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## Gender

### Women & Politics

#### **Fauzia Replaces Sherry as PPP Information Secretary**

President Asif Ali Zardari, also PPP Co-Chairman, on March 18 appointed Fauzia Wahab the party's new Information Secretary in place of Sherry Rehman. Zardari had removed Sherry from the position after consulting senior party leaders and directed her to promote the party's image. Whereas Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani had offered Sherry another cabinet slot after she resigned as Information Minister but the offer was declined. In fact Sherry had quit the federal cabinet in protest against PPP leaders' interference in her Ministry's affairs ahead of the lawyers' long march. Fauzia confirmed her appointment as PPP's information secretary and committed to portray the party's positive image through the media.

*(Daily Times-March 19, 2009)*

#### **Maryam Khan Made PPP Rights Wing President**

Famous human rights activist Maryam Khan has been appointed as President Pakistan Peoples' party Human Rights (Women Wing) for the Federal Capital. Ms. Khan says she has been working with different human rights organizations and has a vast experience in tackling human rights issues especially women rights. According to her she has been associated with some foreign human rights organizations like 'UK inspired Sister' and 'Bridgin Britain', little known organization based in the UK. She has also been providing consultancy services to the Ministry of Human Rights on issues of basic rights. It is to recall that Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, while recognizing her services in the field of human right award on her on the occasion of International Human Rights Day on December 10, 2008.

*(Dawn - March 19, 2009)*

#### **PML-N Women Wing Elects Office-Bearers**

After reorganization of PML-N women wing provincial Secretary General of the party and MPA Shazia Aurangzeb has called upon new office bearers to report within 15 days the progress of their respective areas. At a meeting of the PML-N women wing at the Party Secretariat in Peshawar under the Chair of Shazia Aurangzeb, the following Party activists were assigned with new responsibilities and notification in this regard. Salima Jahangir would be Secretary General Peshawar Division, Shaheen Habibullah Khan Provincial Secretary Information, and Farhana Abid Additional Secretary of the women wing of the Party. The new office bearers have also been directed to report within 15 days about reorganization of the Party in various districts within the purview of Peshawar division to the Party Secretary General. The Provincial President of the Party and MNA Dr. Imtiaz Sultan Bukhari, the legal and political advisor of women wing of the Party Khawaja Aurangzeb Alamgir was also on the occasion.

*(The Nation - March 20, 2009)*

#### **17,000 Women to Get Training for LG Polls**

UNDP will train more than 17,000 women across the Pakistan before organising the forthcoming Local Government Elections of 2009. According to informed sources, 3,000 women would be included from Sindh for the said training session by UNDP. They apprised that the Sindh Government has planned to train women leaders nominated from the different walks of life including political parties, NGOs and different segments and sectors of society before holding the next local bodies' elections in 2009. In wake of the women training program, a ~One Day Orientation Workshop for Trainers on Women Training Module was organised by City Institute of Image Management (CIM) at old KMC building of CDGK on 28 March.

The Provincial Project Manager Abdul Fattah Tunio of Sindh Govt and Director CIM, Mohammad Shahid Khan of CDGK told that Planning and Development Department of the Government of Sindh organised a one-day Orientation Workshop for Trainers on Women Leaders Training Module. Mr Tunio said that the objective of the training programme was to capacitate women leaders for meaningful participation in Local Government elections. Addressing the training session, the Special Secretary P&D Department Ms Rehana G Ali Memon, who is also the Project Director (PPD) of GBG said that women as a leader had always proved best and this is the time that we must motivate the potential women leaders to understand the election process. On the occasion, Abdul Fattah Tunio gave presentation on training methodology, monitoring and evaluation process, selection criteria, district-wise distribution, patterns and allocation of numbers for each stakeholder.

*(The Nation - March 29, 2009)*

## **A Club of Richest Women - MNAs' Asset Details Submitted to Election Commission**

### **Top Six Richest Women Elected on Reserved Seats**

Nuzhat Sadiq, Begum Ishrat Ashraf, Beelum Husnain, Dr. Attiya Inayatullah, Sherry Rehman and Farahnaz Ispahani are the top six richest women MNAs elected on reserved seats, reveal their asset details submitted to Election Commission.

**Nuzhat Sadiq:** Nuzhat Sadiq of PML-N owns an immovable property (commercial, residential and agricultural) of around Rs. 15 billion but surprisingly she does not own a car. She is among those parliamentarians who have given both purchasing cost as well as the present value of their assets. She has liabilities of Rs 154 million.

**Begum Ishrat Ashraf:** Begum Ishrat Ashraf of PML-N owns properties both in and outside the country. The couple has a huge residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural property most of which has been inherited. Ashraf has mentioned the value of property bought by her and spouse but she has not specified the value of inherited assets. The couple has Rs 9 million worth of residential apartment in UK. Ashraf also posses 100 'tola' gold valuing just Rs. 100,000.

**Belum Husnain:** Belum Husnain of PPP owns an immovable property of around Rs 212 million, Rs. 21.2 million investments, four vehicles, 80 'tola' gold and a number of bank accounts.

**Dr. Attiya Inayatullah:** Dr. Attiya Inayatullah of PML-Q owns an immovable property of Rs. 47.942 million, investments of millions of rupees in stock exchange and national savings schemes, a car, Rs 8,000 jewellery, fixed deposits of Rs. 107.802 million and bank accounts.

**Sherry Rehman:** PPP senior leader Sherry Rehman has declared that her husband owns an immovable property worth 90.589 million and movable property of worth Rs 58.557 million. The couple has six vehicles valuing Rs 12.255 million, 190 'tola' jewellery, cash and deposits of some Rs. 69,783 million besides foreign currency accounts. The couple also has liabilities of Rs 208 million.

**Farahnaz Ispahani:** Farahnaz Ispahani and her spouse Hussain Haqqani, who is currently Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, have most of their assets abroad except a house in Islamabad. The couple has \$675,000 worth of apartment in Washington. The mortgage on the apartment is \$555,000. The couple has investments of \$120,000, a BMW vehicle of worth \$30,400 and jewellery valuing \$21,000. The couple has \$90,000 in their bank accounts besides furniture, fittings and articles of personal use valuing \$32,500. Ispahani has mentioned a residential house in F-10/3 purchased in 1992 at Rs 2.7 million.

*(Daily Times - March 24, 2009)*

### **Affluent Women Elected to NA Directly**

Almost all directly elected women parliamentarians belong to affluent families, most of them being feudal landowners or close relatives of influential political leaders. Sixteen women have been directly elected to the 342-member National Assembly (NA). NA Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza is among the richest female members.

**Dr Fehmida Mirza:** In her assets' declaration submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan, NA Speaker Dr Mirza valued her immovable property inside Pakistan at Rs 26.850 million, including a house in Karachi, a plot in Islamabad, a farmhouse and 688 acres of land in Sindh.

**Sumera Malik:** Sumera Malik, a former minister, said she owned agriculture land measuring approximately 9,500 kanals in Mianwali, valued at Rs 39 million. In her assets, she mentioned an 11-kanal plot worth Rs 8.5 million at Bani Gala, Islamabad, and a house worth Rs 36 million in Sector F-6/2 of the federal capital.

**Ghulam Bibi Bharwana:** Ghulam Bibi Bharwana of Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) belongs to a landlord family. She has 2,532.16 kanals of agricultural land worth Rs 850 million, she declared.

**Saima Akhtar Bharwana:** Saima Akhtar Bharwana, who has been elected MNA as an independent candidate twice, owns agricultural land worth Rs 150 million. She did not specify the land's area.

**Firdous Ashiq Awan:** Firdous Ashiq Awan of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has put the value of her immovable assets at Rs 23.761 million that include agricultural land and other property.

**Samina Khalid Ghurki:** Samina Khalid Ghurki, a federal minister, has declared that she owns around 895 kanals of land in district Kasur and some property in Lahore and Rawalpindi without mentioning its present value.

**Tehmina Daultana:** PML-N parliamentarian Tehmina Daultana has declared her immovable property's worth at Rs 132.5 million that includes residential apartments as well as commercial property. She also has agricultural land worth Rs 11.596 million.

**Hina Rabbani Khar:** Hina Rabbani Khar, a state minister, declared that she owns over 1,187 kanals of land at two separate locations in Muzaffargarh district, valuing Rs 6 million. She also owns a plot in Islamabad worth Rs 1.4 million, two vehicles worth Rs 4.6 million and jewellery valuing Rs 2 million.

**Faryal Talpur:** Faryal Talpur, sister of President Asif Ali Zardari, has put the worth of her agricultural assets at Rs 2.166 million and non-agricultural assets, including two houses in Karachi and a plot in Gawadar, at Rs 13.545 million.

**Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho:** Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho has declared immovable property worth Rs 23.846 million and capital investments in various businesses worth Rs 11.667 million.

**Khushbakht Shujaat:** Khushbakht Shujaat of the MQM has two flats worth Rs 2.57 million; shares in a school worth Rs 1.5 million, a vehicle worth Rs 625,000, 150 tolas of gold, bank accounts with Rs 1.025 million and furniture and articles of personal use worth Rs 150,000.

*(Daily Times - March 22, 2009)*

## Women & Economics

### **Discussion on the Issues of Women's Economic Empowerment Organized by NDI**

Minister for Information Sherry Rehman while participating in a discussion on the issue of women's economic empowerment organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) held on March 4 in Islamabad, highlighted the importance and role of the women caucus formation at the parliamentary level which provides a national platform to the women parliamentarians to focus the gender issues regardless of any partisanship, women members can work jointly to enhance the women economic empowerment across the country. The event was chaired by Joy Mac Phail, a former Canadian parliamentarian, and around 30 caucus members exchanged the information and ideas on how to increase women's economic empowerment. There were scores of women leaders in Pakistan and all they needed was a chance, economic empowerment and an enabling environment. At the moment only two percent of women are educated but they are making their presence felt adequately she added. The past generation of women had made great sacrifices to create room for women of today in a male-dominated set-up. The aim should not be to have women in decision-making; rather they should be leaders in decision-making. She called for a collective stance on women's issues, pointing out that there was an urgent need to address matters like burning of schools in Swat. We still have a long way to go in achieving goals on women's empowerment. On the other way the government faced in-party opposition on the issue of money being given to women under the Benazir Income Support Programme and also allotment of land to them. Joy MacPhail stressed the need to legislate equal treatment for women in economic activities such as equal access to banking system, including access to credit, paying women the same as men for doing the same job, as well as women like men must also be provided pension while noting the importance of women being appointed to senior decision-making positions in corporations because that is where economic decisions were made. The general secretary for women parliamentarians' caucus, Nafisa Shah, explained the idea of creating a platform came from women in the parliament. The aim of the caucus was to have a single voice in terms of policy-making; we can discuss women issues across the party line. She highlighted the first project of the caucus was to strengthen women in law enforcement agencies, in fact the step was small yet we brought about a significant change as all parties were playing an important role in the caucus. We can bring the change by following our role models such as Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Begum Rana Liaquat and Benazir Bhutto she added

*(The News March 05, 2009)*

### **Workshop on 'Gender and Microfinance, Enhancing Outreach Impact and Sustainability**

The three-day workshop on 'Gender and Microfinance, Enhancing Outreach, Impact and Sustainability' concluded at Bhurban, with recommendations that sensitivity to gender aspects and particular focus on empowerment of women in microfinance should be ensured. Organized by Women's Empowerment Mainstreaming and Networking (WEMAN) - a process sponsored by Oxfam/Novib at the global level - the workshop was especially designed for Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Chief Operating Officers (COOs) of Microfinance Institutions, Rural Support Programmes and Microfinance Banks. The main objective of the workshop was to help illustrate how a better understanding of gender issues in microfinance and implementation of appropriate strategies and products could help enhance outreach, impact and sustainability of the sector.

