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Gender

Women & Politics

Women MPs Seek End to Social, Political Injustice

The Women Parliamentary Caucus has adopted a unanimous resolution condemning extremism and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and called for elimination of poverty and ending social, political and economic injustices as remedy for eradicating extremism and terrorism. The meeting of the Women Parliamentary Caucus reviewed the working, problems and achievements of women police force and protection of women rights. The meeting called for peaceful resolution of all political disputes to reinvigorate the fight against terrorism and extremism. The resolution also affirmed the commitment to work for peace with women parliamentarians in the region. It lauded national and political unity in the wake of growing internal and external threats of extremism and militancy and welcomed the restraint shown by the Pakistan government and the steps taken to forge political consensus and to gain international support in dealing with the challenges in the wake of the Mumbai carnage. The resolution called upon the Pakistan government to continue to address the issue within the discussion on the subject in Parliament.

Meanwhile, addressing the meeting Dr Fahmida Mirza said that the country's development and prosperity depended on the empowerment of women. She said that the women had 26% representation in Parliament who should play their role to bring about meaningful change in the fate of womenfolk in the country. She said that meaningful legislation would be made to bring about pragmatic changes in the lives of women in Pakistan.

[The News -- December 20, 2009]

Women Parliamentary Caucus Role Eulogized

In its special report published in connection with the International Women's Day on November 25, the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) lauded the efforts of Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) in the National Assembly for its role in protection of women rights and their empowerment. The IPU is the focal point for the parliamentary dialogue and works for fostering cooperation and development among diverse nations before their mutual benefit. In its report, the union appreciated the initiative of Speaker National Assembly Dr. Fehmida Mirza, for her sagacious leadership for launching a parliamentary forum.

The report said that this bi-partisan Caucus of Women Parliamentarians have enabled its members to rise above party politics and to jointly work for the social economic uplift of Pakistani women. The report specifically mentioned the efforts of WPC for focusing on policy formulation and service delivery for women especially for the women survivals of violence and gender bias. It further said that on the advice of WPC, the government of Pakistan is about to initiate measures to ensure medical and legal aid and security assistance to women survivals of the gender based violence. The IPU also lauded the endeavours of Women Parliamentary Caucus for bringing into limelight, the ordeal of acid and kerosene oil burned victims and their treatment and rehabilitation. The report says that the credit goes to WPC for motivating women parliamentarians who have dedicated their development funds to the construction of Burn Treatment Centres in the under develop and remote areas of the country and campaigning for the economic

empowering of women survivors. The IPU advised the parliamentarians to forge national consensus and build cross party alliances to support action for the cause of women's empowerment and protection. "The Parliamentarian should also involve other stakeholders, civil society and grass root organisations for formulation of sustainable policies," the report mentions.

[The News -- November 19, 2009]

Lebanese Female Ministers 'Crack' Male Politisphere

Mother of three Raya Haffar Hassan cracked Lebanon's male-dominated political spectrum last week when she was appointed Finance Minister, the first time for a woman to land such a top job. Activists say the appointment of Hassan and State Minister Mona Afeish in the new 30-member national unity government unveiled on November 9 is a welcome step, but remains a mere "crack in the political glass ceiling." The US-educated Hassan, who has an MBA from George Washington University, was selected by Prime Minister Saad Hariri while Afeish, an attorney and civil society activist, was named by President Michel Sleiman. "The glass ceiling? I guess you could say it's cracked," said Aman Kabbara Shaarani, who heads the Lebanese Council of Women, an umbrella group of several organisations. "Prime Minister Saad Hariri took a good step by appointing two women to his cabinet, but this is far from enough," she told AFP. Lebanon prides itself as a pioneer of women's liberation in the Arab world but it still lags behind some of its more conservative neighbours and only four women have seats in the 128-strong parliament.

In government, female representation fares poorly as well. The first woman to be appointed to a government was the daughter of Lebanon's first prime minister Riad Solh, Leila Solh Hamadeh, who served as industry minister from 2004 to 2005. "We would have hoped women to get at least 30 percent representation in government, especially since women accounted for 53 percent of all ballots cast in our elections last June," Shaarani said. "Unfortunately in this country, qualified women do not reach high-level posts because political shares are divided among men and along sectarian lines," she added. "But our two new female ministers are highly qualified, so it's a step forward in terms of quality at least." Hassan is no newcomer to the world of finance. She has contributed to the establishment of assistance programmes in Lebanon set up by the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. Since 2003, the 42-year-old mother has worked with three former Prime Ministers on financial policies and says she is ready, and capable, of tackling challenges that lay ahead. The task will be tough: although Lebanon has largely ducked the global economic crisis, the national debt is expected to top 50 billion dollars this year. Most of the debt was incurred during the massive reconstruction after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war led by Saad Hariri's father Rafiq Hariri, a five-time prime minister who was assassinated in 2005. Hassan also enters a national debate on whether to privatise the country's extortionate telecoms sector and the money-draining electricity sector, the government's third largest expenditure after debt servicing and salaries. Her detractors deride her as a muse of the Hariri era, and the pro-opposition daily Al-Akhbar has dubbed her the "golden child of Hariri's financial policy." The US- and Saudi-backed Hariri announced the new cabinet line-up after nearly five months of tough negotiations with his rivals in the Iran- and Syria-backed Hezbollah-led opposition. Hariri got the lions's share, with 15 ministries given to his alliance, while the opposition is represented by 10 ministers. President Sleiman, who plays the role of arbiter, appointed the remaining five ministers.

[Daily Times -- November 17, 2009]

Women & Laws

NA Passes Bill to Protect Women at Workplace

In a rare show concern for women without a dissent, the National Assembly unanimously passed a bill, on November 4, to provide for a higher punishment for their sexual harassment, expanding the definition of the crime to facilitate prosecution. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, which must be passed by the Senate as well to become law, amends both the Pakistan Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, increasing the punishment for the crime to up to three years in prison and a fine of up to Rs500,000 from up to one year and unspecified fine already provided in the PPC for a vague 'insult (to) the modesty of a woman'.

The draft, fruit of a campaign by women activists, was introduced in the house early this year by then information minister Sherry Rehman, who won special plaudits from both sides of the house during speeches after the bill -- already approved by a 16-member Standing Committee on Law with Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani cited as its minister-in-charge -- was passed without a debate. However, some members from the both treasury and opposition benches voiced fears about the possibility of misuse of the new law, particularly in rural areas to settle scores -- though some others dismissed such concerns -- and called for an effective implementation, possibly with amendments in other relevant law and rules governing police.

The bill is the second passed by the present 19-month-old lower in three months, the first being a private bill adopted by it in early August -- and later by the Senate -- to provide for monetary and other relief to sufferers of domestic like women, children and other vulnerable persons such as the elderly and domestic servants. It will be followed by another pro-women bill, designed to make provisions for their protection against harassment at workplaces, which was put on the agenda of the house on Monday but was put off because of an opposition walkout to protest against the controversial National Reconciliation Ordinance of former military ruler Pervez Musharraf that the government later decided not to bring for approval.

'Harassment is one of the most common issues faced by the women of Pakistan,' a statement of objects and reasons accompanying the new bill said. 'They face intimidation in the marketplace, in buses, at bus stops and at workplace.' It said this issue alone inhibited most women to move out of their houses for education, availing medical facilities and earning a livelihood. The statement said that although the PPC already had some sections that 'attempt to address sexual harassment to a certain extent, (their) the terminology is vague' and open to interpretation. It said the new amendment was 'in the same spirit' as of the PPC's original section 509 and other relevant clauses providing protection to women but that it 'elaborates and specifies what constitutes harassment of women in public, private and workplaces'.

'This amendment will not only make public and work environment safer for women but will open up the path for more women to pursue livelihood with dignity,' the statement said. 'It will reduce poverty as more and more women will get the courage to enter the job market.'

The existing brief section 509 of the PPC on the subject of 'word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman', defines the culprit as one 'intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman'.

The proposed new section 509 with modified title of 'insulting modesty or causing sexual harassment', additionally defines the culprit as one who conducts sexual advances, or demands sexual favors or uses verbal or non-verbal communication or physical conduct of a sexual nature which intends to annoy, insult, intimidate or threaten the other person or commits such acts at the premises of workplace, or makes submission to such conduct either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, or makes submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual a basis for employment decision affecting such individual, or retaliates because of rejection of such behavior, or conducts such behavior with the intention of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

[Dawn -- November 5, 2009]

Legislation to Help Curb Violence against Women' -- Session on Sexual Harassment and its Legal Remedies

The recent parliamentary legislation will help curb harassment of women at workplace in developing countries like Pakistan where gender prejudice affects almost 80-90 percent women, it was stated at a brain storming session on the subject. Writer and women-rights activist, Dr Fauzia Saeed, delivered the keynote address at the session on "**Sexual Harassment and its Legal Remedies**" arranged by "Church World Service-Pakistan/Afghanistan". She said that according to some estimates, almost 80 to 90 percent of women suffered from harassment, whether in public transport, in markets, on roads or at recreational spots, and above all at the workplace. She hailed the recent passage of the bill in the Parliament, aimed at curbing the menace of sexual harassment. She said that similar sessions on the subject were conducted earlier at Karachi and Hyderabad while another three are planned in other cities soon.

The Islamabad session, the third of its kind, was attended by more than 50 individuals, representing NGOs, youth groups, students, political analysts, lawyers, journalists and others. They asked probing questions about the incidence of women's harassment and whether the recent legislation would help stamp out the menace. Dr. Fauzia Saeed replied that sexual harassment could take many forms but two significant manifestations at the workplace 'were abuse of authority and creating a hostile environment. "The dynamics of harassment at the workplace take on special significance considering The amount of time an adult spends at the workplace and the spillover effects on career growth, worker productivity, general well-being and peace of mind and fundamental rights of workers," Dr. Fauzia added. Mahnaz Rahman, the Programme's Moderator, thanked the participants for making the debate a lively and thought-provoking exercise.

