

JUNE 1 – JUNE 15

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 1-15 June 2018
General Observations

Pakistan

- As part of the Afghanistan Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to deploy liaison officers in Islamabad and Kabul and coordination cells along the border to share intelligence on militants, on 11 June. The decision was taken by the two countries' Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs) during a meeting in Rawalpindi. This is part of the easing of tensions between the two countries.

This was followed by a visit to Kabul by the COAS General Bajwa where he met the Afghan leadership and reiterated the APAPPS being a way forward for peace in the region.

- Despite these peace overtures, terrorists continued to come across from the Pak-Afghan border into Pakistan. On 15 June, at least 5 terrorists were killed after Pakistan's Security Forces responded to a cross-border terrorist attack from Afghanistan. Three Pakistani soldiers also embraced martyrdom. Earlier, on 3 June, 6 terrorists were killed by the Pakistan army in response to an attack from the Afghan side of the international Pak-Afghan border. These terrorist attacks are intended to disrupt the fencing of the border and the establishment of border posts.
- On 5 June the World Bank made clear its position on the Indus Water Treaty when it rejected Pakistan's demands for arbitration on the Kishanganga issue and instead advised Pakistan to accept India's offer of appointing a "neutral expert" on the issue. Pakistan has wasted valuable time on seeking World Bank intervention on this issue.
- The incidents of firing by Indian forces along the LoC and Working boundary continued and on 3 June a woman and a young girl were killed and 24 others, including four children were injured along the Working Boundary as a result of firing of mortar shells by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF).
- On 1 June Indian security forces ran over and killed a protestor as they drove into a crowd of protestors in IOK.

International

- In a first for the UN, on 14 June, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) put out a Report on the Situation of Human Rights in

Kashmir in which the UN Human Rights Chief, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein critiqued the Indian Security Forces for inflicting mass civilian casualties in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and called for an international investigation into human right abuses in the region. Pakistan welcomed the Report especially the proposal for an international investigation into the human rights violations in IOK. India, as expected, rejected the Report.

- On 15 June it was reported that a US drone strike in Kunar province, Afghanistan killed TTP Chief Mullah Fazlullah. He had been the mastermind behind a series of terror attacks in Pakistan including the APS attack in Peshawar in December 2014. Pakistan had been demanding that the US and Afghan government act against him as he had been sheltering in Afghanistan. It would appear that this could be a signal that the US was finally realising that it required Pakistan's cooperation in moving towards peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.
- On 12 June the much-awaited Summit between US President Trump and North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un took place in Singapore. As a result there was an agreement on the "complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula" and the two leaders committed to working towards a new relationship between their two countries. Trump also cancelled the military exercises the US had planned with South Korea. Many were surprised by the effusive praise Trump had for the North Korean leader, and he said the US would lift sanctions against North Korea once "nukes are no longer a factor".
- Meanwhile, US relations continued to deteriorate with other states as President Trump announced 25% tariffs on \$50 bn worth of Chinese goods. China responded by stating it would impose tariff measures against the US on the same scale.
- President Trump also attacked his allies in the immediate aftermath of the G 7 Summit in Canada with a personal attack on Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau. Trump's rejection of the joint communiqué was regretted by German Chancellor Merkel, who termed it as "sobering" and "depressing". Clearly the trade disagreements continue between the US and its allies.
- Relations also continued to deteriorate between the US and Turkey. On 12 June Turkish President Erdogan said that Ankara would use the newly purchased Russian-made S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems if necessary. He said Turkey had been seeking these systems from the US but the US had continued to make excuses not to supply the same.
- In a TV interview, Erdogan asked the US to behave like a strategic partner instead of blocking Turkish arms sales. This was in reference to the US decision to block F-35 sales to Ankara.

- Turkey’s relations with European states also continued to deteriorate in the wake of the Austrian government’s decision to shut down several mosques and deport about 60 Imams, including 40 members of the Union of Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations in Europe (ATIB). On 12 June Turkish President Binali Yildirim denounced this decision demanding a revision of it.
- After the US vetoed a UNSC resolution, proposed by Kuwait, on 1 June condemning Israel’s use of force against Palestinian civilians, on 13 June the UNGA adopted a resolution demanding greater protection for Palestinians and deploring the “excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate” use of force by the Israeli military against Palestinian civilians, especially in Gaza. In a related development, the UNSC rejected a US draft resolution targeting Hamas and supporting the right of Israel to “defend” itself – with only the US voting in support of its own resolution.

--- *Dr Shireen M Mazari*
Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- According to *USA Today* on June 14 House Republican leaders released a draft immigration bill aimed at providing legal protections for undocumented young people known as “Dreamers.”

The bill will also provide \$23.4 billion for a wall along the border with Mexico. The funding would be combined with \$1.6 billion already appropriated to reach President Trump’s requested \$25 billion for the wall. The draft legislation is intended to be a compromise on an issue that has bitterly divided the party. House Speaker Paul Ryan and other leaders circulated it. A vote is likely next week, but it is unclear if the legislation has the votes to pass or if President Trump will support it. The draft proposal would enable an estimated 1.8 million “Dreamers” to apply for “nonimmigrant status” if they meet certain conditions. They must, for example, have a high school diploma or GED and must be under 36 years of age as of June 15.

- According to Justice Department Inspector General, Michael Horowitz, on June 14, Former FBI Director James Comey defied authority while he was the FBI Director.

Although the Justice Department report criticises Comey over the Clinton email case, it has found no evidence of bias. According to the report Comey broke FBI and Justice Department protocol in his handling of the 2016 investigation of Hillary Clinton’s email scandal, but Comey was not motivated by political bias when he cleared Clinton of criminal wrongdoing. “While we did not find that these decisions were the result of political bias on Comey’s part, we nevertheless concluded that by departing so clearly and dramatically from FBI and department norms, the decisions negatively impacted the perception of the FBI and the department as fair administrators of justice,” Inspector General Michael Horowitz concluded in the report.

- On June 12 a US district court judge cleared the merger of telecoms giant AT&T and media firm Time Warner.

The ruling was a major defeat for government regulators. The US had sued to block the deal, arguing that it would reduce competition in pay TV and lead to higher prices for consumers. Judge Richard Leon rejected those arguments, approving the deal without conditions. The ruling is expected to lead to other mergers and acquisitions. The lawsuit against AT&T had sent a signal that the Trump Administration’s Department of Justice was taking a more hardline stance on such mega deals. According to observers the decision will bolster firms such as Comcast that are considering bidding for 21st Century Fox assets, including its stake in Sky, in a challenge to a deal announced between Fox and Disney in 2017.

- According to Hawaii County Mayor Harry Kim on June 8, lava pouring from the Kilauea Volcano for the past five weeks has destroyed 600 homes on Hawaii’s Big Island.

Kim told reporters that in the last three days alone, 320 of the homes were destroyed in the coastal community of Kapoho along with all the homes in Vacationland. Hawaii Governor David Ige said the state is giving the county \$12 million to help with overtime pay, food and equipment

for teams trying to cope with the tragedy. Civil Defence spokeswoman Janet Snyder said the Mayor estimated a minimum of \$5 million a mile is needed to repair destroyed roads. The Big Island, also known as the island of Hawaii, is about 200 miles southeast of Oahu, where the capital, Honolulu is located.

- According to the Arizona Police on June 4, a man gunned down six members of the legal community in Phoenix and Scottsdale before killing himself

Authorities identified the man as Dwight Lamon Jones, whose murderous spree was an effort to “right some wrongs” stemming from a divorce and custody battle. Scottsdale police said if they hadn’t closed in on him sooner, the number of casualties likely would have grown. For four days, the shootings had put the legal community on edge as police withheld the suspect’s identity until he was no longer a threat.

International

- On June 15 the White House announced a 25% tariff on \$50bn worth of Chinese goods over “unfair trade practices”.

The goods targeted by the levies “contain industrially significant technologies”, a White House statement said. The statement said, “In light of China’s theft of intellectual property and technology and its other unfair trade practices, the United States will implement a 25 percent tariff on \$50bn of goods from China that contain industrially significant technologies.” China responded to Washington’s announcement, saying it would impose tariff measures “of the same scale and strength.”

- Reuters reported on June 15 that the US military carried out a strike aimed at Mullah Fazlullah, a senior militant near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

According to Lieutenant-Colonel Martin O’Donnell, a spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan, the military conducted a counterterrorism strike on June 13, 2018 in Kunar province, close to the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He said the status of Fazlullah was unclear. In March 2018 the United States offered a \$5-million reward for information on Fazlullah. Although Pakistani Taliban militants still unleash attacks, the group has lost control of all territory in Pakistan since its December 2014 attack on an army school that killed 132 children.

