

ENVIRONMENT SCAN 16-31 MAY 2018

MARITIME SECURITY & IN MODERNISATION

Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

Indonesia and India to Develop Indian Ocean Port. Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met in Jakarta on Wednesday and stated that the two countries would step up defense and maritime cooperation, with plans to develop a strategic Indonesian naval port in the Indian Ocean. This was Prime Minister Modi's first trip to Indonesia.

Leaders of the two countries discussed various issues including development of infrastructure and an economic zone at Sabang, on the tip of Sumatra Island and at the mouth of the Malacca Strait. Analysts say the move comes amid concerns over China's rising maritime influence in the region, and is part of Modi's "Act East" Policy of developing stronger ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said at a press conference, "India is a strategic defense partner...and we will continue to advance our cooperation in developing infrastructure, including at Sabang Island and the Andaman Islands". Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that "The India-ASEAN partnership can be a force to guarantee peace and progress in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond".

Indonesia's chief maritime affairs minister, Luhut Pandjaitan said last week that the existing port at Sabang, which is 40 meters (131 ft) deep, could be developed to accommodate both commercial vessels and submarines.

He also stated that Sabang would get a transshipment port that could be developed over two years.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/indonesia-india/indonesia-india-to-develop-strategic-indian-ocean-port-idUSL3N1T11XL>

PAKISTAN

Col Arvinder Singh

Pakistani Ex-ISI Chief Faces Inquiry over Book with Indian Counterpart.¹

Pakistan's former ISI chief Asad Durrani wrote "The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the illusion of Peace" with A.S. Dulat, the former chief of India's intelligence arm. On 28 May 18, Pakistan's military barred the former intelligence chief from leaving the country and ordered an investigation into whether he violated the military's code of conduct by writing the book. If charged, Mr. Durrani could face jail time.

Comments. The book is set as a dialogue between the former chiefs, where they expound on topics like the American raid to capture Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan and whether the presidency of Donald Trump is good for their countries. The views Mr. Durrani espouses in the book have raised eyebrows in Pakistan, criticizing both civilian leaders and the military, revered inside the country. The former intelligence chief

1 <https://www.nytimes.com>

claims in the book that the Pakistani military knew ahead of the 2011 United States raid to capture and kill Bin Laden and had received a payment for its cooperation, while feigning surprise. Pakistan's official stance and the Americans' has been that Pakistani officials learned of the raid only after it took place. Other statements made by Mr. Durrani include Pakistan's role in fomenting popular unrest in Kashmir. Officially, Pakistan has always maintained that it supports the population in Kashmir morally and diplomatically and denies any role in the armed, anti-India insurgency in the disputed region.

China Mum on Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan order says CPEC will not affect its stand on Kashmir.² Pakistan's Cabinet on May 21 approved Gilgit-Baltistan Order 2018 which was also endorsed by the region's assembly. Gilgit Baltistan (GB) government formally promulgated Gilgit Baltistan Order 2018, which provides devolution of greater administrative authority and financial powers to the area. As per the government the last empowerment order guaranteed only 17 basic rights and that too was limited only to GB, but now in light of the GB order 2018, a citizen of the area could demand his or her rights at any corner of the country and had access to all apex courts of the country.

The order is being seen as Pakistan's efforts towards incorporating the disputed region as its fifth province. China refrained from making any direct comment on Pakistan's latest move on exercising administrative authority on Gilgit-Baltistan, but said the CPEC, which traverses through the disputed region, will not affect its stand that the Kashmir issue should be resolved between India and Pakistan. The move sparked anger in the region and drew strong reaction from New Delhi which said the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, which also includes the so-called 'Gilgit-Baltistan' areas, is an integral part of India by virtue of its accession in 1947.

Comments. Pakistan has bifurcated occupied Kashmir into two administrative parts - Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Gilgit-Baltistan was treated as a separate geographical entity by Pakistan till now. It is believed that China's concerns about the unsettled status of Gilgit-Baltistan prompted Pakistan to change the region's status.

