

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

- **President Barack Obama speaks to Afghan President Karzai to discuss efforts to reconcile with elements of the Taliban; US Defence Secretary Panetta apologises to the Afghan people over Koran burning**

According to reports, President Barack Obama has spoken to Afghan President Hamid Karzai to discuss efforts to reconcile with elements of the Taliban, including his meeting last week with Pakistani and Iranian leaders. The White House statement, Obama and Karzai on February 20, discussed regional support for reconciliation in Afghanistan. The conversation came in the wake of a three-day summit in Islamabad with Karzai, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.¹

In another development, according to reports, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta has apologised to the Afghan people for an incident in which copies of the Koran were reportedly burned. Panetta said the US military respected the religious practices of the Afghan people “without exception”. The NATO commander in Afghanistan, US Gen John R Allen, has already announced an inquiry into the incident.²

Pakistan

- **US Charge d’Affaire Hoagland summoned by Pakistan’s Foreign Office over Balochistan; Pakistan Foreign Minister slated to meet Clinton; Prime Minister Gilani urges Taliban leaders and other Afghan insurgent groups to take part in a peace process**

According to reports, Pakistan’s Foreign Office summoned US Charge d’Affaire Richard Hoagland on February 20 to protest against a resolution tabled in the House of Representatives for the right to self-determination for the people of Balochistan. This was the second time US Charge d’Affaires Hoagland was summoned to the Foreign Office in seven days on the issue of Balochistan. “Ambassador Richard Hoagland, US Charge d’Affaires, was called to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs today. A strong protest was lodged with him with regard to the tabling of a resolution on Balochistan in the US Congress,” an Pakistan’s Foreign Office statement said.³

However, according to reports, Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar urged Washington to establish a “predictable, transparent and sustainable” relationship ahead of a meeting with US

¹ “Obama, Karzai discuss Afghan reconciliation”, *Dawn*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/21/obama-karzai-discuss-afghan-reconciliation.html>

² “Afghan Koran burning: US apologises”, *Dawn*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17116595>

³ “US Diplomat summoned again over resolution”, *Dawn*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/21/us-diplomat-summoned-again-over-resolution.html>

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to repair damaged ties. Khar said she would meet Clinton in London on February 23 where both are due to attend an international conference on Somalia, to try to heal a rift caused by a NATO air attack last November that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.⁴

In other developments, according to reports, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on February 24, 2012, urged Taliban leaders and other Afghan insurgent groups to take part in a peace process to end 10 years of war in neighbouring Afghanistan. "I would like to appeal to the Taliban leadership as well as to all other Afghan groups, including Hizb-e-Islami, to participate in an intra-Afghan process for national reconciliation and peace," he said in a statement. Meanwhile, Afghan President Hamid this week again invited the Taliban for direct talks with his government, urging Pakistan to facilitate negotiation efforts in Afghanistan, where US-led combat troops are due to leave by 2014. Reportedly, Taliban representatives have begun contacts with US officials in the Gulf state of Qatar designed to build confidence and pave the way for a prisoner exchange, but the militia has publicly refused to talk to Karzai's government.⁵

Bangladesh

- **India assures Bangladesh that the incidents of Border Security Force firing along the border will be brought to zero; Bangladesh aims export to India to increase to \$ 1 bn by June this year; Bangladeshi businessmen urges Indian high commission in Dhaka to simplify the visa procedures; India orders an investigation into the circumstances leading to the collapse of two sluice gates of Farakka Barrage; Verbal decision on canceling deal with World Bank to construct Padma Bridge**

According to reports, India assured Bangladesh that efforts were on to bring down the incidents of Border Security Force firing along the border to zero and that the issue with the proposed treaty on Teesta water sharing would be resolved. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh conveyed this to Bangladesh Home Minister Shahara Khatun, who called on him at his residence in New Delhi on February 24, 2012.⁶

In another development, according to reports, armed with a duty-free facility to India, Bangladesh is aiming for \$1 billion in exports by June this year. A Mutlub Ahmad, President of India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry said "With duty-free export to India, we expect Bangladeshi export to increase to \$1 billion by June 2012 from \$500 million last year,". He made these remarks on the sidelines of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Business Forum meet in Kolkata.⁷

According to reports, Bangladeshi businessmen urged the Indian high commission in Dhaka to simplify the visa procedures and remove trade barriers to minimise the widening trade gap with

⁴ "Pakistan's Khar to meet Clinton to discuss strains", *Dawn*, February 22, 2012 <http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/22/pakistans-khar-to-meet-clinton-to-discuss-strains.html>

⁵ "Pakistan urges Taliban to take part in peace talks", *Dawn*, February, 24, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/24/pakistan-urges-taliban-to-take-part-in-peace-talks.html>

⁶ "More work to do for Teesta", *The Daily Star*, February 25, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=223790>.

