

Gender

Pakistani Women Parliamentarians

Faryal Talpur Elected Unopposed

Faryal Talpur, former Nawabshah nazim and sister of PPP Co-chairman Asif Zardari, was elected unopposed to the National Assembly from NA-207 Larkana. 14 aspirants had submitted nomination forms for by-election for NA-207, which fell vacant after Benazir Bhutto's death. Nomination forms of PPP-SB candidate Mumtaz Ali Gopan were rejected on technical grounds. All other candidates of various political parties and independent candidate Abdul Majeed had withdrawn their nomination forms. Returning officer for NA-207 Jan Muhammad Kalhoro therefore declared Faryal Talpur as the unopposed winner.

With the success of Faryal Talpur, the number of directly elected women Parliamentarians has reached to 16. Overall (both on General and Reserved Seats) there are 76 (22.22%) women Members in National Assembly which is the highest ever representation of women in the history of Pakistan's Parliament.

Sherry Rehman on Women's Empowerment

Information Minister Sherry Rehman said on May 25 that Government land allotments will be made to female family members according to a proposed five-point programme for women's empowerment. Addressing the International Conference on Women's Leadership, she said her plan — yet to be presented to the cabinet — would also obligate **20 percent participation of women in public limited and autonomous organizations**. Sherry, who also holds the portfolio of Women's Development at the federal level, said the government would **empower women in the households in the new fiscal budget**. It would bring them into the mainstream and would give them the opportunities to make choices. She added that the **Constitution gave equal rights to women and women's rights were part of the fundamental human rights**. The Minister also said domestic violence is a major problem for women not only in Pakistan or the South Asian region, but internationally. She said that the **PPP had already put together a domestic violence bill**, which would be tabled in the National Assembly for legislation. Sherry said the government would set up burn and crisis centres for women for relief, help and legal advice.

Tauqir Fatima Bhutto to take steps for Women's Empowerment

Sindh Minister for Women Development Tauqir Fatima Bhutto has said that all-out efforts are being made to provide facilities for the welfare of women and **Rs 30,000 would be provided as loan through the micro-finance scheme on easy installments to women who want to start business at their homes and earn livelihood**. She was addressing an open katchery at Government High School Naudero, District Larkana on May 5. She said that there are limited resources while the problems are unlimited. Sindh Minister for Women Development Ms. Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto said her Ministry plans to establish **working women's hostels in all districts of the Province**. She said that her Ministry is considering various proposals for women's welfare to be included in the forthcoming budget and one of the proposal pertained to the establishment of working women's hostels. She said **women centres would be established in Larkana, Sukkur, Hyderabad and other districts for the rehabilitation of women in distress** adding that these centres would work to create public awareness about violence against women and provide free legal assistance in addition to accommodation, vocational training and psychological counseling to the needy women. The Minister said **display centre will be established in**

which locally made handicrafts and articles will be placed for sale. Besides, she said the **closed girl's schools will be opened and tuition centres will be set up under the Department's literacy programme, which could accommodate thirty ladies to get education free of cost.** Its expenses will be borne by the Women Development Department. She stressed the need for greater skill development to open further avenues of gainful employment for women in rural areas. The Minister exhorted the women to use their political power for addressing and resolving the problems of their community especially in areas of education, health and sustainable development. The Minister said the problems presented by the womenfolk here in the open katchert included family problems, unemployment and financial assistance from zakat funds and bait-ul-mal for the poor womenfolk.

Government to take steps for ending Gender Discrimination: Shazia Marri

Sindh Minister for Information Shazia Marri has said that women in the rural as well as urban societies are facing harassment and gender discrimination and the present PPP government will take steps to ensure end to it. She was speaking as chief guest at a workshop on "Provincial Consultation on Women Rights Strategy 2008" organized by Action Aid society. Female activists from various parts of Sindh & Balochistan presented papers in the workshop on situation analysis towards women status in the society.

Ms. Shazia Marri said that women are being crushed due to male domination and in rural areas their sufferings are at higher level. She said 'pardah' is not an issue of the day and we must not compel women to separate themselves from the values of our society but we have to encourage them to follow good morals & values. She emphasized upon change of attitudes towards women at house hold level by taking them on board to form a new strategy for them. She assured that the Government is committed to give a reality to the dreams of Mohtrarma Benazir Bhutto regarding women rights and called upon the civil society to come forward and help government to get rid of bad values from our social life.

Fehmida assures Punishment for Perpetrators of Crime

National Assembly Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza assured 'Certainty of Punishment' for perpetrators of crime linked to domestic violence. Talking to media during her visit to Burns Centre at Civil Hospital - Karachi, the speaker said legislation would be among the top priorities of the public representatives to protect the marginalized sections.

National Assembly speaker prior to her talk with media went to the centre's ICU and enquired well-being of Zakira, mother of seven children admitted with severe acid burns. She was a victim of homicidal with the perpetrator presently behind the bars. There was also Nagina from Hyderabad with 84 percent burns who told the speaker that injury was inflicted to her 36 days ago due to stove burst. The women recuperating fast was brought with ventilation injury and her lungs were severely affected. The Speaker answering a question said her visit to the Burns Centre was intended to acquire first-hand information about the exact nature of problems faced by doctors and staff as well as patients visiting the facility. Dr Fehmida, herself a qualified medical doctor, said the media need to educate masses about prevention as well as about emergency first-aid to burns victim. Taking notice of the fact that burn victims even from remote areas of Sindh and Balochistan were brought to the facility. With varied degrees of injuries, she said public-private partnership was required to establish relevant medical facilities in Civil Hospitals Hyderabad, Sukkur etc.

Women Job Quota to be increased by 2 percent

Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly Shehla Raza said on May 6 that the PPP government is doing all out efforts to empower women in the country adding that job quota for women will be increased from ten percent to twelve percent in all departments. She said this while addressing a reception held by Women's Action Forum (WAF) in the honour of newly elected women members of provincial assembly. She said that the government has chalked out strategy to increase the number of leady health workers at least up to 0.3 million. She further said that government has adopted the reconciliation policy to run the system in democratic way.

Women & Economics

The Dismal State of Female Home-Based Workers

Home-based female workers constitute 60% of the total labour in Pakistan's informal sector and makes a significant contribution to the national economy, but neither their work is recognized nor they enjoy any legal status. The level of official apathy towards these workers can be judged from the fact that the Government has so far not ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Convention 177, which recognizes the rights of home-

based workers for social security benefits, gratuity, medical facilities, increase in wages, and calls upon the state to give legal cover to these rights. As a result of persistent struggle by the workers' bodies, the Pakistan Government acknowledged the presence of home-based workers in its 2002 labour policy. However, no action has been taken so far to translate those policies into a law. Moreover, there is as yet, no provision in the Labour Laws of Pakistan that applies to these workers. The definition of the payment of Wages Act 1936, West Pakistan Shops and Establishments Act 1969, Industrial Relations Ordinance 1969, the Maternity Benefits Ordinance 1958, and the Employees Old Age Benefit Act does not cover the home-based workers at all. Consequently, these workers, especially the female ones, have become the worst victims of injustice and exploitation by the sub-contractors. Unprotected by law, these female workers are constrained to work in the widespread, heterogeneous and unorganized informal sector and remain at the mercy of the sub-contractors, both for work and for payment of wages. Further, their work is of casual and temporary nature and often they remain without employment for prolonged durations. On an average, working women in the informal sector earn less than half the salaries the men get. Due to growing inflation and unemployment, the financial condition of these workers is getting worse. The treatment being meted out to the women workers is contrary to the provisions enshrined in the Constitution. Article 3 binds the state to "ensure elimination of all forms of exploitation" while Article 25(2) clearly states that "there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone". But, practically very little seems to have been done during the last six decades to give the home-based female workers their due rights.

According to conservative estimates of organizations like ActionAid, CIDA, Women Workers Helpline and Labour Education Foundation, there are about 20 million home-based workers in Pakistan, including 12 million women. The absence of enforcement of minimum wages, in accordance with the national law, on the female workers in the informal sector will leave them at the mercy of middlemen and influential employers. Civil society organizations have drafted a Social Protection Bill for female home-based workers, which they intend to present to the members of National Assembly for consideration and adoption. The bill envisages social benefits like sickness benefits, maternity benefits, family benefits, injury benefits, disablement benefits, gratuity, death, grant and survivor's pension for home-based workers of various hues and colours.

Women & HR

Malaysia Drops Idea of Travel Restrictions for Women

Malaysia rejected on May 5 a proposal to impose restrictions on women travelling overseas on their own following an outcry from women's groups. Home (Interior) Minister Syed Hamid Albar said his ministry could not impose conditions requiring women to get written consent from their family before they can travel abroad alone. When a person applies for a passport, we don't ask them where they are going. A person who wants to travel, makes his or her own decision to travel and how they are going to do it is up to them.

Using women to smuggle drugs: Foreign Minister Rais Yatim said on May 3 that both the Foreign and Home ministries mooted the idea in response to a string of cases where international drug syndicates used women travelling alone to smuggle drugs across borders. The Foreign Ministry clarified on May 5 that Rais's proposal only related to children and women below 21 years of age. The ministry in a statement said that the proposal to facilitate young people with parental letters of intent would not be a violation of human rights since it would, if accepted, only apply to those who are still under the legal guardianship of their parents to begin with. The proposal is not in any way intended to belittle or violate any rights.

Women's groups over the weekend had reacted with outrage, calling the proposal "ridiculous" and "regressive". One of the groups, Sisters in Islam, declined to speculate a hidden religious motive but said the idea assumed women were less capable than men to make decisions. At the weekend, Bernama portrayed the proposal as an anti-crime measure rather than a religiously inspired idea and said it aimed to ensure that a woman's family would "monitor her departure and serve as a preventive measure against being duped". Rais was quoted as saying that the idea came out of a review of criminal cases involving Malaysians abroad. He said in 119 cases of Malaysian women being brought before foreign courts, around 90 percent were linked to drugs.

Women & Media

Uks Research Centre launched Pakistani Women Media Network

Aiming to bring together women working in print and electronic media on to one platform, the Uks Research Centre launched Pakistani Women Media Network (PWMN) on May 16. The ceremony was attended by a large number of journalists who shared their experiences while encouraging each other in what was a friendly

environment. The younger newswomen were briefed on the efforts and sacrifices made by previous generations of journalists in bringing women into mainstream journalism. Introducing the project, Uks Director Tasneem Ahmer said that PWMN project was the result of Uks's decade-long struggle for fair and sensitive reporting on women's issues. She said that struggle to form a platform for women journalists gained momentum with the publication of 'Changing Images' in 2001, a national study on monitoring and sensitization of print media on the portrayal of women. She said that the idea of forming the PWMN was crystallized in 2003 during the conceptualization of 'A gender Sensitive Code of Ethics for Print Media in Pakistan that addressed journalists' code and ethics for gender-just reporting.

She said that the network is also a tribute to the brave and pioneering women journalists who are no more with us among them Najma Babar, Najma Ahmed, Razia Bhatti, Amenah Azam Ali and Saneeya Hussain.