Former Chief Justice Nasirul Mulk Named Pakistan's Caretaker PM.³ Pakistan on 28 May 18 appointed Former Chief Justice Nasir Ul Mulk as interim prime minister until general elections are held on July 25. The announcement was made by Leader of the Opposition Khursheed Shah at a press conference here which was also attended by incumbent Prime Minister Abbasi. The announcement ends weeks of wrangling between Abbasi's ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Shah's Pakistan People's Party. Mulk, who also served as the interim chief of the Election Commission of Pakistan, will head a technocratic government until elections as the current government and parliament will be dissolved on 01 Jun 18.

Comments. The interim administration usually does not make any major decisions until the new government is elected, though it may be forced to act to shore up the economy amid a worsening macro-economic outlook.

Pakistan Parliament Passes Tribal Areas Reform.⁴ Pakistan's lower house of Parliament has passed constitutional amendment extending widespread political, administrative and human rights reforms to the country's northwestern tribal areas, a

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

3 <https://www.ndtv.com>

4 <https://www.aljazeera.com>

region that had long been a sanctuary to armed groups. The constitutional amendment, passed by the National Assembly in the capital, Islamabad, on Thursday, sees the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. It effectively abolishes colonial-era regulations that the districts had been governed under for decades, making its five million citizen's equal citizens of the Pakistani federation. The amendment will now be presented to the upper house of Parliament and the KP provincial assembly, where it is expected to pass without fuss, before becoming law.

Comments. Since Pakistan gained independence from the British in 1947, the country has continued to govern the seven tribal districts along its border with Afghanistan by direct rule from the capital, with each district ruled by a "Political Agent" (PA) appointed by the president. The PA holds nearly absolute power in their tribal districts, where they are responsible for all government services, as well as serving judicial functions. The constitutional amendment sees all seven districts merged into northwestern KP province, with political agents replaced by an accompanying extension of the provincial and federal government's power to deliver government services, including healthcare, education and policing. All Pakistani laws, including criminal and penal codes, have been extended to the tribal districts, which earlier were governed under colonial-era criminal regulations. FATA's five million citizens will also have access to fundamental rights under the Constitution, and will be able to vote for representatives in the provincial and national assemblies.

Pakistan and India Agree to Restore LOC Ceasefire in Kashmir.⁵ India and Pakistan have agreed to reinforce their 15-year-old ceasefire agreement in an effort to end daily exchanges of artillery, missile and small arms fire across disputed border in the northern Jammu and Kashmir region. Speaking on a dedicated hotline, Pakistan's Major General Shamshad Mirza and his Indian counterpart Lieutenant General Anil Chauhan agreed to "fully implement" the 2003 ceasefire understanding along the 482 mile long line of control in "letter and spirit".

Comments. More than 300,000 heavily armed Indian and Pakistani soldiers confront each other, often a few feet apart, along this line that snakes across inhospitable mountains, forests and rivers. Artillery battles were a regular feature across the line until 2003, when both sides agreed to a ceasefire, but this truce began unraveling in 2013 after ties between the neighbors deteriorated.

AFGHANISTAN

Col Arvinder Singh

Afghanistan: UK Considers Sending more Troops⁶. The UK government is considering sending more British troops to Afghanistan. Defense Secretary has recommended sending up to 400 more army personnel into Afghanistan, joining the 600 already there training Afghan soldiers. The UK troops would help train Afghan forces and not be in combat.

Comments. The decision to increase troops would send an important message to NATO allies, and the Taliban. The only way this war is going to end is when the Taliban realize they can't fight their way back to government. They have to resort to dialogue.

5 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news>

6<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk>

India Flags Security Challenges Faced by Afghanistan at SCO Meet.⁷ The SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group Meeting was held in Beijing on 28 May 18 during which India underlined the security challenges posed by terrorism imposed from beyond the borders of the war-torn country. The Indian delegation was led by Additional Secretary (Multilateral Diplomacy) Gitesh Sarma at the second meeting of SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. The meeting discussed issues on three agendas, namely the current situation of Afghanistan and its neighboring regions, the reconciliation process in Afghanistan and role of SCO, and measures for cooperation between SCO and Afghanistan.

