

ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 29 AUG 2016

AMERICA

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

Defence Minister, Manohar Parikkar to Visit US from August 29 to September 1. While the agenda of the visit is not known, it is speculated that India and the US could sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) during the visit. India was not willing to sign the Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) in original form that the US has signed with its NATO allies. LEMOA has been tailor made for India. Unlike the LSA, India under LEMOA will allow use of ports and airports and facilities on case to case basis. India could even deny the US the use of its facilities for an operational mission if necessary.

US Defence Secretary Ash Carter has commented that he will be discussing exciting new projects including a landmark co-production agreement of aircraft/weapon systems. Despite positive talk and promises, America has still not transferred any defence technology to India. We may be able to buy defence equipment but, we would not get the defence technology from America, unless India signs so called US foundational agreements. After we sign LEMOA we may also sign Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum Agreement (CISMOA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) after these take in to account Indian concerns and are modified to Indian requirements. These may clear the way to transfer high-end technology to India.

AFGHANISTAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

Recurring Violence in Helmand. Helmand has become the scene of fierce fighting between Taliban insurgents and Afghan forces. The conflict has closed roads and caused people to flee areas of intense violence.

About 100 U.S. troops were rushed to Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, after local Afghan officials warned that the city was in danger of falling to the Taliban. Insurgents have made gains around the city seizing nearby districts and battling with Afghan forces despite U.S. air strikes. Helmand was the focus of US operations for several years during the Afghanistan War and was the scene of some of the bloodiest battles between international forces and the Taliban. At the peak of violence in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2011, the middle section of Helmand Province, comprised 1 percent of the Afghan population but accounted for over 20 percent of the country's violence.

Around 80 percent of the province is under the control of the insurgents. There are a number of districts under government their control, but the government is only present in the district administrative centre and all around areas are under the control of the insurgents.

The Taliban has made gains across Afghanistan as U.S. and allied forces have scaled back their commitments in the country.

The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has forced the US to rethink its plan to withdraw forces from the country. Last month it slowed the planned drawdown of forces in Afghanistan reducing troop levels to 8,400 by the end of the year instead of the planned 5,500.

American University of Afghanistan Kabul Attacked. The American University of Afghanistan in Kabul was attacked Wednesday 24 Aug. The two militants, who stormed into the university with explosives, were later killed by police. The attack left 12 people dead, including seven students, three police and two security guards and injured 44 people, including 35 students.

The attack follows an Aug. 7 kidnapping of two professors at the university, an American, and an Australian.

The American University of Afghanistan, which opened 10 years ago, has about 1,700 students, according to its website. The private university was established with the help of the United States Agency for International Development in 2006.

Delivery of 4th Combat Helicopter to Afghanistan Delayed. In December 2015, just prior to PM Modi's visit to Kabul, India transferred three Mi-25 (Mi-24D) helicopter gun ships to the Afghan Air Force (AAF). It is yet to hand over the last of four Mi-25 helicopters due to lack of spare parts.

The AAF has been suffering from a lack of Russian spare parts for its fledgling fleet of five Mi-35s gun ships, supplied by the Czech Republic in 2008, which has kept most of the helicopters grounded. Western sanctions against Russia and the resulting inability of NATO countries to purchase Russian-made hardware for Afghanistan have aggravated the problem.

The Mi-25 is an upgraded variant of the Russian-made Mi-24 attack/transport helicopter. It is a close-air support aircraft armed with a four-barrelled, 12.7 mm machine gun, as well as rocket and grenade launchers. It can be deployed against ground troops including armoured and slow moving air targets. It can also serve as a low-capacity troop transport (up to eight paratroopers), and be used for medical evacuation missions.

IRAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

Russia not to Launch Strikes from Iran Military Base. Russia pulled its warplanes out of Iran after conducting three days of air-strikes on Syria from the Shahid Nojeh Air Base in eastern Iran an Iranian base.

Iranian officials stated that Russian fighter jets had temporary permission to fly missions over Syria from Iran. They highlighted that Russia was only refuelling its bombers and not setting up a permanent base.

Foreign forces (Russian aircraft) were based in Iran for the first time since World War II. The foreign use of military installations is forbidden by Iran's constitution. The Iranian defence minister announced that the military cooperation was over.

Russia and Iran are the main international backers of the Syrian regime, but Iran has been more guarded in revealing the full extent of its involvement. Iranian defence analysts are sceptical of Iran and Russia's mutual interests in Syria. The Iranians want to work with President Bashar al-Assad to bolster their common allies in the

Arab world. Russia wants to check US influence in the region. The relationship between Iran and Russia has always lacked trust.

