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PM for Women MPs Role in Country's Development

Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani on said the elected women parliamentarians have very important role to serve country's female population by solving their problems and guiding the government for their welfare. Talking to women parliamentarians at the Prime Minister House, he Prime Minister said such efforts would not only improve the living standard of women but also contribute towards the overall development of the country. The Prime Minister, while mentioning the status of laws for the protection of women-folk in the country, called upon the women members of Parliament to come forward with more suggestions to improve the system. He said sustainable development could only be possible when both genders work in a conducive atmosphere. The Prime Minister said being the members of the Parliament, the responsibility rests on their shoulders to come up to the expectations of people. He urged them to monitor the progress of public welfare projects in their respective areas so as to complete them on time. The Prime Minister said the government was committed to preparing people-friendly policies so that ultimate benefit reaches to the common man. The women parliamentarians apprised the Prime Minister of issues concerning their respective constituencies. The parliamentarians included Parliamentary Secretary Health Mehreen Razzaq Bhutto, MNAs Donya Aziz and Raheela Baloch.

[Pakistan Times – May 12, 2010]

Britain's 'New Politics' Leaves Women Behind

Campaigners warn that a lack of women in the new cabinet undermines Prime Minister David Cameron's promise of a "new politics". Britain's coalition government may have made history, but campaigners warn a lack of women in the new cabinet undermines Prime Minister David Cameron's promise of a "new politics". The senior position of Home Secretary has gone to veteran lawmaker Theresa May, but she is only one of four female ministers in the cabinet — fewer than in ex-Labour premier Tony Blair's first cabinet in 1997. This is despite voters sending a record 142 women to parliament in the May 6 election, although this is still fewer than a fifth of the total of 650. And it means Cameron has a long way to go before fulfilling his promise that a third of his cabinet would be women by the end of his first term. "It's as though feminism never happened," said Ceri Goddard, chief executive of the Fawcett Society lobby group.

It is the first coalition in Britain since World War II and Cameron said it heralded a "new politics". But critics argue there is nothing new about the lack of women in power, more than 90 years after they won the right to vote, with only May and Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman appointed to senior roles. The other two cabinet ministers are Cheryl Gillan, Welsh Secretary, and Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, a Minister without portfolio who becomes the first Muslim woman at the top table. Warsi defended the appointments, saying that we have some phenomenal women and we have Theresa May as Home Secretary - what could be better than that?" But long-serving Labour lawmaker Margaret Beckett, who was one of five women in Blair's first cabinet, admitted the lack of female representation could alienate voters. He said, "I think it could and that would be a pity, because one of the reasons that they probably haven't got more women in the cabinet in senior roles is simply because of the dearth of people coming through". Other commentators noted there were also few women on the campaign trail, other than the three main party leaders' wives who stood loyally by their husbands and endured endless debate about what they were wearing. "The wives were the Madonnas, the good women; the women MPs the bad. All were silenced," said one leading newspaper commentator.

The parties have tried to boost their female intake, however. Labour introduced all-women shortlists ahead of the 1997 election and came to power with a record 101 female MPs, dubbed "Blair's babes", out of a total of 120 women elected that year. In this election, the party put many female candidates in what were considered winnable seats. Only 81 were elected but out of a total of 258 Labour MPs this is a higher proportion than before. The Conservatives pursued a similar policy as part of Cameron's attempts to modernise his party and make it more diverse, and they boosted their number of female MPs from 18 to 48, out of a total of 306. His partners in government, the Lib Dems, did not push women into safe seats but relied on mentoring female candidates, with the result that only seven of their 57 MPs are women.

Nan Sloane, Director of the Centre for Women and Democracy, says the problem is not a lack of women coming forward - record numbers stood for the Tories and Labour in this election - but the attitude of local party members. "They're not getting selected," she told AFP, arguing that only positive action will change the gender

imbalance. Sloane highlighted a law in Spain that says at least 40 percent of candidates must be female. Currently, half the Spanish cabinet are women.

[Daily Times – May 14, 2010]

Women & Laws

Divorcee not Entitled to Dower in Khula Case, Rules PHC

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on May 18 declared that a divorced woman was not entitled to dower if she got khula from her husband on grounds of cruelty to her and dismissed writ petition of a divorced woman seeking dower from her former husband after taking khula from him on cruelty grounds. The PHC division bench's decision is contrary to the Supreme Court's verdict, in which the apex court had ruled that while a woman divorcing her husband under 'khula' provision has to forgo dower and maintenance in a no-fault case, a woman seeking separation on account of cruelty to her is entitled to both. A PHC division bench comprising Justice Liaqat Ali Shah and Justice Syed Sajjad Hussain Shah declared that a woman who took khula on grounds of cruelty to her was not entitled to dower and upheld the district and sessions judge's decision. Shaista, a resident of Nowshera district, had filed a writ petition against the district and sessions judge's decision in the high court. She stated in her petition that the family court had given her khula on grounds of cruelty to her and also had directed her former husband to give her dower as she got khula on cruelty grounds. When the court started hearing in the case, her counsel Saleh contended that the family court had directed her former husband to pay dower to her as she had taken khula on grounds of cruelty. Her former husband then challenged the family court's verdict regarding payment of dower in the court of district and sessions judge. The district and sessions judge accepted the appeal and rejected the family court's decision regarding payment of dower. The lawyer submitted before the court that the woman had got khula on grounds of cruelty and she was entitled to dower. On January 06, 2006, the Supreme Court of Pakistan had ruled that while a woman divorcing her husband under 'khula' provision has to forgo dower and maintenance in a no-fault case, a woman seeking separation on account of cruelty to her is entitled to both. A two-member bench of the SC's Peshawar Registry Branch consisting of justices Sardar Muhammad Raza Khan and Nasirul Mulk had upheld the Family Court and PHC verdicts in a case. In the case, a woman had taken khula on grounds that her husband was cruel to her and the court had ordered her former husband to pay her maintenance. In the case, Muhammad Islam of Landi Kotal had asked the Supreme Court to cancel the PHC verdict of allowing maintenance and other benefits to his former wife Sabra Sultana, a Peshawar resident. Sabra had told the SC that her (former) husband was very cruel and she could not live with him so she dissolved the marriage. The court dismissed Muhammad Islam's appeal and ordered him to pay Sabra maintenance, dower and other benefits she claimed in the petition.

[Daily Times – May 19, 2010]

Women Celebrate Legislation against Harassment at Workplace

Filled with jubilation and exalted by feeling of having won wages against sexual harassment at workplace, women from all walks of life got together at a colorful event at National Art Gallery (NAG) on May 11 to celebrate the passage of the landmark anti-harassment legislation. Alliance Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace (AASHA) organised the event.

Celebrities from all around the country included Sahira Kazmi, Sameena Peerzada, Ayesha Sana and Samina Ahmed. Parliamentarians and working women from both public and private sector paid tribute to those who were involved in drafting the bill and getting it passed from the parliament. Advisor to Prime Minister on Social Affairs Shehnaz Wazir Ali recalled that the conservative mindset that persists in the country also has its influence in the parliament and created hurdles at many stages. She added that it was the determination of Dr Fauzia Saeed, founding member of AASHA and the female parliamentarians that made it possible and today we have legislation unprecedented in South Asia. Bushra Gohar said the bill was an evidence of the ability and the role women parliamentarians were playing in improving the lives of ordinary women of the country. She pointed out that the real challenge is to implement the bill in letter and spirit. National Commission on the Status of Women chairperson said to facilitate, monitor and oversee the implementation process of the Act in the country the commission had constituted a 15-member committee that will ensure the effective implementation of the law for next two years. She said the committee would comprise members from all stakeholders including government departments, civil society, private sector and media. Prior to these laws, sexual harassment was considered a social evil. Now it is a crime with up to three-year imprisonment and fine up to Rs 500,000. These laws deal with sexual harassment at work place by putting the responsibility on the management. It requires all organisations to adopt the code of conduct and constitute a three-member inquiry committee to deal with cases of sexual harassment professionally. In case the complainant is not satisfied with the result of the committee he/she can appeal to the ombudsperson constituted for this purpose, she added. Hosted by Sahira Kazmi and Abdur Rauf,

the star-studded event started with a performance on famous folk song "Laal Meri." Women from all walks of life joined the singer on the stage and danced to the tune of drum's beat while throwing Rose petals on each other. Applying an innovative idea to give audience a taste of harassment women face at workplace, a line of mock harassers welcomed guests at the entrance, which got many by surprise. They passed comments like "nice color," "Kithay chalay ho sohneo" and sang vulgar songs on spotting any guest. Interestingly, they faced real harsh words from some strong women who thought it was real. The event also featured skits by Samina Ahmed and Masood Khwaja and poetry recitation by famous poet Kishwar Naheed that she especially wrote for the occasion. The lively 'Jhomer' dance performance by the artists of Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) also received generous applause from the guests. Many skits highlighted women harassment at work and public places.

Women farmers from Nagar Parker, women police officers, business women, representatives of Islamabad and Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce, buss hostesses, nurses and office workers were conspicuous among the active participants. Women factory workers and farmers were in the forefront to welcome the guest parliamentarians, media persons and private sector representatives, who were being glorified for their remarkable contributions towards empowerment of working women against sexual harassment.

[Daily Times – May 12, 2010]

AASHA Interacts with University Students on Sexual Harassment

As part of their activities to mark the International Labour Day, Women's Organisation for Rights and Development (WORD) organised two Alliance against Sexual Harassment (AASHA) interactive sessions with university students on the laws against sexual harassment. May 1st, International Labour Day, commemorates the historic struggle of working people throughout the world and is recognised in every country except the United States, Canada, and South Africa despite the fact that the holiday began in the 1880s in the United States with the fight for an eight-hour workday. "This Labour Day is historic one for the women in Pakistan, as it links with the larger struggle for demanding decent working conditions we have fulfilled the dream of getting two legislations against sexual harassment approved by the government of Pakistan," said WORD Director Aqsa Khan. The first session was held with the students from various departments of the Quaid-i-Azam University. The session started with an overview given by Aqsa Khan on the need to work on the issues of sexual harassment through legislative measures. She said that it is time to collectively fight against the issue and struggle for promoting a healthy environment in society as well as our workplaces.

Key speaker on this occasion Dr. Fouzia Saeed explained in detail the anti-sexual harassment laws to the students. She said that the issue of sexual harassment needs to be taken and dealt with seriousness and not trivialised through jokes. The law section 509 covers all women in the informal working sector as well as in public places and streets. She further said that prior to these laws sexual harassment was considered a social evil, but now it is a crime with up to 3 years imprisonment and fine of up to Rs500,000. Highlighting the second law Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, she said that it deals with sexual harassment at workplaces by putting the responsibility on the management. "It requires all organisations to adopt the code of conduct and constitute a three member enquiry committee to deal with cases of sexual harassment professionally. In case the complainant is not satisfied with the result of the committee he/she can appeal to an ombudsman constituted for this purpose," she pointed out.

[The news – May 2, 2010]

Women & Economics

Government Urged to Ban Second Shift for Female Factory Workers

Speakers at a conference on women's participation in workforce demanded the government to call off the permission of second shift for factory owners, as long working hours are creating immense problems for female labourers. They were speaking at a two-day national conference titled '**From Household to Workplace: Reshaping the Lives of Women through Economic Empowerment**', jointly organised by Ministry of Labour & Manpower, International Labour Organisation (ILO), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Employers & Workers Organisation.

Eminent poetess and coordinator Hawwa Associates Kishwar Naheed said women should be at least exempted from working late night in the factories, as it is not practical for them to completely ignore their household. Highlighting the challenges faced by craftswomen, she said usually, local wholesale retail shopkeepers and boutiques do not pay the price demanded by women workers. "No NGO or agency helps to promote their products," she pointed out adding that local councillors or other political personalities never extend a helping hand to local women entrepreneurs. She urged for an institutionalised mechanism to ensure market

access for women and suggested that an independent outlet of women products could greatly help in facilitating craftswomen, as it would minimise the role of middlemen. **Advisor to Prime Minister on Women Affairs Yasmeen Rehman** said women workers need to create a collective voice to demand their rights more forcefully, adding that she had moved a bill in the Parliament regarding flexible timings for women but the decision is pending, as the House sees it as impractical, keeping in mind the economic and security situation of the country. She requested civil society to develop a mechanism for the institutionalised implementation of the bill. She said the Trade Development Authority of Punjab plans to organise an exhibition to promote women entrepreneurs by the end of this month. Terming it a great opportunity, she said the expo would provide stalls on nominal rates and women entrepreneurs would also get a chance to check the market for their products. Yasmin Rahman said a number of efforts have been made recently in Pakistan to address gender inequality on legal and political fronts. The reservation of job quota in civil services and a good number of seats for women in local government as well as provincial and national legislatures has brought about an unprecedented increase in women's political participation, creating space for women's voice. Ms Rahman further informed that a national policy for home-based workers as well as significant legal frameworks have also been developed to create supportive environments for working women. She said that the most prominent development in this regard is the adoption of a law for combating harassment at workplaces and providing an enabling environment for the protection and empowerment of women. She said various institutions of the State along with other stakeholders have imparted leadership skills to 1,281 key officials and legislators besides training 6,000 women in employable and entrepreneurial skills. "It is a matter of great satisfaction that overall, 50 per cent of the trained women are already engaged in gainful pursuits, while the ratio of gainfully employed women is 90 per cent in the value-added textile sector," she concluded. Speaking on the occasion, **Country Director ILO in Pakistan Donglin Li** said the economic empowerment of women heavily depends on the ability to participate in the labour market and the working conditions. "The employment trends recorded in different countries indicate that women who manage to find employment often work in less productive economic sectors with lack of social protection and other labour rights," he said. He said there is a need to enhance occupational mobility for both males and females in Pakistan, as women working outside the agriculture sector are often subjected to substandard work conditions, involving low skills and fewer wages. He said that this can be explained through low levels of educational attainment and lack of viable skills among women.

