

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Crisis deepens after a US soldier kills 16 in Afghanistan; White House spokesman: Despite suspension of peace talks, US committed to reconciliation**

According to reports, in a tragic development, a US soldier open fired on villagers near his base in southern Afghanistan. 16 people have been killed by the firing. This incident has added to already straining relations between the two countries after the Koran burning crisis last month.¹

In another development, according to a US official, the United States remains committed to Afghan reconciliation despite the suspension of talks by the Taliban. "There is no likely resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan without a political resolution," White House spokesman Jay Carney said. The Taliban said they were halting preliminary talks with the US because Washington's message had been "erratic" - an accusation denied by Carney. Meanwhile, President Karzai called on NATO troops to leave Afghan villages.²

Pakistan

- **Pakistan invites militant groups including the Taliban for peace talks; Pakistani legal team to visit India on Mumbai attacks; FM Khar: Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project is still viable**

According to reports, Pakistan on March 12, 2012 invited militant groups including the Taliban for peace talks and said banned organisations would be delisted if they "closed down their militant wings". It would be worth noting that Pakistan has banned more than 30 militant outfits, including al Qaeda, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). "If the proscribed organisations assure us that they have closed down their militant wings and abandoned extremism, then we would like to meet them in next few days," Interior Minister Rehman Malik told reporters. "We have been contacted by several banned organisations that want to sit and talk. If they want to give up militancy we will talk to them as we are revising the list of proscribed organisations," Malik added.³

In another development, according to reports, Pakistani investigators and lawyers are travelling to India this week to gather evidence for the prosecution of seven suspects linked to the Mumbai attacks of 2008, when 166 people were killed. The visit is the first of its kind, and comes after Pakistan indicted seven alleged conspirators in 2009 but has since said it needs to gather more

¹ "US soldier kills 16, deepening crisis", *Dawn*, March 11, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/11/us-serviceman-detained-in-afghanistan-over-civilian-casualties.html>

² "US committed to Afghan talks despite Taliban suspension", *BBC*, March 16, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17393837>

³ "Govt revisiting list of banned terror groups", *Dawn*, March 12, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/12/govt-revising-list-of-banned-terror-groups.html>

evidence in India before proceeding further. New Delhi says Pakistan's attempts at prosecution have been a "facade" and insists it has already handed over enough evidence to convict the accused.⁴

In other developments, according to reports, the Pakistan government on March 14, 2012, reiterated its stand on the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project, stating that the project was still viable. "There are always a multiplicity of funding sources which are available for any project," said Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar when asked about the Chinese bank's apparent withdrawal, after her meeting with her Swedish counterpart. "This is a fairly viable project and we hope we will not have any problem in trying to find ways and means of ensuring its funding," she added.⁵

Bangladesh

- **Asian Development Bank Report: Bangladesh world's most vulnerable country to climate change-related risk factors; Bangladesh seeks EU support to resolve the issue of repatriation of Rohingya refugees; India announces Rail connectivity projects linking Agartala to Akhaura; Russia agrees to provide 85 percent of the fund for the first-ever nuclear power plant in Bangladesh; Indian Air Chief is on four day official visit to Bangladesh**

According to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report released on March 13, 2012, Bangladesh is the world's most vulnerable country to climate change-related risk factors. According to the report, Asia and the Pacific have six of the world's 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change. Bangladesh tops this list, followed by India (2nd), Nepal (4th), the Philippines (6th), Afghanistan (8th) and Myanmar (10th)," the report said.⁶

In another development, Bangladesh on March 13, 2012 sought the support of the European Union (EU) in resolving the long-standing issue of repatriation of Rohingya refugees. At a meeting with a seven-member EU delegation led by William Hanna, EU Ambassador to Bangladesh, Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque urged the EU to settle the problem, by sending the Rohingyas back to their homeland in Myanmar. In reply, the delegation informed the minister that the EU had already chalked out a project worth \$100 million to be implemented in Myanmar for the Rohingya refugees intruding in Bangladesh.⁷

