



An Initiative of The Researchers

e- Newsletter

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I. Gender

I Women & Politics

1. No Change in Women Reserved Seats

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), while addressing the members of National Assembly Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs, made it clear that there will be no changes in the present composition of constituencies, while the number of reserved seats for women parliamentarians will remain same in the upcoming elections.

After having briefed by the CEC, the committee recommended that the seats may also be reserved for women in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Federal Capital Territory (Islamabad) for proper representation of women in these areas. The committee also recommended that all development funds under Khushal Pakistan Programme-I may equally be allocated to all constituencies.

The meeting was convened to discuss the Delimitation of Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, 2007 under the chairmanship of Riaz Fatayana. MNAs MP Bhandara, Hamid Chattha, Muhammad Asim Bodla, Nawab Mirza advocate, Maulana Asad Ullah, Sayeda Farhana Khalid Banoori, Imtiaz Safdar Warriach and Nafisa Munawwar Raja attended the meeting.

2. Sumaira Malik Appointed PML Women's Wing President

Pakistan Muslim League (PML) President Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain accepted Federal Tourism Minister Nilofar Bakhtiar's resignation and appointed Sumaira Malik as PML Women's Wing President, stated a notification issued by the PML.

The newly appointed Pakistan Muslim League Women's Wing President expressed gratitude to PML President Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain for her appointment during an interview with reporters. Revealing her future plans, the new president of the PML Women's Wing said a safe and protective environment for women and their economic empowerment would be prioritised. In addition to the PML president, Malik also thanked those who had hailed her appointment and expressed full confidence in her.

PML Women's Wing office-bearers welcomed the appointment of the Women Development and Youth Affairs minister as the PML Women's Wing president.

3. Afghan MP Removed for Insulting Parliament

Afghanistan's most controversial female MP was removed from her post by the lower house of Parliament for calling the house "worse than a stable". A videotape of the private TV interview in which Malalai Joya recently made the remarks was shown in the house before most delegates voted for her removal. She was heard to remark that a stable is better, for there you have a donkey that carries a load and a cow that provides milk. The parliament is worse than a stable. Joya, seen as controversial and outspoken for criticising some mujahideen leaders and commanders, could not be reached for comment. The 28-year old women's rights activist is reasonably famous at home, but her real recognition came in the West when she spoke out against some mujahideen figures in 2003. She won a seat in the 2005 parliamentary elections. There are 68 women MPs in parliament among the 248 lawmakers.

II Women & HR

1. Discrimination against Girls 'Still Deeply Entrenched'

A study has revealed that almost 100 million girls "disappear" each year, killed in the womb or as babies. The report, "**Because I am a Girl**", exposes the gender discrimination which remains deeply entrenched and widely tolerated across the world, including the fact that female foeticide is on the increase in countries where a male child remains more valued.

The report highlights the fact that two million girls a year still suffer genital mutilation, half a million die during pregnancy - the leading killer among 15 to 19-year-olds - every 12 months and an estimated 7.3 million are living with HIV/Aids compared with 4.5 million young men. Almost a million girls fall victim to child traffickers each year compared with a quarter that number of boys.

Of the 1.5 billion people living on less than 50p a day, 70 per cent are female, with 96 million young women aged 15 to 24 unable to read or write - almost double the number for males. While many of the most shocking figures in the Plan International report relate to developing nations, sexual discrimination is still prevalent in the north.

In the UK, two women a week are killed by current or former partners. The country also has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe and having a baby at a young age means women are more likely to miss out on education and slip into poverty. There has also been a substantial rise in obesity in young girls in the UK.

While girls in Britain often outperform boys in school, they are still victims of discrimination in the workplace. The report points out that a recent study found they were still woefully underrepresented in the boardroom, in politics and the courts. While the pay gap between young men and women is 3.7 per cent, it rises to 10.7 per cent for those in their thirties.

The "Because I am a Girl" campaign highlights discrimination and will work towards improving gender equality worldwide. Designed to run until 2015, the campaign will also follow the lives of 125 girls born in 2006 until their ninth birthday. Report is the first in a series of nine studies by Plan International - a global child development agency. Statistics show that 62 million girls are not even receiving primary school education while an estimated 450 million have stunted growth because of childhood malnutrition. "Why, in an era that saw the term 'girl power' coined, are millions of girls being condemned to a life of inequality and poverty?" the report asks.

III Women & Economics

1. Corporate Sector to Focus on Rural Women

Chairman National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) Daniyal Aziz while addressing a Conference on women empowerment organized by National Bank of Pakistan, said that corporate sector should focus on women welfare in the rural areas to bring further prosperity and fast track development.

He said during last couple of years amendments have been made to the Constitution to empower women politically, socially and economically so that they could serve the country with full devotion and confidence. He said the Government had fulfilled its commitment to empower women and for the first time in country's history, women were involved in political process both at local and national levels. He said investment in women Human Resource Development (HRD), especially to educate them could further empower the women.

IV Women & Laws

1. Women Protection Act 2006): Legal and Social Analysis

A discourse on "Women Protection Act 2006): Legal and Social Analysis", organized by the National Commission on the Status of Women, urged that political will and police reform are essential for the smooth working of the judicial system and work shop should be organized for the police and media to clear the confusion regarding Women Protection Act (WPA) and Hudood Ordinance. **Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid** said that under the Hudood Ordinance 99 percent poor women are jailed. WPA few food provision bur Hudood Ordinance should also be made if necessary but after the consultation of all the religious sects and through parliament. Since the

enforcement of WPA no case of Zina has been reported in Karachi jail, which is a healthy sign. Talking about WPA's provision he said on the charge of Fornication only two witnesses have been made compulsory which is against Islam. For the last few years not a single case of gang rape has been resolved. He said only making a law is not enough but the mindset of the people should also be changed. Judicially system is not working properly and only judges are not only responsible for this. Police corruption and low wages of judges are one of the main factors for this mess. After the implementation of Hudood Ordinance women faced many problems and number of women in jails increased because former dictator Zia ul Haq made it haphazardly without knowing its implications **Justice Shaiq Usmani** said while giving the background of Hudood Ordinance that though Government has made WPA for political benefits and on the pressure of America but it has given relief to women, Now cases are resolved through court and women can not be detained in jails. Punishment of stoning death is still included in the WPA, which is awful." Inclusion of crime of fornication in WPA is illegal and the perpetrators can misuse it. Reducing the death sentence in to 10 or 15 years in WPA is not good decision Justice Shaiq said. **Justice (R) Majida Rizvi** pointed out that one year has been passed since the enforcement of this act but still Government has not notified the competent authority.

