

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

March 24-30, 3(4), 2008

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

IRAQ

- **Iraqi security forces launch military action in Basra against Mehdi Army, supported by US Special Forces and coalition air support; Militants blast important oil pipeline; Sadrists accuse Maliki government of targeting them ahead of provincial elections in October**

Iraqi security forces launched attacks against the Shiite militias of the Mahdi Army in the southern city of Basra on March 26, resulting in more than 130 deaths. Prime Minister Maliki initially rejected calls for negotiations by the Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr and asserted that the action was proof of the increased abilities of Iraqi forces to launch independent security operations, a view point also echoed by US President George Bush.¹ Reports later in the week however noted that US Special Forces along with coalition air power were being used to help the Iraqi forces who were getting stalled in clearing Basra's neighbourhoods of the militias.² The militants also blasted an important oil pipeline near Basra carrying over half-a-million barrels of crude every day for exports, resulting in worldwide concerns about Iraqi oil supply and crude prices crossing the \$107-per-barrel mark.³

The assault prompted thousands of Sadrists to protest against the government's action, in Baghdad and its Shiite neighbourhoods, prompting the imposition of curfew. Sadr on his part issued a statement on March 29 calling on his followers not to continue fighting, in a bid to stop the confrontation from spiralling out of control. Sadrists also accused the Maliki government of targeting them ahead of the provincial elections in October, where they were expected to put up a strong performance.⁴ Reports noted that the fighting in the south was indicative of the deep divisions within the Shiite community and the lack of progress in political reconciliation.

In other developments, President Bush was briefed by the top Iraqi commander Gen. David Petraeus over video conference on March 24. Reports noted that Mr. Bush was advised to put on hold further troop withdrawals till at least July and that troop levels would remain the same throughout 2008 without any major changes.⁵

¹ "Iraq's Maliki says he'll fight militia to the end," *Reuters*, March 28, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/reuters_ids_new/20080328/r_t_rtrs_wl/twl-iraq-s-maliki-says-he-ll-fight-milit-2186892.html

² "U.S. Airstrikes Aid Iraqi Army in Basra," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/29/world/middleeast/29iraq.html?ref=todayspaper>

³ "Pipeline blast cuts Iraq's southern oil exports," *Reuters*, March 27, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/reuters_ids_new/20080327/r_t_rtrs_wl/twl-pipeline-blast-cuts-iraq-s-southern-2186892.html

⁴ "Iraq's Sadr orders followers off streets," *Reuters*, March 30, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/reuters_ids_new/20080330/r_t_rtrs_wl/twl-iraq-s-sadr-orders-followers-off-str-2186892.html

⁵ "Bush Given Iraq War Plan With a Steady Troop Level," *The New York Times*, March 25, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/25/washington/25policy.html?ref=todayspaper>

CHINA

- **15-member diplomatic delegation visits Lhasa; Dai Bingguo and NSA Narayanan discuss Tibet; Wen says 'channel for dialogue' with Dalai Lama open, if he renounces Tibet independence; Beijing unhappy with Washington over shipping of ICBM parts to Taiwan**

Tibet continued to generate concern around the world in the aftermath of the riots that rocked the region. In order to explain its position on the issue, the Chinese Foreign Ministry organised the visit of a 15-member diplomatic delegation to Lhasa during the week there in a tour organized by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.⁶ There was however no representatives from the Indian mission in Beijing, which on its part clarified that they received the invitation at the last moment.⁷

Meanwhile, the Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo conversed with NSA M.K. Narayanan over the telephone to explain China's position on the anti-government unrest in Tibet. The Chinese Foreign Ministry noted that Dai Bingguo "explained China's standpoint and deep concern and hoped India could continue to understand and support China's actions." The Ministry further added that Mr. Narayanan noted that India "does not allow Tibetan people to be engaged in political activities that are against the Chinese government."⁸ Earlier in the week, the Chinese government officials had summoned Indian Ambassador in Beijing Nirupama Rao to register concern over the incident of the storming of the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi.

