



MAKING WAVES

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Two navy vessels dock in Davao City as maritime security intensifies in the region

Following President Rodrigo Duterte's declaration of martial law, two naval vessels are now in Davao City to intensify maritime security in Mindanao. AFP East Mincom Deputy Commander BGen. Gilbert Gapay said the move is part of the ongoing hot pursuit operation of the military in maintaining the security in the city in line with the martial law declaration of President Duterte. "These terror groups Abu Sayyaff, Maute, they've been using the seas as their maneuver space and our newest naval assets are a big help in really having effective sea control and naval presence dominance in our seas," BGen. Gapay said.

The Philippine Navy continues to conduct maritime patrols in coastal areas to ensure the security in the area. "All of our floating assets are conducting maritime patrols so we are doubling that up to secure coastal areas from that we are also augmenting our personnel and our security forces with the coordination of our counterparts the PNP and Eastern Mindanao command," NFEM spokesperson Lt. James Reyes said. In line with this, the BGen. Gilbert Gapay assures that there will be no abuse of power in the declaration of martial law in Mindanao. "It is really intended to address this internal conflicts and it is nothing any intended to intake liberties, civil liberties and basic human rights,"he said.

The AFP has also deployed a battalion from the 4th and 10th infantry division in case there is a need for an augmentation in the Marawi operation. Meanwhile, the Philippine Navy will hold in Davao City for the first time its 119th anniversary for the decommissioning of the BRP Davao Del Sur on May 31. President Duterte is expected to attend in the said event.

Source: www.untvweb.com, 26 May 2017

The Indian Navy and India's Overseas Citizens: Operations Sukoon and Rahat

- Bhargav Acharya

The primary role of any government is to safeguard its people at home and abroad. India has a significant number of its citizens living in different parts of the world. The security of these overseas citizens is a moral obligation of India. But there are instances when this obligation to security has been inadequate. One such instance involved a dhow, the MV Bhakti Sagar with 21 Indians on board, which was hijacked by Somali pirates near the Gulf of Aden in February 2006. The Indian Navy (IN) had the destroyer INS Mumbai in the vicinity. The government refused to act on the incident despite IN's willingness to perform a rescue operation. India was unsure of its legitimacy in the area, and feared the backlash of West Asian countries and North Africa. The failure to honour its values drew criticism, and the incident proved to be a timely reminder to the government to contribute more to the cause of the safety of its citizens. The Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) performed thereafter by the IN has been instrumental in trying to set the priorities straight.

This issue brief aims at providing a background to successful Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), namely Operation Sukoon and Operation Rahat, undertaken by the IN. The dynamics associated with such operations are explained, which include such issues as the Indian citizens in the region, a reactive-proactive approach, and India's soft power.

Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO)

The Indian Maritime Doctrine (2009) notes,

There are increasing numbers of Indian citizens who work and reside in various parts of the world. They are important contributors to the progress of their countries of residence as well as to India. In view of insecurity and instability in some parts of the world, Indian citizens there may require to be evacuated under arrangements and control of the Government of India, which could be done by civil or military means, by land, air or sea. The IN may be tasked with undertaking such Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (NEO).

Operation Sukoon and Operation Rahat are two such operations that have been widely acclaimed the world over. It is imperative to have an overview of these two operations that highlight the versatile role the IN has played in securing India's overseas citizens.

Operation Sukoon

Operation Sukoon was orchestrated by the IN to evacuate Indian nationals, along with Sri Lankan, Nepalese and few Lebanese nationals, who were caught in the conflict in Lebanon during the 2006 Lebanon War. The conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah militants intensified, with Israel taking the route of a military offensive. Around 12,000 Indians and a few hundred foreign nationals were left stranded needing help, of which around 2000 were believed to be in the conflict zone.

At around the same time, four Indian warships were in the Mediterranean Sea returning from a 'goodwill' trip to Greece. The naval task force consisting of the destroyer INS Mumbai, the frigates INS Brahmaputra and INS Betwa, and the fleet tanker INS Shakti were directed to help the distressed people. The task force was successful in evacuating 2,280 Indian citizens and personnel from friendly countries. 4 Operation Sukoon of IN was recognised as a landmark achievement, and drew accolades from around the world for its ability to provide succour.

Operation Rahat

In March 2015, the Yemeni crisis began to unravel after the military intervention by the Royal Saudi Air Force led a coalition of Arab states against the Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen. The ground situation in the region took a turn for the worse when the Houthi rebels toppled the government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Thousands of Indians found themselves in a precarious situation, having ignored the initial advisories given out by the India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to avoid travel, and to vacate Yemen. 6 Upon directives by the government, the Indian Armed Forces carried out the civilian evacuation mission known as Operation Rahat.

The IN deployed the patrol vessel INS Sumitra, the destroyer INS Mumbai, the frigate INS Tarkash and two ferries belonging to Lakshadweep—the MV Kavaratti and the MV Coral—to carry out the evacuation operation. The operation also involved the deployment of C-17 aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Air India flights to airlift people. The combined efforts led to the evacuation of 5,600 people, including 4,640 Indians and 960 foreign nationals from 41 countries.⁷ The readiness shown by the

Indian forces at such a time of distress did not go unnoticed, and was applauded on the successful completion of the mission.

Dynamics of Naval Role in Securing Overseas Citizens

The success of Operations Sukoon and Operation Rahat has set the benchmark for the role that the IN could play in providing humanitarian assistance. Understanding what makes them stand out from one another essentially helps one understand the incorporation of the navy as a contributing factor to the overall security of overseas citizens. An analysis of the dynamic aspects of these missions reveals the cornerstones of India's commitment to overseas citizens.

The first aspect is the number of Indian citizens in the region. It is estimated that more than 6 million Indians work in West Asian countries. They are the source of huge remittance flows into India which stood at around 30.8 per cent of the total US\$ 72 billion in 2015.⁸ India receives the largest share—around 12 per cent—of total 4 world remittances, which amounts to nearly 4 per cent of the country's GDP.⁹ This is a reflection of the increased involvement of Indians overseas, contributing to the overall growth of the region as well as of their home country, considering the fact that the remittances grew from around US\$ 2.1 billion in 1991 to US\$ 24 billion in 2006.

The successive governments at the centre did not fail to notice this upward shift in capital inflows—one that was relatively hassle free and steadier than the much hyped Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). These remittances also exceeded India's earnings from high technology exports.¹¹ Operation Sukoon and Operation Rahat carried out by the IN should be understood in the context of the government accepting these facts. For far too long, the safety of Indians in the region has seldom received the kind amount of attention it receives in other parts of the world. There was a growing realisation that India could not afford to ignore either its people or the region since it would prove to be detrimental to its economy in the long run.

The second aspect is the reactive-proactive approach followed by India. India has always been criticised for its lack of initiative in maintaining the security of its overseas citizens caught in conflicts. This was evident in the execution of Operation Sukoon in July 2006. Although the operation has been termed a success, there was ample scope for the better execution of the operation. Undoubtedly, the IN played a crucial role in the success of the mission. But it happened only as a reactive measure—that is, after the conflict had reached an alarming level at Lebanon. The government responded to

the situation after receiving significant pressure from the state governments to rescue their people. India was fortunate to have Indian navy warships returning from Greece in the vicinity. However, the reaction time was questionable since the warships had ended their goodwill trip to Greece on 13th July and had left Mediterranean Sea when the government directive to the IN came four days later—that is, on 17th July.

However, there has been a gradual transition from age old reactive methods to a more proactive approach. Operation Rahat carried out in April 2015 is a testament to such a shift. It redefined the Indian approach to complex situations. The crisis that broke out in Yemen in late March 2015 did not come as a surprise to India as it anticipated the changing circumstances and factors in the region. Even before deploying the IN to rescue its people, the government warned Indians living in the region of the possible repercussions of the conflict. The number of evacuated people in Operation Rahat was in stark contrast to those in Operation Sukoon. While Operation Rahat saw a total of 4,640 Indians being evacuated—barring the few who chose to stay back in Yemen—Operation Sukoon saw only 2,280 people of the total 12000 Indians in the region being rescued. The remaining 10,000 were left stranded, looking for help.¹³ The execution of Operation Rahat was efficient as the IN was able to complete its part of the mission before the conflict turned into a full-fledged war. This proactive approach acted as a reassurance mechanism which was aimed not only at providing humanitarian assistance but also at maintaining regional security and stability when faced with such dire situations.

The third aspect—and perhaps the most vital—is India’s soft power which has emerged as the very crux of India’s global strategy in the 21st century. Soft power is aimed at influencing another nation’s behaviour by attraction, agenda-setting, and legitimacy.¹⁴ This soft power could be observed in India’s approach during the execution of Operation Rahat. The government used the services of the IN and war veterans as soft power tools to resolve standoffs in the region through dialogue for the safe evacuation of Indians.

India has always tried to avoid conflicts and, at times, even seemed reluctant to assume leadership roles while trying to solve them. The priorities of the government were hardly at par with those of the IN. In matters of the security of overseas citizens, the IN had a very limited role to play. But since the onset of the new millennium, the signs of symmetry among the two have started to show promise. The government seems to believe that the IN could indeed be used as an instrument of soft power in securing its citizens as well as in pursuit of India’s regional and global interests.

It is often said that during the exercise of naval power in conflicts, the main problem is the lack of political skill on land rather than the lack of professional quality at sea.¹⁶ Operation Rahat executed in April 2015 reflects a changed strategy on India's part. It concentrated on assuming a central position while negotiating the safe evacuation of Indians. Also, considering the fact that requests to rescue several 6 hundred foreign nationals were made by their respective home governments, the onus was on India to make use of the opportunity to project itself as a capable, efficient, and disciplined power in the global world. The government's decision to send the Minister of State for Overseas Indian Affairs General V. K. Singh as a soft power mascot to negotiate with local forces and oversee the operations¹⁷ worked wonders in realising the success of the mission.

In the wake of the growing security threats to overseas citizens, India has a moral responsibility to ensure their safety. What one can observe from the success of the above NEO is that there is now a better correlation among various stakeholders in the Indian government. Operation Rahat was a monumental success because the MEA, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the IN worked in absolute synchronisation, and with real-time information.¹⁸ India's willingness to confront global challenges has contributed to a positive image even among those countries that have, traditionally, been giving it the cold shoulder in the past. The IN has been an influential factor in changing perceptions. In the recent past, the IN has played a significant role in maintaining interests that are of economic, political, and military importance to the government. Given the multiple role that the IN could play, it is important to make full use of its potential to ensure better environment for the safety of Indians living overseas.

Source: www.maritimeindia.org, 22 May 2017

Third maritime patrol ship inducted for security of CPEC

Minister for Ports and Shipping Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo has said that Pakistan has witnessed major challenges in the shape of regional conflicts and invasion due to its geographic location and with the inception of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) it has become a centre of global attention. He was speaking at the induction ceremony of the third Chinese-built maritime patrol ship PMSS Dasht at the naval dockyard on Monday. The ship built for the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) arrived in Karachi earlier this month. "This [CPEC] region is being seen with

great interest by world powers. The instability in our neighbourhood poses serious challenges for the entire region, particularly Pakistan,” said Mr Bizenjo. “The CPEC has the potential to change the regional canvas and the world. The importance of the project for Pakistan’s strategic strength and economic prosperity needs no elaboration. Every effort is being made to secure the important trade lifeline both on land and at sea,” he said. “The government is undertaking every effort to lead the nation to the path of socio-economic progress...be it building of road networks, energy projects, industrial growth, job creation, transportation...or defence needs,” said the minister.

Acknowledging the government’s efforts in optimizing operational resources of Pakistan Navy and PMSA to safeguard the CPEC sea routes, Mr Bizenjo said: “The government allocated over \$150 million to enable the PMSA fleet to protect our maritime area and sea lines of communication. This will add a great deal to the security fibre not only for the CPEC but for all maritime zones of Pakistan.”

He lauded the project teams in Pakistan and China — China State Shipbuilding Corporation, Chinese Xijiang Shipyard and the PMSA ship’s crew — for their professionalism and dedication. “I have met a few Chinese engineers and technicians associated with the project and appreciate their valuable contribution. Their commitment to the project is indeed commendable and shows the strength of deep-rooted friendship between both countries,” he said, adding that construction of the remaining two ships under the current project at the Karachi shipyard was another fine example of cooperation between the two countries.

Referring to the choice of names for the series of 600-ton multi-purpose vessel ships, Mr. Bizenjo said he was “impressed and deeply moved” by the respect shown for Balochistan by the PMSA by naming the boats after the province’s rivers. “Following contract signing with China Shipbuilding and Trading Company for construction of six ships three of which, including PMSS Dasht, are already delivered while the remaining three ships are under various phases of construction, simultaneously in China and Pakistan,” shared PMSA Director General Rear Admiral Jamil Akhtar.

Admiral Akhtar said two of the ships, Hingol and Basol, were delivered and commissioned on Dec 10 last year in China — almost four months ahead of their contract schedule — while PMSS Dasht was commissioned on April 12 this year in China, which was delivered ahead of schedule as well. “In the meanwhile, construction work on the fourth multi-purpose vessel continues in full pace at Karachi Shipping and

Engineering Works. Two large 1,500 tons ships of the project are also under construction in China and Pakistan,” he added.

The ships possessed latest technology and were optimized for maritime policing roles through in-built capabilities of quick response, extended ranges, longer stay at sea and shorter turn-around-time, asserted Admiral Akhtar.

Source: www.dawn.com, 23 May 2017

Maritime Security: Dakuku debunks reports on piracy, says fast intervention vessels, helicopters will help

The Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) Dr. Dakuku Peterside has again assured Nigerians and the international maritime community that the Federal Government is leaving no stone unturned in tackling the menace of piracy and other illicit crimes on the nation’s territorial waterways. This he said was demonstrated by the Federal Government’s recent approval for the procurement of three (3) helicopters and twelve (12) fast intervention vessels to ensure coastal and aerial surveillance and patrol of the Nigerian maritime environment by the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA.