Comments. The SCO in which China plays an influential role is comprised of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan were admitted to the organization last year. Iran, along with Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia, is an observer in the SCO.

Drought Adds to Woes of Afghanistan, in Grips of a Raging War.⁸ Afghanistan, already torn by decades of intensifying violence, is grappling with a drought in two-thirds of the country that could lead to severe food shortages for up to two million more people, the United Nations has warned. Many farmers have seen their seeds dry out or have delayed planting crops, and there is little or no feed for livestock on pasturelands. The drought has led to the displacement of thousands of people this spring, adding to the nearly two million who have been forced from their homes in recent years, largely because of violence. In the 20 provinces most affected by the drought, nearly 15 million people rely on farming, livestock or labor opportunities in agriculture. In a country that relies heavily on bread, a shortage of 2.5 million tons of wheat is expected this year.

Comments. The drought comes as violence has been escalating in large parts of the country, with Taliban insurgents intensifying attacks. The Afghan government's ability to respond to this latest crisis remains in doubt, as the leadership faces numerous security concerns and is plagued by political infighting.

Afghanistan, Pakistan Renew Push for Cooperation against Terrorism.⁹ Amid heightened tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, senior military and intelligence officials from the two neighbors have agreed to enhance joint efforts to fight against terrorism. The two sides reached the understanding at talks on 28 May at Pakistani Army headquarters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi. The two sides agreed to fast-track the formulation of working groups, especially on bilateral security cooperation, and to undertake measures that would assist both sides in reduction of violence at the hands of terrorists.

7 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india>

8 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/27>

9 <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-pakistan>

Comments. The talks came as Afghanistan and the United States have been increasing pressure on Pakistan to take action against militants operating in the country. Afghan and Pakistani officials were also expected to discuss a series of deadly clashes in recent months along their disputed border.

Afghanistan criticizes Pakistan's Unilateral Decision Over FATA.¹⁰ Afghanistan has strongly criticized Pakistan's unilateral decision on merging the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, saying the move was in contravention of the 1921 treaty signed between Afghanistan and the then British India. Afghan government officials have declared Pakistan's move on the merger of FATA as unacceptable and inappropriate. According to officials in Kabul, Afghanistan has shared its concerns regarding the matter through diplomatic channels with the Pakistani side and the international community.

Comments. Pakistan's Parliament on 24 May 18 passed a constitutional amendment bill clearing the way for the merger of the FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The 229 member's assembly voted in favor of the constitution amendment while one voted against it. Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs has described Afghanistan's criticisms as interference in its internal issues.

IRAN

Col Arvinder Singh

India to Continue Oil Trade with Iran.¹¹ External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj on 28 May 18 indicated that India will continue to purchase oil from Iran as Delhi only follows sanctions by the United Nations and not by any specific country. Swaraj said Delhi's position was independent of any other country and that India is neither enamored nor can be coerced or pressurized by any country. Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who had been to Moscow, Beijing and Brussels, arrived in India on 27 May 18. He held talks with Swaraj here on 28 May 18 as the two sides look for ways to protect energy and connectivity engagements following US decision to pull out of nuclear deal.

Comments. Zarif's two-day visit to India is part of Tehran's efforts to reach out to major world powers after the US pulled out from the nuclear deal. US decision to re impose sanctions on Iran would not impact India's oil imports as long as European countries did not adopt the same stand.

Trump's Iran Sanctions could Backfire on US Goals to Stabilize Afghanistan's Economy.¹² Afghanistan is at risk of become an unintended victim of the Donald Trump administration's sweeping sanctions against Tehran, announced as part of the U.S.

