

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

*Weekly Report on Russia
Report # 110
From 6th February, 2010 to 13th March, 2010
Presentation 17th March, 2010*

Ilam Khan

Contents Page #

***Summary*.....3**

***Political:*.....10**

Authorities Called to Negotiate Resumption of Flights with Russia

Putin and Europe on the Same Crisis Page

France, Russia discuss Iran sanctions

On The Anniversary Of NPT, US, Russia, UN Hail New Peaceful Era

Russia's European security initiative should get fair hearing - Merkel

Russia's Putin to India for 1st Time as PM

UN chief to arrive in Moscow March 17

U.S. Clinton to talk nuclear arms cuts in Moscow next week

Russia To Build Civil Nuclear Plant in India

Ukrainian President Swims Between Two Waters

Moscow passed all data on August war to the Hague

Russia, Jordan plan to strengthen political and economic relations

Russia and Georgia agreed on resumption of direct flights

Government creates more tsars than Russia

India to sign nuclear, Gorshkov deals with Russia

Opposition Sidelined Ahead of Test of Medvedev's Election Pledges

Economic:.....26**Russia's Medvedev, Sweden's Reinfeldt to discuss economic ties in Moscow****Russia reopens market to U.S. pork****Bill Would Strip State Corporations of Profits****Gas Company Finds Ancient Shipwrecks in Baltic Sea****Gas Company Finds Ancient Shipwrecks in Baltic Sea****Putin promises support to every economic initiative of Russian, Swedish business****Russia signs \$1.5-bln fighter jet contract with India****Russia criticizes U.S., NATO over Afghan drug trafficking fight****Social:.....33****Russia's most beautiful girl and her rivals****Saakashvili Orders Hair Drug Test for Officials****100 Years of International Women's Day: Russia was the Pioneer of Women's Rights****Toy balloons released into sky in Russian Far East anti-abortion flash mob****Russia says alleged passenger train bomber killed****Natural population decline in Russia down by 31% in 2009 — Putin****Russia proposes new measures to boost birthrate****Demonstrators in Moscow demand police reform****Internet is examination for human race - Patriarch Kirill****Russian tourists warned about visiting Bangkok****Teen Idol Corey Haim Dies of Drug Overdose**

Editorial: Environmentalists United in Opposition to Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill

Moscow won't be in haste to comment on Russian language in Ukraine

Global drug Trafficking Map

Around 80% of Russians satisfied with living standards - survey

Kirillov Blasts Tiger Fundraising Effort

U.S. Human Rights Report not objective - Russian Foreign Ministry

Moscow turns green for St. Patrick's Day

No booze after 9 for Russians

Summary:

Political:

Authorities Called to Negotiate Resumption of Flights with Russia

Christian-Democratic Movement, a leading party in the parliamentary minority, called on the authorities on March 8 to start talks with the Russian side on resumption of direct air flights.

Putin and Europe on the Same Crisis Page

As expected, the economic crisis has led to social unrest. Most workers have seen little result from the victory over the crisis that government officials and observers announced as far back as the middle of last year. In place of increases to production, employment and the standard of living, Russians have seen improvements to a few statistics and greater corporate profits. Meanwhile, the money that the government so generously doled out to the oligarchs as anti-crisis aid has almost run dry. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin does little more than make a show of scolding businesspeople and exhorting them to do something — anything — for society, reminding them of old promises and the public funds that the authorities continue giving their businesses to keep them afloat.

France, Russia discuss Iran sanctions

Visiting Paris, Medvedev says he's ready to talk about possibility Russia and France took a big step toward tighter relations Monday, entering talks about the possible sale of four French warships to Moscow as Russia toughened its stance against nuclear-minded Iran.

On The Anniversary Of NPT, US, Russia, UN Hail New Peaceful Era

Washington, DC, United States (AHN) - On March 5, 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) entered into force after 43 nations ratified it and today there are some hot spots around the world where NPT violations are glaringly evident.

Russia's European security initiative should get fair hearing – Merkel

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's European security initiative should be discussed in the OSCE framework, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said .

Russia's Putin to India for 1st Time as PM

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is heading to India on Thursday for the first time in his capacity as prime minister, instead of president. Experts say his visit is aimed at strengthening existing military and energy ties between the two countries.

UN chief to arrive in Moscow March 17

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will arrive in Moscow on March 17, two days ahead of the Mideast Quartet's meeting, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman said .

U.S. Clinton to talk nuclear arms cuts in Moscow next week

The U.S. secretary of state will discuss a new nuclear arms reduction pact with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov during her visit next week to Moscow,

Russia To Build Civil Nuclear Plant in India

Russia is willing to build nuclear power plants of up to 15,000 megawatts over the next 10 years in India, the Russian ambassador to the South Asian nation said Wednesday.

Ukrainian President Swims Between Two Waters

On March 9 Ukraine celebrated the 196th anniversary of the birthday of the nation's greatest poet Taras Shevchenko. President Viktor Yanukovich visited the place of the poet's birth, where he made a contradictory statement regarding the status of the Ukrainian and the Russian languages.

Moscow passed all data on August war to the Hague

In the course of their visit to Moscow representatives of the International Criminal Court, investigating the events of August 2008, were granted all the necessary information from competent Russian structures.

Russia, Jordan plan to strengthen political and economic relations

Russia and Jordan hope to further strengthen their political and economic relations, King Abdullah II of Jordan said at a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Wednesday. "Our relations are at a high level, and we have the opportunity today to facilitate their further strengthening," the king said.

Russia and Georgia agreed on resumption of direct flights

Representatives of the United Russia and Movement for Just Georgia agreed on restoration of direct flights between the two countries.

Government creates more tsars than Russia

Public administration committee is not impressed by proliferation of informal appointments There's an old Westminster gag about Labour creating more tsars than Russia. It was never particularly funny, but at least it was recognisable as a joke. Until today – when new figures have been published showing that it is actually true.

India to sign nuclear, Gorshkov deals with Russia

India and Russia will on Friday tighten their strategic and economic ties by signing a slew of agreements, including an umbrella civil nuclear pact and another accord fixing the cost of the refurbished aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov at \$2.35 billion.

Opposition Sidelined Ahead of Test of Medvedev's Election Pledges

Despite President Dmitry Medvedev's rhetoric for smaller parties to be fairly represented in elections, regional authorities have continued to back the ruling United Russia party and derail the campaigns of other parties ahead of Sunday's elections, opposition activists and election monitors said.

Economic:

Russia's Medvedev, Sweden's Reinfeldt to discuss economic ties in Moscow

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will meet on Tuesday with Swedish Prime Minister Frederik Reinfeldt to discuss economic ties and international issues.

Russia reopens market to U.S. pork

Russia said Friday that it would resume taking pork from the United States, reopening a source of about 6 percent of U.S. pork exports. Russia shut off pork exports in December, citing concerns about the health and safety of U.S. pork.

Bill Would Strip State Corporations of Profits

The State Duma will consider a bill that will require Vneshekonombank and the Deposit Insurance Agency to transfer 75 percent of their profits into the federal budget, a Duma deputy said .

Gas Company Finds Ancient Shipwrecks in Baltic Sea

A dozen centuries-old shipwrecks — some of them unusually well-preserved — have been found in the Baltic Sea by a gas company building an underwater pipeline between Russia and Germany.

Putin promises support to every economic initiative of Russian, Swedish business

The federal government will support any economic cooperation initiatives of Russian and Swedish businessmen, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told his Swedish counterpart Fredrik Reinfeldt.

Russia signs \$1.5-bln fighter jet contract with India

Russia's envoy to NATO has sharply criticized the alliance's shift away from fighting drug trafficking in Afghanistan, saying the resulting surge in heroin smuggling is endangering Russia's national security.

Russia criticizes U.S., NATO over Afghan drug trafficking fight

The deal was signed during Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi. Pogosyan said Russia should fulfill the previous contract on supplies of single-seat MiG-29K fighters to India by 2010.

Social:

Russia's most beautiful girl and her rivals

Girls from the Urals region attracted great attention at the Miss Russia 2010 beauty pageant held on Sunday, March 7 in the Barvikha Luxury Village concert hall.

Saakashvili Orders Hair Drug Test for Officials

President Saakashvili has ordered the Healthcare Ministry to test hair samples of public officials for evidence of drug misuse. "Next week I will be the first to provide my hair samples," Saakashvili told Healthcare Minister, Alexandre Kvitashvili and a lawmaker from the parliamentary minority, Dimitri Lortkipanidze.

