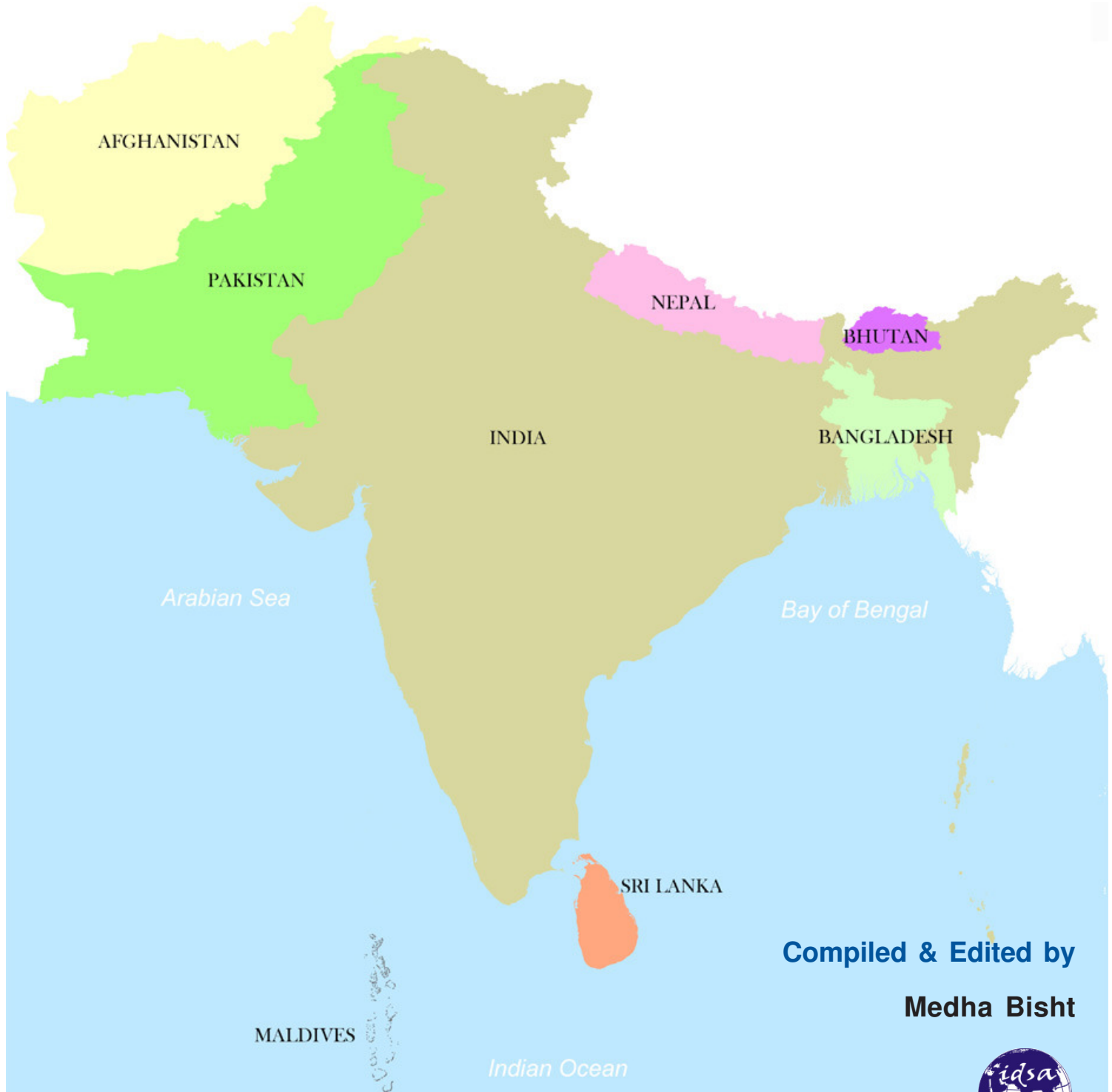


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

Volume 2 Number 2 March 1-15, 2011

South Asia Trends is a fortnightly newsletter on South Asian affairs. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide a panoramic view of important events that shape and impact the politics of the subcontinent. The effort would be to inform our readers of the domestic, regional and international repercussions of the political debates and diplomatic engagements that take place in South Asia.



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Editor's Note

The leaked diplomatic cable once again resuscitated anti-Indian sentiments in Nepal. The cable sent on June 18, 2007, provides details of the interaction between Pranab Mukherjee and Madhav Kumar Nepal, where Mukherjee was categorical in expressing his view that the Maoists should not be integrated into the Nepali Army. While this could further strain the relationship between the Maoists and the New Delhi, the timing of the leaked diplomatic cable become significant. This is particularly so, when after a prolonged period of almost two years, Maoists have returned back to power.

With the UPCN (Maoists) and CPN- UML joining hands, Nepal in the coming months would be led by Jhalanath Khanal. While it has been announced that the Maoists would be given eleven ministries in the cabinet expansion, ministerial portfolios on Defence and the Home Minister have been an issue of heated contestation between both the parties. The Nepali Congress on its part has reiterated its concerns on halting the violent activities of the Maoists, stating that the YCL should be disbanded and seized properties should be returned. Meanwhile, MJF-N has proposed three prerequisites for joining the government. These include, addressing the Madhesi issue, promulgating the constitution by May 2, 2011 and finalizing modalities of integration and rehabilitation of Maoist fighters. Also, according to one media report, a vertical split in UPCN (Maoists) seems to be cementing up.

Suicide attacks in Afghanistan have been increasing in the past months. According to one media report, Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence [ISI] has played an important role in organizing the suicide attacks in Afghanistan. A United Nations report has claimed that 2010 marked the most lethal year for noncombatants in the nearly decade-old war, with a 15 percent increase. The report also claimed that insurgents were responsible for 75 percent of those deaths.

Meanwhile the spat between PPP and PML-N in Pakistan seems to melting down. Shahbaz Sharif called upon Gilani to convene a national conference in order to devise solutions confronting the country. Shahbaz also emphasized that the conference should not only be attended by the leadership of all political parties, but also by the military and the judiciary. However, the Pakistan Muslim League-N categorically stated that it was opposed to any political role of armed forces.

Afghanistan

Karzai, Grossman Agree on Greater Coordination

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, March 3, 2011.

President Hamid Karzai has hoped the newly-appointed US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan will contribute to the expansion of cooperation among the three countries, his office said. At their maiden meeting in London, Karzai congratulated Marc Grossman on assuming the job and wished him success in his new position, the Presidential Palace in Kabul said in a statement. The three allies would succeed in coping with the challenges posed by terrorism in the region, the President said. "Only through trilateral cooperation, we can succeed in eliminating terrorist sanctuaries across the border."

(Source: http://outlookafghanistan.net/news_Pages/main_news.html#03)

President Karzai's Visit to Britain and Its Importance

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, March 4, 2011.

