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Gender

Women & Politics

Caucus Formed for Women Legislators

Women Parliamentarians' Caucus, with the objectives to protect women's rights and women empowerment, was formally launched in a meeting chaired by Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Speaker National Assembly in Parliament House on November 21. The Caucus was formed after adoption of a resolution passed unanimously by the women members of the National Assembly. Spelling out the objectives of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus, Madam Speaker said that the Caucus has been constituted with an aim to attain a broad-based consensus among all female members of the parliament on an agreed agenda for the women development, empowerment and emancipation, enabling them to work beyond and above party lines for the women of Pakistan.

(The Nation – November 22, 2008)

Boycott of Assembly Proceedings by Women Parliamentarians in Punjab over the Issue of Development Funds:

Female members of the Punjab Assembly belonging to PPP and PML-N boycotted the assembly proceedings on November 18 following a protest during November 14 session of not being granted development funds like their male counterparts. The boycott was provoked by the speech of a male parliamentarian who had expressed his concerns over the allocation of development funds. He said that the female parliamentarians did not deserve the same quota as male parliamentarians. This was followed by Sagheera Islam, belonging to the PPP, lamenting that women were not given their due share despite repeated requests. MPAs Uzma Bukhari and Shahzadi Umarzadi Tiwana joined Sagheera in her quest for development funds and demanded an immediate end to the gender discriminatory treatment among parliamentarians. PA Acting Speaker Rana Mashhood Ali Khan deputed MPAs Ghazala Saad Rafiq, Farooq Ghurki, Faiza Malik and numerous others to convince the boycotting members to take an active part in the 10th PA session. The team approached the boycotting members to assure them of provision of development funds. Upon repeated reassurance of granting them their due share of funds, the boycotting parliamentarians agreed to return to the House.

(Daily Times – November 19, 2008)

Highlights of the Interview of NA Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza

Officiating as woman acting President twice in the history of the country, Dr Fehmida Mirza admits it is great honour but at the same "it is an overwhelming responsibility". In an exclusive interview with The News on November 6, Dr Fehmida Mirza said chairing the **in-camera session** of the Parliament where for the first time the officials involved in the national security policy bowed before the Parliament and briefed the parliamentarians on security issues of the country was another honour for her. She said that it was a challenging experience to chair the session of the Parliament where 442 members of both the houses of the Parliament were present and the entire proceeding went smoothly. In her 3rd floor office of the Speaker's chamber, which was earlier used as the presidential chamber, Dr Fehmida Mirza replied to a number of questions with regard to the proceedings of the Parliament and formation of the parliamentary committees. She also spoke on the government's efforts as well as her personal interest in addressing the **women-related issues** saying she would make it sure that women and minorities would get their due time in the Parliament's proceedings. When asked whether the Parliament would come into action after the reports of live burial of five women in Balochistan and a recent case of 17-year girl who was thrown before dogs before being killed, Dr Fehmida said President Zardari had taken notice of the reports and asked MNA Nafeesa Shah from Khairpur to probe into the heinous incident. She said that I have established a **women caucus** in the National Assembly in which all the women parliamentarians either elected directly or on reserved seats could take up the women issues and these issues would be thoroughly investigated. She further said the caucus that would be headed by her would form different sub-committees to take up the women issues. About the functioning of the Parliament, she said, "The house business committees regularly meet before the session of the House; **women parliamentarians** are getting sufficient time to raise their issue; and minorities are also getting their due time in the National Assembly." When asked to reply criticism regarding delay in the **formation of the parliamentary committees**, she said the formation of the committee was not an easy task and she wanted to hold in-depth discussion with all the parliamentary parties before giving final shape to committees so that no one could question their credibility. She said she started consultation with the parliamentary leaders in phases just within the week of the adoption of the resolution.

She also expressed her satisfaction over the performance of the members of the Lower House. When asked about the formation of the committee to revisit 17th amendment that was announced by President Asif Ali Zardari in his first presidential address to the Parliament on October 20, Dr Fehmida Mirza said it was up to the government and not the Parliament. She said that the committee formation on revisiting 17th amendment is the government's prerogative and I do not want to overstep the government affairs.

(Pak Tribune – November 7, 2008)

Sumaira Accuses Chaudhrys of Gender Bias: Dissident PML-Q MNA Sumaira Malik who is leading a revolt against the Chaudhrys of Gujrat, has lamashed the Q-League's cwntral leadership for what she says their gender bias. In an exclusive interview with The News Sumaira Malik, removed by the Chaudhrys from the post of the President, Women's Wing of PML-Q, challenged the Chaudhrys to face her in public. She lamented that while the Chaudhrys objected to her meeting with President Zardari they ignored the fact that they themselves had met President Zardari's private Secretary many times to save the skin of their scion Moonis Elahi who is involved in the Bank of Punjab financial scam. Sumaira Malik accused the Chaudhrys of discriminating against the women parliamentarians. "Why did Shujjat not act against the male Parliamentarians who had openly revolted against the dictatorial policies of these cousins and made their own forward bloc in the senate?" Sumaira asked Chaudhrys and their cronies that she had won the 2002 and 2008 elections on a general seat and was not beholden to any one for her presence in the National Assembly. She asked Chaudhrys to stop taking cronies behind their hand picked women in the party to launch attack on her. She said that like honourable men, they should come forward to face her.

(The News – November 7, 2008)

Petition against Sumaira Malik Referred to ECP: Justice M Bilal Khan of the Lahore High Court on November 17 referred an election petition to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), challenging the victory of MNA Sumaira Malik from NA-69, Khushab. The Judge refused to continue proceedings of the petition due to some personal reasons and referred it to the ECP for placing the same before any other appropriate court. The petition was filed by Malik Umar Aslam Awan, a candidate who lost the election from the said constituency, alleging that the ECP had changed the results, provided by the presiding officers. He also accused Sumaira Malik of managing to get votes cast in her favour by using the state machinery at the behest of her husband who was a bureaucrat. He alleged that the returning officers also cleared hundreds of votes in her favour, which had earlier been cancelled by the presiding officers of various polling stations. The petitioner also alleged that seven presiding officers had been abducted by Sumaira's workers who were later recovered by the returning officer's orders. Sumaira did her intermediate in 1981, but had not done graduation till 2002. Her husband, who was the schools additional secretary, obtained a fake BA degree for her," he said, adding that she also could not contest elections because she was a defaulter and a petition in this regard was also pending before the LHC, Rawalpindi bench. Awan prayed to the court to disqualify Sumaira Malik and declare him a returned candidate.

(The News – November 18, 2008)

Notice Served on CEC, four Women MNAs: The Lahore High Court has issued notice to the Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan (CEC) and four women members of the National Assembly on a writ petition challenging their election on women reserved seats for PML-N in Punjab. The court also sought reply from CEC and MNAs, Nuzhat Sadiq, Sabeen Rizvi, Shereen Arshad and Tasneem Siddiqui till December 20. A PML-N candidate Najma Ahmad has moved the petition through counsel Tariq Aziz Malik arguing that these ladies had filed their nomination papers for the National Assembly reserved seats from the province of Punjab. He said that the petitioner's party submitted its priority list for women reserved seats with name of these ladies before the returning officer, who also accepted her name. He said the returning officer included names of these ladies in contesting candidates' list illegally and unconstitutionally, as they were not a registered voter in any area of the Punjab. He said being not voter members of the Punjab, they could not contest elections from Punjab. The counsel said they were voters of Islamabad Capital Territory of the province of Punjab. He said their computerized national identity cards also showed that they were residents of Islamabad and not Punjab. He submitted that in view of these proves it was clear that the four women were disqualified to be chosen as member of the National Assembly from Punjab. He said the Election Commission also notified them as National Assembly members on March 6, 2008 which was violation of section 51(1)(A) of the election law. He requested to restraint these ladies from holding public office of MNA on the women reserved seats from Punjab and their election should be declared as unlawful, illegal and ultra constitutional. He further prayed that after declaring them disqualified, the Election Commission be directed to issue notification of next woman from Punjab whose name was appearing in the priority list submitted by the PML-N on November 11, 2007.

(The Nation – November 27, 2008)

Convention of Advisory Committee to Enhance Women's Participation in Political Parties by NDI: Representatives of five major political parties agreed to work together to strengthen their women's wings and institutionalise positions for women in their parties' decision-making bodies. Participating in an advisory

committee to enhance women's participation in political parties convened by the National Democratic Institute, senior leaders from women's wings, including MNAs and MPAs, pledged that they will work together to develop a national action plan for minimum standards to strengthen and institutionalise women's role in political parties. Members of the advisory committee include from PPP MNA Shagufta Jumani, provincial president of Sindh Women's Wing and Minister of State for Religious Affairs and MPA Azma Zahid Bukhari, General Secretary Women's Wing Punjab; from PML-N MNA Nuzhat Amir Sadiq, President of Women's Wing Islamabad and MNA Anusha Rahman Khan, Central Vice President of Lawyers Wing; from PML-Q MNA Nosheen Saeed Khan and Senator Rehana Yahya Baloch; from ANP MNA Jamila Gillani, Central Joint Secretary and MPA Shagufta Malik, Provincial Vice President; and from MQM Asma Sherwani, Member of Central Women's Council and MNA Shagufta Sadiq, Member of Women's Central Council.

Advisory committee members were optimistic about the fact that Pakistan's transition to democratic rule has offered women various opportunities in government and in their parties yet they shared concerns that women still face some obstacles to full participation and advancement in their parties. Some of the barriers they identified include lack of institutionalised representation of women on policy-making bodies of the parties, lack of transparent mechanisms for merit-based nomination of women for general and reserved seats, incomplete structures of women's wings at different levels, lack of autonomy and resources for women's wings to conduct activities and lack of training and political education for women.

Citing some of their achievements to strengthen their parties, such as membership recruitment, voter registration campaigns to sign up female party supporters, work on election campaigns, organization of public rallies and advocacy for policies to protect women from domestic and other violence, they agreed that now was the right time to join hands to advocate for measures that will ensure women are fully represented within their parties. They agreed to work within their own parties and together with women from other parties to develop a National Action Plan that will include minimum standards for women's participation in political parties and strategies to implement them. The plan will be developed at a national workshop to be arranged by NDI with the assistance of the advisory committee. Women's wing representatives from different parties from all over the country will participate in the workshop.

NDI Country Director Sheila Fruman in her remarks acknowledged the many positive changes that political parties have made to enhance women's participation adding that it is in their interest to continue to support women activists at all levels of the party because more than half the voting population are women. She stated that NDI would continue to support women's efforts to remove the barriers they face in contributing to the democratic development of Pakistan.

(The News – November 8, 2008)

Government Stance & Initiatives on Women's Empowerment

Sherry Promises Practical Steps to Protect Women's Rights: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Sherry Rehman said on November 11 that there would be no trampling of rights of women during the PPP government and necessary steps in this regard were under way. She said in a statement that women's rights were protected whenever the party was in power in the past. In the very first meeting of the expanded cabinet, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani was explicit in his instructions to the ministers that they must start taking seriously the challenges ahead of the nation in enforcing human rights, including those of minorities and women, she said. Sherry said the PPP manifesto made it clear that women's rights will be given the fullest commitment and this was indicated by the unanimous support for the sexual harassment bill moved by the government. In fact, the PM suggested that domestic workers' rights should also be protected under the domestic violence bill awaiting discussion now in the Standing Committee. She said arrests were being made in the scandalous Balochistan cases of honour killing recently, which she is personally following with the authorities. The PM himself will soon hold consultation with women's activists and stakeholders to chart a way forward for any future legislative and executive action. Sherry said giving high priority to women's issues was not enough and a framework for effective implementation was critical to legislative efforts of the government. Commenting on the Bill on Protection from Harassment at Workplace approved by the cabinet last week, she said any given legislation requires a distinct set of practical actions for enforcement. She said that the government is working to strengthen the mandate of the NCSW as it is a part of our policy commitment." The commission was instituted by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto during her term in the government. Its role in spearheading the movement for the presentation of Women's Protection Bill is a shining example of its potential.

(The News – November 12, 2008)

15,000 Domestic Women to be hired by PBM: The Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal (PBM) through its Production Units Programme will employ 15,000 domestic women being trained in 150 vocational centres across the country. PBM Chief Zamurd Khan said they would use buildings of vocational training centres as production

houses and those completed their training would work in production units to earn livelihood. He observed that this effort will not only provide relief to the domestic women, it would also ensure the provision of opportunities for them to display their creative skills and enhance professionalism. The vocational centres in various districts are providing free training to widows, orphans and poor girls in different skills. He said the PBM will also establish some display centres at major cities to showcase the diversity of crafts from various regions prepared by these domestic women. The PBM had planned to open the Vocational Training Centres in jails for women prisoners initially one in each province. In this connection, one VTC is running in Haripur (NWFP). Whereas other Provinces/Regions have informed that establishment of VTC is not feasible in any of their jail. Talking about the working of Food Support Programme (FSP) of PBM, Zamurd Khan said that there was a shortage of funds while Benazir Income Support Programme initiated by the federal government was more useful than FSP to support deserving families at maximum.

(The Post – November 17, 2008)

30,000 Female Enumerators to be Hired for Conducting Census: To collect accurate information about women, the Population Census Organisation plans to hire 30,000 to 40,000 female enumerators mainly in urban areas and semi-urban areas. A source in the census department told that majority of those enumerators would be teachers. "In addition to original salary for their services, the department plans to pay them extra half-salary in order to motivate them to join the census activities," he said. It is for the first time in the history of census that the department will hire female enumerators. Explaining the reason for not hiring women in rural areas, he said that due to long distances and unfavourable conditions, it would be difficult for them to do so in majority of rural areas. "We will hire female enumerators in as many localities as possible," he pointed out. He said that the questionnaire for House Listing and Population and Housing Census had been finalised which also includes changes made to accommodate gender. "The questionnaire will be first presented before the census advisory committee and after its approval it will be sent to the cabinet for the final nod," he added. Elaborating the changes in 'long form', he said that in Column 13 the household work that is generally applied to women had been divided into further six categories. These categories include 'manufactured or sold things, helped in farming, helped in business, teaching, not specified or did not work. He said that the column was introduced after consultation with all stakeholders as people generally hesitate in sharing the activities of women in the house. "We expect that change would help in making data on female labour force participation more accurate," he said, adding that this information would also provide government with a good indicator, as presently women participation in economic development was very low in papers. He said that March and October were chosen for census, as economic activity was low during those months especially in rural areas. People are usually found in their homes which make it easy to collect correct information.

