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Gender & Women Empowerment

Women & Laws

SBP Issues Guidelines to Comply with Anti-Harassment Law

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has issued instructions to all the banks to comply with the 'Protection Against Harassment of Women at Work Place Act 2010' displaying the Code of Conduct within their premises. The banks are also directed to form specific committees to address these complaints and ensure conducive environment for working women. The progress on implementation process was shared in the second meeting of Implementation Watch Committee. The National Implementation Watch Committee formed on the instructions of the Prime Minister on the platform of National Commission on the Status of Women aimed is to oversee the implementation process of the anti sexual harassment legislation passed in March 2010 by the present government. The Chairperson of watch committee, Dr Fauzia Saeed appreciated this effort of the Bank immensely and said the provinces are now getting into the momentum and Punjab and Sindh governments have already initiated actions for implementation within the provincial departments and at the district level. However, she said that after the initial impetus the work needs to go on for sustained impact. It was informed by the committee that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has been very committed to this process and has already been working on guidelines for all the universities of the country. They have worked with the Implementation Watch Committee to ensure compliance with the new law while their guidelines will be disseminated to all the universities within a month. The committee informed that some of the private sector companies like ICI, Engro, Lever brothers, Telenor, Lakson, and hotels like Serena and Marriott had their people trained by AASHA and have shown high level of commitment to take the agenda forward. Among the government, the PM secretariat, Planning Commission and the Establishment Division are taking the lead in getting the law implemented in the federal government.

Out of 44 federal ministries 31 have complied with the law however, thirteen have still not done that despite the instructions of the PM. One hundred and twenty (120) trainers were trained by AASHA in various sectors like government organisations, private sector, academia, media and law enforcing agencies to prepare resource persons who would then conduct awareness raising sessions in their own sectors.

Human Rights Commission Director IA Rehman, also appreciated the work done so far by the members and said that "We should build on the positive work that has already been done". Ehsan Sadiq, from Islamabad police said that the police is planning to have three lady complaint cell and are thinking of other strategies to get the mindset changed. Talking about the passage of the rules and establishment of the ombudsperson, Ministry of Women was requested to expedite the process. The meeting was attended by members including Omar Hameed Khan, PM secretariat, representatives of other Ministries; Auditor General's office, Women's Ministry and FBR. Others include representatives of Pakistan Business Council, AASHA members and Deputy MD of Pakistan Television Shahid Mehmood Nadeem.

[Daily Times – September 8, 2010]

43 Ministries, Departments Adopt Code of Conduct

According to the data collected by the Ministry of Women Development (MoWD) on implementation of 'Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010' in public sector, around 43 ministries, departments and divisions have adopted the code of conduct whereas 79 institutions have formed inquiry committees up till now. The information was shared by Director General Gender Equality Kishwar Shaheen Awan at a national level awareness-raising seminar organised by the MoWD. The seminar was organised at the Ministry of Population Welfare (MoPW). As part of the monitoring strategy for effective implementation of the Act, all public sector departments are asked to report to the MoWD about progress in the adoption of code of conduct and establishment of the inquiry committee. The session started with the recitation from the Holy Qur'aan that was followed by presentation on harassment act, code of conduct, committee formation, TORs of the committee and penal procedures by Aqsa Khan, Member Alliance Against Sexual Harassment (AASHA). At the end, Aqsa explained the queries and concerns of the participants regarding the implementation of the act. MoPW Secretary Major (R) Haroon Rasheed presented the concluding comments and vote of thanks to the participants of the seminar.

[The News – September 23, 2010]

One Million Women Applied for CNICs to Get Gender Grant

After the initiation of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), about one million women have applied for National Identity Cards to receive cash grants. Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Chairperson Farzana Raja told that the programme was not only instrumental in poverty alleviation, but it also served the cause of women empowerment as only female head of a registered family is authorized to receive cash grant. The BISP has launched a countrywide poverty census to make identification of deserving families more effective and transparent for receiving cash grant. The poverty survey was completed earlier in 38 districts of the country as an initial phase of the census. She said that the scope of the programme has been expanded with the enrolment of recent devastating flood victims and would raise the number of registered families with BISP up to seven million and more than 35 million individuals. The Chairperson has recently inaugurated the survey by completing a survey form of a poor family after a random "knock at door" in Faisalabad. She said that new deserving families would be included in the programme as beneficiary as soon as poverty survey was completed in the districts. She said that the survey teams of the BISP have already been sent to Punjab, Sindh, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan to complete countrywide poverty survey. She said that survey was free of charge and if someone demands even a rupee for the completion of survey form, a complaint could be made at 080026477 immediately.

The BISP Chairperson said that this is the first poverty survey being conducted in the country and every effort has been made to make it comprehensive. She said that service to poor and underprivileged Pakistanis was a dream of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto has sacrificed her life while struggling to complete this mission. She said that the BISP is realising the same dream and it has set 20 percent decrease in the poverty during next three years. She said that the programme has been attached with the name of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto "Therefore, we would leave no stone unturned to make this programme a complete success." "BISP not only provides monthly cash grants to its beneficiaries", she said and added that under the 'Waseela-e-Haq' and 'Waseela-e-Hunar' initiatives of the programme, small entrepreneurship and skill development among under privileged segments of the society are being promoted to enable these segments to lead a self sustained life..

[The News – September 20, 2010]

Time for Positive Discrimination

By Aoun Sahi

Zubaida Batool, 23, a resident of Samanabad, Lahore, has been working in a factory on Multan Road since 2005. Even after five years she does not have a letter of appointment or any other written document to prove that she is an employee of the said factory. There are around 30 women and more than 100 men working in the factory. Both men and women are doing similar jobs and the working hours are also the same but, in Zubaida's own words, "our salaries are much smaller than what the men are offered. "My first salary was Rs 1,500," she tells TNS. "This was in '05. Five years later, I get only Rs 3,000 while my male colleagues with the same work experience get more than Rs 7,000 a month." Zubaida says that the factory owners prefer to recruit young and unmarried girls because "according to them, married women don't make good workers". She reveals that there are no separate toilets for women in the factory, let alone a daycare centre for the children of the married ladies. "If you are in the toilet and a male co-worker also needs it, he will have no qualms about knocking at the door and calling out your name," she elaborates. "What's more, the walls of toilets are chalked with obnoxious jokes and graffiti."

According to a Pakistan Employment Trends for Women 2009 report, prepared by ILO, UNDP and the government of Pakistan, a majority of employed women is classified as being "at the risk of lacking decent work" or, in other words, as vulnerable. Discrimination, on the basis of gender, in economic activity, is very common in Pakistan. The Labour Force Survey 2009-10 shows that in 2008, women in Pakistan generally earned almost one third less than what their male counterparts did. Further, between 2007 and 2008, the real wages for female workers decreased from Rs 3,607 to Rs 3,419 on an average per month, whereas they increased from Rs 4,878 to Rs 4,917 for male workers, during the same period. The report also states that since 2000, the activities of women in urban areas has increased from 89.7 percent to an incredibly high 90.3 percent. It is important to note here that the majority of women working in the formal sector of economy belong to the urban areas. The share of non-active women in rural areas decreased by 9.2 percent during the same time, which means that the presence of women workforce in the informal sector of economy has increased significantly.

Pakistan's constitution guarantees equal employment opportunities for men and women. Existing labour legislations do not discriminate against anyone on the basis of sex but there still is a huge gap between its statement and implementation. Article 18 of Pakistan Constitution clearly states that every citizen; subject to qualifications, can enter a trade, business or profession of his/her choice. Article 26 says that no person otherwise qualified can be discriminated against in the matter of employment on the basis of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth. Furthermore, article 34 states that "steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life". In 2002, National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women was developed that especially sought to ensure women's equal access to all development benefits and social services and to safeguard women's economic, legal, political and social rights, and also to provide equal opportunity and create liberty for women so that they can realise their full potential. The same year, a labour welfare package for workers was announced by the federal government, making it mandatory for the employers to offer gender equality and affirmative action. The package reassured the enforcement of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value through appropriate legislation and recruitment of female labour inspectors for enforcement of labour laws on female workers, though none of these has been implemented yet. Pakistan is also a signatory of the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 and ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951. But Pakistani women continue to face a number of challenges when seeking work in specific economic sectors. They also face difficulties in finding work which also offers decent work conditions even in the corporate sector.

"The employers as well as our male colleagues don't take us seriously," says a woman worker at a private telecom company, on condition of anonymity. "They like to think we are working only for a lark. When there is an opportunity for promotion, men are considered above women. Perhaps, because they are the traditional bread winners in a family. "Our company avoids hiring women for the 'real jobs'," she continues. "If it must hire them, it is only for slots like telephone operators or secretaries. There isn't a single woman here who is working at the executive level."

The situation in the public sector is also not much encouraging for the women. Theoretically speaking, different governments have taken drastic steps to make work environment in offices conducive for working women. Measures have been introduced to increase the number of female workers in the public sector. Presently, in Pakistan, women have been allocated a 10 percent quota in public-sector jobs. But all this is in the books and not put into practice. According to a data culled from the ministry of women development, out of a total of 700,000 employees in the public sector, only 21,000 are women.

Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) was launched in August 2002, as a tool to align policies, structures and procedures that would enable the government to honour its national and international commitments regarding gender equality at the federal, provincial and district levels. As per this plan, federal and provincial governments had to set up Gender Mainstreaming Units (GMU) in order to make a real change favourable for women through Structural Policy Reforms in the Public Sector functioning. So far only the federal and Punjab governments have launched it. In Punjab, it has been working under the Home Department since 2007. According to the GMU Punjab Annual Report 2010, there are only four women working in the provincial secretariat of Home Department out of a total of 237 workers. "The situation in other departments is even worse," says an official of GMU Punjab. According to him, gender mainstreaming is not high on the agenda of any government in Pakistan. "Nobody is ready even to accord the 5 percent quota allocated to women in public-sector jobs. There are no daycare centres or even separate toilets for women in the public sector. Getting maternity leave is hard for the women, leave alone flexible working hours. We have deployed gender specialists in eight departments, making it sure that women can resolve their work-related issues smoothly." The official says that a proposal to make it mandatory for the government buildings to have a daycare centre each was given to the provincial secretary of planning and development since 2009. "I doubt that the secretary will give his approval because it is considered to be a waste of government resources." Pakistan boasts over 70 different kinds of labour laws that guarantee rights to the laborers especially in the formal sector of the economy. "None of these laws discriminates against women as workers," says Bushra Khalique, General Secretary, Women Workers' Help Line, "though there exist exclusive laws like the Daycare Act, the Maternity Leave Act and the Provision of Separate Toilet Act that should facilitate the women workers. The problem, again, is their implementation. No government department or agency, including the labour department, is empowered enough to implement the existing labour laws in any sector."

