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Gender

Women & Politics

Lakki Women Barred from Voting

According to a report by Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), thousands of women were disenfranchised while mostly men in Lakki Marwat exercised their right of vote in PF-75 by-election on February 10. The by-election was characterised by “low turnout, procedural irregularities and illegal campaigning and canvassing around polling stations.

FAFEN observers visited more than 50 of 69 male, female and combined polling stations in the constituency. According to the findings, the turnout in the constituency remained between 25 and 30 percent, and very negligible women voters turned up at female polling stations. It was observed that many of the combined polling stations even did not have female booths. The reasons for low female turnout were restrictions on women mobility and local agreements among contesting parties and candidates on barring women from voting. Furthermore, the observers reported instances of “irregularities” which included presence of unauthorised persons inside polling stations, interference of polling agents in the voting process, irregular application of indelible ink on voters’ thumb, canvassing outside polling stations, presence of party symbols or materials inside and outside polling stations, polling officials going behind secrecy screens with voters.

[Dawn -- February 11, 2010]

WPC to Appoint Focal Persons in NA Committees

The Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) plans to appoint a focal person in each standing committee of the National Assembly that will be responsible to apprise the relevant standing committee on the gender-based issues and the women’s empowerment. The decision to this effect was made at a meeting of the working council of Women Parliamentary Caucus in the Parliament House on February 25. National Assembly Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza Chaired the meeting. The council discussed the appointment of focal persons in each standing committee of the National Assembly. These focal persons would be the members of that respective committee and would act as a bridge between that standing committee and the working parliamentary council. The working council was later briefed by Justice (R) Fakhar-un-Nisa Khokher who is the mover of various bills about the amendments in sections of Criminal Penal Code and Pakistan Penal Code related to women issues. She apprised the council that the proposed pieces of legislation were aimed to remove ambiguities and procedural anomalies in dispensation of justice to women who were subjected to violence, acid throwing and alienation from their right of inheritance. She specifically apprised the council members about the amendment in Criminal Penal Code through which Inheritance Courts would be established at district level. The inheritance courts would ensure quick disposal of cases related to inheritance in lower courts. Dr Fehmida Mirza appreciated the efforts of Justice (R) Fakhar-un-Nisa Khokher and said that the bill had already been referred to the relevant standing committee and the committee would be asked to deliberate upon the bill and submit its recommendations to the house for enactment.

[The News -- February 26, 2010]

Women MNAs Proved More Active During NA Session

Female members showed more interest in the legislative business than their male colleagues during the recently-concluded session of the National Assembly as out of 18 private member bills tabled in the house 12 were moved by women MNAs According to a Parliament Performance report by FAFEN, “almost 46 percent legislators (115 out of 338 MNAs) participated in the proceedings of the 18th session of the National Assembly that concluded on January 29”. The Assembly remained in session for 50 hours and one minute over the 15 sittings. However, every sitting started late by an average of 28 minutes, says the report based on direct observation by observers deputed by FAFEN. The NA passed 10 bills whereas nine ordinances were also laid before the house during the 15 sittings. However, the house did not take up 42 percent of the agenda items mentioned on the ‘Orders of the day.’ As many as 646 questions were raised during the course of the session, of which 420 were responded to by the concerned ministers. A total of 306 supplementary questions were put forward by the members. However, relevant ministers were found absent in nine out of 12 question hours. The average length of a sitting was three hours and 20 minutes. The shortest sitting lasted one hour and 34 minutes. Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani was present in all the sittings of the session. As many as 17 calling attention notices, out of 30 mentioned on the ‘Orders of the

day' were discussed. These notices had been submitted by 47 members - 18 of them from the PPP, 17 from the PML-N, five from the MQM, six from the PML-Q and one from the JUI-F. Out of the 18 private members' bills, four were moved by the PPP MNAs, five by the PML-N members, eight by the PML-Q and one by the MQM. There were 23 resolutions on the agenda of the NA session but only six of them were taken up for discussion. Most of the time of the session was consumed by the members while speaking on points of order. As many as 175 points of order were also raised during the session.

[Dawn -- February 3, 2010]

Women MPAs Demand Boycott Proceedings on Shahzadi Umerzadi Tiwana

The Punjab Assembly could not complete its February 9's business following 'infighting' among women legislators over what their male colleagues called a 'petty' issue. The women legislators of both treasury and opposition boycotted the session to register their protest against PML-N's Shahzadi Umerzadi Tiwana for her comments. Responding to PML-Q's Samina Khawar Hayat's 'indecent' remarks about PML-N's Sanaullah Masti Khel, Ms Tiwana said she had been elected through ballot and those reaching the assembly on reserved seats had come from 'another world' and were wasting the time of the house by indulging in 'useless debates'. She accused Ms Hayat of humiliating a senior parliamentarian. PML-Q's Mohsin Leghari was seeking Punjab government's support for removing 'a misunderstanding' between Punjab and Sindh over Chashma-Jhelum Link Canal project on a point of order when Ms Hayat and Masti Khel's exchange of harsh words derailed the proceedings. When Deputy Speaker Rana Mashhood, who was in the chair, refused to give time to some women treasury members on a point of order, all of them left the house, saying they were boycotting the session (in protest).

After meeting with them, the ministers informed the house that the women legislators wanted 'strict' action against Ms Tiwana and would continue the boycott till the acceptance of their demand.

MMA's Ali Haider Noor Niazi asked the chair not to allow anyone to waste the house's precious time and settle the issue of 'elected and selected' members once for all so that it must not affect the proceedings every now and then. Although the Deputy Speaker constituted a two-member committee comprising Chaudhry Ghafoor and Khwaja Islam to look into Tiwana-Hayat matter and fix the responsibility, he continued allowing the women legislators to speak, who were pouring in one by one, to express their views on the point of order involving the issue. It appeared the women legislators were making a mockery of the house by either demanding action against Ms Tiwana or criticising their male colleagues for raising the gender issue and turned a deaf ear to the chair's requests to continue with the house's business.

PPP's Azma Bokhari claimed 80 percent of the house's proceedings were being run by the women 'elected' on reserved seats. She said the difficulties faced by women legislators in the PML-N government were more than they went through during a dictator's (Gen Musharraf) rule. She said as the reserved seats had become a 'slur' it would be better to do away with them. Ms Bokhari further said Shahzadi Tiwana should not be allowed to sit in the house till she tendered an apology. PML-N's Ghazala Saad Rafiq said women could even win on general seats and they did not mind if the reserved seats were abolished. PPP's Fauzia Behram and Faiza Malik also complained of 'discriminatory treatment' meted out to women legislators. The women legislators even demanded action against Mr Ali Haider Noor Niazi for his 'anti-women' speech.

[Dawn -- February 10, 2010]

Women's Empowerment

SCWE-KCCI, USAID Ink Accord to Empower Women

The Subcommittee of Women Entrepreneurs at Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCWE-KCCI) and USAID Pakistan agreed to focus their energies on increasing women's economic participation through employment and entrepreneurship in Karachi. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between these two parties on February 5. USAID is facilitating this agreement through its economic growth initiative, FIRMS project. The objective of the USAID/Pakistan FIRMS project is to improve government service delivery and develop dynamic, internationally competitive firms to accelerate sales, investment, and job growth. 'Family Support Appreciation Programme' and 'Capacity Building of the Support Institutions' are the two main activities under the agreement.

SCWE-KCCI Chairperson Ms Durre Shahwar Nisar said that our mutual goal is to increase women participation in the economic growth of Pakistan and hope this would bring a positive change in understanding and enhancing the role of women in economic growth. Through the 'Family Support Appreciation Programme' the valuable support provided by family members to their female members' business initiatives would be acknowledged and appreciated.

The second activity, 'Capacity Building of the Support Institutions' will allow institutions to respond to the needs of their constituents and to deliver meaningful and relevant services to members.

[Daily Times -- February 6, 2010]

Saudi Arabia to Allow Women Lawyers in Courts Soon

Saudi Justice Minister Mohammed al Issa said on February 21 that Saudi Arabia could soon allow women lawyers to appear in court, though they would only be able to represent women. According to a Saudi newspaper, Al Issa said the Ministry is drafting new rules to permit female lawyers to fight family cases, adding the new law was part of King Abdullah's plan to develop the legal system. The newspaper said the women would only be able to represent other women in marriage, divorce, custody and other family cases. Female lawyers in Saudi Arabia, where strict Islamic doctrine and shariah law have enforced separation of genders, can currently work only inside the women's sections of law and government offices, where they do not come into contact with men. All judges in the kingdom are male religious clerics. The new legislation will also allow Saudi women to complete certain procedures without the presence of a witness.

[Daily Times -- February 22, 2010]

UN Seeks Aid of Private Sector, Philanthropies in Empowering Women

The United Nations launched a new effort to expand its partnership with the private sector and philanthropies in the battle for complete gender equality and the empowerment of women, not only as a necessary human right but as economic common sense as well. "To the private sector, we look to you to exercise even more leadership for gender equality starting from the top," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a special event at UN Headquarters in New York, attended by some 300 representatives of foundations, private companies, academia and civil society organizations. "We need you to promote education. Support human rights and non-discrimination. Empower women through all levels of corporate responsibility. Secretary General said that to the philanthropic community, we look to you to target women with your programmes. Make sure that female beneficiaries are treated equally. Work to ensure that their communities, homes, schools and workplaces are free of verbal, physical or sexual harassment.

Co-sponsored by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) and the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP), the forum heard speakers stress the importance of women in ending poverty and propelling economic development.

UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi said, "it is well recognized that women and women's leadership are essentials to build strong economies, more stable societies and achieve agreed international goals for human rights and development. The private sector and philanthropy increasingly understand that advancing women is good for business. This is true at all levels, from the market place to the investment community, from the consumer to the work force. Similarly, the United Nations increasingly understands that the private sector is an influential force, one which it is critical to engage... We want to work hand in hand with the private sector to share our expertise on how to move the gender equality agenda". She called for united action to achieve women's full participation in all aspects of community and national life.

ECOSOC, too, noted the enormous potential of women for economic development. "Gender inequality deprives countries of a critical resource in the struggle to end poverty and attain stability. ECOSOC Vice-President Ambassador Morten Wetland of Norway told that empowering women is not only a justice, a rights-based approach, but it's actually good macro-economic policy. So empowering women, allowing them to pursue a family and an education and have a career is actually giving countries a competitive edge.

UNOP Executive Director Amir Dossal underscored the great significance of that event for the UN. He said that the idea is that we must spur concrete action not just within Member States and international organizations but also among civil society and citizens such as yourselves.

[Dawn -- February 23, 2010]

Women & Laws

Senate Passes Harassment at Workplace Bill

Aiming to create a safe working environment for women that is free of harassment, abuse and intimidation with a view toward fulfilment of their right to work with dignity, the Senate unanimously passed the 13-point Protection

against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Bill, 2010. Adviser to the Prime Minister Sardar Latif Khan Khosa moved the bill to make provisions for the protection of women against harassment at the workplace as passed by the National Assembly. Senator Professor Ibrahim was the only one who opposed the bill during the discussion.

According to the bill, harassment is one of the biggest hurdles faced by working women, preventing many from entering the job market. The bill requires all public and private organisations to adopt an internal Code of Conduct and a complain or appeals mechanism aimed at establishing a safe working environment, free of intimidation and abuse, for all working women. The bill said that each organisation shall constitute an Inquiry Committee within 30 days of the enactment of this act to enquire into complaints and that the committee should consist of three members, including one female member. It added that within three days of receiving a written complaint, the inquiry committee would give the accused a formal written receipt of the charges and statement of allegations levelled against him. The bill said that subject to the provisions of this act and any rules made under this, the Inquiry Committee shall have power to regulate its own procedure for conducting an inquiry and for fixing the place and time of its sittings.

[Daily Times -- February 26, 2010]

National Women's Day

National Women's Day Celebrated

For the first time since the brutal events of February 12, 1983 when women activists and their male supporters were beaten and jailed for protesting against discriminatory laws, the National Women's Day was officially celebrated in the capital in a thrilling ceremony at the National Art Gallery. Organised jointly by the Ministry of Women Development (MoWD), the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), the event was attended by a large number of women parliamentarians, civil society members, government officials and women right activists. In addition to recollection of memories by the activists that were present at the protest, the ceremony included melodious performance of Sara Zamaan and Laal Band. The singers received thunderous applause from the jam-packed hall as they gave new life to the revolutionary poetry of Habib Jalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz through their powerful performance. Another striking feature of the event was the recitation of thought provoking poetry by Fehmida Riaz, Rehana Taufiq and Attiya Daud. Poems like 'Adhi Gawahi', 'Shariat Bill' and 'Salam Benazir' revived the feelings of the day that saw 250 women coming on the roads to challenge the military regime. The day is celebrated in the country to mark the struggle launched by the women against 'Qanoon-e-Shahadat,' introduced by late General Ziaul Haq.

