

# ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 01 – 15 MAY 2017

**China (CONTINENTAL), China (MARITIME), Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Bangladesh, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Nepal, Space**

**CHINA (CONTINENTAL)**

**Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM**

Chinese President Pledges Billions of Dollars for New Silk Road, ‘Snubs’ Absentee India. The Chinese President, who is positioning himself as a global leader and chief advocate for free trade, seemed to have snubbed India when he said the belt and road initiative respected “territorial integrity”

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday pledged to pump billions of dollars into the new Silk Road initiative as he described his signature foreign policy push as inclusive, one that should not be held hostage to old rivalries and power games.

China is hosting at least 29 heads of state, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz, Sharif, for a two-day “Belt and Road” conference which India has chosen to give a miss.

All of India’s neighbours, except Bhutan, sent high-level delegations to the event, with Sri Lanka represented by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Xi pledged a major funding boost to the ambitious project, including an extra 100 billion yuan (\$14.50 billion) into the existing Silk Road Fund, 380 billion yuan in loans from two policy banks and 60 billion yuan in aid to developing countries and international bodies in countries along the new trade routes. Xi said China would encourage financial institutions to expand their overseas yuan fund businesses to the tune of 300 billion yuan. He did not give a time frame for the new loans, aid and funding pledged on Sunday.

“We should build an open platform of cooperation and uphold and grow an open world economy,” Xi said in his inaugural address to the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) as he also highlighted the importance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the reason New Delhi has stayed away from Beijing’s most important diplomatic event of the year.

The Chinese President, who is positioning himself as a global leader and chief advocate for free trade, seemed to have snubbed India when he said the belt and road initiative respected “territorial integrity”.

“All countries should respect each other’s sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other’s development paths and social systems, and each other’s core interests and major concerns,” Xi told the gathering at the sprawling China Convention Centre.

The CPEC, a cluster of road, rail and energy projects, will connect Pakistan’s southern Gwadar port city on the Arabian Sea and Kashgar in China’s far-western western Xinjiang province. India has reservations about the project as it passes through Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir, which New Delhi says challenges its sovereignty by lending legitimacy to Pakistan’s claim over the territory.

“No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity,” ministry of external affairs spokesperson Gopal Baglay said on Saturday night.

If there was any doubt about the importance of the CPEC in the One Belt, One Road plan, or Belt Road Initiative (BRI), it was put rest in a policy document released and distributed on the side lines of the BRF.

“The corridor (CPEC) is a flagship program of the BRI. The governments of both China and Pakistan attach great importance to it and have actively started preparation for long-term plans,” the document titled ‘Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice and China’s contribution’ said with a rare mention of “flagship” in a Chinese official document.

The other BRI projects mentioned in the document were not bestowed the honour.

B&R to turn tensions into cooperation: expert

By Yang Sheng Source:Global Times Published: 2017/5/15 0:23:39

China, Philippines to start maritime talks.

Heads of state and senior officials attending the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation pose for a group photo on Sunday in Beijing. Photo: Xinhua

The Belt and Road initiative will contribute significant solutions for security problems between participants, building new-type diplomatic relations based on win-win cooperation, experts said.

Leaders and representatives from countries like Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines, with whom China has experienced disputes and friction, still joined the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation which is being held in Beijing from Sunday to Monday.

According to Japan's Kyodo News, the Secretary General of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party Toshihiro Nikai, who attended the forum in Beijing, planned to deliver a letter from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"The Belt and Road initiative focuses on economic and trade issues, so it's very easy for countries to find and increase common interests. Disputes between them will be laid aside, and this is an effective measure to shift relations with neighbors from tensions into cooperation," Chen Fengying, a research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, told the Global Times on Sunday.

China and the Philippines will start bilateral consultations on the disputed South China Sea this week, the Philippine ambassador to Beijing said, as Manila looks to ease tensions with China, Reuters reported.

"Multilateral platforms are a good arena to solve bilateral problems. Although we can't expect one meeting to solve all problems, at least it provides opportunities for dialogue," said An Gang, a member of the academic committee of the Pangoal Institute, a Beijing-based think tank

All key parties involved in the Korean Peninsula issue, including the US and North and South Korea, also attended the forum. The forum has provided a valuable opportunity for the relevant countries to start engagement as the situation on the peninsula is still intense.

South Korea's delegation to the forum said Sunday that it held a brief meeting with its North Korean counterpart, Yonhap News reported. South Korea's delegation head Park Byeong-seung of the ruling Democratic Party said he had a short conversation with Kim Yong-jae, Pyongyang's minister of external economic relations, at the Belt and Road forum. But the US had apparently complained to China on Friday about North Korea's attendance at the forum, Reuters reported.

"China is trying its best to create a friendly and peaceful environment for the relevant countries to sit down and talk, but if they have no sincerity at all, then what do they expect China to do? Do they really want our mediation?" An said.

\$60b invested in B&R nations

2017-05-13

Chinese investments related to the Belt and Road initiative have totaled \$60 billion since 2013 and a large portion of outbound investment in the future will go to countries joining the initiative, a State planning agency official said on Friday.

