



**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.

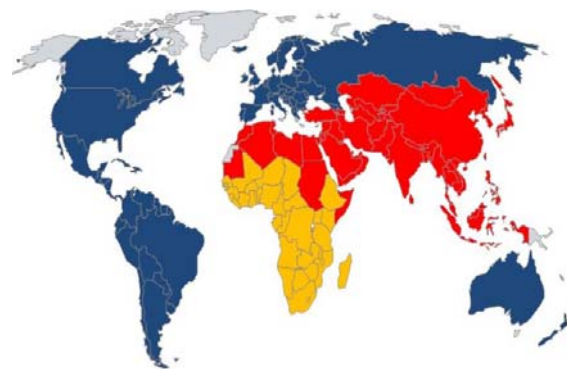
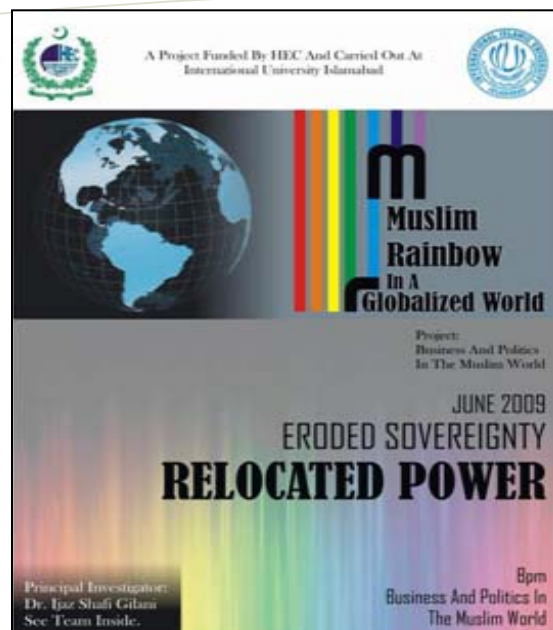
Why should one add another e-letter to many similar exercises already underway? We have pondered this question and here is what we believe to be our possible contribution or *Competitive Advantage*.

- ◆ 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 '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's report consists of **18** surveys. **2** of these are multi-country surveys while the rest are national surveys.

### Gallopedia Highlights Week # 118

Dated 02-08 May, 2010

**ASIA zone-** 2 national polls:

*North East Asia:* Japan, Taiwan

**AFRICA zone-** Nil

**EURO-AMERICAS zone-**

**16** national polls and **2** Multi-Country Polls:

*East Europe-* Slovenia

*West Europe-* France, Italy

*North America-* U.S.A

*Latin America-* Brazil, Mexico, Dominican

Republic, Columbia, Guatemala, Honduras,

Venezuela, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua,

Panama, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile,

Paraguay, Uruguay

*Australasia:* Australia

#### Subjects covered include:

- Political economy
- Security
- Governance
- Technology
- Social issues/ Health & Disease
- Migration
- Religion



### COMMENTARY- The National Prayer Day in the United States

The *National Prayer Day* which U.S. Congress designated in 1954, has generated a lot of debate whether religious practices should or should not be patronized by the state. The opponents view is that a secular state has nothing to do with prayers. But are the American citizens or the United States government *exclusively* secular? This has remained the topic of a light debate for years. The U.S. currency notes too depict faith in God as a republic through the statement written on it "In God we trust".

Polling data depicts that the American public seems to distinctly support the idea of *National Prayer Day*. A *Gallup USA* survey shows that just **5 %** of total Americans and **9 %** of those for whom 'religion is not important' oppose this day. About **six in ten** in the overall American public and **three fourth** of those for whom 'religion is important' support the idea.

This year's commemoration has involved some controversy as the National Day of Prayer Task Force, a private group organizing thousands of events across the country, has made it a goal to promote and publicize *Christian prayer* specifically. Americans generally endorse the task force's goal, as **62%** say promoting Christian prayer should be a major goal of the events while **36%** disagree. Opinions on this matter diverge between religious and nonreligious Americans.

Meanwhile around **83%** Americans claim their faith in a God who answers prayers, while about **9%** say there is a God who does not answer prayers. Meanwhile just **5 %** believe that no God exists.

While Interpretation and practice of faith may differ widely, the American Population does overtly hold on to the notion of a higher being. This notion while deeply imbedded in traditional communal life has also surfaced at the state level and thus continues to be a defining characteristic of an otherwise '*secular*' nation.

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*As you may know, in 1952 Congress designated a National Day of Prayer, which will be held May 6th this year. Do you favor or oppose having a National Day of Prayer, or doesn't it matter to you either way?*

	Favor	Oppose	Doesn't matter	No opinion
All Americans	57%	5%	38%	1%
Religion important	74%	2%	24%	*
Religion not important	24%	9%	66%	1%

USA Today/Gallup poll, May 1-2, 2010

## SUMMARY OF POLLS

### ► NORTHEAST ASIA

Politics » Approval Ratings

#### ***Majority in Japan Disapproves of Government***

Public confidence in the government headed by Yukio Hatoyama has eroded considerably in [Japan](#), according to a poll by [Mainichi](#). **51 %** of respondents disapprove of the current cabinet, up **34** points since October 2009.

May 02, 2010

Politics » Approval Ratings

#### ***Three-in-Five Taiwanese Dissatisfied with Ma***

Many adults in [Taiwan](#) remain critical of the way Ma Ying-jeou is handling his duties, according to a poll by [Global Views](#). **61.4 %** of respondents are dissatisfied with their president's performance, down **4.6** points since March.

May 06, 2010



## EUROPE

### ► WEST EUROPE

Politics » Approval Ratings

#### ***Only a Third in France Approve of Sarkozy***

Public dissatisfaction with Nicolas Sarkozy has grown this year in [France](#), according to a poll by [Ifop](#) published in *Paris Match*. **67 %** of respondents disapprove of their president's performance, up seven points since February.

May 05, 2010

Politics » Approval Ratings

#### ***Confidence in Berlusconi Below 50% in Italy***

A majority of [Italians](#) hold little trust in their prime minister, according to a poll by [IPR Marketing](#) published in *La Repubblica*. **54 %** of respondents do not have confidence in Silvio Berlusconi.

May 06, 2010

### ► EAST EUROPE

Politics » Approval Ratings

#### ***Two-Thirds in Slovenia Dissatisfied with Government***

More people in [Slovenia](#) are unhappy with their national administration, according to a poll by [Ninamedia](#). **67.9 %** of respondents say the work of the government has been unsuccessful, up seven points since February.

