

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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| | IN THIS ISSUE | PAGE |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| I. COUNTRY REVIEWS | | |
| | A. SOUTH ASIA | 3-6 |
| | PAKISTAN | |
| | NEPAL | |
| | BANGLADESH | |
| | B. EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA | 7-9 |
| | CHINA | |
| | MYANMAR | |
| | C. WEST ASIA | |
| | IRAN | 9-12 |
| | IRAQ | |
| II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW | JAMMU AND KASHMIR | 12-13 |
| | MAOIST INSURGENCY | |
| | NORTHEAST | |
| | OTHER | |
| | DEVELOPMENTS | |
| III. ENERGY SECURITY REVIEW | | 14 |

1. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

PAKISTAN

- **Zardari hopes for a change in US policy under new administration; NATO trucks hijacked by militants near Afghan border; Investigations into the dollar scam continues**

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, addressing the UN General Assembly on November 13, stressed the need for cooperation amongst states to tackle global problems.¹ In his meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Zardari apprised her of the security situation in Pakistan and sought Washington's help in restoring order in his country.² Zardari had earlier expressed the hope that President-elect Barack Obama would "re-evaluate American military strikes on Al Qaeda and Taliban targets" inside Pakistan.³

Meanwhile, at least 13 trucks carrying supplies for NATO forces were reportedly hijacked from the Peshawar-Tokham highway near Pakistan-Afghanistan border on November 10. Reports noted that the militants were from Afghanistan's Nangrahar province.⁴ A suicide bomb attack in Peshawar also killed at least 4 people and injured more than dozen on November 11.⁵

In other developments, Finance Adviser, Shaukat Tareen announced at a press conference in Karachi on November 15 that the IMF would lend \$7.6 billion to Pakistan to overcome its financial crisis.⁶ Reports also noted that the Federal Investigations Agency (FIA) had broadened the scope of its investigations into the multi-billion dollar scam in which two officials of Khanani and Kalia International were the co-accused.⁷

NEPAL

- **Constituent Assembly (CA) formally enters into the process of drafting the new constitution; Debate over the integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants continues; Calls made for UNMIN's extension;**

¹ Masood Haider and Anwar Iqbal, "World must combat bigotry: Zardari," *Dawn*, November 14, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/14/top1.htm>

² Masood Haider and Anwar Iqbal, "Zardari seeks US help to stabilise Pakistan," *Dawn*, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/13/top5.htm>

³ "Zardari hopeful of change in US policy," *Dawn*, November 11, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/11/top2.htm>

⁴ Ibrahim Shinwari, "Militants raid Nato supplies, hijack 13 military trucks," *Dawn*, November 11, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/11/top1.htm>

⁵ "4 killed in suicide attack at Peshawar sports stadium," *Daily Times*, November 12, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\11\12\story_12-11-2008_pg1_1

⁶ Saad Hasan, "IMF to lend \$7.6 bn to Pakistan," *The News*, November 16, 2008, http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp

⁷ "Govt widens dollar scam investigation," *Daily Times*, November 10, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\11\10\story_10-11-2008_pg1_1

Dialogue with Terai-based illegal armed groups initiated; BIMSTEC Summit in Delhi

The Constituent Assembly (CA) formally entered into the process of drafting the new constitution with the passage of the detailed schedule of drafting procedures. As per the approved schedule, the election to the post of vice-chairman of the CA will take place on November 28 and the various subject committees will be formed by mid-December and their action plans will be ready by the end of December. The new constitution would be ready by May 2010.⁸

Although the CA process looks almost finalized, political parties in Nepal are still struggling to find a solution to the integration issue. While the Nepali Congress (NC) has been opposing the idea, the Maoists are in favour of group integration. The CPN-UML on its part has argued for the integration of only eligible cadres into the Nepal Army (NA). The general secretary of the CPN-UML, Jhal Nath Khanal had recently ruled out the possibility of any person who was not a member of the NA from becoming its chief. He had charged that the Maoists were planning to appoint commander of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Nanda Kishor Pun 'Pasang', as the chief of the NA to stage a political coup.⁹

Meanwhile, some PLA divisions reportedly undertook a 22-day refresher course related to warfare, weapons and other issues over possible integration into the NA.¹⁰ Reports noted that senior PLA commanders had expressed their willingness to join the NA and to do work ranging from developmental activities to border security. They have also warned of a civil war if the integration process was not resolved logically.