100 Years of International Women's Day: Russia was the Pioneer of Women's Rights

Monday March 8 is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, a national holiday in Russia (since 1965) to commemorate the remarkable achievements of women in guaranteeing victories for human rights despite continued constraints. International Women's Day serves as a focal point for us to document the present and future challenges facing women and to pool resources to implement women's rights on a global scale. Amazing it is that such a Day should still be necessary.

Toy balloons released into sky in Russian Far East anti-abortion flash mob

An anti-abortion flash mob in the Russian Far Eastern city of Vladivostok, entitled Silent Scream, gathered some 30 participants on Sunday who symbolically released black and red toy balloons with unborn children's names into the sky.

Russia says alleged passenger train bomber killed

The head of Russia's main security agency has confirmed that a prominent militant connected with last year's fatal bombing of a passenger train has been killed in Ingushetia.

Natural population decline in Russia down by 31% in 2009 — Putin

Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova said child mortality in Russia decreased by 3.5%, cardiovascular diseases' toll went down by 4.6%, and the TB death rate declined 7.8% last year.

Russia proposes new measures to boost birthrate

Russia's government proposed new measures on Tuesday to fight low birthrate and a dwindling population that experts warn has endangered economic growth, the country's role in world affairs and possibly its territorial integrity.

Demonstrators in Moscow demand police reform

A police spokesman said some 150 people attended the rally but the opposition's Kasparov.ru website put the figure at some 1,000.

Internet is examination for human race - Patriarch Kirill

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia sees the Internet as an examination for the human race as not only has the web become a laboratory forming an individual but also constitutes a threat of destruction.

Russian tourists warned about visiting Bangkok

It advised Russian tourists in Thailand against visiting Bangkok while those who already are in the Thai capital should exercise caution and avoid public rallies.

Teen Idol Corey Haim Dies of Drug Overdose

The Canadian-born actor, who starred in "The Lost Boys" but was probably best known for his roles with fellow actor Corey Feldman, was 38.

Editorial: Environmentalists United in Opposition to Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill

Many major Russian country-wide and regional environmental organizations joined together yesterday to prevent the launch of the Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill (BPPM) and pollution of the unique lake.

Moscow won't be in haste to comment on Russian language in Ukraine

The Russian Foreign Ministry has been refraining from commenting on Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's statement that the Russian language would not be given the status of a second national language in Ukraine.

Around 80% of Russians satisfied with living standards - survey

. Almost 80% of Russians are completely or mostly satisfied with their living standards, according to a survey released on Tuesday by a major Russian insurance company. The Western Siberian region of Tyumen topped the rankings with 81% of residents at least mostly happy with life, just beating the capital, where 80% of Muscovites professed satisfaction with their living standards.

Kirillov Blasts Tiger Fundraising Effort

The head of the state's top environmental watchdog has criticized the World Wildlife Fund's "Adopt a Tiger" program to protect the endangered Amur tiger, calling the name "unacceptable and illegal" because the animals are federal property.

U.S. Human Rights Report not objective - Russian Foreign Ministry

The U.S. State Department's annual report on Human Rights Practices, which was published on Thursday, said the number of racially or religiously motivated crimes in Russia had declined during the year, while ethnic discrimination was still a matter of concern.

Moscow turns green for St. Patrick's Day

Russians love holidays - even those of other countries and cultures. One of their favourites is St. Patrick's Day, with official celebrations being an annual tradition in Moscow since 1992.

No booze after 9 for Russians

Time limits on getting the drinks in could be imposed nationwide. There won't be much chance of a late-night tippie if new anti-alcohol laws are passed banning the sale of off-license liquor after 9 pm

Detail Report:

Political:

Authorities Called to Negotiate Resumption of Flights with Russia

Georgia will engage in talks with Russia through mediators on restoring direct flights if Moscow submits such request for talks, Nino Kalandadze, the Georgian deputy foreign minister, said.

The Deputy Foreign Minister said that Tbilisi's position about the resumption of flights was "positive."

"The problem remains with the Russian side's position. It was the Russian Federation, which has unilaterally ceased flights... There are all the possibilities for them [Russia] to appeal us [for talks]," Nino Kalandadze said.

She said that an agreement on **reopening of the Zemo Larsi-Kazbegi border crossing point** between the two countries "is good precedent" of how issues of this kind can be resolved even in the condition of not having diplomatic relations. She said that like in case of border reopening talks, negotiations on resumption of direct flights could be held with the mediation of Switzerland.

With the diplomatic ties cut since the August war, Switzerland represents Russia's diplomatic interests in Georgia, as well as Georgia's diplomatic interests in Russia through respective countries' interest sections in the Swiss embassies in Moscow and Tbilisi.

After allowing three **charter flights** in mid-January, Russia turned down the Georgian Airways' request to resume regular flights saying that it was up to the aviation authorities of the two countries to negotiate the issue. The Russian Transport Ministry said it was up to Tbilisi to come out with the initiative to start talks.

“It [resumption of direct flights] is not a priority for Georgia; the priority is de-occupation of our territories,” Akaki Minashvili, a ruling party lawmaker who chairs parliamentary committee for foreign affairs, said on March 8.

Russia cut direct air flights with Georgia in October, 2006, following spy row between the two countries. The flights were restored in late March, 2008, but were again suspended after the August war.

Putin and Europe on the Same Crisis Page

The result of these efforts is clear from the start. Businesspeople are not motivated by emotions but by business interests. No persuasion, calls to conscience or reminders of old friendship will change anything as long as a businessperson's economic interests are not affected. And to bring about a change influencing those interests would require a radical societal transformation that both the authorities and the business community are trying hard to avoid. In other words, the government will get nowhere with businesses because both sides share the same goals and ideology. And businesses will give nothing to the authorities because they have already received everything they needed at no cost.

The authorities' helplessness in the face of mounting social problems can be felt around the world. Liberal economists are united in claiming that the only means of preventing another downturn is to give even more money to corporations, write off their debts and buy up their unsold products. The “invisible hand of the marketplace” stubbornly refuses to operate, with no renewal of consumer demand in sight. The battle against the crisis remains the exclusive task of governments. But as budgetary resources dwindle, governments will have no choice but to fill the growing gaps at the public's expense.

The situation in Russia is far from being the worst. The financial collapse in Greece and Spain has compelled the authorities to adopt unpopular measures — measures that Moscow officials refuse to even discuss. We will soon see the same thing happen in Ukraine and the Baltic states. And with Germany's leaders fully committed to saving the euro at any cost, German taxpayers will end up having to foot the bill for it. Because the people of Western European countries are unaccustomed to long-suffering and are not intimidated by their government ministers and lawmakers, they are starting to get a little rowdy — staging strikes, seizing top executives as hostages, rallying in the streets and breaking shop windows. But that wave of social protest will not change anything, and it will not force leaders to change course. Governments react to these events as if they were natural disasters, thinking, “When the storm dies down, we'll all be able to return to life as normal. After all, workers can't strike forever.” Despite all of Russia's problems with democracy, in that sense this country differs little from other European countries.

Sarkozy's government has sought to diffuse any controversy over the sale.

"I want someone to tell me, how can we tell Russian leaders, 'we don't need you to make peace, we need you to resolve a certain number of crises in the world — notably the Iranian crisis ... but we don't trust you?'" Sarkozy said.

"Can we say to President Medvedev in the morning, 'ah, I trust you, vote with us at the Security Council, work with us on the same resolution,' then in the afternoon, tell him, 'no no, excuse us, as we don't trust you and we don't work together — we won't send you the Mistral?'" he added.

"We want to turn the page on the Cold War," Sarkozy said.

Medvedev arrived in the French capital by helicopter, landing on the vast esplanade in front of the Invalides museum, where Emperor Napoleon is buried. Scores of golden-helmeted Republican Guards on horseback led his limousine across the Alexandre III bridge, named for the second-to-last czar.

At the presidential Palace, Medvedev strolled down the red carpet — Republican Guards leading a drum roll and blaring trumpets — to a smiling greeting from Sarkozy.

Medvedev's trip appears less about breaking new ground than about tightening ties and expanding on energy and manufacturing contracts firmed up by his prime minister, Vladimir Putin, in France last November.

France is eager to make a good impression on the Russians. Sarkozy is hoping for a larger chunk of trade with Moscow, despite diplomatic concerns about Russia's sway over its smaller neighbors in eastern Europe.

Natural gas, rail deals
The head of Russia's Gazprom, Alexei Miller, signed a memorandum with French natural gas company GDF Suez's CEO Gerard Mestrallet on Monday for the French company to buy a 9-percent stake in the North Stream AG natural gas pipeline planned to pipe gas from Russia under the Baltic Sea and to western Europe.

