

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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EDITOR: S. SAMUEL C. RAJIV

REVIEW ADVISOR: S. KALYANARAMAN

CONTRIBUTORS

NIHAR NAYAK - Nepal

MAHTAB ALAM RIZVI – Iran, Iraq

GUNJAN SINGH – Bangladesh, Japan

PRIYANKA SINGH - Pakistan



**INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES,
1, DEVELOPMENT ENCLAVE, RAO TULA RAM MARG, NEW DELHI – 110010**

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

PAKISTAN

- **Pakistan political parties express solidarity with the governments position in the wake of Mumbai attacks; US urges Pakistan to cooperate with India on terror attack probe; Zardari: India and Pakistan should sign an agreement to counter terror; Car bomb explosion in Peshawar kills 22**

In the backdrop of the Mumbai terror attacks, an all-party meet was held in Islamabad on December 2. Reports noted that representatives of 58 political parties who had gathered - both from the ruling coalition as well as the opposition, expressed solidarity with the government's position over the issue.¹ President Asif Ali Zardari noted that great countries like India "could not be held hostage by non-state actors."² Earlier, in an interview on November 30, Zardari stated that India and Pakistan should sign an agreement to facilitate questioning of suspected militants in each others' territory.³

In the wake of the attacks, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice flew to the sub-continent and met with both the Indian and the Pakistani leadership. At a press conference in New Delhi on December 4 prior to her visit to Islamabad, Rice asked the Pakistani authorities to cooperate "fully and transparently" with India in investigating those responsible for the Mumbai attacks.⁴ The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen also urged Pakistan to look into "any and all possible ties" of militant groups based in Pakistan to the Mumbai carnage.⁵

Amidst increasing international pressure, Prime Minister Gilani on his part reportedly told a visiting delegation of US Senators that Pakistan would not allow the use of its territory for militant activities.⁶

In other developments, at least 22 people were killed and around 90 injured in powerful car bomb explosion in Peshawar on December 5.

¹ Asim Yasin, "Nation unites to defend sovereignty," *The News*, December 3, 2008, at http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp

² "Non-state actors cannot hijack nations: Zardari," *Daily Times*, December 2, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\12\02\story_2-12-2008_pg1_1

³ "Zardari for pact with India to question terror suspects," *Daily Times*, December 1, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\12\01\story_1-12-2008_pg1_1

⁴ "Rice urges Pakistan to cooperate 'fully, transparently'," *The News*, December 4, 2008, at http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_default.asp

⁵ Anwar Iqbal, "Mullen wants 'any and all ties' explored," *Dawn*, December 5, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/12/05/top4.htm>

⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan to thwart terrorist designs, US senators told," *Dawn*, December 7, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/12/07/top2.htm>

NEPAL

- **Army integration process suffers from lack of cooperation among political parties; Chinese military delegation assures help in integration process; Chinese Foreign Minister assures Nepal of his country's commitment towards protecting its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence**

The army integration process continued to be bedeviled by lack of cooperation among the major political parties. The Nepali Congress (NC) for instance refused to join the special committee on army integration unless its conditions were accepted by the government. NC Vice-President Ram Chandra Poudel urged the reconstitution of the committee and made his party's cooperation contingent upon the government fulfilling its obligations as laid out in the nine-point understanding. The committee presently was made up of two members from the CPN-Maoist and one each from CPN-UML and the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF).⁷

The Nepalese Defense Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa requested China to help his country in the integration process. This was conveyed by Mr. Thapa to a visiting 10-member delegation of senior Chinese military officials led by Lt. Gen. Ma Xiaotian. Gen. Ma on his part stated that China was willing to help Nepal without interfering in the internal affairs of the country. The two sides discussed among other issues, the ongoing peace process and border security. The delegation, which included four Major generals of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), promised to provide Nepal with non-lethal military support worth Rs. 207 million.⁸

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was also on a three day visit to Nepal from December 2, during which he met senior Nepali political leadership, including President Yadav and Prime Minister Dahal. Yang promised to expedite the construction of a much delayed road project connecting Syaprubensi in Nepal to Rasuwamadi on the border with Tibet. The road linking Nepal with Tibet is expected to boost trade and tourism. Kathmandu currently was linked with Lhasa by a road built by China in the 1970s. The Nepalese foreign Minister on his part, during his meeting with Mr. Jiechi, assured him that Nepal has always been upholding the principle of a 'One China policy.' Yang noted that China has been extending full support to Nepal's recent political changes and expressed his country's commitment to provide necessary assistance for protecting Nepal's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.⁹

⁷ "Ruling coalition fails to court NC into special committee," *Nepalnews*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/dec/dec02/news07.php>

⁸ "Chinese military delegation arrives in Kathmandu," *kantipuronline*, December 6, 2008, at <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=169514>

⁹ "China honours political change in Nepal," *The Hindustan Times*, December 3, 2008, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/StoryPage.aspx?sectionName=&id=3aa7a1ab-ef3c-4b6f-8970-40ff5e7d847c&&Headline=China+honours+political+change+in+Nepal>

