



An Initiative of The Researchers

e- Newsletter

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Vol – II Edition – II

April, 2007

I. Gender

I Women & Politics

1. World's Most Female-Dominated Cabinet Appointed in Finland

On April 19, President of Finland Tarja Halonen formally appointed the most female-dominated Cabinet in the world with 60 percent women. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's Cabinet will consist of his Centre Party, the Conservatives, the Greens and the Swedish People's Party. Together the parties will occupy 125 of the 200 seats in the unicameral Finnish Parliament Eduskunta.

The Cabinet will consist of 12 women and eight men, which according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is a world record. The women ministers will be in charge of the portfolios of agriculture, transport, health, environment, interior, education, justice, labour and European affairs and immigration.

II Women & Economics

1. ILO Representative Highlights Predicament of Working Women

A Seminar on : "Women's Employment Concerns and Working Conditions in Pakistan" was organized by ILO and Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights (PCHR) at the Archaeology Department of the University of Peshawar.

Representative of ILO, Dr, Tauqeer Shah stated that lack of basic infrastructure to ensure women's participation in services, discrimination in salary and harassment at workplace are key factors that restrict Pakistani women from going for a job. Dr. Shah said that the Government did not have a single scheme to provide women with transportation to and from their workplaces despite the fact that traveling through transport in the country is a Herculean task. He said the country also lacked required number of day-care centers for the children of the working women through the Constitution provided by the same. In this regard Dr. Tauqeer stated that Pakistan's Constitution guarantees that every office with a certain number of women workers must have day-care centers which are indeed a food for thought for the Parliamentarians.

Dr. Tauqeer said that women constitute 49 percent of the country's population but only 20 percent of its labour force is employed. Regarding literacy rate of the workingmen and women, he said 49 of the former while 28 percent of the later were literate. Another obstacle being faced by the workingwomen of Pakistan, he said, is the glass ceiling, a concept that refers to barriers faced by women who attempt, or aspire to attain senior positions (as well as higher salary levels) in corporations, government, education, and non-profit organizations.

2. Gender Inequality Continues, At Great Cost - Almost \$80 Billion per Year in Asia-Pacific Alone

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) said in its latest Survey that inequality and discrimination against women costs Asia Pacific economies almost US\$80 billion a year due to restrictions in access to employment and education. The Economic and Social Survey for Asia and the Pacific 2007 said the costs were occurring despite considerable gains in reducing discrimination and improving education in recent decades, including in women's life expectancy, lower infant mortality rates, better literacy rates and greater female political participation. But the Survey says many gains are often patchy and uneven across the region with South Asia economies among those likely to benefit the most from reductions in discrimination.

The Survey also believes that major changes can be made at little cost, and calls for political

commitment to support women and girls in areas as basic as primary education. But **disparities exist over a wide range of areas – from low access to education and health services, to economic opportunities and through to political participation.** In North and Central Asia, South Asia and the Pacific island countries findings show the female-to-male ratio in the population is deteriorating due to women's inadequate access to health services. Across the region female primary school enrolment can be as much as 26% lower than that of males. This has significant implications in terms of productivity as well as women's health by imposing additional economic costs, both direct and indirect.

If female participation was placed on a par with United States, India's gross domestic product (GDP) would be lifted by 4.2% a year and growth would be lifted by 1.08 percentage points – a gain to the economy of US\$19 billion.

The social costs of gender inequality also arise in cases of **domestic violence.** Such violence often has a long lasting psychological impact, together with a lowering of women's self-esteem, productivity and wages and destroying marriages – “with all the costs that children ultimately pay.”

The Survey calls for a range of recommendations to enable the region to benefit economically from the elimination of gender discrimination. The recommendations include:

- § Better access to education through free primary education as well as scholarships to girls.
- § Better access to health care that may include initiatives that range from mobile clinics to the promotion of pro-poor growth policies to address malnutrition and encourage condom use to prevent HIV/AIDS.
- § Better access to education and health should be the priority area of concern in order to promote better access to economic facilities

III Women & HR

1. Child Marriage Fact Sheet

Most countries have declared 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage. Despite the sanctions on child marriage, however, more than 100 million girls are expected to marry in the next decade. While the practice has decreased globally over the last 30 years, it remains common in rural areas and among the poorest of the poor. Impoverished parents often believe that child marriage will protect their daughters. In fact, however, it results in lost development opportunities, limited life options and poor health.

Child marriage is a health issue as well as a human rights violation. Because it takes place almost exclusively within the context of poverty and gender inequality, it also has social, cultural and economic dimensions. Married adolescents have been neglected from the global adolescent reproductive health agenda because of the incorrect assumption that their married status ensures them a safe passage to adulthood.

It is no coincidence that the same countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East that have high rates of child marriage are those with:

- § High poverty rates, birth rates and death rates
- § Greater incidence of conflict and civil strife
- § Lower levels of overall development, including schooling, employment, health care

And conversely:

The East Asian “Miracles” like Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand that have successfully eradicated the harmful traditional practice of child marriage are characterized by:

- § Economic growth and opportunity
- § Declines in birth and death rates
- § Increase in educational and employment options for girls

Global and regional trends in child marriage: The practice of girls marrying young is most common in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. In other parts of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, marriage at or shortly after puberty is common among some groups. In parts of Western and Eastern Africa and Southern Asia, the marriage of girls before puberty is not unusual.

In some countries, more than half of all girls under 18 are married. Specifically, the percentage of girls (aged 15 to 19) married by age 18 is:

- § 76 percent in Niger
- § 74 per cent in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- § 54 per cent in Afghanistan

- § 50 per cent in India
- § 51 per cent in Bangladesh

While age at marriage is generally increasing, it is not uncommon to find girls married before age 15.

- § In Ethiopia and some areas of West Africa, some girls get married as early as age 7
- § In Bangladesh, 45 per cent of young women between 25 and 29 were married by age 15
- § A 1998 survey in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh found that nearly 14 per cent of girls were married between the ages of 10 and 14
- § In Kebbi State of northern Nigeria, the average age of marriage for girls is just over 11 years, compared to a national average of 17

Child marriage curtails girls' education: Studies show a correlation between girls' educational levels and age at marriage: Higher median age at first marriage directly correlates with higher rates of girls in school. Conversely, getting and keeping girls in school may be one of the best ways to foster later, chosen marriage.

IV Books/Reports/Articles on Gender

1. Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Girls

Author: UNFPA

No. of pages: 149

Publication date: 2002

Publisher: UNFPA

A report from the consultative meeting held in Bratislava, Slovakia, on 13-15 November 2001. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: first, to examine and explore the impact of armed conflict on women and girls; and, second, to formulate strategies and tools to ensure that reproductive health programmes accurately reflect this population's needs, specifically by addressing them through a comprehensive, gender-sensitive approach.

Complete report is available in PDF format on following link:

http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/46_filename_armedconflict_women.pdf

II. Democracy Watch

I Presidential Elections

1. **IRI Survey and the Position of President Pervez Musharraf**

According to the latest survey conducted by IRI, 54.2 percent of respondents approved the **job that President Perez Musharraf is doing**, down nearly nine percent from his approval rating in IRI's September 2006 poll. In a breakdown by province, Musharraf's approval rating was the highest in Sindh (62.6%) and Balochistan (61%). In Punjab his approval rating is 54% while in NWFP 53%. There is 22.2 percent drop in his approval rating in Punjab.