⁷ Bhattacharya, Pallab, "Bangladesh targets \$1b exports to India by June", *The Daily Star*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=223223>

the neighbour. They also demanded to issue Indian visas for them within 24 hours of application, and good behaviour from the visa officers at the Indian high commission in Dhaka. They spoke at a discussion with Acting Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Sanjay Bhattacharya at the office of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in Dhaka.⁸

Reports noted that the Indian government ordered an investigation into the circumstances leading to the collapse of two sluice gates of Farakka Barrage which allegedly are allowing excess water flow into Bangladesh. The decision came a day after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had raised the issue with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal told reporters on February 23, 2012 that RC Jha, chairman of Central Water Commission (CWC), would look into the reasons behind the collapse of gates 13 and 16 and suggest corrective measures. Jha was asked to submit his report to the ministry within the next 15 days.⁹

In other developments, according to reports, despite strong opposition from within, the government has moved to cancel the loan deal for the Padma bridge project with the World Bank to clear the way for an agreement with Malaysia or other potential donors. A high-level meeting at the Prime Minister's Office last week made a "verbal decision" to cancel the \$1.2-billion deal, said an official of the Economic Relations Department (ERD).¹⁰

Sri Lanka

- **Sri Lankan delegation left to attend 19th session of the UNHRC; Alistair Burt: The UK still believes that a process led in Sri Lanka is better than one led internationally; Thirty illegal migrant returned to Sri Lanka from Togo**

According to reports, the Sri Lankan delegation led by the Plantation Minister and President's special Human Rights envoy Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe left for Geneva to attend the 19th session of the United Nations Human Right Council. The delegation comprises of Minister of External Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris, Minister of Irrigation Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister of Environment Anura Priyadarshana Yapa Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiyutheen and former Attorney General Mohan Peiris.¹¹

In another development, according to reports, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Alistair Burt has said that the UK still believes that a process led in Sri Lanka is better than one led internationally. He made these remarks while participating in a debate on the situation in Sri Lanka in the House of Commons on February 22, 2012. Commenting

⁸ "Businessmen call for easy visa to India", *The Daily Star*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=223560>.

⁹ Bhattacharya, Pallab, "India orders Farakka sluice gates probe", *The Daily Star*, February 24, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=223706>.

¹⁰ "Padma Bridge Project: Govt moves to axe WB deal", *The Daily Star*, February 20, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=223129>.

¹¹ "Sri Lanka has a well-organized plan for UNHRC session", *Sri Lanka Government Website*, February 23, 2012 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201202/20120223sl_well_organized_plan.htm.

on the LLRC report, he said that there is much in the report that can contribute to the pursuit of enduring peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.¹²

In other developments, according to reports, another 30 illegal migrants who were detained in West Africa's Togo returned to the island on February 25 with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The 30 illegal migrants were part of a group of 209 Sri Lankans who were smuggled out of the country and on their way to Canada via Ethiopia and then Togo.¹³

Maldives

- 1 **Vice President designate Mohamed Waheeduddeen met with Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa; President Waheed met Inter Parliamentary Union's Director of Programmes; Special Advisor to the President met Alistair Burt; Special Advisor to the President presented a letter from President Waheed, to Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations; United States Ambassador to the Maldives Patricia A. Butenis paid a courtesy call on President**

According to reports, Vice President Designate Mohamed Waheeduddeen met with President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka on February 22, 2012. Visiting Sri Lanka as a Special Envoy of President Waheed, Waheeduddeen presented a letter to the Sri Lankan President on his behalf. The Sri Lankan President congratulated Waheeduddeen on being the Vice President Designate, and spoke of his confidence on the diplomatic relations between the two countries continuing to thrive in the future.¹⁴

In another development, according to reports, President Waheed met with Inter Parliamentary Union's Director of Programmes, Martine Chungong, on February 23, 2012. This was their second meeting in two weeks.¹⁵

Meanwhile, reports noted that Special Advisor to the President Dr Hassan Saeed met with the UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alistair Burt on February 21, 2012.¹⁶

According to reports, Special Advisor to the President Dr Hassan Saeed presented a letter from President Dr Waheed to Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations Kamallesh Sharma.¹⁷

¹² "A process led in SL is better than one led internationally - UK", *Government of Sri Lanka Website*, February 23, 2012 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201202/20120223process_led_sl.htm.

¹³ "Another batch of illegal migrants return home from Togo", *Government of Sri Lanka Website*, February 25, 2012 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201202/20120225another_batch_of_illegal_migrants_return_home_from.htm

¹⁴ "Vice President Designate meets Sri Lankan President", *President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 22, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6859>.

¹⁵ "President meets IPU Director of Programmes", *President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6871>.

¹⁶ "Special Advisor to the President meets UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State", *President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 22, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6857>.

¹⁷ "Special Advisor to the President meets Commonwealth Secretary General", *President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 22, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6858>.

