

Report # 108
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Turkey, Central Asia, GCC, East Asia, South Asia, India & China
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This report is based on the review of news items focusing on political, economic, social and geo-strategic developments in various regions namely; Turkey, Central Asia, GCC, East Asia, South Asia, India and China from 20 February to 26 February 2010 as have been collected by interns.

TURKEY

Political Front:

Ruling regime held various conferences to brief ‘democratic initiative’ in order to make it successful. PM Erdogan has also asked artists to support his efforts to resolve Kurdish issue. Turkish President has emphasized on the need to bring judicial reforms in order to reach at the level of EU. As far as issue of coup plot is concerned; eleven retired Generals and many other colonels have been detained for their suspected involvement in anti regime coups. Meanwhile Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ has been at the center of fierce criticism over his stance regarding recently exposed military plots to overthrow the AK Party government. Though various actors have called on the government to remove Chief of General Staff from office, AK Party seems reluctant to make such a move for a number of reasons, including a lack of government confidence in the democratic line of candidates who would replace the military chief.

Geo-strategic Front:

Various diplomatic visits have been in order to enhance ties with different countries. Turkey has strongly condemned terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Meanwhile Al-Qaeda criticized Turkey for its involvement in Afghanistan. Turkish parliaments’ failure to ratify various agreements being signed by Armenia and Turkey has irked Armenian government. Turkey stands by with its offer to play potent role in resolving Iranian nuclear issue. Turkey has called on Israel to refrain from taking a “unilateral and provocative” step with its plan to renovate two contested West Bank holy sites. Regarding EU, Turkish PM has expressed positive hopes and claimed that Spain would understand Turkish issues and concerns.

Economic Front:

Turkish growing economic ties with Russia, Syria, Kazakhstan, EU and Tanzania remained significant. Besides that negative impacts of coup plans have been observed in Turkish Stock Exchange. Meanwhile Turkish visa removal policy with various countries has helped her to attract a large number of tourists.

Social Front:

Two earthquakes rocked eastern Turkey this week. However no damage has been reported. Turkish police seized 124 kg of hashish and 37 kg of heroin in five operations across the country.

CENTRAL ASIA

Political Front:

A military court in Kazakhstan sentenced an Israeli businessman and a local defense official to 11 years in jail on corruption charges. Two Kyrgyz opposition parties have declared their support for calls to release former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov from prison. Upcoming elections in Tajikistan have increased political activities over there. Five out of 153 candidates for lower house of Parliament have withdrawn from their candidacies for Parliamentary elections. Meanwhile Election observers from China have reached Tajikistan to monitor elections. Above all 36 polling stations have been set up in the CIS and far abroad countries to allow Tajik citizens residing abroad to vote. Leader of Turkmenistan has expressed his readiness to create an opposition party.

Geo-strategic Front:

The US has expressed great desire to boost ties with Azerbaijan. Armenian military officials in Nagorno-Karabakh have denied Azeri reports regarding violation of cease-fire. Azerbaijan has held talks with Turkey to further enhance military ties. Russia and Afghanistan have decided to improve the effectiveness of OSCE. Kazakh Foreign Minister paid official visit to China. Kyrgyzstan has confirmed that Iran forced one of its planes to land and arrested two of the passengers, apparently confirming Tehran's claim. Kyrgyzstan enjoys cordial ties with Russia. U.S. envoy Richard Holbrook declared Tajikistan to be an important country regarding Afghanistan. Turkmenistan hosted the second consultative meeting on preparation of the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and the Caspian basin. The US envoy claimed that US would not try to open base in Uzbekistan again.

Economic Front:

Iran has expressed her readiness to buy 10bn cubic meters gas from Azerbaijan. Japanese investors have offered to build a nuclear power plant in eastern Kazakhstan. Some 600 people in the central Kyrgyz city of Naryn have protested against a price increase for electricity. Turkmenistan has discovered new oil deposit with flow rate of 300 tons per day. South Korean firms have started putting efforts to explore oil and gas market in Uzbekistan.

Social Front:

Dozens of Kazakh journalists and human rights activists have urged senior government officials to allow unimpeded publication of the opposition weekly "Republika". A Tajik pop singer has been sentenced to two years in prison for helping her fiancée escape from a courthouse last month. Authorities in parts of Uzbekistan's eastern Andijon region have started telling people how much food they should eat. Increase in number of suicides by Uzbek women has been observed.

GCC

Political Front:

The Yemeni army has been redeployed at the borders with Saudi Arabia where Al Houthi rebels were positioning before the war stopped earlier this month.

Geo-strategic Front:

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has expressed doubts about the usefulness of more sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. In this regard Prince Saud Al Faisal claimed that the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions demands a more immediate solution than sanctions. In the meantime Saudi Arabia and Qatar have signed several agreements on the sidelines of the second meeting of the Saudi-Qatari Joint Coordination Council in Doha, further boosting bilateral ties in various fields. The United Arab Emirates has reiterated its support to the international and regional efforts aimed at resuming the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

Economic Front:

Turkey and GCC have agreed to sign free trade agreement by the end of this year.

