

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- **EAM Krishna: India has “no plan to scale down” its activities in Afghanistan; US Ambassador Roemer: India’s role in Afghanistan “very critical”; US officials: Interrogation of Mullah Baradar yielding useful intelligence; NATO to hand over security responsibilities to Afghan government soon; ‘Peace jirga’ to be delayed until after Karzai’s visit to US in May; Deputy Mayor of Kandahar gunned down while offering prayers; Seven killed in earthquake in Central Afghanistan**

EAM S.M. Krishna, speaking in the Indian Parliament on April 21 reaffirmed India's commitment to rebuild Afghanistan despite recent attacks on Indians and added that New Delhi had “no plan to scale down” its activities. 17 Indians have been killed in Afghanistan so far, including nine in 2008, one in 2009 and seven in 2010.¹

US Ambassador Timothy Roemer stated that India’s role in Afghanistan was “very critical” and that the US was looking at “additional” ways to increase the country’s role in Afghanistan. He added that India’s role “has been a great success ...” Mr. Roemer is expected to visit Afghanistan soon and will also have a first hand experience of India’s successful developmental projects.²

US officials indicated that joint interrogation of captured Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar by US and Pakistani officials was yielding useful intelligence. Mullah Baradar, along with six other leaders of the Afghan Taliban leadership council, was captured in Quetta, Pakistan in February 2010. The Taliban threatened to kill three hostages, including a British filmmaker and two former Pakistani intelligence officials if Baradar is not released.³

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, after a two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Tallinn, Estonia on April 23 indicated that NATO members had adopted a framework for turning over security responsibilities to the Afghan government.⁴

Reports meanwhile noted that a ‘peace jirga’ to establish a framework for negotiations with the Taliban would be delayed until after President Karzai’s visit to US in May. The jirga, involving more than 1,000 government officials,

¹ ‘India won't scale down activities in Afghanistan: Krishna’, *The Hindu*, April 21, 2010 at <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/national/article406986.ece>

² “India’s role in Afghanistan ‘very critical’, says U.S.”, *The Hindu*, April 19, 2010 at <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/international/article405314.ece>

³ ‘Interrogation of Afghanistan Taliban's No. 2 yields useful intel, US says’, *Christian Science Monitor*, April 21, 2010 at <http://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/295917>

⁴ ‘NATO approves plan to hand over Afghanistan security to Kabul government’, *The Washington Post*, April 24, 2010 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/04/23/AR2010042301770.html?hpid=moreheadlines>

tribal elders and other Afghan leaders, was originally expected to start on May 2.⁵

In other developments, President Karzai strongly condemned the reported death of four civilians when NATO troops opened fire on a vehicle in southeast Afghanistan.⁶ The Deputy Mayor of Kandahar Azizullah Yarmal was gunned down on April 19 when he was offering prayers in a mosque. An earthquake of 5.3 magnitude intensity hit central Afghanistan on April 19, killing at least seven people and wounding more than 30.⁷

PAKISTAN

- **27 people killed in suicide attack in Peshawar; Taliban again becoming active in Swat; Government initiates action on basis of UN report on assassination of Benazir Bhutto; Kerry: Cut in US international affairs budget by \$4 billion could adversely affect counter-terror operation in Af-Pak region; US urges Pakistan not to block negotiations at the CD on ban on fissile materials**

At least 27 people were killed in Peshawar and over 50 injured in a suicide bombing on April 20. The incident occurred immediately after the Jammāt-e-Islami held a rally to protest against power cuts.⁸

Reports also noted that the Taliban was actively targeting 'pro government' civilians in the Swat valley. Analysts noted that this indicated the return of the Taliban.⁹

In the wake of the findings of a UN commission questioning the role of former President Musharraf and other officials in the death of Benazir Bhutto, the Pakistani government has decided to take action against those held responsible.¹⁰

US Senator John Kerry expressed concern over the cut in the US international affairs budget by \$4 billion. He added that the development could adversely affect counter terrorism operations in the Af-Pak region.¹¹

Reports noted that the US wanted Pakistan to participate in the negotiations in the CD regarding the ban of fissile materials. Pakistan has been

