

Gender

Women & Politics

PML-Q Expels Kashmla

PML-Q has suspended the party membership of MNA Kashmala Tariq and sent a reference to the NA Speaker who shall then forward it to the Election Commission of Pakistan to de-seat her from the NA. PML-Q sources said that the action was taken against her for violating party discipline and passing statements against the party's top leadership. The sources said that there were reports that she was trying to form a forward bloc of the party in the NA in connivance with Adviser to the Prime Minister on Interior Rehman Malik. PML-Q leadership had contacted former minister Hamayun Akhtar Khan, Kashmala's mentor, and asked him to convince her to mend her ways. The party sources said Kashmala's party membership had also been cancelled.

Kashmala Vows to Fight for her 'Right': Kashmala Tariq vowed to fight for her right in the party. She said that PML-Q leadership can expel me from the party, but they cannot de-seat me. I do not fall under the defection clause. She said there were many other members in the party against whom the party had similar allegations, but no action had been taken against them. Kashmala claimed that she was amongst a 'reformers group' of the party who had reservations about the leadership's policies, and had publicly expressed their apprehensions in a democratic way. Kashmala said were the defection clause to be suspended for a day, the 'Chaudhrys of Gujrat' would know how many members stood by them.

India's Dalit Icon aims for Top Job

Will an "Untouchable" become India's next Prime Minister?

The way a number of Indian opposition parties are rallying around Mayawati, a Dalit or "untouchable" icon, and touting her as a future prime minister must be gladdening the hearts of 160 million members of the community she represents. The 52-year-old daughter of a government clerk who grew up in a shanty town in the capital, Delhi, has emerged as the pivot of a fledgling "third front" in Indian politics. It is trying to throw down the gauntlet to the coalitions led by the governing Congress and opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Ms Mayawati's "third front" brings together a slew of regional parties and communists, who are still smarting after they stopped supporting the government over its nuclear deal with the US.

This despite the fact that her Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a regional party based in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, has only 17 seats in the parliament. Since the 2004 general election, Mayawati's fortunes have soared. In the last state assembly elections a little over a year ago, her party swept to power winning 206 of the 403 seats and more importantly, had leads in 55 of the state's 80 parliamentary constituencies. Her party also polled well in at least 60 parliamentary seats outside Uttar Pradesh, making her a pan-Indian Dalit icon of sorts.

The canny political strategist has also broadened her appeal, wooing upper-caste Hindus and Muslims - she has 29 Muslim and 52 upper-caste Brahmin members in the present state assembly. In India's fractious and caste-driven polity, this is a masterstroke in social engineering - an unprecedented coalition of the poorest of the poor and the rich, and of Hindus and Muslims. And this has taken place in a state which accounts for one in seven MPs in the Indian Parliament. The upshot, say analysts, is that her party has become a factor in about 10 states, and could play the spoiler there for the bigger parties in next year's general elections. The unorthodox Mahatma Gandhi-baiting politician with a penchant for gaudy birthday celebrations, expensive jewelry and personal statues has been an enigma for India's upper classes and journalists. On the one hand, her homegrown charisma and mass-based leadership qualities have never been in doubt; on the other, she has been assailed with charges of amassing wealth and property beyond her means. But he says her triumphant Dalit-Brahmin alliance in Uttar Pradesh has become a "blueprint for electoral success" in India.

Analysts say Ms Mayawati thrives best during periods of political instability, even when she appears to lack the numbers to form governments. With only 66 legislators in the 403-member assembly, she took power in Uttar Pradesh twice. She secured a third term with 99 legislators. This is exactly what could happen if the Mayawati-led "third front" mops up about 100 seats or more in next year's general elections which are expected to leave no party with a clear majority. Analysts say that Ms Mayawati is also trying to move beyond a purely caste-based agenda to enhance her appeal among upper-castes and classes - her government recently brought in English in primary schools and announced new urban housing and health plans. But she could also blow her chances because of what her critics describe as her "despotic" side, and a lack of any second rung of leadership. However, the prospect of Ms Mayawati becoming the Prime Minister has immense symbolic value. The next general elections will tell whether Ms Mayawati manages to exploit this opportunity.

Women & Laws

Gender Mainstreaming through Legal Reforms

A three-day (21-23 July) roundtable titled '**Gender Mainstreaming through Legal Reforms,**' was organized by Planning Commission of Pakistan in collaboration with German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). Organized at a time when legislations directly affecting women have been presented before the Parliament for discussion, the roundtable was attended by gender experts, secretaries of key ministries, and representatives of civil society and women political leaders. Speaker National Assembly Fahmida Mirza inaugurated the event. She appreciated the efforts of the Planning Commission for involving all stakeholders in the process of legal reforms regarding gender and said that women were generally confined to subordinate roles in the society. She said that the lacunae of gender imbalance was so deeply imbedded in human history that it was rightly said that history itself had largely remained 'his-story' since 'her story' had never been written.

She pointed out that despite the fact that this region has produced some of the most talented women statespersons of international fame and repute, women in this society have remained victims of religious misinterpretations and social and cultural biases. Highlighting the gaps in the role played by the state regarding gender mainstreaming in past, Fahmida said that it remained faulty and was hesitant to break the status-quo and existing power structure by turning a blind eye to the flagrant escalation of practices like Vinni, Swara and Walwar. She said that it was only after the intense and laborious campaign by women activists and other members of civil society that the executive hesitantly agreed to take some half hearted steps but even in this respect the forceful implementation of the existing laws remains by and large missing. Further criticizing the role of state, she said with regard to religious debate, the state became the party for discriminating against women with the enforcement of controversial presidential ordinance in 1979. Rejecting the concept of 'Protection' in the famous Women Protection Bill, she said that her party voted for the bill as it was an attempt to provide some relief to misery-stricken women but what the state failed to understand was that the word 'protection' was in itself damaging. She added that it strengthens the social perception of women as subordinates and incapable. Stressing the need to review Shariah laws in the light of changed circumstances, she said that the maze of religious misinterpretations and social and cultural biases continue to haunt half of the population of the country denying its due role in national development. The Speaker said that laws could only orient the society towards the right direction but the will to move towards the given direction comes from emancipation of the society. She regretted that despite the existence of many laws, there was little adherence to them.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister Shehnaz Wazir Ali said that gender mainstreaming means addressing the concerns of both men and women in all spheres. She said that there was a need to draw efficient mechanism to properly diagnose the gender gaps and analyze all gender dimensions during the process of making policies and legal reforms.

She said that tremendous amount of work is required to provide equal opportunities to women with regard to education, employment, physical mobility, access to justice and health facilities and these issues can no longer be ignored. Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Salman Farooqui said that the roundtable would play a vital role in institutionalizing the process of gender mainstreaming and would work as a catalyst for public private partnership in this direction. "Participation of all stakeholders shows the general commitment towards empowering women in all spheres of life." Secretary Planning and Development Division Suhail Safdar said that the roundtable was mainly themed to assess the responsiveness of labour laws to women in formal and informal sectors, harassment at work place and successful legal reforms in SAARC countries. Representative of GTZ Ullrich Grabowsky said that there was a need to engender social sector PC-1 format. In her concluding remarks, gender expert at the Planning Commission Viqar-un-Nisa Hashmi said that the event would include series of vibrant discussions leading to concrete recommendations for formulation of reforms and implementation process. Depicting the harsh realities about the problems faced by women home based workers, a documentary titled 'Yeh Hath Salamati Hein Jab Tak' was also screened on the occasion. Executive Director Meher Garh Dr Fauzia Saeed gave an elaborate presentation on the issue of harassment at work place and legal reforms required to curb the menace.

Women & Economics

Women's Land Rights

Land Record Documentation System Recommended

The research study on "Women's Land Rights" has recommended reforms and land redistribution with the intervention of government, as there is a need to ensure redistribution laws and policies are gender sensitive and target poor population. The policy and research findings launched by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), on July 24, has been jointly funded by Actionaid-Pakistan, International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister on Social Sectors, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, while giving presidential address on the occasion recommended land record documentation system, formation of land courts, national identity cards for women and land redistribution. She lamented that government policies in the past have been very weak in terms of addressing women's structural concerns, adding that the focus of all policies have been on financial approaches alone while ignoring the broader social aspects. Wajiha Anwar, while giving presentation on 'Women's land rights: Law and policy' said that the most important change would be to bring inheritance and other family laws under a secular civil code, which would enable the State to enact gender-neutral laws. Even keeping within the confines of Muslim Personal Law, the State could ensure that men and women get equal shares in inheritance as in the case of Turkey and Somalia where male and female children inherit equally from the father's estate". She also suggested that, if a woman provides land security for a loan she should be given concessional credit. This would encourage transfer of property to the woman's name. Secretary, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan Dr Faqir Hussain laid stress on enforcement of inheritance law adding that such an improved mechanism can be useful for the full and effective enforcement of female right to inheritance. He informed that not even 10 percent of women get their due right to property. He stressed to implement the law in the areas of FATA & FANA as well. Earlier, SDPI visiting research fellow, Dr Saba Gul Khattak gave a brief presentation on the key findings and recommendations of SDPI study adding that we believe that there are windows of opportunity, gaps and spaces that can be utilized effectively by the state, the parliament, the judiciary, and development practitioners to push for women's rights to land. For food security and women's traditional agricultural knowledge, it underlines the need to preserve women's knowledge about agricultural systems and suggests build upon this knowledge to effectively deal with the present out-migration phenomenon and current global food crises which is likely to bring focus of the world economy to agriculture as there is a growing realization that local and indigenous farming practices are integral to sustainable agricultural output. On devolution and local bodies, the study pinpoints that the local councilors be used to play a role in land disputes or for ensuring equitable distribution of inheritance and minimizing fraudulent methods of land capture. Regarding agricultural labor, the study underscores that the agricultural work should be brought into the fold of formal economy so it could be regulated and workers could be protected. Women's contribution would thus be recognized and valued, and the multiple issues of agricultural labor could be addressed more effectively, it further adds.

Women to get Stipends during Training

Monthly stipends ranging from Rs 4,000 to Rs7,000 will be offered to women, with educational qualifications of primary pass to masters, during their apprenticeship for varied training programs. A project in this regard, dedicated to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, was launched at Sindh Women Development Directorate on July 3 morning. Project Director, Ashfaq Qadri briefing the Provincial Minister for Women Development, Tauqir Fatima Bhutto, said the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program would mainly focus on Sindh based women. Young girls and women were said to be provided training in different skills in accordance to their academic qualifications and capacities. Programs to be offered would include banking, secretarial skills, information technology, fashion designing, tailoring, textile designing, honey bee harvesting etc.

Giving a breakup of the stipends to be offered to the women apprentice, Ashfaq Qadri said post graduates (Masters) would be entitled of stipend worth Rs7000/- per month followed by Rs 6000/-for graduates, Rs5000/- for Intermediate qualified and Rs5000/- for those having passed their class five exams or above up to matriculation. Sindh Minister for Women Development, Tauqir Fatima Bhutto, expressed her pleasure that a major milestone was to be achieved by the PPP Government, committed to the cause of women empowerment. The Minister who has been actively involved in planning of the scheme said a foolproof mechanism has been adopted for selection of apprentice, said different departments of the Sindh government have also been involved in the scheme.

'Business City' for Women in Major Cities of Punjab

Provincial Minister Muhammad Ishaq while talking to the delegation of skilled women said that to evoke the business and technical capacities of skilled women, 'Business City' would be established in major cities of Punjab. He said that women are 52% of the population of Punjab and it is the need of hour to utilize their skills for betterment. He added that women's capacity would be enhanced through different refresher courses of accounting, budget, product and administration.

Gender Budgeting

Call for Gender Sensitization in Budget

The women members of Sindh Assembly and women right activists emphasizing on gender sensitization initiatives in federal as well as provincial budgets and demanded that at least 20 percent jobs must be given to women in every sector of government. They expressed these views in a seminar on "Provincial analysis of budget from gender perspective" organized by Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation on July 4. The seminar was attended by women member of provincial assembly belonging to ruling coalition of PPP, MQM, and opposition party PML-F. PPP MPA Humera Alwani speaking in the seminar said that inflation, unemployment, suicides and poverty were the gifts of five years rule of last coalition government which inherited PPP government. Highlighting the positive aspects of budget of present government she pointed out that distribution of land in landless farmers and women, low cost houses for poor segment of population and Rs1000 for needy under Benazir Development Programme can be counted gender sensitization initiatives of present PPP government announced in federal and provincial budget. The women constitute 52 percent of overall population but they were not getting even 2 percent shares in jobs in government sectors, she said and demanding from her own government she emphasized that out of estimated 47000 vacant posts in provincial departments of Sindh, at least 20 percent jobs should be given to women. She regretted her party's 5 year role of criticism on previous government and urged the opposition member assemblies especially women lawmakers for unity against problems and anti women laws. PPP women lawmaker also demanded for segregate allocation for empowerment of women in the budget. Another woman MPA Zarin Majeed of MQM said that her party struggling for 98 percent population the country who deprived of their rights by only 2 percent elite class. Despite being an ally of PPP in provincial government, the MQM MPA termed that the budget of current fiscal 2008-09 was pro people but it was not pro poor. Ms. Marvi Rashdi MPA of PML (F) while criticizing the budget said that PPP which claimed pro poor party had been withdrawn the subsidies on food items which resulting in hike in inflation.

