

ENVIRONMENT SCAN 16-30 SEP 2018

KASHMIR

Col Harpreet Singh

Panchayat Elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir will be held in nine-phases beginning 17 November. Around 58 lakh electorate will be eligible to vote in the 35,096 panch constituencies.

Additional ballot boxes will be brought from the neighbouring states. There will be two kinds of ballot papers as sarpanchs also have to be elected directly in these polls this time. Polling will be held on 17, 20, 24, 27 and 29 November and 1, 4, 8, 11 December. The poll hours would be between 8 am to 2 pm, and the entire poll process would be completed by 17 December.

The polls would be held through ballot and migrant Kashmiri Pandits can also vote through postal ballots. There are a total of 4490 panchayat halqas in 316 blocks throughout the state. The election expenditure has been increased in these elections to Rs 20,000 for sarpanchs and Rs 5000 for *Panchs*. The schedule has been framed in such a way that places, which gets snowfall early, have been kept in the first phase of the poll. A four-phase election to urban local bodies from 8 October has also been announced.

Comments. It was speculated that the polls may be deferred in the state after two main political parties the NC and the PDP announced staying away from the polls until the Centre gave an assurance to protect Article 35A, against which a petition has been filed in the Supreme Court. However the Government has gone ahead despite security concerns. It is not just the fear of the gun in the Valley, as this time militants have repeatedly warned of acid attacks against contestants.

Recently, as separatist militants abducted policemen and their relatives, they made their intentions clear and exhibited their capabilities of striking civilians and off-duty policemen in their homes. Three policemen were killed after militants took them from their homes. A number of SPOs resigned leading to security concerns.

The response to the elections from the Muslim-majority Kashmir province and the Jammu region with a significant Hindu population is in sharp contrast. While the Valley's main political parties and separatists are up in arms against the polls, the Jammu province has largely welcomed it. The divide between both regions is likely to increase with these elections.

But the boycott announced by the regional parties has offered hope in other quarters, which are looking to see the rise of alternative leaders. The emergence of alternative leaders who could deliver governance could shake the "old guard of politics who ran fiefdoms". Perhaps understanding this, both regional parties have reportedly fielded proxy candidates.

The boycott of these polls by the regional parties has led to fears of the BJP seizing the opportunity to directly carry out activities in the Valley. The NC and PDP may have left an open space for the BJP to take over local governance in the Valley.

These elections will decide the course of future polls in the state and present new challenges for the security establishment. The voting percentage will decide who wins, the state or the separatists.

Source. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/kashmir-panchayat-polls-chance-for-bjp-to-fill-vacuum-as-nc-pdp-boycott-but-terror-threats-may-deter-mass-participation-5283231.html>

PAKISTAN

Col Karan Singh, VSM

India Pakistan Peace Dialogue. The PM of Pakistan, Imran Khan had written a letter to his Indian PM, seeking resumption of dialogue process between the two countries, on the sidelines of UNGA in New York. India accepted the proposal and soon canceled a proposed UNGA meeting, following the killings of security personnel in J&K and the release of Pakistani postage stamps glorifying local terrorists. The cancellation of dialogue process was criticized by Islamabad, which accused Indian authorities of sabotaging regional peace followed by some terse comments by Pak PM on twitter.

Comments. The resumption of dialogue process and the derailing of process following an incident has been often repeated in past. Indian Government reaction was based on timing of the killing of security personnel and program on Pak national TV on release of postage stamp. It appeared that these events triggered reaction in India where local politics is extremely sensitive to actions of Pakistan interfering in J&K. The news report also suggests Pakistan sustained effort to bring peace to its eastern border as it has requested US to assist them in the process in lieu of their support in Afghanistan peace process.

Saudi Arabia Involvement in CPEC. Pak PM visited Saudi Arabia as his first foreign trip wherein Islamabad invited Riyadh to join the USD 50 billion CPEC as the third "strategic partner". Following the visit, a high-level delegation from Saudi Arabia arrived in Pakistan on Sep 30 for talks during which five MoUs (selling petroleum products to Pakistan on deferred payments, setting up oil refineries in the Gwadar port, investments in the Balochistan gold and copper mines, agreements to privatise two Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) power plants and sale of phosphate-containing fertilizers to Pakistan) are expected to be signed and deliberated by the delegation.

Comments. Saudi Arabia is the first country invited to be as third country partner in CPEC. Pakistan has in the past also suggested that other countries could join CPEC, but the response has been lukewarm due to concerns that China would dominate any relationship. Pak Media has also speculated that PM is eyeing Saudi Arabia to provide loans to rescue Islamabad from the crisis and stave off another IMF bailout. Saudi Arabia has a history of bailing out Pakistan financially. In 2014, six months after Pakistan obtained its last IMF bailout, Saudi Arabia loaned it \$1.5 billion that the government used to strengthen its rupee currency.

Economic State of Pakistan: IMF Visit to Pakistan. A team of the IMF is visiting Pakistan this week. The team is holding meetings with Finance Minister Asad Umar. The delegation is expected to be briefed on the economic situation. As preparation to this Pakistan has pared down its growth forecast from 6.2% to 5.8% based on lower agriculture produce and reduced spending. The ADB in its latest review had put figure at 4.8%.

Comments. The visit can have implications as Pakistan has yet to take a decision over a bailout from IMF. Pakistan has been maintaining stance that they have not made up their mind to approach IMF and exploring all options. Pakistan has gone to the IMF repeatedly since the late 1980s. The last time was in 2013, when Islamabad got a \$6.6 billion loan to tackle an economic crisis. There are fears that the terms of any new loan will be more stringent than in 2013, due to tense relations with the US. Pak has taken number of initiatives like warming up to Saudi Arabia, reduction in import spending and increase natural gas prices by up to 20 percent. The fiscal deficit of Pakistan stands at 6.8% of GDP.

Pakistan Stance at UN General Assembly. Foreign Minister of Pak, Shah Mehmood Qureshi addressed the UN General Assembly at UNGA's 73rd session wherein he accused that India of actively involved in the terrorist attacks in Pakistan by providing financial assistance to the extremists (attack on Peshawar School and Kulbhushan Yadav incident) and that SAARC had become dysfunctional due to the attitude of India. He expressed support for the report on Kashmir presented by Zeid Ra'ad Al-Husseini, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and said that it was ready to welcome the of inquiry proposed. The report had sought inquiry into Indian forces action in Kashmir.

