

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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1. COUNTRY REVIEW

A. SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- **Top Afghan policewoman killed; Taliban frees hostages; US reviews Shindand incident**

Afghanistan's most senior policewoman, Lt. Col. Malalai Kakar, head of Kandahar's department of crimes against women, was shot dead by Taliban insurgents in Kandahar city on September 27. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Seven people, including 3 policemen died after a suicide bomber on a motorcycle attacked two border police vehicles in the main bazaar in Spinbaldak, on the Pakistan border, about 80 miles southeast of Kandahar.¹

Suspected Taliban insurgents on September 26 freed 118 of about 150 Afghan labourers who were abducted in the previous week in the southwestern province of Farah while traveling in three buses to the city of Herat.²

US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte stated that US authorities were conducting a review of the Shindand operation of August 22, which resulted in civilian casualties. The incident had raised a lot of criticism on NATO's military operations.³

PAKISTAN

- **Asif Zardari in the US: World is safer under President Bush; Fighting continues in Bajaur and Darra; Kayani: Army committed to fight the war against terror; Afghan Consul General abducted in Peshawar**

Newly-elected Pakistan President Asif Zardari on a visit to the US met with President Bush on September 23 in New York. The two leaders discussed the situation in FATA and reports noted that President Bush promised to respect Pakistan's territorial sovereignty.⁴ US Defence Secretary Robert Gates had however earlier noted that the US had a right to strike at terrorist outfits within Pakistan and that Islamabad was expected to cooperate with it as a "willing partner."⁵

Meanwhile, in an interview to the *Washington Post*, President Zardari noted that the world was a "safer place" due to the able leadership of President

¹ "Taliban Claim Responsibility in Killing of Key Female Afghan Officer," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/29/world/asia/29afghan.html>

² "In Afghanistan, 118 Hostages are Released by Insurgents," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/27/world/asia/27afghan.html>

³ "US Conducting Review of Shindand Incident," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, September 26, 2008, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=62729>

⁴ Anwar Iqbal, "Bush skirts around issue of sovereignty," *Dawn*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/09/24/top1.htm>

⁵ "US has right to hit targets inside Pakistan: Gates," *Daily Times*, September 25, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\09\25\story_25-9-2008_pg1_1

Bush. Zardari further asserted that the "axis of evil is growing." He however did not specify who constituted this particular axis.⁶

Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) revealed that at least 50 militants were killed in Darra in security operations on September 23.⁷ 14 people were also reportedly killed and several injured when militant targets in the Bajaur Agency were attacked by helicopter gun ships and artillery.⁸ Amidst these developments, Army Chief General Kayani on September 21 asserted that the army was committed to fight the war against terror.⁹

In other developments, Afghan Consul General Abdul Khaliq Farahi was kidnapped on September 22 in Peshawar by unidentified persons.¹⁰

NEPAL

- **Dahal meets with Bush, Lavrov; Nepal's Defence Minister attends military exercises in China; Nepal to import 60 MW of power from India; Transparency International: Nepal ranked 121 in Corruption Perception Index**

PM Pushpa Dahal met with US President Bush, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Cuban Vice-President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. Russia promised support to Nepal to build its defence capability and in improving its infrastructure. Dahal on his part assured President Bush that the Maoists had given up arms in favour of the democratic process.¹¹

Nepal's Defense Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, on a visit to China, observed the "Warrior 2008" military exercises conducted by Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) on September 24 along with Nepal Army (NA) Chief Gen. Chatraman Singh Gurung and Defense Secretary Pratik Thapa.¹²

Nepal would import 60 MW of power from India. An agreement to this effect was signed by the Nepal Electricity Authority with the Power Trading Corporation of India. India would supply the power through the Duhab-Kataiya

⁶ "World safer place because of Bush," *Daily Times*, September 28, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\09\28\story_28-9-2008_pg1_1

⁷ Abdul Sami Paracha, "50 militants in Darra killed, claims ISPR," *Dawn*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/09/24/top2.htm>

⁸ "14 militants killed in Bajaur," *Dawn*, September 27, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/09/27/top3.htm>

⁹ "Army stands by nation in terror war, says Kayani," *Daily Times*, September 22, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\09\22\story_22-9-2008_pg1_1

¹⁰ Ali Hazrat Bacha and Syed Irfan Raza, "Gunmen kidnap top Afghan diplomat, kill driver," *Dawn*, September 23, 2008, at <http://www.dawn.com/2008/09/23/top1.htm>

¹¹ "PM Dahal cozies up with Russian and Cuban leaders after chit-chat with US Prez," *Nepal News*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep24/news02.php>

¹² "Defense Minister Thapa to 'review' Chinese troops," *Nepal News*, September 25 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep25/news01.php>

and Tanakpur-Mahendranagar transmission lines. The deal followed PM Dahal's visit and was intended to mitigate the problem of load shedding in Nepal.¹³

Minister for Water Resources Bishnu Poudel stated that hydropower would be the foundation for initiating an economic revolution in Nepal. Emphasizing that Nepal would give contracts on the basis of competitive bidding to India and China, Poudel added that Nepal has the potential of generating more than the target of 10,000 MW of hydropower for the next ten years.¹⁴

In domestic developments, Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) asserted that Madhes should be a vital stakeholder in any discussions related to the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty.¹⁵

