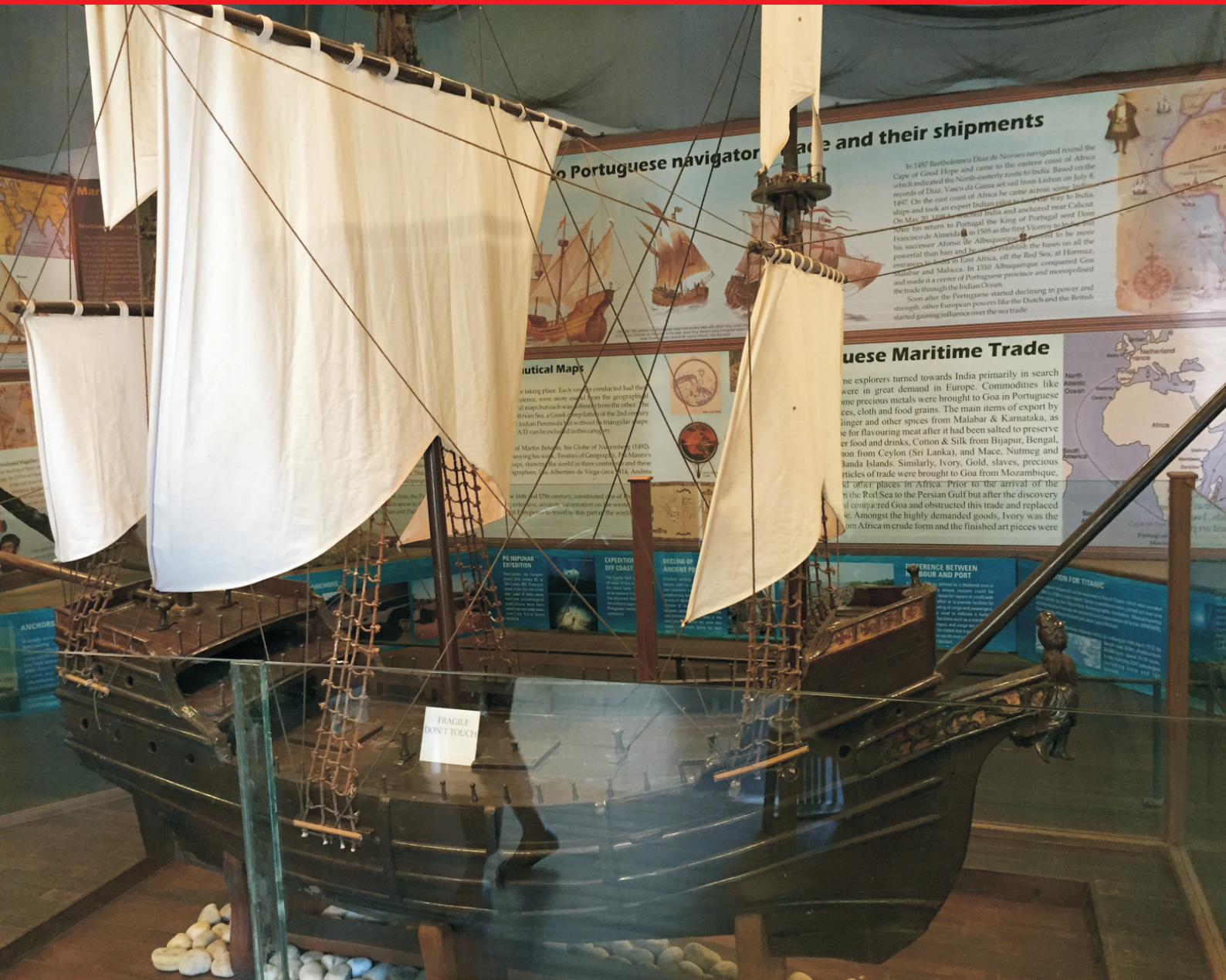


INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



India's Maritime Heritage
Museum in Goa
Photo Courtesy- Udai Bhanu Singh

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CENTRE ACTIVITIES FOR MAY TO JUNE 2017

Editor's Note

There was considerable activity in the months of May and June centred around China's actions in the South China Sea and its One Belt One Road project, which had implications on the region. On the one hand it had reactions from the other major power like the US, Australia and Japan, and on the other, the intra-ASEAN interactions (both positive and negative) were worthy of note. The US continued to engage ASEAN, as in the US-ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Washington in May 2017.

In May, China hosted a Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) which agreed upon the draft framework on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Some of the ASEAN member states showed their willingness to work with China's Belt and Road project. Cambodia did so as it accepted \$240 million aid from China. But Brunei and Thailand's Prime Minister also expressed their willingness to cooperate with China on OBOR. Vietnam-China differences flared up as China cancelled a high level meeting with the Vietnamese side over territorial dispute.

Disunity among ASEAN Member countries became apparent in the skirmishes Vietnam-Indonesia engaged in (near Natuna islands) and Laos and Cambodia got embroiled in border dispute. On the positive side, Malaysia and Philippines cooperated to tackle Islamist militancy. Also Manila hosted the ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces Informal Meeting to coordinate their efforts on important security concerns relating to piracy and terrorism.

Individually, ASEAN Members sought to press on with military modernisation, with Singapore commissioning its LMV and celebrating RSN's Golden Jubilee with its first ever International Maritime Review at Changi Naval Base in May.

Individual country efforts were supplemented with a little help from neighbouring Powers like Japan which offered to donate P-3C patrol crafts to Malaysia for its defence in the South China Sea. Similarly, ASEAN-Australia reaffirmed their Strategic Partnership; and Australia agreed to send Spy Planes to help in Marawi crisis.

India continued to engage the region. Indian Navy participated in the Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise 2017 (SIMBEX-17) in May and also with Indonesia, PNG and Australia. The Australia-India Joint Maritime Exercise (AUSINDEX 2017) and the Australia US Joint Military Exercise (the Talisman Saber 2017) both took place in June but Australia remained out of the Malabar Exercise.

India's emphasis on Act East policy (with greater attention to India's Northeast India) saw the Bhupen Hazarika Bridge linking Arunachal and Assam being inaugurated in May. There were indications that rail connectivity in NE would be improved.

The newstrack has been prepared through the combined effort of two budding scholars Divisha and Upasika. Upasika Singhal has contributed a commentary on the Implications of Vietnamese Prime Minister's visit to the United States.

Udai Bhanu Singh

Implications of Vietnamese Prime Minister's Visit to the US

Upasika Singhal

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On May 31st Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc met US President Donald Trump in Washington. This was the first time a high level meeting occurred between the Vietnamese Prime Minister and the current US President. The meeting mostly focused on trade relations and economic cooperation between the two countries. Ever since Trump torpedoed the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Vietnam has been hoping to foster a strong bilateral relation with the US since it was one of the countries which would have majorly benefited from the agreement. The two leaders agreed to join efforts to boost win-win economic partnership. They emphasised that development cooperation remains a focus in the economic-trade relations between Vietnam and the US. PM Phuc affirmed Vietnam's resolve to press on with economic restructuring and integration into the world, and stepping up the two countries' win-win cooperation in economy, trade and investment. President Trump welcomed the settlement of some prioritised trade issues, including the opening of their markets for each other's agricultural and industrial products and

information technology products and services. The two leaders were unanimous in effectively carrying out the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement to deal with bilateral economic problems in a constructive and fair spirit and to satisfy each side's interests.¹ However this was merely the background to the signalling to the rest of the world. The Vietnamese PM did manage to signal that Vietnam will continue to pursue an independent and self-reliant foreign policy² in the face of ASEAN's uncertainty to having a common approach to China.

The visit also signals pragmatism on both sides. The invitation from Trump and Nguyen's acceptance shows that both the US and Vietnam have decided to let bygones be bygones – a move which is considered bold due to the two countries shared recent history. The visit has also been preceded by a number of favourable events. For instance, Trump agreed to go to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit (APEC) in November. The Naval Engagement Activity (NEA) in July 2016 – an annual port visit to Da Nang by US Navy ships, which began more than a decade ago – marked the 21st anniversary of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the US and Vietnam. These joint activities also aid in

¹ PM Phuc, President Trump talk to enhance Vietnam-US ties, June 1 2017, Sài Gòn Giỏi Phóng, at <http://sggpnews.org.vn/national/pm-phuc-president-trump-talk-to-enhance-vietnam-us-ties-67085.html>

² Vietnam's prime minister starts first US visit, May 29 2017, VnExpress, at <http://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-s-prime-minister-starts-first-us-visit-3591590.html>

fostering mutual understanding, build confidence in the maritime domain, and develop relationships between the people and navies of both nations.³ This year the NEA will be preceded by the fact that the US gifted six *Hamilton* class patrol vessels to the Vietnam coast guard that it had pledged in 2015.⁴ US Senator John McCain, the chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has in fact been pushing for more interaction between the US and Vietnamese navies since last year. In a letter to Vietnamese Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong he mentions that he is “committed to helping build the maritime capacity of the Vietnamese Coast Guard and Navy” and wants to “enhance maritime information sharing and response capabilities throughout the South China Sea”.⁵ All this leads one to come to the conclusion that the US has keen interest in the South China Sea and it will appease and aid Vietnam to flank China from the south and keep it on tenterhooks. Hence, during the visit, Trump did not bring up any sensitive issue such as human rights violations against the Vietnamese press.

The meeting between the US President and the Vietnamese Prime Minister is one of the many high-level meetings that Vietnam has initiated with other powers.

