

ENVIRONMENT SCAN – 17 AUG 2015

CHINA Col C Madhwal, VSM

China says Human Rights Should not Dominate US Ties. Human rights should not dominate the US-China relationship, a senior Chinese official said, ahead of a visit to Washington next month by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Earlier, the top US official for human rights, Tom Malinowski, said that China would have to improve its rights record to ensure the summit between President Barack Obama and Xi is a success.

Speaking after a two-day US-China dialogue on human rights in Washington, Li Junhua, the senior foreign ministry official who headed the Chinese delegation, rebuffed the comments by Malinowski, who chaired the US side. "This issue should not dominate our discussion about our relationship; we should see a bigger picture". Malinowski, the US assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, said after the first day of talks that there was "a growing sense of alarm" in Washington about human rights developments in China.

He pointed to a recent crackdown on lawyers, issues of religious freedom and a proposed Chinese law that would severely restrict the activities of non-government organizations. The crackdown has included the detention of more than 50 lawyers and activists since last month.

The talks with Obama are expected to include discussions on the close economic relationship between the world's two largest economies as well as tensions over China's territorial claims in Asia

On Tuesday, a bipartisan group of leading US senators urged Obama to make what they called Xi's "extraordinary assault" on human rights a key and public component of the talks

Tianjin Explosions: UN Expert says China 'Lacked Transparency'. The United Nations' top expert on human rights and hazardous materials has criticised China for a "tragic" lack of transparency on the Tianjin blasts. UN Special Rapporteur Baskut Tuncak said more timely information could have "perhaps even prevented this disaster". At least 114 people died and another 700 were injured by massive explosions last week at a warehouse storing hazardous chemicals in Tianjin's port. The cause is not yet clear, and a massive clean-up is continuing. Thousands of people saw their homes destroyed or unsafe to return to.

Mr Tuncak called on China to ensure transparency in the investigation into the 12 August incident, and to adhere to international standards such as timely and effective dissemination of information in such disasters.

"This chemical disaster serves as yet another tragic example of the need of information about hazardous substances to protect, respect and realise human rights," he said. "The lack of information when needed - information that could have mitigated or perhaps even prevented this disaster - is truly tragic". is wife in the fire in Tianjin

China's authorities have come under heavy criticism online, accused of not being clear about the risk of contamination beyond the blast zone, nor about why a warehouse containing dangerous materials was situated close to homes.

Local officials appeared unprepared for questions and gave vague answers at the first few press conferences. State broadcaster CCTV cut off live broadcasts as journalists continued asking questions. Discussion on the incident on micro blogging network Weibo was also censored, as is usually the case with sensitive incidents

Authorities have promised to compensate residents whose homes were destroyed or damaged by the blast

China Devalues Yuan, Rattles Global Markets. China on Tuesday devalued the yuan by 1.9%, the steepest in over two decades, rattling global currency and stock markets,. It raises prospects of further pressure on Indian exports, which have declined continuously for the past seven months.

The surprise cut in the daily reference rate, along with a change in methodology, announced by the Chinese central bank is seen as an attempt to deal with weakness in the economy and regain competitiveness in a world that has seen other currencies depreciate more in recent months.

For Indian policymakers, the yuan devaluation is the latest bad news as exports have declined for seven months in a row. "In my opinion it should have some impact on our exports. Exports from China would be cheaper... It may also have impact on FDI if China becomes a more attractive destination vis-a-vis India," finance secretary Rajiv Mehrishi told reporters.

For China, economists said, the devaluation had become necessary. Exchange-rate intervention contributed to a \$300 billion slide in China's foreign-exchange reserves over the last four

quarters. It also made the yuan the best performer in emerging markets, a factor behind last month's 8.3% slide in exports.

The yuan's real effective exchange rate - a measure that's adjusted for inflation and trade with other nations - climbed 13% over the last four quarters and was the highest among 32 major currencies tracked by Bank for International Settlements indexes. Growth in China, the world's second-largest economy, has slowed this year and is set to hit a 25-year low even if it meets its official 7% target.

RUSSIA

Col Anadi Dhaundiyal

Russia Calls on U.S. to Drop Missile Shield Plans. U.S. President Barack Obama had previously assured Moscow in 2009 that deployment of the US Army Avenger Air Defense System (AN/TWQ-1) shield was meant as protection from "rogue" states like Iran, and not directed against Russia. Russia, post Iran accord, has urged the United States on 14 Aug 15 to scrap plans to station parts of a missile shield system in Europe now that Iran has reached an agreement with world powers to limit its nuclear program.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told reporters on Friday that the US President "was not telling the truth" in comments of 2009. Moscow has long opposed the plan, which it sees as a threat to its nuclear deterrence, and vowed to retaliate if it is carried out.

Comments.