NingJizhe, vice chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, told a news conference in Beijing ahead of a forum on the initiative that China's total outbound investment will reach \$120 billion to \$130 billion a year over the next five years.

That would amount to \$600 billion to \$800 billion in total, Ning said, adding "this will be a big driving force for a steady recovery in the global economy, and for free trade and investment."

The scrutiny of outbound investments by Chinese regulators will not affect Belt and Road projects, Ning said.

China is set to strengthen its audit of SOE's overseas investments, cooperation with foreign enterprises, financial management system of overseas assets, their operating efficiency, and risk control, news portal Economic Information Daily reported on Tuesday.

On financing, Ning said China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China have extended \$110 billion in loans for Belt and Road projects by the end of 2016, and China has signed currency swap deals with countries along the Belt and Road routes totaling 900 billion yuan.

More than 1,500 delegates. A total of 29 heads of state and government leaders will attend the upcoming Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Foreign Ministry spokesperson GengShuang announced on Thursday. More than 1,500 special guests from 130 countries will attend the forum and over 4,000 reporters from across the world will cover the event.

The forum marks the highest-profile international meeting on the Belt and Road initiative since China proposed it in 2013. The US is to send delegates to attend the Belt and Road forum, as it "recognizes the importance of China-proposed Belt and Road initiative," according to a statement released by the US Commerce Department.

Matt Pottinger, a special assistant to the US president, will attend the summit, according to China's foreign ministry.

Japanese Liberal Democratic Party's Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai has confirmed to attend a high-level conference during the forum. "The attendance of the US and Japan conveys a positive signal to other Western countries. It shows a positive change in their attitudes and marks a good beginning," Li Haidong, a professor with the Institute of International Relations at China

Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times. Li noted that "whether the attendance is symbolic or practical depends on whether they feel that they could benefit from the initiative."

Meanwhile, South Korea's presidential Blue House said Friday that five-term lawmaker Park Byeong-seug of the ruling Minjoo Party will head the government delegation attending the forum.

North Korea will also send an official delegation to the forum, said China's foreign ministry. "The Belt and Road initiative is expanding its influence in the world as some countries, which used to hold a wait-and-see attitude toward the initiative, have now decided to attend the forum. It showed that the initial benefits of the initiative have changed their passive attitude and attracted them to join the initiative.

India Slams China's OBOR, says it Violates Sovereignty. On the eve of China's biggest foreign policy manoeuvre in years, India on Saturday came out in open opposition against Beijing's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) forum, reminding it that no country could accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity. "No country can accept this," the ministry of external affairs said here ahead of the Beijing OBOR meet.

India has strong objections to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and attending the meet would be as good as accepting the Pakistani and Chinese positions on Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir being "northern Pakistan".

In a strongly-worded statement on the eve of the event, which will see participation of more than 60 countries and 30 heads of state, India escalated its opposition to OBOR, suggesting that the project is little more than a colonial enterprise, leaving debt and broken communities in its wake. India's statement comes as a splash of cold water to Xi Jinping's biggest foreign policy outreach, and puts paid to any prospect of bilateral ties improving during the rest of Modi's tenure. The MEA said, "We are of firm belief that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. Connectivity initiatives must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burden for communities; balanced ecological and environmental

protection and preservation standards; transparent assessment of project costs; and skill and technology transfer to help long term progress and maintenance of the assets created by local communities. Connectivity projects must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity. “

Structural misalignments of OBOR have been detailed by observers. Sri Lanka is a big example, where an unviable Hambantota port project has left Colombo reeling under an \$8 billion debt burden. Pakistan may be headed in the same direction; Laos is trying to renegotiate a railway project, Myanmar has asked for its own renegotiation; a Belgrade-Budapest railway line to be built by China is under investigation by the EU. Chinese infrastructure projects in foreign countries are typically executed by state-owned enterprises, while financing programmes that initially appear attractive sour quickly.

India's savage takedown of OBOR comes even as the US, one of the last holdouts, confirmed its attendance at the forum in the form of Matt Pottinger, a director in the White House. Japan, India's other strategic partner, is sending Toshihiro Nikai, head of ruling LDP and ex-PM Yukio Hatoyama. Confirming that India had received an invitation to participate in the 6 separate forums that China was organising as part of the Belt and Road Forum, the MEA said, “We have been urging China to engage in a meaningful dialogue. We are awaiting a positive response from the Chinese side.” Officials said India had for the past few years repeatedly asked China for consultations on OBOR without any success. India's statement puts paid to any prospect of bilateral ties improving during the rest of Modi's tenure as it trashes Xi Jinping's biggest foreign policy outreach. Xi has given this summit top billing, almost as a coming out party for himself as the world's latest globalization guru at a time when the western world appears to be in retreat. Under the ‘Act East’ policy, the MEA spokesperson said, “We are pursuing the Trilateral Highway project; under our ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy we are developing multimodal linkages with Myanmar and Bangladesh; under our ‘Go West’ strategy, we are engaged with Iran on Chabahar Port and with Iran and other partners in Central Asia on International North South Transport Corridor. BBIN initiative is aimed at enhancing logistics efficiencies in the South Asian region.”

