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## Gender

### Women & Politics

#### **Fehmida Mirza Elected first Woman NA Speaker**

On 19 March, the National Assembly (NA) elected its first female Speaker as Pakistan People's Party MNA Fehmida Mirza made history after winning more than two-thirds of the total votes. Dr Mirza was nominated for the position by the PPP-led would-be ruling coalition that includes the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Awami National Party and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl. She won with 249 votes (21 more than the two-thirds majority of 228) against the 70 votes garnered by her opponent, Sardar Israr Tareen, in the 342-member National Assembly.

#### **Women Councillors Struggling for their Rights**

The women who were given 33 percent representation in general bodies to advocate women rights are still struggling for their own rights in the general bodies. This was stated by representatives of major political parties at a press conference arranged by the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) on March 7. They said that women welfare was still limited to sewing machines and dowry funds from Zakat and stressed the need for thinking beyond such ideas to develop women on equal grounds. CPDI Budget Monitoring Chief Coordinator Bilal Azfar Abbasi said that the government had approved Rs3000 stipend for the council members but the decision had not yet been implemented and they were receiving only Rs1500. Each member of district council is eligible for Rs0.5 million development fund, which was only allotted to those affiliated with the ruling party in the past," he said while adding that majority of members were not able to get the amount. Pointing towards some other discrimination PML-N's Tehseen Fawad said that women were not given microphones during general body meeting and there was no room reserved for them in the district office. Pakistan Islamic Association President Dr Shahina Yasmeen said that women should be provided incentives to work hard as councillors. "With the amount of just Rs1500, it is unjust to expect them to deliver for the welfare and development of women," she said.

#### **UAE Gets First Woman Judge**

The oil-rich United Arab Emirates on March 26 got its first woman judge, a job hitherto reserved for men in this country. President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan, acting in his capacity as ruler of Abu Dhabi, named Kholoud Ahmad Jouan al-Dhaheri as a judge in the emirate, the wealthiest and largest in the seven-member UAE federation. The move made the UAE the second Arab country in the Gulf after Bahrain to name a woman judge. The appointment reflects "the government's keenness to involve women in the development drive" and "boost their role in society", said Sultan Saaed al-Badi, a senior official of Abu Dhabi's judiciary.

The new Judge graduated in Law and Sharia from UAE University and has been a practising lawyer for eight years. The UAE Cabinet includes four women. Nine women also sit on the 40-member Federal National Council, an assembly that advises the government.

### First Women's Expo in Peshawar

The wife of the NWFP Governor, Begum Ghazala Owais Ghani, on March 1<sup>st</sup> inaugurated the first-ever **Khyber Women's Expo** at Dean's Trade Centre. According to an official press release, the Expo is aimed at encouraging female entrepreneurs in the province. The three-day Expo was organized by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan in collaboration with the Mashaloona Development Programme. More than 70 stalls displaying different products have been set up at the Expo by women's organizations. Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Begum Ghazala Ghani urged women to come forward and play their role in the progress and development of the province and the country. She said that during the past 7 or 8 years, women in Pakistan had been offered many incentives and initiatives to participate in national development in every field. TDA Director General Zahir Shah highlighted the role, activities, and performance of the authority and said that such exhibitions were part of the overall government strategy for a gender-balanced approach towards development. Miss Farah Naz, Chairperson of the Mashaloona Development Programme, and Dr Taha of Sarhad University also spoke on the occasion. Later, Begum Ghazala went round the stalls, where she talked to the lady stallholders and also did some shopping.

### Equal Property Rights for Women: Bangladesh Retreats on Policy after Clerics Protest

Bangladesh's military-backed government has backed down from a policy to ensure equal property rights to women amid angry protests by Muslim clerics that the move would override Islamic law. The country's Law Minister Hasan Arif said the government "does not have any plan to enact any laws that go against the Holy Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)". Arif gave the assurance to top Islamic clerics and scholars late on March 13, after Islamic groups warned of nationwide protests, saying they would not tolerate any law that went against Sharia. The clerics' complaints followed a new government policy announced last week which stated women should have equal property rights. Bangladesh, whose population is 90 percent Muslim, has a secular legal system but in matters related to inheritance and marriage Muslims follow Sharia law. Women groups have long protested the disparity and demanded equal rights. The Minister's comments came after Islamic parties and top clerics called protests across the country against what they called "laws against Islam." Leader of the group Mufti Fazlul Haq Ammini said that despite the government's assurances they would go ahead with protests until the "anti-Sharia" provisions were officially dropped. The new government policy has mentioned there would be equal property rights for women which is directly against Islam and the Holy Quran. He said that we will not tolerate anything that goes against the Sharia. He further said that the government had shown "scant regard" for the country's Muslims.

## Women & HR

### 7,870 Cases of Violence against Women Registered in 2007

The year 2007 witnessed a slight increase in the number of cases of violence against women in Pakistan. According to a report, the number of rape-cum-murder, suicide and Hudood Ordinance cases had risen considerably, and the ratio was higher than that of 2006. These facts were revealed in the annual report of violence against women for the year 2007, compiled by the Madadgar Research and Database Centre, ahead of International Women's Day.

**Number of Reported Cases:** The total number of reported cases of violence against women, including physical violence and sexual abuse, were 7,870 in 2007, as compared to the number of 7,564 in 2006, with 3,051 cases of physical abuse and 863 of sexual abuse. Further categorization shows that out of the 7,870 cases, 1,306 were of murder, 104 of murder after rape, 487 of rape, 272 of gang rape, 1,745 of physical abuse, 810 of Karo Kari, 199 of burn cases, 1,321 of kidnap for ransom, 182 of human trafficking and 1,041 cases of suicide were reported. Moreover, 193 women were subjected to torture by the police and 210 cases were of the Hudood Ordinance.

**Provincial Breakup:** According to the provincial break-up of the data, 274 cases of violence against women were reported in Balochistan, 563 in the NWFP, 4,987 in Punjab, and 2,046 in Sindh.

**Reasons for Violence against Women:** Various human rights activists gave various reasons for the 'steady' number of incidents of violence against women for the past many years in Pakistan. They said the major reason for the increasing number of such incidents was that the government was not playing its due role to check

violence against women, which had been creating many hurdles in the working of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Women's rights activist Shahtaj Qazalbash told Daily Times that poverty and lack of education and awareness among the masses were the main reasons behind this increasing number. She said that such cases were reported more in rural parts as compared to the educated sections of the society. She said the NGOs were working for mass awareness, but they could not do anything alone, and furthermore, the government was not playing its role effectively in providing basic facilities of education, food, clothing, and shelter to the public. She said unemployment and the usage of drugs were other basic reasons that brought about frustration in society, and violence against women was the most common outcome. Ms Qazalbash hoped that the new government would devise policies to address such issues. Aurat Foundation Pakistan Coordinator Ume-Laila told that the absence of proper legislation on any kind of violence, especially the domestic kind, was the major reason for the ever-increasing number of violence against women. She also criticised the government for not playing its due role for the betterment of women. She said women in Pakistan were not only suffering from physical violence, but also from economic and political violence. She, while quoting one such example, said there was no law for Home Based Workers who contributed significantly towards the country's economy. Sharjeel Ahmad of the South Asia Partnership-Pakistan blamed the Zia regime for the menace of violence against women in Pakistan. He alleged that discriminatory laws and policies against women had been adopted by General Zia. He said anti-women material was published in the general's regime, due to which the mindset of the people had become patriarchal. He also hoped that the new government would address the issue and try to eliminate violence against women from society.

