



PAKISTAN
GOVERNANCE
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Gender

Women & Politics

Kuwait Votes in First Women Parliamentarians

Kuwaitis voted for change in the Gulf emirate's second poll in a year, giving women their first seats in Parliament and punishing Islamic groups. Frustrated at political turmoil that has rocked the wealthy OPEC member over the past three years, Kuwaitis voted 21 new faces into the 50-member Parliament, reducing Sunni groups to a minority. There was no immediate official figure on election turnout, but the state-run KUNA news agency estimated it at 58 per cent, down from last year's 65 per cent.

Four women candidates made history by winning the first female seats in the Kuwaiti parliament, with one of them coming on top of the 10 winners from her district. Liberals Massuma Al Mubarak, Aseel Al Awadhi and Rula Dashti, besides independent Salwa Al Jassar won seats in the new house. The four women are all US-educated and hold doctorate degrees in political science, economics and education. Sixteen women were among 210 candidates who stood in the election, the third since 2006. Women gained the right to vote and run for office in 2005 but failed in two previous elections to win seats in the 50-member parliament. All of the female winners have Ph.D's from the United States. Among them is economist and women's rights activist Rola Dashti, who battled in court for political rights for Kuwaiti women years before the legislature approved the suffrage bill. The other two women are education professor Salwa al-Jassar and philosophy professor Aseel al-Awadhi.

(Dawn – May 18, 2009)

Letter Warns District Government Peshawar to Sack Lady Councillors

Threatening letters were issued to the district government departments in the provincial metropolis to sack female councillors, otherwise their offices would be bombed. The threatening letters were issued to the Town-IV office on Kohat Road near Ring Road flyover, directing the authorities to ask the female councillors to resign. The authorities were warned against visits of NGO officials to the office. The senders of the small piece of paper claimed to be Taliban, warning the town-IV authorities to sack lady councillors. They threatened the officials of dire consequences if female representatives continued to function. The matter was immediately brought into the notice of the police high-ups who directed the officials concerned to take necessary measures for ensuring security to the setup. Threatening letters are being taken quite seriously as there is a general impression that militants mean what they say. Similar letters were issued to the music centres on Cinema Road, where no security measures had been taken, resulting in a huge blast on May 23, killing 13 people and injuring dozens of others.

(The News – May 29, 2009)

Women & Economics

SAMEDA to Set-Up 14 Centres for Women Entrepreneurs

Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) plans to establish 14 Women Business Development Centres (WBDC) in major industrial and commercial cities throughout Pakistan with the objective of facilitating and promoting women entrepreneurship in the country. Muhammad Alamgir Chaudhary, Punjab Chief of SMEDA stated this while addressing a seminar on women entrepreneurs at Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI). The seminar was jointly organised by SMEDA and ICCI. He said that government would give funds for these centres to provide hands-on support for women entrepreneurs in an exclusive female oriented environment. "In these Centres, all required facilities like offices, exhibition and display facility and business development services (including training programmes) would be offered to women entrepreneurs under one roof. The entire effort is focused at encouraging new business start-ups and support to existing businesses including the right environment for nurturing women owned and managed businesses to an extent that these become sustainable, specifically, in start-up period (first 5 years) when they are most vulnerable," he added.

The centres would also serve as working place on temporary basis for women entrepreneurs performing businesses at their homes. After establishing of businesses at incubators, the businesswomen would shift to a suitable place, he added. Muhammad Ishtiaq Qureshi, Vice President, ICCI also spoke on the occasion and said

that out of total 3.2 million small and medium enterprises in Pakistan, women enterprises represented only 3 per cent, which demands revolutionary measures to enhance their role in business world. He lauded the initiative of SMEDA to establish Women Business Development Centres across the country and hoped that such centres would provide valuable support to the prospective women entrepreneurs in actualising their dreams.

(The News – May 24, 2009)

LCCI Launches Outreach Project for Women Entrepreneurs

The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) in collaboration with the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) May 19 launched a vast outreach project of radio programmes for women entrepreneurs to create greater awareness among them for running successful business. The launching ceremony was jointly performed by Provincial Minister for Excise and Taxation Mian Mujtaba Shujaur Rehman, LCCI President Mian Muzaffar Ali, Senior Programme Manager CIPE Hammad Siddiqui and Convener LCCI Standing Committee on Women Entrepreneurs Development Ms Aasia Sial Khan. LCCI Senior Vice President Tahir Javaid Malik also addressed the ceremony. In his inaugural remarks, the Provincial Minister, while paying rich tributes to the LCCI and CIPE for joining hands on the subject of updating women with latest business-related information, said that the radio programmes would go a long way in bringing more women into the field of business. He said the programmers would definitely help equip the women with lower level of education to better understand the concepts involved in operating a business from home in a versatile way. Speaking on the occasion, the LCCI President Mian Muzaffar Ali said that during the last couple of years an increased participation of women in economic activities has been witnessed. Their economic activities are no more confined to traditional trades but one can see them even in running and managing of businesses of their own, working as career women in the service sector such as marketing, banking, information technology, armed forces of Pakistan, media, traffic management, Civil Service of Pakistan. But despite this happy development, the women still lack access to information about available opportunities for their economic well-being, entrepreneurial skills, procedures, business codes etc

(The Nation – May 20, 2009)

Female Employees in Ministries Facing Discrimination

Women empowerment is always high on the agenda of every government yet women employed in public sector continue to remain deprived of some basic facilities required at workplaces. The list of facilities needed for women employees is long that includes day care centers, transport, first aid boxes etc, but what irritates the female employees the most is the absence of proper toilets specifically for women. Information gathered from different ministries shows that in most of the ministries, either there is no specific toilet for women or if the facility does exist, men extensively use it without realizing that it is highly uncivilized behavior. Female employees of Ministry for Human Rights and Ministry of Labour and Manpower said that there was not even a single toilet reserved for women. Some of the women employees said that they had no choice, but to avoid going to toilet throughout the day.

(The News -- May 9, 2009)

Craftswomen Suffering in Silence

The demand for handmade products has shifted to the big cities, as the locals are poor and mostly simple and illiterate, particularly the craftswomen who are customarily restricted to their homes. These facts are the outcome of a consultation held on 'Direct Marketing and Communication Strategy for Home-Based Craftswomen' organized by the Development Communications Network (DEVCOM) in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Some 52 local craftswomen participated in the meeting, according to a report, in Pakistan; up to 70% of the workingwomen are engaged in home-based work. It mentions that major part of country's economy belong to an unorganized home-based sector and that is why the issues and problems of such workers are more complicated as there is no direct master-servant or employer-employee relationship between them and the person or organization for whom they work. The relationship being ambiguous and indefinite, they are often subjected to exploitation in various forms. In Pakistan, there is not even authentic data on home-based workers.

Even census of Pakistan, do not recognize these workers as an independent category but have included them in the broad category of those working in household industries. As such, home-based workers are not visible in national statistics. Report also pointed out another social aspect how to protect handicraft while availability of machine-made products with more sophisticated designs which are creating negative impact on demand of handmade products as well the negative the role of middleman, who is being benefited without doing any hard work, and paying very low wages to craftswomen. The big reason is the craftswomen are uneducated, and they have no exposure to new trends, designs and market demanding fashions or styles as well. They have no

opportunity and guidance in this regard. Report suggests that the microfinance banks should invest in crafts development and their marketing as it is being practiced in India where the microfinance banks not only invest money in the crafts development but they also have their own display & sales centres across the country. The report recommends that the microfinance facility should be provided at the doorsteps of home-based women and there shall be some mechanism to fix minimum wages for each craft according to the hard work that is put in and suggests that the craftswomen should form their association and fix their wages themselves for every product and no women shall work less than what is fixed as their wage by their own association. It also urges the educated women to come forward to lead their craftswomen to get the rightful, and to form their associations craft-wise.

(The News – May 7, 2009)

Workshop Calls for Protection of Home-Based Workers

Home-based workers must be given protection under the law and the forthcoming national census to be held in October 2009, participants of an advocacy workshop with female parliamentarian said on May 21. The HomeNet Pakistan in collaboration with Aurat Foundation organized the workshop on the '*Implementation Process of the National Policy for Home-Based Workers*'. The workshop was attended by female representatives from the National Assembly, the Punjab Assembly, the Women's Ministry, Directorate of Women Development, Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) and Ministry of Labour and Manpower. HomeNet representative Ume Laila Azhar said one of the most crucial things the new assemblies should implement was a monitoring system, whereby the progress of legislators could be regularly checked. She said the contributions of home-based workers, more commonly known as housewives, continued to be ignored by the community and the government should take a more pro-active stance by enacting legislation to protect such workers. Talking on the impact of globalisation and its emerging new trends, she said the increased informal sector had given birth to increased poverty for women. Samina Khan from Sungi Foundation shared the draft of the national policy for home-based workers. The participants were told that 76 percent of the female workers were in the informal sector and their work was insecure, irregular and often unrecognised. Government College University Assistant Professor Nadia Saleem said thousands of women in Pakistan worked long hours, in cramped and badly ventilated surroundings, earning a mere pittance. They belong to large families, where almost all family members work and contribute to the household income. Hence, most start working from the age of 10-12 years, and are illiterate, unskilled or semi-skilled, burdened with household chores and family responsibilities at the same time.