In other developments, according to reports, United States Ambassador to the Maldives Patricia A. Butenis paid a courtesy call on President Dr Mohamed Waheed on February 22, 2012. Ambassador Butenis assured the President that the US government would continue helping the Maldives move forward.¹⁸

B. East Asia

South East Asia

- **Thai Authorities question terror suspects; Vietnam, Philippines set up Joint Maritime Commission; Myanmar inks peace pact with Mon ethnic rebels; UN Envoy urges world to lift Myanmar sanctions; Indonesian court rejects Abu Bakar's plea**

According to reports, the Thai police are questioning more Iranians, who are in some ways linked to the bomb blasts, which happened in Bangkok lately. Three Iranian nationals have already been held responsible for the bomb blasts. Earlier, Israel had blamed Iran for the bomb blast targeted at its officials in Thailand, India and Georgia.¹⁹

In another development, according to reports, to ease tensions on maritime disputes, the Philippines and Vietnam held a joint commission meeting on maritime and ocean cooperation. The meeting, first ever under the joint commission banner, was held on 20 February 2012. The two sides agreed to take cooperative measures to ensure peace in the region. The two sides also discussed the Philippine proposal for a Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship and Cooperation and the establishment of a code of conduct in the West Philippine Sea. It is likely that the joint commission will assume the work of Joint Permanent Working Group on maritime and ocean concerns and continue discussions on the outstanding issues and identify the new agenda items.²⁰

According to the Myanmar government's state media, the government has reached a preliminary peace agreement with the Mon rebel groups. The peace deal was signed on 25 February 2012. The two sides agreed to hold talks within next forty-five days. The government and the Mons had signed initial ceasefire in early February after state-level mediators held talks with the Mon leaders. Apparently, similar peace agreements have been signed in lately with Karen, Shan, Chin, Wa and Kokang minorities.²¹

¹⁸ "US Ambassador calls on the President", President's Office, Republic of Maldives, February 22, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6853>.

¹⁹ 'Thailand questions more Iranians in bomb plot', *Aljazeera* 27 February 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2012/02/201222762926747476.html>

²⁰ Ph, Vietnam hold joint commission on maritime cooperation, *The Philippine Star*, 26 February 2012, <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=781168&publicationSubCategoryId=63>

²¹ 'Myanmar government reaches preliminary peace agreement with Mon ethnic rebel groups', *Washington Post*, 27 February 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-government-reaches-preliminary-peace-agreement-with-mon-ethnic-rebel-group/2012/02/27/gIQAwdU3cR_story.html

According to reports, appreciating the Thein Sein government's attempts in making Myanmar a democratic country, the UN's special advisor Vijay Nambiar said that the international community should lift the sanctions that are imposed on Myanmar. However, during his four day Myanmar visit, he added that the Sein government must deliver on socio-economic needs, and that the time has come to 'build conditions for sustaining the reform for the betterment of the people of Myanmar.'²²

In other developments, according to reports, the Supreme Court of Indonesia rejected Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's appeal, and upheld the sentence on him. Ba'asyir is sentenced fifteen-year jail term for running a training camp in Aceh.²³

C. Central Asia & Russia

Central Asia

- **Kyrgyz president on a three day visit to Russia; Kyrgyz Premier visits Astana; USA confirms not to use Manas to attack Iran; US officials negotiate new agreements with Central Asia for alternative transit route; Reshuffling of governmental posts in the Turkmenistan; Rise in official number of drug addicts in Kyrgyzstan**

According to reports, Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev visited Moscow as part of the three-day working visit from February 23-25, 2012 with a packed agenda aimed at bolstering business and firming up their strategic partnership.²⁴ During his visit Russia "confirmed its readiness to pay for the lease and operation of infrastructure facilities in Kyrgyzstan [about \$15 million]," the Kremlin said in a statement.²⁵ However, the Kremlin statement noted that Kyrgyzstan owed \$493 million to Russia, but that it understands the "complicated financial and economic situation" in the country and is ready to consider various payoff options.²⁶ The heads of two countries discussed the issue of Kyrgyz foreign debt reduction in exchange for shares of Dastan factory.²⁷ Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told his visiting counterpart that security issues in Central Asia are a top priority in Russia.²⁸

In the meanwhile, Kazakh leaders held talks this week with the visiting Kyrgyz premier Omurbek Babanov and backed a pledge to provide "all-round support" for their small southern neighbor

²² 'UN envoy urges lifting of Burma sanctions' *Voice of America*, 24 February 2012, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/asia/UN-Envoy-Urges-Lifting-of-Burma-Sanctions-140355173.html>

²³ 'Court rejects Ba'asyir's appeal', *The Jakarta Post*, 27 February 2012, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/02/27/court-rejects-ba-asyir-s-appeal.html>

²⁴ "Atambayev kicks off three-day visit to Russia", *Universal Newswires*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11451>

²⁵ "Kremlin to pay \$15M military base debt to Kyrgyzstan", *Universal Newswires*, February 27, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11468>

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ "Almazbek Atambayev: Kyrgyzstan is not afraid of stick and does without carrot policy", *24.kg News Agency*, February 27, 2012 at <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2012/02/27/23136.html>