BANGLADESH

- **CEC: State of emergency to be lifted at a suitable time before the December 29 elections; AL and the JP enter into an electoral alliance; CA urges measures to hold free and transparent national elections**

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) A.T.M. Shamsul Huda asserted that the state of emergency would be lifted at a suitable time before the upcoming December 29 parliamentary elections. Huda noted that the commission had already made a request to the government in this regard.¹⁰ The EC also plans to organise electoral debates on crucial issues before the elections with the participation of top political leaders, including Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.¹¹ Both the leaders on December 5 called for concerted efforts to strengthen democracy in the country.¹²

The Awami League (AL) and the Jatiya Party (JP) meanwhile have agreed to a seat sharing formula ahead of the elections. The JP would contest 50 seats as a component of the AL-led grand electoral alliance, thus bringing to an end some hard bargaining over the issue.¹³ The alliance also drafted its electoral manifesto which includes a promise to make it mandatory to publish the sources of income of the prime minister, ministers, lawmakers and their families to ensure transparency of those in government.¹⁴

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed on his part stated that the press in Bangladesh was totally free as no restrictive regulations have been imposed under the present state of emergency.¹⁵ Ahmed urged field-level government officials to take all necessary measures to hold free and transparent national elections on December 29 so that a corruption and terrorism-free country could be built.¹⁶

In other developments, British High Commissioner Stephen Evans stated that a smooth transition to an elected government through free and credible elections was vital for Bangladesh, as the country could not afford to go on with the politics of confrontation.¹⁷ The US Ambassador to Dhaka on his part noted

¹⁰ "Emergency to be lifted before polls: Hopes CEC after meeting president," *The Daily Star*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=65775>

¹¹ "Khaleda, Hasina may face off: EC mulls rivals' electoral debate," *The Daily Star*, December 3, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=65923>

¹² "Democracy Day: Hasina, Khaleda call for strengthening democracy," *The Daily Star*, December 6, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=66321>

¹³ "AL confirms JP 50 seats," *The Daily Star*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=65830>

¹⁴ "Draft Electoral Manifesto: AL pledges to tackle graft, food prices: Assures disclosure of wealth records of MPs, their family members to ensure transparency," *The Daily Star*, December 4, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=66086>

¹⁵ "Media totally free during emergency: Says chief adviser," *The Daily Star*, December 3, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=65929>

¹⁶ "Go all out to make JS polls free, fair: CA asks govt officials," *The Daily Star*, December 7, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=66449>

¹⁷ "UK envoy for smooth power handover," *The Daily Star*, December 4, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=66105>

that elections intended to restore democratic rule in Bangladesh will be a watershed event which could produce either a model Muslim democracy or a new hotbed of extremism.¹⁸

B. EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

JAPAN

- **Aso rejects call to dissolve lower house of parliament; Japan reiterates its commitments to help India fight terrorism; China-Japan tension over islands in East China Sea**

Prime Minister Taro Aso, in his first parliamentary face-off with opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa, rejected a call to dissolve the lower house of parliament in December. He asserted that the government cannot afford a political vacuum in the face of the global financial turmoil.¹⁹ Aso also called for a departure from the reformist fiscal policies pursued by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, in view of the economic recession and low public approval ratings for such a policy.²⁰

Prime Minister Taro Aso called up his Indian counterpart Dr. Manmohan Singh in the wake of the Mumbai terrorist attacks and reiterated Japanese cooperation on fighting the scourge of terrorism.²¹

Meanwhile, reports noted that the appointment of Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State by President-elect Barack Obama has generated mixed responses in Japan. Reports noted that some analysts were concerned about her focus on China and speculated whether American relations with Japan would be as lukewarm as they were under former President Bill Clinton.²²

In other developments, a 70-member unit of Japan's Air Self-Defense Force was sent to Kuwait in order to lay the groundwork for the withdrawal of Japanese forces from Iraq.²³ In a sign of tension, Japan asked two Chinese research ships to leave waters which it contends were its own sovereign space. This was revealed by Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura. The islands in the East China Sea, known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyutai in China, are controlled by Japan but claimed by Japan, China as well as Taiwan.²⁴

¹⁸ "Bangladesh polls deemed most crucial in world," *The Daily Star*, December 6, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=66352>

¹⁹ "3RD LD: Aso, in 1st face-off in Diet, rejects Ozawa's calls to dissolve Diet," *Associated Press*, November 28, 2008, at http://www.breitbart.com/print.php?id=D94NV67G1&show_article=1

²⁰ "Aso to break with Koizumi reforms," *Japan Times*, December 4, 2008, at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nb20081204a1.html>

²¹ "Japan, India renew vow to cooperate in fight against terrorism," *Associated Press*, December 1, 2008, at http://www.breitbart.com/print.php?id=D94PH5K01&show_article=1

²² "Japan wary of Hillary Clinton as new US Secretary of State," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, December 4, 2008, at <http://www.abc.net.au/cgi-bin/common/printfriendly.pl?http://www.abc.net.au/ra/programguide/stories/200812/s2438353.htm>

²³ "Last ASDF unit sent to Kuwait to work on Iraqi mission withdrawal," *Associated Press*, December 6, 2008, at http://www.breitbart.com/print.php?id=D94T8IDG2&show_article=1