- During a June 14 Press Conference in Seoul, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that President Trump was sticking to demands that North Korea surrender its nuclear weapons despite his declaration that the North was “no longer a nuclear threat.”

Although Pompeo softened some of Trump’s recent comments he did not retract them. He said that United Nations sanctions would remain in place until North Korea had accomplished “complete denuclearisation.” He said, “We are going to get the complete denuclearisation.” Pompeo reiterated the same point later in Beijing, where he met Chinese President, Xi Jinping. China had already shown signs of breaking ranks on tough enforcement of the sanctions against

the North saying that with North Korea now at the negotiating table, they could legitimately be eased.

- On June 12 President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jon Un signed an agreement at the conclusion of their historic summit in Singapore.

The two “conducted a comprehensive, in-depth, and sincere exchange of opinions on the issues related to the establishment of new US-DPRK relations and the building of a lasting and robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.” According to observers the agreement “contains polite diplomatic platitudes but is otherwise largely empty.” They said the statement was a common, low-pressure way to keep talks going. It won’t resolve any issues, but would help keep the countries engaged.

- According to the *BBC* on June 11, a war of words erupted between the US and its G7 allies.

The development came hours after the group had put on an apparent show of unity at the end of a tense Summit. US President Donald Trump continued his personal attacks against Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, tweeting that he “acts hurt when called out”. German Chancellor Angela Merkel termed US President Donald Trump’s decision to reject a joint communiqué both “sobering” and “depressing”. The statement had sought to overcome deep disagreements, notably over trade. In recent weeks, trading partners of the US have criticised new tariffs on steel and aluminium imports imposed by the Trump Administration. In a news conference after the Summit, the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau repeated his opposition to the US tariffs, and vowed to press ahead with retaliatory moves on July 1, 2018. “Canadians are polite and reasonable but we will also not be pushed around,” he said. Trump responded by tweeting that he had instructed US officials “not to endorse the communiqué as we look at tariffs on automobiles”. He said the move was based on Trudeau’s “false statements... and the fact that Canada is charging massive tariffs to our US farmers, workers and companies”. Top economic adviser, Larry Kudlow, and trade adviser, Peter Navarro, also criticised Trudeau. “He really kind of stabbed us in the back,” Kudlow said, while Navarro said, “There is a special place in Hell for any leader that engages in bad faith diplomacy with President Donald J Trump and then tries to stab him in the back on the way out the door.” Canada’s Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland responded by saying Trump’s argument for imposing tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminium was “absurd and frankly insulting to Canadians”.

- On June 6, the EU College of Commissioners endorsed the decision to impose additional duties on the full list of US products notified to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as part of the EU’s response to the US tariffs on steel and aluminium.

The Commission expects to conclude the relevant procedure in coordination with Member States before the end of June 2018. The new duties start applying in July 2018. The application of the rebalancing duties is in line with WTO rules, and corresponds to a list of products previously notified to the WTO. The WTO Safeguards Agreement allows for a rebalancing corresponding to

the damage caused by the US measures with EU exports worth €6.4 billion (2017) being affected.

- According to *CNBC* on June 6, Facebook provided data access to a Chinese firm identified by US intelligence.

Facebook has data-sharing partnerships with at least four Chinese electronics companies, including a manufacturing giant that has a close relationship with the Chinese government. The agreements, which date to at least 2010, gave private access to some user data to Huawei, a telecommunications equipment company that has been flagged by American intelligence officials as a national security threat, as well as to Lenovo, Oppo and TCL. The four partnerships remain in effect, but Facebook officials said in an interview that the company would wind down the Huawei deal soon. Facebook gave access to the Chinese device makers along with other manufacturers including Amazon, Apple, BlackBerry and Samsung.

- Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross announced on June 7 that the US reached a deal with Chinese tech firm ZTE that will remove a ban that prevented the company from buying parts from US suppliers.

The ZTE will pay a \$1bn penalty and hire a compliance team chosen by the US. ZTE will also be required to replace its management board within 30 days. The US had blocked ZTE's access to American suppliers, saying it had violated a sanctions settlement. China's President Xi Jinping asked the US to reconsider that punishment, which forced ZTE, the world's fourth-largest mobile phone maker and a major employer in China, to suspend major operations. Ross said the fine was the largest penalty ever levied by Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security and pledged to continue monitoring ZTE's behaviour. The new deal will also see ZTE paying \$400m into a holding account to insure against future violations.

- According to *VOA* on June 7 the United States appears to be easing public pressure on Pakistan in a bid to encourage the country to help promote peace and reconciliation with the Taliban to bring an end to the war in Afghanistan.

According to observers, the optimism was the result of a rare telephone conversation between US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Pakistani Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. The two leaders discussed ways to advance bilateral relations, said State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert. She said, "the need for political reconciliation in Afghanistan, and the importance of targeting all militant and terrorist groups in South Asia without distinction," was also discussed. Pakistani officials describe Bajwa's first direct conversation with Pompeo as "positive and productive."

Latin America

- According to *Reuters* on June 15 Mexico could strike at \$4 billion in annual imports of US corn and soybeans if President Donald Trump escalates a trade row with new tariffs.

Mexico swiftly retaliated when Trump imposed metals tariffs, hitting dozens of American imports including steel, apples and pork. But it held back from the most lucrative class of U.S. farm products: grains, especially feed corn and soybeans, used to fatten Mexico's cows, hogs and chickens. Imposing such tariffs would be a last-ditch option hitting at U.S. corn farmers' top export market, and such a move would hurt Mexico's own industry. But it has already been increasing its imports of grains from suppliers like Brazil and Argentina that could enable it to lessen the impact.

- According to the *BBC* on June 13, the US, Canada and Mexico will co-host the FIFA World Cup tournament in 2026.

There was some doubt that the United Bid could pull it off, but it managed to win 134 votes from FIFA member nations compared to 65 for Morocco, the other potential host. This is the first time three nations have been picked to co-host the massive international sporting event. The show of North American unity comes at a tough time for the hosts. Canada and Mexico's relationship with the United States has hit a rough patch but the three nations will host the biggest World Cup in history.

---Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On June 14, Germany arrested a Tunisian man suspected of trying to build a biological weapon using the deadly poison ricin.

The Tunisian man was identified as Sief Allah H., and he was detained after police raided his flat in Cologne, where they found “toxic substances” called ricin. The suspect has been charged with violating German law on the possession of weapons of war, and “preparing a serious act of violence against the state.” However, the federal prosecutors had no indication that the suspect had any links to any terrorist organisation or had any concrete attack plans.

- According to a report released by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on June 13, the OPCW’s Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) confirmed that sarin and chlorine were likely used as chemical weapons in the south of Ltamenah town in Syria on March 24 and 25, 2017.

The report’s conclusions for the March 24 and 25, 2017, incidents are based on separate witness testimonies, epidemiological analysis and environmental samples. However, the report does not provide more details regarding the incident nor has it identified the attackers. According to media reports, the Syrian Government forces carried out the attacks. According to the UN Human Rights Council, a Syrian air force helicopter dropped a barrel bomb filled with chlorine on Ltamenah hospital on March 24, 2017, killing three civilians and injuring 32 more people. However, Syria has repeatedly denied using chemical weapons.

- On June 12, Iran said it would soon start re-building the Arak heavy water reactor after China finishes examining the last phase of the re-designing process.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, Spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, said that Iran and China have made good progress and would soon start building and installing the reactor’s equipment. In April 2017, Iran and China signed a contract to redesign and modernise the Arak heavy water reactor in central Iran, an important step in line with the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Under the Agreement, China undertook the responsibility to review the new design of the Arak reactor made by Iranian experts and confirm its compliance with international safety standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran is redesigning the 40-megawatt Arak research reactor to sharply cut its potential output of plutonium. Kamalvandi said the US withdrawal from the JCPOA would not affect the re-designing process and noted that the Chinese side has reaffirmed its commitment to the JCPOA, and re-designing the Arak reactor.

In a related development on June 8, 2018, Ali Larijani, Speaker of Iran’s Parliament, urged European countries to explicitly and swiftly announce their decisions regarding their position on the JCPOA after the US’ withdrawal. Larijani said, “Time for negotiations is running out. If Europe sees itself able to preserve the nuclear deal, it should declare its stance sooner and more

clearly.” He also criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for trying to persuade EU nations to withdraw from the JCPOA.

- On June 12, the US State Department approved the sale of six AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, Hellfire missiles and powerful stinger missiles to India.

