

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- **Reports: New US military strategy looks beyond Afghan war; 16 killed in a bomb blast in Kandahar; Reports: Afghan Taliban would be open to talks**

The US military issued its first new statement of strategy in seven years, moving beyond a focus on the war in Afghanistan to address the rise of China and other strategic challenges. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, noted that “while we continue to refine how we counter violent extremism and deter aggression, this strategy also rightly emphasizes that our military power is most effective when employed in concert with other elements of power.”¹

Reports noted that fifteen policemen and an intelligence agent killed in a string of devastating attacks in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar. The attacks, which played out over several hours and left 45 people injured, involved several suicide bombers armed with guns and grenades firing on the main police headquarters after occupying a wedding hall opposite.²

In other developments, a report noted that Afghan Taliban leaders would be willing to break with al Qaeda to end the war in Afghanistan, but US policy is creating younger, more radicalised fighters less open to a peace deal. The report, by Kandahar-based researchers Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn pointed out that the Taliban could be willing to ensure Afghanistan was not used as a base for terrorism.³

PAKISTAN

- **United States postpones bilateral contacts with Pakistan until its diplomat is freed; Gas supply to Baluchistan suspended after blasts in pipelines; 14 security officials killed in bomb blast in Mardan; Pakistan successfully test fires Hatf-VII missile**

¹ “New US military strategy looks beyond Afghan war, Dawn, February 9, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/09/new-us-military-strategy-looks-beyond-afghan-war.html>

² “Taliban targets police in Kandahar; 16 killed, Dawn, February 12, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/12/taliban-claim-attack-on-police-hq-in-kandahar.html>

³ “Afghan Taliban would be open to talks: report, Dawn, February 7, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/07/afghan-taliban-would-be-open-to-talks-report.html>

The United States has put all bilateral contacts with Pakistan on hold until Islamabad releases an employee of the its consulate in Lahore, arrested for shooting down two men. Reports noted that the dispute could affect three major events planned this year i.e. President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to Washington; the next round of US-Pakistan strategic dialogue and trilateral talks involving Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States.⁴

Reports noted that gas supply to nine districts of Baluchistan was suspended after two main pipelines were blown up near Dera Murad Jamali in Nasirabad district. A relief camp set up by the Turkish Red Cross was damaged.⁵ Meanwhile, a suicide attack targeting a military parade on killed at least 14 security officials in Pakistan's northwestern city of Mardan, police sources noted. The blast took place inside the Punjab Regiment Centre in the city's cantonment area.⁶

In other developments, Pakistan's military reported that it has successfully test-fired a cruise missile capable of carrying "strategic and conventional" war heads. An army statement noted the Hatf-VII or Babur missile, which has a range of 360 miles (600 kilometers), was test-fired from an undisclosed location on Thursday. However, the statement did not specifically if the missile could carry nuclear warheads.⁷

BANGLADESH

- **Foreign Minister of Bangladesh visits Canada; India permits exports of three lakh tonnes of the non-Basmati rice to Bangladesh at a concessional rate**

Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Dipu Moni, left for Canada on February 12, 2011 on a five-day state visit to prepare the ground for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to the country likely in March. During the visit, foreign minister will meet her Canadian counterpart Lawrence Cannon and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and would discuss on issues like development cooperation, trade and investment, regional security and immigration and repatriation of

⁴ "US postpone bilateral contacts until Davis freed", Dawn, February 8, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/08/us-postpones-bilateral-contacts-till-davis-freed.html>

⁵ "Baluchistan without gas after blasts in pipelines", Dawn, February 9, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/09/balochistan-without-gas-after-blasts-in-pipelines.html>

⁶ "Suicide blast kills 14 security officials in Mardan", Dawn, February 10, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/10/blast-in-mardan-casualties-feared.html>

⁷ "Pakistan successfully test fires Hatf-VII missile", Dawn, February 10, 2011 at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/10/pakistan-army-says-missile-test-is-successful.html>