Gender Budgeting for National Progress

Humera Alwani

Gender budgeting, an exclusive budget reserved for women in development, education, health, social and welfare sectors, etc, is being practiced all over the world, including the US, Australia and our neighbour India. This budget defines policies and plans for women to achieve equal benefit and equal output compared to menfolk. It provides them opportunities as per their population ratio in every department of life. In the 2007-08 budget the allocation in this regard was a niggardly Rs30 million. It's the need of the hour to introduce gender equality programme. Annually every district in Sindh is getting a sum of Rs3 million in the name of Gender Reform Action Plan, though it is another matter that a substantial portion of this amount is either misused or misappropriated by the corrupt in the administration. For example, a fair amount of money allocated in 2007 for the release of eligible and deserving women prisoners confined in jails in default of payment of fine, after completing their sentence, was misappropriated. Although women constitute 52 per cent of the population of the country, their needs, development and progress are being deliberately ignored. They need an equal amount in the country's budget, specifically in healthcare, including child healthcare and reproductive health. We need high literacy ratio among women because good mothers are a great source for making a good nation. Likewise women development budget for shelter homes, training schools, skill-building centres, day-care centres, free health, etc, is needed to strengthen the women and in turn strengthen the nation along with the male population. I had made some such proposals during the second tenure of Benazir Bhutto (1993-1996), who started the Prime Minister's Women Health Programme. Now we hope to reactivate the programme, to be known as Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women Health Programme, in which recruitment of lady doctors and health visitors will be a top priority of the government which should re-allocate appropriate funds, specifically for child and maternal health care and provide maternal facilities at union council level of every district.

The gender budgeting proposals include:

- Women teachers' appointment at primary level.
- Scholarships for girl students from Classes V to X.
- Introduction of women recruitment/employment policy in every sector of life.
- Change in discriminatory promotion policy for women.
- Hostels for working women and shelter homes for shelterless women.
- Appointment of more women judges in family courts.
- Reactivating of women police stations
- Reactivating of women banks
- Providing easy credit for small-scale businesses, including cottage industries, the minimum credit amount being Rs300,000 without any guarantee and security.
- Appointment of women medical legal officers immediately at district hospital level.
- Provision of agricultural lands to women farmers and landless women
- Rehabilitation of health training institutions.
- Cows and buffaloes at subsidized rates will be given to women in rural areas to increase their incomes.
- Low -cost housing schemes for divorced, needy and suppressed women, etc.
- Plan to ensure equal opportunities for rural women and those living in remote areas.
- Exclusive budget to minimize death ratio.
- Separate line in Zakat and Baitul Maal fund for women.
- Introduction of adequate Jehaz Fund.
- Stipend for girl students of primary and higher schools.
- Training opportunities for women in textile, garments and IT sectors.
- Expansion of microfinance for targeting poor women, particularly in rural areas of Sindh and urban slums.
- Establishment of mother-child health centres.

As a Member of the Provincial Assembly I have submitted such proposals to the Sindh Chief Minister to allocate a separate gender budget. Women need equal identification, equal rights, equal wages, equal representation in decision-making process if our country wants to progress.

Women & HR

Report on Violence against Women by Aurat Foundation

NWFP: On July 11, Aurat Foundation released its second quarterly report on violence against women that showed 100 cases of murder, 13 of honour killing, 12 of suicide, 18 of rape and one of Swara in Frontier province. Peshawar district topped with 29% of total cases, the report revealed, followed by Mardan and Charsadda, respectively. Asad Ali Qureshi and Shirin Javed jointly compiled the report titled 'Violence Against Women in NWFP April-June 2008' under the AF project namely Policy and Data Monitor on Violence Against Women. Presenting the report here, Shirin said there were 278 registered cases of violence against women during the second quarter of the current year. She said that out of the total 278 cases, there were 100 cases of murder, 55 of hurt and body injuries, 16 of kidnapping, 13 of honour killing, 18 of rape, one of gang-rape, 13 of firearm, 12 of suicide, 21 of domestic violence, two of trafficking, one each of Swara, Vanni, stoning to death, poisoning and murder attempt, etc. Shirin added in the incidents of suicide committed by 12 women, four took their lives due to the family disputes; one owing to the depression caused by prolonged illness and in seven cases the cause was unknown. In 190 cases, the accused were either husband, father, brother, cousin or neighbour and in-laws. In three cases the accused were women. Asad Ali Qureshi told the participants the sources of the information mentioned in the report were newspapers, police headquarters, hospitals and women crisis centres, adding that these were the reported cases and the list might swell if the a large number of un-reported cases were included in it. The report stated that the First Information Reports (FIR) in majority of the cases (shown in the report) had been registered because the cases are collected from the authentic sources, otherwise, there are hundreds of violence cases where FIR is either not registered, or if registered, the facts are twisted and investigation seldom results in favour of the victim.

Punjab: The Aurat Foundation's quarterly report (from April to June) for the province of Punjab states: Violence against women is continuing to increase at an alarming pace and no concrete steps are being taken to stop these gruesome violations of women's fundamental rights to life, security and freedom to make independent choices in private and public arenas. The report is made under the Foundation's 'Policy and Data Monitor on Violence against Women' and was presented at a seminar on July 14. The report has been compiled by Nabeela Shaheen and Abid Ali. Speakers at the seminar included Advocate Shamim Malik, Advocate Irum Sajjad Gul, Shahtaj Qazilbash, Rubina Sehgal, Neelum Hussain, Nabeela Shaheen and Abid Ali. The speakers expressed concern over the growing number of incidents of violence against women. The purpose of the data collection exercise and its subsequent dissemination is to constantly remind the decision makers and all other stakeholders about the gravity of situation and to make them realize the urgency of an all out concerted effort, at all levels, to combat and eliminate gender based violence in Pakistan. It is also a social awareness campaign to ensure that there is zero tolerance for violence against women in society, both in rural and urban areas.

The report has been categorized incidents of violence depending on the nature of violence. These have been categorized as murder, domestic violence, hurt and body injury, kidnapping, firearm, suicide, beating, trafficking, burning, forced marriage, rape, torture, honour killing, harassment at work place (physical and sexual) and any other kind of violence. The report shows that a total of 828 incidents of violence against women occurred in 35 districts of Punjab between April 1 and June 30 this year. The percentage of the cases of kidnapping is highest that is 30 percent among the recorded cases followed by the percentage of murder 20 percent, body injury or hurt 6 percent, rape 13 percent, domestic violence 2 percent, suicide 9 percent, sexual assaults 4 percent, burning/acid throwing 2 percent and torture 6 percent. The report also points out the relationship of the victim with aggressor. Almost 50 percent aggressors were husbands. According to graph 73 percent cases are registered, 19 percent unregistered while the number of unknown cases is 8 percent. The report also takes into account the analysis of the motives behind the incidents of violence.

Bus Driver's Daughter is New UN Rights Chief

United Nations Chief Ban Ki-moon has appointed South African judge Navanethem Pillay to succeed Louise Arbour as his High Commissioner for human rights. Ms Pillay, who has been with the ICC since 2003, was picked from a short list that also included prominent Pakistani lawyer and human rights activist Hina Jilani and Argentine human rights lawyer Juan Mendez, according to diplomats and UN officials. Navanethem Pillay, the daughter of a bus driver, became the first non-white woman judge to sit in South Africa's highest court. Born in Durban in 1941 of Tamil descent, Pillay has built up a formidable reputation during a legal career that stretches back over four decades, initially coming to prominence back in 1967 when she became the first woman to set up practice in the eastern Natal (now KwaZulu Natal) province. She subsequently carved out a reputation as a doughty defender of opponents of the whites-only apartheid regime and a

proponent of women's rights. In 1973, she brought a successful application against the authorities running the notorious Robben Island penal colony which enabled political prisoners -- including Nelson Mandela -- to have access to lawyers. In 1995, only a year after the collapse of apartheid, Pillay made legal history by becoming the first woman of colour to be appointed to the Supreme Court in South Africa. She first came to wider international attention as part of the panel of judges serving on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Under Pillay's presidency, the court handed down a landmark ruling in 1998 in which rape was held to be a crime against humanity. She has been serving as a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), based in The Hague, since 2003. Pillay once admitted in an exchange with a South African judicial service commission publication that she had struggled to be taken seriously in her early years, especially as a woman, but would eventually win over the doubters.

Women & Media

Media Urged to Project Truth

Media women, publishers and journalists' organization held a seminar titled 'Responsibilities and Limitations of Media' on July 1. Addressing the gathering Provincial Minister for Women Development Tauqir Fatima Bhutto said that women in media play a pivotal role in the society. Their worth is once known, as their work gets highlighted. Sultana Siddiqui said that responsibilities and limitations cannot be detached from one another. People who are involved with media must be responsible individuals; because the image portrayed by the media is taken up by the common people as the actual insight into a cultural background of a country. Negative image only harms and distorts the truth. Images that have been severed abroad highlights negative image of Pakistan, which is definitely not correct. Mehtab Rashdi said that the changes are coherently taking place in the country we live in. Interestingly, when one rows up does it dawn upon them the worth of the word and meaning of the word, 'freedom of expression'? It must be cherished and not abused. There was a time during Zia regime, when even Quran verses on tyranny were censored. We though are an independent nation, we still need to become a sovereign independent minded individuals. She said that showing live deaths on the television screens was not a good thing to do, media should not become insensitive to human sufferings. Erum Masud said that media image and face is within us, but the main thing is how we get to execute it. Channels airing such crude images should limit it.

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Final EO Report of 65 Women Contested Constituencies Launched by The Researchers

The Researchers (TR) launched a detailed Election Observation (EO) Report of 65 Women Contested Constituencies on July 28. TR observed 65 national and provincial assemblies' constituencies that were contested by women in General Elections 2008. It included 37 National & 28 Provincial constituencies with 400 short and long term electoral processes observers. Exploring "Gender Face of Politics" a comprehensive report encompassing all phases of elections has been produced. This research report is first-ever documentation of its kind not only in Pakistan but in Asian region that observed elections with an exclusive gender lens & women contested constituencies.

The highlights from observed Women Contested Constituencies (WCC) are:

- 21% of the total constituencies, i.e. 179, were Women Contested Constituencies (WCC), i.e. 64 National Assembly (NA) and 115 Provincial Assemblies
- 195 women contestants in total, 78 on party tickets and 117 were independents.
- At the National Assembly level, 15 women got elected out of 73 contestants. PPPP had 7 winners followed by 3 each belonging to PML-N and PML-Q. 1 each got elected on MQM and independent ticket. No women could make it to the National Assembly from NWFP and Balochistan on general seat.
- A total of 10 women got elected at Provincial level against 122 contestants i.e. 8 out of 73 in Punjab (5 PML-N, 1 each from PPPP, PML-Q and one independent); In Sindh 1 out of 28 was elected of PPPP; In Balochistan 1 out of 8 of PML-Q was elected. In NWFP 11 women contested but none got elected.
- There were 32 Independent Women Contestants at NA level and 85 at PA level. One each at both levels got elected i.e. Saima Akhtar Bharwana from NA-90 Jhang-V and Robina Shaheen Wattoo from PP-188 Okara-IV.
- 16 women got elected on both National and Provincial Assemblies' reserved seats, 10 belonged to PPPP and 6 to PML-N. 3 women contested both on reserved and open seats i.e. Ms. Tehmina Daultana PML-N, Sumera Malik-PML-Q and Khushbakh Shujaat MQM. They won general seats and vacated reserved seats. 9 women losing on general seat, at NA and PA level, made it to the house on reserved seat.
- Political elite women were majority party tickets holder as due to eligibility criteria of education "men of the house" were out and opened vistas for them
- Ratio of contesting Male to Female contestants was 5:1.
- 50% of contesting women at NA level belonged to political household
- In 50 of the observed WCC, majority women were married
- In WCC, their level of education ranged between 2 PhDs to 33 Graduates & 20 of them having a Master's degree
- Election finances were not a problem for women of political households
- The social standing of these families could manage socio-cultural and socio-religio effects/constraints for these women contestants but the same could not be managed for female voters, polling staff, polling agents and independent contestants that faced numerous issues.
- Punjab was better off with regard to women's access to basic social services, even though falling between moderate to low in absolute terms.
- Religious views were moderate as percentage of negative remarks in observed WCC
- The most prominent female party switchers among the previously elected women were Hina Rabbani Khar, Firdous Ashiq Awan and Sughra Imam who switched from PML-Q to PPP, while Shehzadi Umerzadi Tiwana joined PML-N from PML-O. Ms. Abida Husain switched from independent to PPP and Dr. Saira Tariq, minority reserved seat, joined PML-Q leaving PPP.
- For 85% Election process, campaign & canvassing was managed by men of the family having the picture of leader of the party and men of the house more visible in campaign material.
- Media was extensively used by political parties and contestants. However, Media coverage of women in News bulletins for selected channels remained on an average of 20% with highest belonging to Geo and lowest to PTV.

The coverage of women's political empowerment as an issue in current affairs programme averaged 16% on Express TV while PTV ranked last did not give the issue any coverage.