The deal is worth \$930 million and has been moved to the US Congress for further approval. US Defence Security Cooperation Agency said that the AH-64E would provide an increased support to India’s defensive capability to counter ground-armoured threats and modernise its armed forces. In September 2015, India’s Ministry of Defence had ordered 22 AH-64E Apache helicopters for the Indian Air Force. Later in August 2017, India’s Defence Acquisition Council approved the purchase of 6 more helicopters. The delivery of the first set of 22 AH-64E Apache helicopters would begin in 2019.

- On June 12, Iraq received a new batch of South Korean KAI T-50 Golden Eagle supersonic advanced trainers and light combat aircraft.
- On June 8, Iraq received dozens of advanced T-90 battle tanks from Russia.

Iraq’s Defence Ministry announced on June 8, 2018, that Iraq had received the delivery of 39 more T-90 battle tanks from Russia under a deal signed between the two countries in 2017. Earlier in February 2018, Iraq had already received delivery of 36 such tanks. According to a statement issued by Iraq’s Armed Forces, Russian experts have trained Iraqi military personnel on how to operate the battle tanks. The T-90 is a third-generation Russian battle tank featuring a smoothbore 2A46M 125mm main gun, capable of firing both Armour-piercing shells and anti-tank missiles. It is among the best-selling tanks in the world. Apart from Iraq, India, Algeria and Azerbaijan have also purchased hundreds of T-90 battle tanks from Russia. In a related development on June 12, 2018, the Iraqi Defence Ministry said that six T-50 trainer jets had arrived at a military airbase in Baghdad. The Ministry also confirmed that Iraq had received the third batch of the South Korean combat aircraft on May 4, 2018. Iraq and South Korea had signed a deal for the purchase of T-50 trainers and light combat aircraft in December 2013.

- On June 8, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia’s Kinzhal air-launched hypersonic missile system and a laser combat system are already in service with the Russian Armed Forces.

President Putin also said that Russia’s Avangard hypersonic boost-glide vehicle and Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) would become operational in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Putin made these comments during an annual televised Question and Answer session with the Russian public. According to Putin’s remarks, the Kinzhal airborne hypersonic missile can fly at a speed of Mach 10 while the Avangard system is in the process of industrial production. Putin noted that the Avangard can travel over 20 times faster than sound and is capable of changing direction and altitude, making it impossible for any missile defence system

to stop it. Putin stressed that Russia started the development of the new generation of advanced weapons in reaction to the US withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

- On June 8, Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said that Turkey would spare no efforts to procure the Russian S-400 missile defence system as his country had an inalienable right to protect its own security.

Soylu said, “The purchase of S-400 anti-missile system is in Turkey’s national interest and does not have anything to do with the politics.” He added, “The countries, which had refused to supply Turkey with advanced air defence systems wanted to undermine Turkey’s military prowess.” He indicated that Turkey was currently unable to repel a missile attack on its soil. The purchase of the system would strengthen the country’s defence. Earlier on June 7, 2018, Turkey’s English-language Hurriyet Daily News newspaper had cited anonymous diplomatic sources from the US saying that American officials had asked their Turkish counterparts not to make use of S-400 missile systems even if the country acquires them under a deal finalised in 2017. The diplomatic sources mentioned three reasons behind the US’ demands, which were discussed during a meeting between Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington on June 4, 2018. According to the US, Turkey’s plans to purchase S-400 missile systems run contrary to NATO’s efforts seeking to isolate Russia. There are also concerns that the deployment of S-400 systems would endanger the flights of NATO military aircraft, and the US has trade concerns with Turkey over the sale of US-made Patriot air defence systems.

- Iran announced on June 5, that the country had launched a plan to boost its uranium enrichment capacity with new centrifuges.
- On June 4, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called on Iran to ensure “timely and proactive cooperation” with inspections mandated under Iran’s July 2015 Nuclear Agreement with world powers over its nuclear programme.

Ali Akbar Salehi, Head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation, said, “If conditions allow, may be tomorrow night at Natanz plant, we can announce the opening of the centre for production of new centrifuges.” However, Salehi clarified that the plan was to start the production process which did not mean that Iran would start assembling the centrifuges. He also said that the plan does not violate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). He said that Iran has notified the IAEA that the country has launched a plan to increase its uranium enrichment capacity.

In a related development on June 4, Director General IAEA Yukiya Amano said the Agency had access to all sites in Iran that it needed to visit. Amano said that Iran should continue ensuring ‘timely and proactive cooperation’ in providing access to its facilities which would facilitate implementation of the JCPOA and enhance international confidence. He said, “In some cases, there existed room for Iran to provide us with more proactive and timely access, but such cases are not uncommon in safeguard implementation”. An official from the IAEA clarified that the

call for timely cooperation did not mean that Iran had breached any of the rules of the accord but that the Agency was “encouraging Iran to go above and beyond the requirements” of the JCPOA. Regarding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s allegations against Iran during his presentation on the country’s nuclear programme in April 2018, Amano said that the IAEA had carefully watched Netanyahu’s press conference on the topic and had started analysing the information.

- On June 4, Director-General International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano said that his Agency was ready to play “an essential role” in verifying the status of North Korea’s nuclear programme.

Addressing the IAEA Board of Governors meeting in Vienna, Amano said, “The Agency is closely following developments related to the nuclear programme of North Korea. We continue to enhance our readiness to play an essential role in verifying North Korea’s nuclear programme if a political agreement is reached among countries concerned.” Amano indicated that the IAEA had established a team in its Safeguards Department in September 2017 to enhance its ability to monitor the country’s nuclear programme.

- On June 3, India successfully test-fired its surface-to-surface intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) Agni-V off Abdul Kalam Island in the eastern state of Odisha.

India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said that the test was conducted as a user trial of the missile. Ravi Gupta, DRDO spokesman, noted, “It was a perfect launch. It met all the test parameters and hit its pre-determined target.” He also indicated that the missile was fired in full operational configuration and it covered over 4,800 kilometres in 19 minutes to hit its target near Indonesia in the Indian Ocean. This was the sixth test of the missile and the second one in 2018. All its six missions have been successful. The missile will be inducted soon in the Armed Forces.

- On June 1, Pakistan Navy (PN) signed a contract for the acquisition of two warships from China Shipbuilding Trading Company Ltd (CSTC) at the Ministry of Defence Production.

Under the contract, the PN would receive two multirole Type 054A frigates from China for bolstering its war-fighting capability. The PN said, “The induction of these ships will substantially enhance Pakistan Navy’s war fighting capabilities while effectively contributing towards maritime security operations in the region.” The Navy also indicated that Pakistan’s fleet of Type 054A warships would increase to four by 2021. Having been equipped with latest weapons, including long-range missiles and hi-tech sensors, the Type 054A frigate is capable of undertaking operations in all domains of naval warfare. Though the frigates are primarily designed for air defence, they are also equipped to conduct anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA, EAST ASIA & PACIFIC

China

- On June 15, US President Donald Trump announced a 25 % tariff on up to \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports.

Trump Administration said the tariffs would be imposed on goods that “contain industrially significant technologies”. The Administration warned it would pursue further tariffs if China retaliated. In response, China’s Ministry of Commerce said it will retaliate with punitive tariffs on an equivalent volume of US products and that Trump’s move invalidates all economic and trade outcomes of previous talks between the two countries. Earlier on June 3, 2018, China had warned the US during negotiations between Chinese Vice Prime Minister, Liu He and US Commerce Secretary, Wilbur Ross, that any deals reached during trade negotiations would be null and void if Washington “introduces trade sanctions including tariff increases.”

- On June 9, China hosted the 18th annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Qingdao.

Addressing the Summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping called on member countries of the bloc to, “work closely to build an SCO community with a shared future, move toward a new type of international relations, and build an open and inclusive world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity.” Russian President, Vladimir Putin, Pakistani President, Mamnoon Hussain, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and representatives from the Central Asian Republics attended the regional security summit.

North Korea

- On June 12, North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump held a summit in Singapore.

Following the talks, both leaders signed a deal agreeing to work towards “complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula”. The two leaders also agreed to cooperate on building “new relations”, while US President Donald Trump assured to “provide security guarantees” to North Korea. According to North Korean state media “step-by-step and simultaneous action” was required to achieve denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. Trump also ordered the suspension of US military exercises with South Korea and assured the North that the US would lift sanctions against the country once “nukes are no longer a factor”. However, South Korea said it needed to “find out the precise meaning or intentions” behind the US President’s remarks on ending the joint military drills. Observers remain divided on whether promises would be kept or not. Pyongyang has long maintained that the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula must include the withdrawal of all US troops from South Korea and removal of its “nuclear umbrella” security commitment to South Korea and Japan. However, in April 2018, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said that North Korea had dropped its demand that the US withdraw forces from South Korea in exchange for denuclearisation.

- On June 1, US President, Donald Trump reinstated a Summit with North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un on June 12, 2018, in Singapore.

