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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Gender	1
Women & Politics	1
Release of Uplift Funds for Women not a Priority in Punjab.....	1
Speaker N.A. Reviews Progress of NCSW	1
Government Initiatives	2
Consultation on Protection for Women from Harassment Act.....	2
CEDAW Report.....	2
UNIFEM to Strengthen GOP by providing Gender Advisers	3
HR Watch	4
Girl made to Face Hungry Dogs, Shot Dead	4
Violence against Women on the Rise	4
Sindh	4
NWFP	5
HRCP urges Govt to Abolish Death Penalty	5
Pakistanis among Top Asylum-Seekers – UNHCR.....	5
116 Suicide Bombings in Pakistan since 2002	6
Democracy Watch	7
Political Governance	7
NA Standing Committees.....	7
Cabinet Expanded	7
Anti-Terrorism Resolution by Parliament	8
Economic Governance	10
Moody’s Cuts Pakistan Rating	10
ADB to give \$2b to Propel Pakistan Economy	10
National Debts up by Rs 900 billion as Rupee Plunges.....	11
SBP moves to save Banking System.....	11
Provinces Collect only Five Percent of Tax Revenues.....	11
Pakistan stands at 101st Among 134 World Economies	12
Rising Poverty and Food Insecurity	13
Food Inflation has pushed 17m more Pakistanis into Poverty	13
Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)	13
The BISP has been allocated PKR 31b out of PSDP.....	14
Local Governance	15
Changes in Local Government System – Provincial Perspective	15
Punjab	15
Sindh	16

NWFP	16
Civil Society & Local Governance Support Initiatives	16
Restorative Justice System Launched in NWFP	16
Pakistan’s Counter-Insurgency Plan Linked to Reforming LG.....	17
Pakistan’s External Relations	19
Sino-Pak Relations.....	19
Pak, China Ink 11 Pacts.	19
Chinese Bank Governor assures Zardari of Support.....	19
Chinese Firms Offer \$5b Investment.	19
Indo-Pak Relations	20
Kashmir	20
Water Row	20
Pak-Afghan Relations	21
Pakistani, Afghan leaders agree to talks with Taliban	21
Regional Politics & Election Watch	22
Bangladesh – Pre-Election Watch.....	22
Interim Government.....	22
Political Parties	22
Indian Politics	23
Religious Card Being Played in Indian Election Game	23
First Democratic Presidential Elections in Maldives.....	24
Former Political Prisoner Wins Watershed Maldives Vote	24
Thailand – Pressures on PM to Quit	24
Thai Army Chief Hints PM should Quit	24
Indonesian Politics	25
Indonesia’s Sultan Eyes Presidency	25
US Presidential Elections	25
Obama Wins US Historic Elections	25
How Internal Battles Divided the McCain and Palin Camps	26

Gender

Women & Politics

Women Ministers and Chairpersons of Standing Committees

Following Women have been elected as chairpersons of NA standing committees:

Chairpersons of NA Standing Committees		
Name	Party Affiliation	Standing Committee
Ms. Fauzia Wahab	PPP	Finance and Revenue
Dr. Fahmida Mirza	PPP - Speaker NA	Finance Committee of the National Assembly

www.na.gov.pk

Following are the women who are part of expanded Federal Cabinet:

Federal Ministers	
Name	Portfolio
Sherry Rehman	Information and Broadcasting
Firdous Ashiq Awan	Population Welfare
Samina Khalid Ghurki	Social Welfare and Special Education

State Ministers	
Name	Portfolio
Hina Rabbani Khar	Finance and Economic Affairs
Mehreen Anwar	Parliamentary Affairs
Shugafra Jumani	Religious Affairs

(Daily Times – November 5, 2008)

Release of Uplift Funds for Women not a Priority in Punjab

PML-Q parliamentarians loyal to Chaudharys and women parliamentarian in Punjab Assembly are complaining that they have been denied their share of development funds. The Punjab Government led by the PML-N approved Rs8 million development funds for each member during the current fiscal year. But the PML-N government is being accused of having likes and dislikes in award of the development projects. PML-N asked MPAs in May to submit their development schemes in the Finance Department within a week. They were assured that funds would be released to them so that they could carry out development in their respective constituencies. The MPAs submitted their schemes to the Department. PML-N women MPAs, who were elected on reserved seats and submitted their schemes, were asked to wait till the release of next development funds, much to their disappointment. The women members raised the issue and the party formed a standing committee headed by provincial minister Dost Muhammad Khosa but grievances of women MPAs could not be redressed. Women legislators from the PML-N said the committee formed almost a month ago couldn't meet even for once.

(The News – October 14, 2008)

Speaker N.A. Reviews Progress of NCSW & Aims to Promote Women Caucus

Speaker National Assembly, Dr. Fahmida Mirza on 20 October said that women empowerment was necessary for progress and prosperity of the country. She was addressing the meeting of women parliamentarians from all the political parties in Parliament, called to review the working, achievements and problems of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW). She said that legal and financial empowerment of women was must for their uplift and the women should play their role to bring a meaningful change in the fate of womenfolk in the country. She urged the women parliamentarians to enhance mutual coordination and work for welfare of women in the country and underlined the need for meaningful legislation to bring a pragmatic

change in the lives of women. The Speaker said she was working on formation of Women Caucus in the parliament and very soon, a steering committee comprising all women parliamentarians in the National Assembly will be constituted. She said this caucus will be a national forum where the Lady Parliamentarians would be working above the party lines for the betterment and well-being of Pakistani women.

(APP – October 21, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Government Initiatives

Consultation on Protection for Women from Harassment Act

The Federal Minister for Women Development Ms Sherry Rehman, chaired a stakeholders consultation meeting on 18 October discussed the draft legislation on sexual harassment titled '**Protection for Women from Harassment Act**'. During the session, attended by the secretaries of the Women Development Ministry, the Law Ministry and the Ministry for labor and Manpower, along with representatives of leading civil society organizations for women, the proposed Bill was drafted by the Women Development Ministry along with the AASHA, a network of CSOs working against sexual harassment. Federal Minister informed that current meeting was a part of their commitment to screen and analyze every piece of proposed legislation with stakeholders to ensure that they cover maximum ground and address the related issue comprehensively; the draft bill on Domestic Violence by Women Development Ministry and the Freedom of Information Bill by the Ministry of Information have undergone a similar procedure.

Meanwhile briefing the media on the proposed Bill on Sexual Harassment, the Federal Women Development said that there is a set of legislation on Gender Harassment. "This includes a comprehensive Bill titled 'Protection of Women from Harassment Act', and a Bill to amend the Pakistan Penal Code 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898. Ms Rehman further said that that the Bill proposes Code of Conduct for implementation at the workplace. "The Code provides a guideline for behavior of all employees, including management, and the owners of organizations to ensure a work environment free of harassment and intimidation and this Code has already been voluntarily adopted by around 300 private organizations, as the proposed Bill would facilitate critical structures for its implementation across the board." The purpose of the legislation is to create an enabling environment for legal protection of women against harassment at the workplace.

(The Nation – October 19, 2008)

CEDAW Report – Ministry Plans to Complete First Draft by December 2008

As the April-2009 deadline to submit Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report is nearing, the Ministry of Women Development (MoWD) plans to complete the first draft by December end. Having a track record of submitting the report late every time, Pakistan submitted its first and second combined reports in March 2005. Work on the third report has been going on at a much slower pace in the absence of any specific team in the ministry. Pakistan acceded to the convention in February 1996 that was adopted by UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979. By acceding to it, Pakistan became a state party to the convention and had to submit periodic reports every four year on steps taken to eliminate discrimination against women. Pakistan defended its first and second combined report before a 23-member expert committee on May 22 when the committee set some targets for the government in last 53 paragraphs of its concluding remarks. The expert committee expressed concern over 16 issues mainly focusing on appropriate legislation and its implementation. While demanding elimination of discrimination in the existing laws, the committee had taken strong notice of the informal dispute resolution forums (jirgas) that continued to function and took decisions that called for perpetration of violence against women.

The report to be submitted in 2009 would also have to mention any improvements made with regard to strengthening the national machinery responsible for advancement of women. The expert committee believed that machinery mainly the ministry did not have enough authority or human and financial resources to comprehensively carry out its mandate. The committee also expressed concern over lack of an effective mechanism to monitor the implementation of the National Plan of Action and Gender Reform Action Plan based on standards and provisions of the convention. Providing an extensive task to the government, the committee called for improving its literacy rate for women while undertaking a comprehensive review of the existing curricula and textbooks to eliminate gender stereotypes. It also expressed concern over women's lack of access to healthcare. Though the issues indicated by the committee have shown progress on the front of legislation, it is evident that on the implementation side there has almost been no improvement. Developing the third report around concerns and recommendations presented by the CEDAW committee is indeed a tedious task, asking for legal experts but serious work on report has failed to kick off due to one reason or the other. The report preparation suffered a blow when caretaker minister for women development Barrister

Shahida Jameel dissolved the CEDAW team saying that their contracts had expired and that a new team would be hired. Since then, the ministry has been unable to hire any team. On the other hand, the ministry officials told that the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was continuously supporting the process of report making and the ministry would be able to prepare the report in time without hiring any specific team. "Two report writing experts have been hired for this purpose." He said that after preparing the first draft, the report would be distributed among civil society members for consultation and would then be presented before the National Assembly during the second week of February. "We are positive that the report will be submitted in time with the UN," he said.

(The News – October 6, 2008)

UNIFEM to Strengthen GOP by providing Gender Advisers to Sindh, Balochistan

To suggest culture friendly measures for women empowerment at the provincial level, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) plans to provide gender advisors to ministries in Sindh and Balochistan. Country Director UNIFEM Alice Shackelford and provincial ministers for Sindh and Balochistan Tauqir Fatima Bhutto and Ghazala Gola signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard on October 15. Some other areas identified in the MoU for cooperation between the UN body and the provincial ministries were to take concrete measure to combat violence against women and capacity building of provincial ministries to deal with women issues more effectively. A step forward in the direction of implementation of Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at the provincial level, the document also aims to revive Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) in the provinces. Speaking on the occasion Alice Shackelford said that every province had its own peculiarities and there was a need to formulate tools for women development while keeping in mind those differences. She added that more focus on provincial level is required for better implementation of policies.

(The News – October 16, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

HR Watch

Girl made to Face Hungry Dogs, Shot Dead

17-year-old Pakistani girl was mauled by dogs and shot to death in front of him over a land dispute disguised as a so-called "honor killing," her father said. Female senators staged a walkout from the federal parliament on 27 October to press for action on better protections for women after a national newspaper published details of Tasleem Solangi's death. Ibrahim Solangi, 28, has been in custody ever since Taslim's death in March and is awaiting trial on murder charges, said Pir Mohammad Shah, the police chief of the Khairpur Mirs district in southern Pakistan. Taslim's husband was also her first cousin.

