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Gender

Women & Politics

Saadia Abbasi Quits PML-N

Senator Saadia Abbasi on 13 February quit the PML-N and resigned as a member of the Upper House of Parliament after she was ignored by the party leadership, which awarded the ticket for the upcoming Senate elections to Najma Hameed. She was elected on the PML-N ticket for women in 2003, along with 49 other senators, would end on March 11. The parliamentary board of the PML-N and the party leadership preferred Begum Najma Hameed, a veteran Leaguer from Rawalpindi, to Saadia Abbasi from the Punjab.

(The News - February 19, 2009)

PML-N Turns a Blind Eye to Saadia Resignation

No top PML-N leader has made any effort to calm down Barrister Saadia Abbasi, who resigned from the basic membership of the Party and as Senator in protest after she was ignored in the allocation of party tickets for the Upper House election. Shahid Khaqan PML-N MNA, who is the brother of Saadia Abbasi confirmed this. Saadia said that before flying to the United States a few days back Shahid met the Sharif brothers and they had assured the Senate tickets to her. However, PML-N spokesman Pervez Rashid said that the party stipulated the criterion for awarding Senate tickets and the applicants meeting it were accommodated. He said that Saadia Abbasi did not fall in that category and added that there was no point in being angry at the distribution of tickets.

(The News - February 15, 2009)

Women & Economics

Meeting on Violation of Women's Employment Quota

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Women Development on 19 February expressed concern about non-observance of 10 percent employment quota for women in public sector organizations. Committee urged public sector to ensure adherence to women employment quota and recommends the Women Development Ministry to review national plan of action and national policy for women empowerment. The committee met at Parliament House with ANP MNA Bushra Gohar in the chair to discuss issues confronting womenfolk in the country. During the meeting, a three-member subcommittee was formed to analyze issues and challenges confronting women elected representatives and make recommendations for better performance of National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) and Gender Reforms Action Project (GRAP) so that women representatives could discharge duties effectively. PPP MNA Faryal Talpur represents subcommittee. The committee also recorded its concern over the unnecessary delay in appointing the new chairman of National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) had been without a chairwoman and members since 1 January. Besides Bushra Gohar and Faryal Talpur, Shakeela Khanum Rashid, Dr Zile Huma, Sardar Muhammad Umar, Hanif Abassi, Nisar Tanvir, Shaheen Ishfaq, Dr Attiya Inayatullah and senior officials of the Women Development Ministry also attended the meeting seek.

(The Daily Times - February 24, 2009)

Women Entrepreneurs Share Journeys of their Successes

A large number of women turned up to attend the monthly meeting of the Association of Business Professionals and Agricultural Women (ABPAW) on 1 February. From the platform of ABPAW, three successful entrepreneurs got an opportunity to relate to the ladies fascinating tales of initiating their enterprises, followed by their journey of success and barriers. Zeenat Ayesha, more affectionately and popularly known as Gina, proud owner of a well known Italian eatery in the twin cities, claimed that from small beginnings her business had grown from strength to strength and along the path, she had enjoyed the full support of her family, friends and well wishers. The two most important factors that have helped her along remained her focus and persistence to succeed in the business, sometimes amidst strong competition. Amna Saleem, another seasoned entrepreneur, started off three decades ago with an initial investment of only Rs250 and has reached a stage where she exports her merchandise to different parts of the globe. Her message to the ladies was never to despair and be despondent and to have faith in the task ahead. Sarah Aden Haider and Sawera Kiani, two budding young entrepreneurs, gave a spirited and eloquent presentation on a unique business of making gift boxes catered for weddings, newborn arrivals and special occasions. Earlier, ABP&AW (IR Branch) President Tahmeena Malik while welcoming the guests informed the members that the association had played its role in relief operations in Balochistan.

(The News - February 2, 2009)

WCCI Arranges Exhibition to Promote Women Entrepreneurs

Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCCI), Islamabad, held seventh exhibition of work of women entrepreneurs at Fatima Jinnah Park on 15 February to promote small and medium entrepreneurship. As many as 50 stalls were set up to display gems, jewellery, clothes, bridal wear, casual wear, decorative items, shoes, handmade household items, books, bed sheets, sweaters, toys, furniture, sports utilities and a variety of foods. Visitors showed interest in Ayesha Amjad's gems and jewellery items that were on offer for reasonable prices. WCCI senior vice president had tried to provide an opportunity to small entrepreneurs to display their products. Who added, It was so difficult for us to arrange such exhibition, especially in this deteriorating law and order situation. On the other way it provides initiative for economic empowerment of women, giving them a platform to enhance business network and interact.

(Daily Times - February 16, 2009)

Women & Laws

Federal Shariat Court Seeks Amendment in Qanun-e-Shahadat

A full bench of the Federal Shariat Court on 18 February held a provision of the Qanun-e-Shahadat law — that stipulates that a man accused of rape or attempted rape to show that the victim was of generally immoral character - is against the teachings of the holy Quran and sunnah. The provision is contained in Article 151(4) of the Qanun-e-Shahadat Order 1984. The bench, consisting of Chief Justice Haziqul Khairi, Justice Dr Fida Khan, Justice Salahuddin Mirza and Justice Zafar Yasin, held that Article 151(4) was repugnant to the Holy Quran and Sunnah and directed the President of Pakistan to take appropriate steps for repealing the provision within six months, after which the provision would cease to be effective, even if it is not repealed. The court held that the provision was discriminatory on the basis of gender and was in violation of the constitution, adding that it negated the concept of gender equality as enshrined in the holy Quran.

(The Daily Times - February 20, 2009)

Breaking Modules or Reinforcing Stereotypes? - Research Report by LEAD

A comprehensive research report on gender analysis of skill development system in Pakistan under the title of "Breaking the Modules or Reinforcing Stereotypes?" was released by Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) Pakistan. The report says that though the number of available facilities for Teaching and Vocational Education and Training (TEVT) of women is more than men's, most of the courses offered in such situations concentrate on skills associated with women's reproductive roles such as sewing and crafts that eventually leads to less profitable employment. The study reveals that there are 437 public and private TVETs functioning women as compared to 343 public and 161 private institutions for men. For these institutions, the number of female instructors is 4662 as compared to 9945 men. Report also highlights the problems faced by the women to access to TVETs like non-availability of women hostels and no facility for women transport system offered by the private or public sector institutions. The research says that a substantial part of women's enrolment is in short-term courses in home sciences, education and industrial sectors. Though total enrolment in computer science is quite high. It is significantly less than men's. The gap is essentially marked in technical education where women's enrolment comprises only seven percent of the total. Highlighting another interesting fact, the report says that gender-divided training not only confines women to certain fields but also excludes men and boys from pursuing vocations not considered men's trade. For instance in the urban areas, most commercial tailors and barbers are men but only women institutions have beauty courses and few men's institutions offer sewing. The study shows that employers too contribute towards gender distribution in the labour market and therefore indirectly to the types of skill women and men choose to acquire. Women are usually recruited for cheaper, low skilled work increasingly on flexible casual terms such as daily wages or contractual employment. Employers therefore invest very little in this section of work force on on-service training and hence women get little chance of improving skills to move to better level of employment. The research reveals that employers also carry with them preconceived notions and prejudices about women and men's work. Many do not give opportunities to women in non-traditional jobs arguing that women's reproductive demands prevent them from taking on more responsible, demanding productive employment. The study concludes that though Pakistan is far from reaching gender equality in education and skill development there are a number of factors currently in place that could provide the impetus to change.

(The News - February 14, 2009)

Annual Report of Women Leadership Programme (WLP)

Keeping in mind the critically low representation of women at senior management or management levels in both public and private sectors, it is vital to create parity in women participation for professional jobs through training and skill development. These observations were made in an Annual Report of Women Leadership Programme (WLP) that is a part of the Professional Development Programme, managed by the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) and the Institute of Rural Management (IRM). Announced in January 2007, WLP is aimed at developing a cadre of women professionals to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to move to the next level in the organisational structure and eventually reach the top position.

The report says that women participation in remunerative employment is only 13.7 per cent whereas the number of women in leadership positions is unknown. The report points out that the public sphere in Pakistan has been created on the basis of behaviour patterns of men, belonging to the national elite or those linked to the feudal class. The document says that the low level of women participation in the political, economic and social sphere, despite the progress made by public and private sector movements

over the past few decades, highlights two key issues. Firstly, political power is still the main stronghold of patriarchy and has remained virtually untouched till today, and secondly, deep gender inequality continues to exist in every field. The report points out that according to international research, organisations with women in key leadership positions have strengthened their corporate reputation, attracted and retained tremendous talent, and have been able to tremendously target and succeed in new markets.

Mentioning some facts about the international markets, it says that 500 companies that promoted women to high positions were 18 to 69 per cent more profitable whereas companies with women on their senior management teams had 35 per cent higher return on equity. Pointing towards the optimistic side, the report mentions that things are changing. "One can also see women reweaving their worlds by enlivening the home compounds, recreating mutual relations, establishing village and union council level institutions, creating small enterprises, and defying the centuries old discriminatory traditions." The data collected by the gender section of the Rural Support Programme Network (RSPN) on staff gender ratio shows that there are no women at the senior management level and only around 15 per cent at the management level. +89The data shows presence of the highest number of women at the level of professionals that is around 30 per cent, whereas the number of women is very low, around 10 per cent, at the level of support staff that includes peons and domestic helpers.

(The News - February 10, 2009)



Women & HR Issues

Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan - Report by Aurat Foundation

Aurat foundation released report on 'Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan 2008 on 17 February. The report reveals that a total of 7,733 incidents of violence against women were reported in year 2008, with the highest number of cases (4,360) occurred in Punjab. The report is a collection and compilation of statistics on incidents of violence under the Foundation's national programme titled 'Policy & Data Monitoring on Violence against Women.' The report is aimed at identifying violence cases and using statistics as an advocacy tool to create a more informed and supportive environment for women and mobilise social pressure against such acts. According to report the total incidents, 4,360 cases were reported in Punjab, 1,385 in Sindh, 1,013 in NWFP, 763 in Balochistan and 212 in Islamabad. "Among these cases, 73.53 per cent were registered with police while 19.09 per cent were not registered, with no evidence found in media regarding the registration status of the remaining 7.38 per cent of cases." Whereas abduction cases is the highest i.e. 22.79 per cent (1,762) of the total cases, followed by murder of women (1,516), hurt and body injury (844), suicide (579) and honour killing (472). Report also highlights the violent crimes against women such as 439 cases of rape and 307 cases of gang rape were reported last year whereas 25 incidents of 'Vani'/customary practices also made headlines in the media in the span of these 12 month.

