

August 16 – August 31

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 1-15 August 2019

General Observations

Pakistan

- On August 30, thousands of people rallied across the country to observe “Kashmir hour” in a bid to express solidarity with the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). Prime Minister Imran Khan warned India of a “befitting response” if Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) were attacked. He also vowed to continue fighting for Kashmir until its liberation from India. In an op-ed for the New York Times, PM Khan said that dialogue with India could start only when “it reverses its illegal annexation of Kashmir, ends the curfew and lockdown, and withdraws its troops to the barracks.”
- Notwithstanding the deteriorating Pak-India relations, Pakistani and Indian delegations held another round of talks on the Kartarpur corridor at the border area near Dera Baba Nanak on August 30.
- On August 27, Prime Minister Imran Khan held talks with a Chinese delegation, led by Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of China, General Xu Qiliang in Islamabad. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to “collaborate for peace and stability in the region.”
- During a televised address to the nation on August 26, Prime Minister Imran Khan said, “Whether the world joins Pakistan or not, we will go to any extent with regards to our Kashmir cause.” Challenging the Indian leadership over Kashmir the PM said, “India has done what it could...Now it’s our turn and world’s turn.” He said that India had promised Kashmiris a plebiscite but they “never gave them this right.”
- On August 23, Prime Minister Imran Khan warned the international community about India’s plan of “a false-flag operation” in Kashmir to “divert” world’s attention from the human rights violations in the region. Meanwhile, government authorities claim that Pakistan might close its airspace for India and block India’s land trade route to Afghanistan. Earlier on August 21, 2019, PM Imran Khan said that there is “no point” in talking to India saying “India has taken Pakistan’s peace overtures as appeasement.”
- On August 27, Pakistan’s Human Rights Minister, Dr Shireen Mazari wrote a letter to 18 UN Special Procedures mandate-holders, informing them about the violations of International Human Rights laws by India in Occupied Kashmir. Earlier on August 23 at least 2,000 people were detained in IOK during Indian crackdown. The United Nations Human Rights Office said it was “gravely concerned.”

- On August 20, the government of Pakistan decided to approach the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Kashmir dispute after India revoked special status for Indian Occupied Kashmir on August 5, 2019.
- The Kashmir Dispute was discussed during a closed-door consultative meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in New York on August 16. This was the first time in more than 50 years that the Security Council discussed the Kashmir dispute. The consultation was held at the request of China and Pakistan after Indian government annexed Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) by abrogating Article 370 of the Indian constitution that guaranteed special status to Kashmir. India's Ambassador to UN, Syed Akbaruddin reiterated India's stance that Kashmir is "not an international conflict" but entirely "an internal matter" for India.
- Owing to the regional security environment Prime Minister, Imran Khan granted a three-years extension to Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa on August 19.

International

- On August 28, the Supreme Court of India issued a notice to the government on all petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370. The court had decided to hear 14 petitions challenging the government's decision to revoke Article 370 and the subsequent lockdown in Kashmir. However, the Indian government told the top court that in case "notice is issued, it will have cross-border repercussions...It can be misused" by Pakistan at the UN.
- On August 26, 2019, Indian PM Narendra Modi said that all issues between Pakistan and India were bilateral, rejecting mediation over Kashmir. He was speaking alongside President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G7 summit. US President Trump said that Pakistan and India "could handle their dispute over Kashmir on their own, but he was there should they need him." Trump also said that he had spoken to PM Modi about Kashmir and felt that Modi had "it under control." He expressed hope that both Pakistan and India would "be able to do something that would be very good." Trump's statement is a departure from his recent statements during Premier Imran Khan's visit to Washington DC where he offered to mediate between India and Pakistan.
- Earlier on August 22, French President Emmanuel Macron also called on Pakistan and India to resolve the Kashmir dispute bilaterally, supporting India's long held position that all issues between Pakistan and India are bilateral. PM Narendra Modi however made no mention of the Kashmir issue in his statement.

- On August 23, 2019, the Indian PM visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he held bilateral talks with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Modi was conferred the “Order of Zayed” by the UAE government. Modi visited Bahrain on August 25, 2019, where he was awarded with “The King Hamad Order of the Renaissance”. He held discussions with Bahrain’s King, Hamad bin Isa bin Salman. Modi’s induction into the Order of Zayed highlights the importance the UAE places on India, the world’s third-largest consumer of crude oil. Activists within and outside Pakistan have criticised the UAE bestowing the award on Modi notwithstanding his severe clampdown in IOK, saying it gives cover to India.
- On August 16, Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh said that India is “committed to its nuclear policy of ‘no first use’...but what happens in the future depends on the circumstances.”
- Hong Kong police arrested at least three prominent activists on August 30 and blocked plans for a march on August 31 as part of an intensifying crackdown on anti government protests.
- According to media reports on August 30 the Iranian leadership has concluded that Iran must eventually negotiate with President Trump, on the basis that he may be re-elected and that Iran could not withstand another six years of the current sanctions. After President Trump said he would be open to meeting with President Hassan Rouhani, the Iranian leader said on August 27 that he wouldn’t talk until Washington lifted sanctions. Earlier on August 18 an Iranian ship that had been held for six weeks left Gibraltar, days after the authorities there rejected a request that it be turned over to US officials. The departure raised expectations that Iran would relinquish a British tanker. Quoting senior US officials, the NY Times reported that a secret operation in June 2019 wiped out a database used by Tehran to plan attacks on shipping traffic in the Persian Gulf. The cyber attack coincided with President Trump’s decision to call off a strike after Iran shot down an American drone. Meanwhile Israel has carried out a series of attacks in recent weeks to prevent Iran from equipping its Arab allies with sophisticated weapons that could challenge Israel’s defences. Iranian officials said the Israeli attacks would not go unanswered.
- On August 29 President Trump authorised a unified command to coordinate the US military’s role in space. It is a precursor to the Space Force, a sixth branch of the military that he eventually wants to create.
- According to a new national poll on August 27 Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are in a virtual three-way tie for the party’s presidential nomination.

- According to a federal appeals court on August 23, members of the Electoral College, who cast the actual votes for president, may choose whom they please, irrespective of how their states had voted.
- According to media reports on August 27 losing China as a customer has dealt a major blow to US agriculture. Farm bankruptcy filings in the year through June were up 13 percent from 2018, and loan delinquency rates are on the rise.
- On August 26 President Trump said that the US and China would soon restart talks and called President Xi Jinping a “great leader,” three days after branding him an “enemy” of the US. The G-7 Heads of State convened in France on August 25-26 for a meeting overshadowed by the US’ tariff war with China. As he arrived in Biarritz for the annual meeting of the Group of 7 powers, President Trump asserted that he had the authority to make good on his threat to force all American businesses to leave China. However, he admitted later about having “second thoughts” about escalating the trade war. Earlier on August 18 global markets took a downward turn due to speculation that the US could be nearing a recession. Analysts cited the uncertainties of the trade war and its damage to major economies, notably China and Germany.
- On August 29 Ivan Marquez, a former top commander of Colombia’s largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) vowed a return to war almost three years after a peace deal. Although the peace was already shaky the announcement of a “new phase of armed struggle” by the guerrilla fighters came as the worst blow to Colombian peace since the accords were signed three years ago
- On August 28 Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced growing criticism after he reduced the amount of time that lawmakers have to debate and deflect his plans to take Britain out of the EU in nine weeks. The opposition denounced his decision as undemocratic. It also strained relations within Johnson’s Conservative Party. Queen Elizabeth II approved the move, in what was largely considered a formality.
- After rejecting millions of dollars to help combat fires in the Amazon rainforest, Brazil accepted some aid from Britain on August 28. Some locals have expressed their anger at what they see as outsiders trying to decide how Brazilians should “steward their land”. Farmers say they need fire and deforestation to maintain beef and soy exports, and that the damage done to the rainforest was modest.
- On August 23 South Korea said it would not renew an intelligence-sharing deal with Japan, a sign of deteriorating ties between America’s two closest allies in the region.

- According to the NY Times on August 21 after eight years of civil war, the Syrian government now controls much of the country.
- On August 19 at least 63 people were killed and hundreds wounded at a wedding in Afghanistan. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, which comes as American negotiators are finalising a deal with the Taliban to withdraw US forces.

---Amina Afzal

AMERICAS

Domestic

- On August 21, US President Donald Trump stirred controversy when he announced Jewish Americans are ill-informed about policy when they throw their support overwhelmingly to Democrats.

Trump stated that by extending support to Democrats, Jewish Americans were being “disloyal” to Israel. He stated, “In my opinion, if you vote for a Democrat, you’re being very disloyal to Jewish people and you’re being very disloyal to Israel”. Trump has consistently positioned himself as a champion of Israel, siding squarely with the policies of hardline Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In an attempt to capture the Jewish American vote, experts have noted Trump, and the Republicans face an uphill task. Approximately 71% of Jewish voters sided with Hillary Clinton over Trump in 2016, and the Democrats’ advantage among that bloc jumped to 79% in last year’s midterms.

- On August 20, law enforcement officials claimed to have thwarted seven separate mass shootings or white supremacist attacks across the US since the August 3, 2019 mass shooting in El Paso, Texas.

Officials claim that at least four of the alleged foiled plots appeared to involve men espousing far-right viewpoints and racist ideologies. Four of those apprehended were white men in their 20’s, and all but one of them were believed to be armed, some with extensive weaponry.

- On August 19, Ben Ray Luján, the number 4 House Democrat came out in favor of the push to impeach US President Donald Trump, making him the highest-ranking member of the caucus calling for impeachment.

Luján said in a statement that he moved into the pro-impeachment column due to warnings that Russian efforts to interfere in US elections have continued into the 2020 cycle. He stated, “The Trump presidency is creating grave national security concerns” adding, “Not only has he ignored the warnings that our Democracy is being targeted, but he has also actively encouraged Russian interference”. Luján noted, “President Trump’s lack of action is jeopardising our elections, national security, and Democracy” adding “What is evident is that President Trump is abdicating his responsibility to defend our nation from Russian attacks and is putting his own personal and political interests ahead of the American people”. Luján’s announcement adds to a majority of the House Democratic Caucus who now support opening an impeachment inquiry against US President Donald Trump. There are presently 123 lawmakers pushing for an impeachment inquiry.

International

- On August 30, US President Donald Trump released a photograph of an apparently failed Iranian rocket launch and claimed the US had nothing to do with it.

Trump's move stirred controversy after critics accused him of disclosing classified information. Critics argued the high-resolution picture of the location reveals the level of resolution of US spy satellites or alternatively the US' use of an aircraft to capture the detailed images. Iran's minister for communication and information technology Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, rejected reports that a satellite had been lost, but did not comment on the alleged launch-pad explosion.

- On August 29, US President Donald Trump announced the re-establishment of the US military's space command.

Trump announced, "It's a big deal" adding space will be "the next war-fighting domain. And I think that's pretty obvious to everybody".

- On August 28, the White House's Middle East envoy, Jason Greenblatt, announced the US will not release the political portion of the Israeli- Palestinian peace plan before Israel's elections.

US President Donald Trump's Middle East team, including senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner, had wanted to roll out the political plan earlier this year. However, Israeli Prime Minister, and Trump ally, Benjamin Netanyahu's failure to put together a governing coalition after Israeli elections in April elections prompted a delay. Netanyahu now faces a fresh vote on September 17, 2019 and, if successful, will try again to form a coalition.

- On August 26, US President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a joint press conference on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in France, where Trump announced India and Pakistan could handle their dispute over Kashmir on their own, but he was there should they need him.
- On August 20, the US called on India to quickly release detainees and restore basic liberties in Indian Occupied Kashmir.
- On August 19, US President Donald Trump spoke to Indian President Narendra Modi and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and stressed the need for both countries to reduce tensions.