Detailed report is available on following links:

www.theresearchers.org

www.wpaf.org

Electoral Reforms

ECP to Recommend Ban on Contesting More than One Seat

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is likely to recommend the government pass a legislation banning candidates from contesting elections from more than one seat. An 'Electoral Reforms Committee' of the EC, formed a year ago to propose reforms in the electoral process, would submit proposals to the Parliamentary Affairs Ministry for legislation from parliament. Headed by the EC secretary, the committee includes chief election commissioners of the four provinces, four joint secretaries of the federal EC, the commission's director IT and the law section officer. The committee has also held several rounds of meetings during the last few months and is scheduled to meet again from July 14 for three days in Lahore. The committee is likely to propose that the practice of contesting elections from more than one seat should be discouraged, as it is an extra financial and administrative burden on the commission. Elaborating the point, they said that of the 38 constituencies where by-polls were held on June 26, 90 percent were constituencies that had been vacated by more than one seat winners in the general elections. They said the process was still continuing as some candidates had won more than one seat in by-polls and polls in their vacated constituency would be held again.

The committee is also likely to recommend the government declare all Computerized National Identity Card holders (CNIC) as eligible voters. The committee would propose the government to consider every person holding a NADRA computerized national identity card (CNIC) as an eligible voter and abolish the practice of launching expensive voter registration drives, which were a heavy burden on the national exchequer. It will recommend the government to launch an awareness campaign urging the people to get CNICs and inform NADRA if someone in their family dies so that his/her name could be deleted from the automated data.

Several other proposals were under the committee's consideration, including changes in the commission's code of conduct and an increase in the maximum expenditure limit of national and provincial assembly candidates in election campaigns. Proposals to make postal ballot and compliant systems effective were also being considered.

Currently, the EC has fixed a limit of Rs 1.5 million for a National Assembly seat contestant and Rs 1 million for the contestant of a provincial assembly seat. This limit is considered irrational and the commission believes that it is impossible to contest election within this limit.

The United Nations Development Programme is sponsoring the electoral reforms process through its Support National Election in Pakistan unit, which is working with various non-governmental organizations for strengthening the electoral system in the country.

Recommendations for Electoral Reforms

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) released its recommendations for electoral reforms on July 25. The recommendations were made on the basis of data gathered by FAFEN's more than 18,000 election observers who worked nationwide from May 2007 to February 2008. Following are some of the recommendations:

- Contestants should not be allowed to contest elections from more than one constituency.
- Stakeholders should be consulted in case of any reforms in the code of conduct for political parties and their candidates to contest election.
- A clear mechanism should be devised to enforce election related policies.
- There should be combined polling stations for male and female voters.
- ECP should establish a mandatory procedure for publishing election results from each polling station before the official results are gazetted.
- Election related laws must be enforced on the Election Day.

All Election Information on Cell Phones in Near Future'

ECP secretary Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad said on July 5 that election information will soon be made available to subscribers' cell phones. In a meeting at the Punjab office of Election Commission he said, "This way, Pakistan will be the first country in the world to provide such information and data online as well as on cell phones."

Punjab Provincial Election Commissioner Javed Khurshid and IT Director Imran Ahmad Khan briefed the secretary about the IT centre and the infrastructure being established in the newly built building here at 10-Court Street. The secretary was informed that a state-of-the-art infrastructure was being procured for computerized electoral systems. Database maintenance, backup strategy and disaster recovery planning are being evolved to avoid any mishaps, such as data loss from the site. Dilshad said efforts were being made to establish a sophisticated Information Technology (IT) infrastructure at the ECP Secretariat and provincial headquarters, which will bring a change in the electoral system of the country. Dilshad said that Management Information Systems and Geographical Information Systems are being installed which will bring drastic changes in the electoral system of Pakistan to achieve the objectives of transparency and accuracy." He said that electoral rolls are already available on the commission's website, and any voter can search his name in the rolls by entering his CNIC number and voters will also be able to locate their polling stations just by entering their CNIC numbers.

Senate – By-Elections

Akbar Elected Senator from Balochistan

Syed Akbar Shah won a general Senate seat from Balochistan in a by-election held in the Balochistan Assembly on July 11. The seat fell vacant after the resignation of Sana Baloch of the BNP-Mengal in protest against the military operation in the province. Mr. Shah belongs to the Balochistan National Party-Awami and he was supported by the JUI-F. Awami National Party also supported him and withdrew its candidate Abdul Jabbar Kakar. Mr. Shah secured 23 votes, independent candidate Kohda Babar Baloch 20 votes and Mir Baz Khan Khatiran of Pakistan People's Party 15 votes. Sixty of the 65 members of the assembly cast their votes. Two votes were declared invalid.

Government Watch

Parliamentary Secretaries

Ministries Allotted to New Parliamentary Secretaries

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has allotted ministries to 15 newly appointed parliamentary secretaries in the federal cabinet. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Deputy Information Secretary Iqbal Sialvi confirmed the allotment of the ministries to the appointed parliamentary secretaries. He said that it was a 'wise' step of the PPP leadership and would help streamline the working of the ministries.

S. No.	Parliamentary Secretary	Portfolio
1	Mr. Noor Alam Khan	Commerce
2	Ch. Saeed Iqbal	Communication
3	Mr. Sajjad-ul-Hassan	Finance
4	Nawab Liaqat Ali Khan	Food and Agriculture
5	Dr. Mahreen Razaque Bhutto	Health
6	Mr. Muzafar-ul-Mulk	Housing & Works
7	Pir Haider Ali Shah	Industry & Production
8	Mr. Azeem Daultana	Information
9	Capt. (R) Rai Mujtaba Kharral	Interior

10	Mian Abdus Sattar	Planning and Development
11	Shaikh Nauman Islam	Railways
12	Dr. Mehboob Ullah Jan	Religious Affairs
13	Mr. Ramesh Lal	Tourism
14	Mir Dost Muhammad Mazari	Water & Power
15	Dr. Zil-e-Huma	Women Development

Coalition or Collision

Rejoining Federal Cabinet – Nawaz says no to Gillani

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani, in an effort to expand Federal Cabinet with consultation, telephoned PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif, ANP leader Asfandiyar Wali and JUI (F) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman on July 13. Nawaz Sharif refused to rejoin the Federal Cabinet till the reinstatement of the judges, sacked by President Pervez Musharraf last year. He also made it clear that the PML-N would not join the cabinet and expressed no reservations to give ministries to other coalition partners.

Coalition differences Halt Legislation

The ongoing political impasse between the coalition partners has brought the legislation almost to a halt, and 15 bills are stuck in parliament due to delay in the convening of a National Assembly (NA) session and non-functioning standing committees. The deepening differences between PPP and PML-N have hampered the legislative process in the parliament.

There were 15 important bills pending before the house when its fifth session was prorogued. Of the 15, five bills – the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill, 2007, the Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Regulation of Generation, Transmission and Distribution of Electric Power (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2008 and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2008 – were moved in the NA during its session in April. Three bills – the Limitation (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2008 and the Dowry and Marriage Gifts (Restriction) Bill, 2008 – were moved in the upper house of Parliament.

The government also moved seven draft bills – the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Companies Appointment of Legal Advisors (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Federal Board of Revenue (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Modaraba Companies and Modaraba (Floating and Control)(Amendment) Bill, 2008 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2008 – in its last session in June.

PPP should find New Coalition Partners'

Former foreign minister Sardar Assef Ahmed Ali has said the PPP and the PML-N do not agree even on fundamentals and the party is wasting its precious time in trying to develop consensus with the PML-N on key national issues. Addressing a People's Lawyers Forum seminar on July 23, he said the alliance of the PPP with the PML-N would not survive and the PPP should quit the alliance and find new coalition partners in order to run the government affairs smoothly. Assef said the PPP and the PML-N had joined hands to run state affairs with national consensus but the PML-N, despite being in the government, supported the long march and differed with the PPP on the issue of the judges' restoration. He said the PPP wanted to save the country from crisis by resolving all issues but there was a conflict between the coalition partners on critical issues. He said the lawyers' long march backed by the PML-N should have been against President Musharraf and the Presidency but instead it targeted the newly-constituted parliament. He said the PPP introduced a constitutional package to resolve the national issues, including the 58-(2B) and the judges' issue.

Policy Changes

ECNEC Reconstituted

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani has re-constituted the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) with the Prime Minister as its Chairman. According to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division, the members are the ministers for Communication, Education, Environment, Finance, Revenue, Economic Affairs and Statistics, Food, Agriculture and Livestock, Health, Housing and Works, Industries and Production, Information and Broadcasting, Information Technology and Telecommunications, Inter Provincial Coordination, Local Government and Rural Development, Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis, Petroleum and Natural Resources, Ports and Shipping, Privatization and Investment, Railways, Science and Technology, Social Welfare and Special Education, Textile Industry, Water and Power, Women Development, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Governor State Bank of Pakistan, Provincial Finance Minister, Provincial Planning Ministers.

The other members by the special invitation will be Chairman Planning and Development Board Punjab and Additions Chief Secretary (Development) of Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan. The Finance Minister, Planning Minister, and Additional Chief Secretary (Planning and Development) of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir will also be its members. Chief Executive and Chief Secretary, Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA) and Additional Chief Secretary (FATA), Adviser to Prime Minister on Interior and Narcotics Control, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Industries and Production, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Economic Affairs, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Sector and Adviser ministry of Finance and Revenue and Federal Secretaries of concerned Minister/Division will be members. The Committee may invite such other officers to its meetings as may be required from time to time. The Secretariat assistance will be provided by the Cabinet Division.

Decision on Pakistani ISI Control Reversed

The Pakistani government has had to reverse its decision to put its powerful spy agency under civilian control but is yet to explain its move. A BBC report says the government has said it will clarify why it changed its stand only hours after deciding to bring the Inter-Services Intelligence under the Interior Ministry. The ISI, though supposed to be under the Prime Minister's office, has been led by the country's powerful army, which apparently intervened to force the new civilian government's reversal. The ISI, over the years, has become so powerful critics contend it is a state within a state. Some Western powers claim rogue elements in the agency help al-Qaida and Taliban militants in Afghanistan, the report said. In its original decision, the government had said the prime minister had "approved the placement of Intelligence Bureau (the domestic agency) and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) under the administrative, finance and operational control of the (Interior Ministry) with immediate effect ...," the report said. Hours later, the government said it had only meant to emphasize "coordination between" the interior ministry and the ISI in the "war on terror and internal security."

Government's Performance

Charge Sheet against Government's 100-day Performance

On July 3, the PML-Q issued a charge sheet against the coalition government's 100-day performance, terming it "mismanagement and betrayal of the people of Pakistan". PML-Q parliamentary leader in the National Assembly (NA) Faisal Saleh Hayat launched, at a press conference, the white paper titled "The 100-days betrayal, starring the coalition government".

Faisal said not a single promise made by the coalition government had been fulfilled during the first 100 days of its rule. He said the ruling coalition was entangled in petty issues leaving voters striving to make both ends meet. He said the coalition was facing a crisis of leadership, and warned of serious consequences if the process of democracy failed. "If the democratic experiment fails we will be back to square one," he said, adding that the government must sense its responsibilities and live up to the people's expectations. "But for the withdrawal of cases and the 'de-freezing' of their assets under the National Reconciliation Order, they have given nothing to the people so far," Hayat said. He said that his party would continue to play its role for the establishment of a true parliamentary system and would not let the system derail. He however said the main responsibility lies with the ruling coalition whom the people have voted to power. Hayat maintained that his party would continue to sit in the opposition even as the ruling coalition breaks.

Sindh Government's 100 Days in Power – So far so Good, but Future still Full of Challenges: CM

Sindh Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah has termed the government's performance in its first 100 days as satisfactory, but feared that what he described as 'over ambitious elements' that want to derail the system by misguiding people. Flanked by Sindh Information Minister Shazia Marri and Home Minister Dr Zulfikar Mirza, Shah gave the details of his government's 100-day performance at a press conference held at Chief Minister House on July 15. His special assistant on media and party MNA Roshan Junejo were also present on the occasion. Junejo had hosted the commemorations for the death anniversary of his father, Shahnawaz Junejo, a day earlier in Sanghar, where Makhdoom Amin Fahim had criticized the PPP's central leadership and the government.

The Chief Minister was of the view that the government could not resolve all the problems within just a few days, but had either taken some steps or was planning to resolve these problems. He mentioned that the people have more expectations of this government than the previous one. He referred to the government's steps towards good governance, mentioning the abolition of postings of bureaucrats at higher grades on OPS (Own Pay Scale), end to re-employment, appointment of well reputed police officers as DPOs and TPOs on merit, etc. He said that the government has shown an 80 percent success in implementing the abolishment of OPS, admitting that he still faces political pressure. He also talked about the government's plans for economic revival, employment and skill development. Besides, due to government efforts, wheat flour is being sold at Rs 24 per kg and the price is expected to further reduce within a week to Rs 22. The CM and the home minister claimed that the overall crime rate in Karachi has been reduced by 30 to 35 percent, law and order in Lyari has improved and honour killing in interior Sindh has been reduced by fifty percent. Talking about law and order, the chief minister referred to series of blasts on July 7 in Karachi and said that investigation agencies are engaged in probing the incident. Some people link the incident with ethnic problems, while some say it is part of the on-going sectarian issue, while yet others connect it to the situation in the tribal areas. Home minister Dr Mirza went on to say that he is completely satisfied with the performance of the police in Karachi. Cell phone snatching has gone down by 38 percent and car snatching by 38 to 39 percent. Responding to a question, the chief minister defended the federal government's efforts to develop Thar Coal reserves, saying that federal involvement is essential to guarantee foreign investment. However, he expressed his reservations over the abolishment of the Sindh Coal Authority and other laws made by the Sindh assembly. He added that no provincial law or body should be abolished by the federal government," said Shah. He said that the federal government's notification has created confusion and it will be corrected.

