



PAKISTAN
GOVERNANCE
FORUM

AN INITIATIVE OF THE RESEARCHERS

SEPTEMBER 2008

VOLUME – VIII, EDITION – II

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Gender

Women & Politics

Fehmida Mirza – First Woman Acting President of Pakistan

National Assembly Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza became the first woman acting President of the country on September 13 as both President Asif Ali Zardari and Senate Chairman Mohammadmian Soomro were out of the country. Dr Fehmida, who already had the distinction of becoming the first woman speaker of a Muslim country, was briefed by the President's principal Secretary, Mehmood Saleem Mehmood, about various sections of the President's Secretariat on her arrival at the Aiwan-i-Sadr, said a press release. This is perhaps for the first time that the Press Information Department has issued a press release about the visit of an acting President to the Aiwan-i-Sadr, which is otherwise a routine constitutional requirement. Prime Minister's Adviser on Interior Rehman Malik also briefed the Acting President on the process of rehabilitation of 300,000 people displaced by the military operation in Bajaur Agency. Dr Fehmida said that national security and internal stability were paramount and no one would be allowed to challenge the writ of the state. She stressed that all possible measures should be taken to address the grievances of the affected people.

(Dawn – September 14, 2008)

Women share in Decision-Making up by 8pc

According to United Nations Women Development Fund (UNIFEM)'s report "Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009", women today hold more seats in legislative assemblies than ever before with their share being increased by 8pc to the current global average of 18.4pc from 1998 to 2008, compared to an increase of just one percent in the two decades after 1975. The report said that women's direct engagement in the public decision-making has long been seen not just as a matter of democratic justice, but as a means of ensuring better government accountability to women. The report further says that yet even at the current rate of increase, developing countries will not reach the 'parity zone' where neither sex holds more than sixty percent of seats until 2045.

The report said that women's direct engagement in public decision making has long been seen not just as a matter of democratic justice, but as a means of ensuring better government accountability to women. Quotas have been effective vehicle for supporting women's political engagements. But the number of women in politics is in itself not sufficient to ensure better public sector responsiveness to women's needs. It must be linked to gender-sensitive good governance reforms, understood as inclusive, responsive and accountable management of public affairs that increases state capacity to implement gender policies, the report says. In elections held in 2007, the average representation of women was 19.3 percent for those countries that used some type of electoral quota, as opposed to 14.7 percent for those countries without quota, regardless of electoral system. Eighteen of 22 countries that boast 30 percent of more women in national assemblies applied quota in some form.

The UNIFEM report says political accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision making positions, but it cannot stop there. It requires governance reforms that equip public institutions with the incentives, skill, information and procedures to women's needs. At a glance, the report states that to date, women are outnumbered 4 to 1 in legislatures around the world, the majority (over 60 percent) of all unpaid family workers globally are women; in Sub-Saharan Africa, three women are infected with HIV for every two men; and in some parts of the world, 1 in 10 women dies of pregnancy related causes even though the means for preventing maternal mortality are cost effective and well known. Discrimination on this scale after decades of national and international commitments is symptomatic of an accountability crisis. Women continue to face significant access barriers to health, education and agricultural support services. Health clinics and schools are often too distant and too costly to access, agricultural services are geared towards male farmers, and government services are sometimes based on assumption that the applicant is an employed, literate or propertied man. Data is scarce on the impact of environmental degradation, and climate change on poor women, but as women often ensure household food security and do the bulk of water and household fuel collection, their time burdens will increase if drought, floods, erratic rainfall, and deforestation undermine the supply and quality of natural resources.

(Dawn – September 21, 2008)

Detail report can be accessed through following link:

<http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html>

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Govt. Committed to Ending Violence against Women

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Sherry Rehman said on September 2 that the Government is determined to root out anti-women practices. She said all the political forces agreed that heinous practices like alleged killing of girls in Balochistan could not be condoned. Sherry said that the alleged honour killing case in Balochistan was under investigation. Sherry said a democratic society could not tolerate an act that endorsed eliminating a life in the name of honour. She said that the unanimous resolution passed by the Senate condemning the incident reflected the consensus of the political forces and public representatives that this practice was unacceptable. Sherry added that the government's seriousness to curb honour killings and for the well being of women reflected its strong commitment to the cause of human rights. Our steps to root out anti-women practices go beyond law-making. We are working to facilitate institutional structures to ensure that our policy actions are backed by institutional capabilities to respond to such crimes and it is our government's commitment and the responsibility to ensure that no part of the population has their rights suppressed by illegal customs," she said.

(Daily Times – September 3, 2008)

Senate Body dissatisfied with Probe into 'Live Burial' of Baloch Women

A Senate Body on 12 September gave a deadline of one month to Balochistan Police Inspector General Asif Nawaz to submit an inquiry report about the alleged live burial of five women in Balochistan. Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights members expressed their dissatisfaction over the performance of the police in apprehending the 'real' culprits, and suggested the state should become a complainant in order to pursue the case. They said the police should arrest influential people allegedly involved in the case, and include a provincial minister and the Naseerabad district nazim in the investigation. Preliminary reports presented to the committee, which was presided over by Chairman Senator SM Zafar, revealed that the bodies of two women were exhumed but the post mortem report was vague. The committee observed that the progress in the case was poor as only four accused had been arrested. The police have not implicated tribal elders involved in the killings. National Police Bureau Director General Tariq Khosa told the committee the bureau had imposed anti-terrorism charges on unidentified suspects involved in the case. Leader of the House in the Senate Raza Rabbani disagreed with a suggestion to include two senators in the investigation team. Female member of the committee Senator Yasmeen Shah said she had been facing death threats after highlighting the case in the House. She said Senator Israrullah Zahri had conveyed to her that 12 people from a Baloch tribe were allegedly plotting to kill her.

(Daily Times – September 13, 2008)

Independent Investigation Commission demanded over Women's Killing

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) have jointly condemned the inhuman customary practices of violence against women. In a roundtable meeting, they condemned with special focus on burying alive of five women in Balochistan, in the name of honour. The meeting was organized on "Live Burying of women in Balochistan" on 15th September at the auditorium of Council of Islamic Ideology. It was attended by human rights activists and representatives of civil society of the city. Baluchistan Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Robina Irfan also attended the roundtable. Other panelists of the roundtable included I.A Rehman, Naeem Mirza, Tahira Abdullah, Samar Minnallah and Dr. Arifa Syeda Zehra, Chairman NCSW, also spoke on the occasion.

During the roundtable different scholars, analysts and human rights activists demanded the formation of an independent investigation commission. On the occasion Dr. Muhammad Khalid Masud Chairman CII said, "It is regrettable that injustice and cruelty are rampant in our society and such events are daily occurrence. Laws are not being enforced in our country." Dr. Arifa Zehra, Chairperson NCSW said that the real culprits behind such heinous crimes should be brought to task so that no one dares to commit such act. Ms. Sumar Minallah, urged for arresting the real culprits. Ms. Tahira Abdullah said that it is very sad incident that five ladies of Baba Kot have been buried alive. She demanded that Laws of the Qisas and Diyat may be repealed. I.A Rehman said that CII, has presented very useful recommendations regarding Swarah, Vani, Marriage with the Holy Quran and honor killing but they have not yet been implemented. Moulana Abdullah Khilji, Member CII said that such incidents are not confined in a particular area or city. "Cruelty should be condemned everywhere with the same force", he demanded. During the roundtable Ms. Rubina Irfan, Provincial Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Balochistan and Naeem Mirza from Aurat Foundation highly condemned the sad and heinous incident and demanded the formation of an independent investigation commission.

(APP – September 16, 2008)

At least 100 Rapes in Karachi a Day

Additional Police Surgeon (APS) Dr Zulfiqar Siyal said that on average, 100 women are raped every 24 hours in Karachi city alone, and a majority of them are working wome. He said that a majority of them are working class women or those working as domestic help and are mostly up to 20 years old. He told on the sidelines of a discussion

on sexual violence organized by the Aurat Foundation on September 15 that: "I am saying with full authority that such a large number of rape cases happen in the city but very few rape survivors have the courage to come forward in search of justice. They do not come forward because of the lengthy medical process and delayed justice system in Pakistan. Only 0.5 percent of cases are reported and the majority (99.5 percent) of survivors prefers to stay silent. Part of the problem is that there are 11 medico-legal sections in three major public sector hospitals but there are only six women medico-legal officers (WMLOs) for the 18 million population of Karachi. I am sure that there are more than 100 rape cases every day ... but you can gauge how many are reported from the official data which says that during the last eight months (between January to August 2008) a total of 197 cases were reported. The WMLOs also face a lot of problems. Karachi is also short on hospitals where rape survivors can go through the entire medical examination. "It isn't just medical facilities but you won't find a single women police officer (WPO) in any of the total 101 police stations of the city. Provincial Minister Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto said though previous governments had passed legislation they were not implemented.

(Daily Times – September 16, 2008)

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Women's Empowerment

Sindh Govt Considering Courts for Women

The Sindh Government is considering the establishment of courts exclusively for trying cases of females. Sindh Law Minister Mohammed Ayaz Soomro said during question hour in Sindh Assembly on September 4. These courts, he said, would have **women judges** who would be appointed in grade 18. He further informed that establishment of speedy trial and evening courts was also under consideration. During the course of reply by Women Development Minister Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto to the question of Nadeem Bhutto as regards **Legal Advising Centres in Sindh**, the minister announced that District Bar Association Larkana would defend cases of poor, destitute women and widows free of cost. He said their cases would be contested up to High Court level from the platform of People's Lawyers Forum. Ayaz Soomro referred to his meeting with Minister for Human Rights Nadia Gabol and said it has been decided to setup a separate section in the law department and this facility be provided all over Sindh. Referring to formation of "**Committee for Female/Juvenile prisoners**", the Law Minister suggested the nomination of President of every District Bar on this committee to implement its objectives in an effective manner. Replying to a question of Nadeem Bhutto, he acknowledged that government has constituted a committee entitled "Committee for female/juvenile Prisoners." She said the functions of the committee are as under: to consider and decide the deserving cases of female/juvenile prisoner(s), to ensure that female/juvenile prisoner(s) may not continue to remain in jail custody for want of payment of fine money up to Rs 100,000 per prisoner or for want of bail and surety amount up to Rs 100,000 per prisoner. To ensure legal aid, security, safety and repatriation, transportation arrangements and expenses on air tickets to the female prisoners and their dependent children & other necessary expenses of such female/juvenile prisoner(s): to ensure payment of Deeyat amount for release of such deserving female/juvenile prisoner(s). She informed the house that so far Rs 1.3 million has been spent on surety amount, Rs 0.3 million on air tickets and Rs 2.5 million on bail amount. She said that the committee is headed by Secretary Women's Development as its Chairperson while members include IG Prisons, Karachi, Chief CPLC, Karachi, Additional Secretaries Law, Home, Social Welfare, Finance departments, Additional Accountant General Sindh, a suitable representative nominated by Committee for the Welfare of Women Prisoners, (CWWP), headed by Justice (R) Nasir Aslam Zahid, a suitable representative nominated by PANAHA, Edhi Home for Women, LAHRLA, Society for Health, Education & Environment. Tauqeer Fatima said our priority is to also include female MPAs in this committee. To a supplementary she said that now there was no such female prisoner left in prison just for want of surety or payment of fine.

(The Post – September 5, 2008)

100% increase likely in Job Quota for Women

According to sources, the government is considering increasing the job quota for women in federal and provincial departments from 10 to 20 percent. They said the Women Development Ministry has moved a summary detailing the proposal to Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, which has been recommended by the Establishment Division. The Law and Justice Ministry has also endorsed the summary, according to the sources. Former President General Ziaul Haq had allocated a five percent quota for women in government jobs, which was increased to 10 percent during the Gen (R) Pervez Musharraf-led government.

(Daily Times – September 8, 2008)

NEC will increase Women's Job Quota, says Farzana

PPP MNA Farzana Raja said that the womenfolk will get significant representation in the upcoming job openings to be filled through the National Employment Commission (NEC).. Addressing a seminar on '**Role of Parliament for Elimination of Discriminatory Laws Against Women**' arranged by the Women's Media Association at the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA), she said the PPP government would ensure proper representation of women

at all forums including the legislative institutions as it was committed to carrying forward the vision of late Benazir Bhutto to empower women and protect their rights. Farzana said the PPP had also ensured election of the active political worker women from grassroots level to the reserved National Assembly seats as they could understand the problems of their folk more comprehensively. "Benazir Bhutto was in favour of repealing the Hudood Ordinance during her tenures but, unfortunately, the party lacked the required majority in the Senate," she recalled. She said Benazir Bhutto was pretty sensitive about women issues and she had directed the PPP legislators to support Women's Protection Bill tabled by the PML-Q led government in the Parliament.

