

ENVIRONMENT SCAN – 14 SEP 2015

CHINA Col C Madhwal, VSM

Face-off in Ladakh: Commanders to Meet Today as India Demolishes Chinese Hut. A meeting of local commanders of India and China is expected to take place amid a face-off between the two sides in the heights of Ladakh's Burtse area after Indian troops demolished a hut constructed on Indian soil ended in the early hours of Sunday. The ITBP and Army jawans demolished the hut that was constructed 1.5 km inside the Line of Actual Control (LAC) leading to a face-off between the two sides. The area is located 210 km northeast of Leh. The hut, with a solar panel on top, had a camera which recorded the movement of Indian troops. The construction was done by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) to claim that the area belongs to them.

This area is adjacent to Depsang plains where PLA had pitched camps in April, 2013 that had led to a three-week long stalemate. After the demolition of the hut, Indian troops kept the camera and other material which will be handed over to the Chinese side in the form of evidence during the local army commanders meeting. China has been trying to make inroads in Burtse area as it will give access to the PLA to monitor the activities of Indian troops based in Old Patrol Base besides trying to deny an advantage to India to overlook the Karakoram highway linking the territory illegally occupied by China with Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir(PoK).

Amidst the stand-off between Indian and Chinese forces in Ladakh, Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar on Sunday met Home Minister Rajnath Singh. During the 30-minute meeting, Parrikar and Singh are believed to have discussed about the stand-off between the Indian and Chinese forces in Ladakh and various other issues concerning the country, sources said.

China economy: New signs of economic slowdown. Growth in China's investment and factory output in August has come in below forecasts, in a further indication that the world's second-largest economy is losing steam. Factory output grew by 6.1% from the year before - below forecasts of 6.4%. Growth in fixed-asset investment - largely property - slowed to 10.9% for the year-to-date, a 15-year low.

Growing evidence that the world's economic powerhouse is slowing down has caused major investment market falls. Other indications that the economy is weakening can be seen in falling car sales and lower imports and inflation.

Last week, the Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang, said China remained on track to meet all its economic targets for this year despite the economic data. China has already cut interest rates five times since November to encourage lending and spur economic activity, along with other measures to boost growth.

Premier Li pledged that China would take more steps to boost domestic demand and that it would implement more policies designed to lift imports. China recently revised down its 2014 growth figures from 7.4% to 7.3% - its weakest showing in nearly 25 years. For this year, the government is targeting annual economic growth of about 7%.

Meanwhile, the Chinese authorities said they would take new steps towards a more market-based economic system by offering shares in state-owned businesses to private investors. The move, which they said would help improve corporate governance and asset management, is planned to take place before 2020. China's industrial economy is dominated by 111 conglomerates which are state owned

China aims for Moon's far side: China is planning the first ever landing of a lunar probe on the far side of the Moon, an engineer has said. The Chang'e 4 mission is planned for sometime before 2020, Zou Yongliao from the Chinese Academy of Sciences told state broadcaster CCTV.

Mr Zou said the mission's objective would be to study geological conditions on the moon's far side. This could eventually lead to the placement of a radio telescope for use by astronomers. The Moon's far side would be shielded from radio transmissions from Earth, making it an excellent location for sensitive instruments.

China's next lunar mission is scheduled for 2017, when it will attempt return samples of lunar soil and rock to Earth. If successful, China would become only the third country after the US and Russia to have successfully carried out such a mission.

What is China trying to prove with the military parade? The World War II Victory Day parade through Beijing's Tiananmen Square on Sept. 3 marks the first time China is commemorated the allied victory with such a high-profile event. So, are China's actions peaceful, as the foreign ministry maintains, or are they aggressive?

Japan is often cited as a key target of the parade's message. Frosty relations between Beijing and Tokyo hinge on disputes over Japan's contentious wartime record and territorial claims in the East China Sea. It's no mistake that the official name for the parade spells out China's "resistance against Japanese aggression".

But there's a wider global objective too, some maintain.