Speaking in Lagos recently, Dr. Dakuku added that “while acknowledging the fact that piracy is a global problem which is not peculiar to one continent or country, the need for a concerted and coordinated approach in tackling the menace cannot be overstated”. He equally debunked recent reports that piracy was on the increase in the Nigerian waters and the Gulf of Guinea, noting that it is sad that some section of the media are manipulating statistics to the contrary. The truth he pointed out is that the reverse is the case as piracy has been reduced to the barest minimum.

Accordingly, he noted that inter agency and regional cooperation through bilateral agreements among others, as well as effective maritime domain awareness and strong maritime legislation to criminalize and punish piracy is fundamental in addressing the challenges.

Speaking further, Dr. Dakuku said in recognition of the aforementioned, the governments of the West and Central African Countries including Nigeria at the regional level, subscribed to the Continental Maritime Charter on maritime security, safety and development in Africa, in Lome, Togo on the 15th of October, 2016, to

strengthen inter-Agency and transnational coordination and cooperation among member countries in the area of maritime domain awareness, fight against all forms of maritime crimes, prevention and control of pollution of the seas and to promote economic growth of the continent of Africa.

“In the area of inter agency cooperation, it is expedient to mention that NIMASA recently renewed its Memorandum of Understanding with the Nigerian Navy to strengthen collaboration between NIMASA and the Navy to enhance the safety and security of navigation in our waters as, well as leverage on the use of the Federal Government’s Falcon Eye Satellite systems domiciled with the Nigerian Navy including NIMASA’s Global Maritime Distress and Safety Systems to respond to distress calls within Nigerian waters in order to prevent and adequately respond to threats within the Nigerian maritime environment ”, the DG stated.

In order to bolster the aforementioned efforts of the Agency to ensure a virile maritime sector through a robust legislative framework to criminalise and punish piracy and other maritime crimes committed in our waters to serve as a deterrent to offenders; Nigeria has prepared a draft Anti-Piracy Bill to give effect to the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 and the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts at Sea, 1988 and it’s Protocol of 2005 to punish and deter piracy and other maritime crimes.

The Director, Legal Services of NIMASA Mr. Abdulsalam Suleiman also speaking, noted that the Agency is presently working with the Federal Ministry of Justice to finalise the Bill and has the assurances of the National Assembly of the expeditious passage of the Bill into law within the shortest possible time to strengthen the Country’s Anti piracy crusade.

According to Suleiman “It is pertinent to draw attention to the fact that some of the interventions highlighted above are already yielding positive results and have been duly noted by the international community. Worthy of mention, is the just concluded Legal Committee meeting (LEG 104) of the IMO held in London from the 26th to 28th April 2017, where the issue of piracy around the globe was discussed and the Gulf of Guinea and Nigeria were not mentioned as one of the high risk areas”. This lends credence to the fact that Nigeria through its maritime law enforcement agencies are working assiduously in confronting maritime insecurity challenges in Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea.

Recall that as part of efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria in demonstrating its commitment to fighting piracy and other maritime crimes, the sum of One Hundred and Eighty Six Million Dollars (\$186, 000, 000. 00) was recently approved for maritime security infrastructure.

Source: www.marsecreview.com, 18 may 2017

ECSA: Merchant ships still rescuing migrants from sea

ECSA's Maritime Security Working Group recently had an exchange of views with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in Warsaw on maritime security issues. The Shipping industry is directly affected by challenges, such as migrants at sea. Whereas the number of migrants rescued from the sea has gone down from the peak-year of 2015, merchant vessels are still often involved in the Search and Rescue (SAR) operations in central, western and eastern Mediterranean.

Concerning the "Operation Triton" of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, in 2016, out of all 1629 incidents, 4% involved merchant vessels assistance while in 2017 out of 470 so far the share is 12%. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency's activities have intensified and its tasks increased, and the operational concept of its Maritime Operations is related to the early detection of migrants, contribution to the SAR operation and detection of other cross border crime activities. Migration remains one of the biggest operational activities in 2017.

"Often, merchant ships are the first to assist with the rescue of migrants. In accordance with international conventions, our Captains have a legal obligation to help people in distress at sea, and we will of course honour these commitments when needed. However, commercial ships are not equipped neither are the crews trained to undertake large-scale rescues. Therefore, commercial ships should not become a permanent part of the solution to this problem, the scale of which appear to grow proportionally to the availability of rescue platforms at sea. Within the international legal framework, other and more comprehensive solutions should be considered. For example addressing the root causes of the problem, removing the migrants' incentive to migrate, and containing the problem to the shores" the Chairman of ECSA's Maritime Security Working Group, Mr. Jakob Paaske Larsen, said.

”We appreciate to a great extent and are impressed by all the work and operations undertaken by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency on search and rescue operations. The added value of its ongoing operations is important and has ameliorated the pressure on the merchant fleet to a big extent” he concluded.

Mr Georgios Vourekas, Head of Sea Border Sector at the Joint Operations Unit underlined that the European Border and Coast Guard Agency is aware of the impact the high number of search and rescue operations has on the merchant vessels involved and said that it is ready to debate with all partners in order to find a solution for these challenges.

Source: www.ecsa.eu, 254 May 2017

Pakistan boosting maritime security to counter Indian threat to CPEC

Pakistan is beefing up its maritime security to secure its territorial waters in the face of new challenges posed by India, which is trying to undermine China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India is not only trying to make the multi-billion dollars CPEC project a territorial dispute but also threatening it through its naval build-up. “Pakistan is trying to bolster its naval capabilities because of India’s efforts to undermine the CPEC,” official sources said on Monday. For this purpose, Pakistan is in process of enhancing the capabilities of its navy through the collaboration of China and Turkey. Sources said the Pakistan Navy is trying to build eight more multipurpose submarines with Chinese technical cooperation. Likewise, it has signed a landmark agreement with Turkey last week under which Pakistan will build new multipurpose war vessels through a joint venture. Pakistan and Turkey have signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) on the four MLGEM Ada-class corvettes project. The LoI was signed by Defence Production Secretary Lt-Gen Muhammad Owais and Turkish undersecretary SSM Prof Dr Ismail Demir.

On the other hand, the Pakistan Navy spokesperson sounded optimistic that the ongoing visit of Naval Chief Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah to China was expected to go a long way in promoting maritime security and stability in the region and greatly enhance the bilateral cooperation between the two navies. The spokesperson said the deep-rooted naval collaboration between the Pakistan Navy and PLA (Navy) has become even more important in the backdrop of the CPEC project to effectively handle

complex challenges in the maritime domain. Commander PLA (N) China Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong during interaction with Admiral Zakaullah highly appreciated the efforts of the Pakistan Navy in maintaining collaborative security in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Both the naval leaders agreed to further enhance interaction between both navies through port calls, bilateral naval exercises and exchange of training programmes at various levels.

Pakistan and China have very high stakes in the CPEC which plan to tap the potential of Pakistan's deep-sea Gwadar port through networks of new roads as well as railways in order to connect with at least 62 countries in Asia, Africa and Europe.

On its part, India is trying to undermine the CPEC for a variety of reasons including geopolitical and geoeconomics, and has been making concerted efforts to destabilise and isolate Pakistan. Foreign policy and security experts believe that India has been showing its frustration over the CPEC since Pakistan and China signed the bilateral accord in 2013. They say that since then, India has been making all out attempts to undermining the CPEC project by projecting it politically controversial which Pakistan rejected as part of Indian propaganda.

Economically, they believe India was strongly feeling marginalised because of the Gwadar port, which they viewed as a direct challenge to India's main shipping hub, Mumbai port. India, they said, would be at a great disadvantage because of the Gwadar port's economic potential. They say that new challenges from India have prompted Pakistan to take requisite steps not only to secure the CPEC project on land but also in its territorial waters.

Source: nation.com.pk, 16 May 2017

Piracy incident reported against bulk carrier in Gulf of Aden

On 16 May, an Indian anti-piracy patrol received a distress call from a Liberian-registered bulk carrier that reported an incident of attempted piracy by two suspicious mother vessels along with 7-8 skiffs, in Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ministry of Defense informed. When it sent the distress call, MV Lord Mountbatten was located in position 230 nautical miles South-West of Salalah and the INS Sharda immediately proceeded to investigate the incident, as it was, at that time, 30 Nm East of the reported position. On arriving in the area, Sharda detected two dhows along with eight skiffs in vicinity, three of which fled the area at high speeds on sighting the warship.

Indian Navy's MARCOS, with support of the armed helicopter from the ship, investigated the dhows and their skiffs by conducting board and search operations.

“The absence of any fishing gear onboard the two dhows/ remaining five skiffs indicated malicious intent and possible piracy-linked intentions. One high calibre AKM rifle alongwith one filled magazine (28 rounds) was found hidden onboard one of the dhows. The weapon and ammunition has been confiscated to prevent future illegal misuse”, the official statement says.

Source: www.linkedin.com, 17 May 2017

Indian Navy Looks to Buy Subsurface Vessels to Detect Undersea Threat

Indian Navy wants three variants of the underwater vessel namely for detection/inspection, combat and training role. In fact, the Navy will purchase five underwater vehicles which may go up later. The purchase order is expected to be approximately \$95 million: half of the total deal amount has to be invested in India under an offset clause of India's Defense Procurement Policy 2016.

The GPS and inertial navigation system-enabled, 360-degrees maneuverable portable automatic underwater vehicles (PAUV) would be self-propelled using horizontal and vertical thrusters and onboard chargeable battery pack. The Navy wants PAUV to be deployable in rigid-hulled inflatable boats, inflatable crafts, and helicopters. An Indian Navy document demands two hours endurance capacity of the PAUV which can be controllable at a speed of five knots.

The automatic underwater vehicle should be capable of operating specialized equipment to locate using sonar, identify using cameras and disposal of mines using shaped charge. "Two-man PAUV is envisaged to be used in support of detection, identification and disposal of mines, mine-like objects, IED, or other ordnance," the Indian Navy document said.

With just four minesweepers out of the 24 required to secure its region from minefields, the Indian Navy is in dire straits with the existing four also due to be decommissioned next year. There is no news of any induction of new minesweepers. "This major capability void could be overcome by the Indian Navy, at least temporarily, by deploying integral mine-avoidance equipment like side-scan sonars on board major warships," Gurpreet S. Khurana, Captain (Indian Navy) and Executive Director of National Maritime Foundation, said.

Global defense manufacturers like General Dynamics, Textron Systems, Atlas Electronic, SAAB, and DCNS are capable of delivering these underwater vehicles.

Source: sputniknews.com, 19 May 2017

Coral sea to the china seas: the carrier as a constant

-S Misra

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first aircraft carrier battle ever fought, comprising a series of naval engagements off the Australian coast during the Second World War.¹ It was fought between May 04 and May 08, 1942, 75 years to date. The start of May 2017 befittingly saw the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea being commemorated in Australia with a dawn service in Townsville, Queensland, by the Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.² On May 04, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, met with the Australian PM aboard the USS Intrepid, a WW2-era aircraft carrier from the war in the Pacific, to commemorate the 75th anniversary.

Remarking on the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Prime Minister of Australia said that this was the “first time a naval battle was fought entirely from the air.”⁴ And therein lay its uniqueness. With tensions ratcheting up in the China Seas and the ‘attention’ being given to aircraft carriers per se, a look at the Battle of the Coral Sea which just saw its 75th anniversary being celebrated, would not if anything but be apt.

The Battle of the Coral Sea

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the largest naval battle ever fought so close to Australian shores and was significant for two reasons; firstly, the battle was fought solely by aircraft attacking ships, and secondly, at no time did the opposing fleets sight each other, let alone fire at each other. Additionally, and most importantly, it was the first time that the Japanese southward advance in the Pacific had been stopped.

The situation was precarious for the Allies in the early months of 1942. The Japanese seemed unstoppable post Pearl Harbour and the fall of Singapore. The Australian Navy had lost eight ships. The Dutch East Indies, the north coast of New Guinea and the naval base of Rabaul were taken. Darwin had been bombed.⁶ It was also a time when the Japanese were not quite sated with their progress thus far, and also understood the importance of the aircraft carrier. The Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was concerned that the Japanese had missed the aircraft carriers of the US battle fleet at Pearl Harbour. With the US carriers carrying out raids on Japanese bases in the central and south Pacific and the Doolittle raid on Tokyo by bombers from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet exacerbating their concerns, the Japanese looked forward to the destruction of the US Pacific Fleet before it could

rebuild itself. And so, Yamamoto began planning for a move against the island of Midway.

The Japanese had no plans to invade Australia during the Second World War.⁸ They, however, had plans to extend their Pacific control by setting up a base at Tulagi in the southern Solomons and also to capture Port Moresby in New Guinea. This would in effect cut off Australia thus taking them out of the war and leaving them prone to invasion by the Japanese at their convenience, as it were. Control of Port Moresby would safeguard islands held by the Japanese from land based air attacks while enabling the Japanese Air Force to attack Queensland ports and airfields at Horn Island, Cooktown, Coen and Townsville. This would effectively halt the flow of men and materiel by cutting off sea links between Australia and America thus leaving the Japanese unchallengeable in the Pacific area. A subsequent destructive attack on the main US Fleet at Midway would then force the US out of the Pacific war.

The Japanese modus operandi was to first seize Tulagi in the Solomons. Troop carrying transports escorted by the aircraft carrier Shoho and other ships would then head for Port Moresby from Rabaul. The invasion force would have additional protection from the aircraft carriers Zuikaku and Shokaku along with cruisers and destroyers. The plan was for these carriers to intercept the US naval force from two sides as it entered the Coral Sea in response to the invasion.