France's Alstom signed a deal for 25 percent of Russian railway builder Transmashholding.

Russian and French officials would not provide a value for either deal.

GDF Suez and state-controlled Gazprom also said earlier they have begun talks to supply the GDF Suez with up to an additional 1.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year from 2015.

French investments in Russia last year outstripped those of the U.S. for the first time, Medvedev said. Russian news agencies put the French figure at \$10.4 billion.

Just before Medvedev arrived for his three-day visit, French carmaker Renault SA announced it had doubled capacity at its Moscow plant, to help take advantage of Russia's cash-for-clunkers program starting next week.

Also in Paris on Monday, the top immigration officials from each country signed a protocol on immigration that both presidents called a step toward visa-free travel between Russia and Europe.

Culture is expected to be a centerpiece of Medvedev's Paris sojourn: The Louvre Museum is unveiling a sweeping exhibit of Russian art from the dawn of the Russian Orthodox Church more than a millennium ago to western-gazing canvases painted under 18th century leader Peter the Great. Medvedev and Sarkozy will inaugurate the exhibit Tuesday.

On The Anniversary Of NPT, US, Russia, UN Hail New Peaceful Era

On the 40th anniversary of the NPT, U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton commented in a statement, "Unfortunately, a few states, such as North Korea and Iran, continue to defy the international community and their own obligations. We are working with our partners to convince these states to change their course."

Secretary Clinton added, "As President Obama said in Prague last year,"Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something."

President Barack Obama noted that although the "threat of global nuclear war," is history, there is now the lurking danger of "nuclear proliferation."

Listing "disarmament, nonproliferation and peaceful uses"- as the basic pillars of the global strategy, Obama outlined the path: "nations with nuclear weapons will move toward disarmament, nations without nuclear weapons will forsake them, and all nations have an "inalienable right" to peaceful nuclear energy."

Clinton in her statement noted that the Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation Susan Burk, is traveling the globe to bolster international support for the Treaty, while in May, the nations from around the world will convene at the United Nations in New York for the NPT Review Conference, which takes place every five years.

Clinton also highlighted the ongoing negotiations with Russia over "a verifiable arms reduction treaty," and hosting of a Nuclear Security Summit in April under the Obama presidency "to prevent nuclear terrorism."

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon also praised on Friday efforts by Russia and the U.S. to agree on a new strategic arms reduction treaty.

Ban said in a statement, "I welcome the efforts of the Russian Federation and the United States to conclude a successor agreement to the Treaty on the Limitation and Reduction of Strategic Offensive Arms (START)."

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said earlier on Monday that Russia and the United States are close to completing negotiations on a new treaty, and expressed the hope that the document could be signed soon. START 1, the cornerstone of post-Cold War arms control, expired on December 5.

Russia's European security initiative should get fair hearing - Merkel

"President Medvedev and I spoke by telephone last week and we reiterated that we should discuss his initiative on partnership in the security sphere; it should be discussed within the framework of the OSCE," Merkel told reporters in Berlin.

She said the discussion of the Russian proposal "will be invigorated" in the near future.

The Russian draft security European treaty was posted on the president's website November 29, 2009.

However, it has received a lukewarm reaction from the West.

In late February, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rejected Russia's call for a new European security treaty, saying Europe's security would be strengthened by a closer cooperation between Russia and NATO.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in December NATO was ready to discuss Medvedev's ideas, but there was no need for a new security treaty.

The NATO chief added there are enough documents ensuring Euro-Atlantic security, and that conflicts happen because some countries do not comply with the principles enshrined in these documents.

Russia's Putin to India for 1st Time as PM

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin arrives Thursday in India for a two-day visit.

Experts say he hopes to tap into India's growing energy and defense needs, both of which are being fueled by its prospering economy and its desire to modernize its military.

Moscow and New Delhi have enjoyed close ties since the Soviet era and Russia sees India as an important partner whose influence will expand in Asia.

Pavel Felgenhauer is a Russian political and military analyst.

Felgenhauer says Putin's visit is mostly about military aspects. He says Russia and India also share many similar interests and views. For example, stability in central Asia. He says India was a serious ally of the Soviet Union.

Last year, Russia and India agreed to the outlines of a 10-year weapons deal that could be worth at least \$10-billion. They are also building a modern supersonic stealth fighter aircraft.

Again Russian military and political expert Pavel Felgenhauer.

He says that Russia remains India's major supplier of arms and military technology. Felgenhauer says most analysts are also expecting the final deal on the aircraft carrier Russia has been putting together for many years.

The soviet-era aircraft carrier the Admiral Gorshkov was sold to India, but is being refurbished by Russia. The Gorshkov sale has been marred by difficulties, including pricing disputes and delayed deliveries, leading many analysts to wonder whether India could be tempted to reduce its dependence on Russian military equipment by doing more trade with the United States.

The director general of the New Delhi-based Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, Narendra Sing Sisodia, says Russia will remain a reliable trading partner for India.

"We still have very strong cooperation in the nuclear field with the Russians. We are also getting submarines and aircraft carriers from them," Sisodia said. "So it is a signal that the Russians are completely committed to this ongoing relationship. I think Russia is very critical in the context of the fact that we are surrounded by other neighbors who may not be exactly that friendly. So this kind of a relationship with the Russians is, I think, strategically very important," said Sisodia.

Leaders of both countries are also expected to establish a strategy on Afghanistan, critical to their own security.

Jawaharlal Nehru University Professor Anuradha Chenoy says the talks will focus on the situation in Afghanistan, but will also extend to global issues including climate change.

"Major issues in the international security system today are the economic crisis, the financial crisis, the climate crisis and the security crisis and in all these the position India takes, very often, they can coordinate very well with Russia and I think there will be talks about all these issues with Russia," said Chenoy.

Both countries are also expected to try and boost bilateral trade as neither has made a significant presence in the other's markets. India's state-run energy company, ONGC, has been trying to augment its position in Russia, which is the world's largest energy producer.

Jawaharlal Nehru University post-graduate student Isha Dubey says maintaining ties with Russia is important for her country.

"I think Russia has always been favorable towards the Indian scene, in Pakistan or she has always favored us, helped us through the defense department. So it is pretty important that we keep the strategic ties friendly and amicable," said Dubey.

During his trip to Russia last year, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh claimed other countries would never sacrifice India's relationship with the Kremlin.

Russia and India, together with Brazil and China, are part of the so-called BRIC grouping of major developing economies trying to promote a multi-polar world not dominated by the United States.

UN chief to arrive in Moscow March 17

"UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will be in Russia March 17-19, where he will take part in the ministerial meeting of the quartet of intermediaries for the Middle East peace efforts," Andrei Nesterenko said, adding that it would be Ban's third visit to Moscow.

The meeting of the Quartet of international mediators in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which is made up of Russia, the UN, the United States and European Union, will be held in Moscow on March 19.

During his visit, Ban Ki-moon will also have a sideline meeting with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in which they will discuss Middle East peace efforts, the situation in Afghanistan, Iran's controversial nuclear program and also strategic deterrence.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and EU Foreign Policy chief Catherine Ashton are scheduled to attend the March 19 meeting in Moscow.

Talks between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority came to a halt in December 2008, when Israel launched an attack on the Gaza Strip in a bid to put an end to the firing of homemade rockets at southern Israel by Palestinian militants based in the enclave. The conflict left 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis dead.

Settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, both occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, has been the main obstacle to reviving peace talks.

Under the internationally agreed roadmap for Middle East peace, Israel is obliged to freeze all settlement construction activity, and remove unauthorized outposts built since 2001 from the Palestinian territories.

U.S. Clinton to talk nuclear arms cuts in Moscow next week

Hillary Clinton will pay an official visit to Moscow on March 18-19 to attend a meeting of the Quartet of international mediators in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and discussions on Iran's controversial nuclear program.

Andrei Nesterenko said Clinton is also scheduled to hold a number of bilateral meetings, including with Lavrov.

"The ministers will discuss issues concerning efforts in the direction of non-proliferation in the context of the April 12-13 nuclear security global summit in Washington, which is expected to be attended by the Russian president," Andrei Nesterenko said.

The high-ranking Russian diplomat reiterated that the new arms cuts treaty is expected to be signed as soon as possible.

"Both sides are set to provide all possibilities for the signing of the new agreement in the nearest future," Nesterenko said.

Russia and the United States have been negotiating a replacement to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty since the two countries' presidents met in April last year, but finalizing a document has dragged on, with U.S. plans for missile defense in Europe a particular sticking point. START 1, the cornerstone of post-Cold War arms control, expired on December 5.

Lavrov has repeatedly made statements suggesting that a new nuclear arms cuts deal should be linked to Washington's missile plans in Eastern Europe.

