

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

- **At least nine Afghan police personnel killed in an insurgent attack in the southern province of Uruzgan; US to hand over prisons to Afghanistan**

According to reports, nine Afghan police personnel were killed in an insurgent attack in the southern province of Uruzgan on March 6, 2012. This attack was believed to have been facilitated by a fellow officer and suspected Taliban infiltrator. The attack follows a wave of incidents in recent weeks in which members of the Afghan security forces have turned their weapons on their NATO and US allies. It would be worth noting that six American soldiers, two of them senior US military advisers, were killed by their Afghan colleagues last month as the country was gripped by anti-US riots over the accidental burning of the Koran at a military base.¹

In another development, according to reports, Afghanistan and the US have reached a deal to transfer US-run prisons in the country to Afghan control. The largest and most controversial of these is Bagram jail, which holds 3,000 detainees, including terror suspects. Under the deal the US will cede control of Bagram over six months. Reports say they will retain access and be able to block the release of certain detainees. Handing over US-run jails has been a key demand of Afghan President Hamid Karzai ahead of NATO's withdrawal.²

Pakistan

- **Pakistan government appoints Lt Gen Zahir ul Islam as new chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI); Pakistan tests ballistic missile; Khar states options to end energy crisis available; Pakistan Taliban Deputy Head removed; Ahle Sunna wal Jammāt banned by Pakistan**

In an important development, Pakistan government has appointed Lt Gen Zahir ul Islam as the next head of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the country's premier intelligence agency, ending speculations about giving another extension to Lt Gen Shuja Pasha. "Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has appointed Lt General Zahir ul Islam as new Director General Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)," a brief statement issued on Friday by the prime minister's office said without giving further details. His appointment was made on the recommendation of Army Chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. Gen Islam, who is currently the Commander of V Corps, Karachi, will take charge of his new assignment on March 18 when Gen Pasha will retire after heading the ISI for over three years. Reports noted that Gen Pasha's strong loyalty to the army chief earlier won

¹ "At least Nine Afghan police killed, infiltrator suspected", *Dawn*, March 8, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/08/at-least-nine-afghan-police-killed-infiltrator-suspected.html>

² "US deal to hand Bagram and other prisons to Afghans", *BBC*, March 9, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17312911>

him two one-year extensions in 2010 and 2011. The position of the Commander of Karachi V Corps will be filled by Lt Gen Ejaz Chaudhry, currently the Director General of Rangers, Sindh.³

According to reports, Pakistan said on March 5, 2012 that it had successfully test fired a short-range ballistic missile capable of carrying atomic warheads. The Hatf II (Abdali) has a range of 180 kilometres (113 miles) and carries nuclear as well as conventional warheads with “high accuracy”, the military said in a statement. “It provides an operational level capability to Pakistan’s strategic forces, additional to the strategic and tactical level capability which Pakistan already possesses,” the statement said.⁴

In another development, according to reports, Pakistan Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar said on March 5, 2011 that Pakistan would avail itself of all available opportunities, including the Iran gas pipeline project, to overcome its energy crisis. Ms Khar, who was addressing a press conference, said Pakistan would not depend on any one solution but would also pursue the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, besides the Iran gas. Answering a question about US concerns over the Pak-Iran pipeline project, she said “we cannot be selective in this regard and we will complete this project to overcome the energy crisis.” The minister said a new era of trust had begun in ties with India and an uninterrupted dialogue had improved the level of confidence.⁵

According to reports, the head of the Pakistani Taliban Hakimullah Mehsud has removed his deputy commander Maulvi Faqir Mohammad, who was the second-highest ranking Taliban leader, at a Taliban council of leaders on March 4, 2012.

No reason was given but correspondents say the move is the latest sign of a rift within the group. Maulvi Faqir Mohammad has not yet been replaced by another militant commander. A spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban - known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - told BBC Urdu that he had been removed with immediate effect but that the Taliban leadership was considering appointing him to some other position within the group.⁶

In other developments, according to reports, Pakistan’s government has issued orders banning the country’s largest Islamic extremist group. Ahle Sunnah Wal Jamaat was first banned in 2002 by then Pakistani leader Gen Pervez Musharraf. Activists from the pro-al-Qaeda group formerly known as the Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP), or Soldiers of the Companions of the Prophet, have been convicted of killing hundreds of Shia Muslims. Other minorities, security targets and embassies have also been targeted by members of the group. The group has also recently been in the forefront of an alliance of extremist groups calling for an end to the country’s relationship with

³ “Gen Zahir to replace Pasha in ISI”, *Dawn*, March 10, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/10/gen-zahir-to-replace-pasha-in-isi.html>

⁴ “Pakistan test fires short range ballistic missile”, *Dawn*, March 5, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/05/pakistan-test-fires-short-range-ballistic-missile.html>

⁵ “All options on table to end energy crisis: Khar”, *Dawn*, March 6, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/06/all-options-on-table-to-end-energy-crisis-khar.html>

⁶ “Pakistan Taliban removes deputy head Maulvi Faqir Mohammad”, *BBC*, March 5, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17256129>

the US, the Defence of Pakistan Council (Difa). However, the head of the group described the ban as preposterous.⁷

Bangladesh

- **India will place the Mujib-Indira Treaty of 1974 in Parliament for discussion about its ratification; Bangladesh's exports to India will cross \$ 1 bn; Korea trains officials of Jatiya Sangsad on renewable energy**

