



PAKISTAN
GOVERNANCE
FORUM

An Initiative of
The Researchers

JANUARY 2009
EDITION - III, VOLUME- XI

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Gender

Women & Politics

Women in Pakistan Well Represented Politically – Conference on Under-Representation of Women in Politics

Information Minister Sherry Rehman highlighted the political progress of women in Pakistan, saying their representation in politics was higher than in some developed democracies. Sherry was addressing the Oxford Union Society on January 24 during a conference on the under representation of women in politics – ‘Where are all the women?’ She said although the electoral politics in Pakistan had not matured to western level, Pakistan was a good example of being the first Islamic nation to have a woman as Prime Minister, referring to late Benazir Bhutto. She said Benazir, as a student at Oxford, broke new grounds in 1977 when she became the union’s first Asian female President. “ The Minister said her country ranked 45th in the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s (IPU) list of women in national parliaments and stood ahead of several developed democracies, including Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. She said that the political representation of women in Pakistan is higher than other South Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka and Iran ranking. She added that Pakistan was also one of the 30 countries in the world to have a female as Parliament’s Speaker.

She mentioned the political and electoral violence experienced by female candidates, particularly in developing countries, saying the starkest and most recent example was that of Benazir’s assassination. Sherry also mentioned Burmese political leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who continued her struggle for democracy and human rights in her country. “Clearly, governments still need to do a lot to find and implement effective means of addressing election violence and other forms of intimidation targeting female politicians,” she said. Sherry said there were more women in government today than ever before, but their numbers were not enough to change the public policy and resource allocation patterns, which were instrumental in bringing real benefits to the women.

Quoting the UK-based Fawcett Society, she said political parties often failed to adequately respond to significant barriers encountered by women vying for parliament. “These barriers have been summed up as the four C’s - confidence, culture, childcare and cash. Women’s access to political parties, unsurprisingly, is often circumscribed by gender role expectations. This is especially true with respect to leadership positions, affecting women’s ability to influence or shape party platforms. They are often ghettoised as women’s vote mobilisers or women’s wing leaders,” the minister said. Stressing that women needed opportunity and mentoring, Sherry said, inclusive politics in the 21st century needed governance reforms that create incentives, skills, information and procedures for public institutions to respond to women’s needs.

(Daily Times – January 25, 2009)

Faryal Talpur Named as First President of PPP Women Wing

President Asif Ali Zardari, also the PPP Co-chairman, on January 31, appointed Faryal Talpur as the President PPP Women Wing as well as the Youth Wing. MNA Faryal Talpur, a sister of President Zardari, is the first President of the PPP Women Wing, as earlier this post in the party did not exist. Earlier, the party only nominated provincial heads of women wings. Faryal Talpur will be assisted by the four provincial coordinators to run the affairs of the Women Wing in Islamabad. The Coordinators are MNAs Beelum Hasnain (Punjab), Shagufta Jummani (Sindh), Asma Arbab Jahangir (NWFP) and Zil-e-Huma (Balochistan). MNA Palwasha Khan has been appointed as Coordinator PPP Youth Wing with Faryal Talpur as its President. According to a PPP notification, the party’s Secretary General Jahangir Badar, Minister for Water and Power Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Information Minister Sherry Rehman who is also the PPP Information Secretary, have been nominated as members of the party’s central leadership for coordination among different factions of the wings. Meanwhile, addressing women office-bearers of the party from the Punjab in her maiden meeting, PPP’s Women Wing President Faryal Talpur called upon the female workers to gear themselves up for progress and emancipation of the Pakistani women. Faryal Talpur said one of the biggest challenges was to counter the extremist mindset, which wanted to keep women enslaved and in perpetual bondage by depriving them of education, emancipation and enlightenment. She

said women the world over had been subjected to varying degrees of discrimination, exploitation and violence. "This situation must change and it will." She said women constituted 51 percent of the population and they could transform the society if their creative potential was allowed to blossom. "We condemn and reject those who burn and demolish girls' schools in the name of Islam but actually to keep the women folk backward and enslaved," she added.

(The News – February 1, 2009)

Women & Laws

Acid Throwing Cases – Bill 'to be tabled in Parliament'

A bill calling for stringent punishment to the person responsible for throwing acid on another person with the intent to cause physical or mental agony will soon be presented in the Parliament. Prepared by MNA Marvi Memon, the bill suggests imprisonment of maximum ten years but not be less than five years and a fine that may extend to five hundred thousand rupees for the perpetrators. The bill is already on the agenda of the parliament but has not yet been presented before the house during this session. Marvi Memon said that she would try to present the bill during the ongoing session. "If not this time, the bill will be presented in the next session with certain improvements," she said adding that she would also try to develop consensus for its approval.

The bill proposes addition of 'Section 324-A' with the title of 'An Injury by Acid Throwing' in the Pakistan Penal Code 1860. The section says that "Whoever causes any injury to any person by throwing any kind of acid on his face or any part of the body with intent to take some revenge or otherwise disfigures him or her in order to put that person in the mental or physical agony shall be punished with imprisonment of either description which may extend to ten years but shall not be less than five years and shall also be liable to fine which may extend to five hundred thousand rupees."

Acid throwing is a form of premeditated violence, usually against women, involving throwing corrosive acid at the face of the victim. It is said that acid violence rarely kills but it always destroys the lives. As the acid is usually thrown on the faces, it takes away sight of the victims in majority of cases.

(The News – January 22, 2009)

Bill on Domestic Violence Returned on a Technicality

The Sindh Law Department (SLD) has returned a private bill relating to domestic violence to the assembly secretariat, urging it to follow proper procedures. According to sources, the proposed bill on "The domestic violence against women and children (Prevention and Protection)" was submitted by MPA Humaira Alwani (of the PPP) with the assembly. The assembly then sent the draft to the SLD, which pointed out that this was incorrect procedure and sent the draft back.

The sources said, however, that the real reason behind the returning of the bills seemed to be the absence of political will and the prevalence of a mindset which wanted to drag the matter out and to eventually bury it. The sources cited the example of an earlier bill related to women's issues, "The Sindh Prevention of Gender Harassment at Work Place Bill, 2008", which was moved by PPP MPAs Farheen Mughal and Humaira Alwani. That bill, too, was returned by the law department to the assembly secretariat due to procedural issues. The sources said that the SLD's deputy secretary (Regulation) Manzoor Khamisani in his letter on the subject "Domestic Violence Against Women and Children (Prevention and Protection) Bill 2008" tutoring Hadi Bux Buriro, one of the longest-serving assembly secretaries, says, "I am directed to refer to your letters No PAS/Legis-PB-02/2008/5060, dated Oct 21, 2008 on the subject noted above and state that at the outset the subject bill is private bill and the question of its vetting at this stage does not arise.

The SLD's advice is required on "(i) whether the bill can be introduced in the assembly and is otherwise in order, and (ii) whether previous consent to the cabinet to its introduction is necessary."

Further, "(iii) after the advice of the law department has been obtained and where necessary, consultation with departments concerned has been made the department concerned shall obtain (a) instructions of the cabinet regarding provision of the bills. (b) decision of the cabinet as to which of the following motions in the assembly is to be supported, (i) that it be taken in to consideration by the assembly either at once or at some future date to be

specified; (ii) that it be referred to a standing committee or a select committee; (iii) that it be circulated for the purpose of eliciting opinion thereon; and (iv) that it be opposed.

“(c) Consent under article 115 of the constitution, if necessary to the introduction of the bill in the assembly. (iv) If it is to be decided by the cabinet to support the bill it shall be sent to the law department for vetting and giving
(Dawn – January 2, 2009)

1961 Muslim Family Laws not Comprehensive: CII Chief

Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology Dr Mohammad Khalid Masud said that those finding faults with the changes recommended by the CII to reform Islamic laws and make the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 “comprehensive” wanted to kill the initiative before it reached the Parliament for debate. “If we want rule of law in the country, the Parliament should be made supreme,” he said at a round-table discussion on the issue arranged by the CII and attended by women rights activists, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and different scholars. CII’s recommendations only try to save aggrieved party from seeking ‘fatwa’ (decree issued by religious leaders) to save or end a marriage, and to protect women exploited by their husbands in matters of divorce, he said. The council was entangled in a controversy soon after the issuance of its recommendations. Even the government distanced itself and sent them back to the CII for review. The council’s recommendations on reforming Islamic laws also angered the religious scholars of all shades who declared it against Islam.

Assignment No. 1

In its recommendations, the constitutional body had proposed that a wife should have the right to ask for a divorce, in writing, with an obligation for husband to accept the request within 90 days. After the stipulated period, the marriage should be considered dissolved automatically, unless the woman withdrew the demand. Presently, the law recognizes divorce declared by the husband. Dr Masud also declared the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961) not a comprehensive set of code to follow marriages, divorce and dowry matters but compilation of few amendments in the British rules that usually required solutions from fiqh Hanfia and Shafi to fill the vacuum in settling disputes. Marriage is a contract between husband and wife, as enunciated in the Holy Quran, fiqh and Islamic teachings and when the approval of both is necessary to consummate it, then both also have the right to dissolve it either through ‘Khula’ (wife seeking dissolution of marriage) or divorce, Dr Masud said. In khula matters, the recommendation said, Haq Mehr (the right of woman settled before marriage for her future security) and Nan Nafqa (maintenance) are the right of a woman and could not be withdrawn even after the dissolution of marriage either through khula or divorce. But the wife can return bridal gifts if she wanted to but in case of dispute the matter should be decided by courts once for all, the recommendation said. Like marriage, divorce should also be registered at the same forum where marriages are listed, the recommendation said. Dr Syed Mohsin Muzaffar Naqvi of the CII was of the view that while interpreting Islamic laws by our religious leaders, fiqh usually takes precedence over the Holy Quran.

(Dawn – January 2, 2009)

Women & Education

Girl Education in Swat

50,000 Girls Unlikely to Resume Studies in Swat: The future of about 50,000 students in troubled Swat Valley is at stake due to ban on female education imposed by the Fazlullah-led militants. Fearing Taliban’s wrath, about 400 private schools are unlikely to open their doors next month after winter holidays, leaving tens of thousands of students with no educational options.

NWFP Government to Convince Owners to Restart Girls’ Classes: NWFP Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain Shah on January 16 said every effort would be made to convince owners of private girls schools in Swat to start classes after winter holidays end on February 2. The announcement not to start girls’ classes above Grade IV was made by the Private Schools Management (PSM), a representative body of around 400 private educational institutions in Swat, after the deadline set by the militants ended on January 15. Talking to The News after the adjournment of the provincial assembly session, the government spokesman said that the private school owners should not be worried about the threats issued by the militants, saying the government would provide all

possible security to their educational institutions. He said that similar threats were issued to public schools and other governmental departments, but they were never closed. They had even threatened the government to quit or face consequences, but it was our resolve not to bow to the militants, he added.

The minister said the excesses committed by the militants against the local population had made the people hate Taliban and now, when the government had the moral support to act against the militants, they would exercise every option to rid the province of the menace.

NWFP to Provide Full Security to Girls' Schools: NWFP Minister for Primary Education Sardar Hussain Babak said on Friday the NWFP government would provide full security and protection to educational institutions, especially to girls' schools in the restive Swat district. The Minister, while rejecting the threats of militants for total closedown of girls' schools in Swat from January 15, declared that the government would ensure protection to girls' schools and nobody would be allowed to burn or destroy them in the name of religion. He said no power on earth could stop girls and boys from going to schools as it was their birth right to get education, adding the government would come hard on those who challenged its writ. The children studying in various schools in Swat are Muslims and their parents are good practising Muslims, he said.

TTP Hopes Ban on Swat Girls' Education Will Go: A spokesman for the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Maulvi Omar said talks with the Swat Taliban were underway to review the decision about ban on female education in the valley. The Taliban were not against girls' education, Maulvi Omar said, adding that the Taliban Shura was in contact with the Swat-based militants to convince them to review their decision about the closure of all girls' schools in Swat. He expressed the hope that the Swat Taliban would soon announce the reversal of ban on female education on their FM radio.

(The News – January 17, 2009)

Documentary on Female Education Launched

Speakers at the launch of a documentary film on female education on January 15 condemned Taliban for bombing and ordering closure of girls' schools in Swat and demanded that government crack down on the 'brutal group'. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in collaboration with NGOs organised the launch of anthropologist Samar Minallah's documentary, titled Allahoo: A lullaby for You, My Daughter, on its premises. Human rights activists, lawyers, teachers and people from other walks of life turned up in large numbers. Addressing the participants, women rights activist Tahira Abdullah said the bombing and forced closure of girls' schools in Swat by Taliban were barbaric, inhuman and un-Islamic acts. She said that we remind Mullah Fazalullah (Swat-based Taliban's leader) that the first word of Quran is 'Iqra', which is not confined to males only. In light of a Hadith, it's for both men and women to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave, even if it means traveling to China. Tahira Abdullah also blasted Taliban for forcing Swat industrialists to sack women workers, mostly the sole breadwinners of poor families, and ban on women's visit to markets and public places. She demanded the government proceed against Taliban for inhuman and illegal acts. Rakhshanda Naz, of Aurat Foundation, said like Taliban, some other groups were also active in Swat against women rights. She said the Executive Director Officer (EDO) of Swat was too weak to crack down on Taliban. Naz said the troubled valley was virtually inaccessible to journalists. She said lawlessness was not limited to Swat, Kalam and Bunir but also in Peshawar, people were shutting down businesses or moving out due to growing activities of militants. Kishwar Naheed, a poetess, said she's greatly angry and upset at human killings and public hanging of bodies by Taliban in Swat. She said that Swat is a beautiful scenic land famous for production of vegetables but now bullets are being produced out of its soil. And people are forced to eat bread with water nowadays because of poverty. She regretted the government's criminal silence over and indifference to growing lawlessness in Swat. Iqbal Bali, of Awami Jamhoori Ittehad (AJI), also decried total absence of the state's writ Swat and FATA despite prolonged military operations. He demanded immediate yet effective action against terror outfits.

Later, the documentary was also screened to highlight importance of girl education in Afghanistan and Pakhtun regions of Pakistan. Also part of the documentary was a lullaby highlighting little girls from Afghan and Pakistani regions where militants have destroyed girl schools.

(Daily Times – January 16, 2009)

Reports/Articles/Books on Gender

Female Empowerment and the Promise of Microfinance

by Roshaneh Zafar

Recently, I came across a quote from Edmund Burke, an Anglo-Irish statesman of the eighteenth century, “the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men (and women) to do nothing” (parentheses and emphasis, mine). The emphasis on “women” is obviously my attempt to remind us that we need to review Pakistan’s situation through a gender lens. Looking at the recent events in Pakistan, I feel, at times, that a malaise ñ a malaise of indifference - is beginning to creep into our psyche. This malaise is at the forefront of the multifarious problems we face as a society and as a nation.

However, all is not lost. There exist oases of hope in Pakistan like microfinance which can provide long-term financial choices and services to the poor. Microfinance is no panacea, however. It will not defeat global poverty by itself. Nonetheless, it is an important part of the solution. Microfinance provides a stable and sustainable source of income that enables microfinance clients to climb steadily out of poverty, while simultaneously providing better living conditions and opportunities for families. Microfinance borrowers take great pride in their ability to lift themselves out of poverty through their own agency (initiative). While a charitable donation can be helpful in the short run, it is hardly ever an ongoing source of financial support.

I have been associated with the field of microfinance for the past 18 years. As a young development economist at Yale, I came across the amazing story of Khairoun Apa — a Grameen Bank client — who had taken a loan of \$100 from the bank and invested in her business. Based on that first loan transaction, Khairoun had built up a mini-financial empire in her community by owning a mithai (sweetmeat) store, a poultry farm and a thriving public call office. In other words, Khairoun had become the Ted Turner of this small village in Putuakhali on the Bay of Bengal. Khairoun’s story of a woman who started her life owning only one sari that she would wash from one side wrapping the wet end around herself since she did not have the resources to buy another, is a poignant reminder about the undignified nature of poverty.

