October 16 – October 31

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Pakistan

- In his address to the nation on October 31, Prime Minister Imran Khan warned extremist groups not to clash with the state and made it clear that if they continue to incite violence then the state would act against them in order to protect its citizens. The Premier’s response came after members of some extremist religious groups started nationwide demonstrations in reaction to the Supreme Court’s acquittal of Asia Bibi.

- On October 31, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Islamabad and met with Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. The two sides held detailed discussions on regional and global issues.

- The Pak-US relations remain uncertain as the US continues to pressurise Pakistan. On October 30, the United States said that the recent removal of the ban on the Hafiz Saeed-led Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) runs counter to Pakistan’s commitment to the Financial Action Task Force or FATF. According to the US, the development would jeopardise Pakistan’s ability to meet its commitments to fight terrorism under the UN Security Council resolution 1267. Earlier on October 23, 2018, US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo said the US had “made clear that its policy with respect to South Asia has not changed” and that the US expects from Pakistan that it does not provide “safe harbour to terrorists on its western border.”

- Ties between Pakistan and India remain hostile due to the situation in Kashmir. On October, 25, 2018, Pakistan’s Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and termed Kashmir dispute a “core unresolved agenda”. In a related development on October 22, 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan “condemned the new cycle of killings” of more than 10 Kashmiris by Indian Security Forces in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

- Earlier on October 24, Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari presented a conflict resolution model for the Kashmir dispute in a document titled “Kashmir: A potential blueprint for Conflict Resolution.” The Human Rights Minister suggested that Pakistan should propose a solution of the Kashmir dispute resembling the Good Friday Agreement.

- On October 24, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that Pakistan would make “all-out efforts in resolving Saudi Arabia-Yemen conflict by acting as a mediator.” Khan’s comments came a day after his return from Riyadh where he held meetings with the
Saudi leadership and secured a $6 billion financial assistance deal from Saudi Arabia. Analysts have termed the visit a success as Pakistan was able to secure economic assistance from Saudi Arabia and other close allies in order to be able to avoid a complete International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) bailout.

**International**

- India and Japan agreed to seek closer economic and military ties in an effort to counter rising China. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Tokyo on October 30, Modi held “extensive” talks with his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe. Japan also supported India’s membership bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

- According to *Times of India* on October 28, US President Donald Trump rejected Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s invitation to attend India’s Republic Day as chief guest. The development comes in the wake of India’s purchase of Russian built S-400 missile defence system.

- On October 25, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu visited Oman and held talks with Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said. It was the first visit to Oman by an Israeli premier in over 20 years. The surprise meeting was kept secret until Netanyahu’s return.

- After insisting for three weeks that Jamal Khashoggi had left the Saudi consulate in Istanbul alive, Saudi Foreign Minister, Adel al Jubeir acknowledged on October 21, that the Khashoggi’s killing was a “grave mistake”. However, he said the individuals who killed the journalist “did this outside the scope of their authority”, hinting that neither the Saudi state nor the Crown Prince were involved.

- In a victory for Palestine on October 16, the UN General Assembly unanimously approved a resolution that would enable the Palestinians to chair the G-77 group of developing countries at the UN in 2019. The 193-member UNGA voted 146-3 with 15 abstentions to approve the resolution, ignoring objections from the US and Israel.

- On October 24, EU diplomats said that the EU mechanism to facilitate payments for Iranian exports would be legally in place by November 4, 2018. The EU hopes to keep Iran in the JCPOA with Chinese and Russian support, by allowing trade to flow despite the reinstatement of US sanctions.
• On October 23, a UN Committee of Independent Human Rights Experts termed France’s ban on full-face veil a human rights violation and asked the country to review the legislation.

• In a sign of growing tension between Russia and the US, President Donald Trump declared on October 20, that the US would soon withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF). According to US officials the withdrawal can partly be attributed to US efforts to counter China’s military buildup in the Pacific. Experts who believe that the INF Treaty can still be rescued admit that it cannot be modified to include new weapon systems and fails to address the problem of China’s nuclear build-up.

---Amina Afzal
Domestic

- On October 31, former White House Counsel, Don McGahn ended his tenure at the White House.

The President had surprised McGahn months ago in announcing McGahn’s planned departure on Twitter and again in announcing his successor in an Associated Press interview. McGahn has cooperated extensively with special counsel Robert Mueller’s probe, participating in several interviews spanning 30 hours. According to observers, the conversations unnerved Trump, who did not know the full extent of McGahn’s discussions.

- On October 31, President Donald Trump criticised House Speaker Paul Ryan, saying he “knows nothing about birthright citizenship”.

The comments come a day after Ryan dismissed the President’s assertion that he could use executive action to end the constitutional guarantee of citizenship to anyone born in the United States. Ryan told a Kentucky radio station on October 30, 2018 that “you cannot end birthright citizenship with an executive order,” following remarks from the President indicating that Trump believes he can do just that, though many legal scholars disagree. The President tweeted “Paul Ryan should be focusing on holding the Majority rather than giving his opinions on Birthright Citizenship, something he knows nothing about! Our new Republican Majority will work on this, Closing the Immigration Loopholes and Securing our Border!”

- On October 30, President Trump visited Pittsburgh.

According to local officials, Trump’s presence was unwelcome and shouting protestors could be heard in the distance as he viewed memorials to the murdered victims. Trump went unaccompanied as several elected leaders declined invitations to join him. The visit comes amid a widening national debate over the President’s rhetoric, including the angry and at times violent messages he espouses during campaign rallies. Some progressive Jewish leaders asked the President to stay home. In an open letter to the President, members of the City’s “Bend the Arc” organisation wrote that his words and policies had “emboldened a growing white nationalist movement,” and that he was not welcome until he “fully (denounces) white nationalism.”

- On October 27, a man opened fire inside a Pittsburgh synagogue killing at least 11 congregants and wounding another six including four police officers.

The rampage has been described as one of the deadliest against the Jewish community in the United States. The assailant was identified as Robert D. Bowers. The massacre marks the third
mass shooting in a house of worship in three years. In November 2017, a gunman killed 26 worshipers at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas and in 2015 a white supremacist killed nine congregants in a church in Charleston, S.C. The attack comes amid rising tensions and an increase in hate crimes. According to a 2018 annual report by the Anti-Defamation League, the number of reported anti-Semitic incidents in the United States surged 57% in 2017, the largest rise in a single year since the ADL began tracking such crimes in 1979.

- On October 24, authorities started an investigation after pipe bombs were sent to several prominent Democrats, including former President Barack Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The authorities intercepted several crudely built devices packed in manila envelopes across the country. The attacks come two weeks before the midterm elections. Hillary Clinton, Former President Obama, George Soros and CNN have all figured prominently in right-wing political attacks often led by President Trump. He has referred to major news organisations as “the enemy of the people” and has shown contempt for CNN. Trump called the attempted bombings “despicable acts.” “In these times we have to unify,” he said. “We have to come together and send one very clear, strong, unmistakable message that acts or threats of political violence of any kind have no place in the United States of America.”

- According to the *NY Times* on October 21, the Trump Administration is considering narrowly defining gender as a biological, immutable condition determined by genitalia at birth.

The move is a government wide effort to roll back recognition and protection of transgender people under federal civil rights law. A series of decisions by the Obama administration loosened the legal concept of gender in federal programmes, including in education and health care, recognising gender largely as an individual’s choice and not determined by the sex assigned at birth. The policy prompted fights over bathrooms, dormitories, single-sex programmes and other arenas where gender was once seen as a simple concept. Conservatives, especially evangelical Christians, were incensed. According to a memo obtained by *The New York Times*, the Department of Health and Human Services is spearheading an effort to establish a legal definition of sex under Title IX, the federal civil rights law that bans gender discrimination in education programmes that receive government financial assistance.

- On October 19, President Trump praised Republican candidate Greg Gianforte’s 2017 assault on a reporter.

*Trump also criticised Gianforte’s Democratic opponents during a rally meant to mobilise his base’s support in the coming midterm elections. In urging the crowd to vote for Representative*
Greg Gianforte, who is running for re-election, for assaulting a reporter. Trump jokingly warned the crowd to “never wrestle him.” “I had heard he body-slammed a reporter,” Trump said, noting that he was initially concerned that Gianforte would lose in a May 2017 Special Election. He said, “Wait a minute. I know Montana pretty well; I think it might help him and it did.” The President also said, “Anybody that can do a body-slam, that’s my kind of guy.”

- On October 16, Byron Mallott, the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska resigned abruptly.

The resignation followed what Governor Bill Walker, a political independent, called “inappropriate” but unspecified comments. The announcement threw Walker’s already difficult re-election campaign into further disarray. Mallott is the state’s most prominent Native Alaskan politician, a member of the Tlingit people, and remains a hugely popular figure in rural tribal areas of the state. In seeking a second term, Walker will be competing against well-known Democratic candidate, the former United States Senator Mark Begich, and a well-financed Republican former state senator, Mike J. Dunleavy.

- During their second debate on October 16, Texas Representative Beto O’Rourke attacked Senator Ted Cruz’s honesty and character when the two clashed over abortion, climate change and other red-versus-blue divides.