[The Nation -- November 13, 2009]

Women & Economics

Farmland Women Seek a Raise

Farmland women workers have demanded that the district administration force farm owners to raise their wages. At a press conference, Maryam Boota and other women workers said farm owners paid Rs200 per 40 kilo to cotton-picking women, five kilo of paddy for harvesting and thrashing 40kg of paddy, and Rs25 for picking 40 kg of tomatoes or chili. Ms Boota said women workers were also forced to do domestic chores of the cultivators. She said women were now united on a platform and they would demonstrate at the district headquarters if the administration did not give attention to their demands.

[Dawn -- November 14, 2009]

Women of Substance Honoured

More than 50 women excelling in small and medium enterprise and corporate sector were awarded the Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Achievement Award at a ceremony held at the Governor's House on November 18. Speaking on the occasion,

The award ceremony was arranged with the cooperation of Central and North Punjab Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The women who were honoured at the ceremony did outstanding work in banking, pharmaceutical, textile, food and agriculture, education, community development, fashion and fashion accessories, art and literature, sports-goods, gems and jewellery, construction and housing, besides service sectors like IT, media, education, beauty, entertainment, hospital (health-care), corporate social responsibility, environment, judiciary and entertainment. Mrs Amber Haroon Saigol, Prof Dr Shahena Asif, Prof Dr Nikhat Khan, Prof Dr Shahida Khwaja, Samina Ahmad, Dr Musarrat Hasan, Anne Mansoor, Hina Waqar, Mumtaz Maker, Naila Anjum, Najma Najm, Shafqat Sultana, Surriya Anwar, Captain Riffat Hayee and Uzma Gul were the recipients of 20 years shield. In the SME manufacturing sector, awards were given to Anila Saleem, Ayesha Ibrahim, Farah Jahangir, Ghazala Saifi, Maria Saifi, Nazi Khalid, Rafia Sabir, Rizwana Shahid, Samina Bukhari, Sapna Kavita Oberoi, Shamama Tul Amber Shazia Bukhari, Suraiya Waqar and Zeenat Saboohi.

Earlier, CNPWCCI President Dr Shehla Javed Akram said the sole purpose of launching the awards had been to promote and develop women entrepreneurship and to recognise the commendable work done by them for the country.

[Dawn -- November 19, 2009]

Women & Media

Journalists 'Not Equipped to Judge Story with Gender Lens'

Pointing out the prevalence of largely unnoticed gender discrimination in electronic and print media, speakers at a national seminar said the every incident has a feminine side that always remain unmentioned as media persons are mostly not equipped to judge a story with gender lens. They were speaking at a national seminar for journalists on gender sensitive reporting. Organised by Rozan, the seminar was aimed at developing an understanding of what constitutes masculinities and femininities and how the mainstream media are reinforcing such notions in a hegemonic manner. They urged journalists to incorporate all social angles in a story. They stressed for the use of more gender sensitive language and regretted that in stories about women committing a social crime, the role played by men around her is never given any importance. The pointed out that caution against identification should be employed while reporting cases of violence against women.

"Publication of names and photographs of the victim can have devastating impact on their lives," they warned. Print and electronic journalists from Hyderabad, Multan, Peshawar and Abbottabad are participating in the event that comprises lively and interactive discussion sessions and movie shows. A number of Islamabad-based journalists and civil society members also attended the seminar. The experts chosen to speak on different topics at this seminar are Ghazi Salahuddin, Zahida Hina, Talat Hussain, Abdul

Rauf, Neelum Hussain, Aisha Gazdar, Haris Khaliq, Narjis Zaidi, Saba Gul Khattak, Shabana Arif and Saliha Ramey.

Major thematic areas chosen for the seminar include portrayal of masculinities and femininities in the media and its impact on society. Special considerations of investigative reporting on Violence Against Women (VAW), reporting in conflict zone with special focus on VAW and children, women in media and media activism. Speakers said that society and media are interrelated with each other and media can play important part in changing discriminatory and traditional norms imbedded in social mindset. "Pakistanis are seeing their country through the eyes of electronic media," they added. They said that everyone has the right to express his or her opinion but that opinion should be based upon facts. Talking about the misunderstandings between media and NGOs, they pointed out that both aims of both journalists and civil society workers are the same as they work for the betterment of the society.

[The News -- November 22, 2009]

Books, Articles & Reports on Gender

Women Face the Worst of Environmental Degradation: UNFPA Report

With the sixth largest population in the world, Pakistan produces only 0.4 percent of the world's total greenhouse gasses (GHG), which means that it is 135th on the list of global GHG emitters.

This has been revealed in the Pakistan Supplement of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)'s annual report on 'State of World Population'. The publication is titled 'Holding up the Sky: Women, Population and Climate Change', which examines the issues related to links between family planning, reproductive health, gender equality and its impact on future course of climate change. The report maintains that climate change will not only endanger lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable groups in Pakistan but also exacerbate gaps between rich and poor and inequality between women and men. Focusing in particular on women, the report emphasises that they are especially vulnerable to climate-induced calamities. It demonstrates women's pivotal role in addressing climate change effects. It serves as an awareness-raising platform to demonstrate the human face of the effects of rising sea levels, melting glaciers, flooding, earthquakes in heavily populated areas, internal and external migrations, food shortages, environmental degradation, and increased levels of emission of green house gasses, among many other factors. The Pakistan supplement provides significant information on exceptional increase in temperatures in Pakistan, changes in weather patterns, environmental degradation, air pollution, deforestation, water pollution, and land degradation in the Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, NWFP and Gilgit-Baltistan. In the foreword to the report, Daniel B Baker, UNFPA country representative in Pakistan, points out that the country faces multi-dimensional challenges with respect to climate change. "Rapid population growth could lead the total population to double by 2050 if urgent measures are not taken. Fertility and maternal mortality rates remain the highest in the region and some other key human development indicators are also deteriorating. Economic activities in Pakistan are facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of the global economic crisis. In short, climate change can further exacerbate the daunting challenges already faced by the country.

[Daily Times -- November 19, 2009]

Complete report is available on: http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/pdf/EN_SOWP09.pdf

Violence against Women

4,514 Incidents Come to Light in First Half of 2009

According to the latest statistics released in a biannual report by Aurat Foundation, a total of 4,514 incidents of violence against women were reported in the country's four provinces and the capital during January to June 2009.

Once again, Punjab topped the list with 3,067 violence cases, followed by Sindh (835), NWFP (327), Balochistan (174) and Islamabad (111). Among the 4,514 incidents, FIRs of only 3,099 cases were registered, while 759 cases were not registered and there is no evidence found in media regarding the FIR status of the remaining 656 cases. Senior members of the Violence Against Women Watch Group, including Dr Mustafa Solangi and Arifa Mazhar, presented the findings of the six-monthly report titled 'Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan'. The report is a collection and compilation of statistics on the incidents of violence against women, reported in media. They said the figures are high in Punjab because of its population size and better media penetration in different parts of the province. They expressed concern over the difficulties the media persons are facing in reporting such incidents from Balochistan and NWFP. Presenting the report findings, Arifa Mazhar said among the total violence cases, 691 were cases of murder, 293 cases of honour killing, 1,046 cases of abduction, 332 cases of domestic violence, 388 cases of suicide and 466 cases of rape and gang rape. There were 1,086 cases of miscellaneous nature, which included 'vanni', 'swara', custodial violence, torture, trafficking, child marriages, incest, threat to violence, attempted murder, and sexual harassment. Indicating that the tradition is still alive in our society, the list also includes 37 most horrific cases of stove burning. Research shows that major motives behind stove burning are demand of dowry and divorce and other domestic conflicts. Around 27 cases of acid throwing were also reported in the first half of the year, with 21 of them occurring in Punjab. Arifa said out of the total 3,067 incidents of violence in Punjab, there were 901 cases of abduction and kidnapping, 393 of murder, 119 of honour killing, 412 of rape and gang rape, 253 of suicide, 129 of sexual assault, 24 of stove burning, and 21 cases of acid throwing. In Sindh, out of the total 835 incidents, there were 132 cases of honour killing, 135 of murder, 79 of abduction and kidnapping, 103 of suicide, 19 of rape and gang rape, 75 of domestic violence, 18 of sexual assault, eight of stove burning and six cases of acid throwing. She said the number of reported cases from NWFP remained comparatively low due to problems in reporting from conflict areas. "Three newspapers from Swat that used to cover Malakand stopped printing due to the military operation," she said. Out of the 327 reported cases in NWFP, there were 31 cases of murder, 21 incidents of suicide, 93 cases of domestic violence, 31 of abduction and kidnapping, zero of honour killing, two of rape and gang rape, and three cases of stove burning. Arifa said the lowest number of reported cases were from Balochistan, mainly due to the conflict situation in the province. "Out of the total 174 cases, there were 41 cases of honour killing, 26 cases of murder, four cases of abduction and kidnapping, one case of rape and gang rape, and seven incidents of suicide." About Islamabad, she said 111 cases were reported, which included 26 cases of murder, one of honour killing, 31 incidents of abduction and kidnapping, eight cases of domestic violence, four cases of rape and four incidents of suicide.

