

ENVIRONMENT SCAN – 04 APR 2016

CHINA, PAKISTAN, BANGLADESH, NEPAL, SRI LANKA, MYANMAR, USA, ASEAN, WEST ASIA, IRAQ, SYRIA, YEMEN, RUSSIA, IRAN

China Blocks U.N. Blacklisting of Jaish-e-Mohammad Chief:

China has put a hold on India's request to add the head of the Pakistani militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad to the United Nations' al Qaeda-Islamic State blacklist, U.N. diplomats said on Friday, eliciting an angry reaction from the Indian government.

India accused Jaish-e-Mohammad of masterminding a fatal attack on the Pathankot air base in India in January. India had requested that its leader be added to a U.N. Security Council blacklist of groups linked to al Qaeda or Islamic State, the diplomats said, but China objected.

The Jaish-e-Mohammad has already been blacklisted by the 15-nation Security Council, but not its leader, Maulana Masood Azhar, an Islamist hardliner and long-time foe of India. "We find it incomprehensible that while the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad was listed ... as far back as 2001 for its well-known terror activities and links to al Qaeda, the designation of the group's main leader, financier and motivator, has been put on a technical hold," Indian government spokesman Vikas Swarup said in Washington.

It was not immediately clear why China requested that a hold be placed on the Indian request to blacklist Masood Azhar. Technical holds can be lifted and often arise when a Security Council member wants more information. But sometimes they lead to a permanent blocking of a proposed blacklisting.

Asked about China's decision to place a technical hold on the proposed blacklisting of Masood Azhar, Chinese U.N. Ambassador Liu Jieyi offered no details. "Any listing would have to meet the requirements" for blacklisting, he said.

Pakistani security officials have said that a special investigation team set up in Pakistan to probe the Pathankot attack found no evidence implicating Masood Azhar. If Masood Azhar was blacklisted by the U.N. Security Council, he would face a global travel ban and asset freeze.

Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists are blamed for a 2001 attack on India's parliament that nearly led to a war between the nuclear-armed rivals.

Dalai Lama 'Making a Fool' of Buddhism, Chinese View:

Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama is "making a fool" of Tibetan Buddhism with suggestions he may not reincarnate, or reincarnate as something inappropriate, and the faithful are not buying it, a Chinese official wrote on Monday. The animosity between the two sides, and their rivalry for control over Tibetan Buddhism, is at the heart of the debate about reincarnation. Tibetan Buddhism holds that the soul of a senior lama is reincarnated in the body of a child on his death.

China says the tradition must continue and its officially atheist Communist leaders have the right to approve the Dalai Lama's successor, as a right inherited from China's emperors.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning monk has suggested his title could end when he dies. China accuses him of betraying, and being disrespectful toward, the Tibetan religion by saying there might be no more reincarnations. China seeks to influence the appointment of the next Dalai Lama which the current Dalai Lama wants to avoid. Hence the ambiguous statements

Japan Submarine Makes First Call to Philippines in 15 years Amid China Tensions:

A Japanese submarine made a port call in the Philippines, the first in 15 years, in a show of growing military cooperation amid tension triggered by China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. One of the newest and largest submarines in the Japanese navy, it was escorted into the former U.S. Navy Base at Subic Bay by two Japanese destroyers on a tour of Southeast Asia. "This is just an exercise and the main objective is to train the officers," Captain Hiraoki Yoshino of Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force told reporters. "We don't have any message to any country," he said, adding the ship visits were aimed at boosting confidence between the Japan and the Philippines.

Japan and China also have conflicting claims over islets in the East China Sea. Japan is increasing its presence in the South China Sea, sending more ships and planes to allies in Southeast Asia, like Vietnam and the Philippines.

The Philippines and the United States start military drills , including simulating the retaking an island seized by an imaginary enemy in the South China Sea, an exercise likely to rile China.

Japan has offered to help the Philippines boost its capability in monitoring what is going on in the South China Sea by leasing three TC-90 surveillance planes, a deal that could be sealed late this month.

U.S. Plans Third Patrol Near Disputed South China Sea Islands: Source:

The U.S. Navy plans to conduct another passage near disputed islands in the South China Sea in early April, a source familiar with the plan said, the third in a series of challenges that have drawn sharp rebukes from China. Other U.S. officials, speaking after Reuters reported the plan, disputed that such an exercise was imminent. But they made clear Washington will continue to challenge what it considers Beijing's unfounded maritime claims.

The United States has conducted what it calls "freedom of navigation" exercises in recent months, sailing near disputed islands to underscore its right to navigate the seas. U.S. Navy officials have said they plan to conduct more and increasingly complex exercises in the future. "We routinely conduct such operations throughout the world to challenge maritime claims that would unlawfully restrict rights and freedoms provided in international law. This applies to the South China Sea as well," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The USS Stennis carrier strike group is currently operating in the South China Sea. The next freedom of navigation exercise is unlikely to be conducted by a carrier like the Stennis, but rather by a smaller ship, the source said.

Experts predict the next U.S. challenge to the various claims in the South China Sea could occur near Mischief Reef, a feature claimed by the Philippines and which was submerged at high tide before China began a dredging project to turn it into an island in 2014. Mischief Reef is now the site of one of three military-length airfields China has built on man-made islands in the Spratly Islands archipelago.

In recent months, with tensions rising around China's reclamation activities, U.S. ships have been frequently and routinely shadowed by Chinese ships and regular communications with Chinese vessels have often been tense.