The Allies had however cracked the main Japanese codes and discovered the Japanese plans.¹¹ Admiral Nimitz sent two carrier task forces led by the USS Lexington and the USS Yorktown under command of Rear Admiral Fletcher of the US Navy. A third task force commanded by Rear Admiral Crace and led by the cruisers HMAS Australia, HMAS Hobart and the USS Chicago, joined them.¹² On May 07, 1942, US aircraft sank the Japanese auxillary carrier Shoho. However, the next day, Japanese action led to the sinking of the American aircraft carrier USS Lexington. Both, the US carrier USS Yorktown and the Japanese carrier Shokaku³ were damaged on the eighth of May 1942 and the Japanese withdrew.¹³ Both sides to the battle had a heavy price to pay. The US fleet's losses included one carrier destroyed, one damaged, one oiler and one destroyer each sunk plus a loss of 66 aircraft along with 543 men killed or wounded. The Japanese losses on the other hand had one small carrier destroyed, one destroyer and three small ships sunk along with 77 carrier aircraft lost, and 1074 men killed or wounded.

A Turning Point

The Battle of the Coral Sea will be remembered for not only being the first ever aircraft carrier battle but also as a turning point in the Second World War. It was the first major operational failure for the Japanese in the war and stopped the southward advance of the Japanese Pacific expansion. A month later, the Japanese Navy suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Midway, which saw four Japanese aircraft carriers being sunk within a few hours by the US forces.¹⁵ While the Battle of the Coral Sea saw an end to the Japanese invasion plans for Port Moresby, it also contributed to a weakened Japanese force which met the Allied fleet at Midway. This ended Japanese plans to capture Fiji, Samoa and the New Hebrides.

Carriers and the like notwithstanding, it was also an example of America and Australia coming together against a common enemy. The Battle of the Coral Sea is considered to be a key moment in the alliance between America and Australia. The Australian Prime Minister while commemorating the 75th anniversary of the battle said that “The US Navy’s commitment of two of its precious carriers into this battle, showed a total commitment to the defence of Australia.” He further went on to say that “Today, Australia and the United States continue to work with our allies to address new security threats around the world.”¹⁷ This is all the more significant in view of the threat of North Korea and the turmoil in the China Seas.

The Carrier as a Constant

Fast forward from the Coral Sea to the China Seas, and the one strategic constant that springs to the fore is the use of the aircraft carrier as a tool for power projection. ¹⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, American naval officer, and an influential exponent of sea power, published ‘The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660- 1783,’ in 1890, a period which saw tremendous technological advances in warships.¹⁹ While there were no aircraft carriers then, if one were to now interpolate them into that period, then the importance of sea power which he so espoused, would have been even more pronounced.

The China Seas in particular and the Indo-Pacific at large are today, 75 years down the line from the Battle of the Coral Sea, making headlines once again for that same instrument of sea power, the ubiquitous aircraft carrier. April 2017 saw China’s first domestically built aircraft carrier taking to the waters. It is China’s second aircraft carrier after the Liaoning. While the Type 001A carrier which is yet to be named would

become operational only by 2020, it is fair to say that there are more carriers to come.²⁰ China has reasoned the need for aircraft carriers to ‘effectively protect its fair rights that are increasingly extending overseas.’²¹ However, what is equally as important as the number of carriers is the experience of operating them, and that takes time. The US today being the numero uno operator of aircraft carriers with ten carriers, ²² is also the prima donna in the ongoing China Seas - Korean peninsula ‘opera’ that is currently being played out. The USS Carl Vinson is another aircraft carrier that has been in the limelight. The USS Carl Vinson Strike Group was ordered to the Korean peninsula in April 2017, by the Trump administration to deter North Korea from carrying out further nuclear tests. The move of the aircraft carrier led to threats from Pyongyang to sink the US aircraft carrier, ²³ indicating the seriousness that the DPRK attaches to the presence of such concentrated force, as that which a carrier group brings, into its neighbourhood.

Recent events thus bear testimony to the importance that nations – and especially littoral nations – attach to the aircraft carrier and all that it conveys. The aircraft carrier then remains the most effective tool available to exercise military muscle and so also diplomatic might today. The most potent tool of modern ‘gunboat diplomacy’ one might say. Aircraft carriers and by extension aircraft carrier groups thus possess the means to be an effective means of deterrence – as seen with the US sending the USS Carl Vinson Group to the Korean peninsula to deter North Korea. The aircraft carrier with its reach and firepower also provides reassurance to allies, as indicated in the China Seas with the US Carrier Group carrying out joint naval exercises with its ally, South Korea.²⁴ Unlike in the Battle of the Coral Sea, today’s ship borne aerial elements provide far superior maritime domain awareness. In addition to this, the advent of superior technology and weaponry has increased the potency of aircraft carriers, thus resulting in an increased capacity to affect the outcome of not only maritime engagements but also of those on land too. Further, the nearly unlimited reach of today’s nuclear powered aircraft carriers makes it possible for a nation to protect its interests – uninhibited by constraints of distance. ⁵ Finally it is indeed ironical that while the navies of the United States and Japan faced each other off in the first ever aircraft carrier battle in May 1942, 75 years to date, the month of May 2017 saw erstwhile US enemy Japan dispatching the helicopter carrier Izumo – its biggest warship and a ‘carrier’ nonetheless - to protect a US supply vessel within Japanese waters.²⁵ Having remained a strategic constant - from the Coral Sea to the China Seas - the aircraft carrier today acts as an extension of national resolve, perhaps more so than ever in the past and is going to continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Source: www.maritimeindia.org, 18 May 2017

North Korea calls latest solid-fuel missile test 'successful'

North Korea fired a solid-fuel ballistic missile on Sunday that can be harder for outsiders to detect before launch and later said the test was hailed as perfect by leader Kim Jong Un. The official Korean Central News Agency confirmed Monday the missile was a Pukguksong-2, a medium-to-long range ballistic missile also launched in February. South Korea and the United States had earlier described Sunday's missile as medium-range. The Pukguksong (Polaris)-2 is a land-based version of a submarine-launched missile. The missile advances North Korea's weapons capabilities because solid-fuel missiles can be fired faster and more secretly than those using liquid fuel, which must be added separately and transported to a launch site using trucks that can be seen by satellites.

Reached altitude of 560 km

The rocket was fired near the county of Pukchang in South Phyongan province and flew eastward about 500 kilometers (310 miles), an official from South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. It reached an altitude of 560 kilometers (347 miles), the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity, citing office rules. The U.S. Pacific Command said it tracked the missile before it fell into the sea.

KCNA said the test was intended to verify technical indexes of the weapon system and examine its adaptability under various battle conditions before deployment to military units. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered the launch from an observation post and approved its deployment after analyzing the results with officials and finding them perfect, the state news agency said.

Testing times

The February launch was the North's first missile test after President Donald Trump took office. Sunday's launch followed one a week earlier of a rocket that flew higher and for a longer time than any missile the North has previously launched and could one day reach targets in Hawaii and Alaska. North Korea called that launch a success test of a missile that could carry a heavy nuclear warhead. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Sunday that it was too early to know if the international pressures

being exerted on North Korea to discourage its weapons programs were having an impact. “We’re early in the stages of applying the economic pressure as well as the diplomatic pressure to the regime in North Korea,” Mr. Tillerson said on “Fox News Sunday.” “Hopefully they will get the message that the path of continuing their nuclear arms program is not a pathway to security or certainly prosperity. The ongoing testing is disappointing. It’s disturbing.”

Re-entry technology?

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said on Monday that Seoul and Washington believe Sunday’s test provided North Korea with unspecified “meaningful data” on its push to improve the credibility of missile technology. But spokesman Roh Jae-cheon has said the allies believe more analysis is required to verify whether the North has achieved a re-entry technology, which would return a warhead safely back into the atmosphere, for the missile. South Korea held a National Security Council meeting on Sunday to discuss the latest launch, which came hours after new President Moon Jae-in named his new Foreign Minister nominee and top advisers for security and foreign policy.

In Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the launch a “challenge to the world” that trampled international efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear and missile problems peacefully. He vowed to bring up the issue at this week’s G-7 summit in Italy. At the United Nations, diplomats from the U.S., Japan and South Korea said they requested a Security Council consultation on the missile test. The closed discussion will take place on Tuesday. The diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting had not been officially announced.

ICBM risk

Under third-generation dictator Kim Jong Un, North Korea has been advancing its decades-long goal of putting a nuclear warhead on an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. Its two nuclear tests last year may have improved its ability to make nuclear weapons small enough to fit on long-range missiles. And each successful rocket launch is seen as improving or expanding the range and capabilities of its missile arsenal. The test of a Pukguksong-2 might be part of attempts to stabilize the system before operationally deploying the missiles, said Kim Dong-yub, an analyst at Seoul’s Institute for Far Eastern Studies.

The analyst said there was also a possibility that the North was conducting engine tests and other experiments as it pushed for the development of a solid-fuel ICBM that could potentially reach the U.S. mainland. If the North ever obtains a solid-fuel ICBM, it would likely be a rocket powered by a cluster of several Pukguksong-2 engines.

Moon's challenges

Missile tests such as Sunday's present a difficult challenge to Moon Jae-in, a liberal who took over as South Korea's President on May 10 and has expressed a desire to reach out to the North. Pyongyang's aggressive push to improve its weapons program also makes it one of the most urgent foreign policy concerns for the Trump administration. South Korea's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the North's latest launch "throws cold water" on the expectations by Mr. Moon's government to "stabilize peace and denuclearize the Korean Peninsula."

Source: www.thehindu.com, 22 May 2017

Russia Offers Karakurt Corvettes with Italian 76-mm Gun Mount to India

Potential buyers are also offered a fully import-substituted version with Russian engines, the gun mount and radars. The export version of the Project 22800E debuted at the Army-2016 defense show. The corvette version fitted with imported components may be more interesting for foreign customers, the design bureau staff told Mil.Today. The question is primarily about the Indian Navy which is going for maximal diversification in weapons and military hardware.

The "Italian" variant of the exported *Karakurt*-class can be equipped with 76-mm gun mount OTO Melara. Its fire rate is 85-120 rounds per min, range varies from 16 to 20 km. Similar Russian gun mount AK-176MA is a bit heavier and has shorter firing range (15.7 km), but higher rate (up to 130 rounds per min). On March 2, 2017, the Arsenal machine factory (St. Petersburg) reported on successful completion of the gun mount's trials. According to an insider in the Almaz design bureau, in contrast to Russian gun integrated in the ship's weapons and fire control system, the Italian alternative will need the new one.

The expert added that if such gun mount was not initially integrated, targeting and lock-on data transmission would slow down critically. According to him, for *Karakurt*-class corvettes the Russian gun is better, especially, in the air defense issues. Along with AK-630 and aiming systems, these guns make a closed-loop air defense system, operating effectively within their range. For the Russian Navy, *Karakurt* corvettes will be armed with the *Caliber-NK* missile strike system, the 76-mm gun mount and the anti-aircraft gun/missile system. The ship's displacement is 800 tons, speed is 30 knots, endurance is 15 days. Project 22800 corvette was designed by the Almaz bureau as an alternative for Project 11356 frigates which construction is delayed. Totally, the Navy plans to obtain up to 23 *Karakurt*-class corvettes. Although the project's lead corvette was supposed to be commissioned in May 2017, the deadline was postponed then. According to the shipyard, the corvette named *Uragan* will be handed over in December, so join the Russian Navy only in 2018

Source: mil.today, 29 May 2017

North Korea Warns the U.S. to Expect a 'Bigger Gift Package' of Precision Guidance Missiles

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised the test of a new ballistic missile controlled by a precision guidance system and ordered the development of more powerful strategic weapons, the North's official KCNA news agency reported on Tuesday. The missile launched on Monday was equipped with an advanced automated pre-launch sequence compared with previous versions of the "Hwasong" rockets, North Korea's name for its Scud-class missiles, KCNA said. That indicated the North had launched a modified Scud-class missile, as South Korea's military has said. The North's test launch of a short-range ballistic missile landed in the sea off its east coast and was the latest in a fast-paced series of missile tests defying international pressure and threats of more sanctions.

Kim said the reclusive state would develop more powerful weapons in multiple phases in accordance with its timetable to defend North Korea against the United States. "He expressed the conviction that it would make a greater leap forward in this spirit to send a bigger 'gift package' to the Yankees" in retaliation for American military provocation, KCNA quoted Kim as saying. South Korea said it had conducted a joint drill with a U.S. supersonic B-1B Lancer bomber on Monday. North Korea's state media earlier accused the United States of staging a drill to practise dropping nuclear bombs on the Korean

peninsula. The U.S. Navy said its aircraft carrier strike group, led by the USS Carl Vinson, also planned a drill with another U.S. nuclear carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan, in waters near the Korean peninsula. A U.S. Navy spokesman in South Korea did not give specific timing for the strike group's planned drill. North Korea calls such drills a preparation for war. Monday's launch followed two successful tests of medium-to-long-range missiles in as many weeks by the North, which has been conducting such tests at an unprecedented pace in an effort to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of hitting the mainland United States.

Such launches, and two nuclear tests since January 2016, have been conducted in defiance of U.S. pressure, U.N. resolutions and the threat of more sanctions. They also pose one of the greatest security challenges for U.S. President Donald Trump, who portrayed the latest missile test as an affront to China. "North Korea has shown great disrespect for their neighbor, China, by shooting off yet another ballistic missile ... but China is trying hard!" Trump said on Twitter.

Precision Guidance

Japan has also urged China to play a bigger role in restraining North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's top national security adviser, Shotaro Yachi, met China's top diplomat, State Councillor Yang Jiechi, for five hours of talks near Tokyo on Monday after the North's latest test. Yachi told Yang that North Korea's actions had reached a new level of provocation. "Japan and China need to work together to strongly urge North Korea to avoid further provocative actions and obey things like United Nations resolutions," Yachi was quoted as telling Yang in a statement by Japan's foreign ministry. A statement from China's foreign ministry after the meeting made no mention of North Korea. North Korea has claimed major advances with its rapid series of launches, claims that outside experts and officials believe may be at least partially true but are difficult to verify independently. A South Korean military official said the North fired one missile on Monday, clarifying an earlier assessment that there may have been more than one launch. The test was aimed at verifying a new type of precision guidance system and the reliability of a new mobile launch vehicle under different operational conditions, KCNA said.