[The News -- November 24, 2009]

Countrywide Campaign to Check Violence against Women

Women activists launched a nationwide campaign titled 'Together to Commit, Act, Demand', to observe 16 Days of Activism on Elimination of Violence Against Women starting from November 25, the international day on violence against women. Planned in 10 districts as well as provincial and national level, the campaign is an initiative of Women's Organisation for Rights and Development (WORD) in collaboration with Oxfam. For years, the 16 Days of Activism for eliminating Violence Against Women has been marked all over the world, women's organisations launched campaigns, demonstrations, protests and marches throughout the country to commemorate these days. WORD Executive Director Aqsa Khan said that preliminary assessments were conducted in July at the community levels by the participating organisations to analyse the situation of violence against women and what are the mechanisms of institutional support for victims seeking justice. "A huge gap still exists, women have limited access to justice there are delays and impediments for victims and their families in launching complaints, most of the cases are closed or not discussed due to social and cultural pressures. Based on these findings campaign activities were planned." In Pakistan, she said 90 percent women face violence in some form or the other. "The data collected by the Legislative Watch Group of Aurat Foundation shows that a total number of 4,416 incidents of VAW occurred in 35 districts of Punjab, 1,380 in 23 district of Sindh, 799 in 28 district of NWFP and Fata, 767 in 28 district of Baluchistan between January 1 and December 31 2008." "It is time for collective action to make concrete demands to end violence against women through strengthening institutional support for victims and survivors of violence seeking justice be it at family, community and organizational levels" said Rubina Chandio, Director Pirbhat Development Society Shahdatkot Sindh. They said that the campaign would provide a forum for dialogues and strategize for making institutional mechanisms more effective for victims and survivors of violence seeking justice. "Aqsa said that it will also work to sensitise law enforcing agencies, policy makers and stakeholders on the issues of violence commonly affecting women by holding them accountable on the international instruments.

Participating Organizations include Oxfam Islamabad, Women's Action Forum (WAF) Islamabad, Pakistan Welfare Society-Layyah, SYCOP-Muzaffargarhm, We Can End Violence Against Women-OXFAM Muzaffargarh, Al Ghaffar Education and Welfare Society-Rahim Yar Khan, Women's Organization for Rights and Development (WORD)-Islamabad and Hasanabdal, Youth Peace Commission Lodhran, IDSP Quetta, Peasant Women's Society-Khanewal, Mahekan Social Development Organisation Awaran, SAFWCO-Sanghar, Pirbhat Development Organisation-Shahdadkot, Hyderabad, Pakistan Rural Development Programme-Peshawar and District Muzaffarabad.

[The News -- November 23, 2009]

Child Rights

CSP to be Extended to Whole Country

The Child Support Programme of the Pakistan Baitul Maal (PBM) will shortly be extended to the whole country, PBM Managing Director Zamurrad Khan said on November 25. Zamurrad was addressing a high level meeting here at the PBM head quarters. The PBM was held to review functioning and future plans under the CSP. Briefing the meeting about the programme, the PBM MD said about 90000 children of about 40000 families are benefitting from monthly stipend of RS 300 and Rs 600 annually under the child support programme. He said that this programme is comprehensive system of conditional transfer of funds to attract the poorest families to send their children aged between five to twelve years to school. He further said that under the programme, the family that enrolls one child to school gets Rs 300 per month

and the one that gets more than one child enrolled gets 600 per month. Zamurrad told the meeting that the programme was first launched in three districts Tharparkar , Bhakkar and Kohistan and now its scope has been extended to eight more districts including Rawalpindi , Nawabshah , Multan , Abbotabad , Kharan , Quetta , Ghanche and Muzzaferabad . He said the programme is being run under technical assistance of the World bank and this is the reason that it could be compared with any plan of its kind in the world.

[The News -- November 26, 2009]

Juvenile Justice System Launched in Two Districts

The Police and Prisons Departments of NWFP have launched a Juvenile Justice System in two districts of the province on experimental basis. 'The Juvenile Justice System has been launched in Peshawar and Mardan on experimental basis. It will be extended to other districts soon,' a police officer said. According to him, the system is aimed at resolving petty issues such as thefts and quarrels, involving people below 18 years of age, out of the police stations and save both the parties from subsequent visits of courts. The project, to be implemented jointly by Police and Prisons Departments and Just Peace International (JPI), will remain enforce till February 2010. He said that it would be extended for three more years.

The United Nations Children Fund is providing financial support for the project to safeguard children against violence and focus on their development. JPI Coordinator Ali Gohar said that about 60 cases involving children had been received by the project in Peshawar and Mardan since April 2009. He said that all these cases were of minor nature, but police have to arrest the offenders. The project saved them from landing in jails. Going to jails is more dangerous for children as they can become professional criminals there. He said that committees comprising local elders, police officials and representatives of local government had been formed at police station level and they were looking into the cases of children.

[Dawn -- November 13, 2009]

Pakistan 'Lacks Legislative Framework to Protect Children'

Despite ratifying United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990, Pakistan being state party has apparent lack of a legislative framework harmonised with the CRC and it has delayed in the enabling laws that are instrumental to the implementation of the convention. World community including Pakistan celebrated 20th anniversary of the CRC on November 20. Under article 44 of the UNCRC, it is obligatory upon ratifying states to submit periodic reports after every five years and in this regard Pakistan had submitted its third and fourth report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in December 2008, which the committee reviewed in its 52nd session on September 28, 2009. In these observations, the committee expressed serious concerns on the non-implementation of its previous concluding observation in response to the second periodic report, which was submitted in 2002. Following are the observations:

- The committee said that Pakistan has delayed in the enabling laws that are instrumental to the implementation of the CRA, which includes the Charter of Child Rights Bill, a facsimile of the CRC, has yet not been taken on the board. Similarly, the Child Protection (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, which encompasses all the issues like child pornography, exposure to seduction, cruelty to a child, trafficking of human beings, sexual abuse, but it has not been adopted despite it has been roaming in the bureaucratic corridors for years.
- The committee urged that government should abolish or amend some exiting laws that are in conflict with principles and provisions of the convention, mainly the Frontier Crimes Regulation of

1901 enforced FATA and the 'Zina' and 'Haddoo' Ordinances, notwithstanding their revision through the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act 2006.

- In the light of definition of a child and conflict between the article 1 of the CRC and the national laws, the committee suggested the government to have a unified definition of a child to remove discrimination on the basis of sex, such as to amend the Zina and Haddoo Ordinances (1979), as well as the Child Marriages Restraint Act (1929) in order to align the age of marriage of boys (which is already 18 years) and girls (which is already 16 years) by raising the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 years.
- In addition to that, the committee was very disappointed over the poor coordination among the different bodies of the government at the federal, provincial and district levels that are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the convention.
- It further regretted the National Commission on the Rights of Children (NCRC), which was intended to replace the existing National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD), has still not been established despite a bill was being drafted for that purpose in 2001. Regarding budget allocation in the health and education sector for children, the committee recommended Pakistan to increase up to 5 percent of the GDP by 2010 in the education and 16 per cent of the GDP in the health sector.
- The committee was also concerned at that massive disparities of resources' allocations impede full and equal access to services and institutions to all children. The practice of corporal punishment having full legal cover under section 89 of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) 1860 was also severely criticised. The section provides exception to guardians, teachers and persons having actual control and charge of children for punishing them with impunity.
- In Pakistan, in educational settings as well as at homes the tendency of corporal punishment is very high and is considered a major cause behind the exceptionally high dropout rate. Additionally, the use of corporal punishment at home is one of the leading causes forcing children to 'run-away' and leave the protective environment of home. In most cases they end up on the streets, making them highly vulnerable to all kinds of abuses. The committee says that though government of Pakistan has issued administrative orders, no such laws regarding prevention of corporal punishment at federal and provincial level exist and also called for the repeal of 89 of the PPC.
- The committee observed that the 2004 amendment of the Pakistan penal code that facilitates the prosecution of perpetrators of honour killings and prohibits family compromises is appreciable, however there is widespread and increasing problem of honour killings that affects children both directly and indirectly.

[The News -- November 20, 2009]

'Now is the Time to Give Children their Due'

I A Rahman, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Chairman and a prominent journalist, said children were the worst victims of the unrest prevailing in the country. Addressing an award giving ceremony at SPARC Reel View Festival, Rehman said education budget was increased but then it was decreased to pay bills for ministers' bulletproof cars and their trips abroad. He said children made up more

than half of Pakistan's population and yet the governments were not ready to listen to their voices calling for help to grant their demands for quality education, good health, an end to child labour and a happy life. He said, "We keep looking for entry points to work on human rights." He said visual medium was the best way to educate a nation and create awareness for child rights. He further said that sadly this nation does not recognise importance of cinema. He said it was about time to give respect to children and include them in decision-making. "We all have to pitch in to get all children equal opportunities.

Daily Times

26th November 2009

Effective Legislation on Child Rights Sought

National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) Chairperson Nafisa Shah has said there was a need for concerted efforts to ensure child rights in the society. "Child rights were still only a speck on our mental and social horizon," the MNA said while speaking at a two-day annual convention of Society for the Protection of the Rights of Children (SPARC). She urged the grown-ups to do their best in offering protection to children.

Good legislation and upholding the rights of children was a constant refrain at the convention where Robert Kvile, Ambassador of Norway, pleaded that Pakistan implement the UN Convention for Children Rights that it had signed. Mr Kvile pointed out that many children did not go to school and also many did not have healthcare. "We should try to leave a better world for children because that is the way we shall be judged," said the Ambassador.

Ambassador of Switzerland highlighted conflict situations such as bombing of schools, particularly in the NWFP and FATA, which have prevented girls from attending classes.

Donglin Li, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Director in Pakistan said that the continuing military operation has increased the fear among parents for safety of children and they prefer that children remain at home rather than attend schools. Almost 50 percent of children drop out of schools because of rampant corporal punishment, poverty, financial constraints and abuse, according to a statement distributed by the Sparc during the first day of the convention.

Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) Director General Tauqir Nasir regretted that the poor state of our children did not find mention in our discussions.

Jamal Shah, Hunerkada Chief, regretted that corruption-ridden society had damaged children's innocence. Lauding the media, he said it had showcased the situation responsible blighting innocence in the children.

SPARC's Media Manager Fazela Gulrez said the media had campaigned persistently and relentlessly to uphold the rights of children and project their abuse. Ms Gulrez invited the media to participate in a competition on subjects of child abuse the Sparc had projected.