Comments. The rhetoric at UNGA was usual for both countries; however the Pak PM in his deliberation has expressed willingness for dialogue and was exploring options to keep the eastern borders calm by proposing US involvement.

Pakistan COAS Visit to China. General Qamar Javed Bajwa visit China wherein he met President Xi Jinping. This is first visit after new government of PM Imran Khan took office in August. Meeting Bajwa, Xi said the two countries were "iron friends and "China always places a high premium on China-Pakistan relations," and expressed his appreciation for the support and security safeguards provided by Pakistan for the BRI and CPEC.

Comments. Visit of COAS to Pak and importance accorded by President Xi Jinping alludes to power centers in Pakistan today. Pakistan has deepened ties with China in recent years as relations with the United States have frayed. It is likely COAS may be hoping to smooth out any Chinese alarm at comments last week by Pakistan's commerce minister

Russia, Pakistan Sign MoU on Gas Pipeline from Iran. Russia and Pakistan signed a MoU on implementing a project to build an underwater gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan and India, the Russian Energy Ministry said in a on Sep 29. The MoU provides for the identification of authorized organizations through which the project will be supported, feasibility study, identification of the resource base, configuration and route of the gas pipeline. Now Russia will have to inform Iran and India about the signing, after which it expects to sign a similar document with India, Yanovsky said in the statement.

Comments. The project was frozen in 2013 due to the imposition of sanctions against Iran, but its revival started in 2017. In November 2017, Russia and Iran signed a MoU that envisaged Russian support for gas supplies from Iran to India. According to Yanovsky, Russia and Pakistan were holding consultations on another project of building the 1,100 kilometer North-South Gas Pipeline (NSGP) between Pakistan's Karachi and Lahore to transport 12.3 billion cubic meters of gas per year.

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Col Arvinder Singh

China Suggests Working with India in Maldives After Poll Shocker¹. China has reached out to India after pro-Beijing Abdulla Yameen lost in Maldives by suggesting that India and China may work jointly in the Indian Ocean archipelago nation and even went on to suggest that the incumbent president lost due to his high-handed policies. State-run Global Times has published a series of articles since on Maldives poll results. In one of the articles titled 'China, India should cooperate in Maldives', the Global Times suggested that India and China can do joint projects in Maldives and Indian companies can utilize Chinese facilities in Maldives. It shouldn't be a one-or-the-other game for China and India in the Maldives. China invests in

¹<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news>

the Maldives as it is needed by the nation, a normal cooperative practice between two countries. China neither has the intention nor has the need to shut out India on the archipelago. In fact, the building of infrastructure by China in the Maldives created favorable conditions for the business and personnel of Indian companies on the island country. China and India can actually help boost Maldives' development by using their own strengths.

Comments. Solih's victory deals a potential blow to China. However, mainly domestic political factors were behind the election results. For instance, with Opposition leaders and judges arrested by the Yameen government, the Opposition party got united amid public concerns about damage to democracy and the rule of law. Md Nasheed, former Maldives President and close ally of President Ibu Solih, has declared to review all the agreements that Maldives had signed with China under Yameen's five-year rule. Maldives, a small economy relying heavily on tourism, is one of the most at-risk countries of any involved with the BRI to the distress of debt. Chinese loans for projects already account for around 70% of the Maldives' national debt. In 2014, China began to develop major infrastructure projects. One is a bridge linking the capital Male to a nearby island. The other is an expansion of the capital's airport, a project awarded to a Chinese company in 2014. The Maldives has also leased an uninhabited island to a Chinese enterprise for 50 years at a price of around \$4 million, with plans to develop infrastructure for tourism. China is also constructing a 25-storey apartment complex and hospital in the Maldives. On December 7, 2017, China and the Maldives signed a free trade agreement. The biggest challenge for the new government in Male is to balance ties between India and China and in many ways reset ties with Delhi that has been net security provider for Maldives for decades.

India and Oman Agree for Deeper Maritime Security². India and Oman have agreed for deeper cooperation in maritime security and defense industry for future engagement and range of measures to enhance the defense relationship between the two countries. During talks between defense ministers of both the countries the two sides undertook a comprehensive review of bilateral defense cooperation and discussed measures to further enhance bilateral exchanges. The two countries share strong and multifaceted defense ties. The three wings of the Armed Forces hold staff talks and advanced joint exercises with each other. Several enabling agreements and Memoranda of Understanding have been signed between the two countries pertaining to defense related issues.

Comments. Oman is considered a strategic partner for India geopolitically and historically. The Sultanate has opened access to the key Port of Duqm in Oman for military use and logistical support. The Port of Duqm and dry dock will be available for providing maintenance to the Indian Naval vessels which will allow India to expand its footprints in the Indian Ocean Region. Oman is the first GCC to formalize defense ties with India from joint military exercise and cooperation in anti piracy and security matters. Both countries have decided to cooperate in the area of coastal defense, besides holding regular joint exercises by the three defense forces, training of navy, air and army officials.

Japanese Carrier Drills with British Warship Heading to Contest South China Sea³. Japan's biggest warship, the Kaga helicopter carrier, joined naval drills with Britain's HMS

² <https://www.financialexpress.com>

Argyll in the Indian Ocean on 26 Sep as the frigate headed toward the contested South China Sea and East Asia. Britain, Japan and close ally the United States have found common cause in countering growing Chinese influence in the region, to keep key sea lanes linking Asia to Europe, the United States and elsewhere from falling under Beijing's sway. The Argyll's arrival comes after Britain's amphibious assault ship Albion last month challenged Beijing's territorial claims on its way to Vietnam from Japan by sailing close to Chinese bases in the Paracel islands in a freedom of navigation operation (FONOP). China dispatched a warship and helicopters to counter the British presence and warned London that similar action in the future could endanger talks for a possible trade deal Britain is seeking as it prepares to leave the European Union. Defense Ministry spokesman of China said China was paying close attention to Japan's activities, and opposed countries from outside the region getting involved in the South China Sea issue. After crossing the South China Sea, the Argyll will operate in waters around Japan. The Argyll is the third Royal Navy ship in Asia's waters this year, following the tour of the Albion and another frigate.