⁵ 'Afghanistan: Talks on Taliban Postponed', *The New York Times*, April 21, 2010 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/22/world/asia/22briefs-afghanjirga.html>

⁶ 'NATO troops fire on vehicle, kill 4 unarmed Afghans', *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2010 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/20/AR2010042000975.html>

⁷ 'Quake hits central Afghanistan, at least 7 killed', *The Washington Post*, April 19, 2010 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/19/AR2010041900450.html>

⁸ Javed Aziz Khan, '24 die in two Peshawar blasts', *The News*, April 20, 2010 at http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp?arc_date=4/20/2010

⁹ Iqbal Khattak, 'Target killings show Swat Taliban are back in action', *Daily Times*, April 21, 2010 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\04\21\story_21-4-2010_pg1_3

¹⁰ 'Govt initiates action over UN report', *Daily Times*, April 19, 2010 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\04\19\story_19-4-2010_pg1_1

¹¹ 'US budget cut to hurt efforts against terror, says Kerry', *Dawn*, April 25, 2010 at <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/19-us-budget-cut-to-hurt-efforts-against-terror%2C-says-kerry-540-hh-06>

blocking negotiations citing security concerns with India.¹² In a related development, a bipartisan commission has advised the US Congress to institute a mechanism to prevent a war-like situation between nuclear armed neighbours India and Pakistan.¹³

B. EAST ASIA

SOUTHEAST ASIA

- **Thai government rejects UDD compromise offer; UDD leaders allege that Abhisit has ordered army to use force in crack down against protesters; Series of explosions in Silcom district kill 3 protesters; ASEAN-China maritime cooperation agreement finalised; Malaysia's Strategic Trade Bill 2010 includes provisions to ensure nuclear security; Malaysia and Japan agree to strengthen cooperation on issues related to environment and energy; Malaysia agrees to offer medical assistance teams to Afghanistan; Singapore dismisses the concluding document of the Tehran Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation as 'misleading'**

The political crisis in Thailand continued with the Thai government rejecting the offer of the 'Red Shirts' to halt their anti-government demonstrations in return for dissolution of Parliament and holding of fresh election within 30 days. Citing continued use of violence and intimidation, PM Abhisit Vejjajiva stated that Parliament dissolution "must be done for the benefit of the entire country, not just for the Red Shirts, and it must be done at the right time."¹⁴ Abhisit reaffirmed the Thai government's resolve to take appropriate action against the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), reclaim Ratchaprasong business area currently occupied by the UDD and restore peace.¹⁵ A prominent leader of the UDD alleged that PM Abhisit has already ordered the army to use force to crack down on protesters.¹⁶ A series of bomb explosions meanwhile rocked Silcom financial district on April 22. The explosions occurred near the site where the Red Shirts were holding demonstrations, killing 3 people and wounding more than 70 others.¹⁷

¹² 'US hopes Pakistan will join fissile material talks', *Daily Times*, April 21, 2010 at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\04\21\story_21-4-2010_pg1_2

¹³ 'Mechanism to prevent Indo-Pak Nuclear war urged', *Dawn*, April 24, 2010 at <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/mechanism-to-prevent-indopak-nwar-urged-440>

¹⁴ 'PM rejects compromise deal', *The Bangkok Post*, April 24, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/175642/thai-pm-rejects-compromise-deal-to-end-protests>

¹⁵ 'PM: Dissolution is not the answer', *The Bangkok Post*, April 25, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/175728/pm-dissolution-is-not-the-answer>

¹⁶ 'UDD says army attack likely', *The Bangkok Post*, April 24, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/175661/udd-army-chief-ordered-to-disperse-reds>

¹⁷ '3 killed, at least 70 hurt in blasts', *The Bangkok Post*, April 22, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/175502/3-killed-more-than-70-wounded-in-blasts>

During the ASEAN Maritime Transport Working Group Meeting (MTWG) held in Kuala Lumpur, a draft of the MoU on ASEAN-China Consultation Mechanism was finalized. The MTWG is considered to be a significant platform in helping ASEAN member countries in intensifying maritime cooperation.¹⁸