## International Women's Day

### Investment Urged for Gender Equality

The United Nations has urged national governments and development partners to invest more in women and girls and step up financial contributions and commitments to promote gender equality at global, regional and national levels. In a message issued on the eve of the 'International Women's Day', which was observed on 8<sup>th</sup> March, the UN said that the day is an occasion to review how far women had come in their struggle for equality, peace and development. It is also an opportunity to unite, network and mobilize for meaningful change. National governments and international organizations need to adopt gender-responsive budget initiatives. National government budget allocations and public sector expenditures must systematically address gender equality concerns and channel resources where they can achieve the most effective results. International organizations must likewise review their own financial commitments to ensure that gender equality receives the priority it deserves.

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, investments in women and girls "reap positive returns for their health and wellbeing and that of society. Gender equality is a major determinant of health ... There is an information gap about the full economic and social costs of inequality. Social and financial outlays that raise the status and living conditions of women have tremendous multiplier effects – those who live with more dignity are better able to reach their potential and contribute fully to their communities.

A **Planning Commission** report says that although half of Pakistan's population consists of females, their participation in the development process is far from equal and desirable. Socio-cultural traditions reinforced by lack of access to opportunities and resources relegate the majority of women to traditional roles. In some direct market-oriented economic activities like agriculture, their contribution is substantial but it remains largely undervalued and unappreciated. Low female participation in formal economic activities in developing countries can be traced to gender disparities in education that has continued since past generations, the Planning Commission's report on millennium developments goals says.

According to a report compiled by the **Ministry of Women Development**, the health status of women in Pakistan is poor as compared with other countries in Asia. Some 30,000 women die each year due to complications of pregnancy, and 10 times more women develop life-long, pregnancy-related disability. Many girls die prematurely because of common infections and malnutrition, which could have been easily prevented and treated. "About 25 per cent of children are born with low birth weight due to material problems. Ten per cent of children do not reach their first birthday. High fertility, with an average of six children per woman, has resulted in a high population growth of about 3 per cent per annum, and if sustained will further increase poverty and environmental deterioration," the report says.

In a message on the eve of the Women's Day, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that a lack of political will was reflected in the most telling way of all: lack of resources and insufficient budgetary allocations. "That is why the theme of this International Women's Day is **'Investing in Women and Girls'**. He said that this failure of funding undermines not only our endeavors for gender equality and women's empowerment as such; it also holds back our efforts to reach all the Millennium Development Goals.

### **President, PM Pledged Commitments to Women's Cause**

President Pervez Musharraf and Caretaker Prime Minister Mohammadmian Soomro reaffirmed government's pledge and commitment to the cause of women development and empowerment. In his message for International Women's Day on March 8, the President reiterating the Government's commitment towards a better and safe future for Pakistani women expressed the hope that the newly elected government would further enhance and integrate the role of women in national development. The President added that Pakistan joined the international community to commemorate the International Women's Day on March 8, to focus attention and reaffirm our commitment towards a better and safe future for Pakistani women. He said this year's theme 'Investing in Women and Girls', highlights the need to address and target the issues being confronted by women and girls throughout the country by way of providing greater resources not only in financial terms but also through bringing positive change in the mindset of the people.

The President said under the firm commitment for gender equality and gender mainstreaming, necessary measures and initiatives will continue to be taken to safeguard the women's rights and interests including those of the girls within all available resources. The President expressed the hope that "the newly elected government would further enhance and integrate the role of women in national development and would certainly concentrate on devising policies, programmes and strategies to fully utilize the expanding role of women in making the country peaceful and prosperous with zero gender discrimination."

In his message the Caretaker Prime Minister Mohammadmian Soomro said all women and men are equally entitled to share the worldly opportunities throughout their lives, but unfortunately, women have been left behind than their male counterparts. He said, "As a signatory to various UN Conventions especially CEDAW and CRC, our commitment to remove and prevent all discriminatory practices from our social fabric have been further strengthened." He said progress and prosperity of any country is directly linked to active participation of all the citizens in the national affairs and added no country can make progress if half of its population comprising women is unable to participate in all walks of life.

## Formation of Government – Federal

### Prime Minister

**Yousaf Raza Gilani Elected as Prime Minister:** Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani was elected the 24<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Pakistan on 24<sup>th</sup> with a thumping majority in the National Assembly by securing 264 votes, well ahead of the two-thirds majority in the house. While his opponent Chaudhary Pervez Elahi bagged 42 votes. Soon after establishing his majority in the Lower House of the Parliament to become Leader of the House, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, in his brief address, amid slogans of 'go Musharraf go' coming from the visitors' gallery, passed orders for the release of the detained judges of Supreme Court of Pakistan. He also requested the House to pass a resolution recommending a probe into the assassination of Ms Benazir Bhutto under the supervision of the United Nations and also asked the House to adopt a resolution terming the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as a judicial murder. Giving the name of Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA) to the Pakistan People's Parties and its coalition partners, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani termed it a historic moment which was achieved by rendering great sacrifices and was not given to them in charity. He asked all the political forces in the country to come forward and help them overcome the problems confronting the nation, especially the economic crisis.

**Profile of PM:** Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, a member of an influential political family of Multan, started his political career in 1978 after the death of father Makhdoom Alamdar Hussain Gilani, who was a signatory to the Pakistan Resolution. Mr. Gilani's grandfather, Makhdoom Ghulam Mustafa Shah Gilani, and paternal uncle Makhdoom Raza Shah Gilani had been elected members of the legislative assembly after defeating the Unionists in the 1946 elections. Mr. Gilani's great grandfather, Makhdoom Raja Bakhsh Gilani, was both mayor of Multan in 1921 and member of the Central Legislative Assembly of India. He served as a member of the assembly from 1921 till his death in 1936 and was known as the father of the Indian Assembly. Mr. Gilani was the first elected Chairman of the District Council, Multan. He defeated the Local Government Minister Syed Fakhar Imam, some 25 years ago. In the 1985 non-party elections, he was elected MNA and became the Minister for Housing and Railways in the Cabinet of Mohammad Khan Junejo. In 1988 elections, he defeated the then Punjab Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif on PPP ticket. In 1990, again on a PPP ticket, he was elected an MNA after defeating Makhdoom Hamid Raza Gilani, a former Federal Minister. In 1993, he defeated Malik Sikander Hayat Bosan and later became Speaker of the National Assembly. Mr. Gilani contested the election in 1997 on a PPP ticket, but the party did not win a single seat in Punjab. He was jailed in 2001 over charges of misuse of his authority by giving jobs to undeserving people in the National Assembly Secretariat when he was the Speaker. He spent six years in jail and could not contest the 2002 elections. During his detention, he also authored a book, 'Chahe Yusuf Se Sada' He was made the Senior Vice-Chairman of the PPP in 1998.

**Gillani Wins Unanimous Vote of Confidence:** Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani made history by securing a unanimous vote of confidence from the National Assembly on 29 March. After securing unprecedented support from the opposition, Gillani pledged to take all political parties along and to work for the supremacy of Parliament and the independence of democratic institutions. Gillani had received a record 264 votes in the election for Prime Minister, beating Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, who had received only 42. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Naveed Qamar presented the resolution for the vote of confidence. The opposition announced its support for the resolution. Calling it "an historic occasion in the Parliamentary history of Pakistan", opposition leaders said they accepted the results of the February 18 elections, despite reservations, for "national unity".

### **PM's first 100-Day Programme**

Some of the measures announced by the Prime Minister after securing vote of confidence are as follows:

- Ministers to travel only in economy-plus class in domestic flights.
- No unnecessary illumination of government buildings.
- No amount from the national exchequer to be spent on the decoration of government offices and official residences.