Comments. China, which says its intentions are peaceful, claims most of the South China Sea, through which about \$3 trillion worth of trade passes every year. Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei also claim parts of the sea, which has oil and gas deposits and rich fishing grounds. Japan, which is embroiled in separate territorial dispute with China in the neighboring East China Sea, has yet to conduct a FONOP in the South China Sea. Japan's defense ministry said one of its submarines had carried out a naval exercise in the disputed waterway with two Japanese destroyers and the Kaga, which is on a two-month deployment in the Indo-Pacific.

Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Working Group Meet in AP⁴. Best practices related to maritime disaster relief operations were deliberated at the two-day 3rd meeting of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Working Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) which commenced on 27Sep. Besides the hosts, it is being attended by IONS member nations, including Australia, Bangladesh, France, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Oman and Thailand. The participants shared their experiences gained and lessons learnt during the conduct of various HADR operations by their Navies and deliberated on best practices that can be imbibed during Joint HADR operations in the Indian Ocean Region.

Comments. Initiated in 2008 by the Indian Navy, IONS primarily seeks to enhance maritime cooperation amongst navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion on regionally relevant maritime issues and promotes friendly relationship among member nations. It presently has 24 members and eight observer navies.

NORTHEAST

Brig HS Cheema

3 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>

4 <https://www.business-standard.com>

Nepal Revives \$2.5 Billion Hydro Power Plant Project Deal with China.

Kathmandu: Nepal has revived a deal with a Chinese state-owned firm to construct a \$2.5 billion hydroelectric plant that had been scrapped by the previous government. Prime Minister KP Oli's government last week decided to hand over the Budhi Gandaki Hydropower Project to the China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC), reversing the former Sher Bahadur Deuba government's decision to develop the 1200 MW project with internal resources. This is not the first time that the government has roped in the Chinese developer to develop the Budhi Gandaki project. The Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government had, in May 2017, also signed an MoU with the CGGC to execute the project under the EPCF model.

The agreement invited controversy as the project was handed to the Chinese company without initiating a competitive bidding process. However, the Deuba administration scrapped the deal in November last year citing irregularities. After cancelling the agreement with the Chinese company, the then government had plans to build the project using domestic financial resources via the state-owned Nepal Electricity Authority. Subsequently, a committee was formed to explore financing options to build the power plant. The committee had suggested that the government develop the project on its own by providing viability gap funding, covering around one-third of the project's development cost. The Cabinet during the Deuba administration approved the committee report and agreed to provide the gap funding. But the plan never materialized as the government changed before the decision could be implemented. The new administration under Oli, who had publicly criticised Deuba's decision to scrap the deal with the Chinese company, disowned the previous administration's decision.

NDTV: PTI 24 Sep18

Comments. Nepal suffers energy shortage and needs hydro projects to meet its demand. However, present Govt decision to rehire the Chinese Company is an indication of Chinese increased influence in Nepal Govt decision making. It appears Nepal too is going to get into debt trap or forgoes earnings from the projects as it is happening in other countries. China continued ingress into India's neighbourhood should be a cause of concern. As of now India has very limited options to oppose China ingress.

PM Sheikh Hasina Address Rohingya Crisis in UNGA. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has demanded immediate and effective implementation of the Myanmar-UN agreement on the solution to Rohingya crisis which is putting immense socioeconomic pressure on Bangladesh. Addressing the 73rd UN General Assembly at the UN headquarters on 27 Sep 18, she said the crisis has its origin in Myanmar and its solution also needs to be found there. The PM said Bangladesh was appalled by what it saw in UN reports about atrocities against the Rohingyas, which are tantamount to genocide and crimes against humanity. Bangladesh wants an early and peaceful solution to the crisis, she said. "We expect the international community, particularly the UN, to give due importance to the atrocities and injustice suffered by the Rohingya population in Myanmar."

Hasina said Bangladesh could neither ignore nor remain silent about the Rohingyas' plight. She said she presented a five-point proposal at the UN General Assembly last year with a view to finding a durable and peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis. "We're disappointed that despite our earnest efforts, we have not been able to begin Rohingya repatriation in a permanent and sustainable manner."

Bangladesh and Myanmar struck three bilateral deals for Rohingya repatriation, the PM said, adding that despite their verbal commitment to take back Rohingyas, the Myanmar

authorities were yet to take them back. Hasina said 1.1 million Rohingyas have been living in Bangladesh in uncertainty. To the best of its ability, Bangladesh has made arrangements for their food, clothing, healthcare, childcare and security. She said many countries and organisations, including the UN, the Commonwealth, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, have shown solidarity with the Rohingyas and extended support and assistance for them.

Daily Star 29 Sep 18

Comments. Rohingya crisis has created a major socioeconomic issue for the Bangladesh. The country has limited resources as such and without the interference and help of international community the conditions of refugees will further deteriorate. The present assistance being provided is far from adequate and also to find solution the Myanmar has to be pressurised by the international community or in times to come the situation will be very ripe for terrorism and other undesirable activities.

New Opportunities for India-Bangladesh Cooperation. On September 18, Indian Prime Minister and Bangladeshi Prime held video conferences in Delhi and Dhaka respectively. The leaders of the two countries agreed to build an "India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline" between the Siliguri region of West Bengal in India and the Parbatipur region of Dinajpur in Bangladesh—the third and fourth double-gauge railways will also be built between Dhaka and Tongi and between Tongi and Joydebpur in Bangladesh. Through this move, the two countries will further strengthen their ties, speed up the pace of contact in the Bay of Bengal region, and promote closer ties between the surrounding areas. In a video conference, Modi described the current relationship between India and Bangladesh as similar to one between two members of the same family. Hasina, on the other hand, expressed the hope that India would continue to support the achievement of Bangladesh's development goals. It is undeniable that over the past few years, India and Bangladesh have made unprecedented progress both in the settlement of border issues and in the promotion of bilateral projects. And the two countries have a strong will to enhance the level of cooperation and promote bilateral common development. Although the two countries now face new situations, new tasks and new requirements in terms of cooperation, this is a new historic opportunity as well. This is mainly because both countries have placed each other in a strategic position.