As in that case, the allegations surrounding the death of Tasleem Solangi remain unproven. Taslim's father said he was locked up in his home and forced to watch from a window as dogs chased her and then mauled her when she fell down exhausted. She then was shot, he said. Gulsher Solangi said the killing was the culmination of a land dispute. He said his nephew had beaten Taslim throughout the five months of their marriage to pressure him to hand over his small farm. Faced with more threats, Gulsher Solangi said he had fled with his wife and another daughter and abandoned his home. Zameer Hussain Solangi, the girl's father-in-law, claimed that his son confessed to the killing under police torture and that the allegation regarding the dogs was "baseless." He said a tribal council later declared the dead woman an adulterer and compensated the husband with her jewelry. The girl's father claimed that the tribal council, chaired by a local chieftain, declared his daughter an adulterer in May to mask the land-grab and the involvement of others. Shah, the police chief, said he knew nothing of the alleged land-grab or the dogs and promised to investigate further. Pakistan's government, now led by the liberal party of slain former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, has vowed to improve women's rights in Pakistan. Former President Pervez Musharraf made similar moves, notably watering down rape laws that had made it hard for victims to prove their case, despite opposition from hardline Islamic groups.

(www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,444244,00.html)

Violence against Women on the Rise

Sindh

The cases of violence against women are increasing alarmingly and within the last nine months about 1,464 cases of violence against women were reported in the province, of which 229 were murder cases and another 220 women killed under the allegation of so-called honor, or Karo-Kari, 67 women raped, another 50 women gang-raped, according to data compiled by the Aurat Foundation. According to the Aurat Foundation data in the first quarter (January-March 2008) about 328 cases of violence against women were reported out of which 80 women were murdered, 65 women were killed under the charges of Karo-Kari, on seven women murder was attempted, 14 were rape cases and 10 cases of gang rape were reported, 24 women committed suicides and 38 women were kidnapped.

In the second quarter (April-June 2008) the number of cases of violence against women almost doubled and about 390 cases were reported. The data shows that 74 women were murdered, 55 were brutally killed under Karo-Kari charges, 13 raped and 26 were gang raped, 43 committed suicides, two women were sold and 71 were kidnapped.

The data shows that the second last quarter (July-September) of 2008 was the worst for women of the province and an alarming 746 cases of violence were reported. The data shows that 75 murder cases were reported within 90 days of this quarter. The so-called honor killings or Karo-Kari cases rose and about 100 cases were reported out of which 69 were women and 31 were men. About 12 cases of attempted murder on women were reported, 40 cases of rape and 14 cases of gang rape were reported, whereas 204 cases of abduction were also reported in this quarter. About 46 women committed suicides, one woman was burnt to death, 14 cases of sexual assault and 40 cases of kidnapping were reported, 74 women suffered custodian violence and 55 women suffered domestic violence.

(Daily Times – October 13, 2008)

NWFP

The rising index of violence against women was alarming, as a total of 261 cases of violence against woman were reported in July to September 2008 in NWFP. The rights activist said the figures showed in the report had been collected from various sources like newspapers, hospitals (medico-legal reports) and two women crisis centers in the province. Around 129 cases of murder, 51 cases of body injuries, 24 suicide, 17 kidnapping, 17 domestic violence, 5 suicide attempts, 2 honour killing, 2 murder attempts and one each case of customary practice like Swara and Vani, rape, sexual assault and torture were registered across the province. The ratio of violence-registered cases was murder 50 per cent, body injuries 20, suicide 9 and 7 per cent each kidnapping and domestic violence. Furthermore, out of total 312 victims in 261 cases, 265 were women and 47 men. In all the 261 cases the accused is reportedly son, husband, father, brother- in -law (father or brother-in-law). The motives behind violent incidents were family disputes, property disagreements, refusal to marriage proposal, illicit relationship, forced marriage, engagement, poverty, dispute with in-laws, trafficking, ransom, spying against Taliban, etc. He said the district-wise percentage of murder cases was as under Peshawar 32 per cent, Mardan 56, Charsadda 62, Nowshera 46, Swat 75, and Swabi 100 per cent.

(The News – October 17, 2008)

HRCP urges Govt to Abolish Death Penalty

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called upon the government to abolish the death penalty in the country, and to place an immediate moratorium on executions until the punishment is abolished. In a statement issued on World Day Against The Death Penalty on 10 October, the HRCP said that the government of Pakistan should seriously consider moving towards the abolition of the death penalty. The government's announcement in June to commute death sentences to life imprisonments was admirable, it said, however, the government has not taking any action in this regard. "The pronouncement of punishment and executions continues in Pakistan amid the acknowledged and well documented critical defects of the law; of the administration of justice; of the police investigation methods; the chronic corruption and the cultural prejudices affecting women and religious minorities. In the circumstances, the punishment allows for a high probability of miscarriages of justice, which is wholly unacceptable in any civilised society, but even more so when the punishment is irreversible." Contrary to the much-vaunted argument of deterrence, the systematic and generalised application of the death penalty has not led to an improvement in of law and order of the country, it said. The HRCP said that it was ironic that while Pakistan had one of the highest rates of conviction to capital punishment in the world - with about 7,000 convicts on death row in Pakistan today – the country still has an alarming law and order situation. The massive application of the death penalty has not strengthened the rule of law, but its application has, much to the contrary, weakened it substantially, it claimed. The HRCP said that the death penalty was discriminatory, unfair and utterly inefficient and must be abandoned in accordance with international human rights laws.

According to the statement, the government should also promptly restrict the number of offences carrying the death sentence to only the most serious crimes, such as murder, and refrain from adopting new crimes entailing capital punishment in conformity with international human rights standards. Imposition of the capital punishment, if it is to be passed at all, should only be in extreme cases, it said. The HRCP said that the government must adopt an immediate moratorium on executions in light of the serious shortcomings of due process and fair trial in the criminal justice system. There must also be an immediate end to the sentencing and execution of minors, and death sentences pronounced against persons who were below 18 at the time of the offence should be commuted forthwith, it said. Pakistan must take the path of conforming its practices to international human rights norms. So far it has only challenged these at all forums, the statement concluded.

(Daily Times – October 11, 2008)

Pakistanis among Top Asylum-Seekers – UNHCR

Pakistan is on the list of countries whose citizens, in search of safety, are seeking asylum around the world in large numbers, according to a new report published by the UN refugee agency. Iraqis are by far the top nationality seeking asylum, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. Some 165,000 applications were submitted to the 44 industrialised countries included in the report in the first six months of this year and Iraqis made up 12 per cent of all asylum claims lodged with 19,500 applications and some 20 per cent of those petitioning Sweden. The report showed that the number of claims made by Iraqis was higher than the combined number of asylum claims submitted by Russia (9,400) and China (8,700), the second and third highest nationalities seeking asylum. While the top three countries of origin for asylum-seekers saw either a downward or stable trend, the number of Somali claims lodged rose significantly, reflecting a deteriorating situation in the conflict-wracked Horn of Africa country. More than 7,400 Somalis were registered between January and June this year, compared to 5,000 for the same period last year.

Pakistan and Afghanistan also had large numbers of citizens seek asylum in the first half of 2008, with 6,300 claims each, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. For Afghanistan this represents a 22 per cent increase on the corresponding period for last year and a 42 per cent rise in 2006. Although the total number of Iraqi asylum-seekers dropped by 18 per cent from the previous six months and 10 per cent from the first half of 2007, the overall upward trend of asylum claims continues. Data showed an increase of 9 per cent in 2007 compared to 2006 and 3 per cent from the first half of 2007. According to the asylum trends report significant increases were registered by applicants from Mali, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Georgia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Assuming that current patterns remain unchanged, UNHCR say the number of asylum claims lodged during the whole of this year could reach 360,000 or 10 per cent more than 2007. The report also noted that an estimated 25,400 people submitted asylum claims to the US, the largest recipient of new claims, representing 15 per cent of all applications lodged in the first six months of 2008. Canada ranked second as a country of destination with 16,800 applications, or around 10 per cent of all asylum claims lodged.

(The Nation – October 18, 2008)

116 Suicide Bombings in Pakistan since 2002

Suicide bombers have struck 116 times in Pakistan since the first incident of its kind in March 2002 at an Islamabad church, disclosed data collected by a law-enforcement agency. It was March 16, 2002, when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a church in Islamabad, killing five people and injuring 40 others, including Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Pakistan. Fifty days after the March 16 attack, French nationals were attacked by a suicide bomber in Karachi, killing at least 14 persons, including nine French nationals. Since then suicide bombings have continued unabated. Two suicide bombers blew themselves up the very next year while the number of this kind of attacks went to 7 in 2004. Four suicide attacks were recorded in 2005 while another seven suicide bombers hit their targets in 2006.

A total of 37 suicide blasts have occurred in the first nine months of the current year, perishing over 570 people. Twelve of these blasts occurred in Frontier alone. The year 2007 witnessed the most number of suicide bombings as terrorists attacked 57 targets during the year all over the country, killing over 760 persons. During the period, the country lost a former prime minister and late chairperson of the ruling Pakistan People's Party, Benazir Bhutto, in one such attack in Rawalpindi on December 27. At least 30 people were killed and over hundred injured in the incident. Benazir Bhutto had survived a suicide attack on October 18, soon after she landed in Karachi after years of self-imposed exile. Around 150 people were killed in that suicide attack and over 550 sustained injuries. The former premier, however, remained unhurt. Similarly, the then interior minister, Aftab Ahmad Sherpao, was also attacked by suicide bombers on two occasions. In the first attack, 31 people were killed when a suicide bomber struck at public meeting at the Station Koroona locality in Charsadda on April 27. In the second attempt on his life on the occasion of Eidul Azha prayers at a mosque, Sherpao survived once more but over 60 villagers were killed and around 100 sustained injuries. The first suicide attack on police was occurred on January 27, 2007, wherein the then capital city police officer (CCPO) Peshawar, Malik Mohammad Saad, was killed along with 16 other people. The first suicide attack on Marriott Hotel also occurred on January 25, 2007. The second suicide attack on the hotel on September 20, 2008 was reported in the media as 9/11 of Pakistan. The attack was said to be the worst one in Pakistan as 600 kilogram of explosives were used in the blast that killed over 60 people but destroyed infrastructure in two square kilometres area. A few days earlier, on September 6, a powerful suicide blast ripped through the Zangali police post in Peshawar that killed 39 people and injured innumerable others. The latest high-profile target of the suicide bombers was Asfandyar Wali Khan, the chief of Awami National Party. Four persons were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up after breaking the alert security cordon outside Wali Bagh. Asfandyar remained safe. A couple of days later, another suicide bomber struck in Bhakkar, a district of Punjab province bordering Dera Ismail Khan, where sectarian strife has taken heavy toll of life and property. The target was Rasheed Akbar Niwani, an MNA of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

Punjab has suffered a total of 12 suicide blasts during the years 2007 and 2008. The number of suicide attacks in Frontier, however, remained 40 in the last three years, 2006, 2007 and 2008. Twenty-three of these blasts ripped through different towns of NWFP in the previous year while 12 blasts occurred in the current year. The volatile Waziristan region, comprising North and South, witnessed 18 suicide blasts so far. The twin cities, Islamabad and Rawalpindi, have recorded 17 suicide blasts.

