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Summary:

Political:

START-2: It's now or never

When Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama meet in Prague on Thursday to sign the nuclear arms treaty to replace START, they will have already achieved more for Russian-US relations than was accomplished in the whole eight years of George W. Bush's presidency.

When will Russia's Caucasus war end?

As the death toll from the last week's Moscow metro and other terrorist attacks rises to nearly 60, the upsurge in violence has brought home to everyone in Russia that the war in the North Caucasus is not over by a long shot.

Russia Wants Somali Pirates Held Accountable

Russia's ambassador to the United Nations has introduced a draft resolution to the Security Council calling for new measures to ensure Somali pirates are punished when they are caught.

U.S. Needs Russia's Help with Iran

The United States has claimed to “reset” its relationship with Russia but it will test its former Cold War nemesis in asking for help when dealing with Iran. In signing an updated nuclear non-proliferation agreement, the two powerhouse nations are leading the effort in nuclear disarmament, but the U.S. is hoping for a united front with respect to Iran sanctions. President Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev will sit down for a bilateral meeting prior to the treaty signing in which the main topic of discussion will be Iran.

Why Does Russia Buy Military Hardware from Other Countries?

News reports about Russia's intentions to purchase arms from abroad have become frequent recently. Russia purchased unmanned aircraft from Israel, a destroyer from France, small arms and aviation equipment from other countries, etc. What is happening

in the Russian defense industry? Why does Russia have to purchase military hardware from abroad if it takes one of the leading positions on the international market of arms exports?

Critics uneasy about Russian concessions in arms-control deal

As President Obama prepares to sign a landmark arms-control treaty with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a chorus of skeptics here is quietly expressing concerns that Moscow has conceded too much in the deal.

Obama administration may send U.S.-Russia arms treaty to Congress by late April

The Obama administration plans to send the new arms-control treaty package with Russia to Congress by the end of April, hoping for ratification by year's end, officials said Monday as they laid out details of the proposed agreement.

Russia's military airbase in Kyrgyzstan put on high alert

Due to the unrest in Bishkek military servicemen at the airbase in Kant have been put on high alert. Permission to leave the base has been restricted for the servicemen.

Russia rejects involvement with unrest in Kyrgyzstan in strongest terms

Russian Prime Minister and a top Foreign Ministry official have said any suggestions that Russia could be involved in the disturbances in Kyrgyzstan were false. *"We would like to express our complete perplexity in connection with the falsified news that is filling the media now. They are unprincipled, groundless falsehood,"* announced Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin.

India has not made offer to Russia to buy Soyuz-TMA: Isro

India has not made any offer to Russia to purchase Soyuz-TMA spacecraft to undertake the country's own human space flight slated for 2015-16, a top space department official said. "No, that's all what the newspapers write," Indian Space Research Organisation chairman K Radhakrishnan told *PTI* in Bangalore on reports in a section of the Russian media which talked about the "offer".

Russian-U.S. disarmament pact: highlights

Russia and the United States signed on Thursday a new pact on the reduction of strategic offensive weapons to replace the START 1 treaty, which expired in December. The document, signed by presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama, is expected to bring Moscow and Washington to a new level of cooperation in the areas of nuclear disarmament and arms control.

Medvedev approves changes to economic crime law in Russia

President Dmitry Medvedev has signed into law amendments to legislation on economic crimes that should increase the use of bail for suspects awaiting trial and cut abuse of the system, the Kremlin said.

Plane Crash Kills Polish President: A Blow to Russia-Poland Relations

The president of Poland was killed in a plane crash on Saturday in western Russia, setting off a new cycle of grievances between Russia and Poland on a day that was supposed to serve the cause of reconciliation between them. President Lech Kaczynski, his wife and some of his top security officials were among the 96 people killed in the crash. As the fuselage of the Soviet-made Tupelov airplane (operated by a Polish airliner) still smoldered in forest near the city of Smolensk, the grim irony of their deaths became clear to the stunned Polish nation: Their president had been on his way to Russia to commemorate the massacre of tens of thousands of Poles, who had been executed on the order of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin in 1940 in those same forests in the region of Smolensk.

Russia Recognizes New Kyrgyz Leadership

The sudden revolution in Kyrgyzstan prompted some nasty speculation about posturing by Moscow and Washington, just as Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama signed a long-awaited nuclear reduction pact Thursday meant to bolster their military cooperation.

Economic:

Should Russian bankers' bonuses be capped?

Editorial & Cmments: I think the state should strictly limit bonuses in the banks that have received assistance from the government, especially those owned by the state.

Russian markets ride oil price wave

Russia's exchanges threatened to hit their highest level since August 2008, giving a boost to companies coming back to Russia's IPO market after two high-profile deferrals.

Russia Targets Local Debt Market on Stronger Ruble (Update1)

The government had originally planned to cover half of its borrowing needs on the local market and half abroad, Pankin said. The world's biggest energy supplier is returning to international debt markets for the first time since 1998, when it defaulted on \$40 billion

of domestic bonds. Pankin last year said the government may need to sell “considerably” less than the \$17.8 billion in foreign-currency debt initially planned as higher oil prices reduced its borrowing need.

Israel was offered to raise turkeys in Russia

The Sverdlovsk Oblast authorities offered Israeli businessmen to take part in the turkey meat production. The project worth about 24 million Euro has been presented at the Russian-Israeli business forum.

Russian-Arab cooperation forum to be held in Moscow by yearend

The first Russian-Arab cooperation forum will be held in the capital of Russia, Moscow, by the end of 2010, a diplomat from the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Russia Commercial Construction Market Data & Forecast to 2014 - new market Analysis released

Russia Commercial Construction Market Data & Forecast to 2014 - a new market research report on companiesandmarkets.com

Social:

Russian scientists discover new element

A joint Russian-US project has created a new 117-proton element, provisionally called ununseptium, making the second heaviest substance created thus far.

Russian women fight for top jobs

Is the feminist dream viable in Russia? After Deborah Spar, president of New York's Barnard College, came to Moscow to deliver a lecture on the role women can play in social and political leadership, the situation for ordinary women here remains somewhat removed from much of what she hopes for.

For Moscow's Ethnic Minorities, A Fresh Sense Of Fear

Being an ethnic minority in the Russian capital can be a stressful experience even in ordinary times. But after Monday's double attack in the Moscow metro, Moscow residents from the Caucasus and Central Asia are especially on edge. In the aftermath of this week's twin suicide bombings in Moscow, Uzlipat Gebekova is very careful about what she wears in public.

Observers: Corruption hits Russian security

On the day a suicide bomber killed two police officers in the Russian republic of Ingushetia, a leading independent journalist in Moscow said the Kremlin will never defeat terrorism if it does not end corruption in law enforcement agencies.

Amnesty International: "Defensive jihad of Muslims against the infidels is a legitimate means of struggle"

A conference in Saudi Arabia this week ended with a condemnation of the so-called "terrorism" and appeals for Muslims to reject "extremism", but it also recommended that all Muslim governments apply Sharia (Islamic law) in all aspects of life.

Over 4,000 Russian inmates died in 2009 – official

There are currently 861,867 people imprisoned across Russia. The country's prisons are notorious for their overcrowding and the high incidence of infectious diseases.

Washington welcomes Russia, Poland jointly commemorating Katyn massacre

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Wednesday welcomed a joint participation by Russian and Polish prime ministers in commemorating the massacre of Polish prisoners by Soviet security service in 1940.

Detailed Report:

Political:

START-2: It's now or never

But that will only be part of Obama's work. As if dealing with the financial crisis, health care legislation and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were not enough, he will have to deal with an increasingly truculent US Congress in trying to get the new START treaty ratified.

And he will also be on the clock: if the ratification doesn't happen this summer, his current majorities in Congress may be lost in mid-term elections this fall, leaving the treaty high and dry if Republicans - always ready to indulge in Russia-bashing - choose to block the legislation.

The stakes are indeed high: If Moscow and Washington can break the logjam by doing a symbolic deal over nuclear weapons, the way could be open to cooperation in other key areas of foreign policy, such as combating the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran and defusing the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But if the deal doesn't get through Congress in time, the window of opportunity could snap shut.

