

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

July 14-20, 7(3), 2008

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EDITOR: S. SAMUEL C. RAJIV

REVIEW ADVISOR: S. KALYANARAMAN

CONTRIBUTORS

M. MAYILVAGANAN – Sri Lanka
NIHAR NAYAK – Nepal
JAGANNATH PANDA - China
S. SAMUEL C. RAJIV – Iraq, Afghanistan

M. AMARJEET SINGH – Internal Security Review
PRIYANKA SINGH – Pakistan
ARUN VISHWANATHAN – Nuclear Review
(INDIAN PUGWASH SOCIETY)



**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

AFGHANISTAN

- **9 US soldiers die in Taliban attack in Kunar province; NATO denies reports of cross-border operations; Obama in Kabul warns of 'precarious situation'; 13 civilians killed in NATO and US strikes**

In a daring attack by the Taliban on an IASF post in the Kunar province bordering Pakistan on June 13, 9 US soldiers were killed.¹ 15 other American soldiers were also wounded in the attack, along with 4 Afghan soldiers. The post, which was occupied by nearly 70 American and Afghan soldiers a few days before the attack, was immediately abandoned. The US military however vowed to maintain a "strong presence in the area."²

Reports also noted that NATO forces had amassed on the border in anticipation of an attack into Pakistani territory. NATO however denied the possibility of an incursion of troops into Pakistan.³ US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and military chief Adm. Mike Mullen reiterated the need for more allied troops in Afghanistan and for more aggressive action by Pakistani security forces on their side of the border. Adm. Mullen was in Islamabad during the week to drive home the American concerns, his fourth trip to Pakistan since January 2008. President Bush on his part, talking to reporters at the White House on July 15 promised to investigate Kabul's charges that Pakistan had a hand in the recent terrorist attacks inside Afghanistan.⁴ Bush also noted that US military operations in Iraq were faring better than in Afghanistan.

US Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama meanwhile was in Afghanistan during the week and met with President Karzai among others. He termed the situation in the country "precarious and urgent" and called for the injection of more troops.⁵

In other developments, at least 13 people were killed in NATO and US missile and mortar strikes in Khost and Paktika provinces on July 19. The dead included 9 Afghan police officers. The humanitarian organization Oxfam warned

¹ "9 Americans Die in Afghan Attack," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/world/asia/14afghan.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper&oref=slogin

² "US Abandons Site of Afghan Attack," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/17/world/asia/17afghan.html?ref=todayspaper>

³ "No intention of incursion into Pakistan: NATO," *IANS*, July 17, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20080717/884/twl-no-intention-of-incursion-into-pakis.html>

⁴ "US to probe Kabul's charges of terrorism against Pakistan," *IANS*, July 16, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20080716/890/twl-us-to-probe-kabul-s-charges-of-terro.html>

⁵ "Obama: Afghanistan 'precarious,' wants more troops," *IANS*, July 20, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/137/20080720/362/twl-obama-afghanistan-precarious-wants-m.html>; See also "Troops in Afghanistan Need Help, Obama Says," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/us/politics/14campaign.html?ref=todayspaper>

against the growing human cost of the war and called on all parties to the conflict to “do everything possible to avoid causing harm to civilians.”⁶

Reports also noted that the 218-km strategic Delaram-Zaranj road, being built by India, would be ready by July 17. The road would connect landlocked Afghanistan and give Central Asia access to the Arabian Sea, through the Iranian port of Chabahar.⁷

PAKISTAN

- **NATO deploys on Pak-Afghan border; Gilani: Operations against militants in tribal areas to continue; Obama calls for shift in US focus from Iraq to militants’ sanctuary in Pakistan**

The Pakistan Army went on high alert after reports noted that NATO forces were deployed along the Afghan border. Helicopters were also deployed and troops were airlifted to the area further escalating tensions.⁸ Reports noted that coalition forces positioned in Paktia province of Afghanistan launched an offensive in Pakistan’s North Waziristan Agency on July 15.⁹ However, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, talking to the press at the Pentagon on July 16 denied the reports, calling them ‘exaggerated.’¹⁰