(The News February 18, 2009)

2 Minor Girls Mug Traditional Victimization in Abbottabad

On 7 February a case of 'vani' reported in a village of Abbottabad district, where two minor girls, whose uncle had married a girl of his choice, have been given in marriage to men of the family of that girl. Five-year-old Haleema Bibi and eight-year-old Ayesha have been given in marriage to 23-year-old Arshad and 15-year-old Hamayun of the opponent family by a jirga of elders of the area because uncle of the minor girls had contracted court marriage with a girl of opponent family some six months back. Uncle of the victim girls, Muhammad Sabir told that, six months ago one Sajjad and Abida of Biran, a village in Abbottabad tehsil, had solemnized court marriage and had settled in Karachi since then in consequence of that, a jirga of elders of the village arranged a sitting on January 19 and ordered to give two nieces of Sajjad in marriage to the two men of Abida's family. There were around 100 people in the jirga while the father of the minor girls, Muhammad Yousaf, was alone and the two girls were forcibly married to the men of the rival family. The Khateeb-e-Azam of Abbottabad Maulana Abdul Wajid took the matter seriously and summoned the cleric who had administered the Nikah of the minor girls on the orders of the jirga. Meanwhile, Progressive Women Association President Shahnaz Bukhari strongly condemned the incident and demanded of the government to initiate inquiry against the jirga members. She claimed the Khateeb-e-Azam of Abbottabad already admitted the happening of that brutal act done by the local elders.

(The News - February 20, 2009)

Child Rights

Switzerland Helps to Promote Child Rights in Pakistan

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) government of Switzerland has committed US \$7,142,000 aid for a national child rights programme in Pakistan to combat child labour and promote child

protection. The SDC signed three agreements with its implementing partners — the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), for the national child rights programme on February 23. Funds committed by the Government of Switzerland are for a period of three years ending in December 2011. The agreements were signed by Pius Rohner, country director of the SDC, on behalf of the Swiss government, while Unicef Representative Martin Mogwanja, Country Director ILO Donglin Li and Executive Director SPARC Qindeel Shujaat signed the agreements on behalf of their respective organisations here on Monday. Under these agreements, UNICEF will continue to work with the government of Pakistan on the drafting of laws and implementation of policies and provide assistance to the government to set up child protection systems in selected districts. The International Labour Organisation will contribute to the elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2016 by working with the government to mainstream working children into government schools, provide non-formal education to working children in government schools in the afternoons and train older working children in marketable skills. Sparc will concentrate on awareness rising on child rights issues and violations, on jail officials' trainings and on the release of juvenile prisoners who are without legal aid.

(The News February 24, 2009)

Govt. Presented Contradictory Report on Child Rights: SPARC

Anees Jilani respondent from SPARC in a consulting group meeting on 12 February highlighted the contradictory facts of '**Alternative Report on State of Child Rights in Pakistan**', observing no laws exclusively relating to the child rights exist in Balochistan, NWFP, federally and provincially administered tribal areas, Northern Areas and the Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Consulting members also raised certain objections to the report submitted by the government to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC). By discussing the government's submitted report, Anees Jilani from the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) pointed out that government claimed having trained 750,000 teachers since year 2,000 appeared unrealistic, as the total number of teachers in the country was less than this number. In fact, "Paragraphs 25 to 30 of the report talk about training programmes being organized by various non-governmental organizations. Almost all the NGOs in Pakistan are small and operate with limited resources and are thus hardly expected to cover a country of 163 million people". According to SPARC laws for making education compulsory up to grade five had been introduced in all the provinces except Balochistan, NAs and the AJK. However, no steps have been taken to enforce these laws, namely the Punjab Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1994; the NWFP Primary Education Act, 1996; the Sindh Compulsory Primary Education Ordinance, 2002; the Federally Administered Tribal Areas Compulsory Primary Education Regulation, 2002; and the West Pakistan Primary Education Ordinance. One of the CSO official lamented that the bodies meant for enforcing these laws had not been formed despite passage of more than a decade in some cases and the rules had yet to be introduced. National Action Plan on Children, which was introduced in 2006, had yet to be approved by the federal cabinet, "which goes to show the level of interest and government commitment to the issue. The alternative report stated that the National Protection Monitoring and Data Collection System was yet to be introduced both at the federal and provincial levels. After a lapse of 18 years, the country is still experimenting with the pilot projects." It is worth mentioning here that Pakistan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on November 12, 1990. Ideally, National Commission for Child Welfare and Development or a separate unit within the Statistics Division should have been established to collect exclusive child-related data, and to monitor and evaluate progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention, the alternative report suggested. The document further stated that honour killing was a minor issue in Pakistan if compared in the context of around 500,000 under five-year infants dying each year due to malnourishment.

(The News - February 19, 2009)

Journalist Shot Dead in Swat

Musa Khankhel, correspondent for Rawalpindi-based The News daily and a private TV channel, Geo News, abducted and finally shot dead by unidentified gangue while covering a 'peace march' led by Sufi in Matta on 18 February. The Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ) and the Peshawar Press Club (PPC) condemned Musa's killing and demanded the government immediately constitute an inquiry tribunal and arrest the perpetrators. President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani expressed shock and grief over the murder of Musa Khankhel, APP reported. The president and the prime minister ordered an immediate inquiry into the murder.

(Daily Times - February 19, 2009)

Democracy Watch

Senate Elections

PPP Emerges as Majority Party in Senate Polls

The ruling PPP on 4 March emerged as the majority party in the Senate after March 4 elections as now the party holds 27 seats, followed by PML-Q's 22 senators. 19 candidates - PPP's five two each of ANP and JUI-F, one each of BNP-Awami and National Party and eight independent were elected as Senators from Balochistan, NWFP and Fata in the Senate elections. Candidates on 31 seats already had returned unopposed. Polling for remaining 19 seats was held on 4 March at the Parliament House, NWFP Assembly and Balochistan Assembly.

In all, out of 50 seats, PPP got eight seats from Sindh, four from Punjab, two from the Federal Capital, five from the NWFP and three from Balochistan, whereas one senator supported by it in the province could go its way in the House. The party's Mian Raza Rabbani, Dr Babar Awan, Dr Safdar Abbasi, Ratna Chowla and Dr Javed Leghari are already in the Senate. From the federal capital, both seats went to PPP as Nayyar Bokhari and Dr Saeeda Iqbal returned unopposed. Engineer Rasheed, Haji Khan Afridi, Abbas Khan and Idrees Saafi were elected from FATA, polling for which was held at the Parliament House's committee room No 2. Out of 11 FATA MNAs, nine participated in voting, whereas two stayed away, though the polling staff of the Election Commission waited for them before they started counting of votes. Thirty-four candidates were in the turn for four Fata seats. They are Munir Khan Orakzai, Bilal Rehman, Sajid Hussain, Jawad Hussain, Kamran Khan, Abdul Malik Wazir, Shaukatullah, Zafar Baig Bhattani and Noorul Haq Qadri. Having differences with these nine lawmakers, Hameedullah Jan Afridi and Akhunzada Chittan did not turn up for casting their votes. The Senate will meet for its session on March 12 for the oath-taking of 50 newly-elected senators, whereas in the evening, the election of the Senate chairman and deputy chairman will be held. Among parties having representation in the Senate, JUI-F now has 10 senators, PML-N 7 seats, ANP and MQM 6 each, JI 4, BNP-Awami and National Party 2 seats each. Muhammad Ejaz Khan adds from Quetta: PPP emerged as the major political party securing maximum chunk of three seats in the Senate elections from Balochistan, while JUI-F could secure two seats. The polling for the Senate polls was held at the Balochistan Assembly chambers. Provincial Election Commissioner Sono Khan Baloch, who was the Returning Officer for the Senate polls in the province, supervised the polling. All the 63 members of the Balochistan Assembly used their right of franchise. However, one ballot for the women seats was rejected due to the identification marks. The elections were held for 11 different seats from the province including seven general, two technocrats and even number of the women reserved seats. Those elected on the PPP tickets included: Nawabzada Lashkari Raisani, who also happens to be the PPP president in Balochistan, Sabir Ali Baloch and Ms Surriya Amiruddin. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl stood second in the tally with two seats of Senate. Secretary General of JUI-F Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri retained his seat while JUI-F Provincial Ameer Maulana Muhammad Khan Shirani also made his way into the Senate on the technocrat seat. Balochistan National Party-Awami (BNP-A) and National Party also clinched one seat each with their candidates Muhammad Ali Rind and Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo becoming the members of the Upper House. Four independent candidates were also elected in the Senate elections. They include: Humayun Khan Mandokhel, Akbar Magsi, Ms Kalsoom Parveen and Wali Muhammad Badini. It may be mentioned here that 63 members of the provincial assembly cast their votes as only two MPAs including Ms Samina Raziq and Sardar Yar Muhammad Rind did not appear for casting votes. Speaker Balochistan Assembly Muhammad

Aslam Bhotani was the first among the parliamentarians to cast vote in the polls. He cast his vote at around 9:15am. The PML-Q Mir Shoaib Nausherwani was the second to cast his vote followed by Chief Minister Balochistan Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani. Strict security measures were adopted on the occasion. The educational institutions located on Zarghoon road were closed for activities. Syed Bukhar Shah adds from Peshawar: All four nominees of the ANP and PPP ruling alliance, Afrasiyab Khattak and Adnan Khan were elected senators on technocrat seats while Farah Aqil Shah and Farhat Abbas on women reserved seats in the election held in the strictly guarded NWFP Assembly on Wednesday.

The coalition partner — ANP and PPP — having 47 and 30 members in the House of 124, had already elected its seven candidates on general seats unopposed along with one of the JUI-F, which has 14 MPAs. The PML-N having nine MPAs had fielded its Central Secretary General Iqbal Zafar Jhagra who got nine votes. Later, he complained that the PPP had assured him of its support if he withdrew his nomination on general seat, but that commitment was not honoured. The JUI-F, having 14 legislators, had already succeeded in getting Haji Ghulam Ali elected as Senator on the general seat with the consensus of the ruling alliance. It also fielded Shahida Akhtar Ali on women reserved seat and she obtained her party's 14 votes and could not succeed in making it to the Upper House of the Parliament. However, Aneesa Zeb Tahirkheli of the PPP-Sherpao got nine votes while her party's strength in the provincial legislature is five of whom two were already supporting the ruling ANP-PPP coalition. The same was the case with an independent candidate, Ali Gohar, who received 14 votes. Contrary to the tradition and previous elections, journalists were not allowed to cover the Senate election. The apparent reason was stated to be the coverage of the presidential elections wherein the representatives of the ruling alliance had been directed to show their votes to the government's monitors before casting it into the ballot boxes. The media had highlighted the unconstitutional practices, which the government had resented.

(The News - March 5, 2009)

Senators from Sindh and Punjab Elected Unopposed

11 Senators Elected Unopposed from Sindh

Provincial Election Commissioner (PEC) Sindh on February 14 declared all the 11 contestants as returned uncontested after their nomination papers were found in order and the number of seats and candidates were equal. As nominations of 11 candidates were found in order against 11 Senate seats for the province, the PEC issued a public notice declaring them returned uncontested.

From Sindh, out of total 11 vacant seats seven, are general seats with two each reserved for women and Ulema/technocrats. Those returned uncontested on general seats include Babar Khan Ghauri (MQM), Abdul Haseeb Khan (MQM), Maula Bakhsh Chandio (PPP), Islamuddin Sheikh (PPP), Gul Muhammad Lot (PPP), Syed Faisal Raza Abidi (PPP) and Dr Khatu Mal (PPP). Against the seats reserved for Ulema/technocrats, Farooq H Naek (PPP) and Rahman Malik (PPP) were also declared returned uncontested. Similarly, on the seats reserved for women, Shirala Malik (MQM) and Almas Perveen (PPP) were declared returned uncontested.