According to Bushra, the situation in the corporate sector and factories is far too bad as no labour laws apply here. "It is pathetic that our government should guarantee international investors that no labour laws shall apply on them. Hence, the workers even don't have the right to make a trade union for themselves within the corporate sector or in multinational companies working in Pakistan. "Women workers suffer the most in such conditions as they are provided with separate toilets, kitchens and transport facility. Instead of being granted maternity leave, the pregnant women are easily laid off." She also speaks of the society as being reluctant to empower women in any field. "It took decades of struggle to get in place the legislation against sexual harassment at workplace".

Bushra Gohar, MNA and chairperson National Assembly's Standing Committee on Women Development, believes that empowerment of women is a complex issue in our society. "On the one hand, the government is not serious about creating a conducive work environment for women at workplace, on the other fundamentalism is on the rise which makes our society even more difficult to live. Nobody is serious about implementing laws meant to facilitate the working women. We have been talking a lot about protection against the Sexual Harassment Act 2010 and this is one step to ensure the security of women workers, but the government has not allocated a single penny in the budget for its implementation. Come to think of it, we don't have a daycare centre even in the National Assembly and Senate buildings!"

[The News – September 26, 2010]

Women & Media

Women Under-Represented in Media Coverage: Report

Women are still significantly under-represented and misrepresented in news media coverage, according to a new research in 108 countries by the Global Media Monitoring Project, despite significant change since the project started 15 years ago with the coordination of the World Association for Christian Communication. The report said that about 76 percent of the people heard or read about in the world's news were male. The world seen in news media remains largely a male one. The project monitored 1,3656 newspapers, television and radio stations and news websites, 17,795 news stories and 38,253 persons in the news in 108 countries with 82 percent of the world's people.

The report was released on September 29 in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, along with numerous regional and national reports. About 24 percent of people in the news were female, compared to 17 percent in 1995, the report pointed out. About 44 percent of persons providing popular opinion in news stories were female compared to 34 percent in 2005. The news media show significant gender bias with 46 percent of news stories reinforcing gender stereotypes. About 13 percent of the news stories focus centrally on women. According to the report, female reporters were responsible for 37 percent of the stories compared to 28 percent 15 years ago, and their stories challenge gender stereotypes twice as often as stories by male reporters. In Pakistan, the Uks Research, Resource and Publication Centre on Women and Media coordinated the research.

[Daily Times – September 30, 2010]

Articles/Reports/Books on Gender

Forced Veiling Debate Divides Bangladeshi Women

By Cat Barton

A woman's right not to wear the veil has become a hot topic in Bangladesh, with three high court rulings in less than six months banning forced veiling in the Muslim-majority country. When a Bangladeshi government official told Sultana Arjuman Banu she was an "uncultured prostitute" for not wearing a burqa, the outraged headmistress took him to court. In a landmark verdict, Bangladesh's High Court ruled that attempts to coerce or impose a dress code on women clearly amount to a form of sexual harassment.

A woman's right not to wear the veil has become a hot topic in Bangladesh, with three high court rulings in less than six months banning forced veiling in the Muslim-majority country. The veil is neither compulsory nor customary in Bangladesh but public opinion is divided on the politically-charged issue, and even as the courts affirm a women's right to go bare-headed, more women are opting to cover up. "My hijab is my freedom," said 19-year-old television presenter Fahmida Islam, who reads the news on the privately-owned Diganta Channel and wears a full-length veil. "Bangladesh should embrace its Islamic heritage more," she said. Bangladeshi women traditionally wear saris or salwar kameez, and the veil is a relatively new arrival — which some credit to

the influence of the Bangladeshi Diaspora, particularly the millions of migrant workers in the Gulf. Burqa-clad women are an increasingly common sight both in the capital Dhaka and in rural areas, though Fahmida said many people have the wrong concept of the veil, some girls wear burqas but take them off to go to parties. The veil has become a new front in the battle — fought in the courts, in parliament and the education system — to keep the Bangladeshi state officially secular, despite the country's predominantly conservative population.

In March, the high court banned police from hassling women who do not wear the full-face veil after police in northern Rangpur district arrested nine teenage couples in a public park and ordered the girls to wear burqas. "A girl can only be arrested if there is a criminal case against her, not because of what she is wearing," the country's deputy attorney general, Rajik Al Jalil, said at the time. In April, the court banned forced veiling of female workers after an official insulted Sultana Arjuman Banu, trying to force her and fifty other female teachers at the school in Kurigram district to wear headscarves. "How an educated man could utter the word prostitute to a headmistress of a government primary school is not comprehensible," the court said in its ruling, before ordering the official to make an unqualified apology. Last month, the high court issued a ruling banning the imposition of any religious clothing on students, following reports that a principal at a state-run college in northern Bangladesh has forced students to wear veils. "No girl should be repressed, harassed or punished for not wearing burqa or religious attire," education secretary Syed Aatur Rahman said in a Ministry of Education order issued to support the court verdict. "Forcing a girl to wear veil or any religious wear or barring her from sports and cultural activities will be considered an offence," he said. Bangladesh was created as a secular democracy in 1971 after a bloody battle for independence. A series of constitutional amendments in the 1970s and 1980s made Islam the state religion and legalised religion-based political parties.

The Awami League government, which came to power in December 2008 elections, is committed to protecting the secular status of the state — moving to ban religious political parties and launching an overhaul of the education system. But Bangladesh is also a deeply patriarchal society, experts say, where the idea that a woman should dress modestly to prevent sexual harassment is accepted across the social spectrum. "It is a justification often used in ordinary conversations as well as policy rhetoric — 'oh, well, women really ask for it, they should be modestly dressed,'" said barrister Sara Hossain. "Ultimately, this can get pushed to an extreme where women feel safest if they are covered up," said Hossain, a petitioner on headmistress Sultana Arjuman Banu's case.

The recent court rulings are a step towards turning this situation around, by "creating safer, securer spaces and putting the burden on others to make sure that they don't assault women," Hossain said. "The rulings will give space and strength to women who do not want to observe these kind of [Islamic] dress codes or who want to be freer in the way that they want to conduct themselves," she said. But many women, like Samia Islam — who started wearing the veil a few years ago, after her husband completed the Hajj pilgrimage — argue the veil is the best way for women to stay safe. "When I started wearing the veil properly, it changed my experience of my own country," Samia said, adding irritating, insulting rough talk, she used to hear from men had transformed into polite compliments about her veil. "Most women wear the veil because of their family — this was all me, willingly I've embraced the veil as a Muslim woman. I think all women should do this. It protects them from all types of unwanted attention," she said.

[Daily Times – September 17, 2010]

Govt Urged to Set-Up Body to Protect Children's Rights

Participants of a workshop agreed that children's rights could be best protected if the country had an independent commission on the subject with full financial, administrative and legal powers. They also stressed the need to bring children's rights issues on the national agenda and called upon the government to amend relevant rules, if there was a need, and provide speedy justice in case of rights' violations. The **two-day capacity building workshop on children's rights** was organised by the Children's Complaint Office, the Federal Ombudsman Office, Islamabad on September 21.

Giving a brief on the CCO's objectives and its activities, Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi, heading the complaint office, said the complaint office was a part of the federal ombudsman office and had been established a year ago with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund that had provided Rs34 million under a two-year project. Currently, eight federal ombudsman offices were operating in the country in the four provincial headquarters and they all had a section to attend to children's complaints. The complaint office, he said, could investigate and redress any injustices done to a child (up to 18 years) through maladministration of any federal agency such as a school, hospital or law-enforcement agency. "So far, we have received 260 complaints and 90 per cent of the complaints have been resolved within a period of three to six months. The procedure is simple and a child or a parent on behalf of the child can file a complaint without submitting any fee," he said, adding that there was no requirement for a lawyer to process the complaint. The complaints relating to provincial departments were forwarded to the provincial ombudsman offices.

The participants of the workshop recommended a number of measures that could best ensure protection of children's rights. The suggestions included:

- Establishment of an independent commission at the federal and provincial levels with legal, financial and administrative powers
- Establishment of a complaint collection cell in each social welfare department office
- Connecting all police stations with the system and creating monitoring mechanisms and referral systems for children in distress

[Dawn – September 22, 2010]

Findings of UNICEF Reports

Investing in the world's most disadvantaged children and communities can save millions of lives and help spur progress towards achieving internationally agreed development targets, according to a new study by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). The agency found that an equity-based approach, focusing on the needs of the most disadvantaged children, can be a cost-effective strategy to reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - eight targets that include slashing poverty, hunger and a host of other socio-economic ills, all by 2015.

The findings were presented in two publications: **Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals** and the flagship databased report **Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity**. Anthony Lake, UNICEF's Executive Director said that our findings challenge the traditional thinking that focusing on the poorest and most disadvantaged children is not cost-effective.

Responding to a host of questions about the plight of children in flooded Pakistan, UNICEF's Lake said the United Nations and its partners were making progress to alleviate suffering from the heart-wrenching devastation. He had also visited Pakistan and had pledged support to the UNICEF staff there and had urged more resources. "There's still a long way to go," he continued, noting that, with so much of the country under water, farmers would be unable to plant until next spring. He said a major effort was also underway to limit the scope of what appeared to be a second wave of waterborne disease. "The more we do now in the way to limit the scope of the disaster, the more we are investing in the future recovery phase." Carolyn Miles, Executive Vice President of Save the Children, added that her "biggest worry" was Pakistan's recovery phase, as the world was not stepping up. Asked if the Pakistan Government was doing enough to alleviate the suffering of its people, Lake said there was no need to single anyone out: "We all have to do more." At the same time, he had been impressed with the very hard work being carried out by local officials in the areas he visited. While great

progress is being made in international efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals, much more needs to be done over the next five years, the report said.

