



PAKISTAN
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GENDER & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women and Laws

Acid Crimes Bill: No Forgiveness for ‘Crimes against the State’

The bill, submitted by the Ministry of Women Development and Acid Survivor Foundation for review, has been divided into two parts to separately deal with acid crimes and acid attack prevention. Acid Crimes Bill advocates severe punishment for the perpetrators while Acid Prevention Bill is drafted for controlling the distribution of acid and evolving a mechanism to criminalize its unlawful sale.

An official of NCSW said that the commission has proposed to set up a rehabilitation board comprising lawyers, doctors and civil society members to provide all possible assistance to the victims of acid crimes. According to the bill, hospitals treating acid burn victims will be legally bound to report the matter to the police, while all the expenses will be borne by the state. The severity of punishment will be set according to the intensity of the burn injury.

Experts who reviewed the bill termed acid crimes as “crimes against the state” and proposed that the clause of forgiveness of perpetrators be removed from legislation. Acid violence is a global phenomenon is common in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Uganda, Cambodia, Pakistan and United Kingdom. The victims of acid burns not only suffer physical and medial complication but also go through psychological trauma.

[The Express Tribune - March 21, 2011]

Experts Call For Law to Eliminate Swara

Legal experts have suggested the lawmakers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly to pass a separate law instead of passing a resolution to condemn the acts of Swara. A few years ago, no provision was available in the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) to check the tradition of Swara through which girls are given in nikah to members of rival families for settling disputes. In 2004, the National Assembly and the Senate passed the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act under which various amendments were made to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the PPC. The act appeared as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2005 according to which practice of giving females in Badal-e-Sulah (in exchange of peace) was declared a penal offence with rigorous imprisonment of 10 years maximum but not less than three years. More than five years have passed since that section was incorporated in the PPC, but the cases of Swara are still being report or similar traditions prevalent in other parts of the country by other names like vani.

On January 7, 2011, Zarqa Bibi of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl passed a unanimous resolution demanding implementation of the law for the abolition of Swara in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. The resolution stated that under the Swara tradition innocent women and girls were punished for the deeds that they did not commit. Recommendation to the provincial government was given to ensure the strict implementation of the law against the Swara. Both, Advocate Fazal Ilahi Khan and Noor Alam Khan said that the government should enact a separate law to eliminate the inhuman custom of Swara in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas to eliminate the decades-old custom. Advocate Mohammad Arif Jan, who has worked on the issue, said this unlawful, illegal and inhuman act only existed in Pakistan. He said there was no concept of Swara in other Islamic countries. Currently, the high court is playing an active role to curb the menace after Swara victims filed their cases in the court for seeking justice and protection of their own and also rival families. The police, however, remain inactive and start action against the violators only on the court’s directives.

On December 23, 2010, the Peshawar High Court had directed the police high-ups in Buner district to lodge an FIR in a Swara case of two sisters who approached the court against a jirga decision to hand them over to a rival family for settling a dispute. A two-member bench directed

the Buner district police officer to take action against members of the said jirga who had made the controversial decision so that the Swara isn't implemented and also directed the police high-ups to arrange marriage for the girls in accordance to their free will. There was a time when criticizing the customs of Swara was considered a revolt against society.

In 2003 when the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal was in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the provincial law department had prepared a draft of a bill, Prohibition of Swara Marriages Act, 2003, to declare Swara a penal offence. However, despite remaining in power till 2007, the government did not enact the said law and it only remained a proposal.

[The News - February 28, 2011]

WDD-Sindh Notifies Implementation of 'Protection against Harassment Bill'

Sindh Women Development Department (WDD-Sindh) has notified all private and public sector institutions in the province to implement Protection against Harassment at Work Place Act 2010. The Women Development Directorate working under WDD-Sindh have also established complaint cells at Karachi, Hyderabad, Benazirabad, Larkana and Sukkur where women can register their complaints against any wrong done to them; followed by series of steps as establishment of day care centers for children of working women, revolving funds of Rs 20 million for relief of women and juvenile jail inmates who could arrange surety amount on their own.

[Daily Times - April 01, 2011]

Legislation to Ensure Home-Based Working Women's Rights Demanded

The National Organization for Working Communities (NOWC) in collaboration with Home Net Pakistan organized a press conference to present its recommendations in connection with the national policy for home-based workers. Speaking on the occasion, NOWC Executive Director Farhat Parveen said that about 65 percent of Pakistani working women are home-based workers, but unfortunately they were still deprived of their due labour rights. Home-based workers engaged in cottage industries only manage to earn a very meager amount against working approximately 12 hours a day, which is quite insufficient to meet both ends, she said. Farhat said that they had sorted present scattered laws into five categories: Industrial relations, job and services, health and precautionary measures regarding job, human resource, labour welfare and social welfare. She said that it is the need of the hour that home-based women workers are covered under the labour policy, so that they enjoy labour welfare laws. On the occasion she introduced 17 recommendations for the betterment of home-based working women regarding under radar sector, contract system, minimum and equal payment, health and protection, precautionary measures, social protection, social safety net, anti poverty commission, registration, gender indiscrimination, positive trade union culture, labour research, effective system for inspection, social counseling, labour parliament, human resource development and affirmation of ILO Convention C177.