Many experts believe, however, that the Russian demand would probably not be satisfied as the U.S. Senate is unlikely to approve any document containing a formal linkage between the arms cuts and the missile shield.

Obama scrapped plans last year for interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic pursued by his predecessor as protection against possible Iranian strikes in an apparent move to ease Russian security concerns.

In February, however, Romania and Bulgaria said they were in talks with the Obama administration on deploying elements of the U.S. missile shield on their territories from 2015, triggering an angry reaction from Moscow.

Russia To Build Civil Nuclear Plant in India

The talks on setting up nuclear plants in India are in their initial stage," Alexander Kadakin told Dow Jones Newswires on the sidelines of an India-Russia business event.

"We are prepared to start construction of nuclear plants in India, whenever India is prepared," he said, *Wall Street Journal* reports.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin arrives in New Delhi tonight to fend off competition from the U.S. and Europe to supply arms and nuclear energy to India.

Putin is set to meet his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh tomorrow to oversee the signing of more than \$10 billion in deals, including a refurbished aircraft carrier, MiG-29 fighter jets and two nuclear reactors, according to a report in *Bloomberg*.

According to *Economic Times*, India and Russia will Friday tighten their strategic and economic ties by signing a slew of agreements, including an umbrella civil nuclear pact and another accord fixing the cost of the refurbished aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov at \$2.35 billion.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will Friday evening holds talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, who touches down in India close to midnight Thursday for a brief visit lasting less than 24 hours.

The two sides will sign an umbrella inter-governmental civil nuclear agreement, a clutch of defence deals and a visa pact after the talks, officials said. The nuclear pact was initialled during Manmohan Singh's trip to Moscow in December last year.

India has a long history of defense ties with Moscow. The current cooperation program comprises about 200 joint projects, including the transfer of technology for the licensed assembly of T-90 tanks in India, the production of BrahMos missiles and the purchase of Smerch MLRS by India, *RIA Novosti* news agency says.

Ukrainian President Swims Between Two Waters

Ukrainian politicians traditionally visit Shevchenko's hometown where they talk about his contribution to the development of the Ukrainian culture and language. Viktor Yushchenko, the previous president of Ukraine, would always emphasize the importance

of the Ukrainian language and say that Russian would never become an official language of the nation.

Now it is Yanukovych's turn to visit the places, where Taras Shevchenko spent his youth. Yanukovych laid flowers to the monument of the poet in the center of Kiev and then traveled to the town of Kanev in the Cherkassk region. He visited Shevchenko's grave there and saw how the reconstruction was going in the museum of the poet.

Like Yushchenko, Yanukovych spoke about the status of the Ukrainian and the Russian languages.

"The Ukrainian language will be developing in Ukraine as the only state language," Yanukovych said.

The new Ukrainian president virtually repeated the things, which his predecessor Yushchenko was saying for several years in a row. However, Yanukovych added that the European Charter of Regional Languages would be introduced in Ukraine.

The addition means that the regions, where the share of non-Ukrainian speakers exceeds 20 percent, would have a right to officially introduce another language, including Russian.

We have to acknowledge that Yanukovych's statement about the Ukrainian as the only state language looks strange. He promised on the threshold of the presidential election back in 2004 that he would strive for the national status for the Russian language.

He reminded of that promise of his in September 2009 when the most recent presidential campaign was being launched. Yanukovych's Party of Regions has a paragraph in its program about the existence of two state languages in Ukraine. Now that Yanukovych is the president, he suddenly says that the high status can belong to only one language.

Yanukovych acknowledged during his pre-election campaign that it would be very difficult to win the national status for the Russian language in Ukraine. He said that he would take efforts to grant a regional status to the Russian language in the east and in the south of the nation in accordance with the European Charter for Regional Languages. He kept his promise at this point.

Moscow passed all data on August war to the Hague

In the course of their visit to Moscow representatives of the International Criminal Court, investigating the events of August 2008, were granted all the necessary information from competent Russian structures.

According to the Foreign Ministry of Russia, ICC prosecutor's office representatives held meetings with representatives of the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defense, General Prosecutor's Office and Investigation Committee of the Prosecutor's Office of Russia. The Russian side also informed of the process of investigation, being conducted by Investigation Committee of the Prosecutor's Office and answered all the questions the guest side had.

The ICC delegation was headed by department head Beatrice Le Fraper du Hellen, and stayed in Moscow from March 8th to 10th - RIA Novosti.

Negotiations were held in constructive business atmosphere, the Foreign Ministry reports.

The ICC deals with genocide, crimes against humanity, military crimes. It can also try for aggression, but only after clear legal definition of the crime by the international community. Now claims of South Ossetians citizens against Georgia, and Georgia against Russia are in the ICC.

Russia and Georgia agreed on resumption of direct flights

The negotiations were held yesterday in Moscow - RosBalt. Georgia was represented by ex-PM, leader of pro-opposition party; the United Russia delegation was represented by Konstantin Kosachyov, the third chairman of the State Duma Committee for International Affairs.

After the meeting Noghaideli said that opening of air borders became a victory for him personally and his party.

Previously Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, stated that Russia was ready to open its air border, though after solution of technical issues [air companies must sign the due agreements].

Russia, Jordan plan to strengthen political and economic relations

Putin also expressed hope that the meeting would allow them to discuss “problems in the region, bilateral relations as well as trade and economic cooperation”.

Abdullah II said he was glad to have the opportunity to discuss how to resolve the stalemate between Israel and the Palestinian National Administration, especially in light of Israel's increased settlement activities.

The king noted that Russia had traditionally played an important mediatory role in the resolution of conflicts in the Middle East.

That Putin and Abdullah II had established a friendly relationship became clear from the very beginning of the meeting that started with a minor deviation from the protocol. Abdullah II had arrived to the prime minister's residence outside Moscow when Putin

was still in meeting with his government. But instead of going out to meet the guest, Putin invited him to his office and introduced members of the Cabinet to him.

“I had the opportunity introduce practically the whole government of the Russian Federation to you and I should say that we all consider you one of our closest friends,” Putin said.

Having thanked the Russian prime minister for the hospitality, the king, who has visited Moscow several times before, said he was “happy to meet the old good friend”.

“I must say that we greatly appreciate the special nature of relations that are evolving between Russia and Jordan, and I know that you personally have contributed so much to their development over the past several years,” Abdullah II said.

During the talks in Moscow, the Jordanian delegation plans to discuss prospects for stronger relations with Russia, an official at the Jordanian embassy in Russia told Itar-Tass earlier.

In recent years, bilateral top-level contacts have become regular, thus facilitating deeper relations between the two countries. In the past seven years, Abdullah II has made nine visits to Russia. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met with the King of Jordan for the first time in Astana on July 5, 2008, to mark the tenth anniversary of Kazakhstan’s capital. Next time the two leaders met in Sochi, Russia, in August of the same year.

Russia and Jordan have reported an onward trend in trade and economic cooperation.

“New areas of cooperation have emerged, including that in the nuclear power industry,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said earlier. “Cultural, scientific and sport exchanges have increased, and the inflow of Russian tourists to Jordan has grown considerably.”

Government creates more tsars than Russia

The evidence comes from the Commons public administration committee, which has published this list, there were 26 of them.

Tsars are a new development in British politics. According to the report, the term was first used in relation to the NHS appointments and the first tsar appointed in a wider political context was Keith Hellowell, who became drug tsar in 1998.

The committee isn't impressed.

At present there is little transparency concerning the informal and ad hoc appointments made by government to lead on, review or promote particular policies. Job titles are often

uninformative, appointment processes informal and the work undertaken opaque and not clearly linked to results. The allegation that some of these posts might have been created for the sake of a press notice may be unfair, but it is difficult to refute without greater transparency.

The committee says that the government should produce a regular list of tsars working in Whitehall and that, whenever a minister appoints a new one, the relevant department should spell out exactly what his or her responsibilities will be.

India to sign nuclear, Gorshkov deals with Russia

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will on Friday evening holds talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, who touches down in India close to midnight on Thursday for a brief visit lasting less than 24 hours.

The two sides will sign an umbrella inter-governmental civil nuclear agreement, a clutch of defence deals and a visa pact after the talks, officials said.

The nuclear pact was initialled during Manmohan Singh's trip to Moscow in December last year.

Building upon ongoing civil nuclear cooperation with Russia, Manmohan Singh is likely to press for an access to Russian nuclear reprocessing technology. India and the US are close to finalising a pact on reprocessing.

Setting a positive tone for Friday's talks, India's cabinet committee on security (CCS) cleared the \$2.35 billion fresh price for the Admiral Gorshkov.