(Daily Times – May 22, 2009)

Plan to Set-Up Vocational Centers for Rural Women

Managing Director, Pakistan Baitul Mal (PBM) Zamurrud Khan announced establishment of vocational training centers for rural women living in the areas around capital. These vocational centers will provide different kind of training courses for females while PBM will provide financial and technical assistance for these centers, he visited on May 5 to an NGO, Women Action against Violence (WAAV), Bara Kahu. WAAV is working for women rights to end violence against women through creating awareness about their basic rights including their rights to property and their social inclusion in decision making. The NGO also provides market for the handmade products of the needy to create opportunities for them to earn respectable livelihood for their families.

(The News – May 6 2009)

Women & Media

Uks Demands Equal Representation of Women in Media

There should be fair and equal representation of women working in the media. Special measures must be taken to improve the working environment in order to encourage more and more women to opt for journalism as their profession while addressing a press conference on May 13, Tasneem Ahmer, Uks Chairperson urged the media organizations to provide extra facilities to the female working journalists so that they could continue their profession with more enthusiasm. The press conference was organized to commemorate the first anniversary of Pakistani Women's Media Network (PWMN), which is a project of Uks. She also highlighted the long struggle for fair and sensitive reporting on women's issue. PWMN initiated by Uks in collaboration with International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and World Association for Christian Community (WACC) are well underway she added. In future Uks would continue to facilitate women journalists and in this regard they would hold interactive sessions with newspaper editors. UKs would convince them to provide best available facilities to female journalists so that they could be more comfortable while working in this field. She in the end announced that the PWMN would soon launch a website in which there would be detailed information regarding news and events, job opportunities and other happenings in the field of journalism.

(The News – May 14, 2009)

Women & Laws

Hudood Sentences can't be remitted without Heirs' Consent: Supreme Court

The Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court on May 5 ruled that the President and Governors have no authority to remit sentences awarded under the hudood laws without the consent of the victims' legal heirs. The bench dismissed the federation's petition due to non-prosecution and upheld the decision of the Federal Shariat Court (FSC). The bench consisted of Justice Javed Buttar, Justice Farrukh Mahmud, Justice Mahmood Akhtar Shahid Siddiqui, Justice Dr Allama Khalid Mahmud and Justice Dr Rashid Ahmed Jullundhari. The FSC had given a verdict on August 18, 1991 that sections 401, 402(b), 494, 495 of the Criminal Procedure Code and Section 10(4) of the Pakistan Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1958 were repugnant to the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the holy Quran and Sunnah. The FSC had observed that without the consent of legal heirs of the victim, the hudood sentences could not be remitted /pardoned by the president and the provincial governors. The federation had moved the Supreme Court against the FSC verdict on December 31, 1991.

(Daily Times – May 7, 2009)

Uncertain Conditions Delay CEDAW Report to UN

Due to the prevailing uncertain conditions in NWFP, FATA and Balochistan, Ministry of Women Development (MoWD) will not be able to submit its report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) to the United Nations in time. The report on the steps taken to eliminate discrimination against women is a regular exercise of all CEDAW members and has to be submitted to the UN every four years. Pakistan submitted its two combined CEDAW reports to UN in March 2005. This time, the report was to be submitted in May. A Ministry official said they would try to submit the report within this year. He said the process of compiling the report slowed down, as they received no response to their queries from certain parts of the country like NWFP and Balochistan. He said that MoWD wanted to submit a quality report containing information about the steps taken by the government to end gender discrimination in different parts of the country. He pointed out that it was not possible for us to gather information from certain areas due to security reasons. The official said the report also needed to match the reality on ground. "The recent video of flogging of a girl in Swat and the issue of Talibanisation have made it more challenging to defend the government's position," he admitted.

Pakistan acceded to CEDAW in February 1996, a convention that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979. Acceding to the convention makes it obligatory for a member country to condemn any biases against women and take affirmative steps to make the society discrimination-free. The members are also asked to submit regular reports on the status of women and then defend them verbally before the experts' committee. The country failed to submit its first report in time, therefore, two combined reports were submitted in March 2005. The MoWD defended these reports before a 23-member experts committee in what was the 38th session of the Convention on May 22, 2007. In its response, the CEDAW committee expressed concern over the issue of violence against women and demanded further details over the issues of health, education, micro financing, citizenship laws, women representation in decision-making, institutional and administrative gaps, and women with disability. The committee asked the government to correct stereotypes, especially those related to religion while also showing its reservations about the 'jirga' and 'panchayat' systems. It also sought explanation in the next report on insufficient representation of women in state institutions and even lesser representation at the policy and decision-making levels. With the help of UNIFEM, the Ministry prepared the report's first draft and submitted that to the National Assembly Standing Committee on Women Development. In its response, the committee expressed dissatisfaction over the process and content of the first draft report and directed the MoWD to involve key stakeholders including representatives of the NA Standing Committee on Women's Development, NCSW, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior, and members of Women's Rights organisations in the process.

(The News – May 4, 2009)

Reports/Articles/Books on Gender

Rural Women: Intrinsic Contributors to the Agricultural Development of Pakistan

by Shabir Mohsin Hashmi and Dr. Khalida Jamali

Pakistan is one of the most fortunate countries which inherit very efficient and hardworking rural women labour force. Though the participation of women witnessed in every sector of the economy now, however, it is still heavily concentrated to agriculture sector. Pakistani rural women have been intensively involved in agriculture and its allied fields. She performs numerous labour intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fibre. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood

is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural Pakistan. Like collection of wood, fetching water from remote areas is also the duty of women. Because a rural woman is responsible for farm activities, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women. Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. The majority of farms own some livestock. The pattern of livestock strength is mainly influenced by various factors such as farm size, cropping pattern, availability of range-lands including fodder and pasture. It is common practice in the rural areas of Pakistan to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. The number of small ruminants (sheep and goat) is 3 per farm. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income an average of the amount of Rs.8780/- per annum from the sale of animals. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animal, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Further more, rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also bring additional income to poor families .Evidently, rural women are involved in almost all livestock related activities. Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by females.

According to Labour Survey of Pakistan 2006-07 disclosed that stall feeding of animals is carried out by 31 per cent of females, whereas, milking, milk processing carried out by 58 per cent and preparing dung cakes are carried out by 90 per cent of females. 90 per cent women are involved in shed cleaning and 85 per cent in collection of farm yard manure. Watering is also performed by the 69 per cent of females. Males, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Every year, income from poultry farming has been rising. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs produced and poultry meat, leaving nothing for personal use. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins, most of women are in very poor health. Most of women suffer from malnutrition. Rural women play a significant role in farming. Traditionally, cotton picking is exclusively female activity. According to labour survey, 89 per cent women are engaged in it. They are also extensively involved in other activities such as 30 per cent in hoeing and 22 per cent in weeding. Aside from these activities, women have very little involvement in other aspect of cotton production, while the males play major role in seed preparation (85 per cent) cotton ridge making (87 per cent), sowing of cotton on ridges (54 per cent), hoeing (17 per cent), thinning of cotton plants(44 per cent), preparation of pesticide application (98 per cent), fertilizer application (99 per cent), cotton stick cutting (77 per cent), stick collection (62 per cent), cotton field cleaning (55 per cent) and cotton seed preparation seed (87 per cent). Male seek consultation from female while selecting cotton pickers, time to start first Picking, total number of pickings and selecting the storage place for cotton. About 28-42 per cent of females are also being consulted for the variety of crop, plant distance/population, timely sowing, source of seed, ensuring quality-seed collection from own crop, applying seed rate as per cotton variety and selling of cotton at certain price. 14 per cent female have not only been consulted to assess pest attack but have also been consulted to select pesticides and the time for pesticide applications. Only 21 per cent of females have been consulted to use alternative methods of plant protection. 22-27 per cent has some voice in decisions regarding area allocation to cotton crop, selection of land lord to work with as tenant, purchase of inputs, irrigating field from tube well and selling of production to a specific agency. Traditionally, rural women's day starts from dawn and ends at dusk. The daily routine work begins from house cleaning, fetching drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for family, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. She manages these activities very smartly. Even though rural women supply half of the Pakistan's food production, yet her own food security is always at risk. Women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies. Women are major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Their work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry, household and family maintenance activities to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, their role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators.

For the betterment of women folk and in recognition of her contribution in agriculture and its allied field, following recommendations have been made.

(1) Women working in the rural economy and the informal sector are to be formally recognized and her labour work may be accounted in monetary terms.

(2) Steps are to be taken to ensure the access of poor rural women to land, agricultural and livestock extension services and support mechanisms and facilities. Furthermore, providing women easy access to micro-credit,

especially through the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Rural Support Programmes (RSPs), First Women Bank (FWB), Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) and the Khushali Bank.

