

Gender

Women & Politics

Poll Papers of 22 Women Candidates Rejected in Sindh

The nomination papers of 22 candidates seeking to return to the National Assembly on seats reserved for women were rejected by the Election Commission on November 28. Sixty-one women candidates filed their nomination papers for 14 such seats in the province between Nov 21 and Nov 26. The total number of nomination papers filed for the reserved seats was 76 because some candidates submitted more than one nomination paper to the provincial election commission. The nomination papers of 37 candidates were found to be correct and accepted by returning officer Qamaruzzaman Chaudhry, the Sindh Election Commissioner.

The cases of two candidates -- Mrs Soorat of the PML-N and Khursheed Afgan of the PML-F -- were deferred and will be decided by Dec 3, the last date for scrutiny of nomination papers. Among the prominent candidates whose papers were rejected are, according to EC sources, former Sindh Ministers Dr Saeeda Malik and Dr Hameeda Khuhro, former senator Tanvir Khalid and Dr Huma Mir of the PML-Q, former MPA Naila Inam of the PML-F and former MPA Zareen Majid of the MQM. The candidates, whose papers were found in order and were mentioned in the lists provided by their respective parties, are:

- § Benazir Bhutto, Sheher Bano 'Sherry' Rehman, Mehreen Razzaq Bhutto, Nafisa Shah, Rubina Sadat Qaimkhani, Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Farha Naz Ispahani, Ruqia Khanum Soomro, Surraiya Jatoi, Munira Shakir, Shagufta Jumani, Fauzia Wahab, Shazia Marri and Nafisa Munawwar Raja of the Pakistan People's Party.
- § Ms Rifat Khan, Imrana Saeed Jamal, Shagufta Sadiq, Masooma Syed Zaidi, Kishwer Zehra, Naheed Fatima Imtiaz, Khushbakht Shujaat, Fozia Aijaz Khan, Shabina Talat, Rabia Jamal and Sabra Khatoon of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement.
- § Ms Raana Shah, Reena Kumari and Saira Naseer of the Pakistan Muslim League-F.
- § Ms Kaneez Fiza Junejo, Gule Farkhanda and Rahila Tiwana of the PML-Q.
- § Ms Shabana Yusuf, Shaheen and Begum Salma Ahmed Shah of the PML-N.
- § Ms Farida Ahmed Siddiqui, Bilqees Muzaffar, Noorun Nisa and Perveen Khan of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal and Nuzhat Jatoi of the National People's Party.

NADRA, EC to Ensure Registration of Women Voters

Pakistani Women form half of the country's population are deprived of their constitutional right to cast vote according to their wishes in certain areas of the country. However, some women rights activists criticized the women for not taking any interest in the politics and keeping themselves away from the political affairs.

The "Insaani Haqooq Ittehad", an alliance of civil society organizations has asked the NADRA and Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure maximum possible registration of women voters and demanded to ensure the participation of all eligible voters in the polls. According to alliance 50 per cent women have not been registered in the voter lists and many of them have been deprived of their right to vote, as they were not having Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs). Out of 33 million total unregistered voters, 20 million women, who have equal right to vote as that of other citizens but practically, they are devoid of this basic right. Civil rights activist Farzana Bari said that different problems restricted them from casting vote adding that they have problem of mobility, have not ID cards, they could not cast vote independently as they cast it according to wishes of their husbands and other male members of family. Tribal values also stop women from casting vote. They can go to weddings and other functions, and their male family members have no objection to that. But if they choose to fulfil their national obligation to vote, they are barred from doing so, instead of the fact that separate polling stations have been established for women across the country, commented an office worker, Expressing her views on the issue, Shumaila, a working lady said, "Due to lack of knowledge they (women) are not aware of important issues, even they don't know how many political parties will be taking part in coming elections. She said that they are not using

their minds and cast their vote, according to wish of their family head. In rural society even men cast their vote according to the wish of their community ruler, what to say of women. Hamida who belongs to Chitral said that women confined their lives to their homes, their sufferings and hard routine kept them away from politics. She added that eighty per cent women, do not have any concern with politics, they do not have any knowledge about importance of vote and its effects and just know the election symbols.

Women's Empowerment & Gender Balance

Women's Empowerment Mandate of all Ministries

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Women's Development has urged all ministries to take responsibility of women's empowerment and said that it was not the exclusive mandate of the Ministry of Women's Development (MoWD). In the farewell meeting of the standing committee, the participants said that there should be a cell of the MoWD in all the other ministries for rapid and effective resolution of all women-related problems. Women's Ministry Secretary Saleem Mahmood Saleem said that there is a dire need to expand the ministry to solve the problems of women who comprise 51 percent of the entire population. He said, adding that all the ministries and divisions are to act for women's causes within their respective mandates and functions under the rules of business. He further said that there is a need for cooperation and collaboration between all other ministries as one ministry alone cannot possibly cover all the perspectives. Saleem admitted that most of their efforts regarding women's empowerment had proved to be unfruitful due to the lack of funding and lack of collaboration with other sectors. Saleem pointed out that the Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) was supposed to be lined up with six ministries and that there should be a gender development section in all the ministries.

Chairperson of the committee Begum Mehnaz Rafi stressed the need for the ministry to work more efficiently and to write a letter to the prime minister for an increased budget. She said that a TV channel ostensibly running MoWD advertisements at commercial rates took a very cosmetic approach to women's issues. She added that only those women-related programmes were aired that depicted glamour. Rafi also urged the government to increase the number of women's centres across the country and to improve the standard of existing women's centres.

The meeting ended with the hope expressed by all committee members to continue their struggle for the empowerment of women in every field irrespective of the state of the assemblies.

First Summit of Women Leaders on Global Security

The first summit of women leaders held in New York on November 16-17 issued a call for action on global warming, terrorism, poverty and women's security. More than 70 women business leaders, members of government, lawmakers, diplomats and researchers from around the world are attending the two-day "**International Women Leaders Global Security Summit**," under the co-chairmanship of former Irish president Mary Robinson and former Canadian prime minister Kim Campbell. The top issues the summit is seeking greater, coordinated action on, include the dwindling Arctic ice mass that is transforming the Inuits' way of life and the education of their children, and the insecurity of women in Darfur, on which the United Nations on Friday issued a resolution urging action to eliminate rape and other forms of sexual violence whether committed by government troops, irregular forces or civilians. Robinson said she wanted women to get involved in solving the most pressing issues of the day. Launched in October 2006, the women leadership initiative was organized by several organizations, including The White House Project, the Council of Women World Leaders and the Women Leaders Intercultural Forum.

Women & Economics

Darul Falah Women Seek Raise in Stipends -- Survey

Women lodged at Darul Falah have demanded increase in their stipends, as it is becoming difficult for them to fulfil their needs in a small amount of Rs 450. During the survey conducted by The Post, it was learnt that women who were living at Darul Falah, were mostly widows and were solely depending on the stipend they were getting from the Punjab Government. Nazia Firdous belonging to Kotli Sattian told the team that she had been living at Darul Falah for the last two months. She had four daughters and her husband was unable to work, as he was a sugar patient. She said that someone told her about this shelter home, so she decided to live here. She could not afford to live on rent, as there was no source of earning for her, and she was supposed to fulfil the needs of her four daughters. Telling more about Darul Falah she said that she was living in one room and electricity and gas was free. Besides, she was getting Rs 450 per month that was

not enough for her. Another woman, Razia Bibi, hailing from Kalar Sayedan and living in Darul Falah for the last five months said that she had three children. Her husband was in army and after his retirement he went abroad and nine years had passed since his departure, but he had not returned so far. She had no contact with him throughout this period and could not know his whereabouts, despite her best efforts. She said that as she had no other source of income, therefore, she was compelled to go to Darul Falah. She said that she was also working at someone's house to earn more as Rs 450 was not enough to run her family budget. She said that sometime affluent people came here and gave donation for food or money. "The administration of Darul Falah is very cooperative and allows her to go outside and do a job. I leave the place early in the morning and return at 3 o'clock as the incharge of Darul Falah allows all women to work till 3 o'clock, the time they close the main gate," she added. Rubina Bibi, another widow living there and has a one-year-old child. She said that she had been living here for the last four months. Her husband died some time ago and her in-laws were not willing to let her live with them; therefore, she had no other option except going to Darul Falah. She added her mother was a widow and her one brother was handicapped and two other brothers were married and they were not in a position to bear her burden. As it was not possible for her to live with them, so she decided to take shelter here. She said that she felt satisfied here and did not want to go anywhere else.

The incharge of Darul Falah, Tasneem Minhas, said that they were trying to give peaceful environment to women as much as possible. She said that she agreed that the stipend was not enough as prices of everything had gone much higher, adding if the Punjab government increased their stipend, it would become easier for them to live comfortably. When asked about the miserably dilapidated condition of some quarters she said that many a time they had written letters to the concerned authorities to have them repaired, but they did not receive any favourable response.

Women & HR

Afghan Women – The Struggle Continues

The highlight of the ninth day of the World Performing Arts Film Festival was a thought-provoking documentary by Kathleen Foster on the subjugation of Afghan women.

Afghan Women: A History of Struggle (2007) offers this narrative in the words of Afghan women themselves. And by refusing to focus exclusively on female oppression by the Taliban, the film explores parallel discourses on gender inequality. Tracing the experience of Afghan women during different periods of pre-Taliban political upheaval the film focuses on women in the public sphere, such as human rights, social and political activists. Some might argue that this does a disservice to women whose human rights have been violated in the private sphere, since many of these narratives remain unheard. However, by emphasizing that public sphere rights are violated - the film underscores the extent to which this subjugation is, in effect, state-sponsored. The film also details the betrayal of Afghan women by the Hamid Karzai administration, with this United States-backed president failing to incorporate many of the steps outlined in the Afghan Women's Bill of Rights into the country's final constitution.

Given that Washington, after failing to apprehend Osama Bin Laden, sought to convince the world that its intervention in Afghanistan was staged to liberate the women of that country – this is unforgivable. While the audience comes away from this film feeling a mixture of outrage and depression at the ongoing plight of Afghan women – it also sees a glimmer of hope. For despite years of having their right to self-determination systematically denied, Afghan women have never lost sight of the need to identify and secure their rights. Moreover, the film also shows how women from all classes have played their part in the battle for gender equality. The woman who teaches child literacy classes, for example, makes just an important a contribution as the political activist. For, as one interviewee puts it, if one wants the country to change one must be prepared to take positive action, despite prevailing dangers.

Finally, this documentary underlines how the international community has no interest in the development of Afghanistan as an intrinsic goal. Rather, it seeks its stability simply because of its geo-strategic location. For it was not so long ago that Zbigniew Brzezinski declared: "A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions." Yet any nation where women are marginalised cannot hope to prosper.

Books/Reports/Articles on Gender

Title:	The Gender Implications of Pension Reforms. General Remarks and Evidence from Selected Countries
Author:	Steinhilber, S.
Publication Date	January 2006
Publisher	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
Short Summary	Globally, women make up the majority of older people, as well as the majority of the elderly living in poverty. Despite these facts, and despite international and national commitments to gender mainstreaming in all policy fields, concerns about gender equality have been largely absent from mainstream pension policy debates, and from mainstream academic research on pension reforms. This paper argues that current pension reform trends in many countries have weakened women's pension protection. To a great extent this is because of the way in which pensions are calculated on the basis on people's level of experience and number of years working, These calculations fail to take into account the fact that, because of continued gender inequalities in the labour market better-paid, men are more likely to benefit from better paid, higher status jobs, while , women are more likely to interrupt their working lives to bring up children.. Added to this, the male breadwinner model is still a dominant social policy stereotype in Western welfare states, with the assumption that women are secondary earners and need less income both as direct pay and pensions. The paper also discusses selected country examples which illustrate the gender dimensions of pension reforms, and the impacts of particular design features. It considers the consequences of various pension scenarios - for example, if the retirement age for women was raised, as is the case in some Western European countries, there could be potential impacts on families who are reliant on the contribution of grandmothers in providing childcare.

Complete Document [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpPublications\)/52DBB0B27C54635CC1...](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpPublications)/52DBB0B27C54635CC1...)

Disclaimer

All the news which are included in this section, are as reported in the newspapers by 30th November 2007. The position may have changed uptill now.