UN envoy to Nepal Ian Martin, noting that despite considerable political progress, the task assigned to the UNMIN cannot be completed before the end of its current mandate on January 23, has called for an extension of its mandate. No official request was however placed before Kathmandu in this regard.¹¹ India on its part has urged the Nepali government to accomplish the task of army integration on the basis of consensus among political parties.¹²

In a major boost to the ongoing peace process, the Nepali government has initiated dialogue with the illegal armed groups operating in the Terai region. Minister for Local Development and a member of the government team, Ram Chandra Jha, stated that preparations were being made to hold dialogue with the

⁸ "Calendar for constitution writing determined, new constitution by May, 2010," *Nepalnews*, November 16, 2008, <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/nov/nov16/news07.php>

⁹ "Maoists Might be Plotting Coup: Khanal," *The Himalayan Times*, November 16, 2008, at <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullstory.asp?filename=aFanata0vfqzpla4Ta9a9a.axamal&folder=aHaoamW&Name=Home&dtSiteDate=20081116>

¹⁰ "Maoist combatants eager to join NA," *kantipuronline*, November 11, 2008, at <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=166365>

¹¹ "UN's Nepal mission cannot be completed by Jan 23," *news.smashit*, November 11, 2008, at <http://news.smashits.com/315532/UN-39s-Nepal-mission-cannot-be-completed-by-Jan-23.htm>

¹² "New Delhi suggests army integration based on consensus," *kantipuronline*, November 14, 2008, at <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=166680>

insurgent groups operating in the Terai. Jha noted that the government had so far held informal talks with 14 armed groups.¹³ He also indicated that the process would be incomplete without the involvement of the Jantantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha-Jaya Krishna Goit (JTMM-G). He however admitted that it would be meaningless to hold dialogue with JTMM-G as the group still called for the country's disintegration.

At the 2nd summit of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Scientific, Technical and Economic Cooperation) which concluded in New Delhi during the week, Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal urged a "shared commitment" and "concerted effort" to tackle poverty and lack of food security in South Asia. He stated that Nepal was ready to host an international conference on poverty reduction to address such regional development challenges. Pointing out Nepal's immense hydro-power potential, Mr. Dahal invited investments from interested countries to tap its benefits.¹⁴

On the sidelines of the Summit, Dahal met Dr. Manmohan Singh and discussed the ongoing peace process in his country. While Mr. Dahal expressed his commitment to complete the process of constitution writing within the stipulated time, Dr. Singh stressed on the need to follow politics of understanding. Border issues and the Kosi flood also figured in the talks. Mr Dahal also reportedly pressed for the release of nearly 100 Maoist activists lodged in various jails in India.¹⁵

At the BIMSTEC Summit, member states pledged to cooperate in a number of areas, including climate change, and in combating international terrorism and transnational crime. The BIMSTEC decided to set up four regional centres. Of these, BIMSTEC Energy Centre and BIMSTEC Weather and Climate Centre will be set up in India. BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission and the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory would be set up in Bhutan and BIMSTEC Poverty Centre would be established in Bangladesh. Nepal's hope of hosting a tourism centre did not materialise.

The summit also decided to improve transportation and communication linkages and enhance connectivity among member states. It acknowledged the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS) conducted by the ADB as an important first step in identifying bottlenecks and suggesting ways to overcome them. The summit however failed to take concrete decisions on two issues. These included the BIMSTEC Convention on Combating International

¹³ "Govt preparing for talks with Terai outfits in a fortnight," *nepalnews*, November 15, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/nov/nov15/news09.php>

¹⁴ "BIMSTEC summit concludes; PM Dahal calls for int'l investment in Nepal's hydro-power sector," *nepalnews*, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/nov/nov13/news05.php>

¹⁵ "PM Dahal holds bilateral talks with Indian PM," *nepalnews*, November 12, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/nov/nov12/news13.php>

Terrorism, Trans-national Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking and the formation of the proposed free trade infrastructure.¹⁶

BANGLADESH

- **EC extends deadline for filing nominations; Mayors not eligible to contest polls; Hasina and Zia agree to cooperate in resolving crises facing the country; Maritime delimitation talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar begin**