Despite his declining approval rating, IRI's survey found that Musharraf remained the number one **choice as the leader** best able to address the country's problems. In a province breakdown, Musharraf led the other contenders in all of the provinces except for Sindh, where Benazir Bhutto received 55.9 percent. Nawaz Sharif came in second in Punjab with 22.1 percent.

IRI's polling also found that the majority of respondents felt that Musharraf should not continue as **both head of the Army and President** (29.9% support; 55.6% opposed). Since IRI's June 2006 poll, the percentage supporting dropped 19 percent while those opposing increased by 14 percent.

IRI's poll also found that a plurality of voters opposed to **Musharraf using the current parliament to re-elect** himself President, with 43 percent agreeing and 47.7 percent disagreeing. Nearly a third (28.5%) said that they "strongly disagreed," showing a high level of intensity in this opposition. The survey also found that support for re-election dropped depending upon the circumstances under which the election occurred. If the current parliament conducted the re-election, 47.2 percent would support and 43.4 percent would oppose, while if President Musharraf failed to resign his position as head of the army, 34.9 percent would support re-election and 53.2 percent would oppose.

IRI's poll also probed the **overall popularity of leaders**, asking voters to rate them on a scale from one to five, with one being the lowest and five being the highest. Benazir Bhutto, Pervez Musharraf, and Nawaz Sharif occupy the top three places at an average score of 3.24, 3.21, and 3.08, respectively. President Musharraf declined in this rating scale (he occupied the top spot in September 2006 at 3.47) falling to second place behind Benazir Bhutto

2. **Rise of Jihadist Forces Weakens Musharraf: Stratfor**

Islamist and jihadist forces in Pakistan are taking advantage of the ongoing legal crisis sparked by the removal of the Chief Justice, which has weakened President Pervez Musharraf's government, according to a commentary.

Stratfor, a US news intelligence service, writes that as a result, the influence of religious extremists and radical Islamists is gradually spreading beyond the Pashtun areas along the Pak-Afghan border. The Government's cautious approach to these developments could further weaken it as well as embolden those who promote religious conservatism. Recent events in Pakistan involving radical and militant Islamists show that these religious elements are trying to exploit Pakistan's political instability to their advantage.

According to Stratfor the boldest attempt by Islamist extremists is the one by female students of the Jamia Hafsa. Their action demonstrates that Islamists can challenge the Government's writ even in the capital. Making the event even more significant was the defensive posture of the Islamabad administration to the crisis.

Strafor believes that the Government is worried that a crackdown against Islamist vigilantes under the current domestic political conditions could exacerbate unrest. Islamabad has also declined to use force against the vigilantes to avoid giving the impression that it is siding with those allegedly engaged in vice. While this may have prevented an ugly confrontation in the short term, the Government's defensive attitude will only contribute to the growing crisis of governance in the long run, the analysis predicts, arguing that religious extremists all over the country could be emboldened by Islamabad's timid response. This could add to the unrest in the country. The spread of Talibanisation from Pakistan's border regions into its heartland could force Musharraf into sharing power with his secular opponents to salvage his own political position and roll back religious extremism.

3. Commonwealth Wants End to Uniform in 2007

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon said on 25 April that the Group is keeping a watch on Pakistan for signs of democratic progress ahead of a year-end deadline for change. Pakistan was suspended from the 53-nation organisation after General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a military coup in 1999. Pakistan was reinstated five years later in May 2004 after intense lobbying, with the Commonwealth noting progress in restoring democracy. But McKinnon said the Group is watching reforms in Pakistan and had earmarked an end-of-year deadline for General Musharraf to stop holding dual posts as President and Army Chief. "Pakistan is no longer suspended, but it still remains on the agenda,"

McKinnon further said that the Commonwealth leaders have noted Musharraf has "done a lot to bring a degree of normalcy and democracy back to the country. But the one thing that they are concerned about is that President Musharraf is still holding the office of President and Operational Commander of the armed forces". He said that Commonwealth leaders would expect him to divide those two offices by the end of this year.

II General Elections 2007

1. IRI Survey – Parliamentary Elections

Asking about the upcoming elections, IRI's survey indicates that there is a high degree of interest in the upcoming elections, with 82 percent saying that they **intended to vote**.

When asked **which party they would vote for**, PPPP narrowly led the field with 25.7 percent, a nearly four percent up-tick from the 22 percent the PPPP garnered in IRI's September 2006 poll. PML-Q was a close second with 24.3 percent, down three percent from previous polling. PMLN came in third with 15.1 percent, up from 13.8 percent. In a breakdown by province, PML-Q led in Balochistan, NWFP, and Punjab, while PPPP led in Sindh. In Punjab, the largest of Pakistan's provinces containing the majority of the population and considered to be PML-Q's base of support, the party was down 8.6 percent, while PML-N and PPPP were up 4.7 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively.

IRI's poll also found that by a large margin, voters preferred PML-N to form a coalition with PPPP as opposed to MMA. A **coalition between PPPP and PML-N** was also preferred by a plurality of PML-N voters. 41.4% supported PML-N coalition with PPPP while only 14.1% were in support of coalition between PML-N and MMA. It was a constant theme throughout IRI's poll, voters prefer **cooperation and joint-effort between parties with a commonality of purpose**. For example, large percentages want the Baloch and Pashtoon nationalist parties to work together, especially in NWFP and Balochistan, where these two ethnicities are prevalent. Along the same lines, voters would also prefer a **wider coalition between PPPP and the nationalist parties**.

Finally, when asked about a hypothetical election **match-up between coalitions of PPPP/PML-N, PML-Q/MQM, and MMA**, voters overwhelmingly chose a PPPP/PML-N coalition. The PPPP/PML-N coalition also would sweep all of the provinces except for Balochistan, beating PML-Q/MQM handily even in Punjab. 38.9% voters supported PPPP/PML-N coalition, 14.4% supported the PML-Q/MQM coalition while only 8.4% supported MMA.

2. Election Commission of Pakistan/Electoral Rolls

§ ECP Asked to Address Parties' Concerns over Voters List

Five mainstream political parties have asked the Election Commission of Pakistan to provide preliminary voters list to all political parties for scrutiny of the newly prepared computerised electoral rolls during display period. All parties agreed to raise the issues in the Parliament through a joint resolution and vowed to amend the rules if needed to facilitate political parties in getting the lists.

Parties made this demand at multi-party roundtable arranged by National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Centre for Civic Education Pakistan (CCE). Leaders and members of Pakistan Muslim League (Q), Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League (N), Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) and Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) participated in the roundtable.

§ Computerised Voters' List to be Displayed from May

Election Commission Secretary Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad while addressing a workshop said that the final electoral lists are being computerised and will be displayed at more than 50,000 sites in May. He said that free, fair and impartial elections are an imperative part of democracy, and added that he would use international standard equipment in the forthcoming General Elections to ensure transparency.

§ **Transparent Ballot Boxes Ordered**

To fulfil one of the demands, set by PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto for striking a deal with General Pervez Musharraf, a Canadian firm has been asked to make 600,000 transparent ballot boxes. These ballot boxes will be made of light plastic and ballot papers would be visible in them. Transparent ballot boxes are double in size than those iron boxes, earlier being used during elections. For the Punjab province 275,000 boxes will be made, while remaining provinces will get 325,000 boxes. Pakistan will receive these transparent boxes in the first week of August 2007. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has provided funds to the Government of Pakistan for making these ballot boxes. The Canadian fund, Code, will also provide wooden cabins for casting votes. Only one person will be able to stand in the cabin at a time. Beside these cabins, vote can also be cast at public places, parks and high ways, and people would be able to watch the vote casting process. According to sources, a proposal for installing close circuit cameras at polling stations is also being considered.