Russia has short-range aircraft at an airbase outside the Syrian coastal city of Latakia and has launched cruise missiles from the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas. It has also conducted long-range bombing raids from Russia.

Iran for OPEC Action to Boost Oil Price. Iran, OPEC's third-largest producer may support joint action to prop up the oil market aiding efforts to revive a global deal on freezing production levels at talks next month.

Iran has been boosting output after the lifting of Western sanctions in January. It refused to join a previous attempt this year by OPEC plus non-members such as Russia to stabilize production, and talks collapsed in April. Iran is now reaching its pre-sanctions production level soon and is now more willing to cooperate with the OPEC.

Members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries are due to meet informally in Algeria next month on the sidelines of the International Energy Forum.

ASEAN

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

China Factor in the ASEAN Stage



Beijing has always viewed Kuala Lumpur as a special friend given the long relationship the two countries have shared. For Malaysia and China, the focus should be on the convergence of interests.

MALAYSIA has been very quiet on issues relating to the South China Sea (SCS) – Kuala Lumpur and several Asean nations, as well as China, have laid overlapping claims on it – but analysts opine Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is unlikely to change his pro-China stance anytime soon.

Malaysia's position vis-a-vis China was captured in an Asean diplomatic U-turn on June 14. A special meeting in Yunnan between Asean foreign ministers and China's foreign minister ended in confusion after Malaysia released – and later retracted – a joint Asean statement that expressed “serious concerns” over developments in SCS.

And according to foreign press reports, China had lobbied Laos – which is getting economic aid from the mainland – to dissociate itself from the report. This had made it impossible for Asean to take a joint stand on the SCS issue.

The original statement had stated: “We expressed our serious concerns over recent and ongoing developments, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and which may have the potential to undermine peace, security and stability in the South China Sea.”

It was clear that top ASEAN diplomats were protesting against Beijing’s recent land reclamation activities and artificial island-building on disputed reefs, islets and shoals in the troubled waters there. China has claimed sovereignty over 80% of the South China Sea, based mainly on historical ownership.

Following this incident, it was no surprise that Malaysia kept quiet when an international tribunal at the Hague in early July dismissed China’s claims in the resource-rich waters and ruled in favour of the Philippines’ argument that there was no legal basis for Beijing’s claims on most of the South China Sea. China has ignored the tribunal decision.

As expected, ASEAN as a grouping did not issue any joint statement on the ruling after the embarrassing June 14 affair. However, some unhappy members did speak out individually.

Malaysians have given a lot of support to their leaders to maintain close Malaysia-China relations and we should maintain that for mutual benefit. But surprisingly, the Philippines – whose former government was instigated by the United States to lodge a complaint against China at the tribunal – took a conciliatory tone. The present government said it wanted to have economic co-operation with China rather than confrontation, despite open protests held by its citizens against China. Hence, is Malaysia being dynamic and realistic by not offending China on disputes and tension over SCS waters, which China claimed is stirred up by the provocative actions of Japan and the US?

A seminar on Aug 17 on ASEAN-China relations, organised by the Institute of China Studies (of Universiti Malaya), gave a near consensus view that Najib, who dictates foreign policies, would not risk severing ties with China on this issue.

Most analysts see economics as the paramount reason for Malaysia to be “so quiet”.

Lean HooiHooi, professor of economics from Universiti Sains Malaysia, highlighted that both nations have seen “remarkable growth” in bilateral trade, mutual investment and tourism, and noted these economic benefits are expanding.

China has been the biggest importer of Malaysian commodities and goods for the past nine years. Bilateral trade with China from 2013 hit US\$106bil (RM426bil) with balance of trade tilting towards Malaysia’s favour. The two nations are targeting for US\$160bil (RM644bil) in 2017. In Asean, Malaysia has been China’s largest trading partner since 2008.

China is also emerging to be the biggest investor in Malaysia, after buying energy assets from 1Malaysia Development Berhad and equity shares in Bandar Malaysia for RM25bil.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai is planning to woo multi-billion ringgit investments from China for the development of Malaysian ports and airports amid sluggish foreign investments.

Currently, China is the third largest source of foreign tourists for Malaysia. The number of arrivals is expected to hit two million this year, according to Lean.

In addition, China's support of the ringgit via the purchase of Malaysian bonds is one of the factors that have prevented the battered currency from plunging further amid incessant negative news.

Hence, for economic reasons, Malaysia cannot afford to upset China at the moment. It is focusing on the convergence of interests.

In this aspect, Malaysia is no different from other ASEAN members Laos and Cambodia, which are receiving vast financial aid from China and help in infrastructure projects.

