

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

PAKISTAN

- **Federal cabinet expanded; Richard Boucher and Gen. Petraeus visit Islamabad; IMF sanctions \$9 billion; 22 killed in Bajaur**

The Federal cabinet was expanded on November 4 with President Zardari administering the oath to 40 new ministers, 18 of whom were ministers of state. Portfolios of some of the ministers were also changed.¹

US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher and US Centcom Chief Gen. David Petraeus visited Islamabad on November 2 to discuss issues relating to the ongoing 'war on terror' with the political and military establishment in Pakistan.² Reports noted President Zardari telling the visiting delegation that US missile attacks inside Pakistan were proving "counter productive."³

The IMF meanwhile agreed to give Pakistan a loan worth \$9 billion over the next two years. The loan would help Pakistan meet the difficult economic situation with in the country.⁴ In another development, two officials of Khanani and Kalia International (KKI) were arrested on November 7 on charges of illegally transferring billions of dollars outside the country.⁵

In continuing violence in the restive Bajaur province, 22 tribal people were killed and at least 45 injured in a suicide bomb attack on November 6.⁶ A day later, 20 militants were killed in the same region in security operations which also involved air strikes.⁷

BANGLADESH

- **EC announces schedule for parliamentary elections as well as upazila polls; AL and BNP welcome the move, urge free and fair polls; ADB and Bangladesh government sign a \$87 million agreement**

A detailed election schedule was announced by the EC for the ninth parliamentary election, slated for December 18. The commission also announced the schedule for the third upazila elections to be held on December 28, instead of on two different dates as had been declared earlier. The two major political

¹ "Ahmed Hassan Fahim among 40 new ministers," *Dawn*, November 4, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/04/top2.htm>

² "Petraeus and Boucher arrive in Islamabad," *Dawn*, November 3, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/03/top2.htm>

³ Iftikhar A. Khan, "American general warned over missile attacks," *Dawn*, November 3, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/04/top1.htm>

⁴ "\$9bn IMF loan over two years," *Daily Times*, November 8, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\11\08\story_8-11-2008_pg1_1

⁵ Salman Siddiqui, "Kalia, Khanani held in forex scandal," *The News*, November 9, 2008, at http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp

⁶ "Bomber strikes Salarzai jirga in Bajaur kills 22," *Daily Times*, November 7, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\11\07\story_7-11-2008_pg1_1

⁷ "Anwarullah Khan, Operation continues in Bajaur: 20 militants dead," *Dawn*, November 8, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/08/top3.htm>

parties, the AL and the BNP welcomed the announcement but continued to urge the authorities to lift the state of emergency to make the upcoming elections credible.⁸ The BNP on its part demanded an immediate hand over of power to an elected government through a free and fair election. BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia asserted that her party will contest in the polls only if the government met its charter of seven-point demands.⁹

The caretaker government meanwhile started the pullout of troops across the country and relaxed emergency powers rules (EPR) allowing political parties to hold meetings and rallies.¹⁰ The EC announced that the number of political parties and candidates contesting the upcoming parliamentary elections will be much lesser than those in previous years as only 25 parties had registered as parliamentary parties this time around.¹¹ The EC also finalised the voters list for upazila elections.¹²

In other important developments, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Bangladeshi government signed a loan agreement amounting to \$87 million to improve the basic services and infrastructure in municipal towns of Bangladesh.¹³ The Bangladesh Bank stated that India had regained the top position as the country's top importing source, having displaced China.¹⁴

B. EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

CHINA

- **Hu Jintao congratulates President-elect Obama; K2K International Conference held in Dali; China urges Dalai Lama not to support Tibetan independence; China and Italy sign scientific cooperation agreement**

Chinese President Hu Jintao congratulated the US President-elect Barack Obama on his victory. In a telephone conversation with Mr. Obama, the two leaders discussed various bilateral and international issues, including the ongoing financial crisis. Hu expressed satisfaction over the substantial progress made in the Sino-US relationship in the last thirty years.¹⁵ Reports noted that Obama on