[Daily Times - March 8, 2011]

Domestic Violence Bill & International Women's Day

Members of civil society gathered in front of parliament house and staged a protest rally with the demand of immediate passage of 'Domestic Violence Bill' pending in the parliament. They also demanded government to devise a comprehensive strategy to end rising religious extremism in the country. In order to celebrate the 100th International Women's Day, civil society organizations members, NGOs, women's rights activists and peoples from different

walks of life held a rally under the platform of Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI), from Kalsoom Plaza to Parade Avenue - in front of Parliament House.

Women's rights activists and IHI members, Rehana Hashmi, Dr Farzana Bari, Naushaba Arif and Rabia Aslam delivered speeches on the occasion to highlight the significance of IWD and rights of women. Wasim Wagha, coordinator IHI, highlighting the theme of the event said today is not a day to protest but a day to celebrate – to celebrate women's status as an equal and concerned citizen and not a mere marginalized and discriminated gender.

Women's Charter of Demand which they presented at the event was a significant expression of this fact – that all the demand made in the charter was in fact socio-economic, political issues which the peoples of Pakistan are suffering from, including the religious intolerance, sectarian violence. The charter demanded separating religion from state functions, gender equality, balance between administration and justice systems, freedom for press, cultural and educational institutions, provincial autonomy, agricultural reforms, banning weapons, and keeping the peaceful borders.

Pattan's theatre group 'Lok Nattak' presented theatre performance on the issue being faced by the women flood affectees. The women activists also sung women's anthem titled 'Darya ki qasam, maujoon ki qasam - yeh tana bana badley ga'. Earlier, Sufi singer Areeb Azhar and his group enthralled the participants with their music and songs on women's rights. The participants, later in the evening held 'Mashal Bardar Walk' at Super market (F.6).

To mark the International Women Day, Lok Sanjh Foundation (LSF) in collaboration with Lok Virsa organized a rural women conference here on Tuesday at Lok Virsa. Hundreds of women from rural areas of the country participated in the conference urged the government to take practical steps to empower them by providing basic facilities.

[Daily Times – April 9, 2011]

Women's Empowerment & Gender Equality

Gender Equality: Pushing on To Reduce the Gender Gap

Economic disparities among haves and have-nots in Pakistan have made life challenging for men, however, their plight cannot be compared to that of women, who are still unaware and deprived of their fundamental rights. This concern was expressed by participants at the launch of the National Advisory Forum of Gender Equity Programme (GEP). A documentary titled "Main Safar Mein Hoon" (I am in a journey) was also screened on the occasion. The film focused on the past 100 years of women's struggle all over the world, while particularly highlighting the achievements and sacrifices of Pakistani women, from 1911 till 2011.

The five-year programme is an initiative by the Aurat Foundation and has been funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It aims at closing the gender gap in Pakistan by proactively supporting development of women. The programme seeks to improve societal attitudes towards women's rights issues and facilitate women's access to information, resources, and institutes. Women's Parliamentary Caucus Secretary Dr. Nafisa Shah said that giving women seeds to sow and cattle for farm will not empower them. Women need to be given land rights. Sharing the findings of a survey for the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Sindh Provincial Minister Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto said that many women are aware of their right to education and healthcare.

[The Express Tribune - March 28, 2011]

Female Farmers Deprived Of Their Rights

Women farmers in Pakistan grow 80 per cent of food, but usually are the most undernourished in the family and own only 1% of the land. "We work in fields all day doing everything ranging from sowing to cutting, but the monetary benefit always goes into the hands of men," said Neelum Bahar, a farmer from Nawabshah. She was speaking at a press conference organised by ActionAid in which the organisation launched its campaign to support landless female farmers to secure their right to land.

Women's right to land includes their access, control and ownership of the land and other productive resources. The speakers at the press conference said that women's right to land campaign in Pakistan has its roots in 'HungerFree Women Campaign' launched back in 2007. They termed the allocation of land to landless women peasants by the Sindh government a major milestone achieved by the struggle of women farmers. The provincial government allocated 70 per cent of the land to poor landless women whereas the remaining 30 per cent was allocated to other landless peasants.