Highlighting the objectives behind launching the project, Tasneem said that it would address a number of issues with specific focus on factors behind the under-representation of women in the media and their absence at the decision-making level. She explained that this will be a part of Uks's daily and regular media monitoring aimed at ensuring a fair and equal representation of women working in the media. She said that the forum would encourage induction of more women in journalism and would work for provision of better environment and facilities for them. Civil society activist Tahira Abdullah drew the attention of the participants towards the negative projection of women in the advertising sector. She pointed out that women are portrayed as a marketing object and there is a need to work in this direction. Television anchorperson Asma Shirazi said that women had to work harder than men to prove themselves. "There is so much discouragement, women have to face in this field and most of the new lot is given specific assignments related to women issues, fashion and art thus keeping them aside from hardcore journalism. She said that women professionals should not expect encouragement and praises from the society for moving ahead. "If you are talented, no one can stop you from rising in your profession. Senior journalists Shameem Akramullah and Farida Hafeez spoke about their struggle to bring about change in the mindset of the society and their employers at the time when journalism was not considered a domain of women. Highlighting the problems faced by women in journalism, the only female press photographer Sadia Seher said that when she started off with her career following the death of her husband, also a photographer, she was discouraged by male colleagues at the news agency her spouse used to work for. The male colleagues insisted that it was not the field for a woman especially in this society, she said adding that she took that criticism, as a challenge and worked harder to make a position in this field. Later, Tasneem said that women in major urban cities had become more or less acceptable in this profession but those living in less developed cities or in rural areas never got a chance to choose such a field. Rohi TV Anchorpersons from Multan told the participants about the opposition they faced from their 'Baradri' and family on choosing this profession.

South Asian Women Media Association

South Asian Women Media Association--SAWMA (working title) was launched on April 19 2008 at Lahore through a meeting of 40 Lahore based media-women. Subsequently, it was introduced in Karachi, Islamabad and Peshawar in May, forming local chapters in all 4 cities. SAWMA has been created after the realization that the number of women joining the media arena has not translated into equality in the workplace. Issues such as sexual harassment, equal wages, and maternity care still remain high and are not highlighted enough. SAWMA aims to serve as a platform for discussion on women related issues in the media. It also aims to facilitate networking among women in the media, national as well as regional and international media organizations, sensitize media organizations and the public to women related issues and ensure adequate representation of women in various sectors of the media. One of the association's major goals is to ensure equality of opportunity in media organizations and lobby for and introduce policies and clear guidelines for a gender-friendly working environment in all media organizations. SAWMA, being a South Asian association, will have chapters in all countries of the SAARC region, and work on it has already been started. The Pakistan chapter will hold its first national conference end summer 2008. SAWMA's website and logo are on hold only till finalisation of the title and can be expected end June 2008. South Asian free Media Association is the facilitator of the association and lends administrative and financial support to SAWMA. However, SAWMA is independent in all other matters. The core group making up the SAWMA secretariat consists of: Shehar Bano Khan from Dawn, Zebunnisa Burki from SAFMA, Munizae Jehangir from Geo English and Bushra Sultana from SAFMA.

75% Sindhi Girls have never been to School: WB

A World Bank mission led by Reema Nayyar and Senior Minister for Education and Literacy Pir Mazharul Haq disclosed on May 7 that fifty percent of children aged five in the rural areas of Sindh are not attending school and approximately seventy-five percent of girls have never attended one. The meeting's main focus was on the Sindh Education Reform Programme (SERP). Haq assured the World Bank's delegation that all transfers and postings in the education department will be made purely on merit and no political pressure will be accepted. The WB was also assured that closed schools would be reopened. The Education Minister was informed during the meeting that not a single school has been upgraded in his constituency district Dadu over the past five years. In response to this, the Education Department will be sending a written complaint to the Sindh Chief Minister for action against Zila Nazim Dadu Karim Ali Jatoti and than DCO Dadu Aijaz Mangi. Although the De-centralized Elementary Education Programme (DEEP) has wound up, the Sindh government has made other arrangements to continue providing scholarships to female students of Class 9 through intermediate.

Articles on Gender

The Gender Dimension

It is said that economic development automatically reduces gender disparities. This, however, has not been the case in Pakistan – despite several decades of economic growth, gender disparities remain as glaring as always in the country. Some may argue that poverty is similar to pandemic that affects everyone irrespective of the gender. After all, in 2005, Pakistan was ranked 136th out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) – a composite measure of human progress in terms of education, life expectancy and standards of living. A low HDI suggests that poverty has affected everyone indiscriminately and resulted in overall low standard of living. That poverty is pervasive an irrefutable truth, but it can be proved that it impacts women to a greater extend than men. Statistics such as the Gender Related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Employment Index (GEM), cited in the UNDP's Human Development Report 2007-2008 Report endorse this. Pakistan's GDI which indicates the level of gender inequalities was ranked at 151 out of 153 countries. Similarly, the country's GEM – which reflects the political, technical, professional and economic opportunities available to women – was ranked at 82 out of 93 countries.

Research has proved that narrowing the differences between men and women leads to economic development, which in turn reduces poverty. Substantial gender disparities manifest in Pakistan are symptomatic of a flawed social and economic structure. The entire economic matrix will have to be overhauled to purge it of such inequalities. For this to transpire, gender differences ought to be incorporated into the economic analysis and outcomes of public policies be assessed for impact on gender. Most importantly, fiscal policies and the national budget have to be formulated with a gender consideration. On the face of it, budgets are gender-or-class neutral policy instrument, because it deals with financial aggregates such as expenditures and revenues. But budgets appear to be gender-neutral only because they are prepared following a gender-blind approach. It needs to be remembered that Government expenditures and revenues have variable effects on men and women since both occupy different social and economic positions. The interaction between gender and budget can be demonstrated by the fact that governments which concentrate spending in policies for enhancing women's employment achieve high growth rates.

To avoid the disparities caused by gender-blind budgets, policy makers have proposed that gender dimension should be embodied in the budgetary paradigm. In other words, Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) should become the norm. GRB should not be mistaken for being an 'add-on budget for women' or a policy that exacerbates deficits by allocating funds for gender whether the Government's distribution of scarce resources is equitable and optimal so that the objective of gender equality is met. It ensures that budgets are aligned with policies and address the gender mainstreaming. In Pakistan, proposals for GRB were put across several times and the Ministry of Women Development demanded its introduction in a paper submitted for the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) in 2001. However the first step in this connection was taken with the inception of Gender Responsive Budgeting Initiative (GRBI) in 2005. The GRBI is a pilot project launched by the Government in collaboration with the UNDP and other donor agencies., including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. It helped Ministry of Finance and Punjab Finance Department to prepare Gender Budget Statements (GBS), a document that specifies the planned projects and funds allocated for the current and next financial years. However, the GBS being presented with the budget for the last two-years were not without flaws.

A major limitation was that only a few categories of spending had a pro-women component or were gender-specific in nature. According to actual expenditure figures of the Federal Budget 2006-07, only five percent of the development and one percent of the current budget could be classified as gender-specific. An analysis of the gender patterns in employment in the public sector reveals that women had a unemployment rate of 9.6 percent against 6.7 percent of men. The persistence of such glaring disparities requires the review of budgetary allocations. The concept of GRB can be promoted in the country if the Government partners with NGO and academic research on the issue. Currently only budget spending is being evaluated for gender effects. A more comprehensive analysis is possible if the gender impact of tax policies is also determined. The ultimate success of GRB should not only be gauged in terms of changes in the budget and its priorities. Rather, it should be determined by the extent to which women have started to participate in budget debates and decision-making.

Detailed article by Ambreen Saadat was published in The News on June 1, 2008.

Are Americans Aversed to Female Leadership?

A woman? Yes. But not that woman. It is the platitude of the moment, an automatic rejoinder to any suggestion that Hillary Clinton has struggled so desperately -- and so far unsuccessfully -- to grasp the Democratic presidential nomination in some measure because she is female. It isn't the woman part, the rationale goes. It's the Clinton part: That "polarizing" persona and "unlikable" demeanor. The unappetizing thought of President "Billary." The more inspirational quest by Barack Obama to become the country's first black President.

Yet the question remains: If not now, when? If not Hillary, who? The record suggests that if Clinton is not the nominee, no woman will seriously contend for the White House for another generation. This was the outcome of the 1984 Geraldine Ferraro experiment. After 24 years, Ferraro remains the only woman ever to run for national office on a major party ticket. And she was selected, not elected, as a vice presidential candidate. "Maybe a generation from now," says Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "My feeling is, I don't see who's coming after Clinton and I don't feel like it's going to be easy for whoever comes next." The United States already lags miserably behind the rest of the world in electing a woman as head of state. To look around the globe is to see a stark truth: Americans seem peculiarly averse to female leadership. Women have had some success in gaining legislative office. Yet **only eight women currently serve as governors**, the springboard to the White House for four of the last five Presidents. So which woman, exactly, would be acceptable? Someone like Margaret Thatcher or Elizabeth Dole or Condoleezza Rice or Christine Todd Whitman or maybe Kathleen Sebelius, the Democratic governor of Kansas. The roll call itself illuminates the barriers.

Thatcher, for instance, never ran for executive office on her own. She became the first (and only) female Prime Minister of Britain by reaching the leadership of the Conservative Party. That is how many women heads of state have risen -- through Parliamentary systems that often use quotas to guarantee women legislative seats. Americans don't like quotas much. And we don't like political wives who strike out on their own. Yet around the world, presidential spouses, widows and daughters are elected with stunning regularity. Indira Gandhi of India, Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Cristina Fernandez, the current Argentine President -- who succeeded her husband -- all rose to power through family connections. Here, though, revulsion often is expressed at the prospect of the Bushes and Clintons trading the White House among one another. But the "dynasty" argument didn't impede other American political families: not the Adamses, nor the Roosevelts nor the Kennedys. It sure didn't keep George W. Bush from becoming President. Though it never sparked the rancor attached to Clinton's White House drive, Dole's brief presidential bid in 2000 was a preview. Dole, now a Republican senator from North Carolina, served as a Cabinet secretary in two administrations and headed the American Red Cross. Yet a review of media coverage by Rutgers political scientists showed that when Dole received in-depth coverage, nearly two-thirds of the stories mentioned her marriage to Bob Dole, the former Senate Republican leader and presidential candidate. Elizabeth Dole's marriage to a powerful politician often drowned out discussion of her own record. No woman on the political horizon possesses the portfolio that Clinton brought to this campaign: national name recognition. A record as a prodigious fundraiser -- for herself and scores of other Democrats. Winner of two Senate races in New York, a rough-and-tumble state with a trove of 31 Electoral College votes and Democratic donors with deep pockets. And a huge, loyal base of support within her party. Who can compare? Not Secretary of State Rice. She's never run for elective office, and it's tough to run for President with no experience in those muddy trenches. Not Whitman. The former New Jersey governor has openly broken with conservatives who dominate the Republican Party. Not Sebelius. She heads a state with six electoral votes and limited fundraising potential. Clinton cleared the hurdles often cited as holding American women back, yet she is unlikely to surmount the final barrier. So you have to wonder. Is it something about Hillary, or something about us?

Democracy Watch

Bye-Elections

Bye-elections on June 26

The Election Commission (EC) on May 7 announced a new schedule for the bye-elections, which will now be held on June 26. Political parties including those in the ruling coalition had protested against the EC's earlier decision to delay the by-polls to August 18. The Election Commission (EC) of Pakistan had announced earlier that the bye-elections scheduled for June 18 had been postponed for two months until August 18, citing, among other reasons, a report received from the NWFP Home secretary.

The new schedule allows candidates to file their nomination papers from May 8 to May 13. The candidates who submitted their nomination papers on or before May 5 will not be required to file them again, but those who filed their nomination papers on May 6 will be required to file them again. The nominations will be scrutinized from May 14 to May 20. May 24 will be the last day for the filing of appeals against the returning officers' decisions. Decisions on the appeals will be made by May 31. Candidates will be allowed to withdraw by June 2 and a revised list of candidates will be published the same day.

Bye-elections will be held in eight constituencies of the National Assembly – NA-207 (Larkana), NA-147 (Shiekhupura), NA-147 (Okara), NA-11 (Mardan), NA-52 (Rawalpindi), NA-55 (Rawalpindi), NA-119 (Lahore) and NA-123 (Lahore). By polls will also be held for 17 seats of the Punjab Assembly, three of the Sindh Assembly, seven of the NWFP Assembly and three seats of the Balochistan assembly. Political parties welcome decision: PPP, PML-N and ANP hailed the decision.

