

January 1 – January 15

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 1-15 January 2018

General Observations

Pakistan

- On 1 January, Pakistan and India exchanged lists of their nuclear installations as has been done every year since 1 January 1992, under the bilateral agreement signed by the two countries in 1988 – Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations between India and Pakistan – under which both sides commit not to attack each other’s nuclear facilities.
- India upped the nuclear ante against Pakistan when on 12 January, the Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat basically called on India to call Pakistan’s nuclear bluff. As he put it: “Pakistan’s nuclear bogey would be thoroughly exposed if it actually comes to a war with the western neighbour, which often brandishes its short-range Nasr (Hatf-IX) nuclear missiles as a battlefield counter to India’s Cold Start strategy of swift, high intensity conventional attacks into enemy territory. We would call their bluff.”

Pakistan labeled this statement as dangerous and a direct threat from India of a possible nuclear exchange.

- The Pakistan-US relationship went into a fast-paced downward spiral after President Trump put out a tweet on 1 January accusing Pakistan of lying to and deceiving the US while receiving billions of dollars in aid. Pakistan was also accused of harbouring terrorists. This twitter tirade was followed by the US envoy to the UN hurling similar accusations against Pakistan. The State Department spokesperson, Heather Nauert, joined in this series of accusations to be followed by National Security Advisor General McMaster also issuing a threat to Pakistan to fall in line with US demands or face the consequences. Then, on 4 January the Trump Administration announced it would suspend security aid to Pakistan – part of which had already been suspended at the end of 2017. Pakistan was also placed on a US Watch List for “severe violations of religious freedom.”

Pakistan reacted to these threats but the response in substantive terms from the government and the military sent mixed signals with some declaring US was an ally while others insisted the US was no longer an ally. Additionally, all the responses – from the soft to the hardline – were declaratory and no concrete action was taken in response to the actions taken by the US. For instance, on 2 January, the National Security Committee (NSC) expressed “deep disappointment” over Trump’s tweet saying his accusations were “completely incomprehensible” and “contradicted the facts.”

By only issuing declaratory responses, a sense of ambivalence was created in Pakistan as to what is the country's official US policy. Visits and phone calls from mid-level US bureaucrats and decision-makers to the Foreign Office and GHQ have so far added little clarity to the Pakistani position on the relationship with the US beyond the rhetoric that the US was seeking to blame Pakistan for its obvious failure in Afghanistan. There is the August 2017 National Assembly Resolution which contained concrete steps for Pakistan to take against the US threats and hostile rhetoric but so far the government has shown no inclination to act on it.

- Amid the increasingly hostile rhetoric coming from India along with an increase in ceasefire violations along the LoC and the Working Boundary by the Indian military, it came as a surprise move to learn through media reports on 1 January that Pakistan's National Security Advisor (NSA) Nasir Khan Janjua had held talks with India's NSA, Ajit Doval in Bangkok earlier on 26 December 2017.

Clearly the talks had no impact on reducing the Indian attacks across the LoC and on 15 January 4 Pakistani soldiers were killed by Indian shelling from across the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir's Jandrot sector. With January not yet over, the Pakistan Foreign Office stated that in the first two weeks of January 2018, Indian troops had committed more than 70 ceasefire violations along the LoC and Working Boundary.

- On 12 January, the National Assembly unanimously passed a bill to extend the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and Peshawar High Court to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). However, this was seen as a mere first step in the eventual merger of FATA into Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province as demanded by the people of FATA and most political parties in the country.

International

- The US continued to push for India's membership of the four Supplier cartels within the issue area of arms control. India has gained membership of the Missile Technology Control regime (MTCR) and the Wassenaar Arrangement on export controls for conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies. The US has failed so far to get India membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) and on 11 January, Kenneth Juster, US envoy to India, said that the US expected India to join the Australia Group (on chemical and biological weapons) soon and it was working closely with its allies to get India membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

- India's fast-paced weapons development has received a blow with its indigenously developed nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine the INS Arihant suffering major damage due to human error which has prevented it sailing for more than 10 months, as reported by *The Hindu* on 8 January.
- Some weapon deals between India and Israel also do not seem to be working out. On 3 January, Israel's state-owned defence contractor Rafael Advanced Defence Systems said that India had cancelled an order to buy Spike anti-tank guided missiles from the company. However, India's Defence Ministry announced on 9 January that it had approved a plan to buy 131 surface-to-air Barak missiles from Israel in a \$70 million deal. These missiles were intended for India's first aircraft carrier that is presently under construction.
- US nuclear command and control system again revealed its instability when, on 15 January, a false alert warning about an incoming ballistic missile aimed at Hawaii was sent in error, creating panic in that State: the alert read "Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill." This went out on 13 January at 8.00 a.m. and asked people to "seek immediate shelter". It is worrying to think the state with the largest nuclear arsenal globally could accidentally trigger a nuclear war because of its unstable command and control system.
- On 12 January, President Trump went back on his move to undo the Iran nuclear agreement, the JCPOA, and announced that he was keeping the Agreement alive by waiving key sanctions for the third time. He explained this was to give time to the Europeans to work out what he saw as the weaknesses in the Agreement. Meanwhile, the US announced other sanctions against 14 Iranian entities and people, including the Head of Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani. Iran declared these sanctions a hostile act and a violation of international law and said Iran would give a "serious reaction".
- President Trump created another controversy reported on 12 January in the *Washington Post* when he made a blatantly racist remark while discussing the issue of immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador and African countries with lawmakers as part of a bipartisan immigration deal. Trump asked, "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" He then went on to suggest that the US should try to get migrants from countries such as Norway.

The remark also sparked controversy internationally and, on 12 January, Robert Colville, the spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office condemned Trump for his racist

remark as “shocking and shameful, and racist.”

- The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report on 10 January in which the UAE was reprimanded over its human rights record, with concern being expressed over the torture of prisoners, injustice against foreign workers and discrimination of women in the country.

Meanwhile, according to Norway’s Foreign Ministry on 3 January, Norway suspended export of arms and ammunition to the UAE over concerns that these could be used in the war in Yemen.

- A UN SC delegation arrived in Kabul and met with President Ashraf Ghani on 14 January. The exchange was described as productive, ranging from reforms to peace and security, regional cooperation, terrorism, narcotics control and national reconciliation.

In a related development, on the same day, Afghan government representatives held unofficial talks with the Taliban in Turkey.

--- Dr Shireen M Mazari

Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- According to the *BBC* on January 15, President Donald Trump denied being racist, after being criticised for his alleged use of the word “shithole” to describe African nations.

Trump used the term during a bipartisan Oval Office meeting on immigration reform. Denying his statement earlier on January 12, 2017, Trump tweeted that the language he used in the meeting was “tough” but disputed the wording of the reports. He later said, “I am not a racist. I’m the least racist person you have ever interviewed.” It was the first time the president responded directly to the racism accusations. He made the denial to the White House press pool reporters at the Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach in Florida on January 14, 2018.

- According to the *Washington Post* on January 12, President Trump grew frustrated with lawmakers in the Oval Office while discussing immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador and African countries as part of a bipartisan immigration deal.

“Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” Trump said. Trump then suggested that the US should instead bring more people from countries such as Norway. The President also suggested he would be open to more immigrants from Asian countries because he felt that they help the United States economically. Trump singled out Haiti, telling lawmakers that immigrants from that country must be left out of any deal.

- According to *Reuters* on January 14, Ajit Pai, the Chairman of the US Federal Communications Commission, said he would launch a full investigation into a false emergency alert that said a ballistic missile was headed for Hawaii.
- On January 13, an emergency alert notification warned of a ballistic missile threat to Hawaii, which later turned out to be an error.

The message, which also appeared on Hawaii Television, read, “Ballistic Missile Threat Inbound To Hawaii. Seek Immediate Shelter. This Is Not A Drill.” The alert was officially canceled some 38 minutes later. The FCC has jurisdiction over the emergency alert system. FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel said the Commission must find out what went wrong. “Emergency alerts are meant to keep us and our families safe, not to create false panic. We must investigate and we must do better,” she tweeted. Hawaiian Governor David Ige told reporters the mistake was the result of human error and someone at the State Emergency Management Agency pushed the “wrong button” during a shift change. Wireless carriers do not prepare or write the alerts but they run simultaneously on all networks.

- On December 10, US immigration agents raided numerous 7-Eleven stores before dawn to open employment audits and interview workers.

Officials described the raids as the largest operation against an employer under the Trump Presidency. Officials raided at least 100 stores across the country broadening an investigation that began with a 4-year-old case against a franchisee on New York's Long Island. The audits could lead to criminal charges or fines over the stores' hiring practices.

- According to the Department of Homeland Security on January 8, nearly 200,000 people from El Salvador who had been allowed to live in the US for more than ten years must now leave the country.

