

ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 13 APR 2017

China (CONTINENTAL), China(MARITIME), Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Asean, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Russia, United States of America

CHINA (CONTINENTAL)

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

Dalai Lama's Arunachal visit negatively impacts border dispute, says China.

Tibetan spiritual leader The Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh will have "negative impact" on the settlement of the border dispute, China warned India on 16 Apr, accusing New Delhi of violating its commitment on the Tibet issue.

The Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing will take "further action" to safeguard territorial sovereignty and slammed the "provocative" statements of Dalai Lama and Arunachal Pradesh CM PemaKhandu who has said the state shares its border only with Tibet, not with China.

China claims parts of Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet".

"We have lessons to learn from history. When the Indian side violated commitments on the relevant issues, the Indian side insisted on arranging the visit of the Dalai Lama in the disputed section of the China-Indian boundary and indulged in provocative political statements. We have already expressed our solemn representations and it will of course have negative impact on bilateral relations," the foreign ministry spokesperson said.

India and China have been negotiating to resolve the border dispute for more than 20 years but an agreement is yet to be reached. The dispute covers the 3,488-km Line of Actual Control. While China claims parts of Arunachal Pradesh as Southern Tibet, India asserts the dispute also covers the Aksai Chin area, which China occupied during the 1962 Sino-India war.

CHINA (MARITIME)

Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

MYANMAR PIPELINE GIVES CHINA FASTER SUPPLY OF OIL FROM MIDDLE

EAST. China and Myanmar on Monday signed an agreement on the pipeline, as well as eight other cooperation documents, after talks between Xi and Myanmar President Htin Kyaw, who

was visiting China from 7-11 Apr 17. A crude oil pipeline to southwestern China through Myanmar began operations after years of delays, allowing China receive supplies faster from the Middle East and Africa. China is the world's second-biggest oil consumer. Operations on the line, which was completed in 2014 and originally scheduled to start the same year, were beginning after the government of Myanmar agreed to lower transit fees. Trial operations began in 2015 on the 771km pipeline, which is designed to carry 22 million tonnes of crude a year. The pipeline ends in China's Yunnan province, where China has built an oil refinery with the capacity to process 13 million tonnes a year of crude. China finished building the refinery in the provincial capital Kunming about six months ago and has been waiting for pipeline deliveries to start. It would take about 12 million barrels of crude to fill the pipeline before deliveries could start. The link, which allows China to import crude from the Middle East and Africa without having to ship through the Strait of Malacca and into the South China Sea, is part of President Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road" infrastructure and trade development plan.

For Myanmar, the initial benefits are probably minimal. It might get a small amount of oil and some revenue from oil storage and pipeline tariff fees, while experience from China in building energy infrastructure would be a boon later. (Myanmar could take 2 million tonnes annually from it.) Myanmar is growing rapidly, and would need more oil refineries. The process of building energy infrastructure should help them in the long run to meet growing domestic demand.

Once the refinery in China is started up, it would provide oil products to its southwest mainland. This will allow China to export refined products, which were already at a monthly record of 2.85 million tonnes in Nov 16.

China is also fed by a parallel natural gas pipeline that runs through Myanmar to Yunnan province, designed to carry 12 billion cubic metres annually. China began to import gas from Myanmar in 2013, about 2.86 million tonnes last year accounting for about 5 per cent of the country's total imports. Foreign Companies are exploring for resources off shore of Myanmar. The country has about 3.4 per cent of the Asia-Pacific region's total proven gas reserves as of 2015, according to BP data.

PAKISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

Pakistan Army Court confers Death Sentence on Cdr Kulbhusan Jadhav (ret'd). Pakistan sentenced ex Indian Navy Officer, Cdr Kulbhusan Jadhav, (ret'd) to death for carrying out espionage and sabotage activities in Balochistan and Karachi, the military's media wing Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement. According to ISPR, Jadhav was arrested on March 3, 2016 from Mashkel area of Baluchistan for his "involvement in espionage and

sabotage actives” in Pakistan’s restive Baluchistan province and Karachi city.

