

Vol 5 No 2 March-April 2016

# *INSIGHT* SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon  
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& Dr. Hippu Salk Kristle Nathan

*Southeast Asia & Oceania  
Centre  
Bimonthly Newsletter*



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## Editor's Note

The last two months in Southeast Asia and Oceania regions experienced several changes in the political and government structures. The breakthrough came in Myanmar as the country received its first truly civilian President Htin Kyaw after decades-long fight for restoration of democracy. However, the Tatmadaw still holds defence, home and border affairs ministries and in the parliament, they still occupy almost 25% seats which imply that the National League for Democracy government in Myanmar still needs to walk few miles before it reaches its destination of celebrating democracy to its fullest. Besides Myanmar, communist countries like Lao PDR and Vietnam too experienced changes in power and government; however, in both the cases, it was the country's communist party and its politburo that was instrumental in selecting the new president and prime minister. Philippines too will face an election on May 9 and the presidential candidates have started campaigning for themselves in the island country. It is often reported that Duterte is Asia's Donald Trump. The Southeast Asian observers are intensely watching the developments in all these countries as the next leaderships will decide the future course of relationship between Southeast Asia and China. This is particularly interesting to observe as the tribunal court at The Hague is expected to come out with the result of the arbitration case filed by Manila in late 2013. In this background, it was understood why Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi came up with a consensus with Brunei, Lao PDR and Cambodia and claimed that these three countries have accepted that South China Sea disputes are bilateral and not an ASEAN-China issue. A small power shift was evident in Cambodia too as the parliament has reshuffled the cabinet a little bit. The opposition CNRP however is not very hopeful about the country's democratic future. The Thai Junta published a draft copy of the proposed constitution and announced that a public referendum will be organised in the coming months.

Terrorism remains a prevalent problem, both by the hands of the local extremist outfits and by the ISIS. Malaysian authority arrested few suspects who were allegedly having close connections with the ISIS. In March, the Abu Sayyaf group of Philippines abducted few Indonesian sailors and later released them in the month of April.

In the Oceania, the biggest surprise came as Japan was defeated by DCNS, France in a bid to make few submarines for Australia. In the last year, Japan was sure about its win in the submarine deal and understandably, this defeat came as a jolt to the Japanese leadership. Will this affect Japan-Australia relationship? Well, this may not be the case as inexperience of Japanese Mitsubishi was cited as a justification for not offering the deal to Japan.

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee paid a visit to New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and spoke about mutual and beneficial cooperation between India and the island nations in the Pacific. It seems, India's Act East Policy will be much wider and far-reaching in nature now.

The current issue of *Insight Southeast Asia* contains these important developments in the region. Besides, the editorial team is thankful to Mr. Azman Ayob for his thoughtful writing on Myanmar-India relations and how he sees India should act as Myanmar embraces

democracy. Ms. Prapti Borah has offered a review of a book written by Amb. Gurjit Singh on India-Indonesia bilateral relation. The credit for the cover photo goes to our friends from NIAS, Bangalore.

Finally, I sincerely hope, the issue of *Insight Southeast Asia* would enable the students, scholars and readers in getting clear briefs on the current affairs of the region.

We welcome and appreciate any feedback/suggestion that we get from our readers on *Insight Southeast Asia*.

Thank you,

Dr. Sampa Kundu

# Embracing the 'New' Myanmar: India's 'New' Opportunity



**Azman Ayob**

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On November 8, 2015 the general election was held in Myanmar and the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi – a long time champion and the icon of democracy in Myanmar, has won a landslide victory. It was Myanmar's first national election since a nominal civilian government led by former President Thein Sein was established in 2011. The NLD now is the majority party in the Burmese *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* (the parliament) with 135 out of 224 seats in the *Amyotha Hluttaw* (Upper House) and 255 out of 440 seats in the *Pyithu Hluttaw* (Lower House).<sup>1</sup> Though the question remains whether the Burmese *Tatmadaw* (military) is willing to go back to their barracks after 50 years of reigning in power. This seems little difficult as they still enjoy 25% of seats<sup>2</sup> in the parliament. With this landslide victory of NLD, and with the appointment of Htin Kyaw as Myanmar's first civilian President in 53 years-time, it can be said that democracy has once again embraced Myanmar.

But, how India could be benefitted by this new political development in Myanmar? India needs to willingly engage Myanmar.

First, India could further engage Myanmar through economy. India needs to be energetic and enthusiastic in capturing Myanmar's economic potentials. It has become widely known that despite India being the fourth trading partner of Myanmar, followed by Thailand, China, and Singapore, it is still lagging behind in comparison with China's powerful economic presence in Myanmar. India should not only use Myanmar as just a land bridge connecting to the larger economic advantages available in the Southeast Asian markets, but needs to work to strengthen that bridge too. Eventually, if this move by India materialises, it can give India political and strategic advantages in the region, especially in its competition with China.

Second, India's level of commitment in engaging Myanmar must be improved by lessening the lack of bureaucratic will. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Act East' policy must also act fast. The 'Act East' policy is the rebranding effort of India's 'Look East' policy started more than two decades ago. Myanmar occupies a significant position in India's Look/Act East Policy. India and Myanmar are historically and religiously connected. In human societies, history and religion are

<sup>1</sup> See "Myanmar's 2015 Landmark Elections Explained", *BBC*, December 3, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33547036>, accessed on April 26, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

valued as unifying factors which can bring humans closer to each other. So does a country to another country. In international relations, nation-states behave somewhat similar to the behaviour of human being. In Myanmar, India has the advantages of cultural and historical connection, which is not the case for China. The Burmese, if not their government, think and believe that they are more connected to India than to China. India too, should look at this history and cultural connectivity between the two countries as a golden opportunity in the long-term objective of fulfilling India's own economic and geostrategic interests, and act upon it. As due to the suspension of Myitsone dam and illegal movement of the Kokang community across the China-Myanmar border have created some mistrust in China-Myanmar relations, India may take this as an opportunity to engage with Myanmar in more robust way.

Third, India needs to widen its foreign policy objectives towards Myanmar and look beyond security and natural resources aspects. India could slowly bring back its Nehruvian idealism in its

Myanmar's policy,<sup>3</sup> as Myanmar is now under the leadership of the NLD government. It may be recalled here that India showed its democratic-idealist-humanist sentiments in supporting democracy after the 1988 uprising in Myanmar. Same efforts are again desired from India. Helping Myanmar in democratic transition is a way which India may choose in the present scenario. India should invite Myanmar's parliamentary delegation to India for special training programs on parliamentary procedures and practices of the Indian Parliament. India should initiate, and later on, benefit from interaction and linkages with Myanmar's civil society organizations. It should get involved in the participation of strategic communities in both countries for dialogues in order to encourage the discussions of mutual concerns and developing new ideas for the future evolution of the bilateral relations of India and Myanmar.<sup>4</sup> India should not remain on the sidelines without playing a more active and constructive role in Myanmar, as it might usher in Western influence into India's own backyard.<sup>5</sup> Democracy embraces Myanmar once again, and India should not stand idle with folding arms by becoming indifference to the recent wind of change in Myanmar.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Ayob, "Moralistic Politics versus Realpolitik in India-Myanmar Relations," *Proceeding of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Southeast Asia (ICONSEA 2013): Southeast Asia Rising*, 11–13 December 2013, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>4</sup> Rajiv Kumar Bhatia, "Myanmar-India Relations: The Way Forward," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July-September 2011, pp. 324-325.

<sup>5</sup> R. Hariharan, "Taking A Re-Look at India-Myanmar Relations," *South Asia Analysis Group*, paper no. 1141, October 11, 2004, <<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/paper1141>>, accessed October 7, 2013.