(a) Issue earlier raised by the Russian foreign minister.

(b) U.S. State Department quickly responded to the allegation, claiming that Lavrov had twisted Obama's words.

(c) Russian clarification: "The Russian foreign minister quoted the American president. No one forced [Obama] to raise the issue, he said it himself several years ago — that solving the issue of Iran's nuclear program would allow the plans to deploy missile defense systems in Europe to be reviewed".

(d) Moscow military planners view missile defense as a threat to Russia's nuclear forces — the cornerstone of that country's national security strategy — and its capacity to

retaliate against a U.S. nuclear strike. This in turn emboldens Washington's foreign policy against Russia.

France to Pay Under €1 Bln for Termination of Mistral Contract With Russia. France will pay less than one billion euro (\$1.1 billion) for terminating the contract on the delivery of two Mistral-class helicopter carriers to Russia, French Finance Minister Michel Sapin said on 14 Aug 15.

Comments. Issue resolved with France.

Putin Scheduled to Address UN General Assembly. Russian President Vladimir Putin will attend this year's United Nations General Assembly in September, according to a provisional list of speakers released by the UN. Putin plans to address the gathering of the world's heads of states and governments on its opening day, Sept. 28. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed Putin intended to appear, but said the plan was not yet final.

Comments. Russian President Vladimir Putin previously addressed the UN General Assembly in 2000, 2003 and 2005. Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko is scheduled to speak on Sept. 29, the day after Putin's planned appearance, and Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko also plans to attend. Also on the schedule is Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is slated to address the General Assembly for the first time. While the preliminary list is a good indication of who might attend, the lists of General Assembly speakers have been known to see numerous changes in the weeks and days leading up to the high-level meeting.

Joint Russia - China naval exercise Joint Sea 2015 II is being held from 20 Aug 15 to 28 Aug 15 in the Sea of Japan and off the coast of Vladivostok comprising of more than 20 ships from the Russian Navy and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and includes a joint amphibious assault drill. This is the largest Russia- China Naval exercise so far.

Comments. It is a signaling of both increased cooperation between two countries as well as to Japan which has spoken with the US backing so far. It may lead to increased future long term Russian naval presence in the Sea of Japan.

JAPAN

Col Anadi Dhaundiyal

Restart of Nuclear Reactor. Sendai 1 reactor of the Kyushu Electric Power Co is the first of the 54 reactors in Japan to have restarted after an almost two-year hiatus on nuclear power generation. Japan had, by May 2012 shut down all 54 nuclear reactors. Sendai 1 reactor is an 846-megawatt pressurized water reactor.

Comments. Before the 11 March disaster, Japan relied on nuclear power for about 30% of its electricity. Post shutdown power companies predicted a 16% power shortfall in western Japan, which includes the major industrial city of Osaka. Major towns had about 5% shortfall. Imports of coal, oil and gas-fired power plants to keep industry and households supplied with electricity resulted in Japan's first trade deficit for more than 30 years. Fuel imports rose from ¥18 trillion in fiscal 2010 to ¥25 trillion in fiscal 2014. These could fall to slightly below ¥21 trillion if 13 reactors are brought back online by the end of fiscal 2016. The move is a progressive step by PM Shinzo Abe. The government is aiming to reactivate more reactors to realize an envisaged “best energy mix” i.e. target of 20 to 22 percent as nuclear power for fiscal 2030. Economy may come back on track.

Economy chart since 2011.

WWII Apology. The WWII apology has been plaguing Japan since long. This is inspite of the heartfelt apology offered by PM Tomiichi Marayama in 1995. Beijing and Seoul want PM able to stick to the ‘heartfelt apology’ line. PM Abe’s conservative political allies want him to end the humiliating cycle of apologies that distracts Japan’ post war peace record. PM Abe expressed “utmost Grief” for the sufferings Japan inflicted and vowed that they would never again use force to settle international disputes.

Comments. Japan has been an affluent and economically strong neighbour. It stands to diplomatic logic that it is humbled through this method. Otherwise does Germany or Italy apologize for its WWII sufferings caused by them. Has US apologized to Iraqis since no Saddam Hussain WMDs were found. Does USSR/ Russia apologize to Afghans? Why should Japan mark the ending of the WWII and apologise every year?

AFGHANISTAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

Kabul Bombings. There has been great anguish expressed by the Afghan top leadership against purported Pakistani involvement in last week's attacks on Kabul that killed over 50 people and wounded hundreds.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani excoriated Pakistan during a news conference, "The last few days have shown that suicide bomber training camps and bomb-producing factories which are killing our people are as active as before in Pakistan." He said that he is hopeful for peace but messages of war have been received from Pakistan.