Trump announced stated on August 26, 2019, "Pakistan and India can handle the issue on their own, but I am here", in reference to tensions between the two nations over Kashmir. Tensions between India and Pakistan have escalated after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-

nationalist party rushed through a presidential decree to scrap Article 370 from the constitution that grants special status for the Indian occupied Kashmir (IOK) on August 5, 2019. Indian authorities have imposed a communication blackout in IOK, and mass human rights violations are being perpetrated by Indian forces. A senior US State Department official stated on August 20, 2019, “We continue to be very concerned by reports of detentions, and continued restrictions on the residents of the region,” adding, “We urge respect for individual rights, compliance with legal procedures and an inclusive dialogue”. On August 27, 2019, Democratic congresswoman Ilham Omar urged Indian authorities to respect human rights and reduce tensions in Indian occupied Kashmir. Omar stated, “We should be calling for an immediate restoration of communication; respect for human rights, democratic norms, and religious freedom; and de-escalation in Kashmir. International organizations should be allowed to fully document what is happening on the ground”.

In related news, on August 19, US President Donald Trump, spoke with Indian President Narendra Modi and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and called for both countries to reduce tensions. White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said “The president conveyed the importance of reducing tensions between India and Pakistan and maintaining peace in the region”. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi stated, “Prime Minister Khan expressed serious concern over a humanitarian crisis triggered in (occupied) Kashmir and hoped (the) US would play its role in resolving the crisis” adding, “Khan asked President Trump to talk to Indian Prime Minister Modi” about ways to lower tensions between the two countries. Qureshi noted, “We want a UN observer mission to be dispatched forthwith to Indian-administered Kashmir” and for the curfew there to be “lifted immediately”. Earlier on August 16, 2019, Trump and Khan spoke by telephone, where the Pakistani premier expressed how India’s unilateral move on August 5, 2019 threatened peace in the region. Khan conveyed Pakistan’s stance to the US president and highlighted the gross human rights violations taking place in IOK, to which, Trump assured the premier that he would talk to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- On August 24, US President Donald Trump clashed with his fellow G7 leaders on key issues including readmitting Russia to the group, and policies towards Iran and North Korea.

Before the G7 summit commenced, tensions were high as senior aides in Trump’s delegation accused the G7 host and French President, Emmanuel Macron, of seeking to embarrass Trump by making the summit focus on “niche issues” such as climate change, gender equality and development in Africa. During the summit at Biarritz, diplomatic sources revealed all leaders pushed back on Trump’s demand to readmit Russia to the group, except Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte who offered Trump his support, while Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe remained neutral. Trump argued Russia should be included in discussions on key issues including Iran, Syria and North Korea. Russia was ejected from the then G8 in 2014, after it

annexed Crimea. Trump and his European allies struggled to reduce tensions between Iran and the US, after the US withdrew from Iran's internationally brokered 2015 nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions on the Iranian economy. Trump was also at odds with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over the seriousness of North Korea's series of short-range missile launches. North Korea's latest test was on August 24, 2019 where it launched what it described as a 'super large multiple rocket launcher' to counter "mounting military threats and pressure offensive of hostile forces" according to the state news agency KCNA. Trump maintained that the launches did not violate their agreement and were in line with what other states were doing. Abe however argued that the tests were in breach of UN resolutions. G7 leaders from Britain, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan expressed concern over the US' trade war with China, and the threat it poses to the wider global economy. While the G7 summit saw tensions run high between the US and G7 members, Trump during his meeting with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced Britain would have a major trade deal with Washington after it leaves the European Union. Trump also announced on August 25, 2019 that the US and Japan had agreed in principle to core elements of a trade deal that will likely be signed next month.

In related news, on the third day of the summit, on August 26, 2019 Trump and Macron held a joint press conference where Trump announced he would be open to meeting Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Trump stated, "If the circumstances were correct, I certainly would agree to that". French diplomatic efforts have been aimed at reducing tensions between the US and Iran after the US withdrew from the multilateral nuclear deal with Iran. In related news, on August 26, 2019, Trump skipped talks on the climate crisis, where G7 leaders agreed to provide a €20 million fund to fight wildfires in the Amazon.

- On August 23, US President Donald Trump announced his administration would increase tariffs on Chinese goods from 25% to 30% starting 1 October.

Trump's announcement came after China announced on August 23, 2019, it was preparing to impose \$75bn in additional tariffs on US products as the trade war escalates between the two countries.

- On August 21, US President Donald Trump criticised Pakistan's efforts to fight extremism while singling out India for not doing anything in the war on terror.

Trump stated, "Look, India's right there, they are not fighting it, we're fighting it," adding, "Pakistan is next door. They're fighting it, very little... it's not fair. The United States is seven thousand miles away". Trump's statements were in reference to the reemergence of the Islamic State group in Iraq. Trump noted, "At a certain point Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, they are going to have to fight their battles too" adding, "We wiped out the caliphate 100 per cent. I did it in record time. But at a certain point, all of these other countries, where ISIS is

around ... are going to have to fight them. Because do we want to stay there another 19 years? I don't think so". The Trump Administration has reduced its military presence in Syria and Iraq, and is actively seeking to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

- On August 21, US President Donald Trump criticised Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen's after the Danish premier called Trump's interest to purchase Greenland 'absurd'.
- On August 17, US President Donald Trump confirmed he was considering buying Greenland for strategic reasons.

The Wall Street Journal had published on August 15, 2019 reports, that Trump had "expressed interest" in buying Greenland. The Greenland government responded on August 16, 2019 stating it had a good working relationship with the US and saw the inquiry as "an expression of general greater interest in investing in our country and its opportunities" but made clear: "Greenland is obviously not for sale". Trump officially expressed his interest in potentially purchasing the island on August 17, 2019, noting it was "essentially a large real estate deal". Trump stated on Twitter, "Denmark essentially owns it (Greenland)," adding, "We're very good allies with Denmark, we protect Denmark like we protect large portions of the world. So the concept came up and I said, 'Certainly I'd be.' Strategically it's interesting and we'd be interested but we'll talk to them a little bit. It's not No1 on the burner, I can tell you that". Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, responded to Trump's suggestion on August 18, 2019 arguing the suggestion to purchase Greenland was "absurd". Trump announced on August 20, 2019 that he had canceled his scheduled trip to Denmark as Frederiksen expressed "no interest in discussing the purchase of Greenland". Trump on August 21, 2019 lashed out at Frederiksen's remarks rejecting his proposal to purchase Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory, "nasty" and "inappropriate". The US military presently has a major airbase on Greenland, on the north-west of the island. The base has 600 personnel and is important in the country's global radar system.

- On August 21, US President Donald Trump threatened to release "thousands" of captured Islamic State fighters to the countries they came from if Europe doesn't take them.

Trump stated, "We're holding thousands of ISIS fighters right now, and Europe has to take them. If Europe doesn't take them, I'll have no choice but to release them into the countries from which they came, which is Germany and France and other places," Trump said, adding that the U.S. would not detain them at Guantánamo Bay.

- On August 21, US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper confirmed the death of Hamza bin Laden, the son and designated heir of al Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden.

Esper confirmed Hamza Bin Laden's death but added, "I don't have the details on that. And if I did I'm not sure how much I could share with you". US media outlets reported earlier in August 2019, that bin Laden had been killed during the last two years in an operation that involved the US.

- On August 20, the US claimed Iran shot down its MQ-9 drone by a surface-to-air missile over Yemen.

Tensions between the US and Iran are rising after the US accused Iran of supplying Houthi rebels with the missile used to down the US military drone. The rebels however deny Iran supplied them the missile and claim it was "developed locally". National Security Council spokesman Garrett Marquis stated, "We are aware of reports of an attack by Iranian-backed Houthi forces on a US drone. The President has been briefed and we continue to investigate the matter" adding "This attack is only possible because of Iran's lethal aid to the Houthis and serves as yet another example of the regime's relentless efforts to escalate conflict and threaten regional stability".

- On August 20, the US State Department approved the sale of 66, F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan despite warnings from China.

The US will provide Taiwan with the latest version of the Lockheed Martin-built fighter, the F-16C/D Block 70, in a \$8 billion deal. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement that President Donald Trump had approved the proposed sale after Congress was notified last week. Taiwan's plan to upgrade its air defenses comes amid increasing Chinese military incursions into its air space. The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency, which oversees US foreign military sales, said Taiwan's purchase of the F-16s "will not alter the basic military balance in the region". China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang had cautioned the US on August 19, 2019 that the US arms sales to Taiwan "severely violates" agreements between Washington and Beijing and "constitutes severe interference in China's internal affairs", adding the US should "immediately cancel the planned arms sales, and stop selling weapons and military contact with Taiwan". China has warned failure to do so will result in the US having to "bear all the consequences" of its decision.

- On August 19, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross announced a 90-day extension before US businesses are required to cut ties with Chinese tech giant Huawei.

Ross noted, "Some of the rural companies are dependent on Huawei. So, we're giving them a little more time to wean themselves off. But there are no specific licenses being granted for anything". In related news, US President Donald Trump reaffirmed his commitment to a complete ban on US business engaging with Huawei on August 18, 2019 as he argued the company poses

a national security risk to the US. The new deadline by when US companies are to cut ties with Huawei is November 19, 2019.

- On August 19, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, said it was “unfortunate” that the British Royal Marines released an Iranian tanker that was seized by Britain on July 4, 2019.

The Iranian tanker was released on August 19, 2019 and left Gibraltar heading to Greece hours after the British territory rejected a US request to detain the vessel further. Pompeo criticised the move arguing, “These are oil profits, when this is ultimately sold somewhere into the market, that will run back to Qasem Soleimani and the Iranian Quds force, their elite forces that have sown terror and destruction and killed Americans all around the world” adding, “If they’re successful, they’ll have more money, more wealth, more resources to continue their terror campaign, to continue their assassination campaign in Europe.”

- On August 18, the US Department of Defence conducted a test of a conventionally-configured ground-launched cruise missile at San Nicolas Island, California.

A statement issued by the Department of Defence confirmed “The test missile exited its ground mobile launcher and accurately impacted its target after more than 500 kilometers of flight. Data collected and lessons learned from this test will inform the Department of Defense’s development of future intermediate-range capabilities”. China and Russia responded the US test on August 20, 2019 accusing the US of stoking a new arms race. The test comes after Washington formally withdrew from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty earlier this month, on August 2, 2019. The Treaty banned missiles with ranges between 500km and 5,500km in an attempt to reduce the ability of both countries to launch a nuclear strike at short notice.

- On August 16, US Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib rejected an offer from Israel to visit her grandmother in the occupied West Bank.

Israel granted Tlaib entry on ‘humanitarian’ grounds on August 16, 2019, after announcing on August 15, 2019 that it would block Tlaib and another Democratic lawmaker, Ilhan Omar, from entering the country for a planned congressional trip to the West Bank and Jerusalem. Israel’s decision came shortly after US President Donald Trump publicly urged Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to bar the women entry, suggesting that to allow the visit would “show great weakness”. Israel reversed its decision on Tlaib on humanitarian grounds, however Tlaib rejected the offer and stated on Twitter, “I have decided that visiting my grandmother under these oppressive conditions stands against everything I believe in – fighting against racism, oppression & injustice”. Trump criticised Tlaib for “obnoxiously” turning down Israel’s conditional offer. Israel’s controversial move to deny the two Congresswomen entry to Israel

drew strong rebukes from US politicians and even the most powerful pro-Israel lobby groups in the US. Omar and Tlaib are the first Muslim women to serve in Congress, and have openly criticised Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Both women have said they support the use of boycotts to pressure governments, including Israel's, on rights abuses.