Meanwhile, India announced taking up the rail connectivity project linking Agartala, capital of the northeastern state of Tripura, with Akhaura in Bangladesh in a bid to improve ties between the two countries.⁸

⁴ "Pakistan lawyers travel to India for Mumbai prosecution", *Dawn*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/13/pakistan-lawyers-to-india-for-mumbai-prosecution.html>

⁵ "IP gas pipeline project still viable, says Khar", *Dawn*, March 14, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/03/14/ip-gas-pipeline-project-still-viable-says-khar.html>

⁶ "ADB on Climate Change: Bangladesh termed most vulnerable", *The Daily Star*, March 14, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=226202>.

⁷ "Rohingya Repatriation: Dhaka seeks EU support", *The Daily Star*, March 14, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=226226>.

⁸ Bhattacharya, Pallab, "Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link: India announces take-up connectivity project", *The Daily Star*, March 15, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=226395>.

Reports noted that Russia has agreed to provide 85 percent of the fund for the first-ever nuclear power plant in Bangladesh. Bangladesh will further negotiate with Moscow to get the entire amount — Tk 12,000 crore to 15,000 crore — estimated for building the plant at Rooppur in Pabna.⁹

In other developments, according to reports, Indian Air Chief Marshal NAK Browne will visit Dhaka on March 18, 2012 on a four-day official visit to Bangladesh aimed at bolstering defence cooperation.¹⁰

Sri Lanka

- **Uproar in Indian Parliament over the issue of alleged atrocities by Sri Lankan forces; UK for independent investigation; GOSL welcomes Japanese remark at UNHRC session; Sri Lankan Muslim leaders request Indian Government to address the issue of discrimination against old IDPs**

According to reports, both the houses of Indian parliament, Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, had to be adjourned till 12 noon on March 13, 2012 following the uproar in the House over the over the issue of alleged atrocities by Sri Lankan forces.¹¹

In another development, according to reports, following the broadcast of the second video on Sri Lanka conflict by Britain's Channel 4, the United Kingdom on March 15, 2012 called for "an independent, credible and thorough investigation" into the bloody conflict and urged the United Nations Human Rights Council to pass the resolution against Sri Lanka.¹²

According to reports, Minister Sakashita Osamu of the Japanese Permanent Mission in Geneva told the current session of the UNHRC that no country has a perfect record on human rights, and countries need to be given time, space, encouragement, advice, and where appropriate, concrete assistance in order to overcome existing challenges. The political, socio-economic and cultural contexts of each country duly need to be considered when addressing human rights issues. The Sri Lankan government has welcomed Japanese statement.¹³

In other developments, according to reports, seventeen Muslim legislators in Sri Lanka have asked the Indian government to address the issue of discrimination against old IDPs that include a large number of Muslims evicted from the North by the LTTE. The Muslim MPs have written a letter to Indian High Commissioner Ashok Kantha explaining that old IDPs who were displaced prior to 2008 have lost out on the assistance and relief provided to the new IDPs post 2008. The

⁹ Azad, M Abul Kalam, "Rooppur Nuke Power: Russian soft loan pledged", *The Daily Star*, March 17, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=226585>.

¹⁰ Bhattacharya, Pallab, "Indian air chief arrives today", *The Daily Star*, March 18, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=226772>.

¹¹ "Human Rights Issue: SL issue rocks Indian Parliament", *Daily Mirror*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/17437-sl-issue-rocks-indian-parliament.html>.

¹² "UK calls for independent investigation on Sri Lanka after second Channel 4 video", *Colombopage*, March 16, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar16_1331838864CH.php.

