

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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## 1. COUNTRY REVIEW

### A. SOUTH ASIA

#### AFGHANISTAN

- Taliban militants attack government offices in Nimroz, 13 killed including 9 militants; 850 US military personnel to train Afghan security forces as an interim measure; New Zealand PM meets Karzai; US House Armed Services Committee reviews Obama administration's counter-insurgency strategy; Abdullah Ahmadzai named new Chief Electoral Officer; CRS: China's involvement in Afghanistan growing; UK provides six Russian-made MI-17 choppers to assist in border patrol; 66 die in flash floods

About 9 Taliban militants attacked government buildings - including the governor's office, provincial legislature and court in Zaranj, capital of Afghanistan's southwestern province of Nimroz. All nine militants were killed after a fierce gun battle with Afghan security forces. Nimroz Governor Ghulam Dastgeer Azaad stated that the attack was "serious and unprecedented."<sup>1</sup>

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates ordered another batch of about 850 American military personnel to train Afghan security forces. These trainers are expected to arrive and depart before the final combat forces arrive. In effect, the strength of American forces will not go above the 30,000 troops earlier approved by the Obama administration.<sup>2</sup>

New Zealand PM John Key met with President Karzai during a secret visit to Afghanistan. He also held talks with ISAF commander Gen. McChrystal. About 70 of New Zealand's elite Special Forces are believed to be operating in Kabul while a contingent of 140 personnel is carrying out reconstruction work in Bamiyan province.<sup>3</sup>

The US House Armed Services Committee reviewed the Obama administration's counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan. It examined the issue of whether more troops could be deployed if the situation so required. Since December 2009, the Obama administration has added about 30,000 troops, bringing the total number of US troops in Afghanistan to about 100,000.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Abdullah Ahmadzai was appointed as the new chief electoral officer of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan. He had earlier served as deputy operational head at the IEC secretariat for two years. Ahmadzai replaces Daud Ali Najafi who had resigned about two months ago. Soon after

<sup>1</sup> 'Taliban Attack Provincial Capital', *The Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2010 at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703961104575226062706952970.html>

<sup>2</sup> 'US to send trainers to Afghanistan as stopgap', *The New York Times*, May 3, 2010 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/world/asia/04trainers.html>

<sup>3</sup> 'New Zealand PM John Key in secret visit to Afghanistan', *The Times of India*, May 4, 2010 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/South-Asia/New-Zealand-PM-John-Key-in-secret-visit-to-Afghanistan/articleshow/5888139.cms>

<sup>4</sup> 'House panel looks at progress in Afghanistan, troop strength', *CNN*, May 5, 2010 at <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/05/05/congress.afghanistan/>

taking over, he vowed to ensure free, fair and transparent parliamentary elections slated for September 18, 2010.<sup>5</sup>

In its latest report, the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) notes the growing Chinese involvement in Afghanistan. It notes that China has allocated an additional \$75 million in economic aid to Afghanistan in the late 2009, bringing its total aid to nearly \$1 billion since 2002. The report notes that "some diplomats in Washington, DC, indicated to CRS in November 2009 that, should President Barack Obama ask for China to contribute Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) forces, even in a non-combat role, to Afghanistan, China might agree to that request."<sup>6</sup>

The UK meanwhile handed over six Russian-made MI-17 helicopters to Afghanistan on May 5 in order to strengthen its efforts against narcotics smuggling and border protection.<sup>7</sup>

In other developments, at least 66 people have died and hundreds of houses destroyed in flash floods in Badghis, Ghor and Herat provinces.<sup>8</sup>

## PAKISTAN

- Clinton warns Pak of 'severe consequences' if terror link to its soil is proved; Qureshi: Times Square conspiracy could be 'retaliation' from Taliban against US drone attacks; Gen. Petraeus: Times Square suspect was a 'lone wolf'; Pak receives \$1 billion from US as part of the Coalition Support Fund (CSF)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on May 7, in the aftermath of the failed attempt to set off a truck bomb in Times Square, New York cautioned Pakistan that it will face 'severe consequences' if terror links to its soil are proved. She however acknowledged Pakistan's cooperation in fighting militancy and urged further enhancement in the level of cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi stated that the Times Square attempt could be seen as 'retaliation' against US drone attacks by the Taliban. He added that Faisal Shehzad, the man arrested on charges of attempting the bombing, was a naturalized citizen of US.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 'New chief electoral officer vows fair election', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, May 4, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=93578>