News of the planned exercise came a day after U.S. President Barack Obama met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at a nuclear summit in Washington. During the meetings, Xi told Obama that China would not accept any behavior in the guise of freedom of navigation that violates its sovereignty, in a clear warning to the United States.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told Reuters on Saturday that China opposed any such exercise. "China consistently respects and supports the freedom of navigation and fly over that all countries' enjoy in the South China Sea under international law, but resolutely opposes any country using so-called 'freedom of navigation' as an excuse to damage China's sovereignty, security and maritime rights," Hong said

PAKISTAN

Lt Col Anil Gorshi, SM**

Pakistan Nuclear Terrorism: Pakistan in recent years has ramped up its nuclear weapon stockpile including tactical battle field nukes represent the biggest threat. Islamabad's long standing policy of supporting terror groups and the possibility of extremists acquiring the mini nukes is real.

US President has flagged Pak tactical nukes as susceptible to theft, World leaders at the nuclear security summit discussed options to respond should such thefts actually take place.

Terror org across the world are well networked and enjoy synergy with each other countries continue to harbor the misconception that terrorism is only the effected country problem. Prime Minister Modi has asked for dropping this attitude especially when nuclear terrorism has become a serious global threat.

In Pakistan's context security of Pakistan nukes and terror emanating from Pakistan are part of the same chain. The US and Saudi Arabia chose to announce sanction against Pakistan terror entities including those linked to LeT. This sends a clear message to Pak that it's time to review its good terrorist, bad terrorist policy.

However China's veto at UN to designate Pak based Jaishe Mohammad Chief Maulana Masoor emboldens Pak to carry on with good and bad terrorist.

Analysis:

China's veto is not only unfriendly to India, but also undermines international cooperation on terror.

Set back to Prime Minister Modi's energetic diplomacy with China.

Questions the working method of the UN Committee, its principles of unanimity is leading to the adaption of a selective approach to combat terror.

Pak well wishers within the country and outside must help reorient the national security disclosure towards a broader normalization of the state and its polity bestowing nuclear deal or more F-16s and other conventional arm is not going to be helpful, neither to the people of Pak nor its neighbours. The only beneficiaries could be small nuclear elite within Pak that has a narrow, wrapped view of the nation and its future.

Pakistan Joint Investigation Team (JIT): Pak Joint Investigation Team(JIT) had collected evidence in accordance with Pakistan law. JIT took on board detailed evidence that was shared by NIA. The JIT during five day visit also shared DNA of four terrorist, Call records showing involvement of Jaishe Mohammad (JeM) terrorist behind the attack on Pathankot air base.

The Pakistan Joint Investigation Team (JIT) probing the Pathankot terrorist attack has finalised its report and will submit it to Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. As per source privy to the details of the report, it concludes that Pathankot attack looked like another flag operation fully facilitated by Indian Army just to put the blame on Pakistan,

Indian Govt is officially waiting to hear from Pakistan on the outcome of its Pathankot investigations.

India Govt has brought out that it would go purely by what is communicated officially. Officially to the NIA by the JIT or by Pak Govt reps.

BANGLADESH

Col Saikat Roy

Bangla Court Orders Arrest of Ex-Premier Khaleda? Zia:

Last Updated: Wednesday, March 30, 2016 - 21:14

Dhaka: Embattled Bangladeshi ex-prime minister and main opposition leader Khaleda Zia on Wednesday faced another setback when a Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka court issued an arrest warrant against her over a deadly arson attack on a passenger bus during an anti-government protest campaign last year.

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka passed the order against the 70-year-old chairperson of the main opposition outside parliament Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and 27 others from her party after accepting police's charge sheet in the case.

Judge Kamrul Hossain Mollah, after accepting the charges against 38 people including the 28, passed the order in connection with the arson attack in Jatrabari area here in January last year (2015) when Zia's party spearheaded a violent nationwide campaign to topple Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League government.

The Judge passed the order and asked police to execute the warrant and submit the compliance report by April 27. Lawyers and legal experts, however, said Zia was likely to get a chance to secure bail appearing in the court ahead of the deadline.

Last year, Zia was charged by police with masterminding the arson attack on a bus that left 29 people injured, nine of them critically. Today's arrest order is yet another blow to the beleaguered two-times former premier, who has described previous cases, including corruption-related, against her as politically motivated and aimed at keeping her out of politics.

The development came hours after another court in the capital sent BNP's just-elected secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, accused of several identical charges of sabotage, to jail but soon after, ordered his release as his lawyers said he fell sick after his imprisonment.

Alamgir's imprisonment order came hours after BNP announced him as the secretary general of party, six years after he served as the acting secretary general of the party.

Soon after the announcement, Alamgir appeared before the court with a prayer for bail on expiry of his existing bail, granted earlier High Court.

"The magistrate denied his prayer and ordered him to be sent to jail... Hours later the same court granted him bail as his lawyers filed a fresh petition saying their client became sick in the prison," an official of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Court told PTI.

?Bangladesh Islamists Protest Call to Scrap State Religion:

Monday, March 28, 2016

Dhaka: Bangladesh's largest Islamist party called a nationwide strike Monday to protest a legal move to scrap Islam as the state religion. Jamaat-e-Islami said the case, due to open on Monday, was a "deep-rooted conspiracy" against religion in the Muslim-majority nation.

"The people will never accept any government move to remove Islam as the state religion from the constitution in an effort to please a handful of anti-religion persons."

Constitutional changes dating back over three decades have put Bangladesh in the unusual position of being officially secular while still having Islam as a state religion[1]. Bangladesh was declared officially secular after the 1971 war. independence from Pakistan. But in 1988 the then-military ruler elevated Islam to the state religion of the South Asian country in an effort to consolidate power.

This month the High Court agreed to hear a petition by secularists who have argued for decades that Islam's special status discriminates against non-Muslims.