Bangabandhu's condemned killer Noor Chowdhury, who is reportedly in Canada now.⁸

In other developments, reports noted that though India had banned exports of non-basmati rice in April 2008, the government has permitted exports of three lakh tonnes of the rice to Bangladesh on diplomatic grounds and at a concessional rate.⁹

SRI LANKA

- **Formal diplomatic relations established between Sri Lanka and the Dominican Republic; Dr. Palitha Kohona has been reappointed as Co-Chair of the UN Ad-hoc Working Group; CIS countries tops the list of main importers of Sri Lankan Tea; First Islamic Commercial Bank in Sri Lanka to be opened**

Reports noted that Sri Lanka and the Dominican Republic have established formal Diplomatic Relations.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Dr. Palitha Kohona has been reappointed as Co-Chair of the UN Ad-hoc Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. Professor Liesbeth Lijnzaad, Legal Advisor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands has been appointed as the other Co-Chair.¹¹

According to reports, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) continued to remain the largest importer of Sri Lankan tea in 2010, accounting for 77.2 m/kgs of the total exports of 314.2 m/kgs. According to officials, the UAE (30.2 m/kgs down from 31.1 m/kgs in 2009) and Iran (28.69 m/kgs, compared to a slightly lower 28.62 m/kgs in 2009) were in second and third positions. Syria (27.1 m/kgs), Turkey (19 m/kgs) and Jordan (17.6 m/kgs) were the other main importers.¹²

⁸ "Dipu Moni flies today for Canada", *The Daily Star*, February 12, 2011 at, <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=173875>.

⁹ "Govt Floats Tender to Ship 3 Lakh Tonnes Rice to Bangladesh", *Press Trust of India*, February 13, 2011 at <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/govt-floats-tender-to-ship-3-lakh-tonnes-rice-to-bangladesh/125620/on>.

¹⁰ "Sri Lanka, Dominican Republic establish diplomatic relations", *Daily Mirror*, February 8, 2011 at <http://print.dailymirror.lk/news/news/35166.html>

¹¹ "Kohona Co-Chair of UN working group", News Line, February 9, 2011 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201102/20110209kohona_co_chair_of_un_working_group.htm

¹² "CIS, Lanka's biggest tea importer", News Line, February 8, 2011 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201102/20110208cis_lanka_biggest_tea_importer.htm

In other developments, the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank (IDB) has taken a 10-percent stake in the first commercial Islamic bank in Sri Lanka, the Amana Bank Limited which is to be opened shortly in the country. Amana Bank will be Sri Lanka's first licensed commercial Islamic bank to conduct all its business operations in complete harmony with the principles of Islamic banking.¹³

MALDIVES

- **First female Secretary General of the SAARC from the Maldives; Governor of Tripura paid courtesy call on Maldivian Vice President; Honorary Consul of the Maldives in Dusseldorf, Germany met President Nasheed; Maldives welcomes Hosni Mubarak's decision to resign from office**

Fathimath Dhiyana Saeed, former Maldivian Attorney General has been nominated as the first ever female Secretary General of the SAARC. Dhiyana is the second Maldivian to be appointed as SAARC Secretary General, after Special Envoy to the President Ibrahim Hussein Zakee, who served as the Secretary General from January 1, 1992 to December 31, 1993.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Governor of the Indian state of Tripura, Dr. D.Y. Patil paid a courtesy call on Maldivian Vice President Dr Mohamed Waheed on February 13, 2011. Indian High Commissioner D M Mulay also attended the meeting.¹⁵ Honorary Consul of the Maldives in Dusseldorf, Germany, Mr Jurgen Weerth paid a courtesy call on President Mohamed Nasheed on February 13, 2011. At the meeting, Honorary Consul Mr Weerth told the President that he would continue his efforts to bring foreign investments to the Maldives and find avenues for further cooperation in the area of climate change and clean energy.¹⁶

In other developments, President Mohamed Nasheed has welcomed Hosni Mubarak's decision to resign from office.¹⁷

¹³ "IDB buys 10% stake in Sri Lankan bank", *News Line*, February 7, 2011 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201102/20110207idb_buys_10%25stake_sl_bank.htm.