<sup>6</sup> 'Chinese involvement in Afghanistan growing', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, May 4, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=93529>

<sup>7</sup> 'UK provides six helicopters to Afghan forces', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, May 5, 2010 at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=93636>

<sup>8</sup> 'Flash floods kill 66 in Afghanistan', AFP, May 8, 2010 at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jM6iXk7o3zQxYoyOAuNKcF-7u16w>

<sup>9</sup> 'US warns Pakistan of 'severe consequences', *Daily Times*, May 9, 2010 at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\05\09\story\\_9-5-2010\\_pg1\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\05\09\story_9-5-2010_pg1_1)

<sup>10</sup> 'New York bomb plot Taliban payback: Qureshi', *The News*, May 6, 2010 at [http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc\\_default.asp?arc\\_date=5/6/2010](http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp?arc_date=5/6/2010)

Gen. Petraeus on his part stated that the Times Square suspect was a ‘lone wolf’ and his linkage with terror camps in Pakistan was yet to be established.<sup>11</sup> Pakistan on its part offered ‘full cooperation’ in the investigations.<sup>12</sup>

Pakistan meanwhile received \$1 billion from the US as part of Coalition Support Fund (CSF) to finance counter-terror activities. Finance Ministry officials in Islamabad noted that the delay in forwarding the money by the US was impacting the budget process in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

In other developments, in a meeting chaired by President Asif Ali Zardari, the PPP decided that the role of former President Musharraf, Interior Minister Rehman Malik among others will be examined in the ongoing investigations into Benazir Bhutto’s assassination.<sup>14</sup>

## BHUTAN

- **Bhutan PM identifies waste management and agricultural sector as potential areas of cooperation with Malaysia; Bhutan to have nationwide broadband network by 2012; Nepal’s PM says Nepal-Bhutan relations are “excellent”; SAARC Development Fund launched**

Bhutan Prime Minister Jigme Thinley expressed interest in further developing bilateral relationship with Malaysia. Malaysian expertise in waste management and agricultural sector were delineated as potential areas of cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

Bhutan’s Department of Information and Technology (DIT) stated that Bhutan will have a nationwide broadband network by 2012. Currently, only five districts - Thimphu, Chukha, Paro, Wangduephodrang and Tsirang are connected with Optical Ground Wires (OPGW).<sup>16</sup>

Nepal’s Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal in an interview to *Business Bhutan* described Nepal-Bhutan relations as “excellent” and emphasised the need for expediting bilateral economic cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

SAARC Development Fund, with Thimpu as its permanent secretariat, was officially launched on April 29, 2010. Economic integration and alleviation of poverty are some of the important goals identified for the SDF.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> ‘NY suspect is a ‘lone wolf’, says Gen Petraeus’, *Daily Times*, May 8, 2010 at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\05\08\story\\_8-5-2010\\_pg1\\_5](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\05\08\story_8-5-2010_pg1_5)

<sup>12</sup> Syed Irfan Raza, ‘Pakistan assures US of full cooperation’, *Dawn*, May 5, 2010 at <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/pakistan-assures-us-of-full-cooperation-550>

<sup>13</sup> Khalid Mustafa, ‘Pakistan gets \$1.005 bn from US under CSF’, *The News*, May 7, 2010 [http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc\\_default.asp?arc\\_date=5/7/2010](http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp?arc_date=5/7/2010)

<sup>14</sup> ‘Musharraf, PPP leaders included in BB murder probe’, *Daily Times*, May 4, 2010 at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\05\04\story\\_4-5-2010\\_pg1\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\05\04\story_4-5-2010_pg1_1)