Moreover, these ASEAN countries, together with Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar, will benefit from China's massive one-belt-one-road regional economic initiative.

China's economic influence in most individual ASEAN member states is enormous, and has prevented Asean from reaching a consensus on how to deal with China's SCS activities.

Economics aside, Malaysia has limited budget for defence, according to ShahrmanLockman, senior analyst on foreign policy and securities issues at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia.

He believes that a huge allocation of funds for SCS's stormy waters cannot be justified during the current economic slowdown.

The premier's close relationship with China is also reason for Malaysia to stay mum on China's activities and military build-up in the disputed SCS area, observed Shahrman.

He noted that Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, the former premier of Malaysia, was the first Asean leader to establish official ties with Beijing in 1974. And China has often stated its gratitude for this bold gesture made during the Cold War period, and has referred to Malaysia as "the most trusted and reliable friend" in Asean.

The mainland has also been very warm to Malaysian leaders, in particular Najib. Chinese President Xi Jinping is inviting the Malaysian leader to visit China in October.

Over the last two years, Najib and Xi had held six meetings and three special dinners at Kuala Lumpur, Beijing, Boao (China), New York and Manila.

Malaysia's domestic politics is also a factor that demands more time than foreign policy from the leader.

"Since the PM will face a general election within the next two years or so, he cannot afford to court any external trouble now," said Shahrman at a seminar last week.

Analysts note that there is no fear for the Malaysian leader to adopt a pro-China stance as there is backing from Malaysians. Unlike the Philippines and Vietnam, Malaysians have not gone to the streets to protest against China over the SCS issues.

According to a survey by foreign-owned Pew Research Centre, Malaysia and Pakistan were the “most pro-China countries” in the world in 2013, with 81% of Malaysians surveyed holding positive views towards China and 55% towards the US.

Malaysia’s pro-China stance has not changed after three years. A total of 70% of Malaysians have a favourable impression of China, with 67% feeling that the Malaysia-China relationship is heading in the right direction, according to a public opinion survey conducted by the UM’s Institute of China Studies in April this year.

Among the races, a total of 69% of Malay respondents – similar to the Chinese – held positive views towards China.

In the survey, 81% of Indian respondents liked China.

As an economic power, China was viewed by 45% of respondents as “an advantage” to Malaysia while 15% saw it as “potential threat”, 6% as “a serious threat” and 19% took a neutral stand.

“Malaysians have given a lot of support to their leaders to maintain close Malaysia-China relations and we should maintain that for mutual benefit. But if things get complicated, like if the South China Sea issues flare up in a major way again, then it is possible that public opinion may alter,” said DrNgeow Chow Bing who led the survey.

He noted that since the 1990s, Malaysia-China relations have developed in many fronts, including economics, politics and culture.

Due to the belt-road initiative, China’s investment in Malaysia has increased significantly in the recent two years.

According to Bill Hayton, the author of *The South China Sea*, Malaysian politicians know too well that there is no political mileage to be derived from attacking the country which Kuala Lumpur earned the most foreign exchange from. Among the voters are many Chinese businessmen and traders who have earned the “first pot of gold” due to early trade with China. In addition, politicians could not even win votes during the election by attacking China “as not an inch of land was taken away and there is no loss of people’s life” in the SCS issue, noted Hayton.

Generally, most analysts at the Aug 17 seminar held the views that Malaysia, as well as Asean, has to manage relations with China carefully, particularly during times of economic uncertainty.

China on its part may have also realised it cannot take ASEAN’s uneasy silence for granted for too long.

Despite inflamed rhetoric directed at the United States and its allies concerning the Hague’s ruling, China said on July 12 that it is “ready to work with other coastal states and the international community to ensure the safety of and unimpeded access to the international shipping lanes in the South China Sea”.

And on Aug 15 and 16, China and the 10-member countries of ASEAN agreed to finalise the framework for a maritime code of conduct to ease tensions in the South China Sea by mid-2017, according to the *China Daily*. They also agreed to create a

hotline for maritime crisis situations. These agreements will be presented for approval from leaders of the nations involved at the coming summit at Laos in September.

ASEAN has wanted the United States and Japan to play a role to correct the imbalance of influence in this region, but they have also realised there is more tension in the South China Sea than before.

If an unlikely war flared up, it would not benefit any country and international shipping would be hit.

The South China Sea is a vital trading passage for China, Japan and Korea, as well as the US. Over US\$5 trillion (RM20 trillion) of annual shipping trade passes through the region and US-only trade makes up US\$1.2 trillion (RM4.8 trillion), according to the *Wall Street Journal*. Circumnavigating the South China Sea to avoid conflict would be more expensive for shipping firms. The extra distance would involve massive extra fuel costs.