# Masala Bumbu - Enhancing The India-Indonesia Partnership

Gurjit Singh, Beritasatu Media Holdings, Jakarta (2015), Pp 229, Price: Not specified



**Prapti Borah**

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'Masala Bumbu: Enhancing The India-Indonesia Partnership' is an illustrious piece of literature which aspires to find a new course for India-Indonesia relations in the 2015-2025 decade. The title of the book 'Masala Bumbu' represents the multitudes of similarities the two countries have between them, yet they see things differently: the Hindi word for spice is 'masala' and the Bahasa word for spice is 'bumbu'.

The most interesting facet of this book is that it re-examines this bilateral relationship and seeks to chart out the necessary steps to realize its tremendous potential. For this, it probes these ties from an array of angles, through the insights of 34 writers from India and Indonesia, all prominent figures and specialists coming from a wide range of background such as diplomats, academics, activists, politicians, researchers, journalists, entrepreneurs and many more. The content includes articles on various dimensions of bilateral interaction such as 'Economic Cooperation', 'Delivering Democracy', 'Sustainable Development', 'The Media Message', CSR: A New Development Paradigm' to name a few.

Gurjit Singh is the editor of the book, who was till recently, India's Ambassador to Indonesia since 2012.

All the contributors extensively stress on the age-old civilizational and cultural links between the two Asian giants but also agree on the fact that despite such strong affinity, India and Indonesia have largely remained distant. There is therefore a need to balance out the strong past links with the contemporary and future interest.

The book begins with reminiscence to the time immemorial ties between India and Indonesia and a tribute to the Bandung spirit. Gita Wirjawan pointed out similarities like the fact that until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, many areas in present-day Indonesia were ruled by Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms. Bahasa Indonesia, their national language contains 3,000 Sanskrit words in its vocabulary. India and Indonesia had similar fates of colonialism where India was part of the British Imperial Empire and Indonesia was part of the Dutch Empire. Both the countries are also home to two of the largest Muslim populations in the world. The 2014 elections in both the countries brought two power leaders: Narendra Modi in India and Joko Widodo in Indonesia, who were outsiders

to the traditional political elite. Carrying this thread forward, another contributor S.D. Muni echoed the spirit of the Bandung Conference of 1955, where India and Indonesia along with other Asian countries expressed commitment to the vision of Asia's freedom and solidarity. However, the reflections of this conference got caught up in the 'whirlpool of the Cold war, military blocks and intra-Asian conflicts' (p 52). In the recent years, the main stumble block in advancing the Bandung spirit 'lies in the intra-Asian relations'. The intra-Asian relations 'have been critically impacted by China's phenomenal economic rise and its growing political and diplomatic assertion in Asia, backed by a fast pace of its military modernization' (p 54). While United States and China are competing with each other to establish their strategic control over Asia, India must make optimum use of its historical links with this region, particularly with Indonesia to begin with, to firm its own strategic equations with the major regional players. The question that arises is 'how much has the relationship adapted and recalibrated with the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow?' (p 46) Dino Patti Djalal claimed that efforts must be made to answer the above question, because despite so many similarities, Indonesia needs to get India right. For example, there are no direct flights from Jakarta to any airport in India, many Indonesian students prefer to go to US, Germany and Australia rather than India for higher studies. It seems like India is yet to catch the popular public imagination in Indonesia. Djalal expressed the need for strategic trust to become an integral part of the strategic partnership. These reflections are important to highlight

because they will help the policy-makers in both the countries to not take the similarities for granted and thereby prevent each other from turning into a geopolitical blind-spot in each other's foreign policy.

In the field of economic cooperation though there has been a slow yet steady growth in bilateral trade, neither country is in the top five of each other's trading partners. In terms of institutional arrangement to support bilateral trade, there is dearth of active functioning and only movement is on paper. For example, the bilateral trade agreement which was signed in 1963 was last revised in 1978. The Bilateral Trade Ministers Forum which was initiated in 2013 has not worked out. Ambassador Gurjit Singh pointed out that this dimension of the bilateral relation requires momentum. While Indian business associations have felt that Indonesia does not prioritize their engagements, the other side finds Indian trade investment largely confined to the coal sector in Indonesia. Suryo Sulisto listed five sectors where Indian and Indonesian businesses could gain more from partnership: infrastructure, education, healthcare, manufacturing, services. Food security is an important consideration for both the countries hence strategic cooperation in the field of agriculture is extremely relevant. H.S Dhillon stressed on the need for comparative advantages between the two countries where Indonesia should invest in the agro-processing sector in India and Indian businesses should invest in the processing of cashew nuts and pigeon pea industries. India has advanced well in the *Jatropha Curcas*, this could become a new dimension of strategic partnership in the form of joint research in bio-diesel. While India is an important importer of edible oils from Indonesia, there remains a large scope for 'increasing the share of cereal exports to Indonesia' (p 84). Experts from the book suggest that India and Indonesia should work out a joint food reserve against the volatile



climate of international markets. India and Indonesia, two powerful members of the G-33 must work together against discriminatory policies such as the AoA rules that hinder the process of food security in developing countries.

Indonesia and India have been recognised as the rising countries in the political path of democracy. I Ketut Putra Erawan, one of the contributors of the book who is the Executive Director of Institute of Peace and Democracy in Indonesia proposed three means of a possible strategic agenda of cooperation between Indonesia and India. The first agenda is the consolidation of electoral governance such as jointly introducing technologies used in the electoral processes (such as single-electronic ID based on biometric system and implementing electronic voting in the future). The second agenda is equalizing development which involves the reform of public services mechanism. The essence of this is development programmes which would require vast amount of funding, local support for sustainability and long-term commitments. The third agenda of maritime cooperation which would involve 'sharing experiences in developing a White paper, strategic guidance, or policy paper' (p 110). This would mainly focus on sharing experiences on how to develop maritime infrastructure, defence modernization and on building trust of the citizens.

Sustainable Development is a concept that has not largely been an agenda of bilateral relations which makes this an area of abundant scope. Sustainability essentially focuses on renewable energy resources, agriculture or forestry. Shinta Kamdani, one of the contributors opined that initiatives by the Indonesian government like 'The reducing Emissions from

Deforestation and Forest Degradation' (REDD+) in relation to climate change and initiatives in India like projects focused on renewable energy which have been installed to ensure energy security and access in places like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh-can become the foundation for a partnership in sustainable development. For the success of such collaborations, education is extremely important to develop sustainability of human capital in both countries. A particular ongoing project to improve health quality is the 'Quit Tobacco International Project' initiated by the UN.

Security forms the most integral aspect of any bilateral relation. In the context of Indonesia-India relations, regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean and security cooperation along with non-traditional threats are key elements of bilateral security partnership. Shankari Sundararaman highlighted that when it comes to the Indian Ocean, Indonesia despite becoming a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), has hardly made it an integral part of its diplomacy. This forum remains largely undeveloped due to lack of institutional systems and holds great potential to forge greater ties between the two countries by joint action in areas such as maritime safety and security, fisheries management, disaster risk management, science and technology cooperation through this forum. Indonesia's new emphasis on "Maritime Axis" launched by President Joko Widodo offers significant chance to India-Indonesia partnership. Non-traditional threats are the contemporary forces of destabilisation that are confronting regional peace and stability in the form of ethnic insurgency, trans-border threats, Jihadi menace etc. and handling those problems require significant enhancement of bilateral cooperation. For example, India and Indonesia signed a MoU on Combating International Terrorism in 2004 which led to the formation

of a Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism to exchange information and intelligence, capacity building and legal cooperation.

Civil society, media and corporate social responsibility are important tools to develop a matrix of development cooperation between the two countries. This is the most contemporary dimension to the strategic partnership and its outreach is manifold. Mr. Endy Bayuni commented that there is ignorance about India in Indonesia and vice versa. He blamed media of two countries for not giving sufficient coverage to each other. Satryo Soemantri Brodjonegoro who wrote about development of human resources said Indonesia has to learn passion for education and curiosity from India. Mr. Amol Titus appreciated India's low cost education system which he said can be model for Indonesia which also has very large young population like India. He said India can learn to organize functions and events from Indonesia. Ms. Tri Yuli Adriana spoke about corporate social responsibility and said that it should be more effectively used for empowerment of people. She said that while private sector in Indonesia spends funds under corporate social responsibility its objectives are not often met. Mrs. Neeru Singh said that Indian companies have been doing work under the Corporate Social Responsibility for long. The various contributors on sections dedicated to these three themes proposed the need to harness these means to benefit not only India and Indonesia, but other emerging democracies as well.