"The death sentence given to Kulbushan Jadhav shows yet again how Pakistan's military court system rides roughshod over international standards. Stripping defendants of their rights and operating in notorious secrecy, military courts do not dispense justice." This is what Amnesty International; an international human rights organization had to say about Jadhav's sentence and Pakistan's military courts in general.

Comments. Jadhav, who should have ideally been given consular access and a right to choose a lawyer to defend himself, was tried under the secrecy of a military court who are notorious for their arbitrary trial process and have been questioned time and again by the civil society and liberals from Pakistan itself. It is also pertinent to note that Pakistan had introduced these military courts under an amendment introduced in January 2015. These ill-famed military courts were to be automatically disbanded after a period of two years, i.e. January 2015. However, just days before Jadhav's conviction, on 22 March, Pakistan's senate passed an amendment to grant them legitimacy for another two years.

Pakistan Army Officer Goes Missing in Nepal. Lt Col (Retd) Mohammad Habib, a retired Pakistan Army officer has gone missing near the Nepal-India border, while visiting Lumbini, a Nepalese town for a job interview. Habib, who retired in October 2014, was currently employed with a private firm in Pakistan and had posted his resume online in search of employment. He was reportedly offered a job in Lumbini by Mark Thompson who had contacted him, both via email and telephone. It is also reported that after the officer went missing, the website and twitter handle of the recruitment website were suspended and the mobile number shared with him was discovered to be fake.

Iranian Ships Arrive on Training, Goodwill Visit to Pakistan. Two ships of the Iranian Navy, Naghdi and Tonb, arrived at Karachion a goodwill and training visit. The visit is aimed at strengthening mutual collaboration and enhancing interoperability between the two navies through tabletop discussions and exercise at sea. At the end of the visit, ‘passage exercise’ will be conducted at sea to enhance interoperability between the two navies.

IRAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

Iran holds joint military drills with Oman in Indian Ocean. Iran and Oman began joint naval maneuvers in the South Sea and north of the Indian Ocean amid a string of high-profile incidents between Iranian and the U.S. vessels in the Gulf. The two countries will hold five-day joint rescue and relief drills in Iran's southern waters and the northern areas of the Indian Ocean. Iran's

navy routinely holds war games that it says are aimed at improving its readiness against threats. It also sends its warships to international waters off the Gulf of Aden to fight piracy.

The Pentagon has previously voiced concern over a string of high-profile incidents in waters off Iran, where the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) frequently conducts risky maneuvers around U.S. vessels, including some where the Americans have had to fire warning shots.

Comments. U.S. and Iranian naval forces have encountered each other several times in the Gulf while U.S.-Iranian relations are becoming more hostile than by the day. Iranian forces view the American presence in the Gulf and especially the Strait of Hormuz as a provocation by itself. They in turn have accused the U.S. Navy of unprofessional behavior. According to statistics released by the U.S., seven interactions have been reported so far, this year.

BANGLADESH Bangladesh

Col Saikat Roy

Why can't Teesta be Resolved, asks Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina. Hasina, in a piece titled `Friendship is a flowing river` in The Hindu, expressed hope that Teesta R water Sharing Treaty would materialize soon. "We have demonstrated our willpower through the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement. There are some more issues like sharing of waters of the common rivers (the Teesta issue) that need to be resolved," she wrote.

"Relations, at a personal or national level, largely depend on give-and-take measures. Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio said `Friendship is a river`. I think that the friendship between Bangladesh and India is like a flowing river and full with generosity. This is the spirit of the people of the two neighbours. I think if our commitments are honest, we would be able to achieve many things that are beneficial to our people," she said.

Comments. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee`s assent is seen as crucial for inking of a deal with Bangladesh on sharing the Teesta river waters. In 2011, Banerjee had at the last moment dropped out of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh`s Dhaka visit over her opposition to the Teesta agreement draft, which was set to be inked then. Mamata has vociferously championed the water requirements of the farmers of Northern West Bengal and has refused to reconcile her stand. However, this time around she has suggested that if not Teesta, water could be provided to Bangladesh from the adjoining Torsha River. A proposal that remains to be examined and evaluated.

Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina Accorded Ceremonial Welcome. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was on Saturday accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. PM

Modi and Hasina held a bilateral summit on Saturday April 8, 2017 following which 35 documents – 11 agreements and 24 memorandums of understanding, including a civil nuclear and two memorandum of understanding (MoUs) on defence cooperation, were signed. The Indian prime minister announced a new concessional Line of Credit of USD 4.5 billion for Bangladesh and an additional aid of USD 500 million to help its military procurement. PM Modi assured an "early solution" to the long-pending Teesta water sharing as talks remained inconclusive. The two countries also agreed to confront challenges of terrorism with deeper security and defence cooperation with Modi terming spread of radicalism as a "grave threat", not only to the two countries but to the entire region.

Talking about regional connectivity, Mr Modi said India was looking forward to early implementation of the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement which will "usher in a new era of sub-regional integration." The other key MoUs inked were on passenger and cruise services on the coastal and protocol route, and cooperation on cyber security and in the peaceful uses of outer space.

Mr Modi said India and Bangladesh have already identified 17 projects including port development and other key infrastructure upgrade for the usage of USD 4.5 billion line of credit, which was among the largest done for any country bilaterally.

The Bangladesh PM along with her Indian counterpart will also attend 'Sommanona Ceremony' in the evening to honour the Indian martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the liberation of Bangladesh. Hasina visited Ajmer on Sunday April 9, 2017 and met Indian business leaders on Monday, April 10, 2017.

SRI LANKA Sri Lanka

Col Saikat Roy

Prime Minister to Visit Japan for Talks with Shinzo Abe. Prime Minister Ranil

Wickremesinghe is visiting Japan from 10 April to 16 April 2017. During this visit, The Prime Minister will hold a meeting with Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, followed by several other engagements. The Government of Japan has announced that the visit will serve to further strengthen the friendly relations between Japan and Sri Lanka.

Government says no Final Agreement on Hambantota Port. The Government says there is no final agreement yet on the Hambantota Port between a Chinese company and the Government.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament discussions on the port agreement are still ongoing. The Prime Minister said that the Government is facing a severe financial loss as a result of the port and the losses need to be covered. He said the final draft agreement will be submitted to Parliament before it is signed.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Col Saikat Roy

Australia ready to Supply Uranium to India without NSG Membership. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull today said his country is ready to start export of uranium to India, two-and-a-half years after the two countries signed a civil nuclear cooperation deal.

Soon after holding wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Turnbull said cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector has been on an upswing and Australia would like to assist India in generation of nuclear power and is now ready to export uranium to India with the passage of legislation in the Australian Parliament with bi-partisan support. In the talks, Turnbull noted Australia's strong support for India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Comments. India and Australia began talks on the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in 2012 after Australia lifted a long-standing ban on selling uranium to energy-starved India. The agreement was signed during a state visit to India by Australia's then Prime Minister Tony Abbott in September 2014. Australia has about 40 per cent of the world's uranium reserves and exports nearly 7,000 tonnes of yellow cake annually.

Indo-Australia to Deepen Maritime Cooperation. Resolving to deepen maritime cooperation, the two prime ministers recognized that India and Australia share common interests in ensuring maritime security and the safety of SLOCs. "Both leaders recognized the importance of freedom of navigation and over flight, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)," said the joint statement. Modi and Turnbull agreed that the bilateral maritime exercise first held in the Bay of Bengal in 2015 will be repeated off Western Australia in the first half of 2018.

Comments. The comments are seen with reference to China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. China says No to Moscow-Beijing-New Delhi Trilateral Defence Ties. China has turned down a Russian effort to bring defence ministers of India, Russia and China on one platform in Moscow, fuelling speculation in New Delhi that this has been done keeping Pakistan sensitivities in mind. The refusal was officially communicated last week, which was also the time the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh took off despite strong Chinese protests.