[The News -- February 13, 2010]

Women's Day Celebration Activities by ASR

The Pakistani Women's Day was celebrated on February 12 by ASR Institute of Women's Studies to honour women who have struggled for women rights and particularly to pay tribute to the valiant struggle of the women who have consistently challenged all forms of oppression since 1947. Special tribute was paid to women of Lahore and the Women's Action Forum who resisted the dictatorship of Gen Zia on February, 12, 1983. Facing large contingents of police they battled their way through vicious baton-charges and clouds of tear gas to register their opposition to martial law and the "Islamisation" of Pakistan.

Speakers were particularly concerned on resurgence of territorial and ideological nationalisms, increasing conservatism, the validation of oppression in the name of tradition, culture and norms all of which further suppress women. They said despite the sustained struggle of the women's movement and despite its many achievements women are increasingly caught in a spiral of poverty and lack of access to resources and social services. That one half of humanity is relegated to margins of society makes a mockery of national progress and the principles of democracy, equality and justice. The onus to rectify lies with the state, political parties, administrative and institutional structures and with men. Women have been struggling not only for themselves and their rights but also have been significant contributors to the national progress and democratic struggles for justice for all. Now is the time for the nation to acknowledge this; now is the time for it to take a stand against all forms of oppression; now is the time not to impede the course of history; now is the time to stand with history in the making; a moment in history that will bring about a new day for women and for Pakistan, they said. The role of women in the struggle for democracy, progressive development and against all form of oppression, particularly against women, was highlighted.

Samina Rehman (WAF Lahore), Arfana Malla and Amar Sindhi (WAF Hyderabad), Nighat Said Khan (ASR/IWSL and WAF) and Dr Uma Chakravorty (an eminent feminist activist and academic from Delhi) who spoke on the

Indian women's movement, addressed the seminar. The event included feminist songs and a poem by the late Shehla Zia (Aurat, AGHS and WAF) and feminist art was depicted through the use of posters, book covers and banners.

[Dawn -- February 13, 2010]

Women Centres

Women Complaint Centres on Verge of Closure

Five women complaint centres established in different districts of Sindh are on the verge of closure because of the government's lack of interest in running them. Sindh Minister for Women Development Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto told this correspondent that the entire staff posted at the centres had been working without salary since August 2009. The unavailability of funds had caused a variety of problems for the centres and the women in distress who were receiving legal assistance and moral support were feeling neglected, she said. She said that she had personally requested the Chief Minister two or three times to sign the summary for release of funds but in vain. Bureaucratic tactics were hampering smooth running of the centres, she said. She said that the ministry wanted to run these centres in Larkana, Nawabshah, Sukkur, Hyderabad and Karachi on a permanent basis but it seemed a Herculean task under the obtaining circumstances. A centre's expenses with six employees at each centre does not exceed Rs150,000 a month. They deal with cases of domestic violence against women, issues of dissolution of marriages, property disputes and other related matters. In certain cases victim women were provided free legal assistance and shelter at Darul Aman. The matter was conveyed to President Asif Ali Zardari during his visit to Larkana on Dec 27 and he had asked Sindh Chief Minister who was present there to immediately sign the summary. But the Chief Minister had not signed it yet, which had compounded problems at the centres.

[Dawn -- February 4, 2010]

Working of Women Centres

Among total domestic violence victims who took refuge in women centres during last five years, almost 50 percent took the decision to leave homes due to mental torture meted out by their family members. These statistics were revealed by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centre for Women Manager Saira Furqaan in a presentation to members of the Senate Standing Committee for Women Development on February 3. The meeting was attended by representatives of mainstream political parties, officials from the Ministry of Women Development (MoWD), Secretary MoWD Sarod Lashari and Executive Director Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) Rehana Hashmi. The members were briefed on the working of women centre and challenges faced by its management in facilitating violence victims. The committee members also visited different sections of the facility and intermingled with violence victims. They ensured their all out support to make these centres an effective tool to address the issue of violence against women. Praising the performance of GRAP in promoting the gender reform agenda, they demanded that the project should become a permanent programme of the MoWD instead of a separate project.

They said that bringing reforms in administrative structure is a long-term process that demands continuation of GRAP for at least three more years. Prominent among those who attended the meeting included Senate Standing Committee Chairperson Senator Shirala Mallick, Senator Saeeda Iqbal, Suriya Amiruddin, Almas Perveen, Begum Najma Hameed, Nilofar Bakhtiar, Farhat Abbas, Sabina Rauf and Farah Aqil. Highlighting the issues that need to be addressed for better functioning of women centres, member NGO management committee Nargis Zaidi called for networking between women centres and National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra). "Arranging for the passports of victims has always been a challenging task for the centre management," she pointed out. She said that lack of funds also hinder the proper functioning of these facilities. For sustainable economic empowerment of violence victims, she urged members Senate Standing Committee to lobby for a comprehensive credit programme. She also demanded construction of more rooms in the capital women centre to cater to larger number for victims. Currently, the facility has the capacity to house 50 victims.

[The News -- February 4, 2010]

HR Watch

Violence against Women

Films can Help Combat Violence against Women

Filmmaking can prove to be an affective medium to combat culturally sanctioned violence against women in the less developed areas of the country, said human rights activist and film maker Samar Minallah on February 23. She was speaking at meeting entitled 'Positive perceptions' organised by Individualland Pakistan, a liberal non-profit and non government organisation. Samar Minallah was the positive guest speaker. She is the founder of Ethnomedia, a non-government advocacy based organisation. With an MPhil in Anthropology and Development from the University of Cambridge, Samar focuses on a culturally sensitive approach to reach out to her target audience. Samar Minallah shared her mosaic of videos and documentaries with the participants. She briefed them about the factors and inspirations that led her to take this journey. She said that it was complex yet an inspiring task to challenge the discriminatory traditions. "I make films with an aim to bring various issues and problems into the notice of authorities," she said. She shared her experience of working on the critical issues of human trafficking, the heartless rituals against the women. On the occasion, she also showed a documentary she prepared on the custom of 'Swara' (alternative dispute resolution or traditional peace making system). She summed up her talk by mentioning the change factor she has been able to pioneer in the affected areas. In her concluding remarks, Gulmina Bilal of Individualland applauded her efforts and opined that such individuals can bring much needed positive change in these gloomy times.

[The News -- February 24, 2010]

Calendar on Taxonomy of Sexual Harassers -- NGO Aims at Shifting Focus from Victim to Harasser

A new calendar featuring 12 irritating characters frequently harassing the opposite sex has been launched by the Alliance against Sexual Harassment (AASHA) under the title of 'Taxonomy of Sexual Harassers.' The calendar, the third of this series, aims at shifting focus from victim to harasser. It is a wakeup call for people who consider uncivilised behaviour of harassing as normal and a source of fun. This time, the distinctive feature is the introduction of two female characters that harass men and make use of their vulnerable position to their own benefit. Having meaningful illustrations and interesting names, the theme of the third calendar is to identify behaviour that causes sexual harassment. It challenges the common social norm that harassment is the victim's fault and gives a clear message that it is actually the result of bad behaviour. Concepts and characters introduced in the calendar are the brainchild of Dr Fauzia Saeed with the cartoons being beautifully done by Sabir Nazar. The calendar has been designed by Sajid Munir.

- Women can easily relate to the January character, as almost every woman has to face him. He is present in every class and at every corner of the city. He is named the 'Nikamma Jumlay Baz.' These guys make sleazy comments at women passers-by in order to demean them. Such people have usually not accomplished much in their lives and look for interest in mundane activities.
- The month of February features a character that is not only a harasser, but also falls in the category of criminal and abuser as he often targets girl child, at times giving them a psychological impact for life. Girls usually keep such experiences to themselves, as they do not find courage to talk about such issues with their parents. The calendar calls such people 'Mr Chamkara' and says that these harassers are fond of flashing their body parts. This person waits for the moment when a woman is alone in a street or an alley and then embarrasses her with the stark sight of his private parts. It is a pity that society hardly discourages such attitude and starts looking the other way when these topics are discussed.
- March introduces 'Dast Daraz Darzi.' This is a tailor whose hands go to places where they shouldn't while taking measurement of his women clients.
- April presents 'Dost Dushman.' This guy befriends a woman by promising to make her dreams come true, but actually has bad intentions. He takes her beyond the limits she has set for intimacy and at times coerces or blackmails her into other unwilling activities.

- May shows an interesting female character named 'Dukhiari Madhoobala.' These women are the first cousins to the 'Dukhiari Dalip,' a character of men that have the tendency to draw attention of women by telling them sad stories of their broken relationships.
- 'Dukhiari Madhoobala' also tells men their sad tales in order to gain their attention and use this sympathy to get men to do their chores. Another category of female harassers is introduced on the page for August with the name of 'Niswani Ghol.' This is the group of women that feel powerful because of their numbers and enjoy turning the tables on a man by embarrassing him through vulgar comments when he is alone.
- Other interesting characters include 'Darinda Dukandar', the shameless shopkeeper that harass their female customers by touching them inappropriately or by uttering phrases with double sexual meanings and 'Khurchu,' the man who keep scratching his body parts either because he does not shower or because he has the urge to touch himself, especially in the presence of women. Whatever the reason, his actions offend women.
- The month of September indicates towards another common harassment faced by women that work on brick kilns. It presents 'Wehshi-tendants.' These men supervise the work of women labourers in the fields, at brick kilns or in factories. These superintendents are quite blatant in their harassment and in abuse of their authority.
- There is also 'Khabees on Wheels 2' making a strong statement at the page dedicated to October. The women who often use public transport need no introduction of these irritants. These men often stop their cars to offer ride to women walking on the street. They are also known to intimidate women drivers.
- November and December introduce 'Baihadetay Rakhay' and 'Shah Basha.' As the word 'Rakhay' depicts, the first category represents the members of law enforcing agencies who rather than protecting women, do not let any opportunity pass them by to make passes at them or intimidate them. They sometimes serve as the biggest barrier for women seeking justice. 'Shah Basha' is the man that enjoys top leadership position in business or government. Such people think they own all women and feel free to make pass at them. At times they even have them kidnapped. They are surprised at any complaints because they consider this their right as a king.

[The News -- February 15, 2010]

Child Rights

10m Children Involved in Labour

Children working in their tender age appear almost at every nook and corner of the country and become unnoticed for the others due to their large prevalence and acceptance in the society. There is no recent child labour survey had been conducted, but the one conducted in 1996 by the Federal Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with International Labour Organization (ILO), found 3.3 million of the 40 million children (in the 5-14 years age group) to be economically active on a full-time basis. Of the 3.3 million working children, 73 percent (2.4 million) were boys and 27 per cent (0.9 million), girls. However according to unofficial sources as many as 10 million children are associated with child labour.

A survey of the city reveals that a huge number of children are involved in child labour for one reason or the other. Just a round of the city will disclose that there is not a single area, which is free from the curse of child labour. "I was reading in class seven when my father died leaving me with no other option than to bid farewell to my academic career and start some work in order to feed my siblings and to continue the medical treatment of my mother who is suffering from kidney disease," said Rooh Ullah, a 14-years-old boy selling finger chips in front of Bari Imam shrine. It is not only Rooh Ullah who discontinued his education in order to run his domestic affairs but there are millions of other innocent children who have tools instead of books in their hands.

The ILO's most recent global report on child labour emphasized the important contribution that action against child labour can make to the Education for All (EFA) process. Yet, it also noted that the objectives of the latter will only be achieved if child labour concerns are effectively mainstreamed into the EFA monitoring and promotional efforts. The story of Ishtiaq Hussain is not different than others. Migrated from Muzaffarabad, the 12-years old boy has two sisters and four brothers. Being the eldest in his family he has to earn while abandoning his education. "I have a small trolley and used to transport construction material and water gallons to the nearby area which gives me a

daily income of Rs120 that at least is enough to give two times meal to my family,” he said. According to the report, children’s contribution to work in rural areas is about eight times greater than in urban areas. The number of economically active children in the 10-14 years age group is more than four times the children in the 5-9 years age group. In both areas, the percentage of girls working in manufacturing and services is higher than that of boys; this indicates that girls are more likely to work in the manufacturing and services sectors as compared to boys. In urban areas most of the girls are working as housemaids, which are often brought from some village or sub-urban areas of the respected area. “I have been brought from Mardan and my all siblings are working at somebody’s place as my parents are so poor that can’t feed us. Here I work for whole day and get Rs2000 per month,” said Kiran Shahzadi, a housemaid in a posh area of the capital city.