O’Rourke is trailing Senator Ted Cruz in the polls in their hotly contested Senate race. He turned aggressive using phrases like “Ted Cruz is for Ted Cruz” and “all talk and no action,” and questioning whether the senator had delivered any results for Texas. O’Rourke took his most personal shot at his opponent when Cruz expressed skepticism about climate change and argued that O’Rourke supported higher taxes on oil. The congressman invoked an attack line that Donald Trump had used against Cruz in the 2016 presidential race. O’Rourke said, “Senator Cruz is not going to be honest with you. He’s dishonest, and it’s why the President called him Lyin’ Ted, and it’s why the nickname stuck because it’s true.”

International

- On October 30, the United States said that the recent removal of the ban on the Hafiz Saeed-led Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) runs counter to Pakistan’s commitment to the Financial Action Task Force or FATF.

According to the US State Department, the development would jeopardise the country’s ability to meet its commitments to fight terrorism under the UN Security Council resolution. The JuD and FIF are no longer on the list of banned outfits in Pakistan as the ordinance that proscribed them under a UN resolution has lapsed and the new government did not extend it. According to the State Department, “The United States is deeply concerned that this development would
jeopardise Pakistan’s ability to meet its commitments under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 to freeze and prevent the raising and moving of funds belonging to or associated with UN-designated terrorist groups.” And also, “The expiration of the ban on JuD and FIF runs counter to Pakistan’s commitment to work with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to address weaknesses in its counter-terrorism financing regime.”

- On October 21, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin defended his decision to meet with Saudi officials saying his trip was aimed at reinforcing ties at a critical moment, as the United States tries to ratchet up pressure on Iran.

Mnuchin was speaking during a stop in Jerusalem. He said the economic and strategic relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia was too important to be derailed by an international uproar over the Saudis’ killing of a dissident journalist. The trip to Riyadh comes as Saudi Arabia is facing an intense global backlash over the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. The Trump Administration is under pressure to deliver a forceful response, but President Trump has offered shifting reactions to Saudi accounts of the killing. He hardened his tone on October 20, 2018, telling the Washington Post that the Saudis had engaged in “deception.” Meanwhile, Members of Congress from both parties have also demanded that they want to see Saudi Arabia punished for the killing of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

- According to the NY Times on October 19, the Trump Administration is preparing to inform the Russian leadership that it is planning to exit the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

According to officials, the decision would also enable the US to counter a Chinese arms buildup in the Pacific. President Trump has been moving toward scrapping the treaty. While the treaty was seen as effective for years, according to US officials Russia has been violating it since 2014. However, the pact had also constrained the US from deploying new weapons to respond to China’s efforts towards a more dominant position in the Western Pacific.

- On October 19, President Trump broke with his own intelligence agencies appearing to accept the Saudi explanation that Jamal Khashoggi was killed accidentally.

US’ spy agencies are increasingly convinced that Khashoggi was assassinated on high-level orders from the Saudi royal court. Not only has Trump “cultivated Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman” he has also made Saudi Arabia the linchpin of the US’ Middle East policy. Asked during a visit to an Air Force base in Arizona whether he viewed the Saudi explanation as credible, Trump said, “I do.” The President said he still had questions for Prince Mohammed, and he called Khashoggi’s killing “unacceptable.” Trump also talked about possible sanctions against Saudi Arabia, but said that he hoped that Congress would not try to block “billions of
dollars in weapons sales to the Kingdom, which he has held up as proof of the fruits of the alliance.”

- On October 18, President Trump said that he believes the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi is dead.

Trump also expressed confidence in intelligence reports from multiple sources that strongly suggest a high-level Saudi role in Khashoggi’s assassination. However, he stopped short of saying the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, was responsible for Khashoggi’s death. He acknowledged that the allegations on the Crown Prince for ordering the killing raised hard questions about the US alliance with Saudi Arabia and had ignited one of the most serious foreign policy crises of his presidency. “This one has caught the imagination of the world, unfortunately,” Trump said in a brief interview with The New York Times in the Oval Office. “It’s not a positive. Not a positive.” The shift in the President’s tone followed a briefing by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, signaling that after trying to defend the Saudi rulers, Trump was coming to terms with the far-reaching implications of the Khashoggi case.

In a related development on October 16, 2018, the Trump Administration defended the Saudi regime in the Khashoggi Case. The announcement came at a time of increasing criticism of Crown Prince Mohammed including by Republican members of Congress, business leaders and human rights officials over Khashoggi’s disappearance and apparent murder. President Trump said in an interview with The Associated Press: “Here we go again with you’re guilty until proven innocent.” Earlier, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, arrived in Riyadh and issued a statement saying Saudi leaders had promised a “thorough, transparent, and timely investigation” into what had happened to Jamal Khashoggi, after he entered the consulate on Oct. 2, 2018.

- According to the NY Times on October 17, the Trump Administration is busy refashioning the Trans-Pacific Partnership through various bilateral trade deals.

Trump pulled the United States out of the trade pact with 11 other countries that he called a “rape of our country,” now seeks to forge deeper trade ties with several of the nations in the alliance, as well as the European Union and the United Kingdom. Although the Trans-Pacific Partnership was aimed at encouraging China to make extensive economic and structural overhauls that would ultimately help it become a part of the trade pact, the new bilateral agreements seek to contain Beijing’s growing economic, geopolitical and territorial ambitions. The White House gave formal notification to Congress that it would begin trade talks with Japan, the European Union and the United Kingdom. The Administration also plans to sign free trade agreements with the Philippines and Vietnam, as part of its effort to fence in China with agreements in its backyard.
Canada

- On October 17, Canada became the first major world economy to legalise recreational marijuana.

The announcement is the beginning of what observers have called a national experiment. Not only will it change the country’s social, cultural and economic fabric, it will also present Canada with its biggest public policy challenge in decades. As government retailers opened across the country, jubilant Canadians waited for hours in line to buy the first state-approved joints. In its editorial, the Canadian Medical Association Journal called the government’s legalisation plan an “uncontrolled experiment in which the profits of cannabis producers and tax revenues are squarely pitched against the health of Canadians.”

Latin America

- On October 28, Brazil elected Jair Bolsonaro, a strident populist as President.

The vote is being dubbed the nation’s most radical political change since democracy was restored more than three decades ago. The president-elect, has exalted the country’s military dictatorship, advocated torture and threatened to destroy, jail or drive into exile his political opponents. Bolsonaro is further to the right than any president in the region, where voters have recently embraced more conservative leaders in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Paraguay and Colombia. He joins a number of far-right politicians who have risen to power around the world, including Italy’s deputy Prime Minister, Matteo Salvini, and Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary.

- In open defiance of the Mexican and US governments on October 20, a caravan comprising thousands of Central American undocumented migrants, continued to move toward the United States.

The Mexican government, which has been under pressure by the Trump Administration to stop the caravan had ordered the migrants to submit to processing by the immigration authorities at a legal border crossing. However, thousands chose to move on part of a group of people who had been stopped at the Mexican border earlier, after having traveled for several days from Honduras. According to a local government estimate, more than 7,000 people had crossed the border illegally in recent days. Under a proposed bilateral agreement that the Trump Administration has discussed with Mexico, US border officials would be able to legally turn back asylum seekers who first pass through Mexico, forcing them to seek protection south of the border.

---Amina Afzal
ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

• On October 30, India successfully conducted a night trial of its nuclear-capable Agni-I ballistic missile from a test range off the Odisha coast.

The launch, from Dr Abdul Kalam Island was conducted as a part of the periodic training activity by the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) to consolidate operational readiness. According to Indian Defence sources, all mission objectives were met during the test. While the Agni-I’s daytime trials have been conducted numerous times, this test was the second night trial of the missile to reconfirm its technological parameters. The first night trial was conducted on April 12, 2014. The Indian Army has already inducted the missile. With a strike range of 700 kilometres, the Agni-I is a single stage, solid propellant surface-to-surface ballistic missile capable of carrying payloads of up to 1000 kg.

• According to Reuters on October 30, South Korea has asked the US for “maximum flexibility” on its request for a waiver to prevent South Korean companies from being affected by renewed sanctions against Iran.

• On October 24, EU diplomats said that the EU mechanism to facilitate payments for Iranian exports would be legally in place by November 4, 2018.

Following the US’ withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the reinstatement of sanctions against Iranian crude oil exports is set to take effect on November 5, 2018, as a part of US’ efforts to pressurise Iran to accede to a more restrictive deal on curbing its nuclear and missile programme. An October 29, 2018, statement from the South Korean Foreign Ministry indicated that Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha asked for the exemption in a telephone call with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The statement also said that Secretary Pompeo said he would carry out further discussions with South Korea on the matter. Besides South Korea, Japan has also been in talks with the US in a bid to avoid adverse impacts from the re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran. Both countries had attained waivers during the previous round of sanctions which ended in 2016.