¹⁴ "SAARC appoints Maldivian as first female Secretary General", *Haveeru*, February 10, 2011 at <http://www.haveeru.com.mv/english/details/34721>.

¹⁵ "Tripura State Governor Pays Courtesy Call on the Vice President", *The President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 13, 2011 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=4718>

¹⁶ "Maldivian Honorary Consul in Dusseldorf Pays a Courtesy Call on the President", *The President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 13, 2011 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=4720>

¹⁷ "President Nasheed Welcomes Mubarak's Departure, Calls for Democratic Egypt", *The President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 11, 2011 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=4715>

BHUTAN

- **India to give Rs 15 crore grant to Bhutan's education sector; Pakistan's Foreign Secretary calls Prime Minister Thinley, expresses desire to enhance bilateral ties; Chinese Railway Ministry map shows China's rail network stretching across the Chumbi Valley**

India has announced that it would be providing a grant of Rs 15 crores to the education sector of Bhutan. The Rs.15 crore grant is being made to the Kidu Foundation, which was jointly launched by Bhutan's Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley and India's Ambassador to Bhutan Pavan K. Varma on February 3, 2011¹⁸. With the New Economic Policy released on June 2010, Bhutan has branded itself as the "investment destination" in 2011¹⁹.

At the bilateral level, Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir called upon Prime Minister Thinley to discuss bilateral issues of mutual interest. Pakistan has expressed desire to enhance bilateral ties of cooperation including facilities for Bhutanese students in medicine and engineering as well as training of Bhutanese diplomats at the Foreign Service Academy.²⁰

Meanwhile, one media report noted that China would be extending its Tibet railway network into the Chumbi valley area by 2017. Sources state that this was confirmed by a Chinese Railways Ministry map, which showed China's "long term railway network plan" stretching across the sensitive Chumbi Valley.²¹

In other developments, US Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, Maria Otero was on visit to Bhutan from February 10-11, 2011. According to media reports, situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal was the focus of discussion.²²

¹⁸ "India to contribute Rs.15 crores for education development in Bhutan," *Sify News*, February 7, 2011 at <http://www.sify.com/news/india-to-contribute-rs-15-crores-for-education-development-in-bhutan-news-international-lchs4dagcae.html>

¹⁹ "Bhutan brands itself as an investment destination, Business Asia," *Business Asia*, February 8, 2011 at <http://business.asiaone.com/Business/News/Story/A1Story20110208-262386.html>

²⁰ "Salman Bashir calls on Bhutanese PM, discusses bilateral ties," *Associated Press of Pakistan*, February 8, 2011, at http://app.com.pk/en /index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=130260&Itemid=2

²¹ "Plans on track, China rail link to stretch to near Sikkim border," *Indian Express*, February 14, 2011 at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Plans-on-track--China-rail-link-to-stretch-to-near-Sikkim-border/749733>

²² "US Under Secy to visit India, Bhutan & Nepal," *IBN Live*, February 8, 2010, at http://ibnlive.in.com/printpage.php?id=142738§ion_id=2

B. EAST ASIA

CHINA

- **The Chinese naval taskforce rescued a Korean ship; China and Kazakh frontier forces conduct joint petrol; A wireless automatic target-marking system developed by the General Staff Headquarters (GSH) passes test; The Second Artillery Force conducts its first ever actual-combat drill**

Reports noted that the Chinese naval escort taskforce on escort mission in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the Somali coast successfully rescued a merchant ship from the Republic of Korea (ROK) attacked by quite a few pirate boats on 10 February 2011.²³