Speaking on the occasion, NA Deputy Speaker Faisal Karim Kundi pledged his and the party's unconditional support for any bill to be tabled before the NA for legislation for protection, development and empowerment of womenfolk in the country. Former Minister Nilofar Bakhtiar admitted that the Women's Protection Bill, legislated by the previous government, had serious flaws which were not determined or amended despite demands of the socio-political stakeholders. She said that actually, the bill; unfortunately prepared by my Ministry was based on a women commission's report and I had raised objections to it but those were not quashed. She further said that when it was tabled she had already left the Ministry due to certain reasons. Nilofar proposed amendments to the Political Parties Act to bind the parties to nominate the worker-class women on the reserved seats.

(The Post – September 24, 2008)

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Women & Education

49% of Parents Abuse Stipend given to Girls

Almost half of parents in Sindh spend the stipend given to their daughters for their education to pay for food or personal items, whether out of poverty or negligence, according to a study conducted to determine the effectiveness of the European Union (EU)-funded Sindh Education Reforms Program (SERP). Under the program, the Reform Support Unit (RSU) of the provincial education department distributes Rs 500 million to about 300,000 poor girl students studying in classes VI to X in the province. Each student receives up to Rs 1,000 per year. The program administrators distribute the money through money orders delivered by post to ensure transparency in the distribution and delivery of the support amount.

Dr Wasim Qazi of Iqra University presented the findings of the research study titled “**Efficiency and efficacy of stipend delivery to girls of classes VI-X in Sindh**” at a workshop organized by the Education department, the EU and the British Council on Wednesday. Executive District Officers (EDOs) of the education department, head teachers of different schools and various government officers were present. Qazi said that 91 percent of the parents and the female students have said that they had received stipends at the end of the academic year or later. When asked about the best time for delivery, 45.6 percent of parents preferred that the stipend be paid at the end of the year, 29.6 percent prefer it be delivered at any time through the year, 15.6 percent prefer delivery on a monthly basis and 8.4 percent favored a quarterly distribution.

RSU Deputy Programme Manager Saba Mushtaq cited an example to paint a picture of society's attitude toward female education and the abject conditions that female students face. She disclosed that the staff in New Hala sent back the stipends for 30 students, saying that the girls had left school as they had been married. She briefed the participants about the procedure for delivery of stipends and said that around 300,000 girls benefited from the program each year. She emphasized the need for each stage of distribution to be completed on time and ensure that the stipends were received in a timely fashion by the intended beneficiaries. She said that delays in the distribution of stipends may cause girls and their families to be discouraged and cut down female attendance in schools. The EU's Lucy Jones and RSU Chief Program Manager Alia Shahid both stressed on the importance of timely delivery of the stipends. Participants of the workshop complained about spelling mistakes in the names of the students and difficulties faced by parents holding old national identity cards. Some mentioned that the annual stipend of Rs 1,000 is insufficient and should be increased to between Rs 300 and Rs 500 per month.

(Daily Times – September 18, 2008)

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Articles on Gender

Disgracing Humanity

By Luavut Zahid

Baloch Senator Mir Israrullah Zehri was an unknown name and face until destiny decided to bring him into the limelight. The first inkling I had about the brutal murders of five Balochi women were through an email circulated over

the internet. Mir Israrullah Zehri's photo was accompanied with a caption: Meet the man who thinks it's OK to bury girls alive if they don't follow orders. A vast majority of Pakistanis living in big cities thankfully lives a comfortable existence, never realizing how lucky they are to be able to live life without any fears or restrictions. Our lives spill over to our families, friends and recreation, and we seldom think of people who live a marginalized existence. How many of us can really think of burying someone alive just because they chose their own husband? We consider ourselves to be a civilized society, firmly believing in a particular system of justice. But we do not know that there are regions in our very own 'civilized' country, where women are brutally murdered sometimes in the name of tradition and sometimes in the name of religion. Nothing is really done to change this, since the people of the region where such inhumane practices are a norm don't think it is anything extraordinary. On the contrary, for them it is a way of life which they have grown up with. A murder is simply a part of life and nothing more. The fact that these men assert their 'power' over defenseless women, depicts what kind of the men they are. What kind of coward would let such a thing seduce his ego? Killing someone who could not defend themselves, how does that make you powerful? That only makes you a pathetic bully. And to defend such an act in the name of tradition is an insult to tradition itself. So it is not strange if a person like Mir Zehri finds it normal for five women to be buried alive in Balochistan because they defied tradition, and chose to marry men of their own choice. He supports the issue to the extent of openly promoting this in the Senate, indifferent to the public outcry that such a statement would ignite in the country. Ours is a great nation. Ours is a very honourable nation and honour is imperative for survival, if you have no honour you should very well be dead. Nothing here is more fragile than the male ego; it is like a beast, always consumed by an insatiable hunger. When a man feels insecure, a female relative has to pay by dying.

According to recent investigation, there were not five women but two who fell prey to custom, but the fact remains that murder was committed, and the number of victims doesn't really matter. According to Shariah and Pakistani law, the victims had done nothing wrong but they still suffered a gruesome fate. The story goes that the women left their homes for a civil court at Usta Mohammad, district Jafarabad. These girls were 'defying' their elders to marry men of their choice. They would be married to the men of their choice by legally entering a lawful nikah, in effect that is not immoral or unethical or shameful. But the feudal system does not seem to care whether an act is lawful or not, but it seems that the act will be penalized if it goes against custom and tradition, even if the punishment itself goes against Shariah and law. For people living within a cocoon of customs and traditions, it isn't uncommon to come across incidences where women are sacrificed at the altar of honour and no one raises a voice against this.

Coming back to this incident, the victims lead lives of submission never daring to raise their voice against the male folk. And since they took a decision themselves, against the wishes of those who mattered, tradition called for their untimely demise. It wouldn't be surprising if these women killed expected and accepted the consequences without question. These two girls were brave or 'stubborn' to challenge ancient mores, but they did so anyway and therefore suffered 'accordingly'. Each year some woman's life is sacrificed at the altar of archaic mainly in the name of 'honour'. What's shocking is that our lawmakers condone such acts. Does a human life really mean so little that you can simple wipe it off of the face of the earth in the name of tradition? Mir Israrullah claims he will not go against religion or tradition, but just by supporting the murders he went against one.

Pakistan has seen great progress over the past few years when it comes to the cause of women. Every field is brimming with female talent. Fehmida Mirza was only recently elected as the first female Speaker of the national assembly. While the State Bank has had a female Governor - Shamshad Akhtar - for a long time now. However, it is apparent that this progress is nothing but a farce in the faces of those who are sacrificed in the name of honour.

According to many human rights groups, hundreds of women are killed each year in the name of honour killings. The official figure for honour killings in the first five months of 2008 alone stands at 107; and these are only those which have been reported, no one knows how many cases went unreported due to tribal pressure. What these people don't understand is that murder by any other name, even in the name of honour, is nothing more than murder and must be dealt under law accordingly. The murderers of these girls have been arrested, but the people of the area don't seem to be moved by their crime. In fact, the general opinion in their home town leans towards the murderers instead of the victims. This is mainly because the murderers are seen as stalwart honourable men, who will not allow feelings come between what is considered right in that area and will 'punish' anyone who goes against tradition. There are more chances that the murderers are held in high esteem for who would rather die to protect their reputation by killing their daughters, sisters and mothers. What is inconceivable for us in our big cities, is just a part of life for these people. It was a sad day when these women were served their deaths only for wanting happiness, a sad day indeed.

(The News You Page – September 16, 2008)

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Democracy Watch

Election Watch

\$9m Project to Computerize Electoral Rolls Completed

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on September 9 marked the completion of the installation of Pakistan's Computerized Electoral Rolls System (CERS) with a signing ceremony at the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The Certificate of Acceptance signed at a ceremony is a significant milestone in the development of a state-of-the-art electoral system for Pakistan and will contribute greatly to free and fair elections in the country. In 2006, the ECP with the support of the US Government contracted a consortium of leading local companies to execute a computerized electoral roll system for Pakistan.

Approximately \$9 million were provided for the project which had two phases. The first phase included establishing logistics, data entry systems, printing and distribution of the draft and final electoral rolls for the February 2008 general elections. This phase was completed in late 2007. The second phase consisted of procurement and installation of a suite of software applications to be used for the ongoing management of the Election Commission's voter registration database and its electoral rolls. The Election Commission has been working to deploy CERS at its all five locations – Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta. The final deployment at the provincial Election Commission's office in Quetta was completed on September 4. The CERS project was implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Since 2002, the US government on behalf of the American people has provided more than \$2 billion to Pakistan to improve economic growth, education, health and governance and to assist with earthquake reconstruction.

(Dawn – September 10, 2008)

Local Government By-Polls within Two Weeks: ECP

Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Secretary Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad said on September 20 that by-elections for local government institutions will be held within a couple of weeks. Presiding over a meeting at the office of the Provincial Election Commissioner, he said more than 1,500 seats in different categories were vacant in Punjab, adding that in zila councils, two nazim seats, one naib nazim seat, 19 seats for women, five seats for peasant workers and two minority seats were vacant.

(Daily Times – September 21, 2008)

Assessment Report of General Elections 2008 by PACFREL

The launch of Assessment Report of General Elections-2008 and Pakistan Coalition For Free and Fair Elections (PACFREL) was held on September 16. Speaking on the occasion, Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO) Director Harris Khalique said the report focused on instances where the election laws were clearly flouted, ballot boxes were stuffed by deceit or force and the public mandate stolen with the official backing. He said the popular perception about integrity of the electoral process was dismal as the mistrust was caused by an accumulated experience of many elections being encouraged by street wisdom that the rulers and the politicians were not sincere in using elections to determine the will of the people. Khalique said the fears of rigging were a major issue in the run up to the February 18 General Election as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) could not be regarded as an independent organization. The ECP received more than 600 official complaints about pre-polls rigging but it dismissed most of them as it did not have people and infrastructure to investigate these complaints, he added.

The report titled 'How Fair Were Elections 2008? Field observation Report' is an analysis of reports of the field monitors for General Elections for the National and Provincial Assemblies and the report writer is Badar Alam. He said the PACFREL's assessment painted a picture of the elections far beyond from being what they should have been while that government had called the elections fair, free and transparent. Alam said the last election also witnessed several drawbacks including delay in polling, all the polling agents and contenders were found missing at many places and there was a regular traffic of unauthorized persons coming in and out of the polling stations and specially on the polling booths, while use of forces by private individuals, groups and even the state to intimidate voters and seal their mandate was quite visible. He said it was also witnessed that both the parties the PML-Q and the MQM forcefully attempted to rig the polls and both the parties succeeded in most of their attempts.

IA Rehman, in his address, said the real importance of democracy meant to hold fair, free and transparent elections in the state and for that everyone should play due role to strengthen the democratic powers and show involvements in the electoral process for betterment and strengthen the democratic process. Rehman said the government should look into all matters to ensure their fairness and transparency including a census and enrolment of voters while the free

and fair elections were one of the main objectives of the state. He said the electoral role was not properly arranged during the last election and names of female voters were mostly absent from the electoral rolls. Dr Fozia Saeed, a novelist and social activist, said the progressive civil societies should fight and struggle to streamline the democratic process, follow the fact base analysis and factual situation was very important for strengthening the state. She said unbiased reports could provide awareness among the masses which was very important process for the democratic process. Tahir Mehdi, director of Lok Sugag, and several other speakers also spoke on the occasion while scores of civil society representatives, NGO representatives and several governmental and non-governmental organizations representatives were also present on the occasion.

(The Post – September 16, 2008)

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Government Watch

Office of the President

Zardari's Address to Joint Sitting of Parliament

President Zardari addressed the joint session on 20 September. During his address he showed his willingness to give up his powers while asking Parliament to form an all-party committee to revisit the 17th Amendment and Article 58-(2)b of the Constitution. Standing by the side of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's picture on the dais, Zardari spoke on the revival of democracy in the country, Pakistan's security issues, re-naming the NWFP as Pukhtoonkhawa, provincial autonomy, reforming the tribal areas, reforms in FCR laws, and all issues of national importance as well as the challenges facing the country including the war against terror, regional situation, in-camera session of the parliament on security issues, economic downturn, foreign policy and relations with the neighbouring countries. Zardari, prayed for the souls of all those who scarified their lives in the defence of the motherland and for democracy including Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, Zulifkar Ali Bhutto and Murtaza Bhutto as well those who embraced martyrdom at Karsaz in Karachi and later at Liaquat Bagh in Rawalpindi. All the chief ministers, governors, the services chiefs and foreign diplomats were present. PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif was also present.

17th Amendment: President Zardari said it was the responsibility of the elected representatives to remove distortions in the Constitution made by successive dictators to prolong their rule. It also shows that the government accords the highest priority to the fulfillment of its obligations under the Constitution and law, he added. He regretted that despite the constitutional requirement the head of the state during the last eight years addressed the joint sitting of Parliament only once. He made it clear that the President and the government must always seek guidance from Parliament in carrying out their duties.