*(Daily Times - March 9, 2009)*

## National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)

### **National Commission on the Status of Women Reconstituted**

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on March 9 reconstituted National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) and appointed Anis Haroon its Chairwoman and Rashida Anwar Vice-Chairwoman. Other NCSW

Members include Misbah Momin, Romana Tanvir and Khawar Mumtaz from, Charmeen Hidayatullah and Jamy Chandio from Sindh, Dr Fouzia Saeed and Mariana Babar from NWFP, Rakhshanda Ahmad Ali from Balochistan, Ali Begum from FATA, Ratna Chawla from religious minorities, Bushra Ali Zulqamin from Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Noorul Ain from Northern Areas. The Law and Justice, Foreign Affairs and Interior secretaries and the Women Development Ministry's Director General will be ex-officio members of the Commission, according to an official press release. The release mentioned the NCSW would review the government's policy, programmes and other steps for the development of women in the country. It said the commission's main objective was emancipation of women, equalization of opportunities, improvement of socio-economic conditions amongst women, and elimination of all forms of gender discriminations prevalent in the country

*(Daily Times - March 10, 2009)*

## Activities & Commitments on International Women's Day

### **Govt Working to Improve Status of Women: Gilani**

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani in connection with International Women's Day on 8 March expressed that the government has been endeavoring to bring a positive change in the lives of women within available resources and want them to realize their full potential as equal citizens of the country. The present government has a definite agenda for women's development and empowerment. Under a four-pronged strategy, efforts are underway to reduce feminized poverty, promote gender equality, end violence against women, and legislating laws to empower women. He also announced that government would soon present legislation to curb growing crimes against women and also ensured that the existing 10 percent quota for women in public sector jobs was fulfilled.

*(Daily Times - March 9, 2009)*

### **No Compromise on Girls' Education: ANP**

While addressing the 'BNP Women Wing' meeting held on 8th March Afrasiab Khattak ANP NWFP President stated that the Awami National Party-led government will never compromise on women's education and rights. ANP Women's Wing meeting on the Role of Women in Peace and Security - held in connection with International Women's Day. New bills would be tabled in the provincial assembly to empower the women of the province by the ANP, he committed.

*(Daily Times - March 9, 2009)*

### **Women's Day Marks Crisis of Poverty, Violence**

Women on March 8 rallied worldwide to demand equal rights and protest against domestic violence and growing poverty in the global economic crisis as they marked International Women's Day. Thousands gathered in public squares from Bangalore to Kinshasa to the capitals of Europe, drawing attention to discrimination and fears facing women in their respective countries. For Europeans, deteriorating financial security in the face of recession has made life more precarious for women workers. "Masculine globalisation equals female poverty" read a banner at a march in Madrid, while in Warsaw calls for equality were linked to paychecks: "Equal rights, equal pay." "When, in times of crisis, jobs become scarce, women are often the ones who are the first to go," said Hlega Schwitzer, a leader of Germany's powerful IG Metall union. "Women must not be the losers in the crisis," she told a gathering in Emden, northwest Germany, as she noted that women still earn on average 23 percent less than men. The French government sought to raise awareness by releasing a book for 18-year-old girls entitled "Respect Girls", warning teenagers not to buy into stereotypes in advertising and provide information on sexual harassment and equal opportunities. "These few pages will help you know your basic rights so that you can translate this into positive and ambitious life choices," Valerie Letard, state secretary for women's issues, at a meeting with about 100

young women in Paris. The Vatican took a different spin on Women's Day, proclaiming what has liberated Western women the most is none other than the washing machine. "The debate is still open. Some say it was the pill, others the liberalisation of abortion, or being able to work outside the home. Others go even further: the washing machine," the official Vatican newspaper said.

*(Daily Times - March 9, 2009)*

## Reports/Articles/Books on Gender

### **Report on the Performance of Women Parliamentarians in the 12<sup>th</sup> National Assembly**

A study on the performance of women parliamentarians in the 12<sup>th</sup> National Assembly was launched by Aurat Foundation on March 5. Study pointed out the women parliamentarians in the 12<sup>th</sup> National Assembly were discriminated in terms of time and opportunities to speak and raise issues in the legislature, the total 17 percent women in the Assembly moved 42 percent of the private members bills and 27 percent of the total questions. These statistics also explain the women elected on reserved seats were not able to make any difference such as, 3,698 interventions by 58 women legislators during last five years and on average they made 10 interventions per day. Study highlights four key words — **pioneering, participation, persistence and purpose** — sum up the overall achievements of women MNAs. 73 women in the Parliament in the 12<sup>th</sup> National Assembly from among which 60 came on reserved seats. It explains that most of the women elected on general seats belonged to traditional political families with feudal backgrounds whereas a significant number of women elected on reserved seats were party activists with a middle class or upper middle class background.

Women legislatures made most of their interventions during the 'Question Hour' followed by their participation in debates (380), Point of Order (306), Private Members Bill (101), Calling Attention Notices (99) and Adjournments and Privileged Motions (69). The bill also mentions a long list of women rights issues raised by women MNAs with prominent ones as Karokari, violence against women, Hudood Ordinance and discrimination against women in institutions. Appreciating the effort behind producing a comprehensive report aimed at highlighting the work done by women Parliamentarians, Sherry commented that women intellectually empowered the last Parliament by keeping in mind their dual responsibility instead urging male parliamentarians to rethink their policies and follow in the footsteps of women. Pakistan is ranked 45 in the International Parliamentary Union list and is ahead of Canada and UK she added.

*(The News - March 6, 2009)*

### **Report on 'Fight Against Dowry' Launched**

In a continuous struggle by challenging, communicating and changing societal attitudes and mindset through seminal initiatives seeking wisdom from hindsight and sharing the learning with others, the SACHET-Pakistan celebrates the completion of its 10 years arduous journey in 2009. Joining in the celebration with the International Women's Day on March 8, SACHET has launched a brief report on 'Fight Against Dowry' (FAD), an original and flagship campaign that it undertook with the inception of the organisation.

SACHET Executive Director and Founder Director of Agehi Resource Centre Dr. Rakshinda Perveen said that the purpose of the report is to record the ordeal it faced during its determined journey while pursuing some vital projects on women's issues, on the bumpy road of awareness raising and policy advocacy. She said that another objective is to highlight some successes and impacts it generated during the course of the campaign. According to Dr. Rakshinda, initially the issue of dowry was embedded in the fabric of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Women (VAW), but later it sprung up as a district issue and independent campaign. The dowry report campaign scorecard demonstrates that things take time, Dr. Rakshinda said, adding that with consistence, resilience and steadfastness, achieving a target became possible. The report is prepared in four parts, beginning with tracing the milestones of a passionate and

vigorous fight against a social evil, which has deep and complex roots in our social fabric. The second part records a summation of the final policy dialogue convened to have debate on alternative perspective of dowry. The dialogue was held at SACHET-Pakistan on November 27, 2008. Part three contains three exclusive interviews of renowned personalities on the issue of dowry. Part four lists some of the new actions and initiatives of SACHET, envisaged to take the FAD campaign to a higher and larger orbit, so that the message could be spread to both popular and powerful domains simultaneously. SACHET hopes that the report would serve as a motivating factor to its team and partners to continue their struggle against such social evils which have brazen effect on women's lives as well as their participation in the life of the society. The report also expects to convince the proponents of dowry that it is about time to rethink, redesign, and reform the society from all menaces and taboos.

*(The News - March 7, 2009)*



### Women & HR Issues

#### **Women First to fall to Extremism; South Asian Women in Media (SAWM)**

Women are the first to fall in the grip of rising extremism in Pakistan and are largely left out in policy making, speakers called on March 8 at a dialogue organized in connection with the International Women's Day by South Asian Women in Media (SAWM) at the Durab Patel Auditorium of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). Speakers highlighted the trouble-hit areas of the country, women suffered but their miseries were not paid any attention and, also expressed reservations and concern against the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation (NAR), that it was promulgated without any consultation with women, the major stakeholders in it. Legal expert Hina Jillani pointed out the NAR was not promulgated on the demands of the people of the Malakand Division, rather on the demands of gun-totting groups, and the judges of Qazi Courts would be threatened and killed if anyone thought the judge had not interpreted the Islamic laws correctly. In result of that the law changed when every judge tried to interpret and implement it according to his own understanding.

Women's Action Forum (WAF) Convener Nighat Saeed Khan prettily focused the flaws in NAR such as, it was mentioned in the NAR that 'immoral women' would not be tolerated. Now it remains a question what is immoral? They can even call a school-going girl immoral, The WAF convener questioned with whom the government was making a peace deal and what the government has done in Swat and Malakand cannot be termed as a 'peace accord'. The displacement taking place in FATA and the Tribal Areas was directly affecting women but they were given no representation in the 'peace accord'. Women should be given the rights to citizenship, she added. Educationist Samina Rehman recorded her reservations as, it remained a question that who would try and rebuild those 200 schools -most of them girls'- which were bombed by terrorists in FATA and the surrounding areas whereas NAR has not been included even a single point about the women's rights to education. Noted artist Salima Hashmi ironically commented as women were the cause of all the evil in society and under government policy women would be eliminated from the society. She also pointed out the shocking victimization of Shabana, the singer who was murdered in Mingora and her dead body was thrown in a chowk.

*(Daily Times - March 9, 2009)*

#### **TTP Bars Women from Malakand Shopping Centre**

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on 29 March declared a ban on women's entry in shopping centres in Malakand, and warning of strict action against those who violated the order. However, women can visit bazaars if a male member of family accompanies them. The TTP in Malakand left pamphlets at the Malakand Press Club in which its spokesman Mulla Ali warned women to stop visiting shopping centres alone. The Taliban also asked shop owners to put up banners that informed the women of the announcement. The pamphlets also warned people in the computer and mobile ring tone businesses to stop their un-Islamic practices. The Taliban also warned the government to close family planning centres in Malakand and issued directives to the Batkhela hospital medical superintendent to hire female technicians for ECG and female doctors for ultrasound. Meanwhile, Swat TTP spokesman Muslim Khan also clarified that there was no ban on administration of polio drops in Swat.

*(The Daily Times - March 27, 2009)*

### **Law Implementation, Awareness Stressed to Control Child Labour**

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) organized the workshop on March 3 titled “**Activating Media in Combating Worst Forms of Child Labour in Pakistan**”. Speakers highlighted that there are more than 3.3 million child labours across Pakistan and engaged in work that deprived them of adequate education, good health and basic freedom. This social, economic and human rights issue reduced children hopes for a better future. Federal Minister for Labour Khursheed Shah, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Samsam Bukhari, Federal Minister for Human Rights Mumtaz Alam Gilani, ILO Director Donglin Li, Norway Embassy Second Secretary Political Lars Christie, ILO National Project Manager Saba Mohsin Raza, Senior Representative Pakistan Workers Federation Akram Bundha and senior columnist Javed Chaudhry addressed the workshop. According to the Minister for Labour, the Government was committed to eliminate the menace of child labour and striving hard to achieve the targets under the ILO Conventions ratified by Pakistan, and child labour would be eliminate from the country while imparting education to females as educated mothers could improve the situation. Soon government would launch technical institutions all over the country to impart technical education to the children over 10 years age he added. Mr. Li Director ILO, pointed out that child labour was a common issue in third world countries where poverty ratio was high and opportunities for employment were scarce. However, the child labour could be controlled gradually by improving economic conditions. He suggested a proactive role by all segments of the society in this regard such as media could play a vital role in communicating the gravity of the situation to the stakeholders, the government and the people of Pakistan.