The study found that for every additional \$1 million invested in public health care for children, an equity-based approach has the potential to avert around 60 per cent more under-five deaths than the current strategies. In addition, providing the most impoverished children with essential services can greatly accelerate progress towards the Goals, particularly MDG 4 on reducing under-five mortality by two thirds between 1990 and 2015, and reduce disparities within nations. Since most child deaths occur in the most deprived communities, further reductions in child mortality depend on investments in those communities, according to the study. Universal primary education cannot be achieved without extending schooling to those currently excluded, the poorest and the most marginalized children. Further, the discrimination, violence and disadvantage experienced by millions of children will only end with actions and investments that address the inequities they face, the study added.

The data shows that, despite great strides towards achieving gender parity in education over the past decade, girls and young women in developing regions remain at a considerable disadvantage in access to education, particularly at the secondary level. Also, children from the poorest 20 per cent of households in the developing world are more than twice as likely to die before reaching their fifth birthdays as children from the richest 20 per cent of households. Noting that achievements to date on the MDGs have been uneven, UNICEF stressed the need to refocus efforts and investment for development on tackling the urgent needs of the poorest and most marginalized children and families.

The UNICEF reports are being released in conjunction with a report by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Save the Children, entitled A Fair Chance at Life: Why Equity Matters for Children. The Save the Children report examines the disparities in progress on child survival between the wealthy and less well off in countries around the world, and asserts that reaching marginalized communities is the key to reducing inequities and achieving MDG 4. "This study in no way casts doubt on, or calls for a reversal of, what we and our partners have accomplished over the last 10 years. It only helps us find the best way to build on what we've achieved already," Lake told reporters at the launch of the reports in New York. "But we should begin that work immediately. "So when 2015 arrives, we can say that we not only saw the growing gap between rich and poor but we narrowed it. We not only reached the most reachable but we reached the most in need. We not only saw a new opportunity but we seized it."

[The Nations – September 9, 2010]

Rising Crimes in the Country

Crime Ratio Punjab Increased in First 8 Months

The crime graph of heinous nature has shot up across the Punjab province as 15,5829 crimes of heinous nature were reported during the first eight months of 2010 while 12,4328 incidents took place in the corresponding period last year. The crimes include murder, kidnapping for ransom, dacoity-cum-murder, dacoity, robbery, car and bike snatching and theft. The province has seen a spate of crime during the first eight months of the current year and everyone from police officers to businessmen, senior citizens and women especially the female students have become criminals' targets.

According to Comparative Crime Profile Summary (CCPS) furnished by a top police source at Police Punjab Capital Office (CPO), shows that overall 25,9376 cases of crimes of all nature were reported during the first eight months this year whereas 26,0276 cases were traced during the same period last year. The **kidnapping** cases increased by 14 per cent, **attempt to murder** cases by 6 per cent, **rape cases** by 10 per cent and **gang rape** cases increased by 12 per cent. The **dacoity** cases increased by 9 per cent, **robberies** by 11 per cent, **MV snatching** by 13 per cent, **burglary** by 8 per cent, extortion by 10 per cent, **MV theft** by 28 per cent and other theft cases increased by 5 per cent during this span of time. However, the numbers of **Proclaimed Offenders (POs)** increased by 12 per cent while the number of **Court Absconders** shot up by 33 per cent this year. The **crime against person and property** increased by 4 and 9 per cent respectively in Punjab where no less than 4,129 murder cases and 1,783 cases of dacoity (395 PPC) were registered during the eight months in 2010. Around 3,977 incidents of murder and 1,629 incidents of dacoity bids were reported in the same period last year.

The CCPS further revealed that about 9,428 cases of kidnapping/abduction, 4,973 of attempt to murder, 14,681 of hurt, and 102 of kidnapping for ransom were reported during this span of time while 8,278, 4,682, 15,574, and

130 cases of same nature were traced in the same period last year respectively. Almost 18 per cent cases of gang rape increased during this time as 167 were reported during eight months while 149 incidents took place last year. Almost 10,576 incidents of robbery (392 PPC) were reported this year while 9,507 were traced last year. As many as 3,740 cases of MV snatching were reported this year while 3,321 incident occurred last year till August. Punjab Police claimed to have faced 196 'encounters' with 3 per cent increase compared to eight months of the last year, in which 40 policemen were martyred with 122 per cent increase compared to last where 18 police officers were killed. However, 153 accused were gunned down with 2 per cent increase as compared to last eight months in which 150 accused were killed. Punjab police could manage to arrest only 131 criminals almost with 25 per cent decrease compared to 181 arrested in said time of the last year. According to CCPS, it seemed the Punjab police performance could not be increased regarding any sense as it managed to bust only 1,540 gangs with 16 per cent difference as compared to last in which 1,601 were taken to task. Around 10,136 cases were traced against members of notorious gangs with 12 per cent decrease compared to the said time during the last year in which 11,481 criminals were apprehended. The police, however, claimed to have recovered Rs 747 million in cash with 17 per cent increase as the amount was reported Rs 639 million during the last year. The CCPS further reveals that as many as 64,534 POs emerged this year, out of which 67,147 were arrested whereas 57,786 POs reported in the said time during the last year, out of which 42,702 were apprehended. However, as many as 33,292 CAs were reported this year, out of which 31,292 were apprehended while 25,033 were reported last year out of which 24,457 were arrested. About 34,633 cases were registered under Arms Ordinance while 41,216 were traced during the eight months of last year. Punjab Police spokesman Deputy Inspector General of Police Punjab (DIG) Akram Naeem Bharoka was unavailable to respond when contacted.

[The Nation – September 21, 2010]

Governance Watch

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Government Policies/Legislative Business

PM Okays Energy Sector Reforms

Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani has approved in principle the energy sector reforms in order to improve the performance of the energy sector and establish it on a sustainable bases. The PM accorded the approval during a special meeting held at the Prime Minister's House on September 28 to examine the proposed power sector reforms. The country cannot afford to allow public sector enterprises to not function properly, he said. Earlier, the Planning Commission Deputy Chairman explained the salient features of the proposed reforms and their possible impact. The presentation had been prepared after a broad consultation with energy experts, concerned ministries, business groups as well as experts from the donor agencies. It was recognised that the energy sector reforms had been of central importance for the revival of the economy and for maintaining fiscal discipline. Gilani said that if a comprehensive reform plan had not been pursued, the burden of Pakistan Electric Power Company (PEPCO) subsidies could surpass Rs 225 billion during the financial year 2010-11, which would be greater than the budget of the entire civilian government.

The PM directed that **besides structural reforms, such as unbundling of PEPCO, independence to smaller distribution company's and improvement in management efficiency, the fuel mix should also be adopted to provide more gas to the energy sector, in order to lower the cost of electricity. He further directed that the Cabinet should also take the provinces on board regarding the Energy Reform Plan after its approval.**

[Daily Times – September 29, 2010]

Government Bans Five Baloch Groups

In an explicit assertive move, the Federal Government has transferred police powers to the Frontier Corps (FC) and banned five Baloch militant groups. The FC's new powers, extended for a period of three months, will enable it to search and detain people. Interior Minister Rehman Malik said that the decisions had been taken during a high-level meeting held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat to review the law and order situation in Balochistan. **The banned groups are: the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), the Baloch Liberation United Front (BLUF), the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) and the Baloch Mussalah Diffah Tanzim (BMDT).** "They (banned groups) will not be allowed to undertake any activity, their offices will be closed and action will be taken against their office bearers," Malik said, adding that their bank accounts had also been seized. He said that any group whose name included words such as liberation, army and lashkar would be banned.

[Daily Times – September 9, 2010]

NA Unanimously Approves Anti-Monopoly Law

The National Assembly unanimously passed a key anti-monopoly law for a second time by overcoming the last hitch of a grammatical nature, completing the parliamentary approval of the Competition Bill after nearly a year of gruelling rows. The 62-clause bill now only needs a formal assent by President Asif Ali Zardari to become an act of parliament that will reactivate a powerful Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) mandated to ensure what the draft says "free competition in all spheres of commercial and economic activity to enhance economic efficiency and to protect consumers from anti-competitive behaviour" in the country.

Based on a lapsed 2007 ordinance that replaced the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (Control and Prevention) Ordinance of 1970, the bill was brought to comply with a July 31, 2009, Supreme Court ruling requiring all ordinances given permanence by a Nov 3, 2007, Provisional Constitution Order of then-president Pervez Mushrraf to be approved by parliament within 120 days to remain valid. The Competition Ordinance could not get that approval within the prescribed time, though it was kept alive by presidential re-promulgations before the process was blocked by the 18th Amendment passed in April, and faced a row in a National Assembly standing committee mainly over the original provision for appeals against the CCP decisions only

before the Supreme Court, with the result that the draft passed by the lower house last January provided for appeal before a high court before going to the apex court. But in a move to minimise chances of the CCP's work being stalled by interested parties by going to any of the four provincial high courts, an amendment by the Senate, which passed the bill in February, instead provided for appeal by an aggrieved party to a Competition Appellate Tribunal to be constituted by the federal government before going to the Supreme Court. The bill's passage was immediately hailed as a "major legislative initiative towards the realisation of a competitive and fair economy" by CCP chairperson Ms Rahat Kaunain who, in a press statement, called the unanimous vote "a testament to the strength of the democratic system".