CEC Qazi Muhammad Farooq has directed all four provinces to make arrangements for sorting these ballot boxes in districts.

3. Government-PPP Deal

One of the major issues highlighted in media during the month of April was the Government-PPP deal. Throughout the month, there were news which reflected that a deal between Musharraf and PPP has been done. While there were contradictions in this regard as well. Before General Elections 2007, the issue carries great deal of significance. Following are few developments, statements and contradictions in this regard:

Anti-PPP NAB Official Shunted: On April 4, the Government amended the NAB Ordinance to create the post of Deputy Chairman for Afzal, to facilitate him in pursuing the corruption cases against Benazir Bhutto. Afzal was the right-hand man of Saifur Rehman, who had headed the Ehtesab Bureau under Nawaz Sharif. The present Government brought Afzal back to NAB to pursue the cases pending against Bhutto in foreign countries, including Switzerland and Spain. However, Information Minister Muhammad Ali Durrani said the cases against Benazir Bhutto would be pursued in accordance with the law. But another Minister, who did not want to be named, said there was a possibility that the Government wanted to convey a "positive" message to Benazir Bhutto by transferring Afzal to the relatively "dormant" position of principal secretary to the Punjab Governor, who once headed NAB. Railways Minister Shaikh Rashid Ahmed has many a time hinted at a rapprochement between the President and the PPP Chairperson while speaking on TV talk shows.

Musharraf Said No Deal with PPP: President General Pervez Musharraf during an interview with Al-Arabia television on April 20 rejected that the Government had any deal in place with the Pakistan People's Party and announced that elections would be held this year in a fair manner.

Pervaiz Elahi Ruled-Out PPP-Govt Deal: On 29 April 2007, Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi ruled out any deal with the Pakistan People's Party and said the Pakistan Muslim League would contest the upcoming General Elections on the basis of the development works carried out during the last four years. He said the opposition was trying to create confusion by spreading rumours of deal with the PPP. He further said that we would not make an electoral alliance with the PPP as the Pakistan Muslim League, and the PPP follow different ideologies.

PPP-Govt Talks Stalled on Two Issues: The back-channel talks between the Pakistan People's Party and the establishment has ended in stalemate over the issues of a constitutional amendment barring a politician from becoming Prime Minister for a third time and President-in-uniform. In a meeting in Dubai, the two sides failed to reach an agreement over the major proposals for a power sharing formula after the General Elections. Makhdoom Amin Fahim and Rehman Malik represented the PPP at the Dubai talks, while the establishment team was led by National Security Council Adviser Tariq Aziz Warriach and a senior military officer assisted him. The representatives of the establishment told the PPP that their side had already given sufficient concessions to the PPP high command and they were unable to offer them anything additional at the moment. The PPP team was told that the party's 'non-cooperation' might compel the Government to tighten noose around the top PPP leadership again with regard to alleged corruption cases against them. The aides of Benazir Bhutto and President Musharraf have reported back to their bosses and both the teams would likely to hold another meeting soon in which they are expected to rephrase their stances,"

Benazir Ready to Become Prime Minister with Musharraf as President: Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto announced during an interview with Sunday Times that she would accept General Musharraf as President after the 2007 General Elections. She showered praises on Musharraf for his policies to protect minorities and women. Benazir hoped that Musharraf would secure a second term

as President and by seeking re-election from the current assemblies. However, she said it would be difficult to work with General if she becomes Prime Minister. In her first ever interview with any foreign newspaper, after she confirmed the direct contact with the military establishment in Pakistan, Benazir indicated that Musharraf would be getting re-elected from the same parliament and her party may not raise any objections.

Nawaz may Say 'Goodbye' to Benazir: Relations between former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif may sour after the PPP Chairperson said in an interview that she was ready to become Prime Minister with General Pervez Musharraf as President. The PML-N Chief is convinced that the time has come to say "goodbye" to Benazir after their relationship reached the stage where they can no longer work together. Sources believe that the so-called Charter of Democracy signed on May 14, 2006 might be the first causality of this new development followed by the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD).

§ Analysis by The News

Whether or not Benazir Bhutto finally goes for a 'deal' one thing is sure that this term has acquired an irreverent connotation. Further, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the local leadership to defend the exiled leader's deal these days. It goes without saying that each time she speaks on the subject, her party leadership back home finds itself on tenterhooks, coming up with unending and even hollow explanations. From Sherry Rehman to Farhatullah Babar, Pervez Ashraf, Raza Rabbani and even Makhdoom Amin Fahim, everybody is out-rightly denying the possibility of the party's U-turn on a position it took after the 1999 military takeover. They are often seen telling the every-inquisitive journalists, "She has been quoted out of context, PPP leader has been misquoted or that her statement has been twisted." But, a common adage: where there's smoke, there's fire; appears to be fitting in the given situation.

By going through the details of a string of her interviews in recent days, it becomes crystal clear that she no more minces words to speak on the possible deal with President General Musharraf. She went a step ahead while giving an interview to 'The Times', saying she was prepared to work as a Prime Minister with General Musharraf as President, something she never uttered publicly before. Formerly, the PPP leader would also demand of President Musharraf to quit, alleging there is no possibility of free and fair elections in his presence. But she does not think way now: she is willing to work with him. On the tricky question of the President's re-election, initially, she not only opposed it, but also warned that the opposition would quit the assemblies en masse. But now, she is talking of going to courts in case of such an eventually.

On his part, President Musharraf has stopped attacking her in his speeches at public meetings. A clear sign of rapprochement indeed between the two sides! Political scientists foresee a split in the party if the biggest ever U-turn is taken. PPP had bagged 8.8 million votes in the previous election, but its popularity could nosedive in case of a deal in the upcoming polls.

4. Political Parties' News

§ PML-Q Searching Candidates for Polls

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q) has asked its provincial chapters to furnish list of possible candidates for the upcoming General Elections at the earliest. The party's provincial presidents have been directed to complete their homework, keeping in view the performance of the incumbent members of the national and provincial assemblies.

Similarly, the federating units' party heads are also to propose names for several National Assembly seats on which the PML had not fielded its candidates in the 2002 elections. The decision to this effect was taken during a meeting of the Central Working Committee (CWC).

Encouraged by President General Pervez Musharraf's assertion that the assemblies would complete their term and elections be held on schedule, the PML leadership has given instructions to the provincial party heads to take senior vice presidents and vice-presidents into confidence on finalising the lists of probable. These lists would be taken up by the party's parliamentary board, yet to be formed, to make the final lists of the candidates.

Naming the candidates will not be an easy task in the backdrop of long-standing differences among senior party leaders, particularly those who merged their parties with ruling PML in 2004.

§ MMA for Convening APC in Country

The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) supported to convene the All Parties Conference (APC) in the

country rather than abroad and decided to reach an understanding with all opposition parties in this regard.

One of the members of the Supreme Council told the participants that the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and the Tehrik-e-Insaf endorsed the four-point agenda however there is a need to develop a consensus among other opposition parties. The participants agreed that the expected APC should be convened in the country due to on-going critical judicial crises of the country rather than abroad. The MMA leadership is likely to contact the PML-N leadership in order to take them into confidence for holding the APC in the country and then it would reach an understanding with all the stakeholders to announce the date for the APC.