President Karzai has gone on a visit to Britain and has been in discussion with senior British officials regarding a number of important issues including the process of talks with Taliban, Britain's aid to Afghanistan and also the security situation in the country and the planned transition of security responsibilities to Afghan forces by 2014. President Karzai and British Prime Minister David Cameron on March 01, 2011 reiterated their commitment to the timeline set forth for the evacuation of the majority of foreign forces from Afghanistan by 2014. Karzai and British prime minister announced that a section of British and German troops will remain in Afghanistan after 2014 to help with the training of Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP)

(Source: <http://outlookafghanistan.net/2011/03/president-karzai%E2%80%99s-visit-to-britain-and-its-importance/>)

Taliban Changing Tactics by Killing More Civilians and Forging Alliance with International Terror Groups

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, March 4, 2011.

In recent weeks, there has been a spate of suicide attacks that have swept across the country. From the Suicide-cum firing attacks inside Kabul's Finest Supermarket in January to the Jalalabad Kabul Bank deadly attacks and the Faryab suicide attacks of a few days ago, it is emerging that the Taliban and other militant groups such as Haqqani network are increasingly turning to suicide attacks as a significant shift in strategy.

(Source: <http://outlookafghanistan.net/2011/03/taliban-changing-tactics-by-killing-more-civilians-and-forging-alliance-with-international-terror-groups/>)

US apology for Afghan deaths 'not enough' -Karzai

Jordon Times, March 6, 2011.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai told General David Petraeus, the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, his apology for a foreign air strike that killed

nine children last week was “not enough”. At a meeting with his security advisers at which Petraeus was present, Karzai said civilian casualties by foreign troops were “no longer acceptable” to the Afghan government or to the Afghan people, Karzai’s palace said in a statement. Civilian casualties caused by NATO-led and Afghan forces hunting insurgents have again become a major source of friction between Karzai and his Western backers.

(Source: <http://jordantimes.com/index.php?news=35164>)

Gates in Afghanistan to Assess Troop Withdrawals

New York Times, March 7, 2011.

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates landed here for an unannounced trip to meet with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan and begin assessments to determine the number of American troops to be withdrawn from the country in July. In assessing withdrawal plans, American commanders say that the current situation on the ground is mixed. They describe improvements in the parts of Helmand and Kandahar provinces in the south where the U.S. has concentrated tens of thousands of troops for several years, but they acknowledge worsening security in parts of the east and north. In the 10th year of the war, the U.S. has about 100,000 forces in the country.

(Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/asia/07gates.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss)

Taliban Responsible for Surge in Civilian Deaths: UN

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, March 10, 2011

Reuters targeted killings of civilians in Afghanistan doubled last year, the United Nations said. In an annual report, the United Nations said 2010 marked the most lethal year for noncombatants in the nearly decade-old war, with a 15 percent increase in the number of civilians killed to 2,777 – continuing a steady rise over the past four years. Insurgents were responsible for 75 percent of those deaths.

(Source: http://epaper.outlookafghanistan.net/news_Pages/main_news.html#01)

Afghanistan, Turkey sign bilateral agreement

NATO Training Mission Afghanistan, March 13, 2011.

Senior representatives of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Turkey, Japan, and NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan concluded a groundbreaking agreement for the training of Afghan police officers in Turkey at a signing ceremony at the Afghan Ministry of Interior March 1. Minister Bismullah Khan Mohammedi, Afghan Interior Minister, signed a bilateral agreement establishing joint procedures for the Police Officer Candidate School in Sivas, Turkey, along with Turkish Ambassador H.E. Basat Ozturk.

(Source: <http://www.ntm-a.com/news/1-categorynews/2239-afghanistan-turkey-signs-bilateral-agreement-?lang=>)

Iran, Afghanistan ink MoU on boosting cultural ties

Islamic Republic News Agency, March 14, 2011

Iran and Afghanistan Monday [14 March] inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on fostering cultural ties. The document was inked in Kabul by visiting Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister of Iran Mohammad Hoseyni and Afghanistan's Minister of Information and Culture Makhdum Rahin at the end of the summit of the culture ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The MoU was signed to follow up previous agreements reached by the two capitals to boost bilateral cooperation.

(Source: Islamic Republic News Agency website, Tehran)

Taleban group joins peace process in Afghan south

National Afghanistan TV, March 14, 2011

A 10-member insurgents group has joined the peace process and handed over its weapons to the government as a result of efforts by the National Directorate of Security in southern Kandahar. Gen Momen said that formerly the commander of the 10-member group worked as the head of the military commission of the militants. According to him, the group carried out destructive activities in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. They joined the government as a result of efforts by the head of the Panjwai District, Hajji Fazloddin Agha.

(Source: National Afghanistan TV, Kabul, in Pashto)

Afghan senators accuse Pakistani intelligence of organizing suicide attacks

Noor TV, Kabul, March 15, 2011.

Following increasing suicide attacks and civilian casualties in the country, the upper house of parliament has decided to summon senior security officials. Some senators say that Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence [ISI] organizes the suicide attacks in Afghanistan, Mohammad Mansurian reports. The recent increase in the number of suicide attacks and explosions, which have killed and wounded tens of Afghan civilians, have prompted the upper house of parliament to take this issue seriously. Some senators say that ISI is regarded as the main organizer of the suicide attacks in Afghanistan and they strongly criticize government's soft and passive policies [towards government armed opponents].

(Source: Noor TV, Kabul, in Dari)

Bangladesh**Bangladesh bank accused of funding militants**

The Peninsular, March 2, 2011.

A bank in Bangladesh is spending eight percent of its profits to fund militants in the country, a minister has alleged. The Islami Bank Bangladesh is spending the money through the Islami Bank Foundation, State Minister for Home Shamsul Huq Tuku said on Monday at a meeting on ways to combat militancy. According to its website, the bank had a net profit of 3,528 million taka (\$49.69m) in the nine

months to September 2010. The Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited is a leading private bank that works on non-profit basis as prescribed by Shariah.

(Source: <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/s.-asia/philippines/144343-bangladesh-bank-accused-of-funding-militants-.html>)

Bangladesh tells workers to stay in Libya

Zawya, March 2, 2011.

About 60,000 Bangladeshis working on construction sites in Libya have struggled to escape since the violent rebellion against Moamer Kadhafi began, with Dhaka officials admitting they had no resources to send ships or planes. At least 7,500 Bangladeshis have left, but those that remain are being advised by the government not to leave – even though the UN High Commission for Refugees has called for a mass evacuation. “We are discouraging those Bangladeshi who are still in Libya from coming back. These are poor workers. We are afraid if they come back they will lose everything,” Bangladesh’s manpower secretary Zafar Ahmed Khan told AFP.

(Source: <http://www.zawya.com/Story.cfm/sidANA20110302T084053ZAED32>)

Chinese consortium to set up 300 MW dual fuel plant in Bangladesh

Power-Gen World Wide, March 3, 2011.

A Chinese consortium is to set up a 300 MW dual-fuel peaking power station at Ghorashal, close to Bangladesh’s capital city of Dhaka. The Chinese consortium - China National Technical Import and Export Cooperation (CNTIEC) and China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) - has proposed to build the plant.