Social Front:

GCC states have been successful in their efforts to curb trafficking of children for employment as child camel jockeys. National Society for Human Rights claimed that an existing "ban" on Saudi women to vote or run in elections is a blatant violation of international conventions signed by Saudi Arabia and should be lifted. Meanwhile a primary court in the southern region of Saudi Arabia sentenced a Saudi religious policeman for keeping six wives at the same time. Saudi religious figure Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al Barrak said that the mixing of genders at the workplace or in educational institutions was religiously prohibited. Hence those who refuse to abide by strict segregation between men and women should be put to death. In response to this leading religious scholars in Kuwait have rejected a fatwa or religious edict seeking to put to death opponents of strict segregation of men and women. Kuwait has expressed its determination to end discrimination against women in the workplace.

At environmental front, heavy rainfalls over Makah submerged some districts and streets in the city. In UAE, thirty small-scale solar-powered desalination plants would be operational in the next 15 months to provide animals with watering holes in Abu Dhabi's desert environment. Two of the plants are already in use desalting brackish water from underground aquifers into fresh potable water.

EAST ASIA

Political Front:

While addressing Chinese New Year's celebrations Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono promised to improve the government's efforts in guaranteeing civil rights of ethnic Chinese living in the country. Government allies Golkar and the Prosperous Justice Party have joined the opposition in calling for a probe into the finance minister and vice president over the rescue of PT Bank Century. Malaysian PM has been emphasizing greatly on 1 Malaysia in order to develop his country. Negotiators of the Philippines government and a separatist group have intensified their respective campaigns in the country's south.

Geo-strategic Front:

The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has claimed expressed keen interest close Indonesian cooperation against terrorism. The US embassy in Manila has praised

Philippine authorities for their arrest of a Filipino Muslim militant wanted for the kidnapping and murder of American tourists.

Economic Front:

Thailand's industrial production rose for a fifth straight month in January as the global economic recovery helped boost demand for the nation's automotive parts and electronics. The government has outlined two key focus areas to help grow capabilities for companies and boost Singapore's status as a global business hub.

Social Front:

The UNESCO's statistics for 2009 placed Malaysia at 11th out of 137 nations that allocated a huge budget for education. Hundreds of Muslims from outside the area where a 600-member church meets in West Java staged a protest there to call for its closure this month in an attempt to portray local opposition. Malaria has been regarded as potential challenge being faced by Cambodia.

SOUTH ASIA

Political Front:

A massive government crackdown on activists and supporters of the opposition Islamic parties has fueled unrest in Bangladesh. Meanwhile one of the Bangladeshi ministers has assured to restore secularism as a state principle in the constitution. Ministry of Finance and Treasury has submitted a case to Maldives Police Service, accusing the Civil Service Commission (CSC) of attempting to overthrow the government, by indirectly influencing and preventing the government from implementing its financial policies. People's life in Nepal's capital was affected by general strike and shutdown that was called by Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPP- N) as part of its agitation demanding timely promulgation of constitution and referendum on some key issues like republicanism, secularism and federalism. Nepal's three major parties have agreed to resolve the present political impasse through a joint resolution. They have also discussed ways to include Maoists in the government. Nomination period for April's parliamentary votes has ended in Srilanka.

Geo-strategic Front:

India and Bangladesh have decided to set up a joint-venture 1,320-megawatt power plant as a mark of co-operation. China has decided to resume suspended bus service between Tibet and Nepal.

Economic Front:

The Dhaka Stock Exchange suffered its biggest fall in a decade after regulators placed restrictions on trading in the shares of a local mobile phone group. Maldives has opened up its economy and invited Indian investment in sectors like infrastructure projects, airports, ports, renewable energy, healthcare, tourism and education. Political instability badly affected stock markets in Nepal. Inflation in Sri Lanka hit a one-year high in February as low interest rates spurred consumer demand for goods and as commodity prices rose. The latest data provided by the Tea Board of Kenya indicates that the country

has usurped the throne of Sri Lanka for the first time as the biggest tea exporter in the world.

Social Front:

Bangladesh deployed the army at another southeastern hill town after 100 houses were burnt in fresh clashes between Buddhist tribal and Bengali Muslim settlers. Later on curfew was imposed in that area as violence prevailed. Bangladesh Prime minister has urged the global Internet body to allow millions of Bengali-speaking people around the world to browse the Internet in their own language. Maldives has expressed serious concerns regarding Environmental challenges. Nepal's education minister has been sacked over corruption charges.

INDIA

Political Front:

The Indian Union Cabinet has cleared the women's reservation bill after a long wait of 14 years, according to which 33% of all seats in Parliament and state assemblies being reserved for women. All the while the Bharatiya Janata Party has opposed reservation for Scheduled Caste Muslims and Christians recommended in the Ranganath Mishra Commission. They justified their stance by saying that the Christian and Islamic faiths do not recognize the existence of caste in their communities. They further condemned such suggestion by declaring it as a move to divide the country. In the meantime Sushma Swaraj formally took over as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, replacing senior BJP leader L K Advani.