In a related development, China Premier Wen Jiabao stated that the 'the channel for dialogue' was always open for discussion between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama over the Tibet issue, but only if the Dalai Lama abandoned his claim for 'Tibet independence', uses his influence to stop the violence in Tibet, and recognises that both Tibet and Taiwan were inseparable parts of China.⁹

In other developments, Beijing expressed its concerns to Washington over the incident of shipping of cone-shaped fuses used in intercontinental ballistic missiles to Taiwan. Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang demanded a thorough investigation into this matter.¹⁰

⁶ "Foreign diplomats visit Lhasa after March 14 riot," *People's Daily*, March 30, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6383305.html>

⁷ "Indian envoys refuse to join conducted tour of Tibet," *The Times of India*, March 29, 2008, at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Indian_envoys_refuse_to_join_conducted_tour_of_Tibet/articleshow/2908359.cms

⁸ "China minister calls India to discuss Tibet," *Guardian.co.uk*, March 30, 2008, at <http://sport.guardian.co.uk/breakingnews/feedstory/0,-7423058,00.html>

⁹ "Wen: Channels for dialogue with Dalai Lama always open," *People's Daily*, March 31, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6383467.html>

¹⁰ "China voices strong concern, discontent over mistaken shipment of U.S. missile fuses to Taiwan," *People's Daily*, March 26, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6381395.html>

MYANMAR

- **Rice seeks New Delhi's help over Myanmar; Than Shwe: Military will assist civilian government after 2010 elections; *Irrawaddy News*: Yangon supported Tibetan crackdown**

During the recent visit of EAM Pranab Mukherjee to Washington, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reportedly sought New Delhi's help in dealing with the Myanmar issue.¹¹ Meanwhile on March 26, senior general Than Shwe stated that the junta was not power hungry and asserted that it would assist the civilian government after the elections planned to be held in 2010.¹² Reports also indicated that the military junta supported the crackdown by the Chinese authorities in Tibet.¹³

In other developments, the UN Human Rights Council urged the Myanmar authorities to release all political prisoners and control the increasing numbers of human rights violations that were being reported across the country.¹⁴

US ELECTION REVIEW

- **Democratic and Republican candidates restate their positions on Iraq war; Clinton opposes 'long-term' strategic partnership being negotiated with Baghdad; Obama urges Washington to re-build a relationship of trust with Taipei on the occasion of its successful conduct of elections; McCain against governmental involvement in housing crisis, Clinton and Obama call for greater federal intervention**

With the American casualties reaching the 4,000 figure mark during the week, both the Democratic and the Republican presidential candidates reiterated their respective stands on the Iraq war. Senator Clinton and Senator Obama asserted that they will implement a speedy withdrawal of troops, while Senator John McCain, citing the 'successes' accrued due to the 'troop surge', pledged to continue his support to the Iraq war.¹⁵ Senator Clinton also expressed her opposition to the 'long-term strategic partnership' that President Bush was unilaterally negotiating with the Iraqi government without the consent of the US Congress.¹⁶ Along with Senators Bayh, Boxer, Casey, Feinstein, Menendez, Obama, Webb and Whitehouse, she had introduced the Congressional Oversight

¹¹ "US Seeks India's Help on Burma," *Irrawaddy News*, March 27, 2008, at http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11139

¹² "Than Shwe Promises Power Handover," *Irrawaddy News*, March 27, 2008, at http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11143

¹³ "Burmese Junta Supports China's Crackdown in Tibet," *Irrawaddy News*, 28 March, 2008, at http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11156

¹⁴ "UN rights council condemns Myanmar's human rights record," *Associated Foreign Press*, March 28, 2008, at http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5j14_d601asW2zB_zDL9hJhAKmhSA

¹⁵ "Statement from Hillary Clinton," *Hilary Clinton.com*, March 24, 2008, at <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/news/release/view/?id=6694>

¹⁶ "Statement from Hillary Clinton on Bush's Pursuit of a 'Long-Term Strategic Partnership' with the Iraqi Government," *hillaryclinton.com*, March 27, 2008, at <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/news/release/view/?id=6790>

of Iraq Agreements Act (S2426) on December 6, 2007. The provisions of this Act included barring the authorization or appropriation of any funds to carry out any bilateral agreement between the United States and Iraq involving "commitments or risks affecting the nation as a whole," including a status of forces agreement that was not approved by the Congress. On Tibet, the Democratic presidential hopeful urged the White house to be more forceful in condemning the violence. She however made no call to boycott the Olympics.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Senator Obama received rave reviews for his speech in the previous week on the issue of race in America. The speech was compared to those delivered by Martin Luther king and Abraham Lincoln and a poll conducted by CBS News revealed that seven in ten respondents had the explanation of his relationship with his pastor Mr. Wright.