China’s actions in the South China Sea, the Philippines seemingly eating their own words on the issue⁶, and the US exit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership has left Vietnam flustered. With the Malabar starting on the 10th of July, Vietnam has made a shrewd move by meeting both Trump and Shinzo Abe – the leaders of the two permanent member states in the exercise – in one week and having successful talks regarding cooperation with both of them.⁷ This is important since this year China seems particularly threatened by the exercise due to high tensions with India over the Sikkim border, with the US over warships sailing too close to disputed islands in the South China Sea, and with Japan over accusations of China escalating tensions over the disputed Senkaku islands. The overall political climate for China has not been favourable and Vietnam’s talks of cooperation is in attempt to tap into the situation and turn it to its advantage. US has, over time, softened its position on Vietnam by lifting the lethal weapons embargo on it. Vietnam has since then been in talks with the US over its need to boost the country’s fleet of fighter jets, helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft. Analysts say this regional security cooperation in the South China Sea now includes joint naval exercises, and U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels have been allowed to dock for repairs and maintenance in Cam Ranh Bay, a former American deep-water port during

³ 7th annual Naval Engagement Activity Vietnam begins. (September 28 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110137>

⁴ US Gives Vietnam Coast Guard a Boost Ahead of Premier’s Visit, May 30 2017, The Diplomat, at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/05/us-gives-vietnam-coast-guard-a-boost-ahead-of-premiers-visit/>

⁵ McCain Pushing for More U.S. Naval Engagement with Vietnam, May 24 2016, USNI News, at <https://news.usni.org/2016/05/24/mccain-pushing-u-s-naval-engagement-vietnam>

⁶ The Truth About Duterte’s ASEAN South China Sea Blow, May 4 2017, The Diplomat, at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/05/the-truth-about-dutertes-asean-south-china-sea-blow/>

⁷ VN , Japan deepen strategic partnership, June 7 2017, Sài Gòn Giỏi Phóng, at <http://sggpnews.org.vn/national/vn-japan-deepen-strategic-partnership-67180.html>

the Vietnam War.⁸ Vietnam already has a good rapport with India especially after talks on sale of surface-to-air missiles – namely Brahmos and Akash – in February and after the civil nuclear cooperation deal in December last year. With this Vietnam has good relations with all three countries signalling how powerful their navies are in the Indo-Pacific to a certain country whose economy is dependent on energy transported by sea and therefore feels particularly vulnerable with regard to its maritime security.

Vietnam's document on its overall future strategy from 2020 to 2030 states that

Vietnam's strategic environment in the next half decade will witness tensions and the possibility of armed conflict between major powers as a result of the gradual shift towards a more multipolar balance of power. The Asia-Pacific region will witness competition among the major powers, an arms race, and more complicated territorial and maritime disputes.⁹ The document identifies 25 countries with whom cooperation can help Vietnam's position, with additional emphasis given to the US, Japan, India, Russia and Israel. So far Vietnam has worked extensively with most of these countries. Therefore it begs the question, could Vietnam be the key to the China problem?

⁸ A onetime enemy set for a warm White House welcome, May 30 2017, The Washington Times, at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/may/30/nguyen-xuan-phuc-vietnam-prime-minister-to-meet-tr/>

⁹ Military Balance 2017, International Institute for Strategic Studies

Southeast Asia

ASEAN

U.S. engages with ASEAN

On May 4, 2017 the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson hosted the foreign ministers of ASEAN for the US-ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in Washington. The meeting was aimed at reinforcing the strategic relationship that the US and ASEAN share and also to commemorate the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-US relations¹. Tillerson urged the ASEAN nations to implement the UN sanctions on North Korea, who the US believes abuses diplomatic privileges to help fund its arms programs. This comes in light of persistent North Korean efforts to develop a long range nuclear tipped missile capable of reaching the US. He also warned that the US wouldn't shy from passing punitive sanctions against companies and individuals found conducting business with North Korea if the countries don't check themselves. The U.S. deputy assistant of state for East Asia, Patrick Murphy further said that Washington wasn't urging ASEAN to formally cut ties with North Korea but to be aware of where it exceeds its diplomatic needs and to cautiously examine its presence.

Earlier at the United Nations Security

Council meeting held on February 28, Tillerson had asked all countries to suspend or downgrade their diplomatic relations with North Korea. The Secretary also reiterated the shared concerns regarding many of the reclamation processes in the South China Sea and stressed the need for ASEAN members and China to ensure the complete and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea entirely.

On May 3, 2017, a resolution was introduced by Joaquin Castro and Ann Wagner, co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on ASEAN². The Resolution recognised the importance of ASEAN nations in establishing stability, prosperity and peace in South East Asia. In a joint statement, the two stated that ASEAN and the US can address many pressing issues collectively-the threat from North Korea, maritime disputes and even business and human rights. They further emphasised that the ASEAN-US strategic partnership is one of America's most important relationships.

Draft framework on Code of Conduct in the South China Sea

The 14th Senior Officials' Meeting on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was convened on Tuesday, May 16, 2017 in Guiyang between senior officials from China and the ASEAN countries. The two sides reached an agreement on the draft Code of Conduct framework after two days of deliberations.³ Details of the framework were not announced;

¹ Secretary Tillerson meets with the Foreign Ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C., May 4, 2017, available at <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/05/270657.htm>

² Us House underlines value of ties with Asean, May 5, 2017, available at the <http://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/us-house-underlines-value-of-ties-with-asean>

³ ASEAN, China agree on draft framework for code of conduct in the South China Sea, May 22, 2017, available at <http://asianjournal.com/news/asean-china-agree-on-draft-framework-for-code-of-conduct-in-the-south-china-sea>

however spokespersons stated that it would provide a good foundation for upcoming consultations and that all parties have agreed to continuously advance the negotiations further in order to formalise the Code of Conduct soon.

The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs announced on May 19, that the draft framework would be presented for consideration of the Foreign Ministers of China and the ASEAN countries at the Post- Ministerial Conference in Manila scheduled for August this year.

ASEAN Military Chiefs meet at Manila

The Philippines hosted the ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM) from May 17 to May 19, 2017, along with other side meetings. According to the AFP chief General Eduardo Año the meetings were aimed at bolstering the collective experience and capability of ASEAN militaries in combating modern global security challenges and to ensure that they were all on the same page when it comes to their approaches regarding threats of piracy and terrorism⁴.

He further added that these events are seen as a medium to establish the position of ASEAN as a global partner with a fully capable military and as an organisation which responds with consistent cooperation and innovation to local and regional issues. The military leaders are expected to discuss issues of maritime

security, humanitarian assistance, counter terrorism, peacekeeping, etc. Chief of the AFP public affairs office, Colonel Egard Arevalo also stated that these annual meetings provided a platform for the countries to discuss and assess prominent issues and matters of mutual interest in a strategic, comprehensive, positive and productive manner.

Asean partners up to combat transnational crime

The 17th Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime was held in Laos on May 24, 2017. The meeting was attended by delegates from the 10 ASEAN countries and their dialogue partners including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Canada, US and the European Union⁵. The meeting was held to enhance the cooperation between the nations to combat transnational crime by strengthening border security and immigration check points. The recent years have seen an increase in transnational crimes which are a threat for the socio-economic development of the region along with threatening the public and social security of citizens. The delegates discussed future plans to enhance security cooperation to ensure trans-national crimes can decline.

Japanese initiatives to bolster military ties with ASEAN

In a bid to bolster Japan's military ties and influence in South East Asia, on June 12, 2017 Japanese defence firms exhibited their wares to invitees from a military seminar. According

⁴ Chiefs of ASEAN militaries meet in Manila, May 14, 2017, available at <http://www.rappler.com/nation/169783-asean-military-chiefs-meeting-philippines-manila>

⁵ Asean, partners to enhance cooperation in combating transnational crime, May 25, 2017, available at <http://www.india.com/news/agencies/asean-partners-to-enhance-cooperation-in-combating-transnational-crime-2166618/>

to sources, the Ministry of Defence hosted a military technology seminar for selected South East Asian countries, right after the three day Maritime Air Systems and Technologies Asia (MAST) show, in order to ensure attendance. North Korea's recent missile tests have increased tensions in the region; thus the arms exhibition included panel discussions focused on missile defence. The invitees included Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Hideaki Watanabe, head of the Defence Ministry's Acquisition Technology and Logistics agency also hosted a meeting on June 15, 2017 with defence officials from ASEAN countries to discuss potential multi-nation collaboration in sharing equipment and technology. Experts argue that in order to counter China's growing influence in the South China Sea Japan is looking for newer avenues to advance its arms sales and defence collaboration with ASEAN. The military industrial deals are to become a new plank in Japan's diplomatic efforts to engage with the region.

Till recent times Japanese deals were limited to the sale of the TC-90 surveillance aircraft to the Philippines, but now they have been promoting transfer of defence equipment to consolidate their maritime security capabilities and increase their influence in the region.

Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) also invited military officials from the 10 ASEAN nations for a five day trip on board the Izumo- Japan's largest warship⁶. Although the Izumo stopped short of the 9-dash line, which China uses to demarcate its sovereign maritime territory, the outreach to ASEAN is seen as a bridge to build trust. The Izumo is also set to participate in the Malabar Exercise with the US and Indian navies in July 2017.