According to a survey, a considerable proportion of the working children in the 5-14 years age group (46 per cent) are working more than the normal working hours, i.e. 35 hours per week, with 13 per cent working 56 hours or more per week. In urban areas, 73 per cent of the working children work more than the normal working hours, which is significantly higher than in rural areas (42 percent). Knowingly children constitutes a big number of population and only their education and grooming could lead to the prosperous future, nothing significant has been done to curb this menace. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the ILO and the Pakistan government in 1994. The National Steering Committee (NSC) that was created under this cooperation agreement is chaired by the Federal Secretary for Labour. The NSC was comprised of representatives of the concerned Federal ministries (social welfare, education, health, planning, and finance), representatives of employers’ and workers’ organizations, and NGOs.

Since 1997, IPEC has been designing broader types of interventions through IPEC projects on the elimination of child labour. The first major project, which was funded by the US Department of Labour, was initiated in Sialkot to eliminate child labour in the soccer ball industry. Currently, there are six ongoing projects on the elimination of child labour, along with four core action programmes. These are all part of the country programme financed by Germany which include the project to combat the worst forms of child labour, combating child labour through education and training in the NWFP, Pakistan Earthquake Child Labour Response Project, Football for hope project, activating media in combating child labour and combating child labour in the carpet industry. But the lack of commitment and will power on part of the government to address the issue is still not very visible. Poverty is considered as a major factor behind the child labour and according to the experts the only way to curb child labour is to reduce the poverty rate but nothing praiseworthy has been noticed so far on the part of the government to reduce poverty or to involve children in academic activities.

[The News -- February 22, 2010]

Child Protection Bill Lies Rotting Even After 2 Years

It has been two years since the National Child Protection Bill was tabled before the Parliament. The proposed piece of legislation could have been a breakthrough for the innocent girls and boys being raped and murdered across the country but the lack of interest on the part of the Parliamentarians has meant that the bill has been rotting away. Not only this, there is also a dearth of any institute or public mental health facility to conduct research into the causes and occurrence of paedophilia and child abuse and to study the behaviour of psychotic people perpetrating such crimes. Likewise, the Punjab government has also continuously failed to implement pledges of stern action against such criminals and trying them under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The phenomenon of child abuse exists in rural and urban areas alike and factors like poor living conditions, uneducated/unaware parents are mere generalities which hardly effect the rate of its occurrence. Major cities like Karachi and Lahore have faced unhampered child abuse cases since the last many years and yet the government of Pakistan has been unable to implement any child abuse related laws or to ensure that the perpetrators of the crime are given due punishment. Parents and relatives of the victims have forever hesitated to report cases of child abuse due to the stigma attached to it. But today the issue is out in the open for debate and discussion. There are multiple reasons as to why the issue has gained importance and garnered the attention of concerned authorities and the general public. Mostly, it has come under scrutiny because of the brutality of such cases, recovery of the dead body of such a victim or admission of a child into hospitals under such conditions etc. The ferocity of child abuse has also increased as most of the children are brutally killed and their bodies dumped in places like drains. The year 2009 also saw the abduction, rape and murder of eight-year-old Mudassara in the New Anarkali police jurisdiction and the rape and murder of another 11-year-old girl who was found dumped in a drain near the Gujjarpura police jurisdiction. Furthermore, 10-year-old Muzamil was also found dead near the Mayo Hospital on December 2, 2009. So far in 2010, a 10-year-old boy, Jamshed was killed after he was gang-raped on January 10. Other notorious and heinous incidents include the rape and murder of 3-year-old Sana by two policemen in the city

of Karachi. The child's dead body was recovered from a gutter and the culprits were sentenced to death by an anti-terrorism court. Furthermore, Abdul Rehman, the principal of a private school in Baghbanpura was also held by the police for blackmailing students after making inappropriate videos of them.

[Daily Times -- February 15, 2010]

Roundtable on 'Child Protection Bill 2009'

The speakers at a roundtable discussion held on February 17 recommended increase in punishment for child abuse to ensure child rights' protection in the society. The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) organised the roundtable titled "Child Protection Bill-2009" to propose amendments in the Pakistan Penal Code 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898. The CII is a constitutional body, which follows the principles and concepts of Islam as enunciated in the Holy Quran and Sunnah while proposing amendments in existing laws of the land. The participants unanimously recommended seven years imprisonment and fine up to Rs 500,000 to child abusers in place of three years imprisonment and Rs 50,000 fine. They also recommended that the child sexual abuse be declared non-compoundable and non-bailable offence. MNA Dr Azra Fazl said there was need to fix age while defining the word "child" in the bill. Dr Anbreen Ahmed of Rozan suggested that a data be maintained of the habitual criminals of child abuse. She recommended that the doctors providing treatment to the abused child must refer these cases to the law-enforcement departments. MNA Maulvi Asmatullah backed the proposed legislation for the protection of children but not contrary to the Islamic injunctions. Member Council Justice (R) Muneer Ahmad Mughal suggested increase in punishment under Section 182 of PPC to discourage false statements before the courts. Majority of the speakers were of the view that there should be at least 10-year imprisonment and Rs 500,000 fine to those found involved in child abuse. CII Chairman Dr Muhammad Khalid Masud said there was still room for improvement in the Child Protection Bill. He said the bill could be made more effective by introducing some amendments and holding extensive consultation with experts, keeping in view the culture and traditions. Members of the council Dr Muzaffar Naqvi, Maulana Abdul Khilji, Shahid Akhtar Ali, Tahira Abdullah, Hassan Manzoor Mangi, Safeer Hussain Shah, Munaza Bano, Arshad Mehmood, Ilyas Qureshi and Rashid Aziz also shared their views during the discussion.

[Daily Times -- February 18, 2010]

Enactment of Child Protection Policy Urged

The torture and subsequent death of Shazia Masih, the 12-year-old maid, at the hands of her educated employers in Lahore makes it absolutely vital that the National Child Protection Policy, The Protection of Children (Criminal Laws Amendments) Bill 2009 and other related legislation are enacted and enforced on a priority basis. These demands were made by Executive Director Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) Arshad Mahmood while addressing a press conference on February 3. The press conference was organised by Sparc to highlight the Shazia Masih case in particular and to express strong condemnation on the gross violation of child rights being committed in the country especially against children who are poverty stricken, illiterate and down trodden. He pointed out that it is high time that present government demonstrates political will by passing pending legislation such as Protection of Children (Criminal Laws Amendments) Bill 2009, the National Commission on the Rights of Children Bill 2009 and the Charter of Child Rights Bill, which is an enabling law for making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) effective and enforceable.

Mahmood said that Pakistan will celebrate the 20th anniversary of ratification of the UNCRC but after the lapse of two decades neither adequate resources are allocated for socio-economic development of children nor mechanisms for effective legislation and its implementation have been drafted. "It is a pity that children are always very low on the priority list of the government." National Programme Manager Child Rights Iqbal Detho said that in a country of 165 million where children comprise almost 48% of the population, there is no ministry for children. He further added that existing National Commission on Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) and Provincial Commissions (PCCWDs) are not effectively catering the redressal mechanisms and are just recommendatory in nature. He said that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child based in Geneva, which monitors the compliance of State Parties to UNCRC, has raised its concerns in its subsequent reports on Pakistan. "There should be a body with legal status to work for the promotion and protection of children's rights and there should be more budgetary allocation for the implementation of laws and policies concerning children," he demanded. In its charter of demand for the promotion and protection of child rights, the organisation called for punishment for the alleged abusers of 12-year-old Shazia Masih and immediate approval, enactment and enforcement of National Child Protection Policy, Protection of Children (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill 2009 and the National Commission on the Rights of Children Bill 2009.

[The News -- February 4, 2010]

Trafficking -- The Dark Side of Migration

The skilfully directed documentary by Samar Minallah titled 'The Dark Side of Migration' was truly food for thought for everyone and left them wondering, if it really is poverty or greed that forces people to become part of this dirty business of buying and selling human beings. With a combination of wonderfully captured images and tasteful music, Samar made a fine attempt to highlight various aspects of human trafficking and human smuggling in Pakistan, an issue that has been kept under the carpet for so long. "The objective is to start a discussion among people and decision-makers and to create awareness at different levels within the society on the issue," said Samar in her introductory note. From scenes of suffocated dead bodies of young boys who try to migrate illegally for a better future to interviews of young boys, who were once used as jockeys in camel races, the short film marvellously captured the realities and urged the society to speak up and act against this menace. The documentary describes women as the worst victims of trafficking within the country. This is done quietly under the justification of poverty, tradition and culture and majority of girls are given in marriage contract to agents. "Once they are in the red light area, they have no place to go as they realise that society would never accept them with this stigma," said one woman from the red light area.

Highlighting path of the agents who trap young boys into illegal migration, an FIA Director revealed that these boys are stuffed into big containers, as animals and then are sold as commodities to agents in Iran. "From there, they are taken to Kurdistan and then to Turkey. Many die on their way," he added. He said that 95-99 percent of the people travelling abroad illegally do it through the land route. "Land route is the most dangerous way of leaving a country because they are proceeding without any documents or passports. In case they are arrested in any country along the way, they cannot ask for help from the Embassy. They cannot even prove that they are Pakistani nationals." He said that going by boat from Iran to Saudi Arabia or even Oman is a very dangerous journey. "These are usually very small boats that can hardly carry 10-12 people. These agents put in 40-50 and at times 100 people in the boats. It's common for the boats to sink. No country knows whose national have actually died because they are not carrying any identification papers. They just drown and die. Their parents may find out after years that their loved ones have died," he said pointing towards another sad fact.

Samar said that many big names are involved in this kind of trafficking that is the second most profitable and prevalent business in the world after drug trafficking. She said that Pakistan not only serve as source, but is also destination and transit point of this evil trade. She regretted that kids are still used in camel race in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The documentary points out that, families sent these children to Middle Eastern countries to earn money with no idea that may be they will never come back. Eminent poet Kishwar Naheed said that human trafficking and smuggling is such an extensive issue that there is a need to make films on every aspect of it. She said that shrines have become the biggest business spot for such activities. "Even listening to those horrific stories requires a strong heart," she pointed out. Sharing some experiences of her fieldwork, Kishwar said that 'young boys looking for an opportunity of illegal immigration' is the story of 90 per cent households she has visited in rural areas. Commenting on an interview of a woman who was sold to a disabled person in marriage, famous human right activist, Tahira Abdullah said that women accept such trafficking as their destiny. She added that the main issue is that women are considered as commodity in our society.

[The News -- February 17, 2010]

HRCP Concerned Over Detention of Suspected Militants' Relatives

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed grave concern over the detention of family members of suspected militants, as well as over continuing reports of revenge killings in Swat and Malakand division, on February 22. A statement issued by the Commission said, "HRCP is concerned over reports of a large number of people in custody of security forces in this region, who have not been produced in court. Many such detainees, including females, are relatives of suspected militants, who have apparently been taken into custody in order to force militants to surrender". The statement said that similarly, there have been continuing reports of revenge killings targeting individuals who are suspected to have sided with the Taliban.

The statement said: "HRCP acknowledges the government is dealing with a difficult situation in the fight against terrorism in the region, but under no circumstances can state agencies deal with citizens in any manner as they please. Nor does such a situation deprive citizens of their basic rights, particularly their right to life, as well as to due process of law. The government must ensure that such detainees are immediately produced in court, or released and paid compensation for arbitrary detention. HRCP also demands that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is granted access to the detainees. Allowing citizens to take matters into their own hands

would only fuel a cycle of revenge killings, and the government would thus lose another opportunity to distinguish its rule from that of extremists"..

[Daily Times -- February 23, 2010]



Governance Watch

Political Governance

Legislative Business

National Assembly

1. February 22, 2010 -- The Pakistan Naval Academy (Award of Degrees) (Amendment) Act, 2010
2. February 18, 2010 -- The Patents (Amendment) Act, 2010
3. February 18, 2010 -- The National School of Public Policy (Amendment) Act, 2010
4. February 18, 2010 -- The Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority Act, 2010
5. February 8, 2010 -- The Banking Companies (Amendment) Act, 2009

Detail of each bill is available on the website of National Assembly.

[\[www.na.gov.pk\]](http://www.na.gov.pk)

Senate

Senate Unanimously Adopts Organ Transplant Bill

Senate unanimously adopted the Transplantation of Human Organ Tissues Bill, 2009, which aims at regulating removal, storage and transplantation of human organs and tissues. Taking part in the debate, Leader of Opposition Wasim Sajjad said that although the bill contained several clauses needing amendments "we do not oppose its passage because it is a law meant for a good purpose". The House was informed that a committee headed by health minister would monitor the bill's implementation and ensure its judicious use. According to clause 8 of the bill, the main purpose of the Human Organ Transplant Authority is to monitor transplantations and enforce prescribed standards for recognised medical institutions and hospitals. The bill also provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of one million rupees for commercial dealings in human organs. According to the bill, transplantation of human organs or tissues or removal of any part of human organs for the purpose of transplantation shall be carried out only by recognized professionals. Before removing any body part, a professional will have to ensure that a written certification has been obtained from an evaluation committee. The evaluation committee should ensure that no human organ or tissue is retrieved from non-related living donor or without its prior approval and will also determine brain death of any person. A person not less than 18 years of age could donate during his life-time any organ or tissue of his body.