It is the Trump Administration's latest reversal of years of immigration policies and one of the most consequential to date. Homeland security officials said that they were ending a humanitarian programme, known as Temporary Protected Status for Salvadorans who have been allowed to remain legally in the United States since a pair of devastating earthquakes struck their country in 2001. The decision came just weeks after more than 45,000 Haitians lost protection in November 2017.

- On January 7, CNN security personnel escorted Stephen Miller, Senior Adviser for Policy to President Trump, off the set of "State of the Union" show.

In what is being described as a combative TV interview with host Jake Tapper, Miller tried several times to praise Trump as a 'political genius' and also criticise the cable news network's political coverage, which Trump often calls fake. Tapper tried to redirect Miller, saying at one point that the adviser was using the interview to speak directly to Trump. "There's one viewer that you care about right now, and you're being obsequious, you're being a factotum, in order to please him," he said.

- According to *USA Today* on January 5, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention wants Americans to be prepared in case of a nuclear event.

The warning comes amid increasing tensions between North Korea and the US. The Agency has scheduled a briefing titled "Public Health Response to a Nuclear Detonation," where federal, state and local officials will detail what preparations have been made in case of such an event. "While a nuclear detonation is unlikely, it would have devastating results and there would be limited time to take critical protection steps," reads an excerpt from the CDC's website detailing the briefing. "For instance, most people don't realise that sheltering in place for at least 24 hours is crucial to saving lives and reducing exposure to radiation."

- On January 5, Author Michael Wolff dismissed criticism of his bombshell book on President Trump's White House, saying many of the President's close advisors question his fitness for office.

In an interview with NBC, Wolff contended that Trump has “less credibility than, perhaps, anyone who has ever walked on Earth.” Wolff insisted that he talked to the President for the book “Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House,” despite Trump's denial in which he called the book “phony.”

- According to CNN on January 4 a massive “bombogenesis” wreaked havoc on Northeastern United States.

The bombogenesis resulted in a “bomb cyclone” which dumped 6 to 12 inches of snow in New England and hurled 40- to 60-mph wind gusts.

International

- According to a report in the *NY Times* on January 14, officers and troops across the US military are quietly preparing for a possible war with North Korea.

In December 2017, at Fort Bragg in North Carolina some 48 Apache gunships and Chinook cargo helicopters took off in an exercise to practice moving troops and equipment under live artillery fire to assault targets. In Nevada, 119 soldiers from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division parachuted out of C-17 military cargo planes in darkness, simulating a foreign invasion. In February 2017, at Army posts across the country, at least 1,000 reserve soldiers will practice how to set up mobilisation centers that move military forces overseas in a hurry. In February 2017 with the Winter Olympics in the South Korean town of Pyeongchang, the Pentagon plans to send more Special Operations troops to the Korean Peninsula. According to some officials this could be the formation of a Korea-based task force similar to the types that are fighting in Iraq and Syria. Yet others believe the plan is strictly related to counterterrorism efforts. Observers believe the scope and timing of the exercises suggest a renewed focus on getting the US military prepared for what could be on the horizon.

- On December 12, the Trump Administration vowed to pull out of the Iran Nuclear Deal if substantial changes were not made to it.

The announcement set the clock ticking on tough negotiations with Washington's European allies. It also imposed punitive new actions not directly related to Iran's nuclear programme meant to pressure Tehran over its ongoing missile tests and a recent crackdown on protestors. After waiving penalties against Tehran, Trump next faces such a decision in May 2018. “I have outlined two possible paths forward,” Trump said in a statement. “Either fix the deal's disastrous flaws, or the United States will withdraw.” According to Trump the 2015 deal gives Iran too much in sanctions relief for too few curbs on its nuclear programme. European leaders have opposed major revisions. That, they fear, could give Tehran an excuse to walk away from the deal entirely, accelerating Iran's path to a nuclear weapon. Earlier on January 6, 2018, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said the US is working on a plan “to fix” the Iran nuclear deal

as speculation continues on whether President Trump would scrap the famous agreement. Tillerson told The Associated Press. "The President said he is either going to fix it or cancel it," Tillerson was quoted as saying. "We are in the process of trying to deliver on the promise he made to fix it."

- On December 12, President Donald Trump canceled a February 2018 trip to London to inaugurate a new embassy, saying he did not want to endorse a bad deal agreed to by the Obama Administration to sell the old one for "peanuts".

The cancellation is a further blow to an already tense relationship between the close allies. More than a year into his presidency, Trump has yet to visit London. Many Britons had vowed to protest against Trump's visit as they see Trump as "crude, volatile and opposed to their values" on several issues. The decision to move the US Embassy from its current Grosvenor Square location in the upmarket Mayfair area of London and to a site on the south bank of the Thames was agreed in 2008 under the presidency of George W. Bush. However, Trump blamed former president Barack Obama for the sale, saying he would not attend the official opening of the new site. "(The) reason I canceled my trip to London is that I am not a big fan of the Obama administration having sold perhaps the best located and finest embassy in London for 'peanuts,' only to build a new one in an off location for 1.2 billion dollars," Trump tweeted, "Bad deal. Wanted me to cut ribbon-NO!" Trump said.

- According to Aljazeera on January 12, Pakistani and US officials are continuing to meet and cooperate "at all levels" despite the suspension of \$1.1bn in US aid.

Amid fiery statements by political leaders declaring the end of Islamabad's alliance with Washington, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Al Jazeera, "There is no freeze (in relations). We are speaking to each other, at all levels. We are not sharing the details of that at this time, but the effort to find some common ground or traction on both sides is there." Meanwhile an anonymous US State Department official also confirmed that talks between the two sides were also going on. A high level visit by a senior US diplomat to Islamabad is expected in the coming week, with talks on moving an increasingly troubled relationship forward.

- According to Reuters on January 6, the US is examining ways to mitigate any Pakistani retaliation as it piles pressure on Islamabad to crack down on militants.

Pakistan remains a crucial supply route for US military supplies destined for US and other troops fighting in neighbouring Afghanistan. So far, the Pentagon says Pakistan has not given any indication that it would close its airspace or roads to military supplies and US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis played down concerns. A senior Trump Administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Washington hoped that the aid suspension would be enough to communicate its concern to Islamabad. But the official cautioned that the freeze was also not the only tool that America had to pressure the country, suggesting it might resort to other measures, if needed.

- On January 4, the Trump Administration announced that it would suspend almost all security aid to Pakistan.

According to observers, “The across-the-board freeze is the most tangible sign yet of Washington’s frustration with Pakistan’s refusal to crack down on terrorist networks operating there.” The decision came three days after President Trump tweeted that Pakistan had given the US nothing “but lies & deceit.” The move underlines how swiftly relations with Pakistan have deteriorated since Trump took office. However, it is reminiscent of similar rifts between the countries over Pakistan’s alleged role as a sanctuary for extremist groups since September 2001. Administration officials emphasised that the freeze was temporary and could be lifted if Pakistan changed its behavior. The United States is urging the Pakistani government to cut off contact with militants and reassign intelligence agents with links to extremists, among other measures.

- On January 1, President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of lying and deceiving the US despite receiving billions of dollars in foreign aid.

President Trump also accused Pakistan of harbouring terrorists. There was angry reaction to the tweet in Pakistan. It said all the funding was accounted for and that Trump was bitter due to the “US defeat in Afghanistan.” The US is considering withholding more than \$250m in aid that it delayed sending to Islamabad in August 2017.

Canada

- According to the *BBC* on January 12, McCurdy’s Smokehouse in Lubec, Maine, a historic building in the US became the subject of an international dispute after it was swept away to a Canadian island during a blizzard.

McCurdy’s Smokehouse is the last traditional herring facility in the US and is on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the January 2018 “bomb cyclone” tore one of the five buildings from its supports and floated it to a Canadian island. A fight over its remains created tensions between Canada and the US.

- According to *Reuters* on January 11, Canada is increasingly convinced that President Donald Trump would soon announce the US intention to pull out of NAFTA.

The announcement sent the Canadian and Mexican currencies lower and hurt stocks. The comments cast further doubt on prospects for talks to modernise the trilateral North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which Trump has repeatedly threatened to abandon unless major changes are made. Officials are due to hold a sixth and penultimate round of negotiations in Montreal from Jan. 23-28, 2018 as time runs out to bridge major differences.

Latin America

- On January 15, Chilean officials accused the World Bank of treating the country unfairly for several years.

Foreign Minister Heraldo Muñoz, tweeted “fake news was becoming fake statistics.”

He was responding to an interview given by the World Bank’s Chief Economist, Paul Romer, who said indicators for Chile may have been manipulated for political reasons to show a decline in the country’s business conditions. The World Bank has ordered an enquiry. Chile currently ranks 55th out of 190 countries on the World Bank’s closely watched annual “Doing Business” competitiveness rankings. It had been 34th in 2014; the year socialist President Michelle Bachelet took office.