²⁸ "Central Asian security is essential, Medvedev tells Atambayev", *Universal Newswires*, February 24, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11464>

Kyrgyzstan, while discussing energy, water, and gas projects, including the Kambarata-1 hydropower project, which Samruk-Kazyna intends to support.²⁹

In another development, according to reports, the United States will not use the Manas Transit Center outside the Kyrgyz capital to attack Iran, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul said in response to allegations by Russia that the base could be used for this purpose.³⁰ Also, the U.S. officials last week reportedly visited the capitals of all five Central Asian republics in an effort to forge new agreements to facilitate U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan with an aim to create an alternative to using transit routes through volatile Pakistan.³¹ However the negotiations with Uzbekistan are stagnated, due to the high price Uzbekistan is trying to exact from U.S. officials to facilitate the distribution route.³²

Reports noted that President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who won the recent presidential election, reshuffled key posts in the oil and gas sectors, apart from the banking sector, with an aim to increase foreign investment in the hydrocarbon sector.³³

In the meanwhile, the Iranian press service Presstv.com reported the Tajik ambassador to Iran Dolat Ali Hatamov, welcoming the idea of purchasing more Iranian oil at a press conference in the Iranian capital Tehran.³⁴

In other developments, according to reports, the official number of drug addicts in Kyrgyzstan has risen by more than one-quarter over the last four years, an increase of 26.5 percent since 2007. This was noted by the national director of the Center on Addiction, Ruslan Tokubaev.³⁵ Russia and Kazakhstan are in negotiations for Kazakhstan's state-owned nuclear firm Kazatomprom to increase its stakes in a Russian nuclear armament plant wherein the Kazatomprom may pay as much as \$500 million to increase its share of Urals Electrochemical Combine to 49 percent, from 30 percent at the moment.³⁶

²⁹ "Babanov visit to Astana yields more economic cooperation", *Universal Newswires*, February 22, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kazakhstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11436>

³⁰ "US will not use Manas to attack Iran, ambassador says", *Universal Newswires*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kyrgyzstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11455>

³¹ "US negotiates Afghan exit strategy with regional leaders", *Universal Newswires*, February 27, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kazakhstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11472>

³² *ibid*

³³ "Shakeup in Turkmen energy, banking sectors", *Universal Newswires*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11452>

³⁴ "Tajikistan to buy Iranian crude, Iran says", *Universal Newswires*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11445>

³⁵ "Drug addict numbers rise by 26.5% in Kyrgyzstan", *Universal Newswires*, February 24, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11457>

³⁶ "Kazatomprom may buy \$500M stake in Russian nuclear plant", *Universal Newswires*, February 24, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11460>

Russia

(February 13-19)

- **Gazprom lowers gas prices for long term contracts with the EU and Turkey; Russia votes against the Egyptian led UN resolution on Syria; Egyptian Parliament to adopt resolution on Russia's pre-election situation; Skolkovo Foundation to showcase Russia's innovation possibilities; Front line Sukhoi 24 bombers to be replaced by Su-34s by 2020; Russia is ready to build a constructive relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt; Russia denies allegations that it has supplied offensive weapons to Syria; Russian and UAE foreign ministers to discuss the Syria situation in Moscow; Majority of Latvians against giving official status to Russian language; Foreign Minister to tour Netherlands on an official visit; Russia hopes to finish all negotiations to become a part of OECD by late 2013; League of Voters and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation agreed to cooperate in the upcoming Presidential elections in Russia**

According to reports, Gazprom has reduced gas prices by 10% for long term, energy contracts with the EU and Turkey. This step was caused by "mounting pressure to move away from oil-linked prices."³⁷

In another development, according to reports, Russia has voted against the Egyptian resolution on Syria at the UN General Assembly on the grounds that it was 'unbalanced' and targeted against only one side of the conflict.³⁸

Reports noted that the situation in Russia in the run-up to the presidential election will again be among the main issues on the agenda of a European Parliament meeting. Moreover, the body will also adopt a second resolution over the functioning of democratic institutions in Russia.³⁹

According to reports, a delegation of Skolkovo Foundation will hold a presentation to demonstrate possibilities of the Russian innovation centre to the British scientific and investment circles. The Skolkovo initiative is one of President Medvedev's biggest initiatives to usher in modernization in Russia and wean it away from a resource based economy.⁴⁰

Reports noted that Russia's Su-24 front-line bombers will be replaced by Su-34s by 2020 as part of Russia's massive military modernization programme.⁴¹

³⁷ "Gazprom lowers gas prices on long term contracts for the EU and Turkey", ITAR-TASS, February 17, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/345628.html>

³⁸ "Russia votes against unbalanced Syria resolution", ITAR-TASS, February 17, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/345260.html>

³⁹ "European Parliament to adopt resolution on Russia's pre-election situation", ITAR-TASS, February 16, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/344320.html>

⁴⁰ "Skolkovo Foundation to show Russia's innovation possibilities", ITAR-TASS, February 15, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/343177.html>