India and Indonesia are in the middle of new regional dynamics and both countries have common priorities and goals to attain. The means to harness their

partnership further should be expedited. As the larger democracies in the world, the role of both the countries in ensuring favourable regional stability is pivotal.

Masala Bumbu serves as the most comprehensive example of strategic partnership, at least in the field of culture and literature because it is a product of the coming together of intellectuals from both India and Indonesia, this is the first of a kind. The very intention of the contributors of this book serves to reinvigorate India-Indonesia relations. This paves the way for more such collaborations in the field of literature dedicated to India-Indonesia bilateral relations. The book has touched upon some new avenues such as Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility that are fresh opportunities for partnership.

The book is aimed serving as a guide for policy makers, journalists, students of international studies and common readers who are interested in India and Indonesia and it also forms an important milestone in 'Sahabat India – The Festival of India in Indonesia'.

## Interaction between IDSA and National Security Council of Thailand, May 5, 2016

A delegation of five security experts led by Mr. Surat Horachakul, Director of Indian Studies Center of Chulalongkorn University, from the National Security Council of Thailand visited IDSA, which was followed by an interaction with issues relating to the emerging trends in terrorism. The interaction was chaired by Deputy Director General, IDSA, Brig. (Retd) Rumel Dahiya.

Brig. Dahiya in his introduction stated that problems of terrorism are not easily overcome in a short span of time. There are many facets to it. For instance, how much influence will the returnees from the war fighting on the side of ISIS carry back home? How will they be integrated into the society? How will their movements be monitored? Mr. Horachakul asserted that in efforts to counter terrorism, it is very necessary to work together and share information between countries. In the face of fundamentalism, the question that arises is 'how to de-fundamentalise the young minds'. It was then asserted that prevention is more necessary than de-radicalization. The reasons that many youngsters fall prey to such fundamentalist indoctrination has more to do with factors like lack of education, feeling of revenge, lack of self-worth rather than specifically the religious ideology. Citing India's example, it was mentioned that the country represents a unique story- 1000 Ulemas from India have issued the world's largest fatwa against ISIS in a letter addressed to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in 2015.

India has maintained in all international forums that terrorism is transnational. There is a need to look at the unique flavour of terrorism in Southeast Asia. The causes for terrorism are local and therefore the way to tackle them can also be local and unique. Special emphasis should be laid on the study of ethnic groups, societies to reach some kind of a pragmatic and realistic solution to the problem of terrorism. On the issue of the South China Sea conflict, Brig. Rumel Dahiya communicated that India has largely remained silent because ASEAN has not expressed a unified stand on the dispute. However, India has maintained that the South China Sea must be free from conflicts and that freedom of navigation must be maintained.

The interaction addressed some important points of concern between the two countries, making way for more healthy dialogues in the future. There is a lot of expectation hinged on to the development of India-Thailand bilateral relationship which is an important step for India-ASEAN partnership.

## Southeast Asia

### ASEAN

#### Wang Yi's Three Nation SE Asia Tour

In the last week of April, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Brunei, Cambodia and Lao PDR in an effort to court these smaller economies of Southeast Asia before the tribunal court at The Hague gives its verdict on the arbitration case filed by The Philippines in 2013. In this visit, the foreign minister met the heads of states and talked about friendships between China and those countries. He later claimed that these three Southeast Asian nations reached a consensus with China which speaks about bilateral negotiations and maintenance of the DoC and implementation of the Code of Conduct in settling the South China Sea disputes. Several ASEAN leaders expressed their concerns on this development as it represented another Chinese attempt to further diversify ASEAN's opinion on resolving the territorial disputes between China, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei and to some extent, Malaysia. <sup>1</sup>

#### The 2nd ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network

The 2nd ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN) Forum was conducted in Ha Noi, Vietnam on March 5 where

over 500 small and medium-size enterprises owners (all women entrepreneurs) from ten ASEAN Member States participated. The objectives of the forum were to share experiences and exchange views on strategies to nurture women entrepreneurs. Several enterprises and business associations from within and outside ASEAN shared their business models for women's participation in financial sector, corporate social responsibility, and economic empowerment of women. Coca Cola, Women in International Trade Los Angeles, IMEX Pan Pacific, GREAT Women Philippines, Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Indonesia, TH Group, and many more business houses marked their participation in the event. H.E. Nguyen Thi Doan, Vice State President of Viet Nam and ASEAN Secretary General H.E. Le Luong Minh awarded six extra-ordinary women entrepreneurs. The AWEN was established by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women to serve as a platform for ASEAN women entrepreneurs to escalate their business management and skills as well as improve their access to financial institutions, market and business opportunities. Initiated in April 2014, the AWEN is right now coordinated by the Viet Nam Women Entrepreneurs' Council for the initial two years. <sup>2</sup>

#### 23rd ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue

ASEAN and New Zealand Senior Officials met for the 23rd ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue organised in Bali, Indonesia where they confirmed to explore prospects to further reinforce cooperation for mutual benefit. New

<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Murdoch, "South China Sea dispute 'not a China-ASEAN problem'", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 25, 2016, at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/south-china-sea-dispute-not-a-chinaasean-problem-20160425-goe7u1.html>, accessed on May 10, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> "ASEAN to Foster Women Entrepreneurs in Advancing the AEC Development", *ASEAN.org*, March 5, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/asean-to-foster-women-entrepreneurs-in-advancing-the-aec-development/>, accessed on April 18, 2016.



Zealand was acknowledged as a strategic partner of ASEAN at the ASEAN-New Zealand Summit held in November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur where they also commemorated the 40th Anniversary of the relationship. Both New Zealand and ASEAN agreed that their relations are now considerable and multi-faceted. The ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) and cooperation in sectors like defence and security, disaster risk management, connectivity, maritime cooperation and non-traditional security areas have deeper influence on ASEAN and New Zealand relations. New Zealand is involved in regional mechanisms like East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus. It conveyed strong support for 'ASEAN Centrality' in the regional architecture. In the Dialogue, both sides discussed regional and international issues which included recent developments in the South China Sea, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, trafficking in persons, cyber-crime etc. Both sides spoke about peaceful resolution of disputes, respect for legal and diplomatic processes and maintenance of International Law such as the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Abdurrahman Mohammad Fachir, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and Brook Barrington, Chief Executive and Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand co-chaired the meeting.<sup>3</sup>

### Premier Li Keqiang Met SE Asian Leaders

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met leaders from Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam in the southern Chinese resort town of Sanya on Hainan Island on March 23 and he pledged to give \$11.5 billion in loans and credit lines to these five Southeast Asian countries. However, it should be noticed that such offers from China to ASEAN countries are usually made in official gatherings and no time frame was mentioned by Premier Li. China shares territorial disputes with Vietnam over their claims on South China Sea and with Myanmar, the twists and turns in relations came as Myanmar suspended few Chinese projects in the recent years. With new governments both in Vietnam and Myanmar, it is now time to watch the future trends in China-Southeast Asia relations.<sup>4</sup>

### ASEAN Information Ministers Meeting

The ASEAN Information Ministers reiterated their commitment to work together to elevate awareness about ASEAN among the people and make a sense of community through information and media. The 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of AMRI was happened along with the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of AMRI Plus Three, 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials Responsible for Information (SOMRI), 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SOMRI Plus Three and 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of SOMRI Plus Japan. The meeting was themed 'One ASEAN: Connectivity. Community. Opportunity'. The representatives approved the Strategic Plan for Information and Media 2016-2025 to enable the information sector so that it can contribute towards ASEAN community building exercises.

