

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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## I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

### A. South Asia

#### Afghanistan

- **Nine people killed in deadly car bomb attack at Jalalabad airport; NATO soldiers killed in southern Kandahar province**

According to reports, a Taliban suicide car bomber has killed at least nine people and wounded 10 others in an attack at Jalalabad airport in eastern Afghanistan. The insurgents said the bombing was in revenge for a Koran-burning incident at a US air base near Kabul a week ago. The burning, according to US officials, was unintentional, has sparked violent protests across the country.<sup>1</sup>

In another incident, according to NATO sources, two of its troops have been shot dead on a base in Afghanistan, the latest of several attacks after the burning of the Koran by US soldiers. NATO said a man in Afghan army uniform and another in civilian clothes opened fire in southern Kandahar province. The dead are believed to be US soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

#### Pakistan

- **Bin Laden hideout in Abbottabad demolished by Pakistani authority; Pakistan opens doors for trade with India by raising the number of items that can be imported from the country from 1,946 to almost 5,600; Pakistan refuses to budge on its decision on the gas pipeline deal with Iran despite the United State's pressure**

According to reports, Pakistani bulldozers on February 27, 2012 finished demolishing the house in Abbottabad's Bilal Town suburb where Osama bin Laden lived for at least five years until he was killed by US special forces last May. Bulldozers began the demolition work on February 25. The compound was under the control of Pakistani security forces since the Americans ended their covert operation on May 2.<sup>3</sup>

On the economic front, according to reports, Pakistan's federal cabinet on March 1, 2012 flung open the doors for trade with India by raising the number of items that can be imported from the country from 1,946 to almost 5,600. The decision overruled reservations of the ministries of textile and industries which had been pushing for restricted trade with India to protect domestic manufacturers. The cabinet's decision will allow the import of about 90 per cent of all the items that India normally exports. Before this decision, the 'positive list' allowed only 17 per cent Indian export items. From January 1, 2012 next year, India will be able to export all its products

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<sup>1</sup> "Afghan Taliban set off car bomb at Jalalabad airport", *BBC*, February 27, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17175568>

<sup>2</sup> "NATO soldiers shot dead in Afghanistan amid Koran anger", *BBC*, March 1, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17218152>

to Pakistan without restrictions. The cabinet also decided to do away with the 'negative' list of 1,209 items by the end of this year.<sup>4</sup>

In other developments, according to reports, Pakistan has refused to budge on its decision, despite the United State's pressure on the gas pipeline deal with Iran and has said that it will go ahead with the project. Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar said the project was in the interest of Pakistan. Khar was addressing a media briefing a day after the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned that the project was "inexplicable" and could invoke US sanctions that would further 'undermine' Pakistan's 'already shaky' economy.<sup>5</sup>

## Bangladesh

- **India lifts a ban on non-basmati rice and wheat through land custom stations to Bangladesh; Sri Lankan delegates visit Bangladesh; UNCTAD Secretary General called on Dipu Moni**

According to reports, India lifted a ban on non-basmati rice and wheat through land custom stations to Bangladesh that was imposed around four years back. Anup K Pujari, Director General of Foreign Trade of India, signed the letter that said private parties, including state trading enterprises like National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India, could now export non-basmati rice from privately held stocks.<sup>6</sup>

In another development, according to reports, a high-level six-member delegation led by Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Minister Amaraweera Mahinda is visiting Bangladesh to learn about the disaster management system of the country and to follow it in Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup>

In other developments, reports noted that Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and the visiting Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Supachai Panitchpakdi agreed on the imperative to correct imbalances in trade and development. This was underlined when the UNCTAD secretary general called on Dipu Moni at her office on February 29, 2012.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Pakistan finishes demolition of Bin laden hideout", *Dawn*, February 27, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/27/pakistan-finishes-demolition-of-bin-laden-hideout.html>

<sup>4</sup> "Restriction free trade with India after December", *Dawn*, March 1, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/01/restriction-free-trade-with-india-after-dec.html>

<sup>5</sup> "Pakistan rejects US pressure on gas project", *Dawn*, March 1, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/01/pakistan-rejects-us-pressure-on-gas-project.html>

<sup>6</sup> "India lifts ban on export of non-basmati rice, wheat", *The Daily Star*, February 27, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=224037>

<sup>7</sup> "Sri Lankan team in city", *The Daily Star*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=224204>

<sup>8</sup> "Dipu Moni urges Unctad to focus more on LDC issues", *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=224457>

## Sri Lanka

- **China, Pakistan, Russia, Thailand support Sri Lanka at the 19<sup>th</sup> sessions of the UNHRC; DMK: India should not support Sri Lanka; Prof. GL Peiris met Uganda's VP and PM; US clarifies the status of its military presence in Sri Lanka**