The development came after Kim Jong-un's top aide Kim Yong Chol held talks with President Donald Trump in Washington. Kim Yong Chol also delivered a letter from Kim Jong-un to President Trump, a gesture viewed as an effort to ease tensions between Pyongyang and Washington. Earlier on May 24, 2018, US President Donald Trump had cancelled a scheduled Summit with Kim Jong-un in Singapore on June 12, 2018, blaming "tremendous anger and open hostility" from North Korea in public statements.

Japan

- During his visit to Washington on June 7, Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe held talks with US President Donald Trump.

Following the talks, PM Abe reaffirmed Japan's close cooperation with the US to address outstanding issues of concern, including the North Korean nuclear, missiles, and the abductions issue. The talks between Trump and Abe mainly focused on the scheduled Summit between the US and North Korea in Singapore. However, the two leaders also discussed issues related to trade and investment. President Trump said Japan has agreed to buy "billions of dollars of additional products of all kinds," specifically "military jets, airliners from Boeing" and "lots more farm products." Japan was one of the first US allies to be hit with tariffs on steel and aluminium exports to the US.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- On June 14 attempts to keep the UK in the European Economic Area after Brexit were defeated in the House of Commons despite dozens of Labour MPs defying the leader's instructions on the issue.

MPs voted by 327 to 126 against a House of Lords proposal for a close relationship with the EU like Norway's. Jeremy Corbyn urged his MPs to abstain, but 75 voted for and 15 against, while six quit their frontbench roles. MPs overturned six further amendments peers had put forward.

- On June 14, four men received 25-year jail terms in Hungary over the deaths of 71 migrants who suffocated in a sealed lorry in August 2015.

Police found the victims' decomposing bodies in the lorry, registered in Hungary and abandoned near an Austrian village. An Afghan identified as the gang leader got 25 years, as did three Bulgarian accomplices. Ten others got shorter jail terms. They were all found guilty of people-smuggling. In 2015 Central Europe faced a huge influx of migrants, many of them fleeing Syria and other conflict zones.

- On June 13 the European Commission proposed an increase in its next long-term EU budget 2021-2027.

The increase seeks to bolster the EU's strategic autonomy, its ability to protect its citizens and make the EU a stronger global actor. The €13 billion European Defence Fund will provide the financial firepower for cross-border investments in state-of-the-art and fully interoperable technology and equipment in areas such as encrypted software and drone technology. Additionally the High Representative, with the support of the Commission also proposed a new €10.5 billion European Peace Facility, an instrument outside of the EU's long-term budget, to help improve the EU's ability to prevent conflicts, build peace and guarantee international security.

- On June 13 Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov refused to sign an historic deal agreed with Greece to change his country's name, saying it violates the constitution.

"My position is final and I will not yield to any pressure, blackmail or threats," Ivanov declared. On June 12, 2018 Macedonia and Greece agreed to end a 27-year row by renaming the ex-Yugoslav state "The Republic of North Macedonia". The goal was to distinguish it from an identically named Greek province. That mattered to Athens, which argued that by using the name Macedonia, the country was implying it had a claim to the Greek region.

- On June 9, Ali Bashar, an Iraqi man who reportedly confessed to raping and killing a German teenage girl has been deported back to Germany.

Ali Bashar, a failed asylum seeker disappeared after Susanna Maria Feldman, was found strangled near the city of Wiesbaden in May 2018. He was detained in Iraqi Kurdistan and police there say he confessed to the crime. "I'm delighted that the suspect will be tried in

Germany,” Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said in a statement. The case has renewed debate in Germany over immigration policy.

- On June 8 Austria announced its decision to close down seven mosques and expel imams who it says are being funded by foreign countries.

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said the move was a crackdown on political Islam. Some mosques are suspected of having links to Turkish nationalists. In April 2018 images emerged showing children in Turkish army uniforms re-enacting the World War One Battle of Gallipoli. The Turkish President’s office called Austria’s move “Islamophobic, racist and discriminatory”.

- According to the CNBC on June 7, European powers said they are willing to work with the Trump Administration to tackle Iran’s “destabilising actions.”

However, they first want Washington to agree not to punish European industries over their business dealings with Iran. They are seeking broad carve-outs for sectors from health care to energy, as well as assurances that financial institutions can facilitate transactions with Iran’s central bank without fear of reprisal. Firms including French oil giant Total and aircraft maker Airbus have announced billions of dollars in deals with Iran since sanctions were lifted in 2016. Ministers from Britain, France, Germany, and the EU laid out their requests in a letter to top Trump officials.

- On June 7 the European Commission announced €1.5 million in humanitarian aid to address the increasing needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants stranded in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The European Commission has allocated more than €25 million in humanitarian aid to assist refugees and migrants in Serbia, and over €4 million to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition to humanitarian assistance, the European Commission provides Western Balkans partners with significant financial and technical support for activities related to migration and refugee crisis. This is done primarily through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance. Since 2007 the Commission has been providing assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the area of migration and border management through the Instrument of pre-accession amounting to €24.6 million. From January 2016 Bosnia and Herzegovina also benefits from the regional programme ‘Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management’ worth €8 million.

- On June 6, Italy’s new ruling coalition won a crucial trust vote in the upper chamber of parliament.

The alliance of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the right-wing League party will now seek support in the lower house where it has a majority. A win there will empower the government, led by political unknown Giuseppe Conte to carry out its anti-immigration agenda.

- On June 1, a new coalition government had come to power in Italy.

Prime Minister-designate Giuseppe Conte presented his list of ministers to President Sergio Mattarella for the second time in a week. Ministers represent both the anti-establishment Five Star (M5S) and the right-wing League. Attempts to form a technocratic government had failed.

1. On June 1, European shares jumped after a deal to form a coalition government ended three months of political deadlock and removed the risk of another general election in Italy.

The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 1 % while German stocks gained 0.9% and Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.3%. Italian stocks rallied as much as 2.9%, the standout performers in Europe as Italian banks FTIT8300 gained 3.8%. Recent political uncertainty has roiled Italian stocks, resulting in a slide of more than 9 % for the Italian benchmark in May 2018 – its worst month since June 2016.

- According to the European Union's Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom on June 1, the US is playing a "dangerous game" by slapping tariffs on European steel and aluminium.

Malmstrom warned the move by US President Donald Trump would have consequences for the economic recovery of the EU, as well as US consumers. The EU has issued a 10-page list of tariffs on US goods ranging from Harley-Davidson motorcycles to bourbon. Canada and Mexico are also planning retaliatory moves against the tariffs. Malmstrom said the EU would challenge the move at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) but that tariffs on US imports were necessary as "we cannot just take these tariffs and stay silent".

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Israel

- On June 6, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu held talks with his British counterpart Theresa May in London.

Netanyahu received a cold welcome in the UK, as protesters condemning his visit gathered outside the British Prime Minister's residence in Downing Street. During the talks, May told the Israeli PM that Britain was concerned about the deaths of protesters in Gaza. She said, "We have been concerned about the loss of Palestinian lives." Netanyahu told May that Gaza's problems stemmed from Hamas' desire to destroy Israel. He said, "We are not witnessing peaceful protests. We are doing everything we can to both minimise casualties and at the same time protect Israeli lives." During an event organised by the Policy Exchange think tank, Netanyahu said that the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is "no longer immune" from attacks carried out by the Israeli regime. He said, "If he fires at us, we will destroy his forces." He also said, "Damascus had to understand that Tel Aviv would not tolerate the Iranian Military entrenchment against the Israeli regime inside the country. The consequences are not merely to the Iranian Forces there but to the Assad regime as well ..., I think it's something that he should consider very seriously."

- On June 5, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu arrived in Paris and held talks with French President Emmanuel Macron.

During a joint press conference, Macron said the two leaders discussed Iran's growing influence in the region and the 2015 Nuclear Deal. Macron stressed the importance of the accord but said it should complement another agreement that targets Tehran's ballistic-missile programme and activities in the region. On his part, Netanyahu said he did not ask Macron to withdraw from the Nuclear Deal. He said, "I didn't ask France to withdraw from JCPOA because I think it will be dissolved by weight of economic forces." Macron also criticised the relocation of the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, saying it had led to "people dying" and did not promote peace. According to Israel's official mission brief, the two sides inaugurated the "France-Israel 2018 Season", with an objective "to mark a new step in our (France-Israel) economic relationship and to renew the vision that French people have of Israel and that Israeli people have of France."

Jordan

- On June 14, Jordan's King Abdullah II sworn in a new government led by the country's designated new Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz.

- On June 4, Jordanian Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned following a wave of anti-austerity protests by citizens suffering from high unemployment and repeated price hikes.