Afghan Vice-President Abdul Rashid Dostum stated "The war not only in north but in the entire country, everyone knows, who are leading them. One day, the (insurgent) groups fight under the name of Al Qaeda and the other day under the name of IS. But ISI and Pakistan's (military) generals are organising and financing these groups," he said. "They (Pakistani officials) said they are bringing Taliban to negotiation table. But they want to continue war by IS. This is one of the political games of Pakistan."

Pakistan. After carefully digesting the very wholesome accusations from Afghanistan's leadership, Pak Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs and National Security Sartaj Aziz met a high-level Afghan delegation led by Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani and assured Afghanistan of Pakistan's complete cooperation in combating terrorism. During the talks, Pakistan assured Afghan officials that if any evidence linking Pakistan to the recent wave of attacks in Kabul is found, it will duly be shared with Afghanistan. The visiting delegation was also informed that Pakistan's security forces are conducting an internal inquiry to investigate recent Afghan allegations of Pakistan's implicit involvement in Kabul attacks.

Afghan Air Force. The Afghan Air Force added the MD 530, a close-air attack helicopter to its growing fleet. The delivery of the first six armed MD 530 helicopters occurred in March 2015. By early 2016, the AAF will have 16 in their inventory. The MD 530 is armed with two HMP 400 .50-caliber machine gun pods

The armed MD 530s will operate alongside the Mi-17 'Hip' and Mi-35 'Hind' helicopters, as well as the Embraer A-29 Super Tucano light attack turboprop aircraft, due to arrive towards the end of 2015.

IRAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

Nuclear Deal. The nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 countries has been under scrutiny since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was negotiated in Vienna on July 14. The agreement will soon be debated and voted in the US Congress. From the initial skirmishes between supporters and opponents, we now have a good idea of the contentious issues that will drive the debate in Congress after its summer recess.

Many elements of the JCPOA are widely seen as positive, even by sceptics, and are unlikely to be hotly debated in the weeks ahead.

Deep reductions in installed centrifuges and enriched uranium stocks, as well as other constraints on enrichment capacity, will reliably lengthen the time it would take Iran to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a single bomb to at least one year for at least the first 10 years of the agreement.

The re-design of the Arak heavy water reactor, the shipment of its spent fuel out of Iran, and the 15-year ban on reprocessing will effectively block the plutonium path to a bomb for the foreseeable future.

Limits on research and development of advanced centrifuges for the first 10 years are highly restrictive, allowing Iran to test only single machines or very small cascades. Testing of Iran's most advanced centrifuges in larger, operationally-sized cascades can only take place after a decade, delaying deployment and operation in significant numbers.

The agreement ensures high confidence in the ability to detect non-compliance at declared facilities because of the use of advanced verification technologies and the scope and intensity of monitoring arrangements, including continuous surveillance and inventory accounting of activities not usually subject to such rigorous monitoring (e.g., production of uranium ore concentrate and centrifuge rotors and bellows).

The procedure for resolving disputes over site access will allow the United States and its European partners to overrule Iran (even if supported by Russia and China) and require it to grant the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to any location, ensuring that military installations will not be out of bounds to inspectors.

The JCPOA makes clear that Iran will not receive sanctions relief until the IAEA confirms that Iran has fulfilled its key nuclear commitments, including moving roughly 13,000 excess centrifuges to monitored storage, reducing enriched uranium stocks from well over 10,000

kilograms to 300 kilograms, and removing and disabling the core of the Arak heavy water reactor.

Under an unprecedented snap-back procedure, if any member charges Iran with significant non-performance of its commitments, previous Security Council sanctions will be restored, unless a new, veto-able Security Council resolution is adopted that maintains the suspension of sanctions.

The issues that are likely to be hotly debated:-

What happens to Iran's nuclear program after the deal's first decade?

How does the deal address concerns about the possible military dimensions of Iran's past nuclear work?

Is IAEA access to sensitive sites timely enough?

What is the significance of restrictions on conventional arms transfers and ballistic missile activities?

What are the implications of sanctions relief, including release of \$100-plus billion in restricted assets?

What are the consequences of rejecting the deal?

Iranian Foreign Minister's Visit to India. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Sharif, arrived in India and discussed the issue of terrorism and extremism during a series of meeting with top leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

“We have a new threat in Afghanistan and that is infiltration of ISIS there. Everybody has to take note of it. It is a very alarming threat and we need to work together. There is need for all of us— Iran, India and Pakistan and all of us to work together and Iran can play good role in bringing these countries together.

He also praised India for standing with Iran in “difficult times” of sanctions imposed by the Western countries and said Iran was ready to work with India in every sphere including trade and investments. There is a huge potential for economic cooperation between the two countries, he stated.