According to reports, China and Pakistan, Russia and Thailand threw their weight behind Sri Lanka at the 19th sessions of the United Nations' Human Rights Council (UNHRC) sessions. These countries stressed that Sri Lanka should be given more time and space to address post-war issues.<sup>9</sup>

In another development, DMK, a key constituent of the ruling UPA at the Centre, said India should not support Sri Lanka, which is facing war crime charges, at the hearings being conducted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.<sup>10</sup>

Reports noted that External Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris who is visiting several African countries to garner crucial support for Sri Lanka at the Geneva sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has met Uganda's Vice-President and Prime Minister on February 28, 2012.<sup>11</sup>

In other developments, according to reports, clarifying the status of its military presence in Sri Lanka, the United States said on March 3, 2012 that the references in the press to U.S. Special Forces being stationed in the country are misleading. Issuing a statement, the U.S. Embassy in Colombo said that the members of the U.S. military are assigned to work in the Embassy in Colombo as part of the bilateral engagement between the United States and Sri Lanka.<sup>12</sup>

## Maldives

- **India's Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai's visits Maldives; India provides a standby loan of US\$20 million to the Maldives; Chinese government offers to cover the damage to police stations and civic buildings in Addu City; Eleven Indian fishermen released**

India's Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai visited Maldives and called on President Dr Mohamed Waheed on February 28, 2012 at the President's Office. Discussions at the meeting were held on the country's current political situation. Foreign Secretary Mathai assured Indian government's assistance in the Maldives moving forward peacefully and constitutionally. At the meeting,

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<sup>9</sup> "China, Pakistan endorse GoSL's domestic reconciliation process", *The Island*, March 2, 2012 at [http://www.island.lk/index.php?page\\_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code\\_title=46552](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=46552)"Thailand pledges support for Sri Lanka in Geneva", *The Island*, February 28, 2012 at [http://www.island.lk/index.php?page\\_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code\\_title=46354](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=46354)

<sup>10</sup> "India must not support Lanka at UNHRC hearing: Karunanidhi", *The Daily Mirror*, February 29, 2012 at <http://www.dailymirror.lk>

<sup>11</sup> "GL meets Ugandan leaders for support at UNHRC", *The Daily Mirror*, March 1, 2012 at <http://www.dailymirror.lk>.

<sup>12</sup> "U.S. clarifies its military presence in Sri Lanka", *Colombo Page*, March 3, 2012 at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_12/Mar03\\_1330789347CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar03_1330789347CH.php).

President Waheed expressed his gratitude to the Indian government, and welcomed India's support in helping the country move forward.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, Mr. Mathai attended the all party road-map talks and heated up the discussions when the members of the party perceived that India was interfering with the internal affairs by attempting to "compel" the deliberations in a specific direction to rush an early election date. The claims by members of the all party road-map talks that the Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai had put forth an agreement to expedite finalizing a date for early presidential polls has been refuted by Joint Secretary (Maldives) External Affairs Ministry of India Mr. H. V. Shringla. In a press conference held at the Indian High Commission in Maldives, Shringla stressed that the role of the Indian government in the current political strife in the country was part of the sustained engagement in the assistance to the Maldives. Speaking on behalf of the foreign secretary, Shringla revealed that India had merely tried to facilitate dialogue by determining the "lowest common denominator" of the general consensus amongst all political parties to ensure a peaceful resolution to the standoff.<sup>14</sup>

In another development, according to reports, India has provided a standby loan of US\$20 million to the Maldives as the country descends into political turmoil. Indian High Commissioner to the Maldives, D M Mulay, told the Economic Times that the Indian government had expedited the delivery of the loan, which had been given to the Maldives government several days ago. US\$50 million in Maldives' treasury bonds held by the State Bank of India "has also been rolled over for another year", Mulay told reporters.<sup>15</sup>

Reports noted that the Chinese government had offered to cover the damage to police stations and civic buildings in Addu City, which were destroyed in the aftermath of a police crackdown on demonstrators in Male' on February 8, This was reportedly claimed by Economic Minister Ahmed Mohamed. However, Mr. Mohamed was not specific as to whether the offer to repair the Rf183 million (US\$11.8 million) in damage would take the form of a financial loan or foreign aid assistance.<sup>16</sup>

In other developments, according to reports, eleven Indian fishermen have been released after they were taken into custody by the Maldives National Defence Force Coastguard last week for straying into Maldivian waters. After a request by India's External Affairs Ministry, the fishermen were released into the care of the Indian High Commission in Male'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Indian Foreign Secretary calls on the President", *The President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6908>.