In the latest Corruption Perception Index prepared by Transparency International, Nepal was ranked 121 among the 180 countries examined. The Index notes the perceived link between weak institutions, poverty and corruption and cites the gap between the rich and the poor as one of the catalysts for corruption.¹⁶

BHUTAN

- **UNHCR: 5,000 refugees resettled in third countries in 2008; PM Thinley visits New York for UN General Assembly; Bhutan's Ambassador to India: Bhutan and Assam can jointly tap their vast potential in tourism, agro-food processing; India's Eastern Army Commander visits Bhutan**

The UNHCR revealed that over 5,000 Bhutanese refugees had left their camps in eastern Nepal to resettle in third countries in the current year. The vast majority of them had left for the United States, followed by Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada and Denmark. Over 50,000 Bhutanese refugees had expressed an interest in resettlement. There were nearly 107,000 refugees from Bhutan who live in seven camps in eastern Nepal.¹⁷ Reports also noted that the total number of Bhutanese refugees who had resettled in the US (about 60,000) were almost equal to the number of refugees settled in the US from Iraq and Myanmar.¹⁸

Bhutan's Prime Minister Lyonchen Jigmi Thinley, in his visit to New York to attend the UN General Assembly met with members of the the Bhutanese

¹³ "NEA signs power import deal with PTC-India," *Nepal News*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep24/news10.php>

¹⁴ "Minister Poudel says it's possible to generate 10,000 MW in 10 yrs," *Nepal News*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep24/news06.php>

¹⁵ "Madhesh needs to be taken into confidence before reviewing 1950 treaty: TMLP chief," *Nepal News*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep24/news06.php>

¹⁶ "Nepal ranked 121st position in CPI," *The Rising Nepal*, September 23, 2008, at http://www.gorkhapatra.org.np/detail.php?article_id=7319&cat_id=4

¹⁷ "Over 5000 refugees resettled, mix marriages not to qualify," *Nepal News*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep24/news02.php>

¹⁸ "Six dozen Bhutanese refugees resettled in Atlanta," *Nepal News*, September 7, 2008 at <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/sep/sep07/news07.php>

community in the city and discussed various facts of political development in Bhutan.¹⁹

Bhutan's Ambassador to India, Lyonpo Dago Tshering, stated that Bhutan and Assam could jointly explore their vast potential in the field of tourism, energy, agro-food processing and handloom and the cottage industries. At the recently concluded 4th North East Business Summit in Guwahati, a proposal to establish links between ASEAN and SAARC countries was also introduced under the larger ambit of India's Look East Policy.²⁰

In other developments, Lt. Gen. V.K. Singh, Eastern Army Commander visited Bhutan as part of efforts to establish better understanding and cooperation between the armies of the two countries.²¹ A two-day border coordination meeting was held between authorities of the government of Assam and the Bhutanese government.²²

BANGLADESH

- **Dates announced for parliamentary polls; Zia and Hasina to hold talks after Eid; World Bank to provide \$130 million to Bangladesh; Foreign Adviser Chowdhury: CA Ahmed's visit to China has strengthened the "time-tested" and "all-weather" ties**

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed announced that the much-anticipated ninth parliamentary elections would be held on December 18, 2008, while polls to upazila parishads would be held in two phases on December 24 and 28. Political parties, including the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) and the BNP raised doubts about the short time gap between the two elections, with the JIB terming the schedule "unrealistic."²³ US Ambassador James Moriarty hoped that a free, fair and credible election would be held with the participation of all major political parties according to the EC's roadmap.²⁴

Even as Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina on their part agreed to hold 'unconditional' talks after Eid-ul-Fitr on Hasina's return from abroad, the BNP-led four-party alliance made moves to expand the coalition to contest the coming parliamentary election. The AL-led 14-party combine was also aiming at further

¹⁹ "PM meets Bhutanese community in New York," *Bhutan Broadcasting Service*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.bbs.com.bt/PM%20meets%20Bhutanese%20community%20in%20New%20York.html>

²⁰ "The North East nexus 'twixt SAARC and ASEAN," *Kuensel Online*, September 22, 2008, at <http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=11188>

²¹ "Eastern Commander visits Bhutan," *Kuensel Online*, September 20, 2008, at <http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=11175>

²² "India and Bhutan hold border coordination meeting," *National Portal of Bhutan*, September 22, 2008, at <http://www.bhutan.gov.bt/government/newsDetail.php?id=890>

²³ "JS polls on Dec 18: CA also tells nation upazila elections to be held Dec 24, 28; emergency to be relaxed for electioneering," *The Daily Star*, September 21, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55807>; "Jamaat against UZ polls within less than one week of JS election," *The Daily Star*, September 22, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55988>

²⁴ "Khaleda, Hasina should work together for democracy," *The Daily Star*, September 15, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=54886>

expansion.²⁵ The AL leadership also called on its cadres to work united for the restoration of democracy as well as to fulfill the '2020 vision' document, which intends to make Bangladesh a middle-income country.²⁶

BNP leaders asserted that they will not accept the new electoral provisions being implemented in the upcoming parliamentary polls. Reports also noted that the BNP and its allies might not even apply for registration with the EC as they do not accept the new provisions of the Representation of the People Order (RPO).²⁷ The AL on its part demanded that the government and the EC implement the Representation of the People Order (RPO), except some of the provisions it had opposed.²⁸ The EC announced on September 22 that it will ease the procedure for registration of the political parties.²⁹ However, parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) of the BNP-led alliance still opposed some of the criteria, especially regarding the conditions that restricted registration of the religion-based political parties.³⁰