⁸ "Polls on Dec 18 at any cost: Hasina reacts sharply to demand for fresh election schedule; huge reception on return from abroad," *The Daily Star*, November 7, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62235>

⁹ "Accept 7-pt demand to let us join poll: Khaleda tells govt at huge rally in Ctg, alleges bid for 'selection' in the name of 'election'," *The Daily Star*, November 8, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62382>

¹⁰ "Govt to pull out troops soon: Relaxes emergency further to free polls campaign, media," *The Daily Star*, November 4, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=61788>

¹¹ "22 parties get registration; 47 rejected," *The Daily Star*, November 9, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62539>

¹² "Voter list for upazila polls finalized: Expenditure limit fixed," *The Daily Star*, November 9, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62550>

¹³ "\$87m ADB loan to improve basic services in 35 towns," *The Daily Star*, November 5, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=61968>

¹⁴ "India now top import source for Bangladesh," *The Daily Star*, November 7, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=62208>

¹⁵ "Chinese President, Obama discuss relations, international issues over the phone," *People's Daily*, November 9, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6529866.html>

his part as having stated that the US attached great importance to its relationship with China.

A team of about 300 government officials and business people from West Bengal visited Dali, a picturesque city in China's Yunnan Province in Southwest China during the week. A plan to boost bilateral trade, tourism, education, culture and transportation, was agreed upon. The first K2K International conference (named so after Kunming, the Capital of Yunnan and Kolkata, capital of West Bengal) was held in Kolkata in 2003.¹⁶

The Taiwan affairs chief of the Chinese mainland Wang Yi described the current initiative of cooperation between the mainland and Taiwan as a step forward for "exploration, cooperation and peace." Chen Yulin, the President of the Mainland's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) had led a team to Taiwan for exchanging views and to discuss plans for future cooperation between the mainland and Taiwan.¹⁷ Before leaving Taipei, Chen described the ARATS tour as a "long-awaited and honoured mission."¹⁸

Meanwhile, Du Qinglin, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, urged the Dalai Lama not to support the Tibet 'independence' while meeting the Dalai Lama's private representatives, Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltse. Du Qinglin called on the Dalai Lama to respect the history and face the current reality. The Chinese government also urged the Dalai Lama's representatives not to support the activities of the Tibetan Youth Congress, which it termed as "a terrorist organization."¹⁹

In other developments, China and Italy have signed a declaration to boost scientific and technological cooperation between them. The declaration, signed between the Chinese Vice-Minister for Science and Technology, Cao Jianlin and the visiting Italian Undersecretary Stefania Craxi, calls for the setting up of a 10-member joint workshop to trace out the various ways for cooperation in major areas like food science, environment, space, and nuclear physics.²⁰

JAPAN

- ***Asahi Shimbun*: Support for an early general election falls to 33 per cent; Japan and the US agree on the need to credibly verify Pyongyang's nuclear activities**

¹⁶ "Chinese, Indian experts urge closer cooperation," *People's Daily*, November 10, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6530107.html>

¹⁷ "Mainland Taiwan affairs chief describes cross-Strait visit as one of exploration, cooperation, peace," *People's Daily*, November 7, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6529716.html>

¹⁸ "ARATS chief concludes historic Taiwan visit, returns to Beijing," *People's Daily*, November 7, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6529688.html>

¹⁹ "Dalai Lama urged to truly not support 'Tibet independence'," *People's Daily*, November 6, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6528904.html>

²⁰ "Italy, China sign scientific co-op accord," *People's Daily*, November 8, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6529740.html>

The *Asahi Shimbun* reported that support for an early general election fell to 33 percent in the latest poll undertaken from the high of 56 percent in early September.²¹

Japan's top nuclear negotiator, Akitaka Saiki, after meeting his US counterpart, Christopher Hill, stated that both sides had agreed on the need to put together a credible mechanism to check North Korea's nuclear activities.²²

Reports also noted that Japan was considering December 14 as the possible date for a proposed trilateral summit with China and South Korea, to be held in Fukuoka Prefecture, southwestern Japan. The meeting would not only discuss the global financial turmoil but also help the three countries to act together on the North Korean nuclear issue.²³