- On January 11, the US State Department warned tourists to “completely avoid” five states in Mexico because of rampant crime levels and gang activity.

Colima, Guerrero, Michoacán, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas have all been classified at level-four risk, the highest in the scale, putting them at the same levels as conflict-ridden countries including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

---Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- According to *Dawn* on January 15, a false alert warning about an incoming ballistic missile aimed at Hawaii was sent in error, creating panic and anger across the US State.

The alert read “Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.” This notification was sent at 8am on January 13, 2018, urging people to “seek immediate shelter”. Emergency management officials admitted the error that “the wrong button was pushed” during a shift change. Vern Miyagi, administrator of Hawaii’s Emergency Management Agency, “I deeply apologise for the trouble and heartbreak that we caused today.” He added, “We made a mistake and we’re going to take processes and study this so that this does not happen again.”

- On January 14, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said US President Donald Trump had failed to kill off Iran’s July 2015 Nuclear Agreement despite his 2016 election promise of withdrawing from the agreement.
- On January 12, US President Donald Trump announced that he was keeping Iran’s July 2015 Nuclear Agreement alive by waiving key sanctions for the third time

Trump said, “Despite my strong inclination, I have not yet withdrawn the United States from the Iran nuclear deal.” He said that he was extending relief from sanctions for the last time. He also urged his European allies to fix the deal. He said, “I am waiving the application of certain nuclear sanctions, but only in order to secure our European allies’ agreement to fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal. This is a last chance.” Trump added, “In the absence of such an agreement, the United States will not again waive sanctions in order to stay in the Iran nuclear deal. And if at any time I judge that such an agreement is not within reach, I will withdraw from the deal immediately.” In response the EU said in a statement that it had taken note of Trump’s decision and would assess its implications. The statement also said that Trump’s decision had made the situation complicated. Earlier on January 11, 2018, Britain, France and Germany called on Trump to uphold the pact. “We agree on this approach, we want to protect (the deal) against every possible decision that might undermine it,” Germany’s Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said alongside his French and British counterparts and EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini after meeting Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

In conjunction with the waivers, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on 14 Iranian individuals and entities on January 12, 2018 for alleged offenses concerning human rights abuses and censorship in Iran and the arming of groups throughout the region. These sanctions have also targeted Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, Iran’s Head of Judiciary. According to US officials, Larijani has overseen the sentencing and execution of juveniles in Tehran. In response Iran’s Foreign Ministry condemned the imposition of new sanctions on January 13, 2018, and warned that Iran would retaliate. In a statement the Ministry said, “The move crossed all red lines of conduct in the international community and is a violation of international law and will

surely be answered by a serious reaction of the Islamic Republic.” It also asserted, “Iran's response will be severe, and all consequences of this hostile act will be the responsibility of the United States.” The Ministry also rejected any modification of JCPOA. The statement said Iran “will not accept any amendments in this agreement, be it now or in the future, and it will not allow any other issues to be linked to the JCPOA.” On January 14, 2018, President Rouhani also criticised the US and said that the country failed in killing the JCPOA. Rouhani said, “It’s been one year since Trump has been trying to kill JCPOA and hasn't been successful. This means victory of law over dictatorship.”

- On January 11, Kenneth Juster, US Ambassador to India, said that the US was working closely with partners to secure New Delhi’s membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

During his inaugural policy speech on US-India relations, Juster said, “We also expect India to join the Australia Group on chemical and biological weapons in the very near future. And, we are working closely with India and our international partners to secure India’s membership in the NSG.” Regarding the US-India strategic partnership, Juster said that it was now time for both countries to make sure that the strategic partnership between them remains durable. He added, “It is time to put a strategic lens on our economic relationship – just as we have done with our defence relationship.”

- On January 10, the US Air Force announced that the country has deployed three nuclear-capable B-2 stealth bombers and 200 air personnel in Guam, sending a strong signal to North Korea.

Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. said, “The bomber deployment is part of an on-going planned deployment that affects not only the Korean Peninsula, but also a broader alliance structure in the Pacific.” It is unclear how long the B-2s would stay at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. The last time the US deployed the stealth bombers in Guam was in January 2017.

- According to *The Hindu* on January 8, India’s indigenously developed nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) the INS Arihant had suffered major damage due to human error and had not sailed for more than 10 months.

Citing a source from the Indian Navy, the report said that the INS Arihant’s propulsion compartment was damaged after water entered inside the submarine as a hatch on the rear side was left open by mistake while it was at harbour. The source also confirmed that the submarine remains docked while it receives extensive repairs. However, the Indian Defence Ministry did not release any statement on the issue. The INS Arihant was commissioned in October 2016 and is only operational SSBN of India. India’s second SSBN, the INS Arighant, was launched in November 2017 and is currently at trial stage.

- On January 5, the Centre for the Study of the Drone at Bard College claimed that China appears to have secretly sold Pakistan a large combat drone.

Citing satellite images from November 2017, the Centre reported that there was a medium-altitude long-endurance drone spotted at the M. M. Alam Air Base in Mianwali, Pakistan. The report stated, “The drone in the image appears to be a Wing Loong I. This assessment is based on its wingspan -- which we believe to be around 14 meters -- and its V-tail, as well as a comparison with other satellite images of the Wing Loong I elsewhere in the world.” The report also suggested that the drone in Pakistan appears to have been deployed for testing purposes. This report has also been endorsed by IHS Janes, which cited different satellite images taken from the same time. According to IHS Janes, the Wing Loong I is a strike-capable medium-altitude drone built by the Chinese firm Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). It has a maximum take-off weight of 1,150 kilograms with a maximum payload capacity of 200kg. It is considered to be China’s version of America’s Predator drone.

- On January 4, the US imposed sanctions on five subsidiaries of an Iranian industrial group considered important in the development and production of the country’s ballistic missiles.

The sanctions were imposed by the Office of Foreign Assets Control, an arm of the Treasury Department. These sanctions targeted companies that are owned or controlled by the Shahid Bakeri Industrial Group, an Iranian defence entity that is already under US sanctions. The latest sanctions were directed at Shahid Kharrazi Industries, Shahid Sanikhani Industries, Shahid Moghaddam Industries, Shahid Eslami Research Centre and Shahid Shustari Industries, all linked to Shahid Bakeri. Each produces a specific component of ballistic missiles, such as guidance and control systems, motor cases or fibre materials. Steven T. Mnuchin, US Treasury Secretary, said, “These sanctions target key entities involved in Iran’s ballistic missile programme, which the Iranian regime prioritises over the economic well-being of the Iranian people.” The sanctions will prevent the entities from dealing financially with US citizens and financial institutions.

- According to *The Diplomat* on January 3, a North Korean intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), the Hwasong-12, reportedly crashed into one of its own cities after it failed just minutes following its launch from Pukchang Airfield in South Pyongan Province of North Korea on April 28, 2017.

Citing US intelligence sources and satellite imagery, the report said that the missile’s test failed shortly after launch and crashed in the Chongsin-dong, in North Korean city of Tokchon, causing considerable damage to a complex of industrial or agricultural buildings. The report said that the missile’s first stage engines failed after approximately one minute of flight and the missile never flew higher than approximately 70 kilometres. However, it is unclear whether the accidental strike caused any deaths due to the secretive nature of the North Korean regime.

- On January 3, Israel's state-owned defence contractor Rafael Advanced Defence Systems said that India has called off an order to buy Spike anti-tank guided missiles from the company.

Rafael said, "Rafael regrets the decision and remains committed to cooperating with the Indian Ministry of Defence and to its strategy of continuing to work in India, an important market, as it has for more than two decades, to provide India with the most advanced and innovative systems." The termination of the deal, worth \$500 million, comes ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to India. India defence officials did not comment on the cancellation. However, India's Defence Ministry announced on January 9, 2018, that it had cleared a plan to buy 131 surface-to-air Barak missiles from Israel in a \$70 million deal. According to the Ministry, the Barak missiles made by Rafael would be used for India's first aircraft carrier currently under construction.

- According to Norway's Foreign Ministry on January 3, Norway suspended exports of weapons and ammunition to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), expressing concerns they could be used in the war in Yemen.

The Foreign Ministry said, "While there is no evidence that Norwegian-made ammunition has been used in Yemen, there was a rising risk related to the UAE's military involvement there." The Ministry added, "The decision reflects the strict precautionary approach taken by Norway." Norway has revoked the existing export licenses and no new licenses would be issued under the current circumstances. The decision was made on December 19, 2017, but it was not made public. In 2016, Norwegian exports of weapons and ammunition to the UAE rose to \$9.7 million. Human rights groups and several members of Norway's parliament have for months campaigned for a halt in arms exports to the UAE. The UAE is part of a Saudi-led coalition formed in 2015 to fight Houthi rebels in Yemen that controls the country's northern region and its capital Sanaa.