(The News – October 9, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Democracy Watch

Political Governance

NA Standing Committees

Following are the elected chairpersons of the standing committees so far:

Name	Party Affiliation	Standing Committee
Engineer Khurram Dastgir	PML-N	Commerce
Sheikh Aftab Ahmad	PML-N	Defence Production
Ch. Abid Sher Ali	PML-N	Education
Raja Muhammad Asad Khan	PML-N	Environment
Ms. Fauzia Wahab	PPP	Finance and Revenue
Dr. Fahmida Mirza	PPP - Speaker NA	Finance Committee of the National Assembly
Mr. Asfandyar Wali	ANP	Foreign Affairs
Dr. Nadeem Ehsan	ANP	Health
Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi	PPP – Deputy Speaker NA	House & Library
Mr. Masood Abbas	ANP	Housing & Works
Ch. Muhammad Barjees Tahir	PML-N	Information Technology & Telecommunication
Haji Rozuddin Khan	MMA	Local Government & Rural Development
Mr. Murtaza Javed Abbasi	PML-N	Narcotics Control
Mr. S.A Iqbal Qadri	MQM	Parliamentary Affairs
Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan	PML-N	Ports & Shipping
Malik Bilal Rehman	Independent	Privatization & Investment
Ch. Nisar Ali Khan	PML-N	Public Accounts
Sardar Ayaz Sadiq	PML-N	Railways
Moulana Muhammad Qasim	MMA	Religious Affairs, Zakat & Ushr
Mr. Abdul Kadir Khanzada	MQM	Science & Technology
Mr. Sajid Hussain Turi	Independent	State & Frontier Regions (SAFRON)
Haji Muhammad Akram Ansari	PML-N	Textile Industry
Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah	PPP	Water & Power

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Cabinet Expanded

The Cabinet Division on 4 November issued a notification of portfolios of federal ministers and ministers of state who were sworn in on 3 November. The portfolios of some of the ministers have been reshuffled as well.

Following are the details of Ministers and their portfolios:

Federal Ministers	
Name	Portfolio
Makhdoom Amin Fahim	Commerce
Dr Arbab Alamgir Khan	Communications
Chaudhry Ahmed Mukhtar	Defence
Abdul Qayyum Khan Jatoti	Defence Production
Mir Hazar Khan Bijrani	Education
Hameedullah Jan Afridi	Environment
Shah Mehmood Qureshi	Foreign Affairs
Nazar Muhammad Gondal	Food and Agriculture
Aijaz Hussain Jakhriani	Health
Rehmatullah Kakar	Housing and Works
Mumtaz Alam Gillani	Human Rights
Manzoor Wattoo	Industries and Production

Federal Ministers	
Name	Portfolio
Sherry Rehman	Information and Broadcasting
Mian Raza Rabbani	Inter-Provincial Co-ordination
Waqar Khan	Investment
Qamaruz Zaman Kaira	Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas
Khursheed Ahmed Shah	Labour and Manpower
Farooq H Naik	Law and Justice
Humayun Aziz Kurd	Livestock and Dairy Development
Justice (R) Abdul Razzaq Thaheem	Local Government and Rural Development
Shahbaz Bhatti	Minorities
Khawaja Muhammad Khan Hoti	Narcotics Control
Babar Awan	Parliamentary Affairs
Makhdoom Shahabuddin	Planning and Development
Firdous Ashiq Awan	Population Welfare
Israrullah Zehri	Postal Services
Naveed Qamar	Privatisation
Ghulam Ahmed Bilour	Railways
Hamid Saeed Kazmi	Religious Affairs
Samina Khalid Ghurki	Social Welfare and Special Education
Aftab Hussain Shah Gillani	Sports
Najamuddin Khan	SAFRON
Lal Muhammad Khan	Special Initiatives
Farooq Saeed Khan	Textile Industry
Raja Pervaiz Ashraf	Water and Power
Shahid Hussain Bhutto	Youth Affairs)
Noorul Haq Qadari	Zakat and Ushr

State Ministers	
Name	Portfolio
Imtiaz Safdar Waraich	Communication
Arbab Zahir	Defence
Salim Haider Khan	Defence Production
Ghulam Farid Kathia	Education
Hina Rabbani Khar	Finance and Economic Affairs
Rafique Ahmed Jamali	Food and Agriculture
Malik Amad Khan	Foreign Affairs
Afzal Sandhu	Health
Tariq Anis	Housing and Works
Ayatullah Durrani	Industries and Production
Sumsam Ali Bukhari	Information and Broadcasting
Tasneem Ahmed Qureshi	Interior
Abdul Raziq	Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas
Masood Abbas	Local Government and Rural Development
Mehreen Anwar	Parliamentary Affairs
Nabeel Gabol	Ports and Shipping
Jadam Mangrio	Railways
Shugafra Jumani	Religious Affairs

(Daily Times – November 5, 2008)

Anti-Terrorism Resolution by Parliament

In a landmark achievement on 22 October, Parliament finally approved a 14-point resolution on the conclusion of the 15-day in-camera session that sought an urgent review of the country's national security strategy and a revisit of the strategy to combat terrorism in order to restore peace and stability in Pakistan as well as in the

region. Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani moved the consensus resolution during the in-camera session that was adopted unanimously. Earlier, the 16-member parliamentary committee headed by Information Minister Sherry Rehman, after eight hours deliberations, came out with the consensus resolution.

The resolution also envisages to replace the Army, where possible, with civilian law enforcement agencies with enhanced capacity. The resolution also envisaged to form a committee for implementation of the principles framed and roadmap given in the resolution. The resolution also said that local tribal representatives should be included in any future strategy for the tribal areas. This House, having considered through and at great length is of the view that in terms of framing laws, building institutions, protecting our citizens from violence, eradication of terror at its roots, re-building our economy and developing opportunities for the disadvantage, we will commit to the following:

- 1) That we need an urgent review of our national security strategy and revisiting the methodology of combating terrorism in order to restore peace and stability to Pakistan and the region through an independent foreign policy.
- 2) The challenge of militancy and extremism must be met through developing a consensus and dialogue with all genuine stakeholders.
- 3) The nation stands united to combat this growing menace, with a strong public message condemning all forms and manifestations of terrorism, including the spread of sectarian hatred and violence, with a firm resolve to combat it and to address its root causes.
- 4) That Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity shall be safeguarded. The nation stands united against any incursions and invasions of the homeland, and calls upon the government to deal with it effectively.
- 5) That Pakistan's territory shall not be used for any kind of attacks on other countries and all foreign fighters, if found, shall be expelled from our soil.
- 6) That dialogue must now be the highest priority, as a principal instrument of conflict management and resolution. Dialogue will be encouraged with all those elements willing to abide by the Constitution of Pakistan and rule of law.
- 7) That the development of troubled zones, particularly the tribal areas, and NWFP (Pukhtoonkhwa), must also be pursued through all possible ways and legitimate means to create genuine stakeholders in peace. New economic opportunities shall be created in order to bring the less privileged areas at par with the rest of Pakistan.
- 8) That a political dialogue with the people of Balochistan, the redressal of grievances and redistribution of resources shall be enhanced and accelerated.
- 9) That the state shall maintain the rule of law, and that when it has to intervene to protect the lives of its citizens, caution must be exercised to avoid casualties of non-combatants in the conflict zone.
- 10) That the federation must be strengthened through the process of democratic pluralism, social justice, religious values and tolerance, and equitable resource-sharing between the provinces as enshrined in the Constitution of 1973.
- 11) That the state shall establish its writ in the troubled zones, and confidence building mechanisms by using customary and local communities (Jirga) and that the military will be replaced as early as possible by civilian law enforcement agencies with enhanced capacity and a sustainable political system achieved through a consultative process.
- 12) That Pakistan's strategic interests be protected by developing stakes in regional peace and trade, both on the western and eastern borders.
- 13) That mechanisms for internal security be institutionalised by: paying compensation for victims of violence; and rehabilitate those displaced from their homes as soon as possible; that spillover effects of terrorism be contained throughout the country and that public consensus be built against terrorism through media and religious participation.

14) That a special committee of parliament be constituted to periodically review, provide guidelines and monitor the implementation of the principles framed and roadmap given in this Resolution. This House authorises the Speaker to constitute the said Committee in consultation with the parliamentary leaders of both Houses. The committee will frame its own rules upon meeting.

(The News – October 23, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Economic Governance

Moody's Cuts Pakistan Rating

Moody's Investors Service cut Pakistan's credit rating by one level to B3 on October 28, and warned of further cuts, given the depletion of the country's foreign exchange reserves. The country is scrambling to borrow funds to provide it with some breathing room, although many analysts expect it will have to seek support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to overcome economic problems that stemmed from high oil and food prices. Moody's retained a negative outlook, which it had imposed last month after Pakistan's rapidly deteriorating external liquidity position accompanied a stalling of economic reforms and mayhem in its domestic politics. Aninda Mitra, Moody's sovereign analyst for Pakistan, said recent policy moves were not sufficient to stanch the decline in its foreign currency pile, which was further hastened by delays in assistance from key bilateral and multilateral creditors. He said that the failure to obtain timely assistance from Saudi Arabia, China, the United States and other friends, and delays in disbursements from the World Bank, have eroded investors' confidence and resulted in a substantial draw down of Pakistan's foreign currency reserves. Earlier this month, Standard and Poor's Ratings Services (SPRS) cut Pakistan's rating to CCC-plus, one notch below Moody's. SPRS has also retained the negative outlook. Pakistan's five-year credit default swaps (CDS) - insurance-like contracts that protect against defaults and restructuring - were quoted at more than 50 percent upfront, a trader said. Financial markets are mostly worried about a \$500 million obligation that the country faces in February, when its 2009 bonds mature. David Fernandez, JP Morgan's head of economic and sovereign credit research said, "from a market perspective, what matters is whether they can pay on their commercial obligations".