However, South Korea's military and experts questioned the claim because the North had technical constraints, such as a lack of satellites, to operate a terminal-stage missile guidance system properly.

"Whenever news of our valuable victory is broadcast recently, the Yankees would be very much worried about it and the gangsters of the south Korean puppet army would be dispirited more and more," KCNA cited leader Kim as saying.

Source: time.com, 30 May 2017

China's Aircraft Carrier: 'Dreadnought' or 'Doctrinal Dilemma'?

-Gurpreet S Khurana

Within five years after the China commissioned its first Soviet-origin aircraft carrier Liaoning in September 2012, it launched its first-ever domestic carrier – the Type 001A – on 26 April 2017. The new carrier is likely to be commissioned in 2020 as Shadong. Even though the Liaoning and the Type 001A are medium-sized conventionally powered (non-nuclear) vessels equipped with aircraft ski-jumps (not catapults), and thus far less capable than the super-carriers operated by the United States, the occasion was celebrated in China as a major achievement symbolic of China's 'great power' status. A report indicates that China's larger next generation Type 002 carrier equipped with a steam catapult is already under construction since March 2015, and its follow-on carriers may be nuclear powered.

The launch of the Type 001A is indeed a milestone in the development of China as a major naval power. It reminds us of the famous battleship HMS Dreadnought commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1906. The Dreadnought was a highly successful warship induction marking the dawn of the 20th century warfare at sea. It became iconic of a transformative naval capability in a manner that the older existing warships of the world began to fade into obsolescence as pre-Dreadnoughts. The celebration in Beijing similarly justified, given the achievement of China's defence-technological endeavour within a relatively short period of time. It stands out rather conspicuously in comparison to India, which has been operating aircraft carriers since 1961, but is yet to commission its first indigenous carrier named Vikrant.

Moving from 'symbolism' to 'substance', such 'flat-tops' are indeed valuable platforms for maritime force-projection, which, for centuries, has been an important naval mission of all major power navies. However, given China's maritime geography and the kind of insecurities it encounters today from vastly superior adversarial navies of the United States and Japan operating in the western Pacific rim, the PLA Navy's growing doctrinal reliance on carriers seems to be an aberration. It may have been 2 more prudent for China to focus on bolstering its existing Anti-Access/ Area-Denial

(A2AD) operational doctrine with the naval doctrine of ‘sea-denial’ – particularly given the PLA Navy’s traditional strengths in submarine, sea-mine and missile warfare – rather than diluting its naval doctrine by adding the carrier-based ‘sea-control’ doctrine.

Chinese carriers will also be highly vulnerable in the western Pacific rim, not only to the advanced navies, but also to the many unfriendly airbases and submarine bases of the littoral countries dotting the periphery of the East and South China Seas. It is well known that even the smaller countries in the region are building potent seadenial capabilities against China. The recent induction of the six advanced Russian Kilo-class submarines into the Vietnamese Navy is case in point. If a maritime conflict breaks out in the area, the PLA Navy carrier would surely be a primal target, and any such successful targeting would be a major symbolic blow to China’s morale, and thus its war effort.

The Chinese believe that ‘sea-control’ is necessary to assert its maritimeterritorial claims in the China Seas. This could have been achieved effectively – and at reduced risk – by optimally using the air-bases in the Chinese mainland and the occupied islands, which China is expanding through reclamation. Ironically, China’s island-building activity in the South China Sea has caused a major ‘damage’ to China’s claim to its ‘peaceful rise’ theory, which is now being aggravated by its own carrierbuilding programme. Furthermore, the programme lacks operational credibility, much into the foreseeable future. It would take the PLA Navy many years to operationalize a full-fledged Carrier Task Force, and possibly decades to make it effective enough to achieve sea-control against advanced navies. Meanwhile, the process could cause an indelible dent on China’s objective to propagate a ‘benign’ and ‘constructive’ image in the Indo-Pacific region, including through its ‘One-Belt-OneRoad’ (OBOR) initiative.

Chinese strategists also believe that carrier-based sea-control is necessary to protect their Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean, as indicated by China’s recently articulated strategy of “open-seas protection” in its 2014 Defence White Paper. However, this could have been achieved – again effectively, and at reduced risk – by deploying its warships in its naval bases at strategic locations such as Djibouti and Gwadar.

China is likely to have at least three aircraft carriers in commission at any given time in the future. The Chinese have clearly gone too far ahead for any reappraisal of its aircraft-carrier programme, possibly lured into the ‘command of the seas’ gambit of

the major western naval powers, without factoring their own geo-strategic conditions and circumstances. One may, therefore, expect that the PLA Navy's 'doctrinal duality' in terms of primacy to both 'sea control' and 'sea denial' may become its dilemma in the coming years.

Source: www.maritimeindia.org, 23 May 2017

Next Chinese Aircraft Carrier still on drawing board

Construction of China's next-generation Type 002 aircraft carrier has not yet started, according to sources familiar with the project. Military experts told the South China Morning Post that Beijing was still studying how to build the steam-catapult-equipped Type 002 safely and reliably. Recent pictures posted online by military enthusiasts showing large ship components at the Dalian shipyard in Liaoning province prompted speculation that the shipbuilder, which launched the country's first domestically built carrier, the Type 001A, in April, had begun building a Type 002 carrier. Mr Zhou Chenming of the Knowfar Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies said the components could possibly be parts of a warship, but it was not the Type 002. "The Type 002 project is not decided yet... it doesn't make sense that all aircraft carriers will be built by one shipbuilder, according to China's defence industry traditions," Mr Zhou said. "The Beijing leadership always encourages two or three weapons manufacturers to compete with each other, just like the healthy competition between Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group and Shenyang Aircraft Corporation in producing warplanes."

The Dalian shipyard refitted the hull of a semi-completed Soviet carrier, the Varyag, which Beijing bought from a Ukrainian shipyard in 1998, turning it into China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, which was put into service with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy in 2012. A video posted online in December showed Professor Jin Yinan, a former director of the strategic research institute at the PLA's National Defence University, telling a forum that construction of the first Type 002 carrier had started at the Jiangnan Changxingdao shipyard in Shanghai in March 2015. But another source close to the military said there were no signs the Jiangnan shipyard was building the new carrier. "It makes sense that Jiangnan shipyard will win the contract, but we could at least expect to see some components or even a hull in the shipyard if it started construction more than two years ago," the source, who requested anonymity, said.

“However, we can’t see anything so far. The shipyard is empty. It’s impossible to hide such a huge ship.” Mr Zhou also said there was still debate over whether the Type 002 would be conventionally or nuclear powered. “The decision will be made by President Xi Jinping, who also chairs the powerful Central Military Commission, as the aircraft carrier project deals with a strategic weapon related to China’s long-term, comprehensive defence planing,” he said. “There are several competitive tenders as several Chinese shipbuilders are capable of building a warship of up to 80,000 tons. Everyone wants to bid because an aircraft carrier project worth hundreds of billions of yuan can boost local growth.”

Beijing-based naval expert Li Jie said the leadership had made safety a priority because the Type 002 would be the first Chinese aircraft carrier to use a catapult-launching system, and there was “no need to play catch up or meet any anniversaries”. “Steam catapult systems are more complicated than the ski ramp systems of the Liaoning and Type 001A,” Mr Li noted, adding that China’s successful land-based tests of the steam catapult system were only part of the answer. “Steam catapult testing on land is so different from ship operation. On land, it’s an independent operation, but once you fit the steamers on a ship, you need to make sure the catapult can function smoothly after integrating with other systems and components in a very limited space.”

Macau-based military observer Antony Wong Dong said the huge vessel components at the Dalian shipyard could be parts for China’s biggest amphibious assault vessel, the Type 075 landing helicopter dock, which was similar in size to America’s Wasp-class vessels, with a displacement of 40,000 tons. “China plans to build at least four Type 075 amphibious vessels. It makes sense that both Dalian and Hudong are building the same ships,” the source said, adding that Dalian and Jiangnan had worked together on China’s Type 055 destroyer in recent years.

The Type 075 could carry vertical and/or short take-off and landing jet fighters, and military experts said it would also give China’s navy the ability to launch various types of helicopters to attack enemy ships and ground forces in the East China or South China Seas.

Source: www.todayonline.com, 29 May 2017

Chinese Navy conducts first Drill with Myanmar

Three Chinese naval vessels are making a goodwill tour of 20 nations along the route of China's "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," and last Thursday, they arrived in Yangon for the PLA(N)'s first-ever naval exercise with the Myanmar Navy.

According to Chinese state-owned media, the destroyer *Changchun*, the frigate *Jingzhou* and the auxiliary vessel *Chaohu* were in Myanmar's waters for four days. They conducted a variety of exercises with the Myanmar Navy, focusing primarily on communications and search and rescue.

The Chinese vessels' next port of call is Chittagong, Bangladesh, and they will continue on for a six-month tour of Asia, Europe and Africa. It will be the longest goodwill tour that a PLA(N) task force has ever undertaken.

China has a strategic maritime interest in Myanmar: state-owned CITIC Group wants to purchase an oil receiving terminal in Rakhine State, a key link in China's energy security strategy. The new terminal and an associated pipeline are just entering into operation, and they could eventually carry about five percent of China's oil imports overland, bypassing the Strait of Malacca. In return for an agreement on the sale of the terminal, CITIC is said to be willing to drop claims related to a controversial dam project in northern Myanmar.

An expansion of China's maritime power

The naval exercises followed shortly after China's high-profile "Belt and Road Forum" in Beijing, which brought together leaders from around the world to discuss Chinese-led economic development initiatives. Xinhua noted that the Myanmar exercises also began on the same day that The Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed to a new framework for a South China Sea "code of conduct."

Over the past decade, China has generally disregarded the territorial-seas provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which limit sovereign waters to 12 nm from shore and EEZs to 200 nm. Instead, it has conducted a campaign to build fortified islands on far-flung reefs and atolls in the Spratly Islands, despite a ruling from the Permanent Court of Arbitration that declared China's sweeping claims invalid. Under the new draft framework, ASEAN and China will work towards a regional code of conduct for maritime affairs in the South China Sea. So far, the framework "does not involve substantive terms," according to Chinese

state-owned Global Times, and reports suggest that the final product of the talks may be non-binding.

Source: maritime-executive.com, 23 May 2017

Modi launches new projects in Kutch, Gujarat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said Gujarat's Kandla Port will soon be connected with Chabahar port in Iran, which is being developed with India's participation, to boost India's international trade. Mr Modi also suggested that Kandla Port, largest cargo handling port in the country, be renamed as Deendayal Port Trust to mark the centenary of Pt Deendayal Upadhyay's centenary celebrations. "The way competition is increasing, if India has to progress and cement its place in global trade, it is very important to have ports with modern facilities," Prime Minister said, while laying foundation for developing new facilities at Kandla Port. He added that "in a very short span of time, Kandla has emerged as one of the most prominent ports in Asia." However, it may be noted that Kandla Port Trust is the largest cargo handling port in the country for more than two decades. "India has a long history of sea trade. With 7,700-km coastline, what is the need to move cargo by railways or roads? Sea route is far more cost effective and we are moving towards that direction when more and more cargo will be ferried through the sea route," Mr. Modi said, stressing on developing modern infrastructure at ports in the country. Besides developing port facilities, Mr. Modi said, the government was also working on further developing multi-modal transport system to connect ports with railway networks for seamless movements of cargo. "It's of no use to modernize your ports if there are bottlenecks in cargo movement away from ports. That is why we are working on developing all-round transport infrastructure in the country," he said.

Mr. Modi also inaugurated a new pumping station at Bhachau in Kutch on Narmada canal to bring water to parched Kutch district. Built at the cost of Rs 148 crore, the new pumping station will lift water 18-meter high and flow it in the Kutch Branch Canal (KBC) section to bring water to Anjar and Mandavi towns of vast desert district, Kutch. The Prime Minister is on two day visit to his home state Gujarat to launch new projects at Kandla Port Trust, Narmada water pumping station and to inaugurate 42 Annual Meeting of African Development Bank at Mahatma Mandir Convention centre in Gandhinagar on Tuesday. Mr Modi will address more than 4500 delegates of African Development Bank at its annual meeting which is being held in India for the first time.

Source: www.thehindu.com, 22 May 2017

Shipamax raises \$2.5M for its cloud software platform for the bulk shipping industry

Shipamax, a London-based startup and recent graduate of Silicon Valley accelerator Y Combinator, has raised \$2.5 million in seed funding, money it plans to use to continue building and marketing its cloud software platform for the bulk shipping industry. Leading the round is Cherubic Ventures, with participation from AME Cloud, and FF Angel.

Founded in 2016 by Jenna Brown and Fabian Blaicher, Shipamax wants to bring the bulk shipping industry into the digital age, specifically weaning customers, shipping brokers and owner-operators off of things like email, messaging and excel spreadsheets, the administrative tools they currently use for the booking and scheduling process. The problem isn't just that there is a lot of unnecessary back and forth, but also that the data exchanged is unstructured and therefore labour intensive to process and not very scalable. That's made even worse, Brown told me during a brief call, because shipowners and brokers typically receive in excess of 5,000 emails daily.

In one example I was shown, the email consisted of what looked like the fields of a database but written in free-form text and presumably not adhering to any industry standard schema. Whatever the case, it looked archaic to say the least. Enter Shipamax's cloud software solution, which is designed to not only handle all communications between customer, broker and operator — in other words, internal and external communications — but also knock the data exchanged into shape so that the process itself is infinitely more scalable. That's a big deal when the bulk shipping industry as a whole (not to be confused with containers, a different category of sea freight entirely) is said to be struggling with prices falling 90 per cent since 2008 and where every drop of extra efficiency really does count. "Bulk shipping powers the world economy — the grains we eat, the steel we build with and the fuels we consume all get transported by bulk ships. Despite industry perils, demand for dry bulk has increased 40 per cent since the financial crisis. We're enabling the industry to keep up with the pace of change in technology and put them on the road to recovery," says Brown in a statement.

