



An Initiative of The Researchers

e- Newsletter

**I. Gender
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Vol – II Edition – I

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I. Gender

I Women & Politics

1. Asian Women Making Inroads in Politics

In an assessment by The Asia Foundation (TAF) ahead of International Women's Day, "important progress" in reform of laws and policies concerning women in the region as a result of global pressure as well as actions by Asian women groups themselves. Director of Women's Empowerment Programme of TAF's Carol Yost said that "the good news is, despite their under representation in national level government, women are nonetheless becoming a significant political force in many countries and are gaining ground -- particularly at the local level. While there is still a long way to go to achieve parity, the overall trend in women's full and equal participation in political processes and public life is positive."

According to the Statistics collected by the Foundation, women hold an average of only 16.4 per cent of parliamentary seats and own about 30 per cent of small and medium enterprises across Asia. There have been **several notable Government or opposition women leaders** in Asia. Among the current lot are Philippine President Gloria Arroyo, Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and India's ruling Congress party Chief Sonia Gandhi. Asian countries have seen a significant increase in women's political participation in **Provincial Government** via quota systems or legislation. India and Pakistan now have quotas ensuring women more than 30 per cent of seats in **Local Government** while Indonesia has enacted laws encouraging a similar percentage of candidates in political party lists.

Assessment by Asia Foundation further noticed that in many countries in the region, **voter education programmes** targeted at women before elections have been "remarkably successful" in increasing the number of women casting votes. In Afghanistan, where women rights were harshly curtailed under the extremist Taliban group during its five-year rule up to 2001, 50 per cent of respondents of a recent poll conducted by the Foundation thought that political leadership should be for both men and women. Afghan women now hold 68 seats in the 249 seat lower house of parliament.

The Foundation while giving the example of Cambodia said that **Training programmes** for women candidates also have increased the number of women standing for and winning elections in Asia. In some Asian countries women are putting pressure on political parties to include more women on party lists.

Women are also demanding that political parties state **their platform for addressing women's priority concerns**. In Thailand, for example, since the fall of the democratically elected Government to the military in September 2006, women are attempting to ensure that their rights are protected in a new constitution being drafted.

2. More Resource Centres for Women Councillors Planned

Parliamentary Secretary Ministry of Women Development MNA Anaza Ehsan said that as many as 10 more District Resource Centres (DRCs) would soon be established in various town halls of the country to provide wide ranging counselling to women councillors and nazims for enhancing their skills and expertise. She further said that 10 DRCs are already working across the country and providing valuable services to the women leaders at grass-roots level.

II Women & Economics

1. Labour Force Survey: Women Employed 25.7% Less in 2005-06

According to Labour Force Survey 2005-06 by Government of Pakistan, the distribution by employment status and sex, maintained that only 0.9 percent were employers, 34.9 percent were own account workers, 26.9 percent were unpaid family workers and 40 percent were employees. Out of 0.9 percent employees women employers were merely 0.1 percent, 15 percent against 39.8 percent own account female workers. However, women share in unpaid family workers was recorded at 59.2 percent against males 19.1 percent.

Interestingly, against much triumphed women equal participation in all major fields, the sharer of women employees declined to 25.7 percent in 2005-06 against 31.2 percent in 2003-04.

2. Gender Reforms Action Plan (GRAP) in Doldrums

GRAP Assistant Director Farhan told that the GRAP was to be started at the district level from 2005 in the Punjab to plan and execute programmes for women's development is still in doldrums. He said that the programme could not be started earlier. However, he said GRAP had now started recruiting specialists from the Gender Mainstreaming Committees (GMCs) that were to implement the project in the districts. He expressed the hope that the GMCs would start working by May.

The GMCs were formed by the Punjab Government in 2004. According to the notification, the GMCs would consist of the District Nazim who would be its Chairman, the District Coordination Officer (DCO) as Co-Chairman, the literacy, social and women's development Executive District Officer (EDO) as the Secretary, all EDOs and three members from civil society organizations. However the GMCs have remained non-functional.

III Women & HR

1. Oppressed Afghan Women turning to Self-Immolation

Testimonies gathered by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission documents how life for many Afghan women remains so bleak that some choose a horrific and painful death instead. The group interviewed about 800 Afghans whose sisters, daughters and daughters-in-law have killed themselves by self-immolation to escape domestic abuse, forced marriage and other misogynistic social customs.

Reports from Herat, in western Afghanistan, show about 90 women set fire to themselves last year and more than 70 percent died. Afghanistan's poor health system can do little for the badly burned. The commission report, released last week, covers Badghis, Herat, Farah, Nimroz and Kandahar, provinces that media and other reports suggest are the worst affected. However, women's rights advocates suspect that self-immolation is a nationwide problem.

The study indicates a marked increase in reported cases in two of the provinces. Two years ago in Farah Province, there were 15 cases of self-immolation reported. That figure had jumped to 36 in the first six months of last year, the commission found. Kandahar Province had 74 cases two years ago, and 77 cases in the first six months of this past year. The statistics were recorded according to Afghanistan's calendar year, 1385, which ends March 20. Of the other three provinces, Herat and Badghis showed a slight upward trend, and Nimroz a slight decline

Despite advances in women's rights since the fall in 2001 of the Taliban regime, UNIFEM estimates that at least one out of three Afghan women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused. The abuser is usually a family member or someone she knows. Rarely is anyone prosecuted or even reprimanded.

2. Burn Cases during 12 Years

The Pakistan Women Association in its report has registered above 7,500 cases of women burn patients from Islamabad and Rawalpindi since 1994.

Pakistan Women Association has been highlighting the issue of women's burning since 1994.

