

# ENVIRONMENT SCAN – 09 NOV 2015

**CHINA Col C Madhwal, VSM**

US B-52 Bombers Fly Near Disputed South China Sea Islands: Two US B-52 bomber planes have flown near artificial islands built by China in disputed areas of the South China Sea, the Pentagon has said. Their mission continued despite being warned by Chinese ground controllers. The incident comes ahead of a visit by US President Barack Obama to a summit in Manila next week, which China's President Xi Jinping will also attend.

China is locked in maritime territorial disputes with several neighbours in the South China Sea. It claims a large swathe of the resource-rich area and has been aggressively reclaiming land and building facilities on reefs, which the US and others oppose.

The US has said it plans to demonstrate its freedom of navigation principle in the sea, which challenges what it deems to be "excessive claims" to the world's oceans and airspace. The US patrol, which took place overnight on Sunday near the Spratly Islands, was a "a routine mission in the SCS (South China Sea)", said Pentagon spokesman Bill Urban, taking off from Guam and returning there. flew near the Spratly Islands

The B-52s did not breach the area of sea claimed by China around the islands, the Pentagon said. Mr Urban told reporters that the planes received two warnings "despite never venturing within 15 nautical miles of any feature".

"Both aircraft continued their mission without incident, and at all times operated fully in accordance with international law," he said.

Last month, the US sailed warship USS Lassen into the 12-nautical mile zone China claims around Subi and Mischief reefs in the Spratly archipelago, angering Beijing.

China's foreign ministry condemned it as "illegal" and provocative.

China and Taiwan Leaders Hail Historic Talks: The leaders of China and Taiwan have held historic talks in Singapore - their first in more than 60 years. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou shook hands at the start of the talks, which were seen as largely symbolic.

China views Taiwan as a breakaway province which will one day be reunited with the mainland. But many Taiwanese see it as independent and are concerned at China's growing influence.

"Both sides should respect each other's values and way of life," Mr Ma said as the talks began at a luxury hotel. Mr Xi told the Taiwanese leader: "We are one family."

Relations between China and Taiwan have improved under Mr Ma since he took office in 2008, with better economic ties, improving tourism links, and a trade pact signed.

Mr Ma described the talks as "positive and friendly", but no major agreements or deals appear to have been reached. Mr Ma said in advance that the issue of the South China Sea disputes, which has dominated recent concerns in the region, would not be brought up.

Mr Ma proposed reducing hostility across the Taiwan Strait, expanding exchanges and establishing a cross-strait hotline, according to Taiwan's central news agency.

He said this was part of consolidating the "1992 consensus" - the agreement under which both sides recognise the principle of "one China" but define it in their own ways. Similar remarks were made by Mr Xi, who said upholding the consensus would help "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation"

It is not entirely clear why the meeting has happened at this time, as neither side has properly said.

Mr Ma has built his presidency on closer links with China, so there is a good reason for him to meet Mr Xi. There is also a presidential election in Taiwan in January. Mr Ma might think the meeting will give a boost to his party's candidate, who is trailing in the polls, our correspondent says.

China also has something to gain, and that also concerns Taiwan's election. Mr Xi's decision to talk reminds Taiwanese voters that China is far friendlier to a government of Mr Ma's nationalist party than one formed by the opposition, which leans towards independence for Taiwan.

Growing fears over China's influence have led to widespread dissatisfaction in Taiwan. President Ma's Kuomintang (KMT) Party suffered a crushing defeat in local elections last year, a result that was widely seen as a rejection of Mr Ma's push for closer ties with China

In the Taiwanese capital there were protests before the talks and one group tried to enter the parliament building.

**China and Vietnam Pledge Good Ties and Maritime Peace:** China and Vietnam have pledged to be "good neighbours" and agreed to maintain peace in the South China Sea. It comes at the end of a state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the first of its kind for a decade.

The two sides agreed to avoid any acts that complicate their dispute in the sea where they have competing claims. Relations with Vietnam and other neighbours have been strained by China's moves to assert control by reclaiming land on disputed reefs.

China's placement of an oil rig in waters contested by Vietnam last year sparked angry anti-Beijing protests across the country. China later moved the rig away. In a speech to Vietnam's National Assembly on Friday Mr Xi said the two countries were good socialist neighbours which should be able to survive any disruptions in relations.

"We are willing to carry on with the good tradition of learning from each other, supporting each other, working together for the development of our two countries' socialism and the happiness of our people," he said.