That puts a lot of responsibility on Obama's shoulders, but could also be seen by some of his enemies (and counterparts here) as an opportunity to exact concessions on other issues.

The issue of US missile defence systems in Europe could yet prove Obama's Achilles heel. If he gives in to Russian demands to drop these plans, he will face a backlash from Republicans (and some Democrats) in Congress. If he talks too tough in defence of missile deployment, the Kremlin may scupper the deal, claiming that lawmakers in Russia's loyal State Duma can't stomach it.

So while April 8 is a real milestone for Russian-US relations, it may yet be seen as the high water-mark before the opportunity sl

When will Russia's Caucasus war end?

This raises two key questions: How near (or far) are the Russian authorities from tackling the terrorist threat, and what effect will the return of terror to Moscow have on society?

From the authorities' reactions to the Moscow metro bombings, it would seem that they have no "silver bullet" to wipe out the terrorist groups, regardless of the tough statements by Premier Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev to "dredge the sewers" and get "more brutal" on the terrorists, respectively.

The experience of the last two decades has shown that federal security services can claim success by killing particular rebel leaders, such as Dzhokhar Dudayev in 1996, Aslan Maskhadov in 2004 and Shamil Basayev in 2006 - but each new leader and their followers end up becoming more radical than the last.

The latest leader of the insurgency, Doku Umarov, is a prime example of this radicalisation. The outbreak of the first Chechen war, in 1994, saw Umarov training as an engineer in Moscow who did not even know how to observe Muslim prayer traditions. His rise through the ranks in the second war, and the mutation of the rebels' struggle from one for Chechen independence into one for a Muslim caliphate of the North Caucasus, based on reactionary Sharia law, was propelled by the waves of brutality meted out by both sides in the conflict.

As security sweep operations and alleged torture - first by federal forces, and later by forces loyal to Chechen warlord-turned-president Ramzan Kadyrov - became ever more brutal, the conflict radicalised wider layers of society in the region.

Whereas the rebels' influence was centred on Chechnya in the 1990s, now it extends throughout Dagestan, Ingushetia and other North Caucasus Muslim republics.

An indication of how the revenge cycle is deepening could be seen in the video claim of responsibility for the Moscow bombings reportedly made by Umarov last week. The rebel leader said the attacks were revenge for the killing of four young Ingush men out

picking garlic in the woods, and the maiming of their corpses, during a security operation that also saw 18 of Umarov's men killed by federal forces.

And as the supply of radicalised young Muslim men heading for the mountains shows no sign of drying up, neither do the numbers of so-called 'black widows' being recruited as potential suicide bombers.

Press reports in the last few days have identified the two metro bombers as 17-year-old Dzhennet Abdurakhamanova - the widow of rebel fighter Umalat Magomedov, who was killed by federal forces on New Year's Eve - and Maryam Magomedova, a 28-year-old computer science teacher from Dagestan.

On Moscow's side, the tactics in dealing with the insurgency have become more sophisticated - and expensive - but they have also exacted a bigger price: in mirror-like fashion, they have also led to a brutalisation of wider layers of Russian society.

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of federal troops - conscripted and contracted into the war - went through this brutalisation, and after their tours of duty often wound up working as policemen or security guards.

Russian public opinion, as the insurgents' strategy increasingly included terrorist attacks against civilians in Moscow and elsewhere, became ever-hardened against the rebels, and was fed by a constant diet of nationalist media coverage that has tarred all people from the Caucasus with the same brush in the eyes of many Russians.

The ability of the authorities to stop terrorist attacks has been a bitter battleground in the media this last week, with the State Duma speaker, Boris Gryzlov, linking mainstream newspapers Vedomosti and Moskovsky Komsomolets - both politically loyal to the authorities - to terrorists, because they ran articles critical of official responses to terrorism.

While Medvedev said immediately after the March 29 bombings that the government would not use the attacks to restrict civil liberties, the worry is widespread that new anti-terrorist measures will catch the innocent as well as the guilty.

By the end of last week, Medvedev was talking tougher, saying that there was a need to create new laws that would criminalise anyone who gave any kind of aid or help to terrorist suspects - a policy that could backfire and push wider layers of society in the North Caucasus towards supporting Islamic insurgents.

Medvedev's comments on April 2 came two days after hundreds of opposition activists were violently dispersed by OMON troops when trying to hold an unsanctioned protest in the centre of Moscow. It remains to be seen whether the authorities will use the latest wave of terrorist attacks to crack down on opposition movements, or whether this wish to find convenient scapegoats will subside.

Russia Wants Somali Pirates Held Accountable

Vitaly Churkin on April 6 called on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to produce a report in three months on ways to strengthen the international legal system on piracy:

"We feel that one of the weak links in the entire setup, with all the energy which is being expended by the international community, with navies of various countries including Russian naval vessels off the coast of Somalia, one of the weak links is the legal process which would allow us to be sure that there is no impunity once pirates are caught off the coast of Somalia," Churkin said.

Currently, catching pirates is easier than convicting them.

The Somali pirates operate at great distances off the Horn of Africa, sometimes as much as 2,000 kilometers from their homes in Somalia.

When they are caught, they cannot be returned to their homes for trial, because Somali is a failed state riven by civil war.

So, due to the uncertainty over which country has jurisdiction over crimes in the open ocean, the pirates are frequently released instead.

Legal Hurdles:

Even when they are kept in custody, Churkin said, there is no certainty the pirates will be punished severely. That is because different countries approach the crime of piracy differently.

"Some countries have more problems than others because legal systems of some countries match the Anglo-Saxon legal system," Churkin said. "For some countries including Russia there are procedural and other legal problems. So all those issues we hope will be addressed in the report of the secretary-general if this resolution is passed."

The uncertainty of clear and severe punishment is widely thought to embolden Somali pirates to continue seizing commercial ships, despite tough new efforts by many countries to patrol the seas.

NATO, the European Union, China, India, Russia, and the United States have all sent warships to fight the Somali pirates, who hijacked 68 ships last year and extorted an estimated \$60 million in ransom.

Most often, pirates nabbed in the process of trying to intercept commercial vessels are taken to Kenya to await trial. Today there are more than 135 Somalis being held in

Kenyan jails, facing punishments of up to life in prison if convicted.

But many of these prisoners may yet go free because it can be very difficult to prove that armed men at sea are indeed planning to commandeer ships.

Most pirates claim they are merely fishermen. And bringing witnesses against them is complicated by the fact that the witnesses themselves are seamen who roam the globe and often cannot return for the trial.

International Threat

Russia's piracy initiative came as a surprise at the Security Council, because until now Moscow has not been a leader on the issue. That is despite the council's involvement for over a year and a half on how to rein in piracy off the Horn of Africa.

But Churkin said the piracy problem is growing and has become a major international threat. It is exactly the type of a problem, he said, that the UN is mandated to deal with.

Churkin also pointed to the instability in Somalia as directly contributing to the piracy problem.

He said there is a clear link between the spread of piracy off the Somali coast and the weak governance of the country. He said that if Somalia gets on a more stable political footing and can develop its own efficient coast guard, this will certainly affect the issue of piracy as well.

The introduction of the draft resolution is only the start of a lengthy process that will involve a number of legal and maritime experts before the resolution is put to a vote in the council.

But, overall, the proposal appears to have significant support among council members.

Japan's ambassador, Yukio Takasu, who is also the council's president for April, said the Russian proposal is timely and may gain quick support:

"The initial reaction was a very positive one, generally speaking, but at the same time comment was made by several members, for instance, you cannot just isolate piracy from root causes, situation on the ground," Takasu said. "So, therefore, that issue must be taken up in the context of the overall situation."

He also cautioned that the new Russian initiative shouldn't overlap with the existing efforts within the contact group.

One of the options that has been much discussed within the UN Contact Group on Piracy -- the world body's task force for the problem -- is to create a special court in one of the neighboring countries that will try all the pirates.

But some Contract Group members have expressed doubts over whether that approach can work because of the logistics involved, and because of the fragile political and economic balance in the countries neighboring Somalia.