"However, after the recent flood disaster, women farmers are once again faced with issues land re-demarcation and resettlement," said the women farmers. They demanded that land should be distributed among women farmers in the other provinces as well. It is a common practice in rural as well as urban areas that male members of the family transfer the property in their names soon after the legal distribution thus depriving women of their property rights.

Some women farmers complained that the land distributed by Sindh government was mostly given to non-deserving people. "In most of the cases, it was given to sisters and close relatives of feudal in the area and the small percentage that was given landless women farmers was either not suitable for farming or was located far away from the residence of that farmer".

[The News – March 9, 2011]

FIA Female Employees Seek SC Help to Counter Gender Bias

A two-member bench of the Supreme Court (SC) on March 4 accepted different petitions for hearing filed by 130 female employees of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) against discrimination in departmental promotions on the basis of gender. Justice Nasirul Mulk and Justice Ghulam Rabbani observed that discrimination on the basis of gender was not permissible as it was the violation of articles 22, 25 and 38 of the 1973 Constitution. It is relevant to mention here that around nine female ASIs who were deprived of promotion to the next grades filed the petitions. The petitioners were recruited as ASIs in the agency in different phases from 2002 to 2007. During the course of the proceedings, Hafiz SA Rehman, counsel for the petitioners, said there was discrimination in promotions as only male officials were promoted. ‘Women have the same capabilities as that of men,’ he argued.

[Daily Times – March 5, 2011]

Rallies, Seminars Held to Mark 100th International Women’s Day

“Come out ladies, come out friends, let’s create a new world of equal rights and status for ourselves,” read a slogan on a large banner carried at the front of a rally taken out to mark the centenary of the International Women’s Day. Several rallies were brought out here on Tuesday besides organization of seminars and conferences to renew pledges for persistent struggle for securing equitable rights for women. With the exception of the indistinguishable crux of their demands, all the assemblages had different slogans.

The rally of Home Based Women Bangle Workers Association called for equitable work and equitable wages for their gender, covering the home-based workers under the Industrial Relations Act (IRA), free education and social security for them. Likewise, abolition of anti-women traditions, Jirga system and black laws of tribal era were the clamor of the Sindhiani Tehreek while the Taraqi Pasand Nari Tehreek called for equal status and rights for women in society. A joint rally arranged by the Women Action Forum, Bhandar Sangat, Sindh Community Foundation and Sindh Hari Porhiat Council highlighted the demands of giving women ownership of agricultural lands and houses, stopping violence against them and putting an end to harassment, which has now become a punishable crime under the law. Separately, while addressing a seminar organized by the Pakistan Social Welfare Society and Hyderabad Development Forum (HDF), EDO Social Welfare and Community Development Shahid Ahmed Zubairi said some sections of the society were promoting extremism and intolerance, adding that women were also becoming victims of said tendencies. Observing that discrimination against women was not only confined to workplaces, educational institutions or property ownership matters, he pointed towards the family systems and attitudes, which if not changed, would prevent any real progress in granting equal status to women.

[The News – March 9, 2011]

HR WATCH

Child Rights

Armed Conflict Keeps Millions Out Of School: UN

With the 2015 UN target for ensuring universal primary education fast approaching, the UN education agency warned that 67 million children are not attending school, including 28 million caught in armed conflicts. Armed conflict is keeping 28 million children around the world out of schools, where they are often targets of sexual abuse and violence, according to the report by UNESCO.

UNESCO's 2011 Global Monitoring Report concluded that the world is not on track to achieve the goal set by world leaders at a UN summit in 2000 "by a wide margin," despite progress in many areas. The report, titled "The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education", said that 42 percent of children not enrolled in schools around the world live in poor countries wracked by conflict.

This often leads to a vicious cycle in which poverty and lack of development are reinforced by a lack of education, and the risk of further conflict is heightened as millions of youths fail to find employment. "Armed conflict remains a major roadblock to human development in many parts of the world, yet its impact on education is widely neglected," UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova said in a statement released at the report's launch in Dakar. Thirty-five countries were affected by armed conflict from 1999 to 2008, fifteen of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. "Children and schools are on the front line of these conflicts with classrooms, teachers and pupils seen as legitimate targets," the statement said. In Afghanistan, at least 613 attacks on schools were recorded in 2009, up from 347 in 2008 while terrorists in northwestern Pakistan have made numerous attacks on girls' schools, including one in which 95 girls were injured.

In North Yemen, 220 schools were destroyed, damaged or looted during fighting in 2009 and 2010, the report said. According to the report, insecurity and fear associated with sexual violence keep young girls in particular out of school. Rape and sexual violence have been widely used as a tactic of war in countries such as Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. UNESCO warned that the system of humanitarian aid is failing children, with aid skewed toward a small group of countries identified as national security priorities, neglecting many of the world's poorest countries.