The trilateral meeting was to take place on April 25, a day ahead of the Moscow Conference on International Security. Defence minister Arun Jaitley is scheduled to visit the security meet.

Russia was keen that as a strategic outreach the defence ministers of the three countries should do a trilateral to explore architecture of security cooperation.

India agreed after examining the proposal in great detail, particularly keeping in mind Russia's

strong ownership of the idea. However, Moscow later conveyed to New Delhi that Beijing has regretted from participating in the initiative.

Comments. While no specific reason was given, the speculation is that China does not want to signal that it was in anyway trying to undermine its special defence relationship with Pakistan by entering into an arrangement with Russia and India. China had lodged a strong diplomatic protest when US at one point had sought to first form a quadrilateral with India, Japan and Australia. India, it may be noted, has been upset with China blocking Indian membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and literally vetoing efforts at the United Nations to blacklist Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar.

AFGHANISTAN Afghanistan

Brig Deepak Malhotra

Anti-Pakistan protests break out across Afghanistan. Anti-Pakistan protests have broken out across Afghanistan over Islamabad's incessant shelling of areas inside Afghanistan like Nangarhar and Kunar. A massive anti-Pakistan protest was held in Lashkargah, the capital of Afghanistan's southern Helmand Province with an aim to highlight Pakistan as a terrorist-sponsoring state. The Pakistani Law enforcement agencies have launched a crackdown against Afghan nationals in Balochistan and other regions on fabricated charges of terrorism, while on the other hand, Pakistan, has fired rockets and missiles in Nangarhar and Kunar.

Comments. Pakistan has also reportedly activated military operations along the Durand Line, raising the level of aggression manifold. Unconfirmed sources also report of a nexus between Pakistani –based Muslim scholars and the ISI in forcing youth to fight in the name of religion. It is also believed that not only the Taliban but many terror outfits like the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Haqqani Network are based in Pakistan who are fomenting terror in Afghanistan.

ASEAN Asean

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

Malaysian PM Najib Razak's Visit to India. A tense neighbourhood and China's growing security presence in the Indian Ocean have given India and Malaysia much to discuss.

On March 30, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak arrived in India for an official visit

following an invitation from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This was Razak's third official visit as prime minister and an important one at that, given the number of agreements that were signed. The Malaysian delegation's six-day official visit to India focused on the close political and economic ties between the two nations

Areas of Cooperation. Razak clicking a selfie with Tamil superstar Rajinikanth at his home in Chennai indicates Malaysia's conscious attempt to bring 'the people' of both countries to a certain level of understanding – that the two nations share close cultural ties, besides trade and economic ties. It was also seen as a move to appease the Tamil community in Malaysia, to suggest that the friendly and familiar relationship between the Tamil communities in both India and Malaysia remain strong. For Modi, too, the appeasement of the Tamil community is a positive political move in the direction of winning over more adverse political opinions, which have historically gravitated to the Communist left (Marxist) in south India.

Jaideep Mazumdar, joint secretary in charge of Malaysia-India diplomatic relations at the external affairs ministry, confirmed that the two countries discussed \$5 billion-worth two-way investment during Razak's visit, in a bid to boost economic linkages between Asia's third largest economy (India) and one of the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia (Malaysia). This shows that India is keen on building stronger political, economic and strategic ties with Malaysia, seen as a moderate Muslim nation with a population of approximately 28 million. It also shows that Indian firms have moved to Malaysia in a big way, making it a base to do business with other ASEAN nations. Malaysia has invested about \$6 billion for projects in India, and Indian investment in Malaysia amounts to about \$2.5 billion.