*(Daily Times - March 4, 2009)*

### **Child Protection Legislation on Cards**

The draft of a child protection bill has been forwarded to the Finance Division for overview before presentation to the cabinet table for approval. Official sources said the bill was an initiative of the Ministry of Social Welfare and special education to stop violence against children, one of most vulnerable segments of the society. The official said that as per constitutional requirements the Finance Division will examine the bill and after its necessary concurrence it will be put before the cabinet for consideration. The bill has been drafted after intensive consultations with all the stakeholders to provide institutional framework for child protection and conducive environment for their growth. The National Commission on Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) has recommended effective implementation of UN recommendations and national, regional and international commitments regarding child rights. The bill will provide requisite statutory status to the commission for effective performance, supervision and coordination regarding child rights including establishment of a Child Rights Fund. The bill is aimed at promoting a children friendly environment that places children at the center of development, recognises their individuality and values their voice and protects them from violence, abuse and exploitation. It will lead to formulation of a national policy for child welfare and development in the country, the official said.

The ministry plans to establish child courts at district level to deter child abuse in all its forms including physical violence, child mutilation, exposure to drugs, child labour and provide protection to children who are handicapped or in need of social protection, he added. Under the bill, centres will be established at district level on the pattern of National Child Protection Islamabad which would rescue and provide protection to children against violence. The initiative will promote the best interests of the children by creating a facilitative and protective environment and rehabilitative mechanisms in line with the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the official said.

*(The Nation - March 22, 2009)*

### **UN Body Declares Religious Defamation Human Rights Violation**

A United Nations forum on March 26 passed a resolution condemning 'defamation of religion' as a human rights violation, despite wide concerns that it could be used to justify curbs on free speech in Muslim countries. The UN Human Rights Council adopted the non-binding text, proposed by Pakistan on behalf of Islamic states, with a vote of 23 states in favour and 11 against, with 13 abstentions. Belief communities: Western governments and a broad alliance of activist groups have voiced dismay about the religious defamation text, which adds to recent efforts to broaden the concept of human rights to protect communities of believers rather than individuals. Pakistan, speaking for the 56-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), explained a 'delicate balance' had to be struck between freedom of expression and respect for religions. According to the resolution Muslim minorities had faced intolerance, discrimination and acts of violence since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, including laws and administrative procedures that stigmatize religious followers. 'Defamation of religions' is a serious affront to human dignity leading to a restriction on the freedom of their adherents and incitement to religious violence, the adopted text read, adding that 'Islam' is frequently and wrongly associated with human rights violations and terrorism. It called on states to ensure that religious places, sites, shrines and symbols are protected, to reinforce laws to deny impunity for those exhibiting intolerance of ethnic and religious minorities, and to take all possible measures to promote tolerance and respect for all religions and beliefs. The 47-member Human Rights Council has drawn criticism for reflecting mainly the interests of Islamic and African countries, which when voting together can control its agenda. Addressing the body, Germany stated on behalf of the European Union that while instances of Islamophobia, Christianophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of religious discrimination should be taken seriously, it was problematic to reconcile the notion of defamation (of religion) with the concept of discrimination. Individual rights: The European Union does not see the concept of defamation of religion as a valid one in a human rights discourse. The European Union believes that a broader, more balanced and thoroughly rights-based text would be best suited to address the issues underlying this draft resolution. India and Canada also took to the floor of the Geneva-based council to raise objections to the OIC text. Both called the text looked too narrowly at the discrimination issue. It is individuals who have rights, not religions; Ottawa's representative expressed the body. Canada believes that to extend (the notion of) defamation beyond its proper scope would jeopardise the fundamental right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of expression on religious subjects.

*(The Daily Times - March 27, 2009)*

#### A First Parliamentary Year in Focus

The first parliamentary year of the PPP-led coalition government saw many upheavals including the judicial crisis, removal of Shahbaz Sharif-led Punjab government and making and breaking of political alliances, which largely reflected its inability to focus on issues of public importance. The new parliament that came into existence after the February 18, 2008 elections started on a positive note with the two major political parties - the PPP and the PML-N - entering into coalition. However, the alliance ended on a negative note with the Sharif brothers being disqualified by the Supreme Court and Nawaz Sharif successfully leading a long march against the government for the reinstatement of sacked judges of the higher judiciary. Asfandiyar Wali Khan's ANP and Fazlur Rehman's JUI-F were the two other parties in the four-party alliance. The MQM joined the coalition after the PML-N pulled out due to differences with the PPP, especially over the reinstatement of the sacked judges. The PPP-PML-N alliance also helped Yousuf Raza Gilani make history by being the first Prime Minister to get a unanimous vote of confidence. Dr Fehmida Mirza also bagged the honour of becoming the first woman National Assembly Speaker in the Muslim world. It was also for first time in the parliamentary history of the country that the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly became chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Nisar replaced Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi as leader of the opposition after the PML-N moved to the opposition benches. However, the coalition fell apart soon after President Asif Zardari refused to reinstate the sacked judges even after the resignation of former president Pervez Musharraf. PML-N federal ministers resigned from the cabinet in protest and the move severed relations between the two parties creating tensions in Punjab where they were in coalition. The PPP-PML-N relations declined further after Zardari decided to contest the presidential election. The PML-N introduced its own candidate Justice (R) Saeeduz Zaman Siddiqui. President Zardari addressed a joint sitting of parliament in the first such address in about five years. Despite the strained relations between the PPP and the PML-N, the former continued to strengthen its grip on the top slots of the government ultimately getting its own man, Federal Minister for Law and Justice Farooq Naik, elected as the Senate chairman. The strained relations between the PPP and PML-N almost reached a point of no return with the Supreme Court's decision disqualifying the Sharif brothers from electoral politics and allegations by PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif that President Zardari influenced the decision in order to form a PPP government in the Punjab province. Nawaz retaliated by putting his party's weight behind the lawyers' movement and led a successful long march for the reinstatement of the sacked chief justice and other judges of the higher judiciary. This put the PPP on the back foot and it reverted to its policy of national reconciliation. This time Prime Minister Gilani took the lead in efforts to bring the political forces together to confront the challenges faced by the country on national and international fronts. The PPP also suffered a dent towards the end of the parliamentary year when Mian Raza Rabbani resigned as the leader of the House in Senate and as federal minister for inter-provincial coordination in protest against the party's decision to nominate Naik as its candidate for the chairman of Senate, and Sherry Rehman resigned as the federal minister for information and broadcasting in protest against gags on the media. Khawaja Muhammad Khan Hoti also resigned from his cabinet slot over differences with the PPP-led government.

*(Daily Times - March 27, 2009)*

## **Federal Cabinet**

### **Several Cabinet Committees Reconstituted**

The Cabinet Division on 31 March notified the reconstitution of several cabinet committees by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani. These included Committee on Investment, Social Sector Coordination Committee, Committee on Regulatory Bodies, Committee on Agriculture, Committee on Energy and Committee on Privatisation. The prime minister will head all committees, except the Committee on Privatization. According to the notification, The members of the Committee on Investment include the ministers for Commerce; Communications; Food and Agriculture; Housing and Works; Industries and Production; Investment; Ports and Shipping; Privatisation; Textile Industries; Tourism; Water and Power; Finance, Revenue Economic Affairs and Statistics; Information Technology and Telecommunications; and Petroleum and Natural Resources ministers (when appointed). The Social Sector Coordination Committee members include the ministers for Education; Environment; Health; Labour and Manpower; Law and Justice; Local Government and Rural Development; Population Welfare; Social Welfare and Special Education; Women's Development; Youth Affairs; and the minister for Finance, Revenue Economic Affairs and Statistics (when appointed). The Committee on Regulatory Bodies members are the ministers for Commerce; Health; Industries and Production; Information and Broadcasting; Investment; Privatization; Water and Power; and the ministers for Finance, Revenue Economic Affairs and Statistics; Information Technology and Telecom; and Petroleum and Natural Resources (when appointed). The Committee on Agriculture members includes the ministers for Commerce; Food and Agriculture; Industries and Production; Textile Industry; Water and Power; and the Finance, Revenue Economic Affairs and Statistics Minister (When appointed). The Committee on Energy members are the ministers for Commerce; Environment; Industries and Production; Investment; Privatization; Textile Industry; Water and Power; and the ministers for Finance, Revenue Economic Affairs and Statistics; and Petroleum and Natural Resources (when appointed). The Committee on Privatization will be headed by Adviser to the PM on Finance, Economic Affairs and Statistics and members include the ministers for Commerce; Industries and Production; Investment; Labour and Manpower; Law and Justice; Ports and Shipping; Privatization; Textile Industry; Water and Power and the ministers for Finance, Revenue Economic Affairs and Statistics; Information Technology and Telecommunications; and Petroleum and Natural Resources (when appointed). In addition to the notified members, the committees will also invite secretaries and the officials of the relevant ministries, divisions and organizations.

*(Daily Times April, 2009)*

### **Kaira Replaces Sherry as her Resign Accepted**

The resignation of PPP leader Sherry Rehman from the office of Federal Minister for Information and Broadcast has been accepted. Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs Qamar Zaman Kaira has been given an additional charge of Ministry of Information and Broadcast. The decision to accept Sherry's resignation was decided at a meeting between Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani and President Asif Ali Zardari held on 14 March.

*(Pakistan Times - March 14, 2009)*

## **Office of the President**

### **President Withdraws Mobile Courts Ordinance**

President Asif Ali Zardari, on March 4 by the advice of the prime minister, has withdrawn the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance, 2009, canceling an earlier order for the establishment of mobile courts in the country. President's spokesman Farhatullah Babar explained that the advice to withdraw the amendment ordinance was received at the Presidency from Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani

on March 3<sup>rd</sup> evening. The said ordinance, envisaging the setting up of mobile courts, had been issued on February 27 on the advice of the prime minister. The Presidency stated that the prime minister had requested reconsideration and had advised the president to withdraw the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance 2009 (VII of 2009) in exercise of his powers under Article 89 (2)(b) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. After the receipt of the advice, the president approved the Prime Minister's proposal to withdraw the ordinance. Earlier in the National Assembly (NA), the prime minister had advised the president to reverse the decision after it came under criticisms from every circle. The said ordinance was issued under article 89 of the constitution. PM advises the president to withdraw the ordinance under the same article. But the prime minister had clarified that the House had not been in session when the ordinance was promulgated.

*(Daily Times - March 4, 2009)*

## **Punjab Provincial Government**

### **Shahbaz Restored as CM by Court**

PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif has become the second Chief Minister of the Province who was restored through a court's order after being removed from the office. Shahbaz, who was disqualified earlier by the court on 25 February has been given interim relief and restored to the office by a five members' bench of Supreme Court of Pakistan. History of Punjab shows that only two CMs of the province have been able to get back their offices after losing them. Mian Manzoor Wattoo and CM of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif, has been restored to office, who was disqualified by an SC bench including Justice Musa K Leghari, Sheikh Hakim Ali and Sakhi Hussain Bokhari on February 25 this year had assumed the office for second time on June 8, 2008. Earlier, he had also served as CM Punjab from 20, 1997 to October 12, 1999. The review petition was filed by the government to challenge the disqualification of Shahbaz Sharif and the five-member bench of SC including Justice Tassaduq Hussain Gillani, Justice Nasir ul Mulk, Justice Musa K Leghari, Justice Sheikh Hakim Ali and Justice Sabih ud Din Ahmed provided interim relief to Shahbaz and restored his government. Another interesting feature of Shahbaz Sharif's restoration to the office of CM was its striking resemblance with the restoration of his brother, Nawaz Sharif's government in 1993. Nawaz Sharif's government was dismissed by the then President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on April 18, 1993. The petition challenging the decision was filed and on May 26, 1993, the court restored Nawaz's government.