War on Terror: About the menace of terrorism and extremism, the President said that we must root out terrorism and extremism wherever and whenever they may rear their ugly heads Reforming the tribal areas and bringing them into the mainstream of national life can no longer be delayed, he said and added the residents of these areas must be treated at par with the rest of their Pakistani brethren. The President also spoke of the government's three-pronged strategy to meet the challenge posed by the extremist and terrorist elements in the tribal areas and the adjoining regions. He said the strategy comprises: firstly to make peace with those who are willing to make peace and renounce violence; secondly to invest in the development and social uplift of the local people. The use of force will only be the last resort against those who refuse to surrender their arms and take the law into their hands, challenge the writ of the government and attack security forces, he added. The President said he will request the government to hold a national security briefing for an in-camera joint session of parliament, so that all stakeholders are fully conversant with this policy. He said the government should be firm in its resolve not to allow the use of its soil for carrying out terrorist activities against any foreign country.

Relations with Neighbouring Countries: The President, however, stated in categorical terms that Pakistan will not tolerate the violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity by any power in the name of combating terrorism. Zardari said the world has become a dangerous place for nations with conflict on their borders. As such Pakistan needs peace not only within but also in its neighbourhood. Under this strategy, Zardari said, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai was especially invited to his oath-taking ceremony. It was as a mark of Pakistan's sincere desire and consistent efforts to promote close relations and strengthen cooperation with the brotherly country of Afghanistan, he added. On relations with India, he said, the government believes that relations between the two countries can and should be creatively reinvented. The President said for these ideas and for seeking peaceful relations in the region, "we were once called, a 'security risk' by our critics. But ideas cannot be killed by repression." He said that the Charter of Democracy binds the government to a framework of peace and justice for the people of Pakistan and peace and friendship with India. Pakistan has decided to resume the composite-dialogue process with India, driving its relations through enhanced trade, he added.

Kashmir Issue: He expressed complete commitment to the Kashmiri people in their just struggle for their fundamental rights. He said: "we will continue to seek the settlement of all outstanding disputes, including the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir, so that the main hurdle in the way towards peace and full normalization of relations between Pakistan and India is removed." President Zardari said as a new initiative, cross-LoC trade as a pioneering CBM in Kashmir will be started. He also proposed a more liberal visa regime to further expand people-to-people contacts and friendly exchanges, and establish new facilities for the visiting Sikh and Hindu pilgrims. He urged Parliament to form a bipartisan caucus for the purpose of resolving outstanding disputes relating to Kashmir and the Indus Water headworks.

Foreign Policy: President Zardari speaking on foreign policy objectives said the government will endeavour to promote regional and international peace and security as well as the socio-economic development of people. He said Pakistan can position itself as the trade and energy hub for South and Central Asia. The President said Pakistan will strengthen its brotherly relations with Iran and take its time-tested and all-weather friendship and strategic partnership with China to greater heights. He said Pakistan will continue to extend full support to the Palestinian cause of self-determination and values its ties with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Libya.

Economy of the Country: He said the greatest challenge this government faces is on the economic front and the immediate and most urgent task is to provide food and security to the common man burdened with the rising prices of food items. The President attributed the economic downturn to global oil and food shocks as well as the neglect of agricultural sector over the past nine years. He, however, mentioned the introduction of welfare schemes like Benazir Income Support Programme, with a budgetary allocation of Rs34 billion, to provide immediate relief to the poorest of the poor. The President said the present government inherited an economy that was driven by pure consumption, and as such was saddled with huge liabilities of unpaid subsidy-claims on account of petroleum products, power tariffs and luxury imports.

Energy Crisis: On energy crisis, the President said unlike the previous government, which did not generate even a single megawatt of electricity in seven years, the present government has taken immediate short and medium term measures to address the issue. He assured that load-shedding will go by the end of next year. "We cannot take Pakistan out of darkness in one month, but we can certainly do it by the end of the next year."

Agriculture: President Zardari said agriculture needs to be placed at the top of the agenda for ensuring food security on a long term basis, generating jobs and income for a vast majority of people living in the rural areas of the country. He said it was for the first time in the history of Pakistan that the government is mulling over crop insurance schemes.

Women's Rights: President announced that all state allotments, both in income-support or land, would be made in the name of women. He said that "for the first time, all state allotments, both in income support or land, will be made in the name of women of this country as my late wife Benazir Bhutto would have wanted". He said development was not possible without justice and equal opportunities for women. "I note with pain that despite legislation that protects women, the women of this great nation continue to suffer crimes against them with disturbing frequency," he said. Zardari asked the government to do its best to provide protection to women and to empower them "at every step of the long road to their just entitlements as full citizens of this state". He said that "we can't reverse decades of social backwardness by a stroke of the pen but we can and we will turn this tide slowly but surely".

Minorities: The President also said minorities in Pakistan had played an important role in the country's development but "have not received their social and political dues". He said the government would include minorities in the mainstream to 'make full use of their potential'

Freedom of Media: The President said that the media has come a long way from the first day the PPP government opened up the airwaves to private networks. He said: "our government lost no time to dismantle the infrastructure of violence that the last regime had left behind by repealing the PEMRA and print media ordinances which hung over the media's head like a sword." The President said the government will soon be bringing other fundamental laws, such as the Freedom of Information Bill, and work with stakeholders toward an open atmosphere of self regulation with no interference from the state. President Asif Ali Zardari said that he had asked the government to consider wage support and low-cost housing for journalists all over the country.

Parliament as Sovereign Body: The President said under the new set-up, parliament is asserting its role as a sovereign body. "For the first time in more than 44 years, the defence budget was discussed in the National Assembly."

NAB Ordinance: The President said the government has decided to repeal the NAB Ordinance and replace it with a system that is across the board, transparent and within the accepted norms of the mainstream judicial system.

FCR: "The harsh provisions in the FCR are being done away with. A committee for PATA and another committee on FCR set up by the government are finalizing their recommendations."

Renaming NWFP: The President said that he has recommended to the government to change the name of NWFP to Pukhtunkhwa, in response to a long-standing demand of the people of that province.

Balochistan: Referring to the past excesses against Baloch people, the President said tendering an apology to the people of Balochistan was a step long overdue. The release from captivity of former Chief Minister Balochistan is also a positive move, he said, adding the resolution recently of a longstanding dispute and payment of billions of rupees to Balochistan is a step in the right direction. "But much more needs to be done", he stressed.

(The News – September 21, 2008)

Parliamentary Committees

Asfandiyar Elected Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee: ANP Chief Asfandiyar Wali was elected unopposed as Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on September 17. Speaking after his election, Wali assured the members that a meeting of the standing committee would be convened after Eid to discuss the prevailing situation on the country's border. He said that the situation on our borders is very critical. The importance of this committee has further increased in this time of crisis.

Standing Committee on Water & Power: PPP's Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah was also elected unopposed as Chairman of the NA Standing Committee on Water and Power. PPP MNA Abdul Ghani Talpur proposed his name and PML-N member Abid Sher Ali seconded it. muhammad bilal

(Daily Times – September 18, 2008)

PML-N's Nisar Elected PAC Chairman: Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly (NA) Nisar Ali Khan was elected unopposed as the House's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Chairman on September 19. Nisar Ali Khan is the first PAC Chairman from the opposition. All previous PAC Chairmen have been elected from the government. ANP Chief Asfandiyar Wali proposed Nisar's name and PML-Q member Riaz Hussain Pirzada seconded it. Nisar now holds three important positions – he is the PML-N parliamentary leader, opposition leader in the NA and the PAC Chairman. Expressing his gratitude, Nisar Ali Khan said heading the PAC was a great honour and responsibility and that he would try to come up to parliamentarians' and the nation's expectations.

He appreciated the government for setting a precedent by offering the PAC chairmanship to the NA opposition leader in accordance with the Charter of Democracy. He assured the members that there would be an across-the-board accountability, irrespective of party affiliations and a sub-committee would be formed to clear a 15-year backlog. Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani congratulated Nisar on his election as PAC chairman. In his message, the prime minister expressed hope that he would deal with his new responsibilities effectively. Speaker Fehmida Mirza and Deputy Speaker Faisal Karim Kundi also felicitated Khan on his being elected unopposed. They said the government had set a democratic practice by electing the leader of the opposition as the PAC Chairman.

(Daily Times – September 20, 2008)

Provincial Governments

PPP to Stay in Punjab Cabinet: As the PML-N wants the PPP to quit Punjab cabinet following its decision to sit on Opposition benches in National Assembly, the latter has decided to stay in the Cabinet for the time being. A high-level meeting of PPP leaders held at Governor's House on September 12 decided that PPP ministers would start attending their offices from September 13. The PML-N has also been informed of the decision. Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Interior Rehman Malik, Advisor to PM on Industry Mian Manzoor Wattoo, Qasim Zia and PPP ministers including senior minister Raja Riaz and Finance Minister Tanvir Ashraf Kaira attended the meeting, which discussed the ongoing state of tension between the two parties, and the party strategy to cope with the situation. A member of PML-Q forward bloc, Najaf Sial, who voted for Asif Ali Zardari in the recent Presidential Election along with his group of around six like-minded legislators, was also present. The meeting decided that PPP ministers would sit in their offices from today (Saturday) and re-start their routine work. The ministers were told that PPP intended to remain part of the present set up in Punjab till the outcome of an anticipated meeting between President Asif Ali Zardari and PML-N chief Mian Nawaz Sharif due in the first week of October. During this period, the PPP would watch the conduct of Punjab Government with the party ministers and then take a decision accordingly, the meeting further decided.

(The Nation – September 13, 2008)

PPP to Get 'Due Share' in Punjab Power: After weeks of uneasy and tense relations, PML-N and PPP are believed to have moved a step further towards peaceful co-existence in Punjab when the former assured its partner in the provincial coalition of its due share in power. "Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif has assured us of our due share in jobs, development and cabinet as agreed in the power-sharing formula between the two parties," the PPP's Tanvir Ashraf Kaira, Provincial Finance Minister, told after the first meeting of the PMLN-PPP committee formed on 23 September to settle problems and issues that have cropped between them since the formation of the coalition. The PPP is represented in the committee by its parliamentary party leader and Senior Provincial Minister Raja Riaz and Kaira and the PML-N by Law Minister Sanaullah Khan and its Provincial President Sirdar Zulfiqar Khosa. The meeting was presided over by Mr Sharif himself to head off any further misgivings between the two coalition partners.

(Dawn – September 24, 2008 – Page 12)

Senate

PPP has No Plan to Replace Senate Chairman

Despite having a clear majority of legislators on its side, PPP has no intention to replace the incumbent Senate Chairman Muhammad Mian Soomro, Some PPP senators were in favour of de-seating the sitting Chairman, but the party is in no mood to do so, revealed a veteran parliamentarian while requesting anonymity. He claimed that 60-65 senators had voted for Asif Ali Zardari in the Presidential Election of September 6, which was a clear indication that a change could be brought, and the Senate Chairman could be replaced. Ditching the PML-Q candidate Senator Mushahid Husain Sayed, majority of the party legislators also had polled their vote for Zardari, who won the presidential race.

(The News – September 12, 2008)

More Senators Join PML-Q Forward Block

The strength of PML-Q forward block in Senate is increasing day by day as after Presidential poll some other members from the Chaudhary's camp have joined hands with Jan Muhammad Jamil led like minded group. PML-Q legislator from the Senate said that the number of defiant PML-Q senators is ascending and some Parliamentarians in the Upper House from Q League, who has voted Party's Presidential candidate, Mushahid Hussain Sayed, are now gathering under the flag of Jan Muhammad Jamali, thus posing serious threat to the leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Kamil Ali Agha as well as the Chairmanship of Muhammad Mian Soomro. He said that the number of PML-Q forward bloc in the Senate had reached 20 out of total 38. He further said that some members of the forward bloc are in favour of changing leader of opposition in the Upper House while other argue that no big change is needed in the existing set up for the time being as after March 2009 significant changes would automatically occur. Mir Wali Muhammad Badini said that the strength of PML-Q forward bloc in the Senate is above 20. Before Presidential elections, it was believed by PML-Q leaders that the party would witness minimum defection in the Senate and it was being expected that roundabout 28-30 party senators would vote for Mushahid Hussain Sayed but he got only 17 votes from Senate. Apart from forward bloc, Senators including Jan Muhammad Jamali, Mir Muhabbat Khan Mari, Mir Wali Mohammad Badini, Kalsoom Parveen, Zafar Iqbal, Muhammad Amjad Abbas Qureshi and Rehana Yayha Baloch, who had openly cast their votes in favour of Asif Ali Zardari as many as 14 other Senators secretly defied party's line of action.

(The Nation – September 8, 2008)

Economic Issues

ADB for Structural Changes in Pakistan Economy – ADB's Presentation at Planning Commission

A delegation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) headed by Jesus Felipe gave a presentation at the Planning Commission on the competitiveness and structural transformation in Pakistan. The objective of ADB's research program was to understand Pakistan's constraints to industrialize and to transform, upgrade and diversify its economy. The findings of this analysis would be incorporated into ADB's operations in Pakistan namely, lending and policy dialogue. Felipe, underscored that economic development requires diversification, not specialization. He said that growth accelerations were associated with structural changes in the direction of manufacturing. For rapid growth, large manufacturing sectors are essential. The presentation highlighted the importance of sophisticated goods and underlined that countries that export more sophisticated goods, grow faster. It was noted that Pakistan's exports were relatively unsophisticated.