Malaysian analysts are generally optimistic that various claimant parties will find an amicable solution to the South China Sea disputes.

“All obstacles are surmountable. Eventually, the disagreements will be eclipsed by convergence,” opined Shahrizan.

“Relationship is more important than the South China Sea, which for four months in a year experiences very extreme weather conditions. There will be solutions to the SCS issues,” said Datuk Chin Yoon Chin, director-general of the Maritime Institute of Malaysia.

The Haze is Back Across South East Asia. The air pollution is caused by the burning of forests and peat land in Indonesia so it can be used for growing crops, mostly lucrative palm oil. An annual feature of life in Indonesia's neighbouring countries, it has been blamed for deaths and illness.



Indonesia, which has declared a state of emergency in six provinces, has repeatedly said it is cracking down on the slash-and-burn activities.

But the issue is a constant source of diplomatic tension, with Jakarta accused by Singapore and Malaysia of not doing enough to tackle it.

WEST ASIA

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Liberation of Khalidiya Island. The Iraqi forces have liberated Khalidiya Island, an important place, approx 20 km west of Ramadi, along the axis to Fallujah, from ISIS. It is reported that 1200 ISIS elements have been killed in the operation.

Iraqi Forces Liberate Qayyarah from ISIS. The Iraqi forces supported by US led coalition airstrikes have liberated the important town of Qayyarah, south of Mosul, killing dozens of ISIS elements. The ISIS elements are reported to have flooded the streets with crude oil by opening pipelines, as retaliation.

Operations for Retake of Mosul Province. The Iraqi security forces are now focusing on liberation of Mosul. The Iraqi forces have been making slow but steady progress. The Coalition forces have intensified airstrikes in Mosul, killed 12 ISIS elements in south Mosul, 10 ISIS elements killed in an explosion carrying explosive devices.

IDP Fleeing Mosul may Rise to One Million. It has been reported by ICRC that as the fighting intensifies in Mosul, the number of internally displaced people is likely to rise to one million. Thus, there is a need to make necessary arrangements to avert humanitarian crisis.

ISIS Ambush Civilians Fleeing Hawija. ISIS ambushed civilians fleeing Hawija to go to Peshmerga held areas, killing 20 and injuring 45. ISIS also executed 48 young men in Hawija trying to escape to other areas.

Comments.

Iraqi forces have successfully liberated Khalidiya Island and Qayyarah areas from ISIS, major success post liberation of Ramadi. During these operations hundreds of ISIS elements have been killed.

The operations to retake Mosul, the last stronghold of ISIS in Iraq are progressing well, but slowly. The Iraqi forces have made significant gains, inching closer to central part of the city. In the ongoing operations to retake Mosul, the security forces have been exerting pressure from all fronts and significant gains have been made.

A humanitarian crisis is looming large as the operations gain momentum for capture of Mosul. It is expected that IDP are likely to touch about a million. Thus, there is need to make large scale arrangements to locate these people, to avoid humanitarian crisis.

SYRIA

Govt Forces Take Control of Daraya Town. After striking a deal with the rebels, the Assad Govt has taken control of rebel held Daraya town, which was under siege since 2012. The town is just few kilometers away from Assad's palace in Damascus, where the uprising against Assad's Govt began. The rebels along with families have moved to Idlib and residents evacuated to Govt controlled areas in Damascus.

FSA Captures the Border Town of Jarablus. The FSA supported by US led Coalition airstrikes and Turkish airstrikes have captured the strategic border town of Jarablus from ISIS. The ISIS elements have been pushed back to their last strong hold of al-Bab along the Syria – Turkey border.

Turkey Launches Major Offensive South of Jarablus. The FSA post capture of Jarablus, on the east bank of Euphrates River, is looking to capture al Bab, west of Euphrates, to connect the Kurdish territory on both sides of the river. On the contrary, Turkey does not want consolidation of Kurdish territory along its border and wants Kurdish forces to remain on the east bank of the river. Turkey has launched a major offensive south of Jarablus to fight ISIS as well as restrict Kurdish expansion along the border. The situation is likely to escalate.

Govt Air Strikes in East Aleppo. The Govt forces and Russians continue airstrikes in the rebels held east Aleppo, causing large number of civilian casualties.

US and Russia Close to Deal on Syria Peace. US and Russia are close to reaching a deal to bring peace in Syria. A broad agreement has been reached; however, details have not been divulged so far.

Comments.

The situation in Syria remains grim with intense fighting in large parts of the country, due to failure of peace process.

Govt forces continue deadly airstrikes across Syria, causing large number of civilians and damage to property.