Schedule for Bye-Elections

S. No.	EVENTS	DATES
1.	Dates for filing of nomination papers with the Returning Officers by the candidates	08-5-2008 to 13-5-2008
2.	Dates for Scrutiny of nomination papers by the Returning Officers	14-5-2008 to 20-5-2008
3.	Last date for filing of appeals against decisions of the Returning Officers rejecting/accepting nomination papers	24-5-2008
4.	Last date for deciding appeals by the Tribunals	31-5-2008
5.	Last date for withdrawal of candidature	02-6-2008
6.	Publication of revised list of candidates	02-6-2008
7.	Polling Day	26-6-2008

5 HC Judges to Decide Poll Pleas

The ECP has notified five Judges of the High Courts as Election Tribunals to dispose of appeals against the decisions of the Returning Officers. As many as 10 judges from all the four high courts including Lahore, Sindh, Peshawar and Balochistan have been appointed as tribunals with the approval of the President. According to a notification, two tribunals have been established for election appeals in Punjab. The first tribunal comprises Justice Mian Najam-uz-Zaman and Justice Tariq Shamim and the second includes Justice Akram Qureshi and Justice Hafiz Tariq Naseem. The Sindh High Court election tribunal comprises Justice Mrs Qaisar Iqbal and Justice Syed Pir Ali Shah. Peshawar High Court tribunal includes Justice Maroof Khan and Justice Ziauddin

Khattak, while the Balochistan High Court election tribunal would have Justice Nadir Khan and Justice Mehta Kailash Nath as members.

The Election Tribunals would hear appeals against approval or rejection of nomination papers by the Returning Officers. These tribunals would dispose of appeals against Returning Officers' decisions of accepting or rejecting the nomination papers of the candidates vying to contest the forthcoming by-polls being held in 38 National and provincial assemblies constituencies across the country. According to Election Commission, in **Punjab**, Justice Mian Muhammad Najam-uz-Zaman and Justice Tariq Shamim, Judges of Lahore High Court have been appointed tribunals for the constituencies; NA-52 Rawalpindi-III, NA-55 Rawalpindi-VI, PP-10 Rawalpindi-X, PP-48 Bhakkar-II, PP-59 Faisalabad-IX, PP-70 Faisalabad-XX, PP-99 Gujranwala-IX, PP-107 Hafizabad-III, PP-118 Mandi Bahuddin-III and PP-124 Sialkot-IV. Moreover, Justice Muhammad Akram and Justice Hafiz Tariq Nasim, Judges of Lahore High Court have been appointed tribunals for the constituencies NA-119 Lahore-II, NA-123 Lahore-VI, NA-131 Sheikhupura-I, NA-147 Okara-V, PP-141 Lahore-XVIII, PP-154 Lahore XVIII, PP-171 Nankana Sahib-II (Old Sheikhupura-X), PP-219 Khanewal-VIII, PP-229 Pakpattan-III, PP-243 D.G Khan-IV, PP-258 Muzaffargarh-VIII, PP-277 Bahawalnagar-I and PP-295 R.Y. Khan-XI. In **Sindh**, Justice Mrs Qaiser Iqbal and Justice Syed Pir Ali Shah, judges of High Court of Sindh have been appointed tribunals for constituencies NA-207 Larkana-cum-Shikarpura-cum-Kamber Shahadkot (Old Larkana-IV), PS-30 Khairpur-II, PS-44 Matiari-cum-Hyderabad (Old Hyderabad-II) and PS-62 Tharparkar-III. In **NWFP**, Justice Maroof Khan and Justice Zia-ud-Din Khattak, judges of Peshwar High Court have been appointed tribunals for the constituencies; NA-11 Mardan-III, PF-20 Charsadda-IV, PF-45 Abbottabad-II, PF-59 Battagram-I, PF-75 Lakki Marwat-II, PF-81 Swat-II, PF-91 Upper Dir-I and PF-92 Upper Dir-II. In **Balochistan**, Justice Muhammad Nadir Khan and Justice Mehta Kailash Nath Kohli, judges of High Court of Balochistan have been appointed tribunals for the constituencies; PB-9 Pishin-II, PB-32 Jhal Magsi (Old Kachchi-III) and PB-44 Lasbela-I.

Faryal Talpur Elected Unopposed

Faryal Talpur, former Nawabshah Nazim and sister of PPP Co-Chairman Asif Zardari, was elected unopposed to the National Assembly from NA-207 Larkana. 14 aspirants had submitted nomination forms for by-election for NA-207, which fell vacant after Benazir Bhutto's death. Nomination forms of PPP-SB candidate Mumtaz Ali Gopan were rejected on technical grounds. All other candidates of various political parties and independent candidate Abdul Majeed had withdrawn their nomination forms. Returning officer for NA-207 Jan Muhammad Kalhoro therefore declared Faryal Talpur as the unopposed winner.

Shahbaz Elected MPA Unopposed

PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif has been elected unopposed from PP-48 (Bhakkar-II), as according to the unofficial result all his rival candidates, on June 2, withdrew their candidature from the said constituency. The Returning Officer made an announcement to this effect here on Monday. The seat was vacated by Saeed Akbar Khan Niwani, who won the Feb 18 general elections from two constituencies.

Attaur Rehman Declared Winner from NA-25 Tank

The Supreme Court on May 5, declared Maulana Attaur Rehman, a candidate of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) from NA-25 Tank, as the winner. Earlier, on May 15, the Apex Court had reserved its judgment on the election petition of Maulana Attaur Rehman, which was filed against Habibullah Kundi, a candidate of PML-Q from the same constituency (NA-25 Tank). A three-member bench, comprising Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar, Justice Ejazul Hassan and Justice Chaudhry Ejaz Yousuf, while allowing the petition of Maulana Attaur Rehman declared him as winner from NA-25, Tank. Maulana Attaur Rehman, younger brother of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, a central leader of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), had filed an election petition in the Supreme Court against Habibullah Kundi, a candidate of PML-Q, challenging the decision of the Peshawar High Court regarding recounting of votes at various polling stations of the constituency. Earlier, the Supreme Court had not stayed the recounting scheduled to be held on March 18 but restrained the Election Commission of Pakistan from notifying the election results of NA-25 until the final decision of the court. Abdul Hafiz Pirzada, counsel for Maulana Attaur Rehman, had argued that the Election Commission was not competent to order recounting of votes after issuance of results to all the candidates on prescribed form. Wasim Sajjad, senior counsel for Habibullah Kundi, had submitted that the Election Commission had not received the election results in prescribed time, which made the election doubtful; adding that delay in announcing the election results was a sheer violation of Section 39 of the Representation of People Act 1976. Sardar Latif Khan Khosa, counsel for a PPP candidate from the same constituency, Dabar Khan had requested for re-polling in the constituency, stating that the consolidation process had not yet taken place in the constituency.

Aitzaz Withdraws from Bye-Elections

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) stalwart and Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan (SCBA) President Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan on May 18 announced withdrawal of his candidature from NA-55 (Rawalpindi) and instead would lead the long march of the legal fraternity on June 10 as already announced by the Pakistan Bar Council. He further declared that the lawyers would start long march from Multan the hometown of Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani.

Coalition Government

PML-N quits Federal Cabinet

Federal ministers from PML-N on May 13 tendered their resignations to Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who "politely refused" to accept them until PPP Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari returned to Pakistan. He asked the ministers to continue to hold their offices meanwhile. The PML-N ministers also submitted the resignation of Commerce Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who is not in Pakistan. While addressing a news conference after the meeting, PML-N leader Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said Gilani asked the ministers to withdraw their resignations, and even talked to Nawaz Sharif on the phone asking him to withdraw the resignations, but he refused.

PML-N Ministers' Slots to Remain Vacant

Co-Chairman PPP Asif Ali Zardari asked Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on May 14 not to accept the resignations of nine Federal Ministers belonging to PML-N. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the overall political situation in the country that arose after the resignations of the PML-N ministers. They decided to keep the cabinet slots vacant in the hope that the PML-N ministers would soon rejoin it. It was, however, decided to allocate additional portfolios to the existing cabinet members so that the working of the government is not affected.

During the meeting, it was decided that in addition to present portfolios, **Naveed Qamar will have the additional charge of the Ministry of Finance, Sherry Rehman will have the additional charge of Women's Division, Shah Mehmood Qureshi will also keep the additional charge of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Resources, Ahmad Mukhtar will have the additional charge of the Ministry of Commerce and Nazam Muhammad Gondal will have the additional charge of the Ministry of Agriculture.** It was also decided to appoint **Hina Rabbani Khar as Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Finance and Economic Affairs and Shahnaz Wazir Ali as a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Sector with the status of Minister of State.**

New Punjab Governor Sworn-In

Salmaan Taseer was sworn in as the 27th Governor of the Punjab in a ceremony boycotted by PML-N on 16 May. The Lahore High Court Chief Justice, Syed Zahid Hussain, administered the oath. Soon after taking the oath, Taseer, who was surrounded by charged PPP workers, said he would represent the Federal Government in the Punjab. Recalling his political struggle, Taseer said 25 years ago the PPP had struggled for the supremacy of democracy. Taseer, who landed into controversy following the PML-N's reservations over his appointment, observed that as per the mandate he wanted the democratic process to continue. He said everyone no matter which political party he was affiliated to – the PML-Q, the PPP or the PML-N – was equal to him. He said once he used to believe that the Governor House was occupied by Nawabs but now the doors of the Governor House would be open to all and sundry. Taseer said the Bhutto family had won the hearts of the Punjabi people by addressing the problems of the downtrodden. Lauding the struggle of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto, Taseer vowed that the Punjab would never let the Bhuttos down. Concluding his speech, the new governor lauded the contribution of his predecessor, Khalid Maqbool, saying he had done a lot for the uplift of the province.

Profile

After having joined the party in 1982-83, Salman was elected member Punjab Assembly on PPP ticket in 1988. He also took part in 1993 election, and contested on a National Assembly seat from Lahore, but could not make it to the National Assembly. He has also served as party's central secretary information. He worked as Editor daily Musawat from 1992 to 1994. Later, Sajjad Bukhari replaced him. Son of a renowned educationist Prof MD Taseer, Salman is also writer of a book, titled "Zulfikar Ali Bhutto-bachpan se takhta-e-dar tak", a biography of the party founder. His remarks were mistakenly considered as negative by certain party leaders, he added. Taseer is closely related to famous poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Salman's German mother, Christabel Bilquees and wife of Faiz Alys Faiz, are real sisters who came to Pakistan for promotion of Marxist ideas just before partition, but did not go

back. Salman Taseer is owner of "Pace" chain of departmental stores, a telecommunication company. "World Call", a "Chartered Accountancy" firm and "Hayat Regency" chain of international hotels. One of his companies is also in the business of publishing two newspapers both in English and Urdu languages.

PML-N Rejected Taseer as Punjab Governor

Terming the appointment of Salman Taseer as Punjab Governor controversial and part of another move orchestrated from the Presidency to destabilize the PML-N government in the province, the PML-N leadership has sought explanation from PPP government to clarify its role and position on the matter. However, the PPP said it consulted PML-N leaders over the appointment. Terming the new Governor unacceptable, Nisar made it clear that the PML-N would treat the new Punjab Governor in the same way as the party treated President Pervez Musharraf. He said this while addressing a hurriedly-called Press conference held at the residence of PML-N Quaid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif at Model Town here on May 15.