- On January 3, Pakistan Navy's newly commissioned Fast Attack Craft (Missile), PNS Himmat conducted live weapon firing.

PNS Himmat fired the indigenously developed Harbah Naval Cruise Missile. Harbah is a surface-to-surface anti-ship missile with land attack capability. The missile accurately hit the target, signifying its impressive capabilities. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi witnessed the firing and expressed satisfaction on the operational readiness of Pakistan Navy fleet units. He said that successful live weapon firing demonstrated the credible firepower of Pakistan Navy and reaffirmed the resolve of Pakistan Navy to ensure naval defence of the country.

- On January 1, India and Pakistan exchanged lists of their nuclear installations under an agreement aimed at preventing them from attacking each other's nuclear facilities.

According to a statement issued by Pakistan's Foreign Office, the lists were handed over to the representatives of the Pakistani and Indian High Commissions in New Delhi and Islamabad

respectively. This is the twenty-seventh consecutive exchange of such a list between the two countries. The lists are exchanged under the “Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear installations between India and Pakistan,” signed on December 31, 1988 which came into force on January 27, 1991.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA, EAST ASIA & PACIFIC

China

- During his visit to Angola on January 14, Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi held talks with his Angolan counterpart, Manuel Domingos Augusto.

Following discussions, Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi called for the transformation and upgrade of cooperation with Angola. Wang Yi also rejected claims that China's financing has increased the debt burden of African countries. Wang noted that with deepening Sino-African cooperation in recent years, China has increased its financing support for African countries.

- During his visit to Phnom Penh on January 11, Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang pledged billions of dollars to build new infrastructure in Cambodia.

Li visited Cambodia to attend the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation forum. He also held talks with Cambodian leader, Hun Sen. Li offered to fund a new airport in Phnom Penh, a highway from the capital to the coastal city of Sihanoukville, and a hospital.

- During his visit to China on January 8, French President Emmanuel Macron held talks with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

President Macron signalled his country's interest in Beijing's massive New Silk Road plans, even as he called for more balanced trade with China. Macron said France would also work with China on global challenges including climate change. On his part, Chinese President Xi said that China would work closely with France on major international issues.

North Korea

- During his televised New Year's speech on January 1, North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un warned the US that it is, "within the range of our nuclear strike and a nuclear button is always on the desk of my office."

In response, US President Trump said that his "nuclear button" was "much bigger and more powerful" than the North Korean leader's. In his speech, Kim also expressed a desire for dialogue with South Korea and to sending a team to the Winter Olympics to be held in Pyeongchang in February, 2018. North Korea also reopened a hotline to South Korea, almost two years after it was disabled on the orders of leader Kim Jong-un. South Korean President Moon Jae-in welcomed Kim Jong Un's willingness to enter into dialogue.

- On January 9, North Korea agreed to send its athletes to the Winter Olympics in South Korea, after the two sides held talks in more than two years.

South Korea said it would temporarily lift sanctions to allow the North Koreans to attend the Winter Olympics scheduled to be held in February 2018 in Pyeongchang. Both sides have also agreed to hold follow-up discussions regarding North Korea's participation in the Winter Olympics. The agreement represents a major diplomatic breakthrough. China's Foreign

Ministry said it was happy to see talks between North and South Korea and welcomed all positive steps. Meanwhile, South Korea's Presidential Blue House said that Washington and Seoul had agreed that there would be no military drills until the Winter Olympics. North Korea has long denounced US-South Korean joint military exercises, calling them preludes to invasion.

Myanmar

- On January 10, Myanmar's military admitted that its security forces were responsible for the killing of 10 Rohingya Muslims in September 2017, whose remains were found in a mass grave in Inn Din village of Maung Daw Township in the Northern Rakhine State.

The military said it would take action against the perpetrators involved in those killings. Before this admission, Myanmar's military had denied any wrongdoing in the violence that began in August 2017. The UN and other groups have accused the military of widespread atrocities against Rohingya, including killings, rapes, and the burning of homes.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- According to the *Washington Post* on January 15, Julian Sanchez the Mayor of Beaucaire in Southern France banned pork substitutes in school meals, saying he was defending secularism.

Beaucaire is “the latest faultline in a battle over the place of Islam in a staunchly secular society.” Sanchez a member of the far-right National Front removed alternatives to pork in school cafeterias, insisting that religious exceptions to the menu violate France’s Republican principles. There was immediate outrage from every corner of society including parents, the local opposition, Muslim leaders and even the French government. Marlène Schiappa, France’s Gender-Equality Minister, called Sanchez “a typical example of someone brandishing secularism as an anti-Muslim political weapon, or anti-Jewish for that matter.”

- On January 14, Nicola Sturgeon said she would be able to make a judgment on whether to back a second referendum on Scottish independence by the end of 2018.

The First Minister said her decision would be made once the shape of a Brexit deal becomes clear later in 2018. Her comments come ahead of the publication of a Scottish government assessment on the impact of Brexit. The UK government has accused the SNP of trying to undermine the Brexit vote. The SNP delayed plans for a new vote on independence following the loss of 21 MPs in the 2017 general election.

- On January 13, protests took place in the Austrian capital of Vienna over the inclusion of the far-right Freedom Party in the new coalition government.

Police said at least 20,000 people attended the rally, although organisers put the number at double that. Families with children walked alongside marchers chanting “Nazis out!”

The Freedom Party’s Interior Minister caused outrage earlier with his comments over asylum seekers. Herbert Kickl said asylum seekers should be kept concentrated in one place, using a term associated with Nazi prisoners and death camps.

- According to the *BBC* on January 12 the Czech presidential election will go to a run-off after incumbent Milos Zeman led the first round but did not secure enough votes to win outright.

With nearly all results in, Zeman secured 39% ahead of his nearest rival Jiri Drahos at 26.3%. Turnout was 61%. Zeman is seeking a second five-year term but has stoked controversy with his outspoken views and pro-Russian stance. The second round is scheduled for 26-27 January, 2018. Zeman appears to have done worse than expected in rural areas, where his forthright views on immigrants and political correctness have traditionally won him support.

- On January 12, French President Emmanuel Macron held talks with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Kurz's visit to Paris is one of his first abroad since becoming the world's youngest leader at 31. After elections in December 2017, Kurz formed a coalition with far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ). Macron's plans for strengthening the EU received a boost in Berlin where conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel sealed a breakthrough deal with the Social Democrats (SPD) and promised a "fresh start in Europe." The agreement could open the door for changes to the Eurozone, which the French President has been pushing for since his election in May 2017. Progress however will also depend on sceptics like Kurz.

- On January 12, German politicians achieved a breakthrough in talks aimed at forming a new coalition government.

A blueprint for formal negotiations was agreed between Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and their former coalition partners, the Social Democrats (SPD). Politicians stayed up all night to discuss the 28-page document, with discussions lasting more than 24 hours. They managed to agree on key sticking points including migration. They plan to limit asylum-seeker arrivals to about 200,000 annually. The blueprint also speaks of capping at 1,000 a month the number of migrants who will be allowed to join their family living in Germany.

- On January 7, German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed hope that fresh coalition talks aimed at ending the country's political stalemate would succeed.

More than three months after a general election, Germany is still without a new government. The five-day talks will include Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Social Democrats (SPD). Many see this as her last chance to form a stable coalition. "I believe the talks can succeed," Merkel said as she arrived at the SPD headquarters in Berlin. "I'm going into these talks with optimism, indeed it's clear that in these few days we have a huge amount of work ahead of us, but we're willing to take on this work and achieve a good outcome," she added.

- On January 12, Jean-Claude Juncker the President of the European Commission expressed support for the Bulgarian place in the European Council in 2018 and the country's future within the EU and Schengen zone.

"The Western Balkans are a priority of the European Commission as well as a priority of Bulgaria," said Juncker during his meeting with the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov at the Council of Ministers in Sofia, at the ceremony marking Bulgaria's first EU rotating Presidency.

- On January 10, the leaders of Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain said EU citizens should have more say on EU policy to combat populism. They issued a

joint statement at a summit in Rome that “citizens’ consultations” were needed to “foster democracy and citizens’ participation.”

The Rome event was the fourth of its kind since September 2016, when Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras launched the idea of creating a new “southern front” to influence EU policy making on issues like migration, economic growth, social equality and employment. The meeting comes ahead of an EU summit in March 2018 and amid deliberations on the future of migration and economic and monetary policies.

- According to the *NY Times* on January 10, a Belgian official’s decision to expel several Sudanese migrants in late 2017 has wreaked havoc in Belgium.