May 02, 2010

## AMERICAS

### ► NORTH AMERICA

Politics » Health

#### ***Americans No Less Worried About Healthcare Costs***

Despite the passage of highly publicized healthcare legislation into law in March, [Americans](#) are no less concerned about paying the costs of a serious illness or accident, or normal healthcare costs, than they were last year. **61%** are worried about the former, and **48%** are worried about the latter.

[Gallup USA](#)

May 7, 2010



Society » Race & Religion

### ***Few Americans Oppose National Day of Prayer***

Most **Americans** either support or are not bothered by the annual National Day of Prayer, which President Obama proclaimed will be celebrated on May 6 this year. Those who say religion is important in their lives widely support the day, while the majority of those who say religion is not important say it doesn't matter to them, rather than opposing it outright. **Gallup USA**

*May 5, 2010*

Economy » Economic Perceptions

### ***U.S. Job Creation Best since November 2008***

**Gallup's** Job Creation Index in the **United States** finds current job market conditions nationwide to be the best they have been since November 2008.

*May 6, 2010*

Society » Communication/Media/Technology

### ***United We Stand ... on Technology***

While the **U.S.** public dissatisfaction with the state of the nation and federal government is very high, the satisfaction with news media, churches and religious institutions is in the low 30s or 20s, but the satisfaction with technology companies outranks all other institutions. **Pew Research**

**Center**

*May 5, 2010*

Society » Demography

### ***The New Demography of American Motherhood***

The demography of motherhood in the **United States** has shifted strikingly in the past two decades. Compared with mothers of newborns in 1990, today's mothers of newborns are older and better educated. They are less likely to be white and less likely to be married. **Pew Research Center**

*May 6, 2010*



Society » Political Perception

### ***"Socialism" Not So Negative, "Capitalism" Not So Positive***

'Socialism' is a negative for most Americans, but certainly not all **Americans**. "Capitalism" is regarded positively by a majority of public, though it is a thin majority. Among certain segments of the public -- notably, young people and Democrats -- both "isms" are rated about equally. And while most Americans have a negative reaction to the word "militia," the term is viewed more positively by Republican men than most other groups. **Pew Research**

**Center**

*May 4, 2010*

Society » Religion

### ***U.S Catholics Show Mixed Views on Pope***

Results of a new **Zogby Interactive survey** show mixed results among **American** Catholics' evaluations of Catholic Church leaders. Both Pope Benedict XVI and American Catholic Bishops receive largely negative ratings in their handling of the sexual abuse situation with the church. However, pluralities approve of the overall job performance of both the Pope and Bishops. In addition, a clear majority of American Catholics believe Pope Benedict XVI should continue to serve as Pope.

*May 05, 2010*

Society » Health & Disease

### ***The Flu Season That Wasn't***

Despite initial concerns about the rampant spread of H1N1 heading into the 2009-2010 cold and flu season, flu reports have been consistently lower throughout this flu season compared with the last according to the **Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index**. April marks the sixth consecutive month in which fewer **American** adults in

Gallup's tracking have reported having the flu the prior day compared with the corresponding months' estimates from one year ago.

May 6, 2010

Politics » Political Institutions

**Approval for Congress Steady in United States**

Only one-in-four Americans are satisfied with the way the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are doing their jobs, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion. 24 % of respondents approve of the

performance of Congress.

May 03, 2010



► **LATIN AMERICA**

Politics » Approval Ratings

**Brazil's Lula Heads to Retirement with High Numbers**

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva remains particularly popular in Brazil, according to a poll by Ibope. 76 % of respondents rate their president's performance as good or very good.

May 04, 2010

► **AUSTRALASIA**

Society » Immigration

**Australians Want Immigrants in Specific Regions**

People in Australia believe their government should provide incentives for new migrants to settle in specific regions of the country which need and can cope with higher populations, according to a poll by Essential Research. 55 % of respondents agree with this view.

May 07, 2010

**MULTI-COUNTRY POLLS/ GLOBAL POLLS**

Society » Crime

**Many See Drug Trafficking Widespread, Rising in Latin America**

Gallup surveys suggest illicit drug trafficking is common in communities throughout much of Latin America, including in some of the most well-developed countries such as Chile and Costa Rica. At least half of residents in Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, Panama, Venezuela, and Uruguay say illicit drug trafficking or drug sales are taking place in their neighborhoods.

May 7, 2010

Society » Crime

**Colombia Eclipses Mexico in Murders Close to Home**

Despite frequent news of drug war-related deaths in Mexico, Gallup polls show the average Mexican is less likely than those in several other Latin American countries to say a close friend or relative was murdered in the past year. 5% of Mexicans interviewed in August 2009 said someone close to them was murdered in the past 12 months -- about average for the region.

May 5, 2010 §

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

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

#### **TURKEY**

##### **Political Front:**

The Ruling regime has expressed optimism about getting 330 to 367 votes from the **Turkish** Parliament regarding constitutional reform package.

##### **Geo-strategic Front:**

**Turkey's** continuous criticism of *Israel* has further deteriorated relation of the two countries.

Meanwhile the Defense Ministry of *Ukraine*, the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces of **Turkey**, and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) under a *NATO* agreement have agreed to exchange data on air traffic control.

President of *Uganda* paid a visit to **Turkey** last week in order to enhance economic relations between the two states.

The newly elected **Turkish Cypriot** leader has expressed keenness to resume peace talks about reunification of the divided island.

##### **Economic Front:**

**Turkey** expects **5.5%** economic growth in the year 2010. Meanwhile inflation has further increased both in consumer and producer prices. **Turkish** growing economic ties with *Syria*, *Botswana* and *Germany* also remained significant.

##### **Social Front:**

The temperature has increased in western **Turkish** provinces however heavy rainfall and snow has been forecasted in the eastern provinces. Also the **Turkish** government, engaged in its efforts to join the EU, celebrated *Europe Day* on 9<sup>th</sup> May with great pomp and show.

#### **GCC**

##### **Geo-strategic Front:**

The 11th consultative session of **GCC** Interior Ministers was held in **Kuwait** last week. During the session **GCC** Ministers appreciated the successful **Saudi** efforts to defend their land and people along the **Yemeni** border against rebels. They further hailed the efforts of **UAE** security forces for their successful investigation of the assassination of *Palestinian* Hamas leader *Mahmoud Al-Mabhouth*. The Ministers also discussed a whole range of security issues currently confronting the Gulf region, as well as plans and policies to tackle terror cells, drug traffickers, pirates and swindlers.