The decision has been taken by the PEC under Section 18 of the Senate (Election) Act 1975, in place of the members of the Senate belonging to the second group, who are due to retire after expiration of their term on March 11.

(The News - February 15, 2009)

Senators from Punjab Elected Unopposed

The Election Commission on February 17 declared 11 candidates from Punjab as elected unopposed to the Senate of Pakistan following withdrawal of their nomination papers by opponents on the instructions of their respective political leadership. On seven general seats from Punjab, PPP's Jehangir Badr and

Salahuddin Dogar, PML-N's Raja Zafarul Haq, Zafar Ali Shah, Pervaiz Rashid and Mushahidullah and PML-Q's Ch Shujaat Hussain have returned unopposed to the Upper House as a result of broader understanding reached among three major political parties. The PPP candidate Aurangzeb Burki withdrew his nomination papers on the instructions of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani who chaired a meeting of PPP legislators at Governor's House here regarding Senate election. Similarly, on women seats, Sughra Imam of PPP and Begum Najma Hameed of PML-N have made it to the Senate unopposed after PPP's Shaista Jabeen and PML-Q's Rozina Alam withdrew their nomination papers. Likewise, on two seats of technocrats, PPP's Kazim Khan and PML-N's Sajid Mir have been declared successful. Earlier, PML-Q's Mushahid Hussain Syed and PPP's Dr Akbar Khawaja withdrew their nomination papers in favour of these candidates.

(The Nation - February 18, 2009)

15 NWFP, FATA Senators to Retire on March 11

As many as 11 Senators from the NWFP and four from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) will retire from the Senate after the expiry of their term of office on March 11. Out of the 11 Senators belonging to the NWFP, seven are retiring from Senate's general seats, and two each from seats reserved for women and technocrats/ulema. Among those from NWFP retiring on March 11, two are independent senators, two belong to PPP-S, five are from the MMA, one from the PML-N and one from the ANP.

The retiring senators from NWFP are:

Maulana Rahat Hussain (MMA, General Seat): son of Hamayun Khan. Maulana Rahat comes from Shangla District.

Sahibzada Khalid Jan (MMA, General Seat): son of Sahibzada Ahmed Jan, from Malakand Agency.

Dr Kausar Firdaus (MMA, Seat Reserved for Women): wife of Muhammad Azam. Dr Firdaus come from Tehkal Payan, Peshawar.

Waqar Ahmed Khan (Independent, General Seat): son of Gulzar Ahmed Khan.

Shujaul Mulk (PPP-S, General Seat): Shuja comes from Swat district.

Gulzar Ahmed Khan (Independent, General Seat): son of Ghulam Qadir Khan.

Haji Muhammad Adeel (ANP, General Seat): son of Hakim Abdul Jalil Nadvi. Haji Adeel is a resident of Peshawar.

Iqbal Zafar Jhagra (PML-N, General Seat): son of Malik Muzaffar Khan. Jhagra hails from Peshawar district.

Aneesa Zeb Tahir Kheli (PPP-S, Seat Reserved for Women): daughter of Muhammad Aurangzeb. Aneesa comes from Haripur district.

Dr Muhammad Said (MMA, Technocrat): son of Muhammad Hamid from Peshawar.

Maulana Samiul Haq (MMA, Seats Reserved for Ulema): son of Maulana Abdul Haq, a resident of Akora Khattak, Nowshera.

The four retiring senators from FATA are:

Engineer Rashid Ahmed Khan (Independent): son of Malik Zareef Khan, FR Kurram Agency.

Nasar Khan (Independent): son of Haji Amin Shah.

Syed Muhammad Hussain (Independent): son of Syed Jalaluddin, Kotak, Orakzai Agency.

Abdul Malik (Independent): son of Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Landi Kotal, Khyber Agency.

(Daily Times - February 6, 2009)

Federal Government

Gilani Reshuffles Federal Secretaries

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on February 3 changed eight federal secretaries. According to an Establishment Division notification, Finance Secretary Dr Waqar Masood has been made Textile Industries Secretary, Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas Secretary Salman Siddique Finance Secretary, Culture Secretary Shahid Rafi Water and Power Secretary, Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretary Ihtesham Khan Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas Secretary and Ghiasuddin Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretary. The notification also said Population Welfare Additional Secretary Muhammad Ali Afridi had been made Additional Secretary of Livestock and Dairy, National Assembly Additional Secretary Mueenul Islam Bokhari Additional Secretary of Culture, and Naveed Arif Zakat and Ushr Additional Secretary.

(Daily Times - February 4, 2009)

NA Body Approves Law for Early Decisions on Election Disputes

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs on February 10 approved the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2008 for expeditious disposal of election petitions. Chaired by SA Iqbal Qadri, the committee met at the Parliament House to discuss the amendments proposed by the government and the Parliamentary Affairs Ministry. Parliamentary Affairs Secretary Ghazanfar Hussain and Election Commission of Pakistan Joint Secretary Sher Afgan gave a detailed briefing to the standing committee.

PPP lawmaker Syed Allauddin told that the election tribunal under the draft bill had been assigned to dispose of an election petition within four months. The hearing of the petition was proposed on a day-to-day basis for its early disposal and anyone trying to prolong the case would be penalised with a fine of Rs 10,000. Allauddin said the draft bill also called for suspending the returned candidates who were found responsible for delaying a petition pending before the tribunal. The committee members observed that in some instances the court could not decide the cases while the successful candidates completed their terms, he added.

(Daily Times - February 11, 2009)

New Education Policy to be Announced on March 23

Federal Minister for Education Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani has said the new education policy would be announced on March 23, carrying more incentives for teachers and more seats for students in schools and colleges. The Minister said the new policy will address disparity in the education system and the prepared draft is in line with prevailing international standards and according to PPP manifesto. He said the policy draft has been sent to provincial governments and it will be announced after taking feedback from all the relevant quarters. The education ministry officials reviewed syllabus of 29 subjects and work on others is continuing, the minister added. Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani said 10 percent deserving poor students desiring to study at A and O levels would be accommodated in private institutions. The government will bear expenses of these students. The Minister said the problem of a large number of ghost schools persist and the plan is to make them operational. He warned of strict action against those responsible for the ghost schools. The Minister reiterated the government commitment to raise the level of education in the country. Referring to the problem of shortage of teaching staff, he said more appointments were being made in educational institutions in Islamabad. Bijarani said more schools and colleges will be established in the capital to enrol ever increasing number of students. The provincial governments will also hire more teachers to fill vacant posts on merit. The Minister said the government is spending two percent of the budget on education. He

pledged to increase the budget to four percent of GDP within the next three years. The budget for education will gradually be increased to seven percent, the Minister said adding budgetary restraint is hampering the government efforts to increase spending on education.

(APP - February 15, 2009)

LHC Gets 16 New Judges, DAGs

President Asif Ali Zardari on 27 February appointed 16 Additional Judges of the Lahore High Court (LHC) to make the current strength of high court judges from 36 to 52. The president also appointed seven Deputy Attorney Generals and five standing counsels to represent the federal government before the courts. Those who have been appointed additional judges are: Pervez Ali Chawla, Ms Jamila Jahanoor Aslam, Muhammad Shafqat Khan Abbasi, Mahmood Akhtar Khan, Abdul Sattar Goraya, Habibullah Shakir, Pervez Inayat Malik, Nazir Ahmed Ghazi, Syed Ihtasham Qadir Shah, Anwarul Haq Pannu, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Bukhari, Imtiaz Rasheed Siddiqui, Chaudhry Naeem Masood, Arshad Mahmood, Irfan Qadir and Jamshed Rahmat Ullah. Pervez Ali Chawla is from the Punjab Judicial Service and was acting as registrar of the LHC before his elevation as the judge of the high court. Syed Ihtasham Qadir Shah is the son of Advocate Ehsan Qadir Shah who appeared as a counsel of late Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Similarly Irfan Qadir had served the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) as its prosecutor general while appeared as counsel of Tikka Mohammad Iqbal, on the petition of whom the Supreme Court had validated the November 3, 2007 proclamation of emergency by former President Pervez Musharraf as the then army chief. Commenting on the appointment of new judges, a senior constitutional expert on condition of anonymity said, the government could have made better choices. The president, he said, should not have appointed all the people from his own political cadre by ignoring other sections of the bars altogether.

Meanwhile the government has also appointed seven DAGs and five standing counsel namely Khan Dil Mohammad Khan Alizai (DAG) and Robina Saeed (standing counsel) for Islamabad while Yasmin Sehgal, Abdul Razzaq Raja and Syed Iqbal Hussain Shah Gillani as DAGs and Chaudhry Mohammad Jehanzeb Wahla as the standing counsel to represent the federal government in Lahore. Similarly in Karachi Nazar Akbar, Mian Khan Malik, Syed S Ashiq Raza will appear on behalf of the federal government as DAGs while Syed Ahmed Ali Shah, Shahab Sarki and Rizwan Ali Dodani as the standing counsel. In a separate development Sardar Ghazi has been removed from the post of DAG. He was recently appointed by the government as prosecutor to conduct the trial of the suspects arrested from Pakistan in connection with the Mumbai attack. Soon after his appointment he had told media that the government had requested India for the physical custody of lone surviving terrorist Ajmal Qasab. Sardar Ghazi was appointed as DAG during the period when Malik Mohammad Qayyum was the attorney general.

(Dawn - February 28, 2009)

Provincial Governments

Nizam-e-Adl Regulation for Malakand, Kohistan Announced

The NWFP government on February 16 abolished all "un-Islamic" laws in the Malakand division and put security forces engaged in the military operation in Swat in reactive mode after reaching an understanding about the enforcement of Nizam-e-Adl Regulation in seven districts of the Malakand division and Kohistan district of the Hazara division. "We will reciprocate the militants' 10-day armistice with a ceasefire for good," NWFP Chief Minister Ameer Haidar Hoti said while briefing media persons at the Chief Minister's House after a Jirga meeting. He said from now on forces in the valley would be reactive and not pro-active. The valley was calm as both the militants and the military did not carry out attacks on each other. The Maulana Fazlullah-led militants in Swat had announced a 10-day ceasefire after Maulana Sufi Muhammad, his father-in-law and chief of the defunct Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammad agreed with the government on the contents of Nizam-e-Adl Regulation during talks at Timergara, the district headquarters of Lower

Dir where he has been holding a peace camp for the last 17 weeks. Hoti declared after a meeting with representatives of the political parties and a 29-member delegation of proscribed TNSM that "the provincial government in consultation with all political parties, Sufi Muhammad and ulema with the approval of Federal Government introduced changes in the 1999 Nizam-e-Adl Regulation. Today I announce promulgation of Nizam-e-Adl Regulation (Amended) 2009".