Another report noted that the frontier defense officers and the Xinjiang Military Area Command (MAC) of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and their counterparts from Kazakhstan had conducted this year's first joint border patrol from February 5 to 9, 2011. In the joint patrol, the two sides made inspections within their respective defense areas from February 5 to 7, 2011. They carried out cross-border joint patrol on the isolation belt and in the areas well into the territories of both sides from February 8 to 9, 2011. A high official involved in this joint petrol said that the frontier defense contingents from the two countries had been exploring the joint border management and control mechanism since 2009. The joint petrol mainly features joint exercise, joint reconnaissance, joint patrol, joint deterrence and joint interaction.²⁴

The Chinese defence ministry sources informed that a wireless automatic target-marking system has passed the appraisal of the expert group. The training ground of a department under the General Staff Headquarters (GSH) of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has developed this system. The live-fire test by this system has demonstrated a stable performance, high durability of gun-target and fast and accurate information collection, improving the efficiency of shooting training. As of now, most of the PLA live-fire shooting ranges still manually display, examine and mark targets.²⁵

²³ "Chinese naval escort taskforce rescues ROK merchant ship", *PLA Daily* (Online), 12 February 2011 at http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-02/12/content_4383723.htm.

²⁴ "Chinese and Kazakhstani militaries hold 1st joint border patrol in 2011", *PLA Daily* (Online), 11 February 2011 at http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-02/11/content_4383140.htm.

²⁵ "PLA realizes new breakthrough in automatic target-marking technology", *PLA Daily* (Online), 10 February 2011 at http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-02/10/content_4382454.htm.

In other developments, the new-generation of integrated logistic command platform of the Second Artillery Force (SAF) of the PLA has made its debut in an actual-combat drill. This debut symbolizes an overall improvement of the information-based systematic support capability of the strategic missile force of the PLA.²⁶

C. CENTRAL ASIA & RUSSIA

CENTRAL ASIA

- **Kazakh President seeks re-election in April; Kazakh President calls for privatization in Kazakhstan; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan to review safety of Kirov Dam; Kyrgyz-Tajik DMs discuss border security; Kyrgyz air fleet to be upgraded by Russia; Turkey helps Kyrgyzstan to evacuate its citizens from Egypt; Kyrgyzstan, United States sign Manas fuel deal; Iran to increase hydropower investments in Tajikistan; Turkmen President makes first state visit to Bahrain; Turkmenistan offers surplus gas, electricity to Pakistan; Pakistan wants equal pricing on TAPI gas; Uzbekistan's President Karimov visits Tokyo**

Reports noted that Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev has accepted the nomination of the country's ruling party, Nur Otan, to run for re-election in snap presidential polls scheduled for early April.²⁷ Meanwhile, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has given a call on the February 11, 2011 to begin Kazakhstan's planned privatization program this year. The first wave of the program is to be followed in 2012-2013 with initial public offerings (IPOs) or the "People's IPO" by state owned companies.²⁸

Reports noted that water experts from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to review the safety of an aging Kirov dam that is located on their border. Kazakhstan had raised concerns over the safety of its Taraz city, which lies downstream of the dam.²⁹

²⁶ "SAF constructs integrated logistic command platform", *PLA Daily* (Online), 9 February 2011 at http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-02/09/content_4382033.htm.

²⁷ Kazakh president announces re-election bid', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 11, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Kazakhstan/Kazakh-president-announces-re-election-bid/viewstory.aspx?id=3243>

²⁸ 'Nazarbayev calls for privatization to begin this year', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 11, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Kazakhstan/Nazarbayev-calls-for-privatization-to-begin-this-year/viewstory.aspx?id=3236>

²⁹ 'Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan to review safety of border dam', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 10, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Regional/Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-to-review-safety-of-border-dam/viewstory.aspx?id=3223>

The Defense Minister Abibilla Kudaiberdiev of Kyrgyzstan met with his Tajikistan's counterpart Sherali Khayrullaev on February 8 to discuss mounting security concerns from Kyrgyzstan with possibilities that terrorists may slip across the Tajik border. Apart from this they also discussed on regional military cooperation, crisis response cooperation and other regional security issues.³⁰