[Daily Times – March 2, 2011]

Child Labor at Alarming Stage in Pakistan

Ironically, there is no separate policy to ban child labor in the country according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) while growing inflation is compelling people to send their children to work which is clear usurpation of their due rights besides destruction of their personality. Country like Pakistan is indebted to the international financial institutions and to pay the loans and interest, the government is compelled to increase the prices of utilities and indirect taxation is imposed on masses, which results in increasing child labor. Different natural disasters like earthquake of 2005 and the flood of 2010 further escalated child labor in the country. The traditional labor in the agricultural sector also exploits children and makes the situation worse, he added. Whereas, there are significant child labor legislations in Pakistan including the employment of children Act 1991 in which a child's age is still a question mark, he said.

According to the recent study conducted by IHDF which aimed to critically evaluate the effectiveness of child labor policies from 1947 to 2010, an attempt has been made to point out the major socio-economic factors responsible for making the policies ineffective and to attract the attention of the policy makers, planners, legislators and child labor experts to overcome the

complex and multi-dimensional problem of child labor. Another aim is to analyze the status of reflection of policies in national laws and program level impact of government interventions.

The methodology is to review constitution and laws and their implementation mechanism with respect to child labor issue and international conventions relating to child labor and their obligations. He maintained that Pakistan has an agriculture-based economy with colonial background and less industrialization. Fifty-four percent of the total population was living below the poverty line. In the population paradigm 73 million were children (under 18 years of age) who were skilled as well. However this massive flood of talent has no channel to run in smooth flow. If this human capital is invested and utilized through institutions, the outcome will be a healthy society. Otherwise the same can be the reason of destruction for the whole country as these children involve themselves in street crimes, suicide bombings and drug peddling, he said. He informed that no comprehensive work on the extent of child labor in Pakistan has been conducted since 1996, making it difficult to assist the severity of the issue and address the problem appropriately.

Though Pakistan is signatory to UN convention for the rights of child which says every person under 18 years of age is a child, whereas, the employment of children act (ECA), 1991 prohibits only children under 14 years of age from working in factories and hazardous employment, he pointed out. Though there is an act for bonded labor, its implementation has been a problem since its existence. The utilization of funds has not been without problems. The Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance (promulgated in October 2002) does not save children from being victims of the law. Trafficked children are arrested and detained as illegal aliens, rather than being recognized as victims. The prosecutions of criminals need to be complemented with legislation that focuses on protecting children in custody, have access to rather families and other support services.

In 2009 the policy makers from, the ministry of labor and manpower outlined a new law, the Employment and Services Conditions Bill 2009. This proposed law aims to consolidate all labor legislation under new law by completely cancelling 11 existing laws and partly cancelling two laws. Exclusive laws dealing with child labor i.e. Employment of Children Act 1991 and Employment of Children (pledging of labor) Act 1933 stand to be repealed once the proposed law is propagated.

With the active support of ILO, Pakistan has developed a DWCP and the Ministry of Labor, Employer Federation of Pakistan; Pakistan Worker Federation has expressed commitment to implement it. The DWCP addresses the issue of child labor both at policy and programme level. Two district coordination committees on child labor have been established for the district of Sukkur and Sahiwal, he informed. Habib said a lot has been done regarding policies, laws, capacity building, and awareness, however, there is need to have a comprehensive child labor program from all sectors for example domestic child work, rug picking, bounded labor and child trafficking.

[Daily Times – March 21, 2011]

Conflict Watch

Target Killings in Karachi during March

Following are the major incidents of target killings which took place during the month of March:

- On March 7, various localities of the metropolis remained tense after the killings of political and sectarian workers, which left nine people dead, including five MQM workers.
- Five people, including a worker of the MQM, were shot dead in target-killing spree in Orangi Town and Ranchore Line on March 9.
- At least six people were killed and 12 others injured while a dozen of vehicles were set on fire during the strike on March 11. A complete shutter-down and wheel-jam strike was observed in Karachi and all other districts of Sindh on March 11 on the call of the ruling PPP in protest against the Supreme Court's verdict that declared the appointment of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Justice (Rtd) Syed Deedar Hussain Shah as null and void.
- On March 12, fourteen people were killed and six others wounded in the second consecutive day of violence that resulted from the strike called against a Supreme Court (SC) verdict.
- Nine more people, including two activists of the MQM and one worker of ANP, fell prey to the ongoing wave of violence in the metropolis on March 13.
- The non-stop violence, which has disturbed the social and commercial activities of the city, escalated on March 14 with the killing of eight more people, taking the death toll in four days to 36. The target killing claimed eight more lives, including those of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Awami National Party (ANP), in different parts of the metropolis.
- At least seven more people were killed in targeted killings, while two women were killed in mishaps in separate parts of the metropolis on March 16.
- Around 15 people, including three activists of MQM and two of Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PMAP), were killed in a wave of violence in Karachi on March 20.
- Eleven more people were killed in ongoing wave of target killings in the city on March 22. The city's most ethnically divided area, Orangi Town and its surroundings were seen as battleground where incidents of firing on the pushcarts, hotel and buses claimed the lives of eight people, while several persons received bullet injuries.
- Target killings claimed at least nine more lives on March 23, including that of a MQM activist, in separate incidents in the provincial metropolis.
- On March 24, targeted killings claimed 11 more lives while commercial and social activities in several areas remained paralyzed.
- There was no let-up in ongoing unrest in the country's financial hub as 12 more people, including four political activists, fall prey to targeted killings on March 25.