MIDDLE EAST

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

ISIS Launches Holiday Brochure to Lure Jihadis. In a bid to lure potential jihadis, ISIS has come out with a bizarre online holiday brochure, offering travelers, swimming, sunshine & bee keeping in war torn Iraq. Last week, ISIS posted pictures of tempting choc bars, a bridal boutique & a shopping mall to lure British jihadis.

ISIS Executes 19 Women in Mosul for Refusing Sexual Jihad. ISIS militants have executed 19 women in its stronghold of Mosul for refusing to have sex with fighters. It is also believed that treatment of women & dealings with money were proving to be increasingly divisive within its own organization ranks.

ISIS Executes 300 Iraqis in Mosul in A Day. An ISIS firing squad has executed at least 300 civil servants who worked for Iraqi Supreme Electoral Commission in Iraqi city of Mosul.

ISIS Executed More Than 2000 Iraqis in Nineveh Province. The Iraqi Defence Minister issued a statement that ISIS has executed 2070 Iraqi officials in Mosul, who did not cooperate with them. Most of them were employees of the state, members of security services & staff of election commission.

Twin Blast in Iraq Kills 47 & Wounds 100. Two blasts in Eastern Iraq killed 47 & wounded 100, highlighting continued threat from ISIS.

ISIS Uses Chemical Weapons Against Peshmerga Forces. Kurdish auth in Iraq said that their Peshmerga forces have been attacked with chemical weapons, possibly chlorine gas by ISIS. The attacks were in the form of mortar bombs in the area of Erbil, the capital of autonomous Kurdish Region.

125 Dead, 70 Wounded in Airstrikes Targeted ISIS Locations North of Tikrit. Iraq Army AF carried out 6 air strikes targeting ISIS ammunition & weapon dumps in the district of al-Sharqat, North of Tikrit killing 125 & wounded 75 ISIS fighters.

Coalition Warplanes Kill, Wound 15 ISIS Elements South of Kirkuk. Coalition air strikes kill; wound 15 ISIS fighters South of Kirkuk.

Iraqi Forces Kill 29 ISIS Fighters, Destroyed 51 Targets East of Ramadi. In a separate operation Iraqi forces killed 8 ISIS elements in the same area.

ISIS Destroyed Three Strategic Bridges Linking Kirkuk with Other Provinces. ISIS destroyed three longest strategic bridges linking Kirkuk to the three provinces of Baghdad, Nineveh & Salahudin.

Comments. ISIS has been incurring substantial losses in Iraq, short of cadres, thus launched online recruitment campaign through Holiday Brochure to lure potential jihadis, particularly from UK.

Use of chemical weapons by ISIS in Iraq has been by and large confirmed. The chemical weapons in the form of Mortar bombs filled with chlorine gas are likely being used.

ISIS has virtually eliminated the Govt machinery in Mosul, the capital of ISIS in Iraq.

Destruction of three strategic bridges connecting Kirkuk to other provinces by ISIS may be primarily to prevent Govt forces / other machinery being sent to Kirkuk. ISIS could be developing it as the next stronghold after Mosul.

Iraqi security forces have been successful in countering ISIS influence in Ramadi. It appears Iraqi forces are preparing ground for an offensive to retake Ramadi, timeline not known.

SYRIA

ISIS Reported to have Captured the Key Town of Qaryatain in Central Syria. ISIS has reported to have captured the key town of Qaryatain in Central Syria after heavy fighting.

ISIS Lures Recruits with Kitchen Appliances in Syria. Families across Europe are being allegedly lured to war torn Syria by ISIS by offering them homes with latest kitchen appliances as well as payment for each child they bring.

ISIS Kills 25 in Key Syria Town in Aleppo Province. At least 25 Syrian rebels were killed in an attack by ISIS fighters on a insurgent stronghold in Marea town in Aleppo Province. The town is located on a road linking eastern Aleppo and the border with Turkey. At least 8 ISIS fighters also died in the attack.

Hundreds of Casualties in Air Strikes by Syrian Air. Syrian forces carried out series of air strikes in Douma, a suburb town of Damuscus, killing 110 & injuring 300, mostly civilians. This was the second strike in a week targeting busy markets.

Comments. ISIS is incurring losses during fighting, making endeavour to lure potential jihadis from European countries, thus offering facilities to move with families.

ISIS successful in gaining foothold in central Syria, indicative of rapidly decreasing influence of Assad forces which controls only 25 percent of territory as on date.

The recent strike by Syrian air targeting busy markets appears to be an act of desperation by the Assad regime, which is gradually becoming untenable.

YEMEN

Govt forces regain control of Al Anad airbase, NW of city of Aden, from Houthi forces. Govt forces are gradually regaining the lost ground from Houthi forces.

TURKEY

Wave of Attacks in Turkey Kills 8. Post the decision of Turkey to join coalition forces against ISIS, the country has witnessed a wave of attacks killing 8 people. The attacks include attack on US consulate in Istanbul, bomb attack on police station in Istanbul and Kurdish rebels attack on a helicopter carrying police personnel.