Donors put Conditions for Financial Support

Major international donor agencies have asked Pakistan to "put its house in order" to qualify for an increase in external support. Informed sources told on July 26 that the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had told the government to achieve the much-needed stability, without which they would not offer any 'significant assistance'. Foreign inflows of \$2 billion, as promised by some donor agencies, could not be achieved by the end of June because of the coalition government's failure to achieve political and economic stability. A special reference has been made by the donors over the government's failure to timely pass on the increase in oil prices to consumers, further complicating the economic situation.

Benazir Scheme to Support 3.6m Families

A meeting of the National Steering Committee to discuss Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) was convened under the chairmanship of Federal Finance Minister, Syed Naveed Qamar on July 29. The meeting discussed strategy, implementation mechanism, and disbursement criteria, financing of the programme and the overall policy framework for execution of BISP, for which 34 billions have been allocated initially. The programme aims at providing cash grant of Rs.1, 000/- per month to the economically stressed families. The selection will be made through computerized NADRA database and is likely to include 3.6 million families. CNIC will be used as primary database and NADRA has been tasked to provide list of eligible families/households at designated places during August. The administrative cost estimates are expected to be at the level of 1-3 percent of total size of the Programme. NADRA will transmit lists of eligible cardholders to BISP Programme Implementation Unit (PIU), DCOs, Union Councils, Banks and Post Offices. The list of eligible cardholders shall suitably be displayed. The BISP disbursement through banks will be on the basis of individual bank accounts. The disbursement shall be made through Post Offices where bank branches are not available. A three-member Grievance Redressal Committee will be constituted at Union Council levels to review grievances. The Committee would comprise nominees of concerned MNA, MPA and UC Nazim. In districts, District Grievance Redressal Committee will be formed comprising concerned MNA, MPA, UC Nazim, and DCO will act as Coordinator of the Committee.

Effect of Petroleum Prices – 10 to 60% Increase in Prices of Kitchen Items

The unprecedented increase in prices of petroleum products has affected the rate of every item of daily use. A survey conducted by 'The News' on July 23 revealed that the prices of different commodities have registered an increase by 10 to 60 per cent. The Pakistan Railways as well as transporters plying buses and vans on long routes have also increased their fares by 8 to 16 per cent. Shopkeepers have increased the prices of most vegetables by 15 to 50 per cent. Potatoes,

which a couple of days back were available at Rs20 per kilogram, are now being sold at Rs30 per kilogram. Similarly, the price of tomatoes has also gone up. They are now being sold at Rs54 per kilogram against their previous price of Rs32 per kilogram. Onions are being sold at Rs22 per kilogram against Rs16 per kilogram. Ginger is now being sold at Rs80 per kilogram against Rs60 per kilogram. Pumpkin is being sold at Rs36 per kilogram against Rs24 per kilogram. Turnip is being sold at Rs40 per kilogram against Rs28 per kilogram. Ladyfinger is being sold at Rs30 per kilogram against Rs18 per kilogram, 'Shimla mirch' (capsicum) is being sold at Rs48 per kilogram against Rs30 per kilogram. 'Karela' (bitter gourd) is being sold at Rs45 per kilogram against Rs30 per kilogram. 'Baingan' (eggplant) is being sold at Rs40 per kilogram against Rs34 per kilogram. 'Phool gobi' (cauliflower) is being sold at Rs36 per kilogram, which was previously being sold at Rs24 per kilogram. The prices of most fruit also witnessed an increase. The prices of mangoes have increased from Rs60-80 against their previous rates of Rs40-50 per kilogram. 'Aaroo' (apricot) is being sold at Rs40 per kilogram against Rs30 per kilogram. 'Jamun' (black plum) is being sold at Rs100 per kilogram against Rs80 per kilogram. Bananas are being sold at Rs80-100 per dozen against their previous price of Rs60-70 per dozen.

Due to an unprecedented increase in fuel prices, bakers and confectioners have also increased their rates. A small bread is being sold at Rs22 against its previous price of Rs18. The medium size bread is being sold at Rs30 against Rs25. The large size bread is being sold at Rs40 against Rs35. Biscuits are being sold at Rs120-160 per kilogram. A couple of days back, they were available at Rs80-130 per kilogram. Milkmen have also increased the price of milk in twin cities. They are now charging Rs40-60 for one litre of milk. A few days back, milk was sold at Rs35-55 per litre. Milkmen Association President Riaz Ahmad Gujjar said "80 per cent of milk supplied in twin cities is being brought from other parts of the country. The sharp increase in POL prices has forced us to increase milk prices, as we cannot afford to sell milk at old rates. The prices of all brands of ghee and all kinds of pulses also witnessed an increase of Rs10 to 20 per kilogram. The 5-kilogram tin of ghee, which was available for Rs750 a couple of days back, is now being sold at Rs790. Pulses, which were sold at Rs70-110 per kilogram, are now being sold at Rs80 to Rs13 per kilogram. The price of meat has also registered a sharp increase. Beef is now being sold at Rs150 to Rs170 per kilogram. Its price was Rs110 to Rs120 per kilogram a couple of days back. Mutton is now being sold in the range between Rs280 to Rs300 per kilogram against Rs240-250 per kilogram. Al-Quresh Butchers Association (Rawalpindi) President Irshad Qureshi said "We bring animals from other cities. Now transporters have started charging us Rs7,000 per trip instead of Rs5,000 from Khanewal to Rawalpindi. So we have no option but to trickle down the impact of these rising charges to consumers." District Price Control Committee Chairman Haji Jamal told that it was difficult to maintain prices in current circumstances. "Ever-increasing POL prices are damaging the whole infrastructure of the country and wholesalers and retailers increase prices of their commodities on their own."

Asset Statements of MPs

Election Commission asks MPs to Submit Asset Statements by Sept 30

The Election Commission (EC) of Pakistan on July 23 called upon the elected members of national and provincial assemblies to submit yearly statement of assets and liabilities of their spouses and dependents. Chief Election Commissioner Justice (Retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq, in a statement, reminded the lawmakers to comply with the rules by September 30. A cursory look at the lists of those who made their way to parliament and the four provincial assemblies makes it very clear that majority of these hail from influential backgrounds. So much so, several of these elected public representatives are sons, brothers, sisters and spouses of well-known politicians. Therefore, it goes without saying that details of their assets must be worth reading when published in the official gazette. For instance, last year, in his statement of assets, the then leader of opposition in the National Assembly Maulana Fazlur Rehman showed he did not own a car. Filing of statements is a mandatory requirement under Section 42A of the Representation of the People Act, 1976 and Section 25A of the Senate (Election) Act, 1975. Under Section 42A, every member shall, on a form prescribed under Clause (f) of sub-Section (2) of Section 12, submit a statement of assets and liabilities of his own, his spouse and dependents annually to the commission by 30th day of September each year. The statements of assets and liabilities submitted under sub-Section (1) shall be published in the official gazette and copies thereof may be obtained on payment of prescribed fee. By October 15 each year, the names of members would be notified who fail to file statements of assets and liabilities within the period specified in sub-Section (1) and by an order, direct that such member shall cease to function till such statement is submitted. Where a member submits the statement of assets and liabilities under sub-Section (1), which is found to be false in material particulars, he may be proceeded against under Section 82 for committing the offence of corrupt practice.

Meanwhile, the Chief Election Commissioner has authorized the district returning officer, returning officer and assistant returning officer appointed for by-election in PP-107 Hafizabad-III, and the presiding officers appointed for each polling

station of the constituency to exercise the powers of a magistrate first class under the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 (Act V of 1898) on August 04, 2008, the day appointed for polling for by-election, in respect of the offences punishable under sections 80, 82A, 83, 84, 85, 86 and 87 of the said Act and to take cognizance of any such offence under any of the clauses of sub-Section (1) of Section 190 of the said Code and to try any such offence in a summary way in accordance with the provisions of the said Code, relating to summary trials.

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Governance at Large

Local Government

Consultation with Provinces starts: LG System's Control

The National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) has started consultation with provinces regarding handing over the control of Local Government (LG) system to provincial governments.

NRB Chairman Dr Asim Hussain said during a meeting with Car Wright, Secretary of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) that since the local government is a provincial subject, all local government initiatives have to be fully owned by the provincial governments for smooth implementation. He was accompanied by a two-member delegation of the Local Government Association of United Kingdom. The NRB chief said that based on the experience of seven-year working of local governments, the NRB, in consultation with provincial governments, is now reviewing the legal framework of local governments with a view to addressing the implementation problems. The government has agreed, in principle, to shift the control of LG system from Centre to provincial governments. Presently, due to domination of coalition parties at the provincial level and PML-Q at local government level, the LG system is all but dysfunctional. An example is that the Rawalpindi District Government has moved Lahore High Court, urging that the Punjab government be barred from interfering in its affairs. Opposition leader in the National Assembly, Chaudhry Pervez Elahi, has said that his party will not allow the government to wrap up the LG system, which replaced the 150-year-old magisterial system.

Government set to Revive Magisterial System

The government is all set to revive magisterial system in the country by abolishing or marginalizing the current local government (LG) system. A Government official told that the government is in principle ready to restore the magisterial system and abolish the LG system. Most of the government members think that the local governments have failed to ensure law and order situation in the country. In case the LG system is allowed to continue it will be made toothless. The official said that during a meeting Federal Minister for Local Bodies Haji Ghulam Ahmad Bilour had told the participants that all four provinces had consensus over restoration of magisterial system to improve law and order situation. As a follow-up to the meeting, a committee was formed to finalise amendments in the Local Government Ordinance. Federal secretary local bodies will head the committee.

The recommendations of the committee will later be presented in the parliament for amendments. The official said that most of the cabinet members and coalition partners want the LG system out or at least cornered. There are more issues than just the law and order problem. He said that the ministers, especially the parliamentarians feel that district governments take away credits for the development works and MNAs or MPAs are not given due importance as was the case before the LG system. He said that once the LG system is abolished or their powers are clipped, the MNAs and MPAs will have more say in the development projects. The district government comprises district nazim and district administration. District nazim heads the district government and performs such functions as have been assigned to him under the Local Government Ordinance 2001.

Plan to Revive Magistracy System: Nazims to Move PHC following NWFP

The stage is set for a legal battle between district governments and the provincial government as nazims from 13 districts of NWFP decided at a meeting on Thursday to move court against the provincial government's 'interference' in the district governments' affairs. The district nazims from 13 districts of the province gathered at Kund rest house in Nowshera district on July 31 to devise a strategy for the protection of local government system in the face of uncertainty surrounding the system as the provincial governments have decided to revive the old magistracy system. The NWFP nazims moot, which is the first important meeting of nazims since coming into power of the new government, discussed the issues and future of the local government system 2002 and decided to move Peshawar High Court (PHC) against some issues in which, they say, the provincial government is interfering. Nazims also formed a three-member committee comprising District Nazim Peshawar Haji Ghulam Ali, District Nazim Karak Rehmat Salam Khattak and District Nazim Mardan Himayatullah

Mayar. It will look into the issues being faced by the NWFP nazims and would made arrangements for a grand convention of nazims to be held on August 10 in Nishtar Hall Peshawar. Karak Nazim Rehmat Salam Khattak told that the meeting's basic aim was to mobilise nazims against the moves being made against the local government system. He said that postings and transfers should be made with consultation of the district governments while the provincial and federal governments are constantly ignoring them on these issues. "We are in consultation with our lawyers and would move PHC within a week against these issues. He said that the NWFP nazims would arrange a grand convention of district, town, and tehsil nazims in Nishatar Hall Peshawar and after that another country-level convention would be held in Islamabad.

During the convention nazims observed that the local government system 2002 is in accordance with the 1973 constitution and they have got all the political, financial and administrative powers under the constitution. Nazims said that they would react to any attempt to encroach on their powers as their powers were according to the constitution which says that powers would be delegated to grass roots level. Nazims from Mardan, Nowshera, Shangla, Kohistan, Karak, Lakki Marwat, Abbottabad, Dera Ismail Khan, Mansehra, Peshawar, Swabi, Battagram and Haripur districts attended the meeting while those from Tank, Hangu, Swat and Dir could not attend due to security situation. Malakand nazim could not attend the meeting due to his being injured. Nazims belonging to Awami National Party (ANP), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) attended the meeting despite the fact that these parties are coalition partners either at the provincial or the federal levels. However, these parties are ignoring the tone of their nazims, which is becoming aggressive with each passing day against their parties' lines.