The Cabinet also gave nod to India's accession to the UNled TIR Convention in March, which will give Indian traders access to “fast, easy, reliable and hassle free international system for movement of goods by road or multimodal means across territories.”

Can't ignore it: Nepal. Justifying its decision to join OBOR despite India's opposition, Nepal has said it could not ignore China as the latter is an economic powerhouse and also its neighbour. Nepal's ambassador Deep Kumar Upadhyaya told that Delhi's reservations were

mostly about CPEC, and Nepal had nothing to do with it. Apart from Bhutan, India is the only South Asian country staying out of OBOR.

US Makes U-Turn, to Drive Down OBOR. The US has made a sudden U-turn and decided to participate in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative being organised by China with much fanfare in Beijing this Sunday and Monday.

The US move puts tremendous pressure on India, which remains undecided on whether to send representatives to the event. India maintains that China has not created an environment of trust to carry out the belt and road projects. A very good example is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor through which China is looking to link Xinjiang with Gwadar port, which it has built in Baluchistan. Beijing has shown scant regard for the fact that it impinges on India's sovereignty, passing as it does through the Gilgit Baltistan region which India claims as its own. There may not be any immediate material loss to India if it goes unrepresented because OBOR is not a membership-based organization. In fact, India might be praised in some quarters for taking a bold principled stand.

Though taking part in the initiative is a political decision, the US has made it appear like a trade-off that included China's commitment to buy American beef as part of the '100-day plan' agreement. On its part, Washington agreed to allow Chinese banks to expand operations in the US. "India is in a dilemma," Jagannath Panda, a research fellow at the Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis in New Delhi, told TOI. "India has to take cognizance of the US decision. It is an early signal that the Trump administration is reframing the US China relationship," he said. The US is sending an inter-agency delegation led by Matthew Pottinger, a top adviser to the Trump administration and National Security Council senior director for East Asia. The decision emanated directly from the meeting between the presidents of the US and China in Florida last month.

"We welcome all countries to attend. And we welcome the United States' attendance as the world's largest economy," said Chinese vice-finance minister Zhu Guangyao.

China's dominant position in the programme may be somewhat diluted with the US now joining developed countries like Britain and Germany in sending representatives. China may come under pressure to become more transparent about its plans, and whether it would follow internationally-accepted standards on environment and labour in the projects, they said.

Japan and South Korea, which have military differences with China, are sending representatives. Most other countries engaged in territorial disputes with China over the South China Sea issue, including Vietnam and Indonesia, are also sending official delegations. Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are also taking part.

Twenty-Nine Countries will be Represented by their Heads of State. China says it would be a

win-win for all countries, but there are serious doubts on whether Beijing would eagerly share the benefits in the face of pressure from Chinese companies.

The Programme Includes Six Economic Corridors but no Reliable Map has been made Available and it is Evolving with Time. "What actually gets built will depend on what deals Chinese companies or the government make with other countries," abroad or on the deals that the Chinese government makes with other governments abroad, and no one knows exactly what those are going to be," said Tom Miller, author of a recent book, China's Asian Dream.

OBOR Summit: India can Join Project Later, Hints Beijing.

BEIJING: China on Saturday sent out conflicting signals even as India decided to boycott the two-day Belt and Road Forum in Beijing starting tomorrow.

Beijing suggested that it is ready keep the doors open for India to join the Belt program at a later date but will not budge from a construction program in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who is attending the summit, brought along with him chief ministers of four Pakistani provinces. However, he did not include the chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, which covers the disputed PoK region. This is seen as an attempt to placate New Delhi and send out a signal that India is still welcome to join the Belt and Road program.

On the other hand, China hosted a conference on Saturday on the construction of a major hydroelectricity dam, the Diamer-Bhasha Dam, which is located in the disputed areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. The purpose of holding the conference at this time was to convey that the Indian boycott would not affect Chinese determination to construct projects in the area.

India has objected to the fact that one portion of the Belt and Road program, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), passes through Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, raising serious sovereignty concerns.

"The government head in Gilgit-Baltistan did not come for technical reasons. But China is also conveying a subtle message that it recognises India's concerns on the Kashmir issue," Hu Shishang, director of the government-run Institute of South and South East Asian Affairs told TOI.

Hu added it would be perfectly alright if India wants to take its own time to decide, and prefers to join the Belt and Road program at a later date.

"This is not a time-bound program. A country may join when it feels more confident about it. But this is a globalized world, and it would only help India if it joins the program," he said.

Pakistan had earlier tried to obtain finance for the Daimir-Bhasha dam project from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Aga Khan Foundation. But there were serious questions about whether these financiers would agree without obtaining a no-objection sign from India, which claims the area as its own.

China's National Energy Administration has now stepped forward to finance and construct the project. NEA made a presentation about how it will go about the task at a conference attended by Sharif in Beijing on Saturday.

A memorandum of understanding on the project was also signed by the Chinese ambassador in Pakistan, Sun Weidong, and Pakistani power secretary Naseem Khokhar.