Jordanian King Abdullah II summoned Mulki in the aftermath of demonstrations by thousands of people in Amman and several other cities. Mulki submitted his resignation to the King during their meeting. King Abdullah asked Education Minister Omar al-Razzaz to form a new government and called for broad talks on a planned income tax law that has provoked mass protests. Jordan, a key US ally, has largely avoided the unrest witnessed by other countries in the region since the Arab Spring revolts broke out in 2011. The country has seen prices of several basic goods and services like bread, fuel and electricity steadily rise over the year 2017. The demand by demonstrators for Mulki to step down came after the government adopted a draft income tax law and announced new price hikes based on recommendations by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Jordan's economy is struggling to grow in the face of chronic deficits, as private foreign capital and aid flows have declined. Jordan has a public debt of some \$35 billion, equivalent to around 90% of its gross domestic product.

Qatar

- On June 11, Qatar brought a case against the United Arab Emirates at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing the country of human rights violations and discrimination.

According to an official statement from Qatar, the country had filed a case against the UAE at the ICJ, accusing Abu Dhabi of "discrimination against Qatar and Qatari citizens," during a year-long boycott of Doha by four Arab nations. An Emirati Minister dismissed the filing as a stunt. The case focuses on the UAE's decision to expel Qatari citizens, blocking Qatar from accessing its airspace, and other matters arising out of the ongoing diplomatic dispute. Qatar accuses the UAE of violating its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Bahrain, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have not consented to the court's jurisdiction, though the UAE has. The Qatari Foreign Ministry condemned "an unlawful land, sea and air siege against Qatar as part of a campaign of political and economic coercion".

- During the Shangri-La Dialogue conference in Singapore on June 3, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah said that Qatar would not become part of any military action against Iran.

The Minister said, "Is it wise to call the US and to call Israel to go and fight Iran? ... Whether any third party is trying to push the region or some country in the region to start a war in Iran, this will be very dangerous. Everyone should keep holding on to this and advance with this. In my own judgment, I think the US is wiser than to enter in a war with Iran." He did not name any

party, however. According to observers, he was referring to Saudi Arabia, which has also led a blockade of Qatar with its Persian Gulf allies since June 2017.

Saudi Arabia

- On June 11, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait offered \$2.5 billion in aid for Jordan to ease its economic crisis following a wave of anti-austerity protests.

Jordan has been facing mass protests against price rises and a proposed tax hike as the government pushes measures to reduce the country's debt, leading to the Prime Minister's resignation. Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz hosted a four-nation summit in Makkah and offered Amman a bailout in the form of a deposit in the Jordanian central bank, World Bank guarantees as well as budgetary support for five years. The official Saudi Press Agency said, "In light of the close brotherly ties... it was agreed that the three countries (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait) would provide an economic aid package to Jordan totalling \$2.5 billion." The summit was attended by Jordan's King Abdullah II, who offered his gratitude to the three countries, adding the package would "contribute to overcoming the crisis". The announcement came after EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini announced 20 million Euros (\$23.5 million) in aid for Jordan.

- According to *Le Monde* daily, on June 2, Saudi Arabia threatened military action against Qatar if it acquires Russia's S-400 air defence missile system.

In a letter addressed to French President Emmanuel Macron, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz expressed his "profound concern" about talks under way between Moscow and Doha for the sale of the advanced anti-aircraft weapon system. According to King Salman, Doha's acquisition of the mobile surface-to-air missile system would threaten Saudi security interests. He urged France to intervene and pressurise Qatar in order to prevent the deal from going ahead. Saudi King wrote, "(In such a situation), the Kingdom would be ready to take all the necessary measures to eliminate this defence system, including military action." On June 5, 2018, Qatari Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani criticised Saudi military threat as "reckless behaviour," accusing Riyadh of creating "disturbance" in an already crisis-hit region. In October 2017, Qatar and Russia had signed an agreement on military and technical cooperation and to further cooperation in the defence field. In January 2018, Qatar's Ambassador to Russia had said that talks for the acquisition of the air-defence system were "at an advanced stage".

- On June 2, Saudi Arabia announced another cabinet reshuffle with a focus on culture.

According to the official Saudi Press Agency, King Salman ordered the establishment of a new Culture Ministry, called General Culture Authority, and appointed Prince Badr bin Abdullah as its Minister. Prince Badr has been linked to the purchase of a Leonardo da Vinci painting of

Jesus. He was named by the New York Times as the mystery buyer of da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi" for a record-breaking \$450m during an auction in 2018. The Wall Street Journal later reported that he was acting on behalf of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. Prince Badr also holds several other top positions, including the governorship of a Commission to develop a historical tourism destination in the country's north and as Chairman of the Saudi Research and Marketing Group, which is closely linked to King Salman's branch of the royal family. According to observers, it is the second significant government change since the June 2017 appointment of Mohammed bin Salman as heir to the throne. The Crown Prince also serves as Saudi Arabia's Deputy Prime Minister.

In a related development on June 1, 2018, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) threatened Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his "sinful projects". These threats have emerged following a string of reforms by the Crown Prince aimed at bringing modernisation in Saudi Arabia. In its Madad news bulletin, the terrorist group said, "The new era of bin Salman replaced Mosques with movie theatres." The group has threatened to take actions against Prince Mohammed. According to analysts, the reforms in the Kingdom have seen few public denouncements from the ulama and other ultra-conservatives, probably due to fears following bin Salman's crackdown on potential opponents.

Syria

- During an interview with the *al-Alam News Network* on June 13, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said the American, French, Turkish and Israeli troops present in Syria were occupation forces.

Assad said, "Syria's position is to support any act of resistance, whether against terrorists or against occupying forces regardless of their nationality." Referring to the presence of fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement in Syria, Assad said that "the battle is long and the need for these military forces will continue for a long time." He also stressed that there are no Iranian military bases in Syria, however, Damascus would not hesitate to allow them if there is a need. Assad also noted that it is not yet decided how the situation in Syria's militant-held southwest would be resolved.

- During a massive operation on June 8, Daesh seized parts of the Albu Kamal town on the Syrian-Iraqi border.

The developments confirm that Daesh still has a strong presence in Syria even after the country's declaration of victory over the terrorist group. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Daesh used at least 10 suicide bombers during its offensive and swiftly took several neighbourhoods. The offensive is the latest in a string of Daesh attacks which confirm predictions that the militant group would continue to be a threat even after the collapse of its 'caliphate' in 2017. At least 25 government and allied fighters were killed during the operation.

The Observatory also said that the group that once ruled a self-proclaimed state roughly the size of Britain now holds less than 3 % of the Syrian territory.

- On June 2, Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid al-Muallem said Iran has no military presence or bases in Syria. However, Iranian military advisors are there to help Damascus fight terrorist groups.

Muallem said, “There is no Iranian military presence on the Syrian territories; rather there are advisors who work by the side of the Syrian Arab Army.” He also said that the presence of Iranian military advisors in Syria was legitimate and based on an invitation by the Syrian government and they coordinated their activities with Damascus. He thanked Iran for helping Syria in the ongoing war against foreign-backed militant groups. Muallem also rejected Israeli claims that Iran had military bases in Syria, saying that the Tel Aviv regime’s propaganda was an attempt to pressure Iran.

Turkey

- On June 12, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Ankara would utilise Russian-made S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems if necessary.

During an interview to a Turkish TV channel, Erdogan said, “We would not just buy the S-400s and place them in a storehouse. We will use them if need be. These are defence systems. What are we going to do with them if not use these defence systems? Are we going to depend on the US again? We have been demanding them for years, but the answer given to us has been: The US Congress is not allowing. We are tired of this.” Erdogan also said, “Russia has responded to our offer with a pretty tempting offer. They said they would even get into a joint production. And with respect to loans, they have offered us pretty good loan terms.” On June 8, 2018, Turkish Interior Minister, Suleyman Soylu said his country had an unalienable right to protect its own security and will spare no efforts to procure S-400 missile systems.

- On June 12, Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim denounced Austria’s decision to shut down several Mosques and deport imams as a threat against interfaith dialogue and called for revision of the decision.

During a press conference, Yildirim said that it is a “great mistake and greatly unfortunate” that Vienna made the decision shortly before taking over the presidency of the EU. Earlier, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz had announced plans to order the closure of seven Mosques and the expulsion of up to 60 imams, including 40 members of the Union of Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations in Europe (ATIB). The Federal Chancellor also said the government was shutting down a Turkish nationalist Mosque in Vienna and dissolving a group called the Arab Religious Community that runs six other Mosques. The Turkish government denounced Austria’s decision to close Mosques and expel imams as “a reflection of the Islamophobic, racist and

discriminatory wave in this country.” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also slammed Austria’s decision, warning that the measure could trigger a religious war.