Khairoun’s story stayed with me for many years, until one day fate took me to her village where the sun never sets and the umpteen tributaries of the Meghna River lazily wind their way into the Bay of Bengal. This visit was to be my personal epiphany. It was in Putuakhali that I saw the miracle of microfinance unfold in front of my own eyes, when Khairoun proudly took me to her home and showed me the dozens of colourful saris she now owned to wear on all possible occasions, including the marriage of her son which was a few weeks away.

In any economy the sources of credit are often divided into two categories: formal and informal. Mainly, formal credit sources include commercial banks, leasing companies and other non-banking financial corporations. Formal credit sources are usually characterised by highly bureaucratic, and in many ways, anti-poor and anti-women procedures and rules, which essentially push poor households out of the formal financial sector — as the poor are considered “unbankable.” The lack of access to formal financial services is a major obstacle that propagates the vicious cycle of poverty and drastically reduces the economic opportunities that low-income households have. As a result, poor households often have to rely on informal sources of credit: the moneylenders. Moneylenders dominate this sector and are thus poor people’s most important source of credit. Though credit from the moneylender is often provided without the need of collateral, interest rates are almost always exorbitantly high (sometimes up to 25 per cent per month!) and tend to exploit the poor. Due to the nature of this extortive credit source, the poor are often vulnerable and can find themselves trapped in a “vicious circle of debt”, which can continue for generations.

Microfinance is the best solution for two chief reasons: First, microfinance is a market-based solution aimed at resolving the demand for credit by the bottom of the pyramid.

Second, it fulfills the needs not met by the formal banking sector — it is essentially about making financial services affordable and accessible to the poor. People have often asked me why does microfinance work best with women? In patriarchal societies, especially in developing countries, women often tend to be dependent on males for access to resources and their contributions to family income are not properly recognised.

The work women do outside the home is usually in addition to the care they provide for their families, which limits their business opportunities. Moreover, they often face even greater obstacles and are considered less “credit worthy” than their male counterparts when it comes to getting credit from formal sources. Microfinance, therefore, comes as an alternative to satisfy the credit needs of women in order to help them start micro-businesses and contribute to household income. Increased income in the hands of women is invested in health, education and housing for their families. Experience and studies have shown that women use the profits from their businesses to send their children to school, improve their families’ living conditions and nutrition, and expand their businesses. As micro entrepreneurs, women not only make a huge contribution to GDP, but they also create tangible social safety nets for their families and communities.

Today, as a society, we have two clear choices. We can either continue to treat the poor as orphans in the economic system and keep them deprived and locked out of the formal economy thus forcing them to rely on moneylenders and be endlessly caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. Or, we can actively promote and support microfinance, which allows poor people to live with dignity. Fortunately in Pakistan, we have one of the most progressive microfinance regulations which actively promote commercialisation of the sector, thus enabling poor people to be included in the formal economy. Unfortunately, our mindset as a society has not evolved to accept that poor people deserve financial services the same way the rich do. We are still teetering between misplaced good intentions of providing the poor with charity or hoping to build a subsidised financial option for low-income communities. Both these alternatives will ultimately force poor people to rely on money lenders, since none of these are long-term options in terms of access to financial services. I have personally seen thousands of poor families forced into the grinding and brutal indebtedness of the aarthi — the moneylender. Compare this with microfinance that gives people the choice to not only return their loans but to also live with dignity.

(The News – January 20, 2009)

HR Watch

Violence against Women

406 Women Murdered in NWFP in 2008: Report

The Violence against Women Watch, a group of non-governmental organizations, has termed the Year 2008 as the year of violence against women in NWFP as 406 women were murdered in the Province during the year in petty issues, according to the group. Unveiling 2008 report on Violence against Women, Rubina Naz Advocate revealed that violence against women increased in the Province in 2008. She said a total of 1,023 cases of violence against women were reported with 406 of murder, 71 of kidnapping, 60 of suicide and 28 of rape. Besides, she said. 193 cases of hurt and body injury, 113 of domestic violence and 32 of honour killing were reported in the Province. Separately she also presented the group's quarterly report on violence against women from July to September 2008.

About the sources of the report, she said, data was collected from newspapers, hospitals (medico-legal reports) and two women crises centres. She cited family disputes, refusal to marriage proposals, elopement, robberies, marriages of choice, old enmities, and disputes over poverty and petty-nature reasons behind women's murders in NWFP. She said it was observed that like previous quarter, most of the violence cases reported in Peshawar were from Badhabar, Tehkal, Daudzai and Pishtakhara areas.

(Daily Times – January 14, 2009)

Child Rights

Child Protection Cell in Karachi

Acting City Nazim, Nasrin Jalil, has said that instead of individual endeavours, collective efforts be made to reduce the number of street children and agreed to the setting up of a "Child Protection Cell" to function in cooperation with City Government and Civil Society. She was talking to a delegation of Azad Foundation which called on her. Suggesting to Nasrin Jalil the setting up of Child Protection Cell, the delegation proposed that Nazim Karachi should head the Cell with its Board members to be taken from civil society. The delegation informed that UNICEF, French Group Development Organization and EU too would finance the establishment of this cell. Nasrin Jalil fully agreed to the suggestion and said it is more appropriate because it would provide a beginning to collective efforts instead of making individual endeavours on this count. She asked Azad Foundation to prepare a draft within 15 days in relation to the implementation of the proposal. She said this draft will then be sent to the city government's experts and presented before the City Council for approval after its vetting from all angles. Acting Nazim said that proposals and opinion of various segments would also be incorporated in the draft so that, besides making the future of street children safe, they could also be sent to the respective homes. She pointed out that City Government does have such buildings which can be used as shelter home. She appreciated the Foundation's initiatives and hoped that other social organizations would also come to the fore and patronise the children in coordination with City Government. The delegation informed Nasrin Jalil that at present there are about 14,000 street children in Karachi who left their homes for varying reasons. She was informed that the Foundation is also running a shelter home in New Karachi with the cooperation of City Government where about 30 children are being housed who, besides impart of education, being taught various skills. Besides, the delegation said three drop centres are also functioning in Saddar Town, Jamshed Town and Clifton while a center for girls is also functioning in Clifton.

(Pakistan Observer – January 4, 2009)

The State of the World's Children 2009: Report by UNICEF

UNICEF launched its report "The State of World Children 2009" on January 15. According to the report, out of nearly 200 countries, Pakistan ranks eighth highest and the countries ranking above Pakistan are Afghanistan and Iraq. The report says 53 children die out of 1,000 live births. Every year 216,000 newborns die in Pakistan

before reaching the first month of their birth, while 58 percent children die before reaching the age of five. Most of these deaths take place in the first month of usually at home and without access to essential health services and basic life saving medicines. The under five-mortality rate is 28 percent higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural areas, it is 100 and in urban areas 78 children die out of 1,000 live births. One in every 89 Pakistani women will die due childbirth related causes compared to one in 8,000 in the developed world. The maternal mortality rate is 276 deaths per 100,000 live births in Pakistan compared to eight per 100,000 live births in the developed world. In rural areas of Balochistan, the maternal rate jumps to 785 deaths per 100,000 live births, which is triple the national rate of 276 deaths per 100,000 live births. Likewise, in other rural areas of the country, including southern Punjab and Sindh, the maternal mortality is nearly twice compared to that in cities.

About 40 percent of newborn deaths are due to asphyxia (oxygen deprivation), 20 percent die due to infections and 16 percent due to premature birth. The major causes of newborn deaths are lack of mother's access to nutritional food, lack of access to skilled birth attendants, lack of education, lack of use of contraceptives to space births, and little or no knowledge about childhood illness and treatment.

The report suggests that supporting the education and empowerment of women is key to saving lives. Educated women marry later than uneducated ones and are likely to not suffer the complications of early pregnancy; they can use good nutrition during pregnancy and good health choices.

UNICEF'S Representative in Pakistan Martin Mogwanja held Pakistan's inadequate public health care system responsible for the high mortality rates. He said it had been estimated that quality basic health services needed a per capita expenditure of at least \$45 per year (international standards for minimum per capita expense for quality basic health services), but Pakistan spends only \$ 18 on health per person per year, out of which only \$4 is public expenditure while remaining is spend by private. He said burden on poorest parts of the society was huge and any medical emergency could leave families destitute.

(Daily Times – January 16, 2009)

Human Rights

Conflicts, Crackdowns Mar 2008 Asian Rights Record: HRW Report

Human Rights Watch (HRW) blamed Asian giants China and India for abuses against their own citizens but also for backing military dictatorships such as Myanmar, in its annual report for 2008 released on January 14. The New York-based group detailed worsening trends in much of Asia, including China's Olympic-year crackdown on civil liberties and its repression of protests across the Tibetan plateau. Wars turned more bloody in **Afghanistan**, which saw the "worst violence since the fall of the Taliban", and **Sri Lanka**, where the government last January formally scrapped a ceasefire with the separatist Tamil Tigers. Conflicts also flared up again in less-watched hotspots, including Muslim regions of **Thailand** and the **Philippines**, while **Indonesian** forces in remote West Papua "continue to engage in abuses ... with virtual impunity", it said. The HRW pointed to some progress in parts of South Asia, including the return to civilian rule in **Pakistan**, and improvements ahead of polls in **Bangladesh** last month. Elections in **Nepal**, where Maoists took power and the king abdicated, "marked a new era... after a decade of conflict that claimed over 13,000 lives". But the group also highlighted tighter restrictions on freedom of association, expression and religion in China, which it said "broke its promise to improve human rights in conjunction with its hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games". In **Tibet**, where simmering anger against Chinese rule erupted into major protests last March, the HRW said that following mass arrests of suspected demonstrators the whereabouts of several hundred detainees remained unknown. The HRW also criticised Asia's other population giant, **India**, for "serious abuses", including in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, which was again rocked by major unrest in 2008. The report pointed to India's "pattern of denial of justice and impunity" and a "failure to protect women, children and marginalised groups such as Dalits, tribal groups and religious minorities". India, as an emerging global player, was now often placing economic and strategic interests over rights concerns as it tried to compete with China in countries such as Myanmar, said the HRW. In **Myanmar**, also known as Burma – which the HRW said also draws support from **China, Russia and Thailand** – democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi went into her sixth straight year of house arrest, one of over 2,150 political prisoners. In Thailand "the end of a military-installed administration has not led to the restoration of rights and democracy" as political tensions "led to protracted protests and occasional deadly clashes". **Cambodia** "continued its drift toward

authoritarianism" as Prime Minister Hun Sen consolidated power through flawed July elections, while a tribunal to address Khmer Rouge-era crimes made slow progress.

(Daily Times – January 15, 2009)

Violence Cost Nation Heavy in Life – Report by PIPS

Interneine conflicts and cross-border attacks killed almost 8,000 civilians, militants and security personnel and injured more than 9,650 in Pakistan last year, says a report. The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) think-tank in its report for 2008 issued in Islamabad on January 19 says the casualties were claimed by terrorist attacks, border clashes, military operations, political and sectarian violence and tribal feuds. The federal capital, Islamabad, faced nine terrorist attacks including six suicide bombings in 2008. More than 112 people were killed and 321 injured in four suicide attacks in Islamabad. The terrorists targeted the garrison city, Rawalpindi, with eight suicide attacks between July 2007 and December 2008. They hit the twin cities twice in February 2008. Suicide attacks on police at Melody Market, outside the Pakistan Ordnance Factories in Wah Cantonment, and the Marriott hotel were the major suicide attacks last year.

According to the report the highest number of attacks was seen from NWFP (1009), followed by Balochistan (682) and FATA (385), 35 in Punjab, 25 in Sindh, 7 in Islamabad, 4 in Azad Kashmir and one in Northern Areas. More than 3,182 people were killed and 2,267 injured in operational attacks, 557 injured in clashes between security forces and militants. Political violence took 162 lives and injured 419. As many as 1,336 were killed and 1,662 injured in incidents of sectarian clashes, 395 were killed and 207 injured in border clashes. Over 95 clashes took place between security forces and militants, 88 incidents of political violence, 191 incidents of inter-tribal sectarian clashes and 55 incidents of borders clashes took place during last year. At least 2,148 terrorist attacks were reported killing more than 2,267 people and injuring 4,558 during the last year. Regarding suicide attacks, at least 967 people were killed and 2,108 others injured in 63 suicide attacks during the last year. NWFP faced 32 suicide attacks in which 389 were killed and 688 injured, Punjab was second as 10 suicide attacks claimed more than 201 lives and 580 injuries whereas 16 suicide attacks were reported in FATA killing 263 people and injuring 497. Similarly, 381 rocket attacks, 46 incidents of beheading, 112 remote control attacks, 110 landmines incidents, 451 incidents of firing and 373 improvised explosives related incidents were recorded during last year. At least 4,113 suspected terrorists including 30 Al Qaeda suspects, 3,759 terrorists affiliated with the Taliban and Jihadi groups and 354 Baloch insurgents were arrested during the last year. It is pertinent to note that according to PIPS database, at least 907 people were killed and 1,543 injured in 675 total attacks during 2006, as compared to 3,448 deaths and 5,353 injuries in during 2007.

The report says militants targeted political leaders in the NWFP and FATA in 2008, with leaders of the Awami National Party (ANP) -- which won most of the Provincial Assembly seats in the troubled region and leads a coalition government in the NWFP - the most frequently targeted. As many as 31 ANP activists were killed in a suicide attack in Shabqadar area of Charsadda district on February 9, 2008 - the first time the militants directly targeted the ANP. Repeated attacks on parking terminals of companies transporting supplies to Nato forces in Afghanistan in the militancy-plagued suburbs of Peshawar, and in the adjacent tribal belt in 2008 hinted at a change of tactics by the militants.

The report in its recommendations says there is a need to develop improved counter-terrorism strategies at not only the level of security forces but simultaneously at the political, civil society and the media levels as well. These strategies can only be developed when all stakeholders realize the gravity of the threat. The government, civil society and the media have major responsibilities to develop consensus on the issue. It says a rise in the number of acts of terrorism also reflects the need for effective, efficient and resourceful policing and law enforcement. The Federal and provincial governments need to emphasize this aspect and provide better training, skills, equipment and experience sharing with other countries' forces to deal with the threat in a professional manner. It said that with the Taliban expanding their network in settled areas of NWFP, their next target could be the Punjab province. The Punjab government and police need to prepare to counter this threat in early stage.

(Dawn – January 20, 2009)

Political Freedom Set Back in 2008: HR Group

Political freedoms declined around the world for a third straight year in 2008, with Russia and Greece down over political incidents and Iraq and Malaysia up on increased pluralism, a US rights organisation said on January 13.

Russia, docked for elections that were “neither free nor fair,” and neighbouring Russian-influenced countries that had stifled dissent following peaceful anti-authoritarian revolutions led the downward trend, Freedom House said in an annual survey. Greece sank over nationwide riots in December and the government’s “inability” to control them, the pro-democracy group said in a statement released at a news conference in Taipei. But Iraq, despite years of turmoil following a US-led war, moved up the chart due to security improvements and more Sunni political participation. Malaysia also got a higher mark for the opposition’s new momentum in national elections. Freedom House presented the report in Taipei because it sees Taiwan as a free region in Asia, where it wants to make an impact, its local organiser said.