Bureaucracy Conspiring against LG System: LCAP

The Local Councils Association of Punjab (LCAP) has alleged that bureaucracy was hatching conspiracy against the local government system by preventing district governments from discharging their constitutional role. These views were expressed by district nazims of 25 districts who attended the LACP meeting on Wednesday. The participants vowed that they would go to the last extent if any attempt was made to roll back the present system and would also move court. They claimed that the bureaucracy was involved in unconstitutional activities and was misleading the provincial government. The meeting also discussed how to improve coordination among federal, provincial and district governments. The participants said the provincial government should accept the third tier (district government) open heartedly. Instead of rolling back the system, the lacunas of existing system should be removed, they maintained. They also demanded that district ombudsman and internal auditors should be appointed. The Public Safety Commissions should be activated, they added. LCAP President and Tehsil Nazim Ladhraan Asghar Hussian Shah Gillani said after the meeting, that nazims shared their grievances against the provincial government's attempts to harass them by special audits into the affairs of the local governments. He claimed that the local governments were being prevented (by the provincial government) from performing its duties. He also alleged that on the orders of the Punjab government, district coordination officers were creating hurdles, which was in violation of the Constitution. He urged the government to adopt a clear-cut policy on local governments and ensure implementation of the Constitution. He rejected the criticisms made on the local governments that these were corrupt, involved in embezzlement and responsible for lawlessness, saying these did not have financial powers and law and order did not fall in their jurisdiction.

Hunt for District Nazims Starts

Race for political dominance in Punjab has started between the PPP and the PML-N, as both the parties have intensified their efforts to take lead over each other in terms of getting maximum number of district nazims to their side; and to achieve this end, different pressures are being applied on them including threats of bringing no-confidence motions against them and initiation of special audit of district governments' accounts. The PPP is going ahead in the competition so far by winning two district nazims to its side. Rao Nasim Hashim, District Nazim, Pakpattan announced to join the PPP last month, while District Nazim Sheikhpura, Mian Jalil Sharqपुरi joined the party. Sources in the PPP have claimed that a batch of over a dozen more district nazims belonging to the PML-Q were waiting in the wings to join PPP, but before their formal joining, party would take the PML-N leadership into confidence. The PML-N is also learnt to have geared up its efforts to have its share of the district nazims. The Punjab government's latest move to conduct audit of district governments' accounts is also being interpreted in this context. Some nazims are also being coerced into joining the PML-N by hurling threats of bringing no-confidence motions against them. Majority of present district nazims are actually the PML-N turncoats who switched their loyalties over to Chaudhrys of Gujrat in the absence of Sharif brothers from the country.

Political analysts believe that current race between the two parties to 'capture' district nazims would lead to greater confrontation between the two in future and the two sides would find it difficult to run coalition affairs in Punjab. Interestingly, some district nazims themselves are eager to join the present ruling coalition, but they are facing the dilemma as to which party they should join the PPP, which is in power in the Centre or the PML-N, which is holding sway in Punjab. It is believed that they want to be part of the ruling coterie to cover up their corruption. It merits mentioning here that out of 35 present district nazims, 31 belong to the former ruling party, the PML-Q, but only 14 of them are likely to remain loyal to it because of their close relationship with the Chaudhrys of Gujrat.

Punjab Audit Reveals Massive Money Fraud

A special audit of only 60 out of a total of 144 Tehsil municipal administrations (TMAs) of the Punjab reveals that in just two years, from July 2006 to June 2008, a total of Rs 10 billion have been misappropriated. The audit reports of the remaining 84 TMAs for the same period are also being finalized amid serious apprehensions that the detailed audit of the Punjab district and Tehsil governments from 2001-2008 would possibly make President Musharraf's local government system, introduced under his devolution plan, as one of the biggest administrative and financial failures involving multi-billion rupees irregularities in one province. The same report would also possibly serve as a major charge against the PML(Q), which under Musharraf's wings had ruled the country during all these years. The Punjab government is expected to complete the special audit of all the 144 TMAs for the last eight years by the end of the next month but the report of 60 TMAs for the last two financial years reflects irregularities involving financial implications of Rs 9.6 billion.

The provincial cabinet on April 23, 2008 had ordered special audit of all the Punjab local governments in the province since 2001, when the new system was introduced. The concerned authorities were directed that the special audit should be lapse-free and completed in a transparent manner. Once the audit exercise is completed, these cases would be referred to anti-corruption establishment for proper inquiry and corruption proceedings against those who would be held responsible. Official documents reveal that those on top of committing financial irregularities during the financial years 2006-06 and 2007-08 include TMA Rawal Town, Rawalpindi, with Rs 980 million, TMA Sargodha (Rs 585m), TMA Mianwali (Rs 554m), TMA Potohar Town (Rs 391m) and TMA Murree (Rs 314m), etc. The financial irregularities include the categories of misappropriation, embezzlement, irregular payments, procedural irregularities, excess/over payments, losses in own source revenue due to misuse of authority, etc.

Break-up of the total Rs 9.6 billion misappropriated in the above 60 TMAs in two years, include Rs 4.2 billion losses in own source revenue due to misuse of authority, Rs 907m on account of excess/over payments, embezzlement of Rs 434m, irregular payments of Rs 856m, and miscellaneous/procedural irregularities worth Rs 3.1 billion. The auditors were asked to ensure that the exercise of special auditor was accomplished meaningfully and comprehensively and that it should not be taken as a routine exercise. The Finance Secretary Punjab in a meeting, prior to the launch of the special audit, had also stated that a third party would supervise and validate these special audits of the Local Fund Audit (LFA) and any lapse found in these special audit reports would be viewed very seriously and may attract disciplinary action against the auditors and the divisional director concerned. The auditors were also warned that any collusion or other wrongdoing with auditee on the parts of auditors would also be taken seriously.

District Governments Empowered to Enforce MWA

The Punjab government is learnt to have approved a proposal to empower the district government to conduct raids, surprise visits of factories, industrial units, small and medium units to ensure minimum wages of Rs 6,000 per month for unskilled workers. The district administration would ensure the strict implementation of Minimum Wages Act (MWA) of Rs 6,000 to the unskilled workers of private commercial and industrial institutions working within the jurisdiction of. The sources informed that Ministry of Labour in a meeting said a notification to this effect had already been issued to all the private commercial and industrial institutions to ensure the payment of Rs 6,000 per month to the unskilled workers as fixed by the government with effect from July 1, 2008. He said a compliance report in this regard had also been called for from all the private institutions by August 15. Moreover, teams consisting of labour department officials have also been constituted for inspection of private institutions in Multan and other districts of Punjab to ensure the implementation of Minimum Wages Act.

Restoration of Deposed Judges

Lawyers set August 14 Deadline

The All Pakistan Lawyers Representatives Conference, on July 19, set August 14 as the deadline for the government to restore the judiciary to its pre-Nov 3 status. In case this does not happen, the conference unanimously decided that the legal fraternity would intensify its struggle through a number of protest strategies, including sit-ins across the country, including outside parliament, stepping up the boycott of court proceedings, blocking courtrooms, organizing countrywide marches and resorting to civil disobedience. The National Coordination Council will meet on August 15 at the High Court Bar Association's Rawalpindi office if the judiciary was not restored to its pre-Nov 3 status, to give a concrete shape to these decisions, Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) president Anwar Kamal said, while talking to reporters after the conference held at the Karachi Shuhada Hall of the LHCBA.

The conference passed various resolutions to give a boost to the ongoing lawyers' movement. The conference vowed to continue the movement to its logical end in the restoration of all the deposed judges. The conference held that the parties that continued to remain in the ruling coalition after August 14 will be viewed by the legal fraternity as condoning the proclamation of the November 3 emergency.

Good news on judges soon: Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on July 19 said he would soon give the nation some 'good news' regarding the restoration of the deposed judges, just as he had ordered the release of the judges in his first address after taking oath as the Chief Executive of the country.

No Need of Amendment to Restore Judges: LAWASIA

Mah Weng Kwai, President of the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific (LAWASIA) said that there was no need for any constitutional amendment to reinstate the judges of the superior courts. After meeting deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry here at the Judges Enclave, he said although the judges who took oath under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) were working, but the judiciary was still in crisis. He said independence of the judiciary in every country should be the first preference. He said they would try to understand the current situation in Pakistan and its impact on the independence of judiciary and the legal profession. The delegation would also meet bar leaders and the law minister to know their views on the judicial crisis. Mah, who led a five-member delegation, arrived here the other day at the invitation of the Pakistan Bar Council (PCB) and will be in the country till July 21. According to a PCB spokesman, the delegation's visit was aimed at extending support to the lawyers' community of Pakistan for its continued struggle for the restoration of judiciary.

Sacked Judges may take Fresh Oath: Naik

Federal Law Minister Farooq H Naik said on July 3 that the sacked judges of the superior courts could take oath under Schedule 3 of the Constitution and if they did so, they would be given seniority as well as other benefits. He said that the judges who had not taken oath under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) on November 3, 2007 could now take oath under Schedule 3 of the Constitution and they would be welcomed if they did so. He said the judges who took the oath under the PCO, had again taken the oath under Schedule 3 of the Constitution after the lifting of emergency on December 15. He said the oath for sacked judges would not provide any constitutional cover to the extra-constitutional steps taken on November 3 last year when a state of emergency was imposed. He said the draft constitutional package had been shared with the coalition partners as well as the Pakistan Bar Council and the Punjab Bar Council, however their recommendations on the package were still awaited.

Government announces Trade Policy 2008-09

The Federal Cabinet, in a special meeting chaired by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on July 18, approved the Trade Policy 2008-09, which seeks to increase the country's exports to \$22.1 billion while maintaining its imports at \$30 billion. Presenting the policy on state-run media, Commerce Minister Chaudhry Ahmed Mukhtar said the government sought a 15 percent increase in the country's exports. He said the meeting had agreed to allow the import of 136 additional types of raw materials, machinery and transport fuels from India to facilitate export-oriented industries. The payment of customs duty and sales tax on precious gems has been abolished to increase exports. Similarly, import of machinery for mining and grinding of minerals has been allowed from India to promote export. The government has also allowed the import of 10-year-old and used buses and cement bulkers for use by industrial consumers.

Highlights of Trade Policy 2008-09

Following are the salient features of Trade Policy 2008-09 announced by Commerce Minister Ahmad Mukhtar.

The export target for the fiscal year 2008-09 has been fixed at \$22.10 billion, which represents a growth of 15% over the last year's exports worth \$19.22 billion.

- The total merchandise exports for the year 2007-08 were \$19.22 billion with a record net increase (between 2006-07 and 2007-08) of \$2.246 billion.
- The total imports during the 2007-08 amounted to \$39.97 billion giving rise to a trade deficit of \$20.7 billion.
- The underlying causes for this year's trade deficit were mainly the increase in oil prices raising its import bill to over \$11.3 billion as against \$7.3 billion last year; import of wheat at higher than previous prices; increase in price of palm oil from \$502.7 PMT to \$839.3 PMT; raw cotton imports due to crop shortfall; increase in import of machinery and increase in import of fertilizers and chemicals.
- This year again the imports compared to last year have increased by \$9.428 billion whereas exports have also increased by \$2.246 billion.
- Plant, machinery and equipment imported to setup a unit in DTRE scheme will be exempt from duty and taxes.
- Inputs in DTRE will also be allowed to be imported from India, even if these are not included in the importable items from India, or manufactured locally.
- The period of retention of raw material and components for export under temporary importation scheme (SRO 1065) may be increased from current 12 months to 18 months i.e. at par with DTRE.
- It has been decided to increase the draw back rate by 1% of FOB value for 14 products i.e. (i) Tents, Canvas & Tarpaulin, (ii) Electric machinery, (iii) Carpets, Rugs, & Mats, (iv) Sports Goods, (v) Footwear, (vi) Surgical Goods/Medical Instruments, (vii) Cutlery, (viii) Onyx manufactured, (ix) Electric Fans, (x) Furniture, (xi) Auto Parts, (xii) Handicrafts, (xiii) Jewelry and (xiv) Pharmaceuticals. In order to facilitate the exports, the government has decided to introduce a new scheme where by a notified percentage of inputs may be allowed to be imported at zero duties against fob value of exports with flexibility to import any product among the notified list in any quantity within the overall entitlement of the exporter.
- It is proposed to allow the temporary import of PET bottle scrap for manufacture and export of PSF in the DTRE scheme, subject to non-hazardous certification.
- It has been decided to support the setting up of new pharmaceutical plants by providing it with the incentive of having an accelerated depreciation allowance facility of 90pc in the first year on investment in Plant Machinery and Equipment.

- It has also been decided that Ministry of Health will draw up a proposal for establishing bio-availability and bio-equivalence laboratories in the National Institute of Health.
- Export of free samples up to 5% of quantity is allowed against exports in the preceding year to pharmaceutical exporters.
- In order to further facilitate exports in this sector it has now been decided to allow exporting companies to send free samples to the extent of 10% of the commercial quantity exported in the preceding year.
- In addition pharmaceutical sector would also be allowed to retain 15% of their export proceeds.
- To increase the exports of gems and Jeweler sector, and to encourage investment and remove all anti-export biases, gold, silver, platinum, palladium, diamond and precious stones be exempted from levy of customs duties & sales tax.
- It has been decided that import of machinery / equipment for mining /quarrying and grinding of minerals (along with spares) would be allowed from India.

Governance & HR Issues

The State of Pakistani Children 2007 – Report by SPARC

A report titled 'The State of Pakistani Children 2007' was launched by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) on July 23 that gives an account of key developments and challenges confronting children, and intends to improve understanding of different problems.