In other developments, the World Bank decided to provide \$130 million to Bangladesh to help the government implement its ongoing policies and pro-poor programmes designed to cope with high food prices.³¹ The three-day Bangladesh-India maritime boundary talks ended on September 17 in Dhaka without reaching any agreements on the disputed issues. Both side however described the talks as 'fruitful'.³²

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury stated that the recent visit of Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed to China had strengthened bilateral ties between the two countries. Ahmed held talks with President Hu Jintao, Vice President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Chowdhury stated that the meetings underscored the fact that Bangladesh-China relations were "time-tested" and "all-weather," and that they symbolised a "comprehensive partnership for cooperation." Potential areas for cooperation included the construction of Friendship bridges on the Meghna and the Meghna-Gomti,

²⁵ "AL, BNP out to grab election allies," *The Daily Star*, September 19, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55504>

²⁶ "Work unitedly for restoration of democracy: Hasina asks AL men," *The Daily Star*, September 17, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55208>

²⁷ "BNP says no to all," *The Daily Star*, September 22, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55948>

²⁸ "AL's yes to nearly all," *The Daily Star*, September 22, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55947>

²⁹ "EC to ease party registration rules: Asks govt to leave the latest revision to ordinance alone, also criticises govt for not letting it ring enough changes in electoral laws," *The Daily Star*, September 23, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=56067>

³⁰ "Party registration process hits snag: BNP still in dilemma as its allies object to registration rules barring religion-based parties," *The Daily Star*, September 28, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=56893>

³¹ "WB to provide \$130m to tackle high food prices," *The Daily Star*, September 15, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=54896>

³² "No agreement in sea border talks with Delhi: But both sides claim talks 'fruitful'," *The Daily Star*, September 18, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55345>

collaboration on nuclear power technology with a view to implementing the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.³³

SRI LANKA

- **Rajapakse at UN: Government ready to implement “political and constitutional solutions;” Rajapakse requests Norway to assist in relief efforts in the North; Co-Chairs focus on human rights in Sri Lanka; Troops on outskirts of LTTE HQ: Army Chief**

President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York stated that his government was ready to implement “political and constitutional solutions” to redress the grievances of all communities. He also asserted that his government would not let the LTTE hold the Tamils of the north hostage to terror. Mr. Rajapaksa reiterated that his government would talk to the “illegal armed group” (LTTE) only when it was ready to commit itself to the decommissioning of its illicit weapons, dismantle its military capability, and return to the democratic fold.³⁴ At the sidelines of the UNGA meeting, President Rajapaksa also requested the Norwegian Minister of Environment and International Development, Erik Solheim, to assist in the government’s humanitarian efforts in the north, instead of “through other organizations.”³⁵

In another significant development, the Sri Lanka Co-Chairs, a representative body of donors to the nation, in a statement issued at the end of a conference in New York, stressed that emphasis on the protection of human rights and humanitarian access for civilians caught in the crossfire was important.³⁶ Representatives of the US, Norway, EU, and Japan took part in the two-hour meeting.

The Sri Lankan Air Force claimed that it launched a night-time air assault at an LTTE radar point located along the coast of Nagavanthurai, Poonaryn in the north.³⁷ It was not immediately clear if the radar was meant to monitor Sri Lankan aerial or troop movements. The Defence Ministry meanwhile stated that troops in Kilinochchi and Vavuniya battlefronts were further pushing towards Jaffna-Kandy (A-9) Road from Wannai. In particular, the troops of the 57th Division were edging closer to Kokavil and troops of Task Force 2 were heading towards Mankulam. Army Chief Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka stated that his forces

³³ “CA’s visit boosts ties with China: Says Iftekhhar,” *The Daily Star*, September 20, 2008, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55642>

³⁴ B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Sri Lanka for political solution,” *The Hindu*, September 25, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/25/stories/2008092553991800.htm>

³⁵ B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Norway must assist our relief effort: Rajapaksa,” *The Hindu*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/24/stories/2008092460901800.htm>

³⁶ B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Focus on human rights in Sri Lanka,” *The Hindu*, September 27, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/27/stories/2008092751801600.htm>

³⁷ Rafik Jalaldeen, “Severe damage to LTTE radar position,” *Daily News*, September 26, 2008, at <http://www.dailynews.lk/2008/09/26/sec05.asp>

were “around four kilometres (2.5 miles) from Kilinochchi town” and that LTTE leader Prabhakaran was “now a caged animal.”³⁸

In other developments, Thambi Anna, in-charge of the Narcotic Substance Prevention Wing of the LTTE stated that the organisation was making all efforts to prevent narcotic drugs from reaching the Tamil-inhabited areas of Sri Lanka. Reports indicated that Thambi Anna, who was taken into custody, had told the police that contrary to the popular perception, the LTTE was not encouraging smuggling of drugs.³⁹

MALDIVES

- **Election fever grips Maldives; MDP ahead in polls, Gayoom placed third; TI gives an corruption index of 208 to Maldives**

Election fever was gripping Maldives with the Election Commission indicating that even the Maldivian diaspora would be voting in the upcoming elections. It noted that around 2,757 overseas Maldivians had signed up to vote. These included 820 in Malaysia, 1008 in Sri Lanka, 838 in India and 91 in Singapore.⁴⁰

The Maldivian Democratic Party has meanwhile charged that politically motivated efforts were going on to discredit its campaign.⁴¹ Government sources also criticised independent presidential candidate Dr. Hassan Sayeed for crediting himself for the advances made in the arena of press freedom.⁴² Information Minister Mohammad Nasheed on his part stated that the bill on media and press freedom would soon be debated in the parliament.