[Dawn – September 24, 2010]

Consensus Bill May be Introduced Soon

A new accountability law drafted in April but remaining stalled because of objections raised by the opposition PML-N may now reach parliament as a consensus bill. According to Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, the government side has communicated its acceptance, with one minor exception, of PML-N's formulations, but his party wanted the acceptance in black and white. The draft bill approved by the committee in April remained stalled for want of consensus. The standing committee had on April 15 approved the bill, but Nasim Akhtar refused to share the final draft with opposition members of the committee. **If approved by parliament, the bill will replace the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) with a powerful National Accountability Commission (NAC). Once the law is approved, all assets and all employees of NAB will be transferred to the NAC. All cases presently being prosecuted by the NAB would also be immediately transferred to the NAC. The chairman of the proposed accountability commission will be appointed for a period of three years.**

The PML-N has made public its opposition to a number of clauses in the bill. It has been insisting that the head of NAC must be a sitting judge of the Supreme Court whereas the draft of law suggests that the office can be held "either by a sitting judge or a retired judge or any person qualified to be a judge of the Supreme Court". The PML-N is also against immunity proposed for a holder of public office for any wrongdoing committed in 'good faith'. It suggests that the commission should be allowed to pursue cases since 1947. But the bill proposes that the NAC will not carry out investigations against any crime committed before 1985. Moreover, the PML-N says the proposed bill does not require the government to ask foreign states to freeze and forfeit assets relevant to any investigation in Pakistan. A clause to this effect was in the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999, which was used to seek foreign cooperation and mutual legal assistance in the money-laundering case against President Asif Zardari in a Swiss court. This was later withdrawn through a controversial letter written to the Swiss authorities by then attorney general Malik Qayyum after the passage of the National Reconciliation Ordinance. Chaudhry Nisar claimed that the government had conveyed to him that it was ready to accommodate PML-N's proposals with a condition that the opposition would not press for its demand that the NAC should compulsorily be headed by a serving SC judge. He said the government had also expressed its willingness to remove the clause under which any person qualified to be a SC judge had been declared eligible to become chairman of the proposed NAC. The government, he said, believed it would be difficult for the superior judiciary to spare a full-time judge for the purpose in the light of the recently-announced judicial policy by Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. The opposition leader further disclosed that Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani had expressed his desire to get the new accountability law adopted in parliament only through a consensus. On the other hand, Nasim Akhtar Chaudhry, when contacted, denied that she had sent any message to the opposition leader. However, she said she had convened a meeting of the standing committee on Sept 16 only to discuss the objections raised by the PML-N on the draft of the bill that proposes to end the immunity so far enjoyed by members of the armed forces, judiciary and parliament by defining public office in accordance with Article 260 of the Constitution.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Babar Awan had tabled "the Holder of Public Office (Accountability) Act 2009 (the name changed to NAC Act 2010) in the National Assembly in April last year in the light of the first speech made by the prime minister on the floor of the house after his election on March 29, 2008, in which he had promised to disband the NAB and create an independent accountability commission as envisaged in the Charter of Democracy signed by former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in May 2006 when they were in exile.

[Dawn – September 9, 2010]

Police Order 2002

Report on Lynching Exposes Flaws in Police Order

The report formulated by Justice (Retd) Kazim Malik on the lynching of two young brothers in Sialkot has not just highlighted the violence prevalent in society. Rather, by pointing out the ineffectiveness of the Police Order 2002 it has also drawn attention to the legal ambiguity surrounding the law. The Police Order 2002 has not attended to the deficiencies in the legal framework of the police, wrote Justice Malik in his report, saying that without building statutory checks on arbitrary exercise of powers of the police, no improvement could be expected in the system.

However, it needs to be pointed out at this stage that the Police Order 2002 was introduced during General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf's tenure through the Legal Framework Order (LFO) and later was given protection under the Constitution 17th Amendment; the law was placed in the Sixth Schedule of the constitution and could not be altered, repealed or amended without the prior sanction of the president. The Police Order was aimed at making police more responsible and accountable towards citizens. However, with the passage of the 18th amendment its legal status is no longer clear. "The Police Order 2002 is a dead law," Advocate Kamran Adil who recently resigned from the coveted post of the Superintendent Police (SP) Islamabad said. The death of the Police Order 2002 is not a simple affair, he said; instead, he pointed out that it meant that virtually the entire system had reverted to pre-2002 scenario, meaning thereby that the Police Act 1861 is holding the field now. This means also that all legal actions and appointments made under the Police Order 2002 during the last eight months will have to be reviewed as they have been carried out without lawful authority. Besides, all the punitive criminal actions taken under Article 155 of the Police Order 2002 against delinquent police officers in the past eight months will lose their foundation, he explained. However, not everyone agrees with this assessment. "I do not think the police order is a dead law but its fate has to be determined by provinces after the passage of the 18th Amendment," said Senator Raza Rabbani, who presided over the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms (PCCR) for almost nine months and later came out with a draft proposal for the 18th Amendment.

After the passage of the 18th Amendment the Police Order 2002 is no longer protected under the 6th schedule and has now been transferred to provinces which will amend the law according to their own need, Senator Rabbani said. The Police Order 2002 has even come under severe criticism in the Supreme Court more than once when on one occasion Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry deplored the fact that the passage of the law had left the people to fend for themselves and that they had no option but to grease more palms than one just to register the FIR. The SC's attention turned to the law once again while it was hearing the Sialkot incident; when the inquiry report was presented before the apex court, Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday criticised police for not being conversant with the Police Order 2002 and not knowing which wing of police would register the FIR, which would arrest culprits and which would investigate the crime. The police order has failed to introduce modern techniques of investigations because the officers who trained the young batches of police were still imparting outdated techniques, Justice Ramday had deplored. Justice Ramday had also advised that young police officers be sent for training abroad to learn modern investigation techniques instead of attending seminars, conferences and getting education and training that was of no relevance to police service. Justice (Retd) Kazim Malik had also deplored in his report that: "Without unqualified allegiance to rule of law, whimsy, defective, poor, artificial, motivated and dishonest investigation of criminal cases is not going to be of much help for improvement of the system because investigation is like a festering sore, which may prove fatal to the whole system."

[Dawn – September 5, 2010]

ECP & Election Related News

By-Election on PS-94 Put-Off till Oct 17

The by-election on a Sindh Assembly seat (PS-94) has been deferred for over three weeks and polling would now be held on October 17.

The by-election was earlier scheduled to be held on September 22. The seat had fallen vacant after the assassination of Muttahida Qaumi Movement legislator Syed Raza Haider in a Nazimabad mosque on August 2. Chief Election Commissioner Justice (Retired) Hamid Ali Mirza re-fixed the polling date in view of a report of Sindh home secretary in which he stated that the MQM leaders and workers were in a state of grief after the

assassination of Dr Imran Farooq in London and they were observing 10 days of mourning. Though the Awami National Party (ANP) and the MQM — both coalition partners of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party in the Sindh government — are the main contestants, many believe it would be a one-sided show as the constituency which comprises areas of Orangi Town has remained a stronghold of the MQM. The Election Commission had accepted the nomination papers Saifuddin Khalid of the MQM, his covering candidates Abdul Khaliq and Maqbool Alam, ANP's Pir Riaz Gul. Zeenat Yasmin and Adnan Ali Khan are contesting the election as independent candidates. The PPP had not fielded any candidate, but independent candidate Mr Khan, who submitted his nomination papers from the constituency, is said to be a PPP activist. In general elections held in 2008, MQM's lawmaker Raza Haider won the seat by obtaining 79,634 votes, while the runner up, Syed Rais Ahmed Kazmi of the PPP, had bagged only 4,649 votes. In the 2002 general election, MQM's Abdul Qudoos returned successful from the constituency by securing 22,050 votes. The closest contestant, Laiq Khan of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal, had got 8,037 votes. An ANP spokesman has criticised the postponement of the by-election on PS-94 and termed it a "dictatorial decision by an elected government". "The Election Commission of Pakistan should review this decision," he said, adding: "We strongly condemn this decision, which has been taken at the behest of a particular party. Coalition parties were not taken onboard."

[Dawn – September 21, 2010]

43 MPs Running Away from Degree Verification

The number of fake degree holders in parliament is feared to grow much higher than what was expected earlier as the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which has already found degrees of 57 MPs as fake or invalid, has expressed doubts about 443 MPs who have not submitted their educational certificates despite repeated reminders. HEC Chairman Javed Leghari, when approached, told The News that he could not pass a verdict on the genuineness of the degrees of those 443 MPs, who despite repeated reminders are not providing their degrees/certificates to the authorities for verification. Although, Leghari was calculated in his response, the sources in the HEC said that all these cases of 443 MPs are doubtful unless they come up with their required certificates and degrees and get them verified from the HEC. "In this situation we fear that the number of fake degree holders may go much higher than what we had thought before," a senior HEC official said, indicating that the HEC was now considering to refer the whole case to the Election Commission of Pakistan. The source said that repeated reminders had been sent to the concerned MPs by the HEC, concerned universities and the Election Commission of Pakistan but a total of 443 members were neither responding nor submitting their certificates and degrees. The sources said that much doubts about the validity of such MPs' degrees had arisen after some of the MPs, whose graduation degrees were declared valid by the concerned universities, when insisted to produce their matric and FA certificates, produced fakes certificates. The source said that the number of fake or invalid degree holders had reached 57 with the latest additions of Makesh Kumar, Sindh Minister Excise; MNA Ameer Ali Shah; a Sindh MPA, Pitanbar Sehwan; Punjab MPA Dewan Ashiq Hussain; Javed Latif and Iftikhar Ahmad. The source said that the Higher Education Commission has so far verified educational degrees of 538 lawmakers. Among those not yet cleared include the son of the prime minister and Punjab MPA Abdul Qadir Gilani. The sources said that initially, the Punjab University had doubts about the equivalence of his O-level but later it was proven right. However, now the Punjab University authorities are inquiring another aspect of PM's MPA son's qualification. The sources said that the junior Gilani is reported to have been found amongst those over one dozen students who got graduation degrees from the Punjab University but were found to have taken their exam in the examination hall not allotted to them. These sources said that the Punjab University is presently assessing the fact if the junior Gilani was amongst those students who despite repeated summons issued by the concerned committee of the university never appeared before it but still got the degree.

[The News – September 30, 2010]

Political Parties' News

Musharraf Apologises for Mistakes, Launches Party

Former president Pervez Musharraf launched his 'All Pakistan Muslim League' party on October 1 and apologised for the mistakes he said he had committed towards the end of his nine-year rule. Gen (Retd) Musharraf told scores of cheering supporters, "I am aware of the fact that there were some decisions which I took which resulted in negative political repercussions, which had adverse effects on nation-building and national political events, and my popularity also, may I say, plummeted in that last year. I take this opportunity to sincerely apologise to the whole nation. Human beings make mistakes," But he vowed to galvanise people and fight a "jihad against poverty, hunger, illiteracy and backwardness". The programme, attended by a number of

politicians who were in his government, was compered by Advocate Naim Bukhari who had fired the first shot at the chief justice of the Supreme Court, a few days before Mr Musharraf launched his attack on the judiciary which marked the beginning of the end of his rule. The retired general unveiled the new political party and its manifesto at a gentlemen's club in Whitehall Palace. Tight security arrangements were made with all those entering the room being thoroughly checked.