The decision to drop Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister Hafeez-ur-Rehman from Sharif's delegation resulted in strong resentment being expressed by the people in the province in the social media, according to Pakistan Today. Rehman was in the original list of delegates but dropped at the last minute, it reported.

Sharif's team in Beijing includes chief ministers of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces of Pakistan. He is also accompanied by five ministers from the central government in Islamabad.

## **CHINA (MARITIME)**

### **Capt Ranjit Seth**

China held the opening ceremony for the Belt and Road summit in Beijing on Sunday 14 May 17. The Chinese government has been planning the forum for months, with an extensive propaganda campaign on the OBOR initiative in its news media.

China, seeking validation for the project, asked Western countries and American allies to send their leaders, but most declined and sent lower level officials instead.

Speaking at the summit President Xi Jinping provided a vision of a new economic global order, positioning his country as an alternative to an inward-looking United States. President Xi pledged more than \$100 billion for development banks in China to provide for the vast spending on

infrastructure in Asia, Europe and Africa. President Xi called the initiative, “the project of the century.” He portrayed the plan as “economic globalization that is open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all.” China he said, would invite the World Bank and other international institutions to join it in meeting the needs of developing and developed countries.

The One Belt, One Road programme, based on Chinese-led investment in bridges, rails, ports and energy in over 60 countries, forms the bedrock of China’s economic and geopolitical agenda. So far China has spent \$50 billion on the initiative that Mr. Xi announced four years ago. President Xi said that he was increasing the amounts available to China’s main banks. The China Development Bank and the Ex-Im Bank would dispense loans of \$55 billion between them, and the Silk Road Fund would receive an additional \$14 billion. About \$50 billion more would be directed at encouraging financial institutions to expand overseas renminbi fund businesses.

It is interesting to note that China, which has generally been skeptical of social programs by the World Bank, said the initiative would tackle poverty in recipient countries. President Xi promised to deliver emergency food aid and said China would begin “100 poverty projects.”

Mr. Xi spoke of the differences between the United States system of alliances and his notion of commerce under China. “We have no intention to form a small group that would dismantle stability but we hope to create a big family of harmonious coexistence.”

The US sent Matthew Pottinger who is senior director for Asia at the National Security Council, Washington. Mr. Pottinger said that China should insist on transparency in government procurement for the OBOR projects.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said he was proud to stand “shoulder to shoulder” with Beijing.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not attend due to concerns about the issue of sovereignty of Indian territory that the CPEC would violate.

Some western economists who have studied the program feel that China was not giving aid, but was asking countries to assume debt from Chinese banks to pay for the infrastructure.

## **PAKISTAN**

**Brig Deepak Malhotra**

International Court of Justice (ICJ) Stays Cdr Kulbhushan Jadhav's Execution. India moved the ICJ against Pakistan, accusing the latter of violating the Vienna Convention in the case of the Cdr Kulbhushan Jadhav (Retd), who was handed a death sentence by a Field General Court Martial (FGCM) last month. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) will hold a public hearing on May 15 which will be conducted in two phases with the ICJ hearing India's observations in the first phase and Pakistan's observations in the second. In an application filed in the ICJ, India stated that Pakistan has repeatedly denied consular access to Jadhav and has requested the ICJ to ensure that Jadhav's death sentence is suspended and declared a violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

Comments. India has raised its claims before the court under Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR), which grants the right of consular access to a foreign national "who is in prison, custody or detention" and the optional protocol to the VCCR, which establishes the ICJ as the venue for resolving disputes under the VCCR. To raise its claims, India has relied upon the court's compromisory jurisdiction under Article 36(1) of the statute of the ICJ which allows the latter to exercise its jurisdiction on the basis of a 'special agreement' — in this case the optional protocol.

## IRAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

Iran Threatens to Cross Pakistan Border to Hit Terrorist Safe Havens if Attacks Continue. Iran's Chief of Army Staff Major General Mohammad Baqeri warned Pakistan that it would hit terrorist safe havens inside that country if the government does not confront militants who carry out cross-border attacks. Ten Iranian border guards were killed by Jaish-al-Adl, a Baluchi militant group using long-range guns, fired from inside Pakistan. Pakistan has assured Iran it would deploy additional troops along its border.

Comments. The border area has long been plagued by unrest from both drug smuggling gangs and separatist militants. Jaish al Adl is a militant group that has carried out several attacks against Iranian security forces with the aim of highlighting what they say is discrimination against minority groups in Iran. In 2014, Iran warned it would send troops to Pakistan to retrieve five Iranian border guards kidnapped by Jaish al Adl. The issue was resolved when a local cleric stepped in and resolved the situation.

## **BANGLADESH**

**Col Saikat Roy**

BNP Chief Khaleda Outlines Anti-Terror Strategy in Vision 2030. BNP Chief Khaleda Zia has

vowed to take strict steps against the rise of terrorism and militancy as she unveiled her party's Vision 2030 on May 10, 2017. Addressing a Press Conference the BNP chief said that her party will adopt a "core strategy" of resisting radicalism by working against poverty and unemployment. Khaleda said that, "At present, terrorism, extremism and militancy have become a perilous problem for the nation. Democratic deficit, absence of the rule of law and violations of human rights are among the reasons for the rise of terrorism, extremism and militancy in Bangladesh. All efforts for national development will fail if this problem of terrorism cannot be resolved. The nation will plunge into terrible instability." This is why BNP will take stern measures against terrorism, extremism and militancy. BNP said it would encourage inter-faith dialogues.