From India's point of view, the "eastward movement" and peripheral diplomacy are key points of the foreign policy of the Modi government, and strengthening cooperation with Bangladesh and other countries bordering India's eastern region and promoting the economic development of India's northeastern region are the established strategies of India. Judging from this meeting, Modi has affirmed the results of cooperation between the two countries, saying that "when the two neighbouring countries work together, everything can be achieved." This is in line with India's approach during the fourth summit of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)—that is, to strengthen ties with neighbouring countries through multilateral and bilateral cooperation; to change the geographical and transportation conditions in the eastern and northeastern regions of India; to make them become the centres of regional and sub-regional cooperation; to change the underdeveloped face of the northeastern region of India; and to achieve the development goals of the region.

At the same time, India hopes to use this move to strengthen relations with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries, change India's passive position in peripheral diplomacy over the past few years, and reduce nationalist tendencies toward India in neighbouring countries—and then improve India's external development conditions, expand diplomatic space, enhance India's influence in the internal and diplomatic affairs of neighbouring countries,

reshape the peripheral geopolitics, and promote India's peripheral diplomacy from the dominant type of the past to a more reasonable and more acceptable one.

Bangladesh also wishes to strengthen its cooperation with India. On the issue of regional governance, Bangladesh hopes that India will play a greater role in the Rohingya refugee issue. On the one hand, it calls on India to exert pressure on Myanmar to reduce the spillover of Burmese Rohingya refugees and, at the same time, to allow as many refugees as possible from Bangladesh to return to Myanmar. On the other hand, India was asked to take on more responsibility in accepting the Rohingya refugees, that is, to increase its assistance to the Rohingya refugees. Moreover, Bangladesh cannot achieve its development goals without India. The construction of pipelines and railway infrastructure will not only solve the oil and gas bottlenecks that restrict Bangladesh's development, but will also improve the conditions for its development.

As things stand now, promoting connectivity and cooperation in the field of energy is a priority. From the perspective of connectivity, India and Bangladesh have long been constrained by poor infrastructure links between the two countries; the status quo is expected to be improved. In addition to building pipelines and railways, in March of this year, India and Bangladesh agreed on dredging inland waterways and docking waterways; building a railway bridge on the India-Bangladesh border; and opening a new railway line between the two countries. And in order to facilitate the movement of people and goods between the two countries, land customs posts in border areas will also be upgraded to integrated checkpoints. In the area of energy, India has helped Bangladesh to settle the shortage of energy issue. What's more, India plans to set up a natural gas supply centre in Jessore and an LPG terminal at Kutubdia in Bangladesh. The two countries are also exploring ways to strengthen cooperation in clean and renewable energy.

Cooperation between India and Bangladesh is not limited to bilateral issues only, but can also be seen in the framework of regional cooperation as a whole. With the strengthening of cooperation among China, ASEAN and India, Bangladesh's position in regional cooperation will be greatly enhanced as an important link between East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. It is also bound to promote the continued deepening of bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh.

Huang Dekai, Zhu Like and Wang Yao are development researchers based in China.

The Daily Star 30 Sep 18

Comments. A detailed article which gives out priorities for both the countries, what these countries expect from their bilateral relationship. India needs to show similar considerations and initiatives with its neighbours. If the neighbourhood prospers with the economic growth of India it will not only help to have stable environment but will open up more business opportunities for all stake holders. India need to improve its track records for keeping its promises as also meeting the deadlines to complete projects.

Northeast's Deadliest Insurgent Group NSCN-K may Split, Sign Ceasefire Pact with India.

KOHIMA: A possible spit in the SS Khaplang faction of NSCN-K on the lines of nationality has brightened the hopes for an early settlement to the vexed Naga problem and a lasting peace in the Northeast region. There are indications that the members of the NSCN-K faction are not happy with the recent impeachment of the outfit's chairman Khango Konyak which has led to a complete separation in the outfit between Indian and Myanmar origin leaders. It

may be recalled that the NSCN-K impeached its chairman Khango Konyak on August 17. The outfit has replaced him with 45-year-old Yung Aung as the new acting chairman. Khango belongs to a Naga tribe based in India while Aung, who is also the nephew of NSCN-K founder the late SS Khaplang, is a Hemi Naga from Myanmar.

Some other reports suggest that top leaders of NSCN-K along with 300 cadres led by Gen Nikki Sumi, Deputy Chief of Army of NSCN-K, may defect from the group and agree to sign a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India. Led by a Brigadier-rank officer, the Myanmar Army has recently escalated its operations against the NSCN-K faction in the areas controlled by them in the Myanmar Naga hills. The Myanmar Army is also deploying their more men in areas controlled by NSCN-K GHQ and ULFA GHQ in Konyak region. Some reports suggest that the Myanmar Army is destroying NSCN-K camps and video recordings the events as proof of their action. This has led to fear among NSCN-K members and they have shifted their camps to a safe location.

Z News Manish Shukla 27 Sep 18

Comments. NSCN has seen number of breakups sometimes engineered by state actors. There has been generally peace in Nagaland and insurgents are now more active only on the border region. Due to continued pressure from security forces on both sides of the border has forced NSCN-K to come to negotiation table and also has engineered the current situation. Nagaland is far from peace situation primarily due to neglect in development, high level of corruption and limited job opportunities. The Naga Accord signed with NSCN-IM is yet to fructify on ground. Centre and state Govt need to put its act together and disarm this faction at the earliest. If for some reasons the accord is broken Nagaland may land into a major security crisis and this time probably NSCN-IM having upper hand for some time.

SRI LANKA

Brig Navjot Singh Bedi

Sri Lanka Conflict: Missing Children. A number of Tamil children were reportedly taken away by Sri Lankan troops in May 2009, soon after security forces defeated Tamil Tiger rebels. At that time tens of thousands had fled a tiny coastal strip near the north-eastern town of Mullaitivu, where the final stages of the 26-year conflict had taken place. These persons had surrendered based on the promise of a general amnesty given by the Army, to all those who had links with the Tamil rebels. The parents/relatives of these missing personnel haven't heard anything about them since that time.

Comments. Though the violence ended nearly 10 years ago yet there has been little progress in tracing the missing personnel. The conflict is estimated to have killed more than 100,000 people & about 20,000 people, mostly Tamils, are thought to be missing. It divided Sri Lanka along ethnic lines, pitting the majority Buddhist Sinhalese-dominated government against the rebels, who fought for a state for minority Tamils. The government dismisses the apprehensions that those who disappeared may have been killed, as it points out that thousands of militants who surrendered have been rehabilitated and allowed to lead a normal life in recent years. This issue needs to be brought to a closure as it will go a long way in healing the scars of this nation divided along ethnic lines.