*Palestinian* President *Mahmoud Abbas* held talks with the **Saudi** King over regional affairs. Meanwhile **Saudi** Foreign Minister during his visit to *Egypt* discussed prospects of *Middle East peace* process with the *Egyptian* President.

While addressing the General Debate of the *2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty*, **UAE** foreign Minister claimed that every state has got the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in a responsible manner. In the meanwhile **UAE-Morocco** relations also remained significant.

##### **Economic Front:**

A **Kuwait** Energy Company has discovered an oil field in *Ras Qattarah* block in the **Egyptian** Western desert; the discovery is the seventh of its kind.

**Omani-Qatari** Joint Business Council held its third meeting in *Doha* and discussed various areas of joint cooperation between the two countries.

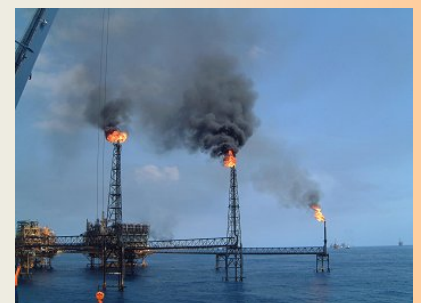
**Bahrain** expects an economic growth of **4%** in the year 2010. Meanwhile the kingdom has started issuing bonds as an income source.

##### **Social front:**

The Ministry of Labor in **Kuwait** has implemented a new mechanism to solve workers' complaints and problems by introducing dispute settlement systems. In



Members of parliament from the ruling **Justice and Development Party** and the main opposition **Republican People's Party** scuffle during a debate at a parliamentary session



accordance with the system disputes and complaints would be examined and solved within three days from the date of being lodged and registered at the Labor Relations Department.

## FERTILE CRESCENT

### *Political front:*

The **Egyptian** Movement for Change (*Kefaya*) has called on citizens to pursue a policy of civil disobedience as a means of resistance, while urging them to boycott all elections, starting with the Shura Council election due to be held in June this year to elect members of the Upper House of Parliament. Submission of candidacy applications for the mid-term Shura Council elections has started. Meanwhile the **Egyptian** PM has called the wave of demonstrations that has recently swept the street to be a new mode for citizens to express their demands and thus has no political dimension.

The recount of **Baghdad** votes that began last week was being monitored by EU and UN observers; where **Iraq's** election commission too was involved in manually recounting around 2.5 million ballots cast in Baghdad during the country's parliamentary election almost two months ago. The political bloc of Nouri al-Maliki, the incumbent **Iraqi** prime minister, has joined hand with its main *Shia* rival, the *Iraqi National Alliance* (INA), leaving the newly-formed coalition just four seats short of a parliamentary majority.

Rival politicians in **Lebanon** have set their differences aside and reached a consensus in many areas as municipal elections begun last week.

### *Geo-strategic Front:*

**Egypt** and *Sudan* have refused to sign the agreement on the sharing of the Nile waters. However *Uganda* and the rest of the Nile Basin countries have expressed readiness to sign the protocol called the Co-operative Framework Agreement.

*Iran* has agreed to ship 1.5 million liters of fuel to breathe life into some **Iraqi** power plants.

The Professional Associations Complex in **Jordan** has started a campaign

to ensure that the **Jordanian** markets do not carry any **Israeli** products. Meanwhile the **Israeli** Authorities deported a **Palestinian** resident of the West Bank to **Jordan** after the army claimed he was illegally staying in the country.

The *U.S.* President, Barrack Obama, has given **Israel** verbal and written guarantees that the United States would not allow the **Palestinians** to conduct any unilateral steps during indirect talks, or in the case of failure of such talks. The sources did not mention any guarantees that would prohibit **Israel** from continuing its unilateral measures especially settlement activities in occupied *East Jerusalem*. Meanwhile the *Palestinian* *Librations Organization* Executive Committee has decided to convene a meeting in order to discuss plans for resuming indirect talks with **Israel** mediated by Washington.

### *Economic Front:*

The survey of 14 economists predicted that gross domestic product (GDP) of **Egypt** would have grown by 4.7 % in the fiscal year that ends in 2 months time, ahead of other gulf nations, except the regional-leader Qatar.

### *Social front:*

The annual report produced by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom has strongly criticized **Egypt** over problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities.

Meanwhile **Egypt's** Communications Ministry has launched its first Internet domain name using Arabic letters to try to boost e-services and the number of people online in the most populous Arab nation. In other news the editorial dispute regarding the popular site, *Islam on line* still persists.

IDPs and refugees have asked the government of **Iraq** to facilitate the process of their return. Meanwhile about one-third of **Iraq's** 1 million Christians have fled the country since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

## IRAN

### *Political Front:*





A large number of university students from all **Iranian** universities have called for the resignation of U.S. President Barack Obama while protesting his recent atomic threats against **Iran**. Meanwhile the *Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)* Undersecretary for International Affairs and Foreign Policy Ali Baqeri has strongly rejected the possibility for suspending **Iran's** peaceful nuclear activities.

#### **Geo-strategic Front:**

A **French** court has turned down a U.S. request for the extradition of an **Iranian** engineer who has been accused of violating an export embargo by purchasing U.S. technology for military firms involved in **Iran's** nuclear program.

**Iran** and **Pakistan** have agreed to coordinate their positions to support sustainable peace, stability and development in **Afghanistan**. Amid a U.S.-led drive to impose fresh sanctions on **Iran**, two powers of the UN Security Council, **China** and **Russia**, have also decided to discuss **Iran's** nuclear issue. Meanwhile the **Venezuelan** President Hugo Chavez and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad held a discussion about **Brazil's** proposal on exchanging nuclear fuel.

#### **Economic Front:**

**Iranian** gasoline imports have declined sharply this month. Meanwhile petrochemical exports have observed a remarkable increase. Meanwhile **Pakistan** as well as the **EU** has expressed keenness to enhance economic collaboration with **Irsan**.

### **CENTRAL ASIA**

#### **Political Front:**

Three **Kazakh** parliament deputies have proposed giving President Nursultan Nazarbaev the official title "Leader of the Nation".

Investigations have been launched against the son of **Kyrgyz** ousted President over a corruption case. Meanwhile the **Kyrgyz** interim government has launched a criminal inquiry into firms supplying fuel to the U.S. air base in the Central Asian nation.

#### **Geo-strategic Front:**

A new **Russian** top negotiator has recently paid a visit to **Armenia** in order to discuss the issue of **Nagorno-Karabakh**. Meanwhile **Turkey** has reiterated its commitment to support **Azerbaijan** over the **Nagorno-Karabakh** issue.