The UN Contact Group on Piracy, which was established in January 2009, includes representatives of the five permanent Security Council members -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States -- as well as the African Union, the European Union, and NATO.

U.S. Needs Russia's Help with Iran

Moscow has a long-standing diplomatic and trade relationship with Tehran and has been reluctant to sign onto any sanctions. Earlier this week, Sergei Rakkov, Russia's chief negotiator on Iran nuclear talks, told the Interfax news agency "we still have not lost hope for a solution to the Iranian nuclear problem through dialogue with Iran."

Iran has adamantly denied it is developing nuclear weapons and insists its nuclear enrichment program is for civilian use only. The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – Russia, Britain, China, France and the United States – plus Germany have been involved in constant talks to try and end a nuclear standoff. While China has been the most hesitant member of the P5+1 group, experts believe that Washington needs to negotiate Iran sanctions, first with Russia and secondly with China. Andrew Kuchins of the Center for Strategic and International Studies says "the hope has always been that you get the Russians and that'll help to bring the Chinese along."

The Obama administration has long proposed acting against Iran as a "unified international community" but strong sanctions have yet to be put in place against the country and President Obama admits not all countries are on board with sanctions. Last Thursday, President Obama called Chinese President Hu-Jintao telling him their two countries needed to work together "to ensure that Iran lives up to its international obligations."

Both Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Chinese President Hu-Jintao will be in Washington next week for President Obama's nuclear summit.

Why Does Russia Buy Military Hardware from Other Countries?

Ruslan Pukhov, the director of the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, believes that the import of arms is an ancient tradition in the history of the human civilization.

"Arms imports have centuries of history. The Russian history of the imports of arms started practically simultaneously with the appearance of the Russian State. Ivan III the Great, who established centralized Russia, was purchasing small arms from Europe, especially from Denmark. Sweden was Russia's major source for arms, especially

cannons, during the second half of the 17th century. Russia continued importing arms on the threshold of the war with Japan. Russia's best vessels of the Pacific Navy were built in France, the USA and Denmark. During World War I Russia was purchasing practically all types of arms from other countries because the domestic industry was unable to produce them in required quantities.

“Things changed after the establishment of the Soviet Union. The USSR was a large economy and could afford self-sufficiency in the defense industry. The USSR was in an opposition to the Western world and could not tolerate any sort of dependence on the West. However, the Soviet administration had to purchase hardware and spare parts from foreign states anyway, even from capitalist countries.

“In the beginning of the 1960s, the Soviet Union decided to launch the production of training aircraft for the countries of the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia. The USSR was purchasing large amphibious warfare ships from Poland. In the beginning of the 1980s, the Soviet Union had to purchase large Bridgestone tyres from Japan. The tyres, 3 meters in diameter, were bought for a missile complex because the Soviet industry could not produce the tyres of such a large diameter.

“As for the USA, this country spends billions of dollars on purchasing arms from other countries. The USA mostly cooperates with its NATO allies at this point, Britain first and foremost. It purchased direction-lift Harrier planes from Britain and cooperated with this country in the development of the fifth-generation F-35 fighter jet.

“There is no country in the world that exports best products of its defense industry. This is a general rule on the arms market. Russia made an exception from this rule in the beginning of the 1990s when it started to export Su-30MKI and MiG-29CMT fighter jets.

Critics uneasy about Russian concessions in arms-control deal

The concerns, fueled by lingering suspicions and anxieties about the vast superiority of U.S. conventional forces, will do little to impede the signing of the treaty in Prague on Thursday. But they will render difficult further progress toward Obama's goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

In a sign of the Kremlin's own unease about how the treaty will be received in Russia, neither Medvedev nor Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has uttered a word about it in public, even as Obama called a news conference to celebrate the conclusion of the talks and followed up this week by unveiling the findings of his administration's review of U.S. nuclear weapons policy.

Criticism of the new treaty has focused on its failure to set any limits on U.S. plans to build a missile defense shield in Europe -- long a point of friction with Russia -- as well as a change in rules that will make it easier for the Pentagon to keep nuclear warheads in storage and quickly rebuild the U.S. arsenal if necessary. Others have delivered an even

broader critique, questioning whether the entire post-Cold War enterprise of nuclear disarmament, including the now-expired 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, has served Russia's interests.

"The departing point or assumption of the critics is that the previous treaty was detrimental to Russian security, and the new treaty, which contains more concessions of Russia to the United States, will be still more detrimental," said Alexei Arbatov, an arms-control scholar at the Carnegie Moscow Center and former member of the Russian parliament.

Limit on warheads

The treaty calls for both nations to cut their deployed arsenals to 1,550 nuclear warheads and 700 missile silos and bombers each, with an additional 100 such launchers permitted to be in repair or other noncombat status.

On the ground, experts say, the treaty will ultimately require a U.S. reduction of about 100 launchers, the equivalent of two squadrons of Minuteman III missiles. Russia deploys fewer launchers than the ceiling set by the treaty.

The limit on warheads should result in cuts by both nations. How deep the reductions will be is unclear, though, because of a new provision that counts bombers as carrying one warhead each regardless of how many are stored on their bases or they are capable of carrying.

The overall deal may seem like a generous one for Russia, and given the Kremlin's tight grip on the political system, ratification of the treaty will no doubt prove easier in the Russian Duma than in the U.S. Senate, where its prospects remain uncertain. But Russian analysts note two substantial concessions by the Kremlin.

Unlike the original START, they say, the new treaty won't count the maximum number of warheads each missile can carry, thus allowing Washington to make cuts by removing and storing warheads while keeping missiles in their silos. That means the United States could quickly rebuild its forces and dwarf the Russian arsenal, which relies on missiles that have less room for extra warheads.

"The good news is that your stockpile will be reduced, but the bad news is that you will have more warheads that could be redeployed in six to 12 months," said Sergei Rogov, director of the Institute for the U.S. and Canadian Studies.

A more obvious retreat by Moscow relates to missile defense, which Putin publicly insisted as recently as December be included in the treaty. Although the Kremlin applauded Obama's decision to scrap President George W. Bush's version of the system, Russian officials have since voiced concerns about the regional shield Obama proposed instead, noting U.S. assertions that it would eventually use interceptors fast enough to strike a Russian intercontinental missile.

Sergei Brezkun, a professor at the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, said missile defense and a reduced Russian nuclear arsenal would embolden the United States to take dangerous risks. "When a person gets an advantage, he can go too far," Brezkun said. "Unfortunately, further cuts would not only leave Russia more vulnerable, but strategic stability in the world will be more vulnerable."

Talks on tactical weapons

The Obama administration has said that it wants the next stage of negotiations to include tactical nuclear weapons, of which the United States has about 500 in its active arsenal and Russia about 2,000.

But Russian officials say that such talks must be linked to NATO's superior conventional forces, as well as missile defense, and that the United States must first withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe, where some allies want them to remain as a symbol of U.S. commitment to defending the continent.

Pavel Podvig, an arms-control researcher at Stanford University, said a new round of talks trying to balance U.S. forces against Russian ones would only open "a can of worms." If the new treaty fosters enough trust, though, the two nations might agree that tactical nuclear weapons have no military value and treat them as a safety issue, he said. "You have to approach it as securing something that is dangerous and useless," Podvig said.

Experts say further nuclear cuts would certainly face resistance from the Russian military. But Alexander Golts, an author and military analyst, said there is a growing consensus within the leadership that Russia's vast arsenal far exceeds its needs and is draining funds needed for conventional arms that might actually be used in a war.

"Military people who are professional know that, with or without this treaty, Russia has to reduce its arsenal," he said. "All these conservatives talking about the treaty not being good for Russia, it's just militaristic rhetoric. It has nothing to do with reality."

Obama administration may send U.S.-Russia arms treaty to Congress by late April

Ellen Tauscher, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, said that work was still being done in Geneva on the treaty, including details on inspections and exchanges of data.

Despite the administration's hopes for Senate ratification this year, several Republican senators have expressed concern about moving too quickly on a vote.