(3) Women, particularly in general and female headed households, women bread earners, and women with disability, are given priority in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building.

(4) In most countries legislative changes have been made to facilitate women's rights and women's have direct access to agriculture credit. For instance, Thailand had made changes in legal term from house wife to women farmer to allow her access to agriculture credit. Similar legislative alterations are also need in Pakistan

(5) To enhance women's literacy rates, and to improve the levels of female education ratio, other urgent measures required. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.

(6) Women are entirely absent from the state structures and decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. Women's lack of involvement in government structures is critical to bring about substantive changes in the development policies and programs that would lead to a shift in gender relations in the society.

(7) Access to justice is another target area. Key policy measures to be instituted including eliminating negative customary practices by increasing knowledge of women's existing rights to access judicial relief and redress, ensuring effective implementation and the enforcement of existing rights, removing discrimination through legal reforms, and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling. More specifically, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, the Pakistan Law Commission, and the National Commission on the Status of Women are to review all laws and formulate proposals for law reform. Finally it is concluded that the rural women are exploited by land lords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub- servant or personal property. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

(The News – May 11, 2009)

HR Watch

The State of Pakistan's Children 2008 – Report by SPARC

Pakistan faces innumerable problems pertaining to the health of children, as every year out of 4,446,000 children 400,000 die in the country, before reaching the age of five. The facts were revealed on May 27 in a report titled 'The State of Pakistan's Children 2008' launched by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC).

The seven chapters of report, which include violence against children, education, health, juvenile justice, child labour, displacement revealed that in each section, the situation of children and their rights, continue to receive low priority both by the government and the civil society. Unfortunately, each year the situation appears grimmer, as the report revealed that there is a little improvement of positive progress regarding child rights. Highlighting the challenges faced by the Pakistani children regarding health sector, the report informed that around 10.5 million of children in the country lack access to basic health facilities. About Education sector, the report quoted the figures of National Education Census (2005-06) saying that almost 20 per cent of Pakistani children lack educational facilities. "But Rs 6508.783 million Public Sector Development Programme PSDP 2007-2008 does not convey any plans to deal with these missing facilities," it added. It also revealed that the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009 has ranked Pakistan 117 out of 134 countries in terms of quality of primary education. It quoted the figures of Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA), according to which as many as 6, 780 children were victimised in Pakistan in last year, including 4,251 boys and 2,529 of girls.

(The Nation – May 28, 2009)

56,000 Children in Asia will Die Due to Financial Crisis: ADB

More than 56,000 children in Asia will die as a result of the economic crisis gripping the world economy, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) alerted on May 3. The sliding growth rate would bring serious economic and social impacts in the region, According to ADB Managing Director General Rajat Nag on the sidelines of the bank's annual governors meeting on the Indonesian resort island of Bali, reported that in developing Asian countries outside Japan, our estimate shows that because of the declining economic growth, it will bring serious economic and social impacts in the region, causing over 56,000 children to die in the region. Nag cited a World Bank report, which estimated that 400,000 children would die worldwide from the impact of the financial crisis. No matter how many thousands it will be, we consider that every one more child is too much.

(Daily Times - May 4, 2009)

7-Years Old Girl Married Under Vani

A seven-year-old girl was married to a 22-year-old man to settle a dispute under Vani in village 206G/B of Tandliawala. According to report Shaukat Ali had married Razia Bibi two years ago but her family had refused to accept the marriage and demanded the hand of Ali's sister in marriage under Vani. A panchayat held on the issue forcibly married 7 years old Shazia to Ghulam Jaffar. However, after the girl's parents refused to comply, Razia Bibi registered a case against six people, including Shazia's father and mother. Shazia has appealed to the government for help.

(Daily Times – May 4, 2009)

Pakistan Bait-ul-Mall Initiated Educational Stipend for Poor Students

Pakistan Bait-ul-Mall announced its initiatives to promote the education among the poorest student across the district Rawalpindi. Educational stipends would be provided under food support program to those students having proven brilliant academic record and studying in government institutions. Saeed Raza, Assistant Director PBM district Rawalpindi explained the details of the program: in fact PBM with the assistance of World Food Support Program (WFSP) initiating the stipend for school going children of those families which are already getting the food support. Educational stipend Rs 300 is to be paid all school going children of the said family, and the registration process for the fair distribution - primary data collection campaign is already launched on 19 April to 12 May 2009 and forms available at 15 locations in Gujar Kahn, 5 in Kahuta, 23 in each town of Rawalpindi, 1 in Murree, and 5 points in Taxila. In the same way 250 teachers hired to collect the data of 5 to 16 years old school going children.

Passage of Child Protection (Amend) Bill 2009 Demanded

Participants of a seminar titled “Media Campaign Against Worst Forms of Child Abuse”, organized by SANJOG on May 21 demanded of the Government to pass the proposed Child Protection (Amendment) Bill 2009 in the National Assembly to save children from different forms of abuse. Society for the Protection of the Rights of Child (SPARC) NWFP Regional Director Jahanzeb Khan said that the passage of the proposed Child Protection (Amendment) Bill 2009 is important to secure the future of the country’s next generation that is at stake. He said the proposed bill was not passed despite the passage of five to six years due to unknown reasons. He said the PPP-led coalition government should pass the bill in the National Assembly without further ado. He said the bill should provide for observation of minimum age for criminal liability; prohibition of corporal punishment; and elimination of sexual abuse, violation and exploitation of children besides creating protective environment for them. NGO Gandhara Services Director Mohammad Khan Yousafzai said that though Pakistani government had ratified international laws for protection of children, but unfortunately no practical steps had been taken so far to protect children from different forms of abuse. SANJOG representative Samina Naz also asked the Government to table the Child Protection (Amendment) Bill 2009 in the National Assembly and pass it to protect Pakistan’s future generation. According to the National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) 2008, she said about 15 to 25 percent of children in Pakistan endure some form of sexual abuse, while around 3,000 children in conflict with the law are detained in different prisons of Pakistan. She further said 70,000 children live and work on streets of major cities and 76 percent children are sexually active while 25 percent children have no knowledge of risk factors and where to access for services or report in case of physical and sexual abuse.

(Daily Times – May 22, 2009)

Bonded Labour ‘Worst Form of HR Violation’

Terming it the worst form of human rights violation, speakers at a ‘National Forum on Bonded Labour’ demanded effective and immediate implementation of anti-slavery laws in the country. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) statistics, around 1.7 million people live in slavery in Pakistan. They regretted that Bonded Labour Abolition Act (1992) is awaiting implementation for last 17 years. The law came into force on March 17, 1992 and on that day the bonded labour system stood abolished throughout the country. “Regardless of efforts from time to time, the problem has persisted and people who live in bondage have extremely poor living conditions,” they said. Government officials, public representatives, human right activists and representatives of organisations working on the issue for several years attended the event that was organised by Interactive Resource Centre and Mehargarh: A Centre for Learning. Prominent figures among the speakers included Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, Minister for Human Rights Mumtaz Alam Gilani, Director for Human Rights Commission I A Rehman, human rights activist Karamat Ali and Director Mehargarh Dr Fauzia Saeed.

The event also included screening of a documentary on bonded labour and a theatre performance. In a bid to highlight the dark side of this forgotten issue and to make participants feel the pain and agony of those in bondage, flowers on the stage were replaced with chains used in personal jails of feudal lords to punish those who try to speak up for themselves. Wearing traditional dresses, women and men from interior Sindh and Punjab who managed to get free from bonded labour narrated the stories of extreme poverty, humiliation and injustice they suffered at the hands of feudal lords. They said that girls in bondage were not allowed to get marry and they suffered extreme sexual abuse. Men, they said, were beaten and chained; women were humiliated and raped whereas children were made to start work at the age of three to four years. Speaking on the occasion, Senator Mian Raza Rabbani admitted that the problem was grave and had its deep roots in traditional system. He stressed the need to launch a sustained media campaign to create awareness about the issue among the masses. He assured full support of the government at the political and parliamentary levels.

Human Rights Commission Director I A Rehman stressed the need to look at the issue in a broader context. “Implementation of one act cannot fully resolve the problem, but we need to see all the relevant legislation, rethink the relationship of the landlords and the tenants (haris) and think about proper land reforms in the country,” he said adding that the issue of bonded labour existed in all parts of the country in one form or the other. Dr Fauzia Saeed focused on the need to make amendments in the law against bonded labour that was passed in 1992. She said after the introduction of local bodies system, titles for the officials, responsible for implementation of the act were changed and the provincial governments used it as an excuse for not enforcing the act. The Minister for Human Rights and Law and Justice Syed Mumtaz Alam Gilani called for implementation of Bonded Labour Act 1992.