This is the first time a Chinese president has visited Vietnam in 10 years. The last time was Hu Jintao in 2005.

Mr Xi's visit comes amid rising tension in the South China Sea, especially after the US navy began patrolling close to the artificial formations that China has built in the contested waters.

At the same time as Mr Xi's visit, Japan's Defence Minister Gen Nakatani is at the strategic port of Cam Ranh, and a French warship is calling in Danang port, both in central Vietnam.

Territorial disputes are what the Vietnamese public want to see their leaders address in the meetings with Mr Xi, and the leaders made sure they did.

In reply, Mr Xi only called for long term and acceptable solutions to the issue, saying both Vietnam and China should look at the bigger picture and the benefits that their traditional and historical relationship brings.

Separately, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has reiterated in a phone call to US Secretary of State John Kerry that the recent presence of a US warship in waters claimed by China had harmed relations.

A statement on the Chinese foreign ministry website said Mr Wang told Mr Kerry that the vessel had "harmed mutual trust and provoked regional tensions".

## UNITED STATES

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

Increase in Interest rates by US Federal Reserve .Higher interest rates in the United States will, all other things remaining constant, prompt an increase in the value of the dollar. It can motivate foreign investors (FII's) to move investments from India to US. However, it may not have a major impact in India due to strong fundamental and vibrant economy except on the stock market but, even this would largely depend on the extent of the rise in the interest rates.

Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP).On 05 Nov 15 , the full text of the TPP was made public . However, full text of the document was not disclosed. Shortly after the text of the document was released, President Obama notified to the Congress of his intent to sign the agreement however, he must wait for 90 days before taking up the signing under the fast track trade powers.

The political climate due to the ongoing presidential campaign is likely to be intense in 2016 and the fact that many candidates including democrat favorite Mrs. Hillary Clinton, are opposing the deal with the prevailing perception that the deal is anti labour and against the economic interest of America , the grapevine suggests that Congress may approve the deal after elections and during the new presidency. But, this is not permitted within the meaning of the Fast Track Trade Negotiating Authority wherein it cannot extend beyond 90 days for approval of the bill even if after it is considered by the committee, senate and the Congress .

## CAR

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

Significance of US Secretary of State Visit to Five Central Asian Republics (CARs)

John Kerry, US Secretary of State visited Five Central Asian Republics (CARs) from 30 Oct to 03 Nov 2015 and announced formation of a new grouping called C5 + 1; countries of five CARs

(Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan plus USA). The visit was reportedly aimed at enhancing economic interest of all the countries.

In Kirghizstan Mr Kerry inaugurated the American University and US Embassy in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), delivered a lecture at Astana University (Kazakhstan) and attended a meeting with all the five foreign ministers at Samarkand (Uzbekistan) reportedly to find a foothold in the region where the US influence is on the decline after closing down of the US Air Station in Manas (Kyrgyzstan). A Joint Declaration on Partnership and Cooperation of the CARs and the US for expanding cooperation in trade, energy, transport; improving the business climate and the expansion of business contacts was issued.

Since the independence of the CARs during 1990's, Russia continues to have strong ties with four CARs leaving Turkmenistan. Organisations like CIS, CSTO and now Eurasian Union has facilitated the Russian influence in a bigger way. Several interactions between the Russian President and Heads of state of these CARs take place every year. China too has made fairly good inroads into the CARs through Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and is enhancing its role further through its Belts and Roads Project.

During 2015 itself, Prime Minister of India and Japan visited all the Five CARs. Iran and Turkey have also been enhancing their influence in the CARs through ethnic affiliations. CARs alongwith Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan have formed an informal group for stabilising Afghanistan situation in the years to come after withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan. US therefore is keen to remain relevant to the region even after withdrawal from the Afghanistan. Mr. Kerry's visit is perhaps an effort towards this goal.

## AFGHANISTAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

### India-Afghanistan NSA talks

The visit by Afghanistan's National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar to New Delhi signals the re-engaging of talks with India. Atmar will hold talks with India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval on a host of issues and this is expected to better the ties between the two nations. The Ashraf Ghani regime in Afghanistan which showed signs of titling towards Pakistan now wants to re-engage with India. The talks come at a time when Afghanistan is gradually moving away from Paksitan. The Kunduz operation could be one of the reasons for this change of heart. During

the Kunduz operation the Taliban had taken control of the provincial town for a short period. Investigations revealed that the Taliban had been assisted by the Lashkar-e-Tayiba fighters. Hanif Atmar realizes the importance of India: Atmar has had a leaning towards India.

