Events of the Year - World

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The Good, the Bad, the Ugly

The year 2008 was a mixed grill of the good, the bad and the ugly in the international scene. They came in various shapes, some were natural and others were man-made. The year started on a sour note for the people of Pakistan as a spill over protest from the death of Binazir Bhutto, leader, Pakistan People’s Party, PPP, and former Pakistan prime minister, on December 27, 2007 led to the death of more than 47 people. Consequently, the country’s Parliamentary election earlier scheduled for January 8 was postponed to January 18 when it was eventually held. On March 22, Yusuf Raza Gillani became the 26th prime minister of Pakistan after the parliamentary elections. On June 10, the US military air strike aimed at Taliban’s militants at the Afghanistan Pakistan border left eleven members of the Pakistani paramilitary dead and strained the relations between US and Pakistan. On August 18, Pervez Musharraf, former Pakistani president, resigned in what he claimed was aimed at putting the country’s interest above “personal bravado.” Muhammed Mian Soomro, the former senate leader, replaced him. Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir’s widower and leader of the Pakistan People’s Party, PPP, was elected Pakistan president on September 6. He won 481 out of 702 votes in the two houses of Parliament to emerge victorious. A truck bomb exploded outside the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on September 20 and killed about 50 people and wounded hundreds. The bomb went off as government leaders, including the president and prime minister were dining a few hundred yards away. The Fedayeen Islamic Group claimed responsibility for the bomb. Kenya also started the year on a sour note as about 500 people lost their lives in a tribal violence between January 1 and 4. This was a fallout of December 18, 2007 presidential election whose result was declared in favour of Mwai Kibaki Raila Odinga, the opposition candidate and his supporters organised a violent protest against it. Succour came to the people of Kenya on March 23, as Kibaki took a move to end the country’s political violence by presenting a bill to the Kenyan parliament to amend the country’s constitution and allow power sharing with the opposition Orange Democratic Party, ODM, led by Odinga as well as address the political violence that resulted from the December 18, 2007 presidential election. Chad became of rebel attack on February 2, when three rebel units comprising the United Force for Democracy and Development, UFDD; the Rally of Forces for Change, RFC, and the Fondamentale, a splinter group of UFDD, formed a coalition called the United Military Command and launched a commando assault on the Chadian government led by Idriss Deby. February 17, marked the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo from Serbia. The decision was received with mixed reactions by members of the UN Security Council and the European Union, EU. While the United States of America, USA, Britain, Turkey, Germany, Italy and France supported Kosovo’s independence as the world’s 195th country, Russia, China, Spain, Romanian and others were against it. Two landmark events were recorded in the world on February 19. Pasquale Condello, a member of an Italian mafia who has been on the run for 21 years, was arrested by the Italian police. Fidel Castro’s era as Cuban leader also came to an end. He resigned on February 19, 2008 as Cuban president, and Raul Castro, his brother, assumed office as the interim president. On March 2, Dmitri Medvedev, Russian president, was elected with the support of Vladimir Putin, former Russian president. On March 2, the three-month peace proposal initiated by the United States between Isreal and Palestine suffered a setback as Israel launched a military attack on Gaza, one of the disputed areas between the two countries. In retaliation, Palestine withdrew from the peace talks. On March 10, Vojislav Kostunica, former Serbian prime minister, was sacked by the parliament over disagreement on Serbia’s secession. Boris Tadic, Serbian president, ordered fresh parliamentary elections. The move by Thabo Mbeki, former South African president, to stop Jacob Zuma, former South Africa Vice-President, from contesting the 2009 presidential election was reinforced with the release of fresh charges of wrong doing against him on March 11. History was made on March 18, in the United States as David Paterson became the first African-American governor of New York. Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwean president, on March 29, faced his toughest challenge in his 28 years in power from Morgan Tsvangirai, leader, of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, in the country’s presidential election. April 2, claiming Tsvangirai declared himself winner of the country’s March 29 presidential election to have won 50.3 percent of the votes. The MDC also won majority seats in Parliament. The High Court of Zimbabwe dismissed a request by Tsvangirai that the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission, ZEC, should release the presidential election on April 14. On April 25, Zimbabwean police raided the offices of the opposition MDC and election monitors and detained many of them for protesting the conduct of the election. On May 2, the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission, ZEC, announced results of the presidential elections held on March 29, more than a month after the election was held. Official results showed that Tsvangirai defeated Mugabe with 47.9 percent of the votes to 43 percent but no party scored the mandatory votes to be declared the winner. Run-off election was fixed for June 27. But Tsvangirai withdrew from the presidential run-off in Zimbabwe on June 22 saying he could not subject his supporters to violence and intimidations from the supporters of ruling ZANU-PF party led by Mugabe. On June 25, President George Bush increased the existing US sanction against Mugabe, Zimbabwean companies and government officials. On June 27, Zimbabwean voters went to cast their votes in the run-off elections where Robert Mugabe was the sole candidate. The move by the US to compel the UN Security Council to sanction Zimbabwe failed on July 11, as China and Russia refused to vote in favour of sanction. Mugabe and Tsvangirai started peace talks to end the political crises and form a government of national unity on July 21 but these efforts have not yielded desirable results to date. The power sharing deal signed September 15, have not yielded the desirable results. On April 7, Paul Biya, Cameroonian president, for 26 years got members of the parliament to amend the country’s constitutional limitations on the tenure of the country’s president. This was to enable him seek another seven year tenure after his tenure expires in 2011.