The information has been compiled from different dailies.

Terrorist Incidents in March

S.No.	Date	Place	Killed	Injured
1	March 1	Ghalingar / Safi / Mohmand Agency / FATA	2	1
2	March 1	Sher Garh / Mardan / KP	1	20

3	March 1	Shah Latif / Karachi / Sindh	1	0
4	March 3	Hangu / KP	10	31
5	March 3	Karkhano Market / Hayatabad / Peshawar / KP	0	3
6	March 4	Akhwand Panju Baba Shrine / Akbarpura / Nowshera / KP	10	40
7	March 4	Shalobar / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
8	March 5	Shaikhan Chowk / Badabher / Peshawar / KP	0	5
9	March 5	Kohat / KP	0	0
10	March 5	Swabi / KP	0	0
11	March 8	Faisalabad / Punjab	32	125
12	March 9	Adezai / Peshawar / KP	43	52
13	March 9	Darwazgai / Peshawar / KP	0	0
14	March 9	Kohiwal / Darra Adamkhel / Kohat / KP	0	0
15	March 9	Pathar Nala / Dera Bugti / Balochistan	6	19
16	March 9	Peshbogi / Sui / Dera Bugti / Balochistan	0	5
17	March 10	Dera Murad Jamali / Jaffarabad / Balochistan	4	18
18	March 10	Dera Bugti / Balochistan	0	7
19	March 10	Sadukhel / Landi Kotal / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
20	March 11	Ali Masjid / Jamrud / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
21	March 11	Bara / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
22	March 11	Shahabkhel / Badabher / Peshawar / KP	0	0
23	March 12	Chethar / Naseerabad / Balochistan	0	4
24	March 12	Pir Koh / Dera Bugti / Balochistan	0	0
25	March 12	Badabher / Peshawar	0	0
26	March 12	Badabher / Peshawar	0	0
27	March 13	Rabih Canal / Naseerabad / Balochistan	0	0
28	March 14	Changai / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	2
29	March 14	Rehmatullah / Changai / Landikotal / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
30	March 15	Parvera / Zorbandar / Bajaur Agency / FATA	0	3

31	March 17	Alam Khani / Sheikhmal Khel / Landikotal / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
32	March 17	Rabi canal / Naseerabad District / Balochistan	2	7
33	March 17	Badani Cross / Naseerabad District / Balochistan	1	1
34	March 17	Turbat town / Turbat District / Balochistan	0	3
35	March 17	Dingra / Turbat District / Balochistan	0	0
36	March 18	Qambar Khel / Bara / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	4
37	March 19	Mach / Bolan District / Balochistan	0	0
38	March 19	Shindand / Bara / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
39	March 20	Kotki / Hangu District / KP	0	8
40	March 20	Wattar / Nowshera Kalan / Nowshera District / KP	0	0
41	March 21	Gur Wali / Dera Ismail Khan District / KP	2	0
42	March 21	Chinari / Safi / Mohammad Agency / FATA	0	1
43	March 21	Rail Bazaar / Gujranwala District / Punjab	0	3
44	March 22	Alam Godar / Bara / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	6
45	March 23	Hazarganji / Quetta / Balochistan	0	3
46	March 23	Mangoli / Naseerabad District / Balochistan	0	0
47	March 23	Matani / Peshawar / KP	1	0
48	March 23	Darsamand / Doaba / Hangu District / KP	0	12
49	March 23	Gulo Khan / Badhber / Peshawar	0	0
50	March 23	Jamrud / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
51	March 24	Doaba / Hangu / KP	9	25
52	March 24	Sibi / Balochistan	0	0
53	March 25	Landikotal / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
54	March 25	Bara / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
55	March 25	Akakhel / Khyber Agency / FATA	0	0
56	March 25	Toor Afghan refugee camp / Dir District / KP	2	2
57	March 25	Pirkoh / Dera Bugti / Balochistan	0	0