[Dawn – October 2, 2010]

PPP's CEC, Federal Council are Just Forgotten

Majority of PPP's Central Executive Committee (CEC) members and that of the Federal Council does not remember the date when the last meeting of these consultative bodies was held. Some also grumbled over inordinate delay in convening of the meetings, saying that it had become all the more essential in the wake of devastating floods that senior party men should sit together and make coordinated efforts at party level to undertake the most urgent task of rehabilitation. Many members of the CEC and Federal Council, who talked to this scribe, also resented the dominating role of the so-called "core group", comprising some federal ministers, which is frequently consulted by party Co-Chairman, Asif Ali Zardari on vital issues, ignoring other members of party's central body.

Talking about the role CEC, one of PPP's founding members told that it was a policy making body, responsible for formulation of all party policies with the mandate to hold negotiations with other political parties, though within the goals and manifestoes of the party. It should meet periodically, a minimum of once every three months to perform its assigned role, he further told this scribe. According to him, the last meeting of the CEC took place in April this year. Many CEC members even don't remember the date and month when the last CEC meeting was held. "It was held long, long ago", was the answer by some members, who seemed visibly perturbed over inordinate delay in convening of the meeting. None of them, however, was ready to speak on record on the issue. It has been learnt that party's federal council, supposed to conduct political training of party workers through workshops and seminars, besides acting as the final decision making authority in case of any serious disagreement within the CEC, has also not met since long. It is supposed to meet at least twice a year. It's Secretary General, Khalid Ahmad Khan Kharral, was not available for comment when he was contacted on his cell phone. A CEC member and advisor to Prime Minister, Nawabzada Ghaza-nfar Gull, attributed the delay in convening of party's CEC meeting to National Assembly's budget session held in June, and to raging floods that hit the country in July this year. He said almost all CEC members were first busy in budget session and then they had hectic engagements in their respective constituencies in the flood-hit areas. Speaking on the issue, a PPP leader termed it an internal matter of the party. He believed the media had no right to poke its nose into such matters which purely fall in the domain of a political party. Without naming any political organisation, he said that some political parties had even dissolved their party cadres and all important party decisions were being taken by a few; but, strangely enough, this did not seem to be an issue with the media persons.

[The Nation – September 14, 2010]

Assessments/Surveys on Governance

Democracy Gets 45pc Marks in Mid-Term Assessment

A non-governmental organisation in its mid-term assessment of elected government working has given 45 per cent marks to the quality of democracy. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) released its assessment report titled: **Mid Term Assessment of the Quality of Democracy in Pakistan** on the International Day of Democracy at a news conference held on the conclusion of a workshop.

PILDAT said the assessment report was prepared by a 24-member Democracy Assessment Group (DAG).The framework for the assessment was based on the experience of democracies around the world that was created by Democratic Audit, UK. Besides democracy, **State-Citizen and Popular Representation in Pakistan won 53 per cent marks while Citizenship Law and Rights Relationship got 46 per cent marks. The representatives of the media received the highest score of 67 per cent while the effectiveness of civilian control over the armed forces got the lowest score of 26 per cent in this overall assessment.**

The assessment was released in the background of the debate whether military takeover is imminent in Pakistan, the subject of talkathons and in fact of media questions put to the Prime Minister recently. Nonetheless, the question came back at the Pildat news conference also. Former Senator Hasil Bizenjo, answered it by saying 'no one could prevent martial law if 'they' want to take over.' Senator Jabbar, who chaired the news conference answered, 'the present assessment had pin-pointed the danger to the state.' As to the

question whether the passage of the 18th amendment has provided a safeguard against military putsch, former Senator Javed Jabbar said democracy was the pillar on which the state of Pakistan was built, and DAG regard the passage of 1973 Constitution as a phenomenon achievement within a civilian set-up and civilian democratic process.

[Dawn – September 16, 2010]

Economic Governance

Facts & Figures on Pakistan's Economy

Country's Debt Servicing Increases 43% in 5 Years

Dependency on foreign loan/assistance gradually increased the debt servicing by 43 percent in the last five years to \$3.112 billion in 2009-10, which was \$2.162 billion in 2005-06, it is learnt. Total external debt increased from \$37.24 billion as on June 30 2006 to \$55.62 billion on 30th June 2010, showing an increase of 49 percent. The debt servicing was on persistent rise with increase in total amount of foreign debt and liabilities. During the year 2005-06, the government paid \$2.162 billion as debt servicing – comprising \$1.446 billion as principal amount and \$716.45 million as interest on the total debt. Total debt servicing for the year 2006-07 fell to \$2.025 billion and the principal amount paid was \$1.203 billion and \$822.09 million interest on the total debt and liabilities. However, for the year 2007-08, the debt servicing rose to \$2.116 billion, which consisted of \$1.133 billion as principal amount and \$982.65 million as interest on it. During the fiscal year 2008-09, there was a big jump in debt servicing to \$3.439 billion, showing over 62 percent increase over the last year debt service payment. Further classification of the total payment consists of \$2.566 billion as principal amount payment and \$872.92 million as interest on the total debt.

In the last fiscal year 2009-10, the government spent \$3.112 billion on debt servicing, which consists of \$2.337 billion as payment in principal amount and \$775.45 as interest over total debt of the country. By analysing the overall trend of debt servicing, there was an upward trend and it might further increase in the years to come if the government failed to renegotiate with donors and international financial institutions. In order to reduce the country's debt burden, the government has several options including further concession borrowing, rescheduling and write-off from creditors, fiscal consolidations, pre-payment of expensive debts and fiscal responsibility law. The "rescheduled loans" refer to loans that have been restructured and renegotiated between authorised institution and borrowers because of deterioration in the financial position of the borrower or of the inability of borrower to meet the original repayment schedule.

From 2002 to 2004, Pakistan remained successful in write-off loans from four countries worth \$1.561 billion. The US government was on top, which wrote off \$1.495 billion, followed by UK worth \$33.33 million, Denmark \$18.44 million and Netherlands \$14.43 million. Total foreign debt and liabilities \$55.62 billion are included as \$23.276 billion from multilateral sources, and \$664 million from other sources. Total loans from bilateral bases reached \$16.470 billion on June 2010. The bilateral external debt composed of two sources-Paris Club Countries (\$13.959 billion) and Non-Paris Club Countries (\$2.511 billion) by end of June 2010. Total liabilities on issuing different bonds etc reached \$1.614 billion by the end of the previous fiscal year. The sources further said that the foreign debt and liabilities of the commercial banks reached \$275 million while Defence related external debt and liabilities remained \$167 million by the end of June 2010. Total short-term debt stood at \$793 million by the end of June 2010. Total banking sector's debt of the country reached \$193 million till end June 2010, which consists of long-term \$118 million and short-term \$75 million. Total private sector debt reached \$3.168 billion till June 2010, the sources maintained. IMF debt and liabilities reached \$8.077 billion by the end of June 2010. Total liabilities of the government over foreign currency bonds (NHA/NC) and deposits with SBP reached \$1.122 billion by June 30 2010, they concluded.

[Daily Times – September 24, 2010]

Hafeez Hints at Higher Reformed GST Rate

Federal Finance Minister Dr Hafeez Shaikh hinted at keeping reformed General Sales Tax (GST) rate higher for generating additional resources for flood victims and said the base reform GST rate would remain at 15%, however, due to the 'flood needs' the reform GST rate could be kept higher for some time. The Minister, however, categorically said the federal government would not fix the Income Tax Surcharge rate at 10% for revenue generation for the flood victims, saying this rate is much higher and final rate has to be much lower than

10%. The five governments, federal and four provincial government have agreed on the enforcement of GST and decisions regarding GST rate and its legislation would be taken during the next two days at a relevant forum, he added. He said we are heading towards significant GST reforms including withdrawal of GST exemptions and it would definitely have a big impact. When asked about the rate of GST to stay at the existing level of 17%, the Minister was of the view that base GST rate would remain at 15%, however, due to the 'floods needs' it could be kept higher for some time. He said "Bill" to be presented in the parliament for the enforcement of GST and timing would be decided in a day or two. The decisions that have been taken would need to be drafted in a legislation shape and then a bill would be moved in the parliament. "We are heading towards final decisions and these decisions will be taken in the next two days, we have internal needs as well as international commitments", he added. Again accusing strong lobbies, the minister said that despite the fact that people having big Jagirs (lands) and bungalows worth over 40 million are not willing to pay tax. Replying to a question on the proposed 10% Income Tax Surcharge, the Minister said 10% rate is much higher and the government would take a final decision on this rate, which is expected to be much lower than 10%. He however said the government would impose this surcharge in such a (transparent) manner that only rich will come under this levy. This would be a one-time tax, however, decision on its continuation for 9 months, one year and one and a half year would be taken at highest level. The Minister categorically said the government would not impose flood tax at import stage, income and sales altogether and only one option would finally be decided for mobilisation of additional resources for the victims of floods.

[Daily Times – September 29, 2010]

PSDP may be Cut by 30% to 50%: NA Informed

The National Assembly was informed that the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) might be cut by 30 percent to 50 percent in view of the recent floods to divert resources for rehabilitation and reconstruction of affected areas. Economic Affairs and Statistics Minister Hina Rabbani Khar told the House that total external debt had risen to \$55 billion and was well within the limits of the Fiscal Limitation Act. "I cannot give the exact figure about the cut in the PSDP. But, it may be between 30 percent to 50 percent. We are reprioritising and if we shall not do it, we shall be the one to lose," she said replying to a question during the Question Hour. She said, "Restructuring is more important. We shall have to go for major orientation. However, no new tax shall be imposed without taking this House into confidence though the GST shall be revised from October 1." The austerity plan approved by the Cabinet is under consideration, she added, adding that two meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Restructuring have been convened and PEPCO will be the first for restructuring. She admitted a delay in implementation of the decision for restructuring and said it was due to certain issues with the PSEs of certain institutions ranging from tens of billions to hundreds of billions. To another question, she said the Planning Commission would not be executing any projects instead of those already under implementation, while the matter regarding cutting the size of the Cabinet was with the Implementation Committee.