(The News – October 29, 2008)

ADB to give \$2b to Propel Pakistan Economy

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide US \$2 billion for Accelerating Economic Transformation Programme (AETP), targeted to correct macroeconomic distortions and ensure 8 per cent annual economic growth. Finance Ministry sources told that the plan resembled with the government's announced four-point Economic Stabilisation Package and was spread over a period of three years. Its successful implementation will ensure to achieve and sustain economic growth of 8 per cent from 2010 to 2020. It's not a plan; it's a set of concrete measures. The key element of the AETP is that the effectiveness of one sub-programme will ensure the release of next tranche for next phase of reforms. The government and the international development partners finalised the programme after months long parleys. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund provided the technical assistance for the programme.

The implementation on first phase of the plan has already been started, which paved the way for release of US \$500 million on September 30. The major crux of the first phase was eradication of subsidies and addressing food and energy crisis. The ADB has convinced the government to give targeted subsidies to the poor instead of mismanaged ones. Its second leg is stretched from October 2008 to June 2009, which would further strengthen first phase reforms and after that Pakistan would be able to get another US \$500 million before the end of the fiscal year 2009, said the sources.

The next two sub-programmes are expanded between July 2009 and June 2011 and with that initial phase of structural reforms would be completed, the Finance Ministry sources added. Overall the reforms process is divided into two broader categories of short-term and medium to long-term structural reforms. In short-term the government would correct the immediate distortions facing the economy with the help of international development partners. It also envisages strengthening of financial markets to facilitate the process. In the medium to long-term, the production and trade structures of the economy will be reformed.

The overarching aim of the AETP is to achieve and sustain 8 per cent economic growth from 2010 to 2020. The programme ensures to expand social safety net up to 5 million people by the end of the current fiscal year. The number will almost be doubled by 2010, as the government is giving sound guarantees to the international development partners.

(The Nation – October 11, 2008)

National Debts up by Rs 900 billion as Rupee Plunges

The sharp downslide of Pakistani rupee against the US dollar has made an alarmingly whopping addition of around Rs 900 billion to Pakistan's national debts without any additional borrowing of even a single penny. A senior official told that depreciation of the currency by just one rupee against a US dollar enhances the public debt by Rs 45 billion. According to him, **Pakistan's national debt currently stands at Rs 5,899 billion, including Rs 2,693 billion (\$45 billion) external debt.** The rupee has been losing its value against the dollar since quite some time while the government remained a silent spectator till the damage was completely done. While the rupee-dollar **exchange rate continued to hover at 61:1 earlier this year, it was at 84:1 in the open market on 16 October.**

However, a major shock came when the exchange rate (80:1) imposed by the banks' cartel got the official stamp of approval as the State Bank of Pakistan provided \$100 million to the foreign exchange companies at the rate of Rs 80 for one dollar. During the previous government, the rupee-dollar conversion rate was determined in the inter-bank. Whatever the reason, the dollar remained available for around Rs 60 for several years before the present unprecedented downslide.

The official said that the massive jump in the national debt because of the sharp rupee depreciation would colossally affect the budget as interest payments would go up. The burden of debt servicing would also tremendously increase, he said. He said the plunge in the rupee would also increase **inflation to around 25 per cent.** The government and private imports will become enormously dear for the Pakistani rupee, he said, adding there will be a mammoth impact on Pakistan's oil import bill of around \$12 billion. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves are down to around \$8 billion and there has been no considerable injection of dollar in the near past, he added.

(The News – October 20, 2008)

SBP moves to save Banking System

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on October 17 reduced the cash reserve requirement (CRR) for deposits of up to one-year maturity by 200 basis points in a bid to restore public confidence in the financial system and quash the rumours claiming that several commercial banks were on the verge of bankruptcy. The measures, which would be applicable from October 18, also include an exemption on deposits of one-year and above from statutory liquidity requirement (SLR).

The move will result in a release of Rs 180 billion into the banking system and enable the banks to meet their customers' cash requirements and the credit demand of the private sector, SBP Governor Dr Shamshad Akhtar announced at a press conference. She said the state bank had already increased eligibility of permanent interest bearing shares (PIBs) towards SLR to 10 percent of Time and Demand Liabilities (TDL), which would inject Rs 30 billion in the market. Shamshad said the SBP had reduced the CRR for deposits of up to one-year maturity to 8 percent from 9 percent, enabling a release of Rs 30 billion into the system. With 200 basis points reduction, the CRR now stands at 6 percent. The central bank will further reduce it to 5 percent on November 15, releasing another Rs 30 billion, she said. She said the reductions in CRR and the exemption of time liabilities from the SLR will contribute significantly in alleviating the prevalent liquidity strain in the market. The Governor added that the SBP had decided to prescribe a maximum Advances to Deposit Ratio (ADR) of 70 percent for banks in order to ensure a prudent liquidity profile of the banking system. However, in order to ensure the smooth transition of banks' balance sheets to this requirement, a timeline up to March 31, 2009 was being allowed to banks whose current ADR is above this ratio.

(Daily Times – October 18, 2008)

Provinces Collect only Five Percent of Tax Revenues

The provincial governments' inability to generate tax revenues has resulted into growing dependence on the share of the Federal Divisible Pool (FDP) and the federating units are set to seek 60 per cent share from the Centre in the maiden session of the NFC, which is likely to be held this month. According to an official document prepared by the UNDP and endorsed by the Ministry of Finance, exclusively available with this scribe, the total tax revenue of the provincial governments in the consolidated accounts of Pakistan accounts for only five per cent of total taxes and revenues. "Most of the revenue required by the provincial governments to finance their expenditure comes from the federal government in the form of their share from the federal government collection, royalties and subventions made available by the federal government," the document states. The National Finance Commission, appointed every five years by the President with membership from the federal government and from each of the four provinces, is the basis for these finances. The provincial governments needed more resources for development of human resources as they come under the purview of the provincial or local governments. Federal government, the UNDP document states, collects as much as

95 per cent of total tax revenue as all the major taxes, including income tax, sales tax, tariff and excise duties, are collected by the federal government. The 1973 Constitution calls for appointment of the National Finance Commission every five years for the distribution of revenue between the federation and the provinces and amongst the provinces.

According to the NFC award formula announced by former President Musharraf, the share of the provinces is as follows: 2006-07 41.50%, 2007-08 42.50%, 2008-09 43.75%, 2009-10 45.00%, 2010-11 46.25%. The provincial share of each province in the Federal Divisible Pool has been on the basis of their respective population percentage until the new award is agreed. Share of each province is as follows: Punjab 57.36 %, Sindh 23.71 %, NWFP 13.82 %, Balochistan 05.11 %. When non-official member of the NFC from Sindh Dr Kaiser Bengali was contacted for comments, he said that the federal government had not yet fixed the date for the maiden session of the NFC. He said they were told that the NFC meeting would be held after Ramazan but they had not received any formal invitation for the session. Answering a query about Sindh's demand for incorporation of various factors, including revenue generation for distributing financial resources, Dr Kaiser Bengali said that Sindh had been demanding this since long and he would also move with the same demand in the formal NFC meeting.

The Punjab insists to continue the status quo by moving ahead with the criteria of population for distributing the financial resources among the federating units. However, Sindh wants to include revenue generation, Balochistan for inverse population density (area) and the NWFP is pursuing backwardness as criteria for distributing the financial resources. When he was asked how much the provinces would demand, he said there were several figures roaming around. He said that Sindh had also formed an internal committee to discuss this issue in detail and a meeting had been held in which they were briefed about the fiscal situation of the province. The next internal meeting will be held before the formal NFC meeting in order to evolve a strategy for pursuing Sindh's case in an effective manner, he concluded.

(The News – October 5, 2008)

Pakistan stands at 101st Among 134 World Economies – Competitiveness Report 2008-2009

Pakistan is almost at the lowest in the world ranking, as according to Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009, the economy of Pakistan stands at 101st place out of 134 global economies. Pakistan could not improve its ranking as it slipped from its last year position at 92 out of 131 countries. According to report, Pakistani economy benefits from its large market size, which is ranked 29th overall. However, a number of competitive weaknesses are hindering its ability to fully benefit from the potential economies of scale, mainly related to the human resources base. Specifically, Pakistan's rankings are low in the pillars measuring health and primary education (116th), higher education and training (123rd), labour market efficiency (121st) and technological readiness (100th). In addition, there has been a measurable weakening over the past year in the perceived quality of public institutions.

The United States tops the overall ranking in The Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009 by the World Economic Forum. Switzerland is in second position followed by Denmark, Sweden and Singapore. European economies continue to prevail in the top 10 with Finland, Germany and the Netherlands following suit. The United Kingdom, while remaining very competitive, has dropped by three places and out of the top 10, mainly attributable to a weakening of its financial markets. The People's Republic of China continues to lead the way among large developing economies, improving by four places this year and joining the top 30. All of the BRIC economies figure in the top half of the ranking, with China followed by India, Russia and Brazil. Several Asian economies perform strongly with Japan, Hong Kong SAR, Republic of Korea and Taiwan, China in the top 20. In Latin America, Chile is the highest ranked country, followed by Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico. A number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa region are in the upper half of the rankings, led by Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Tunisia, with particular improvements noted in the Gulf States since last year. In sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa, Botswana and Mauritius feature in the top half of the rankings, with several countries from the region measurably improving their competitiveness.

The rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey, a comprehensive annual survey conducted by the World Economic Forum together with its network of Partner Institutes (leading research institutes and business organizations) in the countries covered by the report. This year, over 12,000 business leaders were polled in a record 134 global economies. The survey is designed to capture a broad range of factors affecting an economy's business climate. The report also includes comprehensive listings of the main strengths and weaknesses of countries, making it possible to identify key priorities for policy reform. The World Economic Forum has for many years played a facilitating role in this process by providing detailed assessments of the productive potential of nations worldwide. The Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009 offers policy-makers and business leaders an important tool in the

formulation of improved economic policies and institutional reforms,” noted Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum.

(The Post – October 10, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Rising Poverty and Food Insecurity

Food Inflation has pushed 17m more Pakistanis into Poverty, says Oxfam

The poorest one-fifth of the country's population spends 50 to 58 per cent of its income on buying cereal. The skyrocketing wheat prices, therefore, may become a matter of life and death for the extremely poor, according to a report of the Oxfam GB, a UK-based non-governmental organisation. The report was launched on 16 October to coincide with World Food Day. The report, “**Food Crisis in Pakistan: Real or Artificial**”, says the number of poor in the country has risen from 60 to 77 million because of food inflation. The food market has been relatively unregulated in Pakistan since the military takeover in 1999. But it was only around the time of general elections in February this year that nagging flour shortages erupted into a full-blown crisis. Within weeks the price of wheat had doubled. Even as search for scapegoats began Pakistanis found out they were not alone — shortages and rising prices had by then become a pretty much global phenomenon. While the crisis in some countries can be attributed to the global market, for a country like Pakistan, which has a sound agricultural base, abrupt shortage of wheat flour was hard to link to external causes, the report argued. Despite persistent inflation and temporary shortages — deliberately created by traders to manipulate prices — a full-blown flour crisis came as a shock, the report states. Pakistan, it added, is a poor country by virtue of its GDP and per capita income. The government estimates that about 25 per cent of the population is below the poverty line, although independent analysts and groups suspect this is half the real figure if the yardstick a dollar a day is adopted. Inflation and periodic shortages are tackled by Pakistan's poor through selective consumer abstinence and budget readjustments, according to Oxfam.

