



MAKING WAVES

A maritime news brief covering:

- **MARITIME SECURITY**
- **MARITIME FORCES**
- **SHIPPING, PORTS AND OCEAN ECONOMY**
- **MARINE ENVIRONMENT**
- **GEOPOLITICS**

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MARITIME SECURITY

EIGHTY FOUR FOREIGN VESSELS DRIVEN OUT OF INDONESIA'S BINTAN WATERS

- Yuniati JN, Rahmad Nasution

Batam, Riau Islands (ANTARA) - The Indonesian Maritime Security Task Force of 1st Fleet Command has driven out 84 foreign vessels illegally anchoring in the Tanjung Berakit waters of Bintan District, Riau Islands Province, a navy officer said.

Driving out the foreign vessels was part of the Indonesian Navy's endeavors to strengthen its maritime security in the waters which are prone to illegal activities and crimes, the task force commander, First Admiral Yayan Sofiyan, said here Sunday.

The security maritime operations had also resulted in the arrests of suspected criminals who often conducted thefts and captures of several foreign vessels that had illegally anchored in Indonesia's territorial waters, he said.

Over this past week, several vessels that had allegedly violated the Indonesian Shipping Law (Law No. 17 of 2008) were TB NELLY 53/TK NELLY 76, LCT Cahata Maulida, TB SSE Alexandria, MT Sun Live, and MV Luna II, he said.

Yayan Sofiyan also highly appreciated the efforts that naval ship KRI Kujang-642 had made to chase MT Tenggiri which escaped to Singapore's territorial waters.

Source: antaranews.com; 15 June 2020

FIGHTERS, WARSHIPS MOVED TO FORWARD BASES AFTER BLOODIEST DAY IN LADAKH

- Pranab Dhal Samanta

NEW DELHI: The government has given powers to the armed forces to make emergency procurements to stock up its war reserves in the wake of escalating conflict with China along the Line of Actual Control.

While India has initiated dialogue to contain the conflict in Ladakh, sources said, the government did not want to leave anything to chance at this stage, especially after the violence on Monday night.

ET has learnt that Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat has been asked to coordinate with the three services on prioritising the requirements, where necessary.

Those familiar with the details told ET that the Navy has also been given the go-ahead to deploy its assets near the Malacca Strait and, if needed, anywhere else in the Indo-Pacific to counter Chinese action.

Air Force assets, including fighters, too have been moved up to forward locations. The first signs of discomfort in the Indian camp started when the Chinese side a few days ago began pressing hard for another round of Corps Commander-level meeting to kickstart talks on the Pangong Tso.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) even moved a request for a Corps Commander-level meeting on June 16. The Indian side, however, declined and had conveyed to their Chinese interlocutors that a higher-level meeting would only be possible after complete disengagement from Galwan.

This decision was taken at the highest levels, added sources. The issue on the table from an Indian standpoint were two semi-permanent structures with tents on PP (Patrolling Point) 14 in Galwan.

The Chinese troops had moved back some distance following local commander-level talks but had refused to remove these structures. At PP 17, China had apparently raised objection to some Indian hutments.

In the recent past, sources said, Chinese troops have acted in a pattern where they move up, build tented structures and then move back after talks without demolishing what they had made.

It's learnt that this was flagged off by the Army as a way to make reoccupation easier at these heights. However, pending resolution of these issues on Galwan, China was keen to start conversation on Finger areas of Pangong Tso.

At that stage, sources said, a high-level meeting took place in Delhi last Friday where it was decided that India will insist on complete resolution of dispute in Galwan before moving on to Pangong Tso

The turn of events on Monday night took the top brass by surprise. South Block was, in fact, gearing up for a more protracted conversation on getting Chinese troops to move back from Finger 4 in Pangong Tso. It was felt that Chinese PLA would be more belligerent there as it had moved into advantageous ground.

Source: economictimes.com; 18 June 2020

NAVY SENDS MORE SHIPS FROM EASTERN FLEET FOR DEPLOYMENT IN INDIAN OCEAN REGION

- Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi: Amid tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, the Indian Navy has sent out additional ships from its Eastern fleet for deployment in the Indian Ocean Region, ThePrint has learnt.

The move comes at a time when India has put its military machinery on high alert following the deadly clash in the Galwan Valley late Monday evening that led to the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers.

Defence sources told ThePrint that apart from ships that are routinely at sea on various missions, the Navy has instructed other ships to sail out. The sources did not reveal the number of ships, or where they have moved, or for what purpose.

However, they did say both the Eastern and Western naval commands are in a “heightened state of alertness” – which means ships can be deployed on short notice for operations.

ThePrint reached the Indian Navy for comment through calls and text messages Wednesday, but is yet to receive an official response.

‘More ships than normal’

A source confirmed that the number of ships now operationally deployed is “more than normal”.

“Also, there are various fleet exercises at sea during peacetime, and their deployment is such that they can always turn around and be operationally available when needed,” the source said.

For instance, after the Balakot air strikes, the Navy, which was carrying out a major theatre level exercise (TROPEX), was immediately deployed in an operational role in the northern Arabian Sea.

The decision to raise the alert level of the three forces were taken at a high-level meeting held by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat and the three service chiefs Tuesday, following deliberations held at the level of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Source: theprint.in; 18 June 2020

EXPLAINED: WHY A P-8I AIRCRAFT OF THE INDIAN NAVY WAS SEEN FLYING TOWARDS LADAKH AMID INDIA-CHINA STANDOFF

- Prakhar Gupta

Earlier today (Thursday, 18 June) an Open Source Intelligence handle on Twitter, @detresfa, revealed that a P-8I aircraft of the Indian Navy was flying over Himachal Pradesh, possibly headed towards Ladakh, where India and China have been locked in a tense standoff for over a month now.

This has led many users on the micro-blogging site to ask why an aircraft, which should ideally be flying over the Indian Ocean hunting Chinese and Pakistani submarines, is headed towards India’s Himalayan frontier with China.

Source: swarajyamag.com; 19 June 2020

THREE US NAVY AIRCRAFT CARRIERS ARE PATROLLING THE PACIFIC OCEAN AT THE SAME TIME. AND CHINA'S NOT HAPPY

- Brad Lendon

Hong Kong (CNN)The deployment of three 100,000-ton US Navy aircraft carriers to the Pacific Ocean for the first time in years has drawn swift reaction from China, with state-sponsored media saying Beijing will not back down to defend its interests in the region.

The USS Ronald Reagan and the USS Theodore Roosevelt are both patrolling in the western Pacific, while the USS Nimitz is in the east, according to US Navy press releases. With each vessel containing more than 60 aircraft, it represents the biggest deployment of US aircraft carriers in the Pacific since 2017 -- when tensions with North Korea over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program were at their peak.

The presence of the carriers was first highlighted in an Associated Press report on Friday.

"Carriers and carrier strike groups writ large are phenomenal symbols of American naval power. I really am pretty fired up that we've got three of them at the moment," Rear Adm. Stephen Koehler, director of operations at Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii, told AP.

On Sunday, the Communist Party's Global Times mouthpiece said the carriers could threaten troops in the disputed South China Sea.

"By massing these aircraft carriers, the US is attempting to demonstrate to the whole region and even the world that it remains the most powerful naval force, as they could enter the South China Sea and threaten Chinese troops on the Xisha and Nansha islands (Paracel and Spratly islands) as well as vessels passing through nearby waters, so the US could carry out its hegemonic politics," the Global Times report quoted Li Jie, a Beijing-based naval expert, as saying.

The report -- posted on the People's Liberation Army's official English website -- also highlighted the armaments available to China's military, adding that Beijing could hold drills in response to show off its firepower.

"China possesses aircraft carrier killer weapons like the DF-21D and DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missiles," the story said.

China's counter-narrative

The deployments mean three of the US Navy's seven active aircraft carriers are in the Pacific. The other four are in port for maintenance.

Collin Koh, research fellow at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies in Singapore, said China reacted strongly because the presence of the carriers conflicted with Beijing's portrayal of the US Navy as a force crippled by the coronavirus pandemic.

"It goes against the narrative that China wanted to put forth that the US was under stress in the Pacific," Koh said.

Indeed, the Roosevelt returned to sea on June 4 after spending weeks in port in Guam following a coronavirus outbreak on board in March, when more than 1,000 of the ship's nearly 4,900-member crew tested positive.

"We have returned Theodore Roosevelt to sea as a symbol of hope and inspiration, and an instrument of national power because we are TR," the Roosevelt's commander, Capt. Carlos Sardiello, said in a statement.

The Reagan returned to sea in late May after crew members were placed under restricted movements at its home port in Japan to ensure it deployed without any Covid-19 cases. It has also been loaded with more than 1,000 tons of ordnance -- "enough combat power to cause the ship to sit five inches lower on the waterline," a US Navy statement said.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Barry operates with the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan in the Philippine Sea on May 30.

The move comes after the US Pacific Fleet said last month that all its forward-deployed submarines were at sea conducting operations in the western Pacific. No numbers were given, but experts said it likely involved more than eight of the hard-to-track, fast-attack vessels.

Carl Schuster, a former director of operations at the US Pacific Command's Joint Intelligence Center, said it wasn't a coincidence.

"The (Chinese navy) doesn't know where those submarines are and that complicates any response calculations and planning," he said -- especially when Beijing now also has to account for three aircraft carriers and their accompanying destroyers and cruisers.

US-China tensions

The deployments also come at a time of increasing tensions between Washington and Beijing over the South China Sea and Taiwan.

Last week, a US Navy C-40 transport plane, the equivalent of a Boeing 737, flew over Taiwan en route to Thailand on what the Navy said was a routine logistics flight. The US jet was routed over Taiwan, which China regards as part of its territory, by Taiwanese air controllers, US Navy spokesperson Reann Mommsen told CNN.

But Beijing called the flight "an unlawful act and a serious provocation," the state-run Xinhua news service said.

"The overflight undermined China's sovereignty, security and development interests and breached international law and basic norms guiding international relations," the

Xinhua story said, citing Zhu Fenglian, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council.

On June 4, the US Navy sent a guided-missile destroyer through the Taiwan Strait, which separates the island from the Chinese mainland. And in the South China Sea, the 1.3 million square mile body of water which Beijing mostly claims as its sovereign territory, US warships have performed multiple freedom of navigation operations this year. US B-1 bombers and surveillance planes have also been active.

Source: [cnn.com](https://www.cnn.com); 15 June 2020

INDIA LOOKS TO DEPLOY NAVAL LIAISONS AT MADAGASCAR, ABU DHABI FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE

- Dinakar Peri

After joining the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) as Observer in March, India is looking to post Navy Liaison Officers at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar and also at the European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz for improved Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

“We are working closely with France who is a pre-eminent member of IOC to post a Naval LO at the RMIFC in Madagascar. We are also working on posting a Naval LO at the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi,” a defence source told The Hindu. “This will be in the overall realm of improving linkages of the Navy’s Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram with other IFCs and become the repository for all maritime data in the IOR,” the source said. The LOs are expected to be posted in the next few months.

The RMFIC functions under the aegis of the IOC of which India became an Observer in March 2020 along with Japan and the United Nations. The IOC is a regional forum in the southwest Indian Ocean, comprising five nations — Comoros, France (Reunion), Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. China and the European Union (EU) have been Observers in the IOC since 2016 and 2017, respectively.

The Navy LO is expected to be posted at EMASOH by July and at the RMIFC by September or October, the source said. India has an LO at the IFC in Singapore for over four years now.

The EMASOH headquarters is composed of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and French officers and based at the French naval base in Abu Dhabi. The aim is “to monitor maritime activity and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.” On February 5, the initiative was declared operational by the French Ministry of Armed Forces.

The Navy set up the IFC-IOR in December 2018 within the premises of the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram to track maritime movements in the region. France became the first country to deploy a Liaison Officer

at the IFC-IOR followed by the U.S. and several other countries including Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom have announced their intention to post LOs. Currently, infrastructure is being built to house the foreign officers. Pre-fabricated structures are being built and are expected to be ready by the end of the year, a second source said.

Of late, India has signed a series of white shipping agreements, Logistics Support Agreements (LSA) and maritime cooperation agreements with several countries. For instance, at the virtual summit, India and Australia announced a joint declaration on a shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in which they agreed to “deepen navy-to-navy cooperation and strengthen MDA in the Indo-Pacific region through enhanced exchange of information”.

As reported by The Hindu in October last, the IFC-IOR is coordinating with similar centres across the globe. These include Virtual Regional Maritime Traffic Centre (VRMTC), Maritime Security Centre- Horn of Africa(MSCHOA), Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP), Information Fusion Centre-Singapore (IFC-SG), and International Maritime Bureau - Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB PRC).