MYANMAR

- **Tension between Bangladesh and Myanmar mounts over Myanmar's attempt to explore oil and gas in Bay of Bengal; Hundreds flee Myanmar's border with Thailand to escape renewed fighting between KNU rebels and the soldiers of the breakaway ceasefire group, the DKBA and the Myanmarese government**

Reports noted that tensions between Bangladesh and Myanmar continue to mount as the result of the movement of naval warships from both countries in the Bay of Bengal. The Bangladesh government asserted that it will take all possible measures to protect its territorial sovereignty. Dhaka also accused Yangon of entering its seawaters in order to explore for gas. A Myanmarese exploration vessel escorted by three naval ships had found large natural gas reserves in the Bay of Bengal in areas claimed by Bangladesh. Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told reporters on November 4, that a delegation led by Bangladesh's foreign secretary would fly to Myanmar soon to ease the rising tensions.²⁴ Myanmar had reportedly ordered four of its warships to be positioned near the western coast of Sittwe.²⁵

Meanwhile, reports noted that hundreds of Karen villagers had fled their homes along Myanmar's border with Thailand to escape renewed fighting between rebels belonging to the Karen National Union (KNU) and the soldiers of the breakaway ceasefire group Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Myanmarese government. A spokesman of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the military wing of the KNU, stated that the DKBA had seized a

²¹ "Support for early general election dwindles to 33%: Asahi poll," *Kyodo News*, October 28, 2008, at <http://asia.news.yahoo.com/081027/kyodo/d943400o0.html>

²² "Japan, U.S. to push credible nuke verification regime for N. Korea," *The Associated Press*, October 28, 2008, at http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D943R4LO0&show_article=1

²³ "Japan eyeing Dec. 14 for trilateral summit with China, S. Korea," *The Associated Press*, October 31, 2008, at http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D945HQFG2&show_article=1

²⁴ "Tension between Bangladesh, Burma Mounts," *Irrawaddy*, November 5, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14564

²⁵ "Burma positions four warships on western coast," *Mizzima*, November 8, 2008, at <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/1264-burma-positions-four-warships-on-western-coast.html>

base of the KNLA's Battalion 201 in Kawkareik Township after heavy fighting over the weekend. The spokesman added that the attack on the Battalion 201 base was part of a strategy to seize all KNLA bases along the Myanmar-Thai border by 2010, the year the country was scheduled to hold a general election. KNLA sources also indicated that the DKBA had been recruiting soldiers in Pa-an District in southern Karen State since mid-August and had forced villagers to attend military training, in an effort to prepare for an offensive against the KNLA.²⁶

C. WEST ASIA

IRAN

- **Majlis impeaches Interior Minister over fake degree; Supreme Leader praises amicable ties between Sunnis and Shiites in Iran; Ahmadinejad congratulates Barack Obama on his victory: Obama calls on Tehran to cease its 'support' for terrorist organisations**

The Majlis overwhelmingly voted to oust Interior Minister Ali Kordan on account of his fake Ph.D. degree. Kordan had also served as deputy oil minister in the current administration before taking over the Interior Ministry portfolio. Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani stated that the removal of Kordan proved that parliamentarians did not show any 'mercy' to anyone in the discharge of their duties.²⁷

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, meeting with officials in charge of Hajj pilgrimage in Tehran, stated that some people tried to magnify minor issues in the society with the aim of criticizing the government's performance. Khamenei also referred to the amicable ties between Shiite and Sunnis in the Islamic Republic and charged that Iran was being painted as a place of intolerance by its enemies.²⁸

Reports noted that the Deputy Secretary of Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) for Foreign Policy and International Security Affairs, Ali Baqeri will visit New Delhi this week to hold talks with Indian officials. Mr. Baqeri's visit comes on the heel of EAM Pranab Mukherjee's trip to Tehran in the previous week during which both sides signed several agreements encompassing economic, agricultural and judicial cooperation.²⁹