¹⁰ <https://www.tolonews.com>

¹¹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news>

¹² <https://www.cnbc.com>

decision to withdraw from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in early May. The Chabahar Port project is being developed on Iran's southern coast that is set to provide a transport corridor to Afghanistan, granting the landlocked country new access to Indian Ocean trade. But international players leading investment and financing of the Indian-backed port are now in limbo amid fears of punishment by U.S secondary sanctions for doing business in Iran. The Chabahar Port project, whose development is being led by India, has been touted as having the potential to boost Afghanistan's trade by millions of dollars. It also aims to lay the infrastructural foundations to develop the impoverished country's largely untapped mining industry, which is estimated to be worth billions. India relies on Iran for overland access to Afghanistan, and sees increased trade there as a way to reduce neighboring Pakistan's leverage in the country. A trilateral memorandum of understanding signed in 2016 between India, Iran and Afghanistan committed \$21 billion to the project — \$9 billion for the actual port in Chabahar, and the remaining \$21 billion for developing Afghanistan's iron ore export capabilities. This deal was all about Afghanistan.

Comments. Imposing policies that would penalize this investment, since it requires transacting with Iran, could threaten the longtime U.S. policy objective of stabilizing Afghanistan through economic development. Hence this policy of isolating Iran runs directly counter to U.S. interests in Afghanistan. By potentially forcing Afghanistan to sever links with one of its largest trading partners, the Trump administration is hitting the beleaguered Afghan economy with yet another shock at a time when the government is already struggling against a reinvigorated Taliban.

EU Foreign Ministers Seek to Keep Iran Nuclear Deal Alive.¹³ The European Union is seeking to shield the bloc's strategic and economic interests in Iran in the wake of the U.S withdrawal from the international nuclear deal. The EU member states were intensely co-coordinating their efforts to protect the economic investments of European businesses that have legitimately invested and engaged in Iran over the past three years since the nuclear deal was agreed. European powers say they are committed to keep working together to save the deal because they believe it is the best way to keep Tehran from developing a nuclear bomb and they are not motivated by business profits and economic interest in trying to keep the deal alive but it is about the security interest.

Comments. The U.S decision of imposing tough sanctions on Iran will have an impact on some European companies doing business with Tehran.

Iran Truckers Join Nationwide Push for Change.¹⁴ For the seventh consecutive day on 28 May 18, Iranian truck drivers disrupted the nation's transportation system and put Iran's already struggling and decrepit economy in a stranglehold. On 22 May 18 initially truck drivers in over 22 cities spanning all of Iran launched a nationwide strike to protest excessive road haulage taxes, high cost of spare parts, and low wages. The strike

13 <https://www.thespec.com>

14 <https://www.opendemocracy.net>

quickly spread to over 177 cities in 29 provinces and caught Iran's security forces off guard. Thousands of truckers refused to transport loads or accept new loads. Major arteries and highways have been blocked by parked tractor trailers. Fuel shortages and long lines at petrol stations have been reported in all major cities now as fuel tankers have stopped deliveries. Extensive social media coverage of the strike has demonstrated the strike's organization, expansiveness, staying power, and radicalization. Import and export operations in many border and customs agency locations have slowed down to a crawl or halted.

Comments. The united strike of Iranian truckers follows an almost month-long uprising in the city of Kazerun, starting on 16 April, where protestors defied all regime security measures and shouted for regime change. This follows on the heels of the recent nationwide uprising in late December and early January that shook Iran. It would be a mistake to view the events of the last few months in Iran as isolated or purely economic grievances. Iran's leader, Ali Khamenei, has alleged that a triangle of actors are backing his regime into a corner and seeking its overthrow: The US government, regional allies, and the Iran opposition MEK movement.