Latin America

- On August 21, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro accused non-governmental organisations of burning down the Amazon rainforest to hurt his government, global outcry against the wildfires spread. Bolsonaro's comments enraged critics as he failed to present any evidence to support his claims and has been disputed by environmental and climate experts.
- On August 20, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro said he had been in talks with the Trump Administration for months, even as the US ramped up its sanctions.

Maduro stated, "Just as I have sought dialogue in Venezuela, I have sought a way in which President Trump really listens to Venezuela". US National Security Adviser John Bolton however said the only thing being discussed was Maduro's departure and free and fair elections. The US, along with a number of countries recognises opposition leader Juan Guaido as the legitimate president of Venezuela and has demanded Maduro resign.

---Kiran Mazari

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On August 30, EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini indicated that the EU would work with Iran to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- On August 27, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said that his country would not talk to the US until all sanctions imposed on Tehran were lifted.
- On August 22, Iran unveiled its indigenously developed air defence system.

Federica Mogherini said, "My role is to preserve the full implementation of the existing agreements. Again, if something else can be built on it, this would be welcomed and accompanied by the European Union." Regarding Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif's visit to the southwest French town of Biarritz where the Group of Seven (G7) leaders were meeting on August 25, 2019, and his constructive meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, Mogherini said that the meeting could help European countries enhance their engagements with Iran. Meanwhile, Germany's Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas also said the European countries would step up diplomatic efforts to save the JCPOA. He said that Germany, France and Britain wanted to build on momentum from the recent G7 Summit.

Meanwhile, during the G7 Summit on August 26, 2019, US President Donald Trump said that he would meet Iran's President under the right circumstances to end the confrontation. Trump said, "We are looking for no nuclear weapons, no ballistic missiles, and a longer period of time. Very simple." However, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani rejected any possibility of negotiations with the US until all sanctions imposed on Tehran were lifted. On August 27, 2019, Rouhani said, "First the US should act by lifting all illegal, unjust and unfair sanctions imposed on Iran." Regarding Iran's breaching the nuclear agreement in retaliation for US sanctions, Rouhani said, "We will continue to scale back our commitments under the 2015 deal if our interests are not guaranteed." He indicated that Iran never wanted to develop a nuclear weapon because of a religious decree issued in the early 2000s, by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that bans the development or use of nuclear weapons. However, he rejected negotiations over Iran's military capabilities, particularly its ballistic missile programme that the country calls defensive in purpose.

In a related development on August 22, 2019, Iran unveiled its indigenously developed long-range air defence system, the Bavar-373. While speaking at the unveiling ceremony on Iran's National Defence Industry Day, President Rouhani said, "If we want to compare the new air defense system with the famous air defence systems S-300 and S-400, this system is stronger than the S-300 and very close to the S-400."

- On August 29, US President Donald Trump officially established US Space Command as the Defence Department's 11th unified combatant command, and a precursor to the Space Force.

Speaking at the White House, President Trump said, "SPACECOM will boldly deter aggression and outpace America's rivals." He added, "Our adversaries are weaponising Earth's orbits with new technology targeting American satellites that are critical to both battlefield operations and our way of life at home. Our freedom to operate in space is also essential to detecting and destroying any missile launched against the United States." Air Force Gen. Jay Raymond would head the SPACECOM, and some 287 individuals, nominated from Strategic Command, would work under his command. Gen. Raymond said, "Our goal is to actually deter a conflict from extending into space. The best way I know how to do that is to be prepared to fight and win."

- On August 29, Pakistan successfully conducted the night training launch of a surface to surface ballistic missile Ghaznavi.

Director General Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor called the launch successful and noted that the missile was "capable of delivering multiple types of warheads up to 290 kilometres." Ghaznavi is a road-mobile and a solid-fuelled ballistic missile.

- On August 29, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the legacy of nuclear testing destructive, and said that international "collective security" was dependent on bringing a global treaty into force that bans nuclear explosions.

While commemorating the International Day Against Nuclear Tests, observed annually on 29 August, Guterres said, "I reiterate my call for all States that have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), especially those whose ratification is needed for the Treaty's entry into force." He also deplored the fact that an effective and legally-binding prohibition remains one of the longest unfulfilled goals of nuclear disarmament. Despite 184 signatories and 168 ratifications by States, the Treaty has not yet entered into force, more than two decades after its adoption. The CTBT bans nuclear explosions by everyone, everywhere: on the Earth's surface, in the atmosphere, underwater and underground. The Treaty will enter into force 180 days after the date of deposit of the instruments of ratification by all States listed in Annex 2 to the Treaty. Of these, eight states including the US, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and India have yet to deposit their instruments of ratifications. The UN General Assembly declared 29 August as International Day against Nuclear Tests by unanimously adopting resolution 64/35 on December 2, 2009.

In a related development on August 28, 2019, Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) representatives initiated their two-day seminar in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, while marking the International Day against Nuclear Tests. The seminar, titled "The Development and Strengthening of Consultation Mechanisms between Existing Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones,"

brought together representatives of all nuclear-weapon-free zones including Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, South Pacific, Central Asia and Southeast Asia, Mongolia, as well representatives from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO). The representatives discussed ways to strengthen cooperation among participating countries and expand such zones. Kazakh Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yerzhan Ashikbayev said that Kazakhstan would officially accept 20 instruments on August 29, 2019, that are important for ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons or Nuclear Ban Treaty.

- On August 28, US imposed sanctions on two networks that it accused of helping Iran's nuclear programme and evading international sanctions to benefit Tehran's government and military.

The US Treasury Department said that one of the networks used a Hong Kong-based front company to avoid sanctions and target US technology and components, while the other network procured aluminium alloy products controlled by the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The Treasury Department imposed sanctions on individuals connected to the two networks.

- On August 27, the US State Department approved more than \$4.2 billion potential weapons sale to Japan, South Korea, Hungary, Lithuania and Denmark.

According to the Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the State Department approved the \$3.3 billion sale of anti-ballistic missiles to Japan. The DSCA noted that Japan would procure SM-3 Block IIA missiles under the deal. The interceptor missiles would be used on ship-board Aegis system to intercept incoming ballistic missiles. Under the cleared arms sale, Hungary would buy 180 AIM-120C-7 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles worth \$500 million, while Denmark would procure nine AN/AQS-22 airborne low-frequency sonar systems and 600 AN/SSQ-36/53/62 sonobuoys for \$200 million to improve its anti-submarine warfare capabilities. Lithuania will obtain 500 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles with estimated cost of \$170.8 million, and South Korea is purchasing 31 MK 54 All-Up-Round lightweight torpedoes for an estimated \$72 million.

- On August 27, Russia delivered a second battery of Russian S-400 air defence system to Turkey.

Turkey's National Defence Ministry said, "The second batch of equipment of S-400 missile defence system has arrived at Murted Air Base near Ankara." Turkey received its first supply of S-400 missiles in July 2019. The delivery of the first battery was completed on July 25, 2019.

On August 28, 2019, US Secretary of Defence, Mark Esper said that the US would consider allowing Turkey to re-join the F-35 programme only if the Russian-made S-400 air defence system is completely removed from Turkey. Turkey was a partner to the F-35 programme and

was planning to purchase 100 F-35As. However, the US removed Turkey from the programme after Turkey received delivery of the S-400 systems.

Meanwhile, Reuters reported on August 28, 2019, that Russian officials have indicated that both Russia and Turkey were discussing the possibility of procurement of the Russian-made Sukhoi Su-57 stealth fighter jet and Su-35 aircraft to Turkey. Following his talks in Moscow with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on August 27, 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also indicated that Turkey wanted to continue defence industry cooperation with Russia, including on warplanes.

- On August 26, Russia's state weather and environment monitoring agency, Rosgidromet, released new details about an explosion in experimental "isotope power source."

The report noted that Russia's state meteorological service identified four radioactive substances as "technogenic radionuclides," in samples taken from Severodvinsk. These substances are strontium-91, barium-139, barium-140 and lanthanum-140. The report said that these substances were responsible for the "sharp, short-lived change in the radiation situation over Severodvinsk." According to Andrei Zolotkov, a chemist who spent 35 years working on Russia's nuclear icebreaker fleet and knows the details of typical nuclear reactors, there are chances that the failed test involved a highly unusual reactor.

Earlier, on August 19, 2019, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) said that several Russian radiation monitoring stations went silent shortly after the explosion. A CTBTO spokeswoman indicated two Russian monitoring stations near the explosion, Dubna and Kirov, stopped transmitting on August 10, 2019. However, Russia resumed sharing data from radiation monitoring stations on August 27, 2019. Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the CTBTO, said that the two Russian stations reported to be offline are back in operation. Zerbo also noted that data from stations on or near the path of a potential plume of gas from the explosion were still being analysed.

- According to North Korean official *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* on August 25, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised test-firing of a "super-large multiple rocket launcher."
- On August 16, North Korea test-fired two short-range ballistic missiles and criticised South Korean President Moon Jae-in for continuing to hold military exercises with the US.

North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast on August 24, 2019. South Korea's Defence Ministry said two missiles were launched from south Hamkyong, and the missiles landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone. KCNA also issued pictures of the test showing rockets launching from large tubes mounted on the back of an eight-wheel vehicle. The KCNA report stated that Kim expressed satisfaction over the launches and said that North

Korea's young defence scientists who developed the missiles are a "precious treasure and wealth of the country which cannot be bartered for anything." The report also noted that North Korea "will never barter the strategic security of the country for the sanctions relief." This was the seventh round of short-range ballistic missile tests since July 2019, and at least the fourth new missile system unveiled by North Korea since denuclearisation talks stalled at a February 2019 summit between Kim and Trump.

In response to tests, US President Donald Trump said on August 25, 2019, that he was "not happy" about North Korea's latest missile test. Trump said, "I am not happy about it but then again he's not in violation of the agreement." However, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe condemned that launch and said that they clearly violated the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

On August 16, 2019, Kim supervised test-firing of two short-range ballistic missiles. KCNA reported on August 17, 2019, that Kim called the tests successful and expressed "great satisfaction" over his military's "mysterious and amazing success rates" in recent testing activity. Kim also vowed to build up "invincible military capabilities no one dare provoke." However, KCNA did not mention weapon specifications. South Korea's military said the projectiles launched from the North's eastern coast flew about 230 kilometres on an apogee of 30 kilometres before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launches were conducted a day after Moon pledged to try to reunify the Korean Peninsula by 2045, the 100th anniversary of Korean independence, in his annual liberation day address. However, a spokesperson for North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country called Moon's remarks "foolish" and "reckless" in a statement published in the country's state-run media on August 16, 2019. The statement noted, "We have nothing to talk any more with the South Korean authorities nor have any idea to sit with them again."

- On August 18, the US test-fired a new conventionally configured ground-launched cruise missile, a few days after the US and Russia formally withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

The US Defence Department noted, "The test missile exited its ground mobile launcher and accurately impacted its target after more than 500 kilometres of flight." The US Navy conducted the test in partnership with the Strategic Capabilities Office, and the missile was launched from a Mk 41 vertical launch system (VLS) cell. According to Air Force Lt. Col. Robert Carver, the tested missile, called BGM-109 Tomahawk, was a variant of the Tomahawk land attack cruise missile. The test marks the beginning of a new era where ground-launched missile with ranges between 500 to 5,500 kilometres would be increasingly developed following the collapse of the INF Treaty. On August 21, 2019, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper said, "We want to make sure that we, as we need to, have the capability to deter Chinese bad behaviour by having our own capability to be able to strike at intermediate ranges."