The EC extended the deadline for filing nominations for parliamentary and upazila elections till November 20 even as the caretaker government amended the upazila parishad ordinance to prevent individuals from contesting parliamentary and upazila elections simultaneously. The authorities also warned of “stern actions” if parties indulged in any demonstrations before November 27 as such activities violated the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).¹⁷ The EC also stated that the mayors of city corporations and municipalities were not eligible to contest the parliamentary polls as they were holding office of profit.¹⁸ The Chairman of the Regulatory Reforms Commission (RRC) Akbar Ali Khan also suggested that the EC may consider taking the government to court if it created any obstacles to holding the parliamentary polls.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the BNP has been pressing hard to force a delay of the general elections. The AL has indicated that it may accept a deferral of about 10 days only.²⁰ The AL also stated that it would ratify all reform initiatives taken by the caretaker government and recognise laws passed under the current regime, if it is voted to power.²¹ Hasina and Khaleda Zia have also agreed to sit together to resolve the crises confronting the country.²² Reports indicated that the armed forces would help other law enforcement agencies to maintain law and order before and after the upcoming parliamentary and upazila parishad elections.

In other developments, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) decided to provide a \$6million grant towards the strengthening of technical education in Bangladesh.²³ Technical talks between

¹⁶ “BIMSTEC to set up 4 regional centres Nepal's tourism centre hope dashed,” *kantipuronline*, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=166661>

¹⁷ “No poll campaign or demo before Nov 27: Govt decision follows frequent violations of EPR by AL, BNP, Jamaat,” *The Daily Star*, November 12, 2008 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62961>

¹⁸ “Mayors not eligible to contest JS polls,” *The Daily Star*, November 16, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=63554>

¹⁹ “Govt's legitimacy to be at stake if polls not held by Dec 31: Says Akbar Ali,” *The Daily Star*, November 12, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62994>

²⁰ “BNP desperate for polls after 2 months: AL may settle for 10 days' deferral; move on to strike a deal,” *The Daily Star*, November 13, 2008 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=63132>

²¹ “Next govt will have to ratify all reform works: Says AL spokesperson Ashraful,” *The Daily Star*, November 10, 2008 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62703>

²² “Hasina, Khaleda agree to sit, talk crisis,” *The Daily Star*, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=63129>

²³ “Dhaka to get \$6m Swiss grant for skill development,” *The Daily Star*, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=63079>

Bangladesh and Myanmar on the issue of maritime delimitation began on November 16.

B. EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

CHINA

- **Hu calls for reform of international financial system; Beijing objects to EAM's statement over Arunachal Pradesh; Beijing expresses reservations over Dalai Lama's upcoming meeting with Sarkozy; Tibetan conclave at Macleodganj on November 17**

Chinese President Hu Jintao, at the G-20 meeting in Washington, appealed for the reform of the international financial system and the establishment of "a new international financial order that is fair, just, inconclusive and orderly," which would "foster an institutional environment conducive to sound global economic development."²⁴

The Chinese government strongly objected to EAM Pranab Mukherjee's statement that Arunachal Pradesh was an integral part of India. Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang expressed "deep regret over India's public remarks that ignore historic facts." Qin added that "no Chinese government in history has ever admitted the unlawful McMahon line."²⁵

Beijing meanwhile expressed reservations over the upcoming meeting between the Dalai Lama and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy on December 6. Qin Gang, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman asserted that his government firmly opposed "the Dalai Lama's secessionist activities in any country under any identity, and we are also firmly against any foreign leaders contacts with the Dalai Lama in any form."²⁶

A six-day special session of Tibetan exiles at McLeodgani, called by the government-in-exile based in north India, at the behest of the Dalai Lama would start from November 17. The Dalai Lama sought the cooperation of all the Tibetans and Tibet supporters to "take into account the inspiring courage being shown by people all over Tibet ..., the current world situation, and the present intransigent stance of the government of the People's Republic of China. In this light, he called on the participants to discuss "... the best possible future course of action to advance the Tibetan cause."²⁷

²⁴ "Hu urges revamp of finance system," *People's Daily*, November 17, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6534593.html>.