<sup>3</sup> ASEAN, New Zealand To Enhance Cooperation, *ASEAN.org*, March 4, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/asean-new-zealand-to-enhance-cooperation/>, accessed on April 18, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> "China Offers \$11.5B in Loans, Credit to Southeast Asia", *VOA News*, March 23, 2016, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/ap-china-southeast-asian-leaders-seek-greater-cooperation/3250705.html>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

They also discussed preparations to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Founding Anniversary of ASEAN in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

### Solomon Island's Envoy to ASEAN

Ambassador Salana Kalu of Solomon Islands took charge as the Ambassador of his country to ASEAN. Mr. Le Luong Minh expressed that ASEAN and Solomon Islands could further exploit opportunities to uphold cooperation. He also mentioned about the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) through which Solomon Islands and ASEAN can work together. He identified few areas like tourism, fisheries, trade and investment for future cooperation. Both sides also deliberated on potential ways to encourage connectivity and people-to-people contacts between ASEAN and Solomon Islands. Other issues that were discussed included regional and international issues of common interests including ASEAN community building initiative.<sup>6</sup>

### Czech Republic and ASEAN Cooperation

ASEAN and Czech Republic will work together to utilise the vast potential both sides have in common, mentioned H.E. Ivan Hotik, the new Czech Ambassador

to ASEAN. Ambassador Hotik further said that the Czech Republic will also encourage collaboration between ASEAN and the European Union as well as within ASEAN. Secretary-General Minh elaborated that ASEAN and the Czech Republic could further work on areas including trade and investment. Secretary-General Minh and Ambassador Hotik also deliberated on promising ways to further stimulate business-to-business cooperation. Few regional and international issues were also covered in their discussion.<sup>7</sup>

## ASEAN-India

### India Remains Part of RCEP: Minister

Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on April 20 said that India remained part of the ASEAN-led talks for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with six other countries. Sitharaman said, "India (is) participating in the next round beginning April 24, 2016, at Sydney, Australia". This was a reaction to a media report that the negotiating team for the accord had found India to be obstructionist and had asked New Delhi to either agree to eliminate tariffs on all products or leave the talks on the proposed free trade agreement. The negotiations were launched in November 2012 at the Cambodia ASEAN Summit.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "ASEAN Information Ministers Reaffirm Commitment to Raise ASEAN Awareness", *ASEAN.org*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/asean-information-ministers-reaffirm-commitment-to-raise-asean-awareness/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> "Solomon Islands to Forge Close Cooperation with ASEAN", *ASEAN.org*, March 22, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/solomon-islands-to-forge-close-cooperation-with-asean/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Czech Republic to Strengthen Relationship with ASEAN", *ASEAN.org*, March 25, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/54184-2/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> "India remains part of Asean-led trade pact talks: Minister", *Business Standard*, April 20, 2016, at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-remains-part-of-ASEAN-led-trade-pact-talks-minister-116042000347\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-remains-part-of-ASEAN-led-trade-pact-talks-minister-116042000347_1.html)

### India at ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Group Meeting on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy

ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Group Meeting on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy was held in New Delhi on April 11. India sought the cooperation of the ASEAN members in the global fight against terrorism. “The dialogue and cooperation among Asia-Pacific states, both bilaterally and in multilateral forums has intensified,” Preeti Saran, secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, said in her opening remarks. She spoke about terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), territorial and maritime disputes, cyber-crime, piracy, food and energy insecurity, environmental degradation and humanitarian disasters at the meeting. She referred to ARF as one of the earliest forums to focus on counter-terrorism and transnational crime.<sup>9</sup>

### India-Singapore Urban Management Programme Launched

An urban management program organised by Temasek Foundation (TF), Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE) and NITI Aayog was happened in New Delhi on April 27 and over 50 participants from seven Indian states participated. It was arranged with the aim of refining

urbanisation in India with assistance from Singapore. This was in accordance with an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was signed during PM Narendra Modi’s visit to Singapore in 2015. The best practices of Singapore in these areas were shared by TF and SCE.<sup>10</sup>

## Northeast India-Act East Policy

### More Waterways in NE:

Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Development of the North-eastern Region (DoNER), has announced that Northeast India will get 17 waterway projects which will essentially help the region in connecting with the neighbouring states. These waterway projects will be in addition to the railway and road connectivity projects that are underway. He said, “Over a hundred waterways are being developed across the country and 17 such projects planned for the north-eastern region. Multi-modal connectivity in the region has been undertaken on a priority basis to boost trade and to increase the movement of people.” He further mentioned that waterway projects need less investment in comparison to other communication infrastructure. The National Waterways Bill 2015 was passed in the parliament which aims at add 106 inland waterways which will be additions to the existing six National Waterways. This new

<sup>9</sup> “India seeks Asean’s cooperation in fighting terrorism”, *Zee News*, April 11, 2016, at [http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/india-seeks-aseans-cooperation-in-fighting-terrorism\\_1875010.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/india-seeks-aseans-cooperation-in-fighting-terrorism_1875010.html)

<sup>10</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “India-Singapore urban management programme launched”, *The Economic Times*, April 27, 2016, at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-04-27/news/72644778\\_1\\_india-singapore-singapore-cooperation-enterprise-temasek-foundation](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-04-27/news/72644778_1_india-singapore-singapore-cooperation-enterprise-temasek-foundation) , accessed on May 9, 2016.

move by the government has been influenced by the recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture.<sup>11</sup>

### President of India Visits New Zealand and PNG:

President Pranab Mukherjee paid a visit to New Zealand and Papua New Guinea in the last week of April and pitched that the Pacific nations are natural extension of Southeast Asia, India's immediate neighbourhood. He further mentioned,

“With our ‘Look East’ policy evolving into an ‘Act East’ policy, the region has gained even greater salience in our strategic thinking and economic engagement. Most of India's foreign trade flows through the sea lanes of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. These lanes also bring us the bulk of our energy, be it oil, gas or coal.”

New Zealand PM John Key said,

“we do a lot less business with India than we do with China, and a lot less business with India relative to the size of the economy in India, so we're keen to really push that closer economic cooperation at some point.”

The Kiwi PM further said that New Zealand can help India in areas like agriculture, food processing, high-end

manufacturing, disaster management etc. Other areas are tourism and education. Besides, they spoke about climate change, poverty elimination, trade and business, FDI, connectivity and many other areas.<sup>12</sup>

PNG and India signed four agreements, including in the areas of healthcare and information technology (IT). A MoU was signed between India's ministry of health and family welfare and Papua New Guinea's ministry of health and HIV/AIDS for a broad range of cooperation in the field of healthcare and medical science. Another MoU was signed between the Papua New Guinea government and the Export Import Bank of India for a \$100-million credit line for development of infrastructure in the island-nation. The third MoU was between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi, and PNG University of Technology, Lae, for cooperation in agricultural research. The fourth MoU was signed between the governments of India and Papua New Guinea for establishing of India-Papua New Guinea Centre for Excellence in IT. Papua New Guinea is the largest of all the Pacific island-nations.<sup>13</sup>

### ASEAN-Northeast India Business Summit Opens in Imphal

The three-day North East India- ASEAN Business Summit was held in Imphal on April 7-9. It focused on Manipur as the key trade point between India and South East Asian

<sup>11</sup> 17 waterway projects to link north-east with other states, *Business Today*, April 20, 2016, at <http://www.businesstoday.in/current/policy/17-waterway-projects-to-link-north-east-with-other-states/story/230560.html>, accessed on May 9, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> “Look East to Act East policy: President pitches for closer ties with NZ”, *Hindustan Times*, April 30, 2016, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/look-east-to-act-east-policy-president-pitches-for-closer-ties-with-new-zealand/story-WOWMaDSmCywYNPQrXpu7gK.html>, accessed on May 9, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> “India, Papua New Guinea sign four agreements”, *Business Standard*, April 29, 2016, at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-papua-new-guinea-sign-four-agreements-116042900829\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-papua-new-guinea-sign-four-agreements-116042900829_1.html)



countries. Bangladesh Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, ambassadors of Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand, ASEAN representatives and about 140 Indian delegates, including entrepreneurs, took part in the summit.