⁴¹ "Su-34s to replace Su-24 bombers by 2020 — Russian Air Force Com", ITAR-TASS, February 14, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/342098.html>

According to deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia is ready to build a constructive relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood that scheduled to take over power in Egypt.⁴² Meanwhile, Bogdanov also noted that Russia has never supplied offensive weapons to Syria and the weapons exported have always been defensive in nature.⁴³

According to reports, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his counterpart from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Sheikh Abdallah bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan have discussed the Syrian crisis and the prospects for resumption of LAS observer mission.⁴⁴

Reports noted that Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will begin a two-day visit to the Netherlands to discuss bilateral ties, including preparations for the cross-cultural year in 2013. The sides plan to focus on energy cooperation and sum up the results of a trade mission of the Netherlands to Russia within the framework Dutch prime minister's visit to Russia in October 2011. They are also expects to discuss international issues such as cooperation within the framework of the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, Russia's cooperation with the European Union and NATO as well as to exchange opinions on the situation in the Middle East, around Iran, Afghanistan and Syria.⁴⁵

According to reports, Russia's First Deputy Foreign Minister has said that Russia hopes to be through with the procedure of accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) toward the end of 2013.⁴⁶

In other developments, according to reports, Russia's League of Voters and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) have signed an agreement on cooperation in the forthcoming presidential polls due to take place on March 4. The Communist party also has a similar agreement to cooperate with the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and Just Russia party. The agreement involves jointly training observers, setting up information exchange centres and information dissemination.⁴⁷

(February 20-26)

- **Russia to pay its dues for using the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan; President Medvedev agrees to discuss reforms in the political system with the opposition parties; Russia supports**

⁴² "Russia ready to build constructive relations with Muslim Brotherhood – FM", ITAR-TASS, February 13, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/341809.html>

⁴³ "Moscow has never supplied offensive weapons to Syria", ITAR-TASS, February 13, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/341744.html>

⁴⁴ "Russia, UAE FMs to discuss Syrian crisis in Moscow", ITAR-TASS, February 13, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/340967.html>

⁴⁵ "Lavrov goes to The Hague to discuss ties, cross-cultural year", ITAR-TASS, February 14, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/341873.html>

⁴⁶ "Russia hopes to be through with OECD accession procedure by late 2013", ITAR-TASS, February 18, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/346205.html>

⁴⁷ "CPRF and the League of Voters ink an agreement to cooperate in presidential polls", ITAR-TASS, February 16, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/344427.html>

Kofi Annan as a joint UN-Arab League envoy; Russia and China discuss ways to bring out an acceptable solution to the Syrian crisis; Russia to continue its anti-piracy missions in the Somalian waters; Drug seizures continue to rise in Russia; Gazprom's pipeline projects to reduce Ukraine's transit role; Russian President and his Iranian counterpart discuss the prevailing situation in Syria; Russia does not object to Serbia's accession to the European Union; Russia's response to the deployment of American global missile defence system will be efficient and asymmetrical

According to reports, Russia has confirmed that its debt for the lease of the Kant base in Kyrgyzstan will be paid shortly, but admitted that Kyrgyzstan's debt to Russia is a more complex issue. While Russia is expected to pay around US\$ 15 million, Kyrgyzstan owes Russia close to 500 million US\$. The US also has a base in the country for staging military operations into Afghanistan.⁴⁸

In another development, President Dmitry Medvedev has agreed to have an interaction with non-registered parties over the reforms that can be brought into Russia's political set-up. The move can be seen as an attempt to at least hear out the opposition, one of the major rallying points of recent demonstrations in Russia.⁴⁹

According to reports, Russia has supported the former UN chief Kofi Annan as the joint United Nations-Arab League envoy for the Syrian crisis.⁵⁰

According to reports, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi discussed possible steps that can be taken for the settlement of the Syrian crisis.⁵¹

Reports noted that the Russian Navy will continue to participate in an international operation against pirates off Somalian waters but does not intend to deliver strikes on land bases of these pirates.⁵²

According to reports, the inflow of cocaine in Russia has increased by 20-30 percent this year. A major portion of the 400 tonnes of cocaine seized in Russia comes from Latin America with a bulk of the drug destined for Europe.⁵³

⁴⁸ "Moscow confirms debt for Kant base will be paid shortly", ITAR-TASS, February 25, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/351879.html>

⁴⁹ "Medvedev agrees to discuss reform of political system", ITAR-TASS, February 20, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/347670.html>

⁵⁰ "Russia supports Kofi Annan as a joint UN-Arab League envoy", ITAR-TASS, February 24, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/351096.html>

⁵¹ "Russia and China discuss steps needed for the settlement of Syrian crisis", ITAR-TASS, February 24, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/350882.html>

⁵² "Russian naval force to continue mission against Somali pirates", ITAR-TASS, February 24, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/350755.html>

⁵³ "Amount of cocaine seized in RF annually grows by 20-30%", ITAR-TASS, February 23, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/350312.html>

