

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

February 04-10, 2(2), 2008

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

IRAQ

- *Gates visits Baghdad to discuss nature of US troop engagement; US accuses Iran of supplying material to Iraqi insurgents; Sunni council members attacked; Turkey conducts cross-border raids*

US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates flew into Baghdad on February 10 to discuss the security situation and the nature of the US troop commitment in the country. In a sign of the still enormous tasks that lay ahead, over 30 people were killed in a suicide attack in a northern Iraqi town on the same day. President Bush on his part told *Fox News* that the US did not plan on having permanent bases in Iraq though the nature of the troop engagement could be long drawn out.¹ Meanwhile, 5 more US soldiers lost their lives during the week taking the total number of American deaths since the 2003 invasion to 3,957.

David Satterfield of the US State Department told reporters on February 7 that Iran continued to provide “training and equipment to the most radical and violent forces in Iraq.” He charged that attacks with armour-piercing munitions – said to be made in Iran, had increased in the past few months.²

Ethnic violence continued with a suicide bombing targeting a Sunni-led Awakening Council checkpoint in Salahuddin province killing over 15 people on February 10. Reports also noted difficulties in the working of these councils, with Sunni members charging the local Shiite authorities in Anbar and other provinces of undermining their efforts.³ The US military also killed 9 members of these Councils in Iskandiriya south of Baghdad on February 3 in what it termed were ‘accidental killings.’

Among other developments, the Turkish military revealed that it had bombed over 70 targets spread across 11 places inside Kurdish Iraq on February 4. The PKK on its part stated that it had abandoned its bases in the region that was bombed a long time ago.⁴

CHINA

- *Beijing calls of G7 nations to help maintain world economic stability; Wen meets Sihanuk; Two major cross-strait direct sea routes opened*

Addressing the G-7 nations meeting at Tokyo on February 9, Chinese Finance Minister Xie Xuren appealed to the world’s top industrialized nations to

¹ “US not to have permanent bases in Iraq: Bush,” *IANS*, February 10, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/indiaabroad/20080210/r_t_ians_wl_us/twl-us-not-to-have-permanent-bases-in-ir-903abaa.html

² “Iran supporting insurgents in Iraq, says US,” *IANS*, February 8, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/indiaabroad/20080208/r_t_ians_wl_us/twl-iran-supporting-insurgents-in-iraq-s-903abaa.html

³ “Conflicts Deepen Between Local Iraqi Governments and U.S.-Backed Sunni Groups,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/world/middleeast/10iraq.html?ref=todayspaper>

⁴ “Turkish Planes Strike Iraqi Kurdistan,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/world/middleeast/05iraq.html?ref=todayspaper>

implement effective measures and take the responsibility of maintaining world economic stability.⁵ Meanwhile, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that President Hu Jintao would in all likelihood visit Japan next year. Though the dates and the nature of the visit were yet to be fixed, this would be the first visit by a Chinese president in a decade.⁶

On the occasion of the Chinese lunar New Year, Premier Wen Jiabao visited former Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk and praised him for his outstanding contribution in promoting China-Cambodia friendship. The meeting assumed significance in the backdrop of celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Wen also thanked Sihanouk for disaster relief assistance in snow-stricken areas of China.⁷

In other developments, the Chinese government opened two major cross-strait direct sea routes between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan - the Xiamen-Jinmen and Mawei-Matsu routes.⁸

JAPAN

- *Japan and Russia to hold first vice-ministerial talks on ways to fight global warming on February 27; Tokyo lodges strong protest against Tupolev TU-95 strategic bomber intrusion*

Japan and Russia have agreed to hold their first vice-ministerial talks on ways to fight global warming on February 27 in Tokyo. The talks would also focus on the so-called "clean investment scheme" to help a country like Japan attain the targets set under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol for cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Tokyo is also planning to buy a large amount of emissions quotas from Russia - whose quotas exceed what it needs to meet its own target, in return for investments in energy and environmental conservation technologies.⁹

Meanwhile, Tokyo lodged a strong protest over an alleged intrusion into Japanese air space by a Russian Tupolev Tu-95 strategic bomber off the southern part of the Izu Island chain.¹⁰

⁵ "China calls for G7's efforts to ensure global economic stability," *PLA Daily*, February 10, 2008, at <http://english.pladaily.com.cn/>