Source: thehindu.com; 14 June 2020

MARITIME FORCES

JAPAN HALTS DEPLOYMENT OF AEGIS ASHORE MISSILE DEFENCE SYSTEM

- Captain James E. Fanell (Retd)

Japanese Defence Minister Taro Kono said on Monday that he had suspended plans to deploy two U.S.-made Aegis Ashore air defence radar stations designed to detect and counter North Korean ballistic missiles.

Kono told reporters that Japan was halting the deployment due to technical issues as well as cost. The two proposed Lockheed Martin Co radar sites, one in the northern prefecture of Akita and the other in Yamaguchi prefecture in southern Japan, had also faced opposition from local residents.

With radars more powerful than the ship-based version of Aegis that Japan already operates, the planned stations were meant to help counter recent missile advances by North Korea and relieve pressure on Japan's stretched navy.

"I made a decision on Friday to suspend the process... For the time being, Japan will continue to counter (the threat) with Aegis-equipped ships" said Kono.

North Korea, which is threatening military action against South Korea unless it stops defectors from sending leaflets and other material to the North, last year tested a series of new ballistic missiles with irregular trajectories that Japan said appeared designed to penetrate Aegis defences.

The two planned Aegis Ashore systems would cost about 439 billion yen (\$4.1 billion) for operation and maintenance for the next 30 years, according to defence ministry documents.

That price tag comes as Japan faces an economy weakened by the coronavirus pandemic and unprecedented stimulus spending that is putting pressure on government finances.

According to the plans, the sites were to be initially armed with SM-3 Block IIA interceptor missiles designed to shoot down warheads in space. Japan, however, will have to pay to test those interceptors at a U.S. military test site in Hawaii before deployment, further adding to the cost of the Aegis Ashore system.

Tests for the SM-3 Block IIA missiles alone could cost at least \$500 million, sources with knowledge of the programme told Reuters last year.

Source: [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com); 15 June 2020

THREE YEARS AFTER FATAL COLLISION, THE USS FITZGERALD REJOINS THE FLEET

- Kyle Mizokami

The guided missile destroyer USS Fitzgerald is on its way to the new home port of San Diego, California. Heavily damaged in a 2017 collision with a civilian container ship, the ship was sent back to a U.S. shipyard for repairs. The Navy spent more than half billion dollars to repair and modernize the ship, about one quarter the cost of a new ship.

In 2017, the USS Fitzgerald collided with the commercial vessel ACX Crystal off the coast of Japan. The collision killed seven sailors and heavily damaged the starboard side of the ship. Fitzgerald was lifted onto the heavy load carrier M/V Transshelf and carried back to Huntington Ingalls Industries shipyard in the Gulf of Mexico.

Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII) is one of two shipyards currently building Arleigh Burke class destroyers, of which Fitzgerald is an early example. HII repaired Fitzgerald's hull and superstructure as well as internal spaces, and the Navy took the opportunity to also carry out a series of hull, mechanical, and electrical upgrades.

The ship's Combat System and Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence systems were also upgraded. The ship's weapon systems appear to be the same, consisting of a forward mounted Mk. 45 5-inch deck gun, 90 Mk. 41 vertical launch missile silos split between fore and aft sections, two Phalanx radar-guided close-in weapon systems, six Mk. 46 anti-submarine torpedoes, and at least two M240 medium machine guns.

The ship has already completed sea trials and certifications, and the crew was put into quarantine on May 23 to prevent any COVID-19 outbreaks at sea. The ship was originally part of the Seventh Fleet, based at Yokosuka, Japan, but for now will homeport at San Diego. It's not clear if the ship will eventually return to Japan. According to U.S. Naval Institute News, the Navy cost of the repairs and upgrades was originally pegged at \$368 million, later revised to \$523 million.

Source: popularmechanics.com; 15 June 2020

MYTHS SURROUNDING THE QUEEN ELIZABETH CLASS AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

- George Allison

There are scores of myths, rumours and outright nonsense circulating on the internet and even in newspapers about the new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers.

We spend a lot of time pointing out these myths, writing articles about them and directing people to the different articles in an attempt to set the record straight. One

of our readers recently asked, ‘Why not just write one article covering the myths?’, so we have. There’s simply not enough time to discuss or counter everyone of the myths about these vessels so let’s take a look at the most common and resilient myths surrounding HMS Queen Elizabeth and her sister HMS Prince of Wales.

1. ‘The carriers don’t have any aircraft’

This one even gets repeated by politicians, many of you will be aware of our Twitter campaign to correct this claim across the political spectrum.

Claims the carrier do not have any aircraft are simply incorrect. The first jets touched down in 2018. In 2023, the UK will have 42 F-35 aircraft, with 24 being front-line fighters and the remaining 18 will be used for training (at least 5 on the OCU), be in reserve or in maintenance.

2. ‘The computer systems run on Windows XP’.

Confusion on this often brought up myth seems to come from the fact former Defence Secretary Michael Fallon didn’t deny the suggestion the vessels used Windows XP after an image of a laptop appearing to use the operating system (OS) surfaced, the only trouble with this is he doesn’t actually seem to know any better. The Queen Elizabeth class run on the Shared Infrastructure operating system.

Simply put, the system is used in the same way Windows RE is used on commercial machines today, as a recovery and maintenance environment. The use of one operating system in the maintenance of another is not uncommon. XP doesn’t run any systems on-board either carrier.

The vessel is already largely dependent on the Shared Infrastructure OS, for various systems to use XP or a derivative alongside this for anything other than testing, calibration etc would seem to make little sense. While many on board systems used by contractors for various tasks use Windows XP, Windows 7 and various other operating systems, none of these are directly involved in running the vessel and will not be present when the ship enters operation service according to the Ministry of Defence.

It should be noted that none of these systems that use XP in this manner are vulnerable to outside attack in the same way the NHS and other organisations were hit. Speculation was rife on this very topic two years ago an image of Windows XP was seen on a technicians laptop during a documentary.

The MoD said:

“The MoD can confirm that Windows XP will not be used by any onboard system when the ship becomes operational, this also applies to HMS Prince of Wales.”

This would appear to agree that XP (or rather, a variant of Windows similar to XP) was being used to test and calibrate the systems by contractors prior to operational service. This is normal.

3. ‘Smaller carriers would have been a better idea’.

Much has been made of the claim two or three smaller ships would be cheaper or more effective than two large carriers but is this really true? The two Queen Elizabeth class

carriers can accommodate around twice as many aircraft as the three Invincible class. This metric isn't the primary advantage of a larger ship class as each F-35B is considerably larger than a Harrier and has much better performance.

There's very little reason not to build larger carriers, it was once estimated that steel accounted for only about 20 percent of the cost of the ship. The smaller the carrier, the fewer aircraft it can support and the greater waste of resources it becomes when compared to larger carriers. The smaller the carrier, the more the vessels size restricts the performance of the aircraft onboard. The three Invincible class carriers, which the Queen Elizabeth class will replace, operated small and relatively low performance Sea Harriers. The larger F-35 that will operate from the new carriers is more effective than the Sea Harrier. It carries much more and it flies much faster and much farther. It's also a more complicated aircraft, requiring more equipment and personnel.

A carrier accommodating as many F-35Bs as the Invincible accommodated Sea Harriers would be far larger by necessity in order to effectively operate the modern, larger aircraft.

The ships former commanding officer, Captain Simon Petitt, rightfully pointed out that there is a lot of symbolism in modern warfare and that having a ship the size of HMS Queen Elizabeth, which will be the navy's biggest ever, was significant. The sight of a heavily equipped 70,000 tonne carrier, which is almost 300 metres long, heading towards a potential enemy had a deterrent effect that is essential if the UK wants to project influence across the world Petitt claims.

"It is massively visible, you can range back in history and see the value of this. Everything from Nelson deterring Admiral Villeneuve from leaving Cadiz all the way to the big battleships of early 20th century, to what we are doing now. The Americans use it all the time. We currently haven't got this level of carrier capability. The bigger the capability the more influence you have to bear."

So great is the impact of larger vessels as a deterrent, they're often used as a geopolitical chess piece. American governments have, since the second world war, moved aircraft carriers around to demonstrate American resolve.

The particular benefits of using carriers in this way are that they operate on the high seas, where permission is not needed from other countries. Indeed, since modern US carriers are large and imposing they "show the flag" to great effect due to their sheer size alone. Equally, it is often argued that had the Royal Navy had two full sized carriers in 1982 it is more than possible that Argentina would not have attempted to take the Falklands in the first place. Larger carriers don't have to be packed to bursting point with aircraft to achieve their greatest effectiveness, even with fewer aircraft on board, a ship with a large flight deck can rearm and refuel aircraft much more quickly, this is typically why they allow for much higher sortie generation rates than smaller vessels.

The more crowded the flight deck, the slower the turn-around of each aircraft, the lower the sortie generation rate.

Size also offers greater storage capacity, larger vessels do not have to be resupplied as often, impacting both the effectiveness of the carrier and her vulnerability. Because a carrier is more vulnerable when being replenished, the vessel typically withdraws from

station for that function. Much of the time lost is the time spent heading away from station and returning. The smaller the carrier, the more time lost and a bigger logistics chain required in support.

A larger ship is likely to survive damage that will sink or disable a smaller one. The smaller the proportion of a ship that gets damaged, the better the chance that the ship can survive the damage and keep on fighting. It takes sheer size to provide enough protection against all the weapons likely to be used against a carrier, from bombs to cruise missiles to torpedoes.

If a complement of aircraft that would typically be found on one large carrier is split among several smaller carriers, then each vessel needs its own escorts unless they operate together. This would require more resources to operate effectively. It might be argued that splitting up a carrier force would make it more difficult for an enemy to deal with all of it at once but the price paid in escorting ships would be high, making it unfeasible for most navies. Indeed, the most significant effect this would have would be requiring more smaller carriers to do the job of one large vessel, further increasing costs. Each of the smaller carriers in the group is less survivable, more wasteful and less effective than a single larger ship.

4. ‘There are no escort ships to protect her’.

It’s fairly obvious that manning and technical issues with the escort fleet have been causing availability problems but there are still 19 escorts in varying states of readiness. A senior Royal Navy officer recently insisted that the Royal Navy has enough warships to protect HMS Queen Elizabeth. Rear Admiral Burton, former Commander UK maritime forces, said: “We have enough frigates and destroyers to protect that task group. We will use coalition frigates and destroyers, but we have enough to deliver a sovereign task group.” When asked about whether or not the UK has enough escorts to do this without impacting other commitment, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

“The size and the scale of the escort depends on the deployments and the task that the carrier is involved in. If it is a NATO tasking in the north Atlantic, for example, you would expect an international contribution to those types of taskings, in the same way as we sometimes escort the French carrier or American carriers to make up that. It is definitely our intention, though, that the carrier strike group will be able to be a wholly UK sovereign deployable group. Now, it is probably not necessary to do that every single time we do it, depending on the tasking, but we want to do that and test doing it. Once we have done that, depending on the deployment, of course, we will cut our cloth as required.” Air Marshal Knighton added: “The escorts that go with the carrier will depend on the circumstances. The work-up for carrier strike group 21 will be with British ships, because we need to demonstrate and prove that we can do that, but we are already engaged with international partners to understand how we will integrate an Arleigh Burke destroyer from the US or a Dutch destroyer into that package.”

5. ‘One of the ships will be sold/mothballed’.

There are no plans to sell either Queen Elizabeth class ship, zero, nada, zilch. Any suggestion otherwise is pure speculation.

6. ‘The Americans will be the first to use HMS Queen Elizabeth’.

Recently, the Ministry of Defence confirmed plans for the deployment of American F-35 aircraft alongside British jets aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth. However the important thing here is to remember that the US jets will augment the British jets. Not replace them and not operate from them alone. Captain Jerry Kyd, former commander of HMS Queen Elizabeth, commented on the initial deployment and the gradual increase in air wing numbers: “We are constrained by the F-35 buy rate even though that was accelerated in SDSR in 2015, so initial operating capability numbers in 2020 are going to be very modest indeed. We will flesh it out with helicopters, and a lot depends on how many USMC F-35s come on our first deployment in 2021. But by 2023, we are committed to 24 UK jets onboard, and after that it’s too far away to say.”

That being said, there are operational British jets onboard HMS Queen Elizabeth right now as I’m writing this. It is understood that the US aircraft will augment British jets on coalition operations, not replace them and not be the first to fly from the new carriers.

7. ‘The F-35 jets that will fly from the carriers are American’.

The F-35 features a significant amount of British developed components. It’s a multinational effort. As the only Level 1 partner, the United Kingdom has garnered tremendous economic benefits from the F-35. The programme is projected to create and support more than 20,000 jobs across the United Kingdom. Hundreds of British software engineers with BAE have played a leading role in creating software for the F-35 aircraft that will be operational with the US Air Force later this year. The software team at the BAE site in Samlesbury, Lancashire, has worked alongside Lockheed Martin, the prime contractor on the F-35 programme, to deliver the latest update known as ‘Block 3i’. There are more than eight million lines of code required for full operational capability. Block 3i equips the aircraft with 89% of the software code required.