NORTHEAST

Brig HS Cheema

Rohingya Rebels Implicated in Hindu Massacre. Amnesty International says ARSA insurgents last year slaughtered 99 Hindus, findings that will perversely please Myanmar's embattled government. In a statement and briefing paper released on May 22, Amnesty announced it found evidence that “overwhelmingly” indicates the August 25 massacre of 53 Hindus in a remote pocket of northwestern Rakhine state was committed by militants from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), also known as the al-Yaqin (Faith Movement). Some 99 Hindu men, women and children are believed to have been killed: 53 from Kha MaungSeik village tract and another 46 still unaccounted for from the neighboring Ye BaukKyar village. In late September 2017, 45 bodies of Hindus believed to be from Kha MaungSeik were exhumed from mass graves. The matter of whether the Kha MaungSeik massacre was committed on the orders of ARSA's leadership, or was the result of an offshoot group or faction gone rogue, is not something Amnesty's new research endeavors to explore. That's no doubt in part because very little is known about ARSA. Consistent information about the group's power structure, chain of command, factional rifts and even its long-term goals is difficult to confirm apart from the militant group's social media posts.

Comments. It appears that human rights groups tend to see undue focus placed on ARSA as victim-blaming and detracting from the real point: the undeniable and appalling suffering of Rohingya civilians, both inside Rakhine state and now in abysmal refugee camps in Bangladesh. India needs to keep vigilant on the activities of ARSA and other factions/ militant organizations functional in Myanmar and Bangladesh. In both countries ethnic genocide of minority communities is on the rise which is not a very healthy sign.

Nepal Scraps Chinese Contract, will Build Mega Power Project on its Own. Nepal has decided to build a 750-megawatt hydel project on its own after scrapping an agreement with a Chinese infrastructure firm, the Himalayan nation's finance minister Yubaraj Khatiwada has said.

The reservoir type project in western Nepal couldn't be completed as the company, China Three Gorges Corporation or CTGC, demanded a hike in the power purchase rate, the price at which Nepal would be buying electricity. The Nepal finance minister made the announcement to scrap the agreement while releasing the first federal budget for fiscal 2019.

Nepal's rivers, cascading from the snow-capped Himalayas, have vast, untapped potential for hydropower generation, but lack of funds and technology have made Nepal lean on India to meet annual demand of 1,400 megawatts (MW). The power project has been stuck since 2012. A year ago, the Chinese firm had given Nepal an option to reduce the production capacity to 600 MW, in case Nepal was not agreeable to paying a higher power purchase cost. The agreement signed between the two nations state that the Chinese firm CTGC will have a 75 per cent stake in the project and the rest will be held by the Nepal Electricity Authority. The project with the reservoir covers Baitadi, Bajhang and Dadeldhura. It was expected to produce 1.8 billion units of electricity a year. The project with the 207-metre-tall dam was estimated to cost \$1.8 billion, including the interest charges, or \$1.4 Billion excluding interest charges. In November last year, Nepal had also [scrapped a \\$2.5 billion deal](#) with China Gezhouba Group Corporation to build the country's biggest hydropower plant, citing lapses in the award process, the energy minister had said.

NDTV NEWS Edited by Debanish Achom (with inputs from ANI) | Updated: May 29, 2018 21:09 IST

Comments. China has made a long-time strategy to offer loans for infra developments projects and then create conditions that host country is compelled to lease these projects for China strategic advantage. Nepal has taken a right step by moving out of this deal. India must raise these concerns to its neighbours at various forums so as to ensure check in China ingress in its back yard.

Nepal will Close Indian Embassy's Field Office as it has Outlived its Purpose: PM KP Sharma Oli. Nepal will close the Indian Embassy's field office in the near future as it has "outlived its purpose", Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has said. India was permitted to set up the temporary field office in 2008 to issue passes to vehicles for plying on Indian roads in the bordering regions after Kosi floods severely damaged a 17-km stretch of the east-west highway. Initially set up in the eastern Sunsari district, it was later shifted to the nearby Biratnagar city, about 375 kms from here, along the Koshi Highway. After repair of the damaged portion of the highway, Nepal had asked India to shut down the camp office but the Indian side did not comply. The Indian flag was hoisted on the office building while India started distributing scholarships and got involved in various social activities using the facility, the Kathmandu Post reported. India in 2014 sought the government's permission to establish a Consulate General Office in Biratnagar by upgrading the field office, the report said. The Nepali government had tried to remove the field office six years ago when then Maoist leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha was the foreign minister.