Comments. The attacks are supposedly by Kurdish rebels as a reaction to Turkish airstrikes against Kurdish strongholds in Iraq.

IRAN

Iran Foreign Minister Visits Syria. Iranian Foreign Minister Recently Visited Damascus and Conducted Detailed Discussions with President Assad. Iran is mooted a peace plan for Syria which will be presented to UN. Iran has planned consultation with Russia & Syria in the coming week. Iran is likely to present a four point plan to include immediate ceasefire, install unity Govt, constitutional protection of minorities & supervised elections.

PAKISTAN

Lt Col Anil Gorshi, SM**

Pak Stand on Ceasefire Violation. India Govt summoned Pakistan High Commissioner Abdul Basit and lodged strong protest over unabated Ceasefire violations by Pak troops along LoC.

Mr Basit accused India of 70 Ceasefire Violation along the LoC in month of July and Aug and called for more effective mechanism to determine who indulged in unprovoked firing.

There has been escalation of tension between the two countries following terror attacks in Punjab and J&K and incidents of Ceasefire violations ahead of talks between their National Security Advisers (NSA's).

The Indian NSA is scheduled to meet Pak Mr Sartaz Aziz for talks on terrorism related issues on Aug 23 as decided in meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif in Ufa in Russia.

Pak agenda during talks is 'Kashmir' issue. Pak sponsored terrorism in J&K will be India Issue.

Pak Blast. Pak-Punjab Home Minister Shiya Khanzada was killed in a suicide attack on his political office. At least 23 other people were also killed. The impact of the explosion caused the building to collapse.

Banned outfit Lashker-e-Jhangvi (Lej) has taken the responsibility of the suicide attack on Khanzada to avenge killing of Lej Chief Malik Ishaq in July.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Lej) is regarded as the extreme sunni terror group and has killed hundreds of Shias after its emergence in 1990. The org was banned by Pervez Mushraff. Lej also masterminded the 2009 attack on Sri Lankan Cricket team in Lahore. Malik Ishaq and his two sons were killed in exchange of fire with police about a week back.

AFRICA

Col Ajay Ramdev

New Suez Canal

One of the most important waterways in the world, the Suez Canal links the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. It opened in 1869 after a decade of construction by tens of thousands of workers.

The new project inaugurated on 06 Aug 2015, adds a 35-kilometre-long (22 mi) second shipping lane in the existing 164-kilometre-long (102 mi) canal, allowing for separated passing of ships in opposite directions. It also includes the deepening and expansion of a 37-kilometre-long (23 mi) section of the existing canal.

The enlarged capacity allows ships to sail in both directions at the same time over much of the canal's length; beforehand, much of the canal was only one shipping lane wide, with limited wider basins for passing. This is expected to decrease waiting time from 11 to 3 hours for most ships, and to increase the capacity of the Suez Canal from 49 to 97 ships a day. The construction of the new canal was initially scheduled to take five years. It was then first reduced to three years, and finally ordered by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to be completed in one year only.

Background. In 2014, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, addressed the UN General Assembly in New York. During his speech, he announced a project with the potential to become one of the most significant in the history of Egypt and the Middle East, and one that would have an impact on the entire world. "It is the Egyptian people's gift to the world," he said during the assembly. He was referring to the construction of a second waterway at the Suez Canal; the doubling of one of the world's most important trade passages, the link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

Revenues. The New Suez Canal will increase its revenues from US\$5.3 billion per annum to \$13.3 billion by 2023. These advancements are set to boost Egypt's economy by almost doubling its trade income. The entire Suez Canal Zone will eventually be built out into a fully developed economic landscape, supporting multiple skills-led industries, providing an additional one million jobs for Egyptians.

Construction. More than 43,000 workers collaborated to dig out and construct the new canal, culminating in one of the most impressive local labor efforts of the 21st century. The volume of dry excavation works amounted to 250 million cubic meters, at an estimated cost of \$550 million. A total of 80 contractors plus six dredging companies, with the combined power of 4300 geometric calories were deployed. Dredging works totaled 242 million cubic meters of soil, at an estimated cost of \$2.1 billion.

The first phase was to deepen and widen 37 km of the western bypasses at a depth of 24 meters. Secondly, the digging of the new parallel waterway commenced, at a length of 35km and to a depth of 24 meters, at a water level width of 320 meters at its widest point.

Funding for the project was also a combinative effort. President Sisi announced the Suez Canal Authority would be the owner and operator of the project and was able to receive funding from Egyptian nationals through local banks.

Comments. The canal has been a significant income source for Egypt, bringing in over \$5 billion last year. Its expansion is part of a larger plan to turn the Suez Canal zone into a global logistics and trade center.