Commenting on Taiwan's presidential elections, Obama congratulated the people of Taiwan on the presidential elections and hoped that Beijing would respond to this election in a positive, constructive, and forward-leaning way. He also urged Washington to rebuild a relationship of trust with Taipei by supporting its democracy, open the blocked channels of communication with Taiwan officials and continue to provide the arms necessary for Taiwan to deter possible Chinese aggression.¹⁸

In other developments, Senator McCain remarked that he did not support any governmental involvement in the housing crisis, stating that it was "not the duty of the government to bail out and reward those who acted irresponsibly, whether they are big banks or small borrowers." In doing so, he drew a sharp distinction between himself and the democratic candidates both of whom have expressed greater governmental involvement in abating the financial crisis. Senator Clinton had expressly argued for federal intervention to help affected homeowners, including a \$30 billion fund for states and communities to assist those at risk of foreclosure while Senator Obama called for greater federal government involvement, including the creation of a \$10 billion relief package to prevent foreclosures.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Clinton says U.S. should be forceful on Tibet," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2008, at http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080326/pl_nm/china_tibet_clinton_dc_1&printer=1;_ylt=AjWUkJt6.nF1dNm28q4g_ukb.3QA

¹⁸ "Obama Statement Congratulating Taiwanese President-Elect Ma Ying-Jeou," *BarackObama.com*, March 22, 2008, at my.barackobama.com/page/community/post/samgrahamfelsen/gGBnPT

¹⁹ "McCain Rejects Broad U.S. Aid on Mortgages," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2008, at www.nytimes.com/2008/03/26/us/politics/26mortgage.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin -

SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- **Taliban vows a fresh Spring offensive; NATO to come out with a 'Vision Statement' during their Summit in Bucharest; Oxfam: \$10 b of Afghan aid money not spent in past 6 years; Contractor fraud detected in supply of ammunition to Afghan forces**

Even as NATO countries were getting ready for their Summit on Romania this week, the Taliban, in a message posted on an Islamist website vowed to launch a spring offensive and inflict heavy casualties on the coalition forces.²⁰ NATO leaders on their part were seeking to come out with a 'Vision Statement' during the April 2-4 Bucharest Summit pledging more troops as well as cohesion in fighting the Taliban. Among the proposals included a five-year plan with benchmarks regarding training of Afghan Army and police forces.²¹

The British charity Oxfam meanwhile published a report charging that close to \$10 billion in aid money meant for Afghanistan during the last 6 years was not spent, thus hurting Afghan security and development in the long run.²²

In other developments, a report during the week indicated that a major supplier of ammunition to the Afghan forces was under investigation for having supplied sub-standard equipment. The report noted that the case was indicative of the inadequacies of the Bush administration policy of hiring private contractors as integral parts of US war-fighting strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq.²³

PAKISTAN

- **Yusuf Raza Gilani sworn in as the new PM, secures two-third majority in the National Assembly; 23 ministers to be inducted in the coalition cabinet; New Corp Commanders for Lahore and Mangla**

After being sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusuf Raza Gilani proved his majority in the National Assembly (NA) with a unanimous vote of trust.²⁴ Earlier, the NA had elected him for the post with 264 votes.²⁵ He promised to bring about positive changes in the system, including fixing the minimum wage at Rs. 6000 and an increase in the support price of

²⁰ "Taliban declares start of new Afghan offensive: Web," *Reuters*, March 28, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/reuters_ids_new/20080328/r_t_rtrs_wl/twl-taliban-declares-start-of-new-afghan-2186892.html

²¹ "NATO seeks new Afghan push from summit," *Reuters*, March 27, 2008, at http://in.news.yahoo.com/reuters_ids_new/20080327/r_t_rtrs_wl/twl-nato-seeks-new-afghan-push-from-summm-2186892.html

²² "Afghans Lack \$10 Billion in Aid, Report Says," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/26/world/asia/26afghan.html?ref=todayspaper>

²³ "Supplier Under Scrutiny on Arms for Afghans," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/27/world/asia/27ammo.html?ref=todayspaper>