Iran expressed the hope that US President-elect Barack Obama will change American foreign policy and avoid invading foreign countries. Government spokesman Gholam Hossein Elham stated that heavy costs of the wars in Iraq

²⁶ "Hundreds Flee as Regime Troops and their Allies Seize KNLA Base," *Irrawaddy*, November 5, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14562

²⁷ "MPs showed their mettle in impeachment of interior minister: Larijani," *Tehran Times*, November 5, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=181662

²⁸ "MPs showed their mettle in impeachment of interior minister: Larijani," *Tehran Times*, November 5, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=181662

²⁹ "Supreme Leader criticizes irresponsible remarks against government," *IRNA*, November 5, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-22/0811055886173739.htm>

and Afghanistan were the departing President Bush's only legacy.³⁰ Meanwhile, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad congratulated Mr. Obama on his victory and urged basic and clear changes in Washington's foreign and domestic policies. He also called on Mr. Obama to reverse the 'unfair' attitude towards restoring the rights of the Palestinians, Iraqis and the Afghans.³¹

However, Mr. Ahmadinejad's initiative as well as Mr. Obama's response drew criticism from hardliners in both the countries. Obama on his part did not respond to the congratulatory message from the Iranian President, with reports pointing out that he was mindful of the political implications of such a gesture. Obama also added that Iran's development of a nuclear weapon "is unacceptable" and called on Tehran to cease supporting terrorist organisations. Speaker of the Iranian parliament, Ali Larijani described Obama's comments as a "step in the wrong direction." Hard-line Iranian newspapers also criticized the appointment of Rahm Emmanuel as Obama's chief of staff, whose background reportedly included volunteer service in the Israeli army.³²

IRAQ

- **Eleven killed in Baghdad bomb blasts; Iraq's Parliament grants local council seats for minorities; Reports: Obama's victory shifting political ground in Iraq**

Three bombs exploded in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, killing seven people and wounding more than 20 others. Deputy Oil Minister Saheb Salman Qutub suffered minor injuries in another bomb attack in the city. One of the explosions hit the busy Karrada district, damaging many shops. Police appeared to have been the target in the most serious attack, but it claimed the lives of six civilians. Reports noted that while levels of violence remained significantly down from the peaks of two years ago, bomb attacks still continued to occur almost every day. Rising tensions have also been reported between the Iraqi government and the US-backed Awakening Councils. Leaders of the Sunni grouping have accused the authorities of dragging their feet in fulfilling promises to give jobs in the official security forces.³³

Iraqi lawmakers meanwhile have decided that six local council seats would be reserved for minorities, half the number to that proposed by the UN. Out of 150 MPs present in parliament, 106 voted in favour of a resolution to give three seats to Iraqi Christians and three to other religious minorities. Christians

³⁰ "Deputy SNSC secretary to visit India next week," *IRNA*, November 5, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-17/0811053069195356.htm>

³¹ "Iran hopes Obama changes US policy," *Khaleej Times*, November 6, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2008/November/middleeast_November93.xml§ion=middleeast

³² Jim Muir, "Obama quashes Iran's hopes for change," *BBC News*, November 9, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/us_elections_2008/7718603.stm

³³ "Seven dead in Baghdad bomb blasts," *BBC News*, November 3, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7705532.stm

will have one seat reserved in Baghdad, as well as the northern province of Nineveh and the southern province of Basra, out of the total 440 seats in provincial elections scheduled for early next year. Reports note that while around 800,000 Christians lived in Iraq at the time of the US-led invasion in 2003, the number has since shrunk by around a third as members have fled the country. One seat will be reserved for Yazidis, a non-Muslim Kurdish community of around 300,000, in Nineveh, which will have a total of 37 seats. Sabeans, a community of around 60,000, whose religion is a mixture of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Persian traditions, are guaranteed one seat in Baghdad out of a total of 57. The Shabak, a 60,000-strong community whose religion is a fusion of Christianity and Islam, have also been granted one seat in Nineveh.