58	March 26	Matani / Peshawar	0	0
59	March 26	Sharikera / Peshawar	0	0
60	March 26	Adezai / Peshawar	0	0
61	March 28	Jawaki / FR Kohat / FATA	0	0
62	March 29	Sharifabad / Mardan District / KP	0	0
63	March 30	Swabi / KP	14	20
64	March 31	Nowshera Road / Charsadda District / KP	13	42
65	March 31	Tump / Turbat District / Balochistan	5	0
66	March 31	Duki / Loralai District / Balochistan		

This information has been obtained from the website of South Asian Terrorist Portal

250 Clerics Declare Suicide Attacks Haram

250 clerics from around 18 countries have declared suicide attacks as haram. They issued the declaration on the occasion of the three-day-long Seerat-ul-Nabi conference, which was also attended by several Pakistani clerics belonging to different schools of thought. The clerics issued a joint statement at the end of the conference, in which they termed the terrorist attacks as “a plan to destroy the state’s infrastructure” and a “well planned conspiracy against Islam”. The clerics also pointed out the need of establishing a committee, consisting of clerics and scholars, to review the 1961 laws. They also emphasised on the selection of academic syllabus of the madrassas according to the demands of the modern era.

[Daily Times – March 11, 2011]

Blasphemy Law & Minority Rights

Blasphemy Convict's Death in Jail Sparks Suspicion

Two cases of blasphemy were registered against him in the Saddar and Azizabad police stations in 2006 and one attempted murder case was registered by the Sir Syed police station. The victim's family also filed a petition in the Sindh High Court where they challenged the life imprisonment. The attempted murder case was being heard.

Background: On February 25, 2010, Additional District and Sessions Judge Jangu Khan found Qamar David guilty of blasphemy. The judge sentenced David to life imprisonment under Sections 295A and 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code, based on claims made by business rivals. He was accused of sending text messages which contained derogatory remarks about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWW). Christian human rights groups have demanded that a committee investigate the causes of the death. The Catholic Bishop of Islamabad/Rawalpindi Rufin Anthony conveyed his condolences to David's family and protested against the incident.

David was being kept at Central Jail, Karachi. "My husband had no disease," his wife Tabassum told The Express Tribune. "He informed me about receiving threats from someone in jail after the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti." Jail Deputy Superintendent Raja Mumtaz refuted these claims. "No one killed him," he said. "He died of a heart attack." He was taken to Civil Hospital, Karachi where he died while being treated. The postmortem was held on March 16th in the presence of his family, a magistrate and the police surgeon.

[The Express Tribune - March 16, 2011]

Father Pleads Innocence for Son Accused of Blasphemy

Father of Yaqoob, the accused, had come to the police station with documents proving his mental illness. One Saturday evening, a young man from Yaseen, Ghizer, had allegedly uttered insulting comments against Prophet Mohammad (SAWW), triggering a protest in the town. The police arrested the man and launched a case against him under the blasphemy law. Abdur Rauf, a resident of Kondas Gilgit had submitted an application with the city police station saying he had witnessed the incident. The sources who are familiar with the developments said that Taifur Shah, father of the accused, approached the police to say that what his son said was unintentional as he had suffered from mental sickness in the past. His father also showed them documents to support his claim. The documents were related to his son's admission in the hospital and his treatment. The police, however, asked him to present the documents in court when the hearing begins.

Meanwhile, Ismaili Regional Council Gilgit issued a strong condemnation on the act of alleged blasphemy and urged the government to take strong action against the accused. In a press statement issued by the president of Ismaili Regional Council Gilgit, Manzoor Ali said that no Muslim can tolerate disrespect towards the Holy Prophet (SAWW). Ali appreciated the law enforcing agencies' sharp reaction in arresting the alleged blasphemer.

[The Express Tribune - March 28, 2011]

99 Ahmadis Persecuted In 2010: Report

A detailed annual report issued by the Jamaat Ahmadiyya said that the killing of Ahmadis on the basis of religion was increasing and since 1984 the number of killings has reached to 202. The report said that during the previous year, 67 cases were lodged targeting the community that because of discriminatory laws in Pakistan, 234 Ahmadis were attacked, but they fortunately survived. Meanwhile, some worship places of the community were razed, while 28 others were sealed by the government during last year. The report added that 15 of their worship places were illegally taken over and 29 bodies of community members were exhumed, while 51 others

were not allowed to get buried in combined graveyards. Construction of not a single place of worship was allowed in the country and the police forcefully stopped construction of some places of worship in different areas of the country. Ahmadis were not allowed to organize a single demonstration even in Rabwa, an area that has a 95 per cent Ahmadiyya population. At the same time, other people were allowed to hold protest demonstrations in Rabwa where derogatory language and hate speeches were used against their community.