- Special counters for Parliament members at airports to be abolished and the largest Pakistan flag to be flown on the parliament house.
- A Prime Minister's question hour in the National Assembly to be started on the pattern of other democratic countries during which the Prime Minister would directly answer questions from the house members.
- An Employment Commission to be set up with cabinet approval to plan for the creation of employment opportunities in the private and public sectors with a Literacy and Health Corporation under it to provide employment to young people for two years after graduation.
- A National Employment Scheme to be started in 50 per cent districts under which one person from every poor family will be provided job.
- A Madressah Welfare Authority to be set up to provide a uniform syllabus for Madressahs in consultation with all stake-holders and audit their funds.
- A million housing units to be built each year along with five-marla schemes in villages where state land is available and schemes to provide flats and 80 square yards plots in cities for the homeless.
- CNG buses to be made available.
- Sunflower cultivation to be promoted to meet cooking oil needs.
- Crop insurance for small land holders.
- Provision of cheap and good seeds and cheap fertilisers to farmers.
- Poor people to given free national identity cards.
- Frontier Crimes Regulations and Industrial Relations Order repealed
- A "truth and reconciliation commission" proposed PM House budget cut by 40 per cent
- A freedom of information law to be framed, while Pemra will be made a subsidiary of the Information ministry
- Talks will be initiated with extremists who lay down arms and 'adopt the path of peace'
- A new package for tribal areas promised
- Irrigation channels to be bricklined.
- Industrial Relations Ordinance of 2002 would be abolished and minimum wage for labourers would be increased to Rs 6,000 a month.
- Concurrent Lists would be abolished within 12 months and the provinces would be given autonomy in line with the Constitution.
- The amendments to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance made on November 3, 2007 would be revoked PEMRA would be made subordinate to the Information Ministry.

## **Speaker and Deputy Speaker**

**Elections of Speaker and Deputy Speaker:** The National Assembly (NA) elected its first female Speaker on 19<sup>th</sup> March as Pakistan People's Party MNA Fehmida Mirza made history after winning more than two-thirds of the total votes. Dr Mirza was nominated for the position by the PPP-led ruling coalition that includes PML-N, ANP and JUI (F). She won with 249 votes (21 more than the two-thirds majority of 228) against the 70 votes garnered by her opponent, Sardar Israr Tareen, in the 342-member National Assembly. Mirza, 51, was administered oath of office by the outgoing Speaker, Chaudhry Amir Hussain. He hailed her appointment and hoped that she would be able to run the House in an amicable way. After taking the oath of office, Mirza conducted the election of the National Assembly Deputy Speaker.

Faisal Karim Kundi, the PPP-led coalition nominee for the office of Deputy Speaker, trounced his opponent, Khushbakhat Shujaat. Kundi won with 246 votes to Shujaat's 68. Following the NA session, In total, 324 votes were cast for the election of Speaker, in which 319 were declared as valid. Four MNAs — Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Maulvi Asmatullah, Hamid Yar Hiraj and Maulana Noorul Haq Qadri — did not cast their vote. In the Deputy Speaker's election, 318 votes were polled, and four were declared as invalid.

## **Federal Cabinet**

**24-Member Federal Cabinet took Oath from President Musharraf:** In a tense atmosphere President Pervez Musharraf administered oath to 24 Federal Ministers some of whom wore black armbands in silent protest. In an unprecedented move, the PML-N Ministers took oath by wearing black bands around their arms as a mark of protest against the President. They registered their protest yet again when they boycotted the tea party arranged at the Aiwan-e-Sadr for the guests.

Eleven Federal Ministers are from PPP, nine are from PML-N, two from ANP and one each from JUI-F and FATA. Following are Federal Ministers and their portfolios:

| <b>Ministers</b>                            | <b>Portfolios</b>  |
|---|--|
| <b>Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan</b>             | <b>Communications with additional charge of Food, Agriculture and Live</b>           |
| <b>Shahid Khaqan Abbasi</b>                 | <b>Commerce</b>  |
| <b>Chaudhary Ahmed Mukhtar</b>              | <b>Defence</b>   |
| <b>Rana Tanveer Hussain</b>                 | <b>Defence Production</b>  |
| <b>Ahsan Iqbal</b>                          | <b>Education with additional charge of Minorities</b>                                |
| <b>Hameedullah Jan Afridi</b>               | <b>Environment</b>   |
| <b>Muhammad Ishaq Dar</b>                   | <b>Finance with additional portfolio of Revenue, Economic Affairs &amp; Stati</b>    |
| <b>Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi</b>        | <b>Foreign Affairs</b>   |
| <b>Haji Rehmatullah Kakar</b>               | <b>Housing and Works</b>   |
| <b>Sheery Rehman</b>                        | <b>Information &amp; Broadcasting</b>  |
| <b>Qamar Zaman Kaira</b>                    | <b>Kashmir Affairs &amp; Northern Areas</b>  |
| <b>Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah</b>            | <b>Labour &amp; Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis</b>                                 |
| <b>Farooq H. Naik</b>                       | <b>Law &amp; Justice</b>   |
| <b>Haji Gulham Ahmed Bilour</b>             | <b>Local Government &amp; Rural developmment</b>                                     |
| <b>Nazar Muhammad Gondal</b>                | <b>Narcotics Control</b>   |
| <b>Khawaja Asif</b>                         | <b>Petroleum with additional charge of Sports</b>                                    |
| <b>Mir Humayoon Aziz Kurd</b>               | <b>Population Welfare</b>  |
| <b>Syed Naveed Qamar</b>                    | <b>Ports &amp; Shipping with additional charge of Privatization &amp; Investment</b> |
| <b>Sardar Mehtab Ahmed Khan</b>             | <b>Railways</b>  |
| <b>Tehmina Daultana</b>                     | <b>Science &amp; Technology</b>  |
| <b>Nawabzada Khawaja Muhamamd Khan Hoti</b> | <b>Social Welfare &amp; Special Education</b>  |
| <b>Najmuddin Khan</b>                       | <b>States &amp; Frontier Regions</b>   |
| <b>Raja Pervez Ashraf</b>                   | <b>Water &amp; Power</b>   |
| <b>Khawaja Saad Rafique</b>                 | <b>Culture with additional charge of Youth Affairs</b>                               |

## **Formation of Government – Provincial**

### **Punjab**

#### **Punjab Assembly Session on April 9**

Governor Khalid Maqbool finally notified the first session of the Punjab Assembly on April 9 on the advice of the Chief Minister. Outgoing Speaker Muhammad Afzal Sahi will preside over the session. The session is restricted to the oath of the members-elect and election of the new Speaker and Deputy Speaker. Officials said the session would continue for just three to four days. It would be prorogued sine die afterwards, they said, adding that the date for the election of the leader of the house had not as yet been decided. They said the date and time of the session was determined by the Caretaker Chief Minister as per the Constitution, ignoring the Revocation of Proclamation of the Emergency Order under which this was to be done by the President.

#### **PML-N considering Rana Iqbal for PA Speaker**

PML-N's Rana Muhammad Iqbal Khan is being considered for the office of Punjab Assembly Speaker. Iqbal became a MPA after winning the PP-184 Phoolnagar constituency of Kasur district. Sources said the PML-N leadership had almost finalized Iqbal's name for the office of speaker. Iqbal's nomination for the Speaker had

paved way for Sardar Dost Muhammad Khosa to become Punjab's stopgap Chief Minister, until PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif makes it to the Assembly in by-elections.

## **Sindh**

### **Sindh Assembly Session Summoned on April 5**

The maiden session of Sindh Assembly will be held at Sindh Assembly building on April 5. Syed Muzaffar Hussain will preside over the SA session. According to official sources, the newly elected members of Sindh Assembly will take oath as MPAs.