V Books/Reports/Articles on Gender

Title:	Gender Equality & United Nations Reform: A Resource Packet
Publication Date:	January 2007
Publisher:	Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO)
Short Summary:	How did women's organisations and networks respond to the new gender equality architecture proposed by the United Nations (UN) High-Level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence? What actions are women's groups taking? This resource pack outlines the UN's recommendations, gives information on the UN processes and provides statements of response from women's groups in South Asia, Africa and elsewhere. The international women's movement has long lobbied the UN to create a stronger institutional mechanism to respond to the issues of gender inequality and the abuse of women's rights. The women's movement has therefore welcomed the recommendation to create a single, separate UN agency on gender equality and women's empowerment that is fully resourced and headed by a gender equality expert with Under Secretary-General status. Women's organisations are concerned, however, that the intergovernmental process to agree the plan will lead to a dilution of the proposal and they urge women's groups to lobby their governments to back the Panel's original recommendations. Women's organisations also want to ensure that the new agency has authority, gender expertise and resources at all UN levels, from global offices to regional and country teams.

Complete Document:  [View PDF \(Portable Document Format\)](#)

II. Democracy Watch

I Presidential Elections

President Pervez Musharraf is facing criticism both by local and international media for his policies. While he utters that there is a conspiracy going against him. Pressure on him is increasing to remove uniform while he stated uniform as his second skin. Following are some views and comments on Musharraf regime as well as his responses:

- § A commentary published by the **US news intelligence service, Stratfor** said that with each passing day, Musharraf appears to be losing his hold on power. According to the commentary, “Musharraf’s own constituency, the military, is beginning to show signs of concern — even his close Generals are now privately admitting things have gotten out of hand. There also are indications that the US has begun to gradually move away from the embattled Pakistani leader. The developing shift in Washington’s attitude is notable, considering that the Bush administration has heavily depended on Musharraf being at the helm in Islamabad during the war on terrorism. But the US has been preparing for at least a little over a year. In the beginning, however, the US move stemmed from a desire to move beyond reliance on a single individual leader, not because of any threat to Musharraf’s hold on power. Now that he has imposed a crisis of governance on the Musharraf regime, it is only natural that the US now move from planning to actually preparing for the time when Musharraf will no longer be Pakistan’s President. But the military establishment dominates Pakistan, and Musharraf being both President and military chief raises the question of who will replace him.”
- § In an editorial, the **Washington Post** said: "After nearly eight years in power, Pakistani strongman Gen Pervez Musharraf appears to be weakening. Mass demonstrations broke out against him this month in the Punjab, the country's political heartland; tens of thousands at a time are turning out to cheer a Supreme Court judge who tried to investigate human rights abuses and then rejected the General's demand that he resign.
- § **The British media** claimed that the refusal of Benazir Bhutto to strike a deal with General Musharraf “appears to close off another exit for General Musharraf from the crisis” triggered by his removal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.
- § **The Guardian** has said President General Musharraf “appears increasingly authoritarian” in an interview with a private TV channel in which he declared that he would not allow both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto to return. The crisis has taken some sinister twists, the newspaper added. The thrashing of a Pakistani journalist Shakil Turabi, a news agency editor, has also been given coverage in the British media. The Guardian reports that he was dragged from his car in Islamabad by suspected intelligence agency agents and beaten for “writing against the Government”. The Guardian has claimed that the political crisis has further deepened after President Musharraf and his main rival, Benazir Bhutto, dismissed the possibility of a power-sharing deal. It writes that last weekend in Karachi 15,000 police and soldiers failed to intervene as armed MQM gangs blocked roads and shot the supporters of chief justice.
- § **President Musharraf has said that he is proud to be an Army man, and the uniform is like his second skin**, adding, “then how can I even think of taking it off!” In an exclusive interview with BBC Urdu Service, the President said that he had taken over as the President due to the turmoil in the country though he loved being an Army man. Musharraf said the Army did not come into Pakistani politics on its own; rather, it was invited to take care of the civil administration. He said the armed forces had strengthened Pakistan and were its strength. It is the opposition which is spreading a negative propaganda against the armed forces.
- § **President Musharraf has accused the opponents of using his ouster of the Chief Justice to conspire against him** and said he would weep if "lies and deception" prevail in

the crisis threatening his grip on power. In a defiant speech on May 21, Musharraf defended his Government's record and accused unidentified opponents of hijacking a purely legal issue - allegations that Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry abused his office - for their political ends. President Musharraf said the presidential reference against Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry was an encounter between truth and lies, adding that the opposition wanted victory of falsehood by politicising the matter. "The judicial matter is being politicised. The presidential reference is truth versus falsehood. By giving the issue a political colour, the falsehood and deceit are being upgraded and truth is being downgraded," he said at a public meeting at Hazara University.

II General Elections

1. Political Parties' News

§ Jamali Launched Muttahida PML

Former Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali Thursday announced the launching of 'Muttahida Muslim League (MML)'. Rejecting the notion that the MML was formed on the instance of President Pervez Musharraf, Jamali said reconciliation between political parties including Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was the need of the hour. He emphasised the need of a two-party system in the country with only a "Muslim League" and a "People Party" in the political arena. Jamali described the possibility of his rejoining PML-Q as "out of question."

Earlier, he held a one-to-one meeting with Pagaro, which he described as his maiden formal meeting with the PML-F leader regarding the formation of MML. He said he did not see any possibility of elections being held this year. To a question regarding the probability of mediation between Musharraf and the chief justice by him, he said he did not deem himself fit for the task.

§ PPP to Interview Polls Candidates

The Pakistan People's Party's leadership has invited applications from party officials vying to contest the forthcoming General Elections. A key PPP member, seeking anonymity said that the party Chairperson Benazir Bhutto has asked the second-line leadership back home to get applications from would-be candidates. He said that the process of submission of applications was likely to be completed in the third week of June and potential candidates would be summoned to Dubai in July for meetings with Ms Bhutto who would conduct final interviews. The PPP leader also said preliminary interviews would be conducted by provincial executive committees. He said that Ms Bhutto was likely to summon a meeting of the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) and federal council (FC) in Dubai soon.