John Brindle, principal engineer for F-35 Lightning II Development, said: “Beginning with Jaguar, BAE Systems has a long history and world-class expertise in developing software for aircraft systems. We have made a significant contribution to 3i, including producing software for the fuel management system, on-board vehicle systems, structural health management and elements of the navigation and cockpit display system.” According to Lockheed Martin: “The fingerprints of British ingenuity can be found on dozens of the aircrafts key components. BAE Systems, GE Aviation, Martin-Baker, SELEX, Cobham, Ultra Electronics, UTC Actuation Systems and Rolls-Royce are just a few of the more than 100 U.K.-based suppliers for the programme.”

8. ‘The ships were only built to benefit Scottish yards and have no strategic purpose’.

There were 3,000 people in Rosyth, with another 8,000 people working at sites around Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland were involved in everything from building segments of the hull to parts of the systems installed on the ships. Then there’s the wider supply chain network, involving hundreds of companies around the UK. In short, the jobs created and the effort going into this new British built icon are unprecedented for a single project in the 21st century. The origins of the massive and

sometimes controversial Queen Elizabeth class carrier programme lie in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. The review re-evaluated every weapon system (active or in procurement) with the exception of the Eurofighter Typhoon and the Vanguard-class ballistic missile submarines.

The report identified that aircraft carriers offered the following: Ability to operate offensive aircraft abroad when foreign basing may be denied.

All required space and infrastructure; where foreign bases are available they are not always available early in a conflict and infrastructure is often lacking.

A coercive and deterrent effect when deployed to a trouble spot. The report concluded:

“The emphasis is now on increased offensive air power, and an ability to operate the largest possible range of aircraft in the widest possible range of roles. When the current carrier force reaches the end of its planned life, we plan to replace it with two larger vessels.” In November 2004, while giving evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Alan West explained that the sortie rate and interoperability with the United States Navy were factors in deciding on the size of the carriers and the composition of the carriers’ air-wings:

“The reason that we have arrived at what we have arrived at is because to do the initial strike package, that deep strike package, we have done really quite detailed calculations and we have come out with the figure of 36 joint strike fighters, and that is what has driven the size of it, and that is to be able to deliver the weight of effort that you need for these operations that we are planning in the future.”

9. ‘Nuclear power would have been better’.

Cost is single-handedly the most prohibitive reason the Queen Elizabeth class are not nuclear powered. More conservative estimates say a reactor adds 280% to the lifetime costs of a ship. Aircraft carriers typically only carry a month’s worth of aviation fuel, including US and French nuclear vessels, so need to be refuelled monthly anyway. There’s no real operational advantage to having the vessels nuclear powered, especially when weighed against the massive increase in costs. For more on why nuclear power doesn’t make much sense for the new carriers, I fully recommend ‘The reasons HMS Queen Elizabeth is not nuclear powered’ by savetheroyalnavy.org.

10. ‘She is named after the current Queen Elizabeth’.

The name HMS Queen Elizabeth is a continuation of an historic Royal Navy name dating back over a century and the vessel herself is not named after the current monarch.

11. ‘She leaks!’.

HMS Queen Elizabeth made headlines last year when a leak was discovered on board. Issues like this occur often on vessels of all types, especially during a phase of their life designed to identify and rectify faults. A minor leak on a ship is not a serious concern, in fact it’s very common. This happened during the ships sea trials, a stage of her life designed to find and resolve issues.

While some argue that this is a major issue it should be noted that the Royal Navy themselves seemed confident that it would not impact the schedule of the vessel and they were correct. We spoke to someone serving on board the vessel via e-mail, he told us under the condition of anonymity: “We’re bemused, nothing more nothing less. This so called issue isn’t a new thing and it’s not what I would call serious. It’s disappointing to see how easily this has been blown out of proportion.” A Royal Navy spokesman said: “An issue with a shaft seal has been identified during HMS Queen Elizabeth’s sea trials; this is scheduled for repair while she is alongside at Portsmouth. It does not prevent her from sailing again and her sea trials programme will not be affected.” The Sun says that HMS Queen Elizabeth has been taking on up to 200 litres of sea water every hour. “A faulty seal around one of the vast warship’s propeller shafts means 200 litres of sea water pour in every hour.” A typical bilge pump even on a narrow boat, by the way, can handle over 1000 litres per hour. Admiral Chris Parry told Sky News the leak was a non-issue:

“Every ship, to tell you the truth, takes on water that’s why you have pumps. What people have to realise is the whole reason for sea trials is that you race and rally the ship, you stress it right to its extremes, and you’re really looking for faults like this to see what happens. You get this all the time, you’ve got very complicated engineering under the water, it’s operating obviously at sea and every yachtsman will tell you they take in water somewhere, that’s what you’ve got pumps for, that’s why you have dedicated engineers, it really is no big deal I have to tell you.”

Source: ukdefencejournal.org; 16 June 2020

AUSTRALIA COMMITS TO NEXT TRITON UNMANNED ISR AIRCRAFT

- Adam Thorn

Defence Minister Linda Reynolds has confirmed Australia will purchase an additional Northrop Grumman MQ-4C Triton, bringing the nation’s fleet to three.

The project provides significant opportunities for Australian defence industry including the construction of facilities in South Australia and the Northern Territory, software integration, engineering, logistics and manufacturing of components.

Minister Reynolds said, “Once in service, this capability will significantly enhance our ability to persistently patrol Australia’s maritime approaches from the north, in the south-west Pacific and down to Antarctica.”

The 2016 Defence White Paper explained the importance of the Triton platform as it fits within the Australian Defence Force: “To complement the surveillance capabilities of the [P-8A] Poseidon, the government will acquire seven high altitude MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft from the early 2020s ... The Triton is an unarmed, long-range,

remotely piloted aircraft that will operate in our maritime environment, providing a persistent maritime patrol capability and undertaking other intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance tasks.”

“The fleet is being developed and purchased through a Cooperative Program with the US Navy. This program strengthens our ability to develop advanced maritime surveillance capability and ensure our capabilities remain complementary with our security partners, while sharing in the benefits of their technical expertise and project costs,” Minister Reynolds explained.

“Our membership of the Cooperative Program gives us the confidence to acquire our third Triton. We will continue to work closely with the United States to assure our future capability.

“Together we are developing this cutting-edge military technology to the highest standards. This work will help ensure Australia’s maritime region is secure well into the future.”

Remotely flying out of RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia, the Tritons are capable of monitoring 40,000 square kilometres a day and seamlessly flying a round trip for sustained surveillance and in support of allied freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea from the Northern Territory – increasing Australia’s interoperability with key allies, particularly the US.

The Triton is designed to operate in conjunction with Australia’s planned fleet of 12 manned P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and anti-submarine aircraft.

The nation’s Tritons provide a quantum leap in the nation’s surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, while the facilities and crew required to operate, train and maintain will be part of the initial \$1.4 billion investment, which includes \$364 million on new facilities at RAAF Bases Edinburgh and Tindal (in NT).

Source: australianaviation.com; 18 June 2020

DAMEN LEADING ROLE FOR GERMAN NAVY’S MKS 180 FRIGATE PROJECT

- Martin Manaranche

Damen is the main contractor for this complex project which it is undertaking, together with partners Blohm+Voss and Thales, in Germany.

The combination of companies was previously declared the winner of a European tender; the largest in the history of the German Navy. On 17 June, the necessary

financial resources were released by the German Bundestag budget committee. The contract marks the start of the design and construction phase.

Approximately 80% of the project investment remains in Germany as added value. The vessels will be built at Blohm+Voss in Hamburg, but partly also at other shipyard locations in Germany, including Bremen, Kiel and Wolgast. Besides this, approximately 100 small and medium-sized companies from the maritime industry, mechanical engineering and plant construction sectors will be involved in the implementation. These companies originate from almost all German states.

“I am convinced that with the MKS-180 project, we are building a high-quality frigate that meets all the wishes of the German Navy. It is a German-Dutch project. We are already working well with our partners in Germany; Lürssen, Blohm+Voss, and Thales. The project also offers prospects for further European cooperation. The many years of cooperation between Damen and Thales as part of the Dutch golden ecosystem is an important factor in this success. If the Netherlands continues to invest in innovative projects for its own navy, we can further expand our role within European naval construction. That’s good for the Netherlands’ strategic role, which fits in with the Defence Industry Strategy.”

- Hein van Ameijden, Managing Director Damen Schelde Naval Shipbuilding

The German added value and knowledge development also apply to Thales’s mission systems acquired within the project. Approximately 70% is supplied by Thales’s German branches in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. This is done in close cooperation with numerous subcontractors.

“This historic contract for both the German Navy and Thales is a significant milestone in more than 50 years of cooperation, and confirms our worldwide leading position in the field of high-end naval mission systems. The women and men on board of these innovative frigates can rely on the latest technologies in the field of cyber defense, radar and fire control. The AWWS system, developed for the Netherlands and Belgian Navies, will soon also enable the German Navy to withstand threats of today and the coming decades.”

- Gerben Edelijn, CEO of Thales Netherlands

Damen, Lürssen, Blohm+Vos and Thales are delighted with the confidence that the German government places in it. The implementation of the project will begin soon and involves the delivery of four frigates between 2027 and 2031 for an amount of approximately 4.6 billion euros. There is also an option to supply two more frigates after 2032.

Source: navalnews.com; 19 June 2020

SHIPPING, PORTS AND OCEAN ECONOMY

LIBYA'S RETURN TO THE MARKET COULD HELP TANKERS

- Nikos Roussanoglou

The implications from Libya's latest absence from the tanker market are bound to affect rates in this part of the world. While a return to stability appears to still have some way to go, before it's materialized, recent efforts to restore production and increase exports, could go a long way into improving the market, in this part of the Mediterranean.

In its latest weekly report, shipbroker Gibson said that "Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) announced earlier this week that production at the AlFeel oilfield has restarted, with an initial output of 12k b/d, increasing to full capacity of 70k b/d within two weeks. This news came a few days after output from the country's largest oil field, Al-Sharara had recommenced. After long negotiations, the field is restarting production at around 30k b/d, ramping up to full capacity of 300k b/d within 90 days. The field has been closed since January as warring factions have fought within the country. NOC stated that with the resumption of production, they are lifting the force majeure over crude exports from the AlSharara and Al-Feel oilfields. Initially, crude will be delivered to the Zawiya refinery (45km west of Tripoli) to begin fuel production for the local market".

According to Gibson, "Libya has Africa's largest proven crude reserves and relies on oil exports for almost all of the state's revenues. The country's oil fields, pipelines and terminals have frequently been damaged during the fighting. Interruptions to oil exports have cost the Libyan treasury billions of dollars. Crude exports from the country reached 36 mln bbls in October last year but plummeted to 1.8 mln bbls during March and April. Back in January, groups loyal to the General Khalifa Haftar, blocked virtually all oil production and exports from the country. As production stopped, the limited storage capacity at ports was quickly drawn down, resulting in a sudden drop in crude exports".

The shipbroker added that "this follows several drops in exports in recent years, but none have been as severe and long-lasting as those seen during this year. The resumption of exports from Libya will provide additional volumes into the regional/global market at a time when demand is slowing returning. However, adding 370k b/d of crude production will significantly benefit the Libyan economy, and if

production can remain stable, it will provide increased tanker employment. Given that the Cross Mediterranean Aframax (TD19) route currently sits at its lowest levels since April 2018, any increase in Libyan export volumes will be welcome news. However, will this be the case? Reports have emerged that an armed group stormed the AlSharara oil field and shut down oil production in the last few days which has resulted in the continuation of force majeure on oil exports for the time being. A speedy and safe resolution to this situation is hoped for all those involved. However, for tanker markets, this only shows that the return to stability within the region is still some way off”, Gibson concuded.

Meanwhile, in the crude tanker market this week, in the Middle East, “tight early positions initially proved more difficult for some VLCC Charterers and premiums upon those were quickly set upon by Owners on more forward dates to pull the rate average to the East towards ws 60, with runs to the West remaining in the low ws 30’s. Supportive disport delays still prevail but more availability is starting to free up, and next week is likely to test Owners’ stamina somewhat. Overweight Suezmaxes enjoyed quite heavy action into the midweek as Charterers moved to competitively split VLCC stems but even such attention failed to thin lists and rates plugged at down to ws 55 to the East and into the low mid ws 20’s West. Ballasting away lends no attraction either, and next week is set to remain challenging to say the least. Aframaxes fell away as expected – over balanced tonnage chased rates down to 80,000mt by ws 75 to Singapore, and there’s no sign of it getting better anytime soon”, Gibson said.

Source: hellenicshippingnews.com; 15 June 2020

HOW IS THE GLOBAL SHIPPING INDUSTRY PLACED AMID COVID-19 CRISIS?