## **NWFP**

**115-Member NWFP Assembly Sworn-In:** One hundred and fifteen members elected to the NWFP assembly took oath under the 1973 Constitution at the inaugural Provincial Assembly session on 28 March. Shortly thereafter, the Assembly unanimously passed a resolution demanding a United Nations investigation into former premier Benazir Bhutto's assassination. Former Speaker Bakht Jehan Khan's resigned before the dissolution of the Assembly in October 2007 therefore ANP leader and MPA-elect Arbab Ayub Jan presided over the session. After the oath taking, the Assembly hall reverberated with chants. The House also unanimously passed a second resolution, condemning the re-publication of a blasphemous cartoon of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) by Danish newspapers. PPP's Abdul Akbar Khan, ANP's Mian Iftikhar and Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)'s Hafiz Akhtar Ali tabled the resolution. Akbar demanded that the federal government convey the sentiments of the NWFP people to the Danish government, review diplomatic ties with the country and boycott Danish goods.

### **Elections' for Speaker, Deputy Speaker:**

**NWFP PA Speaker and Deputy Speaker Elected Unopposed:** Newly-elected speaker and deputy speaker of the NWFP Assembly Karamatullah Khan Chagharmati and Khushdil Khan, on March 29 took oath of their offices after being elected unopposed by the Assembly. Amidst thumping of desks, senior ANP MPA Arbab Ayub Jan, who presided over the session, administered the oath to the Speaker, who later announced unopposed election of the Deputy Speaker and administered him the oath of office.

### **Chief Minister:**

**Hoti Elected NWFP CM Unopposed:** Amir Haider Hoti was elected as NWFP Chief Minister unopposed on 31 March, as no one had filed nomination papers for the top slot against him.

## **Balochistan**

### **Balochistan Assembly Session Summoned on April 7**

Governor Balochistan Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Mangsi has summoned Balochistan Assembly session on April 7. The maiden session of Balochistan Assembly will be held at Balochistan Assembly building.

On March 29, PPP made a direct "appeal through the media" to President Pervez Musharraf, asking him to summon the first session of the Balochistan Assembly on April 1 after the Provincial Governor informed the party of his inability to do so without the issuance of Presidential orders. A delegation of the PPP and its allies, headed by Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani, the Parliamentary Leader of the PPP, met Balochistan Governor Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Mangsi and appealed to him to immediately convene the session of the Balochistan Assembly. But the governor told them that the power to summon an assembly session rested with the president, and not with the governor. All that he could do in this regard was to request the President once again, he said. The **Balochistan Assembly session has been scheduled for April 7**, but the PPP and its allies described the date as "too late" and demanded that the assembly session be summoned earlier.

Referring to his recent meeting Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani in Islamabad, he said that the meeting had been very short and that he did not get ample time to discuss the whole situation of Balochistan with the Prime Minister. However, he said that when he became the chief minister of the province, for which he was certain to be elected unopposed, he would take up all issues concerning Balochistan with the new PM. Refusing to disclose the names of the forthcoming Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Balochistan Assembly, Raisani said that a consensus had been reached, and that the names would be announced soon.

## Women Parliamentarians

### **Petitions Challenging Reserved Seats for Women Thrown-Out**

Lahore High Court Chief Justice Syed Zahid Hussain on Saturday dismissed a petition challenging the reservation of seats for women in the assemblies. The petition labelled the reservation unlawful and unconstitutional. In his ruling the Chief Justice said that women are an important segment of society whose contribution to various spheres of life can't be undermined. Reserving seats for women equals gender discrimination: Zubia Ijaz moved the petition in the Lahore High Court. Her counsel Tariq Aziz said there were 60 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly and 128 in all four provincial assemblies. He said that under Article 25 (2) of the 1973 Constitution, reserving seats for women in the National Assembly was tantamount to discrimination on the basis of gender. He said that the government had spent Rs 1.006 billion in arranging elections of these reserved seats. He said that the last government had paid Rs 1.76 billion in salaries and allowances to women elected on reserved seats. He added that female parliamentarians have not contributed much in parliament. This is a waste of money.

The Chief Justice wrote that in light of progress made since the enactment of the 1956 Constitution, he found the petition lacking in substance and merit. He wrote that may have been the rationale for reserving some seats in the assemblies so that women could contribute in the legislative field as well. "Adverting to the petitioner's contention as to the provisions of Article 25 (2) of the 1973 Constitution, that 'There shall be no discrimination on the bases of sex alone, reference may apply be made to clause (3) of the same provision of the constitution, which ordains that 'Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children'."

The Chief Justice wrote that under Article 32 of the 1973 Constitution, the state provided for the special representation of peasants, workers and women in local government institutions. He also wrote that Article 34 provided that steps would be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life. He wrote that it was a fact that "some women adorned the Houses by winning the election against general seats, but that does not mean that seats cannot be reserved for them in the assemblies to make better opportunities of representation available to them". "For instance, in India, the president has been empowered to make nominations in the Council of States under Article 80 of their constitution. Renowned personalities like Nargis Dutt, Vyjantimala, Lata Mangeshkar and Shabana Azmi were nominees as members of the Rajya Sabha. It is common knowledge that the first woman prime minister and the first woman National Assembly speaker in the Muslim world belong to Pakistan. So far as the contention about their perks and privileges is concerned, it may be observed that once having become members of the assemblies, they of course are entitled to certain perks, privileges and allowances under the law, which cannot be considered a wastage of resources.

The petitioner's counsel said that in the last National Assembly 12 women were elected on open seats. He said that so far elections on these reserved seats had proved to be on face value, kinship and influence and not on the basis of political contribution. He said that instead of elections on the basis of gender, people of intellect – who would contribute more – should fill these seats. He said that in the case of Shireen Masood, it was requested that women should be admitted to medical colleges on merit, as reservation of seats was in violation of the Constitution. He asked the Chief Justice to abolish these seats so as to encourage women to contest elections on open seats.

## Post-Election Senate

### **Wasim Sajjad Resigned as Senate's Leader of House**

Senator Wasim Sajjad tendered his resignation from his position as leader of the House in the Senate on March 29. He said his resignation would allow the parties forming the new Coalition Government to appoint a new Leader of the House. Mr. Sajjad remained a member of the PML-N until 2000, when he switched sides and joined the king's party to be elected Senator. He said that he was bound to resign after the emergence of new coalition parties victorious in the Feb 18 polls. The former combined opposition comprising the PPP, PML-N, MMA and Baloch parties continue to remain in minority in the Senate after landslide victory of their candidates in the National Assembly polls. However, the dynamics of the upper house will change after the formation of the new government as cracks have already started appearing in the former ruling party. Six senators of the PML-Q have

formed a forward bloc announcing to sit on seats separate from their party. After the withdrawal of MQM candidate Dr Farooq Sattar as opposition's joint candidate for the position of PM, the party's six senators were expected to support the PPP-led coalition on various issues except those which would harm President Musharraf's position.

### **PPP-Led Coalition Short of 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Majority in Senate**

The PPP-led coalition obtained an absolute majority in the Senate on March 24<sup>th</sup> when Senator Gulzar Ahmed Khan and his two sons announced their support soon after four FATA Senators joined the coalition. Senator Gulzar who remained on the treasury benches in the last five years said that we will vote for PPP whether formally requested or not.

Incumbent Senate Chairman Muhammad Mian Soomro and Deputy Chairman Jan Jamli are expected to resign from their posts just like Wasim Sajjad. The ousted PML-Q coalition had a total strength of 58 but with the defection of seven senators and death of Senator Sarwar Kakar a few weeks back, the majority was lost. If Senator Muhammad Amin Dadabhoy, an independent from Sindh province, Senator Amjad Abbad and six Senators of MQM also join the PPP coalition, it would be a bonus. 10-12 PML-Q Senators are already prepared to switch over. This support will give PPP-led coalition a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority in the Senate.