§ Benazir Coming Back Before December

Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has said that she will return to the country between September and December after ending her self-proclaimed exile despite her anticipated arrest. Giving an exclusive interview to BBC, Benazir Bhutto said, "I will go back even if they arrest me because I am ready for it." She said that keeping in view the present scenario back home she might return to the country much earlier than September. She said that she would soon announce a date in this regard and she would leave for the country from London. She said that Gen Musharraf's recent statement regarding rejection of the possibility of return of leaders of two big political parties of the country had really disappointed her.

§ Benazir, Nawaz Cannot Return Before Polls: Musharraf

President Gen Pervez Musharraf said former premiers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif would not be allowed to return to Pakistan before the next General Elections.

2. PPP-Musharraf Deal

§ BB-Musharraf Deal Dead?

According to an analysis based on an interview with the PPP leader, published in the Christian Science Monitor (CSM) on May 17, the prospect of a political deal between General Pervez Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto appears to be dead.

Bhutto said the killing of dozens of citizens in Karachi by a pro-government mob on May 12 had shattered her interest in cooperating with Musharraf. While some would have viewed the Bhutto-Musharraf deal as “pragmatic,” others would have seen it as Bhutto blessing Musharraf’s military dictatorship, effectively splintering opposition to the regime. With the deal called off, the impact on the emergence of a united opposition would be “dramatic,” adds the report.

Benazir Bhutto admitted that from the end of last year until the beginning of this year, she had been speaking to the Musharraf government about possible political cooperation. She refused to elaborate but insisted that the closure of a NAB wing did not mean that the corruption cases against her had been dropped. Although she would not go into details, Bhutto says the talks had already been faltering because she distrusted Musharraf’s side. She referred to an assassination attempt against her sister-in-law Azra Zardari. Police refused to file a criminal complaint against a Provincial Minister and his bodyguards who were accused of the shooting attempt. Examining the possibility of Musharraf still bringing moderate parties together to form a Government, Bhutto said, “I think that if Musharraf does that, he can bargain with the political parties. All the moderate parties should be included. But I can’t talk about him having a chance right now because the passions are running so high in Karachi that people will not hear of it.” She added, “No matter what, I am going back this year. I have to go back because I have been out for too long.”

3. Election Observations

§ Pre-Election Findings and Observations by NDI

An international delegation organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) visited Pakistan from May 13 to May 17, 2007. The delegation assessed the political environment and the framework for the upcoming elections for the national and provincial assemblies expected in late 2007 or early next year.

Following is the summary of findings and observations by the delegation:

- § President Pervez Musharraf announced his intention to step down as Army Chief by late 2004, but he has continued in both roles. Serving in both positions blurs the distinction between military and civilian authority that is fundamental to a democratic system.
- § President also expressed his intention to be re-elected as President by the legislative assemblies that will complete their term on November 15. This decision is controversial within Pakistan and could diminish public confidence in the upcoming elections.
- § There has been widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of political parties which has been criticized for corrupt practices and for failing to fulfill their promises to improve the conditions of ordinary Pakistanis, many of whom live in deep-seated poverty.
- § In areas where tribal customs are dominant, the Government tacitly accedes to pressures that prevent women from voting. In past elections, women’s polling stations have been targeted for fraud on election-day.
- § The Election Commission, whose members are appointed by the Government, is widely viewed as lacking independence. The delegation identified three areas in election administration that give rise to particularly serious concerns: the preparation of voters lists; the procedures for aggregating voters from different polling stations; and the lack of timely adjunction and remedy of election disputes.\
- § There is inadequate information provided by ECP on the registration process. The timetable and requirements for registration have changed on several occasions since they were first announced, and parties, voters, and public at large have received little information about the need to register, how to register or eligibility requirements. Insufficient information is publicly available on how voters may be able to register or appeal to the ECP should they find the voters list in error. Initially expected to be completed and displayed in January, the voters list is considerably that up to 10 million people should be added to the list.
- § The delegation is concerned about the ECP’s preparedness based on findings by election

monitors in past elections. In 2002, international and domestic observers were troubled by the lack of training for poll workers, a lack of supplies, a failure to guarantee secrecy during the vote and the relocation of polling stations without adequately informing the electorate.

The delegation offered several recommendations on contextual issues, legal framework and electoral framework.

§ **Jhang-VIII By-Elections: Bonded Voting, Election Rules Violations**

According to the preliminary election observation report released by Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN); bonded voting, an environment of intimidation, blatant disregard of rules and procedures by election officials and disinterest of political parties followed by a lackluster election campaign characterized the by-election for PP-80, Jhang-VIII seat held on May 24, 2007.

With respect to FAFEN observers' interviews with voters and other stakeholders in the area, a **majority of the votes were cast by people whose livelihood depends on the contesting candidates**. The candidate fielded by the Pakistan Muslim League is one of the most influential landlords of the area and therefore has immense controls on a considerable number of people who live on his lands and depend on him for living. His main ally, disqualified incumbent Imtiaz Lali, also holds huge land tracts and therefore enjoys a considerable following of the people living and working on his land. Most people who were interviewed by FAFEN observers had no interest in party politics and were voting for the landlords as they thought that was the only option they had. Therefore, the votes polled for Ghulam Lali were not indicative of the support of the PML, but can be qualified as the "bonded vote" – a phenomenon that is rampant in rural, feudal districts of Pakistan.

At many polling stations, **local supporters of the candidates, mostly Nazims and councilors, were seen supervising the voting** and keeping an eye on the voters even at the time of their stamping the ballots. At some polling stations, observers witnessed ballots papers of voters being stamped by polling agents of the PML candidate or other party activists deputed to oversee the process. The principal of the secrecy of ballot was compromised consistently in the by-election, based on FAFEN observations.

Some FAFEN observers were also questioned by **armed men supporting the PML candidate**, who pressurized the observers to leave the area. Another team of observers was questioned by a plainclothes-policeman and given a soft warning to leave the area. The same team was also pursued by a police van in a bid to intimidate them out of the area where the Punjab government minister was touring.

The **presence of women was relatively low in polling stations**. Most strikingly, male and particularly female youth did not appear to be involved in the electoral process. This might have been due to their not being registered as voters or lack of national identity cards. In areas covered by polling stations 48 and 49, women were barred from voting.