In response to the test, both Russia and China criticised the US on August 20, 2019, for testing the weapon and creating military tensions. Russia stressed that the US missile test showed that Washington had long been preparing to exit the nuclear pact. Kremlin Spokesman, Dmitry Peskov said, “It is simply not possible to prepare for such tests in a few weeks or a few months. Peskov indicated that it was not Russia, but the US that brought the collapse of the INF Treaty. While condemning the test, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang alleged the US for initiating a new arms race and confrontation.

On August 23, 2019, Russian President, Vladimir Putin ordered the Russian Military to create means to reciprocate the US’ missile test. Speaking at a meeting of his Security Council, Putin accused the US of waging a “propaganda campaign” by alleging Russian breaches of the INF Treaty to start developing and deploying weapons previously banned under the Treaty. However, Putin also said that Russia would not be drawn into costly arms race.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA, EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

China

- On August 29, China's Military sent a new batch of an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 troops into Hong Kong.
- On August 27, China condemned the joint statement issued by the G7 leaders which backed Hong Kong's autonomy.

According to the state news agency Xinhua, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) said that China's Military will make even greater "new" contributions to maintaining Hong Kong's stability. Xinhua also reported that the Military has completed a routine troop rotation in Hong Kong, with air, land and maritime forces having entered the territory. On August 27, 2019, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said that the violence was becoming more serious, but she was confident the government could handle the crisis. Carrie also indicated her willingness to adopt a tougher stance in quelling the anti-government protests, by saying that her administration would consider all the city's laws, including those granting her sweeping emergency powers.

In a related development, the joint statement issued after the meeting in France on August 26, 2019, said "the G7 reaffirms the existence and the importance of the 1984 Sino-British agreement on Hong Kong and calls for avoiding violence." China's Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Geng Shuang, denounced the "irresponsible comments" by the G7 leaders and accused the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US of having "ulterior motives" and of meddling in Hong Kong affairs. He further said that "we will handle our own affairs and we will ask the members of the G7 countries not to harbour evil intentions, mind other people's business nor continue its sinister plot." Regarding the Sino-British Joint Declaration, Geng stressed that "the ultimate purpose and core content of the joint declaration is to confirm that China will resume its sovereignty over Hong Kong."

- On August 29, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a bilateral meeting with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.

During the meeting, Xi said, "the international and regional situations are undergoing profound and complex changes. However, peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit are still an irresistible trend of the times." Xi also expressed his willingness to continue working with Duterte for developing stronger bilateral ties and contributing towards regional peace and stability.

- On August 26, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited China.

During his visit, Zarif presented his Chinese hosts with a 25-year road map on the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership, which was signed in 2016, and reassured that Tehran would actively contribute to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative. Zarif also met with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

- On August 23, China imposed retaliatory tariffs of between 5 and 10 percent on \$75 billion worth of American products.

China said it would raise tariffs on items originating in the US from 5 percent to 10 percent, and the new duties would be implemented in two batches, with the first one beginning from September 1, 2019 and the second from December 15, 2019. US President Donald Trump responded to the tariff imposed by China by scheduling an official notice confirming the tariff increases from 10 to 15 percent on US\$300 billion of Chinese imports. The notice to increase tariffs is expected to appear on August 30, 2019 in the US Federal Register. The draft note hosted on the US Federal Register states, "In accordance with the specific direction of the President, the US Trade Representative has determined to modify the action being taken in this Section 301 investigation by increasing the rate of additional duty from 10 to 15 percent for the products of China covered by the US\$300 billion tariff action published on August 20, 2019."

In response to President Trump's decision to announce new tariffs on Chinese imports, China's Commerce Ministry issued a statement on August 24, 2019, calling on the US not to "misjudge the situation and underestimate the determination of Chinese people." The statement further said that "The US should immediately stop its wrong action, or it will have to bear all consequences."

In a related development, President Trump confirmed on August 26, 2019, that Chinese officials contacted Washington for further talks, despite his earlier threat to order all American businesses to leave China. However, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said he could not confirm Trump's comments about further negotiations. Geng also called for the US to "return to rationality and abandon its wrongful measures" to create an environment for the resumption of trade talks.

- On August 22, China and Russia called on the United Nations Security Council to address the US' withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

The meeting of the 15-member council requested by China and Russia was called to discuss "statements by US officials on their plans to develop and deploy medium-range missiles". The US withdrew from the INF Treaty on August 2, 2019, after accusing Russia of violating the Treaty. The US further cited China, who is not party to the INF, and argued that China had to

show how it was cutting its arsenals. The Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Junon, said that the US was deserting its international obligations by abandoning the INF Treaty. Furthermore, Zhang rejected the allegations made by the US and said that “it is unacceptable to use China as an excuse for withdrawing the Treaty.”

- On August 19, China warned it would take countermeasures against the US for selling 66 fighter jets to Taiwan after US President Donald Trump said he had approved the US\$8 billion deal.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang said the sale of Lockheed Martin F-16V jets was a violation of the one-China principle. In a press conference, Geng said that “China has made numerous solemn representations to the US on the sale of F-16V jets to Taiwan,” adding that the United States should halt the sale. He further said that “The US has to bear all the consequences triggered by the sale,” and stated that “China will take necessary measures to defend its self-interest based on the development of the situation.”

North Korea

- On August 29, North Korea accused the United Kingdom, France, and Germany of meddling in its “self-defensive measures for arms modernisation.”

In response to a joint statement from the United Kingdom, France, and Germany condemning Pyongyang’s “repeated provocative launches” of ballistic missiles, Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported a statement from Kim Son Gyong, an adviser at the Korea-Europe Association, which states that defending national security has become significant after seeing countries “whose destinies were hacked to pieces by the Western powers” and which yielded to demands for disarmament due to the pressure of “international society.” The statement also criticised UN resolutions, saying they “trample the rights to self-defence and survival of the sovereign state, and accordingly, we have never acknowledged them.” The statement said that the United Kingdom, France and Germany are not in a capacity to criticise North Korea because their quest for money has led them “to sell their military equipment to South Korea, though habitually saying that they want peace and security on the Korean peninsula.”

On August 27, 2019, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany issued a joint statement accusing North Korea of violating UN sanctions and insisted Kim Jong Un to engage with the US to make progress on denuclearisation.

- On August 23, North Korean Foreign Minister, Ri Yong Ho called his American counterpart, Mike Pompeo, a “poisonous plant of American diplomacy.”

Ri Yong Ho accused Pompeo of casting “dark shadows” over the US-North Korea talks and said that Pompeo was more interested in his own political ambitions than in current US foreign policy. Ri’s comments come in response to Pompeo’s interview with Washington Examiner on August 21, 2019, in which he said the US will maintain sanctions on North Korea unless it denuclearises. Ri said he could not let the “reckless remarks” by Pompeo pass by him as they came during a possible resumption of nuclear talks. He further added that North Korea is prepared for both dialogue and confrontation, but he cautioned that North Korea will try to remain “America’s biggest threat” if the US continues to threaten it with sanctions.

South Korea

- On August 22, South Korea announced it will scrap its military intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan.

The General Security of Military Information Agreement was signed in November 2016 for the two countries to exchange information on impending threats posed by North Korea, China and Russia. Kim You-geun, Deputy Director of the Blue House National Security Office, said the move comes in response to Japan’s decision to exclude South Korea from its list of trusted trading partners on August 2, 2019. Kim further said that “Under these circumstances, the government judged that it would not be in our national interest to keep the agreement in place, which was signed for the purpose of exchanging sensitive military information for security.”

Japan

- On August 25, Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and US President Donald Trump held a bilateral meeting on the side-lines of the G7 summit in France.

During the meeting, President Trump said that a “very big” trade deal with Japan is expected soon. Trump further added that he and Shinzo Abe had agreed on the principles of a trade deal, while Abe said he hopes to have “productive” discussions, as the two countries are expecting to enter into a bilateral deal in September 2019. On August 23, 2019, Japanese and US negotiators, had agreed on the outline of a trade deal in Washington that would mutually benefit the economies of both countries.

- On August 25, Japan lodged a protest through diplomatic channels against the South Korean military exercise around a disputed island.

Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its “deep regret” over the drill and “strongly urged” South Korea to end its two-day exercise, saying the islands are “an integral part of the territory of Japan”. Japan and South Korea both claim sovereignty of the group of islets called Takeshima in Japanese and Dokdo in Korean.

Cambodia

- On August 27, the 4th meeting of the defence and security committees of the National Assembly (NA) of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia took place in Phnom Penh.

The meeting was aimed at highlighting the importance of the agreements among the three countries to realise the resolve of their governments to increase cooperation towards safeguarding security, stabilising politics, and promoting socio-economic development in the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area. The participants of the meeting also discussed the emerging challenges to the three nations’ development.

---Fareeha Shamim

EUROPE

- On August 30, the European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief, Federica Mogherini said that the EU would work towards preserving the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

Mogherini, however, said that the EU would “continue to ensure that there is full compliance from the Iranian side to its nuclear commitments.” Mogherini made the remarks during the meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Helsinki. The EU has maintained that it is committed to saving the nuclear deal with Iran. Meanwhile, in a separate development, the EU Foreign Ministers expressed “deep concern” at the ongoing political crisis in Hong Kong. Mogherini said she expects local authorities to “respect the freedom of assembly, expression and association”.

- On August 28, Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a five-week suspension of the UK Parliament.

Johnson’s move means that MPs would now have much less time to debate Brexit. However, Johnson’s government described the planned prorogation as “a completely normal procedure”. Britain’s Parliament stops work for three weeks in every autumn. The development has prompted strong response from MPs and opponents of a no-deal Brexit. The government said the five-week suspension in September and October 2019 would still allow time to debate Brexit. The UK was scheduled to leave the EU on March 29, 2019. However, after Parliament rejected the deal negotiated with the EU, that deadline was extended to October 31, 2019. Opposition MPs had announced that they would work together to stop a departure from the EU without an agreement. PM Johnson stated that any efforts by MPs to stop Brexit would do “lasting damage to people’s trust in politics.”

- BBC reported on August 28 that the leaders of Italy’s Democratic Party (PD) and Five Star Movement (M5S) agreed to form a coalition government. It was agreed that Giuseppe Conte would remain Italy’s Prime Minister.

The coalition would serve until the next elections in 2023. Five Star leader, Luigi Di Maio welcomed PD’s willingness to accept Conte’s reappointment. The two parties have been holding tense talks following the collapse of the previous coalition government of M5S and the League Party earlier in August 2019. The League party triggered a political crisis in Italy by exiting the coalition government with an aim of seizing power.

- On August 26, the Group of Seven (G7) summit concluded in Biarritz, France.

Iran, trade and the Amazon’s wildfires dominated discussions at the summit. During the summit, the G7 nations pledged more than \$20 billion to fight the fires in the Amazon. Meanwhile, US President, Donald Trump did not participate in the G7 session on climate, biodiversity and oceans. The US President, however, suggested during the summit that trade tensions between China and the US would ease as both countries would resume talks “very soon”. On his part, French President Emmanuel Macron said that President Trump had “clearly showed his

willingness to reach an agreement” with China on trade issues. Macron further said that G7 leaders were willing to “modernise the rules of world trade in order to more efficiently protect intellectual property, solve disputes more quickly and stop unfair practices.” Macron also held a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif on the sidelines of the summit. Following the meeting, the French President said that conditions for talks between Donald Trump and his Iranian counterpart, Hassan Rouhani have been created. The declaration of the summit noted that “we fully share two goals; to ensure that Iran can never have nuclear weapon, and promote peace and stability in the region.”

- On August 22, British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson met French President, Emmanuel Macron in Paris for Brexit talks.