ASEAN-India

Asean-India partnership reinforced further

On June 22, 2017 an event was organised to commemorate 25 years of the ASEAN-India partnership⁷. Sushma Swaraj, the External Affairs minister gave the keynote address strengthening the Indian diaspora in ASEAN countries. She also encouraged building and facilitating historical and cultural linkages by giving examples of the historical ties that India has shared with the region. She also outlined India's aim to strengthen its relations by advancing its security networks through the strengthening and expansion of strategic partnerships within the region and beyond. The minister also listed issues like terror financing, arms smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering and cyber-crime which both Asean and India have been working together to combat⁸. She also stated that India has been collaborating with Asean to forge a regional

⁶ ASEAN officers take South China Sea tour aboard MSDF's Izumo helicopter carrier, Reuters, June 20, 2017, available at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/20/national/asean-officers-take-south-china-sea-tour-aboard-msdfs-izumo-helicopter-carrier/#.WXWvpXWGPIX>

⁷ Keynote Address by External Affairs Minister on ASEAN-India Partnership, June 22, 2017, available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/28550/Keynote+Address+by+External+Affairs+Minister+on+ASEANIndia+Partnership>

⁸ India, ASEAN working on regional security architecture: Swaraj, June 22, 2017, available at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/india-asean-working-regional-security-architecture-swaraj/>

security architecture which emphasises on peacefully settling disputes, ensuring maritime security, finding collaborative solutions for non-traditional challenges and supports the centrality of Asean in the Asia- Pacific.

Moving towards the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

On May 30th 2017, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs Anurag Bhushan stated that India has actively been engaged in the negotiations for the RCEP, and that the negotiations are in their concluding stage⁹. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership was envisaged as a potential Free Trade Agreement between ASEAN and the six countries with which it has existing free trade agreements. These include China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

Once formalised the RCEP would become the largest trading agreement in the world and would give India and the ten ASEAN countries free trade access to each other's markets thereby expanding their reach, their trade and exports. As of now ASEAN is the fourth largest trading partner for India and India is the seventh largest

trading partner for ASEAN. Bhushan stated that there is far greater trading potential between the two which can be realised by the RCEP. With the US backing out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership the RCEP is being seen as an alternative. The RCEP is scheduled to be concluded and formalised by the end of 2017.

Indian Navy's engagement with ASEAN

The Indian Navy participated in the annual Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise 2017 (SIMBEX-17) in May and then set course for bilateral exercises with Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia. The Indian Naval Ships Shivalik, Sahyadri, Jyoti and Kamorta along with one P8-I Maritime patrol and Anti-Submarine Warfare Aircraft were part of the SIMBEX-17¹⁰.

While addressing a reception on board the Sahyadri and Kamorta docked at the Changi Naval Base, Rear admiral Biswajit Dasgupta, Flag Officer, Commander of the Eastern Fleet stated that India's presence in the Asia Pacific region is a manifestation of India's growing engagement with the ASEAN and other Pacific nations and is thus also seen in furtherance of India's diplomatic initiatives. The preferred method of military engagement between friendly nations, according to Dasgupta, has always been the constructive engagement between navies.

⁹ Cooperation pact with ASEAN likely this year: Official, May 30, 2017, available at <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/cooperation-pact-with-asean-likely-this-year-official/693129/>

¹⁰ Indian Navy to hold exercises with Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia, May 20, 2017, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/indian-navy-to-hold-exercises-with-indonesia-papua-new-guinea-and-australia-3461590.html>

North East India- Act East Policy

Bhupen Hazarika Bridge inaugurated

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 9.15 km long bridge over the Lohit River – a major tributary of the Brahmaputra – in late May. The bridge will connect Assam to Arunachal Pradesh and has been named after Assam’s famous lyricist and singer Bhupen Hazarika. It will reduce the travel time between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh by around four hours where earlier the two areas were connected only through water transportation. The bridge offers a faster and more convenient alternative. Apart from the immediate connectivity benefits, the bridge also serves to assist in rapid movement of India’s defence assets due to the continual incursions by the Chinese army in the area. The Dhola-Sadiya Bridge has been designed to handle the weight of 60-tonne tanks such as the Indian Army’s Arjun and T-72 main battle tanks.¹¹

“Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have huge strategic value to the country. Since the bridge is located close to our border with China, it will help quick movement

of military troops and artillery in times of conflict,” Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said.¹²

Prime Minister Modi also emphasised the effect building the bridge will have on the Act East Policy. He said that he wanted to see the North-East to become a trade hub for South-East Asia, and to be more connected to the rest of India. For achieving this more stress is being laid on the development and infrastructure of the area.¹³

Better railway connectivity to be expected in the North-East

After the Centre announced its plans to improve road connectivity within the North-East, it has now announced new plans to develop railway connectivity in the area as well. Union Minister Rajen Gohain said that the Centre plans to expand the number of double track railway lines as well as the number of trains running. So far most of the work is concentrated in Assam and, according to Gohain, connectivity between Brahmaputra valley in Assam and Barak valley near the Assam-Manipur border has improved. Furthermore 29 more trains will be introduced in the North-East region. The plan also envisages a spike in recruitment of local youths in the grade III and IV posts through NE based examination.¹⁴

Union Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu on a two day visit to the North East said that currently projects worth Rs. 90,000 crore are being executed in the region. Prabhu also laid

¹¹ India’s Longest Bridge, Near China Border, Can Withstand A 60-Tonne Battle Tank, May 14 2017, NDTV at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pm-narendra-modi-to-inaugurate-indias-longest-bridge-on-may-26-near-china-border-1693293>

¹² Narendra Modi to inaugurate India’s longest bridge in Assam near China border, May 14 2017, Livemint at <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/QsIxtkTlc5PmtgRRskgrbM/Narendra-Modi-to-inaugurate-Indias-longest-bridge-in-Assam.html>

¹³ PM gifts India’s longest river bridge to N-E, May 27 2017, The Hitavada at <http://thehitavada.com/Encyc/2017/5/27/PM-gifts-India-s-longest-river-bridge-to-N-E.aspx>

¹⁴ North East Region will have better rail connectivity: Gohain, May 11 2017, Outlook India <https://www.outlookindia.com/newsscroll/north-east-region-will-have-better-rail-connectivity-gohain/1048368>

the foundation stone for construction for construction of a 26-km-long new broad gauge railway line from Mukongselek in Assam to Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh. He also inaugurated the new Shatabdi Express between Naharlagun and Guwahati.¹⁵

Japan to build war memorial in Manipur

Japanese ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu announced Japan's intentions to build a war memorial in remembrance of the Japanese soldiers who lost their lives in the battles of Kohima and Imphal in 1944. The war memorial will be in Maibam Lokpa Ching which was the battleground between the British and Japanese troops. The battles were allegedly so fierce that it was named "the Stalingrad of the East". An estimated 30,000 Japanese soldiers died in the battles and while there is a war cemetery in Kohima for the 1,420 allied troops, there are none for the Japanese.¹⁶

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh said, "Many of the Japanese who came and fought in Imphal and Kohima could not return home. The government shall extend all possible help to Japan in this regard."¹⁷

Brunei

Brunei takes softer approach towards China

Brunei has been one of the Southeast Asian countries to challenge China's claims over the South China Sea. However that has not stopped Brunei from being reconciliatory towards China. Brunei's Second Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Lim Jock Seng attended the Belt and Road Forum for Economic Cooperation in mid-May. There, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China hopes to expand its cooperation with Brunei on the Belt and Road project in order to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea. Lim said efforts should be made to enhance bilateral pragmatic cooperation in trade, investment and other fields under the framework of the Belt and Road, adding that Brunei will continue to play a positive role in properly handling the South China Sea issue.¹⁸ Even the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) signalled a softer approach to China in the RBAF's 56th anniversary when Brunei's Deputy Minister of Defense Abdul Aziz said "Such maritime tensions will continue to be a political issue which for Brunei Darussalam is best dealt with consultations," he added further, "The best way for RBAF is to look for opportunities to enhance practical cooperation that can further enhance

¹⁵ Projects worth about Rs. 90,000 crore being executed in northeast India: Suresh Prabhu, May 7 2017, Economic Times at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/railways/projects-worth-about-rs-90000-crore-being-executed-in-northeast-india-suresh-prabhu/articleshow/58563059.cms>

¹⁶ Manipur: Japan to build a war museum in the state, May 25 2017, The Wire at <https://thewire.in/140034/northeast-dispatch/>

¹⁷ Japan to build war museum in Manipur's Maibam Lokpa Ching, May 22 2017, The Statesmen at <http://www.thestatesman.com/india/japan-to-build-war-museum-in-manipur-s-maibam-lokpa-ching-1495395219.html>

¹⁸ China, Brunei to further cooperation under B&R Initiative, May 12 2017, Xinhua Net at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/12/c_136277585.htm

trust building among claimants as well as addressing the more pressing non-traditional security threats”.¹⁹

Cambodia

China-Cambodia bonhomie continues

Cambodia again raised alarm bells this month when it accepted China’s aid of \$240 million. The funds are allegedly helping Cambodia build schools, fund telecommunications and clean water projects in rural areas. The aid comes with the promise from Cambodia’s side to work together with China on the One Belt One Road initiative. The countries also have set the goal to have two million Chinese tourists in Cambodia by 2020.²⁰

Apart from funding aid, China and Cambodia are witnessing high level visits such as the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visiting Cambodia and Prime Minister Hun Sen visiting China in mid-May. The Chinese Premier in his visit urged cooperation with Cambodia in multiple areas including industrial capacity, investment, agriculture, education, tourism, defence, and law enforcement. According to the Premier, China is also ready to maintain high-level exchanges and strategic communication with Cambodia, promote people-to-people ties, and strengthen coordination on

international and regional issues. For his part, Hun Sen said that his country is willing to deepen cooperation with China in trade, investment, infrastructure, law enforcement, security and other areas, while pledging to advance bilateral friendly relations to a higher level. Cambodia will continue to actively promote China-ASEAN ties and Lancang-Mekong cooperation, and safeguard regional peace, stability and development, Hun Sen said.²¹

Cambodia’s biggest attraction towards Chinese aid stems from the fact that the aid comes with “no strings attached” unlike aid coming from Western countries with conditions to further democracy and rights. Nevertheless, Cambodia continues to pay back China in its own way. In September 2016, Cambodia announced that it will take China’s help to reform its judiciary. In April 2017 China and Cambodia signed a memorandum of understanding to boost cooperation between their state information agencies. Cambodian information ministry officials will travel to China on “educational exchanges” as part of the agreement. Cambodian journalists, presumably from state news services or Cambodian People’s Party-aligned media, will also be given scholarships to study in the People’s Republic. China has also vowed to help Cambodia modernise its military and was its top arms supplier in 2013.²²

However despite the obvious pivot towards China, Cambodia still insists that it is non-aligned and neutral to both the US and China.