It is reported that US and Russia are close to announcing peace deal in Syria to put an end to the hostilities.

YEMEN

Al Qaida Lose Last Stronghold in South Yemen. The Govt forces liberated the entire Abyan Province in South Yemen from Al Qaida and Daesh linked elements, after more than five years of lawlessness. The operation was supported by Saudi led coalition air strikes.

Yemen Forces Break Siege of City of Taiz. The Govt forces have succeeded in partially lifting siege of city of Taiz. The forces captured a strategic mountain located in the western entrance to the city dominating the road from the city to the Port city of Aden. This would help in providing humanitarian relief to the residents of Taiz.

Yemen Meeting in Jeddah to Resume Peace Talks. A meeting on Yemen with a focus on resumption of peace talks between the Hadi Govt and Houthi rebels is planned in Jeddah in the week ahead. The meeting will be attended by top US official, John Kerry and foreign ministers of Gulf countries.

Houthi Rebels Continue Rocket Attacks on Saudi Arabia. The Houthi rebels intensify rocket attacks on Saudi Arabia in retaliation to Saudi led coalition air strikes on Houthi strongholds in Yemen.

Comments.

Sincere efforts are being made to resume the collapsed UN sponsored peace talks between Hadi Govt and Houthi rebels. A meeting is scheduled in Jeddah in the coming week, attended by John Kerry, the US Secretary of State and Gulf countries foreign ministers.

The Hadi Govt has been successful in lifting partial siege in the city of Taiz, humanitarian aid to the residents could be resumed.

The Hadi Govt achieved a major success in liberating Abyan Province, the last stronghold of Al Qaida and ISIS in South Yemen.

AFRICA

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

What next for Islamic State in Libya after Sirte? Militants of so-called Islamic State (IS) are on the verge of being ousted completely from their stronghold in Libya's central coastal city of Sirte.

Militia groups aligned to the UN-brokered Libyan Government of National Accord launched an operation in May to rid Sirte of IS and regain control of the city. The battle to expel the jihadists has achieved more success recently with the help of US air strikes. It has damaged the jihadists, but does not spell the end for their presence in the country.

Why is Losing Sirte Significant? Losing Sirte is a blow to the group's image. In its propaganda, IS had repeatedly portrayed the city, close to Western Europe, as a key position outside of its main areas of operation in Iraq and Syria.

IS turned key buildings in Sirte into its own institutions and prisons, and used the local radio station to air its propaganda. The city, which was the birthplace of former leader Muammar Gaddafi, also brought IS close to Libya's oil-rich area.

Does IS have any other strongholds in Libya? No, but it is still present elsewhere in the country. Its militants have long been fighting other forces in pockets of Libya's second city, Benghazi, and have recently launched several attacks on its western outskirts.

IS took complete control of Sirte in June 2015 it was were pushed out of its initial stronghold of Derna in Libya's far east by rival militias aligned with Al-Qaeda.

How many IS Militants are there in Libya?

There are no reliable figures about the number of IS militants in Libya but it is estimated that the group has about 5,000 fighters in the country, many of who were thought to have been deployed in Sirte.

What might IS do now?

Caught on the back foot, the group may initially dissolve into desert areas and revert to earlier tactics. Before it lost Derna, the group made its presence felt elsewhere in Libya by carrying out repeated bombings in the key cities of Tripoli and Benghazi, as well as of oil installations partly run by Western companies. And now, putting up resistance as it loses the battle in Sirte, IS has again been employing suicide bombings as a means of attack.

Where might they go next?

Some believe IS fighters might flee to remote areas in the south. If they choose this route, they could head for the Sahel-Sahara area, where other jihadists are present and operate relatively freely.

Libya's importance to IS means that the militants may eventually regroup and emerge in another part of the country, seeking to take land that they can then showcase as a major gain.



Bani Walid, another former Gaddafi bastion, is one option for IS fighters. Local media recently indicated that air strikes hit a road in the city's south-east, which reports said were "often used" by IS fighters. The militants may seek to boost their forces in and around Benghazi.

Or they may head towards Sabratha in the west, where they used to run a large training camp. This site might not hold much appeal, however, as it was the target of a US air strike in February. Another option is Ajdabiya, which lies between Sirte and Benghazi, where they previously had a presence. There, however, they would have to confront al-Qaeda-linked rivals and the Libyan National Army of the Tobruk-based parliament.

But while the group might want to seize territory, it may struggle achieve this in the face of mounting pressure and US air strikes.