Zee News 20 May 2018

Comments. India should be more accommodative in its approach and sensitive to its immediate neighbours' legitimate concerns, least it loses its allies in its backyard due to its attitude.

Assam: Rajnath Singh Summons Sonowal to Delhi over Citizenship Bill. Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has been called in by Union Home Ministry to discuss over the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on 30 May will take stock of Assam's ground situation that generated over the controversial Bill. Singh will chair the meeting at North Block that will be attended by senior officials from Dispur as well as Home Ministry. Singh and Sonowal will also discuss the update regarding National Register of Citizens (NRC). The meeting assumes significance as both New Delhi and Dispur are meeting over Citizenship issue after the visit of joint parliamentary committee (JPC). Sources said that New Delhi is taking the matter very seriously as the incumbent government is interested to pass the Bill in the coming session of the Parliament. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 has triggered a widespread protest from cross section of people in Assam. BJP's alliance partner, AGP has even threatened to snap the ties over the issue. Recently, AGP president Atul Bora even called on Home Minister Singh and lodged formal protest against the controversial Bill. Meanwhile, Principal Secretary (Home) LS Changsan and Director General of Police Kuladhar Saikia held meeting with senior home ministry officials in New Delhi on 29 May.

NE Live 30 May 2018 By: RAJIV ROY

Comments. Being SC monitored issue Govt has to work in time bound manner on National Register of Citizens ([NRC](#)) issue. However, this has a long-term security ramification as well as has a direct affect on our relations with Bangladesh. This is going to be a major political challenge for the state Govt.

Centre Plans Connectivity Push on China Border. The 'invasion' of Chinese radio channels has made the Centre plan installation of optical fibre cables (OFC) in areas bordering China. The OFC push is expected to arm civilians and defence personnel with cellular and radio connectivity strong enough to counter the Chinese waves, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in Arunachal Pradesh's capital, Itanagar, on 29 May. Ms. Sitharaman said she experienced poor communication network during her recent visit to Kibithoo, the last border village in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district. "I came to know people in the area access Chinese radio frequency but not All India Radio," she said. "We will soon start work on extension of OFC in the remote border areas. The Union Cabinet discussed the issue 10 days ago and sanctioned additional funds," Ms. Sitharaman, in the frontier State to highlight the achievements of the four-year-old Narendra Modi government, said. The Defence Minister also said the government was trying to recruit more women in the armed forces from border areas. "I am considering permanent commission to women in the defence forces, but the issue is caught in a legal battle," she said. Women in the forces who did not get permanent commission had approached the court some time ago. Ms. Sitharaman, however, declined to comment on reports about mining activities by China near the border with Arunachal Pradesh. "I do not have the details and cannot say anything at this point of time," she said.

Comments. Infra Development on border area particularly opposite China needs more focused and greater impetus so as to augment India's defence preparedness. The issue now being flagged is known long time ago but got the attention of Defence Minister now is a welcome sign.

WEST ASIA

Col Sumit Rana

SYRIA

Battle to Stamp Out ISIS in Syria Gains New Momentum, but Threats Remain.
WASHINGTON — An American-backed ground offensive to wipe out the last pockets of Islamic State fighters in eastern Syria has been reignited over the past month in an attempt to beat back the militants' ability to wage guerrilla attacks.

The mission against the Islamic State has been invigorated by the return of top Kurdish commanders, a surge in French commandos, the arrival of Navy fighter jets and some secret sleuthing by Iraqi spies. But the campaign may have only little more than six months to hunt down the few hundred fighters — not enough time to extinguish a threat that is quickly moving underground.

The new momentum remains imperiled by President Trump's on-again, off-again threat to withdraw some 2,000 American troops in Syria, including hundreds of Special Operations advisers and commandos.

Russian Soldiers Killed in Surprise ISIS Attack in Syria. At least nine Russians and 26 Syrian soldiers have died after a ferocious attack by Isis militants in Syria's eastern desert, reports say.