The primary objective of the summit was to attract Indian and foreign investors to boost economic development and employment generation in the northeast. It was jointly organized by Manipur commerce and industries department and Indian Chamber of Commerce and ICSI.<sup>14</sup>

## Brunei

### China, Brunei Pledge Further Strategic Cooperation

Top diplomatic officials from China and Brunei pledged to further boost strategic cooperation between the two nations and push forward ties between China and ASEAN. The remarks were made at a meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Brunei's Second Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade YB Phein Dato Lim Jock Seng. China and Brunei are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations in 2016. At the meeting, Mr. Wang Yi said that Brunei was a reliable and sincere friend and partner of China, and China highly valued the strategic cooperative relationship between the two countries.

He proposed that the two sides should maintain high-level exchanges to constantly push forward bilateral ties and show support on major issues concerning each other's core interests. For his part, Lim Jock Seng said that Brunei was willing to join hands with China to further deepen strategic cooperation and maintain high-level exchanges between the two sides, boost pragmatic cooperation in the fields of infrastructure construction, finance and petrochemical industry and expand exchanges in tourism, Chinese medicine and youth. He noted that Brunei would always uphold the one-China policy.<sup>15</sup>

## Cambodia

### Cambodia-Australia Refugee Deal under Question

According to local news agencies, a married Iranian couple, who were amongst the five to be resettled in Cambodia under a refugee deal signed between Cambodia and Australia, has already left the country for their home in Iran. The Australia-Cambodia refugee deal was signed in 2014 and through this accord Australia has to pay \$55 million to Cambodia for resettlement of refugees who had earlier fled to Australia from different parts of the world to avoid persecution. With the recent development, the refugee deal is facing another fresh wave of difficulties as very few of the refugees were ready to leave Australia for resettlement in Cambodia. Most of those refugees are originally from Myanmar and Iran and according to media reports; they are ready to return to their home countries despite

<sup>14</sup> "Asean business summit focuses on Manipur", *The Times of India*, April 9, 2016, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/imphal/ASEAN-business-summit-focuses-on-Manipur/articleshow/51750749.cms>

<sup>15</sup> "China, Brunei pledge further strategic cooperation", *Xinhuanet*, April 21, 2016, at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-04/21/c\\_135301271.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-04/21/c_135301271.htm)

existing fear of persecution than resettling in Cambodia. The Australian authority is discussing the possibilities of third-country resettlement with other Asia-Pacific nations as well. Elaine Pearson, Australian Director for Human Rights Watch mentioned,

“Cambodia’s track record of poorly integrating refugees over the last five years was well-known, but the Australian government refused to listen and thought it could throw money at the problem to fix it. Now the cost of this human experiment is not only a wasted \$55 million, but it’s also placing recognised refugees in the perilous position of returning to home countries where they faced persecution.”<sup>16</sup>

### Reshuffle in Cambodian Cabinet

Cambodia’s parliament has recently endorsed a new cabinet of 26 members. In Cambodia’s history, such a move looks a rare incident as PM Hun Sen likes to surround himself with his close associates and he has done it for the last three decades of his leadership. This reshuffle was a result of necessities originated by the change in the minds of the Cambodians. It has been reported that most of the changes were related to reassignments to other portfolios and only two ministers were removed from the cabinet. The next election is due in 2018 and this time PM Hun Sen is expected to face many challenges against his regime. However, the opposition party has

claimed that most of the changes are only a cosmetic and will have no real-time implications on the Cambodian politics.<sup>17</sup>

## East Timor

### India Supports Timor Leste Joining ASEAN, Says Sushma Swaraj

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on March 28 that India looked forward to the Southeast Asian nation of Timor Leste joining the ASEAN bloc. She said this during a meeting with Timor Leste’s Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Hermani Coelho da Silva. This was the first visit to India by a foreign minister of Timor Leste since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries in 2003. The EAM also expressed concern that bilateral trade between India and Timor Leste that stood at only \$3 million and said that both sides should explore new avenues of trade and investment.

There was a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) on health cooperation that was under discussion between the two countries. In terms of capacity building, Sushma Swaraj said that India could increase Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) training slots and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships for Timor Leste. She also said that India could also consider imparting training to Timor Leste diplomats in the Foreign Service Institute here. The Timor Leste minister invited Indian private sector companies to participate in infrastructure development, agriculture development and

<sup>16</sup> Ben Doherty, “More refugees leave Cambodia, further straining \$55m deal with Australia”, *The Guardian*, March 8, 2016, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/08/more-refugees-leave-cambodia-further-straining-55m-deal-with-australia>, accessed on April 18, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> “Cambodia parliament approves PM’s ‘healthier’ new cabinet”, *Reuters*, April 4, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics-idUSKCN0X10IT>, accessed on May 9, 2016.

capacity building. Da Silva also said that 11 oil blocks were also open for exploration by India. Both countries have cooperated closely with each other in UN forums.<sup>18</sup>

### East Timor - Australia Spat over Sea Border

East Timor has requested the United Nations to help resolve its bitter dispute with Australia over a permanent sea border in the oil-rich Timor Sea. East Timor on April 11 informed Australia that it would trigger conciliation proceedings under the UN's Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The move was sharply criticised by the Australian government. The spokesperson for foreign minister Julie Bishop said that the move contravened previous agreements between the two nations. In March, there were mass protests in Dili over the unresolved maritime border, with more than 10,000 people rallying outside the Australian embassy in the Timorese capital.<sup>19</sup>

## Indonesia

### Indonesian –China Row over Fishing

Indonesian warships detained a Chinese trawler allegedly operating in Indonesian waters on April 24, just weeks after a

confrontation between vessels from the two countries caused tensions. This is in line with tough crackdown launched in 2014 on illegal fishing which involved sinking foreign vessels caught fishing without a permit after impounding the boats and removing the crews. The trawler was intercepted by two navy ships after receiving information that a ship wanted by Interpol in Argentina had been spotted in Aceh, in the northwest of Sumatra. The boat was taken to a naval base in Belawan, North Sumatra for investigation. The Chinese trawler was previously reported to have been fishing illegally in Argentine waters in late February.<sup>20</sup>

### Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo Begins in Indonesia

The multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo 2016 was started in Padang, Indonesia on April 12, with an opening ceremony and arrival of navy ships from 35 nations in the city's harbour for the international fleet review. It is the second iteration of the exercise, which began in 2014 in Batam, Indonesia. Komodo 2016 featured a robust harbour phase that included an international fleet review and a sea phase training scenario where participating navies would work together to enhance information sharing and maritime cooperation. Approximately 48 ships and aircraft from 35 navies participated in the sea phase, including 18 ASEAN Plus member states.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "India looks forward to Timor Leste joining Asean: Sushma Swaraj", *The Times of India*, March 28, 2016, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/India-looks-forward-to-Timor-Leste-joining-ASEAN-Sushma-Swaraj/articleshow/51588558.cms>

<sup>19</sup> Tom Allard, "East Timor takes Australia to UN over sea border", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 11, 2016, at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/east-timor-takes-australia-to-un-over-sea-border-20160411-go39tl.html>

<sup>20</sup> "Indonesian navy impounds Chinese trawler for illegal fishing", *Inquirer*, April 24, 2016, at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/138878/indonesian-navy-impounds-chinese-trawler-for-illegal-fishing>

<sup>21</sup> "Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo Kicks Off in Indonesia", *US Pacific Command*, April 12, 2016, at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/719662/multilateral-naval-exercise-komodo-kicks-off-in-indonesia.aspx>

## Laos

### Laos Gets New President and Prime Minister

Communist Party Chief Bounnhang Vorachit was appointed as the country's new president on April 20 by Laos's National Assembly. Foreign minister Thongloun Sisoulith was appointed as country's Prime Minister. The picks were seen by many analysts as a continuation of the status quo in secretive Laos, where the communists have been ruling since the end of the Vietnam War.