I – Presidential Elections

Supreme Court Validated Musharraf's Re-Election

The Supreme Court (SC) on November 23 directed the Chief Election Commissioner and the government to declare Pervez Musharraf President for a second term by December 1, and said that President Musharraf shall relinquish the office of the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) before taking oath as civilian president. The 10-member bench of the SC said in its verdict that during the course of the hearing of the constitutional petitions challenging President Musharraf's Candidacy in the Presidential election, the President's Senior Counsel Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada and Attorney General Malik Muhammad Qayyum had submitted a written undertaking in the SC on September 18, 2007 that General Musharraf would relinquish the office of COAS before taking oath as a civilian president. The bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Abdul Hameed Dogar held that President General Musharraf was qualified to contest the presidential election and did not suffer any disqualification under the constitution and the law. The court also vacated the interim stay of the October 6 presidential election results that had kept the Election Commission from announcing them until now.

Constitutional (Amendment) Order 2007 – Constitutional Cover to President

President General Pervez Musharraf on November 21 amended the Constitution through an executive order which legal experts said was essentially aimed at providing "constitutional cover" to all actions taken during the period of emergency and to clear the path for the lifting of emergency if and when he desired to do so. The Presidential Order, officially described as the "Constitution (Amendment) Order 2007" and promulgated under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO), in essence takes away the powers of judicial review by superior courts of all actions taken under the PCO.

- § The new Article, **270AAA**, has been inserted in order to validate and affirm all laws, orders and constitutional amendments during emergency. Sub-article 1 of the Article 270AAA added to the Constitution reads: "The proclamation of emergency of November 3, all President's orders, ordinances, Chief of Army Staff orders, including the Provisional Constitution Order No 1 of 2007, the Oath of Office (Judges) Order 2007, the amendments made in the Constitution through the Constitution (Amendment) Order, 2007 and all other laws made between November 3, 2007, and the date on which emergency is revoked (both days inclusive), are accordingly affirmed, adopted and declared to have been validly made by the competent authority and notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution shall not be called in question in any court or forum on any ground whatsoever."
- § According to **270AAA (2)**, all orders made, proceedings taken, appointments made, including secondments and deputations, and acts done by any authority, or by any person in exercise of powers derived from any proclamation, PCO order No 1 of 2007, president's orders, ordinances, enactments, including amendments to the Constitution, notifications, rules, orders, by-laws, or in execution or compliance with any orders made, or sentence passed by any authority in exercise of these powers, notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution or any judgment of any court, be deemed to always to have been validly made, taken or done, and shall not be called in question in any court or forum on any ground whatsoever.
- § **Clause 270AAA (3)** says all proclamations, President's orders, ordinances, Chief of Army Staff orders, laws, regulations, enactments, including amendments to the Constitution, notifications, rules, orders or bye-laws in force immediately before the date on which the emergency was revoked, will continue in force until altered, repealed, or amended by the 'competent authority'.

Views of Experts:

- § Former Supreme Court Judge and Eminent Lawyer Fakhruddin G. Ebrahim said that the order would have no legal value, unless it was validated by parliament to come into being after the forthcoming elections. He said it seemed that General Musharraf wanted to give protection to his acts against any adverse court action before a new parliament comes into being as a result of the elections scheduled to take place on January 8, 2008.
- § Mr Ebrahim was quite firm in his view that the Constitution could not be amended through orders and ordinances. He said the proclamation of emergency itself was illegal and unconstitutional because under the Constitution only the President could proclaim emergency on the advice of the Prime Minister. "The Chief of Army Staff cannot impose emergency," he remarked.
- § Khalid Anwer, another seasoned lawyer and former law minister, rejected the Constitution (Amendment) Order as 'rubbish' in constitutional terms. "It will have no legal or constitutional status at all once the emergency is lifted," he remarked. He said Gen Musharraf had tried to insert a sort of indemnity clause into the Constitution through an order to provide protection to what he called 'unconstitutional actions'. He said such indemnities had previously been given but through a constitutional amendment act. Apart from the validation clause, other amendments introduced through the Presidential Order include a clause that would allow the setting up of a high court in the federal capital.
- § About the clause creating a high court in Islamabad, Mr. Khalid Anwer said it was something mala fide and was meant to curtail the jurisdiction of the Lahore High Court (Rawalpindi Bench). He said new appointments would be made for the new high court and politically pliable people would be brought in.
- § Reading in the light of the evolving situation in the coming days, veteran lawyer and politician S.M. Zafar said that the President's Amendment Order was an indication that the emergency imposed on Nov 3 was soon to be lifted. "It is a prelude to the lifting of emergency and is on the pattern of Legal Framework Order (LFO) 2002 that was passed when the emergency was about to be lifted." He said the order was likely to come up before the Supreme Court for examining its constitutional validity, and the apex court's decision would be the first indicator of the future status of this 'legal document'.
- § Commenting on the order, Syed Zafar Ali Shah said General Musharraf was taking illegal and unconstitutional actions and was trying to provide them constitutional cover through orders that had no legal value at all. He said the Supreme Court had rightly or wrongly authorised Gen Musharraf to amend the Constitution while hearing a petition filed by him, but that time had also expired. He said that even parliament could not change the basic structure of the Constitution. He said the amendment to the Constitution through an 'unconstitutional order' amounted to subversion of the Constitution. Like S.M. Zafar, he too viewed it as an attempt by General Musharraf to add a sort of indemnity clause to the Constitution for himself. He said it appeared as if he was scared of the judges appointed by him.
- § Justice (Retd) Gul Zarin Kiani when contacted refused to offer any comment, saying that it was not possible for him to say something about a document he has not seen for himself.

Musharraf takes Oath as Civilian President

President Pervez Musharraf took oath as civilian President of Pakistan for five years on November 28. Chief Justice of Pakistan Mr. Justice Abdul Hameed Doggar administered the oath to the president under the 1973 constitution. The President's oath taking ceremony was held at Aiwan-e-Sadar, Islamabad. Caretaker Prime Minister Muhammadmian Soomro, caretaker cabinet members, former prime minister Shaukat Aziz, President Muslim League (Q) Chaudhry Shujaat, Speaker National Assembly Chaudhry Amir Hussain, former federal ministers, foreign diplomats and top civil and military officials attended the ceremony.

II – General Elections 2008

ECP News

Election Schedule Announced by ECP

The Election Commission announced on November 20 that polling for the national and provincial assemblies would be held on Jan 8. Chief Election Commissioner Justice (Retd) Qazi Mohammad Farooq announced the schedule which in effect means the beginning of the seven-week election process:

Following is the schedule:

Sl. No.	Events	Dates
1.	Dates for filing of nomination papers with the Returning Officers by the candidates	21-11-2007 to 26-11-2007
2.	Dates for Scrutiny of nomination papers by the Returning Officers	27-11-2007 to 03-12-2007
3.	Last date for filing of appeals against decisions of the Returning Officers rejecting/accepting nomination papers	07-12-2007
4.	Last date for deciding appeals by the Tribunals	14-12-2007
5.	Last date for withdrawal of candidature	15-12-2007
6.	Publication of revised list of candidates	16-12-2007
7.	Polling Day	08-01-2008

The CEC, meanwhile, has asked the government to immediately release all people intending to contest the elections or make suitable arrangements to enable them to submit nomination papers. According to an EC press release, the CEC has invited the attention of the government to Article 8 EE of the Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002 and Section 12 (3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1976, under which all candidates are required to personally appear before the returning officer to file nomination papers.

65,000 Polling Stations to be Set-up in Country

EC Secretary Kanwar Dilshad told Caretaker Prime Minister Mohammadmian Soomro on November 22 that the Election Commission (EC) will establish 65,000 polling stations across the country to facilitate 80.1 million voters in the elections to be held on January 8. Briefing Soomro on election arrangements at Prime Minister's House, Dilshad said 430,000 transparent ballot boxes and 350,000 partition screens would be in place at every polling station on the election day.

Voters' Lists Expected on EC Website in a Month

The Election Commission will take another month to be able to display the electoral rolls on its website.

ECP Bans Postings, Transfer of Govt Employees

The ECP on November 20th banned postings and transfers till the completion of the election process. The Chief Election Commissioner Justice (Retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq, dispatched directives to the Provincial Government, as he unveiled the election schedule. The Commission's Secretary Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad confirmed to this correspondent, when contacted that letters had been written to the provinces' Chief Secretaries, asking them not to allow new postings or transfer of the Government employees. He further said that if any violation took place, the Chief Secretary of the respective Province would be held accountable by the Commission.

430,000 Ballot Boxes to be imported from China: ECP

Pakistan is importing 430,000 transparent ballot boxes from China for the January 8 polls, a senior Election Commission official said on November 27 that out of these ballot boxes. Election Commission Secretary Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad said that 350,000 have already arrived while the remaining 80,000 will arrive on December 7 or 8". He further said that the Election Commission of Pakistan has almost completed foolproof arrangements for ensuring free, fair and transparent elections in the country next year. He said a tough electoral contest would be held on a total of 882 seats across the country. He added that more than 300,000 voting screens had also been provided to all polling stations across the country to enable the voters to cast their votes in a completely secure and private environment.

In a bid to educate polling agents of various political parties, around 5 million booklets containing the election rules and regulations had been published by the Election Commission, he added. "There will be 250 polling stations in each constituency. It has been decided to announce results at each polling station. The copies of results will duly be given to all the candidates concerned while one copy of the results will also be pasted on the main gate of each station," he added. A comprehensive media campaign, aiming to educate the masses about the procedure of vote casting would also be launched in the first week of December while the services of around 100 NGOs had also been hired to motivate people, especially women, to take part in the electoral process, he added. He claimed the code of ethics had been devised in consultation with the all political parties.

EC to Hire 100 NGOs to Motivate Rural Areas People for Vote Importance

Secretary Election Commission Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad has said that the Election Commission of Pakistan is set to hire the services of more than 100 NGOs in country's rural areas to enhance awareness about the importance of vote costing. He said that in rural people especially women would be motivated through seminars, workshops at union council level to cost their votes in all circumstances. He said that the awareness campaign was being launched in collaboration with UNDP. He added that various steps are being taken to ensure transparent elections in the country. Code of conduct has already been devised by accommodating the suggestions of major political parties.

As many as 430,000 transparent ballot boxes were being purchased from China with the help of UNDP. Out of which 350,000 has already arrived. While 80,000 would arrive next week, he said. In all polling stations transparent screens have also been hired for ensuring privacy he said and added that 1 million polling staff will conduct the elections. Training process of 500,000 polling personnel were continuing in collaboration with Washington based NGO International Foundation for Election System (IFES).

In a bid to educate polling agents a 25 page booklet has already been published. Soon 5 million booklets will be dispatched to all political parties.

CEC Takes Notice of Anti-BB Ad Campaign

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice (R) Qazi Muhammad Farooq has taken a serious notice of anti-Bhutto campaign in the media being sponsored by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Secretary Kanwar Dilshad issued a statement on November 16, saying that the CEC had taken a serious notice of a smear campaign against Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairwoman Benazir Bhutto, and directed that "the matter be placed before an ECP meeting on Nov 19 for an appropriate action". The CEC also noted that two advertisements that appeared in the media cast aspersions on Bhutto.

Polls in Tribal Areas can be Postponed: EC

Provincial Election Commissioner Akhtar Hussain Sabir said on November 22 that Government is reviewing security situation in Swat District, North Waziristan and Kurrum Agency, and decision about holding of elections in these areas had not been taken yet. The Provincial Election Commissioner said that NWFP Home Department and FATA Secretariat are reviewing the situation in Swat and two agencies of FATA and decision about polls would be taken after recommendations of these departments.

