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Gender & Women Empowerment

Women & Politics

Shama Khalid takes Oath as GB's First Governor

Dr Shama Khalid on March 23 took oath as Governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, becoming the first woman assuming governorship in the country's history. The Chief Judge Supreme Appellate Court of Gilgit-Baltistan administered the oath to Dr Shama Khalid at a special investiture ceremony at the Aiwan-i-Sadr, witnessed by President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan Syed Mehdi Shah and federal ministers. President Zardari had appointed Dr Shama Khalid as the Governor of Gilgit-Baltistan on March 22. Dr Shama Khalid is a leading social worker who voluntarily worked in different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan by establishing free summer medical camps every year.

[Dawn – March 23, 2010]

Women Demand Early LG Polls, More Seats

Participants of a women's assembly on March 9 demanded that local government elections be held at the earliest so that the day-to-day issues of the people be resolved easily. They were speaking at the assembly titled "Raising her voice: women's effective participation in decision-making process" organised by the Aurat Foundation. They further demanded that the number of women seats in the local bodies be increased and if that was not possible, the current number of seats reserved for women must be retained. They demanded that if any amendments were being made, they should be done with a consensus and that some mechanism of accountability be introduced into the system.

Retired Justice Shaiq Usmani said that though the constitution guaranteed the voting right to women, a majority of them were not allowed to cast their vote for the candidate or party of their choice, and in some cases they were not allowed even to cast their ballots. He also urged the women parliamentarians to rise above their party affiliations and take a unified stand on women-related issues, and cast their vote jointly to bring about improvement in the lives of women. MPA Nusrat Abbasi of the PML-Q, pointing out the achievements of the women development department, said that while there was a need to open more women complaint centres of the department, at least five such centres had been closed down, exposing the government's tall claims regarding its commitment to the women's cause. MPA Shama Mithani of the ruling Pakistan People's Party said that the local bodies system in its present shape was full of flaws and efforts were being made to improve it so that it could properly serve the masses. Highlighting the achievements of the women parliamentarians, she said that almost 80 percent of the bills in parliament had been presented by the reserved-seat women parliamentarians. Faisalabad-based Sidra Sadaf, who had won a silver medal in the recently held South Asian games in Dhaka, urged the women not to give up and always try as with continuous struggle they could also achieve their goals and succeed as she did. Sindh chief minister's adviser Sharmila Farooqui, Mehnaz Rehman, Rehana Hameed (from Sibi), Neelam Abbasi (Thatta), Zeba (Dadu), Kauser S. Khan, Mangla Sharma, Falaknaz Mughal, Nasreen Chandio, Asim Malik, Rubina Brohi, and others also spoke.

[Dawn – March 10, 2010]

Female MNAs More Assertive & Effective Voices of Citizens

Women members have been more active, assertive and effective voices of citizens than their male counterparts in the National Assembly, according to a performance analysis of women members of the National Assembly, released by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) to mark the International Women's Day. In a country where political potentialities of women are underestimated and under-documented, the role of women parliamentarians sets a benchmark for their male counterparts to follow, as they accounted for more than half of the parliamentary business conducted during the second parliamentary year, despite the fact that women members represent only 22 percent of the total number of parliamentarians.

Besides being headed by a woman Speaker, the National Assembly includes 76 women members, 16 elected on general seats and 60 on reserved seats. While not all women parliamentarians have been equally active, **50 of them (66 percent of the 76 female members) have contributed almost 50 percent of the agenda of the Lower House** in terms of their numbers of formal interventions – questions, calling attention notices, private member's bills, resolutions, adjournment motions, points of order, and matters of public importance. These members have proven to work effectively in collaboration with male members of their parties, as well as members belonging to

other parties, by jointly tabling calling attention notices, resolutions, private member's bills, and other parliamentary business.

The performance analysis is prepared by FAFEN's Parliament Watch Project (PWP), which aims to collect and publish information about the job performance of members of the National Assembly and members of the provincial assemblies (MPAs) by directly observing the elected representatives' actions in the legislatures. The information gathered is measured against the neutral and objective framework of the normal rules of parliamentary procedure. The FAFEN report analyses participation of women in various types of parliamentary business that are admissible under the Lower House's Rules of Business. There may be more submissions that female members have submitted to the National Assembly Secretariat, but were not presented in the House.

Of a total of 3,314 questions, women members submitted 1,826 questions. Most questions tabled by female members (835) were "starred", requiring an oral answer. Women members from the PML-N asked 1,127 questions, leading the National Assembly in fulfilling the appropriate legislative function of executive oversight. PPP women members asked 500 questions, PML 199, ANP 46 and MQM women members asked 18 questions. Statistically, women members accounted for almost 60 percent of parliamentary business related to executive oversight in the National Assembly.

A total of 67 private member's bills were on the orders of the day for all sittings during the year. Of these, 49 were laid before the House. Of all introduced bills, **female representatives tabled 43 bills**, either independently or jointly with other female or male members, while their male counterparts introduced only 6 private member's bills. Nineteen of these bills were single-member-female bills, 14 were sponsored by multiple female members, and 10 were jointly sponsored by male and female members. Only four single-male-member bills were introduced.

Of a total of 49 resolutions on various issues, women members sponsored 23 as compared to 13 by male members. Women members tabled 22 motions under Rule 259, as compared to 12 by male members. Only 16 resolutions were, however, tabled in the House, of which eight were not on the orders of the day.

According to the order of the day, a total of 124 MNAs moved **147 calling attention notices, of which 38 were women members**. Of 147 such notices, 18 were sponsored by groups of male members, while seven were put forward by groups of female members. The remaining 122 notices were jointly moved by groups of male and female members. Sixteen female Members from PPPP raised calling attention notices, 12 from PML-N, eight from PML and one each from ANP and MQM. As many as 26 calling attention notices raised by women members were directed to the Cabinet Division, 19 to the Finance Division, 12 to the Ministry of Health and 10 to the Ministry of Interior. The rest concerned with areas as diverse as water and power, defence, culture, food and agriculture, communications, education and petroleum and natural resources.

Parliamentary interventions of women were focused on a broad array of issues relating to "high" and "low" politics, evidencing their focus on diverse matters of national importance and their desire to address them democratically. There have been instances during the parliamentary year where participation of women members appeared to be lacking. For example, the female members did not raise any implications about people in general and women in particular when the NWFP government finalised a peace deal with the Taliban, who had a proven track record of curbing women's freedoms. Women members from Punjab were most active, followed by their counterparts from Sindh, the NWFP and Balochistan. Women members belonging to the opposition parties, especially the PML-N and the PML, were particularly active as compared to their counterparts belonging to the ANP, MMA and the MQM. Women members on reserved seats appear to be more active than women members elected on general seats. Many women on general seats were elected in constituencies that have been traditionally retained by male members of their families, who could not qualify for elections due the graduation condition that had not yet been struck down by the Supreme Court at the time of February 2008 general elections.

[Daily Times – March 8, 2010]

Women & Economics

Interactive Policy Dialogue on Bridging the Gender Gap in Workforce Systems

Highlighting the importance of involving women in the mainstream workforce, speakers at an interactive policy dialogue on 'Bridging the Gender Gap in Workforce Systems' said that integration of women into the workforce creates empowerment and supports development efforts in other areas such as education and health. Organised by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Care to commemorate the International Women's Day, the dialogue was participated by policy makers, donors, academia and civil society actors. The forum engaged employers, job seekers, and policy makers on the challenges and opportunities for increasing

women in the workforce. The dialogue focused on building a shared vision regarding workforce development to generate strategic actions and solutions for workingwomen in Pakistan. The participants were of the opinion that **gender equality is present in the employment sector and can be evidenced by the segregation in the labour market, division of labour between paid and unpaid work, discrimination in wages, unequal distribution of resources within household, less access to public services and exclusion of women in policy making.** The said that lack of childcare is number one barrier to women's entry into the workforce.

Shahida Saleem, Chairperson Standing Committee on IT pointed out that business strategies are directed by profit generation where as women employees require more investment as they have time limitations and require facilities like transport and day care etc that discourages employers to hire women. Talking about some other challenges faced by women, she said that uneducated women do not have many choices of socially acceptable work. She said that potential women entrepreneurs lack exposure to business support services and often fail in new ventures. Pointing towards another fact that put off the employer to hire a woman, she said that retention is cited as number one reason for not employing women by business. "They invest a good amount to train a girl but as soon as she gets married, she leaves the job," said Shahida adding that due to such reasons, employers prefer to train a boy rather than providing equal opportunities for women.

Chief of Research and Dean Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) said that it is good to formulate laws, but to draw some benefits of such legislation, equal importance need to be given to the implementation side. "We can not expect miracles from them until they are implemented," he mentioned. He said that enabling environment, income generation, and capacity building can facilitate women participation in workforce. He recommended establishment of franchised social enterprise that sets up and manages day-care centres and pointed out that in order to address these issues, they said that government needs political commitment to identify gender integration at policy level and make it a key priority. For handicraft sector, he suggested strengthening of existing skills development and vocational training institutes to enhance women's skills in producing items that are more marketable internationally as well as locally. He said that 50 percent of carpet weavers are women yet they are hardly involved in other operations of the carpet value chain like collection of raw material, thread making, designing, sale and export. In agriculture, he pointed out high concentration of women in conventional sectors largely doing work for little or no pay, which included seed preparation, collection and preparation of manure, sowing, weeding transplanting, harvesting and post harvest activities.

Speaking on this occasion, USAID Programme Office Director Sharon Paulling said that the interactive dialogue provides an opportunity to the US government to highlight the importance of women in aspects of Pakistani society and especially the workforce. "With our continued support, we hope Pakistan will be able to engage the untapped energies and abilities of all people, especially poor women, to ensure sustained progress in the economic uplift of the country."

[The News – March 12, 2010]

Women Enterprise Development Exhibition – Bringing Financial Hope to Rural Women in NAs

A five-day Women Enterprise Development Exhibition was held to pay tribute to the women of Pakistan and their contributions in all avenues of life, with 15 different organisations setting up more than 70 stalls on the occasion.

The event was organised by Serena Hotel with a primary focus on poverty alleviation through sustainable enterprise development. The Hotel has undertaken many projects in the Northern Areas of the country, as it believes that the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) role has the potential to bring positive change that may turn the Northern Areas into a future hub of small enterprises and production units, run by local communities. A number of projects are already underway under the organisation's CSR motto in various parts of Pakistan to benefit the women of the region. The stall showcasing sparkling jewellery was a huge attraction for women. Embellished with precious and semi-precious stones, the wonderful jewellery items were an amazing treat for the women on this day. "All of the work is done by women. We give them raw material and they just convert it into beautiful wearable ornaments," said Sultan Madad from Hunza. Sultan, however, lamented over the decline in tourism in the past few years, which has adversely affected the lives of the people living in the Northern Areas. He said that there has been a 95 percent decline in the tourists visiting the area and those who used to enjoy fulfilling lives are now living hand to mouth," he said.

"The women of our area do a lot of needlework and then sell it to the market, as it helps them earn a decent living," said Mahi Parveen from Hunza. She told this correspondent that cross-stitch is a traditional embroidery stitch of the Northern Areas and almost every woman living there has a complete grasp over the skill. "We not only do it for the sake of work but it's also our favourite past time. One of the most innovative uses of traditional cross-stitch was witnessed at a stall where it was used to embellish trendy handbags and hand clutches. "I have studied textile

designing, so I try to bring innovations in traditional embroideries by embellishing them in a trendy manner,” said Rashid Ali, the stallholder. One of the most appreciable stalls on the occasion was the one displaying products prepared by special persons belonging to the Northern Areas. Marketing Manager of Shehr Rehabilitation Centre said almost 25 women and 30 men with different disabilities are associated with their organisation. “We teach them embroidery, stitching and knitting, which enables them to earn a good sum of money, so they don’t become a burden on their families and rather contribute positively,” he said. Meanwhile, the Volunteer Women’s Organisation (VWO) also set up 40 stalls on the occasion. “Such events can prove to be really fruitful in bringing women in the mainstream besides giving them financial independence,” said Samina Pirzada, Chairperson VWO.

[The News – March 9, 2010]

Women & Laws

President Signs Bill on Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace

President Asif Ali Zardari signed the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill, 2010, aimed at providing a safe working environment. The President signed the bill at a ceremony attended by some 100 women activists, parliamentarians and members of civil society organisations in the presidency. He reiterated the government’s commitment to ensuring equal rights for men and women in accordance with the Constitution. He paid rich tribute to the women who over the generations had strived for their rights since long and described them as “really a tribute to God’s divine creation.” He also lauded the role of women which they played in history and said all religions accord them due regard, dignity and honour. The bill aimed at creating a working environment for women free from harassment, abuse and intimidation, he added.

The bill was unanimously passed by the National Assembly on Jan 21 and by the Senate on Feb 26. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Social Welfare, recalled the process of drafting the legislation. The Alliance Against Sexual Harassment (AASHA), a civil society organisation, which has been working on the issue, has described the signing of the bill a milestone for women. Aqsa Khan of AASHA said: “This is a true partnership of citizens and the government. We want the government to ensure its implementation.” She said: “Pakistan now stands as a leading country in South Asia for having a specific legislation against sexual harassment at workplace.” Dr Fouzia Saeed, a woman activist who remained engaged with the process for two years, said: “The government has honoured its commitment for a progressive social legislation. This is a breakthrough and we expect continued support to other such laws to make society more civilised and accountable.” She said in a statement that women activists were thankful to Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Sherry Rehman, Raza Rabbani, Senate Chairman Farooq H. Naek and senior leadership of the PPP. She said they were also very proud of members of the Awami National Party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement and many progressive parliamentarians of the Pakistan Muslim League-Q and the PML-N.

Following are the salient features of the bill:

- Overcoming years of conservative opposition, the National Assembly passed the bill to punish harassment of women at workplaces, though last-minute amendments extended the protection to men as an apparent compromise. Punishment for the guilty, or violators of a code of conduct, will range from a censure to dismissal to an unspecified fine under the law.
- The law defines harassment as “any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favours or other verbal and written communication or physical conduct of a sexual nature or sexually demeaning attitudes, causing interference with the work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment, or the attempt to punish the complainant for refusal to comply to such a request or is made condition for employment.”
- All organisations, including federal and provincial government ministries, departments, corporations, educational institutions, private commercial organisations and registered civil society associations, will be required to constitute inquiry committees of at least three members each – one of them a woman – to probe complaints and give their findings within 30 days to the competent authority concerned that will award recommended penalties.
- Minor penalties will be: censure, withholding for specified periods of promotion or increment and stoppage at an efficiency bar in the time-scale, other than fitness to cross such bar, and recovery of compensation payable to a complainant from pay or any other source of the accused.
- Major penalties are: demotion to a lower post or time-scale or to a lower stage in a time-scale, compulsory retirement, removal from service, dismissal from service, and fine, a part of which can be used as compensation for the complainant. “In case of owner (found guilty), the fine shall be payable to the complainant.”
- An inquiry committee may recommend to an ombudsperson for appropriate action against a complainant whose allegations are found to be false and made with mala fide intentions while a party aggrieved by the

decision of the competent authority may prefer appeal to the ombudsperson to be appointed by the federal or a provincial government.

- Appeals against the decisions of an ombudsperson at the federal level can be made to the President and at provincial level to the governor concerned.
- The statement of objects and reasons, accompanying the law, “is to create a safe working environment for workers which is free of sexual harassment, abuse and intimidation” with a view to enabling higher productivity and better quality of life at work.