<sup>14</sup> Visham, Mohamed, "Won't interfere with the internal affairs of the Maldives: India", *Haveeru Online*, February 29, 2012 at [http://www.haveeru.com.mv/president\\_nasheed/40562](http://www.haveeru.com.mv/president_nasheed/40562)

<sup>15</sup> "India extends financial support to the Maldives", *Minivan News*, March 1, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>.

<sup>16</sup> "Chinese government offered to repair police stations, courts in Addu: Economic Minister", *Minivan News*, March 4, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>.

<sup>17</sup> "Detained Indian fishermen released", *Minivan News*, March 3, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>.

## B. East Asia

- **18<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministers meeting held in Myanmar; Vietnam opens hotline with China; Vietnam- China joint border committee meeting held; Aung San Suu Kyi fell ill during election campaign; India, Indonesia to fast track FTA talks; Singapore ship suspected of India's boat accident**

According to reports, the 18<sup>th</sup> ASEAN economic ministers' informal meeting was held in Nay Pyi Taw on February 27, 2012. The meeting, headed by the Cambodian commerce minister Cham Prasidh, focused its deliberations on forming an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. Matters related to cooperation between ASEAN nations, promotion of trade services and ASEAN framework implementation also figured in the meeting.<sup>18</sup>

In another development On March 2 2012, Vietnam and China opened a hotline between the foreign ministries of the two countries. Officials from the two sides pledged to coordinate closely to boost bilateral cooperation and take steps to strengthen Vietnam- China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, reports noted that Vietnam- China Land Border Joint Committee meeting was held in Ha Noi from 24- 27 February 2012. This was the second of the joint meeting series, which hailed the close cooperation between relevant ministries in implementing the Protocol on Border Demarcation and Market Placement, the Agreement on Border Management Regulations, the Agreement on Border Gates and Border Gates Management. In the meeting, it was also decided to accelerate the establishment of a border gate communication mechanism between the two sides.<sup>20</sup>

According to reports, the pro-democracy leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi fell sick on 3 March 2012, while campaigning for the election. Reports of Suu Kyi's frailing health have come out in public in the past few weeks, raising concerns about iconic leader and the democratic movement in Myanmar.<sup>21</sup>

In an important development, India and Indonesia have agreed to speed up the negotiations for early conclusion of the comprehensive market opening pact. This was decided on 3 March 2012 during the three day long visit of India's commerce and industry minister Anand Sharma. According to the reports, 'the two sides also deliberated on the widening the scope of free trade

<sup>18</sup> 'ASEAN economic ministers meet in Myanmar to push for community building', *The Philippine Star*, 27 February 2012, <http://www.philstar.com/article.aspx?articleid=781852&publicationsubcategoryid=200>

<sup>19</sup> 'Vietnam- China hotline opens', *BAOMOI*, 3 March 2012, <http://en.baomoi.com/Info/VietnamChina-hotline-opens/2/239623.epi>

<sup>20</sup> 'Vietnam- China joint land border committee meets', *Vietnam Plus*, 29 February 2012, <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/Home/VietnamChina-joint-land-border-committee-meets/20122/24544.vnplus>

<sup>21</sup> 'Myanmar Democracy Leader Falls Ill During Campaign Rally', *The New York Times*, 3 March 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/world/asia/daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-falls-ill-during-myanmar-rally.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/world/asia/daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-falls-ill-during-myanmar-rally.html?_r=1)

agreement between India- ASEAN, which would include services and investments. Indonesia is a member of ASEAN'.<sup>22</sup>

In other developments, the Singaporean ship MV Prabhu Daya is suspected to be involved in the Kerala boat accident in which two Indian fishermen were killed. As per media report, the Indian authorities suspect that MV Prabhu Daya may have been involved in the collision which happened on 1 March 2012 in the Arabian Sea, twenty nautical miles off the Kochi Harbour entrance.<sup>23</sup>

## C. Central Asia & Russia

### Central Asia

- **Tajikistan demands Russians for base rent; India needs Iran to connect to Central Asia; Riyadh to fund one of the transport corridors in Kyrgyzstan; World Bank to finance Kyrgyz hydroelectric facilities and canals; Kazakh defense ministry purchases 8 Airbus Military planes for maritime patrol; Kazakhstan to be alternative route for UK; Astana attempts to join UNHRC**

According to reports, the Tajik ambassador to Moscow Abdulmajid Dostiyevev said that Russia must start paying rent for use of military facilities in Tajikistan. He conceded that the Tajikistan would even accept 10 percent of the rent demanded last year by the Tajik Foreign Minister Khamrokhon Zarifi to a tune of \$300 million per year for the four bases that Russia uses.<sup>24</sup>