According to reports, India has informed Bangladesh that it would place the historic Mujib-Indira treaty of 1974 in its parliament for discussion for its ratification. The assurance came following a formal request made by Home Minister Shahara Khatun during her February 24-25 visit to India when she met Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and her counterpart P Chidambaram.⁸

In another development, reports noted that the country's exports to India will cross \$1 billion mark this year on the back of duty benefits for Bangladeshi products in Indian market, said the foreign affairs adviser to the Prime Minister, Gowher Rizvi. Mr. Rizvi said around 98 percent of Bangladeshi products now enjoy zero-duty benefit in the Indian market, which will double Bangladesh's exports to the country this year.⁹

In other developments, according to reports, South Korea will train five officials of Jatiya Sangsad on renewable energy under the programme of "Solar Power System in Bangladesh Parliament", supported by Korea International Cooperation Agency (Koica). The two-week training, beginning on March 11 in Seoul and Seongnam in South Korea, would help the trainees learn more about solar power system and new regeneration energy.¹⁰

Sri Lanka

- **US resolution against Sri Lanka at the UNHRC 19th sessions in Geneva; China, Pak, Russia and African states support Sri Lanka; India silent on the resolution; Japanese Envoy to Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka should implement the recommendation made by the LLRC; Attack on Indian Fishermen; Douglas Devananda interacts with the representative of Fisheries associations in Tamil Nadu; 4th Session of Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation; High-profile banking delegation visits Qatar; Sri Lanka is to obtain a US\$ 278 million loan from China to extend the Southern coastal railway line; Japan to provide US\$ 12.5 million grant assistance to Sri Lanka; Iran will continue to provide loan facilities for 1,000 rural electricity projects in Sri Lanka**

According to reports, the United States has submitted the draft resolution against Sri Lanka to

⁷ "Pakistan bans Ahle Sunna Wal Jamaat Islamist Group", *BBC*, March 9, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17322095>

⁸ "India pledges to ratify Mujib-Indira treaty", *The Daily Star*, March 6, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=225180>

⁹ "Exports to India will cross \$1b mark: PM's adviser", *The Daily Star*, March 7, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=225267>.

¹⁰ "Korea to train 5 officials on renewable energy", *The Daily Star*, March 9, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=225588>

the United Nations Human Rights Council at its 19th session in Geneva. The draft resolution submitted to the UN body notes the report of Sri Lanka's domestic Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and its findings and recommendations while acknowledging its possible contribution to the country's national reconciliation process. The resolution welcomes the constructive recommendations made by the LLRC in its report but, it also notes with concern that the report does not adequately address serious allegations of violations of international humanitarian law. The draft resolution calls on the Sri Lankan government to implement the constructive recommendations in the LLRC report and take all necessary additional steps to fulfill its "relevant obligations and commitment to initiate credible and independent actions to ensure justice, equity, accountability and reconciliation for all Sri Lankans." It requests the government to present a comprehensive action plan as "expeditiously as possible" detailing the steps the government has taken and will take to implement the LLRC recommendations and also to address alleged violations of international law. The draft resolution encourages the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and relevant special procedures to provide, and the Sri Lankan government to accept, advice and technical assistance of implementing those steps. It also requests the OHCHR to present a report to the UNHRC on the provision of such assistance at its 22nd session.

Meanwhile, according to reports, Sri Lanka has received support from the power houses of China, Russia and Pakistan as well as from African states, the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the members of the Non-Aligned Movement on the resolution.¹¹

Reports noted that India has largely been silent on its stance on the resolution presented to the Human Rights Council by the United States over Sri Lanka's delay in implementing reconciliation measures. However, responding to a letter sent by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asking India to back the US resolution at the Geneva meeting, India's External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna told media that India will carefully consider the overall ties with its neighbor and the sentiments in its own country before making a decision at the United Nations Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva on the resolution against Sri Lanka.¹² Janatha Party leader Subramanian Swamy on the other hand said that the center government should not support the "one-sided" resolution against Sri Lanka tabled by the United States at the United Nations Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva.¹³

According to reports, Japanese special envoy to Sri Lanka, Yasushi Akashi has said that Sri Lanka needs to be committed to fully implement the recommendations made by the Lesson Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in its report.¹⁴

According to reports, sixteen fishermen from Rameswaram, who have gone fishing in over 600

¹¹ "US submits draft resolution against Sri Lanka to UNHRC", *Colombopage*, March 7, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar07_1331140327CH.php.

¹² "India to consider relationship with Sri Lanka to decide on UN resolution", *Colombopage*, March 8, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar08_1331223584CH.php.

¹³ "India should not support resolution against Sri Lanka - Janatha Party leader", *ColomboPage*, March 11, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar11_1331410970CH.php.