(The News – May 20, 2009)

Fund Launched to Improve Human Rights in Pakistan

Embassy of Netherlands and Asia Foundation on May 19 launched Human Rights Fund (HRF) to help Pakistan improve human rights situation. The fund launched in collaboration with Pakistan's Ministry of Human Rights would focus on freedom of speech and access to information; freedom from torture and basic rights for prisoners; gender base violence; rights for religious and ethnic minorities and economic rights. The fund would project and promote human rights and provide grants to civil society organisations working for human rights. Addressing the launch of the joint venture, Minister for Human Rights Mumtaz Alam Gilani deplored the human rights situation in the country and urged the international community to help government improve it. He pointed out the Ministry was cash starved and the finance ministry was not providing essential funds to run the affairs, and also demanded media to act as eyes, ears and mouth of his ministry, he criticized the feudal system and traditions, responsible for sorry state of human rights' affairs. Netherlands Ambassador Tjeerd de Zwaan said his country had a long history of promoting and protecting human rights at national and international level. He said Pak-Dutch cooperation dated back to the 1950s and over the last 50 years, Netherlands provided more than 550 million euros in grant aid to Pakistan. He explained that Netherlands assistance programme in Pakistan focused on environment, education, good governance and human rights. Through its bilateral cooperation programme, the Netherlands seeks to contribute to security and stability through a sustained engagement with Pakistan, based on mutual respect. Asia Foundation Country Representative Dr Jon Summers said the launching of HRF was made possible due to cooperation of the Dutch embassy.

(Daily Times – May 8, 2009)

Democracy Watch

Government Watch – Political Governance

Standing Committees of National Assembly and Senate

PPP Wins Elections of NA Standing Committees' Heads

Elections for heads of the National Assembly's standing committees on youth affairs, economic affairs and statistics, and sports were held on May 13 and, as expected, lawmakers from PPP won. Under an understanding between parties in the Parliament, Chairmanship of the NA Standing Committees were to be decided on the basis of their numerical strength. Therefore, it was a foregone conclusion that the three committees would go to the ruling party. **Sher Muhammad Baloch, Malik Azmat Khan and Jamshaid Ahmed Dasti were unanimously elected Chairmen of the standing committees on youth affairs, economic Affairs and statistics, and sports, respectively.** Secretary National Assembly Mr Karamat Hussian Niazi conducted the elections.

(Dawn – May 14, 2009)

Major Parties Eye 'Important' Senate Committees

Major political parties in the Senate have set their sights on the chairmanships of the important standing committees of the Upper House, but the PPP is planning to ensure its grip on these committees for a smooth sailing in the legislative process. The chairmanships of the important standing committees like defence, foreign affairs, interior, finance and information are on the priority list of the major groups in the Senate. PPP-led coalition government had decided to allot the chairmanships of the standing and functional committees to all the parties and groups represented in the Senate in proportion to their representation.

Consultative meetings had been held between the designated representatives of the parties and groups to work out the distribution of the chairmanships after Farooq Naik's election as the Chairman of the Senate. Currently there are around six parliamentary groups in the Senate including the PPP and its allies like the Pakistan Muslim League-Functional and other smaller parties like the PML-Quaid, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, the PML-Nawaz and its allies like the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party. There are around 36 standing and functional committees of the Senate and according to the agreed criterion, the chairmanship of one committee would be awarded on the basis of three seats each. Thus the opposition parties will be getting the Chairmanships of around 11 Committees but it is not necessary that they get the slots of their choice. They said since the PPP-led coalition government would be running the government affairs and leading the legislative business the important committees would remain with them.

(Daily Times – May 28, 2009)

Council of Islamic Ideology (CII)

PM Reconstitutes Council of Islamic Ideology

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on May 5 re-constituted the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) and also appointed 12 new members. The members are: Muhammad Siddique Hazarvi, Mufti Ghulam Mustafa Rizvi, Khawaja Sharif Amir Koreja, Mufti Ibrahim Qadri, Syed Saeed Shah Gujrati, Muhammad Khan Sherani, Dr Muhammad Idrees, Fazl Ali, Abu-al Fateh Yousuf, Shahida Akhtar Ali, Dr Anwar Hussain and Prof Dr Sabiha Qadri. Under the constitution, the council consists of not less than eight and not more than 20 members. At least one member should be a woman. A member of the council holds office for three years. A member can resign from the office or the president can remove him or her after a majority of members pass a resolution against him or her. The president also appoints the chairman of the council.

(Daily Times – May 6, 2009)

New Education Policy

New Education Policy to Get Cabinet's Approval Soon: Bijrani

Minister for Education, Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani said his Ministry was committed to introducing new education policy which is expected to get Cabinet's approval soon. In a meeting with a delegation of GTZ here, he said the

impression was totally wrong that the Education Ministry has some way or the other has lost its interest in the policy. He said the Cabinet wanted more input from the provinces as the policy would ultimately be implemented by the provinces. The Minister said reminders have already been sent to the Provinces and he would also talk to Provincial Chief Ministers, asking them to communicate their views, recommendations in the shortest possible time. Bijrani said he also plans to hold an emergency meeting of Inter Provincial Minister's within two weeks so that the education policy can be finalized and implemented.

(APP – May 30, 2009)

Government Watch – Economic Governance

Reports and Statistics on the State of Economy

Trade Deficit Drops by 15.9% during July-April 2008-09: FBS

Pakistan's trade deficit declined by 15.90 percent during first ten months (July-April) period of current fiscal year 2008-09 with total deficit at \$14.160 billion against the deficit of \$16.836 billion in same period of last fiscal year 2007-08. According to provisional figures released by Federal Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan's exports have registered a decline of 3.03 percent during July-April period of current fiscal year 2008-09 with total exports at \$14.762 billion as compared with \$15.222 billion in same period of last fiscal year. Country's imports also witnessed a decline of 9.78 percent during the July-April period of ongoing fiscal year with total imports at \$28.922 billion as against the imports of \$32.059 billion in same period last fiscal year.

April 2009 over April 2008: Country's merchandise exports totaled \$1.362 billion during April 2009 as against the exports of \$1.790 billion in April 2008 projecting a decline of 23.92 percent. Similarly, imports of the country declined by 31.74 percent in April 2009 with total imports at \$2.789 billion as compared with imports of \$4.099 billion in April 2008. Trade deficit during April 2009 totaled at \$1.435 billion as against the deficit of \$2.309 billion in April 2008 indicating a decline of 37.8 percent.

April 2009 over March 2009: The exports of the country witnessed an increase of 3.76 percent in April 2009 with total exports at \$1.362 billion as compared with exports of \$1.313 billion in March 2009. Imports registered a growth of 18.83 percent in April 2009 with total imports at \$2.798 billion as compared with imports of \$2.355 billion in March 2009. Trade deficit amounted to \$1.435 billion in April 2009 against the deficit of \$1.041 billion in March 2009 projecting an increase of 37.82 percent.

According to an official analysis, the textile industry, which has remained the major driver of the export growth once again, depicted sluggish performance and it registered negative growth. This downward trend in the textile sector is contributed by both significant fall in the unit value of almost all major textile items and supply constraints reflected through negative growth even in quantity terms. The share of textile sector has declined from 58.8 percent last year to 53.2 percent this year and it is persistently posting negative growth for some time. The product and market wise diversification is the need of the hour. Notwithstanding, good growth in non-traditional sector, country still needs to look into the structural problems of the textile industry. The January figure of exports is not representative as the pass through of global melt down is yet to be seen. The growth in imports reflects impact of substantial fall in oil and food imports in monetary terms, and these two items were responsible for 80 percent of additional imports bill last year. Import compression measures coupled with massive fall in international oil prices have started paying dividends and imports witnessed marked slowdown during the last two months. Notwithstanding the recent dramatic fall in the prices of crude oil in the international markets, the petroleum is still depicting positive growth of 9.2 percent and adding \$581 million to the additional import bill over last year's petroleum import. The monthly import bill on account of petroleum has lost one-third of its value. The additional import bill during the period July-February 2008-09 on account of petroleum and wheat was just above the \$1.0 billion.

(Daily Times – May 13, 2009)

Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP)

NEC Likely to Recommend Rs 630 billion PSDP

Due to inclusion of multiple developmental schemes by the Prime Minister and Federal Ministers, the National Economic Council (NEC) is likely to recommend Rs 630 billion Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2009-10 in its meeting scheduled for June 4. Earlier, the NEC meeting was scheduled to meet on June 1, but due to the inclusion of more development schemes the meeting has been postponed for June 4.

The Annual Plan Coordination Committee (APCC) on May 22 recommended Rs 600 billion initial size of the PSDP 2009-10. During 2008-09 the government had allocated Rs 541 billion, which showed the government had increased the allocation of the current year development budget by 10.9 percent. The APCC recommended Rs 600 billion as the size of PSDP, which consisted of Rs 400 billion federal component, while last year it was Rs 371 billion, which was later on revised to Rs 219 billion for 2008-09. The provincial component for the year 2009-10 was set at Rs 200 billion while last year it was Rs 170 billion, showing an increase of 17 percent over the last year. The APCC meeting endorsed the recommendation of Priorities Committees of Rs 294 billion for ongoing projects and approved Rs 106 billion for new projects of the federal component. Government has allocated Rs 500 million for internally displaced persons (IDPs) of Malakand, Swat, Buner, Shangla and others areas. It was not clear how the allocated amount would be spent on IDPs. Special schemes of Multan, Balochistan and other political bases will be included in the final recommendation for NEC meeting. It claimed that the size of PSDP would be enhanced from the currently announced Rs 600 billion to near about Rs 630 billion. The NEC meeting is likely to enhance the allocation for power of Central Development Working Party (CDWP) from the current Rs 500 million to Rs 1 billion. At the moment, the CDWP can approve a project worth up to Rs 500 million and above this limit the projects were sent to ECNEC for approval. However, it was decided to enhance the power of CDWP to approve projects worth Rs 1 billion.

