

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- **PM Brown: London conference marks "the beginning of the transition process" where Afghans will take greater responsibility for security; UN Chief calls for a coherent political strategy; Karzai urged the participants to reach out to "our disenchanted brothers who are not part of Al-Qaeda"; EAM Krishna states that "support, sustenance and sanctuaries for terrorist organizations" from neighbouring countries should end; \$500 million pledged for the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund; UN Security Council de-lists 4 Taliban leaders; Staffan de Mistura appointed as the new UN Envoy; Afghanistan wins \$1.6 billion in debt relief**

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown stated that the London conference on Afghanistan which began on January 28 marked "the beginning of the transition process" under which responsibility for security will gradually be transferred to the Afghans. The communique released at the end of the conference states that Afghan forces will take control of security "as rapidly as possible..." and that the discussions marked a "decisive step towards greater Afghan leadership to secure, stabilise and develop Afghanistan".¹

UN Chief Ban Ki-moon called for a coherent political strategy to assist the country in its quest for peace, security and development.² President Karzai on his part urged the participants, especially Western nations to "reach out to all of our countrymen, especially our disenchanted brothers who are not part of Al-Qaeda."³ President Obama, delivering his first State of the Union Address, expressed optimism about the outcome of the London conference.⁴ External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna stated that for Afghanistan to be stabilized, "it is essential for neighbouring and regional countries to ensure that support, sustenance and sanctuaries for terrorist organisations is ended forthwith." He also announced two initiatives to assist the Afghans in the agricultural sector.⁵

Representatives of participating nations welcomed the Afghan government's plans to persuade moderate Taliban fighters to renounce violence

¹ "Afghan forces to take control of security within three years", *The Guardian*, January 28, 2010 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/28/gordon-brown-afghanistan-conference-taliban>

² 'Afghanistan needs coherent political strategy: UN', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, January 28, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=8880>

³ 'World powers back Karzai's Taliban plan', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, January 28, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=88811>

⁴ 'Obama certain of Afghan success', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, January 28, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=88745>

⁵ 'Support to terror groups must end for stable Afghanistan: India', *DNA India*, January 29, 2010 at http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_support-to-terror-groups-must-end-for-stable-afghanistan-india_1340752

and pledged at least \$500 million for the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund.⁶ British Foreign Secretary David Miliband stated that \$140 million was pledged for the first year.⁷ The number of Afghan security forces is also intended to be increased to about 300,000 by October 2011.

Ahead of the London conference, the UN Security Council's al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee approved the de-listing of Wakeel Ahmed Mutawakil, Faiz Mohammad Faizan, Maulvi Abdul Hakim Monib, Shamsus Safa Aminzai and Muhammad Musa Hotak.⁸ President Karzai also attended a meeting in Ankara hosted by Turkish President Abdullah Gul before the London conference. Other participants included Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari, British foreign secretary David Miliband and senior officials from Iran, China, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and observers from the United States, Russia and international organisations.⁹

Meanwhile, former UN envoy to Iraq Staffan de Mistura was appointed as the new UN Envoy for Afghanistan even as reports indicated that the outgoing special envoy Kai Eide has held secret talks with Taliban commanders in UAE.¹⁰ The Taliban however denied the development.¹¹

In other developments, Afghanistan won \$1.6 billion in debt relief from the World Bank, IMF and other creditor nations. The IMF and World Bank in a statement announced that Afghanistan had successfully carried out a debt cancellation program, including economic reforms, despite "an extremely challenging environment characterized by insecurity, a food crisis, and a difficult political situation."¹²

PAKISTAN

- **Zardari: Pakistan willing to hold talks with 'reconcilable' Taliban; German Chancellor Merkel urges Pakistan to play a larger role in Afghanistan; US Envoy to CD: Pakistan delaying talks; Audit report shows US aid not being properly utilised in FATA; 16 people killed in a suicide bomb attack in Bajaur Agency**

⁶ 'Afghan forces to take control of security within three years', *The Guardian*, January 28, 2010 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/28/gordon-brown-afghanistan-conference-taliban>

⁷ '\$140 Million Pledged for Afghan Reintegration Program', *VOA News*, January 29, 2010 at <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/asia/140-Million-Pledged-for-Afghan-Reintegration-Program--83014682.html>

⁸ 'Mutawakil, others off blacklist', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, January 27, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=88687>