“The Chinese consortium has won the bid for its lowest financial offer of Tk13.5bn (\$189m) for constructing the plant,” said an official from the state-owned Power Development Board (PDB).

(Source: <http://www.powergenworldwide.com/index/display/articledisplay/6247550316/articles/powergenworldwide/gas-generation/new-projects/2011/03/chinese-consortium.html>)

Rail connectivity between West Bengal and Tripura via Bangladesh

Steel Guru, March 4, 2011.

Mr KH Muniyappa Minister of State for Railways informed the Lok Sabha that in order to facilitate rail connectivity between West Bengal and Tripura via Bangladesh, Government of India is financing the construction of a railway line on the missing link between Akhaura (Bangladesh) and Agartala (Tripura, India). Time frame for the implementation of the project is dependent on acceptance of the proposed alignment by Bangladesh authorities, availability of land required for the project etc.

(Source: http://www.steelguru.com/indian_news/Rail_connectivity_between_West_Bengal_and_Tripura_via_Bangladesh/194115.html)

BD can emerge as regional investment hub: EU envoy

The Financial Express, March 4, 2011.

Newly-appointed European Union (EU) envoy to Dhaka, William Hanna, said Bangladesh can emerge as a regional investment hub but it should improve energy situation and combat corruption in an effort to woo investors to the country. "Bangladesh is the most potential country and blessed with many advantages, which other LDCs (Least Developed Countries) do not have," Hanna said in his first press briefing in the capital.

(Source: http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=128027&date=2011-03-04)

US offers assistance to bring back Bangladeshis

Daily Star, March 7, 2011.

The US Government will repatriate some of the thousands of Bangladeshis currently stranded in Tunisia as a result of the conflict in Libya. US Ambassador to Bangladesh James F Moriarty confirmed it on Monday, said a press release. "On behalf of the American people, I am glad to announce our assistance and support to so many Bangladeshi citizens in need," Moriarty said. Working through the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the US has pledged \$5 million to support the humanitarian relief effort, he added.

(Source: http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/latest_news.php?nid=28762)

Govt. allows mobile towers near border

Sify News, March 7, 2011.

The Department of Telecom has decided to permit mobile towers within 500 meters of international border. The department has modified its norms according to which installation of towers within 10 km of the international border was not allowed. The move is seen as an attempt to counter incoming signals from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

(Source: <http://www.sify.com/news/govt-allows-mobile-towers-near-border-news-national-ldhpOjeicbf.html>)

India, Bangladesh border forces hold talks

IBN Live, March 9, 2011.

India and Bangladesh today held discussions on issues related to cross-border terrorist activities and presence of camps of Indian insurgent groups on Bangladeshi soil as top officers of border forces of the two countries began their five-day meeting here. Border Security Force (BSF) Director General Raman Srivastava lead the 23-member Indian team while Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) chief Major General Rafiqul Islam headed the 20-member contingent of his country at the meeting. Matters related to early completion of joint verification of unfenced gaps by both BSF and BGB, maintenance of status quo in areas of adverse possession,

presence of Indian insurgent groups and camps in Bangladesh and implementation of joint border management plan will be discussed by the BSF. Sources involved in the talks said BGB will also bring up issues like firing incidents along the border and killing of Bangladeshi personnel.

(Source: <http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/india-bangladesh-border-forces-hold-talks/603450.html>)

Bangladesh to build five warships in next 42 months

New Age, March 11, 2011.

Khulna Shipyard will build five warships for the Bangladesh Navy in the next 42 months at a cost of 300 takas [as published]. The prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, on 5 March inaugurated the construction of the warships and a training school for the navy. "Khulna Shipyard will build more vessels for export after completing the five warships," newly appointed Managing Director of the state-owned shipyard Commodore Riaz Uddin Ahmed told journalists at his office Thursday [9 March].

(Source: New Age website, Dhaka)

Bangladesh court adjourns Nobel laureate's case for two weeks

Daily Star, March 15, 2011.

The Supreme Court on [15 March] adjourned for two weeks the hearing on two appeals filed against the High Court [HC] judgement that upheld a Bangladesh Bank order removing Dr Muhammad Yunus from the office of managing director (MD) of Grameen Bank. Dr Yunus and nine members of board of directors of Grameen Bank on 9 March filed the two separate provisional leave-to-appeal petitions with the apex court against the HC judgement. The six-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque adjourned the hearing to examine the HC verdict that on 8 March rejected two writ petitions filed challenging legality of the Bangladesh Bank order.

(Source: Daily Star, Dhaka)

Bhutan

Nepalese government to merge Bhutanese refugee camps

All Headline News, March 3, 2011.

The Nepalese government hopes to turn the seven Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal into two over the next two years. "Given the large number of people that have been resettled, this is a logical move," Jay Mukunda Khanal, head of Nepal's National Unit for the Coordination of Refugee Affairs, told IRIN, adding: "We hope to complete this effort by the end of 2012." Currently there are 69,203 refugees in seven camps: Beldangi I, Beldangi II, Beldangi II extension, Khudunarabari, Timai and Goldhap (all in Jhapa District); and Sanischare (Morang District).

(Source: <http://www.allheadlinenews.com/briefs/articles/90038150?Nepalese%20government%20to%20merge%20Bhutanese%20refugee%20camps>)

Increasing fuel consumption against declining energy exports

The Kuensel, March 4, 2011

While increasing domestic consumption is slowly eating into hydropower export earnings, energy imports in the form of fossil fuels is also on a drastic surge. Last year, fuel imports jumped to Nu 4.6B from Nu 2.9B in 2009. On the other hand, hydropower export earnings increased from Nu 10B in the fiscal year 2008-09 to Nu 11B in 2009-10. After paying the interest and principle on Indian rupee loans taken to build the hydropower plants, the 2009-10 earnings came to Nu 7.8B. The figure does not account for the import of electricity during lean seasons, which was around Nu 218.4M in 2010. In the last fiscal, Nu 1.4B was paid as interest, while Nu 1.5B was paid as repayment on the principle amount of the Indian rupee debt.

(Source: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/2010/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=18603>)

All lit up

The Kuensel, March 7, 2011.

Almost every household in the central district of Bumthang now has access to electricity, with 420 dwellings in six chiwogs of Chokhortoe gewog being formally lit up yesterday. Except for 108 households in Ura gewog that use solar energy, all the 1,371 households in Bumthang now have access to electricity. "The electrification of Bumthang is now 100 percent achieved," Bhutan Power corporation manager in Bumthang, Ugyen Dorji, said. "The 108 households using solar energy will get hydropower connections by May this year."

(Source: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/2010/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=18631>)

Rs 400 crore for road link to Bodh Gaya

The Times of India, March 7, 2011.

The foreign Buddhist tourists of Sri Lanka, Burma, Bhutan, Korea, Japan and Thailand will get direct road link to visit all the international Buddhist places at a time. Birth place of Lord Buddha, amusement, enlightenment and salvation spots will be connected directly by road. The road construction will be started from the coming financial year. After the completion of the project foreign tourists will get direct road service from Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, Deodeh village, Lumbani of Siddarthnagar, Shravasti and upto Lucknow. Spot verification has been carried out and project of Rs.400 crores has already been chalked out.

