

International scene 2014

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

leaders called for removal of Yingluck. The year 2013 passed with Yingluck being immobile due to repeated strikes and demonstrations in Bangkok. In December 2013, Yingluck dissolved the Parliament and called for elections in February 2014. The opposition parties disrupted the elections, following which the Constitutional Court declared the vote invalid. The Court also ordered Yingluck out of office over irregularities in the appointment of security adviser.

In May, the army moved in and seized power (for the twelfth time since 1932). In August, Army Chief Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha was made prime minister. Fresh elections are not scheduled until 2016.

IRAQ-ISIL

The rise of ISIL around June 2014 in northern Iraq has created deep worries and fears, both among the countries of the Middle East and the West. Led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) is a Sunni extremist jihadi group, which has proclaimed a Caliphate extend-

fight ISIL. However, sensing the grave threat to American interest in the region President Obama decided in August to help Iraqi forces by sending US Air Force to bomb ISIL positions.

The civil war in Syria, the unresolved Palestinian problem, impunity of Israel in killing Palestinians, the Shia dominated Iraqi government and absence of representative democracy in the countries of the region do not bode well for Middle East. The balance of power in the region is undergoing dramatic change, in spite of ISIL. It will take decades before peace is reestablished in Middle East.

PALESTINE-ISRAEL

During July-August the world witnessed one of the most flagrant violations of human rights by Israel. Following the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers and revenge killing of a Palestinian teenager in July, Israel launched "Operation Protective Edge" on Gaza on July 8. The brutal invasion lasted 50 days when an open ended ceasefire came into effect on August 26.

Palestinian state will no doubt see a decline of Islamic jihadi movements in the Middle East and elsewhere.

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

The P5+1 (UNSC P5 plus Germany) began negotiations with Iran in November 2013 to strike a deal that would thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions. Negotiations were supposed to be completed in July 2014. Since differences remained the time limit was extended to November 24. But lack of trust has kept the deal elusive and the time had to be extended again two to dates -- arriving at a "political agreement" by March 1, 2015 and "final agreement" by June 30, 2015. The salient points of negotiations are that Iran will have to abandon enriching uranium that can make weapons; and in return the West will lift the sanctions imposed on Iran. The negotiations were extremely complex and at times it seemed that there would be no deal.

What is interesting is that the Washington does not want to break off the negotiations as Iran has become a strategic ally, helping the West in a significant way to

Jinping left the protestors run out of steam, knowing fully well that Hong Kong being a financial capital of the Asia Pacific region, local residents will not support the cause. (c) Umbrella activists failed to stir sympathisers in mainland China, despite provocations from the Western media. Beijing, of course, clamped censorship over news from Hong Kong. (d) Monolithic Communist Party of China has full control over its territory -- Hong Kong.

PAKISTAN

What happened in Peshawar on December 16 was indeed most heartbreaking. Pakistani Taliban attacked an army-run school which caused the loss of 141 lives, of which 132 were children. The attack was in retaliation to the on-going Pakistan army's operation in the Waziristan region against the Taliban. Audacious attacks by Taliban on different establishment are not new in Pakistan. Now, as US troops head home from Afghanistan, the Afghan Taliban will also raise its ugly head. Pakistan's security will face major challenges as its army will have to deal with two Talibans, which it had originally created.

SCOTLAND

United Kingdom was on the verge of being disunited, when 4.2 million Scots went to vote on a referendum question "Should Scotland be an independent country?" Some Scottish leaders have been trying to dissolve the 307-year old political union. Among several reasons, Scotland always wanted to have more powers for its parliament (commonly called Holyrood). Actually Westminster (UK Parliament) has powers over the major subject like defense, trade, energy, transport, etc. Also, many Scots believe that it could be a viable nation given the huge revenues it gets from the North Sea oil fields. At the polling on September 18, 55.3 percent voted "no" while 44.7 percent said "yes." Thus the "Kingdom" remained "United." Had Scotland voted 'yes' it would have triggered other components -- Wales and Northern Ireland to break from England.

UNITED STATES

Last November, US went for mid-term polls. Democrats lost majority in both Houses of the Congress. Republicans now have 54 seats in the 100-seat Senate, and 247 seats in the 435-seat House of Representatives. The new composition of the Congress will be effective from January 2015. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, will have to face an unfriendly Congress for the remaining period of his presidency.

In another dramatic development on December 17, President Obama decided to end the cold war with Cuba and normalise relations. After treating Fidel Castro's Communist Cuba as a pariah state for more than 50 years, Washington decided to establish full diplomatic ties with Havana. The move came at the behest of Pope Francis when Obama met him in March in Vatican. However, Republican leaders have harshly criticised President Obama for changing the direction of US foreign policy. As 'hard Castro-ism' comes to an end it would be interesting to watch how other anti-US regimes in Latin America respond to this new change in Washington's policy.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.



ing through Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Sinai (Egypt) and parts of Turkey. It has vowed to "free Palestine" and destroy Israel.

This jihadi group grew out of the disgruntled Sunni factions in Iraq opposed to the Shia government led President Nouri al Maliki of Iraq and the Syrian fighters opposed to President Bashar Al Assad (Alawit Shia). What makes it dangerous is its deep links with al-Qaeda and its extremely brutal and vicious ways in dealing with its enemies. Beheading of Western journalists and aid workers has shocked and outraged the world.

What is deeply disturbing is that ISIL has been able to attract many young Muslims from the West and Middle Eastern countries to join and fight for its cause. As of December, well armed ISIL is in control of large swathes of territory in Iraq. Clearly, Iraqi forces are unable to contain its onslaught.

Since withdrawing from Iraq in December 2011, Washington has been reluctant to send troops to Iraq again to

During the unequal war Gaza lost 2,200 lives, including 519 children, and Israel lost 71 lives.

While the world watched Israeli viciousness in disbelief, none of the Western leaders, who openly support Tel Aviv, moved to stop the killing. Even some of the major Middle Eastern countries took the position that Hamas deserved the punishment.

Palestine is officially recognised by more than 135 countries. Israel was angered when in December lawmakers of European Parliament, Britain, France and Spain called for recognition of Palestine. Jordan has drafted a UNSC Resolution calling for a deal within one year and Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories by the end of 2017.

Though Human Rights Watch has repeatedly accused Israel of violating rights of the Palestinians, Israel goes about killing Palestinians with impunity.

A careful analysis will reveal that the seven decades old Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root cause of Islamist extremism around the world. Creation of the

defeat the ISIL in Iraq.

HONG KONG

Beijing was certainly embarrassed when "Umbrella Movement" activists gathered in central Hong Kong demanding universal suffrage to elect the next chief executive of the city. The backdrop to the protest is the decision by Beijing in August, to approve a list of candidates for the post of the Chief Executive. Hong Kong residents will then elect one from that list in 2017. The Umbrella Movement, which began in late September, wanted to elect the chief executive directly without any interference from Beijing. After two-and-half-month of protests, during which confrontations with the police had injured dozens of people, the movement finally was abandoned on December 11. President Xi Jinping must have heaved a sigh of relief.

There are several important points to note here: (a) Beijing was cool during the entire period of protest, the police did not use brute force to evict the demonstrators and no one got killed. (b) President Xi