

## World News Roundup



This handout photo taken on January 25, 2018 by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) shows Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (sixth right), posing for a family photo with political leaders during the India-ASEAN commemorative Summit in New Delhi. New Delhi is hosting the India-ASEAN commemorative summit, which will be attended by 10 heads of state and government including Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi (third right). (AFP)

## Southeast Asian leaders celebrate ties with India

Southeast Asian leaders celebrated ties with India on Thursday, as New Delhi looks to deepen bonds with its eastern neighbors amid China's ever-growing influence.

The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, met

in New Delhi to observe 25 years of ties between India and the 10-nation bloc. The leaders will also be guests of honor at Friday's Republic Day celebrations, an important diplomatic distinction for India.

India has been carefully boosting its diplomatic profile in recent years, amid its

worries over China's growth into a major world power.

But in Beijing, foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying scoffed at Indian news reports that the leaders would discuss countering China's influence.

"Recently, the Indian media seems to

have made a habit of linking every move Indian leaders make with China. I wonder what Indian leaders think about this?" she told reporters. "I feel that the Indian media, in making such speculations, is showing how little confidence they have in themselves, and their lack of trust in

China." Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and the prime ministers of Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam are among those in India for the celebrations. (AP)

## Intelligence

## Co-op on security threats

## Nations launch intel accord to counter IS

JAKARTA/NUSA DUA, Indonesia, Jan 25, (RTRS): Six Southeast Asian nations launched an intelligence pact on Thursday aimed at combating Islamist militants and improving co-operation on security threats, overcoming what analysts described as a high level of distrust.

Under the "Our Eyes" initiative, senior defence officials will meet every two weeks to swap information on militant groups and develop a common database of violent extremists.

The intelligence sharing arrangement comes after insurgents aligned to Islamic State laid siege to the southern Philippine city of Marawi last year.

Dozens of foreigners — most notably Indonesians and Malaysians — were among hundreds of militants who seized large parts of Marawi and engaged in a ferocious battle with Philippine forces that left much of the city in ruins and more than 1,100 people dead, according to government figures.

Some of the foreign fighters are believed to have travelled to Marawi via the porous maritime borders of the Sulu Sea, next to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

"This is something that seems so simple, but the effect is extraordinary," said Indonesian Defence Minister **Ryamizard Ryacudu** at the "soft launch" in Bali.

Ryacudu said intelligence sharing would help ensure another incident like Marawi did not occur and prevent the region from "becoming like the Middle East".

## Intelligence

He added that the intelligence sharing was "specifically for (combating) terrorism and radicalism".

While led by military forces, the intelligence sharing would "involve all parties", including police, he said.

Along with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei — all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — have signed up to the pact.

"It's a significant development," said John Blaxland, an intelligence analyst from the Australian National University.

"ASEAN has long struggled with getting beyond superficiality when it comes to collaboration on security matters."

Blaxland said relations among ASEAN states had been bedevilled by a "high level of distrust" around intelligence cooperations.

"Operational imperatives are overcoming that and you are seeing that come to fruition with this mechanism."

Another security analyst, who declined to be named, said a "pact was better than not having a pact" but added that entrenched mistrust between nations, and between different counter-terrorism agencies within nations, had to be overcome for it to be effective.

Ryacudu said other nations could be invited to join the "Our Eyes" intelligence network, whose name is inspired by the Five Eyes long-standing intelligence pact between the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

As well as other ASEAN nations, Ryacudu identified the United States, Australia and Japan as possible future members.

"Before joining, they will monitor first," he said. Ryacudu asked for assistance when he met US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis on Tuesday in Jakarta.

"General Mattis said that he would help," he said. "I am very glad because, after all, the US has more sophisticated equipment."

Bali itself was the target of Islamist militant bombings in 2002 in which 202 people were killed, including 88 Australians.



Mayon volcano spews ash as it continues to erupt as seen from Camalig town in Albay province, south of Manila, on Jan 25. Philippine authorities who have declared a no-go zone around an erupting volcano said Jan 25 they will remove all holdouts, by force if necessary, to avoid casualties after tens of thousands of other residents fled to safety. (AFP)



Abe



Mnuchin

## Asia

**Japan defends isles claims:** The Japanese government opened a small museum Thursday displaying maps and documents to defend its territorial claims against neighbors South Korea and China.

The Japanese minister in charge of territorial issues, Tetsuma Esaki, said it was important for Japan to improve how information about disputed islands "is transmitted both internally and externally, so as to ensure as widely as possible that our claims are understood correctly."

The National Museum of Territory and Sovereignty displays replicas of historic documents that Japan says show its ownership of two sets of uninhabited islands, one also claimed by China and the other by South Korea.

The dispute with China has heated up in recent years, with Chinese coast guard ships sailing near the islands and their Japanese counterparts trying to chase them away.

The islands, which are near Taiwan, are known as the Senkaku in Japan and as the Diaoyu in China. Taiwan also claims them.

Japan has long feuded with South Korea over another group of tiny islands in the waters between the two countries. Japan calls them Takeshima, and South Korea calls them Dokdo.

South Korea denounced the opening of the museum and demanded that Japan shut it down.

South Korea opened a museum in central Seoul in 2012 to back its claim to Dokdo. Visitors can walk around a large 3-D model of the island and examine video and computerized content on the island's history and nature. Video screens show live footage of the island from a fixed camera.