### **NAB to be abolished**

On March 29, Premier Yousaf Raza Gillani said the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) would be abolished and its cases would subsequently be taken up by normal courts. He said that NAB has miserably failed to perform its functions and is used for political motives. He further said that the Government would ensure an independent judiciary and system of justice where no one could escape being held to account. He said that he had taken the first step to restoring the judiciary by releasing detained judges of the superior judiciary.

### **Committee Set-Up on Judges Return and FCR**

In the first meeting after taking oath, the new Cabinet during a meeting with Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani in the Chair, constituted two committees to recommend implementation of the Murree Declaration for the restoration of Judges and amendment in the Frontier Crime Regulations (FCR). Minister of Information and Broadcasting Sherry Rehman said that both the committees would be headed by Law Minister Farooq H. Naek while the members of the Committee would be nominated after consultation of the allies of the Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA).

### **Implications of Repealing FCR – Analysis by Dawn**

Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani announced the abolition of the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) without actually knowing what the 1901 British law is going to be replaced with and more importantly: what would be its implications? Little wonder then that at least two of the PPP's allies, both from the NWFP — the ANP and the JUI (F) — came out with reservations. The ANP acknowledged that while its leadership had been consulted about "generalities", it had not been consulted on the specifics of FCR, which, according to the ANP's provincial President, Afrasiab Khattak, is the "most investigated and non-implemented law". The ANP, he said, would like to retain the FCR with some amendments, something that the JUI (F) and a vast majority of the tribesmen would also like to see. Maulana Fazlur Rehman told that he too was not consulted and warned that any such move would entail grave implications for Pakistan. The FCR presently in vogue in the seven federally administered tribal regions and six Frontier Regions basically explains relationship between the state and the tribes on the one hand through an indirect form of governance; and on the other lays down procedure for dealing with inter-tribal matters. But the British-era law has been coming in under a lot of criticism from human rights activists, the civil society as well as a section of the tribal people. The very draconian nature of some sections of the law, chiefly the Frontier Crimes Regulation 40, a preventive law pertaining to good conduct that has been grossly misused by the political administration to keep people under detention for longer periods of time than the stipulated three years for peace-keeping it provides for on non-acceptance of sureties by the accused.

The other most controversial sections of the law pertain to collective responsibility and territorial responsibility.

Section 21 (Collective Responsibility) empowers the administration to direct the confiscation of all or any member of a tribe and all or any property belonging to them or anyone of them, if the tribe, or any section or member of such a tribe, are found acting in a hostile manner towards the government or towards people in the country.

Section 22 (territorial responsibility) empowers the administration to impose a fine on an entire village if there appear to be good reasons to believe that the inhabitants of the village have connived with, or abetted in the commission of an offence or failed to render assistance in their power to discover the offender or to effect their arrest.

Article 246 and 247 of the Constitution deals with the tribal areas \_ both the federally administered as well as the provincially administered tribal areas. The Constitution also states that the parliament cannot legislate for the tribal regions unless the president so directs.

The irony is that legislators from FATA can take part in legislation for the whole country but not for their own regions. The power to repeal or introduce any regulation in the tribal regions thus rests with the president.

Analysts warn that any move to repeal or introduce any regulation in the tribal regions would require delicate handling. What happened in the provincially administered Malakand region following the Supreme Court's verdict in 1995 that had declared PATA regulation as ultra vires of the Constitution is now for all to see. That decision created a legal vacuum in Malakand and led to an armed rebellion by Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi calling for the enforcement of shariah to replace the defunct PATA regulation – a problem that continues to haunt the government in Swat.

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## Surveys/Reports

### **HRCP Report for 2007**

Releasing its annual report on the **State of Human Rights in 2007** at the Lahore Press Club on March 29, HRCP Chairperson Asma Jahangir and Director I.A. Rehman said the state of Pakistan was only half alive in 2007, naturally reducing its capacity to guarantee the people's rights and proving to be one of the worst years in its history, if not the worst. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has observed that violation of rights sharply increased in 2007 in the country, and urged the new government to improve governance and prioritise its targets to grasp the nettle. HRCP Secretary-General Syed Iqbal Haider, office-bearers from Sindh, Balochistan and the NWFP, and its members were present at the press conference. Ms Jahangir said former SCBA President Munir A. Malik would be decorated with a medal for his major role in the lawyers' struggle. Following are the main issues addressed in the report:

**JAILS, PRISONERS & DISAPPEARANCES:** Prisons housed 95,016 detainees as against an authorised capacity of 40,825. Across Pakistan, 67 per cent of the prisoners were awaiting trial. As many as 134 convicts were executed and 309 awarded death sentence. There were over 7,000 prisoners on the death row. The number of missing persons in lists before the Supreme Court swelled to over 400 before the Nov 3 judicial purge abruptly ended hearings. Ninety-nine out of 198 missing persons on the HRCP's list before the Supreme Court had been traced before Nov 3.

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:** Police routinely and systematically tear-gassed and beat up peaceful protestors apparently to suppress political opposition to the government. Eighty-eight of National Assembly's 342 members resigned in protest against Musharraf's re-election bid in uniform. As many as 107 members did not say a single word on the floor of the assembly during the 4th parliamentary year. The National Assembly passed 51 bills in five years compared to 134 ordinances promulgated by the President. The assembly completing its full five-year term was seen as self-serving exercise by Musharraf to get re-elected. It twice elected in its one term a serving military general as president, according to the report. Draft voters' lists in June 2007 contained only 52.1 million voters instead of the projected 82 million. The ratio of religious minorities and women among omitted voters was very high and the final list in October swelled to 80.4 million.

**FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT:** Political leaders, judges, activists and many others were subjected to curbs on their movement throughout the year, and more intensely after the declaration of emergency. Section 144 was widely used by the government as the legal cover for such restriction. The deposed Chief Justice and his family were under house arrest for the most of the year even though the government did not officially announce or admit it.

Names appeared on and were taken off the exit control list (ECL) without any reason given and cases were constantly challenged by many on the list which contained hundred of names.

**FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE & RELIGION:** Sectarian violence claimed 580 lives and wounded another 1,120. The militants entrenched themselves in parts of the NWFP and the tribal areas, taking over several towns and implementing their version of Shariah. They also targeted girls' schools and CD shops and threatened religious minorities to convert to Islam or leave the area, the HRCP noted with regret. The Shia community remained the main target of sectarian attacks. Five Ahmedis were murdered while 36 faced prosecution in faith-related cases. Places of worship and graveyards remained a target of the land-grabbing mafia.

**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION:** Unprecedented curbs were placed on electronic and print media following the government's attack on the judiciary and imposition of emergency. At least seven journalists were killed and 73 injured, mostly by police. Security forces arrested 250 reporters for covering anti-government protests or for demonstrating against restrictions on the media. Pakistan's standing in terms of Press freedom over the last 50 years plummeted to 152 in rankings maintained by an international media watchdog. Another US-based media supervisory organisation included Pakistan among the 10 worst countries for the press freedom.

**FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY:** Political and religious gatherings, rallies and demonstrations were usually banned across the country under the excuse that these increased security risks. However, the law-enforcement agencies failed to apply this rule to government-favoured party and groups' rallies. Women protesters were beaten up and manhandled by men assigned law-enforcement duties on many occasions.

**FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION:** All those who were associated with protesting bodies were brutalised by the law-enforcement agencies throughout the year. The government acknowledged the arrests of over 5,000 in November alone. Students in many educational institutions were warned of expulsion if they showed interests in any protest. Various NGOs working for women's rights, awareness and family planning were forced to shut down or relocate from the Northern Areas after bomb blasts from militants. The government tried to tighten its hold around NGOs by formulating a Code of Conduct, but faced extreme criticism for its closed and faulty modus operandi.

**ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN:** The number of violations against women remained high and there were countless reports of brutal attacks on them. The HRCP recorded 1,202 killings of which honour-killing crimes were 636. There were 755 cases of sexual harassment in which 377 victims, including 166 minors, were raped, and 354 (including 92 minors) were gang-raped. There were 736 kidnappings, 143 attacks by burning and many other abuses against women.

The assassination of Punjab Minister Zile Huma and PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto marked 2007 as a deadly year for women politicians. Female students and teachers received numerous threats to their lives and were told to observe purdah (veil). The ensuing bomb scares and blasts at girls' educational institutions badly affected the attendance and enrolment.

**CHILDREN:** Around 2,038 juvenile prisoners were awaiting trial all over the country because of the non-implementation of a law made in 2000 for their protection. Children, especially minor girls, continued to be the victims of widespread sexual and physical abuse. At least 258 cases of rape and gang-rape and 138 deaths by killing were reported. Child labour and trafficking remained rampant in 2007. Children in the earthquake and refugee camps were vulnerable to harsh weather conditions, disease, contaminated water and lack of extensive medical attention, the report said.

**LABOUR:** Unemployment and financial restraints forced people to take desperate measures. There were 330 suicides and 189 attempted suicides due to these reasons. The number of bonded labourers swelled to 17 million. Labour laws were largely ignored and working conditions and salaries were in gross violation of basic worker rights.

**EDUCATION:** Education became a commodity which only the moneyed people could afford, forcing the poor to send their children to substandard government schools, emerged as another deplorable issue.

**HEALTH:** The situation on the health front also remained worst. As many as six cases of polio were reported despite the fact the disease had been 'eradicated' in the country. Despite the law to prevent organ transplant, the incidence of renal transplant remained high.

Replying to questions, Ms Jahangir said the abolition of the statutory bail system was a major cause for the overcrowding of Pakistani jails. She said the human rights issues were a challenge for the new government which could not resolve these immediately, but must make a positive start in this direction.

### **Muslims want to live under Democracies: Poll**

A major survey that claims to represent one billion Muslims around the world has found that the majority favours democratic rights and representative government, rather than any of their radical alternatives. The overwhelming majority of Muslims strongly feels that the West disrespects both Islam and Muslims, a perception that is broadening the gulf between the world's Muslims and the West. The United States in particular is seen as exhibiting "cultural disrespect" for Islam, as well as being out to gain political domination of Muslim countries. The acute conflicts in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan are major factors that deepen the feeling that the US has little interest in helping their resolution in a manner which ensures that justice is done.

The results of the survey conducted by **Gallup Inc**, which forms the basis of a book – **Who Speaks for Islam by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed** - were released on March 20<sup>th</sup> at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The poll conducted over a period of five years, covering 35 countries and 50,000 respondents. Following are some of the findings:

- Substantial majorities in nearly all nations surveyed say that if asked to draft a constitution for a new country, they would guarantee freedom of speech, "allowing all citizens to express their opinion on the political, social, and economic issues of the day". However, while acknowledging and admiring many aspects of Western democracy, those surveyed do not favour wholesale adoption of Western models of democracy. Many appear to want their own democratic model that incorporates Shariah, which they view as representative of Islamic values and the rule of law.
- They want, both men and women, a model that is democratic and yet inclusive of religious values. In Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, the majorities want Shariah as the "only source" of legislation.
- The majority of women in virtually every country surveyed, including Saudi Arabia, believe that women deserve the same legal rights as men, to vote without influence from family members, to work at any job they are qualified for, and even to serve in the highest levels of government.
- According to the Gallup poll, 7 percent of respondents think that the 9/11 attacks were "completely" justified and view the United States unfavourably. Among those who believe that the 9/11 attacks were not justified, 40 percent are pro-US, but 60 percent view the US unfavourably. Analysing and comparing the answers of the 7 percent with the moderate majority produced some surprising results. The survey makes it clear that the 7 percent it calls "politically radicalized" because of their radical political orientation, are going to commit acts of violence. However, those with extremist views are a potential source for recruitment or support for terrorist groups. Because this group believes in changing political conditions, it is likely to view attacks on civilians as justifiable. Forty-nine percent of the radicals were found to be between the ages of 18 and 29; while 41 percent of those with moderate views are in the same age range. Political radicals are more likely to be male (62 percent), 37 percent being female. In addition, a minority of suicide bombers has been women.
- The data also show that lack of education and poverty are not key factors among those with extremist views. The politically radicalized, on average, are more educated than moderates: 67 percent of the politically radicalized have secondary or higher educations (versus 52 percent of moderates). Radicals are not more economically disadvantaged: 65 percent of the politically radicalized say they have average or above-average income, versus 55 percent of moderates.
- Esposito and Mogahed, the authors of the book – *Who Speaks for Islam* – found that when asked in 2002 what they knew about Islam, 54 percent of Americans said "not much". In January 2007, the number of those who gave the same answer to the same question had risen to 57 percent.
- When Muslims were asked by Gallup what they most admired about the West, the majority replied, "Technology, liberty and democracy." When the same question was put to Americans, they could find

nothing about Islam that they admired. When asked if the 9/11 attacks were justified, 92 percent of Muslims in the 35 countries polled answered in the negative. The 7 percent that justified the attacks could not quote a single verse from the Quran to support their view.

## **MFIs unable to tackle Rising Competition – Survey**

The current flood of investment into the microfinance industry could overwhelm those Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) that are not equipped to meet the pressures of rapid growth and rising competition. The high expectations that people have of microfinance both as a social movement and a financial investment could be disappointed, says a new **survey of the risks facing the industry worldwide including Pakistan**. Microfinance Banana Skins 2008, published at a time when the sector is undergoing dramatic changes, reveals strong doubts among microfinance practitioners, investors and observers about the ability of many MFIs to adapt to new demands while still retaining their social objectives. Current levels of management experience and financial skills are seen as a challenge for the industry, though these deficiencies are not universal, and are being addressed in many parts of the world. The Banana Skins report reflects the views of more than 300 respondents from 74 countries, and is the most comprehensive survey undertaken of the risk outlook for microfinance. The survey focuses on MFIs with more than \$5m in assets which are profitable and capable of commercial growth. These number about 350 and account for the bulk of microfinance assets globally. The survey was sponsored by Citi Foundation and the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), with support from the Council of Microfinance Equity Funds (CMEF) and the Microfinance Information exchange (MIX).

Of the 29 risks - or 'Banana Skins' - identified by the survey, many of the top ones are linked to factors directly under MFIs' own control, such as the **quality of management and corporate governance, rising costs, staffing, managing technology, and credit risk**. The main risks in the operating environment are **bad regulation and political interference**, though market risks such as interest rates and foreign exchange are growing as MFIs become more integrated with mainstream markets.

The fastest rising risk is identified as the **growth of competition**, driven by the appeal of microfinance to outside investors and commercial banks. Competitive pressures are seen to be undermining standards, cutting into profitability and aggravating staffing problems, though they are also spurring innovation and forcing down prices. Unless MFIs can manage these pressures, some could fail and damage the reputation of microfinance more widely. The survey was carried out by the Centre for the Study of Financial Innovation, an independent not-for-profit think tank based in London which explores the future of financial services. The CSFI has been running regular 'Banana Skins' surveys of the banking and insurance industries for more than 10 years, and has taken a close interest in the prospects for microfinance. The 40-page report provides a commentary on each of the 29 risks, and breaks down responses by type and region, providing a detailed view of the concerns by geography and different classes of respondent.