The Oxfam report said a major problem in Pakistan was absence of authentic data on food production. Wheat is the staple food in Pakistan constituting 30 per cent of the cereal consumption in the households. The prices of wheat have usually been lower than those in the international markets over the years. The country reported a bumper crop in 2007, which is when shortages hit the market and prices rose steeply, it took everyone by surprise. In general, targets and practices of wheat sowing, production and yield are considered adequate for domestic needs. In 1990-91 the production was 13.5 million tons while in 2006-07 it was 23.3 million tons and considered adequate for domestic consumption. However, recent fluctuations in production have begun disturbing the equation and variation in area cultivated, shortages of irrigation water and rains, quality of seed and rising input costs have been cited as causes. The demand scenarios of hoarders and smugglers and government's tendency to under-report or over-report are likely to exacerbate these fluctuations, the report observed. Since 2000, commodity prices and cost of services have been rising and wages and incomes, while also increasing, have failed to keep pace. The government has been ascribing such inflationary trends to rising growth rates. While there were small flour crises in 2005 and 2006, and overcome, these paled before the major food crisis that took shape in January this year.

Shortages of wheat flour were compounded by steep hikes in prices of all major food items — rice, pulses, edible oil, spices, Oxfam said. Expectations that a new government assuming charge after the February elections would take measures to stem the crisis proved to be unrealistic as political crises overshadowed the economic crunch for several months. Flour mills and hoarders, meanwhile, waited for the crisis to bloom in order to cash in on steep rise in prices. Political compulsions of the outgoing government prevented rationalisation in prices of energy and food to match the hikes in the international market and by the time the new government took over, the subsidies had assumed unsustainable proportions and extraordinary hikes in prices had to be passed on to the consumers by the new government, the report said.

Oxfam advised the government to ensure that the poorest consumers are protected from high and volatile food prices. It also asked the international community to support developing countries and take steps to generate more financial resources to help meet poor people's food needs.

(Dawn – October 17, 2008)

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has appointed Farzana Raja as Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) with immediate effect.

(The Post – October 16, 2008)

The BISP has been allocated PKR 31b out of PSDP

The Government has formulated unclear parameters for determination of poverty of possible beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and the genuine poor people are unable to apply for the monthly money orders. Without any mechanism it will be hard for the government to implement the BISP for the poor and "selections" of deserving recipients of the bimonthly payment by MNA, MPAs and councillor make the programme prone to corruption of highest level. Under the programme only a family earning Rs5000 per month will avail benefit of Rs2000 payment after every two months and it will be an uphill task to find out such genuine deserving families. The family cannot apply the facility if any of its members is receiving any post-retirement benefits or any of the family members owns more than three acres agriculture land or residential plot or house of more than 3 marlas. The family which lives in a five marla house can not get the support in the programme despite acute poverty because assessment of poverty will be made by MNAs, Senators or members of union councils, sources said. The eligible family must be headed by a female member having CNIC. The MNAs/Senators will collect all applications and mailed the same to NADRA by post in special envelopes of BISP having its monogram and NADRA will hand over the record to Pakistan Post for delivery of money orders on the postal addresses of applicants.

(The Post – October 26, 2008)

*** Currently such support is only available through MNA/MPA and each has been given 800 forms against which disbursement will be made of current PSDP.**

[Back to TOC](#)

Local Governance

Changes in Local Government System – Provincial Perspective

Punjab

Punjab Restores Commissioner System

The Punjab government has restored the office of the Commissioner by amending the Land Revenue Act through an Ordinance which was signed by Governor Salman Taseer on 25 October. The restored commissioner system which had been abolished by former President General Pervez Musharraf would not affect the current local government system as it will continue working as usual. After the restoration of the system, eight administrative divisions - Lahore, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Gujranwala have been restored and would have commissioners within seven days. It is further learnt that the government is going to assign various tasks to the commissioners for making the office, as an effective hub of coordination and control. The commissioners would be given the powers of provincial secretaries and would eliminate the difficulties faced by the provincial authority in coordinating with the districts.

The primary purpose is to effectively handle shortage of food items, price checking, profiteering and hoarding of essential commodities and to check increase in encroachment on state land and public places, and make the performance of the government more effective. The government also intended to remove the existing shortcomings in the system of revenue receipts. The commissioners would be given the revenue powers, which are now with the executive district officers (revenue) since the promulgation of the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2002. The commissioners would also be assigned for approval of the development projects, awarding funds, transfers and postings of the employees from BS-1 till to BS-17. The government has selected Faisalabad division as pilot project to award powers of the provincial secretaries to the commissioners.

It is pertinent to mention here that under the LG Ordinance and 6th schedule of the constitution the local government system can not be abolished or amended before 2009. So in 2009, through amendment or abolishing the local government system, the commissioners would be empowered with more authority and they could enjoy the powers of the district governments too. On August 24, the Punjab government had restored the post of the commissioner though not violating the LG Ordinance as it was done according to the Land Revenue Act 1967. However, the governor did not sign the amended version of the Act and expressed his concerns that this could affect the local government system. He asked the provincial government to explain regarding proposed changes in details. Following this, the government sent another summary in detail bringing further changes in the proposed drafts for removing the apprehension of the governor. Over it, the governor called the administration for briefing him in personal. Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif had already approved the restoration of the post of the commissioner by amending Section 5 of the Act, and as a result of this decision, names of senior officers including Hassan Nawaz Tarar, Shumail Ahmed Khawaja, Khushnod Akhter Lashari, Khusroo Pervaiz, Khizer Hayat Gondal and Hamid Akhter besides some others are under consideration. However, the final approval will be given by the chief minister and the issuance of the notification in this regard is expected to issue within one week. It is notable here that the Punjab government on October 24 restored eight divisions, however, in Gujranwala and Rawalpindi divisions six district each have been included that is the highest number in present system. The Bahawalpur Division has the lowest number districts in its jurisdiction that is only three. As per details conceived through the notification, district Lahore, Sheikhpura, Kasur and Okara are in the Lahore Division. In Gujranwala Division, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Narowal, Gujrat, Hafizabad and Mandi Bahauddin districts fall, while in Rawalpindi Division, Rawalpindi, Attock, Jehlum and Chakwal districts fall. In the Multan Division, Multan, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, Vehari, Khanewal and Lodhran districts have been included. The Bahawalpur Division consists of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalnagar districts. Sargodha Division consists of Sargodha, Mianwali, Khushab and Bhakkar districts, while Faisalabad division covers Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh and Jhang districts. The Dera Ghazi Khan division will have Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffar Garh and Layyah districts.

An analyst told The Post that the local government system would be damaged by this development. Presently, he said the commissioners had no powers and now the government has decided in principle to give them some of the powers of secretaries as well and they would all in all

(The Post – October 26, 2008)

Sindh

'Govt to Recommend Amendment in SLGO-2001'

Sindh Local Government Minister Agha Siraj Khan Durrani has said that he has proposed major revamping of present local bodies system so as to make it more effective for the masses. He said that the present Local Bodies system has many flaws, and increased the problems of masses rather than redressing them. Keeping in view the bad situation at many local bodies institutions and their poor working the revamping of the system is badly needed, he added. Durrani said that the complaints of corruption and misappropriation of funds are common against majority of local bodies institutions which are being investigated Nazims have moulded this system for their personal gains, perks and privileges, he added. Durrani said the Sindh government has recommended major amendments in Sindh Local Government Ordinance (SLGO) 2001. It has been recommended to end this system or authorize DCOs to exercise magisterial powers as per the old system.

(The Post – October 6, 2008)

MQM, Opposition against Abolition of LG System

MQM, a partner in Sindh's ruling coalition, and opposition parties have spoken out against the abolition of the local government system that the regime led by ex-President Musharraf introduced in 2001.

Raza Haroon, MQM provincial minister said that we don't support the abolition of this system because it was relatively better than the local system that was enforced before it. Opposition leader in the Sindh Assembly Jam Madad Ali of the PML-F, previously a coalition partner of MQM, told that the flaws in the local government system need to be rectified. Jamaat-e-Islami, an opposition party that opposed President Musharraf for not honouring his agreement with MMA in 2004, supported the idea of amendments instead of abolishing the system.

(Daily Times – October 10, 2008)

NWFP

Flaws in LG System to be removed: Bilour

NWFP Senior Minister and Parliamentary Leader of the ANP Bashir Ahmad Bilour stressed the need for making necessary amendments to remove flaws in the local government system. He expressed these views while chairing a meeting of the steering committee of provincial cabinet at the cabinet room of the Civil Secretariat on 20 October wherein amendments in the Local Government Ordinance, 2001, improving the local government system, reviving the magistracy and divisional commissionerate and other related matters were taken into stock and necessary decisions taken. The meeting decided to forward the draft prepared by the LG&RD Department to the Law Department and getting opinion of the experts on the working paper prepared by the NRB in this regard. Bilour said that committees were formed in the past for prolonging the matters that resulted in enormous losses but the present government would make all the committees result-oriented and would never tolerate delay in this regard. He said that the mistakes of the past in the LG system would be overcome and this system would be made more vital and public welfare-oriented. He expressed the confidence that the improving performance of the health, education and other departments in the new system were given special emphasis in the draft. He directed for the revival and streamlining of the office of public prosecutor in the new system and sending copies of the draft to all the departments concerned within a week. The minister asked all the concerned to attend the meetings with full preparations to make the decisions more better and, thus, provide relief to the poor people in all respects.

(The News – October 21, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Civil Society & Local Governance Support Initiatives

Restorative Justice System Launched in NWFP

The NWFP police launched restorative justice system in Peshawar and Abbottabad districts to seek out-of-court settlement of the disputes in a bid to save people from lengthy litigation process. NWFP Police Chief Malik Naveed Khan said that "as of January 2003, Pakistan had backlog of four million court cases, the number of which might be far more now. In such situation, the restorative justice system is the need of the hour where the offenders, victims and the community resolve the disputes without going to police stations or courts". Speaking as chief guest at the inaugural ceremony of the restorative justice system at Peshawar and Abbottabad at the Police Club on 15 October, he said that the reconciliatory committee established under the Local Government Ordinance 2001 had successfully resolved 3,997 cases of the total 4,000 cases out of court in one year. "Had these cases been registered, these would have put an extra burden on police, courts

and the jail. Out of court settlement saved money of the people, time of police and courts,” the IGP added. He said that restorative justice system was like a jirga that had traditionally been in use for seeking solution to the disputes for centuries. In the present worsening law and order situation, the need for restorative justice system was being direly felt to enable the police to focus on the establishment of peace. Under the system, committees, comprising elders and elected representatives would be established at the police station level, which would be tasked to facilitate dialogue among the victims and offenders for an agreement between them, he added. He said that presently, we are implementing the system at Peshawar and Abbottabad which will later be extended to all 214 police stations in the province.

