

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

January 16-22, 1(2), 2012

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Thirteen killed two attacks in Helmand Province**

According to reports, thirteen people have died in two attacks in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province. In the first, a suicide bomber on a motorcycle killed seven civilians and two police officers in a bazaar in Kajaki district. NATO said some of its personnel are among the wounded. In a second attack, claimed by the Taliban, a roadside bomb killed a local intelligence official and at least two others in Nad-e-Ali district.¹

Pakistan

- **Pakistan intelligence officials: The leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Hakimullah Mehsud believed to have been killed by a US drone strike; Pakistan Supreme Court accuses PM Gilani of contempt of court; Sui blast damages gas pipe; World Bank Report: Economic activity in Pakistan firmed in the second half of 2011 although it continues to markedly lag behind other nations in South Asia**

According to reports, the leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Hakimullah Mehsud, which poses the gravest security threat to the country, was believed killed by a US drone strike on January 12, Pakistan intelligence officials said on January 15, 2012. The officials said they intercepted wireless radio chatter between Taliban fighters detailing how Hakimullah Mehsud was killed while travelling in a convoy to a meeting in the North Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border. However, a senior military official said there was no official confirmation that the Pakistani state's deadliest enemy had been killed. The Pakistani Taliban issued a denial.²

In another development, according to reports, Pakistan's Supreme Court has issued a contempt order against Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, raising the prospect of his prosecution. The court has been considering what to do about the government's refusal to reopen corruption cases against the president and other political figures. Meanwhile, Gilani has said that he will appear in person at the court on Thursday to defend himself. His announcement came on a day of several challenges for the government.³

According to reports, a pipeline transmitting gas to Karachi and interior Sindh was damaged in a blast by unknown attackers near Dera Bugti's Sui area on Monday. According to security

¹ "Afghanistan blast kills 13 in Helmand Province", *BBC*, January 18, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16620589>

² "Hakimullah reported killed in Jan 12 drone strike", *Dawn*, January 16, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/01/16/hakimullah-reported-killed-in-jan-12-drone-strike.html>

³ "Pakistan PM Gilani faces Supreme Court contempt order", *BBC*, January 16, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16572531>

sources, the explosive material was planted in the Gopat area, 24 kilometres from Sui. The blast took place and the pipeline caught fire as a result. However, due to insecurity in the region, the pipeline's repair could not be initiated at the time.⁴

In other developments, a World Bank report released on January 18, 2012 noted that economic activity in Pakistan firmed in the second half of 2011 although it continues to markedly lag behind other nations in South Asia. Pakistan is South Asia's second largest economy, representing about 15 per cent of regional GDP. The portion on Pakistan points out that the country's economy firmed in the second half of 2011. Industrial production surged to grow at a robust 32.1pc annualised pace during the three months ending in October, after falling at 9.1 and 10.1pc rates during the first and second quarters, respectively. Part of the strengthening in growth reflects base effects due to the widespread flooding that had hampered activity in the second half of 2010. Since the floods occurred in July and August 2010, GDP growth on a fiscal year basis (ending June-2011) slowed to 2.4pc.⁵

Bangladesh

- **Bangladesh army foils a "coup attempt to overthrow the present democratic government; Indian Minister for Communications and Information Technology Kapil Sibal stressed upon the efforts to deepen cooperation in the telecoms sector between Bangladesh and India; India relaxed a major condition on using its \$1 billion credit to Bangladesh; The four-member Sri Lankan delegation led by Commander of Sri Lankan Army Lt Gen Jagath Jayasuriya paid a courtesy call on Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral Z U Ahmed; Bangladesh plans to connect with the world's longest undersea cable through Myanmar**