(The News – November 29, 2008)

Senate Body for Promoting Women Skills: The Senate Standing Committee on Women Development has called for steps to promote skill development among women to enhance their economic empowerment and create better job opportunities for them. A press release said the senate body which visited the Government Polytechnic Institute for Women on November 25 stressed the need for establishing linkages with organizations like Navtec to hold short-term skill development courses for unemployed females. The committee highlighted that more industrial homes particularly in Sindh and southern Punjab should be established to cater for the needs of the female population in those areas. The committee asked the government to launch micro-credit schemes and soft loans for rural women to help them set up their own small business ventures. The Chairperson of the Committee, Senator Tahira Latif constituted a sub-committee under Senator Rukhsana Zuberi and its member senators Jamal Khan Leghari, Bibi Yasmin Shah, Sabina Rauf and Semeen Siddiqui to solve the problems being faced by the institute. Ms Zuberi said that students should be imparted training in solar and bio-gas technologies to bridge the gap between supply and demand of energy. Earlier, the committee was informed that institute was providing professional education in specific fields to women to enable them in self employment and use their capabilities in the development.

(Dawn – November 26, 2008)

Women & Laws

Recommendations by CII on Muslim Family Laws

CII Recommends Changes in Muslim Family Laws: The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) on November 15 proposed drastic changes in Muslim family laws. In a meeting, Chaired by CII Chairman Dr Khalid Masood, it was recommended that:

- Divorce demanded by a woman would take legal effect in case the husband failed to oblige after 90 days.

- Divorce papers should also be registered.
- Bridegroom would declare his assets at the time of his first wedding and give complete details of his first wife and children in the Nikahnama when entering into a second marriage.
- A declaration of first divorce pronounced by the husband would be registered following which, a second and third declaration would seal the fate of marriage.
- Another clause will be added in the Nikahnama by which the husband will assign the right to divorce to the wife.

Meanwhile, in a landmark development, President Asif Ali Zardari has set up a committee on the demand of the CII to review and propose a methodology for amending the laws repugnant to the Islamic teachings. Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Babar Awan will head the committee while the CII secretary will be its member.

(The News – November 16, 2008)

CII Refuses Review of Recommendations: CII sticking to its guns on its recommendations for proposed reforms in the Muslim Family Laws said there is no need for a second review. CII Director General Research Dr Syed Nasir Zaidi said that the recommendations were prepared and finalised after extensive discussions within the council in accordance with the concept, teachings and injunctions of Islam. He said that there is no need for a review of these recommendations. He further said that eight members of the council have already supported the recommendations for changes in family laws. "It is up to the parliament to legislate it or not, as far as CII is concerned it has finalised the recommendations," he said.

The recommendations have sparked a row as religious scholars and political parties are accusing the council of "misinterpreting" the Islamic Sharia laws. The religious-political parties, including Jamaat Islami, Jamiat Ulema Islam, Maddaris boards and various Ulema have already rejected the recommendations. They were of the view that the Council has no right to suggest reforms against the basic spirit of Sharia Laws. They demanded the termination of CII Chairman and an expansion in its composition. Well placed government sources said that an expansion cannot be ruled out in the composition of the Council in the near future. According to the prescribed rules there should be minimum eight and maximum twenty members of the CII while at present there are only nine members including its Chairman.

The President has the power to induct new members into the Council or extend the employment period for three years. The present composition of the Council is Professor Dr Muhammad Khalid Masud, Chairman, while other members include - Justice Dr Rashid Ahmed Jalandhri, Dr Manzoor Ahmad, Justice (R) Dr Munir Ahmad Mughal, Maulana Abdullah Khilji, Dr Mohsin Muzaffar Naqvi, Allama Javed Ahmad Ghamdi, Syed Afzal Haider and Dr Faiz Balqees.

(The Post – November 20, 2008)

CII Chairman Defends Family Law Recommendations: CII Chairman Dr Khalid Masood defended the council's recommendations on family laws, saying he was ready to present its point of view even before Parliament, if it summoned the body. Dr Masood told on November 20 that if Parliament summoned the CII over its recommendations regarding divorce and company of mehram for a woman during haj, he would present his stance in view of the injunctions of the Holy Quran and sunnah. He said the CII had submitted its recommendations to the Religious Affairs Ministry so that they could be forwarded to the Law and Justice Ministry. If the ministry deemed it fit for legislation, after proper drafting, the same would be sent to Parliament, he added. Masood said it was up to Parliament to accept or decline the recommendations. He dispelled the impression that the government made the CII to present the recommendations. He said the CII works as an independent body and does not get influenced by the government for its recommendations. Commenting on the ongoing debate, the Chairman termed it a healthy trend, adding that such debates would provide public with an opportunity to indirectly participate in legislation. The Chairman said people, especially religious scholars, need to differentiate between khulaa and tanseekh (dissolution of marriage). Those criticising the recommendations as contrary to Islamic injunctions are confusing khulaa with tanseekh, he added. Even the constitution could not understand khulaa in its real meanings, he added. Dr Masood said the holy Quran and sunnah had not made it mandatory for a woman to be accompanied by a mehram during haj, a journey for education purposes or for offering prayers in a mosque.

(Daily Times – November 21, 2008)

Legislation according to Teachings of Islam: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Farooq H Naek on November 24 said the government is determined to make legislation for the welfare and protection of women and children according to the teaching and spirit of Islam. Talking to newsmen after presiding a high-level meeting to evaluate the proposals given by the Council for Islamic Ideology (CII), pertaining to women's rights and family laws at the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Minister said that the government will not introduce any law against the teachings of Islam and will pay special attention to protect the rights of women. Naek said that the recommendations given by the council could not be implemented as Parliament has to deliberate upon

these proposals. "It is Parliament, which can pass any law after following the process of legislation. The proposals given by the CII will also pass through the same procedure," the Minister added. Earlier during the meeting, the Minister directed the council to give its recommendations regarding family laws following Article 227 of the Constitution, which says: "All existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah, in this Part referred to as the injunctions of Islam, and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such injunctions." He said these amendments are aimed at providing protection to divorced women and their children from exploitation. Dr Khalid Masood, Chairman, Council for Islamic Ideology, told the meeting that recommendations would be submitted according to the teaching of Quran and Sunnah during the next meeting, and deliberations would be conducted on rights of women as well as to ensure protection of children's future after divorce. He further informed the meeting that he has specifically requested the Ministry of Law and Justice to convene a meeting for bringing reforms in laws pertaining to children as, he said, there was no law in the country regarding child protections.

(The News – November 25, 2008)

Women's Economic Empowerment

Dr Akhtar Among Top Ten Women in Asia: State Bank of Pakistan Governor Dr Shamshad Akhtar has been named amongst the top ten women leaders in Asia by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ). The WSJ Asia has compiled a list of Asia-based women, focusing on those who are having an impact on business now or who will be influential in the years ahead. Shamshad Akhtar is better positioned than most to tackle the country's mammoth economic challenges," the journal wrote while announcing its decision on November 10. It said that she doesn't lack for backbone, either. Ms. Akhtar is known for speaking her mind. Dr Akhtar is a former economist with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, so she doesn't lack for experience, it added.

(Dawn – November 11, 2008)

Businesswomen Discuss their 'Recipes' for Success: Encouraging women to come out and discover immense business opportunities around them, women business entrepreneurs in a roundtable meeting said that women could achieve any level of success with hard work backed by passion and zeal. They were sharing their experiences on the ups and downs they faced in their respective businesses at an informal meeting organised by Old Association of Kinnaird Society (OAKS).

Narrating their motivating stories, the speakers said that they never imagined their businesses would flourish the way they did. "When I started off my restaurant, the only target I had in my mind was to earn a profit of Rs3,000," said Zeenat Ayesha, owner of famous Italian restaurant Pappasallis. Talking about the discouragement her idea of opening a restaurant received in the beginning, she said that her close relatives clearly told her that it was bound to fail because of its location. "I had only a few customers on the first day but things completely changed on the third day," she recalled pointing out that it was a weekend and the restaurant was packed. Describing the daily routine on way to her remarkable success, Ayesha said that she used to have her breakfast at the butcher's each morning and from there she went to the vegetable shop. She said that the best thing about a business is that you give employment to many families and in turn are able to serve the overall community. Sharing her experience of serving women in jail, Shaheena Jabeen of the Women Aid Trust said that it all started following a visit to a women's jail to distribute some basic stuff among prisoners. "All that resulted in a series of continuous effort to facilitate them and provide basic training to them to be able to earn their livelihood." She said that women in jail were mostly victims of circumstances and were used by close relatives to commit crimes. "In a need assessment survey, we found out that more than 50 percent of women imprisoned on murder charges had not actually committed the crime and were used by some relative, mostly husbands." Explaining further, she said that men tend to use women in such crimes for they were usually not awarded death penalty. She said that more than 50 percent of women were in jail on charges of drug dealing. Later, Founder of Design by Ilona, Ilona Yusuf said that her passion made her a businesswoman from a kindergarten teacher. She said that inventing new themes while using her skills in a unique way gave her the recognition she enjoys today.

(The News – November 7, 2008)

Reports/Articles/Books on Gender

Global Gender Gap Report

Pakistan Close to Bottom on Global Gender Gap List: The World Economic Forum (WEF) on November 12 released the Global Gender Gap Report 2008 through its partner institute in Pakistan, the Competitiveness Support Fund (CSF). According to the annual report, the social and economic empowerment of women is still very low in Pakistan and they are struggling for their livelihood and survival. Pakistan ranked 127th among 130 countries in this year's Global Gender Gap ranking. The report provides a comprehensive framework for

assessing and comparing gender gaps in 92 percent of the world's population this year. There are three basic underlying concepts of the report; it ranks countries according to gender equality rather than women empowerment; focuses on measuring gaps rather than levels and measures those gaps in outcome variables rather than input variables. There are 14 gender gap indices, which focus on the economic participation and opportunities available to women, their educational attainment, health, survival and political empowerment. Pakistan ranked poorly in almost all categories in the report. It, however, fared better in empowering women politically, ranked 50th among 130 countries. Pakistan ranked 117th in both women's literacy rate and workforce population, 115th in healthy life expectancy, 110th in enrolment in primary education, 60th in wage equality for similar work and fifth in years of a female head of state. Norway: Norway leads the world in closing the gender gap, followed by Finland, Sweden and Iceland. Germany (11), the United Kingdom (13) and Spain (17) slipped down the ranking, but remained in the top 20. Netherlands (9), Latvia (10), Sri Lanka (12) and France (15) made significant gains.

(Daily Times – November 13, 2008)

For detailed report: <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2008.pdf>

For rankings: <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2008.pdf>

Violence against Women

Report on Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan

Despite government tall claims to protect women rights, a sharp increase in violence against women has been witnessed, as during last four months as many as 2531 has been reported countrywide with Punjab ranking on top. Violence against women is a persistent and ongoing problem in Pakistan and around the world that is badly affecting social, economic equality, physical and mental health, wellbeing and economic security of women. Aurat Foundation launched its third quarterly report of 2008 on November 13 on “**Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan**”, which is a collection and compilation of statistics on the incidents of violence against women during July to September this year under its national programme against women in Pakistan. According to report, overall violence against women cases in this quarter is far more than the previous two quarters and there had been a sharp increase particularly in Punjab province.

In third quarter, the total number of 2,531 incidents reported across country. Out of which 1,592 cases were reported in Punjab while 402 in Sindh, 251 in NWFP, 220 in Balochistan and 66 in Federal Capital. Report also informed that FIR's of only 1,953 cases have been registered out of the total which is 77.16 percent. The report said that 441 cases of murder were reported as 242 in Punjab, 50 in Sindh, 129 in NWFP, 18 in Balochistan and 2 in Islamabad. 143 cases of honour killings were reported in third quarter 21 in Punjab, 70 in Sindh, 2 in NWFP, 49 in Balochistan and 1 in Islamabad. The report indicated that 601 cases of abduction reported which are higher than the cases reported in the first two quarters, whereas ratio of suicides was also quite high in the third quarter (246) as compared to the first two quarters and cases of murder were also high (441), as compared to the last two quarters.

(The Nation – November 14, 2008)

1,019 Women killed for Honour over Three Years

The National Assembly was told on November 13 that more than 7,000 cases of rape and murders of women were registered between 2005 and 2007, in addition to 1,019 cases of honour killings. According to statistics tabled in the Lower House, the total number of honour killing cases is 1,019 – 321 in 2005, 339 in 2006 and 359 in 2007. Stove burning cases include 18 cases in 2005, 17 in 2006 and 10 in 2007. Meanwhile, 3,236 murder cases were registered during the period between 2005 and 2007 – 1,075 in 2005, 1,084 in 2006 and 1,077 in 2007. Similarly, 4,971 rape cases were registered in this period. The number of registered cases of domestic violence in the country is 4,290, apart from acid attacks, honour killings and stove accidents. The statistics showed that 53 cases of acid attacks were registered between 2005 and 2007.

(Daily Times – November 14, 2008)

Women Harassment Highest in Karachi, Dadu -- Sindh Assembly Q&A Session

The Sindh Assembly was told on November 27 that during the last three years from January 2005 to April 2008, a **total of 775 cases of domestic violence and harassment of women** were reported in Sindh. The highest numbers of cases were reported in Karachi and Dadu which had 146 cases each. The Sindh Home Department officials were asked questions and Sindh Law Minister Ayaz Soomro on behalf of Dr Zulfiqar Mirza, who was not attending the session, responded to them. On a question raised by Humera Alwani, the house was informed that the Mirpurkhas district was on the second number with a total of 93 cases of domestic violence and harassment of women. The member also pointed out that the seven districts including Tando Allahyar, Tharparkar, Shikarpur, Kashmore, Jacobabad and Larkana had zero cases registered.

(Daily Times – November 28, 2008)

Child Rights

National Plan of Action for Child Protection awaits Implementation

National Plan of Action (NPA) for Child Protection is awaiting implementation even after four years of its approval by the federal cabinet in January 2005. The National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) had prepared the plan under the aegis of Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education to meet the country's national and international commitments to child protection and welfare. However, the government has yet to execute it. Manizeh Bano, Executive Director of Sahil, a non-governmental organisation working for child right, said the execution of plan could ensure provision of a protective environment for child development. She said the government, NGOs and UNICEF developed the plan in January 2005 and it includes suggestions and initiatives for prevention of child abuse

and exploitation. Bano said the NGOs Working Group (WG) against Child Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation conducted six countrywide workshops to sensitise media on child protection issues in the light of NPA. She said the NPA covered the issues like child sexual abuse and exploitation, child pornography and prostitution, health, shelter, poverty, child labour, education and child mortality. She demanded that the government implement the NPA to provide a strong base for child protection in Pakistan. She said the WG was also striving for promoting best reporting practices and mechanism. Bano is also a member of Steering Committee of NGOs Working Group (WG) against Child Sexual Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation. She said children were forced to earn a living for their families and thus were caught in a web of miseries including health hazards, violence, sexual and economical abuse and exploitation. This all, she said, leads to a bleak future. She said children needed protection from sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriages, armed conflicts and corporal punishment. She further said that in September 1990, Pakistan ratified the Convention for the Rights of the Children in world summit by UNO.