(Source: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-08/india/28667832_1_road-construction-road-link-direct-road)

Poverty rate thrice the 10th Plan goal

The Kuensel, March 10, 2011.

With a poverty rate of 44 percent, Mongar dzongkhag is the third poorest dzongkhag in the country, prime minister Jigmi Y Thinley said during the district's

midterm review on Thursday. "If it's to come down to 15 percent, the government's 10th plan goal, all the gewog centres must get connected by road and rural water supply coverage, electrification, health services and school enrolment must increase." Of its 17 gewogs, four are not yet connected by road. In the first two years of the plan, the dzongkhag received a cumulative annual capital grant of about Nu 427M, of which Nu 348.5M has been used.

(Source: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/2010/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=18660>)

Lyonchen Warns Against Fdi In Samdrup Jongkhar As Town Hopes To Be New Tourist Hub

Business Bhutan, March 12, 2011.

The bordering town to the state of Assam, Samdrup Jongkhar will be a tourist hub if things go according to plans. The government is planning to make Samdrup Jongkhar an exit and entry point for tourists to Bhutan since Guwahati is the nearest airport to where Druk Air flies. During the Mid-Term Review (MTR) Prime Minister Lyonchen Jigmi Y. Thinley said the new Asian Highway will help to bring in tourist and help the town grow. The Asian Highway which is going to connect major highways in the region passes along Samdrup Jongkhar. However, Lyonchen warned local residents not to let foreign direct investments for hotels there. He was of the view that if that happens then owners will be non-Bhutanese which will not benefit the local people. Construction of smaller hotels was recommended which could be run as family businesses.

(Source: <http://www.businessbhutan.bt/?p=4973>)

BSF jawan killed another injured in ambush

Press Trust of India, March 14, 2011.

A BSF jawan was killed and another seriously injured when suspected NDFB rebels ambushed their convoy along the Assam-Bhutan border in Kokrajhar district today. Official sources said the militants opened indiscriminate firing on the BSF convoy at the remote Ultapani forest area near the border. While Naresh Kumar died on the spot, Rajpal Singh was critically injured and rushed to a nearby hospital. The convoy was on patrol duty when the militants ambushed them. The militants escaped immediately after the incident. Police suspect the involvement of the anti-talk faction of National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) in the incident.

(Source: <http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/bsf-jawan-killed-another-injured-in-ambush/610309.html>)

Three BSF killed and 7 injured in ambush by NDFB

Times of Assam, March 14, 2011.

Three BSF jawans were killed and at least seven others were injured, three of them stated to be serious, when suspected NDFB (Ranjan Daimary fraction) militants ambush the troupe at Ultapani reserve forest bordering Bhutan in Kokrajhar this evening. According to information the jawans were on way towards Ultapani

from Bongaigaon when the militants ambush the vehicle the BSF were traveling around 6pm. The BSF have a camp at Ultapani.

(Source:<http://www.timesofassam.com/headlines/three-bsf-killed-and-7-injured-in-ambush-by-ndfb>)

NHPC to provide consultancy services for 720 MW power project in Bhutan

Equity Bulls, March 14, 2011.

NHPC Ltd has signed an Agreement with Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project Authority, an Authority set up by Royal Govt. of Bhutan, for providing engineering & design consultancy services for Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project (720 MW) in Bhutan. The stock closed the day at Rs.23.25, up by Rs.0.05 or 0.22%. The stock hit an intraday high of Rs.23.30 and low of Rs.23. The total traded quantity was 13.38 lakhs compared to 2 week average of 10.77 lakhs.

(Source:http://www.equitybulls.com/admin/news2006/news_det.asp?id=88727)

Personal weapons to army personnel under scrutiny, SC told

MSN, March 14, 2011.

The Defence Ministry today told the Supreme Court that it has decided to review the procedures for issuing non-service pattern (NSP) weapons to army personnel in view of findings that they were illegally sold to unscrupulous elements. The ministry said that for the same reason it has also decided to review the procedures followed for permitting army officers to import arms and ammunition while posted in Bhutan. "The army headquarters has also been asked to review the procedures followed in the army for permitting army officers to import arms and ammunition while posted in Bhutan and for issue of NSP weapons from the ordnance depots to army officers for personal use.

(Source:<http://news.in.msn.com/national/article.aspx?cp-documentid=5022683>)

Maldives

Maldives evacuates students from Libya

Haveeru, March 5, 2011.

The Maldivian government today pulled out its students from Libya, amidst the anti-government protests by the Libyan opposition, fighting to overthrow Moamer Kadhafi who has ruled the country for 42 years. A Maldives Foreign Ministry official said the three Maldivian students in the Libyan capital Tripoli were brought back to the Maldives on their request, as the anti-government protests are spreading across the Arab nation.

(Source: <http://www.haveeru.com.mv/english/details/35170>)

Maldives urges UN Security Council: Support imposing no fly zone over Libya

The Asian Tribune, , March 15, 2011.

The Maldives urged the United Nations Security Council to support imposing a

no-fly zone over Libya to prevent Gaddafi using air force to attack rebels and civilians. The Maldives urged all permanent members of the UN Security Council to immediately support the imposition of a no-fly zone in Libya, as advocated by the Arab League, the President's Office said. Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed called upon the UN Security Council to "fulfill its duty to protect the people of Libya and urgently agree on a robust course of action to prevent further deterioration of the situation in Libya."

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2011/03/15/maldives-urges-un-security-council-support-imposing-no-fly-zone-over-libya>)

Nepal

Prachanda led sub-committee dwells on name of new statute

The Himalayan Times, March 3, 2011

The Sub-Committee formed to settle disputed issues of constitution drafting discussed the functions of bicameral parliament and the name of the new constitution. Earlier, the committee led by Maoist Chairman 'Prachanda' agreed to have a bicameral legislature at the centre. Holding a meeting, the committee today discussed jurisdiction and functions of bicameral parliament. Discussions were held on the new name of the constitution, but decision to this effect will be reached tomorrow, said Nepali Congress Parliamentary Party leader Ram Chandra Poudel. The meeting centered on names of the constitution such as Nepal's Constitution, People's Federal Democratic Republic or Federal Democratic Republic.

(Source: <http://thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Prachanda+led+sub-committee+dwells+on+name+of+new+statute&NewsID=278511>)

Nepal's Maoists finally set to join government

News One, March 3, 2011.

Almost 23 months after the first government headed by the former Maoist guerrillas collapsed, the once underground party is now set to return to power after blowing hot and cold for weeks. Former Maoist minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who became embroiled in a vote-buying scandal last year that torpedoed Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda's ambition to become prime minister again, will lead the Maoist team in the new cabinet, Maoist mouthpiece Janadisha daily said. Mahara, a former information and communications minister, will be deputy prime minister in the communist-led government of Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal, and is also likely to have his old ministry. The Maoist daily said the former rebels would get 11 ministries, including three plum portfolios: foreign affairs, information and communications, and physical planning and works. Besides Mahara, four Maoist leaders likely to make it to the cabinet are Dev Gurung and Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, former ministers both, and sitting MPs Barshaman Pun and Top Bahadur Rayamajhi.