In a related development on October 24, 2018, three EU diplomats stressed that the EU mechanism to facilitate payments for Iranian exports would be legally in place by November 4, 2018. The mechanism, called special purpose vehicle (SPV), is designed to circumvent the sanctions, under which the US can cut off any bank that enables oil transactions with Iran. The SPV aims to sidestep the US financial system by using an EU intermediary to handle trade with Iran. One EU diplomat said, “It will not be operational immediately. It will take time and the time that takes will be months.” The EU, with support from China and Russia, hopes to keep Iran in the JCPOA by allowing trade to flow despite the reinstatement of US sanctions.
According to the October 29 India-Japan Vision Statement, Japan supports India’s membership into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

The India-Japan Vision Statement said, “After India’s full accession to three international export control regimes, the two leaders pledged to continue working together for India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, with the aim of strengthening the global non-proliferation efforts.” India is already a member of the Australia Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The statement was issued following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe in Tokyo. Modi was on a two-day visit to Japan to attend the 13th India-Japan annual summit. During the summit Modi and Abe also discussed possible reforms in the UN. The statement stressed, “India and Japan seek expeditious and meaningful reforms of the United Nations, in particular the comprehensive reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to make it more legitimate, effective and representative, taking into account the contemporary realities of the 21st century.” India, Japan, Brazil and Germany have formed a group, called the G4, to support each other’s bids for permanent seats on the UNSC.

On October 26, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Berlin would not export arms to Saudi Arabia until the completion of investigations into the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

During a press conference Merkel said, “We need to clarify the background of this horrible crime and until that, we will not supply weapons to Saudi Arabia.” Merkel also stressed, “Saudi Arabia must do everything to solve the urgent humanitarian situation in Yemen, there are currently millions of hungry people, we are witnesses of one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes.” Germany had approved $480 million worth of arms exports to Saudi Arabia for 2018. Germany has also called on Saudi Arabia to clarify how Khashoggi died inside its Istanbul consulate. Following days of denial, Saudi authorities admitted on October 20, 2018, that Khashoggi was killed after entering the consulate in Turkey on October 2, 2018.


Stoltenberg said, “We will, of course, assess the implications for NATO allies for our security of the new Russian missiles and the Russian behaviour.” He added, “But I do not foresee that NATO allies will station more nuclear weapons in Europe as a response to the new Russian missile.” His comments follow US President Donald Trump’s announcement on October 20, 2018, that the US would soon withdraw from the 1987 INF Treaty. The treaty prohibits both the US and Russia from possessing, producing, or deploying ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with a range of between 500 kilometres and 5,500 kilometres. Stoltenberg said that all
NATO members agree that the US was in full compliance with the treaty. However, NATO members have also expressed concern over the US withdrawal from the INF treaty.

- On October 26, the US conducted a successful test of its Aegis Missile Defence system’s interceptor missile, called the Standard Missile 3 Block IIA (SM-3 IIA), jointly developed with Japan.

According to a US Missile Defence Agency (MDA) statement, the intercepting missile was launched from the USS John Finn in the Pacific after radars on the destroyer detected and tracked the medium-range ballistic missile target. The target missile was launched from the Pacific Missile Range Facility at Kauai in Hawaii. MDA Director Lieutenant General Sam Greaves said, “This was a superb accomplishment and key milestone for the SM-3 Block IIA return to flight.” The successful test of the interceptor missile follows two failed interception attempts conducted in June 2017 and January 2018 respectively. However, an interception test for the same system conducted in February 2017 had been successful.

- On October 24, India awarded Israel an additional $770 million contract to supply the country with Barak 8 long-range surface-to-air missile systems (LRSAM) for its seven ships.

The contract was concluded between Israeli defence firm Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and Indian state-owned aerospace and defence company Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). An earlier contract worth $630 million for the supply of four Barak 8 LR-SAM systems to the Indian Navy was signed between the IAI and the BEL in May 2017. The two defence firms also signed a $2 billion deal for the supply of the medium-range surface-to-air (MRSAM) missile defence systems, the land-based variant of the Barak 8, to the Indian Army in April 2017. The Barak 8 LR SAM is an operational air and missile defence system that has been jointly developed by IAI and India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in collaboration with defence contractors in India and Israel. With a strike range of 70 kilometres, the missile is capable of providing broad aerial and point defence against a wide range of threats to the marine arena from the air, sea or land.


President Trump said, “Russia has violated the agreement. They have been violating it for many years and I do not know why President Obama did not negotiate or pull out.” He added, “We are the ones that have stayed in the agreement and we have honoured the agreement but Russia has not unfortunately honoured the agreement so we are going to terminate the agreement, we are going to pull out.” He indicated that the INF treaty was not acceptable to the US unless Russia and China do not agree to stop developing intermediate-range ballistic missiles also. Signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, the INF Treaty banned ground-launched nuclear and conventional ballistic missiles with ranges between 500 to 5,500
kilometres. The Treaty led to the elimination of an entire class of destabilising nuclear weapons that were deployed in Europe and helped bring an end to the Cold War arms race. The US has been accusing Russia of violating the INF Treaty since 2014 with the development and deployment of a new ground-launched cruise missile identified as the 9M729 with a range that is not compliant with the treaty. President Trump claims that the US would withdraw from the agreement because the country cannot tolerate Russian violations of the INF Treaty. Under the terms of the treaty, it would take six months for the US withdrawal to take effect. However, Russia rejected the US’ allegations on October 20, 2018. Russia’s RIA Novosti state news agency cited Russian Foreign Ministry official saying that the US’ withdrawal had been motivated by the dream of becoming a single global superpower. The official also stressed that Russia has “many times publicly denounced the US policy course towards dismantling the nuclear deal.” On October 21, 2018, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov warned that the US’ withdrawal would be a very dangerous step. Ryabkov also stressed that Russia was observing the INF Treaty in the strictest way, and, in return, accused the US of violating the Treaty. Russia maintains that US missile defence interceptor platforms deployed in Eastern Europe could be used for offense purposes, and therefore, violates the treaty.

On October 23, 2018, President Trump’s National Security Adviser John Bolton confirmed the US’ plan of withdrawing from the INF Treaty following the end of his two-day visit to Russia. Regarding his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Bolton said that he had lengthy discussion with Putin on US’ withdrawal from the treaty. However, he did not give any further details about Putin’s reaction. Bolton indicated that both Putin and Trump have expressed interest in holding direct talks in November 2018 in Paris, where both the leaders may discuss their concerns regarding the INF Treaty as well. The US has not filed a formal withdrawal notice from the treaty. Earlier on October 22, 2018, Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said that the US’ withdrawal would be “undesirable.” Suga said that Japan would formally ask the US to not withdraw from the treaty. Japan is concerned that the US’ withdrawal from the treaty would hinder the progress on North Korea’s denuclearisation and would accelerate an arms race with Russia and China.

- In its October 19 statement, Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry downplayed the efficacy of the sale of Russian S-400 air defence system to India, claiming that Pakistan had developed capabilities that could penetrate India’s planned ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems.

While questioning the effectiveness of the planned BMD system, the Foreign Ministry said that Pakistan had been compelled by Indian attitude “to develop capabilities which render any BMD system ineffective and unreliable.” However, the Ministry also warned that the purchase of the S-400 system would harm strategic stability in South Asia. The statement stressed, “The Indian purchase of S-400 missile system is a part of their efforts to acquire a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) System through multiple sources. This will further destabilise strategic stability in South Asia, besides leading to a renewed arms race.” Following years of negotiations, India signed a deal worth $5.2 billion with Russia to acquire five advanced S-400 air defence systems on
October 5, 2018. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the deal during the 19th India-Russia bilateral annual summit, despite the possibility of US sanctions.

- According to Global Times on October 16, a South China mining company Guangdong Hongda Blasting conducted the successful flight test of a supersonic missile.

In its statement, the Guangdong Hongda Blasting Company said, “All parameters for the supersonic cruising flight of the HD-1 missile achieved their estimated values.” The flight test was conducted on October 15, 2018, from a discrete location in North China. Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military analyst said, “The test flight shows that the HD-1’s core components are now mature, with its aerodynamic design, materials and overall structure already proven viable.” Wei also noted that Pakistan and Middle Eastern countries were likely to show interest given the weapon’s potential to break anti-missile systems at supersonic speeds. According to the Hongda company, the HD-1 is a comprehensive weapon system consisting of solid-fuelled missile, launcher, command and control, target indication and comprehensive support systems. The HD-1 can be adapted to aircraft and ships as well as the basic ground-based vehicle version.

--- Moiz Khan
China

- On October 19, Chinese Prime Minster Li Keqiang met with European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels.

  During the meeting, the Chinese Premier called for the strengthening of ties with the European Union (EU), saying that the two sides need to collectively safeguard multilateralism and a free trade system based on international rules. The Premier said China plans to endorse improvements to the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). He, however, stressed that such improvements must be carried out on the basis of the WTO’s existing rules.

- On October 31, Ma Xiaoguang, China’s spokesperson for Taiwan Affairs said that China resolutely opposes relations in any form between the US and Taiwan.

  Ma made the remarks in response to reports that two US Navy vessels had crossed the Taiwan Strait on October 22, 2018. Earlier in October 2018 Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen said that she would boost “national security” in the wake of what she described as Chinese pressure to assert sovereignty over Taiwan.