In the defence and security arena, Indian pilots operating Sukhoi-30 frontline fighter aircraft trained in Malaysia between 2008 and 2010. The two countries held their first military exercises in 2012 and their first naval exercises in 2016. India and Malaysia signed a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation in 1993 and a Malaysia-India Defence Cooperation Meeting (MIDCOM) was established under its framework. Several MIDCOM meetings and reciprocal visits of high level defense personnel have taken place since. India's 'defence diplomacy' towards Malaysia focuses on developing an integral defence relationship through joint military exercises, training defence personnel and trade in military equipment. India has offered to train Malaysian defence personnel on Sukhoi fighter planes and Scorpene submarines and two Indian naval ships, INS Delhi and INS Kora. Defence cooperation with Malaysia is in India's strategic and economic interest.

Besides a seller-buyer relationship with respect to military hardware, India and Malaysia also cooperate to secure the Malacca Straits. The two countries have discussed the issue of compulsorily piloting the Malacca Straits at the latest Shangri La security dialogue held in

Singapore. India's expertise in maritime security can be useful for protecting the Malacca Straits from emerging non-traditional security threats in Southeast Asia. The two nations also agreed to revitalise the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), as well as to be more proactive in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Stressing the need for freedom of navigation and over flight in the South China Sea, Razak and Modi reiterated their resolve to fight the scourge of terrorism afflicting the world and the two countries in particular. The joint statement issued by the two sides recognised that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to peace and stability in the region.

Overall, the two leaders unanimously declared that bilateral relations are at an all-time high. Using the 60th anniversary of Indo-Malay relations as a strong focal point, Razak vowed that Malaysia would continue to work closely and enhance cooperation with India to ensure that both nations, and the region, would remain peaceful.

What Remained Unsaid. Domestically, the repercussions are enormous. During this somewhat volatile political situation in Malaysia, there is a need to apply a holistic approach to governance. A large chunk of this governance involves placating and seeing to the needs of the different races within Malaysia – including the very influential and visible Indians, most of whom are Tamil, linguistically, religiously and culturally. Furthermore, this holistic approach to diplomacy takes into consideration two other important aspects of strategic thinking: first, Razak's decision to visit India is closely tied to the geopolitical competition between India and China in the Indian Ocean Region; second, Malaysia's stance as a small power juxtaposed with the major powers of India and China. Both Razak and Modi realise the threat of an encroaching China into the Indian Ocean – but this point was not mentioned during talks between the two leaders.

The expansion of a Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean has heightened India's concerns. Beijing says its activities are commercially motivated and intended to better protect its interests and people abroad. However, Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere is consistent with Xi's intention of making maritime power central to achieving Chinese dominance in Asia. In order to assure its own survival as a state, Malaysia as a small power, needs to further engage with India in the larger strategic context, to balance China's growing security presence in the Indian Ocean.

To sum up, Razak's visit to India was clearly more than the signing of MOUs worth billions of dollars. Both nations reiterated the importance of fighting terrorism, betraying a smoke screen for a deeper undeclared 'war' against China's strategic encroachment into the Indian Ocean region. Both India and Malaysia made it a point to say that they should identify, hold accountable and

take strong measures against states that encourage, support and finance terrorism. The message was meant for Pakistan, although it was not explicitly named. Indirectly, China is also implicated as a major power which strategically supports Pakistan and other littoral states in the Indian Ocean, such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

WEST ASIA

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Iraqi Security Forces Resume Offensive to Retake West Mosul. The Iraqi security forces have resumed offensive, after a brief pause to retake strategic Mosque Grand Nuri al-Kabir, in old city, in West Mosul, from where Baghdadi announced Caliphate in 2014. The security forces have cutting-off exit routes, evacuating civilians from the area. The operations are expected to progress very slowly with stiff resistance from ISIS. Intense fighting has been reported from the Old City, ISIS is offering stiff resistance. The Iraqi Forces have retaken 28 out of 38 districts in Mosul from ISIS.

US Led Coalition Air Strikes. The US led Coalition has carried out large scale air strikes causing large scale casualties to ISIS and destroyed large number of logistics targets in West Mosul.

IDPs Rising in West Mosul. In the ongoing operations in West Mosul, 500,000 people have fled the area, so far.