The move has enraged Islamists, thousands of whom staged angry demonstrations in major cities and towns on Friday, and security was tight ahead of the hearing.

"We've sufficient security arrangements in the capital to prevent any violence or any act of sabotage," Dhaka police spokesman Maruf Hossain Sorder told AFP.

Jamaat said its activists had staged demonstrations and marches in at least half a dozen neighbourhoods in Dhaka.

However, offices, schools and private businesses were largely open.

Vessel makes first direct voyage to Bangladesh from Krishnapatnam:

Last Updated: Monday, March 28, 2016 - 19:24

New Delhi: The first direct container vessel to Bangladesh from India left the Krishnapatnam Port today as part of coastal shipping agreement to facilitate trade between both the nations.

"Krishnapatnam Port Embarked a historical moment for India's bilateral trade and commerce as the first direct container vessel, part of coastal shipping agreement to facilitate trade between India and Bangladesh, set sail from the port on 28th March 2016," KPCL said in a statement.

The trade agreements signed earlier between India and Bangladesh were revived during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka last year.

"MV Harbour-1 owned by Neepa Paribahan and built by Western Marine Shipyard is the first Bangladesh container vessel to have received the permission from the shipping departments of both the countries," the statement said.

Krishnapatnam Port Company Ltd (KPCL) Managing Director Chinta Sasidhar said "the service will play a vital role in decongesting the border points and bringing down the cost and transit time involved, thereby providing the best competitive freight rates to the advantage of the industry".

A standard operating procedure was signed between India and Bangladesh last November to move commercial cargo between the two countries also stating the provisions and procedures to be followed for such movement.

To facilitate easy bilateral trade, many conditions have been waived by both countries.

"The vessels of both the countries upon entry into India and Bangladesh shall be treated as domestic vessels and not foreign going vessels. The provision will play a key role in addressing the traffic congestion at Petrapole (India) and Benapole (Bangladesh) the two border points which pose as one of the biggest impediments to the movement of EXIM cargo," the statement said.

This will also offer to reduce the paper work required at the customs check points and port dues paid at Indian ports too will be at par with Indian vessels.

The vessel and cargo will also enjoy complete Protection and Indemnity (P&I) coverage insuring cargo from the point of loading to the final destination and till the time the parcel reaches the final consignee.

The crews on both vessels are exempted from aligning to international certifications as they are certified as per the provisions of the two countries, the company said adding that both the countries have agreed to reduce customs documentation and other requirements to the essential minimum for the purpose of easier cargo movement.

Remove visa system between India and Bangladesh: Tripura governor:

Last Updated: Sunday, March 27, 2016 - 17:27

Agartala: Tripura Governor Tathagata Roy has said he is in favour of doing away with the visa system between India and Bangladesh so that there is easier cross-border movement of people.

"Why this visa system between India and Bangladesh? This visa system must be removed. I would soon propose to MEA (ministry of external affairs) to remove this visa system," he said, speaking at Bangladesh's Independence Day celebrations organised by the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission here on Saturday.

"The leadership of the two countries can sit together and decide about the elimination of visa system, ensuring easy movement of people of two countries," said Roy, a former member of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national executive.

The friendship between Bangladesh and India has strengthened to a point where visa has become unnecessary, he said.

Without naming West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Roy, who was also the BJP's Bengal unit president before being appointed the Tripura governor, said: "Indian Prime Minister was keen to resolve the Teesta water dispute, but the dispute was sought to be kept active by certain quarters. This is a matter of extreme regret."

"We should not suppress the history. Depending on the reality and truth, India and Bangladesh must continue their relationship for the interest of the two countries and their people. The leadership of two countries must evolve innovative ideas for the progress of the two neighbours."

Citing the examples of German reunification and visa-free movement between India, Nepal and Bhutan, the governor said that cultural exchanges between India and Bangladesh must be increased to reinforce the upward relationship.

Singers and dancers from India and Bangladesh performed in the Independence Day and National Day celebrations held at the Rabindra Satabarshiki Bhavan here.

A get-together of India and Bangladeshi personalities was also held on Sunday.

Bangladesh marks 45 years of freedom:

Saturday, March 26, 2016

Dhaka: Bangladesh on Saturday March 26, 2016 celebrated its 46th Independence Day as the nation paid tributes to the millions killed during its 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan with the Dhaka skyline lit up overnight.

The occasion was marked with a ceremonial pre-dawn 21-gun salute as thousands of people thronged the National Memorial in suburban Savar to pay homage to the martyrs.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina were the first to place wreaths at the monument while army bugles played the 'Last Post' at the ceremony.

Invading Pakistani troops launched a brutal crackdown in erstwhile East Pakistan with tanks and artillery on the night of March 25, 1971, after Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won an overwhelming victory in the 1970 general election, triggering the war.

The war saw the breakup of Pakistan as Bangladesh won its independence with Indian military support ending the nine-month conflict which is said to have claimed three million lives.

1971 war veterans rallied in the capital last night and urged the international community to declare March 25 as the 'International Genocide Day' in recognition of the mass killings of innocent and unarmed people on the fateful night 45 years ago.

Recalling the tragedy of the war, scores of people walked over 50 kms from the central Shaheed Minar in the capital to the National Memorial in Savar wearing black robes and carrying the national flag.

China's Xi Jinping greets Bangladesh on National Day:

Last Updated: Saturday, March 26, 2016 – 10:18

Beijing: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Saturday congratulated his Bangladeshi counterpart, Abdul Hamid, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the founding of Bangladesh.

In the message, Xi said that over the years, the China-Bangladesh traditional friendship has been continuously deepened, and bilateral communication and cooperation in all fields have been fruitful, Xinhua reported.