[Daily Times – September 25, 2010]

Donors' Assistance and Pakistan's Economy

IMF Sets Four Criteria for \$2.6bn Loan Tranches

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has set four pre-conditions for continuing with Pakistan's \$11.3 billion standby arrangement (SBA) and withheld the release of two remaining tranches of \$2.6 billion till the government meets the criteria. The IMF's review, which was due in June this year, should have been followed by the release of a \$1.3 billion tranche in July. The government did not meet the performance criteria set for the quarter (April-June 2010) and the review had to be delayed. It finally took place in Washington last month. Under the original plan, the entire \$11.3 billion loan under the SBA should have been completed before the end of this year. However, non-fulfilment of the performance criteria by the government on account of continuous breach of fiscal deficit limits for three quarters, non-implementation of value-added/reformed general sales tax with effect from July 1 and slower progress on the energy sector reforms has led to the stoppage of two tranches of \$2.6 billion. Informed sources told that during the recent talks in Washington, the IMF authorities had taken a very strong position and informed Pakistani officials that the programme would continue only after key measures agreed under the programme were adhered to. The IMF has so far released \$8.7 billion out of the \$11.3 billion package. In view of special circumstances arising out of the devastation caused by floods, the IMF, however, asked Pakistan to avail \$450 million reserved for natural emergencies.

An official said Pakistan could have secured the emergency support through a simple letter, instead of spending a lot of time, energy and resources in the United States. He said the IMF had made it very clear that further talks on macroeconomic review and the release of remaining \$2.6 billion could be held only after the government

introduced reformed GST or VAT next month, as announced earlier. Pakistani officials were also told that the IMF executive board would not be interested in considering Pakistan's request for more funds unless it made tangible progress on power sector reforms, introduced changes in the SBP Act to give it more autonomy and resolved the emergence of a fresh circular debt arising out of commodity operations. The sources said the provinces and the Trading Corporation of Pakistan had contributed heavily to the creation of about Rs400 billion of circular debt in commodity operations, raising fears that this might lead to a crisis-like situation for banks because of flood-related defaults. A 17-member Pakistani delegation stayed in the United States for more than 10 days for talks with the IMF on a belated macroeconomic review. A few members of the delegation have stayed back after completion of the official visit to celebrate Eid with their families.

[Dawn – September 8, 2010]

WB Advises Higher Flat GST Rate

While the business community has strongly opposed ideas of one-time flood surcharge and property tax etc, the World Bank has recommended a higher flat rate of GST reform earlier known as Value Added Tax (VAT). According to well-placed sources, a World Bank mission that followed Vice President Isabel Guerrero's visit last week, has strongly recommended during its day-one meetings with authorities in Islamabad that flat rate of GST reform should be at least a couple of percentiles higher than the earlier target of 15 per cent. Pakistan has committed with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to impose a GST reform earlier known as VAT with a flat rate of 15 per cent from October 1 by all means. Failure to fulfil this commitment besides putting the state-owned power sector in order could cost the country derailment of its programmes with the Bretton Woods institutions," a senior government official observed requesting anonymity. However, most of the top officials consider it difficult to impose a higher rate of the tax that was already not welcomed by sections of the society including the business community. "Since the government has committed to bring the higher rates of the General Sales Tax (GST) down to the flat 15 per cent across the board for withdrawal of exemptions and for extending its net to the services sector, it would be hard to keep the rate higher," the sources said.

According to the sources, the government functionaries appear to have been lured by the idea of imposing a one-time 10 per cent flood surcharge on the existing tax liability (that is income tax) to generate additional resources of Rs 40 to Rs 50 billion. At the same time they find the President's idea of one-time flood tax on houses that is basically a property tax as hardly practicable. So far it is only Sindh province that seemed to be buying the idea of President Asif Ali Zardari to impose property tax in big cities. But their too key coalition partner in Sindh government, MQM, would not be easily coming along," the sources opined. "No other province has so far expressed unequivocal willingness to impose such a property tax," the sources added. According to the sources, these measures would clear out in the revised budget in the backdrop of the unprecedented floods that have jolted the already fragile economy in addition to impacting over 20 million people across the country. The government would take the relevant Parliamentary Committees in confidence over the revised budget. The Finance Ministry is most likely to finalise this revised budget before the end of this month. However, the imposition of VAT or GST reform at a flat rate of at least 15 per cent from October 1 is almost written on the wall as the government has time and again given this commitment to the IMF and the World Bank. "Even if its flat rate could not be increased to 16 or 17 per cent as recommended by the World Bank, it has to be imposed from October 1 as it has become inevitable in the post-floods state of economy," the sources said. The sources were of the view that the government might have to go for an Ordinance until the Parliament enacts the law pending with it for imposition of GST reform for meeting the deadline of October 1 that has become all the more necessary after floods.

[The Nation – September 15, 2010]

WB asks Pakistan to Prove ability to Manage Foreign Aid

Foreign Minister Qureshi responded to Zoellick's call for Pakistan to take the lead in its emergency response plan, saying that every dollar it receives "will be utilised in the most efficient manner ... and in the most transparent manner." He reassured donor countries that their money will be not be wasted, and also stressed that the country would use its own resources to better the lives of flood victims. "I want to assure the international community that every dollar being contributed will be well spent in a transparent manner and we have today in place an oversight mechanism, which is comprising of people with a lot of eminence and integrity," Qureshi said. "We, the people of Pakistan, intend to mobilise our national resources to overcome this challenge," he added. "We cannot expect the world to foot the entire bill. We don't expect that." The reluctance of the international community to respond to the initial appeal of \$459 million made by the UN has been attributed to the concerns that the government have about misuse of the aid. That appeals is still under-funded.

[The Nation – September 21, 2010]

Asian Bank Expands Trade Finance Programme for Pakistan by \$500 million

According to a statement, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has expanded its Trade Finance Programme (TFP) in Pakistan by an additional amount of \$500 million. The Bank would provide around \$1.5-2 billion of trade finance to help the country cope with the immediate needs arising out of the recent devastating floods, as well as longer-term reconstruction requirements, it said. ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda announced this additional support for Pakistan at the high-level ministerial meeting on the flood emergency in Pakistan, held on Sunday at the United Nations building in New York. The trade finance programme provides loans and guarantees through, and in conjunction with, international and the ADB's developing member country banks to support trade transactions in developing countries. By attracting private sector financing and because the typically short-term trade finance can roll over, the impact of the additional funding is multiplied. In 2009, the programme's exposure of \$249 million to Pakistan banks supported \$983 million in trade, the statement said. "The widespread flooding has exacted a heavy toll on the people of Pakistan. They will need medicines and foodstuff straight away and, later on, capital equipment to get the economy humming again," said Kuroda. "The expansion of the trade finance programme in Pakistan will help ensure there are no financial bottlenecks when companies approach their banks to help import what they need to help Pakistan recover and rebuild," the statement said while quoting Kuroda.

The floods along the length of the River Indus have affected 20 million people since late July. Many lives have been lost and millions have been displaced. Crops and livestock have been washed away, raising the threat of food shortages in the future, while physical infrastructure such as roads, power lines, houses, hospitals and schools have been shattered. The new flood relief facility for Pakistan will be split between support for the import of basic commodities, including food and medicine and support for imports of capital equipment for agriculture and infrastructure reconstruction, the ADB said.

As of July, the trade finance programme had supported \$4.3 billion of trade transactions in Asia's most challenging markets, including throughout the recent global financial crisis when trade finance became harder to find. Around 190 banks are part of the programme, including 10 Pakistani banks. More Pakistani banks are expected to start using the programme soon. The ADB had already announced that it will extend Pakistan \$2 billion to help with the rehabilitation and reconstruction work, as well as \$3 million from its Asia-Pacific Disaster Response Fund for immediate emergency assistance. Currently, the bank is also co-leading a damage and needs assessment with the World Bank to examine what is needed to ensure Pakistan recovers.

[Pak Tribune – September 21, 2010]

All Kerry-Lugar Aid to be Monitored by Transparency International

In what would come as a major shock for the PPP government, the entire Kerry-Lugar Bill aid amounting to \$7.5 billion has been put under a strict monitoring regime to be supervised by Transparency International, the watchdog organization which has already pointed out many corruption scandals in Pakistan. The bombshell came in the shape of a formal agreement signed between the USAID and Transparency International, Pakistan, on Wednesday at Islamabad called the "Anti-Fraud Hotline" Project. A press release issued by TIP said: "The objective of the project is to ensure transparency and prevention of corruption in the utilization of \$7.5 billion grant to be provided to Pakistan under the Kerry-Lugar Bill." To follow up the landmark agreement with the USAID, Transparency International is organizing a high profile seminar in Islamabad on Thursday in which international TI speakers, US officials and Finance Minister Hafeez Shaikh will address the issue of transparency in utilization of aid to Pakistan in general and for flood relief in particular. The World Bank and UN agencies have also demanded a transparent structure to use whatever international aid flows to Pakistan.

Transparency International Pakistan's role after its agreement with the USAID will be to register complaints, monitoring under Public Procurement Rules 2004, and Office of Inspector General USAID (OIG) will be conducting the investigations and take further action, the official announcement said. "This will be achieved by ensuring that all procurements of the USAID funds are made under the Pakistan Public Procurement Rules 2004 by all government and non-government organizations (NGOs)," the announcement said. It said: "Citizens and civil society organizations will be provided with awareness through print and electronic media, so as to enable them to report corruption that they may witness in USAID funded projects." An Anti-Fraud Hotline will be established by TI, Pakistan, where corruption related complaints in the USAID funded projects can be registered through the web (internet), email, fax, telephone or by post.