(<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45474584>)

TELECOM

Brig Navjot Singh Bedi

Cabinet Approves National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP) 2018. The Union Cabinet has on 28 Sep 18 approved a new telecom policy named 'National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP) 2018, designed to provide 'broadband to all'. The policy aims to "provide broadband to all and create 40 lakh jobs". The new policy plans to propel India to the top 50 nations in the Information and Communication Technology (IoT) Development Index of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) from 134 in 2017, enhancing the country's contribution to global value chains and ensuring digital sovereignty. NDCP targets to provide 1Gbps (Giga-bits per second) connectivity to all 'gram panchayats' by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022. As per NDCP, the government would establish a National Digital Grid and also form a National Fibre Authority. It also aims to remove barriers in approvals. The NDCP-18 aims at providing a "ubiquitous, resilient, secure and affordable" digital communication services and aims to establish a "comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy, and choice of individuals.

Comments. NDCP will replace the National Telecom Policy 2012. As per the Telecom Minister, this aims to ensure India's "digital sovereignty". As a result of the new policy, the contribution of digital communications sector would be enhanced to 8 % (from 6 % in 2017), which is commendable. The government's plans to expand the ecosystem of IoT to five billion devices will go a long way in facilitating India's "effective participation" in the global digital economy. It proposes to adopt "optimal pricing of spectrum" to ensure sustainable and affordable access to digital communications. High spectrum price and related charges have been main concerns of the telecom sector, which is reeling under a debt of around Rs 7.8 lakh Crore. The policy is aimed at providing universal availability of 50 Mega Bits per second (Mbps) and attracting investments worth \$100 billion. It seeks to enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe and secure digital communications infrastructure and services. All these measures, if implemented in letter and spirit, will certainly propel India to the top 50 nations in IoT Development Index of the ITU, as planned.

<https://knnindia.co.in/news/newsdetails/sectors/cabinet-approves-national-digital-communications-policy-ndcp-2018-plans-to-propel-india-to-top-50-nations-in-iot-index>

Reliance Jio May Launch 5G Services Within 180 Days of Spectrum Allocation. The Govt plans to allocate airwaves to offer 5G by end of 2019. Reliance Jio has 5G-ready LTE network and is preparing to launch 5G telecom services within six months of spectrum allocation, implying that it could well launch the services in India by middle of 2020. R-Jio is aggressively deploying optic fibre which forms the backbone of a 5G network. Fibre rollouts is a key near term focus for the telecom sector, especially for the development of 5G in the country. Both R-Jio and Bharti Airtel have indicated deployment of significant MIMO (Multiple-Input Multiple-Output) and Network Functions Virtualization (NFV) and Software-defined Networking (SDN), to get their networks 5G ready.

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has already invited R Jio in addition to Bharti Airtel, Vodafone- Idea and BSNL for field trials, for which it is planning to allocate free-of-cost spectrum for a limited period. These pilots would provide an opportunity for Telcosto develop the ecosystem and use cases for India. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has already recommended spectrum in the 3300 Mhz - 3600 Mhz range for the rollout of 5G services in the country and suggested a base price for auctioning the band.

Comments. The Telecom Secretary Ms Aruna Sundararajan said the transition to 5G from 4G could happen much faster compared with the switch from 3G to 4G services. The biggest challenge would be the readiness of the ecosystem, including availability of devices, which

support this spectrum band. If there are no instruments or routers to serve the 5G technology, it would be a challenge. Globally, devices supporting 5G technology are expected to be available some time in 2019, starting with the high-end models. Both dominant chipset makers— US-based Qualcomm and Taiwanese MediaTek—are developing 5G-based modems. The telecom arm of the Reliance Industries is in discussions with both local and multinational vendors to ensure the availability ahead of the device before the commercial 5G rollout.

<https://telecom.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/jio-may-launch-5g-services-within-180-days-of-spectrum-allocation/65948346>

Unified Tri-Service Agencies To Handle Cyberspace, Space, Special Operations. The government is finally moving ahead to approve the creation of Tri-Service Organizations to handle the critical domains of cyberspace, space and special operations in modern-day warfare. The new Defence Space Agency, Defence Cyber Agency and the Special Operations Directorate will all be raised from existing resources without fresh manpower accretion.

Comments. This is a much welcomed move and is the need of the hour, considering the developments that have taken place in these niche segments in the world and especially in our neighbourhood.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/unified-tri-service-command-to-handle-cyberspace-space-special-operations/articleshow/65941584.cms>

IRAN

Col Karan Singh, VSM

Attack on Military Parade in Iran Kills Atleast 25. Gunmen killed atleast 25 people and wounded 60 on Saturday in an attack on a military parade in a restive Iranian province of Ahvaz. The reports said that there were four gunmen wearing military uniforms and that security forces had killed two and captured the other two. Both the Islamic State and a separatist group, Al Ahwaz, claimed responsibility.

Comments. Several military parades were taking place across the country simultaneously on Saturday to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the 1980-88 war with Iraq. The parades are held annually across the nation. Iran President has vowed to avenge the killing.

AFGHANISTAN

Col Karan Singh, VSM

Grant Citizenship to Afghan Refugees. Pakistani PM Imran Khan vowed to grant citizenship to Afghan refugees who have lived in the country for several decades. PM was speaking at a event in Karachi.

Comments. The statement from PM has come at a time when relations between Islamabad and Kabul are tense. About 2.5 million Afghans, live in Pakistan. It was unclear whether PM intends to grant citizenship to Afghans born in Pakistan or to all those who have made a home there. Afghans have long complained about constant harassment due to the lack of

citizenship rights for those who have spent decades living and working in Pakistan. There were concerns earlier this year that Islamabad planned to repatriate refugees back to violence-plagued Afghanistan after Pakistan extended the stay of Afghan refugees living within its borders. It may be an attempt by Pakistan to come closer to Afghanistan and increase its stake in US led peace process.

Afghanistan Election for Lower House of Parliament. Election campaigning has started in Afghanistan for next month's parliamentary elections amid concerns that the much-delayed vote could be postponed again due to the uncertainty over new technology. The vote for the lower house of parliament has been scheduled for October 20.