The Social Liberal Party’s presidential candidate Ibrahim Ismail enunciated his party’s policy on fisheries. He asserted that protecting his country’s territorial waters would be one of his top priorities if elected. Ismail also announced that no import duty would be levied on fisheries equipment.⁴³ President Gayoom’s Dhivehi Raiyyithunge Party (DRP) has proposed that the state fisheries company, MIFCO, would be transformed into a public limited company. Gayoom also emphasized that in the newly reorganized MIFCO,

³⁸ “Troops on outskirts of LTTE HQ: Army Chief”, *Daily News*, September 26, 2008 at <http://www.dailynews.lk/2008/09/26/sec02.asp>

³⁹ S Raja “LTTE discourages drug smuggling”, *The Indian Express*, September 23, 2008 at <http://www.expressbuzz.com/edition/story.aspx?artid=JaLJsoYEhak=&Title='LTTE+discourages+drug+smuggling'&SectionID=vBlkz7JCFvA=&MainSectionID=vBlkz7JCFvA=&SectionName=EL7znOtxBM3qzgMyXZKtxw==&SEO=>

⁴⁰ “2,757 Voters Registered Abroad”, *Minivan News*, September 29, 2008, <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5050>

⁴¹ “MDP Reports Threats To Police”, *Minivan News*, September 29, 2008, <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5050>

⁴² “Government Attacks Hassan Saeed Over Press Freedom”, *Minivan News*, September 29, 2008, <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5050><http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5050>

⁴³ “Ibra Releases Fisheries Policy”, *Minivan News*, September 28, 2008, <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5044>

“fishing families would be playing a larger role to ensure equitable distribution of income.”⁴⁴

Opinion polls meanwhile indicated that the Maldivian Democratic Party was emerging as the most popular party with Mohamed Nasheed (Anni) winning 44 per cent of the votes in a poll conducted by DhiFM, a radio channel, followed by Dr. Saeed.⁴⁵ President received 21 per cent of total votes. In a poll taken by another radio channel, MDP again secured 71 percent of total votes. The second place was secured by Dr. Saeed again.⁴⁶

In other developments, Maldives was ranked below Sri Lanka, India, China, Malaysia, and Singapore in the latest Corruption Perception Index released by Transparency International (TI). Maldives had an index of 2.8, with TI noting that a score below 5 was an indicator of a serious corruption problem.⁴⁷

B. EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

CHINA

- **China successfully launches third manned spaceflight; China releases White Paper on “Protection and Development of Tibetan Culture;” PM Singh meets Wen Jiabao in New York; Wen to Ban ki-moon: Poverty a major cause of global instability**

China successfully launched its third manned spacecraft Shenzhou-7 from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest Gansu Province.⁴⁸ President Hu Jintao congratulated the country’s space scientists and the three taikonauts on the successful launch.⁴⁹

The Information Office of China’s State Council issued a White Paper on “Protection and Development of Tibetan Culture” to assist in a better understanding of the steps being taken to protect and develop Tibetan culture. The Paper strongly refutes the allegations of “cultural genocide” in Tibet and mostly highlights the developmental plans and programmes of the Chinese government in the region.⁵⁰

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met with his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao on the sidelines of the UNGA in New York. The Chinese Premier called on developing countries to join hands in seeking development together, which will

⁴⁴ “DRP To Make MIFCO Public Company,” *Minivan News*, September 29, 2008, at <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5050>

⁴⁵ “Anni Wins DhiFM Poll For Third Successive Week,” *Miadhu News*, September 29, 2008, at <http://www.miadhu.com.mv/printer.php?id=7926>

⁴⁶ “Anni Secures Landslide Win In Radio Atoll Poll,” *Minivan News*, September 25, 2008, at <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5033>

⁴⁷ “Maldives Slips 31 Places In Corruption Ranking,” *Minivan News*, September 23, 2008, at <http://www.minivannews.com/news/news.php?id=5028>

⁴⁸ “China’s Shenzhou-7 spacecraft completes orbit maneuver,” *People’s Daily*, September 26, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/95532/95545/6506501.html>

⁴⁹ “Chinese President celebrates successful Shenzhou-7 launch,” *People’s Daily*, September 25, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90881/6506456.html>

⁵⁰ “China issues white paper, refutes charge of ‘cultural genocide’ in Tibet,” *People’s Daily*, September 25, 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6506163.html>

have significant influence on the world. PM Singh stated that India and China were not rivals, but strategic cooperative partners and added that developing friendly relations with China was one of the priorities of Indian foreign policy.⁵¹

Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping urged government officials to sincerely implement the concept of "Scientific Outlook on Development." As per the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) ethos, the concept is a guiding principle for China's economic and social development started by the CPC in 2003 and written into the constitution during the 17th National Congress in 2007.⁵²

On the sidelines of UNGA meeting, Premier Wen Jiabao also met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Both the leaders discussed various issues, including the current economic and financial conditions of the World. Wen reiterated that "poverty" was a major factor causing regional and global instability.⁵³

JAPAN

- **Taro Aso elected Prime Minister; Transport Minister Nakayama resigns following criticism of his comments on trade union; Japan to buy Czech Republic's unused credits**