⁶ "FM spokesman: Chinese President Hu Jintao to visit Japan next year," *PLA Daily*, February 5, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6314966.html>

⁷ "Chinese premier visits former Cambodian King," *People's Daily*, February 11, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6352762.html>

⁸ "Cross-strait direct sea routes remains open on first day of Lunar New Year," *People's Daily*, February 8, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/6352142.html>

⁹ "Japan, Russia to hold global warming talks," *Japan Today*, February 10, 2008, at <http://www.japantoday.com/jp/news/427629>

¹⁰ "Russian air force bomber intrudes into Japanese airspace," *Japan Today*, February 10, 2008, at <http://www.japantoday.com/jp/news/427556>

MYANMAR

- *Election in Myanmar in 2010; Myanmar refutes the UNICEF report; Ban Ki-moon urged to visit Myanmar; Shiv Shankar Menon visits Myanmar*

The military junta announced on February 9 that it will hold a referendum on a new constitution in May 2008 to be followed by elections in 2010.¹¹ National League for Democracy (NLD) on its part expressed surprise over the announcement noting that the junta had fixed the time for the elections even before the results of the constitutional referendum were known.¹²

In other developments, Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej urged the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to make a personal visit to Myanmar to press the junta to accept international talks on political reforms.¹³ Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon was also in Myanmar during the week for talks with the authorities. Reports noted that among the issues on the agenda included pressing the junta to accept one more round of talks with the UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari. Mr. Menon's visit has however been dismissed by the pro-democracy leaders as another attempt to gain access to the country's natural resources.¹⁴

SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- *Gates urges NATO to do more in Afghanistan; Rice and Miliband visit Afghanistan, urge Karzai to allow a UN Envoy*

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates urged his NATO allies during the week to do more to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. At the Munich security conference on February 9, Gates noted that some countries were "forcing other allies to bear disproportionate share of fighting and dying."¹⁵ NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer however insisted that the alliance was united in ensuring that it prevailed in the country. Reports noted that Germany would boost its troop contingent to about 4,500, from its current levels of 3,500 and also widen their area of deployment.¹⁶

¹¹ "Reuters: Myanmar junta to hold elections in 2010 - Aung Hla Tun," *Burma Net*, February 9, 2008, at <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2008/02/09/reuters-myanmar-junta-to-hold-elections-in-2010-aung-hla-tun/#more-11003>

¹² "BBC News: Burmese junta sets voting dates," *Burma Net*, February 9, 2008 at <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2008/02/09/bbc-news-burmese-junta-sets-voting-dates/#more-11002>

¹³ "Agence France Presse: New Thai PM urges UN chief to visit Myanmar," *Burma Net*, February 8, 2008, at <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2008/02/08/agence-france-presse-new-thai-pm-urges-un-chief-to-visit-myanmar/#more-10994>

¹⁴ "Irrawaddy: Indian Foreign Secretary visits Burma - Violet Cho," *Burma Net*, February 7, 2008, at <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2008/02/07/irrawaddy-indian-foreign-secretary-visits-burma-%e2%80%93-violet-cho/#more-10984>

¹⁵ "US accuses NATO allies of half-hearted fight against terror," *IANS*, February 10, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/indiaabroad/20080210/r_t_ians_wl_europe/twl-us-accuses-nato-allies-of-half-heart-ef5d19c.html

¹⁶ "Germany to increase its forces in Afghanistan," *IANS*, February 9, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/indiaabroad/20080209/r_t_ians_wl_europe/twl-germany-to-increase-its-forces-in-af-ef5d19c.html

Meanwhile, Secretary Rice and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband visited Kabul and Kandahar during the week and insisted that it was essential that the Afghan government and NATO win the counter-insurgency war against the Taliban. They also urged President Karzai to agree to an international envoy on Afghanistan to coordinate international efforts on the Afghan issue.

In other developments, 2 Afghan Army soldiers were killed in a roadside bomb explosion in the southern Helmand province on February 8.