Reports noted that after the implementation of Gazprom's entire new pipeline projects including South Stream and Nord Stream, Ukraine's role as a transmitter of Russian gas will be reduced to zero. Russia and Ukraine have been locked in talks for transit fees which Russia must pay to Ukraine for transporting hydrocarbons to Europe. Russia has alleged that Ukraine siphoned off huge quantities of gas meant for Europe during the harsh winter of January 2012.⁵⁴

According to reports, President Dmitry Medvedev and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have discussed the prevailing situation in Syria. They called for an immediate peaceful resolution to the crisis without any external interference.⁵⁵

Reports noted that Russia does not object to Serbia's accession to the European Union but the country should keep in mind its relationship with Russia. Russia and Serbia have a free trade agreement and total trade is more than US\$800 million. However, there are apprehensions that the free trade agreement may not meet the legal requirements of EU membership process.⁵⁶

In other developments, according to reports, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has warned the United States that Russia's response to the deployment of a global missile defence system will be efficient and asymmetrical.⁵⁷

D. WEST ASIA

Iran

- **Top Israeli officials have openly accused Iran of being responsible for attacks in India, Thailand and Georgia; Loyalists of Khamenei look set to triumph in Iran's parliamentary elections; Ahmadinejad travelled to Pakistan and offered to boost bilateral trade**

According to reports, Israeli official stated that Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia are planning to carry out new anti-Israeli attacks around the world. Israel has been on high alert following bomb incidents in India, Thailand and Georgia. Top Israeli officials have openly accused Iran of being responsible and have also implicated Iran's Lebanese Shiite ally Hezbollah in several other foiled attempts to harm Israelis in Thailand and Azerbaijan since the start of the year. Meanwhile, Thailand has arrested two Iranians in connection with a series of blasts in Bangkok earlier this week, and police said they are looking for an Iranian woman who is thought to have fled the kingdom.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ "Gazprom's pipeline projects to reduce Ukraine's transit role to zero-Kupriyanov", ITAR-TASS, February 23, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/350164.html>

⁵⁵ "Medvedev, Ahmadinejad discuss "dramatic situation" in Syria", ITAR-TASS, February 22, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/350082.html>

⁵⁶ "Russia doesn't want Serbian accession to EU to harm its relations with Moscow", ITAR-TASS, February 21, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/348922.html>

⁵⁷ "RF response to US global missile defence to be efficient", ITAR-TASS, February 20, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/346954.html>

⁵⁸ "Iran, Hezbollah plotting new anti-Israeli attacks," *Khaleej Times*, February 17, 2012, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/February/middleeast_February525.xml§ion=middleeast

In another development, according to reports, loyalists of Iran's supreme leader, look set to triumph in Iran's parliamentary poll at the expense of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a contest among hardliners. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei turned against the man he backed in a disputed presidential vote in 2009 after Ahmadinejad challenged his authority over top government posts. But Khamenei remains in the driving seat and the outcome of the March 2 election is unlikely to alter Iran's defiance of the West over its nuclear programme, despite ever harsher sanctions and the possibility of an eventual military confrontation. An alliance of clerics, elite Revolutionary Guards and influential bazaar merchants has made sure many pro-Ahmadinejad politicians cannot register to run for the assembly. The Guardian Council has barred many Ahmadinejad supporters, forcing him to pick younger political unknowns. "They had no public link to Ahmadinejad's camp, but the Council was wise enough to spot them and around 45 percent of his supporters have been disqualified," said one official involved in the multi-layered vetting process. A list of qualified candidates will be announced on February 21.⁵⁹

In other developments, according to reports, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who was on a tour of Pakistan has offered to boost bilateral trade with Islamabad to \$10 billion within two months. The offer came as Islamabad is hosting a trilateral summit involving the presidents of the three neighbouring countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Iranian president held separate meetings with Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani. President Zardari stressed the need for enhancing economic cooperation with Iran and make joint efforts to promote regional peace and security. Zardari proposed encouraging barter and trading in local currencies besides removing tariff and non-tariff barriers.⁶⁰

Iraq

● Suicide bomb killed 20 and wounded many in Iraqi Police Academy

According to reports, a suicide bomber detonated his car as a group of police recruits left their academy in Baghdad, killing 20 people. According to Police sources, the suicide bomber was waiting on the street outside the fortified academy near the Interior Ministry headquarters in an eastern neighborhood in the Iraqi capital. As the crowd of recruits exited the compound's security barriers and walked into the road, police said the bomber drove toward them and blew up his car. Five policemen were among the dead; the rest were recruits. Another 28 recruits and policemen were wounded.⁶¹

⁵⁹ "Ahmadinejad seen big loser in Iran election," *Khaleej Times*, February, 17, 2012, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/February/middleeast_February522.xml§ion=middleeast

⁶⁰ "Iran-Pakistan trade can reach \$10 billion: Ahmadinejad," *Mehr News*, February 17, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1536167>

⁶¹ "20 people killed in Iraqi police academy blast," *Khaleej Times*, February 19, 2012, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle11.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/February/middleeast_February559.xml§ion=middleeast

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

Jammu & Kashmir

- **Sopore in North Kashmir observes complete shutdown in protest to youth's killing; Congress Panch shot at and injured; Sopore encounter leaves a militant killed and a soldier injured; Lashkar-e-Toiba militants killed in Kishtwar**

According to reports, Sopore observed a complete shutdown against the killing of a youth Omar Rasool Kaboo of Arampora by unidentified gunmen. A complete strike was observed in the area with all business establishments remaining closed and traffic being off the roads.