[Pak Tribune – September 23, 2010]

BISP Updates

3m Families Getting BISP Cash Grant

Around three million poor families, enrolled under Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) so far, are getting cash grant across the country after effective and transparent identification. At the initial stage, 2.4 million beneficiaries were registered through parliamentarians. However, the forms distribution through parliamentarians was stopped to ensure transparency and poverty survey was initiated in 16 districts on pilot basis under which 0.7 million families were found eligible for receiving cash grant, an official of BISP told.. The 'Poverty Scorecard' of international standard is being used to ascertain the number of poor families across the country, the official said. In compliance with Aghaz-e-Haqooq-Balochistan, the poverty survey has been completed in the province and the data entry of deserving families is under process through NADRA. The nationwide poverty survey was initiated recently by Chairperson BISP, Farzana Raja by completing a survey form of a poor family after a random "knock at door" survey in a locality of Faisalabad. The scope of the programme has been expanded with the enrolment of recent devastating flood victims and would raise the number of registered families with BISP up to seven million and more than 35 million individuals. The new deserving families would be included in the programme as beneficiary as soon as poverty survey was completed in respected districts. The survey teams of the BISP have already been sent to Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, AJK and Gilgit- Baltistan to complete countrywide poverty survey

[The News – September 27, 2010]

Local Governance

LG Poll Put-Off Indefinitely in Sindh

Local government elections in Sindh stood postponed for an indefinite period after the provincial assembly unanimously passed into law the Sindh Local Government (Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2010. The objects and reasons of the bill state that it is impossible to hold the local government elections in accordance with the timeframe provided in Section 179-A of the SLGO, 2001 in view of the unprecedented floods in the country, including Sindh. Sindh Law Minister Ayaz Soomro, who moved a motion for dispensing with the rules 85, 86 and 87 to take up the bill for immediate consideration, said that an unprecedented devastation was caused by the heavy floods in the province. He said that while hundreds of villages were destroyed rendering millions of people homeless and displaced, floodwater had not receded in many areas after the passage of six to seven weeks. The internally-displaced persons were still staying in camps because the road infrastructure had been destroyed by the floods, he added. Holding of local government elections were not possible in this situation, he said, adding that the bill was being presented in the house so that the elections remained postponed till the situation permitted. He assured the house that the elections would be held as soon as the situation would become conducive.

[Dawn – September 29, 2010]

Local Govts to Stay for Another Year in Punjab

The present Local Government system, headed by administrators, is going to stay for another year, as Punjab government has decided to amend Punjab Local Government Ordinance, 2010 during upcoming session of the Punjab Assembly, due on October 5, to provide legal cover to the desired extension. The new amendment will be made in Section 179 of the Ordinance to authorise the government to continue with the existing arrangement for at least one year without holding fresh elections. Punjab Law Minister, Rana Sanaulah confirmed the development, saying that in the wake of recent devastating floods, the environment had not been conducive to holding of local elections for at least one year. He said government was going to amend relevant section of the Local Government Ordinance to delay the polls for the said period. Replying to a question, he disagreed with the contention of Federal Law Minister Dr. Babar Awan that appointment of administrators in Punjab had become illegal after government failed to fulfil the legal requirement of announcing precise date for the new elections. Rana Sanaulah said that as per provisions of the Punjab Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance, 2010, passed by the Assembly in February this year, the Punjab government had been authorised to dissolve the Local Councils and appoint administrators in place of Nazims, who would continue till election of their successors. He said there was no need to provide any legal cover to the administrators as desired by Babar Awan, as they had been appointed for unspecified tenure till fresh polls were held and they were replaced by elected persons.

[The Nation – September 28, 2010]

LG Law: PML-N Submits Itself to PA Sovereignty

Though the PML-N is indecisive on two major points of new local body system vis-à-vis modes of election of public representatives and chairpersons of local councils, it has decided to put the draft bill before the lawmakers in the Punjab Assembly session likely to start by September end or early October to take an appropriate decision. The party leading the coalition government in the largest Punjab province is divided on whether to hold the local body polls on a party or non-party basis and whether local councils' chairpersons be elected directly or indirectly. The division in the PML-N on the two issues is on urban-rural lines. Those belonging to urban centres are in favour of holding the polls on a party basis while those from the rural areas are supporting non-party option. A similar split is also present on mode of election of councils' chairpersons. Provincial law minister Rana Sanaullah Khan says that as the party is almost equally divided on both the issues, it has decided to take the issue to the sovereign house. According to him, a policy on the two subjects will be formulated in the standing committee to which the house will refer the bill. "The two issues will be left open for a final decision by the standing committee." The committee, he says, will invite all stakeholders, including chief of the now defunct National Reconstruction Bureau, Daniyal Aziz, for a thorough discussion on the bill and take input regarding the new local body system. To a question, he says the framework for new local government system, already made public, is being made the basis for drafting the new local body bill. To another question, he says, Punjab is also interested in restoring the district magistracy and the office of deputy commissioner like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa did recently. For the purpose, he says, the federal government will be approached as it requires amendments in the Criminal Procedure Code, a federal law. Local governments formed as third tier of governance under the devolution plan given by former army ruler Pervez Musharraf were dissolved in August 2009 after completing their second four-year term but their nazims (administrative heads) worked until Feb 5 in Punjab when the provincial government amended their governing law to replace them with bureaucrat-administrators. It was promised to hold new LG polls within 180 days and the deadline lapsed on August 5. Rana Sana says the Punjab government is not at fault in failing to meet the deadline after the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment by the parliament. He argues that the amended Constitution authorised the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold the local body polls, taking away the powers from the provincial local election authority to do the job. "Now it is up to the ECP to give a schedule for the local polls," he vehemently maintains.

[Dawn – September 24, 2010]

Sherry Supports Revival of Nazims

Participants at a stakeholder dialogue organised by the Jinnah Institute Pakistan (JIP) highlighted critical deficits in coordination in inter-agency relief efforts. The participants identified many gaps in the role of UNOCHA, the government and the local NGOs in coordinating flood relief with each other. They also urged the government to enhance transparency of relief efforts and to boost the capacity of institutions such as the NDMA, so it can deliver on critical relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Some delegates urged caution in asking for international assistance if all such multilateral relief was in the form of loans. They also regretted the slow international response to Pakistan's flood appeal, and were unanimous in seeking higher literacy and awareness of local needs by UN and other international relief agencies in the field. These observations were made at a stakeholder consultation in Islamabad by the JIP at a local hotel. Participants from a cross-section of NGOs working on various aspects of flood relief, reconstruction and assessment were invited to share experiences in the field. Representatives from RSPN, Aurat Foundation, NDMA, Heartfile, IFRC, WAF, UNICEF, Sungi, Shirkat Gah, BRAC, UNOCHA and Mercy Corps comprised the round-table chaired by Sherry Rehman, President of the JIP. While addressing, **Sherry Rehman called for reviving local government structures, among other reform efforts in order to service delivery and increase state response to local needs much faster.** She also said that the institute would bring together multiple stakeholders, experts and government representatives on the 23rd September in a conference in Islamabad to organise a first public attempt by a local independent organisation to map the scale of the disaster and to discuss challenges ahead.

[The News – September 17, 2010]

Regional Politics & Election Watch

Afghan Parliamentary Elections

First Partial Afghan Poll Results Released

Afghan officials released the first partial results from parliamentary elections amid mounting allegations of fraud in a poll seen as a test of the Afghan government's commitment to rooting out corruption. This year's elections have about 2,500 candidates vying for 249 parliamentary seats. Tallies have been dribbling into a central tabulation center in the capital and officials said that they had finished with about 67 percent of the ballots from one province — relatively peaceful Panjshir.

There are two seats allocated to Panjshir — one for a man and one for a woman — and the results give large leads to Zahir Sadat and Rahillah Salim. Both candidates are incumbents: Salim is a judge and Sadat is a doctor who runs a private clinic in Kabul. Full preliminary results are expected in early October, but final tallies won't be announced until the end of October at the earliest, because of the time needed to investigate fraud charges. With so many candidates running, there is a large pool of people likely to file complaints. Election day was marred by rocket attacks and bombings at polling stations in volatile areas. At least 21 civilians and nine police officers were killed during the voting, according to the election commission and the Interior Ministry.

Observers complained that many anti-fraud measures did not work. Some people were able to wash off supposedly indelible ink used to mark fingers and therefore prevent multiple voting, while in some areas poll workers let people use fake registration cards and allowed children to vote, according to the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan, the main independent Afghan observer group. Election Commission Chairman Fazel Ahmad Manawi said election officials have been quarantining — or removing from the count — any suspicious ballot tallies, but declined to say how many ballots have been held out so far.

Observers noted nearly empty polling stations in insecure areas. Some of the safer voting sites in large cities were so clogged with voters that they ran out of ballots. About 4.3 million ballots were cast in Saturday's vote, or 25 percent of the country's 17 million registered voters. Nearly 6 million ballots were cast in last year's presidential vote, though many of those were thrown out as fraudulent. Afghan officials originally planned enough polling sites to accommodate 12 million voters, but then cut those back multiple times because of security concerns, saying just before the poll they could accommodate 11.4 million voters. Taliban attacks then kept even more voting sites closed on election day, according to the commission.

[AP – September 23, 2010]

Afghan Poll Body Orders Vote Recounts in 7 Provinces

Afghanistan's election body has ordered a partial recount of votes from seven of the country's 34 provinces on suspicion of fraud, potentially delaying the results of a parliamentary poll further, an official said. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) may also push for the recount of ballots in other provinces after the September 18 ballot, which was hit by widespread allegations of fraud. "We have obtained evidences which show that the results were suspicious and ordered a recount," Zekriya Barakzai, a commissioner for the government-appointed IEC, said. Barakzai said the commission had also declared invalid all votes cast in five polling stations in eastern Khost province. The election passed off relatively smoothly despite a Taliban threat to disrupt the poll, although hundreds of polling centers were unable to open because of poor security and thousands of complaints have been lodged.

Results of the election are being closely watched in Washington ahead of U.S. President Barack Obama's planned war strategy review in December, which is expected to examine the pace and scale of U.S. troop withdrawals after nine years of war. A flawed poll could also weigh on Obama when his administration faces mid-term Congressional elections in November amid sagging public support for the war, with violence at its worst since the Taliban were ousted in 2001.