As many as 11 documentaries were screened. *Child Beggars, Children on the Streets, Child Abuse, Kids Kount, Main Khuda Se Poochta Hun, Khuni Rishte Ka Saudagar, Tinker aur Tina, Child Labour, Child Prostitutions, Stop Child Labour* as well as *Channan Channa*, national anthem of Children's Parliament, found the place in the competition.

Awareness Campaign against Bonded Labour

The Society for Protection of Rights of Child (SPARC) on Monday launched a five-day campaign to create awareness about the plight and problems of bonded labourers and proper implementation of laws against bonded labour. SPARC NWFP Regional Manager Jahanzeb Khan launched the campaign titled "Bondage of Life in an Independent State" at a press conference here. The campaign will run from November 9 to 13. He said that the campaign was being launched simultaneously in different cities of the country and would end with a festival to be attended by freed bonded labourers in Hyderabad on last day of the campaign. He said that liberated bonded labourers and activists of civil society organisations, trade unions, media persons, lawyers, human rights activists and other stakeholders would participate in the campaign. Showing concern over non-implementation of labour laws, he demanded that bonded labour abolition act 1992 and 1995 rules on bonded labour be implemented in letter and spirit and a parliamentary committee be constituted to review the existing laws. He said that in light of the Supreme Court's October 20, 2006 directives to provincial chief secretaries as a short term measure, the standing operating procedures be adopted by the provincial governments for introducing a mechanism through labour department for registration of brick kilns. He said that access to bonded labour funds should be simplified and the institution of district vigilance

[Daily Times -- November 10, 2009]

Bonded Labour: Call for Punishing Land, Kiln Owners

Leaders of National Coalition against Bonded Labour and a number of social welfare organisations demanded on November 11 that landlords and brick kiln owners should be punished under the Bonded Labour Abolition Act 1992, and the Supreme Court decision about registration of brick kilns should be enforced. The coalition organised a rally to voice protest against the nagging menace of bonded labour. A large number of workers, liberated haris and activists of different social welfare organisations took part in the rally. Dr Haider of Green Rural Development Organisation said that forced labour could never be eliminated unless it was admitted first that the menace did exist in Pakistan. Naanji Bheel, Aijaz Khoso, Amb Bheel and others demanded that landlords and brick kiln owners should be punished under the Bonded Labour Abolition Act 1992 and the Supreme Court decision about registration of kilns should be enforced. The participants of the rally adopted a number of resolutions, demanding **implementation of minimum wage of Rs200 per day for kiln workers, appointment and reactivation of district vigilance committees and rehabilitation of liberated haris**. They also demanded that families of Mannu Bheel and other bonded labourers should be recovered and excesses against haris and workers, especially women should be stopped.

[Dawn -- November 12, 2009]

Situation of South Waziristan IDPs

A detailed update on the situation of South Waziristan IDPs is available on www.theresearchers.org, under IDPs section.

Governance Watch

Political Governance

Balochistan Package

Balochistan Package Presented in National Assembly

The government presented the Aghaaz-e-Huqoq Balochistan to a joint sitting of Parliament on November 24. The landmark package contains several initiatives to address the problems of the Baloch people and bring them into mainstream.

Following are the salient features of the Balochistan Package:

- Facilitation of political exiles' return to homeland (except those involved in terrorism)
- End to construction of cantonments
- Tracing missing citizens, facilitating their immediate release
- Provincial consent in launch of mega projects
- 10 percent of profits to be allocated for development of areas with natural resources
- Constitutional matters to be settled by Constitutional Reforms Committee
- Concurrent list be deleted from Forth Schedule of Constitution
- Restructuring of NFC Award criteria
- Judicial probe into Akbar Bugti, other Baloch leaders and target killings
- Fact-finding commission to investigate circumstances that led to Akbar Bugti's killing
- Release of all political workers except those charged with heinous crimes
- FC to replace Army at Sui
- Rs120 billion gas royalty
- Political dialogue with all stakeholders
- Provincial Assembly resolutions to be implemented
- The provincial government to amend local government ordinance
- End of all operation except actions against terrorism
- The policy of conversion of "B" areas into "A" areas to be reviewed from time to time
- The FC's law-enforcement role to be under the chief minister, powers conferred under the customs act to be withdrawn and the coastguard to perform its primary duty of checking arms and narcotics smuggling
- The Federal Government to immediately give 20 per cent from its 30 per cent shares in Saindak project to the province, which will exclusively own it on completion and after withdrawal of the foreign company
- Judicial probe into the allotment of land at Gwadar
- Special quota in HEC scholarships

- 5,000 additional jobs at the earliest
- Ownership in oil and gas companies
- Rs1 billion for Dera Bugti IDPs
- Parliament Committee on National Security to monitor package implementation
- Fishing trawlers to be restricted to 33km from the coast, to help small fishermen.

[Dawn, Daily Times, The News -- November 25, 2009]

For more details on Balochistan Package visit www.theresearchers.org

National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO)

NRO List Out, 34 Politicians Among 8,000 Beneficiaries

List of NRO beneficiaries was issued on November. A majority of the NRO beneficiaries have been bureaucrats and government officials. Only 34 politicians out of a total of 8,000. According to the list, almost 97 per cent of the beneficiaries are from Sindh. The ordinance will lapse on Nov 28 in the light of the Supreme Court's July 31 verdict in the PCO judges case. The list shows that a total of 8,041 people — 7,793 from Sindh — have benefited from the NRO, promulgated by former president Pervez Musharraf on Oct 5, 2007. These people have got withdrawn 3,478 cases (3,320 in Sindh) registered against them on charges of corruption, financial bungling, misuse of authority and criminal charges. General (Retd) Musharraf promulgated the NRO after striking a deal with PPP leader Benazir Bhutto in order to grant amnesty to all those against whom politically-motivated cases were registered between Jan 1, 1986, and Oct 12, 1999.

[Dawn -- November 22, 2009]

Complete list is available on: <http://www.apakistannews.com/list-of-nro-beneficiaries-148411>

Reports/Surveys on Political Governance in Pakistan

Parliament's 16th Session Report by FAFEN

Efforts should be made to understand and address why approximately two-thirds of members of the National Assembly did not participate actively in the Assembly's 16th session and to track whether this problem continues in future sessions. This was stated in a report compiled by Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) that is based on direct observation of the 16th session of the National Assembly held between October 5 and 16, 2009. FAFEN has deployed observers at the National Assembly in order to monitor parliamentary proceedings, using a detailed, standardised checklist and reporting forms covering all types of parliamentary business. Some of the key findings of the report are classified in various sections including participation, representation and responsiveness, output, order and institutionalisation.

About **participation** by the members the report stated that 10 daily sittings of the 16th session of the National Assembly included a total of 34 hours and 25 minutes of parliamentary business. Each sitting started an average of 51 minutes late. The average length of a sitting was 3 hours and 44 minutes. The shortest sitting lasted for 1 hour and 55. The Speaker of the House was not present during 7 of the 10 sittings. As many as 31 members appealed for leave to be absent from parliamentary sittings. Many members who were technically 'present' for sittings actually left the House Chamber to conduct other

business. Less than one-third of MNAs (111 members out of a total of 340) took part in the parliamentary discussions.

With regard to **representation and responsiveness** it said that ten out of 20 Call Attention Notices (CANs) on the Orders of the Day were discussed, including the largest number (4) put forward to the Ministry of Water and Power. A total of 11 PPPP members, 9 PML-N members, 11 MQM members, 4 PML members and 1 PPP-S member put forward CANs. There was ministerial absence in 6 of the 10 sittings during the question hour. A total of 380 questions were put forward during question hour, which was held on 8 of 10 sittings during the session. As many as 135 starred questions were put forward along with 245 un-starred questions. A total of 169 questions of 380 (about 44%) were put forward by female parliamentarians, who represent only 22% of the total number of MNAs. It said that PML-N and PPPP members put forward 251 and 88 questions respectively. Over one-third of questions from both PML-N and PPPP were put forward by female members. The largest number of questions (48) was for the Ministry of Finance and Revenue, which responded completely to 47 questions (99%) and left 1 unanswered. The Ministry of Interior received 47 questions, of which 29 were answered completely (61%) and 18 were unanswered.

Regarding **output of the parliamentary session** the report said forty-six bills were listed on the Orders of the Day for consideration by the House. Three of these bills were rejected, four bills passed while all the remaining introduced bills were referred to the standing committees. It stated that ten Private Member bills were introduced by 11 female and 10 male MNAs. Eleven PML-N, 5 PML, 3 PPPP, 1 MQM and 1 PPP-S representatives moved Private Member Bills. There were multiple movers of the 11 private Bills. Fourteen resolutions were on the agenda of the 16th session, but the one that was taken up was not on the agenda.

About **order and institutionalisation** it stated that 47 per cent of items on the Orders of the Day (almost half of the business agenda of the House) were not addressed during the session. A hundred and three Points of Order were raised. However, none of them required Speaker's Ruling, indicating their inappropriateness vis-à-vis procedural definition. Members of PPPP, PML-N, and PML raised 35, 25, and 18 Points of Order respectively. In the 16th session there were seven adjournment motions. There were six instances of in-House protests and boycotts. Two points of Personal Privilege were raised, one each by PML and MQM members. The report also presented various recommendations including permanent accreditation to observe all assemblies' proceedings, keeping a public record of parliamentary business, transcription of all substantive discussion in the assembly on policy matters especially debate on legislation and keeping records of the actual time spent by members in the Assembly chambers.

[The News -- November 5, 2009]

Corruption in Pakistan Increases: Transparency International

Pakistan has climbed five places to number 42 in an annual list of the world's most corrupt countries, Transparency International (TI) said in a report on November 17. In its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, the TI said Pakistan's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index Score is 2.4, and of the 180 countries and in its ranking as the most corrupt country, it has slipped five ranks, from 47 in 2008 to the 42nd most corrupt country in 2009.