Hearing on 11 Cases Against Khaleda Zia Adjourned. A Dhaka court has once again deferred the hearing in 11 cases on charges of sedition and inciting violence against opposition leader and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson Khaleda Zia. Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge on Tuesday set May 22 as the date for the next hearing after considering a petition by the former Prime Minister's lawyers who cited her ill health.

Comments. Zia, a two-time Prime Minister of Bangladesh (1991-1996, 2001-2006), faces trial in 10 cases related to violence during BNP's anti-government protests in early 2015 over demands to advance election dates. The BNP chief is also facing sedition charges for expressing doubts over the widely-accepted version that three million were killed or martyred during the 1971 Liberation War when Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan.

Raise Voice Against Citizenship (Amendment) Bill: PRISM. Aizawl-based anti-corruption watchdog, People's Right to Information and Development Society of Mizoram (PRISM), on Saturday May 6, 2017 urged the people to raise their voices and stage protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016. The Bill seeks to make illegal migrants of certain minority communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for the Indian citizenship. PRISM has decided to involve all political parties and NGOs of the state in protesting against the proposed legislation. "The Bill, if passed, would cause serious demographic crisis in India. It will affect those regions in the northeast which share international border with Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar".

Comments. The proposed legislation seeks to grant citizenship to any Hindu, Parsi, Jain, Buddhist and Christian who entered India and stayed in the country for six years. PRISM

expressed apprehension that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in western parts of Mizoram would be granted citizenship if the proposed bill becomes a law.

China to Fund Bangladesh for 9th Friendship Bridge. Beijing will fund Dhaka for construction of the ninth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge and other infrastructure development projects. Bangladesh's Economic Relations Department (ERD) Secretary Kazi Shofiqul Azam and Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ma Mingqiang signed an agreement in this regard on Thursday, May 11, 2017.

Comments. Seven such bridges have been completed across Bangladesh and the eighth is under construction over the Kocha River. An ERD statement said that the Chinese assistance will play a vital role on the economic and social development of the country as well as the communication sector.

## **SRI LANKA**

### **Col Saikat Roy**

Modi Assures Sri Lanka Support for Nation-Building. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi today assured Sri Lanka support for the island's nation-building endeavours. Speaking at the International Vesak Day celebrations at Colombo on May 12, 2017, Modi said that on Vesak, his hope is that India and Sri Lanka will work together to uphold the ideals of Lord Buddha and promote values of peace, accommodation, inclusiveness, and compassion in the policies and conduct of the two Governments.

Today, India's development cooperation with Sri Lanka amounts to US Dollars 2.6 billion. Modi says its only aim is to support Sri Lanka in realizing a peaceful, prosperous and secure future for its people. "Because, the economic and social well being of the people of Sri Lanka is linked with that of 1.25 billion Indians. Because, whether it is on land or in the waters of the Indian Ocean, the security of our societies is indivisible," he said.

Modi said that during his conversations with President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe they reinforced the will to join hands in achieving common goals.

Modi and Rajapaksa Talk About Economic Cooperation. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa are now talking of working together to implement India's economic development programs and investments in Sri Lanka. Rajapaksa had, at his request, a half hour meeting with Modi in Colombo late at night on Thursday May 11, 2017. The meeting was very friendly and cordial. The two leaders skipped politics and spoke about forging close economic relations between the two countries. The former Sri Lankan President dwelt on the deficiencies in the economic policy of the Maithripala Sirisena-

Wickremesinghe government and regretted that the projects that his government had launched were stalled.

Curious about China's role, Modi asked Rajapaksa, who is known to be close to China, about the controversies surrounding the China-executed projects such as Hambantota port. Rajapaksa said that the terms of an agreement on the port are still being negotiated and that he expects the Chinese to wait.

Comments. Modi is currently in Sri Lanka to be the Chief Guest at the UN-backed International Vesak Day celebrations on Friday, May 12, 2017. It is clear that Rajapaksa wants to make up with Modi. He had earlier accused the Indian intelligence agency RAW of engineering his electoral defeat in January 2015 for getting close to China at the expense of India. He also refused to reiterate his charge against RAW saying: "Let bygones be bygones." Looking at the meeting as a whole it looks as if Modi wants to keep up a friendship with Rajapaksa to be able to work with him if he comes back to power.

Nepali President Arrives in Sri Lanka to Participate in Vesak Celebrations. Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari arrived in Sri Lanka on May 13, 2017 at the invitation of Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena to participate in the International Vesak celebrations. President Bhandari will be the Chief Guest in the closing ceremony of the 14th UN International Vesak day Celebrations to be held in Kandy on May 14, 2017.

The Nepali President is scheduled to hold bilateral talks with her Sri Lankan counterpart and will hold high-level political talks during her visit. She will also visit various religious sites in Sri Lanka.