Balochistan Cabinet – 45 out of 65

The volume of Balochistan Cabinet swelled to 44 on May 21 with the induction of three more members of the provincial assembly. The new ministers belong to the PML-Q. Balochistan Governor Nawab Zulfikar Magsi administered oath from the newly-inducted ministers: Salim Khosa, Ruqaya Hashmi and Raheela Durrani. In a house of 63 members, the total strength of the cabinet has reached to 44 and Chief Minister Nawab Aslam Raeesani enjoys the support of 61 members. Initially a 38-member cabinet was announced but later three ministers were inducted and it was the second time that the cabinet is expanded unnecessarily. It worth's mentioning here that about 13 ministers are without portfolios but are enjoying the protocol. Sadiq Umrani, Deputy Parliamentary Leader of the PPP and Provincial Minister for communication and works, expressed concern over the cabinet expansion and said that the matter was not discussed in the party meeting. Newly inducted minister Salim Khosa was elected on a ticket of the Jamhoori Watan Party in 2002 elections but he joined the PML-Q after military operation in Dera Bugti and killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti. The PPP Deputy Parliamentary Leader said Salim Khosa had presented a turban to Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain during his visit to Dera Murad Jamali after Bugti's killing. Ruqaya Hashmi and Raheela Durrnai were MPAs during the PML-Q-led coalition government in 2002 to 2007.

Observers believe that there was no need for cabinet expansion and the decision was taken under pressure as the establishment was trying to induct its own people in the cabinet.

Election Observers

FAFEN Election Observation Report

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) released its findings about the February 18 General Elections on May 20, revealing that each contesting candidate had spent 7 percent to 8 percent more money than the prescribed limit in the election campaign. The network has also furnished certain recommendations, proposing a ban on candidates from running for more than one National Assembly or provincial assembly seats. Addressing at a briefing at, the FAFEN Secretary General Sarwar Bari said a parliamentary committee might be formed to consider the network's recommendations. FAFEN emphasized that the voter lists should be prepared afresh and pointed out that as many as 1.4 million persons had been registered at least twice and one person in Karachi had been shown voter in 14 different locations. There were several other discrepancies in these voter lists as well.

About the network's demand for restricting a contestant to contest from only one constituency, Bari said that among other things this would reduce the number of constituencies in which bye-elections have to be held. He explained that after the recently held elections, out of eight National Assembly and 30 provincial assembly seats some 30 seats had been vacated by candidates who had won from more than one constituency. And for these, the bye-election is slated for June 26. He noted that a similar policy was in vogue in India, as it helped curtail wastage of resources and encouraged others who otherwise could not take part in the electoral process. In this connection, Bari believed that political parties should also bar its candidates from taking part in elections from more than one constituency. And even if they issue more tickets to a particular candidate, it should be binding on him to bear bye-election campaign expenses, as in bye-elections, usually a candidate of a ruling party wins. The network also recommended to the Election Commission not to assign election duties to officials from the lower courts, saying this should be carried out by the electoral body itself. Similarly, the lower court judges should be engaged in hearing cases in the election tribunals. About the network findings he said it was also noticed that certain caretaker ministers, the police and intelligence agencies' officials had influenced the election process in several districts.

FAFEN report and recommendations are based on observers' statistical evidence and narrative reports from May 2007 to February 2008 elections, covering all aspects of the electoral process. The network's Election Day data was collected by as many as 18,829 observers including a parallel vote tabulation in 256 National Assembly constituencies. When contacted, a senior official of the Election Commission of Pakistan told 'The News' that an expert committee was already reviewing the electoral laws and related rules and the recommendations by the network would also be given consideration.

Governance at Large

Constitutional Package

Proposed Package of Constitutional Amendments Unveiled

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) wants President Pervez Musharraf to quit rather than be impeached, PPP Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari told a press conference after a PPP central executive committee meeting on May 24. The committee approved unanimously a proposed 62-point constitutional reforms package seeking transfer of executive powers from the President to the Prime Minister.

- Law Minister Farooq H Naek told journalists that the proposed amendments included:
- Changing the name of the NWFP province to Pakhtoonkhwa (Article 1)
- Considering a validation of the suspension or abrogation of the Constitution by a Judge as high treason (Article 6)
- No more than two full terms as President for any individual
- Minorities representatives in Senate (one each from the four provinces and the federal capital)
- Increasing the strength of Senate to 105
- Transfer of executive powers such as appointment of services Chiefs, Provincial Governors, High Court and Supreme Court Chief Justices, Auditor General and Attorney General, to the Prime Minister
- Fresh oath for reinstated judges
- Ban on government servants from contesting elections
- Prohibit individuals from holding two public offices
- Repeal the clause of disqualification over criticism of judiciary and army
- Make consultations with political parties mandatory before appointment of Caretaker setup
- Shorten the concurrent legislative lists giving provinces more autonomy
- Increase provincial representation in the Council of Common Interest
- Obligate at least two meetings of the council every year
- Make the National Economic Council more effective
- Obligate National Finance Commission meetings after three years instead of five

Zardari said the proposed reforms package would be shared with the PPP's coalition partners and "political forces inside and outside the Parliament". Zardari said that this is not sacrosanct document. It is open for debate. The PPP co-chairman said his party believed in dialogue and not in confrontation.

Draft Constitutional Package

The proposed 80-point constitutional package drafted by PPP **recommends amending 20 different articles of the Constitution** to clip the powers of the President and transfer them to the Prime Minister and Parliament.

- According to a detailed study of the amendments proposed in the constitutional package, the first point proposes amending Article 1 of the Constitution to change the name of NWFP province to Pakhtoonkhwa province.
- The second proposed amendment deals with Article 6, according to which judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court, or any individual validating the abrogation of the Constitution, are declared guilty of high treason.
- The third proposed amendment, in Article 41, seeks to wipe out all the clauses protecting President Pervez Musharraf's election as President during his first tenure in the 17th Constitutional Amendment.
- The amendment in Article 44 proposes restricting any individual from employing the office of the President for longer than two terms.
- An amendment to Article 45 will extend presidential powers to grant pardon, reprieve and respite, and to remit, suspend or commute sentences passed by the courts of tribunals.

- The sixth amendment is proposed in Article 48, which seeks to cap the President's discretionary powers to appoint caretaker setups after the dissolution of assemblies. Similarly, Presidential powers to call for referendum on any issue of national importance should be withdrawn and given to the joint sitting of Parliament.
- The seventh amendment, proposed in Article 50, suggests that parliament should comprise of two houses — the National Assembly and the Senate — and proposes that the president should no longer be part of parliament.
- The eight amendment recommends changes in Article 55, reducing the strength of the quorum in both houses of parliament.
- The ninth and likely the most important amendment proposes changes in Article 58, under which the second and third class empowering the President to dissolve the assemblies at his discretion will be completely removed from the Constitution.
- The 10th amendment is proposed in Article 59, which wants to increase the number of Senate members from 100 to 105. This amendment attempts to give greater representation to minorities, as of the five new senators, four would be inducted from each of the provinces. One would be inducted from the Federal Capital.
- The 11th amendment is proposed in Article 62, and wants to introduce changes to the disqualification clause of being convicted on false evidence and working against the ideology of Pakistan.
- The 12th amendment proposes changes in Article 63, stating that no person should hold more than one office, as President Musharraf did when he simultaneously served as president and chief of army staff.
- The 13th amendment, recommended in Article 70, suggests disbanding the mediation committee.
- The 14th amendment suggests that Article 71 details that the formation of the mediation committee should be omitted from the Constitution.
- The 15th amendment has proposed changes in Article 73, under which the Senate can submit its recommendations in the budget within 14 days of its announcement, instead of the existing seven days.
- The 16th amendment proposes that the president should give his assent to make a bill passed by parliament into an act of parliament within 15 days of its passage, instead of the current 30 days.
- The 17th amendment recommends changes in Article 90 and seeks to transfer the executive authority of the federal government to the prime minister, who is regarded as the chief executive of the country.
- The 18th amendment suggests changes in Article 91, under which the National Assembly shall meet on the thirtieth day of its election if it has not been summoned by the President prior to that timeframe.
- The 19th amendment suggests the complete substitution of Article 95, and now seeks to force any party that moves for a vote of no confidence against a sitting prime minister to also propose a successor to the prime minister in case of a successful no-confidence motion.
- The 20th amendment proposes the insertion of a new Article (95A) under which the Senior Minister would perform the duty of the Prime Minister if the Prime Minister either resigns or is disqualified as a member of the National Assembly, until the election of the new Prime Minister.

Package does not reflect Murree Accord

Background discussions with leaders of the two parties point to a dim possibility of a partial agreement on the constitutional package. Not only the leaders of PPP and the PML-N but others also agree that the new package will not lead to an end to the pro-judges movement and will not lead to political stability. The package has thrown the ball in the court of Musharraf to decide whether he wants to become another powerless Fazal Elahi Chaudhry or Rafiq Tarar or would prefer to go home with dignity.

A PPP stalwart said it would not be easy for the PML-N to reject the package in toto because Nawaz Sharif had always been demanding that the President should be a titular head without discretionary powers and this was what the package proposed. "If the PML-N sincerely wants to gun for Musharraf, it would join hands with the PPP to make the President irrelevant. When his powers to appoint the Chiefs of the Armed Forces, the Chief Election Commissioner, the Attorney General and the Auditor General, to dissolve the National Assembly or to appoint provincial governors, are taken away he will become a nobody, sitting in the presidential palace," the PPP leader said. The PML-N hard-line, however, persists even after the unwrapping of the package. A PML-N leader remarked that we have repeatedly asserted that the restoration of the deposed judges has nothing to do with any constitutional package as the two are separate things. He said that first, the sacked justices should be reinstated through a National Assembly resolution as agreed in the Murree Declaration, and then talks can be held on the package.

Upcoming Budget

Budget on June 10

The National Budget 2008-09 will be presented before the National Assembly on June 10. Dr. Ashfaq Hassan, Advisor to Finance Ministry told that budget would be presented on June 10 while Economic Survey for the financial year 2007-08 will be launched on June 9. Earlier, the Federal Budget was scheduled to be presented before the National Assembly on June 7.

Finance Minister Syed Naveed Qamar will present the Annual Budget 2008-09 in the National Assembly. The Budget 2008-09 would go through a swift run of the mill in the National Assembly as its passage in a fortnight possibly earlier than that is to be followed by the by-elections. The main opposition party, PML-Q, already in loop of power sharing after the collapse of the PPP's coalition with the PML-N, is not likely to create any hurdle in the passage of budget. Naveed Qamar recently said that the government's focus would be on agriculture followed by infrastructure.

MoWD seeks Four-fold Increase in Budget

The Ministry of Women Development (MoWD) has sent the proposal to the Ministry of Finance for four-fold increase in its Annual Budget of the next financial year of 2008-09. For the current fiscal year about Rs 150 million had been allocated for the Ministry but this time it has demanded nearly 500 plus million rupees for the upcoming fiscal year. But the biggest problem is the shortage of human recourse. The Ministry, which is a national focal Ministry for the advancement of women and plays the role of advocate, planner and coordinator of women, has less representation of women and mostly key positions have been occupied by men. There is also dearth of skilled managers, workers and project co-ordinators having gender sensitisation regarding women issues. The Ministry also lacks the presence at the district level and only caters 50 percent of the population. The Ministry had decided to build Resource Centres in the 12 districts of the country, including Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Sargodha, Peshawar, Hangu, Sukkur, Karachi, Quetta, Jafarabad, Mardan, and Dir with bulk of aid from international donor agencies to infuse political vision and awareness among women councillors but not a single centre have been functioning properly.

SDF seeks Fair Share for Sindh in NFC Award

The Sindh Doctors Forum (SDF) of the UK has demanded fair share of resources for Sindh in the National Finance Commission Awards. The demand was made through a resolution passed unanimously at the organization's meeting here on May 4. The resolution claimed that the SDF does not accept the population formula because 70 percent of the federal budget is generated by Sindh.

