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Rajnath's-visit-to-Andaman-and-Nicobar-islands-to-focus-on-Maritime-Security

Home Minister Rajnath Singh's three days' official tour to Andaman and Nicobar, beginning April 6, is likely to be circled around maritime security and other development-related issues. Concerned over maritime security and threats from the neighbouring countries, the local administration has sent a proposal to the Union Defence Ministry and Ministry of Home Affairs to extend two existing runways - close to China, Burma and Indonesia - with night landing facilities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is expected that besides attending host of programmes, Singh may review the proposal (on maritime security) with the concerned officials in the archipelago.

Strategically, Shivpur Naval Airbase in North Andaman Islands (which is close to China), and Campbell Bay airstrip in Port Blair (which is close to Indonesia and Thailand) are important points in terms of India's maritime security. The reason being China has already set up a huge naval and air force base in Coco Island in Myanmar. Also, the Western Coast of Nicobar Island required an elaborate security plan. "This stretch is a safe haven for the poachers from China, Burma and Thailand. We should not forget 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, where the perpetrators came in a boat from Pakistan," Speaking to News18, a senior Coast Guard official said.

Andaman and Nicobar is an important strategic point due to its proximity with the Malacca Straits - gateway to international trade. As per statistics, every year more than 42,000 ships - carrying critical energy and defence products beside other trade items - passe through the Malacca Straits. It is expected that Singh may announce several measures to strengthen security. During his stay, Singh will lay a wreath at the Martyr's Column at Cellular jail and meet the Lt Governor Jagdish Mukhi.

He will also lay the foundation stone for a solar power plant at Guptapara village and will visit Tsunami Memorial in Car Nicobar Island. He will inaugurate a new building of a senior secondary school at Malacca and hold a meeting with tribal council captains and other tribal leaders there. He is also scheduled to visit Ross and Havelock Island.

Source: www.news18.com, 5 April 2017

Group airs concern on state of Maritime Security in the country

-Raymund Antonio

A group pushing for the protection of Filipino seafarers has expressed concerns on the state of maritime security in the country, citing the long list of sea mishaps that need government attention. Association of Marine Officers and Rating, Inc. (AMOR) Seaman President Crescenciano “Butch” Elaba Jr. raised the possibility of another sea tragedy bound to happen, with the government inaction to address maritime security. “Have we learned from the past accidents that transpired in Philippine waters? Did the government never learn in the accidents, mishaps in the past? We need a proactive approach rather than heedless approach saving people only after the accident or terror attack,” Elaba said in statement.

Elaba, a seasoned seafarer, made the statement, in lieu of the recent abduction of Super Shuttle Roro 9 chief engineer Laurencio Tiro and vessel’s Captain Aurelio Agac-ac in Mindanao. The Abu Sayyaf bandits kidnapped the two Roro crew during a hijacking off Basilan, but they were later rescued by government troops. “Imagine being snatched inside a vessel while performing their jobs? This might have been avoided if a maritime security plan is intact on that ship. These incidents might have been avoided,” said Elaba.

He claimed that the mere adoption of the International Maritime Organization-International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS), SOLAS XI-2 as amended by IMO and the ISO 28000 standards, in which the country is a contracting party, can address piracy, terror attacks, and sea accidents. “Ships will not sink, no lives will be taken, and drugs will not proliferate if ports and ships are well guarded and checked,” the AMOR president stressed. He recalled that sometime in 2013, he proposed to the government during the time of then President Benigno Aquino III to come up with an “International Summit for Anti-Piracy,” but it was turned down for unknown reasons. “That summit is a perfect venue to address the maritime security concerns, but we don’t know what happened,” Elaba said.

The seafarer suggested that it is the right time to accredit a formidable private maritime security group which is allowed under the IMO-ISPS. He said ISPS Code under Paragraph 2.5 clearly stated that “Government can authorize Recognize Security Organization to undertake certain of their responsibilities under the Maritime Security Measures. Delegation of the responsibilities relating to port facility security to RSOs is usually through the designated Authority, while delegation of responsibilities relating

to ship security is usually through the administration.” While these present constraints can be rectified, Elaba noted the government should “exercise a lawful action to save the Philippine Maritime Security compliance.”

Source: business.mb.com.ph, 6 April 2017

Mumbai on high alert: 3 ISIS terrorists could enter through sea

-Asmita Sarkar

Mumbai has been on high alert since Tuesday after the Indian Coast Guard informed the Mumbai Police that three suspected terrorists of the Islamic State group might try to enter the city via sea. The police are checking lodges and low-end hotels where identity proof isn't asked for by the owners, CNN-News 18 said. On March 29, the police had said that there could be an aerial attack on the city. They had banned the use of flying objects like drones and gliders between March 31 and April 29. "The information is (sic) received from the Coast Guard through fax. We are taking all necessary precautions and getting details about the suspects from the information provided to us," India Today quoted a senior Mumbai Police official as saying.

In November 2008, 10 Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants had entered the city and took hostage hundreds of people at the iconic Taj hotel. They had killed 166 people and injured dozens more in the financial capital of India. While nine attackers were killed, one was arrested and hanged later after a death sentence was handed to him.

Source: www.ibtimes.co.in, 05 April 2017

Senators reintroduce bill to address surface, maritime security concerns

-Hailey Desormeaux

Legislation was reintroduced last week to reportedly address deficiencies in the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) efforts to protect rail, transit, highway, and maritime passenger and freight transportation. U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., chairman of the Senate Committee on Science, Commerce, and Transportation, reintroduced S. 763, the Surface Transportation and Maritime Security Act, in conjunction with Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla.; Deb Fischer, R-Neb.; and Cory Booker, D-

N.J. the legislation, which is very similar to the bill introduced late last Congress, “would address concerns raised by independent government watchdog agencies, that TSA is not adequately positioned to identify security risks across different modes of transportation or effectively support federal, state, local and private providers of transportation security,” according to a release issued by Sen. Thune’s office. Highlights of the Surface Transportation and Maritime Security Act are that it would enhance risk-based security planning, provide canine explosive detection teams for Surface Transportation, increase transparency and enhance passenger rail security, Sen. Thune’s office said. TSA previously told Congress it uses only 3 percent of its budget on surface transportation security.

Source: www.americanshipper.com, 07 April 2017

Somali pirates suspected of hijacking Tuvalu-flagged ship - security source

Somali pirates are suspected of hijacking a bulk carrier ship, the head of a maritime security company said on Saturday, in the latest in a string of attacks after years of calm. A security source working at the Puntland Marine Police Force said the vessel was Tuvalu-flagged and is known as OS35. Graeme Gibbon-Brooks, the head of private company Dryad Maritime Intelligence, said industry sources had confirmed the hijacking. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), which coordinates shipping in the Gulf of Aden area, said on its website it had received a notification earlier on Saturday from a vessel in an area in the Gulf of Aden that was under attack and may have been boarded.

"Vessels transiting the area are advised to exercise extreme caution," UKMTO said, without giving more details. The hijacking comes days after pirates hijacked an Indian dhow that was on route to Bossaso from Dubai. Somali pirates hijacked an oil tanker in March, the first such seizure of a vessel since 2012, but released it after a clash with the marine force in Puntland. Shipowners have become less wary of piracy after a long period of calm off the Horn of Africa, experts say, and some have started using a route known as the Socotra Gap, between Somalia and Socotra Island, to save time and costs. The route is considered riskier than others.

At its peak in 2011, pirates launched 237 attacks off the coast of Somalia, according to the International Maritime Bureau, and took hundreds of hostages. Their actions cost

the world economy \$7 billion and earned the pirates some \$160 million in ransoms, according to the bureau.

Source: www.reuters.com, 08 April 2017

Pakistan apprehends 42 Indian fishermen with 7 boats off Gujarat coast

An official of a fishermen's body on Sunday said that the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) has apprehended 42 Indian fishermen and seized seven boats off the Gujarat coast. "The fishermen along with seven boats were captured by the PMSA in two separate incidents from near International Maritime Border Line (IMBL) off Gujarat coast," National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) secretary Manish Lodhari told PTI.

"While 18 fishermen sailing on three boats were captured late last night, 24 more fishermen were captured along with four boats today. In all, seven boats with 42 fishermen have been captured so far since last night," he said. The seized boats belong to Okha and Mangrol, he added. This is the first such incident in April, Lodhari said, adding that in March, 231 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Pakistani authorities and 40 boats were seized. On March 26, the PMSA had apprehended over 100 Indian fishermen and seized 19 boats near IMBL. Last month, the Indian Coast Guard had captured nine Pakistani fishermen along with a fishing boat found sailing in the Indian water.

Source: www.newsnation.in, 10 April 2017

Japan, Sri Lanka Prime Ministers vow further cooperation on Maritime Security

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Sri Lankan counterpart Ranil Wickremesinghe agreed Wednesday to further advance their cooperation in maritime security. According to a joint statement released after their talks in Tokyo, the leaders emphasized the "special importance of maintaining a maritime order based on the rule of law, including the freedom of navigation and overflight and unobstructed trade." The agreement reflects Sri Lanka's location near shipping routes on which Japan relies for

its oil imports from the Middle East, as well as Japan's concerns over China's expansionary activities in the Indian Ocean and the East and South China seas. "Without a free and open Indian Ocean, there cannot be real prosperity in the region," Abe said at a joint press event after the talks. "This is why it is essential for Sri Lanka to achieve sustainable growth as a hub, and develop ports that are open to everyone, something Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and I completely agreed on today."

The Sri Lankan leader expressed his support for Abe's approach, saying there "should not be any imbalances in the Indian Ocean." On the South China Sea, the leaders agreed on "the importance of the freedom of navigation and overflight, self-restraint, non-militarization and the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea." That language effectively cautions China over its overlapping territorial claims with neighbors and offshore development efforts. The current Sri Lankan government, which came to power in January 2015, has taken a foreign policy stance seeking to balance the country's relationships with China and other countries in the region, in contrast with the previous administration's strong alignment with Beijing.

Abe announced at the meeting Japan's provision of 45 billion yen (\$410 million) in yen loans for infrastructure projects and 1 billion yen in grant aid to develop the port of Trincomalee in Sri Lanka's northeast.

Source: asia.nikkei.com, 13 April 2017

No New Nuclear Submarines for the Indian Navy

While the Indian Navy is in need of nuclear submarines to bolster its strength underwater and to replace its ailing fleet, no builders have shown interest in the project so far. The Union Government had previously announced that six nuclear ones would be built after a clearance given by the Cabinet committee on security.

The project that was estimated to cost Rs 50,000 crore would've provided a much-needed boost to the shipyard. The submarines were to be designed by the Directorate of Naval Design and touted to be built at Hindustan Shipyard. But Hindustan Shipyard has clearly stated that it will not be building them in its yard. "*We will not build any nuclear submarine for the Indian Navy,*" stated the Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Shipyard Limited, retired Rear Admiral LV Sharatbabu.

He has reportedly refused to elaborate further on the topic and even Reliance Defence and Engineering hasn't come forward to build them at their shipyard in Rambilli village in Visakhapatnam district. The company has gone back on the MoU it signed with the state government in the city during the CII Partnership Summit in 2016. They had signed a MoU stating and agreeing to build nuclear submarines and much-needed aircraft carriers for the Indian Navy in collaboration with Russian companies. Even though they yet to even come forward for taking up the project, the state government has already issued a GO for the allotment of land citing the MoU as the reason.

The Indian Navy has 13 conventional submarines and two nuclear submarines – INS Chakra taken on a lease from Russia in 2012 and INS Arihant that was decommissioned quietly in October last year – in its kitty. Reportedly, half of the conventional ones are aged and ready for a medium refit. So, the Indian Navy is in need for more submarines for countering the presence of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean.

In the last few years, Chinese submarines have come close to Indian water six times.

Source: www.yovizag.com, 06 April 2017

Chinese Navy Commissions New Warship for Anti-Submarine Warfare Operations in South China Sea

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has commissioned a new warship to its South Sea Fleet for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations in the disputed South China Sea. A new Type 056/056A Jiangdao-class corvette, named Liupanshui, was commissioned at Yulin naval base in the port city of Sanya on Hainan Island on March 31, China Military Online reports Friday. The PLAN reportedly aims for a fleet of up to 60 Type 056/056A Jiangdao-class corvettes — designated light missile frigates by the PLAN — with one new ship launched ever six weeks. The PLAN currently operates a fleet of 30 Type 056/056A Jiangdao-class corvettes.

The 1,500-ton ASW variant of the corvette is equipped with towed and variable depth sonars, in addition to two 324-millimeter triple torpedo launchers, four YJ-83 anti-ship missiles (two launchers with two missiles each) and a 76-millimeter main gun. The ASW variant's flight deck also allows operation of a Harbin Z-9 military helicopter, specifically equipped for ASW missions.