3. Violence against Women: Options available for Government

Farzana Bari in her article 'Terrorism against Women' highlighted the major incidents of violence against women in the Country. She is of the view that the alarming increase in the incidents of gender based violence poses a serious threat to the safety and security of nearly sixty-three million women of the country.

Farzana Bari proposed two options for the Government's consideration in order to avoid the constant embarrassment it faces at the national and international forums due to shameful incidents of violence against women. Following are the options as put forth by Farzana Bari:

The first option proposes that the National Commission on the Status of Women should be made responsible to deal with the issue of violence against women. For this, the mandate of the NCSW needs to be changed from the present one (which is too broad) to work exclusively on the issue of gender based violence. With this the NCSW should be given sufficient legal and financial power. Special courts, a special police force and a forensic laboratory should be attached with the NCSW. The Commission should also be given a supervisory role to monitor the functioning of shelters and crisis centres.

The Commission should be mobile. They should go from village to village, mohallah to mohallah to register cases of violence against women on the spot through its special police force. The special courts of the Commission should not take more than six months to decide these cases. Speedy justice and all kinds of social, economic, legal and counselling support to the survivor of violence given by the Commission will go a long way to prevent such violence.

The second option proposes to establish a new department/institution to combat violence against women that should have the same roles and responsibilities and operational mechanisms as proposed above for the NCSW.

However the necessary condition to make both options one and two to work in the context of Pakistan depends on the credibility and commitment of a person (s) who will be made responsible to run the NCSW/special institution to combat violence against women. Those who are only interested in doing a job will never be able to deliver on this mandate or face social and political pressures which are often associated with such a job. Therefore, it is recommended that only those who are known for their commitment and working on violence against women issues, who are fearless and have the courage to resist all kinds of social and political pressure, should be assigned to this job.

IV Women & Laws

1. Qisas and Diyat Laws

The Federal Shariat Court (FSC) has accepted a petition challenging the qisas and diyat laws, and issued notices to the Attorney General of Pakistan and Advocate Generals (AG) of the four provinces. A full FSC bench of Chief Justice Haziquil Khairi, Justice Dr Fida Mohammad Khan and Justice Salahuddin Mirza heard the petition that had been pending in the court for nearly a decade, and fixed April 23 as the date for the next hearing in Islamabad. The Qisas and Diyat Ordinance was introduced in 1990, and around 40 provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) related to murder and physical injuries – Section 299 to Section 388 – were amended through the ordinance which was promulgated several times by successive governments, as constitutionally, an ordinance lapses after four months. The Nawaz Sharif government finally gave permanent status to the law when the 1997 Criminal Law Amendment Act (Act No 3 of 1997) was passed by parliament on April 10, 1997. Advocate Abdullah Sani filed a petition in 1997 challenging the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1997, saying that it was un-Islamic and should be declared to be in conflict with Islamic injunctions. Arguing the petition before the FSC bench, he contended that the provisions that compounded 'Qatl-e-Amd' (intentional murder) with unintentional murder were against Islamic injunctions. "Nowhere in the Quran is it mentioned that intentional murder can be compounded or it can be compromised, and only 'Qatl-e-Khata' (unintentional murder) can be compounded," he stated. The petitioner, also the director of the Al-Quran Research Academy, had also challenged the amount set for diyat (compensation payable to the heirs of a victim) by the government, saying that it was against the injunctions of the Quran. He said that nowhere in the Quran had the value of a human life been mentioned, and "when the Quran has not ordained

anything about the diyat amount, the government has no authority to specify it". The petitioner also challenged the Political Parties Act-1962, after the establishment of the Shariat Court in 1980. The act was later replaced with the Political Parties Order-2002. He contended that the Political Parties Order was contrary to Islamic teachings, as there was no concept of the formation of political parties in the Quran.

2. New Contract to Curb Child Marriages in Afghanistan

The Supreme Court of Afghanistan has approved a new marriage contract which is expected to help stop child and forced marriages in the country. The new 15-page formal marriage contract, the 'Nikah Nama', has been welcomed by women's rights NGOs in a country where 60 to 80 percent of marriages are forced, according to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

In Afghanistan, the legal age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys, but human rights groups say every year thousands of Afghan girls are forced to marry at a younger age. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 57 percent of marriages in Afghanistan involve girls below the legal age of 16.

The new marriage document stipulates that if a man wants to marry, he should make sure that his would-be wife is at least 16. Marriage certificates will not be issued for underage brides. Gender activists see the new marriage contract as a courageous reform in a society where only six years ago women were deprived of education, work and political participation. However, officials note that only one to three couples apply for formal marriage registration per day in a country of about 25 million people. This would suggest that the vast majority of Afghans are not officially registering their marriages.

To counter this, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has launched a marriage registration awareness campaign to boost the number of legally registered couples. Officials say that one of the messages they will be trying to get across is that an Afghan man will not compromise his traditionally dominant position in the family by officially registering his marriage.

V International Women's Day Celebrated

People around the world celebrated International Women's Day by paying rich tribute to women and pledging to improve their status.

The United Nations' theme for International Women's Day in 2007 was "**Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls.**"

Government and private organisations held seminars, workshops, rallies and group activities in connection with International Women's Day

Following is the text of the message by President General Pervez Musharraf on International Women's Day:

"As the Pakistani nation joins the international community in observing the International Women's Day on 8th March, 2007, we wish to reaffirm our national and international commitments for the protection of women's rights in the country, with special emphasis on this year's theme 'Ending impunity for violence against women and girls'.

On this occasion, I can state with pride that the recent measures taken by the Government in this regard are indeed commendable and will go a long way in our quest for the emancipation of the women of Pakistan.