## **Economic Issues and IFIs**

### **WB Counsels Pakistan Price Adjustments and Reforms to Avert Economic Crisis**


A senior World Bank official said that rapid adjustments and reforms are necessary to avert "an economic crisis" in Pakistan. Praful Patel, Vice-President of the World Bank, after a three-day visit to Pakistan said that Pakistan will need international community's support in the coming months. He said in a statement issued by World Bank's local office on March 27 that if action is not taken, the economy will start to falter. But with right policies and strong support from multilateral and bilateral partners, we believe the high growth and poverty reduction path can be maintained in Pakistan. Mr. Patel said that high international prices of petroleum products and food items were creating challenges for Pakistan's economy. Mr. Patel said that countries like the United States and Japan and the European Union were facing the same reality, He said that while Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and remittances had maintained pace and the stock market posted gains, fiscal deficit, inflation, current account deficit and foreign exchange reserves would miss their target this year. During his three-day visit, Mr. Patel held talks with economic officials and leaders of the new government and discussed ways of protecting poor people in case domestic prices were adjusted.

### **Donors Reject Government's Claim on Poverty Reduction**

Contrary to official claims, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) say that poverty has increased in Pakistan since 2004 and the new government should take the issue seriously. The banks planned to

offer \$600 million conditional funding to the new government to check the trend by associating “credible private sector organizations” in the effort. Both the donors want their new funding to be channelled through the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), micro-finance banks and reputed non-government organizations. The World Bank and the ADB would also ensure that their new assistance was utilized in a transparent manner and that complaints of financial irregularities must be addressed by the incoming federal and provincial governments. The funding will be for a three-year period.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Q government had claimed that poverty had been reduced from 33 per cent to 23 per cent and unemployment from over 10 per cent to seven per cent. However, the World Bank and the ADB maintained that poverty had declined only by five percentage points by 2004. A PPAF official said he did not want to go into the controversy about the figures but efforts were being made to lower the menace of poverty. He said that the private organization had been offered over \$700 million soft loan by the World Bank over the past few years. He said that our work has been appreciated and now we expect a bigger World Bank funding. He said the new funding would help develop 100,000 new communities to be offered small loans for poverty reduction, health and education. Former Director of Pakistan Institute of Development Economists, Dr A.R. Kamal, said there was some reduction in poverty during 2000-4 but the government’s claim of 10 percentage points reduction was controversial. He said there is no data available to gauge the government’s claim of poverty reduction.



### **Gilani's Meeting with US Deputy Secretary of State**

In his final meeting with any foreign visitor after taking oath, Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani told the United States that decisions on all important policy matters and national issues would be taken by Parliament as the Government is determined to fight terrorism in all its forms politically, economically and strategically. Yousaf Raza Gillani, in his first meeting with US Deputy Secretary of State, John D. Negroponte, said that the Parliament is a sovereign body and every effort will be made to ensure its supremacy. He further said that terrorism is a matter of concern for us and we would confront it with full determination.

### **Hillary to Change Pakistan Policy**

US Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton has promised to end the Bush administration's "one dimensional" policy towards Pakistan if voted to power because it focuses on President Pervez Musharraf and ignores the people. In a policy statement issued by her headquarters, Mrs. Clinton vowed to push for improving relations between India and Pakistan if she wins the 2008 Presidential election. The Democratic leader also promised to increase non-military US assistance to Pakistan and to make the military aid more accountable. Mrs. Clinton, who won three key primaries this week to reassert herself as a leading contender for the White House, blamed the Bush administration for ignoring Afghanistan by entering into an unpopular war in Iraq.

Consequently, "Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan have now merged into one of the most dangerous regions of the world, and one of the most strategically important to the United States," she said. "The recent Pakistan elections are a key step toward the return of democracy for Pakistan and the establishment of a civilian-led government," she observed. Mrs. Clinton stressed that the Feb 18 elections should send a signal to policymakers in Washington that they need to reassess their policies towards Pakistan.

### **Elections in Nepal**

Nepal would be holding its Parliamentary elections on April 10, 2008. Two main political parties are Nepal Communist Party (UML) and Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Chand). In 1999 elections Nepali Congress won by acquiring 113 seats and 36.14 percent of votes.

In 1991 elections 7 women were elected as compared to 198 men, in 1994 polls again 7 women made to Parliament while there were 198 men. In 1999 elections, the number of elected women increased to 12 as compared to 193 men.

**TR & WPAF STOs to Observe Nepalese Elections:** A two-member STOs team of TR & WPAF would be observing the upcoming Nepalese Elections.

### **Malaysian Prime Minister Sworn-In**

Malaysia's Prime Minister took the oath of office for a new five-year term on 10 March, rejecting calls to resign after an unprecedented electoral setback that has shaken the country's political landscape. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was sworn in front of King Mizan Zainal Abidin, the constitutional monarch, and dozens of government dignitaries in the national palace's glittering throne room.

### **Bhutan Elected First Democratic Government**

Bhutan's landmark polls to elect the country's first democratic government ended on March 24 in a landslide win for a party led by a US-educated two-time former Premier. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), or Bhutan United Party, scored an unexpected clean sweep, winning 44 of the 47 seats in the country's lower house in what had been seen as a tight race, the election commission announced. The DPT is led by 56-year-old ex-Premier Jigmi Thinley, who commands wide respect among Bhutan's educated elite and is now expected to be the country's first elected Prime Minister. The elections were proposed by Bhutan's revered royal family — which has ruled for a century — to peacefully transform the small Buddhist country, wedged in the Himalayas between India and China, into a constitutional monarchy. The rival People's Democratic Party (PDP) is headed by Sangay Ngedup

— King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck's uncle — who not only lost the race for premiership, but also his constituency. Analysts say Thinley was perceived to be a man of the people, especially by the poor, while Ngedup's royal connections went against him. Nearly 80 percent of the over 318,000 voters turned up to cast their vote.

**Bhutan – First Ever Elections:** Change is a word often used at election time, but in Bhutan you can sense it at every political meeting and on every door knocking drive. In the run-up to the country's first ever general election on March 24, voters and politicians had to figure out how democracy works and, more important, how to import the concept without hurting their traditions. A few weeks ago, in Khuruthang, a town in the verdant Punakha Valley, workers from the People's Democratic Party – pitched a tent in the courtyard of the town's temple. Buddhism is central to life in this tiny Himalayan Kingdom and temple grounds are regularly used for town meetings. Just then, a local election official called with news; no political party can hold a meeting near a temple, since the brand new draft constitution separates church and state. The Party organizer argued that the choice of venue had nothing to do with religion and everything to do with the temple's nice lawn and handy power outlets. But a rule's rule, so campaign workers tore down the tent and moved the meeting to a dusty, half built hotel nearby. They have to. In 2005, Bhutan's fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, announced that he would abdicate in favour of his son and that the country, after nearly a century of mostly benign royal rule, would become a constitutional monarchy with a popularly elected Parliament. Most Bhutanese were horrified fearing that democracy could lead to instability, as it had in neighbours such as Nepal and Bangladesh, But the King insisted, explaining that no nation should be in the hands of one person and that change should happen while the country was still peaceful and prosperity was growing.