Pope Benedict XV1 paid his First official visit to the United States on Aprill 15, where he condemned in strong terms, sex offences among Catholic priests in that country. In a parliamentary and presidential elections held on May 4, in Equatorial Guinea, President Obiang Nguema got nearly 100 percent of the votes to hang on to power as the country’s leader. The People’s Republic of China experienced its worst natural disaster on May 12 when an earthquake of 7.9 magnitudes stroked the Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces in western China and killed over 68,000 people. Terrorist attack in China on August 4, raised world concern for security in the last Olympic Games held in China. A Muslim group based in western China had launched an attack on policemen who were jogging and killed 16 of them with just four days to the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. Mauritania was on August 6, thrown into political crisis two years after its presidential election as a group of soldiers seized power in a bloodless coup d’etat. Mohammed Abdallahi, the Mauritanian president was accused of being dictatorial. Barack Obama, US president-elect, began his journey to victory on June 3, when he became the first African-American to secure the nomination as a major party’s presidential candidate. He got 2,154 delegates ahead of Hilary Clinton to secure the Democratic party’s presidential ticket. On June 7, Hilary Clinton suspended her campaign for the Democratic Party’s presidential ticket and endorsed Obama for the presidential ticket. Obama picked Joe Biden as his presidential running mate on August 23. History was made in the US on November 4 as Obama, won the presidential election against John McCain taking 338 electoral votes to McCain’s 161. He became the first African American to emerge as the president of the United States. Obama, US president-elect, on December 1, announced his National Security Team and members of his cabinet. He nominated Hilary Clinton, his opponent in the Democratic Party primaries as secretary of state; Eric Holder Jr, former deputy attorney general as Attorney General; Janet Napolitano, Arizona governor, as secretary of Homeland and Security; James Jones,a retired marine commandant, as National Security Adviser. October 7 was a sad day for Thailand as an anti-government protest resulted in the death of two people and over 400 wounded after a clash with security forces. The protest was to prevent the inauguration of Somchai Wongsawat as prime minister. The people of Congo Democratic Republic woke up to a heavy fighting in the north eastern area of the country on October 27. Rebel forces loyal to a Tutsi general, Laurent Nkunda, advanced towards Goma, the capital of Kivu province. The Rebels, however, announced a ceasefire on October 29 after they advanced a few miles to Goma. On November 7, African leaders and UN officials held an emergency meeting in Nairobi to find a lasting solution to the crisis in Congo DR. An agreement calling for an immediate end to the fighting was signed. The Indian people were on November 20 thrown into mourning as more than 170 people were killed and about 300 wounded in series of attacks on Mumbai, the commercial hub that attracts a lot of foreign tourists. Two five star hotels, a hospital, a train station and a cinema centre were targets of the attack. On December 1, the Indian-Pakistani relationship became strained the more after India accused Pakistani militants of being responsible for November 20 terrorist attack on Mumbai which killed more than 170 people. Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held on December 7, in Ghana. But the presidential elections did not produce a winner as the two leading candidates John Atta-Mills of the National Democratic Congress, NDC, and Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party, NPP, failed to score the mandatory 50 percent to be declared winner. A run-off election with scheduled to hold December 28. Pirates in the Somalia waterways who have made shipping difficult on that sea route on November 18, hijacked a Saudi Arabian oil tanker anchored about 480 miles off the coast of Somalia. It was loaded with about two million barrels of oil worth $100 million. On December 14, the political crisis in Somalia worsened as Abdullahi Yusuf, Somalian president, sacked Hassan Hussein, Somalian prime minister. But the parliament voted against his sack. On the same day, Muntadar al-Zaidi, an Iraqi journalist, showed President George Bush of the United States how enraged he was with the US led war in Iraq by throwing his shoes at him during a press conference in Iraq. Guinea was thrown into political crisis on December 23 as a group of military men took over power in a coup d’tat following the death of Lausana Conte, the Guinea’s president.