Security forces meanwhile seized control of Zargari town on July 17 after a fierce operation against the Taliban.¹¹ Reports also noted that peace talks in NWFP with Baitulla Mehsud broke down with Mehsud issuing an ‘ultimatum’ to the provincial government to resign.¹² Amidst these developments, Prime Minister Gilani asserted that the security forces would continue to operate against the militants in the tribal areas to avert a security threat such as 9/11.¹³

In other developments, the Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama on July 15 stated that US foreign policy needed to shift its ‘single-minded’ focus on Iraq and instead concentrate on the tribal areas in Pakistan which have provided a safe haven to the militants.¹⁴

⁶ “US and NATO Forces Kill 13 Afghans in Strikes Said to Be Mistakes,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/21/world/asia/21afghan.html?ref=todayspaper>

⁷ “India’s Afghan road to be ready by July 17,” *IANS*, July 14, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/32/20080714/1067/twl-india-s-afghan-road-to-be-ready-by-j.html>

⁸ Haji Mujtaba, “NATO troops build up on Pak-Afghan border,” *Daily Times*, July 16, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\07\16\story_16-7-2008_pg1_1

⁹ “NATO forces attack targets inside Pakistan,” *Daily Times*, July 17, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\07\17\story_17-7-2008_pg1_1

¹⁰ Anwar Iqbal, “Troop build-up reports ‘untrue’, says US,” *Dawn*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/07/17/top4.htm>

¹¹ Abdul Sami Paracha, “Fierce clashes continue in Hangu,” *Dawn*, July 18, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/07/18/top4.htm>

¹² Anwarullah Khan, “Baitullah’s ‘five-day ultimatum’ to NWFP government,” *Dawn*, July 18, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/07/18/top3.htm>

¹³ “Operation to continue,” *Dawn*, July 15, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/07/15/top3.htm>

¹⁴ “Obama to target sanctuaries in tribal areas,” *The News*, July 16, 2008, at http://thenews.jang.com.pk/arc_default.asp

NEPAL

- **Ram Baran Yadav elected President, Paramanad Jha as Vice-President; CA passes the AEB; UNCTAD: Nepal still a long way to go before graduating from the LDC status; Sen cautions against UNMIN seeking a extended mandate**

Political parties initiated talks on the formation of a new government immediately after the passage of the Fifth Constitution Amendment Bill on July 13. The three major parties – Nepali Congress (NC), Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) and the Maoists, failed to field a consensus candidate for president and vice president and instead fielded separate candidates. The NC, UML and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) agreed to share the three key positions of president, vice-president and chair of the Constituent Assembly (CA) on the morning of July 19. As per the understanding, UML and MJF agreed to back NC's presidential candidate Dr. Ram Baran Yadav while MJF's Paramananda Jha would be supported for the post of vice president and the UML would get the chair of the CA.¹⁵ As a result, Jha was elected as Nepal's first vice president bagging 305 votes, beating his nearest rival Shanta Shrestha of the CPN (Maoist), who had garnered 243 votes.

However, the two presidential candidates – Ram Baran Yadav of NC and the Maoist-backed Ram Raja Prasad Singh failed to gain the 298 votes needed to be elected for the post. While Yadav bagged 283 votes, Singh ended up with 270 votes with 24 votes being invalid. Reports noted that 578 out of 594 CA members registered in the voter list had cast their votes while five fringe parties boycotted the voting.¹⁶

With no presidential candidate securing a majority, re-elections were held on July 21. Ram Baran Yadav was elected the first president of the Republic of Nepal garnering 308 votes while his rival Ram Raja Prasad Singh ended up with 282 votes.¹⁷

A senior Maoist leader charged that the alliance among the NC, UML and MJF was a result of a conspiracy by foreign elements and hinted of the possibility of Maoists reverting to revolt. He also accused the UML of bargaining for the Home Ministry, and that their position had disrupted the alliance between the Maoists and the UML.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the CA on July 14 passed the Advance Expenditure Bill (AEB) that authorized the government to incur expenditures totaling Rs. 73.54 billion in the new fiscal year that began from July 16. Finance Minister Dr. Ram Sharan