- On October 29, US President Donald Trump threatened to impose billions of dollars’ worth of new tariffs on China if the two countries fail to reach an agreement on a new trade deal.

  The US has already imposed tariffs on $250 billion worth of Chinese goods and China has responded with retaliatory duties on $110 billion worth of US goods. According to media reports, Washington was preparing to announce tariffs on all remaining Chinese imports by December 2018 if negotiations between the two sides fail to ease the trade war.

Japan

- During his visit to Beijing on October 26, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held meetings with his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping.

  During the meeting with President Xi, Abe expressed hope that his visit would elevate the China-Japan relationship from competition to cooperation. Both sides announced their decision to boost economic cooperation and not to pose a threat to each other. The two countries also signed multiple cooperation agreements, including one reviving a currency-swap deal. The Japanese Premier was accompanied by delegates from 500 Japanese companies. Abe’s visit to Beijing comes amid China’s worsening trade war with the US.
North Korea

- Speaking at the Xiangshan Forum in Beijing on October 25, Song Il Hyok, Deputy Director General of the North Korean Foreign Ministry’s Institute for Disarmament and Peace, called on Washington to “lift immediately the sanctions” for confidence-building. He said that the sanctions and pressure “do more harm than good.” The Xiangshan Forum is a regional defence dialogue being hosted by China since 2006. North Korea wants relief from US sanctions, however, Washington has pledged to keep them in place until Pyongyang fully dismantles all its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

South Korea

- According to Pentagon spokesperson, Dana White on October 19, US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis and South Korea’s Minister of National Defence, Jeong Kyeong-doo agreed to suspend the joint military exercise.

The development came during the ASEAN-US Defence Ministers informal meeting at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) security summit in Singapore on October 19, 2018. Washington and Seoul insist they are on the same page over the North Korean issue.

--- Muhammad Abdul Qadeer
**EUROPE**

- On October 31, the NATO-Russia Council met in Brussels to discuss matters of mutual interest.

*The council brings together Russia and the 29 NATO Allies. Ambassadors had an open exchange on several topics, including the situation in Ukraine; issues related to military activities, reciprocal transparency and risk reduction; Afghanistan; and hybrid challenges. NATO and Russia provided briefings on major exercises in the spirit of transparency. NATO briefed on the ongoing exercise Trident Juncture 2018, and Russia provided a briefing on exercise Vostok 2018. To inform the discussion on Afghanistan, the NATO Senior Civilian Representative, Ambassador Cornelius Zimmerman, provided a briefing on Afghanistan.*

- On October 30, Denmark accused Iran’s intelligence agencies of planning to assassinate an Iranian activist on Danish soil.

*According to Denmark’s Intelligence Service, the target was believed to be a member of an Arab separatist movement. Denmark has recalled its ambassador from Tehran and is consulting other EU countries about imposing new sanctions against Iran. In September 2018, a massive police operation in Denmark linked to the case led to the bridge to Sweden being closed. Iran has dismissed Denmark’s allegations.*

- According to the *BBC* on October 30, the Italian economy came to a standstill in the third quarter of 2018 registering no growth at all.

*The development comes at a time when the new coalition government is arguing with the European Commission over the need for an expansionary budget to boost growth.*

*Meanwhile, EU figures showed economic growth in the 19 countries using the euro currency slowed by more than expected. Eurozone growth slowed to 0.2%, from 0.4% in the previous quarter. Growth across all 28 countries of the EU fell to 0.3% from 0.5%. Italian Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte said the zero growth in Italy justified Rome’s expansionary 2019 budget, which the European Commission has rejected because it breaks EU rules. In an unprecedented move on October 23, 2018, the European Commission told Italy to revise its budget. The Commission was worried about the impact of higher spending on already high levels of debt in Italy, the eurozone’s third-biggest economy. Italy’s governing populist parties have vowed to push ahead with campaign promises including a minimum income for the unemployed. The country now has three weeks to submit a new draft budget to Brussels. According to the Commission the first draft represented a “particularly serious non-compliance” with its recommendations.*
• On October 30, Italy experienced fierce winds and rain that left 11 people dead in the west and north, while schools and tourist sites were closed in several regions for the safety people.

Winds of up to 180km/h were reported, and two tornadoes ripped through the centre of the coastal town of Terracina, killing one person and leaving 10 others injured. In the canal city of Venice, rising floodwaters overwhelmed many of its famed squares and walkways. Officials say as much as 75% of the city is now submerged. Venice’s central St Mark’s Square was closed after the water level reached “acqua alta” (high water) of 5.1ft. It is the fourth highest level ever recorded.

• On October 29, thousands of people took to the streets of Rome to protest the city’s rundown state.

Demonstrators criticised Mayor Virginia Raggi for failing to tackle issues including uncollected rubbish and potholed roads. Raggi took control of Rome in 2016 for the Five Star Movement (M5S), which formed a national coalition government earlier in 2018. Her popularity has decreased after failing to address the indebted city’s issues.

• On October 29, Chancellor Angela Merkel asked Germans to “get ready for the time after” her.

The Chancellor said she would step down as leader of her conservative party in December 2018 and would not seek re-election in 2021. Merkel may remain on the political scene for the foreseeable future but few observers believe she could hang on until the end of her term, speculating that new elections could be held as early as 2019. The chancellor’s decision now makes clear that neither she nor her country are immune to the forces that have reordered politics across the Continent. These include the rise of populist forces; the migration crisis; and a redrawing of the political fault lines away from the historical left-right divide toward a battle between liberal pro-European values and their nationalist polar opposite. Speculation had grown for months about Merkel’s eventual exit from the political stage, so the announcement was no surprise, but it still came as a shock. It underscores the fragility of German politics and the great uncertainty for a Europe without Merkel.

• On October 29, a majority of EU countries agreed to abolish daylight saving time.

In informal talks, transport ministers suggested the 2019 timetable to scrap seasonal clock changes was unrealistic. The proposal would allow states to choose permanent summer or winter time. An EU-wide survey found most people favoured scrapping daylight saving. “If we aim to do this in 2019, as the European Commission suggested, this will not be supported by the majority of member states,” said Austrian Transport Minister Norbert Hofer, who hosted his 27 EU counterparts in Graz. Allowing until 2021 would help ensure the EU’s three existing time zones did not become a more complicated patchwork, Hofer said.
• On October 27, Roman Catholic bishops called for a more inclusive role for women in church decision-making and greater participation of young people.

The appeal was part of a new document that urged bishops to help renew the church through a more participatory approach, making greater use of the energies and capabilities of young lay Catholics. The document given to Pope Francis for his consideration also called for urgent changes so that women could play a bigger role in church decisions at all levels. “It is a duty of justice,” it said, adding, “The absence of women’s voices and viewpoint impoverishes discussion and the path of the church.”

• On October 25, European share markets steadied after big falls in Asian stocks that followed a bruising trading session on Wall Street.

Tokyo stocks slumped more than 3%, while losses pushed the US Dow Jones Industrial Average and the S&P 500 into negative territory for 2018. European markets followed suit at first, but increased later with London’s FTSE 100 up 0.17%. Concerns over corporate profits and slowing growth have rattled investors.

• On October 24, President Vladimir Putin warned that Russia would respond “in kind” if new US nuclear missiles are placed in Europe. Putin said any European countries hosting US missiles would be at risk of Russian strikes. NATO has said it is unlikely to deploy more nuclear weapons to Europe should an arms control treaty between Washington and Moscow collapse. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg agreed that Russia had probably violated the deal. He said NATO did not seek confrontation but stood ready to defend all allies against any threat. On October 25, 2018, NATO will begin its largest military exercise since the Cold War. The operation is to repel a mock invasion of Norway and will involve all 29 members, as well as Finland and Sweden.

• On October 24, the European Parliament voted to ban a range of single-use plastics across the union in a bid to stop pollution of the oceans.

MEPs backed a ban on plastic cutlery and plates, cotton buds, straws, drink-stirrers and balloon sticks. The proposal also calls for a reduction in single-use plastic for food and drink containers like plastic cups. The European Commission proposed a ban in May 2018, following a surge in public support attributed to documentaries such as David Attenborough’s BBC Blue Planet series.

• On October 23, the European Commission presented its Work Programme for 2019.

The commission set out three main priorities for the year ahead i.e. reaching swift agreement on the legislative proposals already presented to deliver on its ten political priorities; adopting a limited number of new initiatives to address outstanding challenges; and presenting several initiatives with a future perspective for a strong, united and sovereign Europe. The 2019 Work
Programme focuses on 15 new initiatives, and an additional 10 new REFIT evaluations, to review existing legislation. The Commission Work Programme also lists the 45 pending priority proposals under its Joint declaration on legislative priorities, for adoption by the Parliament and Council before the European elections. The Commission also plans to withdraw or repeal 17 pending proposals or existing laws.

- On October 19, the European Court of Justice ordered Poland to “immediately suspend” the application of its law which lowers the retirement age of Supreme Court judges.

The European Court of Justice upheld the request by the European Commission and the head of Poland’s ruling party said it would comply with the decision. According to Warsaw, the reforms, which lower the retirement age from 70 to 65, make the court more efficient. The Polish government has however been accused of trying to appoint loyal judges. In recent months, Poland has clashed with EU bodies over a number of issues.