In another development, according to reports, notwithstanding the U.S. pressure to scale down its engagement with Iran, official sources in New Delhi said that Iran not only remains an important source of oil for India, but is crucial to opening up routes to Central Asian and Caucasian countries, where New Delhi's quest for hydrocarbons and minerals is gathering critical mass.<sup>25</sup>

Reports noted that Saudi Arabia will fund \$15 million for the construction of the critical road, stretching from the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek through central town Naryn to the border town with China, Torugart.<sup>26</sup> This will be one of the six priority transport corridors in the region. In order to improve farm irrigation in Kyrgyzstan, the World Bank offers to fund the reconstruction of nearly 2,000 hydroelectric facilities and canals.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 'India, Indonesia agree to fast track FTA talks', *Rediff*, 5 March 2012, <http://www.rediff.com/business/report/india-indonesia-agree-to-fast-track-fta-talks/20120305.htm>

<sup>23</sup> 'Singapore ship suspected in Kerala boat accident' *DNA*, 4 March 2012, [http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report\\_singapore-ship-suspected-in-kerala-boat-accident\\_1658240](http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_singapore-ship-suspected-in-kerala-boat-accident_1658240)

<sup>24</sup> "Tajikistan latest Central Asian state to pressure Russia for base rent", *Universal Newswires*, February 29, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11485>

<sup>25</sup> Undeterred India for moving ahead with Iran", *The Hindu*, March 01, 2012 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2947231.ece>

<sup>26</sup> "Saudi Arabia to finance part of Kyrgyz thoroughfare", *Universal Newswires*, March 01, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11503>

<sup>27</sup> "World Bank to fund reconstruction of 2,000 Kyrgyz hydro facilities", *Universal Newswires*, March 01, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11500>

According to reports, the Kazakh defense ministry has purchased two planes from Airbus Military, a subsidiary of European aerospace firm EADS, and has placed an order for six more. The planes are of the C295 model, and are to be used for maritime patrol.<sup>28</sup>

Reports noted that Kazakh Defense Minister Adilbek Dzhaksybekov and his British counterpart on 27<sup>th</sup> February inked a military transit deal that would permit Britain to open up an overland supply route to get military equipment out of Afghanistan, after Pakistan closed a vital supply route to NATO troops.<sup>29</sup>

In other developments, reports noted that Kazakhstan has put forward its application to join the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) from 2013-2015, despite the fact that it has in recent months has come under scrutiny for human rights abuses, especially following the brutal crackdown on union protesters last year in the restive western province of Zhanaozen.<sup>30</sup> In the meanwhile, Kazakh state-owned oil and gas firm KazMunaiGas (KMG) recently secured a \$4 billion loan from Kazakhstan's general welfare fund, Samruk-Kazyna, to develop the Kashagan project.<sup>31</sup>

## Russia

- **Prime Minister Putin offers the EU an option to create a common energy complex; NATO Secretary General Rasmussen: There has been no progress in Russia-NATO talks on missile defence negotiations; Russia and EU diplomats to discuss Syria and bilateral relations; Putin assures people that there will be no additional restrictions on the political system in case he gets elected to the office of President; Russia to continue its support to Iraq in its endeavour to create a functional state; Gazprom offers Ukraine a cut of 10% in gas prices; Putin wins 63% of total Presidential votes; Russia offers to restore diplomatic ties with Georgia and enact a visa regime for the Georgian citizens; President Medvedev signs the law on ratification of CSTO charter protocol**

According to reports, Prime Minister Putin has offered to the European Union an option to create a common energy complex with Russia and cancel the third energy package. He also felt that the abolishment of visas will give a strong impetus to a real integration between Russia and the EU and promote cultural and business ties, particularly between small and medium businesses.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Kazakh defense ministry buys 8 Airbus Military planes", *Universal Newswires*, March 01, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11495>

<sup>29</sup> "UK to exit Afghanistan via Kazakhstan", *Universal Newswires*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kazakhstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11479>

<sup>30</sup> "Kazakhstan eyes UNHRC membership", *Universal Newswires*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kazakhstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11482>

<sup>31</sup> "KMG gets \$4B loan to develop Kashagan", *Universal Newswires*, February 29, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11494>

<sup>32</sup> "Putin offers EU to create common energy complex", ITAR-TASS, February 27, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/352447.html>

In another development, NATO Secretary General Andres Fogh Rasmussen has said that there have been no progress in the missile defence negotiations with Russia which may result in the postponement of the Russia-NATO Council meeting schedules to be held in Chicago in May 2012.<sup>33</sup>

Reports noted that Russian and EU diplomats will meet on 29<sup>th</sup> February to discuss a range of bilateral and international issues including developments in Syria and North Africa.<sup>34</sup>