¹⁵ "New alliance is born; 'president to NC, veep to MJF and CA chair to UML,'" *Nepalnews*, July 19, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/jul/jul19/news05.php>

¹⁶ "Jha becomes Nepal's first vice president; re-polling for president set for Monday," *Nepalnews*, July 19, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/jul/jul19/news08.php>

¹⁷ "Dr. Ram Baran Yadav becomes Nepal's first president," *Nepalnews*, July 21, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/jul/jul21/news09.php>

¹⁸ "Chand smells conspiracy in NC-UML-MJF alliance," *Nepalnews*, July 19, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/jul/jul19/news09.php>

Mahat on his part pointed out that the current fiscal year recorded 5.6 percent GDP growth, which was the highest in the last seven years. While the agriculture sector registered a 5.65 percent growth, the non-agriculture sector registered a 5.57 percent growth. The gross domestic savings increased to 11.5 percent, up from 9.7 percent in the previous year. Likewise, foreign assistance had substantially increased from Rs. 37.2 billion in the last fiscal to Rs. 57.6 billion in the current fiscal year. The government debt, during this period, had decreased from Rs. 329 billion to Rs. 324 billion. The general expenditure of the government had also increased by 24 per cent and the capital expenditure by 31.6 per cent from the previous years' figures.¹⁹

While the AEB indicated an excellent performance of the Nepal economy, UNCTAD in its report on the Least Developing Countries (LDCs) pointed out that Nepal could be more than 50 years away from graduating from the LDC group. UN Resident Coordinator for Nepal Rober Piper noted that one-third of the country's population continued to live in some of the worst conditions to be found on the planet.²⁰

In other developments, Indian Ambassador to the UN Nirupam Sen cautioned the UNMIN against seeking a mandate beyond the aspirations of the people of Nepal. Sen pointed out that the UNMIN had established a presence in Nepal at the request of Kathmandu.²¹

SRI LANKA

- **Colombo unveils new restrictions on foreign aid workers; Sri Lankan forces regain Vidathalthivu; HRW expresses concerns about arbitrary detentions; Karunanidhi calls on central government to take back Katchathivu**

The Sri Lankan government unveiled new restrictions on the UN and other foreign aid staff who would be allowed to work in the country. Under the new rules released by the foreign ministry, foreign nationals would not be allowed to stay for more than four years in a single place, while experts and advisers would only be allowed into the country for a year.²² The new regulations came amidst mounting tensions between the government and the UN and key member states, which have been highly critical of the war being conducted against the Tamil Tiger rebels.

¹⁹ "Nepal Constituent Assembly passes advance expenditure bill," *Dailyindia.com*, July 15, 2008, at <http://www.dailyindia.com/show/259460.php/Nepal-Constituent-Assembly-passes-advance-expenditure-bill>

²⁰ "Nepal fares badly even among LDCs," *Nepalnews*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/jul/jul17/news14.php>

²¹ "India cautions UN Mission in Nepal," *Ndtv.com*, July 19, 2008, at <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20080057774&ch=7/19/2008%201:33:00%20PM>

²² "Sri Lanka gets tough on UN, aid visas," *AFP*, July 18, 2008, at <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jQF8ADxGcH8UzNJFhMTVDJsSMEDg>

Sri Lankan forces meanwhile regained the north western coastal town of Vidathalthivu, site of the biggest Sea Tiger base, for the first time since the early 1990's. Troops of the 58 Division under the command of Brig. Shavendra Silva took control of the area during the week.²³

Reports noted that the Sri Lankan government issued notices to around 350 occupants of lands close to key defence establishments in the Kompannaveediya area to vacate the lands on security considerations as well as due to the construction of un-authorized structures.²⁴ Reports also pointed out that the Defence Ministry had issued notices to some 160 occupants to vacate the land belonging to the Ministry, located along Sir Chittanpalam A. Gardinar Mawatha and Uttarananda Mawatha, due to security concerns.²⁵