Scores of people including youth participated in the last rites of Omar. No militant outfit has so far owned responsibility for the youth's killing.⁶²

In another development, according to reports, unidentified gunmen shot at and injured a Panch at Tral in south Kashmir. The gunmen fired upon the Panch, Nazir Ahmed Lone son of Ghulam Qadir Lone at Khasipora Tral. Meanwhile, Police said that unknown persons also lobbed a grenade at Police Station Zadibal in old city.⁶³

According to reports, a militant was killed and a soldier injured in a gunfight in north Kashmir's Sopore town. Superintendent of Police Sopore, Imtiyaz Hussain said that a militant Akash Badar affiliated with Lashkar-e-Toiba outfit was killed in the gunfight.⁶⁴

In other developments, according to reports, Police and army claimed that two militants of Lashkar-e-Toiba were killed in a gunfight in the mountainous district of Kishtwar. Officials said the encounter started after a joint column of police, 17 Rashtriya Rifles and 74 battalion of CRPF, cordoned off a natural cave along the river Chenab in Banjwar area of Kishtwar, during the wee hours. The gunfight ended with killing of two militants.⁶⁵

North East India

- **Two suspected militants killed in Assam; Centre waiting for written proposal from NDFB(R) for further formal talks; GNLA leader escapes; Maoists' plan for North East comes in view;**

⁶² "Sopore shuts against youth's killing", *Greater Kashmir*, February 20, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Feb/21/sopore-shuts-against-youth-s-killing-76.asp>

⁶³ "Congress Panch shot at, injured", *Greater Kashmir*, February 20, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Feb/21/congress-panch-shot-at-injured-74.asp>

⁶⁴ "Militant killed, soldier injured in Sopore encounter", *Greater Kashmir*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Feb/22/militant-killed-soldier-injured-in-sopore-encounter-65.asp>

⁶⁵ "2 LeT militants killed", *Greater Kashmir*, February 26, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Feb/27/2-let-militants-killed-60.asp>

Former HNLC Chief held; Home Minister P. Chidambaram writes to ten Chief Ministers's on NCTC; Mob attack at Deithor police station leads to injuries

According to reports, two suspected militants were shot dead by security forces in Goalpara district after they opened fire at a checkpoint. The exchange of gunfire took place when two motorcycle borne militants fired at a mobile check post jointly set up by the police and the army at a place called Sign Board in the area. According to Superintendent of Police Luis Aind, the two militants are yet to be identified and confirm their affiliation to any particular militant outfit.⁶⁶

In another development, according to reports, the Centre is waiting for a written proposal from the Ranjan Daimary faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) for initiating the next step for formal talks with the outfit. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is unlikely to provide additional forces to Assam as per the request of the State Government. The Home Minister made it clear in the meeting with the Assam Chief Minister that the Centre would require a formal letter from the outfit expressing its desire for talks to initiate the next step like releasing Ranjan Daimary on bail. The issue of suspension of operations against the outfit will be decided only after formal talks begin.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, according to reports, dreaded militant leader of the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) Sohan D Shira, escaped a police dragnet at Samanda village, 18 kms from Williamnagar in East Garo Hills district. A combing operation by CRPF deployed in East Garo Hills led to the discovery of a hideout of the GNLA on a hill- top across the river Simsang during which there were about 12 heavily armed militants who opened fire on seeing the security forces. The army chief of GNLA Sohan D Shira was present in the house at the time of the encounter along with another militant leader identified as Jenny, area commander of Williamnagar. This is the fifth time the GNLA chief escaped security operations launched against his outfit.⁶⁸

According to reports, the Maoist rebels have designed a mega plan for the North East region as well as parts of Myanmar and Bangladesh. The plan has been unearthed by the security forces recently. Meanwhile, the police and security forces have also managed to get the names of at least a hundred Maoist members from Assam. The Maoists have designed a plan for creation of a confederation of states comprising the North East region, parts of Myanmar and the Sylhet area of Bangladesh. According to the plan, the states of the confederation would be created to represent smaller nationalities of the area.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "Two suspected militants killed in Assam", *The Assam Tribune*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2112/at04>

⁶⁷ "Centre awaiting written proposal from NDFB(R)", *The Assam Tribune*, February 20, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2112/at092>

⁶⁸ "GNLA leader escapes police dragnet", *The Assam Tribune*, February 21, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2212/oth07>