The Corruption Perceptions Index looks at perceptions of public sector corruption in 180 countries and territories, - and is a composite index that draws on 13 expert opinion surveys. It scores countries on a scale from zero to ten, with zero indicating high levels of perceived corruption and ten indicating low levels

of perceived corruption. Majority of the 180 countries included in the 2009 index score below five on a scale from 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 10 (perceived to have low levels of corruption). The CPI measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in a given country and is a composite index, drawing on 13 different expert and business surveys. The 2009 edition scores 180 countries, the same number as the 2008 CPI. TI Pakistan Chairman Syed Adil Gilani said TI Pakistan was of the view that terrorism was the direct result of poverty, which had resulted due to corruption, especially the illegal direct, or indirect, rule of armed forces in Pakistan since 1951 to 2007. The endorsements provided to military regimes by a corrupt judiciary were also to be blamed. Adil said positive impact of the few good governance steps taken by the government would be visible by the next year. He mentioned the reinstatement of sacked judges by the Prime Minister through an executive order on March 16, declaration by the Supreme Court chief justice of zero tolerance for corruption and the withdrawal of the National Reconciliation Ordinance from the National Assembly as positive steps. He said TI Pakistan also congratulated the Pakistan Army, which had proved to the world that Pakistan's military were among the best in the world. But Adil said the government was governing the country without governance and had lost credibility all over the world, due to which the country was facing serious economic threats, poverty, inflation, food and electricity shortages and increase in unemployment, which were the direct results of the massive corruption in the public sector. He said the government must make serious efforts to apply rules and regulation across the board in order to reduce corruption.

The TI Pakistan chairman said Pakistan needed immediate enforcement of good governance and a transparent administration to counter the acute problems, the billion of rupees corruption scams reported in the Pakistan Steel, TDAP, EOBI, PIA, rental power plants, KESC, NIC, NHA, OGDC, PSO, PEPCO, CDA, DP Division, DHAs, the NBP and many other organisations. The Berlin-based organisation said Afghanistan and Iraq, countries that receive billions of dollars a year in international support, were also among the world's most corrupt nations.

[Daily Times -- November 18, 2009]

Gilgit-Baltistan Elections

Gilgit-Baltistan Election Results

Elections for the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) were held under the new self-rule arrangement in all six districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, with the PPP emerging as the leading party. In all 264 candidates contested the elections held in 23 constituencies out of 24. Elections in LA-19 were postponed due to the death of an MQM candidate. During the polling a clash was also reported between workers of two political parties in which two people were killed and two others sustained injuries in Diamer district. Sources said the clash reportedly erupted in Darail Tangir area after workers of a political party accused another party of casting fake votes that led to shooting, resulting in death of two people.

Following is the list of successful candidates:

Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly Elections 2009						
Constituency	Winner			Runner-Up		
	Name	Party	Votes	Name	Party	Votes
GBLA-1 Gilgit 1	Syed Razi Uddin	Ind	10012	Jaffer Ullah	PML-N	8858
GBLA-2 Gilgit 2	Deedar Ali	Ind	4535	Jameel Ahmed	PPP	2774
GBLA-3 Gilgit 3	Aftab Haider	PPP	6006			
GBLA-4 Gilgit 4	Muhammad Ali Akhtar	PPP	5024	Muhammad Ali	Ind	3194
GBLA-5 Gilgit 5	Mirza Hussain	PML-Q	1859	Zulfiqar Ali Murad	PPP	1666
GBLA-6 Gilgit 6	Wazir Baig	PPP	3571	Kamil Jan	MQM	2240
GBLA-7 Skardu 1	Syed Mehdi Shah	PPP	5595	Wazir Wilayat	PML-Q	2270
GBLA-8 Skardu 2	Shikh Nisar Hussain	PPP	7793	Syed Muhammad Ali Shah	Ind	4701
GBLA-9 Skardu 3	Wazir Shakil Ahmed	PPP	6432	Haji Fida Muhammad Nashad	PML-N	2592
GBLA-10 Sakrdu 4	Wazir Hassan	PPP	3578	Hussain Khan	Ind	3473
GBLA-11 Sakrdu 5	Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Rizvi	PPP	3145	Fouzia Saleem	Ind	2208
GBLA-12 Sakrdu 6	Raja Azam Khan	MQM	9316	Imran Nadeem	PPP	7125
GBLA-13 Astore 1	Abdul Hameed Khan	Ind	3771	Farman Ali	PML-N	3342
GBLA-14 Astore 2	Muhammad Naseer	PPP	1915	Mehboob Ali Khan	Ind	1760
GBLA-15 Diamir 1	Bashir Ahmed	PML-Q	2356	Ashiq Ullah	ANP	182
GBLA-16 Diamir 2	Janbaz Khan	PML-N	2403	Muhammad Merajan	PPP	1500
GBLA-17 Diamir 3				Polling Postponed		
GBLA-18 Diamir 4	Gulbar Khan	JUI-F	2797	Malik Muhammad Miskin	Ind	1535
GBLA-19 Ghazar 1				Polling Postponed		
GBLA-20 Ghazar 2	Ali Madad Sher	PPP	3206	Sultan Madad	PML-N	2064
GBLA-21 Ghazar 3	Muhammad Ayub Shah	Ind	5246	Ghulam Muhammad	PPP	4903
GBLA-22 Ghanche 1	Muhammad Jaffer	PPP	3772	Muhammad Ibrahim Sanai	PML-N	1741
GBLA-23 Ghanche 2	Muhammad Abdullah	PML-N	4240	Amina Bibi	PML-Q	3963
GBLA-24 Ghanche 3	Muhammad Ismail Engineer	PPP	2770	Muhammad Shafiq	PML-N	1811

[www.elections.com.pk]

More details on Gilgit-Baltistan elections were covered in the update released earlier. The update is available on www.theresearchers.org

National Finance Commission (NFC) Award

Provinces Agrees to Multiple Criteria

A four-point multi-criteria formula for resource distribution between the federation and the provinces based on population, backwardness, revenue and inverse population density was agreed upon by representatives of the four federating units at a meeting of the National Finance Commission on November 19. Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said Punjab had agreed to drop insistence on population as the sole criterion. The provinces and the Federal Government had also agreed to create a fund to compensate the NWFP for losses suffered in the war on terror. While the Federal Government undertook to underwrite the entire expenditure in this regard, the provinces also agreed to chip in with their share from the divisible pool before vertical distribution of resources.

The Chief Ministers of the four provinces also participated in the proceedings. While the meeting gave a conceptual direction to the next NFC award amid reports that provinces would get more than 50 percent in resource distribution, the real issues of percentage and weightage were left for the next meeting to be held in Lahore on Dec 9 and 10. Although Mr Tarin claimed 'good progress' on horizontal distribution and said work on vertical distribution would be completed in Lahore, the absence of a substantive agreement indicated that differences on core issues persist and the meeting was wrapped up by claiming progress on the conceptual aspect. Mr Tarin emphasised that the positions of the provinces on horizontal distribution were very strong and needed more work and refining.

Although Sindh is happy over inclusion of revenue as one of the four criteria, the progress in reconciling divergent views on revenue collection and generation as the basis might delay the final outcome.

One of Sindh's representatives in the meeting, Kaisar Bengali, was of the view that revenue had for the first time been accepted as a criterion for distribution of resources which would be beneficial for the province in either case. He said calculations had to be done in the context of corporate and personal income tax, etc. Mr Bengali said that provinces would get more than 50 per cent in the next award.

While giving details of the day's proceeding in which discussions were held on both vertical and horizontal distribution, Mr Tarin said that once horizontal distribution was worked out, the parties might be required to revisit the vertical module to iron out points of difference, if any. He said that Punjab, while exhibiting flexibility, had agreed on a multi-pronged formula for resource distribution and in the next meeting the NFC would calculate the weightage and percentages of various factors suggested by the provinces. He claimed the provinces would get more even in terms of percentage. Mr Tarin said the participants discussed in detail the horizontal distribution of divisible pool and in case of any loss, it would be compensated under the vertical distribution formula. The Minister said the issue of revenue collection and generation came up for discussion and both the positions were very valid, but there was not much data available to help reach an agreement. Time was needed to come up with a practical formula in this regard, he added. He said horizontal distribution would be finalised at the next meeting and it had been left open for any adjustment, if needed. He said the Federal Government would try to cut its expenses and divert more resources to the provinces. It would also increase its revenue and the tax-GDP ratio whose target was 13.9 percent in six years and 10.6 per cent this year.

[Dawn -- November 19, 2009]

Reports & Statistics on Pakistan Economy

SBP Ensures Sound Financial System for Economy'

In his message embodied in the Annual Report (Vol. II) on State Bank's Performance Review for the year 2008-09 (FY09) which was released on November 23, Governor State Bank of Pakistan Syed Salim Raza discussed following:

- The Central Bank strived to strike a balance between price stability and growth in a challenging economic environment and ensured a stable financial system by proactively responding to emerging risks and challenges to the banking system and taking appropriate corrective measures timely.
- The implementation of the macroeconomic stabilization program was primarily driven by tightening monetary and fiscal conditions to facilitate the resolution of structural problems. These measures yielded results in subsequent months: fiscal deficit was substantially contained, from Rs 777.2 billion in FY08 to Rs 680.4 billion in FY09, at 5.2 percent of GDP (down from 7.4 percent in FY08), on the back of elimination of subsidies as well as a cut in development expenditure.
- Monetary tightening had a visible impact on CPI inflation which fell from its peak of 25.3 percent in August FY09 to 13.1 percent by June FY09; giving SBP the much needed breathing space to switch the direction of its policy stance. Furthermore, after unabated expansion in the last four years, the current account deficit contracted considerably to 5.3 percent of GDP during FY09, from 8.4 percent in FY08. These positive developments need to be viewed with caution, however, given that the economy continues to be fragile, and an assessment of the balance of risks continues to present a mixed picture.
- As inflationary pressures began to ease SBP reduced its policy rate by 100 bps each in April FY09 and August FY10, to 13 percent. Notably, it was the consistent approach to curbing excessive demand pressures which helped subdue inflation.
- In FY09, SBP issued three monetary policy statements (MPS), i.e., for the first half and then one each for the last two quarters of the year. In November FY09, SBP also announced interim monetary policy measures. Cognizant of the uncertain and rapidly changing macroeconomic environment, and to enhance the effectiveness of monetary policy, SBP decided in January FY09 to increase the frequency of its monetary policy statements; first to quarterly basis, and from August FY10, the frequency was further increased to six times in a fiscal year. Similarly, to further enhance the transparency and credibility of the monetary policy formulation process, SBP constituted an independent Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) consisting of both internal and external members.
- Segregation of debt and monetary management with an objective of strengthening the monetary policy framework was the highlight of FY09. In January FY09, the responsibility of deciding the cut-off yields in the primary auctions of Treasury Bills (T-bills) and Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIBs) was shifted to the Ministry of Finance, while SBP's role was to manage the operational

aspect of the auctions. This measure was taken to communicate that changes in the cut-off rate are not reflective of the monetary policy stance, while allowing SBP to focus on liquidity management consistent with the requirements of monetary policy implementation.