Comments. The election to lower house has been delayed by more than three years - and is seen as a test for the presidential elections that will take place in April. The election commission said it has acquired more than 20,000 biometric devices for facial recognition and finger printing to prevent voter fraud. In addition, security also poses a big challenge, particularly with most of rural Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban.

Attack on President at Gazni. Multiple rockets hit the Afghan city of Ghazni during a visit by President Ashraf Ghani. At least two rockets landed within 300 m of the governor's compound where President Ghani was meeting local officials, while a third struck further off.

Comments. Ghazni is on the main highway between the capital Kabul and southern Afghanistan and still bears the scars of days when Taliban stormed the city and overran large parts of the centre. More than 200 civilians at least 100 members of Afghan security forces were killed. President Ghani's was visiting Ghazni, accompanied by his wife to assess security situation in the city.

UN Expresses Concern over Civilian Killing by Airstrikes. The number of civilians killed by Afghan and American airstrikes is rising, the United Nations said Tuesday, as the Afghan government increasingly relies on airpower in its fight against a resurgent Taliban. The United Nations mission in Afghanistan said 21 civilians were killed in two airstrikes last weekend and urged all parties to the conflict to take stronger measures to protect civilians.

Comments. The ground forces are stretched as they fight insurgents in about two dozen of the country's 34 provinces and the Afghan forces and Coalition forces are increasingly relying on airstrikes to push back Taliban gains.

RUSSIA

Col Harpreet Singh

Russian Aircraft Shot Down. A Russian military aircraft was shot down shortly after an air attack by Israel over Syria. The attack proceeded like dozens and hundreds of previous strikes in recent years. Four F-16s took off from an IAF base in the south, flew north, and when they reached a high altitude east of Cyprus, released their munitions at the targets in Latakia. In the IDF debriefing, details of which were also presented to the Russians, the time that appears for the firing of the munitions is 9:42 P.M. According to IDF, the Russians were given an advance warning at 9:38, four minutes before the start of the firing. The munitions itself hit the target at 9:50. Russia maintains that it got a warning of only one minute. At the time the munitions were dispatched, a Russian Ilyushin aircraft was in the skies of northern Syria, about 200 kilometers east of the Israeli planes. For a reason that the Russians are not explaining, the plane did not have an identification system (IFF), which would have enabled the Syrians on the ground to recognize that the aircraft belonged to their ally.

The Ilyushin continued westward. At 9:52 P.M., Syrian air defenses started to go berserk, firing 27 missiles. At 10:05 P.M., the Russian plane was hit by a missile fired by an S-200 battery. By this time, the Israeli planes were near Haifa, on their way to landing. Israel has vehemently rejected a Russian claim that one of the F-16s hid behind the Ilyushin. The two aircraft were flying in different areas, at different altitudes and at different speeds. It is possible – and if so, it would reveal a particularly low level of professional capability – that the Syrians mistakenly identified other Israeli planes as a result of the IDF's use of electronic warfare, which is routine operational behaviour. The Russians, in any case, should have known where the Israeli planes were. Israel is convinced that the radar image published by the Russians in their debriefing of the incident is simply fabricated – the F-16s were not in the place that the Russians claim they were when the Ilyushin was hit.

The September 16 attack by the Israel Air Force in Latakia, came at the end of a particularly sensitive day in the Syrian arena. A few hours earlier, Russia and Turkey had agreed on details of an arrangement which, for the time being, is delaying a major airstrike by the Russians against the tens of thousands of rebels and nearly three million civilians who are trapped in the Idlib enclave. That area, located in northern Syria, is the last central bastion remaining to opponents of Syrian President Bashar Assad after seven-and-a-half years of civil war.

The Assad regime had intended to seize control of Idlib in the same way that it has restored its rule over two-thirds of the country's territory in the past few years – via explosive pommelling with the aid of Russian bombers, at the end of which the rebels hoist the white flag. However, the Russians and Syrians have discovered that the battle for Idlib will be different from the one waged in Aleppo and elsewhere. For the first time, the Russians have encountered limits on their use of power in Syria.

Foreseeing strong resistance in Idlib, the Assad regime had apparently deployed for the extensive use of “neutralizing” chemical weaponry, chlorine gas (while reports appeared in the Russian media about plots among the rebels to fake a chemical attack against them). However, Turkey has insisted on backing the rebels, who are situated close to its southern border, while the United States and France have threatened to use force against Syria's regime if it resorts to use of chemical weapons again.

Under such circumstances, the Russians, in two meetings – in Tehran and afterward in Sochi – decided to come to an agreement with Ankara on freezing the status quo. The region south of Idlib is to be declared a demilitarized zone, Turkey will be responsible for ensuring that the rebels' heavy weapons are removed from the enclave, and Turkish and Russian forces will enforce the cease-fire. At some point, Moscow could well violate the agreement, when it's convenient, but in the meantime Idlib will remain a stick in the regime's craw, along with the U.S. troops stationed at the Tanf airbase in southern Syria, and the Kurdish-held areas in the northeast. At this stage, however, Vladimir Putin is being forced to rein in his ambitions. The agreement was reached to the chagrin of President Assad, who had counted on another lethal show of force by the Russians.

Comments. The downing of the plane was another serious blow to the Russians, following the compromise forced on them with respect to Idlib. Moscow and notably its chain of command in Syria have been extremely unhappy about the ongoing series of Israeli attacks in recent years, and believe that they have sometimes endangered its personnel in the field. Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, has led the hawkish line, under the influence of top officials in Syria. An offshoot of this incident is that, at Putin's request, the first S-300 missile systems will arrive in Syria as soon as early next week. This Russian move, which Jerusalem

has protested and the United States condemned, will constitute a new obstacle to future Israeli moves against Iran in Syria.

Source. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-russia-had-to-swallow-a-deal-in-idlib-then-came-an-israeli-strike-on-syria-1.6513182>

WADA's Vote to Reinstate Russia's Anti-doping Body. Russian sport is coming in from the cold. On September 20th the executive committee of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) voted to provisionally reinstate the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA), an important step towards reintegrating the country and its athletes into international sport. RUSADA, which facilitated a state-sponsored scheme to replace positive urine samples with clean ones during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, has been banned since November 2015. It has not met two of WADA's original criteria for reinstatement: an acknowledgement of the severity of its violations and the release of data and samples from the Moscow Laboratory, the centre of its illicit operations. Last week's decision softens those criteria. RUSADA now has until December 31st to reveal its database, and until June 30th next year to provide samples for retesting.