(Source: <http://www.inewsone.com/2011/03/03/nepals-maoists-finally-set-to-join-government/32750>)

Govt to serve successful term, claims PM Khanal

The Himalayan Times, March 4, 2011

Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal said the government would soon get final shape, and claimed that his government would serve a successful term. M Khanal also said the present coalition between his party, CPN-UML, and Maoists had been inevitable as the nation hardly could afford to exclude the UCPN-Maoist, being the largest party in parliament, from the government. "Previous governments failed because they could not convince Maoists to participate in the government," he added. PM Khanal also participated in an Armed Police Force pass-out function at the AFP Training School, in Lampatan prior to returning to Kathmandu.

(Source: <http://thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Govt+to+serve+successful+term%2C+claims+PM+Khanal&NewsID=278634>)

Maoists hampering new statute: NC CWC

My Republica, March 4, 2011.

The Nepali Congress (NC) has alleged that the Maoists are trying to create an obstacle in the promulgation of the new constitution by relegating the peace process to the backburner. The CWC meeting also stressed the need to conclude the entire peace process before the promulgation of a new constitution. The meeting concluded that the Maoists must first free the country from the shadow of violence by ensuring management of their arms and combatants, returning seized properties, disbanding the paramilitary structure of the Young Communist League, managing conflict victims and implementing all agreements reached in the past with regard to the peace process.

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=28825)

Chinese firm flies Nepalese home from Libya

Nepal News, March 6, 2011.

A Chinese company, Sino Hydro, has rescued 260 migrant Nepali workers from Libya. All those rescued were the company's employees. Officials from Chinese embassy in Kathmandu and government representatives welcomed and received the rescued Nepalis at the Tribhuvan International Airport on Sunday [6 March]. The Xinhua reported that along with the Nepalis around 50 Indian nationals who were rescued by the Chinese company also arrived in Nepal. The report further said, there were altogether around 700 Nepali working for the Chinese company and this is the first batch of Nepalese who returned via Sudan.

(Source: Nepalnews.com website, Kathmandu,)

Nepal Maoist leaders Dahal and Dr. Bhattarai speak one voice

Telegraph Nepal, March 7, 2011

Those who had hoped that rivalry between Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and vice chairman Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai will finally lead to a ver-

tical split in the party have fallen flat. Not only Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai has begun taking on the lines of Chairman Dahal which could be easily observed in his fresh lectures. Bhattarai while addressing a cadre meet in Salleri of Solukhumbu District, March 6, 2011 even praised Chairman Dahal for playing a balancing role in the party. In a speech similar to that of Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Bhattarai recently claimed that 'India was the principle enemy of the party'- which he had objected at the Palungtar extended plenum meet of the party's central committee.

(Source: <http://www.telegraphnepal.com/headline/2011-03-07/nepal-maoist-leaders-dahal-and-dr-bhattarai-speak-one-voice>)

Revived Maoists begin flexing muscle in Nepal

The Times of India, March 7, 2011.

Within days of joining the new communist-led government of Nepal, the former Maoist guerrillas have begun to flex their trade union muscle, calling strikes in quick succession in the major industrial areas, whose effect will also be felt by major Indian companies like Hindustan Unilever, ITC and Dabur India. From Tuesday, the All Nepal Industrial Trade Union owing allegiance to the Maoists withdrew from negotiations with officials of the Hetauda Industrial Corridor in central Nepal and enforced an indefinite strike that has hit nearly 80 industries employing over 5,000 workers.

(Source: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-09/south-asia/28671922_1_surya-nepal-makwanpur-indefinite-strike)

Nepal army integration to be over before constitution promulgation - minister

Nepal News, March 8, 2011.

Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Barshaman Pun has said that the task of army integration will be completed before promulgation of the new constitution on 28 May, 2011. Speaking at a programme organized by Reporters Club in the capital on Tuesday [8 March], the newly-appointed Maoist minister said that although the task of army integration and constitution drafting is moving ahead simultaneously, the first task will be completed before promulgation of the constitution. He also informed that the government will soon come up with appropriate work plan for "wholesale integration" of Maoist combatants in order to take the ongoing peace process to a successful conclusion.

(Source: Nepalnews.com website, Kathmandu)

Nepal PM, Maoist party chief discuss cabinet expansion

Nepal News, March 8, 2011.

Unified CPN [Communist Party of Nepal] (Maoist) chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal discussed issues related with the cabinet expansion with Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal at the PM's official residence in Baluwatar [8 March] morning. There has already been an agreement to allocate 11 cabinet ministers to UCPN (Maoist) and eight to CPN (UML) [Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist

Leninist)]. However, the cabinet expansion has been delayed due to dispute between UCPN (Maoist) and UML on portfolio distribution. On Monday, PM Khanal had delegated his party leader Bishnu Paudel to work as defence minister. The UCPN (Maoist) has placed strategic importance to Defence Ministry and Home Ministry.

(Source: Nepalnews.com website, Kathmandu)

Nepal to crack down on anti-China demo

The Himalayan Times, March 9, 2011.

Nepal Police has rolled up its sleeves to thwart possible anti-China protest in Kathmandu on the eve of the 52nd anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule. March 10 is marked as the Tibetan Uprising Day, which commemorates the Tibet 1959 rebellion against Tibet's occupation by China, forcing the 14th Dalai Lama to flee from Tibet. Police have mobilised 1,500 personnel, including Armed Police Force in the Capital city and increased surveillance in and around the Chinese Embassy, Consular Section, Swoyambhu and Bouddha to prevent Tibetan exiles from turning up on the streets. The local administration has issued prohibitory order on sit-in, assembly and demonstration in the areas.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Nepal+to+crack+down+on+anti-China+demo&NewsID=279414>)

Nepal floats action plan for UN resolutions

The Himalayan Times, March 9, 2011.

The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction has prepared a national action plan to implement the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions No. 1325 and 1820. According to MoPR, the action plan has reached the implementation level following its endorsement by the Cabinet. At a discussion organised here on Wednesday by National Women's Commission and INSEC, it was informed that Nepal is the first country in the South Asian region to draft the action plan to implement the UNSC Resolutions. Under-Secretary of MoPR Dal Bahadur KC said the action plan was readied to implement 1325 and 1820 and urged all concerned to help for its effective implementation.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Nepal+floats+action+plan+for+UN+resolutions&NewsID=279316>)

MJF-Nepal may join govt soon

The Himalayan Times, March 9, 2011.

MJF-N has submitted its concept paper and is waiting for government response, following which it will take a decision on joining the government. "We are waiting for response," MJF-N Chairman Upendra Yadav told The Himalayan Times. "We have submitted our concept paper to the prime minister. We have raised three major issues – constitution promulgation by May 28, integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants in security forces and addressing Madhesi issues." The party will take a final decision after its six-member taskforce led by Ram Sah

Yadav holds discussions on implementation of the concept paper. "We want a firm commitment from the government to promulgate the constitution by May 28, finalise modalities of integration and rehabilitation of Maoist fighters along with the timeline, and address Madhesi issues," added Yadav.