¹³ "Sri Lanka welcomes Japan's stand on human rights," *The Island*, March 15, 2012 at http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=news-section&page=news-section&code_title=48

letter states, “While we have appreciated your valuable contribution to build 50,000 houses in Sri Lanka, we were shocked to see the criteria for housing, which categorically made differences between people displaced before and after 2008.”¹⁴

Maldives

- **President Dr Mohamed Waheed met with the US Congressional Staff delegation; Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad congratulates President Waheed; The UK and Germany lift all travel restrictions to the Maldives; President with the Commonwealth Special Envoy to the Maldives**

Reports noted that Maldives President Dr Mohamed Waheed met with the United States Congressional Staff delegation on March 13, 2012. During the discussion President briefed the visiting delegation on the recent events that took place in the Maldives, and gave them an update on the progress made in resolving the political challenges. President Waheed also assured that the government was fully committed to upholding the Constitution and the rule of law.¹⁵

In another development, Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent congratulations to Maldives President Mohamed Waheed on March 12, 2012 for winning presidential elections, reports Iran’s president’s office website.¹⁶

Reports noted that the UK and Germany have lifted all travel restrictions to the Maldives. Speaking to the press at Berlin’s ITB Fair, Tourism Minister Ahmed Adeeb said he had met with UK and German foreign office officials and the media, and had been able to assure safety for tourists in the Maldives.¹⁷

In other developments, President Dr Mohamed Waheed met with the Commonwealth Special Envoy to the Maldives, Sir Donald McKinnon. Discussions at the meeting were focused on the current political situation in the Maldives.¹⁸

B. East Asia

South East Asia

- **Malaysia, India sign criminal assistance treaty; East Timor President lost in election;**

¹⁴ “Muslim MPs in Sri Lanka ask Indians not to discriminate against Muslim IDPs”, *Colombopage*, Mar 18, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Mar18_1332052447JR.php.

¹⁵ “President meets the US Congressional Staff Delegation”, *The President’s Office, Republic of Maldives*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=7010>.

¹⁶ “Iranian President congratulates Dr Waheed on “winning presidential elections”, *Minivan News*, March 13, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>.

¹⁷ “UK and Germany lift travel restrictions to the Maldives”, *Minivan News*, March 12, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief/page/2>.

¹⁸ “President meets Commonwealth Special Envoy to Maldives”, *The President’s Office, Republic of Maldives*, March 18, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=7029>.

Indonesian police shot five suspected militants dead; World Bank: Philippines must accelerate reforms; Delhi Police team to visit Thailand, Malaysia for investigations; Emergency extended in Southern Thailand

According to reports, Malaysia and India signed a treaty on mutual assistance in criminal matters on 12 March 2012. It took the two countries four years to arrive at a mutually agreeable terms and conditions. The treaty is seen as a major step in fighting transnational crimes including drug trafficking and smuggling of migrants.¹⁹

In another development, Jose Ramos Horta, the President of East Timor, has lost his bid for the by-election. As per the preliminary results shown on 18 March, he has failed to make it to a run-off in the country's second presidential vote as a free nation. The second round for the Presidential elections will be held on 16 April 2012.²⁰

According to a 19 March 2012 media release by Indonesia's national counter-terrorism agency and police, five suspected militants were shot dead. The militants were planning attacks in Bali and are believed to be members of Jemmah Islamiah.²¹

The World Bank on 19 March, 2012 said that to catch up with its Southeast Asian neighbours, Philippines must accelerate economic reforms. It was also said that sustained economic growth above five percent a year is required to improve the lives of weaker sections of the society. The report forecast economic growth of 4.2 percent in 2012 and 5 percent in 2013, up from 3.7 percent in 2011.²²

An investing team of Delhi Police will visit Thailand and Malaysia in late March to find out if the Delhi and Bangkok blasts are linked. According to the reports, the investigating team wants to interrogate Sedaghatzadeh Masoud- an Iranian believed to have links with planning and execution of the terror plot.²³

In other developments, according to reports, the Thai government extended the state of emergency in Southern Thailand for another three months. The decision in that regard was taken on 13 March 2012. The provision gives security forces powers of arrest and detention in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani provinces of Southern Thailand, which is affected by armed insurgency.²⁴

¹⁹ 'Treaty with India to enhance cooperation in criminal matters: Malaysia', *Economic Times*, 13 March 2012.