- On June 11, the Turkish Military said that Turkish fighter jets destroyed 12 targets belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in northern Iraq.

According to the Military, the overnight airstrikes hit targets including shelters and ammunition depots in Iraq’s northern regions of Qandil, Hakurk, and Avasin-Basyan. The Turkish Army has intensified its attacks against the PKK militants in northern Iraq, which has bases in the Qandil Mountains. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed on June 10, 2018 that his country would drain the “terror swamp” in Qandil.

During an interview with CNN Turk on June 7, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had said that Turkey is ready to attack northern Iraq if the Iraqi central government does not take action against Kurdish militant groups in the country. The Turkish Military has often crossed the Turkey-Iraq border to carry out operations against positions of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in the Qandil region located around 40 kilometres southeast of the Turkish border in Iraq’s Erbil province. According to the pro-government Daily Sabah, the Turkish Army had cleared a 400-square-kilometre area from PKK militants in northern Iraq.

- On June 4, Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu held talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the White House.

According to Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “both sides reaffirmed that Turkey and the US remain committed to addressing their common concerns in a spirit of allied partnership. Cavusoglu and Pompeo exchanged views “on bilateral and regional issues.” “They reaffirmed their joint resolve to fight terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. They considered the recommendations of the Turkey-US Working Group on Syria pertaining to the future of their bilateral cooperation in Syria on issues of mutual interest, to include taking steps to ensure the security and stability in Manbij. They endorsed a Road Map to this end and underlined their mutual commitment to its implementation, reflecting their agreement to closely follow developments on the ground.” Minister Cavusoglu and Secretary Pompeo also discussed Turkey-US relations and agreed to hold further meetings of the working group mechanism to resolve current outstanding issues in the bilateral relationship. An initial session of the Working Group on Judicial and other issues took place immediately after the meeting. Following the meeting, Cavusoglu elaborated on an agreement reached between the NATO allies on Manbij. Cavusoglu said provisions of the plan would likely be fulfilled in less than six months but that the real test of the US’ commitment to it rested in its implementation. The terms include a full withdrawal of the Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) from the city and assurances they would be shorn of any weapons provided to them by the US-led coalition for the fight against Daesh. Likewise, the civilian authorities are expected to be purged of pro-YPG elements, clearing the path for Turkish forces to monitor the area jointly with their US partners. Cavusoglu stressed the

accord was “beyond a legal document” and “a road map that will affect relations between the two countries.”

- On June 2, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on the US to act as a strategic partner instead of blocking its arms deals.

Erdogan’s remarks came in response to US plans to block F-35 sales to Ankara. He said, “We say that the US is our strategic partner. As our strategic partner, the US should not say we should knock on another door. If we are strategic partners, if we are model partners, the US should not legally wrong us here.” In May 2018, Turkey had said it would look elsewhere to equip its air force if the US blocks the sale of Lockheed Martin’s F-35 fighter jets to Ankara. According to Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, Washington has not yet put pressure on Ankara to cancel the deal following \$716-billion military policy bill, including a measure to prevent Turkey from purchasing the jets.

Yemen

- On June 15, Yemen’s government said it would not attack the Hudaydah port which is critical to aid efforts in the country, as its forces advance on the rebel-held city of Hudaydah.
- According to Yemen’s Houthi officials on June 13, Yemeni Ansarullah fighters foiled a sea landing by Saudi and Emirati Forces close to the port city of Hudaydah.

On June 13, 2018, forces supported by the Saudi-led coalition launched an offensive against Hudaydah, aiming to take the city that has been controlled by the Houthi movement. At least 39 people were killed during the clashes. The Saudi-led coalition claims that the Houthi Ansarullah movement is using Hudaydah for weapons delivery. The Houthis, however, reject the allegation. According to Houthi official, Dayfallah al-Shami, the Saudi coalition remained unable to advance at all in Hudaydah. He said, “We foiled a sea landing of Saudi and Emirati forces near the port of Hudaydah.” Meanwhile, Emirati state news agency WAM announced that four Emirati soldiers had been killed in Yemen. The UN Security Council has raised alarm over the military operation, which it says could cripple desperately needed deliveries of commercial goods and humanitarian aid to millions in the country.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA: I

Pakistan External

- On June 14, the UN Human Rights Chief, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein criticised the Indian Security Forces for inflicting mass civilian casualties in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and called for an international investigation into human right abuses in the region.

Pakistan welcomed the UN proposal for an international investigation into human rights violations in the IOK. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released its first ever report on the situation of human rights in Kashmir accusing Indian Security Forces of using “excessive force” resulting in unlawful killings in the Kashmir region. The UN called on Indian Security Forces to exercise “maximum restraint”. India’s Ministry of External Affairs spokesman, Raveesh Kumar rejected the report calling it “fallacious, tendentious and motivated” and a “selective compilation of largely unverified information.”

- According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on June 15, at least 5 terrorists were killed after Pakistan’s Security Forces responded to a cross-border terrorist attack from Afghanistan.

Three soldiers of the Pakistan’s Army were also killed during the attack. Earlier on June 3, 2018, at least 6 terrorists were killed after Pakistan’s Security Forces retaliated to militant attacks from across the Pak-Afghan border. According to Pakistan’s military, terrorists resort to such attacks to prevent fencing and construction of border posts. However, the military has maintained that the fencing of Pak-Afghan border and construction of border posts would “continue irrespective of the challenges posed by “inimical forces.”

- Citing a US Military official, *Voice of America* reported on June 14 that the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan’s (TTP) leader, Mullah Fazlullah was killed following a US drone strike in the Afghan province of Kunar.

Mullah Fazlullah was appointed as the group’s leader after the death of Hakimullah Mehsud in November 2013. Fazlullah is responsible for numerous attacks in Pakistan including the December 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar.

- On June 12, Pakistan’s Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Kabul and held talks with Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani on matters related to Afghan peace-making efforts.

General Bajwa also held talks with Afghan Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah and General John Nicholson, the Commander of US forces in Afghanistan, The Army Chief said that Pakistan “desires a peaceful and stable Afghanistan,” and added that Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Stability (APAPPS) would bring more cooperation and coordination between the two countries. General Bajwa’s visit came when the Afghan government announced a cease-fire with the Taliban during Ramadan. Meanwhile, the US National Security Council’s Senior Director for South and Central Asia, Lisa Curtis confirmed that the US has asked for

“Pakistan’s assistance in facilitating Afghan peace process.” Pakistan has long maintained there can be no military solution to the war in Afghanistan.

- Addressing the 18th meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Qindgao on June 10, President Mamnoon Hussain suggested five-point preferences for the development of the region including investment, trade, e-commerce, railways and tourism.

President Hussain said that Pakistan has made unprecedented sacrifices in the war against terror to bring peace to the region. He further stressed that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is changing the country’s economic outlook. On the sidelines of the Summit, President Hussain held a bilateral meeting with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in which the two leaders held in-depth discussions related to Pakistan-China relations and regional and global issues of mutual interest. During the meeting, both leaders agreed that Pak-China relations are a pillar of stability and reiterated their resolve to maintain close engagement on all issues of regional and global importance. President Hussain also held talks with his Iranian counterpart, Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the summit. During their meeting, President Hussain and his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani agreed to further strengthen the ties between their countries by enhancing trade and other activities between the Gwadar and Chabahar ports.

- On June 8, the National Security Committee (NSC) meeting was chaired by caretaker Prime Minister Justice (r) Nasir-ul Mulk. The NSC reaffirmed its commitment to cooperate with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), for addressing shortcomings in the country’s anti-money laundering and counter-terror financing regimes.

Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar briefed the NSC about the scheduled FATF meeting in Paris in June 2018 and the measures taken by the country to meet the FATF’s requirements. While reviewing various actions taken towards fulfilling Pakistan’s international responsibilities under the FATF framework, the NSC expressed satisfaction over the progress made so far.

- On June 7, Pakistan’s Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa held a telephonic conversation with US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo and discussed multiple issues concerning South Asia.

According to the US State Department, Pompeo and General Bajwa discussed ways to advance Pak-US relations, the need for political reconciliation in Afghanistan and the importance of targeting all militant and terrorist groups in South Asia without distinction. Pakistani officials described General Bajwa’s conversation with Pompeo as “positive and productive.” The talks follow an Afghan government offer of a temporary ceasefire to the Taliban during the month of Ramazan. In a related development, US Vice President, Mike Pence called Pakistani caretaker Prime Minister Nasir ul-Mulk. Following the talks, both sides reiterated to “strengthen bilateral relations as well as pursuing the common objective of achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan.”