China stands ready to work with Bangladesh to strengthen the synergy of bilateral development strategies within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative so as to push forward the ever-closer China-Bangladesh comprehensive partnership of cooperation, Xi added.

NEPAL

Col Saikat Roy

China to look at free trade, rail deal with Nepal:

Last Updated: Monday, March 21, 2016 - 12:45

Beijing: China agreed on Monday to consider building a railway into Nepal and to start a feasibility study for a free trade agreement with the impoverished, landlocked country, which has been trying to lessen its dependence on its big neighbour to the south, India.

The Himalayan nation, that serves as a natural buffer between China and India, adopted its first post-monarchy constitution in September hoping this would usher in peace and stability after years of conflict.

But protesters blocked trucks coming in from India, leading to acute shortages of fuel and medicine. Nepal blamed New Delhi for siding with the protesters, a charge India denied.

The border blockade ended last month but supply of oil and cooking gas is far from normal.

Meeting in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Nepali Prime Minister KP Oli told Chinese Premier Li Keqiang he had "come to China with a special mission" when it came to strengthening relations. He did not elaborate in front of reporters.

Hou Yanqi, deputy head of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Asia Division, said Oli raised the possibility of two rail lines, one connecting three of Nepal's most important cities and two other crossing the border from China into Nepal.

Hou said the government would encourage Chinese firms to look at the internal rail plan, and that China was already planning to extend the railway from the Tibetan city of Shigatse to Gyirong on the Nepal border.

"Of course, a further extension from Gyirong is an even longer-term plan. It's up to geographic and technical conditions, financing ability. We believe that far in the future the two will countries be connected by rail," she said.

The two countries signed a total of 10 agreements, including on the feasibility plan for a free trade agreement, as well a concessional loan for a new airport in Nepal's Pokhara and a feasibility study for oil and gas survey projects.

No details were given.

Kathmandu says it wants to import 33 percent of the annual demand of 1.8 million tonnes of petroleum products from Beijing but trade officials say absence of connectivity - logistics, cost and transportation through difficult Himalayan terrain - poses a challenge to any fuel trade between the two countries.

Reuters

Moderate quake jolts central Nepal:

Last Updated: Wednesday, March 30, 2016 – 23:22

Kathmandu: A moderate 4.7-magnitude earthquake today hit central Nepal near the border with Tibet.

The aftershock was felt at 6:11 pm with its epicenter at Sindhupalchowk district, 100 kms northeast of Kathmandu, according to the National Seismological Centre.

Earlier this month, a 4.1-magnitude tremor was recorded on March 17 at Okhaldhunga district in eastern Nepal.

A total number of 442 aftershocks with 4 or more magnitude have been recorded after last year's devastating earthquake in April.

SRI LANKA

Col Saikat Roy

UN keen on credible Sri Lanka investigation:

Last Updated: Tuesday, March 22, 2016 - 12:17

Colombo: The UN has said it remains committed to ensuring a credible investigation into alleged human rights abuses in Sri Lanka during the final phase of the civil war that ended seven years ago.

Deputy spokesman for UN Secretary-General, Farhan Haq was responding to a question yesterday in New York at a press briefing.

The question related to recent comments made by Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena that he was not in agreement in having international judges for the local probe process for war crimes and human rights accountability.

The UN Human Rights Council resolution of 2014 which blamed both sides - the government and the LTTE - for war crimes, had prescribed an international investigation.

The UNHRC chief in his last report to the council had also insisted on foreign judges, questioning the credibility of the Sri Lankan judiciary to deliver justice.

"UN Human Rights Council can evaluate how it is going, but we want to make sure there is a credible investigation into this," Haq said adding that the UN had made it clear to Sri Lanka what their guidelines were for a credible investigation.

Govt looking to devolve power in new Constitution: Lanka PM Ranil Wickremesinghe

Last Updated: Tuesday, March 29, 2016 - 22:37

Colombo: Sri Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Tuesday said the government will look to devolve power without damaging the united nature of the country in the new Constitution to be formulated by next year.

"We will look to devolve power without damaging the unitary and united nature of the country," Wickremesinghe said addressing a workshop here.

"We will also look at decentralisation of power in addition to devolution," he said adding that the whole parliament would be converted into a Constitutional Assembly.

"The Constitutional Assembly will report back to parliament and we are hoping to have the new Constitution ready by 2017 when the 70th anniversary of parliament falls," Wickremesinghe said.

The new Constitution will replace the current executive president headed constitution adopted in 1978.

The parliament had earlier this month unanimously approved a resolution for setting up a Constitutional Assembly to formulate a new Constitution.

The government also expects the new Constitution to address the demand of Tamil minorities for political recognition.

With the defeat of the The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009 the Tamil groups have opted for maximum devolution as opposed to LTTE's goal of a separate Tamil homeland.

With the current parliament adopting a resolution, the Constitutional Assembly process will get underway on April 5.

All political parties will join the process.

Sri Lankan Tamil party to drop 'Eelam' from its name Sat, Apr 2, 2016, 11:04 am SL Time, ColomboPage News Desk, Sri Lanka.

With Tamil separatism crushed, one of Sri Lanka's oldest Tamil militant groups-turned-party has decided to drop the words "Eelam" and "Liberation" from its name.

One of the two factions of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) is set to announce the decision today in Jaffna in the north, IANS reports.

Tamil sources told IANS that the name change had become necessary in view of the radically changed scenario in Sri Lanka following the 2009 military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The new name is likely to be "Social Democratic Party of Tamils".

The EPRLF is a Left-leaning group that was born in 1981 and subscribed to the idea of an independent Tamil Eelam state for years.