Tauscher said the United States and Russia are working on "unilateral statements" that each side would attach to the treaty. The statements would become part of the package reviewed by the Senate and Russian Duma before ratification. Such statements, including

some attached by both countries' legislative bodies, have no effect on the treaty itself but can be useful in solving issues outside of the treaty.

For example, in 1991 the Soviets attached a unilateral statement to the START I treaty that Moscow would be able to withdraw if it deemed that the U.S. missile defense program upset strategic stability. In response, the United States put together its own statement saying Moscow's position was without legal foundation.

Tauscher said that the new treaty would not affect the administration's plan to phase in a missile system to protect Europe and the United States against Iranian missiles. She said there "are no limits or constraint to our ability to put the phased approach forward." The plan would phase in over a 10-year period and, Tauscher said, could involve interceptor missiles deployed "over 2011 in the sea in the Mediterranean, 2015 in Romania, 2018 in Poland," and with land-based radars elsewhere.

The Russians have said they view the shields as a threat. But Tauscher called it a "limited system . . . not formed against Russia," adding that Russian missiles could "overwhelm a system like [this] in seconds."

Tauscher said the data on exchange of telemetry, the electronic signals, from testing of new missiles were less than the earlier treaty, but "over time it's been clear it's not necessary," given the new regime.

She also said that under the new treaty the United States would not have staff at the factory in Votkinsk, where Russian missiles are made. "We do not have the same kind of oversight at Votkinsk as we did," Tauscher said, but she added that inspections, data exchanges and "national technical means" -- meaning U.S. intelligence satellites -- would fill the gap.

She also said the treaty would have no effect on the United States if it decided to put a conventional warhead on either submarine-launched or ground-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles as part of the new global strike concept. That would give the United States the ability to hit a target anywhere in the world -- such as a terrorist camp -- within an hour without having to turn to the nuclear ICBM arsenal.

Russia's military airbase in Kyrgyzstan put on high alert

Russian airbase in Kyrgyzstan has been put on high alert in the wake of an unrest in the Central Asian country that left at least 47 people killed and some 400 injured, a source in the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Protests, initiated in by the country's opposition began in the northwestern Kyrgyz town of Talas on Tuesday spreading to other regions of the country, including the capital

Bishkek, on Wednesday. Opposition has declared that it assumed full power in Kyrgyzstan.

The source added that no incidents have so far been registered near the Russian airbase, which is located some 20 kilometers (12 miles) outside Bishkek.

The airbase in Kant was opened in 2003. Some 250 Russian officers and 150 enlisted personnel from Russia's 5th Air Army are deployed at the base, as well as Su-25 Frogfoot strike aircraft and Mi-8 transport helicopters.

Russia rejects involvement with unrest in Kyrgyzstan in strongest terms

Russia has called on both the Kyrgyz authorities and opposition to come to terms lawfully without violence and bloodshed.

"We're watching intently the current complicated situation in Kyrgyzstan," the diplomat said, adding that the most important thing now is not to let events follow a dramatic scenario and escalate the violence.

Later in the day Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said his nation was completely uninvolved with the Kyrgyz events. *"Neither Russia, nor your humble servant, nor Russian officials have any relation to these events,"* Vladimir Putin said at a press conference in West Russia's Smolensk.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called Wednesday's unrest in Kyrgyzstan an internal affair, but said that its form testified to the extreme degree of people's outrage over the authorities' actions. Medvedev added that at present the priority task was to prevent new casualties and restore the state system. *"Kyrgyzstan has been and will remain Russia's strategic partner and, thus, we will watch the situation developing in this republic with special attention,"* Medvedev's press secretary quoted the president as saying.

India has not made offer to Russia to buy Soyuz-TMA: Isro

Bangalore: Russian reports also said China had received technical documentation on various Soyuz-TM systems and used them to develop its own Shenzhou manned spacecraft.

Radhakrishnan said, "We have a (human space flight) programme," adding, ISRO is going to put two Indians in an orbit around the earth.

"That's our plan. Studies have been conducted. There is a pre-project which is already going on to study some of the critical technologies. And we have a project report which we have given to the Government (for approval)," he said.

ISRO officials said the proposal for undertaking the human space flight to carry humans to a low earth orbit and ensure their safe return to earth has been prepared and submitted to the government for approval.

The space department has already carried out a detailed study on technical and managerial issues related to undertaking manned space missions with an aim to building and demonstrating the country's capability.

The programme envisages development of a fully autonomous orbital vehicle carrying two or three crew-members to a 300 km earth orbit.

ISRO has already developed crew escape system (CES) aerodynamic configuration. Baseline documents have been prepared for astronaut selection and astronaut training.

Baseline configuration document for human centrifuge, spatial disorientation trainer, hypo/hyperbaric chamber, mission simulator and quarantine had also been prepared, officials said.

Russian-U.S. disarmament pact: highlights

The new strategic arms pact stipulates that the number of nuclear warheads is to be reduced to 1,550 on each side over seven years, while the number of delivery vehicles in operation and in reserve must not exceed 800.

According to a White House press release, "warheads on deployed ICBMs and deployed SLBMs count toward this limit and each deployed heavy bomber equipped for nuclear armaments counts as one warhead toward this limit."

The document, which will be valid for 10 years unless superseded by another agreement, stipulates that each side has the right to unilaterally withdraw from the treaty if it decides that any of the provisions of the treaty could lead to an imminent threat to its national security.

In a nod to Moscow's concerns about the Obama administration's plans to deploy a missile-defense system in Eastern Europe, the preamble of the new treaty states that there is a relationship between offensive and defensive weapons.

However, the treaty itself deals only with limits on offensive weapons systems, and Russia has emphasized its right to withdraw if a quantitative and qualitative increase in U.S. strategic missile defense significantly harmed the effectiveness of Russia's nuclear deterrent.

The new pact addresses the return capability of missile launch facilities and heavy bombers, which would lay the legal groundwork for the subsequent elimination of some types of delivery vehicles.

It contains guarantees that strategic submarines and heavy bombers armed with conventional weapons will not be modified to carry nuclear weapons. Russia has been concerned that the United States could circumvent the arms cuts by returning mothballed delivery vehicles to combat use.

The new pact establishes a simplified verification mechanism, which would almost halve verification costs. Russia has in the past bridled at some of the more intrusive elements of the START 1 treaty, which expired on December 5, 2009.

The verification regime includes on-site inspections, data exchanges and notifications.

The White House said the treaty "does not contain any constraints on testing, development or deployment of current or planned U.S. missile defense programs or current or planned United States long-range conventional strike capabilities."

The new treaty also contains an explicit prohibition on the deployment of strategic offensive weapons in third countries.

Russia and the United States began negotiating the deal after the two countries' presidents met in April last year, but the work on the document dragged on, with U.S. plans for missile defense in Europe a particular sticking point.

After the pact is signed, it has to be ratified by the U.S. Senate and both houses of the Russian parliament to come into effect.

A working group of Russia's Federation Council and the U.S. Senate is due to meet in Washington on April 19-21 to discuss the document's ratification.

Medvedev approves changes to economic crime law in Russia

The amendments set a minimum bail of 100,000 rubles (\$3,300) for minor offenses and 500,000 rubles (\$16,600) for serious crimes. Securities and real estate will also be accepted as bail.

The changes also increase six-fold, to 1.5 million rubles (\$50,000) and 6 million rubles (\$200,000), the amount of damage inflicted by serious and very serious economic crimes. It is hoped that this will cut the number of arrests on petty charges and streamline the legal process.

Bail is rarely used in Russia, where suspects can spend two or three years in detention pending trial. Defense lawyers and rights groups say the harsh conditions in pre-trial detention centers are used by law-enforcement officials to intimidate suspects.

Last November, a lawyer representing a London-based hedge fund died in a Moscow jail while awaiting trial on tax evasion charges. Supporters say Sergei Magnitsky was denied access to medical treatment.

Following that and a series of other law-enforcement scandals last year, Medvedev stepped up efforts to reform Russia's criminal justice system.