The **Kazakh-Kyrgyz** border remained closed despite talks via phone between leader of the **Kyrgyz** interim government and the **Kazakh** President. Meanwhile **Kyrgyzstan's** interim government has ordered prosecutors to seek the extradition of former President Bakiev.

**Iran** has officially proposed introducing visa-free travel between **Tajikistan** and **Iran** however **Tajikistan** rejected the offer.

**China** and **Turkmenistan** held talks to enhance bilateral relation. Meanwhile the **Uzbek** President too held a meeting with the **Chinese** Finance Minister and discussed areas of cooperation.

**Azerbaijan** and **Israel** have decided to hold political talks this week.

#### **Economic Front:**

**Turkey** and **Azerbaijan** have reached an agreement for the price of natural gas on the **European Union-backed Nabucco** gas pipeline project.

In a recent report the IMF has given a positive assessment of socio-economic developments in **Turkmenistan**.

#### **Social Front:**

Dozens of youths have been arrested in **Baku, Azerbaijan** as they attempted to mourn the victims of a mass killing at the State Oil Academy a year ago.

**Polio** has emerged as a potent social issue in **Tajikistan**. Meanwhile strong rains have caused floods that have killed at least 20 people in Southern Province of the country.

### **EAST ASIA**

### **Political Front:**

The **Malaysian** government has made a plan to construct a nuclear power plant for energy purpose in the next 12 to 15 years. IAEA approval however is required to proceed with the plans.

According to recent polls, Aquino, the son of **Philippines'** former President enjoys a 12 to 19 point lead for the upcoming Presidential elections. Meanwhile **Philippines'** President's election lawyer has called for the *May 10 elections* to be postponed by calling it the only remedy to prevent elections from failing.

Amidst unrest in **Thailand** the **Thai** PM has announced to take effective measures to counter red-shirt protestors.

### **Geo-strategic Front:**

*China* has announced to donate more than 250 trucks to **Cambodia** just weeks after the *United States* withheld a shipment of military vehicles in response to **Cambodia's** recent expulsion of 20 *Uighur* refugees.

### **Economic Front:**

*World Bank* has appreciated the extra-ordinary performance of **Indonesian** Finance Minister while nominating her to the post of Managing Director of the World Bank. **Indonesia's** exports have increased by **54 %** year-on-year during the first quarter, and **13 %** during March clearly indicating smooth economic recovery. Meanwhile **Indonesia's** banking sector, comprising mainly small to mid-sized banks, has been increasingly attracting foreign investors while domestic consolidation has been relatively slow.

The *Asian Development Bank's (ADB)* Board of Directors has approved a \$100M concessional loan to rehabilitate one of **Vietnam's** oldest and largest irrigation and drainage systems located in the heart of the Red-**Thai** Binh river basin. Meanwhile **Vietnam's** economy has been "relatively stable" so far this year, a trend that the government intends to continue supporting.

### **Social Front:**

Palm oil producers from **Malaysia** have formed a coalition with their counterparts in **Indonesia** to counter intensified campaigns that blame the industry for rapid deforestation. Meanwhile the **Indonesian** president officially opened the 5th *Indonesian Muslim Congress* in East Jakarta last week.



## **SOUTH ASIA**

### **Political Front:**

A fierce clash last week between the activists of **Bangladesh's** ruling party *Awami League* and the main opposition party *Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)* left one person dead and 200 injured.

**Maldives** *National Defense Force (MNDF)* has claimed that no terrorist group has set up a training base in any part of the country.

Maoists have finally launched a general strike in Katmandu, **Nepal** and have asked the PM to resign. Amidst the unrest four journalists were injured, meanwhile the coalition parties have also asked PM to resign in order to lessen tensions.

**Sri Lanka's** parliament has voted to scale back a tough state of emergency laws that were first introduced 27 years ago to deal with separatist *Tamil rebels*.

### **Geo-strategic Front:**

**Bangladeshi** authorities have handed over Ranjan Daimary, chief of the outlawed *National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)*, to **India** where he is wanted for ordering bomb attacks. Meanwhile The cabinet has assigned two ministers and an adviser to the prime minister to scrutinize a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the import of electricity from **India** which was signed between the two neighboring countries during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to **India** in January this year.

### **Economic Front:**

The World Bank has approved \$292 million in loans to finance two infrastructure projects in **Bangladesh**. Meanwhile a constant increase in **Bangladeshi** exports has been observed showing economic recovery.

Strikes have adversely affected tourist industry in **Nepal** rendering a big blow to the nation's economy.

Meanwhile the International Monetary Fund has urged the **Sri Lankan** government to speed up fiscal reforms and produce a more comprehensive deficit cutting plan if it wants to get a multi-billion dollar loan back on track. The UN Economic and Social Commission has appreciated **Sri Lanka's** economic development. Meanwhile sharp increase in the nation's shares has also been observed.

#### **Social front:**

**Bangladesh** has imposed a ban on the import of poultry from **India** due to reported cases of bird flu in the country.

A local *American* church has been helping to make the transition to the country a little easier for 100 refugees from **Bhutan**.

Meanwhile **Maldives** has expressed joy on having built one of the most advanced telecommunications systems in the region.

## **INDIA**

#### **Political front:**

UPA government has expressed desire to restore caste-based census in order to implement Mandal commission recommendations for OBCs and minorities. Opposition parties however criticized the idea. Maoists have targeted government-run *girl's school* and also damaged railway-track in *Northern Bihar*.

*Hürriyet Leader*, Syed Ali Gillani called a march to the office of the United Nations Military Observers Group in **India** and *Pakistan* to submit a memorandum, seeking U.N. intervention to grant the people of **Kashmir** the right to self-determination. In response the government kept him along with a few other leaders under house arrest, a move that led to the launch of anti-government protests in the streets of **Kashmir**.

Meanwhile *Ajmal Kasab* has been delivered a death sentence following the court's conviction regarding his involvement in the *Mumbai* attacks.

At the regional front **BJP** has agreed to pleas made by JMM leaders and let Shibu Soren continue as Chief Minister of Jharkhand for some more time, putting on hold a decision on the transfer of power for now.

The leader of *Trinamool* Congress has announced his intention to contest *anti-Congress* elections in *West Bengal* after holding Congress responsible for breaking their alliance.

#### **Geo-strategic Front:**

**India** and the EU have started working on elimination of differences through negotiations in order to sign FTA later this year.

Meanwhile a sharp decrease in the number of *Pakistanis* visiting **India** has been observed last year primarily because of 26/11.