Colombo meanwhile continued to maintain silence on Human Rights Watch (HRW) allegations regarding the arbitrary detention of more than 400 displaced civilians. HRW had also expressed concerns about the daily pass system that restricted to 30 the number of people who could leave a newly-established camp in Kalimodai, Mannar District.²⁶

Sri Lanka's Commissioner of Elections Dayananda Dissanayake faulted the present electoral system as the root cause for the prevalence of violence and mal-practices, which were a part and parcel of every Sri Lankan election. Addressing the media ahead of the upcoming Provincial Council polls, Dissanayake observed that the tug-of-war for preferential votes along with virulent inter-party rivalry began with the advent of the proportional system in 1981. He called for a balance between the first-past-the-post system and the proportional system, which would give better representation to the aspirations of the people.²⁷

India on its part committed \$109.2 million as aid to Sri Lanka during the first five months of 2008. Iran however emerged as the largest donor, having contributed \$450 million in the same period.²⁸

DMK Chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi called on the central government to take back Katchathivu as Tamil Nadu fisherman continued to face problems in the Palk Straits. He pointed out that the DMK government had in 1974 itself opposed the granting of Katchathivu to Sri Lanka, a plea which was ignored by the centre. He however stressed that the state

²³ Ranil Wijayapala, "Forces regain Vidathalthivu, LTTE loses biggest Sea Tiger base on North Western coast," *Daily News*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.dailynews.lk/2008/07/17/sec01.asp>

²⁴ Sunil Jayasiri, "Hundreds get quit notice on security grounds," *Daily Mirror*, July 15, 2008, at http://www.dailymirror.wijeya.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=20507

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mendaka Abeysekera, "Govt. mum on arbitrary detentions in north," *The Nation*, July 15, 2008, at <http://www.nation.lk/2008/07/06/news7.htm>

²⁷ Rasika Somarathna, "Polls Chief calls for balanced electoral system," *Daily News*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.dailynews.lk/2008/07/17/pol001.asp>

²⁸ "India commits \$109.2 mn aid, Iran tops the list," *Daily Mirror*, July 15, 2008, at <http://www.dailymirror.lk/2008/07/15/292/>

government would take up the issue with New Delhi again.²⁹ The DMK also held demonstrations in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu in order to seek the attention of the central government.

While refuting allegations of Sri Lankan Navy involvement in the alleged killing of two Indian fishermen on July 11, Colombo promised to continue its inquiries into the incident. The Foreign Ministry, citing its preliminary findings, had noted that no naval units were operating on the Sri Lankan side of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the area off Point Calimere on the day of the incident. It added that there was a possibility of the involvement of LTTE in the episode as it hoped “to derive a double advantage by staging such attacks. Firstly, it seeks to place pressure on innocent fishermen to associate themselves with the nefarious activities of the Tigers. Secondly, it endeavours to falsely implicate the Sri Lanka Navy, with a view to damaging the excellent bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka.”³⁰

B. EAST ASIA

CHINA

- **China unveils J-10; Russia to return Yinlong (Tarabary) Island and half of Heixiazi Island; Beijing hopes Darfur situation wont be complicated by the attempted prosecution of al-Bashir; Guidelines for a new round of institutional reform of the State council formulated**

China unveiled its most advanced fighter aircraft, the Jian-10 in Beijing during the week. The aircraft, a joint production of the China Aviation Industry Corporation (CAICI) and the Chengdu Aircraft Design Institute (CADI), boasts of Pili-12 air-to-air missiles, among other advanced features. It had entered into service in December 2006.³¹

Reports noted that Russia was all set to return a territory measuring 174 sq. km. on its northern border with China. The two countries would sign an agreement to this effect during the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Beijing. As per the agreement, Russia would return Yinlong Island (Tarabary Island) and half of Heixiazi Island, which were at the confluence of the Heilongjiang and the Wusulijiang rivers that served as the natural border between the two countries.³² *Xinhua* also referred to a foreign policy paper approved by the new Russian President Dmitry Medvedev which states that