²⁰ 'Ramos- Horta Out as East Timor Heads for Run- Off', *The Jakarta Globe*, 19 March, 2012, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/international/ramos-horta-out-as-east-timor-heads-for-run-off/505729>

²¹ 'Indonesia police shoot 5 suspected militants', *Hindustan Times*, 19 March 2012.

²² 'Philippines urgently needs reforms: World Bank', *Khaleej Times*, 19 March 2012, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle11.asp?xfile=data/business/2012/March/business_March387.xml§ion=business

²³ 'Cops may visit Thailand to Quiz Bangkok 'bomber'', *Hindustan Times*, 18 March 2012.

²⁴ 'Thailand extends state of emergency in violence- prone southernmost provinces', *Washington Post*, 13 March 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/thailand-extends-state-of-emergency-in-violence-prone-southernmost-provinces/2012/03/13/gIQATOSz8R_story.html

C. Central Asia & Russia

Central Asia

- **Manas base to pass into civilian control; Central Asia along with CIS aims to curtail terror financing; Uzbekistan opts out of SCO annual war games; Turkmenistan not part of revised Nabucco plan; European Parliament condemns Kazakhstan for Zhanaozen; Turkmen President visits Ukraine for energy talks**

According to reports, Kyrgyz Defense Minister Taalaybek Omuraliyev told visiting U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta during talks in Bishkek on 13th March that U.S. military forces must leave the Manas Air Transit Center after 2014.²⁵ Kyrgyzstan is willing only to transport non-military cargo to Afghanistan and not military supplies and soldiers. Panetta was in Kyrgyzstan to keep the issue of a possible lease extension open for discussion.²⁶

In the meanwhile, Central Asia's anti-terrorism chiefs, except from Uzbekistan, along with other member nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) agreed last week to focus on cutting off the sources of funding to terrorist and extremist groups in Kyrgyzstan's southern city of Osh.²⁷

According to reports, Uzbekistan opted out of 2012 summer's annual war games of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for reasons unknown. However, Uzbekistan has routinely abstained from SCO exercises, as Uzbek President Islam Karimov has been wary of Russia re-asserting its power in its former republics.²⁸

Reports noted that according to the proposal outlined to BP and other members of the consortium last week, Turkmenistan's gas fields are not part of the newly revised Nabucco plan, known as 'Nabucco West' significantly shorter than the original pipeline. Gas will come from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz II field, and not from fields in either Turkmenistan or Iraq, as the original Nabucco plan originally stipulated.²⁹

In the meanwhile, according to reports, New Delhi will host a conference on March 29 to discuss the implementation of the 'International North-South Corridor' that comes after Indian officials reached an agreement with Iranian representatives to take over the project in January.³⁰ In a

²⁵ "US military must leave Manas after 2014, Kyrgyz DM says", *Universal Newswires*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kyrgyzstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11572>

²⁶ "Manas will pass into civilian control in 2014, Kyrgyzstan says", *Universal Newswires*, March 15, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11593>

²⁷ "CIS security chiefs put spotlight on terror financing", *Universal Newswires*, March 16, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11604>

²⁸ "Uzbek military again opts out of SCO exercises", *Universal Newswires*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/tajikistan/viewstory.aspx?id=11577>

²⁹ "Revised Nabucco plan omits Turkmenistan, Iraq", *Universal Newswires*, March 16, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11602>

³⁰ "India to spearhead transport link to Central Asia", *Universal Newswires*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kyrgyzstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11580>

related development, a Turkish firm signed a deal to supply the Turkmen government with railway equipment for an interregional North-South railway corridor.³¹

Reports noted that the European Parliament in Brussels in a strongly worded resolution last week condemned Kazakhstan for the bloody crackdown against demonstrators in Zhanaozen last December and sought that closer economic relation with Central Asia's leading economy must depend on progress of political reform.³²