According to reports, Prime Minister Putin has said that there will not be any additional restriction on the political system in case he wins the March 4 Presidential elections.<sup>35</sup>

According to reports, Russia will continue to provide assistance and support to Iraq in the implementation of its plans to establish a strong, democratic, independent state with effective territorial integrity. President Medvedev has said that Russia is interested in implementation of infrastructure projects, including those in energy, agriculture, water resources, science, culture and training.<sup>36</sup>

Reports noted that Gazprom has presented a draft agreement to Neftegaz Ukrainy which envisages a 10% cut in prices of gas exported to Ukraine.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, according to reports, Russia has offered to restore diplomatic ties with Georgia and enact a visa regime for the Georgian citizens.<sup>38</sup>

In other developments, reports noted that President Medvedev has signed the Federal Law "On Ratification of the Protocol Amending the Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) of October 7, 2002." The Protocol provides for the specification of the CSTO activities' sphere aimed at building an effective system of collective security and system for responding to crises that threaten the security, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the CSTO member states.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "No progress at missile defense negotiations with Russia, Rasmussen said", ITAR-TASS, February 28, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/354451.html>

<sup>34</sup> "Russian, EU diplomats discuss Syria, bilateral relations", ITAR-TASS, February 29, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/355534.html>

<sup>35</sup> "Putin says will not tighten political system", ITAR-TASS, March 2, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/356827.html>

<sup>36</sup> "RF to continue supporting Iraq in establishing its state", ITAR-TASS, March 1, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/356422.html>

<sup>37</sup> "Gazprom presents draft agreement cutting gas price by 10%", ITAR-TASS, March 2, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/357715.html>

<sup>38</sup> "Moscow offers Tbilisi to restore diplomatic relations", ITAR-TASS, March 2, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/357630.html>

<sup>39</sup> "Medvedev signs law on ratification of CSTO Charter Protocol", ITAR-TASS, March 1, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/356196.html>

## D. West Asia

### Iran

- **European Union Foreign Policy Chief Ashton: Negotiations between Tehran and world powers could begin soon; A sum of 32 to 33 million Iranians votes in Iran's ninth parliamentary elections; Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson: British foreign secretary's remarks once again reveals British officials' interventionist policies:**

According to reports, European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton has noted that that negotiations between Tehran and world powers could begin soon. Ashton said that an offer of dialogue issued by chief Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili on February 14 "suggests we should consider getting into talks." Jalili wrote to Ashton on February 14 offering negotiations and proposing they resume in Turkey. The top EU diplomat represents the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany in talks with Iran. She said those states were working "to look at whether we think it is sufficient to get into talks and I am cautiously optimistic about that."<sup>40</sup>

In another development, according to reports, informed sources said that a sum of 32 to 33 million Iranians have voted in the country's 9th parliamentary elections on March 2, putting the public participation rate at around 66%. Although official sources, including interior ministry and Guardian Council officials, have not released any figure about the number of participants in Iran's 9th parliamentary elections. Over 48 million Iranian voters were eligible to cast their ballots in the legislative polls. More than 5,400 have registered to run in the race for the 290 parliamentary seats. The Guardian Council had approved the competence of more than 3,269 hopefuls.<sup>41</sup>

In other developments, according to reports, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast dismissed as baseless British Foreign Secretary William Hague's claims about Iran's March 2 parliamentary election. According to Reuters, Hague claimed that Iran's parliamentary election was not free and fair and did not reflect the will of the people. He has said that "It has been clear for some time that these elections would not be free and fair. The (Iranian government) has presented the vote as a test of loyalty, rather than an opportunity for people freely to choose their own representatives." Mehmanparast said that British foreign secretary's remarks once again revealed British officials' interventionist policies and their frustration out of the failure of their hostile plans against the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Ashton says Iran and major powers could resume talks soon," *Mehr News*, February 28, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1546164>

<sup>41</sup> "Informed Sources Put Turnout Rate in Iran's Friday Elections at 66%," *Fars News*, March 3, 2012, at <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9012125030>

<sup>42</sup> "Hague's remarks on Iranian polls are out of UK frustration," *Mehr News*, March 4, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1551416>

## Iraq

- **Iraq's Deputy Interior Minister Adnan al-Assadi: Baghdad and Riyadh discuss ways of working together on major issues**