SPARC Executive Director Qindeel Shujaat said that poverty stricken children were being exploited in the name of religion, and those who deny this truth should take notice of children who took part in the Lal Masjid siege. He said that there are clear indications of the continual role of a few madrassahs in the recruitment of children for political activities; however child militancy is prevalent in tribal areas of Sindh and Balochistan as well.

The report has six well-defined portions including the chapters of **violence, education, health, juvenile justice, disaster and child labour**.

It revealed that despite getting almost 17 per cent of the total international aid given to three countries, Pakistan is called the 'home of illiterates' and account for 27 per cent of the world's out of school children among with other two countries in the region. It said that with growing poverty, the number of child labourers threatens to climb thus putting more and more children in to abusive and exploitative situation. The chapter on children in prisons, paints a grim picture and reveals that juvenile offenders' population in all the jails of Pakistan is around 1,800 but varies between 2,100 and 2,200. Among them over 60 per cent are under trial, not more than 20 per cent are actually convicted and over 30 per cent are in dire need of legal assistance. It also highlighted that Pakistan does not have a Child Protection Bill, which means that the children affected by emergencies and disasters are not legally protected.

Pakistan Lacks Adequate System of Child Labour Statistics

Pakistan still lacks an adequate national system of child labour statistics which could provide reliable quantitative information on the number of working children. The children's geographical and sectoral/occupational distribution, age, sex and other relevant characteristics are also not available. Statistics on various socioeconomic characteristics, especially those attributes that are related to the development of the child into a responsible adult member of the society, such as education status and achievements, the time allocated to various non-school activities, the income or expenditure level of the household to which the working child belongs, and important aspects of participation by children in economic activities and its impact, should also be generated to permit the analysis of the economic and social situation of particular groups of working children.

The Population Census which the government plans to hold in October this year will provide an ample opportunity to planners to gather information on child labour. Gathering of essential data would help design intervention policies specifically aimed at combating child labour, and at monitoring and evaluating progress in the implementation of action programmes. The last national child labour survey was carried out in 1996, two years before the national census conducted in 1998, and since then the country's population has risen by over 30 million people. The survey conducted by the Federal Bureau of Statistics had found 3.3 million children in the five to 14 years age group to be economically active on a full-time basis. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), in a new report, has called for national statistical programme on child labour in all its member states including Pakistan. Indicators relating to nature of work, circumstances and harm therefore should be core elements of a national statistical programme on child labour, the ILO recommends. The statistical programme should also provide baseline information on the reference child population engaged in what Convention No. 138 terms 'work or employment', of which child labour is a subset. National statistical programmes should also collect detailed information on working hours as an important proxy for the potential harmfulness of work. While limited light work is not necessarily detrimental to a child's health and need not interfere with formal education, long working hours, on the other hand, are likely to have more serious health and developmental consequences on the child, the report says. Long hours mean greater exposure to workplace hazards and less time available for children to exercise their rights to education and leisure. Information of child labour in the so-called 'unconditional worst forms' is an especially important and challenging component of a national statistical programme on child labour.

These forms of child labour constitute fundamental violations of human rights, and obtaining information to facilitate their elimination is therefore an immediate priority. The report says national statistical standards have to respond to the need of national users who wish to obtain information on the nationally prohibited forms and situations of child labour. Child labour is widely recognized as a major hindrance to achieve the Education For All (EFA) goals. A large number of child labourers are denied the fundamental opportunity to attend school, while those who combine work with schooling are often unable to fully profit from the education on offer. The latest UNESCO statistics show that 75 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2006, compared to a staggering 103 million in 1999. Incidence of children's work also declined during that period. While still about one sixth of the total child population ages five to 14 - 191 million children - were involved in some kind of economic activity in 2004, there were some 20 million fewer working children in this age group than there had been four years earlier. The ILO's most recent global report on child labour emphasised the important contribution that action against child labour can make to the Education For All process. Yet, it also noted that the objectives of the latter will only be achieved if child labour concerns are effectively mainstreamed into the EFA monitoring and promotional efforts. Much remains to be done in this respect. Quite significantly, the report described the EFA and child labour movements as 'two ships passing in the night'. Children living in rural areas attend school less than their urban counterparts regardless of their working status. This is an expected result given that, in most cases, economic pressure to engage children in working activities is higher in the rural areas. In rural areas working children face a considerable school attendance disadvantage vis-à-vis non-working children.

Child labour not only represents a severe obstacle to school attendance, it also interferes with the educational performance of children who combine school and work. Street children, child beggars, child porters, child rag-pickers, child scavengers and child domestic workers are the worst forms of child labour and require government's plan of action to curb them. In bazaars, streets and traffic signals children are forced to beg either by parents or by the mafia after being trafficked. The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) was providing technical and financial support to pilot programmes and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the executing agencies. Major strategies include enhancement of educational opportunities for working children through the launching of crash literacy programmes for school dropouts and introducing apprenticeship, vocational and skills development programmes.

Donors' News

WB to provide \$294.7m for Power and Water Projects

The World Bank on July 14 pledged to provide \$294.7 million to Pakistan for an electricity distribution improvement project and a water sector capacity building and advisory services project. In this regard Pakistan and World Bank signed two agreements for electricity distribution and transmission improvement project of worth \$256.7 million and water sector capacity building and advisory services project of worth \$38 million. Acting Secretary Economic Affairs Division Junaid Iqbal Chaudhry on behalf of the Government of Pakistan and World Bank Country Director Yousapha B Crookes signed the financing agreements for both projects. The project agreements for the electricity distribution and transmission improvement project were signed by the representatives of NTDC, IESCO, LESCO, MEPCO and HESCO on behalf of the

respective entities. The Electricity Distribution and Transmission Improvement Project (EDTIP) will assist the distribution and transmission companies in strengthening the capacity of the distribution and transmission network to meet the increase in electricity demand more efficiently and with better reliability and quality. The project will also strengthen the institutional capacity of power distribution companies and support priority areas of the power sector reform through components included investment in distribution networks, investment in transmission network, institutional strengthening and capacity building and energy efficiency.

The objective of the Water Sector Capacity Building and Advisory Services Project (WSCAS) is to improve the management and investment planning of water resources in the Indus River System through components included capacity building and support of federal institution in water resources planning and management, improvement in water resources management and development in WAPDA, Project management and additional studies. This process will run concurrently with the national plan to develop hydel storage and power infrastructure. Acting Secretary, Economic Affairs Division Junaid Iqbal Chaudhry told journalists that the soft IDA amount of \$52.6 million in EDTIP and \$38 million in WSCAS is interest free, however the service charges at the rate of 0.75% and commitment charges at the rate of 0.5% on undisbursed balance will apply. He said EDTIP also contains hard IDA for an amount of US\$ 30.5 million on which an interest at the rate of 4.2% per annum will be paid, in addition to the service charges and commitment charges.

Repay: He said that the Government of Pakistan would repay both the IDA credits in 35 years including a grace period of 10 years. For the IBRD loan portion in EDTIP of \$173.6 million, a front-end fee will be paid at the rate of 0.25% of the loan amount, and the interest will be paid at the rate equal to LIBOR for the Loan Currency plus the Fixed Spread. The IBRD portion will be repaid in 30 years including the grace period of five years. World Bank Country Director Yousapha B Crookes said that the Bank remained involved in different development projects with the Government of Pakistan and was now involved in power distribution area, which is very important for revenue generation. He said development in this area is important for productivity in the country besides providing quality electricity service to the people.

USAID gives Hardware worth \$450,000 to ECP

On July 22, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) gave information technology hardware worth \$ 450,000 to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to help the commission improve, update, and maintain the computerized electoral rolls.

USAID Pakistan Mission Director Anne Aarnes said that the importance of accurate electoral rolls cannot be overstated. He said that the hardware USAID is providing will improve the ECP's capacity to ensure the integrity of the electoral rolls. The hardware, which is part of USAID's \$18 million Pakistan Electoral Support Project, will be installed in the ECP's offices across the country and will allow the commission to make updates efficiently and accurately. USAID has trained ECP's newly-recruited information technology staff. Since 2006, USAID's Pakistan Electoral Support Project, implemented by the International Foundation for Election Systems, has worked closely with the ECP on voter registration issues. The project developed Pakistan's first computerized election rolls; designed training for 45,000 voter registration officials; and provided transparent ballot boxes for the 2008 elections.

UNDP to help Reduce Poverty – SPRSM Project

'UNDP's support to the Government on reviewing and analyzing public spending and allocations in pro-poor sectors through a gender lens will go a long way in understanding the needs of men and women and addressing them in a gender-sensitive manner' stated Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Social Sectors at the launching ceremony of the UNDP-Supported Strengthening Poverty Reduction Strategy Monitoring (SPRSM) project by the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Also present on the occasion were Mr. Farrukh Qayyum, Finance Secretary and Mr. Fikret Akcura, Resident Representative, UNDP.

The 5-year project constitutes UNDP's support to MoF under its MDG – Driven Pro-poor Policy Package (MP-3) for instituting a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring the targets set out in the PRSP-II framework. The project is being implemented under a cost-sharing agreement with the MoF with the latter contributing US\$ 0.641 million to the total budget of US\$ 6.487 million. UNDP's contribution stands at US\$ 0.750 by UNDP. The resource gap stands at US \$ 5 million. The project works to devolve monitoring poverty results to the provincial level. A key effort will be to link poverty expenditures with results, to enable policy makers determine the best use of Pakistan's resources that target the poor and

the vulnerable sections of the society. To move in this direction the SPRSM project will build capacities at the federal and the provincial levels for tracking pro-poor indicators. Commenting on the need for a devolved poverty monitoring system, Mr. Fikret Akcura, Resident Representative, UNDP stated, 'The problem of poverty indeed represents a serious and pressing challenge. Addressing this challenge requires not only resources and capacity but also sustained and devolved institutional structure for monitoring and analysis of development results. Therefore the role of the provinces is critical.' Furthermore, in order to address gender-needs, the MoF has decided to mainstream the tools developed by the UNDP-supported Gender Responsive Budgeting Initiative in the overall PRS monitoring system. The purpose being that policy makers are informed on the disaggregated impact of poverty expenditures on men, women, boys and girls and take effective fiscal measures to address these gender gaps. These will be implemented across all tiers of government including the district level. In the same vein, SPRSM under the MP-3 umbrella programme is building institutional linkages with the Center for Poverty Research and Social Policy Development (CPRSPD) for pro-poor research, analyses and social policy development. Similar linkages will be developed with the Pakistan Millennium Campaign pipeline project for open state citizen interface on pro-poor spending and their results. These linkages and the substantive inputs extracted from GRB tools and PRS monitoring indicators will be mainstreamed into the Government's pro-poor policy monitoring system, a step forward for enhancing transparency and accountability in the pro-poor spending processes.

WB Refuses to Fund Diamer-Basha Dam

The World Bank has categorically refused to fund water and power projects in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and the Northern Areas (NAs), including the Diamer-Bhasha Dam. The bank's refusal to provide funds has virtually endangered the practicability of the Bhasha Dam on whose feasibility and technical reports huge amounts have already been spent since 2006. Water and Power Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Chairman Shakeel Durrani, officials of the Planning Commission, the finance ministry and the Economic Affairs Division attended the meeting held at the Water and Power Ministry on hydropower generation and water resources. The meeting was told that the WAPDA required \$30-40 billion for the projects, including the Bhasha Dam and others in the next 15 years to meet the growing electricity requirements through cheap power.

The document, available with this correspondent, states that the water and power minister, concerned with the World Bank's refusal to fund Wapda's projects in the AJK and the Northern Areas, made an observation on this occasion that we had to live with these constraints. It was proposed that a study may be undertaken whereby one fourth of the amount required be provided through the PSDP and surcharge on electricity consumption, one-fourth through suppliers credit and DFIs, one-fourth be raised through the market/loans and one-fourth through private sector stocks sale and investment. The Planning Commission and the Economic Affairs Division and the finance ministry would coordinate the issue of raising the finances, it reads. The six-page document consists of the Wapda chairman's briefing on the overall water and power scenario, the Economic Affairs Division officials' update about refusal of funds by the World Bank, financial resources for the water and power sector, views of the provincial governments, small dams construction and ignorance of hydropower projects.

Surveys/Reports/Strategy Papers

SBP Launches 10-Year Strategy

Dr Shamshad Akhtar, Governor State Bank of Pakistan, has said that SBP is launching a ten-year Financial Sector Strategy with an explicit objective to help country achieve higher and sustainable economic growth; develop a dynamic, robust and stronger banking system; mobilize the domestic and foreign resources for private investment and deepen the financial penetration for poor and underserved regions. She made this announcement while addressing the Development Finance Conference on 'Expanding Frontiers of Financial Access in Pakistan' organized by SBP at its Learning Resource Centre in Karachi on the eve of 60th anniversary of the State Bank of Pakistan. The conference, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister, was attended by Sindh Governor Dr Ishratul Ibad, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, Federal Finance Minister Syed Naveed Qamar, Federal Minister for Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs Ms Hina Rabbani Khar and Special Assistant to Prime Minister Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali.

Dr Akhtar said that the objectives of the Financial Sector Strategy will be to broaden and deepen the financial system to help Pakistan to: Achieve higher and sustainable economic growth; Develop a dynamic, robust and stronger banking

system; Mobilise the domestic and foreign resources for private investment (which has to be the key driver of the economy), and deepen financial penetration for the poor and underserved regions. She said that prerequisite for financial sector growth, however, is macroeconomic and political stability and augmentation of the enabling policy environment in the real sector.

