

The Dawn, 17 November 2007

12-hour curfew clamped on Swat (Hameedullah Khan)

MINGORA, Nov 16: A curfew has been clamped on Swat and Malakand areas as security forces, backed by helicopter gunships and artillery, pounded different areas and advanced towards Alpuri, the district headquarters of Shangla, where militants are putting up a stiff resistance. The curfew will remain in effect from 2 am to 2 pm on Saturday. The Inter Service Public Relations said on Friday that troops had resumed operation after consolidating positions in and around a strategically important gorge about six kilometers from Alpuri...more

The Dawn, 17 November 2007

Three SC judges want to quit bench: Petitions against emergency (Nasir Iqbal)

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: Three judges on a 10-member Supreme Court bench hearing petitions against the imposition of emergency on Friday said they wanted to opt out of the bench. Justice Mohammad Nawaz Abbasi, Justice Faqir Mohammad Khokhar and Justice M. Javed Buttar said judicial propriety demanded that they detached themselves from the bench after President Gen Pervez Musharraf had cited their recent judgments to justify the imposition of emergency...more

The Dawn, 17 November 2007

PPP rejects caretaker government (Nasir Jamal)

LAHORE, Nov 16: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairperson Benazir Bhutto on Friday rejected the caretaker government headed by Mohammedmian Soomro and said people who had been sworn in under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) had betrayed the people and the Constitution...The caretaker government is an extension of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League. We do not accept it, Ms Bhutto told a news conference at Senator Latif Khosa residence here on Friday...more

The Dawn, 17 November 2007

Negroponte calls Benazir (By Correspondent)

WASHINGTON, Nov 16: US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte has telephoned PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto to convey the message that the United States wants to continue its contacts with Pakistani opposition leaders, according to the State Department. Mr. Negroponte, who arrived in Islamabad on Friday, telephoned Ms Bhutto after a meeting with National Security adviser Tariq Aziz...more

The Daily Times, 17 November 2007

Musharraf and Soomro wearing two hats each (Rana Qaisar)

ISLAMABAD, Nov 16: Senate Chairman Mohammadmian Soomro on Friday became another Pakistani to hold two top offices simultaneously. Besides being the Senate chairman, he will also hold the office of caretaker prime minister for an interim period to supervise the general elections in the country. Interestingly, President Musharraf also holds two offices... one as head of the state and the other as chief of army staff. It is for the first time in the political history of Pakistan that two top men hold four top offices...two each...more

The Daily Times, 17 November 2007

COMMENT: Law and terror (Rafia Zakaria)

The deflation of the rhetoric that paints the war on terror as a conflict that cannot be won by adherence to the rule of law requires an ideological appraisal of what the rule of law is supposed to accomplish. On November 14, 2007, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States administered oath to the new US Attorney General Michael Mukasey. The swearing on of the new head of the United States Justice Department, coming as it does at nearly the end of President George Bush's second term was notable for several reasons. His predecessor, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, himself the second person to hold the position during President Bush's two terms in office, left his post during Congressional investigations into the role of the executive in allowing warrant-less surveillance and wiretaps and firing federal prosecutors for political reasons...more

The Daily Times, 17 November 2007

COMMENT : Insight: Trouble bubble (Ejaz Haider)

If there is one person other than General Musharraf who is as angry, if not more, at the judicial activism that led General Musharraf to declare this semi-martial law, it has to be Ms Bhutto. Is Pakistan in trouble? Let's take stock of the situation. On November 3, General Pervez Musharraf had to impose Emergency and, as Chief of Army Staff, also promulgate a Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) to avoid being axed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Did he do it happily? No. But let's put this aside for a while and move to the next actor, Ms Benazir Bhutto...more

The Daily Times, 17 November 2007

Resolution in US Congress for suspending Pak military aid

WASHINGTON, Nov 16: A resolution introduced in Congress this week condemns the imposition of martial law in Pakistan and calls on President Bush to suspend military assistance to Pakistan. The resolution was moved by New York Democratic Congressman Gary Ackerman, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia...The Bush administration has for too long relied on one man to achieve our anti-terrorism objectives in Pakistan, said Ackerman...more

The Daily Times, 17 November 2007

Bhutto files appeal in Swiss money-laundering probe

GENEVA, Nov 16: Geneva lawyers for former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said on Friday they had lodged an appeal in a Swiss inquiry into alleged money laundering by Bhutto and her husband. The motion filed last week with Geneva's criminal appeals court could lead to hearings in the long-running case, but not before early next year, Bhutto's lawyer Alec Reymond said...more

BBC News, 17 November 2007

COMMENT: Pakistan police charge Imran Khan

Imran Khan was held by students on the campus. Khan being detained Pakistani police have charged opposition figure Imran Khan under the anti-terrorism act after his first public appearance under the emergency. Details were not given but one official said Mr.

Khan had been disturbing the peace by attending a student protest against President Pervez Musharraf...more

The Dawn, 19 November 2007

Pentagon stresses accountability of US aid to Pakistan

NEW YORK: Frustrated by lack of accountability of massive US aid to Pakistan, Pentagon is moving to overhaul the system which will tie the payments to Islamabad's success in combating Islamic militants, the Los Angeles Times said on Sunday. Pentagon officials have been frustrated for months by their limited knowledge of how Pakistan was spending the US aid. And they're being pushed by congressional criticism and revelations that Islamabad was not using the money as the administration intended, the report said...

The Dawn, 19 November 2007

Musharraf: country more important than democracy

QUETTA: President Pervez Musharraf reiterated his stance on Sunday that the country was more important than the Constitution and democracy and that he was doing the important job of saving the country. The president said he had promised to the nation that assemblies would complete their five-year term and he had fulfilled the promise. He said it was for the first time in the country's political history that an elected prime minister had left the office and the power transfer was completed in a peaceful manner...

The Dawn, 19 November 2007

Local govts' funds may be frozen

LAHORE: The government is considering a proposal to suspend local governments or to freeze their funds to ensure free and fair elections, yielding to pressures from the opposition and certain other quarters, Dawn learnt on Sunday. According to well-placed sources, a decision in this regard is likely to be taken in a day or two...

The Dawn, 19 November 2007

16 PPP activists sent to Adiala jail

GUJAR KHAN: Over 16 activists of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), including former MPA Raja Tariq Kiani, were sent to Adiala jail on Sunday after they were arrested during two anti-government rallies in Gujar Khan city and at Mandra Toll Plaza on Saturday. Those who have been sent to Adiala jail include Raja Syed Ghalib Shah, Syed Sher Shah, Alhaj Farrukh, Tahir Raheel advocate, Raja Shaukat Hayat, Raja Imran Kami, Farrukh Sial, Azmat Sial, Nisar Sial, Rizwan Qureshi, Afzal Shah, Malik Ejaz, Atif Mahmood and Zamir Shah...

The Dawn, 19 November 2007

20-member cabinet to take oath today

LAHORE: A 20-member strong caretaker cabinet comprising lawyers, retired judges, educationists and industrialists is taking oath at the Governor's House on Monday morning with Justice Ejaz Nisar (retired) as the likely chief minister. The list of the cabinet members was finalised after the governor dissolved the provincial assembly on Sunday night. They said 'so far' Justice Ejaz Nisar (retired) was the most likely nominee for the slot of the caretaker chief minister...

BBC News, 19 November 2007

US tells Musharraf to step back

ISLAMABAD: A senior US envoy has urged Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to lift emergency rule and free opponents ahead of elections due in January. Mr Negroponte, the US deputy secretary of state, said he had urged Gen Musharraf to stick to his pledge to step down as head of the army, and encouraged him to release political prisoners. However, the US envoy praised Gen Musharraf as a valued ally in the war on terror and welcomed the Pakistani leader's promise to hold elections on 9 January...

Daily Times, 19 November 2007

Heavy militant casualties in Swat

ISLAMABAD: Around 120 rebels have been killed in the last few days as artillery and gunship helicopters continued pounding the bases of militants loyal to rebel Swat cleric Maulana Fazlullah, the military said. Military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad told AFP on Sunday that militant casualties were heavy, adding that five soldiers have been killed in the clashes...