<sup>15</sup> ‘Bhutan keen on trade ties with Malaysia’, *The Star*, May 2, 2010 at <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/5/2/nation/20100502175340&sec=nation>

<sup>16</sup> ‘The challenge of a June 2011 deadline’, *Kuensel*, May 5, 2010 at <http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=15356>

<sup>17</sup> ‘Nepal Talks’, *Business Bhutan*, May 7, 2010 at <http://www.businessbhutan.bt/?p=1483>

<sup>18</sup> ‘SAARC development fund launched in Bhutan’, *People’s Daily*, April 29, 2010 at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/6967797.html>

## **MALDIVES**

- **Report: Press freedom violations taking place in Maldives; Social Liberal Party leader: De-centralisation bill could jeopardize socio-economic fabric of society; Maldives and China business forum meeting takes place in Shanghai**

Reports noted that press freedom violations were taking place in Maldives. For instance, the Telecommunication Authority of Maldives (TAM), on the request of Ministry of Islamic Affairs, allegedly blocked a dissident website which had published a speech against the State Minister for Islamic Affairs Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed.<sup>19</sup>

Social Liberal Party Leader Ibrahim Ismail has charged that the de-centralisation bill could transform Maldives from a unitary to a federal state and eventually jeopardize the socio-economic fabric of the society.<sup>20</sup>

Maldives and China business forum was held on May 2, 2010 at Shanghai to promote bilateral economic ties. More than twenty-three Chinese business organisations participated in the forum jointly organised by the Maldives Embassy in China and China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPI).<sup>21</sup>

## **SRI LANKA**

- **New Foreign Minister states that country's foreign policies will reflect its history, culture, social and economic values; Reconciliation Commission set up; Colombo signs MOU with SCO**

Sri Lanka's new External Affairs Minister Prof. Gamini Lakshman Peiris stated that the country's foreign policy would its history, culture, social and economic values. He also encouraged foreign countries to explore unique business and other opportunities available in Sri Lanka.<sup>22</sup>

A reconciliation commission has been set up in Sri Lanka with the aim to mitigate differences between majority and minority groups in the island

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<sup>19</sup> 'Press Freedom: Regressing or progressing?' *Haveeru Online*, May 4, 2010 at <http://www.haveeru.com.mv/english/details/30399>

<sup>20</sup> 'Decentralization bill could change Maldives from unitary to federal state', *Asian Tribune*, May 6, 2010 at <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/06/maldives-brief-decentralization-bill-could-change-maldives-unitary-federal-state>

<sup>21</sup> 'China-Maldives Business Forum held in Shanghai', ISRIA, May 3, 2010 at [http://www.isria.com/pages/3\\_May\\_2010\\_152.php](http://www.isria.com/pages/3_May_2010_152.php)

<sup>22</sup> 'Second Court Martial proceedings against Sarath Fonseka scheduled for tomorrow likely to be postponed', *Asian Tribune*, May 4, 2010 at <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/04/foreign-policy-focus-unique-opportunities-available-sri-lanka-prof-g-l-peiris>

country.<sup>23</sup> After much delay, the second court martial of former Army Chief Gen. Sanath Fonseka took place on May 5, 2010.<sup>24</sup>

President Rajapakse on May 3 pardoned J.S. Tissainayagam, a Sri Lankan journalist who was arrested on March 2008 on charges of inciting violence. Mr. Tissainayagam was awarded the Peter Mackler Award for Courageous and Ethical Journalism in absentia at the National Press Club in Washington in October 2009.<sup>25</sup>

In other developments, Sri Lanka signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a dialogue partner. Issues of mutual concern like combating terrorism, economic cooperation and collaboration in science and technology among others have been identified.