[The News – May 6, 2010]

Accord Signed to Empower AJK Women Economically

The Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN) and the Azad Jammu and Kashmir's Ministry of Women Development signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for launching a Rs3.69 million project to provide income generation opportunities to vulnerable women of Azad Kashmir by linking them to markets. The agreement was signed by Brig Javed Akhtar Warraich of Erra, Ahan Chief Executive Maroof Afzal and AJK Women Development Secretary Abdul Sami Khan. ERRA Chairman Altaf Mohammad Saleem and his deputy Lt-Gen Mohammad Haroon Aslam were also present on the occasion.

The project will be implemented in collaboration with AHAN, a not for profit organisation set up by the Ministry of Industries and Production. It will ensure that products prepared by women cater for emerging market trends along with providing market access to women for suitable profit on their products. This project will help develop skills of poor women in AJK in Kashmiri embroidery and stitching, and also link them to designers and markets. Women will be selected using information from a "Targeted Vulnerability Survey" conducted by ERRA, which identified vulnerable persons in Azad Kashmir and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

[Dawn – May 25, 2010]

Articles, Reports and Books on Gender

Women's Movements in Asia

Feminisms and Transnational Activism
Edited by Mina Roces, Louise Edwards

Price: \$41.95 \$37.76

Binding/Format: Paperback

ISBN: 978-0-415-48703-0

Publish Date: May 20th 2010

Imprint: Routledge

Pages: 288 pages

This book is available for complimentary examination to qualified educators and adopters.

Description

Women's Movements in Asia is a comprehensive study of women's activism across Asia. With chapters written by leading international experts, it provides a full overview of the history of feminism, as well as the current context of the women's movement in 12 countries: the Philippines, China, Indonesia, Japan, Burma, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Korea, India and Pakistan.

For each of these countries the manner in which feminism changes according to cultural, political, economic and religious factors is explored. The contributors investigate how national feminisms are influenced by transnational factors, such as the women's movements in other countries, colonialism and international agencies. Each chapter also considers what Asian feminists have contributed to global theoretical debates on the woman question, the key successes and failures of the movements and what needs to be addressed in the future.

This breadth of coverage, together with suggestions for further reading and watching, and an integrated cross-national timeline makes Women's Movements in Asia ideal for use on courses looking at women and feminism in Asia. It will appeal both to students and specialists in the fields of gender, women's and Asian studies.

Reviews

"Experts in analysing gender issues offer this unique comparative analysis of the evolution of 'national essence feminism' in the context of global feminism. To find out how the women's movement in twelve Asian nations have fought for bodily autonomy, participation in politics and religion, new definitions of womanhood, changed family relations and much more – this book is the best (indeed the only) one to read." Chilla Bulbeck Professor emerita and visiting research fellow, The University of Adelaide, Australia

Contents: 1. Introduction: Women's Movements from the Asian Perspective Mina Roces 2. Feminism and the Women's Movement in the World's Largest Islamic Nation Sue Blackburn 3. Rethinking 'the Filipino Woman': A Century of Women's Activism in the Philippines Mina Roces 4. Chinese Feminism in a Transnational Frame: Between Internationalism and Xenophobia Louise Edwards 5. Transnational Networks and Localized Campaigns: The Women's Movement in Singapore Lenore Lyons 6. Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Feminisms in Twentieth Century Japan Barbara Molony 7. Feminism, Buddhism and Transnational Women's Movements in Thailand Monica Lindberg Falk 8. Following the Trail of the Fairy-Bird: The Search for a Uniquely Vietnamese Women's Movement Alessandra Chiricosta 9. The Hong Kong Women's Movement: Towards a Politics of Difference and Diversity Adelyn Lim 10. Military Rule, Religious Fundamentalism, Women Empowerment and Feminism in Pakistan Andrea Fleschenberg 11. Mapping a Hundred Years of Activism: Women's Movements in Korea Seung-kyung Kim and Kyounghee Kim 12. 'Riding a Buffalo Across a Muddy Field': Heuristic Approaches to Feminism in Cambodia Trudy Jacobsen 13. Rights Talk and the Feminist Movement in India Sumi Madhok

Author Bio

From Badin to Sukkur: No Mercy for Women

Three women were killed in different parts of the Sindh late on May 4 night and May 5. A young girl Naseema was axed to death by her brothers when she failed to give them dinner in time in Jaghan Khoso village near Tando Bago late on May 4 night. Mithan Khoso and Shahoo Khoso attacked Naseema with an axe and killed her, according to Ali Hassan Khoso, another brother of the girl. He lodged an FIR his brothers Mithan Khoso and Shahoo Khoso, accusing them of murdering their sister when she was cooking meal for them. They demanded meal while she was still preparing it and flew into a rage when she took some time, said Ali Hassan. Later, Tando Bago police arrested the accused.

Meanwhile, the Badin chapter of the Human Rights Association condemned the incident and said many innocent girls were being murdered in the name of honour. As compared to violence-infested tribal hinterland of upper Sindh, incidents of murder — and that two of a woman — rarely occur in Badin, Thatta, Tharparkar and other parts of peaceful lower Sindh. Our Sukkur correspondent adds: A woman was gunned down by her nephew in the name of honour in Ghous Bux Bhangwar village in the limits of Buxapur police station near Kashmore late on May 4 night. Allauddin Bhangwar suspected that his aunt Mai Shano Khaton, wife of Najam Din Bhangwar, had developed illicit relations with a man in the area. He barged into her house during night when her husband had gone out to irrigate land and opened fire on Mai Shano who was fast asleep. Ms Shano died on the spot. Police moved the body to local hospital in the morning and handed it over to her husband after autopsy. No case was registered till the filing of this report. In another incident, a man killed his teenage sister in the name of honour in Raza Mohammad Khoso village in the limits of Tangwani police station on May 5. Patoli, 14, was in her after-lunch nap when her brother Yasin Sabzoi killed her with a pistol.

[Dawn – May 6, 2010]

Hope for Imprisoned Women Wanting to Reform

Imprisoned women, mostly first time offenders, who want to reform have a hope now. They can come out of prison on probation -- thanks to newly-appointed female Probation Officers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "When I visit prisons and hear women who were either forced by poverty or male members of their families to do a crime, I want to do something for them as they want to reform," says Farzana Sarwar, a Probation Officer for Peshawar, Nowshera and Mardan districts. She has taken 13 women probationers in three months of her appointment.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had become perhaps the first province to appoint seven female probation officers at the Probation and Reclamation directorate. They have been appointed on divisional basis to look after women probationers from prisons in various districts. One benefit of being a female Probation Officer is that I can visit the prisons and meet women and juvenile prisoners, says Farzana, who took up her first job at the directorate after completing her Master's in Social Work degree from the University of Peshawar. Farzana said she was trying to get an aged woman prisoner on probation. She is 80 years old with weak vision and hearing. She was asked by a young passenger in a commercial vehicle to hold a bag and police during checking on the way recovered narcotics from the bag. Other women prisoners had same stories, either poverty or their husbands forced them to become drug carriers, she said. Nusrat Yasmeen, a 40 years old probationer charged with narcotics smuggling, said during her visit to the probation officer's office that she was cheated into smuggling drugs by one of her relatives. "I am now never going to trust anyone," she said and was thankful that she came out on probation to start a normal life once again with her family. But the job of a newly-appointed female Probation Officer (BPS-16) is not as easy as it sounds. "It is not easy for many young women probation officers to travel to different districts as there is no transport facility for them," says Farzana. One rupee per kilometre as a transport allowance is not enough in the face of high fuel prices and distance from one district to another, she says. Muallam Jan, Director of the Probation and Reclamation directorate, said he had moved a summary for 800cc vehicles for female probation officers.

"I'm aware of the amount of travelling involved in probation so I have moved the case for transport facility for the female probation officers," he said. He said it was an achievement that seven women probation officer were appointed in the province. Every probation officer can have around 50 probationers, but right now these officers are not that much burdened and they can manage for the time being. However, transport facilities for these officers is needed, he said. Under the law, a female probation officer can take a person on probation on the order of the court for one to three years. It was a long-awaited demand of the civil society of the province to have

female probation officers to provide relief to women prisoners, but the appointments were possible only after the Peshawar High Court took suo motu notice of the issue and directed the government to appoint at least seven female probation officers in the province.

[Dawn – May 4, 2010]

Women Trafficking

Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan has said that woman was treated as a saleable commodity in Pakistani society. While addressing the concluding session of a **two-day consultative workshop on Countering Women Trafficking**, he said that mere enforcement of laws cannot eradicate the evils like women trafficking, rather we'll have to create awareness among the masses about this scourge. It was organised by the Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP) for district and sessions judges in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and UK Department for International Development (DFID). The PHC Chief Justice said that when there is no will on the part of the people, the enforcement of certain laws will stand useless. He said instead of just focusing on making laws, concentration should be given on addressing the root-cause of the evil of women trafficking. "The cause is lying somewhere else. It lies in the ignorance, lack of awareness and understanding," he said. He added that it was the crime in which father, brother and even mother of the victim were involved without having an iota of feeling that they have committed a wrong which was not only un-Islamic but also against our norms and values. "They don't understand what our religion, morals and ethics speak about this issue," he said and added that women trafficking had widespread tentacles that could not be eradicated through holding seminars only. He said that we'd have to come out of the slumber by taking inspiration and guidance from the Holy Quran and Sunnah to weed out this evil from the society. He suggested that the services of religious scholars should also be used in this regard. He said in the presence of vibrant civil society and an Argus-eyed media it would not be difficult to create awareness against sale and trafficking of women. He appreciated the non-governmental organisations' role in creating awareness on certain issues, but was quick to add that instead of relying on foreign-funded projects we should start making endeavours to resolve our problems ourselves. "If we failed to meet the modern day challenges, we would be nowhere in this world and even the life hereafter," he warned.

CAMP Chief Executive Naveed Ahmad Shinwari said Pakistani government did not comply with the minimum standards to eliminate women trafficking. He said drastic reforms in laws and inter-institutional coordination among the law-enforcement agencies and civil society organisations would help curb the problem. "Child marriages, internally displaced persons' influx and rapid surge in poverty have also contributed to the trafficking of women and girls," he observed. CAMP Project Manager Said Afzal Shinwari said women trafficking had grown fast in the past few years due to harmful traditional practices, non-implementation of the relevant laws and lack of government commitment to address the issue holistically. He said trafficking of women was the third largest illegal business after drug and weapon smuggling.

[The News – May 10, 2010]

Child Rights

Pakistan not Implementing UNCRC Observations of 2002 on Children

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has expressed concern over the non-implementation of its observations made in response to Pakistan's second periodic report submitted in 2002. The concern was expressed by experts at the launch of the latest '**Concluding Observations and Recommendations (COR) Report**' by UNCRC. The launch was organised by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC). Smaranda Popa, head of United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), child protection said, "The report is a very important document, as it is an instrument for measuring the government's role in following the recommendations of UNCRC". "The current child protection system in Pakistan lacks comprehensiveness and is inefficient, therefore strategic priorities for reforming the system are needed". National Assembly Standing Committee on Social Welfare and Special Education Chairperson Rubina Saadat Qaimkhani said children were an important but neglected part of society. She said that there is a dire need for legislation for children... we are preparing a comprehensive bill to improve the current state of affairs ... save our future generations from terrorism and corruption. Royal Norwegian Embassy Minister Counselor Terje Barstad said Pakistan needed to invest in its own future and that meant the Pakistani children. "Pakistan faces many challenges... the committee is not satisfied with Pakistan's non-compliance of UNCRC," he observed. Save the Children UK Country Director Mohammad Hassan Qazilbash said civil society groups were addressing corporal punishment at schools.

[Daily Times – May 14, 2010]

Child Sexual Abuse Cases Rise by Over 9pc

Cases of child sexual abuse in the country increased by about 9.4 per cent in 2009 compared to 2008. A report, “**Cruel numbers 2009**” prepared by Sahil, an NGO, said a total of 2,012 child abuse cases were recorded during the period.

It said Punjab topped the list with 1,256 sexual abuse cases followed by Sindh with 561 cases, Federal Capital 144, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 29, Balochistan 17 and Azad Jammu and Kashmir five cases.

The findings showed that 68 per cent girls and 32 per cent boys were victims of sexual abuse. With 41 per cent, abduction cases topped the list of crimes against children followed by sexual abuse with 28 per cent. Gang rape remained third with 15 per cent of the cases. A total of six per cent children were murdered after being sexually assaulted, whereas 0.5 per cent cases involved children who were murdered during sexual assault attempts. The report revealed that 4,222 persons were involved in sexual abuse of the children in which 3,431 (81%) were acquaintances, 663 (15.5%) strangers, 97 (2.5%) perpetrators within the family and 31 (0.5%) unidentified.