Taro Aso was elected Japan's new prime minister on September 23.⁵⁴ Aso faced his first political crisis just days into the job when his transport minister, Nariaki Nakayama, resigned on September 28. The resignation came weeks before the government faces the prospect of defeat in an early general election. Nakayama was forced to resign following criticism against his tirades against tens of thousands of teachers and other campaigners in one of the country's longest-running civic protests. Ignoring the more than a century of discrimination against Japan's indigenous people, he had also described the country as "ethnically homogeneous." Nakayama charged that Nikkyoso, a left-leaning union representing 320,000 teachers, was a "cancer" that should be "destroyed" for its opposition to the teaching of patriotism in state schools.⁵⁵

In other developments, Japan signed a deal on September 22 to buy some of the Czech Republic's unused carbon credits.⁵⁶

⁵¹ "Chinese, Indian premiers meet on bilateral relations," *People's Daily*, September 25, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6506356.html>

⁵² "China VP calls on officials to do their utmost to back Scientific Development," *People's Daily*, September 23, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6504952.html>

⁵³ "Chinese premier, U.N. chief meet on international issues," *People's Daily*, September 24, 2008, at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6505585.html>

⁵⁴ "Japan ruling party leader elected prime minister," *Associated Press Writer*, September 24, 2008, at http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080924/ap_on_re_as/as_japan_politics&printer=1;_ylt=Ap7fG2MVVnjUpAWWhY3Hdlmn9xg8F

⁵⁵ "Japan's new PM faces crisis within days of taking office," *The Guardian*, September 29, 2008, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/29/japan>

⁵⁶ "Japan to buy Czech carbon credits: ministry," *Associated Foreign Press*, September 23, 2008, at http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5ifvxq_eIFozOTKVeZIAo1HkFwG-w

MYANMAR

- **Regime frees longest-serving political prisoner, Win Tin; Leaked document reveals Myanmar's thinking on US role**

Myanmar's longest-serving political prisoner, the 79-year-old journalist Win Tin, was freed on September 23 after 19 years behind bars. Win Tin was among the 9,002 prisoners released. Only a handful of those released were political detainees. Other political prisoners released included well-known writer Aung Soe Myint, and four members of the opposition NLD - Khin Maung Swe, May Win Myint, Win Htein and Than Nyein. Win Tin, formerly editor of the influential newspaper *Hanthawaddy*, vice-chairman of the Writers' Union, and an active participant in the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, was arrested in 1989 and sentenced to 20 years on charges that included anti-government propaganda. Reports noted that around 2,000 political prisoners were still detained in various prisons in the country.⁵⁷

The Irrawaddy quoted Home Affairs Minister Maj.Gen. Maung Oo as stating at a meeting on July 6, 2008 that Myanmar's military leaders know that they cannot stand alone in the world, but would react to each situation with a view to balancing their relations with the world's superpowers. The report noted that Home Ministry officials were briefed on relations with the United States, China and Indonesia, as well as the regime's policy toward the 2010 elections, the NLD and how the junta would react to future demonstrations. The document further quoted Maj.Gen. Maung Oo as telling officials that due to the global influence of the US and the West, Myanmar would continue to pursue "strong relations" with China, but this did not mean that the junta was following a pro-Beijing foreign policy. Maung Oo criticized the US for "using humanitarian issues and democracy as a policy to overthrow governments that it disliked." He also accused the US for using the UN as part of a broader agenda to accuse the Myanmar government of "crimes against humanity." He charged that the UN and associate international non-governmental organizations were "puppets" of the US.⁵⁸

C. WEST ASIA

IRAN

- **Russia rejects the new UN sanctions against Iran; Ahmadinejad supports dialogue process but not to not accept "illegal demands." Tehran expresses concerns over IPI gas pipeline security; UN approves new Iran resolution; Rafsanjani : US paying financial price for wars**

Russia opposed the imposition of new UN Security Council measures targeting Iran after the White House warned of a new round of sanctions. It also

⁵⁷ "Regime Frees Longest-serving Political Prisoner, Win Tin," *Irrawaddy*, September 24, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/highlight.php?art_id=14299

⁵⁸ "Leaked Document Reveals Burma's US Policy," *Irrawaddy*, September 24, 2008, at http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14298

emphasised the need for constructive dialogue with Tehran with the aim of moving forward in the negotiation process. While Germany was reticent on US and French calls for new UN sanctions, China also argued that such a move would not resolve the stalemate. Three sets of UN sanctions have already been slapped on Iran so far.⁵⁹

The foreign ministers of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, along with Germany unanimously passed a new resolution on Iran, reaffirming demands it stop enriching uranium, but imposed no new sanctions. The IAEA in a report in the previous week stated that without further information, it would not be able to provide assurances about Iran's nuclear programme.⁶⁰

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad meanwhile addressing the UNGA in New York stated that Iran supported the process of dialogue but would not accept "illegal demands." He also lashed out at Israel, asserting that the 'Zionist regime' was headed for collapse and that that Europe and the US were being manipulated by "murderous Zionists." Ahmadinejad also accused the US and NATO of being "aggressors" in Iraq and Afghanistan, and of starting wars "in order to win votes in elections." He further charged that the US Empire was reaching the end of its road. He pointed out that six years after Saddam Hussein's regime was ousted in Iraq, "the occupiers are still there."⁶¹