During the talks, the French President reiterated his stance that Brexit is “not the choice of the European Union” and added that the Ireland-Northern Ireland backstop plan was “indispensable” to preserving political stability and the single market. The backstop seeks to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland after Brexit. Johnson insists the EU must discard the Irish backstop plan. Earlier, on August 21, 2019, Prime Minister, Boris Johnson met with German Chancellor, Angela Merkel in Berlin and discussed a way forward for Britain’s exit from the European Union (EU). Following the discussions, Johnson told Merkel that the UK “cannot accept” the current terms of their Brexit deal to leave the EU. Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the burden was on the UK to find a workable plan. Johnson is pressing EU leaders to reopen Brexit negotiations in order to avoid the UK leaving the bloc without a deal on October 31, 2019. However, the EU says it would not renegotiate the Withdrawal Agreement that was struck by Theresa May. Earlier, on August 19, 2019, Prime Minister Boris Johnson called on France and Germany to change their position on Brexit and negotiate a new exit deal for Britain. Johnson, however, reiterated that Britain would leave the EU without a deal if they do not.

- On August 21, US President Donald Trump cancelled his planned state visit to Denmark after the Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen dismissed as “absurd” Donald Trump’s proposal of buying Greenland, the semi-autonomous Danish territory.

The Danish government conveyed to the Trump Administration that Greenland was not for sale. In response, President Trump said he has decided to postpone his meeting with the Danish PM because of her comments that she has no interest in discussing the purchase of Greenland.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

GLOBAL TERRORISM

- On August 27, Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), noted that Daesh “continues to aspire to have global relevance,” despite the group’s territorial defeat.

While briefing the UNSC on Daesh’s threat, Vladimir Voronkov said, “It capitalises on its affiliates and inspired attacks and has an estimated residual wealth of up to three hundred million dollars at its disposal.” Voronkov noted that there was “a striking increase in Daesh and Al-Qaida-linked recruitment and violence in Africa’s West.” He pointed out that “Daesh’s West Africa Province is now one of the strongest affiliates of the group” with some 4,000 fighters. Warning that current pause in Daesh attacks “may only be temporary,” the Under Secretary-General urged UN Member States to stay vigilant “to mitigate the risk posed by the evolution of Daesh, and to deny it new recruits and prevent its resurgence.”

Meanwhile, Michele Coninx, the Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, said that challenges in responding to the aftermath of Daesh’s defeat and the threat posed by its affiliates globally “remain substantial.”

- On August 27, China’s Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, Wu Haitao, urged the international community to keep a “watchful eye on the global threat of terrorism.” *While speaking at the UNSC, Wu Haitao said the UN charter should be upheld and the UNSC should play a central role in coordinating counter-terrorism efforts. Wu stressed that Member States were required to adopt a holistic approach to defeat the menace of terrorism by addressing the root causes as well as the symptoms of terrorism. While highlighting the need to step up international judicial cooperation in the light of emerging trends and new characteristics of terrorism, he said, “China is deeply involved in counter-terrorism cooperation within the frameworks of the United Nations, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and so on. China has been supporting member states’ counter-terrorism capacity building and carrying out fruitful cooperation with many member states.”*

- According to *Dawn* on August 23, Pakistan’s National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) declared two outfits including Hizbul Ahrar and Balochistan Raaji Ajoin-R-Sangar (BRAS) proscribed organisations under Section 11-B of the Anti-Terrorism Act, putting their members and activities under surveillance.

The report noted that the Interior Ministry has placed the two organisations on the list of proscribed outfits. An official from the Interior Ministry said that operation against the proscribed organisations would continue till the achievement of results under the National Action Plan.

- On August 19, the EU issued a statement noting that it was stepping up its support for counter-terrorism efforts in Pakistan with a new €4 million (PKR 704 million) programme.

The statement read, “This new EU support, which is funded by the European Commission’s Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, is a clear and tangible deliverable in line with the EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan, which was signed by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, and the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, in June 2019.” The EU said that additional support would respond to the significant terrorism related threats in Pakistan that continue to exist, despite a substantial decrease in the number of terrorist incidents as a result of the efforts of the Pakistani authorities. The statement also noted that the programme would be implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and would build upon the achievements and lessons learnt from the EU project named “Support to Pakistan’s Action to Counter Terrorism, with special reference to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa”, which would be completed by the end of 2019.

--- Moiz Khan

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Iran

- On August 29, a rocket at an Iranian space centre that was to conduct a satellite launch apparently exploded on its launch pad.

On August 30, 2019, US President Donald Trump released a photograph of an apparently failed Iranian rocket launch and said the US had nothing to do with it. While Iranian state media did not acknowledge the incident at the Imam Khomeini Space Centre in Iran's Semnan province, a top official wrote on Twitter that a satellite Tehran planned to launch was safe in a lab. However, satellite images by Planet Labs Inc. and Maxar Technologies showed a black plume of smoke rising above a launch pad there. Tehran was believed to have been planning a third attempt to loft a satellite into space, after two launches in January and February, 2019 failed to place satellites in orbit. Iran's Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, rejected reports that a satellite had been lost, but did not comment on the alleged launch-pad explosion. He wrote on his twitter: "Apparently there were reports that the third attempt to put the satellite in orbit were unsuccessful. In fact, Nahid 1 is alright, and is right now in the laboratory. Reporters can come visit the laboratory, too. Transparency." The US has warned Iran against rocket launches, fearing the technology used to put satellites into orbit could help it develop the ballistic missile capability needed to launch nuclear warheads, though Tehran denies its activity is a cover for such development.

- On August 25, Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif flew in for side talks at the G7 summit, as host France ramped up efforts to ease tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Zarif's arrival was a dramatic diplomatic move that the White House said had surprised President Donald Trump. European leaders have struggled to ease the brewing confrontation between Iran and the US since Trump pulled Washington out of Iran's internationally-brokered 2015 nuclear deal and re-imposed sanctions on the Iranian economy. Foreign Minister Zarif flew to the southwestern French town of Biarritz where the Group of Seven leaders were meeting. A French presidency official said, "Zarif came to Paris with Iranian propositions which obviously must be refined. Yesterday there was a substantial discussion between G7 leaders and it is important to now update Zarif in order to keep closing the gap... on the conditions with which we could deescalate the tensions and create breathing space for negotiations." Zarif held talks with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian. Trump declined to comment when asked whether he was aware of Zarif's presence in Biarritz. A White House official said "it was a surprise" to Trump that Zarif had been invited. Calling Zarif's visit a parallel event to the summit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said every opportunity should be seized to reduce tensions.

Iraq

- On August 29, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry criticised Bahrain for backing recent Israeli attacks on Arab countries.

The Ministry said in a statement that it “rejects and condemns” Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah’s Tweet about the Zionist enemy’s targeting of Arab territories and Iraq’s Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) or Hashed al-Sha’abi, an effective force in the Baghdad government’s anti-Daesh fight. It also stressed that the PMU has stood by Iraqi Armed Forces “to defend our holy land and made great sacrifices to liberate the cities of Iraq, and to defeat Daesh terrorist gangs.” The Israeli regime is widely known to be behind a wave of air raids on positions of Iraq’s Hashed al-Sha’abi in recent weeks. According to reports, the air raids had the support of the Saudi regime and were launched from the areas controlled by US-backed Kurdish militants in the northern parts of neighbouring Syria.

- On August 26, Iraqi government officials met with leading members of the Hashed al-Sha’abi following a purported Israeli strike on the paramilitary force.

On August 25, 2019, Israel struck a position held by Brigade 45, a Hashed al-Sha’abi unit based near Iraq’s western border with Syria, killing one fighter and severely wounding another. A string of suspicious incidents at Hashed bases have sparked concern of a possible confrontation between Iran, the US, and Israel on Iraqi soil or in its airspace. Iraq’s President Barham Saleh hosted the Prime Minister, Speaker of the Parliament and Hashed top brass to discuss the instability. The statement from the Presidency said, “These attacks are a blatant, hostile act that target Iraq. Iraqi sovereignty and the wellbeing of its people are a red line.” It stressed the government would take all necessary steps to “deter aggressors and defend Iraq” but did not threaten a military response.

- On August 24, at least six people were killed and nine others injured in a rocket attack at a sports stadium in north Baghdad.

According to a statement from Iraqi security officials, the attack targeted a soccer stadium in Daquq, in the ethnically diverse province of Kirkuk. The statement said, “Six civilians were killed and nine others were wounded in an attack with rocket-propelled grenades and medium-grade weapons.” There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but law enforcement agencies said “terrorist gangs” were involved, an apparent reference to Daesh.

Jordan

- On August 18, Jordan summoned Israel’s Ambassador, Amir Weissbrod, in protest over “violations” at Jerusalem’s flashpoint Al Aqsa Mosque compound.

Jordan's Foreign Ministry summoned Israel's envoy to voice its "condemnation and rejection of Israeli violations" at the highly sensitive site, where Israeli security forces clashed with Palestinian worshippers in recent days. Jordan is the only Arab country apart from Egypt to have a peace agreement with the Jewish state and supervises some holy sites in Jerusalem. Its diplomatic protest came days after Israeli Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan reportedly told a radio station that the country should work toward Jews being allowed to pray at the holy site. He added the change should come through "political agreements and not by force." Jordan's Foreign Ministry expressed "the Kingdom's strong condemnation" over Erdan's comments, demanding "an immediate stop to Israel's violations and all its attempts to change the historic and legal status quo" at the site.

Lebanon

- On August 27, Lebanon's Higher Defence Council stated that the Lebanese nation reserves the right to defend the country "by any means necessary" in the wake of an Israeli drone attack on the southern part of Beirut.
- On August 26, Israeli drones bombed a Palestinian base in eastern Lebanon near the border with Syria.
- On August 25, Hezbollah leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah warned the Israeli Army stationed along the border with Lebanon that his movement was preparing an imminent response to Israeli drone attacks.

The Council said in its statement that "This is a right that is enshrined in the UN Charter," emphasising that "national unity remains the best weapon in the face of any aggression." The strike against the Palestinian base came a day after an alleged Israeli drone crashed in a stronghold of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in southern Beirut while another exploded and crashed nearby. Lebanese President, Michel Aoun told the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Jan Kubis, that the attacks violate a UN Security Council resolution that ended the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah. In comments released by his office, Aoun said, "What happened is equal to a declaration of war and gives us the right to defend our sovereignty, independence, and the safety of our land." Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri called upon the UN Security Council to pressure Israel not to initiate any action of aggression against Lebanon. He stated, "If Israel's aggressions escalate, this will have dangerous repercussions for Lebanon and the whole region."

According to the state news agency report, there were three strikes after midnight on August 25, 2019, that struck a base of a Syrian-backed group known as the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command', an ally of Hezbollah. Abu Wael Issam, an official with the Palestinian group in Lebanon, said that Israel carried out the strike and did not inflict

any casualties. He accused the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of using such attacks to boost his credentials ahead of Israel's parliamentary elections in September 2019. Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah said that his group will confront and shoot down any Israeli drones that enter Lebanese airspace from now on, raising the potential for conflict amid heightened regional tensions. He said the "suicide drone" attack was intended for a specific target and was a "very, very, very dangerous development" and that everything possible would be done to prevent a repeat. In a related development on August 30, 2019, Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri told UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during a telephonic conversation that the Israeli regime bears full responsibility for the drone attack on the southern part of Beirut. He said, "This unacceptable act threatens the stability and peace that has prevailed on the international border for 13 years. Such acts of aggression threaten to drag the region into an unaccounted-for conflict." He also called on the international community to put pressure on Israel to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which brokered a ceasefire in the war of aggression Israel launched against Lebanon.