[Dawn – March 10, 2010]

Women & Media

Female Journalists Urged to Focus on ‘Gender Side’ of Story

Female journalists can play a vital role in highlighting human angle of story by focusing on ‘gender side’ of a situation that usually remains unexplored due to gender blind reporting. This was stated by filmmaker and Ethnomedia Director Samar Minallah at a one-day training workshop on **‘Women’s Participation in Media: International Comparisons, Challenges, Opportunities and Partnership’**. The event was part of a series of 15 workshops, seminars and focus group discussions organised by the Gender Development Section (GDS), Ministry of Information, in collaboration with Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP), Ministry of Women Development. In addition to reporting on challenges faced by women, she said that mediapersons should also highlight the role models that promoted and encouraged their daughters, sisters and wives in certain fields. She said that there are plenty of such examples in society, but not much importance is given to them by the media. She said that it takes time to modify the social mindset, but eventually the change comes and media can play an important and constructive role in this process. “Women in media can bring new picture of social problems before society.” Reiterating the fact that women are the worst victims of a crisis, Samar said that it is equally important to focus on the courage and resilience shown by the women during that crisis in addition to stressing on their miseries.

GRAP Executive Director Rehana Hashmi called for the implementation a code of conduct in the media to portray gender equality. She appreciated Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani’s decision to continue gender reform agenda in every ministry. “Women’s empowerment is a crosscutting theme and requires involvement of every ministry,” she added. In her presentation, Rehana said that GRAP, CEDAW and Women Centres are all projects that need to have sustainability in order to make an impact. “There is thus need to have them on non-development side of the ministry’s budget to be able to play a positive role in strengthening the ministry,” she mentioned.

Minister of State for Information Syed Sumsam Bokhari said that Pakistani society is a beautiful combination of Islamic and eastern traditions and both social systems give high status to the women. Criticising the approach of extremist elements, he said that Islam has made it obligatory for every Muslim to get education even if he or she has to go to China for that. “On the other hand, the extremists are blowing up women schools and consider education bad for girls.” Terming it shameful that women are buried alive or killed in the name of honour in certain parts of the country, he said that neither Islam nor eastern traditions allows such inhuman behaviour. He said that no country could truly develop with gender discrimination and assured government’s full support in any effort to eliminate gender inequality.

[The News – March 17, 2010]

International Women’s Day

PM Announces Measures for Women’s Empowerment

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani on March 8 announced the **establishment of the Office of Women’s Ombudsman, 10 percent quota for women in the Central Superior Services (CSS) and the conversion of youth development centres into working women’s hostels.**

Addressing a function on the occasion of International Women’s Day at the Convention Centre, Gilani said the government had initiated several measures for empowering women. He said the National Commission on Status of Women would be given complete administrative and financial autonomy, adding the government had also decided to strengthen the First Women’s Bank to empower women economically. Gilani said the government had an unflinching commitment towards gender equality and was fully cognizant of the existing critical issues and problems facing women.

The Prime Minister pointed out some of the measures taken by the government for the empowerment of women and said increased representation in national and provincial assemblies had helped strengthen women politically.

He said Dr Fehmida Mirza was the only female speaker of a House of parliament in the Muslim world and many of the National Assembly standing committees were currently being headed by female parliamentarians. He said an active women's caucus had been formed at the national level with representation from all the parties. Gilani said Pakistan, being a signatory to various UN conventions, especially Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Convention on Rights of Children and the Millennium Development Goals, was committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. He said discriminatory laws were being amended and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2009 had been enacted, while the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Bill, 2010 had been passed by parliament. Gilani said a draft Domestic Violence Bill, 2009 was also in the process of enactment, adding that legislation to enable women to own property and assets was also being formulated.

[Daily Times – March 9, 2010]

A Salute to 'Women of Substance'

Global Peace Pioneers (GPP) organised a biography and picture exhibition of famous women from Pakistan and around the world in connection with the International Women's Day. Chairperson GPP Hina Iqbal said the sole purpose of organising the event was to salute the women who have made remarkable contribution for the prosperity of the world. She highlighted that Pakistani women have not been honoured the way they should be and this day is all about learning from the leading women personalities of Pakistan, which are the role models for the future generation. She said in the developing countries and especially in Pakistan, importunate deprivation of women from their active role in the social order is a basic cause of failure to embark upon the road of prosperity. "Pakistani women in particular have been subjected to domestic torture, honour killing, lack of social justice and have been denied the basic necessities of life. Looking at the far flung areas of Pakistan i.e. the tribal areas of NWFP and Balochistan, the condition is much dire," she said.

Head of Gender Studies Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) Dr Riffat Haque shared the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the UN, which emphasise on eliminating the gender gap for socio-economic prosperity. "By ensuring gender equality at all levels, we will be able to get out of the vicious circle of poverty," she said. Senior National Specialist Arshad Saeed Khan in his presentation said it is estimated that 50 percent of the total women population in Pakistan is illiterate as compared to that of men's ratio that falls between 80 to 89 percent roughly. He further added that sustained efforts are needed to achieve the 2015 Education MDG - full primary completion and gender parity in enrolments. Senior Programme Coordinator UNIFEM Saghira Bukhari said the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of every person to take part in the government of his or her country. However, he added that it is a dilemma of Pakistan that even though being the first Muslim nation to have a female Prime Minister, the rural women here still could not cast their votes on their free will and this plague of not involving women in the decision making process has penetrated in all sectors of society. Senior Lawyer Supreme Court of Pakistan Kowkab Iqbal highlighted the efforts of Pakistani women lawyers, especially in the restoration of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. He said Pakistan is moving in the right direction of women empowerment and the approval of Harassment Bill is a prime example in this regard, however, a lot is yet to be done.

[The News – March 11, 2010]

Articles, Reports & Books on Gender

Reports

Annual Report of Women's Leadership Programme (WLP)

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

The report includes following findings:

- The report says that women participation in remunerative employment is only 13.7 percent whereas the number of women in leadership positions is unknown.
- The report points out that the public sphere in Pakistan has been created on the basis of behaviour patterns of men, belonging to the national elite or those linked to the feudal class.

- The document says that the low level of women participation in the political, economic and social sphere, despite the progress made by public and private sector movements over the past few decades, highlights two key issues. Firstly, political power is still the main stronghold of patriarchy and has remained virtually untouched till today, and secondly, deep gender inequality continues to exist in every field.
- The report points out that according to international research, organisations with women in key leadership positions have strengthened their corporate reputation, attracted and retained tremendous talent, and have been able to tremendously target and succeed in new markets.
- Mentioning some facts about the international markets, it says that 500 companies that promoted women to high positions were 18 to 69 percent more profitable whereas companies with women on their senior management teams had 35 percent higher return on equity.
- Pointing towards the optimistic side, the report mentions that things are changing. 'One can also see women reweaving their worlds by enlivening the home compounds, recreating mutual relations, establishing village and union council level institutions, creating small enterprises, and defying the centuries old discriminatory traditions.'
- The data collected by the gender section of the Rural Support Programme Network (RSPN) on staff gender ratio shows that there are no women at the senior management level and only around 15 percent at the management level.
- The data shows presence of the highest number of women at the level of professionals that is around 30 percent, whereas the number of women is very low, around 10 percent, at the level of support staff that includes peons and domestic helpers.

[The News – March 9, 2010]

2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report Launched

Achieving gender equality promotes human development, not only for women, but for whole societies, and is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, said UNDP Country Director Toshihiro Tanaka at the launch of the 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report. The report titled “**Power Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and Pacific Asia**” says that Pakistani women are poorly represented in critical decision-making positions that are central to translating laws and policies into practice. The report notes that despite remarkable economic progress and development, the Asia-Pacific region is still struggling to bridge the widening gender gap and to provide equal rights to women in different spheres of life. Authored by UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, the report also marked 20 years of the UNDP's first published report on human development in 1990.

According to the report, almost half of the adult women in South Asia are illiterate, a higher proportion than in any other region in the world. Another finding reveals that agricultural jobs account for more than 40 percent of women's jobs in East Asia and 65 percent in South Asia, yet women control only seven percent of the farms in these regions. The report chronicles that Pakistani women's participation in the labour force is less than 20.8 percent of the female population, and the female unemployment rate is 8.4 percent of the female labour force. In parliamentary representation, women held only four percent of ministerial positions in 2009. Although the net primary school enrolment for girls is 57.3 percent, the secondary school enrolment is 25.8 percent with tertiary enrolment as low as 4.2 percent, it said.

[Daily Times – March 11, 2010]

Women Lack Access to Technical Skills

Restriction of women to certain work domains is evident from the fact that though they form a significant portion of urban economy, majority of them (60.2 percent) are engaged in 'crafts and related trades' compared to 0.3 percent as 'plant and machine operators'. These statistics make part of the report to be presented by Pakistani NGO representatives at the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Following are some of the findings of the report:

- Women's participation in formal labour force is 20 percent of the total labour force with concentration of women workers in low-skilled, low-tiered jobs in manufacturing sector and their almost total lack of access to technical skills.
- The trend among women as unpaid family workers is rising and is said to be at 65 percent including women in the agriculture sector. It mentions that education level among women is still quite low with 62 percent of them living in 'katchi abadis' (urban squatter settlements).
- National labour legislation for both the formal and informal sectors lacks gender sensitivity; the data too is not gender segregated.

- Across all industry divisions and all occupations, the average Pakistani woman is getting 3.6 times less than an average male worker.
- There is no female lawyer, female judge or presiding officer (except one in Karachi Labour Court) in labour courts. The government's procedures are cumbersome, and tripartite consultations do not include women.
- Over the past 5 years, it was found that NGOs and CSOs across the country have been engaged in wide ranging activities. While most of NGO advocacy was on violence against women (VAW) and related legislation or excesses, the least number of activities were undertaken by CSOs and NGOs in the critical areas of environment, media, and institutional mechanisms.
- Women form 70 percent of rural workers but have no control over their earnings as usually men collect all or most of their earnings. 'Every day, approximately 500 acres of farmland is swallowed up by urbanisation (1 acre of fertile farmland lost every 5 minutes) as rural poor displaced by degrading land migrate.'
- UN has warned that unless the world turns back to organic agriculture, it will be faced with a food and agricultural catastrophe. Given that women bear the main responsibility for household food needs, it recommends that women in poor rural household should be provided 2-5 acres of land for self-managed organic agriculture backed with appropriate extension and support services.

The report includes following recommendations:

- The document also suggests women-centred land reform on usufruct terms be introduced. It also demands end to commercialisation of deep sea fishing which has led to the loss of livelihood of scores of women. It says that minority of women are in a double bind as women and as belonging to minority communities.
- With regard to education, the report demands improvement in quality of education and removal of gender biases in texts. It also recommends training opportunities for girls and women in diverse non-traditional fields. It stresses to address as high priority the critical area of mobility and understand the political, economic and social context of girls' education and unpack gender accordingly. The report also demands basic reproductive health information in school curricula for girls starting at age 10 with information getting progressively more mature with age.
- Dealing with health issues in a comprehensive way, the paper says that women and girls lack access to the most basic health care services and are at the highest risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. It also points out non-availability of lady health service providers in rural areas and says that women are often not taken to medical clinics or hospitals because only male doctors are available.
- Commenting on women in media, the report says that due to lack of code of ethics, there is lack of women specific concerns. Though there is greater visibility of women and their issues as well as more space and opportunity for women to join the media, it regrets that stereotypical portrayal of women is largely prevalent in media.
- In the end, the report demands that critical areas of poverty, economy and environment be clustered together and the girl child concerns should be reviewed. It also demands greater focus on persons displaced due to conflicts and natural disasters.

[The News – March 6, 2010]

Articles

Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities

By Fauzia Yazdani

Female empowerment will not happen through political slogans, but through carefully designed policy interventions that focus on integrating women so as to further gender mainstreaming. I was part of the critical mass of women that was created to celebrate the International Women's Day in Islamabad, jointly organised by the Ministry of Women's Development (MOWD) and PTV on March 8, 2010. The critical mass had to wait, as usual, for almost two hours for the Prime Minister to grace the occasion. It was a show of pomp that failed to dedicate a moment of silence to recognise the large number of women who had lost their lives in conflict and abuse of human rights in Pakistan in 2009. Unfortunately, while the grand finale was singing 'Let's Touch the Skies', the theme song of the day, six girls in Rawalpindi, 30 minutes from the venue, lost their lives to a fire in their hostel. But the show must go on.

The Prime Minister gracing an occasion has become a political indicator of the importance of the event, hence, this day also stood acknowledged at the highest level. The gift hamper for the women of Pakistan included: (i) the establishment of the Office of Women's Ombudsman, (ii) 10 percent quota for women in the Central Superior Services (CSS) and (iii) the conversion of youth development centres into working women's hostels. Besides, he announced that the National Commission on the Status of Women would be given complete administrative and financial autonomy, adding that the government had also decided to strengthen the First Women's Bank to

empower women economically. He ordered the Establishment and Finance Division to strengthen the MOWD and all other federal and provincial ministries and departments to mainstream gender equality.

This was my umpteenth women's day function. Each year they start with a need to recognise the wajood (existence) of women in Pakistan and this year was no different. Our dilemma is that we focus on being the 'first' in the world and forget about the 'rest' at home — be it the first female Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly, Governor of the State Bank or others. By ratifying international conventions like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with marked reservations, the government plays to the gallery for international actors only. No doubt, these personalities and actions are landmark affirmative indicators, but what does all this mean for the 80 million vulnerable and marginalised women of Pakistan? Does it make 52 percent of the women in Pakistan feel safe, respected and empowered?

Let me discuss the ineptness of these announcements. The bumper prize — the Establishment of Women Ombudsman — leaves one wondering why another parallel, vertical, federal institution will be put in place. Having a women-specific institution does not translate into female empowerment, it rather adds to their marginalisation and compartmentalisation in this case. The regular ombudsman has legislative backing and a mandate, which facilitates across gender lines. A women's ombudsman will neither empower nor increase the access to justice for women, as it is a federal set-up. Surely the authors of this institution neither attempted to gather feedback on the in-activation of district ombudsman set-ups under the Local Government Ordinance 2001, nor on the achievements of Justice and Arbitrary Committees (musalihah anjumans), which are available even at the Union Council level with women's representation. That is why the new Local Government System has retained the musalihah anjumans, which deliver much more than a women's ombudsman. This left me wondering about what had stopped the Prime Minister to accord administrative and financial independence and autonomy for the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) with provincial outreach. A strong NCSW with provincial outreach would not only be a policy watch set-up, but could also facilitate set-ups like musalihah anjumans and provincial women's development departments to deliver much more than a women's ombudsman.

Gift number two: reservation of 10 percent quota for women for recruitment to public office, through a competitive examination called the Central Superior System (CSS). This system already has its due share of quotas: 10 percent seat allocation on merit, the rest of the seats as per provincial quotas and 10 percent quota for induction from the armed forces that land in premier service groups only, e.g. the foreign office. This system is based on open, nationwide competition. A substantial number of women have been competing and joining the Civil Service of Pakistan, besides being toppers. With the introduction of another quota slab for women, the word 'competitive' should be dropped from the CSS. What is the basis for this decision? Did the MOWD, NCSW or FPSC conduct any analysis that recorded a marked decrease in the induction of women to demand this reservation? I guess not because the statistics would have revealed a different trend. Around the world such competitive systems of public office recruitment are gender neutral and Pakistan is no exception.

Gift number three: Converting Youth Development Centres into women hostels in Quetta and Peshawar. The youth constitutes almost 60 percent of our population, which, in itself, is a marginalised segment. This order would mean that the entire management system of these set-ups will be either jobless or will add to the free lunch brigade of public servants, because men cannot run women hostels. This means the capacity building of staff to manage a specific gender, besides refurbishing these set-ups in line with women specific needs, e.g. new toilets, higher boundary walls, etc., hence a complete institutional changeover. Again, is this decision based on statistical analysis? And how much would this institutional change of hands and transition cost the respective provincial governments, especially in Balochistan where the women's development department became independent merely a few months ago?

The Prime Minister instructed the Establishment and Finance Division to strengthen the MOWD. I am reminded here of a verse by Allama Iqbal that says even God cannot improve the status of those who do not want it for themselves. This is apt in the case of MOWD, which could not even capitalise on the opportunity of having the Prime Minister of the country as its minister-in-charge for over a year. Unfortunately, it is perceived as one of the weakest ministerial set-ups, lacking staff, technical expertise and adequate financial allocation. It is further rated as an apex sidelined ministry. Numerous efforts of its strengthening and restructuring, with heavy financial inputs, are nicely shelved in its archives, leaving one to wonder how it will be strengthened by the input and support of the Establishment and Finance Division.