The Justice Peace International is implementing the system in collaboration with the Asia Foundation, in the wake of the speedy and cheap justice, this system gained currency around the globe, especially in New Zealand, USA, Middle East, Africa and others where the offenders, victims and community resolved the disputes and the penalty imposed on criminal went to the community's uplift. "The NWFP is fit for the system because the people are traditionally used to jirga system which resembled with the restorative justice system. In this system, the criminals get constructive punishment," Ali said, adding that a mediation room had also been set up at the Police Lines where the dialogue among the offenders, victims and community would be facilitated. Victims and communities would be facilitated

(The News, October 16, 2008)

Pakistan's Counter-Insurgency Plan Linked to Reforming LG – Research Study

According to a research study by Joshua T White, published in the current issue of Asian Security, the structure of local governance in the NWFP's settled areas may well be a determining factor in the success of Pakistan's counterinsurgency campaign against the neo-Taliban and other religio-political movements which seek to destabilize the state. White, who is well conversant with the region, having spent a good deal of time there, writes that in the Tribal Areas, enthusiasm for reform of the antiquated Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) may well lead to new systems of governance which, democratic virtues aside, are even less adept at dealing with insurgent actors. Already, ambitious reformers have proposed new frameworks for the FATA which, in key respects, are likely to lead to the very problems they are intended to solve. White argues that modern states like Pakistan will continue to face pressures to reform their systems of local governance by instituting the rule of law, and by devolving powers to representative citizen bodies. Such reforms are ultimately important mechanisms by which the state can extend the sphere of individual liberties, and attend to the needs of the citizenry. He contends that in moving to alter well-established, locally legitimate forms of government, the state would take care to pursue a gradual and carefully sequenced programme of reform. In this critical exercise, the Anglo-Indian soldier and statesman Thomas Munro's concern with linking cautious governance and deference to tradition to the ultimate stability of the state should be a welcome warning to the modern reformer. Munro wrote that a state that "cannot adapt its laws to the circumstances of the people" would find itself pursuing a futile course.

White maintains that behind the everyday realities of insurgency and religious radicalisation in the NWFP lies a growing crisis of local governance. He believes that it is essential to reform the antiquated and dysfunctional Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) of 1901, which provides the basis of tribal governance in the FATA; and managing the transition to a devolved system of local governance in the settled areas, initiated by the 2001 Local Government Ordinance, which has unfolded concurrently with the rise of new threats from the Taliban and other militant Islamic actors. In the post-colonial era, Pakistan has continued to grapple with problems of local governance, in part because it inherited such a wide array of governance systems. It is worth noting that at any given time in Pakistan's history, two or three of these systems have been extant, and transitions from one system to another have often been geographically piecemeal. Newly-independent Pakistan, White argues, had no pretensions of becoming a welfare state, and thus had little reason to be concerned that the tribal system practically precluded delivery of basic services. It was, furthermore, focused on its border with India, and was pleased to have a buffer region along the disputed Durand line with Afghanistan. For these reasons among others, the ethnic Punjabi and Mohajir elite in a sense adopted an essentialist rhetoric that framed the Pashtun tribes as being basically ungovernable - and this, ironically, after millions of Pashtuns had already been successfully assimilated into a robust system of local governance in the settled areas. The result was the perpetuation of a tribal system, up to the present day, increasingly out of step with the reformist trends in the country at large.

According to White, "Today both the central and local governments are faced with two critical governance challenges in the frontier. The first involves transitioning the Tribal Areas to more regular settled forms of governance, a process to which, at least in principle, the new coalition government in Islamabad has committed itself. The second involves the devolution of local governance within the settled areas from the traditional deputy commissioner system to the devolved LGO system, a process which has been underway since 2001." He points out that regions like the FATA, in which the Pakistani state has little presence and

possesses no ordinary legal basis for action, is precisely the sort of territory that concerns strategists who focus on containing global insurgencies. Not only is the state hampered by its physical lack of presence in the FATA, but longstanding tribal codes known collectively as Pashtunwali, which among other things demand the provision of hospitality to strangers, create social safe havens for criminal elements and anti-state insurgents. By bypassing the authority of the political agent when conducting armed operations in the FATA, the military inadvertently disempowered its traditional conduit of influence in the Tribal Areas. There is a recognition among some military and civilian leaders that it may be more profitable to move forward with FCR reforms than to attempt a reinvigoration of the now-discredited political agent system.

White contends that the FCR in its current form provides for Councils of Elders, which could be institutionalised and granted more expansive authorities. Alternately, the state could use the institution of the agency council, which was created in late 2004 as a partially-elected forum for promoting local governance, but which, at present, is little more than an institutional shell. Whether appointed or elected, these tribal leaders could then be granted a set of legally defined powers by which they are charged to keep order within their respective jurisdictions. Regardless of the particulars of such a system, the general principle would be to recognise, insofar as it were possible, existing patterns of tribal leadership, and at the same time bring the exercise of that leadership under the domain of law.

According to White, structural reform proposals for the Tribal Areas often overlook the interaction effects between governance reform and development policy. He points out that US policymakers, in spite of having initiated an ambitious aid programme for the FATA of \$750 million over five years, chose until recently to keep governance reform “off the table” in deference to the pre-February 2008 Pakistani status-quo on the FCR. In the absence of closely integrated governance and development reform plans for the FATA, the expected influx of development monies from the US and other international donors over the next several years is likely to result in de facto changes to the governance paradigm of the tribal areas. As the provision of aid to the FATA has in recent years had mixed effects - at times stabilising and at times destabilising - the net impact of these changes, if driven by the aid agenda, is unpredictable. It is critical that the governance and aid agendas be mutually reinforcing.

White holds the devolution system brought in by the previous regime for impairing the ability of the government to respond quickly to emerging threats. The devolution of responsibility without authority concentrated decision-making at high levels, and slowed the overall response time of the government. Whereas the deputy commissioner once had latitude to act quickly under provisions designed to promote “maintenance of public order,” the DCOs under the new system were empowered for the most part only to issue recommendations, which then were to be cleared by the provincial home secretary and transmitted back down the chain of command - a process which often took weeks. The devolution reforms also inadvertently politicised key policing functions of the state. The reforms undertaken in 2001 had an adverse effect on the state’s ability to manage the border regions located between the settled and Tribal Areas of the frontier.

(Daily Times – October 24, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Pakistan's External Relations

Sino-Pak Relations

Pak, China Ink 11 Pacts: On 15 October, Pakistan and China inked 11 agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) aimed at bolstering the existing bilateral cooperation in various fields. The signing ceremony was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Defence Minister Ahmad Mukhtar, Adviser to Prime Minister on Interior Rehman Malik and Pakistan ambassador to China Masood Khan were the signatories.

Among these agreements was economic and technical cooperation agreement, amending protocol to free trade agreement, framework agreement on cooperation in the field of minerals, MoU on cooperation between the ministry of land resources of PRC and the ministry of petroleum and natural resources of Pakistan, agreement on environmental protection, framework agreement for cooperation in the field of radio and television, Paksat-IR satellite procurement contract, MoU on scientific collaboration in agricultural research and technical cooperation, agreement on properties exchange between the ministry of foreign affairs of PRC and the ministry of foreign affairs of Pakistan, cooperation agreement between Beijing museum of natural history and the museum of natural history of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, MoU on cooperation between Cricket Association of the PRC and the Pakistan Cricket Board, MoU on project of X-Ray container/vehicle inspection system. Earlier both the countries also agreed to further boost strategic, economic and bilateral ties and foster people-to-people contact. During the meeting, which lasted for two hours, the two leaders expressed complete unanimity and commonality of views and agreed to bolster economic cooperation in multi dimensions in line with the mutuality of interests.

(The Post – October 16, 2008)

Chinese Bank Governor assures Zardari of Support: China Development Bank Governor Chen Yuan called on President Asif Ali Zardari at the State Guest House on 15 October and discussed the prospects of trade and investment in various fields in Pakistan. He assured the President of CDB's all-out assistance and support to the public and private sectors of Pakistan. President Zardari lauded CDB's support to Pakistan and hoped that the bank will continue to extend its assistance in Pakistan's development efforts.

(The Post – October 16, 2008)

Chinese Firms Offer \$5b Investment – China to invest \$1.7b to Generate Hydel Power: China's investment companies and industrial firms have offered to invest \$ five billion in Pakistan's defence, banking, oil exploration and mining sectors and Thar coal and Bhasha dam projects. Leading industrialists, business executives and giant investors called on President Asif Ali Zardari on 17 October and discussed prospects and opportunities for augmenting Chinese investment in important sectors of the economy with an objective to further diversifying and expanding bilateral economic cooperation. Those who held separate interactions with the visiting President at the State Guest House here, evinced keen interest and exhibited desire to capitalize the investment potential in Pakistan, especially in view of vibrant and resilient Economic Vision of Asif Zardari that he shared with Chinese leadership and business tycoons during the first state visit.

Those who called on the President along with their respective delegations included Ma Zhigeng, Chairman NORINCO, Zhang Liansheng Chairman Poly Technologies, Liu Minkang Chinese Banking and Regulatory Authority, Yan Lijin, Chairman CETC and Fan Jixiang, President Sinohydro. They expressed their readiness to upgrade and intensify cooperation and collaboration in different fields including defence production, oil and gas, energy, poly-technologies, electronics, hydro power generation and other sectors. They took deep interest in conducive investment climate and the business opportunities Pakistan offers for being corridor of trade and investment due to its geo strategic location and economic potentials.

A delegation of China International Water and Electricity Corporation led by its Senior Vice President called on President Asif Zardari to discuss prospects of Chinese investment in power sector. The Senior Vice President said his company will invest 1.7 billion dollars for generating low cost hydel electricity in Pakistan. He said his company was working with other Chinese power generation groups and WAPDA on this gigantic project. A memorandum of understanding has been signed between the two countries for this project.

Zhang Liansheng Chairman Poly Technologies offered technical assistance and investment in oil exploration and generation of electricity from coal-fired power plants. He said his company can play an important role in expanding bilateral cooperation in fields of media and education. The business leaders said Chinese banks will establish their branches to take advantage of the growing economy of Pakistan.