[The Express Tribune - March 18, 2011]

GOVERNANCE WATCH

Political Governance

Federal & Provincial Governments

Provinces Reluctant To Take Control of Five Ministries

The Implementation Commission on 18th Amendment once again found itself in troubled waters as the provinces showed reluctance in taking charge of five ministries because of financial crunch as well as lack of infrastructure. In the meeting of the commission with Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Committee, Mian Raza Rabbani, in the chair to resolve the issue in line with the 18th Amendment. Chief Secretaries of the four provinces were also present on the occasion.

Well-placed sources informed Daily Times that provinces were reluctant to accept five more ministries, including education, tourism, social welfare and special education, livestock and dairy development and culture, because of financial difficulties. They said that the second phase of the devolution process could be in doldrums as the provinces demanded the federal government to take it upon itself the burden of payment of salaries to the federal government employees for the next five years, or delay the process for the next six months. However, the commission is determined to complete the whole process by June 30, 2011, as enshrined in 18th Constitutional Amendment. Sources further added that devolution process was very likely the part of the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) award, in which the federal government massively increased the share of provinces up to Rs 350 billion to accept the responsibilities, which might be increased up to Rs 400 billion for the next financial year 2011-12.

Rabbani informed newsmen that the consensus between the provinces and the commission could not mature because another amendment would be needed, if commission welcomed the demand of provinces to delay the devolution process for next six months. It is worth mentioning here that federal government has already been bearing the burden of more than 4,500 employees of five ministries, which were devolved in the first phase of the devolution process. Sources further maintained that the commission Chairman, Raza Rabbani, took a tough stance over the new stance taken by the provinces and termed it 'out of question'. Under the 18th Amendment of the constitution, the concurrent list has been abolished but some of its items have been placed in the federal legislative list-II and Council of Common Interest (CCI) would decide about them later.

[Daily Times - March 16, 2011]

Rights Body Backs Formation of FATA Reforms Committee

The FATA Democratic Movement has supported the formation of the 10-member committee of political parties for political, legal and administrative reforms in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Speaking at a news conference, its organizer Abdur Rahim Afridi said that the crisis in the tribal areas could only be resolved through political and democratic means. Under the British-inherited Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and administrative system the tribesmen have no access to political, legal, human and economic rights. He said the formation of the 10-member committee of various parties was a good omen for early reforms in Fata that had been promised by President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani had pledged to abolish the inhuman FCR system in his first speech which is yet to materialize. The military and civil establishment had created hurdles in Fata reforms He applauded the role of the National Democratic Institute for working on implementation of reforms in Fata.

[The News - April 01, 2011]

Centre Diverting Funds to Punjab, Sindh: Baloch MPAS

Lawmakers from the ruling party and its coalition partners were united in criticizing the federal government and bureaucracy for the non-completion of development projects. They decided to form a joint strategy to get Islamabad to release funding for major schemes in Balochistan.

The federal government has had to freeze much of its development spending because of financial constraints, but the Balochistan members feel that their province has been disproportionately affected. Minister for Agriculture Asad Baloch raised the issue on a point of order, citing various highway projects, and the Gwadar deep sea port, as examples of works that were at a standstill. Sardar Sanaulah Zehri, Habibur Rehman Hassani, Maulvi Sarwar, Ehsan Shah, Shahnawaz Marri, Jaffar Mandokhel and Nasrin Khetran complained that Chief Minister Nawab Aslam Raisani's meetings with the president and prime minister in Islamabad had not improved matters. They supported the chief minister's decision to decline a briefing from the National Highways Authority (NHA) on ongoing projects.

The lawmakers proposed that the assembly pass a resolution, but Speaker Aslam Bhootani pointed out that the many resolutions previously passed by the assembly had had no effect. Sports Minister Shahnwaz Marri accused the federal government of breaking all its promises during the last three years. Shah said that the province faced a massive power crisis in Makran Division, which consists of Gwadar, Panjgur and Kech districts. He said the division was getting 35 MW of its 50 MW demand from Iran, but the power supply agreement was about to end so the government should renew it. The speaker said that the Iranian consul general had told him personally that Iran was ready to provide more electricity to Makran Division.

[The Express Tribune - March 16, 2011]

Demand for New Provinces

Bahawalpur Declaration' To Be Unveiled On April 14

Former information minister and chief of Bahawalpur Muttahida Mahaz, Senator Mohammad Ali Durrani said that the Nawab of Bahawalpur Salahuddin Abbasi would unveil 'Bahawalpur Declaration' on April 14, taking the movement for the restoration of Bahawalpur's status as province into a decisive phase. Addressing a huge public gathering Senator Durrani said that The Bahawalpur Declaration would slay all conspiracies being hatched against the restoration of Bahawalpur and the people of Bahawalpur would launch their final move and all those who are hatching conspiracies against Bahawalpur would be foiled. He said that after looting the resources of their people, the landlords of Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan were eyeing the rich resources of Cholistan but no one would be allowed to loot Bahawalpur's resources as people are cognizant of the situation and they would not allow making Cholistan a hunting ground for the landlords of southern Punjab. Bahawalpur is 24 percent of the Punjab province. Under the National Finance Commission Award, Bahawalpur should be given Rs 54 billion as its share for the development of the area, while the government has given only Rs 1 billion.