- SBP Governor said that in response to the changing economic and business cycle, the Central Bank also stepped in to facilitate the banking sector by rationalizing the minimum capital requirements to Rs10 billion, to be implemented in a phased manner by December 2010, and allowing the use of 30 percent of the Forced-Sale Value (FSV) of collateral in calculating provisioning requirements for the rising base of Non Performing Loans (NPLs). In view of the complex regulatory requirements of large financial conglomerates, SBP also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the SECP to undertake consolidated supervision. Similarly, progress on modernization of the legislative framework including the revamping of SBP Act, 1956, and the Banking Companies' Ordinance 1962 is underway, while efforts are also underway to introduce a Deposit Protection Scheme and a Consumer Protection Act.
- First half of FY09 was characterized by a continuation of pressures in the foreign exchange market. During Jul-Oct FY09, the trend of deterioration in current account deficit seen in FY08 accelerated further, mainly owing to higher import prices and a sharp fall in financial inflows. This led to a rapid depletion of foreign exchange reserves along with substantial pressure on the exchange rate. However, subsequent implementation of a macroeconomic stabilization program led to a marked improvement in the external account position in the ensuing months. This also helped SBP build up foreign exchange reserves which had dropped to US\$ 6.7 billion in October FY09, back to the almost end June FY08 level of US\$ 11.4 billion.
- In continuation of SBP's efforts to strengthen its reserve management capabilities, substantial value were added to its profitability through active management of the investment portfolio in FY09. On gross return basis, SBP managed to earn a return of 2.31 percent, which while less than the 4.9 percent return in FY08, is still significant given the situation in the global financial markets.
- SBP in partnership with the UK Department for International Development launched the Financial Inclusion Program in July FY09. The Financial Inclusion Program worth UK £50 million is being implemented by the State Bank of Pakistan and the program was designed and developed through broader consultations with the stakeholders. This will help SBP implement Pakistan's Microfinance Strategy which was approved by the Prime Minister.

[Daily Times -- November 24, 2009]

\$3.7bn Received in 2008-09 as Foreign Direct Investment

The country received \$3.7 billion foreign direct investment during the financial year 2008-09, the Investment Ministry told the National Assembly on November 5, while domestic investment during the same fiscal totalled Rs 927.3 million. The House was also told that the number of immigrants who had been repatriated to Pakistan in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 stood at 134,926. The Interior Minister told MNAs that in 2006 and 2007, a total 359 Pakistanis were deported from Spain. Replying to a question, Federal Commerce Minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim told the House that exports of leather goods had fallen to \$544.9 million during 2008-09 from \$699.5 million in 2007-08 - a decline of 22.1 percent. The House was told that during 2008-09, Rs 3.46 million were refunded to diplomats/embassies on account of exemptions to foreign diplomats/embassies from the petroleum development levy. Replying to another

question, Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar told the House that loans received/disbursed since March 2008 amounted to \$5.895 billion. Replying to a separate question, Hina told the House that over the last three years - July 2006 to June 2009 - the World Bank had provided Pakistan \$3.144 billion, \$2.358 of which had been utilised. The National Assembly was also told that there were 509 vocational training institutes for women operating in the country, according to a survey conducted in 2006.

[Daily Times -- November 6, 2009]

New Initiatives

SBP Launches New Agri Financing Scheme for NWFP, FATA

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has launched a new Agricultural Loans Refinancing and Guarantee Scheme designed specifically for the affected areas of NWFP and FATA. The new scheme is designed to support the development of affected districts of NWFP (Swat, Lower Dir, Malakand, Upper Dir, Bunner and Shangla) and FATA (Bajaur Agency, Khyber Agency, Kurram Agency, Mahmand Agency, N Waziristan Agency, Orakzai Agency and S Waziristan Agency) and to facilitate banks and farmers of these areas for resuming agricultural activities. This scheme, which comes into effect immediately, will remain valid till December 31, 2012. The SBP will provide refinance facility to banks, except Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd. Banks will be permitted to charge a maximum spread of 2 percent per annum from borrowers against their seasonal agri. production/working capital loans to farmers of affected areas. Therefore, mark-up rate for farmers will be 8 percent per annum under the scheme.

Under the scheme:

- The SBP will also share bonafide losses of banks up to a maximum of 50 percent against their agri production/working capital loans disbursed to the farmers of affected areas in order to encourage them lending under the scheme. However, banks will be required to put in place an effective monitoring and recovery system for ensuring timely recovery of agri. loans. Further, banks shall also exercise due diligence in recovering dues in all possible manner in respect of any guaranteed account as it might have exercised in the normal course, if no guarantee had been provided.
- The banks are also encouraged to arrange for the insurance of loans provided under the scheme and mandatory crop loan insurance for five major crops viz. wheat, rice, cotton, sugarcane and maize to avoid risk of losses due to natural calamities. The tenor of the crop production loans and its repayment will be based on the cropping cycle while for other farming activities working capital will be provided for a maximum period of one year.
- Moreover, there will be no maximum limit for borrowing by farmers under the scheme, however, the borrowing limit of a farmer shall be fixed by the bank keeping in view credit requirements, cash flows, repayment capacity, profile of the borrower, etc.
- Under the Scheme, yearly limits will be allocated to individual banks having branches involved in agri. lending in the eligible areas. The limits will be allocated for each fiscal year from July 1 to June 30, which will be reviewed on quarterly basis.

- The principal amount of loans under the scheme shall have to be repaid on the agreed date between bank and the borrower, however, in case of crop production loans it may not be later than 60 days from the date of harvest of respective crop.
- The banks shall not take more than 5 working days in evaluating an application for credit under the scheme from the date of receipt of complete information from the borrower.

[Daily Times -- November 7, 2009]

Donors' Financial Assistance

Saudi Arabia to provide \$380m Soft Loan to Pakistan

Saudi Arabia, while honouring its commitment to the Government of Pakistan made at the Tokyo conference of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FoDP) and subsequent bilateral interaction, has come forward to provide assistance to Pakistan. The Saudi government has announced a tangible soft loan and funds to improve the balance of payments. (According to agencies, Saudi Arabia would give \$ 380 million as soft loan and budgetary support to Pakistan). King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz has directed the Ministry concerned to provide the much-needed assistance to Pakistan on conditions that suit to the recipient country. Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Aziz bin Ibrahim Saleh Al-Ghadeer told The News that a high-level delegation of the Saudi Development Fund (SDF), headed by Engineer Yousuf Al-Bassarn, delegated member and vice president of the SDF, is due to arrive in Islamabad today (Tuesday) to ink agreements for assistance in various fields. The ambassador said the three-member Saudi delegation will have discussions with the officials concerned for further enhancement of cooperation in different economic fields. The envoy said the Saudi King has asked the ministry to make assessment of Pakistan's requirements that could be fulfilled by Saudi Arabia.

\$100 million loan will be for buying fertiliser, \$80 million for the Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project while \$ 200 million to overcome the budget deficit. Out of the total package, \$180 million is loan and \$200 million is budgetary support.

[The News -- November 10, 2009]

BISP Updates

BISP Jurisdiction being Expanded to Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK

Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Farzana Raja on November 11 said that development of Gilgit-Baltistan is among the top priorities of the PPP government. "Following the vision of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto, the government has initiated the development process to end the sense of deprivation among the people of Gilgit-Baltistan," she said in a press statement. She said under the BISP more than 50,000 deserving families are being facilitated in Gilgit-Baltistan. For the first time in the country's history, the government has started poverty census to get the accurate data about the poor families. Farzana Raja said that jurisdiction of the BISP is being expanded to Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and rest of the country to provide financial, technical and healthcare assistance to the deserving families.

[APP -- November 11, 2009]

BISP National Poverty Survey in December

BISP will start its National Poverty Survey in 21 districts by the end of December to identify more deserving families. BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja said that the programme would benefit five million families by June 2010 and efforts were continuing to reach the maximum number of people. Initially, the pilot project of the poverty survey was conducted in 15 districts and 2.5 million families were identified. She said that NADRA had been directed to complete the verification process of these families to provide them assistance under the programme. Farzana said that the Benazir Smart Card would be issued to people in the districts where the survey had been completed to make the programme transparent. She said that workers of 20 post offices had been dismissed on charges of corruption and strict action had been taken against those found involved in embezzlement. The beneficiaries will also be provided accident and health insurance besides imparting vocational and technical training to one member of the family. Giving details about the relaxation in the BISP conditions, she said the board of directors had agreed to relax its conditions with regard to differences in addresses in the National Identity Cards (NICs), the BISP forms and account holders. Over 500,000 faulty applications received under the BISP will be reprocessed, which aim at providing maximum assistance to deserving families after complete verification.