Last but not least, all federal ministries and provincial departments should be asked to facilitate gender reform and gender mainstreaming. There is no policy directive or guideline that can be used as a checklist to assess the level of sensitivity to women and responsiveness in governmental policies. The budgetary allocations and expenditure of

the government are yet to be on a gender disaggregated basis. The PC-1 format of the Planning Commission also remains gender blind. Within such an environment, I wish gender mainstreaming was easier done than said by the prime minister, especially when even the term gender is being misused in the government set-up to indicate women only. The Prime Minister assured everyone that his government was determined to follow and implement, in letter and spirit, Ms Bhutto's vision of a greater and stronger Pakistan. I wish he had recognised the institutional, social and religio-cultural challenges that we are facing as a nation, where the definition of fundamental human rights is becoming skewed. Female empowerment will not happen through political slogans, but through carefully designed policy interventions that focus on integrating women so as to further gender mainstreaming. It is high time that we take women's empowerment beyond political rhetoric and slumber.

[Daily Times – March 15, 2010]

HR Watch

Violence against Women

Domestic Violence is a Crime, not Family Issue: Expert

Domestic violence is a common scourge, which deserves attention from all levels of the society. It is gender neutral and occurs in all relationships and across all cultures and religions. Moreover, it is incompatible with the practices of Islam. These views were expressed by Dr. Batool Kazim, consultant psychiatrist and instructor at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, while speaking on domestic violence at a session titled 'Breaking the Silence.' The lecture was organised by the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in connection with International Women's Day. Dr. Batool was brave enough to share her own experiences, as a survivor of domestic violence over many years. She talked about the high incidence of domestic violence in the US, and estimated even higher prevalence in Pakistan. Dr. Batool said that women's silence is what perpetuates domestic violence. It is not a family problem, but a criminal activity and should be interpreted as such. Although it is common in both genders, the bulk of the victims are females. Domestic violence is defined as incidentally violent, cohesive or controlling behaviour meant to assert or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Domestic violence has physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, economic and legal dimensions. In the US, 4 to 5 million women have a history of violence and 30 to 50 percent of married couples experience violence. Some co-factors, which enhance risk of domestic violence include poverty, unemployment, youth, and having a personality disorder. Most victims present with pelvic, abdominal and musculoskeletal pain, and often present to medical clinics. Asking a victim about abuse needs to be part of all medical assessments. Children who have seen parental violence can experience insecurity, developmental delay, and poor academic performance, and may reflect the same behaviour in their own marital lives, Dr. Batool informed the audience.

Later, Professor Dr. Rizwan Taj, Head of the Department of Psychiatry, highlighted the challenges that make it difficult to address domestic violence in the Pakistani culture, where solutions and support are not as readily available as in the west. "Separation and divorce can be a horrifying experience for a female with no economic security and in a society, which still looks down upon such individuals. Divorce is often accompanied by issues of survival for the victim, and as such, the ultimate option lies in mending fences, improving the marital relationship and addressing issues of aggression, etc," Dr. Rizwan commented. The psychiatrist recommended that the extended family system should be more supportive towards couples. "Before a couple embarks on a conjugal relationship, the male needs to be counselled more about his new role as a husband. Currently, only females are counselled about their roles as partners in marriage," he said. Dr. Rizwan recommended that the issue be addressed and be projected as unacceptable and contradictory to our culture and religious teachings. The session was attended by a large number of doctors, and staff of Crisis Centre for Women and Struggle for Change.

[The News – March 13, 2010]

Child Rights

Justice System for Juveniles Yet to be Implemented

National Assembly Standing Committee on Social Welfare and Special Education on March 9 called for implementing Juvenile Justice System to establish institutional mechanism for providing justice to young offenders. The Committee decided to invite provincial ministers for social welfare and registrars of provincial high courts in its next meeting to discuss its implementation. The Committee was chaired by Rubina Sadaat Qaimkhani. The Committee was informed by Secretary ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education that juvenile justice system was promulgated in year 2000 aimed at providing a unified system to be implemented by the provincial governments which deals with establishment of special 'remand homes' and provision of legal assistance to juvenile offender.

The law also called for rehabilitation of offenders on state expense. However due to financial constraints the provinces have not established the required number of such remand homes. Similarly separate courts were not established and required probation officers have not been appointed. Secretary social welfare said that limited health, education, counseling, recreational facilities and vocational training were being provided by provincial governments to the juvenile offenders and that too with the help of civil society organisations. The committee was of the view that provincial governments should allocate substantial funds for the implementation of juvenile justice system and involve civil society organisations and other international donor agencies in this effort.

The Committee was also briefed about the special education institution in Islamabad and other provinces, the ministry was directed to establish such institutions in the remote areas of the country. The Committee constituted a Sub-Committee under the convenership of MNA Akram Masih Gill, to discuss and formulate guidelines for the Ministry on child related issues. The Committee directed the ministry to extend assistance to the family of late Shazia who died in Lahore due to domestic violence.

[Dawn – March 10, 2010]

One Child Abused Every Seven Hours in 2009

With an increase of 9.4 percent, the reported child abuse cases in the country jumped to 2,012 in 2009 from 1,838 in 2008. The statistics compiled by Sahil show around 3.3 children (68 percent girls and 32 percent boys) were abused daily over the last one year, approximately one child almost every seven hours.

Among the crime categories **abduction cases top the list** of abuse crimes against children with about 41 percent cases. The **second highest crime category was that of rape and sodomy** with 28 percent cases of both girls and boys, while **gang rape and gang sodomy was the third highest category** of crime with 15 percent cases. The **fourth highest crime category was that of attempted rape/sodomy** with 9.5 percent cases. A total of six percent children were murdered after being sexually assaulted. Around 0.5 percent cases were of those children, who were murdered in an attempt of sexual assault.

The 2009 statistics identifies 4,222 people as child abusers with 81 percent (3,431) acquaintances of the victims, 15.5 percent (663) strangers and 2.5 percent (97) family members, while one percent (31) couldn't be identified. The most vulnerable age group of children to abuse remained that of 11-15 years in which almost 25.5 percent cases took places, followed by that of 6-10 years with 16.5 percent cases. The data shows children were abused almost everywhere from inside home to places outside home with 15 percent cases taking place at the abusers' place and 11 percent cases at the victim's place.

Cases of one time assault were the highest (54 percent). However, around seven percent of the victims were abused on a long-term basis ranging from one day to more than six months. Punjab province topped the list by reporting majority (62 percent) of such cases, followed by Sindh (28 percent), Islamabad (seven percent), NWFP (1.5 percent), Balochistan (one percent) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (0.5 percent). The rural-urban divide of the cases showed around 63 percent cases occurred from rural areas and 37 percent cases from the urban population. The identification of 70 percent victims was revealed by printing names (63 percent) and pictures (seven percent) in newspapers, whereas the identification of 30 percent victims was not revealed. As many as 81 percent of the reported child abuse cases were registered with police, whereas six percent cases went unregistered. The status of 13 percent cases remained unknown.

Sahil compiled majority of the cases i.e. 1,940 (96%) by monitoring of newspapers, while 55 cases (2.7 percent) were obtained from the medico-legal officers of the relevant areas. Seventeen cases (one percent) were directly reported to Sahil for services and were not reported by the media. The organisation says child abuse victims, due to the general silence on the subject of sexual abuse and lack of awareness of violation of rights might lead to underreporting of such cases.

Sahil also collected international statistics on child abuse according to which around 150 million girls and 73 million boys experience rape or other sexual violence, most often by members of their own family, around the world every year. In **Sri Lanka**, the official statistics reveal, 2099 children are sexually victimised every year, of which 930 are raped, 654 sexually harassed and 515 subjected to other sexual offences. Around 100 young people are sexually exploited or abused every day in Sri Lanka. There is lack of official statistics on child sexual abuse in **Bangladesh**. However, according to a report, one of three children have been sexually abused in Bangladesh i.e. nearly 20 millions children every year. Another report mentioned that a study found, the children who grew up in the city slums/streets, in almost 100 percent of the cases, admit of being sexually abused to the worst degree on a non-commercial basis. In **Nepal**, a recent research found that nearly 18 percent of the 4,000 students interviewed experienced severe sexual abuse, including molesting and rape. Another research report on child sexual abuse said nearly 13.7 percent of the 5,000 interviewed students had suffered from severe sexual abuse. The situation is no different in India where, according to a study done in 13 states, more than 53 percent children report facing one or more forms of sexual abuse.

[The News – March 31, 2010]

Child Abuse: Efforts on for Harsher Punishments

Federal Minister for Human Rights Mumtaz Alam Gilani stressed the need for effective legislation to protect children's rights, as Pakistan lags behind on a relevant UN convention. Mr Gilani was speaking at a ceremony organised by Sahil, a non-governmental organisation working against child sexual abuse, to present the "Child Friendly Newspaper Award 2009". The Minister said a bill for harsher punishment for people sexually abusing children was under consideration, adding that his ministry intended to involve civil society in the entire process. According to Mr Gilani, the government is working to raise a force of 4,000 volunteers for the protection of human rights. The human rights ministry has so far registered 1,000 volunteers and plans to launch the force called the 'Defenders of Human Rights' within next six months. On the occasion, awards were given to three Urdu language newspapers for best coverage of child-related issues. The award winning newspapers were Khabrain, Islamabad; Kaavish, Hyderabad; and Leader, Lahore. Similarly, performance of 13 other newspapers was acknowledged for following ethical guidelines, as they neither published photographs of victims nor mentioned their names. Eight volunteers were also awarded for taking active part in disseminating messages developed specifically for children about body protection. These volunteers used different mediums to create awareness among their communities. Earlier, Rubina Shams of Sahil shared findings of a report with the participants. According to the report, a total of 2,012 cases of child sexual abuse were recorded all over Pakistan in 2009. The figure showed a 9.4 percent increase when compared with the figure recorded in 2008. Sixty-eight percent of the victims were girls and 32 percent boys. Norwegian Ambassador Robert Kvile said the civil society had an important role to play for protection of the rights of children.

[Dawn – March 26, 2010]

Afghan Children Face World's Worst Conditions'

Afghanistan is the hardest place in the world to be a child, the South Asia Regional Director for UNICEF said, with high child mortality rates, poor levels of nutrition and rampant sexual abuse.

Daniel Toole said on a visit to Afghanistan said that the situation in Afghanistan as a whole is one of the most dramatic in South Asia and also in the world. Afghanistan is the most difficult place to be born as a child, "If I could take one challenge, it's survival." Three decades of war and a worsening insurgency have made it ever tougher for an Afghan child just to survive, Toole said during a visit aimed at highlighting what UNICEF calls the worst conditions for children on earth. One of the girls he had just met in a woman's shelter was only nine years old when she was forced to marry a total stranger. Another was just 11. More than a quarter of Afghan children - 257 out of 1,000 - will die before they reach their fifth birthday and 165 out of every 1,000 will die in the first year of their lives, more than any place in the world, according to UNICEF data from 2008.

Afghanistan also has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world after Sierra Leone, with 1,800 women per 100,000 live births dying during child birth, according to UNICEF estimates from 2005. "On top of that, we overlay the conflict, and so children are being displaced, their food production has been disrupted, so the chances of being yet further endangered by the security situation ... make it that much more dramatic," said Toole. Violence in Afghanistan is at its worst levels since a US-led invasion in late 2001 overthrew the Taliban. Since then, intense fighting between insurgents and foreign and Afghan troops has forced thousands of civilians to flee their homes. An increasing number of children are also fleeing across Afghanistan's borders, said Toole, with many turning up as far away as Western Europe without their parents. Last April, 24 Afghan children aged between 14 and 16 were found living on a sidewalk of a railway station in Rome. The Save the Children aid group said Afghan children now made up one of the biggest groups of unaccompanied minors in the city.

Other major problems facing children in Afghanistan, particularly girls, said Toole, is underage marriage and sexual abuse. Forty-three percent of girls aged 20-24 were married before they were 18, according to UNICEF figures from 2009. Girls are often married against their will to men more than twice their age and are forced to have sex with their husbands before they reach puberty. Toole described a visit he made to a women's shelter supported by UNICEF in the western city of Herat. The shelter is the only place in the city where girls who have been sexually abused or married at a young age can seek refuge. "Two young girls, one who was nine who was married. She didn't even know she was being married until she arrived and was told, 'here is your husband'. Another married at 11 against her will," said Toole after meeting the girls at the shelter. "Dramatic stories, painful stories, but I think it's the tip of the iceberg. I found myself thinking, 'how many girls have had this happen and can't get to this centre?'," he said. But despite the difficulties facing Afghan children, Toole said progress was being made, especially in education with an increasing number of girls being sent to school

[Daily Times – March 19, 2010]

Other HR Related Issues

Mob torches Christians' houses in Narang Mandi

A furious mob robbed and later burnt houses of five Christian families in Narang Mandi in which copies of the holy Bible were also allegedly burnt. The mob attacked the houses on alleged involvement of the families in the murder of a young son of a landlord of Kirtu Pandoori village in Narang Mandi. In her application to police, Shamshad Bibi alleged that the assailants also kidnapped her sons Faisal and Yasir and brother-in-law Khalid, while later handed over Faisal to police.

[Daily Times – March 11, 2010]

Islamabad Police Set-Up Human Rights Cell

Islamabad police have established a Human Rights Cell under the supervision of Superintendent of Police (SP) Legal Javed Iqbal Khatytak in the office of the senior superintendent of police (SSP). The SSP has asked the people to lodge their complaints at landline number 051-9261083 or forward email at ssp.ict@islamabadpolice.gov.pk

Islamabad police have issued special directions to investigation officers and other personnel of the force to avoid violation of human rights and adopt modern techniques during the investigation from the nabbed criminals. According to a press release, SSP Tahir Alam Khan Tuesday issued these directions to the personnel of operational police after a meeting with Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Kaleem Imam. The SSP also held meetings with the sub-divisional police officers (SDPOs) and station house officers (SHOs) directing them to ensure friendly policing in the city and ensure protection to the rights of the citizens. He has also directed not to detain any person without registering the case. The policemen and officers have been also warned of stern disciplinary action in case of any violation of human rights and torture. IGP has also directed SPs of four zones and SP investigation to visit every police station and brief police personnel about the protection of human rights. He has directed Islamabad police to hold seminars for change in policing culture and lectures on human rights to CIA staff and policemen by the prominent lawyers and important personalities.

[Daily Times – March 10, 2010]

Pakistan Human Development Index

Showing a slight improvement of 1.30 percent annually, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s '2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Power Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific Asia' launched on Wednesday mentions that Pakistan's Human Development Index (HDI) for this year is 0.572, which gives the country a rank of 141st out of total 182 countries. The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development that includes living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and gross enrolment in education) and having a decent standard of life (measured by purchasing power parity and income). The report chronicles that in Pakistan, women are poorly represented in critical decision-making positions that are central to translating laws and policies into practice. Women's participation in labour force is less than 20.8 percent of the female population and the female unemployment rate is 8.4 percent of the female labour force. In parliamentary representation, in 2009 only 4 percent of ministerial positions were held by women while the seats in parliament were 21.1 percent of the total. Although the net primary school enrolment for girls is 57.3 percent the secondary school enrolment is 25.8% with tertiary enrolment as low as 4.2 percent. It recommended reforming constitutions, training judicial and law enforcement personnel in gender-sensitive practices and progressively interpreting religious principles, which recognise the equal value of all human beings. It suggests that political quotas to increase women's political participation, with sanctions for non-compliance, could be necessary. "More women should also be enfranchised into party politics; and relied upon as brokers of peace in times of emergency," it mentions. It says that while Asia and the Pacific can take pride in the region's vibrant economic transformation in recent decades, this has not translated into progress on gender equality and women have not benefited from this progression. "Discrimination and neglect are threatening women's survival in the Asia-Pacific region, where women suffer from some of the world's lowest rates of political representation, employment and property ownership. Their lack of participation is also depressing economic growth. "Achieving gender equality promotes human development- not only for women, but for whole societies, and is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals," said UNDP Country Director Toshihiro Tanaka while welcoming the guests.