"I think the most important thing is reasserting nuclear deterrence and that's a message for the United States," explains Mathieu Duchatel, head of the China and Global Security Project with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. "China does not have many occasions to assert the state of its nuclear arsenal."

New ballistic missiles are expected to star in the parade, including the DF-41, a long-range missile that can carry multiple warheads, capable of hitting any target in the US.

Global messages aside, the parade comes at a sensitive time in Chinese domestic politics too. In the past month, the country has been rocked by chemical explosions in the port city of Tianjin, and the swift decline of its main stock markets. Both can be blamed, in part, on government incompetence.

"Frankly speaking, the new leader wants to shore up his authority," says Shanghai-based military commentator Zhao Chu, referring to Xi Jinping. "He is giving an explicit signal to the domestic audience that he has a stronger grip over the military than his predecessors."

Two of the military's senior generals, men who sat on the all-powerful Central Military Commission, have already been sacked for corruption. Mr Xi is keen to reassert his position at the top of the pile.

UNITED STATES

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

US Strategy in Syria After Russian Involvement in Syrian Civil War. President Obama says that U.S. would not change its policy in its fight against ISIS which it is leading in an international coalition. In fact, in the initial stages of rise of Islamic state, United States stayed away from active involvement of its combat forces in Iraq and Syria till Iraq suffered serious setbacks. Thereafter, besides, training and lethal/non lethal weapon/material support, it has been launching air strikes against Islamic states terrorists. As per US state department, as on 08 Sep15, U.S. has conducted a total of 5,239 air strikes in Iraq and Syria (2,858 Iraq/2,381 Syria) whereas; coalition has conducted 1,461 air strikes. (1,340 Iraq /121 Syria). All these strikes are against the ISIL and not against regular Syrian army. Despite this extensive manned/ unmanned air support and targeting Islamic state fighters, U.S. itself has not targeted Syrian army's positions which is also

fighting ISIS as well as rebels (Free Syrian army) This strategy is likely to continue even after report of Russian support to the Syrian regime.

U.S. believes that Russian support to the regime of Syrian President Bashir al-Assad would potentially be destabilizing and could actually be counterproductive. What is coalition success against ISIS? In reality Islamic state have grown in strength with every passing day. In Syria, it controls almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of Syria despite being targeted by the coalition air strikes. U.S. wants to continue to support moderate Syrian forces in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and is pursuing the policy to train and equip the Free Syrian army which has not been successful so far. This is indirectly helping ISIS as there is no credible force to fight them.

Russian support to Syria may be for their own reasons such as being an old ally, protection of its strategic port on Mediterarian Syrian coast as well as market for their weapons but, it is morale boosting for President Assad's forces. United States and coalition should rethink. Once Islamic State gains full control of Syria, Would it provide a people friendly regime to Syria? The future state of things to come can be imagined from the current large scale migration of refugees from Syria.

Further, with success of ISIS in Syria it may have far greater appeal among the section of Muslims from across the world who fantasize with the idea of a Khalifa. These could now come directly to Syria through air or sea instead of illegally through other states. It would be much difficult to defeat this outfit which would be much stronger and could engage in illegal trade, blackmail of the world and resort to tactics similar to Somalian pirates to earn revenue. Hence, Islamic state has greater potential to threaten the world in time to come. United States therefore, should recast its Syrian policy.

RUSSIA

Col Anadi Dhaundiyal

Ceasefire in Ukraine: Putin. Russia's President Vladimir Putin said on 12 Sep 15, that it was welcome that fighting had stopped in eastern Ukraine, a change in rhetoric compared to his previous accusations against Ukraine for violating a ceasefire. "It's heartening that the main thing is the cessation of shelling of the Donbass (eastern Ukraine) from the side of the armed forces as well as the so-called volunteer battalions of Ukraine," he said in the Crimean town of Chersonesus. Putin also said that Russia could solve the issue of gas supplies to Ukraine and rebuild bilateral relations. He further said "I think that we will also solve questions connected

with supplies of gas and electricity," Putin said. "In general it is necessary to rebuild relations on a full-scale format." He was in Crimea for a meeting with his old friend Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister, on a private visit.