The Approach Paper for 10th Five-Year Plan 2010-2015 would also be presented for approval. The plan suggested for redirecting resources to accelerate growth in Balochistan, NWFP, FATA and less developed areas in other provinces and regions through plans developed and implemented by them within the 10th Plan Framework and reduce disparities in human development and social indicators in these areas with the national average. The Approach Paper further suggested that agriculture and agro-business would serve as a leading sector for economic development and stressed for its development. For improving economic situation of the country, it also recommended for developing the Pakistani firm as part of a global value chain by increasing their competitiveness and reducing the cost of doing business.

(Daily Times – May 29, 2009)

PM Announces Rs 50bn PSDP for Balochistan

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani announced a Rs50 billion grant for Balochistan, saying the government was trying its best to end the sense of deprivation in the province. Presiding over a meeting here at the PM House, Mr Gilani said despite limited resources, the government was trying to provide best possible facilities to Balochistan in an effort to bring it on a par with the rest of the country. He said the government would set aside for the province in the next budget Rs8 billion more than what was earmarked in the last one. The Prime Minister informed the delegation that he, in his capacity as the vice-chairman of Pakistan People's Party, had formed a committee on Balochistan, comprising Commerce Minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Babar Awan, Minister for Labour and Manpower Syed Khursheed Shah, Mian Raza Rabbani and Balochistan President of PPP Haji Lashkari Raisani. He said Mr Rabbani had been asked to finalise draft recommendations before the all-parties conference on Balochistan. The Prime Minister said the government had summoned the meeting of the PPP's provincial executive committee on June 5 to take the provincial party on board on the issue.

(Dawn – May 31, 2009)

Donors' Economic Assistance to Pakistan

WB Extends \$25m to Pakistan for Transport Logistics

The World Bank has approved \$25 million credit to help Pakistan improve its trade and transport logistics. A statement issued by the Bank said the Second Trade and Transport Facilitation Project would provide technical advisory services to help implement the National Trade Corridor Improvement Program (NTCIP), a comprehensive government programme designed to significantly cut the cost and time of exporting and importing goods. The programme encompasses services, infrastructure, reforms and investments in highways, trucking, ports, maritime and air transport, railways and trade facilitation. "Over the past decade, the government of Pakistan has done much to improve its procedures and logistics services," said Yusupha Crookes, the WB country director for Pakistan.

(Daily Times – May 14, 2009)

Budget 2009-10

No New Taxes in Upcoming Budget

The Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance, Shaukat Tarin, said that the Government would not impose new taxes in the budget but rationalise the existing taxation system and widen its base. The Adviser said it was unfortunate that industry's contribution to tax collection was 60 per cent, but there were no taxes on agriculture, services and real estate sectors. Mr Tarin said there was no proposal to increase the general sales tax, but interest rate was likely to be lowered to bring the existing 17 per cent inflation down to a single digit. Special economic zones, he said, would be developed. The government would allocate funds for infrastructure development and building new dams, wind energy projects and increase investment in dairy industry. He said growth had been adversely affected because of the reduction in Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) allocation. Highlighting the government's poverty alleviation strategy, he said it would continue providing subsistence to the poor and enable them to earn a living through skill development. The poor would be provided with temporary employment at the union council level and allocation for health and education would be increased from the existing two per cent. He said Pakistani textile industry was not only importing cotton but earning less than \$1 billion while India and China were earning \$2 billion and \$4 billion, respectively. Incentives would be provided to textile industry, pharmaceutical, automobile and leather sectors for increasing income through value-addition. He said the government would form think-tanks to strengthen the institutions. It was trying to retain the competitiveness of rupee in the exchange market without disadvantage to the industry.

(Dawn – May 31, 2009)

BISP Updates

NADRA Rejects 5000 Forms of BISP over Different Objections

National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has rejected 5000 Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) forms from Constituency 178-Muzaffargarh on different objection according to details , as many as 8500 forms were submitted after initial verification from MNA Jamsheed Ahmad Khan Dasti. NADRA office Islamabad accepted 3500 forms and amount was paid against these forms but rejected 5000 other forms on different objections. Regarding objections, most of the persons who submitted forms were pensioners having readable passport.

(The Post – May 8, 2009)

Government Watch – Local Governance

Provinces & LG System

Punjab

Punjab not yet Clear About Future of Local Govts: Different groups were constituted on May 28 to think over the future of local governments in Punjab, keeping in view the possibility of announcement of fresh elections by the Election Commission of Pakistan. The bureaucratic groups were constituted by Local Government Minister Sardar Dost Muhammad Khosa at a meeting amidst indications that the constitutional protection to the local government system given by Gen Musharraf could be extended by the federal government. The indications have created another worry for the provincial government awaiting expiry of the protection on Dec 31 so as to eliminate the existing system and introduce a new one of its choice instead.

Sindh and the NWFP governments had already given their proposals to the federal government regarding the future shape of the local government best suited to them. And despite claims of also following the suit, the **Punjab government** was still considering what to recommend. A handout issued after the May 28 meeting however quoted the minister as having said that the province too had sent its recommendations to the federal government, asking for replacement of the existing system with the local government mechanism of 1979 with certain amendments, desiring restoration of the executive magistracy and withdrawal of financial and administrative powers from the local bodies. The meeting decided that recommendations by the groups comprising senior officials of the provincial government would be finalized in a week for their submission to the cabinet for final

approval. The government intends to establish local bodies under the 1979 Local Government Ordinance, giving them mainly municipal functions and eliminating the rural-urban divide introduced under the Local Government Ordinance of 2001. The meeting initially discussed the province's course of action if the fresh elections to the local governments were not held after the expiry of their current term on October 17, extending their period till the expiry of the constitutional protection to the Local Government Ordinance 2001 to get a free hand to introduce a new system of its own choice. But there were no concrete proposals as to what the provincial government would do if the Election Commission of Pakistan announced the local elections afresh under the existing system.

(Dawn – May 29, 2009)

Sindh

Govt to Take Control of LG Bodies: Sindh Minister for Local Government Agha Siraj Durrani said that, initially, the Sindh government will take control of the local government bodies after the completion of the present local government system's tenure in August, and then President Asif Ali Zardari will decide about the future of the LG system. He said that the period of the local bodies system would end in August this year and after its completion, administrators would be appointed before heading for fresh elections. He said that the present local government system was a product of a dictator and corruption in local bodies had destroyed the whole system. Regarding reports that the government has stopped funding various local governments in the province, he refuted the claim that funds of the City District Government Karachi have been stopped, however, admitted that releases have been stopped to some of the nazims who have been found involved in corruption. According to him, a lot of development work has been carried out in Karachi, however, he went on to say that some of the areas have been neglected.

(Daily Times – May 27, 2009)

PPP, MQM Still Differ Over Revival of Commissionerate System: The core committees of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) could not resolve differences over the restoration of the commissionerate system in Sindh. Education Minister Pir Mazharul Haq said that both the parties have consensus over bringing certain changes in the police system, however, consultations about the restoration of the commissioner system are continuing. He said that the decision about the restoration of the commissioner system has been delayed due to the departure of MQM leader Syed Sardar Ahmed, who is abroad, while adding that both the parties have agreed to fill vacant government posts on merit.

(Daily Times – June 3, 2009)

NWFP

NWFP Government Delegates more Powers to Commissioners: Taking a step forward towards the empowerment of Commissioner System in the Province, the NWFP government on May 7 allowed the commissioners to suspend and transfer the district officers working in their respective divisions. The commissioners would have the authority to suspend and transfer the district coordination officers (DCOs), assistant coordination officers (ACOs), district revenue officers (DROs) and executive district officers (EDOs) in their respective districts. The key decisions to decorate the commissioners with more powers were taken during a meeting chaired by NWFP Chief Secretary Javid Iqbal on May 7. Commissioners from all the divisions of the province participated in the meeting. Earlier, the respective provincial departments were responsible for the transfers and postings of DCOs, ACOs, DROs and EDOs. However, the meeting decided that the same power would be enjoyed by the commissioners on divisional levels. Transfers and postings of tehsildars, girdawars, naib tehsildars, patwaris, etc would also be made by the commissioners on divisional level, which is a cut on the powers of the district nazims.

The meeting also decided that monitoring cells of the Planning and Development (P&D) department would be overseen by the respective divisional commissioners. The anti-corruption officials would be liable to bring the arrest of any person under corruption and embezzlement charges in a district into the notice of the respective divisional commissioner.