The world’s 89 “free” countries or regions outnumbered the 42 listed as “non-free” last year, but political rights and civil liberties declined largely because governments worldwide mimicked European anti-authoritarian “colour revolutions” that reversed course and squelched democracy, Freedom House said. Finland led the 193 countries and regions surveyed, with North Korea at the bottom. Situations in neither country changed over the year, the Freedom House survey indicated. China scored near the bottom because instead of improving human rights and democracy ahead of the Beijing Olympics last year, it showed the world a “self-confident totalitarian spectacle”, Freedom House said in its 2008 report. The global financial crisis threatens political rights and liberties this year in places without “democratic institutions” and “safety valves” to ease any ensuing conflicts, said Christopher Walker, Freedom House’s director of studies.

(Dawn – January 14, 2009)

UNHCR Registers Over 60,000 IDPs

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has registered over 60,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and they are living in 12 camps. Rida Ali, a UNHCR representative, told that more than 200,000 IDPs are still to be registered and have been migrated to others cities of the country. She informed that majority of the people are displaced from Swat, Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies. UNHCR with the support of other organisations is providing all the necessary items to them including education and health facilities. WHO and Unicef, in collaboration with the provincial health department, are working for the health and education of the IDPs. The teams of WHO and UNICEF have already launched a health, education and communication campaign to create awareness on how to prevent diseases like diarrhoea, scabies and Acute Respiratory Infections (ARIs) in four camps included Charsadda, Mardan, Newshehra and Peshawar. The teams are also working for improvement of water and sanitation.

(The News – January 28, 2009)

Democracy Watch

Political Governance

Federal Government

Portfolios of Newly Appointed Ministers Announced

Portfolios for newly-inducted Federal Ministers in the cabinet have been announced:

Newly Inducted Ministers	Portfolios
Dr Farooq Sattar	Overseas Pakistanis
Babar Khan Ghauri	Ports and Shipping
Maulana Attaur Rehman	Tourism
Azam Swati	Science and Technology

(Daily Times – January 29, 2009)

Gilani Shuffles 10 Federal Secretaries

In a major bureaucratic reshuffle on January 16, the government transferred and appointed 10 federal secretaries to several ministries and divisions, including those for the cabinet and establishment divisions. The government also appointed its first anti-terrorism coordinator to strengthen its efforts to eliminate terrorism. According to sources, former Federal Investigation Agency Director General Tariq Pervaiz was appointed to the newly-created position. They said Zafar Mehmood, who was serving as an officer on special duty, was appointed as the Cabinet Division secretary, while Ismail Qureshi was transferred from the Water and Power Ministry and appointed as the Establishment Division secretary. They said health secretary Salman Ghani was appointed as commerce secretary and Sibtain Fazal Haleem was named to replace him. Former housing and works secretary Samiullah Khilji was appointed as railways secretary to replace Kashif Murtaza, while Murtaza was named the secretary for the Science and Technology Ministry. Social welfare and special education secretary G M Sikandar was appointed as housing and works secretary. Textile secretary Abdul Rauf Chaudhry was appointed as education secretary, while investment division secretary Ashraf Hayat was posted as planning and development secretary. Additional secretary Tariq Puri was named the additional secretary in-charge of the Investment Division.

(Daily Times – January 17, 2009)

New Body for Accountability of Politicians in the Offing

The PPP government is setting up an **Independent Accountability Commission (IAC)**, a politician-specific accountability apparatus, to replace the National Accountability Bureau but it will not be permitted to check loan defaults as Law Minister Farooq Naek says this is not a crime and mostly banks are responsible for defaults. Naek said he did not consider loan default as a crime as, according to him, in most of the cases banks are responsible for such defaults. But bank frauds will still be a crime, he added. The new arrangement will come into effect with the promulgation of a new law, which according to its proposed draft will be called Holder of Public Offices Act- 2009 (HPOA). HPOA will come into force after the proposed draft, which was presented to the president last Saturday, is discussed in cabinet, parliamentary committee, Parliament and finally promulgated. Though, Federal Law Minister told that the proposed draft of the new law might be promulgated through a presidential ordinance earlier as well. Bureaucrats and private persons including businessmen will not come in the new accountability net and will be dealt with through FIA and other government departments under the PPC and other already existing laws of the land. The holders of public offices, under the new law will include the President, Prime Minister, Governors of provinces, Chairman Senate, Speaker and Deputy Speaker National Assembly and provincial assemblies, Chief Ministers of provinces, Federal and Provincial Ministers, Ministers of State, Members of Parliament, Members of Provincial Assemblies, Attorney General and other law officers including Provincial Advocate Generals, Advisers and Special Assistants to the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers, Federal and

Provincial Parliamentary Secretaries, Auditor General, Political Secretaries and Consultants to the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers. It also includes those who hold or have held a post or office with the rank or status of a Federal Minister or Minister of State. It was, however, not clear whether district nazims or naib nazims and other local government officials, who under NAB were included in the accountability net, will fall under the domain of the new law or not.

While explaining the structure of new IAC, which will be established under HPOA, Naek said the IAC would be headed by a chairman. "The only qualification for the chairman will be that he should be a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He will be appointed by the Prime Minister in consultation with leader of the opposition and the appointment will be confirmed by a parliamentary committee," Naek said, adding "this parliamentary committee will comprise a certain number of members (according to sources eight) with an equal representation of MPs from treasury and opposition benches from the both the houses of the Parliament. The tenure of the chairman will be four years. All these things were decided in Charter of Democracy."

Naek also categorically dispelled the impression that the cases against the parliamentarians would first be scrutinized by the said parliamentary committee. He said the cases against the parliamentarians would need no permission or scrutiny from the parliamentarians and would only need the approval of the chairman IAC. He said parliamentarians would have nothing to do with the establishment or structure of this institution rather they would be accountable to this new commission. "How could parliamentarians become the part of this institution when it is being made for their accountability," Naek stressed. Naek said an important aspect of the HPOA would be that the cases against the parliamentarians would be registered in the area (province) from where they were elected. Centre's cases would be dealt in the centre and while that of provinces in respective provinces, he added. "It should not happen that if Nawaz Sharif is elected from Lahore and is being tried in Balochistan, so, that there should be no victimization," Naek commented.

(The News – January 10, 2009)

NA Passes Resolution Condemning Gaza Attacks

The National Assembly, on January 12, unanimously passed a resolution condemning the Israeli aggression in the Gaza strip and calling upon the international community to help bring the atrocities to an immediate end. The resolution, tabled by Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Babar Awan, said the Israeli military offensive and continued siege of Gaza were in contravention of international law and international humanitarian law. The lawmakers crossed party lines to strongly condemn the Israeli aggression in Gaza and urged all concerned international bodies to adopt binding resolutions for an immediate stop to the aggression.

(Dawn – January 13, 2009)

New Education Policy to Abolish Inequality in System

The new education policy to be announced next month will aim at eliminating inequality in the education system while improving the quality of education as well as achieving the Education For All (EFA) goals, with a seven per cent increase in the current budget for education by 2015 while ensuring 100 per cent enrolment by that time. This was stated by Federal Minister for Education Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani while addressing a meeting with parliamentarians on 'Education for All in Pakistan', organised by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) in collaboration with the UNESCO. The Minister said despite severe economic constraints and security challenges faced by the government, the leadership was committed to invest in the social sector, particularly education. "We believe that various ills of the society, including unemployment, injustice and extremism, stem from illiteracy prevailing in the country and the only way to curb such ills is to increase the literacy rate," he said. Bijarani said the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Commission on Human Development (NCHD), was jointly working to promote basic education in rural areas. "

(The News – January 30, 2009)

17th Amendment Bill

PML-N Presents PPP Draft of 18th Amend: PPP and PML-N vowed to work together for reaching a consensus over five draft bills submitted to the National Assembly for repealing the 17th Amendment from the Constitution. Talking to the journalists at the Parliament House on the eve of submission of the draft bill prepared by PML-N to repeal the 17th

Amendment, leaders from both the parties including Mian Raza Rabbani, Dr. Babar Awan, Ishaq Dar and Ahsan Iqbal called for concentrated efforts to reach a consensus draft bill. "As many as five draft bills have been submitted to repeal the 17th Amendment by PPP, PML-N, PML-Q and MQM. We would review all these bills to reach a consensus document for the 18th Constitutional Amendment," said Mian Raza Rabbani. Senator Ishaq Dar said it was the moral obligation of his party to restore the Constitution as of October 12, 1999 position. "We have passed on our draft proposals for 18th Amendment to the PPP leaders. PML-Q and MQM have already submitted their proposals over the subject," he added. Dar said his party wanted to repeal most of the clauses of the 17th Amendment. Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Mian Raza Rabbani said the Parliamentary Party and the Parliamentary Committee of PPP would review the draft bill presented by the PML-N.

(The ARY News – January 15, 2009)

MQM Bill to Repeal Parts of 17th Amendment: MQM submitted to the National Assembly Secretariat on January 12 the draft 18th Constitution Amendment Bill which seeks to repeal most constitutional amendments introduced during the tenure of former president Pervez Musharraf. MQM's Parliamentary Leader in the National Assembly Dr Farooq Sattar said the bill sought to repeal 'undemocratic clauses' in the 17th Amendment. Clauses 'essential for the democratic system', like those about reserved seats for women, voters' age and joint electorate would be retained. Dr Sattar said time had come to end the centre-based system. "A strong centre cannot guarantee a strong Pakistan, but strong federating units can." He said the sense of deprivation among provinces should be addressed. The constitution was amended in the past to serve interests of individuals or some political parties, but MQM's bill, he said, aimed at 'empowering the people'. He said the bill also provided real concept of independence of judiciary with appointments of judges through a judicial commission. According to Dr Sattar, the bill also aims at eliminating feudalism and adhocism. He said the tussle for power between president and the prime minister had always been a problem and had in the past provided an opportunity to the army to intervene. The bill, he added, tried to delineate the powers of the president and the Prime Minister.

(Dawn – January 13, 2009)

PML-Q's New Draft to Amend 17th Amendment: PML-Q, in a fresh draft of constitutional changes, has completely backpedaled on its previous stand on the discretionary presidential powers and a majority of provisions of the 17th amendment. These were the very provisions that the former ruling party had passed on the orders of Pervez Musharraf in 2004. Amendments have now been proposed in over two dozens of articles of the Constitution. The new bill, likely to be tabled in the National Assembly, seeks purging the Constitution of superfluous language in its different portions. The PML-Q bill now seeks repeal of all the discretionary powers of the President including the dissolution of the National Assembly, appointment of the services chiefs, the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Federal Public Service Commission. It wants the term of national and provincial assemblies cut to four years. It also seeks scrapping of a clause in Article 41, which provided for election of Pervez Musharraf through his public referendum and wants to bring the Article back to its 1973 position.

(The News – January 6, 2009)

Provincial Governments

Major Changes in Sindh Provincial Law System on the Cards

The Sindh government, on 12 January, announced the setting up of evening courts in the province, amending jail manuals, abolishing the post of Law EDO, revoking the Police Order 2002 and appointing around 104 district attorneys. Sindh Law Minister Muhammad Ayaz Soomro said that the Federal Government has given an approval to these changes and all formalities will be finalised within a week. At the same time, the Minister said that the Sindh government was not in a hurry to restore the commissioner system in the province, as is prevalent in Punjab. The Minister said that judges from the Sindh High Court and lower courts will be appointed for the evening courts. These courts will hear civil and appellate matters, although no custody will be produced in these courts. The working hours of the SHC are also being extended and it will now be functional from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. Soomro added that the post of the Law EDO has been abolished in the province. This post was created easily, as it was not made under the Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001. He said that the provincial government will also raise the salaries of judges and they will now receive salaries equal to those in Punjab. Soomro also revealed the government's plans to appoint 104 deputy district attorneys at Rs 20,000 per month each. According to him, the criminal and prosecution wings of the law department are being merged to save public money, as around Rs 360 million is spent annually on the criminal department alone. Talking about the government's plan to introduce jail reforms or make amendments in the jail's manual, Soomro said that under

these reforms, no prisoner will be kept in the condemned prison ward, the Phansi ward, until his appeal for mercy is not rejected from the president's office. According to Soomro, no prisoner will be shackled in the future. He said that separate blocks will be established in jails for prisoners of different categories and political prisoners will be given TV sets and other facilities. The Minister said that the government will establish primary schools and health centers in every prison. Responding to a question, he said that the Police Order 2002 will be revoked and investigation and operation wings of the police will once again be merged. Soomro said that his department has recommended to the government to confer civil awards on March 23 to those senior lawyers who provided free legal services to the poor.

(Daily Times – January 13, 2009)

Balochistan Cancels Allotment of Land to PAF: MoU Annulled

The Balochistan cabinet revoked allotment of 63,000 acres of land to the Pakistan Air Force in coastal areas of Lasbela district. The cabinet, which met with Chief Minister Aslam Raisani in the chair, decided to use the land for agriculture purposes. The previous provincial government had signed a memorandum of understanding for allotment of the land in Hingol national park area for setting up a firing range by the PAF. The area people were issued notices to vacate the land, but Balochistan Assembly Speaker Aslam Bhootani, who has been elected from the area, opposed the decision. The cabinet decided to approach the federal government for construction of two dams in Hingol area that would irrigate over 200,000 acres of land. The meeting decided to restore the system of commissioners with immediate effect and urged the chief minister to approach the federal government for reviving magistracies in the province. The cabinet decided to restore Qazi courts in Gwadar, Khuzdar, Panjgur, Nasirabad, Sibi and Turbat after some cabinet members had expressed reservations about replacing them with civil courts. "Sharia laws are above all laws and there is no need for a discussion on the issue," the chief minister told the meeting. The meeting decided that the government would get audit of district governments and local councils conducted and lifted a ban on transfers and postings of officers of grade 17 and below.

The chief secretary informed the cabinet that NOCs had been issued to various companies for oil and gas exploration in Qila Saifullah, Zhob, Musakhail, Lasbela, Awaran and Washik and work was in progress. The chief secretary said that with the dredging of channels, the Pasni fish harbour would become functional very soon, benefiting around 3,000 fishermen. He informed the meeting that the Gwadar port had become functional and seven big ships carrying fertiliser had anchored at the port since Dec 20 while more ships would arrive soon. He said the port would remain busy during the next four months because the federal government had decided to unload 900,000 metric tons of wheat at the port, in addition to 300,000 metric tons of wheat from the US. Mr Bhootani attended the meeting on a special invitation.

(Dawn – January 11, 2009)

Economic Governance

Reports and Statistics

Half-Year Trade Deficit Hits \$9.55bn

The country's trade deficit hit \$9.55 billion during the first half of the current financial year (July-Dec 2008). The figure for the corresponding period during the last financial year was \$8.29 billion — an increase of 15.27 per cent. The import bill reached \$19.132 billion, as against \$16.95 billion of the same period last year. Exports rose to \$9.57 billion, as against \$8.65 billion during the first half of 2007-08. The figures released by the Federal Bureau of Statistics on January 10 showed that imports declined by 9.45 per cent to \$2.12 billion in December, as against \$2.34 billion over the same month last year. Exports fell by 0.70 per cent to \$1.31 billion in December from \$1.32 billion of the same month of 2007. A slowdown in imports was seen during the past three months, particularly in December, due to a substantial decline in international prices of edible oil, crude oil, steel products and some food items. The government has also taken several measures to contain imports of some commodities to reduce pressure on foreign exchange reserves. The reserves edged up to \$10.003 billion by Jan 3 from less than \$9 billion in November. A senior official in the finance ministry told that the reduction in imports would be more visible in the next few months. Exports proceeds declined because the textile and clothing sector, the largest contributor to the country's foreign trade, showed a negative growth during the first half of the year.