- On June 7, Pakistan’s Foreign Office spokesman, Dr Muhammad Faisal said that Pakistan and Russia, “finalised a MoU for conducting feasibility study for implementation of undersea gas pipeline project.”

The spokesman said that the proposal for construction of undersea gas pipeline has been under consideration since 2017. The proposal involves Pakistan, Iran, Russia and India. According to the Foreign Office, Russia seeks to promote energy cooperation with Pakistan and the two countries have “concluded various proposals in the energy sector, including construction of North-South Gas Pipeline, import of LNG from Russia.”

- During a media briefing on June 4, DG Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Major General Asif Ghafoor said that Pakistan’s offer to India for dialogue always remains on the table and stressed “both sides would have to show positivity for moving forward.”

Ghafoor added that there was no space for war between the two nuclear-armed countries, however, he warned India not to mistake Pakistan’s desire to promote peace as its weakness since the country is fully capable of responding to any sort of aggression. On Pakistan’s relations with the US in the context of Afghanistan, the DG ISPR said that Pakistan would extend any help to US-led coalition forces for achieving peace in Afghanistan while keeping its national interest foremost.

- Dawn reported on June 5 that the World Bank has asked Pakistan to accept India’s offer of a “neutral expert” and stand down from pursuing its position of referring the Kishanganga dam dispute to the International Court of Arbitration (ICA).

Earlier, on May 19, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited IOK to inaugurate the Kishanganga hydroelectric power station. Pakistan says that the construction of the Kishanganga hydropower project would disrupt water supply to Pakistan and affect agricultural production. Therefore, the dispute should be referred to the International Court of Arbitration. Meanwhile, India maintains that the differences are due to the design of the dam and hence the matter should be addressed to a “neutral expert”.

Pakistan Internal

- On June 14, Pakistan’s Foreign Office rejected Indian protests against the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Interim Constitution (13th Amendment) Act 2018 and its “fallacious and baseless” claim over the State of Jammu & Kashmir being an “integral part” of India.

Earlier on June 1, 2018, the AJK Legislative Assembly and the AJK Council approved the amendments to the AJK Interim Constitution, Act 1974, further empowering the State government by abolishing the AJK Council. Following the development, India conveyed to Pakistan that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, which also includes the AJK is an integral part of India by virtue of its accession in 1947. It asked Pakistan to vacate all areas it “illegally occupies” in Kashmir.

- On June 3, a woman and a minor girl were killed and 24 others, including four children were injured after the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shelled mortars on villages along the Working Boundary in Sialkot.

Indian media reports claimed that at least 2 BSF personnel were killed and 11 civilians were injured after Pakistani troops resorted to mortar shelling and firing of small arms in IOK's Pargwal and Kanachak areas. Earlier, on May 29, 2018, the DGMOs of India and Pakistan had agreed to "fully implement" the ceasefire pact of 2003 in "letter and spirit" to stop border skirmishes on the Line of Control (LoC) and Working Boundary.

- On June 1, at least 1 civilian was killed after an armoured vehicle of the Indian Security Forces drove into a crowd of protesters in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

The incident led to strong anti-India demonstrations in the region. The latest tensions come at a time when the Indian government has directed its Security Forces in IOK to follow what it calls "non-initiation of combat operations" during the month of Ramazan.

India

- During his address at the 18th meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Qindgao on June 10, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi reiterated India's position that international connectivity projects should respect other countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

India maintains that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) violates its sovereignty because it passes through the Gilgit-Baltistan region, which India claims as part of its territory. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also invited Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit India for an informal Summit in 2019. The two leaders also resolved to continue efforts to ensure peace and tranquillity along their border.

- During the 17th Asia Security Summit in Singapore on June 1, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi said that the India's vision for the "Indo-Pacific" region is that of a free, open and inclusive region and added, "India does not see the region as a strategy or as a club of limited members."

He also stressed that the relationship between India and China is key to a positive future. The Prime Minister said that bilateral cooperation between Delhi and Beijing is expanding and the two countries "have displayed maturity and wisdom in managing issues and ensuring a peaceful border." Modi also highlighted his country's leadership role in the Indian Ocean, a region where China has been building up its naval presence. In response, India has developed naval ports with countries such as Indonesia, the Seychelles and Oman.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

SOUTH ASIA: II

Afghanistan

- On June 13, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Chief, Mullah Fazlullah was killed in a US drone strike in Afghanistan's Kunar province.

According to the Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence spokesman, Mohammad Radmanish, "A US drone strike in Afghanistan's northeastern Kunar province killed the leader of the TTP". Other commanders of the TTP killed in the drone strike include Abu Bakr, Sajjad, Emran and Mawlawi Omar. Fazlullah directed numerous high-profile attacks against Pakistani targets over the years including the December 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar that killed 151 people, including more than 130 children. For years Pakistan insisted that Fazlullah was living on Afghan soil but the Afghan government has been refuting the claim. Nonetheless, the killing of the outlawed TTP leader would have a positive effect on Pak-Afghan relations.

- On June 12, the Taliban captured the Kohistan district of the northern Faryab province.

During the attack Abdul Rahman Panah, the Kohistan District Governor was killed. Several Security Forces personnel were also killed during the attack. In another related development, the Taliban attacked Moqur district police headquarters in Ghazni province. At least five soldiers were killed and 26 others, including the district governor, were wounded during the clash. Although the Taliban agreed to a brief cease-fire during three days of Eid-ul-Fitr, their drive for greater territorial control continues under the Spring Offensive session.

- On June 12, a suicide attack outside Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Kabul's PD 6 area killed 17 people and left another 40 wounded.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack. In a related incident on June 4, 2018 a suicide attack killed 14 and wounded 17 others in Kabul. The explosion occurred near a gathering of over 2,000 religious scholars at the Loya Jirga or the Grand Assembly shortly after the scholars issued a fatwa against the ongoing war in the country. The religious scholars said in the fatwa that war in all its types was forbidden under Sharia law. They also said that according to the Holy Quran, killing of Muslims was haram and illegitimate. The religious scholars repeated their call on the Taliban to accept the Afghan government's unconditional peace offer. Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani welcomed the fatwa saying the government fully supports the clerics' stance.

- On June 11, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to deploy liaison officers in each other's capital and establish coordination centres along the border to share intelligence on militant suspects.

The decision was taken during the meeting of the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs) of the two countries in Rawalpindi. In a related development on June 12, 2018 Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Afghanistan and met with Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani in Kabul. Ghani and Bajwa discussed the implementation of the

Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace, the fight against terrorism, and the peace process. Since the Afghanistan Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) was operationalised in April 2018, diplomacy between the two countries has intensified. On May 27, 2018 a high level Afghan delegation led by Afghan National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar, Interior Minister Waris Barmak and head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) Masum Stankzai visited Pakistan. The establishment of coordination centres along the border to share intelligence on militant suspects and deployment of liaison officers in each other's capitals is part of the APAPPS.

- On June 10, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani attended the 18th meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), held in Qingdao, China.

While praising the US' South Asia Strategy, Ghani stressed upon the need for regional cooperation to bring peace to Afghanistan. Chinese President, Xi Jinping said that SCO member nations should focus on the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in order to help facilitate peace and reconstruction in the war torn country. Pakistani President, Mamnoon Hussain said that Islamabad and Kabul would be working together to draft a comprehensive strategy for establishing peace in Afghanistan and that peace and stability in Afghanistan was a common objective and also that Pakistan was playing its due role in this regard.

- On June 7, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani announced a ceasefire with the Taliban from the 27th of Ramazan (June 12) to the fifth day of Eid-ul-Fitr (June 19), 2018.

Ghani said that the ceasefire announcement epitomises the strength of the Afghan government and the will of the people for a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict. He added that the ceasefire is an opportunity for the Taliban to realise that their violent campaign is not helping them win hearts and minds but further alienating the Afghan people from their cause. On June 4, 2018 more than 2,000 religious scholars from across Afghanistan issued a fatwa saying "the ongoing war in Afghanistan is forbidden under Islamic law".

- An Afghan Security Forces' operation in the Dasht-e-Qala district of northern Takhar Province on June 5 left 40 Taliban insurgents dead and 36 others wounded.

According to the Afghan Ministry of Defence, Security Forces have managed to clear the district of militants. The Taliban have not yet commented on the report. On May 28, 2018 the Taliban captured at least 10 villages including 17 security check posts in Takhar Province.

- On June 5, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani said that China is a global pillar of international peace and stability and that Beijing must play a more inclusive role in stabilising Afghanistan and the region.