Source: techcrunch.com, 22 May 2017

Port-Maduravoyal project gets government nod after five years

CHENNAI: The 19km Maduravoyal-Chennai Port elevated corridor project which got stalled for the last five years is set to be revived with the State government giving its nod for the project. The project that was frozen after the State government raised objections to the alignment, was resolved as the State opted for a suggestion where in the alignment along Cooum would have single piers at almost all places barring a few where it will be double pier, said a National Highways Authority of India source.

The alignment is more or less the same, a NHAI official said. Work commenced on September 2010 but the project was stalled in 2012 as the Public Works Department had sought revised Coastal Regulation Zone clearance for the elevated corridor and also said certain remedial measures such as dredging two metre beyond the outer column and construction of the retaining wall for three to four meters in the extended portion should be carried out.

This resulted in a bitter legal battle. On the intervention of the Supreme Court, a committee consisting of NHAI and State government officials was formed to iron out differences to revive the project.

It is learnt that NHAI has gone in for a detailed project report for the elevated corridor and it is expected to be submitted in the next three to four months after which work is expected to begin.

Source: www.newindianexpress.com, 24 May 2017

Centre plans to upgrade ship repairing facilities at 7 ports

The Central government has identified ship repairing facilities of seven ports for upgradation into modern units in collaboration with the Cochin Shipyard, a top official said here. "It has been decided at last week's meeting in Goa that seven ports, which have ship repair facilities that need to be upgraded, should enter into an understanding with Cochin Shipyard Ltd for developing them into a good ship repairing facility," Union Shipping Ministry Joint Secretary, Sagarmala Wing, Rabindra Kumar Agarwal said here.

He said the respective ports and Cochin Shipyard would decide the modalities of development. Pandu (river port) in Assam, Mumbai, Goa, and Kandla are among the

identified ports where redevelopment of repairing facilities would be done, Agarwal said on the sidelines of an event organised by Indian Chamber of Commerce. The aim is to have enough such repairing facilities across states, he said, adding that if ships are taken to longer distances for repairing works, it entails additional costs. "There are existing facilities with the ports but their utilisation came down over the years. Since there is space available, it will be easier for us to develop them," he added.

On connecting north eastern states, particularly Mizoram through Myanmar, Agarwal said that it was for this the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) in Myanmar was conceptualised. It was being administered by the Ministry of External Affairs with a view to facilitate connectivity between the mainland and the northeastern States of the country through maritime shipping, inland waterways and roads of Myanmar. "The port project at Sittwe in Myanmar, which is being developed by India is almost completed," Agarwal said. With the development of the route, ships coming from Haldia can go to Switte in Myanmar and from there, they can go to Paletwa (in Myanmar) through Kaladan river. There will be road connectivity from Paletwa to Mizoram, he added.

Source: www.business-standard.com, 23 May 2017

Mumbai Port Trust plans solar unit, save on power costs

The city will start saving about 2 MW conventional coal power and nearly 3 MLD drinking water within next two years. Thanks to Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) that will save on buying conventional power worth Rs 4 crore by adopting energy efficient gadgets and setting up its own solar power plant by the end of next year. This will help city save about 1200 kg carbon emissions per hour.

Similarly within the same time frame, MbPT will also offer its 3 MLD (million litres per day) treated sewage water for industrial purpose to save on drinking water presently being used by industries. Efforts to enhance the capability in handling of oil spillage up to 1,500 tonnes has also been undertaken to save marine life along Mumbai coast. . "So far, major ports have already commissioned 16 MW solar and 6 MW wind power projects commissioned to achieve the set target of developing 175 MW of non-conventional energy from solar and wind power by year 2022 including 69 MW of rooftop solar projects. The stakeholders under the leadership of Union minister of

Shipping, Nitin Gadkari are meeting on Tuesday to deliberate the issues and road map to take these initiatives to their logical conclusion," said Sanjay Bhatia, chairman, Mumbai Port Trust.

A conclave titled - Green Ports & Oil Spill Management 2017 is being organised on Tuesday by the Indian Federation of Green Energy (IFGE) in association with Ministry of Shipping, Sagarmala, Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT), Indian Ports Association (IPA) and Shipping Corporation of India (SCI). The conclave will deliberate and address environment concern of oil spillage in the sea by enhancing awareness of various technologies available for Oil Spill Management, said MbPT deputy chairman Yashodhan Wanage.

Source: [/timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 30 May 2017

India's new private ports challenge ageing state giants

Off a dusty stretch of coast under the scorching Gujarat sun, dredgers are reclaiming hundreds of hectares of land from the Arabian Sea in the latest challenge to India's once-dominant state-owned ports: a private deepwater terminal that will handle 20m tonnes a year of everything from textiles to cement. Essar Ports, which is developing the Hazira site, is one of several companies to have spied an opportunity as government facilities struggle to keep pace with India's booming international trade. The big 12 state-owned ports' share of the country's shipping by volume has slid from 72 per cent to 55 per cent in less than a decade. The future of these marine gateways is crucial to the country's economy — now the fastest-growing of any leading nation, with an annual growth rate above 7 per cent. To maintain that pace, India needs to handle ever larger volumes of trade. And if the government is to realise its hopes of boosting India's status as an exporting power, it will need to narrow the logistical gap with rivals such as China. To some, the answer is a continued shift away from the public ports. "Productivity and efficiency are much higher at the private ports," says Subhas Das, the Hazira port's chief executive. "None of the state ports are yet modern." But Nitin Gadkari, minister for road and maritime infrastructure, is fighting back against such criticism with a vast campaign to improve the state ports' efficiency and scale that has earmarked Rs8tn (\$124bn) in spending over the next 18 years.

“It will be the biggest project in the history of the country,” Mr Gadkari said in December of the Sagarmala scheme, which includes upgrades to the big 12 state ports, the construction of six new large ports and dramatically improved ship-to-rail links. The government sees it as a main plank in its ambitious plans for infrastructure in India, which has already witnessed blistering growth in sea trade since the liberalisation of the 1990s. Its container shipping volumes, which in 1991 amounted to just 602,000 twenty-foot equivalent units, hit 13.2m TEUs last year. Given this was still only about half that of South Korea, Malaysia or Japan, and one fifteenth that of China — whose economic growth rate India continues to outstrip — the government expects the rapid expansion to persist. Yet little detail has been given on the funding for the Sagarmala programme. And the state’s performance in other industries gives grounds for scepticism about its ability to compete with the private sector.

State-owned flag carrier Air India has racked up eight annual losses in the past decade after losing share to more efficient private airlines. India’s state-controlled banks labour under a stressed loan ratio of nearly 16 per cent — more than triple the level at private-sector banks. Nonetheless, the government’s focus on port improvement is sparking optimism for the likes of Cyril George, vice-chairman of the Port of Chennai. The port, one of India’s oldest, is working to boost efficiency through measures such as automated gates that allow trucks swifter passage — but it is still hampered by “legacy issues” including a large manpower surplus, Mr George warns. By comparison, he says, the private ports “enjoy a lot of freedom in all respects” — a gap he thinks will be closed by the passage of a bill giving greater autonomy to the state ports to invest and form partnerships with private companies. Progress on the ports is being keenly tracked by companies such as Sigma Electric, an export-focused maker of metal products in the western city of Pune. Sigma’s products typically spend three to six days in limbo between entering an Indian port and setting sail, which weighs on the company’s margins by tying up working capital, says chief executive Viren Joshi. Beyond questions of efficiency, port development has been raised by some as a means of protecting Indian trade from international shocks. The limited depth and handling facilities of Indian ports mean few of the world’s largest intercontinental vessels dock at them. As a result, much Indian cargo has to be transferred to or from these ships at more developed Asian ports, adding time and expense.

A quarter of the containers that passed through the main state-owned ports in the 2016 financial year had to be “trans-shipped” elsewhere. Half went through Sri Lanka, where Chinese port investment has been the most visible and contentious manifestation of Beijing’s growing sway over Colombo. Suresh Subudhi, a partner

focused on infrastructure at the Boston Consulting Group, predicts a shift towards domestic trans-shipment at new ports with the capacity to service the latest supersized cargo vessels. The Adani group is developing one such port in the south-western state of Kerala at a cost of about \$1bn. The government is building another at Enayam on the country's west coast — one of at least six new “megaports” that are a centrepiece of its port policy. Shailesh Garg, India head for maritime consultancy Drewry, says the government should focus on the expansion of all ports to reduce the need for trans-shipment, rather than spending billions on new ones. But in its plans for the existing main ports, too, the government is showing a clarity of focus that contrasts sharply with the “laxity and inertia” of the past, says Jose Paul, former chairman of Mumbai's Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, the country's biggest port. JNPT is undergoing an expansion that will double its container capacity to 10m TEU a year — equivalent to more than 80 per cent of the country's entire container shipping volume in the 2016 financial year. “I have not seen such a concerted effort to develop the port sector,” Mr Paul says. “For the sheer survival of the major ports, the government has to give them greater powers to compete.”

Source: www.ft.com, 23 May 2017

Carriers say mega-ship sizes maxing out, but doubts remain

- Reynolds Hutchins

Some of the world's largest container lines say the industry has reached the end of the so-called 'big ship era' as ship sizes have begun to plateau, enabling marine terminals, service providers, and shippers to adjust to the larger vessels being deployed, but analysts say the respite is only temporary.

According to analysts, low freight demand, overcapacity, and the consequent tightening of profit margins — the top carriers ended 2016 with a cumulative loss of about \$3.5 billion — has placed shipbuilding on a sort of hiatus, but it won't last. If they are right, then the delivery of the largest container ships in existence — the Orient Overseas Container Line (OOCL) Hong Kong, Maersk Madrid, and MOL Triumph — will be easily outdone in a decade's time. “We have not reached the end of the mega-ship era,” Tan Hua Joo, an executive consultant at maritime database Alphaliner, told

JOC.com. “Fresh ordering of larger ships will return within the next decade, as this industry moves in cycles. They will be needed when demand returns.”

Carriers, in turn, have argued there are diminishing economies of scale and return on investment now that ships can carry an excess of 20,000 TEU. Even the largest, most productive ports in Asia and Europe and the widest and deepest canal, the Suez, can't efficiently handle anything much larger. “We would disagree to headlines out there saying, ‘Maersk makes bigger and bigger ships.’ For all intents and purposes, right now, I don't see any reason for increasing the size of ships,” Anders Boenaes, head of network at Maersk Line, told JOC.com. This debate has emerged over the past three months as Maersk and other ocean carriers have taken delivery of their largest ships yet, all with capacity in excess of 20,000 TEU. There are 17 total vessels of this size set to be delivered this year, all for the Asia-Europe trade, representing a total net addition of more than 350,000 TEU, according to IHS Markit Maritime & Trade. Although they're larger, their size in general has started to plateau. The largest vessels delivered to date have room for just hundreds more TEU than the prior generation, not thousands. That's an important distinction, Boenaes said.

He said the world's largest ocean carrier is aware of the concerns that larger ships mean more congestion, port call consolidation, and the potential for a cascade effect as extra capacity on major trade lanes is offloaded onto secondary lanes with limited infrastructure. The latest deployment of new mega-ships represents only a “slight enhancement” to the prior generation of mega-ships, improving carriers' carbon footprint, adding capacity for a few hundred TEU, and boosting cost competitiveness in a market with razor thin margins, he said.

“It's minor enhancements on the hull form to get even better economies out of it. We have also moved the accommodation building a couple of containers forward on the ship. That means you can have a few more containers onboard,” Boenaes said. “This is not what we would consider going one step further. Going one step further would be to make it another 5,000 TEU bigger, either wider or longer. This is definitely not that.” Maersk took delivery of what was the largest container ship in existence in April, but lost that crown shortly thereafter. Over the past three months, that crown has changed hands not once or twice, but three times. In March, MOL took delivery of the MOL Triumph, a 20,170-TEU vessel, part of a six-unit series. One month later, Maersk upped the ante and christened the Maersk Madrid, a 20,568-TEU ship and part of an 11-unit series. Then, just weeks ago, OOCL deployed the OOCL Hong Kong, a 21,413-TEU ship, part of a six-unit series.

Although they're just a fraction larger than the prior generation of mega-ships, OOCL, Maersk, and MOL said they are still taking special care to integrate the new, larger vessels into their fleets to avoid port disruption and dramatic changes to vessel rotations. "We're phasing these in gradually on our existing trade routes," Timothy Pajak, a spokesperson for MOL, told JOC.com. "OOCL has taken much effort to ensure we have the right-sized ships in our fleet to ensure competitiveness, optimal operational efficiency, and that we continue to meet market requirements," Stephen Ng, an OOCL spokesperson, said. "So far we have been successful in working with all our stakeholders in deploying the right vessels in the right trade lanes while maintaining quality customer services."

The carriers are also addressing concerns over so-called "cascading." As larger ships are deployed on the Asia-Europe trade and eventually reach the Asia-North America trade, it will require carriers to balance capacity and offload ships onto secondary lanes, such as the north-south trade between the United States and Brazil. Mega-ships like the Hong Kong, Triumph, and Madrid will more than likely be deployed on all the major east-west trade lanes within the next decade. At that point, carriers will be relegated to offload capacity onto secondary north-south lanes. "It's not because the demand is there. It's not because it's the optimum deployment or the optimum ship for those trades. It's just the shipping lines have got to find something to do with those ships," according to Andrew Penfold, director of global maritime at the New York-based engineering and design firm WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff.

This is concerning to terminal operators, service providers, and shippers because bigger ships simply don't "fit" at ports on secondary north-south lanes, Penfold said at the American Association of Port Authorities at its Spring Conference in Washington in April. There are already concerns for when ships the size of the Hong Kong, Madrid, and Triumph reach the US West Coast, which Boenaes says could happen in a matter of four to seven years.