Although President Ashraf Ghani initially tilted towards Pakistan, it was the NSA Hanif Atmar who ensured that the controversial pact between Afghanistan and Pakistan was aborted. The NSA is aware that Afghanistan is finding it hard to reign in the Taliban due to the support it has from Pakistan sponsored terror groups.

### India May Provide Military Helicopters

Soon after taking over, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani held off military assistance from India while he courted Pakistan's political and military leadership to end years of mutual hostility. But a wave of bombings in Kabul that were stated to have been plotted in Pakistan, followed by the Taliban encircling major cities including briefly taking over Kunduz in the north, has prompted a reorientation in tilt.

Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar would finalise the transfer of the Russian-made Mi-25 helicopters. Afghan forces need air power to reverse gains by the Taliban and in particular helicopter gunships that have range as well as firepower. While the United States has agreed to supply Afghan forces with light McDonnell Douglas MD 530 helicopters, which can be fitted with weapons, many Afghan officers prefer the bigger, sturdier Russian machines. Afghanistan has sought military hardware not only from India but also Russia directly.

The deal is likely to be a one-off arrangement.

The supply of the assault helicopters will be the first offensive weapon to Afghanistan since India signed a strategic partnership agreement with Kabul in 2011. It has donated light helicopters, vehicles and provided military training in the past. India had discussed ways to ship the Mi-25 helicopters to Afghanistan with the commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell.

The NSA will likely also discuss a proposal to train Afghan Special Forces in counter insurgency schools in India.

IRAN

## IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Iran has met a Thursday deadline for supplying information to the International Atomic Energy Agency for assessing its past nuclear work. Iran had agreed to take a set of steps as part of the nuclear agreement reached in July with six world powers. The agreement will relax sanctions on Iran in exchange for limits on the Iranian nuclear program to ensure it is peaceful. The IAEA now has until Dec. 15 to provide “the final assessment on the resolution of all past and present outstanding issues”.

Iran always has asserted that its nuclear work is peaceful. But doubts about past Iranian activities, had been an acute obstacle in the negotiations. The main issue concerned suspected experiments at Parchin, a restricted military site outside Tehran, on trigger devices that could be used in nuclear weapons.

Iran’s Parliament formally endorsed the nuclear agreement this week, and it was then ratified by Guardian Council, the final approval required from the Iranian side. The ratification by the veto-wielding Council was made within 36 hours after Parliament accepted the details of the agreement.

Iran will now start dismantling thousands of centrifuges and redesign a heavy-water reactor into a much less a dangerous light-water reactor. Iran will also take several other measures. It is therefore likely to take six to nine months for Iran to carry out all the steps required before sanctions are lifted.

## AFGHANISTAN

### Russia's Involvement in Afghanistan

Russia is stepping up its military and security involvement in Afghanistan following Nato’s withdrawal and subsequent, dramatic advances by the Taliban and Islamic State. Russia however remains wary of the Afghan quagmire, with memories still fresh of the disastrous 1979-89 war. Russian leaders are alarmed at the growing threat ISIS poses. They say it has established international training camps in Afghanistan, and they are concerned at the prospect of jihadis infiltrating the former Soviet states of central Asia and Russia’s mainly Muslim Caucasus region. The Taliban’s recent temporary capture of the strategically important city of Kunduz was particularly unnerving, which was seen as a direct threat to the northern border.

Addressing a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit in Kazakhstan last week, President Vladimir Putin said the situation in Afghanistan was “close to critical”.

The CIS summit agreed to create a joint border task force following earlier warnings from Tajikistan’s president, Emomali Rahmon, that fighting was going on along more than 60% of the Tajik border with Afghanistan. Russia has begun sending military reinforcements, including attack helicopters, to its large Tajikistan military base.

Moscow has also reportedly agreed to a plea from Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Russian-trained veteran warlord who is now the first vice-president of Afghanistan, to supply Kabul with helicopter gunships and other heavy weapons. Dostum visited Moscow this month, and also met the Putin ally and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov in Grozny. Dostum’s spokesman said. “We’re lacking air support, weapons, ammunition. We need a lot of backing and support to fight against terrorism.”