The most vulnerable age group of children is 11-15 years in which 25.5 per cent cases were reported followed by 6-10 years age group with 16.5 per cent cases. The report said children were abused almost everywhere, from inside to outside their houses with 15 per cent cases taking place at abusers' place and 11 per cent at the victims' place. Cases of one-time assault were the highest - 54 percent. However, still about 7 per cent of the victims were abused on a long-term basis ranging from one day to more than six months. As many as 81 per cent of the reported cases were registered with the police, whereas six per cent remained unregistered while the status of 13 per cent of the cases was not mentioned. The identification of 70 per cent victims was revealed by printing their names and pictures in newspapers and that of 13 per cent was not mentioned. The highest percentage of clearly identified abusers among acquaintances was that of females. These include women involved in supporting the abusers in sexual crimes. Besides, acquaintances clearly identified in the reports were neighbours, police, religious teachers, guards, teachers, landlords, employers, shopkeepers, spiritual healers, doctors and a dispenser. A total of 34 court convictions of child sexual abuse cases were reported in the press.

The report recommended that laws, policies and child protection bill should be passed to protect every child from sexual abuse. Support systems should be established for intervention and rehabilitation. Rural areas should be made more safe and secure by giving civic amenities. A course must be included in the curriculum to equip the child with the knowledge of body safety. The police department should facilitate the process of registering the FIR for the victims of child sexual abuse. Professionals working children should be sensitised and trained to appropriately respond to child sexual abuse from prevention, detection and management perspectives.

[Dawn – May 12, 2010]

Domestic Child Labour Goes Unchecked

While complaining of widespread child domestic labour in the country, Society for the Protection of Rights of the Child (SPARC) says that the government's effective interventions can help stop people from employing children, especially girls, at homes.

Kashif Mirza of the SPARC said that though banned, child domestic labour is a very common in our society. It is practised in rural and urban areas alike without hindrance. Most of the children as domestic help work in hazardous conditions for long hours in certain cases even without pay. They are subjected to abuse — verbal, emotional, physical and sexual — that sometimes turns out to be deadly. It is time that parliament outlaw child domestic labour and enforce it. Mirza said that people even educated too engaged children for domestic work against the promise of free food, lodging, and some monthly payment to their families. He said since there was little or no concept or even opportunity of education, most parents brought their little girls and boys to the city to work in homes. He said these boys and girls worked for unregulated hours, with no or little time for recreation. He said that things may have changed in the country for labourers, but boys and girls as young as seven and eight work in the confines of alien homes day and night without proper remuneration or working conditions. He insisted the number of child domestic labourers subjected to torture and abuse by their adult employers could be anywhere in thousands if not in millions. According to him, Pakistan is signatory to many international pacts against child domestic labour. He further said that we had signed and ratified United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes it binding on us to provide children with education, health facilities, safety and security. We are also signatory to the International Labour Organisation Convention, which sets the minimum age for children to begin work at 15 years or the one, which shouldn't be less than compulsory school age. At the same time, we are our own law, Employment of Children Act (ECA) 1999, which bans labour of children

under-14 in certain process and occupations. However, child domestic labour is not a part of the schedule of banned occupations of the ECA,”

Mirza wanted the government to fulfil its national and international obligations. He said the government should notify child domestic labour under the schedule of banned occupations of the ECA and strictly ban the employment of children as domestic help. He also demanded better working conditions such as eight-hour a day work for children of permissible age. He dubbed Article 25-A of the recently enacted 18th Amendment, which assures education to all children between the ages of five and 16, and demanded early, effective enforcement of the law.

[The News – May 3, 2010]

70 million Child Labourers in Pakistan: ILO

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated that Pakistan has 70 million children working as labourers. The last ILO-IPEC survey carried out in 1996 had put the child labour population in the country at 3.3 million. In a report, titled “Accelerating Action against Child Labour”, the ILO said the global trends in child labour showed a decline from 2004 to 2008. However, the decline was slowing. There are still 215 million children caught up in child labour, according to the report. The only reference made in the report about Pakistan pertained to the decade-long collaboration between FIFA and ILO-IPEC in the football goods industry. The report said the project was a good example of successful public-private partnership in eliminating child labour. But the lack of an integrated approach to fundamental rights at work in Sialkot, in particular the challenges to freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively, led to a crisis in 2006 in the city’s sporting goods sector. Faced with persistent reports of anti-union harassment and the fear that child labour was re-emerging in subcontracted supply chains, one major global brand threatened to end a major contract. The result was the negotiation of the tripartite agreement for decent work in the Pakistan sporting goods sector, in Islamabad in 2007, underwritten by the ILO and the government, which committed the global and national social partners to pursue the realisation of all fundamental rights at work and to seek to establish the sector in Pakistan as a global centre of excellence, according to the report. The critical fight against child labour has to be won in South Asia, where the greatest numbers of child labourers are to be found.

[Dawn – May 10, 2010]

Cabinet Approves Protection, Welfare of Child Bill 2010

Khyber Pakhtun-khwa Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain on May 18 warned of escalation in acts of terrorism, as the war being fought by foreign powers for their vested interest in this region was entering final round in coming months. “Terrorism cannot be defeated as the world powers have their own stakes in the region and they have clash of interests. As long as their clash persists, the menace of terrorism could not be overcome,” Iftikhar said while briefing media persons after a meeting of the provincial cabinet. Assuring the people, Mian Iftikhar said: “We will save our people and children. We will fight the militants with same zeal as we fought earlier. We are on right path, victory will be ours and terrorists will be defeated.” He paid glowing tributes to those who laid their lives in the war against militants including, soldiers, policemen, media persons and the common people of the country.

Earlier, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet, which met with Chief Minister Ameer Haider Hoti in the Chair, decided to give ownership rights to the people living on state land in Jharma area of Kohat district. The meeting approved the Protection and Welfare of Child Bill 2010. “The provincial cabinet decided to promulgate the draft as an ordinance,” he added. Mian Iftikhar said the cabinet, keeping in view the fragile economic situation of the province, rejected the raise in the salaries of the provincial ministers. The meeting also decided that prisoners sentenced to death would be kept in special barracks. The provincial cabinet also approved the two-year performance report of the government.

[The News – May 19, 2010]

Minorities’ Rights

Draft Bill on Minorities under Consideration

The draft bill on minorities is underway and the government is working to create consensus on it, said Munir Chaudhry, additional secretary at the Ministry of Minorities. He was speaking at a policy forum on ‘Rights of the Scheduled-Caste Hindus’ organised by the Scheduled-Caste Rights Movement on May 18. MPs and ministers in double digit had promised to attend the forum but none except one turned up. Uzma Qadir conducted the proceedings. Munir Chaudhry, representing Federal Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, who had to go abroad, said that Islam does not believe in discrimination on the basis of colour, creed or religion. He said that 5 per cent quota in

FPSC jobs had been accepted but provinces were to work on it. He said that the Scheduled-Caste Hindus are more in number than reflected on paper as many hesitate to reveal their identity at the time of census. He said that Muslims should adopt Islamic teachings in their practical lives regarding minorities. He requested the media to wage a campaign against hatred, intolerance and biases in society. Ramesh Bhatia demanded registration of their marriages and fixing 50 per cent quota in jobs for the Hindu minority. He also urged voting rights and seats for low-caste Hindus in assemblies from within the minority quota. He said that most of the Scheduled-Caste Hindus are homeless and had to lead a nomadic life. They should be given a quota in low-cost housing schemes. Riaz Fatiana, Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights, said that a minority girl marrying a Muslim man must be sent to safe house for two weeks to keep her away from the influence of her 'husband' and his family to know if the marriage is a forced one. He said that his committee is taking up some cases in its meeting on June 1.

[The News – May 19, 2010]

Call for Protection of Hindus' Rights, Worship Places

Scheduled Caste Rights Movement (SCRM) organized a policy forum on May 18 to put forth their demands of parliamentary legislation ensuring legal protection of fundamental rights, particularly of Hindu marriage registration, land ownership, equal political participation, ending discrimination and protection of religious places and graveyards. The event was organised by ActionAid and was attended by leading parliamentarians, policy makers, minority leaders of political parties, civil society activists and members of SCRM.

Despite being a large religious minority in Pakistan, scheduled caste Hindus are unable to obtain National Identity Cards, in the absence of which their other rights are also violated. They face dual discrimination as a minority in a Muslim country and as "lower caste" among fellow Hindus. As shared by the Hindu communities, lack of NIC and marriage registration has resulted in many domestic, social and psychological problems for the Hindu families, especially affecting the women and resulting in their exploitation. Since inception of Pakistan, the worst affected community has been Scheduled Caste Hindus who are discriminated in almost all spheres of life. In most parts of the country, local landlords and politicians have illegally occupied their religious seminaries, graveyards and land. For years Hindu women have been forcibly converted to Islam and married to Muslim men while they were already married to a Hindu. Since there was no documentation to prove the earlier marriage, the woman's husband or family were unable to take up the issue on legal grounds. Hindu married couples face numerous problems in travelling and lodging outside their place of residence. Many of them lack national identity cards (NIC), but even those who have NICs lack the proper evidence of marriage.

[Daily Times – May 18, 2010]

Conflict Watch

Militants Neutralised, Isolated in Swat: Survey

Majority of Swat population is convinced that the security situation has improved in the district after the deployment of military, which has also neutralised the militants, reveals a survey. Similarly, majority of the residents also believe that the militants have been isolated. Launched by former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Secretary Khalid Aziz's NGO, Regional Institute of Policy Research and Training (RIPORT), the survey claimed that 78 per cent of the population was convinced the security situation had improved after the deployment of military in Swat. Only nine per cent people disagreed with the statement while 13 per cent had no idea. Out of the 384 households interviewed in the two Tehsils — Matta and Mingora — 68 per cent people said the military had neutralised the militants.

The valley's fragile peace was threatened and population rattled by target killings last month but the survey was conducted before the incidents in February-March. Some 57 per cent of people also believe the militants have been isolated. The population in Swat no more supports militants and instead has developed deep antipathy towards them. Swat is the district where once Maulana Fazlullah, the Taliban chief, was the most popular cleric. Ostensibly, he preached the Islamic teachings but later started militant activities against the state and the population. The military was first deployed in November 2007, when the Taliban stepped up their activities. It drove them out in a short military operation but did not chase them into mountains. The militants bounced back strongly and captured the whole of Swat by April 2009, leaving the previous two military operations unsuccessful. The military thrashed out a comprehensive strategy with backing from the nation and attacked all their bastions in the valley. The operation that continued for two- and-a-half months displaced tens of thousands of people.

The military claims killing 3,601 and arresting 2,600 militants in the offensive. The Swat Valley has now been declared cleared of militants. Security forces lost 400 soldiers in the fight, besides injuries to 1,248. The militants slaughtered and shot dead members of the communities. It is believed that militancy and military operations in Swat left more than 2,100 civilians dead. The survey reveals an alarming aspect of the society in the Valley, which may be a matter of concern for all those worried for peace. It says that a huge 89 per cent of people interviewed said there would be more bloodshed, as people would take revenge from the Taliban members and their supporters after the withdrawal of the military. Based on people's perception about the drivers of conflict in Swat, the study said a thumping majority — 90 per cent people — in Swat was of the opinion that illiterate or less-educated persons were more inclined to enroll as militants. It said 75 per cent of people believe unemployment also forced youth into joining the militants. An 85 per cent closely linked the poor socioeconomic status to militancy. Now that the government is struggling to step up reconstruction in Swat, people think development could do the trick. The survey said 67 per cent of people agreed with the statement that provision of services to people was instrumental to winning the support for the government. The valley's infrastructure has greatly suffered. The militants have fully destroyed 179 and partially damaged 202 schools. Tourism, business, transport, agriculture, health and all other sectors have faced billions of losses during militancy and military operations. The government has said it had spent Rs 420 million on reconstruction in Swat and for the revival of different sectors more projects worth billions were in the pipeline.

[The News – May 17, 2010]

Legislative Business

Sixty percent Bills Passed by NA yet to become Law

In terms of legislative business, the National Assembly has performed a satisfactory job as it managed to pass 38 bills in two years. However, over 60 percent of these bills have not become acts of the parliament so far due to various reasons. The record obtained from the National Assembly and Senate secretariats reveals that of the 38 bills, passed by the Lower House since March 2008, the President has put his seal only on 15.

The updated data shows that the National Assembly has so far transmitted 31 bills to the Senate Secretariat and the remaining seven bills are still to be transmitted. Of the 31 transmitted bills, the Senate has approved 20 bills. However, the Senate passed five of the bills with some amendments and under the Constitution these bills now need to be approved by the assembly again. The NA passed one bill (the Finance Bill 2008) in June 2008; one bill in August 2008; two bills in November 2008; one bill (the Finance Bill 2009) in June 2009; eight bills in August 2009, four in October 2009, two in November last year, 10 in January this year, five in February, three in March and the 18th Constitution Amendment Bill in April. According to the record of the National Assembly Secretariat, a total of 93 private member bills were tabled in the House during the last two years and almost all of them are pending before the concerned standing committees.

[Dawn – May 2, 2010]

Islamabad High Court Bill with Amendments

The Senate passed the Islamabad High Court Bill, 2010 with two amendments. The National Assembly has already passed the bill but in view of the two amendments incorporated in it by the Upper House, it will now again go back to the Lower House for approval. The government did not oppose the amendments. After the amendments in the bill, the IHC shall consist of a Chief Justice and six judges who would be appointed “from the provinces and other territories of Pakistan, in accordance with the constitution”. Earlier, the National Assembly had approved the appointment of one IHC judge from each of the four provinces, one from the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and one from FATA. It had also approved that the Chief Justice of the IHC shall be appointed in rotation from the ICT, the provinces and FATA. Now the judicial commission is authorised to take decisions regarding the appointment of judges and later the senior most judge of the IHC would head it. Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Babar Awan congratulated the House over its adoption of the bill, saying that it is a pro-people legislation. In reply to the points raised by Senator Professor Khurshid Ahmed, the law minister said that the National Assembly has fulfilled its responsibility by passing the IHC Bill. He said that after the passage of the 18th Amendment, any one particular province would not be allowed to have a majority representation in the IHC.