The radiation-related death of a scrap metal worker has raised concerns over nuclear safety in **India**. Authorities have launched a probe into the unauthorized disposal of a disused machine from the chemistry department of Delhi University, which contained the radioactive material cobalt-60 and ended up in a scrap metal hub in the capital.

#### **Economic Front:**

In the year 2008-2009 **Indian** exports amounted to USD 185 billion. This year a slight decline may occur however economists hope to observe exports of \$170 billion.

Meanwhile the CII Business Outlook Survey based on response from 458 companies said that **India Inc** expects the economy to grow by **7.5 to 8.5 %** during the current fiscal fuelled mainly by rising capital investment and expanding exports. The industry optimism was also expressed in the Business Confidence Index that rose to **67.6** points for April-September 2010-11, compared to **66.1** points during the second half of 2009-10.

## **JAPAN**

#### **Political Front:**

Backtracking on a prominent campaign pledge, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has told angry residents of



*Okinawa* that it was unrealistic to expect the United States to move its entire Marine Corps air base off the island. His delays and apparent flip-flopping on the issue have fed a growing feeling of disappointment in the prime minister's leadership, driving his approval ratings below **30%**.

Meanwhile **Japan** has restarted a costly fast-breeder nuclear reactor for the first time since it was shut down 14 years ago because of a major accident and cover-up.

#### **Economic Front:**

The **Japanese** economy has been growing smoothly as various known companies have witnessed an increase in sale. Meanwhile fluctuation in stock exchange has also been observed.

#### **Social Front:**

The number of children under age 15 in **Japan** has fallen to 16.9 million, down 190,000 from a year earlier.

### **KOREA**

#### **Political Front:**

**South Korean** President has been a popular figure among his people however the recent ship-sinking incident has put his position in doubt.

#### **Geo-strategic Front:**

*China* seems optimistic about **North Korea's** readiness to end their nuclear program in exchange for economic aid and better global standing. However **South Korea** has ruled out chances of holding nuclear talks with **North Korea** before resolving the Ship-sinking issue. Meanwhile **North Korean** leader Kim has paid a visit to *China* to seek the latter's support regarding the ship-sinking issue.

#### **Economic Front:**

Sales of **South Korean** *Kia* and *Hyundai* motors have increased remarkably. Meanwhile growth in **South Korean** stock exchange has also been noticed. Exports of **South Korea** have also observed marked growth.

#### **Social Front:**

**Korean** children and teenagers have been surveyed as the least happy or content with their lives among their peers in OECD member states mainly because of academic issues. In a serious breach of human rights, young female **North Koreans** have become a commodity in *China*, where they can be purchased at around \$1,500 per head. §

## Zone 2- Africa:

### *Sub Saharan Africa*

#### **POLITICS OF SECURITY AND CONFLICT ISSUES**

**West Africa** In **Ghana** the Zongo Caucus of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) has mapped-out schemes to expand and solidify its dominance in the Muslim communities nation-wide to boost the party's chances of retaining power in Election 2012.

Meanwhile participants at a review meeting in **Ghana** on the 1992 Constitution has called for an amendment of Article 71 (1) to allow the Fair Wages and Salary Commission (FWSC) to determine the salary and allowances of the President.

**Togolese** Prime Minister Gilbert Houngbo last week tendered the resignation of his government to make way for the formation of a new governing team following the presidential inauguration. Incumbant President Faure Gnassingbe, while praising his predecessor has asked Houngbo to "ensure the expedition of current affairs until the nomination of a new prime minister."

Meanwhile US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton congratulated the people of **Togo** on the nation's 50th independence anniversary.

Following recent reports of tension among Guinea's transitional authorities, the interim President Sékouba Konaté has reassured the United Nations and its African partners that presidential elections will be held as scheduled on 27 June this year.

Two newly elected MP's for the *Conservative Party* in the *UK*, are of **Ghanaian** origin.



**Togolese** Prime Minister  
Gilbert Houngbo

**Ghana's** Vice President John Dramani Mahama has pledged that the Government would offer all the necessary support to **Zimbabwe** to politically stabilize for economic prosperity and freedom for all its citizens.



A potential boundary dispute is looming within the Mano River Union basin as **Liberia's** President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has confirmed that **Guinea** has grasped portion of **Liberian** territory along **Liberia's** northern border with neighboring **Guinea**.

**South Africa:** **Madagascar's** armed forces have rowed back on an ultimatum given last month to the island's leader *Andry Rajoelina* and said they have no place to influence the make up of a new government.

Meanwhile **Madagascar's** leader said that he could form a politically

"neutral" government after last-ditch power-sharing talks failed over the weekend, and said he expected to retain the military's support.

**Mauritian** Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam is set for a second term after the opposition conceded victory to an alliance led by his Labour Party following a landslide election win in parliamentary elections.

Three U.S. senators have introduced a bill, *Zimbabwe Transition to Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (DEERA)*, aimed at bringing a more flexible approach to sanctions against **Zimbabwe**.

According to the police minister **South African** police have broken up a plot by white supremacists to plant explosives in black townships, just a month after the murder of a prominent white separatist.

**Central Africa:** In **Rwanda** a new accomplice Capt. Jean Marie Vianney Karuta in the case involving Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, was produced in court last week, accused of being a member a terrorist group and planning activities aimed at causing state insecurity.

Meanwhile **Rwanda** *Patriotic Front (RPF-Inkotanyi)* members in the eight districts of the Southern Province last week voted overwhelming for incumbent President Paul Kagame as their party candidate at the district level.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN DOMESTIC POLITICS

**West Africa:** The Supreme Court of **Liberia** has placed a stay order on the passage of the controversial population Threshold Bill currently before the **Liberian** Senate. The bill amongst other things, seeks to reapportion constituencies in keeping with the conduct of the Population and Housing Census.

**Ghana's** Mr. John Tia Akologu, Minister of Information, last week assured **Ghanaians** of government's commitment to passing the Information Bill into law that would encourage democratic participation in the national development process.

Meanwhile *Doha-based Ghanim Bin Saad Al Saad & Sons Group* is setting up the first Islamic university in **Ghana** at an estimated cost of \$30mn.

The United Nations is setting up a human rights office in **Guinea** to help the Government prevent abuses such as last year's violent suppression by the then military junta of mass protests in which 156 people were killed, women raped, political opponents arrested and their homes looted.

**South Africa:** Parliamentarians from all over **Africa** are pushing for a continent-wide ban on female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and are calling on the UN to pass a General Assembly resolution appealing for a global FGM/C ban.

**Central Africa:** The Human Rights Advisor to the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), Oumar Kane, has described Rwanda's progress in observation of human rights as impressive and promising.