## AFGHANISTAN

### U.S., NATO Signal Willingness to Slow Afghan Drawdown

The United States and its NATO allies are considering slowing their withdrawal from Afghanistan, days after the Taliban's brief takeover of a provincial capital stoked concern about the strength of Afghan state forces.

U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter asked allies for flexibility while the US reviews its withdrawal timetable currently supposed to slash the nearly 10,000 U.S. troops to a small U.S.-embassy based force after 2016. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said: "I sense that many allies are willing to stay longer if needed."

Although Afghan forces have recaptured the strategic northern city of Kunduz, its brief fall to the Taliban last month underscored concerns about the capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces.

U.S. President Barack Obama had aimed to withdraw all but a small U.S. force before leaving office, pinning his hopes on training and equipping local forces to contain Taliban militants fighting to return to power. The US has spent around \$65 billion on preparing the fledgling Afghan security forces of about 350,000 personnel.

Rand Paul: Why is US still in Afghanistan

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, a GOP presidential candidate said the U.S. military strike that hit a hospital in Afghanistan raises questions over the U.S.'s continued involvement in that country, 14 years after the U.S. first deployed troops there. Paul argued the U.S. should no longer be fighting the war in Afghanistan and that "the Afghans need to step it up and defend themselves."

Sen. Paul said that while the U.S. "had a clear cut mission" in Afghanistan following the attacks of September 11, 2001, "that's been long gone for many years now." Paul, whose non-interventionist foreign policy views are largely out of step with his party's hawkish majority, said the U.S. should avoid a "perpetual war" in Afghanistan and said Afghans "should be able to defend themselves" as the U.S. has poured billions of dollars in aid into Afghanistan.

Donald Trump: Afghanistan war a 'mistake,' but troops need to stay

GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump said that he believes that invading Afghanistan in 2001 was a "terrible mistake," but he added U.S. troops need to stay in order to avoid a collapse of the government.

"We made a terrible mistake getting involved there in the first place," Trump said. "It's a mess, it's a mess and at this point we probably have to (leave U.S. troops in Afghanistan) because that thing will collapse in about two seconds after they leave." Trump has long called the Iraq War a mistake, but this is the first time that Trump has described the U.S. war in Afghanistan in the same terms.

While virtually all 2016 presidential contenders now say they believe the Iraq War was a mistake, none has lamented the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following al-Qaeda's terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Afghan Forces Requested Strike on Hospital in Kunduz

Afghan forces under Taliban attack requested U.S. airstrikes near a hospital in the northern city of Kunduz, the commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan said, correcting earlier military reports that American forces were under fire in the area and called in the strikes for themselves. Saturday's incident at the 'Doctors Without Borders' hospital, killed 22 people and injured numerous others.

President Barack Obama expressed condolences for the strike over the weekend. "There is no country in the world and no military in the world that goes to greater lengths and places a higher

premium on avoiding civilians casualties, than the United States,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said.

#### Afghanistan the Next Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member

Afghanistan has formally asked to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), was founded by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 2001.

For SCO member states—especially China and Russia—the security situation in Afghanistan is of importance to overall regional security. Though the SCO has a mostly muted political and economic agenda, it serves as a regional coordination forum for counter-terrorism. The SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) oversees member state cooperation against what the organization describes as the “three evils”: separatism, extremism, and terrorism.

Afghanistan received observer status at the SCO in 2012 and, was the sole SCO observer state that hadn’t taken any steps toward accession. Afghanistan, as a member of the SCO, could serve as an important fulcrum for the organization’s regional security agenda and could make the SCO more relevant in Asia. More so if the United States and NATO end up going by their current plan of withdrawal from Afghanistan despite an uncertain security situation Afghanistan could lean on the SCO for assistance.

#### MYANMAR

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

Elections in Myanmar and its Implications. Though the final results of election in Myanmar are not out as yet, but as can be gauged from some declared results that National League of Democracy (NLD) is expected to sweep the Myanmar parliamentary polls. But, despite the win by NLD, the military will continue to remain important with its 25% reserved seats in both houses comprising 664 members. The President would subsequently be elected by the elected parliamentarians and the process is likely to complete by March 2016. India has always been supporter of the pro-democracy NLD leader, Ang San Suu Kyi who was somewhat disappointed with India after it resumed interaction with the Myanmar military regime by PM Narsimha Rao government in nineties due to its strategic compulsion. Even after NLD win, Ang San Suu Kyi cannot become the President due to the constitutional restriction of barring those elected representatives from being appointed to highest executive post whose blood relations are foreign

Nationals. Ang San Suu Kyi has however categorically stated in an interview that in the event of her party gaining majority in the elections, she would exercise indirect control on the government through her party leader who could well occupy the high post.