How China's Base in Djibouti Reveals an 'Expanding Sphere of Influence'. As the Chinese military base in Djibouti is set to complete by next year, China has repeatedly expressed that it has no intention of following the US's example in expanding its global military influence and projecting power over other countries. But what do the Chinese want to achieve in Djibouti? China's facilities in the small East African nation of Djibouti are meant to reinforce Chinese peace-keeping and anti-piracy missions near the Gulf of Aden and Somalia, according to the Global Times.

US Tries to Prevent Eurasia's Integration Led by Russia, China has a very small number of overseas military deployments and the country largely lacks the ability to protect its citizens and interests in Africa. Other countries have an excessive amount of military bases all over the world, particularly the US which has military bases in 42 foreign countries. Djibouti is also no exception to an American military presence as it has the largest US permanent military base in Africa, Camp Lemonnier, which is home to more than 4,000 personnel, mostly part of the Combined Joint Task Force. "The facilities in Djibouti serve to protect China's economic interests in Africa and to help safeguard regional peace, as China is only beginning to learn to behave like a responsible global power," Global Times reported Li as saying.

Considering that both the US and China will be rubbing shoulders in Djibouti, it raises some concerns regarding how will the two powers manage to cooperate in the African country. "Most likely, China and the United States might face some friction over Djibouti," the former head of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Lieutenant-General Nikolai Moiseyev told online publication Gazeta.ru

The US base in Djibouti is primarily used by Special Forces for unmanned operations against the jihadist groups in the region. The US base is located near the main airport of Djibouti. Attack helicopters and other US military aircraft use the runway of the airport. Hence, the United States frankly does not want Chinese military aircraft; including unmanned aircraft to fly anywhere near US facilities. This is How China Plans to Rival US Dominance in Global Trade Djibouti is situated on the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and is gateway to the Suez Canal. It enjoys unusual stability in an otherwise volatile region and provides an important port for landlocked Ethiopia. Its proximity to troubled regions in the Middle East and Africa makes it a preferred location for foreign military bases, so it seems that China and the US will continue to compete for influence in Africa.

Chinese Ministry of National Defense admitted in February that China has begun construction of logistics facilities in Djibouti to support troops in ships in the Gulf of Aden and waters off the Somali coast. In response to claims that "China is elbowing Americans out of the strategic East African footprint," Djibouti Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf said that the country greets China's presence in Djibouti, "just as we previously welcomed forces from the US, NATO, France, the UK, Italy, and Japan, who are present in our country,". However, Pentagon analysts predict that in the next decade China will build a few more military bases.

One of the most likely candidates for the placement of the Chinese outposts is Oman, where Chinese military ships often stop personnel leave and resupply of material resources. Some experts have predicted that a future Chinese base could be built in the Seychelles or the Pakistani port of Karachi. The officials of these countries, however have so far, made no statements about this.

Somalia attack: Gunman storm beach restaurant in Mogadishu



At least seven people have been killed in a bomb and gun attack on a seaside restaurant in the Somali capital Mogadishu.

Police said a car bomb exploded outside the Banadir Beach Club in the Lido area and gunmen then stormed the building. Security forces say they killed two attackers and arrested another after a six-hour operation overnight.

The militant Islamist group al-Shabab stages regular attacks in Mogadishu and other parts of Somalia. Earlier this year, 17 people died when the group stormed a restaurant on Lido beach.

Al-Shabab, which is linked to al-Qaeda, was ousted from Mogadishu in August 2011 but still has a presence in large areas of southern Somalia.

Nigerian Launches Offensive Against Militants in Delta Oil Hub.

Nigeria's military said on Saturday it had launched a new offensive against militants in the oil-producing Niger Delta, killing five and arresting 23.

Armed groups have claimed responsibility for a series of attacks on oil and gas pipelines in the southern region, reducing the country's oil output by 700,000 barrels day.

A Special Forces battalion moved against militant camps on Friday in an operation "aimed at getting rid of all forms of criminal activities", army spokesman Sani Usman said in a statement. "In the course of the operation, five militants that attacked the troops were killed in action, while numerous others were injured and 23 suspects were arrested."

There was no immediate reaction from militant groups, which operate from hard-to-access creeks in the swampland. The groups say they want a greater share of Nigeria's oil wealth to go to the impoverished region. Crude sales account for about 70 percent of Nigeria's government revenue and most of the oil comes from the Delta.

MYANMAR

Gp Capt GD sharma, VSM (Retd)

State Visit of President of Myanmar to India (August 27-30, 2016). Following the recent visit of our Minister of Foreign affairs, President U Htin Kyaw of Myanmar have come to India on four days state visit. Mrs Sushma Swaraj had gone to

Myanmar immediately after NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi returned from her first visit of China after her party formed government in Myanmar. Some analysts termed our foreign affairs Minister's visit an effort to counter Chinese influence on Myanmar as NLD leader Suu Kyi had chosen Myanmar over India in her first overseas state visit. Now it seems President Htin Kyah's visit too is aimed at serving same purpose i.e. to find some kind of balance in relations with her two large neighbours India and China.