²⁵ "Arunachal was Never officially demarcated," *Zeeneews.com*, November 11, 2008, at <http://www.zeenews.com/nation/2008-11-11/482587news.html>

²⁶ "Chinese FM: China opposes French President's meeting with Dalai Lama," *People's Daily*, November 14, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6534171.html>

²⁷ "Dalai Lama seeks cooperation of exiles ahead of conclave," *IANS*, November 14, 2008, at <http://www.aol.in/news-story/Dalai-Lama-seeks-cooperation-of-exiles-ahead-of-conclave/2008111410389012000005>

In other developments, diplomats from the DPRK and China met on November 12 to discuss efforts to push forward the Korean peninsular nuclear disarmament agenda and deliberated on the next phase of the six-party talks. The Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Wu Dawei led the Chinese delegation while the DPRK delegation was headed by Ri Gun, director general of the DPRK Foreign Ministry's American affairs bureau.²⁸ A high-level military delegation led by the Vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), Xu Caihou is on a three nation goodwill tour to Venezuela, Chile and Brazil. Qian Lihua, director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Chinese Defence Ministry stated that the tour was "an important diplomatic activity of the armed forces, which aims at enhancing the mutual understanding and substantial military exchanges and cooperation."²⁹

MYANMAR

- **Myanmar and North Korea sign visa agreement; 14 dissident activists given 65-year sentences for their part in the August 2007 uprising; New economic sanctions imposed on drug traffickers by US Treasury Department; Bush to appoint Special Envoy to Myanmar**

Myanmar and North Korea signed documents to eliminate visas for diplomats and government officials. North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Young Il and his Myanmar counterpart, Kyaw Thu, signed the agreement during Kim's four-day visit to Myanmar which began on November 10. The two nations resumed their diplomatic relations in April 2007. Myanmar had cut its ties with the North Korean regime after North Korean agents attempted to assassinate South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan and his delegate in Rangoon in 1983.³⁰

In domestic developments, fourteen leading activists from the 88 Generation Students group were each given 65-year sentences on November 11 for their participation during the monk-led uprising in 2007. The lengthy imprisonments were seen as an indication that the military government was invoking harsher punishments on dissidents. The 88 Generation Students group were involved in the mass protests against the rising fuel prices enforced by the government in August 2007.³¹

Meanwhile, the United States on November 13 named 26 individuals and 17 companies as "specially designated narcotics traffickers" and imposed new economic sanctions, including the freezing of assets held by them in the US. The individuals and companies are associated with Wei Hsueh Kang and the United

²⁸ "Chinese and DPRK diplomats meet over six-party nuclear talks," *People's Daily*, November 13, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6533387.html>

²⁹ "PLA senior officer leaves for Latin America visit," *People's Daily*, November 16, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6534555.html>

³⁰ "Burma, North Korea Sign Visa Agreement," *Irrawaddy*, November 12, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14612

³¹ "88 Generation Activists Given 65 Years", *Irrawaddy*, November 11, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/highlight.php?art_id=14608

Wa State Army (UWSA), both of whom have been designated as traffickers of illegal drugs under the Kingpin Act. Barbara Hammerle of the US Treasury Department Office of Public Affairs (OFAC) charged that the United Wa State Army is the largest and most powerful drug trafficking organization in Southeast Asia and is a major producer and exporter of synthetic drugs, including methamphetamine.

The latest round of sanctions imposed on individuals and companies associated with these drug traffickers was expected to have an impact on the drug trade in the region, especially where the Wa army was predominant. The action is part of the ongoing US effort under the Kingpin Act to apply financial measures against significant foreign narcotics traffickers worldwide.³²

Meanwhile, US President George Bush announced on November 10 that he will nominate Michael J. Green, a former White House adviser, as a US special envoy to Myanmar. The EU on its part reiterated that the 2010 election would have no credibility unless all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, were released unconditionally and the junta initiates an inclusive, long-term dialogue process with the opposition as well as ethnic groups.³³

In other developments, Aung San Suu Kyi and Karen physician Cynthia Maung, who runs a grassroots medical clinic at the Thai-Burmese border, will receive the Catalonia International Prize. The two women will share 100,000 euros (US \$128,000) and receive a sculpture titled *La clau i la lletra* (The key and the letter) by Antoni Tàpies. The award is presented annually to persons who have made a remarkable contribution to the development of cultural, scientific or human values anywhere in the world. The Myanmarese democracy campaigner Zoya Phan, who is the international coordinator of Burma Campaign UK, will accept the award on behalf of Suu Kyi.³⁴

C. WEST ASIA

IRAN

- **Conservatives back Ahmadinejad in June 2009 presidential election; Majlis representatives congratulate Ahmadinejad on his letter to Obama; Iran test-fires a new generation long range missile; ElBaradei welcomes direct talks between Iran and the US; Iranian diplomat kidnapped in Peshawar**