Source: www.defenseworld.net, 08 April 2017

Indian Navy Set to Patrol Malacca Straits Gateway to South China Sea

India has been asked to join the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) framework, and will commence naval operations to patrol the area, which acts as an oceanic gateway to and from the South China Sea, and also links the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. From an economic and strategic perspective, the Malacca Straits is one of the most important shipping lanes in the world. It serves as the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and links major Asian economies such as India, China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

In 2006, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand formed the MSP to provide maritime security to the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. The MSP comprises of the Malacca Straits Sea Patrol (MSSP), the "Eyes-in-the-Sky" (EiS) Combined Maritime Air Patrols, as well as the Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG). The Straits of Malacca is one of eight major oil chokepoints throughout the world, and the MSP was initiated in the wake of an upsurge in pirate attacks on ships in the region in the early 2000s. About 80 percent of China's crude and oil imports from the Middle East and Africa passes through these straits.

Former Indian Navy Commander Abhijit Singh is quoted stating, “If India does manage to join the MSP, it will be a very significant development. The four countries involved in patrolling the Malacca Straits have acute sensitivities about each other’s maritime activities closer to their own territorial waters. They are also inherently wary of extra-regional contributions to the patrolling effort. Part of the problem is that three of the four states have competing territorial claims in littorals adjoining the Malacca Straits. Now, as armed robbery and militancy in Southeast Asia are on the rise, there is a clamor for outside assistance in the maritime security effort. But India must be aware that joint maritime operations in the region will come with its share of challenges.”

The Straits of Malacca are considered a weak point in China’s maritime strategy, and India wants to assert itself more with such a strategic move as becoming part of the MSP. Once India is authorized to patrol the Malacca Straits, it will have access to real-time data of commercial ships and naval platforms.

The move is certain to upset China, whose own occupation and development of various disputed reefs around the South China Sea has caused regional criticism. India’s involvement in the MSP will essentially limit the extent of any further Chinese expansion and could be used to blockade supplies to China in the event of a conflict. India has a powerful navy, including nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers. The move also signals that India is ready to take on greater responsibilities in acting as a counterweight to the perceived Chinese naval might. This comes as the United States looks to withdraw from the region, and puts India in a possible position of influence, especially with respect to how some of the ASEAN nations can counter perceived territorial threats from Beijing.

Source: www.india-briefing.com, 12 April 2017

Navy Changes New Frigate Design - Adding Stepped-Up Weapons for "Blue Water" Combat

-Kris Osborn

The Navy plans to revise its new Frigate, to be operational by 2023. The new ship be armed with a wide range of new weapons to include long-range missiles. electronic warfare ability and anti-submarine technology. The Navy is exploring the possibility of adding Local Air Defenses, new weapons and enhanced protection technology to its

requirements for a new Frigate slated to emerge in the early 2020s. While the new Frigate was conceived of as a more survivable adaptation of the Littoral Combat Ship, new analysis is no longer restricted to the idea of loosely basing the "hull design" upon the LCS. Furthermore, new requirements analysis underway by a Navy Frigate Requirements Evaluation Team is examining the feasibility of making the ship even more lethal and survivable than what previous plans called for. "As a result of the Navy's 2016 Force Structure Assessment, increased emphasis on Distributed Maritime Operations, and increasingly complex threats in the global maritime environment, the Navy continues to assess the capabilities required to ensure the Frigate outpaces future threats," Alan Baribeau, spokesman for Naval Sea Systems Command, told Scout Warrior. "The Navy is pursuing an update to the analysis performed by the 2014 Small Surface Combatant Task Force to reassess Frigate requirements and capabilities."

This new analysis, which will be briefed to Congress and Pentagon leadership later this Spring, may lead to a larger, more reinforced hull able to better withstand enemy attacks. Existing plans for the Frigate have called for "space armor" configurations, a method of segmenting and strengthening ship armor in specified segments to enable the ship to continue operations in the event that one area is damaged by enemy attack. While Navy officials did not specify details of new technologies now under consideration, they did say the new examination could lead to a different kind of hull design, as well as new offensive and defensive weapons. Stronger air defenses and enhanced survivability initiatives open the door to a wide range of offensive and defensive weaponry, such as emerging low-cost laser weapons able to incinerate incoming enemy attacks or launch offensive strikes.

This revised assessment of the Frigate transpires as the Navy is finalizing the weapons, sensors and technologies it plans to engineer into its new Frigate - a more survivable and lethal Littoral Combat Ship variant designed to perform anti-submarine and surface warfare functions at the same time, service officials said.

The Navy already plans for the new Frigate be integrated with anti-submarine surface warfare technologies including sonar, an over-the-horizon missile and surface-to-surface weapons such as a 30mm gun and closer-in missiles such as the HELLFIRE. Some of the over-the-horizon missiles now being considered by the Navy include the Naval Strike Missile by Kongsberg-Raytheon, a Harpoon or the Long-Range Anti-Ship missile (LRASM) made by Lockheed and the Pentagon's research arm, DARPA. It is not yet known whether the Frigate will be engineered with Vertical Launch Systems (VLS) to fire larger, longer-range missiles such as a Tomahawk or Standard Missile 6, among others. However, that could be a possibility depending upon emerging Navy

requirements for weapons on the ship, developers have said. It is certainly conceivable that these kinds of considerations could inform ongoing deliberations. The LCS hull is not engineered to accommodate VLS. However, should a different hull form be considered for the Frigate, the prospect of VLS or other kinds of ship-launched weapons could emerge.

Alongside ongoing efforts to specify weapons for the emerging Navy Frigate, the service is also hoping to integrate additional weaponry on the LCS itself. As a result, weapons development for both the new Navy Frigate and existing LCS are distinct, yet also interwoven initiatives. Along these lines, Baribeau added that while the design for the Frigate matures, "the Navy remains firmly committed to execution of the current LCS program of record, in order to maintain the viability of both shipyards, maximize competition for future ship contracts, and deliver critically needed capability to the Fleet as quickly as possible."

Some of the weapons such as the Kongsberg-Raytheon Naval Strike Missile, however, may still be configured for both Frigate and LCS platforms.

Distributed Lethality

Engineering a more up-gunned, lethal and survivable Frigate than previously planned is unambiguously consistent with the Navy's often articulated "distributed lethality" strategy. This concept, underway for a year or two now, involves numerous initiatives to better arm its fleet with offensive and defensive weapons, maintain a technological advantage over adversaries such as the fast-growing Russian and Chinese navies, and strengthen its "blue water" combat abilities against potential near-peer rivals, among other things.

Arming the Littoral Combat Ship, and its more survivable and lethal variant, the Frigate, is designed to better equip the LCS for shallow and open water combat against a wider range of potential adversaries, such as enemy surface ships, drones, helicopters, small boats and maneuvering attack craft, at beyond-the-horizon ranges. The LCS is already equipped with 30mm and 57mm guns to destroy closer-in enemy targets such as swarms of small boats and the Navy is also engineering a maritime variant of the HELLFIRE Missile aboard the ship to destroy approaching enemy targets from "within the horizon." While the Navy is, perhaps more than ever, still committed to freedom of navigation and working to ensure safe passage in strategic areas in international waterways, the new strategy is aimed at ensuring the entire fleet is engineered with the sensors, computer technology, radar, communications gear and weapons systems to over-match any potential near-peer competitor such as Russia or

China. The strategy seeks to ensure the U.S. Navy retains its technological advantage amidst a fast-changing global technological landscape.

Part of the rationale to move back toward open or “blue water” combat capability against near peer competitors emphasized during the Cold War. While the strategic and tactical capability never disappeared, it was emphasized less during the last 10-plus years of ground wars wherein the Navy focused on counter-terrorism, counter-piracy and things like Visit Board Search and Seizure. These missions are, of course, still important, however the Navy seeks to substantially increase its offensive “lethality” in order to deter or be effective against emerging high-tech adversaries.

Having longer-range or over-the-horizon ship and air-launched weapons is also quite relevant to the “distributed” portion of the strategy which calls for the fleet to have an ability to disperse as needed. Having an ability to spread out and conduct disaggregated operations makes Navy forces less vulnerable to enemy firepower while. At the same time, having long-range precision-strike capability will enable the Navy to hold potential enemies at risk or attack if needed while retaining a safer stand-off distance from incoming enemy fire.

Navy Frigate - 2023

The Frigate is slated for delivery to the Navy by 2023; the platform is an outgrowth of the Navy’s Littoral Combat Ship effort which originally planned to build 52 shallow-water multi-mission ships equipped with interchangeable groups of technologies called “mission packages” for mine countermeasures, anti-submarine technologies and surface warfare systems.

However, lawmakers, analysts and some members of the Navy argued years ago that the LCS was not “survivable” enough. Although the LCS speed of 40-knots is by itself regarded as a survivability-enhancing attribute, critics argued the ship would be far too vulnerable to enemy attack. The concern, ultimately echoed by then Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, was that the ship did not have enough weapons, armor fortifications and what’s called “blue water” combat capability to challenge near-peer adversaries. “LCS as designed is a focused mission ship. It can do one specific mission at a time and the combat capability to do that mission is provided by the mission packages,” he added. “We are going to take a modified LCS and take that as the baseline and then add changes or modifications to improve its lethality and survivability.” The new ship will also have seven 11-meter Rigid Inflatable Boats for short combat or expeditionary missions such as visiting, searching and boarding other ships.

At the same time the anti-submarine technologies planned for the ship include a multi-function towed array sonar, variable depth sonar to detect submarines and sensors combined with a submarine hunting MH-60R helicopter. While the LCS, which is currently in service with the Navy, is credited for its speed, maneuverability and shallow draft which enables it to access shallow water ports larger ships are unable to reach. The LCS ships in service this far have performed quite well, Navy officials explained. The original initiative to engineer a more survivable and lethal LCS variant emerged out of a multi-month effort directed by Secretary Hagel and the formation of an entity called the Small Surface Combatant Task Force. There was a chorus of concern from Pentagon leaders, members of Congress, analysts and some Navy officials about whether the existing LCS will be "survivable" enough to withstand and prevail in large-scale surface combat. Could the ship continue to function if struck by enemy fire? Does it have the needed long-range offensive strike capability?

While very few question the utility or overall benefit of having the LCS in the Navy fleet, the idea of a stronger, more weaponized and fortified Frigate variant seems to address these concern in the minds of many. This new analysis appears to be taking this effort even further.

Several years ago, the Secretary of Defense directed the Navy to stop building LCS at 32 ship and do a study or come up with alternatives to see what the remaining 20 need to be to meet the small surface combatant requirement. The emerging Frigate ship will also be equipped with next-generation and stronger electronic warfare technologies far greater than the existing LCS and instead comparable to current Navy Cruisers and Destroyers, Navy developers have said.

In addition, the ship will be configured in what's called a "modular" fashion, meaning it will be engineered to accept and integrate new technologies and weapons as they emerge such as lasers and rail guns. It certainly seems realistic that a new, even more survivable Frigate might be engineered with an additional capacity for on-board electrical power such that it can accommodate stronger laser weapons as they become available. The Frigate is being engineered to meet anti-submarine and surface warfare missions at the same time.

Navy Missiles & Weapons Being Considered

Harpoon

The Littoral combat ship USS Coronado has successfully executed live-fire over-the-horizon missile tests using a Harpoon Block IC missile. Navy officials told Scout

Warrior that part of the rationale for the live-fire Harpoon exercise was to assess the ability of the LCS to withstand a deck-firing of the weapon. Harpoon is an all-weather, over-the-horizon weapon designed to execute anti-ship missions against a range of surface targets. It can be launched from surface ships, submarines and aircraft and is currently used on 50 U.S. Navy ships: 22 cruisers, 21 Flight I destroyers and seven Flight II destroyers, Navy statements said.

The Boeing-built Harpoon reaches high subsonic speeds and is engineered to reach over-the-horizon ranges of 67 nautical miles, Navy information says. It has a 3-foot wingspan and weighs roughly 1,500 pounds. The air-launched weapon is 12-feet long and the ship and submarine launched Harpoon is 15-feet long; it uses Teledyne Turbojet solid propellant booster for surface and submarine launch, Navy information specifies. The Harpoon generates 600 pounds of thrust and fires with a sea-skimming mode to better avoid enemy ship radar detection. Its warhead uses both penetration and high-explosive blast technology.

Naval Strike Missile

The Naval Strike Missile, which has been assessed aboard the USS Freedom LCS, is built to find and destroy enemy ships at distances up to 100 nautical miles, service officials said. The Naval Strike Missile weapon is developed by a Norwegian-headquartered firm called Kongsberg; it is currently used on Norwegian frigates and missile torpedo boats, company officials said.

In 2014, NSM was successfully test fired from the flight deck of the USS CORONADO (LCS 4) at the Pt. Mugu Range Facility, California, demonstrating a surface-to-surface weapon capability, the Navy official explained. First deployed by the Norwegian Navy in 2012, the missile is engineered to identify ships by ship class, Kongsberg developers said. The NSM is fired from a deck-mounted launcher. The weapon uses an infrared imaging seeker, identify targets, has a high degree of maneuverability and flies close to the water in “sea-skim” mode to avoid ship defenses. The NSM was designed from the onset to have a maneuverability sufficient to defeat ships with advanced targets; the missile’s rapid radical maneuvers are built into the weapon in order to defeat what’s called “terminal defense systems.” Developers say one of the distinguishing features of the missile is its ability to avoid terminal defense systems based on a passive signature, low-observable technologies and maneuverability; it was specifically designed to attack heavily defended targets, For instance, the NSM is engineered to defeat ship defense weapons such as the Close-In-Weapons System, or CIWS – a ship-base defensive fire “area weapon” designed to fire large numbers of projectiles able intercept, hit or destroy approaching enemy fire. CIWS is intended to defend ships from enemy fire as

it approaches closer to its target, which is when the NSM's rapid maneuverability would help it avoid being hit and proceed to strike its target.