[The News -- November 6, 2009]

BISP asked to Register Victim Families

BISP for NWFP and FATA Dr Ikram Ghani has directed the field staff to expedite registration of victims of the bomb blasts so that the affected families could receive financial support without any delay. He issued the directives while speaking at a workshop for the BISP field supervisors for NWFP and FATA. The workshop was chaired by the BISP director general NWFP/FATA and was attended by the divisional directors and all the newly recruited field supervisors. Dr Ikram Ghani told the staff that BISP expected them to display efficiency, honesty and courtesy.

[The News -- November 22, 2009]

Local Governance

'Powerless' Nazims not Ready to Quit

The district nazims prefer to hold their offices despite claims that the Punjab government is not cooperating with them. Khanewal District Nazim Ahmed Yar Hiraj said Section 154 of the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2000 said that district nazims would hold their offices until fresh elections were not conducted. He said the Punjab government had to amend the ordinance for removing them from their offices after December 31. He said the Punjab government was still not cooperating with them despite the fact they too were elected representatives. Asked if he was not exercising powers and the provincial government too was not cooperating why he does not resign, he said, "We will prefer to hold offices rather than leaving the 'field open for other actors'." Sialkot District Nazim Akmal Cheema said the people had elected him and he would not leave the "field open" for the Punjab government. Faisalabad District Nazim Rana Zahid Tauseef said they were being hurdled from exercising their powers, adding that they would prefer to fight for their rights rather than leaving their offices. Earlier, the Punjab government had accused district nazims of corruption.

Separately, as many as 24 nazims had 'challenged' the provincial government to prove the allegations. They had also said the government's attitude had hampered the development work in their respective districts. The district nazims who had held press conferences against the Punjab government were: Attock Nazim

Tahir Sadiq, Sardar Ghulam Abbas (Chakwal), Mubashir Abbas Bhatti (Hafizabad), Faisal Mukhtar (Multan), Nazim Rao Nasim (Pakpattan), Nazim Abdul Rehman Kanju (Lodhran), Tariq Bashir Cheema (Bahawalpur), Sardar Maqsood Leghari (Dera Ghazi Khan), Fayyaz Chattha (Gujranwala), Javed Akhlas (Rawalpindi), Rafiq Leghari (Rahim Yar Khan), Shafaat Hussain (Gujrat), Riaz Asghar (Mandi Bahauddin) and Mumtaz Ali Shah (Nankana Sahib).

[Daily Times -- November 18, 2009]

Speakers say No to Magistracy Powers to Bureaucracy

The speakers at a seminar on 'Local government: Issues and Opportunities' opposed restoration of the magistracy powers to bureaucrats, but supported party-based local bodies elections as soon as possible. The seminar was organised by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on November 12. Former chairperson National Reconstruction Bureau Daniyal Aziz said, "We have to decide if we want democracy or bureaucracy in the country adding the local governments were paralysed during the last 18 months." He said that nazims now had no financial and administrative powers and bureaucratic controls were restored through illegal means. It is not return to democracy, but to bureaucracy," he said, adding that unless local democracies are not given right to handle local issues, we cannot solve the problems. He emphasised that governance style set in by British Raj was replaced by NRB through separating executive from judiciary. He said that ownership rights created responsibility in LG members that was the aim of devolution plan. He said that magistracy was a control regime used for party management adding administrators were appointed before 2002 to revitalise parties. MNA Kashmala Tariq said that the committee on local bodies had no issue on the agenda at the time though LG issue should come in its agenda. She said that elections of LG should be held. She said that dictators are sitting everywhere so they do not support democracy. If these parties are popular, why they do not let the polls to take place. She also lamented lack of democracy in political parties. She said that LGs provide relief to citizens at their doorsteps thus save MPs from indulging in problems like sewerage and metalled roads. In the question hour, Daniyal Aziz said that after the end of LG nazims they would continue to hold their offices until elections of their replacements. Answering another question, he said that Schedule 6 had many provincial subjects in the 1973 Constitution and insertion of local bodies in it was not against the spirit of provincial autonomy. He denied that nazims indulged in corruption. He said corruption of billions was not brought to scrutiny due to involvement of scions of bureaucracy but poor nazims are criticised for it.

[The News -- November 13, 2009]

Role of Bar Associations and Press Clubs in Jeevay Pakistan Movement

A large number of representatives of bar association and press clubs from all over Pakistan participated in Islamabad Abbotabad Quetta Sukkur Lahore Karachi and Hyderabad conventions held under the umbrella of Jeevay Pakistan movement. Their leaders also addressed the conventions.

- On October 22, President Pakistan federal union of journalists Mr. Pervez Shoukat declared his full support to the movement at Jeevay Pakistan Conference. On October 22 a large number of representatives of Faisalabad Rahim yar khan, Kohat , Swabi , Haripur ,Sialkot , Muzaffargarh , Gujrat , Narowal , Tharparkar , Sukkur , Pasheen , Zob , Turbat , Bar associations and press clubs participated in Islamabad convention. Sardar Abdl Rouf (President District bar associations and haripur) and general secretary district press club pasheen Abdul Khakeem Akmal also addressed the convention.

- On August 3, a large number of representatives of Abbotabad Swabi Nowshera Bannu , Kark and Kohat Partner Bar associations and press clubs participated in abbotabad convention . President DBA Abbotabad Tahir Faraz Abbasi and general secretary Abbotabad press club sardar shafique addressed the convention.
- On August 9 a large number of representatives of Gawader Turbet Pasheen Lauralai Naseerabad and Zob bar associations and press clubs participated in Quetta conventions. Syed Iqbal Shah Member Baluchistan Bar associations and General Secretary Zob press club Rafique Mando Khel addressed the convention.
- On August 13, a large number of representatives of Sukkur, Khairpur , Tando Allah yar , Thata , Badeen , Mirpure Khass and Tharpar Ker Bar associations and press clubs participated in Sukkur Conventions. Lala asad Pathan (President Sukkur press club) addressed the convention and reaffirmed his full support for the local governments.
- On August 19, representatives of bar associations and press clubs of all districts of Punjab like Gujrat Rahim yar khan , Faisalabad , Vehari , Narowal , Muzaffargarh , Multan and Sialkot participated in Lahore convention . Former General secretary Lahore PRESS club Shoaib -udeen and ch Muhammad aslam (District bar association Gujarat) Addressed the convention.
- On August 20, a large number of representatives of bar associations and press clubs participated in Karachi and Hyderabad conventions. They demanded that the government should announce the date of local body elections.

[The News -- November 26, 2009]

Regional Politics and Election Watch

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Sino-Pak Relations

Pakistan-China in \$1.4 billion Fighter Jet Deal

China has agreed to sell Pakistan at least 36 advanced fighter jets in a landmark deal worth as much as \$1.4bn, Pakistani and western officials said on November 10. China will supply two squadrons of J-10 fighter planes in a preliminary agreement, which could lead to further sales in future, a Pakistani official said. The official added that Pakistan might buy "larger numbers" of the planes in the future, but denied reports that Pakistan had agreed to buy 150 jets. Experts describe the agreement as a "landmark" in Pak-China relations. Abdul Qayyum, a retired Pakistani General said that the agreement should not simply be seen in the narrow context of Pakistan's relations with China. He further said that there is a wider dimension. By sharing its advanced technology with Pakistan, China is ... also saying to the world that its defense capability is growing rapidly. China has supplied Pakistan with fighter jets for more than three decades. Experts said the sales would be evidence of China looking to expand its military power. "Countries like Iran and possibly some of the Middle Eastern countries would be keen to deal with China.

[Daily Times -- November 11, 2009]

Pakistan, China Sign MoU in Education, Research

Pakistan National School of Public Policy (NSPP) and China National School of Administration (CNSA), two premier institutions of both the countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for imparting training to the civil servants from both sides. The MoU was signed from Pakistan side by Lt. Gen. (Retd) Javed Hassan, Rector, Pakistan National School of Public Policy and by Mr. Wei Liqun, Vice Executive President of CNSA from the Chinese side on Tuesday, said a statement here Wednesday. This MoU aims at cooperation in the areas of education, research and training between the two training institutions.

[The Nation -- November 11, 2009]

Sino-Pak Military Relations Irk India

India said, on November 27, that it was irked by China's growing military ties with Pakistan, thereby puncturing any chances for Beijing to play a role to help foster peace in South Asia. Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony told a meeting of security analysts that New Delhi needed to be vigilant about China's improving defence capabilities even as it kept an eye on Pakistan's 'thriving' terror infra-structure. Mr Antony's strong comments on Beijing followed a recent joint declaration between the Chinese and US presidents in which they had offered hopes of working for peace in South Asia.

Mr Antony said that we have been making sincere and continuous efforts to resolve long outstanding issues in our region. He further said that we have always strived for peaceful relations with all our neighbours. Even with a vibrant democracy and a prospering economy, we cannot ignore the security calculus, Indian

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 'willingness' to resume dialogue with Pakistan must also be seen in this context, Mr Antony said. 'Pakistan must put an end to terror activities emanating from its soil. However, the terror infrastructure on the ground remains intact — and is actually thriving. Pakistan is yet to demonstrate any will to take speedy action against terrorists and international criminals. We need to closely monitor the developments in Pakistan.' India was hopeful that China would reciprocate its initiatives aimed at mutual trust building and understanding, Mr Antony said. But, he added: 'The increasing nexus between China and Pakistan in military sphere remains an area of serious concern. We have to carry out continuous appraisals of Chinese military capabilities and shape our responses accordingly. At the same time, we need to be vigilant at all times.