¹⁴ "Sri Lanka needs to commit to fully implement LLRC recommendations - Japanese special envoy", *ColomboPage*, March 11, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar11_1331481738CH.php.

boats near the IMBL, have said that they were pelted with stones and bottles by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel. An official spokesperson of India's Ministry of External Affairs has told media that the Ministry has asked the High Commission in Colombo to take up the issue with the relevant Sri Lankan authorities.¹⁵

In the meantime Sri Lanka's Minister of Small and Medium Industries, Douglas Devananda has held a discussion with the officials representing many Fisheries Associations in Tamil Nadu on the constant problem of the problem of Indian fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters.¹⁶

Reports noted that Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have held a joint commission meeting in Dhaka on March 7 after a lapse of 19 years. Latest round of trade talks took place at the 4th Session of Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The third session of the Joint commission was held in 1993.¹⁷

In another development, according to reports, a high-profile banking delegation was on a three-day tour in the oil-rich country of Qatar to market Sri Lanka's impressive post-war economic growth and attract more foreign investments to the country. The 11-member delegation, led by the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Ajith Nivard Cabraal, is seeking investments in infrastructure, tourism and banking sectors on the basis of anticipated economic growth of 8 percent this year.¹⁸

Reports noted that Sri Lanka is to obtain a US\$ 278 million loan from China to extend the Southern coastal railway line from Matara to Kataragama. The Ministry of Finance has announced that the Exim Bank of China has agreed to provide the US\$ 278 million concessionary loan for the construction of the Matara-Kataragama Rail Track Project. The construction of the 27-kilometer long railway tracks from Matara to Beliatta under the first phase has already begun.¹⁹

According to reports, during a meeting with Sri Lanka's Power and Energy Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka at his Ministry, Iran's Ambassador to Sri Lanka Dr. M.N. Hasani Poor has said that Iran will continue to provide loan facilities for 1,000 rural electricity projects undertaken to supply electricity to 300,000 families before the end of this year. Minister Ranawaka has appreciated Iran for its continuous support despite many obstacles Iran is facing currently.²⁰

In other developments, according to reports, Japan announced on March 6, 2012 that it will

¹⁵ "Indian mission to take up alleged attack by Sri Lanka Navy on fishermen", *ColomboPage*, March 11, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar11_1331480065CH.php.

¹⁶ "Sri Lanka Minister in discussions with Tamil Nadu fishermen", *Colombopage*, March 5, 2012, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar05_1330966604CH.php.

¹⁷ "Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in trade discussions after 19 years", *ColomboPage*, March 8, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar08_1331149422CH.php.

¹⁸ "Sri Lanka banking delegation in Qatar to attract investments", *Colombopage*, March 6, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar06_1331054947CH.php.

¹⁹ "US\$ 278 million loan from China to extend Sri Lanka's southern coastal rail line", *Colombopage*, March 5, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar05_1330968059CH.php.

²⁰ "Iran to continue assistance for electrification of rural Sri Lanka", *Colombopage*, March 7, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar07_1331062073CH.php.

provide over US\$ 12.5 million in grant assistance to Sri Lanka for three development projects in the Northern and Eastern provinces.²¹

Maldives

- **India's role appreciated by President Dr Mohamed Waheed, but criticised by other political parties; India-mediated cross-party peace talks halted; India offers to replace all police vehicles destroyed during the unrest; UK High commissioner to the Maldives and Sri Lanka: The UK recognizes states, not governments**

According to reports, President Dr Mohamed Waheed has sent a letter of appreciation to the Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, for the warm felicitations on his assumption of office as Maldives' President. In his letter, President Waheed also briefed the Prime Minister on the steps the government was taking to continue the efforts of democratic consolidation in the Maldives.²² Meanwhile, Home Minister Mohamed Jameel also thanked

Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai for brokering the roadmap negotiations and told Press Trust of India that India has a moral obligation to safeguard democracy in the Maldives. However, several political parties in the talks had accused India of interference in Maldivian internal affairs.²³

However, according to reports, the India-mediated cross-party peace talks initiated by President Mohamed Waheed Hassan have been halted after the facilitator of the talks, Ahmed Mujuthaba, had to leave the Maldives for a personal matter.²⁴

According to reports, the Indian government has offered to replace all police vehicles destroyed during the unrest that flared across the country following the recent transition of Presidential power. The police bore the brunt of the anger that followed former President Nasheed's resignation, resulting in damage that the Ministry of Home Affairs has estimated to amount to Rf183million.²⁵

In other developments, according to reports, UK High Commissioner to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, John Rankin, has emphasised that democracy must continue in the Maldives, "and [there must be] no return to the autocratic rule that has been in existence prior to 2008." In his regular "Ask the High Commissioner" interview, Rankin said the UK had called on "all parties to exercise good faith to try to find a way through the current problems and consensus for the

²¹ "Japan grants over US\$ 12 million to Sri Lanka for three development projects", *Colombopage*, March 6, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar06_1331046303CH.php

²² "President thanks Indian Prime Minister for the support and cooperation", *President's Office, Republic of Maldives*, March 5, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6933>

²³ "India has "moral obligation to safeguard democracy" in the Maldives, Jameel tells PTI", *Minivan News*, March 6, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>

²⁴ All party peace talks halted as facilitator leaves country on "personal matter", *Minivan News*, March 5, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>

²⁵ "Indian government offers to replace destroyed police vehicles", *Minivan News*, March 8, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>

way forward.” “The UK recognises states, not governments,” he explained. Rankin said the UK backed the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)’s call for early elections, and for agreement as to the constitutional changes required for that to happen.²⁶

B. East Asia

- **China to stay on socialist path of development; China: Resume dialogue on Iran nuclear issue; China hopes positive progress from US- DPRK talks; China to provide \$2m humanitarian aid to Syria; China enhancing military ties with Canada, France; Terrorism not to affect Sino-Pakistan ties; Hu congratulates Putin on election; Chinese FM Yang meets with Indian counterpart in New Delhi; China to further expand cross-border RMB businesses**