(The News – May 8, 2009)

Balochistan

Balochistan Decides to Abolish District Govts: The provincial cabinet unanimously approved, on May 4, the Balochistan Local Government Act of 2009, replacing the Local Government Ordinance of 2001. The decision

to introduce the new law was taken at a marathon cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Nawab Aslam Raisani. Balochistan Assembly Speaker Aslam Bhootani was specially invited to the meeting. The Balochistan Local Government Act would abolish all district governments and restore metropolitan corporations and municipal committees. Salient features of the law were thoroughly discussed by coalition partners before approval. According to Chief Secretary Nasir Mehmood Khosa, the Balochistan Local Government Act would be presented in the provincial assembly as a bill for adoption before sending it to the federal government for approval. Under the new law, urban and rural areas would be differentiated and rural councils would also be set up. It was also decided to hold next local bodies elections on non-party basis under a new election authority. The new act would abolish the provincial local bodies' commission and authorize the government to audit local government funds. The provincial government would also be able to dissolve the institutions and suspend or dismiss their heads. Like before, metropolitan corporations and municipal committees would be headed by mayors and chairmen, respectively and Women would get 33 per cent representation.

(Dawn - May 5, 2009)

Provincial Autonomy

Conference Calls for Provincial Autonomy

A "Consultation and Reconciliation Conference" convened by the Awami Tehrik on May 10 called for a system based on the spirit of the 1940 resolution to ensure autonomy and sovereignty of federating units. The conference was presided by Mr Palijo urged leaders of Sindh to unite on a common agenda to solve the problems of the province. He did not agree with the idea of independence and said that if Sindh was to become a separate entity then all divisions, districts and talukas should also be given the status. He said that the 1940 resolution was thrown in the dustbin after Pakistan's creation. He accused a province of robbing the Indus water and said that before partition, 94 MAF water used to flow into the River Indus but because of construction of 19 barrages and link canals, Sindh today was facing a serious water shortage. Constitutional expert Abdul Mujeeb Pirzada rejected the independence theory and said that discussions should be held on the basis of ground realities- do you want the law of the jungle or the army to come if you throw out the constitution. He called for persuading political forces, particularly politicians like Nawaz Sharif to accept provincial autonomy and the Pakhtoons should not be alienated because they were natural allies of the Sindhis against the Urdu-speaking people. Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz secretary-general Dr Safdar Sarki said he would cooperate with pro-Sindh forces but would not accept anything short of independence. Sindh National Front leader Ayub Shar criticised the PPP, saying it had no clear stand on Kalabagh Dam. Sindh Hari Committee's Azhar Jatoi asked parties to go to the court of the people of Sindh. He said that the greater Thal canal was being constructed and Nisar Khuhro who was convener of the Anti-Greater Thal Canal Action Committee keeping quiet. PML-N leaders Ismail Rahu and Sardar Raheem supported the struggle of nationalists for Sindh's rights. They said that smaller provinces must be compensated for excesses committed against them. Why is the PPP which used to criticise the 1991 accord signed when our party was in power not giving a new accord, Mr Rahu inquired. Abdul Khaliq Junejo of the Jeay Sindh Mahaz said Sindh's resources were looted before Pakistan's creation and the 1973 Constitution legalised it. He said that there were people among Sindhis who were party to the robbery. Sindh United Party secretary-general Zain Shah said that the 1973 Constitution did not protect Sindh's resources and did not have the mechanism to check influx of outsiders. The Objectives Resolution should be deleted from the constitution and 1940's resolution should be incorporated into it, he added. Environmentalist Naseer Memon demanded a ban on new licenses for exploration of oil and gas because 50 per cent of the reserves had already been consumed. We should stop demanding royalty and call for an end to issuing new licenses for exploration, he said. Usman Baloch, Prof Mushtaq Mirani, G.N. Mughal, Qadir Bux Jatoi, Hashim Leghari, Mumtaz Sahto, Syed Shah Mohammad Shah, Zahida Sheikh, Amraah Samoon and Muzaffar Sadiq Bhatti also spoke on the occasion.

A declaration adopted at the conference called for excluding immigrants from census in Sindh and said that they should not be given the voting right in the province even if they had work permits.

- It said that state institutions served the interests of the establishment and feudal and anti-Sindh forces. The declaration said that although the province contributed billions of rupees to national economy, its people were deprived of basic amenities.
- It said that Sindh's cities were being snatched from Sindhis and their administrative control was being surrendered to urban terrorist groups, land mafia and illegal migrants.
- It said that the recent wave of migration from up-country must be stopped and said the 'aliens' should be expelled. It said despite producing oil, gas and coal 60 per cent of rural Sindh lived in abject poverty.

(Dawn – May 11, 2009)

Election Watch & Electoral Reforms

ECP Announces Election Schedule for NA-55

According to the schedule announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on May 28 the by-election in NA-55 will be held on July 4. The seat had fallen following resignation of Haji Pervez Khan of PML-N after a committee found him guilty in an examination scam. Mr Khan failed to defend himself after his nephew, Bilal Javed, was caught taking an FA examination in his place. According to the schedule, the returning officer will receive nomination papers from June 3 to 6, and scrutinise them on June 8 and 9. Last date for filing appeals against rejection or acceptance of nomination papers is June 11, while the election tribunal will decide the appeals by June 16. The last date for withdrawal of candidature will be June 17 and a final list of candidates will be published on June 18.

(Dawn – May 29, 2009)

Electoral Reforms by Election Commission

The Election Commission (EC) has recently sent a package of electoral reforms to the Prime Minister for his approval. The proposal includes a new provision – to be added to Article 14 of the Political Parties Order of 2002 – that says a political party will not be eligible to obtain an election symbol if it does not secure at least one seat with its symbol in any of the previous three parliamentary polls, or fails to secure five percent of total votes cast in the constituencies in which its candidates took part in any of the previous three parliamentary polls, or does not establish a functional central office with a central committee, and offices in at least 10 administrative districts and 50 tehsils or taluqas. Presently, Article 14 of the Political Parties Order of 2002 says, “Notwithstanding anything contained any other law for the time being in force, a political party shall be eligible to obtain an election symbol for contesting elections for Majlis-e-Shoora (parliament) and provincial assemblies on submission of certificates and statement referred to in Articles 12 and 13: “Provided that a combination of political parties shall be entitled to obtain a common election symbol for such election only if, each party constituting such combination, submits the certificates and statement referred to in Articles 12 and 13.” The second clause of Article 14 says: “Where any political party or a combination of political parties, severally or collectively, contravenes the provisions of articles 12 and 13, it shall not be entitled to obtain an election symbol for election to the Majlis-e-Shoora (parliament) or the provincial assemblies, and the Election Commission shall not allocate an election symbol to such party or, as the case may be, the combination of political parties for such election.”

The reforms proposed by the EC also include increasing the nomination fees for candidates “to stop non-serious candidates from contesting the polls” EC was also planning to begin updating the electoral rolls in near future “to make it a viable document for the next general elections. The enumeration proceedings for a voter list and a census are not possible together, because that may lead to confusion and registration of under-age voters.

(Daily Times – May 17, 2009)

Judicial Reforms

New National Judicial Policy Announced

The Supreme Court registrar, on May 30, announced the National Judicial Policy stating that pending cases would be disposed of in one year after June 1, the day, when the policy will come into force. Supreme Court Lahore Registry, SC Registrar Dr Faqir Hussain said the policy was drafted by the National Judicial Policy Making Committee, headed by the Chief Justice of Pakistan, after having deliberations and consultations with all bar associations, high courts, IGPs, IG prisons and other stakeholders. Registrars of all four high courts were also present on the occasion. As far as new cases are concerned, he said, they would also be decided in one year from the date of their filing. While in Balochistan six months time would be enough to end backlog of old cases and to dispose of new cases. He said the backlog was mainly due to inadequate budgetary allocation, which was negligible. Not even a one percent of federal and provincial budget is allocated for the third pillar of state. The SC called upon the government to remove the shortage of funds to enable the judiciary to cope with the twin problems of “backlog” and “delays”, he said.

Main features of the policy included: **Independence of judiciary, eradication of corruption and expeditious disposal of criminal cases.** Revealing the features of the policy, Dr Faqir Hussain said:

Independence of Judiciary:

- No Chief Justice or a Judge of the Superior Courts would accept appointment as acting governor of a province.
- No retired Judge of the superior court would accept an appointment, which is lower to his status or dignity, including appointment as presiding officer of banking courts, customs courts and administrative tribunals.
- Posting of serving judges against executive posts in federal and provincial government departments on deputation be discontinued. All such judges should be repatriated to the respective high court.
- The judiciary would avoid its involvement in the conduct of election as it distracts judicial officers from professional duty and complaints of corrupt practices tarnish the image of judiciary. However, the government request in this regard would be considered by the NJPMC.