²⁹ “Time to take back Kachtathivu,” *Dinamani (Chennai)*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.dinamani.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=DNT20080717115538&Title=TamilNadu+Page&ITitle=R%AAZLm&Topic=0&ndate=7/18/2008&dName=No+Title&Dist=0>

³⁰ “Government probes alleged fishermen attack,” *Daily Mirror*, July 16, 2008, at http://www.dailymirror.wijeya.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=20626

³¹ “Model of China's latest fighter jet unveiled in Beijing,” *China Military*, July 18, 2008, at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2008-07/18/content_1368902.htm

³² “Russia set to return Chinese land after 40 years of talks,” *People's Daily*, July 21, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/6454234.html>

Russia would expand its bilateral ties with both India and China, while “pursuing the fundamental line to strengthen interaction in dealing with pressing international issues and to boost mutually beneficial bilateral ties in all areas, especially in trade and the economy.”³³

On the Darfur issue, the Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed the hope that the situation would not get complicated by the attempted prosecution of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. Beijing noted that it was deeply worried by the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) attempted prosecution of the Sudanese leader. An ICC prosecutor had in the previous week sought the arrest of al-Bashir, charging him with having committed war crimes in Darfur.³⁴

Meanwhile, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH) has awarded the sixth Chinese peacekeeping team a “peace medal” for its contributions to the peace process in Haiti. The Chinese team was expected to return back in mid-August.³⁵

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has dismissed indications of any diplomatic politics behind the invitation extended to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi to attend the inaugural ceremony of Beijing Olympics on August 8. The Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that a head of state or government should be invited by the Olympics committee of that country as per the rules of the International Olympics Committee (IOC). This was in response to various newspapers reports in India which noted that the invitation indicated a soft approach to the Congress Party chief.³⁶

In domestic developments, the Chinese government formulated a set of guidelines for a new round of institutional reform of the State council - the country’s Cabinet, in an effort to build up service-oriented, responsible governance, based on law and a clean government for the nation. This was disclosed by an official in charge of the General Office of the Central Government Set-up Committee. These initiatives are seen largely as an effort in implementing the mandate of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) which attempted to readjust the functions and duties of the various central government departments.³⁷

The spokesperson of the Taiwan’s President’s office, Wang Yu-chi reiterated his country’s desire to continue and procure defensive arms from the United States. The statement was in response to the comments made by the US

³³ “Russia to boost ties with China, India,” *People’s Daily*, July 15, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6450680.html>

³⁴ “China warns against complication of Darfur issue by ICC move,” *People’s Daily*, July 17, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6452622.html>

³⁵ “Chinese peacekeeping troops win UN “peace medal,” *People’s Daily*, July 14, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6449766.html>

³⁶ “FM spokesman: Indian Times’ report on Indian leaders attendance at Olympiad ‘not a fact,’” *China Military*, July 18, 2008, at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2008-07/18/content_1368945.htm

³⁷ “China sets guidelines for central government’s administrative reform,” *People’s Daily*, July 17, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6452642.html>

military chief, Adm. Mike Mullen that there was “no pressing need” for arms sales to Taiwan.³⁸

C. WEST ASIA

IRAQ

- **Bush opposes “artificial timeline” for troop withdrawals; Maliki and Bush agree on ‘time horizon’ for reduction of US forces; Obama proposes plan for troop withdrawals by summer of 2010; Iraq hopes to have security control in all its 18 provinces by end of 2008**

US President George Bush reiterated his opposition to what he called an “artificial timeline” for the withdrawal of American troops.³⁹ In a video conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on July 17, both the leaders agreed for a “general time horizon for meeting aspirational goals such as the resumption of Iraqi security control in their cities and provinces and the further reduction of US combat forces from Iraq,” in the words of White House spokeswoman Dana Perino.⁴⁰ The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen also asserted that setting a timetable for troop withdrawal was “dangerous” and any decision in this regard had to be “exclusively based on conditions on the ground.”⁴¹