The report focuses on three key areas -economic power, political decision-making and legal rights to analyse what holds women back, and how policies and attitudes can be changed to foster a climb toward gender equality. Asia, the report asserts, is standing at a cross-road and by putting the right policies in place now, countries in the region can achieve positive change.

[The News – March 11, 2010]

Pakistan Major Source of Human Trafficking: UNHCR

Pakistan is a major source, transit and destination for men, women and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labour as well as sexual exploitation. According to UNHCR report entitled **Human trafficking Report 2009** about one million Pakistani men, women and children are victims of bonded labour. Though FIA with its meagre resources is committed to arrest the human smugglers but it fails to snub the human smuggling from Pakistan, a statistical data of the human smugglers and proclaimed offenders available with The Nation reflected. As per FIA Red Book 2009 there were 1,710 proclaimed offenders across the country out of whom only 328 were arrested while in the first two months of the year 2010 FIA arrested 80 proclaimed offenders and 1,656 are still at large. Interpol has so far issued red notices to 17 most wanted traffickers. First red book of the wanted persons, absconders and proclaimed offenders involved in illegal immigration, human trafficking and human smuggling was issued in the September 2006, Which contained profiles of 69 POs out of whom majority was involved in 10 to 30 cases.

As per red book Wilayat Hussain from Karachi was involved in 30 cases of human smuggling, Muhammad Ilyas resident of Bhimber AJK 12 cases, Shaukat Ali alias Bhola resident of Rawalpindi 33 cases, Ajab Gul alias Raja Humayun from Gujrat 14 cases, Nadeem Butt Gujrat 13 cases, Iftikhar Ahmad of Mandi Bahauddin 12 cases and 18 cases were registered against Naveed Anjum of Gujrat. Interestingly these cases were registered within period of one year but in most of the cases FIA failed to arrest the accused. The UNHCR report further revealed that parents sell their daughters into domestic servitude, prostitution, or forced marriages, and women are traded between tribal groups to settle disputes or as payment for debts. Pakistani women and men migrate voluntarily to Gulf states, Iran and Greece for low-skilled work as domestic servants or in the construction work. As a result of fraudulent job offers made and high fees charged during recruitment, however, some find themselves in conditions of involuntary servitude or debt bondage once abroad, including restrictions on movement, non-payment of wages, threats and physical or sexual abuse. Moreover, various NGOs contend that Pakistani girls are trafficked to the Middle East for sexual exploitation. Pakistan is also a destination for women and children from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, and Nepal trafficked primarily for forced labour. Women from Bangladesh and Nepal are trafficked through Pakistan to the Gulf States. The report alleges that the government of Pakistan does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Convictions of trafficking offenders decreased during the reporting period. The government continued to punish victims of sex trafficking and did not provide protection services for victims of forced labour, including bonded labour. The report acknowledges the government of Pakistan made insufficient efforts to address trafficking in 2008, particularly regarding labour trafficking.

Pakistan prohibits all forms of trans-national trafficking in persons through its Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance (PACHTO); the ordinances prescribed penalties range from seven to 14 years imprisonment. The government uses Sections 17 through 23 of the Emigration Ordinance to prosecute internal cases of trafficking. Pakistan did not provide data to demonstrate any significant law enforcement efforts against labour trafficking. Though Pakistan has a substantial problem of bonded labour, neither the federal nor the provincial governments provided evidence of criminal prosecutions, convictions, or punishments for perpetrators of bonded labour, or for other acts of forced labour, including fraudulent recruitment for the purpose of forced labour, and forced child labour. Moreover Pakistani sex trafficking victims were sometimes arrested and incarcerated for prostitution without screening for evidence of trafficking and some were subjected to punishment under Islamic law for adultery. During the year, the Punjab Governments Child Protection Bureaus in Lahore, Rawalpindi, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan, and Faisalabad made serious efforts in 2005 to rescue child beggary and provide rehabilitative services. Pakistan also made efforts to prevent trafficking in persons during the reporting period, though lack of public awareness continued to be a problem. The FIA launched a hotline for reporting cases of trafficking and smuggling that received 811 complaints, but did not specify the number of trafficking-specific calls. In addition, the Ministry of Interior produced and distributed a film about the dangers of trafficking on state television and to vulnerable populations along the border with India.

[The Nation – March 26, 2010]

Conflict Watch

332 Terror Hits Claimed 5,704 Lives since 9/11

The extent to which Pakistan has borne the brunt of the US-led War against Terror can be gauged from the fact that during the last 102 months since the 9/11 episode, the country has averagely been rocked by terrorists every 10th day during this period, which has witnessed 332 terrorism-related incidents inflicting 5,704 deaths till date. While 58 terrorism-related incidents have jolted Peshawar (Charsadda and Darra Adamkhel included) since September 11, 2001, the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad have been hit 46 times by terrorists in these last eight and a half years. A research conducted by The News, using statistics and chronology recorded by the US

Department of State, archives of Pakistani newspapers and websites carrying information about global terrorism, has revealed that while the port city of Karachi has been struck 37 times by terrorists during this period under review, Lahore has confronted such happenings on 21 occasions, the same number as the Swat valley. While Quetta has so far seen blood pouring down its drains 18 times, Dera Ismail Khan has been attacked 16 times by the terrorists during this still ongoing war. The Pakistan Army personnel and installations of country's armed forces, outside the war zones of Swat, South and North Waziristan etc, have been targeted at least 22 times during this time period under review. Meanwhile, not fewer than 105 terrorism incidents have taken place since in the war-ridden Bajaur Agency, Kurram Agency, Orakzai Agency, Lower and Upper Dir, Mohmand Agency, South Waziristan and North Waziristan agencies etc. The NWFP cities mainly hit include Hangu, Kohat, Shangla, Buner, Bannu, Mansehra, Buner, Haripur, Nowshera, Lakki Marwat and Parachinar etc. Terror has also whacked the calm of Dera Bugti four times. The residents of Bahawalpur, Sialkot, Hub, Sargodha and Faisalabad found themselves strapped in the grip of fear on two occasions each. Horror also haunted Multan, Mian Channu, Taxilla, Pishin, Panjgur, Gujranwala, Wah, Dera Ghazi Khan, Kalat, Kamra, Bhakkar, Chakwal, Mianwali, Hassan Abdal and Muzaffarabad etc, at least once each.

Claiming that it has lost around \$35 billion since joining the still-continuing War on Terror, Pakistan witnessed only two terror-related incidents in 2001, 14 in 2002, just 8 in 2003, 18 in 2004, 11 in 2005, 16 in 2006, 56 in 2007, 72 in 2008, 130 in 2009 and 29 in the first two-and-a-half months of 2010 till the fling of this report. The year 2009 of course remained the bloodiest of all with 130 incidents claiming around 1,800 lives, followed by 2008 which saw 1,565 people falling prey to 72 such attacks. Terror in Pakistan claimed the lives of eminent personalities like the two-time Premier Benazir Bhutto (December 27, 2007), banned Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sihaba chief Maulana Azam Tariq (October 6, 2003), former Interior Minister Lt Gen (R) Moinuddin Haider's elder brother Ehteshamuddin Haider (December 21, 2000), noted religious scholar Ghulam Murtaza Malik (May 7, 2002), eminent Deobandi scholar and head of Islamic religious school Jamia Binoria, Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai (May 30, 2004), leading Shia scholar and Chief of Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan, Allama Hassan Turabi (July 14, 2006), Chief of Peshawar City Police Malik Saad (January 27, 2007), former Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam MNA and Wafaqul Madaris Vice Chairman Maulana Hassan Jan (September 15, 2007), Pakistan Army's top medic Lt Gen Mushtaq Baig (February 25, 2008), former head of Pakistan Army's Special Services Group Maj Gen (R) Ameer Faisal Alvi (November 19, 2008), Awami National Party Provincial law-maker Alam Zeb Khan (February 11, 2009), leading Sunni Barelwi cleric Sarfraz Ahmed Naeemi (June 12, 2009), Punjab-born Balochistan Education Minister Shafiq Ahmed Khan (October 25, 2009), Balochistan's Deputy Inspector General Nizam Shahid Durrani (November 19, 2009), ANP politician Shamsher Ali Khan (December 1, 2009), former NWFP Education Minister Ghani-ur-Rehman (January 3, 2010), Peshawar's District Police Officer Iqbal Marwat (February 12, 2010) and Jamaat Ahl-e-Sunnat's key leaders Mufti Saeed Jalalpuri (March 11, 2010) and Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Nadeem (March 14, 2010). During this particular period, former President Pervez Musharraf survived three life attempts. While Musharraf saw death close to him twice in December 2003, he also managed to survive the July 6, 2006, attack aimed at his life. Then Corps Commander Karachi Lt Gen Ahsan Saleem Hayat also narrowly escaped on June 10, 2004, when gunmen opened fire at his convoy in Karachi. On July 30, 2004, there was an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Prime Minister-elect Shaukat Aziz, while he was campaigning for a by-election in Attock District. On August 2, 2004, Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Mohammad Yousaf also managed to deceive death. On April 28, 2006, the then Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Sherpao, survived an assassination bid at Charsadda. On July 17, 2007, another suicide bomber blew himself up outside the venue of the district bar council convention in Islamabad, just before the arrival of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto also escaped unhurt on October 18, 2007, when her convoy was attacked in Karachi upon her return from a long exile, but could not ride her luck the second time she was fatally targeted on December 27, 2007. On October 30, 2007, a suicide bomber struck a police checkpoint in the high security zone of Rawalpindi, less than a kilometre from President Musharraf's Camp Office. The blast also splattered the checkpost outside the residence of then Chief of the General Staff General Tariq Majid. On November 9, 2007, a suicide bomber detonated explosives at the house of the then Federal Political Affairs Minister Amir Muqam in Peshawar. The minister escaped unhurt though. On December 21, 2007, a suicide bomber again unsuccessfully targeted former Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao. On June 9, 2008, controversial Swat cleric and chief of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi Maulana Sufi Muhammad survived a remote-controlled bomb. On October 2, 2008, a suicide attacker targeted the Charsadda house of ANP leader Asfandyar Wali Khan, who survived the attack. On October 6, 2008, a suicide attacker targeted a gathering at PML-N legislator Rashid Akbar Nawani's house in Bhakkar. Nawani luckily survived the attack. On November 11, 2008, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a packed Qayyum Stadium in Peshawar, minutes after the NWFP Governor Owais Ghani had left the venue and just moments prior to the departure of Senior Provincial Minister Bashir Bilour. On March 3, 2009, a convoy carrying Sri Lankan cricketers and officials in two buses was fired upon near the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. Six members of the Sri Lankan cricket team were injured. On March 11, 2009, senior minister of the NWFP Bashir Bilour survived yet another assassination attempt in Peshawar. On June 11, 2009, the NWFP Prisons Minister, Mian Nisar Gul Kakakhel, was seriously injured when

his convoy was ambushed by suspected militants in Darra Adam Khel. On September 2, 2009, sitting Religious Affairs Minister Hamid Saeed Kazmi was injured in a brazen attack in Islamabad. On February 9, 2010, renowned politician Sheikh Rashid Ahmed was attacked by militants in Rawalpindi, though Sheikh Rashid managed to live on by ducking the bullets.

[The News – March 18, 2010]

Artists, Intellectuals asked to Work for Conflict Resolution

The opening session of an international conference on Sufism and peace began on March 14 with a consensus that artists and intellectual writers must jointly work to end conflicts exposing people to misery and suppression. The three-day conference hosted by the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) is being attended by delegates from 35 countries, including Afghanistan, Canada, China, England, Germany, India, Iran, Morocco, Palestine, Russia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. In addition, there was a large presence of delegates from across Pakistan as well as local literati from the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. PAL Chairman Fakhar Zaman, in his keynote address, placed some heavy responsibility on the shoulders of the writers gathered there, saying they had to fight the establishment and its status quo mould. As he put it, 'some writers have to die so that others might live.' Mr Zaman reiterated what he had said many times that he convened the conference in pursuance of the wishes of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

The presidium of the conference consisted of six eminent writers – Peter Curman (Sweden), Vito Salierno (Italy), Zhou Yuan (China), Gerd Leineweber (Germany), with PAL chairman leading it. Europe had undergone a change in the last 25 years, said Mr Curman, the recipient of the Quaid-i-Azam International Award for Literature. The fall of the Berlin wall, erected to divide East and West Germany, was the defining moment in opening the door for European writers to look beyond their frontiers and establish a sort of camaraderie in writing. The experiment had succeeded in establishing a writers' centre where people of this profession could live free. Mr Curman said he embarked on a similar project of establishing a writers' centre in Cyprus. He invited Pakistani writers to join him in this voyage of exchanging ideas and finding ways of acting together. Vito Salierno read his essay on Sufis and monasteries. He said the Christian and Islamic viewpoint of Sufis and monasteries coincided, adding that it was prayer that united all religions. Thereby he tried to find common denominator between Islam and Christian dogma. According to him, Sufis and monasteries were one aspect of the common thought. Zhou Yuan took a similar position as regards the influence of Sufi teachings in Chinese people, including the Muslim population as well as among non-Muslims. The journeys of saints turned into an important factor to develop and preach Sufism, to exchange ideas and thoughts and to strengthen the relations of Sufis of China, she remarked. However, she went on finding many similarities between Taoism and Sufi branch of Islam. German scholar Gerd Leineweber defined mysticism as a means of reflecting on the question as to how the world was sustained in delving into to the mysteries of the universe.

[Dawn – March 15, 2010]

Governance Watch

Political Governance

Legislative Business

20th Session of National Assembly

Total Sitzings

1. March 11, 2010
2. March 12, 2010
3. March 15, 2010
4. March 16, 2010
5. March 17, 2010
6. March 18, 2010
7. March 19, 2010
8. March 24, 2010
9. March 25, 2010
10. March 26, 2010
11. March 29, 2010
12. March 30, 2010
13. March 31, 2010
14. April 1, 2010
15. April 2, 2010

The National Assembly, on an average, met for 2 hours and 34 minutes daily for 15 days. The shortest sitting was observed on April 2, 2010, which lasted 1 hour and 36 minutes. None of the sittings started on the stipulated time, registering a delay of 44 minutes on an average.

The Speaker of the House was not present during 10 of the 15 sittings. Deputy Speaker remained absent during 8 of 15 sittings. In the sittings, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9, neither the Speaker nor the Deputy Speaker was present, with the House being chaired by the Panel of Chairpersons. The Prime Minister was present at all sittings. However, Leader of the Opposition did not attend 10 sittings.

The parliamentary leaders of MQM and ANP were absent during 11 of 15 sittings. The absence of PML parliamentary leader was observed during 10 sittings, while MMA parliamentary leader did not attend 12 sittings. PMLF parliamentary leader attended 8 sittings, while the only member of PPPS was present during 13 sittings. Members of NPP and BNPA did not attend the session at all. The attendance of chief whips of parties was better than that of parliamentary leaders. Chief Whips of PPPP attended 14, PMLN 13, PML 12, MQM, ANP and MMAP 10 each and PMLF 7 of 15 sittings.

On an average, only 72 (21 percent of total NA strength) Members were present at the start of each sitting while the average number of MNAs present at the end of each sitting was 82 (24 percent of total NA strength). The lowest count of members at the outset of the sitting was recorded at 34 during the 12th sitting held on March 30, 2010. Only 43 members were present in the House at the end of 8th sitting held on March 24, 2010. Only 51 members were present in the House when the session was prorogued sine die at its last sitting. More MNAs appear to attend the morning sittings as compared to the evening sittings. Many Members who were technically "present" for sittings actually left the House Chamber to conduct other business.