At one point, it was aligned, with other Tamil militant groups, with the LTTE, which spearheaded a bloody separatist campaign for three long decades.

Later, the ERPLF registered itself as a political party and embraced electoral politics.

The LTTE turned viciously against the EPRLF after the latter joined the India-backed provincial administration in Sri Lanka's northeast in 1989. In 1990, the LTTE massacred the EPRLF's top leadership in Chennai.

The EPRLF then broke into two factions. One group, calling itself the original EPRLF, joined the LTTE-backed Tamil National Alliance. The other named itself the Pathmanabha-ERPLF after its slain leader K. Pathmanabha.

It is the Pathmanabha-EPRLF which is going for the name change.

The Pathmanabha-EPRLF is now meeting in Jaffna, with delegates coming from all parts of Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces as well as the West including Canada, Britain, Switzerland, Germany and France.

The EPRLF, like most Tamil groups, has been a vocal advocate of devolution of powers to provinces in Sri Lanka so that minorities there enjoy a sense of autonomy.

But a Tamil source told IANS on telephone from Jaffna that the idea of autonomy was widely viewed in the Sinhalese-dominated regions of Sri Lanka as a stepping stone to eventual separation -- and so was not popular.

"The continuing ethnic divide overshadows the real rationale for devolution of power," the source said. "We can't keep ignoring this. After all we need to take everyone along in Sri Lanka.

"Devolution should not be seen as if to mean devolution only for Tamils."

Tamil sources said the Pathmanabha-EPRLF will go for a new constitution to effect the name change.

Delegates at the Jaffna meet will also discuss the political situation in Sri Lanka, issues related to human rights, and relationship between Muslim and Tamil communities in the island nation.

Drug bust at sea exposes heroin route to Sri Lanka:

April 2, 2016 11:19 am

Drug dealers from Pakistan and Afghanistan have been engaging in large scale drug trafficking activities in collaboration with the drug dealers in Sri Lanka while fishing trawlers are being used to transport massive consignments of narcotics into the island, Sri Lanka Navy said.

During a joint mission carried out by the Navy and the Police Narcotics Bureau, a haul of 101 kg of narcotics was apprehended whilst transferring through the Southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka.

The consignment which was apprehended on 30th March 2016, is said to be the largest ever stock of narcotics apprehended at sea in the recent history.

Although the mission of arresting the illegal drug smugglers were accomplished two days ago, the investigations are still underway to arrest the rest of the suspects in connection to this drug smuggling racket, SLN media unit said.

“The drug dealers of Pakistan and Afghanistan have been engaging in this large scale drug trafficking activities in collaboration with the drug dealers in Sri Lanka. Further it was revealed that the consignment of drugs is transferred by foreign vessels to the sea areas of Sri Lanka and, brought ashore by Multi-day fishing trawlers in the guise of engaging in fishing.”

“Subsequently the stock is transferring to Colombo via the Southern Expressway. This drug racket has been recognized to be a well-organized business running without detection to the radar of the authorities,” the statement said.

On receiving of credible intelligence by the Sri Lanka Police Narcotics Bureau along with the Sri Lanka Navy executed this raid on 30th March 2016 in the Southern coastal belt. SLNS Nandimithra and SLNS Mihikatha along with few other Fast Attack Craft were deployed for the mission.

During the raid Navy along with the Police personnel were able to apprehend 10 Iranians and 01 Pakistani with the craft used for the smuggling of drugs. Apart from the 100 kg of heroin recovered, the Naval and Police personnel were able to discover another 1kg of heroin concealed in the vessel along with another 1kg of unidentified narcotic drug.

The suspects are already in police custody and investigations are in progress to nab the rest of the dealers connected to this network, according to the navy media unit.

MYANMAR

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM(Retd)

NLD leader Ms. Aung San SuuKyi to be the “State Advisor”: Despite the landslide victory of her party in the parliamentary election, the Myanmar constitution bars Ms. Ang San SuuKyi from occupying the high office of the President of Myanmar as after late husband her sons are foreign nationals.

The first ever legislation passed by the parliament was the NLD proposed bill for appointment Ms. SuuKyi as a “State Advisor”. This was in line with SuuKyi earlier declaration that even if she does not become president, she will position herself above the president. Now as a state advisor, she would be able to the guide the President in governance of the state. The bill was passed with majority vote of the NLD despite stiff opposition from the army members of the parliament who could not stop this move as this was not the constitutional amendment.

NLD has the task ahead for reviving the battered economy which was under army rule almost since 1962 with brief spell of 5 years of democratic rule in the end. The previous government under Theine Seine had initiated political and economic reforms. She needs to take these forward more vigorously as well bring reconciliation in between various ethnic groups.

Even with NLD in the seat of governance, one cannot expect drastic changes in Myanmar foreign policy. Her win in the election has been seen positively by all nations particularly by the West. She therefore, could be favourably inclined to the west. It is also expected that Ang San SuuKyi government will maintain friendly relations with all neighbours without specific preference for any one. India as democratic neighbour has more commonality with Myanmar. Hence, India should provide unconditional support to Myanmar in all areas. The previous Myanmar government was favorably disposed to India. Same is likely to continue. The completion of India sponsored infrastructural projects in Myanmar will help in building closer relations with the new government. As regards to control of insurgent groups on India Myanmar border, the Myanmar military which will continue to control the Defence and Internal security should continue to cooperate with India as before. NLD government is not likely to affect this relationship.