Palestine

- On August 17, Israeli warplanes struck at least three targets in the Gaza Strip but caused no apparent casualties.

The strikes, which came after Palestinians fired a rocket from the territory at southern Israel on August 16, 2019, hit a Hamas observation post in Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip, an unidentified target near Gaza City and open ground near Deir El Balah in the central part of the territory. A statement from the Israeli Army mentioned only two strikes, against "underground targets belonging to the Hamas terror organisation in the northern and central Gaza Strip." According to the statement, the rocket fired by Palestinians was intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defence system. Earlier, on August 16, 2019, the Palestinian Health Ministry said that 32 Palestinians were wounded by Israeli live fire during weekly protests along the Gaza border. An Israeli Army spokeswoman said that about 5,600 people demonstrated along the border, some throwing hand grenades and explosive devices toward soldiers and attempting to reach the border fence. She said that troops responded with "riot dispersal means" but she was unaware of any live fire. Regular protests along the border began in March 2018.

Saudi Arabia

- Reuters reported on August 28 that Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz expressed "extreme irritation" with the UAE's recent stances, especially on the Yemen war.

According to the report, the King made the unusual comments about Saudi Arabia's closest partner at his Makkah palace on August 11, 2019 in a conversation with fugitive ex-president of

Yemen, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. A divide started to appear in the Saudi-UAE alliance in July 2019, when the UAE announced the pull-out of most of its forces from the Yemen crisis, a decision that deeply upset its Saudi allies.

Syria

- On August 26, at least nine civilians were killed in regime and Russian air strikes in northwest Syria.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Russian air raids on several areas in the south of Idlib province left six civilians dead. Regime air raids killed three civilians in the same region, which is controlled by Syria's former Al Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The bombardment also wounded 20 other civilians. Regime forces have in recent days weakened the militants in the Idlib region on the Turkish border following months of deadly bombardment. The gains come despite a deal reached between Turkey and Russia to set up a buffer zone around the region to protect its three million inhabitants. Since August 21, 2019, the Syrian Military has seized the key town of Khan Sheikhoun from militants and allied rebels and overran the countryside to the south, encircling a Turkish observation post in northern Hama.

Turkey

- On August 28, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country's deal with the US on establishing a "safe zone" in northern Syria was a correct step, and Ankara would not let Washington delay its implementation.
- On August 27, Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Russia to discuss the Syrian crisis.

Following their talks, Putin and Erdogan said they hoped to work together to ease tensions in the Idlib province. The two leaders said they shared deep concerns over rising tension in northwestern Syria, with Ankara warning it would take the steps necessary to protect its troops there. In August 2019, Russian-backed government forces launched a ground offensive against Idlib, one of the last major areas of Syria outside government hands. The fighting is threatening to increase tensions between Russia and Iran, who back President Bashar al-Assad's regime, and Turkey which supports some rebel groups. During a press talk with President Erdogan, Putin said, "The situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone is of serious concern to us and our Turkish partners." He also said that Turkey had "legitimate interests" to protect its southern borders and supported the creation of a security zone in the area. For his part, Erdogan said "The situation (in Idlib) has become so complicated that at this moment our troops are in danger. We do not want this to continue. All necessary steps will be taken here as needed." The two leaders said they supported Syria's territorial integrity, but Putin emphasised the need to keep fighting militant forces in Idlib.

In a related development, speaking to reporters on his way back from meeting his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Erdogan said Ankara would not accept any delay in the implementation of the plan. He said, “The agreement which we have reached with the US is a correct step toward establishing a safe zone and removing the YPG from the east of the Euphrates.” He added, “All the personnel, the armoured carriers, all are on the border. That is, we are in a position to do everything at any moment.”

- On August 19, air strikes targeted a Turkish army convoy inside a rebel-held part of northwestern Syria, killing three civilians and wounding 12 others.

According to the Turkish Defence Ministry, the convoy was attacked while heading to one of Turkey’s observation posts in rebel-controlled Idlib province. Syria’s Foreign Ministry said the convoy of armoured vehicles was delivering weapons to Khan Sheikhoun, a major rebel-held town that lies on the front line of fighting along the southern edge of the Idlib enclave. The town is a stronghold of Al Qaeda linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), the most powerful militant group in the area. It was not immediately clear whether the air strikes were carried out by Syrian or Russian warplanes. The convoy consisted of several armoured vehicles and flatbed trucks carrying tanks. The incident raised tensions in the region, where Turkey, Russia, US and Iran are involved and endeavouring to secure their own interests.

Yemen

- On August 29, Yemen’s internationally recognised government accused the Emirati Air Force of attacking its troops as they were heading to the key southern port city of Aden to fight separatists backed by the UAE. At least 30 government forces were killed in the air strikes.

Col Mohamed al-Oban, a commander of the government’s special forces in Abyan province, said the troops were on the road, headed from Abyan toward Aden, when the strikes took place. He did not say who was behind them, saying only the planes were from the Saudi-led coalition. Yemen’s Foreign Ministry tweeted a statement by Deputy Foreign Minister, Mohammed Abdullah al-Hadrami, saying: “The government condemns the Emirati air strike on government forces. We hold the UAE fully responsible for this explicit extra-judicial targeting” of the government forces. The statement added that the air strikes also left several civilians dead but without providing a specific death toll. Officials in the UAE declined to immediately comment. The development raises concerns about the future of a Saudi-led coalition that has been fighting Yemen’s Houthi rebels since 2015.

- On August 28, Yemen government forces reclaimed the interim capital Aden and its presidential palace, pushing back separatists who seized the city and other parts of the south earlier in August.

According to Information Minister Moammer al-Eryani, forces loyal to the internationally recognised government of Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi were able “to secure the presidential palace in Aden and the surrounding areas.” He tweeted: “The national army and security services have full control over the province’s districts.” The separatist’s losses came nearly three weeks after the pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) took control of Aden, the government’s base since Houthi rebels took over the northern capital Sanaa in 2014. According to analysts, the clashes between the STC and government forces who for years have fought alongside each other against the Iran-aligned Houthis have raised concerns that the famine-threatened country could break apart entirely.

- On August 20, Yemeni separatists drove government troops out of two military camps following fierce clashes.

The fighting in Abyan province came after the pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) partially withdrew from key sites it occupied in Aden earlier in August 2019. The Saudi-led military coalition, which backs the government, said it had “succeeded in calming the situation”. However, according to Abyan governor, Abu Bakr Hussein, fighters from the so-called Security Belt Forces initially surrounded a special forces camp in Zinjibar, the capital of Abyan about 60 kilometres from Aden and a nearby military camp at Al-Kawd. He said the separatists then seized the Al-Kawd camp in fierce clashes, forcing out the 350 troops there, and that they remained positioned around the Zinjibar base following the exit of government forces in a deal mediated by local authorities. At least four military personnel, two separatists and two government troops were killed and 23 wounded during the clashes. The rising tensions between the separatists and progovernment forces constrains their cooperation against a common threat—the Houthi rebels.

- According to the Houthi-run *Al-Masirah* TV on August 18, Houthi rebels appointed an ambassador in Tehran, a step condemned by the internationally recognised government as a breach of international laws.

Al-Masirah TV said that a presidential decree was issued appointing Ibrahim Mohammed al-Dallami as an ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary for the republic of Yemen to the Islamic republic of Iran. Iran made no announcement about accepting the appointment of an ambassador for the Houthis, who control Sanaa and much of the north. The internationally recognised government in Yemen said that the “exchange of diplomatic relations between Tehran regime and the Houthi militias breaches the international laws and norms and contravenes UN Security Council resolutions related to the Yemen crisis.” It further said the step has exposed the hidden relationship between the Houthis and Iran.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA: I

Pakistan

External

- Addressing a gathering outside his office on August 30, Prime Minister Imran Khan warned India that it would get a “befitting response” in case it attacked Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). He vowed to continue fighting for Kashmir until it is “liberated” from India.

Thousands of Pakistanis, on the appeal of PM Imran Khan, rallied across the country to observe “Kashmir hour” in a bid to express solidarity with the people in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). During his address, PM Khan called Narendra Modi a “fascist” and equated him with Adolf Hitler. He said, “All Pakistanis are standing with Kashmiris.” Meanwhile, writing for the New York Times on the same day, PM Khan said that dialogue with India could start only when “it reverses its illegal annexation of Kashmir, ends the curfew and lockdown, and withdraws its troops to the barracks.”

- On August 30, Pakistani and Indian delegations held another round of talks on the Kartarpur corridor at the border area near Dera Baba Nanak.

Pakistan’s Foreign Office said that “good progress was made during the discussion”. Pakistan and India are discussing the modalities regarding the opening of the corridor in Narowal in November 2019.

- On August 28, Pakistan’s Foreign Office rejected the Afghan government’s allegations of firing and shelling by Pakistani troops along the Pak-Afghan border

The Foreign Office said that Pakistan does not fire across the Pak-Afghan border and that it only responds in self-defence when attacked by terrorists based on Afghan soil. Pakistan asked Kabul to fulfil its commitment to eliminate terrorist hideouts along the Pak-Afghan border. The statement came in response to a letter written by Afghan Representative at the UN, Adela Raz to the President of the UNSC in which the Afghan government alleged “continued violations of the territory of Afghanistan by military forces of Pakistan”.

- In a televised address to the nation on August 26, Prime Minister Imran Khan said, “Whether the world joins Pakistan or not, we will go to any extent with regards to our Kashmir cause.” He cautioned India and the international community that “since both countries have nuclear weapons...if the situation leads to war, no one will win and that the entire world would face consequences.”

Prime Minister Imran Khan said Narendra Modi had committed a “historic blunder” in “arrogance”. Khan claimed that Pakistan’s Kashmir policy is now at a “decisive point.” He appealed to Pakistanis to “firmly stand with Kashmiris until they get freedom from India.” Khan said that a 30-minute event would be held every week in Pakistan to show solidarity with the

Kashmiris. The Pakistani Premier challenged the Indian leadership over Kashmir issue saying “India has done what it could...Now it’s our turn and world’s turn.” He said that India had promised Kashmiris of plebiscite but they “never gave them this right.” During his address, the PM also talked about the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) party which is believed to be a parent organisation of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He said that RSS believes in Hindu supremacy and that there is a hatred for Muslims in their ideology. “Their leaders followed racist and fascist ideologies.” He also talked about the lack of action against India by Muslim countries and assured the nation that “these countries will eventually come on our side.”

Pakistan-India tensions rose in recent weeks after the Indian government decided to annex Indian Occupied Kashmir. Many fear India would attempt to convert IOK from a Muslim-majority into a Hindu-majority territory. India has also further intensified its military grip in the region by deploying thousands of extra troops, in addition to the 700,000 troops already present. Since then, there has been a widespread communications blackout, with internet, mobiles phones, landlines, television and radio cut. The move has provoked an aggressive reaction from Pakistan, as well as demonstrations in support of Kashmir around the world.

Earlier, on August 26, 2019, Indian PM Narendra Modi while speaking alongside President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G7 summit, said that all issues between Pakistan and India are bilateral, rejecting any offer for mediation over Kashmir. Meanwhile, President Trump said that Pakistan and India “could handle their dispute over Kashmir on their own, but he was there should they need him.” Many saw Trump’s comments as reversal from his earlier offer to mediate between Pakistan and India on Kashmir.

Successive Indian governments have rejected any mediation offers over Kashmir maintaining that Simla Agreement bounds both Pakistan and India to resolve all matters bilaterally. However, Pakistan does not believe that a bilateral dialogue could bring a resolution as New Delhi has rejected any discussion over Kashmir with Islamabad maintaining it is an “integral part” of India. In an interview with the New York Times on August 21, 2019, PM Imran Khan said that there is “no point” in talking to India saying “India has taken Pakistan’s peace overtures as appeasement.”