PAKISTAN

- *Interior Ministry: Security plans for the February 18 elections approved; Anti-militancy operations continue across country*

A Spokesperson of the Interior Ministry in Islamabad announced on January 29 that the federal government had approved four security plans so as to peacefully conduct the upcoming general elections on February 18.¹⁷ The US on its part, through Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher, urged Pakistani authorities to do away with “serious distortions” to ensure a fair election process.¹⁸ A report in the *Chicago Tribune* noted that the PPP would be the decisive factor in determining the ‘future of Pakistan’ owing to the sympathy wave in which the PPP candidates were expected to head for victory in the polls.¹⁹

Security operations continued in various parts of the country with 24 militants who were holding security personnel hostage getting killed in Peshawar in the Kohat tunnel on January 27.²⁰ At least 12 more ‘foreign militants’ were killed in North Waziristan later on January 29 in an operation by the Army. These militants had allegedly held 300 children hostage in a school.²¹

Amidst widespread protests of the lawyers’ across the country, the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Aitzaz Ahsan called for a complete boycott of the judges who had taken oath under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO).²² Later however on February 2, Ahsan was put under detention by the Punjab government for this act of contempt.

¹⁷ “Four security plans approved for elections: Interior Ministry,” *Daily Times*, January 30, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\01\30\story_30-1-2008_pg1_2

¹⁸ Khalid Hasan, “US wants ‘serious distortions’ fixed before elections,” *Daily Times*, January 30, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\01\30\story_30-1-2008_pg1_1

¹⁹ “PPP’s future will determine that of Pakistan,” *Daily Times*, January 29, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\01\29\story_29-1-2008_pg1_2

²⁰ Manzoor Ali Shah, “Army retakes tunnel, 24 militants dead,” *Daily Times*, January 28, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\01\28\story_28-1-2008_pg1_1

²¹ “12 militants killed in North Waziristan missile strike,” *Daily Times*, January 30, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\01\30\story_30-1-2008_pg1_4

²² Syed Faisal Shakeel, “Aitzaz calls for complete boycott of PCO judges,” *Dawn*, February 2, 2008 at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/02/02/top2.htm>

BANGLADESH

- *Bangladesh the new destination for ship-building; Miliband urges Dhaka to lift emergency*

The *Financial Express* reported on the February 5 that Bangladesh had become a new destination for ship-building companies who were into construction of small ocean-going vessels. This was because of the fact that traditional ship-building nations such as South Korea, China and even Vietnam were now focusing on building large ships.²³

In domestic developments, the High Court of Bangladesh dismissed the case against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in an extortion case. The Court concluded that it was "illegal" to prosecute her under the emergency power rules as the offence was committed at an earlier date.²⁴

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband urged the Bangladeshi government to lift the state of emergency in the country and to hold elections before the end of 2008.²⁵

NEPAL

- *Gyanendra expresses dissatisfaction with the decision of interim parliament to abolish monarchy; Rival camps accuse the other of trying to upset CA polls; EU urges cessation of violence for smooth conduct of polls; Exit permits issued to Bhutanese refugees*

King Gyanendra in a statement on February 6 expressed dissatisfaction with the decision of the interim parliament to abolish the monarchy, asserting that the move was not in tune with "democracy." Emphasizing that people have a right to choose the fate of the monarchy, he pointed to a survey which reflected that forty-nine percent of respondents favored the monarchy.²⁶

Meanwhile, the verbal war between the leaders of the opposing camps continued, with the Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai publicly accusing the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML of trying to upset the CA polls.²⁷ The CPN-UML on its part has accused the Maoists of "high handedness" and that such attitudes could jeopardize SPA unity. Criticism was also raised against the CPN for reviving the Maoist Revolutionary People's Council.²⁸ The revival of the council has also drawn flak from the UN Mission in Nepal, which asserted that the

²³ "Bangladesh set to emerge as new shipbuilding hub" *The Financial Express*, February 5, 2008, at http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/search_index.php?page=detail_news&news_id=24509

²⁴ "Extortion case against Hasina: HC declares trial under EPR illegal: Entire trial proceedings quashed: Govt plea to stay the verdict brushed aside: Appellate Division hears appeal t" *The Daily Star*, February 7, 2008, at <http://nation.ittefaq.com/issues/2008/02/07/news0987.htm>

²⁵ "Britain calls for democracy in Bangladesh" *The Associated Foreign Press*, February 9, 2008 at <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gs26bYOe4jg4rzrRPtzzyfowKdQ>

²⁶ "King Gyanendra breaks 'silence' yet again, slams decision to abolish monarchy," *Nepal News*, February 7, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/feb/feb07/news03.php>