The historic legislations made and the practical steps taken are a clear sign of the Government's strong will, unwavering commitment and determination to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women with the ultimate goal of making them equal, active and dignified partners in all spheres of life, as given by our great religion Islam and enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan.

On this day, let renew our pledge to continue our forward march for the accelerated development

and empowerment of women. I am confident that the Government would take all necessary steps to fully realize the tremendous potential of women in national development.

May Allah Almighty Be our Protector and Guide. Ameen!"

Following is the text of the message by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on International Women's Day:

"On 8th March each year, we join the community of nations in celebrating the International Women's Day. This day not only reminds us the historic struggle of women for their equal rights but it also marks the reiteration of commitment for the cause of women' at national levels.

The current year's theme i.e. 'Ending the impunity for violence against women and girls' is the concern and responsibility of every human being and demands concerted and deliberate efforts by the public and private sector organizations. The government is effectively playing its role for providing a secure and sound environment to women who are half of the nation so that they could lead a healthy and prosperous life without any gender discrimination.

Great strides have been made during the last seven years to bring women at par with men and accord them a status they deserve under the Constitution of Pakistan. Enactment of Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004, Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, women's sizeable representation right from grass-roots to the Parliament, reservation of women's quota in Central Superior Services are some of the many unprecedented significant initiatives and measures taken so far. The cumulative effect of such measures can be witnessed from the fact that apart from the traditional sectors of health and education, women are present in almost all other non-traditional professions like armed forces, police, banking, entrepreneurship, information technology etc. The role of NGOs in civil society organizations and the donor agencies in promoting efforts for women's development and empowerment and gender mainstreaming is also laudable.

While celebrating the Women's Day, all of us must ensure in our own respective spheres of activity to end the violation of women's political, economic, social and legal rights."

Women's Development and Youth Affairs Minister Sumaira Malik held the spotlight and declared that women had come a long way in the last seven years. She said that Pakistan was now ranked as the top country where women were politically empowered. She hoped that an even brighter future awaits Pakistani women.

VI Books/Articles/Reports on Gender

Publication: Toward a Compassionate Society

Authors: Elise Boulding, Charlotte Bunch, Mahbub ul Haq, Uma Narayan, Arati Rao, Aruna Rao, Arvind Sharma

Edited with an introduction by: Mahnaz Afkhami

Views on Publication:

"As a gender specialist working within the UN system, for the first time in my life I have found a book that elaborates on peace with a gender perspective. Toward a Compassionate Society strengthened my conviction that women are agents of change." -Isabella Waterschoot, Gender Advisor for Knowledge Management, UNDP

Toward a Compassionate Society is an anthology focusing on women's roles in conflict resolution, peace building, and democracy in a culturally and politically diverse world. It addresses the importance of cultural pluralism and women's role in promoting peace in the rapidly globalizing world of the 21st century. The issues are examined from a variety of gender-focused cultural and inter-disciplinary perspectives including sociology, anthropology, human rights, philosophy, and religion.

The publication could be accessed through following link:

<http://www.learningpartnership.org/docs/copanthology.pdf>

II. Democracy Watch

I Presidential Elections

1. **Musharraf Weakened but In No Immediate Danger**

A report in the New York Times says that although President General Pervez Musharraf has come under fire from both right and left, there is little reason to suggest that his rule is in immediate danger

Following observations have been highlighted in the report:

- § Street demonstrations against the suspension of the Chief Justice are still limited. But even officials who say these troubles will soon blow over privately acknowledge that his authority has been notably weakened and that he may have to compromise with some of his political opponents to survive.
- § Legal dispute is principally over the constitutionality of the President holding the office of Army Chief. In 2003, Parliament gave the General the leeway to hold both offices, but that expires when his term does, in October 2007.
- § The report notes that General Musharraf has not said whether he would remain in uniform, only that he would call elections this year. Regarding the future of the Chief Justice, he has said that he will abide by the SJC verdict.
- § The report quotes that former Foreign Minister and Diplomat Abdul Sattar who said, "Decent people are not coming forward to say a word in favour of the Government." He told the newspaper that the public outcry after Justice Chaudhry's suspension stemmed from accumulated grievances, on everything from corruption in government to the entrenchment of the army in civilian affairs to the "general legitimacy of the government". He added that Gen Musharraf's Government deserved credit for many things - an improved economy, for one - but pointed out that those achievements had been overshadowed by the gradual erosion of independent Government institutions. He called the firing of Justice Chaudhry "the last straw".
- § The report also quoted Former Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad. He warned of "despair and disillusionment" among Pakistanis, in a "stinging" newspaper opinion piece, that said, "either the President is totally cut off from the world of reality or he has deliberately chosen to close his eyes". Former Foreign Secretary was of the opinion that "the issue will fade out" but "however this plays out, Musharraf comes out weaker than he has been, but not as weak as for his Government to collapse".
- § The report quotes Daily Times' editor Najam Sethi, who wrote last week that if the SJC endorses the President's move, it will be seen as "a puppet of the military," whereas if it restores the Chief Justice, he would likely "become a rigid obstacle in General Musharraf's path. In the long run, it is a no-win situation unless the General is prepared to share power and abide by the Constitution."

2. **Current Assemblies to Re-Elect Musharraf**

The President of Pakistan Muslim League (Q), Chaudhary Shujhat Hussain has said that General Elections would be held on time according to the constitution. However elections may postpone in case of an attack on Iran. He further said that in this case President Pervez Musharraf would be re-elected from the current assemblies.

II General Elections 2007-04-07

1. **Electoral Rolls and Voters' Lists**

n **Electoral Rolls to be finalized by July**

Secretary Election Commission Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad said that the process of computerized electoral rolls will be completed by the end of this year. He said that the data collection process has been completed and the preliminary lists will be displayed at designated centres in May. He said that around 50,000 display centres will be set up across the country for

the voters to seek their claims and objections.