US Presidential candidate Barack Obama, writing in *The New York Times* termed the Iraq war “the greatest strategic blunder in the recent history of American foreign policy.” He put forth his proposal for the withdrawal of most of the American troops by the summer of 2010 with a residual force to perform limited missions – including operations against remnants of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, protecting American service members and in training Iraqi security forces.⁴² While Prime Minister Maliki welcomed Obama’s withdrawal plan, reports also noted that members of the Iraqi security forces were skeptical of its implementation due to the conditions on the ground.⁴³

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown meanwhile visited Iraq during the week and refused to set an “artificial timetable” for the withdrawal of British troops. Brown also called for the “immediate and unconditional” release of

³⁸ “Taiwan expects U.S. arms sales to Taiwan to proceed as planned,” *The Central News Agency*, July 17, 2008, at

<http://www.cna.com.tw/cnaeng/EnglishTopNews/TopNewsDetail.aspx?TopNewsSerialnum=1676&strTopNewsDate=20080717&strTopNewsID=200807170045>

³⁹ “Bush Emphasizes His Opposition to Timetable for Iraq Withdrawal,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/16/washington/16prexy.html?ref=todayspaper>

⁴⁰ “Bush, al-Maliki discuss ‘time horizon’ for troops pullout from Iraq,” IANS, July 19, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20080719/890/twl-bush-al-maliki-discuss-time-horizon.html>

⁴¹ “Bush adviser says Iraq timeline ‘very dangerous,’” IANS, July 20, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/137/20080720/362/twl-bush-adviser-says-iraq-timeline-very.html>

⁴² Barack Obama, “My Plan for Iraq,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/opinion/14obama.html?ref=todayspaper>

⁴³ “In Iraq, Mixed Feelings About Obama and His Troop Proposal,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/17/world/middleeast/17voices.html?ref=todayspaper>

British hostages being held in the country, after one of the five reported to have committed suicide. They were kidnapped in May 2007 from the premises of the Iraqi finance ministry in Baghdad allegedly by Shia militiamen.⁴⁴

In other developments, Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaffaq al-Rubaie stated that Iraq hoped to have security control of all its 18 provinces by the end of the year. He was speaking at a ceremony where US-led troops transferred security responsibilities for the southern province of Qadisiya province to Iraqi forces during the week.⁴⁵

In domestic political developments, 6 Sunni ministers belonging to the largest Sunni bloc – the *Tawafiq*, rejoined the government during the week.⁴⁶ In continuing incidents of violence, 2 suicide bombers struck outside an Army recruiting station in Baquba in Diyala province on July 15 killing over 30 people while a car bomb killed over 20 people in the northern city of Tal Afar on July 16.

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

- **IED blast kill 10 soldiers in J&K**

At least 10 soldiers were killed and 18 others wounded when unidentified militants triggered an improvised explosive device (IED) blast at Narbal Crossing on the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Highway on July 19. The Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) claimed responsibility for the blast.

In another incident, the security forces foiled an infiltration attempt while killing five militants in a fierce gunbattle on the LoC in Kupwara district on July 18.⁴⁷

MAOIST INSURGENCY

- **Maoists kill 20 policemen in Orissa; Centre plans to set up six jungle warfare and counter-insurgency schools in Maoist-affected states**

In a Maoist-triggered landmine blast in Orissa's Malkangiri district on July 16, 20 policemen were killed. The policemen were returning after visiting a village which the Maoists had attacked. The impact of the powerful blast threw the vehicle of the policemen about 50m into the air. This was the second major Maoist strike in the district in less than 20 days.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ "Brown demands release of British hostages in Iraq," *IANS*, July 20, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20080720/884/twl-brown-demands-release-of-british-hos.html>

⁴⁵ "Iraq eyes full security control by year-end," *IANS*, July 16, 2008, at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/137/20080716/362/twl-iraq-eyes-full-security-control-by-y.html>

⁴⁶ "Sunnis End Boycott and Rejoin Iraqi Government," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/20/world/middleeast/20iraq.html?ref=todayspaper>

⁴⁷ "10 soldiers killed, 18 injured in massive blast on highway," *Daily Excelsior*, July 20, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08july20/news.htm#1>

⁴⁸ "Maoists kill 20 policemen," *The Hindu*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/07/17/stories/2008071756950100.htm>