Candidates can Change Party till Symbols are Allotted

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) officials said that even after filing their nomination papers with the returning officers indicating their association with a particular political party, candidates contesting the Jan 8 parliamentary polls can still change their affiliations if they want to, "The contestants can finally decide about their alignment with any political party at the time of scrutiny of their candidacy papers and on the day of the allotment of election symbols. According to the polls schedule, the scrutiny of candidacy papers will take place from Nov 28 to Dec 3, both days inclusive. The candidates fighting for direct or special seats were allowed by the ECP to indicate their party affiliation. They were not required to file a certificate from their political party showing that they were its candidates. The official said after the allotment of symbols to political parties by the ECP, these would be assigned by the returning officers to all the candidates, who would produce certificates of their respective parties. Others would be treated as independent contestants. Once a symbol is allocated to a candidate, he or she cannot change it or the party with which he or she has shown his or her affiliation by producing its certificate to the returning officer, the official said. After the election, a legislator is not allowed to switch loyalties otherwise he would be unseated under the prevailing anti-defection law which, however, has never been implemented. Change of political parties by candidates in election and even afterwards is a normal practice. Availability of about a week to them to decide about their future affiliations will enable them to make up their mind.

JI to Approach EC for Separate Polls Symbol

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) NWFP has proposed four election symbols for approval to the central leadership that would approach the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for a separate party symbol to contest the coming general polls. A senior JI leader told that the Provincial Chapter of the party has recommended 'umbrella', 'car', 'inkpot' and 'bulb' as their election symbol if they had to contest the elections separately. Now this is up to the central leadership that which symbol they approve. The spokesperson of JI Pakistan, S. A. Shamsi, when contacted confirmed recommendation of four election symbols by the JI NWFP. The JI sources disclosed that they would apply for a separate election symbol as a precautionary measure.

47 Parties Apply for Polls Symbols

Out of 94 political parties registered in the country that had filed their statements of assets with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) this year, a total of 47 have applied for election symbols and therefore will be contesting the January elections. The applicants, according to the ECP sources, have applied for the same election symbols, which they had been allotted for the 2002 general elections. In all, as many as 77 parties had taken part in the last electoral process.

Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid), Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Awami National Party and Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party have applied for the symbols they had used for their election campaigns in 2002. Senator Latif Khosa, who is PPP's Election Cell Chairman, confirmed that they have applied for 'arrow' again, as "Our popular symbol sword was erased from the approved election symbols list in 1979." The PML-Q, PML-N, MMA, MQM, ANP PPP (Sherpao) and Pk MAP have applied for 'cycle', 'tiger', 'book', 'kite', 'lantern' and 'tree' respectively. It is interesting to note that majority of political parties are opposed to again awarding the symbol of 'book' to MMA, a conglomeration of six religio-political parties. So much so, ANP a secular and progressive party had filed a case in a court of law last time, challenging the allotment of 'book' as symbol to the alliance. When approached for comments, ANP's Central Information Secretary Zahid Khan said that if again, the Election Commission awarded the same symbol to MMA, they could again mislead innocent people to win their votes. However, a senior official at the commission, when contacted for comments, explained that the 'book' was very much part of the 146 election symbols and there was no hint of deleting it or denying to the alliance of religious parties.

Code of Conduct for Elections

The Election Commission on November 19 approved the Code of Conduct for Elections expected to be held on Jan 8, after making some amendments in its draft.

Major opposition parties boycotted the EC meeting which was presided over by Chief Election Commissioner Justice (Retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq. The Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf and some components of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal had announced that they would boycott the meeting because the commission was not independent and that fair, free and credible elections were not possible under the state of emergency. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Mushahid Hussain Sayed and Imtaiz Ranjha of PML(Q), Anisa Zeb Tahirkheli of PPP(S), Muhammad Ramzan Alvi of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (Sami), Kashif Nizamani of PML(F) and Chaudhry Muhammad Akram, legal adviser of Pakistan Awami Party attended the meeting.

The EC Secretary said although some of the political parties stayed away from the meeting, the recommendations received from them had been duly considered and accepted, wherever necessary, for incorporation in the draft Code of Conduct for the contesting candidates and political parties.

Following is the link to approved Code of Conduct:

<http://ecp.gov.pk/COCFinal.pdf>

Code of Conduct for Political Activities

The Ministry of Interior has drawn up a code of conduct for political activities in the run-up to the forthcoming General Elections in the country and has passed it on to the Pakistan Election Commission (PEC) as well as all the political parties for getting their consent. The government has banned all processions and rallies during the forthcoming general elections to be held on January 8, 2008, allowing gatherings only at specified places all over the country and that too with the prior approval of the administration. The Interior Ministry Spokesman, Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema, in his weekly briefing, said on November 27 that the government did not want to impede political activities but would take all necessary measures to minimise the threat posed by extremist forces.

The salient features of the code of conduct drawn by the Interior Ministry are:

- § Processions/rallies may be banned.
- § Only gatherings may be allowed at specified places. All provincial governments and district administration should notify such places.
- § Organisers must get NOC from respective provincial governments so that security arrangements may be tied up to avoid any untoward incident.
- § Over all responsibility/command of security rests with administration/LEAs and not with private security of political parties.
- § Administration/LEAs must use electronic equipment for screening/jamming i.e. walk through gates, scanners and frequency jammers.
- § Pre-event engagement by provincial governments/district administration with all stakeholders should be ensured and an agreed code of conduct worked out.
- § Political parties should nominate their own focal persons responsible for security to interact with the administration at the federal, provincial and district levels.
- § Any violation of the code of conduct would be at the political parties own risk.
- § Provincial governments would ensure even-playing field for all political parties.
- § Political leadership should not expose itself unnecessarily for a longer period of time.
- § Movement of political leadership should be well coordinated, ensuring foolproof security for them.

Caretaker Set-Up

Punjab Cabinet

Punjab Governor Khalid Maqbool administered the oath to the new Cabinet and also announced the portfolios allocated to the Caretaker Provincial Ministers. The function was attended by a good number of the senior government officials, secretaries of different departments and notables of the province. Among others Punjab Assembly Speaker Chaudhary Muhammad Afzal Sahi, Chief Secretary Salman Siddiquie, Corps Commander Lahore Syed Shaffat Ullah, Inspector General of Police (IG) Ahmad Nasim, high ranking civil and military officials, former members of the Punjab Cabinet and families of the newly inducted ministers also attended the oath taking ceremony.

According to an official notification issued by the Punjab Service and General Administration Department (S&GAD) the provincial ministers given following portfolios:

- § Mumtaz Khan Minhaes -- Livestock,
- § Khursheed Zaman Qureshi – Agriculture
- § Khawaja Muhammad Jalaluddin Roomi – Industry
- § Professor Dr. Mira Falbous – Education
- § Mubashir Luqman – Information Technology
- § Mian Muhammad Shafiq – Commerce
- § Barrister Mahmood Shaikh – Law
- § Maqbool Illahi Malik – Human Rights
- § Sohail Afzal – Special Education
- § Saad Hasan-ud-Din – Forest and Fisheries
- § Justice (R) Asif Jan – Local Government
- § Shahzad Azeem Khan – Labor and Manpower
- § Mian Shafqat Ali – Housing and Physical Planning
- § Senator Syed Dilawar Abbas – Irrigation
- § Walid Tariq Sehgal – Excise
- § Makhdoom Iftikhar-ul-Hasan – Mineral Developments
- § Karim Malik – Prosecution

Sindh Cabinet

Caretaker Chief Minister of Sindh Justice (Retd) Abdul Qadir Halepoto, and his 14-member Caretaker Cabinet sworn-in on November 19 at the Governor House. Governor Sindh Dr Ishhratul Ebad administered the oath of office to the new Chief Minister and his Vabinet. The Caretaker Provincial Ministers and their portfolios are:

- § Brig (Retd) Akhter Zamin – Home Affairs
- § Diwan Yousaf Farooqui – Finance
- § Haji Irshad Memon – Auqaf, Religious and Minorities Affairs
- § Ijaz Shah Shirazi – Agriculture and Food
- § Nadira Panjwani – Women Development and Population Planning
- § Shujat Baig – Education and Literacy
- § Amber Raza Nancy – Culture, Tourism, Sports and Youth Affairs
- § Fauzia Lari – Health
- § Arif Ali Abbasi – Labour, Transport, Industries, Commerce
- § Syed Jalal Shah Jamote – Planning and Development
- § Jam Karam Ali – Environment, Alternate Energy and Information Technology.

The portfolios of Provincial Ministers Chaudhry Iftikhar, Dr. Karim Mahar and Pir Sibghatullah Rashdi will be announced later. The 14-member Cabinet dominated by the PML-F and the MQM members surprisingly there is no any member of PML-Q in the Caretaker Sindh Cabinet. Caretaker Chief Minister (R) Justice Abdul Qadir Halipotota along with his 11-member cabinet took oath of the office. Halepoto is a former Judge. He was appointed as the Judge of the Sindh High Court during Zulfiqar Ali Bhuto regime. However, he was shunted off by General Zia ul Haq.

NWFP Cabinet

Twelve new ministers, including two females, were inducted into the caretaker NWFP government, increasing the number of cabinet members to 17. Those who were inducted into the provincial cabinet in the third phase included the former provincial minister and vice chancellor of the NWFP Engineering University, Syed Imtiaz Gillani, Dr Khalid Raza Zakori, Abdul Karim Qusuria, Iftikharuddin, Ijaz Durrani, Kamal Shah, Alamzeb Khan Alai, Hassamuddin Bangash, Brigadier (R) Qayyum Sher, Colonel (R) Bashir Wali, Ms Seemi Riaz and Ms Meraj Humayun Khan. NWFP Governor Ali Mohammad Jan Aurakzai administered oath to the new cabinet members at a ceremony in the Governor House. Caretaker NWFP Chief Minister Shamsul Mulk and senior government officials were also present on the occasion.

Following are the members of new Cabinet:

- § Imtiaz Gillani – Information
- § Dr Khalid Raza – Social Welfare
- § Abdul Karim Qusuria – Rural Development
- § Iftikharuddin – Labour and Transport
- § Ijaz Durrani – Fisheries
- § Alamzeb Alai – Agriculture
- § Hassamuddin Bangash – Environment
- § Ms Seemi Riaz – Women Development
- § Ms Meraj Humayun – Population Welfare
- § Kamal Shah – Forest
- § Qayyum Sher – Culture and Sports
- § Bashir Wali – Health

The new ministers were provided official security as well as protocol staff immediately after they sworn in. With the appointment of 12 more ministers, the number of cabinet members has now reached to 17. Four ministers were appointed in the NWFP government in the first phase when Shamsul Mulk took over as Chief Minister. They included Home Minister Shahzada Gastasip Khan, Finance Minister Azam Khan, Labour Minister Bakht Bedar and Works and Services Minister Mohammad Ali Shah. Later Justice (Retd.) Ajmal Mian was also included into the petite cabinet to head the Ministry of Law.

Clear majority of the incumbent Cabinet members either directly belongs to the PML-Q or PPP-S. Some of them are even senior office-bearers of the two parties that have formed a coalition at the Centre to run the Pervez Musharraf-led government. Only a few are those who could be rated as neutral but they make a slight share in the five caretaker governments, formed in the Centre and four provinces. The opposition parties have feared mass rigging in the coming General Elections under the interim governments run by the favourites of the PML-Q and PPP-S.

Balochistan Cabinet

Caretaker Chief Minister Saleh Mohammad Bhotani along with his 11-member Cabinet took oath of the office on November 19. Governor Balochistan Awais Ghani administered oath at a ceremony held at Governor House and attended by high civil and military officials. The members of the Caretaker set up of the Province are:

- § Saadat Ali Hazara
- § Amjad Rasheed
- § Nawab Ghaus Buksh Barozai
- § Mir Mohammad Murad Abro
- § Mir Arif Mohammad Hasni
- § Dr. Atta Mohammad Gul
- § Sardar Haider Khanasir
- § Abdul Ghaffar Baloch
- § Nawabzada Aurangzeb Jomezai
- § Roshan Khursheed Barocha
- § Nawabzada Saifullah Magsi

Most of the members are either tribal leaders or members of NGOs. Opposition in Balochistan rejected the caretaker set up and termed it as continuation of the PML-Q regime. Caretaker Chief Minister Saleh Bhotani, who has served as provincial minister several times, hails from Dareji area located in District Lasbela. He was born in 1950 and contested his first election in 1977. Bhotani's family members had been winning the elections for seven times continuously from their

native area. Bhootani won the election six times and in 2002 polls Aslam Bhootani, younger brother of the caretaker CM, won and remained deputy speaker in Jam Muhammad Yousaf's government.