The **violations of election rules and procedures** were rampant and reported by all observation teams in different parts of the constituency. Most of these violations were of procedural in nature with serious implications on the election result and committed by the election officials themselves, as most were either not trained to handle their job or disinterested in asserting their authority. Similar laidback attitude of election officials was earlier reported by FAFEN in Karachi, Jamshoro and Bannu by-elections.

Some FAFEN observers also reported that election officials were allowing **voting on photocopies of National Identity Cards**. In one polling station, a driving license was accepted as a legitimate form of identification for voting. At some polling stations, the election officials started to check the NICs and fill out blank counter-foils on ballot books only after noticing the presence of FAFEN observers.

Most striking to FAFEN observers was the **presence of unauthorized people inside the polling stations**. Election officials did not seem to have any control over the presence of such people, neither would the police take any action to ensure that only voters enter the station. Some election

officials, when asked, said they just wanted to get through the day and would not take the risk of challenging these locally influential people, many of whom also carried arms. Most of these unauthorized people were supervising voting, ensuring that the votes were cast in favor of the PML candidate. It also appeared the local police, who are supposed to remain neutral, were siding with the PML candidate, speaking with his supporters and exchanging notes about the voting and later the count.

ECP procedures for checking the identity cards of all voters, checking their entry in the voters lists and then issuing the ballot paper was also not followed at many polling stations. **The voters chit issued by the PML camp was sufficient proof to allow anybody to vote.** However, the election officials would improve the implementation of the procedures after seeing FAFEN observers in their polling booths. Most observers reported that the elections officials were not marking voters' right thumb with indelible ink, citing various excuses. The most common excuse was the inadequate, substandard quantity of ink that was made available.

Some **mistakes in procedure** were also made by the district ECP officials responsible for organizing the by-election. At some polling stations, polling officials, particularly women, were deputed who were listed as voters in the same polling area where they were performing their duties. Many election officials also complained that the Returning Officer gave them remuneration with deductions of Rs. 75 per official without assigning any reason. **The training for election officials that was held in the third week of May was also inadequate.** Many election officials said they were only given a handbook without any explanation about the election rules.

4. Other News

§ Three Names under Review for Caretaker PML

President General Pervez Musharraf and his colleagues have decided not to import a caretaker Prime Minister from abroad for the interim set-up to be announced before November 15. Three names are under consideration for the post of caretaker Prime Minister. They are Chaudhry Ahmed Saeed, former Chairman of the Pakistan International Airlines; Lt-Gen (Retd) Hamid Javed, Chief of Staff to the President; and Dr Ishrat Hussain, former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, who is at present Chairman of the National Commission for Government Reforms. It has been learnt that Pakistan Muslim League President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain would not object to the name of Chaudhry Ahmed Saeed, even though they had been opponents in the past many elections in the Gujrat district.

III. Governance at Large

I CJP and Political Situation in Pakistan

- § **The Government on May 2nd requested the Supreme Court to expand the five-member bench** hearing identical petitions, including that of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, into a full court. Advocate Ibrahim Satti — who made the request on behalf of Sharifuddin Pirzada, representing President General Pervez Musharraf — said in the application to the Supreme Court that the five-member bench was open to question on various grounds because it comprised four junior judges and an ad hoc one whose appointment had been challenged in the apex court. The Government side opposed the idea of full court when on April 27 the chief justice had requested formation of a full court comprising all judges of the Supreme Court.
- § **Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, through an application on May 3rd challenged the Government's move for constitution of the full court** for the hearing the constitutional petition filed by him. The chief justice prayed in the application that “the application of the respondent is malicious and is an attempt to prolong the hearing of the aforesaid petition, malign the exercise of power by the acting chief justice. It is inconsistent with the earlier stand of the respondent and hence liable to be dismissed and disregarded”.
- § **Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary addressed Lahore High Court Bar Association on May 6.** Thousands of supporters turned out to greet him as he travelled by road from Islamabad. The trip takes four hours but took him more than 20. Nations and states which are based on dictatorship instead of the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law and protection of basic rights get destroyed.
- § **A larger bench of the Supreme Court on May 7 ordered hearing of the constitutional petition** of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and 22 other identical petitions pertaining to the presidential reference by a full court in view of the importance of the matter.
- § **The Supreme Court on May 8 constituted a 14-member full court** to hear the constitutional petition of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry against the presidential reference along with 22 other identical petitions.
- § **The Supreme Court on May 9 prohibited discussions, comments and write-ups likely to interfere with the legal process in connection with the presidential reference** against Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and the constitutional petitions on the subject.
- § On May 12, the Chief Justice was stationed at the Jinnah International Airport Karachi and was unable to leave due to **violence and road-blocks** established around his location till 8 PM. The Government agreed to send a helicopter to transport him out of the airport, but Chaudhry Iftikhar refused, indicating that he wished to travel by ground.
- § On May 14, four men sneaked into the house of **Supreme Court (SC) Additional Registrar Hammad Raza** on April 14 and gunned him down, apparently in a target killing. Raza was a prime defence witness in the presidential reference against the CJP. Munir A Malik, a lawyer on the CJP's defence team, said the CJP had confirmed that Raza could appear in court as a witness to defend him and his murder at this time is suspicious.
- § On May 15, the full court of the Supreme Court comprising 13 judges on May 14 passed short orders to confirm **the interim stay of the Supreme Judicial Council's proceedings** till a final decision by the (full) court.
- § Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in his **affidavit submitted to the Full Court of the Supreme Court** here May 29 alleged that he was ‘illegally and unlawfully’

restrained to perform his constitutional functions as a judge and as the Chief Justice of Pakistan. Giving details of the March 9 incidents, he said that President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf met him wearing army uniform in the Rawalpindi Camp Office. He said that Prime Minister of Pakistan Shaukat Aziz, DG MI, DG ISI, DG IB, COS and another official were also present in the Army House and all officials (except DG, IB and COS) were in uniform. According to the affidavit, the President General Pervez Musharraf insisted that Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry should resign and if he (Chief Justice) resigned, he (the President) would 'accommodate' him (the Chief Justice). However the President also said that in case of refusal to resign, the Chief Justice will have to face the reference which could be a bigger embarrassment for him (Chief Justice). The affidavit further stated that the Chief Justice finally, and more resolutely, said, 'I wouldn't resign and would face any reference since I am innocent; I have not violated any code of conduct or any law, rule or regulation; I believe that I am myself the guardian of law. I strongly believe in God who will help me'.

§ Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday said on May 31st that the **President of the Country enjoys no absolute immunity under the Constitution and is answerable to the court.** Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday observed while hearing arguments on the maintainability of a petition by CJP Iftikhar Chaudhr. Justice Ramday said under Article 248, the president's office is not protected; however he could not be sued in person.

§ **Germany and Italy Voiced Concerns Over Judicial Crisis:** As concern over the 'suspension' of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry grows both at home and abroad, Germany became the second EU member Country to express concern over the Government's row with the judiciary and the recent violence in Karachi. Earlier, it was the Italian Deputy Prime Minister who, in his meeting with Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, pointed out the importance of respect for the rule of law and safeguarding the law and order situation. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier hoped that conditions in Pakistan would improve before the elections.

II Karachi Riots

On May 12, thirty-four people were killed and more than 140 injured as a major portion of Sharah-e-Faisal turned into a battlefield when rival political groups clashed with each other soon after the arrival of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. The terrible violence also saw an attack on a private television channel, two petrol pumps were reduced to ashes and more than 30 vehicles were burnt across the city. The utter failure of the Sindh Government and the law-enforcers to maintain law and order made the city hostage to political workers. However, Adviser to the Sindh Chief Minister on Home Affairs Waseem Akhtar blamed the Chief Justice for a breakdown in law and order and deaths in incidents of violence. President General PERvez Musharraf blamed CJP and Aitzaz Ahsan for Karachi killings.

According to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, the fighting has occurred as armed members of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) have clashed with members of opposition parties who retaliated with gunfire. The pro-Musharraf MQM had planned a rally coinciding with Chaudhry's arrival to demonstrate their support of Musharraf's suspension of the Chief Justice. However it is a matter of majority opinion that the violence was started by MQM who have a history of violence in the city of Karachi.

"Daily Times" looked upon the Karachi violence as the worst political violence in Pakistan in many years. It held Government responsible for riots and stated that *the plan of a counter rally by the Government in Karachi was a recipe for disaster. The way things were planned could be seen from the way the Government leaders, including the Sindh governor, tried to put the blame for the violence on the arrival in Karachi of the CJP. Governor Ishrat-ul Ibad told TV channels that the Provincial Government had clearly informed the CJP in writing that his arrival could create a law and order situation. This is interesting. Why was the Provincial Government "fearing" a law and order situation and simultaneously eager to go through the exercise of a counter rally? The same line was used by Dr. Farooq Sattar and various MQM leaders interviewed on camera. And the same line was taken by General Musharraf when he addressed his lacklustre rally in Islamabad.*

“The News” pointed towards the similitude between Karachi and Baghdad on May 12 and alarmed that the situation would be bearing long impact on the city’s law and order as well as economy. *The Many of those watching scenes on television on May 12 could not be faulted for thinking that perhaps the city that they were watching bore a strong resemblance to Baghdad where dozens of people die in bombings and shootings every day and where the Government writ is wholly absent. That May 12 events are going to have a disastrous and long-term effect on the city’s law and order situation and economy, especially in terms of attracting foreign visitors and investment, is an understatement. And those who think that they ‘own’ the city need to take a long look at their own actions, because these end up hurting only Karachi.*

Two causes for violence were mentioned by **“Dawn”**: *an inexplicable desire on the part of the Governing Sindh coalition, which has the MQM as a major partner, to ‘discourage’ the CJ from visiting Karachi. The CJ camp could have backed off; it too did not. Two, the law and order machinery completely failed to do its job, the Sindh Governor and the Chief Minister’s tall claims assuring the people of complete peace notwithstanding.*

III Lal Masjid Offers ‘Last Chance’ to Solve Row

In a response to the statement of Crisis Management Cell chairman Brig Javed Cheema in which he said the Lal Masjid administration was responsible for the failure of talks in the past, Ghazi Rashid said negotiations with the Government had failed because the Government never fulfilled any of its promises.

Ghazi accused the Government of not showing flexibility on the Lal Masjid issue despite a high degree of flexibility on their part. Ghazi said that the intelligence agencies are kidnapping our students in broad daylight. This is the last chance for the Government to settle all of the disputes, including implementation of Shariat in the country by talks, otherwise the government will have to suffer a lot. He further said that the Lal Masjid will keep the policemen hostage till the talks between the Lal Masjid and the Government concludes. If the first round of talks yields positive results, then policemen would be released.

A high-level meeting chaired by President General Pervez Musharraf was held and a set of issues including the overall law and order situation of the country, political matters and the Lal Masjid issue came under discussion. Certain important decisions were taken in the meeting. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and ruling PML-Q president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain also attended the meeting. President directed Chaudhry Shujaat to hold talks in categorical and unequivocal terms with the Lal Masjid administration. The President stated that the release of policemen held hostage be secured and legal action be initiated against the elements involved in the acts of breach of law. If Lal Masjid administration does not desist from taking steps against the law enforcement agencies, then the Government will be forced to initiate action against these elements.

IV Budget 2007-08

In the month of June Budget for FY 2007-08 would be presented in National Assembly. During the month of May following news were prevailing regarding Budget.

- § According a Finance Ministry official, the **federal budget for 2007-08 is likely to be of a little over Rs1.5 trillion** with no new taxes. Instead of providing its opponents another opportunity to criticise it by imposing new taxes, the Government had decided to raise resources for the budget by ‘broadening the existing narrow tax base’. Both the President and the Prime Minister are said to have agreed that fresh taxes have to be avoided at all costs. The official said the revenue target was estimated to be Rs1 trillion.
- § The **Federal Government is indicating to launch a huge development programme of about Rs500 billion during next fiscal 2007-08** which is an election year. It will be almost one-third of about Rs1.5 trillion proposed budget of 2007-08, and about 45 per cent more than the public sector development programme of Rs270 billion of the current fiscal year 2006-07. Official documents reveal that the total development outlay for 2006-07

amounted to Rs385bn which included Rs115bn for the provincial annual development programme and Rs270bn federal development programme. The Government's claim is that it has steadily been increasing size of public sector development programme and also improving the utilisation capacities of government agencies every year.