On this occasion, the first national plan of action was prepared by Pakistan on the basis of the targets set by the world summit for children. She said in May 2001, the End Decade Review Report issued by UN Secretary General stated that Pakistan's progress fell significantly short of the targets set by the UN in world summit.

(Daily Times – November 12, 2008)

Impact of Internal Displacement on Children

Society for Protection of the Rights of the Children (SPARC)'s Executive Director Qandeel Shujjat said that the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bajur, Swat valley, Balochistan and Sindh due to either military operation, or earthquake, or floods is as high as 0.8 million out of which 0.4 million are children. Speaking at the National Conference organized on the Impact of Displacement on Children, he said that these were modest figures and that the actual number be as high as 600,000 IDPs only for Swat Valley. Shujjat said that the IDPs were either living in camps or with host families. The issue of the impact of displacement on children had been neglected he said, adding that conflict in NWFP, earthquake in Balochistan and floods in Sindh were responsible for the plight of the IDPs. The issues related to schooling, protection and repatriation of children should be taken up by the Government. Shujaat said, adding that the right of internally displaced children should be protected.

(Daily Times – November 14, 2008)

Child Rights Initiative Launched: Parliament of the Children, by the Children, for the Children

November 14 turned out to be a big day for Pakistani children, as they had a Parliament of their own in place. Created with a realisation to give children a platform to voice concerns and demands about issues and challenges confronting them, Children's Parliament – an initiative of SPARC (Society for the Protection of the Rights of Children) – opened its maiden session with a unanimous call for protection of child rights by the society at large. There came also an appeal to politicians for upholding democratic norms and values. Picked during a nationwide electoral exercise at schools of late, 34 children, both girls and boys, formally became members of Children Parliament by taking the oath.

Prime Minister Zainab Samantash of Islamabad Convent School also made it to the session chaired by Speaker Bakht Jamshed of Islamabad City School. Anees Jilani, a senior Supreme Court lawyer, administered oath to the children representing Islamabad, Peshawar, Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Mithi (Sindh), Kohlu (Balochistan), Balakot (the NWFP) and the country's other towns. A day ago, little MPs were briefed on Parliament's working, rules and procedures and constitution. A UNDP official, Marvi, conducted the briefing. Anees Gillani advised minor lawmakers to discuss and legislate on protection of child rights, child development, cleanliness, community help etc.

The opening remarks came from SPARC Executive Director Qandeel Shujaat, who said he had conceived the idea of creating parliament of the children, for the children and by the children last year and realised it a one-year time. He said Parliament would make available a forum to children for apprising the authorities and the society of demands and concerns regarding their rights and other problems. There followed the formal opening of the floor to the Parliamentarians by the speaker.

(Daily Times – November 15, 2008)

Basic Human Rights

54 Million Pakistanis without Safe Drinking Water

As many as 54 million Pakistanis out of a population of 165 million do not have access to safe drinking water and 76 million lack access to sanitation, Simi Sadaf Kamal, a water expert from Karachi, told a conference on

Pakistan's water problem held at the Woodrow Wilson Centre. Kamal, Chairperson of Hissar, an NGO in Karachi, told the conference that 98 million of Pakistanis depend on agriculture, while 49 million live below the poverty line.

She said 92 percent of Pakistan's land area is arid or semi-arid, with the Indus plain covering about 25 percent of the country's total land area on which 65 percent of the population lives and where most of the agriculture is carried out, representing 25 percent of Pakistan's GDP.

Scarcity: She said Pakistan is a water short and a water stressed country and there would be a scarcity of it in 2035. She said 38 percent of Pakistan's irrigated lands are waterlogged, 14 percent are saline and while there is salt accumulation in the Indus basin, saline water has intruded into mined aquifers. She said the decline in the water table in Balochistan has reached alarming levels, while there has been a drastic reduction of sweet water pockets in the lower Indus basin. Kamal told the conference that in Pakistan there has been a protracted debate over the provincial division of water, a division that hides the more critical distribution among the various uses of water. Irrigation and agriculture use up 97 percent of all of Pakistan's freshwater resources, leaving just 4 percent for all other uses. She found that expenditure on water supply and sanitation is less than 0.2 percent of the GDP. She said Mangla and Tarbela dams have lost 25 percent of their storage capacity and as canals work on rotation, there is little additional water that can be mobilised over and above what is currently used. She also found that water loss between canal heads and water courses is about one-fourth, while water courses account for one-third of delivery. Another 25 percent is lost within the farms. There are persistent inequalities in water distribution to head, middle and tail areas and only 45 percent of cultivable land is under cultivation at any given time.

Productivity: Pakistan is using 97 percent of its surface water resources and mining its groundwater to support one of the lowest productivities in the world per unit of water and per unit of land. This reality, she pointed out, does not figure in the ongoing water debate in Pakistan.

Dams: Kamal said there is need for costly investments for the construction of one or two dams, but they have become a protracted and controversial issue between Punjab and the other three provinces. The Kalabagh dam stands shelved for the moment while the Diamer-Bhasha Dam has 'reared its head'. If built, it would cost \$12.6 billion and will be completed in 2016, generating 45,000 MW of electricity. It will also benefit the country to the tune of \$1.5 billion in the form of hydropower and \$600 million in the form of water for irrigation. She was of the view that more efficient and better maintained system will lead to substantive savings in the total amount of water lost in transmission. A reasonable proportion of this water will be freed for storage and the needs of lean years it would thus be possible to meet. Kamal said the politics of water in Pakistan is still built around access to river water for traditional methods of irrigation that do not disturb the status quo of feudal land relations. She said there has been much neglect of rain-fed and non-irrigated arid zones, with the entire province of Balochistan badly affected. Very little effort has been made to develop non-flood methods of cultivation and micro-irrigation strategies have been neglected. She said there are half a million tubewells in the Indus basin area and groundwater now accounts for half of all on-farm irrigation requirements. Kamal stated that only one out of the 17 main creeks of the Indus delta are now active and the balance between seawater and freshwater in the tidal zone has been disturbed. The sixth biggest mangrove forest in the world is now disappearing and the drying up of the Indus downstream from the Kotri Barrage is a serious development. There is sea water intrusion.

Laws: Kamal told the conference that Pakistan does not have a comprehensive set of water laws that define water rights, uses, value, pricing principles, subsidies, conservation and polluter penalties. There is disproportionate emphasis and preoccupation with water distribution among provinces, the current arrangement being the one provided by the Water Accord of 1991. Environmental flow is a major source of contention between Punjab and Sindh and their protracted positions have fed many political campaigns. There is a lack of coherent positions on water in the manifestos of Pakistan's political parties. She said every river in the world has a dispute of some sort between the upper and the lower riparian, so Pakistan is no exception, but there are many models that can be studied. Safeguards for the lower riparian are essential and solutions are possible.

Kamal said Pakistan can meet its water challenges through a continuation of conventional reforms and interventions. However, it has to be something other than 'business as usual'. It needs a paradigm shift to reframe the entire discourse and debate on water. The fundamental issues of rights and water access have to be addressed. What is needed is a shift from provincial distribution to uses of water and the users of water. The Punjab-Sindh debate should make way for better managed water for the whole of Pakistan. There has to be a shift from management of water supply to management of water demand. She pointed out that not everyone in Punjab has excess or even adequate water, while not everyone in Sindh is deprived of water. The use of water should be rationalised and the greatest savings made where there is the greatest use, as in agriculture.

(Daily Times – November 24, 2008)

UNFPA Report on State of World Population Released

State of World Population 2008 report released by United Nations Population Fund under the title “**Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights**” calls for Integration of Culture into development policy and programming stressing that culturally sensitive approaches are crucial for understanding legal, political, economic, and social power relations and its effective use for development. “Human rights reflect universal values.

Following are the highlights of the report:

- It calls for culturally sensitive approaches to development because they are essential for human rights in general, and women’s rights in particular”, says the report.
- The document highlights that cultures are influence and are influenced by external factors and people are continually reshaping them, while some aspects of culture continue to influence choices and lifestyles.
- The report suggests that generalization about cultures is risky. “It is particularly dangerous to judge one culture by the norms and values of another. Even in the same culture not everyone agrees on norms and values, in fact, change comes about when people resist cultural pressures” it says. Underlining the need of embracing cultural realities, the report says that it is the most effective way to challenge harmful cultural practices and strengthen beneficial ones.
- The State of World Population regrets that human rights protect groups as well as individuals but the critical relationships between human rights and cultures are often overlooked.
- The document while stressing the need for awareness about culturally sensitive approaches among all communities even in the marginalized groups, adds “Human development with full realization of human rights depends on serious and respectful engagement with cultures”.
- The document, while highlighting the poor status of Women and Children says that despite international agreements, including the most recently the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the gender inequality remains deeply rooted in many cultures. “Women and girls are three fifths of world’s one billion poorest people; women are two thirds of 960 million adults in the world who cannot read, and girls are 70 percent of 130 million children who are out of school”, it informs.
- The report says that many harmful practices continue in many countries despite laws against them. “Cultural sensitivity helps to mitigate and overcome cultural resistance to couples and individuals using modern contraception”, the document notes.
- The report reveals that culturally sensitive approaches are essential to improve maternal health and reaching the MDGs as the number of women dying due to pregnancy related complications remains unchanged since 1980s.
- The report recognizes religion as central to most people’s lives, influencing their most intimate decisions and actions. The report notes that appeals to religion can be used to justify blatant human rights violations such as killing women in the name of, “honour” or “crimes of passion”.
- The document says that the very poor and other marginalized communities benefit least from development policies. “Poorer women, in particular, suffer from harmful aspects of tradition and culture, with higher risks of maternal death, illness and injury” says the report. Similarly the report adds “‘Unequal development’ makes more people poor, and makes the already poor poorer. Low levels of health and education make it more difficult to translate any additional income into improved well-being”
- The report finds that, cultural constraints rather than poverty hold women back from using family planning. The report says that key to better motherhood is better reproductive health, including access to family planning, skilled care for all births; timely obstetric care for complications during childbirth and skilled care for women and babies after delivery.
- The report acknowledges that migration creates problems both for host as well as source countries by creating misunderstanding, discrimination and hostility towards migrants. Similarly the source countries lose skilled and qualified workers and family community members. “Trafficking, the dark underside of migration, damages both communities and the individuals concerned” the document says.
- The document pinpoints that Women due to their cultural position are often targeted in war and subjected to sexual violence. “The woman suffers doubly, communities may view her as tainted or worthless and she may suffer further violence as a result”, says the report. It says that militarization of culture makes violence more likely and more acceptable and holds women back from empowerment and equality.
- The report stresses that development and humanitarian assistance must be sensitive to the stresses brought on by armed conflict. “Culturally sensitive approaches aim to protect women from violence and help men o avoid using it” the document notes. The report says that failure in recognizing the implications of conflict may exclude women and minorities, including people with disabilities, from involvement in setting post –conflict priorities and development strategies.

- “Culturally sensitive approaches are also needed for people coping with trauma; meeting refugees’ needs for sexual and reproductive healthcare; building partnerships with local organizations and helping people retain or recover their sense of cultural identity amid the ravages of war” reveals the document.
- The State of World Population 2008 concludes that the cumulative impact of economic and social change is forcing cultures to change in response.” But successful adaptation depends on understanding what is happening and responding to it”, the document notes.

The detailed report can be accessed through: <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2008/presskit/docs/en-swop08-report.pdf>

(The Nation – November 14, 2008)

Violence in Karachi

Death toll in the fresh wave of riots and firing incidents in various parts of Karachi shot up on November 30 to 30 with over 200 injured. Sindh Home Department has imposed a ban on pillion-riding for three days. Heavy contingents of police and Rangers failed to maintain law and order situation as another 16 people were killed and more than 70 sustained injuries besides 50 vehicles, houses and a number of shops were set on fire Sunday by the unruly mob. Different trade centres, markets, petrol pumps, shops and CNG stations remained closed and transport system in the City completely came to stand still. Sindh Interior Department has declared red alert in the City and deployed more than 500 rangers personnel and increased police patrolling in different parts. The entire city is in the grip of tension and fear and city administration has declared emergency in all hospitals. Police department has also cancelled vacations of its personnel in view of the law and order situation. Paramedical staff of Qatar and Abbasi Shaheed Hospital also wounded in the riots. Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies have arrested more than 35 miscreants from different parts of city.

(The Nation – December 1, 2008)

SAFMA-PMC Moot Urges Media to Promote Tolerance

Participants of the Roundtable held on November 29-30 said that media should promote tolerance, democratic culture and respect for human rights and should win the hearts and minds of the people to isolate terrorists. They appreciated the initiatives taken by South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) and Pakistan Media Commission (PMC) to have arranged the dialogue within the media and with participants from the civil society. The resolution said that both electronic and print media must strengthen the institution of editorial, quality control and social responsibility while strictly adhering to voluntarily following code of ethics recognized by leading media bodies and appointment of knowledgeable and independent ombudsman in each media outlet. The resolution further says that a journalist must not personally attack another journalist and respect friendly polemics and debate. No room for terrorists attacking citizens, mosques, imambarghs, hospitals, schools and citizens on whatever pretext.

(Daily Times – December 1, 2008)

Democracy Watch

Political Governance

Parliamentary Committees

Parliament's Oversight Committee Formed: National Assembly Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza constituted a 17-member special committee on November 10 to monitor implementation of a resolution on national security passed by the joint session of both houses of Parliament on Oct 22. The speaker said the committee had been formed in consultation with parliamentary leaders of both the houses to periodically review, provide guidelines and monitor implementation of the principles framed and roadmap given in the resolution. Dr. Mirza said the committee comprising 10 Senators and seven MNAs would frame its own rules and Mian Raza Rabbani would preside over its meetings because the chairman of the committee was yet to be appointed. She said the committee had been asked to frame rules within one month from the date of its notification. The speaker said that the committee would be allowed to hold open public meetings in troubled areas, if it wanted to do so. Its discussions on sensitive matters of national security and its visits would, however, be kept confidential, she added. The committee may also call for convening an in-camera session of Parliament if required, Dr Mirza said, adding that committee's consensus formulations would be made public.