Comments. Athletes' committees, sporting federations, and other national anti-doping agencies have immediately seen the vote as a craven move that allows Russia to save face and edge its way back into the good graces of international sport, while showing the rest of the world that powerful countries need not play by the rules. WADA's forgiveness suits the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which provides half of WADA's funding and committee members, and which wants to bring Russia back into the fold. Doing so means that the country can bid for hosting rights at major events. Indeed, immediately after RUSADA's reinstatement, Kazan was named on the shortlist of hosts for the 2023 European Games, an Olympic-style event.

Source. <https://www.economist.com/game-theory/2018/09/26/wadas-vote-to-reinstate-russias-anti-doping-body-is-a-farce>

India Approves S-400 Buy from Russia. India has approved a \$5.43 billion program to buy five S-400 Triumf air defense systems from Russia, just a week before Russian President Vladimir Putin's Oct 5 visit to the country. A formal government-to-government contract is expected to be announced during the 19th India-Russia summit.

The program was approved earlier this week by the Indian government's highest defence approval body, the Cabinet Committee on Security headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India's decision in relation to U.S. objections over the purchase has been communicated to Washington.

Comments. India cannot afford to distance itself from Russia, if for no other reason than the fact that it requires Russia's continued support to maintain and operate in-service equipment, a large proportion of which is of Russian-origin. India has been apprehensive about the fate of armament supplies from Russia following U.S. sanctions on Russian entities under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA. The Indian defence establishment is convinced that S-400 Triumf system is ideally suited to fill a critical gap in existing capabilities. That being the case, there is no reason for India to buckle under the U.S. pressure to roll back procurement of hardware from Russia. Moreover the indications from US are that they understand our concerns. However as a result of the S-400 buy, any future Indian plans to procure the F-35 from US may not fructify.

Source. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2018/09/28/india-approves-s-400-buy-from-russia/>

WEST ASIA

Col Sumit Rana

SYRIA

Russian Reconnaissance Aircraft Gunned Down – 16 Sep 18. The September 16 attack by the Israel Air Force in Latakia, at whose conclusion Syria's aerial defense system downed a Russian intelligence-gathering aircraft that led to the death of 15 Russian crew members after an Israeli air strike in Syria

S 400 Missile Defence System Delivery Commences. Russia announced on Friday that it has begun transferring to Syria the advanced aerial defense systems following the downing of the Russian aircraft on Sep 16.

Syrian Opposition Back out of Peace Talks After UN Invites Iran to Attend. 'Geneva II' conference could be in jeopardy after UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon invites Iran to preliminary meeting.

Adam Withnall.

In a major blow to the prospect of peace in Syria, the country's main opposition group has said it will not attend talks in Geneva unless the UN retracts its invitation to Iran.

This morning it was announced that the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon had come to an agreement with Tehran after extensive discussions with the Iranian foreign minister Javid Zarif.

Yet while Mr Ban said President Bashar al-Assad's key regional ally "needs to be part of the solution to the Syrian crisis", the move seems to have put this week's conference in jeopardy after more than a year of planning.

Ahmad Ramadan, a senior member of the western-backed Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), accused Iran of "invading" Syria by coming along to a meeting ahead of the so-called "Geneva II" talks, and said the rebel group would be "suspending" its own participation as a result.

Ramadan said the SOC will not be going to the conference "if the situation does not change".

Geneva II was set to be the first face-to-face meeting of the two warring factions at the heart of the Syrian conflict.

LEBANON

Lebanese Army Fires on Syrian Helicopters 'for Violating Airspace'. Officials say the Syrians were chasing rebels who were trying to sneak into Lebanon

Diaa Hadid

QATAR

Qatar Relents and releases French footballer Zahir Belounis after outcry.

Sam Wallace

Belounis's plight, picked up by The Independent, became an international cause that threatened to damage Qatar's attempts to burnish their international reputation ahead of the 2022 World Cup finals. The Gulf state finally relented on Wednesday and granted the player an exit visa after decisive pressure was brought to bear by FifPro, the international footballers' union.

Belounis, 33, had been told he could not leave the country unless he dropped a legal action begun in February against his former club El Jaish over what was then 18 months' unpaid wages. Campaigners from the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC), who have supported Belounis, said that his legal case will continue even after he arrives back in Paris at 7pm on Thursday.

The tipping point came this week when the latest round of negotiations to secure Belounis an exit visa, under the controversial kafala system of visa sponsorship, came to nothing. It was then that FifPro opted to make public their concerns and the Qatari authorities decided that they would accede to the request that Belounis and his family could leave the country.

IRAN

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei says Iran will not Budge over 'Nuclear Rights'. The Iranian supreme leader appears to be assuaging hardliners at home ahead of a possible interim accord that would rein in Iran's nuclear programme in return for the easing of sanctions.

As the so-called P5 plus 1 world powers met Iranian delegates for a second round of talks, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued a defiant message, saying the Islamic Republic would not step back from what it believes are its nuclear rights, and that he had set "red lines" for his envoys in Geneva.

In a long, televised address to the fanatical Bassij volunteer loyalist militia, Ayatollah Khamenei expressed support for the talks with negotiators from the UK, US, Russia, France and China, plus Germany, that continue today, but warned that Iran would not budge "an iota", and cautioned against raising the pressure on his country. The Ayatollah has ultimate authority over Iran's nuclear programme which Western governments fear could be diverted towards building an atomic bomb.

He described Israel – whose Prime Minister was in Moscow demanding stricter conditions on Iran – as the "rabid dog" of the region.

He accused France of “kneeling before Israel” presumably in reference to France’s tough, last-minute amendments to the draft proposals worked out by US and Iranian negotiators, which have been blamed for breaking up the previous talks in Geneva 10 days ago. French President François Hollande said that such attacks by the Iranian leader were “unacceptable”.

By picking such a hard-line domestic audience, it appears likely that the Ayatollah’s speech was intended for Iranians at home who are sceptical of any agreement with the West, countering concerns that negotiators may be preparing to yield on core issues. In some respects, the negotiators have already backed down from some of Iran’s “red lines”. The last Geneva meeting stumbled over objections to Iran’s insistence that its “right” to enrich uranium be explicitly recognised, as well as its construction of a heavy-water reactor near Arak that could eventually yield plutonium. However, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, has since suggested a way around the first point, by saying Tehran has the right to refine uranium but not insisting that others recognise that right.