"Physically, they can go in and be handled at some of the terminals in Long Beach or Los Angeles. The challenge is, with the current port productivities it would take a very, very long time to empty and fill up the ship again," Boenaes said. Forcing big ships into much smaller ports on north-south lanes will not just test limited capacity, technology, and equipment at these gateways, but could also throw a wrench in the works and congest operations. "We are acutely aware of the capabilities of ports around the world and who can do what," Boenaes said. "The cascading onto other trades, that's

something we've been dealing with at various degrees over the past three or four years.”

After 2017, “future deliveries numbers are not firm,” said Devlin McStay, a data analyst at IHS Markit Maritime & Trade, “due to a 15 percent to 25 percent pushback on vessel deliveries due to market pressures.” The numbers are not firm, but, according to Tan, “The largest container ship sizes will likely plateau over the next four to five years.” At least within the next decade, however, Tan and other industry analysts have forecast ocean carriers will start to aggressively increase ship sizes again. “The next jump is likely to reach 24,000 TEU.” “I wouldn't be surprised when the current pressure comes off the container lines, maybe in two or three years' time, you'll see another round in upsizing of ships,” Penfold said. As large as 22,000- to 24,000-TEU, he said.

For now, however, the “market pressures” that McStay noted will suppress additional increases to ship size, something analysts and carriers agreed upon. “For the foreseeable future, the maximum/optimum size has been found,” Boenaes said.

Source: www.joc.com, 23 May 2017



MARINE ENVIRONMENT



Beach pollution at Redang caused by irresponsible dumping of marine oil

The irresponsible act dumping of used marine oil by an unidentified vessel has been blamed for the beach pollution at Pulau Redang. Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Razif Abdul Rahman said that chalet operators of Redang Lagoon, Redang Bay and Redang Pelangi have complained to authorities of the oil pollution at Long Beach at 5pm on Sunday. The black sludge had ended up as tar balls and painted the pristine beach black. “Following investigation, we discovered that an irresponsible individual had dumped a large plastic bag containing about 25 litres of used marine oil off the island, which later drifted to the beach and affected a stretch of beachfront about 300m long. “The resort operators, divers and tourists cooperated in cleaning up the beach, using a case machine and plastic bags to remove the polluted sand to a nearby dumping ground. “The cleaning up process was completed in less than two hours,” said Razif. He added that although the pollution was not of large scale but it was nevertheless a serious matter as it affected marine life, caused environmental pollution and threatened tourism at Terengganu’s idyllic islands which is a main revenue generator for the state and its people.

Environment lovers had warned that pollution from oil spills could have adverse effects on marine life and other animals, let alone beachgoers. The thick black oil can also prove fatal for turtles coming to lay eggs, birds looking for food, fish, microorganisms and even corals.

Razif added that the authorities, including officials from the Marine Parks Department and Fisheries Department, would monitor the situation to ensure the beaches of its five main touristic islands of Pulau Redang, Pulau Perhentian Besar, Pulau Perhentian Kecil, Pulau Lang Tenah and Pulau Kapas were not tainted.

Source: www.nst.com.my, 18 May 2017

Marine disaster guaranteed if oil spills

The Vasco MLA Carlos Almeida have asked Mormugao Port Trust (MPT) authorities to initiate an action plan to refloat the dry dock of Western India Shipyard Limited which partially sank on Wednesday and to avoid a possible marine disaster due to a possible oil spill.

Speaking to reporters in Vasco on Thursday, Almeida said he was shocked to note the floating dry dock at WISL which was showing sign of distress for the last few months had partially sank. He said “It was the prime responsibility of WISL management as well as MPT to ensure that they did not act in a careless manner and responded well before the dry dock could partially sink. Now as a portion of the dry dock has already sunk, there are high chances that oil and other pollutants from the dry dock might spill and lead to massive marine pollution. If such thing happen then whole of Vasco bay will be polluted and a large number of fishermen operating from Khariwado will be affected.”

He further added “The incident has already been reported and MPT have already filed a police complaint against the WISL management for the laxity due to which a part of the dry dock has sunk. Now we expect the MPT to expedite and initiate stringent action plan in order to refloat dry dock and to avoid a possible marine disaster due to oil spill. Since this is a serious issue , I am taking up the issue before Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) and District Disaster management authority so that necessary directions can be issued before a oil spill can take place.”

Meanwhile in a surprising move, the Chairperson of Mormugao Municipal Council (MMC) Deepak Naik has also decided to file a police complaint against WISL management for the laxity and negligence due to which the part of floating dry dock at WISL has sunk. “I was surprised to note that the WISL workers alerted the MPT and WISL management about the dilapidated condition of the floating dry dock and possibility of it sinking. What is more surprising is that neither MPT nor WISL management took the issue seriously and today we fear a massive marine disaster due to a possible oil spill” Naik said.

He further said “Earlier on behalf of citizens of Vasco I had filed a complaint against the concerned officials of the cruise liner MV QING, which also showed sign of distress and finally got grounded after tilting towards the cruise berth side. I am surprised that no action was initiated against the culprits responsible in the grounding of cruise liner

that still contains 350 tons of oil and now with the sinking of floating dry dock, the threat to marine environment has doubled. I feel that likewise in the case of cruise liner, even the dry dock was purposely allowed to tilt and only to cheat the government by making a case fit for cheating the insurance company, besides endangering public life and property. I therefore on behalf of citizens of Vasco will be filing an FIR against WISL management for negligence and creating fear of pollution at Vasco bay and endangering Public Life and Property”

Source: www.heraldgoa.in, 30 May 2017

Centre to strengthen regulatory mechanism to curb pollution

The marine environment in India is under stress due to pollution and it has become one of the probable reasons for the decline in fish stock, said the new national policy that was released by the Centre. It said that the government would strengthen regulatory mechanisms to control pollutants to ensure that land and sea-based pollution are effectively controlled and the ecosystems were monitored. Fishermen too have promised to ensure that fishing vessels do not contribute to marine pollution. The new policy has been welcomed by stakeholders, especially traditional fishermen who say that it has addressed most of their concerns. "The policy has covered a lot of aspects that we had raised, including the issue of foreign vessels fishing in our waters," said Charles George, Kerala fish workers union president.

However, one of the major demands had been seeking a separate ministry for fisheries. "We had sought a separate ministry and demanded that fisheries must be a part of concurrent list. We expect that it would be addressed later," he added. The gazette notification said that to safeguard the ecological integrity of such tail-end ecosystems, the government will consider a landscape-to-seascape approach for sound management of inland water resources. Coastal and inshore waters are tailend ecosystems and marine fish resources in this area are highly dependent on the inflow of freshwater and sediments that bring in nutrients.

However, these water bodies are subject to anthropogenic pressures, resulting in degradation of environmental quality and reduced freshwater inflow. Such changes impact stocks of several important marine fishery resources, particularly high-value shrimps that complete a phase of their lifecycle in these inland coastal waters. The

government, in consultation with concerned scientific institutions and fishermen, will implement measures that will help sustain resources. These measures will include, input and output controls such as fleet size, fishing days, area of operation, engine horsepower, gear size, MSY (maximum sustainable yield), minimum mesh size, minimum legal size, diverting effort to areas that are relatively less harvested, fleet plans, and creating fisheries management areas to ensure that resource depletion is contained. On the issue of foreign vessels, the government will consider an alternate mechanism for development of this sector and rescind the existing 'Letter Of Permit' scheme. It said that private investments will be promoted in deep sea fishing and processing, to fully harness the potential of marine fisheries for inclusive development. Sustainable utilisation of deep sea fisheries resources necessitates an optimum fleet size of modern fishing vessels capable of undertaking extended voyages.

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 22 May 2017

Reports Assess Status, Protection and Threats to Arctic Marine Environment

In conjunction with the 10th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council, released three reports discussing marine biodiversity, environmental protection and invasive species in the region. The Ministerial Meeting was held in Fairbanks, Alaska, US, from 10-11 May 2017. A report titled 'State of the Arctic Marine Biodiversity Report' looks at trends in key marine species and highlights gaps in biodiversity monitoring in critical ecosystems. It focuses on: sea ice biota, plankton, benthos, marine fishes, seabirds and marine mammals, as changes in the outlook for these species likely indicates overall marine environmental change, according to the report.

Many of the publication's conclusions relate to the loss of Arctic sea ice and rising temperatures. The publication asserts that many Arctic species are losing food resources and that ecosystems are undergoing pressure from cumulative changes in their physical, chemical and biological environment. Species reliant on sea ice will experience range reductions. The report concludes that some species are shifting their ranges northwards, and southern species are moving into the Arctic due to warming conditions, which is also increasing contagious disease and opening opportunities for the introduction of invasive alien species (IAS).

Another report, titled ‘Arctic Invasive Alien Species,’ was produced by CAFF in conjunction with the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Groups. The publication introduces the ‘Arctic Invasive Alien Species (ARIAS) Strategy and Action Plan,’ which informs the Arctic Council and partners of steps to prevent impacts from IAS. The publication documents several case studies and features an action plan to: inspire urgent and effective action; improve the knowledge base for well-informed decision making; and undertake prevention and early detection/rapid response initiatives.

A third report, also produced by CAFF and PAME, discusses the protection of the Arctic environment. Titled ‘Arctic Protected Areas Indicators Report,’ the publication is based on data submitted by each of the Arctic Council member States to update the Protected Areas Database and serves as an inventory of protected areas across the region. According to a press release on the report, “protected areas in the Arctic have doubled since 1980, with 4.6% of the marine and 20.2% of the terrestrial environment, or 11.4% of the total Arctic (3.7 million km²) achieving protected areas status under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categories.”

Each of the three reports address targets and priorities laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Aichi Biodiversity Targets. One Aichi Target calls for the conservation of 17% of terrestrial and inland water and to conserve 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020. IAS, protected areas, as well as ecosystem and species preservation are addressed under SDG 14 on life below water and SDG 15 on life on land.

Source: sdg.iisd.org, 18 May 2017

Killer waters – why the UK’s polluted sea led to the death of a whale

- Tess McKain

On a cold November in 2016, a female killer whale washed up on the shores of the Isle of Tiree in western Scotland, having been caught up in fishing lines used to haul lobster cages up from the seabed. Known as Lulu, the deceased animal was a member of the UK’s last resident killer whale pod, which hunts amid the waters in and around the UK all year round. Lulu was estimated to be around 20-years-old, and was part of a pod that had been monitored for 23 years. Lulu’s appearance on the beach was unexpected,

and scientists seemed to be at a loss to explain how an otherwise healthy killer whale was unable to orient herself out of danger once she had become tangled in the fishing lines. Although the circumstances surrounding Lulu's death were known, *why* it had occurred remained a mystery.

Six months later, following a post mortem conducted by Dr Andrew Brownlow, head of the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme and veterinary pathologist at Scotland's Rural College, results from an analysis of Lulu's blubber have revealed that she had the highest levels ever recorded of toxic PCBs in her system, which could have affected her ability to free herself once she became caught up. According to a WWF report on Lulu's death, the whale was found with 950mg of PCB in her blubber, which is over 100 times upper limit of 9mg that is known to cause damage to marine species. The average contamination level for killer whales in the Atlantic Ocean is 150mg.

The analysis of the blubber also goes some way towards explaining why no calves have ever been seen with the pod – excessive exposure to PCBs is known to cause infertility in animals, leading many to fear that the pod are now likely to become extinct. PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are man-made chemicals known to cause adverse health effects in both humans and wildlife. PCBs were developed in the 1930s, when they were widely used as dielectric and coolant fluids in electrical goods. It wasn't until the 1970s that health implications of widespread PCB use were realised, with known side effects to continued exposure resulting in possible hepatic and respiratory damage in humans, and a host of dangerous side effects in animals, including infertility and death.

Although most countries have banned the manufacture of PCBs, issues surrounding their disposal have continued to linger. PCBs take a very long time to deteriorate, and as demonstrated by the toxic levels discovered in Lulu's blubber, some have found their way into the world's oceans. Killer whales are apex predators, meaning that no other predator feeds on them. This makes them highly susceptible to PCB contamination, as levels of the contaminant build up in consistently larger levels higher up in the food chain. The death of Lulu represents a small but important slice of the wider legacy of ocean pollution that is being revealed as time passes. Whilst most whale pods are migratory, Lulu's group of eight killer whales were the only known pod to reside exclusively in waters off the west coast of the UK.

PCBs are an odourless, colourless pollutant, and Lulu's death was a visible consequence of an otherwise invisible pollutant in the UK's waters. In recent years,

ocean pollution has moved into mainstream discourse in the UK media, but PCBs are just one of a slew of pollutants affecting marine life in the UK. The UK government's website notes that oil spills, plastic pollution, and overfishing are all factors that contribute to pollution and wildlife loss in and around UK waters. Over the last year the Scottish government has set up over 30 new Marine Protected Areas in order to try to reverse the increasing lack of biodiversity in Scottish waters. The purpose of marine protected areas is to 'adopt an ecosystem approach to manage the growing pressures of diverse human activities in an environmentally sustainable way'. Part of this process is to ensure that issues such as overfishing and plastic pollution are addressed.

Currently, 60 per cent of Scottish fishing industries are operating at capacity, with a further 30 per cent consistently overfishing. The UK is governed by the EU's common fisheries policy, which underwent major reform in 2013 in an attempt to make fishing more sustainable in the long-term. Although this is positive news, there are concerns about how environmental policy will be shaped by the UK's exit from the EU, with some charities urging the government not to abandon its pledge for ocean sustainability post-Brexit.

Recent government initiatives in the UK and the EU have also focused on trying curb the use of some single-use, non biodegradable plastics, such as plastic bags and cutlery. Estimates for how much plastic ends up in the sea per year vary, but the World Economic Forum estimates that around eight million metric tons of plastic ends up in the world's oceans annually. The implications for this on wildlife is huge, with many fish and bird mistaking plastic for food. Non biodegradable PCBs and plastics have even been found 10km deep in the Mariana trench.