The long-delayed renegotiated pact for the carrier, renamed INS Vikramaditya, will be among the defence deals worth \$4 billion that are expected to be finalised during Putin's visit.

The warship, originally purchased for \$1.5 billion, is currently undergoing a refit at Russia's Sevmash shipyard. Of this, \$974 million was meant for the refit and the balance for a squadron of MiG-29K combat jets that will be deployed on the vessel.

Citing additional costs for the refit, Moscow had scaled up the price to \$2.9 billion. New Delhi wanted the price to be scaled back to \$2.1 billion. Finally, the two sides have settled for \$2.35 billion after months of intense negotiations.

A slew of defence contracts like the \$1.2 billion deal for 29 MiG-29K maritime fighters and the joint development of the stealth fifth-generation fighter aircraft (FGFA) are also likely to be finalised during Putin's visit.

Pacts on setting up joint pharmaceutical ventures and visa simplification are also

expected to be signed during the visit, key steps that can take scale up business ties that have not matched the level of strategic partnership the two countries have enjoyed since the Soviet era, sources said.

Under the visa agreement, Indian businessmen wishing to visit Russia will require a certificate from an industry body like the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) or Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) confirming their credentials.

Russia's stringent visa regime was widely considered a major obstacle by Indian businessmen wishing to travel to that country to explore business opportunities.

India and Russia are aiming to more than triple their bilateral trade to \$20 billion by 2015.

Opposition Sidelined Ahead of Test of Medvedev's Election Pledges

Russians will vote this weekend in the first major elections since disputed polls in October triggered calls from President Dmitry Medvedev for smaller parties to receive better representation in regional legislatures dominated by United Russia.

But despite Medvedev's rhetoric, regional authorities have continued to back the ruling United Russia party and derail the campaigns of other parties ahead of Sunday's elections, opposition activists and election monitors said.

Voters will elect eight regional legislatures and 12 municipal legislatures on Sunday. About 84,000 candidates are running for about 40,000 open seats, according to the Central Election Commission.

The elections will be the last to use early voting, criticized by election observers as one of the most blatant ploys to manipulate election results, and regional authorities are once again taking advantage of early voting to collect votes for United Russia, said Grigory Melkonyants, deputy director of Golos, Russia's only independent election monitoring organization.

"The most important thing for officials is to get the necessary results," Melkonyants said. "They will only think about what will happen next tomorrow."

Medvedev lashed out against the election-time use of "stupid administrative methods" during a session of his State Council dedicated to the issue in January. He also urged regional governors to respect the public's will and not interfere in the voting process.

In February, Medvedev sent a bill on electoral reform to the State Duma that, among other things, abolishes early voting. The amendments, which will go into effect in time for the next major elections in the fall, will restrict early voting to people who live or work in hard-to-access places. Currently, anyone can vote early by declaring that it will

be impossible to vote on election day, and election observers often cannot observe how this voting takes place.

Melkonyants said early voting for the municipal legislature in Sochi, which will host the 2014 Winter Olympics, is of particular concern.

Several members of the local election committee have complained to Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in a YouTube video that local officials are forcing people to vote early.

“We are urging you to cancel the results of early voting in Sochi because of multiple violations,” committee member Yelena Zakaryan said in the video, which is also posted on the Golos web site. The video footage shows Zakaryan standing with a group of election committee members and candidates.

Zakaryan said municipal officials were delivering voters by the busload to polling stations and forcing them to vote for certain candidates. Zakaryan does not identify the party affiliation of the candidates.

But Yevgeny Raschepkin, the Communist Party's election coordinator for the Krasnodar region, which includes Sochi, said the votes were being cast for United Russia.

“These buses have become the de facto election headquarters for United Russia,” Raschepkin told The Moscow Times by telephone from Sochi.

He said Communist observers had tried to ask the early voters why they had decided to show up early and only sparked anger from the officials bringing the groups to the ballot boxes.

Raschepkin suggested that the people were being forced to vote at risk of losing their jobs.

“People depend on their bosses,” he said.

Senior Sochi election officials denied wrongdoing. United Russia also denied wrongdoing in the elections.

But opposition parties said regional officials have erected multiple barriers to prevent them for participating in the elections.

Despite Medvedev’s appeal for smaller parties to participate, running in local elections has become even harder, said Vladislav Morozov, head of the Yabloko opposition party's branch in the Kaluga region, located 160 kilometers southwest of Moscow.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court banned the party from running for seats in the regional legislature, citing problems with signatures the party collected to be registered for the

vote. Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin said the violations were minor, *Noviye Izvestia* reported Wednesday.

Morozov is currently one of three Yabloko deputies in the regional legislature, which like most in Russia is dominated by United Russia.

Morozov complained that Kaluga Governor Anatoly Artamonov, a member of United Russia is actively campaigning for United Russia candidates and almost daily appears on local television to endorse party candidates.

“That reminds me of the times of Brezhnev,” he said, referring to Soviet elections when the Communists had a one-party monopoly.

Also this week, the Central Election Commission banned Just Russia election posters in which party leader Sergei Mironov urges people voting for the Sverdlovsk regional legislature to fight against the use of administrative resources — a nod to the regional authorities' vocal support for United Russia. The ban was imposed on the grounds that the poster mentions that Mironov is also the speaker of the Federation Council, which amounts to abuse of authority, *Vedomosti* reported.

United Russia often uses campaign posters featuring Putin, who heads the party, and Medvedev, but it faces no problems because it does not mention which positions the two men hold.

After the last major elections, held on Oct. 11, deputies with the Communist, Just Russia and Liberal Democratic parties stormed out of the State Duma in protest of fraud. They refused to return until Medvedev agreed to listen to their complaints. United Russia swept the elections.

Medvedev defended the elections, telling the party leaders at the time that the political system was functioning well and that their parties had failed to present evidence of violations in court.

Economic:

Russia's Medvedev, Sweden's Reinfeldt to discuss economic ties in Moscow

Agreements on space, energy, healthcare and other spheres of cooperation have been drafted for Reinfeldt's visit. This will be his first visit to Russia in his current post which has occupied since 2006. Last November, he met with Medvedev in Stockholm where the Russian leader came to attend a Russia-EU meeting.

The Swedish premier intends to discuss with Medvedev climate change, trade and cooperation with the EU as well as meet with Swedish businessmen working in Russia.

A Kremlin source said trade between the two countries in 2009 was estimated at \$5.24 billion and that joint projects are developing in the automobile industry, electronics, space, telecommunications, nanotechnology, metalwork, agriculture, forestry, transportation, construction, oilfield development, as well as in the bank and financial sectors.

Russia reopens market to U.S. pork

Hog prices are recovering slowly from the 2009 lows caused by weak exports and the H1N1 virus scare. April hog futures closed at \$73.30 per hundredweight, up about 60 percent since September.

Economists and pork organizations have predicted that pork producers may return to profitability this year after two years of losses.

Iowa is the nation's largest hog producer, with sales of about 33 million animals annually and a inventory of about 19.3 million pigs at any given time.

The United States exported nearly 20 percent of U.S. pork production in 2009. Russia imported \$257 million worth - 6 percent - of U.S. pork and pork variety meat exports last year.

A U.S. delegation has been meeting with Russian officials in Moscow since Monday to discuss trade issues related to pork and poultry.

These negotiations led to the development of a new veterinary certificate to ensure that pork exports from the United States meet specific Russian microbiological and tetracycline-group antibiotic residue requirements.

Exports to Russia, which were just \$7.6 million in 2003, have soared since the United States and Russia signed a meat agreement in 2004.

In 2008, the United States shipped \$476 million of pork to Russia, making that country the No. 5 market. Last year sales to Russia fell to \$289 million because of a several-months ban on U.S. pork over concerns about the H1N1 flu, the global economic downturn and Russian delisting of a number of U.S. pork facilities.

National Pork Producers President Don Butler of North Carolina said the next priority for U.S. pork producers would be China, which closed its market to U.S. pork in late April after the initial reports on the H1N1 flu outbreak.

In December, China announced it would reopen its market but has yet to begin taking U.S. pork. It recently reached agreement with Canada to take that country's pork.

"We're losing pork sales to Canada and the European Union," said Butler. "We need to get back into the Chinese market."

Bill Would Strip State Corporations of Profits

The bill would require the state corporations to transfer most of their profits from 2009, 2010 and 2011 after their head offices finish the final accounting for each year, said Konstantin Shipunov, a deputy in the United Russia party, Interfax reported.

The legislation aims to help curb the growing federal budget deficit, which reached 5.9 percent of gross domestic product in 2009. Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said last month that 2010's deficit would stay within 7 percent.