USA

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

4th Nuclear Security Summit was held in Washington from March 31st to April 1st: It is perceived world over that while threat of use of nuclear weapons in war has receded but, with rise in terrorism world over, possibility of a nuclear attack by terror groups has gone up. Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) seeks to coordinate international efforts to prevent acts of nuclear terrorism. It is an initiative of President Obama who has put this on global agenda after his address at Prague in 2009. The first such summit was held at Washington in 2010. Thereafter, the summits have been held every two years with second summit at Seoul in 2012, third in 2014 at Hague and 4th Summit at Washington has just been concluded.

India's Stance at the summit: Surrounded with active terror groups in our neighborhood, we have a lot at stake in the summit. Hence, the Indian contingent was led at the highest level by PM Modi at the recently concluded summit at Washington. He drew the attention of the foreign delegates in the summit to the following realities of the terror:-

The terrorists have evolved and are using modern technology and devices but, the governments haven't" and national and international efforts to counter them is still outdated and lacks coordination. The recent terror strikes in Brussels and France showed that the threat from terrorism is real and immediate.

Countries have different perception of terror which is detrimental to the cause.

The emerging tactical nuclear weapon threat in South Asia.

India has strong security culture and has established itself as a responsible nuclear power. He drew attention to the issue of nuclear apartheid which is the reason for non-acceptance of India as a nuclear weapon state.

He used the opportunity to garner support for India's entry in Nuclear Supplier Group. Towards this effort, he met several Heads of NSG member states.

Focused attention on the issue of nuclear, biological and chemical materials smuggling. In near future, India will host a conference with INTERPOL to prevent smuggling.

PM Modi released a progress report which underlined the various steps India has taken on nuclear security i.e., updating export controls for companies manufacturing nuclear technology, setting up inter-ministerial counter smuggling team, using low enriched uranium in place of

high enriched uranium, setting up 23 response centers across the country to take care of nuclear radiological emergency.

Surrounded with terror active centers, India needs strict security protocol for nuclear arsenal and nuclear material in nuclear organization as well as in industry and hospitals etc. which use radiating materials.

Criticism:

The summit did not change the current duplicity in defining terror and its treatment. China blocking Indian proposal to get Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammad leader, Massood Azar proscribed as terrorist on technical ground is the latest example of this duplicity. Chinese action may have been prompted due to its close link with Pakistan. This also exposes Pakistan which had sent Joint investigation team in India to investigate a terror incident by members of Jaish-e-Mohammad committed in India when around the same time, the nuclear Security was deliberating on the issue of terrorism.

The critics also point out that why the conference is confined to fifty members when in reality all countries are susceptible to nuclear terrorism. Moreover, instead of US providing leadership for the summit, United Nation should have played more proactive role such as for CTBT and NPT which have more than 180 signatories.

ASEAN

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

US Upgrades Economic Ties With ASEAN Amid China's Growing Influence:

As China's influence rises, Washington is seeking to expand its own economic and trade ties in Southeast Asia.

U.S. trade and investment ties with ASEAN, a grouping of 10 Southeast Asian states that collectively are the third-largest economy in Asia and the seventh-largest in the world, has been significantly boosted with a series of new initiatives proposed in the recent U.S.-ASEAN Summit concluded in late February.

ASEAN has become the strategic focus in the U.S. "rebalance to Asia" strategy. China enjoys comparative advantages in historic, geographic, and geo-economic terms, and has been ASEAN's

largest trading partner for six consecutive years since the bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) was launched in 2010 (in 2014, bilateral trade was over \$480 billion and total Chinese FDI in ASEAN was about \$400 billion). In an attempt to counter China's economic influence and make up for its own loss (Washington traditionally has more leverage in political and security ties), the United States began to strengthen its trade and investment ties with Southeast Asia. According to the U.S. State Department, ASEAN countries now are collectively America's fourth-largest trading partner. Progress was made especially during Obama administration: U.S. trade in goods with ASEAN countries has expanded by 55 percent and topped \$226 billion in 2015, and U.S. FDI in ASEAN has nearly doubled since 2008, with a total stock of over \$226 billion.

In line with formal economic dialogues including Trade and Investment Framework Agreements, the most remarkable achievement for the United States to engage ASEAN countries in trade was the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which aims to set high-level trade rules to dominate cross-region economic activities

Against that background, President Barack Obama initiated a series of new measures in the U.S.-ASEAN summit to bring closer bilateral trade ties. He announced new efforts to help all ASEAN countries, including the six that are not yet TPP members (Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines), to understand the key elements of TPP as well as the reforms, with the vision and purpose "that could eventually lead to them joining" TPP.

At the summit, Obama also launched a brand-new initiative, U.S.-ASEAN Connect. The concept consists of four pillars (Business Connect, Energy Connect, Innovation Connect, and Policy Connect), to establish a network of hubs (particularly in Singapore, Jakarta, and Bangkok) across ASEAN to better coordinate U.S. economic engagement and connect more entrepreneurs, investors, and businesses with each other.

ASEAN countries are ready to establish platform to combat terrorism together with the international community after Brussels' blasts.

The 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) confirm their readiness to combat terrorism together with the international community, the association said, condemning the deadly Brussels attacks.

The organization "strongly" condemned three suicide attacks in Brussels that claimed 31 lives and wounded 300 people early Tuesday. The Islamic State jihadist group, outlawed in many

countries including Russia, claimed responsibility for the two explosions at Brussels Airport in Zaventem and one blast inside a subway carriage near EU institutions in central Brussels.

America's New Maritime Security Initiative for Southeast Asia:

On March 18, Amy Searight, the deputy secretary of defense for South and Southeast Asia, told reporters at the opening session of the U.S.-Philippine Bilateral Security Dialogue that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) had submitted a notification to Congress as it prepares to roll out a new maritime capacity-building initiative for Southeast Asian states near the South China Sea. With that notification, the United States will soon begin implementing the so-called Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) which was initially announced last June.