President Ahmadinejad received praise from Iran's reformist politicians after he sent US President-elect Barack Obama a congratulatory message in the previous week. The conservatives had criticised him for the move. Ahmad Tavakoli, a

³² "US Imposes Sanctions on Burma Drug Cartel," *Irrawaddy*, November 15, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14631

³³ "US Appoints Special Burma Envoy," *Irrawaddy*, November 11, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14611

³⁴ "Suu Kyi and Cynthia Maung Win Prize," *Irrawaddy*, November 11, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14610

Member of Parliament, in a letter, noted that Mr. Ahmadinejad's unilateral efforts had been met with "arrogant responses." However, anticipating that such a criticism might inadvertently strengthen a possible reformist candidate in Iran's presidential elections in June 2009, reports noted that they have quickly shifted to supporting Mr. Ahmadinejad's re-election bid. For instance, *Kayhan*, a leading conservative daily, called Mr. Ahmadinejad the "most qualified candidate" and argued that his achievements were more significant than his failures. Reports however noted that Mr. Ahmadinejad's domestic political standing was suffering due to the damage to Iran's economy caused by high inflation and a sharp drop in oil prices.³⁵

Other Majlis representatives like member of the Majlis Presiding Board, Hamid-Reza Haji-Babayi, termed the letter to Obama as a "sign of Iran's active diplomacy" and as a "positive move." Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee deputy chairman Esmail Kosari also stated that Ahmadinejad's letter showed "Iran's good will" in its foreign policy.³⁶

Iran successfully test-fired a new generation of long-range surface-to-surface solid fuel missile, the Sejil, with a range of 1,200 miles during the week. Analysts noted that the missile seemed to resemble an earlier weapon in Tehran's armoury, the *Ashoura*. Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar stated that the missile was "very fast" and could be produced and stored "in mass" and can be easily prepared for launching. The missile launch was revealed a day after Iranian media reported that the Revolutionary Guards had test-fired another new missile, the *Samen*, near the border with Iraq. They also followed on the heels of reports that American helicopters were flying close to Iran's airspace.³⁷

IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei noted that Mr. Obama's stated readiness for dialogue with Iran without preconditions could make Tehran more forthcoming with the IAEA.³⁸ Reports also talked about the Obama administration engaging Tehran and 'reconcilable' elements within the Taliban to seek a peaceful end to the war in Afghanistan.³⁹

Meanwhile, a panel of 20 experts including academics and former ambassadors in a joint statement to be presented at a conference on the future of US-Iran relations urged the US Administration to give Iran a "place at the table" in shaping the future of Iraq and Afghanistan. The panel, which includes former

³⁵ Nazila Fathi, "In Shift, Conservatives in Iran Back Ahmadinejad," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/11/world/middleeast/11iran.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin

³⁶ "Lawmakers' comments on Ahmadinejad's letter to Obama," *Tehran Times*, November 11, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=182153

³⁷ Nazila Fathi and Alan Cowell, "Iran Reports New Missile Tests," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/13/world/middleeast/13iran.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin

³⁸ "Obama openness may help IAEA with Iran: ElBaradei," *Tehran Times*, November 13, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=182259

³⁹ "Obama administration may engage Iran for peace in Afghanistan," *Tehran Times*, November 13, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=182341

US special envoy to Afghanistan James Dobbins, former US ambassador to the UN Thomas Pickering, and a host of Middle East scholars from US universities, among other measures has called for security assurances to be given to Iran in the nuclear talks.⁴⁰

In other developments, gunmen kidnapped an Iranian diplomat and killed his guard in the north-western Pakistani city of Peshawar. The incident occurred a day after an American aid worker and his driver were shot dead as they travelled to work in a suburb of the city. In a similar incident two months ago, unknown gunmen kidnapped Afghan consul-general, Abdul Khaliq Farahi, from the same locality after killing his driver. Mr Farahi is still missing. Areas close to Peshawar, the biggest city in north-west Pakistan, are known to be Taliban and al-Qaeda strongholds.⁴¹

IRAQ

- **28 killed in three bomb blasts in Baghdad; Iraqi soldier kills two US security forces personnel; UN: Iraq stabilizing, but caution still required**

At least 28 Iraqi people were killed in three bomb explosions in Baghdad during the week. The first two blasts were car bombs and then a suicide bomber detonated his charges in the crowd that had assembled in the aftermath. The attacks took place during morning rush hour in the Shia area of Kasra and in Baquba, north of Baghdad. Reports noted that while attacks have decreased in number overall in Iraq in the last year, there have been a string of bombings in Baghdad and elsewhere in recent weeks, most of them targeting the police or security forces, government officials or civilians going to work in the morning.⁴²