(Dawn – January 11, 2009)

December 2008 over December 2007 (Statistics by FBS)

	Trade Deficit	Imports	Exports
December 2008	\$8.159 million	\$2.126 billion	\$1.310 billion
December 2007	\$1.028 billion	\$2.348 billion	\$1.320 billion

(Daily Times – January 11, 2009)

Performance during July-November 08: Industrial Growth Declines by 5.57 Percent

The industrial growth remained gloomy during the first five months of current fiscal year as it declined 5.57 percent over the corresponding period of previous year. During the month of November of current fiscal, it fell by 7.53 percent over the same period of previous year, **Federal Bureau of Statistics** reported on 21 January. The falling industrial output has been caused by a host of factors. Most obvious ones are frequent power outages, deteriorating law and order situation, depreciation of rupee against the dollar and high interest rates during the period under review. The global financial meltdown also left its scars on the local industrial sector to some extent, as the export sector is the worst hit by the slackening demand in the western countries. Production in the seven sub-sectors, which include auto, textile, and metal industries, contributing 72.4 percent of weight to the LSM, remained under pressure.

The LSM sector had shown robust growth during the last four financial years (FY04-08), when it grew by an annual average of 12 percent. However, growth in 2007-08 tapered off significantly, dropping by 380 basis points YoY to settle at 4.8 percent. Structural issues like energy shortage, poor performance of agri sector particularly the cotton crop (9.3 percent YoY drop in production to 11.7 million bales) hit the textile sector's performance. Overall slackening of demand on both the export front and domestic consumption amid global slowdown and high inflation contributed significantly to the decline in industrial growth.

Analysts said that industrial growth would remain subdued in the short-term due to high interest rates, slowdown in domestic as well as export growth, political haziness on both the international and domestic front, and structural issues especially due to the ongoing power crisis. However, with decline in the interest rates LSM growth may regain momentum, they believed.

In **petroleum sector**, production of Jet fuel oil declined by 12.59 percent, kerosene oil 5.67 percent, diesel oil 29.09 percent, LPG 18.36 percent, High-speed diesel 1.71 percent, furnace oil 10.32 percent, lubricating oil 8.64 percent while motor spirits production remained flat during the first five month of current fiscal. In the **food sector**, vegetable ghee production declined by 13.83 percent, cooking oil 4.05 percent, wheat and grain milling 11.19 percent, beverage 7.73 percent, tea blended and starch & its products rose by 6.49 and 17.08 percent, respectively. Among the **electrical items**, refrigerators recorded a negative growth of 0.23 percent, deep freezers 26.02 percent, electric bulb 22.91 percent, electric tubes 16.68 percent, electric motors 24.00 percent, electric meters 17.93 percent and transformers 0.14 percent. Production of air-conditioners went down by 10.52 percent, electric fans 2.63 percent, switch-gears 3.59 percent, TV sets 30.53 percent and bicycles 12.25 percent. Production of **paper and board** also dropped by 2.70 whereas production of cement remained flat. The production of coke (Pakistan Steel) increased 48.23 percent. Production of jeep and cars were down by 44.37 percent, motorcycles 13.74 percent, and trucks 11.62 percent during July-November of this fiscal.

(Daily Times – January 22, 2009)

IFIs and Donors' Assistance to Pakistan

\$3.1 billion IMF Loan Received So Far

Pakistan has received Rs 3.1 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) out of the total loan of \$7.6 billion.

A senior official of the Finance Ministry said that we have received \$3.1 billion from the IMF on November 26, 2008 out of the total agreed loan package of \$7.6 billion while [the] remaining amount will be received in phases after quarterly reviews in a 23-month period/ He denied media reports claiming that the IMF would re-negotiate the loan with the Pakistan government.

Commenting on the reports, he said revenue generation and exports were improving, adding that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) collected Rs 426.9 billion in revenues during July to November 2008, compared to Rs 340.1 billion collected in the same period in 2007. He said the FBR had set a revenue target of Rs 1.36 trillion for the current financial year and expressed hope that the government would be able to achieve the target. He added Pakistan's exports had also registered an increase of 17.1 percent in July to November 2008, compared to a 13.2 percent increase registered in the same period of the last fiscal year. He said exports during the time under review were registered at \$8,269.8 million. He added that during July to November 2008, Pakistan received worker remittance of \$2,966.5 million. He further said that Pakistan signed a loan agreement of \$300 million with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with the objective of achieving sustainable high economic growth, poverty reduction and improving health services. He said another loan agreement of \$900 million was signed with the ADB to improve the transportation system under the National Trade Corridor programme.

(Daily Times – January 2, 2009)

IMF Says Pakistan has Met Initial Targets

IMF said on January 29 that data indicated Pakistan had met its end-December targets under its 23-month IMF funding programme, suggesting the government was making some headway in its balance of payments crisis. "Initial developments under the programme have been positive," IMF spokesman David Hawley told a regular news briefing. He said that the foreign exchange rate has appreciated somewhat and preliminary information suggests that end-December targets for net international reserves and net domestic assets at the State Bank of Pakistan were met. Asked if Pakistan's reserves had increased, Mr Hawley said he did not have reserve figures. Responding to another question, the IMF spokesman said no date had yet been fixed for sending an IMF mission to Pakistan for reviewing the programme. "The next assessment will take place in the first programme review which is scheduled to be completed by March," he added.

(Dawn – January 30, 2009)

CIDA Aid for Pakistan to be Raised to \$60 Million

Canadian Federal Minister for Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney called on Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. The Canadian Minister is visiting Pakistan at the invitation of Minister for Labour and Manpower. According to Foreign Office statement, Minister Jason Kenney and the Foreign Minister discussed various aspects of Pak-Canadian bilateral relations with particular reference to immigration issues, employment of Pakistani manpower in Canada, investment in Pakistan, the role of Pakistani community in Canada, regional situation and other issues of mutual interest. The Foreign Minister appreciated the continued Canadian assistance to Pakistan for human resource development and capacity building. He also appreciated corporation between the two countries for improving border management between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Kenney informed that **Canada had decided to double CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) assistance for Pakistan to C\$60 million mainly for local government, basic healthcare for girls and primary education.** In addition, Canada would also support projects under the Friends of Pakistan Forum, he added. Qureshi and Kenney also discussed the post-Mumbai tension between Pakistan and India. The Canadian Minister expressed the hope that both Pakistan and India would be able to overcome the current tensions and resolve their differences peacefully.

(The Nation – January 11, 2009)

WB Puts \$834.5m Projects for Pakistan on Hold

The World Bank's (WB) monthly operational summary for revealed that two key projects for Pakistan worth \$834.5 million are to be put on hold. The report, released on January 12, said the WB had suspended the programme loans for Pakistan due to the country's poor macroeconomic conditions. The suspension is likely to continue until the WB's Executive Board considers that Pakistan's macroeconomic indicators are improving. Under this arrangement, the two projects are being put on hold and further action on them would depend on the WB's decision. According to the summary, both sides may negotiate the projects' purpose and cost in the months to come. The report said the WB was suspending the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

(IBRD)-funded National Expressways project. The \$634.5 million project is to provide an efficient, high-speed, safe and access-controlled expressway system, which would contribute to lowering transit costs and time. The other project that the WB shelved temporarily was the National Trade Corridor Improvement Programme. The \$200 million project funded by the IBRD would work to enhance the country's export competitiveness by reducing the cost of trade and transport logistics, and bringing the service quality to international standards. Other WB-funded projects whose preparation is underway are:

Higher Education Support Programme: The \$100 million project is to support the government of Pakistan's higher education medium-term development framework. It will work to foster public-private partnership in the higher education sector. The project also aims at providing substantial technical support in developing a reasonable financing plan, consistent with the macro-framework of the country.

Mineral Sector Technical Assistance: The objective of the \$50 million project is to implement a strategy to accelerate sustainable mineral sector development by strengthening governance, transparency, and capacity in the management of mineral resources.

Rural Telecommunications and e-Service: The project worth \$124 million aims at accelerated access to communications in under-served areas by using targeted subsidies for rural expansion and strengthen legal, policy, regulatory and spectrum management.

Second Sindh Structural Adjustment: The project costing \$100 million is to implement reforms to improve fiscal and financial management, governance, public service delivery, and the state's regulatory framework.

Support to Safety Nets: The \$50 million project will support the effective strengthening of implementation and monitoring mechanisms for delivery of cash transfer programmes, including the Benazir Income Support Programme.

Trade and Transport Facilitation-II: The project worth \$25 million will facilitate the National Trade Corridor Implementation Plan and modernise Pakistan's international trade procedures and practices.

(Daily Times – January 13, 2009)

State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)

Interest Rate to Stay Unchanged: SBP Chief Sees Economy Picking Up

The State Bank announced on January 31 that the discount rate for the remainder of the financial year would stay unchanged at 15 per cent. Governor Syed Saleem Raza, unveiling the first monetary policy since taking office a month ago, said financial stringency would continue for now as "we are not out of the woods yet". The Bank would now review the monetary policy every quarter instead of after every six months. Shamshad Akhtar, the former SBP Governor, had said in November the interest rate could further go up by 1.5 per cent if the core inflation did not come down. The core inflation remained at 18.8 per cent last month — a fractional fall from 18.9 per cent in November. Mr Raza held out hopes that the economy would pick up, saying encouraging signs were already there. Although it was too early to evaluate the benefits of measures that the stabilisation programme stipulated, the governor said, early signs were emerging of an improvement in the outlook for some important variables, eg inflation, foreign exchange reserves, import growth, and government borrowings from the State Bank. The SBP said the recent data revealed that the rate of increase in government borrowing from the SBP had come down and foreign exchange reserves had improved. "This raises hopes for a certain degree of stability by the end of the current financial year." The policy paper said the spike in CPI inflation had somewhat eased, but the high level of inflation and rigidity in core inflation remained a source of concern. The CPI inflation is projected to come down to 12 per cent by June, but the average rate of inflation for 2008-09 was likely to hover around 20 per cent, the paper said. However, the Central Bank expressed concern over a decline in demand for exports, energy shortage, the law and order situation, and the circular debt trap, warning that these problems would act as a drag on economic growth. The SBP has decided to raise the bank limit under the export financing scheme (EFS) by Rs35 billion. The total limit under EFS will now rise by Rs25 billion — from Rs181.3 billion to Rs206.3 billion. The move would free up Rs46.4 billion as a cushion with banks over and above their current utilisation for meeting requirements of the industry. In order to support long-term investment in new plant & machinery, the limits have also been raised by Rs10 billion —from Rs9.5 billion to Rs19.5 billion.

(Dawn – February 1, 2009)

Cut in PSDP

Planning Commission Finalising 20% to 30% Cut in PSDP

Keeping in view the tight financial situation, the Planning Commission has prepared a summary with 20 percent cut in Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the year 2008-09. In this regard a meeting of rationalisation of PSDP was held in the Planning Commission to find out ways to cut the actual size—Rs 541 billion— of PSDP. All the ministries and divisions were asked to prioritise their projects and forward the proposals to the Planning Commission. Majority of the ministries/divisions have already sent their list of projects. This scribe was informed that some water related projects were being put aside from the PSDP in which initial investments are already done.

One official of the Planning Commission said that the government is likely to cut the size of PSDP by 20 percent while another claimed that it would be around 30 percent amid weak financial position of the country.

The sources informed that the PSDP cut would not effect education and health sectors, as these are the priority areas for the government. However, the sources said that all the projects scraped from the PSDP would be transferred to the Infrastructure Project Development Facility (IPDF) for execution with the private sector investment. The IPDF is already negotiating with the private sector investors to undertake projects of national importance. If the Prime Minister approves a 20 percent cut, then Rs 108 billion would be subtracted from the original PSDP and it would be reduced to Rs 433 billion. However, if the 30 percent cut is approved, then over Rs 162 billion would be deducted and the overall size of the PSDP would be Rs 379 billion. For total 65 different agriculture related development projects, the government has allocated Rs 20.015 billion in the PSDP 2008-09. These projects are of crucial importance and their completion would greatly help in ensuring food security in the country.

Among the total 65 development projects 24 were declared by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture as “**high priority**” projects and total allocation for these in the PSDP was Rs 17.435 billion. However, a cut of Rs 2.904 billion was recommended and now allocation for these projects would be Rs 14.531 billion. In **category B, (medium priority projects)** included 36 projects worth Rs 2.530 billion in the PSDP 2008-09. An amount of Rs 1.070 billion cut was recommended for these projects and now the total allocation for these projects is reduced to Rs 1.459 billion. **Category C (low priority / delayable project)** consists only one project, namely “Improvement of Agriculture Livestock Market and Marketing System” with initial total allocation Rs 13.400 million. The official in the meeting informed that this has been reduced to Rs 5 million. The fourth **category D** includes those projects, which are either to be completed as early as possible or would be wind up by December 2008. In this category there were four projects. Total allocation for these four projects was Rs 36.196 million, which is now reduced to Rs 16 million.

(Daily Times – January 22, 2009)

Local Governance

Local Government System

Bureaucracy Biggest Hurdle in LG System: LCAP Director

Local Councils Association Punjab (LCAP) Director Anwar Hussain said that the local government (LG) system is facing a lot of problems in the Punjab, as the provincial government wants to implement old 1979 magistracy system. He stated this during a meeting with City District Nazim Raja Javed Akhlaq, City District Naib Nazim Afzal Khokar, Potohar Town Nazim Raja Hamid Nawaz, Rawal Town Nazim Rashid Shafiq, Taxila Town Nazim Siddique Khan and local councillors. Hussain said elected representatives were main force in every developed and under-developed country, while bureaucracy assisted them, but in Pakistan the case was vice versa. He told participants of the meeting that the association was a member of Commonwealth Local Governments Forum (CLGF) and United Cities and Local Governments, the biggest international forum regarding LG system. He said they had three meetings with CLGF Secretary General Carl Wright and apprised him about the problems faced by local governments in Pakistan. He said the CLGF secretary general during his visit to Pakistan had met the government officials and asked them not to wrap up the system rather remove the loopholes in it. The federal government is ready for it, but the Punjab government has mixed reactions to CLGF perception, he added.

Explaining the LCAP structure, he said the association had a board of governors and of 35 districts 33 were its member. He said the two remaining districts of Lahore and Faisalabad would soon become its member. He said LCAP executive body, which comprised seven members run the organisation. He said LCAP had started work in Lodhran and Kasur districts. He said the association was set up to establish horizontal linkages at the district and tehsil levels and relations among local and provincial governments as well as to resolve their conflicts. Another objective of LCAP is to train councillors so that they could serve their council in a better way, he added. He said in third week of January they would organise a convention for the local councillors of the Punjab. Akhlaq said LG system was successfully operating in many developed and under-developed countries for the last 300 years, but in Pakistan the government was bent upon to wind up the system. He said for the last 10 months the system had been suspended. The local government fruits have started reaching to the people in rural areas, he said, adding, there is a need to strengthen the system. He said fake cases were being framed against those who were trying to facilitate the government. He said the district nazim, the chairman of the district, had not been invited to important meetings. Every year he chairs the meeting to prepare security plan for Muharram, but now the commissioner or the district coordination officer is presiding over these meetings, he added. On this occasion, District Executive Forum for LCAP was formed with Siddique Khan as its convener. Other members of the forum included Mohammad Safdar Sahi, Nasrullah Jaral, Raja Mohammad Nawaz, Raja Tassadaq Hussain, Malik Munir, Umer Farooq, Raja Mulazim, Rukhsana Jamshed Butter, Noreen Akhtar, Samina Mukhtar Siddiqui, Yasmin Tahir, Salim Ghauri, Tabbasum and Kahuta tehsil municipal officer.