In a major development, according to reports, the Bangladesh army has foiled a "coup attempt to overthrow the present democratic government", an army spokesman said on January 19, 2012. A band of religious fanatics, comprising mid-ranking officers and their retired colleagues, was involved in the failed putsch. At the instigation of some non-resident Bangladeshis, they sought to "disrupt democracy by creating anarchy in the army, cashing in on the fanaticism of others". Brigadier General Muhammad Mashud Razzaq, director of Personnel Services Directorate, disclosed the information at an unprecedented press briefing at the Army Officers Club in Dhaka cantonment. He was accompanied on the dais by Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Sazzad Siddique, acting judge advocate general of the army. Also present were Lt Gen Md Mainul Islam, chief of general staff, and Brig Gen Ridwan-Al-Mahmud, director of Military Intelligence. Reading out a statement, Mashud said the army had unearthed specific information about some serving officers' involvement in the conspiracy. "This evil plot has been resisted thanks to sincere efforts by the well-disciplined members of the force," he said adding that some serving and retired officials had already admitted their involvement. Replying to a query, Brig Gen Mashud said around 14 to 16 mid-level officers were believed to have been involved in the bid.⁶

⁴ "Blast damages pipeline near Sui", *Dawn*, January 17, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/01/17/blast-damages-pipeline-near-sui.html>

⁵ "Pakistan's economy recovering: WB", *Dawn*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.dawn.com/2012/01/19/pakistans-economy-recovering-wb.html>

⁶ "Army foils bid to topple govt", *The Daily Star*, January 20, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=219131>

According to reports, Indian Minister for Communications and Information Technology Kapil Sibal has stressed upon the efforts to deepen cooperation between Bangladesh and India in the telecoms sector. The minister said this while talking to the visiting Bangladesh parliamentary delegation led by Hasanul Haq Inu, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on ministry of posts and telecommunications in New Delhi.⁷

In another development, according to reports, India relaxed a major condition on using its \$1 billion credit to Bangladesh to expedite the implementation of various projects with this loan. A major hurdle to implementing the projects was the condition of purchasing 85 per cent of supply from Indian origin, allowing Bangladesh sourcing only 15 per cent from the local market. But India has agreed to allow Bangladesh more room for local sourcing, which would be determined on the basis of the nature and requirements of the projects. The decision was reached at a high-level official meeting between the two countries, held at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) in Bangladesh's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.⁸

Reports noted that the four-member Sri Lankan delegation led by Commander of Sri Lankan Army Lt Gen Jagath Jayasuriya paid a courtesy call on Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral Z U Ahmed at Naval Headquarters. The delegation visited Bangladesh from January 10 to January 16, 2012.⁹

In other developments, Bangladesh reportedly, plans to connect with the world's longest undersea cable through Myanmar to strengthen its back-up for internet operation. To connect with the SEA-ME-WE 3 (South-East Asia - Middle East-Western Europe), Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd (BSCCL) will build about 50-kilometre fibre optic link from Cox's Bazar up to the Myanmar border.¹⁰ Meanwhile, according to reports, the World Bank (WB) will provide \$ 290 million to Bangladesh to finance the Second Local Governance Support Project to cover all 4,504 union parishads and benefit around 130 million population of the country.¹¹

Sri Lanka

- **India's EAM Krishna visits Sri Lanka; Fourth meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries held; Sri Lanka decides to donate 7,500 metric tons of rice to Somalia; Former Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam visits Sri Lanka**

In a significant development, reports noted that India's External Affairs Minister S M Krishna made a four day official visit to Sri Lanka from January 16-19, 2012. During his visit, EAM met

⁷ "India calls for deeper ties in telecoms", *The Daily Star*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=219020>

⁸ "Use of \$1b Credit: India relaxes condition", *The Daily Star*, January 20, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=219165>.

⁹ "Sri Lankan army commander meets navy chief", *The Daily Star*, January 16, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=218536>.

¹⁰ Mamun, Abdullah, "Bangladesh may link up with another submarine cable via Myanmar", *The Daily Star*, January 17, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=218633>.

¹¹ Bid to Strengthen Local Governance:\$290m loan deal signed with World Bank, *The Daily Star*, January 18, 2012 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=218843>.