According to reports, China has announced that it will be following the socialist path of political development with Chinese characteristics.²⁷

Meanwhile, Beijing has stated that it hopes that the P5+1 that were engaged in Iran nuclear talks will start dialogue at an early stage.²⁸

On the other hand, according to reports, China has stated that it supports contact between the United States and DPRK and hopes that the food aid talks will progress in a positive direction.²⁹

In recent announcement Beijing has declared that it will be providing emergency humanitarian aid of 2 million to Syria.³⁰

Meanwhile, according to reports, a senior Chinese military official stated that Beijing hopes to promote joint efforts with Canada as well as France and promote practical cooperation between the armed forces.³¹

According to reports, Beijing asserted that the violent activities by terrorists in Xinjiang will not affect the China-Pakistan friendship.³²

²⁶ “Democracy must continue; “no return to autocratic rule”: UK High Commissioner”, *Minivan News*, March 7, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>

²⁷ “China to stay on socialist path of development” *China Daily*, March 9, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012npc/2012-03/09/content_14801124.htm

²⁸ “China: Resume dialogue on Iran nuclear issue” *China Daily*, March 9, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/09/content_14792685.htm

²⁹ “China hopes positive progress from US- DPRK talks” *China Daily*, March 8, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/08/content_14791118.htm

³⁰ “China to offer \$2m humanitarian aid to Syria” *China Daily*, March 10, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/10/content_14802123.htm

³¹ “China enhancing military ties with Canada, France” *China Daily*, March 7, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/07/content_14782581.htm

³² “Terrorism not to affect Sino-Pakistan ties” *China Daily*, March 7, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/07/content_14779473.htm

Meanwhile, according to reports, Beijing announced that it is prepared to work closely with Russia and Chinese President Hu Jintao congratulated Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on his election to presidency.³³

According to reports, the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi who was visiting India held talks with Indian External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna in New Delhi.³⁴

In other developments, according to reports, China has announced that it will be promoting the use of its currency in cross-border trade and investment settlements in 2012. This will happen as it gradually makes the yuan more internationally convertible, the country's central bank announced.³⁵

C. Central Asia & Russia

Central Asia

- **Iran to boost trade and investment with Tajikistan; Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan seeks governmental assurances; Gazprom prospects in Uzbekistan for hydrocarbons; Croatian government abolishes visa requirements for Kazakhs; Malaysian firm signs three-way deal to extract Kazakh hydrocarbons; Kyrgyzstan refuses to swap natural resources for Chinese railway construction; Kyrgyzstan contemplates joining international aid program**

According to reports, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi visited Tajikistan to ramp up trade and investment between both countries. Both sides discussed the ongoing Iranian investment in large scale construction projects such as the Sangtuda-2 hydropower plant; regional developments and on the subject of Iran's disputed nuclear program.³⁶ Tajik Foreign Minister Khamrokhon Zarifi said that his country does not support sanctions, particularly economic ones on Iran as it will not resolve the quarrel over its nuclear program.³⁷ It would be worth noting that Iran is Tajikistan's third largest trade partner after Russia and China. Two-way trade has grown over the last decade to around \$215 million in 2011, according to official statistics out of Dushanbe.³⁸

³³ "Hu congratulates Putin on election" *China Daily*, March 5, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/05/content_14760068.htm

³⁴ "Chinese FM Yang meets with Indian counterpart in New Delhi" *Xinhua*, March 1, 2012 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/01/c_131440863.htm

³⁵ "China to further expand cross-border RMB businesses" *Xinhua*, March 1, 2012 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/01/c_122773607.htm

³⁶ "Iranian FM visits Tajikistan for investment talks", *Universal Newswires*, March 08, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11545>

³⁷ "Tajikistan speaks out against Iran sanctions", *Universal Newswires*, March 09, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11555>

³⁸ *ibid*

In the meanwhile, the Islamic Revival Party (IRP), Tajikistan's leading opposition group, last week adopted a statement petitioning the state authorities to ensure its legal protections and prevent defamation against the party.³⁹ The call was in response to a media article alleging that President Emomali Rahmon ordered security services to increase surveillance of IRP members and local religious groups.⁴⁰

Reports noted that Gazprom International, the Russian oil and gas giant's foreign unit, has begun testing a second exploration borehole in Uzbekistan—the Kumoy prospect on the Ustyurt plateau at the Aral Sea in the northwest part of the country.⁴¹

According to reports, the Croatian government has suspended visa requirements for Kazakhs, apart from citizens of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine, to visit Croatia between April 1 and October 31 this year. However no clear reason is given as to why those four countries no longer need visas to enter Croatia.⁴² In the meanwhile, Malaysian oil and gas firm Sumatec Resources signed a three-way deal by partnering with independent Kazakh firm CaspiOilGas (COG) and Malaysian company Markmore Energy (Labuan) to develop the Rakushechnoye oilfield and gas deposit located in Western Kazakhstan on the Caspian Sea shores.⁴³

In other developments, according to reports, Kyrgyzstan will not provide China with natural resources in return for China's construction of a railway linking the East Asian giant to Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan's deputy transportation minister said recently.⁴⁴ The Kyrgyz government is weighing the option of joining an international aid program which would allow it to halve its foreign debt in exchange for aid to Afghanistan, that is, it could write off 50 percent of its foreign debt which is around \$1 billion.⁴⁵