The project is not without controversy, as some have questioned whether it is the best use of the nation's resources at a time when there are arguably more pressing needs. Analysts have also cast doubt on its purported economic benefits, arguing that the government's projection of more than \$13 billion in annual revenues by 2023 is overly optimistic.

Nigeria: Boko Hara

According to Idriss Deby, the president of neighbouring Chad, Abubakar Shekau the head of the Boko Haram Islamist group has been ousted as its leader. Shekau, who gained worldwide notoriety after appearing in a series of videos in which he threatened to sell the girls as slaves, has been replaced by another Boko Haram deputy who is said to be open to peace talks.

The announcement was made by Mr Deby, whose forces have been fighting Boko Haram militants around Nigeria's border areas, at a press conference on 11 Aug 2015, in which he claimed that the group was now on the back foot militarily and would be finished "by the end of the year". As per him, "There is someone apparently called Mahamat Daoud who is said to have replaced Abubakr Shekau and he wants to negotiate with the Nigerian government.

Comments. It was not clear how Mr Deby had obtained his information, although rumours have been circulating in recent months that Shekau had gone on the run or even fled Nigeria altogether as a result of increased military operations against Boko Haram by both the Nigerian and Chadian governments. It is not the first time that reports have emerged claiming Shekau's downfall. Reports from the Nigerian military and media have declared him dead on several occasions, although experts also believe that the various videos that have appeared purporting to be him sometimes feature lookalikes.

Nigeria's new president, ex-general Muhammadu Buhari, is understood to be willing to talk those willing to lay down their arms, despite pledging to take a firmer hand against the group than his predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan. On the contrary, President of Chad is believed to have ruled out

all prospects of peace talks, allegedly causing rifts with other Boko Haram commanders who favoured negotiations that could also have led to the freeing of the schoolgirls.

Libya: UN Envoy Calls for Peaceful Resolution

Libya is in chaos as two governments and parliaments vie for power, while Islamic State and other armed groups exploit a security vacuum, for the past four years after the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi.

The United Nations special envoy to Libya has called on the country's rival governments to reconcile this month. The latest round of the Libyan Political Dialogue concluded two days of talks at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The talks were presided over by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Bernardino Leon.

Speaking at the start of two days of peace talks in Geneva, Bernardino Leon said a national unity government should be formed by the end of August. He called for the new unity government to be endorsed by both factions with a vote in September. "It is extremely risky to reach October without an agreement because we will be in a more chaotic situation," he said. "This is why it is important to have this timeline."

Libya's internationally recognised government was last year driven from the capital Tripoli by Libya Dawn, an alliance of local militia groups. The militias declared their own government, dividing the country.

All of Libya's rival factions have gone to the Geneva talks, despite suggestions just days ago that some groups would not attend. Among those present are leaders of the General National Congress (GNC), the Islamist-backed parliament that now sits in Tripoli. GNC leaders had declined to participate in an earlier UN-sponsored agreement, signed in Morocco in July.

The UN proposals presented in Geneva call for a one-year government led by a prime minister and council of ministers.

Comments. Currently, Libya's internationally recognised parliament is based in the eastern port of Tobruk, while the GNC is nearly 1,000km (620 miles) to the west in Tripoli. Mohamed Shoaib, head of the delegation representing the elected parliament based in the east, said he hoped

the rival assembly in Tripoli, which rejected an initial deal last month, would now agree to a unity government.

The pushes for peaceful settlement have been sidelined by new fighting. Forces loyal to the internationally-recognised government based in eastern Libya bombed Islamic State positions in the central city of Sirte.

UNSC Reforme

13 Feb 2015: China for “broadest consensus through diplomatic means” on UNSC reform. Steering clear of outright support, China has said it respects the aspiration of India and Brazil to play bigger roles at the U.N. Security Council.

08 Apr 2015: The U.S. President considers it a foreign policy priority to continue to strengthen India-US ties. President Barack Obama has reiterated United States’ support for India’s membership of a reformed United Nation Security Council as he considers it a foreign policy priority to continue to strengthen India-US relationship.

The U.S. has joined Russia and China in their blocking of any large-scale reforms of the council and rejection of veto power to new members. Earlier, in letters to the U.N.’s special committee in charge of inter-governmental negotiations in July, Russia and China made it clear that they are not in favour any large-scale reforms of the U.N.’s prized P-5 (permanent five) structure that gives them a special status on all international issues.

Though as per analyst, U.S. and other P5 countries cannot veto U.N. reform, which will be decided by the General Assembly, where each country has one equal vote. If it comes to a vote, India will need the support of at least 129, or two-thirds, of the 193 member-states.

P5 Position on UNSC Reforms.