It was pointed out that services sector is the largest contributor to output growth but Pakistan has an agricultural economy for the employment structure which has low level of labor productivity. Also it has low manufacturing share compared to successful economies. All this ends at low level of export sophistication. In order to get the firms move from the poor parts to the rich parts of the world, a country needs to change to products that use similar capabilities. It was observed that Pakistan occupied textiles & garments cluster in the product space which is tightly connected to itself, but poorly connected to the rest of the space. Moreover in Pakistan's case, the export dynamism lagged relative to comparators in the region. For transformation, public-private cooperation was strongly recommended. Some policy

initiatives like open architecture, self-organization, co-financing and transparency were also proposed. Deputy Chairman Planning Commission chaired the meeting, whereas representatives of various other ministries and officials of the Planning Commission attended the presentation.

(The News – September 3, 2008)

Pakistan's Forex Reserves Down to \$4bn in Real Terms

A senior government official at the Ministry of Finance told that in a shocking situation, Pakistan is now left with foreign exchange reserves of only \$4 billion, in real terms, enough to cater for the import of one month. The total forex reserves stand at \$8.89 billion, out of which commercial banks have \$3.38 billion, meaning that the State Bank of Pakistan possesses \$5.5 billion. Out of this \$5.5 billion, \$1.5 billion have already been consumed because of the forward booking liabilities. Keeping in view the fast depleting foreign reserves, the dollar-rupee parity stands at \$1-Rs 77, which is alarming. Financial experts are of the view that dollar's value can cross any time Rs 80 because of the worsening reserves situation and the prevailing political uncertainty.

Some financial experts are of the view that political chaos would continue even after September 6, the day a new president would be elected, as the judges' issue would continue to linger on and Nawaz Sharif, along with the All Parties Democratic Movement, would jointly increase the political momentum on the issue that would aggravate the situation. This has actually left the Pakistan's economy in a lurch. Presently, there seems no light at the end of the tunnel, as the fate of oil facility amounting to \$6 billion from Saudi Arabia is still in doldrums till the election of the new president. As far as the government's request to the World Bank seeking \$1 billion loan, there is no progress. The bank has, in fact, refused to extend any programme loan. According to official sources, the bank has agreed to extend project loans only. The World Bank's top guns have conveyed to the authorities in Pakistan that the bank has linked its future programme loans to the issuance of the Letter of Credit by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The two installments each of \$136 million from the UAE-based Etisalat Company against the privatization of the PTCL are now overdue and the government is awaiting the delivery of \$272 million. However, there is no progress on this issue. The government, despite its tall claims, has so far failed to float the Workers Remittances Securitization Bond worth \$750 million to provide cushion to the worsening foreign reserves situation.

On the privatization front, there seems no tangible progress on sell-off programmes. The government claims that some privatization proceeds amounting to \$1.86 billion are in the pipeline. The government was earlier claiming that it would have inflows of \$250 to \$300 million as the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) was going to issue some licenses of that value to various companies in the first quarter of the current fiscal. So far, no progress has been seen on this issue too. The Abraaj, an Arab group that has become the new administration of the Karachi Electric Supply Company, still has not injected \$400 million investment into the KESC. It means the Forex reserves would continue to decline in the days to come.

(The News – September 4, 2008)

GDP Growth Target likely to be lowered to 5 Percent

A senior official at the Ministry of Finance told on September 13 that Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth target for the fiscal year 2008-09 is likely to be lowered from 5.5 percent to around 5 percent. GDP growth targets are being revised in view of disturbed manufacturing due to the increased load shedding and the cotton crop output being less than expected, the official disclosed. Changes being finalized in the macroeconomic framework would result in the lowering of the growth forecast of the economy in the current fiscal year, the official said, adding that macroeconomic targets would be re-adjusted and a revised growth forecast made ready in a month. The Ministry of Finance had set the GDP growth target at 5.5 percent for fiscal year 2008-09, despite having 6.8 percent GDP growth in the previous fiscal year 2007-08. This was due to power shortages, less water availability for agriculture production and rising oil prices.

(Daily Times – September 14, 2008)

Pakistan says No to IMF Assistance

Finance Minister Naveed Qamar unveiled a policy package on September 19 to restore economic stability, ruling out seeking assistance from the International Monetary Fund. The package includes elimination of subsidies, reduction in development expenditures, financing through non-inflationary instruments and arranging foreign exchange through privatization of oil, gas and power sector entities. Naveed Qamar told a news conference that that package will bring down the fiscal deficit and current account deficit and protect our reserves. He said the measures had been decided by the government, and hoped the IMF would endorse them. He further said that elimination of subsidies on fuel and electricity was a key element in the package. He said that the government would do away with the subsidy on electricity by the end of the 2008/09 (July-June) fiscal year, but the bulk had already been phased out. State Bank Governor Dr Shamshad Akhtar said the immediate target of the package was to increase foreign exchange reserves to provide an import cover two to three months.

(Daily Times – September 20, 2008)

State Bank may Freeze Dollar at Rs75

Seeing unabated erosion in the value of rupee against the US dollar, the State Bank of Pakistan is likely to freeze the dollar-rupee exchange parity at Rs 75, according to sources. They said that the high ups of the SBP are working on a mechanism to fix the dollar-rupee exchange rate and a notification in this regard is expected to be issued soon after Eid holidays. The price difference between the two trading currencies is anticipated to narrow, reaching a certain level of parity as the central bank is ready to put barrier or verbal cap on interbank and open market dealings by fixing rate of Rs 75 for the trading of both currencies in local forex market, sources said. It may be noted here that during the past couple of months the value of dollar had edged up by 15 rupees against Pak-rupee that showed the gravity of the vulnerability of the local currency against the US currency. The recessionary tendency being witnessed in the capital market attributed to global credit crisis and the complications on financing of external current account deficit, speculative positions in the domestic foreign exchange market and import demands are putting enormous pressure on the exchange rate mechanism

The domestic currency market is likely to gain exchange rate momentum against the US dollar including other major foreign currencies as the central bank is expected to fix dollar-rupee parity by 75 rupees within 1-2 weeks. The SBP may announce this directive through a notification by the start of next month to be followed by scheduled banks and authorized exchange companies. Sources said that, this "extra ordinary" development to be taken place by the SBP for the upcoming days is on the cards. Earlier, currency analysts were projecting that there was a bubble in the capital market which could finally burst any time and the dollar might be reaching at Rs 80 at any upcoming session of forex trading. Analysts do term "uncertainty" being observed in the local capital market is very much accompanied by so-called speculative behaviour rather than liquidity mechanism. Despite facing weaknesses in the supply side due to slow growth in financial inflows, absence of any consolidated economic strategy coupled with lack of viable financial agenda to tackle the prevalent economic issues is making our capital markets are more volatile.

(The Nation – September 26, 2008)

Pakistan Assured of \$1.3bn World Bank Assistance

The World Bank is considering a \$1.377 billion package to help Pakistan overcome its economic problems, the Bank's President said. World Bank Robert Zoellick made this commitment during a meeting with President Asif Ali Zardari in New York on 25 September. He assured the Pakistani leader of the Bank's continued support and said that a \$1.337 billion World Bank funded programme was in the pipeline. The fund will be used for investment in energy and water sectors and for developing infrastructure. He also assured World Bank's support for development projects in Fata as well as for poverty reduction programmes. President Zardari discussed his government's macroeconomic stabilization programmes with the bank's president and sought his assistance for the Benazir Income Support Programme for the poor. He also urged the bank to help mobilize resources for industrialisation and investment in Pakistan. He said the political government had taken difficult and tough decision to meet the current economic challenges and was doing its best to bring the country out of the current economic crisis.

(Dawn – September 26, 2008)

Sharp Increase in Wheat Support Price

In a major incentive to the agriculture sector and to achieve food security in the country, Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on 29 September announced the decision of fixing minimum guaranteed price for the next wheat crop at Rs950 per 40kg with an ambitious target of 25 million tonnes for the coming Rabi season. As part of the first package of his six-month-old coalition government, the Prime Minister also announced pro-farmer relief measures while addressing a press conference at the Prime Minister Secretariat to boost agriculture produce. One of the measures was the launching of the Benazir Zarai Card to enable farmers to get agricultural inputs on credit. Flanked by Information Minister Sherry Rehman and Minister for Food, Agriculture and Livestock Nazar Muhammad Gondal, the Prime Minister said a crop insurance scheme is being launched with a premium of 1.5 per cent, adding the government would pay premium on behalf of smaller farmers. Earlier, the Prime Minister chaired a special federal cabinet meeting that approved the first agricultural incentive package of the coalition government. The prime minister said the total financial impact of increasing the minimum support price would be Rs10 billion that would be sustained by the government. "It was better to pay Rs10 billion to our farmers as subsidy than paying Rs60 billion to the farmers of those countries from where wheat is imported," he added. He said a committee headed by the finance minister has been constituted to look into the feasibility of introducing a green tractor scheme to provide tractors to farmers at subsidised prices.

(The News – September 30, 2008)

Black economy Thrives as Country Struggles to keep afloat – \$85 Billion Black Economy depriving Government of Billions of Rupees in Taxes

Pakistan's black economy has grown to over \$85 billion, depriving the government of a huge amount of money in taxes. The government can garner huge money in taxes if black money is whitened. A senior official at the finance ministry said that the country's formal economy is to the tune of \$166 billion while the black economy estimated at \$85 billion is almost half of it. He added if the government levied a minimum 10 percent tax on black money, it would get more than \$8 billion. The country's economy is largely undocumented, providing space to the informal sector to thrive. "Under-invoicing has been going on for years on a large scale," the official said. Recently, hoarders and black

marketers earned billions in wheat and flour trading but no record was available to pin them down, the official added. The government is believed to have taken a serious view of the situation and thought of proposing punitive measures during pre-budget exercises but dropped the idea because it would have sent a wrong signal to the market. Instead, it decided to offer incentives that would gradually merge the black economy into the formal one. The official said a strategy to bring the informal sector into formal one was aimed at achieving new resource mobilization, particularly by encouraging development of the cottage industry across the country. The finance ministry's officials have been tasked with devising a mechanism to increase revenues substantially by providing the informal sector with more incentives to merge it into the formal sector. The black economy issue, the official said, was upsetting public welfare plans. An official at the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), however, said, "I believe the black economy is 30 to 40 per cent of our total economy. Even this is quite disturbing and if it is over 50 per cent, it is disastrous". He said that there is substantial part of the informal economy which is not in the mainstream economy and needed to be documented if at all new resources are to be mobilized for welfare purposes.

(The Post – September 13, 2008)

Other Government Watch News

Legislation comes to a Halt

Twenty-three legislative bills are pending before the National Assembly (NA) as its standing committees remain non-functional, bringing the legislation to a standstill in parliament, a source said on 14 September. The PPP-led government has failed to set up standing committees in the Lower House after more than six months of its formation. The source at the NA Secretariat said the legislative business at the House was being accumulated due to delay in the election of committees' chairpersons. The bills pending with standing committees include the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2008, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2008 and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill, 2007. These bills were introduced in the NA during its session in April. Eight more bills, including the Finance Bill, were moved in the NA during its session in June. The House passed the Finance Bill on June 22. The Senate passed and forwarded four bills to the NA last month, but they are pending before the standing committees. Eight more bills introduced in the NA in August are pending before the committees.

(Daily Times – September 15, 2008)

Socio-Economic Uplift of Common Man Govt's Top Priority, says NCSW

National Council of Social Welfare (NCSW) Chairman Rais Mehboob Ahmed said that government under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani was giving top priority to social welfare and economic uplift of common man with a view to achieving social change in the country. Addressing at an Iftar dinner hosted for children of Anjuman Faiz-ul-Islam with cooperation of Khalifa Zayed Al Nehan Trust, UAE and Ibtida Foundation Pakistan, he said the government will continue to assist those institutions who are playing an important role in this noble cause. The representative of UAE Ambassador to Pakistan, Hamood Al Shamsi, Chairman, Ibtida Foundation, Osman Ali Saad-ud Din and President Anjuman Faizul Islam, Mian Siddique Akbar were present. Rais Mehboob stressed upon the philanthropists to cooperate with the Anjuman for welfare of orphan and downtrodden children. "These innocent children are the integral part of our society and their care falls on our shoulders, thus we must share with them all happiness and sorrows," he added. He also appreciated the work and performance of the Anjuman and said this is the NGO, which has been caring the little children before the creation of Pakistan. Chairman, Anjuman Faizul Islam threw light upon the performance of the Anjuman and said four different institutions were imparting education to more than 800 children. He said, a girls college has been established in Mandhra where orphan children from all over the country are being imparted education.

(The News – September 26, 2008)

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Opposition in NA

Elahi Resigns as NA Opposition Leader

Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi resigned as opposition leader in the National Assembly (NA) on September 14. In his resignation sent to the National Assembly Speaker, Elahi said that he was resigning "in the interest of the smooth working of Parliament and with a view not to embarrass your position as speaker". Elahi added that the office of the opposition leader was being "sought by those who were part of the federal government until September 13", in an apparent reference to the PML-N. The PML-N had requested the Speaker to nominate Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan as the leader of the opposition because the party had 92 members in the National Assembly, compared to 53 PML-Q MNAs. The PML-Q media cell said that the party leadership wanted to see democracy functioning smoothly in the country. The leadership had decided that its opposition leader should resign in the interest of the country.