with President M. Rajapaksa, PM DM Jayaratne, his counterpart Prof. GL Peiris, the TNA representatives and members of ALL Ceylon Muslim Congress. During the visit, both the countries have signed MoU specifying the modalities for the next phase of the housing project being implemented with India's assistance of about 260 million US\$, MoUs for cooperation in the field of Agriculture and for cooperation between the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India and Telecommunication Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka; an agreement for India to provide a line of credit of US\$ 382.37 million restoration of Northern Railway Services Buyer Credit Agreement. EAM Krishna also visited Kilinochchi and Jaffna in connection with Government of India assisted projects and handed over the first lot of housing units at Ariyali Jaffna. As a token gesture, he also provided 10,000 bicycles to IDPs in the Northern Province.¹² He also visited Galle where he inaugurated a segment of the Southern Railway Project implemented under a Line of Credit extended by India.¹³ He announced a substantial increase in India's educational assistance, amounting to Rs. 2.5 billion in grant-funding, to assist meritorious Sri Lankan students. Under this programme, scholarships and self-financing slots for undergraduate, masters and doctorate-level courses will be increased to nearly 270 per year.¹⁴

In another development, according to reports, fourth meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries was held in Colombo on January 13-14, 2012. The Sri Lankan delegation was led by Ms. Kshenuka Senewiratne, Additional Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka while the Indian delegation was headed by Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of India. The 11-member Indian delegation had representatives from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and a host of agencies, including the Indian Coast Guard. The two countries, noting that the Joint Statement on Fishing Arrangements of 26th October 2008 had since led to a decrease in violent incidents, have agreed to allow both countries to pursue their fishing activity in a safe, secure and sustainable manner, including discouraging fishermen from using destructive fishing methods, a joint statement issued by the two countries said. The two sides also agreed to develop programmes for bilateral exchanges in aquaculture and fishing related activities, including training in fisheries management, genetic improvement of cultured species, fishing technology, exchange of scientists, etc. A Memorandum of Understanding on development and cooperation in the field of fisheries and an agreement to set an early date for the work were also suggested during the meeting.¹⁵

Meanwhile, according to reports, rejecting some negative news reports that related to the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group meeting , Sri Lankan Ministry of External Affairs said "unfortunately, these are misinterpretations of the positions taken by either of the parties, and

¹² For details see "EAM's remarks at joint media interaction with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka", January 17, 2012 available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530118908>

¹³ Indian Minister hands over Galle-Hikkaduwa railway track in Southern Sri Lanka, *ColomboPage News Desk*, January 19, 2012 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Jan19_1326990157CH.php.

¹⁴ "India announces expansion of scholarship program in Sri Lanka", *ColomboPage News Desk*, January 19, 2012, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Jan19_1326993481CH.php.

¹⁵ "SL, India agree to enhance bilateral cooperation on fishermen's issues", *Newline*, January 16, 2012 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201201/20120116sl_india_agree_to_enhance_bilateral_cooperation.htm

do not reflect the cordial, friendly and constructive manner in which the relevant issues were discussed.”¹⁶

Reports noted that the Cabinet of Sri Lankan government has decided to donate 7,500 metric tons (MT) of rice to Somalia and approved the release of 15,000 MT of paddy from Ampara and Polonnaruwa districts to produce rice for the purpose.¹⁷

In other developments, India’s former President, A P J Abdul Kalam, visited Colombo on January 19, 2012 to jointly launch Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s ambitious Trilingual Initiative along with President Rajapaksa himself. The two leaders launched the historic Trilingual Initiative in Colombo on January 21.¹⁸

Maldives

- **President Nasheed meets with Indian and Sri Lankan delegates participating in the trilateral discussion in maritime security in the IOR; SAARC Secretary General Dhiyana Saeed decides to tender her resignation; Maldives’ Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Aslam Shakir met with Deputy Assistant Secretary of the US Department of State, South and Central Asia Affairs Dr Alyssa Ayres**

According to reports, President Nasheed met with the Indian and Sri Lankan delegates participating in the trilateral discussion in maritime security in the Indian Ocean region on January 18, 2012. The two meetings were held separately at the President’s Office.¹⁹

In another development, according to reports, SAARC Secretary General Dhiyana Saeed has decided to tender her resignation from the post. The decision was made after she came under heavy criticism from President Mohamed Nasheed’s Press Secretary Mohamed Zuhair, following her participation in a news conference to condemn the recent arrests of Vice President of DQP Dr. Jameel and the Chief Criminal Court Judge Abdulla Mohamed. Zuhair had also accused Dhiyana of violating the SAARC charter. This would be the first time a SAARC Secretary General has resigned from the post.²⁰

In other developments, reports noted that Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Aslam Shakir met with Deputy Assistant Secretary of the US Department of State, South and Central Asia

¹⁶ “India- Sri Lanka Joint Working Group: SL fully committed working towards fulfilling mandate”, *Government of Sri Lanka Website*, January 16, 2012 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201201/20120116india_sl_joint_working_group.htm

¹⁷ “Sri Lanka to donate 7500 MT of rice to Somalia”, *ColomboPage News Desk*, January 19, 2012 at, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/Jan19_1326984143CH.php

¹⁸ Venkat Narayan, S. “Former Indian President Kalam arrives in Colombo: To launch Trilingual Initiative along with Mahinda”, *The island*, January 19, 2012 at http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=43534.