The Shiv Sena has criticized new BJP chief Nitin Gadkari for asking Muslims to give the disputed plot of land for the Ram temple and promising to help build a mosque elsewhere. According to Sena seeking permission from Muslims is an insult to the hundreds of karsevaks who laid down their lives during the Ram Mandir agitation”.

In order to deal with Maoist issue Union Home Minister has given a proposal of 72 days ceasefire to negotiate with insurgents' demands. Responding to Chidambaram's proposal the Maoists offered a conditional ceasefire, asking the government to halt its offensive for 72 days and involve mediators for talks.

Geo-strategic Front:

Army Chief General has denied the media reports of occupation" of Indian territory by Chinese troops. Meanwhile Air Chief Marshal claimed that India and China would conduct their first-ever joint Air Force exercise in 2012. He added that initial planning for the war game has started but the venue for the exercise as well as its scope has yet to be decided. All the while Indo-Pak foreign secretaries' talks proved a failure as both countries did not show any leniency on their respective stands. India wanted to focus on terrorism while Pakistan was willing to bring Kashmir and water dispute on table.

Economic Front:

The pre-budget Economic Survey (2009-10), presented by finance minister Pranab Mukherjee in Parliament predicted that India would be able to attain a high nine per cent growth in 2011-12 on the way to becoming world's fastest growing economy in four

years. Meanwhile the document, which assesses the state of the economy, warned that high food prices would rise further over next few months.

Social Front:

The Indian Election Commission informed the Supreme Court that wearing a burqa by a Muslim woman was a mere religious custom, and not an integral part of Islam. In its response to a special leave petition to restrain it from publishing photographs of veil clad Muslim women in the electoral rolls, the Commission said: "Article 25 of the Constitution does not confer unfettered rights to religious practice, but merely protects the essential or integral practice of any religion." The United Nations narcotics watchdog, International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), has blamed India for the rising drug abuse in its neighborhood, particularly in Bangladesh and Bhutan. Punjab farmers seem quite enthusiastic to explore the vast barren tracts of land in Africa for agriculture prospects as some African countries opening up farming activities to Indian farmers. Meanwhile five deaths due to swine flu have been reported from Gujarat.

CHINA

Political Front:

Senior officials of the Communist Party of China (CPC) urged Party organs and governments at all levels to prioritize talented individuals as the top resource for social and economic development. China's top Legislature has started amending Administrative Laws in order to enhance supervision of the country's civil servants.

Geo-strategic Front:

While commenting on a U.S. report on the weakness of Taiwan's air force, a Chinese mainland spokesperson stressed the peaceful development across the Taiwan Strait. The report was speculated as a move of Pentagon to provide justification for Washington to grant the sale of relatively advanced F-16 jet fighters to Taiwan. Chinese newspaper has strongly condemned America for launching on-line warfare to create unrest in Iran after elections. Meanwhile Chinese growing ties with South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Cambodia, Japan, Pakistan and Slovakia also grabbed attention. China has stressed greatly on the need of peaceful resolution of Iranian issue. Danish Prime Minister has expressed his appreciation for Chinese Premier's important and constructive role in the Copenhagen conference.

Economic Front:

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into China rose for the sixth consecutive month in January, up 7.79 percent year on year to 8.13 billion U.S. dollars. In the meantime China's tourism revenue rose 26.9 percent to 64.62 billion Yuan (9.46 billion U.S. dollars) during the Spring Festival. The flow of oil from Saudi Arabia to China rose to more than 1 million barrels per day (bpd) last year, just as demand in the United States fell below that level for the first time in more than two decades. All the while Chinese Premier has urged the United States to open the exports of hi-tech products to China and acknowledge China's market economy status. Many scholars and economists claimed that the Chinese government's insight and the adjustment of the economic pattern were the two major factors helping China ride out the global economic downturn.

Social Front:

American authorities have reportedly identified a Chinese computer hacker believed to be behind attacks on Google last year. Chinese government however denied these reports. Meanwhile a senior Chinese military officer has called for a new national body to enforce Internet controls. China's National Bureau of Corruption Prevention has announced to explore ways to fight corruption in non-public commercial entities and "new social organizations" in 2010.

Some 64.15 million people traveled on China's roads on the 22nd day of the Spring Festival traffic rush.

Some overseas Chinese criticized U.S. President Barack Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama in Washington, and pointed out the real intention of the Dalai Lama's hobnobbing with the West.

Hong Kong & Macao:

A Legislative Council by-election would be held on May 16 to fill one vacant office in each of the five geographical constituencies in Hong Kong. Macao's foreign exchange reserves amounted to 18.43 billion U.S. dollars at the end of January 2010.