Laos has average GDP growth of 7 percent over the past decade, with increasing use of natural resources contributing a third of output growth.<sup>22</sup>

### New President of Laos Paid a Visit to Vietnam

The newly elected president of Laos, Bounnhang Vorachit, visited Vietnam as his first foreign stop. Vorachit told his Vietnamese host, General-Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, that it was a great honour to visit Vietnam on his first overseas trip to meet Vietnam's leaders who were "extremely close and trustworthy friends" of Laos. Trong, who was elected to a second five-year term in January, said that Vorachit's visit would boost bilateral relations between two of

the world's last remaining communist countries. Laos is holding the annual chairmanship of the ASEAN for 2016.<sup>23</sup>

## Malaysia

### Malaysia-China Row over Fishing

More than 100 Chinese fishing boats and ships were found traversing in Malaysian waters illegally. The Royal Malaysian Navy and Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency were looking into the matter and sent bombardier aircraft to fly that area in order to examine whether the Chinese boats and ships encroached into Malaysian Exclusive Economic Zone. The Prime Minister's office mentioned that, proper actions will be taken if those boats and ships were found guilty by having trespassed into Malaysian territory.<sup>24</sup>

### ISIS Links Arrested

The Malaysian Police have arrested 15 people allegedly involved with the ISIS in the week when the Brussels attack happened. Khalid Abu Bakar, Malaysia's national police chief, released a statement showing that the suspects, aged between 22 and 49, include a mosque cleric, a student, a police officer and a technician. There were 4 women in the 15 people group. This has added to the number of 160 people already arrested by the Malaysian authority in connection with ISIS linked terrorism. Followed by the Jakarta attack in January 2016,

<sup>22</sup> "Communist Laos appoints new president, prime minister", *The Times of India*, April 20, 2016, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/Communist-Laos-appoints-new-president-prime-minister/articleshow/51905941.cms>

<sup>23</sup> "New president of Laos visits Vietnam to boost ties", *The Jakarta Post*, April 25, 2016, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2016/04/25/new-president-of-laos-visits-vietnam-to-boost-ties.html>

<sup>24</sup> "More than 100 China vessels spotted in Malaysian waters", *The New Straits Times Online and Bernama*, March 24, 2016, at <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/03/134965/more-100-china-vessels-spotted-malaysian-waters>, accessed on April 19, 2016.



Malaysia is on high alert too. The police suspects that these 15 people were working on the instruction given by a Malaysian who is fighting for the ISIS from Syria now and they group was trying to sabotage the country by one attack.<sup>25</sup>

### 1MDB and Malaysian PM

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has sued the present PM Najib Razak for his alleged involvement in the state fund 1MDB. Mahathir Mohammad has accused Mr. Razak of stealing \$681m from the 1MDB and prevented the law and judiciary from taking appropriate action against him. The attorney general of Malaysia has already given a clean hit to Mr. Razak and the prime minister also has denied all allegations. His office maintains that the money in question in Najib's personal accounts came as a gift from the Royal Saudi family and not from 1MDB. During his tenure, Mr. Mahathir Mohammad was accused of arbitrary arrests and restrictions on media; allegations that are now troubling the Najib government as well. However, Mahathir Mohammad is now trying to unseat the present government and is involved in anti-Najib movement. He was part of a rally which was organised in protest of Najib's government in downtown Kuala Lumpur. He has also resigned from his post in UMNO, a political body that was made extremely powerful during his tenure and

which still enjoys an extra-ordinary role in Malaysian politics. In response, Najib side-lined Mahathir from the politics and the police have questioned him over one defamation case brought by the present prime minister. In between Mahathir has also tried to topple the present government in the parliament by a zero-confidence vote.<sup>26</sup>

## Myanmar

### Htin Kyaw New President of Myanmar

After National League for Democracy's landslide victory in the November 2015 election, Myanmar got its first civilian president in five decades. Htin Kyaw was a choice of the NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. As the 2008 constitution of Myanmar restricts her to get the presidency in Myanmar, she has opted for foreign ministry and the position of state councillor for herself. This has been a victory of decade-old democracy movement in Myanmar. However, the military still holds almost 25% seats in the parliament and the ministries of home, defence and border affairs are still with them. Hence, it would be mandatory for Suu Kyi and her party to have certain kind of compromise with the Tatmadaw to run the government and administration. Another challenge for the NLD government would be to optimise the chances of restoration of peace and security in areas of ethnic unrest. Under the leadership of Thein Sein, only eight out of the 18 ethnic groups had signed the nation-wide ceasefire agreement.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Simon Lewis, "15 Suspected ISIS Members Planning Terror Attacks Have Been Arrested in Malaysia", *Time*, March 24, 2016, at <http://time.com/4271704/malaysia-arrested-15-isis-members-terror/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Holmes, "Former Malaysian premier Mahathir sues PM Najib over 'abuse of power'", *The Guardian*, March 23, 2016, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/23/former-malaysian-premier-mahathir-sues-pm-najib-over-abuse-of-power>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Jonah Fisher, "Myanmar begins presidential selection as Aung San Suu Kyi ruled out", *BBC*, March 10, 2016, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35770535>, accessed on April 18, 2016.

### Armed Forces parade day Celebrated

Amid political transition towards democracy led by National League for Democracy and Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi, the Myanmar military has celebrated the Armed Forces Parade Day to celebrate Myanmar's war against imperialist Japan during the World War II. The commander-in-chief of Myanmar Armed Forces, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing said that the *Tatmadaw* has ensured the stability of the country which, in turn, has helped in democratic transition. He further said, "The *Tatmadaw* has to be present in a leading role in national politics". He also reiterated that the military will be the upholder of the constitution.<sup>28</sup>

## Philippines

### US Instigating Manila, Says China

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying mentioned that Philippines' action to go against China in the international court is illegal and unlawful. She continued, "Its (Philippines') stubbornness is clearly the result of behind-the-scenes instigation and political maneuvering. China is surely not going to humour such a political farce." Clearly she was referring to the US while mentioning about instigating Manila. This came as a response against

US diplomat Daniel Russel's comment that the forthcoming decision by the international tribunal on the arbitration case brought by the Philippines would bring "rules-based" future in the region. Hua Chunying further mentioned that US itself is not a part of the UNCLOS, but speaks about stability in South China Sea through international law and order.<sup>29</sup>

### Indonesian Sailors Abducted by Aby Sanyaf and Later Released:

The Aby Sanyaf group of Philippines had abducted 10 Indonesian sailors in March and held them hostages for more than one month. They were released by the end of April, according to sources from the foreign affairs ministries of both the countries. Abu Sanyaf is a terror group involved in kidnapping and collecting ransom for more than two decades now. These Indonesian sailors were however released without paying any money. The government of Philippines, despite its efforts to minimise the group's establishment, could not do much to eliminate them.<sup>30</sup>

## Singapore

### Singapore Signs Paris Agreement on Climate Change

Singapore signed Paris Agreement on climate change in New York on April 23. Foreign Affairs Minister Dr Vivian Balakrishnan represented Singapore at the signature ceremony. Dr

<sup>28</sup> Shibani Mahtani, "Myanmar Military Display Highlights Army's Continuing Power", *The Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2016, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/myanmar-military-display-highlights-armys-continuing-power-1459057726>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> "China accuses US of instigating Philippines to go to UN on SCS", *Press Trust of India and Business Standard*, March 23, 2016, at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/china-accuses-us-of-instigating-philippines-to-go-to-un-on-scs-116032300903\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/china-accuses-us-of-instigating-philippines-to-go-to-un-on-scs-116032300903_1.html), accessed on April 21, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Floyd Whaley, "Abu Sanyaf Releases 10 Indonesian Sailors Held Hostage in Philippines", *The New York Times*, May 1, 2016, at [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/world/asia/10-indonesian-sailors-held-hostage-in-philippines-are-released.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/world/asia/10-indonesian-sailors-held-hostage-in-philippines-are-released.html?_r=0), accessed on May 9, 2016.