The government has been straining to find ways to narrow the deficit: It plans to raise \$2.4 billion dollars this year in a sell-off of stakes in some state-owned companies and has floated the idea of raising the gas extraction tax to prop up flagging tax revenues.

The legislation would require changes to the laws that govern the operations of the two state corporations. Currently, VEB's supervisory council and the Deposit Insurance Agency's board of directors decide what to do with their profits, and by law, VEB's profits must be invested in the bank's funds.

In a commentary on the law, deputies said "significant funds have been distributed by means of state support" and the actions undertaken by VEB, the Deposit Insurance Company and the Central Bank to support the banking system have "clearly reflected very positively on [their] profits." The deputies added that, through their subordinated loans to refinance bank debt, VEB had a profit margin of 1 percent to 7 percent.

VEB's net profits in 2009 stood at 22.8 billion rubles, while the Deposit Insurance Agency earned 14 billion rubles.

Many major Russian country-wide and regional environmental organizations joined together yesterday to prevent the launch of the Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill (BPPM) and pollution of the unique lake.

The "For Baikal!" coalition included the domestic branches of Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Moscow-based Biodiversity Conservation Center and conservationists from St. Petersburg, Siberia, Karelia and other parts of the country. They call for canceling a government decree allowing inadequately cleaned waste runoff to be dumped in the world's largest freshwater lake. If their demands are not heard in Moscow they will turn to international institutions: The unique ecosystem of Lake Baikal was included on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites in 1996.

This protest is interesting because these environmentalists already have experience of achieving the cancellation of decisions made in the higher echelons of power. In 2006, Vladimir Putin listened to their arguments and thousands of protests, and diverted the route of the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline from the shores of Lake Baikal.

Their ideas are shared by a large part of the population of the Baikal region. Irkutsk region's major regional tour operators also demand the launch to be canceled. "Tourists do not go to places that smell of Methanethiol!" (a gas with a sharp smell of sulfur emitted in the production of cellulose — Ed.) heads of the largest travel agencies said in their letter to the president, prime minister and governor Dmitry Mezentsev. More than 39,000 people had signed a petition to Dmitry Medvedev on the web site Babr.ru yesterday demanding the order for the plant's launch to be canceled.

Gas Company Finds Ancient Shipwrecks in Baltic Sea

The oldest wreck probably dates back to medieval times and could be up to 800 years old, while the others are likely from the 17th to 19th centuries, Peter Norman of Sweden's National Heritage Board said Tuesday, *The Associated Press* reported.

Workers on an underwater pipeline in the Baltic Sea has discovered a dozen previously uncharted shipwrecks - some of them 1,000 years old.

"We have manage to identify 12 shipwrecks, and nine of them are considered to be fairly old," said Peter Norman, a senior advisor with Sweden's Heritage Board which made the announcement this week.

"We think many of the ships are from the 17th and 18th centuries and we think some could even be from the Middle Ages," he added. "This discovery offers enormous culture-historical value," *Telegraph.co.uk* reports.

The Baltic Sea has been called an "archaeological paradise" because its waters contain so little salt that they don't attract the hull-eating worms that destroy shipwrecks. The sea is also shallow and easier to explore than other bodies of water.

In February, Robert Ballard, the U.S. marine scientist who discovered the Titanic, told *CBS News* that scientists recognize "the discovery potential of the Baltic given its unique characteristics for preservation of ancient wooden ships."

The 12 ships found by Nord Stream are largely intact, though it's not clear yet whether they will be brought to the surface or restored, *AOL News* reports.

Putin promises support to every economic initiative of Russian, Swedish business

“The Russian government will provide support to any initiatives that develop trade and economic relations,” he said. “Everything must be done to enlarge the bilateral investment potential.”

“Russia-Sweden trade neared \$9 billion in 2008 and dipped by almost 40% in the following year because of the world crisis,” Putin said.

“A large number of Swedish companies, such as IKEA, Electrolux, Tetra Pak, Scania and Volvo, are working in Russia,” he added.

Putin thanked Sweden for the approval of the Nord Stream project. “The new gas pipeline is bound to provide sustainable deliveries to European consumers in the upcoming years, and Germany, Denmark, France and the United Kingdom will receive additional amounts of energy resources,” he said.

Nord Stream is a gas pipeline to link Russia and the European Union via the Baltic Sea. It will carry natural gas to supply both businesses and households. The new pipeline will be an important factor of energy security in Europe. Nord Stream will transport up to 55 billion cubic meters of gas each year. This is enough to supply more than 25 million households.

Nord Stream is a 1,220-kilometer-long offshore natural gas pipeline stretching through the Baltic Sea, from Vyborg, Russia to Greifswald, Germany, which is to be built by Nord Stream AG. Nord Stream is a joint project of four major companies: Gazprom, BASF/Wintershall Holding AG, E.ON Ruhrgas AG and N.V. Nederlandse Gasunie. Such a powerful consortium is a guarantee of the best technology, security and corporate governance.

Initially one pipeline will be built with a transport capacity of around 27.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas per annum. In the second phase, a parallel pipeline will be laid to double the annual transport capacity to around 55 billion cubic meters. The second pipeline is planned to come on stream in 2012. The total investment for the offshore pipeline is estimated to be 7.4 billion euros.

In the Russian territory, a 917-kilometer-long on-shore connection is being built by Gazprom, to connect Nord Stream to the Russian gas transmission system.

Two on-shore connections from Greifswald to the south and west of Germany with a total length of 850 kilometers will be built by WINGAS and E.ON Ruhrgas.

Nord Stream runs through the Exclusive Economic Zones of Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany as well as through the territorial waters of Russia and Germany.

The route has been selected and optimized on the basis of an integrated evaluation of technical, environmental, cultural and economic factors. An integrated feasibility study conducted in 1997-1999 considered several alternative routes and landfall locations. The

proposed route was judged the most feasible. Nord Stream will carry gas to Germany, from where it can be transported onwards to Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, and France. The project is open for planning peripheral pipelines to other European countries and regions in the North and West.

Reinfeldt said he had discussed broadening business contacts between Sweden and Russia with President Dmitry Medvedev earlier in the day.

“We signed five agreements on a broad range of issues,” he said, noting that Sweden and Russia still disagreed over certain issues. “There are still some disagreements, but such meetings are bound to resolve them,” he said.

Russia criticizes U.S., NATO over Afghan drug trafficking fight

In an interview late Thursday, Dmitry Rogozin also highlighted the lack of cohesion within NATO, saying Moscow is worried about declining public support in Europe for the war.

"(Russia) is losing 30,000 lives a year to the Afghan drug trade, and a million people are addicts," Rogozin said. "This is an undeclared war against our country."

"We are obviously very dissatisfied with the lack of attention from NATO and the United States to our complaints about this problem."

For years, the allies tried to eradicate poppy crops, but that resulted in a boost to the insurgency as impoverished poppy farmers joined the Taliban. Gen. Stanley McChrystal's new policy of trying to win the support of the population means that these farmers are now left alone, enabling them to tend crops that produce 90% of the world's heroin.

Russia says that drug production in Afghanistan has increased tenfold since the U.S.-led invasion that ousted the Taliban regime in 2001. Smugglers freely transport Afghan heroin and opium north into Central Asia and Russia, and also on to Western Europe.

Rogozin pointed to Washington's inconsistency in its attitude to international drug trafficking saying that in contrast to Afghanistan, it was waging a drug war in Colombia because that was the primary source of cocaine that goes to America.

"But in the case of the heroin which goes to Russia, they are doing practically nothing," he said. "This is not how you treat your friends and partners."

NATO spokesman James Appathurai said the alliance understands Russian concerns, and that the problem affects Europe as well. The most important part of solving the drug trade was helping to defeat the insurgency, and NATO has 120,000 troops trying to do just that, he said.

Appathurai noted that the U.N. cites the Marjah region, where NATO has just completed a large-scale offensive, as one of the world's foremost opium-producing areas. "By helping re-establish government control there, we are making a substantial contribution to the counter-narcotics effort," he said.

"We would welcome increased support from Russia for our overall effort and (NATO) has made very specific requests to Moscow which they are considering," Appathurai said.

Russia contributes logistical support for NATO- and U.S.-led operations by providing a vital land and air transit corridor for the shipment of supplies to the international force. It also services Soviet helicopters and organizes training for the Afghan anti-drug police. But Moscow has always ruled out sending ground troops.

During the Cold War, the Soviets provided military support for the secular Afghan government, and sent over 100,000 troops to defend it against religious fundamentalists being financed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Britain, and other Western nations. More than 9,000 Soviet soldiers were killed in the 10-year war in the 1980s.