Meanwhile, on July 16, Union Home Secretary Madhukar Gupta chaired a high-level meeting in New Delhi to review the Naxal/Maoist situation in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The meeting reviewed the progress of implementation of the Integrated Action Plans (IAP), involving the development of the worst-affected districts. Following the meeting, Gupta announced the setting up of six jungle warfare and counter-insurgency schools within the current year to train commando forces being raised by the Maoist-affected states.⁴⁹

In other developments, the Maharashtra government on July 17 approved a Rs. 51.6 million proposal to grant incentives to villages in the Gadchiroli and Gondia districts that denied entry to the Naxalites.⁵⁰

NORTHEAST INSURGENCY

- **Manipuri militant groups recruiting children; Nine militant groups active in Assam**

In the past few weeks, reports noted that at least 17 children were missing from militancy-infested Manipur. The police suspect that some of the missing children have been lured away by the militant groups to join the armed movement. A directive issued by the Manipur Director General of Police to all district superintendents of police on July 16 noted that forcible recruitment has been reported from areas like Andro in Imphal East and Sekmaijin in Imphal West.⁵¹ The Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) has on its part admitted that it was recruiting children, but denied allegations of kidnapping or of using them as combatants. On July 17, PREPAK paraded six children before the media at its general headquarters somewhere in Chandel district to drive home the message that the children had come to the outfit 'voluntarily.'⁵²

Meanwhile, the Assam Minister for Forest and Environment Rockybul Hussain stated on the floor of the state legislative assembly on July 18 that 9 militant outfits, with total cadre strength of 2,275, were operating in the state. The minister noted that the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was the most powerful militant outfit with 1,175 cadres. The other groups included the United Liberation Front of Barak Valley (ULFBV) with 250 cadres, Dima Halom Daogah-Jewel (DHD-J) with 240 and Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLFF) with 225 cadres. Of the other groups, the Muslim United Liberation Tiger of Asom (MULTA) had 160 cadres, the All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA) had 90, Hmar People's Convention-Democratic (HPC-D) 50,

⁴⁹ "Union Home ministry reviews left-wing extremism situation," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, July 17, 2008, at http://satp.org/satporgtp/detailed_news.asp?date1=7/17/2008#14

⁵⁰ "Maharashtra Government to reward villages that deny entry to Maoists," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, July 18, 2008, at http://satp.org/satporgtp/detailed_news.asp?date1=7/18/2008#12

⁵¹ "Ibobi moves to rein in 'missing' menace," *Telegraph*, July 18, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1080718/jsp/northeast/story_9563768.jsp

⁵² "Rebels line up six kids - Prepak denies abductions," *Telegraph*, July 20, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1080720/jsp/northeast/story_9572857.jsp

Harkat-ul-Mujahiddin (HuM) 45 and Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) had about 40 cadres.⁵³

Elsewhere, a suspected ULFA militant, Ramen Baruah, was arrested from the residence of the Member of Parliament Anowar Hussain in New Delhi on July 19, when he allegedly came to extort money Hussain. However, two other militants managed to escape. Delhi Police claimed to have recovered three extortion notes addressed to Hussain, EAM Pranab Mukherjee and Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh from the arrested militant.⁵⁴

III. NUCLEAR REVIEW

INDIA

- **UPA wins trust vote in Lok Sabha with a margin of 19 votes; Dr. Singh describes outcome as a convincing victory; Menon: India will manage a “clear and unconditional exemption” from the NSG; China not to be a stumbling block for safeguards agreement**

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh won the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha on July 22. The UPA and its allies managed to garner 275 votes as against the opposition, which secured 256 votes. As many as 10 members were either absent or abstained from voting.⁵⁵ Prime Minister Singh described the outcome as “a convincing victory” for the UPA government, the Congress and its supporting parties and noted that the victory would “send a message to the world at large that India is prepared to take its rightful place in the comity of nations.”

Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon meanwhile, who had recently visited Vienna to interact with the IAEA board members and representatives of the NSG member countries, expressed his confidence that reservations of some countries regarding the deal would be overcome. Menon added that India would manage a “clear and unconditional exemption” from the Nuclear Supplier Group.⁵⁶

China, an important member at the IAEA Board as well as the NSG, has on its part indicated that it may not be a stumbling block when the safeguards accord came up before the IAEA for approval.⁵⁷

In other developments, Joseph R. Biden, Democratic chairman of the powerful US Senate Foreign Relations Committee asserted that he would push

⁵³ “Nine militant groups active in Asom: Hussain,” *Sentinel*, July 19, 2008, at http://sentinelassam.com/sentinel_en/main%20news.htm

⁵⁴ “ULFA ultra held for extortion bid in Delhi,” *Assam Tribune*, July 20, 2008, at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=jul2008/at07>

⁵⁵ “Manmohan government wins trust vote,” *The Hindu*, July 23, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/07/23/stories/2008072358200100.htm>

⁵⁶ “India hopes to get support at IAEA, NSG,” *The Hindu*, July 22, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/07/22/stories/2008072257291000.htm>

⁵⁷ “China may not object to Indo-US nuclear deal when it comes to IAEA, NSG,” *PTI*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.ptinews.com/pti%5Cptisite.nsf/0/82871EF819A2D888652574890051826C?OpenDocument>

the India-US nuclear deal in the Congress “like the devil.” He however expressed fears that the passage of the deal was going to be “very, very tight.”⁵⁸

IRAN

- **Washington plans to open a US interests section in Tehran; Senior State Department official ‘present’ at EU-Iran talks; EU-Iran talks make little headway**

In a plan that reversed over three decades of American diplomatic posture towards Iran, reports note that the Bush administration was planning to open a US interests section in Tehran. Since the 1979 Iranian resolution and the hostage crisis, US interests in Tehran have been looked after by the Swiss Embassy. The shift in the position of the Bush administration, which has pursued a hawkish approach to Iran throughout its tenure, comes at a critical time in US-Iranian relations. After weeks of increasing tensions due to Israel’s war games and Tehran’s long-range missile tests, a thaw appears to be under way.

In other developments, Amb. William Burns of the US State Department attended the EU-Iran talks on the Iranian nuclear standoff that took place on July 19. The discussions however did not make much headway. Iran circulated a 2 page document at the meeting titled, “The Modality for Comprehensive Negotiations - Non Paper.” It did not make any concession on the Western countries’ demand to stop its enrichment programme. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warned Iran on July 14 not to continue to “stall” and held the possibility of more sanctions if it defied a two-week deadline to accept the proposals.⁵⁹

NORTH KOREA

- **North Korea removes 4000 nuclear fuel rods from Yongbyon; Six parties present verification mechanism to North Korea**

North Korea reached the half way mark on the process of pulling out the 8,000 odd nuclear fuel rods from the Yongbyon reactor. The step was one of the last steps to ensure that the facility was rendered difficult to restart.⁶⁰

In other news, US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill stated that the US had proposed a mechanism for verifying North Korea's claims about its nuclear past at the meeting of the top nuclear envoys in Beijing. Ambassador Hill noted that the Six-Party members were waiting to hear specific responses from

⁵⁸ “US lawmaker Biden to push nuclear deal 'like the devil',” *Economic Times*, July 16, 2008, at http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/PoliticsNation/US_lawmaker_Biden_to_push_for_N-deal/articleshow/3239569.cms

⁵⁹ Elaine Sciolino, “Iran Offers 2 Pages and No Ground in Nuclear Talks,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/22/world/22iran.html?ref=middleeast&pagewanted=print>

⁶⁰ “N. Korea pulls half of fuel rods from key reactor,” *AOL News*, July 16, 2008, at http://news.aol.com/story/_a/n-korea-pulls-half-of-fuel-rods-from-key/n20080716204409990004

the North Korean side. Hill also said that Pyongyang had been asked to come back with specific comments on the draft verification mechanism.⁶¹

⁶¹ Jae-Soon Chang, "US offers nuclear proposal to NKorea," *Washington Post*, July 22, 2008, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/21/AR2008072101536_pf.html