In **DRC** a report alleging that government troops summarily



executed fifty civilians in early April in fighting around Mbandaka, the capital of the **Democratic Republic of Congo's** northwestern Équateur Province has been rejected by the government.

Meanwhile the top United Nations humanitarian official last week ended a five-day visit to areas of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** that have witnessed some of the worst atrocities against civilians, stressing the vital need that UN peacekeepers remain beyond the August 2011 deadline set by the Government.

Reports from the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** indicate that 'disarmed' FDLR elements have been allowed to relocate to Kisenge in DRC's south-eastern Katanga Province. The United Nations-funded Radio Okapi, revealed last week that the move is a bid to diminish the militia's security threat to **Rwanda**.

Meanwhile the UNHCR says its teams have now regained access to some 35,000 **DRC** refugees now on **the Republic of Congo (ROC)** side of the Oubangui River. They are part of a larger group of some 114, 000 refugees, who have fled clashes sparked by fishing and farming disputes in Equateur Province in northwest **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

A week after **Rwandan** Prosecution revealed that it would soon issue a warrant of arrest for a top Genocide fugitive in the *Netherlands* ex-FAR Maj. Pierre-Claver Karangwa, three other alleged Genocide suspects have been confirmed to be living in the same country.

## HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

**West Africa:** A United Nations-backed pilot programme that supplies electric generators to rural women farmers in **Burkina Faso**, freeing them from lengthy chores so that they can devote more time to education, childcare and health care, is to be adopted on a national scale.

**South Africa:** Meanwhile **Zambia's** ruling party has accused the *Netherlands* of financing the main opposition party, a charge that threatens to raise tensions with donors who froze funding for AIDS and other health programmes last year amid concerns about corruption. The ruling Patriotic Front (PF) has denied these allegations.

Decaying road infrastructure in Binga district, in **Zimbabwe's** province of Matabeleland North, prevented anti-malaria spraying teams from reaching the area, and is being blamed for an outbreak of the mosquito-borne disease.

Meanwhile \$ 5.6 Million have been allocated under United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for **Zimbabwe** to fight against measles epidemic.

**Central Africa:** A recent survey by the Public Policy Information, Monitoring and Advocacy (PPIMA) project of the **Rwanda** Civil Society, shows that **90 %** of **Rwandans** are happy with the education and health services offered by the government.

Meanwhile in a bid to maintain a healthy workforce, **Rwanda's** ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) has embarked on a nationwide sensitization campaign to fight against **HIV/AIDS** within the public sector.

## POLITICAL ECONOMY

**West Africa:** **Liberia's** President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has challenged the Dunn Commission's report on the e-mail scandal linking her and some family members with the alleged transfer of US\$600,000 from *Cellcom*.

As a strategic partner of **Liberia's** post-war development goals, the **Liberian** Government in the *Spring*

*Meetings of the World Bank* in Washington, D.C has made a series of pleas with the organization to step up and consolidate its efforts toward the country's infrastructure and social services.

Meanwhile **Ghana** has struck a deal with **Equatorial Guinea** for the supply of one million barrels of oil a year.

The *Millennium Development Authority (MiDA)*, has committed \$401.94 million in various contracts as at the end of April 2010. According to the Chief Executive Officer of MiDA, the five-year programme is on course and the



expectation is that the Programme budget would be fully utilized within the period.

In **Liberia** the Ministry of Finance has confirmed that a select group of cabinet ministers and other top officials are benefiting from a dual remuneration scheme wherein they are paid lucrative sums - from both government and the United Nations Development Program's capacity development fund.



**South Africa:** According to last week's reports **Zambia** has fired private lawyers who appealed against a court decision that acquitted former President Frederick Chiluba of stealing millions of dollars from public treasury.

Meanwhile in **Zimbabwe** a public disagreement between Prime Minister, *Morgan Tsvangirai*, and Finance Minister *Tendai Biti* over pay increases in public servants' salaries is being seen as evidence of greater divisions between two of the most senior leaders of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Last week **South African** stocks booked their biggest one-day fall in almost 13 months as panicked investors dumped everything from banks to resource firms on concern about the fall-out from Greece's debt crisis.

**Namibia** and **Angola** are moving ahead with a \$1.1 billion hydropower plant on a river that runs along their common border in a bid to end power disruptions that have plagued their economies for decades.

Meanwhile according to a senior official **South Africa's** goal-shy team has been offered one million rand (\$132,200) to share for every time they find the net at next month's World Cup on home soil.

The leaders of **Ethiopia**, **Malawi**, the *Netherlands*, *Spain* and *Vietnam* have been invited to attend the G20 summit in Toronto next month.

**Eastern Africa:** Suspected **Somali** pirates have seized a Taiwanese fishing vessel off the waters of Seychelles, the second incident off **Somalia** in two days, according to a regional maritime body.

**Central Africa:** The **Rwandan** Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Agnes Kalibata, has handed over 25 boats worth Rwf 346m to **Rwanda** National Police (RNP) and **Rwanda** Defence Forces (RDF) to be used by marines to fight crimes that affect food production around the lakes.

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

### WESTERN EUROPE

The European Commission has referred four Member States, **Estonia**, **Italy**, **Luxembourg** and **Portugal**, to the EU's Court of Justice for failing to communicate their national measures for transposing legislation on working conditions in the international rail sector.

**Euro zone** members and the IMF announced last week that they have agreed on a 110 billion-euro aid package for **Greece** over the next three years. The **EU** will provide 80 billion euros of it, while the rest will come from the *IMF*. Meanwhile **Greek** Public employees kicked off a 48-hour strike against the government's austerity measures that include wage cuts.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele said in an interview last week that the fact that *Turkey* is a

predominantly Muslim country should not be an obstacle to EU membership.

According to documents shared with The Associated Press last week *Israel's* secretive nuclear activities may undergo unprecedented scrutiny next month, with a key meeting of the *International Atomic Energy Agency* tentatively set to focus on the topic for the first time.

**France's** opposition Socialists presented a bill last week that would ban Islamic face veils in places such as hospitals and banks.



A **British** court has said that the government will not be allowed to keep evidence secret from former Guantanamo prisoners who are suing the U.K. over its alleged complicity in their detention.

Outgoing *U.N. climate chief* Yvo de Boer shot down expectations of a climate treaty this year, saying last week that a major U.N. conference in December would yield only a "first answer" on curbing greenhouse gases.

## CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Tens of thousands of people hit the streets of *Tirana* **Albania** last week in a protest organized by the opposition, insisting authorities open the ballot boxes from the June 2009 general elections, which they say were marred by violations. The government, however, says the demands are illegal. Amidst ongoing protests Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Meta has asked members of the opposition Socialist Party (SP) to end their hunger strike and start a fresh dialogue. Meanwhile the **European** Parliament (EP) has failed so far to bring **Albania's** political parties together for dialogue aimed at ending the country's political crisis.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (BiH) announced last week that parliamentary and presidential elections will be held on October 3rd.

Meanwhile in **Croatia** May 1<sup>st</sup> marked the 15th anniversary of Operation Bljesak (Flash), in which **Croatian** forces removed Serb forces from the self-proclaimed Republic of **Serbian** Krajina.

**Montenegro** officially became an associate member of the EU last week when the country's *Stabilization and Association Agreement* (SAA) with the bloc took effect.

Crin Antonescu, **Romanian** leader of the opposition National Liberal Party, has called for the



government of Prime Minister Emil Boc to resign, while saying that the premier should either step down or find an actual solution to the economic crisis. Also the two largest opposition parties, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party, have drafted a no-confidence motion against the government of Prime Minister. Meanwhile *Washington* and Bucharest signed an agreement that will eventually lead to visa-free travel for **Romanian** citizens visiting the *United States*.

**Russian** President Dmitry Medvedev has handed over score of volumes from an investigation into the World War II Katyn massacre of some 20,000 **Polish** officers and other prominent citizens, to his **Polish** counterpart as a move to repair

long-troubled relations with Warsaw.

Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the twin brother of **Poland's** late president told reporters in first political speech since his brother's death that he has gathered some 1,650,000 signatures of support for his campaign in the presidential elections.

The **Czech Republic** will hold a general election on May 28-29 that looks likely to bring back the centre-left Social Democrats to power. The election could break a deadlock that has crippled policymaking in the central European country since an election produced a hung parliament in 2006. But polls show that no strong government is likely to emerge, owing to the fine balance between left and right-leaning voters, and a minority government is a possibility.

President Shimon Peres told **Czech** Foreign Minister Jan Kohut who was on *Israel's* tour to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between **Czechoslovakia** and *Israel*. He also urged the later to follow the example set by the Czech Republic, i.e. the amicable division of the former **Czechoslovakia**, in the process of seeking a two-state solution to the *Israeli-Palestinian* conflict.

**Belarusian** President Alexander Lukashenko said last week that he would not hand over *Kyrgyzstan's* ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to face charges of violence in Kyrgyzstan. He has also criticized both Moscow and the West for supporting *Kyrgyzstan's* new government.

**Russian** Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has signed a decree that resets the export duty on *Russian* natural gas for **Ukraine** to zero for volumes of 1.1 trillion cubic feet in 2010. The premier has also proposed merging Gazprom with **Ukraine's** much smaller National Energy Company, Naftogaz Ukrainy. The proposal came after the new **Ukrainian** President Viktor Yanukovich's agreement last month to extend the lease of a Russian naval base in

exchange for cheaper gas imports.

On the financial front the **Polish** finance ministry has asked the central bank (NBP) to back its request to prolong a credit line of more than 20 billion dollars granted to Poland by the IMF last year.

The Ministry of Defense of the **Slovak** Republic (MoSR) unveiled its first Iveco M65E 4x4 Light Multirole Vehicle (LMV) at the International Defence Exhibition Bratislava (IDEB) last week. The vehicle is the first of ten LMVs that



were delivered to the MoSR last week following an 'integration' program bringing the systems up to date with current **Slovakian** standard operating procedures.

**Hungary's** incoming government says the budget deficit this year could come in at **7-8 %** of GDP, based on its current estimate, but it will seek to get it down to **5-6%**, economy. **Hungary** targets a deficit of 3.8 % of GDP this year under a key financing deal with the IMF and the EU.

European Commission forecasts have showed that **Estonia** looks set to meet on a sustainable basis the criteria it needs to adopt the euro, with inflation and deficits staying within EU limits in 2010 and 2011. **Estonia** says it already met the criteria for 2009, the year on which its 2011 entry bid will be judged. But to convince European authorities of its fitness to adopt the single currency it will have to show those goals.

The **Lithuanian** government has approved an amendment to the country's electricity law to implement the EU's third energy package of legislative reforms, which provides a new framework for competition in the energy sector.

The European Commission last week referred **Poland** to the EU Court of Justice for incorrectly implementing EU rules prohibiting discrimination based on race or ethnic origin. The move comes after **Poland** failed to adequately transpose the legislation agreed at EU level in its national law.

The far-right **Slovak** National Party (SNS) has outraged Roma with election posters suggesting they abuse the welfare state, straining ethnic relations in the run-up to a general election. Posters for the SNS show a dark-skinned man with tattoos and a golden necklace, accompanied by the slogan "Do not feed those who do not want to work."

According to the report of a joint United Nations-European Union mission of experts, the Mining in the Kalush area of **Ukraine** has left the ground unstable and flat to subsidence, endangering the security dams at risk of bursting as a result of snowmelt and spring floods. Ground and surface water has become highly contaminated.

## RUSSIA

A **Russian** warship opened fire on a hijacked oil tanker last week, freeing the crew and arresting the Somali pirates, who a day earlier had raced across the Indian Ocean to seize a cargo valued at more than \$50 million.

**Russia** and *Turkey* have agreed on all the details and commercial terms for the construction of *Turkey's* first nuclear power plant.

According to reports Cold War allies, **Russia** and *Cuba* have recently moved to restore their ties which declined after the breakup of the U.S.S.R.

Meanwhile *US* and **Russia** are also to propose ban on WMD in Middle East. The proposal – involving the appointment of a special coordinator to conduct exploratory talks with *Israel*, *Iran* and the *Arab states*, followed by a regional conference – was a central issue at last week's New York conference aimed at preventing further spread of nuclear weapons around the world.

A 'National Nanotechnology Network' has been announced by the **Russian** Government in which the largest state universities and research centers will be integrated into a countrywide network, whose members will receive access to information about one another's research developments and facilities. Meanwhile *Iran* and **Russia** have reached an agreement on launching two satellites into orbit in order to study distance communication. The agreement was reached during *Iran's* Communications and IT Minister's last visit to **Russia**.

*Ukrainian* Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov acknowledged last week that his newly elected pro-**Russian** government was seriously considering



*Moscow's* proposal to merge its state-run behemoth Gazprom with *Ukraine's* national energy company Naftogaz.

Dmitry Medvedev has launched a wide-ranging attack on the **Soviet Union** as a totalitarian state that crushed individual liberties in the most outspoken comments on the USSR by a **Russian** leader in recent years. According to some Mr Medvedev's comments, which also included stinging criticism on the historical role of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, will be interpreted by many as an attempt to distance himself from Vladimir Putin, the prime minister, who has adopted a more ambiguous stance on **Russia's** often tragic history.