¹⁹ Defense diplomacy remains Brunei force’s key strategy to resolve maritime rows: deputy minister, May 31 2017, Xinhua Net at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/31/c_136328866.htm

²⁰ China gives \$240m in aid, May 18 2017, Khmer Times at <http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/38482/china-gives-240m-in-aid/>

²¹ China, Cambodia vow to enhance cooperation, promote regional stability, May 16 2017, Xinhuanet, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/16/c_136289529.htm

²² Cambodia looks to China for ‘governance’ guidance, May 13 2017, Asia Times, at <http://www.atimes.com/article/cambodia-looks-china-governance-guidance/>

As Foreign Affairs Minister Prak Sokhonn told a crowd of over 200 students at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, “We will stay neutral and unaligned . . . Non-alliance does not bring harm to us . . . We have good relations with the United States; we have good relations with China, but are not allied to China or pro-China.” Sokhonn also mentioned the difficult times Cambodia had by allying with major powers.²³ Although he didn’t mention any country by name many felt it was hinted at the US-backed Lon Nol regime which led to the formation of the Khmer Rouge.

Khmer Rouge Trials coming to a close

The Khmer Rouge tribunal or the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) announced that the last day of closing statements will be on June 22nd. The trials are charging two important figures from the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-79. Khieu Samphan, the regime’s 85-year-old former head of state, 74-year-old Kang Kek Iew, and 90-year-old Nuon Chea, right-hand man to the group’s late chief, Pol Pot, are being tried on charges including war crimes, genocide, rape and murder.²⁴ While most of the accused have been indicted in 2010 there have been some outstanding issues

that the ECCC wants to resolve. The counts have been so numerous against the accused that the trials were separated on the basis of issues and crimes committed to quicken the process of the trials. The accused too are so aged that the prosecutors feared they would die before the culmination of the trials.²⁵ Some of the accused such as Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith died before their trials could be concluded whereas most of the regime’s leaders such as Pol Pot died before a trial could even begin.

The Khmer Rouge’s brutal policies during the regime’s 1975-79 reign are blamed for the deaths of 1.7 million Cambodians from execution, starvation and inadequate medical care. Co-prosecutor Chea Leang on Wednesday described Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge as a “slave state” in which everyone had to toil on huge infrastructure projects or in the rice fields from before dawn until well into the night, and any attempt at escape was punished by death.²⁶ The accused claim that they had no knowledge of the suffering and the crimes that were being committed under the regime. Khieu Samphan acknowledged that while people suffered, the Communist Party of Kampuchea never exterminated people. Samphan even went on to say that he categorically rejects the term ‘murderer’ being used against him. He claimed that all accusations against the Khmer Rouge were Vietnamese propaganda.

In contrast, Kaing Guek Eav, better known by the alias Duch, who ran the Khmer Rouge’s

²³ Non-aligned? Cambodia is neutral: Sokhonn, May 31 2017, The Phnom Penh Post, at <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/non-aligned-cambodia-neutral-sokhonn>

²⁴ Prosecutors give summation at trial of Khmer Rouge leaders, June 14 2017, Times Colonist, at <http://www.timescolonist.com/prosecutors-give-summation-at-trial-of-khmer-rouge-leaders-1.20579166>

²⁵ Top Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan denies Cambodia genocide at close of UN-backed trial, June 23 2017, The Straits Times, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/top-khmer-rouge-leader-khieu-samphan-denies-cambodia-genocide-at-close-of-un-backed>

²⁶ Prosecutors give summation at trial of Khmer Rouge leaders, June 14 2017, Times Colonist, at <http://www.timescolonist.com/prosecutors-give-summation-at-trial-of-khmer-rouge-leaders-1.20579166>

notorious S-21 torture prison, at times displayed remorse and engaged with the questions put to him by his victims, giving written responses in some cases. In one such response, Duch, the first person convicted by the tribunal, wrote to two civil parties to apologise that he had mistakenly rejected their claim that their relative was imprisoned at S-21. Duch acknowledged that their relative “must have suffered inhumane hardship”, and said “I do not seek any excuse to exonerate myself”.²⁷

Nuon Chea, on the other hand, made little to no comments and, through his lawyer, decried the tribunal as a “deeply flawed and broken institution” and a product of “victor’s justice”.²⁸

East Timor

East Timor enters negotiations for permanent borders with Australia

East Timor has announced that it will tear up an oil and gas treaty with Australia in light of the treaty being unfairly in advantage to Australia and will re-enter negotiations with Australia

regarding their shared maritime borders. The Treaty on Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea had temporarily frozen negotiations on a permanent border and was vying to divide the revenue from a lucrative oil and gas reserve called the Greater Sunrise fields on a 50:50 basis. However Australia was caught in an espionage scandal where it was revealed that the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) had bugged the Timorese cabinet room enabling the ASIS to gain access to top-secret information and use it to their advantage for the ongoing negotiations.²⁹

Since then East Timor has been pushing for an equidistant maritime border which will result in the Greater Sunrise oil and gas fields to be completely within Timorese territory. East Timor’s President Jose Ramos-Horta believes that the demands of his country are fair and just. East Timor has been a sovereign country for only 17 years and is still trying to be economically stable. The gas and oil field would prove to be a great stabiliser for the economy.³⁰ However energy security has become a major political issue in Australia in recent months with a potential gas shortage looming in parts of the country. It would serve in the best interests for both countries to renegotiate and reach a win-win solution.³¹

²⁷ No apologies: Khmer Rouge Tribunal hears defiant final words from accused, 26 June 2017, The Phnom Penh Post, at <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/no-apologies-khmer-rouge-tribunal-hears-defiant-final-words-accused>

²⁸ ‘We did not exterminate our people’: Defiant Khieu Samphan gives final statements at Khmer Rouge tribunal, June 23 2017, The Phnom Penh Post, at <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/we-did-not-exterminate-our-people-defiant-khieu-samphan-gives-final-statements-khmer-rouge>

²⁹ East Timor tears up oil and gas treaty with Australia after Hague dispute, Jan 9 2017, ABC News, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-09/east-timor-tears-up-oil-and-gas-treaty-with-australia/8170476>

³⁰ East Timor wants a ‘just’ border with Australia: Ramos-Horta, May 7 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald, at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/east-timor-wants-a-just-border-ramoshorta-20170507-gvzws1.html>

³¹ Jose Ramos-Horta says new East Timorese president will push for new maritime boundary with Australia, May 11 2017, ABC News, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-11/east-timor-president-to-push-for-new-maritime-boundary/8514800>

Indonesia

Joint Maritime Patrol with India

Under the 29th India-Indonesia Co-ordinated Patrol (Ind-Indo CORPAT), the Indian Navy and the Indonesia Navy conducted a joint maritime patrol. The exercises were envisaged to help both countries to fight maritime disturbances like illegal fishing, narcotics, smuggling of weapons and human trafficking³². This exercise was especially significant as the Indian and Indonesian ocean borders 10 other nations. The Co-ordinated Patrol also aims to enhance mutual understanding and the mutual operability between the navies of the two countries. The Indonesian navy warship KRI Sutedi Senoputra was a part of the patrol along with an Indonesian Maritime Patrol Aircraft. The Indian delegation included the naval warships Karmuk and Dornier. The patrol was conducted from May 9 to May 25.

Skirmish with Vietnam over disputed waters

According to Rifky Effendi Hardijanto, Secretary General of Indonesia's Fisheries Ministry, on May 21, 2017 an Indonesian sea patrol intercepted five Vietnamese fishing boats with 55 crew members as they entered Indonesian waters near the Natuna Islands. Reports suggest that a Vietnamese coast guard allegedly tried to

forcibly free the fishing boats and their detained crew. It is also alleged that a Vietnamese coast guard vessel also rammed and sunk one of the boats which was being escorted to an Indonesian base on the Batam Island³³.

The maritime borders between the two countries often lead to confusions over jurisdiction since Indonesia defines its borders via the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) while Vietnam uses the Continental Shelf. Hardijanto stated in a news conference that despite what media suggests the two nations have agreed to settle the dispute by diplomatic means. Vietnam's Ambassador Hoang Anh Tuan stated that the diplomatic machineries of the two countries were in touch and are working together to ensure such a case doesn't reoccur. Indonesia is seeking Vietnam's assurance that the latter would not enter its territorial waters. The two countries have set up a joint investigation of the incident and have also decided to discuss their maritime border issues.

Bilateral meeting with China

The President of Indonesia Joko Widodo and the President of China Xi Jinping held bilateral talks during the Silk Road Summit held in Beijing on May 14, 2017. President Widodo led a delegation of 11 cabinet ministers and was seeking investment opportunities for infrastructural development in Indonesia as part of the Maritime Silk Road. He stated that the Belt and Road initiative would create a fresh momentum for cooperation between China and Indonesia.