(Daily Times – January 3, 2009)

NCGR for Reforms in LG System

The National Commission on Government Reforms (NCGR) on January 10 announced to propose amendments in the local government (LG) system to increase its competency and efficiency for better service delivery to the masses. Besides, the Commission, has also decided to prepare proposal of recommendations for improving working of the establishment division and ensure efficient and systematic functioning of the bureaucracy, Chairman of the Commission MNA Ch. Abdul Ghafoor told mediapersons after preliminary meeting. He said that the LG system needs to be modernized; therefore, the Commission would propose a new model to bring it in par with modern age demands plus redress the grievances of the provincial governments over the issue. The Commission observed that conducting local bodies elections through Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was totally unconstitutional as it was provincial subject and only provincial governments could hold the elections on their discretion. As the system, despite its flaws, has delivered a little to masses, so the Commission does not want it to be winded up, he said. Meanwhile, the Commission also rejected the Reforms Commission Report prepared by the last government. Abdul Ghafoor, who also possesses status of the federal minister, informed to prepare new reforms report within time frame of next two years after seeking inputs from provinces, women, minorities and other stakeholders. Representatives from all federating units including Khan Ahmed Goraya, Muhammad Hassan Bhutto, Sikandar Jamali, Itikhar Ahmed Khan, Nelson Azeem, Perveen Qadir, Afzal Shingri, besides federal secretaries of the relevant departments attended the meeting.

(Daily Times – January 11, 2009)

Local Government System – Govt Considering 4 Proposals to Overcome Problems

National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) Chairman Dr Asim Hussain told the National Assembly (NA) Standing Committee on Local Government and Rural Development that the **government is considering proposals to abolish, improve, restore a previous system or introduce a new one.** Briefing the standing committee – which met here under the chairman of the committee, Haji Rozuddin – Asim conceded that there were ‘complications and corruption’ in the local government system, but the government was considering four proposals to work out the problem. He said that after reaching a consensus, a single proposal would be sent to the prime minister for his approval. The committee was told that the Prime Minister had also formed a committee headed by Law Minister Farooq Naik to ‘revisit’ the Local Government Ordinance 2001.

The NA body, however, called on the Local Government Ministry to take steps to abolish the system. Rozuddin observed that ‘effective measures’ should be taken to overcome the deficiencies – especially procedural delays in the release of funds – and complete projects on time. PPP MNA Mir Munawar Talpur said the structure in place before Pervez Musharraf introduced the local council system must be looked into. Talpur said the prime minister had announced Rs 10 million for development schemes thought up by each parliamentarian in the current fiscal year, but no funds had been released although 10 months had passed. Local Government and Rural Development Minister Masood Abbas told the members that the government had allocated Rs 4.42 billion under

the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for 442 MNAs and senators' schemes. The meeting was told that 325 parliamentarians had so far submitted their proposals for projects. The committee also expressed concern over the agency-wise variation in the cost for the construction of roads, and formed a subcommittee to look into the matter.

(Daily Times – January 23, 2009)

26 Nazims Seek Zardari's Help Against Punjab Government

Twenty-six district nazims of Punjab have written a letter to President Asif Ali Zardari seeking his help against the Punjab government's "subversion and sabotage" of district governments. In the letter dated January 29, the nazims complain the provincial government spent millions of rupees on an advertising campaign to malign them despite the auditor general's statement that "audit objection cannot be termed as proof of the nazim's corruption". They have alleged the provincial government had instructed DCOs to "cause hurdles in the smooth functioning of" district governments and the devolved departments do not accept the directives of district nazims. The Provincial Finance Commission Award had been delayed because of "mala fide and negligence" of the Punjab government, they have said in the letter, leaving the system "paralysed and collapsed" and threatened billions of rupees of investment on welfare projects "to sheer wastage". The nazims have also requested the president for a "personal hearing" to "apprise yourself ... the specifics of the illegalities".

(Daily Times – February 1, 2009)

Other Local Governance Related Issues

LG&CD Ready to Take Action against District Governments

The Punjab Local Government and Community Development (LG&CD) Ministry is ready to issue notices to district governments for not submitting replies to objections raised during an audit by the office of the Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP). Sources in the local government have said that all 35 district governments have been asked to furnish replies on the objections within a stipulated timeframe. Under the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001, every district government is required to discuss any such objections in their respective district assemblies and to submit replies after discussions. However, with the deadline for the submission of replies set at January 13, sources said that no district assembly in the province had held a session to discuss the objections, while no such session was scheduled for the coming week. Minister for Local Government and Rural Development Sardar Dost Muhammad Khosa told that his department had sought replies from the district governments on specific points and areas of ambiguity. He said that Naveed Ahmed Chaudhry, a Pakistan People's Party leader and a member of the Local Government Commission had sent letters to 18 districts that fell within his jurisdiction. In the letters he had demanded immediate replies from the district governments with regard to the objections, but no response had been received as yet, he added.

(Daily Times – January 11, 2009)

Government Plans to Carve a New District from Lahore

The Punjab Government plans to create a 'Ravi district' from the existing districts of Lahore and Sheikhpura. According to Punjab Civil Secretariat and Board of Revenue sources, the Ravi district will consist of Shahdara area of Lahore district and Ferozwala tehsil, while some adjacent parts of Muridke and Sharaqpur tehsil will also be included. Two divisions: Government plans to bifurcate Lahore division into two divisions - Lahore and Sheikhpura. According to the idea conceived by the Punjab Board of Revenue, the new Lahore division will consist of Lahore and Ravi districts, whereas the rest of the districts of existing Lahore division will be included in Sheikhpura division. The board is preparing a summary in this regard to be approved by the chief minister. Lahore will be the second metropolis to house multiple districts after Karachi. The number of divisions in Punjab will reach 10 after establishment of Sheikhpura division. The existing nine divisions of Punjab are: Lahore, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Multan, Sahiwal, Bahawalpur and DG Khan. According to the sources, the government has also decided to carve a Chiniot district from the existing Jhang district.

(Daily Times – January 6, 2009)

Poverty and Food Insecurity

Updates on Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)

BISP Launched in Punjab: PPP central leader Farzana Raja launched the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in the Punjab on January 11. Federal Minister for Social Welfare and Special Education Samina Khalid Gurki, MNA Shakeela Rasheed, MPA Sajida Mir, Town Nazim Khalid Gurki and office-bearers of the PPP were also present on the occasion. Chairperson BISP, Farzana Raja said the applicants of the scheme could be men but only women would be allowed to receive the amount as they were responsible for families. She said 3.4 million people would be beneficiaries of the programme and that the government was spending an amount of Rs 34 billion, which would be raised to Rs 70 billion till next year. She said 128,000 money orders were ready and would soon reach the applicants.

(The News – January 12, 2009)

Taliban Ban BISP in North Waziristan: The Taliban in the restive North Waziristan Agency (NWA) on January 2 banned the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), co-education and sale and consumption of narcotics and alcohol in the tribal region, warning violators of death sentence after January 5 deadline. The decisions were taken at a meeting of the central Shura of the pro-government Taliban, led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur, at Miramshah on Friday. The decisions of the Shura were later announced in several mosques of the tribal region whereas pamphlets inscribed with the verdict were also distributed. Announcements were made through loudspeakers in mosques and prayer leaders informed the faithful about the new laws through the Friday sermons. The militant leaders, while criticising the BISP, argued that widows and other poor deserving women from the NWA were forced to visit offices of political administration which, they said, was against the tribal customs and traditions.

(The News – January 3, 2009)

BISP to be Launched for FATA Women: The government has decided to take the BISP to people in tribal areas, despite reported threats from the local Taliban that women receiving monetary help would be killed. Farzana Raja said the people in North Waziristan, including the Taliban, should meet their MNAs and Senators for information about the programme because it appeared that because of some misconceptions they had decided to stop women from receiving financial assistance. Ms Raja said that tribal women would not have to go to any office because the monetary support would be provided at their doorstep. She said that the women will not have to go out of their homes to get their cards because lady workers of NADRA will visit them and complete the process. The card required only thumb impression and not photograph. She rejected Taliban's claim that tribal women would become morally corrupt and said that the programme was similar to the Zakat system. "How can one call our programme un-Islamic," she said.

(Dawn – January 5, 2009)

Opposition to ID Cards for Women for BISP bars Women's Rights: BISP Chairperson Farzana Taja said that opposition by fundamentalist elements in the Tribal Areas and the NWFP to women acquiring computerised identity cards (CNICs) to benefit from BISP deprives women of basic human rights and creates hurdles in performing religious rites. She was addressing a press conference at the BISP headquarters. She said the Taliban distributing pamphlets against women getting their CNICs was an illegal, unconstitutional and unethical act.

She said the government had arranged women-only staff for preparing the CNICs for women in the Tribal Areas and the NWFP. These teams will go from door-to-door to prepare ID cards keeping in view the Islamic and local traditions. No one is required to come to Islamabad or other main cities for this purpose as is being propagated by some elements. She said financial assistance was being provided to women through the record available with NADRA and BISP applicants must have CNICs to qualify for support under the programme.

(Daily Times – January 6, 2009)

Sufi Backs BB Income Support Plan: Sufi Mohammad's Nifaz-i-Shariat Committee of Swat has decided to support the Benazir Income Support Programme. Maulana Multan Mir, a representative of Sufi Mohammad, conveyed the decision via teleconferencing from Swat during a consultative meeting organised by the Council of

Islamic Ideology on January 15. He said that we do not oppose the programme because our people also have a right to share the state's benevolence. BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja presided over the meeting held in collaboration with the Iqbal International Institute for Research and International Islamic University.

The topic of discussion was “**Democracy and Social Welfare Programme for Poor, especially Women, in the light of Shariah.**” Ms Raja thanked Sufi Mohammad for his support to the programme. She questioned the logic for opposing the programme since the 1973 Constitution clearly stated that country's laws must conform to the Quran and Sunnah. IIU Vice-Chancellor Dr Farooq Khan said that as far as Swat was concerned the people in general did not oppose the programme.

CII Chairman Dr Khalid Masud drew attention to the Islamic system of Zakat and said it was a golden means to provide justice to all citizens of an Islamic state by sharing wealth between the rich and poor. He also presented guidelines about the Nifaz-i-Shariat movement in Malakand, FATA and Swat.

(Dawn – January 16, 2009)

IMF Seeks Change in BISP Selection Procedure

IMF has asked the government to select deserving families for the Benazir Income Support Programme by adopting a method devised by the World Bank and not through the elected representatives. Sources told Dawn that the 'change in selection procedure' was one of IMF's conditions for its \$7.6 billion loan. A well-placed source in the Finance Ministry said that now a \$50 million loan was being sought from the World Bank to carry out a proxy means test (PMT) based on its methodology of scoring card to select poor families for the Rs34 billion BISP. He said that even before the programme was formally launched, the World Bank had asked the government to adopt its methodology, but the Prime Minister approved the political approach of using legislators to select the deserving families. The source said that as directed by the World Bank, the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), a non-government organisation, would conduct the test and get Rs1 billion for its services. He said that the NRSP would receive the \$50 million World Bank loan, but it would be returned by the government. The head of the NGO and World Bank's representatives have already given a presentation to President Asif Ali Zardari and got his approval for the tests. When contacted, BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja confirmed that the survey would be carried out through the World Bank model. The current disbursement of funds through legislators was only for providing immediate assistance to the poor, she said. She said that disbursement of money through the existing system would, however, continue. A senior finance ministry official on condition of anonymity said that a formal request had not been made to the World Bank for the loan. He said that it was not possible to disburse Rs34 billion allocated for the BISP by June 30. He said that the Rs1 billion to be given to the NRSP for conducting the survey might be used from the programme's budget of Rs34 billion. Over the past nine months, 127,000 families have been identified for receiving Rs4,000 by money order through the Pakistan Post by the end of this month. So far, 250,000 families have submitted forms and applications will be accepted till Jan 31.

(Dawn – January 12, 2009)

National Survey on Poverty to be Started Soon: Farzana Raja

Chairperson Benazir Income Supports Programme (BISP), Farzana Raja said that government has decided to hold the door to door National Survey on Poverty soon. She said while speaking at a seminar on “Current Situation and Our Economy” that we will organise the survey in collaboration with BISP across the country including FATA, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Norther Areas. Those who spoke among others on the occasion were Advisor to the Prime Minister on Interior, Rehman Malik, Information Secretary of PML-N Ashan Iqbal, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Advisor Pak-Gulf Construction Company Pvt Limited Abdul Aziz Mirza, PML-Q leader Ms.Kashmala Tariq, Sardar Illyas Khan, Syed Kokab Mohiuddin, Prof Dr.Ahsan Malik, M.A Rauf, Kazi Abdul Hamid Mughul and Anjum Aqeel. .Farzana Raja said that government is taking measures for improving the living conditions of the people and it has taken a number of steps including the introduction of BISP for the social protection of poorest section of the society.

(The Nation – January 23, 2009)

Election Watch

Senate Elections

EC Announces Names of Senators Retiring on March 11

Election Commission (EC) of Pakistan Secretary Kanwar Dilshad on January 24 formally released the names of 50 senators who will retire on March 11 after completing their six-year term in the Upper House of Parliament. Prominent among the retiring senators are Senate Chairman Muhammadmian Soomro, Law Minister Farooq Naik, Federal Investment Minister Waqar Khan, Attorney General of Pakistan Latif Khosa, Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) Secretary General Mushahid Hussain and Leader of the Opposition Kamil Ali Agha. The EC secretary said Chief Election Commissioner Justice (R) Qazi Muhammad Farooq would issue the schedule for holding the election to fill the 50 Senate seats in the first week of February. Naik, Khosa and Ahmed seem certain to be re-elected to the Senate for the next term while Soomro, Agha, Mushahid, Wasim Sajjad and Nisar Memon are unlikely to return to the Upper House. The PPP stands to gain the most in the elections, while the PML-Q and the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) seem likely to lose the most seats in the elections.

From each of the four provinces, 11 senators including seven on general seats and two each on women and technocrats seats would retire. Two senators from Islamabad capital territory and four from FATA would also retire.

ISLAMABAD: Mushahid Hussain and Tahira Latif from the PML-Q.

PUNJAB: The retiring senators on general seats are Sardar Mehmood Khan, Kamil Ali Agha, Amjad Abbasi and Dilawar Abbas from the PML-Q, Sajid Mir from the PML-N and Latif Khosa from the PPP. Saadia Abbasi and Razina Alam Khan from the PML-N, on seats for women and Khalid Ranjha and Anwar Bhindar from the PML-Q on seats for technocrats/ulema are also retiring.

SINDH: Amin Dadabhoy (independent), Babar Ghauri, Abbas Kmaili and Muhammad Ali Brohi from the MQM, Muhammadmian Soomro from the PML-Q, Asif Jatoti from the NA and Enver Baig from the PPP are retiring as senators on general seats from Sindh. PPP's Rukhsana Zuberi and PML-Q's Yasmeen Shah are retiring as senators on seats for women, while PPP's Farooq Naik and PML-Q's Nisar Memon (PML-Q) on seats for technocrats/ulema.

NWFP: Waqar Khan and Gulzar Ahmad Khan (independent), Shujaul Mulk from the PPP-S, Maulana Rahat Hussain and Sahibzada Khalid Jan from the MMA, Haji Muhammad Adeel from the ANP and Iqbal Zafar Jhagra from the PML-N are retiring as senators on general seats from the NWFP. Aneesa Zeb Tahir Kheli from the PPP-S and Kauser Firdaus from the MMA are retiring as senators on seats for women, while Muhammad Said and Maulana Samiul Haq from the MMA on seats for technocrats/ulema.

BALUCHISTAN: Mir Wali Muhammad and Naseer Mengal from the PML-Q, Abdul Ghafoor Haideri from the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, Liaquat Ali Bangulzai from the MMA, Akbar Shah from the BNP-Awami, Ayaz Khan Jogezi and Raza Muhammad Raza from the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party are the outgoing senators on general seats from Balochistan. Kalsoom Parveen and Agha Pari Gul from the PML-Q on seats reserved for women and Kamran Murtaza from the MMA and Mumtaz Hussain Mehfooz from the PPP on seats for technocrats/ulema are also retiring.