§ **PML-N Releases Report on Mega Corruption Scandals**

On instructions of Mian Nawaz Sharif Chief of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) a 90-page report titled Loot sale - mega corruption scandals of General Musharrafs Government was launched here on 21 April, which includes scandals relating to:

- The privatization attempt of Pakistan Steel Mills (PS)
- Privatization of the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL)
- Privatization of Habib Bank Limited (HBL)
- Purchase of Chinese locomotives
- Land grabbing by agencies
- Scandals in sugar, oil and cement sectors
- The ongoing judicial crisis

Additional Secretary Information PML-N Punjab Bilal Butt, Advocate highlighting mega scandals in Pakistan during the last seven years, charged the present Government was the most corrupt in the country's history. Quoting the report he said that the current electricity crisis in the country is the result of failure of Government to initiate even a single power generation project during last seven years. This is just beginning of the summer and there is 2,000 megawatt shortage of power. When the summer will reach the peak, the shortage will touch 5,000 megawatt and hurt the already volatile economy. The report charged that in Steel Mills case some vested interests earned Rs 110 billion. It said different acts of omission and commission were also witnessed in the privatization process.

§ **MQM Decides to Go National**

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) has decided to field its candidates from across the country in the next General Elections. According to a press statement released by the MQM's London secretariat on April 3, the decision was taken by the party's coordination committee at a meeting held in the British capital. Dr Imran Farooq, the MQM's convener, chaired the meeting.

§ **MQM Likely to Announce Polls in May**

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) will likely announce the names of its candidates for the forthcoming elections by the end of May. Party sources said the MQM's coordination committee had sent a list of registered voters and "influential" candidates across the country to MQM Chief Altaf Hussain in London.

The MQM is keen to clinch maximum seats from the Punjab and the MQM central leaders are in contact with the major political personalities in the country. An MQM official said that the MQM will formally start its election campaign once the party leadership finalises the names of the candidates. He added by saying, "we want to tell people that the MQM is a national party. It is not confined to any cast, creed or a geographical location. Its manifesto is to empower common people and give them due share in national politics".

MQM Punjab Information Secretary Ansar Buttar said the party organisation would soon be completed in the Punjab and the MQM adopts a foolproof system to select election candidates. Unlike other parties, he said, the MQM did not sell its tickets. He said the MQM bore the expenses incurred on election campaign and when we find an MQM parliamentarian not serving people, we ask him/her to resign.

5. Other News

§ **Benazir Bhutto Slams Nawaz Sharif in Revised Autobiography**

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has attacked the exiled Premier Nawaz Sharif in her revised autobiography published in London. Without mincing her words, she has frankly termed him the "political son" of military dictator General Ziaul Haq who was in a favour of Talebanisation of Pakistani society during his second term by becoming "Mullah Omar".

Benazir Bhutto has also made a startling disclosure that had her brother Murtaza returned to Pakistan during her first Government in 1988, he might have been imprisoned by the then Chief Minister of Punjab, Nawaz Sharif, on the behest of the military establishment with the blessing of Ghulam Ishaq Khan. Because of this growing fear about the fate of Murtaza, Benazir Bhutto has recalled that she had even talked to Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to seek asylum for Murtaza in London and she had agreed to her request.

According to Benazir Bhutto, after the sacking of her Government in 1996, Nawaz Sharif became Prime Minister, and Pakistan was moving backward. She said Nawaz Sharif was seeking to give constitutional cover to his "Islamisation" bill and publicly praising the Taleban society as one for Pakistan to emulate.

§ **Punjab Government Released Rs 730m under Election Funds**

The Punjab Government has released Rs 730 million to various districts for development projects under the election campaign, the first ever in two decades. However, measures have been mapped out to cut the funds to be issued from Rs 30 million to Rs 15 million following a scarcity. Punjab Government approved Rs 730 millions to ensure completion of various development projects to strengthen party vote for the upcoming General Elections. The Finance Department released the said amount as supplementary grants to various districts, to be transferred to the concerned districts accounts.

The Finance Department on the directive of the Chief Minister's Secretariat released Rs 300 million for six districts, Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal, Gujrat and Faisalabad for establishment of model villages. As many as Rs 6 million was issued to Rawalpindi to up-grade schools and Rs 85 million to set up a district headquarter hospital at Mandi Bhuddin. In the same month, Rs 22 million was issued to Sargodha for the up-gradation of schools, Rs 2 million for the carpeting of roads in Gulberg, Lahore, Rs 16 million to Bahawalpur for the construction of four roads and Rs 6 million to Faisalabad for the up-gradation of schools. Khushab, Mandi Bhuddin, Khenawal and Dera Ghazi Khan received Rs 80 million for its education sector. The Finance Department released Rs 19 million to Rahim Yar Khan to build roads, Rs 15 million to Muzaffargarh, Rs 19 million to Sialkot, Rs 27 million to Attock and Rs 20 million to Bahawalpur district. During April, the finance department issued Rs 30 million to Mandi Bhuddin, Rs 24 million to Kasur for roads and drainage, Rs 50 million to Sialkot and Rs 9 million to NA-125 of Lahore for the laying of sewerage. The Punjab Government has earmarked the remaining Rs 15 million, to be provided to the districts concerned in the next budget.

III. Governance at Large

I Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary – Chronology of Events during April

§ **3 April 2007 (Hearing):** The Supreme Judicial Council adjourned hearing of presidential reference against non-functional Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry till April 13. Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan, leading lawyer assisting the non-functional Chief Justice in the reference, gave his arguments for open trial in the SJC proceedings, which were continued for an hour.

§ **13th April 2007 (Hearing):** Strict security measures were taken in Islamabad on the hearing of presidential reference against non-functional Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. Large number of political workers of Pakistan Peoples Party, Muslim League (N), Jammat-I-Islami, Pakistan Tahreek-i-Insaaf, ANP and JUI(Sahibzada Fazal Karim Group) gathered outside Supreme Court building. According to Government officials possibly the Government Lawyer Wasim Sajjad will give the evidences after the completion of Aitzaz Ahsan arguments. Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) adjourned the hearing of presidential reference against non-functional Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry till April 18. The lawyer of Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry Barrister Atizaz Ahsan argued about the position of three SJC judges Justice Javed Iqbal, Justice Chaudhry Iftikhar and Justice Abdul Hamid Dogar.

§ Full text of reference against CJP Justice Chaudhry was leaked to press on 19 March 2007. According to BBC, **main charges against CJP Justice Chaudhry** are as following:

- CJP forced Government officials to unlawfully help his son get admission to medical college and then had him appointed as Grade 18 Police Officer.
- CJP was entitled to use a 1700cc car, but he used a 3000cc Mercedes and kept several other vehicles in his use in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi.
- CJP required more protocol than he deserved. He required senior officials to receive him at airports and was also using helicopters and planes to go to private functions.
- Use of a BMW Car "RAZIA 1" by his family
- Different Oral and Written Orders in cases worth 55 million PKR
- Asking for more perks than he was eligible for.

§ **April 18 (Hearing):** Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry while expressing no-trust in the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) comprising "biased judges" filed a petition in the Supreme Court (SC), seeking an immediate stay against the SJC hearings. The petition also challenged the presidential reference against him, its maintainability, competence of the SJC, conduct of three "biased SJC judges", the decision of his suspension and sending him on forced leave and the appointment of an acting CJ. The SJC rejected an application by the CJP's lawyers, seeking an early decision on alleged biased judges in the council, saying the judgement would be given after hearing all legal objections of the defence. The SJC adjourned the hearing till April 24.