The official, Theo Francken, is a Flemish nationalist who in 2014 was appointed Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration. He is known for making incendiary comments about migrants; in September 2017 he apologised for using the term “cleaning up” about a police operation in which several undocumented immigrants were arrested. The term was condemned as being xenophobic. The problems reflect not only the fraught migration debate in Western Europe but also the divisions that make the country increasingly difficult to govern.

- On January 10, Germany’s Lufthansa bypassed Ryanair to become Europe’s largest airline by passenger numbers.

Ryanair was forced to cut thousands of flights because of pilot rostering problems. The Lufthansa group as a whole carried 130 million passengers in 2017. The equivalent figure from Ryanair was 129 million. Ryanair slipped behind Lufthansa after overtaking it in 2016. Lufthansa has grown rapidly, after taking over Brussels Airlines at the end of 2016 and is aiming to grow its budget brand Eurowings to become Europe’s third largest point-to-point carrier. The group also includes Swiss and Austrian Airlines and has benefited from the collapse of German rival Air Berlin in the latter part of 2017. Air Berlin, stopped flying in October 2017. Ryanair, meanwhile, has curbed its growth plans after a pilot rostering issue left it without enough standby pilots to fly its planes, forcing it to cancel 20,000 flights.

- On January 9, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced a sweeping reshuffle of his government.

The move is being seen as an effort to punish political rivals while improving the governing party’s image abroad as it engages in a bruising battle with other European nations. Morawiecki announced the dismissal of a third of his cabinet, including the Foreign Minister, the Defence Minister and several others with tense relationships with European leaders. In laying out the changes at a news conference Morawiecki also reiterated Poland’s stance against Muslim immigrants. The country, he said, needed to be “safe at its external borders as well as inside the country.”

- On January 9, Thousands of tourists were left stranded after heavy snow in the Alps cut off towns and villages across Switzerland, France and Italy.

In the Swiss resort of Zermatt, more than 13,000 tourists are trapped and some visitors who wanted to leave were airlifted by helicopter. Skiing is not possible as slopes are closed because of the risk of avalanches. More than a metre (39in) of snow fell in parts on Monday alone. This is the highest it has been for almost 10 years. Earlier on January 3, three people died as winter storm Eleanor swept across most of northern Europe, causing widescale disruption. A skier died in the French Alps and 15 others were injured elsewhere in the country, four of them seriously. Two people were killed when they were swept away by a huge wave on Spain's northern Basque coast.

- According to the Italian Police on January 9, Police in Italy and Germany arrested 169 people in an anti-mafia swoop.

Assets worth €50m were seized in the operation targeting the 'Ndrangheta organised crime group. As part of the group's activities, German restaurants were forced to buy wine, pizza dough and pastries made in southern Italy. Those arrested include the president of Crotona province, Nicodemo Parrilla, in Italy's Calabria region. The investigation focused on the Farao-Marincola gang, one of the strongest in Calabria. In Germany, arrests were made in the Hessen and Baden-Württemberg regions. The 'Ndrangheta network is based in southern Italy but has expanded its reach into the rest of Europe.

- On January 9, the EU defended its right to make plans for a “no-deal” Brexit, amid UK fears firms may lose out as a result.

Brexit Secretary David Davis complained about EU guidance stating the UK would become a “third country” in 2019 with no reference to a possible trade deal. In a letter to Theresa May, Davis warned UK firms may have to relocate to Europe or risk seeing contracts terminated. But the EU said the UK had first raised the possibility of there being no deal. A spokeswoman rejected suggestions that Britain was being treated differently to other EU members and that its rights were being abused.

- On January 3, the EU called the deaths of Iranians during nearly a week of protests “inexcusable.” However, its members have so far refrained from issuing a more full-throated, joint condemnation despite US efforts.

The EU is especially anxious that President Trump may use the protests in Iran as a reason to reimpose US economic sanctions on Iran, possibly ending the multilateral deal that limited the country's nuclear programme. The EU also suggested that Trump's open support for the protesters in Iran risks helping the country's religious and political hard-liners and damaging

the relatively more moderate Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani. The European reluctance to side more openly with the protesters is the latest divergence of approach with the United States over a critical matter of foreign policy since Trump announced he would move the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

- According to the *BBC* on December 2, police is investigating two German far-right politicians over anti-Muslim messages on New Year's Eve.

Beatrix von Storch, deputy leader of the AfD party, had her Twitter account temporarily suspended on December 1, 2017 after posting an inflammatory message. She accused Cologne police of appeasing "barbaric, gang-raping Muslim hordes of men" after they tweeted a New Year message in Arabic. Another politician is being investigated after supporting her. Alice Weidel, one of the party's leaders, wrote on Facebook that authorities were submitting to "imported, marauding, groping, abusive, knife-stabbing migrant mobs". Police say both women may be guilty of incitement to hatred. If so, they could face fines or a prison sentence. Twitter and Facebook have deleted the posts.

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Iran

- On January 13, Iran warned it would retaliate against new sanctions imposed by the US after President Donald Trump set an ultimatum to fix ‘disastrous flaws’ in the Iranian nuclear deal.

Earlier, on January 12, Trump announced that he would waive nuclear sanctions on Iran for the last time to give the US and European allies a final chance to amend the nuclear deal. While approving the waiver on US sanctions, Washington announced other sanctions against 14 Iranian entities and people, including the Head of Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani. Iran’s Foreign Ministry described the sanctions against Larijani as ‘hostile action’ and said that the move “crossed all red lines of conduct in the international community and is a violation of international law and will surely be answered by a serious reaction of the Islamic Republic”. The Ministry, however, did not specify what any retaliation might involve.

- On January 9, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that Iran has foiled attempts by its foreign enemies to turn legitimate protests into an insurgency to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

Khamenei tweeted, “Once again, the nation tells the US, Britain, and those who seek to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran from abroad that you’ve failed, and you will fail in the future, too.” Earlier, on January 7, 2018, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards said that the security forces had put an end to the unrest. At least 1,000 people were arrested in the anti-government protests, with the judiciary saying ringleaders could face death penalty. Khamenei said US President Donald Trump was grandstanding when he tweeted support for protesters and promised great support from the US. Khamenei also blamed the violence on Israel, exiled dissident group ‘People’s Mujahedin’ of Iran and ‘a wealthy government’ in the Gulf.

In a related development on January 2, 2018, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accused Iran’s enemies of stirring unrest in the country. Khamenei said, “In recent days, enemies of Iran used different tools including cash, weapons, politics and intelligence apparatus to create troubles for the Islamic Republic. The enemy is always looking for an opportunity and any crevice to infiltrate and strike the Iranian nation.” According to Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, the US, Britain and Saudi Arabia were behind the recent riots in Iran. He said, “Saudis will receive Iran’s unexpected response and they know how serious it can be.”

Iraq

- On January 15, at least 38 people were killed and more than 100 injured in two suicide bombings in Baghdad.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack as yet. Al Tayaran Square was attacked where large crowds of construction workers gather to find work every morning. It has been targeted by militants in the past. Baghdad has been the target of bombings and armed attacks since Daesh captured large areas of the country in 2014. However, the pace of attacks has slowed since Iraq's government declared it had retaken all the territory. According to experts, continuing attacks suggest that the militants might revert to the guerrilla tactics they had been using.

Israel

- On January 7, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu called for the closure of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

During his weekly cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said, "UNRWA is an organisation that perpetuates the Palestinian refugee problem." Israel has long viewed the UN Agency as being biased against it, an allegation the Agency strongly denies, saying it is only providing necessary services to Palestinians. Netanyahu said that while millions of other refugees around the world were cared for by the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Palestinians have their own body which also treats 'great-grandchildren of refugees who aren't refugees'. He said, "This absurd situation must be ended." UNRWA Spokesman, Chris Gunness responded by saying that its mandate came from the UN General Assembly 'whose members give wide and strong support to the Agency's humanitarian and human development mission'. He said, "What perpetuates the refugee crisis is the failure of the parties to deal with the issue. This needs to be resolved by the parties to the conflict in the context of peace talks, based on UN resolutions and international law."

- On January 2, Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) passed an amendment that would make it harder for the Parliament to cede control over parts of Jerusalem in any peace deal with the Palestinians.

The amendment was passed with 64 votes in favour and 52 against. The legislation was sponsored by the far-right Jewish Home coalition party. The amendment raises to 80 from 61 the number of votes required in the 120-seat Knesset to approve any proposal to hand over part of the city to 'a foreign party'. Palestinians condemned the move as undermining any chance to revive talks on statehood. According to Nabil Abu Rudeineh, Spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Trump's policy-shift on Jerusalem and the passage of the amendment is 'a declaration of war against the Palestinian people'. He said, "The vote clearly shows that the Israeli side has officially declared an end to the so-called political process."