Comments.

(a) Restarting of diplomatic relations would pressurize EU to ease the economic sanctions. This will improve Russian economic condition.

(b) Russia, on rebuilding diplomatic relations, will look to renegotiate the erstwhile subsidized prices of gas, oil and electricity. Russian population has since been questioning as to why the Russian taxpayer should bear the Ukrainian subsidy.

(c) Cessation of shelling will enable consolidation of civilian govt functions in the Donbass areas.

(d) Enforcement of Minsk Agreement could pave the way for Russia to solve the issue of gas supplies to Ukraine and rebuild bilateral relations, thus bringing peace in the neighbourhood.

(e) Russian President Vladimir Putin may hold a summit meeting with Ukraine's Petro Poroshenko in the coming weeks under the EU's aegis.

Crimea. Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi became the most prominent Western politician to visit Russian-annexed Crimea when he strolled beside the Black Sea on 11 Sep 15 with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Russian president has met with his ally and personal friend, former Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi, in Crimea near the monument erected in memory of Sardinian soldiers who died in the Crimean War in the 19th century. During the flower laying ceremony Vladimir Putin proposed to create a park around the memorial and to restore a plaque inscribed with the names of buried Italian soldiers with the help of the Italian Artillery Museum. Western visitors have been rare since Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014. Moscow played up a visit by several French parliamentarians to Crimea this summer as it attempts to win international recognition of the annexation.

Comments. It is a signaling to the world of the increased acceptance of Crimea, as part of Russia.

Russian Military Equipment/ Experts in Syria. The Barack Obama administration and the U.S. intelligence community have on 10 Sep 15 have concluded that Russia is set to start flying combat missions from a new air base inside Syria. They have reports of the growing buildup of Russian military equipment and personnel in Latakia, a city on the Syrian coast controlled by the Bashar al-Assad regime.

As per Fox news in the previous presence of nearly 50 Russian marines, 100 housing units and armored, the Russians have delivered aviation, intelligence and communications facilities to deploy a powerful offensive force. The Fox news has stated that more than 1,000 Russian combatants -- some of them from the same plainclothes Special Forces units have been seen. Some of these Russian troops are supposedly logistical specialists and were needed for security at the expanding Russian bases.

As per Western intelligence sources, the shadowy Iranian commander of the Quds Force which is the international arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, Soleimani visited Moscow from 24 July to 26 July. He had reportedly met with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Putin to discuss arms deals. But Fox News has since learned that the Russian and Iranian leaders were also discussing a new joint military plan to strengthen Syrian President Bashar Assad, a plan that is now playing out with the insertion of Russian forces in Syria.

When asked Putin had said last week when asked whether Russia was willing to take part in the fighting in Syria. "We are already providing serious support to Syria with armaments and military training."

Comments.

(a) Russia's military build-up may denote an intent by Russia to join the U.S.- led anti-ISIS coalition in its own way.

(b) The Russians want to protect their interests in Syria. When the Syrian civil war began in 2011, the Russians had \$4 billion in outstanding arms contracts with the Syrian government. The Russian Navy has maintained a base in Syria since the 1970s.

(c) The reason that the Iranians are increasingly concerned about Assad's future is that they do not want a situation in which the Islamic State makes its way to Lebanon unchallenged, posing a threat to Iran's proxy Hezbollah, according to Western sources. This makes the Iranians natural allies of the Russians.

(d) Iran wants Syria to serve as its buffer zone between ISIS and Hezbollah. Therefore they serve the broader US/ EU aim of elimination of ISIS. Tactically, the U.S. will benefit from Assad's success against Islamic State, but it won't back him publicly or make any long-term bets on his success.

(e) As per skeptics in Western media the Russians' intentions are to keep Assad in power, not to fight ISIL. For many in the Obama administration, especially those who work on Syria, the idea of acquiescing to Russian participation in the fighting is akin to admitting that the drive to oust Assad has failed. Plus, they fear Russia will attack Syrian opposition groups that are fighting against Assad, using the war against the Islamic State as a cover.