²⁴ Raja Asghar, "Gilani wins unanimous trust vote," *Dawn*, March 30, 2008 at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/30/top1.htm>

²⁵ Raja Asghar, "A Momentous Day," *Dawn*, March 25, 2008 at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/25/top1.htm>

wheat. Later on March 30, Gilani announced the abolition of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and stated that the subsequent cases would be taken up by the normal courts.²⁶

PML's Nawaz Sharif meanwhile expressed his displeasure with the coalition government headed by PM Gilani - the Pakistan Democratic Alliance, over the inclusion of the MQM in the coalition government. He blamed the MQM for the Karachi bloodshed which killed 48 people.²⁷ President Musharraf on the other hand expressed his willingness to cooperate fully with the new government.²⁸

US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher visited Pakistan during the week and met with PM Gilani among other interlocutors. PM Gilani assured the American delegations that the new government was determined to fight terrorism and that Parliament shall take all key decisions.²⁹

In other developments, top-level changes were also effected in the Army with Lt. Gen. Ijaz Ahmad Bakshi and Lt. Gen. Nadeem Ahmed taking over as Corps Commanders of Lahore and Mangla respectively.³⁰

NEPAL

- **Tibetan exiles in Nepal protest against Chinese crackdown; Prachanda accuses Nepali police of importing arms from India; UNSC, Japan call for free and fair elections**

Tibetan exiles in Nepal demonstrated during the week against the Chinese government over its policies in Tibet. Kathmandu however adopted a hard line stance policy and stated that it had "no choice but to prevent anti-Chinese protests."³¹

In domestic political developments, Maoist Chairman Prachanda alleged that foreign interests were influencing the outcome of the forthcoming Constituent Assembly (CA) polls.³² Prachanda also accused the Nepali police of

²⁶ "NAB will be abolished," *Daily Times*, March 30, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\03\30\story_30-3-2008_pg1_2

²⁷ Nisar Ahmad Khan, "Nawaz opposes MQM's inclusion in govt," *Dawn*, March 24, 2008 at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/24/top3.htm>

²⁸ Iftikhar A. Khan, "Musharraf prepared to work with coalition," *Dawn*, March 24, 2008 at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/24/top5.htm>

²⁹ Sajjad Malik, "Parliament to make all policy decisions, Gillani tells US," *Daily Times*, March 27, 2008 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\03\27\story_27-3-2008_pg1_1

³⁰ Iftikhar A. Khan, "Major reshuffle in army," *Dawn*, March 25, 2008 at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/25/top3.htm>

³¹ "Human Rights Watch has condemned Nepal's government for using what it calls excessive force against protesting Tibetan exiles," *BBC News*, March 20, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7306111.stm

³² "Prachanda claims foreigners are working for CPN-M's defeat in polls; deplores 'biased' media coverage," *The Nepal News*, March 26, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/mar/mar26/news03.php>

clandestinely importing arms from India and charged that these activities breached the comprehensive peace agreement.³³

The UN Security Council on its part has emphasized on the need to conduct free and fair elections, while assuring the full support of the UN mission in Nepal to the process. The UNSC also called on the Seven Party Alliance to "uphold public security" and create an atmosphere that was conducive for the conduct of successful elections.³⁴

The Japanese government has also promised to send a team, under the provisions of Japan's International Peace Cooperation Law, to monitor the CA elections. The team was expected to arrive in Nepal by April 5.³⁵

BANGLADESH

- **Passenger train service between Kolkata-Dhaka from April 14; Dhaka to seek donor status at UNHCR**

Reports indicated that India and Bangladesh had agreed to launch the Dhaka-Kolkata passenger train service on Pahela Baishakh, which falls on April 14, 2008.³⁶ In other developments, Dhaka announced its decision to seek a donor status at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to enable it to be a part of the decision-making process.³⁷

SRI LANKA

- **Colombo initiates developmental projects in the South and re-settlement drives in the East; Muslim refugees to form a political party; Saudi Arabia to help develop Sri Lankan oil and gas industry; Olmert supports Colombo over the LTTE with reports noting LTTE was receiving training in Palestinian camps**