(Daily Times – September 15, 2008)

Chaudhry Nisar Notified as Opposition Leader in NA

Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza has notified PML-N parliamentarian Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan as the leader of the opposition in NA. The speaker formally issued the notification on September 17 after the resignation of outgoing NA opposition leader Pervaiz Elahi was accepted. A separate notification regarding the acceptance of Elahi's resignation has also been issued. Nisar Ali Khan would be the 15th opposition leader in the National Assembly.

(Daily Times – September 18, 2008)

PML-N Ministers' Resignations Accepted

On the advice of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, President Asif Ali Zardari has accepted resignations of nine Federal Ministers from PML-N. PML-N media coordinator Asim Junaid told that Gilani had told PML-N leader Nisar Ali Khan that the government had decided "in principle to accept the resignations of PML-N ministers". According to the Online news agency, Zardari will expand the Federal Cabinet after his visit abroad. It reported that MQM would get five ministries while negotiations with the ANP are underway. Advisers to the Prime Minister Mian Manzoor Ahmed Wattoo and Syed Hamid Kazmi are also likely to be included in the cabinet,

(Daily Times – September 14, 2008)

Nawaz Meets Zardari but Declines to Rejoin Coalition

In a rare show of political goodwill, PML-N leader and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on September 8 called on President-elect Asif Ali Zardari and congratulated him on his election to the country's highest office. But at the same time Nawaz politely declined Zardari's request to rejoin the coalition government. Nawaz Sharif along with Punjab Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif and a seven-member delegation of the PML-N called on President-elect Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani at the PM's House. It was their first formal meeting after the PML-N pulled out of the coalition over the issue of the restoration of the deposed judges. Sources said Asif Ali Zardari during the meeting invited Nawaz Sharif to rejoin the coalition government while Nawaz Sharif said he would not do so unless the 17th Amendment was repealed and all the deposed judges, including Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, were reinstated. However, Nawaz Sharif assured Asif Zardari that he would continue to extend his full support to the existing set-up, sources said. The president-elect in return assured Nawaz Sharif that he would not allow any provincial government to be destabilized and would continue to promote reconciliation. Both the leaders agreed on continuing cooperation with each other in defusing tension in the Punjab. The president-elect said that greater political engagement was the top priority of the PPP-led coalition government.

(The News – September 9, 2008)

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Governance at Large

Local Government System

Local Government System to be Strengthened: Zardari

President Asif Ali Zardari said that amendments to the local government system will be made through parliament to make it more effective. The President was talking to National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) Chairman Dr Asim Hussain at the President's House. The NRB Chairman briefed the President on the Bureau's performance and its role in strengthening the local government system. Zardari further said that the local government system would be further improved to enable it to deliver effectively at the grassroots. The NRB is working on a comprehensive plan to bring improvements to the local government system on the directions of the PPP-led government.

(Daily Times - September 18, 2008)

Punjab wants Police under Bureaucracy

The Punjab Government intends to place police once again under Deputy Commissioners (DCs), if at all they are restored, to the extent of maintaining law and order. Police managed to wriggle out of the administrative control of civil bureaucracy through the Police Order. Nazims were, however, made their bosses in districts to the extent of controlling law and order, keeping them out of the age-old command of DCs (civil bureaucracy). A senior Punjab government official said that the provincial government was not going to end the autonomy of police which they had obtained after a long struggle. Without touching the Police Order, the government would focus on the Local Government Ordinance 2001 under which law and order was made the responsibility of nazims, also giving him the authority to write annual confidential reports of key police officers in their districts, he said. The official says the experience of making law and order a responsibility of nazims failed for they are partisans, and therefore they avoid taking precautionary or damage control measures whenever their interest is at stake.

(Dawn, September 26, 2008)

Seminar on Local Government System -- Changes in Local Government System and People's Perspective

The civil society organizations categorically stated their all out resistance to any attempt, manipulation or effort to roll back or drastically change the local body system, which can otherwise be made more effective through introducing some positive changes. The representatives of these organizations showed their firm resolve to protect the local government system at a seminar on 'Changes in Local Government System and People's Perspective' organized by the South Asian Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK). The speakers of the seminar said every provincial government must have full powers to frame its own local government system according to its own ground realities and any change in this system should be introduced through respective provincial assembly. Sungi Development Foundation Director Samina Khan said it has become our culture that we make one step forward and two steps backward due to which no local system gained ground in our country. She said the civil society organizations after a series of consultations with all the stakeholders of the system and with masses at large, collectively declared that the local government system must be retained with some necessary changes to make it more responsive, transparent and accountable. Harris Khalique of Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO) said the Federal Government should not meddle in the local government affairs and political parties should extend their support to ensure its sustainability, efficacy and usefulness. He said the function of the union councils must be enhanced and some functions be transferred from district and tehsil nazims to union council nazims. Representatives of various social organizations from all the federating units highlighted the positive aspects of the local government system and suggested measures to make it more effective and efficient.

Nusrat Ara from NWFP said the system provided the common people with an opportunity to directly access their elected members and informed them about their grievances and problems. She suggested that local body elections must be held on party basis and five per cent quota be earmarked for disabled persons to make them part of the decision-making process. Firdous Abro from Sindh said the union councils be given powers to provide clearance and fitness certificates on completion of development projects that would certainly remove corruption at the grassroots level. She said the provincial government should not interfere in the affairs of the district governments and steps be taken to avoid duplication and overlapping in the power structure. Henry Baloch from Balochistan, said the local government system empowered the people at the grassroots levels especially women and minority groups greatly benefited from it. He said one union secretary is currently dealing with four union councils in Balochistan that causes slow pace of work at various level, so every union council has its own grade-11 secretary to improve their working. Farooq Khan from Punjab said the local government institutions are the nurseries to produce a lot of young and energetic politicians and any effort to minimize their role would result in disappointment among the people. He said if

the federal government wants to introduce any change in this system, a consultative process be initiated to take input from all the stakeholders. Later, the organizers demanded on behalf of fourteen civil society organizations that the democratically elected government should use more of its energies and resources to strengthen the local government system instead of weakening it against the wishes of the people.

(The News – September 26, 2008)

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Restoration of Deposed Judges

Three Deposed SC Judges, PHC CJ Take Fresh Oath: Three deposed judges of the Supreme Court on September 5 took fresh oath, parting their ways with deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in the fight he had been waging along with the lawyers for the independence of the judiciary. Justice Mian Shakirullah Jan, Justice Tasadduq Hussain Jillani and Justice Syed Jamshed Ali who had refused to take oath under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) on November 3, 2007, finally took fresh oath and accepted the offer of the government regarding their reappointment. Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar administered fresh oath to the three judges at a ceremony held here in the Supreme Court building. It was announced that they would return to their offices with immediate effect and their seniority was ensured from November 2, 2007. It was further announced that they would also get all the pension benefits as judges of the apex court. Meanwhile, soon after the oath-taking ceremony, Law Minister Farooq H Naek reiterated that Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar was the constitutional Chief Justice of Pakistan and there could be no two chief justices under the Constitution. To a question, he said the decision regarding appointment of Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry as the Chief Justice will be taken once he comes back. He pointed out that there could be one Chief Justice at a time, adding that if Iftikhar Chaudhry also takes oath in the present circumstances, it will lead to another constitutional crisis.

Meanwhile, Justice Tariq Pervez Khan re-joined the office of the Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court (PHC) by taking fresh oath to the office, which he had refused to take after the promulgation of November 3 emergency. NWFP Governor Owais Ahmad Ghani administered him fresh oath at the Governor's House. Besides, two deposed judges Justice Shah Jehan Khan and Justice Dost Muhammad Khan were also present on the occasion. Official sources said that Chief Justice Tariq Pervez would retain his seniority, as it was on November 2, 2007, and would also be entitled to pension benefits, etc on the basis of his original appointment in accordance with the constitution and law.

Among the four judges of the PHC, who had refrained from taking oath under PCO of November 3 now only Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan is sticking to his stance of not taking oath until deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry was reinstated. Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan said people from the provincial judiciary and the federal government, were in constant contact with him. "I am grateful to these well-wishers but believe me I could not convince my conscience even for a single moment to take oath without Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry who has become a symbol of independence of judiciary," he said. The honourable judge will remain in the office for another seven years as his retirement is due in 2015 and if elevated to the Supreme Court he would get another three years extension, if he agrees to take fresh oath.

(The News, September 6, 2008)

Three More Deposed SHC Judges Take Oath: Three more deposed judges of the Sindh High Court, including the senior-most judge Justice Sarmad Jalal Osmany, took oath on September 16 after their reappointment. SHC Chief Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali administered the oath to Justice Sarmad Jalal Osmany, Justice Gulzar Ahmed and Justice Mohammad Athar Saeed. The oath-taking ceremony was held at the Conference Room of the Sindh High Court. The ceremony was attended by SHC judges, federal and provincial law officers and other senior officials of the judiciary. Deposed SHC chief justice Sabihuddin Ahmed, Justice Mushir Alam, Justice Maqbool Baqar and Justice Arshad Siraj, however, have not decided to take fresh oath under the Farooq Naek formula.

The seniority of judges placed at the official website of the SHC is: Chief Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali, Justice Sarmad Jalal Osmany, Justice Azizullah M Memon, Justice Khaliji Arif Hussain, Justice Amir Hani Muslim, Justice Gulzar Ahmed, Justice Munib Ahmed Khan, Justice Mohammad Athar Saeed, Justice Mrs Yasmeen Abbasey, Justice Mrs Qaiser Iqbal, Justice Ali Sain Dino Metlo, Justice Faisal Arab, Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, Justice Nadeem Azhar Siddiqui, Justice Abdur Rehman Farooq Pirzada, Justice Zafar Ahmed Khan Sherwani, Justice Salman Ansari, Justice Abdul Rasheed Kalwar, Justice Syed Mehmood Alam Rizvi, Justice Dr Rana Mohammad Shamim, Justice Khawaja Naveed Ahmed, Justice Khalid Ali Z Kazi, Justice Agha Rafiq Ahmed Khan, Justice Syed Pir Ali Shah, Justice Bin Yamin, Justice Arshad Noor Khan, Justice Qamaruddin Bohra, Justice Ghulam Dastagir Shahani and Justice Furruk Zia Sheikh.

(The News - September 17, 2008)

Four Deposed Judges Inducted into SC: The government, on September 19, notified the reappointment of two deposed judges of the Supreme Court and elevation of one sacked and one serving judge of the Sindh High Court (SHC) to the Supreme Court. According to two separate notifications issued by the Law and Justice Division, two deposed judges of the Supreme Court namely Justice Sardar Muhammad Raza Khan and Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk have been reappointed while deposed Chief Justice of the Sindh High Court Justice Sabihuddin Ahmed and Justice Sarmad Jalal Usmani, the senior-most sacked judge, who recently took fresh oath as an SHC judge, have been elevated to the Supreme Court.

According to the Supreme Court seniority list, Justice Sardar Muhammad Raza Khan will become the Chief Justice after the retirement of Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar on March 21, 2009. He will retire on February 9, 2010, after which Justice Faqir Mohammad Khokhar will be the senior-most judge till his retirement on April 15, 2010. After the oath of Justice Raza Khan and Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk, there now remain four deposed judges of the Supreme Court -- Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday, Justice Falak Sher, Justice Raja Fayaz Ahmad and Justice Chaudhry Ejaz Ahmed. Justice Falak Sher will retire on September 21, 2008.

(The News - September 20, 2008)

Four SC Judges Take Oath: Four sacked judges took a fresh oath as Supreme Court (SC) judges on September 20. They include sacked SC judges Justice Sardar Muhammad Raza Khan and Justice Nasirul Mulk, sacked Sindh High Court (SHC) Chief Justice Sabihuddin Ahmed and serving SHC judge Justice Sarmad Jalal Osmany. Under Article 177 of the Constitution, the President reappointed the four as judges of the SC with effect from the date of their oath taking. It was also announced that they would retain their seniority and benefits. Chief Justice of Pakistan Abdul Hameed Dogar administered the oath in a ceremony attended by Islamabad High Court Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Aslam, Shariat Court judges, Law Minister Farooq H Naik and Attorney General Latif Khosa.