The NSM is also engineered with a "stealthy" configuration to avoid detection from ship detection systems and uses its sea-skimming mode to fly closer to the surface than any other missile in existence. The subsonic missile was designed to attack advanced CIWS systems by banking and turning with a horizontally stabilized seeker, Kongsberg officials said. Raytheon and Kongsberg signed a teaming agreement to identify ways we can reduce the cost of the missile by leveraging Raytheon's supplier base and supplier management. Kongsberg is working with Raytheon to establish NSM production facilities in the U.S., Raytheon officials said. Kongsberg is also working on a NSM follow-on missile engineered with an RF (radio frequency) sensor that can help the weapon find and destroy targets. The new missile is being built to integrate into the internal weapons bay of Norway's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter as well.

Kongsberg and Raytheon are submitting the missile for consideration for the Navy's long-range beyond-the-horizon offensive missile requirement for its LCS. The two firms are pitching the missile as a weapon which is already developed and operational – therefore it presents an option for the Navy that will not require additional time and extensive development. Lockheed Martin is developing a new deck-mounted launcher for the emerging Long Range Anti-Ship Missile engineered to semi-autonomously track and destroy enemy targets at long ranges from both aircraft and surface ships. The weapon, called the LRASM, is a collaborative effort between Lockheed, the Office of Naval Research and the Defense Advanced Project Research Agency, or DARPA.

While this emerging weapon is earlier in the developmental process than both the Harpoon and the NSM, it could provide an even more capable, high-tech ability to the LCS or Frigate. However, industry sources indicate that the LRASM is expected to be much more expensive than the other alternatives, and a LRASM-specific deck-mounted launcher for the LCS would need to be operational before the weapon could successfully fire from the ship. Lockheed Martin is developing a new deck-mounted launcher for the emerging Long Range Anti-Ship Missile engineered to semi-autonomously track and destroy enemy targets at long ranges from both aircraft and surface ships.

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much more expensive than the other alternatives, and a LRASM-specific deck-mounted launcher for the LCS would need to be operational before the weapon could successfully fire from the ship.

The adaptation of the surface-launcher weapon, which could be operational by the mid-2020s, would use the same missile that fires from a Mk 41 Vertical Launch System and capitalize upon some existing Harpoon-launching technology, Lockheed developers told Scout Warrior. The LRASM, which is 168-inches long and 2,500 pounds, is currently configured to fire from an Air Force B-1B bomber and Navy F-18 carrier-launched fighter. The current plan is to have the weapon operational on board an Air Force B-1B bomber by 2018 and a Navy F-18 by 2019, Navy statements have said. With a range of at least 200 nautical miles, LRASM is designed to use next-generation guidance technology to help track and eliminate targets such as enemy ships, shallow submarines, drones, aircraft and land-based targets. "The objective is to give Sailors the ability to strike high-value targets from longer ranges while avoiding counter fire. The program will use autonomous guidance to find targets, reducing reliance on networking, GPS and other assets that could be compromised by enemy electronic weapons," a Navy statement said.

The missile has also been test fired from a Navy ship-firing technology called Vertical Launch Systems currently on both cruisers and destroyers – as a way to provide long range surface-to-surface and surface-to-air offensive firepower.

Navy officials told Scout Warrior that the service is making progress with an acquisition program for the air-launched variant of LRASM and is also working on a ship-launched version of the anti-ship missile.

High-Tech Semi-Autonomous Missile

Along with advances in electronic warfare, cyber-security and communications, LRASM is design to bring semi-autonomous targeting capability to a degree that does not yet exist. As a result, some of its guidance and seeker technology is secret, developers have said. Once operational, LRASM will give Navy ships a more a short and long-range missile with an advanced targeting and guidance system able to partially guide its way to enemy targets and achieve pinpoint strikes in open or shallow water. LRASM employs a multi-mode sensor, weapon data link and an enhanced digital anti-jam global positioning system to detect and destroy specific targets within a group of ships, Lockheed officials said.

LRASM is engineered with all-weather capability and a multi-modal seeker designed to discern targets, Lockheed officials said. The multi-mode sensor, weapon data link and an enhanced digital anti-jam global positioning system can detect and destroy specific targets within a group of ships, Lockheed officials said. LRASM is armed with a proven 1,000-pound penetrator and blast-fragmentation warhead, Lockheed officials said.

Source: www.scout.com, 13 April 2017

US Navy's Latest F-35-Carrying Warship Shoots Down Drone in Missile Drill

The lead vessel of the U.S. Navy's newest class of amphibious assault ships, the USS America, completed a live-fire exercise by successfully destroying an unnamed aerial vehicle (UAV) using the ship's self-defense Rolling Airframe Missile (RAM) system, according to a U.S. Navy press release. The exercise took place off the California coast in early April. RAM is a supersonic, lightweight, quick-reaction, fire-and-forget weapon system designed to defend against anti-ship missiles and other incoming aerial threats. With a maximum range of 5.6 miles, the RAM (so named because the missile spins around its long axis), is launched from Mk 144 Guided Missile Launcher (GML) of the Mk 49 Guided Missile Launching System (GMLS), which holds 21 missiles. The RAM live-fire exercise was part of so-called Amphibious Squadron/Marine Expeditionary Unit Integration operations to prepare the 1,000 sailors and 1,600 Marines currently on board the ship for the USS America's maiden deployment later in the year. "The purpose of this exercise was to test the capabilities of the combat systems on board and to ensure they were fully operational," according to a sailor currently serving aboard the America, designated Landing Helicopter Assault (LHA) 6. "The exercise consisted of targeting our RAM to a drone strategically placed in the Pacific Ocean." America-class ships are aircraft carriers in all but name, as I explained in a previous piece:

America-class amphibious assault ships are 844 feet (257 meters) long with a 106-foot (32 meters) beam and weigh approximately 44,000 tons. The lead ship of the class is armed with 12 defensive weapons systems including two rolling aircraft missile RIM-116 Mk 49 I launchers; two Raytheon 20mm Phalanx CIWS mounts; and seven twin .50 cal. machine guns. Next to a maximum crew of 1,204 and 1,800 Marines (plus equipment), the USS America can accommodate up to nine F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter, four AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters, four CH-53E Super Stallion

helicopters, 12 MV-22 Ospreys, and two MH-60S Search and Rescue helicopters. The large number of modern military aircraft, provides the ship with firepower on par with some medium-sized aircraft carriers of other navies. The U.S. Navy also refers to the warship as an “aviation centric amphibious assault ship.” The core of the America-class’ strike capability will be the F-35B, which is slated to replace three U.S. Marine Corps aircraft: the AV-8B Harrier, F/A-18 Hornet, and the EA-6B Prowler. The F-35B is the U.S. Marine Corps variant capable of vertical or short takeoffs and vertical landings without requiring a catapult launcher. The U.S. Navy plans to commission 11 America-class ships in the coming years as it slowly phases out the older Tarawa-class of amphibious assault ships.

Source: thediplomat.com, 12 April 2017

Japan plans joint drills with US navy in show of force against North Korea

-Samhati Bhattacharjya

Japan has teamed up with the US Navy and plans to hold joint drills near the Korean peninsula in a military show of force against North Korean threats, reports said on Wednesday. According to two sources, the drills will involve helicopter landings by Japan's Maritime Self Defence Force on each other's ships as well as communication exercises. A US naval strike force that was led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson left Singapore for the peninsula last Saturday, and is expected to reach the Korean peninsula around April 25. The 100,000 ton Nimitz-class vessel is powered by two nuclear reactors and carries almost 100 aircraft.

"Japan wants to dispatch several destroyers as the Carl Vinson enters the East China Sea," one of the sources told Reuters. The Foreign Ministry of Japan has also issued a travel notice for all Japanese nationals travelling to or residing in South Korea to pay attention to the situation in the Korean peninsula. However, it stressed that the current situation "does not immediately affect the safety of Japanese". Lee Duk Haeng, Unification Ministry spokesman of South Korea, said there is no need to worry about security in the Korean peninsula, and that Seoul is working with other governments to manage the tensions. North Korea has said that the US deployment was "reckless" and it was "ready for war". Hwang Pyong So, the military chief said the country is prepared to "mount a pre-emptive nuclear attack on South Korea and the United States in order to wipe them out without traces if they attempt to launch a war of aggression".

On Tuesday, US Defence Secretary James Mattis said of the deployment: "There's not a specific demand signal or specific reason we're sending her up there." "She's stationed in the Western Pacific for a reason. She operates freely up and down the Pacific and she's on her way up there because that's where we thought it was most prudent to have her at this time," Mattis added. Initially, US Navy's Carl Vinson carrier strike group was scheduled to make port calls in Australia. Mattis said: "I believe she was originally headed in one direction for an exercise and we cancelled our role in that exercise." The Straits Times quotes Defence expert Tosh Minohara of Kobe University as saying that it was "about time" for joint drills between the Japan and US navies. "US and Japan need more operational-level training, and so this is to be welcomed in light of the current security environment," he said.

Meanwhile, this recent display of US-Japan naval power close to China could upset Beijing, which is locked in a territorial dispute with Tokyo in the region over a group of uninhabited islets close to Taiwan in the East China Sea known as the Senkakus or Diaoyu islands. The Japanese Coast Guard officials said four Chinese patrol ships temporarily entered Japanese waters near the islands on Monday. According to reports, this was the ninth such incursion this year. Dr. Minohara said that China needs to quickly realise that the joint drills or any other action taken by the US-Japan-South Korea security triangle is "not directed at them but is a direct consequence of them not acting more forcefully towards North Korea". China is regarded as a major economic benefactor and political ally to the impoverished North Korea, although it has banned all imports of coal from the country until the end of the year.

All these latest developments have been the outcome of the rising tension that was created after the North's ballistic missile launch on Wednesday. North Korea is on a quest to develop a long-range missile that will be capable of hitting the US mainland with a nuclear warhead. Till now it has staged five nuclear tests, two of which were tested last year. US President Donald Trump, who has said his country is ready to go it alone against North Korea, said on Twitter that Pyongyang was "looking for trouble" and the US would "solve the problem" with or without Beijing's help.

Source: www.ibtimes.sg, 12 April 2017

10 things you should know about China's first home-built Aircraft Carrier

-Minnie Chan

China's first domestically built aircraft carrier, the Type 001A, is near the final stages of construction. Military sources have suggested that the ship may be launched as early as April 23, the anniversary of the foundation of the PLA Navy. Here are 10 key questions answered about the vessel.

How big is it?

The Type 001A weighs about 70,000 tonnes, is 315 metres long, 75 metres wide and has a cruising speed of 31 knots.

What's the significance of a ceremonial ship launching for the carrier?

The ceremony will transfer the carrier's hull from dry dock into the water. It is a naval tradition dating back thousands of years as a ship first enters the sea and marks the first step in the vessel's formal entrance into the fleet.

Will any dignitaries attend the ceremony?

Media reports and sources close to the navy have said President Xi Jinping, who also chairs the powerful Central Military Commission, may attend the event.

How do we know the Type 001A is near launching?

China's defence ministry confirmed last month that the carrier had entered its final stage of construction. The giant ship, which is now at the Dalian Shipyard, has also been painted in PLA navy grey, meaning it is almost ready for launch, based on previous experience with other vessels.

Why hold the launch ceremony on the anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Navy?

The launch also comes amid a huge expansion in China's navy. The military is undergoing a massive overhaul to make it a more nimble and efficient fighting force and the navy will play an increasingly important role. The size of the marine corps, for

example, will be increased from about 20,000 to 100,000, military sources have told the *South China Morning Post*.

Why is the Type 001A important to the navy?

China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, was bought from Ukraine in 1998. This will be the nation's first domestically-built carrier. China will become the seventh country with the capability to build its own carriers aircraft after the US, Russia, Britain, France, Italy and Spain.

Will the Type 001A be given a name like its sister ship, the Liaoning?

Yes, the Type 001A will given a name on its launch day. Chinese media have speculated that it may be called "the Shandong" because it will be docked at the Qingdao carrier base in Shandong province. The Liaoning was named after the carrier was refurbished in Dalian in Liaoning province.

What are the key differences between the Liaoning and the Type 001A?

The Type 001A looks similar to the Liaoning, but military experts said its layout, equipment and overall operational concept were advanced, including a bigger hangar to carry more J-15 fighter jets and more space on deck for helicopters and other aircraft.

Why is its home port Qingdao?

It's a geographic consideration as all new ships may need further work and maintenance. Qingdao carrier base is close to the shipyard of the Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Company, which refurbished the Liaoning and built the Type 001A.

When will the Type 001A be put in full service?

It will take a couple of years for the newest carrier to enter full service after its launch, including two to three years to train carrier-based pilots and training with other ships to form a carrier group. Military experts have suggested the carrier will fully join the PLA Navy in about 2020.