²⁷ "There are anti-election elements in NC and UML, claims Bhattarai," *Nepal News*, February 5, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/feb/feb05/news15.php>

²⁸ "Maoist highhandedness could jeopardise SPA unity: MK Nepal," *Nepal News*, February 7, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/feb/feb07/news06.php>

development was contrary to the spirit of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.²⁹ The E.U observation team to Nepal, which has agreed to deploy an observation team at the behest of the Elections Commission, has stressed on the need to stop all acts of violence as a primary pre-condition for conducting fair elections.³⁰

In another development, the three Madhesi parties – Madhesi People’s Rights Forum, Terai-Madhes Democratic Party and Sadbhawana Party have formed a United Madhesi Democratic Front. They have proposed a six-point charter of demands – including an autonomous Madhesi state, right to self-determination, annulment of the current election law, proportional representation of Madhesis, women and Dalits in all organs of the state and declaration as martyrs those killed during the Madhesi movement in 2007.³¹

The Nepalese government has issued exit permits to refugees in eastern Nepal to enable their resettlement in a third country. Reports suggested that the United States and Canada had offered to resettle 60,000 and 5,000 Bhutanese refugees respectively.³²

SRI LANKA

- *Rajapakse: Terrorism and poverty two main challenges confronting the state; 39 LTTE cadres killed in North*

A Claymore blast which followed President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s Independence Day statement to “liberate” the North claimed 6 civilian lives in Colombo.³³ In his Independence Day speech, President Rajapaksa asserted that terrorism from the East had been cleared and that poverty and terrorism were the two main challenges confronting the state.³⁴ The prospects of elections in the East suffered another setback when the main opposition party - the United National Party decided not to contest due to the conflict prone environment.³⁵

The Sri Lankan Air Force continued to bomb key targets of the LTTE in the North.³⁶ Heavy casualties were also being reported with the Defence Ministry claiming that 39 cadres of the LTTE had been killed.³⁷

²⁹ “Maoists under fire for reviving revolutionary council,” *Nepal News*, February 7, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/feb/feb07/news09.php>

³⁰ “EU stresses on need to end violence,” *Nepal News*, February 7, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/feb/feb07/news07.php>

³¹ “Madhesi parties form front,” *The Hindu*, February 10, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/10/stories/2008021050341200.htm>

³² “Nepal issues exit permits to Bhutanese refugees for third country settlement,” *Nepal News*, February 4, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/feb/feb04/news06.php>

³³ “12 civilians die, 17 injured in Sri Lanka bus blast,” *The Hindu*, February 5, 2008, at: <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/05/stories/2008020559601500.htm>

³⁴ “Sri Lanka President says eradicating terrorism and poverty the main challenge,” *Colombo Page*, February 4, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/February410124CH.html

³⁵ “PAFFREL says election in eastern Sri Lanka will be fair and peaceful,” *Colombo Page*, February 5, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/February5193857JR.html

³⁶ “LTTE targets ‘destroyed,’” *The Hindu*, February 6, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/06/stories/2008020652771700.htm>

In other developments, Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights issued a statement stating that Human Rights Council in Geneva had not reported any incidents of human rights violations in the country and that Sri Lanka now stood clear of any rights violations charged against it.³⁸

2. NUCLEAR REVIEW

INDIA

- *Mukherjee: India might have to face global isolation if nuclear deal does not go through; Mulford: Its "now or never"*

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee warned that India may face global isolation if it did not go ahead with the Indo-US nuclear deal. He added that India and the IAEA were still to find a common ground on the safeguards agreement.³⁹

The US Ambassador to India David Mulford on his part stated that the deal had reached a point of "now or never." He however asserted that the failure of the nuclear deal would not affect Indo-US ties.⁴⁰

NORTH KOREA

- *North Korea completes eight of eleven disablement measures: Chun Yung-woo; Lee Myung-Bak promises dramatic rise in living standards if Pyongyang gives up its nuclear programmes; DNI questions North Korea's commitment; Hill: US ready to establish full diplomatic ties if Pyongyang gave up nuclear weapons and programmes*

South Korea's chief nuclear envoy, Chun Yung-woo stated that North Korea had completed eight of the eleven measures required to disable its nuclear facilities. He noted that North Korea had made progress in disabling its main plutonium-producing facilities but had failed to complete the work by an end-of-2007 deadline because of technical reasons.⁴¹ Meanwhile, senior US State Department official Sung Kim, visiting Pyongyang to revitalise the stalled disarmament process, urged North Korea to make a complete and accurate declaration.⁴²