Daily Times, 19 November 2007

US helping Pakistan protect its nukes

WASHINGTON: Over the past six years, the Bush administration has spent almost \$100 million on a highly classified programme to help Pakistan secure its nuclear weapons, the New York Times reported on Sunday, quoting current and former senior administration officials. The programme paid for training Pakistani personnel in the US and the construction of a nuclear security training centre in Pakistan, a facility that US officials say is far from complete. Equipment was given to Pakistan to help secure its nuclear material, warheads and laboratories...

Independent, 20 November 2007

Imran begins hunger strike to seek return of judiciary

Imran Khan, Pakistan's cricketing idol-turned-politician, declared yesterday that he was beginning a hunger strike in protest at the state of emergency imposed in his country and the regime's seizure of the judiciary. Mr. Khan's former wife, Jemima Khan, expressed concern about the impact such an action would have on his health. "He plans to keep it up until the judiciary is restored," she said...

Dawn, 20 November 2007

Musharraf gets SC reprieve on re-election: All but one pleas dismissed

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed all petitions, except one which does not appear to be of much significance, which had been filed before the proclamation of the state of emergency to challenge General Pervez Musharraf's eligibility to contest the election for presidential term. These petitions were being heard earlier by an 11-judge bench, but most of its members stood deposed on November 3 after they refused to take the oath under the Provisional Constitution Order. The decision taken by a 10-member bench on Monday leaves way for allowing the Election Commission to notify Gen Musharraf's re-election after the only pending petition is decided on Thursday...

Dawn, 20 November 2007

Army moves for tough action in Swat

Security forces on Monday directed that two villages in the Kabal sub-division of the troubled Swat District be vacated, while two other villages in the area came under intense shelling in the evening. The forces claimed to have made some gains while advancing towards Alpuri, the headquarters of the adjoining Shangla district, which was occupied by militants a week ago. The people of Dagai and Akhund villages, about 25km from here, were seen fleeing the area in large numbers following the announcements made by security forces on loudspeakers. An announcement was made on loudspeakers by soldiers that the two villages should be vacated by 5pm, an inhabitant of Dagai said...

Dawn, 20 November 2007

Musharraf goes to S. Arabia today

President Gen Pervez Musharraf will visit Saudi Arabia on Tuesday for talks with King Abdullah, the official SPA news agency reported on Monday. He will be going for a bilateral trip to discuss economic cooperation and security issues. No meeting with Sharif is on the agenda, a senior government official said...

Dawn, 20 November 2007

28 die before jirga brokers truce in Kurram Agency

Twenty-eight people were killed and 27 others injured on the fourth day of sectarian clashes in Kurram Agency before a jirga brokered a ceasefire in Parachinar city on Monday. However, reports of continuing clashes were received from Pewar, Tirimengal, Muqbal, Baleshkhel, Sadda, Arawali and Boshera areas of the agency. Tension was escalating in the lower parts of the agency along the border with Afghanistan...

Daily Times, 20 November 2007

Poll schedule today; opposition boycotts EC meeting

All opposition parties on Monday, including the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the component parties of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) boycotted the Election Commission (EC) meeting convened to finalise a code of conduct for the general elections. The EC had invited 19 major political parties to Monday's meeting, but only the Pakistan Muslim League, Pakistan People's Party-Sherpao, Pakistan Muslim League-Functional, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Sami and the Pakistan Awami Party were present...

Daily Times, 20 November 2007

US secret plan to deal with Frontier insurgency

The United States has a secret plan in hand to expand the presence of American military trainers in Pakistan and directly finance a separate tribal paramilitary force in order to deal with the insurgency in the country's northwestern border areas, according to a report in the New York Times on Monday. Pentagon is about to start funding the Frontier Corps (FC), one military official told the newspaper. Until now, the FC has not received American military financing because the corps technically falls under the Pakistan Interior Ministry. American officials say the FC is in the long term the most suitable

force to combat an insurgency...

Daily Times, 20 November 2007

Gul phones Musharraf

Turkish President Abdullah Gul on Monday telephoned President General Pervez Musharraf to discuss issues of bilateral interest, regional situation and recent developments in Pakistan. President Gul expressed solidarity and understanding of the current situation in Pakistan. He praised Pakistan's efforts for fighting terrorism and extremism in the region. The two presidents expressed satisfaction over the friendly relations between the two countries...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

EC announces poll schedule: Seven-week process begins today

The Election Commission announced on Tuesday that polling for the national and provincial assemblies would be held on Jan 8. The nomination papers can be withdrawn by Dec 15 and the final list of candidates will be published on Dec 16. After the publication of the list, candidates will have 22 days of electioneering in accordance with a 'code of conduct' prepared by the EC. The CEC, meanwhile, has asked the government to immediately release all people intending to contest the elections or make suitable arrangements to enable them to submit nomination papers...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

Exodus continues from Shangla; 25 killed

With thousands of people fleeing the violence-hit areas of the Swat valley, at least 16 militants and nine civilians were killed and 35 others suffered injuries on Tuesday in clashes in Shangla district. Most of the people of Kabal sub-division's Akhund and Dagai villages left their homes and moved to other places following a warning given by security forces on Monday about impending military actions. Civilians were reported fleeing in large numbers from various parts of Shangla and the government sought the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to set up four relief camps...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

Saudi efforts for Musharraf's talks with Nawaz reported

President Pervez Musharraf and King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia agreed on Tuesday to increase exchange of information and sharing of intelligence to counter militancy and terrorism. The two leaders also dwelt at length on bilateral relations, the situation in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. Lt-Gen Nadeem Taj, the chief of the Inter Services Intelligence, accompanied the president to Saudi Arabia...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

US envoy meets Fazl

The US ambassador to Pakistan met Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Tuesday, the embassy said, in the latest in a series of encounters with the country's opposition leaders. Patterson's meeting with Maulana Fazl, who has previously voiced support for Afghanistan's Taliban movement, came a day after she held talks with opposition leader Benazir Bhutto...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

Emergency not to affect defence ties, says US

Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Tuesday that the emergency had not affected military to military relations between Pakistan and the United States. According to a Pentagon spokesman, the US Department of Defence has asked to spend \$97 million in support of the Pakistani paramilitary force in 2008, nearly double the amount for this year. Admiral Mullen told a briefing at Washington's Foreign Press Centre that from a military standpoint, he had not seen any effect of the emergency on bilateral relations...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

Deposed judges free to go to their hometowns: Cheema

The government has allowed deposed judges to move to their hometowns or keep their official houses till the law permitted them, said Interior Ministry spokesman Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema on Tuesday. Denying that many judges of the Supreme Court, including Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, were under house arrest, he said 'they can move to their homes for which they will be facilitated by the government'. However, some lawyers were of the view that even after going back to their homes, the deposed judges would not be allowed to move outside and they would remain under a virtual house arrest...

Dawn, 21 November 2007

Indian oil minister puts off visit: paper

India's Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Murli Deora has put off his visit to Pakistan later this month, The Hindu said on Tuesday. It said the indefinite postponement had caused a setback to proposed crucial talks on Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (Tapi) gas pipelines. Mr. Deora was to lead a high-level delegation to Islamabad on Nov 28 and 29 to sign the formal agreement of India joining the Asian Development Bank-sponsored Tapi pipeline...

Daily Times, 21 November 2007

3,416 political detainees freed: Cheema

Interior Ministry Spokesman Brig (r) Javed Iqbal Cheema said on Tuesday the government had freed 3,416 political workers and lawyers arrested since the imposition of emergency on November 3. 'Federal and provincial authorities have released 3,416 detainees and another 2,000 will be freed soon,' Cheema told a weekly press conference. Asked about the release of Supreme Court Bar Association President Aitzaz Ahsan and other political detainees, he said some of them were facing criminal charges and courts would decide their cases...

Daily Times, 21 November 2007

Imran eating bread, eggs and fruit: jail official

Jailed politician Imran Khan continued his hunger strike for a second day on Tuesday, his party said, but Dera Ghazi Khan Jail Deputy Superintendent Bakhsh denied Khan had stopped eating, saying he had bread, eggs and fruit for breakfast. Jail officials said Khan's

supporters were spreading word of the strike to attract media attention...