¹⁹ “President Meets with Indian and Sri Lankan Delegates Participating in the Trilateral Maritime Discussions”, *President’s Office, Republic of Maldives*, January 18, 2012 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=6607>

²⁰ “Dhiyana Saeed to resign as SAARC Secretary General”, *Haveeru*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.haveeru.com.mv/news/39838>

Affairs Dr Alyssa Ayres. During the meeting State Minister Shakir highlighted the need for judicial reform, claiming that the current judicial system “has not lived up to international norms and obligations”, a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs read.²¹

B. Central Asia & Russia

Central Asia

- **Kazakhstan’s new parliament reconvened after the election on January 20; Astana to open East-West transnational highway corridor by end of 2013; Britain seeks to step up wide-ranging cooperation with Bishkek; World Bank: Developing states like CARs may face new economic crisis; Turkmenistan begins offering citizenship to stateless people**

According to reports, Kazakhstan’s new parliament reconvened after the election on January 20. The president’s party, the Nur Otan now holds 83 of the 107 seats, Ak Zhol holds 8 and while the Communist People’s Party holds seven. The international election monitors, including those from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), found the Kazakh election process failing in adhering to democratic ethos, while President Nazarbayev lauded the three-party parliament as paving way to democratic development.²² However, the OSCE report on its finding on Kazakh parliamentary elections was termed unbalanced.²³

In the meanwhile, Prime Minister Karim Massimov in a report said that Kazakhstan by the end of 2013 will open its part of East-West transnational highway corridor connecting China with Europe. The highway, which will be laid on 1,732 miles of Kazakh territory, consists of a total length of 5,250 miles, linking the Russian city of St. Petersburg at one extreme to China’s eastern seaport city of Lianyungang.²⁴

According to reports, Britain seeks to step up wide-ranging cooperation with Kyrgyzstan as it establishes full embassy operations in the country, Britain’s top diplomat told a news conference in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek on January 19, 2012. British Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan David Moran, who is also the UK’s ambassador to Kazakhstan, told in a news conference in Bishkek that Britain seeks to step up wide-ranging cooperation with Kyrgyzstan as it establishes full embassy operations in the country. He reportedly stated, “The planned withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 2014 is approaching, so the issues of defense and military cooperation between our countries become more relevant.”²⁵ In related development, according to reports,

²¹ “State Minister briefs US envoy on Maldives’ extremist rhetoric”, *Minivan News*, January 19, 2012 at <http://minivannews.com/category/news-in-brief>.

²² “New Kazakh parliament opens”, *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2011 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kazakhstan/9028043/New-Kazakh-parliament-opens.html>

²³ “OSCE vote report ‘not balanced,’ Kazakh ambassador says”, *Universal Newswires*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11197>

²⁴ “East-West highway to open in 2013, Kazakh PM says”, *Universal Newswires*, January 20, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11206>

²⁵ “Britain to bolster ties with Kyrgyzstan”, *Universal Newswires*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11195>

Judith Farnworth will take up residence in Bishkek next month as the UK's first ambassador to work full-time in the Kyrgyz capital.²⁶

In another development, reports noted that Russia has transferred military vehicles and communications equipment to Kyrgyzstan mid-January to strengthen the country's porous borders ahead of the withdrawal of NATO troops from nearby Afghanistan.²⁷ In the meanwhile, President Almazbek Atambayev of Kyrgyzstan and the chief of State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) Rovnag Abullayev signed a tentative accord to build an oil refinery that will process 2.2 million tons of crude per year.²⁸