Plane Crash Kills Polish President: A Blow to Russia-Poland Relations

Blame for the crash has fallen on the pilot, who reportedly ignored warnings from air traffic control and tried to land on Saturday morning in dense fog, snagging the tail of his plane on a tree about a mile from the airport. "The pilot was advised to fly to Moscow or Minsk because of heavy fog, but he still decided to land. No one should have been landing in that fog," an air traffic control official told Reuters, indicating that recklessness may be behind the tragedy. Russian law enforcement officials said they had opened an investigation, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called to express his condolences to Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who reportedly wept upon hearing of the catastrophe on Saturday.

Kaczynski, who became Poland's president in 2005, had been a dogged critic of Putin and Russia's efforts to restore influence over the former Soviet Union. He sparred with the Kremlin over the bans Russia imposed on Polish food imports in recent years, calling them part of a strategy of political blackmail and manipulation. In 2006, he even proposed that the European Union impose sanctions on Russia for its economic bullying in Eastern Europe. His animosity had deep roots. In 1980, he spent nearly a year in prison for "anti-socialist" activities when the Moscow-backed communist government imposed martial law in Poland. After his release, he became a leader of the underground Solidarity movement that campaigned for democratic reform, helping to topple the communist regime.

One of the key initiatives of his career was to achieve greater openness and recognition from Russia about the massacre of Polish officers by the Soviet secret police in 1940. He insisted that the two countries could not build normal ties without achieving reconciliation over these crimes. On Wednesday, Putin made an unprecedented gesture of good will on this issue, becoming the first Russian leader ever to commemorate Stalin's mass executions of Poles alongside a Polish leader. Prime Minister Tusk had flown in to Smolensk that day for the ceremony in the village of Katyn, where most of the 22,000 political murders were carried out by Stalin's NKVD secret police, a forerunner to the KGB.

After the ceremony, which marked the 70th anniversary of the killings at Katyn, Putin gave a controversial explanation of why Stalin had ordered them. He said Stalin was seeking revenge for the death in 1920 of Red Army soldiers in Polish prisoner of war camps, where around 32,000 troops under Stalin's command who had been captured by the Poles died of hunger and disease. "It is my personal opinion that Stalin felt personally responsible for this tragedy, and carried out the executions [of Poles in 1940] out of a sense of revenge," Putin said at a press conference. He also disappointed many in Poland by failing to call the massacres a war crime or to pledge that the perpetrators' names, which are now sealed in Russia's secret archives, would finally be opened to the Poles.

But for most people in Poland and in Russia, Wednesday's ceremony with Tusk was still seen as a remarkable step forward in the process of reconciliation. President Kaczynski was due to arrive on Saturday for another ceremony along with a delegation of more than 80 Polish officials and relatives of the victims of the Katyn massacres. "I hope I get a visa," Kaczynski had joked when announcing the visit. As part of the ceremony, he was due to receive an urn of soil from the forests where the thousands of Polish officers had been executed with a bullet to the base of the neck.

The horrific irony of the crash that cut short this visit was not lost on officials in Russia, who expressed their shock and grief over the incident. "The soul can only shudder from the realization that Katyn has claimed more victims," said Konstantin Kosachyov, head of the foreign affairs committee of Russia's parliament. Mourners in Warsaw had already begun to gather by the presidential palace on Saturday to lay flowers and light candles. The political impact of the crash will likely be felt in Poland for years to come.

Under the constitution, new presidential elections will have to be held, and replacements will also need to be found for the chief of Poland's military and the deputy minister of foreign affairs, as well as scores of other officials who were on that flight. How the tragedy will effect relations between Poland and Russia will depend a lot on how Russia handles the investigation of the crash alongside Polish authorities. For his part, Putin is traveling to Smolensk on Saturday to help oversee the inquiry and meet with Tusk, who has also said he is coming to the scene of the crash. But whatever the investigators find among the wreckage, Poles will now have yet another tragic reason to mourn their countrymen in the forests around Katyn.

Russia Recognizes New Kyrgyz Leadership

Some observers said Moscow won a new ally in strategically valuable Central Asia, while the United States and Europe lost out by keeping silent over ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's increasingly authoritarian rule.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin gave his official blessing to the new leadership in Bishkek by speaking with interim leader Roza Otunbayeva by telephone Thursday.

"It is important that the conversation was held with her in her role as the head of the government of national confidence," Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told Reuters.

The Russian military also dispatched 150 paratroopers to its air base in Kyrgyzstan to protect the families of Russian servicemen, RIA-Novosti reported, citing the General Staff.

Observers agreed that Putin's endorsement would boost the opposition tremendously.

In an interview to Ekho Moskvyy later Thursday, Otunbayeva thanked Russia — and Putin personally — for the "significant help ... exposing this corrupt family regime," referring to criticism of rampant nepotism in Bakiyev's government.

The comments did nothing to ease frustration among the ousted Kyrgyz leadership with Moscow's stance on the violence and subsequent overthrow.

Shortly before being ousted, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov suggested that Moscow had actively worked to undermine his country, accusing Russian media of biased reporting that was unfit to "encourage the growth of friendship between both countries."

"Our intelligence services will have to investigate whether any outside power is influencing the [unrest] in Talas," he said, Interfax reported. The rioting, which swept away the government, started Tuesday in Talas, a town close to the Kazakh border.

The remarks prompted Putin to deny that he or his government played any role. "Neither Russia, nor your humble servant, nor Russian officials have any links whatsoever to these events," Putin told reporters late Wednesday.

Washington, while in no hurry to recognize the new government, was also quick to tamp down speculation that foreign affairs were a factor.

"The people that are allegedly running Kyrgyzstan ... these are all people we've had contact with for many years," Michael McFaul, Obama's top Russia adviser, told reporters in Prague. "This is not some anti-American coup, that we know for sure. And this is not some sponsored-by-the-Russians coup, there's just no evidence of that."

In an interview to Ekho Moskvyy radio on Thursday, Bakiyev defended himself but said he "wouldn't name a specific country" as being involved.

"But without foreign forces, it's essentially impossible to conduct such a coordinated operation," he said.

The coup was "unexpected, both for [Putin] and for me," Bakiyev said, denying that he had been in contact with either Moscow or Washington in the preceding days. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan offered assistance before Wednesday, he said, but he declined the offer.

The theory of foreign instigation hardly squares with observations from reporters in Bishkek, who said the protesters appeared to be leaderless — and some even drunk.

Independent analysts, however, noticed well before the putsch that Bakiyev had come under attack from state-controlled Russian media.

A paper published April 1 by the Jamestown Foundation, a Washington-based think tank, argued that unprecedented criticism in national media in recent weeks showed the Kremlin's frustration with Bakiyev.

“The Russian media might eventually become Bakiyev’s greatest challenge,” the report said.

The paper’s author, Erica Marat, a research fellow at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, said Thursday that it was too early to say Moscow won and Washington lost.

“Obviously Moscow favors some of the opposition leaders and launched a mass media attack against Bakiyev in the past two months. ... But I don’t think Russia in any way helped to organize the spontaneous riots,” she said in e-mailed comments.

Boris Nemtsov, a leader in the Solidarity opposition movement, also said he did not believe that the Kremlin had anything to do with the unrest.

This would be senseless since the governments in both Moscow and Bishkek were equally undemocratic and corrupt, he told The Moscow Times.

“Bakiyev did everything Putin did, but the difference is that he is a beggar while Putin is rich and can keep utility costs low,” Nemtsov said.

The Kyrgyz unrest was sparked by anger over a steep rise in the costs of electricity and housing services.

Yet Bakiyev’s close ties to the United States now seem like a heavy liability for the Obama administration. Last year, the Kyrgyz leader had played Moscow and Washington off each other over the issue of military bases in his country.

First, he promised to close the U.S. air base in Manas in exchange for a \$2 billion loan from Russia and promises of investment to build new hydroelectric power plants.

He soon took a U-turn, however. In the summer, Bakiyev negotiated higher rent for the base, reportedly getting \$170 million from the Obama administration to have the Manas lease extended.

After years of lobbying against the U.S. base, which provides vital logistics for military operations in Afghanistan, Moscow was left with a promise that it could build a second base, in addition to its existing one near Kant.

Experts have called this a worthless promise, not least because the location is in the volatile southern province Osh.