Bills Passed by National Assembly

1. March 11, 2010 – The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2009
2. March 12, 2010 – The Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Act, 2010

3. March 31, 2010 – The Alternative Energy Development Board Act, 2010

Government Bills Introduced

1. March 11, 2010 – The State Bank of Pakistan (Amendment) Act, 2010
2. March 19, 2010 – The Gwadar Port Authority Act, 2010
3. March 26, 2010 – The Pakistan Trade Control of Wild Fauna and Flora Act, 2010

Private Members' Bills Laid

1. March 16, 2010 The Prisons (Amendment) Act, 2010
2. March 16, 2010 The Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Act, 2010
3. March 16, 2010 The General Clauses (Amendment) Act, 2010
4. March 16, 2010 The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2010
5. March 16, 2010 The Compulsory Blood Test of the Relatives of Thalassaemia Patients Act, 2010
6. March 30, 2010 The Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2010
7. March 30, 2010 The Foreigners (Amendment) Act, 2010
7. March 30, 2010 The Pakistan Private Hospitals, Clinics and other Private Healthcare Units Regulatory Authority Act, 2010

Ordinances Laid

1. March 19, 2010 – The National Vocational and Technical Education Commission Ordinance, 2009
2. March 19, 2010 – The National Database and Registration Authority (Amendment) Ordinance, 2009

Calling Attention Notices

The House discussed 22 of 30 Calling Attention Notices on the Orders of the Day. The largest number of CANs (3 each) was put forward to the Ministry of Water and Power and Ministry of Education. These CANs were raised by 62 MNAs, 40 male and 22 females.

Questions

A total of 509 questions were put forward during Question Hours of the 20th Session. More questions came from female parliamentarians. As many as 236 (46 percent) were put forward by male and 273 (54 percent) by female parliamentarians, who are just 22 percent of the Assembly composition.

Details are available on the website of National Assembly i.e. www.na.gov.pk

** Above information is mainly collected from the website of National Assembly while some observations have been obtained from the Parliament Watch reports of FAFEN.*

The Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act 2010

Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa New Name for NWFP

The Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms on March 31 concluded a landmark task by finalising its recommendations for the draft 18th amendment bill, after it arrived at a consensus on the renaming of the NWFP and the composition of the judicial commission. The 26-member committee headed by Mian Raza Rabbani signed the final draft of the amendment package at the Parliament House.

In March 31st deliberations, the ANP and the PML-N agreed to rename the NWFP Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa. However, the PML-Q and the PPP-Sherpao wrote a “note of reiteration” over the clause and vowed to vote against it whenever the draft is moved in Parliament for approval. The parliamentary committee also included PML-N’s demands regarding the composition of the proposed judicial commission. The PML-N had demanded that the appointment of judges to superior courts should be based on the chief justice’s recommendations, who must have the authority to appoint a retired judge, who never took oath under the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO), as seventh member of the proposed commission. The committee also decided that the law minister, instead of the attorney general, would represent the government in the commission. PPP-Sherpao chief Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao said his party supported Pakhtoonkhwa as the new name for the NWFP, as the provincial assembly had adopted a resolution in its favour. PML-Q’s Amir Muqam called the proposed name for the NWFP “highly biased”, fearing it will create linguistic rifts in the province.

Under the proposed package, the Council of Common Interest has been given additional powers and the provinces have been given more say on national matters by enhancing their representation in the council, which would be authorised to deal with all subjects put under part-2 of the federal list. The committee also proposed the abolition of Article 58(2b), which empowers the president to dissolve parliament.

[Daily Times – April 1, 2010]

18th Amendment Draft Presented to Speaker

Constitutional Reform Committee on March 31 presented draft of the 18th constitutional amendment to Speaker National Assembly Dr Fehmida Mirza. All members of the Constitutional Reform Committee led by Senator Raza Rabbani presented the draft to the Speaker NA. Speaker NA Fehmida Mirza terming March 31 as historical day said that political parties consensus on reconciliation policy has proven that parliament is the institution that has the capability to solve the nation's problems. She expressed the hope that the both houses of parliament would now pass the bill. Dr Fehmida Mirza announced that the room in the parliament house where CRC had conducted over seventy-seven meetings in past nine months for the revival of the 1973 constitution should now be called constitution room. The chairman of the committee Raza Rabbani welcomed it as it a historic day which reflects the hard work and dedication of the committee. Senator Raza Rabbani speaking on the occasion said he appreciates the will and commitment of the members of the committee and they proved that the parliamentarians had the capability to pull our nation out of crisis. He said that all political parties with maturity and consistence drafted a constitution for a federal democratic Pakistan. Rabbani said that no military dictator could abrogate the 73 constitution and only put it in abeyance because the constitution had enjoyed the support of the political parties. The constitutional reforms committee has signed a draft for the 18th constitutional amendment on Wednesday. The new amendment aims to bring back the 1973 constitution to its original shape and it will be presented in the national assembly on Friday.

[The Nation – April 1, 2010]

Salient Features of the Constitutional Package

- Only the native of a particular province would be made the Governor of that province.
- The Islamabad High Court (IHC) is also being established under the new constitutional package in addition to formation of new high courts at Mingora and Turbat.
- Under the proposed amended Article 232 of the Constitution, the President of Pakistan could not act on his own without proper consent of the concerned provincial assembly. The new clause being added to the article reads that now imposition of emergency in the country due to internal disturbance beyond the powers of a provincial government to control, a resolution from the provincial assembly of that province shall be required. It has also been provided further in the same article that if the president acts on his own, the proclamation of emergency shall be placed before both the houses of parliament to be approved by each House within 10 days.
- President Asif Ali Zardari's powers are proposed to be transferred to the Judicial Commission and parliamentary committee of both the houses of parliament.
- Quite a few clauses are being added to Article 175 to facilitate the new process. According to the new proposed Article 175 (clause 6), the Judicial Commission, by a majority of the total membership, shall recommend one name for each vacancy in the Supreme Court or a high court to the parliamentary committee while the parliamentary commission would have the powers to send back a recommendation to the judicial commission by a 3/4th majority, and in such a case, the judicial commission shall send a new name for its consideration. The committee would decide the matter within 14 days of the receipt of recommendation, failing which it shall be deemed to have been confirmed.
- Now the age of a proposed judge would be enhanced from 40 to 45. Now the consultation of the president with the CJ and governors has been done away with as this power will vest in the hands of judicial commission being set up under article 175-A.
- Two new high courts — one at Mingora and other at Turbat — are being set up.
- Article 203-C is also being amended to define the criteria of appointment of judges. Now only those people would be made judges of the Federal Shariat Court who would have at least 15 years experience in Islamic law, research or instructions. The judges of the Shariat court shall not be removed from office except in the like manner and on the like grounds as judge of the Supreme Court. In another amendment, the president can no longer assign the judge of the Shariat Court to any other chore.
- Powers of the President to appoint a Chief Election Commissioner are now being shifted to the Prime Minister and opposition leader. In the new order, the Prime Minister shall, in consultation with the leader of

the opposition in the National Assembly, forward three names for appointment of the commissioner to joint parliamentary committee for hearing and confirmation of any one. The joint parliamentary committee, to be constituted by the speaker, shall comprise 50 per cent members from opposition parties, based on their strength in parliament, to be nominated by the respective parliamentary leaders. In case there is no consensus between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition, each shall forward separate list to the joint parliamentary committee for consideration, which may confirm any one name.

- The total strength of the joint parliamentary committee shall not exceed 12 members out of which 1/3 shall be from the Senate. When the National Assembly is dissolved and a vacancy occurs in the office of the chief election commissioner, the joint parliamentary committee shall comprise members from the Senate and the foregoing provision of this shall "mutatis mutandis" apply.
- Election Commission shall consist of the Commissioner who shall be the Chairman of the Commission and four members, each of whom has been a judge of a high court from each province, appointed by the President in the manner provided for the appointment of the commissioner in Clause 2-A of the Article 213.
- The powers of the President to appoint the Federal Public Service Commission chairman are being proposed to be shifted to the prime minister after proposing changes in Article 242. Now, the discretionary power of the president to appoint the FPSC Chairman was abolished. Now he would be required to make an appointment on "advice of the Prime Minister". Likewise, a Governor will also appoint Chairman of the Provincial Public Service Commission on the "advice of the Chief Minister".

For complete act click on:

http://www.na.gov.pk/govt_bills/govt_bill2010/constitution_eighteenth_amendment_act2010_060410.pdf

Council of Common Interests Reconstituted

President Asif Ali Zardari has reconstituted the Council of Common Interests (CCI) on the advice of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani to resolve issues between the provinces in a better way. Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar said that the decision would help in tackling inter-provincial issues like distribution of water. The CCI has been reconstituted on the recommendations of the provinces. It will be deemed to have taken effect on August 5 last year.

According to a Cabinet Division notification of March 3, which is in supersession of its earlier notification of August 5, there is no change in the composition of the council and its members. The CCI, headed by the Prime Minister, will comprise Chief Ministers of the four provinces. Dr Arbab Alamgir Khan, Minister for Communications; Humayun Aziz Kurd, Minister for Livestock and Dairy Development; and Syed Naveed Qamar, Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources, will be members of the reconstituted CCI.

[Dawn – March 5, 2010]

Cabinet Approves Restructuring of 8 Public Enterprises

The Federal Cabinet on March 10 approved the restructuring of eight major Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs), which include the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM), Pakistan Electric Power Company (PEPCO), Pakistan Railways (PR), National Highway Authority (NHA), Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Cooperation (PASSCO), Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) and the Utility Stores Corporation (USC). "The decision will bring about financial discipline and is aimed towards revival and good governance," said the cabinet, which met with Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani in the chair. The meeting considered a report of the cabinet Committee on Restructuring (CCOR) of PSEs – constituted on December 16, 2009 in pursuance of decision to introduce austerity measures – that had recommended that the enterprises be saved from billions in losses. The meeting also announced a road map to reconstruct ill-managed enterprises, which said that an independent and professional board of directors (BoD) would be formed in each PSE by April 30. It was also decided that the formation of an independent and professional BoDs and appointment of CEOs would be proposed by the Finance Ministry in consultation with the CCOR and that the restructuring plan would be presented by each ministry to the cabinet for its decision.

[Daily Times – March 11, 2010]

ECP & Election Updates

By-Polls

NA-123 Lahore, PP-82 Jhang, PP-284 Bahawalnagar , PP-25 Jafarabad

PML-N won March 11 by-elections in NA-123 Lahore and PP-82 Jhang while PML-Zia and Pakistan People's Party clinched PP-284 Bahawalnagar and PP-25 Jafarabad, according to unofficial results received so far from the majority of the polling stations.

Malik Pervez of PML-N has returned successful with sizeable margin in NA-123 Lahore while Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's candidate Hamid Khan Mairaj stood second. Azam Cheela of PML-N has secured PP-82 Jhang (runner up Ghazanfar Ali Khan of PPP); Shahid Anjum of PML-Zia won PP-284 Bahawalnagar (runner up Kashif Naveed of PPP) while Sardar Nasir Khan Jamali of Pakistan People Party grabbed PP-25 Jafarabad (runner up Attaulla Bulaidi - Independent).

[Pak Tribune – March 11, 2010]

PP-111 Gujrat, PF-65 D.I.Khan

PML-N candidate Imran Zafar emerged the winner against PML-Q's Imran Masood in a neck-to-neck battle in PP-111 by-polls in Gujrat. Imran Zafar won by a narrow margin by getting 25,020 votes against his opponent Imran Masood, who secured 22,466 votes.

In PF-65 by-polls, Samiullah Alizai of the PPP has gained a decisive lead against JUI-F's Maulana Lutfullah in another close contest. Out of total 77, unofficial results of 72 polling stations are already out, according to which Alizai has obtained a decisive majority. The seat had fallen vacant after the death of PPP's Latifullah Alizai. According to the unofficial results, Alizai secured 23,378 votes while JUI-F candidate, the brother of JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Maulana Lutfur Rehman bagged 19,675 votes. There were total 77 polling stations in the district. Samiullah is the nephew and son-in-law of the deceased MPA Latifullah. The PPP had nominated 27-year-old Samiullah Alizai, nephew of late Latifullah Alizai and son of former PPP MPA Hafizullah Alizai for PF-65, largely comprising the Seraiki-speaking rural population of DI Khan district.

[The News – March 25, 2010]

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)

ECP Launches Draft Strategic Plan to Improve Electoral System

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on March 25 launched the draft five-year Strategic Plan to improve the election system as well as implementation of electoral reforms. Comprising 15 Strategic Goals, the Plan (2010-14) will focus all areas concerning the electoral process and dispense with these goals within a stipulated period. Secretary Election Commission Ishtiaq Khan said that this is an outcome of our previous as well as ongoing consultation process to remove anomalies from the electoral system and make it more impartial and transparent. He mentioned to interactive sessions with the political parties, civil society organizations, FAFEN and Electoral Support Group (ECG) and said, now the Commission has invited the media for their input. He further said that the Election Support Group in consultation with the Commission has prepared 32 recommendations to ensure impartiality and transparency of polls and these proposals have been sent to Constitutional Reforms Committee for consideration in the package.

The outline of Strategic Goals reveals: to focus on **legal framework; registration of voters and electoral rolls; election operations; election complaints and dispute resolution; restructuring the Election Commission; infrastructure, logistics and equipment for ECP offices; human resource - staffing and compensation; finance and budget; training, research and evaluation; information technology; public outreach and interaction with political parties, civil society organizations and the media; political parties and candidates; participation of voters/civic and voter education; marginalized groups including women, minorities and persons with disabilities; and branding of the Election Commission.** The deadline for achieving these goals vary from the current month (March 2010) up to December 2014 with details of execution and implementation, execution and finalization.

[APP – March 25, 2010]

Plea for CEC Tenure to be Increased to Five Years

The Election Commission has sent a summary to the parliamentary committee on constitutional reforms recommending that the tenure of Chief Election Commissioner be increased from three to five years. EC Secretary Ishtiaq Ahmad Khan said on March 25 that we hope that the proposal will form part of the 18th amendment bill. He was speaking at a briefing after the commencement of consultations process on the first-ever five-year strategic plan developed by the commission to prepare roadmap for meaningful electoral reforms. The first round of consultations on the plan was held with the Election Support Group (ESG) comprising members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of international organisations supporting electoral reforms.

[Dawn – March 26, 2010]

Call for Error-Free Electoral Rolls

A group of experts has called upon the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to take prompt steps for preparing error-free electoral rolls before the forthcoming local government elections and demanded an inquiry into the preparation of faulty voters' list ahead of general elections 2007 after spending a hefty amount of over Rs1 billion. The Citizens' Group on Electoral Process (CGEP), a non-partisan group of eminent Pakistanis facilitated by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) in a background paper on the state of electoral process released on March 8 asked the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to conduct an inquiry into the preparation of Computerised Electoral Rolls 2007 for fixing responsibility and learning lessons for the future. The Group observed that the process of preparing the electoral rolls in 2006 was apparently faulty in its design and execution. Widespread lack of trust was expressed about the draft of the rolls and eventually the Supreme Court had to intervene and suggest remedial measures as the general election 2008 was imminent.

The CGEP is of the view that the then CEC and other officials apparently did not make any meaningful effort to use the NADRA database to make rolls accurate. It alleges that huge public funds and international financial assistance were apparently misspent on the preparation of faulty and incomplete electoral rolls. The Group proposed that the ECP in conjunction with the NADRA should move in a determined manner to introduce one-window operation for the issuance of new CNICs and registration of voters. However, the CGEP has expressed satisfaction at the emerging cooperation, albeit belated, between the ECP and the NADRA for producing a credible voters list.

[Dawn – March 9, 2010]

FAFEN Proposes Vital Election-Related Constitutional Reforms

The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) has called for significant reforms to the election-related provisions of the 1973 Constitution to bring meaningful improvement in the administration and quality of future elections in the country. FAFEN has prepared a detailed proposal for the consideration of Parliament, which is set to take up the package of constitutional amendments being finalized by the Constitutional Reforms Committee headed by Senator Raza Rabbani. FAFEN has already shared these proposals with the Election Commission of Pakistan, the now-inactive National Assembly Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs, and a select group of parliamentarians.