The Russian ministry of defence said at least four Russian national soldiers were killed by rebel shelling during a joint attack mounted by several different opposition groups on an army base in Mayadeen in Deir Ezzor province last Wednesday.

Two Russian military advisers were killed during the incident and two more later died in hospital, Russian news outlets reported.

ISRAEL

Israel plans to act against Iran anywhere in Syria, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday, as Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman prepared to fly to Moscow for talks about removing the Islamic Republic and its proxy armies from the war-torn country.

Israel Believes Gaza Fighting is over for Now, Won't Attack if Rocket Fire Ends. A potential calm was reached in Gaza after the Israeli military struck dozens of militant sites in Gaza overnight as rocket fire continued toward southern Israeli communities into early Wednesday morning. Egypt negotiated a cease-fire without Israel, but Israeli defense officials said the army will respect the deal if the calm is kept.

The border area has been tense in recent weeks as Palestinians held mass protests aimed at lifting an Israeli-Egyptian blockade imposed after Hamas seized power in 2007

TURKEY

Europe Banks Alert: Turkey on Brink of Collapse as Lira Plummets Threatening by Paul Withers. As of last week, the lira was down 17 percent against the US dollar for the year, spooking global investors as many banks have borrowed money from Turkish companies.

On Tuesday, the currency rallied, jumping 5.2 percent on the US dollar to trade at TL4.467 - its strongest week since 2009 - but still down 15.3 percent for the year.

According to figures from the Bank of International Settlements, which measures financial and credit flows, global banks have lent just under €200billion to Turkey.

UAE

Yahsat's Third Satellite Now Ready to Offer Satellite Broadband Services to Africa and Brazil. Dubai: The third satellite launched by UAE-based global satellite operator Yahsat into space this year has completed its orbit testing and is now ready to start offering commercial services, it was announced on Wednesday.

Yahsat, wholly owned by Mubadala Investment Company, in a statement on Wednesday announced the successful mission completion of Al Yah 3 located at 20W. The satellite was launched into orbit from French Guiana in January this year to expand Yahsat's Ka-band coverage to 19 additional markets across Africa covering 60 per cent of the population

RUSSIA

Col Harpreet Singh

Amid Risk of US Sanctions, India and Russia Conclude Advanced Missile Deal.

Russia and India are likely to announce the S-400 Missile Defence System deal before an annual summit between PM Narendra Modi and Vladimir Putin in October. The negotiations for the missile deal have been concluded and the financial component has been finalised. The S400 missile can hit aircraft over 300 kilometres away and intercept incoming missiles.

The US had announced sanctions against Russia under the stringent law for its alleged meddling in the American presidential election in 2016. India and Russia are now looking at ways to insulate the deal from the sanctions announced by the US against Russia under its Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). CAATSA, which came into effect in January, mandates the Donald Trump administration to punish entities engaging in significant transaction with the defence or intelligence establishment of Russia. There has been mounting concerns in India over the US sanctions against Russian defence majors including Rosoboron export as billions of dollars of military purchases may be impacted because of the punitive measure. The issue is understood to have figured during PM Modi's informal talks with Vladimir Putin in Sochi last week.

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis last month appealed to the Congress to urgently provide India the national security waiver, saying imposing sanctions under CAATSA for the S-400 air defence missile deal would only hit the US.

Comments. India wants to procure the long-range missile systems to tighten its air defence mechanism, particularly along the nearly 4,000-km-long India-China border. S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system and both countries are keen to finalise the deal.