- Jonathan Saul and Devika Krishna Kumar

The international shipping industry is a significant pillar of world trade as it carries ~90% of the trade that happens around the world. It is because of the shipping industry that intercontinental trade, massive transport of raw materials, and import and export of reasonable food & manufactured goods are possible.

The expansion in the seaborne trade has brought benefits for the customers worldwide with attractive freight costs. The improved efficiency and growing economic liberalisation increase the likelihood of industry expanding further in the future. Presently, there are more than 50,000 merchant ships that trade globally and transport all types of cargo.

The global shipping industry, however, has come under the spotlight recently due to the challenges faced amid the COVID-19 crisis. The novel coronavirus has opened Pandora’s box of problems within the industry. Earlier the challenges faced by industry was that the seafarers who were denied medical assistance by the port authorities and now is a significant increase in the cyberattack by 400%.

In this article, we would understand these recent challenges faced by the global shipping industry.

Challenges faced by Ship Operators and Seafarers:

International Chamber of Shipping or ICS is the primary international trade association for both ship operators and owners. It is involved with all technical, legal, employment affairs as well as trade policy-related matters that affect the global ship functions.

On 21 May 2020, ICS, in its press release, highlighted that the coronavirus pandemic is generating considerable difficulties for the ship operators and seafarers. It also updated about the ICS software that keeps track more than 25 million hours of work on board ships that happens every month by seafarers. Over the past 12 months, the software noted a fall in the rate of non-conformances by 25%. As per the ICS software, seafarers can handle shipboard working activities in line with the IMO & ILO rules amid the coronavirus pandemic. Further, ICS is keeping track of the working and rest hours of the global seafarer via its ISF Watchkeeper compliance software and is used on more than 8,000 ships which gives evidence of compliance with the international regulations as per the flag States and Port State Control requirements.

On 28 May 2020, ICS in its press release, addressed the health concerns of the seafarers amid COVID-19 crisis. ICS updated that in some instances, the port authorities were not providing medical assistance to seafarers. Seafarers who were experiencing medical situations not linked to COVID-19 were not allowed to enter the port or were refused medical evacuation for several days.

The situation is alarming as seafarers who are suffering from a severe medical emergency like a stroke are being denied medical evacuation.

There are more than 400,000 crew members that are stuck at sea or house due to the travel restriction imposed by the countries due to COVID-19 outbreak. Many crew members have worked the number of months beyond their contracts and some over a year.

As per Guy Platten, secretary-general of the ICS, the situation is alarming as the longer the situation continues, there might be a risk to the global supply chain. He also pointed out that the folks cannot work for an indefinite time.

Apart from this, many seafarers are struggling to get entry or exit visas.

Spending a prolonged period, the seafarers are at threat from the unfavourable health impacts. On that front, new guidance is being issued by ICS for the ship operators and owners to tackle the unwell seafarers.

International Labour Organization, or ILO, on 8 June 2020, called for essential, co-ordinated measures to liberate 150k to 200k seafarers who are stuck on board due to the measures to curb COVID-19 spread.

Further, ILO appealed governments, immigration, health as well as maritime authorities to accept seafarers as a key worker as they make sure the flow of trade & movement of essential medical supplies, food, safety devices as well as crucial goods during this pandemic.

Cyber-attacks up by 400% since February 2020:

ICS, in its recent press release, highlighted that the rising pace of digital connectivity on board ship has resulted in the rapid development of onboard communication. Digitisation has challenged the traditional practices followed by the shipping industry. It is because of the digitisation that the shipping industry gets instant access to the information.

However, there is another big challenge pointed by an Israeli maritime cyber-security expert Naval Dome recently during the first week of June 2020. Naval Dome apprised about an increase in the cyber hacks by 400% since February 2020.

Naval Dome has built the highly extensive and secure maritime cyber defence solution for critical onboard systems.

The rise in the cyber hacks is because of the increase in malware, ransomware and phishing emails exploiting the coronavirus crisis.

The increasing cyber threat is bringing maritime safety at risk as over 300,000 marine assets operate exposed to cyber-attacks. This is a further alarming situation for the maritime industry.

Some of the direct impacts of the cyber threat might cost billions of dollars and let global supply chain cripple. Other than this, the shipping companies, as well as the industry itself, are highly at risk to the cyber-attacks.

A Glance at the Australian Maritime Industry

As per the report published by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) on 28 May 2020, the cases of the coronavirus are rising in Australia, and the situation is changing fast. In the past 24 hours, Australia has seen 18 new cases of COVID-19 (As on 14 June 2020 at 9:00 PM AEST). The Department of Health is heading the government response to COVID-19. They have released a coronavirus data for the maritime industry.

ASMA remains accessible for businesses and would give regulatory services to its clients and the broader community. Regional offices remain temporarily closed to prevent direct interaction with the customers. However, they can be contacted via email or phone.

Source: kalkinemedia.com; 15 June 2020

VIETNAM TO BE LINKED BY 140 TBPS UNDERSEA CABLE

- Nguyen Quy

A 9,400-km submarine cable that passes through Vietnam with a bandwidth of 140 Tbps, higher than all cables connected to the country, is scheduled for completion by the end of 2022.

Japanese tech firm NEC has been appointed by the Asia Direct Cable (ADC) consortium to lay the cable with multiple pairs of optical fibers to enable high-capacity transmission of data across East and Southeast Asia, Singapore newspaper Strait Times reported on Friday.

It will also connect Hong Kong, China, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

In Vietnam, the point of connection would be in Quy Nhon town in the south central province of Binh Dinh, American business technology news website ZDNet reported.

Members of the consortium are Vietnam's military-run Viettel, Singapore's Singtel, China Telecom, Japan's SoftBank, and India's Tata Communications.

Ooi Seng Keat, Singtel's vice-president of carrier services, OTT, satellites, and group enterprise, said the cable will help the telco meet rapidly growing demand for high-speed connectivity to support advanced technologies such as 5G, Internet of Things-related services and high-definition video.

Chang Weiguo, one of the ADC co-chairs from China Telecom, told ZDNet: "The ADC system provides the highest cable capacity and necessary diversity for Asia's key information hubs, which will enable carriers and service providers to better plan their networks and services for sustainable development."

Vietnam, where more than 64 percent of the population is online, has six submarine cable systems, plus a 120 gigabit channel that runs overland through China.

The Asia Pacific Gateway undersea cable, which currently has the highest bandwidth of 54 Tbps, has suffered from disruptions many times.

Source: vnexpress.net; 14 June 2020

IRAN SETS ITS SIGHTS ON LNG SUPERPOWER STATUS

- Simon Watkins

Qatar's recent decision to go ahead with bold plans for the North Dome, its supergiant non-associated gas reservoir, together with corollary deals to secure massive new liquefied natural gas (LNG) capacity in its chief target export market, China, has spurred Iran into moving forward with its own long-stalled LNG plans, according to a senior oil and gas industry figure who works closely with Iran's Petroleum Ministry. "Iran and Qatar share the same huge [non-associated] gas reservoir [the 9,700 square kilometre gas basin, 3,700 of which is Iran's South Pars, with the remainder being Qatar's North Dome], so each side is always suspicious that the other's drilling activities will impinge on their own deposits," he said.

"Now's a very good time for Iran to move ahead with its LNG strategy, as relatively low gas prices means there's little opportunity cost in re-configuring the various sectors of its gas sector, and by the time that it is in a position to offer a significant LNG business,

gas prices should be a lot higher,” he added. “Iran has thought for a long time that there’s a huge discrepancy between its status as a global gas superpower and its position in the global LNG market,” he told OilPrice.com last week. “Given how much more difficult it will be under the new U.S. sanctions to complete some of the pipeline export options for gas, the emphasis now is on finally realising an LNG capability,” he added. Always a prime advocate of Iran developing its status as a key global LNG supplier, in recent weeks Petroleum Minister, Bijan Zanganeh, has repeatedly pressed the issue at cabinet meetings, he underlined.

In fact, Iran has been tantalisingly close to doing just this for years. Before the penultimate round of sanctions were ramped up in 2011/12 forcing its suspension of the project, German chemicals giant Linde Group had 60 per cent completed a US\$3.3 billion flagship LNG export facility near Tombak Port that was set to produce at least 10.5 million tons per year (mtpy) of LNG, with expectations that it would take less than a year to finish. After sanctions were lifted again in 2016, Iran awarded Linde – whose liquefaction process the facility’s first two trains were to have used - a ‘sweetener’ contract when it signed the first petrochemical co-operation deal between Iran and Germany; a Front End Engineering Design contract for the olefin unit of Kian Petrochemical.

Iran had also been moving ahead with plans to construct floating LNG facilities, especially in and around continental Europe, with in-principle deals having been struck with Italy’s Eni and Spain’s Cepsa to take both oil and LNG when it became available from Iran. Similar plans were being discussed between Iran and Greece’s state-run gas supplier, Depa, to form a new firm that would build and run a floating LNG storage and re-gasification facility at Alexandroupolis, in the north of Greece. An expansion of the Revythousa re-gasification terminal near Athens was also being looked at as a potential entry point for Iranian gas. Both facilities would have been connected to two international pipeline systems: the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, and the Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria links.

Additionally, prior to 2011/12, Iran was in negotiations over various LNG projects with, among others: Total, Petronas, Repsol, and Royal Dutch Shell. Each of these already had different agreements with Iran as part of its fourth ‘Five Year National Develop Plan’ (2005-2009) that aimed to produce 70 million tonnes per year (mtpy) of LNG from the South Pars, North Pars, Ferdosi and Golshan gas fields.

With the newest U.S. sanctions in place since 5 November 2018, however, there has been an understandable degree of caution on the part of European firms to fully re-engage with Iran, despite the E.U. itself invoking the ‘Blocking Statute’ that makes compliance by European firms with U.S. sanctions illegal. Linde’s chief executive officer, Aldo Belloni, highlighted earlier last year that the company had to wait to find a way to transfer money out of the country before proceeding with its Iran investment plans. The same is true of the plans for a series of mini-LNG complexes to be funded and built by South Korean entities.

In this latter context, late in 2018, South Korea’s Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Kim Hyun-mee, agreed the finer points on its LNG co-operation with Zanganeh, which included Exim Bank’s initial €8 billion credit line to Iran and another €2.3 billion from two other South Korean companies. Prior to the withdrawal of the

U.S. from the nuclear deal in May 2018, the intention had been for the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), utilising South Korea's technology and know-how, to build up a large number of mini-LNG complexes. The production capacities of these would range from 2,000 to 500,000 tons of LNG per year, compared to typical large scale plant capacity of between 2.5 and 7.5 million tons per year.

These smaller facilities benefit particularly from being both relatively quick to start up and locatable almost anywhere, even in very remote gas fields. This idea was again voiced at the end of last year by Talin Mansourian, the director of investment at the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), who said that Iran was looking at constructing six small LNG units with a total 500,000 tons per year production.

Recently, though, another option has emerged, involving Russia. "Exactly the same rationale lies behind the determination of [Russia's President, Vladimir] Putin to bring Russia's LNG standing in the world market into line with its status as a global gas superpower as is the case with Iran," a senior oil and gas industry source in Moscow told OilPrice.com. In Russia's case, this determination, and massive state funding, has resulted in the continued success of the Yamal LNG project, run by Russia's number two gas producer (after state-owned Gazprom), Novatek.

Significantly as well, this has seen Russia largely insulate itself operationally from the effects of any of its own U.S. sanctions by indigenising much of the technology and machinery involved with the Yamal LNG project. The 'Arctic Cascade' process - based on a two-stage liquefaction process that capitalises on the colder ambient temperature in the Arctic climate to maximise energy efficiency during the liquefaction process - is the first patented liquefaction technology using equipment produced only by Russian manufacturers. "Russia is perfectly capable of supplying Iran with all the machinery, technology, expertise, and money that it needs to get its own LNG sector into the next phase," said the Iran source.

This would build on the signing in 2018 – just after the U.S.'s re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, of two memoranda of understanding between the NIOC and Russia's state gas behemoth, Gazprom. This came after wide-ranging discussions between Zanganeh and senior Gazprom officials, including its chairman and CEO, Alexey Miller. Gazprom – which already supplies nearly one third of all of Europe's gas – led to an agreement with NIOC of a two-fold LNG sector development strategy. The first part involved a gas cooperation roadmap between the two companies, and the second the construction of Iranian LNG facilities in partnership with Iran's Oil Industry Pension Fund.

Initially, this would allow Gazprom to, in effect, take over from Linde on the existing 60 per cent complete LNG complex, and later to be integral in the construction of the mini-LNG complexes, with Gazprom taking payment for its work from the sale of gas both from this complex and from part of the output from fields feeding gas into it. Indeed, at the time of the deal announcement, Zanganeh stated: "Repayment of the finances for developing these projects will be made by selling the produced gas and because... Gazprom is an experienced company it will consider gas exports either by launching pipelines or construction of plants to produced liquefied natural gas."