Balakrishnan delivered the statement at the ceremony to “affirm Singapore’s support and commitment for the Agreement”. He noted that Singapore ranked 123rd in emissions intensity out of 142 countries worldwide, but assured that the country

“...will continue to do more”. “Within the geographical constraints we face, we will pursue renewable energy in the form of increased solar PV deployment. This will supplement our substantial energy efficiency efforts and other mitigation measures to lower our Emissions Intensity by 36% from 2005 levels, and to stabilise our emissions around 2030. We take our pledge seriously, and will now turn to making the necessary domestic preparations to enable us to ratify the agreement and to achieve the objectives under our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)”.<sup>31</sup>

## Thailand

### Thaksin Shinawatra Spoke about Thai Junta

Thailand’s former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra appeared in New York after several years of unknown and lesser known whereabouts and gave a detailed interview where he spoke about the Thai *junta* and its rule. He mentioned that he

may stay out of Thailand as the *Junta* has revoked his Thai passport and with his Montenegro passport, he can travel to any country except Thailand. During his tenure in government, Thaksin was accused by his opponents of corruption. However, Thaksin termed his family’s wealth as modest and estimated it at about US\$1 billion.<sup>32</sup>

### New Constitution Drafted in Thailand

The Thai *Junta* has unveiled a proposed constitution and said that no criticism of the draft constitution would be accepted. The public referendum for the constitution will be held in August and followed by that, PM Prayuth is likely to organise the election in 2017. The draft constitution has a clause for a 250 member Senate, members of which will be hand-picked by the Junta and six seats will be reserved for the defence and police chiefs. Sunai Phasuk of Human Rights Watch said,

“We are trying to hold the junta accountable to its own pledge to return civilian democratic to Thailand, but this draft charter is showing the opposite,... It doesn’t give any promise of a democratic transition, but rather a prolonged control of the military.”

Prayuth has explained that the military takeover is necessary to reinstate order after years of political turmoil and to free Thailand from corruption and misuse of power. He has claimed that the new constitution will support him accomplish those ends.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “Singapore signs Paris Agreement on climate change”, *Asia One*, April 23, 2016, at <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/singapore-signs-paris-agreement-climate-change>

<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Loh, “Thaksin says he will ‘never’ give up on Thailand, but is prepared to ‘stay out’”, *Asian Correspondent*, March 10, 2016, at <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2016/03/thaksin-says-he-will-never-give-up-on-thailand-but-is-prepared-to-stay-out/>, accessed on April 18, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> “Thailand’s proposed new constitution unveiled to the public”, *The Japan Times*, March 29, 2016, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/29/asia-pacific/thailands-proposed-new-constitution-unveiled-public/#.VzFvJCGc2Vr>, accessed on May 10, 2016.

## Vietnam

### Vietnam and China Defence Ministers Meeting

Colonel General Chang Wanquan, China's Minister of National Defence, paid an official friendly visit to Vietnam from March 26 to 28 at the invitation of his Vietnamese counterpart General Phung Quang Thanh. Territorial disputes in the East Vietnam Sea/ South China Sea were the focus of discussions between the two. Minister Thanh underlined that Minister Chang's visit was a great opportunity for bilateral defence cooperation between the two countries. It was decided that the resolution of disputes ought to go in line with legal models and principles specified in international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Minister Thanh and Minister Chang also promised to jointly look for fundamental and long-term solutions to disputes approved by both nations; with strict adherence to mutual agreements and understanding achieved by the countries' senior leaders; that is, to strictly implement the principles of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Vietnam Sea as well as towards the adoption of the Code of Conduct for the sea.<sup>34</sup>

### Top Policeman is now the President

Tran Dai Quang was sworn in as president on April 2 by Vietnam's parliament, elevating the head of an internal security agency to one of the most powerful political posts. Quang's approval was a formality since he was the only candidate put forward by the party's five-yearly congress in January. Quang, 59, was a police general who hailed from the Ministry of Public Security, an organization with broad powers and a remit that included intelligence gathering and thwarting domestic and foreign threats to the party. A resolution approving Quang's presidency was backed by 460 of the 465 lawmakers who casted votes. He swore his loyalty to the party and people.<sup>35</sup>

### New Prime Minister of Vietnam

Vietnam's rubber-stamp parliament on April 7 elected Nguyen Xuan Phuc as prime minister. In a formal vote, 446 of the 490 members in the National Assembly voted to install Phuc, 61, as the head of government. The appointment of Phuc, who rose from governor of the central province of Quang Nam to deputy prime minister five years ago, was a mere formality after he was picked at the Communist Party's congress in January as the sole candidate to replace Nguyen Tan Dung, who was removed from office on April 6. Phuc takes office at a time when the country is crippled with soaring public debt, a serious budget deficit, China's territorial assertiveness in the South China Sea, as well as an

<sup>34</sup> "Vietnam, China defense ministers meet up over maritime disputes", *Tuoitre news*, March 28, 2016, at <http://tuoitrenews.vn/politics/33984/vietnam-chinese-defence-ministers-meet-up-over-maritime-disputes>

<sup>35</sup> Martin Petty, "Vietnam parliament swears in top policeman as president", *Reuters*, April 1, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-politics-idUSKCNOWZ037>



unprecedented drought and salt intrusion in the country's main rice-growing region of the southern Mekong Delta.<sup>36</sup>

## Oceania

### Australia

#### French Shipbuilder Wins \$39 billion Australian Submarine Deal

French shipbuilder won Australia's largest-ever defence contract to produce a new generation of submarines. French state-controlled defence contractor DCNS won out over Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems and Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to build 12 conventional submarines that the Australian navy expects will cost at least 56 billion Australian dollars (\$43 billion). Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani said that the outcome was "very regrettable." Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said that the French were "best able to meet Australia's unique needs," but that both the Australian and the Japanese governments "are thoroughly committed to the special strategic partnership between Australia and Japan which gets stronger all the time."<sup>37</sup>

#### Regional Agreement to Challenge People Smuggling

Australia signed a landmark regional non-binding agreement to tackle people smuggling, which included recommendations that countries should consider alternatives but to detain vulnerable people at a meeting co-chaired by Indonesia and Australia as part of the 45-nation Bali process in the Asia Pacific. It was the first time the group had signed a declaration to tackle people smuggling and trafficking. The agreement, signed at a ministerial meeting in Bali, said member nations were "concerned by the tragic loss of life at sea, and by the abuse and exploitation of migrants and refugees at the hands of people smugglers and human traffickers". The foreign minister, Julie Bishop, said the agreement was ambitious and would strengthen regional cooperation and determination to combat irregular migration, people smuggling and human trafficking. Although the declaration was non-binding, it was an advance on previous meetings since 2002, which had only produced statements by the co-chairs, summarizing the proceedings.<sup>38</sup>

#### Arun Jaitley Visited Australia

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley visited Australia from March 28 to April 2. On his first day in Sydney, he inaugurated 'Make in India'

<sup>36</sup> "Vietnam elects prime minister amid China's assertiveness and worrying budget deficit", *The Indian Express*, April 7, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/vietnam-new-prime-minister-nguyen-xuan-phuc/>

<sup>37</sup> Rod McGuirk and Raphael Satter, "Australia's largest-ever defence contract has gone to a French shipbuilder to produce a new generation of submarines, thrilling officials in Paris and inaugurating half a century of close defence cooperation between the nations", *USNews*, April 26, 2016, at <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2016-04-25/australia-says-french-company-wins-huge-submarine-contract>