- On August 27, Prime Minister Imran Khan held talks with a Chinese delegation, led by Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of China, General Xu Qiliang in Islamabad.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to “collaborate for peace and stability in the region.” The Chinese delegation’s visit to Islamabad took place against the backdrop of heightened tensions between Pakistan and India over Kashmir.

- According to *Radio Pakistan* on August 27, Pakistan’s Human Rights Minister, Dr Shireen Mazari wrote a letter to 18 UN Special Procedures mandate-holders, informing

them about the violations of International Human Rights laws by India in Occupied Kashmir.

The Human Rights Minister noted that rights violations in IOK include denial of right to self-determination, gender-based violence as a weapon of war, communications shutdown, imposition of curfew, arbitrary arrests, child abuse and religious persecution. The Minister urged the UN Special Procedures mechanisms to pressurise India to reverse its decision of illegally annexing Jammu and Kashmir, end the communications shutdown and ensure compliance with its international human rights obligations. Earlier, on August 21, 2019, Dr Mazari wrote a letter to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) asking them to remove Priyanka Chopra, an Indian actress, as a UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador as she supported war between Pakistan and India. The Human Rights Minister noted that the actor's support for war undermined the credibility of her position as a UN representative. However, the UN said that goodwill ambassadors "in their personal capacity...retain the right to speak about issues that interest or concern them".

- On August 26, Prime Minister Imran Khan telephoned Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman and briefed him on the situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

This is the second telephonic conversation between PM Khan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman since the Modi government annexed Kashmir by revoking article 370 of its constitution on August 5, 2019. Imran Khan had said that he would "act as Kashmir's Ambassador" and raise the Kashmir issue on every platform.

- On August 23, Prime Minister Imran Khan warned the international community about India's plan of "a false-flag operation" in Kashmir to "divert" world's attention from the human rights violations in the region.

Meanwhile, government authorities claim that Pakistan might close its airspace for India and block India's land trade route to Afghanistan.

- On August 20, the government of Pakistan decided to approach the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Kashmir dispute after India revoked special status for Indian Occupied Kashmir on August 5, 2019.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that the decision was taken after "considering all legal aspects." Pakistani officials say a panel of lawyers of "international repute" would be engaged to pursue the case on behalf of Pakistan at the ICJ.

- The Kashmir Dispute was discussed during a closed-door consultative meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in New York on August 16. This was the first time in more than 50 years that the Security Council discussed the Kashmir dispute.

The consultation was held at the request of China and Pakistan after Indian government annexed Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) by abrogating Article 370 of the Indian constitution that

guaranteed special status to Kashmir. India's Ambassador to UN, Syed Akbaruddin reiterated India's stance that Kashmir is "not an international conflict" but entirely "an internal matter" for India. He said "We don't need international busybodies." Pakistan's UN Ambassador, Maleeha Lodhi said the UNSC consultation on Kashmir had brought the dispute back to the fore. She said that the fact the meeting took place meant that the issue was an internationally recognised dispute. The Security Council did not agree on a statement, however, China's UN Ambassador, Zhang Jun expressed serious concern over the human rights situation in IOK and called on all parties to refrain from taking any unilateral action that might further aggravate the tension. Pakistan is lobbying to gain international support against India over Kashmir and is seeking a formal UNSC meeting on the issue. Ahead of the UNSC consultation on Kashmir, President Donald Trump held a telephonic conversation with Imran Khan and Narendra Modi over Kashmir. According to the White House, President Trump conveyed the "importance of Pakistan and India reducing tensions through bilateral dialogue regarding the situation in Kashmir."

- On August 23, Pakistan's Finance Ministry rejected as "incorrect and baseless" Indian media reports that Pakistan has been blacklisted by the Asia-Pacific Group (APG), the regional affiliate of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The Finance Ministry clarified that APG in its 22nd Annual Meeting held in Canberra, Australia from August 18-23, 2019, adopted Pakistan's 3rd Mutual Evaluation Report and put Pakistan in its enhanced follow-up as per APG's Third Round Mutual Evaluation Procedures. The Ministry said that Pakistan would be required to submit follow-up progress reports to APG on quarterly basis.

- *Radio Pakistan* reported on August 20 that India has released about 200,000 cusecs water into the River Sutlej without any intimation, which has caused a flood-like situation in the Pakistani river system.

According to the National Disaster Management Authority, all federal and provincial bodies are coping with the situation.

- Talking to media in New Jersey on August 18, US President Donald Trump said that Pak-US ties were improved after he decided to cut \$1.3 billion in security assistance to Islamabad.

The US President referred to his July 22, 2019 meeting with PM Imran Khan as "really good" and noted that both countries have "a great relationship" now. In 2018, US President Donald Trump announced to suspend 1.3 billion aid to Pakistan alleging that US had "foolishly" given Pakistan more than \$33 billion in aid over the last 15 years, and got "nothing but lies and deceit" in return.

Pakistan

Internal

- According to DG Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on August 20, at least six soldiers of the Indian Army, including an officer, were killed and many others injured after Pakistan Army responded to Indian ceasefire violations in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) along the Line of Control (LoC).

Earlier, on August 15, 2019, at least three Pakistan Army soldiers and two civilians were killed in AJK after Indian troops shelled mortars from across the LoC. In a related development on August 18, 2019, a seven-year-old child was also killed after Indian troops sniped at him from across the LoC.

- On August 19, Prime Minister, Imran Khan granted another three-years extension in tenure of Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

According to the Prime Minister's Office, the decision was taken keeping in view the regional security environment.

- On August 16, at least five people were killed while 15 others were injured following a bomb explosion inside a Mosque during Friday prayers in Quetta.

According to authorities, the explosive material was planted inside the Mosque. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

India

- On August 28, Supreme Court of India issued a notice to the government on all petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370.

The court had decided to hear 14 petitions challenging the government's decision to revoke Article 370 and the subsequent lockdown in Kashmir. However, the Indian government told the top court that in case "notice is issued, it will have cross-border repercussions...It can be misused" by Pakistan at the UN.

- On August 22, French President Emmanuel Macron called upon Pakistan and India to resolve the Kashmir dispute bilaterally, saying France would "remain attentive to ensuring" that the rights of Kashmiris on "both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) were respected." The development follows talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the French President in Paris.

Macron said that the Kashmir dispute should be resolved on a bilateral basis. Meanwhile, Narendra Modi made no mention of the Kashmir issue in his statement. The French President's

statement backs India's long held position that all issues between Pakistan and India are bilateral. Pakistan, however, seeks multilateral negotiations to help resolve the Kashmir issue.

On August 23, 2019, the Indian PM visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he held bilateral talks with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Modi was conferred the "Order of Zayed" by the UAE's government. After concluding his visit to Abu Dhabi, Modi then visited Bahrain on August 25, 2019, where he was awarded with "The King Hamad Order of the Renaissance". Modi also held discussions with Bahrain's King, Hamad bin Isa bin Salman.

On the same day, the Indian PM travelled back to France where he attended the G-7 summit on "Biodiversity, Oceans, Climate". On August 26, 2019, Modi also held talks with US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the summit. During the discussion, Trump said that he spoke about Kashmir with PM Modi and "he really feels he has it under control." President Trump expressed hope that both Pakistan and India would "be able to do something that would be very good."

- On August 16, Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh said that India is "committed to its nuclear policy of 'no first use'...but what happens in the future depends on the circumstances."

Pakistan termed Singh's remarks as "irresponsible". Meanwhile, PM Imran Khan asked the world to consider "the safety & security of India's nuclear arsenal under a fascist and racist" Modi government. According to analysts, the Indian Defence Minister's remarks are a vindication of scepticism by Pakistan and China which have long doubted India's declared "no first use" policy.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

SOUTH ASIA II

Afghanistan

- On August 31, the Taliban launched a major offensive and captured parts of northern Kunduz city.

According to Al-Jazeera, Taliban have captured several government buildings, including the main hospital of the city. Kunduz Police spokesman claimed that heavy clashes are underway to repel the Taliban assault. He also contended that eight Taliban fighters have been killed so far. The attack occurred amid peace talks between the US and the Taliban in Doha. The insurgent group controls or holds sway over roughly half of Afghanistan and is believed to be at its strongest since 2001.

- On August 30, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford said that Washington does not want Afghanistan to become a sanctuary from where the US and its allies are threatened.
- On August 28, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford said that it is too early to talk about a full American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Dunford's remarks came during a joint press conference with US Defence Secretary, Mark Esper at the Pentagon. Dunford told reporters that any US deal with the Taliban will be based on security conditions on the ground and that Afghan forces are not yet able to secure the country without help from allied forces. He added that at some point the Afghans may be able to provide for their own defence without requiring direct US military support. When asked about continuing strikes on the Taliban, Esper said, "We reserve the right to keep all options on the table, but look, clearly we have a plan going forward. The key to resolve this conflict is a political agreement. We are on that path right now, and we are hopeful that we can reach some type of conclusion." The statements from top Pentagon officials came as the US and the Taliban negotiators are engaged in the 9th round of talks in Doha to reach a peace deal.

- On August 29, US President, Donald Trump said that he will reduce the number of US troops in Afghanistan from 14,000 to 8,600.
- On August 27, US President, Donald Trump said that Washington is in no rush to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

Trump said, "Whatever it is, there is no rush. We're there, we're really a peacekeeping force more than anything else, frankly. We could win that war in a very short period of time, but I'm

not looking to kill 10 million people.” President Trump’s remarks came at a time when the Taliban and the US negotiators are engaged in their 9th round of talks to strike a peace deal. It was expected that a timeline for a US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan would be announced after the ongoing round of talks. On August 23, 2019, Dawn quoting a Taliban spokesman, reported that the US and the Taliban have reached an agreement on a time frame of pullout of foreign forces from Afghanistan.

- On August 28, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said that Washington is not seeking a permanent military presence in Afghanistan.

Pompeo said, “America has never sought a permanent military presence in Afghanistan and all sides recognise the time to move on. So, for a year and continuing today we continue to work to get clear-eyed engagement with all Afghans. We don’t know how these efforts toward peace and reconciliation will end but President Trump is committed to making sure that we get it right.” Meanwhile, a Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said that the group is close to finalising the peace agreement with the US in which both parties have agreed on a 15-month gradual withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, and the US has also agreed on the Taliban’s counter-terrorism assurances. However, on August 27, 2019, US President, Donald Trump said that his country is in no rush to drawdown its forces from Afghanistan.

- On August 28, NATO Senior Civilian Representative for Afghanistan, Nicolas Kay, said that international forces will remain in Afghanistan even after a peace agreement.

Kay said that there is a need for NATO military presence in Afghanistan until all threats are eliminated from the country. He added, “Let me be clear on the NATO position, our NATO task is to support the security for the elections, and we are supporting Afghan national security and defence forces prepare for elections on September 28, 2019.” Kay also said that the alliance will work together with Afghans to protect the gains the country has made in its strides towards democracy such as human rights, civil liberties, women’s rights, strengthening of the role of women and the youths in the peace process. His comments came two days after Reuters cited some unnamed Taliban members saying the US will stop its support to Afghan forces once a peace deal is signed. Dawn also quoted a senior Taliban member saying the group will continue its offensives against the Afghan government forces after reaching a peace deal with the US.

- On August 28, Afghanistan’s Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah said that his team is ready to postpone the upcoming presidential elections for the sake of peace in Afghanistan.