Reports noted that the Sri Lankan government was following a multi-pronged strategy to counter the LTTE, including making efforts to improve the developmental process in the South. The Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development for instance allocated Rs. 2.5 billion for the region, primarily to strengthen local governance structures.³⁸ In a similar initiative towards peace-building, a resettlement drive in the East commenced with nearly

³³ "Maoists enforce bandh in three districts; Prachanda asks govt to clarify arms episode," *The Nepal News*, March 26, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/mar/mar25/news08.php>

³⁴ "UNSC Hopes for 'Free and Fair' CA Polls in Nepal," *The Himalayan Times*, March 28, 2008, at <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullstory.asp?filename=6a1Va3udo2am8&folder=aHaoamW&Name=Home&dtSiteDate=20080328>

³⁵ "Japan deploys election observers in Nepal," *Japan Today*, March 29, 2008, at <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/japan-deploys-election-observers-in-nepal>

³⁶ "Dhaka-Kolkata train starts on Pahela Baishakh," *The Daily Star*, March 24, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=29091>

³⁷ "Dhaka wants donor status at UNHCR," *The Daily Star*, March 25, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=29195>

³⁸ "Sri Lanka government allocates 2.5 billion rupees to develop South," *The Colombo Page*, March 24, 2008, at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March24113421JR.html

500 people belonging to over 100 families from the Pallikudiruppu and Muttur areas having been shifted to other areas.³⁹ The military campaign meanwhile intensified with the death of over 100 rebels during the past week, most of who were accounted for in the battles in the North.⁴⁰ Reports also noted that Muslim civilians who had survived the civil war and who were living in refugee camps had decided to form a political party to more effectively find solutions to the various issues being faced by these refugees.⁴¹

In other developments, the Sri Lanka government launched an international campaign to seek support for its candidature to the UN Human Rights Council. The effort was being seen as an attempt to counter international criticism over its poor human rights record.⁴²

Saudi Arabia would be investing in Sri Lanka to develop oil and refinery projects with the goal of increasing its generating capability from 50,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 100,000 bpd.⁴³

With reports indicating that the LTTE had been receiving training in Palestinian camps in Syria and Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert asserted governments cannot capitulate in the face of terrorism. Olmert also voiced his support to the Sri Lanka position over the issue.⁴⁴

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Geelani calls for poll boycott**

Senior separatist leader and Hurriyat Conference (G) chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani, while speaking at a seminar in Srinagar on March 27, asked J and K Liberation Front chairman Yasin Malik to support his own Safar-e-Azadi (Journey for Freedom) campaign by calling for boycott of elections. Geelani further added that the J and K High Court Bar Association too should rise to the occasion and join the boycott movement so that people would stay away from voting. Gilani added that voting in Kashmir would result in an increase in waywardness, immorality, human rights violations, torture, custodial killings, detentions, among other things.⁴⁵

³⁹ "All IDPs in eastern Sri Lanka to be resettled before polls," *The Colombo Page*, March 24, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March25134334JR.html

⁴⁰ "Tamil Tigers suffer heavy casualties, Sri Lanka military says," *The Colombo Page*, March 24, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March24115150CH.html

⁴¹ "Muslim victims of Tamil Tiger ethnic cleansing in Sri Lanka to form political party," *The Colombo Page*, March 25, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March25112901JR.html

⁴² "Sri Lanka launches international campaign to keep its seat at UN," *The Colombo Page*, March 27, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March2742604JV.html

⁴³ "Sri Lanka to receive Saudi help for oil exploration and refinery projects," *The Colombo Page*, March 25, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March25113928JR.html

⁴⁴ "Israel says Sri Lanka should fight terrorism and not capitulate to it," *The Colombo Page*, March 26, 2008, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_08/March2644608JV.html

⁴⁵ "Geelani calls for Safar-e-Azadi type poll boycott," *Kashmir Times*, March 28, 2008, at <http://kashmirtimes.com/news2.htm>

In other developments, four security personnel and a top Lashkar-e-Taiba commander were killed in a fierce gun battle in Srinagar on March 23.⁴⁶

NORTH-EAST INSURGENCY

- **Insurgents storms railway station in Asom; Gogoi ready to facilitate Bangladesh trip for talks with ULFA**