[Dawn -- November 28, 2009]

Indo-Pak Relations

Pakistan to Move WB on Water Issue

Pakistan is all set to move the World Bank (WB) for appointment of a neutral expert instead of opting for the Court of Arbitration on the Indian Kishanganga Hydropower Project. The WB-appointed neutral expert is our top most priority after receiving a discouraging response while exercising bilateral channels as the Indian project is being built to divert River Jhelum water. The Permanent Indus Water Commission (PIWC), appointing two negotiators from each side, proved merely time buying moves of India. It will also be a futile exercise if Pakistan opts for court of arbitration consisting two nominees from each country and three mutually agreed ones, and, we can ill-afford to give more and more time to New Delhi to go ahead with its controversial project. The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) 1960 provides appointment of a neutral expert by the World Bank as a last option to resolve water related matters, and, there are several disputes on the water entering Pakistan from Indian Territory.

A Foreign Office (FO) Spokesman confirmed and said, "we are examining the possibility of invoking the option of neutral expert instead of court of arbitration". The FO spokesman maintained that the Pakistan government along with experts was working seriously on an urgent basis to go for a neutral expert appointment since India was wasting time while engaging us in step-by-step process. Pakistan first tried to resolve the problem at PIWC, the only body between two neighbouring rivals, secondly called for negotiators and then comes the option of court of arbitration. "We do not believe that India will agree within one month under IWT 1960 to nominate its members for the arbitration court.

In response to a question, Abdul Basit said he was not in a position to give exact time-frame as to when Pakistan will move the WB for appointing a neutral expert whose findings will be binding both on Pakistan and India on water issues. Jawaharlal Nehru and Ayub Khan had inked the historic treaty in Karachi with the WB as a guarantor after the then WB President Eugene R Black, agreed to act as a conduit of agreement between the two states. The PIWC Commissioner for Pakistan, Syed Jamaat Ali Shah, said Pakistan was moving ahead with the relevant clauses of the treaty. "And next step is establishment of a court of arbitration." He, however, referred to the Foreign Office for furtherance on the Kishanganga project while saying it was now before the Government of Pakistan to handle after the India did not agree to the PIWC platform. "And if the issue is not settled on the platform of court of arbitration, Pakistan can exercise the option to move the WB for appointment of a neutral expert.

[The News -- November 8, 2009]

Post-Election Scenario in Afghanistan

Karzai Sworn-In for Second Term as Afghan President

Facing an intense resurgence by Taliban and global pressure to crack down on corruption, Hamid Karzai was sworn in as the Afghan President for a second five-year term, on November 19, and vowed to form a national unity government following a controversial poll marred by allegations of fraud. 51-year-old Karzai was administered oath of office by the head of the Supreme Court, Abdul Salam Azmi, at a grand ceremony at the heavily-fortified Presidential Palace in the presence of 800 guests, including External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In his first public address after being sworn-in for a second term, he invited his rival in the August 20 Presidential polls, Abdullah Abdullah, to join in the unity government. The President also said that the Afghan armed forces would take over the country's security duties from the U.S.-led NATO troops in five years. Mr. Karzai was declared re-elected to the Presidency on November 2 by the country's independent Election Commission after Mr. Abdullah withdrew from the November 7 run-off, which was ordered following a UN-backed commission's findings that nearly a third of the votes cast on August 20 were fraudulent. Fearing Taliban strikes during the ceremony, Afghan and NATO forces put the capital city of Kabul under heavy security net, closing the international airport and advising citizens and foreigners to stay indoors.

[The Nation -- November 19, 2009]

Myanmar Politics

Senior US Official Holds talks with Suu Kyi

A top US official held rare talks with Myanmar's detained opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi as part of Washington's highest-level visit to the isolated army-ruled country in 14 years. The Nobel Peace Prize winner met United States Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell for more than two hours at a hotel near Yangon's Inya Lake, close to her home where she has been detained for much of the past two decades. Later, at Yangon airport before the US delegation left the former Burma, Campbell said the United States wanted to improve relations with the government but the authorities needed to take concrete steps towards that end, too. Describing the visit as an exploratory mission designed to explain the results of a US policy review towards Myanmar, he said the United States advocated "strong support for human rights, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners and the pursuit of democratic reform".

[Dawn -- November 5, 2009]

US will not Lift Myanmar Sanctions

A senior US Diplomat said that the United States, although embarking on a new policy of engagement, will not lift its sanctions on Myanmar unless its ruling generals make concrete progress toward democratic reform. US Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs Scot Marciel spoke after he and another State Department official completed the highest-ranking visit to Myanmar in 14 years, putting into motion the Obama administration's new policy of "pragmatic engagement" with the isolated country. He made it clear that the stick would remain along with the new carrot, and that Washington would be closely watching the junta's next moves.

[AP -- November 4, 2009]

Upcoming Presidential Elections in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's General Quits: Likely to Run for President

General Sarath Fonseka, the architect of the war that annihilated the LTTE, submitted his resignation from the post of Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) apparently to contest the forthcoming election against President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Fonseka is likely to be a candidate of the main opposition United National Party (UNP). Sri Lanka media quoted Lalith Weeratunga, secretary to the President, as saying that General Fonseka had submitted a letter addressed to the president, seeking retirement from the post of CDS. He refused to divulge any other details of the letter. However, General Fonseka is yet to declare that he is entering politics. "I am retiring. He told, "that is all I can say at the moment. However, he added that in the resignation letter he had stated the reasons for seeking to quit". Earlier at a speech made to a gathering of Lankans in the US, General Fonseka said that a soldier could not be in uniform all the time and that even after shedding the uniform he was ready to serve the people and ensure their security against any resurgence of the LTTE.

[Dawn -- November 13, 2009]

'Sri Lanka to Hold Presidential Poll on January 26'

Sri Lanka's electoral office said on November 27 that presidential elections would be held on January 26, with President Mahinda Rajapakse expected to face his former Military Chief Sarath Fonseka. Dayananda Dissanayake, the Commissioner of Elections said that the elections will be held on the 26th of January. Rajapakse, 64, called the election two years ahead of schedule in a move designed to help the government benefit from public goodwill after the end of the country's 37-year separatist conflict, which ended in May. Local media had widely predicted the poll for January 23 or 26, which are considered astrologically auspicious for the President.

Fonseka, 58, is expected to confirm his candidature after he won the backing of Sri Lanka's two main opposition parties this week. The former General quit as Chief of Defence Staff this month, after a rift with Rajapakse over who should take credit for the military victory over the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels. After the fighting ended, he was moved from the post of army chief to become chief of defence staff, a more ceremonial position that reportedly left him feeling sidelined because of its lack of command powers. A statement from the elections office said that nominations would be accepted on December 17. Sri Lanka, where parliamentary elections are also expected some time before April 2010, has 14 million eligible voters.

[Daily Times -- November 28, 2009]

Central Asia

Uzbekistan to Withdraw from Regional Power Grid

Uzbekistan is set to withdraw from the Central Asian unified power grid that links four Soviet nations in the region, a top energy official announced in a move that will prompt fears of deepening electricity shortages among neighboring countries. Uzbekenergo dispatch center Chief Esso Sadullayev wrote in the government newspaper Pravda Vostoka that the grid has become a source of conflict between participating countries. Uzbekistan acts as a transit point for electricity supplies between energy-rich Kazakhstan and power-starved Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. But officials have registered anger at repeated moves by Tajikistan to siphon off more electricity from the network than it was allocated. Sadullayev said that in the

way that the Central Asia unified energy system currently works, there is a real threat to the stability and safety of Uzbekistan's own power system,. He further said that in these circumstances, Uzbekenergo sees no possibility of continuing to operate" in the grid. Uzbekenergo says Tajikistan has illegally appropriated around 100 million kilowatt hours from the system since late last year.

Tajik authorities acknowledge their actions and have made efforts to supply the intended users of the electricity with amounts equivalent to what they took. Countries in the region are highly dependent on one another's power and water supplies, but have failed to reach any consensus on how to share their resources. Complex difficulties over resource-sharing are a lingering legacy of the haphazard fashion in which national boundaries were created during the Soviet Union.

Local reports have suggested Uzbekistan will begin seeking payment for electricity transmission through its lines, whereas transit rights for power deliveries from Kazakhstan to cash-strapped Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were previously provided for free. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have also been studying ways to link their grids directly, although Kazakhstan warned last month it may also pull out of the regional grid in the even of further misappropriations of electricity. In a related development, Tajikistan's power company announced Thursday that will suspend electricity supplies to several regions in the country, raising concerns of another winter of crippling blackouts. Tajik energy officials say they are negotiating with Uzbekistan to allow the transit of electricity from energy-rich Turkmenistan.

[Daily Times -- November 5, 2009]

Uzbekistan Denies Closing Border with Kazakhstan

Tashkent—Uzbekistan denied reports it had unilaterally sealed its border with Kazakhstan, saying it had only imposed a heightened safety regime to combat the spread of seasonal flu. The border was not closed, but simply operating under "temporary quarantine measures". On November 23 a Kazakh Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Uzbekistan had unilaterally closed their shared border and that Astana had received no information on the motives for the decision. The Uzbek news agency said, however, that Uzbekistan had informed the Kazakh side about the heightened measures as early as November 13. The Agency also lashed out at a privately-owned Russian television channel for reporting the closure and suggested that the report was fabricated in Russia to spoil relations between the two Central Asian neighbours. "On November 23 during its evening news broadcast, Russian channel RBK spread an announcement that 'Uzbekistan had unilaterally and without any explanation closed its border with Kazakhstan'," it said.

Although there have been only a handful of confirmed cases of the deadly A(H1N1) swine flu in Central Asia, governments in the region have been on high alert and rumours of outbreaks have caused considerable panic among the population. The accusation also came as relations between Moscow and Tashkent have plummeted to their lowest point in over a decade over Russian plans to open a military base inside Kyrgyzstan near the Uzbek border. Uzbekistan reacted angrily to the base announcement, and Uzbek President Islam Karimov has visibly snubbed the Kremlin since then by not attending a series of regional meetings hosted by Moscow. Moscow has recently been courting its former Soviet satellites in the region in an attempt to counter what it perceives as a growing US military presence in its traditional geo-strategic backyard.

[Pakistan Observer -- November 26, 2009]