Tehran has also expressed serious concerns over the security situation in Pakistan, and has asked Islamabad to make security an important part of the proposed multibillion-dollar pipeline deal which would take Iranian gas to Pakistan and India. Sources in Pakistan's Petroleum Ministry told *Daily Times* that along with other demands regarding the IPI project, Iran had called for including a provision on security in the Gas Sales Purchase Agreement (GSPA). With such a provision, Tehran would be able to suspend gas supply to Pakistan in case of "a security incident" in the country. Out of the 900 kms of the pipeline to be laid in Pakistan, a 787 km stretch would be in the province of Balochistan, while a 113 km section would pass through Nawabshah district in Sindh.⁶²

In other developments, former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani stated that the current financial crisis in the US was the price Washington was paying for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶³

⁵⁹ "Russia rejects new measures against Iran," *Tehran Times*, September 21, 2008, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=178339

⁶⁰ "West 'agrees new Iran resolution," *BBC News*, September 26, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7638323.stm

⁶¹ "Iran defends nuclear plans at UN," *BBC News*, September 23, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7632691.stm

⁶² "IPI Gas Pipeline Security," *Iran Daily*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.iran-daily.com/1387/3229/html/economy.htm#s333798>

⁶³ "Iran cleric says US paying financial price for wars," *Khaleej Times*, September 26, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.aspx?xfile=data/middleeast/2008/September/middleeast_September506.xml§ion=middleeast

IRAQ

- **Iraq and the US still differ over SOFA; Iraqi parliament passes law for provincial elections; More than 32 people killed and 100 injured in Baghdad bombing**

Iraq's Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi stated that Baghdad and Washington were still in disagreement over some articles of the security deal. al-Hashemi emphasized that his country would only seek a deal which respects Iraq's dignity and sovereignty. Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari meanwhile stated that if an agreement was not reached, then the alternative would be to go to the UN Security Council for an extension of the mandate. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in a meeting in New York that he expected the situation in Iraq to improve further.

The Iraqi parliament meanwhile passed a law paving the way for provincial elections, after months of wrangling. As a compromise, parliament has agreed to deal separately with the issue of Kirkuk, so that elections can go ahead in other parts of the country. Agreement over the drafting of the laws has been seen as a key part of political reform in Iraq. The law must now go before the country's three-man presidency council, headed by President Jalal Talabani. Provincial elections are part of an American-backed plan to reconcile rival groups, particularly the Sunnis, who boycotted the last round of provincial elections in 2005. Control of Kirkuk is disputed between Iraqi Arabs, Kurds and ethnic Turkmen, and disagreements over how to treat the city held up debate in parliament. Parliament adopted a draft provincial election law in July 2008, despite a boycott by Kurdish and some Shia Muslim MPs, but it was rejected by the presidential council. Polls had been scheduled for October this year, but were cancelled after MPs failed to reach an agreement. Parliament has now set a deadline of January 31, 2009 for elections to be held in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces.⁶⁴

In continuing violence, a bomb hidden under a pile of trash killed five people near the northern city of Mosul, where US-Iraqi military operations aimed at routing insurgents were going on. Baghdad also faced more violence with at least three civilians getting killed in two separate bombings.⁶⁵ Death toll from an ambush against Iraqi police in the restive province of Diyala rose to 35. Gunmen also struck and shot dead 12 policemen and eight anti-Qaeda fighters in the village of Al-Dulaimat near the town of Khan Bani Saad north of Baghdad.⁶⁶

At least 32 people were killed and more than 100 injured in a string of bomb attacks in Baghdad on September 27. While twelve died in a car-bomb attack in the south of the city, shortly before the Iftar meal, two further bombs

⁶⁴ "Iraq deal over province elections," *BBC News*, September 24, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7633557.stm

⁶⁵ "Baghdad, Washington Still Disagree Over SOFA," *Iran Daily*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.iran-daily.com/1387/3229/html/east.htm#s333912>

⁶⁶ "Iraq ambush toll climbs to 35: Mayor," *Khaleej Times*, September 25, 2008, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2008/September/middleeast_September489.xml§ion=middleeast

struck the Karrada district later in the evening, leaving at least 19 people dead and 70 wounded. Senior US military commander in the capital, Maj.Gen. Jeffery Hammond had told reporters in the previous week that Baghdad had so far witnessed the least violent Ramadan in over three years. He however admitted that the past few days had seen a spike in the number of attacks.⁶⁷

D. US ELECTION REVIEW

- **First presidential debate centres on economy and Iraq; McCain suspends campaign due to financial crunch; Obama and McCain participate in bailout talks with President Bush; McCain campaign alleges *New York Times* of favouring Obama**

Amidst clouds of uncertainties in the prevailing economic crisis, the first in the series of presidential debates took place in Oxford, Mississippi on September 26. The two candidates focused on issues related to the financial crackdown, future prospects of the US role in Iraq and also on the question of engaging Iran.⁶⁸ Senator McCain had earlier suspended his campaign in view of the financial situation which he termed as “historic crisis.”⁶⁹

Meanwhile, Senator Obama continued to be placed ahead of his rival. His position in Michigan doubled the margin of his lead as noted by a Detroit Free Press-Local 4 Michigan Poll conducted from September 22-24.⁷⁰ A poll conducted in Indiana by Rasmussen Reports however gave a slight edge to McCain of 2 per cent over his Democrat contender. In another poll taken by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, McCain managed a four-point lead over Obama.⁷¹ According to a survey published in the *Jerusalem Post* on September 26, Obama was popular amongst the members of the Jewish community and was ahead of McCain by over 27 points.⁷²