Russia

- **Russia's Central Election Commission officially declares Putin as the new President of Russia; US President Obama congratulates Putin on becoming the President; Opposition stages demonstrations in Moscow with a call for 'Fair Elections'; Putin to continue dialogue with the opposition; Russia and the League of Arab States adopt a joint statement on the principles of crisis settlement in Syria; Italy's Prime Minister calls for an early Russia-**

³⁹ "Tajik Islamic party concerned over government hostility", *Universal Newswires*, March 09, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11558>

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ "Gazprom tests second Uzbek well", *Universal Newswires*, March 08, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11548>

⁴² "Croatia suspends visa requirements for Kazakhs, Russians", *Universal Newswires*, March 09, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11560>

⁴³ "Malaysian firms sign three-way deal to explore Kazakh oil", *Universal Newswires*, March 09, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11557>

⁴⁴ "Kyrgyzstan will not pay for China-Uzbekistan rail with resources", *Universal Newswires*, March 06, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kyrgyzstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11531>

⁴⁵ "Kyrgyzstan may provide Afghan aid to write off debts", *Universal Newswires*, March 07, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kyrgyzstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11539>

Italy Summit; Ukraine aims to reduce the dependence on Russian gas; Medvedev orders to check the legal validity of Khodorkovsky and Lebedev guilty verdicts; Foreign Ministers of Russia and the Gulf countries to meet in Cairo on March 10, 2012

Reports noted that Russia's Central Election Commission has officially declared Putin as the new President of Russia. He received 63.60% votes and will be office for the next 6 years.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, US President Barack Obama has congratulated Putin on becoming the President of Russia. They discussed key issues of bilateral cooperation including the START treaty and hoped that the relationship will be strengthened in the future.⁴⁷

However, according to reports, hundreds of people have demonstrated in Moscow's central Pushkin Square against the perceived lack of fair Presidential elections.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, President Putin has promised to continue a dialogue with the opposition and said that he ready to listen to their constructive suggestions.⁴⁹

In another development, according to reports, Russia and the League of Arab States (LAS) have adopted a joint statement on the principles of crisis settlement in Syria. These include cessation of violence, impartial monitoring, no external interference, access to humanitarian aid for civilians and establishment of a political dialogue between the government and the opposition.⁵⁰

Reports noted that Italy's Prime Minister Mario Monti has expressed the hope for an early meeting with members of Russian political leadership in order to give a new boost to the bilateral partnership. Russia and Italy have a tradition of holding inter-governmental consultations once a year.⁵¹

Meanwhile, according to reports, President Viktor Yanukovich has said that Ukraine will aim to reduce its dependence on Russian gas. Ukraine has already reduced the gas imports to 27 billion cubic meters from 41 billion cubic meters.⁵²

According to reports, outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev has given directions to the Russian Prosecutor-General's Office to analyze in accordance with the legal procedure the lawfulness and the validity of the guilty verdicts of the court against Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Lebedev.

⁴⁶ "Putin officially proclaimed new President of Russia", ITAR-TASS, March 7, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/361690.html>

⁴⁷ "Barack Obama congratulates Putin on winning presidential election", ITAR-TASS, March 10, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/362473.html>

⁴⁸ "Opposition rallies "For Fair Elections" in Pushkin Square", ITAR-TASS, March 5, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/359718.html>

⁴⁹ "Putin to continue dialogue with opposition", ITAR-TASS, March 5, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/358862.html>

⁵⁰ "Russia, LAS adopt joint statement on Syrian settlement", ITAR-TASS, March 10, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/362810.html>

⁵¹ "Italy's Prime Minister voices hope for early Italian-Russian summit", ITAR-TASS, March 8, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/362003.html>

⁵² "Ukraine determined to reduce import of Russian gas", ITAR-TASS, March 6, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/360619.html>

The case has generated intense media coverage on account of it being seen as an attempt to muzzle opposition in Russia.⁵³

In other developments, reports noted that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will meet his counterparts of the Cooperation Council of Arab Countries of the Persian Gulf in Cairo on March 10, 2012. Developments in Syria will be among a range of issues slated for discussions.⁵⁴

D. West Asia

Iran

- **UN nuclear inspectors allow visiting Parchin military site; Iran and 5+1 groups resume dialogues; Huge turn out in ninth Majlis election indicates people trust in system: Ayatollah Khamenei; Iran and India plan to hit \$25 billion in annual bilateral trade in the next four years**

According to reports, Iran will grant UN inspectors access to a military complex where the UN nuclear agency suspects secret atomic work has been carried out. Tehran had previously banned UN inspectors from visiting the Parchin installation, southeast of Tehran, but a statement by Iran's permanent envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said the visit will now be allowed in a gesture of good will. Inspecting Parchin was a key request made by senior IAEA teams that visited Tehran in January and February. Iran rebuffed those demands at the time, as well as attempts by the nuclear agency's team to question Iranian officials and secure other information linked to the allegations of secret weapons work. The Parchin complex has been often mentioned in the West as a suspected base for secret nuclear experiments — a claim Iran consistently denies. IAEA inspectors visited the site in 2005, but only one of four areas on the grounds and reported no unusual activities. Yukiya Amano, DG IAEA said recently that "we have our credible information that indicates that Iran engaged in activities relevant to the development of nuclear explosive devices." However, Tehran has dismissed the information, saying it was based on "fabricated documents" provided by a "few arrogant countries" — a phrase authorities often use to refer to US and its allies.⁵⁵