*(The News April 01, 2009)*

## **Government Watch - Economic Governance**

### **Zardari Announces Rs 46.6 Billion Package for Balochistan**

President Zardari, in presence of Governor Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Magsi and Chief Minister Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani announced a sum of Rs46.6 billion for development package for Balochistan. Out of this sum, four water storage reservoirs would be constructed at a cost of Rs36 billion, small delay-action dams at a cost of Rs2.5 billion, Rs3 billion will be spent on projects in Quetta and Rs5 billion on transmission lines. He expressed that the Parliament and the people of Pakistan would ensure that the rights of the people of the underdeveloped province were not denied. President visited the Balochistan for the first time after taking oath as the president was a matter of immense pleasure for him. The PPP-led government was the aware of all aspects of the Balochistan issue and would make all-out efforts to resolve it at the earliest. The Balochistan issue has been existing for more than five decades and it could not be resolved in one year, he also assuring that the issue would be resolved soon. The Parliament was the best forum for the resolution of the issues, the president had recommended the formation of committees, which would present their suggestion to the Parliament after negotiations with the representatives of the province.

*(The News March 28, 2009)*

## Donors' Financial Assistance and Economic Governance

### **US to Pakistan Assistance Bill Likely to Include One-Time \$ 5 billion: CSM Report**

U.S. lawmakers will soon introduce a measure on expanding socio-economic assistance for Pakistan to \$ 1.5 annually that is likely to include an additional one time \$ 5 billion in support of the democratic government's efforts to pull the key South Asian country out of its economic troubles. The economic support initiative is part of the policy shift Washington is in the process of making in its relationship with the anti-terrorism ally in the region, considered critical to U.S. security interests. The assistance will be geared towards enabling the elected government to combat violent extremism more comprehensively, particularly in its tribal border areas along Afghanistan, where thousands of US troops are battling a spreading Taliban insurgency. Two influential senators are expected to file legislation in the coming days that would triple nonmilitary US aid to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion a year and include \$5 billion to stave off an imminent economic crisis, The Christian Science Monitor reported on March 2. The report came days after the Obama Administration held review consultations with Pakistani and Afghan officials on evolving future U.S. policy toward the militancy hit border region. Citing some of the pressing challenges facing the nuclear-armed country including its economic woes, the report said "the shift is part of an increasing awareness of Pakistan's precarious position" and that more than military operations will be needed to build a stable state capable of beating back extremism in the long term.

Senator John Kerry, chairman of the influential Foreign Relations Committee and Ranking Republican member Senator Richard Lugar are lead supporters of the expected new legislation on Pakistan, to be known as Kerry Lugar Act. Kerry made a pitch for the much-needed additional \$ 5 billion aid for Pakistan in the light of a new Atlantic Council report on US relations with Pakistan last week, cautioning that the time was running out. The legislative measure mirrors a plan that Vice President Joseph Biden proposed last year when he was still a senator. Meanwhile, the Pakistani diplomats, led by Ambassador Husain Haqqani, have been meeting with leaders on the Capital Hill to underscore the importance of economic support for Pakistan.

*(The Post-March 3, 2009)*

### **Italy Provides 40m Euros for Micro-Credit to Cope Poverty**

Italy will provide up to 40 million euros to Pakistan for the provision of micro-credit to the people living in areas bordering Afghanistan, including FATA, the NWFP and Balochistan, explained by Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry Development Expert Mr. Walter Zucconi here on March 8, and that amount will be used for granting micro-credit to the people. Mr. Zucconi is on a weeklong visit to Pakistan to meet officials to discuss Italian proposals regarding assistance for poverty alleviation projects.

*(Daily Times -March 9, 2009)*

### **ADB to Restructure Country Partnership Strategy (CPS)**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has decided to restructure its \$4.4 billion Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) 2009-2013, funding only selected projects and moving away from the education sector. According to the 165-page CPS unveiled a few weeks ago, its previous active portfolio was worth \$5.2 billion. There were 80 ADB-funded projects at the end of 2006, which were decreased to 58 by Aug 31, 2007.

The CPS says: "Education will not be a focal area of ADB given the substantial amounts of external financing for the sector from other multilateral and bilateral donors." The CPS, however, makes no mention of the fact that the government has cut Rs100 billion in funding for social sectors, especially education and health, reducing expenditure on the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). ADB's support for governance will remain limited, with focus on public resource management, economic reforms and private sector development. In the agriculture sector, the bank will now mainly focus on irrigation and water

management. The bank's support for rural development projects and stand-alone agriculture reforms programmes is being phased out. The document says overall progress on the Access to Justice Programme, for reforms in the judicial sector and police services at the federal level, "remained uneven". The bank says implementation of a number of stand-alone education and health projects has shown mixed results in the past. A Decentralised Elementary Education Project in Sindh, which had been approved in 2002, faced delays and never got off the ground. There was slow progress in the multi-sector Devolved Social Services Programmes (DSSP) in Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan because of start-up delays, even though many of the goals were achieved, said the bank. Over the next five years, the CPS said, Pakistan needed \$60 billion just to overcome the energy crisis, adding that the bank would continue to fund activities in this vital sector. The report attributed the crisis to policy bottlenecks and unmet capital investment. According to the bank's calculation, the country's power system is under increasing stress, with a shortage of 5,000 megawatts during peak hours. "The gap between demand and supply will grow in the coming years."

*(Dawn - March 15, 2009)*

## **Reports & Statistics on the State of Economy**

### **Fiscal Economic Growth 2008-2009: ADB Estimates Pakistan's Growth at 2.8% in 2008-09**

Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2009 has projected Pakistan's economic growth at 2.8 percent for current fiscal year 2008-09 due to the impact of the global slowdown, tight demand management policies and the power deficit. ADB's Country Director, Rune Stroem has termed fall in growth as warning bells on for Pakistan and has declared growth less than 3 percent is concern for us as well as any body else, growth less than 3 percent has its social implications as un-employment being major impact. Addressing a media briefing at Pakistan Resident Mission along with country economist Safdar Parvez, Rune Stroem said Pakistan has been fortunate being not affected, as it has not yet adopted such sophisticated financial instruments that had led to financial crisis in US and around the globe. However, he was of the view that global economic slowdown would definitely affect Pakistan's economy in terms of negative impact on exports, reduced foreign investment and remittances in months to come. Mr Stroem said its ripe time for Pakistan to learn the global financial crisis and prepare its own second generation capital and financial market reforms having effective checks on instruments to be introduced. Pakistan's economic growth is not expected to fall further as terrorist attacks, militancy, political instability as well as power and gas shortages have been kept in view while finalising the growth estimates, Safdar Parvez informed. ADB is extending financial help to Pakistan for finalising second generation financial sector reforms and would also help to put in place effective regulatory mechanism to save its financial sector from crisis similar to global crisis, Rune added. Growth in agriculture will improve with respect to that in the last fiscal year, but will remain moderate on account of high input costs including electricity, fertilizers, pesticides and pest attacks. The sugarcane crop has been disappointing and the cotton crop has been short of target. However, the wheat crop is projected to be very good because of improved water availability and a 52 percent increase in the support price for farmers, announced in September 2008. Energy shortages, the law and order situation and capacity and input constraints caused by higher import prices from the large depreciation of the Pakistan rupee will lower industrial performance. Growth in services, too, will moderate because of the knock-on effect of the lower growth momentum in the commodity-producing sectors on wholesale and retail trade. The performance of the financial sub-sector could be affected by the increase in non-performing loans this year. The fiscal deficit is expected to decline in FY2009, as the government removes or reduces subsidies and rationalises development expenditure. With the fiscal deficit targeted to fall to 4.3 percent of GDP, the government has already fully eliminated the subsidy on petroleum products, and is undertaking a phased reduction in the electricity subsidy, with the target to remove this subsidy too by the end of FY2009. A reprioritisation of projects is expected to lead to a slashing of the development budget by over Rs 100 billion for FY2009. The fiscal deficit in the first half of the fiscal year of 1.9

percent of GDP suggests that the authorities are on course on meeting the fiscal deficit target for the full year. The economy needs to develop infrastructure and invest in health and education. Deficit spending can be carried out judiciously and it need not be inflationary because the economy is very far from full employment. Although global food and oil prices are on the decline, the increase in the wheat support price and the reduction in subsidies, along with currency depreciation, will together keep up the inflationary pressure in FY2009, resulting in an average consumer price inflation of around 20.0 percent. Despite the fact that inflation pressure declined from November 2008 to January 2009, the consumer price index, food inflation and core inflation were still all over 20percent on a year-on-year basis. Despite growth in exports, the current account deficit jumped to \$7.3 billion in first half of 2009 and came in 20 percent higher than in the same period in the previous fiscal year. A comparison of the first 7 months reveals that the current account deficit in FY2009 was only 1.5 percent above the level in FY2008. Imports would need to continue to compress significantly in the second half of FY2009 to improve the current account balance. The current account deficit is projected to go down to 6.0 percent of GDP in FY2009. Workers' remittances would need to be sustained to achieve the projected reduction in the current account imbalance. The current account gap remains a major challenge that was exacerbated by the deterioration in the financial account in the 7 months of FY2009. This imbalance imposes a balance-of-payments constraint to sustainable growth in Pakistan.

*(Daily Times - April 1, 2009)*

### **Trade Deficit Falls 6.8pc to \$11.62bn - FBS**

The trade deficit for the first eight months of the current fiscal year stood at \$11.62 billion, registering a decrease of around 6.86 per cent compared to \$12.47 billion in the same period last fiscal, the Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS) said on 9 March. It is interesting to note that the balance of trade has for the first time registered a decline and also imports went into the negative zone, helping the policy-makers to keep current account deficit (CAD) well below 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Decline in the balance of trade and imports clearly reveals that the economy is showing signs of slowness and it will continue to do so in the coming months, an analyst said. During July-February 2008-09, Pakistan's exports totalled \$12.16 billion and imports \$23.77 billion against \$11.66 billion and \$24.14 billion, respectively recorded during the same period last year. Imports were 1.49 percent less than the same period last fiscal, while exports rose only by 4.25 percent, said FBS data. The current trend of decline in exports particularly when compared with last month and corresponding month of last year indicates that the country would miss the export target of \$22.10 billion. However, an overall decrease in imports during the first eight months as well as month-on-month basis, the imports will remain well below the set target of \$30 billion, the analyst anticipated. Imports were \$2.12 billion during February 2009 down 41 percent compared to \$3.66 billion in February 2008. However, comparing exports of February 2009 with the same month of last year, they were \$1.2 billion against \$1.5 billion showing a decrease of 17.68 per cent, the data added. Comparing exports of February 2009 with the previous month, the bulletin reveals a decrease of 6.94 percent as against exports of the previous month, which stood at \$1.3 billion. The imports declined by 16.02 per cent from \$2.52 billion recorded in January 2009.

*(The News - March 10, 2009)*

## **Government Watch - Local Governance**

### **Balochistan Restores Levies to Pre-2000 Status**

The Balochistan cabinet has approved restoration of levies force to pre-2002 status in line with the resolution adopted by the Balochistan Assembly, as Chief Minister Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani believed this was a step forward toward good governance. A high-level committee comprising home, finance,

revenue and law ministers would supervise the process of the restoration; it was decided in a meeting of the provincial cabinet held with Chief Minister Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani in the chair here March 5. Reviewing the law and order situation in detail, the cabinet was unanimous that the restoration of Levies force was unavoidable for bringing improvement in the law and order situation. The provincial cabinet, discussing the proposal to transform the Quetta Wasa into Balochistan Wasa or give it under the authority of the provincial government, decided to remove relevant complications and submit it in the next cabinet meeting after being approved following completion of the paper work. The cabinet made the promotion of the teachers and raise in their salaries conditional with their training, thus upholding a decision of the provincial cabinet made in 2001 with regard to the issue. The cabinet, however, rejected the proposal of recruiting the SST teachers on ad-hoc basis. Following the cabinet decision, now the recruitment of the SSTs (BS-16) would be made through the Balochistan Public Service Commission to make the process free and fair. The cabinet also upheld its previous decision regarding restoration of the Qazi Courts in the province; laying stress on the immediate restoration of the Qazi Courts and appointment of the candidates graduated from the Wafaqul Madaras. Speaking on the occasion, Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani said that resolution adopted in the provincial assembly regarding restoration of Levies force would be implemented forthwith; and he also noted that it is the endeavour of the government to ensure implementation of all the resolutions to be adopted by the provincial assembly. He said that it was the top priority of the government to establish good governance in the province, and for these steps were being taken in order to bring improvement in performance of all the departments and the institutions. The cabinet expressed satisfaction over successful completion of the Senate polls as well as over promotion of the political harmony and understanding in the province. The cabinet members also extended felicitation to the newly elected Senators and hoped they would play role in highlighting the issues of the province. The cabinet also condemned the suicidal bomb attack at a seminary in Killi Karbala of Pishin district and offered 'fateha' for the departed souls. Besides, the cabinet members, Balochistan Assembly Speaker Raees Muhammad Aslam Bhotani also participated in the meeting.