⁶⁹ "Maoists' mega plan for North East comes to light", *The Assam Tribune*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2412/at092>

Meanwhile, reports noted that Meghalaya Police arrested surrendered 'chairman' of the Hynñiewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) Julius Dorphang along with seven others for alleged assault, intimidation and damage of private property. All the arrested surrendered rebels were produced before the court of Additional District Magistrate under Khliehriat Sub-Division SC Laloo and were booked under Sections 120B, 447, 506 and 379 of the Indian Penal Code. Laloo remanded the accused to five days' police custody.⁷⁰

According to reports, breaking his silence over stiff opposition to his pet project NCTC, Home Minister P Chidambaram today wrote to 10 non-Congress Chief Ministers, saying that countering terrorism is a shared responsibility and Centre will continue to work with states to fight the menace. In identical letters to the Chief Ministers, including West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee, Chidambaram said the Union Home Secretary would convene a meeting of the police chiefs of all the states in this regard.⁷¹

In other developments, according to reports, four armed constables of 23rd IRBP and three civilians were injured when a mob of around 500 persons attacked Deithor police outpost. All the injured police personnel and civilians have been rushed to nearby Golaghat civil hospital after the incident.⁷²

III. UNITED NATIONS (UN) REVIEW

- **India votes against Syria's Assad regime in UNGA; Mandate of panel of experts on Sudan sanctions extended; Security Council alarmed at malnutrition levels in Sudan; Security Council delegation visits Haiti; UN General Assembly President meets Indian PM; India discusses post-2020 climate regime with BASIC counterparts**

Reports noted that India was among the 137 nations that voted in favour of a UN general Assembly draft resolution that urged the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down. The resolution backed by the Arab League condemned human rights violations and called for an end to the violence. Russia and China were among the 12 nations that voted against the resolution. While condemning the wide-spread violations of human rights in the nation, the resolution also expressed full support to the League's plan of halting the crackdown on anti-Assad demonstrators and urged the UN Secretary-General to appoint a special envoy to Syria.⁷³

⁷⁰ "Former HNLC chief held with 7 others", *The Assam Tribune*, February 23, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2412/oth05>

⁷¹ "PC writes to 10 CMs on NCTC", *The Assam Tribune*, February 24, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2512/at096>

⁷² "7 injured as mob attacks Deithor police outpost", *The Assam Tribune*, February 26, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2712/at094>

⁷³ "India votes in favour of UN resolution on Syria", *IBNLive*, February 17, 2012 at <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/india-votes-in-favour-of-un-resolution-on-syria/230985-2.html>

In another development, according to reports, the mandate of the panel of experts monitoring sanctions imposed on Sudan related to the Darfur conflict was extended by the UN Security Council for another year. The extension was due to the violence perpetrated by individuals associated with the Government against civilians and for impeding the peace process.⁷⁴

According to reports, the UN Security Council expressed alarm at the rising levels of malnutrition and food shortages in parts of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan which could deteriorate further if access is denied to international humanitarian aid. The 15-member body also called on the Sudanese government to give UN humanitarian personnel immediate access to the affected areas. It also encouraged the UN to strengthen engagement with the African Union (AU) and League of Arab States to address the humanitarian crisis. The Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North were urged to resume peace talks to address conflictual issues.⁷⁵

In the interim, reports noted that a Security Council delegation went on a four-day visit to Haiti, a country that has begun its transition towards reconstruction, job creation and capacity building post the 2010 devastating earthquake. The delegation assessed the implementation of relevant resolutions concerning MINUSTAH, the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti and to also discuss the situation in the country with the stakeholders.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, in his official visit to India, UN General Assembly President, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser discussed reform and revitalization of the UN with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. Other issues that were discussed included the forthcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), developments in Syria and state of world economy.⁷⁷

In other development, according to reports, as the world negotiates a post-2020 climate regime, India took a clear stand on 'equity' and the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. The prime Minister also said that India would work closely with the BASIC countries and group of 77+China. The meeting of the four BASIC countries was crucial as all of them are expected to submit their notes to the UN on how talks under the 'Durban Platform' for the post-2020 climate regime should be framed.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ "Sudan: Security Council extends mandate of panel on Darfur-related sanctions", *UN News Centre*, February 17, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41279&Cr=darfur&Cr1=>

⁷⁵ "Sudan: Security Council alarmed by humanitarian crisis in conflict-hit states", *UN News Centre*, February 14, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41237&Cr=sudan&Cr1=>

⁷⁶ "Security Council ambassadors begin official visit to Haiti", *UN News Centre*, February 13, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41226&Cr=haiti&Cr1=>

⁷⁷ "General Assembly President discusses global issues with Indian Prime Minister", *UN News Centre*, February 16, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41266&Cr=nasser&Cr1=>

⁷⁸ "Equity remains central plank of Indian climate stance: PM", *The Times of India*, February 17, 2012 at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-02-17/developmental-issues/31070614_1_durban-platform-climate-talks-targets-for-emission-reductions