Dawn, 22 November 2007

Blanket indemnity for president; Constitution amended by executive order; Post-Nov 3 actions immune from judicial review

President General Pervez Musharraf on Wednesday amended the Constitution through an executive order which legal experts said was essentially aimed at providing "constitutional cover" to all actions taken during the period of emergency and to clear the path for the lifting of emergency if and when he desired to do so. The presidential order, officially described as the "Constitution (Amendment) Order 2007" and promulgated under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO), in essence takes away the powers of judicial review by superior courts of all actions taken under the PCO. The president's order allows insertion of a number of amendments in the Constitution which, legal experts say, could otherwise only be carried out with the support of a two-thirds majority in parliament. Perhaps the most crucial of the amendments introduced through the surprised executive order is the introduction of a new clause to be called Article 270AAA in the Constitution which under the PCO has been held in abeyance.

Dawn, 22 November 2007

'Court order on deposed CJ has lost its efficacy'

Defending President Pervez Musharraf's proclamation of the state of emergency, senior counsel Sharifuddin Pirzada argued before the Supreme Court on Wednesday that the court's short order restoring deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry in July had lost its efficacy because the detailed verdict was not issued within three months. The validation of Nov 3 emergency by Gen Musharraf was one of the pleadings of the counsel who advised the court to confer all powers to the army as it had done in the 2000 Zafar Ali Shah case. Petitioner Barrister Zafarullah Khan of the Watan Party and president's counsel Sharifuddin Pirzada concluded their arguments on Wednesday. Attorney General Malik Muhammad Qayyum was to start his arguments when the court time was over. "We have the highest regard for the judiciary because we believe in its independence and hold the judges in highest esteem, but some orders were passed which render the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) ineffective," Mr Pirzada said in an obvious reference to the July 20 short order of restoring Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry.

Dawn, 22 November 2007

Clashes continue in Swat

Security forces backed by helicopter gunships and heavy artillery advanced a little further towards Alpuri, the headquarters of the Shangla district, on Wednesday. Security personnel said that around 30 to 35 militants were killed when troops regained control of Manai Sar, a strategic height overlooking the road connecting Alpuri with Besham, a major town in Shangla. However, a militant spokesman refuted the claim and said the militants had killed about 40 soldiers in fierce clashes in Shangla district. "We are very much in control of the area and the claim made by the security forces is a lie," said spokesman Sirajuddin from an unknown location. There were reports that six civilians were killed when shells hit two houses. Local people of Kabal told Dawn that about 20 houses and two schools were damaged in the Kabal sub-division, which remained the

target of intense artillery shelling on Tuesday night and Wednesday...

Dawn, 22 November 2007

Bush swears by Musharraf's commitment to democracy

US President George W. Bush has strongly backed his counterpart Pervez Musharraf, calling him a man who has done more for democracy in his country than any modern leader has. "He has done more for democracy in Pakistan than any modern leader has," Mr Bush told ABC television. "And one of the reasons you're seeing the blowback that you're getting in Pakistan is because of the reforms that President Musharraf has put in place." He disputed the notion that he had put too much faith in Gen Musharraf and appeared cautiously optimistic that the general would return Pakistan to the path to democracy. Throughout the interview, Mr Bush appeared firm in his trust in Gen Musharraf, refusing to join in harsh criticism of the leader the interviewer offered. Instead, he tried to strike a hopeful note. When the interviewer suggested that Mr Bush had put too much faith in Gen Musharraf, he recalled that the Pakistani president had joined the US-led war against terror soon after 9/11 and had been "a loyal ally" in fighting terrorists...

Dawn, 22 November 2007

'N-sites vulnerable to militant attacks'

The Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU), a British think-tank, has come up with a scary thesis that in the current political turbulence the chances of nuclear assets falling into the hands of tribal militants have increased as most of them are located in the North and West of the country. Releasing the salient features of the publication titled "The Security of Nuclear Weapons in Pakistan" on Wednesday, the PSRU said Islamabad had in place robust measures but each contained some weaknesses and many were being exacerbated by the present political turbulence in the country. Authored by the PSRU chief, Professor Shaun Gregory, the paper claimed that to assure the security of its nuclear weapons against the Indian threat, Pakistan established many of its nuclear weapons sites to the country's north and west of Pakistan, "but this had the unintended consequence of placing them close to areas which are presently dominated by Taliban and tribal militants groups."...

The Nation, 22 November 2007

Election schedule (Editorial)

The Election Commission has announced a tight election schedule which has been outright rejected by PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif while the PPP spokesman has questioned its locus standi arguing that any elections under present conditions would be neither free nor fair and would in fact amount to a selection. With more than 2000 political activists and several prominent opposition leaders still under arrest, it would be too much to expect that all potential contenders would be able to file nomination papers by Monday. The condition requiring every candidate to be personally present at the time of the submission of his papers would straightaway debar the top two leaders of the PML-N who are not being allowed to return home. The schedule gives only three weeks for canvassing. Keeping in view the large constituencies that every candidate is required to cover, critics have called it too short a time...

Dawn, 23 November 2007

Deal shadow over Sharifs' homecoming

With a sudden change of heart on the part of the ruling Saudi family, Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has been invited to Riyadh from his "safe house" in Jeddah to meet King Abdullah on Friday, and there are strong indications that he may be allowed to return to Pakistan later this month. But even before he is given permission to leave Saudi Arabia, a new formula has been evolved through back-channel diplomacy under which Mr Sharif's wife Kulsoom Nawaz and brother Shahbaz may return earlier, possibly by Sunday, to file their nomination papers for the coming general election. Highly placed sources that are privy to some of the negotiations and are following the rapidly changing situation told Dawn that if this formula came through, Nawaz Sharif might delay his return, and arrive in Pakistan after Nov 26, which would be his way of avoiding participation in the Jan 8 elections. According to agency reports, Nawaz Sharif is likely to return to Pakistan in a day or two...

Dawn, 23 November 2007

Way almost cleared for Musharraf's oath-taking

The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed the last pending challenge to General Pervez Musharraf's re-election, but announced that it would hand down a short order on Friday, clearing the final obstacle to his becoming civilian president. "Dismissed", announced Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar after conferring with other judges of a 10-member bench hearing a petition filed by a relatively unknown homoeopath, Zahoor Mehdi, against the rejection of his own nomination by the Chief Election Commissioner for the presidential election. On Monday, the apex court had dismissed all other petitions filed before the proclamation of the state of emergency to challenge Gen Musharraf's eligibility to contest the presidential election for another term. The petitions were earlier being heard by an 11-judge bench, but most of its members stood deposed on Nov 3 after they refused to take the oath under the Provisional Constitution Order. The same bench had on Oct 5 declined to stay the presidential election, but directed the Election Commission not to notify the results till it gave its final verdict...

Dawn, 23 November 2007

Verdict on emergency and PCO likely today

A seven-member bench of the Supreme Court hearing petitions challenging the imposition of the state of emergency is expected to announce its decision on Friday. The bench was close to winding up arguments on Thursday on two identical petitions of Tikka Iqbal Mohammad Khan and Watan Party chairman Barrister Zafarullah Khan challenging the proclamation of emergency and the PCO, removal of judges of the superior courts and curbs on the media, when it decided to adjourn further proceedings for Friday. Barrister Zafarullah Khan will take a few minutes to reply to points raised by the respondent's side on his petition. The same right has been exercised by Advocate Irfan Qadir, representing Iqbal Tikka. Defending Gen Pervez Musharraf as army chief, senior counsel Sharifuddin Pirzada told the court that a day before completing its five-year term, the National Assembly had endorsed the emergency and the PCO...

Dawn, 23 November 2007

'Foreigners in Pakistan planning global attacks'

President Pervez Musharraf sought to justify his emergency rule on Thursday, saying that foreign militants based in Pakistan were planning terrorist attacks around the world. He said that Pakistan had to "get our own house in order" and then show its efforts to the West. "Foreigners are sitting here and are planning terrorism all over the world," Gen Musharraf said in a weekly televised question-and-answer session broadcast on the PTV. "We have caught people who had maps of European countries and targets there. They (the West) are asking us to eliminate these people," he said. "We are also concerned because these people are also carrying out suicide bombings inside Pakistan." Gen Musharraf cited a surge in attacks by Al Qaeda and Taliban militants as well as an "unruly judiciary" for imposing the state of emergency. At the time he asked his Western allies for understanding, saying Pakistan was tackling militants on their behalf. "We have to put our own house into order and then talk to the West. They recognise our efforts," the president said...