The committee members are: Mian Raza Rabbani, Babar Awan and Sherry Rehman (PPP), Ishaq Dar and Mehtab Abbasi (PML-N), Wasim Sajjad (PML-Q), Syed Haider Abbas Rizvi (MQM), Asfandyar Wali (ANP), Maulana Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F), Prof. Khurshid Ahmed (JI), Abdur Razzaq Thaheem (PML-F), Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao (PPP-S), Abdur Rahim Mandokhel (PkMAP), Mir Israrullah Zehri (BNP-A), Shahid Hassan Bugti (JWP), Maulana Sami-ul-Haq (JUI-S) and Munir Khan Orakzai (Fata).

(Dawn – November 11, 2008)

Special NA Committee to Probe Fake Encounters by Punjab Police: The National Assembly on November 19 agreed to form a special committee to probe fake encounters by Punjab Police and empowered the Speaker to name its members. On a point of order, PML-Q legislator Raza Hayat Hiraj raised the issue of extra-judicial killings in five police stations of Khanewal and demanded a formation of a special committee of the house to probe fake encounters by Punjab Police. However the PML-N members opposed the formation of the committee, arguing the matter should be taken with the Punjab Government as it was a provincial subject. Federal Minister of the Parliamentary Affairs Dr Babar Awan and Minister of State for Interior Tasneem Qureshi termed the extra-judicial killings as an extra-constitutional act and said he government had no objection over formation of the special committee to probe such incidents. Deputy Speaker Faisal Karim Kundi also agreed to the proposal and directed Raza Hayat Hiraj to take up the issue with the Minister of the Parliamentary Affairs Dr Babar Awan and Minister of State Tasneem Qureshi so that the committee could be formed, if needed. Rana Tanvir of PML-N opposed the formation of the committee, saying that as the PML-N had assured actin against the police officials, therefore there was no need for the committee. Ghaus Bux Mahr supported the constitution of the committee. Later, the Deputy Speaker on the recommendation of the House agreed to constitute a committee to probe the incidents.

(The News – November 20, 2008)

Legislative Business

Electronic Crimes Ordinance

Cyber-Terrorism will be Punishable by Death: President Asif Ali Zardari promulgated the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance on November 6, making cyber-terrorism punishable with death or imprisonment for life. The penalty is limited to an offence that 'causes death of any person', according to the ordinance that will be considered effective from September 29.

Following punishments would be imposed with respect to particular cyber crime:

- "Whoever commits the offence of cyber terrorism and causes death of any person shall be punishable with death or imprisonment for life, and with fine," the new law states. In other cases, "he shall be punishable with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, or with fine not less than Rs 10 million, or with both".

- “Any person, group or organisation who, with terroristic intent, utilises, accesses or causes to be accessed a computer or computer network or electronic system or electronic device or by any available means, and thereby knowingly engages in or attempts to engage in a terroristic act commits the offence of cyber terrorism.”
- ‘Terroristic intent’ has been defined as: “To act with the purpose to alarm, frighten, disrupt, harm, damage, or carry out an act of violence against any segment of the population, the government or entity associated therewith”.
- “Aiding the commission of or attempting to aid the commission of an act of violence against the sovereignty of Pakistan, whether or not the commission of such act of violence is actually completed; or stealing or copying, or attempting to steal or copy, or secure classified information or data necessary to manufacture any form of chemical, biological or nuclear weapon, or any other weapon of mass destruction also includes cyber terrorism,” states the ordinance.
- Fraud, stalking, spamming: Criminal access to an electronic system will be punishable with up to two years in prison and a Rs 300,000 fine, according to the ordinance. Criminal data or system damage is punishable with up to three years.
- Electronic fraud will be punishable with up to seven years of imprisonment and/or fine, ‘misuse’ of electronic systems with up to three years, unauthorised access to code with up to three years, and producing malicious code with up to five years.
- Cyber stalking is punishable with up to seven years in prison and a Rs 100,000 fine, and up to 10 years if the victim is a minor.
- Spamming will be punishable with up to a Rs 50,000 fine for the first offence, and three months in prison for subsequent offences.

(Daily Times – November 7, 2008)

Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services Bill

NA Adopts Opposition Bill to Train Parliamentarians: The National Assembly completed, on November 18, parliamentary approval of an opposition bill to provide for a training and research institute for the country’s mostly inept parliamentarians, which the government too took as a feather in its cap that still remains deprived of a major legal decoration. The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services Bill had already been passed by the Senate and, after its unanimous approval by the lower house, needs only a presidential assent to become an act of Parliament for the facility to be set up with budget allocations from both houses of Parliament, contributions from provincial assemblies and parliamentarians, grants from federal and provincial governments and unspecified national and international agencies, as well as funds to be raised by the institute itself.

The functions of the Institute for Parliamentary Services, which will be located in Islamabad with branches in the four provinces, will include maintaining national, provincial and international data, information and statistics to provide to parliamentarians, undertaking research in respect of federal and provincial laws, having a study of international laws to help parliamentarians in law-making, and providing technical assistance and training to parliamentarians and parliamentary functionaries. Its other functions will be: arrange seminars, workshops and conferences, take measures to develop law-making, maintain a record of all existing acts, ordinances and other enactments in force in Pakistan and in each province, assist parliamentarians and legislative bodies in their efforts to ensure public understanding of the working of parliament, arrange legislative drafting courses with special emphasis on parliamentary practices, manage internship programmes for parliament and provincial assemblies, establish and maintain resource centres for parliamentarians and support parliamentary committees in performing their functions and any other function that may be assigned by parliament or the institute’s board of governors to be headed by the Senate chairman or the National Assembly speaker by rotation for three years.

(Dawn – November 19, 2008)

Industrial Relations Bill

NA Approves Industrial Relations Bill: The National Assembly, on November 19, approved the Industrial Relations Bill with majority voice vote despite strong opposition from the PML-N and a walkout. The bill aims to consolidate and rationalise the law relating to the formation of trade unions and improvement of relations between employers and workers. The Senate had already passed the bill unanimously while in the National

Assembly too all parties, including the PML-Q and the MQM, supported it except for the PML-N. Interestingly, the PML-N, which had supported the bill in the upper house, took a U-turn in the National Assembly, saying the bill should not be passed in haste. Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Mian Raza Rabbani had moved the Industrial Relations Bill 2008 in the National Assembly. The bill aims to regulate the government's vision on dignity of labour, elimination of animosity and antagonism by fostering a trust-relationship between employers and employees and promoting social dialogue in the law. The bill also aims to give the right of association to workers employed in Railways, Pakistan Mint and in any institution established for payment of employees' old-age pensions or for workers welfare to provide free discretion of trade unions to join or not to join in any federation or confederation of their own choice and to review the Labour Appellate Tribunals on persistence demand of trade unions/federation in order to ensure speedy disposal of labour disputes.

Minister for Inter-provincial Coordination Mian Raza Rabbani said the IRO-2002 had robbed workers of their rights and it was provided protection under the 17th Amendment. He said all labour unions and labour federations opposed the IRO-2002 and demanded its abolition. "All political parties supported the idea of its early abolition," he added. He said this was an interim law, which would lapse on April 30, 2010. He said during this period a tripartite conference would be held and a new legislation would be introduced following consultation with all the stakeholders. Referring to the PML-N's opposition, he said its legislators in the Senate had fully supported its unanimous adoption by the upper house. He rejected the impression given by some MNAs that the bill was being bulldozed in the house, saying the upper house had thoroughly discussed the bill and it was also referred to the Senate standing committee where several amendments proposed by the opposition senators were incorporated into it.

(The News – November 20, 2008)

National Security Council (NSC)

NSC Dissolved: Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has said the government has decided to dissolve the National Security Council, constituted by General (R) Pervez Musharraf. Gilani was addressing a Press conference on November 28 at the PAF Airbase said that we do not recognise institutions, which are meant to strengthen individuals as the case was of the NSC, constituted by Musharraf, because we believe in the strengthening of the institutions. Earlier, prior to his arrival, a bulletproof podium was erected for him. Seeing this, Gilani got annoyed with the management, and ordered removal of the podium. He apologised to the mediemen, and said he would order a probe into the matter. Gilani, while referring to his meeting with President Asif Ali Zardari earlier Friday, said we had discussed the NSC, and had reached the conclusion that there was no utility of the NSC. "We are for strengthening the institutions, no individuals, and we do not recognise Musharraf's NSC. Nawaz Sharif was also advised to constitute the NSC, but he refused, but this NSC was constituted for empowering an individual," he said while praising the services rendered by Advisor to Prime Minister for National Security Gen (R) Mehmood Ali Durrani. "The General (R) is a competent fellow. He had been working as an ambassador of Pakistan to the US and head of the Inter-Services Intelligence," he added.

(The Nation – November 29, 2009)

Economic Governance

IMF Board Approves 7.6 billion Dollar Credit to Pakistan

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said its executive board approved a credit of 7.6 billion dollars for Pakistan, the Fund's first rescue in Asia since the global financial crisis began. The credit will "support the country's economic stabilization program," the IMF said in a brief statement. The Fund and Pakistan had already announced an agreement in principle earlier this month on the package, aimed at staving off a balance of payments crisis that has raised the prospect of the violence-hit nation defaulting on its foreign debts. Pakistan's precarious financial situation has caused worldwide alarm due to its role as a key ally in the US-led "war on terror" and its position as the Islamic world's only nuclear power.

(The News – November 25, 2008)

Pakistan receives \$3.1 Billion from IMF: IMF has transferred \$3.1 billion in State Bank's account, which will push Pakistan's foreign currency reserves beyond \$9 billion. Syed Waseemuddin, spokesman for the Central Bank, confirmed that Pakistan had received the amount from the IMF. The inflow is part of the \$7.6 billion loan approved by the IMF for Pakistan as a 23-month standby arrangement. Pakistan would be receiving the remaining amounts in quarterly installments. The amount is to be repaid with an interest of 3.51 percent to 4.51 percent between 2011 and 2016. State Bank said on November 27th country's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$6.596 billion on 22nd November. Foreign reserves held by the State Bank of

Pakistan stood at \$3.438 billion while net foreign reserves held by banks other than SBP stood at \$3.157 billion. The reserves have fallen from a peak of \$16 billion in October 2007 because of burgeoning trade and current account deficits. A banker said this inflow would not directly support the rupee because it cannot be used by the central bank for intervention in the foreign exchange market. But it would indirectly support the rupee by lessening the pressure on SBP's own reserves, as these dollars can be used to repay country's debt and for government's own import payments.

(Daily Times – November 28, 2008)

Interim Report on Economic Stabilization with Human Face presented to PM

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on November 18 reiterated that the government is fully committed to restoring macro-economic stability and to rebuild investors confidence, both domestic and foreign. "At the same time it is essential that any stabilization programme, that we adopt, provides an adequate potential for the poor and vulnerable", the Prime Minister said while addressing a meeting of the economic experts, in which he was presented an interim report on economic stabilization.

Dr. Hafeez Pasha, Chairman of the Panel of Economists, which was constituted by the Planning Commission in September this year to suggest a short-term stabilization package to restore macro-economic stability, presented the interim report to the Prime Minister. Advisor to the Prime Minister on Finance and Economic Affairs, Shaukat Tarin, Minister for Planning and Development, Makhdoom Shahabuddin, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Salman Farooqi and Minister of State for Finance, Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar were also present in the meeting.

The Prime Minister lauded the Panel of Economists, Ministry of Finance as well as the Planning Commission for their contribution in the formulation of interim report. He said the report will assist the government in drawing up a home-grown economic stabilization programme, which was being finalized. The Prime Minister said the findings of the report will also help the country's economic team in their negotiations with donors and multilateral institutions. Gilani he said he was happy to note that the report contains his suggestion that the stabilization programme should be both efficient and equitable.

Advisor to the Prime Minister on Finance, Shaukat Tarin briefed the meeting about the government's nine point economic plan and said its implementation will be overseen and reviewed by a policy board co-chaired by the President and Prime Minister. He said the policy board will consist of representatives of government, members of the Planning Commission and experts from the fields of economy and social sciences. An executive committee will work under the board. Each committee member will head a group working on various subjects of the economic plan, he added. Shaukat Tarin said the plan has been prepared with the input of politicians and private sector. He said part of the plan, economic stability will be priority of the government. Social protection, agriculture, industrial competitiveness, human resource development, integrated energy plan, strengthening of capital markets and private public sector partnership are main areas of the plan, he added. The Advisor said previous economic policies failed to yield desired results due to weak implementation so achievement of set targets will remain the main task. The Finance Ministry will be monitoring the economic plan on a monthly basis, he added.

The report has two parts including short term stabilization programme: 2008-2010, with the human face of stabilization focusing on social protection. The second part focuses on identification of structural weaknesses of the economy over medium term with growth strategy, development priorities and institutional improvements to resolve the economic weaknesses. The report notes that there are accumulated imbalances in the form of trade and fiscal deficits that need substantial adjustment, which if not done, the result would be substantial depreciation of the currency and high inflation. Dr. Pasha said the panel is of the view that Pakistan must take decisive action to restore macro economic stability. Pasha was of the view that proposed stabilization recommended in the report would be based on economic mobilization, privatisation, an integrated economic package and social safety nets. The panel proposed mobilization of domestic resources and cut in expenditure besides a privatisation programme aimed at efficient utilisation of domestic and external resources. The economic strategy will focus on sustainable and equitable economic growth putting in place effective social safety nets to protect the vulnerable and poor sections of society, he added. Dr. Pasha said report of the panel targets growth recovery over a medium term through promotion of international competitiveness that may involve exchange rate adjustments. The proposals will help spur agriculture growth, address sub regional inequalities and promote cross border regional trade especially with China through development of infrastructure and appropriate incentives to tap South Asian markets. The panel stresses on institutional reforms including distribution of state land to landless and tenants and provision of credit to small entrepreneurs so that they can become equity holders in the mainstream fields such as dairy, livestock, fisheries, processed food, telecommunication, apparel and software. Dr. Pasha said the interim report also

reaffirms the process of devolution and fiscal assignments between federal and provincial governments especially regarding capital value tax and GST on services.

Detailed report is available on the following link:

<http://www.planningcommission.gov.pk/usefull%20links/Economist/Title-Final-CorelFile1.pdf>

(APP – November 18, 2008)

Draft of Poverty Reduction Plan Unveiled

The government unveiled on November 14 the draft of its policy for reducing poverty during 2009-11 through economic liberalisation, deregulation and transparent privatisation. The **draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)-II** has come at a time when over half the country's population is unemployed, close to one-fourth subsists in poverty and a little less than half is illiterate. The draft was issued at a workshop attended by representatives of donors and the government. Two more workshops will be held before finalising the policy.