Alongside ensuring the continued development of the flagship supergiant South Pars non-associated natural gas field the onus to maximise the potential gas feeds for Iran's

LNG complexes is on bringing new output online from relatively underdeveloped gas fields. Typical of the type of development proposition Iran is focussed on that is considered by Tehran as a possible candidate for more direct Russian involvement is Halegan, discovered in 2005. It is in an ideal location, to begin with – in Fars Province in southern Iran, 73 kilometres north of the Assaluyeh patchems hub, 25 kilometres south of the Sefid Baghoun gas field, and neighbouring the Sefid Zakhour and Dey gas fields to the north.

According to current estimates, the Halegan site holds at least 355 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas reserves in place, about 72 per cent of which is deemed recoverable. Based on initial domestic studies, the development of the site would allow for a sustainable output of about 50 mcm/d of gas over a 20-year period, contributing to an overall estimated value of the field of about US\$85 billion.

Source: [oilprice.com](https://www.oilprice.com); 16 June 2020

IMO CHIEF CALLS FOR CREW CHANGES TO AVERT ‘REAL SAFETY RISK’

- Bob Jaques

Kitack Lim, secretary-general of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), has repeated his plea for governments around the world to allow safe seafarer crew changes as a matter of urgency.

In his keynote speech at opening of the virtual 10th annual Capital Link Operational Excellence in Shipping Forum held today, Lim pointed out that industry bodies had worked together to draw up a series of 12 protocols to ensure safe crew changes. These had been endorsed by the IMO itself and last week were backed by United Nations secretary-general António Guterres himself, he reminded.

Lim called it “imperative” that Governments now implement these protocols and “implored” them to do more to allow crew changes. “This cannot wait,” he said. “This is now a real safety issue, endangering the safe operation of ships.

“We cannot expect seafarers to stay at sea forever,” he stated. “Governments must allow shipping to continue moving by getting seafarers to their homes, and to their ships to work.”

Drawing positives from the pandemic, Lim went on to welcome the advances uses of technology and strong spirit of cooperation that had been in evidence in recent weeks.

He said that these qualities would continue to be need to help shipping confront its other main challenges besides recovering from the pandemic, including embrace of the digital revolution, ongoing implementation of new IMO 2020 fuel rules, and the “biggest” battle of all against climate change.

Source: [seatrade-maritime.com](https://www.seatrade-maritime.com); 16 June 2020

MARINE ENVIRONMENT

CREATE FRESHWATER, MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE GULF OF GUINEA- STAKEHOLDERS

- John Oba

Stakeholders in the Freshwater and Marine ecosystems have called for the creation of Freshwater and Marine Protected Areas in Nigeria, the Congo Basin and in the Gulf of Guinea.

The experts in a two-day virtual convergence/webinar conference reviewed the threats to aquatic ecosystems in the region and examined ways of monitoring and protecting them.

Participants at the conference which includes speakers from Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and South Africa and stakeholders made up of fishers, civil society organization members, students and academics shared knowledge and experiences in monitoring and advocating for conservation of the threatened aquatic ecosystem.

The participants established the need to support the preservation of aquatic marine and freshwater ecosystems and livelihoods in the Congo Basin area as well as in the Gulf of Guinea and to empower fishers and other community members to actively monitor and protect their ecosystems.

Speaking at the opening of the convergence, the Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation, (HOMEF), Dr. Nnimmo Bassey stressed that “it is time to raise the capacity of our fishers to monitor aquatic ecosystems, share knowledge, map threatened and valuable species, network with other fishers within and across borders.

The stakeholders further resolved that policies on protected areas and conservation approaches must be gender sensitive, socially inclusive and context specific, traditional knowledge and norms should be integrated into all biodiversity conservation processes.

That governments should fund research and institutions/agencies related to freshwater and marine ecosystems and encourage research that address the real challenges faced by fishers and coastal communities. Also that the research outcomes should be fully utilised in policy development and implementation.

Source: blueprint.ng; 14 June 2020

INDIA'S TWO CYCLONES, LOCUST OUTBREAK, MARINE HEATWAVES – AND THEIR CLIMATE CHANGE LINK

- Roxy Mathew Koll

As every year, Indians were eagerly awaiting monsoon rains by the end of May. Instead, they got back-to-back cyclones on the East and West coasts, locust outbreaks in the North, and scorching heat waves throughout the country.

The cyclones hit two of the most populated metropolitan cities in the world – Kolkata and Mumbai. The propensity towards similar climatic events has increased around the Indian Ocean. Unseasonal storms in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, which triggered the locust outbreaks in South Asia and the wildfires in Australia, are part of these unusual events. At the same time, a series of heatwaves led to the bleaching of coral reefs along the Indian coast, which has evolved as a hotspot for climate extremes, rampaging the marine ecosystem.

Cyclones

The North Indian Ocean accounts for only about 7% of the total number of tropical cyclones that occur globally. However, more than 80% of the global fatalities occur in this region, particularly around the Bay of Bengal. Hence, any rise in the frequency or intensity of cyclones in this region is of grave concern – and that is exactly what is happening.

Cyclones draw their energy from the warm ocean waters. As the Indian Ocean is rapidly warming, it is brewing more intense storms during some seasons. India has come a long way in cyclone forecasting since 1999, when the super cyclone on the East coast killed several thousands. From fatalities running into five-digit numbers, we have moved to two digits.

This is owing to improvements in forecasting systems as well as efficient communication between government departments. In the case of cyclones Amphan and Nisarga, the India Meteorological Department gave a skillfully accurate forecast of the track and intensity, which saved lives.

In recent years, we see that cyclones are forming quite quickly: Amphan intensified from a category-one to a category-five cyclone within 18 hours. Our research shows that high ocean temperatures are conducive to such rapid intensification of cyclones in the North Indian Ocean.

The buoys in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea basins registered surface temperatures in the range of 30°C–33°C. These are record temperatures driven by climate change – we have never seen such high values until now. Weather forecast models find it a

difficult task to simulate this rapid cyclone intensification due to ocean warming, and that is a challenge that we need to address in near-term.

African locusts and Australian wildfire

The locust outbreak started after warm waters in the Western Indian Ocean in late 2019 fuelled storms and substantial amounts of rains over East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. These warm waters were caused by a phenomenon called the Indian Ocean Dipole – with warmer than usual waters to its West and cooler waters to its East. Rising temperatures due to global warming amplified the dipole and made the Western Indian Ocean particularly warm.

Heavy rain triggers the growth of vegetation in arid areas where desert locusts can then grow and breed. These locusts then followed the winds and rains to the Indo-Pak region early this year. They found greener pastures over North India as the pre-monsoon rains during March–May were in excess.

While the warm waters in the West Indian Ocean enhanced the storms over there, it also pushed dry air over the Eastern Indian Ocean. This accentuated the dry summer over Australia, triggering some of the worst bushfires that the country has seen.

Marine heatwaves

A less-discussed element of ongoing climate change is the marine heat waves. These are the ocean's erratic response to increased warm waters, and are quite similar to the ones over land. Coral reefs occupy only 0.1% of the planet's surface but are home to 25% of all the marine life found in the ocean.

An underwater survey showed that 85% of the corals in Gulf of Mannar near the Tamil Nadu coast got bleached in May after the ocean temperatures peaked. Satellite observations reveal that number of marine heatwaves has likely doubled in recent decades and have also become longer-lasting, more intense, and extensive. Fisheries catch in the Indian Ocean appears to have already been impacted by the effects of warming on growth, reproduction and survival of fish stocks.

The way forward

With an event like the tropical cyclone, it is not just the intensity of the winds that increased, but also the amount of rainfall, as warmer air holds more moisture; the inundation due to storm surges, as sea levels have risen; and saline water intrusion.

When these events cascade and overlap – called compound events – the threat gets much more severe. Considering that cities like Kolkata and Mumbai have a bellying population where land development comes at the cost of mangroves, rivers and floodplains, such events present challenging scenarios.

India already has a National Climate Change Action Plan and related policies. However, these policies haven't been adequately followed up. An IIT-Bombay study

reveals that floods in Indian cities are more of a management problem. India can – and should – take up the climate crisis as an opportunity to lead other countries in the research and development of renewable energy resources and energy-efficient infrastructure.

Our weather forecast system is sound, but we need early warning systems that integrate the multiple weather events with the human demographics and land use at the local level. The Indian Ocean rim hosts one-third of the world population and as extremes rise, we need early warning systems in all these regions, including East Africa and South Asia. Efficient forecasts require efficient monitoring of the ocean – but we have gaps there too.

Now, the Covid-19 pandemic, which is severely limiting our ability to maintain the Indian Ocean Observing System array, has presented a new dilemma. One of the buoys which recorded peak ocean temperatures in the Bay of Bengal stopped working after the cyclone. We need to join all these missing dots such that we can monitor and address the compounding crisis.

With the monsoon forecasted to be normal this year, the winds may bring in a good amount of fertile rains from the Indian Ocean during the season. Human memory is short and we often get complacent as events pass by. The impact of Indian Ocean is far beyond what we have imagined – as it can churn out intense cyclones, heavy rains and even locusts. We need to consistently and continuously work towards adapting and mitigating climate change in the Indian Ocean – for we have seen her furious face many a times.

Source: scroll.in; 17 June 2020

DEEP-SEA MINING: AN ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTION OR IMPENDING CATASTROPHE?

- Elizabeth Claire Alberts

In 2007, a submersible with a large drill descended 1,600 meters (5,250 feet) into the sea off the coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG), landing near a network of hydrothermal vents that host an array of rare and unique sea life. The machine operators, working for Canadian mining company Nautilus Minerals, Inc., began drilling into the seabed, searching for copper, gold, zinc and silver. In the years that followed, the company drilled again and again.

By 2019, Nautilus, the first company to ever receive a deep-sea mining license, had gone bankrupt before extracting any minerals, and the PNG government, which had invested in the project, was left with millions of dollars in debt.

The marine environment didn't fare much better. Jonathan Mesulam, a resident of New Ireland province in PNG, located near a Nautilus project site, said his community experienced "serious impacts" when the company began exploring the seabed.

“We were worried because the mining is experimental, there are no examples anywhere in the world, and Papua New Guinea has no regulatory framework,” Mesulam said in a presentation he gave at a MiningWatch Canada conference in 2019. “Also, we knew that there is an active undersea volcano at that site, could it cause a tsunami?”

“It also affected our unique shark calling culture that is our identity,” he added. “We can call sharks to our canoes. They are a major source of food for our people. When Nautilus started its exploration activities the sharks left our waters.”

Polymetallic nodule mining

What happened in PNG is referenced as a cautionary tale in a new report published in May by the Deep Sea Mining Campaign, a program run by The Ocean Foundation, and MiningWatch Canada. While the operation in PNG targeted hydrothermal vents, the report examines a different form of deep-sea mining aimed at polymetallic nodules: potato-sized rock accretions on the seafloor that harbor commercially valuable metals like manganese, nickel, cobalt and copper.

Polymetallic nodules are found in many parts of the world’s oceans, but a large accumulation occurs in the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ), an abyssal plain that stretches across 4.5 million square kilometers (1.7 million square miles) between Hawaii and Mexico in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. Since the CCZ lies within international waters, any mining in this region would be regulated by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), an intergovernmental body set up to oversee and control mining beyond any country’s jurisdiction. Companies wishing to mine in the CCZ also need to be sponsored by at least one nation in order to get a permit. Currently 16 international companies have contracts to explore the CCZ for nodules, and two companies have permits to do so in the Indian Ocean and the West Pacific Ocean, according to the report.

The report, written by a group of researchers from James Cook University in Australia and the University of the South Pacific, with a main campus in Fiji, reviews 250 scientific articles, reports and industry sources. It analyzes current mining interests in the Pacific Ocean and various mining processes, and assesses the potential impacts on local ecosystems, biodiversity, fisheries, and social and economic dimensions. The report also highlights many gaps in knowledge about deep-sea habitats and species, and how very little is known or understood about the risks of deep-sea mining.

Deep-sea mining has not yet begun anywhere in the world, but many companies are already prospecting the seabed for nodules and other forms of minerals to assess their size, composition, distribution, and economic value.

“The reason we decided it was really urgent to put this report out is because ... the International Seabed Authority is under a lot of pressure to get the regulations finalized that would allow the mining to start,” Catherine Coumans, one of the report’s editors and the Asia-Pacific program coordinator for MiningWatch Canada, told Mongabay. “The mining could literally start within the next couple of years.”

What's in the deep sea?