[Daily Times – My 14, 2010]

Resolution to Enforce Job Quota for FATA

The Senate on May 10 passed a resolution recommending to the government to effectively implement the quota meant for Fata in the federal government jobs. The resolution, moved by Senator Rasheed Ahmad, was not opposed by the government and unanimously adopted by the House. The mover said poverty and backwardness were among the reasons behind the current turmoil in the region and the issue could be addressed by providing more employment opportunities to the people of FATA. He lamented that the issue of reforms in FATA could not be taken up along with the recently promulgated constitutional reforms. He also demanded announcement of special package for FATA to bring it at par with other regions of the country. Winding up the debate on the resolution, Minister for States and Frontier Regions Najmuddin Khan said a lot of work on extending the Political Parties Act, 2002, to FATA and separating office of the political agent from judicial work were being carried out and would soon be implemented there. He added that there was a two per cent quota for FATA in the Federal Government jobs and it was being enforced. He said 2,500 jobs had also been allocated to the region and the number would be increased next year. He said the salaries of Levies had been brought at par with police. The minister pointed out that the developmental expenditure for FATA, which

was Rs 5 billion during the previous government, had been raised to Rs 21 billion this year and would be increased further during next year.

[The News – May 11, 2010]

Alternative Energy Development Board Bill 2010

The Senate passed the Alternative Energy Development Board Bill 2010, approving the establishment of an Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB) that will substitute the Alternative Energy Development Board Ordinance 2007. The bill – moved by Minister for Water and Power Raja Pervez Ashraf – is aimed at promoting alternate energy resources in the country to meet Pakistan's energy requirements. The National Assembly has already passed the bill and it will now be forwarded to the president to make it an act of parliament. Ashraf said the government intends to substitute the 2007 ordinance with a democratic and people-friendly act of parliament to ensure the generation of energy through alternative resources. Moving the bill, Ashraf said the bill would help promote indigenous forms of energy to reduce environmental pollution and explore options to provide electricity to the remote areas of the country.

However, Leader of the Opposition Waseem Sajjad, PPP Senator Raza Rabbani and some other members opposed the bill, saying that the AEDB – constituted in 2003 – had made no contributions towards alternative energy generation during the last seven years. Rabbani termed the bill 'contradictory' to the 18th Amendment, saying that under the 18th Amendment Bill, energy generation had been shifted to the provinces and it was not a Federal Government subject anymore. Responding to the senators' reservations, Ashraf said the bill did not contradict the 18th Amendment, as the AEDB would only offer advice to the provincial governments, coordinate with them and the donor agencies in producing power through alternative resources. Aimed at supplying power to every nook and corner of the country, the AEDB has provided solar energy to a large number of villages in Sindh and Balochistan, he added. Refuting the impression that AEDB was a bureaucratic set-up, the minister said the board was set up in 2003 and was attached to the department of Cabinet Division. Later, it was made a part of the Water and Power Ministry in 2008.

[Daily Times – May 5, 2010]

Creation of New Provinces

PML-LM for Creation of 12 Provinces

Pakistan Muslim League-Like-Minded (PML-LM) on May 5 proposed creation of at least 12 provinces on administrative and not ethnic or linguistic basis. Under the proposal Balochistan and Punjab should be divided into three each, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa into four and Sindh province into two. The Party's Central Executive Committee, Steering Committee and Members of Parliament met at the party's secretariat with Senator Salim Saifullah Khan in the chair. They discussed the demands emanating from various provinces and concluded that it would support more provinces to strengthen regional economic conditions. Former Foreign Minister and Chairman Steering Committee Mian Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri justified the demand for a separate Bahawalpur province as well as carving out Southern Punjab comprising Multan and D. G. Khan to divide Punjab into three provinces. Party Chairman Hamid Nasir Chattha, President Salim Saifullah Khan, secretary general Humayun Akhtar Khan, Lala Nisar and Kashmala Tariq were also present. The meeting decided to divide Balochistan into three administrative units--Quetta, Chaman and Noshki. He however declined to dwell upon proposed division of Sindh but it was presumed that his party might agree to divide it into two provinces. He said a decision on Sindh has been deferred on the request of provincial president Arbab Rahim who was living in exile in Dubai after facing life threats.

[Daily Times – May 6, 2010]

Complete Strike in Hazara for Separate Province

A complete wheel-jam and shutter-down strike was observed in the Hazara belt on May 2 in support of the demand for a Hazara province and against the renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Traffic remained suspended all day while business centres were closed in Mansehra, Battagram, Kohistan and Haripur. Peaceful demonstrations and rallies were also carried out and no loss of life or property was reported from any district of the division. Meanwhile, a large public meeting was organised by the Tehreek-e-Hazara movement at the Shuhada Chowk, which was chaired by Haider Zaman Khan and attended by members Gohar Ayub Khan, Amanullah Jadoon, Dr Azhar Jadoon, Sardar Yaqoob Khan, Qalandar Lodhi among others from the districts of Hazara. Traders and transporters also participated in the strike, while the protesters kept the Silk Route blocked all day. Demonstrators burnt tyres on the road and, later, gathered at the Shuhada Chowk, where HPMC members addressed the crowd.

[Daily Times – May 3, 2010]

'No Diamir Bhasha Dam before Hazara Province'

In an unprecedented development going on in favour of Hazara movement, a local jirga formed in Kohistan, a Pakhtun majority district, strongly opposed the construction of Bhasha-Diamir Dam till the formation of Hazara province on May 3. According to the details, the jirga that includes the local chieftains, political leaders, traders, public representatives as well as other respectable personalities of Kohistan and that is openly supported by President PPP Kohistan Zarbuland Khan, has decided in a meeting to strongly oppose the construction of Diamir Bhasha Dam till Hazara province is formed. All the factions and cross sections of the society that are part of the jirga have joined hands in support of Hazara cause, yet another development in the last couple of weeks that has increased manifolds the support for Hazara cause. It bears mentioning here that besides Haripur, Abbottabad and Mansehra, Tehreek-e-Hazara has received unprecedented support and encouragement in Batgram and Kohistan that previously were regarded as 'no go areas' for Tehreek. Meanwhile, a meeting of the Tehreek-e-Hazara was held in Abbottabad on May 3 evening that continued till late night. Briefing this scribe about the agenda of the meeting, Central Convenor Hazara Action Committee and President Abbottabad Trade Union Sardar Shafqat said that meeting discussed the restructuring of Tehreek-e-Hazara in all the five districts.

[The Nation – May 4, 2010]

No Need to be Negative While Seeking Hazara Province

In his enthusiasm as a forceful campaigner for creation of Hazara province, Sardar Haider Zaman is saying things that could sidetrack and harm his movement. Speaking at a public meeting in Haripur on May 9, he was quoted as making the following allegations.

1. The renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was part of a conspiracy to create Greater Pakhtunistan for which the elders of the ANP sided with the Congress Party during the referendum in 1947.
2. Anti-state elements were conspiring to harm Pakistan by dividing Hazara, which was the jugular vein of the country.
3. The followers of Gandhi are hell-bent on dividing the country on ethnic basis, but the people of Hazara would protect the country with the same spirit with which they voted in its favour in the 1947 referendum.
4. The people of Hazara would not only get their own province but also lobby for the construction of Kalabagh Dam.

Sardar Haider Zaman, the elderly Abbottabad politician who is commonly referred to as Baba Haider Zaman, has every right to peacefully campaign for Hazara province. In fact, he and his colleagues in the Sooba Hazara Tehrik have done a good job to mobilize the people in support of Hazara province and put their political opponents on the defensive. As Sardar Haider Zaman and most other leaders of the movement belong to the PML-Q, their activism and growing support in Hazara has affected the popularity of the rival PML-N and forced every other party to support the demand for Hazara province. However, Sardar Haider Zaman doesn't need to resort to falsehoods or raise controversial issues such as Kalabagh Dam to win support for Hazara province. Pakhtunistan is a forgotten issue and raising its bogey is strange. One has never heard about Greater Pakhtunistan and one would like to know how Sardar Haider Zaman came to know about it. Let me assure him that renaming NWFP as Pakhtunkhwa, or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to be exact, didn't involve any conspiracy and it isn't the first step towards creating the utopian Pakhtunistan. Renaming the province to reflect the identity of the majority Pakhtun population was a simple and emotional wish of most Pakhtuns and not of the ANP alone. Sardar Haider Zaman was also wrong when he alleged that anti-state elements were trying to harm Pakistan by dividing Hazara, which was a jugular vein of the country. If the ruling ANP or some other political party is trying to create Abaseen division to divide Hazara and weaken the movement for a separate province, it is politics and nothing else. The PML-Q and all other parties do political point-scoring through such methods and it would be unwise to brand each other as traitors. Parties go to the extreme to win public support but those with popular backing emerge victorious.

Sardar Haider Zaman shouldn't push Gandhi into the debate and dub the ANP and its members as his followers. It is an old story that should be best forgotten so that Pakistan and its citizens could move on instead of being bogged down by history. None of the political parties that take part in elections is trying to divide Pakistan on ethnic basis. In fact, Sardar Haider Zaman should have known that the ANP has moved close to the country's establishment and is on the best of terms with the military. It is no longer the party that was viewed with suspicion by the civil and military bureaucracy.

Lastly, the issue of Kalabagh Dam should have no place in any debate on Hazara province. In any case, Kalabagh Dam would be an issue concerning Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and not Hazara if the latter were to become a province. By offering to support Kalabagh Dam, Sardar Haider Zaman is unnecessarily earning the anger of people opposed to the project not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also in other provinces, particularly in Sindh.

If the case for Hazara province is strong and valid as Sardar Haider Zaman believes, there should be no need for him and other leaders of the Sooba Hazara Tehrik to take controversial position on contentious issues. They should highlight the positive aspects of the demand for Hazara province and try to promote their cause by presenting arguments and data in its favour. There is no need to be negative while arguing the rightful cause of the Hazarawals.

[The News – May 10, 2010]

‘People of Hazara Can Launch Civil Disobedience’

Hazara Province Movement leader Sardar Haider Zaman Khan has said that people of Hazara can launch a civil disobedience movement if the government does not accept their demand for a new province. Addressing a seminar organised by the Mir Khalil-ur-Rahman Memorial Society (MKRMS) on the topic of ‘Can the prevailing problems come to an end with the formation of new provinces’ on May 16.

Speaking on the occasion, Sardar Haider Zaman, a former provincial minister, said people of Hazara were brutally tortured by the government only because they had raised their voice for a just demand. He said he had always been of the view that the issue of renaming the NWFP should not be raised as it could cause a very serious conflict among people of the province. He said the problems had increased after the renaming of the province and now the government would have to accept the just demand of people of Hazara who wanted a province of their own. He said it was unfortunate that without paying attention to the sentiments of Hazarites, President Zardari in United Nations used the word of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, he said, the CM of the province also violated the constitution by congratulating the president after the province was given the new name. PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique said the dictators had ruined the entire fabric of the federation and even prime ministers could be executed or forced to live in exile. He said the division of provinces on the linguistic basis could never be encouraged and if it was inevitable, provinces could be divided only on the administrative basis. He said the organisation of the PML-N in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had serious reservations over the renaming of the province and the party also believed that division should never be made on the basis of language. Central leader of the PML-Q (likeminded) Gohar Ayub Khan said that historically, the area of Hazara presented the look of a province. He said Ahmed Shah Abdali, the former ruler of the region, had also divided the area into Lahore, Hazara, Peshawar, Multan and Kashmir provinces in 1747. He said it was also a historical fact that people of Hazara voted in favour of Pakistan at the time of partition but the the National Awami Party extended its support to India. Gohar said that nearly 0.5 million people of Hazara were not taken into confidence over the renaming of the NWFP. He said if there could be 34 provinces in Afghanistan, six in Iran and dozens in India, why not a separate province could be made for people of Hazara. Shamshad Ahmed Khan, former foreign secretary, said the prevailing problems in the country could not be overcome with the creation of new provinces. He said it would instead give rise to new expenditures which would be borne by people of the country.

[The News – May 17, 2010]

ECP & Election Related News

PPP Wins Two NA Seats PML-N Grabs PP-63

Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) on May 15 bagged two National Assembly seats in by-elections while the ruling party in Punjab, PML-N, managed to retain the hotly contested PP-63, Faisalabad. The other provincial assembly seat, PP-259 Muzaffargarh, won by independent candidate Basit Ahmed Sultan.

PPP candidate Jamshed Ahmed Dasti, who resigned for holding a fake degree, retained NA-178 Muzaffargarh as he bagged 54,656 votes while his closest rival Nawabzada Iftikhar of Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) got 50,913 votes.

In NA-167, Asghar Ali Jatt of PPP won the battle with clear margin after obtaining 69,475 votes. Nazir Ahmed Arain was second with 43,519 votes while Shahid Mehdi Naseem of PML-N was a distanced third with 27,384. Mian Ajmal Asif made sure that Rana Aftab of PPP, provincial chief of the party, could not succeed in his second successive attempt to get elected from PP-63 Faisalabad. Ajmal got 31173 votes while Rana obtained 22,233 votes.

In PP-259 Muzaffargarh, Basit Ahmed Sultan, an independent candidate, won the show. He grabbed 32,512 votes while his rival PPP candidate Samiullah Leghari bagged 30,247 votes. Shah Jamal in NA-178 Muzaffargarh.