A summary of FAFEN's proposed constitutional reforms is as follows:

- Appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Members of the Election Commission – The Chief Election Commissioner and Members of the Election Commission to be selected on the basis of professional qualifications and experience, through a transparent and inclusive parliamentary process involving public hearings (Articles 213, 215, 216, and 218 of the Constitution)
- Power of the Chief Election Commissioner – Empower the Chief Election Commissioner to grant final approval to rules and regulations for the conduct of elections (Article 221 of the Constitution).
- Neutrality of Government Entities During Elections – Offer legislative assurance that government entities will not become involved in electoral processes without specific direction from the Election Commission of Pakistan (Articles 48, 91, 105, 130, 220, and 224 of the Constitution).
- Limitation on Multiple Candidacies – Establish that candidates for office must be registered voters in the constituency in which they seek election and specify that candidates must not be allowed to seek election in more than one constituency (Articles 62 and 223 of the Constitution).
- Preparation of the Electoral Rolls – Allow the Election Commission of Pakistan to engage outside organizations in preparing the electoral rolls (Article 219 of the Constitution).
- Accuracy of the Electoral Rolls – Make CNICs a required form of identification for citizens to register on the electoral rolls and as a requirement to vote on Election Day in order to remove duplicate and incorrect entries on the electoral roll and in order to prevent fraudulent voting (Articles 51 and 106 of the Constitution).

[FAFEN Press Release – March 31, 2010]

Facts & Figures on Pakistan's Economy

Quarterly Report on State of Pakistan's Economy

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has raised the fiscal deficit forecast for the current financial year 2009/10 (July-June) to between 5.0 and 5.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) from the targeted 4.9 percent in the wake of high defence spending and low revenue collection. The SBP in its Second Quarterly Report on the State of Pakistan Economy maintained its GDP forecast for FY10 at between 2.5 and 3.5 percent, but lowered its projection for the current account deficit to 3.2 to 3.8 percent from the previous estimates of 3.7 to 4.7 percent.

The report by SBP on Second Quarterly Report (October-December) for FY10 on the State of Pakistan's Economy includes following:

- The fiscal outlook appears especially challenging. Existing rigidities in current expenditures have been exacerbated in FY10 by the strong build-up in domestic and external debt, and rising military spending on anti-terrorist operations. The growing energy sector circular debt and the government's controversial policy of paying higher-than-market price to farmers for certain commodities also contributed to widening of the fiscal deficit, the bank said. Analysts say that keeping the fiscal deficit target at 4.9 percent remains one of the key conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under its \$11.3 billion Standby Agreement with Pakistan.
- Weak revenue generation and considerable lags in the receipts of Coalition Support Fund also contributed to the widening of fiscal deficit, which rose to 2.7pc of GDP in July-December 2009, compared with 1.9pc in the same period the previous year.
- In recent consultations with the IMF, need for cut in Public Sector Development Program and relaxation in fiscal deficit target was also recognized. However, a cut in the development spending is not desirable. "The government's ability to protect development spending has been severely cramped by non-availability of expected external aid inflows from the Friends of Democratic Pakistan.
- The central bank's forecast for the current account deficit improved to 3.2 to 3.8 percent from 3.7 to 4.7 percent estimated in its first (Jul-Sep) quarterly report. Better than expected exports and robust performance of remittances helped slash the current account deficit, the bank said.
- Pakistan will achieve GDP growth of 2.5 to 3.5 percent in the current fiscal year despite weak agricultural output on the back of industrial recovery and reasonable performance of the services sector.
- A rise in demand for consumer durables, cars and cement led the growth in large-scale manufacturing sub-sector. "Nonetheless, it will be extremely challenging to sustain the growth seen in Jul-Jan 2009/10 given the prevalent energy shortages."
- The SBP said the country's overall economic outlook remains mixed as inflationary pressures have decisively reemerged in recent months. The year-on-year inflation, which dropped to 8.9 percent by October 2009, bounced back to the double digits of 13 percent by Feb 2010, the bank said. Also, sustaining current account deficit is challenging given rising import requirements and evident weakness in pace of growth in remittances, it added. "Prospects for real GDP growth are better relative to the preceding year. However, this level of growth is not adequate to generate required employment opportunities." About criticism of its tight monetary policy by the industry, the central bank said given the weakness in the country's fiscal outlook and risks to external flows and rising inflation, policy options for Pakistan were limited.
- The SBP said trends in financial and capital accounts were discouraging as of the \$3.7 billion surplus for Jul-Feb about \$2.8 billion were recorded in the first quarter. Practically, all of the external financing was in the form of debt, significantly adding to the country's vulnerability to external shocks.
- The rupee also depreciated sharply between mid-December 2009 and mid-February 2010 despite continued inflows from the IMF pushed up Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

[The News – March 30, 2010]

Country's Burden has Escalated in 2 years: External Debt, Liabilities Rise 28%

The external debt and liabilities of the country crossed \$55.266 billion in January 2010 from \$43.141 billion in the corresponding period of 2008, showing a net increase 28 percent in the last two years of the present government. The total medium and long-term external debt and liabilities on January 2010 reached \$42.914 billion and short-term debt remained at \$320 million. The total sum of these two loans is \$43.234 billion and is known as Public and Publicly Guaranteed Debt. It further consists of external loan taken from sources like multilateral, bilateral, issuing of bonds, commercial banks and defence.

Multilateral: From January 2008 to January 2010 the government took loan from multilateral bases at \$23.734 billion. The break up of this category is \$11.249 billion from Asian Development Bank (ADB), \$1.783 billion from International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and \$10.109 billion from International Development Association (IDA). From other sources the government took \$593 million till January 2010. These sources are European Investment Bank (EIB) \$64 million, Islamic Development Bank (IDB) \$293 million, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) \$189 million, NORD Development Fund \$16 million, and OPEC fund \$24 million.

Bilateral: Total loan from bilateral bases reached \$16.665 billion on January 2010. It further composed of two sources-Paris Club Countries (\$14.271 billion) and Non-Paris Club Countries (\$2.394 billion). Paris Club Countries included various countries. These are Austria \$72 million, Belgium \$36 million, Canada \$516 million, Finland \$6 billion, France \$2.298 billion, Germany 1.937 billion, Italy \$109 million, Japan \$6.691 billion, Korea \$476 million, Netherlands \$124 million, Norway \$21 million, Russia \$121 million, Spain \$80 million, Sweden \$153 million, Switzerland \$108 million, United Kingdom \$10 million, United States \$1.514 billion. Non-Paris Club Countries' external debt and liabilities reached \$2.394 billion till January 2010. These countries are China \$1.661 billion, Kuwait \$108 million, Libya \$5 million, Saudi Arabia \$499 million and United Arab Emirates \$121 million.

Bonds: Total liabilities on issuing different bonds etc reached \$2.150 billion.

Commercial Banks: The foreign debt and liabilities reached to \$166 million.

Defence: External debt and liabilities reached \$199 million on January 1, 2010.

Short-Term Debt: Total short-term debt from IBD reached to \$320 million.

Banking Sector Debt: Total banking sector debt of the country reached \$196 million till January 2010, which consists of long-term \$126 million and short-term \$70 million.

Private Sector Debt: Total private sector debt reached \$2.942 billion till January 2010, official figures available with Daily Times revealed. The sub-component of this sector is Multilateral Creditors at \$416 million, Paris Club \$1.264 billion, Non-Paris Club \$260 million, PIA (Hire/purchase (long-term), SBP \$865 million and bonds \$137 million.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt: Total IMF debt and liabilities reached \$7.494 billion by January 1, 2010.

Deposits with SBP: Under this category, the government foreign debt and liabilities reached \$1.400 billion.

[Daily Times – March 16, 2010]

Remittances Decline by 8.19 percent in February

The remittances sent by overseas Pakistani declined by 8.19 percent or \$52.44 million in February 2010, as the central bank has received an amount of \$588.78 million, compared with \$641.32 million in February 2009. However, the remittances sent home by overseas Pakistanis continued to show a rising trend as an amount of \$5.787 billion was received in July-February 2009-10, showing an increase of \$868.26 million or 17.65 percent over the same period of the last fiscal year. The amount of \$5.787 billion includes \$1.0 million received through encashment and profit earned on Foreign Exchange Bearer Certificates (FEBCs) and Foreign Currency Bearer Certificates (FCBCs).

Country	July-February 2010	July-February 2009
UAE	\$1,317.17 million	\$1,035.55 million
USA	\$1,173.37 million	\$1,156.51 million
Saudi Arabia	\$1,148.86 million	\$962.30 million
GCC Countries	\$826.93 million	\$783.39 million
UK	\$596.26 million	\$344.08 million
EU	\$171.41 million	\$150.05 million

Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during the first eight months of the current fiscal year amounted to \$550.65 million as against \$486.34 million in the same period last year. The monthly average remittances for the July-February 2010 period comes out to \$723.36 million as compared to \$614.83 million during the same corresponding period of the last fiscal year, registering an increase of 17.65 percent. During February 2010, remittances from Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, GCC countries (including

Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman), UK and EU countries amounted to \$149.45 million, \$136.88 million, \$111.48 million, \$89.21 million, \$45.91 million and \$13.48 million respectively as compared to \$123.64 million, \$166.62 million, \$127.48 million, \$93.09 million, \$54.12 million and \$18.31 million in February 2009. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during February 2010 amounted to \$41.13 million compared with \$58.04 million in the same month last year.

[Daily Times – March 11, 2010]

Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP)

PM Increases PSDP by Rs 50 billion

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani on March 15 said the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) would be fixed at Rs 300 billion, which was earlier fixed at Rs 250 billion. The original PSDP allocation was Rs 421 billion for the year 2009-10. PM said the Rs 300 billion PSDP would focus on developing the social sector and backward areas. The size of the PSDP was slashed due to the war on terror and efforts to help the internally displaced persons (IDPs). Despite resource constraints, social sector allocations will be protected," he said. Gilani said the annual PSDP had become the main instrument for translating the nation's goals of socio-economic development. A quarterly review of the PSDP should now become a permanent feature, he said.

[Daily Times – March 16, 2010]

Finance Ministry Opposes PSDP hike to Rs300bn

With Pakistan and International Monetary Fund yet to sign a memorandum of understanding for the next \$1.2 billion tranche, the Finance Ministry is insisting that it would not be possible to increase the size of current year's development programme to Rs300 billion. During a visit to the Planning Commission early this week, the Prime Minister had announced to raise the PSDP to Rs300 billion from Rs250 billion.

A senior official said that we have two options. To raise incremental (Rs50 billion) amount through additional revenue measures, which is a politically difficult decision in the current situation or take the most difficult path of giving up the IMF programme, which is not possible given the limited fiscal space. He further said that there is no point in announcing higher amount for the development programme, which could not be made available. The official said the inflows from FoDP were "as uncertain as they were six months ago therefore, the government should link increase in development spending to additional releases from FoDP. The finance ministry had earlier decided to cut the PSDP by 45 percent to Rs250 billion and told the Planning Commission and other line ministries to reprioritise their development schemes to meet the revised targets agreed to with the IMF.

[Dawn – March 18, 2010]

PSDP Allocations for Industrial Sector Cut by 45%

Allocations for industrial sector has been slashed by 45 percent to Rs 4.3 billion from earlier allocation of Rs 7.822 billion in PSDP. Keeping in view the emergent financial position of the country, the government decided to cut PSDP 2009-10 allocation. According to an official estimates there are about 1332 sick industrial units countrywide which were not only helpful in enhancing production in different areas but also generated employment subject to its revival. But slashing developmental budget for industrial sector would further complicated industrialisation process in the country.

The government allocated Rs 7.822 billion in 2009-10, while during the year 2008-09 the allocation for industrial sector was Rs 10.458 billion. But under rationalisation process the government further cut the allocation for Ministry of Industries and Production (MoIP) to Rs 4.3 billion from earlier Rs 7.822 billion. The industrial sector was projected to achieve a growth rate of 1.8 percent during 2009-10, it is based on the assumption that energy shortages will reduce to a certain extent and export competitiveness will improve through appropriate incentives and policy measures. Accordingly, large-scale manufacturing is targeted to grow by 1 percent. However, cut in developmental budget for industrial sector would badly affect the performance of industrial sector. The industrial sector was confronting a crucial time due to energy shortfall, frequent power break down, high interest rate, lack of competitiveness and many others.

The Ministry of Finance announced cut in PSDP 2009-10 by about Rs 150 billion due to weak financial situation. The total federal component of PSDP 2009-10 is Rs 421 billion with Rs 21 billion as operation shortfall. If Rs 150 billion cut is implemented then the size of PSDP will be Rs 250 billion. But the Prime Minister during his visit to Planning Commission last week increased the allocation of PSDP by Rs 50 billion, which made total allocation to Rs 300 billion from initial allocation of Rs 421 billion. In the current grim financial conditions, sources said it was

likely the MoIP might consider winding up some of the national importance projects at short notice. There are 491 development projects in the MoIP with total allocation of Rs 7.822 billion in the annual development budget. At the start of the current financial year there were 18 ongoing development projects and their budgetary allocation was Rs 2.765 billion. Thirty-one (31) new projects were also included in the PSDP 2009-10 with Rs 5.056 billion allocations. The cut of Rs 3.522 billion for industrial sector might badly affect national importance projects of the country.

Some of the national importance ongoing important MoIP projects include, development projects of Pakistan Gem and Jewellery Development Co, for which the government allocated Rs 800 million in PSDP 2009-10. Development projects of Marble and Granite Sector for which the government earmarked Rs 1.1 billion in current PSDP and Agro-Food processing Facilities Multan, for which the government allocated Rs 55 million. Other projects are construction of boundary wall site office for Gwadar EPZ for which the government allocated Rs 3 billion and Women Business Incubation Centers all over Pakistan including AJK and NA.

[Daily Times – March 24, 2010]

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Updates

US Grants \$85m for BISP

US has given a cash grant of \$85 million for BISP. Agreement to this effect was signed and notes were exchanged by BISP chairperson Farzana Raja and Robin Raphel, US special coordinator for Economic Development, here on March 4. Ms Raja said that transparency and openness of the programme had attracted foreign donors and more aid was coming in. The present assistance, she said, would benefit more than 600,000 poor people in about 16 districts of the country and Gilgit-Baltistan, who had been identified through the ongoing poverty survey being conducted to assess the low income people and register them for aid. The amount, she said, could be given to even more people who were being assessed by the ongoing survey. About the survey, she said it would take time to complete. Ms Raja said Balochistan was on priority list and the survey would be completed in the province before June. She appreciated the US government for extending financial assistance to the BISP which, according to her, was the largest pro-poor programme in South Asia. Ms Raphel on the occasion said the US would continue to provide assistance to Pakistan for the development of social sectors like health, education and poverty alleviation.

[Dawn – March 5, 2010]

BISP to Launch Health Insurance Pilot Project in June

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) plans to launch pilot project of health insurance worth Rs25,000 to 30,000 for needy families in the coming June, said BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja. She was speaking at the Women's Rights Conference organised by the Human Rights Ministry in collaboration with BISP to commemorate the International Women's Day. During the same month, she said that BISP will start distribution of monthly stipend through Benazir Smart Card. She said that National Assembly Standing Committee has finally passed the legislation regarding the BISP and it will soon be presented before the National Assembly. She added that once it will become legislation, the programme will get a permanent status and could not be blocked even after the change in the government. In the first phase of poverty survey, she said that over 0.6 million families have been registered in 15 districts whereas, for the nationwide survey NGOs, civil society and community notables have been taken on board to ensure transparency. She said that before June, the poverty survey will begin in 24 districts of Balochistan as well. She said the deserving families in surveyed districts will be given Benazir Smart Cards and in the next phase they will be provided health insurance and technical training for one member of the family to enable it to become self-sufficient. "Survey teams will go door-to-door so that deserving families get relief under this program," she pointed out.