The environmental impacts of nodule mining are manifold, according to the report. Polymetallic nodules, which take millions of years to form, provide a critical habitat for an array of unique and largely understudied species, including deep-sea corals, sponges, sea urchins, starfish, jellyfish, squid, octopus, shrimp, and sea cucumbers. Deep-sea habitats and species are slow-growing, so a full recovery after mining could take thousands, if not millions, of years — if a recovery is possible at all, the report says.

The report suggests that sediment plumes and waste discharge from mining could upset phytoplankton blooms at the sea's surface, and introduce toxic metals into marine food chains. This mining waste could also travel through the ocean and damage nearby seamounts and coral reef systems, which many fish and marine mammal species depend upon for shelter and food, and put entire fisheries at risk. The report also calls attention to the potential impacts of light pollution, which could disrupt a multitude of species attuned to living in the dark, and noise pollution that could change the swimming and schooling behavior of tuna, and cause dolphins and whales to strand.

Coumans and her colleague, Helen Rosenbaum, at Deep Sea Mining Campaign, said in an email that the scientific studies reviewed by the report's research team represent a "clear consensus in the scientific community that mining of polymetallic nodules is predicted to lead to a significant loss of biodiversity in the marine environment."

"Some people who are proponents of mining say, 'Oh, let's mine first and then we'll be able to see what the problems are,'" Coumans told Mongabay. "And we're saying, 'Well, we don't really need to do that.' We know you're going to destroy the biodiversity down there and that species are going to be lost. We know that the impacts are going to be long lasting because those nodules take millions of years to form."

DeepGreen Metals, Inc., a private company based in Vancouver, Canada, was granted a 15-year license to explore minerals in the CCZ through its subsidiary, Nauru Ocean Resources Inc., and has three sponsoring Pacific island states: Nauru, Tonga and Kiribati. When Mongabay reached out to DeepGreen Metals, a spokesperson for the company said that polymetallic nodule mining would be less destructive than land-based mining.

"We see nodules as an opportunity to compress the disastrous impacts of land-based mining," the spokesperson told Mongabay in an email. "Whilst nodule collection will impact the seabed where nodules are collected and create sediment plumes, the impacts of which will be studied in-depth over the next three years, our research finds that nodules offer significant environmental and social impact reductions when compared to mining the same metals on land. As it stands, more territory has been set aside in the CCZ under protected 'areas of particular environmental interest' than has been licensed out for exploration by the ISA. These protected areas will make sure that the animals in the area have plenty of habitat on the abyssal plain, the largest ecosystem on the planet.

“Mining on land now takes place in some of the most biodiverse places on the planet,” the spokesperson added. “The ocean floor, on the other hand, is a food-poor environment with no plant life and an order of magnitude less biomass living in a larger area. We can’t avoid disturbing wildlife, to be clear, but we will be putting fewer organisms at risk than land-based operations mining the same metals.”

The spokesperson for DeepGreen also said there was a difference between mining polymetallic nodules in the CCZ, which they described as a “deep, dark,” environment, and other forms of deep-sea mining that target cobalt crusts and seafloor vents in shallower waters – the type of activity that Nautilus was conducting off PNG. The former would be much less destructive than the latter, according to DeepGreen. The company also said it would host a research program to better understand the seabed and the organisms living on and around it.

“Our program will take in over 100 studies, involving over 100 researchers and scientists who will freely publish their findings over the next three years,” the spokesperson said. “This will make the eastern CCZ one of the most intensely studied regions of the deep ocean. We will generate massive amounts of new knowledge and data which will be shared freely to anyone wishing to analyse it and to extract new information about the deep-ocean.”

‘Who’s going to be the watchdogs?’

To Coumans, another big concern is the lack of supervision of deep-sea mining and the practicalities of addressing any problems. While the ISA is meant to regulate and control deep-sea mining in international waters, Coumans says observation is difficult in the deep ocean.

“On land, you can fly a drone over [a mine], and there’s all kinds of ways to see what’s actually going on,” Coumans said. “But in the deep sea, who’s going to be the watchdogs down there? And if things go wrong, how do you fix it?”

DeepGreen responded to this concern by saying the company had invested in “a suite of technologies” using sensors and underwater drones to enable the company to monitor the mining activity and minimize risk in real-time.

But Coumans says that mining companies don’t have the experience to safely deal with problems several kilometers underwater, even with technology to help them.

“There’s no history of how to actually deal with unpredicted impacts,” she said. “On land, we do have that history because we’ve had hundreds of years of mining, and even on land that doesn’t work out very well, so you can just imagine how much more difficult it will be in the deep sea.”

Boom or bust for Pacific island nations?

According to DeepGreen, nodule mining would reap significant economic and social benefits for any Pacific Island nation that partnered with a mining company, especially those countries most at risk from the impacts of climate change.

“It is very easy for privileged activists to say what’s right or wrong for small island developing states,” the spokesperson for DeepGreen said. “It’s probably better to hear what they [Pacific island nations] have to say for themselves on this issue. DeepGreen

believes that polymetallic nodules represent an opportunity for these states, which have historically been left behind in global development, to level the playing field, taking advantage of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea — which has granted them sovereignty over vast tracts of the ocean — to lead in the development of an industry that has the potential to fully supply the critical minerals required for the shift to clean energy with a fraction of the social and environmental cost.”

While some individuals and groups in Pacific island nations may support polymetallic nodule mining, the report by the Deep Sea Mining Campaign and MiningWatch takes a different view. Deep-sea mining would have many negative repercussions for Pacific islanders, the report says, including adversely affecting local fisheries that provide wealth, employment and food security for many islanders.

“Risks to tuna fisheries and other open ocean species would be greatly increased by mine waste released in surface layers as well as noise and light pollution from DSM [deep-sea mining] infrastructure,” the report says. “Yellowfin and bigeye tuna would be exposed to waste discharges at depths of up to 1,000 metres [3,300 feet] or more, as these species make extended deep dives. Climate change research predicts that tropical tuna stocks will move eastwards in future years, shifting their populations into habitats where nodule deposits occur. If plumes from nodule mining affected seamounts, deep sea snapper fisheries would be at risk.”

The report also says many Pacific islanders are troubled by the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of mining, and that their concerns are validated by a growing “body of knowledge” about the negative impacts of polymetallic nodule mining.

“They [DeepGreen] talk a lot about how this is going to have great windfalls for the Pacific Island countries that would be involved, but the first deep seabed mining project has not had a good outcome for Papua New Guinea,” Coumans said.

Citizens in Tonga are also concerned about their government’s move to sponsor Tonga Offshore Mining Limited, a local subsidiary of DeepGreen Metals. The Civil Society Forum of Tonga, a group of 46 individuals, recently released a statement to try and convince their government to place a moratorium on mining in Tonga’s territorial waters as well as in international waters.

“As the deep sea remains understudied and poorly understood, there are many gaps in our understanding of its biodiversity and ecosystems,” the Civil Society Forum of Tonga said in a statement published on MiningWatch Canada’s website. “This makes it difficult to thoroughly assess the potential impacts of deep-sea mining and to put in place adequate safeguards to protect the marine environment. The livelihood of a billion people in the world is based on the ocean including 90% of the Pacific People. The Ocean is our home and this is the essence of sustainable development.”

Is sustainable energy ‘sustainable?’

Another argument made by companies like DeepGreen is that nodule mining is necessary to obtain the minerals needed for a global transition toward sustainable energy. There is growing demand for certain resources used in the production of wind turbines, solar panels and electric vehicles, according to a report by the World Bank. In fact, the report found that the production of minerals such as graphite, lithium and cobalt would need to increase by nearly 500% by 2050 to meet the growing demand for sustainable energy sources.

Yet Coumans says research shows that the minerals required for renewable energy can be found in existing terrestrial stocks and accumulations of electronic waste, and that the development of circular economies makes deep-sea mining an unnecessary exercise.

“This is not needs-based mining, this is profit based mining, and it’s unnecessary even if you were to believe the argument that we need these metals for the upcoming technology,” Coumans said. “The metals can be mined on land ... and we don’t need to extend the harm that we do with mining on land into the deep sea environment.”

‘A precautionary approach’

While companies like DeepGreen say that nodule mining would be far less destructive than land-based mining, the report concludes that “mining of deep sea polymetallic nodules would result in severe and irreversible damage to deep sea ecosystems which include unique and largely unstudied species.” Further research is needed, the authors say, and nodule mining warrants “a precautionary approach.”

The Deep Sea Mining campaign, which is a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, a group of more than 80 nongovernmental organizations, calls for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, including the issuance of licenses to explore the seabed for minerals, until several objectives have been met. These include acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the environmental, social and economic risks of nodule mining; demonstrating that deep-sea mining can be managed in a way that prevents damage to the marine environment and the loss of biodiversity; ensuring that mining companies receive consent to mine from indigenous peoples in affected communities; conducting exhaustive research into alternative sources of minerals for renewable energy; establishing public consultation mechanisms; and reforming the ISA to ensure transparency and accountability.

“What people need to understand is what is at risk,” Coumans said. “The risk is to all of the ecosystems that are associated with the deep sea, and that goes right through to the fisheries that a lot of Pacific island nations rely on for food security and also for their livelihood. And the risk is also to the global community. If you destroy these nodules ... you are not going to get them back in our lifetime, and you will be destroying the species that are associated with these nodules, as well as the microorganisms, and all the potential that they hold for us going forward.”

Source: [mongabay.com](https://www.mongabay.com); 16 June 2020

OCEAN MAPPING PLAN TARGETS ENERGY, ECONOMY, RESOURCES

- Douglas W Domenech

As one of our nation’s principal stewards of our ocean, Great Lakes and coastal resources, the Department of the Interior recognizes the interplay between the vitality of our nation’s natural resources, the health of our fellow citizens and the strength of our economy. America’s oceans and Great Lakes are used by millions for recreational boating and fishing, commercial fishing, transportation of goods and transmission of data and information through undersea cables; and they provide our country oil, gas and critical minerals to energize our economy and support national security. DOI has a “Blue Portfolio” with broad and diverse responsibilities for offshore energy and the revenue it generates, as well as coastal ecosystems with the biological diversity and coastal protection they provide. We also have responsibilities for conservation, recreation, Outer Continental Shelf lease management and foundational science and technology, to support the wise management and use of coastal and ocean resources. To fulfill our mission, we work across the federal family and rely on many partners.

With President Trump proclaiming June 2020 National Ocean Month, on June 11 the White House announced a series of new planning documents developed in response to the president’s memorandum titled “Ocean Mapping of the United States Exclusive Economic Zone and the Shoreline and Nearshore of Alaska.” DOI was one of several agencies that contributed to this cartographic planning, which includes a first-ever national strategy for mapping, exploring and characterizing the U.S. EEZ; a 10-year plan to map the coast of Alaska; and a set of recommendations for efficient permitting and authorization of ocean exploration, mapping and related research activities. America’s geographic footprint is larger than one might think. The Outer Continental Shelf of the U.S. is roughly 2.5 billion acres of underwater seabed, while the total land area of the 50 United States is 2.4 billion acres; essentially doubling the size of our country. Exploring our nation’s OCS encompassing the areas off of the coastal states, around Hawaii and Alaska, and around America’s 13 territories and possessions, is like discovering a new continent. Describing what exists there and mapping it — in many places for the very first time — will be of tremendous scientific value.

This is a monumental task. Members from the DOI Ocean Team at the U.S. Geological Survey, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and others have worked alongside partners at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Defense, National Science Foundation and several other federal agencies, to produce the new planning documents. Our work doesn’t stop here. We are already preparing to take the next steps to implement the national strategies laid out in those documents. Staff and scientists at DOI’s BOEM and USGS are well engaged with an array of partners from other federal agencies, private companies, academia and international initiatives — all focused on exploring the ocean areas and helping us identify and prioritize what’s next.

In sharing the vast amounts of data we collect through these partnerships and the scientific research we produce, we advance offshore energy production; ensure the safety and security for offshore infrastructure; prepare coastal communities for hazards such as tsunamis, hurricanes, typhoons, sea level rise, land subsidence and storm surge; reduce conflict between the many users of our ocean resources; and support protection and management of offshore and coastal ecosystems. Science is the overarching, binding element for DOI's work on ocean and coastal resources, and the Trump administration has prioritized science in its ocean policy. Using a coordinated approach, DOI is fulfilling its stewardship mission, to ensure current and future generations can benefit from and enjoy healthy, resilient and prosperous ocean and coastal resources.

Source: [bostonherald.com](https://www.bostonherald.com); 18 June 2020

SPIKE IN SEA TEMPERATURES, CYCLONES INCREASE IN INDIAN OCEAN REGION: REPORT

- Akshit Sangomla

Increasing sea surface temperatures in the tropical Indian Ocean and an increase in frequency of very severe cyclones in the region were pointed out by the first climate change assessment report published by the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences on June 17, 2020.

Sea surface temperatures in the tropical Indian Ocean rose by one degree Celsius on average between 1951-2015, said the report, titled Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region.