FATA: Senators Engineer Rashid Khan, Nasar Khan, Muhammad Hussain and Abdul Malik (all independent) are retiring.

(Daily Times – January 25, 2009)

PPP will Gain Majority Seats after Senate Election

While PPP will gain maximum seats in the coming Senate election, the former PML-Q will be the major loser. There will be a new political dispensation in the Senate after the March election with the PML-Q losing 17 out of 37 members. The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) and the PPP-Sherpao (PPP-S)

will be among the major losers since they do not have enough strength to win any seat in the upcoming election. The JI, PkMAP and PPP-S will lose two seats each.

Adviser on Parliamentary Affairs Izhar Amrohvi told that out of the total 50 seats being vacated, there is one general seat from the federal capital, seven general seats each for the four provinces. About the seats reserved for technocrats/ulema and women, he said elections would be held on two seats each in all the four provinces and on one women seat in the federal capital. Amrohvi said according to the formula for the Senate election, 172 votes of the National Assembly members are required to win a general seat from the federal capital. In the quota, 47 votes are required in Punjab, 22 in Sindh, 16 in NWFP and nine in Balochistan to win a seat. Sources in the Parliamentary Affairs Ministry said the PPP was likely to gain the most in the upcoming elections while the PML-N, ANP and the MQM were also expected to consolidate their position in the Upper House keeping in view their strength in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies after last year's general elections.

(Daily Times - January 2, 2009)

ANP-PPP Formula for Senate Polls Firmed-Up

ANP and PPP almost have agreed on a formula for the upcoming Senate elections under which the ruling coalition in the NWFP will field five candidates each against 11 seats to be fallen vacant in March this year. According to the sources, the coalition partners will also convince the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) in the NWFP Assembly to support their joint candidates whereas the ANP and PPP would back its candidate for a general seat. Enjoying maximum seats in the 124-member provincial assembly, the candidates of the ANP, PPP and JUI-F would face least difficulties in securing all the 11 seats, if the three parties agreed on the proposed formula, the sources added. Eleven of the senators from the NWFP will retire from the Upper House of the Parliament on March 12 that include seven general, two technocrats and two women seats. The ANP is the largest single party in the NWFP Assembly with 48 MPAs, followed by the PPP and JUI-F with 31 and 14, respectively. Under the proposed adjustment, six of the general seats would be allotted to the ANP and PPP while one would be spared for the JUI-F if it agrees. The ANP will field its candidates against three general, one technocrat and one women-reserved seats. Similarly, the PPP will have three general seats and one each for technocrats and women reserved seat. The source said the ANP and PPP have already taken into confidence the independent MPAs and some of the lawmakers from the PPP-S and PML-Q, adding that both the parties will field some influential and wealthy candidates. The PPP is likely to nominate the outgoing senators Gulzar Ahmad Khan and his son Waqar Ahmad Khan, who elected last time in independent capacity and Sardar Ali Khan against general seats, while Farhatullah Babar on the technocrat seat.

(The News – January 23, 2009)

Electoral Reforms

Plan to Improve Public Access to Poll Data: Workshop on Election Reforms

The Election Commission of Pakistan is planning to develop a highly sophisticated electoral management system integrating the computerized electoral rolls, list of voters and polling stations as well as availability of election results for public access through the Internet and cellular phones. This was stated by Secretary of the Election Commission Kanwar Dilshad while addressing the **Provincial Consultation Election Reform Process Workshop** on January 19. He said the commission was committed to employing the best available international practices and modern technologies for electoral administration and electoral framework. This would enhance the credibility and transparency of elections and the election commission, besides providing better services to contesting candidates, political parties, the media, analysts and observers, he said. At present, he said, the Commission was actively involved in examining the suggestions and recommendations of national and international observer missions received after the last year's general elections and those received from time to time from political parties, civil society and the public to make the service better. Mr Dilshad said the strength of democracy depended not only on the richness of its elections but also on the degree to which the citizens were aware of their right and responsibilities and participate in the political process. "Elections are not merely necessary condition for democracy; they are a test of a country's democratic health," he said. Provincial Election Commissioner, Sindh, Ch. Qamaruz Zaman and the Provincial coordinator, M. Wajhi Akhtar, were also present on the occasion.

(Dawn – January 20, 2009)

Graduation Condition: SC Releases Detailed Judgment

The Supreme Court has held the graduation condition for legislators imposed in 2002 by former President Pervez Musharraf as unjust and unconstitutional. Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar wrote in a detailed judgment issued on January 3 that wisdom and knowledge are God-gifted, inborn and inherent virtues and might not always be dependent on acquiring certificates or degrees. On April 21 last year, a seven-member bench had scrapped the graduation condition for legislators. The judgment held that it would not be fair to deprive society of the services of such people merely because they do not come to a certain yardstick. The educational qualification is neither a reasonable restriction nor a reasonable classification within the contemplation of Articles 17 (freedom of association) and 25 (equality of citizens) of the Constitution and the same is declared to be void, the judgment said.

Through Article 8(A) of the Chief Executive Order No 17, Section 99 (1)(CC) was inserted into the Representation of People's Act 1976, in 2002, requiring a contesting candidate to be at least a graduate in any discipline or holder of a degree recognised by the Higher Education Commission. On July 11, 2002, a five-member bench of the Supreme Court had upheld the graduation condition on a PML-Q petition, but now in the fresh judgment the apex court said the Constitution was in abeyance then. Moreover, no authentic data was placed before the court to show the lack of educational facilities in far-flung areas like PATA, FATA and Balochistan.

Authored by Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar, the **78-page verdict** observed that the framers of the Constitution have already taken care of education-related qualification, under Article 62 that provided that a candidate for election should have adequate knowledge of Islamic teachings and practices obligatory duties prescribed by Islam and who abstains from major sins, is sagacious, righteous, non-profligate, honest and ameen. The need is to ensure that the public representative offices are manned by persons possessing such attributes, the judgment emphasised, adding the presence of such persons in public offices would rid society of evils it was afflicted with.

Elaborating why graduation condition is unreasonable in the context of fundamental rights, the judgment said: One, it was not called for in the interest of sovereignty or integrity of Pakistan or public order in terms of Article 17(2); two, it did not take into consideration social and economic conditions of Pakistan and their impact on the people; and three, a vast majority of the population would be deprived of their cherished right of franchise. The educational qualification as a condition for contesting election, with the exception of elementary education, or the ability to read and write, is not in vogue in other countries of the world. It is also against the principles recognised by the United Nations in its different charters, the judgment said. The classification based on educational qualification for contesting election is unreasonable inasmuch as at the most 2.6 per cent of the population and 6.9 per cent of the registered voters will be eligible to contest the election while more than 93 per cent of the registered voters will be disenfranchised. This is against the spirit of democracy, the judgment observed. These figures are based on the record of the HEC, while according to NADRA, the percentage is lower, according to which the number of graduate citizens is only 1.6 per cent of the total population and 4.1 per cent of the registered voters. The literacy rate in the country is just 35 per cent, which also includes persons who can read, write or just sign, the judgment said.

(Dawn – January 4, 2009)

Wider Consultations on Draft of Declaration Urged – Conference on Best Practices for Domestic Election Observation

Civil society groups from the Asia region agreed on January 29 to hold wider consultations on a draft of 'Declaration of Principles for Domestic Election Observation' at a conference hosted by Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) to seek input and comments from similar organisations throughout the sub-continent. The goal of the regional conference on 'Best Practices for Domestic Election Observation' was to raise the technical and professional standards for domestic election observation by civil society organisations in Asia region, potentially, as a model for election observers around the world. The domestic election observation groups from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have formed a regional working committee to finalise the draft declaration, which seeks to raise the standards of domestic election observation in the region.

Paikaisothy Saravanamuttu from Centre for Policy Alternatives along with other regional election observers briefed the media at the concluding ceremony about the outcome of the conference. He said the delegates discussed how these 'best practices' enable domestic election observation groups to have the greatest impact on preparations for an election, deterring misconduct on the election day and long-term electoral reforms. Mossarat Qadeem from FAFEN said the working group would prepare a uniform code of conduct that would certainly help create a better and congenial environment for the local election observers. She said the election day is only a small part of the overall electoral process, so all the local citizens as well as international community should remain vigilant about the remaining parts of the process before reaching conclusions. Aazar Ayaz, a researcher, said the draft of the declaration would be finalised after a detailed discussion among all the stakeholders. He said that the sharing and exchanging of experience and views would help make the draft more transparent and applicable in the context of the regional electoral scenario.

Organisations that participated in the Conference include Election Working Group (EWG) of Bangladesh, Peoples Voter Education Network (JPPR) of Indonesia, Democracy and Election Alliance of Nepal (DEAN), Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) of the Philippines, Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) of Sri Lanka and Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), Pakistan Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (PACFREL) and The Researchers of Pakistan. The Conference was hosted in collaboration with The Asia Foundation Pakistan.

(The News – January 30, 2009)

Asset Details of Political Parties & Parliamentarians

PML-N, PTI Richest of Country's Political Parties

According to the annual returns submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), PML-N and the PTI are the richest political parties, while the PPP, JUI-F; and PML-Q are among the poorest, According to a report published by the ECP, the **PPP** had only Rs 436,405 in its treasury at the close of the financial year ending on June 30, 2008. Secretary General Raja Pervez Ashraf has signed the statement of the party's accounts. The **JUI-F**, for all intents and purposes, has a zero balance in its kitty. The statement signed by Secretary General Senator Maulana Ghafoor Haidri claims that the party has Rs 848,115 in its accounts, but the same amount is due against them in the form of liabilities. The Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain-led **PML-Q** closed out the year with a deficit of Rs 12,100. The party's total income for the past year was Rs 7.2 million, but its expenditure was Rs 9.819 million as it distributed Rs 3 million in donations in the flood-hit Balochistan areas. **ANP** and **PML-F** both have deficits of Rs 177,134 and Rs 277,044, respectively. The **PML-N** has emerged as the richest party with Rs 12.716 million in their accounts; the major chunk coming in the form of ticket fees for the February 18 general elections. The party has also mentioned the PML House at Margalla House, Islamabad as part of its fixed assets. Similarly, the **PTI** of Imran Khan is the second richest party with Rs 2.601 million in its accounts. The **MQM** is the third richest political party, with Rs 2.595 million in their kitty at the close of financial year 2008. The Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan had a net balance of Rs 1.216 million in their accounts. The **Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party**, led by Mehmood Khan Achakzai, has only Rs 11,203 in its kitty. The Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) and the Pakistan People's Party-Sherpao have Rs 321,000 and Rs 653,306, respectively. In total, 56 political parties submitted their annual returns to the ECP and are thus considered as registered political parties. It should be noted that the balance sheets quoted above do not take into account the fixed assets of the parties in the form of offices, furniture and office equipment.

(Daily Times – February 1, 2009)

Assets of Senators Notified

Details of assets declared by Senators to the ECP seem to ridicule the public perception as statements by some legislators perceived to be rolling in money showed that their owned properties valued only a few million rupees. Some even claimed they did not own any property or their multi-million properties were gifted to them by 'unknown sources'.

Federal Minister Israrullah Zehri, who faced criticism for terming the act of burying alive of three girls in Balochistan a tribal tradition, is the richest Senator, the returns showed. He owns around 50,000 acres of agricultural lands worth several billions of rupees, mostly in Balochistan. According to Mr Zehri's statements of assets and liabilities submitted to the Election Commission, he owns 25,000 acres of agricultural land in Kalat,

15,000 acres in Jhal Magsi, 5,000 acres in Khuzdar and 3,000 acres in Thatta. The value of land has not been shown in his statement. According to Mr Zehri, he inherited the land, which is yet to be distributed among his family members. Mr Zehri owns bungalows in Karachi, Islamabad and Quetta and runs a transport business and also owns a construction company. His statement shows he has Rs35 million in cash and Rs33 million in bank.

Minister for Science and Technology and JUI-F Senator Azam Khan Swati owns huge properties inside and outside Pakistan, including nine houses in Bahria Town in Rawalpindi with an estimated value of Rs180 million. His statement shows he owns properties worth over \$1.6 million in the US and two under construction residential towers in the UAE worth 20 million dirhams.

Attorney-General Sardar Latif Khan Khosa is among the 50 Senators who will retire on March 11 and is among Senators who own houses in Lahore, Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Kasur, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, a flour mill, flats, offices, agricultural land and residential plots.

PML-Q Senator Tariq Azim is among a few parliamentarians who have declared their assets abroad. According to his statement, he owns a house in the UK with an estimated value of £600,000 and other assets worth £120,000. The value of his house in Islamabad is around Rs28 million. Many, including **Deputy Chairman of Senate Jan Mohammad Jamali**, declared they did not own a car, suggesting they either travelled by public transport or used only luxury vehicles provided by the government. Lawmakers who routinely used luxury cars have declared that they owned cars worth just a few hundreds of thousands of rupees. Some legislators tried to prove that they were under a heavy debt.

Senate Chairman Mohammedmian Soomro, who lives in a multi-hectare farmhouse and owns a luxury bungalow in the heart of the capital, declared the value of his immovable assets to be just Rs4.689 million. He owns houses in Karachi, Lahore, Jacobabad, Ahmedpur and Shikarpur. Among these, two houses have been gifted to Mr Soomro by his mother while the rest were also shared by his family members. The Chairman has a Toyota 1998 valuing Rs350,000 only besides Rs892,324 in bank accounts. Deputy Chairman Jan Mohammad Jamali is among Senators who do not own a car. His immovable assets are worth Rs20.1 million, including rice mills worth Rs10 million in Usta Mohammad. Mr Jamali has declared that he operates a bank account in which he has only Rs60,000. But he said he possessed jewellery worth Rs1.38 million and furniture worth Rs200,000.

Leader of the House Mian Raza Rabbani is one of the luckiest lawmakers. He was 'bestowed' two properties as 'gifts' in posh areas in Lahore and Karachi worth Rs5 million each. He did not mention whether these properties were houses or plots and did not identify his benefactor. Mr Rabbani's other assets include two cars, jewellery weighing 220 tolas, Rs446,000 in bank accounts and furniture worth Rs700,000.

Leader of the Opposition Kamil Ali Agha owns a property worth Rs5.62 million along with moveable assets of Rs13.5 million. The vehicle he owned and furniture and money in his bank accounts was valued at just a 'few' million rupees.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Senator Babar Awan is also among senators who have declared assets abroad. His properties inside Pakistan are worth Rs77.12 million. He has provided details about a property in Spain in which he has paid advance payment of Rs15 million. He has also declared he owns movable assets, including a law firm, worth Rs4.376 million. Mr Awan owns two vehicles and operates two bank accounts with Rs192.41 million and Rs8.383 million, respectively. He has also declared details of multi-million properties owned by his wife.

Minister for Law and Justice Farooq H. Naek has declared immovable property of Rs10.201 million including plots and houses in Karachi besides an office worth Rs1.124 million. His movable assets are worth Rs10.379 million. Mr Naek has liabilities worth Rs5.669 million, including Rs3.23 million received through a crossed cheque on the closure of a foreign currency account operated by Mrs Nusrat Bhutto as her attorney.

Ports and Shipping Minister Babar Ghauri owns properties worth Rs177.55 million and movable properties worth millions of rupees.

Minister for Housing Rehmatullah Kakar has owns an 'inherited' property worth Rs130 million, 25 per cent share in a Quetta hospital and two kilograms of jewellery and millions of rupees in bank but he does not own any vehicle. He also owns millions of dollars and other foreign currency accounts in foreign and local banks. He has liabilities of \$1.1 million payable to banks in the United States as loans.

PML-N's parliamentary leader in the Senate Ishaq Dar owns immovable property in Pakistan worth Rs49.5 million while he owns a villa in the UAE for which he has paid 7.04 million dirhams. His assets also include four vehicles, two of them Mercedes. His other assets are worth millions in investments and bank accounts. There is no liability on Mr Dar.