[The News – March 16, 2010]

10 Firms Selected for Poverty Survey

The government started a process on March 12 for carrying out a poverty survey to ascertain the exact number of poor and deserving people in the country and to work out plans to minimise their sufferings. BISP, which will supervise the survey, selected 10 firms that will compete for the contract of the survey. An official announcement said that bids of 10 firms, out of 11, were opened at the BISP headquarters by Chairperson Farzana Raja. The eligible firms would now submit financial proposals on the basis of which the contract would be awarded. The firms which submitted technical proposals are: Rural Support Programme Network Islamabad, Anjum Asim Shahid Associates (Pvt) Ltd Karachi, Kher Khegera Tanzeem Peshawar, Fincon Consulting Services Pakistan Islamabad, Avais Hyder Liaquat Nauman Chartered Accountancy Islamabad, Europe (Pvt) Ltd Hungary, Socio-Economic and

[Dawn – March 13, 2010]

Local Governance

Deadline for LG Law, Poll Extended

A 30-day deadline envisaged in the Sindh Local Government (amendment) Act, 2010 to finalise a new local government law was extended by another 45 days through a gubernatorial ordinance. The Sindh Local Government (third amendment) Ordinance, 2010 was promulgated by Sindh Governor Ishratul Ibad Khan on March 21 night, extending the deadline by 45 more days. The extension will ultimately delay the holding of the next local government election, which should now be held within 165 days instead of 120 days from the date of the appointment of administrators – Feb 26, 2010.

According to relevant clauses of the act, the provincial government is bound to approach the chief election commissioner within 30 days for holding new LG elections after the dissolution of the local governments and councils in Sindh. However, the extension in the one-month deadline suggested that both parties are in no hurry to resolve their differences over the new LG system.

[Dawn – March 22, 2010]

Elections in Six Months: NWFP to Revive 1979 LB System

NWFP Senior Minister Bashir Ahmad Bilour said that the local bodies' elections in the province would be held on party-basis within six months after amendments in the 1979 system. Mr Bilour said that important changes would be made in the Local Government Ordinance following which erstwhile municipal corporations and committees would be revived. Mr Bilour said that the new local government system would be transparent and devoid of corruption. He stated that in the present system, it was impossible for a nazim to look after many departments. "How a nazim could take care of 16 departments when it is difficult for a minister to supervise a single department," he added.

[Dawn – March 22, 2010]

ANP to Fully Participate in LG polls: Azam Hoti

Former federal minister and central leader of Awami National Party Azam Khan Hoti has said that ANP will fully participate in the coming Local Govt polls to be held in the province within six months. He was addressing the meeting of the party workers. The meeting was held with the ANP Mardan district President Haji Rehmat Gul in chair while other members of the district cabinet also attended it. Besides preparation for the next Local Govt elections, the participants of the meeting also discussed various important matters as well. Speaking on the occasion, Mr Hoti said that the ANP would win majority of the seats in the elections due to its people-friendly policies.

[The Nation – March 18, 2010]

'PML-N Teaming Up with Banned Outfit for LG Polls'

PML-N is expected to form an alliance with a banned religious outfit and the PML-Z for the upcoming local government (LG) elections. In the recent by-elections, the PML-N won in the PP-82 (Jhang) constituency with the support of a banned religious outfit, whereas it supported the PML-Z candidate in Bahawalnagar (PP-284), who also turned out to be the winning candidate. Sources within the PML-N told that the party would 'most likely' form an alliance with the Sipah-e-Sahaba and the PML-Z in the upcoming local bodies elections. They said the party believed in gaining all possible support going into the local bodies elections, and the PML-N did not "see any harm" in forming an alliance with the Sipah-e-Sahaba or the PML-Z, as members of both parties are Pakistani citizens who had a "right to vote". The sources said that forming such alliances was a part of politics and there is nothing "wrong" about it. Separately, the opposition bench in the Punjab Assembly expressed its concerns over the Sipah-e-Sahaba's support for the PML-N in the Jhang by-polls. Deputy Opposition Leader Muhammad Yar Hiraj said it was "shocking" that the PML-N had connections with a banned religious outfit. He alleged that the PML-N was an 'opportunistic' party and would form an alliance with any party at the need of the hour regardless of the other party's philosophy and beliefs, a fact obvious by its affiliation with the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). He also said the main reason behind the delay in conducting the LG elections in Punjab was to allow the PML-N time to form an alliance and gain enough support before the polls.

[Daily Times – March 12, 2010]

APC Urges Govt to Unveil Schedule for LG Elections

An All-Parties Conference (APC) on March 21 asked the government to immediately announce schedule for the Local Government elections. Convened by JUI-F, the moot was attended by almost all the political parties except the ruling PPP. JUI-F Provincial President Senator Maulana Gul Naseeb Khan, General Secretary Maulana Shujaul Mulk, ANP Provincial General Secretary Tajuddin, JUI General Secretary Shabbir Ahmad Khan, Rahmat Salam of PML-N, Asad Qaiser of PTI, Fazlur Rahman Madani of Jamiat Ahle-Hadith, Faqir Hussain of PPP-Sherpao, Intikhab Khan of PML-Q, Abdus Salam Salfi and other leaders attended the conference. A joint declaration issued at the end of the APC called for putting in place local bodies with full administrative and financial autonomy. It stressed that the autonomous status of the local governments should be maintained in line with the Local Government Ordinance 2001, the declaration stated. The moot also stressed the need for making the financial system of the local bodies more effective by activating the local government Commission. The conference took strong exception to dissolution of the local government institutions and appointment of administrators, terming the step undemocratic. The declaration condemned the investigation of financial irregularities in the district governments through the administrators and bureaucrats. It pointed out that these officials used to run the financial matters of these institutions and were equally involved in any financial mismanagement that may have occurred. The investigations should be done through auditor general and local government commission, the declaration demanded. The meeting urged the government to ensure timely polls for the local government institutions. The participants said that all the political forces in the province should be taken into confidence over the amendments to the Local Government Ordinance.

[The News – March 22, 2010]

MQM, PML-F Agree on Joint Strategy for New LG System

MQM and PML-F agreed on March 11 that a joint strategy for introducing the new local government (LG) system in Sindh would be adopted. The parties held two separate rounds of meeting to discuss this issue so it could be resolved before holding fresh local bodies elections in the province. The first meeting was held at the residence of MQM leader Wasim Akhtar, while the other was held at the residence of PML-F chief Pir Pagaro. The meeting was attended by MQM's Raza Haroon, Wasim Aftab, Dr Sagheer Ahmed, Babar Ghauri and Adil Siddiqui; PML-F's Imtiaz Shaikh, Muzaffar Hussain Shah and Jam Madad Ali were also present. Talking to the media after the meetings, Ghauri said the PML-F had presented its proposals regarding the new LG system and the MQM had prepared a draft in this regard. Both the parties would come up with a formula that would be acceptable to each other and consultations would continue between the parties, he added. He also said the PML-F leaders had accepted the invitation to MQM headquarters Nine Zero.

[Daily Times – March 12, 2010]

PPP-MQM Differences Over LG System Persist

Although the countdown to legislation about a new local government system has begun, differences unaffected by a much-trumpeted policy of reconciliation have continued to plague the talks between PPP and MQM over the future administrative setup of Karachi. Both parties have prepared their own draft bills and held discussions over the future local government system during several meetings of their core committee. A law committee comprising members of the PPP and the MQM was also formed to evolve a consensus on the future local government system. However, several rounds of slow-moving dialogue between the two parties have remained inconclusive, enabling another ally party — the Pakistan Muslim League-Functional — to offer mediation between the PPP and the MQM.

The PPP wants the revival of the old Commissionerate system, restoration of five districts of Karachi and the withdrawal of certain functions assigned to the local governments under the former military dictator's devolution of power plan system. The MQM wants empowered local governments, opposes the restoration of five districts of Karachi and the Commissionerate system and demands that the police and land control be also given to the local governments under the new law.

[Dawn – March 11, 2010]

Regional Politics & Election Watch

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Pak-Afghan Relations

Islamabad, Kabul to Boost Trade, Communications

Reiterating that ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan were important for regional peace, security and development, the two countries agreed to develop their communications network, boost trade to \$15 billion by 2015 and enhance cooperation in the education, agriculture and energy sectors. A joint declaration issued at the end of a two-day visit by Afghan President Hamid Karzai on “**Next Steps in Afghanistan-Pakistan Comprehensive Cooperation**” expressed both sides’ determination to realize the full potential of their “vast human and natural resources for the progress and prosperity of their people”. Islamabad and Kabul agreed to evolve joint strategies for early implementation of trans-Afghan energy projects, with a particular focus on CASA-1000 and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Gas Pipeline. The joint declaration, signed by Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Afghan Foreign Minister Dr Zalmi Rassoul, agreed on developing a roadmap for strengthening road, rail and air connectivity and for upgrading existing facilities. The two countries agreed to attach priority to undertaking the completion of the Peshawar-Jalalabad Expressway and completing the feasibility study of the Peshawar-Jalalabad rail link. The two countries also agreed to undertake joint studies on promotion and facilitation of multi-modal transport to operationalise transport corridors on mutually agreed routes and to expand aviation links as well as extend bus services to additional destinations. They also agreed to develop plans of action for customs harmonisation and trade facilitation to improve bilateral trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan and to optimally utilise the natural comparative economic advantage of the two countries so as to enhance bilateral trade to \$5 billion by 2015. The two sides also agreed to establish a Silk Route CEOs Forum, establish the Pakistan-Afghanistan Reconstruction Consortium and to pool public and private corporate resources for reconstruction and development. It was also decided to explore the establishment of a Joint Investment Company that could undertake joint development projects, including initiatives for the development of the region’s vast mineral and hydel wealth and also to consider setting up Economic and Industrial. The two countries decided to enhance the number of scholarships for Afghan students in Pakistani educational institutions from 1,000 to 2,000 and to make special arrangements for female Afghan students. It was decided to set up an Institute on Management, Business Administration and Faculty Training in Afghanistan.

[Daily Times – March 12, 2010]

Pakistan-Turkey Relations

Pakistan and Turkey to Improve Strategic Ties

Pakistan and Turkey vowed on April 31 to strengthen their strategic partnership and intensify political and economic cooperation. During a meeting at the President’s House, President Asif Ali Zardari and his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul condemned extremism and terrorism and reiterated their resolve to jointly defeat the menace that continued to claim the lives of innocent people. They expressed their commitment to boosting relations in the areas of economy, trade, investment, agriculture, infrastructure development, industry, culture, education and defence and promoting people-to-people contacts. President Zardari said that we have decided to pay special attention to re-energise our trade relations and are determined to fully exploit it for the mutual benefit of the people of two countries and to meet the agreed targets.

President Gul said the two countries had already initiated a freight train service and would also improve the rail infrastructure to reduce travel time. He said that members of his business team would discuss energy projects with their Pakistani counterparts. He regretted that the depth of political relations was not reflected in the economic arena, but expressed the hope that by focussing on potential areas the two countries would not only achieve the trade target of \$2 billion by 2012, but would also increase it to \$5 billion. President Zardari conferred an honorary degree of PhD in International Relations on President Abdullah Gul in recognition of his service and support for Pakistan. The degree of Quaid-i-Azam University was awarded to the Turkish president at a special ceremony at the Aiwan-i-Sadr. A citation read out on the occasion termed Dr Abdullah Gul the “most eminent person” as considered by the university syndicate to receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations (Honoris Causa), by virtue of his “scholarship and distinction and for his deep love and support for Pakistan”. Mr Gul said it was an honour for him to receive the degree from the institution bearing the name of the father of the

nation. He said Turkey and Pakistan enjoyed brotherly relations with their ties deep rooted in history and expressed the hope that the two countries would remain strong and reliable partners.

[Dawn – April 1, 2010]

South Asia Agreement on Trade in Services

South Asia Agreement on Trade: 7 Countries to Enhance Trade in Services

South Asia Agreement on Trade in Services among seven South Asian countries including Pakistan and India is expected to end by the end of 2010. Technically, the South Asia Agreement on Trade in Services would cover all four aspects i.e. cross border supply of services like telecommunication services, consumption of services medical facilities abroad, commercial presence in the form of opening bank branches and the most important movement of natural persons to be the part of the agreement. The draft of the South Asia Agreement on Trade in Services is under active consideration by experts from all seven-member countries of the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Agreement. A schedule of commitment would be agreed on regarding the sector that would be opened by the member countries for enhanced trade in services and actual market access would be agreed on after signing the Agreement. This development has been achieved at the last meeting of the Committee of Experts (COE) of the SAFTA member countries held at Katmandu, where senior officials from the Ministry of Commerce represented Pakistan. According to the official sources, the other milestone that has been achieved in the meeting is the agreement on principle regarding reduction of the existing trade sensitive lists by 20 percent by the member countries to expand the existing volume of trade between the South Asian block. A time frame has been agreed on between the member countries at the meeting of Committee of Expert (COE) held to complete the process for reduction in the sensitive lists by September 2010. There is no disagreement regarding reduction in sensitive list between the member countries i.e. Non-Least Developed Countries (Non-LDCs) namely Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) namely Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives, the official maintained. Reduction in the sensitive lists by 20 percent by each member country would mean allowing trade of 20 percent more items within the region, the member countries would be allowing duty concessions on 20 percent additional items in case the member countries agreed at SAFTA Council of Ministers and next SAARC Summit, the official sources explained. The consultation with the local trade and industry would be completed after having consultation with stakeholders at the first stage through consultation for selection of the products that the local trade and industry require from the member countries, and the products of Pakistan's exports for gaining market access in member countries.

[Daily Times – March 17, 2010]

India-Pakistan Water Row

India Plans 52 Projects to Control Pakistan's Water

Chairman Indus Water Treaty Council Hafiz Zahoor-ul-Hassan Dahr has said that previous 131 rounds of talks between Pakistan and India under Indus Water Treaty bore no fruits and the latest dialogue would meet the same result. He also warned that Pakistan could become another Somalia and Ethiopia. Zahoor pointed to various projects launched by India to divert the water flow of three rivers entering Pakistan from Occupied Kashmir and said these projects were aimed at controlling the water of Chenab, Jhelum and Indus rivers, which were illegal and a clear violation of Indus Water Treaty. He said India was constructing 52 illegal dams, including five large ones, of which as many as 32 small dams had already been completed while 12 others would be finalised in 2014. Zahoor said New Delhi was also constructing Kargil Dam, the second largest in the world, on Indus, adding that that India was getting support from a consortium of nine non-Muslim countries, four multi-national companies, an international donor agency and three intelligence agencies to accomplish 17 mega water projects for controlling Pakistan's water. He said India had seized 70 per cent water of Chenab and Jhelum rivers as a result of which over 0.9 million acres of land, being irrigated through Marala Headworks, was now presenting the view of Thar and Cholistan deserts. Dahr said the Baglihar Dam was causing an annual loss of Rs140 billion to Pakistan and feared that India would soon stop entire water flow of Chenab and Jhelum rivers, turning 18 districts of Punjab and six districts of Sindh into a desert. He also accused Israel and the US for backing India, which resulted in bulldozing the Indus Water Treaty and lamented the fact that the international community was silent over the issue. He urged the government to take the issue seriously to Indian water aggression. "If the rulers fail to adopt immediate measures, India will turn us into Somalia and Ethiopia," he feared. According to him, the anti-Pakistan forces have united and evolved a plan to turn the country into a desert and the irrigation system is being given to a Swedish company on contract to forward the vested interests of India. He said India was spending billions of dollars on this project with the financial support of Israel. He said it was very much clear that the Indian and Israeli lobbies were working on long-term projects to harm Pakistan.

[The Nation – March 30, 2010]

Indo-Pak Water Talks Remain Inconclusive

India and Pakistan failed to arrive at a conclusion as the two sides ended their three-day deliberations on the ongoing water dispute on March 30. The Indo-Pak talks on Nimoo-Bazgo hydel generation project, which India is constructing on Indus River in occupied Kashmir, remained inconclusive as no consensus could be developed on the issue. According to agenda items, Pakistan showed serious reservations on the delay in the provision of details of the project by India.