PM Abadi Urges Dialogue to Resolve Sovereignty Issue of Kurdistan Independence

Referendum. PM Abadi has urged to hold dialogue on Kurdistan independence referendum, as it is not possible as long as ISIS is present in the region. However, preparation for holding referendum is getting wider. The Kurdistan Council has decided to nominate two boards; one for internal preparation for referendum and second one will act as executive.

Comments. The Iraqi forces have resumed offensive, after brief pause to retake strategic Mosque Grand Nuri al-Kabir, in Old city, West Mosul, from where Baghdadi had declared Caliphate in 2014. The operations are progressing slowly and are being heavily contested by ISIS.

The demand for separate state for Kurdistan is catching momentum which is likely to escalate in the days ahead. Kurdistan Council has initiated preparations for referendum by nominating two boards to conduct the referendum.

SYRIA

Chemical Attack in Syria. A suspected chemical attack in Idlib Province has drawn international condemnation, with US, France and UK pointing finger at Assad forces. At least 87 people were killed in the chemical attack in the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib Province. The UN has said it would investigate the bombing raid as a possible war crime.

US Missile Attack in Retaliation to Chemical Attack. US carried out a missile attack on Govt held Shayrat Airbase, firing 59 Tomahawk Cruise Missiles. US has claimed destruction of one fifth air assets of Assad Forces, ammunition and fuel storage facilities. However, as per Russian sources, only 6 Mig-23 aircraft and some buildings were destroyed.

G-7 Countries Push for Fresh Sanctions on Russia. In a recent meeting of G-7 countries held in Italy, fresh sanctions were proposed against Russia. However, due to lack of unanimity the proposal was dropped.**US - Russia Talks in Moscow.** US Secretary of state visited Moscow and held talks with his counterpart. US is making efforts to convince Moscow to stop support to President Assad, which Russia would not accept.**US: Assad Overthrow no Longer a Priority.** There has been a major shift in US policy in Syria, wherein it has said that overthrow of Assad is no longer a priority for US. It believes in finding a solution to the larger problem and people could decide Assad's fate later. However, the rebels supported by US have expressed their reservations on it.

Evacuation of Syrian Towns Begins with Exchange of Prisoners. More than 30,000 people are proposed to be evacuated under the deal from four towns; Govt held towns of Madaya & Zabadani in Damascus and rebel held towns of Foa'a & Kafraya in Idlib. These towns are under seize by the either party for years now. The evacuation has commenced and expected to be completed smoothly.

Comments. There has been a major shift in US policy in Syria, wherein it has said that overthrow of Assad is no longer a priority for US. It believes in finding a solution to the larger problem and people could decide Assad's fate later. US missile strike in Syria in retaliation to chemical attack supposedly by Govt forces is likely to complicate the issue further. This has widened the trust deficit between US & Russia. Evacuation of besieged areas and exchange of prisoners is a step in the right direction, facilitate distribute humanitarian relief to these areas.

YEMEN

Govt Forces Make Gains in North Yemen. The Govt forces supported by Saudi led coalition have made significant progress in two strategic cities of Haji and Medi along the border with Saudi Arabia.

Govt Forces Prepare to Retake Strategic Hodeida Port. Govt forces supported by Saudi led coalition forces are preparing for a major offensive to retake strategic Hodeida Port on Red Sea.

The Houthi rebels have been receiving arms through this port and levying illegal taxes on commercial imports. However, the UN and aid agencies have warned against the offensive for safety of millions of civilians. In the meantime Govt is renovating Mokha Port as an alternative entry point for humanitarian relief. Houthi Rebels Carry Out Missile Attack on Saudi Arabia. The Houthi rebels recently carried out missile attack on cities of Saudi Arabia. It indicates that the rebels are still receiving assistance from Iran, supposedly through strategic port of Hodeidia.

Comments. The Govt forces supported by Saudi led coalition have been focusing on liberating strategic cities along Saudi Arabia border from Houthi rebels. This would reduce the influence of rebels in areas along the border in Saudi Arabia. Capture of strategic Hodeida Port on Red Sea is imperative for the Govt forces to cut-off supply of arms and weapons to Houthi rebels, its capture would exert immense pressure on operations of rebels.