§ **April 24 (Hearing):** Pakistan's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) - a panel of top judges - has adjourned the hearing into the case against the suspended Chief Justice, Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry till 2 May. The SJC adjourned the case after Supreme Court Justice M. Raza Khan recommended that a larger panel of judges hear the case against Chandhry. Thousands of lawyers and opposition party leader protested outside the Supreme Court building in the Pakistani capital Islamabad as the case against Chaudhry. Protestors shouted slogans in favour of the suspended Judge and against the Government and Musharraf. The ruling party PML-Q also held a rally in support of the Government.

§ **Government Witnesses in CJ Case:** The Government has lined up several high-profile witnesses, including a Provincial Chief Minister and a Federal Cabinet member, to be produced before the Supreme Judicial Council against Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. Those who have already conveyed their willingness to stand in the witness box against the Chief Justice of Pakistan include Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Yousaf, Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Sherpao, Secretary Interior Syed Kamal Shah, Federal Ombudsman Javed Sadiq Malik, Secretary Establishment Division Syed Tariq Ali Bukhari, Commandant Police Academy Ziaul Hasan, Justice (Retd) Mushtaq Ahmad, the prosecutor-general of the Punjab, and the director-generals protocol of Sindh and the Punjab. There are some other witnesses will also be produced before the SJC by the Government.

§ **Day-to-Day Hearing of CJP's Case from May 7:** Acting Chief Justice Rana Bhagwandas on April 28 formed a five-member bench of the Supreme Court (SC) to hear Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's petition against a presidential reference against him and 35 other identical petitions. The bench had representation from all four provinces, and it would begin hearing the petitions from May 7 on a day-to-day basis.

II Issue of Lal Masjid

§ The administration of Jamia Hafsa on April 3 selected **10 Qazis (Judges) to issue decrees on various religious issues**. Jamia Hafsa Principal Maulana Abdul Aziz said that the establishment of a Shariat court at Lal Masjid and implementation of Shariat would be announced during the 'Shariat and Glory of Jihad Conference' on April 6.

§ Maulana Abdul Aziz, prayer leader of Lal Masjid and Principal of Jamia Hafsa madrassa, announced the **enforcement of Sharia in the premises of Jamia Fareedia, Jamia Hafsa and the Government's Children's Library** on April 6 during the 'Shariat and Glory of Jihad Conference'. Maulana Abdul Aziz warned the Government of suicide attacks if it launched an operation against the madrassas. The Lal Masjid prayer leader gave the Government a month's deadline to close brothels and gambling dens and the sale and purchase of liquor in Islamabad. He further said that if the Government planned action against the madrassas as a "last option", the madrassa students would resort to suicide attacks as "their last option". State Minister for Information Tariq Azeem denounced Aziz's threat and urged him not to force the Government to take stern action.

§ President General **Pervez Musharraf invited clerics to talks** to resolve the issue of extremist madrassas in Islamabad that have threatened suicide bombings if the Government acts against them. He said the Government could take action against the mosque and madrassa at any time, but it wanted to resolve the issue amicably.

§ In the **first ever high-level contact between the Government and administration of Lal Masjid**, PML President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain called on Lal Masjid Imam Maulana Abdul Aziz and his brother Ghazi Abdur Rashid the night of 7 April to talk out the row with the mosque over the enforcement of Sharia. Shujaat visited Lal Masjid accompanied by a delegation and stayed there until the morning of April 8. The focus of discussion was about the announcement of the Lal Masjid administration that it would enforce Sharia and set up a Qazi court was the focus of the discussion. Maulana Abdul Aziz informed the PML leader that they had only enforced Sharia in the Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia madrassas, contrary to the impression that they wanted to Talibanise the entire society.

§ At a high-level meeting on April 9, chaired by President General Pervez Musharraf, it was decided Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, President of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), to **continue talks** with the administration of Lal Masjid to end the tense standoff in the capital peacefully.

§ A **petition was moved in the Supreme Court (SC)** on April 9 against Lal Masjid imam Maulana Abdul Aziz and Jamia Hafsa principal Abdul Rashid Ghazi for setting up a Qazi Court and forming a private army against the state. The petition moved by Shahid Orakzai, a freelance journalist, has been filed under Article 184 (3) of the Constitution as a matter of public importance and urges the court to restrict the activities of Aziz and Ghazi.

§ On April 10, **the Lal Masjid administration relaunched its website on an international domain** in two days after it was blocked by the Government. Deputy Information Minister Tariq Azeem said that we will block anything that promotes religious hatred and calls for suicide attacks. He said that this cannot be tolerated.

§ Pakistan Muslim League (PML) President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain held **another round of talks** with the administration of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa here on April 11, saying "good progress" had been made and there could be a breakthrough in three or four days. The talks were held at the residence of Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and also attended by PML Secretary General Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed.

§ On April 13, Maulana Abdul Aziz stated that our purpose is to put pressure on the Government for the imposition of the Islamic system in the country, we don't want bloodshed, but want a peaceful revolution. He further said that our doors are open for **negotiations**, but we will not abandon our stand

to impose the Islamic system in the entire country.

§ On April 14, the **Lal Masjid administration refused to set any time frame for talks**, saying that first the Government must start rebuilding seven mosques here that were demolished in January. Shujaat had agreed that first the seven demolished mosques should be reconstructed and the Government would take visible actions for enforcement of Sharia.

§ The administration of Lal Masjid on April 15 vowed to **stop the sale of alcohol** in the federal capital.

§ On April 16, the Lal Masjid pulled out of talks with the Government, after **two army helicopters hovered over the mosque** compound in the morning taking pictures and spraying a gas on madrassa students, in what the mosque sees as a prelude to an operation. Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Sherpao said that the helicopters were on regular flights and they might have deviated from their routes. He said the Lal Masjid clerics were in search of “issues” to use against the Government.

§ On April 17, the Lal Masjid administration withdrew its decision to suspend talks with the Government and announced that they had **resumed negotiations** to try and find a peaceful end to the standoff in the capital.

§ Thousands of Pakistanis staged **rallies in major cities** on April 20 to condemn extremism and exploitation in the name of Islam. Rights activists organised simultaneous protests in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi and Peshawar to denounce extremist actions by students of the Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia madrassas, affiliated to Lal Masjid, in the capital.

§ Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Pakistan Muslim League President, told a meeting chaired by President Gen Pervez Musharraf on April 22 that negotiations with the Lal Masjid administration have been successful, and **the matter would be settled peacefully**.

§ Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, President of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML), declared on April 23 that the stand-off with Lal Masjid in the capital had been “amicably resolved”, but the mosque’s administration denied there had been a breakthrough in talks, saying several issues were yet to be resolved.

§ On April 23, a **report was released by MQM**. According to the report many women at Jamia Hafsa are from poor families from Kashmir who have been either kidnapped or bought. The report claims the Lal Masjid administration plans to use women as “human shields”, in case of police action, and use their deaths as a propaganda tool to justify suicide attacks. According to the report, Lal Masjid was initially built legally as a non-denominational mosque, but a few years ago, the mosque was “illegally occupied by armed force by the sons of the late Maulana Abdullah, i.e., Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Ghazi Abdul Rashid”. The brothers were high-grade Government employees but were sacked for possessing illegal arms. The report says many students living in the Lal Masjid compound are engaged in Afghan jihad. They were trained for suicide attacks and encouraged to seek martyrdom. There were some 4,000 to 5,000 of these men. The madrassas also stockpile “brand new” Kalashnikovs, AK-47s and rocket launchers.