- § The Government has decided to allocate **Rs 180 billion in the next budget for agriculture credit** to disburse among the farmers during the next fiscal year. Farmers in Pakistan have a much better access to the formal sources of credit, the private and public sector banks.
- § The **Punjab Assembly's finance committee approved a Rs 426 million assembly budget** for the year 2007-08, which is almost 25 percent more than last year. Last year, the assembly's budget was Rs 37, 70, 35,000 that was revised to Rs 427,200,000 while this year the budget has been approved for a period of nine months because the assembly will complete its tenure in November.
- § Inter-Provincial Coordination Minister Salim Saifullah Khan has proposed that the **National Finance Commission (NFC) award** should be based on poverty, state of development and special needs of the federating units. Saifullah's proposed formula is different from all the provinces. He proposed that the Council of Common Interests should meet at least every six months. About the devolution of functions from the Centre to the provinces, he said all matters other than those given in the federal legislative list shall be dealt by the federating units.

V Book on Military's Business Empire Launched

A book putting a critical spotlight on the military's business nooks was launched from a virtual sanctuary on 31st June and some high-profile political reviewers seized upon it to denounce the army's role in Pakistani politics. The launching of the book, **Military Inc: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy**, by Dr Ayesha Siddiqa, a military analyst, was due to have taken place at the capital's elitist Islamabad Club. But the author told a surprised audience that not only the club cancelled the booking of its auditorium, "all hotels in Islamabad were also told" by unspecified authorities not to allow the use of their halls for this, forcing the organisers to find a sanctuary at a third-floor room provided by a non-governmental organisation.

It speaks about the role of the military power in transforming the Pakistani society, armed forces becoming an independent class entrenched in the corporate sector and their five giant welfare foundations, or conglomerates, running thousands of businesses ranging from petrol pumps to industrial plants.

VI ADB's Economic Update Shows Decline in Pakistan's Inflation

The Asian Development Bank's Economic Update has revealed that inflation declined in Pakistan but was still high at 7.6 percent during the first eight months of the fiscal year 2006-07.

Following are some findings by the ADB report:

- The ADB economic update said there was a slowdown in non-food inflation, with a sharp decline in oil-based inflation, including the cost of fuel, lighting, lubricants and transportation.
- Oil-based inflation declined from 12.8 percent in June 2006 to 8.8 percent in February 2007.
- Non-food, non-oil inflation, often referred to as (core monetary policy included) inflation, which had started declining after November 2005 (8.1 percent), continued to fall in the first eight months of the current year and stands at 6.3 percent. This was because of the tight monetary policy conditions.
- The annualized increase in food prices, on the other hand, accelerated to 8.7 percent in February 2007 from 6.9 percent in June 2006, as shortages of some vegetables, such as potatoes, onions and tomatoes and a number of pulses pushed up their prices. However, the latest price trends indicate an easing of food prices as well. The quarterly food inflation declined to 10.4 percent in February 2007, after peaking at 11.3 percent in December

2006.

- The tightening of monetary policy during the last two years had a dampening effect on the private sector demand for credit, which declined to Rs 241.6 billion in the first eight and half months of 2006-07 from Rs 330.5 billion in the same period of 2005-06.

VII World Bank Approved \$340m Credit for Pak Reforms Programme

The World Bank has approved \$350 million credit to support the Government's medium-term reform programme, which aims at promoting economic growth targeting poverty reduction.

The Second Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC-II), which supports the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, will:

- finance reforms designed to maintain macroeconomic stability
- improve management and effectiveness of public expenditures
- assist power sector reforms
- support the privatisation programme
- Improve the regulatory framework for competition as well as enhance women labour force participation and labour market flexibility
- support to improve governance through reforms in financial management, procurement, and the statistical system
- help accelerate progress in human development by creating additional public resources for education and health, strengthening the health and education national sector policies; and piloting innovative programmes, focusing on the poor, to enhance demand for these services
- support the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population through targeted programs aimed at addressing poverty and vulnerability directly.

This credit, from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's concessionary lending arm, carries a 0.75 percent annual service fee, while a portion of this credit (less than half) also carries an interest charge of 4 percent. The entire credit has a 10-year grace period, and a maturity of 35 years.

VIII First Global Peace Index Ranks 121 Countries Pakistan among 10 least Peaceful Countries

According to first global peace index, Pakistan is among 10 least peaceful countries in the world. Norway is the most peaceful country in the world and Iraq the least, according to the study, which notably puts Japan near the top and Russia and Israel close to the bottom.

The Global Peace Index, published a week before a Group of Eight (G8) summit in Germany, rates 121 countries from Algeria to Zimbabwe on factors including levels of violence, organised crime and military expenditure. While most European countries including Britain rank in the top, more peaceful, half of the league table, the United States is nearer the bottom in 96th place, while Russia is fifth from last on 118th.

The index is backed by international figures including the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former US President Jimmy Carter and US economist Joseph Stiglitz, all winners of the Nobel peace prize. It is also supported by Queen Noor of Jordan. Overall the study found that small, stable countries which are part of regional blocs such as the 27-nation European Union are most likely to be more peaceful. Income and education are crucial in promoting peace, it said.

Following are the 121 GPI rankings. Countries most at peace ranked first

Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
1	Norway	1.357	62	Bahrain	1.995
2	New Zealand	1.363	63	Jordan	1.997
3	Denmark	1.377	64	Namibia	2.003
4	Ireland	1.396	65	Senegal	2.017
5	Japan	1.413	66	Nicaragua	2.020
6	Finland	1.447	67	Croatia	2.030