Additionally, Washington found itself in the awkward position of receiving two key officials from the disgraced Kyrgyz leadership this week.

Bakiyev’s son Maxim, who had been seen as a possible successor, arrived Wednesday in the U.S. capital, where he and Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev were to hold official consultations with State Department officials and brief an investment conference.

The consultations were postponed, but there will be some meetings “while the foreign minister is here,” State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said Wednesday, according to a transcript published online.

Most experts agreed Otunbayeva, a Soviet-trained diplomat, would enjoy better relations with Moscow.

“They will move a little closer to Russia, but they will still have to balance ties with Washington,” said Alexei Malashenko, from the Carnegie Moscow Center.

Marat, from the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, said Otunbayeva has also expressed strong pro-American views in the past.

Sergei Markov, a State Duma deputy for the ruling United Russia party and a Kremlin-connected pundit, said talk about winners and losers was useless because there is no zero-sum game for foreign states in Kyrgyzstan.

“Bishkek offers one problem for everyone — it is a failed state and something needs to be done about that,” he told The Moscow Times.

Asked why Washington seemingly misjudged the weakness of Bakiyev’s leadership, Markov said the United States was too focused on keeping its military foothold. “They did not want to understand [the political situation], they just wanted the base,” he said.

Any government in Bishkek will have to balance the interests of at least three powers, Malashenko said: “They are located in a triangle between Moscow, Washington and Beijing,” he said.

China is almost certainly the key foreign player in the country now, although it does not lay open its plans, said Chris Weafer, chief strategist at UralSib.

“Given that their most troublesome province is just next door, and Beijing is keen to keep a buffer between its territory and the increasing number of Islam militants in the Ferghana Valley, you can bet that they are keenly involved,” he said in a research note.

Economic:

Should Russian bankers’ bonuses be capped?

I think the state should strictly limit bonuses in the banks that have received assistance from the government, especially those owned by the state.

These are the largest players in the market, but they are not accountable to private shareholders, are working extremely inefficiently and are involved in corruption schemes.

t the same time managers get paid huge bonuses, despite losses of billions of dollars and falling share prices after IPOs.

Sonya Borodyanskaya

Language teacher

The banks have become victims of their own traps. They have created bonuses in order to attract good specialists and keep them working for them.

So as soon as one bank introduces the initiative to abolish bonuses it instantly loses its best workers. They will give it up for the sake of another bank and better payments.

So even if we decide that it's a bad practice and a lot of money which could have gone for other useful purposes ends up in the pockets of people whose salaries are already above average - nothing can be changed.

Marina Frolova

Accountant

Banks have rapidly increased the interest rate for credit due to the crisis, but I don't think they have suffered from it severely.

When I got a car loan I had to pay a third more than the car's total cost - the loans in this country are not fair at all.

There should be ban on bonuses for bankers if they claim they are in crisis and raise the interest rate even more.

Igor Khrustalyov

Doctor of Philology

It's not a very noble thing to count other people's money, but sometimes the bonuses which the top management of banks and big companies receive are just stunning!

And their regular salaries aren't small! All this doesn't match up with the principles of social justice.

Now in Russia it isn't your education, skills or efforts that determine higher living standards but your place of work.

I think teachers, doctors and other highly educated people deserve much higher pay, but at the moment their salaries are closer to those of lower level personnel at the banks and companies.

Russian markets ride oil price wave

Moscow's MICEX closed at 1480.17 on Friday, riding on a wave of risk appetite following better than expected employment data in the US and oil touching \$85 a barrel.

Venezuelan Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez said Friday during Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's visit that oil had established a floor of \$75 a barrel, and prolonged high energy prices will provide a further boost to Russian equities and the economy.

"Oil futures closed near \$85 p/bbl on Nymex and ICE and now appears to have established a new trading range in the \$80's p/bbl rather than the \$70's [a barrel]," Chris Weafer, chief strategist at Uralsib, wrote in a note to investors.

The winning streak will also be a boost to pharmaceutical producer Protek, which last week announced it was seeking to raise \$400 million in an IPO in May or at the beginning of June. Protek's listing, which will be held jointly on Russia's MICEX and RTS indexes, will also please the country's Federal Financial Markets Service (FFMS), which has come under fire from bankers for restricting access to foreign capital.

At the beginning of the year the FFMS slashed the limit which Russian companies could list abroad by 10 per cent, down to 25 per cent, in an effort to force firms to stay at home and boost Moscow's claim as a financial centre.

Bankers, however, say the new listing laws could do the opposite and send companies abroad in search of fresh international capital to inject into their debt-laden companies. "Either companies will be reluctant to list, or they will have listings in Russia that will not encourage the value of the company to be returned to shareholders," said Tom Mundy, a strategist at Renaissance Capital. "Or they will find ways of creating structures abroad to allow them to list."

While the bankers say they can understand the government's desire to turn Moscow into an international financial hot-spot, the infrastructure and legislation aren't in place to attract sufficient foreign capital to Russia.

The FFMS were unavailable for comment at the time of writing.

Russia Targets Local Debt Market on Stronger Ruble (Update1)

Russia may turn to domestic debt markets to cover more than half this year's financing needs as declining yields and ruble gains make the market more attractive.

“Last year we were concerned that we won’t be able to sell a substantial amount of sovereign bonds on the domestic market,” Deputy Finance Minister Dmitry Pankin said at a conference in Moscow today. “Now we are seeing that it’s not the case and there are ample opportunities on the domestic market. A bigger share of borrowing will take place on the internal market.”

The yield on Russia’s benchmark ruble bond due 2036 dropped to 7.24 percent yesterday, sending the bond’s price to highest in at least a year, according to Bloomberg composite prices.

The extra yield investors demand to own Russian bonds instead of U.S. Treasuries was unchanged today at 1.35 percentage points after rising 2 basis points, or 0.02 percentage point, yesterday, according to JPMorgan Chase & Co.’s EMBI+ Index.

‘Market Is Improving’

“The situation on the ruble market is improving at a considerably faster pace compared to the external market,” Leonid Ignatiev, a fixed-income analyst at Bank of Moscow, said by phone. “So selling more debt at home seems an appropriate reaction to market trends.”

Russia’s government should sell domestic bonds to plug the budget deficit and help boost domestic capital markets even as it prepares to push through its debt sale to international investors, Ksenia Yudaeva, chief economist at OAO Sberbank, the country’s biggest lender, said last month. This will help the domestic fixed income market to grow and become more liquid, she said.

“In the next three to six months the decision is justified because there’s tremendous liquidity in the system, an appreciating ruble and bond yields may match the lowest levels reached before the crisis,” Bank of Moscow’s Ignatiev said. “Demand for quality debt is still relatively high.”

Crude Surge

The government planned to sell 568.4 billion rubles (\$19.4 billion) on the domestic market in 2010, according to this year’s budget. Russia more than doubled domestic sovereign borrowing last year, selling 415.9 billion rubles of domestic debt, the Finance Ministry said in a Jan. 14 report. Domestic borrowing was at 171.6 billion rubles in 2008, ministry data show.

Urals crude, Russia’s chief export, has surged 99 percent since the end of 2008, creating windfall oil revenue that’s helped contain the budget deficit. The ruble has gained about 6 percent against a basket of euros and dollars since the beginning of December, even after the central bank signalled it would use policy to curb currency gains.

Balanced Budget

Russia targets balancing its budget by 2015, Pankin said today. Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said on April 1 Russia may run a budget deficit this year as narrow as 6 percent of gross domestic product, less than the government's official forecast of 6.8 percent.

Moody's rates Russia's foreign-currency and ruble debt Baa1, its third-lowest investment-grade ranking. Standard & Poor's rates Russia's foreign debt BBB and its local-currency obligations BBB+.

Israel was offered to raise turkeys in Russia

The regional government informed RusBusinessNews that the project initiator - "The Urals Farmstead" Agroindustrial Complex Ltd. - has obtained land plots for the construction of several poultry-houses, slaughterhouse and processing workshop, and incubation facility. A granulated feed production line has been purchased from Amandus Kuhl (Germany). Up until now turkey meat has not been produced on industrial scale in the Sverdlovsk Oblast.

In 2009 Russia imported 53 thousand tons of turkey meat. Main supplier is France (44%). 17% of the total was supplied by Belgium, 16% - USA, 14.5% - Brazil.

Russian-Arab cooperation forum to be held in Moscow by yearend

This forum will help to promote better political coordination between us and to strengthen our relations in the economic, financial, investment spheres, culture, sports as well as in other sectors," Sergei Vershinin, the head of the ministry's department for the Middle East and North Africa, said.

He added that the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Arab League have already begun their work on the preparations for the upcoming forum in Moscow.

A memorandum on establishing the Russian-Arab cooperation forum was signed by the head of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov during the latter's visit to Cairo last December.

Established by the seven founding states in 1945 in Cairo, Arab League now has 22 members, including 21 states and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Russia Commercial Construction Market Data & Forecast to 2014 - new market analysis released

Russia Commercial Construction Market Data & Forecast to 2014

Russia Commercial Construction Market Data & Forecast to 2014 is the essential entry level source for industry data and analysis, covering the commercial construction market in Russia , both at the top level and providing in-depth category and channel insight. The report provides historical market values for the period 2005-2009 at an overall level as well as showing category splits which make up the commercial construction market in

Russia . The report also contains forecast values and segmentation for 2010 to 2014 for the construction industry in Russia . Profiles are included for the following companies: MIRAX GROUP Holding B.V., PIK Group, Mostotrest OAO, The Public Joint-Stock Company (OAO) Stroytransgaz, Sistema-Gals OAO

Each of these profiles includes key facts about the company as well as contact information and an overview of the key areas and geographies in which they are engaged.

Social:

Russian scientists discover new element

The experiment, headed by Yury Oganessian of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna, near Moscow, began in July 2009 when scientists fired calcium-48 at berkelium-249 target, eventually creating six atoms of ununseptium, RIA Novosti reported.

Like all elements heavier than uranium, the new substance cannot exist stably in natural conditions, and the research is yet to be verified by a second laboratory.

But the Dubna project adds weight to the theory that some superheavy elements could occupy an "island of stability" which prevents them from decaying almost instantly.

The scientists from the Flerov Laboratory of Nuclear Reactions have been successfully synthesizing new elements that include numbers 113 - 116 and 118, the heaviest element to date, since 1960s.

The experiment headed by Yuri Oganessian in the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna, Russia started in July 2009. For the synthesis of the new element the scientists shot calcium-48 at a berkelium-249 target. These collisions created six atoms of two different isotopes of an element with 117 protons.

Once the discovery has been replicated in another laboratory the element will be given an official name, usually suggested by the discoverers. The last element to be named, number 112, was officially called Copernicium in February 2010. It was produced in 1996.

The scientists from the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research will not stop at this and plan to start synthesis with elements 119 and 120 next. It will require some modernization of the equipment. The works will begin this year with first experiments planned for 2012.

Russian women fight for top jobs

Speaking to The Moscow News before her talk at the Baibakov Arts Centre, Spar explained that Russia was making progress in repairing the damaging legacy of the Soviet system, which pushed women out of top jobs.

But she warned that there are many challenges still to be overcome, both globally and locally.

"Only now women in Russia are starting to have opportunities in business, politics and journalism and have more ambitions," she said.

"It's a really interesting time here.

"But many women have to take care of the family at home and be as productive as men at work which puts a great pressure at them. And when the economy model changed here a lot changed including some useful social institutions like daycare services have gone."

Spar urges employers to give women greater flexibility and support them in their family life as well as their work - but not everyone in Russia is so keen on that message.

"It's obvious that maternity leave is not enough - we do not stop having kids after a year or two," she added. "The problem is that women still have to operate in the men's world and act by men's rules. So the workplace will have to change, to be adapted to women."

Anna Ludkovskaya, editorial director of the "Khleb i Sol" cookery magazine, agrees that there's a problem but is unconvinced that a solution is due any time soon.

"I wouldn't say men and women should strive to be equal, although women have definitely more problems having their salaries up and building a career," she said. "Russian women are used to doing everything by themselves and do not rely on anyone.

"Of course this puts more stress on them here but I don't think anything could be done in the near future."

Family pressures also concerned Irina Egorova, an engineer for a utilities company who is bucking one trend by working in a traditionally male area.

"At first women are restricted because they have great responsibility both in their family and at work," she said. "But many have even greater restrictions after marrying men who make women sit at home and regard them as property, I couldn't handle that at all."

And statistics for women in the workplace are depressing, according to Rostrud. Almost two thirds of Russia's unemployed are women, backing up international stats which suggest men are more likely to be retained during an economic crisis.

"Women are traditionally more vulnerable than men in terms of employment and they tend to accept lower salaries than men," agreed Yury Virovets president of online recruitment company HeadHunter. "In general they can be more attractive to hire because they do not drink as much so they are more responsible and reliable.

"The main drawback in hiring women is maternity leave, and the fact they have to stay home when the kids are sick.

"In the crisis women faced more difficulties finding a job, and were more easily fired than men.

"Women faced more redundancies during the crisis because many of them work as office managers, in marketing, PR and HR spheres that were most affected."

This reflects a divide which concerns Spar - one between the traditional "feminine" professions and the macho worlds of politics and big business.

Although she says she's had enough of being patient and waiting for reforms to happen organically, she also cautioned against imposing quotas, citing examples in Norway where these became artificial measures promoting inexperienced women into senior positions where they struggled.

But while Russia boasts three senior female ministers out of 17 -- minister of economic development Elvira Nabuilina, health minister Tatyana Golikova and agriculture minister Elena Skrynnik - it remains hard to persuade women to get involved.

"I think there should be more women in politics," said Egorova.

"If a woman can sort out the problems in her own family she would be able to get things done on a top level.

"But as for me, I'm not really interested in politics and my family is more important for me."

For Moscow's Ethnic Minorities, A Fresh Sense Of Fear

A resident of Makhachkala, the capital of the North Caucasus republic of Daghestan, Gebekova is living in Moscow temporarily while she studies jewelry-making. And she doesn't want anybody associating her with the two female suicide bombers who wore long black skirts to cover the explosive belts they detonated on the Moscow Metro, killing 39 Monday-morning commuters.

"The situation is very dangerous for us," Gebekova says. "Wearing a head scarf is a risk. I think even wearing a skirt would be dangerous. It's best just to wear trousers. To come here [to Moscow] now -- whether for business, education, or medical treatment -- is dangerous."

Life in Moscow is never easy for ethnic minorities, particularly people from the Caucasus. They are routinely subjected to discrimination, harassment, attacks, and humiliating document checks by police. But their situation gets even worse when terrorism strikes, returning the public focus to Russia's long-simmering conflict in the North Caucasus, and heightening resentment between ethnic Slavs and other city residents.

The Moscow-based Sova Center, which monitors racially motivated attacks, has recorded assaults on five members of ethnic minorities in three separate incidents since the March 29 attacks. Among those attacked were three females, including a 17-year-old Armenian girl and two Muslim women who were wearing head scarves.

““ For them, it doesn't matter where in the Caucasus somebody is from. ””

The Sova Center's deputy director, Galina Kozhevnikova, says the number of actual attacks is undoubtedly much higher, since minorities are often afraid to report such attacks and police are reluctant to investigate them.

"We know that many people who don't have a Slavic appearance have consciously avoided going out in public in the days following the attack. They are afraid of attacks," Kozhevnikova says.

Stress, Fear, And Grief

Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov has claimed responsibility for the March 29 suicide bombings in a video posted on the Internet and said attacks on Russia would continue.

And with Moscow bracing for possible follow-up attacks, some politicians are making pointed statements that it is time for the government to take the gloves off and deal harshly with those responsible for plotting and carrying out terrorist attacks.

In remarks reported by the website gzt.ru, State Duma Deputy Aleksandr Gurov claimed that concerns over political correctness were preventing the authorities from dealing with terrorism effectively. "How much can we play with this so-called tolerance?" he said.

But tolerance is the last thing ethnic minorities are experiencing, according to Abdullah Duduyev, editor of the Chechen-language magazine "Dosh."

Duduyev says he and other Chechens in Moscow are "saddened by what happened," adding that those who perished in the blasts were "innocent people." He adds that "now it is the Chechens who will suffer, as they always do" in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

"Attitudes toward us have gotten worse," Duduyev says. "When two Muslim women were beaten in the metro, not a single person in the crowded wagon stuck up for them.

This shows the mood of society. Stress, fear, and grief are visible on people's faces. It is impossible to hide the aggression people feel toward outsiders."

The twin suicide bombings killed 39 people

Central Asians living in the Russian capital are also fearful. "The atmosphere for our compatriots in Moscow is depressing. People are afraid and are going out less. We canceled a meeting two days ago due to security concerns," says Abdullo Davlatov, a leading member of Moscow's Tajik migrant community. "Police are checking documents more, but we have not yet had any complaints about attacks by nationalists or skinheads."

Outhouses

And

Sewers

Aleksandr Verkhovsky, director of the Sova Center, says the rhetoric used by the authorities has contributed to the climate of fear among minorities. This includes recent remarks by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who pledged on March 30 to "drag" terrorists "from the depths of the sewer." The comments were an echo of his notorious pledge in 1999 to "wipe out" terrorists while they were sitting "in the outhouse."

Verkhovsky says that instead of such provocative phrases, Putin should be using language that unites society.

"So this time the prime minister isn't going to wipe out terrorists in the outhouse. Instead he is going to get them in the sewer," Verkhovsky says. "Of course you need to go after the terrorists, but this over-the-top rhetoric is destructive. It encourages negative emotions. This is the prime minister speaking, not some common citizen talking in the kitchen."

Initially, Russian officials said they were focusing on the North Caucasus, where Moscow has been battling separatists for nearly two decades, to find those involved with the recent attacks. But Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the National Security Council, suggested that Georgian involvement in the attacks "could not be excluded."

Russia and Georgia fought a bitter five-day war in August 2008 and relations between the two neighbors remain tense. The Georgian government -- which immediately condemned the attacks, offered condolences to the victims, and said it was prepared to assist in any investigation -- denied Patrushev's claim.

Johny Karatskhelia, president of Lazare, a Moscow-based Georgian community organization, says Patrushev's remark shows that all people from the Caucasus living in Moscow are under suspicion -- and therefore in danger.

"For them, it doesn't matter where in the Caucasus somebody is from. They don't make a distinction between a Chechen, an Ingush, a Georgian, or an Abkhaz," Karatskhelia says. "All Georgians and all people from the Caucasus are afraid of what will happen next."

Observers: Corruption hits Russian security

"There is a fundamental problem that doesn't allow Russia to fight terrorism, and that's the awful corruption of the law enforcement forces in Russia," said Yevgenia Albats, chief editor of Russia's New Times magazine. She spoke Monday on CNN's "Amanpour" program.

Albats said Vladimir Putin, then Russia's president and now prime minister, promised democracy in exchange for security back in 2000, but the result was neither democracy nor security.

The bomb in Ingushetia killed two police officers and wounded four others outside a police station in the town of Karabulak. It was the latest in a string of attacks in the North Caucasus region of Russia that have followed a March 29 double suicide bombing on the Moscow subway system.

The Moscow bombing killed at least 40 people and wounded more than 60. A former Chechen rebel who is now advocating global jihad has claimed responsibility for that attack.

Dimitri Simes, president of the Washington-based Nixon Center think tank, told CNN it's vital for Moscow to restore the capabilities of Russia's Federal Security Service, the successor organization to the KGB.

"Frankly, I will say something very controversial. They have to restore (the) good police work of the ... Federal Security Service," he said. "It lost most of its informers. It became very ineffective. And they cannot do the most important thing: terrorism prevention."

Stephen Cohen, a professor of Russian Studies at New York University, said Moscow can't end the terrorist attacks by withdrawing from the Caucasus region, because it's a constituent part of the Russian Federation.

"Secession will not be permitted, because the Kremlin feels it'll be the breakup of the Russian state. But if it can be a negotiation about real federation, and then that begins to raise the question of democracy, there may be some semi-solution there."

Amnesty International: "Defensive jihad of Muslims against the infidels is a legitimate means of struggle"

Sources say that hundreds of scientists and experts gathered at the Islamic University of Medina for a conference. A long list of adopted by the Delegates recommendations included "an implicit call for terrorism to be defined in a way that excludes resistance against foreign occupation".

Curiously, the international human rights organization Amnesty International has officially agreed with it.

More than 80 research papers were examined in 12 sessions over four days, after which a 2,500-word document of recommendations for Muslims was compiled and released.

Among these, Muslim parents were encouraged "to foster moderation in their children and to shield them from Web sites belonging to deviant and extremist groups".

"Extremist groups that identify with Islam were advised to think seriously and carefully about the ramifications of their actions and the negative impact they have on Islam and Muslims", said the delegates.

The document also said Muslims should learn their religion from "trustworthy scholars known for being moderate" and reject "unreliable teachings relating to jihad and takfir (apostasy)".

However, the very notion of "extremist groups" remains a matter of controversy. Who are to be considered "extremists and terrorists"?

Further the recommendations went on to urge all Muslim governments to "apply Islamic law in all aspects of life".

The Medina document said conference participants condemned "all acts of terrorism regardless of the place or the perpetrators".

Scientists have called "Israel" "a state of terrorism", and urged Islamic media to continue "coverage and exposure of Israeli occupation crimes against defenseless Palestinian civilians, in particular the Israeli Holocaust in Gaza".

Like most declarations of Islamic scholars on terrorism, the final document of conference stated that one should distinguish between the concepts of "terrorism" and "actions taken against foreign occupation" recommended the adoption of a definition of terrorism as articulated by the Arab Council of Interior Ministers and Arab Council of Justice Ministers.

According to the press, at the most recent meeting of the Arab Council of Interior Ministers, in Tunis on March 17, the body - as it has done in years past - again "emphasized the need to differentiate between terrorism and the legitimate struggle of people against occupation".

However, apparently, the participants of conference tend to believe that the struggle of the Palestinians is a defensive jihad, and the struggle of other Islamic nations do not fall under in this category as though. That is rather strange, if not more clearly - this is a sign of hypocrisy.

Interestingly Amnesty International Secretary-General Claudio Cordone said that "defensive jihad of Muslims against the infidels is a legitimate means of struggle and it does not violate human rights", western media outlets reported.

Over 4,000 Russian inmates died in 2009 - official

Over 4,000 people died in Russian correctional facilities in 2009, a senior prosecutor has said.

"Last year alone, 4,150 people died in correctional facilities. In the same period, 521 people died in pre-trial detention centres," Deputy Prosecutor General Yevgeny Zabarchuk said in an interview in the Rossiiskaya Gazeta newspaper to be published on Tuesday.

"This problem is deserving of particular attention," he said.

"After all, the large majority of the inmates are not elderly people...but those at an age that should see them at the peak of their strength. Nevertheless, many of them do not live until their release date or come out disabled."

"There is no modern medical equipment in many pre-trial detention centers," he went on, adding that in some facilities medical staff were entirely unqualified.

"Inmates, even incorrigible criminals, remain citizens of our country and have not been deprived of the right to medical aid," he noted.

Washington welcomes Russia, Poland jointly commemorating Katyn massacre

Russia's Vladimir Putin and Poland's Donald Tusk took part in ceremonies in Katyn forest near the Russian city of Smolensk, where thousands of officers, police and civilians taken prisoner during the 1939 partitioning of Poland by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were killed by the NKVD, a forerunner to the KGB.

The Katyn massacre, which the Soviet Union tried to blame on Nazi Germany, has been a painful issue in relations between Poland and Russia. Clinton said the meeting could help heal the division, which has made Poland the strongest critic of post-Soviet Russia in Europe.

"This meeting of the current generation of Polish and Russian leaders is a sign of a much better present and of the hope for an increasingly bright and peaceful future," Clinton said. "We welcome the strengthening of the Russian-Polish relationship this mutual tribute symbolizes, and hope that it promises the continued growth of cooperation in Europe."