FAFEN Questions Impartiality of Caretaker Setup

The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) doubted Friday impartiality of the Caretaker Government set up to oversee the executive functions of the state till the next general elections. According to a press release issued on November 16: "It is vital for a Caretaker Government to maintain political neutrality for free and fair elections. Article 224 of the Constitution clearly says neither the Caretaker Prime Minister nor the Caretaker Chief Ministers shall be eligible to contest the elections".

A FAFEN spokesperson said a Caretaker setup comprising personalities who were either politically affiliated or had a stake in the results of the next elections was contrary to the concept of neutrality. He said the Caretaker Government installed after the expiry of the National Assembly comprised several names who had known political affiliations. In addition, there are some other adherents of the same political party who have been inducted into the caretaker cabinet, he added. He said that a politically partisan caretaker setup had the potential of impeding a free election that required robust competition among candidates in which the electorate were well-informed about candidates' differing platforms or viewpoints. He maintained that there has been no consultation with the political parties on the composition of the caretaker setup," the spokesman added. He said Fafen had suggested forming a caretaker government comprising neutral, non-political and scrupulous personalities that enjoyed confidence of all the political parties and opposition parties. He added that Elections under emergency rule are contrary to the best election practices around the world, a caretaker setup comprising political personalities put together without broad-based consultations with the political parties will compromise the integrity of elections.

Sindh Assembly 2002-07 – An Overview

Sindh Assembly Referred a Rubber Stamp or Tissue Paper: Of the four Provincial Assemblies of Pakistan, the Sindh Assembly ranked fourth in terms of law-making output during its five-year term. Some critics have, as usual, referred to it as a "rubber stamp" or "tissue paper". To be fair, however, rubber stamps and tissue paper have their use; the question is, how useful was the Sindh Assembly for the public in Sindh? When MPA Shazia Marri (PPP) looks back, she remembers that the first year was marked by the battle against the Legal Framework Order. For her, this is just an indication of a long-term trend of ruling a country through ordinances signed by the governor instead of laws argued, tabled and voted on by the assembly's treasury and opposition. She said that the PPP submitted more than 35 private member bills on protection of children, welfare of senior citizens, domestic violence, disaster management, health boards, fishermen, HIV/AIDS, shelter homes. "It is extremely disappointing that the regime overstated its role in the empowerment of women but failed miserably to help destitute women, even to the extent of framing any women-friendly laws in the province," she adds.

First CM with a 27-Member Team: Critics asked why a Chief Minister required the assistance of 20 different advisors, each being paid a hefty salary and provided a lot of benefits. The sultan in Aladdin just had one advisor (vizier). Granted, he wasn't the best of advisors but still, there was just one. The Constitution doesn't even allow the President to have more than five. In addition to the 20 Advisors, the Chief Minister also appointed seven assistants. Now-ex Chief Minister Dr Arbab Ghulam Rahim made many controversial decisions during his tenure, including the administrative bifurcation of different districts of Sindh, but one of them was also the decision to have a huge cabinet of 17 provincial ministers and a large number of appointments. Dr Rahim recruited a large number of his friends and people from different coalition partners as special assistants to the CM and advisors to the CM. The Sindh government's records reveal that most of them were given the status of provincial minister (which gives them all minister privileges). According to the records, Dr Rahim recruited 27 people to his team - nine advisors with the status of provincial minister, eleven advisors without the status of provincial minister and seven special assistants. Out of these 27, eleven advisors were not even assigned a portfolio till the last day of the CM's tenure.

3 Education Ministers, and Six Secretaries Later: During these five years, the Education Ministry was changed thrice. The first Education Minister was Irfanullah Marwat in Ali Mohammad Mahir's Cabinet, while the portfolio was given to Dr Hamida Khuhro in Dr Arbab Ghulam Rahim's Cabinet. Three months ago, the education department was bifurcated into 'literacy and education', which included primary, secondary and high school education, and 'colleges'. There was also a change in the ministry and the Sindh chief minister took over the literacy and education section while Dr Khuhro was named the in charge of the colleges section. Furthermore, during the outgoing government's tenure, the

education department's secretary changed six times. Hashim Leghari, Nadir Merkhayani, Sabhago Khan Jatoi and Ghulam Ali Pasha each served as the secretary twice and Mohammad Ali was the most recent secretary. Twenty-five thousands posts in the Sindh education department remain vacant as the outgoing Sindh government completes its five-year tenure. According to sources, the government had failed to re-open the 4,000 or so closed schools across the province and enrollment rates had remained low, especially in rural Sindh where gender gaps are most significant. **A study conducted by the World Bank reveals that in urban Sindh, 43 girls enroll in primary school per every 100 boys and in rural Sindh, only 17 girls enroll in high school per every 100 boys.**

Sindh Government worked with 2 CDGKs – the JI and the MQM: Apart from being the first government to complete its five-year term, the outgoing Government of Sindh was also the first to work with two local governments of Karachi. The first government was the one established on August 14, 2001, by the Al-Khidmat group of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). This was also the first government to be formed under the new local government system devised by President Musharraf. The second city government is the current one that was established in October 2005 by the Haq Parast group of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). Sources within the City District Government Karachi (CDGK) told that the Haq Parast government had been fortunate as all key posts in the provincial government, including those in finance, home affairs, excise and taxation, health, information technology, environment and alternate energy, and labour and industries, were held by members of the MQM who had extended unconditional cooperation to the city government in all sectors. Sources said the previous city government had appointed hardly 100 to 150 workers on daily wages as peons and helpers and they were all fired by the new city government in 2005. "But during the last two years, the city government has appointed a large number of people in education, health, solid waste management, coordination, transport and communication, and community policing departments. Also, the appointment of over 400 officials in the fire brigade department on contract basis is also in the pipeline and it might be confirmed before the elections."

Nawaz Returns

Former Premier Muhammad Nawaz Sharif returned to the country on November 25th after eight years of exile and vowed to contest the General Elections. After arriving in Lahore from Medina at 6.25pm, he said that all decisions regarding participation in polls would be made on the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM)'s platform. He said the APDM would participate in the elections if General Musharraf withdrew the emergency declaration he issued on November 3 and released opposition members who had been jailed. He said he had made no deal with President General Pervez Musharraf. He said he has not changed his position on Musharraf, "He is not a legitimate president of the country. I do not accept that, not at all." He said he had refused recent attempts by General Musharraf to meet him in Saudi Arabia because the two men "are poles apart". The PML-N chief said there was "no question" to him ever agreeing to a power-sharing deal with General Musharraf as president and himself as prime minister.

Restoration of Judiciary: Nawaz called for the restoration of the judges who were sacked after General Musharraf proclaimed emergency on November 3. He also demanded the restoration of the constitution.

'Common Ground': Nawaz said he had been talking to former Premier Benazir Bhutto "trying to find common ground" in the opposition to General Musharraf's government.

Thousands of PML-N workers and leaders had earlier broken through police barricades at the airport and welcomed Nawaz Sharif and his family. Nawaz said the arrested PML-N workers were proof that he had no deal with Gen Musharraf.

Emergency and Elections

Emergency, PCO to Go on December 16

President Pervez Musharraf said on November 29 that the emergency rule and the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) would be lifted from the country on December 16, and the January 8 elections would be held at all costs under the constitution. He said this during a televised address to the nation, and at a ceremony after taking oath as civilian president to resume his second five-year term as head of the state.

Commonwealth Defends Pakistan's Suspension

The Commonwealth on November 23 said Pakistan's suspension from the organization and was justified and would stand until democracy was restored. Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon said that we still believe that the democratic institution is best to deal with these issues, rather than any kind of unilateral type leadership situation. British PM Gordon Brown said that this wasn't a desire to heap retribution on Pakistan, this was a determination to live up to our principles. An ultimatum set by the Commonwealth for Musharraf to step down as army chief, free judges and opposition supporters, and lift curbs on the media expired on Thursday. Late on Thursday, a special ministerial group harshly criticized President General Pervez Musharraf for his three-week-old state of emergency and suspended Pakistan's membership.

Petitions against Emergency – Three SC Judges Want to Quit Bench

After getting the final no from the three judges, Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar has scaled down the ten-member Supreme Court bench to seven judges that would now hear the petitions against the imposition of emergency. Justice Muhammad Nawaz Abbasi, Justice Faqir Muhammad Khokhar and Justice M Javed Buttar had announced during the proceedings on Friday that they would inform the chief justice about their decision whether or not they would sit on the bench. The government was upset over the reaction of these judges, who had stated that they wanted to opt out of the bench, a worried senior law officer of the federal government. Justice Khokhar had said that one of the grounds of proclamation of emergency was the failure of the judiciary and since he was a part of decisions criticized by the government, consequently, he should not sit on the bench. "It was being said that the Supreme Judicial Council was made ineffective as a consequence of the order passed by the Supreme Court in the case of the presidential reference against Chief Justice [now deposed] Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. It was a matter of judicial decorum that I should not hear the case against the imposition of emergency and proclamation of the Provisional Constitution Order."

Emergency and PCO Validated

The Supreme Court (SC) validated the proclamation of emergency and Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) on October 23 under the "doctrine of necessity". The court held that when the constitution provided no remedy or satisfactory solution to an issue threatening national security, the doctrine could be invoked. Announcing its three-page verdict on the petitions challenging emergency rule and PCO, the seven-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Abdul Hameed Dogar unanimously decreed, "Sufficient corroborative material produced by the respondents justifies taking extra-constitutional measures by the Chief of Army Staff and the President."

Judicial activism: The court said terror attacks, suicide bombings and kidnappings had rendered the situation in Pakistan very unstable, but that the government had been hampered by activist members of the judiciary. The court also said that the judges who had not taken oath under the Oath of Office (Judges) Order of 2007, had ceased to hold their offices and their cases cannot be re-opened. The court declared all the extra-constitutional steps of proclamation of emergency and others valid. In absence of parliament, the court said, General Pervez Musharraf, in pursuance of the proclamation of emergency, may in the larger public interest and the safety, security and integrity of Pakistan - under the principle of *salus populi suprema lex* ('Let the good of the people be the supreme law') - perform all acts or legislative measures which are in accordance with, or could have been made under the 1973 Constitution, including the power to amend it; all acts which tend to advance or promote the good of the people; and perform; and all acts required to be done for the ordinary orderly running of the state.

Political Parties' News

PPP Decides to Contest Polls under Protest

PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto on November 22 declared her party will not leave the field open for the opponents and is filing nomination papers under protest for the upcoming elections. Benazir said: "We are submitting nomination papers for the election in protest. We don't want to give walkover to the opponents." She said the government is already engaged in pre-poll rigging and has provided 25,000 ballot papers in advance to each of 108 PML-Q candidates. She said though the PPP believed that free, fair, and transparent election would not be held under the present set-up the party decided not leave the ground open for ruling parties. She said the party was filing nomination papers and participating in the election process just to expose the rigging of the regime in the election. She said her father and former prime minister late ZA Bhutto had also not left the ground open for opponents and participated in the election.

Working with Civilian Musharraf Possible

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Benazir Bhutto has said that PPP will take part in the forthcoming General Elections. Talking to media persons at her Naudero residence, Benazir said in the first stage PPP strived to convince all other political parties to have participation in the elections, adding following the PPP stance, all the political parties are taking part in the elections. She said as to if President Musharraf fulfils his promise of doffing his uniform, PPP will consider the option of working with him. Talking about President General Pervez Musharraf's uniform, she said that the General had made a promise with PPP and the whole nation that he would doff his uniform. "If now he is fulfilling his promise of shedding his uniform, it will be a good omen, She said PPP also desires to set up an independent Election Commission, adding that a struggle would be launched in collaboration with all other political parties to establish a, independent, free and impartial Election Commission in the country.

Fazl's Stance on Polls Dividing MMA

Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) General Secretary Maulana Fazalur Rehman,s stance on participating in the upcoming general elections has again created a gulf among the MMA component parties. According to sources, Fazal was persuading leaders of others parties in the alliance to negotiate with the caretaker government on lifting emergency and holding fair elections. However other component parties insisted that they would boycott the elections unless the emergency was lifted and the judiciary was resorted, they added Fazal insist that if President General Pervez Musharraf doffs his uniform before the elections then all parties including the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) would develop good relations with the president, Then why the MMA and other opposition parties should keep away from politics by remaining out of the assemblies.