Laws, Ordinances Promulgated

Legislation Limits Dowry to Rs 30,000

Prior to the mayhem and exchange of harsh words in the Senate on May 12, the treasury and opposition showed a consensus to pass three different bills on the private members day and set a precedent as an un-disputed legislation.

Recorded as first legislation by the PPP-led government coalition, the upper house passed three bills moved as private members bill by Senator Chaudhry Muhammad Anwar Bhinder. According to one bill, the total value of dowry cannot be exceeded to Rs 30,000, while the bridal gifts have been limited to Rs 50,000.

The three bills passed by the upper house are:

- The bill to provide for restriction on dowry and marriage gifts (**The Dowry and Marriage Gifts (Restriction) Bill, 2008**),
- Amend the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (**The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2008**)
- Amend the Limitation Act, 1908 (**The Limitation (Amendment) Bill, 2008**)

According to the details of the bill, the list of dowry and bridal gifts will be attached with the marriage certificate (Nikahnama) and at the time of divorce, these gifts and dowry will be owned by the wife. Arguing in favour of the bill, mover Chaudhry Anwar Bhinder said that the bill would provide relief to the poor and also save the lavish expenses on marriages. "It will also facilitate the divorced wives and save them from lengthy litigation," he added. Bhinder said the 1976 Act restricted the lavish expenditure on marriages dowry to Rs 5,000 but it could not be enforced.

Governance & HR Issues

Combating Child Labour - EC, ILO to provide Rs 545m for Project

European Commission (EC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) would provide Rs 545 million (Euro 5,197,900) to finance a 5-year long project focusing on child labour in hazardous occupations under the most intolerable conditions ranging from exposure to chemicals and other harmful substances to long tedious working hours. Under this project, the EC and ILO would support the government's efforts in combating abusive child labour in line with its National Policy and the medium-term plan on Combating Worst Forms of Child Labour (2008-16).

A contribution agreement was signed on 21 May between the EU and the ILO in the presence of Federal Minister for Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah. Secretary Labour and Manpower Malik Asif Hayat, Jan de Kok, the Ambassador of the European Commission Delegation to Pakistan, and Donglin Li, the Country Director, ILO Islamabad signed the agreement.

The project will cover all hazardous sectors and occupations identified by the national legislation. In first process, the project will initially be implemented in the selected districts of NWFP and Sindh. The 5-year Project "Combating Abusive Child Labour II" is aimed at promoting and replicating the "District Model" that has proven successful under ongoing child labour in the target districts and beyond. According to the project, institutions would be strengthened at the district, provincial and federal levels through the enhancement of capacity of respective child labour units and the establishment of a child labour monitoring and referral system. It would also enhance child labour knowledge base through the conduct of a second National Child Labour Survey and related research studies, and the promotion, development and adoption of pro-child policies and legislative framework. A majority of the out-of-school child population of Pakistan is expected to receive benefits directly or indirectly as a result of interventions carried out by this Project. According to it, an estimated 10,000 children are expected to be withdrawn from hazardous workplaces. Under the Contribution Agreement, the EC and the ILO will contribute Euro 4.75 million and Euro 447,900 respectively.

40.5 Million Non-Registered Labourers in Pakistan

Labour Minister Ashraf Sohna after assuming office announced that the department would register labourers in Punjab. He, however, did not realise that the process is extremely complicated and it seems that he only considered Social Security Department's recommendation before making the announcement.

There are at least 40.5 million total non-registered labourers in Pakistan and two-thirds of them live in Punjab. Labourers can receive benefits such as medical care and educational and workers' welfare funds by paying one hundred rupees per month. At least 73 percent labourers work in informal sector and the working units in this sector are not registered with the Social Security Department. Labourers who work on a contractual basis feel insecure and do not have social security benefits if their working unit is not registered with the department. Labourers' concerns can be mitigated if the Punjab government abolishes contract system so that low-paid labourers can have job security and receive social security benefits. The Punjab government can also get data of

unregistered labour force if all industrial units functioning in the informal sector register with the Labour Department. The new Labour Minister should order registration of all units in the informal sectors which are not registered so far. There is no dearth of allocation of funds for the welfare of labourers as the Federal Government had announced Rs 66 billions for this purpose. Spiraling prices of food items have hit labourers and they demand the government make an all out effort to save them from hunger and starvation.

The PML-Q government banned the entry of labour inspection in the factories due to which cases of labour abuses also multiplied at an alarming rate in the Province. The labourers were expecting that the new Punjab government would lift ban on labour inspection so that their rights could not be violated in the future. Labourers have said that the new Labour Minister should allow labour inspector unrestricted access to workplaces in a bid to check labour abuse in the Province. They said that this step could help curb exploitation of labourers at the hands of employers. Registration of labourers instead of industrial units would be tantamount to putting the cart before the horse, they added. The new Labour minister has announced equal facilities, rights, overtime, allowances and security arrangements to women labourers. Proper planning will help the labour minister resolve labour issues rather than adopt ill-advised policies. Pakistan Labour Party President Farooq Tariq has said that the labour Minister has set wrong priorities by announcing to register labourers instead of labour organizations. Ashraf said the provincial government would register all labourers without any discrimination. He said the government was trying to provide maximum relief to labourers. He said the Labour Ministry and trade union bodies were working on a comprehensive plan to register all labourers.

Punjab on top in Child Abuse Cases – Cruel Numbers in 2007

As many as 2,321 cases of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) were reported countrywide in year 2007 including male and female with Punjab remained at the top of the list as more than half of these cases took place here. This was revealed in a statistical report '**Cruel Numbers in 2007**' issued by a non-governmental organization 'Sahil' on May 20.

Following are some of the findings of report:

- As per the analysis, 56 percent cases were reported in Punjab in 2007. While six percent cases were reported in the Federal Capital, 3 percent in NWFP and 32 percent in Sindh province. Two percent cases of Child Sexual Abuse were reported in Balochistan and 1 percent in AJK, the report said. The report suggests that the real number could be much higher because such issues are taboo and not easily reported.
- The report says that 3.6 children are being abused sexually in a day in Pakistan.
- Among 2,321 of total cases 1,612 (69 percent) are girls and 709 (31 percent) are boys. Male children are less victimized by the criminals.
- However, report shows that CSA cases have slightly decreased as compared to the total number of cases in 2006 when a total of 2,447 cases were reported. But at the same time there is an increase in reported cases of 4.1 percent in boys as compared to the year 2006.
- While greater ratio of the girl victims could be due to the reasons that they are more easily accessible at homes where the majority of abuses occur. Girls also are considered a mean of settling outstanding scores with rivals.
- The findings show categories of crime ranging from abduction for sexual purposes to murder after sexual assault.
- Abduction is still the highest among the females as seen in a total of 199 cases. There are 289 molestation cases reported in 2007, where 96 are males and remaining 193 are females. As many as 505 cases of rape and sodomy have been reported, out of which 213 are males and 292 are females. Out of total 2,321 victims, 391 children were gang raped or gang sodomized. It seems that abusers not only lack an individual conscience but also a collective conscience. According to reported cases gang rape and sodomy could involve 2 to 5 abusers. Out of the total 2,321 victims 62 children were murdered after sexually assault.

- The data shows that 80 children were of five years and below, 46 (57.5 percent) females and 34 (42.5 percent) males fell a victim of sexual assault. The children in this age group are easily exploited due to their innocence and vulnerability. The report revealed that 358 children between six to 10 years were sexually abused. Out of them 168 (47 percent) were females and 190 (53 percent) male. The age analysis of the victims in the bracket of 16-18 years again shows that it is much more vulnerable for girls (82.7 percent) as compared to boys (17.3 percent).
- The report said majority of abusers are acquaintances. Sexual abuse is usually committed by those who have power and control and easy access to children. Out of a total of 5,144 abusers 3, 449 acquaintances were the major perpetrators of the crime. Report says that 17.49 percent of the abusers were strangers to the victims. Strangers are usually involved in gang rapes or sodomy. An alarming finding is that there is an increase in the number of neighbour category from 118 in 2006 to 218 this year. This shows more than a 54 percent increase making them the third highest category of abusers.
- The cases in the rural communities are more as compared to the urban areas overall. This is directly related to the fact that 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas.

Restoration of Judiciary

Fakhruddin G. Ebrahim and Aitzaz Ahsan Quit Committee on Judges

Former Supreme Court Judge Fakhruddin G. Ebrahim has dissociated himself from a committee constituted by PPP and PML-N 'for reinstatement of the deposed judges and allied matters' because it was discussing proposals on retention of the judges inducted after Nov 3, 2007.

A letter addressed by him to Federal Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Farooq H. Naek on May 5 was made public by Pakistan Bar Council Executive Chairman Rasheed A. Razvi at a hurriedly-called press conference in the evening. The letter was endorsed to Mr Razvi and PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif and was desired to be circulated among the members of the committee. The PBC Executive Chief appreciated the letter as being truly reflective of 'the legal fraternity's stance and national aspirations'. Asked whether Supreme Court Bar Association President Aitzaz Ahsan would also quit the committee,

Mr. Ebrahim's letter said: "The first meeting of the committee for restoration of deposed judges and allied matters held on May 3 discussed proposals for increasing the strength of the Supreme Court from 17 to 27, restoration of the illegally deposed judges, including Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, in terms of the Bhurban Declaration and retention of the judges inducted after Nov 3, 2007. Since then, I have pondered over these proposals and arrived at certain conclusions, which I deem it necessary to share with your good self.

"You will recall that Clause 3(d) of the Charter of Democracy signed in 2006 by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif states in no uncertain terms that 'no judge shall take oath under any PCO.....' Therefore, I, in good conscience, cannot become a party to devising any formula which may reward those who have acted in violation of your Charter of Democracy on Nov 3, 2007.

"The Bhurban Declaration promised the people of Pakistan that 'the deposed judges would be restored on the position as they were on Nov 2, 2007, within 30 days of the formation of the federal government through a parliamentary resolution. Five former chief justices of Pakistan and 16 other former judges of the Supreme Court concur in stating, vide their statement of March 15, 2008, that 'a simple resolution in the National Assembly....would provide more than sufficient backing for the executive, which in any event is obligated under Articles 5 and 190 of the Constitution to take immediate measures restoring all chief justices and judges removed on Nov 3, 2007, (save those who have reached the age of superannuation) and issue necessary directions'.....

"I am also a party to the March 15 statement, Para 6 of which says that ' with respect to the new appointments made during and after the PCO regime, we are of the view that the removals being unconstitutional, no new appointment could be made against existent or non-existent vacancies, particularly without consulting the de jure chief justice. Nevertheless, on humanitarian considerations the cases of deserving meritorious appointees could be considered for fresh appointment in accordance with the exercise carried out in Al Jihad case.....

"Therefore, I am constrained to state that, notwithstanding my respect for the two major political parties who have received public mandate, I cannot be a party to any formula which attempts to reward those judges who have

taken oath under the PCO of Nov 3, 2007, and had acted in violation of the Supreme Court order of Nov 3, 2007. In the circumstances, I cannot persuade myself to continue to participate in the committee proceedings.”

Aitzaz also quits Panel on Judges: On May 6, Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan announced that he was quitting the committee formed to finalize the resolution on the judges’ restoration, saying he does not want to be part of dillydallying on the issue.

Long-March from June 10

All Pakistan Lawyers Representative Conference Saturday announced to hold a long march of the legal fraternity from all over the country to Islamabad on June 10 to press the reinstatement of the judges deposed by General Pervez Musharraf through a PCO on November 3. Representatives of Pakistan Bar Council, Supreme Court Bar Association, provincial bar councils, high court bars and the district bar associations from across the country, after six hours of deliberations decided to hold All Pakistan Lawyers Conventions on May 24, May 31 and June 9 which would be presided over by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary while other deposed judges would also be invited. About 300 representatives of the lawyers from the bars all over the country attended the conference and except one dissenting voice, all others unanimously supported the resolution for long march and the conventions. President SCBA Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan said the long march would be called 'Adlia Bahali Long March' (Restoration of Judiciary Long March). To a question if the government would reinstate the judges before June 10, Aitzaz said: "In that event the legal fraternity all over the country will celebrate the restoration." He said the march by no means is aimed at stopping the parliament from restoring the judiciary to November 2 position and the community would welcome the move if the government would reinstate the judges according to lawyers’ demand.