³⁷ "Claims of heavy casualties in Sri Lanka," *The Hindu*, February 9, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/09/stories/2008020959931800.htm>

³⁸ "Sri Lanka cleared of all bogus HR violations- Human Rights Minister," *Colombo Page*, February 7, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/February7130019JR.html

³⁹ "India FM alert over nuclear deal," *BBC*, February 4, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/south_asia/7225575.stm

⁴⁰ "Failure of N-deal will not hit Indo-US ties," *Times of India*, February 6, 2008, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/rssarticleshow/msid-2760055,prtpage-1.cms>

⁴¹ Hyung-Jin Kim, "N. Korea Completes 8 Disablement Measures," *Washington Post*, February 1, 2008, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/01/AR2008020100208_pf.html

⁴² "US envoy says he urged NKorea to fully declare nukes," *Channel News Asia*, February 3, 2008, at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/326570/1/.htm

South Korean President-elect Lee Myung-Bak offered North Korea a dramatic rise in living standards if it abandoned all its nuclear programmes. Lee has already announced plans to merge the South Korean unification ministry with the External Affairs Ministry. Lee has also indicated that he would seek greater reciprocity in relations and link aid more closely to denuclearisation.⁴³

The debate surrounding the merits of the administration's North Korean policy continued with Mike McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) telling the Senate intelligence committee that North Korea was continuing its uranium enrichment program.⁴⁴ Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill on his part stated that the US was ready to open full diplomatic ties with Pyongyang if it completely gave up its nuclear weapons and programs. Ambassador Hill wanted greater clarity on the part of North Korea over three specific areas: the status of any nuclear weapons development program, of any uranium enrichment program and of foreign nuclear cooperation it may have had.⁴⁵

Speaking at a Congressional hearing, Ambassador Hill also stated that the US planned to send a second shipment of fuel oil to North Korea despite the latter not having provided a full declaration of its nuclear programmes.⁴⁶

IRAN

- *Mottaki urges patience, asks Security Council to wait for the IAEA report; EBaradei: IAEA making progress with Iran on outstanding issues; Iran testing advanced centrifuges at Natanz*

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki urged the U.N. Security Council to wait for a report from the IAEA before taking any decision on a new sanctions resolution.⁴⁷ Opinions also differed among members of the UN Security Council and other members over the future course of action. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Kislyak on his part noted that a third round of UN sanctions would send a "serious political signal" for Iran to meet international demands and would encourage it to freeze uranium enrichment.⁴⁸ South Africa on the other hand protested the "rush" by the five veto-wielding

⁴³ "S. Korea's leader offers N. Korea better life without nukes," *Channel News Asia*, February 5, 2008, at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/print/327035/1/.html

⁴⁴ "US intelligence chief questions N. Korea's commitment to nuclear disarmament," *International Herald Tribune*, February 5, 2008, <http://www.iht.com/bin/printfriendly.php?id=9760187>

⁴⁵ Arshad Mohammed and Paul Eckert, "U.S. ready for full ties if N. Korea denuclearizes," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2008, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/06/AR2008020601916_pf.html

⁴⁶ "US to send fuel aid to N. Korea despite nuclear list delay," *Channel News Asia*, February 7, 2008, at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/327401/1/.html

⁴⁷ Barry Malone, "Iran urges U.N. Council patience on sanctions," *Reuters*, February 2, 2008, at <http://africa.reuters.com/wire/news/usnL02304655.html?rpc=401&>

⁴⁸ "Russian diplomat: new U.N. sanctions to prompt Iran to freeze uranium enrichment," *International Herald Tribune*, February 3, 2008, at <http://www.iht.com/bin/printfriendly.php?id=9699116>

Security Council members to adopt new UN sanctions.⁴⁹ IAEA Director-General, Dr. Mohammed ElBaradei meanwhile stated that the Agency was making headway in “resolving the remaining outstanding issues of the past.”⁵⁰

In other news, reports noted that Iran was testing an advanced centrifuge at its Natanz nuclear complex. However, it's not yet known what stage the testing had reached or exactly how many centrifuges Iran was operating.⁵¹

3. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

- *SOG unearths nexus between car thieves and militants; Soz: Militancy has caused irreparable damage to cultural values*

The Special Operations Group (SOG) of the Jammu and Kashmir Police unearthed a nexus between an inter-state car lifters gang and the militants, who had been purchasing the cars to use in subversive activities including car bombing.⁵²

At a function in Delhi on February 4, Union Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz noted that the two-decade-old militancy in J and K had caused irreparable damage to ‘cultural values’ in the state and exhorted scholars and litterateurs to work for reviving cultural bonds.⁵³

NORTH-EAST INSURGENCY

- *UNLF refutes Army claim on Somtal; ULFA militant reveals plans to hijack planes*

Within three weeks of the Army declaring Somtal in Manipur a ‘liberated zone’, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) on February 8 claimed that its bases were still intact. The outfit vowed to mount offensives on the troops to push them back and stated that it had already killed as many as 17 soldiers during the said operation.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, a United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militant, Manoj Tamuli, who was trained in the hijacking of aircraft, was arrested from Jalukbari on the outskirts of Guwahati on February 9. During interrogations, he revealed

⁴⁹ “S. Africa Protests Plan to Sanction Iran,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/world/AP-UN-Iran-Sanctions.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=IAEA&st=nyt&oref=slogin

⁵⁰ Alaa Shahine, “IAEA Director sees progress with Iran inquiry,” *Reuters*, February 3, 2008, at <http://africa.reuters.com/wire/news/usnL03715244.html>

⁵¹ Mark Heinrich, “Iran testing advanced centrifuges,” *Yahoo News*, February 6, 2008, at http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080206/wl_nm/iran_nuclear_centrifuges_dc;_ylt=Ail12chO7cTbDucnQLbpJ_dm.3QA

⁵² “Several stolen cars sold to Kashmir militants,” *Daily Excelsior*, February 5, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08feb05/news.htm#3>

⁵³ “Militancy an irreparable cause to cultural values in J&K: Soz,” *Daily Excelsior*, February 6, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08feb06/news.htm#3>

⁵⁴ “UNLF belies Somtal ‘success’,” *Telegraph*, February 9, 2008, at <http://telegraphindia.com/section/northeast/index.jsp>

that ULFA was working on a plan to hijack an aircraft from one of the several airports in the Northeastern region with the intention of taking it away to Bangladesh or Nepal, and then to Afghanistan or Pakistan.⁵⁵

MAOIST INSURGENCY

- *Union Government rules out the deployment of Army to combat Maoist violence*

The Union Defence Minister A.K. Antony ruled out the deployment of Army in combating Maoist violence. He however added that the Army would not shy away in containing the menace and were already providing logistical support and training to police forces of Maoist-affected states.⁵⁶ In another development, as many as three soldiers were killed in a fierce gun battle between Maoist extremists and security personnel in Jharkhand's Giridih district on February 9.⁵⁷

Bihar Times reported that the Jharkhand Liberation Tigers (JLT) has ordered villagers not to sell or consume Hadia, a local brew and also directed the schoolteachers to attend to their duties in the schools.⁵⁸

INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW - OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- *Life sentences awarded in IC-814 hijack case; Ban on SIMI re-imposed; Karunanidhi: LTTE not to be allowed a free run in state; US DNI: LeT and other Kashmir-focused groups will continue attacks against other targets across India*

A Special CBI court in Patiala on February 5 awarded life sentences to Abdul Latif, Dalip Kumar and Yusuf Nepali for abetting and conspiring with terrorists who hijacked the Indian Airlines flight IC-814 to Kandahar in Afghanistan on December 24, 1999. They were found guilty on various counts, including murder.⁵⁹

The Union Government on February 7 decided to re-impose the ban on Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) for two years for its anti-national activities.⁶⁰

The DMK paper *Murasoli* quoted the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi as stating that the LTTE would not be allowed a free run in the

⁵⁵ "ULFA man trained for plane hijack held," *The Indian Express*, February 10, 2008, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/sunday/story/271171.html>

⁵⁶ "Govt rules out Army deployment in naxal areas," *The Indian Express*, February 4, 2008, at <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Govt-rules-out-Army-deployment-in-naxal-areas/268867/>

⁵⁷ "Three cops killed by Maoist extremists," *The Indian Express*, February 10, 2008, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/sunday/story/271163.html>