[Dawn -- February 11, 2010]

Sindh Assembly

PA Passes Public-Private Partnership Bill 2010

The Provincial Assembly adopted the Sindh Public-Private Partnership Bill, 2010, which the Sindh Law Minister Ayaz Soomro tabled in the House. Speaking in favour of Bill, Sindh Minister Syed Sardar Ahmed said that the bill was aimed at creating a conducive environment for private sector participation in infrastructure development projects in the province of Sindh through public-private partnership projects. He said that it is expedient to expand the provision of infrastructure services and improve their reliability and quality for accelerating economic growth and achieving the social objectives of the government; to mobilize private sector resources for financing, construction, maintenance and operation of infrastructure projects, to improve efficiency of management, operation and maintenance of infrastructure and development facilities by introduction of modern technologies and management techniques, to incorporate principles of fairness, competition and transparency in public-private partnership projects, and ancillary matters, and enact a law. He said that there shall be a Public-Private Partnership Policy Board in the province to formulate Public-Private Partnership policy based of strategic goals and ensure its implementation in the province. The board will comprise 11 office bearers. Sindh Chief Minister will be the Chairman of the Board, Advisor/ Minister P&D will be its vice chairman; Chief Secretary will be its member and Minister of concerned department will be its co-opted member. Senior Minister Pir Mazharul Haq, Sasui Palejo, Zahid Bhurgari, Dr Mohan Lal, MQM member Heer Soho supported the bill. PPP legislator Haji Munawwar Ali

Abbasi pointed out shortcomings of the bill and said that it would be better if reservation of members were addressed. He, however, supported the bill. After hearing speeches, the chair put the bill in the House after law Minister read out it clause by clause, which passed into law. The house carried question answer session of revenue and relief department.

[The Nation -- February 19, 2010]

Federal Cabinet

Cabinet Okays Population Policy: The Cabinet approved in principle the Population Policy and Ministry of Population Welfare also made a presentation to the Cabinet on the Population Policy. It was informed that the Policy envisioned to achieve population stabilisation by 2020 through expeditious completion of demographic transition that entailed decline in both fertility and mortality rates. This will be achieved through reduction in total fertility rate to 2.1 percent, reduction in population growth rate to 1.3 percent and universal access to modern family planning methods. The PM said population increase had primarily affected the supply and demand in all sectors. The Population Welfare Programme, therefore, should be coordinated among the Ministries of Health, Education, Religious Affairs, Youth Affairs, Social Welfare and Information & Broadcasting to prepare a comprehensive policy. The same policy should be shared with the Provincial Governments and they be asked to monitor its implementation at the local level.

[The Nation -- February 25, 2010]

Cabinet Approves Legislation on Futures Trading: The federal cabinet accorded approval, in principle, to initiate a comprehensive law 'Futures Trading Bill 2010' on corporate rehabilitation to enable the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan to administer the financially distressed companies to turn around. The proposed legislation 'Futures Trading Bill 2010' will provide a comprehensive and independent legal framework which will not only provide the infrastructure necessary for a sound mechanism of futures trading but will also provide an enabling environment for fair, transparent and efficient trading in the futures market. The proposed bill will provide for licencing of futures exchange and clearing house and shall give statutory recognition and authority to the futures exchange and the clearing arrangements. The bill will also provide protection to investors from market offences such as false trading, bucketing, cornering, price manipulation employment of fraudulent and deceptive devices, and fraudulently inducing trading in futures market.

The cabinet granted approval to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to initiate negotiations on agricultural cooperation between Pakistan and Germany. The proposed MoU is aimed at enhancing and strengthening cooperation in the field of agriculture research. The MoU also envisages market access for cotton products, rice, maize, fruits and vegetables.

The meeting also approved starting negotiations with Bulgaria on the abolition of visa for holders of diplomatic and official passports. The cabinet approved a proposal for initiation of negotiations on agreement on promotion and protection of investment with Canada. In the year 2008-09, Canadian investment flows into Pakistan were about 2.4 million dollars. To meet the growing demand of energy in the country, the cabinet granted ex-post facto approval to the agreement for import of electricity from Central Asia, and South Asia Regional Electricity Market.

[The News -- February 25, 2010]

Water Dispute Between Punjab and Sindh

Punjab, Sindh Resolve Water Dispute

Punjab and Sindh have reached an agreement over the distribution of water on the basis of the provinces' crop-specific needs, Punjab Irrigation Secretary Malik Rab Nawaz said on February 22. The Irrigation Secretary made these comments while talking to the media after holding the second phase of negotiations between the delegations of the two provinces, especially formed to resolve the issue. The Punjab Irrigation Secretary told that the two provinces had reached an agreement over the distribution of water based on the provinces' 'sowing season' needs. The Punjab delegation had visited Sindh on February 13 to solve the water distribution dispute, after which the Sindh delegation – led by Sindh Irrigation Secretary Shuja Junejo – travelled to Lahore to hold talks with the Punjab irrigation Secretary.

Malik informed the media that during the meeting, the two sides reviewed various water-related issues, including the Chashma-Jhelum Link Canal and the Chashma Power Plant House. To a question, he said the two teams presented various suggestions about how to best utilise the available water resources. The Irrigation Secretary said

that experts from both Punjab and Sindh were of the opinion that water was the 'collective asset' of all provinces and a province-specific stance should not be taken over the issues, particularly the CJ Link Canal. It is pertinent to mention here that the Indus River System Authority (IRSA), at the request of the Punjab government, had shutdown the CJ Link Canal on Monday morning.

[Daily Times -- February 23, 2010]

Proposed Police Order 2010

Rights Activists Want Changes in Draft Law

Civil society and human rights organizations found faults in the proposed Police Order 2010 prepared by the Punjab Police Department, urging the need for evolving non-partisan and independent accountability system which must overlook human rights abuses by police. They gave suggestions to improve the draft law at a consultative meeting which was organized by the Human Right Commission of Pakistan and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) at the headquarters of the former. Senior police and Punjab government officials, representatives of both bodies, International Committee of the Red Cross and the civil society discussed the proposed law. HRCP Chairperson Asma Jahangir presided and participants included HRCP Director I.A Rehman, ICRC head of office Lars Oberhaus, CHRI in-charge of police reforms Ms Nawaz Kotwal, Punjab government officials Saif Anjum and Khalid Sherdil, Additional IG Aftab Sultan, former Additional IG Fayyaz Mir, SSPs Jawad Dogar, Ali Javed and Azim Arshad, Punjab University's professor Ahmad Warraich, former district and sessions judge Munir Ahmad Sheikh, lawyer Asad Jamal and others. Summing up the discussion, Ms Asma Jahangir said the participating civil society and rights activists were of the view that:

- There should be a fixed tenure for the Accountability Commission which should have multiple representation. All parties in parliament should mutually select Commission members and its capacity should be built for an effective oversight over the working of police.
- Experts from outside the Police Department should be deputed for the police training which should be independently evaluated and used as incentive for promotions, postings and other fringe benefits.
- The Police Department should allow access to information right from the IGP office to the police station to ensure accountability of police.
- The proposal to allow change in investigation at three levels would reflect on police and therefore its levels should be reduced.
- All recruitments should be made free of political influence and the recruitment standards should be higher, introducing specialization in the department for better policing. Ms Asma said that civil society members expressed their concern over the trend of registering false FIRs and urged action against those found guilty of the practice. They nevertheless objected to introduction of penal sanctions on forgery by police personnel in the draft law because punishment for it already existed in law.
- The participants recommended humane treatment for police functionaries like fixed working hours for them as overwork generates inefficiency and harsh behaviour among the force.
- They endorsed the proposal regarding the appointment of the IGP on the choice of the Chief Minister, but said that he (the IGP) should be allowed to make all postings under him. The chief minister should never be allowed to appoint officers of the rank of DPOs and above.
- There should be community policing and police should be changed from a force to a service-oriented department.
- Ms Asma Jahangir, Ms Nawaz Kotwal and almost all other participants objected to the proposed mechanism of accountability. They said there should be a permanent commission or authority for the purpose as the suggested councils would merely act as post office.

Ms Asma announced the formulation of a working group for further looking into the draft law and giving various alternatives. Public awareness about the proposed law would also be created through media. She appreciated the

police department for openly discussing its affairs with civil society and rights activists for the first time, terming it a good development towards improvement in national institutions. Additional IG Aftab Sultan, who represented the Police Department, assured participants that suggestions of the meeting would be considered while finalizing the draft.

Earlier giving an overview of the draft law, he said it was not sacrosanct and the police department was open on it. It would shortly be cleared whether the law would be introduced by the federal or provincial governments. Mr Sultan mentioned various aspects of the draft law and said it contained accountability mechanism through people and their elected representatives. The proposed law ensures greater autonomy for the IGP, flexibility in police administration, and clear chain of command. It is simple and contains 111 sections instead of 187 of the Police Order 2002. The law suggests powers for DPO to impose Section 144 for 48 hours, makes IGP ex-officio secretary and responsible for law and order. It also makes law and order a subject of the district police. It introduces provincial, and district police councils, and criminal justice and citizen police liaison committees for accountability of police through people and their representatives. The law provides for one police organization, direct recruitment of sub-inspectors through public service commission. It also provides for recruitment of constables through boards. It prescribes posting of DIGs as CPOs in districts and an additional IGP as CCPO in Lahore. It provides for separate investigation wing under the SHO. There should be no separate hierarchy of investigation and the authority of transferring investigation staff will be with the DPO. Transfer of investigation will be at the levels of DPO, RPO and the PPO. The SP (Crimes) will supervise investigations of heinous crime. The list of such offences will be approved by the IGP which can be altered from time to time.

[Dawn -- February 13, 2010]

Institute of Disaster Management

Institute of Disaster Management Opens

The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) was formally launched in the capital city on February 15 to serve as a centre of excellence for training and research. The Institute has been established by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) with technical support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to build the capacity to respond and prepare for disasters across the country. NDMA Chairman Lt-Gen (Retired) Farooq Ahmad Khan said the institute had the huge responsibility of instilling disaster risk management ideas in the minds of the youth, government officers and civil society organizations. He expressed the determination to make the NIDM a hub of knowledge and information on disaster risk management. UNDP Deputy Country Director Mikiko Tanaka said: "When disasters strike, the impact of our work, so often measured in gradual increments over time, is by necessity, instant and pivotal. At moments like this, we are reminded again of the imperative to work on disaster risk reduction and response in times of both stability and turmoil. The NDMA was established in 2007 with an aim to be at the forefront of disaster management in the country. It was mandated to focus on putting in place systems which reduce the potential devastation from a disaster and ensure that if they do occur there are mechanisms to respond to them effectively.

[Dawn -- February 16, 2010]

Election Updates

NA-55

'N' wins NA-55 by-polls

PML-N candidate Malik Shakil Awan, on January 24, won the by-polls of the NA-55 with a convincing margin of 21,358 votes against Awami Muslim League (AML) Sheikh Rashid, who was thought to be the hot favourite candidate in the elections.

[The Nation -- February 25, 2010]

FAFEN Points-Out Anomalies in NA-55 By-Polls

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its preliminary report on NA-55 by-elections pointed out serious anomalies in the polling process, saying it was characterized by heavy presence of security forces, including intelligence officials, with the election officials failing to enforce electoral regulations. Following are some of the observations by FFAEN:

- At 12 polling stations, ballot books had counterfoils filled before the ballots had been removed, indicating the possibility of fraudulent votes being stuffed in ballot boxes.