This shows a realistic approach of the NLD leader. Myanmar in its national interest will try to maintain friendly relations with both. Suu Kyi was cut up with India on its maintaining close relations with the former military regime of Myanmar. But, this was our necessity in view of cross border terror and illegal narcotic trade which flourished in the India's north east and Myanmar. This could not have been controlled without support of the former Myanmar regime, secondly, we also have concerns about Chinese adversarial influence in the region. The situation is much better now with India trying to manage insurgency arriving agreements / military means in which Myanmar does have a major role.

During her visit to Myanmar, Mrs. Sushma Swaraj focused her talks on promotion of bilateral trade ties, cooperation in transport, health and energy sectors and has offered assistance in development of Myanmar in various sectors. Myanmar on its part pledged not to allow any anti India activity from its soil. It has vowed to cooperate on border security following clashes between the Army and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-IM), near Myanmar-India border.

It must be understood that new government is trying to reduce its dependence on any one country. It seems that Chinese leadership had sought to restart work on closed Myittha dam project on Irrawaddy river which was stopped by the previous regime after local population of Myanmar protested. There is nothing to support the view that Suu Kyi will go against the people's wishes and give clearance to the project which was stopped after public outcry.

India has advantage in relations with Myanmar due to old historical linkage, similarities and cultural ties. We need to complete our promised projects such as Trilateral highway, Multimodal project etc in time. To gain goodwill, the delivery of projects should come along with keeping in mind the sensitivities of the local population. They should not feel that India is exploiting them as being perceived in respect of China.

NEPAL

Col Saikat Roy

Nepal's special envoy calls on Prime Minister Mr. Modi. Nepalese Deputy Prime Minister Bimalendra Nidhi, who is visiting India as a special envoy after a new government came into power in the Himalayan nation, called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday, August 20, 2016. This is the first high-level visit from Nepal to India after the new Maoist-led government headed by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" took charge in Kathmandu earlier this month. Nidhi, who is on a four-day visit to India, on Friday called on External Affairs Minister Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, Home Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh and President Pranab Mukherjee. After coming to power, the new Maoist-led government said Nepal wanted to further strengthen bilateral relations with both India and China.

Comments.

While the “Prachanda” Govt is eager to have cordial relations with India, it continues to court China as a viable alternative to its dependence on India.

BANGLADESH

Col Saikat Roy

Dhaka Cafe Attack Mastermind and Two Others Gunned Down in Police Encounter. Bangladesh Police on Saturday, August 27, stormed a militant hideout and killed Dhaka cafe attack mastermind, Canadian-Bangladeshi, Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury and his two associates. Chowdhury was identified by police as the mastermind of the July 1 cafe attack in Dhaka that killed 22 people and the subsequent assault on the Eid congregation at Sholakia. According to police, Chowdhury used to stay in Canada and might have developed a network of financiers abroad before coming to Bangladesh in 2013. The raid was conducted upon information gleaned from an arrested operative of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Comments.

The tracking down of the terrorist mastermind is a result of a series of arrest that had been made earlier to apprehend the perpetrators of the terror attacks.

The Islamic State group had claimed responsibility for the restaurant attack, but Bangladeshi authorities continue to deny the presence of organised foreign terrorist in Bangladesh, in fact it has on each occasion trounced the claims of IS presence and reiterated that JMB a home-grown radical terrorist outfit is responsible for the terrorist acts.

SRI LANKA

Col Saikat Roy

Al-Qaeda Attempting to Recruit Youth from Sri Lanka. The Asian Age has reported that Al-Qaeda is attempting to recruit youth from Sri Lanka and South India. In an attempt to counter the propaganda drive by Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda is now translating its publications and propaganda materials into regional Indian languages such as Tamil and Malayalam. This is the first time that al-Qaeda has made a concerted attempt to target youth from South India and Sri Lanka.

Comments. Experts point out that of the Indians who travelled for jihad to Syria and Afghanistan, majority joined al-Qaeda instead of ISIS, and many of them hailed from the southern states. They are believed to be helping the al-Qaeda with the translation work.

Pakistan looks to strengthen relations with Sri Lanka. Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said Pakistan and Sri Lanka have tremendous scope to further strengthen the bilateral economic and trade relations and that the Pakistani Government will fully cooperate for expanding the bilateral economic ties.