The conference has decided to continue the lawyers protest movement. The conference representatives, particularly from other provinces, showed great enthusiasm for the march. However, a PBC member belonging to PPP, Pervez Inayat Malik, opposed the decision of holding the long march, saying that the parliament should settle the judges issue. Speakers at the conference commended the 'epic struggle' of the community for the restoration and independence of judiciary for which thousands of lawyers have to bear hardships from house arrest to jail and torture. They said it was due to lawyers' efforts and lofty character of the deposed judges which challenged a dictator and opened the way for democracy, supremacy of the Constitution and rule of law in the country. After receiving input from the representatives, the conference announced to start long march on June 10 which may take up to three days to complete.

US Senator urges Judges’ Restoration

A top US senator urged Pakistan to quickly restore dozens of judges ousted by President Pervez Musharraf. Sen Russ Feingold (D-Wisc), one of several American lawmakers also said it was important for the United States to engage the country’s various political parties to make up for the past “mistake” of relying solely on Musharraf. Feingold said in an interview that he was not trying to side with a particular party. “Other reforms may well be appropriate,” he said. “At an absolute minimum, and first, I am calling for these judges to be reinstated. He further said that it is a matter of whether the legal system in Pakistan is perceived around the world as one that is based on the rule of law. It’s also one of the most important issues to the people in Pakistan.

Local Government System

Zardari Rules-out LG System’s scrapping

Co-Chairman PPP Asif Ali Zardari said on May 31 that instead of scrapping the LG system, PPP Government would introduce reforms for its improvement. In a statement released by Zardari House, the Co-Chairman dispelled the speculations that LG system was being disbanded. He said that PPP believes in a three-tier governance structure: federal, provincial and local and the local government is a tier that can deliver responsible government at grass root level. Zardari emphasized the need that the three tiers of Government should work in harmony and there should be clear communication lines between the local representatives and policy makers so that the information and the implementation regarding the welfare of the masses could travel both ways. However the system was not created in good faith and was used for political manipulation therefore there was a need to improve the system to make these institutions more democratic and representative in nature.

NWFP Government Wants to Replace LG System with Magistracy

NWFP Local Government and Rural Development Minister Bashir Ahmed Bilour said on May 31 that The NWFP Government wants the abolition of the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001 and the revival of the

magistracy system through the Local Government Ordinance 1979. He said that a proposal in this regard had been sent to the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB). The Frontier government has made it clear to the federal government that it wants to revive the magistracy system. He further said that we are not in favour of amendments in the LGO 2001 and want its complete abolition.

Coalition wants to Amend Local Government Ordinance

Both the coalition parties, the PPP and the PML-N, want to introduce amendments to the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) and the Police Order (PO) but their differences over the judges' issue have put the matter on the back-burner. A thinktank has been working to determine the changes to be brought about in the Local Government Ordinance and the Police Order. The new system may be a mixture of the old and the existing one. The coalition government wants to abolish some posts in the existing LG System besides giving police force at the disposal of DCOs. The coalition leaders believe the present system has ruined the administrative control of the provincial governments. Furthermore, they think the system is messed up owing to the presence of some unnecessary posts in it. However, there are some legal hindrances in the way of bringing about any amendment to the existing LG Ordinance and the Police Order. Either the coalition partners will have to bring a bill in the National Assembly to exclude the LG System and the Police Order from the sixth schedule of the Constitution, or they take permission from the President, or wait till 2009, when provincial governments could make amendments to the existing system according to their requirements. Besides legal obstacles, the recent changes in country's political scenario, since the resignation of PML-N ministers from the federal cabinet and appointment of Salman Taseer as Punjab Governor, have put the issue on hold. A senior bureaucrat says the sole purpose of the proposed amendments is to provide powers to the administrative officers so that the government affairs can be run smoothly and the writ of the government established successfully. He says the new system may be a combination of the old and the present one. Under the present system, District Police Officers (DPOs) are answerable to the district nazims.

It has been suggested that the DPOs should be put under the command of DCOs, as in the old system. Moreover, the DCOs will also be given the powers of District Magistrate like Deputy Commissioners (DCs) in the old system. After assuming powers of DCs, they will be able to use police force to maintain law and order in the respective districts. The DCOs will be answerable to the government in this regard. Furthermore, they will have also powers to control the price of essential commodities and take action against profiteers and hoarders. The think tank is also reviewing to make the offices of District Officer (Revenue) and District Officer (Registration) effective by giving them powers of Assistant Commissioner (AC) and Tehsildar, respectively. Moreover, it is also considering to create posts of Regional Coordination Officers (RCO) at divisional headquarters level. The RCOs will not only coordinate various government departments but also control DCOs. They will have the same powers as enjoyed by the commissioners in the old system. The RCOs will have the authority to write the ACRs of DCOs and DIGs in the proposed system. In the proposed new system, the district nazims will have no administrative powers. They will look after the development projects and matters pertaining to public welfare.

Task Force to Recommend Amendments to LG System

The NWFP Government has set up a task force to recommend amendments to the Local Government System, with a special focus on improving the province's law and order situation. A member of the task force told that we will look into the Local Government Ordinance with special emphasis on how it has negatively affected the law and order situation of the province. He said that the local government system had abolished the magistracy powers established in the British colonial era, which had relied on public-government linkages for service delivery. The task force includes two senior provincial ministers -- Bashir Bilour of ANP and Rahim Dad Khan of PPP -- two MPAs and two retired civil bureaucrats -- Azam Khan and Khalid Aziz.

The task force member said that the establishment of the Regional Coordination Officer (RCO) is the first admission of the failures of the system. He said that we are not against the system but it must be fine-tuned to set standard parameters for security. The newly established RCO has renewed the link between the tribal region and the settled districts, which was previously maintained by the commissioner's office that was removed after the ordinance was promulgated on August 14, 2001. According to the source, the local government system has not succeeded in maintaining law and order. This is evident from the very unsatisfactory security situation in Pakistan. The roles of the nazim, the district co-ordination officer and the district police officer all need to be reviewed if better results are to be achieved. Under the new system, the security mechanism has been placed in the hands of the district nazim, which critics claim is the root cause of the law and order problem. The task force member said that the newly formed task force was a follow-up to a separate task force that was assigned with proposing methods to control militancy with a \$4 billion investment plan.

Audit of District Governments yet to be started

Inordinate delay in the constitution of special teams on the part of Auditor General Pakistan has delayed the start of audit of 35 district governments in Punjab Province. In response to the decision of the Punjab Cabinet taken in its first meeting about 10 days back, the Punjab government had sealed the record of 35 district governments and requested the AGP to constitute special teams of auditors for doing their audit.

According to Punjab Local Government Ordinance (PLGO-2001), the AGP is responsible for the audit of districts while the responsibility of audit of Town/Tehsil Municipal Administrations rests with the Punjab Local Fund Audit Department. The PLFA has already constituted special teams which about a week back started audit of 144 TMAs in the province. The special teams have taken up the audit of current accounts of the TMAs that is from July 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008 and financial year 2006-07 in the first phase. The audit in the first phase will be completed till May 25, 2008. Heads of the audit parties are supposed to submit the draft special audit report by May 31, 2008. Officials at the Local Government and Community Development Department said that the audit of 144 TMAs have already been started while the Punjab Government has not received any intimation from the AGP regarding constitution of special teams for doing the audit of 35 districts. They said that it was difficult for them to tell that when these teams would be constituted. According to the set procedure, the Punjab Government is required to forward request to the AGP for the constitution of audit teams for district governments. The AGP directs the Director General Audit District Governments Punjab to make necessary arrangements for the audit of district governments. The DG Audit directs divisional directors to constitute special teams of auditors depending upon the requirements and size of different districts in his jurisdictions. Officials at the office of the DG Audit District Governments Punjab revealed that the constitution of special teams was delayed as majority of the auditors were busy in the routine audit of local governments. They said that the special teams would be constituted soon and the audit of district governments would be started in near future.

The objective of the audit is to unearth financial irregularities committed by the previous government and nazims. The special audit teams will examine the process of allocation, execution and release of funds for Citizen Community Board projects, ascertain the procedure with regard to approval and utilization of annual budget estimates, scrutinize auction of all leases, rent of shops, allotment of land/property, tracing of application of rates, audit of bulk purchases of goods and services, physical verification of non-perishable stores, audit of works bills exceeding Rs 50,000, determine the rationale of provisional payments, propriety of payments of daily wages staff, scrutinize every item of receipt/expenditure where some embezzlement could be suspected. The audit teams will also have to give comments on the overall performance with regard to service delivery of a local government.

Other Governance Issues

Khushhal Pakistan Fund to be scrapped soon

The Khushhal Pakistan Fund (KPF) set up by the previous government to benefit the poor living in the remote areas of the country will be soon 'scrapped' as per reports and its funds allocated for politically-motivated programmes be launched with political objectives.

Concentration: According to informed circles, KPF funds, so far, have been concentrated in **Balochistan** province (62 percent), followed by **NWFP** (32 percent) and **Sindh** (6 percent), adding that KPF has so far financed over 9,841 infrastructure schemes in 51 districts of the country with a beneficiary population of about 10.7 million. KPF financing has largely concentrated on drinking water supply (32 percent), communication (23 percent), sanitation (17 percent), agriculture (8 percent), irrigation (7 percent), education (7 percent), health (1 percent), and others (1 percent). KPF focuses on reaching the deprived communities particularly in remote rural areas of the country, as is evidenced by the sector-wise distribution of schemes in the provinces, which also reflect the variety of local needs and preferences of CPI schemes across Pakistan. According to details, in Balochistan, acute shortage of clean drinking water, and inadequate sanitary conditions were raising health concerns and fears of outbreaks of water-borne diseases, making the local population highly vulnerable. Health concerns relating to access to basic social services across the province have been competitively high. KPF initiated to contribute to development of community physical infrastructure schemes in Balochistan. Consequently, the district governments have implemented 7241 schemes in CPI initiative of KPF covering 97 percent of the geographic area of the province. Major sectors supported are water supply schemes (46 percent), Education (16 percent), Communication (14 percent) and Agriculture (8 percent). However, need based schemes in Sanitation (5 percent), Irrigation (4 percent), and Health (3 percent). Majority of KPF funds were utilized in water supply sector accounting for 41 percent of the total funds to Balochistan, whereas communication and education sectors received 23 percent and 12 percent share, respectively.

Partnerships: KPF partnered with SRSP and NRSP so far, in 10 different districts of NWFP. A total of 1525 schemes with an approximate per capita investment of Rs 500 have been attended by KPF, benefiting more than 34% of the population of these districts. These schemes are being carried out following participatory development approach capitalizing upon indigenous knowledge, cost sharing and participatory O&M through community mobilization at grassroots level. In Sindh, KPF funds have been released to TRDP and SRSO for 13 districts identifying 652 schemes so far. The community organizations have prioritized demand for irrigation (32%) followed by water supply schemes (24%), communication (21%) and sanitation (16%). KPF on the other hand in Punjab, is in the process of finalizing partnership with NRSP. The agreements are likely to be made shortly.