Eradication of Corruption from the Judiciary:

- In each High Court a cell to be called '*Cell for Eradication of Corruption from Judiciary*' may be established in the Registrar's office under the supervision of Chief Justice of High Court to entertain complaints with credible evidence.
- Action should be initiated against those judicial officers/staff that carry persistent reputation of being corrupt or have their life style beyond ostensible means of income, he said.
- The corrupt judicial officers be made OSDs and kept against their posts for the purpose of drawing salary only, and disciplinary proceedings should be quickly finalized.

Expeditious Disposal of Criminal Cases:

- The bail applications would be decided not beyond a period of three days by the magistrate, five days by court of sessions and seven days by the high court. In bail matters, notice to the State for production of record should not exceed beyond three days.
- In criminal cases, police/investigating agency would submit challan (Police Report) within a period of 14 days as contemplated in Section 173 CrPC. In case of non-completion of investigation, an interim report shall be submitted.
- About the disposal of civil cases, Dr Faqir Hussain said writ petitions under Article 199 of the Constitution should be disposed of as quickly as possible.
- Stay matters should be decided within 15 days of grant of interim injunction and in case of delay, the judicial officer should report reasons to the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned through the registrar.
- The rent cases should be decided speedily within a period of four months while family cases should be decided within 3-6 months.
- Civil judges should decide review applications within 30 days, and the trial of new cases (instituted after January 1, 2009) should be completed within six months.
- Priority should be given to women and juvenile cases for quick disposal.
- In the Supreme Court and high courts, priority should be given to dispose of old cases.
- To clear the backlog under different categories, special benches should be constituted for each category by the Supreme Court and high court.

(The News – May 31, 2009)

New National Judicial Policy Stands Enforced

The National Judicial Policy has been enforced from June 1 sets apparently an impossible task of clearing a huge backlog of 1.5 million cases in subordinate judiciary and 0.13 million cases in the superior judiciary in just one year despite facing a shortage of 380 judges and judicial officers in courts. The lawyers, while welcoming the policy, hoped that this would restore the confidence of the people on judicial system. A cross section of lawyers commenting on the new Judicial Policy said that the crime rate would lower with making it obligatory to decide family matters cases within three months and murder cases in six months.

(The News – June 1, 2009)

Eligibility of Sharif Brothers

SC Allows Sharifs to Contest Polls

The Supreme Court on May 26 set aside the judgments of the Lahore High Court and Supreme Court and allowed PML-N Chief Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Mian Mohammad Shahbaz

Sharif to contest elections. The larger bench headed by Justice Tassadaq Hussain Jilani and comprising Justice Nasir ul Mulk, Justice Mohammad Musa K. Leghari, Justice Shaikh Hakim Ali and Justice Ghulam Rabbani heard proceedings. Head of bench announcing the verdict in a short order said that the review petitions filed by Nawaz Sharif and civil review petitions filed by Shahbaz Sharif and criminal review petition filed by Javed Mehmood are allowed while all the remaining civil review petitions and civil miscellaneous applications are not maintainable and are disposed of.

Consequently the judgments of the Lahore High Court of June 23, 2008 and of the Supreme Court under review on February 25, last are set aside and the order of the Returning Officer accepting nomination papers of the petitioner Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif and Mian Mohammad Shahbaz Sharif on May 16, 2008 are restored, Justice Jilani announced. He said that the mandate of Article 225 of the Constitution has not been appreciated in the context of the instant cases. The Article places a bar to challenge an election dispute except through an election petition under the law i.e. the Representation of People's Act 1976. In exceptional circumstances, however, the qualification or disqualification of a candidate can be challenged under Article 199 of the Constitution provided the order passed during the election process is patently illegal, the law has not provided any remedy either before or after the elections; and the alleged disqualification is floating on record requiring no probe and enquiry, he said. In the cases in hand, Justice Jilani said the issues of unpaid loans, of court contempt and of filing false affidavit were disputed questions of fact which could not have been adjudicated upon in the proceedings under Article 199 of the Constitution and even the material placed before the Court was not sufficient to render the impugned findings. He said the `Presidential Pardon', in the case of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif stood admitted by the Federation of Pakistan through the statement made by the Deputy Attorney General before the High Court, before this Court during the hearing of the main petition and in the instant review petition and even by the Attorney General who appeared in these review proceedings. Justice Jilani said to allege that it was conditional or qualified pardon required deeper probe that exercise entailed factual enquiry.

(The Post – May 27, 2009)

Regional Politics and Election Watch

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Pakistan, Iran Sign Gas Pipeline Deal

President Asif Ali Zardari and his Iranian counterpart, Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, signed an inter-governmental framework declaration to support within the framework of their respective laws and regulations the gas deal signed by the oil ministries of the two countries. Earlier, the Gas Sale Purchase Agreement (GSPA) was signed by the MD National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and the MD Inter-state Gas System for export of Iranian natural gas to Pakistan on the border of Iran-Pakistan for domestic consumption in Pakistan. The deal, known as "peace pipeline", was signed on the sidelines of the tripartite summit of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran on elimination of terrorism, drug and human trafficking, held here on May 24. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Shaukat Tarin and Adviser to the Prime Minister on Petroleum and Natural Resources Dr Asim Hussain were also present during the signing ceremony of the gas deal. Adviser on Petroleum and Natural Resources Dr Asim Hussain told that Pakistan and Iran would sign the formal agreement for the multi-billion dollar gas pipeline project in a third country within the next 15 days. He said the two countries on Sunday signed a final consultative process document as well as an inter-governmental framework document of the gas pipeline project. Separately, Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit said on Sunday that the Pak-Iran gas pipeline project had been signed at the trilateral summit in Iran. The 2,100-kilometre-long pipeline is to transfer Iranian gas to Pakistan. Some 1,100 kilometres of the pipeline would be laid in the Iranian territory and 1,000 kilometres in Pakistan. The project is to transfer about 750 million cubic feet of gas per day. Construction of the pipeline is to be completed in five years.

(The News – May 25, 2009)

Ties with Pakistan High on New Singh Govt's Agenda

Indian President Pratibha Patil appointed Dr Manmohan Singh for a second term as Prime Minister and there were instant signs that ties with Pakistan were high on the agenda of the re-elected Congress party-led government. Even as Dr Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi met the President with their list of support from an overwhelming 322 MPs, the foreign ministry handed over to the Pakistan High Commission more information on the November 26-29, 2008 terrorist attack that claimed over 170 lives. The additional information and details relating to the Mumbai terror attack were sought by Pakistan, a report said quoting the Indian foreign ministry. The fresh information handed over to a Pakistani diplomat here reportedly consisted of the confessional statement of Ajmal Amir Kasab, the lone Pakistani gunman captured alive during the three-day terror siege and DNA samples of the Mumbai terrorists. New Delhi says they are members of Pakistan-based militant outfits. A clear mandate to the ruling Congress party following the April-May polls is expected to enable the government to deal with security issues in the neighborhood with greater authority. Wednesday's exchange of material evidence is being seen as a message to Pakistan to speed up the prosecution of the plotters of the Mumbai attacks, which stalled their bilateral dialogue. Much would depend on Pakistan's initiative on Mumbai to revive the talks.

The development on the Pakistan front came as Dr Singh, accompanied by Ms Gandhi, called on President Patil. Staking claims to form the government, they also handed over to the president letters of support extended to them by various political parties and others, a presidential communiqué said. The president having satisfied herself, on the basis of various letters of support received, that the Congress-led UPA alliance, which is also the largest pre-election alliance, is in a position to command majority support of the newly constituted 15th Lok Sabha and to form a stable government, appointed Dr Manmohan Singh as the prime minister and requested him to indicate the members of the new Council of Ministers, the statement confirmed.

(Dawn – May 21, 2009)

Indian Parliamentary Elections

Results of Indian Parliamentary Elections

General Election 2009 Results		
	Party	Won
UPA	CONG	206
	DMK	18
	NCP	9
	TC	19
	JMM	2
	NC	3
	Others	5
	Total	262
NDA	BJP	116
	JD(U)	20
	SS	11
	SAD	4
	AGP	1
	RLD	5
	Total	157
Third Front	Left	22
	BSP	21
	JD(S)	3
	AIADMK	9
	TDP	6
	TRS	2
	BJD	14
	Others	3
Total	80	
Fourth Front	SP	23
	RJD	4
	Total	27
Other Parties		17

Source: Election Commission of India

Manmohan Singh Takes Oath as PM for 2nd term

Overseen by President Pratibha Patil, Manmohan Singh, 76, was the first to take oath at a simple and brief function at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. This is the first time she has administered the oath of office. Among the new entrants in the Cabinet were Mamata Banerjee, the Trinamool Congress leader who trounced the Communists in West Bengal, Rajasthan Congress unit president CP Joshi, Congress general secretary M Veerappa Moily, and former Karnataka chief minister S M Krishna. The oath taking ceremony in the Rashtrapati Bhavan was attended among others by Vice President Hamid Ansari, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and BJP leader L K Advani. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, former Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Lalu Prasad, Ram Vilas Paswan and service chiefs were also present.