The Nation, 23 November 2007

Six bomb blasts rock Balochistan

Five persons including two police constables were injured in violence while six bomb blasts took place in different areas of the province amidst shutter-down strike over the killing of Baloch guerilla commander Balaach Marri on Thursday. Police rounded up 120 persons including 50 in provincial capital of Quetta on the charges of rioting and violence. Balach Marri was killed in a military drive in an unknown location, most probably in Sarlath area at no man's land in Pak-Afghan border, some 200 km north-west of Quetta by the security forces. The incident of killing of Baloch guerilla commander provoked the youth who resorted to protest by blocking the highways, roads and throwing stones on vehicular traffic and even in some place subjecting Punjabi speaking people to torture. At some places these protesters opened fire in the air and damaged the govt vehicles. Two police constables received bullet injuries when a group of armed persons opened fire on a police party in Katan area of Khuzdar district...

The News, 23 November 2007

30 militants, 13 civilians die in Shangla clashes

Another 25-30 militants and 13 civilians were killed and several soldiers sustained injuries in fighting in Swat and Shangla districts on Thursday as villagers continued to shift to safer areas to escape harm. The authorities imposed a curfew in Swat and the adjacent Malakand Agency apparently to facilitate the movement of military convoys. Official sources said the curfew would be in place in Swat from 5 to 12 in the morning today (Friday). In the Malakand Agency, the curfew timings are from 2 am Friday morning till midday. It would be the third time in the recent days that curfew would be put in place in Swat and the Malakand Agency. Meanwhile, the militants released two paramilitary soldiers in the presence of reporters in Mamdheray village, the headquarters of rebel cleric Maulana Fazlullah located across the River Kabul from Mingora city...The two men told reporters they were captured by the Taliban at Salanda village near Manglawar in Swat and kept in a dark room bereft of sunshine...

The Nation, 23 November 2007

Pakistan's political crisis and the US (Tayyab Siddiqui)

Open season has been declared on Pakistan and President Musharraf by the media, think tanks and political leadership in the West including the US. The 'indispensable' ally has become a liability. Denunciation of his policies and actions against the media and judiciary are becoming shrill and vociferous. Doomsday scenarios are being painted of the future of Pakistan - a nuclear state. The US and European media and think tanks are accordingly advising the US administration to distance itself from Musharraf regime, which has shown signs of collapse. Notwithstanding the president's tenacity to hold onto power, there is strong evidence to suggest that military commander, who is also the president of the Republic is getting isolated and has lost most of his appeal and support among the masses. The triumphant return of Benazir and the tragic suicide attacks in Karachi, Waziristan and Swat, in the opinion of these analysts, show that Musharraf is no longer governing the country, but merely ruling it with the support of the US. Regardless of the unpopularity of the president, the US and west still reckon Musharraf indispensable, at least for now, to wage the war against terror and fulfil the US agenda at the risk of Pakistan's long term integrity and security...

The Nation, 23 November 2007

The end game (Wajahat Latif)

It is now clear that the emergency imposed on November 3 was to bring the Supreme Court to heel. Emergency was proclaimed and a Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) was issued by General Musharraf as the army chief. Seven out of eleven judges who were about to decide General Musharraf's eligibility as a presidential candidate refused to take oath under the PCO. They were placed under house arrest and removed from service through a government notification but not before they had met and declared the emergency and all actions connected therewith, illegal. They were replaced with other judges. A seven judges' bench (three having opted out in the protest against the disparaging remarks the president made about the judiciary for their decision in the chief justice's case) of the new court is hearing the petition against the emergency tamely brought before them. Speculations in the capital this morning were that they would endorse the PCO on November 22. If so, the new martial law of November 3 will stand sanctified under which the deposed judges are still under house arrest...

Dawn, 24 November 2007

SC hands out clean chit to Musharraf; Emergency, PCO validated; Deposed judges criticised

Endorsing President General Musharraf's reasons such as rise in terrorism and judicial activism for imposing the state of emergency and suspending fundamental rights, the post-PCO Supreme Court on Saturday validated all actions taken by him in his capacity as Chief of Army Staff. However, the court called for revoking the emergency rule at the earliest and ending the period of constitutional deviation. The order was announced by Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar, head of the seven-member SC bench, hearing identical petitions challenging the imposition of the state of emergency and the Provisional Constitution Order. The verdict is the first formal validation of the army chief's action to impose emergency and govern through his own PCO. But in the opinion

of some senior lawyers, it hardly came as surprise because the entire Supreme Court bench, including the chief justice, had taken the oath under the PCO which in a way amounted to accepting the army chief's actions...

Dawn, 24 November 2007

Nawaz to land in Lahore tomorrow

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif will fly back home from Madina on Sunday, a spokesman for the PLM-N leader in the British capital said on Friday. Begum Kulsoom Nawaz and Shahbaz Sharif will also join Nawaz Sharif for the journey from Madina, Nadir Chaudhry, the spokesman said. Shahbaz Sharif is expected to leave London for Madina on Saturday. Mr Nawaz and his family would reach Lahore at around 5pm Pakistan time, Mr Nadir said. The former prime minister had an extended meeting with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh on Friday. The meeting lasted a couple of hours, sources said. Nawaz Sharif was also invited to what many termed here a "farewell dinner" by the Saudi king for his Pakistani guest. According to the sources, Nawaz Sharif himself had sought the meeting so as to find out details of the discussions earlier during the week between President Gen Pervez Musharraf and the Saudi leadership. Riyadh has been abuzz with rumours that an "understanding" was likely between Gen Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif after the president's visit to the Saudi capital...

Dawn, 24 November 2007

EC told to notify result

The post-PCO Supreme Court on Friday certified the Oct 6 presidential election of General Pervez Musharraf for a second term, but said he should take the oath of the office only after quitting the post of the Chief of Army Staff. Vacating the stay against the Election Commission of Pakistan from notifying the results of the presidential election, a 10-member SC bench directed the commission as well as the federal government to take steps by December 1 for the final announcement of the results of the election and issue a public notification. The court held that President Musharraf was qualified for and did not suffer from any disqualification under the Constitution for the presidential election 2007. "The view taken by the Chief Election Commissioner is unexceptionable," the verdict said. It directed President Musharraf to relinquish the office of the COAS before taking oath to the office of the presidency. The seven-page order came after the court had dismissed all petitions challenging Gen Musharraf's re-election and acceptance of his nomination by the Election Commission...

Dawn, 24 November 2007

'Political crisis affecting Kashmir issue'

Former AJK prime minister Sardar Sikandar Hayat on Friday observed that the situation obtaining in Pakistan had cast profound effect on Kashmir, apparently putting it on the backburner, and asked Islamabad not to forget the issue. "The current state of turmoil in Pakistan has attained alarming proportions and has provided India with opportunity to fortify its positions and resume military activities along the Line of Control," he said at a press talk here. Pointing out that the talks on Kashmir, regardless of their utility, had also been put in abeyance due to the situation in Pakistan, Mr Hayat said: "I am afraid the Kashmir dispute, which is not only an issue of the future of more than 12 million

Kashmiris but also of Pakistan's own stability and prosperity, should not disappear in the prevailing turmoil in Pakistan and I appeal to Islamabad not to forget Kashmir." The former AJK premier stressed that Pakistan should not give any opportunity to India to strengthen its positions along the LoC...