Focus: KPF's initial focus is on rural communities in the poorest districts of Pakistan. The process of social mobilization is being used at the community level for establishing sustainable, multi-functional community organizations (COs). These COs are then federated locally and at higher levels in order to (a) enhance access to public and private sector services (e.g., local government water and sanitation services; health & education services, physical infrastructure) and (b) strengthen the voice of poor communities in articulating their demands to local government (at union, tehsil and particularly district levels). KPF is currently working with the community-driven development model, since it aims to focus on increase in income of the poor households and improved social impacts. KPF ensures that the COs are socially inclusive, gender sensitive and equally benefit all in the community.

Objectives: KPF has the following objectives: To assist the un-served communities of the country, mainly in terms of basic infrastructure, as established by objectively verifiable data; to provide project-based and time-bound support for capacity building without increasing the recurrent expenditure of its implementing partners; to establish implementing partnerships with the local governments as well as private and non-governmental organizations working in collaboration with the local governments and to prioritize for support, the lagging districts of the country as identified and assessed by the respective provincial governments.

SBP Counsels Cut in Expenditure: Slowdown in Economy Forecast

The State Bank has advised the government to take “concrete steps” for resource generation and check expenditure in order to ensure that the economy retains the “high growth momentum” of recent years.

The third quarterly report of the State Bank, released on May 31, highlighted the depressing features of a challenging economic environment that would put the collective wisdom of the two-month-old coalition government to test. The report reaffirmed fears of a mild economic slowdown based on latest figures. Following are some of the findings by the report:

- Real GDP growth in FY08 is expected to drop below the six percent level for the first time in five years, annual inflation is poised to return to double-digit, fiscal deficit is forecast to rise substantially and the annual current account deficit, as a percentage of GDP, is projected to be at all-time high. It attributed increasing signs of pressure on macro-economic indicators to a combination of adverse domestic and international developments.
- Even fiscal measures (tariff cuts and subsidies) aiming to at least partially protect the broad populace from rising food and energy prices are likely to prove unsustainable, given the already large fiscal deficit.
- All price indices have moved up significantly so far in FY08 and are significantly higher than the annual averages for the preceding five years. In particular, CPI food inflation reached 25.5 percent in April 2008.
- The weakening of the rupee that fell by 7.3 percent by the first week of May to weakness in the external account. Both agriculture and large-scale manufacturing sectors performed below the target during the year and the services sector would at best just be on target as growth in finance and insurance sub-sector appeared to have slowed down.
- The dismal performance of the commodity producing sector has been identified as a principal factor pulling the growth rate down.
- The most recent data clearly indicates that the slowdown in the economy during FY08 is principally in the commodity producing sector. For example, the disappointing performance of important major crops contributed significantly to slowdown in agricultural growth during FY08.

- Initial prospects of achieving a reasonable growth in the large-scale manufacturing (LSM) sector during FY08 were clouded by aggravating energy crisis coupled with high international commodity prices and political unrest through most of the year. As a result, the LSM sector posted a dismal growth of 4.8 per cent in the first nine months of FY08, compared with nine percent in the same period of FY07.
- Information for the first nine months of FY08 suggests that the services sector is poised to achieve the annual targeted growth. Main contributors to this performance are wholesale and retail trade, transport storage and communication as well as public administration and defence sub-sectors.
- Elaborating reasons for record high inflation despite tighter monetary policy, the SBP report blamed the government's fiscal irresponsibility for the trend, particularly leaning on the central bank for financing the current account deficit against the bank's advice.
- The desired impact of tight monetary stance of the SBP has been neutralised by huge government borrowings. Core inflation, measured by 20 per cent trimmed mean, accelerated to double-digit (14.1 per cent record high level) in April 2008.

The State Bank, however, has not lost hope and expects reinvigoration of robust growth momentum if the government heeds its advice on fiscal responsibility and put in place a right set of economic policies. People and the corporate sector expect some relief from the coming budget, but the tight fiscal position offers little manoeuvrability space to the government.

Geo-Political Dynamics

Pakistan's External Relations

Commonwealth Re-Admits Pakistan

After being out for seven months following the imposition of emergency on Nov 3, Pakistan has regained admission in the 53-member Commonwealth organization having met all the obligations in accordance with the club's fundamental values and principles. The decision to reinstate the South Asian country was taken at the 29th meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group held at Marlborough House. The deliberations were chaired by the Malaysian Foreign Minister Dr Rais Yatim. The CMAG comprise foreign ministers of Malaysia, Ghana, Namibia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Uganda, United Kingdom, Papua New Guinea and St Lucia.

A statement read out by the new Commonwealth Secretary-General Dr Kamallesh Sharma said the group welcomed the fact that President Pervez Musharraf had given up his role as the Chief of Army Staff while the separation of the offices of the head of the state and COAS had met a longstanding requirement of Commonwealth leaders. CMAG noted that the state of emergency imposed on Nov 3 last year was lifted on Dec 15, 2008. The Constitution had been subsequently restored along with the fundamental rights of the people.

The group commended the holding of the parliamentary elections in Pakistan on February 18 and the transition to a democratically elected government. It noted that while most observers of the polls had found them to be reasonably credible and the results accepted by all parties, there was a need for reforms. In this regard, it welcomed the new government's stated intention to reform the election commission and enhance its independence. CMAG welcomed the recent removal of curbs on private media broadcasts on the press that had continued to be in place even after the emergency was lifted. It also noted that political detainees and activists arrested under the proclamation of emergency had now been released. It accordingly decided that Pakistan is now restored to the Councils of the Commonwealth. The secretary-general was directed to continue to offer technical assistance to Pakistan to support further strengthening of democratic institutions and processes in the country. CMAG also urged other Commonwealth members to provide similar assistance.

Pakistan Re-Elected to UN Human Rights Council

Pakistan is re-elected to the Human Rights Council, the UN top rights body, to serve a 3-year term from May 21. Elections to fill 15 of the 47 seats on the Geneva-council took place in the 192-member General Assembly. Six countries contested the four positions distributed to Asian States. The three other countries elected were Japan, Bahrain and South Korea. Pakistan polled 114 votes when 97 votes were required.

Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Munir Akram said that this success reflects the renewed international confidence in Pakistan following the restoration of full democracy in the country. The victory, he said, was the outcome of considerable hard work done by the Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistani embassies abroad. Participating in the campaign that Pakistan and some other developing countries do not deserve to be on the council because of their human right record were the Freedom House and UN Watch. Third world diplomats rejected their propaganda, saying these bodies, which are funded by secret agencies of the Western governments, target countries that forcefully advocate the cause of the developing world.

The three seats up for grabs in the Latin America and the Caribbean region - successful candidates in each category must obtain an absolute majority of valid votes cast by the 192 General Assembly members - went to Chile, Brazil and Argentina. In the Eastern European category, Slovakia and Ukraine won the two available seats, while Serbia was unsuccessful. The closest contest occurred in the race for the two vacant seats in the Western European and Other States category. France scored 123 votes and the United Kingdom picked up 120, edging out Spain, which garnered 119 votes. Under Council rules, members serve for three-year periods and cannot run for immediate re-election after two consecutive terms. Overall, the 47 members include 13 from Africa, 13 from Asia, six from Eastern Europe, eight from Latin America and the Caribbean, and seven from Western Europe and other States.

Indo-Pak Relations

Pakistan Offers ‘Grand Reconciliation’ with India

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has said that Pakistan is ready for ‘grand reconciliation’ with India and the next round of peace talks will begin in mid-July in New Delhi.

Mr Shah Mehmood Qureshi said at a joint press conference with Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee after the political review of the fourth round of ‘composite dialogue’ on May 21 that our government is ready for grand reconciliation for the resolution of longstanding issues that need to be resolved peacefully through dialogue and in a manner that is dignified and commensurate with the self-respect of the involved parties.” Although the Foreign Minister did not unveil the specifics of the grand reconciliation offer, it was a clear indication that Pakistan was ready to show flexibility on some thorny issues that had been straining their relations and impeding progress in talks taking place since 2004, if India reciprocated. Mr Qureshi said Pakistan was open to innovative ideas that could facilitate the dialogue and create a more enabling environment. Mr Mukherjee said India was equally determined to resolve all core issues and overcome hurdles in improving its ties with Pakistan. Notwithstanding the cheerful mood of the two ministers, it was apparent that they had made no substantial progress on major issues and were banking on the working relationship they had built during the talks to make progress in the next round. The only highlight of the talks held after a hiatus of seven months was the signing of an accord to provide consular access to prisoners in each other’s jails and agreement on some minor confidence-building measures. Both sides avoided making any statement that could vitiate the cordial atmosphere in the dialogue. The two countries were hopeful of progress on certain major issues in coming months.

During the talks, Pakistan tabled new proposals on Siachen, which Mr Qureshi said could bridge the differences and help the two sides move forward. Mr Mukherjee said progress had been made on **Siachen** but more time would be required for deliberations on the issue. He cautioned that no timeframe should be fixed for progress. He said **economic cooperation** was one of the ‘principal subjects’ in his talks with Pakistani leadership. He said there was a lot of scope of economic cooperation which could also complement the progress on resolving major issues. He said economic cooperation should not be held hostage to lack of progress on unresolved issues. Negating the impression that India was engaged in an arms race, he said the Indian government was more concerned about pressing economic issues and addressing problems of poverty and backwardness. But at the same time he observed that his government could not be oblivious of the country’s defence requirements. Both sides agreed to enhance their **counter-terrorism cooperation** by activating the Anti-Terrorism Mechanism and holding a meeting in this regard before the fifth round in July. Pakistan urged India to resolve the issue of **transit fee for the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline**, terming it a good CBM. The two ministers agreed on making the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation** more effective. The two sides also signed an **agreement on granting consular access to prisoners in each other’s jails**.

JOINT STATEMENT: A joint statement issued after the talks enumerated the Kashmir-related CBMs agreed in the meeting, including an increase in the frequency of Muzaffarabad-Srinagar and Rawalkot-Poonch bus services, modalities for intra-Kashmir trade and truck service and implementation of other measures to expand and facilitate travel for which a meeting of the working group on cross-LoC CBMs would be convened within two months. The two sides reaffirmed the importance of ceasefire along the Line of Control and their commitment to cooperate to safeguard it. The statement said the experts’ group concerned should consider proposals by both sides to develop further CBMs in the nuclear and conventional fields. Both sides agreed to finalize an agreement to liberalize their visa regime and facilitate people-to-people contacts.

Nepal – From Monarchy to Republic

Nepal Constituent Assembly Election – Report by The Researchers

A two-member team of The Researchers (TR) observed Nepal’s Constituent Assembly Election held on April 10, 2008. Following are the highlights of the observation report:

There were 74 political parties which were registered with ECN and contested election. In term of alliances Seven Party Alliance was seen to be as major political force. Political campaigning was closed 72 hours before the elections. Visibly elections were seen as a medium to transition form period of conflict and political crisis to period of nation building. It was observed and participated by all to move from non inclusive structure of state, primarily

due to the failure of political parties, to an institutionalized vibrant democratic culture. All stakeholders tried to create political space for all political actors to take part in decision making process.

The Nepalese stunned the world by having a relatively peaceful elections and a landslide victory for the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist. In a complex electoral process for 601 seats, Maoists have bagged 220 seats. Last time, it was the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) that surprised the world when it emerged as the largest party in 1994 elections. For the first time in Asia, communists were voted to power at the national level. The Maoists landslide has surprised even themselves. The communists here had always been at the forefront of democratic struggle. Formed in 1949, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) went through all the twists and turns of international communist movement. Despite some democratic reforms paving the way for multiparty elections in 1990, Nepal until now was a classic example of a feudal state ruled by a powerful monarch supported by the upper-caste Hindu elite. The masses have been looking to the communists to rid them of exploitation by the monarchy. Hence UML was voted by the electorate to power in 1994. But the communist government not only failed to deliver the land reforms it had promised, it also disillusioned its cadres.