Putin Scheduled to Address UN General Assembly. Russian President Vladimir Putin address to United Nations General Assembly on 28 September will be at a time when Russia presides over UNSC. Putin will likely preside over a meeting of the 15-nation body UNSC during his visit. If he does, it will be interesting to watch for which world leaders attend the meeting – and which ones will decide to boycott. US President Barack Obama had chaired a meeting of the Council in Sep 2014 and in Sep 2009. He is likely to explain the Ukrainian imbroglio. A high-level summit is taking place on Sept 25-27 where world leaders will adopt a set of goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire at the end of the year. A record number of world leaders are expected for this year's opening of the General Assembly, which will also mark the UN's 70th anniversary, including Pope Francis who will be the first pontiff since Benedict XVI in 2005 to address the gathering.

Comments. The politics of the same will unfold only towards the end, just prior to the dates.

AFGHANISTAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

The sixth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan was held in Kabul last week. The purpose of this two-day summit was to examine the challenges of rebuilding Afghanistan after years of conflict. Even with representatives from 30 countries and 40 international organizations in attendance, India was conspicuous by its rather low-profile representation. Instead of a ministerial presence, India decided to send a junior bureaucrat to the conference. Though India has rejected suggestions that there is a strategic shift in relations with Kabul, India's decision not to revive the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2011 is being

viewed as a sign of India's displeasure over the Afghan unity government's outreach to Pakistan at the cost of Indian interests.

Russia expects to offer military assistance to Afghanistan that could among other items, include helicopters. Moscow fears instability in Afghanistan could rise following the pullout of NATO troops and spill over into the ex-Soviet Central Asia, threatening Russia's own southern borders.

A U.S. drone strike killed at least 15 Pakistani militants in Afghanistan's Gomal district on Wednesday, part of an intensifying drone campaign against Pakistani militants in Afghanistan. Three Pakistani intelligence officials confirmed Wednesday's strike in an area bordering Pakistan's South Waziristan region.

The officials confirmed the militants belonged to the Gandapur faction of the Pakistani Taliban led by Mullah Fazlullah, who claimed responsibility for the massacre of more than 130 pupils at an army-run school in the northwestern city of Peshawar last December.

Fifty one militants had been killed in 24 hours in military operations in 11 provinces of Afghanistan. (Sep 12, 2015) The operations were jointly conducted by Afghan army and personnel from the National Directorate of Security in Takhar, Kunduz, Sar-e-Pul, Jowzjan, Kandahar, Oruzgan, Khost, Paktika, Herat, Ghor and Helmand provinces Fifty-one militants were killed, 24 injured and 10 others were arrested by the security forces, the statement added.

IRAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

Iran's diplomatic moves are gaining momentum following the Vienna nuclear agreement in mid-July this year. Iran is trying to redefine its Middle East policy and its potential role in the region. Experts believe that the successful nuclear deal has boosted the confidence of President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif convincing them that a diplomatic approach is the way ahead. Iran believes this to be a suitable time to improve its relations with Arab neighbours and bring stability in the region.

In an attempt to push forward the new Iranian foreign policy towards the region, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif wrote an op-ed in a newspaper, stressing on the need for "regional discussion for regional issues."

However, Saudi Arabia's response to the new Iranian approach after the nuclear deal is modest mainly because of Tehran's behaviour in the region during the post Arab Spring period where Tehran allegedly tried to interfere in the internal affairs of the GCC countries.

Prior to the nuclear deal, the Gulf leaders, during the GCC Summit at Riyadh in May, showed their "keenness to develop a balanced relation with Tehran." They emphasised that any coordination with Iran would be based on the principle of "good neighbours" and respect for state sovereignty under international law.

FM Javad Zarif visited Qatar and Kuwait marking the beginning of Iran's new outreach to its Arab neighbors. Both Qatar and Kuwait, in response to Tehran's initiative "stressed the need to develop good relations with Iran." On the other hand Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirate (UAE) did not respond to the overtures of the Iranian Foreign Minister.