The Nation, 24 November 2007

Curfew in Swat, Malakand

At least 38 persons including 30 militants were killed and scores of others were injured in fierce fighting between the armed forces and the militants in different areas on Friday. Meanwhile, curfew was imposed in Malakand and Swat from zero hours Thursday night till 12am noon on the eve of the arrival of military convoys here. According to details, 38 persons, including 30 militants and eight civilians were killed in clashes, mostly occurred in Kotki Dadkhel areas, when gunship helicopters, while supporting their ground troops, targeted the suspected hideouts of the militants. Over 30 houses were damaged when rockets and mortar shells, fired by the armed forces, hit them. In Shangla, the security forces claimed to have pushed back militants upto Shangla Top, while the militants claimed the possession the Alpori area...Meanwhile, the government decided to increase the number of troops in the embattled areas and curfew was imposed in Malakand and Swat from 12.00 midnight till 12.00 noon amid continuous clashes between the militants and the armed forces here Friday...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

APDM to boycott elections : Govt given four days to lift emergency

The All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) on Saturday announced that it would boycott the Jan 8 elections. The action committee of the 17-party alliance gave a four-day ultimatum to the government to lift the state of emergency and withdraw the Provisional Constitution Order, restore the Constitution and the pre-PCO judiciary and release all political activists, lawyers and judges. MMA secretary-general and JUI (F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman did not attend the meeting and instead sent his representatives. It was the second time that Maulana Fazl did not attend the alliance's meeting. The poll boycott decision was also endorsed by PML (N) chief Mian Nawaz Sharif. Another meeting of the APDM will be convened after four days to work out further strategy. In reply to a question about Maulana Fazl's absence from the meeting, MMA president Qazi Hussain Ahmed said: "I am responsible for my own party. I am wholeheartedly with the APDM and back its decision. I cannot guarantee that Maulana Fazlur will also follow the alliance's policy."...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

PPP with opposition

Pakistan People's Party chairperson Benazir Bhutto has assured Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal President Qazi Hussain Ahmed that the PPP would go along with the other opposition parties over participation or boycott of elections. In a message sent to Qazi Hussain through Leader of the Opposition in Senate Raza Rabbani, the PPP chairperson said her party saw no possibility of fair and free elections and was filing nomination papers under protest. Ms Bhutto said she was ready to discuss all matters in a joint meeting of all political parties, says a JI press release. The PPP leader said that opposition parties would

be in a better position to take a collective decision after the return of former prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif on Sunday...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

18 die in Rawalpindi suicide attacks

Two suicide bombers struck in the city during the morning rush, targeting military personnel and installations, killing at least 18 people and injuring 40 others. Almost all of the victims were either military personnel or civilians working for an intelligence agency. The condition of some of the injured was critical and the toll might rise. Most of the casualties occurred when a suspected bomber rammed his explosive-laden van into a bus packed with security personnel at the gate of an intelligence establishment's compound, known as Hamza Camp (old Ojhri Camp), near Faizabad. The other bomber blew himself up when security guards stopped him at a checkpoint on the outer ring of the General Headquarters (GHQ). Inter-Services Public Relations Director-General Maj-Gen Waheed Arshad told reporters that the attacks were suicide bombings. Both the blasts occurred before 8am, when there is brisk movement near the military institutions...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

EC notifies presidential polls result

The Election Commission on Saturday notified the result of the Oct 6 presidential polls, removing the last hurdle for Gen Pervez Musharraf to becoming a civilian head of the state. The Chief Election Commissioner issued the notification after receiving a copy of the orders passed by the post-PCO bench of the Supreme Court rejecting petitions that questioned legality of Gen Musharraf's candidature for the coveted office. The Election Commission officials have been directed to issue a formal notification of presidential election stayed by a pre-PCO full bench of the Supreme Court. The apex court had rejected the plea for putting off the polls till the final disposal of the case, but had directed the Election Commission not to issue a final notification of the election results. According to unofficial results, Gen Musharraf had won the election securing 98 per cent of the votes. Election Commission Secretary Kanwar Dilshad said the notification declaring Gen Musharraf as the returned candidate had been sent to the cabinet secretary...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

Nawaz to return aboard Saudi king's plane; Ex-PM will file papers: Shahbaz

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif will be landing at the Lahore airport at 4pm on Sunday, PML-N sources told Dawn. The twice-exiled PML-N leader will be using a special plane of Saudi King Abdullah when he, along with his wife Kulsoom Nawaz, former Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif and other family members, will leave for Pakistan from Saudi Arabia. Shahbaz Sharif and Begum Kulsoom Nawaz left London on Saturday evening for Madina to join Nawaz Sharif. According to the party's tentative reception plan, immediately after landing at the Lahore airport, Mr Sharif will be taken to Data Sahib's shrine through Saddar Bazaar, Dharampura, Garhi Shahu, Laxmi Chowk, Gowalmandi, and Circular Road. After offering prayers at the shrine, he will leave for his Raiwind residence. Nawaz Sharif's spokesman Zaeem Qadri said the former prime minister would address a public meeting at Bhati Gate. However, the party has not sought

official permission for the purpose...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

Nawaz return generates heated debate in US media

As former prime minister Nawaz Sharif performed his last Umrah on Saturday before heading home, diplomatic sources in Washington say that the initiative for his return came from Saudis. Former Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif endorsed such speculations in an interview he gave to VOA radio, saying that "the Saudis did not want to get further involved in Pakistan's domestic politics, that's why they are allowing his brother to return. Another PML (N) leader, Javed Hashmi, told the American radio that President Pervez Musharraf tried to convince the Saudi government to prevent Mr Sharif from returning home, but the Saudis refused to do so. He said that since the Saudis were no more willing to keep Mr Sharif, the government did not have the option of sending him back to the kingdom as it did on Sept 10. "They can arrest him but that too will not be easy," Mr Hashmi said. "Gen Musharraf has weakened considerably since Sept 10. Arresting Mr Sharif will create new problems for him." ...

Dawn, 25 November 2007

Panic grips Swat as Artillery pounds valley

Security forces clamped a 24-hour curfew on the troubled Swat as different areas of the district came under intense artillery and mortar fire. There were reports of troops advancing towards Charbagh, a militant stronghold on the Mingora-Kalam Road. Seven militants were killed in the Shangla district as sporadic clashes continued in Pagori, Puran and other areas, sources said. Security forces claimed killing a number of militants near Manglawar area in Swat. However, it could not be confirmed from independent sources. Panic gripped the area after the curfew was imposed in Swat starting at 2pm on Saturday. Earlier, the curfew started at 12 midnight on Friday, which continued till 9am on Saturday. People purchasing daily-use commodities started rushing back to their homes after the sudden announcement of the curfew. Many were unable to buy food and other necessary items. "We got very little time to return back home as we came to know about the fresh curfew only half an hour before it was to take effect," said a resident of Mingora...

Dawn, 26 November 2007

Sharifs finally home; Jubilant welcome in Lahore; Nawaz vows to struggle for democracy; Demand for restoration of pre-November judiciary

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif returned to the country on Sunday to a tumultuous welcome and vowed to "continue his fight against dictatorship". In his brief address to highly charged PML-N workers at the airport, he said: "Pakistan was not created for dictators or emergencies. It was created for democracy and the rule of law. I am here to play my role in ridding the country of dictatorship and bringing back the rule of law." About boycotting the next elections, he said the All Parties Democratic Movement would assess the situation after the expiry of the four-day notice it had given to the government. "But the movement is committed to democracy and constitutionalism. That is why it has demanded restoration of the judiciary to its pre-Nov 3 position." Mr Sharif, wearing Shalwar-Kameez and a black waistcoat, told the crowd that he had not come to the

country under any deal. "My roots are among the masses and I will never ditch them. I will live and die for the people of Pakistan," he said amid a thunderous applause and sloganeering...

Dawn, 26 November 2007

Opposition's decision to boycott polls not final yet: Benazir

Pakistan People's Party chairperson Benazir Bhutto said on Sunday that if all political parties decided to boycott the upcoming general elections the PPP would deliberate on the issue and take a suitable decision. However, she made it clear that the PPP was preparing to contest the elections because it could not leave the field open to rivals. She was talking to newsmen after filing her nomination papers for the reserved seats for women in the National Assembly at the offices of the provincial election commissioner here on Sunday. Ms Bhutto later flew to Larkana in the evening where she is expected to file nomination papers on Monday for NA-204, Larkana-I and NA 207, Larkana-1V, for general seats. She welcomed return of Nawaz Sharif's and said this would have a positive effect on political activities in the country. "We welcome his return to the country; it will contribute positively to the political scene," Ms Bhutto said, adding seat-adjustments accords could be reached with the PML-N and other opposition parties. Answering a question, she said that the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) had not finally decided to boycott the polls, adding that it had only issued a warning to the government...

Dawn, 26 November 2007

Benazir and Nawaz will take part in polls: Shujaat

Chaudhry Shujaat Husain, president of the Pakistan Muslim League, says he did not expect Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan before elections, although he always wanted him to be here along with PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto for the sake of credibility of the electoral process. He told this correspondent on Sunday he had been urging the authorities concerned to let both the former prime ministers return and take part in the polls. He said Mr Sharif and Ms Bhutto would participate in the elections no matter what they said in public statements. According to him, parties in the All Parties Democratic Movement would also take part in the January 8 elections "in the interest of the country". Chaudhry Shujaat said that with the participation of all major parties, the international community would not get a chance to question the credibility of the election process. He said Mr Sharif should behave responsibly and, unlike Ms Bhutto, should not try to create problems for the government. The PML-N leader, he said, should "strictly adhere" to the code of conduct approved by the Election Commission...