In another development, according to reports, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany said they have accepted an offer to resume talks with Tehran on the nuclear issue. Responding to a February letter from Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili in which he proposed new discussions, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton called for dialogue that would deliver "real progress." Ashton's statement said the EU hopes that Iran "will now

⁵³ "Medvedev orders to check Khodorkovsky, Lebedev verdicts validity", ITAR-TASS, March 5, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/359026.html>

⁵⁴ "RF, Gulf FMs to meet in Cairo March 10", ITAR-TASS, March 5, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/359286.html>

⁵⁵ "Iran to allow UN nuke inspectors into army site," *Khaleej Times*, March 6, 2012, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/March/middleeast_March130.xml§ion=middleeast

enter into a sustained process of constructive dialogue which will deliver real progress in resolving the international community's long-standing concerns on its nuclear program." Ashton had written Jalili in October, offering Iran a new round of talks toward an agreement that "restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program."⁵⁶

However, according to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the people's huge turnout in the March 2 parliamentary election was in fact an endorsement of the Islamic system and a demonstration of their trust in the system. He noted that in the scene of confrontation with the opponents, the people demonstrated their "wisdom and faith-based power" by turning out in large number in the election. This way they neutralized plots by the opponents who had been campaigning for a long time to dissuade people from taking part in the election. Khamenei went on to say that the people's large turnout in the election was in fact a "divine blessing" and one should pray God for this.⁵⁷

In other developments, according to reports, Tehran and New Delhi plan to hit \$25 billion in annual bilateral trade in the next four years, said Joint Secretary of the Indian Commerce Ministry Arvind Mehta, while heading an 80-member trade delegation to Iran. The Indian official said the current annual trade between the two countries was around \$15 billion, IRNA news agency reported. The delegation was in the country to explore commercial opportunities created by the EU and US sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program. Iran is India's second-largest oil supplier after Saudi Arabia, providing around 12 percent of the fast-growing country's crude needs. The two countries, which have long-standing historic ties, hope to settle around 45 percent of their oil trade in rupees by increasing exports.⁵⁸

Iraq

● Iraqi Vice President visits Tehran and discusses bilateral issues

According to reports, Iraqi Vice President Khodair al-Khozaei has said that the consolidation of ties between Tehran and Baghdad will definitely deal a heavy blow to the enemies of the two countries. Khozaei made these remarks during a meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Tehran. He said that Iraq is keen to cement ties with the Islamic Republic and will make every effort to help expand relations in all spheres. He also described the roles of the two countries in the regional arena as important and emphasized the necessity of making efforts to help serve the common interests of the two countries. In the meeting, Ahmadinejad commented on the conspiracies devised by the two countries' common enemies and said that the expansion of ties will foil such plots. In a separate meeting with Khozaei, Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said that the global powers' failures in Iraq and Afghanistan gave a great

⁵⁶ "5+1 group to resume talks with Iran," *Mehr News*, March 6, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1553623>

⁵⁷ "Large turnout in election showed people's trust in system: Leader," *Mehr News*, March 8, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1555223>

⁵⁸ "Iran, India set trade goal of \$25 billion in four years," *Mehr News*, March 10, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1556697>

⁵⁹ "Tehran-Baghdad close ties will deal a blow to enemies: Iraqi official," *Mehr News*, March 10, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1556768>

lesson to them. He expressed satisfaction with the withdrawal of US force from Iraqi soil and said that the situation in the country has provided a great opportunity for the Iraqi government to play a substantial role in the region.⁵⁹

II. DEFENCE REVIEW

National

- **Sukhoi Squadron gets President's prestigious decoration and recognition; New chapter in bilateral cooperation between India and China**

Reports noted that President Pratibha Patil on March 6 presented a Standards, a highly prestigious decoration and recognition, to Indian Air Force (IAF) 24 Squadron that operates the frontline Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighter jets. The President also bestowed the honour on 111 Helicopter Unit that operates Cheetah helicopters in high altitude areas. The ceremony, attended by IAF chief Air Chief Marshal Norman Anil Kumar Browne, was held at the Bareilly air base in Uttar Pradesh. The squadron, named Hawks, was the first to operate the Su-30MKI from Leh airfield in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. Its motto is 'Navijitya Nivartanam' which means 'No Return Without Conquest'.⁶⁰

In another development, according to reports, India and China have decided to open a new chapter in bilateral cooperation by agreeing to undertake joint operations against pirates and sharing technological know-how on seabed research. The maritime cooperation proposals were made by visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and welcomed by his counterpart S.M. Krishna. The first proposal seeks to involve the Coast Guards, the navies and air forces in action against pirates. The modalities will be worked out by a joint group that will include the two Foreign Offices, besides the Ministries of Defence, Shipping and Oceanography. Mr. Yang's second proposal – sharing technological knowhow on seabed research falling outside the domain of coastal countries – is aimed at dousing India's apprehensions after Beijing was permitted by the International Seabed Authority to explore in south-west Indian Ocean.⁶¹