Around 115000 staffers were hired for distribution and collection of the data forms. A team was appointed to monitor the process all over the country and the Election Commissioner himself visited numerous places and inspected the process of data collection.

n **Fresh Voter Lists in August**

NWFP Election Commissioner (EC) Akhtar Hussain Sabir said that the EC would publish fresh voter-lists in August for the 2007 General Elections. He said that around 2.7 million old voters have not been registered in NWFP, while the tribal areas have 0.84 million such voters who have failed to get the Computerised National Identity Cards.

According to voter-lists prepared for the 2002 General Elections', there are 8.87 million voters in NWFP and 1.30 million in FATA. There were two separate voter-lists: one for Local Government Elections for which the age of voters is 21 years and another list for General and By-Elections in which age limit for voters is 18 years. He said that the new lists would be used for both General and Local Government Elections, with 18-years age limit for voters.

n **New Voter Lists to be Kept at 70,000 Display Centres**

Provincial Election Commissioner Qamar-uz-Zaman said that new electoral lists would be kept at 70,000 display centres across the country, so that the masses could check their names and other details from them. He said that it was the need of the hour that people should verify their names and other details in the electoral lists and added that the election system of the country was fair and transparent, as compared to many other countries.

Qamar-uz-Zaman said that the Election Commission always took action against rigging if the presiding officer or returning officer of any polling station complained in this regard. He said that the Election Commission would make efforts to provide transparent ballot boxes at polling stations in the next General Elections, so that reservations in this connection could be addressed.

n **CNIC Photo not Mandatory for Women**

According to NADRA press release, women do not have to get their pictures taken to get Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs). The statement said that NADRA considered moral and religious values while making registration policies for women. It said the authority also did not allow its employees to ask female applicants to take off their veils for photographs. However, NADRA said it was better for women to allow themselves to be photographed, as this would facilitate them in various situations, such as in the acquisition of passports.

n **Disappearing Voters in New List Concerns PPPP**

Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarian (PPPP) has expressed great concern over the reports of disappearing voters' in the new voters' lists and called for immediate steps to ensure that all eligible voters were registered and the list should be displayed at prominently at public places. Millions of voters have reportedly disappeared in the new lists as only 55 million voters have been registered thus far as compared with 72 million registered during 2002 elections.

Spokesman of the Party Farhatullah Babar said that on one hand, citizens have been made to disappear at the hands of state agencies and on the other hand voters seemed to have disappeared too during the house to house count. He said that it is a serious matter that must be addressed urgently.

The party also called for whipping up and optimizing the capacity of National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) to issue Computerised National Identity Cards to all eligible voters as quickly as possible. The NIC Cards should be made free of cost so that there is no financial obstacle in the way of registration of poor voters.

2. Political Parties' News

PML-Q:

n **PML-Q to Woo Dissident MPs Before Next Elections**

PML-Q is considering a plan to woo dissident parliamentarians and active politicians of the

opposition as a part to strengthen the ruling party before the next General Election. The PML sources confided the top leaders directed their sub-ordinates to prepare a list of dissidents and like-minded politicians of the opposition parties in order to extend invitations for joining the ruling party. The modalities to catch the attention of some 'favourite' politicians of opposition parties would be finalised when PML Chief Ch Shujaat Hussain, who is currently out of country, would come back.

As part of reshuffling in the political parties, the PPP (Patriot) has already joined PML following its strategy to contest the upcoming polls and some other parliamentarians of the opposition parties, who could not enjoy the privileges like the members of ruling coalition, are desirous of joining the PML-Q. But the revolving political situation of the country compelled them to keep 'mum' and wait for 'suitable' time for announcement of their decisions.

The dissident leaders of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are more attractive for the PML-Q as both political parties have strong roots at the grass root level. Some of the politicians of the PPP and the PML-N have strong reservations with their overseas leaderships as they off and on expressed their remarks during the meetings of their parties.

The PML-Q will give the task to its members in the capital as well as all four provinces to increase their relationships with the dissident politicians of opposition parties in line with the party's strategy.

PPPP

PPPP Hints at Moving SC against Voter Registration

The People's Party Parliamentarians (PPP) is considering challenging the ongoing voters' registration process in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Some serious flaws had been found in the voters' registration process. The issue of challenging the process had been under discussion at various party forums for the past few weeks, but the leadership had not been able to take a final decision due to a difference of opinion within the party on the issue.

PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto had constituted a six-member committee to give recommendations to the party as to what strategy should be adopted to get the voters' list rectified. The committee, headed by Senator Sardar Latif Khosa, had been directed to send the report to Ms Bhutto by March 8. Other members of the committee are Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan, Dr Babar Awan, Syed Nayyar Hussain Bokhari, Sherry Rehman and Palwasha Behram.

Senator Khosa that the party had collected complete data from various sources and come to know that names of some four million eligible voters were not present in the electoral rolls of 27 districts of Sindh alone.

The PPP leader questioned the logic behind the decision of making fresh voters' list and called for updating the list used in the 2002 elections. A senior PPP leader said there was a large group in the party which was opposed to the idea of taking the voters' list issue to court as they believed that the party would not be able to do anything if the court declared the process flawless.

MMA

Jl to Take Part in Polls under MMA

Jamat-e-Islami Amir Qazi Hussain Ahmad has said his party will take part in the upcoming elections on the platform of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) under one election symbol. He further said that the party will attend the multi-party conference of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) after consulting other component parties in the MMA and his party will support the idea of forming a grand alliance to launch an anti-Musharraf drive.