According to reports, Russia is preparing to offer Kyrgyzstan a range of modern aircraft and helicopters to help modernize its aging civil fleet. The delegates from Moscow visited the Kyrgyz capital for the 12th meeting of the Intergovernmental Kyrgyz-Russian commission on trade-economic, scientific-technical and humanitarian cooperation. During this meeting, both the sides agreed that Russia's United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) and Russian Helicopters firm will issue proposals within one month, giving the Kyrgyz government three months to respond.³¹ The Russian side pointed out that the Kyrgyz republic could use its new Sukhoi Superjet 100 and Antonov An-148 passenger aircraft, which would be very well suited for the climate in Kyrgyzstan. It could also use B-200 amphibious planes and Ka-32A11VS, Ka-226, Mi-17 and Mi-8 helicopters.³²

Meanwhile reports noted that Turkey helped 121 Kyrgyz nationals – mainly students to be evacuated from Egypt by providing a plane to fly them home. According to the foreign ministry sources, more than 200 Kyrgyz nationals have refused to leave Egypt and remain in the country.³³

The United States has signed a deal to pass part of a \$630 million Afghanistan fuel contract to a newly formed state company in Kyrgyzstan on February 8, 2011. The deal has been signed in a compromise designed to safeguard its air base – a crucial supply hub for the war in Afghanistan.³⁴

Reports noted that Iran is planning to build new hydroelectric dams in Tajikistan – a large 170-megawatt Ayni hydropower plant (HPP) and invest in

³⁰ 'Kyrgyz, Tajik defense ministers discuss border security', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 08, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Regional/Kyrgyz-Tajik-defense-ministers-discuss-border-security/viewstory.aspx?id=3194>

³¹ 'Russia to help upgrade Kyrgyzstan's airplane, helicopter fleet', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 11, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Kyrgyzstan/Russia-to-help-upgrade-Kyrgyzstan39snbspairplane-helicopter-fleet/viewstory.aspx?id=3235>

³² -ibid-

³³ 'Turkey helps Kyrgyzstan evacuate citizens from Egypt', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 09, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Kyrgyzstan/Turkey-helps-Kyrgyzstan-evacuate-citizens-from-Egypt/viewstory.aspx?id=3209>

³⁴ Richard Orange, 'Kyrgyzstan, U.S. sign Manas fuel deal', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 08, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Kyrgyzstan/Kyrgyzstan-US-sign-Manas-fuel-deal/viewstory.aspx?id=3205>

two 350-megawatt upgrades of the Nurabad HPP—as its ongoing hydro construction projects near completion.³⁵

Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited Bahrain on February 9 on his first two-day state visit to the Persian Gulf country. He will discuss expanding bilateral cooperation and economic trade with the country's top officials.³⁶ Turkmenistan, which was previously an isolationist country under former President Saparmurat Niyazov, has been expanding its ties with Gulf countries, including stepping up cooperation with the United Arab Emirates as well as Qatar and Saudi Arabia.³⁷

Meanwhile, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan Turkmenistan may offer surplus gas and excess electricity to help Pakistan get out of the energy crisis that is hampering its growth.³⁸

Reports noted that Pakistan officials told a Turkmen delegation that Pakistan wants all partners, in the GSPA (Gas Sales Purchase Agreement), of the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline to pay the same price for gas; Pakistan officials told a Turkmen delegation visiting Pakistan this week. It would be worth noting that the current gas pricing proposal would have Pakistan and India pay higher prices than other partners to account for security and transport fees from the Turkmen border through volatile Afghanistan.³⁹

President Islam Karimov visited Japan on February 9-11, 2011 to reach substantial agreements on uranium and economic development in Uzbekistan. A memorandum of understanding released jointly showed that Japan will provide a \$218 million loan to further develop Uzbekistan's railroad system.⁴⁰ Uzbekistan also expressed its support for Japan to join the United Nations Security Council. Japan also plans to assist in the search for rare earths elements on Uzbek soil.⁴¹