- On October 17, at least 19 people were killed and dozens more wounded in a shooting at a college in Russian-annexed Crimea.

An 18-year-old student ran through the Kerch technical college firing at fellow pupils before killing himself. Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 in a move condemned by many Western powers. The annexation marked the start of a conflict involving Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine that continues even today.

---Amina Afzal
GLOBAL TERRORISM

- In a joint statement on October 25, nine organisations including Index on Censorship and Reporters Without Borders called on the House of Lords to recommend significant amendments to the United Kingdom’s counter-terrorism and border security bill as it reaches the closing stages of its passage through parliament.

The bill proposes powers for border guards to stop and search individuals without suspicion on the grounds of tackling “hostile state” activity, and would criminalise travel to terrorist hotspots and the viewing of terrorist-linked material online. It has received significant criticism from the cross-party joint committee on human rights. Rebecca Vincent, the UK Bureau Director for Reporters Without Borders said, “This bill has extremely worrying implications for press freedom and the protection of journalistic sources. We have underscored our concerns over a number of specific clauses that should be struck, or at a very minimum, amended to include clear exemptions for journalistic activities. We call on Lords to carefully scrutinise this problematic bill and amend it to ensure that it does not contribute to further deterioration of UK press freedom.”

- On October 26, the United States Justice Department charged a suspect with five federal crimes, including interstate transportation of an explosive and threats against former presidents.

Packages containing pipe bombs were sent to several prominent figures across the country. Authorities have arrested Cesar Sayoc, a 56-year-old, who had been previously arrested in 2002 for making a bomb threat. On October 22, 2018 one device was sent to George Soros, a billionaire investor and philanthropist. On October 23, 2018 Secret Service personnel intercepted a pipe bomb addressed to the residence of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former President Bill Clinton in Chappaqua, New York. On October 24, 2018 Barak Obama received a package containing a bomb at his residence in Washington D.C. A bomb was found in the CNN mailroom in New York addressed to former CIA director John Brennan and another suspicious package was found at the Florida office of Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz. It was addressed to former Attorney General Eric H. Holder. Two more packages were retrieved from Maxine Waters, a Democrat from California. On October 25, 2018 Robert De Niro and Joe Biden received a similar package. On October 26, 2018 Senator Cory Booker from New Jersey, James Clapper former Director of National Intelligence, Senator Kamala Harris from California and Tom Steyer a major Democratic donor were sent explosive devices in packages.

- On October 28, United States Senator Rand Paul criticised Saudi Arabia during a Montana rally.

Paul is a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who condemned Saudi Arabia as a sponsor of global terrorism and accountable for human rights violations in Yemen.
Paul’s comments add pressure on the Trump Administration, which is already reviewing options to further punish Saudi Arabia over the killing of journalist and Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi.

- On October 30, UAE approved an anti-money laundering law that will help combat terrorism financing.

The law is aimed at combatting money laundering and to establish a legal framework to support and strengthen the efforts of relevant authorities in countering money-laundering and related crimes. The law also counters the financing of terrorist operations and suspicious organisations. The anti-money laundering law is in line with the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force, an inter-governmental body set up in 1989 and responsible for developing and upholding policies to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and other types of financial crime.

---Rimsha Zulfiqar
MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Iran

- On October 28, Iran, for the first time, sold its oil to private buyers through its energy exchange as part of its efforts to counter renewed US sanctions.

According to Fars News Agency, only 280,000 barrels were sold out of one million offered, and went for $74.85 per barrel, more than $4 below the initial asking price. The US has announced that it would reimpose sanctions on Iran’s oil industry on November 5, 2018, following President Donald Trump’s decision to pull out of the 2015 nuclear deal. The plan to sell oil to private companies on the energy exchange was proposed by first Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri in July 2018. The plan is aimed at defeating the US’ efforts to stop Iran’s oil exports. The Iranian government hopes that selling to private buyers, rather than directly to foreign clients, would make it harder for the US to monitor and stop its sales.

Iraq

- On October 25, new Iraqi Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi said Baghdad would prioritise its own interests and independence when it comes to implementing unilateral US sanctions on Iran.

PM Mahdi said, “We want to secure Iraq from any interference in issues, affairs of other countries, whether it is a neighbouring country or any other country in the world.” Baghdad had earlier called US sanctions on Iran “wrong and unacceptable”, pledging that it would never accept the “cruel” measures. Former Iraqi premier, Haider al-Abadi had initially said that his government would only respect the dollar ban in transactions with Iran.

- On October 24, New Iraqi Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi and two-thirds of his cabinet were sworn in.

Lawmakers failed to reach a consensus on the rest of the cabinet, postponing the votes till November 6, 2018. Out of the 22-member cabinet proposed by the new PM, 14 nominations won a vote of confidence. However, the parliament did not make any decision about the rest, including the ministers of interior and defence. Thamer Ghadhban became Oil Minister and veteran Kurdish politician Fuad Hussein the Finance Minister. Mohammed Ali al-Hakeem was elected the Minister of Foreign Affairs.
Israel

- On October 28, at least three Palestinians were killed in Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip.

According to the Israeli Military, “three Palestinians approached the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip, attempted to damage it and were apparently involved in placing an improvised explosive device adjacent to it.” In response, an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) aircraft fired on the Palestinians. Tensions have been high along the Gaza-Israel frontier since Palestinians began a wave of border protests in March 2018. In another development on October 26, 2018 at least five Palestinians were killed as clashes broke out with Israeli troops along the Gaza border. Since the beginning of the protests, at least 217 Palestinians have been killed by Israel.

- On October 28, Several Palestinian officials criticised attempts to normalise relations between Tel Aviv and Arab countries following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s visit to Oman.

- On October 25, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu visited Oman and held talks with Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said.

It was the first visit to Oman by an Israeli premier in over 20 years. The surprise meeting was kept secret until Netanyahu’s return. Netanyahu visited Oman even as the two countries have no diplomatic ties. According to Israeli officials, Netanyahu and Sultan Qaboos discussed the Middle East peace process “and other issues of shared interest”. They also said the trip formed part of “the policy outlined by Prime Minister Netanyahu on deepening relations with the states of the region.” Netanyahu’s wife accompanied him during the visit and his delegation included Mossad intelligence Chief Yossi Cohen and National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat. Yemen’s Houthi Ansarullah movement criticised the Sultanate of Oman for welcoming Israeli Prime Minister’s unannounced visit to the country. According to Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, the President of the Houthi Supreme Revolutionary Committee (SRC), the real goal of the Israeli Premier’s trip to Muscat was “to isolate Oman from playing any positive role in the future with its allies and friends.” According to observers, the trip is important for Netanyahu, who has said he wants to bolster ties with the Arab world despite a stalemate on the Palestinian front. Mohammad Shtayyeh, an adviser to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and member of the central committee of the Fatah movement, said the visit signalled the death of the Arab peace initiative, which was endorsed by the Arab League in 2002. The initiative calls for normalising ties with Israel in exchange for the regime’s withdrawal to the pre-1967 Arab borders.
Jordan

- On October 21, Jordan announced it would not extend the 25-year deal that allows Israel to use two tracts of territory along its border.

Much of the land in Baquora in the northwestern part of Jordan and Ghumar in the south is used by Israeli farmers, some of whom were given private land ownership rights and special travel rights under a 1994 peace treaty between the two countries. The agreement will expire in 2019. King Abdullah has been under increasing public pressure to end the arrangement with Israel. He told senior Jordanian politicians that the country wanted to exercise its “full sovereignty” over the two areas. Following King Abdullah’s announcement, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged that Jordan wanted to exercise its option to end the arrangement. However, he said Israel “will enter negotiations with it on the possibility of extending the current arrangement”. According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, under the terms of peace treaty, the lease would be automatically renewed unless either of the parties notified the other a year before expiry that it wished to terminate the agreement.

Oman

- During a security summit in Manama, Bahrain on October 27, Omani Foreign Minister, Yousef bin Alawi bin Abdullah said that Oman would not act as a “mediator” between Israelis and Palestinians.

The remarks followed Netanyahu’s visit to Oman. Abdullah said that the sultanate was only offering ideas to help Israel and Palestinians to come together. He said, “We are not saying road is now easy and paved with flowers, but our priority is to put an end to the conflict and move to a new world.” He also said, “Oman relied on the US and efforts by US President Donald Trump in working towards the deal of the century.” The Minister also claimed Israel was “present in the region, and we all understand this, the world is also aware of this fact and maybe it is time for Israel to be treated the same and also bear the same obligations.”

Palestine

- On October 23, Palestinian Prime Minister, Rami Hamdallah held talks with visiting Chinese Vice President, Wang Qishan in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

During their talks, PM Hamdallah urged China to play an active role in the so-called Middle East peace process and support President Mahmoud Abbas’ initiative for ending the conflict with Israel. The initiative seeks to replace the US with an international mechanism as the mediator in the conflict. According to PM Hamdallah, the talks focused on “enhancing joint cooperation and the latest political developments, including the Israeli violations against our
people and the US unilateral moves to support such violations.” He also praised Beijing for its “continued” support for Palestine in several fields and the so-called two-state solution. He said, “I called China to support President Abbas’ peace initiative and to hold an international peace conference in which China will be a key sponsor.” Hamdallah complained about efforts by Israel and the US to undermine Israeli-Palestinian talks and the so-called two-state solution, denouncing Tel Aviv’s illegal settlement construction activities in the occupied lands and Washington’s recognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel’s “capital.” He also urged China to exert pressure on Israel to “halt its violations and honour international laws and resolutions.”