Source: www.scmp.com, 12 April 2017

TU-142M arrives at Vizag, to be converted into museum

TU-142M, one of the long-range Maritime Patrol aircraft of the Indian Navy which was decommissioned after 29 years of service, arrived here on Saturday, to be converted into a museum. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu received the aircraft at INS Dega. He presented bouquets to the five-member crew as the aircraft landed for the final time. Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, Vice Admiral HCS Bisht and other officials attended the ceremony.

Earlier, the aircraft took off from INS Rajali, the air station of the Indian Navy at Arakkonam, Tamil Nadu. The TU-142M aircraft is the heaviest, fastest and highest flying Turbo prop in the world which had been the mainstay of long range maritime reconnaissance and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Operations of the Indian Navy for close to three decades.

Authorities were making preparation to convert the aircraft into a museum on the lines of Kursura Submarine Museum on the Beach Road here. It is expected to be ready on one acre of land on Beach Road by June. The entire project is expected to cost Rs 10 crore. Officials said the technical evaluation of tenders by five companies for converting the aircraft into a museum was completed and financial bid would be opened soon. The aircraft would be dismantled at INS Dega and shifted to the site for assembling and converting it into a museum. The district authorities have finalised the tender for dismantling and shifting the aircraft.

Source: www.daijiworld.com, 08 April 2017



Congestion on Port road eliminated: Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust

The Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) has claimed to have eliminated traffic congestion on roads leading to its three terminals. A source of constant frustration for drivers of trucks delivering cargo to the terminals, who have had to spend hours in queues waiting for their documents to be verified by port officers, the JNPT administration has said a number of measures have resulted in zero traffic congestion in the past nine months. Massive traffic jams and days-long waiting period had resulted in truck drivers turning violent in November 2015, attacking port officers and policemen, and ransacking buildings.

Identifying long queues as a focus area, JNPT chairman Anil Diggikar said the submission of hard copies of documents at the entry gate has been stopped. “We have introduced e-forms and RFID tags, so now truck drivers submit their forms online. Each truck saves at least five minutes,” he said. The port has also created a traffic management team to regulate traffic, as the local police were not able to do it on their own. The port also introduced what is called the inter-terminal movement, allowing trucks to return to processing areas without having to travel 7.5 km on the port road to exit. Diggikar said this has led to a 8 per cent drop in congestion on the road and fuel savings of Rs 125 crore. On Thursday, JNPT also published its figures for financial year 2016-17, recording a marginal increase in its operating income.

Its income was Rs 1,677.90 crore in the just-concluded year, compared to Rs 1,665.10 crore in the previous year. Owing to an increase in fuel prices, its expenditure rose to Rs 788.49 crore, up 13 per cent from Rs 693.12 crore in 2015-16, said Neeraj Bansal, Deputy Chairman, JNPT. In 2016-17, the port handled 4.50 million tonne equivalent units (TEUs) of container traffic, the highest since its inception. The port’s own cargo terminal, the JNPCT, also logged a significant rise in cargo traffic the previous year, handling 1.53 million TEUs over 1.43 million TEUs in 2015-16.

Bansal said the first phase of the port’s fourth terminal, which is being built in partnership with the Port of Singapore Authority, would be completed by December 2017, while the second phase is expected to be completed by 2023.

Each phase will increase the length of the berth by one km and is expected to add 2.4 million TEUs to the port's capacity.

Source: indianexpress.com, 07 April 2017

Growth at public Indian Ports slows despite productivity gains

The pace of growth at public or major Indian ports slowed in fiscal 2016 and 2017 despite productivity gains at ports nationwide and another record-setting year at the country's busiest gateway of Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust. Traffic at major ports, which account for 70 percent of India's container trade, increased 3 percent year-over-year to 8.45 million 20-foot-equivalent units (TEUs) compared with growth of 4 percent in the previous fiscal year, according to an analysis of provisional port statistics by JOC.com.

JNPT and its 4.5 million TEUs accounted for nearly 55 percent of volumes moving through Indian ports, while traffic at Chennai, the second-busiest major port was relatively flat year-over-year, at 1.5 million TEUs due to truck bottlenecks and productivity issues that drove some major carriers to nearby private terminals such as Kattupalli and Krishnapatnam. JNPT and Chennai together load more than 70 percent of India's containerized freight moving through major ports.

Fiscal 2016 to 2017 volumes at other public container ports were as follows: Kolkata, up 16.4 percent from 663,000 TEUs to 772,000 TEUs; Tuticorin, or V.O. Chidambaranar, up 5 percent from 612,000 TEUs to 642,000 TEUs; and Visakhapatnam, up 25 percent from 293,000 TEUs to 367,000 TEUs, according to the collected data. Fast-growing DP World-operated International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), also known as Vallarpadam Terminal, increased annual volume 17.2 percent year-over-year to 491,000 TEUs from 419,000 TEUs previously. "In fiscal year 2016 to 2017, we at DP World Cochin built a robust hinterland network by venturing into new geographies to create an ecosystem valuable to the trade," ICTT officials told JOC.com. "In the coming year, we aim to further amplify our network to facilitate ease of doing business."

Encouraged by positive reports on gate automation at JNPT, the government of India is aggressively pushing the introduction of radio-frequency identification technology (RFID)-enabled gate procedures elsewhere as part of a larger scheme to shore up port

productivity and cut logistics costs. The Ministry of Shipping in an update last week said the ports of Paradip, Cochin, Mormugao, and Kandla already have moved onto RFID gate systems while others are either in the final stages of carrying out trial runs or awarding contracts. “Implementation of RFID system will eliminate manual checking of documents at port gates and real time tracking of movement of vehicles, men and materials,” the ministry said. “This would reduce congestion and also cost of operations at ports.”

DP World Nhava Sheva has taken a lead over the rest of the pack by rolling out an optical character recognition (OCR) technology-based gate processing system, which reportedly would allow its terminals at JNPT to reduce average gate-in time to less than 60 seconds from five minutes previously. To further aid productivity, New Delhi is investing heavily in new berths, last-mile rail projects, dredging, equipment upgrades, mechanization, and automation of cargo processes at major ports as part of its Sagar Mala program. Above all, the government is working to transform these public ports into independent companies with greater autonomy, especially pricing power, through promulgation of new legislation despite labor protests.

Such efforts will be essential to handle the double-digit growth in container traffic some, such as Maersk Line, expect in the coming year.

Source: www.joc.com, 04 April 2017

Global Shipping Fleet Braces for Chaos of \$60 Billion Fuel Shock

Little more than 2 1/2 years from now, the global fleet of merchant ships will have to reduce drastically how much sulfur their engines belch into the atmosphere. While that will do good things -- like diminishing the threat of acid rain and helping asthma sufferers -- there's a \$60 billion sting in the tail. That's how much more seaborne vessels may be forced to spend each year on higher-quality fuel to comply with new emission rules that start in 2020, consultant Wood Mackenzie Ltd. estimates. For an industry that hauls everything from oil to steel to coal, higher operating costs will compound the financial strain on cash-strapped ship owners, whose vessels earn an average of 70 percent less than they did just before the 2008-09 recession.

The consequences may reach beyond the 90,000-ship merchant fleet, which handles about 90 percent of global trade. Possible confusion over which carriers comply with

the new rules could lead to some vessels being barred from making deliveries, which would disrupt shipments, according to BIMCO, a group representing ship owners and operators in about 130 countries. Oil refiners still don't have enough capacity to supply all the fuel that would be needed, and few vessels have embarked on costly retrofits. "There will be an absolute chaos," said Lars Robert Pedersen, the deputy secretary general of Denmark-based BIMCO. "We are talking about 2.5 million to 4 million barrels a day of fuel oil to basically shift into a different product." Merchant ships around the world are required to cut the amount of sulfur emitted under rules approved in October by the International Maritime Organization, a UN agency that sets industry standards for safety, security and the environment. As well as contributing to acid rain, sulfur, combined with oxygen, can form fine sulfate particles that can be inhaled by humans and may cause asthma and bronchitis, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. There are two main ways to comply: vessel engines are fitted with scrubbers that would eliminate the pollutant, or oil refiners will have to make lower-emission fuels. The limit on sulfur content will drop to 0.5 percent from 3.5 percent.

So far, neither the refining industry nor shipping is doing anywhere near enough for owners to achieve compliance in 2020, according Iain Mowat, a senior analyst at Wood Mackenzie. "Ship owners are reluctant to install scrubbers to continue using the same oil because of uncertainties and lack of funding," Mowat said. "And most refineries won't invest to convert heavy fuel because that will cost more than \$1 billion and take about five years to complete." Just 2.2 percent of the fleet will have scrubbers installed by 2020 that would allow them to continue using current fuels, estimates the International Energy Agency in Paris, an adviser to 29 nations. "The compliant technical options are still very immature, and it is hard for us to see them as a real compliance option for our fleet," said Aslak Ross, head of marine standards at Maersk Line, the world's biggest container shipping company. For Maersk alone, the additional fuel cost will amount to billions of dollars annually, he said. Most ships will switch to using a mix of lower-sulfur fuel oil or more-expensive middle distillates, according to Jan Christensen, head of global bunker operations at Bomin Bunker Holding, a Hamburg, Germany-based fuels supplier.

The scrubbing technology could cost as much as \$4 million per engine, depending on its size, said Nick Confuorto, president and chief operating officer at scrubber supplier CR Ocean Engineering. Retrofitting engines might be worth doing, possibly paying off in two years, because the price of compliant fuel probably will be three times higher than what ships currently burn, he said. While the world's largest owners are already reserving spaces for refits, smaller operators are taking a more wait-and-see approach,

said Neil Carmichael, chief executive officer at Pacific Green Technologies. Wood Mackenzie estimates about 70 percent compliance globally by 2020 and full compliance by 2025 after a transition period. Merchant ships earned an average of about \$9,800 a day this year, according to data from Clarkson Research Services Ltd., part of the world's biggest shipbroker. Ten years ago, they were earning about \$34,000. In the industry's three main markets -- container shipping, dry-bulk cargo transportation, and oil tankers -- there's been evidence of overcapacity and depressed rates over the past several years.

Those tough markets are making it harder for owners to secure investment and finance they need to comply, which means the IMO and its member states will probably permit some kind of transition period when the 2020 rules begin, Simon Bennett, policy director and external relations at the International Chamber of Shipping, said in a phone interview. "If there were no flexibility on Jan. 1 and owners couldn't get fuel, then that would have an impact on world trade," Bennett said. Either way, "this will have a profound impact on the economics of shipping."

Source: www.bloomberg.com, 05 April 2017

Focusing on port-led development; aiming for international standards: Nitin Gadkari

The government is focused on port-led developments and the target is to make Indian ports at par with international standards, is the word coming in from the Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari. Talking exclusively to CNBC-TV18, he said while developing the ports full care will be taken of all the norms of air and water pollution.

According to reports, the government ports have reported remarkable reports with respect to time, tonnage and profits, said Gadkari. The government also plans to implement new recommendations made by private consultants, he said. "In Sagarmala port-led development we have planned for 14 industrial clusters with an investment of Rs 15 lakh crore," he said. Government is also formulating a scheme for fishermen at Sagarmala, he added. Government ports are ahead of the private sector in all the segments that they operate in aided by lot of reforms be it administrative, working system, decision making process, in technology, said Gadkari. They aim to have all machinery on electricity and not diesel. He is also hopeful of Rajya Sabha passing the Motor Vehicle Amendments in the next parliament session.

Below is the verbatim transcript of the interview

Q: You said that the government run ports are doing much better than the private ports. Could you highlight that for us?

A: The report which was received from all the ports, it is very remarkable and historical. In the case of time, tonnage and profits. We have now the highest record. This improvement in the ports sector is a great achievement for our country. We have also implemented a lot of new recommendations given by the private consultant then our target is to make our port of international standards and we are comparing all the things with international standards. At the same time, in water pollution and air pollution, we have taken a decision that we should be very cautious about it and we should fulfil the norms which are of the ports in different states by achieving the goal of water pollution and air pollution because our ports should be free from water pollution and air pollution. This will be our highest priority.

Q: You also spoke of how automobiles are something that are being exported from the Mumbai port. But are you looking at expanding that basket, more commodities and other things?

A: This is a great achievement that Mumbai, the Bombay Port Trust (BPT) has exported 2,50,000 cars and this is also a record. This is one of the important things for the automobiles sector. For the future, I feel that it will be very useful for our sector that we will export more cars and auto spare parts and this is a sector which is giving maximum employment potential to the youth of our country.

Q: So, more sectors are going to be added?

A: Yes, in Sagar Mala, port led development, we have planned for 14 industrial clusters and we expect the investment of Rs 15 lakh crore: automobile cluster, petroleum cluster, wood and furniture cluster, chemical cluster, steel cluster, these are different type of clusters there. Even in Sagar Mala, we are now formulating a scheme for fishermen and we will allow them to go more than 12 nautical miles in the sea and the result will be five times more production in the fishing. 18 percent of our population is in the coastal area and it will be a great achievement for the people that they will get more money from fishing which is going to be very useful for the socio-economic transformation in that area.

Q: Coming to using foreign currency loans. That has been on your agenda for the longest time. Private ports are already doing it, so what is the government doing about it?