³⁵ 'Iran considers additional Tajik hydropower investments', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 11, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Tajikistan/Iran-considers-additional-Tajik-hydropower-investments/viewstory.aspx?id=3241>

³⁶ 'Turkmen president makes first state visit to Bahrain', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 09, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Turkmenistan/Turkmen-president-makes-first-state-visit-to-Bahrain/viewstory.aspx?id=3218>

³⁷ -ibid-

³⁸ 'Turkmenistan offers surplus gas, electricity to Pakistan', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 09, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Turkmenistan/Turkmenistan-offers-surplus-gasnbselectricity-to-Pakistan/viewstory.aspx?id=3207>

³⁹ 'Pakistan Wants Equal Pricing on TAPI gas', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 11, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Turkmenistan/Pakistan-wants-equal-pricing-on-TAPI-gas/viewstory.aspx?id=3238>

⁴⁰ 'Japan to lend Uzbekistan \$218M for railroad development', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 11, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Uzbekistan/Japan-to-lend-Uzbekistan-218M-for-railroad-development/viewstory.aspx?id=3244>

⁴¹ -ibid-

More importantly, Uzbekistan has signed an agreement with Japan to jointly explore and develop uranium in Uzbekistan which has around 122,356 tons of nuclear metal, having twelfth largest reserves in the world.⁴² As per the agreement, Uzbekistan will supply uranium to Japan for the next 10 years which marks Japan's latest step in a strategy to diversify its natural energy sources, and in part to wean itself off from heavy dependence on China.⁴³

RUSSIA

- **British Journalist expelled from Russia; Russia to boost defence of Kuril to ward off any eventuality; Russia supports a democratic Egypt; Russia to build \$3 billion Nickel Smelter in Indonesia; Russia's privatization drive**

A British journalist who reported extensively on Wikileaks cables wherein he criticized the Russian leadership has been expelled from Russia. 'The Guardian's Moscow correspondent Luke Harding had labelled Russia under Mr. Putin as being a virtual mafia state. Harding was denied from re-entering Russia and after being detained for about forty minutes sent back to the UK. The expulsion of the journalist followed several incidents of harassment amid official disapproval of his coverage. The issue has raised serious concern amongst human rights groups. Russia is regularly ranked as amongst the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. The matter also highlights the simmering tension between Russia and UK ever since UK categorically blamed certain sections of Russia's official machinery for the murder of Kremlin critique Alexander Litvinenko in London. In December last year, UK expelled a Russian diplomat stationed in London on espionage charges and Russia too responded in the same vein by expelling a British diplomat.⁴⁴

Reports noted that Russia's unresolved conflict with Japan over the Kuril Islands, may reach a boiling point as Russian authorities are set to go ahead with their plan to shore up the disputed territory's defence potential. The Russian President has ordered the deployment of additional weaponry on the disputed islands which he described as an 'inseparable part of Russian Federation'. There has been a sharp rise in rhetoric on both sides with Japanese Prime Minister having

⁴² 'Uzbekistan signs deal to supply uranium to Japan', *Central Asia Newswire*, February 08, 2011 at <http://centralasianewswire.com/Uzbekistan/Uzbekistan-signs-deal-to-supply-uranium-to-Japan/viewstory.aspx?id=3192>

⁴³ -ibid-

⁴⁴ "Russia Expels British Journalist", Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 8 February 2011 at http://www.rferl.org/content/russia_british_guardian/2301159.html

described President Medvedev's visit to the Kuril Islands as an 'unforgivable outrage'. Although trade relations have improved between the two countries yet the unresolved status of Kuril Islands has prevented Russia and Japan from forging a strategic partnership in spite of their shared interest to combat the growing might of China.⁴⁵

Russian President Medvedev has expressed his support for the democratic transition in Egypt by announcing that a strong and a democratic Egypt is essential for the fragile peace in the Middle East. Medvedev has promised full Russian support to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy, ensure stability and restore the normal functioning of power structures in the country.⁴⁶