The Chinese Ambassador to UN has asked for small and medium-sized countries to take turns to serve in the Security Council.

The Russian Ambassador clarified that, none of the current members’ powers would change, saying: “The prerogatives of the current Permanent Members of the Security Council, including the use of veto, should remain intact with them only”.

U.S. Ambassador, Samantha Powers has said the U.S. was “open to a modest expansion” of the membership, and wanted specific countries that would be considered to be named in advance, thereby rejecting the current text-based process that India had been pushing for.

The U.K. and France support India’s position.

Comments. The India-U.S. Joint Statement issued during President Barack Obama’s visit in January said: “President Obama reaffirmed his support for a reformed U.N. Security Council with India as a permanent member.”

Things could go down to the wire in the next few weeks as it is imperative that the consolidated document uploaded by the President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, at least be accepted by the countries as a basis for discussing UN reform next year.

Negotiations over reform and expansion of the U.N. Security Council have run on for more than seven years, and Indian officials feel that the fact that countries have committed to positions is a positive development for the process.

If, however, one of the P-5 countries — for instance, China — decides to veto a resolution to accept the document, India’s hopes for a permanent seat in the near future will be in danger.

BANGLADESH

Col Saikat Roy

The President mentioned the historic India-Bangladesh land boundary agreement in his Independence Day speech. He said, “As we make progress in advancing our interests globally, India is also engaged in pro-actively promoting goodwill and prosperity in our immediate neighbourhood. It is heartening that the long pending land boundary issue with Bangladesh has been finally resolved,” he said.

The Chief Minister of Meghalaya Mr Mukul Sangma speaking on the Independence Day said that the Land Agreement would give a fillip to trade, commerce and tourism between the two countries. The Chief Minister said, "All this should bring economic benefits to the people residing in the border areas as well as to Meghalaya as a whole... It is my earnest hope that what was once a boundary of discord will now turn into an area of vibrant trade and commerce to build a bond of friendship".

Bangladesh, India decide to double purchase limit at 'Border Haats'. At present, three 'haats' are in operation at Brahmanbarhia's Kosba, Sunamganj's Lauagarh, and Feni's Chhagolnaiya. A decision to set up such markets was taken in 2010 during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's India visit. The two neighbours are gearing up to set up more such markets to boost bilateral ties and trade along their border in Tripura, Assam, Mizoram and Meghalaya.

Now a buyer will be able to purchase goods worth \$200 (Tk 15,560) as against a limit of \$100 earlier stipulated for these 'haats'. The neighbours are also planning to double the number of vendors at the 'haats'.

Joint Drive against Currency Counterfeiters. Bangladesh and India are planning to carry out a joint drive against currency counterfeiters and smugglers. Both countries are in the process of preparing and sharing their respective criminal databases.

Mr SK Singh, Inspector General of the NIA, led a 15-member delegation that reached Bangladesh on 11 Aug 15. (Earlier, during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Dhaka visit in June, the two countries also signed an MoU regarding the drug and counterfeit money issue.) During the meeting, a MoU was also signed. Although the main agenda was to discuss ways to stop counterfeiters, the top law enforcement officials also talked about the smuggling of gold, arms and drugs across the borders.

Discussions were held on how the counterfeit money was the main source of funding for banned Islamist outfits Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Indian Mujahideen. In their investigation, the Indian NIA team found that the accuracy of the counterfeit money produced by the terrorists made it difficult to trace it even in laboratory examinations. Different security initiatives like joint patrol, surveillance and permanent check posts have so far failed to put a stop to counterfeit money being smuggled.

Comments. Bangladesh will remain one of the most important neighbours of India and it is in India's interest to maintain good neighbourly ties with Bangladesh in the long run due to the following factors :-

(a) Among the seven neighbours Bangladesh has the longest land border with India.

(b) The International Border is porous and prone to smuggling and drug trafficking, it is also a safe haven for criminals and anti-national elements who take benefit of the international border to evade apprehension.

(c) The narrow Siliguri corridor and the national highway passing through it and beyond is prone to landslides and disruptions by insurgents. North eastern States can be accessed faster and in a cheaper manner through existing port facilities in Bangladesh.

(d) India needs to remain cognizant about the increasing Chinese overtures in the region and needs to be pro-active to be of relevance in the future geo-strategic matrix.

The recent warmth in the Indo-Bangladesh relations is a result of the mutually shared confidence and should be carefully nurtured. The relations in the upswing are beneficial to the populace on either side of the IB and in the larger interest of both the Nations.

30 Years Later, Assam Accord Back in Focus. (Aroonim Bhuyan, New Delhi, IANS/bdnews24.com, Published: 2015-08-15). As the country celebrated Independence Day, the historic Assam Accord, signed on 15 Aug 85, 30 years ago to detect and deport illegal immigrants in the Northeastern State, has returned into focus. The accord demanded detection and deportation of illegal immigrants who threatened the culture, identity and economic future of the indigenous people of Assam. Successive central and state governments have failed to implement key clauses of the agreement.