⁵⁸ "Jharkhand Liberation Tigers bans liquor in villages," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, February 5, 2008, at http://satp.org/satporgtp/detailed_news.asp?date1=2/5/2008#3

⁵⁹ "Kandahar hijacking: life term for three," *The Hindu*, February 6, 2008, at <http://www.TheHindu.com/2008/02/06/stories/2008020659221300.htm>

⁶⁰ "Centre extends ban on SIMI," *Sentinel*, February 8, 2008, at http://www.sentinelassam.com/sentinel_en/main%20news.htm

state. The report further noted that as many as eleven LTTE cadres, 92 LTTE supporters were arrested during the last 20 months of the DMK rule. It noted that 40 of the arrested were detained under National Security Act.⁶¹

Meanwhile, the US Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Mike McConnell, while briefing the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence noted that the "Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and other Kashmir-focussed groups will continue attack planning and execution in India. Shia and Hindu religious observances are possible targets, as are transportation networks and government buildings..."⁶²

IV. ENERGY SECURITY REVIEW

ONGC LOOKING FOR PARTNERS TO ACQUIRE CANADIAN OIL COMPANY

- *Over 120 Canadian companies participate in event organized in Calgary to attract participation under NELP-VII*

Oil and Natural Gas of India (ONGC) Chairman and Managing Director R. S. Sharma, in Calgary to participate in the New Exploration and Licensing Policy (NELP-VII) road show organised by the Indian Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, stated that ONGC was looking for business partners to acquire the assets of Alberta Oil Sands.⁶³ Over 120 Canadian companies participated in the event designed to attract Canadian investment in NELP-VII.

FUEL PRICE HIKE

- *Deora: Minimum inconvenience to people if prices are raised*

Union Petroleum Minister Murli Deora told reporters on February 8 that fuel prices would not be raised till at least the budget for the coming financial year was announced.⁶⁴ The government has been under tremendous pressure from oil marketing companies who were facing losses to the tune of Rs. 150 crore daily on account of global increase in crude prices. Deora added that even when the prices will be raised, the government will ensure that minimum inconvenience is borne by the people.

⁶¹ "LTTE will not be given a free run in TN: Karuna," *The Indian Express*, February 4, 2008, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/268881.html>

⁶² "LeT will attack India, warns US Intelligence," *The Hindu*, February 6, 2008, at <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/LeT-will-attack-India-warns-US-Intelligence/269756/>

⁶³ "ONGC looking for partners to acquire Alberta oil sands assets," *The Economic Times*, February 1, 2008, at http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News_by_Industry/ONGC_looking_for_partners_to_acquire_Alberta_oil_sands_assets/articleshow/2748074.cms

⁶⁴ "Relax! Petrol price hike put on hold till budget," *CNN-IBN.COM*, February 8, 2008, at http://www.ibnlive.com/printpage.php?id=58508§ion_id=7

IRAN-PAKISTAN-INDIA GAS PIPELINE

- *India not to attend trilateral IPI met in Tehran*

Reports noted that India has decided not to attend the trilateral IPI gas pipeline talks in Tehran to be held from February 12-13, 2008. Tehran had organised this meeting to resolve differences between India and Pakistan over the pipeline and initiate a speedy resolution to all contentious issues such as transit fees and price of the gas. Iranian sources had earlier indicated that Indian and Pakistani ministers, who had discussed pricing issues in their recent meeting in London, were expected to continue their discussions in Tehran.⁶⁵

Reports also indicated that further meetings on the pipeline would only take place after the conclusion of the Pakistani general elections.⁶⁶ Petroleum Minister Murli Deora was expected to visit Pakistan in March on the invitation of Pakistani Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Amanullah Khan Jadoon to sort out details of the transit fees.

TAPI STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING POSTPONED

- *Meeting was scheduled to be held from February 13-16*

The TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline steering committee meeting also met the same fate as that of the IPI. The steering committee was scheduled to meet on February 13-16, 2008 but has been indefinitely postponed. India has boycotted TAPI meetings since July 2007 on grounds of non-resolution of transit fees issue.

⁶⁵ "IPI pipeline talks to continue in Tehran," *Tehrantimes.com*, February 4, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=162612

⁶⁶ Sujay Mehudia, "India not to attend pipeline talks," *The Hindu*, February 6, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/02/06/stories/2008020662100100.htm>