MQM

MQM Decides to Go National

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

3. ARD

n ARD Considers Contesting Polls from Single Platform

The top brass of Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) is considering the possibility of contesting the forthcoming General Elections from a single platform.

The idea of turning the ARD into an electoral alliance was discussed in the recent meeting in London between former Prime Ministers Mian Nawaz Sharif, chief of his own faction of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), and Benazir Bhutto, Chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP).

Though mending of fences between the PPPP and the PML-N is still a far cry, local leaders of the two parties have in the recent past made several contacts with each other to initiate a joint campaign against the Government. The PPPP understands that it is impossible at this juncture to convince leaders of the PPP-Patriots to rejoin their mother party, as most of them have already joined the ruling PML. Similarly, the country's political situation has compelled the PML-N to contest the forthcoming General Elections in alliance with other opposition parties. In the wake of some recent developments, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) has also reviewed its policy and showed willingness to forge alliance with other political parties. The MMA, however, has strong reservations over alliance with the PPPP, which has also expressed similar sentiments about the six-party religious alliance. Still, the MMA has been able to convince Tehrik-e-Insaf and other smaller like-minded parties to form a coalition against the Government. Though it has so far not announced an electoral alliance with these parties, the MMA could do so in due course of time.

n Cooperation with MMA: Differences between PPP, PML-N Persist

Acting parliamentary leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) in the National Assembly Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan claimed that Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) Chairperson Benazir Bhutto is willing to cooperate with the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) and wanted the PML-N to play the role of a bridge between the ARD and the MMA. The claim of the PML-N leader, however, was refuted by the PPP, which said that Ms. Bhutto is not willing to cooperate with MMA at any cost. PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar said Benazir Bhutto had told Nawaz Sharif that the PPP is ready to cooperate with the PML-N on the ARD platform and that the PML-N is free to have relationship with MMA on its own.

4. APC and Political Parties

n APC Postponed

Exiled Premier Nawaz Sharif has postponed the All Parties Conference (APC) he had convened in London on March 24-25 in view of the new situation in the country in the aftermath of removal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. Shahbaz Sharif said a new date for holding the conference convened by Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from the ARD platform will be announced later after consulting leaders of the parties who have consented to attend.

PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto confirmed that Nawaz had consulted her prior to the announcement. She said the PPP would be represented by a team designated by her when the APC is called on new dates. However, she reiterated that her party would not join the religious grouping, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal in any countrywide anti-Government agitation. Such a movement would be conducted from the platform of the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD). The meeting's postponement appeared to be the result of a mini-conference organised by the PML-N in Islamabad on March 17, attended by all opposition parties except the PPP, which boycotted it contending that it was not consulted on the issue.

5. Election Observations

Bannu By-election: Report by FAFEN

Coercion, lax enforcement of election laws, massive use of the local government apparatus, bogus ballots from women's polling booth, and flaws in the electoral lists marred the by-election to the NA-26 seat in Bannu, held on March 29, 2007, according to Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) observers

FAFEN, a network of 30 leading civil society organizations, was accredited by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to monitor the poll for the National Assembly seat that fell vacant after the demise of Maulana Naseeb Ali Shah, who belonged to MMA. A 17-member FAFEN delegation observed 72 out of a total of 274 polling stations in rural and urban areas of the constituency. The observation was made through all stages of polling - opening of polling stations, voting and counting of votes. In addition to employing standardized observation forms following international standards for domestic monitoring, the delegation interviewed more than 200 voters, election officials, polling agents and political party activists to draw its conclusions.

FAFEN observed the Bannu by-election with an interest in improving the election process in Pakistan, as credible elections are an essential component of credible governance. In a spirit of cooperation towards this goal, FAFEN urges the ECP to take greater responsibility for the preparation and security of polling officials as well as enforcement of all election laws and regulations ahead of the forthcoming general elections.

Detail report on Bannu By-Election can be assessed through following link:

<http://www.fafen.org/FAFEN%20Bannu%20By-Election%20Preliminary%20Statement%20FINAL%203-30-2007.doc>

III. Governance at Large

I Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and the Political Situation of Pakistan

Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan from 2005 to 9 March 2007. Famous for taking suo moto actions, especially against the Government, he became first Chief Justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan to be suspended on charges of misuse of power.

Before his suspension an open letter by Supreme Court lawyer / TV Host Naeem Bokhari was circulated in the media accusing Justice Chaudhry of misuse of power and taking undue benefits for himself and his family.

According to Daily Times, the reasons for Justice Chaudhry's downfall could be:

- § He worked hard while pursuing his efforts to clear the backlog of cases and burnt the midnight oil in literal sense while taking up the additional responsibility of the human rights cases under his suo moto jurisdiction. A separate human rights cell was set up at the Supreme Court that received thousands of complaints from poor victims across the country.
- § Lawyers had a grudge that Mr Chaudhry was wasting his precious time while hearing cases which actually came under the jurisdiction of civil courts.
- § The entire police hierarchy, bureaucracy, politicians from the ruling as well as opposition parties, feudal lords and several incumbent rulers directly or indirectly came in the line of fire when Mr Chaudhry either gave decisions against them or passed stern directions for them to comply with.
- § He admonished the former inspector general of Punjab police, Maj (R) Ziaul Hasan, when the Punjab police was accused of not implementing 90 percent of the SC directives. Hasan might have felt that he was humiliated in an open court so he retaliated and broke the court decorum by exchanging words with the judge. At the time, the judge told journalists not to report that part of the proceedings.
- § In the Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) case, Mr Chaudhry headed a larger bench and ruled that the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCOP) grossly violated the law in the PSM sell-off. Certainly, the government would not have liked this judgement because none other than the Prime Minister was heading the CCOP.
- § While pursuing the case of missing citizens, who were allegedly picked up by the intelligence agencies, the judge fixed responsibility on the Government and observed that it was the duty of the state to protect people's lives and ensure their safety. This case might have annoyed the Government.
- § In the public interest cases, he also went off the Government line and issued directions for the authorities to benefit the common man.