³² Indonesia, India set to conclude joint maritime patrol, May 24, 2017, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/05/23/indonesia-india-set-to-conclude-joint-maritime-patrol.html>

³³ Indonesia, Vietnam to probe reported skirmish in disputed waters, May 23, 2017, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-vietnam-fishing-idUSKBN18J1ND>

Three deals were successfully signed in the meeting³⁴. The Foreign Ministers of the two countries Retno Marsudi of Indonesia and Wang Yi of China signed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership deal for 2017-2021. The Indonesian Minister for National Development and Planning Bambang Brodjonegoro and the Chinese trade Minister Zhong Shan signed an agreement to enhance the economic and technical cooperation between the two countries.

Indonesian state owned companies – Wijaya Karya (WIKAJK) and Jasa Marga (JSMRJK) formed the PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China (KCIC), a consortium with the China Railway International Co Ltd to build Indonesia's first high speed railway. They signed a loan worth \$4.5bn with the China Development Bank. The loan is expected to cover 75% of the total costs which are expected to rise upto \$6bn. During the bilateral meeting President Jokowi stated that Indonesia was keen for further cooperating in China's Belt and Road initiatives and showed special interest in partnering with China on projects like the integrated economic corridor of North Sumatra or the port facilities at the Kuala Tanjung and North Sulawesi regions.

Laos

Laos and Cambodia get embroiled in border dispute

Troops from Laos and Cambodia continue to have a tense face-off in northern Siem Pang district since February. Cambodia has alleged that Lao troops crossed into the Cambodian border while building a border road whereas Laos has maintained that the crossover occurred in an undemarcated area. However despite complaints being made by both sides the national-level authority of both countries have chosen to remain silent on the issue. When the dispute broke out in February Cambodian Minister for Border Affairs called the situation normal. "When they build, we stop them; when we build, they stop us, but we discuss with each other, reach an understanding," he said, adding more than 80 percent of the countries' border had been defined. Such border skirmishes have indeed occurred before.³⁵ For example in April last year Cambodia objected to Laos building a military base on the border in the Thala Barivat district. However Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen dismissed the conflict as a rumour and boasted about the countries good relations with each other.³⁶

³⁴ Jokowi-Xi bilateral at Silk Road Summit, May 15, 2017, available at <http://asiahouse.org/jokowi-xi-bilateral-silk-road-summit/>

³⁵ Border row amid state visit by Laos, February 22 2017, The Phnom Penh Post, at <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/border-row-amid-state-visit-laos>

³⁶ Dispute with Laos persists, May 15 2017, The Phnom Penh Post, at <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/dispute-laos-persists>

Malaysia

Malaysia collaborates with Philippines and Indonesia to tackle IS presence

Marawi, on the southern island in Philippines, has been under siege for weeks following a shock invasion by Islamic militants loyal to Abu Sayyaf commander Isnilon Hapilon in May.³⁷ The conflict in the city of Marawi has raised fears that the Islamic State group's violent ideology is gaining a foothold in the Philippines' restive south, where Muslim separatists have fought for greater autonomy for decades. The situation has neighbours Indonesia and Malaysia worried about a spill over effect. Both countries are now looking to cooperate with Philippines and coordinate patrols to tackle the situation in Marawi. "The main objective of this initiative is to ensure that militant threats such as the Islamic State (IS) do not use the Sulu Sea to gain entry into our countries, more so following the Marawi city incident," said Malaysian Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein. He was joined by his counterparts from Indonesia and the Philippines, Ryamizard Ryacudu and

Delfin Negrillo Lorenzan³⁸ on Indonesia's Tarakan Island in northern Borneo, just across the border from Sabah, Malaysia. He said they'll discuss increasing security and signing an agreement to step up joint patrols.³⁹ Indonesia is particularly concerned with the situation due to the country having an 87 percent Muslim population.

Since early last year, dozens of Indonesians and Malaysians have been abducted by armed men linked to the notoriously violent Abu Sayyaf rebel group in the Sulu Sea. Abu Sayyaf claims to promote an independent Islamic state comprising part of Mindanao Island and the Sulu Archipelago in the Philippines. Besides kidnappings for ransom, it has engaged in bombings, assassination and extortion, making it one of the Philippines' most serious security threats.⁴⁰

The Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia have agreed to pool intelligence and tackle militant financing as fears grow that protracted fighting in a southern Philippine city could be the prelude to an Islamic State (IS) infiltration of the region. Foreign ministers and defence officials of the three neighbouring countries agreed to work together to share information, track communications, and crack down on the flow of arms, fighters, and money, amid what experts say is the biggest security threat facing South-East Asia in decades.⁴¹

³⁷ Residents fleeing Marawi saw around 100 bodies, Philippines official says, June 16 2017, CNN, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/16/asia/philippines-marawi-isis-dead/index.html>

³⁸ Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines launch Trilateral Maritime Patrol, June 19 2017, The Star Online, at <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/06/19/malaysia-indonesia-and-the-philippines-launch-trilateral-maritime-patrol/>

³⁹ Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines to join forces vs militants, June 13 2017, Philippine Daily Inquirer, at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/157932/indonesia-malaysia-philippines-join-forces-vs-militants>

⁴⁰ Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines to begin joint patrols next week, June 13 2017, ABS-CBN, at <http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/06/13/17/indonesia-malaysia-philippines-to-begin-joint-patrols-next-week>

⁴¹ Islamic State: Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia pledge to thwart penetration of South-East Asia, June 23 2017, ABC News, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-23/se-asian-countries-pledge-to-stop-islamic-state-penetration/8644792>

Japan offers patrol aircrafts to Malaysia

In response to Malaysia's request Japan will donate P-3C patrol aircrafts to step up the region's defence in the South China Sea. The two countries are among a number in the region stepping up defence cooperation against what they see as Beijing's aggressive stance on the high seas. China claims most of the South China Sea - a resource-rich region scattered with hundreds of reefs and small islands - where the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have claims.⁴²

The Diet is currently weighing revisions to the foundational law of the Ministry of Defense that would allow equipment to be given to other nations at no cost. Currently, some form of compensation is legally required for any national asset. Malaysia will likely be the first beneficiary once that change is made, receiving P-3C patrol aircraft previously used by the Maritime Self-Defense Force.

P-3Cs, developed by Lockheed Martin of the U.S., are equipped with radar and other capabilities letting them detect and monitor suspicious ships and submarines. Kawasaki Heavy Industries manufactured the aircraft under a license agreement for a time, though that production has since ended. The Maritime Self-Defense Force has 60 or so of the aircraft in operation, and plans to retire

those that have logged around 15,000 hours in flight.⁴³

Myanmar

Suu Kyi begins second round of peace talks with ethnic groups

Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi has opened a new round of talks aimed at reviving a stuttering peace process after months of intense regional fighting. Hundreds of representatives from some of Myanmar's biggest ethnic groups gathered in the capital city of Naypyidaw on Wednesday for a five-day conference. The discussions are Suu Kyi's second attempt to end fighting in the country's troubled frontier regions, where various ethnic groups have been waging war against the state for almost seven decades. The previous round of negotiations, which took place in August 2016 and was organised by the Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), was welcomed with great optimism by many, including the then United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. But the latest talks have been met with some scepticism as there has been little progress since Suu Kyi took power more than a year ago.⁴⁴

Since then increased clashes in the north between ethnic armed groups and the military have made the prospect of peace seem even more distant than it did a mere nine months ago while a lack of clarity about the process has instilled uncertainty among the more than 120,000 people who are still internally displaced

⁴² Japan to donate patrol aircraft to Malaysia: Report, May 6 2017, The Straits Times, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/japan-to-donate-patrol-aircraft-to-malaysia-report>

⁴³ Japan seeks to give patrol planes to Malaysia, May 5 2017, Nikkei Asian Review, at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Japan-seeks-to-give-patrol-planes-to-Malaysia>

⁴⁴ Myanmar's Suu Kyi opens fresh round of peace talks, May 24 2017, Al Jazeera, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/myanmar-suu-kyi-opens-fresh-peace-talks-170524045940849.html>

by fighting that first flared back up in 2011. Dubbed the 21st Century Panglong conference after a long-defunct 1947 agreement between ethnic groups and Aung San Suu Kyi's father, Aung San, the talks are aimed at ending decades of conflict plaguing Myanmar since independence in 1948, ideally through the establishment of a federal union. After winning elections in 2015 and coming to power the next year, she said establishing peace was her main priority. But the handling of negotiations, which used a nationwide cease-fire agreement signed by eight ethnic armed organizations under the previous administration as a starting point, has been bumpy.⁴⁵

India to look into movement in the Indo-Myanmar border

Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat, on a four-day visit to Myanmar, met the country's iconic leader Aung San Suu Kyi and held talks with the top military leadership to boost defence and security cooperation between the two countries in late May. He also met Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. Gen Rawat inspected a Guard of Honour accompanied by Senior General Soe Win, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar Armed Forces.⁴⁶ The meeting was held in the wake of

considerable international pressure on India to take in Rohingya refugees fleeing atrocities in Myanmar.