The two parties that competed in the election have nearly identical platforms, but accusations (mild by Western standards) of influence-padding and smear tactics have begun to enter the discourse, and people are worrying that Bhutan's close knit society will suffer. Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, Bhutan's Chief Justice and the main architect of the draft constitution, understands that there should be a political debate but laments the differences are splitting villages and even families. The political change – the election was swept by the DrukPhuensum Tshogpa (DPT, or Virtuous Bhutan Party), which is seen as more royalist of the two --- comes as Bhutan grapples with its shifting place in the world. Squeezed between giants China and India, it has slowly opened up over the past few decades. There still may not be a single stoplight in the Capital. Thimphu, but there are Internet cafes. Bhutan's royal leaders are prodding their tiny nation into the rushing stream of globalization.

## Southeast Asia

### **Suu Kyi Barred from Myanmar Election under New Charter**

According to the proposed new Constitution of Myanmar, detained Nobel laureate and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will not be allowed to stand for election in army-ruled Myanmar because she was once married to a foreigner. A copy of the Charter confirmed that a "person who is entitled to rights and privileges of a foreign Government or a citizen of a foreign country" cannot run for office. Suu Kyi, 62, was married to British academic Michael Aris from 1972 until his death in 1999, and as such was entitled to hold a British passport. However, rather than being an invention of the former Burma's military junta to keep their nemesis at bay, the clause has simply been copied across from Myanmar's two previous constitutions of 1947 and 1974, experts said. The proposed charter, a key step in the generals seven-point "roadmap to democracy", goes to a referendum some time in May and has left opponents of the junta in a quandary, unsure whether to vote "Yes" or "No". Integral to the "discipline-flourishing democracy" advocated by the generals is a proviso that 25 percent of seats in Parliament are reserved for the military. The commander-in-chief of the armed forces will also be the most powerful person in the country, with the right to suspend the constitution at will. However, the charter also enshrines many rights that have been absent for nearly the last two decades.

Under the proposed Charter, the Southeast Asian nation's 53 million people will be allowed to form political parties and unions and freedom of the press and religion will be protected. Myanmar's myriad ethnic groups, many of whom have waged years of guerrilla war since independence from Britain in 1948, will also be accorded the specific right to promote their own languages and cultures. While some people are refusing to approve any constitution spawned by a reviled military regime, others say it is better to have a bad constitution than none at all. Information Minister Kyaw Hsan said that the Charter would be open to incremental change after multi-party elections slated for 2010.

## **Myanmar's Human Rights Record Worsened in 2007 – US State Department Report**

According to a report by the State Department of United States, Myanmar's violent suppression of pro-democracy marches last September made the military-ruled country's already poor human rights record even worse. Burma is the former name of the Southeast Asian country. The report said that throughout the year, the regime continued to commit extrajudicial killings and was responsible for disappearances, arbitrary and indefinite detentions, rape, and torture. At least 31 people were killed when the junta sent troops to crush pro-democracy marches led by Buddhist monks in September, according to the United Nations and other agencies. Some rights groups put the death toll much higher and noted that the reported dead did not include Buddhist monks. The State Department's report said that at year's end many of the monks had not returned, and many remained missing. Myanmar's junta did not honour its commitment to begin a genuine discussion with the democratic opposition and ethnic minority groups. Defying calls from the UN Security Council and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for the early release of all political prisoners, the regime continued to hold opposition leaders under incarceration, including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who remained under house arrest. The report added that private citizens and political activists continued to 'disappear' for periods ranging from several hours to several weeks or more, and many persons never reappeared.

## **East Asia**

### **China Vows Reforms for More Equal Society**

On March 5, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao pledged a more equal society and streamlined government, as he vowed to address a vast array of problems tarnishing the nation's remarkable modernization drive. Wen Jiabao used his annual 'state of the nation' speech to Parliament to promise reforms that would make life more fair for the country's 1.3 billion people, who have experienced massive changes during three decades of historic reforms. Just months before Beijing hosts the Olympic Games, Mr Wen said inflation, which hit a near 12-year high of 7.1 per cent in January, topped the list of national concerns. Against this backdrop, Mr. Wen said some of the other problems the Government needed to address were the environmental consequences of economic growth, food and drug safety, a lack of jobs and an inadequate social safety net. He also said the gap between rich and poor was continuing to grow, especially between the fast-developing cities and the rural areas. Cutting massive bureaucracy in China while pushing ahead with political reforms were two key areas identified by the Premier in the government's plans, but he said the Communist Party would not loosen its grip on power. About Government efficiency, Mr. Wen announced plans that could lead to the consolidation of the many Government departments and ministries. There are currently 28 full-blown ministries, and dozens of other bodies of nearly equal weight, and there has been speculation for months the Government intended to collapse many into "super-ministries".

## **Middle East**

### **UNSC Slapped More Sanctions on Iran**

The United Nations Security Council adopted a third set of sanctions regime against Iran on 3 March, with a vote of 14-0 demanding that Tehran halt its uranium enrichment activities. Indonesia, one of the 10 non-permanent members of the 15-member Security Council, abstained saying it was not convinced that more sanctions were warranted against Iran, which in its opinion was cooperating with the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran rejected the resolution saying it was pursuing its rights in accordance with Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) under the supervision of UN watchdog atomic agency (IAEA). The five permanent council members --- the United States, China, Russia, Britain and France --- and Germany, which is not on the council, agreed in Berlin on Jan 22 on a draft text outlining a third round of sanctions against Tehran. Libya, Vietnam and South Africa who had expressed serious reservations over the new sanctions resolution eventually voted in favour of the resolution in order to preserve what they termed "the council's unity. The resolution 1803 banned for the first time trade with Iran in goods that have both civilian and military uses. It would introduce financial monitoring on two banks with suspected links to proliferation activities --- Bank Melli and Bank Saderat.

The Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations, Mohammad Khazee, in his remarks before the vote observed in reality, people across the globe have now lost their trust in the Security Council and consider the actions of the council as result of political pressure exerted by a few powers to advance their own agenda. Libya's UN Ambassador said that Israel's nuclear weapons programme should also be examined by the international community and deplored the Israeli attitude. The resolution would freeze the assets of about a dozen companies and a dozen individuals with links to Iran's nuclear or ballistic missile programmes. It would require countries to

exercise vigilance and report the travel or transit of those individuals. It also imposes a travel ban on several individuals linked to Iran's nuclear effort. The resolution, however, welcomes Iran's agreement with the IAEA to resolve all outstanding issues about its past nuclear programme "and progress in this regard". It reiterates that the package of incentives offered by the five permanent council nations and Germany in June 2006 remains on the table if Iran suspends enrichment.

### **60pc Voter Turnout in Iranian Elections**

On March 14, Iranians voted in a Parliamentary Election weighted in favour of supporters of the Islamic Republic's establishment. Many reformist opponents of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were barred from the race. But the new Assembly might not give him an easy ride, even if conservatives dominate. Interior Minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi said some results would be announced on Saturday, but Tehran might take longer. He said turnout exceeded the 50 per cent of four years ago, while another official said it topped 60 per cent.

Some Ahmadinejad's rival politicians said their informal exit polls suggested the United Front, the most pro-government group of candidates, was doing well in Tehran. Conservatives held 26 of the capital's 30 seats in the outgoing assembly. But even if conservative factions consolidate their grip on the 290-seat assembly, there are critics as well as supporters of Ahmadinejad in their ranks. Some of his potential rivals in next year's Presidential election say he has fuelled inflation. Others blame his foreign policies. The Security Council this month imposed more sanctions on the Islamic Republic over its nuclear programme. Reformists favouring more political and social freedom had hoped to capitalize on public discontent about inflation, now at 19 per cent. But the vetting process and a government crackdown on dissent muted their challenge. They may struggle to keep the 40 or so seats they had held in the previous Parliament. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who usually stays above the political fray, effectively endorsed Ahmadinejad in remarks published on Thursday and relayed in mobile phone text messages as voters went to the polls.