RUSSIA Russia

Col Harpreet Singh

Attack on Russian Metro. Fourteen people were killed and dozens injured in a blast on the St. Petersburg, Russia metro on 03 Apr 17, in a terrorist attack. An explosion tore through a train as it was traveling between two stations in Russia's second-biggest city. A second device was found and defused at another station. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but the main suspect is a Kyrgyz born Russian Islamist, Akbar zhon Jalilov.

Comments. The blast is likely to have been triggered as retaliation to Russia's intervention in Syria. It is likely to result in increased anti terror policing but may not bring about any major change to Russia's internal/external policies.

G7 unites against Russia on Syria. Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) major industrialized nations met in Italy, looking to put pressure on Russia to break its ties with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad following a chemical attack in Syria. Looking to build their case against Assad, Italy also invited the foreign ministers from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Qatar to sit down with the G7 group to discuss Syria. All oppose Assad's rule. G7 urged Russia to pressure the Syrian government to end the six year civil war.

In a shift in Washington's strategy, US missiles hit a Syrian air base last week in retaliation for the poison gas attack by Syria's military in which scores of civilians died. The Syrian government has denied it was behind the assault. Russia has rejected accusations that Assad used chemical arms against his own people and has said it will not cut its ties with Assad. US hinted that Russia tried to cover up the chemical attack.

Calling the strike a "game changer", British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson had earlier said

support for the Syrian president "was toxifying the reputation of Russia" and suggested sanctions could be imposed on Moscow if it refused to change course. However G7 nations rejected the British call for sanctions.

Russia and Iran have warned the US they will "respond with force" if their own "red lines" are crossed in Syria.

Comments. US President Donald Trump had previously appeared disinclined to intervene against the Syrian leader and the attack raised expectations that he might now be ready to adopt a tougher-than-expected stance with Russia, Assad's main backer. However, the strikes do not find popular support in the US and it is unlikely that any such strikes will make Russia back off in Syria as it holds most of the cards there, with US being only a fringe player. There is also a possibility of escalation of the conflict, especially after the Russian warning. The US will not want to get drawn into a showdown with Russia, considering Russia's presence in the Mediterranean which is considered the strongest since the cold war. Moreover the US already has its hands full with a belligerent North Korea and South China Sea issues. More western sanctions against Russia was possibly the best outcome the US could have hoped for but the same has been rejected by G7.

Tillerson's visit to Moscow. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is on a visit to Moscow after attending the G7 meet in Italy. The G7 nations have given the clearest possible mandate from the West, to convey to the Russians to stop supporting Assad. Tillerson said that the main priority for the United States was the defeat of one of Assad's main foes, the Islamic State militant movement, and it is unclear how far he will want to push the Russians.

Comments. UK Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson has been criticised for cancelling a planned visit to Moscow in the wake of the devastating Syrian chemical attack on the town of Khan Sheikhun. Clearly US wants to keep the Russian channel open with the Tillerson visit. Russia has also sent a diplomatic message by not scheduling Putin's meeting with Tillerson during the visit.

Russian Hacker's Arrest. The Russian hacker arrested in Spain this weekend is the latest suspect swept up in a global dragnet that U.S. officials hope will yield intelligence on Russian government interference in November's presidential election.

At least six Russians have been arrested in Europe on international warrants over the past several months, including the one in Spain, accused of scamming and data theft. The arrest was likely to be linked to hacking in Trump's election win.