While U.S. defense officials have remained tight-lipped on the exact details of MSI with a congressional notification pending, its goal is to build regional capacity to address a range of maritime challenges – including China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea – through various means such as improving regional maritime domain awareness, expanding exercises, and leveraging senior-level engagements. Even though MSI is significant both for the five main Southeast Asian states involved – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam – and the Obama administration's rebalance to the Asia-Pacific more generally, it is also facing a number of challenges as it gets underway.

Background:

The essence of MSI – building ally and partner maritime capabilities – is not new. Even before the advent of this initiative, the Obama administration had accelerated U.S. maritime security assistance to Southeast Asian states as Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea became clear, with efforts such as helping the Philippines build its National Coast Watch Center; assisting Vietnam in constructing a coast guard training center; and bolstering the maritime surveillance and radar capabilities of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Speaking generally due to the sensitivity of the issue, the source said that technical “supporting infrastructure” would facilitate ‘sharing’ maritime information across the region to build a COP; and expanded exercises, training and other engagements would lead to more ‘contributing’ from allies and partners. MSI is more about equipment, supplies, training and small-scale construction that fit within this broad approach, rather than hardware.

“What you hear is improving the ability of allies and partners to sense, share and contribute,” the source said.

How exactly this might work is still unclear. The “big picture,” the source said, would be to work towards a COP in the South China Sea starting with the Philippines’ National Coast Watch Center and out onto the rest of the region, with willing countries as initial connective nodes eventually leading to a network that actors can “plug into

“This is more about building a system, a network where countries can plug in if they want to,” the source said, stressing that MSI was still very much in its early stages.

Significance

WEST ASIA

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Cleansing operations continue in Ramadi: Post capture of Ramadi in Dec last year, consolidation operations continue in the outskirts of Ramadi to eliminate terrorists still holding on in various locations. Iraqi forces have seized a large laboratory in the outskirts of Ramadi which has been manufacturing explosive devices and belts. In the ongoing air strikes against ISIS locations in proximity to Ramadi 29 ISIS elements were killed.

Operations Continue for Liberation of Fallujah: The Iraqi Forces continue operations for liberation of Fallujah. The city remains under ISIS control but the Govt forces have laid siege around the city cutting off supplies, which has resulted in acute shortage food and medicines in the city, could lead to humanitarian disaster.

Airstrikes in Heet District of Anbar Province: Iraqi Air Force carried out large scale air strikes in Heet District, approx 80 Km west of Ramadi, which is under ISIS control, killing large number of ISIS elements.

Operations to retake Mosul: Iraqi security forces supported by US led coalition have launched large scale offensive to retake Mosul from ISIS. It is estimated that there are approx 7000 ISIS elements in Mosul. It is expected to be a long drawn battle but the operations could be

concluded earlier in case of uprising by the people against ISIS, particularly by large number of retired military personnel in Mosul, who appear to be well equipped with weapons.

Comments:

Post Liberation of Ramadi, the Iraqi security forces are progressing operations to capture areas around Ramadi from ISIS, with focus of operations in Fallujah. The operation launched to liberate Fallujah continue to progress slowly. The Govt forces have laid siege around the city cutting off supplies, leading to acute shortage of food and medicines in the city, could lead to humanitarian crisis.

SYRIA

Govt forces retake city of Palmyra: The Govt forces supported by Russian airstrikes have retaken the ancient cultural city of Palmyra from ISIS achieving great success.

Govt forces retake a town in Homs province: In yet another success, the Govt forces have driven out ISIS from the city of al Qarytain, 100 Km west of Palmyra, in Homs Province.

Comments:

Two major successes achieved by the Govt forces in retaking cities of Palmyra and al Qarytain have extended the influence of Assad Govt, would afford greater leverage to Assad regime in the subsequent peace talks.

YEMEN

Al Houthis escalate fighting in Taiz: In a significant setback to the Govt forces, the Houthis have retaken the strategic road connecting the city of Taiz to Aden. Thus, siege to the city has been restored by the Houthi rebels.

Yemen forces make major gains in the northern Province: The Govt forces have liberated the northern province of Jawf, seizing large areas from Houthi rebels.

UN sponsored peace talks: UN sponsored peace talks are likely to take place in Kuwait from 18 Apr, ceasefire is to come into effect from 10 Apr.

President dismisses PM and Vice President Bahah: In a surprise move, President Hadi has dismissed PM and Vice President Bahah over failures in governance. He has appointed his own confidant as PM and a ret'd General as the Vice President.

Comments:

The Govt forces have suffered a major setback by losing control of strategic road connecting city of Taiz to Aden. This had led to reimposing siege to the city by rebels. This would adversely impact humanitarian relief to the city, could lead to deterioration of existing humanitarian crisis.

The President has dismissed his PM due to ongoing differences between them for quite some time. This is being seen as consolidation of his position as the President, prior to UN sponsored peace process scheduled shortly.

RUSSIA

Col Anadi Dhaundiyal

Russian Syrian Withdrawal & Palmyra:

Even though the Russian withdrawal was publicized, the bombers persisted at Syria.

Between March 7 and March 27 the Russian Air Force supported Syrian government units near Palmyra, conducted around 500 sorties and delivered over 2,000 airstrikes against ISIL.

Comments. The Palmyra's control over a number of important roads connecting northern and southern parts of the country means that IS will now have trouble transporting weapons and fighters across Syria.