The opening of the Japanese museum comes two weeks before Prime Minister

## Rohingya

## 'Whitewash, cheerleading operation'

## Richardson quits from panel

YANGON, Myanmar, Jan 25, (AP): Former New Mexico gov Bill Richardson has resigned from an advisory panel on the massive Rohingya refugee crisis, calling it a "whitewash and a cheerleading operation" for Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The sudden resignation Wednesday of probably the panel's most prominent member, a former senior US politician and diplomat who considered Suu Kyi a close friend, raises serious questions about international efforts to deal with the calamitous fallout of Myanmar military operations since August against the Rohingya Muslims that the United Nations has called "textbook ethnic cleansing."

It also offers possible insight into the thinking of Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate once revered as an icon of human rights whose leadership during the Rohingya crisis has shocked many outsiders.

Richardson, a former US ambassador to the United Nations and President Bill Clinton's energy secretary, castigated Suu Kyi for blaming outsiders for the crisis instead of looking honestly at military actions that have forced nearly 700,000 Rohingya to flee to squalid refugee camps in Bangladesh, where they have spoken of mass killings, rapes and the obliteration of whole villages in Myanmar.

"She believes there's a concerted international effort against Myanmar, and I believe she is wrong," Richardson said Wednesday evening in an AP interview at his hotel in downtown Yangon, the country's biggest city.

"She blames all the problems that Myanmar is having on the international media, on the UN, on human rights groups, on other governments, and I think this is caused by the bubble that is around her, by individuals that are not giving her frank advice."

The 10-member advisory board is meant to implement earlier Rohingya recommendations made by a group led by former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, but Richardson said Suu Kyi appears to want the board to validate her Rohingya policies.

"The advisory board is mainly a whitewash and a cheerleading operation for the Myanmar government, and I'm not going to be part of it because I think there are serious issues of human rights violations, safety, citizenship, peace and stability that need to be addressed," Richardson said. "I just felt that my advice and counsel would not be heeded."

A spokesman for Myanmar's government said it was sorry about Richardson's resignation.

"The reason why we formed the advisory commission was because we hoped that the team will give us constructive support and advice," spokesman Zaw Htay said in Naypyitaw. "We are sorry that Bill Richardson is releasing a statement and resigning from the commission but that, of course, is out of our control."

In Washington, US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said Richardson's resignation and his reasons for doing so "are cause for concern." She said the US has urged

Myanmar's government to fulfill its pledge to implement the Annan commission recommendations "as a matter of urgency."

Richardson's biting criticism of Suu Kyi and his resignation from the panel come as refugees cram camps in Bangladesh rife with crushing poverty, disease and a pervasive air of hopelessness.

More than 680,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled the military of majority Buddhist Myanmar, which began what they called clearance operations following attacks by an Islamic militant group on Aug 25. The UN human rights chief has suggested that what's happening to the Rohingya may be genocide.

Rohingya are severely discriminated against in Rakhine state and called illegal immigrants although many families have lived there for generations. They have been denied citizenship, freedom of movement and other basic rights.

Richardson, who has frequently negotiated for the release of Americans imprisoned in foreign countries, also said he was "very unhappy and distressed" by Suu Kyi's heated reaction to his plea that two Reuters journalists detained on charges of violating a British colonial-era secrecy law used by a former military junta to muzzle freedom of speech "be treated fairly and rapidly."

"That brought almost an explosion on her part, saying there were issues related to the official secrecy act, that that was not my charter as a member of the advisory board," Richardson said. "It was a very heated exchange that we had."

**Shinzo Abe** is set to visit South Korea to meet with President Moon Jae-in and attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. (AP)

## US boosts North Korea sanctions:

The United States announced new sanctions on Wednesday aimed at stopping North Korea's nuclear weapons development and urged China and Russia to expel North Koreans raising funds for the programs.

The US Treasury imposed sanctions on nine entities, 16 people and six North Korean ships it accused of helping the weapons programs. It said two China-based trading firms were involved in exporting millions of dollars worth of metals and other goods used in weapons production.

The individuals included members of North Korea's Workers Party operating in China, Russia and Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia region. Among them were North Korea's vice consul in Nakhodka, Russia and an individual reportedly involved in sending North Korean laborers to Abkhazia.

"Treasury continues to systematically target individuals and entities financing the Kim regime and its weapons programs, including officials complicit in North Korean sanctions evasion schemes," Treasury Secretary **Steven Mnuchin** said in a statement. (RTRS)

**US carrier likely to visit Vietnam:** In a move likely to irritate China, a US Navy aircraft carrier is likely to visit Vietnam in March for the first time since the war, US and Vietnamese officials said Thursday.

Defence Secretary Jim Mattis and his counterpart discussed a plan for a carrier visit to Danang in March, Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said.

He said the Vietnamese are awaiting final approval by more senior government authorities but David said the US expects the approval to be granted.

The Vietnamese Defence Ministry said separately that the two defence ministries had submitted their proposals for a port visit to their leaders. The idea was floated last summer when Vietnamese Defence Minister Ngo Xuan Lich met Mattis at the Pentagon.

The two met again in Hanoi on Thursday during Mattis' first trip to the Southeast Asian nation, which also included a meeting with President Tran Dai Quang. (AP)



US Secretary of Defense James Mattis (right), reviews an honour guard with Vietnam's Defence Minister Ngo Xuan Lich during a welcoming ceremony at the Ministry of Defense in Hanoi on Jan 25. Mattis is on a two-day official visit to Vietnam. (AFP)