This temperature rise was 0.3°C higher than the global average of 0.7°C, according to the report. Ocean heat content in the top 700 metres of the tropical Indian Ocean also rose in the same period, with the past two decades displaying an abrupt rise.

Oceans absorb around 90 per cent of the warming caused by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that can, in turn, lead to more intense cyclones, sea level rise and faster melting of polar ice shelves.

Sea levels in the North Indian Ocean (NIO) region rose by 3.3 millimetres every year between 1993 and 2017, almost double the maximum rate of 1.75 mm per year measured between 1874 and 2004, the report said.

The frequency of very severe cyclones also increased in the region by one per decade in the last two decades even though overall frequency of cyclones decreased in the latter half of the last century and the first two decades of the 21st century, said the report.

The last two years saw a significant rise in number, intensity and unpredictability of cyclones in the NIO region, the latest being super cyclone Amphan in the Bay of Bengal and very severe cyclone Nisarga in the Arabian Sea.

All these trends will continue to rise if GHG emissions are not curbed. Global warming from GHG emissions presents unique challenges for India.

“Monsoon extremes are unique to India: More intense wet periods and more frequent and longer dry periods with widespread floods and droughts,” said Raghu Murtugudde, a climate scientist at the University of Maryland, US.

“This is combined with more intense cyclones and sea level rise, making India one of the most vulnerable countries,” he added.

This also held significance for regional geopolitical stability, as vulnerabilities of the country’s neighbours end up becoming national security and humanitarian crises, something already obvious in the Rohingya issue, according to Murtugudde.

There was already a spike in extreme weather events over the region because of the observed change of 0.7°C in average temperatures over India, said Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune.

“Rainfall patterns have changed. There are longer dry spells intermittent with heavy rainfall events. The frequency of very severe cyclones has increased over the Arabian Sea,” he said. “Over the Himalayas, the glacier retreat is going at a fast pace. Glacier melt and ocean warming raised sea level across the Indian Ocean,” he added.

Recent records showed a sea level change of three centimetres per decade along the Mumbai coast, with a change of five centimetres per decade along the Kolkata coast, according to Koll.

Temperatures are projected to rise by 2.7°C by 2040 and 4.4°C by the end of the century, according to the report.

The region should be ready to face a further increase in intensity, frequency and extent of extreme weather events, according to Koll.

The chances of such events overlapping were also large, multiplying the threat.

“We call them compound events. For example, an intense cyclone may be accompanied by heavy rain and storm surges as in the case of the recent cyclones. Droughts may occur along with heatwaves,” said Koll.

Local environments, with high population densities and land use conditions can increase risk and vulnerability to such events as well.

This is where installing early warning systems that integrate multiple threats can help, Koll pointed out.

“Recently a flood warning system was installed in Mumbai on an experimental basis. Such a flood warning system takes topography, city’s drainage and water bodies, tidal levels and rainfall data into consideration and tells us the extent of flood that can happen at different pockets of the city,” he said.

The first step towards climate resilience was to replicate such efforts, Koll added.

India also needs to take up more attribution and modelling studies to understand climate change impacts in a clearer way.

There have not been many attribution studies on monsoon trends. It may be better, however, to focus modelling efforts on improving weather and climate predictions and regional projections for the short-term, according to Murtugudde.

“Adaptation to expected impacts will be the most critical with efforts to mitigate the impacts,” said Murtugudde, citing the example of afforestation and mangrove forest recovery.

Source: downtoearth.org.in; 19 June 2020

GEOPOLITICS

REMAINING NON-ALIGNED IS GOOD ADVICE

- M K Narayanan

For weeks, the India-China stand-off dominated newspaper headlines, warning about the possibility of a major conflict along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors. With both India and China agreeing to step back marginally from positions adopted at the beginning of May, and “reaching an agreement”, the newspapers and most other believe that tensions have abated. The reality is, however, very different.

Behind the statements

Confirmed facts about incursions during May are that Chinese forces came in sizeable numbers and crossed the undemarcated LAC at quite a few points in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors. These were in the vicinity of Pangong Tso (Lake), the Galwan Valley, the Hot Springs-Gogra area (all in Ladakh), and at Naku La in the Sikkim sector. Talks at the level of military commanders, from lieutenant generals to brigadiers and lower formations, have produced, to repeat the official jargon, a “partial disengagement”. Both sides have also agreed, according to the same set of officials, to handle the situation “in line with the agreement” that had been reached.

The blandness of the statements conceals many a truth. This time, it would appear, the Chinese are here to stay in places such as the Galwan Valley. It is also unclear, as of now, whether the Chinese would withdraw from Pangong Tso, any time soon. Restoration of the status quo ante which existed in mid-April is thus nowhere on the horizon. Another bone of contention also seems unlikely to be resolved for quite some time, viz., China’s insistence that India stop road construction in the border area on the ground that it is taking place in Chinese territory, which India contests, insisting that it is taking place within Indian territory.

Public attention has been deflected from China’s sizeable military presence along the LAC, (comprising armoured vehicles, artillery units and infantry combat vehicles in far larger numbers than at any time in recent years), and the partial disengagement may provide many in India an opportunity to claim that China “blinked” while India showed “steely resolve”. This is not, however, the time for political grandstanding. There is a great deal at stake.

More weightier reasons

India needs to undertake a detailed analysis of recent events to find proper answers to many vexed questions. To merely affirm that India’s decision to strengthen its border infrastructure was the main trigger for the recent show of strength by China, would be simplistic. Both India and China have been strengthening their border infrastructure in recent years, and while the strengthening of the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi

road may have angered the Chinese, to ascribe China's recent show of strength to this would be misplaced.

Admittedly, Chinese President Xi Jinping disdains Deng Xiaoping's aphorism, "to keep your head low and bide your time", but Mr. Xi is not known to act irresponsibly. A demonstration of military strength, merely because India was improving its border infrastructure, would fall into this category. Nor does this action fit in with western assertions that such steps demonstrate China's newly assertive post-pandemic foreign policy.

There have to be far weightier reasons for China's actions, and India needs to do a deep dive to discern whether there is a method behind China's actions, viz., as for instance, the existence of certain geopolitical factors, an increase in bilateral tensions between India and China, economic pressures, apart from China's internal dynamics. China's action clearly belies the code of conduct drawn up at the Wuhan (China) and Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu) summits by the leaders of India and China, and the recent incursions do convey the imprimatur of the top Chinese leadership.

The American orbit

If we were to examine geopolitical factors, it is no secret that while India professes to be non-aligned, it is increasingly perceived as having shifted towards the American orbit of influence. India's United States tilt is perhaps most pronounced in the domain of U.S.-China relations. Quite a few instances could be highlighted to confirm the perception that India tends to side with the U.S. and against China whenever there is a conflict of interest between the two. An evident degree of geopolitical convergence also exists between the U.S. and India in the Indo-Pacific, again directed against China. India is today a member of the Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India) which has a definite anti-China connotation. U.S. President Donald Trump's latest ploy of redesigning the G-7, including in it countries such as India (India has conveyed its acceptance), but excluding China, provides China yet another instance of India and China being in opposite camps. A recent editorial in China's Global Times confirms how seriously China views the growing proximity between Delhi and Washington.

Coming next to bilateral relations, and notwithstanding the public bonhomie at the level of Mr. Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, relations between the two countries have been steadily deteriorating. India is almost the last holdout in Asia against China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI). India also loses no opportunity to declaim against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China further views India's assertions regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, as an implicit attack on the CPEC, China's flagship programme. More recently, India was one of the earliest countries to put curbs and restrictions on Chinese foreign direct investment. Adding to this, is the rising crescendo of anti-China propaganda within India. The Global Times has implied in one of its editorial pieces recently, that China's friendly policy towards India should be reciprocated, and that India "should not be fooled by Washington". On the eve of the recent high-level border talks between top military leaders, China again made an elliptical reference to the need for India to maintain equidistance between the U.S. and China.

Such sentiments do impact border matters. Almost all India-China border agreements are premised on the presumed neutrality of both countries. As the Special Representative for Border Talks with China (2005 to 2010), this sentiment was an ever present reality during all border discussions. The document, “Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question” (2005), one of the very few documents relating to the China-India border, reflects this reality.

China’s internal dynamics

One should also not ignore the impact of internal pressures that have been generated within China — in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in part due to other factors. Mr. Xi has, no doubt, accumulated more power than any other Chinese Communist leader since Mao, but there are reports of growing opposition within party ranks to some of his policies, including the BRI.

As the full impact of the most serious health crisis that China has faced since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 becomes evident, and alongside this the Chinese economic miracle is also beginning to lose steam, the current Chinese leadership is faced with an unique crisis. The coupling of political and economic tensions have greatly aggravated pressures on Mr. Xi, and the situation could become still more fragile, given the rising tide of anti-China sentiment the world over. How the present crop of Chinese leaders led by Mr. Xi would react to this situation, remains to be seen.

History and the present

These are dangerous times, more so for countries in China’s vicinity, and specially India. India is being increasingly projected as an alternative model to China, and being co-opted into a wider anti-China alliance which China clearly perceives as provocation. We cannot ignore or forget the circumstances that led to the unfortunate India-China war of 1962. Faced with the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and increasing isolation globally (with even Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev trading barbs), Mao chose to strike at India rather than confront Russia or the West.

A single misstep could lead to a wider conflagration, which both sides must avoid. This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a belligerent coalition of forces seeking to put China in its place — even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, now seems to be joining the anti-China bandwagon under prodding from the U.S. India has consistently followed a different policy in the past, and it is advisable that it remains truly non-aligned and not become part of any coalition that would not be in India’s long-term interest.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

Source: thehindu.com; 16 June 2020

SOUTH CHINA SEA: BEIJING HAS A MAJOR NATURAL ADVANTAGE IN THE GEOPOLITICAL POWER GAME

- Ankita Sen

Hundreds of miles away from the scene of the current Sino-Indian dispute lies another perpetual theatre of war where China is a permanent player — the South China Sea, where tiffs over competing claims frequently degenerate into maritime muscle-flexing.

China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei all lay claims to these waters. Rival countries have wrangled over territory in the South China Sea for centuries, but tension has steadily increased in recent years following China's rapid rise in military prowess.

The possibility of a sudden armed conflict there is never far away, given its importance in three major settings — location, strategic resources, and military advantages.

One-third of the world's shipping pass through here, carrying over \$3 trillion in trade each year, making this stretch the second-most used sea-lane in the world.

As for strategic resources, the region has proven oil reserves of around 7.7 billion barrels, with an estimate of 28 billion barrels in all. Natural gas reserves are estimated to total around 266 trillion cubic feet.

The most vital of them all, the country controlling this maritime route will have natural military advantages — making this region the geopolitical pivot to controlling the rest of Asia.

Chinese claims & the Nine-Dash Line

The South China Sea has been a bargaining chip in China's pocket since the beginning of its rise in the global order. Here, Beijing operates from a position of strength, with physical control over critical islands. Possession of these gives Beijing a clear upper hand and the ability to exert strategic authority over these waters, regardless of the rights and interests of other neighbouring nations.

China has followed up on its expansive claims with island-building and naval patrols.

It has been a cause for concern for others ever since Beijing unilaterally put forward the Nine-Dash Line — which stretches hundreds of miles south and east from its most southerly province of Hainan — in 2009 to declare the South China Sea as its territorial waters.

Being neither treaty-based nor legally maintainable, China's claim is tenuous. Nonetheless, keeping the specifics of the Nine-Dash Line ambiguous has provided China with a useful tool to buy time in critical situations.

For China, the South China Sea also acts as a natural shield in terms of national security. It provides relative "sanctuary" for its second-strike nuclear submarines that would be its insurance in case of a first strike against it.

In terms of trade too, the South China Sea is an important route for China — with 80 per cent of its energy imports and 39.5 per cent of total trade passing through here.

India's stake

Over the past decade, China has been using coercion on four major fronts: in the East China Sea, South China Sea, China-India border, and toward the US on the question of freedom of navigation.

Of these, only the border feud impacts India directly. However, the significance of the South China Sea in emerging geopolitical equations cannot be overlooked anymore.

Even though India is not an active player in the high-stakes jostle for the control of these waters, it will hardly remain an unaffected bystander in case the power structure there changes drastically.

Nearly \$200 billion worth of Indian trade passes through the South China Sea and thousands of its citizens study, work and invest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

This makes it an area of high strategic necessity for India. If China comes to establish un-rivalled sway over these waters, that could upend a huge part of the existing trade and geopolitical set-up.

Access to the major waterways in Southeast Asia is an important consideration for Indian policymakers, as is the need to build capacity in member states of the ASEAN. Both are central to New Delhi's Indo-Pacific vision.

In other words, what happens in the South China Sea is very much India's business too. It must find ways to play its cards right, so that it can leverage these disputed waters when the time comes to hold Beijing to account for its brazen border breaches and other transgressions.