Gulf States and extra regional powers can play crucial roles in finding a possible solution to the disagreements between Riyadh and Tehran on the Syrian crisis. The extra-regional powers like the USA, Germany, Britain, Russia, China and Turkey have already endorsed Iran's role in dealing with regional issues which can shift the position of Riyadh and its allies on the Syrian crisis.

MIDDLE EAST

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Security Forces Liberate Area South of Ramadi. Iraqi security forces have regained control over al-Naimiyah area south of Fallujah, thus tightened seize over ISIS.

Coalition Warplanes Destroy ISIS HQ in Ramadi. Coalition warplanes carried out strikes on main HQ of ISIS in central Ramadi, destroying the command centre as well as ammunition store.

Al-Hashed Al-Shaabi Forces Announces Zero Hour to Break into Mosul. Al-Hashed Al-Shaabi, a shia militia force announced the formation of Joint Operations Command at Erbil for forces, as the beginning of actual preparation to liberate Nineveh Province. International forces are prepared to support, arming & training the shia militia force.

US Envoy : Liberation of Mosul Within Months. US envoy to International coalition forces against ISIS announced that liberation of Mosul would be achieved within months, however did not lay down any definite timeline. He brought out that tribal leaders would play an important role in liberation of Mosul.

Peshmerga Forces Secure International Road between Baghdad and Kirkuk. Peshmerga forces managed to secure international road linking Baghdad to Kirkuk by liberating Daqaq District, south of Kirkuk from ISIS.

ISIS Making & Using Chemical Weapons in Iraq & Syria. US has identified four occasions in Iraq & Syria where ISIS has used mustard agents. ISIS has a dedicated cell to make these weapons. Mustard agents are being used in powder form & packed into traditional explosives like Mortar rounds.

Comments. Iraqi forces operations to retake Anbar Province over last two months are slow but showing progress.

Blockade of Ramadi for over two months has been further tightened. The seizure, has resulted in shortage of food, medicines & other items, which could lead to one of the worst humanitarian crisis.

Preparations to retake Mosul from ISIS are underway with establishment of Joint Operations Command, arming & training of shia militia in coordination with coalition forces

SYRIA

Fall of City of Idlib : Turning Point for Syria. Coalition rebel groups including Nusra, the affiliate of Al Qaida, have taken over the city of Idlib causing the biggest blow to Assad forces in last two years. The city of Idlib is close to the major highway which connects Damascus to the north & not far from Assad's stronghold of Latakia. It is now clear that vast areas of north Syria are under the control of rebel forces.

ISIS Advances Close to Airbase in Syria. The ISIS has seized an army post which is barely one Km from Deir Ezzor airbase south of Raqqa town. It was one of the fiercest attack in which 36 ISIS elements & 10 regime soldiers died.

Russian Military Planes Land in Syria. Russian foreign minister has admitted that Russia is airlifting weapons to Syria and training Syrian forces. John Kerry & NATO have raised concern over military involvement of Russia in Syria and warned that it could lead to more violence.

Australia to Join Coalition Against ISIS in Syria. Australian Foreign Minister has announced that Australia is committed to destruction of terrorist organization and would take part in missions against ISIS in Syria.

Bashr-al-Assad : The Beginning of End. It is being widely believed that with loss of two major cities of Palmyra & Idlib, it may be the beginning of end of Assad regime. The triumph of rebel coalition forces and loss of Palmyra to ISIS is a major blow to Assad regime.

Comments. With loss of city of Idlib to rebel coalition forces, the vast areas of north Syria are out of Assad regime control. This could prove to be a turning point for the future of Syria. This is probably the beginning of end of Assad regime.

The control of Assad regime is restricted to areas around Damascus and Latakia Province. ISIS is gradually knocking the doors of Damascus and north Syria under rebel control, time may be running out for Assad.

Russian support both men & material arriving at Latakia could be preparation for the last bastion of Assad before he is ousted.