In an apparent sign of increased economic cooperation between Russia and Indonesia, reports noted that Russian investors plan to build a 3 billion US\$ nickel smelter in Eastern Indonesia's Halmahera Island. Indonesia is one of the world's largest exporters of tin and thermal coal while Russia's Norilsk Nickel, in which RUSAL owns a 25 percent stake, is the world's largest nickel miner. Meanwhile, Indonesia is keen to increase its revenue accrued from the mining sector and under a new law, miners must be in the field of processing minerals in the domestic sector before exporting them.⁴⁷

In other developments, reports noted that Russia has initiated a massive privatization programme starting with the sale of shares of the country's second biggest bank VTB, fetching the government over 3.3 billion US\$. Although the names of the new shareholders in VTB were not identified yet it is believed that many major US, European, Middle Eastern and Asian companies have for the first time invested significant money in the Russian economy. Russia last year unveiled a huge five-year privatisation programme wherein the plan is to raise close to US\$ \$60 billion.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ "Medvedev orders more weapons to Kuril Islands", Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 9 February 2011 at http://www.rferl.org/content/russia_japan_kurile_islands/2302595.html

⁴⁶ "Russia looks for Democratic Egypt", The Moscow Times, 14 February, 2011 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-looks-for-democratic-egypt/430926.html>

⁴⁷ "Indonesia says Russia to build \$3 bln nickel smelter", Reuters, 14 February 2011 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/14/indonesia-nickel-idUSL3E7DE09J20110214>

⁴⁸ "Russia starts asset sale, gets \$3.3 bln for VTB", CNBC, 14 February 2011 at <http://classic.cnbc.com/id/41572692>

D. WEST ASIA

IRAN

• Iran discloses new satellites and rockets; Iran's opposition leaders call for a rally despite government warning

Iran has revealed four domestically manufactured satellites and a satellite-carrier rocket namely the Rasad, Zafar, Fajr, and Amir Kabir satellites and the Kavoshgar 4 rocket in a ceremony. The first-stage and second-stage engines of the Safir-e-Fajr satellite carrier and a space recycling and environmental station were also unveiled during the ceremony. The satellites are made for different purpose such as Amir Kabir satellite is a research satellite, the Fajr satellite is a reconnaissance satellite, the Rasad and Zafar satellites will be used for remote sensing missions. The images taken by these satellites can be utilized in meteorology and for the demarcation of water borders and charting the topography of the tributaries of rivers.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Iran's opposition renewed its call for a rally in support of protesters in Tunisia and Egypt despite a government warning of repercussions if demonstrations take place. According to a reformist website 'kaleme' the opposition called its supporters to rally in central Tehran and blamed the government for double standards by voicing support for the Egyptian and Tunisian demonstrators while refusing to allow Iranian political activists to stage a peaceful demonstration. Iranian authorities have detained several activists and journalists in recent weeks and put opposition leader Mahdi Karroubi under house arrest. The authorities have also imposed restriction on opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi. Both Mousavi and Karroubi have compared the turmoil in Egypt and Tunisia with their own post election protest movement in 2009, which the Iranian government eventually managed to quash.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ "Iran unveils new satellites and rocket," *Mehr News*, February 7, 2011 at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1248483>

⁵⁰ "Iranian opposition defies warning, calls for rally," *Khaleej Times*, February 13, 2011, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/February/middleeast_February461.xml§ion=middleeast

IRAQ

- **Iraqi parliament approved new ministers for Maliki's cabinet**

Reports noted that Iraq's parliament approved eight new ministers however; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has still not decided about who will hold the key posts such as defence and interior. Maliki's new government was approved in late December after nine months of political backbiting but he left 10 cabinet posts with acting leaders, keeping the Defence Ministry, which runs the army, Interior, which controls the police, and National Security for under his hold temporarily. Meanwhile, parliament has also approved new electricity and trade ministers, two key positions covering provision of basic services and food, the focus of recent protests in Baghdad and the provinces.⁵¹