In the meanwhile, according to reports, the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and other leaders of post-Soviet countries held talks in Moscow on March 19, 2012 on further integrating member states of their regional economic grouping wherein participants of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec) were expected to take decisions on the basic principles of the draft treaty reached in December 2011 to further solidify the group as a new integration association.³³

In other developments, according to reports, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited Ukraine on a three-day (March 12-14, 2012) visit to hold energy talks and signed legal documentation in support of an interstate program of trade and economic cooperation for 2012-2015, etc.³⁴ The two regions envisage cooperation in the supply of tractors, aircraft, and power machine building companies.³⁵

Russia

- **Russia and the US to continue their discussions of installation of a missile shield in Europe; India to buy 10 Sukhoi Super-jet aircrafts from Russia; Russia to formulate new arms programme by 2025; Foreign Minister Lavrov meets the UN Secretary General to discuss a host of issues; Russia will not send its military troops to Syria; Russia to dispose off upto 4 million guns by 2015; Germany to provide upto 20 million Euros for the disposal of Russia's chemical weapons; Duma may pass a law simplifying creation/registration of political parties by March 23; Russia calls on North Korea to abstain from launching a satellite; Russia calls for a UN Security Council resolution to probe human organ trade in Kosovo**

According to reports, Russia and the US will continue to discuss the issue of guarantees that the US missile defence system in Europe, on which the two sides continue to disagree, is not directed against Russia.³⁶

³¹ "Turkish firm to supply equipment for interregional railway corridor", *Universal Newswires*, March 19, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11618>

³² "EU censures Kazakhstan over Zhanaozen", *Universal Newswires*, March 16, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11606>

³³ "Regional leaders meet in Moscow for Eurasian Union summit", *Universal Newswires*, March 19, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/kazakhstan/viewstory.aspx?id=11617>

³⁴ "Ukraine PM welcomes Turkmen leader to Kiev", *Universal Newswires*, March 12, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/turkmenistan/viewstory.aspx?id=11565>

³⁵ "Ukraine, Turkmenistan boost gas and business ties", *Universal Newswires*, March 14, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/turkmenistan/viewstory.aspx?id=11584>

³⁶ "US to continue discussion of missile shield in Europe with RF", ITAR-TASS, March 16, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/367454.html>

In another development, according to reports, India's Aviotech Pvt Ltd will buy ten Russian Sukhoi Super-jet 100 aircraft and the Sukhoi company expects to sell upto 100 aircrafts in India.³⁷

Reports noted that Russia will formulate a new arms programme by 2015 which will lay the foundation of the country's arms procurement program through to 2025.³⁸

Meanwhile, according to reports, Foreign Minister Lavrov has met the UN Secretary General to discuss issues ranging from the violence in Syria, instability in Libya to the proliferation of weapons.³⁹ Foreign Minister Lavrov has ruled out sending military troops to Syria.⁴⁰

Reports noted that the Russian Defense Ministry is planning to dispose of four million obsolete guns, mainly Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles, by 2015.⁴¹

According to reports, the German government will assign up to 20 million Euros this year for disposal of Russia's chemical weapons.⁴²

Reports noted that the State Duma may pass a law that simplifies the creation and registration of political parties by March 23. Some of the provisions include reducing the minimum number of party members required for registration from 40,000 to 500.⁴³

According to reports, Russia has called on North Korea to abstain from launching a satellite since it has the potential to escalate regional tensions and create additional impediments to resumption of six-nation negotiations on nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁴

In other developments, according to reports, Russia calls for the UN Security Council to approve a resolution to investigate the trade in human organs in Kosovo.⁴⁵

³⁷ "India to buy ten Sukhoi Superjet 100 aircraft", ITAR-TASS, March 16, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/367372.html>

³⁸ "Russia to Develop New Arms Program to 2025", RIA Novosti, March 15, 2012, http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20120315/172192509.html