According to reports, the World Bank, in its recently published "Global Economic Prospects 2012" report, warned of a new financial crisis wherein Eurozone crisis is threatening to set off a 'contagion' depressing economies throughout the globe hitting the developing countries the hardest. It projects that developing countries' growth in gross domestic product (GDP), previously projected to grow 6.2 percent in 2012 and 6.3 percent in 2013, may now see respective growths at 5.4 and 6 percent.²⁹ The report noted that developing states will have a harder time recovering from the imminent economic crisis than they did in the 2008-09 global financial crisis. Part of this reason is slower growth than expected in Russia, which is a critical source of both foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances for many Central Asian states.³⁰

However, according to reports, the National Bank of Tajikistan stated that the remittances from Tajik migrant workers now account for 45 percent of Tajikistan's GDP. Remittances received by Tajik residents amounted to \$6.3 billion, which represents a 33.6 percent increase in funds provided by migrant workers to the Tajik economy compared to 2010 revenue.³¹

In other developments, according to reports, Turkmenistan is one of several nations which have begun offering citizenship to individuals who previously had claims to no country following a UN campaign, a UNHCR expert said on January 20, 2012. The Turkmen government has undertaken a new drive to formally register stateless persons. Reports noted that over 20,000 have been registered. Of these, more than 3,000 have been granted Turkmen citizenship.³²

Russia

- **Russia hands over Nerpa nuclear submarine to India; PM Putin is ready for dialogue with 'non-system' opposition; NATO believes that there has been an improvement in its**

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ "Russia transfers equipment to strengthen Kyrgyz borders", *Universal Newswires*, January 18, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11184>

²⁸ "SOCAR agrees to build oil refinery in Kyrgyzstan", *Universal Newswires*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11191>

²⁹ "World Bank: Developing states face new economic crisis", *Universal Newswires*, January 18, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11188>

³⁰ ibid

³¹ "Tajik remittances now account for 45% of GDP", *Universal Newswires*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11199>

³² "Turkmenistan grants citizenship to stateless following UN campaign", *Universal Newswires*, January 20, 2012 at <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=11209>

relationship with Russia; Russia's new Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin appointed as chairman of government military industrial committee; Former Soviet President Gorbachev supports Yavlinsky's nomination for presidential elections; Russia-NATO approve cooperation plan for 2012; Russia's space agency revives plan of having a permanent moon base; At least 30 Mig-31 fighter planes are on round-the-clock high-alert duty to protect Russia's airspace; Russia believes that Japan's rigid stand on Kurile islands is an impediment in improving bilateral ties between the two; Russia's strategic nuclear forces to get 8 Borey class submarines; Two Russian diplomats to leave Canada amidst spying allegations

Reports noted that Russia has handed over the K-152 Nerpa nuclear-powered attack submarine to the Indian Navy. In line with the contract worth over \$900 million, the Project 971 Shchuka-B (NATO: Akula II) class sub has been leased to India's Navy for ten years. It will be renamed the INS Chakra. The ceremony took place in the Far Eastern Primorye Territory. Russian submariners trained their Indian colleagues to steer the Nerpa in the Pacific Ocean. The event was attended by Indian ambassador to Russia Ajai Malhotra, United Shipbuilding Corporation head Roman Trotsenko, Eastern Military District commander Admiral Konstantin Sidenko and other officials.³³

According to reports, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has said that he was ready for dialogue with the Voters' League and the "non-system" opposition but lamented the fact that nobody turned up for the meeting despite the invitation send out to them.³⁴

In another developmnt, NATO's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has said that there has been an improvement in relationship between the North-Atlantic pact and Russia. Rasmussen mentioned that NATO remains committed to the proposal of building a strategic partnership with Russia on the principles of security and mutual trust as specified by the agreements the two sides reached in November 20, 2010 at Lisbon.³⁵

Reports noted that Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has been appointed as chairman of the military industrial committee under the Russian government. Rogozin replaces Sergei Ivanov who had headed the committee till the end of 2011 before being appointed as chief of the Russian presidential staff. Rogozin was earlier posted as Russia's representative to NATO.³⁶

Meanwhile, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has supported Grigory Yavlinsky's nomination as a presidential candidate and added his signature to the list of his supporters.³⁷

³³ "Russia hands over Nerpa nuclear sub to India", Ria Novosti, November 23, 2012, http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20120123/170896950.html