<sup>38</sup> Paul Karp, "Australia signs landmark regional agreement to tackle people smuggling", *The Guardian*, March 24, 2016, at <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/24/australia-signs-landmark-regional-agreement-to-tackle-people-smuggling>

conference where he strongly pitched for foreign investments in India, especially in the area of manufacturing and infrastructure. In Canberra, he met Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull as he highlighted the potential of the Indian economy to grow beyond the current rate of 7.6 per cent and the large scope for higher economic exchanges between the two nations. During the meeting in Canberra, Mr. Turnbull expressed interest in cooperating with India in renewable energy sector where Australia had expertise. Mr. Jaitley also extended an invitation to Mr. Turnbull to visit India. The Finance Minister also met his Australian counterpart Mathias Cormann at a luncheon meet.<sup>39</sup>

## New Zealand

### New Zealand's Connection with Panama Papers:

Radio New Zealand, TVNZ and investigative journalist Nicky Hager came out with a joint paper where they showed that Mossack Fonseca actively described New Zealand as one of the most attractive place for foreign investment because of its tax-free regime and other legal facilities and the so-called leaked Panama Papers have shown that many Australians have used New Zealand as their way to dump their money through illegal means. New

Zealand Pm John Key mentioned that New Zealand is not a tax heaven and he is ready to make changes in the tax laws if recommended properly. Opposition Labour Party Leader Andrew Little mentioned the government needs to shut down any system that makes New Zealand a tool in the hands of the global networks of tax avoidance.<sup>40</sup>

## Papua New Guinea

### Papua New Guinea Closed Australia Migrant Camp

Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea on April 26 ruled that detaining people at Australian-funded Manus island facility was unconstitutional and illegal as a result Australia's hardline immigration policy was thrown into turmoil. "Respecting this (court) ruling, Papua New Guinea will immediately ask the Australian government to make alternative arrangements for the asylum seekers currently held at the Regional Processing Centre," Prime Minister Peter O'Neill said. Papua New Guinea's former opposition leader Belden Namah had challenged the Manus arrangement in court, claiming that it had violated the rights of asylum seekers. Despite this, Australian immigration minister Peter Dutton remained adamant that none of the 850 or so men held there would come to his country and that the government's policy — designed to deter others wanting to make the risky journey by boat — would not change.

<sup>39</sup> "Jaitley meets Turnbull, talks trade", *The Hindu*, March 31, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/union-finance-minister-arun-jaitley-visit-to-australia-jaitley-meets-turnbull-talks-trade/article8416675.ece>

<sup>40</sup> Charlotte Greenfield and Rebecca Howard, "Panama Papers report alleges New Zealand prime place for rich to hide money", *Reuters*, May 9, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-panama-tax-newzealand-idUSKCN0Y000W>, accessed on May 9, 2016.

“As I have said, and as the Australian government has consistently acted, we will work with our PNG partners to address the issues raised by the supreme court of PNG,” he said in a statement after O’Neill’s decision. Canberra currently has an arrangement with Cambodia, along with Papua New Guinea, to resettle those found to be refugees, although only a handful have taken up the option. However, O’Neill did not set a timeframe for the closure.<sup>41</sup>

### **Papua New Guinea to File Official National Climate Action Plan**

Papua New Guinea filed its new climate action plan under Paris Agreement climate change deal, 2015, with the UN, becoming the first country to do so officially. The Paris Agreement was underpinned by a series of voluntary INDCs from national governments, which set out how they intended to curb emissions and enhance climate resilience. However, with official ratification of the Agreement slated for April at a ceremony in New York, countries are now required to formally lodge their plans with the UN, converting them from ‘intended’ plans into Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement. “I congratulate Papua New Guinea on this first NDC,” said outgoing UN climate change chief Christiana Figueres in a statement.

“Before the UN climate change conference in Paris, the international community had already envisioned an unprecedented response with almost every nation on Earth setting out their preliminary action plans to address climate change. These provide the foundation upon which the world will over time strengthen their ability to keep a global temperature rise well under 2C if not 1.5C, and build resilient societies. Much more remains to be done but NDCs under the Paris Agreement represent one of the next key steps alongside the opening for signature of the Agreement in New York on April 22 en route to it swiftly coming into force.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Supreme Court Judge Arrested in PNG**

A Supreme Court judge in Papua New Guinea was arrested and charged with corruption on April 11. Bernard Sakora was arrested by members of the country’s fraud and anti-corruption squad. After several hours of questioning, Mr Sakora was charged with one count of judicial corruption. The police said that the charge was related to a payment Mr Sakora received from a lawyer at the centre of the scandal surrounding alleged illegal payments to the firm Paraka Lawyers. Mr Sakora failed to declare his interest, and presided over a number of Supreme Court cases, including that involving an arrest warrant for the Prime Minister, Peter O’Neill. However, Mr Sakora denied the charges.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> “Turmoil as Papua New Guinea shuts Australia migrant camp”, *The Times of India*, April 27, 2016, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/Turmoil-as-Papua-New-Guinea-shuts-Australia-migrant-camp/articleshow/52010573.cms>

<sup>42</sup> James Murray, “Papua New Guinea becomes first country to file official national climate action plan”, *Business Green*, March 30, 2016, at <http://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news/2452702/papua-new-guinea-becomes-first-country-to-file-official-national-climate-action-plan>

<sup>43</sup> “PNG Supreme Court judge arrested, charged with corruption”, *Radio New Zealand*, April 11, 2016, at <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/301223/png-supreme-court-judge-arrested,-charged-with-corruption>

### **Attorney-General Ano Pala Arrested by Country's Fraud Squad**

Anti-corruption police in Papua New Guinea arrested the country's Attorney-General Ano Pala on April 12. Ano Pala was picked up and taken in for questioning by PNG's National and Anti-Corruption Fraud squad at Jacksons International Airport in Port Moresby. Police alleged that he misused money intended for his

electorate. "The charges related to him abusing his office and power to apply public funds earmarked for Rigo District in the Central Province for his own use," Papua New Guinea police said. "This arrest is a result of ongoing investigations involving District Services Improvement Program (DSIP) Funds and further arrests will be made soon."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Eric Tiozek, "PNG's Attorney-General Ano Pala arrested by country's fraud squad over misuse of funds", *ABC News*, April 12, 2016, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-12/png-justice-minister-ano-pala-arrested/7320984>



## Centre Activities

1. Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh wrote on Significance of the November 2015 Myanmar Elections in *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 40, Issue 2, March 2016.
2. Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh wrote on Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper: An Indian Perspective in *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol 10, Issue 2, April 2016.
3. Dr. Sampa Kundu wrote on India's ASEAN Approach: Acting East at *The Diplomat*, April 8, 2016
4. Dr. Sampa Kundu wrote on India and the Indian Ocean: A Briefing at *The SARCist*, April 11, 2016
5. A 10-member delegation of National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) of Thailand led by Mr. Vera Urairat, Deputy Secretary General/NSCS visited IDSA on March 2, 2016
6. A delegation of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia visited IDSA on March 22, 2016
7. Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh spoke on political transition in Myanmar during a Monday morning meeting on April 11, 2016.
8. Dr. Sampa Kundu spoke on India's Act East Policy in the Air Force Training, organised at IDSA on March 8, 2016.

## ABOUT US

The Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre focuses on policy-relevant research in respect of the ten ASEAN states, East Timor and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand. The Centre studies India's bilateral and multilateral relations with states of the region with a view to providing contemporary relevance to India's Look East policy. It has a futuristic approach and examines the emerging trends in the regional security architecture. The Centre studies the potential for India's enhanced defence cooperation (including maritime issues) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues with the region. It examines internal developments of countries in this region, especially political transition and the role of the military, and their implications for India. The Centre seeks to promote Track-II institutional linkages with the region.

### **Contributions are invited for:**

Book Review (800 words)

Commentary (900 - 1300 words)

Photo Essay (10-12 photographs, each with a caption,  
accompanied by a 1000 words essay)

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