*(The Daily Times - March 6, 2009)*

### **Security Forces and TNSM Strike 17-Point Accord**

The NWFP Government struck a 17-point deal with the banned Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi in the Swat valley on March 5, A 17-point understanding was reached with a TNSM delegation and music has been banned in Swat and it has been agreed to expel prostitutes and pimps from the district ANP and PPP co-led the provincial government at the talks, while Maulana Safiullah and spokesman Amir Izzat Khan represented the TNSM - with Malakand Commissioner Syed Muhammad Javed also in attendance. The meeting came a day after suspected Taliban killed two army troops and continued taking government officials hostage, despite having agreed to ceasefire in the wake of the provincial government's February 16 accord on the implementation of sharia in Swat Sharia: According to that accord, Music and vulgar CDs will be banned; shops will remain closed during prayer times and the complete implementation of sharia laws in the region will come into effect from the 16 March, according to the key points of the agreement. Vulgarity would be rooted out and profiteers dealt with under the law. An anti-crime campaign will be launched and Quran classes will be started for jail inmates in the region. The Malakand commissioner's office released to the media the 17-point understanding - which does not explained the fact that if the Taliban would stop abducting government officials and attacking government forces. The commissioner explained the TNSM delegation that he would forward the 17 points to the chief secretary in Peshawar for the government's approval, however, the TNSM delegates insisted that the commissioner bring into effect some of the points through his own administrative powers.

*(The Daily News -March 5, 2009)*

### **Qazi Courts Start Functioning in Swat**

Though the proposed Nizam-e-Adl Regulation has not been formally promulgated in Malakand division, the newly appointed Qazis have started hearing cases in accordance with it. The first case of civil nature was decided under the proposed law in Khwazakhela on March 17. The details of the case showed that a resident of the area owed Rs37,000 to his fellow villager. The Qazi Court took Rs21,000 from the borrower in cash and paid it to the lender and asked him to pay the rest of the amount in instalments. The Malakand division Commissioner Syed Muhammad Javed also visited the court to overview the proceedings. The commissioner also met veteran leader of the Awami National Party Afzal Khan Lala at his residence in Durushkhela, Matta, and discussed the prevailing situation in the valley. Exams started: The Intermediate examinations started in the valley on March 17 and the commissioner visited several examination centres in Charbagh, Khwazakhela and other areas. Alternative arrangements were made for the students of those schools, which had been destroyed, in the military operation. In the Dherai area of Kabal tehsil, people staged a protest and blocked Matta-Mingora road for all kinds of traffic. They demanded dismantling of checkpoints set up in the educational institutions and private properties.

*(The News - March 18, 2009)*

## **Election Commission and Electoral Reforms**

### **Justice Hamid Mirza Appointed new CEC**

The Government on 17 March appointed Justice Hamid Ali Mirza, a retired judge of the Supreme Court, as Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) with immediate effect. It may be mentioned here that Justice (Retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq, who was holding the office of CEC, retired on March 16, 2009. The President Asif Zardari has appointed Justice (Retd) Hamid Ali Mirza as CEC, contrary to the speculations that Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar would be given the slot after his retirement as CJ. In fact Justice Dogar was deliberately ignored in view of the controversies surrounding him. Political parties may have objected to Dogar's appointment as CEC. Zardari appointed Mirza for a three-year term to the post lying vacant for the last two days after the retirement of Justice (Retd) Qazi Farooq, who had organised the 2008 general elections. Article 213 of the Constitution, dealing with the appointment of CEC, says:

There shall be a Chief Election Commissioner (in this part referred to as commissioner), who shall be appointed by the President [239] [in his discretion. The very next article (214) provides that before entering the office, the Commissioner will take from the Chief Justice of Pakistan oath in the form set out in the Third Schedule. The Commissioner shall, subject to this article, hold office for a term of three years from the day he enters his office. Provided that the National Assembly may by resolution extend the term of the Commissioner by a period not exceeding one year. Justice Hamid Ali Mirza relinquished the position of a Supreme Court judge in September 2005 on his retirement during the tenure of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

*(The News - March 18, 2009)*

### **Sweeping Electoral Reforms Finalised**

ECP has finalized a set of 80-page recommendations, aimed at sweeping electoral reforms, and forwarded to Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani for consideration. Secretary ECP Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad told on 13 March that the recommendations, approved by former CEC Qazi Muhammad Dilshad Farooq and his team, had been thrashed out after months-long deliberations by a committee of electoral experts and inputs by all the stakeholders. He explained that as a result of the marathon exercise, a compendium of Electoral Reforms Proposal was compiled, summarizing 600 pages from 16 reports and documents by national and international entities from 2006 to 2008. The ECP Secretary said amendments had been proposed in the Constitution that included The Electoral Rolls Act, 1974 (Act No. XXI of 1974), The Delimitation of Constituencies Act, 1974 (Act No. XXVI of 1974), The Senate (Election) Act, 1975 (No. LI of 1975), The Representation of the People Act, 1976 (LXXXV of 1976), The Political Parties Order 2002, Chief Executive's Order No.18 of 2002 and the Presidential Election Rules 1998.

Thus, in all, 318 proposals and recommendations were grouped in 16 categories with proper cross-reference to source reports, primary implementers and assessment of required legislation, with a summary of 32 key electoral reform recommendations. The initiative was designed to strengthen the Election Commission and to enable it to fulfill its constitutional and legal obligations independently, more efficiently and effectively.

*(The News - March 14, 2009)*

### **Proposed Amendments by ECP**

ECP has proposed the Government to amend the clauses pertaining to appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and setting the dates for fresh elections. According to the sources at the Election Commission, amendments in the articles 48 and 213 pertaining to Presidential powers for setting the date for fresh elections as well as appointment of the CEC. They said that the Commission, in the article 48 clause (5), proposed that the President, after dissolution of National Assembly would consult the Chief Election Commissioner for setting new date for the polls. Existing clause (5) provides, when the President dissolves the NA, setting new date and appointment of Caretaker Government, is his discretion. But the proposed amendment provides, "where the President dissolves the NA, he shall, in consultation with the CEC, (a) appoint a date, not later than [ninety] days from the date of the dissolution, for the holding of a general election to the assembly; and (b) appoint a Caretaker Cabinet, which shall be neutral and non-partisan. The Caretaker Prime Minister, chief ministers and ministers, as the case may be, shall not take part in the elections and/or political activities during their tenure of office." To rationalize the amendment, the powers and functions/responsibilities of the Caretaker Government were not clear as these had not been defined anywhere in the Constitution. The ECP had observed that during the conduct of elections in the country, neutrality and credibility of the Caretaker Government sometime became doubtful. As some complaints were received from contesting candidates/public regarding alleged involvement of the Caretaker ministers in elections by supporting one candidate or the other, the EC has proposed that the appointment of the Caretaker PM should be made in consultation with political parties represented in the National Assembly of Pakistan. The Caretaker Government should not have the powers to appoint or transfer the Government servants on large scale during their tenure. For amendment in article 213, it had been proposed that the new CEC should be appointed by the President in consultation with the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition. Giving rationale, the Commission has stated presently, appointment of CEC is made by the President in his discretion. The political parties, civil society organizations, media and foreign observation missions, have been constantly demanding that the appointment of the CEC should be broad based to make this office more independent.

*(The Post - March 17, 2009)*

### **Most MPs Billionaires: ECP Report**

The declared assets of parliamentarians have revealed that the parliamentary leaders are not only the senior-most politicians -- they are also the most affluent members of their parties. The assets submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) show that apart from JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, almost all parliamentary leaders are billionaires.

**Opposition leader:** Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, opposition leader in the National Assembly (NA), has come out as one of the richest lawmakers, with declared properties and assets worth billions of rupees. In addition to several properties in Rawalpindi and Lahore, Khan also owns two cars and has Rs 4.36 million in cash. He has another Rs 1.5 million in a bank in Rawalpindi and Rs 4.75 million in a bank at Parliament House. The declared value of his furniture and articles of personal use is Rs 235,000. His wife also owns several kanals of property and shares at Ferozsons, Omer Fabrics, and KFW. She also owns two Mercedes cars, and jewellery worth 350,000. She has Rs 4.9 million deposited in one bank, Rs 600,000 at another and Rs 28,000 in a third.

**Former Punjab CM:** Former Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi has declared several billions of rupees in assets, but he does not own any vehicles. He has stated that he has a 50 percent share in two houses -- one in Lahore and another in Islamabad -- worth Rs 8.54 million. He also owns agricultural land and has shares in a flourmill in Rawalpindi. He and his wife have joint shares valued at Rs 25 million in two private companies. The couple has Rs 131.24 million cash in hand, while Elahi's spouse owns 50 tolas of jewellery worth Rs 0.4 million. Their personal articles are estimated at Rs 180,000.

**ANP Chief Asfandiyar Wali Khan** owns an inherited residential house valued at Rs 3 million and agricultural land. He owns a car valued at Rs 400,000. The ANP Chief possesses 50 tolas of jewellery worth Rs 1 million and has declared there is Rs 39,000 in his bank account and his articles of personal use are worth Rs 300,000.

**PPP-S Chief Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao's** assets and liabilities declaration reveals that he owns a market in Charsadda that is valued at approximately Rs 3.5 million. He also has a farmhouse worth Rs 6.5 million. He also has Rs 4.5 million in his bank account in addition to several shares and moveable assets such as a car. His wife's wealth is estimated at Rs 15.3 million, and both his daughters own agricultural property. His son owns agriculture land and shares valued at Rs 1.5 million.

The parliamentary leader of FATA members in the National Assembly, Munir Khan Orakzai, has declared that he has two joint family houses in Kurram Agency and Peshawar valued at Rs 34 million. He also has agricultural land worth Rs 2 million. He has a cash account of Rs 2.67 million and has a business outside the country.

**MQM Parliamentary leader Dr Farooq Sattar** has two family residences worth Rs 26 million, 400 grammes of jewellery valued at Rs 100,000, and cash deposits worth Rs 2.039 million.

*(Daily Times - March 22, 2009)*

## Senate Updates

### **Senate Chairman, Deputy Chairman Elected Unopposed**

Farooq Naik of the PPP and Jan Muhammad Jamali of the PML-Q were elected unopposed as the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, respectively, of the Senate on 12 March. Senator Tahir Hussain Mashhadi, who conducted the proceedings as presiding officer, took oath of office from Senate Chairman Naik, who has now become the fifth chairman of the Senate. Naik then administered the oath to Deputy Chairman Jamali. This marks Jamali's second three-year term as Deputy Chairman. President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and PML-Q President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain congratulated Naik and Jamali on their election. Senator Ishaq Dar of the PML-N said his party did not field a candidate for Chairmanship as they had decided to boycott the election. Also on 12 March, 49 of the 50 senators-elect took oath amid slogans of 'Zinda Hai BB, Zinda Hai' to mark the PPP's majority. These comprise 11 senators each from Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan, and 10 from NWFP. Four senators from FATA and two from the federal capital also took oath.