Flanked by NWFP Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain and Health Minister Syed Zahir Ali Shah, the Chief Minister said the regulation's implementation would take effect after peace was restored to the valley. "As soon as government writ is re-established in Swat and all police stations, courts and departments start functioning normally, the regulation will be implemented immediately," he explained. Sufi Muhammad has promised the government to convince Maulana Fazlullah and his fighters to lay down arms after the promulgation of Nizam-e-Adl Regulation. The promulgation of the regulation triggered a wave of jubilation across the division, particularly in the troubled Swat valley where people pinned high hopes on it to restore peace.

(The News - February 17, 2009)

Disqualification of Sharif Brothers

SC Knocks-Out Sharifs; Governor Rules Punjab

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court (SC) decided, on February 25, that the Sharif brothers were not qualified to be members of parliament, dismissing petitions on their electoral eligibility. Justice Muhammad Moosa K Leghari, Justice Syed Sakhi Hussain Bukhari and Justice Sheikh Hakim Ali also de-seated Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in the short order, announced after Attorney General Latif Khosa - who assisted the court as amicus curie - completed his arguments. Shahbaz Sharif vacated the Chief Minister's House after the Supreme Court verdict, and returned to his Raiwand residence without protocol. Later, President Asif Ali Zardari imposed a two-month governor's rule in Punjab and Governor Salmaan Taseer took over the affairs of the province. Supreme Court: "For the reasons to be recorded later on, all the petitions are dismissed and the June 23, 2008 order of the Lahore High Court (LHC) is upheld," the brief verdict of the Supreme Court said. A full bench of the LHC had disqualified PML-N Chief Nawaz Sharif from contesting a by-election on June 23, citing his conviction for conspiring to hijack the plane bringing then-army chief General (R) Pervez Musharraf to Pakistan. The court had conditionally allowed Shahbaz to hold the Chief Minister's office until an election tribunal decided his case. The court dismissed the petitions of Mehr Zafar Iqbal - who proposed Nawaz's name for the elections - and Shakeel Baig - who seconded him - and told them to deposit Rs 100,000 each as the cost within 15 days or go to prison for three months. The attorney general said in his arguments on 25 February that the Punjab Assembly speaker and the Punjab chief secretary were not parties to the case and therefore not entitled to file petitions. He said Nawaz's proposer and seconder could become parties to the case if the court permitted.

Governor's Rule: The decision to impose governor's rule - under Article 234 of the Constitution - was made in a high-level meeting chaired by the President and attended by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, Raza Rabbani, Sherry Rehman, Rehman Malik, Farooq Naik and Baber Awan. Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar said that Zardari issued the proclamation after consultation with Prime Minister Gilani after a 'detailed meeting' at the President's House. The proclamation said an "unprecedented and unique constitutional void" has been created in the province due to the decision of the Supreme Court disqualifying and unseating Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif as member of the provincial assembly. The chief minister and the provincial cabinet had immediately ceased to hold offices, it said.

(Daily Times - February 26, 2009)

Aftermaths of Disqualification

Protests after the Decision

Charges protesters burnt vehicles and tyres as PML-N observed countrywide protests on February 26 by holding demonstrations and staging rallies against the disqualification of the Sharif brothers and the imposition of governor's rule in Punjab. Nawaz Sharif had given a call for nationwide protests. Most shopping centres in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura and other parts of the province remained closed. Lawyers and traders also joined the demonstrations. Lawyers boycotted courts and held protest demonstrations by burning tyres and chanting slogans against President Asif Ali Zardari, accusing him of 'planning' the disqualification of the Sharif brothers. The angry PML-N workers blocked main roads in the Federal Capital and its twin city Rawalpindi. The newly constructed Islamabad Highway and Murree Road presented scenes of a battlefield where hide and seek between police and protestors continued till the night. The charged activists set ablaze six vehicles including a police van near Kurri on the Islamabad Expressway.

(The News - February 27, 2009)

PML-N 50 MPAs Short of Simple Majority

Members of the Punjab Assembly belonging to the PML-N called a session of the Punjab Assembly in an apparent show-of-strength move after the proclamation of governor's rule late on February 25, but were 50 members short of a simple majority. There were 136 members in the House. The PML-N members passed a resolution protesting against the Supreme Court verdict declaring their leaders Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif ineligible to be parliamentarians.

(Daily Times - February 26, 2009)

Governor Rule Endorsed by Federal Cabinet: Declaring the Supreme Court's decision of disqualifying the Sharif brothers as regrettable but according to the law, the federal cabinet in its special session on 27 February endorsed the governor's rule in the Punjab but agreed that its duration should be kept to a minimum. A special meeting of the federal cabinet that lasted four hours was held under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani at the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Some federal ministers from the PPP and the coalition parties expressed their reservations on the imposition of the governor's rule. They were of the view instead of imposing the governor's rule, the majority party should have been given a chance to elect the new leader of the house. Such a move, they argued, would not have landed the country into the kind of political turmoil being witnessed now. One of them said it would be difficult for the government to defend this decision in parliament. However, others said there was no other option but to impose the governor's rule to fill the constitutional vacuum. They justified the Supreme Court's decision and the imposition of central rule in the Punjab. In the end, the cabinet agreed that the imposition of the governor's rule in the Punjab was an option of last resort, and the proclamation order was issued after the constitutional and administrative void created in the Punjab in view of the judgment of the Supreme Court.

PPP Man to Rule Punjab, Zardari Tells MPs: President Asif Ali Zardari told the PPP MPAs from the Punjab on February 27 that the next Chief Minister of the province would be from the PPP. He was addressing the party MPAs, MNAs and senators from the Punjab who gathered in the Presidency to ponder over the latest political situation arising out of the imposition of governor's rule in the province. Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar confirmed that the next Chief Minister would be from the PPP. President Asif Ali Zardari said that if the Sharif brothers had consulted him after the Supreme Court's verdict against them a solution could have been explored but they chose the path of confrontation rather than reconciliation.

(The News - February 28, 2009)

Donors' Financial Assistance and Economic Governance

Pakistan to Seek \$4.5bn More from IMF: Tarin

Pakistan would make a formal request to the IMF next month for an additional loan of \$4.5 billion, Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Shaukat Tarin said on February 19. Mr. Tarin said that I will visit the Washington offices of the IMF in March to make a formal request for more loan. The loan will be considered on the basis of the performance of Pakistan's economy being under review in Dubai. He further said that Pakistan needed financial support to improve its reserves and to help enhance its credit rating. Mr. Tarin said the government would be issuing term finance certificates (TFCs) to resolve the issue of circular debt of the power sector. It is expected that the TFCs worth Rs80 billion would be launched by the end of this month.

(Dawn - February 20, 2009)

ADB to Give \$2.8 Million for Transport System

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is to fund a pilot project that will help cities in the region to develop transport systems that are better for the environment and are affordable to the poor. ADB will provide a project preparatory technical assistance grant of US \$2.8 million to fund studies for sustainable urban transport systems. Urbanization and the increasing use of private motor vehicles in Asia have led to serious traffic congestion, a rapid increase in greenhouse gas emissions, high levels of local pollution, and some of the highest accident rates in the world. The factors have also reduced economic opportunities and income for the poor, who typically live on the fringe of cities and struggle to afford high transportation costs. The assistance will be used to identify policies and potential projects in the selected cities that will cut greenhouse gas emissions, improve public transport, increase personal mobility and pedestrian facilities, and restrain private vehicle use.

(The Post - February 21, 2009)

ADB to Pay \$300m for Improving Urban Services in Sindh

ADB on February 6 signed an agreement to provide Sindh \$300 million for improving basic urban services like health, water supply and sanitation, drainage and solid waste management in 20 towns across the province. The agreement was signed by Economic Affairs Division Secretary Farrukh Qayyum on behalf of the federal and Sindh governments and ADB's Country Director, Mr Rune Stroem. The initiative will enhance investment, innovate institutional arrangement and help improve health and quality of life in Sindh. The programme will enable 500,000 households to get water supply, waste water and solid waste management services. It is expected to soften the impact from displacement by prioritising rehabilitation and optimising work within existing facilities. New construction is proposed on vacant government land where feasible. To ensure compliance with government and ADB policies and requirements on involuntary resettlement, a Land Acquisition and Resettlement Framework has been prepared in accordance with the ADB's policy on involuntary resettlement. According to an ADB evaluation report, cities and towns in the centre and south of the province like Khairpur Mirs, Sukkur, Shikarpur, Larkana, Nawabshah, Mirpurkhas, Thatta and Badin "are under increasing stress of population growth and continuing urban poverty and the provision of urban infrastructure and services falls short of targets for quality, continuity and coverage". Some 55 per cent of urban population in Sindh living outside Karachi have access to piped water, but the water "is of poor quality and the supply is not continuous. Only 37 per cent of the population is served by garbage collection system. No sanitary landfills exist, and waste is disposed of by either burning or dumping into open spaces illegally or the drainage channels". The report said that poor coverage, inadequate

institutional infrastructure for planning and management of urban services keeps quality low, cost high and impedes the economic competitiveness of these cities. It results in higher business and household costs, poor urban environment and the low potential investment. All this contributes to a downward spiral of development and push for migration to bigger cities which are already under pressure to cope with rising population. According to the report, the service delivery in Sindh "needs to be separated from system regulation and political interest; service provision needs to be progressively placed on a commercial and self-sustaining basis, leveraging private sector expertise and incentive structures as appropriate."

(Dawn - February 7, 2009)

Reports & Statistics

Labour Force Survey - 2007-08: Unemployment Rate Remains at 5 Percent

Unemployment rate has remained unchanged at 5 percent during last fiscal year 2007-08, according to the latest report of Labour Force Survey (LFS) for 2007-08 released on 28 February. The main findings in comparison with previous LFS 2006-07 are:

Participation rate suggests fractional improvement (Male 31.8%, female 32.2%) for both genders. Area wise, rural rate gain a percentage point while urban one lose by same margin. Employment by major industries indicates increase in the share of agricultural and allied activities in a gender equivalent way. As for non-agricultural employment, the comparative figures are close to each other. However, manufacturing and community, social and personal services indicate fall in the level of activity. Employment Status shows decrease in the comparative profiles of employees and own account workers while unpaid family workers increase mainly for females. **Formal Sector**, as a whole, recedes during the comparative periods due to decline in the rural areas while urban areas remains at the same level. The opposite configuration holds for the informal sector. **Informal Sector** accounts for more than 73 percent of the employment in main jobs outside agriculture, more in rural (75%) than in urban areas (71%). Contrarily, formal sector activities are more concentrated in urban areas (30%) as compared to rural areas (25%). Informal employment shows increase (Male: 72%, Female: 73%) in the comparative periods, more for females than males and in rural than urban areas. The Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS) has been conducting annual LFS since 1963. It provides data on age, sex, marital status, literacy, level of education and migration of the population, dimensions of country's labour force, such as employed labour force classified by industry, formal and informal sectors, occupation, employment status, hours worked, occupational safety and health information of the employed persons and characteristics of the unemployed labour-age sex and level of education and previous experience.