Source: economictimes.com; 17 June 2020

WUHAN SUCCESS ON THE VERGE OF BEING UNDONE, CHINA'S CHAIRMAN OF EVERYTHING FACES GRAVE NEW TEST

- By Bloomberg News

As Chinese officials in Wuhan struggled to contain a deadly coronavirus outbreak in January, it was Xi Jinping who stepped in and took control. Now, the president who declared himself personally responsible for every aspect of the China's response to the pandemic faces a fresh test: a rapidly growing outbreak in Beijing.

The cluster of more than 130 cases in the city that is the seat of Communist Party power risks undermining the government's narrative that it handled the epidemic better than many western nations. It could upend its nascent economic recovery if it turns into a

second wave. The stakes are even higher for Xi, who has staked his credibility on China's response and sought to frame himself as a global leader in the crisis — to the chagrin of nations from the US to Australia.

It comes as Xi grapples with external challenges, too. He's navigating a US president in the midst of a re-election campaign who has taken to frequent outbursts against China on everything from trade to Covid-19 to Beijing's growing influence on Hong Kong. Trump has also signed legislation into law requiring US sanctions for Chinese officials found responsible for mass detentions of Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups.

And now China is embroiled in a risky spat with neighbouring India after an altercation in a remote, disputed border area of the Himalayas left 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops dead. In recent years Xi has essentially made himself "chairman of everything," which risks complex issues becoming bottlenecked as he seeks to handle them personally. It also means that any missteps could be seen as his own.

"This poses challenges for Xi as he has to carefully navigate through both a domestic economic slowdown and external pressures of being gradually isolated by the whole Western world," said Chen Daoyin, a political commentator and former professor at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law. "If China proves its model to be successful again, it will earn more credit globally and at home."

Xi was banking on that when in February, at the height of China's epidemic, the rare release of internal speeches showed he was personally leading the government's response, including ordering the lockdown of about 60 million people in Hubei province at great economic and social cost.

In the months that followed, it appeared Xi had been validated. New cases dropped as officials implemented strict quarantine, surveillance and testing measures. Public anger over local officials' initial response turned to nationalist pride as governments around the world struggled in turn to contain their own outbreaks.

The resurgence of cases in Beijing threatens to undo that success. Infections have already spread to at least four other provinces, all stemming from the city's largest wholesale market. Gao Fu, head of China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said it's likely the virus had been spreading a month before it was discovered last week.

More Manageable

Still, the city has so far refrained from the citywide lockdowns that China employed to stem the spread of Covid-19 in Wuhan and in the northeast region in a bid to minimize disruption to the country's most important city. Officials are instead relying on an aggressive contact tracing campaign to identify and isolate people who had contact with the market.

They also have more infrastructure in place this time around, including the ability to conduct more than 90,000 tests a day and a "health code" system available through residents' cellphones that can show whether someone is at risk of being infected.

“We think the second wave is more manageable than the first wave,” said Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley Asia. “The more active surveillance and improved testing and contact tracing will likely result in selective rather than massive lockdowns,” he said, allowing “economic activity in most regions of China to resume while keeping public health challenges in check.”

But avoiding economic pain isn’t Xi’s only consideration. In February, he warned government and party officials that they had to “spare no effort” to contain a cluster that broke out in the Beijing’s West District — home to central party and government compound Zhongnanhai.

“The safety and stability of the capital city directly concerns the broader outlook for the party and the country,” he said.

Cai Qi, Beijing’s party chief and a close ally of Xi, on Tuesday vowed to “resolutely contain the virus.” He urged cadres to “take strict precautions, maintain social stability and make sure no serious incidents happen again,” according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Beijing has since then moved to close down schools, reinstate strict restrictions in housing compounds and limit outbound trains and flights. Local officials warned on Wednesday that more cases will be reported in the coming days.

The source of the outbreak remains unclear, though Chinese officials have indicated they think it came from Europe. Salmon is being boycotted in China after the virus was traced to the chopping board of a vendor selling the imported seafood and authorities are testing some food imports before allowing them in the country, even though scientists say that there’s no evidence that food can transmit the pathogen.

The outbreak in Beijing comes as Xi faces criticism from other nations even as he seeks to tout the advantages of the Chinese approach. On Wednesday, China and India sought to defuse their dispute, even as each side blamed the other for causing the border clash and as their local media whipped up nationalist fervour.

“This is a time when you think that Beijing would want to stabilise its periphery, ease up on confrontation, and focus on the major issues” like the economy and unemployment, Daniel Russel, a former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, told Bloomberg Television. “And yet the border with India is not the only place where China is throwing punches.”

Covid-19 cases are likely to keep rising as China embarks on a series of high-profile international meetings meant to burnish its virus-fighting credentials. On Wednesday, Xi hosted a summit about battling the virus with African nations, before a high-level Belt and Road video conference scheduled for Thursday. A virtual China-EU officials meeting is set for next week.

Chen, the political commentator, said the pandemic has “fundamentally changed” China’s relationship with the west.

“China faces threats of breaking up global supply chains, the possibility of a new Cold War with the west and its authoritarian rule clashes with the ideology of the free

world,” he said. “How China navigates through such a predicament is the question Xi has to answer.”

Source: economictimes.com; 18 June 2020

SOUTH CHINA SEA RULES CANNOT BE NEGOTIATED VIRTUALLY: INDONESIAN OFFICIAL

- Dian Septiari

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has spilled over into regional geopolitics as it threatens to delay the completion of the elusive Code of Conduct (COC) for the South China Sea, with ASEAN and Chinese officials unable to meet face-to-face at the negotiating table.

As countries closed their borders and physical distancing measures took effect around the world to prevent COVID-19 from spreading further, restrictions on international travel and face-to-face contact have led many to carry out diplomacy virtually.

However, Indonesia’s point man for ASEAN affairs, Jose Tavares, has insisted that negotiations on the COC would require officials from both sides to be physically present in one place.

“It will be very hard to negotiate the COC draft virtually, so we’ll wait until the situation improves and we can resume the talks [in person],” Jose told reporters on Wednesday.

Experts have alluded to the “ASEAN Way” of diplomacy that espouses both collective bargaining and building personal relationships based on mutual trust – two strategies that are invariably best served by face-to-face interactions.

Before the viral outbreak occurred, ASEAN and China had scheduled a series of meetings around the region, first in Brunei in February, followed by negotiations in the Philippines in May, Indonesia in August and China in October.

However, all meetings were postponed due to the pandemic, as countries in the region looked inward to mitigate the crisis.

As COVID-19 spreads across the globe, Southeast Asia has become a particularly affected region, with more than 122,000 confirmed cases and 3,552 deaths recorded as of Wednesday.

“We were supposed to finish the second reading this year,” Jose said during the virtual briefing. “Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has said that the negotiations will be completed next year, but it might be delayed due to the force majeure.”

In 2019, ASEAN and China completed the first reading of a “single draft” text that was announced at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore a year earlier. The text underpins all future negotiations of the COC, a requirement in the 2002 Declaration

of Conduct (DOC) in the South China Sea that Beijing had flouted since its adoption. At the ASEAN Summit a few months later, China's Li said the COC talks would be completed within three years – by 2021.

Jose underlined the increasing importance of the COC and the collective responsibility to build confidence in negotiations, as tensions ran high following China's various standoffs with Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines in the disputed waters. Jose underlined the increasing importance of the COC and the collective responsibility to build confidence in negotiations, as tensions ran high following China's various standoffs with Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines in the disputed waters. Despite the delay, Jose said that ASEAN was still optimistic that the negotiations would be completed, owing to the fact that both sides had finally shored up the political will to move forward. "We also hope that what is discussed at the negotiating table can be reflected on the ground," he said.

Source: thejakartapost.com; 18 June 2020

JAPAN FILES DIPLOMATIC PROTEST OVER CHINESE SHIPS NEAR DISPUTED DIAOYU ISLANDS

- Julian Ryal

Japan has filed a diplomatic protest with Beijing after four Chinese government ships were again monitored in waters close to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands on Wednesday.

Chinese coastguard vessels have been operating for 65 consecutive days within or near the territorial waters around the uninhabited islands that Japan claims as its sovereign territory and knows as the Senkakus. China and Taiwan also claim the islands.

This is the longest period since September 2012, when Beijing and Tokyo were at loggerheads over the question of sovereignty after the Japanese government bought some of the islands from the Japanese family that owned them.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga declined to comment on what the Chinese ships might be doing in waters around the islands.

"The Senkaku Islands are under our control and are unquestionably our territory, historically and under international law. We believe it is extremely serious that these activities continue," he told a press conference. "We will respond firmly and calmly to the Chinese side."

Suga's comments come five weeks after Japanese coastguard vessels intervened to stop a group of Chinese coastguard ships pursuing a Japanese fishing boat that was operating within territorial waters around Uotsuri, one of the islands in the archipelago. The Chinese vessels left the area after receiving a warning via radio.

“Beijing is constantly trying to probe and find opportunities to exploit Japanese weaknesses around the islands as part of its longer-term strategy,” said Stephen Nagy, an associate professor of international relations at Tokyo’s International Christian University.

The aim, he said, is to enter the disputed waters to demonstrate to the international community that Japan’s claim is weak because it cannot exercise administrative control over the area – a strategy dubbed “lawfare”.

Yoichi Shimada, a professor of international relations at Fukui Prefectural University, agreed that China has long-term ambitions over the Diaoyu Islands and other territories that it presently appears to be simply helping itself to.

“With the Senkakus, Beijing has been waging a 100-year battle intended to show the world that the islands are administered by China and I would say that any Japanese politician who said now that they could halt that ambition is dreaming,” he said.

“The only way that Japan has of stopping Chinese moves against the islands is to consolidate our security relationship with the US,” he said. “The US military is the only force that China is afraid of.”

The problem, Shimada conceded, is that US President Donald Trump has shown himself to be “reluctant to help other countries, even America’s allies”.

“I am afraid that China might misunderstand Washington’s position and conclude that this US administration will not help Japan resist Chinese moves against the Senkakus,” Shimada said. “The US-Japan security pact is in place, but there are no guarantees that the US will honour it.”

The showdown in the East China Sea is being replicated elsewhere in the region, analysts point out, with Chinese military aircraft entering Taiwanese airspace in recent days; an ongoing dispute between China and five Southeast Asian states over territory in the South China Sea; and a deadly clash between Indian and Chinese troops along their undemarcated border that left 20 Indian soldiers dead.

Both Washington and Beijing have also been deploying more warships to the South China Sea region, and for the first time in three years, three US aircraft carrier battle groups have been operating in the Pacific in recent days.

The USS Theodore Roosevelt – which was laid up in Guam for more than two months in the spring after more than 100 of its crew contracted the coronavirus – is operating with its strike group off Guam. The USS Nimitz and its accompanying flotilla is off the west coast of the US and the USS Ronald Reagan is operating in the Philippine Sea after leaving its home port in Japan.

Before the coronavirus outbreak, Japan had been making headway in engaging with China, and President Xi Jinping was due to pay a state visit to Tokyo later in the year. The pandemic has thrown bilateral relations off kilter, although Japan has resisted pressure from the US to condemn China’s handling of the crisis.

On Wednesday, Japan joined other G7 countries calling for China to “reconsider” its proposed Hong Kong national security law, saying it had “grave concerns” about the law threatening the city’s rights and freedoms.

Source: scmp.com; 19 June 2020

NEPAL ON ITS SIDE, CHINA NOW WOOS BANGLADESH

NEW DELHI: Just when India-China ties suffered a new low following the recent clashes at Galwan Valley in Ladakh, Beijing seems to be aggressively wooing Bangladesh, a strong ally of India in the neighbourhood, with a host of sops.

The India-China stand-off at Ladakh has also coincided with Nepal redrawing its map to include some Indian territories, presumably under a nudge from China.

While India is working to retaliate to the border violence by China, which claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers, through various measures mainly to hurt its economy, Beijing has reached out to Dhaka by offering to waive off 97% tariff on 5,161 items that Bangladesh trades with China.

Dhaka had asked for the waiver from China for being a "less developed country", and Beijing responded favourably on June 16, ironically a day after the Ladakh clash.

"Tariff Commission of the state council of ministry of finance of the People's Republic of China issued a notice dated on 16 June on granting zero treatment to 97% of tariff products of Bangladesh. This will come into effect from 1st July," Bangladesh foreign office said in a statement.

The new list adds to Dhaka's existing benefit of tariff-free trade on 3,095 products with Beijing under the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement.

The development, which could lead to Beijing and Dhaka coming closer, can add to the discomfort of Delhi which sees Bangladesh as a strong ally - an equation built over many years that kept China at a distance. Indo-Bangla ties, though, had taken a setback last year over India's National Register Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act, both of which generated some unpleasantness in Dhaka.

Source: indiandefensenews.in; 20 June 2020

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