"Today we are helping them fight the same fanatics whom they supported against us 20 years ago," Rogozin noted.

He expressed concern over weakening support for the nine-year war from America's European allies, "who ended up in Afghanistan without really knowing what they were doing there."

"The result is falling public commitment to the war," he said.

Last month, the Dutch government collapsed because it tried to comply with a NATO request to keep its 2,000-strong contingent in Afghanistan. The Dutch crisis, and growing public opposition in other European countries to further involvement in Afghanistan, has sparked fears that other NATO nations might also pull out their troops.

"NATO is still dominated by the United States, and European allies still fall in line just to keep the alliance going, (by) participating in U.S.-initiated military adventures, even though their national interests in doing so are far from clear," said Ian Buruma, a professor of democracy at Bard College in New York.

"It is hard to see how this can continue for much longer."

Russia signs \$1.5-bln fighter jet contract with India

Russia and India have signed a \$1.5-billion contract on the supplies of 29 more MiG-29K carrier-based fighter jets to New Delhi, the head of the Russian Aircraft Corporation MiG said on Friday.

"An agreement on supplying an additional set of MiG-29K fighter jets has been signed, the start of supplies is scheduled for 2012," Mikhail Pogosyan said.

Russia and India signed a contract stipulating the supply of 12 single-seat MiG-29Ks and four two-seat MiG-29KUBs to India in January 2004. The contract is part of a \$1.5 billion deal to deliver the Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier, currently being retrofitted in Russia for the Indian navy.

India's first MiG-29Ks and MiG-29KUBs officially entered service earlier this year.

Analysts believe that India will remain the main purchaser of Russian-made combat aircraft for the next 15 years under existing and future contracts, as the country desperately needs to upgrade its fighter fleet, which includes Su-30MKI and MiG-29 fighters, but mainly consists of obsolete Soviet MiG-21 models.

Social:

Russia's most beautiful girl and her rivals

Irina Antonenko, a 18-year-old student from the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, was crowned Miss Russia 2010. Along with the title and the crown, Antonenko received a cash prize of \$100,000 and an opportunity to represent Russia at the forthcoming Miss World pageant in Nha Trang, Vietnam

Saakashvili Orders Hair Drug Test for Officials

The latter has proposed such tests for public officials, which was picked up by the President calling it: "One of the best ideas I have heard recently."

Although there have been several cases of drug testing among public officials, MP Lortkipanidze offered on March 5 to conduct hair drug tests, instead of urinalysis, saying that analysis of hair samples is more effective, which can provide a drug history of over a 90-day period.

"The government should listen attentively to all those reasonable initiatives, which will be coming from the political groups. The reaction [of the government] should not be rejection, [proposals] should be accepted if considered necessary for the country," Saakashvili said.

He said the entire "public sector - and it is about 100 thousand persons" should undergo these tests.

He also said there were 6,000 inmates in the Georgian prisons serving sentences for illegal drug trade. He called drug misuse “a catastrophic” problem for Georgia.

“In recent years the level of drug misuse has stabilized, but we managed to do it through taking draconian measures... Although I understand that repressive methods can not resolve this problem,” he said and added that environment should be created, wherein drug misuse would be socially unacceptable.

100 Years of International Women’s Day: Russia was the Pioneer of Women’s Rights

“The beating was getting more and more severe. In the beginning it was confined to the house. Gradually he stopped caring. He slapped me in front of others and continued to threaten me. Every time he beat me it was as if he was trying to test my endurance, to see how much I could take”. (1)

History of International Women’s Day

International Women’s Day started in the United States of America, launched by a declaration of the Socialist Party of America on February 28th, 1909 using as a basis the need to guarantee women’s rights in an increasingly industrialized society and was taken up by the international community at the first International Women’s Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1910. The horrific and inhumane conditions at the New York Triangle Shirtwaist factory which caused the deaths of 140 garment workers (mostly women) in 1911 provided an added impetus at a time when women were pressing for the right to vote and demonstrations in Russia prior to the 1917 Revolution were the first signs of women’s emancipation in that country, culminating in the declaration by Lenin of a Women’s Day on March 8th; in 1965 it was declared a public holiday by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

“Emotional abuse is worse. You can become insane when you are constantly humiliated and told that you are worthless, you are nothing” (2)

Why March 8th?

Women had been demonstrating for their rights since pre-Classical times (e.g. the sexual strike called by Lysistrata in Ancient Greece, the March on Versailles by Parisian woman calling for “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” in the 1790s). Copenhagen had chosen 19th March for the celebration of an International Women’s Day but in 1913, Russian women chose the last Sunday in February (following the Declaration by the Socialist Party of America in 1909) as the date for their International Women’s Day to call for peace on the eve of the First World War. As Springtime and local customs to give the first flowers to women combined, the end of February/beginning of March began to be the time of year observed by the feminist movements, until in 1917, Russian women called a strike on the last Sunday of February to protest against the War (23d February) in the Julian Calendar; 8th March in the Gregorian.

Toy balloons released into sky in Russian Far East anti-abortion flash mob

Women in Russia, whose population is 142 million, undergo some 1-1.5 million abortions annually in line with official statistics.

But the flash mob participants released toy balloons to the sound of a bell ringing each six seconds, which they said was due to unofficial statistics, in line with which an unborn child dies in Russia during an abortion each six seconds, which is four-five times the official figures.

The flash mob ended when all available toy balloons were released into the sky.

"Today we are holding a youth action entitled Silent Scream against abortions and we consider an abortion to be a murder. We... want to address women and say: 'Don't darken your soul with the murder of your own child'. An abortion is inadmissible, especially in this country that is experiencing a demographic crisis," an organizer said.

Silent Scream is the name of a documentary dating back to 1983 showing the abortion of a 12-week fetus. Abortion opponents use the film as proof illustrating their viewpoint.

A recent United Nations report indicates that the Russian population will fall from 142 million in 2008 to 116 million by 2050 unless action is taken to reverse current trends.

Russia has implemented a raft of policies as part of efforts to arrest the decline, which has accelerated since the collapse of the Soviet Union and ensuing economic hardships, aiming to keep the numbers at 142-143 million people by 2015 and ensure an increase to 145 million by 2025.

President Dmitry Medvedev, who oversaw ambitious welfare projects driven by a recent economic boom as first deputy premier, has spearheaded measures to support foster families, develop preschool education, and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Programs the government has launched to tackle the demographic crisis include incentive payments for second births. Posters like those depicting a young woman with three babies and reading "Love for your nation starts with love for family" have been widespread.

Russia says alleged passenger train bomber killed

In footage shown on Russian television, Federal Security Service director Alexander

Bortnikov made the report to President Dmitry Medvedev.

Bortnikov said Alexander Tikhomirov, a Caucasus rebel ideologue who went by the *nom de guerre* of Said Buryatsky, was among eight insurgents killed in a police operation this week in the hamlet of Ekazhevo.

Bortnikov said Saturday that evidence found after the attack directly linked Tikhomirov and the other dead militants to last November's bombing of a Moscow-St. Petersburg express train, in which 26 people died.

Natural population decline in Russia down by 31% in 2009 — Putin

The natural decline of Russia's population in 2009 went down by almost a third, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Tuesday.

"We have the following final data: birth rate grew by 2.9%, death rate reduced by 3%. The population's natural decline went down by 31%," Putin told the inner Cabinet.

She added that the government was still waiting for final figures on immigration and emigration, but preliminary numbers showed that Russia's population increased during 2009 - the first gains since 1995.

In January, government proposed new measures to fight the low birthrate and dwindling population that experts warn endangers economic growth, the country's role in world affairs and even its territorial integrity.

A recent United Nations report indicates that the Russian population will fall from 142 million in 2008 to 116 million by 2050 unless action is taken to reverse current trends.

Russia has implemented a raft of policies as part of efforts to arrest the decline, which has accelerated since the collapse of the Soviet Union and ensuing economic hardships, aiming to keep the numbers at 142-143 million people by 2015 and ensure an increase to 145 million by 2025.

President Dmitry Medvedev, who oversaw ambitious welfare projects driven by a recent economic boom as first deputy premier, has spearheaded measures to support foster families, develop preschool education, and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Programs the government has launched to tackle the demographic crisis include incentive payments for second births. Posters like those depicting a young woman with three babies and reading "Love for your nation starts with love for family" have been widespread.

Russia proposes new measures to boost birthrate

Speaking at a session of the Presidential council on demographic policy, Health Minister Tatyana Golikova said 14-year-olds will undergo more intense medical checks at school

starting next year, which could help reveal possible reproduction problems and start treatment on time.