Under the Indus Water Treaty, India is bound to give technical details of water sector projects to Pakistan six months before beginning construction of such projects. At the end of final day of discussions, both water commissioners told a joint press briefing that they had failed to arrive at a consensus. They said the issue would now be taken up in the next meeting in New Delhi, which is likely to be held in May. Indian Water Commissioner G Aranga Nathan said the reservations put forward by Pakistan would be resolved soon. However, Nathan rejected claims that India was involved in water theft or blocking Pakistan's share of water. He said relatively low rains and continuous dry spell resulted in the reduced release of water to Pakistan. Pakistani Water Commissioner Jamaat Ali Shah said the two sides had different points of view on the Nimoo-Bazgo project, adding that the people should not expect major outcomes from the meetings, as the issue required time to settle. Shah said they had asked the Indian Water Commission to arrange for a site visit of the under-construction projects in June-July, hoping India would respond positively to Pakistan's request. He said that the commission had also been requested to limit the acreage of agricultural water. y 1960.

[Daily Times – March 31, 2010]

Gas Pipeline Projects

India now Plans to Buy Gas from Iran via Deep-Sea

India in less than a week of signing the gas pipeline deal between Pakistan and Iran has planned to take gas from Iran but bypassing Pakistan at a dearer tariff. New Delhi has also spoken of **Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline** that it abandoned to harm Pakistan. Indian sources have claimed that in light of the freeze in ties with Islamabad, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has advised its government to walk out of the proposed IPI gas pipeline but continue talks with Tehran for a deep-sea pipeline that avoids Pakistan. "In view of the complicated relationship between India and Pakistan, the MEA does not advise meeting between India and Pakistan for further discussions on the project. The deep-sea pipeline option may not involve Pakistan and, therefore, the same can be pursued," The Indian MEA officials said at a meeting to decide India's position on the IPI pipeline.

Endorsing MEA's position, officials from the Indian National Security Council (NSC) Secretariat cautioned that the IPI pipeline would be a potential target of India-centric terror groups in Pakistan. Interestingly the Indian NSC is headed by a Pakistan basher Shiv Shankar Menon who till recently was foreign secretary of his country and earlier served as high commissioner of his country in Pakistan. On March 16, Pakistan signed two agreements with Iran in Istanbul that deem India's participation in the project at a later date. The pipeline through Pakistan is envisaged to carry 60 million standard cubic meters of gas per day of which half would be for India. The Indian inter-ministerial group of bureaucrats, who met on March 9, decided that India continues its talks with Iran on upstream gas exploration/development and assured gas supply. While the meeting was told that "Iran is internationally isolated due to continuing sanctions, any wholehearted engagement in Iran may emerge as an area of friction between India and the West, there was a unanimity that in view of the energy security of the country, India does need to continue engagement with Iran". Besides providing "first-mover advantage" on exploration and LNG projects there, the panel agreed that India's engagement with Iran, an important oil and gas player, would open the option of laying another on-land pipeline up to Iran-Pakistan border from where a sub-sea pipe would be laid to India. The sub-sea pipe would be laid in international waters away from the coast. It could make the proposition cost wise impossible. Delhi will approach Tehran for meetings of the Indo-Iran Joint Working Group on Oil & Gas and the Joint Working Group on IPI Project in May, said an India official. An Indian expert who has less knowledge of pipeline affairs is of the view that the pipelines combination will be shorter than the proposed IPI pipeline; result in lower pipeline cost and transport tariff, he said.

[The News – March 22, 2010]

Move to Revive Turkmenistan Gas Plan

With energy shortfall rising in Pakistan and India, efforts have been stepped up to revive the \$4 billion **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India** gas pipeline project. Informed sources told that a meeting of experts from the four countries was being convened for April 17-18 in Ashkabad to discuss the project route and the volume of gas Turkmenistan could spare for Pakistan and India. The meeting will be the first in three years. In 2008, India

was to host a meeting of experts on the project, but it was postponed at the eleventh hour for unknown reasons. There have been no expert-level talks on the subject since then despite claims from Turkmen side that India wanted to be part of the project. The experts' meeting, informed sources said, would precede a gathering of a ministerial steering committee. A senior official of petroleum ministry said that Pakistan is committed to the project because of the wide gap between gas demand and supplies. He, however, added that Turkmenistan had not been able to provide independent certification of the gas reserves in fields it wanted to dedicate to the project. This will be one of the key issues at the Askabad meeting to enable participating countries to proceed with the project. The security situation in Afghanistan would also be one of the key issues for discussion. The delegations in the meeting will specify allocation and requirements for the gas in recipient countries through the pipeline that is to stretch more than 1,600kms from Turkmenistan's south-eastern Daulatabad field to Indian city of Bikaner, via Afghanistan and Pakistan, the sources said. The governments of four countries have not been able to sign the gas sales and purchase agreement, a draft of which had been prepared by Pakistan. The draft is to deal with contractual obligations of the parties in the pipeline construction, security, gas tariff and uninterrupted gas flows over the 30-year lifespan of the project. The Asian Development Bank, which has offered to provide technical support to the project, has concluded a thorough feasibility study which says that the inclusion of India will be of great benefit not only for the project but for all stakeholders. The ADB has already incorporated Indian suggestions in the agreement. A source in the petroleum ministry, however, said that before finalisation of any agreement, four stakeholders would have to hammer out seven issues hampering progress for almost four years now. The cost of the 56-inch diameter and 1,435km pipeline (from Turkmenistan to Multan) has recently been revised to about \$4 billion from \$3.3 billion in 2004. The pipeline which is to originate from Turkmenistan's Daulatabad gas field, will run 145km in the host country, 735km in Afghanistan and 555km in Pakistan (up to Multan) under the preferred southern route i.e., via Herat and Kandahar. Official sources said that besides importing natural gas through Iran-Pakistan pipeline, Pakistan also wanted to pursue the TAPI pipeline because the energy demand was growing in the region and within 10 to 15 years of its completion, gas from Iran would not be sufficient to meet the demand. The US has also been supportive of the four-nation pipeline to set up a regional energy grid stretching from central Asia to New Delhi.

[Dawn – March 16, 2010]

Indian Politics

Rajya Sabha Passes Women's Quota Bill

History was created in the Rajya Sabha when it voted by an overwhelming majority a Bill to reserve 33 per cent of the seats in Lok Sabha and Assemblies for women after the Government pushed ahead with it, ignoring possible threats to its stability and after eviction of troublesome MPs opposed to it. Fourteen years after the first attempt was made in the Lok Sabha and repeated failures subsequently, the Constitution Amendment Bill was adopted in the mandatory division with 186 members voting for it and one voting against.

In the 245-member House with an effective strength of 233, the Bill required the backing of at least 155 members and the UPA had the clear support of 165 in the run up to the event. The Bill seeks to reserve for women 181 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha and 1,370 out of a total of 4,109 seats in the 28 State Assemblies. Ruling UPA constituent Trinamool Congress, which has two members, kept away from voting, while the BSP, which has opposed the Bill in its present form, walked out before voting. The JD(U), whose president Sharad Yadav is a staunch opponent of the Bill, appears to have backed the Bill with most of its 7 members voting for it in response to the call by its senior leader Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who intervened in the discussion, described the occasion as a "momentous" and the legislation as a "historic and great" step in the empowerment of women.

[The Hindu – March 9, 2010]

Women's Bill Row: 7 MPs Suspended in Rajya Sabha

Seven members of Rajya Sabha belonging to SP, RJD, LJP and an unattached MP were suspended on March 9 for remaining part of the Budget session for their unruly behaviour in the House on Monday over the Women's Reservation Bill. The suspended members are Subhash Yadav (RJD), Sabir Ali (LJP), Veerpal Singh Yadav, Nand Kishore Yadav, Amir Alam Khan and Kamal Akhtar (SP), and Ejaz Ali(Unattached). The motion for their suspension was moved by Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Prithviraj Chavan and was passed by a voice vote. The action was taken under Rule 256 of the House, for showing total "disregard for dignity of Council and authority of the Chair" by obstructing the business of the House. On March 8, these members had indulged in unprecedented unruly scenes and even tried to attack Chairman Hamid Ansari when the Womens' Reservation Bill was moved by the government. Meanwhile, both Houses of Parliament are being adjourned repeatedly following uproar over the Women's Reservation Bill. RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav led the protests in the Lok Sabha against the Women's Reservation Bill forcing the Speaker to adjourn the House. Earlier in the morning, Sharad Yadav, Lalu Prasad and

Mulayam Singh Yadav, who are opposing the Women's Reservation Bill had met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and informed the PM of their differences towards the bill. On March 8, SP and RJD MPs had held the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to ransom by disrupting proceedings where the landmark legislation was to be discussed and adopted.

[The Times of India – March 9, 2010]

Maoists Bigger Problem than J&K: Defence

The annual report of Indian Defence Ministry said that the operations against Maoists are the main focus of internal security, more important than even the "proxy war" in Jammu and Kashmir. The Defence Ministry also acknowledged for the first time in several years that relations with Bangladesh had improved but India was concerned with the security situation in Pakistan.

Reflecting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 2005 statement that Naxalites were the "gravest internal security threat", the Defence Ministry has probably for the first time knocked Jammu and Kashmir off the top billing it got in its list of priorities for internal security. Even insurgency in the Northeast is more important now that there are signs that militancy in Kashmir is on the wane, the report added. The report does not dwell on the role of the armed forces in tackling Maoists because that is primarily the responsibility of the Home Ministry. But the army and the air force are involved in training police and transporting troops and material in anti-Maoist operations.

In Jammu and Kashmir, it says, "all parameters of proxy war are at an all time low and the current situation indicated a shift towards normalcy and peace ... the ceasefire on the borders/Line of Control is holding out with a few minor aberrations". It noted that "the Pakistani government made some progress in tackling jihadi insurgency in Swat and the adjacent districts and also in South Waziristan". "The continued infiltrations across the LoC and the existence of terrorist camps across the India-Pak border, however, demonstrate the continuing ambivalence of **Pakistan** in its actions against terrorist organisations," India has exercised exemplary restraint in the face of gravest provocation," the report said. Praising **Bangladesh**, the Ministry said: "Relations with Bangladesh have been strengthened since the restoration of multiparty democracy in that country. India is appreciative of the increasing co-operation with Bangladesh in security matters, especially vis-à-vis Indian insurgent groups operating from its territory." It also said co-operation with **Myanmar** on security issues was being expanded. In **Sri Lanka**, the report said, there is "a historic opportunity" to find a political settlement in the northern region after the conclusion of anti-LTTE operations. On **China**, the ministry observed that India was "conscious and alert about the implications of China's military modernisation...". Rapid infrastructure development in Tibet and Xinjiang have boosted China's force projection abilities. But a regular mechanism for friendly military exchanges with China has been established with continuing confidence-building measures. India is also concerned in **Afghanistan** because "the security and stability of Afghanistan is critical to India's own security concerns." The report also took note of the security situation in Afghanistan after the US's plan to deploy an additional 30,000 troops in the Af-Pak region by May this year and President Barack Obama's July 2011 timeframe for withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.

[The Telegraph – March 30, 2010]

Post-Presidential Election Scenario in Sri-Lanka

Trial of Sri Lanka's Ex-Army Chief Adjourned

The court martial of Sri Lanka's former army chief was adjourned after judges said they could not hear both of the separate sets of charges against him. Sarath Fonseka, who led the military to victory over the Tamil Tiger rebels last year, fell out with President Mahinda Rajapakse and unsuccessfully tried tns in January. He faces one set of charges that he interfered in politics before he retired from the army, and another set alleging he was involved in corrupt arms deals. A statement from the army said the judges had decided they could only hear the political interference case, which will start on April 6. The trial on defence procurement irregularities was adjourned indefinitely. Fonseka's spokesman, Anura Kumara Disanayake, said the decision was a tactic to prolong Fonseka's detention and prevent him from campaigning in parliamentary elections on April 8. Fonseka denies all the charges and says they are part of a vendetta against him. Rajapakse has been accused by political opponents and international human rights groups of suppressing dissent since his resounding re-election. Fonseka entered politics after quitting the military in November, six months after the separatist Tamil rebels were finally crushed. When he resigned from the military, Fonseka said that Rajapakse suspected him of planning a coup. Fonseka was arrested 12 days after he lost the presidential election to Rajapakse.

[AFP – March 16, 2010]

Sri Lankan Opposition Protests Ex-Army Chief's Court Martial

Sri Lankan opposition groups demonstrated in Colombo on March 23 demanding the release of former army chief Sarath Fonseka, who attempted to unseat the president in recent elections. Hundreds of activists from the JVP, or

People's Liberation Front, which backed Fonseka's failed bid for the presidency, shouted anti-government slogans outside the main railway station. On Monday dozens of unidentified men pelted stones at an independent television station in Colombo in what was thought to be a politically motivated attack before next month's parliamentary elections. The latest protests came ahead of another court martial hearing against the detention of Fonseka after he lost the presidential election to incumbent Mahinda Rajapakse. Fonseka, who led the military to victory over the Tamil Tiger rebels last year, fell out with Rajapakse and the two became bitter political foes. Court martial hearings are due to open on April 6, two days ahead of parliamentary elections at which Fonseka is a candidate from the Democratic National Alliance, a party backed by the JVP. Fonseka entered politics after quitting the military in November, six months after the separatist Tamil rebels were finally crushed after decades of ethnic bloodshed on the island. When he resigned from the military, Fonseka said that Rajapakse suspected him of planning a coup.

[Daily Times – March 24, 2010]

Myanmar – Suu Kyi's Detention

Suu Kyi's Party Allowed to Open Offices

Burma's junta has allowed the party of Aung San Suu Kyi to reopen offices closed since 2003 as international anger grew over new laws barring the opposition icon from elections this year. Locals are seen reading state-run 'New Light of Burma' in a street of Rangoon, on March 9. Burma's ruling junta has used new election laws to officially annul the result of polls in 1990 that were won by Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party, according to state media. The US slammed the legislation as a "mockery", while UN chief Ban Ki-moon appealed to Burma's military regime to free Suu Kyi and let her take part in the country's first polls in two decades.

Under the laws enacted March 8, Nobel Peace laureate Suu Kyi faces exclusion from her own National League for Democracy and is prevented from standing in the elections, expected in October or November. In a surprise move, Burma's rulers permitted the reopening of around 300 NLD offices which were shut after an attack by a pro-junta mob on Suu Kyi's motorcade in May 2003 which left dozens of people dead. The latest law to be published officially annuls the result of the country's last elections in 1990. The NLD won those polls by a landslide but the junta never allowed the party to take power. "The result of the multi-party democracy elections, held under a deleted law, is automatically abolished as it is not in accordance with the constitution," said the law.

The 64-year-old Suu Kyi has been in prison or under house arrest for 14 of the last 20 years since those elections. She was sentenced to three years' jail in August over an incident in which a US man swam to her lakeside home, but her sentence was commuted by junta supremo Than Shwe to 18 months under house arrest. Under the new laws, anyone serving a prison term is not allowed to be a member of a political party and parties contravening that regulation can be dissolved. The law also gives parties 60 days from Monday to register, meaning that the NLD must decide quickly whether it will expel Suu Kyi and contest the elections or pull out of the process. The laws sparked anger from western nations which have imposed heavy sanctions on Burma, which was formerly known as Burma.

Britain expressed "regret" over Suu Kyi's exclusion from the polls. The UN's Ban renewed his call for Burma to "ensure an inclusive political process leading to fair, transparent and credible elections in which all citizens of Burma, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, can freely participate," his office said in a statement. Rights groups also reacted angrily to the new laws. Human Rights Watch said in a statement that the law showed the junta's "contempt for the democratic process." Burma's Asian neighbours have however remained quiet over the laws. China and India have huge investments in Burma, while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), of which Burma is a member, says it is trying to bring about reform through engagement with the regime.

[Bangkok Post – March 11, 2010]