## B. EAST ASIA

### JAPAN

- **China asserts that its survey ship acted legitimately when it opposed the activities of a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in the East China Sea; Japan re-starts a fast breeder nuclear reactor for first time since the reactor was shut down 14 years ago**

The Chinese Foreign Ministry asserted that a Chinese marine survey ship had acted legitimately earlier in the week when it chased a Japanese Coast Guard vessel that was allegedly engaged in research activities in an area claimed by Japan as within its territorial claims in the East China Sea. China of course does not recognize the Japanese claims.<sup>26</sup>

In other developments, Japan restarted a fast-breeder nuclear reactor for the first time since it was shut down 14 years ago because of a major accident. After getting a final go-ahead, a spokesman for the Japan Atomic Energy Agency stated that workers began removing control rods from the plutonium-fired reactor in the northern fishing town of Tsuruga.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> 'Reconciliation Commission - what Asian Tribune was lobbying for the past one year', *Asian Tribune*, May 6, 2010 at <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/06/reconciliation-commission-what-asian-tribune-was-lobbying-past-one-year>

<sup>24</sup> 'Sarah Fonseka's heart and the second court martial', *Asian Tribune*, May 5, 2010 at <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/05/sarath-fonseka%20%99s-heart-and-second-court-martial>

<sup>25</sup>'Sri Lanka President pardons convicted Journalist Tissainayagam', *Asian Tribune*, May 3, 2010 at <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/03/sri-lanka-president-pardons-convicted-journalist-tissainayagam>

<sup>26</sup> 'Pursuit of Japanese coast guard ship legitimate: China', *Japan Times*, May 6, 2010 at [http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20100506a4.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed:+japantimes+\(The+Japan+Times:+All+Stories\)&utm\\_content=Google+Reader](http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20100506a4.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+japantimes+(The+Japan+Times:+All+Stories)&utm_content=Google+Reader)

<sup>27</sup> 'Japan reactor reopens after 1995 accident', *Associated Press*, May 7, 2010 at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jnS4EjX7kdRXslv4gJYhuM1mcckwD9FH4H7O0>

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

- **Thai PM proposes a five-point political roadmap to end political crisis; General elections in Thailand to be held on November 14; Red Shirts accept Abhisit's roadmap but refrain from calling off street protests; Thai government reiterates that recent violence will not affect roadmap; Suu Kyi's party dissolved under new election law; Malaysian Prime Minister visits Cambodia**

At a meeting at a military base in Bangkok on May 2, Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva stated that he was working on a political roadmap to bring an end to the current political crisis gripping the country.<sup>28</sup> Abhisit's roadmap is reportedly based on five key areas: respect for the monarchy; solution of social and economic justice through a national reform; ensuring of free but responsible media' probing of incidents resulting in the loss of life or affecting the public sentiment; and amendment of the charter to be fair to all political parties.

Abhisit also announced that next general elections will be held on November 14, if all political parties agree to the reconciliation process proposed by the government.<sup>29</sup> The Thai PM stated on May 6 the parliament would be dissolved any day from September 15–30.<sup>30</sup> The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) cadres on their part have decided to accept Abhisit's roadmap to prevent further violence. They have however not called off their protests and stated that their future course of action will be decided only after acquiring more information regarding the dissolution of Parliament.<sup>31</sup>

Violence continued even after the roadmap of the government was announced. A grenade explosion on May 8 at Lumpini park near Silom in Thailand killed one cop and injured three soldiers.<sup>32</sup> In another incident, one cop was killed and three others injured as a biker shot at the police on patrol near the Bangkok Bank.<sup>33</sup> The Thai government has however reiterated that its reconciliation road map will not be affected.<sup>34</sup>

In Myanmar, pro-democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party National League for Democracy (NLD) was dissolved under the new election law according to which political parties were needed to legally register themselves.