Manifestoes

PPP Manifesto Unveiled

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chair-woman Benazir Bhutto launched on November 30th her party's manifesto for elections on January 8, but reiterated that she was taking part in the polls under protest. The former Premier said that our policy is based on five E's - **employment, education, energy, environment and equality**. APP quoted her as saying that **employment opportunities** would be created for the people through various initiatives, including a Public Works Programme, which would provide guaranteed employment for one working member of 25 percent of the poorest families in the country for at least a year. Benazir said literacy schemes would be initiated with the objective of providing short-term employment to educated youth. She also said the PPP would initiate **reforms in madrassas and syllabuses** and would purge the madrassas of arms and **lift the ban on student unions**. She said her party would revive its 1996 scheme of "**Apna Ghar**" - **free boarding schools for socially and economically disadvantaged children**, APP reported. She said that Pakistan's power shortage would be overcome on a war footing. She further said that we will work on **bio-fuel technology** and form a team of experts for it. She said the PPP's environment policy would revolve around **community participation, water resource management, climate change and ecological management system**, APP reported. Explaining her party's agenda to ensure equality in every segment of society, she said that in line with the PPP's slogan of "Roti, Kapra aur Makan" (**food, clothing and shelter**), her party would take specific policy initiatives.

Initially Reported Review of PML-Q Manifesto

The election manifesto of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League commits the party to a **comprehensive review of the 1973 Constitution**, particularly of the issue of transfer from the federal and concurrent lists some subjects that can be better taken care of by the provinces. Provinces will also be given authority to generate funds for such new subjects to make them financially independent.

Head of the manifesto committee Senator S. M. Zafar told on November 12 that the **imbalance in the powers of the President and the Prime Minister** will also be corrected. Former Law Minister, Mr Zafar said it would not be fair to transfer various subjects to the provinces and then leave them at the mercy of the centre for funds to run them. The manifesto, he said, would also commit the party not to appoint a minister belonging to a particular field to head the ministry associated with it. This means, an industrialist would not be made minister for industries or a banker minister for finance. Likewise, a practicing lawyer will not be appointed minister for law. In the light of its experience of five years in power, the PML has also reached the conclusion that the Senate should be given a role in the **appointment of judges and ambassadors**. The relevant committees of the upper house would clear top judicial and diplomatic appointments. The Constitution, he said, would also be amended to ensure that no ordinance was issued when the Senate was in session.

At present, the President is barred from issuing an ordinance when the National Assembly is in session. But there is no restriction on him when the upper house is in session. Senator Zafar said a concept of regular inter-party conference in the assemblies would also be provided for in the new manifesto. This, he said, would ensure constant dialogue among the parties represented in the legislatures. There is also a strong recommendation to integrate the tribal areas into the national mainstream in accordance with the spirit of Article 247 of the Constitution. The manifesto also commits the party to build new dams to meet growing irrigation and power needs. However, the new projects have not been identified.

Providing **jobs, learning opportunities and justice** would get priority in the new manifesto. Senator Zafar said he had proposed "**Rozgaar, Ilm and Insaaf**" as the election slogan for the party. "But I am not sure whether this slogan will be accepted because there are some practical politicians who don't seem to be fascinated by Ilm and Insaaf." To promote literacy, the manifesto commits the party to a comprehensive plan of partnership between the government and private entrepreneurs. As for access to justice, Senator Zafar said, emphasis would be laid on an alternative dispute resolution approach. He said: "The final thrust of the manifesto is to make a Pakistani proud of his identity as a citizen of the Islamic Republic."

Nominations

Elahi to Contest for One NA, 3 Provincial Seats

PML-Q Punjab President and former Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi on November 25th submitted his nomination papers from NA-187 Bahawalpur and in three provincial seats at PP-282 (Bahawalnagar), PP-110 (Gujrat) and PP-118 (Mandi Bahauddin). Elahi's son Moonis Elahi also submitted his nomination papers from PP-110 as a covering candidate. Former MNAs Syed Tasneem Nawaz Gardazi, Zaffar Warriach, Najeebullah Awaisi, Farooq Anwar Abbasi and former MPAs Dr Muhammad Afzal, Tabish Alwari, Iftikharul Hassan Gillani, Chaudhry Ijaz Shafi, Khalid Mahmood, Begum Shahnaz Javed Elahi and a large number of the party workers gave Elahi a warm welcome when he reached Bahawalpur.

Elahi also filed nomination papers from PP-282 (Bahawalnagar) in the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge and Returning Officer Muhammad Amjad Khan. People on the occasion raised slogans Prime Minister Pervaiz Elahi. Elahi also submitted his nomination papers from PP-110 (Gujrat). Former parliamentarians Chaudhry Wajahat Hussain, Mian Imran Masood, Muhsin Warriach and PML workers welcomed him when he reached Mandi Bahauddin to submit his nomination papers for PP-118.

Ali Ahmad Kurd Files Nomination Papers for 3 Constituencies

Former Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) Chairman Ali Ahmad Kurd on Monday filed his nomination papers for two Rawalpindi constituencies and one Quetta constituency. Kurd will contest the elections against former railways minister Sheikh Rashid. Police brought Kurd to Rawalpindi from Jhelum jail late on Sunday. He appeared before a returning officer on November 26 and filed his nomination papers for NA-55 and NA-56. A police official paid Kurd's nomination fee from his own pocket.

10 Nominations for NA-48 and NA-49 Accepted

The Election Commission (EC) received nomination papers of 10 candidates and issued 72 nominations for Islamabad's two National Assembly seats - NA-48 and NA-49 - till November 26th.

NA-48: Muhammad Shahid, Main Muhammad Aslam, Khurshid Ahmad Qureshi, Muhammad Attiqueur Rehman and Syed Anwar Ahmad submitted their papers for NA-48, while Muhammad Iqbal, Sajid Zaman, Jamil Abbasi, Malik Tabarak and Mansoor Asad submitted their papers for NA-49. Those who obtained their nomination papers for NA-48 include Mushtaq Ahmed, Sultan Mehmood, Dr Shahid Atiq, Javed Khan, Mian Aslam, Shah Noon Advocate, Israr Shah, Ikram Shah, Raja Adnan Ali, Atiqur Rehman, Alamgir Khan, Khurshid Anwar Qureshi, Arshad Hussain Bhatti, Dr Abid Rauf, Khawaja Fazal, Mazhar Hussain Shah Sherazi, Talat Abbas, Rafiq Guncha, Tasneem Waseem, Mohammad Ajmal Baloch, Naila Joseph, Daud Akhtar, Rab Nawaz, Syed Anwar, Nadeem Hussain Fazal, Muhammad Zareen Qureshi, Shaukat Mehmood Khan, Dr Shahzad Waseem, Noreen Khan, Imtiaz Ahmad, Muhammad Sajid, Chaudhry Malo, Ali Wahla, Usman Akram, Shakeel Hussain Qaisar, Khalid Pervez, Muhammad Ilyas, Mazhar Hassan, Faisal Imran, Jalil Ahmad, Rifque Sanjrani, Mohsan Ayub Khan, Aurangzeb Malik, Riffat Javed, Raza Muhammad, and Chaudhry Ilyas Meharban.

NA-49: Those who were issued nomination papers for NA-49 include Mustafa Nawaz, Usman Nawaz Advocate, Raja Ishtiaq, Raja Adnan Ali, Jamil Abbasi, Syed Hassan Zafar, Tabarak Hussain, Amir Zaib, Ishrat Hussain Bhatti,

Muhammad Raheem Awan, Raja Mohammad Yamin Abbasi, Mohammad Naveed, Shehzad Murtaza, PPP's Nayyar Hussain Bukhari, Sardar Naseer Ahmed, Talat Abbas Advocate, Dr Rafiq Ahmed Guncha, Daud Akhtar Advocate, Mansoor Asad, Syed Zafar Ali Shah, Zafar Alam Sarwar, Hafiz Tanveer Ahmad, Muhammad Ramzan Abbasi, Haji Muhammad Nawaz Khokhar, Syed Hassan Raza Bukhari, Raja Muhammad Shakeel Abbasi, and Chaudhry Tariq Fazal.

Nomination Papers submitted by Caretaker Ministers

A sitting Minister of NWFP Caretaker Government has also submitted nomination papers for a Provincial Assembly seat in Lakki Marwat District. Pir Dr Khalid Raza Zakori, Caretaker Minister for Social Welfare, was still holding his office when submitted nomination papers with the returning officer in southern Lakki Marwat district. He would be candidate of the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) for being the President of the Ulema and Mashaikh wing of the party.

Apart from Pir Zakori, another Minister of the Caretaker set up, Shahzada Gastasip Khan has also submitted nomination papers to contest for a Provincial Assembly seat from Mansehra. Gastasip, however, quit the Cabinet before going to submit nomination papers. He was holding the portfolio of Home Minister.

Though it is considered as unethical, relatives of a few ministers in the caretaker government are flexing muscles to try their luck in the coming polls. Provincial minister for higher education, Iftikharuddin, is one such cabinet member whose son, Intikhab Khan, is candidate of the PML-Q. Intikhab, a lawyer by profession, has submitted nomination papers for a National as well as Provincial Assembly seat from Peshawar. He is the Additional Secretary General in the Central Cabinet of the PML. His father, however, has said he would have nothing to do with the election campaign of Intikhab and would just concentrate over his job to hold free and fair elections.

Among the Federal Ministers from NWFP, Naseer Mohammad Khan, son of Minister for Housing Nisar Mohammad Khan, has submitted nomination papers for two National Assembly seats. He has been the district nazim Charsadda during the two tenures. Another son of Nisar Mohammad Khan is said to be candidate for a provincial assembly seat. It is to be mentioned that a number of district and tehsil nazims have also flexing muscles to contest the coming elections. However, they have to quit their offices before submitting nomination papers.

PPP's Ticket to Hina Raises Many Eyebrows

Some PPP circles are unhappy with the award of party ticket for NA-177 to former State Minister Hina Rabbani Khar and demanded withdrawal of the decision. PPP aspirant for NA-178, Jamshed Dasti said that the Hina Rabbani's issue will be disastrous for the Party because the people of the District do not like the Khar family in PPP.

Alliances and Forthcoming Elections

PPP, PML-N Plan Grand Opposition Alliance

The refusal to the Caretaker setup by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (N) will help to bring both the main stream opposition forces closer and to move forward for the formation of grand opposition alliance to end the state of emergency as soon as possible. The telephonic conversation between Ms Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif followed by their separate telephonic discussions with the other opposition leaders also focused on forming a grand opposition alliance to build a pressure that could force the rulers for the withdrawal of emergency. Meanwhile, the PPP and PML-N central leaders also agreed to contact the component parties of MMA, All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM), Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) and Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM) so that a consensus could be made for the formation of a grand alliance. It may be mentioned here that the PPP chairperson in her news conference on Friday stated categorically that the caretaker setup was not acceptable to her. The same response was given by the PML-L leadership from abroad and the PML-N leaders Mian Nawaz Sharif and Mian Shahbaz Sharif before making this statement also had a chat with Ms Bhutto.

The PML-N insiders said that the Mian Nawaz Sharif also held a detailed discussion with Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) President Qazi Hussain Ahmad regarding ongoing political scenario and the forthcoming general elections that likely to be held during the state of emergency. Both the leaders agreed on one point that if the coming general elections would be held under the state of emergency no one could guarantee for its (election's) impartiality and transparency, insiders said adding that in these circumstances a joint opposition effort needed to counter the situation. The insiders also said that PPP Chairperson Ms Benazir Bhutto had already hinted on Friday that she wanted to resolve the issue of general elections under the terms and conditions of Chartered of Democracy (CoD). Ms Bhutto's soft corner for CoD was enough to understand that she has realized that grand opposition alliance is needed, said insiders.

APDM Gives Boycott Deadline

The All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) said on November 29 that the alliance would boycott general elections if the government did not restore the judiciary to its pre-November 3 status by December 15.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief Nawaz Sharif told after presiding over an alliance meeting at his Model Town residence that the APDM will participate in the elections only if President Pervez Musharraf restores the judiciary to its pre-emergency status, or we will withdraw our nomination papers on Dec 15. Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal President Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Tehreek-e-Insaaf Chairman Imran Khan, Balochistan National Party (BNP) President Abdul Hayee Baloch, Awami National Party (ANP) Secretary General Haji Ghulam Muhammad Bilour and Pukhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai attended the meeting.