Erik van Sebille, a research fellow and lecturer at Imperial College, London, notes that 'until we know where the millions of tons of plastics reside in the ocean, we can't fully understand the full suite of its impacts on the marine ecosystem.' He suggests we act now to 'turn off the tap' to prevent waste from entering the oceans in the first place. The UK government now enforces strict rules on the disposal of PCBs, but unfortunately it is estimated that up to ten per cent of all PCBs ever produced are now already in the world's oceans. The death of Lulu, and the apparent infertility of her pod is a stark reminder of the ecosystems at stake through the inadequate disposal of non-biodegradable materials. In the case of PCB pollution, knowledge of the dangers of the chemical came after its mass manufacture, which then created the problem of its safe disposal. On the other hand, plastics continue to be manufactured at an ever increasing

rate, without due precautions as to how to dispose of them after use – despite knowledge of the damage they cause to oceanic ecosystems.

Source: geographical.co.uk, 24 May 2017

Plastic everywhere: How floating debris is contaminating Oceans

Scientists have long warned about rampant pollution of the world's oceans. But the head of Unesco's marine programme says a positive change in consumer behaviour can still tip the balance. By Eva Krafczyk When Jo Ruxton sees 1960s advertisements for plastic products she can only shake her head. "This was hailed as particularly modern and progressive," says the former BBC documentarist and veteran employee of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Decades later, the longevity of plastic is a problem across the world's oceans. Shocked by reports of an "island of plastic" floating in the Pacific, Ruxton, a passionate diver, worked with scientists on the celebrated Blue Planet documentary team eight years ago to examine the problem of this debris. "When we were in the Pacific we didn't see anything. The water there looked beautiful," the Briton recalls. But as soon as water samples were taken, the illusion ended. "There was plastic everywhere, and the further we went, the more we found. And it was mixed with plankton – right at the beginning of the food chain."

The consequences of this become apparent in new research reports about plastic debris found in the stomachs of seabirds or seals. But the problem is by no means confined to the Pacific, stresses Ruxton, who also set up the Plastic Oceans Foundation that documents the contamination of the seas. "We travelled to 22 regions and even found plastic in the Arctic and Antarctic," she said. At a recent panel discussion in Frankfurt, Lutz-Christian Funke, managing director of the KfW Foundation, warned that in 2050 there could be "more plastic items than fish" swimming in the world's oceans. This prognosis is a cause of huge concern for Fanny Douvère, the head of Unesco's World Heritage Centre's marine programme. Scientists have long been alarmed by the pollution of the oceans. Douvère emphasises the race against time, where a change in consumer behaviour can still make a difference.

In addition to climate change, illegal fishing and general marine pollution, plastic waste is a very special challenge for World Heritage Sites on the seas, including the Galapagos Islands and the Australian Great Barrier Reef.

For example, in Papahānaumokuākea, an atoll belonging to Hawaii, more than a thousand tons of plastic waste have been cleared from the beaches since 1996, says Douvère. “Imagine the temple of Angkor Wat or Machu Picchu being covered by garbage. The international community would be outraged,” she says, referring to some of the most visited sites in the area.

In the case of smaller Pacific islands, far from the attention of the world, only island inhabitants or environmentalists are outraged. And among the more than a thousand globally recognised protection sites, only 49 are in the oceans. “You can say that the oceans are under-represented,” says Douvère. Moreover, most of the marine areas are located in international waters and are not subject to any national legislation – which is a prerequisite for the World Heritage Convention to take effect at all. Ruxton also finds that the importance of the oceans is still too poorly anchored in people’s consciousness: “Most people think that we get our oxygen only from the forests and that protection of the rainforests is important. But about half of our oxygen comes from the seas.” And even for those who live deep inland, she notes, all plastic materials that flow into streams and rivers end in the sea. Whether through waste separation or deposits paid on plastic containers, asking manufacturers of plastic products to take more financial involvement would have a faster impact on other packaging. “You can drink from glass bottles or take a shopping bag to the supermarket,” she says. “Everyone can do something.” – DPA

Source: www.gulf-times.com, 23 May 2017



How a Melting Arctic changes everything

A corrosion-proof, titanium Russian flag sways in the currents of the North Pole seabed, planted there in August 2007 by a privately funded expedition. It doesn't mean that Russia owns the pole any more than the Apollo 11 flag means the U.S. owns the moon. But it's a powerful symbol. The Arctic story is a tale of sweeping geologic change catalyzing a sweeping geopolitical contest. Melting sea ice is gradually making the Arctic Ocean accessible to economic development. Before the region truly opens for business, however, sovereign governments need to figure out which of them owns what. Titanium flags aside, it's a bit unclear at the moment, and no one more than Russian President Vladimir Putin is taking aggressive steps to implement a vision.

Putin is playing two hands at once. He's the unpredictable international leader who annexed Crimea, is reinvesting in northern security as if the Cold War were coming back, and sits atop a government that, as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Sunday, meddled in the 2016 U.S. election. Yet Russia's Arctic diplomacy has been a pillar of regional stability for the past two decades. The warming Arctic offers an economic opportunity for nations to access resources. But first, nations must sort out questions of boundaries and access—and Russia did not expand to 11 time zones by missing opportunities such as this.

The Human Arctic

Putin may feel entitled to an outsized Arctic presence because, in both coastline and population, Russia has an outsized Arctic presence. More than 4 million people live north of Earth's Arctic Circle, nearly half of them in Russia and the rest scattered among the seven other northernmost countries—the U.S., Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. About 500,000 people live among one of dozens of indigenous nations whose ancestry and bonds extend beyond modern borders. Over the most recent generation, many of these communities have banded together into large regional organizations that promote their interests among the international community.

When change or strife touches some part of the world, the political or environmental causes are usually local. Arctic communities facing rapid change are different, because scientists know the causes are not local. Warming is global, and residents of the high north are feeling only the first wave. Politics in the Arctic often aren't local either. By expanding northward, Putin is setting Russia up to take advantage of new shipping routes and oil deposits, and potentially mix clubby Arctic matters with more high-pitched global affairs. The population data betray Putin's grand challenge—to boost national economic growth amid a population decline both north and south of the Arctic Circle.

A decades-long push by the Soviet Union to industrialize the Arctic is indirectly responsible for the fact that any international governance is there to begin with. Finland, downwind from Soviet facilities that emitted pollution, gathered the eight Arctic nations together in 1991, with umbrella groups representing indigenous peoples, to figure out an international environmental-protection strategy. The effort morphed into the Arctic Council, a consensus-driven environmental forum that then evolved still further into a catch-all working group for regional affairs. The efforts of the council may sound mundane to the civilized world beneath the 66th parallel, but they are vital to future life in the Arctic. The council has created oil-spill readiness plans and scientific endeavors, and it has divided areas of search-and-rescue responsibilities among its member nations.

Search and Rescue Areas

No individual accomplishment of the council is particularly world-altering, but together its achievements have quietly built a modicum of trust and a pattern of collaboration among players that pose a significant counterweight to national aspirations in the region, Russia's or others'. (The two-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council last week passed from the U.S. to Finland.) The Arctic Council has risen in import and attention as the top of the world became a place where developed economies want to play. Everybody wants in. The U.K., a permanent observer to the council, has called itself "the Arctic's nearest neighbor." China, which was made a permanent observer in 2013, considers itself a "near-Arctic" nation, even though its northernmost point is about 900 miles south of the circle. Trade and shipping have much to do with their interest. The state observers are all East Asian or West European nations that stand to benefit from shorter marine routes linking them.

Not everyone can join the club. The eight council members denied all observer applicants in 2015, including the European Union. In last week's meeting in Fairbanks, they allowed in a new national observer, Switzerland, and several organizations, including the National Geographic Society and the World Meteorological Organization.

Who Owns the North Pole?

The Arctic might as well be part of a different planet. In addition to the fact that it's warming twice as fast as the rest of the world, the region itself challenges general sensibilities of near and far. In the high north, Denmark and Russia are close enough to disagree over which has the right to call the North Pole its own. This geographic tightness has a way of enforcing the peace.

Consequently, territorial disputes have so far been dealt with bilaterally and in good faith. As recently as 2010, Russia and Norway finally agreed on where their waters part. Even in the final days of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the U.S. were able to come to an agreement over maritime boundaries in the Bering Strait. Possible points of tension remain, not the least of which is that U.S.-Russian boundary. The scale of Russian military and economic activity—driven in part by a national mythology and pride rooted in its northern identity—means that, regardless of U.S. policy, there is competition for Arctic power and resources. Benefits accrue to early movers, and the U.S. is not one of them. Russia and China are investing in the Arctic. “That will affect U.S. waters, coastlines, and peoples, and we're not preparing,” said Heather Conley, senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “The U.S. has forgotten why this region is so important.”

All nations, in the Arctic and elsewhere, can claim an “exclusive economic zone,” or EEZ, that extends 200 nautical miles from shore. Nations have the right to explore the waters and seabed within their EEZs—but not the surface, which is considered international water.

A treaty ratified by 168 countries, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, governs how they should figure out which nations have rights to what. Russia in 2001 made the first-ever legal claim to seafloor rights beyond its EEZ under the convention. After its vision was rejected, the Kremlin resubmitted it in 2015. Denmark has also filed a North Pole claim, and Canada is expected to do the same, perhaps within a year.

Russia, Full of Surprises

Russian officials' rhetoric about its Arctic presence, coupled with military re-entrenchment, has been less diplomatic. It's the flipside of what Heather Conley of CSIS has called the "maddening duality" of Russia's strategy. Dmitry Rogozin, deputy prime minister and director of Putin's Government Commission for Arctic Development Issues, has called the 1867 sale of Alaska a "betrayal of Russian power status" and has said that the Kremlin has a "right to reclaim our lost colonies."

The harsh words are partly political theater for a domestic audience. But from the Kremlin's perspective, there is real concern. In the five-and-a-half centuries since Russia first annexed Arctic coastline, no leader has faced the disappearance of a critical natural defense: sea ice. Putin's decision in 2014 to create a brand-new northern strategic command, build (or rebuild) dozens of military facilities, and bulk up the nation's submarine fleet reflect a perceived change in Russia's security needs. The nation doesn't have many friends in the region. Five other coastal nations are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

An Arctic country since the 1867 purchase of Alaska, the U.S. gives less attention than one might expect to northern affairs and its largest swath of coast, which stretches 6,600 miles on both the Pacific and Arctic oceans. Americans may not be giving their "fourth coast" due attention, according to a growing chorus of researchers and policymakers—including the Pentagon and State Department under the previous U.S. administration. Russia's behavior "warrants close attention to the region on the part of the United States," according to a recent report by the Rand Corporation.

The U.S. styles itself—and many others see it—as the most powerful nation in the world. And the most powerful nation in the world has so far chosen to abdicate a formal diplomatic role in the quest for Arctic economic rights. The country's involvement, or lack thereof, in Arctic affairs has been limited by a dispute that's different from the standard political skirmishing—one between the executive branch and the Senate. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama both supported Senate ratification of the Law of the Sea treaty, which provides the framework for countries' maritime claims. Not joining the treaty, the White House has argued, might prevent the U.S. from gaining access to economic resources it could otherwise claim rights to. Conservative senators have balked at ratification, citing concerns about national sovereignty. It is unclear what strategy the Trump administration holds.

In practice, the U.S. lives up to the letter of the law, even though it is not a part of the pact. As it stands, the Arctic is a picture of stability, enviable by many other parts of the world. The stability is enforced in part, and at least for the moment, by a topic the Arctic Council is unable by design to even raise: military strategy. The U.S. advocated in the mid-90s that the Council be prohibited from tackling hard-security issues. As a consequence, there are important conversations for the great powers to have about the Arctic and security, but no obvious forum to have them in.

U.S. nuclear missiles on submarines in the Barents Sea could reach Moscow in 15 minutes. The six Delta IV submarines maintained by Russia's northern fleet can each carry 16 submarine-launched ballistic missiles and together deliver 800 nuclear warheads.

Arctic Military Facilities

The rule of law is the foundation on which economies operate. It's in no one's economic interest to de-stabilize the high north. "Military and economic concerns are deeply intertwined in the Arctic," wrote Stephanie Pezard and three RAND Corporation colleagues in March, "and ... these concerns can, at times, lead to apparently disjointed Russian policies in the region." While the Cold War is long gone, Cold War rules still apply in the Arctic: Everything is fine. Just make no sudden movements—and hope there's no accident or misunderstanding along the way.

Source: www.bloomberg.com, 16 May 2017

Moody's downgrades Hong Kong's rating to reflect close ties to China

Moody's Investors Service followed its downgrade of China's sovereign rating Wednesday with a downgrade of Hong Kong, reflecting its view that credit trends in China will continue to affect Hong Kong given their close economic, financial and political ties. Moody's lowered Hong Kong's rating to Aa2 from Aa1. The rating now stands at the third-highest level of investment grade, above China's rating of A1, which is the sixth-highest level of investment grade. "The economic and financial linkages between Hong Kong and China are close and broad-based," said the ratings agency. "Combined with political linkages, this means that any erosion in China's credit profile, such as that reflected in the 24 May downgrade of China's rating to A1 with a

stable outlook, will ultimately affect Hong Kong's credit profile and will be reflected in the Special Administrative Region's (SAR) rating." China accounts for more than half of Hong Kong's exports of goods, three quarters of tourist arrivals and 40% of exports of services in general, said Moody's. As a very open economy, Hong Kong is exposed to global trade, bringing it even closer to China as it increases its share of world GDP and global trade, it said.

Source: www.marketwatch.com, 24 May 2017

In first under Trump, U.S. warship challenges Beijing's claims in South China Sea

- Idrees Ali

A U.S. Navy warship sailed within 12 nautical miles of an artificial island built up by China in the South China Sea, U.S. officials said on Wednesday, the first such challenge to Beijing in the strategic waterway since U.S. President Donald Trump took office. The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the USS Dewey traveled close to the Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands, among a string of islets, reefs and shoals over which China has territorial disputes with its neighbors.