[The Nation – May 16, 2010]

Low Turnout, Fraudulent Voting Mar By-Elections

Low female turnout, incidents of fraudulent voting, heavy presence of police and security officials inside polling stations and sporadic violence marred the by-elections on National Assembly seats in Muzaffargarh and Vehari, says a report prepared by an independent group of local election observers. The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its report termed the canvassing for PPP candidate Jamshed Dasti by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani a violation of the established code of conduct for the political parties and contesting candidates. Jamshed Dasti had won the seat in the February 2008 elections on a PPP ticket but had to resign before a Supreme Court bench hearing a petition challenging his degree as fake. Interestingly, Mr Dasti once again won the seat in the by-polls.

At nine of the 32 observed polling stations, additional counterfoils had been filled on the ballot books whereas at eight polling stations, the ballot papers were issued without filling the counterfoils, indicating the possibility of fraudulent votes being stuffed in ballot boxes. The observers from seven polling stations reported that the numbers of computerised national identity cards 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 might have taken place. Unauthorised persons were observed to have been stamping ballots papers at one polling station. In Vehari, the observers reported presence of unauthorised people in 44 polling stations. The observers found police and other security officials inside 31 polling stations in Muzaffargarh and 105 polling stations in Vehari. These officials at times appeared to have been in control of the electoral process. Under electoral rules, even at sensitive polling stations, police is only authorised to maintain order outside polling stations to ensure smooth polling. They can only enter polling stations when requested by the presiding officer. The observers reported from 31 polling stations that the workers of contesting candidates were campaigning and canvassing in violation of election laws that bar the same within 400 yards of polling stations. Candidates or their workers were seen to have been persuading voters to vote in their favour at three of the 32 observed polling stations, while at one polling station, even an election official was seen campaigning for a certain candidate. In Vehari, 36 trained observers had been deployed to monitor over 90 per cent of the polling stations set up in the constituency (NA-167). The seat was vacated due to the resignation by Chaudhry Nazir Ahmed Jatt of the PML-Q.

[Dawn – May 17, 2010]

Detailed observation reports are available on:

http://www.fafen.org/site/v1/view_data.php?php=reportsand_doc.php

Voters' List Planned with Photographs

The Election Commission has set a target of increasing voters' turnout from 42 per cent to 65 per cent over the next five years and is preparing error-free computerised electoral rolls bearing photographs of voters before the coming local government elections. Election Commission's Secretary Ishtiaq Ahmad Khan launched a five-year strategic plan at a press conference here on Tuesday to make the electoral processes credible and transparent.

The plan lays out 15 major goals divided into 129 detailed objectives. Its implementation will require an estimated funding of Rs8-10 billion, half of which the commission expects from external sources. Mr Khan said a door-to-door verification campaign would shortly be launched to remove duplicate entries from electoral rolls.

[Dawn – May 26, 2010]

Economic Governance

Facts & Figures on Pakistan's Economy

Remittances Rise 15% to \$7.3bn during 10 Months FY10

International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), a specialised agency of the United Nations, in its quarterly Financing Facility for Remittances newsletter has reported that Pakistan showed the highest growth in the world in remittances despite recent global financial crisis. According to the newsletter, Pakistan is followed by Bangladesh, Mauritius, Swaziland, Guinea-Bissau and Philippines. Remittances sent home by overseas Pakistanis rose to \$7.306 billion in the first ten months (July-April) of the current fiscal year, showing an increase of \$951.07 million or 14.96 percent over the same period last year.

In April 2010, an amount of \$755.77 million was sent home by overseas Pakistanis, up 8.35 percent or \$58.25 million, when compared with \$697.52 million received in the same month last year. The inflow of remittances in the July-April, 2010, period from UAE, Saudi Arabia, USA, GCC countries (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman), UK and EU countries amounted to \$1.663 billion, \$1.525 billion, \$1.461 billion, \$1.033 billion, \$734.59 million and \$210.22 million, respectively, as compared with \$1.366 billion, \$1.264 billion, \$1.435 billion, \$996.02 million, \$467.98 million and \$196.53 million, respectively, in the July-April, 2009, period. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during the first ten months of the current fiscal year amounted to \$ 676.86 million as against \$ 628.09 million in the same period last year.

The monthly average remittances for the July-April, 2010, period comes out to \$730.67 million as compared with \$635.56 million during the corresponding period of the last fiscal year. During April 2010, remittances from Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, GCC countries (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman), UK and EU countries amounted to \$183.13 million, \$165.98 million, \$144.09 million, \$100.17 million, \$73.62 million and \$20.65 million, respectively as compared with \$150.49 million, \$156.64 million, \$144.18 million, \$102.83 million, \$61.55 million and \$20.86 million in April, 2009. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during April 2010 amounted to \$68.11 million compared with \$60.97 million in the same month last year. It may be pointed out that the State Bank, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis had undertaken a joint initiative called 'Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI)' with a view to facilitating the flow of remittances through formal channels. This initiative has started to materialise and remittances through formal channels are showing considerable growth. The amount of \$7.306 billion includes \$1.02 million received through encashment and profit earned on Foreign Exchange Bearer Certificates (FEBCs) and Foreign Currency Bearer Certificates (FCBCs).

[Daily Times – May 12, 2010]

SBP Concerned Over Sharp Decline in SME Financing

Syed Salim Raza, Governor, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), on May 5 expressed concern over the sharp decline in the financing of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) by commercial banks. Addressing the third meeting of the SME Credit Advisory Committee, he said that the sector's share in the total financing by banks drastically reduced during the last two years to Rs348 billion in December 2009 from Rs437 billion in 2007. The share of SME financing in total lending portfolio of banks has also witnessed a decline to 10 per cent from 16.2 per cent. The Governor urged the banks to come up with initiatives and other measures to meet the funding needs of the sector on sustainable basis.

The major share of total SME advances — around 89 per cent is being disbursed for meeting working capital requirements, reflecting on the banks' reluctance to bridge the long-term financing needs of the SME sector. Around 90 per cent of the total SME portfolio is concentrated in Punjab (64.22 per cent) and Sindh (25.93 per cent), while only 10 per cent is shared by Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Balochistan, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK, reflecting severe regional disparity. Top 20 districts make up 85 per cent of the total SME financing, ignoring the remaining 110 districts. The Central Bank is playing its due role in the development of the SME sector and has recently launched three SME-related schemes, which included Credit Guarantee Scheme for Small and Rural Enterprises, Refinance Scheme for SMEs of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan and FATA and a Refinance Scheme for meeting the long-term financing needs of Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the SBP governor said. Besides, the State Bank has also developed financing facility for storage of agricultural produce, as well as broadening the scope of recent refinance facility for all key SME clusters. The objective behind these schemes is to ensure availability of credit to the SMEs, he said, adding that its success and utilisation depends upon active participation of the banks.

Giving a detailed presentation on SME Finance, Mansoor Siddiqui, Director, SME Finance Department of the SBP, stressed upon the need to develop a multidimensional strategy for the SME banking and not just SME Finance in the country. The task will be assigned to a sub-committee. The central bank will provide the initial sketch of the strategy to the committee, Siddiqui said, adding that the bank would arrange international resources to develop capacity of banking industry in specialised fields such as product development, strategic planning, risk mitigation and low-cost delivery channels. The State Bank is also looking at the possibility of setting up a Venture Capital Fund in collaboration with the federal government, besides initiating SME sector development projects with the support of the World Bank and the USAID, he added.

[The News – May 6, 2010]

Donors/ Financial Assistance & Pakistan's Economy

Pakistan Receives \$468m from US under CSF

Pakistan received \$468 million from the US under the head of Coalition Support Fund, State Bank of Pakistan said on May 5. Spokesman for the Central Bank Waseemuddin said that the country had received \$188 million on April 30. Thus, the total disbursement under the fund stood at \$656 million. A banker, however, insisted that the country had received the whole amount when there was a surge in rupee liquidity in the market. PSO made a payment of \$33 million to its foreign sellers. PSO had received Rs 16 billion from the government.

Meanwhile, the government reduced cut-off yields on all three Treasury bills. Return on three-month paper fell from 12.14 percent to 11.96 percent, six-month paper from 12.28 percent to 12.14 percent, one-year paper from 12.35 percent to 12.22 percent. But still, the SBP, is not likely to cut interest rates in its policy rate review meeting to be held later this month, said a banker. He added that the inflation was above 12 percent and could increase further because of increase in petroleum, electricity and gas prices. The government had set a target of 9.5 percent for full-year inflation, but later revised it to 12 percent.

[Daily Times – May 6, 2010]

WB Spells-Out 10-Point Strategy for Pakistan

Stressing the need for improving governance by representatives of all multilateral and bilateral creditors, World Bank (WB) Acting Country Director John Wall advised Pakistan to implement a 10-point strategy on short-term basis. A national workshop titled '**Pakistan's Economy: Structural Transformation and Inclusive Growth**' was arranged by the donors on May 11 in which certain bottlenecks were identified that were hampering revival of the growth trajectory.

Outlining 10-point strategy, John Wall said there was need to improve governance, make land record transparent and accessible, reform civil service, develop Indus Basin with the objective to utilise water effectively, develop mineral and natural resources for ending energy shortages, put in place regulatory framework for developing mineral and natural resource areas of Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab, negotiate duty free exports to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, forget the money pledged by the FODP, get government out of agriculture sector and implement national assessment system on education to run schools effectively. He added that if Pakistan gets duty free access to the OECD countries, it is better idea to give boost to manufacturing sector. IMF's Country Director in Pakistan Paul Ross said better governance was essential for reversing resources towards the much-needed sectors of the economy. The IMF, he said, possessed comparative advantage in areas of macroeconomic stability, tax reforms and financial sector reforms and the fund was extending its assistance to Pakistan for bringing reforms in these sectors. He said there was a need to improve savings and investment climate. "The IMF will work to promote growth coupled with stability into macroeconomic sector," he added. Pakistan achieved stability with concerted efforts despite concerns of security environment, he noted.

[The News – May 12, 2010]

Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2009-2012

Trade Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2009-2012: MoF Approves Rs 16 billion

The Ministry of Finance has approved Rs 16 billion for the implementation of Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF) 2009-2012 in the next fiscal year 2010-11. **The Trade Policy 2010-11 would aim at increasing a number of items mainly raw materials from India in consultation with stakeholders, improvement in Research and Development, improvement in transit trade and trade facilitation.** However, the trade promotion initiatives announced in the three-year trade policy framework in 2009-10 would remain almost the same in 2010-11, Federal Secretary Commerce Zafar Mehmood informed National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance on May 20. In a presentation made at the meeting it was informed that in the first 10 months of the ongoing fiscal year 2009-10, exports have seen a growth of 8.03 percent, which is above the target set at 6 percent for the first year of the STPF. If this trend continues and energy situation improves, overall STPF target of \$23.5 billion can be achieved by June 30, 2012. An inventory of proposals being received from trade bodies is being compiled. In coming weeks these would be examined in consultation with other ministries and private sector. Changes in the form of trade policy 2010-11 will be announced in the second week

of July 2010, he added. He said that to achieve the \$23.5 billion export target by 2012, the total expenditures on three-year STPF are estimated at Rs 35.22 billion. However, current status of the funding of STPF initiatives is not satisfactory, after completion of all formalities, Ministry of Finance has pended the release of Rs 2.5 billion for the year 2009-10 due to financial constraints. This has put STPF implementation in jeopardy. The Ministry had placed a demand of Rs 8.098 billion as non-development budget of the commerce division, however, the approved ceiling is Rs 4.919 billion for the next fiscal year 2010-11, the secretary informed the meeting. Secretary Commerce said that Pakistan wants United States and European Union to create a legal window for duty concession on Pakistani products. He informed the committee that our claim or demand does not constitute begging, but it's the matter of right as Pakistan has suffered a lot due to security situation owing to frontline state against terrorism. Both European Union and United States have not indicated for signing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Pakistan nor have we received any draft for FTA from US authorities. He informed that both EU and USA want FTAs with similar size economies and Pakistan's economy is much smaller than the requirement of these countries. It's not necessary that FTA is always a beneficial tool for every country, we are in a process of reviewing performance of the FTAs and Preferential Trade Agreements these days. Signing FTA has been beneficial for many sectors of the country, however, ceramic and sanitary sector have been affected due to this FTA. If, we are going to sign FTA with European Union, our auto sector would suffer a lot, as we shall be required to open our markets, he added. He informed that Pakistan and Afghan delegations are holding another round of negotiations for early finalisation of Afghan-Pak Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) at Kabul. In case Afghan side agrees to our proposal for blocking inward inflow of imports made under ATTA into Pakistan then this agreement would be finalised soon. To a question, commerce secretary informed that USAID study for elimination of cross border smuggling is expected to be completed by June 2010. He further informed that in rupee terms we have already witnessed a healthy growth in our exports and exports in dollar terms are also on the rise.

[Daily Times – May 21, 2010]

National Finance Commission (NFC) Award

NFC Award, its Criteria cannot be Changed: CM

Chief Minister Sindh Syed Qaim Ali Shah said that regardless of the Federal Government's insistence on Value-Added Tax (VAT), the National Finance Commission (NFC) award and its criteria could not be changed. He said that neither the NFC award nor its multiple criteria can be changed. It stands notified and signed by the President. He said that while the issue of GST on services had been decided under the NFC, the federal government wanted to recover some taxes. He further said that the Federal Government used to collect around Rs60 to Rs70 billions through (GST) services and it is not willing to give in so easily. But we are working out a formula under which without affecting our viewpoint, the federal government will not suffer any substantial loss because of our efforts. He said that the Federal Government could impose VAT on goods without affecting Sindh government's position recovery of GST on services and added that goods was not a provincial subject.