- On October 16, the UN General Assembly unanimously approved a resolution that would enable the Palestinians to chair the G-77 group of developing countries at the UN in 2019.

Egypt, the current chair of the group, told the Assembly before the vote that because the Palestinians are from a non-member observer state at the UN, a resolution is required to give it “the rights and capacity required” to head the 135-nation group. During the September 2018 meeting of world leaders at the General Assembly, members of the G-77 formalised their decision to give Palestinians the chair. Palestinian Ambassador to the UN, Riyad Mansour said that Palestinians “will spare no effort to prove worthy of this trust” and defend G-77 interests while also engaging “with all partners I repeat with all partners in order to advance cooperation and mutually beneficial agreements for the common good of humanity.”

Saudi Arabia

- On October 24, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman vowed that the killers of Jamal Khashoggi would be brought to justice.

- On October 21, Saudi Foreign Minister, Adel al Jubeir acknowledged that killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Embassy in Turkey was a “grave mistake”.

According to a statement three weeks after the murder, the Saudi government said Khashoggi was killed in a fistfight at its consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018. Until now Saudi authorities had insisted that the journalist had left the consulate alive. In another explanation, the Saudi government said that Khashoggi might have been choked to death by his interrogators who were trying to force him to surrender and return to Saudi Arabia. Khashoggi, once a confidante of the royal family, moved to the US in 2017 and regularly criticised Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the articles and blogs he wrote for Washington Post. He had gone to the consulate to collect documents for marrying his Turkish fiancée. Minister Jubeir blamed his country’s “rogue agents” for Khashoggi’s murder while US President Donald Trump praised Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman as a “strong person” with “very good control”. Jubeir said the individuals who killed the journalist “did this outside the scope of their authority”,
hinting that neither the Saudi state nor the Crown Prince were involved. He also said that the Kingdom was conducting its own investigation and those responsible would be punished. Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan dismissed Saudi Arabia’s efforts to blame the killing of journalist Khashoggi on rogue operatives, calling it a “planned, savage killing”, and called upon Riyadh to punish those responsible.

**Syria**

- According to *Press Tv* on October 30, the Syrian government strongly condemned the municipal elections in the Golan Heights, stating that the Tel Aviv regime is seeking to legitimise its occupation and land expropriation policies there through such attempts.

In two separate letters addressed to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the rotating President of the UN Security Council, Sacha Llorenty, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates stated that Israel is trying to advance its Judaisation plans and enforce its own law in the occupied territory. The Syrian government “called on the UN Security Council to act urgently and safeguard international peace and security by condemning the Israeli aggression on Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan Heights.” The international community does not recognise Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights, and the UN Security Council has declared it “null and void.” Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected the international opposition, and has stated that the occupied territory “will forever remain under Israel’s sovereignty.”

- On October 29, Syria’s Ambassador to the UN, Bashar al-Jaafari strongly criticised sanctions imposed on Syria by the US and the EU, saying the bans are harming the Syrian people.

During a UN Security Council meeting, Jaafari said that foreign-backed terrorists and the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU were inflicting suffering on the Syrian people. On May 28, 2018, the EU had extended its restrictive measures against the Damascus government until June 1, 2019. The sanctions currently in place against Syria include an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments and a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank held in the EU. The EU has also banned companies linked to the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Washington has also placed restrictions on hundreds of employees and scientists at a Syrian government agency over their alleged involvement in developing chemical munitions. Syria has rejected using banned weapons during its anti-terrorism operations. The Syrian envoy also accused the US-led coalition of using white phosphorus bombs during its air strikes on Deir ez-Zor province.

- According to *Anadolu* news agency on October 28, the Turkish Army attacked the US-backed Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria, east of the Euphrates River.
Turkish artillery strikes hit trenches and positions built by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) on a hill in the village of Zor Moghar, in rural northern Aleppo. The village is across the Euphrates River that separates Turkey-backed Syrian opposition forces and the YPG. According to a statement from the YPG, the shelling killed a Kurdish fighter from the Self Defence Forces. The newly formed forces are affiliated with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, leading the fight against Daesh in eastern Syria. Ankara considers the US-backed Kurdish militia an extension of its own insurgent groups, which it refers to as “terrorists and separatists.” Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vowed to expand the military operations to clear the borders from terror.

- On October 23, Senior diplomats of Iran, Russia, and Turkey, which act as guarantors of an all-Syria ceasefire, held consultations in Moscow in an attempt to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

The meeting was held within the Astana format. The Kazakh capital has been hosting talks since January 2017 between the Syrian government and opposition, with the guarantor states in attendance as mediators. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Vershinin said, “We aim to use the consultations in this format to ‘synchronise our watches’ and to consider the situation on the ground and around Syria.” Hossein Jaberi Ansari, the Iranian Foreign Minister’s Special Assistant for Political Affairs, has been representing Iran in both the Astana talks and other relevant consultations. The participants decided that the next top-level meeting in the format would take place in Astana in November 2018.

- On October 19, at least 41 people, including 10 children, were killed in a US-led coalition air strike on a Mosque in al-Sousa village.

According to the coalition, it targeted Daesh militants using the Mosque as their base. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, many of those killed were Iraqi relatives of Daesh fighters. The coalition raids, which hit a Mosque and houses, also killed 22 militants around the Euphrates River near the Iraqi border, one of the last Daesh enclaves in Syria. According to the Syrian Foreign Ministry, coalition warplanes had “committed a crime”, killing at least 62 civilians in al-Sousa and a nearby village in Deir ez-Zor province.

Turkey

- During his address to a group of provincial leaders of his Justice and Development Party (AKP) on October 26, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a “final warning” to those who endanger Turkey’s borders.

Erdogan’s warning was an apparent reference to the US-backed Kurdish militants operating in northern Syria. He also noted that Turkey was determined to focus its attention towards the east of the Euphrates in Syria, rather than the Manbij area, citing the presence of the Kurdish
People’s Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara considers a terrorist group. Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov had also warned that the US is seeking to establish a quasi-state east of the Euphrates River and create illegal structures there.

Yemen

- According to Press Tv on October 31, the United Nations said it aims to resume Yemen peace talks “within a month”.

The announcement followed a similar call by the US that was condemned by the Houthi Ansarullah movement. The UN envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths welcomed calls for an immediate re-launch of negotiations and a ceasefire in Yemen. He said, “I urge all concerned parties to seize this opportunity to engage constructively with our current efforts to swiftly resume political consultations to agree on a framework for political negotiations. We remain committed to bring the Yemeni parties to the negotiations table within a month.” On October 30, 2018, US officials called for a ceasefire in Yemen and demanded that the sides to the conflict come to the negotiating table within a month. The Houthi movement opposed the US proposal for mediation in efforts to resolve the conflict in Yemen, holding Washington responsible for the Saudi-led aggression against Yemen. Mohammed al-Bakhiiti, a member of Houthi movement’s Political Council, said that Washington’s proposed solution for the Yemen conflict included dividing the country.

- On October 30, Yemeni Foreign Minister, Hisham Sharaf criticised the latest remarks by US Defence Secretary, James Mattis about the need for the establishment of a semi-autonomous region in Yemen.

Minister Sharaf said that the Yemeni nation welcomes any initiative that does not undermine national principles. He said, “Yemen is a sovereign country. We do not take orders from anyone, and do not accept the loss of our national sovereignty.” He also said, “Our missiles are meant to safeguard Yemen’s security. We had not attacked anyone prior to the onset of the Saudi-led military aggression.” He said that the Pentagon Chief’s comments about a political case confirms that Washington views Yemen through a military perspective.

--- Muhammad Shoaib
SOUTH ASIA: (I)

Pakistan
External

- On October 31, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Islamabad and met with Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

The two sides held detailed discussions on regional and global issues. Both sides underscored the need to promote bilateral relations in all areas including political, economic and defence cooperation. The two sides also discussed the issue of kidnapping of 14 Iranian border guards by Jaish al-Adl militant group from a post near the Pak-Iran border on October 16, 2018. Following the incident, Pakistani officials assured the Iranian government of their full cooperation in tracing the abducted guards.

- During his visit to Istanbul on October 29, President Dr Arif Alvi met his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

President Alvi visited Turkey to attend the inaugural ceremony of the Istanbul Grand International Airport. Arif Alvi remarked that the relations between the two countries are unprecedented and both countries have made huge efforts for peace and stability. According to media reports, President Arif Alvi also stressed on the early conclusion of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement and increasing bilateral trade between the two countries.