In India, the Union Home Ministry has constituted another committee to examine methods to curb the misuse of free movement along the Myanmar border, indicating a significant shift in India's policy towards Myanmar, a friendly country, with which it shares unfenced borders and unhindered movement of people across the border. Home Minister Rajnath Singh, who was on a two-day visit to Mizoram, said a committee headed by Rina Mitra, Special Secretary-Internal Security, was being constituted to "examine the present rules and regulations adopted by the border States for implementation of free movement regime."⁴⁷

Mr Singh said on Twitter, "Free movement regime is being misused by militants and trans-border criminals who smuggle weapons, contraband goods and fake Indian currency notes. Taking advantage of the free-movement regime, occasionally they enter India, commit crimes and escape to their relatively safer hideouts." Since the NDA government came to power, this is the second time a committee is being constituted to study the free movement across the Myanmar border.⁴⁸

Mr Singh also asked the Assam Rifles personnel to take extreme precaution while guarding the porous Indo-Myanmar border so that India's

⁴⁵ Aung San Suu Kyi Opens Second Round of Myanmar Peace Talks, May 24 2017, Voice of America, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/aung-san-suu-kyi-opens-second-round-myanmar-peace-talks/3868567.html>

⁴⁶ Army Chief Bipin Rawat meets Aung Suu Kyi, military leaders in Myanmar, May 29 2017, The Indian Express at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/army-chief-bipin-rawat-meets-aung-suu-kyi-military-leaders-in-myanmar-4679690/>

⁴⁷ Panel to study free movement along Myanmar border, June 12 2017, The Hindu, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/panel-to-study-free-movement-along-myanmar-border/article18967743.ece>

⁴⁸ Ibid

cordial relations with the neighbouring country do not get hurt.⁴⁹

Philippines

Australia to send Spy Planes to help in Marawi crisis

On June 19, 2017 Australia agreed to send the Philippines two surveillance planes to tackle the Islamist rebels who have declared the town of Marawi as their own Islamic territory. The planes are the AP-3C Orion aircraft for reconnaissance which will facilitate pin-pointing locations of Maute group fighters⁵⁰.

The Australian Defence Minister Marise Payne stated that the regional threat from terrorism particularly from Daesh and other foreign fighters was a direct threat to Australia and its interests. Australian help is being seen as crucial for the Philippines as the Maute fighters and their affiliates seem to have better preparedness, resources and combat capability as has been evidenced during the weeks of tension and fighting.

Philippines ends funding agreement with the European Union

The European Union's delegation to the Philippines confirmed on May 18, 2017

that the Philippine government had decided to end its P13.8-B funding agreement with the European Union. According to Franz Jessen the EU ambassador to Philippines the decision would cost them grants worth 250 million Euros⁵¹.

Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said that the Philippines was rejecting aid from the EU in order to prevent interference into their internal affairs. Political commentators see this move as a result of the harsh treatment that President Duterte's war on drugs received from European countries, including a joint resolution passed in March 2017, by the European Parliament for investigating the unlawful killings and violations. Duterte's Philippines is keen on cutting ties with the US and the EU and has been inching closer to China, who recently promised heavy investments under their Belt and Road initiatives.

Duterte to sponsor Turkey and Mongolia's bid to become members of ASEAN

According to reports, Turkey and Mongolia have shown interest in becoming members of ASEAN. The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Mongolian Prime Minister Jargaltulga Erdeneba reportedly spoke to President Rodrigo Duterte of Philippines on the sidelines of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, China which the three leaders were attending⁵².

⁴⁹ Home Minister Rajnath Singh asks Assam Rifles to take precautions along Myanmar border, June 13 2017, The Economic Times, at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/home-minister-rajnath-singh-asks-assam-rifles-to-take-precautions-along-myanmar-border/articleshow/59126809.cms>

⁵⁰ Australia to send spy planes to help Philippines fight militants, June 23, 2017, available at <http://nypost.com/2017/06/23/australia-to-send-spy-planes-to-help-philippines-fight-militants/>

⁵¹ Philippines ends P13.8-B funding from European Union, May 18, 2017, available at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/05/18/1701193/philippines-ends-p13.8-b-funding-deal-european-union>

⁵² Duterte on Turkey, Mongolia joining ASEAN: 'Yes, why not?', May 16, 2017, available at <http://www.rappler.com/nation/170013-duterte-turkey-mongolia-asean-member>

During a news conference on his arrival in Davao city President Duterte stated that they made the request to him since the Philippines is chairing the ASEAN this year. He also stated that he was willing to endorse and sponsor their entry into ASEAN. Reports also suggest that the plan was questioned by the State Counselor of Myanmar Aung San Suu Kyi who highlighted the physio-geographic prerequisites for nations to seek ASEAN membership and whether Turkey and Mongolia met that criterion. Duterte responded that there was ambivalence regarding Turkey's position whether it is a part of Asia, or Europe or a bridge from Asia to Europe.

According to the ASEAN charter admission to ASEAN is based on various criteria out of which location in the recognised geographical region of South East Asia is important. Mongolia is bordered by China and Russia and Turkey straddles Europe and Asia, neither country can geographically be considered a part of South East Asia.

Singapore

The RSN Commissioned its First Littoral Mission Vessel

On May 5, 2017 the Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong commissioned the Republic of Singapore Navy's first Littoral Mission Vehicle named the RSS Independence. This 80m platform, with

a displacement of 1,250t is first of a set of eight surface platforms that are meant to replace the Fearless-class patrol vessels of the RSN by 2020. The LMVs will be used for coastal security, maritime patrolling and surveillance missions. They can also be configured via mission packages to run humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and search and rescue operations. The newly commissioned RSS Independence will operate with the 182 Squadron out of the Tuas Naval Base as part of the RSN's Maritime Security Task Force.

The Ministry of Defence Singapore awarded the contract for these LMV's to ST Engineering on January 30, 2013. The Keel for the first vessel was laid on September 11, 2014.

The LMV's are more mission flexible than their predecessors and have enhanced sea faring capabilities, and increased endurance with a small crew capacity. They have advanced the operating efficiency by increased levels of automation and remote monitoring, which has reduced the manning crew from 30 to 23. The RSS Independence is armed with one Oto Melara 76mm main gun, two Oto Hitrole 12.7 mm remote controlled weapon stations and one Rafael 25 mm Typhoon gun system. The LMV has the MBDA's VL Mica anti-air missile system for protection against aircraft and precision guided munitions which is deployed via its 12-cell vertical launching system (VLS)⁵³.

The RSS Independence was at display as a part of Singapore's delegation at the RSN's International Maritime Review on May 15, 2017. As of 2017, the 5th LMV is under construction.

⁵³ Singapore commissions first Littoral Mission Vessel, May 5, 2017, available at <http://www.janes.com/article/70105/singapore-commissions-first-littoral-mission-vessel>

The Republic of Singapore Navy celebrates its Golden Jubilee

In order to commemorate its 50th year, the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) planned out several events in 2017 including the first ever International Maritime Review that was held at the Changi Naval Base from May 15, 2017. The RSN hosted more than 70 distinguished military personnel from 44 nations including 30 chiefs of navy and directors of coast guards along with over 40 flag rank officers and more than 6,000 other attendees. There were 46 ships in attendance at the review comprising of 28 warships from 20 foreign navies, 16 warships from the RSN along with 2 Shark-class Police Coast Guard Boats.

The foreign vessels included the Japanese Helicopter Carrier Izumo-class JS Izumo, the Russian guided missile cruiser Slava-class RFS Varyag, the Chinese Jiang Kai II-class PLAN Huang Shan, the United States Arleigh Burke-class USS Sterett and others from the ASEAN countries, Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, France, Bangladesh, Australia and the Republic of Korea. The Shivalik-class INS Sahyadri and the Kamorta-class INS Kamorta were India's representatives at the maritime review⁵⁴. The Indian Navy stated in a statement that their participation underscores India's peaceful presence and solidarity with friendly and harmonious countries to ensure good order in the maritime domain.

As part of the group sail the warships also partook in the Western Pacific Naval

Symposium Multilateral Sea Exercise, led by Singapore in exercising the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea. This code was signed in 2014 by 21 members to provide a framework for military vessels in order to reduce the probability and risk of incidents at sea.

In conjunction the RSN also hosted the IMDEX –International Maritime Defence Exhibition Asia 2017 where 230 exhibitors from across the world took part, and the International Maritime Security, as well as the International Naval Engineering Conference. According to the Ministry of Defence Singapore such conferences and exercises provide a platform for navies and maritime enforcement agencies to come together and forge cooperation. According to naval experts by hosting events of such scale the RSN is highlighting its use of 'Naval Diplomacy' which is seen to be critical for their security interests. The President of Singapore Tony Tan Keng Yam stated that being a maritime nation it is crucial for the RSN to be committed and capable of protecting its interests and its sea lanes of communication. He believes that working with like-minded navies from the region would help build mutual trust and respect and together they could provide a safe maritime environment for all.

India-Singapore Joint naval Exercise SIMBEX-2017

The 24th edition of the Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise-SIMBEX was held from May 18 to May 24, 2017. The SIMBEX 17 was a week-long bilateral exercise between the Republic of Singapore Navy and the Indian Navy wherein they conducted a series of advanced naval warfare drills including air defence exercises and live gun firings.

⁵⁴ First International Maritime Review ends on high note, May 16, 2017, available at, <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/first-international-maritime-review-ends-on-high-note>

The Singaporean delegation included two frigates the RSS Formidable and the RSS Supreme, and the missile corvette the RSS Victory. It was also the first time the Singapore's F 15SG fighter jets took part. The Republic of Singapore Air Force also deployed two F-16 D+ fighter aircrafts and a Fokker-50 maritime patrol aircraft. The Indian delegation included the two frigates INS Sahyadri and INS Shivalik, the corvette INS Kamorta, the oiler INS Jyoti and a P8-I Maritime patrol aircraft.

The Indian Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sunil Lanba PVSM, AVSM, ADC also visited Singapore on an official tour for the International Maritime Review and SIMBEX⁵⁵. He also held discussions with the Defence Minister of Singapore, the Chief of Defence Forces and the Chief of the Singaporean Navy along with bilateral talks with the Chiefs of other Navies who partook in the International Maritime Review. According to the CO RSS Formidable Lieutenant Colonel Albert Khoo, the SIMBEX has advanced in its scope and complexity beyond its traditional emphasis since it was initiated in 1994, to include elements of maritime security and anti-air, and anti-surface warfare. From a serial based exercise it has become a mission based exercise which includes threat based scenarios⁵⁶. The exercises not only deepen the defence cooperation between the two countries but also increase the capabilities of the two

navies to work together to plan and execute warfare missions.