However, regardless of NLD win, the military continue to remain important and it has the authority to nominate appointments for the key posts i.e. Home Minister, control the police, the security services and the justice system. Military is not accountable to the government or the Parliament. The military dominated National Defence and Security Council is more powerful than the parliament and the government and it would continue to exercise direct and indirect control over large segments of Myanmar's economy.

India despite its support of NLD leader Ang San Suu Kyi in the past in her struggle to usher democracy in the country, it could not ignore the reality of the military rule. The international sanction regime and consequent isolation had forced it to depend on China which while it supported Myanmar in the United Nations, extracted its price in return. After 2010 elections, Thein Sein government saw through this and has diversified its relations with other nations which became possible with gradual democratization of the country and lifting of sanctions. The opening of the economy and interaction with the world has made it less dependent on China. Now with Ang San Suu Kyi at the helm, the process of reforms will get speeded up and is seen cause of the worry by China.

Would election change Myanmar's outlook towards world at large and its foreign relations? Not likely! Ang San Suu Kyi would surely move faster on reforms but, it remains hinged on support from the military. She visited china before election setting at rest any speculation about any major change in foreign policy. She essentially will strive to maintain friendly relations with all its neighbors including India and China. India however, could empathize more with the democratically elected civilian government than before which will help in building a closer relations in Myanmar and give push to Act East policy. Myanmar provides India connectivity with ASEAN. It can play a huge role in promoting economic prosperity and security of our North-Eastern region. With its vast reserves of oil, gas and other hydrocarbons, Myanmar can play a significant role in ensuring India's energy security. A lot will depend on India's ability to deliver on the promises it made in past.

AFRICA

Col Ajay Ramdev

### 3rd Indo – Africa Summit: Key Highlights

The third India-Africa Forum Summit, which is the largest gatherings of African nations outside the continent, was attended by all the 54 African countries. About 40 African presidents and prime ministers participated in the event along with several ministers and other dignitaries.

Logo – It depicts Lion with one half of an African lion and another half of an Indian lion.

Slogan – “Proud, Courageous, Bold and on the Prowl, ready to take on the future and seize every opportunity”.

#### Summit Highlights:

Largest International Summit since 1983. It is the first time that an international summit on such a scale was held in India, after the Non-Aligned Summit in 1983; the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in the same year saw the participation of 42 countries.

Economic, Cultural and Political ties. Several economic, cultural and political issues were discussed during the summit, including green technology, blue economy, space technology, education, skill development, healthcare, food security, connectivity and peace & security.

Trade and Investment. India's trade with Africa has increased 20 times since the beginning of the century and currently stands at \$70 billion. India's investments in Africa are in the range of \$30 to \$35 billion. India has given \$7.4 billion concessional credit for 17 projects across 41 African countries. These projects cover areas including water, agriculture, infrastructure and energy.

Africa- China. China's trade statistics with the continent are overwhelming. At \$222 billion, its trade with Africa in 2014 was almost three times that of the United States – a country that China only overtook in 2009 as Africa's largest trading partner. In comparison, India's trade statistics may not look impressive. However, compared to the bilateral trade of \$1 billion in 1995, the 2011/12 figure of \$70 billion is staggering. The worrying factor is that this figure has remained largely the same for the past 3 years. In 2014/15, the bilateral trade was \$71.5 billion.

#### Key Highlights of the PMs Speech

"This is a meeting of dreams of one third of the humanity under one roof,"

During his inaugural address, the PM outlined areas of emerging partnership and specific areas of cooperation and roadmap to achieve it. Key take-away from the summit are highlighted below:

#### Pitching for UNSC Reforms

India called for unity for pushing reforms in international institutions like the UN Security Council, with more than a quarter of UN members, or the world's largest democracy with one-sixth of humanity. It was proposed that, there should be two seats for African countries in the reformed Security Council and one for India.

#### Climate Change

India called for cooperation with Africa to combat climate change. The PM emphasized that "Our goal is to make solar energy an integral part of our life and reach it to the most unconnected villages and communities." India has proposed to launch in Paris on 30 November 15 at the time of COP-21 meeting. He invited African nations to join an alliance of solar-rich countries.