Use of State Powers to Affect Elections

PML-Q Influencing Elections through Nazims

According to sources, Pakistan Muslim League (Q) is employing the powers of its District Nazims, particularly in its home province Punjab, to win the forthcoming General Elections hence depriving other political parties of a level playing field, pre-requisite to ensure transparent election process. Punjab, Pakistan's largest province in population and plays a decisive role in the formation of Federal Government, comprises of 35 Districts. Almost all District Nazims are staunch supporters of PMLQ and presently making efforts to use persuasive or coercive means to level the ground in favour of the PML-Q in the election campaign. The sources said that among these 35 District Nazims only two, one from District Kasur and others from Muzaffargarh, have some friction with Chaudhrys. Before the dissolution of Punjab Assembly, former Chief Minister Punjab Chaudhary Pervez Elahi's lightning election campaign across the province was thoroughly supported by these local players of power game.

Former Minister Using State Machinery for Election Campaign

The opposition's apprehension about free and fair election under emergency and with local government system is being vindicated as leadership of PML-Q continues using state machinery for the upcoming polls. Though the Punjab Assembly has been dissolved on October 19, former Provincial Minister for Law and Local Government Basharat Raja and his younger brother Raja Nasir who has also served as an advisor to the Punjab Chief Minister, are still enjoying their political influence in using state machinery of Potohar Town Municipal administration. The Public Relations section of the Potohar Town is still issuing statements of the former Provincial Minister and his brother who is also President PML Rawalpindi district calling upon the people to avoid participation in the public gathering of other official parties.

EC Sends Complaint against Rashid to RO

The Election Commission of Pakistan on November 27 sent Pakistan People's Party complaint against Sheikh Rashid Ahmad, for allegedly flouting the Code of Conduct, to the concerned returning officer for a possible action. Sources in the Commission told that PPP Election Cell Chairman Senator Latif Khosa visited the ECP Secretariat on Monday and filed a complaint against the former minister. The ex-minister, the senator contended in the complaint, had grossly violated the code while "misusing state resources" during his rally to file his nomination papers, the sources maintained.

Sheikh Rashid has filed nomination papers from NA-55 and 56. Amir Fida Paracha of PPP is stated to be his main rival in NA-55 constituency. Sources quoted the Senator having said that Sheikh Rashid was using the state resources, as if he is still a Minister. The EC Secretary Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad confirmed that the PPP complaint is sent to the relevant returning officer for his comments.

Change of Platforms

Ex-Adviser to Contest Party-less Elections

Veteran politician Raja Munawar has announced to contest next elections from PP-21 as an independent candidate. Raja Munawar is a founding member of the Pakistan Peoples Party and the creator of the party manifesto in 1967. He was the Adviser late General Zia ul Haq and contested party-less elections in 1985 for National Assembly seat in 1988 on JUP ticket. In 1997, he contested elections on the PPP ticket.

Mustafa Khar to Field his Group from PML-N

Former Punjab Governor Malik Ghulam Mustafa Khar has decided to contest the General Elections from the platform of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and he will field his strong candidates from five seats in Kotaddu and Muzaffargarh tehsils. Former Provincial Minister Malik Abdul Rehman Khar, son of Mustafa Khar, said that PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif would take a final decision about their candidature. Rehman Khar said Mustafa Khar was eligible for the elections as he held a degree equivalent to graduation required for contesting the election. Former Pakistan People's Party (PPP) veteran Mustafa Khar made inroads into PML-N ranks when he appeared seating by Mr Sharif during the flight on his failed attempt to land in Pakistan on Sept 10. The candidates likely to be fielded from the Khar group include: former member of the National Assembly (MNA) Malik Arbi Khar, former MPAs Rehman Khar, Malik Tahir Miladi Khar and Malik Bilal Khar. Also many politicians took their nomination papers from returning officers in Muzaffargarh and Kotaddu.

Pre-Election Surveys and Analysis

Fears in Washington Polls could be 'Very Flawed'

The US administration fears that Pakistan is heading towards a "very, very flawed" election, which could bring chaos and instability to the country. According to diplomatic sources, the Americans fear that if the situation worsens, Pakistan may end up having yet another military regime. The US policy towards Pakistan has two basic objectives: fighting terrorism and to promote democracy. The second objective stems from a realisation that the military alone cannot defeat terrorism and therefore it is important to take political forces along. When this policy is implemented, it translates into a desire to continue to work with President Pervez Musharraf who should be partnered with a strong civilian politician to give the much-needed political clout to the government in Islamabad. This led to the US involvement in negotiating a power-sharing deal between General Musharraf and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Although this arrangement has run into trouble after the imposition of emergency on Nov 3, the Americans still want it to succeed. The realization that the military alone cannot deliver comes from recent experiences in the NWFP and tribal areas but Washington's reluctance to trust a purely civilian set-up in Islamabad is rooted in Pakistan's history.

Polls won't be Fair in Current Scenario: UK

British High Commissioner to Pakistan Robert Brinkley said that the coming general elections would not be fair and free in the current scenario. Talking to newsmen at Deputy High Commission's office of UK in Karachi on November 21 afternoon, he said that the UK was emphasizing the need to hold fair, free and transparent elections in Pakistan that could help the restoration of genuine democracy and marginalize the militants. "In the current situation the fair and free elections could not be held," he said. Mr Brinkley invited senior newsmen to discuss his meeting with PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto in Karachi the same day. He, however, did not disclose the nature of issues he had discussed with the PPP Chairperson.

Survey by Centre of Civic Education

According to the Centre of Civic Education (CCE) Survey, a vast majority of youths (over 70 percent) is indifferent to politics but an overwhelming majority (nearly 84 percent) thinks that their increased participation could bring positive changes to the country's political environment. According to the Survey, the feeling of non-engagement towards politics is highest in NWFP – almost 80 percent. This was followed by Islamabad, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. The result was consistent between male and female respondents. About 85 percent of the respondents knew more than one political party and 15 percent could not name any party. Less than half of the respondents knew that the last General Elections were held in October 2002. Some 30 percent did not answer the query and 20 percent gave 1970-2007 as the year of last General Elections.

The Survey which was funded by National Democratic Institute Pakistan was based on a set of questions used to capture major aspects of youth political behavior.

Pakistan's Mullahs Sidelined in Crisis'

Analysts say that fragmented, outflanked by young militants and politically compromised, Pakistan's mainstream Islamist leaders have only a side role to play in the crisis engulfing the country. Since President Pervez Musharraf imposed emergency rule, the outcry has been led at home by ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, lawyers and rights groups, and abroad by the US. That, says Farzana Shaikh, an expert at the London-based think tank Chatham House, is due to a "deeply-rooted confusion" over the role of Islam in public life since Pakistan's creation. When independence came, "there was no clear consensus on whether Pakistan was meant to be a state for Muslims, or whether it was to be a state governed by Islamic

law. She said that the mullahs have been influential in the past: forcing Bhutto's father in the 1970s to ban alcohol and declare Friday prayer day a holiday; helping oust him in 1977; and mobilizing mass protests in 2001 against the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Analysts point to three key reasons why religious parties are not so influential this time. They are hopelessly divided – there is an Islamic fundamentalist alliance called the MMA, but its two biggest parties cannot even agree whether to take part in January 8 elections. They have a long association with previous military regimes, notably when Pakistan backed Afghanistan's mujahedin and the Taliban. And they are losing influence to battle-hardened militants in Pashtun-dominated Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan.

Political analyst Shafqat Mahmood said religious parties could likely muster only around five to 10 percent of the vote. He told that the people of Pakistan are not essentially pro mullahs. Their role in overall politics has never been as decisive as in some other countries. In 2002, when Musharraf needed electoral support, he was supported by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and JUI leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman favours taking part in the polls.

Analyst Rahimullah Yusufzai But while the JUI has more clerics in its fold than the other main Islamic party, the Jamaat-e-Islami, its style – playing big-time politics, sending women to parliament, among others – “has alienated many people who want them to stick to their role as mullah. Like the secular opposition,” said Chatham House's Shaikh, “the religious right is deeply fragmented. In Balochistan and the Tribal Areas meanwhile, those now holding sway are young commanders with experience in Afghanistan. Yusufzai said that they are calling all the shots. They are willing to make sacrifices. They have hundreds of fighters. They have weapons and resources.

Governance at Large

Performance of the 12th National Assembly

The last National Assembly has made history by becoming the first elected assembly in the country's brief Parliamentary history but failed to meet constitutional requirement on three major counts. And they were:

- § The Presidential address to the joint sittings of the Parliament at the beginning of every Parliamentary calendar year
- § Formation of the Council of Common Interest (CII) and
- § At least, its one meeting every year and mandatory 130 days sittings in one Parliamentary calendar year.

The Assembly started off with noisy protests against President General Pervez Musharraf amid slogans of 'no Musharraf no' and 'go Musharraf go' and desk thumping under the Legal Framework Order (LFO) and culminated under Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) with en-bloc resignations by the opposition parties except PPP-Parliamentarians against Musharraf's re-election by the current assemblies. There was no opposition in the final session of the NA on Nov 7 that endorsed the proclamation of emergency rule by the President. The Assembly could pass only two bills during the first parliamentary year as most of the time was consumed in the opposition's protest and debates on the LFO which was finally adopted by the NA in December 2004 in the form of 17th Amendment with two-thirds majority, thanks to the religio-political grouping of MMA. Similarly, the Dual Offices Bill enabling Musharraf to jump the deadline of Dec 31, 2004 as uniformed president was another legislation that generated heated debates in the House.

The President's Address to the Joint Sittings of the Parliament

The last Parliament's calendar year started on November 15 and President General Pervez Musharraf is bound to address the joint sitting of parliament under Article 56 (3) of the constitution. The President is supposed to set the government's agenda for the next year and highlight its achievements during the outgoing year. The President addressed the joint sitting of the parliament after the culmination of first parliamentary year in 2004 amid noisy protests of 'No Musharraf No' but didn't turn up again for that purpose notwithstanding repeated calls by the opposition. Article 56 (3) states at the commencement of the first session after each general election to the National Assembly and at the commencement of the first session of each year the President shall address both Houses assembled together and inform the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) of the causes of its summons. The President had reportedly said he would not address the joint sittings of parliament because it was uncivilized parliament. Dr Sher Afgan Niazi said that President would only address the joint sitting of the parliament provided it assures 'maturity' in his presence and shunned protest.

Formation of the Council of Common Interest (CII)

As for the constitution of CCI, Article 153 requires the President to form the body, and appointment of Provincial Chief Ministers its members and an equal number of members from the federal government to be nominated by the Prime Minister from time to time. The CCI is supposed to take contentious issues between/ among the provinces and there will be no decision but on the consensus by the Council. The council, chaired by the Prime Minister, is supposed to make recommendations to the parliament, and is answerable to the parliament. However, President Musharraf failed to form the CCI until directed by the Supreme Court in its verdict in Pakistan Steel Mills Case in 2005 despite having the parliament in place. The Supreme Court annulled the deal of Steel Mills privatization, pointing out irregularities in the process and commissions and kickbacks.

Mandatory Meetings

The National Assembly is supposed to meet for 130 days in every parliamentary year under Article 54 (2) of the Constitution of Pakistan. The Assembly met this requirement for the first four years but unfortunately failed to complete the requirement in the final year. According to the current position, there are only 13 days left in the current parliamentary year while it is still short of 48 days of session. The status quo will persist, as the National Assembly session before November 15 is unlikely. This detail does not include the final session that lasted for over two hours. The session adopted a resolution endorsing the proclamation of emergency rule. National Assembly has met for 607 days and 1,235 hours and 50 minutes during its five-year term. As per year-wise breakdown, it met for 131 days (121 hours and 25 minutes) in the first day, 130 days (331 hours and five minutes) in second year, 132 days (271 hours) in third year, 132 days (303 hours) in fourth year and 82 days (209 hours and 20 minutes) in fifth year. The Article 54 (2) states, "There shall be at least

[three] sessions of the National Assembly every year, and not more than 120 days shall intervene between the last sitting of the Assembly in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session: Provided that the National Assembly shall meet for not less than 130 working days in each year.”