⁹ 'Karzai meets neighbours ahead of key London conference', *Zee News*, January 26, 2010 at <http://www.zeenews.com/news599137.html>

¹⁰ 'UN Afghan envoy holds secret talks with Taliban', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, January 29, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=88828>

¹¹ 'Taliban deny meeting UN envoy for Afghan peace talks', *AFP*, January 30, 2010 at http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hdWRmrNqy1cVYadPwvwLuPA39_3Q

¹² 'Afghanistan wins \$1.6 bln in debt relief: IMF', *Reuters*, January 26, 2010 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN26143859>

President Zardari, addressing a joint press conference with Turkish President Abdullah Gul and President Karzai in Istanbul on January 26 stated that Pakistan was willing to hold talks with the 'reconcilable' Taliban and pursue a policy of 3Ds - dialogue, development and deterrence. The summit was intended to develop an "indigenous" way to fight terrorism.¹³ German Chancellor Angela Merkel meanwhile urged Pakistan to play a larger role vis-a-vis Afghanistan and added that "there will be no peace in this region unless Pakistan carries its share of responsibility."¹⁴

US representative Garold N. Larson noted that Pakistan was delaying negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Pakistan attached a condition to its participation at the talks insisting that India be urged to bring down its nuclear stockpile.¹⁵

An audit report revealed that US aid was not being properly utilized in the FATA region even as Washington gets ready to put more money into the militant-infested area. The report notes that only \$15.5 million out of a total of \$46 million has been spent in the past nearly 2 years.¹⁶

In other developments, at least 16 people were killed in a suicide attack in Khar, headquarters of the Bajaur Agency on January 30 even as reports indicated that differences had cropped up amongst the Taliban factions in the region.¹⁷

BHUTAN

- **Bhutanese oranges to be exported to Bangladesh through West Bengal; India to deploy women paramilitary forces along international borders to "give impetus to civic action programmes and counter anti-India propaganda"; Bhutanese Advocacy Forum Europe (BAF Europe) established to raise issues of human rights and democracy in Bhutan**

The first consignment of Bhutanese oranges is to be exported to Sylhet, Bangladesh through the Dawki land customs station in Meghalaya. India and Bangladesh had entered into an agreement during the visit of Sheikh Hasina to facilitate the movement of trucks from Bhutan and Nepal at Phulbari in West Bengal.¹⁸

¹³ 'Ready for talks with reconcilable Taliban', *Daily Times*, January 26, 2010 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\01\26\story_26-1-2010_pg1_1

¹⁴ 'Pakistan must play bigger Afghan role: Merkel', *Daily Times*, January 31, 2010 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\01\31\story_31-1-2010_pg1_5

¹⁵ 'Pakistan accused of delaying Geneva nuclear talks', *Dawn*, January 27, 2010 at <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/16-pakistan-accused-of-delaying-geneva-nuclear-talks-hs-08>

¹⁶ 'Audit says US aid plan failing in FATA', *Daily Times*, January 30, 2010 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\01\30\story_30-1-2010_pg1_7

¹⁷ 'Rift among Bajaur Taliban widens', *Dawn*, January 29, 2010 at <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/12-rift-among-bajaur-taliban-widens-910--bi-06>

¹⁸ 'Bhutan to export oranges to Bangladesh via northeast India', *Asian News*, January 30, 2010 at <http://www.littleabout.com/news/63744,bhutan-export-oranges-bangladesh-northeast-india.html>

The Indian government has decided to deploy women para-military personnel along international borders with Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. The move is intended to “give impetus to civic action programmes and counter anti-India propaganda.”¹⁹

In other developments, Europe-based Bhutanese refugees have established Bhutanese Advocacy Forum Europe (BAF Europe) in order to raise the issue of human rights and democracy at international forums. The Forum’s chief coordinator Durga Giri stated that the forum was formed on December 4, 2009 when many Bhutanese demonstrated in front of the UN’s Geneva offices when Bhutan presented its Human Rights Report 2009 for the first time.²⁰

SRI LANKA

- **Rajapakse wins re-election securing nearly 58 per cent of the votes polled; Fonseka alleges irregularities; India to open a consulate in Jaffna**

Incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse secured a landslide victory in the presidential polls securing nearly 58 per cent of the votes polled. The elections witnessed a turnout of more than 70 per cent.²¹ Opposition candidate former army chief Sarath Fonseka urged the Election Commission to annul the elections due to alleged irregularities. Fonseka’s camp pointed out that lack of transportation facilities in North inhibited many internally displaced people from exercising their franchise.²² Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama meanwhile stated that the decision of the Election Commission to allow Gen. Fonseka to contest was objectionable despite doubts about his being a registered voter.²³ Mr. Rajapakse on his part promised to rebuild the lives of people in the North and East of the country.²⁴

In other developments, India will open a consulate in Jaffna to promote interaction with the Tamil population and assist the Sri Lankan authorities in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process.²⁵

¹⁹ ‘Para-military women to counter anti-India propaganda’, *Press Trust of India*, February 1, 2010 at http://www.ptinews.com/news/493071_Para-military-women-to-counter-anti-India-propaganda

²⁰ ‘Bhutanese Diaspora in Europe announces advocacy forum’, *Bhutan News Service*, January 22, 2010 at http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/main-news/diaspora_exile_resettlement/bhutanese-diaspora-in-europe-announces-advocacy-forum/

²¹ ‘Mahinda Rajapaksa declares victory in Sri Lanka presidential election’, *Colombo Page*, January 27, 2010 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10/Jan1264601942CH.html

²² ‘Fonseka cries foul, asks Election Commissioner to annul the polls’, *Colombo Page*, January 27, 2010 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10/Jan1264613425CH.html

²³ ‘Government mulls challenging Fonseka’s candidacy for president in the Courts’, *Colombo Page*, January 26, 2010 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10/Jan1264523903CH.html

²⁴ ‘Election results endorse Sri Lanka’s commitment to peace – President’, *Colombo Page*, January 28, 2010 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10/Jan1264658193CH.html

²⁵ ‘India plans to open a consulate in Northern Sri Lanka’, *Colombo Page*, January 28, 2010 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10/Jan1264786041CH.html

B. WEST ASIA

IRAN

- **Opposition leader Karroubi acknowledges Ahmadinejad as president; Two people hanged for their alleged role during post-election riots; US Senate passes a bill approving new sanctions against Iran**

Opposition leader Mahdi Karroubi, while standing by his claims that the June 12, 2009 presidential elections were rigged, announced that he now recognizes Mr. Ahmadinejad as the head of Iran's government. Karroubi is stated to have said that the decision was to show that the opposition was not protesting against Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and added that "since Khamenei endorsed Ahmadinejad, I recognize him as the head of the government."²⁶

Meanwhile, two people arrested during the post-election protests and convicted of being *Mohareb* (enemies of God) and members of a monarchist group were hanged. Mohammad Reza Ali Zamani and Arash Rahmani Pour were hanged as they were charged with plotting to overthrow the Islamic regime. 19 year old Rahmani Pour's lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh asserted that her client did not have any role in the post-election riots and charged that she was prevented from representing Rahmani Pour at his "show trial" in July 2009 and that many of the charges related to the time when he was a minor.²⁷

The US Senate meanwhile approved the bill allowing President Obama to extend sanctions against Iran. The bill targets non-Iranian companies that export fuel to Iran or help expand Tehran's oil refining capacities by denying them US loans and other financial assistance. Mr. Obama on his part on January 27 warned that Iran's leaders would "face growing consequences" as they "continue to ignore their obligations."²⁸

IRAQ

- **41 killed in deadly blasts in Baghdad**

At least 41 people were been killed in three separate explosions near prominent Baghdad hotels including the Sheraton Ishtar Hotel, Babylon Hotel and Hamra Hotel. These hotels are reportedly popular with Western journalists and foreign security contractors. The attacks were seen as another blow to the credibility of an Iraqi government struggling to plug security loopholes that have seen many attacks since August 2009.²⁹

²⁶ 'Mahdi Karroubi recognizes Ahmadinejad as president', *Tehran Times*, January 26, 2010 at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=213019

²⁷ 'Iran hangs two post-election 'rioters': report', *Khaleej Times*, January 28, 2010 at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2010/January/middleeast_January594.xml§ion=middleeast

²⁸ 'US Senate approves Iran sanctions', *BBC News*, January 29, 2010 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8486441.stm>

²⁹ 'Death toll in Baghdad blasts rises to 41', *Khaleej Times*, January 26, 2010 at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2010/January/middleeast_January548.xml§ion=middleeast