YEMEN

Houthi Rebels Fire Missile at Marib Camp Causing Huge Casualties to Saudi Led Forces in Yemen. It is reported that Houthi rebels fired Tochha missile at Safir Camp in Marib, the staging camp of Saudi led forces, killing 60 coalition soldiers. Among the dead included 45 soldiers from UAE, 10 from Saudi Arabia & 5 from Bahrain. This could prove to be a turning point in the fight for Yemen.

Saudi Led Coalition Forces Prepare for a Massive Sana'a Offensive. Saudi led coalition carried out massive airstrikes targeting Houthi HQ, strongholds, ammunition depots and other infrastructure. Such intense airstrikes have never been witnessed in the capital city so far.

More Troops Join Yemen Forces. Approx 10,000 Yemeni fighters are ready to serve the National Army, who are being trained to liberate Sana'a and other areas.

Saudi Led Coalition Sent More Troops to Yemen. It is reported that Saudi led coalition has sent more troops & military vehicles across Yemeni border as preparation to retake Sana'a. Apache helicopters have joined the battle against Houthis.

Qatar has decided to join the Saudi led coalition and participation in the offensive. Around 6000 Egyptian & Sudanese troops are expected to join the operations. It is reported that around 10,000 foreign soldiers would take part in the offensive to retake Sana'a.

20 Indians Killed in Airstrikes. Atleast 20 Indians were killed by Saudi led airstrikes against arms & fuel smugglers at Yemeni port of Hodeidah. Two boats were hit in the air attack in the area al-Khokha near Hodeidah Port. However, only 7 people are missing and 13 have been rescued.

Comments. Saudi led coalition forces have made huge build up of forces for the offensive to retake Sana'a. The fall of Sana'a is only a matter of time.

Saudi led coalition has committed soldiers on ground contrary to the belief that only airstrikes are being carried out.

Saudi led coalition has expanded to include Egypt, Sudan, UAE & Qatar.

PAKISTAN

Lt Col Anil Gorshi, SM**

Confidence Building Measures BSF and Rangers. Indian Home Minister, Mr Rajnath brought out that India wants friendly relations with Pakistan and will never fire the first bullet.

At the same time Pak must ensure that terrorists do not infiltrated into India from its areas. Indian Home Minister stressed "Two nations have to be united in controlling terrorism. In this response Maj Gen Umar Farooq Chief of Pak Rangers said India Pak also wants to have good relations with India.

Home Minister also brought out in firing, civilians should not be targeted on either side.

CBM agreed upon by BSF and Pak Rangers are expected to be put in place in next fortnight. Necessity to enhance communication has been brought out. Both sides can illuminate on the border if either side detect same thing objectionable.

Analysis.

- The CBM talks have taken place after two years.
- The mortar firing claims lives of civilians, it is to be banned.
- BSF delegation will be visiting Pakistan next year for similar talks.
- Coordinated patrolling along the IB and also to be implemented in Jammu frontier.
- Either side to help and repatriate those who inadvertently cross the border.
- Ceasefire violation will be jointly investigated.

Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Mr Sartaj Aziz remarked, India's role in promoting terrorism in Pak is not a secret. India is interfering in Pak Internal matter.

AFRICA

Col Ajay Ramdev

Somalia: Al-Shabab Attacks African Union Janale Base.

Background. Al-Shabab, part of Al-Qaeda, is battling the AU-backed government for control of Somalia. The 22,000-strong, United Nations-backed AMISOM force consists of troops from Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Sierra Leone. It has been dealt serious blows in recent months in Al-Shabaab attacks. The terror group seems to be shifting tactics, moving from smaller, asymmetrical suicide-bombing attacks on civilian, government and military targets to larger and more sustained operations solely focused on smaller, remote AU bases.

On 03 Sep 15, Al-Shabaab claimed to have killed 70 AU soldiers at the Janale base, 90km (55 miles) south-west of the capital. A source from Somalia's security services confirmed, that at least 25 Somali government troops were killed in the fight. Twelve Ugandan soldiers also were killed as per the Uganda's military spokesman. It was the largest loss sustained by the Ugandan contingent of the AU Mission to Somalia, or AMISOM, since 2012.