Arms supply to IS from Turkey: As per Russian envoy to UN, terrorist groups operating in Syria received explosive materials worth \$1.9 million from Turkey last year. This included 2,500 tons of ammonium nitrate (worth approximately US\$788,700); 456 tons of potassium nitrate (\$468,700); 75 tons of aluminum powder (\$496,500); sodium nitrate (\$19,400); glycerin (\$102,500); and nitric acid (\$34,000). Also TOW anti-tank missile systems, RPG-7 grenade launchers, M-60 recoilless rifles, and hand grenades, as well as various ammunition and communications tools have also been supplied through several NGOs.

Comments: Info only. Point being repeated for effects and to keep the pressure mounted on Turkey preventing further major supply.

West's Anti Putin Strategy: Konstantin Kosachev, the head of the Russian Upper House Committee for International Relations has said that planned smear attacks on Putin are being carried out within the country. It aims to politically isolate Russia and tear its economy to shreds, encourage mass social protests and spoil Russia's relations with neighboring countries, impose the West's will on Syria and damage the authority of the United Nations. He further said that Russia's growing international influence, which, in turn, was closely connected with Vladimir Putin's work and personality prevents the success of the US/ Brussels' plans. President Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov has said that Western mass media intends to launch a new slander attack on Vladimir Putin and fresh set of false reports made with intent to harm the president's reputation will be released in the nearest future.

Moscow Times, a west backed newspaper, has been publishing various media reports. A Russian Deputy Olga Li has allegedly posted an online video addressed to Putin criticizing Putin's domestic and foreign policies for having led to the "collapse of the Russian financial system and rule of law.

Comments: For info only. It falls in tune with the assessments issued by CENJOWS with regards to the US/ EU shaped the events that unfolded in the Ukraine.

Downing of Russian SU-24 aircraft: Turkey has been facing a lot of flak for shooting down of the Russian bomber. In order to assuage the Russian sentiments Turkish police has reportedly detained Alparslan Celik, a field commander for groups of Turkmen militia in southern Turkey and one of the leaders of the Turkish Gray Wolves radical nationalist group, who claims to be responsible for shooting to death a Russian SU-24 bomber pilot while parachuting to earth after his jet was hit last November.

Comments: Turkey aims to assuage the international sentiments on the issue.

Milk: India's efforts to boost sagging farm exports has got a shot in the arm as Russia has agreed to drop a stringent condition that was obstructing Indian supplies of dairy products to that country. Condition was that milk be procured from a farm having at least 1,000 animals. An import protocol is expected to be signed soon with Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance, which will pave the way for Indian dairy product supplies to that country. Once commenced the exports will amount to \$150-200 million in the first year itself.

Comments: India, the largest milk producer, will benefit in the long run.

IRAN

Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

U.S. to Allow Iran Limited Access to Dollars:

The US administration is considering a rule change to allow some Iranian businesses to use offshore financial institutions to access US dollars in currency trades. This has upset cynics of the nuclear deal that Iran signed with the G5+1 in July last year. Hardliners in the US feel the nuclear deal only lifted nuclear-related sanctions on Iran but kept other sanctions related to the country's support for terrorism, human rights abuses and its ballistic missile program in place. They believe that the US administration is making far too many concessions to the Iranians to keep the nuclear deal alive.

This is not how the Iranians see it. Over the last month, Iran has complained that the United States was not upholding its end of the bargain. It implied that Iran may have to back out of its own commitments if the US does not do more to signal to foreign banks and businesses that it's safe to invest in Iran.

European and Asian banks remain reluctant to conduct any financial transactions with Iran due to fears that they might run afoul of the U.S. Treasury and its regulations that ban dollar dealings with Iranian firms. Most major international trade, particularly in oil and gas, is conducted in U.S. dollars.

Election season in the US too has a bearing on the situation. The Republicans do not favour the deal and the Democrats cannot be seen to be soft towards Iran. Recently the Democratic House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer urged the Treasury department not to go through with the rule change saying: "The Administration had indicated that there would be no further concessions beyond those specifically negotiated and briefed to Congress. I do not support granting Iran any new relief without a corresponding concession."

However some experts disagree on whether any of these post-deal concessions are significant. The US Administration argues that Iran has complied with its primary commitments — the removal of low enriched uranium, the modification of key nuclear sites like Arak and allowing far greater transparency of its program.

Missiles As Instruments Of Diplomacy:

Iran's supreme leader said on Wednesday that missile power was key to the country's future security, slamming down moderates who say the focus should be on diplomacy. He said that if the Islamic Republic seeks negotiations in trade and technology, but has no defence power, even small countries would dare threaten Iran. He is quoted as saying, "Our enemies are constantly enhancing their military and missile capabilities and given this how can we say the age of missiles has passed? Those who say the future is in negotiations, not in missiles, are either ignorant or traitors".

(His comments appear to have been aimed at ex-president Hashemi Rafsanjani, a senior leader of the reformist and moderate camp, who last week tweeted: "Tomorrow's world is the world of dialogue, not missiles.")

Iran had carried out a fresh ballistic missile test in March to show its "deterrence power. The missile is the Emad -- a liquid-propelled rocket with a 1,050-mile (1,700-kilometer) range.

The United States, France, Britain and Germany have said that Iran's recent ballistic missile tests violate UN Security Council resolutions. Iran has twice tested ballistic missiles since the July 14 nuclear deal, prompting Western condemnation and new US sanctions. Iran has replied that these missiles are not covered by the UN resolution that accompanied the nuclear accord. Russia too, said on Wednesday that Iran's test launches of missiles did not violate the UN resolution.

Cyber Capabilities:

The Islamic Republic began heavily investing on its social media, Internet and cyber capabilities after the protests which erupted in the aftermath of the 2009 contested election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iranian leaders became cognizant of the significance of social media in galvanizing people and advancing political interests. In 2012, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei