



**ASIA**  
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA; WEST ASIA; SOUTH ASIA; NORTH ASIA; EAST ASIA



**AFRICA**  
WEST AFRICA; EAST AFRICA & HORN OF AFRICA; CENTRAL AFRICA; SOUTH AFRICA



**EUROAMERICA**  
WEST EUROPE; EAST EUROPE; NORTH AMERICA; LATIN AMERICA



**GLOBALIZED OPINION...**



**GLOBALIZED FINANCE...**



**GLOBALIZED ELECTIONS...**

# Friday on the facebook

WEEKLY NEWS MONITOR OF OPINIONS & EVENTS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Based on weekly reports produced by the project 'Globalized Business & Politics: a View from the Muslim World.'

Using a rich data-base of news reports and opinion polls from all over the world we analyze and compile papers on global trends and patterns in the sphere of economics, politics and society. These reports and analytical summaries are uploaded online for discussion and are accessible on the [BPM Blog Page](#).

## WELCOME REMARKS for new readers What is FOF?

Dear Colleagues,

We are mailing to you the weekly e-letter of the project: Globalized Business and Politics: A View from the Muslim World". The e-letter is a snapshot of the detailed data gathering and analysis which our research team does each week.

Why should one add another e-letter to many similar exercises already underway? We have pondered this question and here is what we believe to be our possible contribution or *Competitive Advantage*.

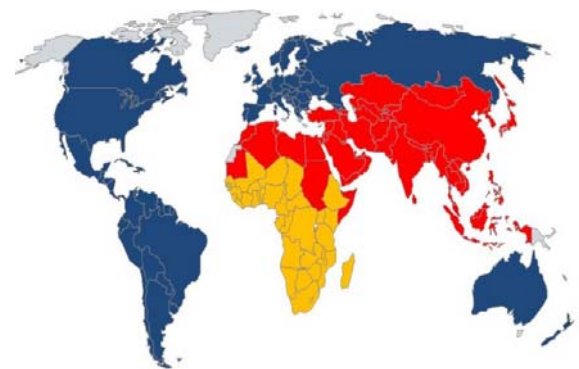
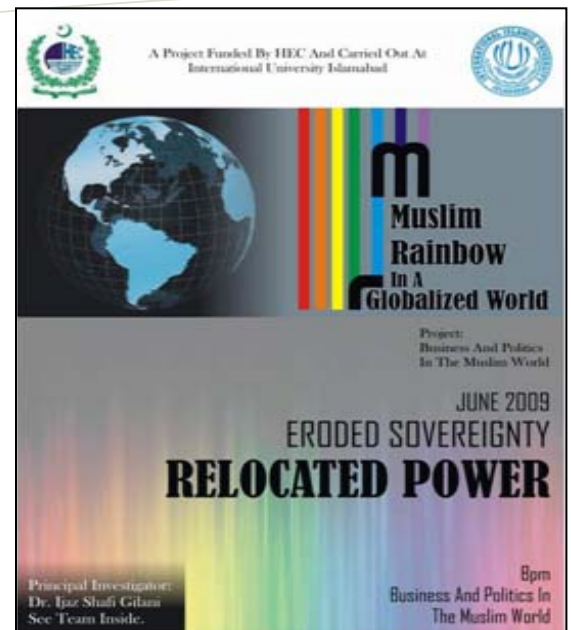
- ◆ We will make the e-letter a multi-layered presentation: in other words Friday on the Facebook will provide clicks to deeper levels of information; for comprehension (Maps and Data) as well as for elaboration



and analysis (complete weekly Events data, supplementary commentaries and related links).

- ◆ Our weekly e-letter will be grounded in a thorough Analytical framework of Relocation of Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- ◆ Our weekly e-letter will be targeted to produce an annual synthesis of Global Trends. Each issue will serve as an input for the annual analysis.
- ◆ Our weekly e-letter will be designed to become a teaching tool for class-room instruction in courses dealing with global political sociology or related fields.
- ◆ Our weekly e-letter will also be designed to build a theoretically inclined community of political sociologists.

With best wishes and prayers we present our 'pilot weekly e-letter: *Friday on the Facebook. - A Weekly Monitor of Global Opinions and Events.* §



Business and Politics in the Muslim World (BPM) refers to a study funded by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, and is conducted at the International Islamic University (IIU), Islamabad.



## Globalized Opinions

This week report consists of 27 surveys. 2 of these are multi-country surveys, 1 is a Global Survey while the rest are national surveys.

Week # 115

Dated 11-18 April, 2010

### Gallopedia Highlights

**ASIA zone**- 4 national polls and 1

Global poll covering:

*Middle East & N.Africa:* Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon

*South Asia:* Bangladesh, Pakistan, India,

*South East Asia-* Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia,

*North East Asia:* Japan, South Korea

**AFRICA zone**- 0 national polls & 1 Global Poll covering:

*West Africa:* Senegal, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria,

*Central Africa:* Tanzania, Rwanda, Cameroon, Chad, Uganda, DR

Congo, Ethiopia,

*East Africa & Horn of Africa:*

Kenya, Djibouti

*Southern Africa:* Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana

**EURO-AMERICAS zone**-20

national polls and 2 Multi-Country Polls & 1 Global poll covering:

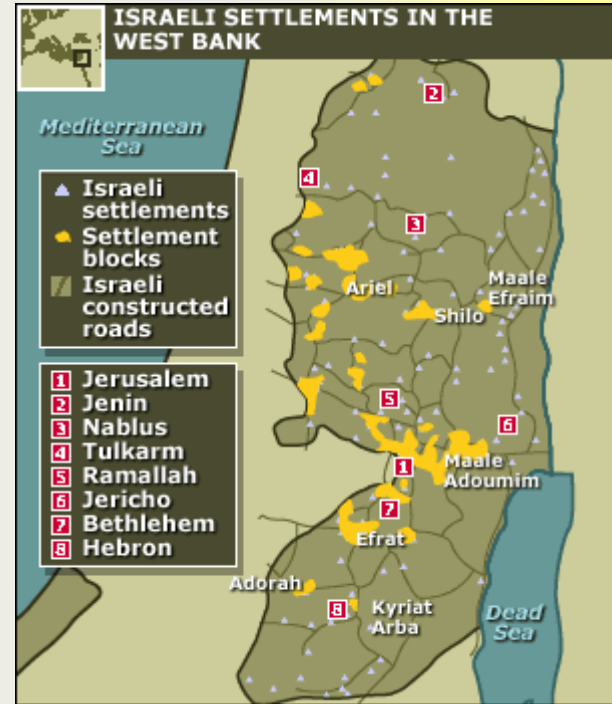
*East Europe-* Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Russia

*West Europe-* UK, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden

*North America-* U.S.A, Canada

*Latin America-* Brazil

*Australasia:* Australia



### Dismantling Settlements Is Creating Polarization in Israel?

**Israelis** settlements in *West Bank* have been one of the major hurdles in the resolution of *Israeli-Palestinian* crisis in accordance with the *two state solution*. **Palestinian** views about this issue seem quite clear: an end to these settlements and the eventual creation of a *Palestinian* state. As opposed to this in **Israel** the public perceptions regarding this issue have remained rigid against evacuation.

A recent survey<sup>1</sup> in **Israel** shows a kind of shift in the general *Israeli* public attitude towards this issue. Opposition to dismantling these settlements has dropped remarkably and support for the idea has reached as high as **60%**. This is the highest level of support recorded since 2005. Among the settlers who would be most affected by the dismantling of these settlements, the perceptions on this issue differ remarkably from the general **Israeli** public. Almost seven in ten (**69%**) settlers oppose the idea of dismantling these settlements. This is in sharp contrast to general Israeli public. Mistakenly **57%** of the settlers believe that general **Israeli** public is also opposed to the idea of evacuation, which is in fact not true. A large majority of general **Israeli** public believe that motive for living in settlements should be attached with religious or missionary zeal but the settlers stated that they are more motivated by personal quality of life, housing and community then religious or missionary objectives.

These findings suggest that settlers and general **Israeli** public have widely different views about dismantling the settlements in *Judea* and *Samaria*. Moreover the settlers entertain misperceptions about general **Israeli** views regarding evacuating *West Bank settlements*. Does this suggest that general **Israeli** public and settlers are moving towards two different poles? Settlers would definitely be the most affected group if Israeli government decides to evacuate, so will this decision create internal groups in public and Israeli politics? On the other hand if Israel continues with these settlements will there ever be *peace* between *Palestinians* and *Israelis*?

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Zone 1- ASIA

**MIDDLE EAST**

***Israeli Public's Support for Dismantling Most Settlements Has Risen to a Five-Year High***

A survey of the Israeli general public and Israeli settlers taken in early March shows three-fifths of the Israeli public (60%) support "dismantling most of the settlements in the territories as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians." This is eleven points higher than the previous reading (49%) taken in December, 2009.

*April 15, 2010*

***Israelis Reject Construction Freeze in Jerusalem***

A large proportion of adults in Israel would reject a prospective demand by U.S. president Barack Obama, according to a poll by Maagar Mochot. 70 per cent of respondents think Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should not freeze construction in Jerusalem for an unlimited period of time.

*April 17, 2010*

**SOUT EAST ASIA**

***Aquino, Roxas Headed for Win in the Philippines***

The Liberal Party (PLP) could gain control of the two highest political offices in the Philippines, according to a poll by Pulse Asia. 37 per cent of respondents would vote for PLP presidential nominee Benigno Aquino III in next month's election.

*April 16, 2010*

**NORTHEAST ASIA**

***Only A Third of Japanese Content with Cabinet***

Only a third of people in Japan are satisfied with the performance of the sitting government, according to a poll by Kyodo News. 33 per cent of respondents approve of the cabinet, down three points since March.

*April 13, 2010*

**Zone 3- EURO-AMERICAS**

**EAST EUROPE**

***Many Russians Express Trust for Medvedev***

Many people in Russia express confidence in president Dmitry Medvedev, according to a poll by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center. 40 per cent of respondents say they completely trust him as a person and as a politician.

*April 15, 2010*

**WEST EUROPE**



***Tories Lead by Ten Points in Britain***

The Conservative Party remains ahead of its competitors in Britain, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 38 per cent of respondents would support the Tories in next month's election to the House of Commons.

*April 14, 2010*

***Spaniards Reject Government's Abortion Law***

People in Spain are not satisfied with their government's new pregnancy

termination regulations, according to a poll by NC Report published in *La Razón*. 54.2 per cent of respondents oppose the Abortion Law.

*April 18, 2010*

### ***Spaniards Throw Support Behind Opposition PP***

Spain's Popular Party (PP) is now stronger than the ruling Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), according to a poll by NC Report published in *La Razón*. 43.6 per cent of respondents would vote for the conservative PP in the next legislative election, while 37.6 per cent would vote for the PSOE.

*April 13, 2010*

### ***French Socialists Like Strauss-Kahn in 2012***

International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn is a popular option to become the presidential candidate of France's Socialist Party (PS), according to a poll by LH2. 37 per cent of respondents say Strauss-Kahn should lead the left into the 2012 election.

*April 16, 2010*

## **NORTH AMERICA**

### ***Voters Currently Divided on Second Obama Term***

Registered voters are about evenly divided over whether President Barack Obama is deserving of a second term in office. Currently, 46% say he deserves re-election and 50% say he does not. Predictably, Democrats are one-sided for Obama's re-election and Republicans are one-sided against it, while independents lean against a second Obama term.

*April 16, 2010*

### ***Making Ends Meet Is a Threshold for Personal Wellbeing***

Having enough money to "buy the things you need" is a strong correlate of Americans' broad perception of their own wellbeing. Overall, 60% of Americans who say they have enough money for their needs rate their lives well enough to be considered "thriving." By contrast, 27% of those who can't meet their needs are thriving. This pattern is generally seen at each income level.

*April 16, 2010*

### ***Americans' Views on Healthcare Law Remain Stable***

Americans remain divided on the merits of the new healthcare law, with 45% saying it was a good thing that Congress passed the legislation and 49% saying it was a bad thing. This assessment from an April 8-11 Gallup poll shows little change from two weeks ago.

*April 15, 2010*

### ***Republicans Lead by 48% to 44% on Congressional Ballot***

Gallup Daily tracking for the week ending April 11 puts Republicans slightly ahead of Democrats, 48% to 44%, in the congressional voting preferences of registered voters nationally. This marks the third week since the U.S.

House passed healthcare reform on March 21 that the Republicans have tied or led the Democrats.

*April 13, 2010*

### ***Americans Blame President Bush for the Bad State of The Economy***

According to the latest Harris Poll, the Republicans are a long way from convincing the American people that it is time to return the GOP back to power in Washington. The public may have serious doubts and reservations about the Democrats, but the memories of Bush era are still haunting Republicans.

*April 07, 2010*

### ***Americans Split on Whether Their Income Taxes Are Too High***

For the second straight year, slightly less than half of Americans say the amount of federal income tax they have to pay is too high, while almost as many say the amount they pay in taxes is about right.

*April 14, 2010*

### ***Six in 10 Americans Expect Their Taxes to Increase***

Sixty-three percent of Americans believe their taxes will increase in the next 12 months, while 4% expect a change that will reduce their taxes. Majorities of all income groups share this view, though it is more common among Americans in upper-income households.

*April 14, 2010*



### ***Most Americans See Home Prices Stable or Rising***

Lower but stabilizing home prices combined with continued low mortgage interest rates have persuaded 72% of Americans that now is a "good time" to buy a house -- essentially the same percentage as a year ago, but up 19 points from 2008.

*April 15, 2010*

### ***Tomorrow's News***

But the leaders of America's newsrooms are nonetheless worried about the future. Fewer than half of all those surveyed are confident their operations will survive another 10 years -- absent significant new sources of revenue. Nearly a third believe their operations are at risk in just five years or less. And many blame the problems not on the inevitable effect of technology but on their industry's missed opportunities.

*April 12, 2010*

### ***Americans Dread Foreign and Domestic Terrorism***

Many adults in the United States foresee an act of terrorism taking place on U.S. soil in the next year, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 69 per cent of respondents think an attack carried out by foreigners is likely to happen, while 58 per cent feel foresee an act of terrorism carried out by Americans.

*April 14, 2010*

### ***Americans in Tune with Obama on Nuclear Weapons***



Most people in the United States agree with the notion that there should be fewer nuclear weapons in the world, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 36 per cent of respondents think the U.S. government should focus on eliminating weapons worldwide, while 35 per cent think it should try to reduce the number of nuclear arms in the world.

*April 13, 2010*

### ***Few Canadians Endorse Bigger House of Commons***

Few people in Canada support a government proposal to increase the number

of seats in the lower house of Parliament from 308 to 338, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 17 per cent of respondents think this would be beneficial for Canada, whereas 31 per cent say it would be detrimental.

*April 12, 2010*

### ***Canadian Majority Would Legalize Marijuana***

Many adults in Canada believe marijuana should be legalized, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 53 per cent of respondents agree with this idea.

*April 18, 2010*

## **LATIN AMERICA**

### ***NDP Holds Double-Digit Lead in British Columbia***

The opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) has extended its advantage in British Columbia, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 47 per cent of respondents would vote for the NDP in the next provincial election, up four points since March.

*April 18, 2010*

### ***Serra Barely Ahead of Rousseff in Brazil***

Brazilians could be facing a tight first round in this year's presidential election, according to a poll by Vox Populi released by Bandeirantes. 34 per cent of respondents would vote for Jose Serra of the Brazilian Party of Social Democracy (PSDB) in the upcoming ballot.

*April 14, 2010*

## **GLOBAL POLLS**

### ***Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa***

As compared with other parts of the world, sub-Saharan Africa is the most religious zone in the world. The vast majority of people in many sub-Saharan African nations are deeply committed to the practices and major tenets of one or the other of the world's two largest religions, Christianity and Islam, though traditional African religious beliefs and practices have not disappeared. Rather, they coexist with Islam and Christianity.

April 15, 2010

### ***Little Hope for Middle East Peace in Three Nations***

People in three countries hold little hope in the success of a potential Middle East peace process, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. At least 40 per cent of respondents in Canada, the United States and Britain believe there will never be a solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

April 16, 2010

### ***Bullying is a Crime for Canadians and Americans***

People in two North American countries believe bullying should be considered a crime even if no physical violence is involved, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 62 per cent of respondents in Canada—and 52 per cent in the U.S.—agree with this notion.

April 15, 2010

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## Zone 1- **Asia: Summary**

### ***Asia, Middle East & North Africa***

#### **TURKEY**

**Political Front:** The Ankara-based *metropolis Strategic and Social Research Center* conducted a poll on 7 & 8 April regarding the question of Constitutional amendments. **50.6%** respondents supported the reforms while **39.2%** claimed that in case of referendum they would not support the amendments package.

**Geo-strategic Front:** **Turkish** Foreign Minister has expressed optimism about the chances of revival of the *Iranian* nuclear deal with **Turkey** according to which *Iran* would send its low enriched uranium reactors to **Turkey**. He further denied any knowledge of sanctions against *Iran* and reiterated the importance of the nation for **Turkey** being provider of a route to the later to *Central Asia*. He further regarded peaceful negotiations to be the best way to resolve the *Iranian* nuclear issue.

Meanwhile during the 47-nation *Nuclear Security Summit* in Washington US President Barack Obama has urged Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to maintain **Turkey's** constructive contribution, initiative and efforts to achieve a solution to *Iran's* nuclear standoff. In response Erdogan urged the international community to pay equal attention to *Israel* as well that has been carrying on acts of aggression against *Palestine*.

On the sideline of the *nuclear summit* Erdogan held meeting with the *Armenian* President and asked him to resolve their issues with Azerbaijan as Turkish-Armenian relations can not be delineated from *Azeri-Armenian* ties.

*Italy* disagrees with *France* and *Germany's* view that **Turkey** should have a “privileged partnership” with the European Union. Meanwhile **Turkish** growing ties with *Oman*, *Kazakhstan* and *Kyrgyzstan* also grabbed attention.

**Economic Front:** **Turkey** and *Iran* have planned to commence studies for the establishment of a free industrial zone between the two countries. **Turkish** foreign direct investment (FDI) has recently become more concentrated in Middle Eastern countries, rising by **55.9 %** in the first two months of the year over the same period of 2009 and accounting for **43.8 %** of all investments made. **Turkey** has lost nearly \$208 million in the past three years due to problems it has faced in the operation of the *Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC)*, carrying Caspian Sea crude oil to European markets.

**Social front:** Religious groups have expressed their concern after *Dutch* research recently identified 185 different industrial uses of a pig – including the use of its hemoglobin in cigarette filters. The announcement prompted **Turkish** health authorities to conduct a series of tests on different brands of cigarettes sold in **Turkey**, concluding that there was no trace of the blood.

#### **GCC**

**Geo-strategic Front:** *Pakistan* has welcomed **Saudi** mediation for the restoration of meaningful composite dialogue with *India*.

Meanwhile the **Saudi** King has won appreciation for his call to hold dialogue among various religions.

**Bahrain** and *Thailand* have agreed to bolster their cooperation on food security, Islamic finance, education, culture and construction. Meanwhile **Oman** has started talks with the *UK* seeking to buy Euro-fighter Typhoon aircrafts.

**Economic Front:** **Yemeni** imports from *Pakistan* have reached USD 200 million during the past year. Saudi stock exchange rose at highest level since 2008. The government has decided to pay the difference of the customs fees applied under the Gulf Cooperation Council unified customs tariff on 180 major food items and construction materials to help curb inflation in the *Kingdom* that reportedly surged to a 27-year high of 8.7% in

February.

**Qatar** has offered to invest \$1 billion (Dh3.67 billion) in *France's* heavily indebted CMA CGM, the world's third-biggest shipping group.

**Social Front:** A bomb explosion at a South **Yemeni** Prison caused successful escape of 30 prisoners.

In **Saudi Arabia**, land and homeowners in unplanned districts across the province of *Makah* have demanded



an increase on compensation packages which have already paid out SR32 billion for 2,000 properties demolished by the Mayor's Office.

Government of **Bahrain** has refused to register cars with *Gulf* license plates. Meanwhile a municipal council in **Bahrain** has demanded closure of restaurants and cafés at midnight. Analysts claim that such demand could increase existing strain between liberals and conservatives in the country.

**Kuwait's** information ministry has pledged a zero-tolerance policy towards satellite channels that broadcast programs that could "erode national

unity or undermine social cohesion. Meanwhile **Kuwaiti** media criticized the participation of three **Kuwaiti** athletes in an international track meet where *Israelis* also participated.

Public Smoking has been banned in **Qatar**.

## IRAN

**Political Front:** **Iran** has barred reformist former president *Mohammad Khatami* from leaving the country ahead of a trip he planned to make to *Japan* for a nuclear disarmament conference.

**Geo-strategic Front:** **Iran's** envoy to the UN nuclear watchdog has criticized the US nuclear summit and claimed that any decision made over there would not be binding for those who would not attend the summit. On the other hand five permanent members of *UNSC* along with *Germany* have been engaged in talks regarding sanctions against **Iran**, where *Turkey* and *BRIC* countries have emphasized the need for a diplomatic solution for the issue.

While talking to the press recently **Iranian** military Commander has warned that **Iran** would respond to any military attack from the *United States* by targeting *American* forces stationed in the *Middle East*.

**Economic Front:** Following talks with the *US* President, *Malaysian* PM has announced to cut off gasoline supplies to **Iran** because of its controversial nuclear program. Meanwhile *China* sold two gasoline cargoes to **Iran**. Besides that growing economic ties of **Iran** with *Brazil* and *Poland* are also significant.

**Social Front:** Large numbers of German tourists have been visiting **Iran** this week. All the while growing **Iranian** cooperation with *Turkey* against drugs and boosting **South-Korean & Iranian** cultural ties also remained potent.

## CENTRAL ASIA

**Political Front:** The *European Court of Human Rights* has strongly condemned the government of **Azerbaijan** for its poor voting record.

Opposition activists and independent journalists gave a petition to the U.S. Consulate in *Almaty* urging President *Barrack Obama* to reject **Kazakh**



Continued...



**Kyrgyzstan's ousted leader**  
Kurmanbek **Bakiyev**

President's invitation to attend an *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE) summit in Astana. Meanwhile the **Kyrgyz** interim regime offered security guarantees to ousted President and his family in case he agreed to resign and then leave the country. Ousted President Bakiev accepted the offer and has now moved to **Kazakhstan**. Before leaving **Kyrgyzstan**, Bakiev addressed his nation and said that he has been toppled by force. Meanwhile Interim government has taken an initiative to run a trial against the President for killing dozens of innocent people.

**Geo-strategic Front:** *Turkish* Foreign Minister has reiterated his country's constant position over the issue of *Nagorno-Karabakh*, during his meeting with **Azeri** counterpart. The **Azeri** FM has also discussed areas of bilateral cooperation with the EU.

**Kazakh** PM has announced to provide humanitarian aid to **Kyrgyzstan** for the victims of the violent clashes between antigovernment protesters and **Kyrgyz** security forces. Meanwhile **Kyrgyz** President has granted the US new over-flight rights for the re-supply of *US* and *NATO* troops in *Afghanistan*.

*India* and **Kazakhstan** have started talks for a civil nuclear deal.

*US* Assistant Secretary of State paid a visit to **Kyrgyzstan** last week and held a meeting with the new government. Meanwhile the interim leader of **Kyrgyzstan** has agreed to abide by previous agreements on *Manas Airport*.

In the meanwhile *Russia* has warned **Kyrgyzstan** against the threat of civil war amidst ongoing political crisis.

**Economic Front:** **Azerbaijan**, **Romania** and **Georgia** have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the project **AGRI** for gas supply. The World Bank has provided 13.5 million U.S. dollars for rehabilitation of the water supply system in the city of Kulob.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the intergovernmental **Turkmen-Armenian** commission on economic cooperation was held in Yerevan.

*Belarus* has ratified an intergovernmental agreement with **Turkmenistan** on international motor transportation of passengers and cargos.



**Social Front:** **Azerbaijani** police dispersed an opposition rally against restrictions on freedom of assembly in the capital city and briefly detained demonstrators.

A web browser that bypasses censors has become the most popular way to access the Internet in **Kazakhstan**.

## **EAST ASIA**

**Political Front:** **Indonesian** President has voiced positive expectations from the *Jakarta Declaration* that would boost infrastructure development in *Asia-Pacific region*. The declaration would probably be signed in ongoing Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference in Jakarta.

The **Malaysian** PM was in the US last week attending the nuclear summit.

In Bangkok, **Thailand** Pro-Thaksin *Red Shirt* demonstrators have launched violent protests. Despite a declaration of emergency in the country protestors refused to end their demonstration demanding that the PM step down. Despite huge pressure the PM who enjoys full support of the establishment has hence far remained reluctant to leave his place.

Unrest has increased prior to upcoming elections in the **Philippines**. Last week a grenade attack on a political gathering left one man dead and 14 wounded. Meanwhile government's decision to use machines for voting in May-10 elections has also become a point of concern for analysts who claim that it would lead to unfair voting and would cause problems in elections.

**Vietnam's** media has started drawing comparison between **Thai** unrest and stability in their country amidst recent crisis in the former.

**Geo-strategic Front:** The *United States* has announced its decision to stop a shipment of military trucks to **Cambodia** as punishment for sending *Uighur* asylum-seekers back to *China*.

**Economic Front:** The *United States* and **Indonesia** signed an agreement paving the way for increased US investment in *Southeast Asia's* largest economy and the world's fourth most populous country. Meanwhile *Newzeland* and **Malaysia** have also signed a free-trade agreement.

*Pakistan* has appreciated **Malaysian** investment in *Baluchistan* province in various sectors.

Political unrest has adversely affected **Thai** economy. Meanwhile **Myanmar** and **Vietnam** have agreed to promote economic cooperation in 12 key sectors.

**Social Front:** People have launched violent demonstrations in the **Indonesian** capital asking one of the senior officials to resign.

A 7.7 magnitude earthquake rocked Aceh province of **Indonesia** last week.

## SOUTH ASIA

**Political Front:** **Bangladesh**, Dhaka High Court judges threatened to call the police after former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's lawyers shouted slogans in a courtroom and threatened them, calling them "agents" of the government.

The government of **Maldives** has presented the Political Parties Act bill to the parliament and declared it an effort to strengthen the democratic system in the nation.

Meanwhile a member of the **Maldivian** Presidential Commission, who had been appointed to investigate corruption allegations against the former regime, has resigned, after the President's Office allegedly informed the commission not to disclose details of an investigation.

The **Nepali** Congress has offered to back a reinstallation of a *Maoist* government in the country, incase they come out with a concrete action plan on former combatants and meet other key demands. Congress has also expressed serious concern about future of peace process after 28 May- due date for completion of the constitutional draft.

**Geo-strategic Front:** The government of **Bangladesh** has given approval for a deal with *Russia* to build a 1,000-megawatt nuclear power plant to meet energy needs. Meanwhile *Denmark* has assured *Bangladesh* of providing



UCPN Maoist president Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, vice president Mohan Baidhya 'Kiran' and General secretary Ram Bahadur Thapa

more support to the country's power, energy, ship building industry and trade and business sectors for her socio- economic development. UCPN (Maoist) has intensified bilateral discussions with different parties in an attempt to get their support against the current coalition government.

**Economic Front:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has urged **Bangladesh** to boost electricity generation through public-private partnership to stimulate the overall economy. The idea of lending small loans to poor people has grabbed the attention of Bangladeshi government. United Nations and **Maldives** Government have signed the agreement on the USD 40.6 million, as pledged during the donor conference.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has cautioned that **Nepal** could continue to feel the lagged effect of the crisis in 2010, which in turn could challenge country's macro-economic management.

**Iran** has expressed desire to double its purchase of **Sri Lankan** tea. Meanwhile the *Asian Development Bank* (ADB) has announced to provide an emergency loan of

\$150 million to **Sri Lanka** for projects involving the internally displaced persons.

**Social Front:** People across **Nepal** celebrated the country's New Year on 14 April in accordance with the official calendar Bikram Era 206. In the meantime *Sinhalese* and Tamil Communities jointly celebrated their Traditional New Year for the first time, ending a three decades old conflict.

## INDIA

**Political Front:** Leader of main opposition party *BJP* has strongly condemned Congress for the price rise and growing rate of unemployment in the country. Meanwhile he also condemned DMK for the power and power crisis in Tamil Nadu. He called his own party to be a non-communal party that works for country's development irrespective of caste and creed. Government has also been condemned for launching operation against *Naxalites*. Trinamool Congress Chief, Mamta Banerjee, has claimed that government's launched



operation in search of *Maoists* has caused ruthless killing of innocent people. The Government meanwhile has successfully flown an American *Unmanned Ariel Vehicle* in the first trial run during the operation against *Naxalites*.

All the while involvement of *Tharoor* in the IPL franchise has raised concerns among political circles and even in his own party. Left parties have even demanded his resignation as, for them, its highly inappropriate for a minister in the Union government to be part of such activities.

The *Chief Election Commissioner* expressed concern that roughly 700 out of 1,000 registered political parties do not contest polls but the Election Commission has no power to de-register them.

**Economic Front:** Majority of Indian investors have high hopes regarding **Indian** economic recovery and growth.

**Social Front:** Senior *BJP* leader L K Advani has said that the party needs to work to explain to the people that *Hindutva* and *Indian secularism* are synonymous. §

## Zone 2- Africa:



**Nigerian** former military leader  
**Gen Ibrahim Babangida**

### POLITICS OF SECURITY AND CONFLICT ISSUES

**West Africa:** In **Ghana** President Mills is facing intensifying pressure to sack ministers as some top men in his administration have come under severe criticisms for purportedly neglecting party foot-soldiers, non performance, and in some cases downplaying the party's "Better Ghana" agenda.

In a statement by his spokesperson **Nigerian** former military leader Gen Ibrahim Babangida has announced his intention to run in the 2011 presidential poll. One of the country's wealthiest men - Gen Babangida has told the BBC he will not buy his way to power. Meanwhile as **Nigerians**

called for credible polls ahead of the 2011 general elections, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar last week questioned the democratic credentials of the former military President Ibrahim Babangida, who he accused of banning him from contesting during his regime.

Acting **Nigerian** President Goodluck Jonathan met with US President Barrack Obama at the White House last week, to discuss issues relating to the *Niger Delta*, oil industry reform, electoral reform and **Nigeria's** role in global peace.

Lt. Gen. Masanneh Kinteh, current Chief of Defense Staff of the **Gambia** Armed Forces testified earlier this month as the tenth prosecution witness in the ongoing treason trial of former Chief of Defense Staff Lt. Gen. Lang Tombong Tamba and seven others. Meanwhile the *European Union* has expressed concern about the negative impact on freedom of assembly and expression in **Gambia** after the prosecution and imprisonment of the opposition United Democratic Party campaign manager, Femi Peters.

The US has accused two senior military men from **Guinea-Bissau** of drug running. Air force head Ibraima Papa Camara and former navy chief Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, have been named "drug kingpins".

**South Africa:** According to **African Union** Commission Chief Jean Ping AU sanctions against **Madagascar's** leaders are being undermined by the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

**Zimbabwe's** constitution-making process has been derailed after donors delayed releasing funds for the process. This caused the first stage, of deploying outreach programme teams, to be abandoned last week.

Former president Thabo Mbeki has been roped into urgent diplomatic negotiations aimed at securing the release of four **South African** police peacekeepers kidnapped in war-torn *Darfur, Sudan*.

According to a military source **Madagascar's** army has given President Andry *Rajoelina* until the end of April to offer an acceptable way out of the 13-month political crisis on the Indian Ocean Island. Following the

ultimatum **Madagascar's** leader vowed to disband his internationally rejected government with an ousted opposition leader.

**Central Africa:** Equatorial Guinea's main opposition party CPDS has accused national security forces of the kidnapping of several exiled Equatoguinean opposition members based in Nigeria in late January, disapproving a form of "state terrorism."

**Rwandan** President Paul Kagame received last week a delegation from *Sweden* that included Members of Parliament and officials from the United Nations Association of Sweden. The group, in its 3-day working visit to assess the country's development, held discussions with the President on issues including economic growth, the upcoming presidential elections, human rights and relations with the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**.

In the eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** Hundreds of final year secondary school students have been unable to sit all their national exams due to fighting between a faction of the Mayi-Mayi militia and the armies in the territory of Fizi, South Kivu Province. Meanwhile (**DRC**) government has also opened a humanitarian corridor to provide safe passage for hundreds of civilians trapped by fighting between the army and rebel militias in Orientale Province, northeastern **DRC**.



Following a request from the *Kinshasa* government The UN peacekeeping mission MONUC has announced it will start pulling out from the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** in July. However fighting for control of the capital of **Congo's Equateur** province has revived concerns about the strength of Kinshasa's army. Meanwhile ICRC has said that eight aid workers have been kidnapped by armed men in eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN DOMESTIC POLITICS

**West Africa:** Politicians in *Borno* State in north-eastern **Nigeria** are debating a bill aimed at curbing religious extremism. This *Islamic Preaching Bill* would outlaw preaching likely to cause a breach of the peace and will also require most clerics to obtain a preaching license.

Meanwhile **Nigerian** police has been found guilty by a court in Borno sect clashes case. The family of a man who died in police custody in **Nigeria** during an Islamist uprising last year has welcomed the court's ruling.

In **Cameroon** Sex Workers convened an extraordinary general assembly last week to retaliate against the recent administrative decision to ban prostitution in the city of Douala. The band commonly called 'liberal sisters' intends to Boycott Labour Day.

**South Africa:** Last week **Zimbabwe** marked 30 years of independence from the UK.

The United Nations refugee agency last week urged the **Zambian** Government to halt the expulsion of refugees and asylum-seekers to the *Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)* after 36 individuals were recently sent back.

According to a report released by Human Rights Watch, the government of **Angola** has not done enough to combat pervasive corruption and mismanagement. Even though the oil-rich country's gross domestic product has increased by more than **400 %** in the last six years, **Angolans** are not seeing their lives improve accordingly.

**Central Africa:** **Rwanda's** Media High Council earlier this week suspended Umuvugizi and Umuseso for six months on the grounds the two weeklies violated Rwanda's media laws and provoked public order. The editor of **Rwanda's** Umuvugizi independent newspaper has termed the decision as politically motivated.

According to a statement issued by the defense ministry the army has rescued nine women abducted by the *Lord's Resistant Army (LRA)* in the ongoing operations against the rebels in the **Central African Republic**



(CAR). The women included **Ugandans, Congolese and Central Africans.**

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström visited the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** earlier this month where both rebels and the national army have been accused of mass rape. The visit follows a new report, commissioned by Oxfam and conducted by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative that shows a shocking pattern of rape in **Eastern Congo.**

## HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

**West Africa:** According to a recent official report in **Cameroon** projected from the results obtained from the third Population and Housing Census of November, 2005 and based on the average demographic growth rate of **2.6%**, the country's population as of January 01, 2010 stands at 19,406,100.

**South Africa:** Delegates from 42 countries in *Africa*, which along with Asia is the most vulnerable continent to disasters, held a *United Nations*-backed meeting last week in Nairobi to discuss ways to make their communities and citizens safer.

According to **South Africa's** water minister the country will increasingly use desalinated seawater to meet growing demand for drinking water in coastal towns facing the worst drought in 150 years.

A new report by **Zimbabwe's** National AIDS Council (NAC), showing a dramatic rise in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among people aged 15 to 24 in the capital, Harare, has health experts worried that the country's success in reducing HIV could be unraveling.

**Central Africa:** In **Rwanda** the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Food and Nutritional Interventions Project (US\$16m) project was launched aimed at tackling food insecurity among people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans.

## POLITICAL ECONOMY

**West Africa:** In **Ghana** inflation continues its downward trend as the figure for March dipped to 13.3%, down from 14.2 % in February; the ninth monthly fall in a row. Meanwhile Some 60 companies from Ghana participated at the 5th Abuja International Trade Fair last week.

The last president of *West African Bar Association (WABA)* Mr. Femi Falana insisted in statements last week that the former **Nigerian** Military President *Ibrahim Babangida* has a case to answer in a \$12.4 billion oil windfall scam. The report stating that the past **Nigerian** leaders stole more than \$89.5 billion from the national purse over a period of 38 years, from 1970 through 2008, has cast a shadow on efforts by Acting President Goodluck Jonathan to attract fresh foreign investment, which was part of his agenda in Washington. Meanwhile 80 persons, foreigners and **Nigerians**, including four former Heads of State and two of their wives, as well as former Governors and Ministers -the top echelons of the country's political and military establishments, including technocrats - have been indicted by the United States law enforcement officials over a N27 billion Halliburton bribery scandal.

According to news reports a top official of the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission [RMAFC] in **Nigeria** State governments in this country may not be able to pay workers' salaries in the next two months when the \$3.2 billion currently left in the Excess Crude Account is shared out.

Acting President Goodluck Jonathan has asked the World Bank to support **Nigeria's** efforts to revamp its infrastructure and overcome the challenges of power generation. Meanwhile **Nigeria's** already unstable oil production might be affected by news that Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (SPDC) has shut down the SPDC Joint Venture-operated East Area (EA) oilfield offshore in the Niger Delta as a precaution to enable repairs on equipments.

**South Africa:** **Zimbabwe's** Cabinet has postponed the regulations for domestic and foreign companies to submit plans to hand **51 %** of shares to black **Zimbabweans.**

**Central Africa:** Last week the *Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)* celebrated the opening of its new regional parliament in Malabo, the **Equatorial Guinean** capital, with the presence of all presidents of the *Central African region.*§



Delegates follow proceedings during the **second ministerial conference on disaster risk reduction** at the KICC April 14,2010



## Zone 3- Euro-America: *Transatlantic Community*



### WESTERN EUROPE

A damning report on human rights reveals that the discrimination Muslims face all across **Europe** is alarmingly on the rise, mainly due to raging conflicts.

**UK** Conservatives launched their manifesto earlier this month for the May 6 general election, with a raft of pledges they say will put power back in people's hands. Meanwhile **British** voters witnessed the first U.S.-style political

debate, a historic event billed as an exciting prelude to one of the closest elections in years.

**French** President Nicolas Sarkozy said on Monday he would decide next year if he will stand for re-election in 2012. Sarkozy's center-right party was heavily beaten in regional elections last month and his approval ratings have fallen sharply as concern over the fragile state of the economy and disapproval of his restless governing style have grown.

**Eurozone** finance ministers gathered last week to seek ways to halt a government debt crisis as **Greece** asks the European Union and the International Monetary. The first debt sale since then raised 1.56 billion euros indicating improved investor confidence.

The *Vatican* responded Monday to allegations it long concealed clerical sex abuse by making it clear for the first time that bishops and clerics worldwide should report such crimes to police if they are required to by law.

Meanwhile **Italy's** constitutional court has rejected bids to have gay marriages recognized in two Italian cities i.e. Venice & Trento.

**Belgium** soon may be the first European nation to outlaw the burqa and other Islamic garb that completely hides a woman's body and face. Neighboring **France** and the **Netherlands** may also outlaw attire that is viewed by many in western European societies as demeaning to women. It is also considered a gateway to radical Islam, a fear that is stoking rightwing sentiment across the continent.

In **Greece** earlier this month Prosecutors pressed charges against six people over their alleged membership in the far-left terror group Revolutionary Struggle. The suspects -- five men and a woman -- are accused of multiple counts of attempted homicide, setting off explosions and armed offences. Meanwhile the Police also detained about 70 demonstrators who had gathered in downtown Athens to protest the arrests.

**France** last week voiced its opposition to a U.S. extradition request for an *Iranian*, Majid Kakavand, a 37-year-old engineer, accused of evading export controls to purchase technology over the Internet to sell to *Iran's* military.

**Germany's** defense minister said last week that military restructuring could free up more soldiers for international missions, potentially bringing it in line with other countries' efforts. Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg's comments come as the country faces pressure from the *United States* to send more soldiers to *Afghanistan*, where it currently has about 4,000 troops. The war is extremely unpopular at home and Chancellor Angela Merkel has resisted the request for further troops.

### CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

**Albania's** Defence Minister Arben Imami has said that the country plans to have all old ammunition destroyed by 2013 under a new dismantling effort in Elbasan and Polican, financed by **Denmark**. In need of dismantling are more than 90,000 tonnes of ammunition inherited from the communist regime. Meanwhile earlier this month **Albania** abolished its visa regime towards **Serbian** citizens, another sign of improving bilateral relations.

The Court of **BiH** has decided to release former **Republika Srpska** (RS) Prime Minister Gojko Klicekovic on bail. Klicekovic is accused of war crimes committed in Bosanska Krupa during the 1992-1995 **Bosnian** conflict.

The cloud of volcanic ash over Europe led US President Barack Obama and other World Leaders to cancel their trip to **Poland** to attend funeral of President Lech Kaczynski.

**Bulgarian** Prime Minister Boyko Borisov has announced that the country will give up its *eurozone* application for the time being due to its current inability to meet the European Monetary Union criteria.

The **Kosovo** Embassy in London received a note earlier this month informing it that *Swaziland* has recognized **Kosovo's** independence, the 66th country to do so since *Pristina's* declaration of independence in February 2008.

**Montenegro's** Lawmakers with a 47 to 27 vote rejected a no-confidence motion last week against Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic's cabinet, submitted by the opposition Movement for Changes (PzP) and other parties.

**Romania, Georgia** and **Azerbaijan** signed an official agreement in Bucharest last week to provide natural gas from the Caspian Sea to **Romania**.

**Serbian** President Boris Tadic has stated that **Serbia** and **Croatia** are searching for an out-of-court solution to the two countries' reciprocal genocide lawsuits filed at the International Court of Justice, for war



crimes committed during the 1990s.

**Czech** President Vaclav Klaus, a fierce critic of the European Union and its reforming Lisbon Treaty and the last EU leader to sign the reform deal said last week that the pact has failed to boost the 27-member bloc's effectiveness.

In **Hungary** the right-wing Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) with **52.7%** of the vote won an absolute majority in parliamentary elections held last week. The neo-fascist Party for a Better

Hungary (*Jobbik*), which ran a racist election campaign directed against Roma and foreigners, obtained **17 %** of the vote.

*Kyrgyzstan's* ousted president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, claims that two countries, *Kazakhstan* and **Belarus** have offered him political asylum.

**Russia's** first Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov has disclosed that the nation may abandon its plans to join the World Trade Organization in a joint bid with *Kazakhstan* and **Belarus**.

Since **Belarus** was not invited to participate in the top-level 47-nation nuclear security summit in Washington on April 12-13, during which world leaders agreed to 'secure all vulnerable nuclear material in four years', the **Belarusian** President Alexander Lukashenko has announced that the nation has hundreds of



Prime Minister of **Ukraine**,  
Mykola Azarov

kilograms of highly enriched uranium and it is not going to get rid of.

At the economic front, **Czech** central bank Vice-Governor Miroslav Singer very strongly condemned IMF for its 'misleading reports', painting a miserable picture of the country's financial exposure.

According to a *Bloomberg* survey, average gross wages in **Hungary** has probably advanced **3.5 %** in February. Meanwhile the yield on **Hungary's 8 %** bond due February 2015 fell 2 basis points to 5.789 percent.

The Ministry of Health of the **Slovak Republic** has awarded US Company Ness Technologies, Inc. a contract to provide the first phase of an electronic healthcare services system valued at €32.4m.

According to the Statistical Committee reported, **Belarus'** gross domestic product (GDP) rose **4.0 %** in the first quarter of 2010 from a year earlier.

The **Ukrainian** Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said last week that his country and the International Monetary Fund have agreed to revise its two-year bail out program that was approved in 2008 and **Ukraine** has so far received 11 billion U.S. dollars out of a **16.4**-billion-dollar loan from the IMF while the rest had been suspended since last November.

**Estonia** is likely to become the seventeenth member of the euro zone in 2011 as its macro-economic performance remains under control despite the recession. The European Commission is set to give its green light in mid-May.

The **Polish** constitution stipulates that if a president dies in office, the speaker of parliament assumes his duties and must decide on an election date within 14 days, with the election to follow no less than 60 days after that. Acting president Bronislaw Komowski announced the election will be held on June 20.

**Belarus** has initiated discussions on the formation of active citizenship among the young generation of the CIS countries aimed at involving of youth in development and strengthening of human values, education for their civil and patriotic feelings.

The Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government presented to the **Latvian** Cabinet an information report on the implementation of the e-Government Development Program 2005-2009. This includes the introduction of a secure e-Signature infrastructure, national e-Procurement system, new State and municipal information systems etc.

## RUSSIA



The 47-nation U.S. summit on nuclear security earlier this month got off to a rocky start when **Russia** indicated that it did not favor tough economic sanctions against *Iran*. Further news of *Iran* buying an ultra-sophisticated missile system from **Russia** to protect its nuclear sites has caused fury and fear among Western powers seeking to stop the country from developing nuclear weapons. The new **START** (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) bilateral nuclear arms reduction treaty between Russia and the United States was signed by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama on April 8, 2010 in Prague. A ceiling was fixed for each

country of 1,550 nuclear warheads and 700 deployed nuclear delivery vehicles. The new limits are about a third lower than the previous ones negotiated by George W. Bush in the 2002.

President *Dmitry Medvedev* participated in a summit of four i.e. *Brazil*, **Russia**, *India*, and *China* in *Brasilia* aimed at strengthening cooperation. The leaders called for a 'new international order' as they reached consensus to file a draft resolution before the Group of 20 (G20) in *Canada* in June, demanding more power for emerging and developing countries in global decision-making bodies.

After the Summit Medvedev said that **Russia** will leave the *Kyoto Protocol* on greenhouse gas emissions if a deal can't be reached on carbon emission reduction. The Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

**Russia's** uneasy ties with *Poland* face a test after *Polish* President Lech Kaczynski, his wife and dozens of other senior *Polish* officials died in a weekend plane crash tentatively blamed on fog and pilot error.

The foreign minister of *Kazakhstan*, who currently chairs the OSCE stated that the *United States*, **Russia** and *Kazakhstan* worked together to allow *Kyrgyzstan's* ousted president to leave the country. Meanwhile **Russian** President Dmitry Medvedev has linked the collapse of political regime in *Kyrgyzstan* with the failure to solve social and economic issues and announced to continue its humanitarian aid to the nation but will conclude major agreement only with a legitimate government that will be able to cope with them.

According to *Moscow's* central bank reports the ruble weakened **0.2 %** to 29.0225 per dollar. Also the yield on the **7.5 %** government bond in dollars due March 2030 fell 1 basis point to **4.791%**.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin last week said that **Russia** might lend \$5 billion to \$6 billion to *Ukraine* to construct two nuclear reactors, while promising to consider a new deal on gas supply prices.

Three suspected Islamic insurgents blew themselves up as security forces stormed the private house where they were hiding in an Ingush village last week, and the widow of one of them attacked investigators killing one

police officer.

According to a statement by the **Russian** Orthodox Church the bodies of victims of Stalinist purges found in a mass grave during the construction of a road near the **Russian** Far Eastern town of Vladivostok are to be reburied.

## US/CANADA

Last week just hours after Congress passed an \$18 billion bill to restore unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed, President Barack Obama made it the law of the land. A measure to restore eligibility for the jobless to receive up to 99 weeks of unemployment checks appears on track despite objections from Republicans concerned about its cost.

Allied activists demonstrated this month all over the **US** protesting government spending and what they deem as the Washington tax grab. Meanwhile former President Bill Clinton warned of a slippery slope from angry anti-government rhetoric to violence like the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, saying "the words we use really do matter."

Obama opened the global security summit earlier this month after two days of meetings with selected presidents and prime ministers of the 47 countries assembled to recharge efforts to keep nuclear material out of terrorist hands.

According to reports The **United States** is leading an effort by a handful of anti-whaling nations to broker an agreement that would limit and ultimately end whale hunting by Japan, Norway and Iceland.

In **Canada** a scandal involving a former cabinet minister has helped cut public support for the Conservatives. Meanwhile the weekly Ekos survey for the **Canadian** Broadcasting Corp put popular support for the Conservatives at **31.4%**, down from **33.6%** last week. Support for the main opposition Liberals rose to **29%** from **27.3%**.

On the **Canadian** financial front stronger-than-expected trade figures for February and a steady housing market confirm the **Canadian** economic recovery is picking up speed ahead of expected interest rate hikes by the Bank of **Canada**.

**Canadian** Prime Minister Stephen Harper has announced that **Canada** will return spent nuclear fuel to its supplier, the *United States*, as part of a global drive to secure fissile materials.



## LATIN AMERICA

Earlier this month **Argentina's** Cristina Fernandez rejected the idea that her leftist politics would prevent a strong working relationship with Sebastian Pinera, a right-wing billionaire whose inauguration last month ended 20 years of center-left rule in **Chile**.

A landslide swept away dozens of houses near Rio de Janeiro last week, worsening a disaster caused by heavy rains that has killed many around **Brazil's** second-biggest city. In a recent statement officials updated the number of confirmed dead to 219.

According to Agencia Angola Press reports Petroleo Brasileiro SA, **Brazil's** state-run oil company, plans to expand its exploration activities in **Angola**.

**Brazilian** opposition candidate Jose Serra launched his bid for the presidency last week, buoyed by an opinion poll lead and extensive experience ahead of what promises to be a tough race until the October 3 poll. According to a recent poll candidate Jose Serra and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's chosen successor, Dilma Rousseff, are in a statistical dead heat six months before the October election.



Meanwhile President Barack Obama met with Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of **Brazil** and *Turkish* Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan last week in Washington D.C. to discuss *Iran's* controversial nuclear program. The meeting took place on the sidelines of a summit that focused on nuclear security in the face of terrorist threats.

On the economic front according to reports **Brazil** may need to drill more wells to find the 5 billion barrels of oil reserves needed in a proposed swap for new shares in state-controlled Petroleo Brasileiro SA.

The *United States* and **Brazil** signed an agreement last week meant to bolster military ties, but **Brazil's** Defense Minister Nelson Jobim did not offer any hint about a key defense contract sought by U.S.-based Boeing Co. The accord, which was signed at the Pentagon by Jobim and U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, is the first agreement of its kind in more than 30 years between the two countries.

Seeking to smooth relations with **Mexico** at the annual gathering of the NAFTA partners last week, Prime Minister Stephen Harper blamed *Canada's* decision to impose visas on Mexican nationals on Canada's refugee system, and urged Parliament to enact changes to stem the flow of "bogus" claims.

Despite a severe energy-related crisis at home **Venezuelan** President Hugo Chavez offered last week to help **Uruguay** expand a refinery and supply it with crude oil at discounted rates. Meanwhile President Chavez extended an electricity emergency for another 60 days despite recent rainfall that raised hopes that severe power shortages would end in the oil-exporting nation. According to the *South American OPEC nation's* oil minister **Venezuela** has diversified its oil markets and is selling more than 460,000 barrels per day to China, a **21 %** increase from a year ago.

**Venezuela's** President Hugo Chavez in a recent statement during a ceremony to receive the first of eight naval patrol boats purchased from Spain, called U.S. officials "stupid" for criticizing his arms purchases from *Russia* and said he would keep buying weapons until the country is ready to defend itself.

## AUSTRALASIA

**Australia's** Prime Minister Kevin Rudd threatened last week to ask voters to directly back his sweeping health reform plans as opposition from powerful state leaders threatens to hobble his re-election strategy. Rudd has played down early polls, but said he would go ahead with a risky referendum alongside the election if state leaders rejected his health shakeup.

Web attackers in *China* flooded an international network link to one of Optus' large commercial clients in



**Australia** in what is known as a denial-of-service attack. This caused congestion that significantly slowed Internet and e-mail links to other customers on that link, including AAP and News.

The United Nations has raised concerns about **Australia's** decision to freeze asylum applications from *Afghanistan* and *Sri Lanka*, saying it could leave people in detention for prolonged periods. **Australia** this month suspended applications from *Afghans* and *Sri Lankans*, saying the situation in their war-weary homelands had improved and fewer nationals of these countries would likely be considered refugees in the future. §