- On October 28, President Dr Arif Alvi said that Pakistan would not establish any ties with Israel and that it supports the Palestinians because Gaza has also faced “unprecedented atrocities” like Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

The President’s remarks came in the wake of a controversy that was sparked following Haaretz Editor, Avi Scharf’s tweet on October 25, 2018 in which he claimed that a private Israeli jet flew from Tel Aviv to Islamabad and remained there for 10 hours. However, the government was quick to deny that any such development had occurred. Pakistan’s Civil Aviation Authority and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi termed the Israeli plane story “baseless”. The Israeli journalist’s tweet triggered outrage among Pakistanis whereas, opposition political parties asked the government to provide an explanation on the matter. Scharf’s tweet coincided with the first ever visit of Israeli Prime Minister Binjamin Netanyahu to Oman, where he met with Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said.

- Addressing a seminar in Islamabad on October 25, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi emphasised that as per the principles of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, Kashmir could not become a part of India.

The Foreign Minister recalled that the Indian subcontinent was partitioned on the basis of principles that the Muslim majority population/areas in terms of geographical contiguity would become part of Pakistan. He said that in this context, Kashmir should have been a part of
Pakistan. Qureshi said that until the Kashmir dispute is resolved, Pakistan-India relations would remain bitter.

- During a televised address to the nation on October 24, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that Pakistan would make “all-out efforts in resolving Saudi Arabia-Yemen conflict by acting as a mediator.”

Khan said that Pakistan would also play a “mediatory role” in unifying the Muslim nations. PM Khan’s address comes a day after his return from Riyadh where he held meetings with the Saudi leadership and secured a $6 billion financial assistance deal from Saudi Arabia. On April 10, 2015 the Pakistani Parliament had adopted a resolution calling for Pakistan to remain neutral in the Yemen conflict. According to the draft, the parliament expressed desire “that Pakistan should maintain neutrality in the Yemen conflict so as to be able to play a proactive diplomatic role to end the crisis”, while also urging “the Muslim Ummah and the international community to intensify their efforts to promote peace in Yemen”.

- According to Pakistan’s Foreign Office on October 23, Saudi Arabia agreed to provide Pakistan $3 billion for a period of one year as balance of payment support and an additional loan worth up to $3 billion in deferred payments for oil imports.

Saudi Arabia also “confirmed” its desire to invest in a Pakistani petroleum refinery. The development follows Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to Riyadh on October 23, 2018, to participate in the “Future Investment Initiative” conference. The Pakistani Premier also held talks with King Salman and Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman during his visit to Riyadh. Pakistan is currently faced with a balance of payments crisis with approximately an $18 billion account deficit. In this context analysts termed the visit a success as Pakistan was hoping to secure economic assistance from Saudi Arabia and other close allies in order to be able to avoid a complete International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) bailout.

- On October 23, US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo said the US had “made clear that its policy with respect to South Asia has not changed” and that the US expects from Pakistan that it does not provide “safe harbour to terrorists on its western border.”

Pompeo added that Pakistan would be held accountable if it did not achieve this objective. He emphasised that everyone wanted reconciliation in Afghanistan but “to achieve that goal, there can be no safe harbour for the Taliban or the Haqqani network”. Pakistan maintains it has eliminated all terrorist hideouts from its territory and has repeatedly asked the US not to discredit its sacrifices in the war on terror. Chances of peace in Afghanistan remain elusive as Afghan government and Security Forces face heavy losses against Taliban insurgents. In a major blow to the government, Kandahar’s Police Chief General Abdul Raziq, a powerful opponent of the Taliban, was shot dead by his own bodyguard on October 18, 2018. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. However, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani alleged that the attack had been planned in Pakistan. Pakistan termed the allegations “baseless” and “unfounded”.

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• According to Radio Pakistan on October 18, Prime Minister Imran Khan telephoned his Malaysian counterpart, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad and highlighted the need for high-level exchanges between the two countries.

Prime Minister Khan also appreciated Dr Mahathir’s vision for Malaysia’s steady economic progress. He emphasised that both countries should boost bilateral collaboration at an “operational level” to benefit from each other’s expertise.

Pakistan Internal

• Addressing the nation on October 31, Prime Minister Imran Khan said, “Pakistan is the world’s only country that was created in the name of Islam after Medina.” He recalled that no law could be made in the country “against the teachings of Quran and Sunnah.” Furthermore, he warned extremist groups not to clash with the state and made it clear that if they continue to incite violence then the state would act against them in order to protect its citizens.

The Premier’s response came after members of some extremist religious groups started nationwide demonstrations in reaction to the Supreme Court’s verdict in which Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy was acquitted. The Supreme Court ruled that the evidence against Asia Bibi was fabricated and insufficient. Following the acquittal, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, leader of extremist religious-political group, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) incited people against the government and the army. He also threatened to kill the Supreme Court’s judges who gave the verdict.

• Speaking on Azad Kashmir Day in Islamabad on October 24, Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari presented a conflict resolution model for the Kashmir dispute premised upon the principle of self-determination and a plebiscite.

In a document titled “Kashmir: A potential blueprint for Conflict Resolution,” the Human Rights Minister suggested that Pakistan should propose a solution of the Kashmir dispute resembling the Good Friday Agreement. She also referred to the East Timor independence based on the concept of self-determination and said Pakistan should press the Kashmir case along these lines. She also noted that Pakistan should ask the UN to document all Kashmiris in Indian Occupied Kashmir and Kashmiri diaspora across the world qualified to vote in a plebiscite based on UNSC resolutions whenever it took place. She also called upon Pakistan to proactively move the UN Human Rights Council to establish a commission of inquiry to conduct a comprehensive independent international investigation into allegations of human rights violations in Kashmir.

• On October 22, Prime Minister Imran Khan “condemned the new cycle of killings” of more than 10 Kashmiris by Indian Security Forces in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).
PM Imran Khan said that India should resolve the Kashmir dispute through dialogue in accordance with UNSC resolutions. The killings have triggered widespread anti-India protests in IOK seeking an end to Indian rule in the region. In the wake of the worsening human rights situation in IOK, Pakistan continues to urge the international community to “act against Indian atrocities”.

- In a related development on October 26, at least 8 Kashmiri fighters and 2 Indian soldiers were killed in gun battles in IOK.

The ties between Pakistan and India remain hostile due to the situation in Kashmir. On October 25, 2018 Pakistan’s Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and termed Kashmir dispute a “core unresolved agenda”. Meanwhile, speaking to the media in Delhi on October 27, 2018 Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat accused Pakistan of supporting the stone-pelters and said that the Indian Army would ensure that Jammu and Kashmir remain part of India.

India

- On October 30, Italian Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte visited India and held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two leaders agreed to expand bilateral cooperation in areas of defence, trade, energy and infrastructure. Both sides also recognised the need to strengthen defence ties and make them “enduring and mutually beneficial.” Moreover, the two leaders agreed to set up a fast track mechanism to promote two-way investments. PM Modi and PM Conte also acknowledged the importance of promoting economic growth and people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

- During his visit to Tokyo on October 30, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held “extensive” talks with his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe.

The two leaders discussed issues of bilateral interest and signed multiple agreements including naval cooperation and a high-speed rail project. India and Japan agreed to seek closer economic and military ties in an effort to counter rising China. PM Modi and PM Abe also agreed to initiate a 2+2 dialogue involving their foreign and defence ministers. Referring to the South China Sea disputes, both leaders emphasised that their vision for the Indo-Pacific is based on “a rules-based order that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, ensures freedom of navigation and seeks peaceful resolution of disputes without resorting to threat or use of force.” Japan also backed India’s membership bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

- According to Times of India on October 28, US President Donald Trump rejected Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s invitation to attend India’s Republic Day as chief guest.
The White House said that President Trump could not accept the invitation because of his pressing engagements at home. The development has come amid India’s purchases of Russian built S-400 missile defence system.

--- Muhammad Abdul Qadeer
Afghanistan

- On October 30, an explosion killed at least six people and wounded another eight in Kabul.

- On October 24, at least 17 civilians were killed during an Afghan Security Forces operation in Rodat district of eastern Nangarhar province.

Protesting against the incident, families of the victims laid the bodies of the deceased next to the Jalalabad-Torkham highway. Earlier this month the United Nations reported that in the first nine months of 2018 at least 8,050 Afghan civilians were killed or wounded across the country.

- On October 24, Afghanistan, Iran and India held their first trilateral meeting on the Chabahar port project.

According to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, detailed discussions were held between the three sides on full operationalisation of the trilateral agreement for international transit and transport through the Chabahar port. In May 2016, India, Iran and Afghanistan had signed an accord for the establishment of a transit and transport corridor using Iran’s Chabahar port. It was also decided during the meeting to constitute a follow-up committee that would hold its first meeting within two months at the Chabahar port. India has invested heavily in Iran’s Chabahar port to access Central Asia via Afghanistan. The implementation of the project remains uncertain after the US imposed new sanctions on Iran following the annulment of the JCPOA.

- On October 20, parliamentary elections were held across Afghanistan amid tight security.