(Daily Times - September 21, 2008)

Oath-taking splits Lawyers: Difference of opinion over the procedural modalities to reinstate the deposed judges has led to a split among the lawyers of Islamabad District Bar. Division among lawyers became more apparent when Islamabad Bar Association (IBA) President Haroon-ur-Rasheed did not participate in the condolence reference arranged by Bar General Secretary Riasat Ali Azad in connection with the death of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Insiders revealed the President did not participate in the condolence reference because of friction among the lawyers as one group of lawyers had no objection to reinstate the judges with a fresh oath while the second group totally opposed the way and called it unconstitutional. Meanwhile, a group of lawyers chanted slogans against newly nominated Deputy Attorney General Amjad Iqbal, former President Islamabad Bar Association, and newly appointed standing committee members Aleem Abbasi and Akhtar Awan. They alleged that the lawyers had sold their conscience and were traitor to the sacred cause of the lawyers' movement. They said the lawyers were united and committed to their cause. They said that Sharifs and BB returned to the country after the lawyers' movement got momentum and pressurized the Musharraf regime. They said that the current rulers should realize that they were holding the current positions because of the lawyers' struggle. They said that lawyers were being lured through attractive jobs and packages to fail their movement.

Haroonur Rashid said the lawyers had no concern over the modality of reinstatement the judges adopted by the government. He mentioned that lawyers wanted only Nov 2 judiciary, "it is not a matter that judges are taking afresh oath". He mentioned the government should take care of judges' seniority for their restoration. He declared Asif Ali Zardari would be a good president for Pakistan as he had got a high mandate. He was hopeful and said that President Zardari would reinstate all the judges as he did not say he would not reinstate them. He accepted the momentum of lawyers' movement was slow due to summer vocation and presidential election. He added that next strategy about movement would be announced after a meeting in Lahore. When contacted, Riasat Ali Azad, who completely opposed the way of reinstatement of judges and declared it unconstitutional, said there was no word of reappointment of judges in the constitution. He added that judge could only be removed under the Article 209.

(The Post - September 12, 2008)

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NFC Award

Rs457bn Transferred to Provinces in 2007-08

The centre transferred Rs457 billion to the provinces in 2007-08 as their share from net proceeds of the federal divisible pool but this was Rs8.5 billion less than the budgetary allocation of Rs466 billion. The final consolidated accounts released by the Finance Ministry, however, suggest that the provinces' share in the net proceeds of the federal divisible pool was about 14.25 per cent higher than Rs400 billion paid to the provinces in 2006-07.

Punjab received Rs228 billion, which is Rs8.24 billion less than the budgetary target of Rs236.24 billion, but about 19 per cent more than Rs191.5 billion in 2006-07. Sindh received Rs143 billion, about Rs1.2 billion less than the budgetary estimate of Rs144.2 billion, but 8.9 per cent more than Rs131.3 billion it got in 2006-07. However, the NWFP got about Rs56.5 billion against the budgetary target of Rs55.9 billion, or 23 per cent more than Rs46 billion it had received in 2006-07. Balochistan was paid Rs30 billion against its budgetary allocation of Rs29.6 billion. When compared with 2006-07, its share declined by about Rs1.2 billion or 3.8 per cent.

The Federal Government has estimated Rs568.3 billion as provincial share in the federal divisible pool, up by about Rs111 billion or about 24 per cent higher than last fiscal year's final payouts of Rs457 billion. The fiscal transfers to the provinces include grants and loans from the federal government. The net proceeds of the divisible pool are arrived at by deducting five per cent collection charges by the federal government. The federal share in the net proceeds of the divisible pool for 2008-09 is 56.25 per cent, with the remainder 43.75 per cent going to the provinces. Likewise, the royalty on crude oil and development surcharge on natural gas, after a deduction of two per cent collection charge, is transferred to the provinces on the basis of well-head production. The provinces are entitled to one-sixth of sales tax revenue, which is subsequently transferred by the provinces to district governments and cantonment boards.

(Dawn - September 3, 2008)

Punjab for New NFC Award Formula

Punjab has said it is willing to change the federal formula for revenue sharing between the provinces and an agreement is expected in the National Finance Commission (NFC) meeting to be held soon. Senior Balochistan Minister Abdul Waaseh told on September 11 that Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif had expressed his willingness on changes to the NFC Award, to include factors other than population in determining provincial shares. These factors may include area, backwardness, revenue collection and development needs. The new formula would help the three smaller provinces, Sindh, the NWFP and especially Balochistan, to use their increased share for development and poverty reduction, he said. The Minister said Punjab had earlier opposed any change to the formula and former President Gen (R) Pervez Musharraf had given out an 'interim' NFC Award because of disagreement among provinces. Any flexibility in Punjab's stance may significantly increase the likelihood of an agreement on a new formula in a meeting, a date for which has not been fixed so far. Giving details of a meeting between a top-level Balochistan delegation headed by Chief Minister Nawab Muhammad Aslam Khan Raisani with the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, the Minister said his province had been assured of 'full co-operation' in regard to release of funds and swift removal of bottlenecks.

(Daily Times – September 12, 2008)

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Geo-Political Dynamics

Pakistan's External Relations

Bush-Zardari Meeting

US President George W Bush assured President Asif Ali Zardari that his country respects Pakistan's sovereignty and its sovereign right to defend itself against terrorism. Bush sat down for his first face-to-face meeting on 23 September with Zardari to discuss security and economic issues before they attended the UN General Assembly. The two Presidents had their maiden meeting here in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where the US President is staying.

The US President welcomed the newly elected Pakistani leader and assured him of his country's cooperation. They discussed enhancing bilateral relationship with the US leader, pledging support for Pakistan in the economic and security fields. The two Presidents held discussion on a number of issues of mutual interest. President Bush at the outset expressed profound sense of grief over the heavy loss of lives on the Marriott hotel, Islamabad. President Zardari expressed the confidence that Pakistan would be able to overcome its problems. "Democracy is the answer" to the problems facing Pakistan, he said. "We have problems, we have a situation but we will solve them." President Bush said: "I thank you for coming. And I have really been looking forward to this meeting; after all, Pakistan is a close and important friend." He offered his deepest condolences to the victims of those who died as a result of the terrorist attack in Islamabad. "I know that you -- your heart goes out to the families of those who suffered and so does the collective heart of the American people; we stand with you," George Bush said. Referring to the current economic difficulties of the United States, President Bush said the world leaders are wondering whether or not the United States has the right plan to deal with this economic crisis.

President Zardari thanked President Bush and said: "Thank you for your kind words. Thank you for your thoughts. As always, you prove to the world that your heart is in there for us Pakistanis, we respect your feelings, we respect the American ideals. And we bring to this the whole concept of your promise to the world of bringing democracy to Pakistan. Democracy has come full circle and it's been the help of all the friends around the world and we are thankful to the world for helping democracy." He said: "Democracy is the answer. We will solve all the problems. We have a situation. We have issues. We've got problems. But we will solve them and we will rise to the occasion. That's what my wife's legacy is all about. That's what democracy is all about, to take difficult decisions and do the right thing for the people of our country and our two great nations. We should come together in this hard time and we will share the burden and the responsibility with the world," President Zardari concluded. President Zardari was assisted by Foreign Minister Shah Mehmud Qureshi, Finance Minister Syed Naveed Qamar, Information Minister Sherry Rehman, National Security Advisor Maj-Gen Mehmud Ali Durrani, Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan's permanent envoy to the United Nations Hussain Haroon while the US President was assisted by Secretary of State Dr Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser Hadley and Assistant Secretary of State for Central and South Asia Richard Boucher.

(The News – September 24, 2008)

Zardari-Manmohan Meeting

Pakistan and India have agreed to resume trade through land routes and decided to open four points for this purpose, including two along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, while two would be on the international borders. Meanwhile, India assured Pakistan that it would stand by the Indus Waters Treaty and Pakistan would get its share of river waters in accordance with the treaty. President Asif Ali Zardari raised the issue of water share in his maiden meeting on 25 September evening with Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in his hotel in New York. A joint statement was issued after the meeting and the two leaders also had a brief interaction with the media. The leaders of Pakistan and India, vowing to work for an early and full normalization of relations, have agreed to open four trade routes as part of the efforts to strengthen trade, commerce and bilateral ties.

- The joint statement reads: "Both the leaders agreed that the forces that had tried to derail the peace process must be defeated." "This would allow the continuation and deepening of a constructive dialogue for the peaceful resolution and satisfactory settlement of all the bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir," added the statement issued after the hour-long session.
- "They agreed that violence, hostility and terrorism had no place in the vision they shared regarding the bilateral relations, and must be visibly and verifiably prevented," it said, adding: "Severe action would be taken against elements involved in terrorist acts," the statement said.
- The two leaders welcomed the "several positive outcomes of the four rounds of the composite dialogue, which had brought their people, businesses and institutions closer." They agreed on the opening of the Wagah-Attari

road link and Khokrapar-Munabao rail route for all permissible items of trade. They also decided to commence cross-LoC trade on the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Poonch-Rawlakot roads on October 21, and to discuss modalities for the opening of the Skardu-Kargil route soon. The two countries have just concluded talks in New Delhi on the subject of opening of trade routes across the LoC.

- The meeting between the two leaders called for consolidating the gains made through sustained efforts to resolve all outstanding issues. "They agreed to work for an early and full normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan, on the basis of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and non-interference," the two-page statement said.
- Pakistan and India also agreed that their foreign secretaries would schedule meetings of the fifth round of the composite dialogue in the next three months to focus on "deliverables and concrete achievements".
- They also agreed to stabilize the ceasefire and that the director-generals military operations and sector commanders would stay in regular contact. The two sides also agreed to hold a special meeting of the Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism in October to address mutual concerns, including the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul.
- The two leaders also agreed on expansion of people-to-people contacts, trade, commerce and economic cooperation as it provided an effective platform to develop and strengthen bilateral relations.
- They evolved a consensus to continue interaction between the planning commissions of both the countries to develop mutually beneficial cooperation, including the energy sector.

(The News – September 26, 2008)

Asif Ali Zardari's Address to UNGA – Main Points

- I come before you today in the name of my late wife, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, as a victim of terrorism representing a nation that is a victim of terrorism. I am a grieving husband, who has seen the mother of my children give her life fighting the menaces of terrorism and fanaticism that haunt the entire civilized world.
- Today we still do not know what forces and institutions were involved, who plotted and planned and coordinated and trained and paid for the murder of my wife and my nation's beloved leader. A UN investigation into the murder of their leader would reassure the people of Pakistan that the international community cares about them, that the UN's charter of justice is more than rhetoric. We owe it to her. We owe it to history. We paid a political price at home for coming to the UN and not conducting the investigation at home. But we wanted this investigation to be credible and independent and representing this respected institution's commitment to the victims of terrorism. If the President of a country and his children cannot get justice through the United Nations, how would the poor and the dispossessed around the world find reassurance that the UN is capable of protecting the weak and the suffering? In the name of humanity and in the name of justice, move forward quickly on the investigation of the assassination of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, so the people of Pakistan and the world will know once and for all, whose bloody hands took away one of the greatest women of history.
- We may be the targets of international terrorism, but we will never succumb to it. Toward that end, we reach out to you and to the entire civilized world. Terrorism cannot be fought by military means alone. Fighting it requires political will, popular mobilization, and a socio-economic strategy that wins the hearts and minds of nations afflicted by it. Unilateral actions of great powers should not inflame the passions of allies. Violating our nation's sovereignty is not helpful in eliminating the terrorist menace. Indeed, this could have the opposite effect. Many of you in this great hall read about terror. We live with it. We do not learn about terror from reading newspapers or watching the evening news. We see our children and our wives being blown up before us. My cities, neighbourhoods, streets, hotels and offices bear the brunt of the terrorist fanatic rage every single day.
- A democratic Pakistan is in the process of reaching the national consensus necessary to confront and defeat the terrorists. Only a democratic government can win this war. We are fighting the menace and we will continue to fight. But this is the fight for the peace of the world. This is the fight for the future of generation to come. Yes, we fight for ourselves, for our children, for our very soul. Yes, this is our war, but we need international support – moral, political and economic. In our stability lies the world's security. Globalization is not just economic; it is also political. The terrorist vision strikes out at all continents and all nations. We must draw the line on their rampage. And we must draw that line in Pakistan.
- The question I ask the world's leaders in this august chamber is whether you will stand with us, just as we stand for the entire civilized world on the frontlines of this epic struggle of the new millennium?
- Today, as we meet here in New York, the democratically elected leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, continues to be imprisoned in Yangon. She has suffered year after year under house arrest. The world should demand that this great woman finally be freed.