The vision of the paper is to regain macroeconomic stability, maintain a growth momentum of 7-8 per cent per annum, create employment opportunities and improve income distribution and the country's global economic competitiveness. It lays emphasis on agriculture and manufacturing sectors, alongside services. Labour-intensive sectors, such as housing and construction and small and medium enterprises, will receive greater attention with the focus on skill development and higher education.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)-II would be based on 10 pillars, as compared to four in the PRSP- I, to improve living standards of the poor and to bring out country from current economic crises. These 10 pillars are; **Macroeconomic stability and real sector growth; protecting the poor and the vulnerable; increasing productivity and value addition in agriculture; integrated energy development programme; making industry internationally competitive; Human development for the 21st century; removing infrastructure bottlenecks through public private partnership; capital and finance for development; Housing and assets title; and the last one is governance for a just and fair system. Linking the economic growth-poverty reduction nexus** are the very elements that the new PRSP focuses on.

PRSP is a national economic pro-poor policy document aimed to reduce the menace of poverty through developing a stable macroeconomic framework and improve human and physical infrastructure. Under the PRSP-II, the government would try to achieve 3.4 percent real GDP growth in 2008-09 while in next year 2009-10 it would be increase to 5 percent and in 2010-11 the real GDP growth rate is targeted to be 5.5 percent. Under the PRSP-II, the trade deficit would be 8 percent in 2008-09, next year it would be reduced to 7.5 percent and in 2010-11 to 7.1 percent of the GDP.

(Dawn – November 15, 2008)

Petrol Price Cut by Rs 9, Diesel by Rs 4

The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) on November 30 evening announced Rs 9 to Rs 13.5 per litre reduction in petroleum products with immediate effect. This is the third relief measure in real terms since November, fixing petrol price at Rs 57.66 per litre, diesel at Rs 48 per litre, HOBC at Rs 72.08 and kerosene oil at Rs 51.87. The decision of decreasing petrol prices by Rs 9 per litre, kerosene oil by Rs 5 and high-speed diesel by Rs 4 will be applied with immediate effect. Prices of High Octane Blendin Component (HOBC) have also been reduced by Rs9 per litre. Likewise, the prices of Light Diesel Oil (LDO) have also been reduced by Rs5 per litre. The new prices of High Speed Diesel (HSD) after reduction of Rs4 per litre will be notified by the respective oil marketing companies. The government had reduced the POL prices on November 15 and November 1 earlier this month. Experts say it will help reduce inflation in the country for which the Sate Bank had also increased the discount rate to 15 per cent. The reduction in LDO price would give comfort to the masses and it would now lead to big relief in kitchen items and food prices as transportation costs would come down. The price of kerosene oil will provide relief to the poor who live in remote areas of the country where natural gas and LPG facilities are not available. The fast dwindling of POL prices and food commodities in the international market will not only help massively reduce inflation in the country, but also give oxygen to the ailing economy of Pakistan. However, according to experts, inflation would be negative in most of the world except Pakistan in the new scenario. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance, Shaukat Tarin had announced two days earlier that prices of petroleum products would be reduced on Sunday. He had said the benefit of declining international oil prices would be passed on to the consumers.

(The News – December 1, 2008)

Local Government System & Provincial Updates

Punjab

Commissioners to Co-ordinate between Provincial, District Govts’: Provincial Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Rana Sanaulah Khan said that the Punjab government does not want to abolish the local government system, instead, it wants to establish co-ordination between the provincial and the district governments by restoring commissioners at divisional levels. He said this in a programme, ‘Meet the Press’, at the Punjab Assembly (PA). The Minister said that just because the Land Revenue Amendment Bill had been presented in the House, it did not mean that the Punjab government wanted to hinder the local body system.

The Minister said that it is just about the development schemes the Punjab government wishes to bring to a division level. He further said that the government wanted to establish proper co-ordination between the local bodies and the Punjab government. He said that without commissioners there was no co-ordination between the provincial and the district governments, adding that the Punjab government had appointed divisional commissioners for the public’s betterment. To a question about amendments in the local government and police ordinances, he said that the government wanted to make necessary amendments in them, adding that the Punjab government had sought President Asif Ali Zardari’s permission for it. Replying to a question about the differences between the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) regarding the appointment of the provincial ombudsman and prosecutor general, he said that there were differences between both parties, adding that the matter had been resolved.

(Daily Times – November 23, 2008)

Proposal to Abolish LG System sent to PM’: Punjab Local Government Minister Sardar Dost Muhammad Khosa said on November 17 that the Punjab government has sent its final set of recommendations to the federal government on abolishing the local government system introduced by former President Pervez Musharraf in 2001. The minister told the media after attending a USAID workshop at the National Art Gallery that “we have sent our final recommendations to abolish the 2001 local government system to the prime minister, and have suggested that it be replaced with the local bodies system of 1979”. He claimed that the current system was ‘not transparent’, and said the Punjab government had recently identified misappropriation of Rs 52 billion in the local government audit for 2005-08. A detailed report had been prepared on the misappropriation and 144 tehsil municipal administrators had been named in it, he added. Khosa said the current system had created several ‘complications’ and was full of confusions. “Under the Local Government Ordinance, provincial governments could not intervene in the working of district governments ... even when it became essential in certain cases. The failure of the local government system led to problems during Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry’s visit to Karachi last year,”

(Daily Times – November 18, 2008)

LGO Protected by Ambiguity in Constitution: There is great confusion concerning the time remaining before the constitutional bar on amending the Local Government Ordinance (LGO), 2001 is lifted, a Punjab government official has said. The federal government maintains that the constitutional condition is valid until December 2009, while the Punjab government claims that the mandatory time period has already expired. However, the provincial governments of the NWFP and Balochistan state that the condition would end in April 2009. The Sindh government has not expressed any opinion on the matter as yet, the official added. Meanwhile, another official said, a summary submitted to the Prime Minister requesting that the federal government waive the condition of the Sixth Schedule has not shown any progress. Under the Sixth Schedule, the LGO cannot be altered, repealed or amended without prior approval of the president. The official said that President Asif Ali Zardari had visited Sindh recently to settle the reservations of the main coalition political party of the province regarding the LGO, but no progress had been made. The summary is still pending at the PM Secretariat, he added. Sources said that all the stakeholders had varying views about the end of the constitutional condition, preventing any actual progress.

(Daily Times – November 29, 2008)

Sindh

Audit of Local Bodies Announced – MQM-backed LGs Exempted: In an effort to tame local bodies mainly headed by nazims from opposition parties, the Sindh government has ordered a special audit of their funds for the period from 2002 and 2008, it has been learnt. While Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah’s order calls for the special audit of the local bodies of the whole province, it exempts the City District Government of Karachi and the District Government of Hyderabad – which individually are not only the biggest single district establishments in the province but their budget might also be more than the combined budget of the rest of the local governments of the province. The order by Mr Shah says that teams are being constituted for the

special audit of all district governments/ town/ taluka municipal administrations in Sindh (excluding the city district government of Karachi and the district government of Hyderabad) with the following composition in accordance with Section 115(8) and Section 132 (C) of the Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001. The order says that the special audit shall be undertaken in phases, starting with the current financial year and going back to financial years up to audit year 2002–2003. In the first phase, special audit of accounts pertaining to financial years 2006–2007 and 2007-2008 (up to June 30, 2008) shall be taken up immediately. The audit conducted during the aforementioned periods shall not form the basis of any immunity from the special audit and they shall not be exempted from the purview of the said special audit. The special audit exercise would compass all payments from Account No IV and from the accounts of all banks of TMAs (town municipal administrations) both officially allowed and those created unlawfully by the sub-national governments. The audit teams shall take special note of this anomaly and recommend actions for the malpractices in the contravention of Section 108 of SLGO 2001. The finance department shall provide a complete list of the annual development programme (ADP), Tameer-i-Karachi Programme, details of PFC awards, releases pertaining to special programmes during the period under audit and other releases to the teams for conducting the audit. The special audit teams shall take into account the financial management system of sub-national governments and ensure that the provision of Section 109 SLGA 2001 is duly followed.

Civil Society & Local Governance Support

UNDP to Help Strengthen Local Governance School

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will help strengthen the capacity of Local Governance School (LGS) of the NWFP government to make its operations in accordance with the needs of the modern age. To this effect, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Muhammad Ikram, Khan, the project director of Gender Based Governance (GBG) System Project NWFP-a UNDP funded initiative-and Rehmat Kabir, director LGS, says a press release. The GBG system project was launched in June 2008 in collaboration with Planning and Development Division, Islamabad, and NWFP Planning and Development Department. The UNDP is supporting the initiative both technically and financially with cost sharing donors, including UK Department for International Development, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Norwegian government. The GBG, as per the MoU, will train nazims, naib nazims, councillors, planning officers, tehsil municipal officers and tehsil officers on gender-based local planning and service delivery. The MoU also stipulates the institutionalisation of the capacity-building initiatives of the GBG-UNDP. For the purpose, LGS will be assisted in curriculum and module development, integrating gender perspective, strengthens faculty and resource persons to deliver gender responsive trainings. The LGS is a newly established training institute working under NWFP Local Government Department. Its main objective is to provide trainings, refresher courses, study tours and exchange of dialogues to the public sector employees in general and local government in specific.

(The News – November 9, 2008)

USAID Survey – Citizens' Perceptions and Preferences on LG System

The people support democratically elected government and believe that a properly functioning Local Government (LG) system may be the best method for improving quality of their life. These views were expressed by the speakers at the launch of the results of the national survey on the citizens' perceptions and preferences about the LG system in the country. Funded by the USAID, the Urban Institute (UI) and AC Nielson conducted the survey at a time when all the provinces are undertaking a formal review and reform of their local government systems in order to improve the delivery of services to the people. The survey results have been grouped into three different areas: Perspectives on institutions of governance at the provincial and federal level; opinions about the coverage and quality of services and preferences for policy reform.

The speakers said the reform of the provincial LG system is not a matter of closeted technical design and drafting of legislation; it can be more effective when it takes place in an environment where the needs, priorities and experience of the people are taken into consideration. They said the legitimacy of the government is measured by its capacity to meet the service delivery needs at the earliest. The speakers said the provincial and federal governments should move with the review and reform of the LG system keeping in view the concerns of the common people. **Punjab Minister for Local Government and Community Development** Dost Muhammad Khosa while speaking on the occasion said the people attach lot of expectations with the local governments that must live up to their demands. The Minister said the present LG system needs drastic changes as it is not likely to deliver any thing substantial to the people. He said any system should be developed in line with the local conditions otherwise it would not match with the aspirations of all the segments of the society. **Mission Director USAID Pakistan** Anne Aarnes said the survey is intended to solicit and present the citizens' voice, which needs to be taken into account. She said the policy-makers face many other urgent problems requiring immediate solutions, however, devolution reform can provide solutions to critical issues. **Secretary General Common Wealth Local Government Forum** Carl Wright said the overwhelming support for a democratic LG system that can retain control over local services

confirms Aberdeen census. He said the LG system is seen as relatively better service provider than the provincial and federal governments at the grassroots level but it needs some changes to enhance the performance. **Senior Technical Advisor of DTW** project William Cartier said the survey shows that a majority of people are of the view that neither the provincial and federal nor the local governments are interested in knowing their views on policies and priorities. He said the survey also underlined the fact that people in rural areas particularly in Balochistan and NWFP have least understanding of the government structures and functions and are often the most critical of issues regarding accountability, access and responsiveness.

(The News – November 18, 2008)

Poverty & Food Insecurity

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)

Allocation for BISP

Chairperson of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Farzana Raja has said that the budget allocation for Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), currently worth Rs 34 billion, would be doubled in the next phase. Addressing a press conference at the Governor House on November 9, the PPP MNA said the program would also be made an act through the parliament. She said the government aimed at increasing the number of families who would benefit from the BISP to seven million. The program currently aims at catering around 3.5 million families living below the poverty line. She said the government aimed at improving the program in the next phase by not only doubling the budget but also by improving it as steps like **life insurance and crop insurance** would be added to the program.

Speaking about the aims of the project, Farzana said besides monetary assistance, the BISP would empower women as **only female heads of the family were entitled to apply for and receive the monetary relief package**. Apart from this, the step would also help in women empowerment in **far-flung areas like the FATA** where women were discouraged from **registering for Identity Cards**. It would lead to registration of more voters besides helping with the security issue as more people would be registered with the NADRA. Talking about the progress of BISP, she said forms, after being filled by applicants, were being returned straight to the **NADRA offices for verification of the applicant's qualification for the program**. To qualify for the program, a woman must hold NADRA's computerized ID card and the monthly income of the family must be below Rs 6000. Families having a person employed in or receiving pension from public, semi-public, authority, department or armed forces were not eligible. A family having a person who held more than three acres of agricultural land or more than 3 marla plot or house, family having a person with a source of income through independent means, a person having machine readable passport or a person having National Identity card for Overseas Pakistanis and a person having bank account in a bank other than National Bank, Habib Bank, United Bank, MCB, Allied Bank, Bank of Punjab, Bolan Bank, Khyber Bank, First Women's Bank, Agriculture Development Bank, Khushhal Bank and microfinance banks was also not eligible to apply for the program. Stressing that the government had ensured complete transparency in the program, Farzana mentioned that none of the **parliamentarians, government officials or programs officials had any link to the budget disbursement**. She informed after the completion and printing of lists by NADRA, the final lists of selected people would be forwarded to Post Offices, who would in turn ask the BISP for releasing the amount. The first person to get hold of BISP money would be the postman, Farzana said. She said there was **no prescribed fee for either the forms or the money order through which Rs 2000 would be delivered to selected families** after every two months. The government would pay the dues for delivering money orders to the postal service, she informed. She said anyone asking for fee for the money order or for the forms of BISP would be dealt with strictly under the law. She said the whole system had been computerized and inter-linked with NADRA.

The program worth 0.3 percent of the GDP, would facilitate **12-14 percent of the low income people in all areas of the country including the FATA, northern areas and Kashmir** by increasing their buying power to about 20 percent. Confessing the program was too little for too few, Farzana added the government aimed at providing fast relief while pondering over long term plans which could take much longer time. She said the program would at least help a family of 5-6 persons with monthly income less than Rs 5000 to fulfill their needs of buying flour. She said the government would not use the word of 'poor' for the selected families, but calls them victims of wrong economic policies of the previous regime. Responding to queries, Farzana said the **provincial and divisional level offices of the BISP would be set up** by December 1. Responding to a query, Farzana said **people benefiting from Punjab's food support scheme were not entitled to apply for the BISP**. She said lists of people selected for Punjab government's program were sought and dispatched to NADRA to check and strike out duality. To another question, Farzana said the forms of parliamentarians from reserved seats would be given to affiliated organizations of the PPP. To another question regarding the uselessness of the BISP in improving the status of life of poor people and giving them long term relief, she said, "some thing is better than nothing and we have to start from somewhere."