A: First time in the history of our country, we have taken foreign loans in dollars in Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) and in Ennore Port. Now, it has already started

because we are getting money in dollars without hedge with 2 percent. So, our turnover in the ports is more than Rs 5,000 crore per year. So, we can easily take a loan of Rs 50,000-60,000 crore or more than that in dollar which interest cost will be only 2 percent. So, that is going to be important thing because as per the internal rate of return (IRR) of the project is concerned because of less interest cost, it can be possible for us to be economic viability of the projects.

Q: Cruise is something that you have been looking at giving a fillip to. What is the scenario there? Just now, you pointed out how the profits have gone up.

A: Profits are going up. The efficiency is improving, time period is improving. Cruise tourism is improving. Every sector in the port, everywhere now, we are ahead more than private sector. That is the great achievement for the government because it is under the leadership of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. A lot of reform we have taken in administrative reform, reform in the laws, reform in the working system, reform in the decision process, reform in some of the outdated system we have just now changed all that. And we are very transparent, positive and development oriented and using the best technology. Now, we have decided that all type of machinery, they should take on electricity, not on diesel. We are just hanging on the mandatory order for that, no diesel, no fuel, take electricity.

So, these are the new things, small things, but giving more impact and that is to be a great achievement for the sector.

Q: For ports and shipping, have you set any target for the coming financial year?

A: Yes, always target is there. Now, the next time, we have given the target, but I will not discuss the target because sometime the media printed that this is my commitment. So, it creates a problem for me because the target for the road sector was 40 km that was the target. That was not commitment. It comes to 23 km per day, then people say he has given 40, why is it coming 22-23, then it is an unnecessary confusion that starts.

Q: The Rajya Sabha does not seem that the bill will be passed at all, the amendments to motor vehicles.

A: I have tried my level best to convince them because every minute we have a death of four persons. So, it is unfortunate and I feel that I try my level best. I want to save the life of the people. They are also interested, they are supporting it. It is actually the standing committee\'s recommendation, all recommendation we have accepted. The recommendation from the 18 transport ministers belonging to 10 political parties, their suggestions we have accepted, parliament has already passed unanimously. So, the Rajya Sabha, I was trying my level best to convince them, but now we have no option. The next session, I am expecting that this bill will be passed.

New report looks at coastal commerce

Settled four centuries ago by seafaring pilgrims, Massachusetts continues to draw sustenance from the water as more than 90,000 people are employed in its maritime economy, according to a new report.

The Bay State\'s maritime economy accounts for \$6.4 billion, or 1.3 percent, of its gross state product, and it has outpaced other industries, according to a report commissioned by the Seaport Economic Council. Fishing, marine transportation and tourism are some of the fields that make up the sector, according to the report, which highlighted offshore wind and aquaculture as “two opportunities” for the marine economy. In 2013, Massachusetts had an estimated 145 aquaculture operations generating \$18 million in revenue, and while no offshore wind has yet been installed off the coast of Massachusetts, it has “the largest offshore wind potential of any U.S. state,” according to the report.

The report will inform the council in its work to promote job growth on the coast and prepare for sea-level rise. The council anticipates awarding about \$8 million in grants over the next year and a half, according to the Baker administration. “This council is focused on the economics of our coastline and the waters that exist here and leveraging those natural assets and those infrastructure assets for more jobs and more economic development,” said Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, who chairs the council and said it has given out about \$20 million in grants. “My hope is that we continue to protect and preserve our resources and at the same time build a talent pool that can really fuel these emerging industries and promote what we have here in our Commonwealth.” At a council meeting on Tuesday, Fall River Mayor Jasiel Correia said major companies that have moved into the Spindle City need “workforce training.” “We’re in jeopardy of losing those types of companies if we can’t produce the workforce they need,” Correia cautioned.

Michael Goodman, executive director of the Public Policy Center at UMass Dartmouth, said business leaders in the marine industries expressed concern about taxes, regulations and other business costs, and were interested in preserving ocean resources, and marketing their industries. Goodman, who helped write the report, said research and development in marine technology has been less successful at finding commercial applications for its products - such as underwater robots - than innovators in other technology fields. The report also said Massachusetts exported \$445 million worth of fish and other marine animals in 2015, and imported \$2 billion of those same products. “There’s an untapped market for eating our own fish,” Goodman told the council. He said, “We import a lot of fish. It’s hard to know where your fish comes from.” Sen. Bruce Tarr, a Gloucester Republican, said the Baker administration’s council is more attuned to promoting economic development than prior efforts to assist the state’s coastal communities. “The focus has been sharpened from one that was broadly infrastructural to one that is much more focused on economic development, and I think they’re looking more closely than they have in the past at the connection between an investment of public dollars and a return in terms of employment and economic activity,” Tarr told the News Service. The report said the state established 10 designated port areas intended to protect water-dependent industrial uses. Port cities seeking to bring research and education to their waterfronts would need “flexibility” from current strictures to accomplish that, according to the report. Tarr also wants flexibility for people with businesses operating within the designated port areas. “There are limited activities that those property owners can conduct, and that limits their access to capital,” Tarr said. “So, on the one hand we’re saying these are critical pieces of infrastructure for the state and because of that we’re regulating them, and on the other hand we’ve been unwilling to put major infusions of capital in to keep them alive so I think we need to be more consistent in the message that comes from state government.”

Source: barnstable.wickedlocal.com, 12 April 2017

‘Cocoa still sensitive economic commodity’ – Shippers Authority

The Cocoa sector continues to be a sensitive commodity to Ghana’s economy in 2016 and the country therefore has to increase its yields in the coming years to realise its full benefits in the export sector. “As a result of the key impact of the cocoa sector on Ghana’s economy, the Ghana Shippers Authority (GSA) in collaboration with the Cocoa Marketing Company succeeded in obtaining a freeze on freight rates for the shipment

of the country's cocoa," Dr Kofi Mbiah, GSA Chief Executive Officer told newsmen in Accra. Speaking at the first in a series of media engagements tagged: "The Shipping Quarter and Outlook," Dr Mbiah revealed that the total transit and transshipment for 2016 amounted to 900,763 metric tonnes. The statistics indicate that transit and transshipment trade imports hit 861,299 metric tonnes while exports trade recorded 39,464 metric tonnes. Transit and Transshipment trade recorded an impressive growth of 82 per cent in the first quarter of 2016 as compared to 2015, but recorded a decrease of 4.5 per cent in the second quarter; down again to 4.32 per cent in the third quarter and dropped further to 42.1 per cent to end the year. Dr Mbiah noted that in spite of the volatility of transit and transshipment trade in 2016, transit volume for the three major landlocked countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in the same period amounted to 801,336 metric tonnes which comprised 764,909 metric tonnes and 36,427 metric tonnes of export. The GSA Chief Executive said the statistics represented 88.9 per cent of total transit and transshipment trade through Ghana's transit corridor to the hinterlands- major transit trade commodities included Bagged Fertilizer, Processed Foods/Beverages and Cashew nuts. On maritime trade outlook for 2017, Dr Mbiah revealed that maritime trade was likely to experience steady growth in trade volumes with boots in both imports of major commodities and exports of raw materials and semi-processed goods to the Chinese and European markets. Ghana's international trade volumes was expected to grow by 10 per cent this year, this Dr Mbiah attributed to the calm political environment after last year's election and the peaceful transition processes, and renewed business confidence in the new government.

He also identified the Ghanaian economic activities and new policies and initiatives as other factors likely to impact positively to boost the agricultural, manufacturing and industrial sectors. Dr Mbiah however noted that to achieve growth, players in the maritime sector; 'need to accelerate the pace of reform in business processes, increase technological penetration in the clearance processes, reduce delays, cut down costs and make shipping more competitive. "We must improve upon our profiling, utilisation of advance information, improvement in the non-intrusive inspection mechanism, our post audit and sanctions regimes". He said Government must also explore every effort to stabilise the cedi to ensure predictability and certainty for business. Mr Fred Aseidu-Dartey, GSA Director of Public Affairs, explained that the authority would continue to ensure prudent management of the demand side of Ghana's shipping industry with a view to protecting the interests of Ghanaian shippers in relation to port, ship and inland transportation.

He said the authority would also deal with other ancillary problems which sought to hinder operations in the maritime sector with a view to ensuring a quick, safe, reliable and cost effective delivery of cargo for the shippers in Ghana. Mr Aseidu-Dartey said GSA would continue to work closely with other sectors of the industry in protecting and promoting the interests of Ghanaian shippers and ensure the provision of relevant logistics for the growth of shipping and trade in the country. He said this year, the GSA would organise and hold seminars and workshops to educate and sensitise shippers, the business community and other relevant stakeholders in order to assist them improve on their knowledge and skills and adopt best business practices. “We will also hold open fora in order to interact with importers, exporters and traders in their trading localities to learn of problems confronting them in their day-to-day business transactions,” he said. GNA

Source: vibeghana.com, 11 April 2017

Weak Maritime Sector needs sea change

-Cmde Udai Rao (ret'd)

Every year, the country celebrates April 5 as National Maritime Day (NMD), when SS Loyalty, the first ship of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company, set sail from Mumbai for the United Kingdom in 1919 and created nautical history. NMD was first celebrated on April 5, 1964. The NMD recognises the maritime sector's contribution to the national economy through the facilitation of trade across the five oceans. Besides ports and shipping, the maritime domain constitutes ship building, ship repair, off-shore development, fisheries, exploitation of sea bed resources, inland water transport, ship breaking and marine tourism. It is also a day to salute Indian seafarers, who constitute 6.7% of the global maritime community. They sail across the oceans and brave the perils at sea, such as the elements of nature and the scourge of piracy.

Historically, we have been a maritime nation given that Indian sailors used the monsoon winds to trade with faraway lands. Moreover, India's geo-physical position and geo-political realities compel it to be a maritime nation. India has an Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.03 million sq km which is a treasure trove of resources. Over 90% of the country's trade by volume and over 72% by value, including crude oil, is transported across the seas, which is vital for our economy and energy security. In a sense, this makes India an island country. Despite being a maritime nation, India has for centuries had a continental outlook and has suffered from “sea-blindness.” Lately,

the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, piracy incidents off Somalia and the movement of China towards the Indian Ocean with its anti-piracy task force, submarine patrols and New Maritime Silk Route, have resulted in a maritime reawakening among our security bureaucracy, but not so much among the people. So, on NMD, it is time to take stock of our shortcomings and work towards overcoming them.

Geographically, ports and shipping help nations to connect with each other. The country's 12 major ports compare poorly with other advanced ports across the world. None of these ports feature among the top 10 ports globally. Importantly, China's ports occupy the first seven spots among the top ten. India's ports suffer from lack of capacities, high turn around time, limited water depth which requires frequent dredging, old and inefficient cargo systems, congestion on approach roads and labour issues. Foreign ships, therefore, often prefer to bypass India and tranship containers at Colombo, Sri Lanka; Kelang, Malaysia; and Singapore. These ports, which entail zero deviation from international shipping lanes, are also equipped with automated infrastructure for quick turnaround times measured in couple of hours, along with competitive tariffs. India possesses a fleet of about 1,246 ships of which only about 400 are foreign-going vessels. Most of these ships are past their prime and should rightfully have ended up at the ship breaking yards by now. Today 90% of India's trade is transported in foreign-flagged vessels. Besides loss of revenue, this is a strategic vulnerability, especially during hostilities when enemy war ships could target Indian-flagged vessels, mostly oil tankers, thus affecting energy security and the national war-waging capability.

Foreign ships, on the other hand, would avoid conflict zones or charge hefty insurance premiums to do so. During crisis situations such as the recent evacuation of Indian citizens from Yemen, Indian-flagged merchant vessels were also required in the national effort along with the Indian Navy. Ship building in India, too, is in dire straits. Most are government ship yards and suffer from a public-sector undertaking mindset which often results in time and cost over runs, as well as quality issues. India has a long way to go before it can catch up with world leaders, such as China, South Korea and Japan, in ship building.

However, since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office, the beginnings of a sea change in the maritime industry are apparent. His 'Act East' policy, 'Make in India' campaign, enunciation of 'SAGAR' (an acronym for Security and Growth for All in the Region), push for 'Blue Economy', the 'Sagarmala Project' with its port-led development plans, have all given a much-needed impetus to the maritime sector.

The Centre has made several policy changes and announced tax rebates to reinvigorate the maritime industry. India's state-owned ports and shipping entities reported their best performances in fiscal year ended March 2016, after a very long time. Today, the privately-owned minor and intermediate ports such as Adani's Mundra have clearly taken the lead over their public-sector counterparts.

With Modi's firm hand on the steering wheel, 'achhe din' may truly be here for the maritime industry. Fair winds and calm seas will follow for the maritime fraternity. The NMD, among other things, should be an occasion to spread maritime awareness and bring about sea mindedness among the people. The future of India, like that of many other countries, lies on the oceans and seas around us.