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<sup>28</sup> 'PM confirms work on peace roadmap', *Bangkok Post*, May 3, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/176768/thai-protesters-mull-pm-offer-of-november-elections>

<sup>29</sup> 'PM: Election could beheld on November 14', *Bangkok Post*, May 3, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/176812/pm-election-could-be-held-on-nov-14>

<sup>30</sup> 'PM: House Dissolution Sept 15-30', *Bangkok Post*, May 6, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/177033/pm-house-dissolution-sep-15-30>

<sup>31</sup> 'Red Shirts welcome Reconciliation Roadmap', *Bernama.com*, May 4, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=495614>

<sup>32</sup> 'Cop killed by Lumpini bomb blast', *Bangkok Post*, May 8, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/177232/one-police-killed-by-lumpini-bomb-blast>

<sup>33</sup> 'Drive-by shooting kills cop on Silom', *Bangkok Post*, May 8, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/177231/drive-by-shooting-kills-policeman-on-silom>

<sup>34</sup> 'Saturday attacks won't affect road map', *Bangkok Post*, May 8, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/177247/saturday-attacks-won-t-affect-road-map>

The NLD had refused to re-register itself as a political party by the May 6 deadline set by the government. The NLD refused to do so as under the new rule, it was required to expel Suu Kyi from its ranks.<sup>35</sup>

The US government expressed concern over the forceful dissolution of the NLD by the Myanmar authorities. Kurt Campbell, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs stated that the US was “troubled” and that it had “very real concerns about the elections laws and the environment that’s been created.” Campbell visited capital Naypyidaw on May 9 to have talks with junta officials as well as with Suu Kyi on these and related issues.<sup>36</sup>

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak visited Cambodia from May 9. This was his first visit to Cambodia after assuming office in April 2009 and is expected to strengthen bilateral ties.<sup>37</sup>

#### APRIL 26-MAY 2, 2010

- **Myanmar to develop closer ties with SAARC countries; Myanmar authorities encourage formation of new pro-junta political parties ahead of general elections; EU says Myanmar's challenges "can only be addressed through genuine dialogue between all stakeholders"; UDD urges the EU to look into the April 10 clash with government forces; Finland PM visits Malaysia; Malaysia and Australia to set up an Anti-Terrorism Committee; Bhutan to develop closer economic ties with Malaysia**

After attending the recently concluded SAARC summit at Thimphu as an observer, Myanmar has expressed a keen interest in developing closer relations with SAARC countries, with which it already has long-standing cultural and trade ties. Myanmar had showed interest in becoming a full member of SAARC in May 2008. India has backed Myanmar's entry into the grouping wholeheartedly.<sup>38</sup>

Ahead of the upcoming elections expected to be held towards the end of the current year, several key leaders of Myanmar's ruling junta, including PM Thein Sein, have resigned from their military positions. About 25 political parties have also applied for registration by April 30 and applications of 12 of these parties have already been accepted. Most of these are pro-junta parties. PM Sein himself has filed to form a party 'Union Solidarity and Development Party' (USDP). Myanmar's main opposition party National League for Democracy

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<sup>35</sup> 'Suu Kyi's party dissolved', Bangkok Post, May 7, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/177137/burma-democracy-leader-suu-kyi-party-dissolved>

<sup>36</sup> 'US troubled by Burma election prep', Bangkok Post, May 9, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/177338/us-troubled-by-burma-election-preparations-envoy>

<sup>37</sup> 'Najib arrives for official visit to Cambodia', Bernama.com, May 9, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=496745>

<sup>38</sup> 'Myanmar cajoles SAARC, Eyes membership', Bernama.com, April 29, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=494447>

(NLD) has opted to abstain from contesting the upcoming elections, due to which it may face dissolution in the near future.<sup>39</sup>

During a recent meeting in Luxembourg, EU foreign ministers' have expressed their desire to send a mission to Myanmar to discuss concerns over the upcoming elections. They have also urged junta leaders to cooperate with Piero Fassino, EU's Special Envoy to Myanmar and reiterated their demand for the release of Suu Kyi. The EU ministers reiterated that Myanmar's challenges "can only be addressed through genuine dialogue between all stakeholders, including the ethnic groups and the opposition."<sup>40</sup>

In Thailand, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) have urged the EU to send its representatives to look into the issue of use of force by the Thai government in the clash between them and government forces on April 10. 20 civilians and five soldiers were killed and more than 800 people injured in that incident.<sup>41</sup>