Labour Force (In Millions)		
Indicators	2006-07	2007-08
Male	39.92	40.82
Female	10.41	10.96
Total	50.33	51.78
Employed		
Male	38.11	39.06
Female	9.54	10.03
Total	47.65	49.09
Unemployed		
Male	1.81	1.76
Female	0.87	0.93

Total	2.68	2.69
Employed by Sector (%)		
Agriculture	43.6	44.6
Industry	21.0	20.1
Services	35.4	35.3
Total	100.0	100.0

(Daily Times - March 1, 2009)

FBR Faced Rs 53.48 Billion Collection Shortfall in Jul-Jan

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has met a shortfall of Rs 53.48 billion in federal tax collection during the first seven months of current fiscal year 2008-09. In line with the upwards-revised tax collection target of Rs 1.360 trillion, FBR is chasing a target of Rs 681.7 billion, however, provisional collection has amounted to Rs 628.22 billion only. Income Tax target has been increased from Rs 449 billion to Rs 530 billion, GST collection target from Rs 470 billion to Rs 515.9 billion. Similarly collection target for Federal Excise Duty has increased from Rs 112 billion to Rs 121.4 billion and Customs **Duty collection target** has been revised upwards from Rs 169 billion to Rs 192.7 billion to ensure collection of Rs 1.360 trillion by June 30, 2009. In view of declining inflation and GDP growth rate, the FBR authorities strongly feel that the total tax collection would remain Rs 1.31 trillion by end of this fiscal. According to the provisional tax collection figures direct tax collection witnessed a growth of 22.6 percent and amounted to Rs 234.595 billion in first seven months as compared with Rs 191.664 billion in the same period last fiscal. **Indirect taxes collection** also witnessed 22.5 percent increase with a provisional tax collection of Rs 393.226 billion in Jul-Jan period as against the collection of Rs 320.953 billion in same period last fiscal year. Within the indirect taxes, overall general sales tax collection was up by 25.1 percent and stood at 249.161 billion in first seven month of this fiscal year as against the collection of 199.222 billion in same period last fiscal year. **General sales tax collection** at import stage witnessed a growth of 5.4 percent and amounted to Rs 118.492 billion as against Rs 112.473 billion collected in same period last fiscal year. Major decline in import values of different taxable products and commodities was the reason of meager increase in GST at import stage. However, general sales tax at domestic level witnessed a growth of 50.6 percent and stood at Rs 130.669 billion against the collection of Rs 86.750 billion in same period last fiscal. GST collection from electricity, POL, gas and other sectors was instrumental in major increase in GST at domestic level. **Customs duty collection** was up by 10.8 percent with total collection of Rs 83.551 billion in first seven months of this fiscal year as compared with Rs 75.423 billion in same period last fiscal year. Declining trend in import value of dutiable items has been identified as the reason in decline in growth of customs duty and FBR authorities expect further decline in duty collection in months to come. **Federal Excise Duty collection (FED)** was also up by 20.7 percent with total collection at Rs 60.545 billion in Jul-Jan period of this fiscal as compared with Rs 46.306 billion collected in same period last fiscal year. FED collection at import stage amounted to Rs 8.205 billion in first seven months against the collection of Rs 7.816 billion in same period last fiscal indicating an increase of 5 percent. FED collection at domestic level witnessed an increase of 35.9 percent with total collection of Rs 52.334 billion in Jul-Jan period as compared with Rs 38.490 billion in same period last fiscal year Improved collection from cigarettes, cement, POL products, gas and telecom services was instrumental in increase in FED at domestic level. FBR has paid refunds and rebate to the tune of Rs 41.782 billion in first seven month as against Rs 41.999 billion paid in same period last fiscal year.

FBR has managed to collect federal taxes to the tune of Rs 74.390 billion with collection from direct taxes at Rs 24.659 billion, Rs 31.982 billion from general sales tax, Rs 5.983 billion from FED and Rs 10.791

billion from customs duty. FBR was supposed to collect Rs 580.7 billion in first half period of current fiscal year while it actually collected Rs 553.1 billion.

(Daily Times - February 4, 2009)

International Competitive Index: 'Pakistan's Ranking Drops to 101 from 92'

Pakistan's rank in International Competitive Index (ICI), which includes a total of 138 countries, has dropped to 101 from 92 because of fast eroding competitiveness of the domestic products. The worsening competitiveness of exportable items has been caused by high cost of production mainly on account of expensive financing and utilities, newly elected President of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), Sultan Chawla told newsmen at a press conference on February 3. Chawla in his first interaction with the media since assuming the charge of apex trade body of the country couple of days back unveiled his vision for strengthening the industrial base of the country as well as identifying the major bottlenecks faced by the sector. The high cost of borrowing and electricity were identified as the key factors which spiked the cost of production. Giving a comparative analysis of electricity rates in Pakistan and its competitors, FPCCI chief pointed out that cost of one kwh of electricity comes to 10.08 cents in Pakistan. Whereas, it is 8.14 cents in case of India, 8.5 cents in China, 5.23 cents in Bangladesh and 7.28 cents in Sri Lanka, being the top competitors of Pakistan in textile and clothing. On cost of borrowing, he mentioned that banks lend at 19 percent (KIBOR+2) domestically, which is far higher compared to India, where it is nine percent, Only 1.6 percent in China and 19 percent in Sri Lanka. Bangladesh has variable mechanisms of borrowing with ten percent for production sectors and 17 percent for consumption sectors, he said. About the vision of the trade during his tenure, he said that the first and foremost focus would be to reprioritise and redefine the policies to work for the industrialisation and improve the health of existing industrial units. He emphasised for public-private partnership for the betterment of economy, as unilateral decisions would be of no benefit. "Time has come to start relying on our own resources, which would only be possible through public private coordination," he asserted. He also called for development of agriculture sector, which if remains in the current situation would ultimately impact the industrial sector adversely. He underlined the need for more attention on education in conforming to the needs of the new age. Emphasising on the need of foreign direct investment, FPCCI President maintained that capital is attracted by profits and safety. He also disagreed with the policy of phasing out subsidies and argued that it is necessary to support the marginalised section of society. Pakistan only gives eight percent in subsidies out of its total national budget outlay, which is far lesser than India, which doles out 38 percent of its national budget in subsidies. The figure is even staggering in case of USA, which according to Mr. Chawal extends 61 percent of its budget in subsidies to various sectors. Other office bearers of FPCCI and prominent businessmen also attended the event.

(Daily Times - February 4, 2009)

125 Projects Removed from PSDP to Cut Budget Deficit

About 125 projects have been removed from the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) and 432 others are facing implementation delays because the government is trying to reduce spending and bring down budget deficit to 4.2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product. The Planning Commission recently briefed the Prime Minister on the state of development activities and its document presents a rather gloomy picture of the pace of development. While terrorist activities have taken a heavy toll on infrastructure and business and development activities, the process of releasing funds for several important projects has been quite slow. The government has set the deficit target for 2008-09 at Rs562 billion which is 4.2 per cent of the GDP. It will need a funding of Rs350 billion from external sources and

Rs212 billion from internal sources. The cut in the PSDP is by now estimated at Rs100 billion, but sources in the finance ministry say that savings will go well beyond the figure by June 30.

According to the PC document, 170 of the 432 projects could not be implemented on time due to 'lack of management capacity'. Delay in the release of funds has affected 73 projects and 60 others could not meet the completion deadline due to 'inefficiency' of contractors. Ten projects were delayed because of faults in designs, 16 due to inability of implementation authorities to acquire land and nine because of the law and order situation. Twenty-seven projects could not be taken up on time because of delay in the appointment of staff or their absence. Lack of coordination between provincial and federal governments affected eight projects and 'delay in appointment of consultants' another eight. Problems in loan disbursement delayed five projects, while 46 projects failed to meet the deadline due to other factors. Of about 100 infrastructure projects, 82 are facing delays of more than a year and five of one year. Eight are in the initial stage. The government has approved 233 projects for social sector and only nine of them are on schedule. Of them, 173 projects are facing delays of more than a year and 34 of one year. Seventeen social sector projects are in the initial stage.

(Dawn - February 20, 2009)

Government Watch - Local Governance

Powers of Nazims Restored

Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer has announced immediate restoration of administrative, financial and constitutional powers of the district Nazims in the province. Besides, the Governor has also announced to withdraw the cases registered against them, saying that they were based on political victimisation. He made this announcement while talking to the media after chairing a meeting of 28 district Nazims on Saturday. Khanewal Nazim Ahmad Yar Hiraj, Jhang Nazim Sultan Hameed, Khushab Nazim Malik Ghulam Muhammad Tiwana, Chakwal Nazim Sardar Ghulam Abbas, Rawalpindi Nazim Raja Javed Akhlaq, Gujranwala Nazim Ch Fayyaz Chattha, Sialkot Nazim Akmal Cheema, Rahimyar Khan Nazim Sardar Rafiq Haider Laghari, Nankana Nazim Mumtaz Ali Shah and Narowal Nazim Dr Naimat Ali Javed attended the meeting. The Governor said all the Commissioners and the District Coordination Officers had also been directed to respect the Nazims and facilitate them in the execution of their development projects. He said the government wanted to continue the development schemes in the province by working together. He said the government would strengthen the district Nazims. Earlier, addressing the meeting, he said the funds of the Nazims, which were frozen a year ago, would be released to the district governments according to the Provincial Finance Award and its notification would be issued this week.

Funds for reforming the education sector would be released later whereas the ongoing projects of the Citizens Community Boards have immediately been restored. The governor said the district governments are the foundation of democracy, which cannot flourish without the local body system. He said the Nazims could have their personal affiliations but the institution of the district government was a platform for development. Taseer announced to 'cap' the funds released to DCOs on verbal orders by the previous provincial government and the concerned DCOs could no longer utilise these funds. He said these funds were released in violation of the Local Government Ordinance.

The Governor said the government would speedily execute the Rs 34 billion Lahore-Sialkot Motorway project. He announced immediate release of two billion rupees for land acquisition, which was stopped by the previous government. He said the offices taken away from the district Nazims would be given them back in certain districts. He said the Nazims would hold open Kutcherys twice a month for resolving problems of the people. The provincial government has issued directions to all DCOs and DPOs to give

respect to the constitutional status of the Nazims and ensure their participation in the open Kutcherys and implement the orders of the Nazims, he added.

(The News - March 1, 2009)

Balochistan to Amend LG Ordinance

The Balochistan government on October 16 decided to amend the Local Government (LG) Ordinance and present the proposed amendments before the provincial cabinet soon, following which the amended bill will be tabled for approval in the forthcoming session of the Balochistan Assembly. This was decided at a meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Nawab Aslam Raisani. Parliamentary leaders of coalition partners in the provincial government, members of the Balochistan Assembly and Chief Secretary Nasir Mehmood Khosa attended the meeting.

The participants of the meeting said the local government system had not met its objectives due to which the government would introduce amendments in it aimed at facilitating the people in the province. Addressing the meeting, Raisani said the amendments would protect the rights and interests of the people and the historic amendments would be in accordance with the constitution. He said the legislation would not only continue in the Balochistan Assembly, but it would be further accelerated in the House for providing facilities to the people in the province. He said the resolutions that had already been adopted in the House would be presented in the form of bills for approval. Earlier, the provincial secretary local government department briefed the participants of the meeting about the proposed amendments in the local government law. He said the district governments functioning under the LG Ordinance would complete their terms by end of the current year, following which parliament, Prime Minister and President had the authority to either annul completely the LG system or introduce amendments in the ordinance. He said all four federating units had agreed upon amendments of the LG Ordinance while the NWFP had already introduced a new law regarding the local government. He also highlighted the historical background of the local government systems and said the existing one had similarities with that of the LG system introduced in 1980. The participants of the meeting also gave suggestions for the amendments, and lauded the vision of the CM in this regard.