"More intense medical examinations of teenagers are planned to start from 2011 with the goal of examining their reproductive function and recommending individual medical courses, which would identify and treat reproduction problems," Golikova said.

A recent United Nations report indicates that the Russian population will fall from 142 million in 2008 to 116 million by 2050 unless action is taken.

Russia has sought to take action against the decline, which has accelerated since the collapse of the Soviet Union and ensuing economic hardships, to keep the numbers at 142-143 million people by 2015 and ensure an increase to 145 million by 2025.

Golikova said infant mortality in the country declined 6.9% in January-November 2009 compared to the same period in 2008, and maternal mortality rate decreased 18.5% between 2005 and 2008, although the rates remain high in Chechnya and Dagestan, and some other regions.

However, she said illnesses among schoolchildren rose 9.3% in the past decade, with more than 20% of schoolchildren having chronic illnesses and over 50% of teenagers having health problems that could affect their reproduction ability in the future.

Golikova also highlighted growing alcohol consumption and smoking habits among children.

The opening of more family kindergartens and pre-school facilities will spur the birthrate by 4%-5% and create jobs, the minister said. Many women in Russia stay at home after the birth of a child because of the lack of quality daycare facilities and remain on maternity leave for up to three years.

Golikova said ahead of the session on Monday that the birthrate could rise by as much as 20-30% through reducing abortions, citing gloomy statistics for 2008 - 1,714 newborns against 1,234 abortions.

President Dmitry Medvedev, who oversaw ambitious welfare projects driven by a recent economic boom as first deputy premier, has spearheaded measures to support foster families, develop preschool education, and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Programs the government has launched to tackle the demographic crisis include incentive payments for second births. Posters like those depicting a young woman with three babies and reading "Love for your nation starts with love for family" have been widespread.

Demonstrators in Moscow demand police reform

Human rights activists held a sanctioned rally calling for police reform on downtown Moscow's Triumphalnaya Square on Saturday.

Russian ombudsman Vladimir Lukin was among the protesters. They demanded the dismissal of the Interior Ministry's top officials and the end to persecutions of honest policemen.

The police closely watched the rally covered by some 60 journalists.

The police spokesman told RIA Novosti that no incidents occurred during the rally.

"No one was detained and taken to police stations," he said.

Lev Ponomaryov, head of the For Human Rights organization, said earlier that the meeting was originally due to be held on February 28, but was postponed because of a "misunderstanding" with the Moscow authorities over the venue.

Following a series of brutal crimes by police officers, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has moved to introduce tougher punishment for police found guilty of crimes, submitting a bill to parliament imposing harsher sentences than for civilians convicted of similar offences. The president announced in December extensive Interior Ministry reforms.

The reputation of the Russian police force has declined dramatically in recent years. In just over 18 months, Russian police officers have been convicted or charged with burning a suspect to death, shooting sprees and rape.

Internet is examination for human race - Patriarch Kirill

"Nowadays the Internet is a kind of laboratory where a individual should be formed and where a character should be sharpened," Patriarch Kirill said during his meeting with Moscow students.

He also said the Internet has become "an examination on our authenticity, an enormous power challenge" as in that space one can easily indulge in depravity, lies, vulgarity, and the desire to lash out with aggression and impunity.

"Just like a nuclear bomb, [the Internet] may lead the human race to collapse or protect it," Patriarch Kirill continued.

In February, Russian communication service providers agreed to protect Internet users from child pornography using all legal means, as well as fighting against child pornography production, storage and trafficking on the web.

Russian tourists warned about visiting Bangkok

Russia has cautioned its nationals against visiting Bangkok in the next couple weeks due to upcoming opposition protests in Thailand, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday.

"On March 11 through 23, anti-government opposition protests have been planned in Thailand, primarily in the historical center of Bangkok and near government buildings," the ministry said.

No information is available on how many Russian tourists are in Thailand or how many were planning to visit.

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship is planning to have up to 1 million people out in the streets on March 14 in anti-government protests in Bangkok and continue the demonstrations until the Abhisit Vejjajiva government falls.

Teen Idol Corey Haim Dies of Drug Overdose

Corey Haim, eighties teen idol, died Wednesday morning of an apparent drug overdose, according to Los Angeles police.

He was found unresponsive at his Oakwood apartment around 3:30 a.m., according to *KTLA-TV*. His mother was at the apartment at the time of his death.

The actor, who has struggled with drug addiction, was pronounced dead at Providence St. Joseph's Medical Center in Burbank, *New York Daily News* reports.

Haim shot to fame in the '80s after starring in several teen films, including *The Lost Boys*, *Lucas* and *License to Drive*. Most notably, he collaborated numerous times with Corey Feldman, and the pair were dubbed "The Two Coreys." They starred in an A&E reality show with that name from 2007 to 2008.

But Haim struggled with drug addiction for several years, *People Magazine* reported.

Editorial: Environmentalists United in Opposition to Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill

Many major Russian country-wide and regional environmental organizations joined together yesterday to prevent the launch of the Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill (BPPM) and pollution of the unique lake.

The "For Baikal!" coalition included the domestic branches of Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Moscow-based Biodiversity Conservation Center and conservationists from St. Petersburg, Siberia, Karelia and other parts of the country. They call for canceling a government decree allowing inadequately cleaned waste runoff to be dumped in the world's largest freshwater lake. If their demands are not heard in Moscow they will turn to international institutions: The unique ecosystem of Lake Baikal was included on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites in 1996.

This protest is interesting because these environmentalists already have experience of achieving the cancellation of decisions made in the higher echelons of power. In 2006, Vladimir Putin listened to their arguments and thousands of protests, and diverted the route of the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline from the shores of Lake Baikal.

Their ideas are shared by a large part of the population of the Baikal region. Irkutsk region's major regional tour operators also demand the launch to be canceled. "Tourists do not go to places that smell of Methanethiol!" (a gas with a sharp smell of sulfur emitted in the production of cellulose — Ed.) heads of the largest travel agencies said in their letter to the president, prime minister and governor Dmitry Mezentsev. More than 39,000 people had signed a petition to Dmitry Medvedev on the web site Babr.ru yesterday demanding the order for the plant's launch to be canceled.

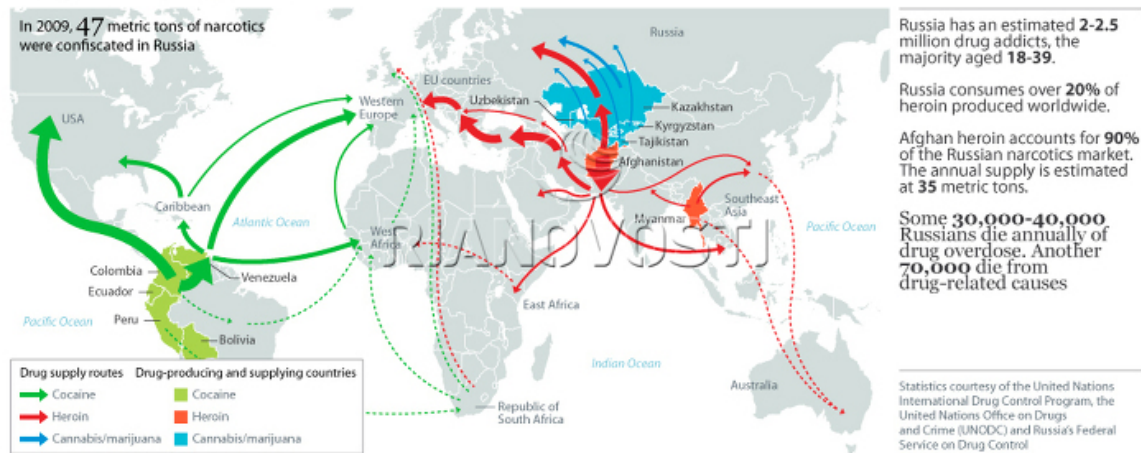
Moscow won't be in haste to comment on Russian language in Ukraine

"I would not like to comment on this at the moment," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said at a press conference in Moscow on Thursday.

"Let us not run too fast. Let us wait until all executive agencies have been formed in Ukraine and the new government's policies have been shaped in general," the diplomat said.

Global drug trafficking

Main global drug supply routes



Russia has an estimated 2-2.5 million drug addicts, the majority aged 18-39.

Russia consumes over 20% of heroin produced worldwide.

Afghan heroin accounts for 90% of the Russian narcotics market. The annual supply is estimated at 35 metric tons.

Some 30,000-40,000 Russians die annually of drug overdose. Another 70,000 die from drug-related causes