- In the early years of the new millennium, there are two great battles before mankind. First there is the battle for democracy and liberty against authoritarians and dictators – the fight for universal human rights that is the hallmark of this body. At the same time, we are fighting in the trenches of the battle that will determine the course of the new millennium – the battle against extremism and terrorism – between the forces of ignorance and the forces of education, between bigotry and tolerance, between justice and discrimination, between confrontation and reconciliation.
- Democracy is not like water from a tap that can be turned on and off when it's convenient. It is a universal value guaranteed to all men and women. It is the outcome of these struggles that will determine whether the noble experiment embodied in these hallowed walls of the United Nations will succeed or fail. The struggle between the Bhutto Doctrine of Reconciliation and the Terrorists' Doctrine of Death will determine the future of mankind.
- It is time for the world to take notice. We are not the cause of the problem of terrorism, we are its victims. We are an aggrieved nation not one that has caused grief. We have fought this battle largely alone. We have shared our air bases, our air space, our intelligence, and our armed forces in a coordinated effort to contain terrorism. It is time for the developed world to step up to the plate to help us, and in turn help itself.
- The fight against extremism is a fight for the hearts and minds of people. It can't be won only by guns and bombs. The fight must be multifaceted. The battleground must be economic and social as well as military. We will win when people are mobilized against the fanatics. To mobilize them we have to give them hope and opportunity for their future. They need jobs. Their children need education. They must be fed. They must have energy. We must give people a stake in their own government, and we must demonstrate to them that democracy does perform, that democratic governance can improve their everyday life. An economically viable Pakistan will be a stable Pakistan. And a stable Pakistan will suck the oxygen from the terrorists' agenda. Economic justice and political democracy are the worst nightmares of the terrorists.
- We must all fight this epic battle together as allies and partners. But just as we will not let Pakistan's territory to be used by terrorists for attacks against our people and our neighbours, we cannot allow our territory and our sovereignty to be violated by our friends. Attacks within Pakistan that violate our sovereignty actually serve to empower the forces against which we fight together.
- We will work together with our neighbour Afghanistan, and the NATO forces stationed there, to ensure security of our common border. We will continue the composite dialogue with India so that our outstanding disputes are resolved. Whether it is the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir, or cooperation on water resources, India and Pakistan must accommodate each other's concerns and interests; we must respect and work with each other to peacefully resolve our problems and build South Asia into a common market of trade and technology.
- Pakistan will prove wrong all the negative predictions about its future. We will show the way in overcoming suspicions towards and from our neighbours, and building a future for our people.
- Throughout her life, my wife struggled to make the world a better place for our children, the children of Pakistan and the children of the world. I owe it to her memory, and to all of the martyrs of democracy to continue to do the same, until the Bhutto Doctrine of Reconciliation is not just her dream but the world's reality.

(Daily Times – September 26, 2008)

Friends of Pakistan – Forum Launched

A permanent forum was launched in New York on 26 September to help raise billions of dollars to avert a possible economic collapse in Pakistan. The forum, which will be called the Friends of Pakistan, will hold its first meeting in Abu Dhabi in October. The decision to form such a body was made at a meeting of some of the world's richest nations that also have close ties to Pakistan and want to help.

President Asif Ali Zardari, while explaining what Pakistan expected from the new forum, said that "I don't want them to give us the fish. I want to learn how to fish and do it myself".

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that we are engaged with Pakistan through international financial institutions. She further said that we will support the steps Pakistan must take for economic reforms. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband described the meeting as "a very strong signal of political and economic support to the democratically elected government in Pakistan". UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed said his country fully backed the

initiative to “show our commitment to Pakistan”. The three officials were among half a dozen world leaders who attended meeting formally inaugurated by President Zardari.

The United States, Britain, Italy, Germany, France, Japan, China, Australia, Turkey, Canada, Saudi Arabia and the UAE attended the inaugural meeting. European Union and the United Nations sent their representatives. Other countries are also likely to join. Recent reports in the western media indicate that Pakistan needs as much as \$10 billion to avoid an economic meltdown. The United States and Britain jointly launched the initiative to form a group to help Pakistan after realizing the seriousness of the economic crisis confronting the country.

(Dawn – September 27, 2008)

Zardari Ready for US Training of Army Anti-Terror Units -- Interview with International Herald Tribune

President Asif Ali Zardari said in an interview on 28 September that we want to co-operate with the United States in training specialized counter-insurgency army units for use in the Tribal Areas. Talking to International Herald Tribune, the President said, “I mean business. We will train ourselves with the US present as trainers to raise the quality of certain forces.” But he warned against US military incursions inside Pakistan. “It is counter-productive and a political price is paid,” he said. President Zardari did not mince words in his determination to defeat a growing Taliban insurgency, the Herald said. “It is my decision that we will go after them, we will free this country,” he said, “Yes, this is my first priority because I will have no country otherwise. I will be the President of what?” President Zardari was asked if the assassination of his wife last year motivated him to confront insurgency. “Of course,” he said, “It’s my revenge. I take it every day.” He continued, “I will fight them because they are a cancer to my society, not because of my wife only, but because they are a cancer, yes, and they did kill the mother of my children, so their way of life is what I want to kill. I will suck the oxygen out of their system so there will be no Talibs.” He said he was concerned but not fearful for his life. “Because I don’t want to die so soon, I have a job to do,” he said. Zardari said his ‘new medicine’ for the Tribal Areas would include industrial investment, incentives for alternative crops to poppy and a firm message that ‘we are hitting the Taliban’ so make sure ‘your space is not being used by them’.

(Daily Times – September 30, 2008)

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Bangladesh – Pre-Election Watch

Interim Government

Bangladesh Parliamentary Polls set-for December 18:

The Head of Bangladesh’s military-backed administration on 20 September said that national elections would be held on December 18 to transfer power to a civilian government. He said that the Elections Commission has taken the decision and informed him that the national elections will be held on December 18. Ahmed said the elections to local village and town councils would be held in two phases - on December 24 and 28. A military-backed interim government has ruled Bangladesh since January 2007, when President Iajuddin Ahmed cancelled scheduled general elections and declared a state of emergency. The President’s move came after months of violent protests demanding electoral reforms. Ahmed said emergency rules barring public gatherings would be relaxed or suspended during the election campaign for the 300 parliamentary seats. Bangladesh’s National Parliament has 330 seats, 30 of which are reserved for women who are selected later by the elected lawmakers. Ahmed said the Election Commission would soon announce details such as the deadline for filing nomination papers and campaigning. The interim government has initiated some electoral reforms, such as making it mandatory for political parties to register with the Election Commission. It has also compiled a new electoral roll including voters’ photographs to avoid cheating. A reconstituted Election Commission has been holding talks with political parties to discuss the reforms.

(The Post – September 21, 2008)

Govt totally Focused on Pledge to Hold Dec 18 Election: Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed assured the world leaders that his Caretaker Government is now focused on fulfilling the pledge to hold free and fair parliamentary polls on December 18. He expressed the hope that all political parties would participate in the elections under new laws and regulations. The Chief Adviser said in a statement at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly, “Let me reiterate here that my government is completely and totally focused on fulfilling our pledge to hold free and fair parliamentary elections on December 18 as announced last week.” In his about 20 minutes’ speech, the Head of the Caretaker Government said the judiciary was made fully independent, National Human Rights Commission established to protect fundamental rights of all citizens and Right to Information Law enacted to provide the transparency to a well-functioning democracy. Besides, he said, the government in consultation with political parties amended and strengthened Representation of People Order (RPO) under which forthcoming elections will be held.

This law and regulations, under which it will require registration of political parties for elections, ensure intra-party democracy and implement campaign finance reforms to limit the influence of corrupt money in the political system.

(The Daily Star – September 27, 2008)

Election Commission

EC to Ease Party Registration Rules: On September 22, the Election Commission (EC) announced it will ease the procedure for registration of the political parties, and said it can do nothing more about the issue, a sticking point in electoral negotiations. Chief Election Commission (CEC) of Bangladesh ATM Shamsul Huda made the announcement at a press briefing at the EC Secretariat's conference room. He criticized the government for not allowing enough electoral reforms. He said the Commission had proposed a number of reforms in the electoral laws to bring about a qualitative change in politics in line with the aspiration of 1/11. But, he added, the government did not let it happen as it gave priority to the opinions of political parties.

Of the other proposals, one says a registered political party will be allowed to spend a maximum Tk 1.5 lakh for each of its candidates. If an unregistered party's candidate gets elected using electoral symbol of a registered party, he will be considered a lawmaker of the latter, says another proposal. The EC will also propose that the government bring amendments to allow loan defaulters to contest the upcoming parliamentary polls by rescheduling their loans before filing nominations. The amended Representation of the People Order (RPO) says someone defaulting on loans will not be allowed to run in the polls if he fails to reschedule his loans six months before filing of nomination. Besides, there is a proposal to clarify the restrictions on NGO officials seeking to stand in the parliamentary polls. The RPO says a person shall be disqualified for election as or for being a member of [parliament] unless three years have passed since his retirement or resignation as chief executive officer of a non-government organization. The restrictions caused widespread criticism as they apply to all NGO chiefs regardless of if one receives salary from the organization or not. According to the draft proposal in this regard, the provision will apply only to the salaried chief executives of the NGOs.

(The Daily Star - September 23, 2008)

Strict Code of Conduct set-to Take Effect: The new code of conduct for parliamentary polls will not allow any electioneering until three weeks before the start of polling. This means political parties and candidates in the December 18 general election will not be able to begin campaign before November 27. EC Secretariat officials said that it will take retrospective effect from September 18, the day it was assigned a Statutory Rules and Orders number by the law ministry,

The codes of conduct in the previous parliamentary elections took effect with the announcement of election schedules. A violation of the code is punishable by at least six months in prison, fine of Tk 50,000, and even cancellation of candidature in the event of gross irregularities. With similar restrictions, the code of conduct for the upazila elections slated for December 24 and 28 has already been published in gazette. It will come into force with the announcement of polls schedule.

Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain said the EC will announce schedules for both the polls together in early November.

RESTRICTIONS

- With the enforcement of the code of conduct for parliamentary polls, no prospective candidates or anyone on their behalf can donate or promise to donate to charities or other organisations openly or secretly.
- None will be allowed to bring out procession or stage showdown during filing candidacy applications.
- Processions or any showdowns using buses, trucks, motorcycles, trains, water transports and other vehicles will not be permitted. Besides, none will be allowed to bring out torch processions.
- The code of conduct will also ban pasting posters on vehicles and public establishments across the country, and buildings, walls, trees and electricity pillars under the city corporation and municipalities areas.
- Scrawling graffiti on vehicles, buildings, walls, bridges, road dividers or any other establishments, erecting archways and gates, illuminating structures and using helicopters in election campaigns too have been banned.
- Only the party chiefs will be allowed to use choppers as means of travelling. But they will not be permitted to distribute leaflets, posters and drape banners from helicopters.
- According to the code of conduct, portraits of party chiefs and candidates, and election symbols could be printed on posters, but no pictures of processions or programmes.
- It means Awami League and BNP will not be able to use portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman in electoral campaigns.
- The code also prohibits electioneering at mosques, temples or any place of worship.

The EC has all along been arguing that a stricter code of conduct will help reduce election expenditures and thus encourage honest and competent candidates in national polls.

(The Daily Star - September 26, 2008)

EC Unable to Enforce Poll Code of Conduct: The new code of conduct for parliamentary polls officially took effect on September 18, but Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said that the Election Commission (EC) is unable to enforce the rules mainly due to non-registration of the political parties. The CEC identified this as a "major problem" in enforcing the code of conduct, which was made for the registered political parties and candidates contesting the polls. CEC Huda said on 29 September: "The new code of conduct will be enforced with announcement of the schedule for the parliamentary polls." The EC has already announced that the election schedule for the December 18 national ballots will be declared in first week of November. This means the political parties and prospective candidates will not have to wait for November 27 to launch campaigns for electioneering unless the emergency power rules (EPR) prohibit those activities.

(The Daily Star - September 30, 2008)

Political Parties

Khaleda Zia Granted Bail on Remaining Two Charges: The Bangladesh High Court granted bail to detained former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on 9 September, clearing the way for her release after 12 months behind bars on corruption charges. The court bailed her on the remaining two of four charges brought after her arrest in September 2007 by the army-backed Interim Government. Political leaders and analysts said Khaleda's bail was an important step toward holding a credible parliamentary election by year-end, paving the way for a peaceful transition to democracy. About 170 key politicians, mostly from the BNP and Hasina's Awami League, were detained in a huge anti-graft drive after the interim administration took charge in January 2007 following months of political violence.

(Dawn - September 10, 2008)

Sheikh Hasina to return Home in October: Former Bangladeshi Premier Sheikh Hasina Wajed is expected to return home early in October after completing medical treatment in the United States, her secretary said on September 17. The ex-Prime Minister, who faces multiple corruption charges, was released on parole in June after nearly a year in detention, as part of an apparent deal with the country's army-backed authorities. Sheikh Hasina's secretary, Hasan Mahmud, told that she would return on October 7 or 8, having been treated for hearing problems at a hospital in Maryland. Observers say Sheikh Hasina, whose parole is due to end on October 6, will likely be awarded bail on all charges she faces before arriving in Bangladesh.

(Daily Times - September 18, 2008)

Sheikh Hasina's Bail Rejected: Hopes of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returning home to take the reins of her party ahead of a December election suffered a blow on 29 September when the High Court rejected a bail petition. Hasina was expected to return to Bangladesh over the next few weeks but her party, the Awami League, demanded she should have full freedom. The country's army-backed Interim Government has vowed to make the Dec. 18 election fair and credible, with participation of all major parties, including those of Hasina and another ex-premier, Begum Khaleda Zia. But Hasina's Awami League has threatened to boycott the poll unless Hasina was freed and all charges against her were withdrawn. Her lawyers said the court refused to grant bail to the former Premier, now in the United States on medical parole, over a charge of extorting 50 million taka (\$729,700) from a businessman while she was in power between 1996-2001. It is one of several corruption charges pending against her. Independent analysts say the election would be flawed, or thwarted amid feared political violence, if any of the two main parties boycotted it.