Abdullah said, “If the opportunity comes one day before or after the elections, we are ready for that and there is no doubt in it.” Interestingly, on August 20, 2019, Abdullah said that the

upcoming presidential election takes precedence over the peace process and it will ensure a better future for the country. He also mentioned that Afghans should go to the ballot boxes to prevent the return of a “liar group”, indirectly hinting at a possible return of the Taliban as part of a possible peace deal. He added that the Taliban is refusing to hold negotiations with the Afghan government and that the group is creating a hurdle in the way of peace.

- On August 25, US Senator, Lindsey Graham warned that American pulling troops out of Afghanistan would lead to “another 9/11”, saying that the US cannot outsource its national security to the Taliban.

Graham said in an interview with Fox News, “If we left tomorrow, the Taliban cannot be trusted to take care of ISIS (Daesh) and al-Qaeda. They don’t have the capability. So when you ask our intelligence community...what would happen to America if we withdrew all of our forces. They tell us without any hesitation it would lead to another 9/11 in a matter of time.” Graham issued a similar warning ahead of US President Donald Trump’s meeting with his security advisors where they discussed issues around a possible peace deal with the Taliban.

- On August 25, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani visited Saudi Arabia and met with King Salman in Jeddah.

During the meeting, the two leaders reviewed relations between their countries, ways of developing and strengthening them in various fields and the latest developments in Afghanistan. Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal, Saudi Minister of Commerce and Investment Dr. Majid Al-Qassabi, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir, and a number of senior Saudi and Afghan officials also attended the meeting. In a separate meeting with Yousef Al-Othaimen, Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Ghani praised the support provided by the OIC to Afghanistan and its active role in promoting peace and security.

- On August 22, US President Donald Trump said that countries like India, Iran, Russia and Turkey will have to fight terrorists in Afghanistan at a certain point of time.

Trump said that other nations are currently making little effort against fighting terrorism in Afghanistan. He added, “At a certain point Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey they are going to have to fight their battles too. We wiped out the caliphate 100 percent. I did it in record time. But at a certain point of time, all of these countries are going to have to fight them because do we want to stay there for another 19 years? I don’t think so.” He also said, “Look, India is right there. They are not fighting it. We are fighting it. Pakistan is right next door. They are fighting it very little. Very, very little. It’s not fair. The United States is 7,000 miles away.”

- On August 21, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani met with NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Gen. Tod D. Wolters and warned that adopting any "wrong policy" for achieving peace will have unpleasant consequences for the country.

Ghani said that there is a need to move the peace process forward with caution. He added that the Taliban are yet to have a will for peace and a ceasefire, and that the group should let Afghans know about their relations with Pakistan, drugs, al-Qaida, Daesh and dozens of other terrorist groups. Ghani also reiterated that the Taliban cannot remain in the absence of their safe havens in Pakistan. In a separate interview with Tolo News, Ghani said that withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan as part of a peace deal between the US and the Taliban will not impact the lives of Afghans whose basic need is peace. Ghani said he requested a reduction in the number of US troops in Afghanistan in a letter to President Donald Trump seven months ago but reiterated that a decrease in number of forces will be conditions-based. He added that the barrier to direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban is the presence of international forces, but the Taliban's relations with Pakistan and terrorist networks and drug trafficking groups is another issue in this respect.

- On August 20, the US announced an additional amount of nearly \$125 million in humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

The US Embassy in Kabul said that the aid is to meet the needs of vulnerable Afghans, including internally displaced persons, conflict and flood-affected communities, and Afghan returnees. The statement added that the amount will support life-saving activities that provide emergency food, nutrition, clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, emergency health, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, shelter, protection, humanitarian coordination and logistics, and non-food items and relief commodities. The US urged all countries to make or increase their contributions to the UN humanitarian appeal for Afghanistan, which is currently only 27% funded. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 3.5 million Afghans have been displaced since 2012.

- On August 19, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said that the US is trying to reduce American casualties and the cost of the war in Afghanistan.

Pompeo said in an interview with Fox News that the US is also committed to preventing Afghanistan's territory from being used against the US. He said, "The mission the president gave us to do two things, to see if we can reduce our cost which has been tens and tens of billions of dollars a year in Afghanistan and we lose the lives of American young men and women every year to reduce that risk, but at the same time, ensure that we maintain a posture that can reduce the risk that there is an attack again from Afghanistan to our homeland." Addressing a query related to the withdrawal of US forces, Pompeo said, "Any reduction that we make will be based

on conditions on the ground and will be consistent with achieving those two goals on behalf of the President and on behalf of American people.” On August 16, 2019, US Senator Lindsey Graham in a tweet urged President Donald Trump to “learn from President Obama’s mistakes” and take his time while making a deal with the Taliban. He said that “a bad agreement puts the radical Islamist movement all over the world on steroids”. Graham also contended that to trust the Taliban to control al-Qaeda, ISIS (Daesh), and other radical Islamist groups present in Afghanistan – as a replacement for a US counter-terrorism force – would be a “bigger mistake than Obama’s Iranian nuclear deal”. He further said that any peace agreement which denies the US’ robust counter-terrorism capability in Afghanistan is not a peace deal. This comes as the US and the Taliban are expected to finalise the timeline for the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan in their 9th round of talks in Doha.

- On August 17, at least 63 people were killed and more than 180 wounded in a suicide bomb attack on a wedding ceremony in Kabul.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack which occurred in a minority Shia neighbourhood. Women and children were among the casualties. The Taliban denied any involvement, calling the blast “forbidden and unjustifiable”. However, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the group “cannot absolve themselves of the blame, for they provide a platform for terrorists”. Ghani along with Afghanistan’s Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah condemned the attack. International community and organisations including the UN also condemned the attack, calling it barbaric and a crime against humanity. The Taliban and Daesh, have repeatedly attacked the Shia Hazara minority in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan over the years.

- On August 16, the White House said that discussions between President Donald Trump and top advisers went “very well” regarding a peace deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Trump met with national security advisors including Defence Secretary Mark Esper, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, National Security Advisor John Bolton and Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad. According to the White House, “Discussions centered around ongoing negotiations and eventual peace and reconciliation agreement with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan. The meeting went very well, and negotiations are proceeding.” Meanwhile, President Trump tweeted: “Just completed a very good meeting on Afghanistan. Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal – if possible!” Expectations are rising for a deal in which the United States would start withdrawing its 14,000 soldiers from Afghanistan after a two-decade war.

Sri Lanka

- On August 23, Sri Lankan President, Maithripala Sirisena denied Pakistan's claims that Sri Lanka offered mediation and facilitation of dialogue between Pakistan and India to re-activate the SAARC forum.

On August 22, 2019, the High Commissioner of Pakistan to Sri Lanka Major General (retd) Dr Shahid Ahmad Hashmat called on Sirisena to apprise him about the current situation in occupied Kashmir. Following the meeting, a press statement issued by the Pakistan High Commission stated that the Sri Lankan President had offered to mediate between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. However, a statement issued by Sri Lankan President's office said that Sirisena did not make any comment on the issues pertaining to India and Pakistan.

---Kashif Hussain

UNITED NATIONS

- On August 28, Stephane Dujarric, Spokesman for the UN Secretary General, said that the UN Chief was monitoring the worsening situation in the Indian occupied Kashmir (IOK), particularly in relation to reports of restrictions and detentions.
- On August 22, five UN Human Rights Experts called on India to end the crackdown on freedom of expression in the Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK).
- On August 16, the UNSC held a closed-door meeting in New York to consider the volatile situation in the IOJK, and focused solely on the dispute, for the first time since 1965.

Dujarric said, “We are obviously following the situation very closely in Jammu and Kashmir, and reports of restrictions and detentions.” He made these comments in response to a question regarding international media reports on the deteriorating humanitarian situation and protests in the IOJK. He indicated that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed his views, both privately and publicly, and has urged leaders of India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and take steps to defuse tension.

On August 22, 2019, five UN experts also expressed concerns over curbs on freedom of expression in the IOJK. The UN experts are David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Bernard Duhaime, Chair-Rapporteur, Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and association; and Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. While describing the situation as a near total communications blackout, the experts said that Indian measures, adopted after revoking the Constitutionally-mandated status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, would exacerbate tensions in the region. They called restrictions disproportionate and the blackout to be “a form of collective punishment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, without even a pretext of a precipitating offence.” The experts added, “The shutdown of the internet and telecommunication networks, without justification from the Government, are inconsistent with the fundamental norms of necessity and proportionality.” They stressed that communication restrictions were in violation of Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, (General Assembly Resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations.

In a related development on August 16, 2019, the UNSC held a meeting to consider crisis in the IOJK following the Indian Government’s August 5, 2019, announcement revoking Kashmir’s special status, placing it under central control. Following the meeting, China’s Ambassador to the UN, Zhang Jun, said the UNSC members expressed their serious concern regarding the

current situation in IOJK. Zhang said, “The Kashmir issue should be resolved properly through peaceful means, in accordance with the UN Charter, the relevant Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements.” The UNSC meeting was called on requests from Pakistan and China. Pakistan’s Ambassador to the UN, Maleeha Lodhi said the meeting had allowed “the voice of the people of the occupied Kashmir to be heard.” She argued that “the fact that this meeting took place, is testimony to the fact that this is an international dispute.”

- On August 26, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that “we have the tools to address the climate emergency, but we need more political will.” while urging G7 leaders for a shift towards greener and cleaner future.

Antonio Guterres made these comments during his meetings with G7 leaders to mobilise action ahead of his Climate Action Summit in September 2019 in New York. Guterres said, “The UN Summit comes against the backdrop of a dramatic climate emergency with the UN World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) reporting the years 2015 to 2019 are on track to be the five hottest years ever recorded, and historically high concentrations of CO2 in the atmosphere.” He said that scientific studies provided by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has made clear that the international community “need to keep the rise of temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius to the end of the century and to be carbon neutral in 2050 and to have a 45% reduction of emissions by 2030.” The UN Chief stressed that the G7 was an excellent opportunity to appeal for the very strong engagement of the international community, and to urge states to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

- On August 26, Ahmed Shaheed, UN Human Rights Expert and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, urged Sri Lanka to take action to strengthen respect for freedom of religion and address ethno-religious tensions.
- On August 19, UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet called the appointment of alleged war criminal, Sri Lankan Lieutenant-General Shavendra Silva, as Commander of the country’s Army is deeply troubling.

Following his 12-day visit to Sri Lanka, Ahmed Shaheed presented his report on the country noting that there was “deficit of trust among ethno-religious communities in Sri Lanka following the deadly Easter Sunday bomb blasts and subsequent mob violence in April 2019.” Though the country has taken measures to strengthen rule of law, Shaheed stressed that many religious communities remained very concerned about their security owing to “incitement to hatred and violence by some religious extremists.” He said, “I call on the Government and all others to create an enabling environment for the exercise of fundamental freedoms, in the lead-up to elections and not to use ethno-religious tensions for electoral gain.”

In a related development on August 19, 2019, UN Human Rights Chief, Michelle Bachelet raised concerns over promotion of alleged war criminal Sri Lankan Lieutenant-General Shavendra Silva as Commander of the country’s Army. Michelle Bachelet indicated that Silva’s promotion

was alarming because he had been given this role despite “serious allegations of gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against him and his troops during the war.” Bachelet noted that appointment of Lieutenant-General Silva would severely compromise Sri Lanka’s commitment to promote justice and accountability in the context of Human Rights Council resolution 30/1,” which promotes reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. According to the UN, the UN investigations have implicated Lieutenant-General Silva’s 58th Division campaigns during the final stages of the military operations against the LTTE rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009 in alleged serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Bachelet also noted Sri Lanka has made “minimal progress” on setting up mechanisms to deal with the worst crimes committed during the conflict during 2009.

--- Moiz Khan