#### Investments and Financial Assistance

In addition to the ongoing credit programme, Mr Modi promised to offer concessional credit of \$10 billion over the next five years in a bid to add strength to the partnership. At the India-Africa Forum Summit, he outlined India's vision to assist Africa with infrastructure building from "Cairo to Cape Town, Marrakesh to Mombassa".

The PM also pledged:

An assistance of \$600 million to the continent, which includes 50,000 scholarships for African students in India,

An India-Africa Development Fund of \$100 million and

An India-Africa Health Fund of \$10 million.

India will also support the expansion of the Pan Africa E-Network and institutions of skilling, training and learning across Africa.

India to help Africa in Agriculture

Africa has 60 percent of the world's arable land reserves and just 10 percent of the global output. India will help to develop Africa's agriculture sector that can drive the continent's march to prosperity and also support global food security.

## Summary

In summary, the summit was characterised by an enthusiasm from both sides to take the relationship forward. The summit reflected on the historical ties between India and Africa, especially India's support for liberation struggles on the continent and how this relationship evolved to become the embodiment of South-South Cooperation.

## BANGLADESH

### Col Saikat Roy

#### Publisher of Atheist Blogger's Books Hacked to Death

The gathering would recall Avijit Roy, Bangladeshi-American online activist, writer and blogger was hacked to death by two assaulters on 26 Feb 2015, while he was returning from a book fair with his wife. Roy was an advocate of free expression and founder and co-administrator of the Bengali blog Mukto-Mona (freethinkers), coordinating international protests against government censorship and imprisonment of atheist bloggers. He was dragged from the rickshaw to the pavement before striking them with machetes, according to witnesses. Roy died at 10:30 pm. In an interview with BBC's Newshour, Roy's wife said that police stood nearby when they were attacked on the spot but did not act.

Four secularist bloggers have been killed by suspected Islamist militants in Bangladesh this year. Roy was hacked to death by unidentified assailants on February 26. Blogger Washiqur Rahman was murdered in central Dhaka on March 30. Writer and blogger Ananta Bijoy Das was killed in a similar attack in northeastern city of Sylhet on May 12. On August 7, attackers entered the apartment of blogger Niladri Niloy Chattapadhyay and hacked him to death.

In a follow up incident a Bangladeshi publisher, Faisal Arefin Dipan, 43, who worked with slain atheist writer and blogger Avijit Roy, was on Saturday 31 Oct 2015, hacked to death by unidentified assailants.

Earlier in the day, three secular bloggers, including Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, another publisher of Roy, were hacked in the Bangladeshi capital by unidentified attackers. Tutul, 43, Ranadipam Basu, 50, and Tareque Rahim, 30, were taken to hospital with serious injuries after they were hacked at the office of Shuddhaswar publications.

Dipan owns Jagritee Prakasany (Publishers), he was killed in his office in central Dhaka locality of Shabagh, very near the venue of months of demonstrations demanding capital punishment for Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and other fundamentalists who had collaborated with Pakistani troops during Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971. Dipan died of stab wounds on the shoulder.

Ansar Al Islam, a radical group linked to al Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) had claimed responsibility for the killing on social media, calling the victims "atheists and blasphemers", (enemies of Islam and Allah).

Hundreds of people, including book-shop owners, took to the streets of Dhaka to protest perceived government inaction over a string of attacks including the machete murder on Saturday of a publisher of secular books.

"This is not an isolated incident. They first started killing authors, then the bloggers and now they've targeted the publishers," Mustafa Selim, head of the Bangladesh Creative Publishers Society, told reporters.

Fears of Islamist violence have been rising in mainly moderate Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

## Comments

Though the incident may appear to be a standalone isolated incident, the issue has to be viewed with the growing religious intolerance and polarization of the society on religious issues. Bangladesh once a moderate Islamic state is gradually showing a shift towards being a society where hardliner and radicalized elements are increasingly calling the shots.

While dwelling on the issue one cannot refrain from viewing the events which have happened in India in the recent past without analyzing its effect across the borders. This report when viewed alongside the Zee News feature on atrocities afflicted on the minority Hindu population in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the growing No of incidents reflecting religious intolerance, large No of eminent personalities returning their awards in protest and the Govt's resolve to provide asylum and extend stay of personnel of the minority community oppressed in Pakistan,

Afghanistan and Bangladesh would draw the attention to the polarization within the Indian society and the dangers to our credentials of being secular and democratic state.