International

- **Philippines to hold annual Balikatan military exercise with the United States; IISS Report: Asian defense spending is likely to exceed that of Europe, in nominal terms, during 2012**

According to reports, the Philippines would hold its large-scale annual Balikatan military exercise with the U.S. next month near an area where it is locked in a tense territorial sea dispute with China. The maneuvers, which this year will involve nearly 7,000 troops, will reinforce the close military ties between the longtime allies. This was told by armed forces chief Lt. Gen. Jessie

⁶⁰ "IAF Sukhoi Squadron Gets President's Standard," March 07, 2012, at <http://www.defencenews.in/defence-news-internal.asp?get=new&id=1061>

⁶¹ "India, China move to maritime cooperation," the Hindu, March 01, 2012, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2951373.ece>

Dellosa. The General said in a statement, "The cooperation between the two armed forces manifests the unswerving dedication and commitment of our security forces toward a more stable and secure Asia-Pacific region,". About 4,500 U.S. troops will join 2,300 Filipino counterparts in various exercises during April 16-27 on the main island of Luzon and in Palawan. The U.S. Embassy in Manila said in a statement that the exercises would include computer-simulated command post drills, multiple field exercises, as well as medical, engineering, humanitarian and civic activities.⁶²

In another development, according to reports, military spending in Asia this year will top that in Europe for the first time, a London-based think tank the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said in its annual assessment of the strength of the world's armies. "Since the financial crisis in 2008, there has been a convergence in European and Asian defense spending levels," IISS Director-General John Chipman said during a news conference at the launch of the "Military Balance 2012" report. "While per capita spending levels in Asia remain significantly lower than those in Europe, on the current trend, Asian defense spending is likely to exceed that of Europe, in nominal terms, during 2012," he added. It was further noted that shifts in global economic power were increasingly reflected in military spending. As per the report China leads the way in Asia and is engaged in a modernization program of its forces and military hardware financed by its rapid economic development.⁶³

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

Jammu & Kashmir

- **Tension grips Rajouri district; Indefinite curfew imposed in Rajouri; PMO and MHA team visits Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir; Cop injured in attack**

According to reports, nearly half a dozen people were injured when two groups clashed in border town of Rajouri during a religious procession. According to reports members of one community took out a religious procession from the Sanatan Dharam Sabha and when it reached the bus stand area there was a heated argument between the two groups. Soon both the sides indulged in stone pelting which lasted for more than an hour.

Later police reached the spot and used force to disperse the crowd. Reports said that situation is tense in many localities of the town and administration has deployed additional forces to restore peace.⁶⁴ Further, indefinite curfew was clamped in the border township of Rajouri while police

⁶² "Philippines, U.S. Set Date for Annual Exercise," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, March 07, 2012 at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120307/DEFREG03/303070004/-1/7daysarchives/Philippines-U-S-Set-Date-Annual-Exercise>

⁶³ "Asia Defense Spending May Surpass Europe's This Year," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, March 07, 2012, at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120307/DEFREG03/303070007/-1/7daysarchives/Asia-Defense-Spending-May-Surpass-Europe-8217-s-Year>

⁶⁴ "Tension grips Rajouri", *Greater Kashmir*, March 6, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/7/tension-grips-rajouri-57.asp>

arrested about half a dozen persons during raids at various places as tension between two communities continues. Sources said the restrictions on public movement, imposed as a precautionary measure following bandh and protest calls by the two communities. Alleged inflammatory remarks by Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Praveen Togadia at a public rally and subsequent clashes between members of two communities has sent tempers high in the town.⁶⁵

Reports noted that a team of officers from Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Union Home Ministry arrived in Kupwara on an assessment tour. Officials said the three-member team comprising Prime Minister's advisor, T K A Nair, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Home Affairs (Kashmir Desk), K Skandan and Director, Prime Minister's Office, Dheeraj Gupta visited the frontier district of Kupwara. Prime Minister's advisor took review of newly constructed two room residential quarters for Kashmiri Pandit migrants at Nuttnusa and Khumriyal. According to sources the officers from PMO would meet Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah, Chief Secretary Madhav Lal and other top dignitaries in Jammu before winding up their visit.⁶⁶

In other developments, according to reports, unidentified gunmen fired at a police constable at Sariabala. Militants fired upon a police constable near the shrine of Hazrat Dastgeer Sahib causing injuries to him.⁶⁷

North East India

- **Third term for Congress in Manipur; Naga People's Front wins four seats in Manipur elections; New Congress Legislature Party leader to be elected soon in Manipur; Caretaker Chief Minister of Manipur O. Ibobi offers talks to militant outfits; Meghalaya Governor calls borders and GNLA are major concerns; Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) guerilla killed in Tripura; Centre mulls action against militants**

According to reports, the ruling Indian National Congress (INC) in Manipur scored a hat trick after the party got an absolute majority in the Assembly election winning 42 seats in the House of 60 including 14 seats in the five hills districts. The Trinamool Congress did well winning seven seats, while the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) that could not win a single seat in the last polls, also performed well, bagging five seats. But the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Manipur People's Party, major constituents of the opposition Progressive Democratic Alliance (PDA) comprising 11 non-Congress parties, could not fare well this time.⁶⁸

In another development, according to reports, the Naga Peoples' Front (NPF) clinched four seats in the 60-member Manipur Assembly and the party termed it an achievement. It also vowed to contest the Arunachal Pradesh and Assam polls on the issue of integrating Naga-