Ghani's remarks came during an interview with China's CCTV. While praising the role of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative for the stability of the global economy he said that

the ongoing threats faced by Afghanistan were not confined to a single country and that regional nations must arrive at a common understanding to deal with these threats. According to Ghani China can play an effective role in curbing the scale of violence in Afghanistan. China has made serious efforts for both economic reconstruction and political reconciliation in Afghanistan. In December 2017, Beijing hosted the first China-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral dialogue mechanism to maintain a smooth and workable environment for Afghan political reconciliation.

- On June 1, the Taliban rejected General John Nicholson's statement that some Taliban factions were open to talks and were involved in back door negotiations with Afghan officials.

Nicholson said that there is an intensified dialogue between mid-level and senior-level Taliban leaders and government officials in Kabul. However, Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said in an email to media outlets that the general's claim was untrue. He added that Nicholson had made the claims in an attempt to divert attention from his failure in Afghanistan. The Taliban said that they did not want to enter into talks with "unauthorised sections" and waste their time. The insurgent group had asked the US for direct talks but Washington suggested the rebels should hold talks with Afghan officials.

Maldives

- On June 5, The Maldives gave India a deadline to take back two helicopters that were gifted to the Maldives National Defence Force.

The Maldives government decided not to renew the letters of exchange for the helicopters, which had expired recently and asked India to remove the aircrafts by the end of June. The two naval helicopters gifted to the Maldives, operated by an Indian crew, were primarily used by the military for emergency medical evacuation and to conduct search and rescue operations. The development would further strain India-Maldives relations. The Maldives had agreed to a US\$ 10 million loan from Pakistan to finance the purchase of two Super Mushak aircraft from Pakistan Aeronautical Complex. The three-crew small planes are used as trainer aircraft and for military purposes.

Nepal

- On June 7, Nepal's Chief of Army Staff, Rajendra Chhetri visited India and met with Indian Defence Minister, Nirmla Sitharaman.

Chhetri thanked the Government of India for the ongoing defence cooperation including defence hardware and capacity building. Sitharaman stated that such support and cooperation would continue in future as required and requested by the Nepali Army. Earlier, Chhetri had held separate meetings with the National Security Advisor of India, Ajit Doval, Defence Secretary, Sanjay Mitra, Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat, and Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ajit Kumar.

---Kashif Hussain

UNITED NATIONS

- On June 13, the UNGA adopted a resolution calling for greater protection for Palestinians, and deploring any use of “excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate” force by the Israeli military against Palestinian civilians, particularly in Gaza.

The Resolution, sponsored by Algeria and Turkey on behalf of Arab countries, was adopted by a vote of 120 in favour, 8 against, with 45 abstentions out of the total 193-member states. The resolution calls on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to make proposals within 60 days “on ways and means for ensuring the safety, protection, and well-being of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation,” including “recommendations regarding an international protection mechanism.” The resolution also calls for “immediate steps towards ending the closure and the restrictions imposed by Israel on movement and access into and out of the Gaza Strip.” During the session, the US had also proposed an amendment in the resolution to condemn Palestinian resistance movement Hamas for inciting violence in Gaza. However, the amendment failed to gain the two-thirds majority it required to be adopted. While introducing the amendment before voting, Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the UN, said, “It is totally one-sided. It makes not one mention of Hamas, who routinely initiates violence in Gaza. Such one-sided resolutions at the UN do nothing to advance peace between Israel and the Palestinians,” UNGA President Miroslav Lajcak had convened the emergency meeting following a formal request from Algeria and Turkey, in their respective capacities as Chair of the Arab Group and Chair of the Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

- On June 9, Lebanon accused the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, of intimidating refugees to prevent their return to Syria.

Lebanon also blocked residency applications for the UNHCR’s staff. Gebran Bassil, Lebanon’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, had issued instructions to stop requests for residency presented to the Ministry. Bassil said, “It’s time to tell them enough.” He added, “Lebanon’s economy is collapsing and that no other country in the world has been as accommodating and offered as much concessions.” Lebanon is home to more than a million Syrian refugees. Bassil accused the UN Refugee Agency of discouraging the return of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by emphasising the lack of security guarantees in Syria. In response, William Spindler, UNHCR Spokesperson, denied that the Agency’s Staff was discouraging refugees from considering a return. Spindler said, “We do not discourage or oppose returns taking place based on an individual decision.” He said that conditions in Syria were not conducive for an assisted return.

- On June 6, UN Agencies and Myanmar signed an agreement aimed at creating conditions that would allow Rohingya refugees to voluntarily and safely return to their homes in the country’s Rakhine province.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Government of Myanmar and UN Agencies including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Under the Agreement, the signatories would devise a framework to create conditions conducive to voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable refugee returns from Bangladesh, and their reintegration in the country. The MoU would give the UNHCR and the UNDP access to Rakhine state, including to refugees' places of origin and potential new settlement areas and would also allow the Agencies to carry out assessments regarding the needs of people in affected communities and strengthen the capacity of local authorities to support the voluntary repatriation process. Ahead of signing the MoU, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar, Knut Ostby, said that the two most important conditions for their safe and voluntary return are citizenship rights and an end to violence. He said that without such conditions Rohingya return would be of no use. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the signing of the MoU and urged Myanmar to take decisive steps to implement the agreement. According to the UN, some 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled Myanmar's Rakhine state for Bangladesh to avoid violence and persecution, including a military campaign by Myanmar forces, since August 2017.

- On June 5, the UN General Assembly elected Ecuador's Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces as its next President, making her the fourth woman to lead the 193-member world body in its 73-year history.

Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces defeated Honduras' UN Ambassador Mary Elizabeth Flores Flake by 128-62 with two abstentions in the secret-ballot vote. In her acceptance speech, Garces noted that she was the first woman ever from Latin America and the Caribbean to preside over the UNGA. The selection of the UNGA's President follows a regional rotation mandated by the body. This time it was the turn of Latin America and the Caribbean to preside over the body for one year. Though the presidency of the UNGA is largely ceremonial, it is considered prestigious. The UNGA controls the UN budget, adopts treaties, addresses global issues from poverty to climate change, and passes numerous resolutions that are not legally binding but reflect global opinion.

- On June 5, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) urged the US to stop detaining and separating asylum-seeking Central American immigrant children from their parents at the southern border with Mexico.

OHCHR Spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani, said that the current US policy of separating young children from their asylum-seeker or migrant parents constitutes a child rights violation. Shamdasani indicated that several hundred children crossing the southern US border have been held in custody since October 2017, following an executive order issued by US President Donald Trump when he took office in January 2016. According to Shamdasani, the US has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child but the country has signed the international accord and ratified other such accords meaning that the US is legally obliged to protect rights of

children. She also called on Washington to ‘adopt non-custodial alternatives that allow children to remain with their families.’

- According to *Dawn* on June 4, UN Special Rapporteur on poverty, Philip Alston, claimed that poverty in the US is extensive and deepening under US President Donald Trump’s Administration.

Alston said that poverty was intensifying in the US owing to the weak policies of President Trump’s Administration that are aimed at removing the safety net from millions of poor people, while rewarding the rich. He said, “Welfare benefits and access to health insurance were being slashed, President Donald Trump’s tax reform awarded ‘financial windfalls’ to the mega-rich and large companies.”

- According to a June 2 report by the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), nearly 3.7 million Afghan children are missing out on school, due to on-going conflict, growing poverty and discrimination against girls.

The report noted that girls account for 60% of those being denied an education. This figure increases in the highly-affected provinces including Kandahar, Helmand, Wardak, Paktika, Zabul and Uruzgan where 85% of girls are not going to school. The study indicated that discrimination, displacement, lack of women teachers, poor facilities, and insecurity in conflict-affected areas are major obstacles to girls’ education in Afghanistan. However, the report noted that the number of dropout cases are low in schools, implying that boys and girls who start education at the primary level manage to stay in school to complete all grades. UNICEF Afghanistan Representative, Adele Khodr, urged the Government of Afghanistan to prioritise the year 2018 as the year of education.

- On June 1, the UNSC failed to adopt a draft resolution condemning Israel’s use of force against Palestinian civilians.

The draft proposed by Kuwait received 10 votes in favour while four other members of the UNSC abstained. However, the US vetoed the text, saying that the resolution failed to condemn Hamas. If the draft had been approved, it would have urged the UNSC to consider “measures to guarantee the safety and protection” of Palestinian civilians and request a report from the UN Secretary-General on a possible “international protection mechanism.” In a related development on June 1, 2018, another draft resolution proposed by the US also failed to be adopted. The US-drafted resolution had blamed Hamas for the violence and upheld Israel’s right to defend itself. However, the resolution did not get any support except from the US itself, three other UNSC members rejected it while 11 others abstained. The UNSC members said that the US text was tabled without prior consultation and did not take into account the overall context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. According to the UN, at least 116 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza border protests since March 30, 2018.

--- Moiz Khan