According to reports, a senior Iraqi security official hailed improving security ties with neighbouring Saudi Arabia amid a tentative rapprochement between the two countries in recent weeks. Iraq's Deputy interior minister Adnan al-Assadi said Baghdad and Riyadh had already discussed working together on measures against terrorism, illegal narcotics, organised crime and cross-border smuggling, and would soon hold talks on prisoner exchanges. The warming of ties comes after Saudi Arabia appointed a non-resident ambassador to Iraq on February 20, the Sunni kingdom's first envoy to the Shiite-majority country since Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. It came after a visit to Saudi Arabia by Assadi and Iraqi National Security Adviser Falah al-Fayadh, during which they met with the kingdom's intelligence chief Prince Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz and assistant interior minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who is the kingdom's top counter-terror official. The statement said the Iraqi officials visited Saudi Arabia after an invitation from Saudi Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, who is also the interior minister.<sup>43</sup>

## II. DEFENCE REVIEW

### National

- **Indo-US war games to be conducted in Rajasthan desert in 2<sup>nd</sup> week of March 2012; India holds major military exercises along the Chinese border**

According to reports, the Indian Army is all set to undertake two major exercises in Rajasthan desert, including one with the US Army titled "Yudh Abhyas 2012", to fine tune its war fighting strategies. For the exercise with USA to be held in March second week, an advance group of 30 US military personnel, along with a platoon of its trademark armoured vehicle Stryker and support equipment landed in New Delhi on Monday. The rest of the contingent comprising another 170 personnel is expected to arrive soon. They will move straight to the training area in Rajasthan where the exercise will be conducted under the aegis of the South Western Command. Strykers came to India for the first time in 2009 for an exercise with the Indian Army at Babina near Jhansi. That was for the first time Stryker was deployed in anywhere Asia other than Afghanistan where these heavy duty armoured personnel carrier were put to use. The 2012 Indo-US joint exercise is designed to promote cooperation at the tactical level while sharing training procedures and building joint operating skills. During the exercise, troops from both nations will engage in joint planning for a variety of missions, including live fire drills, cordon and search operations and search and rescue training.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> "Iraq hails improving Saudi security ties," *Khaleej Times*, February 29, 2012, at [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/February/middleeast\\_February816.xml&section=middleeast&col=](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/February/middleeast_February816.xml&section=middleeast&col=)

<sup>44</sup> "India, US set for major war games in Rajasthan desert," *Deccan Herald*, February 27, 2012, at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/230602/india-us-set-major-war.html>

In another development, according to reports, India has begun major military exercises along the Chinese border involving Special Forces of the Army and frontline fighters such as Su-30MKI as part of the endeavour to be battle ready in the inhospitable mountainous region. The exercise is Code-named as 'Pralay' (devastation). The day-and-night exercises are mainly dominated by the aerial manoeuvres with support by ground forces. The four-day exercises in the north-eastern sector, including Arunachal Pradesh, began, coinciding with the official India visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jeichi here. China has been laying claim over entire Arunachal Pradesh and voices objections whenever any senior union minister visits the state. IAF spokesman said the exercises were taking place "along the Brahmaputra river and eastern region" and "involves joint Army-Air Force operations by Eastern Air Command and Army Eastern Command." The exercise is aimed at testing the combat potential of the IAF in various roles such as air defence, ground support operations, counter air operations and electronic warfare, he said. Besides the frontline Su-30MKI, Mirage-2000, MiG-29 and Jaguar fighter aircraft, IAF would be flying the strategic lift C-130J transport plane along with AN-32 and the AWACS. "Apart from war fighting in the skies, various ground contingencies related to Air Force operations are being tested," the IAF spokesman said, adding that lessons learnt from this exercise would be incorporated in future operational strategies. Army would also be using the remotely piloted aircraft for the exercise.<sup>45</sup>

## International

- **Switzerland boosts its exports of military equipment by 36 percent last year; US top commander claims China more restrained after Clinton's strong statements**

According to reports, Switzerland boosted its exports of military equipment, mainly training aircraft and air-defense systems, by 36 percent last year from the 2010 level, official data showed on February 28. The value of the exports totaled 872.7 million Swiss francs (\$973 million). A big factor behind the increase was the export of unarmed military training aircraft to the United Arab Emirates amounting to 258.1 million Swiss francs (\$287.6 million), the Swiss Department of Economic Affairs said in a statement released. Switzerland also delivered wheeled armored vehicles to Germany and Belgium as well as air-defense systems to Germany.<sup>46</sup>

In another development, a top U.S. commander, Adm. Robert Willard, the head of the U.S. Pacific Command which covers Asia, said China was still actively staking claims in the South China Sea and challenging vessels that conduct operations in the hotly disputed waters. But in an appearance before Congress, Willard said, "We've seen fewer confrontations in 2012 than we did in previous years. 2010 was quite landmark in terms of the confrontations." Willard further

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<sup>45</sup> "India holds military exercises close to China border," The Times of India, March 01, 2012, at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-03-01/india/31113443\\_1\\_military-exercises-iaf-c-130j](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-03-01/india/31113443_1_military-exercises-iaf-c-130j)