⁶⁵ "Indefinite curfew in Rajouri", *Greater Kashmir*, March 8, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/9/indefinite-curfew-in-rajouri-41.asp>

⁶⁶ "PMO, MHA team visits Kupwara", *Greater Kashmir*, March 7, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/8/pmo-mha-team-visits-kupwara-41.asp>

⁶⁷ "Cop injured in attack", *Greater Kashmir*, March 9, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/10/cop-injured-in-attack-54.asp>

⁶⁸ "Third term for Cong in Manipur", *The Assam Tribune*, March 6, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0712/at08>

dominated areas in the Northeast. NPF had contested in 12 Naga-dominated constituencies in the hill districts of Manipur with the sole agenda of integration of Naga inhabited areas. Sources in NPF said the party is now preparing to field candidates in the assembly polls in Arunachal Pradesh in 2014 and the Assam assembly elections scheduled for 2016.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, reports noted that a new Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader would be elected in the next few days to pave the way for formation of new Congress-led ministry in Manipur where the party got 42 seats in the 60-member Assembly. The present 9th Assembly expires on March 15 and an official order constituting the 10th Assembly would be issued on March 12.⁷⁰

According to reports, a day after Congress retained power for a hat trick, Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh sought cooperation from all communities for progress of the State. He also appealed to the underground groups in the State for a talk or dialogue to bring about an amicable solution.⁷¹

Reports noted that Meghalaya's somewhat porous 443-km international border with Bangladesh, the ethnically sensitive border with Assam and atrocities of the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) are areas of concern identified by the State Government. Meghalaya Governor RS Mooshahary said in his address at the Budget session of the State Assembly, the long international border with Bangladesh remains vulnerable in terms of "influx, smuggling and easy transit routes for the militants,". "The State Government has taken up with the Government of India to intensify patrolling along the border and where human habitations and settlement are located near the border, to erect the fence along the Zero Line," the Governor added.⁷²

According to reports, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is of the view that the movement of militants in Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh and in Majuli river island of Assam has become a matter of concern, and there is need for sustained operations in those areas to prevent growth of militancy in the region. Highly-placed sources in the MHA told that there have been reports of movement of members of almost all the major militant groups of the region through Tirap and Changlang districts and the militants are not only using the area as shelter but also for going to their bases in Myanmar. Sources said that almost all the militant groups of the region including the hard-line faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) have strong bases in that area and use the routes to go to Myanmar, while, the inter-factional clashes between NSCN (I-M) and NSCN(K) in that area also resulted in deterioration of the situation. The Government of India has also agreed to deploy four battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in the area and one battalion is ready to be put into use. But the slow progress of allotment of land for the setting up of the battalion headquarters is slowing down the process.⁷³

⁶⁹ "Naga party says its Manipur result an achievement", *The Assam Tribune*, March 7, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0712/at042>

⁷⁰ "New CLP leader to be elected soon in Manipur", *The Assam Tribune*, March 8, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0812/at0154>

⁷¹ "Ibobi offers talks to militant outfits", *The Assam Tribune*, March 7, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0812/oth05>

⁷² "Borders and GNLA prime concern: Mooshahary", *The Assam Tribune*, March 9, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1012/oth05>

⁷³ "Centre mulls action against militants", *The Assam Tribune*, March 10, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1112/at05>

In other developments, according to reports, a Mizoram-based guerrilla was killed in a shootout with police in Tripura. Police said that the slain militant had come from the neighbouring Mizoram to collect ransom from villagers in northern Tripura. A mobile phone and a gun were recovered near the body.⁷⁴

IV. UNITED NATIONS (UN) REVIEW

- **India calls for comprehensive strategy to address terrorism off Somalia's coast; UNSC concerned about violence between Sudan and South Sudan; India votes against Syria's expulsion from UNESCO**

In the light of the increase in attacks by pirates off the Somali coast, India called on the international community to adopt a comprehensive counter-piracy strategy to deal with the problem. India's representative to the UN Security Council said that such a strategy should involve effective sanitization of the Somali coastline and enactment of national laws on a priority basis to criminalize piracy. India also welcomed the adoption of an UN Security Council resolution which provides for force enablers and multipliers for AMISOM and also expands the UN support package.⁷⁵

In another development, while expressing concern about reports of renewed cross-border violence between Sudan and South Sudan, the UNSC called for a ceasefire in the area to end the hostilities that led to thousands of people fleeing from the region. The urgency of delivering aid to prevent the current crisis from worsening was also emphasized.⁷⁶

In other developments, according to reports, India's intervention at the UNESCO's Paris meet contributed to the body's decision of not expelling Syria from its human rights committee in spite of pressure from the West and other Arab countries. India called for the differentiation of political issues from cultural matters.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ "Guerilla killed in Tripura", *The Assam Tribune*, March 11, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1112/at044>

⁷⁵ "Increase in piracy attacks off Somali coast worrisome: India", *The Hindu*, March 07, 2012 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2969307.ece>

⁷⁶ "Security Council concerned over renewed clashes along Sudan-South Sudan border", *UN News Centre*, March 06, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41472&Cr=sudan&Cr1=>

⁷⁷ "India saves Syria from UN expulsion", *MSN.com*, March 10, 2012 at <http://news.in.msn.com/exclusives/it/article.aspx?cp-documentid=5917170>