Two American soldiers were killed and six others wounded by an Iraqi soldier in an attack in the northern city of Mosul. The Iraqi soldier attacked two platoons of American soldiers who had stopped at a combat outpost. The head of police operations in Mosul, Brig. Gen. Abdul Karim al-Jubouri stated that the incident was set off by a quarrel between an American and an Iraqi soldier. In a similar incident in Mosul in December 2007, two American soldiers were killed and three wounded when a Iraqi soldier opened fire on a patrol.⁴³

The UN special representative to Iraq, Staffan de Mistura at the UN Security Council stated that the situation in the country was improving, but warned against overconfidence ahead of elections in January 2009. De Mistura, applauding the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq for helping the country's

⁴⁰ "US diplomats, academics call for unconditional talks with Iran," *IRNA*, November 15, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-203/0811158675094447.htm>

⁴¹ "Iran envoy abducted in Pakistan," *BBC News*, November 13, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7726107.stm

⁴² "Three bombs kills 28 Iraqi people, school girls," *IRNA*, November 11, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-22/0811110248141917.htm>

⁴³ Sam Dagher, "Iraqi Soldier Reportedly Kills 2 G.I.'s," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/13/world/middleeast/13iraq.html?_r=1&hp=&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print

democratic processes, called on Baghdad to deliver services, ensure security and create conditions for the conduct of free and fair elections.⁴⁴

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

- **Congress party promises Regional Councils and devolution of power**

The Congress party's poll manifesto, "Peace, Dignity and Hope" released on November 16 states that the party will be committed to the devolution of powers to district, block and panchayat level and restructure the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir into a federal set up by setting up separate regional councils for Kashmir and Jammu to ensure effective participation of people in the democratic system. Releasing the manifesto, Union Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Prithvi Raj Chavan stated that the concept of devolution of power as proposed by the party was totally different from that of the NC, which calls for 'greater autonomy' or of the People's Democratic Party's, which calls for 'self- rule'.⁴⁵

In other developments, security forces killed an Assamese militant during an encounter in the forest of Bari in Poonch on November 16. The slain militant was identified as Nayak Uma of Assam.⁴⁶

MAOIST INSURGENCY

- **55 per cent turnout of voters in Chhattisgarh**

Nearly 55 per cent of the 63.97 lakh electors cast their votes on November 14 in the first phase of polling in 39 constituencies spread over 10 districts in Chhattisgarh.⁴⁷ An Indian Air Force officer was killed and another wounded when suspected Maoists attacked their helicopter as soon as it took off from Bijapur. The helicopter was airlifting electronic voting machines and polling staff when it was attacked. Separately, a CRPF personnel was also killed after being hit by a sniper bullet at Antagarh in Kanker district. In all, there were 25 incidents of encounters between security forces and Maoists in the state on November 14. Six polling booths were also attacked. The ultras looted as many as 21 electronic voting machines.

The Maoists had given a boycott call and even threatened to kill those who participated in the election process. Despite the threat, the overall polling percentage in the Maoist-affected areas remained high with Dantewada and

⁴⁴ "Iraq stabilizing, but vigilance urged before elections: UN," *Khaleej Times*, November 15, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2008/November/middleeast_November297.xml§ion=middleeast

⁴⁵ "Regional Councils, devolution of power promised," *Daily Excelsior*, November 17, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08nov17/news.htm#1>

⁴⁶ "NE ultra killed in Poonch," *Kashmir Times*, November 17, 2008, at <http://kashmirtimes.com/main.htm>

⁴⁷ "55% turnout of voters in Chhattisgarh," *The Hindu*, November 15, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/11/15/stories/2008111558170100.htm>

Bijapur reporting close to 40 per cent. Narayanpur saw 35 per cent voter turnout, Kanker 45 and Bastar 55 per cent.⁴⁸

NORTHEAST INSURGENCY

- **Assam government names NDFB and ULFA for October 30 serial blasts; Special decision-making powers to security forces**

The Assam government on November 11 formally named the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) and United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) as the perpetrators of the October 30 serial blasts in the state. Earlier on November 10, investigating officials revealed that NDFB cadres had helped Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) trigger the serial explosions after they found that the motorbike used in one of the blasts belonged to NDFB.⁴⁹ The NDFB's information and publicity secretary S. Sanjarang denied the outfit's involvement.