Dawn, 26 November 2007

White House fears political upheaval could affect war on terror: report

The White House fears that the current political upheaval in Pakistan could undermine US efforts to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces along the Afghan border, says an intelligence report published in the US media on Sunday. The report, prepared by the US National Security Council, however, acknowledges that it is still too early to say if Pakistan's political turmoil can go out of control. The report notes that both the Taliban and Al Qaeda maintain headquarters, logistical support and training camps in the tribal territory along the Afghan border which increases US concerns about the possible

repercussions of the current political impasse in Pakistan. According to the Washington Post, the White House concedes that the war effort in Afghanistan has not met strategic goals set this year. The main conclusion of the report, prepared earlier this month, is that while individual military battles against the Taliban have been successful, other areas remain wanting. The Post also quotes US Defence Secretary Robert Gates as saying that the US Special Operations Command has been lobbying for a more active role along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border...

The Nation, 26 November 2007

US expert warns against regime change in Pakistan

Warning against regime change at this critical time in Pakistan, an American foreign policy expert has called for supporting President Pervez Musharraf, while denouncing the politics of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. "(W)hat beleaguered Pakistan needs now is tranquility, a state of mind that must be restored before another Islamic revolution breaks new ground," Viola Herms Drath, a member of the executive committee of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, wrote in an article in The Washington Times on Saturday. "Abandoning Gen. Musharraf, who is in need of support because he dared to be loyal to the United States, would not necessarily unlock democracy but would nourish prospects of Islamists making the rules." The writer called Ms. Bhutto a polarizing figure, saying her bold demand for a voluntary transfer of power by the establishment of an interim government without Gen. Musharraf found few backers. She also described the regime of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif as "corrupt"...

The News, 26 November 2007

Big ground operation finally launched in Swat

A massive military operation was finally launched by the security forces against the militants in the Swat district on Sunday with an Army spokesman saying that, at least, 30 followers of rebel cleric Maulana Fazlullah had been killed and his group's strongholds destroyed. Major General Waheed Arshad, the military spokesman and Director General, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), also conceded the death of two soldiers and injuries to another 14 in the non-stop exchange of gunfire between the security forces and the militants during the night between Saturday and Sunday. The fighting continued on Sunday as the militants tried to put up a fight to stop the advance of troops into their area. The authorities extended the 24-hour curfew to an indefinite period in the restive Swat and the adjoining Malakand Agency, causing untold hardships to thousands of residents of the region. By late Sunday evening, the curfew had been in place for more than 36 hours and nobody knew when it would end...

The Nation, 26 November 2007

Second homecoming (Editorial)

After a period of seven years and one botched up attempt this September, Mian Nawaz Sharif is finally back in Lahore. Though the setting for the upcoming national and provincial elections is far from ideal, the fact that all the major political players are back in the country is a heartening development. With both Mr. Sharif and Ms. Bhutto back in the country, these two major political parties of the country can effectively mobilise their own particular constituencies. Activists of the party were present at different points of the

city on the known Sharif itinerary, starting from the airport itself. Several dozens of party activists have been detained. If the PML(N) argues for greater freedom in this regard, citing the free hand given to the activists of the PPP when welcoming Ms. Bhutto back into the country, the authorities can cite that very same instance in pointing out a need to avoid any untoward incident. But protecting the citizens against the bomb blasts that have become the pretext of lowering the scale of such receptions is the responsibility of the state...

Dawn, 27 November 2007

Musharraf plans farewell visit to GHQ tomorrow: Civilian president to be sworn in on Thursday; 'Oath under '73 Constitution likely'

General Pervez Musharraf would be sworn in as a civilian president at the Aiwan-i-Sadr on Thursday, presidential spokesman Maj-Gen (ret) Rashid Qureshi said on Monday. "This will end all rumours and speculations," he said, adding that before taking the oath Gen Musharraf would hand over the charge of the army chief to Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani for which the ministry of defence would formally issue a notification. Supreme Court Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar will administer the oath to Gen Musharraf. The ceremony will be attended by caretaker Prime Minister Mohammedmian Soomro, former prime minister Shaukat Aziz, federal ministers, the four governors, the chief ministers and the three services chiefs. On Wednesday, the president will preside over a meeting of the corps commanders at the General Headquarters (GHQ), Rawalpindi. The sources said that the security of Gen Musharraf would remain with the army even after he took the oath as civilian president...

The Nation, 27 November 2007

BB wants alliance with PML-Nawaz

PPP Chairperson and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto said on Monday that extremists posed a threat to the country's country solidarity and there was no concept of suicide attacks in Islam. Talking to reporters here, Benazir said extremism was a serious challenge for the world. She said now US did not support dictatorship but was backing of democracy in Pakistan. She said the PPP would contact with all political parties and political dialogues would continue for restoration of true democracy, hoping that the APDM would also end its boycott. AFP adds: PPP Chairperson said she was ready to form an alliance with Nawaz Sharif as she filed her papers to contest upcoming general elections. "We are ready to forge an alliance with all moderate political parties," she told reporters in Larkana, her family's ancestral home. "We welcome Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan. It will strengthen the democratic and political culture."...

Dawn, 27 November 2007

More needed to be done, US tells Musharraf

The United States said on Monday that President Gen Pervez Musharraf's government has taken "some encouraging steps" towards returning to constitutional rule but must lift the state of emergency. "Pakistan won't be back on the right road until it is back on the road of constitutional democratic rule," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters asking about Musharraf's plan to quit as army chief. He said that "there have been some encouraging steps as of late," citing those "in which President Musharraf

would take off the uniform before being sworn as president and has scheduled elections." Mr McCormack added: "Those are pretty good, those are positive," but more needed to be done. "We continue to urge and counsel the state of emergency be lifted prior to the election so you could have elections in which the Pakistani people have confidence," he said...

Dawn, 27 November 2007

20 militants, 4 soldiers killed in Swat

Security forces on Monday claimed killing 20 militants and capturing a number of positions on mountains near the Imam Dehri area. Four members of security forces were also killed in clashes. Backed by helicopter gunships and artillery, security forces bombed several strongholds of militants in Imam Dehri, Koza Banda, Bara Banda and Ningwalai. Reports reaching here said that helicopter gunships attacked an eight-vehicle convoy of the militants fleeing the area via Bara Banda-Shakardara road. All the vehicles were destroyed in the attack. However, no exact figures of the militants killed in the attack were available. People in Matta area told Dawn that an important militant commander had been killed. They said that Commander Khan Khatab alias Baba, who was leading the militants in the area, had been killed. A press release of the Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) said that the mountain positions of the militants in Bara Bande, Kuza Bande, Imam Dheri and Segram had been captured...

The Nation, 27 November 2007

Case for change of direction (Javid Husain)

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen - Ralph Waldo Emerson. The president and the coterie of sycophants around him do not tire of calling for the continuity of the policies pursued by him since October 1999 when he overthrew an elected government in violation of his oath and the constitution. It is basically on this argument that the general and his fast dwindling supporters rest their case for his continuation in power. One would, therefore, assume that after Musharraf's eight-year rule the country would be politically stabilised and socially cohesive with significant improvements in the law and order situation and the economic life of the common man. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Musharraf's second coup on November 3 was against the system that he himself had established with the assurance that it had finally closed the door of military intervention in politics, thereby giving the lie to his claim...

The News, 27 November 2007

Changed goalposts (Editorial)

With the triumphant return to Lahore Sunday evening of PML-N leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, and his brother Shahbaz Sharif, the political goalposts in the country have changed. Despite the arrest of hundreds of party workers, the enthusiasm with which the Sharifs were welcomed to their home city after a seven-year exile, indicates they still retain a great deal of popular appeal. Indeed, a survey completed a few months ago, in the days before the emergency rule, by the Islamabad-based National Republican Institute found that the PML-N was the most popular party across much of Punjab, and also had a significant following in NWFP, where it offers a challenge to the

MMA. It is likely that following more recent events, Nawaz's popularity may have risen further as a result of the perception that, unlike Benazir Bhutto, he has refused to enter into a deal with General Musharraf or give in to US pressures...