- The numbers of Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) of voters as written on the counterfoils of the ballot books did not match the corresponding entries on the electoral rolls, again raising the possibility that fraudulent voting.
- At 19 polling stations, dubious thumb impressions marked on counterfoils of ballot books at the same angle with phasing out ink print were observed. In the case of genuine voters, each thumb impression is marked in fresh, dark ink and may be at varying angles.
- Security officials were present inside most polling stations and polling booths. Many presiding officers said that security officers were present on premises of polling stations without their permission and on the orders of the local administration.
- Intelligence officials were entering polling stations and asking questions about the number of votes cast, an act that is against standard electoral procedures. Under electoral rules, even at sensitive polling stations, only police are authorized to maintain order outside polling stations in order to ensure smooth polling. They can enter polling stations or booths when requested by the presiding officer. At some polling stations, security officials accompanied
- At some polling stations, FAFEN observers reported that police officers were assisting election officials in counting and handling election materials.
- Armed civilians were observed to have been present inside eight polling stations. Public representatives and officials were present inside six polling stations. At one polling station in Khayban-e- Sir Syed Area, an unidentified man was acting on behalf of a female presiding officer and was positioned at a place from where he could view voters stamping their ballots.
- Canvassing around polling stations: FAFEN observers reported from all polling stations that the workers of political parties, particularly AML, PML-N, JI and PTI were campaigning and canvassing in violation of election laws that bar the same within 400 yards of polling stations. At 13 polling stations, campaigning and canvassing was being done inside the polling stations. Incidents of use of loudspeakers for canvassing were also observed. Similarly, at most polling stations, election officials did not remove campaign materials as required by election laws and specifically mentioned in the ECP instructional handbooks.
- The setting up of cameras inside polling stations, apparently for security reasons, is a certain case of breach of voters' privacy. In at least one polling station, which was also reported to the returning officer, a security camera was affixed on top of the secrecy screen where voters go and stamp their ballot.
- FAFEN observers reported from 29 polling stations that either the election officials or the polling agents were going behind the secrecy screen to assist voters in stamping ballots. Such practices interfere with people's right to vote in secrecy, a fundamental electoral right. At some polling stations, secrecy screens were affixed in a manner that election officials could view voters stamping their ballots. In some polling stations, voters were allowed to vote without the prerequisite CNIC.
- Many of the procedural irregularities especially the presence of unauthorized persons inside polling stations, including security officials, may just be due to lack of training of election staff.

[Daily Times -- February 25, 2010]

NA-123

LHC Rejects Plea Challenging Nawaz's Electoral Eligibility

An election tribunal of the Lahore High Court (LHC) on February 16 dismissed a petition challenging the acceptance of nomination papers of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief, Nawaz Sharif, from NA-123. The bench, comprising Justice Chaudhry Iftikhar Hussain, Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed and Justice Nasir Saeed Sheikh, upheld the returning officer's order of accepting Nawaz's papers. The bench held that the petitioner, Shahid Orakzai, had failed to provide evidence to substantiate his allegations against Nawaz. The petitioner alleged that Nawaz had tried "to buy the loyalty of seven FATA MNAs" after the general

[Daily Times -- February 17, 2010]

Nawaz Sharif Withdraws Papers from NA-123

PML-N Chief Nawaz Sharif withdrew his nomination papers from NA-123 (Lahore) on February 16. According to the Election Commission (EC), 64 candidates are still in the race for the seat. Nawaz had already declared unofficially that he would not contest the by-election and had nominated PML-N Finance Secretary and Adviser to Punjab Chief Minister Pervez Malik to the seat. Earlier, two PML-N candidates Khawaja Ahmed Hasaan and Noshad Hameed had withdrawn their nomination papers while the papers of three other candidates, including Akhtar Rasool had been rejected by the EC. PPP, a coalition partner of the PML-N, has not fielded a candidate.

[Daily Times -- February 17, 2010]

PF-75

JUI-F's Candidate Wins Lakki Marwat By-Polls

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl's (JUI-F) Naseer Muhammad Khan won the by-election for PF-75 Lakki Marwat-II on February 10. According to unofficial results of 57 polling stations out of 59, Naseer Khan secured 10,386 votes against Bahadar Khan's 3,790 while independent candidate Moin Khan bagged 2,067. The constituency fell vacant due to the death of JUI-F's Khalid Raza Jakori. The polling started at 8am and continued up till 5pm without any break. Around 21 candidates were contesting from the constituency. The total number of registered voters was 88,636 including 51,436 males and 37200 females.

[Daily Times -- February 11, 2010]

PP-111

SC Rejects Plea for Staying By-Polls in PP-111 Gujrat

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court on February 19 rejected a plea seeking a stay on by-elections in PP-111, Gujrat constituency. The bench comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, Justice Chaudhry Ijaz Ahmed and Justice Ghulam Rabbani, however, accepted a plea by PML-N candidate Haji Nasir Mehmood against the decision of an election tribunal of the Lahore High Court, which disqualified him on February 3 for having an unrecognised bachelor's degree. Mian Imran Masood of the PML-Q had challenged that Haji Nasir possessed a bachelor's degree from a university that was not recognised by the Higher Education Commission.

[Daily Times -- February 20, 2010]

Judicial Updates

Govt Accepts CJP's Demands

The Government accepted recommendations by the Chief Justice "in the best national interests", elevating Justice Saqib Nisar and Justice Asif Saeed Khosa as judges of the Supreme Court and appointing Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday an ad hoc SC judge, while Justice Khawaja Muhammad Sharif would continue serving as the Lahore High Court chief justice. Confirming the appointments, Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar said President Asif Ali Zardari signed the summary of the appointments last night. Earlier in the day – following negotiations with Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry that lasted for more than three hours at the Prime Minister's House, Yousaf Raza Gilani announced the withdrawal of the Presidential Orders of February 13 and the issuance of a new notification. The Prime Minister and the Chief Justice agreed that the consultative process among the pillars of state should be constructive and meaningful.

[Daily Times -- February 18, 2010]

Economic Governance

Facts & Figures on Pakistan's Economy

Remittances Rise By 21% in First 7 Months of FY10

Remittances sent home by overseas Pakistanis continued to show a rising trend as an amount of \$5,198.13 million was received in the first seven months (July-January) of the current fiscal year 2009-10, showing an increase of \$920.82 million or 21.53 percent over the same period of the last fiscal year. The amount of \$5,198.13 million includes \$0.99 million received through encashment and profit earned on Foreign Exchange Bearer Certificates (FEBCs) and Foreign Currency Bearer Certificates (FCBCs).

In January 2010, an amount of \$667.90 million was sent home by overseas Pakistanis, up 4.80 percent or \$30.60 million, when compared with \$637.30 million received in the same month last year. The inflow of remittances in the July-January, 2010 period from UAE, USA, Saudi Arabia, GCC countries (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman), UK and EU countries amounted to \$1,180.29 million, \$1,061.89 million, \$999.41 million, \$737.72 million, \$550.35 million and \$157.93 million respectively as compared to \$868.93 million, \$1,029.03 million, \$838.66 million, \$690.30 million, \$289.96 million and \$131.74 million respectively in the July-January, 2009 period. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during the first seven months of the current fiscal year amounted to \$509.52 million as against \$428.30 million in the same period last year.

The monthly average remittances for the July-January 2010 period comes out to \$742.59 million as compared to \$611.04 million during the same corresponding period of the last fiscal year, registering an increase of 21.53 percent. During last month i.e. January 2010 remittances from UAE, Saudi Arabia, USA, GCC countries (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman), UK and EU countries amounted to \$158.33 million, \$153.50 million, \$123.49 million, \$95.27 million, \$67.56 million and \$15.14 million respectively as compared to \$169.50 million, \$123.76 million, \$125.54 million, \$93.76 million, \$50.14 million and \$20.33 million in January 2009. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during January 2010 amounted to \$54.62 million compared with \$54.25 million in the same month last year. It may be pointed out the State Bank, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis had undertaken a joint initiative by the name of 'Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI)' recently in the hope of facilitating the flow of remittances through formal channels. This initiative has started to materialize and remittances through formal channels are showing considerable growth.

Macroeconomic Brief : PIDE Sees Signs of Economic Recovery After Back-to-Back Shocks

Buffeted by back-to-back external shocks and internal challenges during the past couple of years, Pakistan's economy has begun to show some signs of improvement as inflationary pressures have eased and the current account balance has improved significantly.

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)'s Macroeconomic Brief, issued on February 1, revealed that the fiscal deficit has narrowed down to 5.2 percent of GDP, a decline of about 30 percent in 2008-09. Despite these signs of recovery, however, growth prospects for 2009-10 remain grim as the economy continues to face serious challenges on both external and domestic fronts, says the Brief. It says there is, therefore, a need to gear macroeconomic policies towards consolidating the nascent recovery while at the same time laying the foundations of sustainable growth.

The global financial crisis hit Pakistan at a time when the economy was reeling from severe macroeconomic imbalances resulting from the unprecedented hike in prices of oil and other commodities, it says. The global financial and economic meltdown combined with crippling power crisis and the security environment exacerbated Pakistan's woes as economic growth slowed down sharply, foreign exchange reserves dwindled, and foreign capital inflows dried up. The surging fiscal and current account deficits, and unavailability of other external financing options forced the government to sign a stand-by agreement with the IMF in November 2008 to achieve macroeconomic stability through fiscal consolidation and monetary tightening, it says. Ironically, it says, when the rest of the world was slashing discount rates and providing fiscal stimuli, the Pakistani government revised the PSDP (2008-09) downwards by Rs 150 billion and the SBP kept the policy discount rate at a high of 15 percent. Consequently, the government relaxed its stance toward stabilization and moved towards economic stimulus through a more expansionary fiscal policy coupled with a relative easing of monetary policy. Questions, however, remain regarding sustainability of macroeconomic stabilization and availability of fiscal space for economic stimulus, he said.

Various economic indicators have shown volatile behaviour in the recent past. **Inflation** touched the single digit in October 2009, after a marathon run of double digit inflation for 21 months, only to rise again in November. Manufacturing sector posted positive growth for July (0.63 percent) and August (1.3 percent), went in the negative zone in September (-2.6 percent), and rose again in October (5 percent). Tax collection as a percentage of GDP actually declined, raising questions about availability of much needed fiscal space for economic stimulus. It is our considered opinion that the economic recovery is uncertain and the situation warrants caution in changing gear from stabilisation to stimulus. After following a tight monetary policy under the Stand-by Agreement with the IMF for about six months the SBP has been on a path of steadily lowering the discount rate. This revision was basically premised on 'substantial improvements' in multiple indicators—the downward trend in inflation; the improving current account balance; domestic demand contraction; and positive trends in the real sector. The expectation that inflation will remain in single digit is, however, quite unrealistic in view of the rising international commodity prices, recent increase in domestic power and gas tariffs, and the dismal performance of the real sector. To provide further impetus to the sluggish economy, the SBP again revised the policy rate downwards by 50 basis points to 12.5 percent in November 2009. This easing of monetary policy without taking care of supply-side bottlenecks is likely to build inflationary pressures in the economy.

Fiscal activism is also evident as PSDP for 2009-10 (421 billion rupees) is almost twice the PSDP for 2008-09 (219 billion rupees, revised). Total **expenditure** in the first quarter of FY 10 increased by about 25 percent compared to the same period last year. Increased government expenditure in the past two quarters on account of war on terror, the IDPs and ambitious expenditure outlays by provinces combined with lax taxation efforts do not bode well for

fiscal consolidation. Continued dependence on external sources of finance in an environment where global economic recovery is sluggish adds to uncertainties regarding the financing and size of fiscal deficit.

A look at some key macroeconomic indicators presents a worrying picture. Inflation remains stubborn even today. Inflation has receded in recent months on account of strong base effect of the fiscal year 2008-09, and this effect is expected to phase out by early 2010. Monthly Consumer Price Index (CPI) reveals a constant upward trend, though December 2009 witnessed a slight decline in the index. The recent increase in the **electricity and gas tariffs** will exert an upward pressure on general price level. So, in all fairness, inflationary pressures will build up again. It is interesting to note that the present policy stance completely disregards the supply-side imperfections that inhibit price adjustments in domestic markets. The wheat crisis during Ramadan and the present sugar crisis reflect governance issues (cartelisation, hoarding) in the domestic supply chain and cannot be tackled through monetary policy alone. The support price mechanism also needs review. Last year, the support price for wheat was fixed at Rs 950 per mound when international wheat prices were going down, without realising its impact on inflation later on. Further, controlling inflation has been problematic due to depreciation of Pakistani rupee, which inhibited pass through of lowered international oil and other commodity prices to domestic consumers in the aftermath of global economic crisis. These prices are showing upward trend again, therefore domestic prices will become under pressure even more.

The **industrial production** has shown some recovery during July-November 2009: the Quantum Index Number of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries [QIM] shows positive growth (0.7 percent, Y-o-Y), arresting the downward slide of the index for thirteen months in a row. However, a combination of factors including continued power outages and tariff hike, increased cost of imported raw materials, the law and order situation, and depressed external demand pose significant risks to a lasting recovery in the industrial sector. The credit to private sector shows marginal improvement in recent months, but Y-o-Y average shows a contraction of three percent in credit off-take during November. Though total domestic credit expanded by eight percent, the expansion is accounted for by increased allocation of resources for government budgetary support; thus crowding out credit to private sector.