China Keeps Mum over Sri Lanka Rejecting Submarine Docking. The Chinese Foreign Ministry parried questions on reports that Sri Lanka has rejected China's request for its submarine to dock at Colombo next week after a similar visit in 2014 triggered a strong protest from India.

China is all set to host Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe for the high-profile Silk Road Summit on May 14-15. During his visit, Wickramasinge is expected to finalise the Hambantota Port deal as well as a Chinese free trade zone in the area which were stalled by public protests. Saddled with heavy Chinese loans, Sri Lanka offered to lease 80 per cent of the loss making Hambantota port for 99 years lease. The two sides are also expected to finalise Free Trade Agreement.

Comments. China has made about USD eight billion investments in Sri Lanka in the last few years, specially in port projects like Hambantota and Colombo ports. It continues to pressure the island nation for docking its submarines despite assertion by Sirisena government that it will not permit them due to concerns from India.

India has expressed concern over the previous Mahinda Rajapaksa's government for permitting a

Chinese submarine in Colombo harbour in 2014. China's request to dock its submarines coincided with the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Colombo.

China says it wants docking facilities for its submarines to take part in the anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. In February this year, Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Karunasena Kodituwakku told the media here that Colombo will not permit any military activity by China in any of its ports including Hambantota where a Chinese firm plans to acquire 80 percent in view of India's concerns.

However, China is happy that Wickramasinghe has consented to take part in its Belt&Road Forum. Significantly, Wickramasinghe and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif are the only two top leaders from South Asia to attend the conference. The other South Asian countries would be represented by either ministerial or official level delegation.

## **MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

### **Col Saikat Roy**

Larsen and Toubro to Manufacture the K9 Vajra-T Guns. The defence ministry signed a Rs 4,500-crore contract with Larsen and Toubro (L&T) for 100 155mm/52 calibre tracked self-propelled guns. This is the largest order for an Indian company from the defence ministry. The army will receive the guns within 18 months of signing the contract (by September 2018). The entire order will be executed in 42 months (by the end of 2020).

Built with Korean technology, the K9 Vajra-T guns, having a range of more than 40 km, were field-tested extensively in the Pokhran desert and other areas in the western sector. The K9 Vajra-T gun, is an enhanced version of South Korean major Hanwha Tech Win's K9 Thunder – a self propelled Howitzer, customised and co-developed by L&T and the Korean firm to suit the requirements of the Indian Army, including desert operations.

Comments. Since the induction of the Bofors guns in the 1980s, the army did not have any artillery guns. An ordnance factory in Jabalpur is now making indigenous Dhanush artillery guns, using the Bofors technology. These guns, however, are not anywhere close to induction.

## **AFGHANISTAN**

### **Brig Deepak Malhotra**

US Confirms Death of ISIL Leader in Afghanistan. Abdul Hasib, the head of ISIL in Afghanistan was killed in an operation led by Afghan Special Forces in the eastern province of Nangarhar. US military officials in Afghanistan have previously said Hasib's death would

"significantly degrade" the group's operations and "help reach their goal of destroying them in 2017". Abdul Hasib was appointed last year after his predecessor Hafiz Saeed Khan died in a US drone attack - is believed to have ordered a series of high-profile attacks, including one in March on the main military hospital in Kabul by a group of fighters disguised as doctors.

Comments. The local affiliate of ISIL - sometimes known as ISIL Khorasan (ISIL-K), after an old name for the region that includes Afghanistan - has been active since 2015, fighting the Taliban as well as Afghan and US forces. It is believed to maintain links with the main ISIL group in Iraq and Syria, but has considerable operational independence.

Pentagon Wants to Boost US Troop Numbers in Afghanistan. US Intelligence chiefs have warned the war against the Afghan Taliban will deteriorate over the next two years. The Pentagon is considering boosting the nearly 8,500 soldiers in Afghanistan by 3,000 to 5,000 soldiers, including Special Operations forces. The aim of such a step would be to break the military stalemate in Afghanistan and push the Taliban - who have made gains in recent months - to negotiate with the Kabul government. Afghanistan has seen intensified Taliban attacks across the country, leaving Afghan forces - already beset by killings, desertions, and vacuums in leadership and morale - stretched on multiple fronts.

Comments. The US has about 8,500 troops in Afghanistan, with about another 5,000 from NATO allies. Back in February, General John Nicholson, the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, told Congress that he would need an extra "few thousand" troops to make gains against the Taliban and break what he called a stalemate against the armed group's fighters. The potential increase in US troop figures comes amid NATO calls for the UK to also increase the number of its own soldiers in Afghanistan.

Hekmatyar Returns to Kabul After 20 Years in Hiding. After two decades in hiding, Hezb-i-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar returned to Kabul, pleading for peace as he was welcomed by the Afghan government at the presidential palace. The controversial commander's arrival in the capital - a city his forces had shelled with thousands of rockets during the Afghan civil war - came after his largely dormant group signed a peace deal with President Ashraf Ghani's government in September. The Taliban has shown no sign of accepting any arrangement with Hekmatyar, but Ghani thanked him for accepting the deal and said the Afghan people wanted peace and prosperity.