Parliamentarians noted that the new quota will be implemented only for the provincial election expected at the end of January 2009. The next quota would take into account the next census. The vote came after Iraqi Christians complained that controversial legislation passed in September that governed the conduct of provincial elections excluded guarantees of representation for minority groups. The law had sparked street protests staged by minority groups and strong criticism from the UN, which in October proposed 12 seats in all for Christians and other communities. The new resolution however failed to satisfy Christian politicians, who called it an insult to the community. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki meanwhile called on the electoral commission to ensure that the rights of minority communities were protected under the law.³⁴

Reports also noted that the election of Mr. Obama was already beginning to shift the political ground in Iraq and the region, with Iraqi Shiite politicians indicating that they will move faster toward a new security agreement regarding American troops. Gen. Petraeus' decision to withdraw another combat brigade six weeks ahead of schedule reinforced the assurances by Iraq's defense minister that his troops could handle more of Iraq's security and sent a signal that the American troop withdrawals would become a reality.³⁵

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

- **Separatists welcome Barack Obama's victory, pin hopes on Bill Clinton**

Senior separatist leaders welcomed the reported announcement of appointment of former US President Bill Clinton as 'special observer' on Kashmir, by US President-elect, Barack Obama. Chairman Hurriyat Conference (G), Syed Ali

³⁴ "Iraq parliament grants minorities six council seats," *Khaleej Times*, November 3, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2008/November/middleeast_November53.xml§ion=middleeast

³⁵ Alissa J. Rubin, "Obama Victory Alters the Tenor of Iraqi Politics," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/world/middleeast/07iraq.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin

Shah Geelani stated that if the US was serious about the issue, hurdles in the way of resolution of the Kashmir issue would be removed to a great extent. Geelani also hoped that the Kashmir issue would become a priority of the new administration and hoped that the United States' anti-Muslim policy would change. Chairman of the Hurriyat Conference (M), Mirwaiz Umar Farooq stated that the statement by Obama was encouraging and that the changing political scenario in the world had forced the international community to pay attention towards the resolution of Kashmir issue.³⁶

Meanwhile, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that it treats Kashmiri Pandit migrants as 'internally displaced persons', a status the community has been demanding for long. This was in response to a memorandum submitted by a Kashmiri Pandit group 'Roots In Kashmir' (RIK), which urged the world body to take the plight of Kashmiri Pandits who had to leave their homes in the Kashmir Valley. The RIK stated that even 19 years after the mass exodus, over 50,000 Kashmiri Pandit refugees were "living in pathetic conditions in uninhabitable refugee camps" and that the successive Indian central and state Governments had failed to protect their rights. The UNHCR however added that its mandate was to work for refugees "in some countries, on invitation by sovereign governments, with internally displaced populations."³⁷

NORTHEAST INSURGENCY

- **Tarun Gogoi: Bangladesh biggest threat to Assam**

Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on November 8 stated that the biggest threat to Assam was from Bangladesh as several terrorist outfits operating in Assam had bases in that country. Mr. Gogoi termed Assam as "the most vulnerable state in regard to terror attacks from Bangladeshi soil." While noting that militant outfits also operated from Myanmar and Nepal, Mr. Gogoi insisted that Bangladesh remained the states biggest threat.³⁸

In other developments, a team of Special Task Force of Kolkata police and the military intelligence arrested eight suspected Manipuri militants from an auction house in Central Kolkata on November 7. An auction of old vehicles of the Border Road Task Force (BRTF) was in progress when they were arrested.³⁹

³⁶ "Separatists welcome Obama's victory, pin hopes on Clinton," *Kashmir Times*, November 7, 2008, at <http://kashmirtimes.com/jktoday.htm>

³⁷ "UNHCR treats KPs as IDPs," *Daily Excelsior*, November 4, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08nov04/news1.htm#4>

³⁸ "Bangladesh biggest threat: Gogoi," *Telegraph*, November 9, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1081109/jsp/frontpage/story_10085074.jsp

³⁹ "8 suspected Manipuri UGs held in Kolkata," *Imphal Free Press*, November 9, 2008, at http://kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=headline&newsid=44059&typeid=1&Idoc_Session=6c03ce93623803f82ef6936db323ae61