Nearly 60% of India's defence equipment is of Russian origin. In additions there are a number of Joint Ventures between the two countries. Though the US appears to understand that India does not have a choice in terms of buying Russian

equipment/spares as the major portion of its arms are of Russian origin, it is bound by CAATSA provisions. But with India now being a key partner for US interests such as QUAD, anti-terrorism and the Indo-US Logistics Pac, the US may now look at waivers for India within CAATSA, as indicated by the US Defence Secretary. It is clear that the US also has a lot to lose if the Indo-Russia defence deals are scuttled.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gp Capt G D Sharma, VSM (Retd)

Upcoming Summit between US and North Korean Presidents. There has been lot of speculation about the summit. The unscheduled 2nd meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Kim Jong- Un at Dalian, China , the indiscreet comments by the U.S. Vice President on lynching of Libyan leader Col Gadaffi by pro West rebels and North Korean leaders own safety concerns had led to this state of uncertainty. The meeting is on radar now. The credit for this goes to US secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who has put in lot of effort to get the meeting on track again. Mike Pompeo had held meeting with the Kim Jong Un at Pyongyang and Kim's his right hand man, Gen. KimYong –Cho at new York. There is a possibility of this meeting to be tripartite with South Korean president also joining the other two presidents at Singapore.

Mean while, Sergie Lavrov, Russian foreign minister has also met Kim Jong Un. His purpose of the meeting is not known but, invariably meddling by the third party may complicate the matter. There is already a doubt about the meaning of denuclearisation as understood by U.S. and North Korea. What is emanating from North Korean is that denuclearisation would be in phases which do not conform to the expectation of the Americans, who initially were demanding full denuclearisation which is transparent and well as verifiable. This now is not likely as U.S. president has accepted that this may not happen in one meeting.

There is also a doubt in many a mind that whether North Korean will forego the nuclear weapons at all. If this happens then all the gains of the summit will be for North Korean leader as he has sought assurance of no attack by U.S. and lifting of U.S. sanctions.

US Disinvites China From Military Drill Over South China Sea Actions. The United States has disinvited China from upcoming RIMPAC 2018 at international maritime exercise in Hawaii due to Beijing's "destabilizing behavior" in the South China Sea which is inconsistent with the maritime laws of the sea. China has participated in the exercise twice earlier.

This has happened as China has recently deployed anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, and electronic jammers on the Spratly Islands in South China Sea. China's also landed H6K bomber aircraft at Woody Island.

Chinese have criticized US action but would not withdraw their weapons as these are deployed on their own territory and are defensive in nature.

United States has failed to act in time when they were engaged in reclamation activity on the islands .It does not appear that any amount of US pressure will dissuade them now from strengthening their hold on these. Moreover, China now has considerable military capability and could counter US actions.

US Military Renames Pacific Command. United States has renamed its Pacific command as Indo-Pacific Command. The name change has come amidst tension with china. Apart from now bringing in the importance of Indian Ocean region in the overall concept of Indo- Pacific, the change does not entail any change in its area of responsibility or addition of its assets. The Indo- pacific should extend up to the African coast and its choke points but, this is not included in the Indo-Pacific command area of responsibility and presently covers part the US Central command.

CAR

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

Enhancement of Central Asian Republics (CARs)-Pakistan Relations through CPEC Connectivity. A seminar titled “Pakistan – A Land of Opportunities for Central Asian Republics” was held in Pakistan on 29 May 2018. It was attended by the Minister for Planning and Development, Ahsan Iqbal, ambassadors from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan among others. The minister stated that in addition to ongoing CPEC projects, two more corridors would also be completed during the next few years connecting Pakistan, China and Central Asia. One corridor would link Peshawar with Kabul and Tajikistan and the other will connect Quetta with Herat and Turkmenistan¹⁵. He informed that these corridors would not only provide connectivity to Central Asia but also extend it to the Russian Federation. All the five CARs are landlocked and don't have access to sea. They could launch transit trade through the Gwadar Port. Tajikistan could access the Indian Ocean by connecting the China-Pakistan railway once it is completed. It was brought out that in the context of geo-strategic situation in the region, CPEC offers an alternative solution to link up Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which directly border China, as well as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, to the route, thus ruling out reliance on the traditional perception that all roads from Pakistan into the Central Asia go through Kabul or Wakhan corridor. This arrangement if successful is likely to affect the centrality of India supported Chhabahar port for providing ocean connectivity to CARs and beyond.

¹⁵ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/323064-cpec-to-provide-impetus-to-pak-cars-relations>, 30 may 2018