Detailed report on the performance of National Assembly can be accessed through following link:

http://www.pildat.org/events/07-11-17/pdf/5Years_NA_Report.pdf

Army Act 1952 Amended – Civilians can be Court Martialled

The government on November 10 amended the Army Act of 1952 to give wide-ranging powers to the Army to court-martial civilians. Under the amended act, the Army can now try civilians on charges ranging from treason, sedition and attack on army personnel to “assaulting the President with intent to compel or restrain the exercise of any lawful power” and “giving statements conducive to public mischief”. The un-amended Army Act, too, had a provision to hold court martial of civilians but only when at least one of the accused belonged to the armed forces. In recent years, several members of the extremist Islamic groups have been tried and sentenced by different field court martial, but in all these cases members of the armed forces were also involved. Many of these cases related to abortive attempts on General Pervez Musharraf’s life. Although not stated in clear terms, one of the underlined reasons for the amendment to the Army Act is said to be the inability of the existing anti-terrorism courts to hold proper or speedy trials of the people involved in acts of terrorism or fanning religious or other brands of armed militancy in the country. The amendment, he said, had been made only in Section 2 (1-d) of the Pakistan Army Act, 1952, by adding some more offences of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and allowing the military courts to try and convict the civilians.

The amendment has been made through an ordinance that will come into force at once and will be deemed to have taken effect from Jan 2003.

Under the amendment, a sub-clause (iia) will be inserted into the sub-clause (ii) which says: “Any offence, if committed in relation to defence or security of Pakistan or any part thereof or Armed Forces of Pakistan, punishable under the Explosive Substance Act, 1908 (VI of 1908), prejudicial conduct under the Security of Pakistan Act, 1952 (XXXV of 1952), the Pakistan Arms Ordinance, 1965 (W.P.Ord. XX of 1965), the Prevention of Anti-national Activities Act, 1974 (VII of 1974) or Anti-terrorism Act, 1997 (XXVII of 1997), Sections 109 (punishment of abetment if the act abetted is committed in consequence and where no express provision is made for its punishment), 117 (abetting commission of offence by the public, or by more than ten persons), 120B (punishment of criminal conspiracy), 121 (waging or attempting to wage war or abetting waging of war against Pakistan), 121A (conspiracy to commit offences punishable by Section 121), 122 (collecting arms, etc., with intention of waging war against Pakistan), 123 (concealing with intent to facilitate design to wage war), 123A (condemnation of the creation of the state and advocacy of abolition of its sovereignty), 124 (assaulting president, governor, etc., with intent to compel or restrain the exercise of any lawful power), 124A (sedition), 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon), 302 (punishment of Qatl-i-amd), 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) and 505 (statement conducive to public mischief) of the Pakistan Penal Code or attempt to commit any of the said offences.” The government notification said that: “In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of Article 89 of the Constitution read with proclamation of emergency of the of third day of November 2007 and the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) No 1 of 2007, the president is pleased to make and promulgate the ordinance”.

Govt, UNDP to Launch Anti-Poverty Project

The Ministry of Finance and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on November 29 signed a memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch a 5-year joint project worth \$6.5 million titled Strengthening Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Monitoring. This partnership would develop and refine poverty reduction strategies, approaches and mechanism. Federal Minister for Finance, Statistics and Economic Affairs Dr. Salman Shah was the Chief Guest at the signing ceremony. UNDP Country Director Alvaro Rodriguez and Secretary Finance Ahmad Waqar and Secretary Economic Affairs Division Akram Malik signed the partnership documents. Speaking on the occasion, Shah said that realizing the significance and need for the consistent monitoring of government policies, the finance ministry and UNDP had instituted this joint project. He said that the ministry had contributed over Rs.38.5 million towards Strengthening PRS Monitoring through a cost sharing agreement with the UNDP. Shah said major functions of the project were poverty outcome monitoring. Improvement in quality, collection, analysis and management of data at national and international level, anti-poverty expenditure tracking and analysis of pre-poor public spends and allocation through a gender budgeting.

He said the project would ensure improved capacity to formulate and implement pro-poor policies and deficient and effective spending aimed at poverty reduction. Rodriguez said this partnership was vital to pave the way for evidence-based planning of poverty reduction strategies and budgeting for development interventions. The provinces, together with the centre, have a significant role to play towards a unified and complementary approach to poverty reduction in Pakistan, he said.

Education for All Global Monitoring Report

The Report "Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?" of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report was launched on 29 November at the United Nations in New York. Published by UNESCO and Oxford University Press, the sixth edition of the annual Report is a mid-term review of progress towards the six EFA goals established in 2000. On the positive side, there is a rise in the number of children starting primary school, the number of girls in school, and spending on education and aid. However, poor quality, the cost of schooling and high levels of adult illiteracy rates need to be tackled in order to meet the EFA goals by 2015. The Report's findings were used to prepare the Seventh Meeting of the High-Level Group of Ministers on EFA from 11-13 December 2007 in Dakar, Senegal. The Report will be presented on 12 December at the meeting.

Following is the link to detailed report:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001547/154743e.pdf>

Situation in Swat

Militants Capture Shangla District

In a surprising move, the militants after capturing two more towns in Swat district finally entered the adjacent Shangla where they captured all the major government installations without facing any resistance from the police force. Sources said almost all government officials including the district coordination officer, the district police officer and heads of different government departments had already left the town and vacated their offices after reports reached there a few days back that Taliban had captured Shangla Top and were now planning to sweep the district.

Financial, Industrial and Commercial Crisis of Swat

The turbulent Swat is in grip of financial, industrial and commercial crisis with an average loss of Rs 2.5 billion per day since the clashes have erupted in the area. Following are some of the sectors greatly effected by the current situation in Swat:

- § Tourism has come down to zero point. Business and commercial activities are standstill. Transportation is halted. Hotels and restaurants have been shuttered down. Clashes between the militants and the government resulted in huge losses to the tourist industry. The hotels have vacant rooms as tourists are avoiding the area. There is hardly any foreign or Pakistani tourist in the scenic Swat, which is also known as little England. Thousands of workers including waiters, bearers, cooks, dry cleaners, watermen, watchmen, sweepers, managerial and clerical staff are looking forward to the tourists. Tourist guides and translators are also waiting for the tourists to earn their livelihood. More than 12,000 workers engaged in power looms industry went jobless.
- § Roads are deserted as there is a no any coach, taxi or other vehicle on the roads. As many as 14 bus stands are lying vacant as coaches, taxis and other vehicles have been garaged.
- § Containers loaded with wooden handicrafts, furniture, embroidered cloth, woolen cloth, caps, shawls, bed sheets gloves and other items, worth Rs 100,000 per container, used to be driven to Karachi for onward shipment have been parked. Dry fruit and fresh fruit business is another the worst-hit business. Apple trade, a source of millions of rupees of foreign exchange, left decaying. Vegetables dispatched to Peshawar lying abandoned.
- § Construction business including housing, shops, rest houses, huts and buildings have drastically come down to zero point particularly in Madain and Kalam. Investment in cottage industry and other goods produced here has also been affected.

Eminent economist and former Vice Chancellor of Peshawar University Dr Abdul Matin said it would take long time to restore the economic activities in Swat. He said the displaced people must be supplied with tents, food and blankets. There was no relief, shelter or accommodation for the displaced people. Only a tent village with the capacity of 500 people had been set up without water and other basic amenities, he added. Matin said the government should set up a quick

response unit cell to find out problems, worries and needs of the affecttees. "Swat is devastated. Tourism has come down. Business is standstill. People are in panic", he said calling for short term and long-term measures to help the downtrodden people.

SBP's Annual Report 2006-07

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) released its annual report 2006-07, which shows sustainability and continuity in macro-economy. It also boldly indicates the ills of the national economy. It also pinpoints the emerging negative trends and potential threats to macro-economy. It suggests different policy measures to control weakness in all the important sectors/areas. The annual report of SBP (2006-07) is the ideal combination of achievements and missing targets. Despite all the hardships, domestic persistence, political instability, deteriorating law & order, increase in terrorist activities, rise in oil and commodities' prices in international markets and the drastic change in regional politics, the country achieved 7 per cent GDP (one of the fastest in Asia during FY07, surpassed only by China and India). It was mainly supported by the real investments. It is also estimated that the GDP would be in good health due to rise in investment to GDP ratio at a record 23 per cent, assisted by a surge in domestic private investment and record FDI flows in the days to come. Furthermore, National Savings increased, and total revenue increased (10.2 per cent as against the 9.9 per cent during FY06) while the budget deficit stayed at last year's level of 4.3 per cent of GDP. Foreign exchange reserves of the country are now at a record level, exchange rate is stable and fiscal deficit is also manageable. Per capita income has increased. Poverty has been reduced. But there is noticeable rise in income disparities too.

Other Side: It is ironic that high GDP rates in the third world leads to nothing but in widening rich-poor gap. The rich-poor gap has materialized and the highly projected "trickle-down effect" is still a far-reaching dream.

Missing Targets: The SBP has advised that the emerging weaknesses of the economy which, if left unadvised, could pose a serious challenge to the macro-economy. The SBP has pinpointed many major problems of the economy i.e. huge current deficit, soaring oil prices, sluggish exports, mounting imports, increase in domestic and foreign debt burden, rising inflationary pressures and narrow tax base which have to be squarely confronted to maintain the growth momentum and impart stability to the process. The current account deficit widened further in FY07 (\$7 billion or five per cent of the GDP). Another point of concern is the 10 per cent increase in debt burden, of which domestic debt grew by 12 per cent and foreign debt by eight per cent. The tax to GDP ratio is still very low, and inflation remained stubbornly high, showing only a sluggish decline in FY07. The growing current account deficit is the resultant of a sharp slowdown in export growth. The revival of declining exports may be rectified by lowering cost of doing business, removing bureaucratic hurdles, reducing the cost of energy and water, and lowering inflation in the economy, and proper implementation of long term result-oriented policies. It is also suggested that growth in non-commodity sector always leads to inflation so there should be balance in tight monetary policy. According to the SBP annual report (2006-07), debt and liabilities are up 10 per cent: Pakistan's total debt and liabilities rose by 10 per cent in fiscal year 2006-07 to Rs5.024 trillion, standing at 56.7 per cent of GDP. The rise was fuelled by increases in both domestic and external debt; domestic debt grew 11.9 per cent to reach Rs.2.597 trillion, whereas external debt and liabilities grew 8 per cent to reach \$40.1 billion. Of the rise in external debt and liabilities, 62.5 per cent was contributed by floating interest rate loans.

Declining Exports: The country had missed export target, and pointed out just 3.4 per cent growth witnessed in the exports as against the target of 13.1 per cent and overall exports stood at 17.1 billion dollars during 2007 financial year. According to the SBP annual report, the slowdown in the overall export growth was attributed mainly to textile exports growth, which declined from 14.4 per cent to only 4.9 per cent during last four years from 2004-2007. The SBP report said that poor rice, fruit and cotton crops together with European Union (EU) ban on fish and fish products import from Pakistan and industry's specific issues were considered as the main contributory factors behind the sluggish growth in non-textile exports during 2007 financial year.

Tight Monetary Policy: The report defends its continued tight monetary policy. On the contrary, the tight monetary policy of the State Bank seems to be a blessing in disguised. The spread between deposit and lending rates has come down somewhat, due to continuous prodding by the State Bank, which is a healthy sign. The central bank has miserably failed to mangle the high ratios of inflationary pressure. The price stability duty of the SBP is the picture of total failure too. While money supply grew by 19.3 per cent during 2006-07 as against the target of 13.5 per cent, CPI rose by 7.8 per cent or higher by 1.3 percentage points than the target. It is also suggested that growth in non-commodity sector always leads to inflation so there should be a balance in tight monetary policy.