The repercussions of the ouster of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry are going to be far-reaching and ugly. The president should have deliberated further if he thought the charges against the judge were serious enough to warrant a confrontation. From a purely political point of view, however, he might have considered taking action against Justice Chaudhry after the 2007 general election. After all, what was the big hurry? Unless, of course, one believes what the opposition is now saying: the government feared that judgements in the constitutional cases relating to the dual office of the president and his re-election by the current assemblies inevitably due before the court might go against it if Justice Chaudhry was CJP.

Various scholars expressed their views on the scenario emerged after Judicial crisis:

Karamatullah K. Ghorri in his article "Judiciary Faces its Moment of Truth" writes, "keeping Justice Chaudhry cloistered and incommunicado for five long hours at the site of his 'inquest' wasn't only a gross violation of a person's basic human rights. It was also something unimaginable and apocryphal when that person happened to be the exalted head of the judiciary. We Pakistanis are guilty of some truly petrifying and appalling acts of gross miscarriage of civility and decency with regard to our luminaries. We have hanged our leaders, killed them, sent them into exile, called them traitors and agents of our enemies et al. But we had never before disgraced a Chief Justice the way Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry was humbled and humiliated in broad daylight".

Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi opines that "no matter what is the outcome of the current protest, the Government does not have support in the streets. The politically active circles have lost patience for the centralised and authoritarian rule by the Musharraf Government and its efforts to overwhelm all the sectors of the state and the society".

Syed Shafuddin points out: "What is at stake is not the judicial process or the issue of transparency because there are instances where inquiries have been held in camera. What is important is that the Council also looks at the record of Justice Chaudhry's professional performance. How much harm or good have his judicial verdicts and suo motu notices brought to the country? How far has he been instrumental in restoring the independence of the judiciary? Has he inspired his juniors in the profession to be bold and fearless in dispensing justice for the public good?"

When General (R) Hammed Gul was asked about current situation during an interview, he responded by saying, "We have come to show solidarity, not so much with the chief justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as with the independence of judiciary in Pakistan. At this particular time when Pakistan is being subjected to all kind of external pressure from America, Afghanistan...and Iranian situation is evolving, to render Pakistan so unstable by hitting at the roots of our judiciary and the fundamental rights of the people of Pakistan."

Imtiaz Alam comments on the current situation by saying that Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary came to prominence for his judicial activism and grant of relief to helpless citizens. His onslaught against the police and in defence of citizens made him very popular among the common litigants.

A lot has been written in favour of Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary and against the step taken by President Pervez Musharraf. Chief Justice is having tremendous support from masses as well as lawyers, judges and political parties. Justice Bhagwandas has taken oath as acting Chief Justice. The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) on Tuesday heard arguments for and against in-camera proceedings against the suspended chief justice of Pakistan (CJP), Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, and then adjourned for April 13.

II New Peace Deal Inked in Bajaur

The authorities and tribal elders in Bajaur signed a peace deal March 26 with pro-Taliban militants in this troubled region bordering Afghanistan. The tribesmen and militants agreed not to give foreign militants safe haven in the area or allow "subversive" activities, while the authorities pledged not to make arrests without consulting the elders.

Pakistan signed peace pacts with pro-Taliban rebels in the South Waziristan area in 2005 and North Waziristan in 2006, although unlike the Bajaur deal those agreements involved the withdrawal of thousands of troops. US and NATO officials in Afghanistan criticised the previous deals, saying they led to an increase in attacks on foreign troops. The Taliban representative Malik Abdul Aziz stated that the local Taliban organisation has authorised me to sign this agreement and they have assured that **they will not take part in any subversive activity**. He further said that **the administration will not raid their places without any solid proof and withdraw warrants of arrests issued against their people on the basis of suspicion**. The deal was signed during a tribal council, or grand jirga, attended by some 700 tribesmen, elders, clerics, MPs and local officials in Khar, the main town of Bajaur.

Chief of the local administration Shakil Qadir urged **the tribal elders to help the authorities to maintain peace in the district.**

III Ministry of Social Welfare Agrees to Revise NGOs' Code of Conduct

The Ministry of Social Welfare has accepted some of the reservations of the civil society over the proposed Code of Conduct for NGOs and has agreed to revise the document. The revised code will be presented to stakeholders in a few weeks.

NGOs had opposed the Government's plan to introduce a Code of Conduct for regulating the civil society, saying it gave sweeping powers to authorities for stifling their voice. Leading organisations had boycotted an internet-based opinion poll conducted by the Ministry on the proposed code, fearing that it would not be truly representative of their concerns because of its limited scope.

Interestingly, the decision about revising the code was communicated to NGOs through a foreign mission in Islamabad. Some NGOs' representatives were invited to a meeting by the foreign mission for informal discussions, where they were told about the development by the International Programme of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, which was involved in drafting the Code of Conduct.

Strengthening Participatory Organisation's Malick Shahbaz Ahmad confirmed the meeting convened by the foreign mission, saying they were told there by Phil Cooper, an official of the Charity Commission, that the Ministry would revise the code in the light of NGOs' 'position paper' and that the code proposed originally has been withdrawn. Officials of the Ministry deny involvement of any foreign mission in the code of conduct controversy. They insist the code was "authored and owned" by the Ministry and no one had the right to intermediate or speak on behalf of the Ministry. An official involved in the preparation of the code said the Ministry only benefited from the expertise of the International Programme of the Charity Commission for England and Wales while drafting the code and the organisation had got nothing more to do.