Current account balance showed remarkable improvement in the first quarter of fiscal year 2009-10, declining to \$532 million from \$4.26 billion during the same period a year ago. In fact, the deficit narrowed down from its peak in October 2008 to post a surplus in September 2009. There are two warning signs in this development. First, much of this improvement owes to a surge in the foreign remittances. Questions arise regarding sustainability and origin of this unusual phenomenon. Second, trade gap is beginning to widen again as import growth has outstripped growth in **exports** in December 2009 on a year-on-year basis. **Import** of textile machinery has taken a hit, which is 32 percent lower for July-November 2009 as compared to the same period the previous year, implying sluggish economic activity in our main export sector. High cost of inputs, power crisis and dampened external demand pose substantial barriers for rapid recovery of exports. Meanwhile, imports are likely to increase due to upward trend in the oil and other commodity prices, and expansion in domestic demand.

Pakistan's external liabilities soared by almost US\$ 3 billion during the first quarter. This does not augur well for the fiscal balance in future. If the increase in external debt remains consistently unmatched by GDP growth and foreign exchange earnings, then Pakistan may once again face debt servicing difficulties, similar to that of the late nineties, when a major part of taxation revenues were being eaten up by debt servicing. This complexity is compounded by the fact that foreign direct investment has dried up due to weak economic growth globally and law and order situation in Pakistan.

On the whole, the economy continues to face problems on internal as well as external front. Internal structural problems persist in the form of power shortages, law and order situation, and absence of domestically garnered resources. External situation is not optimistic as global economic recovery continues to remain weak, not boding well for our exports and availability of external finance. Overall, persistent inflation, sluggish activity in the real sector, internal security environment and weak recovery in the global economy present a challenging environment for reviving growth. The Brief concludes that there is a silver lining on the horizon as the emerging macroeconomic stability would help improve macroeconomic fundamentals and restore investor confidence thus providing a basis for durable recovery. However, a balancing act is required on part of the government to keep its stabilisation policies on track while giving impetus to economic activities.

[Daily Times -- February 2, 2010]

Tax to GDP Ratio at 10.5pc by June

Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar, on February 25, told the National Assembly that Government was working on a strategy to enhance tax to GDP ratio from current 9 percent to 10.5 percent in the current financial year. During question hour, she informed that gradually this ratio would be enhanced up to 15 percent of GDP by 2015. To a question, she said that a number of sectors providing services were included in the tax net in the current financial year while more sectors would be included in the tax net in the next financial year. She said that a target of Rs 1,380 billion revenue collection was set in the current financial year and it was expected the target would be surpassed. Ms Khar informed that a summery had been submitted to the Prime Minister for holding population census in which it had been proposed that house listing operation should be carried out in April while the population census will be held in October this year.

[The Nation -- February 26, 2010]

Donors' Financial Assistance and Pakistan's Economy

Pakistan Receives \$1.413bn Foreign Loan on Bilateral Basis

The government received \$1.413 billion loan on bilateral basis from different countries from February 2, 2008, to January 31, 2010 on different weighted average interest rates per annum (from 0.75 to 3.24 along with LIBOR + Margin). **China** has extended the maximum loan of \$795.17 million to Pakistan - \$295.17 million on 2.39 weighted average interest rate per annum and \$500 million on variable interest rate based on LIBOR + Margin. Saudi Arabia was second country that extended a maximum loan of \$455.591 million to Pakistan - \$123.41 million on 3.24 weighted average interest rate per annum and \$332.18 million over variable interest rate based on LIBOR + Margin. The government of **Japan** provided \$71.11 million loan on 1.34 fixed interest rate per annum. Germany extended \$45.61 million loan on fixed interest rate of 0.75 per annum, the lowest interest rate on which a loan was provided to Pakistan, the sources claimed. Pakistan received \$39.18 million foreign loan from **Kuwait** with 1.98 fixed interest rate per annum. The sum-total of these six countries' foreign loan is \$1.413 billion on fixed and variable interest rates.

Apart from the above bilateral loans, the government also got external loans from multilateral donors organizations. Pakistan had got \$5.475 billion over different interest rates, ranging from 0.75 to 3.97 along with LIBOR + Margin. From February 2008 to January 2010, Pakistan received \$2.724 billion from **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** - \$1.071 billion ADB loan was extended on 1-1.5 percent weighted average interest rate and \$1.654 billion on variable interest rate based on LIBOR + Margin. Second multilateral organization was the **International Development Association (IDA)**, which extended \$1.333 billion on fixed interest rate of 0.75 percent. **Islamic Development Bank (IDB)** (Short-term) forwarded \$1.078 billion on variable interest rate based on LIBOR + Margin. IDB extended \$153.448 million on both fixed and variable interest rates. An amount of \$111.394 million loan was provided on fixed interest rate of 3.97 percent per annum and \$42.053 million loan was provided on variable interest rate based LIBOR + Margin. During the same period, the sources claimed that the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)** extended \$145.268 million on variable interest rate based on LIBOR + Margin. Pakistan has received \$30.332 million from **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** on fixed interest rate of 0.75 percent per annum. **OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID)** provided Pakistan \$12.141 million on fixed interest rate of 1.40 percent per annum. The sum total of both bilateral and multilateral loans is \$6.888 billion, in which bilateral loan is \$1413.670 million and \$5.475 billion loan was received from multilateral donors organisation.

[Daily Times -- February 24, 2010]

Pakistan Identifies 80 Projects for FoDP Investors

Pakistan has identified at least 80 projects in the energy, infrastructure, agriculture, health and education sectors for potential investors from the Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FODP) forum under the Public-Private Partnership programme. Islamabad identified the projects at the FODP's first Public-Private Partnership Conference held in Dubai on January 26. The conference was co-chaired by UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Ali Nahayan and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Sources said work on some of the proposed projects would initiate soon, as the government had already received numerous enquiries from potential investors from the 20 countries present at the conference. The investors promised to take advantage of Pakistan's investor-friendly environment, sources added. They said the government was already busy making arrangements for the next Public-Private Partnership conference that would be held either in Karachi or Islamabad after some time. They said the Dubai conference was a unique event, as for the first time, over 400 delegates – including Turkish Deputy

Prime Minister Bulent Arinc and 250 corporate sector representatives – got together to explore potential investment opportunities in the country.

The investors were offered to finance projects in the energy, infrastructure development, agriculture, and education and health sectors. Separately, Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit told Daily Times that the FODP was not a donors' forum, but a platform to attract investors to Pakistan. The FODP, as the name suggests, is aimed at helping Pakistan improve its security situation and the economy, he added.

[Daily Times -- February 3, 2010]

AusAID to Assist BISP

Federal Minister and BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja said that Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is making headway in introducing various new initiatives for alleviation of poverty and making the poorest of the poor section of society financially independent. Talking to a delegation of AusAID visiting the BISP Secretariat on February 19, Farzana Raja said through the 'Waseela-e-Haq' scheme BISP is giving a loan of Rs300,000 to deserving families selected through a computerised draw. The loan will allow the lucky families to start their own business and escape the trap of poverty. She said various other initiatives were in the pipeline, which included health insurance for BISP beneficiaries and technical training for one member of the family. Through these initiatives BISP aims to bring financial independence, health and employment opportunities to the neglected section of the society, which is reeling under the burden of inflation, healthcare bills and unemployment.

The AusAID delegation appreciated BISP's performance and said it has made great achievements in a very short time. The delegation said AusAID seeks to identify possible areas of cooperation with BISP and was already in touch with BISP's development partners, such as USAID and World Bank. AusAID is looking into ways and means to support BISP.

[The News -- February 20, 2010]

Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP)

Public Sector Uplift Projects Face 36 Percent Cut

The Planning Commission has sought Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's approval for cutting allocation for the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) by a massive 36 percent. The cut will translate into PSDP's reduction to Rs285 billion from the original budgetary allocation of Rs446 billion for 2009-10. An official summary to this affect has been sent to the Prime Minister's office.

The summary disclosed that against the budgetary allocation of Rs446 billion for 2009-10, total releases in the first half (July-December) period stood at only Rs111 billion, which comes to about 25 percent indicating a massive reduction compared to the historical trends in the same period of the last few years. A tug of war continues between the Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry as the latter is conveying a downward revision up to 44 percent, scaling it down to Rs250 billion from an earlier envisaged allocation of Rs446 billion but the Planning Commission wants to keep the size of the PSDP, at least, at Rs285 billion. The PPP regime has been compelled into slashing PSDP spending owing to the non-materializing of the financial pledges made by the Friends of Democratic Pakistan Forum, reluctance on part of the US to release the promised assistance, and the FBR's revenue shortfall in the current fiscal year. Now the Planning Commission has sought the premier's approval for keeping the size of the PSDP to the tune of Rs285 billion instead of Rs250 billion, as desired by finance, in order to avoid delays on mega projects such as Bhasha Dam, and some of the projects which were already inaugurated by President Asif Ali Zardari or Prime Minister Gilani - Chashma (C) 2, C3 and C4, and many others.

Keeping in view the Mid-year Review of the PSDP for first six months (July-December) period with all ministries/divisions, the PC proposed criteria for adjusting downward revised allocation. It states that the projects nearing completion would be fully protected, contractual bindings with foreign donors will be honoured, projects under packages will be protected to a possible maximum extent while slow moving projects would be deferred, bricks and mortar projects can be delayed unless very critical and new projects not yet started may be deferred till next financial year 2010-11. The PC pointed out in the summary that the special development packages initiated by the government to ensure regional balanced growth like Quetta, Southern Punjab, Karachi, Larkana, Dera Bugti, Kohlu, and Lyari would also be subject to heavy reductions leading to delays in completion.

Pointing out risks of downsizing the PSDP, the summary states that the large-scale reduction in development expenditures will further slow down the economic revival and job opportunities created through development projects would be adversely affected. It further states that the projects nearing completion will be further delayed by a year or two that will not only result in depriving the nation of benefits from the projects, but also result in cost overruns. The summary says the progress on mega infrastructure projects such as Mangla Dam Raising, Bhasha Dam, small and medium dams (some of them have already been inaugurated by the president or the prime minister), motorways and highways, Gwadar connectivity roads, New Gwadar International Airport, fixed investment of railways, C2, C3 and C4, satellite programmes and national watercourses programmes would be affected with high economic cost. The expenditure on the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the summary states, would have to be reduced against commitment made with the World Bank. With the reduction, the summary pointed out that the government's commitment to allocate more funds to less developed regions such as Balochistan, Fata, Gilgit-Baltistan, and the AJK would also be difficult to fulfil and the ongoing development activities in the areas would suffer to large extent. The summary states that in January 2010, the Finance Division informed the Planning Commission that the overall size of the PSDP would be slashed to Rs250 billion as against the original estimates of Rs446 billion, a reduction of 44 per cent on the grounds of financial constraints.

To strike a balance between resource constraints and development needs, the Planning Commission has worked out two options, according to which, one seeks bringing down the PSDP from Rs446 billion to Rs250 billion as indicated by the Finance Division. However, keeping in view its repercussions as well as evaluating demands by ministries/divisions/executing agencies in the recently concluded Mid Year Review of PSDP 2009-10, the option two recommended that the government keeps the revised size of the PSDP at Rs285 billion against Rs250 billion proposed by the Finance Division. The PC also says that there should be some priority areas, and not an across the board cut.

[The News -- February 6, 2010]

National Finance Commission (NFC) Award

Provinces' Grants Slashed to Rs 6bn for 2010-11

The Federal Government has finally decided to bring down the grants to the four provinces to just only Rs 6 billion in the next fiscal year (2010-11) from Rs 53 billion provided in 2009-10. The source in the Ministry of Finance said, "the provinces would be achieving budget surplus of Rs 275 billion in the next fiscal year 2010-11 as per NFC share award."

All the four provincial governments would receive Rs 1.261 trillion in 2010-11 as total revenues, including, NFC share, straight transfers and net lending from the federal government, besides total expenditures of the provinces have been estimated at Rs 986 billion in the current fiscal year 2010-11, showing a surplus of 275 billion in 2010-11, sources added. Official sources informed that Budget Strategy paper-1 has been approved in the federal cabinet meeting on February 10, 2010, which also contained the Provincial Government's 'Medium Term Fiscal Framework' having projections for 2010-13.

Provincial Government's 'Medium Term Fiscal Framework', which has been prepared based on forecast of revenues and expenditures of all the four provinces in the next fiscal year. Provincial Government's MTFP projections revealed that net revenues of the provinces would jump to Rs 1.261 trillion in 2010-11 from revised estimates of Rs 891 billion in 2009-10, projecting an increase of Rs 370 billion. Provincial share of federal revenues to increase from Rs 577 billion in 2009-10 to Rs 900 billion in 2010-11, straight transfers from federal government to provinces to increase from Rs 85 billion to Rs 145 billion in 2010-11. Grants from the Federal Government to all four provincial governments to decreased to Rs 6 billion in 2010-11 as compared to Rs 53 billion in 2009-10. Non-tax revenue of the provincial governments is projected at Rs 99 billion in 2010-11 as compared to Rs 70 billion in the current fiscal year 2009-10. Net federal lending to the provinces by the federal government would remain at the same level of Rs 11 billion in 2010-11.