The *Washington Post*-ABC News poll was subject to criticism by Republican supporters who alleged that Obama was placed 9 points ahead of McCain wrongly.⁷³ The McCain campaign also accused the *New York Times* as

⁶⁷ “Many killed in Baghdad bombings,” *BBC News*, September 28, 2008, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7640782.stm

⁶⁸ Michael Cooper and Elisabeth Bumiller, “Candidates Clash on Economy and Iraq,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/27/us/politics/27debatecnd.html?_r=1&nl=pol&adxnln=1&oref=slugin&emc=pola1&adxnln=1222684854-ad/4wD82zJLlazTz7o0AnQ&pagewanted=print

⁶⁹ John Ibbitson, “McCain suspends campaign - but over which crisis?” September 25, 2008, at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20080925.IBBITSON25/TPStory/National>

⁷⁰ Todd Spangler, “Obama doubles lead with Michigan voters,” September 26, 2008, at <http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080926/NEWS15/809260378/&imw=Y>

⁷¹ “Indiana: McCain 49%, Obama 47%,” Angus Reid Global Monitor: Polls & Research, September 24, 2008, at http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/31076/indiana_electoral_college_2008_x

⁷² “Poll: Obama leads among US Jews,” *The Jerusalem Post*, September 26, 2008, at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1222017398358&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FPrinter>

⁷³ “Poll Results Attacked, Cheered,” September 24, 2008, at http://voices.washingtonpost.com/dot.comments/2008/09/poll_results_attacked_cheered.html

“an organization that is completely, totally, 150 percent in the tank for the Democratic candidate, which is their prerogative to be.”⁷⁴

In other developments, both presidential candidates met President Bush to discuss the proposed \$700 billion bailout plan in Washington on September 25.⁷⁵ Senator McCain was reportedly more critical and called for a greater insight on the issues involved. Obama urged the administration to “work quickly, in a bipartisan fashion, to resolve the immediate crisis and avert an even broader economic catastrophe.”⁷⁶

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

- **Election Commission gears up to hold Assembly elections in November; 110 infiltration bids since January 2008; 9 militants gunned down on September 27**

As the consultations with political parties, state and central governments for their inputs on poll preparedness and security situation have already been held, the Election Commission of India is understood to have geared up exercise for holding Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir in November.⁷⁷ On September 10, the Election Commission headed by CEC N. Gopalaswami held a two hour-long meeting with J&K Chief Secretary S. S. Kapur and DGP Kuldeep Khoda in New Delhi for assessing the ground situation. The state officials projected a requirement of more than 600 companies of security forces for the smooth conduct of polls.

Reports noted that since January 2008, Pakistani troops had violated the five-year-old cease-fire agreement 32 times. Nearly 110 infiltration bids have also been reported in the last eight months from across the Line of Control (LoC).⁷⁸

Security forces gunned down nine militants in three separate incidents of encounters in the Kashmir valley on September 27. While a soldier lost his life, twelve others, including eight civilians were wounded. Six of the militants were foreigners.⁷⁹ Earlier on September 21, four militants were killed in a fierce

⁷⁴ “McCain Camp Takes Issue With Times Coverage,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2008 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/23/us/politics/23times.html?nl=pol&emc=pola2&pagewanted=print>

⁷⁵ “McCain, Obama headed to Washington for bailout talks,” September 25, 2008 at <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/24/campaign.wrap/>

⁷⁶ Michael Cooper and Patrick Healy, “McCain, More Critical of Bailout Plan, Faults Oversight,” *The New York Times*, September 23, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/23/us/politics/23campaign.html?nl=pol&emc=pola2&pagewanted=print>

⁷⁷ “EC gears up to hold elections in November,” *Daily Excelsior*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08sep24/news.htm#1>

⁷⁸ “Two more militants, jawan killed on LoC in Poonch,” *Daily Excelsior*, September 23, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08sep23/news.htm#2>

⁷⁹ “9 militants, soldier killed in Valley encounters,” *Daily Excelsior*, September 28, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08sep28/news.htm#1>

gunbattle on the LoC in Poonch district. A soldier was also killed in the gunfight.⁸⁰

NORTHEAST INSURGENCY

- **Seven HuJI militants killed in Assam; Assam CM: Threat from Jehadi groups to Assam high**

The Army on September 26 gunned down seven suspected Bangladesh-based Harkatul Jihadi Islami (HuJI) militants in Assam's Dhubri district. The alleged militants were reportedly planning to join another HuJI team hiding in Guwahati. A large quantity of arms and ammunitions including four revolvers, two pistols, three grenades, a bomb weighing 400gm, a pen pistol, and 2 kilograms of RDX were recovered from the site of the incident.⁸¹

Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi stated that the threat to Assam from the jihadi groups, including HuJI, was a serious one and asserted that the Army operations in the state would continue till the situation improved. Addressing a press conference in Guwahati on September 27, Gogoi reiterated that the threat to Assam was much more due to its long international border with Bangladesh, which was porous and riverine.⁸²

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- **Blast in Delhi again, two killed**

Exactly a fortnight after a series of five blasts rocked Delhi, a bomb exploded in the crowded Mehrauli area of South Delhi on September 27, claiming the lives of a nine-year-old boy and a 60-year-old unidentified man. More than two dozen people were wounded. Preliminary investigations indicated that the bomb was of a crude nature, with a chemical-detonation mechanism and nails were used as splinters.⁸³