Residential areas were flooded in **Russia's** district of Dagestan, due to heavy rains and an emergency water discharge from the local Gedzhukh Lake. Some 210 private houses, where about 1,000 people live, were flooded.

The leader of the **Russian** Orthodox Church has called upon the faithful to have more children in order to repopulate their vast nation.

At least 13 injured in hippodrome explosion in **Russia's** North Caucasus. The bomb exploded near a VIP box during a horse race in the city of Nalchik, according to the report. No one was reported killed in the blast.

Last week on 9<sup>th</sup> May troops from the United States, Britain and France marched in **Russia's** annual Victory Day parade through Red Square for the first time, a step **Russia's** president called a nod toward their "common victory" in World War II. The annual parade celebrates the defeat of Nazi Germany by the former Soviet Union and its Western allies and serves as a demonstration of **Russian** military might.

According to a recent poll conducted by *Nextep Pakistan*, *Croatia* and **Russia** have topped a list of countries where people sitting behind shop and office counters have a surly attitude and find it difficult to smile.

## US/CANADA

The Flagstaff City Council in **America** voted unanimously last week to sue over the new Arizona state immigration law. The council's vote directs the city attorney to retain legal counsel. It is an unfunded mandate to

carry out the responsibilities of the federal government.

On the international front *Iranian* President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad warned that a new round of UN sanctions against Tehran would close the door on diplomatic engagement with the **United States**.

Meanwhile a record number of **Canadians** returned to work in April, stunning markets and adding pressure on the Bank of **Canada** to raise interest rates in June, ahead of other major industrialized countries.

The **Canadian** Supreme Court said in a landmark ruling last week that reporters in the country have no constitutional right to offer their sources blanket confidentiality. In the first pronouncement of its kind, the court ruled by an 8-1 majority that journalists could offer sources protection. But if prosecutors subsequently demanded to know who those sources were, courts would decide the merits of confidentiality promises on a case-by-case basis.

A **Canadian** military board of inquiry reported last week that the soldier who embarrassed Ottawa by alleging troops knew Afghan authorities were abusing prisoners handed over by **Canada's** forces was mistaken. A note by the soldier, written after an incident on June 14, 2006, became public last December and seemed to contradict official assurances that Canadian troops had no credible evidence that prisoners might be harmed.

## LATIN AMERICA

**Argentine** Ambassador in **Peru** Darío Alessandro was summoned by an **Argentine** court last week in connection with the probe into the alleged bribes to export goods to **Venezuela**.

The European Union and the **South American** trade group *Mercosur* are to relaunch stalled negotiations on a trade liberalization pact. Leaders will formalize the move at an EU-Mercosur summit in two weeks in Madrid.

**South American** leaders at the 12-nation UNASUR summit last week slammed a controversial new immigration law in the US state of *Arizona*, but stressed they did not hold US President Barack Obama responsible.

Meanwhile the group named former **Argentine** President Nestor Kirchner as their secretary-general, setting aside their differences in hopes that the 12-nation UNASUR group can consolidate into a regional force.

**Argentina** has finally signed up for a significant increase in natural-gas imports from **Bolivia**, ending years of short-term solutions to its gas-supply deficit.

Last week **Argentina's** lower house passed a gay marriage bill that, if also approved by senators, will put the



country among a handful in the world that allow homosexual couples to marry.

**Brazil's** president *Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva* has been named the most influential leader in the world by Time magazine – ahead of Barack Obama, who came fourth, Nancy Pelosi (8th) and Sarah Palin (9th), while neither Gordon Brown nor any other European leader made it to the top 25.

According to the country's labor minister **Brazil** will be able to create up to 2.5 million new jobs in 2010, higher than a previous estimate of 2 million.

On the security front *Turkey* and **Brazil** are trying to revive a stalled atomic fuel deal with Iran in an attempt to help the Islamic Republic avoid new UN sanctions over its nuclear program. However **Brazil's** Foreign Ministry on Wednesday said Brasilia had not made an official offer to mediate over a UN-backed nuclear fuel swap between Iran and the West.

According to the Agriculture Ministry Sugar output in **Brazil**, the world's biggest producer, will rise 17 % this year as drier weather will favor harvesting and after cane growers increased planting.

In the after math of the controversial immigration law, **Mexico's** Congress has urged President Felipe Calderon to consider breaking commercial ties with Arizona and called on government officials to refrain from traveling to the U.S. state.

Senior **Mexican** and *Chinese* lawmakers have voiced their intention to work for more exchanges at the congressional level to help bring ties between the two countries to a new level.

Meanwhile the **Mexican** government has said that drug violence that has killed some 23,000 people could rage until 2014.

**Venezuelan** police has arrested a man on suspicion of trying to 'incite' the assassination of President Hugo Chavez. The accused allegedly has links with **Columbia** where according to the police messages were found on his computers alluding to a plot to kill Chavez involving **Colombia's** outlawed right-wing paramilitary



groups.

The *US* Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs *Arturo Valenzuela* criticized **Venezuelan** President Hugo Chávez's meddling in the **Colombian** presidential elections. Chávez has repeatedly said that it would be "very difficult" to mend relations with **Colombia** if the candidate of the ruling Social National Unity Party, Juan Manuel Santos, is elected. He has also questioned leftwing candidate Gustavo Petro, for his views on the Bolivarian Revolution.

According to a recent report by international firm FTI Consulting, **Venezuela**, along with **Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala** and **Mexico**, tops the list of countries with the largest amount of public security problems.

President *Hugo Chavez's* ruling party rallied hundreds of thousands of members to a congressional election primary vote last week— a key step in preventing infighting as they battle a resurgent and united opposition.

On the energy front, **Venezuela** state oil company *Petroleos de Venezuela*, has agreed to buy a 49% stake in the **Dominican Republic's** Refidomsa refinery, which can process 34,000 barrels of oil a day.

*China* has signed an in-principal agreement with political ally **Venezuela** for the sale of 33 civil aircrafts, including the Harbin Y12E. Reportedly **Venezuela** plans to use the aircraft to develop regional passenger and cargo services in rural areas. Meanwhile it is expected that in 2010 the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) may shrink for the second consecutive year, which economists and business associations term inevitable.

## AUSTRALASIA

Just months ahead of an expected general election **Australian** Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's government has taken a beating in an opinion poll after ditching its climate change plan, with the opposition taking the lead for the first time in years. §