Provincial Government's MTFP projections on expenditures side revealed that total expenditures of the four provincial governments were projected increase to Rs 986 billion in 2010-11 as against Rs 807 billion in the current fiscal year 2009-10. Total non-development expenditures of the four provinces were projected to increase to Rs 700 billion in 2010-11 as against Rs 590 billion in the current fiscal year 2009-10. Moreover, Provinces would be required to pay federal government Rs 20 billion in the head of interest of federal loans in 2010-11 as against Rs 17 billion interest payments in the current fiscal year 2009-10. Development expenditures of the provincial

governments have been projected to increase to Rs 260 billion in 2010-11 as against Rs 200 billion in the current fiscal year 2009-10. Net revenues of the four provincial governments were projected at Rs 884 billion at the start of the current fiscal year 2009-10, however, due to improved federal share of taxes, the revised projection for the net revenues of the provincial governments are expected to be Rs 891 billion by June 30, 2010. Provincial share in federal revenues is to increase from initial Rs 570 billion to Rs 577 billion by June 30, 2010. Tax revenues at Rs 70 billion, straight transfers at Rs 85 billion, non-tax revenues Rs 95 billion, federal grants at Rs 95 billion, net federal lending at Rs 11 billion by June 30, 2010. The total expenditures of the four provincial governments have been estimated to remain at the same level at Rs 807 billion, as were projected at the time of the start of the current fiscal year 2009-10 i.e. non-development expenditures at Rs 590 billion, interest to federal government at Rs 17 billion, and development expenditures at Rs 200 billion.

[Daily Times -- February 19, 2010]

Local Governance

LG Convention Opposes Change of System

A Convention on local government system has opposed appointment of administrators in place of nazims and demanded holding of elections and enforcement of article 140(A) of the constitution that deals with the LG system. The Convention was organised by the Local Councils Association of Sindh at the residence of Tando Allahyar District Nazim Dr Rahila Magsi on February 6. Former Chairman of National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) Danyal Aziz, Quetta city nazim Mir Maqbool Lahri, Sukkur District Nazim Nasir Shah, Tharparkar District Nazim Arbab Anwar, former provincial minister Dr Irfan Gul Magi and others spoke on the occasion. Danyal Aziz alleged that the government was harassing nazims and levelling accusations against them. He held the government responsible for paralysing local governments by withholding funds and preventing officers from attending meetings of nazims. "But these hurdles cannot disappoint nazims," he said. He said that people had seen that the governments of the PPP and the PML-N had delivered nothing except for corruption and price hike. He said that late Benazir Bhutto under a new social contract had proposed district governors, but the present government had failed to do that. He said that the PPP and PML-N could seize this opportunity and utilise their workers in the local government system but they did not trust their activists. He said that government was out to do away with the present system. He claimed that the promise for holding local government elections in Sindh within four months was a lie because it would be busy in budget making after four months in June. He said that 6,122 union councils of the country would draft a new charter of democracy if their aspirations were not fulfilled. Dr Rahila Magsi demanded elections under the supervision of judiciary and army. She urged Muttahida Qaumi Movement chief Altaf Hussain and his party not to compromise over principles. "You (Altaf Hussain) should pressurise government to announce local government elections," she pleaded.

RESOLUTIONS: The Convention adopted resolutions, demanding local bodies' elections and opposing administrators' appointment. It called for elections by an independent authority and vowed to strive for the provincial autonomy. It pledged to launch a campaign to inform people about fully-empowered and effective local governments. Later, participants of the Convention staged a protest walk.

[Dawn -- February 7, 2010]

Provinces & the Status of LGS

Punjab

Administrators Take Charge of Local Govts in Punjab

The Punjab government on Wednesday appointed administrators for local governments in the province after gazette notification of the Punjab Local Government Amendment Ordinance 2010 under which the councils and the nazims also automatically ceased to exist. The appointment of administrators ended the four-year rule of nazims who were made controversial after the PML-N formed its government in Punjab last year. The Punjab government also intends to shortly replace the district government system given by Gen Musharraf in 2001 with a local council system of its own choice. The amendments made to the 2001 ordinance by the Punjab Assembly early this month and ratified by the governor on Tuesday also provide for the announcement of next elections in six months, and under the provincial election authority rather than the previous practice of doing so under the Pakistan Election Commission.

According to sources, the provision to create a local election authority in Punjab has been made to avoid announcement of elections by the Election Commission of Pakistan under the existing Musharraf regime's Local Government Ordinance of 2001. They say that the Punjab government intends to hold the next local elections under a system of its own choice which shall be introduced through another law of the Punjab Assembly. The administrators were appointed through notifications and senior Punjab government officers said they all would immediately assume charge of their new offices while performing their original duties. They clarified that the appointment had been made under Section 179-A of the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001 after inserting the new amendments in it.

DCOs were made administrators of the city district and district governments, DOs (Revenue) of the tehsil municipal administrations of district headquarters, DDOs (Revenue) of all the other tehsil municipal administrations, and tehsil officers (Regulation) of all union councils falling in a tehsil. As many as 23 junior officers working in the five city district governments in Punjab -- Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Multan -- were also appointed administrators of the towns where they were posted.

[Dawn -- February 25, 2010]

Administrators' Appointment on Non-Political Basis: Sanaullah

The Punjab government will appoint administrators on "non-political basis" to replace nazims in districts, provincial Law Minister Rana Sanaullah said on February 23. The Minister made the comments while addressing a ceremony to mark the completion of the parliamentary year at the Punjab Assembly. Sanaullah said the Punjab government would appoint administrators through a notification immediately after the Punjab Governor signed the local government amendment bill. He said issues related to the appointment of administrators had already been resolved at a meeting between Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders. The Minister said Grade 17 or 18 officers would be appointed to small districts, while officers of Grade 20 could be appointed to major districts. He said town municipal officers would not be appointed administrators, as "they do not qualify for the post".

[Daily Times -- February 24, 2010]

Sindh

LG Bodies Dissolved

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah announced on February 24 the dissolution of all local government institutions — from the city district governments to the union councils — and relieving of nazims by appointing administrators throughout the province. The Chief Minister said all efforts of the government were aimed at holding elections within 120 days, most likely in May, under new local government laws which were being framed. He said Fazlur Rehman, the Secretary to the Local Government Department, had been appointed Administrator for the Karachi city government but in most cases district coordination officers and town municipal officers had been retained as administrators in their respective institutions. He also said offices of the DCO and TMO had been merged into one designation of administrator who would run and supervise the ongoing projects.

These administrators would also be responsible for holding the coming local government elections in a fair and transparent manner. These elections would be conducted by the Election Commission of Pakistan under its rules in contrast to the three other provinces, Punjab, the NWFP and Balochistan, where the LG election authority had been revived to conduct elections in accordance with the pre-2001 practice. The Chief Minister said that we have decided to hold elections under the Election Commission due to peculiar circumstances in our province. Besides, he said, a new local government law was being framed based on good aspects of the Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 1979 and the Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 2001 which besides reflecting the aspirations of the people should be able to resolve their basic problems at their doorsteps.

[Dawn -- February 25, 2010]

Ordinance Promulgated to Resolve Administrators' Issue

Dr Ishratul Ibad promulgated Sindh Local Government (second amendment) Ordinance, 2010 on February 23 to remove the lacuna that stood in the way of appointment of local government officers as administrators across the province. The promulgation of a last-resort ordinance, which largely makes the Sindh assembly's bill irrelevant, is being seen as a failure of the provincial lawmakers to make well-thought-out legislation. The Sindh Assembly had unanimously passed the Sindh Local Government (amendment) Bill, 2010 on February 15 and the Governor lost no time in signing it on the next day and after his nod the bill became an act, titled the Sindh Local Government (Amendment) Act, 2010. Sub-section 3 of the amended Section 179-A of the Act allowed the Provincial

Government to appoint civil servants as Administrators in districts, towns/talukas of the province. The term civil servant does not apply to the officers of the local government services and thus they could not be appointed administrators. After hectic consultation between the two coalition partners, PPP and MQM, it was decided that the governor would promulgate an ordinance to remove the legal hitch.

[Dawn -- February 24, 2010]

NWFP

NWFP Dissolves Local Bodies, Appoints Administrators

The NWFP government on February 20 dissolved with immediate effect all district, tehsil, town and union councils across the Province, according to a notification. Consequently, all nazims, naib nazims and other council members in the Province have ceased to hold their respective offices. Senior NWFP Minister Bashir Ahmed Bilour – who also holds the Local Government (LG) portfolio – said at a press briefing at the NWFP Assembly that the district coordination officers (DCOs) in the province had been appointed as administrators in place of the district nazims. The DCOs would also continue to perform their previous duties, he added. The LG minister said town municipal officers, tehsil municipal officers (TMOs) and tehsil municipal administrations (TMAs) had been authorised to perform the duties of town nazims and tehsil nazims in addition to their current duties. The LG Minister said the assistant coordination officers (ACO), town officers (TO) and the deputy district officers (DDO) had been authorised to perform the duties of an administrator in tehsils and TMAs to facilitate the people of the province. He said the LG polls would be held within six months on party basis. The LG minister said the government would “keep an eye” on administrators, monitor their work and take action against non-performing officials. He further said that the government would also launch investigations against former nazims “involved in irregularities”. Bilour said it was unfortunate that dictators had toppled the democratic set-up of the country, and had used the LG system to prolong their rule through referendums and other “unfair” means. The Senior Minister said that LG was a provincial subject, and the NWFP government would not allow anyone to interfere in the province’s affairs, as the NWFP government believed in provincial autonomy.

[Daily Times -- February 21, 2010]

Regional Politics & Election Watch

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Pakistan, India Fail to Break Logjam on Peace Process

Hopes for early normalisation of bilateral ties between Pakistan and India were dashed, on February 25, as the countries' top diplomats failed to agree on a timetable to revive the stalled peace process. Diplomatic sources said the meeting between Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir and his Indian counterpart, Nirupma Rao, concluded with differences over all key issues, including the Kashmir dispute and terrorism. The two sides did not issue a joint statement at the end of talks, nor held a joint press conference – opting instead for separate media briefings – in an indication that the gulf between the two sides is too vast to bridge in a single session. The only ray of hope to emerge from the meeting was a general understanding to “remain in touch” and the possibility that Nirupama Rao would accept an invitation to visit Pakistan ahead of a SAARC summit scheduled for April 20.

Addressing a press conference, the Indian Foreign Secretary said “terrorism” was discussed for most of the time and India had handed over “three dossiers” to Pakistani officials. A foreign news agency said the dossiers were on those linked to the Mumbai attacks, an al Qaeda-linked terrorist, and Indian fugitives hiding in Pakistan. The sources said Pakistan failed to achieve the goals of time-and-result-oriented dialogue, the revival of the composite peace process and the resumption of talks from the pre-Mumbai attacks status. Pakistan also failed to hand over a dossier listing evidence of Indian involvement in the Tribal Areas. While the country's diplomats brought up the distribution of water, they failed to move India. The secretary-level talks have given weight to the notion that the meeting was managed by India to highlight its concerns over “cross-border terrorism” and sideline the Kashmir dispute.

[Daily Times -- February 26, 2010]

Accord on Roadmap to Settle Pak-India Water Dispute

India and Pakistan agreed on a “roadmap for resolving water disputes” and decided to hold two additional meetings, besides a routine meeting due in May, over the next six months. On the last day of a five-day visit, a three-member Indian delegation yielded to a Pakistani demand that all “water disputes must be resolved with an agreed timeframe” because their lingering would create problems for both countries. Pakistan's Indus Commissioner Syed Jamaat Ali Shah said the two sides had decided to hold one of the additional meetings by the end of March and the other by the end of June to expedite the pace of dispute resolution. He said that the decision is the biggest achievement made during five days of deliberations. Pakistan expressed concern over dwindling water supplies in western rivers which were given to Pakistan as a replacement for eastern rivers. Pakistan is supposed to transfer western water to its eastern part. Shah said the Indians were told that a reduction in supplies was jeopardising the water transfer operation which should be allowed to happen. Pakistan called for an effective flow of information as required under the Indus Basin Water Treaty and said that any obstruction in this regard would create problems for implementing the treaty. Shah said the Indian delegation had agreed that settlement of all water disputes must be time-bound because open-ended talks were counter-productive and bred confusion and frustration.

The Indus treaty protects rights of both the upper (India) and lower riparian (Pakistan) states. The two countries needed to stick to their parts of implementation, Mr Shah said, adding that Pakistan had also asked India to take steps if deforestation and environmental impact affected river flows on its side. Talking to reporters at the Lahore airport before leaving for home, Auranga Nathan, India's Indus Commissioner, rejected a perception that the water issue could trigger a war between Pakistan and India.