The report has projected that the GDP growth target would be 7-7.4 per cent, inflation 6-7 per cent, monetary assets (M2) 13.2-14.2 per cent, fiscal deficit around four per cent and current account deficit growth would be 4.8 per cent during the current fiscal year. During 2008 fiscal year, export would be 18.3 billion dollars as compared to target of \$18.9 billion as per balance of payment, while imports would be \$28.9 billion as against the target of 29.6 billion dollars. The slowdown in monetary growth is expected to be reflecting mainly through growth in private sector credit, lower government borrowings from the SBP, and slower net growth in net foreign assets (NFA) of the banking system, consequent to changes in the monetary policy framework in 2008 financial year. Generally, the growth during FY08 would be strong and broad-based, with contributions coming mainly from agriculture and the services sectors. It is estimated that continuation of tight monetary policy would help contain demand pressures in the economy, with monetary growth forecast to remain close to indicative target of 13.7 per cent. Domestic inflation would also be expected to be close to the annual target of 6.5 per cent. However, high food commodity prices and rising international energy prices which may force the government to increase domestic oil prices are major risks to the inflation outlook. Current account deficit may be larger than FY07 in absolute terms but is expected to fall as a share of GDP. The target for money growth during 2007-08 has been fixed at 13.7 per cent which, even if achieved, would almost be equal to the rise in GNP in nominal terms.

Mixed Performances: Although, GDP is 7 per cent but it is not so balanced within the different sectors of the economy. Agriculture sector witnessed a moderate recovery due to bumper wheat (23.5 million tons), sugar cane and grams crops. Manufacturing sector performance is mixed. Large-scale manufacturing left much to be desired and the construction sub-sector grew by 17.2 per cent. According to the report, the national economy is now absorbing more construction related workers than before. The higher demand for construction workers is well reflected in a continued double digit rise in their wages. It also shows 5.6 per cent growth in mining and quarrying despite growing lawlessness in Baluchistan and Northern Areas. Electricity and gas distribution showed a negative growth of 15.6 per cent, relatively less than a fall of 23.8 per cent shown a year earlier. Banking and insurance continue to be driving force behind the sustained growth of services sector. This sector is showing a sustained growth for the last six years. The services sector is now all time high at 53.3 per cent of the national economy in 2007. Nonetheless, the data compilation process is not in line with the importance of services sector in the national economy.

Concluding Remarks: The annual report of SBP (2006-07) is the true reflection of our successes and failure and the government should take it in true sense. The consecutive high percentages of GDP have been negated by high inflation, high prices, and widening income disparities. Efforts should be taken to abridge the negative trends in macro-economy.

Main Achievement (Selected Macro-Economic Indicators)

	FY05	FY06	FY07	Targeted Annual
Real GDP	9.0	6.6	7.0	7.0
Agriculture	6.5	1.6	4.5	5.0
Major Corps	17.7	-4.1	4.3	7.6
Manufacturing	15.5	10.0	11.0	8.4
Large Scale	19.9	10.7	13.0	8.8
Service	8.5	9.6	7.1	8.0
CPI	9.3	7.9	6.5	7.8
SPI	11.0	7.8	-	9.4
Monetary Assets (M2)	19.3	15.1	13.5	19.3
Private Sector Credit	34.4	23.5	-	17.3
Exports	16.9	14.3	13.1	3.4
Imports	32.1	38.8	-2.0	6.9
Liquid FE Reserves(million \$)	10,487	11,471	-	14,070

As per % of GDP

Total investment	19.1	21.8	21.5	23.0
National savings	17.5	17.2	17.2	18.0

Tax revenue	9.7	9.9	10.2	10.2
Total revenue	13.8	14.2	13.2	14.9
Budgetary expenditure	17.2	18.5	17.5	19.2
Budgetary deficit	3.3	4.3	4.2	4.3
Current account deficit	-1.4	-3.9	-	-4.9
Domestic debt	32.4	30.2	-	29.8
Foreign debt	31.3	28.3	-	26.8
Explicit liability	1.7	1.3	-	1.0
Total debt	64.3	58.8	-	56.7

Future Projections (Growth Rates (%))			
	FY07	Annual Plan	SBP Projection
GDP	7.0	7.2	7.0-7.4
Inflation	7.8	6.5	6.0-7.0
Monetary Assets(M2)	19.3	13.7	13.2-14.2
Billion US\$			
Worker Remittances	5.5	5.8	6.0-6.5
Exports	17.1	18.9	18.3
Imports	27.0	29.6	28.9
% of GDP			
Fiscal Deficit	4.3	4.0	4.0
Current Account Deficit	5.3	5.0	4.8

Source: SBP Annual Report (2006-07)

Geo-Political Dynamics

Southeast Asia

EU Imposes Fresh Sanctions on Myanmar

EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels on November 18 confirmed the imposition of tougher sanctions on the Myanmar regime following October's crackdown against pro-democracy demonstrators. The new restrictions, agreed on October 15 and formalized by ministers on November 18, include a longer list of Myanmar officials who are subject to a travel ban and an assets freeze. An EU statement said that an investment ban on Burmese state-owned enterprises has also been extended to include businesses owned or controlled by the regime or "by persons and entities associated with the regime." Ministers also confirmed additional restrictive measures on Myanmar's logging, timber and mining sectors. While the General Affairs Council in Brussels was to consider "further restrictive measures", EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said the effects of current sanctions should be assessed first.

Election Campaign Kicks-Off in Thailand

Eighteen political parties registered their party-list candidates and were assigned candidacy numbers on November 7, signaling the start of election campaigning for the December 23 nationwide poll. Of the 480 House seats up for grabs, 80 will be decided by proportionate votes cast in eight constituencies, each with 10 available seats, and 400 will be allocated via direct votes cast in 197 constituencies, each with one to three seats depending on the number of eligible voters. When campaigning begins in earnest in the coming days and weeks, Thailand's 40 million-plus voters will learn more about parties' policy platforms, their ideological orientations and the methods they will use to persuade people to vote for them. All the parties, either newly created or groups of political old-timers registered under a new name, will have less than two months to introduce themselves to the public, communicate their ideas and canvass for votes.

There is widespread concern that some of the parties, armed with formidable war chests, will resort to vote-buying to bankroll their way to the House of Representatives. Both the Election Commission and the interim Surayud government have pledged to do their best to prevent electoral fraud and ensure a free and fair election. The Election Commission is the leading agency organizing the election, while the Surayud government is charged with providing security, logistical support and making sure that all government officials stay impartial and do nothing that can be construed as being biased in favour of or against certain parties. Both the Election Commission and the government are faced with a tall order. Vote-buying tactics, which continue to be widespread in rural constituencies where people are poor, have evolved over the years. In the old days, canvassers simply handed out cash to eligible voters they wanted to persuade to vote for them. These days, cash can be transferred electronically to recipients over time, in instalments, to avoid arousing suspicion and detection by poll monitors.

It is already evident that the election will be contested between supporters of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's now-defunct Thai Rak Thai Party and the political forces opposed to his five-and-a-half-year reign that ended when the military overthrew him in a bloodless coup in September last year. Battle lines have been drawn between two camps symmetrically opposed. Thaksin loyalists, who are contesting the election under a new party banner, can count on the support of the rural masses still enamoured by populist policies, while anti-Thaksin parties can depend on the urban middle-class to vote for them. But there are also some opportunistic parties - most of them created overnight by politicians with deep pockets - that are ready to latch on to whichever side emerges as the biggest winner next month.

The election is being touted as an important turning point, after which Thailand is supposed to revert to full democracy following more than one year of military rule. But Thailand's future as a democratic society is far from assured unless the Election Commission and the interim government succeed in enlisting the support of fair-minded, democracy-loving people, particularly idealistic youths, to serve as election monitors and ensure a relatively clean election. The Election Commission and the government must also make the best use of the less than two months between now and election-day to educate the public about how democracy works. People need to be taught quickly how to distinguish between the candidates. They need to be able to tell the difference between principled political parties, with responsible policies backed by realistic financing options, and unprincipled ones that have no qualms about bribing people for votes while

promising instant gratification through populist policies, at the same time providing no clue as to where they are going to find the money to fund them.

Middle East

Lebanon's Lahoud Steps Down, Creating Power Vacuum

Lebanese President Emile Lahoud stepped down at the end of his term, leaving the country in a dangerous power vacuum after rival politicians failed again to elect his successor. Before leaving office, he said he was handing over responsibility for the country's security to the army, a move promptly denounced by rival Prime Minister Fuad Siniora as unconstitutional. The tense situation prompted calls from world leaders for the Lebanese to remain calm and for their leaders to find a compromise in the political deadlock that has gripped the country for the past year.

Jordanian Parliamentary Election 2007

Parliamentary elections were held in Jordan on November 20, 2007 to elect representatives to the Chamber of Deputies of Jordan, which is comprised of 110 seats spread over 45 regional electoral districts, 3 closed tribal electoral districts and one national woman quota district. The Parliament guarantees a minimum of six seats for women, nine for Christians, and three for the Circassian and Chechen minorities. The biggest opposition party, the Islamic Action Front, stated it would contest the elections. Those elected constitute the 15th Chamber of Deputies. Electoral campaigning started one month before the elections.

Following the election, Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit and his cabinet resigned, as it normally followed in the Jordanian political system. King Abdullah II appointed Nader al-Dahabi on November 22 as the next Prime Minister to lead a new technocrat government.

885 candidates contested the elections, including 199 women (the highest participation of female candidacy the country has seen to date). Traditionally elections have been fought by individuals standing as independents or under tribal support and not as partisans. Some of the candidates in this election have political affiliations, and some belong to political parties. Most of the Islamic candidates contested under the Islamic Action Front (IAF) banner, with the party fielding 22 candidates. Only 6 of those 22 representing the IAF candidates won the elections, which is viewed as a major setback to the influence of the IAF inside Jordan. Reports of "vote buying" spread; a local newspaper published a picture showing a voter allegedly receiving a sum of money from the aide of a candidate.

Results:

Overall turnout was 54%, though it varied between 80% in rural areas and 28% in some constituencies in the capital.

Summary of the 20 November 2007 Chamber of Deputies of Jordan election results

Parties	%	Seats
Independents of various tendencies	89	98
Islamic Action Front (<i>Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami</i>)	5.5	6
Seats allocated to women by a special electoral panel	5.5	6
Total (turnout 54%)	100.0	110

Bush Sees Palestinian State Next Year

US President George W. Bush announced on November 27 that Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to a joint document that might ultimately lead to the creation of a Palestinian state and hoped that the two sides will be able to reach a peace treaty before the end of next year.

Mr. Bush said at a news conference in Annapolis, near Washington that we meet to lay the foundations for the establishment of a new nation, a democratic Palestinian state that will live side by side with Israel in peace and security," At the opening ceremony, Mr. Bush stood at a lectern with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on his right and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on his left. After Mr. Bush read the joint statement signed by two sides, Mr Olmert and Mr. Abbas reached across the lectern and clasped hands in front of the US leader, then took their seats. Later, the two leaders also embraced each other.

Mr. Abbas, speaking after President Bush, said that the path of peace is the only choice. He thanked the international community for its support and urged Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian territories and to free political prisoners. Mr. Abbas said that this opportunity might not be repeated. Mr Abbas claimed that public opinion in both Palestine and Israel favoured a peace process. Bs said that peace is not impossible to achieve if there is a will and freedom is the single word that stands for the future of the Palestinians and captures the meanings of all their generations," he said. "It is their sunshine and it is the life that inspires their future. It is the last word voiced by the martyrs and victims, and it is the song their prisoners sing. He urged the international community to back "the solution of two states, based on ending occupation and the establishment of the state of Palestine side by side to the state of Israel, and the resolution of all issues relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Responding to Mr. Bush's call for establishing a Palestinian state, the Israeli Prime Minister said he was willing to work with the international community to find a proper framework for creating such a state in the territories agreed between the two sides. But he warned that the negotiations for creating such a state will not take place here in Annapolis but rather in our home and in your home. These negotiations will be bilateral, direct, ongoing, and continuous, in an effort to complete the process in the course of 2008." Negotiations for a Palestinian state, he said, will address all of the issues which we have thus far avoided dealing with.

Mr. Olmert also availed this opportunity to urge Muslim and Arab states to recognise Israel. He said that the time has come to end the boycott. He added tha: "We are ready. . . . Together we shall start. Together we shall arrive." The US media noted that this was the right platform Mr Olmert to make such an appeal. This is the first occasion that all 22 members of the Arab League are participating in peace talks with Israel. Two Arab states -- Saudi Arabia and Syria -- that have so far avoided direct talks with Israel are also attending the conference. As many as 40 countries, including Pakistan and India, have sent senior diplomats to the conference, which is depicted in the US media as the biggest peace show put together by the Bush administration in seven years.