(Daily Times - September 30, 2008)

4-Party Tags RPO Scrapping with Poll Participation: The BNP-led four-party alliance placed before the government and the Election Commission a five-point demand, including withdrawal of state of emergency and scrapping of the Representation of the People Order (Amendment) 2008, as conditions for participating in the upcoming parliamentary election. At a meeting of the alliance leaders it also announced programmes for holding countrywide rallies on October 12 to press their five-point demand. The other demands are holding of upazila elections after a reasonable interval of the national polls, withdrawal of the Gatco, Niko and Barapukuria corruption cases and other false cases against alliance leaders, and release of all political leaders, activists and general people detained without specific charges before the Eid-ul-Fitr and withdrawal of the false cases against them. Earlier, the four-party alliance set September 20 as the deadline for meeting its demand for withdrawal of the emergency rules clamped on January 11 last year.

(The Daily Star - September 29, 2008)

Jamaat's Charter in Clash with Country's Constitution: Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh will have to bring fundamental changes to its constitution to get registered with the Election Commission (EC) so that it qualifies for participating in parliamentary polls. If the party changes its constitution to conform to the registration criteria, it will

definitely lose its characteristics as an Islamic political party. Among the registration criteria laid down in the revised Representation of the People Order (RPO), two conditions infuriated Jamaat leadership as those put the party's very existence as a hardline Islamic party at stake. One of the significant criteria for registration says that a political party shall not be qualified for registration if the objectives laid down in its constitution are contradictory to the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Jamaat's constitution clearly contradicts the objectives laid down in the country's constitution, the supreme law of the land. The preamble to the constitution reads: "... it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to realise through the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation, a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social will be secured for all citizens." But the aims and objectives laid down in Jamaat-e-Islami's constitution are to establish rule of Islam through all out efforts and for establishing peace all over the world and welfare of mankind. The party constitution also urges to end all types of repressions, injustice by establishing rule of Allah and rule of honest people through organized efforts. The Jamaat constitution disagrees with the aims and objectives laid down in the Bangladesh constitution and it also rejected the country's constitution saying "it was man made". There are many other provisions in Jamaat's constitution that contradicts with the country's constitution.

According to the constitution of Jamaat, only religious Muslims can join the organization and be members or leaders of the party. This means none but religious Muslims are eligible for being a member or leader of Jamaat-e-Islami. Legal experts say that this is absolutely discriminatory and contradictory to the Article 28 (1) of the country's constitution. They said if any organization wants to discriminate based on religion and claim such discrimination as its rights, the constitutional guarantee against non-discrimination will obviously have to be thrown away. Jamaat also opposed the criterion that says that a political party willing to get registration shall have a specific provision in its constitution fixing the goal of reserving at least 33 percent of all committee positions for women including central committee and successively achieving this goal by the year 2020. After the new provisions in the RPO were incorporated in an ordinance promulgated on August 19, Jamaat's Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid filed a writ petition with the High Court (HC) challenging the three provisions. In the writ Jamaat claimed that the provisions are unconstitutional.

Interestingly, the Special Powers Act (SPA), 1974 does not allow Jamaat and other Islamic political parties to run their activities in the name of or on the basis of religion. The parties have been going on with their activities for the last three decades due to non-enforcement of the laws. However, the SPA, 1974 is still in force and calls for ban and punishment for violation of the provision. All successive governments since August, 1975 changeover used the SPA to suppress opponents but turned a blind eye to banning political activities in the name of or based on religion.

(The Daily Star – September 29, 2008)

Election Observers

Dhaka asks for Commonwealth Polls Mission: The Foreign Adviser said in a statement on 24 September that Bangladesh has requested the Commonwealth to send a polls observation mission for the December general elections.

Foreign Adviser Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury said in a press statement that the Commonwealth Secretary General agreed to visit Bangladesh in the last week of October.

(Independent Bangladesh – September 25, 2008)

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Thailand – Elections of PM

Thai Parliament elects New PM

Thailand's Parliament elected a brother-in-law of ousted leader Thaksin Shinawatra as Prime Minister on September 17, ensuring continued tension with protesters who accuse the new government of being Thaksin's puppet. Somchai Wongsawat, a 61-year-old former Judge and government bureaucrat married to Thaksin's younger sister, won a clear majority of parliamentary votes as the six-party ruling coalition held firm. He has been acting Prime Minister since Samak Sundaravej, whom the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) also accused of being an agent for Thaksin, was sacked by a Court for hosting TV cooking shows while in office.

Just an hour after being elected, the bespectacled and soft-spoken Somchai called for national reconciliation to end the political crisis that dates back to the PAD's first attacks on Thaksin in late 2005. Their campaign played a major part in the coup that followed in 2006. He said that it is time for Thailand to reconcile. We do not hate each other, so we should not let hatred prevent us from tackling the immediate problems the country is facing. His words are likely to fall on deaf ears, with the PAD immediately labelling him a "Thaksin nominee" and vowing to continue its three-week occupation of the Prime Minister's official compound. PAD leader Somsak Kosaisuk told that we really don't care. This is just a group of bandits choosing a new leader. Somchai's wife, one of 111 Thaksin-linked politicians banned from

politics for five years after the coup, has been accused of links to dodgy deals at Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi airport, charges she denies. However, analysts said that, and his obvious family ties to Thaksin, would provide ammunition for the PAD and opposition Democrat party against a man otherwise seen as bland, inoffensive and lacking in charisma. With the PAD refusing to budge from the Government House compound, Somchai will work out of Bangkok's old Don Muang airport, where his aides have set up temporary offices. Showing an intention to get down to business, he said he would meet financial regulators to discuss the impact of the US financial crisis on the country. The central bank has already said Thailand's banking system remains strong.

(Daily Times – September 18, 2008)

Following events led towards elections of new Prime Minister:

The Senate President lodged a complaint with the Constitutional Court of Thailand (ConCourt) on 2 June 2008, and the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) submitted a similar complaint 29 July 2008. The complaints requested the ConCourt to decide whether the premiership of Samak Sundaravej is terminated upon Section 91, Section 182 Paragraph One (7) and Section 267 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (2007).

On September 9, a Thai court ordered the Prime Minister to quit for hosting TV cooking shows, but his party said it would re-elect him within the week and protesters vowed to keep up a campaign that has paralyzed the government. Analysts said the guilty verdict should have provided at least a stop-gap solution to the crisis, but the likelihood of the stalemate dragging on for months will almost certainly take a further toll on Thailand's financial markets. The constitutional court, in a televised broadcast, said Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej had violated the constitution by hosting cooking shows on commercial television while in office, calling it a conflict of interest. Protesters from the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), who accuse Samak of being a puppet of Thaksin Shinawatra, ousted as premier by the army in a 2006 coup, said they would not move from the Government House, where they have barricaded themselves for two weeks.

On 10 September 2008, however, the PPP shied away from their earlier statement they would renominate Sundaravej and was apparently looking for an alternative candidate instead; the new PM was to be nominated on 12 September 2008. People Power Party's Deputy Spokesman Kuthep Suthin Klangang, on 12 September, 2008, announced that: "Samak has accepted his nomination for Prime Minister. Samak said he is confident that Parliament will find him fit for office, and that he is happy to accept the post.

On 12 September 2008, the quorum for selecting the new PM was not reached and the decision was delayed to 17 September 2008 in an event seen as signaling the end of Samak's career. After its four coalition partners stated they'd prefer someone else to become PM instead of Samak, the PPP agreed to drop his nomination. Embattled Samak Sundaravej abandoned his bid to regain his Thailand Prime Minister post, and Teerapon Noprampa said Samak would also give up the ruling People's Power Party (PPP) leadership.

Meanwhile, PPP's chief party spokesman Kudab Saikrachang and Kan Thiankaew announced on 13 September that Caretaker Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, Caretaker Justice Minister Sompong Amornwiwat and PPP Secretary-General Surapong Suebwonglee were PPP's candidates for premiership post. However, Suriyasai Katasila of People's Alliance for Democracy (a group of royalist businessmen, academics and activists), vowed to continue its occupation of Government House if a PPP candidate would be nominated.

The ruling People Power Party, on 15 September, 2008, named Somchai Wongsawat, candidate for Prime Minister to succeed Samak Sundaravej. Somchai Wongsawat was ratified by the National Assembly of Thailand as Prime Minister of Thailand on the 17th September, winning 263 votes against 163 votes for Abhisit Vejjajiva.

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US Presidential Elections

First Debate between John McCain and Barack Obama

Barack Obama may have lost not only his first debate with Sen John McCain but also the Pakistani-American vote, which so far he was widely expected to get, given what came across as unsympathetic remarks about Pakistan and possible unilateral military strikes in certain situations. While McCain came out as supportive of Pakistan and sensitive to its position and the difficult insurgency it is dealing with, Obama appeared to be otherwise. McCain also took advantage of the fact that he has visited Pakistan's Tribal Areas and, given his military background, came out as more appreciative of the difficult terrain and the entrenched insurgency there. McCain also admitted that after Afghan freedom fighters drove the Russians out of Afghanistan, "we basically washed our hands off the region. And the result over time was the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and a lot of the difficulties being faced today." Those, he added, are lessons of

history that cannot be ignored. McCain said, "I'm not prepared at this time to cut off aid to Pakistan. So I'm not prepared to threaten it, as Senator Obama apparently wants to do, as he has said that he would announce military strikes into Pakistan. We've got to get the support of the people of – of Pakistan. He said that he would launch military strikes into Pakistan. Now, you don't do that. You don't say that out loud. If you have to do things, you have to do things, and you work with the Pakistani government." He pointed out that the new President of Pakistan has "got his hands full".

McCain mocked Obama for his lack of familiarity with the region, saying, "I've been to Waziristan. I can see how tough that terrain is. It's ruled by a handful of tribes." He was dismissive of Obama on account of his having called for more troops, adding, "but what he doesn't understand, it's got to be a new strategy, the same strategy that he condemned in Iraq. It's going to have to be employed in Afghanistan. And we're going to have to help the Pakistanis go into these areas and obtain the allegiance of the people." He warned that it is going to be 'tough'. The local tribes have intermarried with Al Qaeda and the Taliban, but "we have to get the co-operation of the people in those areas." He also stressed that the Pakistanis are going to have to understand that that Marriott hotel bombing was "a signal from the terrorists that they don't want that government to co-operate with us in combating the Taliban and jihadist elements". He said Pakistan is a very important element in the new regional strategy, adding, "I know how to work with him. And I guarantee you I would not publicly state that I'm going to attack them."

Obama denied that he had talked about attacking Pakistan. Clarifying his earlier remarks, he said, "If the United States has Al Qaeda, bin Laden, top-level lieutenants in our sights, and Pakistan is unable or unwilling to act, then we should take them out." He called the 'right strategy', the 'right policy'. Referring to "cross-border attacks against US troops", Obama said, "We have to start making some decisions." Turning to the strategy pursued by Washington for 10 years, he summed it up as "we coddled Musharraf, we alienated the Pakistani population, because we were anti-democratic. We had a 20th-century mindset that basically said, 'Well, you know, he may be a dictator, but he's our dictator'." As a consequence, the US lost legitimacy in Pakistan. "We spent \$10 billion. And in the meantime, they weren't going after Al Qaeda, and they are more powerful now than at any time since we began the war in Afghanistan. That's going to change when I'm President of the United States." McCain replied, "I don't think that Senator Obama understands that there was a failed state in Pakistan when Musharraf came to power. Everybody who was around then, and had been there, and knew about it knew that it was a failed state."

(Daily Times – September 28, 2008)

Canadian PM calls Election for Oct 14

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper on 7 September called an election for October 14 in a bid to strengthen his hold on power after two-and-a-half years in charge of a minority Conservative Party government. Opinion polls show the Conservatives have such a large lead over the opposition Liberals that they could win a majority of the 308 seats in Parliament. Harper says Canada needs steady leadership at a time when the economy is suffering from the US slowdown. He already has made clear he will not be proposing the kind of high-profile tax cuts his right-leaning government unveiled in the past. The Liberals say that if elected they will bring in a revenue-neutral carbon tax designed to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Harper says the plan is a disaster. "Between now and October 14, Harper said in a statement that Canadians will choose a government to look out for their interests at a time of global economic trouble,

Opponents say Harper is breaking an electoral law that fixed the date of the next election for October 2009. Harper, whose government introduced the law, says he needs a vote now because Parliament has become dysfunctional. Canada has not had back-to-back Conservative governments since Brian Mulroney won a second term as Prime Minister in 1988. Harper won power in a January 2006 election. An Ekos Internet/telephone hybrid survey released on 7 September put the Conservatives at 37 percent, the Liberals at 24 percent, the leftist New Democrats at 19 percent, the Greens at 10 percent and the separatist Bloc Quebecois at 6 percent. Under Canada's first-past-the-post electoral system, a party needs about 40 percent of the vote to win a majority. The Conservatives have 127 seats and the Liberals have 95.

(Daily Times – September 8, 2008)

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