Suspected insurgents of the Jewel Gorlosa faction of the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) stormed Harangajao railway station in Asom on March 24, and gunned down three persons, including two railway workers. Communication networks, including telephone lines, were damaged in the firing.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the Asom Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on March 25 said that so long Bangladesh serves as the haven for militants from the Northeast region; the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) will not come forward for peace talks. Gogoi, however, expressed his Government willingness to facilitate a trip to Bangladesh for anyone who is willing to organize talks with the ULFA leadership.⁴⁸

INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW – OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- **SIMI chief among 13 held at Indore**

The Special Task Force of the Madhya Pradesh police arrested as many as thirteen Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) activists including its all India chief, Safdar Nagori, from a house in Indore on March 27. They were wanted in connection with several cases of bomb blasts and other anti-national activities. Several arms and ammunitions including seven pistols as well as incriminating documents were recovered from their possession.⁴⁹

- **Separatist Groups of North Bengal Seek New State from Lower Assam to Malda**

Telegraph reported that three separatist groups of north Bengal - the Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Party (GCBDP), the Kamtapuri People's Party (KPP) and the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), have agreed to support each other's demands and launch a joint movement across the region to put pressure on the state government. While the KPP and the GCBDP want to carve out a separate state out of Bengal extending from lower Assam to Malda, the GJM's

⁴⁶ "4 security men killed in encounter," *The Hindu*, March 25, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/03/24/stories/2008032457400100.htm>

⁴⁷ "Three die in attack on railway station", *Telegraph*, March 26, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1080326/jsp/northeast/story_9056118.jsp

⁴⁸ "I'm ready to facilitate Bangladesh trip for talks with ULFA: Gogoi", *Sentinel*, March 26, 2008, at http://sentinelassam.com/sentinel_en/main%20news.htm

⁴⁹ "SIMI chief among 13 held in Madhya Pradesh crackdown", *Indian Express*, March 28, 2008, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/289387.html>

proposal for Gorkhaland included the Darjeeling district, Terai and the Dooars leading right up to the Sankosh river near the Bengal-Assam border.⁵⁰

- **TOI: LET PART OF D-COMPANY**

The Times of India reported that the Pakistan-based underworld don Dawood Ibrahim's notorious D-Company had now become a part of Lashkar-e-Toiba's (LeT) terror network.⁵¹

IV. NUCLEAR REVIEW

INDIA

- **EAM to US: Political problem over nuclear deal being resolved**

EAM Pranab Mukherjee, during his recent visit to the United States asserted that India was interested in implementing the landmark nuclear agreement reached with the United States. He however noted that there were some political problems and that India was engaged in the process of resolving them. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice assured Mr. Mukherjee that Washington would continue to work on the deal. The EAM also met President George Bush.

Speaking on the India-specific safeguard negotiations with the IAEA, Mr. Mukherjee noted that while the discussions were over, an agreement was yet to be initialed and approved by the board of governors of the IAEA.⁵²

IRAN

- **Kofi Annan warns against conflict with Iran**

Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned that military action against Iran would be "a real disaster" and that the Middle East could explode if the international community did not handle the many conflicts in the region very carefully. Though Kofi Annan chose not to comment on the UN Security Council's demand to suspend uranium enrichment, he reiterated that dialogue was the only way forward. He also disclosed that he had told Iranian leaders that transparency was the best option. He urged Tehran to allow UN inspectors full access in order to reassure the world that it was only interested in peaceful use of nuclear technology.⁵³

⁵⁰ "Gorkhaland demand finds allies in plains", *Telegraph*, March 28, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1080328/jsp/frontpage/story_9066954.jsp

⁵¹ "Lashkar takes over D-Company", *Times of India*, March 29, 2008, at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Lashkar_takes_over_D-Company/rssarticleshow/2905260.cms

⁵² "Political problem over nuclear deal being resolved: Pranab," *The Hindu*, March 25, 2008, at <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/03/25/stories/2008032559681200.htm>

⁵³ Edith M. Lederer, "Annan Warns Against Conflict With Iran," *Washington Post*, March 21, 2008, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/20/AR2008032002895_pf.html

NORTH KOREA

- **Hill to visit Seoul in an attempt to restart the stalled nuclear disarmament process**

Ambassador Christopher Hill, the chief US nuclear envoy on North Korean disarmament will undertake a four-day visit to South Korea beginning March 31, 2008. The visit is in the backdrop of souring of diplomatic relations between Seoul and Pyongyang since the South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, pledged to review the rapprochement projects pushed by his two liberal predecessors. Myung-bak has stated that progress in international efforts to halt the North's nuclear program was a prerequisite for South to be involved in investments or aid projects in the North.