Disabled to Get Rs 1,000 Monthly from BISP: Every family with a disabled member will soon be entitled to a monthly stipend of Rs 1,000 under the BISP, Planning Commission (PC) Deputy Chairman Salman Farooqi said on November 17.

Talking to journalists after a consultation workshop regarding persons with disabilities, Farooqi said the workshop's recommendations - including paying Rs 1,000 a month to any family with a disabled member under the BISP - would be sent to the Cabinet Division for approval, adding the PC would facilitate the process.

The two-day workshop was organised by the PC in collaboration with the Social Welfare and Special Education Ministry and UNICEF. Farooqi said there were 119 institutions for the disabled across the country, adding the government should double the number of these institutions.

He said the two percent employment quota under the Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981, needed to be effectively enforced to make persons with disabilities self-reliant.

(Daily Times – November 18, 2008)

PM for BISP Extension to Northern Areas: Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani constituted a Cabinet Committee to look into the possibility of granting constitutional status to Northern Areas and also directed to extend BISP to the region. The premier passed these orders while talking to a delegation of Northern Areas Legislators and Advisors headed by Chief Executive Northern Areas, Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan and Rani of Hunza, who called on the former here at the PM House November 18 afternoon. The Chief Executive Northern Areas gave a detailed briefing to the Prime Minister about the Northern Areas. He informed that there was exemplary peace in the Northern Areas due to which the World Bank team had selected it for its project for the development of the tourism industry in the region.

(The Nation – November 19, 2008)

BISP to Include Displaced Persons and Quake Victims: President Asif Ali Zardari on November 27 directed to devise a special project under BISP for the disaster-affected people of Balochistan and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Talking to Chairperson BISP Ms Farzana Raja, MNA, the President said that IDPs in NWFP due to action against the militants and those living in makeshift camps in Balochistan following the recent earthquake are disaster-affected people and need special attention.

(The News – November 28, 2008)

Poverty Line Sucks further 5pc Population

Leading economists in the country have estimated that the widespread inflation over the past year has pushed a further five per cent of the population below the poverty line in Pakistan.

Economist Dr Kaiser Bengali has said that the exact figures will be available when the Economic Survey is published, but an estimated five per cent of the population has joined the people already living below the poverty line in Pakistan. Every two or three years, the Federal Bureau of Statistics conducts a survey on the income and expenditure of families to ascertain the level of poverty in the country. People below the poverty line are defined as those earning less than two dollars per day. According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, this amounts to 65.5 per cent of the population of Pakistan. Bengali, who has until recently been the National Coordinator Benazir Income Support Programme and Member National Finance Commission, believes that the nature and extent of the economic crisis that Pakistan faces today is structural. He explained that the crisis had been the making for 30 years, but was aggravated during the last eight. Haris Gazdar, an economist associated with the Collective for Social Science Research, an independent think tank based in Karachi, agrees with the assessment that recent months have forced a further five percent of the population below the poverty line. According to him, the government should introduce an employment guarantee scheme similar to the one in India to combat poverty. Gazdar added that the poorest section of the population should be provided with social security and a cash support programme, while their children should be supplied with food at schools.

A UNDP report titled **High Food Prices in Pakistan - Impact Assessment** and the Way Forward says: "Food security in Pakistan has significantly worsened as a result of the recent food price hikes. In rural households, particularly in the western provinces sharing a border with Afghanistan, food deficit districts are the most affected. The total number of households in Pakistan falling into this category was estimated to be seven percent." The report further says: "The main findings indicate that more than half of the surveyed households experienced high food prices by reducing non-food expenditures. The high food prices undermine the poverty reduction gains, as food expenditures comprise a large share of the poor's total expenditures. The food price

hike has severely eroded their purchasing power. The field assessment suggests that the number of households that cannot afford to obtain medical assistance when sick has increased from six percent to 30 percent. Similarly, there is a serious risk of massive school dropout and thus loss of the gains in primary school enrolment achieved in past years.”

(The News – November 12, 2008)

Election Watch

Upcoming Senate Elections – March 2009

PPP and PML-N are all set to clinch major chunk in the March Senate elections but the ruling coalition might still fall short of simple majority in the 100-member Upper House. As intra-party race to get tickets has started, the latest party position in the national and provincial assemblies bodies the role of independents and change of loyalties by Q-League members would ultimately benefit these two major parties to share vacant seats.

Elections on 50 seats are due in March as eleven senators from each province (7 general, two technocrats and two women seats from every federating unit), two from Federal Capital and four from FATA are going to complete their maximum six-year term on March 12, 2009. Including Chairman Senate Muhammad Mian Soomro, Law Minister Farooq Naek, Attorney General Latif Khosa, former Information Minister Nisar Memon, Khalid Ranjha, Professor Sajjid Mir, Maulana Samiul Haq, Kamran Murtaza, Tariq Azim, Parigul Agha, Raza Muhammad Raza and Yasmeen Shah are amongst 50 outgoing senators. The **Senate Chairman's election** for the next three-year term will also be held in March shortly after the completion of the Senate election. The Q-League will shrink to less than half of its present strength as 20 of its senators will retire, and the Party will be able to win just two seats in the forth-coming senate elections, thanks to the drubbing it received in the February 2008 general elections.

Probable Party Position in Senate after March 2009 Elections: **JUI-F** of Maulana Fazalur Rehman will lose much its present strength yet it will maintain 10 seats. Seven of its 13 Senators are retiring but four will be re-elected. The **PPP** might be able to acquire the majority party status in the Senate with its total strength rising to 30 after March 12. It is going to win nearly 26 seats in the elections but four of its current nine senators will retire. It will not be in a position to claim more than one-third of the total even if Gulzar and his two sons are included in its tally. With JUI-F maintaining its importance for the Government, the ruling coalition partners, Fazl, MQM, ANP, BNP and FATA members would enable the treasury to get a razor thin simple majority in the March elections. The coalition will have a total of 53-54 members in the Senate. The **Nawaz League** presently having four senators, three of whom are going to retire, will raise its tally to 10. The ANP have five seats in toto with one of its two incumbent senators retiring. The **MQM** is expected to retain its strength of six in the Senate, as it will get three while three of its senators will retire. Likewise, the **BNP** will also maintain its one seat. **PakhtunKhawa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP)** of Mehmood Khan Achakzai will be left with just one Senator though it has presently three members in the Senate, as two of its Senators will retire in March. The Party had boycotted the February 18 elections. The **Q-League** and the **PML-F** besides **PPP-Sherpao** would be left with 23 Senators from their present collective strength of 40 as they would get just three seats in March elections while 20 of their Senators will complete their term in March.

Province-wise Party Position: In **Punjab** the PML-N having 170 MPAs is likely to clinch three of the four women and technocrat seats being vacated in March, as it enjoys majority in the Provincial Assembly. A minimum of 185 votes are required for one technocrat or women senator whereas 53 MPAs support is required to get one senator elected on one of the seven general seats that are going to be vacated in Punjab. The PPP will get three and the PML-Q just one or may be two in bargaining with other parties from the same province. Of **Sindh's** eleven seats, the PPP would be in a position to grab five general seats, one women and one technocrat seat whereas the second largest party in the Province, the MQM will be in a position to get three senators, one on the reserved seats. And the PML-F and Q-League will also get one seat collectively. In **NWFP**, the ANP and the PPP would share two seats each from two technocrat and reserved women's seats. Besides, they will win two to three seats each on the General seats. The JUI-F might get two from the NWFP in exchange for extending support to PPP on women and technocrat seats in the Province and at the centre. The **Balochistan** province might produce some surprising results where the PPP is expected to win seven seats including a woman and a technocrat seats. The JUI-F, the BNP and the Q-League will get one seat each.

Retiring Senators: The Q-League's eight senators from Punjab, three from Sindh, five from Balochistan, two from Islamabad and two from the NWFP will complete their tenure on March 11, 2009. In Punjab and Sindh, only a few members of the Q-League would be able to return on the party tickets in the next year's election. Muhammad Anwer Bhinder, Khalid Ranjha, Kamil Ali Agha, Muhammad Amjad Abbas Qureshi, Razina Alam Khan, Sardar Mehmood Khan, Syed Dilawar Abbas and Zafar Iqbal Chaudhary are the eight PML-Q Senators

from Punjab who will complete their term. One of the PML-N member Professor Sajid Mir and PPP's Latif Khosa are also from Punjab. Likewise, three of the PML-Q senators, Yasmeen Shah, Muhammad Mian Soomro and Nisar Memon belong to Sindh who will retire in March. Allama Muhammad Abbas Komeli, Asif Jatoi, Babur Ghuri, Muhammad Ali Brohi, Farooq Naek, Rukhsana Zuberi, Muhammad Amin Dadbhoy and Enver Baig are among others including 3 each from MQM and PPP. In the NWFP, the erstwhile MMA would be the major loser, as four of its senators would retire. They are Anisa Zeb Tahirkheli (PPP-Sherpao), Haji Adeel (ANP), Kauser Firdous (MMA), Muhammad Said (MMA), Gulzar Ahmed Khan (Independent but supporting PPP), Maulana Rahat Hussain (MMA), Maulana Samiul Haq (JUI-S), Sahibzada Khalid Jan (MMA), Shujaul Mulik (PPP-Sherpao), Zafar Iqbal Jhagra (PML-N) and Waqar Ahmed Khan. In Balochistan, the PML-Q would again be the major loser since five of its senator would retire. They are Mir Muhammad Naseer Mengal, Abdul Ghafoor Haideri (JUI-F), Mir Wali Muhammad, Pari Gul Agha and Kalsoom Parveen. Other Senators to retire include Kamran Murtaza (MMA), Liaquat Bangluzai (MMA), Moulvi Agha Muhamma (MMA), Nawab Ayaz Khan Jomezai (PkMAP) and Sanaulah Baloch (BNP). Former Information Minister Tariq Azeem and Tahira Latif will also complete their tenure leaving the field open for the PPP and PML-N to get seats from the Capital.

(The News – November 17, 2008)

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Indo-Pak Relations

Mumbai Incident and Tensions between India & Pakistan

Over 80 Killed in Series of Gun and Grenade attacks in India's Financial Hub: Teams of heavily armed gunmen stormed luxury hotels, a popular tourist attraction and a crowded train station in at least seven attacks in India's financial capital, killing 80 people including the Mumbai Anti-Terror Squad chief. At least 250 people were wounded in the gun and grenade attacks, officials said. Gunmen opened fire on two of the city's best-known luxury hotels, the Taj Mahal and the Oberoi. They attacked the crowded Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus station in southern Mumbai and Leopold's restaurant, a Mumbai landmark. They also attacked police headquarters in south Mumbai.

'Pakistan Involved': India pointed a finger on November 28 at "elements" linked with Pakistan for the attacks in Mumbai, raising the prospect of a breakdown in the nuclear-armed rivals' peace efforts. After Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's November 27 statement laying responsibility on groups based in India's neighbours, usually an allusion to Pakistan, **Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee** was more explicit in implicating the neighbouring country. "Preliminary evidence, prima facie evidence, indicates elements with links to Pakistan are involved," Mukherjee told a news conference. However, "Proof cannot be disclosed at this time," he stressed. He urged Pakistan to dismantle the infrastructure that supports militants. Indian Home Minister Jaiprakash Jaiswal said a captured gunman had been identified as a Pakistani. However, he did not present any evidence to support the claim. APP reported Mukherjee as saying the Mumbai attacks made it impossible to leap forward in bilateral relations. An official statement said, "Pranab Mukherjee spoke this evening to the Foreign Minister of Pakistan Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi to convey the hope that the government of Pakistan will take immediate action with regard to the terrorist attacks on Mumbai. "He conveyed that while the government of Pakistan has said that it wants a leap forward in our bilateral relations, outrages like the attack on our embassy in Kabul and now the attack on Mumbai is intended to make this impossible.

Statements Issued by the Representatives of Pakistan & India:

'Don't Play Politics': **Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi** has asked India to refrain from 'playing politics' in the aftermath of the Mumbai terrorist attacks. "Do not play politics into the issue. It is a collective issue. We are facing a common enemy. We have to join hands to defeat this enemy," he repeatedly told reporters. Qureshi asked both the Indian government and media to restrain from jumping to conclusions and blaming Pakistan for the terrorist attacks. The foreign minister told the Indian Women Press Corps that India had alleged Pakistan's involvement in the Indian embassy bombing in Kabul but had not yet shared any 'credible evidence' into Pakistan. "It is easy to find linkages. We have such incidents in Pakistan as well, where a section also blames India. But, our government during the past eight months have not cast insinuations on India without proper investigations," he stated. He said Pakistan was ready to offer full co-operation. "We want to look into your concerns carefully. Your concerns have become our concerns as well. We will certainly address India's concerns in a more understanding manner," he replied when asked if Islamabad would consider deporting Indian criminals taking refuge in Pakistan. Qureshi took a break from the press conference to receive a call from his Indian counterpart Mukherjee. He cautioned that if the situation in Pakistan gets out of hand, India would not remain untouched.

Too early to say Anything: The British government is investigating whether some of the attackers in the deadly India shootings could be British citizens with links to Pakistan or the disputed territory of Kashmir but there was no such evidence yet, **British Prime Minister Gordon Brown** said on November 28. "There is so much information still to be discovered and made available," British Prime Minister Gordon Brown told reporters. "I would not want to be drawn into early conclusions about this." Brown said he would discuss the situation with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "Obviously when you have terrorists operating in one country they may be getting support from another country or coming from another country," Brown said. Foreign Secretary David Miliband said British detectives would work with India to shed light on the source of the plot. "We obviously will want to work very, very closely with the Indians."

Zardari for Pact with India to Question Terror Suspects: Pakistan is willing to have an agreement with India to allow each other to question terror suspects in the other country, President Asif Ali Zardari said in an interview with CNN-IBN'S Karan Thapar. Asked if Pakistan would allow India to question people it suspects were involved in terrorism on its soil, the President said it was 'a procedural matter'. But he insisted that questioning should be allowed only when there is evidence of a suspect's involvement. Asked if he would close down terrorist training camps allegedly operating in Pakistan, the president said if there was evidence of any camps, he would close them down and take action against people running the camps. "I assure you, if any evidence points out to any camps . . . we will not only close down, but [also] take action against those people who are running those camps." The President said the people of India should see the Mumbai terror attacks as an action of 'non-state actors'. He said Pakistan would co-operate with India in the investigation "without any hesitation whatsoever, no matter where it may lead". Zardari said Pakistan and India were facing threat from the same forces. "I have a personal threat. I have a country [threatened] by these same forces. They may not be the same individuals, but they are definitely the same forces with the same mindset. So I am not standing in to appease any other people. I am trying to save my own nation, my own country."