³⁹ "Sergei Lavrov and Ban Ki-moon hold meeting in New York", ITAR-TASS, March 13, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/364763.html>

⁴⁰ "Lavrov rules out Russia's military presence in Syria", ITAR-TASS, March 14, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/366130.html>

⁴¹ "Russian Military to Dispose of 4 Mln Guns by 2015 - Paper", RIA Novosti, March 14, 2012, http://www.en.rian.ru/military_news/20120314/172150838.html

⁴² "Germany to assign up to 20 mln euros for Russian disposal of chemical weapons", ITAR-TASS, March 13, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/365329.html>

⁴³ "Duma may pass law simplifying creation/registration of parties by March 23", ITAR-TASS, March 15, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/366485.html>

⁴⁴ "Moscow calls on North Korea to abstain from launching satellite", ITAR-TASS, March 16, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/368209.html>

⁴⁵ "RF calls for UN SC resolution to probe human organ trade in Kosovo", ITAR-TASS, March 16, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/367806.html>

D. West Asia

Iran

- **Former Iranian president Rafsanjani reappointed Expediency Council Chairman; Reports: Israeli officials now agree with the U.S. assessment that Tehran has not yet decided on the actual construction of a nuclear bomb**

According to reports, in a decree issued, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei reappointed Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the chairman of the Expediency Council and the other members of the council for a new five-year term. In the decree, the Leader described the track record of the Expediency Council during its previous term as adequate and said that he is hopeful that the measures taken by the previous council would come to fruition and produce positive results for the country.⁴⁶

In other developments, according to reports, Israeli officials now agree with the U.S. assessment that Tehran has not yet decided on the actual construction of a nuclear bomb, according to senior Israeli government and defense figures. Israel's leaders have been charging in no uncertain terms for years that Iran is trying to build nuclear weapons. Though officials say they accept the more nuanced American view, they warn that it is just a matter of semantics, because an Iran on the verge of being able to build a bomb would still be a danger. Several senior Israeli officials who spoke in recent days to the Associated Press said Israel has come around to the U.S. view that no final decision to build a bomb has been made by Iran. The officials, who are privy to intelligence and to the discussion about the Iranian program, said this is the prevailing view in the intelligence community, but there are also questions about whether Tehran might be hiding specific bomb making operations. The concern, they said, is about allowing the Iranian program to reach the point where there is enough enriched weapons grade material that a bomb could quickly be assembled, within a year. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on March 18, 2012 "Iran, whose leader foments terrorism and violence around the globe and calls for our destruction ... this regime, must never be allowed to have nuclear weapons."⁴⁷

Iraq

- **Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki: Iraq never allow its land or its skies to be a passage for weapons in any direction**

According to reports, following a claim by a US newspaper that Iran is moving weapons to Syria via Iraqi air space, Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki clarified that all items transported through Iraq to Syria were humanitarian goods. Maliki stated, "Iraq does not allow its land or its

⁴⁶ "Rafsanjani reappointed Expediency Council chairman," *Mehr News*, March 14, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1560190>

⁴⁷ "Israelis agree Iran hasn't decided on atom bomb," *Khaleej Times*, March 18, 2012, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/March/middleeast_March429.xml§ion=middleeast&col=

skies to be a passage for weapons in any direction, and from any source.” He added that Iraq was “pushing towards finding a political solution to the Syrian situation... to avoid more bloodshed.” Earlier, the Washington Times had reported that Iraq refused “several” US requests to stop Iranian cargo flights bound for Syria, citing an unnamed US official.⁴⁸