<sup>46</sup> "Switzerland Defense Sales Up 36 Percent in 2011," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, February 28, 2012, at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120228/DEFREG01/302280002/-1/7daysarchives/Switzerland-Defense-Sales-Up-36-Percent-2011>

<sup>47</sup> "U.S. Commander: Friction with China Ebbing," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120228/DEFREG03/302280008/-1/7daysarchives/U-S-Commander-Friction-China-Ebbing>

noted that “very strong statements” by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former defense secretary Robert Gates and members of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations likely affected China’s thinking. The public comments “I think took China aback and has caused them to reconsider that particular approach to their South China Sea claims,” he said. “They are endeavoring to continue to pursue it, but in a more thoughtful manner,” he added in response to a question from the Senate Armed Services Committee.<sup>47</sup>

### III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

#### Jammu & Kashmir

- **Protest erupted in Pulwama over power shortage; Media continued to boycott J&K Assembly proceedings; Two Kashmiri youths held in the Capital; Hurriyat Conference Chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani may be questioned by the India’s Ministry of Home Affairs**

According to reports, massive protests erupted in Pulwama over continued breakdown of electricity in the area following a fire incident at the local receiving station a month back. The town also observed complete shutdown to protest official neglect. Hundreds of protesters took to streets raising slogans against the state government over its failure to restore the damaged transformer at the local receiving station. The shops and other business establishments remained closed while the traffic was also off the roads. The protesters also attacked the motorcade of Member Parliament Ghulam Nabi Ratanpuri.<sup>48</sup>

In another development, according to reports, media continued to boycott the coverage of proceedings of state legislature on second consecutive day against the controversial remarks made by Speaker Muhammad Akbar Lone. Despite intervention of Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Ali Muhammad Sagar, Chief Minister’s Political Advisor Devender Singh Rana and several MLAs to end the deadlock, nearly 100 media persons staged a sit-in outside the Assembly complex seeking to expunge the remarks of the Speaker from the records of the House. Lone had earlier remarked that the media is under his control and they need to reveal their sources. This created resentment among the media persons who immediately left the press gallery and decided to boycott the ongoing proceedings.<sup>49</sup>

According to reports, two youths who were recently arrested by Delhi Police on the charges of planning to carry out bomb blasts in New Delhi, hail from north Kashmir’s Sopore area. Sources said the JK Police had provided the tip off to the Delhi Police about the duo.

The Union Home Minister P Chidambaram had, at a press conference in Delhi said that the

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<sup>48</sup> “Protests rock Pulwama over power shortage”, *Greater Kashmir*, February 27, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Feb/28/protests-rock-pulwama-over-power-shortage-76.asp>

<sup>49</sup> “Media continues Assembly Boycott”, *Greater Kashmir*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Feb/29/media-continues-assembly-boycott-51.asp>

security agencies busted Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) sponsored militant module in the national capital by arresting two militants who were planning to attack a crowded locality with bombs.<sup>50</sup>

In other developments, according to reports, Hurriyat Conference (G) chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani may be questioned by the Delhi Police in connection with the visa recommendation given to an alleged Lashkar-e-Taiba militant who was planning to bomb Delhi. Official sources said a copy of the recommendation letter given by Geelani for getting a Pakistan visa was found in the papers seized from 24-year old Ahtesham Malik, arrested by the Delhi Police recently.<sup>51</sup>

## North East India

**Repolling to be held on March 4 in some constituencies of Manipur; Two hurt in Guwahati grenade blast; Police convoy attacked by GNLA rebels; ULFA linkman arrested in Meghalaya; Blast destroys power tower**

Reports noted that the Election Commission of India ordered re-poll in 67 polling stations of 9 Assembly seats across five hills districts in Manipur on March 4. Fresh polls will now be held between 7 am and 3 pm in Manipur. Re-poll has been ordered in 25 polling stations in Chandel (ST) seat and Tengnoupal (ST) in Chandel district, 13 in Karong (ST), 10 in Tadubi (ST), 6 in Mao (ST), 2 in Saikul (ST) in Senapati district, 8 in Tamei (ST) in Tamenglong district, one in Chingai (ST) in Ukhrul district and Singhat (ST) in Churachandpur district. Polling had been countermanded following complains from 10 non-Congress parties in connection with the detection of alleged malpractices in many polling stations in the January 28 Assembly polls.<sup>52</sup>