(Daily Times - February 17, 2009)

Local Government Elections Unlikely in NWFP

The provincial government has no plan to hold local government elections and the secretaries of the union councils may assume the powers of the union council nazims. Sources told that the provincial government had no plan to hold elections for the local government for at least next couple of years and the Devolution Plan was going to reach a dead end on the 31st of March. They said the commissioners had received special instructions from the provincial government, according to which, the district coordination officers were going to assume the charge as the deputy commissioners acquiring all the powers of district nazim, while the assistant coordination officers would become assistant commissioners assuming the powers of tehsil and/or town nazim. According to the source, the ACO of Abbottabad for the purpose of preparing them to take the responsibilities of nazims convened a meeting of the union council secretaries of Abbottabad tehsil recently.

Abbottabad ACO Malik Riaz confirmed that the old magistracy system was being revived, but said that they did not get any specific instructions from the provincial government about the elections or giving the powers of nazims to the DCOs, ACOs and UC secretaries on district, tehsil and the union council levels,

respectively. Regarding the meeting of the union council secretaries, he said, "As the tenure of the present local governments is going to expire on 31st of March, it was a routine meeting to prepare them to handle the situation after the date." Present local government system was introduced by the Musharraf regime in year 2000 under the National Reconstruction Bureau. The first local government elections were held in different phases from December 2000 to March 2001, while the second local polls were held in year 2005.

(The News - February 21, 2009)

Frontier Govt to Replicate 1979 LG Law: Cabinet Approves Draft

The NWFP cabinet on February 3 approved a draft of a new law to replace the local bodies system introduced by former president Pervez Musharraf in 2001. The draft Local Government Act, 2008, repealing the Local Government Ordinance (LGO-2001), was endorsed by the provincial cabinet in its 8th meeting held here with NWFP Chief Minister Ameer Haider Khan Hoti in the chair. "The proposed local bodies system is almost the replica of the local council system introduced in 1979," said Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain, while briefing journalists soon after the cabinet's meeting. The Minister said that the provincial cabinet discussed the draft of the Local Government Act, 2008 at length and now it was being sent to the Federal Government for further action. The local bodies system introduced in 2001 had been put in sixth schedule, which restricts provinces of making any amendment in the system without the approval of the President. The Minister said the local bodies, established in 2001, were based on a complex system, as there was no coordination among provinces, districts and the federal government. Similarly, there was no sense of ownership of public affairs in the system that's why all the provinces were opposing it and wanted to improve it, he remarked. The proposed act, he said, was aimed at strengthening the local councils, as the union councils would remain intact, while the province would be the in charge of the local bodies system.

Sharing the salient features of the proposed act, the Minister said rural and urban divide had been restored, as rural areas would have two tiers including union councils and district councils, whereas in urban areas there would be municipal committees and municipal corporations. Similarly, the local bodies' elections would be conducted by provincial election authority, to be established by the provincial government, on party bases. Also, establishment of accounts and grants committees to oversee financial system of the local councils were some of the important features of the proposed act, the Minister explained. Exemption of cinema from entertainment tax was another point on the agenda, which the Minister said had been deferred by the cabinet. The NWFP Excise and Taxation Department had prepared the proposal to exempt cinemas from entertainment tax in a bid to help the dying industry to overcome its financial crisis. The Punjab and Sindh governments had already waved off such levy. The Minister said that the cabinet decided to defer the issue because there were so many problems with the exemption of five marla houses from property tax, announced by former MMA government.

(Dawn - February 4, 2009)

Provinces Want Revival of Old Local Govt System

The provincial ministers for local government and rural development on February 3 expressed lack of confidence in the local government (LG) system and demanded the revival of the previous system. "The provincial ministers demanded the revival of the old LG system in addition to the abolishment of nazims' control over law and order. They said law and order should be placed under the control of the provincial governments," a source privy to the Inter-Provincial Ministerial Meeting. Federal Minister Justice (R) Abdul Razaq Thaheem chaired the meeting, which was held at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Governments. All the provincial ministers for rural development and local governments and their respective secretaries attended it. The meeting was held to gain the input of the provinces about a revamp of the LG system that was established in 2001. During the meeting, the participants demanded that execution powers of development projects be placed with the provinces, with federal ministries playing the role of

coordinator. The sources said that almost all the provincial ministers believed that instead of revamping the current system, the government should improve the 1971 LG system. However, addressing a press conference after the meeting, Thaheem said that the LG elections would definitely be conducted in line with peoples' expectations. He said that President Asif Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani would determine whether to conduct the LG elections on party or non-party basis. He said the provinces and the federal government were committed to running the system smoothly. Admitting that there were several controversial clauses in the current LG system, he said that these would be removed in consultation with the provinces. Thaheem said the LG system would also be introduced in Islamabad and FATA. He said the government had forwarded proposals to the Ministry of Defence about launching the LG system in Cantonment areas, and a reply was awaited. He said the revival of the magistracy system is not linked to the LG system.

Punjab Local Government and Rural Development Minister Sardar Dost Muhammad Khan Khosa opined the entire system was a provincial subject. Sindh Mminister Agha Siraj Durrani said the provincial government would never put up cases against the nazims of Sindh without proof.

(Daily Times - February 4, 2009)

Poverty & Food Insecurity

BISP Updates

BISP Payment to IDPs Started: Director General of BISP for NWFP and FATA, Ikram Ghani Khan, has said payment of funds to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of Bajaur and Mohmand agencies under the emergency relief package announced by the government has begun. An official communication issued on February 20 quoted Ikram as having said the disbursement could not be started immediately as the recipients of the funds were only house wives and in majority of the cases CNICs were not available with the women. Ikram said emergency arrangements were made with the help of NADRA to set up counters in all the camps. He said to overcome the slow pace of attestation by the political agents, the MNAs concerned were requested to attest the CNIC forms. He said despite all odds the BISP had been able to start payment of funds to the IDPs residing in the camps. Ikram said around Rs2 million had already been distributed in Jalozei Camp, Nowshehra, Kacha Garhi-I, Peshawar, Benazir Complex Risalpur and Palosa Camp, Charsadda. He said about Rs0.8 million would be distributed in various camps of Dir within next two days. The Director General of BISP NWFP/FATA is personally supervising the disbursement of funds in all the camps. Financial assistance under the package will be provided to all the IDPs whether living in the camps or residing with host families provided they obtained CNICs for the beneficiaries and approach the NADRA concerned centers for filling out the BISP forms.

(The News - February 21, 2009)

BISP in AJK, Northern Areas Soon: During a briefing to the Members of Punjab Assembly, Farzana Raja said that the BISP will soon be expanded to AJK and Northern Areas. She said the programme's official website would soon be launched to ensure fair distribution of money among the needy. She further said that the next phases of the programme would cover schemes of health insurance, technical training, education, treatment and loans on easy installments.

(Daily Times - February 20, 2009)

BISP Formally Launched in Sialkot: Addressing a big public meeting at Anwar Club on February 15 after formally launching BISP in Sialkot district, Farzana Raja said that due to the poor economic policies

of the past regimes poverty had widened its clutches impacting on the life of the common man. Farzana further said that the government would soon introduce free "health and life insurance" facility to redress the problems being confronted by the masses. She said BISP had been designed merely for the welfare of the poor segment of society adding that under the programme the hands of womenfolk would be strengthened. She said donor agencies like World Bank and Friends of Pakistan were fully backing the BISP. She said foolproof arrangements had been made to ensure transparency in the BISP adding that special attention was being given to hurdle-free distribution of the amount to deserving families on their doorstep. She made it clear that BISP was designed for women and under the programme womenfolk would be entitled to the grant.

(Daily Times - February 16, 2009)

Farzana Launches BISP in Balochistan: BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja formally launched the programme in Balochistan on February 1. Addressing the launching ceremony of the programme at the Government General (Retd) Muhammad Musa Hazara College, she said the government would empower women financially and reduce poverty through the programme in the country. She said the programme was aimed at emancipating women from economic constraints and enabling them to stand on their feet as they would be able to provide better education to their children.

(The News - February 2, 2009)

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Indo-Pak Relations

Aftermaths of Mumbai Incident

Islamabad Hands-Over Mumbai Probe Report to New Delhi

Pakistan has formally handed over the details of its investigation into the Mumbai terror attacks to India, the Foreign Office said on 12 February as Adviser to the Prime Minister on Interior Rehman Malik admitted that the attacks were 'partially planned' in Pakistan.

Foreign Office Spokesman Abdul Basit said that the Indian high commissioner was ... [on Thursday given] material pertaining to the Mumbai terror attacks probe by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), by the foreign secretary.

Meanwhile at a press conference, Rehman Malik announced 'breakthrough' arrests in the Mumbai probe, and admitted that the Mumbai attacks were partially planned in Pakistan. He said some of the suspects were linked to Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LT). Rehman said a case was registered under the Anti-Terrorism Act against eight suspects - including LT's Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, Hammad Amin and Zarar Shah - on charges of "abetting, directing, conspiring and facilitating a terrorist act". Six of these suspects are in the custody of intelligence agencies, and all will be tried under Pakistani law. Rehman said the suspects used three boats, all of which have been seized, to sail from Karachi to Mumbai between November 26 and 28, 2008. Rehman, however, said these findings were not final and Pakistan needed more information from India. He said the Indian authorities had been asked to answer 30 questions raised by the Pakistani investigators. The Adviser said "the system of various other countries" was also used to plan the attacks. Rehman said two more men were being held, and identified them only as Khan and Riaz. Other leads pointed to Europe and the US, and Malik said Pakistan would ask the FBI for help.

Pakistan's Action a 'Positive Development': India

India has branded Pakistan's response to a dossier of evidence given to Islamabad 'positive', but said it still expects the South Asian neighbour to take credible steps to dismantle 'terrorism infrastructure'. Soon after Pakistani Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir handed over details of Islamabad's investigation to Indian High Commissioner Satyabarta Pal in Islamabad, top Indian officials - including External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, The External Affairs Ministry later said in a statement that Pakistan was still in the process of investigating the attacks. It also acknowledged that Islamabad had taken certain actions, including the arrest of suspects and the registration of a case, that were a "positive development". The statement claimed that Islamabad had 'admitted officially' that elements in Pakistan were 'involved' in the attacks.

It is Now India's Turn to Respond Positively: Zardari

President Asif Ali Zardari said that Pakistan has investigated the Mumbai attacks transparently and it is now India's turn to respond.

(Daily Times - February 13, 2009)

Kashmir Issue

Pakistan, India Came Close to Drafting Outline of Kashmir Solution: Kasuri

India and Pakistan were close to working out the contours of a solution to the Kashmir issue, former foreign minister Khurshheed Mehmood Kasuri said on 19 February. On a private visit here, Kasuri also disclosed that an understanding had been reached on disengagement in Siachen, adding that both the countries had also discussed demilitarisation on both sides of the Line of Control. Kasuri said there was a substantial understanding on a joint mechanism, which would have representatives from the two countries as well as from both sides of the divided Kashmir. The agreements could not fructify because of 'sheer bad luck' and because of India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Islamabad not materialising, he said in an interview.