AU forces say they are back in control after taking a "tactical withdrawal".

A member of Al-Shabaab, claimed that the battalion behind Tuesday's attack is the same group of about 200 fighters who assaulted an Ethiopian convoy and a base predominantly held by Burundian soldiers in Leego, Somalia, in July. Those two attacks killed dozens of AMISOM troops. The fighters call themselves the Abu Zubair Battalion -- named after the Al-Shabaab leader (Ahmed Abdi Godane) who was killed by a U.S. drone strike in Somalia in September 2014.

The U.N. has been criticized for not providing requisite funding for fighting the insurgents. The Security Council recently authorized the Member States of the African Union to maintain the deployment of AMISOM until 30 May 2016.

Comments. The attack underlines that Al-Shabaab remains capable of conducting occasional devastating attacks in Somalia, as well as in neighboring countries like Kenya. However, there is also a risk of reading too much into the heavy casualties apparently inflicted by the latest attack, which seems more likely to indicate that while the group remains capable of mounting deadly attacks when circumstances permit, it is not necessarily making a longer-term comeback.

The attack also does not materially alter the fact Al-Shabaab currently controls only limited amounts of Somalia, having been driven out of all its major urban centers in the country during the last several years. At the same time, however, abuses committed by AU troops in Somalia continue to stir popular resentment of foreign forces and to potential create new support for Al-Shabaab.

EGYPT

Col Ajay Ramdev

Egypt's Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab and His Cabinet have Resigned on 12 Sep 15, Days After the Agriculture Minister was Arrested Over Corruption. Mr Mahlab's 31-member government was sworn in March 2014 and tasked with organising a presidential election which Mr Sisi, the previous army chief, won in May of that year. The upcoming polls will come more than two years after Mr Sisi toppled Mr Morsi, whose now-banned Muslim Brotherhood swept the last general election in 2011.

"The prime minister handed the government's resignation to the president who accepted it," a statement said without giving a reason for the resignation. However, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi asked Mr Mahlab to stay on as caretaker prime minister until a new government is formed.

Mr Sisi tasked outgoing oil minister Sharif Ismail with forming a new government. The announcement comes as Egypt is set to hold long-delayed legislative elections in phases from 17 October to 02 December 15.

But there have growing calls for Mr Mahlab's resignation and increasing protests by civil servants over a new law that centralises promotions while taxing bonuses. "The main reason was the president was displeased with the job of some ministers, and his feeling that the government wasn't achieving what he wanted, especially in light of complaints by citizens regarding services.

Comments. It may be recalled that the resignation of the current Govt comes at a crucial time, when the parliamentary elections are due next month onwards. Egypt will hold a long-awaited parliamentary election, starting 18-19 Oct with 2nd round on 22-23 Nov 15. This was to ensure the final step in a process to bring back democracy that critics say has been tainted by widespread repression.

Egypt has been without a parliament since June 2012 when a court dissolved the democratically elected main chamber, dominated by the now-banned Muslim Brotherhood, reversing a major accomplishment of the 2011 uprising that toppled autocrat Hosni Mubarak. The election had been due to begin in March but was delayed after a court ruled part of the election law unconstitutional.

El-Sissi in recent months has had to perform tasks that normally should fall to Mehleb, such as arranging meetings with ministers and negotiating business deals with foreign investors. Mehleb also failed to pressure his ministers into following through on MoUs that el-Sissi signed during a much-publicized economic summit in March.

The country's private media, while lavishing praise on el-Sissi, have slammed the government in recent weeks, accusing ministers of incompetence and of being out of touch with ordinary citizens suffering from years of turmoil since the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

BANGLADESH

Col Saikat Roy

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will visit Bangladesh 16 Sep 2015, (Wednesday). Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will come to Bangladesh on 16 Sep 2015, Wednesday from Beijing. He would call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and brief her about the nuclear agreement, and discuss ways to boost bilateral ties. He will also hold a bilateral meeting with his counterpart Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali during the 'one-day' visit.