More than 2,500 candidates contested for 249 seats in Afghanistan’s lower house of parliament, known as the Wolesi Jirga. According to the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, out of 8.8 million registered voters almost 4 million people turned out to vote. Voting could not be held in the provinces of Kandahar and Ghazni due to the security situation. Several security related incidents during the elections left at least 78 people dead and another 470 wounded. Twenty eight members of the Security Forces were among those killed. The elections’ results would be announced by the mid of November 2018. The Taliban boycotted the elections and also warned Afghans against taking part. According to the latest report of the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Taliban control 14.5% of Afghanistan and 29% of the country remains disputed between the insurgent group and the government forces.

- On October 18, the Police Chief of Kandahar province, General Abdul Raziq and Intelligence Chief, General Abdul Momin were killed in a high-profile Taliban attack.
Kandahar Governor, Zalmay Wesa was fatally injured. Two US soldiers including a Brigadier General were also wounded in the attack. The attack occurred when the officials were leaving the governor’s house after a meeting. Commander of the US and NATO Forces in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller was also present at the meeting, however, he narrowly escaped the attack. Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani said that Raziq’s assassination was planned in Pakistan and asked Islamabad to handover those responsible for the attack. However, Pakistan’s Foreign Office outrightly rejected the claims. The incident, which occurred just two days before the parliamentary elections, led to the postponement of voting in Kandahar. The attack not only highlights loopholes within the US backed security apparatus of Afghanistan but also demonstrates the Taliban’s ability to successfully attack high profile and heavily guarded targets. The incident would also adversely affect the already fragile reconciliation process.

Bangladesh

- On October 29, a Dhaka court sentenced former Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Khalida Zia five-year imprisonment for corruption. Zia has already been serving a 5-year sentence for embezzling funds for an orphanage. The new verdict found her guilty of graft charges linked to the misappropriation of $375,000 set aside for a charity. However, her supporters said that the charges are politically motivated to prevent her from contesting the general elections in December, 2018.

- On October 25, Bangladesh and India signed three agreements to allow New Delhi to use Mongla and Chattogram ports as transit points to access its northeastern states for trade. The two sides also decided to introduce a passenger cruise service between Chennai and Cox’s Bazar. A bilateral Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade was also inked for the inclusion of Dhubri (Assam) and Pangaon (Bangladesh) as new ports of call. Discussions were also held to make Nakugaon land port in Bangladesh and Dalu Integrated Check Post in India operational and to connect with Gelephu (Bhutan) as a tripartite cross-border route. India-Bangladesh relations reached new highs under Narendra Modi and Shiekh Hasina. Both the countries also resolved their decades old border dispute in July, 2015.

Bhutan

- On October 18, Bhutan released results of its general election where the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) won 30 seats in the National Assembly enabling it to form a new government.
The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) won 17 seats. The voter turnout was 71.61% which was higher than the 66.1% voter turnout of the 2013 general election. Bhutan has been following this governmental and political system since year 2008. Before 2008, the country was an absolute monarchy.

**Sri Lanka**

- On October 26, Sri Lankan President, Maithripala Sirisena sacked Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe and replaced him with Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Sirisena has suspended parliament until mid-November 2018 stopping Wickremesinghe from calling an emergency vote to challenge the decision. On the other hand, Wickremesinghe, refused to accept the decision by calling it unconstitutional. The growing political turmoil seems to be the result of months of hostilities between the two strong men, who belong to opposing parties and were governing the country in coalition since 2015. On October 18, 2018, Sirisena, during a Cabinet meeting, allegedly accused Indian intelligence agency RAW of plotting his assassination and asked Wickremesinghe to cancel his visit to India. However, Wickremesinghe firmly rejected the claim and embarked on his Indian visit on October 20, 2018.

---Kashif Hussain
• On October 30, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, the UN Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs said that a large number of civilians have lost their lives in Ukraine due to landmines and explosive remnants of war.

DiCarlo was briefing the UNSC on the security situation in Ukraine following a sharp rise of civilian deaths during the last few months. She said, “On the ground, continued and unpredictable escalations of hostilities aggravate the climate of insecurity.” And added, “We continue to call upon the parties to ensure the full and immediate implementation of the ceasefire agreements and exercise utmost restraint to protect the civilian population.” She was referring to the Harvest Ceasefire and Back to School Ceasefire owing to which the impact of conflict on civilians has been significantly reduced. Representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) negotiated these two ceasefire agreements in July and August 2018 respectively.

• On October 23, a UN Committee of Independent Human Rights Experts termed France’s ban on full-face veil a human rights violation and asked the country to review the legislation.

The Committee gave the ruling on complaints filed by two French women for being fined for wearing a full-body veil or niqab. The committee of 18 independent experts from around the world is mandated with monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Based on a 2010 French law which stipulates that “no one may, in a public space, wear any article of clothing intended to conceal the face,” the two women were convicted, prosecuted and fined in 2012. They had filed their complaints in 2016. The Committee said, “The State has not demonstrated how the full veil presents a threat in itself for public security to justify this absolute ban.” It also noted that the French Government had not adequately explained why hiding one’s face is forbidden for religious reasons, while it is authorised in other contexts such as sports, or artistic settings. However, the Committee also acknowledged that the governments’ law enforcement entities must be able “in some circumstances” to demand that individuals show their faces where public security was at stake. Though the Committee’s ruling is not legally binding, it gives France 180 days to report back on actions it has taken.

• On October 19, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that he was “deeply troubled” by the reported confirmation of the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

Guterres also stressed the need for a prompt, thorough and transparent investigation into the circumstances of Khashoggi’s death and full accountability for those responsible. On October 19, 2018, the Saudi Foreign Ministry posted a tweet that the missing Saudi journalist, a columnist with the Washington Post newspaper, had been killed. The tweet said that an argument
that took place with the citizen Jamal Khashoggi during his presence in the Consulate of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul escalated negatively which led to a fight and to his death.

- On October 18, UN Universal Postal Union (UPU) expressed regret over the US’ withdrawal from the world body’s membership.

Pascal Clivaz, the Deputy Director General of the UPU, said, “It is regrettable that the US has taken this step. We, however, respect the decision because we believe it was taken after careful consideration and reflection.” US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued the withdrawal notification on October 17, 2017. The withdrawal would take effect one year after the UPU received the notification. According to media reports, the US withdrew from the UPU on grounds that the international mailing rates set by the body gave unfair advantage to China. The Union sets shipping rates for overseas mail, at a lower rate for developing countries, than developed nations. Clivaz said that UPU Director General Bishar A. Hussein would meet with US officials to further discuss the matter, and expressed hope that the issue would be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction “through discussion and a constructive dialogue.”

- On October 17, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed that the elimination of poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest global challenges and priorities for the UN.

While commemorating the 25th International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Guterres said, “Let us remember that ending poverty is not a matter of charity but a question of justice.” He added, “The deprivations that people living in poverty remind us that there is a fundamental connection between eradicating extreme poverty and upholding the equal rights of all people.” According to the UN, the 2018 theme for the international day was; “Coming together with those furthest behind to build an inclusive world of universal respect for human rights and dignity,” underscoring the connection between extreme poverty and human rights. Guterres indicated that 700 million people were unable to meet their basic daily needs.

- On October 16, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously approved the Egyptian-drafted resolution enabling Palestine to chair a major group of developing countries called the Group of 77 (G77).

The 193-member UNGA voted 146-3 with 15 abstentions to approve the resolution, ignoring objections from the US and Israel. The US, Israel and Australia voted against the move and 29 other countries did not vote. Jonathan Cohen, US Deputy Ambassador to the UN said, “We cannot support efforts by the Palestinians to enhance their status outside of direct negotiations. The US does not recognise that there is a Palestinian state.” Cohen added, “We strongly oppose the Palestinians’ election as chair of the G77. Only UN member states should be entitled to speak and act on behalf of major groups of states at the United Nations.” However, the European countries supported the measure. Following the vote, Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian Ambassador to the UN said, “Palestinians will spare no effort to prove worthy of this trust and
defend G-77 interests.” During the annual UNGA session in September 2018, the members of the G77 had formalised their decision to give Palestine the chair, in an effort to allow Palestine to achieve statehood and full UN membership. The UNGA overwhelmingly approved the de facto recognition of the sovereign state of Palestine when it upgraded the Palestinian Authority’s UN observer status to non-member state.

- On October 16, World Food Programme (WFP) spokesman Herve Verhoosel warned that 12 million Yemenis could soon be on the brink of famine if the security and economic situation of the country did not improve.

Verhoosel said, “If the situation persists, we could see an additional 3.5 million severely food insecure Yemenis, or nearly 12 million in total, who urgently require regular food assistance to prevent them from slipping into famine-like conditions.” He added, “Yemen is currently facing the world’s worst hunger crisis, with almost 18 million people throughout the country not knowing where their next meal is coming from.” He also indicated that the WFP was scaling up its activities in Yemen to provide emergency food assistance. However, the Agency still did not have access to some 51,000 tonnes of wheat stocks at its Red Sea Mills facility in the port city of Hodeida. In a related development on October 16, Lise Grande, the UN’s Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, condemned an attack on passenger buses in Yemen’s Hudaydah governorate on October 13, 2018. While calling on warring parties to ensure protection of civilians, Grande also reiterated that under international humanitarian law, parties to the conflict are obliged to respect the principles of precaution, proportionality and distinction.

--- Moiz Khan