[Dawn – May 14, 2010]

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Updates

BISP at Town Level Planned

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) will be set up at the tehsil/town level for facilitation of the beneficiaries. Inaugurating a complaint centre on May 19, BISP Chairperson Farzana Raja said the government planned to enhance the scope of the programme in the country. She said a poverty survey was underway for the first time in the country and had covered 16 districts registering 700,000 deserving families. The listed families will be issued Benazir smart cards while one member of the family will be imparted technical training to enable them to become self-sufficient. The poverty survey was started in Balochistan under the Haqooq-i-Balochistan package and so far four districts have been surveyed and the data sent to Nadra for verification. The survey will be completed in the province soon. She said the Benazir smart card had been launched in Bahawalpur which would ensure transparency in the programme.

[Dawn – May 20, 2010]

BISP Offices Being Set-Up in GB

Twenty-one offices of the BISP are being established in Gilgit-Baltistan and an Assistant Director level officer will be appointed to look after the affairs to facilitate the poor. Ajmal Baig, an official of the BISP said that the offices were being set up at tehsil level where a complaint officer would also be deputed. He said out of 50,000 forms

so far some 12,000 applications had been entertained and remaining were under process. He said those who had computerised passport and were getting more than 6,000 per month salary were not eligible to get benefit under the programme. Mr Baig said survey to identify poor people had been started, adding some 40 women would be given Rs300,000 under the Wasila Haq programme. Meanwhile, the administration of Gilgit-Baltistan is fully geared up to deal with any eventuality in case the artificial lake formed on the River Hunza bursts and has identified nine points where people could be shifted in case of emergency. This was stated by Deputy Commissioner Gilgit Asad Zamin while speaking to media on Tuesday/ He dismissed the report of foreign expert David Patley who had declared the Hunza lake as most vulnerable if leakage from it was increased, threatening lives of the people of surrounding villages. He said adequate arrangements had been made to store food and medicines in different parts. The DC appealed to media to avoid exaggeration in their reports about the lake, which often created panic among the residents.

[Dawn – May 5, 2010]

Poverty-Scorecard Data Collection

Poverty-scorecard data collection in Baluchistan is being started on a priority basis, states the memorandum. A comprehensive plan for nationwide rollout of the poverty-scorecard based targeting has been prepared with the help of the World Bank; the process of contracting firms has begun and is expected to be completed by end-May 2010. The poverty-scorecard system is expected to be rolled out nationwide by end-March 2011. This statement in the Memorandum indicates that the Government has sought 9 months extension in the timeframe that was having earlier deadline of June 30, 2010 for nationwide roll out of the BISP with disbursements of Rs 70 billion. "The delays in the rollout of the poverty-scorecard system will slow the delivery of BISP assistance and we now project BISP disbursements of Rs 50 billion in 2009/10," it admits the missing of the targets in so many words. According to the initial Letter of Intent (LoI), submitted to the IMF on November 20, 2008 Pakistan had committed, "the design of the BISP, in particular the targeting of transfers and the delivery mechanism, will be reviewed in the first half of 2009, in consultation with the World Bank". However, without waiting for the outcome of consultations with the World Bank, the BISP Secretariat began in fiscal year 2008-09 to distribute 8000 forms to each MNA and senators, 1000 forms to each MPA and 1000 forms to MLAs in AJK and Northern Areas.

[The Nation – May 3, 2010]

Local Governance

550 UC Nazims Accused of Graft in Audit Report

Out of 900 union councils of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, former nazims and naib nazims of 550 union councils were (allegedly) involved in misappropriation of funds and misuse of powers. Sources in the Auditor General (AG) Office revealed that the office issued audit report of former nazims and naib nazims to Local Government Department and according to the report, nazims and naib nazims of 550 union councils were (allegedly) involved in misappropriation of funds and misuse of powers during their term. The sources said that out of 92 union councils of the capital city, nazims and naib nazims of 40 union councils were found involved in misappropriation of funds and misuse of powers. The officials said that the report had been sent to the concerned department for action against such nazims and naib nazims. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Minister Bashir Ahmed Bilour said that cases would be forwarded to accountability courts if corruption and misuse of power cases were proved against the former nazims and naib nazims nominated in the report. The Minister said that the local government department would now hold an inquiry. Besides recovery of misappropriated funds, action would also be taken against the corrupt nazims if allegations against them proved to be true. The minister said the provincial government was not in favour of prevailing local government system and that was why it had proposed important amendments in it through a bill, which was tabled in the provincial assembly. In the proposed amendments, he said, the provincial government had limited nazims' role to only civic problems at grassroots' level. He said that under the former President Musharraf's local government system, 16 departments were given to nazims including executive powers, due to which problems increased rather to decrease at grassroots' level. The Minister also said that about Rs 1 million were issued to each union councils of the capital city for replacement of old water pipelines. He said the provincial inspection team had started investigation into misappropriation of funds after receiving complaints that pipelines were not replaced in most of the union councils. ANP-backed former district nazim Peshawar Umar Khan who said that it was wrong perception of the provincial government that the local government system was bad. He, however, said that nazims were not against accountability saying action should be taken if nazims were found involved in misappropriation of funds and misuse of powers. Abdul Wahid Qadri, a former union council nazim of the city, said that nazims were not against accountability. He said that accountability should also be done of MNAs and MPAs and not only of nazims.

[Daily Times – may 5, 2010]

Ordinance Delays LG Polls by Six Months

A gubernatorial ordinance was promulgated on May 3 to delay the upcoming local government election in Sindh by six more months. Although Sindh Governor Dr Ishratul Ibad Khan had signed the Sindh Local Government (Fourth Amendment) Ordinance, 2010 on May 1 night, the ordinance was formally promulgated on May 3 after the law department issued a gazette notification in this regard, said a source in the government. While the Sindh Assembly had unanimously passed the Sindh Local Government Act, 2010 in January, some lacunas and other reasons had compelled two coalition partners — the PPP and the MQM — to get the legislation amended for as many as four times through gubernatorial ordinances.

Although both the PPP and the MQM claimed that they were very much willing to hold LG elections in the province, the delay of six month through the ordinance raised suspicions over their resolve, as it seemed that the interim set-up being led by bureaucrats suits them more. The Pakistan Muslim League (Functional), another coalition partner in the Sindh government, had already expressed its reservation over the extension in the poll deadline. The actual timeframe envisaged in the Sindh Local Government Act, 2010 for making a new local government law and holding LG election in Sindh was 30 days and 120 days, respectively. However, negotiations between the PPP and the MQM to craft a new LG law became deadlocked and on March 21 the governor promulgated another ordinance and extended the deadline for making a new law and holding elections by 45 days and 165 days, respectively. However, during the period, the law committee comprising members from both parties showed no interest in holding dialogues to finalise a mutually-acceptable law. Recently, the PPP informed the MQM that it wanted to hold next LG election after the passage of the upcoming provincial budget from the assembly. Although they wanted to extend the deadline for two months, sources said that the Sindh governor extended the timeframe for making a new law by 105 days. The latest amendment in the Sub-Section 5 (a) of the amended Section 179-A of the Sindh Local Government Act, 2010 gives 105 more days to the provincial government, primarily to the coalition partners, to hold deliberation to make a new local government law. Besides, the amendment in Sub-Section 5 (b) gives six more months (180 days) to the provincial government to hold local government elections.

According to Sub-Section 5 (a) and (b) of the Sindh Local Government (Fourth Amendment) Ordinance, 2010, on dissolution of the local governments and councils, the government shall, within 180 days, request the Chief Election Commissioner to hold the elections of the local governments. The elections of the local governments shall be conducted under this amendment or new enactment. If any new law is not passed, the elections shall be conducted under this amendment. In any case, the government shall ensure elections within 270 days within the scope of the clause.

After the promulgation of the ordinance, the government is now bound to hold local government elections in the province by November 23, 2010. The local government institutions were dissolved on Feb 24, 2010 and the notification to appoint administrators for the interim set up was issued on Feb 26.

[Dawn – May 4, 2010]

Restoration of Old Districts: Magsi for Review of Boundaries

Sindh Taraqqi Pasand Party Chairman Dr Qadir Magsi has said a process of reviewing boundaries of the districts can be initiated afresh only after restoration of the bifurcated districts in Sindh to their earlier status. All these districts were either created to accommodate some particular class or political groups with a malafide intention, added Dr Magsi. He castigated Altaf Hussain for harping on the tunes of ethnic riots and said that no such plan could succeed and advised the Muttahida Chief to avoid making such insinuations. He said that no consultation was made with the local people while creating new districts. "First of all old districts should be restored and only then a process for creating new districts, including Karachi and Hyderabad, and redefining their boundaries can be initiated. It always required socio cultural conditions besides facilities for people instead of accommodating people on ethnic grounds", he said. He said that in upper Sindh princely states were created through bifurcation of districts, added the STP Chief. He said that Dr Arbab Ghulam Rahim had confirmed it all in his statements that he bifurcated Hyderabad to appease MQM adding that Prime Minister's statement after two years became a source of jubilation among people of Sindh but clarifications by the government frustrated them. He was highly critical of Altaf Hussain's speeches delivered after Prime Minister's statement and had STP not exercised restraint such statements were enough to foment ethnic riots. He ridiculed MQM's stance that it has given up Mohajir politics. "We want to know who is conspiring for fomenting ethnic riots and if Altaf Hussain thinks that we will be terrorised then we know how to defend ourselves", he said. He said new districts were created to accommodate political orphans and to appease some political group with some input from secret agencies. He said that MQM needed to explain its position in politics as there couldn't be two different sets of rules for Sukkur and Karachi. He said that while Karachi with a 15 million population was made one district and Hyderabad with a 2.5 million populace is bifurcated in four districts. He doubted statements of Altaf Hussain calling for administrative units. He said that while taking refuge behind demands for Bahawalpur and Hazara

provinces Altaf Hussain should not consider himself smart enough to say that small administrative units were necessary.

[Dawn – May 11, 2010]



16th SAARC Summit

Poverty Alleviation, Promotion of Economic Cooperation and Tackling Terrorism

The 16th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) concluded recently in Bhutan. The key issues on the agenda, this year, were **climate change, poverty alleviation, promotion of economic cooperation and tackling terrorism**. Other agenda items were **improving inter connectivity, promoting people to people contacts and evolving a consensus strategy to resolve the water dispute**. The resolve and sincerity displayed at the Thimphu summit by the leaders of the eight SAARC member countries could go a long way, exhibiting increased level of mutual trust, respect and cooperation to achieve new milestones for the betterment of the oppressed and the under-privileged masses in the region.

Addressing environmental degradation is the need of the hour. Most of the SAARC countries do not possess the required level of forest areas which is essential to protect their ecology. Conservation of meager water resources and protection of millions of rural people, who are directly dependent on forest and other natural resources for their survival, is also essential. Forests cover less than 5 per cent of the total area in Pakistan, 8 per cent in Bangladesh and 21 per cent in India. Pakistan is planning to increase its forest cover to 6 per cent by the year 2015, which, if accomplished shall remain much below the desired level of 30 per cent. Pakistan witnessed the devastating impact of deforestation and rampant elimination of trees, on the eve of October 2005 earthquake. Had Pakistan maintained its natural ecosystem, the severity of the earthquake could have been much lesser and many precious lives and properties could have been saved. The impact of deforestation is visible in the form of rapid elimination of firewood, on which most of the rural population depends for their cooking and heating purposes. Any endeavor to increase Pakistan's resources will be the right step forward.

Due to the shrinking job opportunities as compared with the high population growth and costs of doing business and farming activities, millions of South Asians are residing below the poverty line, even though South Asia has enough resources and technology to end the vicious circle of poverty forever. And collective efforts from the platform of SAARC can make the task easier to be accomplished. One option to address the poverty issue is to accelerate GDP growth by 10 per cent till 2020. GDP growth could be supplemented by bringing the rural areas at par with advanced manufacturing and business hubs and by exploiting rural human and natural resources through appropriative initiatives, including conservation and afforestation strategies and developing rural-based entrepreneur activities. Furthermore, exploiting new means of income generation for poor farmers would also be highly effective. Forest farming and animal husbandry are intimately related as about 40 per cent of the livestock feed is derived from forests and trees grown on farms. They are also related with conservation activities. Similarly, a major share of energy is derived from fuel wood. How to increase the supply of these in a sustainable way so that they are used by citizens for both economic development and livelihood promotion should be an essential component of the SAARC agenda. The SAARC debate needs to focus on the promotion of rural-based business activities. Forests generate multiple products and services, which are competitively marketed. Some products act as safety nets for the most vulnerable groups, such as selling livestock, honey etc. Some other goods and services such as timber and fuel wood and ecological services are jointly and simultaneously produced from the same area.