(Source:<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=MJF-Nepal+may+join+govt+soon&NewsID=279280>)

Nepal sets up taskforce to incorporate Maoist fighters into army within 50 days

Kantipur Daily, March 11, 2011

Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal and UCPN [Unified Communist Party of Nepal] (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Friday [11 March] agreed to form a taskforce to complete the integration and rehabilitation of the former Maoist combatants within the next 50 days. The name list of the members to be incorporated in the taskforce will be finalized by the meeting of the special committee formed to integrate the combatants scheduled this afternoon. According to minister for peace and reconstruction, Barsa Man Pun, the meeting held at the prime minister's residence in Baluwatar agreed to recruit needed manpower as per the demand by the secretariat. The added manpower will be given the responsibility to visit entire Maoist combatant's cantonments.

(Source: eKantipur.com website, Kathmandu)

Nepal to set up special court to interpret new constitution

Nepal News, March 11, 2011

Political parties have agreed to the provision of constitutional court in the new constitution which will hold the exclusive right to interpreting the constitution. Emerging from the meeting, Nepali Congress [NC] leader and subcommittee member Ram Chandra Poudel informed that the aforesaid constitutional court will comprise five members with chief justice of the Supreme Court [SC] as the chief coordinator. Up until now, the Supreme Court reserved the sole right to interpreting the constitution. While NC, CPN-UML [Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)] including other parties had been insisting that the right to interpreting the constitution should remain with the SC, UCPN [Unified Communist Party of Nepal] (Maoist) and Madhesh [plains]-based parties were arguing that a separate constitutional court should be formed for the purpose.

(Source: Nepalnews.com website, Kathmandu)

Nepal to curb foreign diplomats' access to PM

Nepal News, March 15, 2011

Foreign diplomats in Nepal can meet the prime minister only through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from now on, according to the PM's private secretariat. PM's press adviser Surya Thapa informed Nepalnews the rule will be strictly implemented from now on. Although there is rule that the diplomats can meet the

PM only through the Foreign Ministry as per the protocol, the rule was not being implemented in the past.

(Source: Nepalnews.com website, Kathmandu)

Fonseka supporters fear extradition from Nepal to Sri Lanka

Kantipur Daily, March 15, 2011.

A group of Sri Lankan nationals who worked closely with former general and commander of Sri Lankan army Sarath Fonseka during Sri Lanka's 2010 presidential and general elections have been seeking asylum in Nepal for the last few months. The government, however, has denied the request. The Sri Lankans, who are currently semi-underground in Kathmandu, said they fled their country along with their families and sneaked into Nepal during the second half of the last year. They said they fled to save their lives from the "repressive" regime of President Mahinda Rajapakse, who beat Fonseka in the 2010 presidential elections.

(Source: eKantipur.com website, Kathmandu)

112456: Indian officials take tougher stand on Nepal Maoists

The Hindu, March 15, 2011.

On June 15, Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee confirmed to the Ambassador that the Government of India had taken a tougher line on Maoist abuses. Mukherjee's recent visit to New Delhi had coincided with the visit of Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. Foreign Minister Mukherjee had been categorical in his discussion with MK Nepal that the Maoists should not be integrated into the Nepal Army. Ambassador Mukherjee asserted that the GOI would not tolerate continued attempts by the Maoist splinter Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha ("People's Terai Liberation Front") (JTMM) to derail the Constituent Assembly election. He agreed that the Maoists had not showed a true commitment to joining the political mainstream.

(Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/article1538173.ece>)

Pakistan

Unification Bloc has harmed democracy, says Shah Mehmood

Dawn, March 2, 2011.

Former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz chief Nawaz Sharif should understand that the Unification Bloc's defection has harmed democracy. Qureshi said those who could change their political affiliations with changing times could not be trusted. Speaking to media representatives in Multan, Qureshi said incidents such as the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti would affect Pakistan's image internationally.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/02/unification-bloc-has-harmed-democracy-says-shah-mehmood-qureshi.html>)

NAB Sindh probes corruption in flood aid

Dawn, March 3, 2011

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Sindh, initiated an investigation against the officials of three provincial departments– Revenue, Irrigation and Food– for corruption in flood aid distribution, DawnNews reported. The evidences of the corruption were provided by a local NGO and an MNA from Thatta division, Ayaz Shah Sherazi, sources told the Dawn that the NAB found important evidences against the mentioned officials during its investigations. According to sources, relief goods under the Sindh government, had not actually been distributed among the deserving flood affectees although the documents contradict that, and some of the flood relief goods had been stolen by mentioning it as distributed on papers on fake National Identity Cards (NIC) and names.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/03/nab-sindh-probes-corruption-in-flood-aid.html>)

Trilateral talks satisfied with cooperation

The Nation, March 4, 2011.

The Tripartite Commission composed of senior military representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Coalition Forces in Afghanistan on Thursday reviewed security situation in areas along Pak-Afghan border. Delegations were headed by Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, Commander of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) General David Petraeus and Chief of General Staff of Afghan National Army General Sher Mohammad Karimi. A brief official statement released by the ISPR said the participants showed satisfaction over the existing level of cooperation and the forum also discussed various measures to further improve the coordination.

(Source: <http://nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Politics/04-Mar-2011/Trilateral-talks-satisfied-with-cooperation>)

Eight killed in Nowshera bomb blast

Dawn, March 4, 2011.

Eight people were killed and 25 were injured in a bomb blast in northwest Pakistan's Nowshera region on Friday, DawnNews reported. According to initial information, the blast occurred near a mosque in Nowshera's Akbarpura area. A shrine was also situated near the mosque. Rescue workers had reached the site of the explosion and wounded were being shifted to hospitals. Pakistan has seen a wave of militant attacks in the past three years, many in the country's northwestern region, where the Pakistan military is battling Taliban insurgents.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/04/bomb-blast-reported-in-nowshera.html>)

Shahbaz stresses tolerance, restraint

The News International, March 7, 2011.

Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif has said that Pakistan is facing serious chal-

allenges and there is a greater need for tolerance, brotherhood, restraint and unity now than ever before. He said that it was imperative that collective efforts were made for the solution to the problems being faced by the country and he was ready to go to anyone for this purpose. According to a handout, Shahbaz stated this while talking to assembly members here on Sunday. He said Pakistan was facing terrorism and extremism and the aim of progress and prosperity could not be achieved without eliminating the menace. He said the whole nation would have to gather on a platform for the stability of the country and foiling the designs of those who were trying to create chaos.

(Source: <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=34846&Cat=2&dt=3/7/2011>)

CM Punjab contacted PM to ease political tensions

Dawn, March 7, 2011.