Source: www.deccanherald.com, 05 April 2017



MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Mumbai's most popular beaches are also the World's most Polluted ones

-Pallavi Goel

The mapping was carried out by Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research in Germany after compilation of data from 1,237 scientific researches on marine litter which have now been collated into a single comprehensive database. The compilation further brought out that seas around Kerala and Andaman Nicobar follow the ones in Mumbai in terms of extent of marine pollution. The high levels of marine litter on these beaches are severely affecting fish and seabirds. On analyzing the extent of plastic debris in the seas of Mumbai, it was found that there was an average of 68.83 items per sq m on the beaches of Juhu, Aksa, Dadar and Versova. The size of these micro-plastics varied between 1m to 5m. Also, of all the litter, about 41.85 percent was micro-plastic. The beach of Juhu has the highest quantity of micro-plastic litter, a whopping 55.33 percent, followed by Versova (28.8 percent), Dadar (18.6 percent) and Aksa (7.9 percent).

Recreational and religious movements on these beaches are the primary contributors of this micro-plastic. As per one of the authors of the paper, poorly treated domestic waste has further added to the already severe sea pollution levels.

Other prominent findings of the study are:

1. 60-90 percent of marine litter comprises food and beverage containers, plastic bags, plastic polymers and fishing gear.
2. Every year, 8 million metric tons of plastic leaks into oceans across the world.
3. In 2015, 322 million tons of plastic was manufactured globally.
4. In 2010 alone, the plastic debris that entered the marine world weighed between 5 and 13 million tons.

5. The approximate yearly cost of this environmental devastation is estimated as USD 13 billion.
6. As of March 23, 2017, 34 percent of marine species consume litter and 30 percent get trapped in it. A total of 1,220 marine species have been affected so far, and the number is on a steady rise.

Melanie Bergmann of the AWI says

“In the AWI Litterbase, we have for the first time analyzed all groups of organisms affected by the litter, and have presented it in map form. The number of affected marine species is currently at 1,220, and is rising steadily”.

The analysis has also reported that Kerala’s Vembanad Lake, the longest lake of India had micro-plastics in all its sediment samples which indicates a considerable presence in the lake. In fact, anchovies in the mud bank area of Alappuzha also contain micro-plastics. Given that clams and fishes form a major part of the locals’ meals, the existence of micro-plastic in the lake indicate the possibility of severe food contamination for the people.

The issue of marine litter has always been a crucial one for the entire world. This has been indicated by a number of studies and researches in the past, as well. Marine pollution still continues to pose a major threat to the underwater world as thousands of countries across the world continue to dump their waste in oceans.

However, India manages to consistently be on the top of the list of countries littering and dumping waste in their aquatic treasures. Yet again, Indians have proved to the world that they can knock over everyone in all aspects but social etiquette.

But, it is high time that the world starts taking some steps towards protection and preservation of this maritime wealth, or it will be too late. Here are a few things every individual must start doing right from this moment to prevent our seas and oceans from further pollution:

1. All those who love to eat and drink around the seas **MUST NOT** throw any sort of garbage in the water or nearby areas. Use **ONLY DUSTBINS** for throwing garbage.

2. Plastics in any form should be a BIG NO, especially in areas surrounding seas and oceans.
3. ALWAYS use CLOTH BAGS to carry your stuff when visiting a beach.
4. Do not spill while boating and fishing.
5. Switch to organic products in your home and kitchen.
6. Invest in reusable items. Use of disposable bottles, bags etc. should be minimum.
7. Recycle batteries, electronics, oil filters, motor oils, and everything else that can be recycled.
8. Do NOT dump waste in seas and other water bodies in the name of religion.

Keep your beaches clean. They have done a lot for you for generations. It is your time to return the favor.

Source: topyaps.com, 04 April 2017

Millions of discarded flip flops posing huge hazard to Ocean life

-Olivia Yasukawa

The shores of Watamu on the Kenyan coast should be pristine. They're not. Downstream from an ecological disaster brewing a continent away, these placid waters are bearing the brunt of a foot-born problem: your flip flops. The Japanese call them zoris. They're thongs in Australia. Tsinelas in the Philippines and chinelos in Brazil. Archaeologists have even discovered an Ancient Egyptian pair made from leather, dating from approximately 3,500 years ago. "Over three billion people can only afford that type of shoe," says Erin Smith of Ocean Sole, a conservation group and recycling collective. "They hang on to them, they fix them, they duct tape them, mend them and then usually discard them." The average lifespan of a flip flop is two years, she adds. They're ubiquitous, and the modern day synthetic rubber flip flop is not going away. In fact, tons of them are washing up on the East African coast. Reports suggest that at

least eight million tons of plastic enters our oceans every year. By 2050, there could be more plastic than fish in the seas by weight, according to one estimate.

The majority of debris visiting Kenya comes from Asia, India and China, Smith claims, and the ocean current spreads it all along the East African coast, drifting south. Some will eventually leave the Indian Ocean and make it as far as South America. "We are actually receivers of pretty much the rest of the emerging world's marine pollution," she argues. And a significant quantity of the pollution which appears on East Africa's beaches come from discarded flip flops -- approximately 90 tons a year, says Ocean Sole. Kenya is not an entirely innocent party, however. Smith says one company produces 100,000 flip flops a day, many of which, with grim inevitability, also enter the waterways. Before they reach the ocean they're already a problem. Smith reports that in Kibera, one of Nairobi's largest slums, a back-up of discarded flip flops once blocked the area's clean water supply. They're not only an eyesore, but a direct health hazard, and with no hope of biodegrading. "Our founder Julie Church back in the 90s discovered an entire beach ... was just covered in flip flops," Smith says. "What she saw were not just dead fish that had been trying to eat in their natural habitat, but turtles unable to come up on to land and actually hatch. "[The pollution] started to kill the plant life, it started to kill the crabs on the sand ... we have deserted beaches that used to have communities there, that used to be able to fish, and the whole ecosystem has been ruined by this massive increase in marine pollution."

Matilda Mathias, a debris collector from the "Blue Team" in Watamu, cites the benefits to the tourist industry when the beaches are clean, and says "we also benefit from the money." Most of the detritus is recycled, some is reused, but in the case of flip flops, they're upcycled. Ocean Sole has trained a team of 40-or-so artisans in a workshop in Nairobi to craft sculptures from these pre-owned, unloved objects into a source of income. Importing flip flops from recycling crews along the East Coast and from as far away as Zanzibar, Smith estimates the Ocean Sole team can repurpose approximately 800,000 flip flops a year. Not all sculptures are equal, ranging from handheld creations to an 18-foot life-sized giraffe, but Smith says between its programs Ocean Sole aims to produce a million products a year.

The sculptures are a colorful reminder of the damage being done to our planet; a statement shipped to Rome Fashion Week in 2008, the Swedish Cultural Museum in 2010, London Zoo in 2013 and placed in the hands of Pope Francis in 2015. Seven hundred people are involved in Ocean Sole's work, and Smith says there's interest in exporting the model from as far and wide as Mexico and Nepal. And there's little chance artisans will run out of raw material any time soon as long as our flip flop habit remains.

"I think it's time for us to start looking for an alternative shoe, or an alternative material, to fit that kind of fashion need," argues Smith. "Our products need to evolve."

German sportswear company Adidas is already experimenting with renewable materials. Its sneaker collaboration with Parley for the Oceans, using illegal deep-sea gillnets and recycled ocean plastic, won praise among the design community last year and was award-nominated.

Moreover, Adidas is also experimenting with a material it calls AMSilk, creating a biodegradable shoe packaged along with an enzyme solution, so that owners can dissolve their sneakers when they're done with them. It may be a while before this technology finds its way to three billion people's feet. In the meantime, Ocean Sole is prepared to remind you just how impractical your flip flops are --- and not just for walking backwards.

Source: edition.cnn.com, 13 April 2017

Save oceans: World's first ever underwater CEO conference at Kovalam

-Ramesh Babu

Chief executive officers (CEOs) of five IT firms are set to take their message against marine pollution and global warming to a new level with an underwater conference in the Arabian Sea on Monday. At the 30-minute conference near the famous beach resort of Kovalam, the CEOs will take a pledge to protect the ocean and marine life.

Armed with scuba gear and other gadgets, the CEOs will descend at least six to seven metres into the sea for the conference. After the meeting, they will take a pledge and sign a memorandum to protect ocean and marine life. They will also release a logo as part of their "ocean love" campaign. For the underwater conference, the CEOs have been training for the past week. Their underwater conference assumes much significance in the wake of a recent global report that termed seas near Mumbai, Kerala and Andaman and Nicobar Islands as the most polluted in the world. The report also said most of the plastic and other debris in the sea originate from inland. Besides affecting marine biodiversity, pollution poses a big threat to people who live close to the sea, said the report prepared by three eminent world bodies. "Sea pollution is rising at an alarming level. Our endeavour is to make the public aware of the dangers posed

by littering especially the unscientific disposal of plastic,” said Raja Gopaal Iyer, CEO of Uday Samudra Group, one of the main organisers of the event. Iyer will also participate in the underwater meeting.

After the conference, details will be posted on the Facebook page of the Kerala Tourism Department. “I am really excited. I hope such attempts will help send a right message,” said Hema Menon of UST Global, one of the participants. Other tech firms include Neologix and SKHF, two IT firms based in Thiruvananthapuram Technopark. Kerala Tourism, Kovalam Surfing Club and Swacch Bharat are co-partners.

Iyer said on World Ocean Day on June 8, a club will be launched (Beach and Marine Environment Protection Club) roping in many hotels on the beach stretching from Kanyakumari to Kasargode. “At least 40 hotels have joined the club. We will regularly clean beaches and river fronts to ensure that litter won’t enter seas,” he said adding that after gauging its success the club will cover the entire coastal belt of the country. While the CEOs’ meet is unique, it is not the first time such an event will take place. In October 2009, the Maldives government made an attention-grabbing plea for climate change action by holding the world’s first underwater cabinet meeting.

According to a recent report of the World Economic Forum at least 12.7 metric tonne of plastic end up in the sea each year and by 2050 there could be more plastic in the sea than fish.

Source: www.hindustantimes.com, 09 April 2017

Another month, yet another record low for Arctic sea ice

-Tom Yulsman

Finally! Some relief from the unrelenting decay in Arctic sea ice.

Well, no. I was hoping to be able to report that. But I can’t. The National Snow and Ice Data Center’s most recent update shows the extent of Arctic sea ice in March dropping to a record low for the month. And that marks the sixth month in a row of record-setting lows.

On March 7, the extent of Arctic sea ice seems to have reached its maximum extent for the year, after an entire winter of frigid temperatures. But here too, there was no good news to report: that maximum extent also was noteworthy for being the lowest in the 38-year satellite record. And this is the fourth year in a row that this particular record has been broken. “The strange seems to be the everyday up there now,” says Mark Serreze, the NSIDC director. Arctic sea ice extent for March 2017 averaged 452,000 square miles below the January 1981 to 2010 long-term average. To help put this into perspective, that 452,000 square miles of anomalously open, unfrozen water is nearly three times the size of California. The animated graph above shows what the trend for March looks like since the start of satellite monitoring in 1978. And there are similar trend lines for all months of the year.

In fact, since the late 20th century, the decline in summer Arctic sea ice has been so steep that it appears to be unprecedented for the past 1,450 years. “We’re losing the sea ice,” Serreze says. He predicts that continued human-caused warming will leave the Arctic with no significant sea ice cover during summer in little more than a decade. Why should we care about what’s happening in the Arctic? Suffice it to say that what happens in the Arctic doesn’t stay there. Research published just this past March links extreme weather in the middle latitudes, where much of the world’s population lives, to the dramatic withering away of sea ice, and the amplified warming that this is associated with.

The vagaries of Arctic weather can have a big impact on the sea ice, even in summer. So, it’s not possible to make a firm prediction of whether Arctic sea ice at the end of the warm season in September will set the record for lowest overall extent. But it’s not looking good. In addition to the geographic coverage of the ice being extraordinarily low, so is the overall volume. According to one estimate, made using observations and computer modeling, that volume is currently at a record low as well.

That does not bode well for the fate of sea ice during the coming summer.

Source: blogs.discovermagazine.com, 12 April 2017

China steps up Pollution fight

-Jean-François Tremblay

China's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) is sending 5,600 inspectors throughout the north of China as part of a one-year crackdown on the air pollution that afflicted Beijing, Tianjin, and other major Chinese cities for most of the winter. The national government's move suggests that it doubts the ability or willingness of provincial and municipal administrations to confront polluters.

In a notice posted on its website, MEP said that, so far, its inspectors have discovered that the city of Handan in Hebei province was allowing the illegal operation of coal-fired boilers that had previously been ordered to close. A police investigation is ongoing, the ministry said.

National officials have also found close to 100 violations after inspecting nearly 200 sites, MEP said. The national inspectors' methods include surprise visits to industrial sites and undercover work. The north of China struggled with extremely high levels of air pollution throughout the winter. In early January, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, which measures outdoor air quality, reported that its Air Quality Index had repeatedly breached 400, a level that it considers hazardous.

Chinese government officials have been attempting to pressure polluters and suspected polluters for several months now. As early as November, several firms in the Hebei province city of Shijiazhuang, including the drug company CSPC Pharmaceutical, were ordered to temporarily stop production.

No reports have surfaced of drug or chemical firms being affected by the latest crackdown.