III Pakistan Development Forum (PDF) 2007

Pakistan Development Forum (PDF) is an annual event hosted by the Economic Affairs Division, Government of Pakistan in coordination with the World Bank. PDF is a unique opportunity for the Government of Pakistan to share with its development partners, its policies, reform agenda and initiatives in areas such as poverty alleviation, human resource development, governance and infrastructure development etc. PDF is also known as donors forum. The theme of Pakistan Development Forum 2007 was **"The Demographic Dividend-Unleashing the Human Capital"** and it focused on how Pakistan can take advantage of its reduced population growth rate to unleash its human capital and increase growth.

The Forum was organized from 24-26 April, 2007 in Islamabad. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz while addressing the inaugural session stated that Pakistan’s per Capita income was \$847 last year, this year it is expected to be around \$950 and will surpass \$1,000 next year. He further said that the number of people below poverty line had decreased from 34.5 percent in 2001 to 23.9 percent in 2005 – in urban areas from 39.3 percent to 28.1 percent. In absolute terms, 13 million people have been lifted out of poverty, out of which 10.5 million belong to rural areas.

The donors pointed out that Pakistan's economy poses challenges in shape of achieving macroeconomic balance, poverty reduction, holding free and fair elections and improved social service delivery in order to provide dividends to its masses in coming years.

World Bank's Country Director Yusupha Crookes, while appreciating the Government's agenda on economic front, also spells out certain challenges for a Country which is growing at the rate of 7 per cent per annum. He said poverty has declined in Pakistan and in all four provinces but rural poverty still remains high.

Asian Development Bank's Country Director Peter Fedon said the bank endorsed Government's views on competition, industries, cities growth and Fata development plan. The broader consensus on these initiatives will remain a challenge for the Government, he added.

The **IMF's** representative said that the Fund encourages macro-economic stability of Pakistan as its role has changed and the IMF has assumed advise-given status rather than providing balance of payment support to Islamabad in the recent past.

The **EU** delegate in his speech called upon Pakistan for reducing military role in business and politics. He also said they support the process of free and fair election in Pakistan. He said judges and lawyers play an important role and the independence of judiciary is a key element in a democratic state which respects the separation of powers. The EU wishes to express its appreciation for the Government's recent initiative to provide legislation that better serves for the protection of women. Serious concern remains about the actual role and position of women in society, he added.

Mark Ward, Senior Deputy Assistant for **USAID** said that US development assistance focuses on four areas that include education, health, good governance and economic growth. "All four areas are vital to Pakistan's future,". He said the US welcomes Pakistan's leadership endeavours for setting development priorities in view of the Paris Declaration. He also said the US strongly supports the Fata development agenda and looking forward to work with other donors for bringing improvement in the life of the people living in this important area.

Canadian representative said more needs to be done on implementation side and they are focusing on education side. He said aid effectiveness can only be achieved if the recipient country has ownership in the development plan. **Norway** said that Fata development plan is quite impressive but Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) poses certain challenges in terms of growing middle class in Pakistan.

Switzerland also urged Pakistan to respect human rights and scaling up education budget up to 4 per cent of the GDP. They also support Pakistan's development vision related to FATA and other sectors of the economy, he added.

Japanese Ambassador Seiji Kojima said his country is willing to participate in the FATA development plan. He also said the aid effectiveness can be achieved only with ownership of the recipient country. The representatives of **Saudi Arabia, Kuwait Fund and Denmark** also spoke on the occasion and extended their all-out support for the future plan for improving Pakistan's economy.

IV International Conference on Governance for Millennium Development Goals

National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) Chairman Daniyal Aziz said on 28 April that Pakistan is committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

A two-day 'International Conference on Governance for Millennium Development Goals' was organized by National Reconstruction Bureau and the World Bank Institute in collaboration with the government of Japan (PHRD Programme), CIDA and UNDP. Addressing the 'International Conference on Governance for Millennium Development Goals', he said the structure of institutions inherited from the colonial age continued to exist in most developing countries.

In his welcome address, World Bank (WB) Country Director Yusupha B Crookes said strengthening of government pillars was the bank's top priorities and that the WB supported reforms, privatisation and liberalisation of economies in developing countries. He said the service delivery system had improved in various fields in Pakistan including the education and health sector. Over 100 million people in

Pakistan are below 25 years of age who will soon take over the country's reins.

Japanese Ambassador Seiji Kojima said Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's presence at the Conference demonstrates the importance Pakistani Government attached with achieving the MDGs. He said Japan is committed to supporting Pakistan in its effort to achieve MDGs targets. He said the achievement of goals would mean improvement in the health, education, women's development and other social sectors that would benefit the poor. Japan also supports the human resource development in Pakistan, he added. About Pak-Japan relations, he said both countries had always enjoyed good relations, adding that Japan had been Pakistan's major trade partner and a major donor.

On the concluding session of the Conference, Daniyal Aziz stated that implementation of devolution plan, hallmark of the regime, "is painfully slow, especially in Blochistan, due to hardly motivated provincial governments and federal bureaucrats' cognitive dissonance

V Rural Poverty Rising: World Bank

World Bank partially released a report titled "Pakistan: Promoting Rural Growth and Poverty Reduction", ahead of the Pakistan Development Forum (PDF) meeting. The World Bank said that an unequal distribution of land and water is a major obstacle to reducing rural poverty despite high agricultural growth. Following issues and recommendations have been highlighted in the report:

§ The Bank called for **increased participation of the poor people** to reduce rural poverty.

§ The report says that ensuring **efficient use of water and building partnerships** with the private sector can help fulfill agriculture's potential for diversification and growth.

§ An effective poverty reduction strategy, however, must also address the rural non-farm economy and needs of the rural non-farm poor. **Social mobilisation can empower the poor**, enabling them to have a greater role in the development process, not only to improve delivery of public services, but also to increase their market share by building the voice and scale in farm and non-farm sectors.

§ The report says that agricultural growth, rural incomes, rural poverty and social welfare indicators have all showed marked improvements in recent years. "Yet despite impressive achievements, there is little reason for complacency. Around 35 million people in rural areas remain poor, representing about 80 per cent of Pakistan's poor."

§ However, the majority of the rural poor in Pakistan are not farmers, and additional measures need to be taken to revitalise the rural economy so that it could generate substantial **rural employment**. Such an expansion of the rural non-agricultural economy and improvement in the welfare of the rural poor cannot take place, though, without major investments in infrastructure and improvements in social services, including safety nets."

§ The report says that a major reason for the limited impact of rural development efforts in Pakistan is the lack of participation and influence of rural poor households. This limits effective demand for public services and reduces the efficiency in development programmes. Although **inclusive economic growth** should be the main mechanism for reducing poverty, increased social protection efforts are needed to protect the most vulnerable.

§ **Social mobilisation, along with economic empowerment**, should be at the heart of the rural livelihood development strategy. The benefits of broad economic growth trickle down very slowly when the poor have little access to key physical, social and financial endowments. To overcome highly unequal distribution of these endowments and achieve rapid pro-poor growth, poor people need new opportunities to organise, generate business and link with mainstream development activities.

VI Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Proposes Cut in President's Powers

The Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) Salim Saifullah has called for clipping the powers of the President vis-a-vis appointment of the Chief Justice and the Chief Election

Commissioner. Salim Saifullah circulated a document carrying the list of proposed amendments to the Prime Minister, the PML President, the Law Ministry, the Establishment Division, the Parliamentary Affairs' Ministry, the NRB and Senator Wasim Sajjad. Wasim, the Leader of the House in the Senate, is the head of the subcommittee formed to prepare a bill on provincial autonomy.