SBP Governor said that the strategy would be financially inclusive, supporting the small savers and meeting the requirements of small borrowers in the agriculture, housing, SME and microfinance sectors. It would aim to modernize the wholesale and retail markets and reduce the systemic risks of the financial system by developing an adequate safety net for the small depositors, while reforming the regulatory architecture to ensure that the central bank can play an effective regulatory and supervisory role. No reforms are complete without also ensuring further strengthening of the central bank, she said and added that in this context, the State Bank has worked to modernize the central bank legislation in line with the international best practices.

Dr Akhtar shared with the audience major areas of reforms envisaged in the Financial Sector Strategy. The strategy advocates:

- Adoption of a holistic financial inclusion programme.
- Strengthening consumer protection and financial education.
- Consolidating and strengthening the banking sector by promoting continued mergers and acquisitions, while seeking to restructure the outstanding public financial institutions.
- Strengthening competition and efficiency.
- Strengthening prudential regulation and supervision.

IRI Survey

According to the findings of a survey, conducted by the US-based International Republican Institute (IRI) between June 1 and 15, about 86 per cent of the respondents believe that Pakistan is heading in a wrong direction while only 12 per cent think the direction is right. According to the survey, 83 per cent of the respondents want the new government to remove Gen (Retd) Musharraf from Presidency. A majority of 67 per cent people said they supported the election of nuclear scientist Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan as the country's next President while 15 per cent said they did not.

Most Popular Leader: With the decline in Mr. Musharraf's popularity and after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif has emerged as the most popular leader in the country, with 82 per cent saying they like him and only six per cent saying they do not. This is up from 36 per cent in June 2006, when he trailed both Mr Musharraf and Ms Bhutto. Likewise, Mr Sharif easily dominated the 'best leader for Pakistan' category, being the choice of 38 per cent, leaving the competition far behind. Interestingly, Dr A.Q. Khan is at number two (with 76pc) and deposed chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif sharing the third position (with 65pc) on the list of favourite personalities.

Musharraf's Declining Support: The poll found that President Musharraf's job approval rating had dropped significantly. Only 11 per cent said they approved of his performance while an all-time high of 75 per cent saying they did not. In the IRI's June 2006 poll, President Musharraf was the most popular leader in the country, with 52 per cent saying they liked him. In the June 2008 poll, only nine per cent said they liked the president. When asked which one leader was the best person to handle the country's problems, President Musharraf was the choice of only three per cent. When asked if they thought President Musharraf should resign, an all-time high of 85 per cent answered in the affirmative, up 10 points from the last poll. In addition, 79 per cent said they would feel better about the future of the country if Musharraf was out of office. Likewise, Musharraf's allies also find themselves in an unpopular position. Only eight per cent of the respondents said they liked PML-Q leaders Pervez Ilahi and Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain.

Government Performance: When asked to rate various institutions, 85 per cent said they had a favourable impression of the government, making it the most popular institution. This is in sharp contrast to the 29 per cent rating that the previous government had received. When asked how had the government performed on issues important to them, 41 per cent responded positively and 51 per cent negatively. Despite the fact that a majority rated the government's performance as poor, this represents a significant drop from the last rating achieved by the old government. In the February poll, 80 per cent rated the old government's performance poorly while only 18 per cent rated it positively. When asked if they felt that things would get better in Pakistan now that there is a new government, 52 per cent replied yes and 20 per cent said no.

Economic Situation: When asked about their personal economic condition over the past year, 12 per cent said it had improved, 72 per cent said it had worsened and 16 per cent said it had remained the same. When asked if they felt their economic wellbeing would improve or worsen during the coming year, 19 per cent said it would improve, 46 per cent said it would worsen and 21 per cent felt it would remain the same. When asked to choose their most important issue from a list, 71 per cent cited inflation, 13 per cent unemployment and five per cent poverty. This represents a total of 89 per cent of the population citing economic concerns as their top priority.

Restoration of Deposed Judges: Pakistanis are also unambiguous when it comes to restoration of the deposed judges. Eighty-three per cent said they wanted the judges to be reinstated. When asked how important this issue was to them, 86 per cent described it as important.

War on Terror: In the last poll, conducted in the wake of both Ms Bhutto's assassination and some suicide bombings, 12 per cent selected terrorism as their top issue and six per cent law and order. In the June poll, however, the issue barely resonated; two per cent cited suicide bombings and less than one per cent chose Al Qaeda as a top concern. While 61 per cent said they felt that religious extremism was a serious problem in the country (down 12 per cent), only 45 per cent said Al Qaeda and the Taliban were a serious concern, a 20 point drop since February and an all-time low since the IRI started asking the question last September. Further, the number supporting the army fighting in the NWFP and tribal areas dropped six points to 27 per cent. When it comes to solutions for combating extremism and terrorism, the poll reveals that the Pakistani people are unambiguous, preferring negotiations and development to military options. When asked if they supported political dialogue with extremists, 71 per cent responded yes while 65 per cent said they supported a peace deal. When asked what they thought was the most effective way to deal with terrorism, 61 per cent said economic development and education, nine per cent said military force and 24 per cent said both.

Popularity of Leaders: Among the PPP leaders, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani saw a large increase in his popularity, with 64 per cent saying they liked him, up from 23 per cent in the last poll. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also saw an increase in his popularity to 61 per cent, up from 55 per cent. Likewise, PPP co-chairman Asif Zardari also saw his popularity rise from 37 per cent to 45 per cent. And while Makhdoom Amin Fahim saw his popularity drop from a high of 67 per cent in the wake of Ms Bhutto's assassination, he remained popular with a rating of 49 per cent. It is interesting to note that his rating is still higher than Mr Zardari's.

1,080 Pak Soldiers among Thousands Killed in Terror War

According to the data compiled by The News from articles, web sites, magazines and newspapers, and after talking to the official spokesman of the Pakistan Army, over 3,050 Pakistanis have been killed in terrorist attacks since September 11, 2001 while the same number of militants have also died in different operations conducted by Pakistan Army. The war on terror has cost over 3,000 Pakistani nationals since 9/11 and the ISPR has confirmed that 1,080 Pakistani soldiers have been martyred to get their country free of terror. Almost 3,500 militants have faced death while the number of injured amounts to more than 5,000 in all terrorist attacks since Pakistan joined the war on terror. Pakistan faced some 81 suicide attacks since it became the frontline state in the war on terror. The sectarian incidents that took place in the country in the last seven years would add more to the figures if included.

Around 660 people have been killed in terrorist attacks in the first half of 2008, mostly in NWFP. These attacks mainly include the ongoing war in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Fifteen suicide attacks have already occurred in the country in the first half of the year. These attacks mainly include attack on naval college in Lahore, attack on FIA building in Lahore and attack on medical personnel in Rawalpindi and a suicide attack on a funeral in Swat. The Pakistan Army has also started operation in NWFP against militants who have been bombing the girls' schools and killing the spies in the mobs.

The year 2007 proved to be the goriest for Pakistan when some 1,500 people were killed in different terrorist attacks across the country with hundreds of soldiers abducted and many others killed. Some 2000 militants have also been killed in the tribal area during the year. Statistics show 46 suicide attacks occurred in the country while other attacks include 250 mainly in the tribal areas. The suicide bombing deprived the country of Bhutto and many others. The famous Lal Masjid siege now also became the leaflet in the history of 2007 where hundreds of seminary students, including girls ten Army men, were killed.

From 2001 to 2003, some 181 people were killed in terrorist attacks. This also features an attack on President Pervez Musharraf in Rawalpindi on December 25, 2003. During this period the Christian community remained the main target of

the terrorists in Bahawalpur, Murree, Textile, Islamabad and Daska. Famous journalist Denial Pearl was also killed on February 22, 2002 while twelve French Nationals were killed in Karachi on May 8, 2002.

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Geo-Political Dynamics

Pakistan's External Relations

Kashmir-Related CBMs Endorsed in Delhi Talks

The Kashmir-related confidence building measures (CBMs) were endorsed in the Pak-India talks on July 21. Triple entry permits would be introduced with effect from Oct 1, 2008. A separate form for the purpose has been agreed. All three entries are to be made from the same crossing point. The facility will be automatically available to senior citizens and their spouses. The Rawalakot Deputy Commissioner and the Jammu regional passport officer would be authorities for the Rawalakot-Poonch bus service, with effect from Oct 1, 2008. Monthly coordination meetings between authorities will be held, with the provision to convene urgent meetings, whenever required. Crossings will stand enhanced to sixty people per crossing. Steps will be taken to cut the processing time for applications on both sides. The operation of the Tithwala-Chiliana crossing point will be effective from May to November every year, in view of accessibility problems in the winter. A crossing on the Uri-Hajipir will also be facilitated. Authorities will start exchanging application forms by e-mail from October 1, 2008. E-mail transfers will be backed up by hard copies. In a case of emergency (death of a close relative across the LoC), clearance will be processed within a week. Stay in such cases will be for up to seven days. It will be effective from October 1, 2008. The frequency of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Poonch-Rawalakot bus services will be increased from fortnightly to weekly, with effect from August 21, and August 25, 2008, respectively. Designated authorities will reconcile data on crossings regularly. Lists of commodities to be traded with a zero-tariff regime were also exchanged. To begin implementation, each side will indicate items which they are willing to receive. The visit of chambers of commerce people from both sides of the LoC will take place as early as possible to make recommendations for trade modalities.

Afghanistan Boycotts Meetings with Pakistan

Afghanistan lashed out at Pakistan on July 14, alleging that its intelligence service and Army are behind the bloody Taliban-led insurgency, calling Pakistan's security forces the "world's biggest producers of terrorism and extremism".

In protest of what it called "direct interference in its internal affairs", Afghanistan said it is suspending its participation in three upcoming meetings with Pakistani officials. Afghan President Hamid Karzai directly accused Pakistan's intelligence agency of being behind a recent series of attacks by militants that have killed scores of people. Karzai said in a statement: "The murder, killing, destruction, dishonouring and insecurity in Afghanistan is carried out by the intelligence administration of Pakistan, its military intelligence institutions. We know who kills innocent people. We have told the government of Pakistan and the world and from now on it will be pronounced by every member of the Afghan nation." Karzai's statement was, however, one of the harshest with the two neighbours officially trying to repair a relationship strained by mounting extremist violence. Karzai also referred to a suicide attack that targeted police in southern Uruzgan province that killed 24 Afghans, most of them civilians in a bazaar, police said. He also condemned the Taliban's killing in Ghazni province the same day of two women whom the militants alleged were prostitutes and worked for the police.

The cabinet announced, meanwhile, that Afghanistan would boycott a series of upcoming meetings with Pakistan unless "bilateral trust" was restored. The statement accused the Inter-Services Intelligence of involvement in a number of recent attacks in the country, an attempted assassination of President Hamid Karzai in April, the July 7 suicide bomb attack outside Indian embassy in Kabul that left over 60 people killed and a spate of suicide bombings and roadside bombs blamed on Taliban militants. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director-General Maj-Gen Athar Abbas, declined to comment, referring a request for reaction to the foreign ministry. Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammed Sadiq, who was in London en route home from an official visit to the United States, was not immediately available for comment.

PM's Visit to Unite States

Bush Supports Pakistan's Sovereignty, Democracy

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and President George Bush, on July 28, discussed enhancing cooperation in economic and security fields with the U.S. leader declaring Washington's strong support for democracy in Pakistan and cooperative efforts in the fight against terrorism along Afghan border. "Pakistan is a strong ally and a vibrant democracy. The United States supports the democracy and supports the sovereignty of Pakistan," Bush stated in his post-meeting remarks as both leaders reaffirmed their common commitment to fight against terrorism.

In a joint appearance with the Pakistani leader, Bush hailed Pakistan as a strong ally and described the meeting as "good and constructive." Washington, he emphasized, respects "sovereignty of this (Pakistani) democracy" and acknowledged the Pakistani leadership's strong commitment to fight against terror. Prime Minister Gilani renewed Islamabad's commitment to curb extremism and emphasized that an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis across the country including the tribal areas want to live in peace. He said it is only a handful of people who stir up trouble. In the regional perspective, the two leaders discussed ensuring security on Afghan border and observed that Prime Minister Gilani wants "a peaceful country on its (Pakistan's) border.

After making press remarks the two leaders went to luncheon hosted in honor of the Pakistani leader.

Bush said that we're going to spend a lot of time on the economy, about how the United States and Pakistan can continue to cooperate to—for economic benefits for all the people of Pakistan, and for our own country, for that matter," Bush said. Assisting the Prime Minister at the Oval Office meeting were Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Information Minister Sherry Rehman, Defense Minister Ahmed Mukhtar, Advisor to the Prime Minister Rehman Malik, National Security Advisor Mahmud Ali Durrani and Pakistan Ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani. The US side included Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and White House Chief of the Staff Joshua Bolton.