Comments. In February, the UN Security Council lifted sanctions on him, which paved the way for his return to Afghanistan. Human rights groups were strongly critical of September's agreement, saying it reinforces a culture of impunity that allows those accused of human rights

violations to get away with abuses. During his self-imposed exile, Hekmatyar was long believed to be living in hiding in Pakistan, though his group had claimed he was inside Afghanistan.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

### **Brig Ranjit Singh**

#### **IRAQ**

Endgame for Retake of West Mosul. The Iraqi security forces have retaken strategic districts close to the Old City of Mosul. The Iraqi Forces have pushed deeper in to West Mosul, dividing areas held by ISIS to take them on piece meal. The final showdown would be for capture of 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, approx 10,000 civilians are leaving every day. The ISIS resistance is collapsing, they are retreating quickly. The operations have entered last phase of operations, Iraqi Forces have retaken 91 percent of area, 36 out of 38 districts in Mosul from ISIS. Mosul is expected to be liberated before Ramadan, which starts on 27 May, as reported by Iraqi security forces spokesperson.

US Led Coalition Air Strikes. The US led Coalition is continuing with large scale air strikes causing heavy 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, the number of IDP has touched 450,000, it is increasing by the day. The civilians trapped inside are on the verge of starvation and are surviving by eating grass.

ISIS Fighting Capability. It is reported that ISIS strength has fallen to a few hundred in Mosul. 60 ISIS elements have fled along with their families. One of the important ISIS leader has fled carrying huge amount of cash. They are primarily restricted to the old city of Mosul, the escape routes have been cut off. It expected that ISIS terrorists would fight to the last man last round. The ISIS cadres left are believed to Uzbeks, Uighurs and French speaking Europeans.

Comments. The Iraqi offensive to retake Mosul has entered last phase of operations, countdown has probably begun, with only 2 out of 38 districts to be retaken from ISIS. It reported ISIS terrorists are holed up in the old city of Mosul, numbering a few hundred, who are expected to fight last man last round. A large number of ISIS fighters are reported to have escaped with their families. It is reported by Iraqi spokesperson that Mosul operations would be completed before start of Ramadan on 27 May.

## **SYRIA**

SDF Retakes Tabqa from ISIS. US backed SDF has retaken the strategic town of Tabqa, 55 Km west of Raqqa. Syrian Kurds and Arab fighters backed by US, have fully retaken the control of the city, after intense fighting. It has seized control of both dam and the city, clearing the way for capture of ISIS capital city of Raqqa.

SDF: Final Push for Raqqa. SDF backed by US will soon begin final attack for capture of Raqqa from ISIS. US President has approved direct arms shipment to Kurdish rebels, YPG, to ensure a clear victory.

Supply of Weapons to SDF by US Opposed by Turkey. The direct supply of weapons by US to Kurdish rebels has been vehemently opposed by Turkey. However, US has decided to go ahead with their plan to defeat ISIS at the earliest.

Syria Safe Zone Plan Comes in to Effect. During the peace talks in Kazakhstan early this month, Russia, Turkey and Iran agreed to establish four safe zones in Syria. The plan has been put in to effect. It envisions establishment of safe zones that would bring relief to thousands of civilians and encourage refugees to return. The plan bans all aircraft flying over the safe zones.

Comments. SDF supported by US has retaken the strategic town of Tabqa, which has cleared the way for capture of Raqqa. SDF would shortly begin the final offensive to retake Raqqa from ISIS. To ensure victory, US has decided to supply weapons directly to SDF. Capture of Raqqa appears to be a matter of time.

Establishment of four safe zones in Syria has come in to effect as a fall out of peace talks in Kazakhstan. It was agreed by Russia, Turkey and Iran to establish the safe zones to provide relief to thousands of civilians and encourage return of refugees.

## **YEMEN**

Rebels on Defensive as Govt Forces Retake Red Sea City of Medi. Heavy clashes have been reported in Northern Province of Hajja, where Govt forces have retaken the Red Sea city of Medi, inflicting large scale casualties on Houthi rebels. The Govt forces have broken months of stalemate putting rebels on defensive in Haradh and Nahim districts close to Sana'a.

State of Emergency in Yemen. Al Houthis have declared state of emergency in capital city of Sana'a over deadly outbreak of Cholera, which has killed 115 and more than 8,000 are ill. It has manifested in to an epidemic, scale of disease is beyond control. Houthis have sought international help to control the epidemic.

Yemen on the Brink of Starvation. It is reported that approx 17 million people ie two-third of population is on the brink of starvation, leading to humanitarian crisis. The UN sponsored aid is inadequate, not reaching the affected people.

Saleh Preparing to Sever Ties with Al Houthis. It is reported that Saleh, the former President of Yemen, who headed the Houthi rebels has fallen out with them. It is believed that Houthis are planning to assassinate him. He has called on the media loyal to him to expose the rebels supported by Iran. He is also willing to negotiate in the peace process with Saudi Arabia.

Ex Governor of Aden Forms New Council. The former Governor of Aden, Maj Gen Zubaiedi, recently sacked by President Hadi, has formed new transition council with 27 members for South Yemen. He is supported by Saudi led coalition. The Governor enjoys large support base in South Yemen.