Source: cen.acs.org, 17 April 2017

"Major Weaknesses" in Arctic Oil Spill Response Plans, Says Environmental NGO

WWF-Canada (WWF) Thursday said "major weaknesses" in plans for oil spill response in the Arctic has left remote Arctic communities to face "almost certain environmental catastrophe." The announcement comes alongside WWF's release of new research that identifies "major issues" related to the availability of appropriate oil spill response equipment, training resources, and communications infrastructure. WWF says the lack of spill response capacity, coupled with growth in Arctic shipping and extreme weather events, means Arctic communities are increasingly vulnerable. "Community members are often the first responders to any spill, and need access to effective and reliable equipment to contain and clean up oil," explained WWF. "Though the chances of a large-scale oil spill in the Arctic are currently small, the consequences would be significant. As sea ice melts and ship traffic increases, there is an opportunity now, while traffic is still relatively low, to put measures in place to respond to spills, or prevent them from happening in the first place."

In order to respond to gaps identified by the new research, WWF says the use of HFO by ships should be phased out, response time standards in the North should be aligned with those south of 60 degrees latitude, community-based response plans should be developed, funding for community responder training should be increased, consultations with Inuit organisations should be carried out, and scientific and traditional knowledge should be utilised to identify preferred shipping routes and areas to be avoided. "Community members are often the first responders to any spill, and need access to effective and reliable equipment to contain and clean up oil ". Shipping in the Canadian Arctic is only going to increase. We've already seen a large cruise ship traverse the Northwest Passage, and new proposals for increased shipping for major mining projects are emerging due to longer open-water periods," said Andrew Dumbrille, WWF-Canada senior specialist for sustainable shipping. "The gaps identified in these reports are extremely concerning. It is not right that these communities should bear the heavy consequences of a ship-based oil spill, and not be given the tools and training necessary to limit the damage. We need to make serious changes to oil-spill response plans in the Arctic before our luck runs out."

As Ship & Bunker reported in October, the Clean Arctic Alliance, a coalition of not-for-profit organisations, underlined concerns previously raised by some of its members, which include Seas At Risk, Transport & Environment (T&E), and WWF.

Source: shipandbunker.com, 10 April 2017

The South China Sea: A Looming Environmental Disaster?

Most of the attention in the South China Sea has focused on China's military activities. But the impending natural disaster there is also cause for concern. As a recent report makes clear there's been significant coral loss due to seawater warming. But apart from ocean warming, the Chinese government, through over-fishing and reef destruction, is contributing to the devastation. The Arbitral Tribunal's award at The Hague in July 2016, in *The Philippines v China*, found that Beijing's construction of artificial islands at seven features in the Spratly Islands violated the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea obligations to protect the marine environment. As James Borton reminds us, the Spratly Islands' immense biodiversity can't be overlooked. Beijing suggests that its island building efforts are a 'Green Project'. The Chinese government claims its techniques simulate the natural processes of weather as sea storms blow away and move biological scraps which gradually evolve into an oasis on the sea.

John McManus, from the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School, has highlighted the impact of island expansion on Scarborough Atoll, Pratas Atoll, the Paracel Islands, and the Spratly Islands corals to a point beyond which they will be unable to recover. Damaged coral reefs won't be able to keep up with rising sea levels. Last year McManus concluded that 40 square miles (104 square km) of some of the most biodiverse coral reefs on Earth have been destroyed in the South China Sea thanks to giant-clam poachers.

Combined with China's building artificial islands around disputed rocks and reefs, it has paved over another 22 square miles of coral. When the two activities are taken together, McManus says, about 10% of the reefs in the vast Spratly archipelago to the south of Hainan, and 8% of those in the Paracel islands, between Hainan and Vietnam, have been destroyed.

The biologist Alan Freidlander, from the University of Hawaii, notes that dredging and building on coral reefs in the South China Sea is causing irreparable damage to one of the most diverse ecosystems on earth. Damage to coral by humans during construction includes compaction or digging, which breaks the coral apart. The coral can also be buried under sand and concrete, from which it can't recover.

In pursuing its reclamation activities China should look to UNCLOS, to which it's a party. Article 206 of UNCLOS states: 'When States have reasonable grounds for believing that planned activities under their jurisdiction or control may cause substantial pollution of or significant and harmful changes to the marine environment, they shall, as far as practicable, assess the potential effects of such activities on the marine environment and shall communicate reports of the results of such assessments in the manner provided in article 205.' There's also a requirement under customary international law to undertake an environmental impact assessment—although the exact scope and content isn't clear—where there's a risk that the proposed activity may have a significant adverse impact across a boundary.

It's now time to get greater connection and cooperation between the traditional security and environmental communities on the South China Sea. We need people with a greater understanding of both military and environments affairs. It's worth noting that the US is now making some useful contributions to improve fisheries management capacity in Southeast Asia. Fisheries management is also being linked with maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. There's also scope to cooperate with environmental groups but to date been there's been a deafening silence from the environment movement when it comes to condemning coral reef reclamation. Maybe it's because advocating on this issue might be seen as a bit too boutique compared with clean energy, where such groups want China to reduce its use of coal. Perhaps it's a concern that cooperation with the US on this issue would open them up to the charge that they're being used as proxies. Or maybe it's because there aren't images of polar bears stranded on melting ice, birds covered in oil, elephants with their tusks removed or turtles caught in fishing nets.

Source: nationalinterest.org, 10 April 2017



Dalai Lama arrives in Guwahati on 12-day Northeast visit amid China's protests

-Samudra Gupta Kashyap

The 21st century, unlike the 20th century which was a “century of violence”, should become a century of peace and dialogue, said the Dalai Lama, who arrived here on Saturday on a 12-day visit to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh amid loud protests by China. “Unlike the 20th century, which was one of violence in which over 200 million people were killed, let the 21st century be one of peace, in which every man-made problem should be settled through dialogue. I particularly make this appeal to the younger generation to whom this century belongs, and whose responsibility it is to make this century one of peace,” the Tibetan spiritual leader said.

The Dalai Lama also recalled his escape from Tibet way back in 1959, described how he was received by Indian officials on the border in the Kameng sector of present-day Arunachal Pradesh, and how he continued to remain as the “longest guest” of India. “First I came to India in 1956 to attend a religious function, and then in 1959 as a refugee. Since then I have been in India, as the longest guest of the Indian government,” he said. He was speaking at a function to mark the diamond jubilee celebrations of The Assam Tribune group of newspapers here.

He gave a vivid description of how he was waiting at the border in 1959 for a message from the Indian side until he was informed that India was ready to receive him. “Then, when I received a message from Indian officials that India was ready to receive me, I came down, to continue to stay in India. Every time I visit these areas, the Tawang area, it is very emotional for me. I see a place where I had enjoyed freedom for the first time,” the Dalai Lama said.

The Dalai Lama, however, preferred to remain mum on China's renewed objection to his visit to Arunachal Pradesh. The anti-talk faction of ULFA – whose leader Paresh Barua is said to be holed up near the China border in Myanmar – on the other hand had asked the Dalai Lama not to make any remarks against China during his visit to the region.

He is attending a couple of more functions in Guwahati on Sunday and deliver a talk in Dibrugarh on Monday before embarking on a nine-day tour of Arunachal Pradesh. While he will consecrate a temple at Lumla on the India-China-Bhutan tri-juncture on April 4, he will take part in a series of religious discourses in Tawang, Dirang, Bomdila and Itanagar before returning to Himachal Pradesh on April 12.

Source: indianexpress.com, 01 April 2017

Kenya and Seychelles agree to collaborate on Maritime Security

Kenya and Seychelles have agreed to collaborate in areas of fisheries, livestock, marine security and aviation among others following Seychelles President Danny Faure visit to Kenya. In fisheries, Kenya and Seychelles agreed to enhance cooperation in processing, information and intelligence sharing and partnerships for the benefit of the two countries. Seychelles offered to help establish a fisheries service in Kenya through direct employment and industrial internships.

On its part, Kenya will export livestock products to Seychelles, ranging from beef, lamb, goat, poultry, butter, ghee and powdered milk. The two countries also boosted their cooperation in aviation with Kenya Airways signing a joint marketing agreement with Seychelles Tourism Board, which provides a framework for collaboration to promote intra-Africa tourism to one of the world most popular tourist destination.

The MOU covers intra-Africa tourism, joint marketing and participation in events across the continent as well as stakeholder education. KQ will also explore the possibilities of regular cargo freight flights to Seychelles. Kenya and Seychelles also agreed to launch a Sea and Safari product to meet the tourism sector requirements with the focus being on jointly marketing the tourism products of the two countries. The two countries also shared an MOU on joint promotion of tourism, planning, professional exchanges and training.

Following the Seychelles President's State Visit, the two countries also resolved to collaborate in joint surveillance, patrols and capacity building to boost marine security especially in the Exclusive Economic Zones. Seychelles offered to work with Kenya in the establishment of Coast guards as a further step towards ensuring maritime security. The two countries also agreed to collaborate in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking by scaling up their sharing of information and intelligence.

President Faure jetted out on board a Kenya Airways aircraft, days after he praised the national carrier for showing loyalty to the Seychelles – where it has maintained flights for years.

Source: africabusinesscommunities.com, 07 April 2017

US Policy focus 2017: Middle East or East Asia? – Analysis

The United States in 2017 seems to be falling into the same trap of the decade of the 2000s wherein US Middle East-predominant policy focus enabled China's military rise threatening American predominance in East Asia. The United States policy establishment should recall that the Korean War of the 1950s involved North Korea and China entering into an armed conflict with the United States despite American unsurpassed military predominance. In 2017 too, one sees an unfolding of North Korea unrestrained by China as its strategic patron and nuclear weapons technology supplier egging by proxy North Korea towards an inevitable armed conflict with the United States. Inevitably, China and North Korea seem destined for a clash of arms with the United States over North Korea's nuclear weapons whose origin is Chinese.

China exploited the first decade of the 21st Century when the United States created a policy vacuum in East Asia by its strategic distractions in Afghanistan and Iraq. China exploited the American strategic inattentiveness to Asia Pacific security in that decade to plot and put in place China's emergence as a major naval power and also to establish predominant control over the South China Sea conflictual maritime expanse without any matching restraint imposed by United States power predominance. The major collateral damage attendant on the above was the United States insensitivity and overriding strategic interests of its allies like Japan, South Korea and the Philippines to placate the Chinese from generating mischief.

However, the major collateral damage to United States national security interests in that decade was that the United States was forced into the dubious policy option of combining a 'China Hedging Strategy' with a 'Risk Aversion Strategy' when it came to facing China's aggressive brinkmanship in the South China Sea conflicts with its less powerful neighbours. This major limitation of the United States led to a strategic diminution of American stature in Asian capitals.

Former US President Obama belatedly indulged in a damage limitation exercise of the 'US Strategic Pivot to Asia Pacific' to signal the American resolve to stay committed to Asia Pacific security. That effort was impeded by Congressional sequestrations on the US defence budget. The result was China's greater South China Sea conflict escalation and creation of Chinese fortified artificial islands which could affect US naval predominance in Western Pacific.

In 2017, with new US President Donald Trump in office, the United States seems to be headed falling into the same trap as the previous US Presidents in the first decade of the 21st Century. Instead of nipping in the bud North Korea's nuclear weapons challenge threatening United States and its allies, President Trump seems to be getting sucked into the Middle East quagmire by ordering missiles strikes against Syrian Air Force bases accused of chemical strikes. This would again lead to a colossal repeat of American mistakes in creating policy vacuum focused on China, and North Korea to deal with their strategic gauntlets thrown at the United States under their impression that the United States accords a greater policy priority to the Middle East than East Asia and Asia Pacific.

In 2017, the United States cannot afford to let grow China's unrestrained military rise to a status of military equivalence with the United States and also allow a China free run to its North Korea proxy to endanger Asia Pacific security. At the first instance President Trump should not have invited the Chinese President Xi to the United States or a so-called Super-Summit. Secondly President should have not accepted the Chinese President's invitation to President Trump to visit China in 2017. These steps should have been delayed by President Trump and his advisers to be cogent on China showing greater accommodation to United States sensitivities on North Korea and the South China Sea military build-up.

That the above has not happened betrays the trend in the making that President Trump is also inclined to adopt the erstwhile United States policies towards China of 'China Hedging' and 'Conflict Aversion'. Once again, the United States seems to be doomed to create a US policy and strategic vacuum in the Asia Pacific so as to placate China. Such American timidity to face-off China and its transgressions can ultimately lead China to success in prompting a US-Exit from the Western Pacific endangering US Homeland Security and laying bare the United States to Chinese and North Korean nuclear missiles threats.

Essentially, the United States keeps falling into the Chinese geopolitical trap because of the inability of the United States policy establishments to discern as to which is the

major threat to the United States, Russia or China? Arguing for over a decade and half in my writings and in my book on China last year, I have consistently pointed out that China is United States “Enemy Number One” and further that China is a more potent, dangerous and unpredictable threat to the United States, than Russia.

Simply, because comparatively, the United States and Russia have a shared history in managing a bipolar world with a predictability template to work on during the Cold War days. China on the other hand has only a historical conflictual record with the United States including a full-fledged War in the Korean Peninsula in the 1950s when the United States was the sole nuclear weapons power and China a primitive massed manpower force. China in 2017 is a revisionist power with only one stake in global affairs and that is to shatter United States predominance especially in Asia Pacific.