In the proposed amendments, he also touched upon the issue of missing persons and called for deletion of all the constitutional clauses facilitating the security forces to detain citizens illegally. Following amendments have been proposed by the Minister:

Provincial Autonomy: In the proposed amendments which are being deliberated upon in line with the Government efforts to table a bill on Provincial Autonomy in Parliament, Saifullah has suggested a number of drastic changes. Besides proposing the empowerment of a Provincial Assembly to change the name of a Province with a two-thirds majority, he has also tried to discourage the trend of "imported" governors and said he should be from the same province. Saifullah has also called for handing over the control of seaports to the respective Provinces and that the mineral resources should be put at the disposal of the federating units. The document discloses promising changes and can well be termed the "panacea for the prevailing ills", ranging from the judicial crisis to that of Provincial disharmony and the illegal detentions being allegedly made by the intelligence agencies.

Money Bill: He has also proposed that an amendment to Article 73 should be made to make it mandatory for the National Assembly to incorporate the recommendations of the Senate on the money Bill.

Appointment of Chief Justice: Saifullah has also proposed an amendment to Article 177 that is about the appointment of the Chief Justice. Unlike the prevalent practice in which the president can appoint a person as the chief justice without consulting anybody, he has proposed an amendment to Clause 1 of Article 177, to incorporate the words "after being approved by the Senate". If it is amended, the President would be unable to make the appointment without the clearance of the nominee for this constitutional office, from the Senate.

Appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner: The amendment to Article 213 that deals with the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner has also been proposed. According to the proposed amendment, "There shall be a Chief Election Commissioner who shall be appointed by the President after consultation with the leader of the House and the leader of the opposition." Further, an amendment to Clause 3 of the said Article has been proposed to be read as following: "The Commissioner shall have all the powers, which in his discretion are necessary for holding fair, just and transparent elections."

Arrested or Detained Persons: Saifullah has also proposed an amendment to Clause 2 of Article 10. According to the proposed amendment, any person arrested or detained under any law providing for protective detention, would have to be produced before the court of magistrate within 24 hours. Saifullah has proposed the omission of Clauses 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Article 10 of the Constitution, dealing with the arrest and detention and are presently facilitating the security agencies to put under arrest several persons.

Trial of the Missing Persons: Through this proposed amendment, Saifullah has apparently called for a trial through the court of law of the missing persons whether the Baloch nationalists or the alleged Jihadi activists whose forced disappearances have whipped up resentment against the Government.

Equal Representation of Federating Units on the CCI: The proposed amendment to Clause 2 of Article 153 of the Constitution calls for an equal representation of the federating units on the Council of Common Interests (CCI) through the induction of four Federal Ministers from each Province.

Appointment of the Acting Governors: Saifullah has also proposed the deletion of the Objectives Resolution of Pakistan from the introductory part of the Constitution. The proposed amendments also call for delegating the power of President to the Provincial Assembly Speaker vis-a-vis the appointment of the acting governor.

PM opens PDF today

Donors forum to review Pakistan's economic status

VII 50,000 Fishermen at Risk of Losing Livelihood

According to the World Conservation Union, the world's largest conservation network, at least 45,000 fishermen fish around the tiny islands of Bhundal and Dingi, near Pakistan's port city of Karachi. Depending on fishing conditions and tides, fishermen spend differing periods of time actually living on the 7,000 acres of island land.

Fishermen are furious over a recent **deal between Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Ports and Shipping and United Arab Emirates-based construction company Emaar Properties to develop a luxury resort city on the islands.** In a joint venture with Port Qasim Authority (PQA), Emaar is expected to develop the proposed Diamond Bar Island City at a cost of US \$45 billion over the next 13 to 16 years. The luxury development, which involves the reclamation of 5,000 acres of mangrove swamp between the islands, would drastically affect the local fishing community. Muhammad Ali Shah, Chairman of the Pakistan Fisherfolks Forum (PFF), which represents the fishing communities in the Southern Sindh Province said that the blocking off of the islands and the water around them would affect at least 500,000 people (fishermen and their dependents) and make it still harder than before for these impoverished people to survive.

The development project is the latest in a series of issues that have pitched the fishing communities of Sindh against the Government. The Government has argued that the development is necessary and earns revenue. The outcome of the tussle may determine the fate of other projects planned along the coastal waters that lap Pakistan's Southern Provinces of Sindh and Balochistan.

Negative Impacts of the Project:

§ Specialists say that the development of the islands would contribute to further pollution of the sea around Karachi. Already, the dumping of waste in water there has resulted in a decline in fish stocks and high levels of toxins, including mercury, have been found in fish and shrimps caught in the area.

§ In addition, the development plan for the islands envisages reclaiming large tracts of mangrove swamp, which environmentalists argue would cause extensive damage to the unique ecological system of the Indus delta, the fifth largest delta in the world.

§ Fishermen fear that the development work would jeopardize their livelihood, displace them from key fishing areas and push the community further into poverty.

IV. Geo-Political Dynamics

I South Asia

1. **14th SAARC Summit**

14th SAARC summit started in New Delhi on April 3 with the formal joining of Afghanistan as its eighth member and China, the US, the EU and South Korea as observers.

India announced that it would open its markets for South Asian neighbouring countries without insisting on reciprocity. Dr Singh also announced that India was unilaterally liberalising the visa regime for students, teachers, journalists and patients from SAARC member countries and hoped that this would improve the inter-SAARC flow of tourists in the next five years.

Dr Singh said that SAARC had the potential to realise the goal of achieving welfare for the people of South Asia and to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region. He said that only roads and railways could not achieve full regional connectivity. "We must commit to actually making travelling freer and easier," he added. He said that India would allow duty free access to all its South Asian neighbouring countries before the end of 2007 and the country would also amend its list of "sensitive" trade items. On the region's growing energy demand, Dr Singh said that South Asia would soon face an energy shortage and member countries should harmonise systems and methods and ultimately move on towards an energy exchange with energy markets. Dr Singh said the SAARC members had decided that they would set up a regional food bank to meet shortages caused by natural calamities such as floods and droughts. The Indian PM said that SAARC members should sincerely implement the pledges made on eliminating terrorism from the region.

Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz stressed for the resolution of differences and disputes within and between member states "through dialogue and compromise". Presenting his five-point agenda, Aziz said that it was vital to promote an environment of "genuine" peace and security in South Asia because security was essential for development. He said there was a need to build confidence to remove the "trust deficit" which had been hindering meaningful cooperation in the region.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said that Afghanistan was the best corridor for trade and energy cooperation for South Asia and Central Asia. Karzai mentioned the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and said that similar projects could be extended to other regional countries.

Almost all leaders who spoke on the occasion termed the contents of the previous declarations and treaties adopted in the last 22 years since the conception of SAARC as rich in content, but less on follow up action. They called for more connectivity between the member states. They also announced they were setting up a South Asia University, calling it an important symbol of the connectivity of ideas that would build knowledge economies of the future.

2. **India set to announce more Kashmir CBMs**

The Indian government is set to announce several Kashmir related confidence building measures ahead of the round table conference of Kashmir leaders scheduled. A group of ministers, led by External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, reviewed the recommendations of four working groups set up by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in May last year.

The recommendations adopted by the ministerial group include:

- § Facilitating movement across the Line of Control (LoC)
- § Rehabilitating kin of slain militants
- § Removing bottlenecks preventing the construction of Mughal Road

The ministry group discussed the recommendations of a working group led by former Foreign Secretary M K Rasgotra to send documents of people desiring to travel on the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad or Poonch-Rawalakot bus service to Pakistani authorities through e-mail. Currently officials from both countries meet every month at the LoC near Uri and Poonch to exchange the documents. The two countries have already established a regional passport officer in Srinagar and a district magistrate in Muzaffabad, both of whom are authorised to issue travel documents subject to verification.