³⁴ "Putin ready for dialogue with "non-system" opposition', ITAR-TASS, January 18, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/319498.html>

³⁵ "NATO's Rasmussen says relations with Russia improving", ITAR-TASS, January 20, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/320586.html>

³⁶ "Rogozin appointed chairman of govt military industrial committee", ITAR-TASS, January 19, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/319911.html>

³⁷ "Gorbachev supports Yavlinsky's nomination as presidential candidate", ITAR-TASS, January 14, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/316256.html>

According to reports, Russia and NATO have approved a cooperation plan for 2012. Although the details were not released immediately, it is believed that they will continue to work on the agenda set for the previous year. These include: joint combat training programme, increased contacts between military medics and specialists in logistics, disposal of homemade explosive devices, training of military personnel, cooperation in the fight against piracy off the Horn of Africa and cooperation on Afghanistan.³⁸

According to reports, Russian Space Agency Roscosmos is in talks with its European and U.S. partners on the creation of manned research bases on the Moon. The Moon base project appears to revive the 1950's Cold War-era plan of creating a permanent outpost on the Moon. Moreover, Russia is also planning to send two unmanned missions to the Moon by 2020.³⁹

Reports noted that more than 30 MiG-31 Foxhound supersonic interceptor aircraft are on round-the-clock high-alert duty every day protecting the Russian airspace from airborne threats. MiG-31 interceptors are an integral part of a comprehensive aerospace defence network being created in Russia to thwart any potential airborne threats, including ballistic and cruise missiles and it is estimated that 370 of them remain in active duty.⁴⁰

According to reports, Russia believes that Japan's position on the Kurile Islands is not conducive to better relations between Russia and Japan. The dispute lies in the fact that both Japan and Russia lay claim to the Kuril Islands. All Japanese who lived on the South Kurile Islands were deported to Japan when the Soviet Union took over these territories after the Second World War.⁴¹

Reports noted that the Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces will put in service two new strategic missile-carrying cruise submarines of Borey class 955 Yuri Dolgoruky and Alexander Nevsky by the end of this year. A total of eight Borey submarines will be built at the Sevmash shipyard under the state armament program through 2020.⁴²

According to reports, Russian deputy premier in charge of Defence, Rogozin has said that the US and its NATO allies have about one thousand missiles capable of intercepting Russia's intercontinental ballistic missiles. He was speaking in the backdrop of deadlocked Russia-NATO missile defence talks. Russia is seeking written and legally binding guarantees that the U.S.-backed European missile defence program will not be directed against it while the US has refused to provide any guarantees.⁴³

³⁸ "Russia, NATO approve cooperation plan for 2012", ITAR-TASS, January 18, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/319527.html>

³⁹ "Roscosmos revives permanent moon base plans", RIA Novosti, January 19, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/science/20120119/170840782.html>

⁴⁰ "Russia keeps 30 Mig -31 interceptors on high alert duty", RIA Novosti, January 22, 2012, http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20120122/170883852.html

⁴¹ "Japan's position on territorial dispute not conducive to better relations", ITAR-TASS, January 14, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/316275.html>

⁴² "Russian strategic nuclear forces to get 8 Borey submarines", ITAR-TASS, January 20, 2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/321232.html>

⁴³ "US, NATO have some 1,000 interceptor missiles- Rogozin", RIA Novosti, January 20, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20120120/170856516.html>

In other developments, according to reports, two Russian diplomats have left Canada amid spying allegations of receiving sensitive NATO and Canadian military information.⁴⁴

C. West Asia

Iran

- **Iran agrees to discuss nuclear issue with the IAEA; Iran condemns Saudi Arabia over Saudi Arabian Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi's remarks ; Iranian officials release US President Obama's letter to Iran**

According to reports, Iran said on January 17, 2012 that it was open to discuss "any issues" in rare talks this month with the U.N. nuclear watchdog IAEA, which wants Tehran to address mounting concerns that it may be trying to develop nuclear weapons capability. A senior Iranian official said that a high-level team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would hold three days of talks in Tehran from January 29-31, 2012. The IAEA delegation, to be headed by Deputy Director General Herman Nackaerts, is expected to seek explanations regarding intelligence information which indicated that Iran is engaged in research and development of nuclear weapons. Iran's IAEA envoy Ali Asghar Soltanieh told that "We are open to discuss any issues that the IAEA is interested to discuss, within the framework of its mandate of course ... I am optimistic that we will have a constructive, professional, technical meeting."⁴⁵