Yan Lijin, Chairman CETC billing said, a special committee will be set up to prepare roadmap, design and plan for Thar Coal project. The company also offered one million dollar for research work on this project. Chairman CETC further said that he was honoured by the President for nominating him as member of the Board of Experts for Special Economic Zone in Pakistan which is working out vibrant economic approach for fast development in diverse fields. MoU has been signed between China and Pakistan after meeting on Thar Coal Project which would help explore the prospects of joint venture and collaboration between the two sides.

Fan Jixiang, President SINOHYDRO said that their company was already working in Pakistan on Hydro power projects and will continue to play its role in further strengthening Pak-China friendly relations. The company had already an investment of dollar 200 million in different sectors in Pakistan and intended to further enhance the size of investment in important fields.

A prominent Chinese power generating entrepreneur has said that it will make investment to the tune of \$ 1.7 billion for generating low cost hydel electricity in Pakistan. China International Water and Electricity Corporation (CWE) said that they focused on Bhasha and Kohala Dams. Jin said for Bhasha Dam CWE was developing concept with Chinese Hydel power generating groups and also with WAPDA as it is a gigantic project. He said the MoU in this regard has already been signed. CWE is recognized one of the major state-owned enterprises in China. By the end of September 2007, the company has completed over 600 international contracts in more than 60 countries and regions.

(The News – October 18, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Indo-Pak Relations

Kashmir

Kashmir trade resumes after 60 years: Trucks loaded with apples, onions and nuts crossed the frontier in divided Kashmir for the first time in six decades on 21 October as nuclear-armed India and Pakistan opened a trade link aimed at easing tension. The decision, taken only last month, to allow limited trade across the front line in Kashmir symbolises attempts to solve a bitter dispute over the Himalayan region by creating “soft borders” allowing the free movement of goods and people. White doves of peace were released as 14 Pakistani trucks bedecked with the national flag crossed a bridge into held Kashmir carrying rice, onions and dried fruit. Schoolchildren chanted “Long Live Pakistan” and “Kashmir will become a part of Pakistan” as a brass band played patriotic music. A convoy of 13 trucks carrying mostly apples set off on a historic trip to Azad Kashmir from held Kashmir, with 14 trucks packed with Pakistani fruit making the journey in the opposite direction.

It was the first time vehicles had been allowed across the LoC and the newly constructed Peace Bridge, since a 1948 war. The opening of trade in Kashmir is the latest in a series of tentative peace moves that have done little to resolve their central territorial dispute, which has for decades hobbled regular trade across their international border further south.

(The News – October 22, 2008)

Water Row

Singh Commissions Baglihar Dam Project: Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh opened the first phase of the Baglihar Dam Power Project in Indian-held Kashmir on 10 October, and said New Delhi had addressed Pakistani concerns regarding the dam. He said Pakistan’s ‘justified concerns’ had been taken care of while building the dam. “We have taken care of the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty during the construction of the dam,” he added. The Indian premier also called for a ‘co-operative relationship’ with Pakistan to fight poverty and other problems facing South Asia. Reiterating India’s commitment to resolve all issues with Pakistan, including Kashmir, through dialogue, the premier said he had envisaged a concept of ‘a different neighbourhood, where borders exist only on maps’.

India is planning to set up three more hydropower projects on Chenab river to generate 2,100 megawatts of electricity in Indian-held Kashmir. An agreement had been signed to his effect ahead of the premier's Kashmir visit.

(Daily Times – October 11, 2008)

'Water Row can hurt Ties with India': President Asif Ali Zardari warned on 12 October that any Indian move to block Pakistan's water supply from the Chenab River would damage bilateral ties. In a statement, he said Pakistan would have to pay a very high price for such a move. "India should not trade-off important regional objectives for short-term domestic goals," he said, adding that the government was pursuing India's violation of the Indus water treaty at the highest level. He said that Pakistani officials would be taking up the matter with the Indian officials. The President said that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had assured him in a meeting in New York that his country was seriously committed to the mutual water sharing treaty. "We expect him to stand by his commitment."

President Zardari said that Pakistan and India should reap the benefits of a shared border, rather than letting it become a problem for the two nations. He said Pakistan's government was committed to protecting national interests, and hoped that the Indian Prime Minister would ensure the implementation of the water agreement.

(Daily Times – October 13, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Pak-Afghan Relations

Pakistani, Afghan leaders agree to talks with Taliban

Pakistani and Afghan representatives decided in a jirga (tribal council), on 28 October, to seek dialogue with the Taliban, saying the 'door is now open' for reconciliation. The announcement came in the form of an Islamabad Declaration, adopted after two days of dialogue between 50 officials and elders from both sides. The jirgagai, or mini jirga, was a follow-up to a larger Peace Jirga held in Kabul in August 2007. The jirga also decided to form a committee 'of prominent individuals' to 'initiate contact with opposition groups', according to the declaration. The participants also decided to form a second committee to oversee the implementation of the jirga's recommendations on strengthening of mutual ties especially in development and counterterrorism efforts.

(Daily Times – October 29, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Regional Politics & Election Watch

Bangladesh – Pre-Election Watch

Interim Government

Bangladesh Interim Govt to Quit on Dec 31: According to a report on 18 October, Bangladesh's army-backed rulers will hand over power to an elected government on December 31 after holding national polls. The interim government, which came to power in January 2007, will hold a general election on December 18 and local government polls on December 24 before transferring power to a civilian government, said Law Minister Hassan Ariff. He said that "the tenure of this government will come to an end on December 31 and we will then hand over power to an elected government and go back to our respective professions. It was the first time a minister has clearly spelled out the dates for transferring power to an elected government. The emergency administration had earlier said a democratically elected government would take over in early 2009, but did not specify a handover date. Bangladesh has been under emergency rule since January 11, 2007 when weeks of political turmoil led the country's powerful military to intervene and set up a caretaker government. Since then, the government led by a former central bank chief has embarked on a major effort to clean up Bangladesh's notoriously dysfunctional political system.

Hundreds of top political figures including two ex-premiers were arrested and prosecuted as part of a nationwide anti-corruption crackdown. But since June, the government has freed two ex-premiers and a number of political leaders on bail as part of efforts to ensure participation of the country's two main political parties in December polls.

(Daily Times – October 19, 2008)

Political Parties

AL Sticks to Associates, Ignores RPO Changes: The Awami League (AL) has finalised draft proposals for amending the party constitution to get registered with the Election Commission (EC) but kept the provisions for associate organisations and foreign chapters. The provisions of keeping these bodies contradict the registration laws laid down in the revised Representation of the People Order (RPO). According to the RPO, political parties willing to get registered shall have specific provisions in their constitutions prohibiting formation of any associated or affiliated bodies consisting of teachers and students, employees and labourers of financial institutions and other professionals. It says the same on having a party's foreign chapters. The AL's associate bodies consist of students, labourers and professionals. The AL will again formally request the EC to further ease the registration rules so that keeping the names in its constitution does not become an obstacle to getting registered, said members of a committee formed to prepare the draft of the amendment proposals. They said they only kept the names of the associate organisations in the party constitution and suggested scrapping most of the sub-sections in relevant clauses so that from now these bodies can be regulated by their own charters independently.

(The Daily Star – October 13, 2008)

BNP, Jamaat Revise Constitutions: BNP made some major changes in its constitution to apply for registration with the Election Commission (EC) on the closing date. The party and its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami collected forms from the EC Secretariat. Jamaat too brought about drastic changes in its charter to meet the criteria for registration, now mandatory for political parties seeking election to parliament. The interim constitution of BNP does not provide for front organisations and chapters abroad. It however has a provision like arch-rival AL's to allow associated organisations. Jamaat-e-Islami has changed 12/13 sections in its constitution. The phrases 'establishing the rule of Allah' have been replaced by 'establishing a fair and just Islamic society'. Like BNP, it scrapped the provision for front organisations. Besides, the party has included a section to let non-Muslims become its members.

(The Daily Star – October 20, 2008)

Govt 'Accepts' 6 out of 7 BNP Demands in Talks: The BNP has claimed that its second round dialogue with the government was a major success as the government agreed in principle on six of the party's seven demands including lifting of the state of emergency. BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain told in a press briefing that Government has almost agreed in principle on six of our seven demands. Commerce

Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said that we have differences only on the issue of holding of upazila elections. We have agreed to disagree on the issue of upazila election schedules but we will continue our discussion on it. Delwar said the advisers gave them assurance that it would consider their demand for lifting of the state of emergency before the upcoming parliamentary election slated for December 18. Hossain Zillur said, "The government is not stubborn on the issue. The restriction on political campaign will be lifted soon phase by phase and the clauses of emergency rules will be addressed later."

(The Daily Star – October 24, 2008)

Bangladesh Leaders to Get Extra Security for Polls: A minister said on 24 October that Bangladesh's rival political leaders – both former Prime Ministers – will be granted extra security ahead of next month's general elections. The heightened security details, including mobile police escorts, will be provided to Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed – known as the "battling begums" for their longstanding personal rivalry.

(Daily Times – October 25, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Indian Politics

Religious Card Being Played in Indian Election Game

Hard-line Hindu groups are organising attacks in Orissa state, trying to win political support among Hindus over long-standing tensions with missionaries. Asked when he thought attacks by Hindu mobs against Christians would end in this remote part of eastern India, local Christian leader Ranjit Nayak replied immediately, and with a resigned smile. "March," Nayak said, referring to a general election due in early 2009. "This is all totally politically motivated."

Like many Christians, human rights groups and government ministers, Nayak suspected hardline Hindu groups of organising these attacks in Orissa state, trying to win political support among Hindus over long-standing tensions with missionaries. From attacks on Christians to suspected militant bombings, communal politics is back on the agenda across India, to challenge an embattled secular-leaning government as its gears up for an election against a Hindu-nationalist opposition in 2009. The Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is trying to take the political offensive, campaigning here in Orissa state on issues such as missionary conversion, or convincing Hindus in other states of the risks from militant.

The ruling Congress, under pressure to ban Hindu hardline groups and get tough on terrorism, is struggling both to avoid alienating Hindu voters while also securing its traditional support among minorities, including Muslims.

The government held a meeting on 13 October of the National Integration Council, a panel of public figures, to discuss communal tension, the first time the group has met since 2005. "It is not by accident that these incidents are increasing," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told the council. "We need to collectively consider whether short-term narrow political ends are driving some of us to encourage forces of divisiveness." Attacks in Orissa and bombings by suspected militants that have killed hundreds have dominated media and political debates in the last month. Muslim leaders accuse the police of indiscriminate arrests and even murders of Muslim youth as they try to show they are catching terrorists. Dozens have died in Muslim-Hindu riots in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The headlines often supplanted voter worries over inflation.