Designing and implementing rigorous methods for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of small income generation activities to improve human livelihood is vital. In addition to this, developing and promoting products and services that are essential for natural resource based indigenous businesses. To apply conservation through poverty alleviation, integrated business modules to a broad range of conservation sites and products could be identified by each SAARC member. Then the data may be further refined and shared for a common goal. Ensuring financial and technical support is necessary to be given to farmers and small producers engaged in the development of handicraft products, honey-bee cultivation, goat and cattle farming etc from a common SAARC fund. Furthermore, investment opportunities linking local businesses and farmers to profitable markets all over the region, offering sustainable conservation and poverty alleviation services to the community and arranging small loans to empower the rural poor is a must. Finally, poverty should be made history by accelerating microfinance on the basis of Grameen Bank. In Pakistan, forest resources are disappearing fast,

threatening the lives and livelihood of millions of people. Despite its huge potential, forest cover in Pakistan is estimated at around five per cent only of its surface area. This ratio is very low as compared to both world average and Saarc countries average. In the last 20 years, 48 per cent of the forest area in Kashmir has been reduced to 43 per cent. Trees, apart from being an essential natural resource for any country, are also crucial for the survival of mountains and forest communities. They provide wood – both for personal consumption and commercial use – plants, fruits, shrubs and pasture. Thus any effort from the platform of SAARC related to improvement and conservation of natural and forest resources and for the poverty reduction strategy should be welcomed by Pakistan.

[The News – May 10, 2010]

Indo-Pak Relations

Pak, Indian FMs to Meet on July 15: Qureshi

Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and India will meet on July 15 to resume peace talks in a bid to normalise relationship between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi told this during a press conference that was called on emergency basis to let the local and foreign media know that his Indian counterpart SM Krishna would arrive Pakistan on July 15 and that Pakistan and India had once again agreed to resume talks. He told that talks will involve a wide range of issues adding that they would be carried out by the Interior Ministers and Foreign Secretaries of the two states. Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram will visit Pakistan on June 26 to participate in Home Ministers' Conference of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), it is said. Relations between the two countries faced halt after India accused Pakistan-based militants for Mumbai attack in November 2008, in which 166 people were killed. Qureshi said that my Indian counterpart has accepted offer to visit Islamabad to discuss ways to tackle issues confronting Pakistan and India which have put the peace of entire region at stake. He said that let us hope that these talks will be helpful in bringing our two countries closer together and let's hope that our efforts will be fruitful.

[The Nation – May 12, 2010]

CBMs to Strengthen Cross-LoC Trade Approved: India

India says it has unilaterally approved several Kashmir-related confidence building measures to strengthen cross-Line of Control trade, and is awaiting Pakistan's approval for their complete implementation. Presenting a monthly report from the Home Ministry, Home Secretary GK Pillai told that New Delhi had approved setting up a banking mechanism to eliminate barter system and increasing the number of trading days from two to four days a week. Pillai said the Defence Ministry had been asked to procure and install full-body truck scanners to facilitate checking at checkposts. The plan also involves upgrading infrastructure at the two trading centres at Salamabad in Uri along the Sringar-Muzaffaraabd road and Chakan da Bagh in Jammu region along the Poonch-Rawlakot road. The Telecommunication Ministry had also ordered permitting international calls from Indian-held Kashmir to Pakistan after a hiatus of 20 years. An order issued stated that the facility would be confined to select trade centres for cross-LoC trade. The ISD facility to Pakistan from IHK was withdrawn in 1990 following the outbreak of militancy. The official telephone provider, BSNL, had been asked to install ISD facilities in the offices of the Poonch district development commissioner, the manager of the district industries centre there, the custodian of LoC trade in Salamabad in north IHK's Baramulla district, and in the office of the Srinagar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The links will facilitate traders to talk to their counterparts across the border. Moreover, to ensure additional security, all traders registered for cross-LoC trade have been asked to collect their identity cards from the trade facility centres. Indian officials had been complaining that they do not hear from Pakistan over proposals on enhancing cross-LoC trade. Even the proposals of meetings of business chambers from both sides had not been responded to. Last month (April), the Indian Cabinet Committee on Security had approved a proposal of the IHK government to permit Jammu and Kashmir Bank to open an Asian Currency Unit account at the State Bank of Pakistan to allow traders to trade in currency units rather than barter. The IHK government had been pressing the Indian and Pakistani banks to open vostro accounts of each other's rupee for trans-LoC trade to recognise it as domestic trade instead of an import-export feeling coming from adopting the ACU method for payments by the traders on both sides. However, since the Indian and Pakistani rupees are not traded in each other's country, the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of Pakistan will have to buy and sell the two currencies at fixed rate to prevent exchange risk to traders while trading in dual currency.

[Daily Times – May 1, 2010]

Sino-Pak Relations

Pakistan, China Agree on N-Assistance

Pakistan and China were on the same wavelength on May 13 regarding Chinese assistance to Pakistan in the field of nuclear cooperation. The Chinese Foreign Ministry reassured the international community that its nuclear cooperation with Pakistan is completely 'peaceful' in nature, and in accordance with the safeguards set up by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). China is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). When approached, the spokesman at the Foreign Office said that the position taken by China is the same as that of Pakistan that the nuclear cooperation between the two sides is for 'peaceful' purposes under the safeguards of the IAEA

This reassurance came in response to the remarks of US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, who said that discussions were underway about the issue (Chinese nuclear cooperation to Pakistan) and the United States has not "reached a final conclusion." "But it's something we're obviously looking at very carefully," Steinberg said in response to a question at a forum at the Brookings Institution. Steinberg made these remarks while the US itself has not 'scrupulously' honoured these commitments and broken rules while entering into an agreement with India for nuclear cooperation despite the fact the New Delhi has not signed the NPT. "The cooperation is subject to safeguards and the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It is in compliance with respective international obligations of the two countries," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu said while responding to a statement by US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg. The China National Nuclear Corporation has agreed to finance two more civilian reactors at the Chashma site in Pakistan.

[The News – May 14, 2010]

Exchange of Pak-China Writers' Delegations Stressed

Chinese Ambassador Luo Zhohui said that the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and China is versatile and it can be strengthened through increase in exchange of writers' delegations. He was speaking as chief guest at the launching ceremony of a travelogue titled Chalo Cheen Chalain by Riazur Rehman Sagar. Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) organised the book launching ceremony, which was presided over by its Chairman Fakhar Zaman. Aftab Iqbal Shamim, Muhammad Mansha Yad, Sarwat Mohyuddin and Shahzad Rafiq expressed their views. Zhohui said Chinese government was very thankful to Pakistani government for literary exchange programmes. "The exchange of writers delegation between the two countries must be increased," he said. Zaman said PAL would initiate a research projects on great philosopher Confucius. He said a research project on Sufi poets of Pakistan had also been launched. He said in Beijing University of China there was a department of Pakistani languages. The department of all Pakistani languages should be established in all the Chinese Universities, he said. Similarly, in all Pakistani Universities a department of Chinese language should be established and Chinese language should be taught as an optional subject, he maintained. Yad said China had a rich history of fiction and has produced great writers. China is a great nation with every respect, he said, adding, Pak-China friendship was all weather. "Sagar's travelogue is a document that proved his command on language and his sharp observation and aesthetic powers," he said.

[Daily times – May 14, 2010]

Politics in Bangladesh

Tribal Anger Rises in Bangladesh's Volatile Hills

Bangladesh's southeastern hills are again simmering with ethnic tension, raising concerns that a fragile peace reached 13 years ago will collapse. Hundreds of ethnic Chakma, a Buddhist tribal group indigenous to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, lost their homes in February when violence broke out between them and Muslim Bengali settlers, prompting a harsh army crackdown. "With the assistance of the army, the settlers came here to attack us," said Joshna Chakma, who lost her house and says her village has been plagued by violence since Bengali settlers and an army post arrived around two years ago. "Last year, there were 78 houses burned down by the settlers, helped by the army," said Joshna, who is a member of the local council in the remote Baghaichhari district. She said, "this year, it was the same: the Bengali settlers came into our village chanting slogans. We know that the chant is a signal, so we ran into the forests, and when we got back the houses were all burned down" The three-day bout of arson, violence and arrests left three dead and scores injured in the impoverished area, while Joshna said 410 houses and several pagodas were torched. Two tribal people were killed when the army opened fire on villagers protesting the arson attacks. A Bengali settler from a nearby village was killed in

clashes with tribals two days later. It was the worst violence since a peace deal was signed in 1997, ending the tribal groups' slow-burning insurgency, which official figures say has claimed more than 2,500 lives since the early 1980s. Villagers say the episode and how it was handled by the Bengali-dominated army, with bullets and mass arrests, is proof tribal people are second-class citizens in Bangladesh. "The army tell us: if you have courage, live here, if you do not then run away, as for us to kill you is like a tree losing its leaves in the winter," said Ganandu Chakma, who is leader of a land committee in the area. Joshna's account of settler-led, army-backed violence was supported by Pornomas Bhikkha, a Buddhist monk, who said he was forced to flee when his temple was attacked by 35 settlers with help from around 50 soldiers. "I could see the settlers, they had sticks, knives and other weapons. The army was just behind them. I went out and they tried to attack me, so I ran away and they broke into the temple and burned it to the ground," he said. The army had come back after the incident to cut down the teak trees on the grounds of the pagoda, he said. Villagers say the settlers encroach on tribal land, including ancient burial grounds and fields which are periodically left fallow, and view the arson and army brutality as an attempt to drive the tribal community away for good. "Where are our rights? Why does the state only respect the Bengali settlers not us?" asked Joshna, lowering her voice to point out the gun-toting army patrols that inspect the dusty, burned-out village on a daily basis.

Bangladesh's sprawling hills and their ethnic inhabitants have for decades been a source of tension in this majority-Muslim nation of 144 million, which is one of the most densely populated countries on earth.

Since the early 1980s, successive governments pursued policies of Bengali settlement in the area, moving poor, landless farmers like Mohammad Abu Hamid, 47, to the hill tracts and giving them five hectares (12.4 acres) of land to farm. "This land was given to me by the government but the ethnics demand it, saying it was their forefathers' land. But I have documents, they have none, and I have farmed this land for decades," Hamid said. Such policies meant that by 1991 49.5 percent of the local population was "non-tribal", up from just 2.0 percent in 1947. No figures were given in the 2001 census, but tribal leaders say Bengalis are now likely the majority.

The hundreds of thousands of settlers have been "used by the Bangladesh state as political pawns," said Bhumitra Chakma, a tribal academic who teaches politics at England's Hull University. The militarisation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Bengali settlement policy means "ethnic cleansing is going on and in a way which is rather indirect and gradual, but effective," he said.

The February violence was a textbook example of the type of army-backed settler-led violence that has for decades underpinned all land grabs in the region, and which goes ignored by central and local authorities, he said. The key provisions of the 1997 peace deal were to resolve land disputes and dismantle major army camps, but both have faltered, and violence like that seen in February makes implementation harder, tribal leaders say. The Awami League government, which does not support new settlements and negotiated the 1997 deal, condemned the February attacks and hinted anti accord elements of the Islamist-allied opposition may be involved. The government provided rice and construction materials to help the victims of February's violence.

Local police chief, Mohammad Abu Kalam Siddiq, who was moved to his post shortly after the violence as part of a "routine rotation", said that his brief was to attempt to get the community to live in harmony. He said that as far as land goes, it is a national problem and it is a problem for policymakers to solve. Other local officials such as Rangamati's deputy district administrator, Viswajit Bharttagharya, called the fires "an accident, an act of god, like an earthquake". "Most of the victims are anyway living on land that should not be theirs," he said, adding that it was illegal to live on or own Forestry Administration land. For Hull University's Bhumitra, who has carried out extensive field work in the hill tract area, the result of such mixed messages and government inaction will be a new insurgency. He said that many (young tribal people) vowed to take up arms again. It is highly likely that violence will become more intense in the coming years.

[Daily Times – May 7, 2010]

Bangladesh War Crime Probe Chief Quits

The lead investigator at Bangladesh's new war crimes tribunal, set up to prosecute perpetrators of atrocities during the 1971 independence war against Pakistan, resigned on May 5, an official said. Abdul Matin, a former top bureaucrat, submitted his resignation in the wake of allegations by senior officials that he had ties to the country's main Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, which sided with Pakistan during the war. The Home Ministry's Senior Information Officer Mohammad Sahenor Miah said that he resigned citing personal reasons. Matin was named the head of the seven-member investigation team for a special tribunal, set up in March this year, to prosecute Bangladeshis who sided with Pakistan and committed murder, rape and arson during the war. Leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami have been accused of both committing and facilitating the murder of freedom fighters and many of the country's intellectuals during the nine-month struggle. Last month Alauddin Ahmed, an Advisor to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, accused Matin of being a key activist for the Islamic Chhatra Sangha - the now defunct student wing of Jamaat. Matin has vigorously denied being a member of the student wing,

saying that he was neither a freedom fighter nor an activist for any group which opposed the liberation struggle in 1971.

[Dawn – May 6, 2010]

Parliamentary Elections and Peace in Afghanistan

International Backers Pledge Afghan Elections Support

Afghanistan's international backers gave their support for parliamentary elections scheduled in the war-torn nation in September, pledging tens of millions of dollars in funding. The vote was initially planned for this month, but had to be postponed in the face of a spiralling Taliban insurgency and a lack of funds that world powers feared would undermine the democratic process. On May 11, the top UN diplomat in Afghanistan, Staffan de Mistura, signed an agreement with Fazel Ahmad Manawi, the new Chairman of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), pledging financial support for the polls. De Mistura said lessons had been learned from previous elections - last year's presidential poll was mired in widespread fraud and resulted in the sacking of the then IEC Chairman.