China said its warships had warned the U.S. ship and it lodged "stern representations" with the United States. China said it remained resolutely opposed to so-called freedom of navigation operations. The U.S. patrol, the first of its kind since October, marked the latest attempt to counter what Washington sees as Beijing's efforts to limit freedom of navigation in the strategic waters, and comes as Trump is seeking China's cooperation to rein in ally North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Territorial waters are generally defined by U.N. convention as extending at most 12 nautical miles from a state's coastline.

One U.S. official said it was the first operation near a land feature which was included in a ruling last year against China by an international arbitration court in The Hague. The court invalidated China's claim to sovereignty over large swathes of the South China Sea. The United States has criticized China's construction of islands and build-up of military facilities in the sea, and is concerned they could be used to restrict free movement. U.S. allies and partners in the region had grown anxious as the Trump administration held off on carrying out South China Sea operations during its first few months in office.

Last month, top U.S. commander in the Asia-Pacific region, Admiral Harry Harris, said the United States would likely carry out freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea soon. Still, the U.S. military has a long-standing position that the operations are carried out throughout the world, including in areas claimed by allies, and they are separate from political considerations. "We operate in the Asia-Pacific region on a daily basis, including in the South China Sea. We operate in accordance with international law," Pentagon spokesman Captain Jeff Davis said in a statement. The Pentagon gave no details of the latest mission.

'Errant ways'

Chinese defense ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang told a monthly briefing two Chinese guided-missile warships had warned the U.S. vessel to leave the waters, and China had complained to the United States. "The U.S. side's errant ways have caused damage to the improving situation in the South China Sea, and are not conducive to peace and stability," Ren said. Ren was referring to a recent easing of tension between China and other claimants, in particular the Philippines. China's extensive claims to the South China Sea, which sees about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade pass every year, are challenged by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, as well as Taiwan.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said such patrols were "very likely to cause unexpected sea and air accidents". Under the previous U.S. administration, the Navy conducted several such voyages through the South China Sea. The last operation was approved by then-President Barack Obama. The latest U.S. patrol is likely to exacerbate U.S.-China tensions that had eased since Trump hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping for a summit in Florida resort last month. Trump lambasted China during the 2016 presidential campaign, accusing it of stealing U.S. jobs with unfair trade policies, manipulating its currency and militarizing parts of the South China Sea.

In December, after winning office, he upended protocol by taking a call from the president of self-ruled Taiwan, which China regards as its own sacred territory. But since meeting Xi, Trump has praised him for efforts to restrain North Korea, though it has persisted with ballistic missile tests. U.S.-based South China Sea expert Greg Poling of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the operation was the first conducted by the United States close to an artificial feature built by China not entitled to a territorial sea under international law. Previous freedom of navigation operations have gone within 12 nautical miles of Subi and Fiery Cross reefs, two other

features in the Spratlys built up by China, but both of those features are entitled to a territorial sea. Mischief Reef was not entitled to a territorial sea as it was underwater at high tide before it was built up by China and was not close enough to another feature entitled to such a territorial sea, said Poling. He said the key question was whether the U.S. warship had engaged in a real challenge to the Chinese claims by turning on radar or launching a helicopter or boat - actions not permitted in a territorial sea under international law.

Otherwise, critics say, the operation would have resembled what is known as "innocent passage" and could have reinforced rather than challenged China's claim to a territorial limit around the reef.

Source: in.reuters.com, 25 May 2017

Why China's Great Leap Into Kashmir Is An Own-Goal

The Indian government's decision to boycott the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has resulted in much debate, with most commentators either castigating or praising the official position. The government's decision is based on two key concerns

1. On grounds of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly because BRI's flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), passes through the illegally occupied Gilgit-Baltistan region and Pakistani-held Kashmir.
2. The fact that the BRI initiative is not transparent and its supposed economic benefits could not possibly be balanced and equitable.

The government can be lauded for not blindly giving in to Chinese rhetoric about inclusive growth and also for providing a reality check to the countries that have lined up for soft Chinese loans. The government understands that the project is really about Chinese peace, prosperity, well-being and global leadership, at the expense of India. That is why CPEC is its flagship project. By increasing connectivity through disputed areas and throughout Pakistan, China is killing many birds with one stone, including neutralising India's Cold Start doctrine.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is god-sent to India

However, both the government and its critiques have failed to acknowledge that the CPEC is actually god sent to an increasingly besieged India for two reasons —

Firstly, because it allows India to turn the argument into one where Indian participation is contingent upon China taking steps to embrace democracy, pluralism, human rights, rule of law and abiding by established international rules. This way, not only the absence of democracy in China and the plight of Tibetans can be highlighted but also the hypocrisy of those who disregard such matters in the hope of gaining business. Moreover, this clears the way for an alternative principled connectivity-based path that India can champion and through which equal alliances can be established.

Secondly, and crucially, CPEC has rendered obsolete the essential demand which forms the core of the Pakistani grievance since 1948 regarding Kashmir, by what can only be labelled as the China-Pakistan Own Goal masquerading as an economic corridor. And, that is the demand of a plebiscite — something which Pakistanis have always harped on, internationally, ever since an inexperienced Nehru administration committed the folly of taking the Kashmir dispute to the United Nations on 1 January 1948.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor ensures unfairness and partiality

For a plebiscite to be held in Kashmir, essential preconditions are a must and include fairness and impartiality. Clearly, the Pakistani establishment has never been fair and impartial in Kashmir, and with China entering the fray as its dominant economic partner, even those who are only indoctrinated in Pakistani ideology will have to dig deep to justify that fairness and impartiality are the hallmarks of the Pakistan-China relationship.

Naturally, it is then valid to ask how CPEC ensures that a plebiscite is rendered impossible in Kashmir. Simply because, to protect Chinese economic interests, Pakistan will have to increase the number of security personnel in Gilgit-Baltistan, as well as in the part of Kashmir which they are occupying illegally. And, to ensure that Pakistan is looking after their interests, the Chinese will have to send in more troops too. As such, the UN Security Council Resolution 47 will not only be further violated by Pakistan but also a meddling third-party — China, which is engaged in unconscionable conduct by undertaking business in illegally occupied land. This then

pretty much ensures that the precondition of holding a plebiscite in Kashmir can never be put into effect.

It's all about Kashmir

With a plebiscite no longer an option, there is basically one reality — Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir will never be returned to India. And, the only political solution is to turn the Line of Control into a permanent border. Could it be then that this is what both Pakistan and China really want and the strategy in the form of CPEC is to eventually make India realize that the military option is permanently off the table. And, then India can start negotiating on Kashmir? If it were that simple, the political solution would already be in place. Rather, CPEC is another strategy in the battle for Kashmir. It will place Pakistan in a position of permanent dependence on China. And, with that established, the rogue state can make more disruptions in Indian Kashmir. In light of this, the CPEC is about changing the terms of the Kashmir dispute — India will now potentially be fighting Chinese and Pakistani interests permanently.

But, rather than boxing it in through Chinese and Pakistani design, the CPEC has provided India the opening she was looking for — that Kashmir is in danger because of CPEC; that Pakistan is not pro-Kashmir; and India more than Pakistan stands for Kashmiri rights as only she can safeguard generations from being swallowed up by debt owed to China.

The way forward

It must be stressed that creating trouble in parts of CPEC by utilising the Balochi's will be a zero sum outcome. Rather, India needs to fix its own house in Kashmir through a series of measures, including articulating properly the detrimental consequences of CPEC on Kashmir, taking steps to connect and integrate Kashmir with the rest of India, creating jobs and empowering the Kashmiri people. However, most importantly, India actually needs to live up to its claim of being a secular country. If people are free and safe, then they simply won't look to Pakistan and China for support and one does not have to be an economist to know that that is a prerequisite for Indian prosperity.

Source: www.huffingtonpost.in, 29 May 2017

India's boycott of China's Belt and Road summit highlights deepening tensions

India's decision to boycott the May 14-15 One Belt, One Road (OBOR) forum in Beijing underscores the escalating geo-political frictions between India and China, mostly bound up with New Delhi's growing relations with Washington. The forum was the international launch of the OBOR project initiated by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. Invoking the history of the Silk Road of medieval times, OBOR envisages the construction of ports, railway lines, roads, pipelines and power plants connecting the major economic centres of China and Europe.

Under the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has increasingly lined up with the US military-strategic offensive against China. By opening India's air bases and ports for use by US warplanes and battleships last August, the Modi regime transformed India into a veritable "frontline state" in the US war preparations against China. Ships of the US Seventh Fleet, the armada at the centre of US war plans against China, will be serviced at an Indian shipyard. Washington also designated India as a major defence partner, allowing New Delhi to purchase advanced US weapons systems, on a par with Washington's most trusted allies. This closer relationship between India and the US has caused deep fissures between India and China, and India and Pakistan, India's historical arch-rival. In response to the US "strategic favours" to New Delhi: Beijing and Islamabad have strengthened their own strategic ties.

The \$US50 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship OBOR initiative. Rail, road and pipeline links will connect western China with Gwadar, Pakistan's newly-built Arabian Sea port in southwestern Baluchistan. India has maintained its opposition to the project, citing "sovereignty issues" because it passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which New Delhi claims is part of India. Just hours before the Beijing forum started, Indian external affairs spokesman Gopal Baglay stated: "No country accepts a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity."

To legitimise India's stance, the statement raised suspicion over China's mega-project, claiming it violated "international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality." Allegedly, it would "create an unsustainable debt burden for communities," breach "balanced ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards" and lack a "transparent assessment of project costs." New

Delhi's real concerns are that the CPEC will boost Pakistan's beleaguered economy and allow China to substantially boost its strategic influence in South Asia, which the Indian capitalist class views as its own region of hegemony and exploitation. At the same time, India is acting on behalf of Washington, which sees the CPEC as a means for China to circumvent US plans to blockade China's economy by seizing Indian Ocean and South China Sea "chokepoints" in the event of a war or crisis.

US Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Scott Swift visited India on May 5 amid China's attempts to get India to participate at the Beijing forum. There is little doubt that Swift discussed the forum issue with Indian officials. He said both countries want to counter China's "increasing presence" in the Indian Ocean. After meeting with civilian and military leaders, Swift publicly questioned the intent of OBOR. Complaining that Chinese warships were making an "OBOR tour" in the Pacific Ocean, he declared: "Right now there are more questions than answers." Swift claimed Chinese actions were adding a sense of "anxiety" to the region, with uncertainty about the goals of the OBOR being raised "in every country I visit." Swift said his discussions with Indian officials covered what India and US could do to provide "stability" in the region. Talking about the annual US-Japan-India Malabar naval exercises, Swift added, "There would be a deepening of our understanding on how to operate those platforms on anti-submarine warfare." This emphasis on anti-submarine warfare obviously targets China's increased naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

On March 13, the *South China Morning Post* reported that China's People's Liberation Army will increase its fighting force to 100,000 personnel, allowing for deployment at Gwadar in Pakistan and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. On March 16, the *Hindu* reported that Masood Khalid, Pakistani ambassador to China, said Pakistan had deployed more than 15,000 troops to protect the CPEC, as well as a naval contingent for the protection of Gwadar Port. US National Security Advisor Lieutenant General Herbert McMaster met with Prime Minister Modi on April 18—Modi's first meeting with a senior member of the Trump administration. According to the *India Strategic* web site, McMaster "shared his perspective" with Modi on "the security situation across Asia and in the extended region, including in Afghanistan, West Asia and North Korea."

Confronted by India's intensifying alignment with Washington, Pakistan's reactionary bourgeois elite, which for decades served as a satrap for US imperialism, is today tightly holding China's hand. At the same time, cross-border firings between India and Pakistan, both of which have nuclear weapons, point to the danger of a confrontation

that would have grave consequences for millions of people across the Indian sub-continent. India has been at loggerheads with China on three other fronts. One is India's bid to secure membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which regulates the global nuclear trade. While the US has backed India's bid, China has objected that India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Secondly, New Delhi has demanded China end its opposition to the Indian government's attempt to add someone to the UN international terrorism "blacklist"—Masood Azhar, the chief of Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Pakistan-based Islamist insurgent group active in Indian Kashmir.

Thirdly, India continually promotes the exiled Tibetan "spiritual" leader Dalai Lama, whom China regards as a "dangerous separatist." Fresh tensions arose in April when India invited him to visit disputed Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls southern Tibet. The US further stoked the conflict when a Congressional delegation led by House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi visited the Dalai Lama on May 9.

A significant layer of the Indian ruling elite seem worried by India's failure to participate in OBOR. Jayshree Sengupta from the Observer Research Foundation, an Indian think tank, published an opinion column titled "Missing OBOR a big mistake" on May 20. "The main thing is that the Chinese, and not Indian, firms will become more prominent in the neighborhood, cashing in on their willingness and urgency to join OBOR," he wrote.

Nevertheless, New Delhi, acting in concert with the US, is aggressively seeking to block China's activities, sending unmistakable signals of escalating tensions.

On May 22, Reuters noted: "The failure of China's efforts to bring India on board, details which have not been previously reported, shows the depths to which relations between the two countries have fallen over territorial disputes and Beijing's support of Pakistan."

Source: www.wsws.org, 29 May 2017

Beijiong calls on Japan to ‘Be more cautious’ in South China Sea Statements

Japan should be careful in its statements related to the disputed South China Sea, China's State Councilor Yang Jiechi said, as quoted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Tuesday.

BELJING (Sputnik) — On Monday, Yang held a meeting in Tokyo with Shotaro Yachi, the head of the Japanese National Security Council's secretariat, within the framework of the fourth round of high-level political dialogue between the two states.

"We hope that the Japanese side would be cautious in its statements and actions related to the South China Sea issue and would play a constructive role in the settlement of the dispute between the relevant regional countries," Yang said.

The official added that mutual trust was necessary for stable development of relations between states and expressed hope that Tokyo would make steps to improve bilateral relations. China has a number of territorial disputes with its neighbors, including in the South China Sea. Japan, which has a dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, called the Diaoyu Islands by China, sometimes makes statements about Beijing's relations with other states on the issues, attracting Beijing's criticism.

Source: sputniknews.com, 30 May 2017