The Nation, 28 November 2007

Musharraf says goodbye to army

President General Pervez Musharraf, who relinquishes the Army Chief office today (Wednesday), paid farewell visits to the headquarters of the armed forces here on Tuesday. General Musharraf began a two-day blitz of farewell calls at the end of his around 43-year career with the Pakistan Army including his nine-year as the Chief of Army Staff. He paid farewell calls at the Joint Staff Headquarters, the Naval and the Air Headquarters. He will visit the General Headquarters today. There, he will also hand over the command of army to the incumbent Vice Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani. During his visit to Joint Staff Headquarters, the President thanked the officers and Jawans for their co-operation and lauded their services for rendering supreme sacrifices for their country in meeting external and internal threats and particularly noted their role in fighting the global war against terrorism. The President said the professionalism of the three services was internationally acknowledged and a source of pride for the country and its armed forces...

Dawn, 28 November 2007

Nawaz assures full support to judiciary, media

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday assured the judiciary and media of his unflinching support and said that they were fighting for a national cause and Pakistan would become a failed state if they failed. Talking to journalists who accompanied him to the residences of Justices Khawaja Sharif and Khalilur Rehman Ramday, Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan, Geo TV offices and later to the Lahore Press Club, he said he had come to Pakistan with the sole agenda of restoring the rule of law. Accompanied by Shahbaz Sharif and former president Rafiq Tarar, he said that the judiciary and media were his natural allies because they had been fighting for the rule of law. "The judiciary has sacrificed like never before," he told newsmen at the residences of Justices Khawaja Sharif and Khalil Ramday. "The PML(N) will not accept anything less than the restoration of deposed judges and all of them must be restored to the Nov 2 position," he said...

The Nation, 28 November 2007

No boycott of elections, says Benazir

Pakistan Peoples Party Chairperson Benazir Bhutto said on Tuesday that the doffing of uniform by General Pervez Musharraf was a welcome step but, she added, still more was needed to be done such as lifting of emergency and release of all the political workers, lawyers and the judges who were arrested after emergency. She was addressing a Press conference at the Bilawal House after returning from her hometown of Larkana here. She repeated her stance that the PPP would contest the upcoming elections. She said that the President had fulfilled his promise which he made with people and Supreme Court and commitment with the PPP when she held dialogue with the government for peaceful transition to democracy...The PPP Chairperson said that despite a rigging plan prepared

by the government, the PPP would contest the elections with the support of the people. She said the PPP wanted the judiciary as an institution should be strong...

Dawn, 28 November 2007

Nawaz says he will persuade Benazir to boycott polls

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif said on Tuesday he would meet and try to convince PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto to boycott the coming elections. Addressing media personnel at the Lahore Press Club, he said that taking part in elections did not make sense in the existing circumstances. "If Ms Bhutto joins hands with other opposition parties, political forces can win the battle for Pakistan," he added. "It will be much better if parties boycott elections with total consensus. Half-hearted and indecisive measures will neither benefit political forces nor the country, the media and the judiciary. I will try myself to build such a consensus among parties which are still reluctant," Mr Sharif said. The PML(N) leader reiterated his earlier stance that he would not be a candidate for the premiership because it did not make sense to even think of that when the country was under martial law and the media and judiciary were under siege...

Dawn, 28 November 2007

US denies role in Nawaz's return

United States has said that it played no part in arranging former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan. Talking to Dawn in Washington, a State Department official cautiously welcomed Mr Sharif's return, saying that it's for the people of Pakistan, and not the United States, to say whether his return will be good for them. The official also welcomed Gen Pervez Musharraf's decision to retire from the army and urged him to end the state of emergency as well. "We cannot say whether or not we welcome it," said the official when asked if Washington welcomed Mr Sharif's return. "It is not for us to say, it is for the Pakistani people to determine whether or not they are happy and believe his return is good for Pakistan." The official also rejected as incorrect media reports that the US ambassador in Saudi Arabia facilitated talks between Mr Sharif and the Pakistani government. "This is a matter among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Mr Sharif. The United States plays no part."...

Dawn, 28 November 2007

Army assault continues on militant strongholds

With a curfew still in force in Swat, security forces continuing their assault on militants' strongholds claimed to have consolidated their positions on some mountains. The curfew in Mingora was relaxed from 8am to 12 noon on Tuesday and a similar relaxation was announced for Wednesday. According to a police official, an explosive device planted by militants exploded near the Mingora Police Lines on Monday night, damaging the boundary wall of the Police Lines. The ISPR said troops killed two militants who were approaching the Najia Top in the Kuza Banda area secured by the forces a few days ago. With the cellular phone service remaining jammed in the Malakand region and Battagram, the ISPR claim could not be verified from independent sources. For the same reason, journalists could not contact militants' spokesman Sirajuddin to get his version. The continuing curfew has crippled Mingora, the headquarters of the Swat district...

The Nation, 28 November 2007

Establishment-induced intervention (Husain Haqqani)

The return of former PM Nawaz Sharif to a popular welcome after seven years of exile, on a special plane provided by the King of Saudi Arabia, serves as a reminder of the folly that is military intervention in politics. Mr Sharif should have been allowed to return to his homeland when the Supreme Court ruled that he had an inalienable right to do so. But soon after the Supreme Court's judgement, the government unlawfully bundled Mr Sharif out of the country. Having failed to implement the law of the land, the general has now capitulated to the demands from the Saudi Royal family to enable the same outcome that would have resulted from following the apex court's ruling. Quite clearly, foreign powers that provide aid to Pakistan's ruling generals are more important in their eyes than Pakistan's own institutions...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

Musharraf retires to full-time politics; Gen Kayani gets the baton of command; Civilian president takes oath today

Gen Pervez Musharraf on Wednesday handed over the command of the army to the new Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, fulfilling a promise many people had doubted he would keep. He passed the baton of command to Gen Ashfaq Kayani at a ceremony held in the Army Hockey Stadium, close to the General Headquarters (GHQ)...On Thursday, Gen Musharraf will be sworn in as a civilian president. Chief Justice of Pakistan Abdul Hameed Dogar will administer the oath at Aiwan-i-Sadr. In the evening, the president will address the nation on radio and television and is expected to announce the lifting of the state of emergency. The president said army was his life and passion and he served it with honour and dignity, adding that army had given him love and affection which he would never forget...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

Troops wrest control of key Swat areas

Security forces claimed on Wednesday to have gained full control of Imam Dehri and some other strongholds of militants and police resumed their normal duty in Alpuri, the district headquarters of Shangla. The bodies of six militants, one of them an Uzbek found by troops near the Najia Top, were handed over to the local administration. Around 50 militants have been killed in clashes over the past four days, according to official sources. There were reports that Muslim Khan, a close aide of Maulana Fazlullah, had been killed near the Najia Top, but there was no confirmation from the government. It is learnt that militants vacated Matta, Khwazakhela and Madyan police stations on Tuesday night and fled to nearby forests. They also left the Charbagh police post in Khwazakhela, their stronghold about 27km from Mingora. Police and troops are yet to enter the areas. The forces, meanwhile, continued pounding suspected militants' positions...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

US doubts Sharif's commitment to war on terror

US President George W. Bush has gone public with his administration's reservations about Nawaz Sharif's commitment to the war on terror, saying the former prime minister's relations with religious parties raised doubts about his ability to do so. "I don't

know him well enough," Mr Bush said in an interview to American news agency AP when asked to comment on Mr Sharif's return. He, however, noted that Mr Sharif had good relations with Pakistan's religious parties, which raised doubts about his commitment to battling the Taliban and Al Qaeda. "I would be very concerned if there is any leader in Pakistan that didn't understand the nature of the world in which we live today," Mr Bush said. The comments prompted the US media, which had already been expressing similar doubts about Mr Sharif since his return to Pakistan, to look back at the Sharif era with suspicion and doubt...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

Emergency needs to be lifted: US

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Wednesday hailed Gen Pervez Musharraf for taking "a good first step" towards restoring democracy to Pakistan by quitting the army. "Let me say first that this is a good step, a good first step in President Musharraf carrying out his obligation, indeed his promise, to take off his uniform," said Ms Rice in an interview to NBC television. But "we do continue to expect that Pakistan needs to end the state of emergency" because free and fair elections cannot be held under an emergency rule, she added. Asked if Gen Musharraf has assured her he will end the emergency rule, Ms Rice said: "Look, we are talking with the Pakistanis about this. I'm not going to talk about the details of those conversations." She, however, emphasised that it was "extremely important" to get Pakistan back on a road to democracy. Earlier, in an interview to an American news agency hours before Gen Musharraf quit as army chief, President George W. Bush also hailed the general as a leader he trusted...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