Meanwhile, Adm. Takashi Saito, chairman of Japan's Joint Staff Office stated that North Korea represented a "threat to the stability of the world" because of its sharing of nuclear technology with other countries. He called for "dialogue and pressure" by the five nations confronting North Korea at nuclear disarmament talks to deal with the threat before it became a bigger problem.⁵⁴

FRANCE TO CUT DOWN ON ITS NUCLEAR FORCES

- **Sarkozy also calls on nuclear powers to sign the CTBT, proposes treaty banning nuclear-armed short and medium-range ground-to-ground missiles**

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has indicated that France would continue to reduce its nuclear arsenal to fewer than 300 warheads. The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) has estimated the French nuclear arsenal to be 348 warheads of which 288 were deployed on submarines, 50 on air-launched cruise missiles and 10 bombs. President Sarkozy also called for all nuclear powers to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and proposed talks on a treaty banning nuclear-armed short and medium-range ground-to-ground missiles. He also called for an immediate moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and a treaty banning its production.⁵⁵

GROWING CIVILIAN NUCLEAR ENERGY PLANS

- **Britain hopes to learn from the French expertise in civilian nuclear power**

Britain and France are to sign a deal to construct new generation of nuclear power stations and export the technology around the world in an effort to

⁵⁴ "US Nuclear Negotiator Going to S. Korea," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/us/AP-US-South-Korea.html?sq=nuclear&st=nyt&scp=1&pagewanted=print>

⁵⁵ Steven Erlanger, "France Adds Nuclear Sub and Vows to Cut Warheads," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/22/world/europe/22france.html?sq=nuclear&st=nyt&scp=19&pagewanted=print>

combat climate change during the “Arsenal Summit” on March 27-28, 2008. Britain hopes to learn from the French expertise in building nuclear power stations. Nearly 79 per cent of France's electricity was generated from its highly-developed nuclear power industry. On the other hand, nuclear energy contributed roughly 20 per cent to Britain’s energy needs. Moreover, most of Britain’s nuclear plants were at the end of their design life and were on the verge of being decommissioned. Prime Minister Brown hoped that the deal would create a skilled British labour force who would then work in partnership with France to sell nuclear power stations to other countries over the next 15 years.⁵⁶

- **Russia and Egypt to conclude an agreement for peaceful nuclear cooperation**

Russia and Egypt would conclude an agreement on peaceful uses of nuclear energy during the forthcoming visit of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to Moscow. Russia and Egypt have been working on the agreement since 2000. The agreement would provide a legal basis not only for interaction between the scientists of the two countries but also for the construction of a nuclear power station in Egypt by Russian specialists.

In April 2005, Presidential aide Sergei Prikhodko, speaking on the eve of President Putin's visit to Cairo, had stated that Russia had long been interested in concluding an agreement on cooperation in the field of nuclear power. However, bureaucratic procedures delayed the process. The agreement would enable Russia to participate in a tender for the construction of Egypt's first nuclear power station. Cairo had plans to build three to four nuclear power plants, with the first of them to be built in the area of Al Dabaa on the Mediterranean coast, 150 km from Alexandria, before 2015.⁵⁷

- **UAE to pursue nuclear energy for electricity**

The United Arab Emirates plans to establish a \$100 million agency to look into developing nuclear energy to meet the rising power demand in the country. A recent government statement stated that an “analysis of future domestic electricity demand ... has concluded that peaceful nuclear power generation represents an environmentally promising and commercially competitive option which could make a significant contribution to the UAE's economy and future energy security.” The statement outlined that the UAE intended to establish a Nuclear Energy Implementation Organisation and that the country was proceeding to evaluate the establishment of a peaceful nuclear programme.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “Britain and France to take nuclear power to the world,” *The Guardian*, March 22, 2008, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/mar/22/nuclearpower.energy1/print>

⁵⁷ “Russia, Egypt to conclude atom-for-peace agreement,” *ITAR-TASS*, March 25, 2008, at <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=12510947&PageNum=0>

⁵⁸ Lin Noueihed, “UAE says to explore nuclear energy for electricity,” *Reuters*, March 24, 2008, at <http://www.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=USL242453720080324>

The UAE also signed a deal with France during President Nicolas Sarkozy's visit in January 2008, agreeing to cooperate on a peaceful nuclear programme. The French on their part have already signed civilian nuclear deals with Arab oil producers, Algeria and Libya. A recent cabinet memorandum on UAE nuclear energy policy has made it clear that the UAE would not enrich uranium itself but import nuclear fuel for its plants.