In another development, according to reports, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has advised Saudi officials against making injudicious remarks about boosting oil production amid European countries' efforts to impose oil sanctions on the Islamic republic. "We expect the countries in the Persian Gulf region, particularly Saudi Arabia, with which we have always called for the best relations, to avoid injudicious discourses," Salehi said on Tuesday in response to Saudi Arabian Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi's comments that his country will make up for any shortfall in world oil supply caused by sanctions against Iran. "If Saudi officials' recent remarks are to be regarded as their official view, we advise them to respond more thoughtfully and sensibly to regional issues," Salehi added. It would be worth noting that Iran exports roughly 2.5 million barrels per day.⁴⁶

In other developments, according to reports, a number of Iranian officials have released the details of the letter that US President Barack Obama recently sent to Tehran. Earlier, the New York Times, citing US government officials, wrote on January 12 that the Obama administration had sent a message to Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei warning that closing the Strait of Hormuz is a "red line" that would provoke a response by the US. In the

⁴⁴ "Russian diplomats leave Canada amid spying scandal", Radio Free Europe, January 21, 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/russian_diplomats_leave_canada_amid_spying_scandal_/24458428.html

⁴⁵ "Iran says ready to discuss "any issues" with IAEA," *Khaleej Times*, January 18, 2012, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2012/January/middleeast_January485.xml§ion=middleeast

⁴⁶ "Iran advises Saudi officials against making injudicious remarks," *Mehr News*, January 17, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1511870>

letter, Obama has also announced readiness for negotiation and the resolution of mutual disagreements. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast said that US officials had sent a message on the Strait of Hormuz to the Islamic Republic through three officials, noting, "Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, delivered a letter to Mohammad Khazaii, the Islamic Republic of Iran's ambassador (to the UN). The Swiss ambassador to Tehran (Livia Leu Agosti) also conveyed the message, and Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president, conveyed the message to officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well."⁴⁷

Iraq

- **Iraqi government issues arrest warrants for 120 members of Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO)**

According to reports, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced that arrest warrants have been issued for 120 members of the Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO). Maliki described the MKO as a "terrorist" group and said that it has committed terrorist acts in Iraq and Iran for many years. He also reiterated the Iraqi government's decision to expel the members of the group and to bring an end to the issue. Maliki went on to say that Iraq wants to maintain relations with its neighboring countries and to put an end to the crises that Saddam Hussein created in relations with the countries including Iran and Turkey. He pointed out that Iraq had pushed for the expulsion of the group by mid-January, but foreign intervention hindered the process. Maliki further added that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had asked Iraq to be patient in this regard and extend the deadline for the expulsion. The MKO started its activities as a terrorist group based in Iraq in the early 1980s. In addition to the assassination of hundreds of Iranian officials and citizens, the group cooperated with Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime in its repression of the Iraqi people.⁴⁸

II. DEFENCE REVIEW

National

- **Cabinet Committee on Security to consider a major proposal for procurement of trainer aircraft from Switzerland; Indian Naval Academy may throw open its scholastic doors to international trainees 'friendly foreign countries'**

According to reports, India's Air Chief Marshal NAK Browne has noted that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) is expected to consider a proposal worth over Rs 1,850 crore for procurement of 75 Pilatus trainer aircraft from Switzerland in its meeting scheduled later this

⁴⁷ "Details of Obama's letter to Iran released," *Tehran Times*, January 19, 2012 <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/94692-details-of-obamas-letter-to-iran-released>

⁴⁸ "Iraq issues arrest warrants for 120 MKO members," *Tehran Times*, January 19, 2012, at <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/94690-iraq-issues-arrest-warrants-for-120-mko-members>

week. "I am hopeful, because it is pending for clearance from the CCS. The moment the CCS clears, we should be able to sign the contract," the IAF chief said. Reports noted that the aircrafts are being procured by the Indian Air Force to provide training to its rookie pilots and replace the HPT-32 trainer aircraft which have been grounded for over two years after a fatal accident in 2009. The deal is critical for IAF's training requirements as in the next two years, there will be a shortage of Kiran Mk II trainer aircraft which are being used to impart flying lessons to the new trainee cadets in the flying branch of the IAF.⁴⁹