7	Sweden	1.478	68	Malawi	2.038
8	Canada	1.481	69	Bolivia	2.052
9	Portugal	1.481	70	Peru	2.056
10	Austria	1.483	71	Equatorial Guinea	2.059
11	Belgium	1.498	72	Moldova	2.059
12	Germany	1.523	73	Egypt	2.068
13	Czech Republic	1.524	74	Dominican Republic	2.071
14	Switzerland	1.526	75	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2.089
15	Slovenia	1.539	76	Cameroon	2.093
16	Chile	1.568	77	Syria	2.106
17	Slovakia	1.571	78	Indonesia	2.111
18	Hungary	1.575	79	Mexico	2.125
19	Bhutan	1.611	80	Ukraine	2.150
20	Netherlands	1.620	81	Jamaica	2.164
21	Spain	1.633	82	Macedonia	2.170
22	Oman	1.641	83	Brazil	2.173
23	Hong Kong	1.657	84	Serbia	2.181
24	Uruguay	1.661	85	Cambodia	2.197
25	Australia	1.664	86	Bangladesh	2.219
26	Romania	1.682	87	Ecuador	2.219
27	Poland	1.683	88	Papua New Guinea	2.223
28	Estonia	1.684	89	El Salvador	2.244
29	Singapore	1.692	90	Saudi Arabia	2.246
30	Qatar	1.702	91	Kenya	2.258
31	Costa Rica	1.702	92	Turkey	2.272
32	South Korea	1.719	93	Guatemala	2.285
33	Italy	1.724	94	Trinidad and Tobago	2.286
34	France	1.729	95	Yemen	2.309
35	Vietnam	1.729	96	United States of America	2.317
36	Taiwan	1.731	97	Iran	2.320
37	Malaysia	1.744	98	Honduras	2.390
38	United Arab Emirates	1.747	99	South Africa	2.399
39	Tunisia	1.762	100	Philippines	2.428
40	Ghana	1.765	101	Azerbaijan	2.448
41	Madagascar	1.766	102	Venezuela	2.453
42	Botswana	1.786	103	Ethiopia	2.479
43	Lithuania	1.788	104	Uganda	2.489
44	Greece	1.791	105	Thailand	2.491
45	Panama	1.798	106	Zimbabwe	2.495
46	Kuwait	1.818	107	Algeria	2.503
47	Latvia	1.848	108	Myanmar	2.524
48	Morocco	1.893	109	India	2.530
49	United Kingdom	1.898	110	Uzbekistan	2.542
50	Mozambique	1.909	111	Sri Lanka	2.575
51	Cyprus	1.915	112	Angola	2.587
52	Argentina	1.923	113	Cote d'Ivoire	2.638
53	Zambia	1.930	114	Lebanon	2.662
54	Bulgaria	1.936	115	Pakistan	2.697
55	Paraguay	1.946	116	Colombia	2.770
56	Gabon	1.952	117	Nigeria	2.898
57	Tanzania	1.966	118	Russia	2.903
58	Libya	1.967	119	Israel	3.033
59	Cuba	1.968	120	Sudan	3.182
60	China	1.980	121	Iraq	3.437
61	Kazakhstan	1.995			

IV. Geo-Political Dynamics

I South Asia

1. IISS Strategic Dossier on Nuclear Black Markets

The IISS Strategic Dossier on nuclear black markets provides a comprehensive assessment of the Pakistani nuclear programme from which the Khan network emerged, the network's proliferation activities, and the illicit trade in fissile materials. In addition, the dossier provides an overview of the clandestine nuclear procurement activities of other states, along with the efforts made both by Pakistan and the international community to prevent the reoccurrence of further proliferation networks and to secure nuclear technology. The final chapter assesses policy options for further action.

According to dossier: "Nuclear Black Markets: Pakistan, A. Q. Khan and the Rise of Proliferation Networks" launched by IISS on May 2nd, the **"Father of the Pakistani bomb" should be former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the political side and Munir Ahmad Khan on the technical side**, and not the country's disgraced top scientist Dr A.Q. Khan. According to Mark Fitzpatrick, one of the author's of the IISS dossier, Bhutto as his country's Minister for Mineral Resources in the late 1950s and early 1960s, set up the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Sciences and Technology (PINST) in 1960 and sent hundreds of students abroad to obtain degrees in physics and other nuclear-related science disciplines.

Mr. Fitzpatrick also said that investigators had found **no link between the Khan network of nuclear proliferators and the terrorist group that caused the 9/11 attacks** on the United States. He said that the Khan network also had no links with Umma Taamir-e-Nao, an NGO whose members allegedly met Osama bin Laden and discussed the production of nuclear weapons with him.

Mr. Fitzpatrick identified **Dr Khan as the head of the group that sold nuclear technology and equipment to Iran, Libya and North Korea but said that "the network's sales to Libya were almost exclusively private business transactions, beyond state control."** The centrifuges sold to Libya were produced in Malaysia, Turkey, Europe and South Africa and trans-shipped in Dubai, the report added. But the report also identified some 'gray areas', adding that "past Pakistani governments' knowledge of and even involvement in A. Q. Khan's secondary proliferation activities remains open to debate."

2. Kashmiri Leaders Want Amnesty for Militants and Prisoners

Kashmiri leaders from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) issued a joint statement calling for a general amnesty for militants and political prisoners and for Government support in facilitating the movement of men and material across the LoC. The leaders also decided to form **coordination committees of legislators, women and youth to strengthen and accelerate the peace process between India and Pakistan.**

The meeting, jointly organised by former Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qayum Khan and Panthers Party Chief Prof Bhim Singh, urged the Indian Government to allow jailed militants and political leaders to start a new life. The statement demanded **a general amnesty for all militants and safe passage for foreign militants, and those suffering in jails or still present in Jammu and Kashmir should be given an opportunity to return home.** The statement was released at the conclusion of the Heart-to-Heart conference, which was attended by several politicians, academics and journalists from Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Leaders from the Indian side of Kashmir were noticeably absent. Reiterating their commitment to strengthen the ongoing peace process, the joint statement said the conference participants vowed to facilitate the peace process in every respect. They identified harsh restrictions on both sides as impediments for people-to-people interaction between the two Kashmirs.

It was recommended **that all the historical and natural routes, including pony, road and rail routes, should be restored to their pre-partition state, said the statement.** The statement further suggested that the **arrangement regarding cross-LoC travel from before 1956 be**

restored, including deputy commissioners power to issue travel permits.

3. 50,000 Hindus in India Convert to Buddhism

Several thousand low-caste Indians converted to Buddhism in a mass ceremony in Mumbai on May 30. Almost 50,000 young men, many dressed in white, believed the conversion would give them dignity in a society where they are known as dalit or untouchables. Organisers said the ceremony was conducted to fulfill the dream of Indian leader BR Ambedkar, himself a dalit and freedom fighter. Ambedkar was the chief architect of the Indian Constitution that outlawed discrimination based on caste. He had planned to hold a mass conversion ceremony in 1956, but died a few days before the function.

4. 10,000 More Troops for Durand Line

Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said that Pakistan has increased the number of troops and military posts on the rugged border to check cross-border movement of militants.