A working group led by Minorities Commission Chairman Hamid Andari suggested extending rehabilitation to the kin of slain militants. Currently, the facility covers only the kin of security forces or

civilians who are caught in crossfire. Other decisions taken by the Prime Minister's Office include the construction of Mughal Road that is essential for connecting the Kashmir Valley with the districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

3. Political Situation in Bangladesh

§ After army-backed Government began a drive against corruption it was decided to send Bangladesh ex-Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia into exile. One of Khaleda's detained sons was released as part of a deal with the Government for her family to go abroad. A close associate of Khaleda confirmed that her "departure is imminent" and said she made the deal with the Government out of frustration over lack of support from top officials of her political party.

§ Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar refused to allow Khaleda Zia into their countries, by complicating a plan by Bangladesh's Government.

§ According to the newspapers of April 24, Former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia pulled back from a reported deal with the army-backed interim Government to go into exile. She conveyed her final decision (to the Government) not to go abroad in a while.

§ On April 22, former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was barred from bordering a flight to Dhaka after Bangladesh authorities asked the airlines to prevent her returning home. Hasina faces charges in Bangladesh of murder linked to street battles between political opponents and extortion.

§ On April 23, a court suspended an arrest warrant against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a day after it had issued the order citing a murder charge. The suspension came after a police officer investigating the case told the court the charges were flawed and he needed more time to reinvestigate.

§ Bangladesh's emergency Government, which had been trying to exile two former Prime Ministers on April 25, said that it would drop a ban on Sheikh Hasina returning to the country and stated there would be no restriction on the movements of Khaleda Zia. The Government had also withdrawn a press note issued on April 18, the statement said, referring to a ban imposed on Sheikh Hasina entering the country.

§ **Nobel Prize Winner Yunus to Enter Politics with 'Citizen Power' Party:** In an open letter to the people of Bangladesh, Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus sought support for his newly proposed political party. Public response has been tremendous, but analysts are critical of his political ambition and sceptical of his timing to enter politics. Professor Yunus has received an encouraging public response and, therefore, he thinks there is no reason to delay the launch of his political party. All political activities are presently banned in Bangladesh due to the state of emergency but Dr Yunus insists he will abide by the law and not flout the enforced regulations. However, he does seem to be in a rush. He has said that he would choose his party members very carefully, especially those who want to switch over from existing parties. To enter the political arena with full force, Yunus has already decided to leave his organisation, the Grameen Bank, which shares the Nobel Peace Prize with him.

4. Bhutan Votes for First Time in Democracy 'Dummy' Run

Residents of the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan voted for the first time in the country's history on April 22 in "dummy" elections designed as a warm-up for democracy. Authorities in the "Land of the Thunder Dragon" are hoping to teach people how parliamentary polls work, ahead of the planned transformation next year from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy.

An estimated 400,000 people are eligible to vote in the tiny Buddhist nation, which is about the size of Switzerland and sandwiched between Asian powerhouses India and China.

Real elections for a new Parliament are due to be held in 2008, the culmination of a plan by former king Jigme Singye Wangchuck - who handed his crown to his young Oxford-educated son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in December - to change with the times and assume a more ceremonial role. This is in contrast to King Gyanendra in the nearby Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, whose ill-fated attempts at guarding dictatorial powers has placed his monarchy on the verge of being dismantled.

For centuries Bhutan, which was never colonised, has chosen to remain isolated from the outside world, maintaining a barter economy and allowing few foreigners to visit. It had no roads, telephones

or currency until the 1960s. For the “dummy elections,” voters have been asked to choose between the fictional Druk (Thunder Dragon) Blue Party, the Druk Green Party, the Druk Red Party and the Druk Yellow Party.

Home to 600,000 people and known as a Shangri-la of jaw-dropping beauty, Bhutan’s transition to democracy began in 2001, when the hugely popular former king handed over the powers of daily Government to a Council of Ministers.

A 34-point draft constitution unveiled in 2004 has also been sent to the Bhutanese people for their views ahead of the 2008 polls. The constitution will replace a 1953 royal decree giving the monarch absolute power.

II Central Asia

1. Regional Water Management Lacks Cohesion in Central Asia

As officials and water specialists from across Central Asia gathered in the Kazakh commercial capital of Almaty to mark a decade and a half of post-Soviet efforts to regulate scarce water supplies in the region, there are doubts about whether they are prepared to make committed efforts to assure water security for the region's more than 55 million inhabitants.

The meeting, which opened on 24 April, is the 47th time the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) - comprising delegates from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - has met since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. But observers see few concrete achievements.

Water management during Soviet times was highly centralised, with Moscow instructing the upstream republics of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to accumulate water in their reservoirs in winter and to release it downstream at the beginning of the cotton-farming season to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. In return, the three former Soviet republics provided their upstream neighbours with the fuel and natural gas needed for energy during winter. There was a "seasonal exchange of water resources and other resources", Masaid Khamidov, Tajik minister of land reclamation and water resources, said. However, when they all became independent in 1991, their interests started to clash.

Rising Nationalism: "Rising nationalism and competition among the five Central Asia states has meant they have failed to come up with a viable regional approach to replace the Soviet system of management," said a recent report by the International Crisis Group, an international think tank. The downstream countries require more water for their growing agricultural sectors and rising populations, while the upstream countries are trying to gain more control over their resources and want to use more water for electricity generation and farming, the report said.

Tensions focus on the region's two main rivers, which flow into the Aral Sea. Kyrgyzstan's Syr Darya river winds through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan's Amu Darya river through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The disputes between the countries often result in a lack of irrigation water for villagers.

Uzbekistan needs uninterrupted water supplies during its vegetation season for its plantations of cotton, a thirsty crop. The country is the world's second largest cotton exporter and fourth largest cotton producer. There is also friction over reservoir levels. If water from overflowing reservoirs upstream is released in winter, it can flood downstream countries, which in summer suffer water shortages, leading to low crop yields.

The states' positions remain unchanged, however. As Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan insist on their right to use water generated in their countries for hydropower, downstream states say water is common property.

2. Education and Agricultural Reform in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan's President has announced a salary hike for teachers as he pushes ahead with an overhaul of a deteriorated education system and announced plans to reform the country's ailing agricultural sector.

Educational Reforms:

Introducing a 40 percent pay rise for teachers and 40 percent increase in scholarships for students, effective from 1 September, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov said better pay

would allow teaching staff to concentrate on their core work. Until now, low wages in Turkmen schools and universities have forced many teachers to find ways to supplement their incomes.

The salary rise comes on top of education reforms announced earlier in March, including a reduced workload for teachers, school class sizes capped at 25, schooling expanded from eight years to 10, and the abolition of a work experience requirement that had restricted access to higher education.

Agricultural Reforms:

Agriculture topped the People's Council agenda, with Berdymukhammedov calling for bottom-up reform. Three new laws aimed at stimulating agriculture were passed at the session, while Berdymukhammedov ordered local authorities to draw up a strategy to reform rural life, including the construction of social facilities in remote areas.

Central Bank Chief Geldimyrat Abilov pledged to raise the prices at which wheat and cotton are purchased from farmers to an unspecified level, expand agricultural loan opportunities and ensure that farmers receive payments on time. Payments are often delayed by the state, creating cash flow problems for farmers.