The accord was signed between the central and Assam governments on one side and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). According to the accord, all foreigners who entered Assam illegally on or after 25 Mar 1971, were to be detected, their names deleted from the electoral rolls and deported under the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964. Though the accord was signed on 15 Aug 1985, seemingly unending illegal immigration continues from Bangladesh till this day. According to official figures released way back in December 2001, there were an estimated five million foreigners in Assam. Last year, while campaigning for the BJP ahead of the general elections, Mr Narendra Modi promised that, if brought to power, he would ensure that all clauses of the Assam Accord were implemented and illegal immigrants in the state detected and deported. Now, with the NDA government completing one year in office, the AASU, organised a National Seminar themed "30 Years of Assam Accord: Issues, Challenges and Implementation" at New Delhi on 11-12 August 2015. The idea was not only to

highlight the non-implementation of the accord's clauses but also the security threat posed to national security by the phenomenon of illegal immigration.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that as an immediate step, he would visit the Bangladesh border in Assam within this month accompanied by an AASU delegation to take stock of the situation arising out of the illegal immigration. The home minister also said discussions would be held with AASU to find out the shortcomings in the Assam Accord that were stopping its full implementation.

With the process of updating the National Register of Citizens also going on in Assam under the direct supervision of the Supreme Court - the deadline is August 31 - the historic accord seems to have somehow regained its relevance.

Comments. India must walk the path with utmost caution, on one side we have the genuine concerns of the indigenous population of Assam while on the other International relations with Bangladesh are at stake. The situation has reached an alarming proportion with the native inhabitants being converted into a minority in their own homeland, at the same time the Nation is confronted with the humungous task of identifying and repatriating the refugees. While the National interest and the demographic change that has been brought about in the last 30 years remains a big concern, one must admit that the same was with the connivance of the various ruling political parties for the sake of vote bank. The language in the Accord and the provisions therein leaves many loopholes in the implementation of the Accord. In fact, the process of detection and deportation of foreigners remains a farce as less than 10% of the persons declared as foreigners by the Tribunals, could be physically deported.

The process of deportation has also slowed down because of the refusal of the border guarding force of Bangladesh to accept them as Bangladeshi nationals, and so far, the Government of India has not been able to persuade the neighbouring country to sign any kind of treaty to accept the persons declared as Bangladeshi nationals by courts and tribunals here in India.

Tapi Gas Pipeline- Turkmenistan to lead the project

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

A major contentious issue regarding leadership of the TAPI Gas Pipeline Project seems to have been resolved on 06 Aug 2015. During the 22nd meeting of the steering committee of TAPI, a ministerial level body empowered to take executive decisions, Turkmenistan offered to lead the

consortium that will build and operate the pipeline. The oil and gas ministers of the participating countries, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India; agreed unanimously. The representatives of ADB (Asian Development Bank), which is serving as transactional advisor for the project, were also present at the meeting held in Ashgabat. As consortium leader, the state concern TurkmenGaz will lead the construction, financing, ownership and operation of the Gas pipeline project. All the TAPI participants will make investments according to the techno-commercial viability, shareholders agreement and investment agreement, which will be worked out soon. The implementation phase of TAPI is expected to start in December 2015, while gas deliveries to India via the new pipeline are likely to start in 2018. In addition, negotiations are on for the participation of Russia and China, which is expected to facilitate political and technical aspects of the project. President Berdymuhamedov of Turkmenistan expects some Japanese and Korean companies also to join in the TAPI gas pipe line work. So far, Chevron and ExxonMobil the two groups in contention for the leadership role, insisted on getting rights to Galkynysh gas field of Turkmenistan as a precondition to lead the consortium which was an unacceptable breach of the hydrocarbon laws of Turkmenistan.

The pipeline Length is expected to be 1,735 km with a maximum discharge capacity of 27 billion cubic meters per year. The pipeline is expected to start from Galkynysh gas field in Turkmenistan, pass through Herat and Kandhar in Afghanistan and then Quetta and Multan in Pakistan finally to arrive at Fazilka in India. GAIL, the Indian representative has already entered into an agreement with TurkmenGaz for importing 38 mscmd (million standard cubic meters a day) of natural gas through the pipeline for a 30-year period. By the initial agreement, of the 90 mscmd to be handled by the pipeline, India and Pakistan would get 38 mscmd each while Afghanistan would receive 14 mscmd. Security is a big challenge. Once this is addressed, the pipeline is only a matter of time. In addition to gas pipeline, roads and communication cables network is also expected to be build along the pipeline route which is likely to enhance communication and bring these four countries together.