The decision to revise the code met instant rejection with NGOs saying it fell well short of their demand for no regulatory controls. They, however, took it as a preliminary success in their campaign against the code. An NGO representative said that they stick to their fundamental position adopted in the position paper that there should be no laws and regulations that could obstruct the working of civil society, adding they had no objection to endeavours for financial transparency and accountability in both government and non-governmental sector.

IV Third Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report Launched

The third MDGs report, which aims at preparing aggressive and proactive policies to advance social economic, political and cultural causes of people, has been launched.

Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said Pakistan was committed to achieving Millennium Development Goals. He claimed success in different sectors in the last couple of years, especially in poverty alleviation and improvement of health and educational facilities. The focus of the MDGs report, he said, would be on improving social indicators in the shortest possible time.

The Prime Minister claimed that poverty had been reduced by 10 per cent but there was no room for complacency and extra measures would be taken to achieve the goals by 2015. The MDGs report calls for allocating more funds to achieve the goals through proper implementation. Mr Aziz urged Provincial and District Governments to play their role in implementing programmes envisaged in the MDGs to improve the life of the people. He said Pakistan had made progress in all indicators set by the United Nations for human development but there was still a need for special efforts to achieve the objectives with the help of civil society. About women's empowerment, he said that besides legislation to ensure empowerment of women and give them equal status, the Government had also increased the job quota for women.

The report also focuses on awareness, prevention and treatment programmes to control HIV/Aids, malaria, hepatitis, tuberculosis and other diseases, clean environment, a population welfare programme to bring down the population growth rate, improving health and education facilities, devolution programme and empowering people at the grassroots level. Mr Aziz expressed the confidence that the local level empowerment, rising awareness and financial autonomy would go a long way in achieving MDGs.

IV. Geo-Political Dynamics

I South Asia

1. **Pak-India Nuclear Accord to Stay for 5 Years**

The recently concluded 'Indo-Pak Agreement on Nuclear Risks Reduction' will remain in force for a period of five years. The agreement signed this year in February at New Delhi is the revival of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the same vital issue signed by former Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif with his then counterpart, Atal Behari Vajpayee on February 21, 1999. The MoU signed at Lahore, nonetheless, remained far from implementation owing to the removal of Nawaz Sharif from his office in October 1999. Only a few contents of the significant accord signed at New Delhi in February this year were made available to the media after the signing ceremony and most of them remained unpublished.

Following are the important components of the agreement:

- § According to the text of the agreement, the **nuclear risk reduction agreement shall remain in force for a period of five years**. However, upon agreement by the parties, the pact may be extended for successive periods of five years at a time. A party may withdraw from this agreement by giving six months written notice to the other indicating its intention to terminate the agreement, according to the text.
- § Pakistan and India while recalling the MoU signed at Lahore on February 21, 1999 agreed that each party should maintain and improve, as it deems necessary, the existing **national measures** including organizational and technical arrangements, to guard against accidents related to nuclear weapons under its control.
- § The agreement recognized that both parties had national measures including Command and Control structures to guard against accidents related to nuclear weapons. However, the parties shall notify each other immediately in the **event of any accident relating to nuclear weapons**, under their respective jurisdiction or control, which could create the risk of radioactive fallout, with adverse consequences for both sides, or create the risk of an outbreak of a nuclear war between the two countries. In the event of such an accident the party within whose jurisdiction or control the accident has taken place will immediately take necessary measures to minimize the radiological consequences of such an accident. The obligation of a Party to notify shall be in respect of only such accidents, which may result in an international trans-boundary release that could be of radiological safety significance or have security implication for the other Party.
- § The parties shall make **use of the hotline links** between the two Foreign Secretaries and DGMOs or any other appropriate communication link as mutually agreed upon between their governments for transmission of, or request for, urgent information in situations relating to the implementation of this agreement.
- § The parties may also make use of any other **communication channels**, including diplomatic channels depending upon the urgency of the situation. Information obtained by a party pursuant to this agreement shall not be disclosed to a third party without the prior consent of the other party except where it concerns environment, public health or safety.
- § The agreement shall not affect the **rights and obligations of the parties** under existing international agreements to which they are a party. The parties may hold consultations, as mutually agreed upon, to review the implementation of the provisions of the agreement as well as to consider possible amendments aimed at furthering the objectives of the agreement.
- § **Amendments** shall enter into force in accordance with procedures that shall be agreed upon, says the text of agreement.

2. Bill Urges Linking Military Aid to Pakistan

Three top Democrats in the US Senate introduced legislation calling on the George W. Bush administration to link future military aid to Pakistan to progress by Islamabad in combating terrorism within its borders.

Text of the resolution submitted by Senators Chris Dodd, John Kerry and Joseph Biden says that "Military aid to Pakistan should be guided by demonstrable progress in achieving certain objectives related to counterterrorism and democratic reforms". Biden and Dodd are vying for the 2008 Democratic Presidential nomination, while Kerry was the Democrats' nominee who lost to Republican President George W. Bush in 2004.

3. India Forms Committee on Kashmir Demilitarization

The Indian Prime Minister has given a green signal to set up a committee that could presage demilitarization of the disputed area in Jammu and Kashmir. It is further reported that the committee has already been set up. By this action, Pakistan cannot blame India to be slow in peace process.

The statement announcing the demilitarisation committee appeared sufficiently ambiguous and it clearly indicated that a major move was neither inherent nor imminent.