Former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Chief Javed Ashraf Qazi has declared immovable properties worth Rs19.1 million besides movable properties of Rs6.09 million and operates local and foreign currency accounts worth a few million.

Senator Talha Mahmood of JUI-F has declared his immovable property including three houses and a plot worth Rs500 million and Rs114 million movable assets. His liabilities stand at Rs150 million.

PML-Q Secretary-General Senator Mushahid Hussain owns just Rs35,000 in his own name while rest of the property including a 50-acre plot of agricultural land, a 600-square-yard plot and a luxury house in Islamabad are either owned by his wife or shared by his two brothers. A Suzuki car worth Rs300,000 is owned by his wife.

JUI-F's Secretary-General Senator Abdul Ghafoor Haideri has a house and a plot worth Rs400,000 and Rs150,000, respectively, and furniture valued at Rs100,000. He has no other assets.

MQM's Mohammad Ali Brohi is among 'poor' senators. He owns a house valued at just Rs600,000 and jewelry worth Rs500,000 and furniture of Rs250,000. **Ratna Bhagwandas Chawla, elected on a minorities' seat**, has no immovable property. However, she got loans and advances worth Rs147 million. Ms Chawla, however, operates bank accounts with Rs2.409 million in her name. **Senator Maulana Gul Naseeb** is among the poorest of Senators with just Rs30,000 in his bank account. He has no other assets.

(Dawn – February 1, 2009)

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Mumbai Incident & Indo-Pak Relations

India Lobby' to Advocate Tough US Stance on Pakistan

Indian-American organisations have formed a new 'task force' to advocate a tougher US stance towards Pakistan especially following the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in late November, according to South Asia expert Vijay Prasad. "But this is not just about justice for the victims of Mumbai," he writes in an article that appeared on the CounterPunch newsletter's website. "There is another dynamic involved, which is to walk the Jewish American road, to create an 'India Lobby' that resembles the 'Israel Lobby'." "We're fighting the same extremist enemy," he quotes Charles Brooks of the American Jewish Committee as saying at a meeting of Jewish American and Indian American "partisans of the right". But Prasad says such rhetoric "fails to distinguish between the tactics that people use and the social and political conditions that generate their hostility".

The demands that the task force would make on the US Congress – to pressure Pakistan on the extradition of Mumbai suspects despite the absence of an extradition treaty, and the demand to close down all madrassas "which preach nothing but hate" – are "on the surface, quite bland, but also purposely naïve," he says. "It deceives the citizenry with its simplicity, and yet it pushes adversaries into corners."

(Daily Times – February 1, 2009)

Mumbai Attacks not Planned in Pakistan: A Pakistani investigation into the Mumbai attacks has shown they were not planned in Pakistan, the Pakistani High Commissioner to Britain Wajid Shamsul Hassan told an Indian television news channel on January 30. It was the first time a top Pakistani official had commented in detail about a dossier of evidence that India handed to Pakistan. Hassan said Ajmal Kasab's nationality did not necessarily prove the hand of Pakistan in the attacks. "He does come from Pakistan, that doesn't mean that Pakistan has sponsored whatever he carried out in Bombay," said Hassan. Hassan said Pakistan's examination of the Indian dossier would show its 'non-involvement' in the attacks and questioned the veracity of the Indian information, saying it 'could be fabricated'.

(Daily Times – January 31, 2009)

Dossier is still being investigated, says Gilani: Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said on January 30 that Pakistan is still investigating the Mumbai terror attacks, and "we will share our findings with the world". "We are investigating, and very soon will come back to the world [with] whatever the findings are," said Gilani. About the Pakistani high commissioner's comments, Gilani said the diplomat had spoken too soon.

(Daily Times – January 31, 2009)

Pakistan Forms Committee to Analyse Mumbai Dossier

Pakistan has formed a high-level committee to analyse the information about the November 26 Mumbai terrorist attacks that New Delhi has shared with Islamabad, Interior Adviser Rehman Malik said on January 15. Addressing a news conference, he said the findings of the body would be shared with the parliament and the nation. Sources privy to the measure said FIA Additional Director General Javed Iqbal would head the committee, which would also include Special Investigations Group in-charge Khalid Qureshi and an FIA Director Liaqat Ali Khan. Malik said Pakistan had closed down 20 offices, two libraries, 87 schools, seven madrassas and five camps run by the banned Jamaatud Dawa, and had arrested 124 people in a crackdown on banned groups in the wake of the Mumbai attacks. In a clarification, Interior Secretary Kamal Shah said 71 people had been arrested. Publications by the banned group – Al Dawa, Zarab-e-Tayyaba, Voice of Islam, Nannhay Mujahid and Arabic magazine Rabita – and six websites linked to it had also been shut down, Malik said. The Interior Adviser asked New Delhi to allow Pakistani investigators to travel to India for investigation, and asked it to cooperate with Pakistan through direct diplomatic links. Malik asked New Delhi for details of its allegations of infiltration of terrorists from FATA into India.

(Daily Times – January 16, 2009)

India Handed Over Dossier to Pakistan

India on January 5 formally handed over a dossier to Pakistan containing “information and evidence showing Pakistan-based individuals’ involvement” in the Mumbai terror attacks. Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon and Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad Satyabrata Pal separately handed over the dossier to High Commissioner Shahid Malik in New Delhi and Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir in Islamabad. “We have asked for assistance, credible action,” said Menon. External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee told journalists, “What happened in Mumbai was an unpardonable crime.” He called on Pakistan to launch further investigations and share the results with New Delhi. Earlier, an Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman said that the material handed over to the Pakistani high commissioner included interrogation reports of Ajmal Kasab, the lone gunman arrested after the attacks; details of the attackers’ communication links with ‘elements in Pakistan’ and data retrieved from GPS and satellite phones. Briefing reporters, Foreign Secretary Menon rejected the possibility of a joint investigation. He said India expected Pakistan to share results. Meanwhile at a briefing in Islamabad, a Foreign Office spokesman said India had handed over ‘some information material’ on the attacks to the Pakistani high commissioner in New Delhi. “The material has been received in Pakistan and is being examined,” he said. Separately, the spokesman said in a statement that the Indian high commissioner called on the Pakistani foreign secretary in Islamabad, and handed over a dossier on the ‘status’ of Indian investigations. The foreign secretary told the Indian high commissioner that Pakistan was carrying out its own investigations, and was determined to uncover the full facts of the attacks. He said Pakistan would evaluate the information provided by India. Pakistan has decided to form a joint investigation team of its intelligence agencies – including the FBI and IB – to examine the ‘evidence’ handed over by India, a private TV channel reported.

(Daily Times – January 6, 2009)

Sino-Pak Relations

10 Pak-China Friendship Schools to be established

The governments of Pakistan and China have jointly decided to establish at least 10 Pak-China Friendship Schools in Islamabad. The agreement was reached in a meeting between the Minister for Education Mir Hazar Khan Bijrani and Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Lozohae who called on him here on Thursday. The matters pertaining to the Pak-China educational cooperation were discussed in details. It was consensus on both the sides that in future more stronger and cooperative projects will be initiated for education sector in Pakistan.

Pakistan and China are currently offering cultural exchange programmes as students of both the friendly countries are studying in each others educational institutions. China is offering almost 100 cultural exchange scholarships which will be enhanced in the days to come. The Minister told the Ambassador that in Pakistan the Government is implementing new education policy very soon. The new policy aims of providing free education up to the secondary level to all and sundry in Pakistan. While advocating the importance of technical education, the Minister said the concept of knowledge-based economy can only come true when sufficient number of technical trained individuals are available. The Minister further said that the Government believes in providing equal opportunities to both male and female students in the country. However, the people’s government aims at providing special initiatives for the students of far flung areas where educational facilities do not exist up to satisfactory level. The Ambassador while appreciating the efforts of the Government of Pakistan invited the Minister to visit China and study the Chinese education system.

(The Nation – January 16, 2009)

IPI Gas Pipeline Negotiations

Pakistan to Resume Talks with Iran on IPI Gas Price

The steering committee for the \$7.6 billion Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project decided on January 15 to undertake a fresh round of negotiations with Iran to resolve differences over gas price. Earlier, it was believed that the committee would shelve the project because of differences over the pricing mechanism. US Ambassador Anne W. Patterson visited the office of Adviser to Prime Minister on Petroleum Dr Asim Hussain to discuss the IPI project. However, an official announcement by the petroleum ministry said the adviser discussed with the ambassador matters relating to Pakistan’s 185 billion tons of coal deposits and sought US cooperation and investment in utilising the deposits for gasification and power generation. The committee meeting presided over by Mr Asim Hussain, was attended by Prime Minister’s Adviser on Finance Shaukat Tarin, Balochistan Chief

Minister Sardar Aslam Khan Raisani and officials of the petroleum ministry. The US has been opposing the IPI project because of Iran's involvement and reached a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with India to make it agree to the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) project. Pakistan believes that the TAPI is not a viable project due to its cost and the law and order situation in Afghanistan. Petroleum ministry officials, the sources said, had earlier informed the Prime Minister that Iran was demanding a price of \$10-11 per million British thermal unit, which was very high, compared to Pakistan's offer of \$6.66. Pakistan will have to pay \$6 billion a year for its daily share of one billion cubic feet of gas, if Iran links the price to the international crude price. The steering committee, the sources said, also discussed concerns expressed by India about a guaranteed supply of gas throughout the project's life. The official announcement said the adviser told the US ambassador that the government was taking steps to exploit untapped hydrocarbon resources in onshore and offshore areas to meet energy needs. Mr Hussain said the government had announced various incentives and packages in the new petroleum policy for foreign investors. The bidding process for issuing exploration licences to foreign companies had been cut short to attract investment.

"The government is pursuing fast-track exploration policies because it wants to be self-sufficient in indigenous gas production in three years," the adviser said. The ambassador said the US wanted to build long-term and multi-faceted relations with Pakistan. She stressed the need for expanding economic cooperation. The ambassador offered technical assistance to Pakistan in exploiting natural resources.

(Dawn – January 16, 2009)

Pak-Afghan Relations

Zardari, Spanta Agreed to Convene Pak-Afghan Jirga

President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Spanta on January 30 agreed to convene a Pak-Afghan jirga, and make the initiative a frequent and effective process between the two countries. The announcement was made during the visiting Afghan minister's meeting with Zardari at the Presidency. Issues regarding bilateral relations, and the regional security situation were discussed between the two leaders. While praising Afghan hospitality during his visit to Kabul earlier this month, President Zardari said he was looking forward to welcoming his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai in Pakistan. Zardari said the Joint Declaration on Directions of Bilateral Cooperation, signed during his Kabul visit, provided a framework for bilateral relations in the future, adding the two sides would follow it for promoting mutual ties. The Afghan Foreign Minister also met his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi at the Foreign Office. Cooperation: The two ministers expressed satisfaction over the ongoing bilateral cooperation, saying both the countries were ready to further strengthen the coordination, both at the strategic and tactical levels. Foreign Minister Qureshi expressed the hope that the new United States government under Barack Obama would adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach in addressing the challenge of terrorism in the region. Qureshi hoped the surge in US troops' number in Afghanistan would be coupled with a political and development surge as well. He said it was now universally accepted that the use of force alone could not counter terrorism. Dialogue with moderate forces and engagement with reconcilable elements was important to control the spread of extremism and militancy, the Foreign Minister said. Qureshi and Spanta also reiterated their support to the jirga process, which, they said, helped pursue the dual objectives of dialogue and development. They also agreed that closer bilateral cooperation was necessary to control the movement of terrorists across the Pak-Afghan border.

(Daily Times – January 31, 2009)

New Obama Administration and US Foreign Policy towards Pakistan

Obama Administration Asked to Re-Evaluate Drone Strike Policy

With an emerging consensus among foreign policy experts that FATA poses the greatest security challenge to the US – a US-based foreign policy research organisation has called on President Barack Obama's administration to re-evaluate its drone attacks policy for the Tribal Areas.

A report by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) says that the American drone attacks policy needs a serious re-evaluation, as ... it has fuelled, rather than quenched, the insurgency. A commission of experts for evaluating past American policy in FATA and its effectiveness should probe this issue in depth. The report – authored by ISPU fellow Hassan Abbas and titled 'President Obama's Policy Options in FATA' – outlines steps for

both the Pakistani government and the US administration to deal with the unrest in the Tribal Areas. In the process of devising a new FATA strategy, the report calls on the US to engage with 100,000 Pashtun-Americans. Meanwhile, Pakistan's traditional friends – such as China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia – should be involved in developing a cohesive development policy for FATA and NWFP. It says the Obama administration should also consider 'repairing' the US image among Pakistanis. It says that at least 50 percent of American counter-terrorism funds must be redirected towards the capacity building of Pakistan's law-enforcement and civilian investigation agencies. In a bid to stabilise the region, the report says the US should help India, Pakistan and Afghanistan reconcile differences. The author of the report also proposes more US scholarships for Pakistanis and American investment in Pakistan's publishing industry. For Pakistan, the report says, "FATA should be fully incorporated into Pakistan by scrapping the Frontier Crimes Regulation [as a federating unit]." It also calls for the abolishment of the seven FATA agencies. The report concludes by saying, "The prevailing democratic transition in Pakistan ... provides the best opportunity for it, as well as for India and Afghanistan, to halt the region's extremist trends through joint cooperation and trust building. Creative American policies can play a significant role in this context. An Iraq-style surge in Afghanistan and unilateral incursions in FATA are unlikely to be seen as reflecting any change. The Obama administration has the credentials."

(Daily Times – January 27, 2009)

Regional Politics & Election Watch

Bangladesh – Post Election Scenario

Hasina Sworn-in as BD Prime Minister

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina was sworn in as Prime Minister of Bangladesh by President Iajuddin Ahmed on January 6. Hasina was sworn in as the country's 12th Prime Minister, taking office for the second time. A 31-strong Council of Ministers was also sworn in at the President's Secretariat. The full list of ministers included 23 cabinet members alongside Hasina, the rest being ministers of state. The Chief of Army, General Moeen U. Ahmed, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus joined some 1,000 foreign diplomats, government officials and members of Parliament at the ceremony.

(Bangladesh News – January 7, 2009)

Cabinet

Five Women in new Bangladeshi Cabinet: Bangladesh's newly sworn-in Prime Minister **Sheikh Hasina Wajed** has unveiled her cabinet team, appointing women for the first time to head the Home and Foreign Ministries.

The 31-member cabinet comprises five women in total, including the 61-year-old Prime Minister **Sheikh Hasina** herself, who is taking office of the impoverished country for the second time.

Dipu Moni, a doctor and first-time MP who was active in the party's women's wing, was named the country's first female Foreign Minister.

Sahara Khatan, a lawyer, was given the Home Ministry portfolio.

Motia Chowdhury returned to the Agriculture Ministry. She headed in Sheikh Hasina's previous administration.

Munnujan Sufian, a newcomer to politics, was made a State Minister.

(Dawn – January 8, 2009)

Bangladeshi PM Expands Her Cabinet: Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Saturday expanded her cabinet by inducting six state ministers into it, raising the members of the cabinet to 38. The new state ministers are: Shahjahan Mia, Abdul Mannan Khan, Quamrul Islam, Shamsul Haque Tuku, Jahangir Kabir Nanok and Motahar Hossain. This is the first expansion of the cabinet within three weeks of the new government's assumption of office on Jan. 6 following as weeping victory of Awami League-led 15-party alliance led by Hasina in the Dec. 29 polls.

(Reuters – January 24, 2009)

BD Parliament Convened

Bangladesh took another step in its return to democracy on January 25 when parliament convened for the first time since 2006, following two years of rule by an unelected military-backed interim government. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia led legislators from their respective parties and alliances to the sprawling parliament house, with outgoing speaker Jamiruddin Sircar presiding at the opening session.