Thailand

Development in Thailand to be linked with OBOR

The Prime Minister of Thailand Prayut Chan-O-Cha and the Thai Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak stated that Thailand was ready to promote win-win cooperation with China under their One Belt One Road initiative on May 8, 2017 during a seminar with Chinese entrepreneurs⁵⁷. The world is faced with uncertainty, the free trade regime is being challenged, thus according to them, the Belt and Road initiative has become the new hope for countries willing to cooperate in order to move ahead. They have stated that Thailand is open to further collaborating with China on linking the OBOR with Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC). New cities and markets would develop along the OBOR that would give Thai products a better market. The Thai government is seeking cooperation on multiple projects and believe that the OBOR initiative would benefit all South East Asian countries.

Thailand's Prime Minister Accepts Donald Trump's Invitation

The spokesman for the Junta Major General Werachon Sukhonthapatipak has stated that the Prime Minister of Thailand, Prayut Chan-O-

⁵⁵ Chief of the Naval Staff to attend Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) 50 International Maritime Review (IMR) May 14, 2017, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=161776>

⁵⁶ India-Singapore joint naval exercise SIMBEX 2017 concludes, May 25, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-singapore-joint-naval-exercise-simbex-2017-concludes-4673123/>

⁵⁷ Thailand says its development to be linked up with Belt and Road initiative, May13, 2017, available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1046737.shtml>

Cha has accepted an invitation to visit the United States and has thanked them for the same⁵⁸. The offer was made via a series of phone calls to various South East Asian Countries including Philippines. America is seen trying to muster up regional support in light of North Korea's troublesome actions, including the recent failed missile test on April 28, 2017. The Spokesman didn't mention North Korea but stated that the US and Thailand stood ready to enhance bilateral cooperation in all dimensions.

Thailand says Trade Deficits not a result of unfair policies

The Donald Trump administration has over the past been critical of the trade deficit with South East Asian countries and accused them of tampering to gain trade advantages. They are seeking to push a crusade for fair trade and are investigating the causes of US trade deficits⁵⁹. The Thai government stated on May 11, 2017 that the US trade deficit with the country was not a significant amount and that they had not resorted to unfair exchange rate policies to gain any advantages. In 2016, Thailand had a trade surplus of USD 18billion with the United States. While the US is a major market for Thai exports, the Thai government is struggling to revive its economic growth.

The Head of the Commerce Ministry's Trade Policy and Strategy Office Pimchanok Vonkhorporn stated that the

Thai government had submitted a report to the United States clarifying that the trade deficits were a manifestation of structural asymmetries between the two economies. The value of the Thai deficit however is only 1.5% of the total U.S. trade deficits, making it less significant. Further adding that lack of a Free Trade Agreement between the US and Thailand is a reason for the low rate of US imports, along with a slow rate of US investment and slow global growth rate. She also reiterated that Thailand had not partaken in currency interventions and that the central bank was focused on stability in exchange rates.

Vietnam

China cancels high-level military meeting with Vietnam over territorial dispute

Politburo member and Vice Chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China Senior Lieutenant General Fan Chang Long was to pay an official visit to Vietnam for a border defence friendship exchange programme. The programme aimed to foster friendship and solidarity between local governments, people and border guard forces, thus enhancing political trust and strengthening ties between the two countries and armies. The programme included various activities, including a seminar and culture-art exchange, the inauguration of the Vietnam-China Friendship and Culture House, and a conference to review the two-year twin relations between villages of Lai Chau and China's Yunnan province. A joint drill on combating

⁵⁸ Thailand junta chief accept Donald Trump invite, May 1, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/thailand-junta-chief-accepts-donald-trump-invite-4635276/>

⁵⁹ Thailand says U.S. Trade Deficit 'Not Significant,' No Unfair Policy, May 12, 2017, available at <https://coconuts.co/bangkok/news/thailand-says-u-s-trade-deficit-not-significant-no-unfair-policy/>

cross-border crime between the two sides was also to be held for the first time.⁶⁰

However the scheduled start of the gathering, came and went without any of the coverage in the state news media the two countries had expected. The Chinese Defense Ministry later said in a statement that it had cancelled the event “for reasons related to working arrangements.” Analysts, citing government sources, said that the Chinese delegation had unexpectedly cut short a trip to Vietnam after tempers flared during a closed-door discussion on disputed territories in the South China Sea.⁶¹

China is currently building man-made islands and military infrastructure in the South China Sea, which Vietnam calls the East Sea. And Vietnam has made efforts to form military partnerships with Japan and the United States. Recently, Vietnam has also permitted a foreign company to explore for oil in the area known as the Vanguard Bank. The country has long claimed Vanguard Bank, about 700 kilometres off the coast, as part of its continental shelf.⁶²

Trans Pacific Partnership to be revived again

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, pledged to work together toward the rapid passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement during a meeting in Tokyo on Tuesday.

While the leaders put the agreement on paper in the form of a joint statement on their “broad strategic partnership” released after the meeting, the statement did not indicate that Abe and Phuc had reached a consensus on whether they want the TPP to take effect without the United States, which pulled out of the pact in January. In the joint statement, the leaders agreed to step up their cooperation in defence and security, energy, education, and responses to climate change.

“Amid a current of protectionism and anti-globalization, Prime Minister Phuc and I will promote free trade and investment together,” Abe said at a joint appearance after the talks.⁶³

However the joint statement does not showcase only the revival of the Trans Pacific Partnership but also reaffirms the deepening relations between Vietnam and Japan – a factor which has been a thorn on China’s side

⁶⁰ Lai Chau to host fourth VN-China border defence friendship exchange, June 14 2017, Vietnamnet Bridge, at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/180184/lai-chau-to-host-fourth-vn-china-border-defence-friendship-exchange.html>

⁶¹ China Cancels Military Meeting With Vietnam Over Territorial Dispute, June 21 2017, The New York Times, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/21/world/asia/china-vietnam-south-china-sea.html>

⁶² Chinese General’s Early End to Vietnam Visit Worries Some Experts, June 22 2017, Voice of America, at <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/chinese-general-end-vietnam-visit/3912072.html>

⁶³ Japan, Vietnam leaders vow unity in bid to bring TPP into force, June 7 2017, The Japan Times, at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/07/business/abe-vietnam-leader-vow-unity-bring-tpp-force-rapidly/#.WZwSZPgjHIU>

ever since Vietnam began contesting China's claims over the South China Sea. And despite the US withdrawing itself from the TPP, Vietnam continues to engage in good relations with the US. The feeling is seen to be mutual as US transferred six patrol boats to the Vietnamese Coast Guard to help build security cooperation between the two countries, U.S. embassy in Hanoi said in a statement.⁶⁴

Oceania

Australia

Malabar Exercise to not include Australia

Initiated for the first time in 1992, the Malabar Exercise is a bilateral naval exercise between the United States and India. Since then it has evolved and matured in its complexity and scope, becoming a trilateral exercise with the inclusion of Japan in 2014. In recent times, on various occasions officers from the U.S. and Japan have shown keen interest in including Australia in the exercise. On May 5, 2017 Admiral Scott Swift, the U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander stated that the U.S. is keen on Australia's inclusion but the final decision would rely on consensus with the partner countries.

The first step in the process would be to grant observer status, which would lead to potential partnership on the basis of a collaborative and bilateral discussion between the U.S. and India⁶⁵.

It has been reported that Australia has been beckoning India since January to grant it observer status at the Malabar Exercise scheduled for July this year. However, India was reluctant to expand the exercise. China has reportedly warned against expanding the drills, which resulted in India blocking Australia's proposal. India fears that Australia's involvement might antagonise China, and they might retaliate in response. Especially taking into consideration the extensive maritime engagement that China has in the region. Since 2013 China has had about six submarine deployments in the Indian Ocean, along with deployments in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Instigating them might lead to a greater backlash⁶⁶. India also seemed to have clashed with China recently with regard to the Dalai Lama and the OBOR summit. While the U.S. and Japan believe Australia is their natural partner and involving it would facilitate balancing against China's growing might, India decided to take a more risk averse position. Australia however keen to become a part of the exercise wouldn't do so on the cost of irritating China, its largest trading partner. In future Australia might become a part of the exercise, but for now India and Australia would engage bilaterally.

⁶⁴ U.S. Delivers Patrol Boats to Vietnam to Deepen Security Ties, May 23 2017, U.S. News & World Report, at <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-05-23/us-delivers-patrol-boats-to-vietnam-to-deepen-security-tie>

⁶⁵ U.S. keen to expand Malabar exercise to include Australia, May 5, 2017, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/us-keen-to-expand-malabar-exercise-to-include-australia/article18394812.ece>

⁶⁶ To avoid China backlash, India turns down this request from Australia, May 31, 2017 available at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/to-avoid-irking-china-india-wont-include-australia-in-naval-drills-1706047>

Australia considering sending troops for NATO operations in Afghanistan

For the last 16 years the U.S. and her North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies have been entangled in an intractable war against the Taliban and other Islamist militants in Afghanistan. In February 2017, the Commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission, U.S. General John Nicholson requested several thousand international troops to break the stalemate against the Taliban, ISIS, remnants of al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups⁶⁷.