The last election in 2004, when Congress came to power, was partly seen as a secular backlash against the incumbent BJP-led government, especially after the Gujarat riots in 2002 when more than 2,000 Muslims were massacred by Hindu mobs. While some BJP leaders now prefer to campaign on economic issues, others are happier to rail against issues such as religious conversion, which unite many Hindus. Kuldip Nayar, a political analyst, referring to the concept of Hindu revivalism said that where the BJP is challenging for power they are playing the Hindutva card. Take Orissa, where at least 35 people, mostly Christians, have been killed in religious clashes since late August.

The BJP's support rose by around five percent in September's local elections. Congress fell to third place for the first time. Many saw the campaign against conversion as helping the BJP. The BJP denies it has been involved in attacks, but many people blame its grassroots organisations. The government is considering banning one such group, Bajrang Dal. Ashok Sahu, a respected Hindu leader in Orissa, offers a glimpse into the mentality of grassroot Hindu nationalists. He lamented that Christians were a tight group that counted more than more loosely-knit Hindus. He criticised Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, a Roman Catholic, for using Christians politically. He said that Christians may only be three percent of the population, but they account for

about five percent in polls. That makes a lot of difference in elections. But it is not just about attacks on Christians. Bombings this year, including serial blasts in New Delhi that killed at least 23 people, were blamed on militants and put the government's response to terrorism high on the political agenda. On the one hand, the government has been criticised for being soft on terrorism for failing to stop the attacks. But it has also come under fire for the tough police response. A key parliamentary supporter of the government, the Samajwadi Party, relies on Muslim votes and criticised the government after the police crackdown. This kind of division may play into the hands of the BJP. Seema Desai, London-based analyst for political risk consultants Eurasia Group, called the BJP's hardline campaign on terrorism "soft Hindutva," allowing the party to promote Hindu revivalism without alienating centrist voters. The argument goes that Indians may back a hardline stance on militancy, even if they are uneasy with out rightly promoting Hindu religious causes.

(Daily Times – October 14, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

First Democratic Presidential Elections in Maldives

Former Political Prisoner Wins Watershed Maldives Vote

A former political prisoner swept to victory in the Maldives' first democratic presidential election unseating Asia's longest serving leader and sparking scenes of celebration on 29 October. Supporters of Mohamed "Anni" Nasheed hugged and drove around the capital of the Indian Ocean atoll nation waving yellow flags representing his party as the scale of his victory became clear. The election commission said that with all votes counted from watershed poll, Nasheed had won 54.21 percent to 45.79 percent for incumbent leader Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Conceding defeat, Gayoom said he would give his "full support and cooperation" to Nasheed taking power. In a television address Nasheed, 41, thanked the outgoing President for accepting the people's verdict, calling it "an example of democracy". Gayoom, 71, has ruled the tourist paradise islands unchallenged since 1978 and over a period of six years repeatedly jailed Nasheed, a former Amnesty International "prisoner of conscience". Thousands of Nasheed supporters drove around the capital Male waving their yellow flags as others embraced at a beachfront promenade where young people had camped for days to drum up support for his campaign. Fathimath Niusha, a 27 year, old school teacher, said she was thrilled with the change of leadership. "I want to see how it will be under a new President," Niusha said. "All my life, it had been under Gayoom." Gayoom had failed to win an outright victory in the first round of voting three weeks ago, prompting a run-off against the charismatic Nasheed. Nasheed, a political moderate, has promised to root out corruption, improve health care and communications to remote islands, cut state spending and turn the lavish presidential palace into the first university in the country. The elections followed Gayoom's promise to bring political freedoms to the archipelago in the wake of pro-democracy protests and mounting international pressure. Forty percent of the population earn less than a dollar a day, while an attack blamed on religious extremists targeted tourists last year. Local journalist Ibrahim Mohamed, 20, said he campaigned for two years to topple Gayoom as young people were fed up with his autocratic rule. "It is really the young people who made this happen," Mohamed said. "I was arrested and locked up three times in the past two years. I was determined to work for a change."

President Gayoom said he accepted his defeat "Beloved citizens of the Maldives, I accept the results of the runoff election and respectfully congratulate Mohamed Nasheed and his party". He said he would not leave the country.

(Daily Times – October 30, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Thailand – Pressures on PM to Quit

Thai Army Chief Hints PM should Quit

Thailand's influential Army Commander strongly hinted the country's Prime Minister should step down to take responsibility for last week's violent suppression of a street protest. However, the powerful military leader repeated his vow not to stage another coup. Gen. Anupong Paochinda said that if I were the prime minister and a violent dispersal of protesters happened and caused loss of lives and resulted in injuries ... I would definitely resign. It was the strongest comment so far by Anupong about Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, highlighting that no clear solution is in sight for Thailand's long-running political crisis.

The anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy has been demanding Somchai's resignation because they regard him as a puppet of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a telecommunications billionaire

who was ousted by a 2006 military coup for alleged corruption and misuse of power. Somchai is Thaksin's brother-in-law.

(The Post – October 18, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

Indonesian Politics

Indonesia's Sultan Eyes Presidency

The Sultan of Yogyakarta, a revered Indonesian royal who has long harboured political ambitions, told an audience of thousands made up of princes and commoners that he would run for President next year. Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, whom many Javanese regard as semi-divine, said he would address widespread unemployment and poverty if he won the election against incumbent Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. "Fulfilling the call of the mother country, I am ready to be the president in 2009," the sultan, 62, told a crowd of about 200,000 who braved the rain to gather in Yogyakarta's main square to hear him speak, applauding enthusiastically.

Hamengkubuwono, who is also governor of Yogyakarta, is not the first Indonesian royal to dabble in politics. Some of his royal counterparts from the various kratons, or palaces, in Bali and elsewhere have joined political parties. Some of his ancestors famously resisted the Dutch colonial powers, while his father served as vice president under the late president Suharto. The royal family's support for independence from the Dutch helped to cement their popularity in Java, home to more than 58 per cent of Indonesia's total population. More recently, in 1998, the sultan's call for national unity at the height of Indonesia's political and economic crisis helped his political credentials. He remains popular in Java, the island with the most political clout. But Hamengkubuwono may struggle to beat Yudhoyono, the current front-runner. A recent opinion poll put Yudhoyono's support at 32 per cent, ahead of former president Megawati Sukarnoputri's 24 per cent.

The sultan had the support of about 4 per cent, slightly behind Wiranto, Suharto's former army chief. Born Bendoro Raden Mas Herjuno Darpito, the sultan inherited the title of "beholder of the universe" in 1989 on the death of his father, who famously used to sneak out of the palace in disguise to mingle and talk to ordinary people in the market. The current sultan loves golf and is pro-business, but he still rules as a demigod over Yogyakarta, which is renowned for its art, culture, and large student population, and where palace staff traditionally walk in a crouching position in his presence.

(Dawn – October 29, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)

US Presidential Elections

Obama Wins US Historic Elections

Democrat Barack Obama, fresh from a historic election win as the first African-American US President, turned on 5 November to the sobering challenge of steering a new course for a country grappling with two wars abroad and the threat of a prolonged recession at home. Obama easily defeated Republican John McCain in a triumph that reflected Americans' weariness with eight years of Bush administration rule. The Democrats expanded their majorities in both the US House and the Senate. McCain conceded defeat and pledged to support Obama. Prominent African-American leaders were overjoyed, weeping in public. Key American allies were quick to welcome Obama's election, which some in Europe compared to man's first steps on the moon and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Obama is expected to bring a new style and tone in American foreign policy. He has said he will try to withdraw US troops from Iraq in 16 months and has called for reaching out to adversaries, such as Iran and Cuba. He has urged the closing of the Guantanamo Bay prison and favours cap-and-trade systems to reduce global warming. With most US precincts tallied, Obama clinched 52.3 percent of the popular vote compared to 46.4 percent for McCain, becoming the first Democrat president since John F Kennedy to win popular vote. In the state-by-state contest Obama sailed to victory with 349 to McCain's 147, with three states still too close to call. Voter turnout, still being counted, was expected to shatter records. Obama's first task before he takes charge on January 20 will be to begin building a Democratic administration that will help him make good on the promises of change that carried him to the White House. On Thursday, top intelligence officials are scheduled to begin meeting with Obama for classified daily briefings.

(Daily Times – November 6, 2008)

How Internal Battles Divided the McCain and Palin Camps

As a top adviser in Senator John McCain's now-imploded campaign tells the story, it was bad enough that Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska unwittingly scheduled, and then took, a prank telephone call from a Canadian comedian posing as the President of France. Far worse, the adviser said, she failed to inform her ticketmate about her rogue diplomacy. As a senior adviser in the Palin campaign tells the story, the charge is absurd. The call had been on Palin's schedule for three days and she should not have been faulted if the McCain campaign was too clueless to notice. Whatever the truth, one thing is certain. Palin, who laughingly told the prankster that she could be President "maybe in eight years," was the catalyst for a civil war between her campaign and McCain's that raged from mid-September up until moments before McCain's concession speech on November 4 night. By then, Palin was in only infrequent contact with McCain, top advisers said.

The tensions and their increasingly public airing provide a revealing coda to the ill-fated McCain-Palin ticket, hinting at the mounting turmoil of a campaign that was described even by many Republicans as incoherent, negative and badly run. For her part, Palin told reporters in Arizona on 4 November morning that "there is absolutely no diva in me." Later in the day, she refused to address the strife within the campaigns. "I have absolutely no intention of engaging in any of the negativity because this has been all positive for me," she said, adding that it was time to savor President-elect Barack Obama's victory and "not let the pettiness or maybe internal workings of a campaign erode any of the recognition of this historic moment." As the ticketmate with a potentially brighter political future, Palin has more at stake going forward than McCain, whose aides now have an interest in blaming outside factors for their loss, making Palin a tempting target. And even as the votes from the election were still being counted, there were new recriminations, with McCain's aides suggesting that a Palin aide had leaked damaging information about them to reporters. The tensions were described in interviews with top aides to the two campaigns who spoke on condition of anonymity because they did not want to be seen as disloyal to McCain's effort at a difficult time. Finger-pointing at the end of a losing campaign is traditional and to a large degree predictable, as McCain himself acknowledged in a prescient interview in July. The disputes between the campaigns centered in large part on the Republican National Committee's \$150,000 wardrobe for Palin and her family, but also on what McCain advisers considered Palin's lack of preparation for her disastrous interview with Katie Couric of CBS News and her refusal to take advice from McCain's campaign. But behind those episodes may be a greater subtext: anger within the McCain camp that Palin harbored political ambitions beyond 2008.

(International Herald Tribune – November 6, 2008)

[Back to TOC](#)