Concluding, the strategic choice is that of the United States to neutralise China and North Korea acting in tandem to undermine United States security or get lost in the Middle East quagmire that should be allowed to fester until such time it hits grievously those regional nations who generated and supported the Syrian Civil War. The United States has no viable option but to restrain, if not contain, China’s military brinkmanship in Indo Pacific through its proxies North Korea and Pakistan.

Source: www.eurasiareview.com, 11 April 2017

Turnbull's India Visit: A new chapter for Bilateral Ties?

-Rupakjyoti Borah

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s recently concluded visit to India could signal the beginning of a new chapter in India-Australia bilateral ties. The two countries share many commonalities, like being secular, multi-cultural liberal democracies with common colonial histories (and even a shared love for cricket).

What was the significance of Turnbull’s visit?

First, this visit was important because it Turnbull’s first to India as the Australian prime minister, though he and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had met on the sidelines of the G20 summit. His predecessor Tony Abbott had visited India in September 2014. Back then, the two countries signed an agreement for civil nuclear

cooperation. Australia holds almost 40 percent of the world's known uranium reserves and New Delhi needs uranium for its nuclear power requirements. India is looking at a massive increase in nuclear power generation as it struggles to meet the requirements of its booming economy and a growing population.

Second, there are almost 500,000 people of Indian descent in Australia who have made an immense economic contribution in the country. Moreover, Australia is the second most-popular destination for Indian students abroad, with close to 60,000 students from India pursuing their post-secondary education in Australian educational institutions last year. The Indian government is aiming to train around 400 million people in various skills by 2022 and Canberra can be a key partner in this initiative.

Third, there is growing synergy between New Delhi and Canberra on a host of issues. In the aftermath of the horrific 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, India, Australia, Japan, and the United States came together to provide relief and rescue efforts to the affected areas along the Indian Ocean rim. The four together are also part of many regional initiatives like the East Asia Summit, the G20, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (formerly known as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation). New Delhi also requires Australian support in its bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Despite all this room for cooperation, there are quite a few challenges as well. Two-way trade in goods and services between the two countries stood at \$19.4 billion in 2015-16, which is far below its actual potential. Though there was some hope for an improvement, neither the anticipated CECA (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement) or the Australia-India FTA (Free Trade Agreement) were signed during this most recent visit, which is a big disappointment.

That said, the outlook for the future remains bright. Australia is a key strategic partner for India in the Indo-Pacific region and it needs no reiteration that freedom of navigation in the waters of the region is key to both countries continued economic prosperity. Turnbull, writing recently in an Indian newspaper, notes that "as liberal democracies, we can work together to encourage free trade and prosperity and to help safeguard security and the rule of law in our region." Australia and India are also taking part in ongoing negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which assumes increasing significance in the region after the United States' pull-back from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Moreover, the Indian Navy, which is one of the most capable actors in the Indian Ocean region, has been collaborating with friendly navies like the Royal Australian Navy in order to tackle both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the region. India's Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands also lie very close to Aceh province in Indonesia, another capable player in the Indo-Pacific. The Indian Navy is thus a strategic actor in the greater region.

As India looks to operationalize its 'Act East' policy and Australia looks to expand its 'Look-West' policy, there is a clear path forward for both sides to expand their partnership.

Source: thediplomat.com, 12 April 2017

China's Chilling plan to become the Maritime Police Officer of Asia

-Ralph Jennings

The presidents of China and the United States just exchanged views on geopolitics during their first-ever meeting. But at least in public Chinese leader Xi Jinping made no commitments beyond platitudes about working together on easing the pains of a nuclear-capable North Korea and re-harmonizing a strained trade relationship with the United States. We've seen little from the April 6-7 meeting in Florida about the South China Sea, where Beijing is quickly gaining ground on five rival governments and the United States wants to limit its control.

The lack of commitments to the United States, its only formidable military adversary, gives the Chinese position another boost in the South China Sea dispute. The tropical sea spans 3.5 million square kilometers (1.4 million square miles). Heaps of oil and natural gas await under the seabed and world-class fisheries fill the water. Barring U.S. intervention, China will follow this five-point plan to become a de facto ruler of the sea with the power to make everyone else seek its permission to use it.

Keep ignoring the world arbitration court ruling of 2016. A tribunal of the world court in The Hague ruled in July that much of China's claim to 90-plus percent of the sea lacked legal merit. China called the ruling a "farce" then. As time passes with a dwindling outcry from abroad, it gets only easier to ignore. The Hague can't enforce the ruling on its own.

Talk individually with rival countries in Southeast Asia. China has talked to the smallest claimant, Brunei, about trade and investment since before the arbitration outcome. In October it began a dialogue with the Philippines, which had filed for the world court ruling, aimed at some solution to their conflicting South China Sea claims. Vietnam and China stepped up dialogue late last year and into this year with an eye toward their own maritime cooperation.

Offer aid and investment to other claimants. China has the world's No. 2 economy and, increasingly, the political will to spread it around overseas. It's helping Brunei run the country's major port and three years ago the two sides set up an "economic corridor." China pumps enough money into Malaysia to be its top investment source. The Philippines got pledges of \$24 billion in Chinese development aid in October and Vietnam is seeing a boom in Chinese *tourism*. Taking points 1-3 together, Southeast Asian countries with maritime claims should first sidestep the world court ruling, then enter a dialogue and finally get goodies from China to help their own economies. They happen to know *China doesn't mind cutting back economic ties* with countries that go against its political will.

Build up disputed islets and install surveillance technology. Over the past half-decade, China has reclaimed land to expand tiny islets it occupies in the sea's Paracel and Spratly chains. It's nearly ready for air combat facilities and radar systems on some islets, according to the American think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies' Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. Separately, government agencies are preparing to install an underwater observation system somewhere in the sea, official media reports in China say. The platform could send data back to land on undersea oil reserves and monitor what other countries are doing in the same body of water. "What it does is it lets them make a reality out of what they've been claiming," initiative director Gregory Poling says. "Obviously, they don't have a legal leg to stand on, and they know that," he says. "That doesn't really matter if Chinese vessels... are just swamping the region in numbers and capabilities."

Use its technology to patrol the whole sea. Here's the climax. The other claimant countries are talking to China and getting Chinese economic support – while China passes ships and explores for resources as it wishes despite old disputes. To make sure this formula works, China will use the surveillance tools outlined in item 4 to learn what everyone else is doing. Some analysts believe Beijing will eventually use that intelligence to make foreign fishing boats and oil rigs register first to use tracts of the sea that China calls its own. China will get a pivotal chance to use that power from May

through August, the term of an unusually strict fishing moratorium covering waters used by Vietnam and the Philippines.

Source: www.forbes.com, 11 April 2017

Chinese official media warns India over interference in K-issue

Beijing may interfere in the Kashmir issue, if India chooses to play dirty with China by allowing the Dalai Lama to visit Arunachal Pradesh, as per the Chinese official media. Taking exception to MoS Home Kiren Rijiju's remarks that Arunachal Pradesh was "an inseparable part of India", the China Daily and Global Times editorials stated using Dalai Lama as a tool against China for its veto against India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and UN ban on JeM chief Masood Azhar was wrong. "With a GDP several times higher than that of India and military power that can reach up to the Indian Ocean, if China engages in a geopolitical game with India, will Beijing lose to New Delhi?" said the Global Times. "Before this trip, the Dalai Lama was received by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee. At a time when he was given the cold shoulder in many places of the world, New Delhi is treating him as a favourite," it said.

An editorial said, "Tibet is a part of the Chinese territory no matter whether New Delhi agrees or not. Should Rijiju have any questions regarding the status of Southern Tibet, he can consult the historical archives. Justifying Indian control over Southern Tibet is legally untenable." At present, the Dalai Lama is on a nine-day visit to Arunachal Pradesh. "The Dalai Lama has been to the region before, but what makes this trip different is that he is received and accompanied by Rijiju.

Source: www.tehelka.com, 6 April 2017

Dissonance and infighting hit Trump's Asia Policy

-Richard Javad Heydarian

Far from being disciplined by the rituals and responsibilities of office, the Trump administration continues to be hobbled by policy dissonance and bureaucratic infighting. To be fair, US President Donald Trump's highly-anticipated summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping went largely according to script. Although there were no specific agreements on thorny issues such as trade and North Korea, both sides agreed to establish new and effective mechanisms for high-level dialogues to properly manage areas of conflict and expand areas of cooperation. United States National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, who replaced Mr Michael Flynn, has played a key role in restoring the National Security Council (NSC) to its more conventional form, booting out ideologues such as former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon and restoring Mr Daniel Coats, director of national intelligence, and General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the influential principal's committee of the advisory body. The other victim of the McMaster-led shakeup is Ms Kathleen MacFarland, the former No. 2 at the NSC, tipped to become the next ambassador to Singapore.

Nonetheless, a cursory look at Washington politics nowadays reveals a flailing superpower in search of a coherent strategy, particularly in Asia. Both major and smaller regional allies and partners in the region may well worry about strategic neglect under the current American administration.

Meanwhile, China has fortified its position in the South China Sea and stepped up its economic charm offensive across South-east Asia, particularly the Philippines.

Nonetheless, tossing aside its predecessor's pivot to Asia policy, the new US administration has vowed to remain active and engaged in Asia, although under its own formulation. But almost three months into office, the Trump administration has yet to assemble a full-fledged Asia team, namely the senior officials in the State Department, the National Security Council (NSC) and the Pentagon, who are tasked with formulating, implementing and overseeing America's day-to-day policies in the region. Mr Matthew Pottinger, a veteran China hawk, is widely expected to take over as the chief Asia-focused figure in the NSC.

Partly, this is due to bureaucratic infighting and political vendetta. Both Defence Secretary James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have failed to install preferred deputies in the Pentagon and the State Department, respectively, due to fierce opposition from the White House.

For instance, proposed undersecretaries Mary Beth Long (for the Pentagon) and Elliott Abrams (for the State Department) were reportedly turned down by the Trump administration due to their earlier participation in the Never Trump movement, which featured 150 leading Republican national security experts who opposed Mr Trump's candidacy last year.

Other prominent Republicans such as Mr Robert Zoellick (former World Bank president), Mr Tom Ridge (former secretary for Homeland Security) and Mr John Negroponte (former national intelligence director) were similarly frozen out. Dr Patrick Cronin, a widely-respected Asia expert who was designated to become the director of the Pentagon-funded Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, reportedly became the latest victim of a seeming political purge of past critics.

The appointment of Asia-focused assistant secretaries has also been affected, given many leading experts' earlier criticism of Mr Trump's campaign agenda. The seeming prioritisation of loyalty over meritocracy could, and already has, left a discernible competence gap in American government.

The other area of concern is policy dissonance. After months of threatening to abandon allies and get tough on China, Mr Trump has ended up reassuring Japan of his "100 per cent" support, while repeatedly extending an olive branch to Beijing by emphasising cooperation rather than conflict. In the South China Sea, the Trump administration initially adopted a tough language, contemplating a naval blockade against China and stepping up so-called freedom-of- navigation operations close to Chinese-made artificial islands in the Paracels and the Spratlys.

As a result, many South-east Asian countries were concerned about unnecessary and dangerous escalation in the maritime disputes. However, latest reports suggest the Pentagon has struggled to get the White House's permission to dispatch, on a more regular basis, larger ships and naval assets close to Chinese-occupied land features in the South China Sea.

However, the biggest area of concern is the prospect of diminished American leadership and optimal strategic engagement.

The US State Department, crucial to development of a nuanced strategy in Asia, is grappling with steep budget cuts of up to 28 per cent alongside personnel reduction, the purging of ambassadors from the Obama administration, and numerous resignations among demoralised members of the diplomatic corps. As Mr Trump's generals and diplomats have warned, the massive reduction in America's overseas development aid will inevitably have a negative impact on American soft power and conflict-prevention strategy around the globe.

At the same time, China is rolling out major infrastructure projects under its One Belt, One Road and Maritime Silk Road initiatives. The China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China, along with the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, are also expected to play crucial roles in bankrolling development projects across Asia with Chinese know-how and technology.

The Philippines, America's oldest ally in Asia, has received a pledge of up to US\$50 billion (S\$70 billion) from China, which recently sent both its commerce minister and vice-premier to Manila and Davao, the hometown of President Rodrigo Duterte, who has increasingly gravitated towards Beijing and away from Washington.

The Trump administration, which nixed the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) on its first day in office, has put no tangible economic initiative on the table, yet. And it is far from clear whether Mr Trump or any senior American official will meaningfully attend the East Asia Summit and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' meeting later this year in the Philippines and Vietnam respectively.

So far, top American officials have been on a series of back-to-back visits to North-east Asia and Europe, but South-east Asia has been left out. Vice-President Mike Pence is slated to visit Indonesia in the coming days, but there are concerns that the trip will be mostly a jet fuel stop and vacuous exercise in handshake diplomacy, with no concrete agreements on the table. While one can argue that it's still too early to judge the merits of Mr Trump's Asia policy, the first months have been far from encouraging. In the highly dynamic world of Asian geopolitics, time and initiative is of essence.

Source: www.straitstimes.com, 13 April 2017