Chief Minister Punjab Shahbaz Sharif said he had contacted Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani three days ago to ease the political tensions between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and to refocus on issues confronting the public. Speaking to media representatives in Lahore, Shahbaz said he had contacted Prime Minister Gilani on directions from PML-N chief Mian Nawaz Sharif. Shahbaz said he advised Prime Minister Gilani to call a conference to devise solutions confronting the country. Shahbaz said a conference with such an objective should not only be attended by the leadership of all political parties, but the military and the judiciary should also be invited to participate so that their input can be used when developing strategies to solve national issues.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/07/cm-punjab-contacted-pm-to-ease-political-tensions.html>)

US charges Pakistani with illegal nuclear exports

Dawn, March 10, 2011

A Pakistani national has been arrested and charged with a scheme to illegally export nuclear-related materials to his home country from the United States, the US Justice Department said. Nadeem Akhtar, 45, who lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, a Washington suburb, was indicted for conspiring with others to illegally export restricted goods and technology to a Pakistani nuclear power plant and a Pakistani research commission. With an unidentified co-defendant, the alleged scheme began late in 2005 and lasted until March of last year, officials said. Most of the illegal exports took place between 2005 and 2008.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/10/us-charges-pakistani-with-illegal-nuclear-exports.html>)

Anti-Taliban leader threatens to stop cooperating with govt

Dawn, March 10, 2011

The leader of a powerful anti-Taliban militia threatened to stop cooperating with authorities after a deadly suicide bombing on his men — a warning that high-

lights the risks Pakistan is taking by using private armies with questionable loyalties in its struggle against the insurgents. Dilawar Khan and other militia leaders close to Peshawar have long demanded more money and weapons from authorities in northwest Pakistan, accusing the government of encouraging them to rise up against the Taliban but not giving them the support needed to do so. Wednesday's suicide bombing by the Taliban at a funeral attended by militiamen in which at least 43 people were killed has stoked anger and led to new threats by Khan, who is based in a fortress-like compound and claims to have hundreds of followers.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/10/anti-taliban-leader-threatens-to-stop-cooperating-with-govt.html>)

Pakistan Feb trade deficit \$895 mln vs \$1.11 bln in Jan

Reuters, March 10, 2011.

Pakistan's trade deficit narrowed to \$895 million in February, from \$986 million a year earlier, the Federal Bureau of Statistics said on Thursday. Exports totalled \$2.15 billion in February, against \$1.51 billion a year ago, according to the bureau. Imports totalled \$3.05 billion, up from \$2.50 billion in February last year. The country's trade deficit for the first eight months of the 2010/11 fiscal year (July-June) was \$10.26 billion, compared with a \$9.51 billion deficit in the same period a year earlier.

(Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/10/pakistan-trade-idUSL3E7EA0K820110310>)

PML-N reiterates opposition to Army's role in politics

The News International, March 10, 2011.

The Pakistan Muslim League-N on Wednesday reiterated its opposition to any political role of armed forces but at the same time maintained that consultation with forces was inevitable to root out terrorism and bring peace for economic development of the country. "Keeping in view the fall of Dhaka and separatist movements in the smaller provinces, no sensible politician can support the political role of armed forces in the country," PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal said while addressing a news conference at the party office here adding that Pakistan had to pay a heavy price for political role of the armed forces in the past. Coming down on Dr. Babar Awan, he said despite possessing a fake doctorate degree he is still keeping the portfolio of Ministry of Law and Justice and had derived wrong meanings from the proposal of Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif given to the prime minister. "It is better for him to contact the interior minister to learn correct meanings of the proposal," he said.

(Source: <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=35430&Cat=2&dt=3/10/2011>)

Pakistan, China negotiations focus on reducing trade deficit

Associated Press of Pakistan, March 10, 2011.

Pakistan and China on Thursday [10 March] started negotiating the second phase

of Freed Trade Agreement (FTA) with special focus on reducing Pakistan's trade deficit in bilateral trade and tariff concessions to each other. The first phase of the FTA between the two countries would conclude on 31 December, 2012 and the respective organizations of the two governments have started negotiations to finalize the modalities for the second phase which would be implemented from January 2013. The current discussion would focus on devising a comprehensive plan to encourage exports from Pakistan to China and help reduce the huge trade gap between the two neighbouring countries.

(Source: Associated Press of Pakistan news agency, Islamabad)

Gas pipeline blown up in Pakistan's Balochistan

Associated Press of Pakistan , March 12, 2011

Gas supply to a purification plant was suspended after unknown miscreants blew up a 24-inch diameter gas pipeline in Sui Saturday [12 March]. According to the local officials, the miscreants had strapped explosive materials to pipeline supplying gas to a purification plant. The blast damaged 2-foot-long piece of the pipeline and resulted in suspension of gas supply to the plant. Local police has registered case against unknown miscreants.

(Source: Associated Press of Pakistan news agency, Islamabad)

Pakistan: Clash reported between police, religious party workers in Lahore

The News, March 14, 2011.

Panic gripped the area around Data Darbar due to aerial firing of police and workers of Sunni Tehrik after a scuffle at about 5:30pm here on Sunday [12 March]. The police arrested six activists of the Sunni Tehrik for creating disturbance and firing at police officials. However, no case has been registered by the Lower Mall Police till filing of this report. A member of Sunni Tehrik's Central Executive Committee, Shahid Ghauri, had been in the City for the last four days and he was visiting Data Darbar on daily basis for giving lectures to the activists of the religious organisation. The members of activists got infuriated on the comments of policemen and as a result, a scuffle erupted between the policemen and the activists. During the scuffle, both the parties initially exchanged harsh words then beat up each other and finally started firing into the air in order to warn each other.

(Source: The News website, Islamabad)

Pakistan Sharif party condemns military official's statement on defence budget

Dawn News, March 14, 2011.

Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) has condemned the military spokesperson's statement regarding the defence budget. Saad Rafique has said that the military's statement is not compatible with democracy. Saad Rafique has said that the statement by the military is not acceptable to supporters of democracy and it is in the interest of the country that the military should remain

restricted to national security and defence issues. This was the statement of Khuwaja Saad Rafique, PML-N's leader. He said that a handful of generals have caused more damage to the country than any foreign foe has ever done. Rafique also said that because of the presence of powerful neighbours, a strong and professional military was, and will remain, necessary for Pakistan. But Rafique has also said that the military mechanism and its usage of the budget are not immune to criticism.

(Source: Dawn News TV, Karachi, in Urdu)

Pakistan minister rules out possibility of institutional clash in country

Daily Times, March 15, 2011.

There is no possibility of clash amongst institutions during the tenure of Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) government, said Federal Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Babar Awan. Babar said this in a meeting with the delegation of lawyers from Burewala Bar Association. He said it was the policy of reconciliation and dialogue which had not only led to a peaceful transition towards democracy but also promoted the culture of tolerance and respecting each other's views and opinions. Babar said that a revolution had already taken place in the country as there has not been a single incident of political victimisation during PPP's tenure. He described the passage of 18th and 19th amendment as a historic step which would make the country a true participatory federation characterised by sovereignty of parliament, independence of judiciary and provincial autonomy.