*(Daily Times - March 13, 2009)*

### **Farooq Naik Dissolved the Senate's 32 Standing Committees**

Chairman Senate dissolved the senate's 32 standing committees on 21 March and demanded the names of new candidates from all the representing political parties. According to the senate secretariat 32 standing committees were performing before the dissolution. Chairman also has approved the New Year's financial budget but the majority members of the parliament showed half hearted interest while the grounding and

some of them even not participated. In fact the positive gesture was the 49 percent completion of working-days recorded in the present year as compared to the previous assembly. By the end of first parliamentary year 12 standing committees were performing without their heads.

*(Jang - March 21, 2009)*

## Restoration of Deposed Judges

### Judges Restored to Nov 2, 2007 Position

The government on 17 March formally restored deposed judges of superior judiciary, including Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, to the Nov 2, 2007 position; hence they do not need to take any fresh oath. After getting approval from the President, the Law Ministry issued two separate notifications and Law Secretary Justice Agha Rafiq, while addressing a press conference, read out the notifications that stated:

1. "WHEREAS the Prime Minister of Pakistan was pleased to announce on 16th day of March, 2009 that the deposed judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, including Mr Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, the deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan, shall be restored to the position they were holding immediately before 3rd day of November, 2007.

NOW THEREFORE, the President of Pakistan is pleased to restore Mr Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, the deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan to the position he was holding immediately before 3rd day of November, 2007. Mr Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry will assume office of Chief Justice of Pakistan on 22nd March, 2009, after retirement of Mr Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar, Chief Justice of Pakistan on 21st March, 2009."

2. "Prime Minister of Pakistan was pleased to announce on 16th day of March, 2009 that the deposed judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, including Mr Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, the deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan, shall be restored to the position they were holding immediately before 3rd day of November, 2007:-

#### Supreme Court of Pakistan:

- Mr Justice Javed Iqbal
- Mr Justice Khalil-ur-Rehman Ramday
- Mr Justice Raja Fayyaz Ahmed
- Mr Justice Ch Ijaz Ahmad

#### Lahore High Court:

- Mr Justice Khawaja Muhammad Sharif
- Mr Justice Ijaz Ahmed Chaudhry
- Mr Justice Iqbal Hameed-ur-Rehman

#### High Court of Sindh:

- Mr Justice Mushir Alam
- Mr Justice Maqbool Baqar

#### Peshawar High Court:

- Mr Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan

NOW, THEREFORE, the President of Pakistan is pleased to restore the above mentioned deposed judges of

the Supreme Court and High Courts to the position they were holding immediately before 3rd day of November, 2007. These judges will assume their office with immediate effect."

The federal law secretary said as all the deposed judges were reinstated to the position of November 2, 2007, they were not required to take fresh oath.

*(The News - March 18, 2009)*

### **Zardari Welcomes Judges Restoration**

President Asif Ali Zardari stated that he would always bow his head before their lordships, the judges, irrespective of whether he was the president or an ordinary citizen while addressing the farewell dinner in the honour of the retiring Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar at the Presidency on 20 March. The President also expressed his vision that the institutions should grow and gain strength through evolution and continuity. Our vision may not have been shared by all, some were even critical, but this is the price leaders have to pay, he added. The president claimed that early this week the remaining deposed judges of the superior courts were also restored. Their restoration should be seen as another step in the evolutionary process of strengthening the institutions. President has welcomed all the restored judges to their pre-November 3, 2007 positions as well as remarked that it is time to look forward and build on what has been achieved, it is time to forget the past and to move on. Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, Chairman Senate Farooq H Naek, Speaker National Assembly Dr Fehmida Mirza, federal ministers, Supreme Court judges, services' chiefs, chairman joint chiefs of staff committee, parliamentarians and senior government officials attended the ceremony. However, none of the restored judges, including Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, attended the dinner despite invitation.

*(The News- March 21, 2009)*

## **Poverty & Food Insecurity**

### **BISP Updates**

**President Directs for Expansion of BISP:** President Asif Ali Zardari said there was need for expansion of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) to provide maximum benefits to the people asking for making it transparent and corruption free programme. The President said this during a briefing on BISP at the Aiwan-e-Sadr. Chairperson BISP Farzana Raja briefed the President that so far a list of over one million verified beneficiaries of BISP has been provided to the Pakistan Post. Funds for these beneficiaries had also been provided to Pakistan Post. Money order payments are currently in progress. Farzana Raja apprised the President about the launch of pilot project for Benazir Smart Card - a technology based solution for value added social sector services in collaboration with NADRA - at one of the relief camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from FATA. The Benazir Smart Cards are expected to be distributed to the IDPs at one of the relief camp shortly. The President expressed satisfaction over BISP and directed that Benazir Smart Card scheme should be implemented in such a way that it eventually becomes a credible poverty alleviation programme.

*(The Nation - March 3, 2009)*

**BISP to Launch Smart Card Scheme Soon:** BISP Chairwoman Farzana Raja on 3 March announced that BISP will soon launch Smart Card Scheme to financially support poor families and, fulfilled Benazir Bhutto's promise to improve socio-economic conditions of the masses to provide people with best possible educational, health and environment facilities.

*(Daily Times - March 4, 2009)*

**BISP Pushed-Out of PSDP:** The government has excluded the multi-billion-rupee BISP from the list of the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). Over Rs 34 billion, allocated for the programme, will now be put under the head of the current expenditure. The change in the arrangement of the BISP-related spending was aimed at avoiding audit objections that could be surfaced in the future. The programme aims at providing Rs 1,000 to 3.4 million households each on monthly basis in order to help the poor in the wake of the skyrocketing inflationary pressure. The government had put the BISP in the PSDP list in the 2008-09 budget despite stiff resistance by the planning managers of the country. However, after discussions at the highest level, the programme has been excluded from the PSDP.

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Shaukat Tarin confirmed this and said that we have excluded the BISP from the PSDP list and put it under the current expenditures. He further said that it was done to avoid some difficulties. During the preparation of the 2008-09 budget, we had recommended to the government not to include the BISP in the PSDP list, said a Planning Commission official, adding the government finally agreed to the recommendation after holding consultations on the issue. Citing another reason for recommending the government to exclude the BISP from the PSDP list, the official said it would provide additional Rs 34 billion fiscal space for providing funds to other development projects. The financial constraints, the official said, has put pressure on the economy and options to consider rationalisation of the development projects had resulted into removal of several uplift projects from the PSDP. It is our priority that there should be no cut in PSDP allocations, he said and added that the rationalisation exercise was initiated keeping in view the current financial crunch being faced by the country. He said the development needs will be fulfilled through promoting public private partnership as well as seeking investments from foreign donors.

*(The News - March 29, 2009)*

## Regional Politics & Election Watch

### Pakistan's Foreign Relations

#### **Sino-Pak Friendship to Flourish Further: Chairman Senate**

Mr. Luo Zhaohui, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan visited chairman's office on March 19 and warmly felicitated Farooq H. Naik on assuming the prestigious office of the Chairman, Senate of Pakistan. Chairman senate warm welcomed the honorable ambassador, and also admired the never ending relationship between the two countries characterized by close affinity, cordiality and mutual respect besides a long tradition of multi-faceted cooperation and coordination. Pakistan and China have supported each other and have mutuality of perception on many regional and international issues. Their friendship is also a source of stability in the region, Underscoring the need for promoting Parliamentary exchanges between the two countries, Chairmen observed that the two sides must endeavour to observe and understand each others' political system for fostering greater affinity and strengthening the bonds of friendship and emphasized closer people to people contacts. In this connection, the Chairman underlined the need to strive for learning each others' language to overcome such barriers. The Chairman apprised the Ambassador of the role and functions of the Upper House of the Parliament explaining that it is the symbol of the federation where all the federating units have equal representation and we work with a bipartisan approach. The Ambassador warmly felicitated Naek on assuming the prestigious office of the Chairman, Senate of Pakistan and also conveyed sincere congratulation and good wishes of the Chairman, National Peoples' Congress and Chairman. He also extended an invitation on behalf of the Chinese leadership to Naek to visit China.

*(The News - March 20, 2009)*

### Upcoming Elections in India

#### **Alliance Partners Playing Hard to Get with BJP, Congress**

Regional parties and allies are troubling the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, as it has become clear that neither party would be in a position to form government on its own after upcoming elections. With election fever gripping the country, both parties are engaged in bargaining with alliance partners, who are demanding a large number of seats in their areas of influence. The BJP was in trouble on Sunday when one of its major and old allies Biju Janata Dal (BJD), the ruling party in eastern Orissa, walked out of the alliance and decided to contest elections on its own. The Congress on Monday exuded confidence that it would return to power following the general elections after the BJD quit the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

"The battle is already won, even before elections start and nominations are filed, as the rival BJP-led NDA coalition has already shown cracks and is proving to be no challenge to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)," Congress spokeswoman Jayanti Natrajan said. When told that the Congress should have no reason to rejoice, as the BJD was only drifting towards a third front, she said there "is no third front as yet, even according to the left parties. Jayanti added that in the present circumstances, only the UPA has a credible chance to emerge as winner". She disagreed that the Congress was also facing revolt from its allies, including the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) of Sharad Pawar and the Samajwadi Party (SP). "They have not dumped us. Talks are continuing. Our doors are open for all seats," Jayanti said. General Secretary Digvijay Singh, in charge of Uttar Pradesh affairs, earlier said the alliance with SP was intact and talks

were on to remove misunderstandings and finalise the seat-sharing agreement. Addressing his first press conference at the BJP headquarters, BJP spokesman Siddarth Nath Singh said the party would launch an all-out poll campaign on March 16 through public meetings and media advertisements. The BJP's first slogan was 'Mazboot neta, nirnayak sarkar' (strong leader, decisive government), Singh said, pointing out that the BJP would campaign on a positive note. He said the BJP would point out the UPA's failures and give 'our solutions' to the country's problems. Singh said the BJP planned to campaign through FM radio stations, Internet and would also use text messages to reach out to over 350 million voters. He said the Congress had come to power by promising to create 10 million jobs a year, but in reality 15 million people had lost their jobs in just the last three months. Meanwhile, BJP President Rajnath Singh on Monday chose Murlidhar Rao, an RSS ideologue, as one of his aides to assist him in the elections. Also, Sudhanshu Mittal, a go-getter and national council member, was designated as co-incharge of the northeastern states that are overseen by Rajya Sabha MP SS Ahluwalia.

*(Daily Times - March 10, 2009)*

### **Congress Fights to Retain Allies Ahead of Elections**

As a possibility of a hung parliament in India is turning into a certainty, the post-poll alliance prospects are impacting both the national parties - Congress and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). It is now increasing becoming clear that only an alliance that can cross the magical 272 figure can hope to come to power. While the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) broke away from BJP in eastern state of Orissa, the Congress finds systematic attempts by its allies in United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to marginalise it in states, first by Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and now by Lalu Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal and Lok Janshakti Party of Ramvilas Paswan in Bihar. The party is now totally out of reckoning in these two largest states accounting 120 parliamentary seats. The Congress suspects some sort of similar revolt by Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in Maharashtra to dump the alliance and contest on some of the Congress-held seats. All the same, Congress spokesperson Jayanti Natarajan asserted at the press briefing on Tuesday that "our alliance is not in tatters," just because some allies are trying to assert. "We will work together to ensure secular vote is not divided. "Be it Samajwadi Party's Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad, Paswan or Pawar, they are striving to contest on maximum seats to have the number for post-poll bargains and reduce the Congress strength to the lowest possible to bargain better deal with it in the event of the UPA winning the polls. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress last week announced 24 candidates and its in charge general secretary Digvijay Singh threatened to declare another lot of 25-30 candidates by this weekend. This is seen in political circles as an end of the party's poll understanding with Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh. The unilateral announcement of the seat-sharing formula by Lalu Prasad and Paswan at a Press conference came as a rude shock to the Congress as they left just three seats to it that it had won in the last 2004 elections. RJD will contest on 25 seats and LJP on 12. Jayanti Natarajan asserted that Lalu Prasad and Paswan have not consulted the Congress before announcing the seat-sharing formula in Bihar. "It is unacceptable to Congress," she said, stating that talks will be held with them to ensure sufficient number of seats for Congress. "We certainly expect more than three seats," she said while declining to state any number. Union Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, who heads the Bihar screening committee of Congress, told reporters that there were no talks with him on the seats. The Congress had sought 11 seats and would have agreed on nine or ten, he said, dropping hints that the Congress will contest that many seats in any case, no matter if it were a "friendly contest" with allies as emerging also in Uttar Pradesh where the Samajwadi Party left not even ten seat for Congress. Lalu Prasad faced the first revolt from none else but his brother-in-law Sadhu Yadav, a RJD MP from Gopalganj, who wanted the Betiah seat since Gopalganj has become a reserved seat in the delimitation. He threatened to contest from both Betiah and Motihari, the two RJD seats "surrendered" to LJP. Lalu Prasad reacted, saying Sadhu be treated as expelled from the party for defying its discipline. Sadhu did not reveal if he would contest as an independent or on some other party's ticket, but an hour later he was at the residence of Shinde, who was quick to announce that the Congress doors are open for him. Around the same time that Sadhu was with Shinde, filmstar-turned

BJP leader Shatrughan Sinha dropped at the residence of Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh, triggering speculation if he were trying to switch side. It, however, appeared to be a tactical move of Shatrughan to put pressure on the BJP's central election committee meeting in the evening to decide candidates for Bihar to give him the Patnasaheb seat. In the deal with Paswan, Lalu Prasad has sacrificed the Betiah seat he had promised to Sadhu and okayed candidature of noted film maker Praksh Jha from there.