(Dawn – January 26, 2009)

Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament

Advocate Abdul Hamid and Col (Retd) Shawkat Ali were unanimously elected Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the ninth parliament respectively in the inaugural session of the House on January 25. The inaugural session began with immediate past speaker Jamiruddin Sircar presiding over it to elect the new Speaker and Deputy Speaker. After delivering his inaugural speech, Sircar began the process of electing the new speaker and deputy speaker. The main opposition lawmakers including Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia also did not oppose Hamid's election; rather they welcomed him by thumping on the desks.

A lawyer by profession, Hamid has been involved in AL politics since the 1960s. He was elected the youngest ever member of the Pakistan National Assembly in 1970 at the age of 25. Hamid was also elected a member of parliament (MP) in 1973, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 general elections on his party ticket. Shawkat, who will work as the Deputy of Hamid, also has a long political career with experience of being the chairman and a member of many parliamentary committees. Shawkat, a freedom fighter, was first elected lawmaker of the second parliament in 1979 from Shariatpur-2 constituency, followed by his election as an MP in 1991, 1996, 2000 and 2008. He is also a listed Supreme Court lawyer.

(The Independent Bangladesh – January 26, 2009)

Upazila Elections in Bangladesh after 19 Years

Upazila Polls Influenced: EC slams ruling party for misusing offices, controlling administration; tells of violence, ballot-stuffing, seizing polling stations by AL men; decides to probe low turnout reason slide show. Low turnout, ministers and ruling party lawmakers meddling in balloting, and irregularities in places marked the long-awaited upazila elections on January 22, meaning a letdown for the Election Commission (EC). Despite a relatively peaceful atmosphere, people did not come out in droves to vote like they did in the recently held national election. Concerned, the EC has decided to open an enquiry to find out the reasons. Sakhawat, who had earlier visited some polling centres, observed that lawmakers interfered to secure win for their favoured candidates as they want to keep upazila parishads under their sway. The EC has suspended elections in five upazilas and over 50 polling stations in response to violence and ruling party MPs exerting influence on the election process.

Originally, the commission scheduled the local polls to precede the parliamentary election as it sought to avert the polls being influenced by the ruling party or alliance. It however had to give in to mounting pressure from the major political parties including AL and BNP, and rescheduled the elections for January 22. Election Commissioner Sakhawat said it rests with the government to see whether the elections are acceptable with such a low voter attendance. He however said the voter turnout might be around 50 percent, which was more or less the case in the previous upazila polls.

Poll Results of Seven Upazilas Cancelled: The Election Commission (EC) suspended poll results of seven upazila parishads on grounds of massive irregularities in the elections, following an investigation sparked by an onslaught of complaints from defeated candidates. After a series of meetings, the commission also decided to launch a judicial inquiry to find the details of the irregularities. Earlier, the Commission suspended polling in six other upazilas preceding and during the elections due to similar allegations which will be investigated as well. The EC also decided to let the judicial inquiry committee investigate alleged involvement of government ministers and ruling party lawmakers in the January 22 local government election irregularities. He however did not mention which ministers and lawmakers will be investigated, but said the probe will reveal who influenced the elections. Based on the inquiry report, the Commission will decide the fate of the suspended election results of the seven upazilas, and whether any legal action is warranted against the perpetrators.

The upazilas -- poll results of which are not being published in the official gazette -- are Bancharampur of Brahmanbaria, Araiহার of Narayanganj, Teknaf of Cox's Bazar, Kaliganj of Gazipur, Mehendiganj of Barisal, Muradnagar of Comilla, and Raipura of Narsinghdi.

The upazilas where polling were suspended during the January 22 elections are Brahmanbaria Sadar, Ramganj of Laxmipur, Barura of Comilla, and Belkuchi of Sirajganj, while polling in Dighinala of Khagrachhari, and Ukhia of Cox's Bazaar had been put off before the election day.

(The Daily Star – January 28, 2009)

Presidential Elections

Zillur Rahman to be ext Bangladesh President: Bangladesh's Awami League, which is poised to form a new government, named Zillur Rahman as the country's next President. The 79-year old Zillur was elected Deputy Sheikh Hasina told that the opinion of the Awami League Parliamentary Party is that senior party leader Zillur Rahman will be the next President of the country" when incumbent Iajuddin Ahmed quits. She said Rahman, who is in his early 80s, was chosen as deputy leader of the National Assembly, a position he would quit when he goes to Bangabhaban, the Presidential palace.

Se further said that he (Rahman) is a senior member of our party. We want to recognise him first for his long time contribution to our party as well as the political arena of Bangladesh. He has played an important role in all our struggles including the (1952) language movement. The decision came as a major ally of the Awami League-led grand alliance, Jatiya Party Chief and former President H M Ershad, demanded presidency in line with an "understanding" he had reached with Hasina ahead of the earlier postponed polls slated for January 22 last year. Jatiya Party sources said that in a meeting ahead of the oath-taking ceremony of the new lawmakers Ershad took a tough stance saying his party might not support the government if he was not made President. In reply to a query about Ershad's demand, Hasina said "let's see what we can do for him. He will be in the Parliament." "(But) Zillur Rahman is one of the country's senior most politician who has contributions to country's all democratic campaigns since the 1952 Language Movement he has the priority to become the President," Hasina said.

(Deccan Herald – January 4, 2009)

Presidential Polls in JS on Feb 16: The Election Commission announced on 29 January that the presidential election will be held on February 16. It also announced schedule of the long due election to the country's top post following confirmation of the polling date by speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad. Lawmakers constitute the electorate for the presidential polls to be held in parliament from 2:00pm to 5:00pm. Earlier, the EC had sent a proposal to Speaker Abdul Hamid for holding the election on February 18. As per electoral laws, the EC had to consult the speaker since the election will be held when parliament is in session and the House will be used as polling venue, if the election is contested.

According to the polls schedule, nomination papers have to be submitted to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda, who is Returning Officer (RO) of the polls, from 9:00 am to 4:00pm on February 8. Scrutiny of those will be held at 10:00 am on February 9. The last date for withdrawal of candidacy is February 11 till 4:00pm. The EC has prepared electoral roll for the election with 294 legislators of the ninth parliament on the list, as by-election to six seats vacated by the chiefs of AL, BNP and Jatiya Party were yet to be held.

If everything goes smoothly, veteran politician and Deputy Leader of the House Zillur Rahman is going to be elected President uncontested on ruling Awami League nomination as the main opposition BNP will not nominate any contender. Officials in the EC Secretariat said if there is only one candidate for the post, Zillur Rahman will be declared elected on expiry of the time limit for withdrawal of candidacy -- 4:00pm on February 11. On February 12, the EC Secretariat will publish the election results in the gazette, clearing the way for Zillur to take oath as new president. This will end the controversial tenure of incumbent President Iajuddin Ahmed.

Since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991, only the presidential election held in that year was contested as the then opposition AL had its nominee in the election. And the presidential elections held in 1996, 2001 and 2001 were uncontested. Meanwhile, Iajuddin's tenure as present expired on September 5, 2007 but a new president could not be elected as there was no parliament. So, he continued to hold the office. As per constitutional provision, a new president is going to be elected within 30 days of first sitting of the 9th parliament held on January 25.

(The Daily star – January 30, 2009)

Indian Politics

Indian President Okays Her Own Salary Hike by 300 percent

Indian President Pratibha Patil has approved the law giving her a 300 per cent hike in salary taking her monthly pay cheque to Rs 1.5 lakh from Rs 50,000 per month in the New Year. She also gave her assent to another law that will hike the monthly salary of vice-president M H Ansari's salary from Rs 40,000 to Rs 1.25 lakh per month. The hike comes a year after the Cabinet considered a proposal seeking an increment to the salary of India's First Citizen and enhancing post-retirement benefits for former Presidents and Vice-Presidents. Earlier, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, had taken a decision to rationalise the salaries. The hike comes close on the heels of government announcing a bonanza for its employees by implementing the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission report under which a secretary at the Centre will draw Rs 80,000 a month. Immediately after the hike was announced, President Pratibha Patil contributed a month's salary to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund towards the relief and rehabilitation of those affected by Bihar floods. The salary of President, which was fixed at Rs 10,000 in the Constitution, was gradually raised to Rs 50,000 a month in 1998 with effect from January 1, 1996. Almost everything that the President does or wants to do is taken care of by the annual Rs 22.5-crore budget that the Government allots for his upkeep.

(Indian Express – January 3, 2009)

Pakistan, China Role Limits Indian Influence in Sri Lanka

After decades of strong-arming tiny neighbour Sri Lanka, India finds itself jostling for influence, as its power has blunted by the island nation's growing ties with Pakistan and China, with the civil war nearing an end. While domestic political sensitivities over the fate of Sri Lanka's Tamils forced India to ease its leverage, China and Pakistan stepped into the breach, offering Colombo military assistance in its war against the Tamil Tiger rebels. China has sold Jian-7 fighters, anti-aircraft guns and JY-11 3D air surveillance radars to the resurgent Sri Lankan Army, as it seeks to finish one of Asia's longest-running wars by squeezing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters in a shrinking patch of the jungle in the north. Pakistan also supplied the army small arms and multi-barrel rocket launchers, and trained the Sri Lankan air force in precision-guided attacks against the rebels, strategic analysts said. "There have been several shipments of weapons from Pakistan. What has made a real difference to the outcome of the war is the Sri Lankan air force, which has been rigorously trained by Pakistan in precision-guided attacks," Indian Army Major General (R) Ashok Mehta said. India, by contrast, had limited its military assistance to the Sri Lankan Army to 'defensive weapons'. India has been limited by its insistence on protection of Sri Lanka's Tamils, who are closely linked to 60 million Tamils in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, across a narrow strait from Sri Lanka. "The shine has somewhat gone off from the leverage India has over Sri Lanka, partly because India has allowed it to happen," said Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu of the Colombo-based Centre for Policy Alternative. China's and Pakistan's help against Tamil Tiger rebels may have been crucial, a former Sri Lankan official said.

India trained and armed Tamil Tiger rebels in the early 1980s and followed it up a disastrous 1987-1990 peacekeeping foray into Sri Lanka, which has cast a long shadow over the war and made Sri Lanka wary of its giant neighbour. National Security Adviser MK Narayanan asked Sri Lanka to stop seeking arms from China or Pakistan last year, saying India as the regional power would still meet its defence requirements. Narayanan made an unscheduled visit to Colombo last year to ensure Sri Lanka did not become a cockpit of regional rivalry, as with Afghanistan where Islamabad feared Indian influence. This week, Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee visited Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, and the two discussed safety measures for Tamils trapped in fighting between the army and Tamil Tigers separatists, and post-war reconstruction. The visit was also to cool tensions with Tamil Nadu politicians in India's ruling coalition who were sympathetic to the Tigers and demanded India broker a ceasefire.

Power struggle: The strategic battle in Sri Lanka is seen as part of a wider power struggle in South Asia, involving not only India and Pakistan but also China, which seeks to gain influence in the important economic region. China has made strides developing strategic assets, like the Gwadar port in Pakistan, the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota and assets in Yangon, part of a strategy to protect shipping lanes. Sri Lanka sits next to shipping lanes that feed 80 percent of China's and 65 percent of India's oil needs. "There is a convergence of strategic interest in Sri Lanka among regional powers," said security analyst C Uday Bhaskar. But ignoring India may be

hard for Sri Lanka, as the war appears to draw to a close, the focus is turning to the state of Sri Lanka's \$32 billion economy. Sri Lanka is suffering from costly short-term foreign debt. The war is expected to cost nearly \$2 billion this year. Indian investments in Sri Lanka have grown.

(Daily Times – January 30, 2009)

By-Election in Thailand

Ruling Coalition Wins Most Seats

New Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's government won the most seats in by-elections on January 11, early results showed, strengthening his shaky coalition in its first test at the polls. Voting closed at 3:00 pm (0800 GMT) for 29 parliament seats across the kingdom, with Abhisit's Democrat Party-led coalition grabbing 20 seats and the opposition gaining nine in the 480-member Parliament. The Election Commission's Public Relations Director Ruengroj Chomsueb said the Democrats won seven seats and its allies scooped 13, while the two parties linked to ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra held on to nine seats. Turnout was estimated at 60 per cent, although the results still have to be certified by the Election Commission and officially announced within one month.

The Democrats lost elections in December 2007 to the Thaksin-backed People Power Party (PPP) and came to office in a close parliamentary vote last month after a court dissolved the PPP. That decision brought an end to six months of sometimes-violent protests against the PPP and Thaksin, which peaked with the crippling week-long occupation of Bangkok's two airports in late November. The Dec 2 ruling by the Constitutional Court also banned scores of lawmakers from politics for five years because of vote fraud charges linked to the 2007 polls, triggering the by-elections. Bangkok residents also voted on Sunday for a new governor, with the Suan Dusit university exit poll showing Democrat Party candidate Sukhumbhand Paribatra taking the job after winning nearly 47 per cent of the vote. Previous governor Apirak Kosayodhin — who is a deputy leader of the Democrat Party — quit in November last year, just a month after winning a second term, when corruption allegations emerged. Deputy National Police Chief General Wichian Potphosri said more than 34,000 police had been deployed at polling stations for the by-elections, with the army and navy also helping out in some provinces. Alcohol was banned for the day in areas where voting was held, with authorities cautious following months of political turmoil and protests by royalist anti-Thaksin group the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). Of the 29 seats up for grabs, 13 were held by the now-defunct PPP — which has regrouped in opposition as the Puea Thai party — and 16 were held by its then-allies in the Chart Thai party, which was also disbanded. Thailand remains deeply divided between those loyal to Thaksin and elements of the old power cliques in the military, palace and bureaucracy who felt threatened by his huge popularity with the rural poor. The urbane, Oxford-educated Abhisit has so far failed to make a dent in Thaksin's support base in the north and northeast. The Democrat Party count Bangkok and the south as their strongholds.

(Dawn – January 12, 2009)

US Post-Election Scenario

Barack Obama becomes First Black US President

Barack Obama became the first black US president on January 20, making history before a sea of people and declaring the United States in the midst of a crisis that can be defeated with a united sense of purpose.

The inauguration of Obama, 47, the son of a black Kenyan father and a white mother from Kansas, was steeped in symbolic meaning for African-Americans, who for generations suffered slavery and then racial segregation that made them second-class citizens.

Obama's in his inauguration speech said: This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed - why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath. So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have travelled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people: "Let it be told to the future world...that in the depth of winter, when

nothing but hope and virtue could survive...that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet (it)." America. In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."

(The News – January 21, 2009)

Obama Shuts-Down Gitmo, CIA Prisons

US President Barack Obama on January 22 signed three landmark executive orders mandating the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison, shutting down all CIA prisons and banning the use of torture during suspected terrorist's interrogation, AFP reported. Signing the Guantanamo order, Obama said he was setting in place a process by which the camp "will be closed no later than one year from now".

But many of the prisoners could find themselves released a lot sooner, as the order establishes a process to review their cases "with the goal of disposing of the detainees before closing the facility". In a separate order he shuttered all CIA prisons operating abroad. The order "states that the CIA shall close any detention facility that it currently operates and shall not operate any such facility in the future", an official told reporters. Obama also signed an executive order asking the US Supreme Court to delay a review of the case of the only 'enemy combatant' on US soil, Qatari national Ali Al-Marri.

President Obama also told military leaders to make additional arrangements to withdraw US troops from Iraq, Reuters reported. "During the discussion, I asked the military leadership to engage in additional planning necessary to execute a responsible military drawdown from Iraq," Obama said in a statement after the meeting.

(Daily Times – January 23, 2009)