(Source: Daily Times website, Lahore)

Sri Lanka

Fishery Protection

Lanka Business, March 4, 2011

Sri Lanka's coast guard is to deploy its growing fleet of craft against Indian fishermen poaching in the island's northern waters, an official said. The coast guard this week took delivery of a patrol boat built by the navy and is to get more craft, including four fast patrol boats also from the navy and later two surveillance vessels, Daya Dharmapriya, director-general of Sri Lanka's coast guard said. "At the moment we're focusing on fisheries protection. Indian trawlers poaching in the north is a big problem," he told LBO. Dharmapriya said that although the coast guard wanted to focus on protecting marine resources and habitat, it had to deploy boats initially against poaching in northern waters as it was a more immediate problem. The poaching became a diplomatic issue recently owing to the killing of two Indian fishermen and subsequent detention of over a 100 Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan fishermen.

(Source: <http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/fullstory.php?nid=1032170527>)

US calls for probe in Lanka

Hindustan Times, March 4, 2011.

The US government has passed a resolution calling upon Colombo, the international community and the UN set up an international mechanism to look into war

crimes allegations. The US Senate also called up President Barack Obama to formulate a Lanka policy that would reflect Washington views on human rights, democracy besides economic and security interests. The Senate called on Lanka to allow humanitarian organisations, aid agencies, journalists, and international human rights groups' greater freedom of movement, including internally-displaced persons camps.

(Source: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/US-calls-for-probe-in-Lanka/Article1-669082.aspx>)

Sri Lanka forex reserves \$6.6bn in January

Lanka Business Online, March 6, 2011.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves were 6.6 billion US dollars by end January 2011, the same level as in December, the Central Bank said, as trade and economic activity expanded. The central bank said the reserves were equal to 5.9 months of imports of the past 12 months of 1,108 million US dollars, slightly lower than the 6.0 month figure for December 2010. Sri Lanka's external trade has expanded in 2010 with a resurgence of economic activity following a slump in 2009, and the trade gap expanded 66 percent to 5,204 billion US dollars from 3,122 billion a year earlier. But the trade deficit is just a part of the balance of payments, which includes remittances and capital inflows, which provide the purchasing power for people and the state to spend on imports.

(Source: <http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/fullstory.php?nid=338410948>)

Sri Lanka exports earnings high; workers' remittances up by 23%

Asian Tribune, March 7, 2011

Sri Lanka's export earnings is reported, the highest ever annual value at US \$ 8.3 billion in 2010 (up 17.3%) while the export earnings on December recorded highest ever monthly values in December 2010 at US \$ 968 million (up by 34% year on year), according to the recent data released by Central bank. Central Bank also said that the workers' remittances increased by 23.6% to US \$ 4.11 billion in 2010. Consequently, Central Bank of Sri Lanka outlined that the gross official reserves continued to remain above the targeted level and stood at US \$ 6.6 billion by end January, 2011 without Asian Clearing Union (ACU) balances. Also Central Bank in its recently released data revealed that based on the previous 12-month average expenditure on imports of US \$ 1,133 million per month, the gross official reserves without ACU balances, were equivalent to 5.9 months of imports.

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2011/03/07/sri-lanka-exports-earnings-high-workers%E2%80%99-remittances-23>)

EU concerned about violence in SL

Daily Mirror, March 9, 2011.

The European Union Heads of Mission are deeply concerned by the election related violence reported in the country, according to a statement released by the Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. "The EU Heads

of Mission based in Sri Lanka are deeply concerned by the pre-electoral violence in Sri Lanka which has already caused two deaths and numerous injured. The EU believes that a peaceful environment is an essential pre-requisite for free and fair elections," the statement said. The EU requests the parties contesting the upcoming local government polls to act in peaceful and equitable manner. "The EU Heads of Mission call on all Parties in Sri Lanka to support a peaceful environment where the people of Sri Lanka can chose their political leadership in a free, fair and unbiased election."

(Source: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/10241-eu-concerned-about-violence-in-sl.html>)

No Presidential poll till 2017-MR

Daily Mirror, March 10, 2011.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa today said that there would not be a Presidential election till 2017 or General election till 2016. "Those who wanted to topple the current government have to wait till 2016 as the next Presidential election will be held in 2017 while the General Election will be held in 2016," he revealed in Nuwara Eliya.

(Source: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/top-story/10251-no-presidential-poll-till-2017-mr.html>)

Sri Lanka PM says LTTE training centres in India

Economic Times, March 10, 2011.

Prime Minister D M Jayaratne today told the Parliament that LTTE still operate training centres in India. He said a former Lanka rebel named Vinayagam heads the operations in India with the assistance of Nediyan who is Oslo based. Jayaratne added that there was a chance that Indian trained LTTE cadres may carry out attacks in Sri Lanka. Jayaratne's comments came as Indian press reported intelligence reports which suggested the presence of LTTE activists in India.

(Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics/nation/sri-lanka-pm-says-ltte-training-centres-in-india/articleshow/7667649.cms>)

Sri Lankan MP demands better security for Tamil politicians (Interview Excerpt)

Daily Mirror March 11, 2011.

Text of interview with Tamil National Alliance MP Suresh Premachandran published by Sri Lankan newspaper Daily Mirror on 11 March

Question: The attack on Jaffna district TNA [Tamil National Alliance] MP Sridharan in Nochchiyagama has raised serious concerns on the security of politicians. How concerned are you as a fellow Tamil MP from the North?

Answer: We can't understand why it took place in an area like Anuradhapura [northern area in Sri Lanka]. The government must take responsibility and explain why and who was behind it. When several killings and abductions hap-

pened in Jaffna recently and we raised it in Parliament, the government promised investigations, but there has been no arrests still. Even if you were to surmise that these killings were by Tamil para-military groups in the north and the east, how do you explain an attack in Anuradhapura? The government is telling the world that there is no violence in the country and there is peace but how do you explain the threat to a Parliamentarian today?

(Source: Daily Mirror website, Colombo)

Sri Lanka PM retracts remarks on Tamil Tiger camps in India

Daily Mirror, March 11, 2011.

Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne said yesterday that his parliamentary speech, which asserted that there were three LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] training camps in Tamil Nadu [southern Indian state], had been based on some reports published in local newspapers, but that these reports had later been found to be false. Commenting on India's rejecting his allegation, the prime minister said: "It was a thing mentioned in two newspaper reports. There appears to be false information in these reports. It was nothing more than that." However, in his speech to parliament, he had said that there were intelligence reports regarding these camps.

(Source: Daily Mirror website, Colombo)

Tamil "diaspora" trying to "distort" Sri Lanka's image - president

The Island, March 15, 2011.

Certain elements, who cannot even speak in Tamil or do not know where Vavuniya [in northern Sri Lanka] is and the actual situation in Jaffna, operate as pro-LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] or Tamil Diaspora for their own survival, said President Mahinda Rajapakse during Janapathi Janahamuwa (President meets the people) telecast on state and private TV channels on Friday [11 March]. "The Sri Lankan government never drove out or evicted Tamils from this country. Hence it is quite incomprehensible as to why the Tamil expatriates around the globe continue to work under the label of the Tamil Diaspora", president added.

(Source: The Island website, Colombo)