In another development, according to reports, the Indian Naval Academy (INA) at Ezhimala, about 280 km north of Kochi, may throw open its scholastic doors to international trainees from 'friendly foreign countries' in the next couple of years. INA Commandant Vice-Admiral Anurag G. Thapliyal stated, "As and when the Navy decides to open the academy to international trainees, we would be undertaking their training also.... But it will take sometime [to materialise] as it is a policy decision to be taken by the Naval Headquarters (NHQ). I guess there are a lot of queries [from friendly countries] about when the INA will allow foreign trainees to train here,"⁵⁰

International

- **Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW): Libyan regime of Moammar Gadhafi possessed Chemical Weapons; US Chairman of the Joints Chiefs in Israel amid heightened tensions with Iran**

According to reports, the Libyan regime of the late dictator Moammar Gaddafi possessed mustard gas shells that it had not declared as a member of the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the group said on January 20. "At the request of the Libyan authorities the inspectors examined munitions, mainly artillery shells, which they determined are chemical munitions and hence declarable," the OPCW said. The Gaddafi regime joined the OPCW in 2004 but only destroyed some 45 percent of its declared stocks of chemical weapons before the destruction facility malfunctioned in February 2011, just as the ultimately successful rebellion broke out.⁵¹

In another development, according to reports, US Chairman of the Joints Chiefs Gen. Martin Dempsey during his first visit to the Jewish state on January 20, urged Israel to keep the channels of communication open amid concerns that the Jewish state could launch a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. Dempsey said both sides would benefit from greater engagement over regional issues, in an apparent reference to the Iranian nuclear standoff. This is his first visit to Israel since taking office in October 2011. After talks with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Gen. Dempsey stated, "We have many interests in common in the region in this very dynamic

⁴⁹ "CCS to consider Pilatus aircraft proposal: IAF Chief," Indian Express January 17, 2012, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/ccs-to-consider-pilatus-aircraft-proposal-iaf-chief/900672/>

⁵⁰ "Naval Academy may enrol foreign trainees soon," The Hindu, January 20, 2012, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2814546.ece>

⁵¹ "Gadhafi Regime Had Undeclared Chemical Weapons, Group Says," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, January 20, 2012, at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120120/DEFREG04/301200004/-1/7daysarchives/Gadhafi-Regime-Had-Undeclared-Chemical-Weapons-Group-Says>

time and the more we can continue to engage each other, the better off we'll all be,". Israel fears a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat to the Jewish state and has refused to rule out a resort to military action to pre-empt it, although earlier this week Ehud Barak had said that any such decision remained "very far away." Reports suggest that Washington is against such a strike, and the U.S. administration is understood to be putting pressure on Israel to hold off.⁵²

III. UNITED NATIONS (UN) REVIEW

- **UNSC fixes date for filling vacancy in International Court of Justice; UN Secretary General condemns deadly attacks in Nigeria**

Reports noted that the UN Security Council has fixed April 27, 2012 as the date for an election to fill the vacancy on the International Court of Justice (ICJ), after a judge recently resigned from the body. The judge will be chosen by coordinated actions of both the Council and the General Assembly.⁵³

In another development, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the multiple attacks across the northern Nigerian city of Kano which caused large-scale casualties and massive destruction of property. While voicing his solidarity with the Government and people of Nigeria, Ban also sent out his condolences to the bereaved families.⁵⁴

⁵² "U.S. Military Chief in Israel Amid Iran Tensions," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, January 20, 2012, at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120120/DEFREG04/301200007/-1/7daysarchives/U-S-Military-Chief-Israel-Amid-Iran-Tensions>

⁵³ "Security Council to hold election in April to fill UN World Court vacancy", *UN News Centre*, January 19, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40981&Cr=icj&Cr1=>

⁵⁴ "Ban condemns deadly attacks in Nigerian city of Kano", *UN News Centre*, January 21, 2012 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41000&Cr=Nigeria&Cr1=>