Emergency to be lifted 'very soon', says AG

The government would lift the state of emergency "very soon" with President Pervez Musharraf keen to withdraw the measure before January elections, officials said on Wednesday. "I cannot give any exact date and time about lifting the emergency but I can say now that it will be lifted very soon," Attorney General Malik Mohammad Qayyum told AFP. The comment came after Dawn News television, quoting unidentified sources, reported that Gen Musharraf "who stepped down as army chief on Wednesday" was set to end the state of emergency within 48 hours. A senior government official earlier said Gen Musharraf wanted to lift the measure before January 8 elections but "is still weighing his options". "He has indicated to his aides that he would like to lift the emergency before the elections but it is not yet decided when to do it," the official said on condition of anonymity...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

Command change not to affect war on terror: FO

Pakistan declared on Wednesday that the change of command in the army would not have any effect on its role in the war on terror. Foreign Office spokesperson Mohammad Sadiq told a weekly news briefing: "There will be no change in our policy. Our participation in the war on terror is not related to the uniform issue in any way." He declined to comment on President Pervez Musharraf's decision to step down as the Chief of Army Staff, saying it was not a foreign policy issue. The spokesperson confirmed that the government was

dispatching two groups of special envoys to Europe and the United States "to inform the host governments, the local legislators, the media and expatriate Pakistanis about the political developments in Pakistan."...

Dawn, 29 November 2007

The change of guard (Editorial)

After reigning and ruling as head of state and chief of the army staff for over eight years, today Gen Musharraf becomes a civilian president. His farewell to arms, telecast live on state-owned TV, underlined both his love for the institution and the power he drew from it. How his gradual distancing from the army will alter the balance of power in the country was aptly described by the general himself in a DawnNews TV interview as a reversion to the creation of a "troika" comprising the president, the prime minister and the army chief " not necessarily in that order! Addressing the change in command ceremony held inside the Army Stadium in the GHQ, and with his voice betraying strains of emotion, General Musharraf said he had the privilege of commanding the "best army in the world". General Musharraf's political role will continue to figure in public discussions for some time but, as his military career comes to an end, observers will look at his track record as a military leader and commander...

Dawn, 30 November 2007

Emergency to end on 16th, says president

President Pervez Musharraf on Thursday promised to lift the state of emergency and withdraw the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) on Dec 16. In a brief address to the nation on the state television and radio, he urged opposition parties for the second time in the day to refrain from boycotting the elections. "I am determined to lift emergency on Dec 16 and withdraw the PCO and hold fair and free elections on Jan 8," the president said. The promise to lift the emergency and withdraw the Provisional Constitution Order he had decreed on Nov 3 came about nine hours after the president was sworn in for another five-year term. Though the president, by announcing the cut-off date for lifting the emergency and withdrawing the PCO, partially accepted one of the major demands of opposition parties and the civil society, he made no mention of their calls for the restoration of the superior judiciary to the pre-November 3 position. He described his Nov 3 action as "extraordinary measures" needed to meet extraordinary circumstances...

Dawn, 30 November 2007

20 militants held in Swat; 12 villagers die in attack

At least 12 people were killed when helicopter gunships pounded the Allahabad area on Thursday and officials claimed to have arrested 20 militants, including a brother of Maulana Fazlullah. The district administration and police have started functioning in Alpuri, the headquarters of Shangla district, whereas security forces have been pounding some areas in the district to flush out militants. The road connecting Swat with Shangla is yet to be opened. And the administration has not started functioning in several areas in Upper Swat vacated by militants. It is learnt that Frontier Corps personnel arrested Fazal Ahad, the brother of Maulana Fazlullah, at the Ghaligai checkpost, outside Mingora on the Peshawar-Swat road. Among the other 19 militants who were detained near Fizzagut, there is one Daud who is said to be a nephew of Sirajuddin, the militants' spokesman

here. Official sources said that one of the detained militants was a would-be suicide bomber and he possessed a jacket meant for such attacks...

The News, 30 November 2007

PPP, JUL-F, ANP to participate in polls

Benazir Bhutto on Thursday said that her party now plans to take part in the January 8 general elections, but reserved the right to pull out later, AFP reports. To take the process forward we have to take part, we believe, either to force the elections to be credible or - if its rigged - to demonstrate that it has been forcibly rigged, Bhutto told the agency. The PPP is participating under protest but reserving the right to boycott subsequently, she added. Benazir welcomed President Pervez Musharraf's promise to lift a state of emergency on December 16, as well as his resignation as army chief the previous day and his recent announcement of a date for elections. Meanwhile, MMA Secretary-General Maulana Fazlur Rehman said on Thursday that the boycott of the general elections would go against the interests of the APDM. Talking to a TV channel, he said the two-day APDM conference that had begun on Thursday would decide on participating or boycotting the general elections. The Awami National Party (ANP) on Thursday refused to boycott the general elections unless all opposition parties, including the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), do the same with the resolve to bar the elections at every cost...

Dawn, 30 November 2007

More measures need to be taken for democratic rule: US

President Pervez Musharraf's decision to set a date for lifting the emergency rule was a positive and significant step but more needed to be done, the US State Department said on Thursday. "This announcement combined with the fact that President Musharraf has taken off the uniform and is now sworn in as president of Pakistan as a civilian are all positive steps that will help get Pakistan back on the pathway to democratic and constitutional rule," the department's spokesman Sean McCormack told a briefing in Washington. "But there are still steps left in order to get Pakistan back firmly on that road to constitutional democratic rule," he added. The spokesman then explained what more the US would like President Musharraf to do. These include allowing the candidates to "peacefully participate" in the political process; giving them access to "free and independent" media and allowing the media to operate freely and independently...

Dawn, 30 November 2007

US to target Al Qaeda hideouts inside Pakistan, says Bush

US President George W. Bush has said that he will still send American troops into Pakistan if he gets actionable intelligence that Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders are hiding somewhere in the country. Last year, Mr Bush caused uproar in Pakistan when he declared that he would authorise direct US military action if he had evidence that senior Al Qaeda leaders were hiding somewhere in the country. Later, US officials assured Pakistan that while they retained the option to target Al Qaeda leaders anywhere in the world, they would take no action that could destabilise a friendly government. In an interview to CNN on Wednesday evening, Mr Bush was reminded of his earlier declaration and asked if this was still his position. "Yes," he said. Mr Bush,

however, acknowledged Pakistan as a key ally in the war against terror and praised its cooperation in bringing Al Qaeda leaders to justice...

Dawn, 30 November 2007

A defining moment (Editorial)

This is a defining moment for President Musharraf's leadership. He can carry forth the process of reconciliation that he initiated in the last weeks as the army chief with adversaries like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, who have now returned from exile to take part in politics. This is a good beginning made and must be built upon. At a time when Mr Musharraf could have taken a safe passage out of a political mess of his own making by stepping aside as the COAS and president, he decided to give that safe passage to the army. He has served his institution well by sending it back to its professional duties, to deal with the growing threat of extremism and other challenges. Now it is time for him to serve the cause of national unity by lifting emergency rule and establishing his own credentials as a civilian head of state willing to work under a fully restored Constitution. The need now is for greater national reconciliation to keep the integrity of Pakistan as a viable polity, and not as a state to be ruled by military might alone...

The Nation, 30 November 2007

To boycott or not (Dr Ijaz Ahsan)

The most important issue today is whether or not the opposition parties will boycott the polls. Imran Khan has rightly said that by taking part in the polls, the opposition will be strengthening Musharraf. He has said judges have sacrificed their whole careers for the national cause, but the political parties are not willing to forego the fruits of power. He has boycotted the polls and torn his nomination papers. Benazir has said her PPP will take part in the elections. She has said she will not hold talks with the general unless he doffs his uniform. She said this knowing full well that he was scheduled to doff it the very next day. This really means she will talk to him. Fazlur Rehman as usual was the first to announce that JUI - F will not boycott the polls. The trouble is: whereas Benazir or Nawaz Sharif see only a possibility of their getting power in Punjab or Sindh, the maulana is virtually certain of his party getting into power in NWFP, and possibly also in Balochistan, thanks to 'general sahib's' policies in those regions...