(Daily Times - February 20, 2009)

Sir Creek Dispute

Pakistan, India Plan to Lodge Claims over Sir Creek in May

Both India and Pakistan could lose a lot in terms of Sir Creek's unexplored natural resources, because of conflicting claims they are planning to file in May under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Seas (UNCLOS) over the outer limits of their exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and the continental shelf. Diplomatic sources said that under the UNCLOS, state parties to the convention must claim maritime rights - such as territorial waters, contiguous zones, EEZs and the continental shelf - by the end of June this year. "As Sir Creek is disputed, none of the parties to the dispute can exploit maritime benefits and oil and other mineral resources, but they can lodge claims pending a decision on the dispute over the boundary between the two countries," they said. They said Pakistan would lodge its claim in May over the EEZ and the continental shelf, and India was also planning to file its documents in the same month - as failure to do so by the June deadline would culminate in the other party's claim being accepted. They said that Pakistan is preparing its case to claim its rights because an early resolution of the Sir Creek dispute is not possible ... an early settlement could help demarcate the Indo-Pak EEZs on the basis of UNCLOS guidelines. According to the sources both countries would file their claims, but neither could utilise the creek's natural resources until a boundary was determined. Both sides have been wrangling over the demarcation of the maritime boundary for decades. Indians say accepting Pakistan's premise on the 'green line' would mean the loss of about 250 square miles of EEZ for New Delhi, while, Pakistan rejects India's proposal for mid-channel demarcation because "this is applicable to navigable channels ... Sir Creek is not navigable". Under the composite dialogue, progress was made towards resolution of the dispute, and both countries carried out a 20-day joint survey of the creek. The survey by Indo-Pak hydrographers formally began on January 15, 2008, to finalise mutually agreed maps that would help demarcate the disputed boundary. The survey was conducted on land as well as off the coast to verify the outermost points of the coastline on the principle of equidistance and helped draw a mutually agreed map that was a great leap forward to solve the issue.

(Daily Times - February 16, 2009)

Sino-Pak Relations

Pakistan, China Sign Power Generation Pact

Pakistan and China signed an agreement on 22 February for cooperation in hydro-power generation. WAPDA Chairman Shakeel Durrani and China's Three Gorges Project Corporation President Li Yong'an signed the agreement with President Asif Ali Zardari in attendance. According to the agreement, China would assist Pakistan technically in hydro power generation. The President earlier held talks with Li Yong'an, and called

for cooperation in the energy sector. Chinese power generation model and development in agriculture sector is role model in the region and Chinese investors are ready to assist Pakistan in every possible way to overcome its energy challenges.

(Daily Times - February 23, 2009)

Pak-US Relations

US, Pakistan Agree on 'Active Engagement'

Pakistan and the United States on 11 February agreed to speed up bilateral efforts and 'active engagements' to formulate strategies to resolve regional problems, including extremism and terrorism. The decision was made during a telephonic conversation between US President Barack Obama and President Asif Ali Zardari, in his first direct interaction with Obama.

Foreign Office spokesperson Abdul Basit said that US President Barack Obama spoke with President Asif Ali Zardari over telephone and both leaders agreed to start an active engagement for the resolution of problems facing our region through a holistic strategy. He said both leaders stressed the need for a joint strategy to bring peace and security to the region, adding Obama reiterated his country's support for democracy and socio-economic and human development in Pakistan. Various bilateral issues and the regional security situation were discussed, Basit said, adding the two leaders also took up US special envoy Richard Holbrooke's visit to Pakistan. President Zardari hoped the new US administration would benefit the whole world, particularly the region and Pak-US relations, the spokesman said. President Obama laid great emphasis on the importance of Pakistan in the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban during his election campaign, urging greater coordination with the country, but has warned of unilateral US action if it had actionable intelligence about Al Qaeda figureheads inside the Pakistani territory.

(Daily Times - February 12, 2009)

Bangladesh – Post Election Scenario

Presidential Elections

Zillur Sworn-In As President

Veteran Awami League leader Zillur Rahman was sworn in as the country's 19th president in a simple ceremony at Bangabhaban on February 12. Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin administered the oath of office and secrecy to Zillur at the Darbar Hall of the presidential palace in the evening. Zillur is the fifth president elected by the Jatiya Sangsad since the parliamentary system was restored in 1991. The Election Commission on, February 11, declared Zillur, an AL presidential nominee, elected President unopposed. Zillur was the deputy leader of the House. Among those who witnessed the investiture were Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Speaker Abdul Hamid, Deputy Speaker Shawkat Ali, chief advisers to caretaker governments Fakhruddin Ahmed and Justice Latifur Rahman, Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, ministers, members of parliament, judges of the Supreme Court, and senior civil service and military officials. BNP leaders MK Anwar and Barkatullah Bulu, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon, members of the diplomatic corps, senior journalists and Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana were also present.

On January 3, AL Parliamentary Party unanimously nominated Zillur for the country's top post. Son of late Meher Ali Mian, Zillur was born in a respectable Muslim family at Bhairab in Kishoreganj on March 09, 1929. He started his academic life in Mymensingh town and passed his Matriculation examination from Bhairab KB High School in 1945. He obtained Intermediate of Arts (IA) certificate from Dhaka Intermediate College. In 1954, he got his MA with honours in History and LLB degree from Dhaka University. He played an active role in the 1952 Language Movement. He presided over a student gathering held in the historic Amtala on Dhaka University campus on February 19, 1952, demanding Bangla be made the state language. Zillur was one of the prominent leaders of the 11 student-leaders who met beside the pond between Fazlul Huq Hall and Dhaka Hall on February 20, 1952, and decided to violate Section-144. In 1953, he was elected vice-president of Student Union of Fazlul Huq Hall of Dhaka University without contest. The university authorities had expelled him and snatched his masters' degree for his active participation in the Language Movement. However, facing intense students' agitation the university was forced to return his degree. At the time of Jukto Front Election in 1954, he was made the vice-chairman of Election Steering Committee of the greater Mymensingh district. He was elected general secretary of Dhaka District Bar Association in the 60s. Zillur Rahman became close to Bangabandhu in 1946 when he was in Dhaka Intermediate College. He was engaged in campaign for a referendum in Sylhet during the British era. He took part in all mass-movements including the movement against military rule in 1962, the Six-point Movement in 1966 and Mass Uprising in 1969. In 1970, he was elected member of the National Assembly of Pakistan. He was one of the veteran organisers of the country's Liberation War in 1971. He was associated with the operations of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (the radio station of independent Bangladesh) and publication of the newspaper Joy Bangla, the mouthpiece of the then Mujibnagar government. In 1972, just after victory in the Liberation War, he became a member of Bangladesh Constituent Assembly and actively took part in forming the Constitution of Bangladesh. He was elected lawmaker in 1973, 1986 and 2001. In 1996, after his election as lawmaker, he was made minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. He was also deputy leader in parliament then. Hasina had made Zillur the acting party chief after she was

arrested in 2007. His beloved wife Ivey Rahman, a veteran leader of AL, succumbed to her injuries two days after the August 21, 2004, grenade attack on an AL rally on Bangabandhu Avenue. Zillur is blessed with two daughters and a son.

(The Daily Star - February 13, 2009)

Mass Grave Found After Bangladesh Mutiny

A day after disgruntled border guards in Bangladesh ended their two-day mutiny; the police on 27 February discovered a mass grave containing 38 bodies, some of them already beyond recognition. The bodies were believed to be those of officers seized as hostages, said a Bangladeshi police official, who requested anonymity under police rules. The mutiny took place at the headquarters of the border force, known as the Bangladesh Rifles, in the capital, Dhaka. The body of the force's commander, a Bangladeshi Army officer named Shakil Ahmed, was also found in the mass grave. Three others were discovered inside manholes in the compound, as the death toll rose to at least 62. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who promised amnesty to the mutineers earlier, told that those responsible for the killings would be punished under the law. A top General, Brig. Abu Naim Shahidullah, told the local NTV television station that all the victims appeared to be officers and were wearing combat fatigues. Security forces rounded up hundreds of fugitive border guards after the mutiny crumbled in the face of a government show of force, according to news reports. The ordeal ended Thursday evening after army tanks surrounded the guards' headquarters, averting the prospect of a clash between the civilian and military leadership. Army officers were quoted as saying that security forces had set up roadblocks and arrested almost 300 border guards, many of whom shed their uniforms and fled after the mutiny fizzled. The guards had been demanding improved pay and working conditions. Security forces searched buses and ferries for more fugitives, the reports said. The mutiny was the first major test for Mrs. Hasina, who was elected last December after two years of military rule.

(The New York Times - February 27, 2009)

Indian Politics

Indian Elections May Not See Clear Winner

India's Congress party-led coalition could beat the Hindu-nationalist opposition in a general election but the balance of power may lie with small, regional parties, a national poll said on February 21. The ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, headed by the left-of-centre Congress party, is predicted to win 36.6 percent of the votes, marginally up from 36.5 percent in the last elections in 2004, the CNN-IBN poll said. The opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), will see its share of the vote drop to 29.4 percent from 35.9 percent. That would mean the winner would need to forge post-election alliances. In the last 2004 election, Congress won power by securing the backing of leftist parties, which helped lead to the stagnation of economic reforms. The survey, carried out by CNN-IBN news channel and the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), sampled around 20,000 people in every major state in the country. Congress is expected to perform better than five years ago, the poll said, which may improve its bargaining power as it forges post-election alliances, but the BJP's share of the vote, without its allies, will stay almost the same. Both parties will likely be let down by dwindling support for some of their current allies, leaving the door open for regional parties outside the UPA and the NDA. For example the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which has its powerbase among the Dalits in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, will see its share of the vote increase to 5.8 percent from 5.3 percent. The BSP's controversial leader, Mayawati, has been tipped as a possible kingmaker or prime minister if the UPA or NDA fail to form a government on their own. Congress's former leftist allies, who ditched the UPA over India's landmark civilian nuclear deal with the United States last year, will see their vote slide to 6 percent from 8 percent. But that is potentially still enough

for them to tip the balance in favour of Congress if they choose to rejoin the UPA, Tewari said. Opinion polls before Indian elections can be unreliable. Tewari said a lot can change before the world's largest democracy goes to the ballot box likely scheduled for April and May.