²⁴ "Japan Demands Chinese Ships Leave Disputed Waters," *Bloomberg*, December 8, 2008, at http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601101&sid=aa7_JWuNKIOQ#

C. WEST ASIA

IRAN

- **Mottaki: Iran has entailed heavy costs over the last years on account of Iraq; Ahmadinejad: Relations between people in an Islamic system were based on religious beliefs; Larijani, in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, urges India and Pakistan not to fall into the “trap of countries” seeking adventure in the region; DG IAEA: Efforts to limit Iran’s nuclear ambitions have been a “failure”**

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that the Islamic Republic of Iran has entailed heavy costs over the past six years in helping maintain security and promoting development in the war-torn country. On the Iraq-US security pact which was approved by the Iraqi parliament on November 27, 2008, he noted that foreign forces will hand over administration to Iraqi forces within 6 months and added that the fact that the Iraqi people will vote on the pact was of prime importance.²⁵

President Ahmadinejad stated that relations between the people and the government in an Islamic system were based on religious beliefs. He made these remarks at a special ceremony to launch an electronic communications system to bridge the gap between the people and the government in the East Azarbaijan province. Ahmadinejad stated that the new communication system will provide a suitable medium for people to gain easy access to the country's officials.²⁶

Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, reacting to the Mumbai attacks, warned India and Pakistan not to “stumble into the trap of countries which seek adventures in the region.” Terming the attacks as “brutal,” Larijani called on Islamabad and New Delhi to investigate the issue calmly.²⁷

The Director General of the IAEA Mohamed ElBaradei stated that efforts to limit Iran’s nuclear ambitions were “a failure.” He however was optimistic about making progress on the issue under the incoming administration of Barack Obama. The UN Security Council has so far passed three sets of sanctions on Iran insisting that it shut down its uranium enrichment programme. The US and its European partners have also offered Iran diplomatic and economic incentives to suspend uranium enrichment. Iran on its part maintains that the enrichment is for civilian reactors.²⁸

²⁵ “Mottaki: Iran has entailed heavy costs to maintain Iraq's security,” *IRNA*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-203/0812022082181347.htm>

²⁶ “Ties between people, government based on religious beliefs,” *IRNA*, December 4, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-24/0812049199171627.htm>

²⁷ “Iran warns India, Pakistan to beware of ‘traps,’” *Tehran Times*, December 4, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=183977

²⁸ “Nuclear watchdog director calls Iran efforts a failure,” *Khaleej Times*, December 7, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/international/2008/December/international_December455.xml§ion=international

IRAQ

- **Suicide bomber Killed 36 Iraqis; Saddam Hussein's cousin gets second death sentence; Iraq-Iran parliamentary friendship come closer**

Suicide bombers struck across Iraq targeting Iraqi and US security forces and killing as many as 36 people, including 15 cadets, at a police academy in Baghdad. Also in the capital, Maj. Gen. Mudher Mawla, overseeing the transition of tens of thousands of mainly Sunni Arab paramilitary fighters into the Iraqi security forces and other government entities, escaped an assassination attempt during the week. The roadside bomb targeting him killed one of his bodyguards.

While general levels of violence have dropped dramatically across Iraq over the past year, bombings remained a daily threat. According to data from the Health and Interior ministries, the death toll for November was 339, compared with 278 in October. However, the number was far lower than the previous year, when 608 Iraqis died in war-related violence during November. The UN's Iraq envoy, Staffan de Mistura on his part predicted "spectacular attempts" by insurgents to disrupt the provincial elections and derail security gains made in recent months.²⁹

An Iraqi court meanwhile sentenced Saddam Hussein's cousin 'Chemical Ali' to death for crushing a Shi'ite revolt after the 1991 Gulf War. It was the second death sentence to be handed down against Ali Hassan al-Majeed, who earned his nickname for his role in using poison gas against Kurdish villages. Al-Majeed was first condemned to be hanged last year for the killing of tens of thousands of Kurds in the 1980s, but that sentence was held up by political wrangling. The court, the Iraqi High Tribunal, was set up to try former members of Saddam's government. Saddam was executed in December 2006 after being convicted of crimes against humanity for the killing of 148 Shi'ite men and boys after a 1982 assassination attempt. Also on trial are former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz, facing charges over the execution of dozens of merchants accused of breaking state price controls in 1992.³⁰

In other developments, MP Heshmatolh Falahatpisheh announced that the members of Iraq-Iran parliamentary friendship group will visit Tehran in the near future at the invitation of the Iranian parliament. The MP also noted that Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani's visit to Iraq was on the agenda. His Iraqi counterpart, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani's visited Tehran in October.³¹

²⁹ "36 Iraqis killed in suicide bombing," *IRNA*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-22/0812022592114209.htm>

³⁰ "Iraq's 'Chemical Ali' gets second death sentence," *Khaleej Times*, December 2, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2008/December/middleeast_December28.xml§ion=middleeast

³¹ "Iraqi parliamentary team to visit Iran," *Tehran Times*, December 7, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=184179