(Daily Times – November 29, 2008)

Pakistani Government Convenes All-Party Conference:

Political and diplomatic activities revolving round the possible fallout of the Mumbai carnage on Pakistan-India relations acquired a hectic pace on November 30 with President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani going all out to defuse tension that many believe could bring South Asia on the verge of a conflict. With disturbing signals emanating from New Delhi suggesting the Indian government's attempt to raise the ante by discussing 'all possible actions', President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani secured the support of a large number of politicians, including the main opposition leader Mian Nawaz Sharif, for the way they are handling the situation. President Zardari contacted a number of world leaders to present Pakistan's case and ask them to use their good offices to make India realise that it could be suicidal to indulge in a blame-game even before the completion of initial investigations. The Prime Minister has invited the heads of all political parties to a conference on national security to evolve consensus on how Pakistan should act in the prevailing situation and what steps should be taken if it gets worse. President Zardari called Afghan President Hamid Karzai, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and sought their intervention for normalising the situation. Prime Minister Gilani, who postponed his scheduled visit to Hong Kong, said he had received full support from all the democratic forces.

(Dawn – December 1, 2008)

Experts Rule-Out Islamabad's Involvement

A panel of experts interviewed by CNN appeared to all but rule out the possibility of Pakistani involvement in the Mumbai attacks. One of the experts, John McLaughlin, a former number two at CIA, said that his experience with Indian intelligence services was that they were very good individually but they do not talk to each other as much as they should. It is possible that they had information about the likelihood of a terrorist attack but that information did not get fully circulated within the Indian system. That, he added, would be what his experience would suggest. Frances Townsend, who served as a senior official for National Security in the Bush White House, said Indian authorities were in receipt of many threats and this could well have been one of them. Peter Bergen, CNN expert on terrorism, said if the Mumbai attacks were found to have linkages with 'rogue' elements in the Pakistani military intelligence agency, that would 'change the game'. He recalled that India had accused Pakistani agencies of being behind the attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul and if similar involvement of such elements was discovered, that would be "very provocative as far as India is concerned". McLaughlin, in answer to a question about Pakistan pulling back troops from its border with Afghanistan to deploy them on its eastern border with India, said "we should be most concerned. If I were looking for an Al Qaeda hand in this, this may be giving them too much credit for strategic thinking. I would see that Al Qaeda would encourage Lashkar-i-Toiba or some other group to do this precisely to achieve that outcome because al Qaeda has the sanctuary up there along that border. It is under some pressure both from the United States and Pakistan. This will be one way to relieve that pressure."

Indian defence experts have said blaming Islamabad for the Mumbai attacks is very easy but to prove it is almost impossible. The Indian defence experts have described the Indian Prime Minister's statement blaming Pakistan as an unreasonable act. Former Indian security adviser Barjesh Mishra claimed new Delhi did not have evidence of Islamabad's involvement. Defence analyst K Sabramaniam was quoted as saying the attacks were aimed at disrupting the peace process.

(Daily Times – December 1, 2008)

Diplomatic Danger after Mumbai:

The terrorist attack in Mumbai has quickly turned into a dangerous diplomatic incident between India and Pakistan. It's possible that was the intention of the attackers.

The Indian government cannot afford to be seen to be weak in its response. If so it will be wiped out by the Hindu Nationalist BJP at the next election. But, if they can restrain themselves, what happens if there is another attack in the next few weeks? National outrage would be so great the government could fall. So as well as various diplomatic responses such as closing border crossings, cancelling cricket tours and reducing trade, another option open to New Delhi is to move troops to the Pakistan border. This is what happened in 2001/2002 after the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament. Pakistan responded in kind and a crisis quickly developed with cross-border artillery battles and the rattling of nuclear sabres. A powerful Bush administration moved to calm things down but it was a close call. If, over the next few weeks, India moves tens of thousands of extra troops to the border, Pakistan would be forced to respond in kind. The Pakistani troops would be moved from the North West Frontier region bordering Afghanistan where they are currently engaged in anti-terrorist operations against the Taliban. The USA wants them to stay there as part of America's strategy in Afghanistan. So, enter Washington DC. The American government is desperate to restrain India from going too far, whilst at the same time trying to pressure Pakistan to keep taking on the Taliban. Pakistan is under enormous pressure from America and India, but the diplomatic climate has changed since 2001. Then General Musharraf was President and in almost full control of his military and intelligence officers. Now there is a weak civilian government in Islamabad, led by President Zardari, and a military and intelligence community which believes it should be calling the shots on issues of national security. It adds up to a very dangerous situation in which the American government has to play a calming role at a time when it is in transition and has many other problems to deal with.

(Sky News – December 1, 2008)

Sino-Pak Relations

China to Provide \$500m Aid to Pakistan

Following President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to China, the Chinese government has agreed to provide financial assistance of \$500 million to the Pakistani government. According to an official statement issued by the Ministry of Finance on November 13 night, this gesture by the Chinese government bears testimony to the close relations between the two countries.

(Daily Times – November 14, 2008)

Pak-UAE Relations

Pakistan, UAE to Boost Trade

President Asif Ali Zardari and UAE President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan resolved, on November 24, to boost bilateral ties particularly in trade and investment. Zardari, who arrived in the UAE capital on Monday, held wide-ranging talks with the UAE President, focusing on developing strategic and economic partnership between the UAE and Pakistan. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Finance Adviser Shaukat Tareen, Interior Advisor Rehman Malik, Board of Investment Chairman Saleem H Mandviwalla and Ambassador-at-large Javed Malik assisted Zardari in the delegation-level talks. Members of the UAE cabinet accompanied Al Nahyan. Zardari and Al Nahyan also held a one-on-one meeting.

Investment: The delegations agreed on encouraging private and public investment from the UAE in energy, agriculture, construction and infrastructure development joint ventures.

Security: The two leaders discussed the security situation in the region and stressed the combined efforts to ensure peace and development in the region.

Power plant: Rehman Malik said Zardari expressed during the talks Pakistan's need for the early transport of a 400-megawatt power plant that the UAE government has offered to Pakistan. Later on Monday, Zardari met chief executives of the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development and Etisalat separately.

Zardari said world peace required increased international co-ordination. "With the world having turned into a global village, no one can remain indifferent [to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq]," he said. Zardari thanked the UAE for its support to Pakistan in the recent meeting of the Friends of Pakistan forum in Dubai and financial assistance in the time of an economic crisis. The two leaders also recalled the farewell meeting between Benazir Bhutto and Al Nahyan when she left the UAE for Pakistan last year to participate in the general elections. Interior Adviser Rehman Malik called the visit 'very successful', citing the UAE president's rare gesture of receiving Zardari at the airport and making a courtesy call after the official talks.

(Daily Times – November 25, 2008)

World must Combat Bigotry: Zardari

President Asif Ali Zardari told world leaders on November 13 that Islamophobia and anti-Semitism were both forms of bigotry which must be combated. Addressing leaders from 66 nations at the UN General Assembly, Mr Zardari stressed the need for dialogue between civilisations and faiths. "Bigotry manifested in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism must be combated," he said. "Dialogue, and not discord, between civilisations and faiths must be encouraged." His remarks were well received by the audience which included Saudi King Abdullah and Israeli President Shimon Peres who, along with the United States, have played a key role in arranging this conference on 'culture of peace', which seeks to remove differences between the Islamic and western worlds. President Zardari also used his speech to pitch the idea of providing financial assistance to nations caught in extremism. "Nations with little resources caught in the crossfire of extremism should be helped, strengthened and aided by the international community," he said. President Zardari praised Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz and described him as "an elder brother", "a man of wisdom and a man of action". He commended the Saudi monarch for "having the courage and the vision to convene this meeting on interfaith dialogue," noting that this initiative had "revived the great Islamic tradition of reconciliation and inclusion". President Zardari started his speech with the traditional Islamic salutation, repeating it in English to wish "peace" to the participants and the rest of the world. "Let us not isolate people; let us engage people," he said. "Violence is an act of desperation." Mr Zardari also stressed the need to eliminate the root causes of extremism and terrorism, giving all people in all societies renewed faith in their countries, in their laws, and in the futures of their children. "Let us hit the causes of the terrorist menace, not condemn its innocent victims," he said. The President reminded world leaders that they lived in a dangerous world of confrontation and terror, which threatened to provoke the "clash of civilisations" that this dialogue was instituted to prevent. Mr Zardari noted that there were elements in this world who would thrive in chaos and draw power by pitting "thought against thought; faith against faith; people against people." The President said that this conference was particularly important for Pakistan, which was a major victim of extremism and terrorism. "For us, it is a personal opportunity to advance the message of a moderate, modern and loving Islam, which guided the work of our beloved leader, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who sacrificed her life for the cause of tolerance, dialogue and the avoidance of a clash of civilisations," Mr Zardari said. The President noted that Islam was tolerant of other religions and cultures and internally tolerant of dissent. "Islam accepts as a fundamental principle the fact that humans were created into different societies and religions and they will remain different," he said.

Mr Zardari urged world leaders to honour Ms Bhutto's memory and unite to recreate a world of tolerance and an end to bigotry. "Let us unite to create a world of understanding and respect. Let us unite to build a world of peace and stability. Let us unite to create the world of 'reconciliation' for which she died."

The President said that while most Muslims advocated interfaith dialogue they also witnessed events frustrating the call for dialogue. "We hear hate speeches across countries and regions in which Islam as a religion is attacked. Hate speech against Islam also leads to injustices against Muslims." Mr Zardari noted that the imaginary fear of Islam was rising. "This is exactly what the terrorists had hoped to provoke. Those in the West that accept this are falling into the trap of the terrorists," he warned. "This imaginary fear of our religion has created a new form of discrimination and is giving rise to new tensions." Mr Zardari urged world leaders to declare that hate speech aimed at inciting people against any religion was unacceptable. The President said that for Muslims, Islam was about social justice and emancipation of men and women. "Islam is about serving the Muslim masses by ending poverty and backwardness and building peace and tolerance. As such we reach out to all of God's creations."

(Dawn – November 14, 2008)

Regional Politics & Election Watch

Bangladesh – Pre-Election Watch

JS Elections on Dec 29, Upazila on Jan 22: The long-awaited parliamentary election will now be held on December 29 and upazila on January 22, announced the Election Commission (EC on November 23, meaning most likely an end to the impasse over the polls. Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said hopefully the timings this time will be acceptable to all, and the political parties will begin full-fledged electoral activities. This is the third revision to the polls schedules unveiled on November 2. Originally, the parliamentary election was to be held on December 18 and upazila on December 28.

Schedule of 9 th Parliamentary Elections	
Last Date of Filing of Nomination Papers	30 November 2008
Dates of Scrutiny of Nomination Papers	03-04 December 2008
Last Date of Withdrawal	11 December 2008
Polling Date	29 December 2008

(The Daily Star – November 24, 2008)

EC Registers 39 Parties to Contest JS Polls: The Election Commission has registered a total of 39 political parties to allow them to contest the upcoming ninth parliamentary elections rescheduled for December 29, screening out a host of others under the reformed rules. The commission, on November 24, formally published the list of the registered political parties along with the election symbols allocated to them. Names of the parties' presidents and general secretaries along with addresses of their central offices are also enlisted with the registration, settling all disputes coming from factious ones. Nurul Islam Khan, EC Joint Secretary and also EC's technical committee head, told that the EC has registered 39 political parties for contesting the ninth parliamentary election. He said a total of 107 political parties applied to the commission for registration, and after scrutinising their documents, the EC gave registration to these political parties. NI Khan categorically said that no further political party would be given registration before the ensuing polls. He said 13 political parties which were found ineligible for registration have applied to the EC for reconsidering their registration. "But the EC will not give registration to any political party before the election," he said.

The 39 registered political parties are: Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Jatiya Party (JP), Samyabadi Dal (ML), Krishok Sramik Janata League, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesh Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Gonotontri Party, National Awami Party-NAP, Workers Party, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Jatiya Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Zaker Party, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh Jatiya Party-BJP, Bangladesh Torikat Federation, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, Bangladesh Muslim League, National People's Party, Jomiat-e-Ulima-e-Islam Bangladesh, Gono Forum, Gono Front, Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), Bangladesh National Awami Party-Bangladesh NAP, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, Oikyabaddha Nagorik Andolon, Islami Front Bangladesh, Bangladesh Kalyan Party, Islami Oikya Jote, Bangladesh Khelafat Mojlish, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Bangladesh Islami Front, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party, Bangladesher Biblobi Workers Party, Khelafat Majlish and Freedom Party.

(The Independent – November 25, 2008)

Emergency to Go Well Ahead of Dec 29 Poll

Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury on December 27, said the state of emergency will be lifted well ahead of December 29 general elections and it will be announced soon. The Adviser welcomed the EU election observation mission to monitor the elections, saying that Bangladesh would return to its political tradition characterised by democracy, pluralism and liberalism. Asked about the lifting of emergency rules, Iftekhar said the matter was discussed with Lamsdroff. "It will be lifted well ahead of the elections...a precise date of lifting (emergency) will be known soon." He compared the caretaker government with a river and said that as a river ends up in ocean, the caretaker government is taking all towards the ocean of elections.

(The Independent – November 28, 2008)

AL, BNP Want 24 Poll Observers Out: Awami League (AL) lodged objections with the Election Commission (EC) to 20 organisations monitoring the December 18 national election and BNP to four. The parties asked the commission for disqualification of the observer bodies they do not find impartial enough.

Earlier, the EC had primarily selected 138 organisations and asked the political parties to register formal objections, if any, by November 16. After submitting the letter to EC Secretary Humayun Kabir, an AL delegation team disclosed names of the 20 organisations they do not want as election observers. AL raised objection also to a foreign observer body--Bangkok-based Asian Network for Free Elections Foundations. EC Secretariat officials said the commission will soon hold hearings to decide on the observers in question.

In response to widespread allegations of biased election observation, the EC this time has laid down new guidelines for domestic observers. To monitor the parliamentary polls, an organisation must be accredited by the commission.

The observers that AL disapproves of include Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC), Democracywatch, Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (Fema), Khan Foundation, Jagarani Chakra, Light House, Noakhali Rural Development Society (NRDS), Shariatpur Development Society, Srijani Bangladesh, Bangladesh Manabdhikar Commission, Association of Muslim Welfare of Bangladesh, National Youth Forum of Bangladesh, Hilful Fujul Samajik Sangstha, Jugayan Samajik Unnayan Sangstha, Unit of Social Advancement, BRAVE, COAST Trust, Development Organisation for the Poor, and Nari Udyog Kendra.

In the letter, AL alleged that the organisations are biased towards BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, and so should not be allowed to observe the upcoming general election, AL sources said.