Jordan

- On January 6, Jordan's Foreign Minister, Ayman Safadi announced that the Arab League would soon begin a diplomatic drive to persuade the UN to recognise a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Six Arab Foreign Ministers met in Amman to follow up on earlier decisions taken by the Arab League to counter US President Donald Trump's move in December 2017 to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The talks were attended by the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and the UAE. Safadi said, "There is a political decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and we will strive to reach an international political decision to recognise a Palestinian state... with (east) Jerusalem as its capital." He said Arabs have three main goals, including invalidating Trump's decision. Safadi added, "According to international law, Jerusalem is an occupied land." Earlier on January 6, 2018, Jordan's King Abdullah II met the Arab diplomats and said, "the question of Jerusalem must be resolved within the framework of a just and lasting peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis".

Palestine

- On January 14, Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas said that US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace efforts are the "slap of the century" after his recognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's capital.

During his meeting with Palestinian officials in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Abbas said, "The deal of the century is the slap of the century and we will not accept it." He also said that the Tel Aviv regime had ended the 1990s Oslo peace accords with its actions. He said, "We said no to Trump, we will not accept your project." The Oslo Accords were signed between the Israeli regime and the PLO during the early-mid 1990s to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to guarantee the Palestinians' right of self-determination. The PA was established following the Oslo Accords.

- On January 1, Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas condemned a vote by Israel's ruling Likud party in support of annexing large parts of the West Bank and criticised the US for its silence.

Earlier, on December 31, 2017, the Likud Central Committee had backed a resolution urging Israel to extend sovereignty over all settlement areas in the West Bank and called for unlimited settlement construction. Abbas said the non-binding vote by the Central Committee of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party could not be taken without the full support of the US Administration. He said that the White House had refused to condemn Israeli colonial settlements as well as the systematic attacks and crimes of the Israeli occupation against the

people of Palestine. He said, “We hope that this vote serves as a reminder for the international community that the Israeli government, with the full support of the US Administration, is not interested in a just and lasting peace. Rather its main goal is the consolidation of an apartheid regime in all of historic Palestine.” According to observers, taking such a measure could effectively end hopes for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as there would be little area left for a Palestinian state. According to a significant number of the right-wing coalition members, that is precisely what they are seeking and openly oppose a Palestinian state.

Syria

- On January 9, the Israeli Army conducted air strikes and fired rockets at targets in Syria.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the air strikes targeted the Syrian Army and Hezbollah weapon depots. According to the Syrian Army, the Israeli Air Force conducted strikes on the Qutayfeh area northeast of Damascus. The Syrian Army retaliated by hitting an Israeli plane. Syrian air defences intercepted one rocket, but several more hit near a military position, causing material damage. The Syrian Army also said Israel launched land-to-land missiles into Syria from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, the Israeli Army has conducted out several attacks on the Syrian Army and its ally Hezbollah movement. According to the official SANA news agency, Syria’s Foreign Minister, Walid Muallem called on the UN Security Council to ‘condemn these blatant Israeli aggressions... and to adopt firm and immediate measures to put an end to them’. In a related development on January 9, 2018, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu said, “We have a long-standing policy to prevent the transfer of game-changing weapons to Hezbollah from Syrian territory. This policy has not changed. We back it up as necessary with action.”

In another development on January 9, 2018, at least 24 people, including children, were killed in regime air strikes on a rebel enclave near Damascus. The latest civilian killings came as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock visited Syria and discussed the delivery of aid to civilians. Lowcock also met with Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Muallem and other government officials as the UN seeks greater access to besieged populations.

- On January 4, at least 30 civilians were killed in Russian air strikes on a residential area in a besieged rebel enclave.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least four bombs destroyed two buildings in the Eastern Ghouta town of Misraba, killing around 20 and wounding more than 40 people. At least ten people were killed in aerial strikes in other nearby towns. Backed by Russian strikes, government forces have escalated military operations against Eastern Ghouta in recent months, seeking to tighten the siege. According to local residents and aid workers, it is a

deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war. Russia rejects Syrian opposition and rights groups' accusations that its jets have been responsible for deaths of thousands of civilians since its intervention in Syria.

Turkey

- On January 15, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the US over its support for the creation of a 30,000-strong “terror army” on the country’s southern borders with Syria, vowing to crush the force before it was even set up.

Earlier in the day, the US-led coalition in Syria announced its plan to work with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to train a new Syrian Border Security Force (BSF). According to the coalition, its goal is to create a force with about 30,000 personnel “over the next several years”. About half would be Kurdish and Arab SDF fighters and the other half new recruits. President Erdogan said, “America has acknowledged it is in the process of forming a terror army on our border. It is our duty to nip this terror army in the bud. Trust in Turkey if we are your strategic allies. If soldiers are needed in Raqqah or Manbij, we can send one or two brigades. Act with Turkey. What you are doing is wrong; you’ll disgrace yourselves in front of your strategic partner.” He also warned US officials that the new force, which would be comprised of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militants, would eventually betray them. He stressed that the Turkish Army is ready “at any moment” to launch an operation against the YPG in Syria. Ankara considers Kurds fighting for the SDF to be part of a terrorist group. In a related development, the Syrian government called the creation of the SDF border force “a blatant attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity and unity of Syria, and a flagrant violation of international law”.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA: (I)

Pakistan External

- On January 2, the National Security Committee (NSC), expressed “deep disappointment” over US President Donald Trump’s accusations against the country including “deception” and “harbouring of terrorists,” noting that it was “completely incomprehensible” and “contradicted the facts.”
- In a related development on January 4, the US State Department’s spokeswoman, Heather Nauert said that the US was suspending security assistance to Pakistan for failing to take “decisive action” against the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. The measure includes the suspension of delivering military equipment and the transfer of security-related funds to Pakistan.

However, the State Department did not mention how much aid would be suspended. Media reports citing the US officials said the suspended aid would amount to more than \$255 million. Earlier in December 2017, the US withheld a separate \$255 million. The new suspension follows President Trump’s tweet on January 1, 2018, in which he levelled accusation against Pakistan of providing safe havens to terrorists and that the US had given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars since 2002, “foolishly”. In response, Pakistan summoned David Hale, the US Ambassador to Pakistan, to protests against Trump’s comments. US-Pak relations are at rock bottom as the US continues its hostile rhetoric against Pakistan accusing the country of harbouring terrorist groups. Pakistan strongly disagrees with the US claims, stressing that tens of thousands of Pakistanis, including its security personnel have died fighting terrorism, and their sacrifices cannot be “trivialised.” Security analysts say President Trump’s efforts of taking a tough approach towards Pakistan could prompt the country to suspend its Ground Lines of Communications (GLOC) and Air Lines of Communications (ALOC) for the coalition through which it transfers its supplies to land-locked Afghanistan. However, Pakistan’s Defence Minister, Khurram Dastgir said on January 9, 2017, that Pakistan would leverage its logistics support for coalition in Afghanistan at an appropriate time.

The continued US allegations against Pakistan have also prompted responses from its allies China and Turkey. China has reiterated that that the international community should acknowledge Pakistan’s contributions to the global cause of counterterrorism. On January 3, 2018, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan called his Pakistani counterpart, Mamnoon Hussain and assured Pakistan of his support.

- During her visit to Islamabad on January 15, acting US Assistant Secretary of State, Alice Wells met Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua.

Alice said that Pakistan’s support was critical to the success of the US strategy for Afghanistan and acknowledged Pakistan’s efforts in eradicating terrorism. She also conveyed the US desire to work with Pakistan in furthering the shared objectives of stabilising Afghanistan. Foreign Secretary, Janjua said the two countries should move forward their relationship under an

environment of mutual trust and respect. She also expressed concerns on the continued use of Afghan soil by elements hostile to Pakistan's stability. Wells is the first mid-ranking US official to visit Pakistan after the US suspended security aid to the country.

- According to Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on January 12, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa held a telephonic conversation with US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander, General Joseph Votel and discussed Pak-US relations' post-US President Donald Trump's tweet regarding Pakistan on January 1 2018.

The CENTCOM Commander assured Pakistan that the US is not planning, "any unilateral action inside Pakistan" and is seeking "cooperation to tackle Afghan nationals who, in the US view, use Pakistan's soil against Afghanistan." General Bajwa told General Votel that the "entire Pakistani nation felt betrayed" after the latest statements from US officials. He, however, stressed that Pakistan, "would continue counter terrorism efforts even without US financial support in accordance with our national interest." Earlier in December 2017, the Pentagon told Congress it would work to expand cooperation with Pakistan "in areas where our interests converge and to take unilateral steps in areas of divergence."

- On January 4, the US State Department placed Pakistan on a "Special Watch List" for "severe violations of religious freedom."

The development came at the same time the US announced cuts to security assistance to Pakistan. Pakistan rejected the US designation saying the placement reflects, "the double standards and political motives behind the listing and hence lacks credibility."