*(Daily Times - March 19, 2009)*

### **Singh Leads Advani in Opinion Polls**

According to a report, Indian bookmakers are backing incumbent Premier Manmohan Singh for a second term in office ahead of general elections due to kick off in mid-April. Economist Singh, 76, has an edge over opposition prime ministerial candidate Lal Krishna Advani and other aspirants including Mayawati Kumar, darling of millions of Dalits at the bottom of India's rigid Hindu caste hierarchy, the Times of India reported. The paper, quoting an unidentified law enforcement official, said leading bookies had reinforced their network in India and abroad in preparation for the polls set to take place from April 16 to May 13. "These bookies follow political developments very closely and have their own informants in major political parties," the official was quoted as saying. "Millions of dollars will have been wagered by the time the first phase of the polls start," he said. Singh is given the highest chance of becoming prime minister again with bookies quoting odds of two-and-a-half to one. The odds on Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) leader L.K. Advani becoming prime minister are five to one. Mayawati faces much longer odds of 25 to one in her quest to become prime minister.

*(Dawn - March 15, 2009)*

### **Analysis: Topsy-Turvy Elections**

*By Saba Naqvi*

The absurd has become commonplace, the venal routine, the bizarre really quite banal. Nothing is working according to the script in Election 2009. In the absence of any grand issue or great leader, there is just great chaos. There have been some thrills and spills, and both the UPA and NDA have received sharp kicks on the shin from allies. But instead of the national parties getting a reality check, both formations continue to act in ways that appear to defy political logic. All barriers are being crossed, yesterday's friends are today's enemies, there are no rules to this game and after the great crash-landing on May 16 (when the results are announced), and every one expects the real bargaining to begin. One would have thought that given the stability of the last two alliance governments—the NDA and UPA—coalitions would be consolidated. But first the BJP received a royal snub from the elegant Naveen Patnaik in Orissa, indicating that ideological extremism can become too heavy a cross for regional parties to carry. The BJP at least was quite rattled at parting ways with the BJD. It is the Congress that really seems to have become almost delusional about its capacity to recover in the Hindi belt. In an election where everyone knows that alliances are the key to power, the Congress kept making irrational demands on existing and potential allies. The result: the grand old party has made an enemy out of its staunchest secular ally, Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar, and is still friendless in Uttar Pradesh. The UPA has begun to unravel. The Congress decision to contest seats in Bihar against the RJD-LJP front appears to be a case of cutting its nose to spite its face. We are told that Congress strategists still have memories of past grandeur and the party is beginning the process of 'regeneration' in the Hindi belt by going it alone. To most political observers, this strategy appears quite ridiculous given ground realities. There is also no sign of Rahul Gandhi emerging at the centre of Congress affairs. Loyal Congresswallahs had ecstatically speculated that this would be Rahul's election. So far, however, we have only the BJP's Gandhi hogging the mindspace even as Sonia Gandhi has declared that Manmohan Singh is her prime ministerial candidate. Feroze Varun, the son of Sanjay and Maneka Gandhi, has managed to add an inglorious chapter to the family history with the most rabid anti-Muslim

speeches in recent history. His shocking "chop off their hands/sterilise the Muslims" rhetoric has also threatened to hijack the BJP's election campaign. Just when L.K. Advani and the party had decided not to raise any Hindutva issue, this Gandhi torpedoed their best-laid plans. Ever since, the BJP has been dissembling. Consider this response of former BJP president Venkaiah Naidu when Outlook asked him about Varun: "We understand his viewpoint. I also know your viewpoint. It is not our viewpoint. And there is no point in raising the same point!" The BJP is once again caught in that all-too-familiar trap between the hankering for respectability (and more post-poll allies) and the temptation to stoke and take advantage of anti-minority emotions. The party's natural urge is to take advantage (if any) of the atavistic emotions Varun is trying to arouse. But NDA allies like the JD(U) are clearly annoyed with the Varun venom and the BJD wound is still raw. Does this mean the BJP will again fall between two stools? Does it remember that allies blamed the Gujarat riots for the NDA's defeat in 2004? While the Big Two blunder along, it's the small parties who're getting set to play big boys in the post-poll show. cpi national secretary D. Raja has a point when he says that "what rattles a certain section the most is the possibility of Left and regional parties calling the shots. Even if the Left tally comes down, we all expect a post-poll realignment of forces where the Left gives a certain credibility." G.V.L. Narasimha Rao, a psephologist now with the BJP, articulates similar views: "I believe the national parties will get more than half the seats in Parliament. Yet another fight for power in these elections will begin after May 16. We cannot rule out the possibility of a crisis for some days as parties scramble to get the numbers.

But the possibility of the Left or regional parties emerging top dog puts the fear of God in traditional elites and the business community. There is also an impulse in the entire political class to somehow isolate BSP supremo Mayawati who plays by her own rules. It may be impossible to do so, given that her expected tally of 30 to 40 seats upsets all calculations. Shahid Siddiqui, contesting on a BSP ticket from UP, says: "The fear of Mayawati is both real and imaginary. She's a threat to the traditional caste system and established elites, does not pander to the media or depend on corporate houses. Those who gravitate around power don't know how to approach her." Certainly, this formidable woman frightens everyone. She has so far engaged with the Third Front initiative but on condition that she be its PM candidate.

If Mayawati looms large north of the Vindhyas, down south it is the remarkable J. Jayalalitha. No one knows which way the lady will go, but few have forgotten how she tormented A.B. Vajpayee in 1998 before giving her letter of support. In the neighbourhood lurks another kingmaker who wouldn't mind being king—Chandrababu Naidu. But both he and Jayalalitha become relevant only if they pull in the numbers.

All this uncertainty has now led to real talk of a fourth or even a fifth front. One scenario is that if the UPA flounders, then many regional parties, including those in the NDA and UPA, will come together after the polls and seek outside support from the Congress. Corporate houses and some western embassies are circulating another theory that seeks to isolate the Left. It works like this. All regional parties get together and get outside support of the BJP. This would exclude only three parties who would stick to "secular principles"—the Congress, Left and the RJD while Mulayam Singh could go either way. This scenario sees NCP chief Sharad Pawar, with his links to the corporate world, as the lynchpin, if not the PM candidate. However, D. Raja has this to say: We have heard this. But thankfully corporate houses don't decide in our democracy. Common people do. There is only one certainty. That there will be realignment post-May 16 when the results of this topsy-turvy election when declared.

*(The Nation - March 30, 2009)*

## **Bangladesh - Post Election Scenario**

### **Human Rights Watch Urges Bangladesh to End Abuses**

Human Rights Watch urged Bangladesh's new democratically elected government on 18 March to end human rights abuses, pointing out there was widespread torture and intimidation in the country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Bangladesh Awami League party, took office on 6 January following a massive

win in an election that ended two years of emergency rule by an army-backed interim government. The human rights situation in Bangladesh is poor. There is widespread torture and security agencies get away with murders, tortures and intimidations ... there is a culture of impunity that must be ended declared by Brad Adams, Asia director for Human Rights Watch also showed deep concerned over the traumatic security situations and expecting the new government to keep its promises to address all these problems and this is what Bangladeshi voters expect. Hasina addressed the parliament recently that the government would investigate all allegations of extra-judicial killing and abuses and punish the offender and want to protect human rights. Hasan Mahmud, state minister for foreign affairs, told Reuters also put forward the suggestions and opinions of the rights leaning organizations will be duly incorporated in the government policy to uphold human rights. Adams arrived in Dhaka on March 18 on a six-day visit to discuss the human rights situation with the new government. He met senior officials including law and foreign ministers. A succession of Bangladesh governments had made promises but not kept them and this time it must be different. Adams uttered Human Rights Watch also expressed concern over possible abuse of the country's anti-terror laws, politicization of civil services, and abuse of Bangladeshi workers. On the other way Hasina stressed that government has also promised trial by special tribunals or court martial of those involved in last month's revolt by paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) border guards at their Dhaka headquarters. The BDR rebels killed around 80 people, mostly army officers who traditionally commanded the paramilitary, triggering a security alarm across the country. Adams also announced that HRW would prefer the BDR trials be in regular courts, but special tribunals could be acceptable if they followed legal process and took adequate time.

*(Daily Times - March 20, 2009)*

### **Dhaka Grounds Suspected 1971 War Criminals**

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said that Bangladesh has barred war crimes suspects in the 1971 war from leaving the country ahead of a planned trial. He said the government is preparing to try those accused of collaborating with Pakistani troops and helping them in killings, rape, arson and looting during the war. He said the immigration authorities have been given a list of the suspects to stop them from traveling overseas. He refused to say who or how many people were on the list. "What I can tell you is that those who have committed crimes against humanity during the 1971 war must be put on trial," Ahmed said. "The process of starting the trial has already begun." Ahmed did not provide further details.

*(Daily Times - March 24, 2009)*

### **Muslim Charities Face Security Probe in Bangladesh**

Bangladeshi authorities declared that they were investigating dozens of Muslim charities in the impoverished country over allegations they are funding militants. Finance Minister AMA Muhith explained that the government had decided to launch the probe a month after a mutiny at a military base in the capital, in which authorities suspect militants played a role. The investigation is under way and scrutinising their activities of charities. Authorities so far investigated the organizations that were created between 2001 and 2006, under the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led coalition government. Thirty groups were under investigation, according to Bengali language paper Samakal, reported that there were more than 78,000 non-government organizations (NGOs) operating in the grindingly poor nation of 144 million people. It is not known how many are classed as "Islamic". More than 70 people were killed in the mutiny last month at the Bangladesh Rifles headquarters in Dhaka. At least 56 of the dead were senior army officers. The government has claimed that it has found links that suggest militants from the banned Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) were involved in the revolt. The JMB was blamed for a series of bombings and suicide attacks throughout Bangladesh in 2005 in which 28 people died. The group's leaders were hanged under the last military-backed government, in power for two years from January 2007. Meanwhile,

Bangladesh soldiers raided a madrassa on March 24 as part of countrywide hunt for militants and seized a cache of arms and explosives stored there by suspected militants, police confirmed.