NATO Secretary General while addressing a joint news conference with Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said that the NATO troops have been deployed in Afghanistan for peace, stability and reconstruction of the country that will take long time. No withdrawal framework can be announced. The two sides discussed various global and bilateral issues including war on terror and in this context situation in Afghanistan, Indo-Pak peace process, Iran and Iraq, Palestine and bilateral relations. They agreed to take new and effective measures to strengthen security along the Pak-Afghan border. President Musharraf, however, told the NATO Secretary General that the Taliban were primarily an Afghan problem and that Afghan and international coalition forces needed to do more at military, political and administrative levels to defeat the insurgency. He said that Pakistan, Afghanistan and NATO are in the same boat and joint efforts were required to curb terrorism and extremism in the region.

Foreign Minister Kasuri said that Pakistan and NATO would start a formal process of consultation to enhance cooperation in various fields. He added that the onus for border control could not be placed on Pakistan alone. Kasuri said Pakistan was directly affected by the rampant of narcotics trade in Afghanistan. He emphasised the need for taking more efficient steps by Afghanistan in this regard.

Kasuri said Pakistan had made huge efforts to enhance stability in the border region. He said that Pakistan had increased the number of troops and military posts on the rugged border to check cross-border movement of militants. He stated that previously we had 80,000 soldiers but now with the movement of some more troops it's now reached 90,000.

5. World Bank Offers Funds for IPI Pipeline

Vice-President of the World Bank Praful Patel has said that the World Bank is ready to fund the proposed \$7.2 billion Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project. Patel said the IPI gas pipeline project is "good and quite feasible" and would help cater to the energy needs of Pakistan and India. He said the Bank also supports the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) gas pipeline project. He further said that if Pakistan would come to ask for funding for any of the pipeline, the World Bank would seriously consider extending the funding. He added that in case of materialisation of the IPI gas pipeline, Pakistan would also get the transit fee annually from India, which would play a pivotal role in strengthening its economy. Patel said that IPI gas pipeline project is a win-win situation for Pakistan and India. He again said that in case the Bank is approached to finance the project, it would give serious consideration to the same.

According to official sources, progress has been made in narrowing down differences between Pakistan and India over charges to be paid by Delhi to Islamabad for allowing passage of Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. Now June-end deadline for signing of a tripartite agreement looks achievable with this development on \$7.4 billion gas pipeline project. Iran wants to sell natural gas to India and Pakistan at \$4.93 per mBtu (at USD 60 per barrel crude oil price). Transportation tariff and transit fee are in addition to this price.

6. Bhutan Takes another Tilt at Election

The small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan takes another swing at the art of voting, undeterred by the challenges of reaching remote villages and a marked reluctance to abandon the monarchy.

The Buddhist country, sandwiched between Asian giants China and India, is preparing for its first ever election next year by holding a second round of dummy polls. After April's first round produced a turnout of just 30 percent, officials are hoping for a better response from the 400,000 eligible voters this time. But they face major hurdles in their effort to educate people on the finer points of parliamentary democracy.

A draft constitution, due to replace a 1953 royal decree giving the monarch absolute power, has been sent for public consultation ahead of the 2008 polls. Respect for the royal family cuts across generations here, although older Bhutanese seem unable to agree on the need for reform. Acceptance of change was stronger among the young, who have adapted to the shifts in society - new cars imported from India and radio stations airing songs by the Black Eyed Peas, Gwen Stefani and Bob Dylan -- more easily.

II East Asia

1. Pro-Democracy Activists Rally in Myanmar

Hundreds of pro-democracy activists supported by foreign diplomats rallied on May 27 near the home of Myanmar's detained Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, lighting candles to mark the election her party won in vain in 1990.

Members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), some wearing T-shirts emblazoned with pictures of Aung San Suu Kyi, gathered at party headquarters, not far from the lakeside home of the democracy icon. They were joined by former student activists, and the crowd of about 350 people lit candles and chanted "Free Aung San Suu Kyi" as they released more than 100 balloons carrying the same slogan into the skies above Yangon. Aung San Suu Kyi was on Friday informed that she would spend yet another year confined to her house, which police barricaded with barbed wire late Saturday, witnesses said.

On May 27, 1990, the NLD won elections here by a huge majority, but Myanmar's military rulers did not allow it to take power, and Aung San Suu Kyi has since spent most of the last 17 years in detention. Diplomats from countries including the United States, France and Australia joined the pro-democracy activists at their headquarters at midday for a ceremony marking the NLD victory. About 300 activists then tried to march to Yangon's famous Shwedagon pagoda to hold a prayer vigil for Aung San Suu Kyi, but witnesses said they were blocked by a pro-junta group, provoking tense scenes before they decided to turn back.

The NLD again called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other detained party members, but made clear its wish to hold talks with the junta, which calls itself the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). "Frank and honest dialogue" should be held between the SPDC, the NLD and the nation's many ethnic minority groups for the "destiny of the country," it said in a statement released during the commemorative ceremony. Security was tight at the gathering, with about 50 plainclothes police on guard, many taking photographs and videos of the activists.

III Middle East

1. U.S., Iran to End 27-Year Diplomatic Freeze

The United States and Iran broke a 27-year diplomatic freeze on May 28 with a four-hour meeting about Iraqi security. The American envoy said there was broad policy agreement, but that Iran must stop arming and financing militants who are attacking U.S. and Iraqi forces. Iranian Ambassador Hassan Kazemi Qomi said that the two sides would meet again in less than a month. U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker said Washington would decide only after the Iraqi Government issued an invitation.

The talks in the Green Zone offices of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki were the first formal and scheduled meeting between Iranian and American Government officials since the United States broke diplomatic relations with Tehran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the seizure of the U.S. Embassy. The American envoy called the meeting "businesslike" and said at "the level of policy and principle, the Iranian position as articulated by the Iranian ambassador was very close to our own."

The icebreaking session, according to both sides, did not veer into other difficult issues that encumber the U.S.-Iranian relationship — primarily Iran's nuclear program and the more than a quarter-century history of diplomatic estrangement. For its part, Iran's Shiite theocracy fears the Bush administration harbors plans for regime change in Tehran and could act on those desires as it did against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Washington and its Sunni Arab allies are deeply unnerved by growing Iranian influence in the Middle East and the spread of increasingly radical Islam.