[Dawn -- February 11, 2010]

Pakistan, Iran to Work for Regional Stability

Pakistan and Iran have stressed that parliamentary relations and people-to-people contacts are two key factors in strengthening relations between the two countries. This was stated in a joint statement issued at the conclusion of National Assembly Speaker Dr Fahmida Mirza's visit to Iran on an official invitation of her Iranian counterpart Dr Ali Larejani. The statement called for enhanced cooperation and communication between the parliamentary standing committees, particularly security and foreign relations, economy, legal affairs, culture and education.

The two countries underscored the importance of continued closer contacts between women parliamentarians and encouraged regular exchange of delegations. It was agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of research on issues of common interest since being two important independent Islamic countries of the region, they have significant academic, scientific and research base. For this purpose, Iran's Parliament declared its readiness to make available to the National Assembly of Pakistan the researches undertaken by the Research Center of Parliament on legislative and other related issues. Pakistan and Iran underlined the need to settle all international disputes by peaceful means through dialogue and negotiations without the use of coercive measures, which could further destabilise the region.

[The News -- February 10, 2010]

Indian Politics

History Inverted -- Indian to Re-Launch East India Company

A Mumbai-born entrepreneur plans to relaunch the East India Company after strenuously acquiring shares in the firm that once ruled India. With a \$15 million investment and inputs from a range of experts, from designers and brand researchers to historians, Sanjiv Mehta plans to open the company store in Conduit Street of the main Regent Street in the heart of London next month. Describing it as an achievement, Mehta said "I have this huge feeling of redemption, this indescribable feeling of owning a company that once owned us." Mehta said he travelled around the world, visiting former East India Company trading posts and museums, reading up records and meeting people who understood business of that time. He said that there was a huge sense of responsibility. I did not create this brand, But I wanted to be as pioneering as the merchants who created it. The East India Company was formed initially for pursuing trade with the East Indies, but that ended up trading mainly with the Indian subcontinent and China. The oldest among several similarly formed European East India Companies, the firm was granted an English Royal Charter, under the name Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies by Queen Elizabeth 1 on December 1600.

[The Times of India -- February 14, 2010]

Iran Warns India Against Delaying IPI Gas Project Decision

Iran nearly gave an ultimatum to India on February 9 to take a decision on the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project before it is "too late". Addressing a press conference, Iranian Ambassador to India Syed Mehdi Nabizadeh said Tehran could not wait "indefinitely" for India to decide on the project, while negotiations with Pakistan had reached the implementation stage. "We have kept our doors open for India to join the project. It (Iran) will not wait indefinitely. There must be a time limit," the envoy said. India has cited security concerns and over-pricing as reasons for delaying the decision on the 2775 kilometre-long gas pipeline project. However, the Iranian envoy welcomed India's offer to resume foreign secretary-level talks with Pakistan, and offered Tehran's help in facilitating talks between New Delhi and Islamabad.

[Daily Times -- February 10, 2010]

Post-Election Scenario in Afghanistan

Afghan Leader Cancels Meeting with Muslim Body

Afghan President Hamid Karzai canceled a meeting with a major Muslim group in Saudi Arabia that had been aimed at helping reconciliation efforts with the Taliban. The meeting was called off because Karzai had reservations about the agenda, a senior official from the group, the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), said. However, an Afghan diplomat traveling with Karzai told that the meeting was canceled because the Afghan delegation wanted to visit Medina. Karzai arrived in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, seeking help in his efforts to reconcile with the Taliban. The canceled meeting would have addressed the OIC's role in containing Afghan tensions and followed up on OIC efforts to organize a conference for Islamic scholars from different Afghan religious authorities, the OIC said. The senior OIC official said, "we understand that Saudi Arabia supports this drive by the OIC for debate among Afghan religious leaders as a means to convince the Taliban to openly abandon al Qaeda."

Riyadh has arranged and hosted talks between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives in the past and Karzai, in remarks published by Saudi newspapers, said any message from King Abdullah would have a big impact on the Taliban and other Islamist movements. But Riyadh has said the Taliban must deny sanctuary to Saudi-born al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, whose group waged bloody attacks against the kingdom in the past, before it will agree to act as a mediator in any Afghan peace deal. And Mustafa Alani, of Dubai-based think tank Gulf Research Center, said Saudi Arabia had no intention to mediate because the risks were too high and the rewards

unclear. In cooperation with Washington, Riyadh lent financial support to the Afghan Mujahideen in its fight against Soviet forces in the 1980s. But that support came under scrutiny after the September 11, 2001 attacks on U.S. landmarks, claimed by al Qaeda.

[Reuters -- February 3, 2010]

Sri-Lanka's Presidential Election

Sri Lanka to Court Martial Presidential Loser

According to the Defence Ministry, Sri Lanka's former Army Chief and defeated Presidential hopeful Sarath Fonseka is to be court-martialled on charges of conspiring against the government. Ministry spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said Fonseka, seized by troops at his office in Colombo on February 8 night, had colluded with opposition politicians while still head of the army. Rambukwella said that the broader charges were that he engaged with political leaders and political parties that were working against the government. He shall be tried and punished for that offence by a court martial. Asked if Fonseka could be tried for treason, Rambukwella said: "It could be one of the charges."

Fonseka, 59, the only four-star General in the Army, quit in November after falling out with his Commander-in-Chief, President Mahinda Rajapakse, whom he later challenged in January Presidential elections. Shortly after the poll, which Rajapakse won, the government accused Fonseka of plotting a coup to overthrow the president and assassinate his family members.

Opposition leader and former premier Ranil Wickremesinghe said Fonseka's arrest was "a big blow to democracy" in Sri Lanka. "This should never have happened," Wickremesinghe told reporters during a visit to India where he called on Rajapakse to secure Fonseka's immediate release. The arrest also prompted concern from the United States, which said it could worsen divisions as the island recovers from its long war.

[Daily Times -- February 10, 2010]

Sri Lankan Opposition Parties Protest over Election Results

Sri Lankan opposition parties, including the United National Party (UNP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), together with their defeated "common candidate," General Sarath Fonseka, held a protest rally in Colombo on Wednesday to demand the annulment of the January 26 presidential election results. The UNP and JVP, with the political assistance of the ex-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), are seeking to cynically exploit widespread popular concern and anger over President Mahinda Rajapakse's abuse of democratic rights and expanding crackdown on political opposition. Both the UNP and the JVP are well-known for their own anti-democratic methods. Moreover, Fonseka, who was the country's top general until last December, would have just as ruthless in implementing the agenda of the business elite if he had won. Around 10,000 people, mostly members and supporters of opposition parties, took part in the protests. Their slogans included "Condemn election rigging", "Don't accept the distorted result of the election", and "We cannot let the king [Rajapakse] shut the mouth of the media". Police refused to allow loudspeakers to be used.

According to the official results, Rajapakse won the election with a majority of about 1.7 million votes. During the campaign, his ruling coalition certainly exploited state resources and the state-owned media to the hilt. Undoubtedly, the government resorted to intimidation, violence and ballot stuffing—as did the opposition parties to a lesser extent. However, neither Fonseka nor the opposition leaders has provided evidence of electoral malpractice on a scale that would have altered the outcome. Rajapakse won primarily because many voters did not regard Fonseka as an alternative. Both men ruthlessly waged the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that ended in its defeat last May. Rajapakse and Fonseka bear responsibility for the military's indiscriminate slaughter of thousands of civilians and its abuse of democratic rights, including the operations of death squads that killed hundreds of people. Both made clear to corporate leaders that they would impose the burden of the present economic crisis onto working people.

[www.wsws.org -- February 5, 2010]

Nepal's New Constitution

Time Running Out in Nepal's Quest for a Constitution

Two years after landmark elections ended centuries of royal rule, lawmakers in Nepal are scrambling to complete a new constitution that will shape the future of the troubled Himalayan nation. With just three months to go until the interim constitution expires, disagreements remain on such fundamental issues as the structure of the national government and the creation of federal states where none now exist. The new constitution is supposed to heal the divisions that led to a bloody Maoist insurgency and is viewed as a crucial step in Nepal's rapid transformation from semi-feudal Hindu monarchy to secular democracy. Analysts say it is key to ensuring lasting peace after a decade-long civil war between Maoist guerrillas and the state, in which more than 16,000 people died.

Senior Adviser on the Constitution building process with the UN Development Program said that the constitution writing is a vital part of the peace process. He said that it's part of what people were promised, part of the terms and conditions of the making of the peace. If you have a state that works, people have an incentive to be attached to it. If you have a state that's inclusive in its function, people have a greater incentive to be attached to it. But the document has been the subject of almost two years of political wrangling, and a deadline of May 28, when the Interim Constitution introduced in 2006 will expire, is looming. Nilambar Acharya, chairman of the Parliamentary committee charged with putting the constitution together, admitted that the drafting process was in "cold storage." He told in an interview that disputes between the parties regarding the new federal structure, the judicial and governance systems and the roles of the head of the state and government remain unresolved. Some lawmakers want the country to be run as a Westminster-style parliamentary system with a ceremonial president, while others are calling for a powerful elected president -- the system favored by the Maoists.

[Dawn -- February 4, 2010]

Election in Ukraine

Yanukovich Officially Declared President of Ukraine

Ukraine's Viktor Yanukovich was declared President-elect by the country's main Election Body on 14 February, leaving rival Yulia Tymoshenko with only a slender chance of taking power through a legal challenge.

Background

The EU recognised the Presidential Elections in Ukraine, the second round of which took place on 7 February, as fair. Before that, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, who monitored the elections, issued a statement calling Sunday's vote an "impressive display of democratic elections". But observers also pointed to the lack of mutual trust between the candidates. According to the final election report from the Central Elections Commission, Yanukovich gained 48.95% of the vote, while his rival, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, gained 45.47%. The turnout stood at 69.07%. A total of 4.36% of voters rejected both candidates. Yanukovich has received congratulations for his election from many Western leaders, including NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Following the elections, Ukraine, a former Soviet republic of 46 million people wedged between the European Union and Russia, is faced with the challenge of handling relations with its powerful neighbours and unblocking frozen IMF aid for its ailing economy. Just days before the first round, Tymoshenko promised that her country would become an EU member if she were elected president (EurActiv 15/01/10). After the first round, Yanukovich led with 38% of the vote, Tymoshenko had 24% and businessman Sergey Tigipko obtained 13%.

Tymoshenko, the fiery 49-year-old Prime Minister who trailed Yanukovich by only a slim margin in the 7 February vote, renewed charges of election fraud against his camp on Saturday and said he would never be a "legitimately-elected" President. But supporters of the 59-year-old opposition leader, who is backed by wealthy industrialists, brushed off any real threat from an expected challenge by Tymoshenko to a high court. One pro-Yanukovich official said that after the Central Election Commission's declaration on Sunday Yanukovich could be sworn into office as early as the last week of February. The Central Election Commission declares Viktor Fedorovich Yanukovich elected president of Ukraine," Commission President Volodymyr Shapoval said after confirming results that showed Yanukovich had defeated Tymoshenko by 3.48 percentage points.

Court Suspends Ukraine Result on PM's Challenge

A Ukrainian court suspended the official result of this month's (February) Presidential Election after agreeing on February 16 to consider a challenge by Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko to Viktor Yanukovich's narrow win. Few commentators expect Tymoshenko to be vindicated or for the case to delay the Feb. 25 inauguration of Yanukovich, a veteran politician who was denied the top job by the 2004 "Orange Revolution" protests against electoral fraud. The Supreme Administrative Court is expected to issue its ruling by the end of the week. Tymoshenko, personally lodging her complaint with the court, repeated her claims that Yanukovich's supporters cheated at several hundred polling stations, robbing her of victory in the Feb. 7 election. Yanukovich and his Regions Party have brushed off the allegations.

The court said the official result of the election was suspended pending its review of Tymoshenko's complaint. It could have dismissed her allegations without a review of the case. Political analysts have said Tymoshenko's challenge aims to undermine the legitimacy of Yanukovich, whose victory margin of around 890,000 votes compares to an electorate of 25.5 million. Although the court case is not expected to delay the inauguration, Ukraine faces a tough few weeks, if not months, as a new political order takes shape. Yanukovich's supporters in parliament are trying to win over parties to form a new coalition and, if they succeed, a vote of no confidence in Tymoshenko's government is expected. Tymoshenko has urged her backers in parliament to hold their nerve. Her governing coalition has a slender majority and relies on supporters of her ally-turned-rival, outgoing President Viktor Yushchenko, for a majority. Investors hope the coalition horse-trading will last only weeks and result in a stable government capable of bringing back International Monetary Fund lending -- suspended, while the economy suffered its worst recession in 15 years, over broken spending promises.

[Reuters -- February 17, 2010]