The Sri Lankan Finance Minister congratulated Ishaq Dar on successful hosting of the SAARC Finance Ministers meeting and stated that decisions reached in the meeting will further strengthen the SAARC process. The Sri Lankan Finance Minister

also appreciated the exceptional economic performance of Pakistan over the past three years. He said the South Asian countries could learn a lot from the reform efforts in Pakistan, which have not only stabilized the economy in a short span of time but also put it on the path of growth.

Sri Lanka Seeking a Partner from the Indian Subcontinent to Develop East Container Terminal at Colombo Port. The Sri Lanka Port Authority is seeking an investment of approximately \$400 million to complete the half-built East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port, Shipping Minister Arjuna Ranatunga said on Thursday, August 25, 2016. The Sri Lankan government is keen to involve a company from the Indian subcontinent as 75 percent of container traffic through Colombo is transshipment cargo from the region. The project comes three years after the opening of the \$500 million Chinese-built Colombo International Container Terminal, which made Colombo the only Mega Port between Dubai and Singapore. Ranatunga said the East Container Terminal will be about two meters deeper, when completed, than the CICT.

Comments. Due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean and proximity to the Indian mainland, Sri Lanka forms an important element in the rubrics of Indian Naval strategy. Since such economic cooperation are closely linked to defence cooperation and extension of the facilities for subsequent use as port of call, India should play its cards cautiously and ensure that forces inimical to the Indian interests do not make inroads in the proposed deal.

U.S. Pacific Command concludes Operation Pacific Angel in Northern Sri Lanka. The United States and Sri Lanka conducted humanitarian assistance operations from August 15-20, 2016, as part of Operation Pacific Angel (PACANGEL) 16. Led by Pacific Air Forces, the exercise enhances participating nations' HADR capabilities while providing much needed services to people. The multinational team led by United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) provided general medical care for approximately 4,000 people and renovating six schools that serve a total of 1,100 students, in Jaffna.

Sri Lanka Armed Forces Annual Joint Field Exercise Cormorant Strike to Commence on September 3, 2016. The three-week long joint military exercise, 'Exercise - Cormorant Strike VII- 2016', annual Field Training Exercise (FTX) with the participation of over 3,500 personnel of Sri Lanka Armed Forces and representatives from foreign countries will commence on Saturday, September 3. Military officers from Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and USA have confirmed their participation at the exercise. This year's exercise is aimed at training participants on patrolling, infiltration, exfiltration, reconnaissance and surveillance, combat tracking, link-ups, caches, demolitions, raids, ambushes, cut-off and blocks, rescue missions, sniping, urban fighting and disaster relief missions.

UN Secretary General to visit Sri Lanka Next Week. The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to arrive in Sri Lanka next week. On the evening of August 31, the Secretary-General will meet President, Prime Minister and other members of the Government. While in Sri Lanka, the Secretary-General will visit a resettlement site in Jaffna in the North, and participate in an event on the role of youth in reconciliation and coexistence in Galle, in the South of the island.

Taranjit Singh Sandhu next Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka. Taranjit Singh Sandhu, who is India's deputy chief of mission in Washington, is headed to Sri

Lanka as the new High Commissioner. Mr. Sandhu, with a distinguished career spanning over twenty eight years, has previously served in Sri Lanka as the Head of the Political Department in the High Commission of India, Colombo from December 2000 to September 2004.

SPACE

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM(Retd)

ISRO successfully tested Scramjet engine technology on 28 August 2016 in an Advance Technology vehicle which apart from twin Scramjet engines, comprised two stage rockets which flew for 300 seconds. After the second solid rocket stage burn out, the scramjet engine was switched on for 5 seconds. With this, apart India from US, Russia, China and Japan have tested this technology.

Research in Scramjet engines commenced in 1950's but, interest remained subdued till 70's. It is only recently, computational tools have reached to a level of maturity to analyse and design the scramjet engines.

Similar to conventional jet engines, scramjet-powered aircraft carry the fuel on board, and obtain the oxidizer by the ingestion of atmospheric oxygen. This requirement would limit the use of scramjets to suborbital atmospheric propulsion, where the oxygen content of the air is sufficient to maintain combustion. Hence their use could be for transportation or in missiles. In absence of atmosphere at higher heights, their use in space launch appears to be limited since upper space is devoid of atmosphere.

An aircraft using this type of jet engine could dramatically reduce the time it takes to travel from one place to another. However, there are questions about whether such a vehicle could carry enough fuel to make useful length trips, and then there is concern of sonic boom the reason for this the Concorde was withdrawn from flying .However, the technology is still at a nascent stage to draw firm conclusions .