Recommendations

Broadly following will be the recommendations

- All parties must contribute through political prudence and be flexible to form consensus government to give democracy and will of people affair chance
- Undertake electoral reform process especially focusing on:
 - Simplifying the electoral system & balloting process
 - Rationalization of the procedural requirements for the conduct of election especially election day
 - Counting process to be simplified by polling stations count and announcement and then tabulation at designated place to save time and promote transparency
 - Training of Polling staff
 - Liaising with political parties and civil society
 - Mainstreaming women in higher electoral processes
 - Institutionalization & standardization of :
 - Volunteer corp. both as polling staff and for security
 - Security arrangements on and around polling stations
 - Election related complaint system and its redressal
 - Establishment of polling stations
 - Enhancement of voter credibility by:
 - Fresh updating of voter rolls
 - Focusing on Voter education especially for women
 - Voter friendly election procedures
 - ECN, civil society and political parties should undertake voter mobilization campaigns
 - Political capacity building of the elected women
 - Options for voter mobilization should be defined if transport ban is to continue
 - ECN should make all the relevant information available in English for international observers

Detail report is available on following links:

<http://www.theresearchers.org/Nepal/Nepal%20Observation%20report.pdf>

<http://www.wpaf.org/theresearchers.org/Nepal.htm>

Post-Election Scenario

Nepal's Constituent Assembly Sworn-In: A newly elected Assembly that will rewrite Nepal's constitution was sworn in on May 27. Maoist leader Prachanda, who is slated to head the country's next Government, said that this is an epoch-making day. The Maoists, who waged a decade-long armed struggle before signing a peace deal in 2006, won more than a third of the constituent assembly's 601 seats in elections in April. Prachanda said that for the past 50 years people have been fighting for this.

Nepal's 239-Year Monarchy Ends: Constituent Assembly in Nepal on May 28 voted overwhelmingly in favour of abolishing the Himalayan nation's 240-year-old Hindu monarchy and declaring a republic. In a historic vote that caps a peace deal between Maoist rebels and mainstream parties, politicians ordered unpopular King Gyanendra to step down and for his palace to be turned into a museum. Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist

spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara said that the sacrifice of thousands of Nepalese has been honoured today by us getting rid of the monarchy. He further said that the Nepalese people have been freed from centuries of feudal tradition, and the doors have now opened for a radical social and economic transformation. A senior member of the 601-member Constituent Assembly, Kul Bahadur Gurung, said 560 members voted in favour and just four opposed. The remaining lawmakers were absent. Nepal's Maoists, who fought for 10 years to oust the Gyanendra's Hindu dynasty and create a secular republic, won the largest single bloc of seats in the assembly in elections. The abolition was a triumph for the leftists and marks a fresh start for one of the world's poorest countries, still reeling from a civil war that left at least 13,000 people dead. Officials said Gyanendra, who ascended to the throne after most of the royal family was massacred by a drunken prince in 2001, will have 15 days to vacate his Kathmandu palace. The republican declaration states that Nepal will become "an independent, indivisible, sovereign, and secular and an inclusive democratic republic." "Nepal has turned into a democratic republic, all the existing laws and administrative functions that contradict this idea will be invalidated from today," it reads. It says that all the privileges enjoyed by the king and royal family will automatically come to an end, noting that May 29 will henceforth be celebrated as "Republic Day." The meeting also directs the government to take necessary actions to turn the palace into a national museum. Nepal's Peace Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, told journalists that Gyanendra "should understand and leave the palace by himself, that would be the best thing." Outside the venue a crowd of about 1,000 people -- who have been waiting impatiently for the vote — cheered wildly as the decision was announced.

Royal Flag Lowered as Nepal Celebrates becoming Republic: The royal flag was lowered from Nepal's royal palace on May 29 as the Himalayan nation celebrated its first day as a republic following the abolition of its 239-year-old Hindu monarchy.

Nepal Moves to Nationalize Royal Property: Nepal's government said on May 30 that it had started an audit of palace property after an historic assembly abolished the monarchy and gave Hindu 'god-king' Gyanendra a two-week eviction order. The ousted king has kept a studied silence behind the high walls of his pink-hued Narayanhiti palace, although the royal flag has come down from over the heavily-guarded complex. Information Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara told that an official letter has been dispatched from the government asking Gyanendra Shah to vacate the palace. He further said that a high-level committee has been formed to prepare the details of the property inside the palace. All the property will be transferred to national property.

International Reaction: International reaction to the monarchy's demise has focused on calls for Nepal's government to end months of political in-fighting and concentrate on lifting the mountainous, landlocked country out of poverty. While the United States is not yet prepared to strike the Maoists from its terrorist blacklists, Washington has reversed its previous policy of not talking with the group's leaders. Britain, Nepal's former colonial ruler, sent its congratulations after the assembly's first session. Foreign Office Minister Mark Malloch Brown called it "another step toward the democratic and stable future that the people of Nepal justly deserve."

Democracy in Bangladesh

Bangladesh Government invites Parties to Poll Talks

Bangladesh's Interim Government invited political parties for talks on elections planned for December, while pressing on with the prosecution of two detained former Prime Ministers. Supporters of ex-Prime Ministers Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have been demanding their release ahead of the polls, but the army-backed interim administration has said the law will take its own course and that the conduct of elections was not linked with the trials of the leaders. The talks will cover election details, preparations and security concerns, officials said.

Hasina's Awami League and Khaleda's Bangladesh Nationalist Party — the nation's two main parties — say talks with the government and the election commission on the elections were pointless without the participation of their leaders. But leaders of smaller groups said they will attend the talks so that elections could be held on time. Ferdous Ahmed Koraihy of the Progressive Democratic Party said that otherwise the country is likely to plunge into a worse crisis than it faced before, Both Hasina and Khaleda, who have been under detention since last year, face a range of corruption cases and abuse of power.

Bangladesh Government Head Hopeful of Return to Democracy

The head of Bangladesh's army-backed interim government said on May 21 that a final round of talks with political parties would steer the nation to democracy through elections in December. Fakhruddin Ahmed said that we hope the talks will yield a good result for all and with a credible election we will be able to return to democracy, In a televised speech on May 12, Fakhruddin reiterated that his government would hold a Parliamentary Election in December. Former Central Bank Governor Fakhruddin took charges in January 2007, following political violence, and cancelled a controversial election due in the same month.

Political Situation in Sri Lanka

Former LTTE Rebel becomes CM of Sri Lankan Province

Ten years ago, he was believed to be the mastermind behind the LTTE attack on Sri Lanka's most hallowed Buddhist shrine, the Temple of the Tooth in the historic city of Kandy. Today he is the 33-year-old Chief Minister of the country's eastern province who walks in with a cluster of flowers as offering to the very same Temple that holds the sacred tooth of Lord Buddha. Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan alias Pillayan, one time child soldier of the LTTE who rose to become a senior most member of the terror organization but quit the Tiger separatist outfit early 2004, obtained blessings from the chief Buddhist prelates of the Kandy Temple after his appointment as Chief Minister on May 16. He was not berated by the Buddhist clergy for his role in the 1998 bombing. However, other Buddhists in the country are angrily demanding a public apology from the former LTTE rebel for his role in the temple blast that partially destroyed the historic shrine, killed nine persons and wounded over 25 persons. But while a public apology for the temple bombing does not seem to be forthcoming, Pillayan has admitted that it was a 'regrettable incident'. Now sworn to abide by the law the ex-LTTE member has been appointed Minister of Law and Order in the Eastern Provincial Council. As Chief Minister some of the important ministries entrusted to him among others are Finance, Administration, Rehabilitation and Tourism.

Following his political party, the TMVP which contested in unison with the UPFA government winning the controversially concluded recent eastern provincial council elections, Pillayan took oath as Chief Minister amidst appeals by President Mahinda Rajapakse to the public not to judge the former LTTE cadre by his old record of terror. President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a speech delivered soon after the appointment said it was a laudable thing for a person who believed in weapons but gradually entered the democratic political system to be appointed the Chief Minister of the east. The President opined that the eastern province would set an example in many ways in the future but opposition parties and human rights activists did not agree. They insist that Pillayan's para-military group still carries arms in the east despite their coming into the democratic process. Making a renewed call for disarming Pillayan's armed men, rights groups also cry foul over the provincial council elections won by the TMVP-government alliance. Meanwhile, the Island newspaper on Wednesday said all chief ministers of the eight provincial councils, including the recently elected chief minister of the eastern province have decided to forward a resolution to the government that they be vested with full powers in accordance with the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution.

Myanmar Disaster and Political Dynamics

Myanmar Cyclone Toll Climbs to 22,500, 41,000 Missing

Myanmar's military government raised its death toll from Cyclone Nargis on May 6 to nearly 22,500 with a further 41,000 missing, nearly all of them from a massive storm surge that swept into the Irrawaddy delta. Of the dead, only 671 were in the former capital, Yangon, and its outlying districts, state radio said, confirming Nargis as the most devastating cyclone to hit Asia since 1991, when 143,000 people died in Bangladesh.

Emergency lifted: The government lifted states of emergency in three of the five states declared official disaster zones and some parts of the worst-hit Yangon and Irrawaddy regions. The Information Minister also said the government had sufficient stocks of rice despite damage to grain stored in the huge delta, known as the "rice bowl of Asia" 50 years ago when Burma was the world's largest rice exporter.

The total left homeless is in the several hundred thousands, United Nations aid officials say. Even in delta villages that managed to withstand the worst of the winds, food and water is already running low. Residents of Yangon itself were queuing up for bottled water and there was still no electricity four days after the cyclone hit. Prices of food, fuel and construction materials have skyrocketed, and most shops have sold out of candles and batteries. The disaster drew a rare acceptance of outside help from the diplomatically isolated generals, who spurned such approaches in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Bernard Delpuech, a European Union aid official

in Yangon, said the junta had sent three ships carrying food to the delta region. Nearly half the country's 53 million people live in the five disaster-hit states.

Myanmar Extends Suu Kyi House Arrest

Myanmar's military junta extended the house arrest of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi by another six months on May 27. The official, who asked not to be named, said a government officer had gone to the Nobel laureate's home to read out the extended detention order in person. Oxford-educated Suu Kyi, 62, has been under house arrest or in prison for more than 12 of the last 18 years. The widely-expected move is likely to dismay Western donor nations which have pledged tens of millions of dollars in conditional aid since Cyclone Nargis hit on May 2, leaving up to 2.4 million people destitute. The military, criticized for its slow response to the disaster which left 134,000 dead and missing, has slowly opened the isolated Southeast Asian nation to foreign aid and workers. But the generals have also shown no sign of relaxing their iron grip on the country.

Other News

Food, Energy Crises – Asia faces Social, Political Unrest

Analysts say public anger over food shortages, particularly wheat flour for the staple roti bread, was a factor in the defeat of President Pervez Musharraf's allies in elections in February. The soaring price of food is breaking the budgets of the poor and raising the specters of hunger and unrest, experts warn. The Director General of Asian Development Bank, Rajat Nag has said that a billion people in Asia are seriously affected by the surging costs of daily staples such as rice and bread. He said that this includes roughly about 600 million people who live on just under a dollar a day, which is the definition of poverty, and another 400 million who are just above that borderline. Globally, the World Bank last month estimated that 33 countries were threatened with political and social unrest because of the skyrocketing costs of food and energy. Damien Kingsbury of Australia's Deakin University told that once people get hungry they start also getting quite desperate and take desperate measures. India's top farm scientist and architect of the 1960s "Green Revolution", monkombu Swaminathan has said India needs a second agricultural revolution to boost food supplies or face huge social turmoil. Experts blame the high food prices on a confluence of factors including increased demand from a changing diet in Asia, droughts, the rising use of crops for biofuels, and growing energy and fertilizer costs. Around the region, the impact varies from traumatic to minimal.