Elections in Bangladesh

New Laws Allow Bangladeshis to Cast 'No' Ballots

Authorities in Bangladesh, on July 14, introduced new measures to keep politicians in the notoriously corrupt country on their toes, including allowing voters to reject all the candidates in an election. The so-called "no" votes are part of preparations for national polls in December which will mark the restoration of democracy after nearly two years of rule by an army-backed government. Chief government spokesman Syed Fahim Munaem said in a statement that voters in a constituency can cast 'no' votes if they don't like any of the candidates. He said that if "no" votes account for more than 50 percent of the total ballots counted in one constituency, the result will be invalid. In previous general elections, voters have been required to vote for someone even if they do not like any of the candidates. Other election rules approved by Bangladesh's interim cabinet include capping the amount candidates can spend on election campaigns. Individuals can spend 1.5 million taka (21,866 dollars) and parties can spend up to 45 million taka, while no individual donation to a candidate can exceed 20,000 taka. The new laws will also bar people convicted of corruption from standing for up to five years. Those convicted of other crimes and sentenced to jail terms of more than two years will also be banned from running in elections for five years. The move effectively seals the fate of scores of political leaders, ex-ministers and lawmakers who have been convicted on corruption charges by the country's emergency courts. Loan defaulters and convicted war criminals are also be barred from contesting polls. The emergency government has said the new laws are part of reforms to the existing electoral system and aimed at making sure democracy is cemented in a country where corruption is rampant and elections frequently rigged.

Bangladesh Completes Voter List

Bangladesh has cleaned up and completed a voter registration list ahead of elections in December. Election Commission officials said they recorded the identities, photographs and fingerprints of more than 80 million voters in less than one year at a cost of \$65 million. The new list dropped "fake names and duplicate entries", one election commission official said.

The previous list had more than 90 million voter names, many of them found to be fake in fresh registration held with the help of the army. The completion of the new voter list was an achievement for the interim government which took office in January last year vowing fair and free elections by the year's end. The interim government, which cancelled elections in January last year and then announced emergency rule, embarked on a massive clean-up of local politics in preparation for the year-end voting. Earlier it introduced new election rules making it compulsory for political parties to register to take part, and giving voters the chance to reject all candidates if they thought none were suitable. Fakhruddin Ahmed, the head of the army-backed government said the demand for an error-free voters' list with photographs was almost universal.

Bangladesh President's Powers in Question

Bangladesh's President Izzatullah Khan is now in a critical situation. The Supreme Court has declared that the President has no constitutional authority to impose any rules that are not related to calling a general election as long as there is no Parliament in the country. Also, the media has exposed a "canal scandal" by members of the President's family, alleging abuse of power. The situation has given rise to questions as to whether the President will remain in office, and who will replace him in the coming days? On July 13, after a long hearing, the High Court passed a verdict in a case challenging the legality of an ordinance on Muslim marriage registration and divorce. Three senior lawyers submitted arguments as friend-of-the-court briefs. The court ruled that the President, as head of an unelected caretaker regime, has no authority to impose an ordinance that is irrelevant to an election. The court declared such an action to be beyond the powers granted the President by the Constitution, and thus null and void. The High Court's decision has already been challenged by the military-controlled government before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. Therefore the people must wait for the issue to be resolved at the highest level of the judiciary - which has already created controversy by abdicating its own constitutional power to consider granting bail to people arrested under the current government's emergency laws. However, the High Court's decision has already shaken the government's policymakers and raised questions concerning the legality of some 77 ordinances passed since the State of Emergency was proclaimed on Jan. 11, 2007. The President has been giving his consent by default to ordinances drafted by the military-controlled government, regardless of the necessity and legality of these so-called laws. Adding to the President's woes, a Bangladeshi newspaper published a report on July 23 alleging that part of a canal in the capital city of Dhaka has been permanently leased to the President's wife, Professor Anowara Begum, who is the chairperson of the governing body of the British Columbia School situated adjacent to the canal. The process of leasing the submerged land was initiated by the president on Nov. 2, 2006 - less than 48 hours after he took the oath of office as chief adviser of the caretaker government on Oct 31.

Ever since the President took over the office of chief adviser - equivalent to the Prime Minister - of the caretaker government, there have been debates concerning the legality of his move. The two recent incidents have brought the President's relationship with the law into further question. First, if the 77 ordinances imposed by the president under the military-controlled regime are illegal, what happens to the orders and decisions taken under those ordinances? Emergency powers laws have been used to arrest, detain and implicate hundreds of thousands of persons in Bangladesh; what will happen to the victims of these illegitimate ordinances? Who will be held responsible for such a disaster? How will the responsible persons and officials be brought to justice and punished, or will they be given amnesty? The second issue concerns the President's own position. Izzatullah Khan completed his five-year term in office on Sept. 5, 2007, but since there has been no Parliament to elect a new President, he has simply continued in office. Khan's critics are putting pressure on him to step down as a result of the "canal scandal." To take responsibility for his actions, he should hand over the office to the speaker of the Parliament, Jamir Uddin Sarkir, according to the Constitution. Another group of critics suspects that army chief Moeen U Ahmed wishes to hold the office of president, even though in public he denies this. Some even suspect that this ambition was behind the approval of the canal deal in June 2007.

Indian Politics

Indian Coalition Government Survives Vote of Confidence

India's embattled coalition government survived a chaotic parliamentary confidence vote on July 22, clearing the way for it to forge ahead with a civilian nuclear energy deal with the United States. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh won the backing of 275 deputies against 256 who opposed his Congress-led government, mainly left-wingers and Hindu nationalists, speaker Somnath Chatterjee said at the end of a raucous session.

Singh needed just a simple majority to survive and see through the last year of his mandate. Had he failed, the world's largest democracy would have headed into early elections — with his opponents emboldened. The result came after a tense hand-count of some votes that apparently were not properly recorded by machine, and a furore over opposition allegations that the ruling coalition paid out large sums of cash in bribes to ensure its win. The deal gives the government the green light to move forward with a pact with Washington designed to bring India into the global loop of nuclear commerce after decades of international isolation.

BJP Expels 8 MPs after Government Wins Vote

India's main opposition movement, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on July 23 expelled eight of its MPs who switched loyalties in a government confidence vote. The vote was triggered by left-wing parties who withdrew their support for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's coalition government over a controversial nuclear energy agreement with the United States. Despite a tight race, Singh's government won with a comfortable margin amid furious opposition allegations that the coalition had bribed MPs to vote in their favour in order to see through its last year in office. The party said that eight BJP legislators who either abstained or voted in favour of Singh's government have been expelled. Opposition leader Lal Krishna Advani told a news conference that all those who have violated the whip have been expelled. He said that three BJP MPs created a furore in parliament ahead of Tuesday's vote by waving bundles of money they alleged had been offered to them for abstaining to help the government win. The new opposition bloc consists of four left-wing groups and six other regional parties, who say they can provide an alternative to both the ruling Congress and main opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The parties identified inflation, the nuclear accord and farmer suicides as the main issues for their campaign ahead of national elections, which are due anyway by May 2009 at the latest.

Nepal in Post-Election Scenario

Nepal elects its first President: Maoists Suffer Setback

Lawmakers in Nepal voted in the Himalayan nation's first post-royal President on July 21, but their rejection of a candidate backed by the Maoists was likely to lead to more political deadlock. Ram Baran Yadav, who was supported by the centrist Nepali Congress party, won 308 out of 590 votes cast in Nepal's constitutional assembly in a run-off between him and Maoist-backed rival Ramraja Prasad Singh. The selection of a President has been seen as a vital step to ending weeks of political impasse after the assembly ousted unpopular king Gyanendra and abolished the 240-year-old monarchy in May. But the result showed other parties in the assembly ganging up against the Maoists -- who won the largest single block of seats in elections to the new assembly earlier this year but not an outright majority. Yadav, a former Health Minister and trained medical doctor, told that he would use his new position to try to unite Nepal and address grievances among the country's ethnic communities.

Nepal Maoists set Conditions to Form Government

Nepal's Maoists, on July 25, offered to reverse a decision to boycott forming a government in a compromise that could steer the newly republican country out of a new political crisis. The former rebels, who won the most seats in recent elections to a Constitutional Assembly but not a majority, had said they will not form a government because their choice of President was rejected by rival lawmakers. The presidency is a largely ceremonial position but the Maoists say having a rival in that position would paralyze their government and ambitious reform agenda. But Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara offered a compromise to the impasse, which has left Nepal without a government. He told that one of the conditions is we want a written commitment from the other political parties that they will not be involved in the forming and ousting of the government once we lead the government, for at least two years. The other conditions were that rival parties agree to allow the Maoists to push through a "minimum programme," and that the three main rival parties dissolve their alliance. The former rebels want to overturn what they view as a wider, "feudal" caste-ridden system, and have vowed to bring revolutionary land reforms in the Himalayan nation. Minendra Risal, a senior Nepali Congress party official said that we are always ready to move forward with politics of consensus. The Maoists tried to go alone, tried to dictate to other parties and they suffered defeat in the presidential vote.

Case Registered against Nepali Vice-President for taking Oath in Hindi

A writ petition has been registered at the Supreme Court Friday against newly-elected Nepali Vice President Parmananda Jha for taking oath in Hindi instead of the national language Nepali. Advocate Bal Krishna Neupane filed the writ at the apex court demanding rejection of the oath taken by Jha and asking him to re-take it in Nepali language or be expelled from the post. Meanwhile, different affiliated parties, organizations and student unions continued massive protests in Nepali capital Kathmandu on July 25 against Jha's use of Hindi while being sworn in as Vice President on July 23. The agitating students have charged that the vice president who represents the whole country ignored the national language and took the oath in the Indian language. Vice President Jha had taken the oath of office and secrecy by translating it into the Indian language even though President Ram Baran Yadav had administered it in the Nepali language.

Nepal President asks Maoists to Form Government

Nepal's President has invited former Maoist rebels to form the first government in the world's newest republic in a bid to end weeks of political deadlock, according to a statement by President's office on July 30. President Ram Baran Yadav gave the Maoists seven days to form the administration. Political wrangling has left Nepal without a formal government since it became a republic in late May after abolishing its monarchy. The President "has called on the Maoists party to forge a political consensus for the appointment of the Prime Minister and formation of Council of Ministers within seven days. The former rebels, who won more than a third of seats in polls, later said they were willing to lead a new administration as long as certain conditions were met. Those included demands for a guarantee from the other three main rival political blocs that they would make no attempt to topple their government for at least two years. They also want rival parties to agree to allow them to push through a "minimum programme" that includes revolutionary land reforms. The other parties had earlier expressed reluctance to accept Maoist demands. "Our party has already decided against the demands made by the Maoists. They are not in a position to make such demands," said Nepali Congress general secretary Kul Bahadur Gurung.

Nepal Parties allow PM to attend SAARC Summit

Nepal's major political parties decided on July 30 to allow the Caretaker Prime Minister to take part in a regional conference in Sri Lanka. Girija Prasad Koirala, who resigned earlier this month but is continuing as head of a caretaker government, has been cleared to fly to Colombo for the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation summit. Koirala met leaders of the main political parties and convinced them to let him lead the Nepalese delegation. Bhim Rawal of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) said since there was not enough time for a new Prime Minister to take office it was decided to allow Koirala to lead the Nepalese delegation.

Southeast Asia

Arroyo asks MPs to stop Polls in Muslim Areas

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has formally asked lawmakers to speed up legislation postponing elections in Muslim areas in the south to boost talks with rebels, her peace adviser said on July 30. Manila and the 11,000-member MILF agreed a deal for a homeland for around three million Muslims in the south of the largely Catholic archipelago last week, but the agreement is no guarantee of a formal peace deal, which faces many hurdles. One challenge is that there is an existing Muslim homeland in the southern region of Mindanao, created from a previous agreement with another rebel group in 1996. Arroyo wants to postpone elections in this six-province Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) because a deal with the MILF will create a new, larger political structure. But while her allies in the lower house of Congress have filed two bills seeking the postponement, members of the upper house are opposed to the move arguing that they do not know what has been agreed with the MILF.

US Presidential Elections

US Presidential Election – 51 percent Americans see Obama winning

According to Fox News poll, a majority of Americans believe that Democratic candidate Barack Obama will win the presidential election against Republican hopeful John McCain in November. While 51 percent say Obama, who is vying to become the first African American President, will win the election, only 27 percent are betting on a McCain victory. Voters registered as Democrats are more confident about their candidate's chances than their Republican peers. 71 percent of Democrats see Obama winning on November 4 while 51 percent of Republicans believe McCain will win. One in four Republicans think that Obama, a senator from Illinois, will succeed US President George W Bush. A month ago, 47 percent of Americans believed that Obama, 46, would win the election compared to 32 percent for McCain, a 71-year-old Arizona senator. Even though many Americans are predicting an Obama victory, the race remains tight. In a head-to-head matchup, Obama leads McCain 41 to 40 percent among registered voters, the poll showed. If Libertarian candidate Bob Barr and independent hopeful Ralph Nader are added, Obama leads McCain by 40 to 37 percent. If Obama chooses former Democratic nomination rival Hillary Clinton as his running mate and McCain picks former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, a former Republican candidate, the Democratic ticket leads 48 to 39 percent.

The survey was conducted between July 22-23 among 900 voters. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points. While the race remains close, Obama is struggling to convince many Americans of his commander-in-chief mettle after serving in the US Senate for only three years. An NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll out Wednesday showed that 55 percent of Americans believe Obama would be the riskier choice for the presidency compared to 35 percent for McCain, a Vietnam war veteran.

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