FOUR US ICBM NOSE-CONE FUSE ASSEMBLIES MISTAKENLY SHIPPED TO TAIWAN

- **Gates orders a complete inventory of US nuclear arsenal**

US Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates ordered a complete inventory of the country's nuclear arsenal and all associated components after the recent discovery that four nose-cone fuse assemblies for U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles were mistakenly shipped to Taiwan instead of helicopter batteries. The mistake went unnoticed for more than 18 months. The Pentagon's Press Secretary Geoff Morrell noted that Secretary Gates viewed the situation as "...totally and completely unacceptable" and that he had ordered the Air Force, the Navy and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) to take inventory of and assess control measures for all nuclear weapons and their associated parts within 60 days, "to verify positive control and accountability of all such materials."⁵⁹

II. ENERGY SECURITY REVIEW

TNK-BP IN DISPUTE WITH RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES

- **Authorities detain nearly 150 engineers and geologists of BP**

In a development that has again placed Russia against the western oil companies, Russian authorities detained 148 expatriate engineers and geologists of British Petroleum (BP), citing loopholes in their work permits. BP's joint venture in Russia, TNK-BP is already in a dispute with Gazprom, the Russian state gas company, over the terms of sale of a large gas field in Siberia. The present dispute however started early last week when TNK-BP was confronted with charges that an employee had engaged in industrial espionage. Authorities had also announced an environmental inspection at the joint ventures' largest oil field.⁶⁰

BIDS SOUGHT TO DEVELOP GAS FIELDS IN ANBAR PROVINCE OF WESTERN IRAQ

- **Move to bolster economy of Sunni areas**

The Iraqi oil ministry invited local and international oil companies to bid for contracts to develop natural gas fields, especially the Akkas gas field in the

⁵⁹ Josh White, "Gates Orders Nuclear Inventory Control: Measures to be reassessed," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2008, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/27/AR2008032703440_pf.html

⁶⁰ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia dispute over BP workers", *The New York Times*, March 26, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/26/business/worldbusiness/26fobriefs-DISPUTEOVERB_BRF.html

former Sunni insurgent stronghold of Anbar province in western Iraq. The ministry has set April 24 as the deadline for the companies to submit plans to develop the field which has estimated reserves of more than 2.15 trillion cubic feet. The move is seen as crucial to bolster the economy of Sunni areas which have not been touched by the oil riches so prevalent in the Kurdish north and the Shia South.⁶¹

FALL IN CRUDE OIL PRICES AFTER CONCERNS OVER PIPELINE BLAST AT BASRA

- **Concerns over disruption of Iraqi oil supply; Crude prices cross \$107-per barrel**

Crude oil prices at New York fell after concerns over disruption in Iraqi oil supply due to a pipeline fire in the southern city of Basra ceased. Crude oil for May delivery fell 1.4 percent by as much as \$1.50 to \$106.08 a barrel, and traded at \$106.66. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on his part pledged to continue the crackdown on Shiite militias in Basra.⁶² Oil had gained 1.6 percent on March 27 on account of the blast on the Zubair-1 pipeline. According to an official in Baghdad, the fire at the pipeline was put out before midday local time the same day and the damage was being assessed.

⁶¹ "Iraq seeks to develop gas fields," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2008., at <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/tnt.html?tntget=2008/03/24/business/worldbusiness/24iraqgas.html&tntemail=y&emc=tnt&pagewanted=print>, *New York Times*, March 24, 2008, at

⁶² Grant Smith and Nesa Subrahmanian, "Crude Oil Falls as Concern Eases Over Iraq Supply Disruptions," *Bloomberg News*, March 28, 2008, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=aeMOnLhBDIWg&refer=europe>