- **DGP Tamil Nadu police: Nothing alarming about LTTE movement in state**

DGP K. P. Jain told reporters in Chennai on September 23 that there was nothing alarming about the LTTE movement in Tamil Nadu as alleged by some political parties. He asserted that whenever any movement of LTTE cadres came to notice, the 'Q' Branch police took swift action and asserted that the intelligence gathering system was effective.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ "4 militants killed in gunbattle on LoC," *Daily Excelsior*, September 22, 2008, at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/web1/08sep22/news.htm#7>

⁸¹ "Army guns down 'rebels' with I-cards," *Telegraph*, September 27, 2008, at http://telegraphindia.com/1080927/jsp/frontpage/story_9894963.jsp

⁸² "Jehadi threat to State real, says Gogoi," *Assam Tribune*, September 28, 2008, at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=sep2808/at02>

⁸³ "Blast in Delhi again, two killed," *The Hindu*, September 28, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/28/stories/2008092861040100.htm>

⁸⁴ "Nothing alarming about LTTE movement in State: DGP," *The Hindu*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/24/stories/2008092455450800.htm>

III. ENERGY SECURITY REVIEW

- **India hopes to join Turkey and Israel in a \$12 billion multi-purpose project**

Reports noted that India hoped to join a \$12 billion MedStream project, a multi-purpose offshore pipeline project linking Turkey and Israel for transporting crude oil across the Mediterranean. Russia's state-run gas company Gazprom, Indian Oil Corporation Limited, Italy's Eni S.p.A., Turkey's Calik Holding A.S., and Royal Dutch Shell were expected to be some of the partners in the project.⁸⁵

- **Chavez signs a series of energy co-operation deals with China**

Venezuela, one of the world's largest oil producers, was seeking new markets to reduce its dependency on exports to the United States. It has therefore decided to increase oil exports to China with President Hugo Chavez stating that the total exports to China could rise threefold by 2012. Other plans in the country include joint projects to build three oil refineries capable of processing Venezuela's heavy crude oil.⁸⁶

- **Tanganyika gets \$1.8 billion Sinopec takeover offer**

Tanganyika Oil Co., a Canadian oil and natural gas producer with operations in Syria and Egypt, stated that China Petrochemical Corp. made a takeover offer valuing the company at \$1.8 billion. An offer for C\$31.50 a share in cash was made by Sinopec International Petroleum Exploration and Production Corp., a wholly owned subsidiary of China Petrochemical, Tanganyika said in a statement to the Stockholm stock exchange on September 25. The Vancouver-based company holds operating interests in two Syrian production-sharing agreements covering the Oudeh and Tishrine/Sheikh Mansour blocks.⁸⁷

Chinese state oil companies were seeking energy assets overseas to meet rising demand at home. Citic Resources Holdings Ltd., a unit of China's fourth-biggest oil producer, bought an oil field in Kazakhstan for \$1 billion in June 2007.

- **US gasoline inventories at their lowest level since 1967**

US gasoline inventories shrunk to the lowest level since 1967 after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike shut Gulf Coast oil refineries. The Bush administration has however stated that there was still no need to ask for emergency fuel supplies from European allies. The drop in fuel stocks caused long lines at service stations in southern cities. Reports noted that retail outlets, including in Atlanta and Memphis and Ohio, had run out of fuel.

⁸⁵ "India joins Turkey and Israel in \$12 billion multipurpose project," *Market Wire via Comtex*, September 26, 2008, at <http://asianenergy.blogspot.com/2008/09/mediterranean-pipeline-project.html>

⁸⁶ "Venezuela signs Chinese oil deals," *BBC Americas Analyst*, September 25, 2008, at <http://asianenergy.blogspot.com/2008/09/venezuela-signs-chinese-oil-deal.html>

⁸⁷ "Tanganyika gets \$1.8 billion Sinopec takeover offer," *asiaenergy.blogspot.com*, September 25, 2008, at <http://asianenergy.blogspot.com/2008/09/tanganyika-gets-18-billion-sinopec.html>

US Energy Secretary Sam Bodman also stated on September 24 that the Bush administration was not considering making a request to the International Energy Agency for emergency gasoline supplies. Bodman asserted that the Energy Department was "reasonably satisfied" with the recovery of the US oil sector after the hurricanes.

US gasoline stocks fell 5.9 million barrels last week to just under 179 million barrels, down almost 19 million barrels from a year ago, according to the Energy Information Administration.⁸⁸

- **Vietnam to explore gas, oil fields in Uzbekistan**

Vietnamese companies will participate in exploration and further exploitation of the gas and oil fields in Uzbekistan. An agreement to this effect was signed between the Vietnam National Oil and Gas Group (PetroVietnam) and the state-owned Uzbekneftegaz during the visit of a Vietnamese energy delegation to Tashkent on September 17-18. The deal also allows joint energy ventures on the territories of both countries, and envisages energy cooperation in other third states also.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "US gasoline inventories lowest since 1967," *Reuters*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE48N85320080924>

⁸⁹ "Vietnam to explore gas, oil fields in Uzbekistan," *Ferghana News*, September 23, 2008, at <http://enews.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=786&mode=snews&PHPSESSID=3d9a85dcc80f7c152cdde511ad0b6fae>