Dhaka expects the visit would usher in a 'new beginning' in the 'brotherly' relations, particularly in diplomatic, economic and trade fronts, which witnessed a hiatus during international sanctions.

Tehran's Ambassador in Dhaka Abbas Vaezi at a briefing to diplomatic correspondents on 01 Sep 15 said Iran was ready to have cooperation and trade with Bangladesh in many fields now. "We will be able to help Bangladesh in many ways," he had said, suggesting that Tehran could buy jute, clothes and agricultural products from Bangladesh and export oil, natural gas and petrochemicals.

He had also stressed on energy and power sector cooperation, and said that Bangladesh could discuss with New Delhi to get gas from a pipeline, which was to be rolled out from Tehran via Pakistan.

Comments. Tehran has showed renewed interest in the Iran, Pakistan, India oil and gas pipeline. This proposal was in a limbo since sanctions were imposed on Iran.

Two Tripura Rivers to be Linked with Bangladesh's Meghna. To create three waterways between landlocked Tripura and Bangladesh, two major rivers of the state would be linked with the river Meghna of the neighboring country, official sources said today.

The Ministry of Water Transport and Shipping has asked the state government to prepare a detailed project report (DPR) to connect state's two major rivers- Howrah and Gomati with Meghna, state Transport Secretary Samarjit Bhowmik told reporters.

"Transport department has already engaged a consultancy agency to prepare a DPR for the project, which is likely to be available within a short period and then we would place the budget for the project", Bhowmick said.

Earlier, RITES had conducted a survey for the new waterways and submitted the report to the ministry suggesting dredging of the two rivers and a required fund of Rs 47 crore for developing three waterways, he added.

Meanwhile, another (DPR) for construction of a bridge on River Feni has been finalized to connect Sabroom, a subdivisional town in South Tripura district with Ramhar of Chittagong Division of Bangladesh and the government of India has sanctioned Rs 91 crore for the project.

The DPR for the 250 feet long bridge was handed over to the state department of Industries and Commerce, the nodal department for communication with Bangladesh, State PWD's Chief Engineer Sunil Bhowmik said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to the neighbouring country on June 6 had laid the foundation stone for the bridge through video conferencing from Dhaka in presence of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

India will construct the bridge on the river Feni to get access to the Chittagong international sea port in Bangladesh and the neighbouring country has agreed to allow India to use the Chittagong port, about 75 km from Sabroom.

Tripura has 856 km long international border with Bangladesh which surrounds the state on three sides.

Comments. Connecting the two rivers to River Meghna would provide Tripura, otherwise a landlocked state of India access to the inland waterways. Bridge over River Feni would further improve the access to the state from mainland India and would boost trade, commerce and development in the region.

MODERNIZATION

Gp capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

India and Russian Collaboration on FGFA. A recent news report stated that Indian Air Force has asked Russia to allow its pilots to test fly and evaluate FGFA which is being jointly made by India and Russia at 50;50 share basis. As on now eight FGFA prototypes are flying in Russia. Aircraft matches in performance American Raptor F-22. The final agreement would be signed during PM Modi visit of Russia later this year. The development cost of fifth generation fighter is

estimated at \$10.6 billion. This cost will be split equally between India and Russia. India plans to give a firm order for 154 FGFA at an approx cost of \$200million per unit and with delivery at a compressed time frame (earlier time frame for final production 2022 onwards) in face of dwindling force level caused by phasing out of old inventory. The need to induct the aircraft has become greater in view of delay in induction of MMRCA. The 126 Rafale deal with France has already been junked and even Gov-to Govt deal of 36 Rafale in flyway condition is also getting delayed and is stuck up at price negotiation stage raising skepticism of its materialization. Even otherwise, IAF needs to build up at least sanctioned 42 sqn credible force with 4th and 5th generation aircraft if it has to meet the challenge posed by China and Pakistan.