Yemen Peace Talks Before Ramadan. There is a great push by UN envoy and Hadi Govt to start the peace process before Ramadan. Prime Minister of Yemen has said that his Govt was determined to sign a peace deal with Houthi rebels to put an end to bloody conflict. The UN envoy to Yemen has voiced his hopes of renewed peace talks before Ramadan.

Comments. The situation in Yemen remains grim with really no worthwhile progress, even though the Govt forces have pushed rebels in to defensive in northern Yemen. The smuggling of weapons by the rebels continues through the rebel held Hodeida Port. The UN sponsored peace talks could commence before Ramadan, as reported by UN envoy to Yemen.

Two major political developments which may define the course of events in future; former President falling out with Houthi rebels, would wean away troops loyal to Saleh from the rebels, weakening their military capability and New Transition Council for South Yemen formed by the sacked Governor of Aden, would give impetus to the demand of a separate state of South Yemen.

## **NEPAL**

### **Col Harpreet Singh**

Nepal China's Rail Network. Nepal is in talks with China to build a cross-border rail link and funding could be expected after Nepal formally signed up to Beijing's Belt and Road initiative. The proposed 550 kilometer long railway would connect China's western Tibet region to Nepal's capital of Kathmandu and will carry goods and passengers. The railway will travel over 400 kilometres in China to the Nepal border, and then about another 150 kilometres from the Nepali border to Kathmandu, he said. The two countries had been in discussions for the past five months about the project, which could cost \$7-8 billion and take up to eight years to complete.

The Himalayan nation officially signed an agreement two days ago to be part of President Xi Jinping's ambitious plan to build a new Silk Road while attending the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing.

Comments. Nepal is again playing the balancing act between India and China by joining China's OBOR initiative and stating that it cannot ignore a giant neighbour like China. It also said that its relationship with India is strong. However it is clear, that Nepal is looking forward to the rail network and OBOR links with China and it will keep its perceived national interests foremost regardless of India's concerns.

Nepal Local Body Polls. Nepalese voters headed to the polls on 14 May for local elections that were the first to be held in the country since 1997. Nearly 50,000 candidates stood for 13,556 positions as mayor, deputy mayor, ward chairman and ward member in 283 local municipalities. The election is to take place in two phases owing to fears of election related violence in four remaining southern provinces, with the second poll scheduled for June 14.

The first phase of voting was mostly peaceful, though an army ordnance disposal team safely detonated two explosive devices planted opposite a candidate's house in the capital, Kathmandu.

Comments. Since 2002, when the five-year mandate of the previous elected government representatives expired, local positions have been occupied by government-appointed bureaucrats. Elections could not be held amid a 10-year communist insurgency that ended in 2006, which was followed by years of delay in drafting a new constitution. The government has pledged to vote on an amendment to the constitution after the election on Sunday, but the fragile ruling coalition is having difficulty bringing together a sufficient majority to get the bill passed.

The local bodies election taking place after a gap of two decades would empower the people and distribute power and other amenities to villages. Agreement between Madhes and the government is a good sign for the stability of Nepal.

Nepal Chief Justice Reinstated. Nepal's Supreme Court reinstated the country's first woman chief justice Sushila Karki and directed Parliament to halt her impeachment. A single member bench of Justice Cholendra Shamsher Rana issued the order stating that the impeachment move was against the spirit of Nepal's Constitution. His order came in response to a writ petition against the motion to impeach Karki. Comments. The court decision has put the government in an awkward position. The impeachment motion against Karki was registered in Parliament by two major ruling parties that accused her of 'interfering' with the executive and issuing 'prejudiced' verdicts. However since Karki is due to retire in May end, the government appears to be waiting for the same to avoid any controversy.

## **SPACE**

### **Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)**

China Intends to Land a space probe on an Asteroid. Recently, It was reported in the media that China has planned to explore three asteroids and eventually land its probe on the Asteroid. This has also been articulated in its Space white paper of 2016. So far US and Japan has landed their probes on the asteroids. China intends to send this probe after success of the Lunar probe which is planned in 2020.

The mission would show case Chinese progress in the realm of the outer space. The stated purpose is to study the formation of the asteroid which itself will could unravel the origin of the solar system. The other purpose is to mine precious and rare materials which are expected to exist on the asteroid. The value of the precious material itself will meet the cost of the project.

It may not be out of place to mention that US former president Obama in 2015, made it legal to allow the private companies to own and mine the asteroids. This is not far-fetched as US has already exhibited its capability to transport Cargo to the International space station using a Unmanned vehicle of Space X and Orbital Sciences .

NASA says it's already trying to pick out an asteroid that a robotic mission could reach, capture and bring into an orbit around the moon. Astronauts would then travel on the Orion spacecraft to explore the asteroid and collect samples. China is also expressing similar views.

The outer space treaty calls space and planets and Asteroids as Global commons. But it seems that a space race has begun to own part of the space assets as it has happened in case of the Antarctica. Presently the focus of research is economic and scientific study but, it could have strategic implications too in future.