All it said was this:

- § After reviewing the situation in Jammu & Kashmir, the Government of India, in consultation with the Government of J&K, has decided to set up a mechanism to examine some of the problematic aspects of the current situation.
- § The proposed mechanism would comprise an expert panel to be headed by the Defence Secretary. The panel would include representatives from the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs, the Armed Forces and the J&K Government.
- § The panel would be an expert and professional body intended to carry out an in-depth assessment of the situation. It would determine whether there is need to relocate and reconfigure security forces.
- § While making its determination, the panel should ensure that cardinal aspects of security are not compromised in any manner.

Dr. Raj Baldev, Chairman, National Integration Assembly (NIA) has congratulated the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for having taken such a decision, which was long awaited. It was delayed because, it wanted a strong will and that he has exhibited. Pakistan shall have no excuse of blaming India now for moving slow in the Peace Process.

4. Bangladesh to Enact Election Reforms by July

Election Commissioner Sakhawat Hossain said that the reforms to the country's voting system and candidate eligibility rules are expected to be completed by July and will pave the way for polls which were cancelled in January following violent protests over vote rigging allegations. He did not specify a date for when the next election would be held. He said the bar on defaulters and other reforms such as declarations on funding sources are part of the sweeping moves that country's military-backed interim government promised after taking over power following a state of emergency in January.

Hossain, a Retired Brigadier General, was one of three Election Chiefs the Interim Government appointed as part of its pledge to prepare the ground for credible polls. The last elections, which had been slated for January 22, were cancelled by President Iajuddin Ahmed following violent protests over opposition allegations the outgoing Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had sought to rig the ballot. Ahmed also stepped down as the head of the previous Caretaker Government and imposed the emergency. The opposition Awami League had alleged that pro-BNP election commission officials had drawn up a voter list with at least 14 million fake names.

II Middle East

1. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Slaps New Sanctions on Iran

The Security Council voted unanimously on March 24 to slap new UN sanctions on Iran. The Council's 15 members adopted Resolution 1747, co-sponsored by Britain, France and Germany, that broadens UN sanctions already imposed on Iran in December for spurning repeated demands to suspend the nuclear fuel work.

The unanimous vote came after the text crafted by the five veto-wielding permanent members was slightly amended to satisfy non-permanent members South Africa, Indonesia and Qatar. The United States described the new UN sanctions imposed on Iran as an international rebuke against the Islamic Republic which would leave it even more internationally isolated.

Main Points of Resolution:

- § UNSC's 15 members unanimously adopted Resolution 1747 that broadens curbs imposed on Tehran in December
- § It does not call for military action against Iran
- § Blocks all Iranian arms exports
- § Freezes the overseas assets of 28 additional officials and institutions linked to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes
- § Restricts financial aid and loan to Iran
- § Sets a fresh 60-day deadline for Iran to comply with UN demands or face "further appropriate measures"
- § Offers to suspend the sanctions once the IAEA has verified that the Islamic Republic has met all its obligations
- § Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US propose new talks with Tehran to find a negotiated solution

2. Palestinians Welcome New Government

Palestinians on March 16 welcomed the long-awaited announcement of a unity Government after a turbulent 12 months of deadly power struggles, international isolation and economic hardship. Hamas leader Ismail Haniya is the new Prime Minister.

Hamas will take 12 of the 25 portfolios in the incoming cabinet, while Abbas's Fatah faction will take six. Seven Ministries, including the powerful finance, foreign and interior posts, will go to independents and smaller factions. Palestinians hope the new Government will usher in an era of calm and economic prosperity after a year of bloodshed and boycott. It underscored this optimism in a cartoon that depicted the new unity government marching through cracks in a stone wall labelled "International Boycott." In the teeming streets and impoverished refugee camps of the Gaza Strip, where the Fatah-Hamas power struggle has been fiercest, residents voiced rare optimism.

Despite the landmark Palestinian agreement, however, the international community has given few indications that it will end its punishing aid boycott. Israel called the unity Government agreement a step backwards, and immediately ruled out any concessions. The United States and European Union were noncommittal, saying they would withhold judgment until they study the new cabinet's platform. Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh reiterated his Government's uncompromising and urged continued cooperation with Abbas to undermine Hamas.

3. Egypt Passes Constitutional Changes

A vast majority of Egyptian voters approved the controversial changes to their constitution, the Government announced on 27 March, even as the opposition scoffed that few people bothered to turn up. Justice Minister Mamduh Marei said 75.9 percent of Egyptians who took part in the referendum voted in favour of the amendments to 34 articles proposed in December by President Hosni Mubarak. He added that 27.1 percent of the 35-million-strong electorate participated.

Opposition parties — which had called for a boycott of the referendum — contested the figure, arguing that turnout did not even reach the 10 percent mark, while civil society groups protested of widespread vote rigging.

The regime has defended the changes as a boost to democracy and security, but observers have described the amendments, especially new anti-terrorism measures, as a major setback for basic freedoms.

III East Asia

1. **Phillipines: Most Corrupt Economy in Asia**

A Survey of 13 economies in Asia was conducted by Hong Kong based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC). In the grading system of the Survey zero is considered as the best possible score and 10 the worst. The **Phillipines** got 9.40 worsening sharply from its grade of 7.8 last year.

Thailand and Indonesia, both on a grade of 8.03, shared the spot as Asia's second most corrupt nations.

China was the seventh most corrupt nation, according to the survey table, up two places from last year. **Vietnam** was in 10th place out of 13, also up two.

Malaysia scored 6.13 although it was still better than the 2005 score of 6.80.

India, though improved its score from 6.76 last year to **6.67** this year, India was in the ranking of nine among 13 Asian economies.

Singapore (1.20) and Hong Kong (1.87) were seen as the cleanest economies.