(The Daily Star – November 17, 2008)

5,500 Polling Centers Finalized for JS Polls

The Election Commission has sent a list of some 35 thousands polling centre to the Bangladesh Government (BG) press and it hopes that the BG press would be able to prepare a list of voting centers and voters' list constituency wise within a week, according to EC sources. "We have sent a list of 35 thousand polling centre to BG press and it will complete the printing work within a week. Earlier, in the country, the total voting centers were 29,988. As the balloting centers have been increased this year, so the number of election employees would be increased," the sources said adding this year, the EC is weighing appointing more 1,20,000 employees to conduct the upcoming polls compared to that of last election, the EC sources said. The sources further said the EC is set to start the task of printing ballot papers for the next parliamentary election after finalisation of candidature on December 11. The EC has also prepared a special budget for the members of different law enforcing agencies who will be engaged in maintaining law and orders situations during and before polls. Besides, it has already taken all preliminary preparations for holding the polls in a peaceful manner.

This is first time in Bangladesh that the EC will use pens in lieu of irremovable ink in the voting centers. The commission has already started the process of buying those items and it has estimated a budget of Tk 90 crore and requested the finance ministry for allocating this sum of money. The commission would hike the allowance of assigned assistant presiding officers to Tk 700 from Tk 300, the sources said, adding that and the commission also might increase the payment of all employees who will be involved in conducting the elections.

(The Bangladesh Today – November 27, 2008)

Anyone sentenced to over 2 Years under EPR Barred from Poll: The High Court (HC) on November 30 barred former Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda, convicted of corruption, from contesting the coming December 29 election by keeping Section 11 (5) of the Emergency Power Rules 2007 operative. The HC ordered that if anyone is convicted for more than two years in cases filed under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR), he or she is disqualified from contesting the local body and general elections. A HC division bench comprising Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana and Justice Rezaul Haque delivered the order upon a writ petition filed by the former Communications Minister challenging the legality of Section 11 (5) of the EPR. In its observation the HC said, as per Article 66 (2)(d) of the Constitution, a person shall be disqualified for contesting the local body or the general election -- who, upon conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, has been sentenced to imprisonment for a term not less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed after his release. On the other hand, the Rule 11(5) of the EPR mentioned that if anybody is convicted under this rule, he or she would be disqualified for contesting local body and general elections. After the HC order, deputy attorney general JBM Hassan told reporters that "The ruling means that those sentenced to more than two years will not be eligible for contesting poll, but those convicted for less than two years will be able to contest it."

(The Independent – December 1, 2008)

Indian State Polls

India State Polls seen as Pointer to 2009 General Election

Millions of Indians began voting November 25 in a series of four state polls to be held over the coming week that were seen as a test for the ruling Congress party ahead of a general election due by May. But the voting was overshadowed by a wave of coordinated gun and grenade attacks on India's financial hub of Mumbai that left at least 100 people dead and up to 300 injured. The attacks on targets including two five-star hotels, a Jewish centre and the city's largest train station were claimed by a shadowy Islamic militant group calling itself the "Deccan Mujahedeen" and were expected to push terrorism even higher up the political agenda. Kicking off the week of ballots was the central Madhya Pradesh state where India's main opposition, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was pitted against the Congress. November 25th vote was slated to be followed by polling in the national capital New Delhi on Saturday, northeastern Mizoram state on December 2 and Rajasthan on December 4. Analysts say the polls could reveal emerging trends ahead of the general election next year and the performance of the Bahujan Samaj Party will be closely watched. The BSP claims the support of Dalits, or "untouchables," at the bottom of India's caste-ridden society and success could signal a political sea-change, said Mahesh Rangarajan, professor of political science at Delhi University. The party's fiery female chief, Mayawati Kumari, has made no secret of her prime ministerial ambitions. "No one expects the party to win. But its own calculation is to deny the Congress a third straight win in Delhi and win enough to ensure a hung legislature in Madhya Pradesh," Rangarajan said. Elections in Chhattisgarh state, currently ruled by the BJP, were held earlier this month.

With 100 million people eligible to vote across the five states, the results due on December 8 will give a good pointer to what could happen in the general elections. "These polls are a popularity test for the Congress and the BJP," said Rasheed Kidwai, an analyst and biographer of Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi. "Many of the states are important ones in India's northern belt." The Congress party, which led the campaign for Indian independence 60 years ago, is battling rising inflation and seeking to strengthen the economy amid the global financial crisis. "High food prices touch the lives of everybody, especially the poor," said Paranjay Guha Thakurta, another prominent political author. "It is the poor in India who come out to vote in larger numbers, so this is a major issue for the Congress." The BJP, which administers Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, besides Chhattisgarh, has hopes of capturing the national capital region, ruled by the Congress for the past decade. Thakurta noted incumbency would pose a problem to both the Congress and the BJP as "going by past statistics, roughly 50 percent of legislators don't get re-elected."

(AFP – November 26, 2008)

Challenges to Nepal's Young Democracy

Nepali Militias Take Law into their Own Hands

Fighting a decade long 'People's War' for the revolutionary transformation of a feudal monarchy meant that the Maoists had to militarise Nepali society, including women and youth. However, even after the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) was popularly elected to power, following the April elections to the constituent assembly, it seems reluctant to disband the paramilitary Youth Communist League (YCL). Indeed Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who has been under pressure to dismantle the YCL, has instead applauded its contributions. The CPN-M's communist partner in the coalition government, the Nepal Communist Party-UML (United Marxist Leninist) or NCP-UML, needed little prodding to launch its own clone, the Youth Force (YF). Not to be left behind, all the leading political parties, that till recently had been berating the YCL for "taking the law into their own hands," are now scrambling to form their own groups. The leaders of the centrist Nepali Congress, which has long dominated Nepal's democratic politics, may decry the YCL, but have been encouraging the formation of the Tarun Dasta out of its youth wing in the districts. The result has been violent clashes among the various youth forces, but most especially between the YCL and the YF. In September traffic was disrupted on the major Dharan-Danuta highway for nearly a week and a curfew had to be imposed on Dankuta Bazaar to contain violence between the two forces over road tax collection. Even the current agitation around efforts to regulate Nepal's famous casinos has a turf war angle, with leaders of the YF saying they are competing for space with the dominant YCL cadres. With tensions growing, on Nov 2, the two communist ruling partners constituted a high level coordination committee to iron out differences. A major item on the agenda is to look into the reasons for the clashes between the YCL and YF and how to prevent them. But it is unlikely that there will be any rollback to establishing the youth organisations, going by the sporadic and contradictory statements made by political authorities about disbanding these forces that seem to be above the law. YCL emerged as an ubiquitous force during the political uncertainty of the 2006-8 transition that brought the Maoists into the democratic mainstream and made Nepal a republic. It was created in Nov 2006 after the signing of the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement which entailed confinement in cantonments of the Maoists' Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). But several PLA commanders and commissars were transferred to the YCL. While Maoist minister Hsila Yami praised the YCL cadres for assisting her in implementing change against a status quo bureaucracy, the Kathmandu-centric media was full of YCL's

abuses such as kidnapping, intimidation and physical assault of opponents. The UN Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (OCHR) in Nepal has lent its voice against YCL excesses.

(Dawn – November 7, 2008)

Bhutan's New King Crowned

Bhutan Crowns New King to Guide Young Democracy

With mediaeval tradition and Buddhist spirituality, a 28-year-old with an Oxford education assumed the Raven Crown of Bhutan on November 6, to guide the world's newest democracy as it emerges into the modern world. As the chief abbot chanted sacred sutras to grant him wisdom, compassion and vision, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was given the red and black silk crown by his own 52-year-old father, who imposed democracy on Bhutan and then abdicated two years ago. Dressed in a red and gold gho - the knee-length gown all Bhutanese men wear - he then sat cross-legged on the ornate Golden Throne, looking solemn but allowing himself one fleeting smile, as offerings were made to the new king and the gods. This handsome young man, who also studied in the United States and India, embodies the changes sweeping the conservative Himalayan kingdom - a young country, a young democracy, with an eye on the outside world but one foot firmly planted in its past. The crown, embroidered with images of white skulls and topped with a blue raven's head, represents Bhutan's supreme warrior deity and a monarchy that united this country 100 years ago and remains enormously popular. Freed from the burden of government that his father bore, Wangchuck remains an important symbol of national unity and stability in a country of just 635,000 people undergoing a sometimes traumatic and divisive transition to the modern world. "His Majesty the King will always play a very important role as a moral force in our country," said Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley, elected in the country's first elections last March.

(Daily Times – November 7, 2008)

Bhutan's New King Crowned

New Maldivian President Sworn-In

A former political prisoner who unseated Asia's longest-serving leader as president of the Maldives was sworn into office Tuesday, taking charge of a nation he fears could soon disappear.

Mohamed "Anni" Nasheed, 41, took his oath of office at a ceremony televised live from a convention centre in the capital island Male where he began his pro-democracy campaign in 1990 as a journalist for an underground magazine. Nasheed has already hit the headlines with his idea to take out insurance in case the Indian Ocean atoll nation, a top luxury tourism getaway, is swamped by rising sea levels. A one-metre rise would almost totally submerge the country's 1,192 coral islands scattered off the southern tip of India. Experts predict a rise of at least 18 centimetres is likely by the end of the century.

"I don't want Maldivians to end up as environmental refugees in some camp," Nasheed told reporters at his first press conference after winning the election. "We are talking about taking insurance - if the islands are sinking we must find highland some place close by. We should do that before we sink." Nasheed told Britain's Guardian newspaper that he had already broached the subject of finding a new homeland for Maldivians with several countries and found them to be "receptive." India and Sri Lanka are targets because they had similar cultures and climates, while vast Australia was also an option. Aside from global warming, Nasheed faces a host of other challenges as he begins his five-year term.

There is a danger of civil unrest after decades of one-party rule under ousted president Gayoom, a need to release political prisoners and push through a series of promised reforms in the new democracy. "There should be no political prisoners in the Maldives," Nasheed said. "That is clear and we will very quickly look into the cases of those who are being held." The new president will also have to steer the economy through some difficulties, with crucial tourism earnings - driven by well-heeled visitors to island resorts offering white-sand beaches and crystal clear water - set to dip because of the global financial crisis. Nasheed told AFP that he was seeking about 300 million dollars in emergency international aid to restore economic stability in the nation of 300,000 Sunni Muslims. Although the islands are best known as a luxury holiday destination, about 40 percent of the population earn less than a dollar a day and are clamouring for a greater share of tourist revenues. The country also faces a serious drug problem, with one out of three youngsters in the country affected. Nasheed has promised to improve healthcare and links between remote islands, to privatise state enterprises and to turn the presidential palace into the country's first university. He has also promised action on an acute housing shortage: average families often cram into a single room in Male, one of the world's most congested cities with 90,000 people living in a 2.5-square-kilometre area.

“The biggest challenge for the new president is managing expectations,” said Mohamed Latheef, a senior leader of Nasheed’s Maldivian Democratic Party. “People expect a lot. They want to see a change very quickly. It won’t be easy to move quickly.”

(Daily Times – November 26, 2008)

Myanmar’s ‘Road Map’ to Democracy

Myanmar Leader Calls-On Country to Back ‘Road Map’ to Democracy

The head of Myanmar’s military junta made a rare call on November 22 for all citizens to back a controversial “road map” to democracy. Writing in an article on the front page of the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper, Senior General Than Shwe said it was every citizen’s national duty to support the political process. “The state’s seven-step road map is being implemented to build a peaceful, modern and developed new democratic nation with flourishing discipline,” he wrote on the eve of the country’s national day. “The entire population are duty-bound to actively participate with united spirit and national fervour in the drive to see the seven-step road map,” the paper quoted him as saying.

Under the government’s “road map” to democracy, Myanmar has adopted a new constitution after a widely criticised referendum held days after a cyclone ravaged large swathes of the country in early May and left 138,000 people dead or missing. Authorities said the referendum, carried out without independent monitoring, had received support from 92.48 percent of voters. The road map paves the way for elections in 2010 in a country that has been ruled by the military since 1962. But the US, the EU and the United Nations have dismissed the lengthy proceedings as a sham due to the absence of detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Than Shwe’s announcement comes a day after Myanmar’s most famous comedian Zarganar was sentenced to 45 years in prison, and in a month when more than 150 activists have been given long jail terms by the military regime, according to opposition sources. About 150 members of the National League for Democracy party held a ceremony November 22 to mark the country’s national day at its headquarters in Yangon amid tight security. Rights groups have accused the junta of trying to curb dissent ahead of the 2010 elections. New York-based group Human Rights Watch (HRW) joined UN experts and the United States in condemning the sentences. Brad Adams, the group’s Asia director, using the former name of the country, said the jailing of the comedian Zarganar was “a cruel joke on the Burmese people”. “But it’s a bigger joke on those abroad who still think ignoring repression in Burma will bring positive change,” he said. afp

(Daily Times – November 23, 2008)

US Post-Presidential Election Scenario

Hillary Clinton says Yes to Obama’s Offer

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton has accepted the post of Secretary of State offered to her by president-elect Barack Obama, Fox News reported on November 22. Clinton is said to have made her decision to accept quite recently, after Persistent courting by Obama and his transition team. Another network, ABC News said that Clinton was even leaning towards rejecting Obama’s offer, but his staff members flooded her with calls to convince her to say yes. Clinton told the Obama transition team on Wednesday that she did not want to give up her independence in the Senate. The New York Times, citing two Clinton confidants, said that the former First Lady reached the decision to accept after further discussions about her potential role with Obama. Meanwhile, Wendy Chamberlin, a former ambassador to Pakistan and current President of the Middle East Institute, has been inducted in the Obama transition team, where she will be offering advice on foreign affairs and other areas of her expertise.

(Daily Times – November 23, 2008)

‘Obama Looking at Regional Strategy in Afghan War’

Barack Obama’s incoming administration is considering a regional strategy to the war in Afghanistan that could include talks with Iran, the Washington Post reported on November 11. The newspaper, citing unnamed Obama national security advisers, also said the incoming US officials support talks between the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai and “reconcilable” members of the Taliban. Once he takes over as the president on January 20, Obama intends to renew the US focus on hunting Osama bin Laden, the Obama advisers told the Post. The administration of George W Bush “has been hampered by ideological and diplomatic constraints and an unrealistic commitment to the goal of building a modern democracy” in Afghanistan, the newspaper said. A more realistic goal would be to help build a stable Afghanistan that rejects Islamist extremism and does not threaten US interests, the officials told the Post. The newspaper cited conversations with several Obama advisers and senior military strategists before and after the November 4 election. None of the Obama advisers or the military strategists would speak openly, “citing sensitivities surrounding the presidential

transition and the war itself,” the Post said. During the presidential campaign, Obama said that he would explore the possibility of direct talks with the US foes, including Iran.

(The News – November 12, 2008)