II. DEFENCE REVIEW

National

- **Indian defence budget gets a robust hike of 17.6 per cent**

According to reports, with several crucial acquisitions in the pipeline, India’s defence budget has got a robust hike of 17.6 per cent with the maximum amount of modernisation funds allocated for the Air Force, which is in the process of finalizing a multi-billion dollar contract for new generation combat aircraft. India’s military expenditure remains less than 2 per cent of the GDP, a parameter that is rare for a nation on a major modernisation drive. While last year the budget was pegged at 1.83 per cent of the GDP, this time there has been a marginal increase to 1.9 per cent of the GDP. Of the Rs 1.93 lakh crore defence budget, close to 41 per cent or Rs 79, 579 crore has been earmarked for capital acquisitions. The Air Force will get over Rs 29,853 crore for modernisation this year. Navy will get over Rs 23,865 crore. The largest capital head is for the acquisition of new aircraft for the IAF at Rs 23,701 crore. A multi-billion dollar contract for new fighters, in all likelihood the French Rafale, is set to be signed this year. The Navy has also got a significant amount of Rs 13,617 crore for modernisation of its fleet with several new warship acquisitions in the pipeline. The Army has got the lowest share of the capital budget – Rs 18,828 crore – for modernisation. The capital budget for research and development for the three forces has, however, remained static at Rs 4,640 crore, a minuscule Rs 18 crore hike from last year.⁴⁹

International

- **U.S. strengthening its navy in Arabian Gulf; North Korea’s top leader exhorts armed forces for war**

According to reports, Adm. Jonathan Greenert, chief of naval operations (CNO), told the U.S. Senate Armed Services committee that four more minesweepers and four more minesweeping helicopters are to be sent to the Arabian Gulf. This is a move which will increase the number of mine countermeasure forces available to keep open the sea lanes around the Strait of Hormuz should Iran choose to mine that critical waterway. He stated, “We are moving four more minesweepers to the region, making eight.” He further added, “We want to improve our

⁴⁸ “Maliki says Iraq does not allow weapons shipment to Syria,” *Mehr News*, March 17, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1561802>

⁴⁹ “Defence budget hiked by 17.6 pc,” *The Indian Express*, March 17, 2012, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/defence-budget-hiked-by-17.6-pc/924712/0>

underwater minehunting capability.” Speaking to reporters after the hearing, Greenert declined to comment about when the ships or helicopters would leave for the region.⁵⁰

In another development, Pyongyang’s official news agency said on March 15 that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has overseen an attack drill and ordered the military to “mercilessly wipe out” their enemies in case of war. Many of the country’s top military and civilian officials attended the exercise, which featured a simulated attack by planes, ships and artillery on enemy warships. Kim was officially appointed supreme commander of the 1.2 million-member military after taking over the national leadership following the death of his father, Kim Jong Il, on December 17, last year. His regime has agreed to a surprise nuclear deal with the United States but has taken a consistently hostile tone towards South Korea.⁵¹

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

Jammu & Kashmir

- **Curfew lifted in the town of Rajouri; Grenade attack near SHMS Hospital in Srinagar; Religious personality shot at, injured**

According to reports, curfew was lifted in Rajouri town of Jammu and Kashmir following improvement in the situation even as dialogue between the two communities was on to restore calm in the trouble-torn area. To restore normalcy in the town, leaders of the two communities met in the presence of Ministers Surjeet Salathia and Shabir Khan. Senior police and civil officials were also present at the meeting. Curfew was clamped on the town after some unidentified persons pelted stones at a religious procession, prompting security personnel to burst tear gas shells to disperse them. The stone-hurlers were protesting against VHP International president Praveen Togadia’s recent remarks which, they alleged, had hurt sentiments of a particular community.⁵²

In another development, reports noted that two CRPF personnel were injured in a grenade attack on their picket by militants in Karan Nagar area of the city. Unidentified militants lobbed a grenade on a CRPF picket outside the OPD block of SMHS hospital. Two paramilitary personnel suffered minor injuries in the blast which created panic among the passersby. No militant outfit has claimed responsibility for the grenade attack so far.⁵³

⁵⁰ “U.S. Doubling Minesweepers in Arabian Gulf,” March 15, 2012, at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120315/DEFREG02/303150007/U-S-Doubling-Minesweepers-Arabian-Gulf?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|FRONTPAGE>