The Strategic Trade Bill 2010 tabled in the Malaysian Parliament on April 1 reaffirms the need to prevent chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) incidents. The Bill provides for measures to control activities that may facilitate the design, development and production of WMD and their delivery systems. It also proposes to "effectively control the trans-shipment, transit and brokering of all arms, development of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction."¹⁹

During the visit of Malaysian PM Najib Razak to Tokyo, a joint statement 'Enhanced Partnership for a New Frontier' was released outlining over 20 areas of cooperation. These include environment preservation, chemical, wastes and recycle management, biodiversity and energy conservation, emphasis on renewable energy, among other aspects.²⁰ The recently introduced bilateral initiative 'Japan-Malaysia Cooperation Initiative for Environment and Energy' also emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation on issues relating to environment and energy through the introduction of green technology.

Malaysia meanwhile has indicated that it could send a medical team to Afghanistan soon. The step is being seen as indicative of its commitment to help achieve peace in the country.²¹

Singapore termed the concluding draft of the two-day Tehran Conference on Disarmament and Non-proliferation as 'misleading'. The Singapore Foreign Ministry insisted that there was no agreement among delegates to the Tehran Conference to issue such a document and "neither was there any discussion on the contents of the document."²²

In other developments, Myanmar and Australia are to join seven other states as observers at the upcoming SAARC summit in Thimphu from April 28-29, 2010. The summit is expected to issue a joint declaration 'Towards a Green and Happy South Asia' with climate change as its key theme. Two pacts on environment and trade in services are also expected to be signed.²³

¹⁸ 'MoU on ASEAN-China Consultation Mechanism Finalised', *Bernamea.com*, April 22, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=492808>

¹⁹ 'Malaysia committed to worldwide nuclear Security', *Bernamea.com*, April 20, 2010, at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=491964>

²⁰ 'Malaysia, Japan Announce initiative for environment, energy', *Bernamea.com*, April 19, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=491836>

²¹ 'Malaysia agrees to send Medical Team to Afghanistan', *Bernamea.com*, April 19, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=491844>

²² 'Singapore Distances itself from Tehran Nuclear Conclusion', *Bernamea.com*, April 20, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=491965>

²³ "Australia, Myanmar to be observers at SAARC Summit", *Indo-Burma News*, April 24, 2010, at <http://www.indoburmanews.net/australia-myanmar-to-be-observers-at-saarc-summit>

C. WEST ASIA

IRAN

- **US: Military action not off the table: Iran agrees to allow IAEA officials greater access to Natanz site**

The Pentagon reiterated that US military action against Iran continued to be an option even as the US follows diplomacy and sanctions to halt Iran nuclear program. A spokesperson indicated that the US was “not taking any options off the table as we pursue the pressure and engagement tracks.”²⁴

Iran meanwhile has indicated that it will allow UN nuclear officials better monitoring and access to the Natanz site where it began enriching uranium to higher levels over two months ago. Iran maintained that the agreement was indicative of its continued cooperation with the IAEA.²⁵

IRAQ

- **58 killed and over 100 injured in Baghdad blasts; Seven dead in blasts in Anbar province**

Series of bombings in Baghdad killed at least 58 people and wounded more than 100. Most of the bombings were near Shia mosques during Friday prayers. At least two bombs went off near the offices of radical Shia cleric Moqtada-al-Sadr.

Seven people also died on April 23 in a series of bombings in Khalidya in Anbar province. The targets were homes of police officers and a judge. Anbar province was the centre of Sunni insurgency a few years ago.²⁶

²⁴ ‘Option of striking Iran never off the table-Pentagon’, *Khaleej Times*, April 22, 2010 at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2010/April/middleeast_April313.xml§ion=middleeast

²⁵ ‘Iran to allow better UN monitoring’, *Khaleej Times*, April 23, 2010 at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle09.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2010/April/middleeast_April344.xml§ion=middleeast

²⁶ ‘Dozens die in Baghdad bomb blasts’, *BBC News*, April 25, 2010 at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8639223.stm