In another development, according to reports, two days before the Budget session of the Assam Legislative Assembly is scheduled to begin, unidentified miscreants on February 28, lobbed a grenade near Punjab National Bank on the RG Baruah Road, injuring two persons. The grenade, according to police, was lobbed from the other side of the road and exploded near an auto rickshaw which was moving towards Ganeshguri. The driver of the auto-rickshaw is among one of the injured.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, reports noted that a senior police official and his convoy narrowly escaped an ambush by a heavily-armed group of the Garo National Liberation Army at Ramdapara area in West Garo Hills district. Ampati Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Sacheng R Marak and his convoy travelling to Dalu from Tura were ambushed by about ten heavily-armed GNLA cadres. The

<sup>50</sup> "2 Kashmiri youth held in Delhi", *Greater Kashmir*, February 29, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/1/2-kashmiri-youth-held-in-delhi-79.asp>

<sup>51</sup> "Geelani may be questioned: MHA", *Greater Kashmir*, March 2, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/3/geelani-may-be-questioned-mha-42.asp>

<sup>52</sup> "Manipur repoll on March 4", *The Assam Tribune*, March 4, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0112/oth05>

<sup>53</sup> "2 hurt in city grenade blast", *The Assam Tribune*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2912/at05>

<sup>54</sup> "Police convoy comes under GNLA ambush", *The Assam Tribune*, February 28, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2912/at098>

GNLA placed themselves on a strategically placed hill in the area and opened heavy fire on the convoy. However, the convoy retaliated and managed to drive the GNLA cadres into the nearby forest after an hour's gunbattle.<sup>54</sup>

According to reports, a Bangladeshi linkman of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and Garo National Liberation Army was arrested in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills district when he sneaked into India from the neighbouring country. BSF troopers seized a cellphone with Bangladesh SIM card from Marak's possession. During questioning, Marak revealed that he was staying in Samalchura area in Bangladesh's Sherpur district and that he has been working for ULFA for the last 10 years and got involved with GNLA during previous year.<sup>55</sup>

In other developments, according to reports, an improvised explosive device (IED) allegedly planted by anti-talk faction of ULFA exploded at Borpathar in Sivasagar district, damaging a power transmission tower of NEEPCO. Police said three IEDs, weighing nearly a kg, were planted on the power transmission tower and one of them exploded damaging the tower. The other two IEDs were later defused by the army bomb squad. The tower transmits electricity from Assam Power Generation Corporation Limited's Lakwa Thermal Power Station (LTPS) at Maibella. The police suspect ULFA anti-talk faction had caused the explosion to threaten the pro-talk faction of the outfit chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, who hails from the area.<sup>56</sup>

## IV. UNITED NATIONS (UN) REVIEW

- **UNSC calls for prompt action to fight piracy in Gulf of Guinea, India expresses readiness; India abstains from UNHRC resolution on Syria; Prosecutor for war crimes tribunal appointed**

According to reports, the UN Security Council urged the countries of the Gulf of Guinea region to take prompt action to develop and implement counter piracy and armed robbery at sea. The countries were also urged to work through regional organizations towards convening of the planned joint summit of Gulf of Guinea States to develop a regional anti-piracy strategy in cooperation with the African Union.<sup>57</sup> On the same occasion, India expressed its readiness to contribute to international efforts to tackle the threat of piracy. The Indian representative to the Council also added that it was quite possible that the failure of the international community to act decisively against piracy off the coast of Somalia could have spawned a new surge in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> "ULFA linkman nabbed in Meghalaya", *The Assam Tribune*, March 1, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0112/at044>

<sup>56</sup> "Blast destroys power tower", *The Assam Tribune*, March 4, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0512/at092>

<sup>57</sup> "Security Council urges prompt action by Gulf of Guinea nations to counter piracy", *UN News Centre*, February 29, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41420&Cr=gulf+of+guinea&Cr1=>

<sup>58</sup> "India ready to help fight piracy in Africa", *IANSA*, February 28, 2012 at [http://twocircles.net/2012feb28/india\\_ready\\_help\\_fight\\_piracy\\_africa.html](http://twocircles.net/2012feb28/india_ready_help_fight_piracy_africa.html)

Meanwhile, India and two other countries abstained from the UN Human Rights Council resolution that called on Syria to end all rights abuses and to allow aid agencies 'free and unimpeded' access to the victims. Out of the 47 members of the body, 37 voted in favour and 3 abstained. Russia and China voted against the text.<sup>59</sup>

In other developments, a prosecutor was appointed by the UN Security Council for a term of four years to finish the remaining tasks of the UN war crimes tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, while the body's president was appointed by the UN General-Secretary.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "UN Human Rights Council deplores 'brutal' actions by Syria against civilians", *UN News Centre*, March 01, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41425>

<sup>60</sup> "UN appoints senior officials to help finish work of war crimes tribunals", *UN News Centre*, February 29, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41417&Cr=criminal+tribunals&Cr1=>