TURKEY

China welcomes Turkey’s ‘participation in Belt and Road partnership’. Chinese Ambassador to Ankara Yu Hongyang has welcomed Turkey’s participation in Beijing’s intercontinental trade routes network project.

“We sincerely look forward to the participation of all countries, including Turkey, in the [Belt and Road](#) partner network so that the fruit of this initiative could benefit more countries and more people,” he said at an event organized in the Turkish capital Ankara to mark the 69th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

“This year also marks the fifth anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, which holds the principle of seeking shared benefits through consultation and collaboration. This initiative comes from China, but belongs to the world,” he added.

Yu also recalled the fifth meeting between Turkish and Chinese presidents, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Xi Jinping, in South Africa in July.

“The two heads of states reached important consensus and chartered a clear direction for bilateral relations,” he said.

ISRAEL

Putin Made a Move, but It's a Big Playing Field': Israeli Official Addresses 'Challenge' of S-300 in Syria.

Noa Landau

Official says Israel will deal with arrival of aerial defense system in Syria 'in different ways, not necessarily by preventing the delivery'. The S-300 anti-aircraft missiles that Russia is transferring to Syria are "a complicated challenge" for Israel, an Israeli official said Friday. The official added: "We're dealing with it in different ways, not necessarily by preventing the delivery." According to the official, Russian President Vladimir Putin updated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the fact that he intends to send the missiles to Syria within two weeks, and then acted accordingly.

After Trump Meeting, Netanyahu Backs Palestinian State Under Israeli Security Control.**Noa Landau**

NEW YORK - Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters Wednesday he was not surprised by U.S. President Donald Trump's remark that he favored a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying "Everyone defines the term 'state' differently."

Briefing reporters following his meeting with Trump at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Netanyahu said he expects Trump to accept the Israeli approach that any possible peace scenario would leave security control of territories west of Jordan in Israel's hands.

CAR

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

Upswing in Indo-CARs Relations. Several efforts by the Indian Govt have enhanced the expanse of emerging relationship between India and the five Central Asian Republics (CARs). India's entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) last year facilitated many high level interactions on several occasions. Visit of the Indian PM to all the CARs re-invigorated the relationship. Participation of the Indian armed force in the SCO Peace Mission Exercise brought the defence forces closer. All the CARs consider India as a reliable defence partner and India has posted Defence Attaches (DAs) to all these countries for increasing the cooperation further.

At least three high level interactions would be taking place during October 2018. President of the Uzbekistan visited India from 30 September to 01 October 2018 and signed 17 important agreements which included a Memorandum between the Ministry of Defence of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Defence of India on cooperation in the field of military education¹. Uzbekistan shares sensitive border with Afghanistan and no peace deal is considered feasible without an active cooperation from it.

President of India would be visiting another important CAR, Tajikistan from 07 to 09 October. During the meeting of Emomali Rahmon and Ram Nath Kovinda, the issues of strengthening the legal framework of cooperation between Tajikistan and India will be touched upon².

President Kovind's visit will be followed by foreign minister Sushma Swaraj's visit, also to Tajikistan, for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization heads of governments meeting from October 11 to 12³.

CARs are increasingly finding themselves coming under Chinese influence especially due to increased emphasis on BRI projects in the region. Even Russian traditional all pervasive influence in the region appears to be getting affected and causing concerns to the Russian govt. An increased Indian influence could be beneficial to all CARs and Russia without antagonising other SCO members.

 List of Documents signed between India and the Republic of Uzbekistan during the State Visit of President of Uzbekistan to India; <https://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?30452/List+of+Documents+signed+between+India+and+the+Republic+of+Uzbekistan+during+the+State+Visit+of+President+of+Uzbeki>
 Asia-Plus Media Group (Dushanbe, Tajikistan), 03 October 2018; <https://news.tj/en/node/259556>
 India-Central Asia all set to begin fortnight long Summit level engagements ;
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-central-asia-all-set-to-begin-fortnight-long-summit-level-engagements/articleshow/65985245.cms>

SPACE

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

A key House member in US Congress announced on 26 Sep 18 that he is introducing a legislation that would extend operations of the International Space Station to 2030, weeks after senators sought a similar extension.

Recently, President Trump has issued a directive to the Pentagon for formation of a Space Force as a sixth Independent force in the United States with the prime aim to safeguard US space assets .Pentagon is tasked to present a feasibility report in this regard by December 2018. This is in conformity with the President view that United States must maintain dominance in the outer space. He also sought private businesses to participate in the space ventures particularly in space tourism in Lower Earth Orbit (LEO). Private businesses such as Space X and Orbital of United States are involved in the business of satellite construction and launch. NASA has retained the private entities like **Space X** and **Orbital** for replenishment of **International Space Station** thorough their independent space launches.

International Space Station (ISS) which was launched in 1998 is a multilateral effort which involves eleven EU states and Canada, Japan, Russian federation and the United States. China has been intentionally been kept out of this effort. Now China has launched its own space stations first, an unmanned prototype Tiangong -1 in 2011 which served an unmanned laboratory. This was followed by launch of Tiangong-2 in 2016 and has served as a test-bed for technologies that China wants to integrate into Tianhe. (Tiangong -3) which is planned for launch this year. China is planning to have moon station in future as well as planning for a Mars flight in 2022. The ISS mission is likely to end by year 2024. Thereafter, only Chinese space station would remain. This situation does not present a picture of US dominance in the space hence; it is not acceptable to some members of the US congress and has sought its extension till 2030. The advancement in space in civil has implication in the defence too. This has prompted US to take note of this and re-establish their dominance in the space which US thinks is slowly slipping away to the adversaries (Russia and China).

The idea of an independent space force has led to a turf war in the United States. US Air force which presently controls the US space command finds the idea unnecessary and very

expensive for apart from adding unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. It will need to create independent infrastructure and man power which otherwise was being shared.

Despite the opposition it is certain that US will have an independent space force to maintain its lead in the outer space and also to cause setbacks to the suspected Chinese effort to extend its concept of Belt and road to the space to increase its influence.

Setting up of separate space force by United States signals a beginning of the military space race among the nations in the coming years.