59 Ministers Sworn-In to Complete Indian Government

India's President swore in 59 new Ministers on May 28, completing the formation of the new government and ending days of political maneuvering since the Congress-led coalition swept to victory. The main dispute was with one of Congress' main pre-election allies, the DMK, a regional party from southern India. The party had asked for five Cabinet posts and threatened to only support the government from the outside. But leaders eventually agreed to Congress' offer of three spots, as the governing party -- emboldened by its unexpected election success -- held firm.

The government is a mix of veteran politicians and Congress stalwarts and several new faces, representing a younger generation brought in by Gandhi's son, Rahul. Rahul Gandhi emerged as a major force in the Congress party ahead of the 2009 vote and has been credited as the key strategist of the election victory, campaigning relentlessly in the months before the vote. Rahul was asked to join the Cabinet -- a common precursor to the Prime Ministership -- but declined. He has said he wants to continue his work strengthening the party's youth wing. Among those sworn-in was 28-year-old Agatha Sangma, India's youngest minister. Her father was a leading politician, and she has taken over his seat in parliament. The massive 79-member government is also a reflection of the vast differences in India. The ministers come from 21 of India's 28 states and include representatives from the country's Muslim minority and the lower castes.

(The News – May 29, 2009)

Upcoming Presidential Elections in Afghanistan

Karzai Registers for Re-Election

Afghan President Hamid Karzai registered as a candidate for Afghanistan's August Presidential elections on April 4 and selected a powerful warlord and former top political leader as his new vice-presidential running mate. Karzai wanted to run again to serve more Afghan people, as he acknowledged, in fact there had been some mistakes during his ending five-year term as President. Karzai made a major change to his ticket, selecting Muhammad Qasim Fahim, a powerful Tajik warlord, as one of his two vice-presidential running mates. Meanwhile, the UN mission head in Afghanistan begged President Hamid Karzai not to name Fahim as his running mate, who was linked to accusations of human rights abuses but was ignored.

(The News – May 5, 2009)

Abdul Hassib Arian to Contest Elections Again

Abdul Hassib Arian is listed as coming last in Afghanistan's previous presidential election in 2004, but that has not stopped him from standing for the next polls in August. This time he is in it to win it, the balding policeman with a large bushy moustache says earnestly. In the 2004 polls -- the first-ever presidential election in this turbulent nation -- Arian won 8,373 votes, or 0.1 percent, according to the Independent Election Commission. It compared to Hamid Karzai's 4.4 million, or 55.4 percent, and put him at the bottom of a list of 18. The poor showing, Arian says, is because he withdrew just ahead of voting day and told his supporters to choose Karzai instead. He told that when you see (then U.S. president George W.) Bush saying that he will support Karzai, it is meaningless to run. He said that "I asked my supporters to vote for Karzai. According to my people at the polling stations, some 1.5 million people who initially wanted to vote for me voted for Karzai". He was later promoted to police chief for one of 17 districts in Kabul city -- a post he quit a few days after his interview with AFP to make another run for election.

Barely known outside his small, poor Kabul neighborhood, the former police colonel believes Karzai is not as strong as he was in 2004. The past five years have been tough, with Taliban attacks soaring and Afghans increasingly disillusioned by the state of their country. Under President Barack Obama, the U.S. administration appears to have cooled toward Karzai. Arian is adamant he has what it takes over the men many say are Karzai's strongest challengers -- internationally known economist Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah.

There are 44 candidates for the presidential election, Afghanistan's second in a history of war, coups, occupation and assassinations. The August 20 poll is a test of U.S.-led efforts to introduce democracy as part of a plan to set Afghanistan on a path that would squeeze out Islamists, warlords and other symbols of the past. To stand, candidates need to meet basic requirements, such as being born in Afghanistan, holding only Afghan citizenship and being over 40 years old. To register they had to present themselves to the Independent Election Commission with 50,000 afghani (1,000 dollars), the voting cards of 10,000 supporters and two running mates.

(Tehran Times – May 20, 2009)

Most of the Presidential Candidates Weak

Afghanistan's election authority complained about the calibre of some of the 44 candidates for the August 20 presidential polls, charging they were unknown and had no clear programme. Independent Election Commission chief Azizullah Ludin said that all met the basic legal requirements but some had never even worked in an office. He told that most of them are unknown and they don't have any programmes for the future. He further said that that all 44, who include two women, had passed the commission's initial vetting process. He recounted an exchange with one would-be candidate. Ludin did not make it clear whether this man, whom he would not identify, was eventually one of the 44 to sign up to stand for election. He called on the media to inform Afghan people about "essential" standards for someone who would run the country. Candidates for president have to meet basic requirements, such as being born in Afghanistan, having only Afghan citizenship and being older than 40.

(AFP – May 16, 2009)

Sri Lanka's Victory Over Tiger Rebels

Sri Lanka Declares Final Victory-Over Tiger Rebels

Sri Lanka's military declared a final victory on May 18 in its decades-old conflict with the Tamil Tigers, after routing the remnants of the rebel army and killing its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. The army said its commandos had overrun the last sliver of Tiger territory, killing the last 300 fighters and decimating the rebel leadership. It said Prabhakaran and two deputies tried to flee in a van, but were shot dead.

Army Chief Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka announced that all military operations have come to a stop. Now the entire country is declared rid of terrorism. His statement marked the end of one of Asia's oldest and most brutal ethnic conflicts which left more than 70,000 dead from pitched battles, suicide attacks, bomb strikes and assassinations. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) emerged in the 1970s, with all-out war breaking out in the early 1980s as they pursued their struggle for an independent Tamil homeland on the Sinhalese-majority island. Officials said all rebel leaders were now dead. A senior Defence Ministry official told that Prabhakaran and his two deputies had tried to flee advancing troops in an ambulance and another van but were ambushed by commandos. The Defence Ministry said troops also killed Prabhakaran's deputies – Sea Tiger leader Colonel Soosai and LTTE intelligence chief Pottu Amman. Also killed were the rebel leader's 24-year-old son Charles Anthony, the group's political wing leader B Nadesan, and the head of the LTTE's defunct Peace Secretariat, S Pulideevan.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet website said the LTTE leadership had appealed to the Red Cross to be evacuated, and that "initial reports indicate a determined massacre by the Sri Lanka Army". In a dramatic announcement, the Tamil guerrillas had acknowledged that their battle for an independent ethnic homeland had reached its "bitter end" – signalling Asia's longest running civil war was all but over. Rajapakse will open a new session of parliament today (Tuesday) with an address that will officially mark the end of the war. The capital Colombo, which has been frequently hit by Tiger suicide attacks over the past quarter century, saw street celebrations – with residents setting off firecrackers and waving flags. "This is a victory against terrorism. I am very proud of our forces, of what they have done," said Ashani de Silva, a Colombo student, as national flags were put up over shops, homes, offices and cars. Victory euphoria also gripped Sri Lanka's stock exchange, with the main index jumping 6.45 percent.

(Daily Times – May 19, 2009)

Nepal's New Prime Minister

Madhav Kumar Elected Nepal's New Prime Minister

The Nepalese Parliament elected a moderate communist leader as the new Prime Minister on May 23. Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda resigned, plunging the nascent republic into a crisis sparked by his failure to fire the Army Chief.

Madhav Kumar Nepal, 56, a veteran leader of the moderate Communist UML party, was elected unopposed after the Maoists refused to field a candidate and said they would boycott the vote. The former Maoist rebel leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who still uses his nom de guerre Prachanda, meaning "fierce", resigned on May 4 after President Ram Baran Yadav stopped him from firing General Rookmangud Katawal. Prachanda accused Katawal of undermining the civilian government.

A loose **alliance of 22 political parties** later backed the moderate communist Nepal for the post of Prime Minister. A former bank clerk turned politician and a commerce graduate, he is known for his ability to negotiate with rivals. The new Government has a year to oversee the drafting of a new constitution, a key part of the deal that ended a conflict with Maoist insurgents that killed more than 13,000 people.

(Daily Times – May 24, 2009)

Myanmar – Suu Kyi's House Arrest

Myanmar Ends Suu Kyi House Arrest, Keeps Her Detained

Myanmar officially ended Aung San Suu Kyi's six-year house arrest on May 26– but she remains in jail facing charges over an incident in which a US man swam to her house, her party said. Nyan Win, a spokesman for the National League for Democracy (NLD), said a senior policeman gave Aung San Suu Kyi papers notifying her that the restriction orders keeping her at her lakeside home had been lifted. But he said her supporters “don't know whether we should be happy or sad” since she is currently held at Yangon's notorious Insein prison facing a five-year jail term on charges of breaching the terms of her house arrest. Her lawyers had argued that her six years under house arrest were due to expire on May 25, and pointed to a UN panel's ruling that her house arrest was already illegal under both Myanmar and international law. Myint Thein, the police official, had told reporters and diplomats just hours before the order was lifted that the military regime had the legal right to keep Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for another six months.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner has spent 13 of the last 19 years under house arrest since the military junta refused to recognise the NLD's landslide victory in the country's last elections, in 1990. She was charged on May 14 with violating the terms of her house arrest by assisting American man John Yettaw, who swam to her house under cover of darkness and spent two nights there.

(The News – May 27, 2009)