⁵¹ “Kim to N. Korean Troops: ‘Wipe Out the Enemies’ in Event of War,” AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, March 15 2012, at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120315/DEFREG03/303150002/Kim-N-Korean-Troops-8216-Wipe-Out-Enemies-8217-Event-War?odyssey=mod|newswell|text|World%20News|s>

⁵² “Curfew lifted in Rajouri”, *Greater Kashmir*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/14/curfew-lifted-in-rajouri-56.asp>

⁵³ “Grenade attack near SHMS Hospital”, *Greater Kashmir*, March 15, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/16/grenade-attack-near-smhs-hospital-43.asp>

In other developments, according to reports, Peer Jalal-ud-din, a prominent religious personality was shot at and injured by unidentified assailants at his Batamaloo house on March 17, 2012. Taking cover of darkness, assailants pumped bullets into Jalal-ud-Din's right leg and injuring him critically.⁵⁴

North East India

- **Okram Ibobi Singh to be sworn in as Chief Minister of Manipur; Centre formally confirmed that Maoist establishing bases in North East; 1 killed and 5 hurt in a blast in Imphal**

Reports noted that Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh will be sworn in as Chief Minister for the third consecutive term.⁵⁵

In another development, according to reports, the Centre has formally confirmed that North Eastern States, including Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, have become theatre of CPI (Maoists) activities. Organisational bases are being established to forge links with the insurgent groups of the region. The CPI (Maoists) of the main Left Wing Extremists (LWE) Group have been trying to expand their activities in various parts of the country and to establish bases in the North-East with a view to forge relations with other insurgent groups to meet its military requirements, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Jitendra Singh said in reply to a joint question by 16 MPs. The UALC is also engaged in recruitment and training of cadres for the outfit in Assam. These cadres have been utilised in extensive propaganda against mega dams in Assam, the Minister added.⁵⁶

In other developments, according to reports, a nine-year-old girl was killed while five others, including three other girls, sustained injuries when a powerful bomb exploded inside a rented house in Manipur's Imphal East district.⁵⁷

IV. UNITED NATIONS (UN) REVIEW

- **Mandate of UN support mission to Libya extended; UNSC appreciates ICC verdict; India: No one-size-for-all solution to crises in the Middle East**

According to reports, the mandate of the UN mission assisting Libya (UNSMIL) with its

⁵⁴ "Religious personality shot at, injured", *Greater Kashmir*, March 18, 2012 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2012/Mar/19/religious-personality-shot-at-injured-61.asp>

⁵⁵ "Ibobi to be sworn in tomorrow", *The Assam Tribune*, March 12, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1312/oth05>

⁵⁶ "Maoists establishing bases in NE: Centre", *The Assam Tribune*, March 13, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1412/at07>

⁵⁷ "Girl killed, 5 hurt in Imphal blast", *The Assam Tribune*, March 15, 2012 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1612/oth07>

democratic transition was extended for 12 months. The mandate was also adjusted to support national efforts to promote rule of law, protect human rights, restore public security and hold free and fair elections. The extension will be subject to review within six months.⁵⁸

In another development, the UN Security Council appreciated the first verdict of the International Criminal Court which found the Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga Dyilo guilty of conscripting child soldiers under the age of 15 into his militia.⁵⁹

In other developments, in a debate within the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, India warned against foreign 'intervention through military force or arming of the civilian populations' and also said that there is no one-size-for-all solution to the crises in the region. India also urged the political leaders of the concerned countries in West Asia and North Africa to resolve the problem through inclusive internal political processes that meet the aspirations of their people.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Security Council extends UN mission assisting Libya for another year", *UN News Centre*, March 12, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41517&Cr=libya&Cr1=>

⁵⁹ "ICC conviction of Congolese warlord vital step to fight impunity – Security Council", *UN News Centre*, March 16, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41569&Cr=ICC&Cr1=>

⁶⁰ "India warns against military intervention, arming of civilians in Middle East", *People's Daily*, March 13, 2012 at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90777/7756804.html>