Comments. U.S. intelligence officials and cyber experts have long felt that the Russian security services use "patriotic" hackers to carry out attacks on intelligence targets. The hackers have the expertise and their operations can not be easily traced back to the security services. If hackers

decline to help out, they can find themselves in trouble with Russian authorities. However these facts are going to be difficult to prove or be traced back to Russian authorities.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Toshiba Corp. Grapples with Billions of Dollars Losses in its Operations. Earlier, it was Westinghouse which declared its economic distress and has filed for bankruptcy in United States, now its sponsor Toshiba corp. the 142 years old Japanese conglomerate has expressed its economic woes. The company owns Westinghouse has posted operating loss of 5.2 billion for this year ending 31 Dec 16. Yet, disturbing news made to the stands that Chinese company may bid for Westinghouse. All these do not portend well for India's nuclear energy development plan. India has sought to increase its nuclear energy yield in the energy sector from present approx.4% to nearly 20% by 2024. The programme was earlier stymied by the Indian Liability law. This was sorted out during President Obama's visit of India in Jan2015. Thereafter, only commercial agreement was to be arrived between Westinghouse and NPCIL. Still further progress was held up for want of India's Nuclear deal with Japan whose company Toshiba Corp. held the majority share in Westinghouse and could to act and allow Westinghouse operation only in conformity with the Japanese laws. India has signed Nuclear deal with Japan but, Japanese Parliament (Diet) is still to ratify it. Hence, the plan from the beginning was doomed to be a non-starter. Westinghouse was to construct three power plants in Jaitapur, Maharashtra. Now, new developments indicate that the nuclear power plants constructed by Westinghouse are not likely to materialize in India. India should therefore, without delay change the company so that our nuclear our power generation plan does not suffer. America may not allow Chinese to gain control of the Westinghouse however, If Chinese Company eventually succeeding gaining control of Westinghouse, Westinghouse still may be keen to follow up the plan. This act could further strengthen our strategic economic leverage with china which already has huge trade surplus with India and would soften its attitude towards India.

NUCLEAR

North Korea Warns of Nuclear Strike if Provoked. North Korea has conducted five nuclear tests, two of them last year, it is threatening another nuclear test and may be working towards miniaturization of the warheads towards Tactical nuclear weapons which will have great

repercussions on the South Korea. It claims working to develop nuclear-tipped missiles that can reach the United States. Taepo Dong 2 (claimed range 8000Km) is under development can possibly cover the northern part of the American continent. If allowed to develop this capacity it will challenge America at some stage. If it were to happen, American leverage against North Korea will diminish significantly.

There is more concern due to the 105th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il –Sung, the founding father and grandfather of the current ruler and North Korea like in past may test its nuclear weapon or missile. What are then options to control the rouge state?

STEPS TAKEN BY US

(a) US president have impressed upon Chinese President XI Jinping who was on visit to America to US to rein in North Koreans or else United States will solve the problem with or without Chinese help. Consequent to this, Chinese media have warned North Korean from conducting any more nuclear test. Historically, Chinese have been using North Korea as a strategic leverage and have supported the North Korean regime despite the sanction regime of the united nation which has been in place since 2006.

(b) US have ordered its Carrier strike group to head for western pacific as an act of their coercive diplomacy. This is more of reactive in nature and will not motivate North Korean to abandon their nuclear programme.

(c) It is reported that US is redeploying nuclear weapons in South Korea to deter North Korean misadventure. This again is not likely to deter a rouge leader.

(d) US have deploying Ballistic missile defenses to tackle this contingency.

(e) US may press for foe more sanctions though it says it has military option on the table but, this is unlikely to be followed.

US recent firing of 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles against a Syrian air base has sent a message to China to do something to hold North Korea. With Strike group moving in has strengthened Chinese view that America could take punitive action. This will undermine Chinese capacity against North Korea hence, its media taking cognizance of this possibility has warned North Korea from precipitating action. However there is no official reaction so far on this .For the present, American coercive diplomacy may work however, ultimate answer lies

in denuclearization which has been discussed by Trump with XI Jinping. This however, is a difficult option as North Korean nuclear and delivery assets could be well protected. But, by attacking the Syrian base and moving of the Strike group in west has brought in clarity Trump interventionist policy. This policy is substantially different than the Obama,s policy which banked on restrain and negotiations. It is to be seen how China reacts to the changed situation.