President Hamid Karzai's credibility with ordinary Afghans and his Western backers is also at stake, with the memory of his fraud-riddled 2009 re-election still fresh and allegations of graft in his government creating tension at home and abroad. Barakzai said an investigation had been launched to determine who was involved

in the possible vote fraud in the seven provinces -- Kunduz, Balkh, Takhar, Badakhshan and Parwan provinces in the north and northeast, Logar to the south of Kabul and Khost in the east. The final results, originally set to be declared on October 30, may face more delays because of the recount, Barakzai said.

[Reuters – September 27, 2010]

Widespread Fraud Seen in Latest Afghan Elections

Evidence is mounting that fraud in parliamentary election was so widespread that it could affect the results in a third of provinces, calling into question the credibility of a vote that was an important test of the American and Afghan effort to build a stable and legitimate government, reports The New York Times. The complaints to provincial election commissions have so far included video clips showing ballot stuffing; the strong-arming of election officials by candidates' agents; and even the handcuffing and detention of election workers. In some places, election officials themselves are alleged to have carried out the fraud; in others, government employees did, witnesses said. One video showed election officials and a candidate's representatives haggling over the price of votes. Many of the complaints have come from candidates and election officials, but were supported by Afghan and international election observers and diplomats. The fraud appeared to cut both for and against the government of President Hamid Karzai, much of it benefiting sometimes unsavoury local power brokers. But in the important southern province of Kandahar, where election officials threw out 76 percent of the ballots in last year's badly tainted presidential election, candidates accused the president's influential half brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, of drawing up a list of winners even before the Sept. 18 election for Parliament was carried out. "From an overall democracy-building perspective it does not look rosy," said one diplomat who asked not to be identified because he was not authorised to speak to the news media. The widespread tampering and bare-knuckle tactics of some candidates raised serious questions about the effort to build a credible government that can draw the support of Afghans and the Obama administration and its NATO partners as they re-evaluate their commitment to the war. American and international diplomats kept their distance from the tide of candidate complaints this week, and NATO and American Embassy officials said little other than that the election was an Afghan process and that it was the Afghans who were responsible for its outcome. daily times monitor

[Daily Times – September 26, 2010]

Afghan Election Commission Puts Turnout at 47 percent

Afghanistan's election authority put turnout in the country's parliamentary election at 47 percent based on the number of eligible voters in areas where polling centres opened. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has said that more than 1,300 polling centres failed to open Saturday because security could not be guaranteed following Taliban threats to disrupt the election. "The updated figure of voters who cast a ballot is 4,332,871," the IEC said.

[AFP – September 22, 2010]

India's Domestic Policies

India Issuing ID numbers to its 1.2bn People

India started the massive task of issuing unique identification numbers to its 1.2 billion people, many of whom don't have documents establishing their Indian identity. Ten people from India's remote tribal areas received the first identification numbers from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and governing Congress party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi in Nandurbar in western Maharashtra state. Manmohan said that impoverished people were often unable to open bank accounts or receive benefits from government welfare programmes without any proof of identity. Rich Indians generally possess passports, driver's licenses or credit cards that establish who they are. But the poor often are forced to rely on electricity bills, ration cards, voting cards or letters from local officials. Last year, the government set up the Unique Identification Authority of India, headed by Nandan Nelkani, a founder of Infosys Technologies Ltd, India's second-largest outsourcing company. The authority is creating a central database of names and will use biometrics — probably some combination of fingerprints and facial identification — to ensure that every Indian is assigned one and only one number. It has not said how long it might take to complete the task. The agency's initial budget is 1.2 billion rupees (\$24.6 million), but the total cost is expected to be far higher. The government expects to give a UID number to every Indian citizen within four years. Birth registration is not universal and it is hoped that the database will give an accurate picture of Indian society. Under the scheme, all Indians will be issued a 12-digit ID number which they will use to receive welfare handouts, to apply for other documents like passports and even to open bank accounts. The government hopes this will prevent corrupt officials from faking the names of people seeking welfare benefits or access to education - potentially saving billions of dollars. Critics, however, complain that the project itself will cost billions

of dollars and are also worried about the authorities collecting so much personal information. Others say there is no guarantee that the scheme really will make much of a difference to India's corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy.

[Daily Times – September 30, 2010]

Political Situation in Nepal

Nepal Fails in Eighth Attempt to Elect New Premier

Nepal's Maoist party called for the formation of a new power-sharing government after parliament failed for the eighth time to elect a new Prime Minister. The former rebels abstained from 26 September vote, the latest in a series of attempts to elect a new leader for the troubled country, which has been without a government for almost three months. Their candidate, party chairman Pushpa Kama Dahal, earlier withdrew from the running to be prime minister to pave the way for fresh talks on forming a national consensus government. Nepal has been without a government since June 30, when former prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal stood down under intense pressure from the Maoists. Since then, the parties have been unable to agree on the shape of the new administration and a series of votes in the 601-member parliament have proved inconclusive, with none of the candidates securing an overall majority. "It is clear that we cannot elect a new prime minister in this way. We should now look to form a national unity government," said Maoist vice chairman Baburam Bhattarai after the vote. The Maoists, who fought a decade-long civil war against the state before transforming themselves into a political party and winning elections in 2008, hold the largest number of seats in parliament, but not enough to govern alone. Dahal, a former warlord who still goes by his nom de guerre, Prachanda ("the fierce one"), was the front-runner in earlier votes, but failed to win the simple majority he needed to form a new government. His only rival, Ram Chandra Poudel, chairman of the second-largest party in parliament, the centrist Nepali Congress, stood uncontested on Sunday but took only 116 votes.

The next vote is due to be held on September 30.

[AFP – September 26, 2010]

Koirala Elected Nepali Congress President

The Nepali Congress, the oldest political party of the country, elected Sushil Koirala, who took charge as acting president of the party after the death of his uncle Girija Prasad Koirala in March, as its new President. Koirala is the sixth president of the Nepali Congress, the second largest party in parliament after Maoists. Koirala secured 1652 votes of the over 3000 polled while his closest contender former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba got 1317 votes. The third candidate Bhim Bahadur Tamang got only 78 votes. But hours after the election result was announced, Koirala complained of chest pain and had to be admitted to the TU Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu.

[Daily Times – September 23, 2010]

Myanmar's Polls

Myanmar Democracy Party Urges Vote Participation

The leader of a Myanmar democracy party whose participation in upcoming elections put it at odds with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said it would be a "political crime" to disrupt the vote. Myanmar "has passed the worse political era," said Khin Maung Swe of the National Democratic Force (NDF), created by former members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). To move forward, "political parties and politicians have a duty to show the way," he said at the opening of a new regional office in Yangon. The NLD decided to boycott the upcoming polls, saying the rules were unfair, and has subsequently been dissolved by the ruling generals. Suu Kyi's backing of a boycott has led to rift within the opposition between those who support her defiant stance and others who see the vote as the only hope for progress in the autocratic nation. One NDF member said Suu Kyi's supporters have visited areas where the breakaway party is campaigning to urge people not to give it their support. The NLD won the last election in 1990 by a landslide but was never allowed to take office. Suu Kyi has spent most of the past 20 years in detention and is currently under house arrest at her lakeside mansion. The NLD marked the 22nd anniversary of the party's founding on Monday, watched by plain clothes police. Because it is no longer officially recognised by the junta, the gathering of about 200 people was held at vice-chairman Tin Oo's house – unlike in the past when they met at the party headquarters.

[Daily Times – September 28, 2010]

Official Myanmar Election Campaign Begins

Campaigning has begun in Myanmar for November elections, with state television and radio broadcasting the first officially sanctioned party announcements. The ruling junta plans to hold general elections on Nov. 7, the first in 20 years. Detained Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory in the 1990 polls, but was not allowed to take power by the military. It decided to boycott this year's elections, charging that the process is unfair and undemocratic. The government announced last week that the 37 political parties contesting the elections will each be allowed 15 minutes of airtime to describe their party platforms. Parties have to apply for permission seven days ahead of time and submit the texts of their party policies for approval by the Election Commission.

During the National Unity Party's 15-minute broadcast, joint secretary Khin Maung Gyi presented its policies and urged people to "correctly choose reliable candidates." He said the party would ensure basic human rights such as freedom of expression, assembly and religion within the framework of the constitution and would combat bribery and corruption. The party is not especially popular because of its association with the late dictator. However, it is well funded, and with nearly 990 candidates running, it is the only party that can come close to fielding the same number as the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, which has more than 1,100 candidates. Separately, Myanmar's military regime on Saturday hailed the capture of a rare white elephant as a sign of a successful 'democratic transition' in the upcoming controversial elections. Historically considered to herald good fortune, the elephant was caught on Thursday in western Rakhine state - the fifth found since 2001 and a source of "national pride," the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper said. Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962 and the November polls - the first in two decades - have been derided internationally as a sham, designed to shore up the regime's power under a civilian guise. The elephant's capture came three years after a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests led by Buddhist monks, in which at least 31 people were killed and hundreds of activists detained. The newspaper said the elephant signalled that people would "enjoy peace and stability and prosperity in the time of a new government like in the time of existing government".

[Daily Times – September 26, 2010]

Suu Kyi's Party Warned Over Polls Criticism

Myanmar's state-controlled media warned pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's disbanded party that criticism of controversial upcoming elections could lead to long jail terms. A commentary in the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said criticizing the Election Commission for having dissolved the party was "an irresponsible act and could cause misunderstanding among the public." The commission is overseeing Nov. 7 general elections, the first in the military-ruled country in 20 years. Under new election laws, any party that does not register for the balloting is automatically dissolved. The laws also prohibit Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, from running or even remaining a member of her own party. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy has decided to boycott the elections, calling them undemocratic and unfair. The NLD overwhelmingly won the last elections in 1990, but the military refused to relinquish power. The commentary did not specifically name the NLD, but said "an old party that has been dissolved automatically in according with the existing law is inciting the people to boycott the elections." It warned that a 1996 law provides for five to 20 years in prison for anyone who makes statements that "undermine the stability of the state, community peace and tranquility and prevalence of law and order." ap

[AP – September 19, 2010]