The central government meanwhile has decided to grant special decision-making powers to security forces in the North East region. The CRPF and the BSF will soon have a special director-general stationed at Guwahati. With closer inter-state and intra-state co-ordination on the anvil and to facilitate a massive drive to seal the international border, the home ministry has decided to empower these forces. The special directors-general will be able to take quick decisions regarding sanction of funds and operations against militants. They are expected to play a pivotal role in the intelligence co-ordination group, a new mechanism created after the serial blasts.⁵⁰

In other developments, the central government has extended the ban on ULFA, NDFB and the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) for two more years. Of the 34 militant outfits that have been banned so far, 13 belong to the North East region.⁵¹

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- **Tribunal confirms ban on LTTE**

The Tribunal constituted under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act upheld on November 10 the ban imposed by the government on the LTTE on May 14 for a period of two years. The LTTE was initially banned in India following the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in May 1991. Since then it is being renewed every two years.⁵²

⁴⁸ "IAF officer killed in naxalite attack on copter," *The Hindu*, November 15, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/11/15/stories/2008111558190100.htm>

⁴⁹ "Dispur names NDFB, Ulfa - October 30 blast culprits unmasked," *Telegraph*, November 12, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1081112/jsp/northeast/story_10097497.jsp

⁵⁰ "More teeth for N-E forces," *Telegraph*, November 12, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1081112/jsp/frontpage/story_10098718.jsp

⁵¹ "Ban extended on 3 outfits," *Telegraph*, November 13, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1081113/jsp/northeast/story_10104025.jsp

⁵² "Tribunal confirms ban on LTTE," *The Hindu*, November 11, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/11/11/stories/2008111161251100.htm>

III. ENERGY SECURITY REVIEW

CHINA AND RUSSIA SUSPEND PIPELINE TALKS

- **Russia blames China's 'absurd conditions' for loan package**

Russia and China suspended talks on the construction of a new Siberian oil pipeline on November 12. The Russian state pipeline monopoly, Transneft and oil production company, Rosneft blamed China for insisting on "absurd conditions" to execute the \$25 billion loan package, being negotiated in exchange for importing oil. Sources noted that China's state oil company CNPC had asked for higher rates of interest owing to the recent freeze in lending following the financial crisis.

Transneft and CNPC had signed a long-awaited deal at the end of October during a visit to Moscow by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. The pipeline would have run from the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean trunk pipeline, still under construction, to the Chinese border. Its capacity was expected to be about 15 million tonnes per year. The branch pipeline was planned to run some 70 kilometres (45 miles) from Skovorodino in Siberia to the Chinese border and was to eventually supply the oil hub of Daqing in northern China.⁵³

RUSSIAN TALKS WITH EU OVER PIPELINE ENTER ROUGH WATER

- **Putin threatens to scrap a planned pipeline that would carry gas under Baltic Sea to Germany**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin threatened to scrap a planned pipeline that would carry Russian gas under the Baltic Sea to Germany. The high-profile project has faced stiff opposition in parts of Europe. Putin told Finland's Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen, at a meeting in Moscow that it was up to Europe to "decide whether it needs this pipeline or not." If it did not take a decision, Putin stated that Russia will "build liquefaction plants and send gas to world markets."⁵⁴

MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH BATTLE FOR HYDROCARBONS

- **Myanmar's activities spurred by Dhaka's similar actions**

Reports noted that Myanmar's drilling for oil in the disputed water-zone off the Bay of Bengal has probably been accelerated by similar activities by Bangladesh in the Chittagong area during the recent past. Both Myanmar and Bangladesh have vast deposits of natural gas that can meet their industrial and domestic energy needs for quite a long time. Simultaneous drilling by the two countries in the border areas has resulted in the recent political crisis.⁵⁵

⁵³ "China and Russia suspend pipeline talks," *Interfax News Agency*, November 12, 2008, at <http://asianenergy.blogspot.com/2008/11/china-and-russia-suspend-pipeline-talks.html>

⁵⁴ "Putin threatens to scrap gas pipeline as talks with EU leaders approach," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2008, at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122653533902022571.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

⁵⁵ "Bangladesh and Myanmar battle for hydrocarbons," *Asia Energy*, November 12, 2008, at <http://asianenergy.blogspot.com/2008/11/myanmar-and-bangladesh-battle-for.html>