The Australian Defence Minister Marise Payne stated on May 29, 2017, to a Senate Committee that Australia was willing to send 30 additional troops to join the training and assistance mission led by NATO in Afghanistan. This would bring their total deployment to 300. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had earlier stated that he was open to idea of increasing deployment in Afghanistan, after analysing the commitment of the Australian Defence Forces in other parts of the world. He reportedly received the specificities of the NATO request from military authorities while on his visit to Afghanistan at the end of April. He stated that it was crucial for Australia and the allies to continue to work together in their efforts in Afghanistan.

These additional troops from the Australian Defence Force as part of their current train, advice and assist mission, would allow Australia to commit additional advisors to facilitate the

development of long-term capabilities of the Afghan security forces. Being a strong US ally, Australia has had deployment in Afghanistan since 2002, despite the fact that they are not a member of NATO. Other NATO members like Germany have refused to send more of their troops back to Afghanistan.

Australia-India Joint Maritime Exercise AUSINDEX 2017

The Indian naval ships INS Shivalik- a multi role stealth frigate, INS Kamorta the anti-submarine warfare corvette and INS Jyoti the fleet replenishment tanker visited Australia from June 13, to June 17, 2017 to participate in the AUSINDEX 2017⁶⁸. This comes weeks after India rejected Australia's proposal to become a part of the Malabar exercise later this year. The aim of this joint maritime naval exercise between the Australian and Indian navies is to ensure inter-operability between the two and to cement their growing cooperation. The success of the first edition hosted at Vishakhapatnam in 2015, has made this exercise a biennial event.

Both Australia and India have the largest coastlines facing the Indian Ocean making them natural partners in issues of maritime security. The event involved complex naval maneuvers, and professional interactions in between the naval personnel from the two sides along with harbor stays, formal receptions on board, guided tours and official calls. In pursuit of India's Act East Policy, the ships under the command of the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet, Rear Admiral Biswajit Dasgupta have been on a tour of South East Asia including Singapore, Papua New Guinea and Australia

⁶⁷ Australia considering NATO request to send more troops to Afghanistan, May 12, 2017, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-afghanistan-australia-idUSKBN188081>

⁶⁸ India, Australia kick off joint exercise Down Under, June 15, 2017, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-australia-kick-off-joint-exercise-down-under/articleshow/59152044.cms>

ASEAN-Australia re-affirm Strategic Partnership

The 7th ASEAN-Australia Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting was held on June 16, 2017 at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was co-chaired by the permanent representative of Myanmar to ASEAN Ambassador Min Lwin along with the Australian Ambassador to ASEAN Elizabeth Jane Duke, attendees included permanent representatives of ASEAN member states and representatives of the ASEAN Secretariat.⁶⁹

The meeting outlined the progress made so far across all ASEAN Community Pillars, under the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action (2015-2019). Australia reaffirmed its commitment to support ASEAN integration by contributing AU \$ 57.8 million for the second phase of the Development Cooperation Programme, along with pledging support for the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and for the ASEAN Integration Work Plan. The two sides further exchanged their views on how to take their relationship forward and highlighted the expediency for enhancing cooperation in key areas such as counterterrorism, cyber security, trade and investment among others. The two sides are also working together for convening a Counter Terrorism Conference and a Business Summit early next year which would be followed by the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney scheduled for March, 2018.

Australia-U.S. undertake biggest Joint Military Exercise

The Talisman Saber 2017, a biennial joint military exercise between the United States and Australia commenced on June 29, 2017. The exercise included more than 33, 000 Australian and U.S. troops on board battle ships equipped with strike jets, and was the largest joint military exercise undertaken by the two sides, leading to fears of confrontation from China. The Head of the U.S. Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris stated that he was pleased about the signal the size of the deployment would send to their friends, allies, partners and potential adversaries⁷⁰.

This was the 7th time the Talisman Saber was being conducted and included force preparation activities, Special Forces activities, amphibious landings, parachuting, land force manoeuvre, urban operations, air operations, maritime operations and the coordinated firing of live ammunition and explosive ordnance from small arms, naval vessels and aircraft. It focused on the planning and conduction of high end warfighting. Alongside the USS Bonhomme Richard, the exercise would also include 20 other ships and over 200 aircrafts. Military personnel from New Zealand, Japan and Canada would also participate, embedded within the Australian and U.S. units. A Surface Action Group consisting of the U.S. destroyer Sterett and four Australian frigates were also a part of the exercise.

The U.S. Navy also tested its up gunned Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) concept within a realistic war fighting scenario against a capable adversary that included a mix of

⁶⁹ ASEAN, Australia reaffirm commitment to strengthen strategic partnership, June 21, 2017, available at <http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/111482/asean-australia-reaffirm-commitment-to-strengthen-strategic-partnership>

⁷⁰ Australia, United States begin their biggest joint military exercise, June 29, 2017, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-usa-military-idUSKBN19KoID>

surface, air and subsurface threats using real submarines, aircraft and ships throughout the exercise, adding training value to both the Australian and U.S. troops. A People's Liberation Army Navy PLAN type 815 Dongdiao-class electronic surveillance ship was also sighted off the Australian territorial waters but inside the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone in the Coral Sea, close to Queensland where the TS17 exercise was being conducted⁷¹.

Fiji

India donates F \$ 2.02 million for Fiji's presidency of the COP 23

The COP 23 stands for the 23rd annual Conference of the Parties to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Cop23 would be held in Bonn, Germany in November 2017. The current presidency for the conference is with Fiji, which is the first Small Island Developing State to assume such an important role.⁷²

On June 19, 2017 the Fijian Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama receive a cheque donation of F \$ 2.02 million from the Indian Government in support of Fiji's Presidency. The Indian High Commissioner to Fiji Vishvas Sapkal stated that India stood in solidarity with Fiji and other Pacific Island Countries in their efforts to highlight the adverse effects

of climate change on these vulnerable island countries. The Fijian Prime Minister thanked the Indian government for their support as Fiji gears up to uphold and defend the Multilateral Consensus that was achieved under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, despite U.S.'s decision to withdraw from the agreement.

New Zealand

P-8A Poseidon potential sale to New Zealand

New Zealand has been surveying the markets for a new Multi-Purpose Aircraft to replace its 6 Lockheed Martin P-3 Orion aircrafts. One of the key parameters is range, they need the aircrafts to loiter for seven hours or so 1,000nm away from the base. This led to them inquiring about the P-8A Poseidon. The United States State Department has approved a potential sale of four Boeing P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol aircrafts to New Zealand. The deal is estimated to cost them around \$1.46 billion⁷³. Neighbouring Australia also uses four P-8As with orders for additional samples.

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea participates in naval exercises with India

In accordance to the Act East Policy, the Indian Navy conducted naval exercises with the Papuan Navy. The Indian frigate Sahyadri

⁷¹ Chinese intel-gathering ship spotted near US-Australia exercise, available at <http://www.defensenews.com/training-sim/2017/07/24/chinese-intel-gathering-ship-spotted-near-us-australia-exercise/>

⁷² India contributes F \$ 2.02 Million towards Fiji's COP 23 Presidency, June 20, 2017, available at <https://fijisun.com.fj/2017/06/20/india-contributes-f2-02-million-towards-fijis-cop23-presidency/>

⁷³ New Zealand requests details about P-8A Poseidon, May 2, 2017, available at <https://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/new-zealand-requests-details-about-p-8a-poseidon-436763/>

arrived in Moresby in mid-June after engaging in an annual maritime exercise in Singapore. “The visit of the Indian Naval ships seeks to underscore India’s peaceful presence and solidarity with friendly and harmonious countries towards ensuring good order in the maritime domain and to strengthen existing bonds between Papua New Guinea and India,” Navy spokesperson Capt D K Sharma said.⁷⁴

The Indian Navy has been trying to engage more with the ASEAN navies. Its participation in the annual Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise 2017 (SIMBEX-17) is an indicator of that. It is also taking this as an opportunity to showcase its naval strength by bringing its most top of the line products. The

Indian Naval Ships (INS) Shivalik, Sahyadri, Jyoti and Kamorta and one P8-I Maritime Patrol and Anti-Submarine Warfare Aircraft are participating in SIMBEX-17, with INS Jyoti and Shivalik conducting exercises with the Royal Malaysian Navy before that.⁷⁵

“Our presence in this region is a manifestation of growing engagement with ASEAN countries and the maritime nations of the Western Pacific in furtherance of our diplomatic initiative,” Real Admiral Dasgupta said. “Constructive engagement between navies has always been a preferred method of military engagement between friendly nations,” he said at a reception hosted on board Sahyadri and Kamorta.⁷⁶ The Indian Navy will set course for further interaction with Indonesia and Australia after this.

⁷⁴ Indian Navy ship in Papua New Guinea, June 12 2017, The Indian Express, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/indian-navy-ship-in-papua-new-guinea-4700880/>

⁷⁵ Indian Navy To Hold Maritime Exercises With Indonesia, Papua New Guinea And Australia , May 20 2017, NDTV, at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indian-navy-to-hold-maritime-exercises-with-indonesia-papua-new-guinea-and-australia-1696148>

⁷⁶ Ibid

Centre Activities for May to June 2017

- Round Table with Dr Christopher Roberts on “The 'South Sea' Regional Positions, Implications and Avenues Forward” on June 20, 2017
- Dr Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, Visiting Fellow from Thailand with Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre presented her Fellows' Seminar on Mindanao and Patani movements and Security sector reforms. Dr Uday Bhanu Singh made his contribution as Internal Discussant on June 9, 2017.
- Dr Sampa Kundu wrote IDSA Comment for the website “BIMSTEC at 30: Hopes and Apprehensions”, June 20, 2017



Fellows Seminar by Dr Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, Visiting Fellow at IDSA.

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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