The head of the UN mission in Afghanistan told Manawi that we have a chairman and members who are enthusiastic and committed to see a better election than the previous one. We feel that all the steps that have been taken under your leadership are in the right direction. Manawi said the agreement had resolved an election funding shortfall and he was optimistic that security problems could also be sorted out. He said that we all know that the international community is committed to helping Afghanistan as well as committed supporting democracy in Afghanistan. And we know that the basis for democracy is elections. Security is still a problem, but I am pleased to say discussions are ongoing. I hope that we will solve this problem. No figures were disclosed, but senior IEC official Zakaria Barakzai said the polls were expected to cost 149 million dollars and the United Nations would cover a funding shortfall of more than 40 million dollars. Last year's presidential election was marred by massive ballot-stuffing in favour of the incumbent, Hamid Karzai. The Electoral Complaints Commission, a UN-backed watchdog, ruled that more than a third of the votes cast for Karzai were not legitimate, prompting criticism of organisers including accusations of involvement in the rigging. Manawi said the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force had agreed to provide security for the ballot in a country still in the grip of a bloody insurgency waged by the Taliban since they were overthrown in 2001. Karzai in Washington: Karzai is currently on a visit to Washington for talks with US President Barack Obama aimed at smoothing ties strained on a range of issues including endemic official corruption and vote-rigging. The visit comes as the US military gears up for a crucial stage of Obama's strategy to surge 30,000 extra troops into Afghanistan, in a bid to defeat the Taliban and allow US forces to start coming home next year. Key to that strategy is a plan to reconcile elements of the Taliban with mainstream society, which the international community has pledged to bankroll. But first Karzai must shore up support at home, and has planned a "peace jirga," or conference in Kabul later this month to be attended by around 1,000 community and political leaders to discuss the reconciliation plans. This will be followed by a global conference in Kabul, similar to one held in London late last year at which Afghanistan's backers will assess progress on a range of issues, including corruption, as a point from which to decide on continued support.

[AFP – May 11, 2010]

Afghanistan Bars Security Firms after Civilian Deaths

Afghanistan has barred two private security firms from one of the country's most dangerous highways after their guards shot and killed two civilians, the government said on June 9. The victims were killed accidentally in separate incidents on the road that connects the Afghan capital Kabul to the south — the heartland of the Taliban militants waging a bloody insurgency against the Western-backed government. Civilian deaths are a highly sensitive issue in Afghanistan and Interior Ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary said both companies had also been ordered to pay compensation to the victims' families. He said that the perpetrators of both incidents have been arrested and are being prosecuted.

[Daily Times – May 10, 2010]

Afghan Peace Draft Wants Exile for Taliban Leaders

Taliban leaders may be offered exile overseas in third countries as part of a draft peace proposal by the Afghan government in an effort to persuade insurgents to end a nine-year-old U.S.-led war. The draft, distributed to some diplomats, also envisages the Taliban cutting ties with al Qaeda and joining the political mainstream as part of any peace accord. The draft plan comes weeks before a grand council of Afghans, known as a "jirga" that will meet in Kabul from May 29 to discuss how to make peace with the insurgents. The plan did not give more details. But Saudi Arabia, which has in the past facilitated at least one round of talks between the Afghan government and the militants' emissaries, is seen as a possible place where the opposition leaders can get

exile. Washington, with the bulk of some 140,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, is cautious about peace talks, saying it is too early to expect a breakthrough, particularly as U.S. military operations gain momentum in the coming months. The Taliban have made a comeback in recent years inflicting heavy losses on Western and Afghan forces, prompting some NATO nations to say why they need to fund the war or send their soldiers to battle zones. Karzai in March himself held negotiations with envoys of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former prime minister, who leads a separate insurgency force from the Taliban. The Taliban have turned down repeatedly Karzai's peace overtures in recent years, saying they will engage only if foreign troops leave.

[Reuters – May 9, 2010]

Myanmar – Suu Kyi's Detention & Upcoming Elections

US 'Troubled' by Myanmar Poll Plans

A senior US diplomat said that the United States was concerned by Myanmar's preparations for a long-awaited election but would continue its attempts at deeper engagement with the country's military rulers. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, Washington's top official for East Asia and the Pacific, was travelling to the former Burma later on Sunday to meet government officials and key figures including detained Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. "I will say we are troubled by much of what we have seen and we have very real concerns about the election laws and the environment that has been created," Campbell told a news conference in Bangkok. "We will be looking to clarify some questions and also to urge the government to broaden its overall approach." The election, on an as yet unspecified date this year, has been dismissed by many analysts as a sham after nearly five decades of army rule in the strategically located but isolated country, which is rich in resources such as gas, timber and gems. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which won Myanmar's last election in 1990 in a landslide ignored by the junta, was effectively disbanded on Friday after choosing not to re-register as a party for a poll it says is unjust and unfair. Campbell, who was the most senior US official to visit Myanmar in 14 years when he travelled to the country in November, declined to give details of all the parties he would meet this time. But he indicated he would be talking to pro-junta parties and might also see members of a breakaway NLD faction that hopes to contest the election as a new political entity. "We will be meeting with elements of the NLD, we will be meeting with other groups as well," he said. The Obama administration decided in September to pursue deeper engagement with Myanmar to try to spur democratic reforms, although it has no plans to lift sanctions on the country. The United States has long voiced concerns over Myanmar's rights record, and is also worried that the ruling generals are seeking to acquire nuclear technology from North Korea.

[Reuters – May 9, 2010]

Suu Kyi's Party Abolished

Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's party, for two decades the symbol of resistance against the ruling junta, was dissolved at midnight on Thursday under laws laid down for elections. The National League for Democracy (NLD) refused to meet a May 6 deadline to re-register as a political party — a move that would have forced it to expel its own leader — and boycotted the vote scheduled for later this year. At the party's ramshackle headquarters in Myanmar's former capital Yangon, the "fighting peacock" flag was still flying, but party workers were packing up files and mulling new plans to focus on social and development work. "We have decided not to take down our party signboard and flags as Daw Suu has asked," said prominent NLD member Phyu Phyu Thin, using a respectful form of address for the Nobel peace laureate. She said that although we have no legal headquarters, we will continue our movement. Our people have sacrificed their lives... many of our party members and activists are still in prison. Along with Suu Kyi's lakeside home, where she has been detained for 14 of the last 20 years, the shabby wooden headquarters has been the focus of efforts to end nearly half a century of military rule.

The NLD was founded in 1988 after a popular uprising against the military junta that left thousands dead. Two years later the party won elections in a landslide but the results were never recognised by the regime. Prominent rights activist Win Tin, a former political prisoner and senior NLD member, told French radio service RFI he had no regrets. "We would have lost all dignity, all credibility by placing ourselves in the service of the junta," he said, adding that the decision did not mean that the struggle for democracy in Myanmar was over. He further said that it really doesn't matter to us that they dissolve us. We will not go away. We will not abandon our ideology, our political struggle, our leadership. We will remain as a party," the 80-year-old activist said. The junta's new election laws, which forced the NLD into the difficult boycott decision and also officially nullified the 1990 poll results, have been roundly condemned by the international community. Suu Kyi filed a lawsuit to try to overturn the laws, but the Supreme Court turned down the bid, paving the way for her party to be automatically abolished at midnight.

[Dawn – May 7, 2010]

Myanmar's Junta Prepares Ground for Elections

Myanmar's generals have shed their uniforms and are establishing a new political party ahead of the country's first election in two decades, but doubts remain over whether any real change is likely. The military government, which faces strict Western sanctions because of its human rights record, has billed this year's polls – expected in late October or November – as a shift of power outside its entrenched military structure. But critics charge that the shift is essentially cosmetic and part of a long expected bid by the military regime to buy some legitimacy.

Prime Minister Thein Sein and 22 other ministers resigned from the military to officially become civilians ahead of the polls. The premier then filed to form the "Union Solidarity and Development Party" (USDP), a name echoing Myanmar's body charged with lobbying and social activities, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). David Mathieson, an expert on Myanmar at Human Rights Watch, said "it's like the script is playing itself out" as the rulers attempt to polish their image. He said that for so long people have been assuming this is going to happen, and now it is. They're taking off their uniforms, they're claiming they're going to transform into a political party. It's going according to the plan. The international community did not conceal its anger in early March when the regime unveiled election laws that effectively barred opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, along with other serving prisoners, from taking part. The legislation forced her National League for Democracy (NLD) party to consider ousting her as leader to enable it to register for the elections – a move it later decided against. The NLD, the country's main opposition party, has opted to boycott the poll and may face dissolution, leaving the way clear for the junta at the ballot box.

[AFP – May 2, 2010]

Nepal's Peace Process

Strike Chokes Nepal, UN Seeks Mission Extension

Maoist protesters shut down Nepal for a fifth straight day on May 6 in a showdown with the government that is threatening a fragile peace deal, even as authorities seek an extension of a UN peace mission. Experts say the Maoists, who control 40 percent of seats in the 601-seat parliament, are applying pressure tactics to return to power, a year after quitting in a conflict with the president. "He (Maoist chief Prachanda) could not come to power through the parliamentary arithmetic so he has gone to the streets," said Kunda Dixit, editor of the weekly Nepali Times. Thousands of Maoists, many carrying bamboo sticks, blocked roads, demanding Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal resign and accept Maoists at the head of a unity government. The government has so far said it will not give in. "The Maoists cannot press us from the streets. There are parliamentary and democratic rules," said Arjun Narsingh K C, a senior leader of the Nepali Congress party, the biggest group in the ruling alliance. Some people have already begun to defy the Maoists and there were reports of minor clashes between residents and Maoist supporters in Kathmandu and other towns across Nepal. Indefinite curfews have been established in towns outside the capital, after clashes were quelled by Police with tear gas and batons. The standoff has delayed the integration and rehabilitation of more than 19,000 former Maoist fighters, a key part of the peace deal, and hit the UN peace mission's exit plans. The current mandate of the UN mission, known as UNMIN, ends on May 15 and was meant to be its last. But Nepal's UN Ambassador, Gyan Chandra Acharya, asked the Security Council on Wednesday to extend it for another four months. Diplomats said the Security Council was expected to make a decision on the Nepali request soon.

[Daily Times – May 7, 2010]

Political Crisis in Thailand

Thai PM Offers to Dissolve Parliament in September

Thailand's Prime Minister said that he would dissolve Parliament in September, paving the way for new elections demanded by anti-government protesters if they end their crippling occupation of Bangkok's commercial district. But in a sign of the deep mistrust between the opposing sides, the demonstrators said they would not go home until the government made its promise official and specified a date for the legislature's dissolution. On May 3, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva unveiled a roadmap to reconciliation that included an offer of new elections on November 14 - about a year before his term would end - if they pulled out of their barricaded encampment in the heart of the Thai capital. Leaders of the anti-government movement, known as the Red Shirts, welcomed that plan, which takes into account the protesters' main grievances. It includes respect for the monarchy, reforms to resolve economic injustice, free but responsible media to be overseen by an independent watchdog agency, independent investigations of violent incidents connected with the protests, and amendment of the constitution to be more fair to all political parties. The nearly two-month standoff in Bangkok has paralyzed vital areas of the capital, hammered the economy, decimated the tourist industry and

ground government machinery to a near halt. Clashes with soldiers and other violence have killed 27 people and injured nearly 1,000.

[AP – May 6, 2010]

Uneasy Peace in Thailand, Uncertainties Lie Ahead

Thai authorities restored order over most of Bangkok on May 20 but the peace looked fragile, a day after rioting and fires that veered towards anarchy as troops took control of a camp occupied by anti-government protesters. Thousands of the mostly rural and urban poor “red shirt” protesters had deserted their once-barricaded rally site in central Bangkok, but the tough crackdown and bloodshed raised fears of deepening anger among Thailand’s underclasses. Danny Richards, analyst at the Economist Intelligence Unit said that Thailand has become a nation deeply divided, and although talk of a civil war may still be premature, there is a high risk that civil unrest and political violence will not be contained. The crackdown that began before dawn on May 19 morning killed 15 people and wounded nearly 100. About 1,500 protesters took refuge in a temple, where six bodies were found on May 20. Hundreds who remained inside were coaxed out by police. Dozens of buildings were torched, including many banks, the stock exchange and Southeast Asia’s second-biggest department store. By morning, the worse was over.

Political analysts say the next step is up to Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who some say will forever be tarnished by overseeing military operations in which 82 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since April 10. Nearly 1,800 people have been wounded in the period as the government, backed by Thailand’s royalist establishment, and the protesters with their support from the rural masses failed to find common ground. “He is more than tarnished,” Michael Montesano of Singapore’s Institute of Southeast Asian Studies said of Abhisit. “All extenuating circumstances notwithstanding, he will always be recalled as the man whose miscalculated incursion led to a burning Bangkok.” Troops have now established control of Bangkok and the protest encampment occupied since April 3, but at great cost. Analysts say regardless of the outcome, the violence marked a turning point in a country where the richest 20 percent of the population earn about 55 percent of the income while the poorest fifth get 4 percent, according to the World Bank. But protest leaders, now detained, called for calm. “Democracy cannot be built on revenge and anger,” Veera Musikapong, Chairman of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, known as the red shirts, said in a televised statement while in custody, calling on protesters to go home. Thailand’s unifying figure, revered 82-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej, has not publicly commented on the current bout of turmoil in the kingdom, after defusing previous crises during his 63 years on the throne on the same date 18 years ago. The king has been in hospital since September 19. A curfew in Bangkok and 23 provinces was extended for another three nights, raising questions about whether authorities feared more unrest in a country where the ranks of the military and the police are split along the same socio-economic fault lines dividing protesters from the government and its affluent backers. The surrender of key protest leaders on May 19 and a seeming end for now to violence that has killed at least 53 people and wounded more than 400 in six days could put the focus back on early elections and a “reconciliation roadmap” the prime minister had proposed before the latest bout of violence.

[Reuters – May 20, 2010]