- On January 13, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif denounced as "irresponsible" remarks by Indian Army Chief, Bipin Rawat in which he said that his force was ready to call Pakistan's "nuclear bluff" and cross the border if the government asked them.

The Foreign Minister also warned that the Indian Army Chief's statement "amounts to invitation for nuclear encounter." Meanwhile, Pakistan's Army spokesperson, Major General Asif Ghafoor said that Pakistan has "a credible nuclear capability, exclusively meant for threat from East." Pakistan maintains that the country's tactical nuclear missile, Hatf-IX has deterred India from carrying out a limited conventional attack under its "Cold Start" doctrine.

- Dawn reported on January 1, that the National Security Advisor (NSA) of Pakistan, Nasir Khan Janjua, held talks with India's NSA, Ajit Doval in Bangkok earlier on December 26, 2017.

However, the two countries did not give any official statement about the meeting. Earlier on December 18, 2017, addressing a national security seminar in Islamabad, the Pakistani NSA had said, "the possibility of nuclear war cannot be ruled out." According to media reports, in the meeting with Doval, Nasir Janjua raised the issue of Jammu & Kashmir and targeting of civilians along the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Kashmir. Meanwhile, the Indian NSA raised the issue of alleged infiltration of militants into Occupied Kashmir from across the (LoC).

- On January 6, Pakistan’s Foreign Office spokesperson, Muhammad Faisal expressed doubts over the press freedom in India and alleged that the Indian Government got removed the news story telling truth about convicted Indian spy, Kulbhushan Jadhav from a newspaper.

On January 5, 2018, an Indian news portal The Quint published a news story titled “Two Ex-RAW Chiefs Did Not Want Kulbhushan Jadhav Recruited As Spy”, written by an Indian journalist, Chandan Nandy. One day later, The Quint retracted the article and said it was “rechecking” the story. Meanwhile, Pakistan’s Foreign Office citing media reports said that Nandy was “missing” or had “gone in hiding”, since then. Nandy, in his article, said two former chiefs of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) had been against the recruitment of Jadhav as a spy to Pakistan. He revealed that after two RAW chiefs rejected Jadhav’s appointment, a third one agreed to it and “the recruitment was approved by a joint secretary as the supervisory officer. The RAW has a special unit which also undertakes parallel operations in certain crucial target countries for which it seeks out its own recruits.”

- On January 4, Pakistan’s Foreign Office released a video of convicted Indian spy, Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav.

In the video, Jadhav reiterated that he is a “commissioned officer of the Indian navy”, and his commission is “not yet over”. Jadhav also said that his mother and wife, who met him on December 25, 2017, were “shouted at” by the Indian Deputy High Commissioner who was accompanying them. In response, India’s Ministry of External Affairs dismissed the video as being “propagandistic”. Earlier on December 25, 2017, Kulbhushan Jadhav’s mother and wife had visited Islamabad and met him at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Soon after the meeting, India’s External Affairs Ministry had accused Pakistan of “intimidating” Jadhav’s family. Pakistan had rejected the charges.

- On January 4, Pakistani Defence Minister, Khurram Dastgir held a telephonic conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Brigadier General, Amir Hatami.

The two sides discussed increasing unrest in the region and agreed to hold “frequent discussions” on the regional situation. The Iranian Defence Minister also termed the Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa’s visit to Tehran in November 2016, as a turning point in defence relations between Pakistan and Iran.

- During his visit to Islamabad on January 4, Japanese Foreign Minister, Taro Kono met with Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

The Japanese Foreign Minister assured PM Abbasi that Japan would work with Pakistan for strengthening bilateral ties. Meanwhile, the Pakistani Premier said that his country aims to enhance cooperation with Japan in all areas. During his meeting with General Bajwa at the General Headquarters (GHQ), Kono assured Pakistan of his country’s cooperation with Islamabad on the subject of security and counter terrorism efforts.

Pakistan Internal

- On January 15, at least four Pakistani Army soldiers were killed by Indian shelling from across the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir's Jandrot sector.

According to the Pakistan Army, three Indian soldiers were also killed and several others injured in an exchange of fire. According to Pakistan's Foreign Office, so far in 2018, Indian forces have committed more than 70 cease-fire violations along the Kashmir border. Earlier on January 12, 2018, Indian troops firing in Azad Kashmir's Kot Kotera region killed a 65-year old woman.

- On January 12, the National Assembly unanimously passed a bill extending the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and Peshawar High Court to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

However, despite frequent demands from the lawmakers, the government has failed to introduce the bill in Parliament to merge the FATA region with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

- On January 9, Balochistan's Chief Minister, Sanaullah Zehri resigned from his post after opposition threatened to remove him through a vote of no confidence.

On January 13, 2018, Balochistan Assembly's former Deputy Speaker, Abdul Quddus Bizenjo was sworn in as the new Chief Minister of the province. The development came after 14 members of the provincial assembly, filed a motion of no-confidence against him on January 2, 2018, citing "unfulfilled commitments".

Bangladesh

- On January 15, Bangladeshi and Myanmar officials held talks in Naypyidaw to "settle issues" over the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

Myanmar has vowed to repatriate refugees driven into Bangladesh by an Army crackdown in 2017, if they can verify they belong in western Rakhine state. The two governments signed an agreement in November 2017, paving the way for repatriations from January 23, 2018. The deal applies to Rohingya who fled Myanmar in two major outbreaks of violence since October 2016.

- On January 2, a Bangladeshi court issued an arrest warrant for former Prime Minister and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader, Khaleda Zia involving an arson attack during an anti-government protest in 2015.

The Bangladeshi authorities accuse Zia and the others for the attack on a bus that killed eight people in February 2015. There was no immediate reaction from Khaleda Zia. In a separate development, Khaleda Zia warned the government that it would not be able to hold the 11th parliamentary elections by keeping the BNP out of the elections and claimed that Sheikh Hasina and her party have decided to oversee the elections to perpetuate power. The BNP has been

demanding dissolution of parliament and formation of a 'non-partisan, facilitating' government before the general elections, a demand the ruling Awami League has rejected.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

South Asia: II

Afghanistan

- On January 14, members of the United Nations Security Council met with Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani in Kabul.

Ghani said, “We had a productive discussion about reforms, security, peace, reconciliation, regional cooperation, transnational terrorism and counter narcotics”. He added that efforts were underway to improve relations with Pakistan but there has been no sign of cooperation from Pakistan. We want more pressure on Pakistan to ensure stability in Afghanistan. He said joint efforts were required to move forward on the Afghan peace process. He hailed US President, Donald Trump’s strategy for South Asia and Afghanistan as a positive change for Afghanistan and the region. The UN Security Council delegation included the Ambassadors of United States, China, Britain, Russia, France, Sweden, Poland, Kazakhstan, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kuwait, the Netherlands and Peru.

- On January 14, Afghan government representatives held unofficial talks with the Taliban in Turkey.

Humayun Jarir and Abbas Basir were representing the Afghan government at the meeting. Jarir said that the talks were unofficial and that they would discuss mechanisms to pave the ground for official talks between the two sides. He added that the Taliban delegates were representing the Quetta Shura, the Haqqani network and other Taliban factions. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah’s spokesman Mujib Rahman Rahimi said that they welcome any move that brings peace in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, rejected the meeting, claiming that the participants were not representing the group. Mawlawi Abdul Rauf, a Taliban leader who headed the delegation said, “We represent the overall Taliban (members) of the Islamic Emirate except some of individuals who are not willing to opt for intra-Afghan peace talks and who want to talk through Americans”. The first and second rounds of Government-Taliban negotiations were held in Turkey in 2017.

- On January 10, at least 23 Taliban insurgents including three local commanders were killed in an operation in eastern Nangarhar province.

The operation was launched in Sordag area of Khoghyani district of the province in which 14 other suspects were also arrested. Three Taliban commanders including Qari Hedayat, Qari Khalid and Ismael were also among the dead. The Resolute Support Mission confirmed in a statement that no coalition service members were killed in the engagement.

- On January 5, a suicide attack killed 20 and left 30 others wounded in Kabul. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On January 10, at least 17 Daesh fighters were killed in drone strikes in eastern Nangarhar province.

- On January 3, Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) arrested 13 Daesh militants in Kabul city.
- On January 2, at least 65 Daesh militants were killed in Afghan Security Forces operations in eastern Nangarhar province.

An NDS statement said, “The group was active in transferring suicide bombers and providing facilities to the terrorists in the Kabul city”. Meanwhile, Nangarhar Governor’s spokesman, Attaullah Khogyani said, “The operations were conducted from the air and ground in Gorgore and Wangora areas of Haska Mena district. 18 other Daesh militants were wounded in the operations. One civilian was killed and thirteen others, including women and children, were wounded during the operations”. In a related development on January 7, 2018, at least 15 Daesh insurgents and 3 Afghan policemen were killed in a clash in eastern Kunar province.