*(Daily Times - March 25, 2009)*

## **Analysis: Bangladesh Mutiny Dealt Serious Blow to Country's Security**

*By David Montero*

They were found lying in ditches by the dozens. Many were bound at the hands and feet. On their uniforms they bore the marks of their crime: the badges and stripes of colonels, majors, and lieutenants of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). Over the weekend, police in Bangladesh discovered 50 bodies in three mass graves at the BDR headquarters in Dhaka, bringing the total death toll of officers killed in [last week's mutiny](#) to 63. Among the dead were Maj. Gen. Shakil Ahmed, the head of the Bangladesh Rifles, a paramilitary border security force, and his wife, who lived on the headquarters premises. Four days after the armed uprising, more than 72 officers are still missing. They are feared dead as well. Reacting to the scale of the tragedy, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina rescinded the general amnesty she had earlier offered rebellious BDR soldiers, warning that those responsible would be subject to exemplary punishment. Heightening fears of possible clashes, the Army on Sunday announced that it was deploying across the country in an operation to apprehend fugitive BDR soldiers, while police filed a case charging six lower-level BDR personnel with leading 1,000 men in the uprising. As grisly evidence continues to be exhumed, Bangladesh is confronting a tragedy that, even by the tumultuous standards of this South Asian nation, ranks among the worst ever seen here: Many of the country's brightest military leaders have been killed in one strike, their death rendering a serious blow to the country's security apparatus while feeding fears that more violence may follow. "The BDR is fully divested of its command structure. It's a big blow for the country. We have a weakened border," says Brig. Gen. Shahedul Anam Khan (ret.), a columnist on security issues for The Daily Star, a leading English-language newspaper. Days after the mutiny, Dhaka remains a city captive to fear and rumors. In living rooms and restaurants, in offices and on the street, Bangladeshis have done little else in recent days but comment, question, and speculate - sometimes wildly - on the origins and repercussions of the bloody uprising. According to official accounts, thousands of BDR personnel from across the country gathered at an annual BDR conference last Wednesday in Dhaka. Among them were 168 officers. Suddenly, shots were fired by junior personnel, who were allegedly aggrieved over poor pay scales and untimely promotions. The mutiny appeared to spread in subsequent days as BDR soldiers in several districts abandoned their barracks. But it was quickly reined in when Prime Minister Hasina, under pressure to de-escalate the situation, promised a general amnesty. Still, the facts themselves have served only to deepen the public's sense that the mutiny was well planned and, perhaps, connected to a larger plot to destabilize the country, which [just restored democracy in December elections](#), as one observer points out. In an editorial for The Daily Star, Abdul Bayes, an economics professor, posed key questions: "How could soldiers get arms instantly from the store that lies almost one kilometer away from the [meeting] hall? Second, why should thousands of [soldiers] leave the hall as if they knew before what was to come next? Third, how could thousands of the [soldiers] flee despite the fact that the whole area was cordoned? Fourth, the killings, tortures, and disposal of dead bodies seems to indicate that the whole episode was pre-planned and done in a systematic fashion." While the questions swirl, Bangladesh's new civilian government is trying to react quickly but judiciously to answer them. An investigation committee was hastily formed last week but, after opposition political parties complained that they were not included, was just as quickly dissolved. A new committee was announced on Sunday, to be comprised of members of all the political parties. New tensions seemed to be developing by the weekend's close. On Saturday, the Home Ministry ordered all BDR deserters to return to their barracks or face harsh punishment if apprehended later. By Sunday, thousands were reported to be on their way back, where they will face questioning. Many, if not most, are innocent, but there are concerns that the Army or the general population, with emotions running high, might seek retribution. There will be some fears because [the BDR soldiers] do not know what awaits them. Out of

enmity, some people may try to instigate others to violence, explains M. Zahir, an eminent lawyer and legal analyst in Dhaka. The government now has a tightrope to walk, Mr. Zahir adds: interrogating the BDR soldiers to ascertain who is responsible for a national tragedy, while also shielding them from a swell of public anger.

*(Daily Times March 3, 2009)*

## **Presidential Elections in Afghanistan**

### **Afghan Commission Sets August Presidential Vote**

On 4 March Mr. Azizullah Ludin, Chief of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) Afghanistan announced the August 20 for the country's upcoming second presidential vote, and confirmed a decree from President Hamid Karzai for an April ballot which technically has the authority to set electoral dates, leaves open the question of how to resolve a key constitutional problem. Although the IEC says it is impossible to hold adequate elections within weeks, given Afghanistan's overwhelming security problems, in fact the constitution says the vote must be held 30 to 60 days before the President's five-year term expires on May 21. By anticipating the constitutional deadline, Karzai issued a decree calling for an April 20 election. While we respect and accept the President's decree, its implementation is not possible because all the problems which we listed previously, which are mainly security and weather conditions, are still in place," said Ludin. "This is why after a thorough study the IEC came to the conclusion that we have to hold transparent, free and fair elections. That's why we confirm the date of August 20," he added. Karzai, under huge pressure from the United Nations, United States and other Afghan allies to support the IEC date of August 20, caused a stir when he issued his decree. The IEC in January delayed the vote until August, saying it needed the time to prepare and also wanted NATO military reinforcements on the ground to help secure the polls from Taliban attack. April poll: Separately, the Afghan interior minister said Afghan forces would do their best to secure an early election called for by the President next month. Karzai "is the commander in chief of our country. When he orders us to get ready, we will get ready," Interior Minister Hanif Atmar told reporters late on Tuesday. Atmar, whose ministry controls the country's 80,000-strong police, said Taliban militants and their allies would attempt to upset the election. "It's a sad reality of the Afghan situation, but we'll do our best," he said. The Interior Ministry had already provided a report on the readiness of the police to protect the election.

*(Daily Times - March 5, 2009)*

### **UNSC Calls for Credible and Secure Afghan Polls**

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has extended the United Nations presence in Afghanistan for another year, while recognizing the key role played by the world body in coordinating international efforts in the war-torn country and in supporting upcoming elections. In a unanimously adopted resolution on March 23, the 15-member body renewed the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until 23 March 2010, and decided that the Mission and the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Kai Eide, will continue to lead international civilian efforts in the country. UN Security Council also includes supporting, at the request of the Afghan authorities, preparations for the 20 August Presidential elections. The Council underscored the importance of the polls to the country's democratic development, committed for all efforts to be made to ensure the credibility, safety and security of the elections. The 20 August election date set by the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission is three months after the presidential term expires on 22 May. This has generated "constitutional uncertainty" over the President's legitimacy after 22 May whereas there is no higher responsibility in Afghanistan right now than that of the three branches of government to find a solution to the constitutional issue in a way that ensures the existence of a functioning Government between 22 May and the inauguration of the next presidential term, he added.

*(Associated Press of Pakistan - March 24, 2009)*

## Politics in Thailand

### Thai PM Beats No-Confidence Motion

Thai Premier Abhisit Vejjajiva and five ministers in his three-month-old government on 21 March easily survived a no-confidence motion called by the opposition over allegations of corruption. Opposition MPs had sought during a fiery two-day debate to show the government was illegitimate and accused the British-born Abhisit of certifying false financial statements for his ruling Democrat Party. They also said his party had received millions of dollars in illegal donations and illegally distributed funds from the electoral commission. But Abhisit -- an Oxford-educated economist who came to power in December -- easily survived the censure motion by a 246-176 vote. Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij, his deputy Pradit Patharaprasit, Interior Minister Chavarat Charnvirakul and his deputy Boonchong Wongtrairat also survived with a comfortable majority. Abhisit said the result of the vote, the latest round in the bitter political dogfight that has divided the kingdom since former premier Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted in a 2006 coup, proved his government was sound. "Nothing needs to change. I will carry on working as I gained the vote of confidence from parliament," he said. Of the men cited in the motion filed by the Puea Thai party, which is allied to Thaksin, Kasit had been in most danger of being forced out because of his support for protesters who forced the closure of Bangkok's airports last year.

The Democrats have 170 seats out of 465 in parliament, but can count on the support of around 70 coalition partners. Puea Thai has 182 seats. Opposition MP Chalerm Yoobumrung, who led the censure debate, was unusually stoic in defeat.

*(The News - March 22, 2009)*

### Thai PM Threatens Action Against Protests

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said on 31 March that he was prepared to take action against protesters who have blockaded his office for six days, but said they would not goad police into violence. Speaking before he left for the key G20 meeting in London, Abhisit said the protest group allied to fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra could not be allowed to continue its rally indefinitely. The protest is the latest in the kingdom's long-running political turmoil which kicked off when billionaire Thaksin was toppled in a military coup in 2006 and has flared up again since Abhisit came to power in December. The demonstrators -- known as the "Red Shirts" because of their distinctive crimson attire -- say they will stay until the British-born Abhisit resigns and calls fresh elections. Asked by a reporter if he would consider decisive measures to remove them, Abhisit replied: "If the need arises then the government will have to, but the government has no plan to use violence."

Abhisit came to power after a controversial court decision that forced the previous Thaksin-allied government from office, but that ruling followed months of divisive street rallies that occasionally turned violent. At one point anti-Thaksin protesters occupied Bangkok's airports for nine days from late November to early December, costing the economy billions of dollars. The Prime Minister promised nothing similar would happen this time.

*(Dawn - April 1, 2009)*

## Policies of Obama Administration

### Troops to Stay Away From Pak Territory: Obama

According to US President Barack Obama, the US troops will not go in hot pursuit of extremists across the Afghan border into Pakistan -- but demanded Islamabad hold up its end of the anti-terror struggling in

fact we haven't changed our approach referring to the US missile strikes on militants. If US have a high-value target within its sights by prior consulting with Pakistan, he recorded his statement in CBS programme 'Face the Nation' on March 29. He asked if he would send US troops on the ground into militant safe havens inside Pakistan, Obama negate this option and positively stressed that our plan does not change the recognition of Pakistan as a sovereign government. US need to work with Pakistan to deal with al-Qaeda. But we have to hold them much more accountable. Pakistan is at the centre of the fight against Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network with a new strategy to commit thousands more troops and billions of dollars to the Afghan war. Obama thinks its America's war but the focus over the last seven years in his opinion has been lost.

*(The News - March 30, 2009)*

### **Obama Calls for New Beginning with Iran**

US President Barack Obama launched an historic direct appeal to the Iranian people on 20 March, urging an end to decades of animosity and offering 'honest' engagement with the Islamic Republic. A top adviser to Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad welcomed Obama's olive branch, but urged Washington to recognise and repair "past mistakes." Obama said in a video message marking the Iranian New Year, Nauroz, that his administration "is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community." In a new decisive break with his predecessor, President George W. Bush, Obama called the celebrations a time of "new beginnings." He said he wanted a new era of "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect." Obama said he wanted "constructive ties" with Iran, which could take its "rightful place" in the world if it renounced terror and embraced peace. "For nearly three decades relations between our nations have been strained," he said. "But at this holiday we are reminded of the common humanity that binds us together." The two nations have had no diplomatic ties since 1980, following Iran's Islamic revolution, the taking of US diplomats as hostages for more than a year and a foiled US military operation to rescue US diplomats.

Bush lumped Iran in his "Axis of Evil" with North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, than led international accusations that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear bomb. Iranian officials regularly refer to Washington as the "Great Satan." "We welcome the wish of the president of the United States to put away past differences," the Iranian president's press adviser Ali Akbar Javanfekr told AFP in Tehran. But he added: "The American administration has to recognise its past mistakes and repair them as a way to put away the differences." "If Obama shows willingness to take action, the Iranian government will not show its back to him," Javanfekr said, while condemning what he called the "hostile, aggressive and colonialist attitude of the American government." Iran's Energy Minister Parviz Fattah said: "Absolutely this message is positive ... although it might also have negative points in itself as well." Iran's leaders "will precisely assess this message. We believe that we need that in addition to messages we need positive action from Mr Obama as well as from his government," the minister said in Islamabad.

EU foreign policy Chief Javier Solana described the Obama video as "a very constructive message" that could "open a new chapter" in international relations with Tehran.

*(Dawn - March 21, 2009)*