EGYPT, YEMEN

- **Hosni Mubarak resigns as President of Egypt; Anti-government protesters clash with police and pro-government protesters in Yemen**

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned from his post on February 11, handing over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, on the 18th day of mass protests against him.⁵² This was announced by Vice-President Omar Suleiman in a short statement in which he said that, "In these difficult circumstances that the country is passing through, President Hosni Mubarak has decided to leave the position of the Presidency. He has mandated the Armed Forces Supreme Council to run the state."⁵³ Protesters, earlier on the same day, had marched on presidential palaces, state television buildings and other government installations. Later, in a statement on the same day, the military announced that it would lift a 30-year-old emergency law but only "as soon as the current circumstances end." The military has assured that it would guarantee changes to the constitution as well as a free and fair election, and it called for normal business activity to resume.⁵⁴ Later on February 13 the military announced that they have dissolved the parliament, suspended the constitution

⁵¹ "Maliki fills power, trade, other Iraq cabinet jobs," *Khaleej Times*, February 13, 2011, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle09.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/February/middleeast_February473.xml§ion=middleeast

⁵² "Hosni Mubarak resigns as president", Al Jazeera, February 11, 2011, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121125158705862.html>

⁵³ "Mubarak resigns, handing control to Egyptian military", *The National*, February 12, 2011, available at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/mubarak-resigns-handing-control-to-egyptian-military>

⁵⁴ "Hosni Mubarak resigns as president", Al Jazeera, February 11, 2011, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121125158705862.html>

and would govern only for six months or until elections took place. In a statement, the Higher Military Council promised a referendum on constitutional amendments.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, thousands of protesters have come out to the streets of Yemen demanding political reform and the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Several thousand protesters, many of them are university students were stopped by the police when tried to reach the central square in the capital Sanaa on February 13. Pro-government protesters were also seen in the city centre, at some points facing off against the opposing demonstrators. On February 12, clashes broke out in Sanaa between groups supporting and opposing the government after men armed with knives and sticks forced around 300 anti-government protesters to end a rally.⁵⁶

E. USA

- **Obama compares Egyptian peaceful protests to Gandhi's resistance against British**

Responding to the resignation of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's resignation, US President Obama described the Egyptian uprising as a model of nonviolence and moral force "that bent the arc of history." He urged the Egyptian army to ensure that democracy is established, as Hosni Mubarak steps down. President Obama's tone was optimistic, and he promised the crowd in Cairo's Tahrir Square which was listening to his brief broadcast live via Egyptian state television, continued American support for Egypt. Reports noted that this support is likely to take new forms as administration officials agreed that the \$250 million in economic aid was a pittance compared with the \$1.3 billion in annual military aid, and the White House and the State Department were already discussing setting aside new funds to bolster the rise of secular political parties. Under Egypt's current Constitution, alternatives to Mubarak's National Democratic Party are all but banned. Meanwhile, White House officials are assessing the longer-term impact of the revolutions that have deposed two dictators in less than a month, Tunisia's leader, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's leader Hosni Mubarak.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ "Egypt's military rulers dissolve parliament, suspend constitution", *Khaleej Times*, February 13, 2011, available at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle09.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/February/middleeast_February472.xml§ion=middleeast

⁵⁶ "Yemen protesters clash with police", *Al Jazeera*, February 14, 2011, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/video/middleeast/2011/02/2011213235027318750.html>

⁵⁷ "Obama Presses Egypt's Military on Democracy" *Post- Gazette*, February 12, 2011 at <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11043/1125050-82.stm>

Reports noted that in Israel and Saudi Arabia, both of which depended heavily on Mr. Mubarak, officials were strong in their criticism of USA, arguing that the United States abandoned a long-time ally without first building in guarantees that Egypt's revolution could not be hijacked by religious extremists.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Ibid