India

- On January 14, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu arrived in India for a 6-day visit.

This is the first visit by an Israeli leader to India in 15 years. Netanyahu was accompanied by the largest-ever business delegation to travel with an Israeli leader. Netanyahu said, “This visit is an opportunity to enhance cooperation with a global economic, security, technology and tourism power”. Meanwhile Modi said, “Your visit to India is historic and special. It would further cement the close friendship between our nations”. On January 15, 2018 both the Prime Ministers signed nine MoUs in the fields of defence, space, agriculture, cyber security, science and technology, film cooperation and medicine.

- On January 12, Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat said that Pakistan’s nuclear bogey would be thoroughly exposed if it actually comes to a war with its western neighbour.

Rawat said, “Pakistan’s nuclear bogey would be thoroughly exposed if it actually comes to a war with the western neighbour, which often brandishes its short-range Nasr (Hatf-IX) nuclear missiles as a battlefield counter to India’s Cold Start strategy of swift, high intensity conventional attacks into enemy territory. We would call their bluff. If given the task, we would not say we cannot cross the border because they have nuclear weapons”. Pakistani Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif called Rawat’s statement ‘very irresponsible’ in a tweet. Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry and Army’s Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) also reacted to Rawat’s remarks categorically calling upon India to ‘test their resolve’.

Rawat also suggested that the Indian Army would ramp up a military offensive to pile up heat on Pakistan to stop “cross-border terrorism” in Kashmir. He said that political initiative must go hand-in-hand with military operations to bring peace to (Occupied) Jammu and Kashmir. He

said the Armed Forces operating in the region could not be 'status quoist' and must evolve new strategies and tactics to deal with the situation.

- On January 12, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched its 100th satellite, Cartosat-2 into space.

The ISRO's workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV- C40) placed Cartosat-2 and 29 other satellites in orbit. It includes those from the US, France, Finland, the UK, South Korea and Canada, and it lifted off from the launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. According to the ISRO, Cartosat-2 Series satellite would provide regular remote sensing services using its panchromatic and multispectral cameras. A day before the launch, Pakistan raised objections over the satellite and said that its dual nature, military as well as civilian, could have a "negative impact on the regional strategic stability". The PSLV-C40 mission occurred four months after the failure of PSLV-C39.

- On January 8, Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat said that Indian and Chinese troops had resolved an issue over the recent attempt by Chinese teams to build a road on the Indian side of the border at Tuting in Arunachal Pradesh.

According to the Times of India, China has agreed to stop road construction activity across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), with Indian troops returning two earth excavators and other equipment seized from Chinese workers. Rawat said, "The Tuting incident has been resolved. A Border Personnel Meeting (BPM) was held two days ago". The BPM in Arunachal Pradesh, with Brigade Commanders from the two sides leading the talks, was held on January 6, 2018. The incident is an indication of heightened tensions between the two armies after the Doklam stand-off, which saw both armies move additional infantry battalions, tanks, artillery and missile units forward towards the LAC. In a related development on January 12, 2018 Rawat said, "China is a powerful country but we are not a weak nation...We would not allow our territory to be invaded by anyone. We are prepared". He said his force was shifting its focus from the western front to the northern borders with China.

- On January 7, a bomb blast killed 4 policemen in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

A police spokesman, Harmeet Singh said, "The explosion ripped through a market in the town of Sopore. Four policemen who were on law-and-order duty were killed. Ten shops were also damaged due to the blast, as it was very strong". Jaish-e-Mohammad claimed responsibility for the blast. In a related development on January 1, 2018, 5 Indian soldiers and 3 Jaish-e-Mohammad fighters were killed in a gun battle at the Lethora-based camp, in Occupied Kashmir.

- On January 7, Mehbooba Mufti, the Chief Minister of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, asked the governments of India and Pakistan to resume talks and resolve their mutual issues amicably.

Mehbooba said that a friendly relationship between the two countries would have a positive bearing on the situation in the state, which had seen enough bloodshed over the last three decades. She added, "Dialogue is the only way out and I appeal to the governments of India and Pakistan to resume the talks and resolve the mutual issues amicably. Dialogue alone would end mayhem and destruction and bring peace. Violence has inflicted only miseries upon the people and the state needs to be taken out of this vicious cycle. Deaths on both sides of the border and killings inside the state rob us of peace and only the graveyards are getting filled, devouring the sons of the soil".

- On January 7, Indian government sanctioned the construction of 14,000 bunkers along the Line of Control (LoC).

7298 bunkers would be constructed in the twin districts of Poonch and Rajouri, whereas 7162 underground bunkers would be constructed along the Kathua and Samba districts. A total of 13,029 individual bunkers and 1431 community bunkers would be constructed. The capacity of the 160 square feet individual bunker would be eight people, and of the 800 square feet community bunker would be 40 people.

- On January 1, Indian Home Minister, Rajnath Singh said that the government plans to link all posts along the Sino-Indian border by roads.

Singh celebrated the New Year with the troops of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) at Uttarakhand. He said, "A project is underway to connect all the border outposts along the Sino-India border with roads". Talking about the incidents of Chinese incursion, he said the ITBP had been successful in preventing such incidents. "China is our neighbouring country and we have good relations with them. India has always tried to maintain good relations with its neighbours". Addressing a Pakistan related query, he said, "Our neighbour, Pakistan, does not stop its activities, but the jawans of our Army, CRPF and Jammu and Kashmir Police are doing their duty very well".

--- Kashif Hussain

UNITED NATIONS

- On January 14, the top United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) official indicated that only in the first 14 days of the year, more than 30 children have been killed in escalating violence in Syria's East Ghouta, where an estimated 200,000 children have been trapped under siege since 2013.

Fran Equiza, the UNICEF Representative in Syria said, "It is shameful that nearly seven years into the conflict, a war on children continues while the world watches. Millions of children across Syria and in neighbouring countries have suffered the devastating consequences of unabating levels of violence in several parts of the country." According to the UNICEF, two medical facilities came under attack a few days ago in East Ghouta, and most health centres had to close because of the violence. In Idlib, to the northwest of the country, heavy violence reportedly killed and injured scores of children and women and displaced an estimated 100,000 civilians. In a related development on January 10, 2018, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that Syrian government forces and their allies killed at least 85 civilians since Dec 31, 2017, in Eastern Ghouta. He said that warring parties were flouting their obligations to distinguish between civilians and lawful military targets. He stressed that such a situation is raising concerns that war crimes may have been committed in the region.

- On January 12, the UN condemned US President Donald Trump for his racist description of African nations and Haiti as "shocking and shameful, and racist."

Rupert Colville, spokesman for the UN Human Rights Office, said, "If confirmed, these are shocking and shameful comments from the President of the United States. Sorry, but there is no other word one can use but racist." He also criticised Trump for suggesting that the US should welcome immigrants from places like Norway, whose population is overwhelmingly white, instead of from African countries and Haiti. He said, "Like the earlier comments made vilifying Mexicans and Muslims, the policy proposals targeting entire groups on grounds of nationality or religion, and the reluctance to clearly condemn the anti-Semitic and racist actions of the white supremacists in Charlottesville -- all of these go against the universal values the world has been striving so hard to establish since World War II and the Holocaust." Trump had used the language regarding African nations during a meeting with lawmakers about immigration reform, demanding to know why the United States should accept citizens from those countries.

- On January 10, the UN reprimanded the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over its human rights record, raising concerns over the torture of prisoners, injustice against foreign workers and discrimination of women in the country.

A report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) shed light on the suppression of freedom of expression and the undue influence of executive authorities and security services on the judiciary in the UAE. The report also raised concerns over the UAE's

2014 counterterrorism law under which anyone over the age of 16 found to “undermine national unity or social peace” can be sentenced to death. The 13-page report was prepared on January 5, 2018, and is expected to be presented at the 29th session of the Human Rights Council, which will run from January 15 to 26, 2018. The report is one amongst various other documents that must be submitted before meetings of the UN’s Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in the coming months in which the records of the UAE and Israel, among others, are to be scrutinised.

- On January 2, the United Nations human rights experts deplored Saudi Arabia’s continued use of counter-terrorism and security-related laws against human rights defenders.

The group of experts said, “The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are severely restricted in Saudi Arabia.” They also urged Saudi Arabia to release all those detained for peacefully exercising their rights. They indicated that religious figures, writers, journalists, academics and civic activists are being targeted in widespread and systematic arbitrary arrests and detention. The experts said, “We have written to the Government requesting detailed information about these numerous arrests on terrorism, cyber crime or any other state security-related charges during that period.” These experts are independent staff appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation.

--- Moiz Khan