(Daily Times - February 22, 2009)

Internal Security, Ram Temple Focus of BJP's Poll Agenda

India's main opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on February 8 concluded its national general council meeting in Nagpur after approving an agenda for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The party sent out a clear message that the construction of Ram Temple at the site of the demolished Babri Mosque would form part of its poll agenda, while internal security, along with good governance and development, would be the engine of its campaign. Dynastic control over the Indian National Congress was also likely to figure prominently in the BJP's election campaign. The pre-eminence of internal security, imperilled primarily because of terrorism, was underlined in BJP prime ministerial candidate LK Advani's concluding 'guidance' at the meeting through six questions, put forward to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi. He questioned why a commission of enquiry was not set up for the Mumbai attack and at whose behest was Home Minister Shivraj Patil removed for incompetence Advani also questioned why no diplomatic options were used despite the rhetoric of all options being open against Pakistan and if the prime minister would admit he erred by not making special anti-terror laws for four years. He asked Sonia if she accepted her mistake of opposing the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002. Advani also demanded the government explain why it had not hanged convicted terrorist Afzal Guru and why it had ignored the Supreme Court's directive for measures to curb infiltration from Bangladesh. But he also explained in detail how the BJP was not opposed to Muslims or Christians. He said the BJP believed in true secularism unlike the pseudo-secularism of the Congress, which used Muslims as vote-bank. He outlined five major points that would determine the National Democratic Alliance's agenda, which included major investments in infrastructure projects and agriculture. The BJP also announced the decentralisation of its poll management in the Lok Sabha elections, instead of overseeing it from its central office in New Delhi. It formulated a plan of winning over around 140 million people, many of whom will be voting for the first time, by organising special felicitation conferences by March 15.

(Daily Times - February 9, 2009)

Regional Parties Will Challenge BJP, Congress

Analysis by Arun Nehru

Coalition governments are about power sharing, and power is about political longevity, personal gain and creation of financial resources for future battles. Every political party and leader will talk of moral values and express concern for the poor and the weak, but power is the real concern behind all this. And that's why when the government in power makes crucial appointments the "loyalty" factor always comes into play. In this context, it is strange that we adopt a hypocritical attitude on these matters. The present controversy in the Election Commission is an instance. The fact is that the Chief Election Commissioner was appointed by the previous BJP-led NDA government and two Election Commissioners were appointed by the UPA government. Despite the political wars, the EC has done an excellent job in conducting several Assembly elections. Everyone in EC deserves credit for this. The decision to conduct elections in Jammu and Kashmir (I believe it was a 2-1 decision) was tough but turned out to be a spectacular success. Lok Sabha elections are due in two-three months and irrespective of who heads the commission, the CEC will do its job well. Battles between the Congress and the BJP and their allies are fought and won in the political arena and usage of any government agency — be it the EC, the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Enforcement Directorate or the income-tax department — is of no help. Past trends show that misuse of government agencies by "insecure" leaders usually boomerangs and causes defeat in the polls. We are in the age of 24x7 media coverage and all such excesses will be exposed to the voting public immediately. India is performing well since 1991 on the economic as well as other fronts — be it arts, science or medicine. But

has the system of governance also done well? There have been brilliant political performances in Gujarat and Delhi where Narendra Modi and Sheila Dikshit have won for the third time. Similarly, Shivraj Singh Chauhan and Raman Singh of the BJP and Naveen Patnaik of the BJD have won for the second time. Political leaders at state levels who have a good governance record are Nitish Kumar (JD-U) in Bihar and the BJP chief ministers in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. They are potential winners and this will be reflected in the results of the Lok Sabha elections. The question is whether any of the Central parties have gained ground over regional parties in the last five years? My assessment is in the negative and I do not see either the Congress or the BJP gaining in numbers over regional parties. Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh are holding the ground and so is BJP leader L.K. Advani. But the future of Congress will depend on Rahul Gandhi and the BJP's on Mr Modi. Their ability to score electoral points over the regional leaders will play a major role. The Lok Sabha elections will test the mettle of these future leaders and we must wish them well as their success will mean the success of their party. In the last six Assembly elections, we have noticed that leaders without ability or charisma have failed in states. Governance is not easy and there is always the "before" and "after" syndrome. A leader can say all the right things "before" the elections. Take the case of the new US President Barack Obama, for instance. He is confronting the disastrous political and economic legacy left by the Bush era and one can see the difficulty he is encountering in his bailout package. The point I am trying to make clear is that governance today is not easy and there is no formula for instant success. The challenges for 2009 and the future can be very different from the immediate past. We are witnessing changes in the global political structure with the emergence of China, Russia, India and Brazil. We will also see drastic changes in outlook as the free market ideology collapses. Few, if any, can predict the course of events in the next few months. We will be very lucky to have five per cent GDP growth though this can go down to three-four per cent. There is a solution to every problem. But we are very closely linked to the global economy and unless the economy in the Western world revives, we will continue to be under constant pressure.

(The Asian Age - February 09, 2009)

Political Dynamics of Sri Lanka

Ruling Party Wins Provincial Elections in Sri Lanka

President Mahinda Rajapaksa's ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) recorded convincing victories in two of the nine provinces where local elections were held on February 14. The victories in the Central and North Western Provinces were widely seen as an endorsement of the military campaign against Tamil rebels in the northern part of the country. Final results in one of the provinces has been held up as the Election Commissioner has ordered a re-poll, but the UPFA has recorded convincing victories in all five districts in the two provinces where the polls were held. The re-poll in one of the voting places will not alter the final results. In four of the five districts where final results have been announced the UPFA returned 58 members as against 31 of the main opposition United National Party and a solitary member from the Marxists JVP (People's Liberation Front). The UPFA has recorded an average of over 60 per cent of the votes in all five districts of the two provinces. Some 65 per cent of the 3.4 million registered voters turned up for polling. The UPFA heavily campaigned on the success of the military in the north and eastern parts of the country where the security forces have recaptured vast amounts of land that had been held by the rebels, who are now restricted to some 150 square kilometers. Ruling party candidates had called on voters to endorse the military victory by electing their party members to the provincial administration, which is considered the stepping stone to the national parliament.

Rajapaksa last year conducted elections in three other provinces and his party won. The next crucial election will be in the Western Province, which includes the capital city of Colombo, and will be followed by elections to two other provinces. The President has vowed to hold a similar provincial election in the

Northern Province soon after the military captures the last remaining areas held by the rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

(Dawn - February 17, 2009)

Lanka Threatens to Kick-Out Aid Agencies, Diplomats: Report

Sri Lanka's top defence official has threatened to expel aid agencies, diplomats and foreign journalists seen as supportive of Tamil rebels cornered by troops in the island's north, a report said on February 1. Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapakse told that there would be "dire consequences" for any foreign non-governmental organisation, diplomat or correspondent attempting to give "terrorists a second breath of life." Rajapakse is leading the government's crackdown against the Tigers who lost their mini state last month in the face of a military offensive that has pushed the rebels back to a narrow strip of land. The foreign ministry recently summoned German ambassador Jurgen Weerth over remarks he made at the funeral of a newspaper editor and outspoken government critic who was killed by unidentified gunmen. Rajapakse accused CNN, Al-Jazeera and the BBC of trying to sensationalise civilian hardships by broadcasting video clips from LTTE websites, the paper said. The government maintains that it has a policy of "zero civilian casualties" and accuses the Tamil Tigers of using tens of thousands of men, women and children as a human shield. The government does not allow independent media free access to the island's conflict zone. The UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross have been joined by overseas governments as well as local and foreign rights groups in demanding safe passage for the civilians trapped by the fighting. The UN has asked the Tigers to allow civilians to leave the small strip of jungle area where they have been boxed in by the military offensive. The ICRC has said "hundreds" of civilians were killed in heavy fighting in January.

(Daily Times - February 2, 2009)

Protests in Thailand

Thai Protesters Vow to Topple Government

Protesters besieging the Thai Prime Minister's office vowed a "protracted" campaign to unseat the government as their rally entered a third day on 26 February, threatening further turmoil on the eve of a key summit. Thousands of supporters of ousted Premier Thaksin Shinawatra surrounded Government House on 24 February, demanding new elections, and the red-clad demonstrators have camped outside the compound since. Numbers had dwindled to about 800 on 26 February, police said, but protest leader Jatuporn Prompan told reporters they would fight on until they had toppled Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's two-month-old administration. "As the protest enters a third day, we still have not got an answer from the Prime Minister on our demands," he said.

The "Red Shirts" have said they will not disrupt the Hua Hin summit, but have been making headlines with their colourful sit-in outside Government House under the close watch of police and soldiers. Jatuporn said they were mapping out a strategy for future protests, which also aim to force the foreign minister from office because of his ties to anti-Thaksin protest group the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). The Red Shirts want PAD leaders to face legal action for their week-long seizure in November-December of Bangkok's two airports, which only ended when a court dissolved the Thaksin-linked former ruling party. The airport closures also forced the postponement of the ASEAN summit, which was originally scheduled for December. Despite the protesters outside his office, Abhisit was able to enter Government House.

(Daily Times - February 27, 2009)

Political Tensions in Malaysia

Scuffle in Malaysian Parliament

Political tensions in Malaysia erupted into a scuffle at Parliament on February 26, witnesses said, as angry ruling party members confronted an Opposition veteran. Karpal Singh, a 69-year-old wheelchair-user and Opposition politician, enraged the youth wing of the ruling UMNO party with a feisty performance in Parliament this week where he accused them of sending him bullets in the mail. Karpal, Chairman of the Democratic Action Party which is part of the Opposition alliance, said a group of 20 UMNO Youth members confronted him at Parliament and demanded he apologise. Another DAP MP, Lim Lip Eng, said he was assaulted as he tried to help Karpal escape the pushing and shoving which broke out at one of the entrances to parliament. The political temperature has been rising in Malaysia since general elections a year ago that saw the Opposition gain unprecedented ground, winning a third of seats in the national parliament. Karpal sparked controversy this month when he threatened to take legal action against the sultan of Perak state. In Parliament, Karpal accused his political opponents of being responsible for two bullets he received in the mail, and proclaimed "Singh is King" after the title of a new Bollywood movie. UMNO Youth Secretary Abdul Rahman Dahlan confirmed members of the influential party wing were involved in the scuffle.

(The Nation - February 27, 2009)

Policies of Obama Administration

Obama Seeks \$130bn for Wars Next Year

US President Barack Obama on Thursday proposed war spending that nears \$11 billion a month for the next year and a half despite the planned drawdown of US forces in Iraq. The Obama administration wants to spend about \$75 billion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through next fall, costs that were largely set by the Bush administration. On top of that, the new budget proposal asks Congress for \$130 billion for next year. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said the budget for next year figures in new costs for Afghanistan, and he warned that the process of pulling out tens of thousands of forces from Iraq will be expensive. The US has been spending some \$11 billion to \$12 billion per month fighting two wars. Before the war began in 2003, Pentagon planners had estimated the entire cost of the conflict at about \$50 billion. The White House budget summary said that the President is working with his military commanders to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan while responsibly removing combat forces from Iraq. Details of military spending were not included. Obama has said he will no longer hide the full costs of the war, as he accused his predecessor of doing. He did include a special category for war spending in material released to support his budget request for next year. Obama's budget does not list the projected costs for each war individually, and a defence official said the \$130 billion war request also includes some costs for other overseas spending such as military help in Pakistan. And, as in years past, the figure for what Obama now calls "overseas contingency operations" does not give the complete picture of war spending. The Obama category omits military pay, health care and other costs. Those costs are part of the nearly \$534 billion Obama wants for regular Pentagon operations next year. Altogether, Obama is asking for \$739 billion for the military through the fall of 2010.

(Daily Times - February 28, 2009)