Finland PM Matti Vanhaen visited Malaysia on April 28. His visit is expected to boost bilateral ties and facilitate cooperation in various fields, including innovation, information communication technology, and green technology.<sup>42</sup>

Malaysia and Australia are to set up a Joint Working Committee on Anti-Terrorism. This Committee is expected to replicate the successful mechanism used by the Malaysia-Australia Working Committee on Human Trafficking.<sup>43</sup>

Bhutan Prime Minister Jigme Thinley expressed his country's willingness to develop closer economic relations with Malaysia, particularly in the trade sector. Praising Malaysia's expertise in waste management technology and in the agricultural sector, Thinley stated that being an agrarian economy itself, Bhutan can benefit from Malaysia's expertise.<sup>44</sup>

## C. WEST ASIA

### IRAN

- Clinton at the NPT RevCon charges that Iran has violated NPT provisions; Mottaki invites UN Security Council members for dinner to discuss Iran's nuclear programme, US, UK, France and Russia do not

<sup>39</sup> 'Burma junta preparing for elections', *Bangkok Post*, May 2, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/176625/burma-junta-prepares-ground-for-elections>

<sup>40</sup> 'EU hopes to send mission to Burma', *Bangkok Post*, April 26, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/175912/eu-hopes-to-send-poll-mission-to-burma>

<sup>41</sup> 'UDD submits petition to EU', *Bangkok Post*, April 29, 2010 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/176254/udd-submits-petition-to-eu>

<sup>42</sup> 'Finland Prime Minister arrives for a two-day visit', *Bernama.com*, April 28, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=494077>

<sup>43</sup> 'Malaysia-Australia form Anti-Terrorism Committee', *Bernama.com*, April 28, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=494264>

<sup>44</sup> 'Bhutan keen on trade ties with Malaysia', *Bernama.com*, May 2, 2010 at <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=495044>

## **send Ambassadors; Iran begins construction of 1,350 kms Chabahar-Zahedan-Mashhad railway project**

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference charged that Iran had violated its NPT obligations and should be held to account. She added that "Iran is the only country represented in this hall that has been found by the [International Atomic Energy Agency] board of governors to be currently in non-compliance with its nuclear safeguard obligations."<sup>45</sup> President Ahmadinejad earlier in his speech at the conference blamed states with nuclear weapons of threatening those who wanted to develop peaceful nuclear technology. His comments provoked delegates from the US, the UK, and France to walk out of the conference.

Foreign Minister Manoucher Mottaki hosted a dinner for representatives of UN Security Council members, including the US. Reports noted that the event was a rare move for a visiting dignitary to host a dinner for all the Council's 15 member nations. Other than the US, UK, France and Russia, most of the other countries sent in their ambassadors.<sup>46</sup>

Reports noted that the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan-Mashhad railway was going on along its 1,350 kms length. The project, started with a 3 billion euro credit, had more than two years of planning. Iran's minister of roads and transportation, Hamid Behbahani stated that 800 billion rials (around €60m) have been allocated to start the project.<sup>47</sup>

## **IRAQ**

### **• Iraq's votes recount process starts**

With incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki demanding a recount on charges that the electronic system of counting was imperfect, a manual recount of some of the ballots cast in Iraq's election started in Baghdad. The recount affects 68 seats and could change the result either way. Election officials are expected to recount two million votes in a process that could take weeks. The election was narrowly won by Maliki's rival Iyad Allawi and his secular Iraqiyya bloc, but neither Allawi nor al-Maliki have obtained a clear majority to form a government.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 'Nuclear talks spark Iran-US clash', BBC News, May 4, 2010 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8658743.stm>

<sup>46</sup> 'Mottaki hosts Security Council members including US rep', Tehran Times, May 8, 2010 at [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=219005](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=219005)

<sup>47</sup> 'Iran starts big railway project', Tehran Times, May 8, 2010 at [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=219060](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=219060)

<sup>48</sup> 'Iraqi election recount under way', BBC News, May 3, 2010 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8657705.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8657705.stm)