The Senator warned the government against a food crisis looming ahead if the water disparity was not avoided, saying that South Punjab was the mass farming area of the country and the denial of water share for the area could spark a food crisis. Senator Durrani said that the movement for the restoration of Bahawalpur could not be blocked and it would continue.

[Daily Times - March 26, 2011]

Saraiki Province A Bid to Bring PPP, PML-Q Closer

PPP and its new ally, PML-Q, have got closer after Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani announced that he would make Saraiki province a part of his party's next election manifesto. The PML-Q had already been supportive of this idea but the PPP was not airing or supporting it since it was

in alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in Punjab, which considered the very demand of a Saraiki province an attempt to reduce its control over the vast stretch of Punjab. Sources in the PPP informed Daily Times that the prime minister's statement was not an off-the-cuff move but a part of a thought out plan to give a befitting reply to the PML-N besides making the public a party to the idea of creation of new provinces in the country. The move was, in fact, discussed at a high-level meeting in Islamabad last week, the sources said, adding that PPP leadership had decided in principle to support the demand on a request of the PML-Q.

[Daily Times - March 15, 2011]

Census - 2011

First Stage of Decennial Census Kicks Off

The first stage of the census includes the house listing and summary sheets of house materials. The estimated cost of this census is Rs. 5 billion. The first stage will be completed by April 19. The main census operation and installation of data capture equipment will begin on October 6. No details will be made public till the completion of the process. A total of 146,270 enumerators will conduct the census in 424 census districts in the rural and urban areas of the country. Census-takers and associated workers will be supervised by 3,626 district census officers and tehsildars in the first stage of the population census. The teams would conduct the survey in 25 divisions, 139 districts, 424 census districts, 533 tehsils, 62 towns, 1,470 urban union councils, 50,612 villages, and 6,055 rural union councils, 62 towns of the city districts, 174 municipal committees, 286 town committees and 43 cantonments.

The census will also be carried out in 14 tehsils in the volatile areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa including Chitral, Dir, Malakand and Kohistan. House listing in various villages of Fata and Gilgit-Baltistan will also be undertaken. Three forms will be distributed for the census 2011:

- Form-1 is for house listing
- Form-2A is a detailed questionnaire
- Form-2 relates to the population census which is to begin in autumn

Demographic, social characteristics, literacy, geographical area, economic characteristics and fertility have also been included. The SDP officially requested for some 0.2 million soldiers, for 15 days to provide security cover to the field staff as well as for the collection of questionnaires. The army, Rangers, Frontier Constabulary, Levies and other paramilitary forces guaranteed their support to survey teams.

According to the 1998 census Pakistan's population was around 132 million while the PCO's current data states that the population has risen above 175 million. A few political parties including the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) expressed their reservation over the census procedure and said they would protest over it at various forums. On the other hand nationalist parties in Sindh have started a campaign to mobilize people by establishing the Sindh Census Monitoring Committee. The committee headed by President Sindh United Party Jalal Memood Shah has demanded the deployment of the Army in sensitive areas to ensure transparency in the process.

[The Express Tribune - April 5, 2011]

Police to Decide If They Want Help From the Rangers: DCO

Addressing a press conference at the DCO camp office, Muhammad Hussein said that security measures have been taken at the federal level and the City District Government Karachi (CDGK) will offer a 'supporting hand' for census 2011. He admitted that there are some "sensitive areas" in the city where the law and order is not completely under control but the CDGK has chosen

teachers to do the house listing because they are respected by all segments of society. This will help the teams collect data.

The only category being marked right now is the number of buildings in the city, including those in unplanned settlements. A residential apartment that has several flats would still be allotted a single census identification number (CIN). However, the number of residents or citizens would also be listed next to the CIN. All citizens, including non-Pakistanis, would be counted in the census; however outsiders would be marked as non-nationals. The actual figures on population are important because the allocations in the budget, civic facilities and resources are based on this data. The strength of the trained enumerators, which is 8,500 right now, would be increased two-fold in the final phase, in which each individual would be counted. The enumerators would carry a significant identity sign that would also bear the imprint of the "Government of Pakistan". This would ensure their safety and a hassle-free performance.

For the census, Karachi has been divided into circles, blocks and town municipal administrations. There would be at least seven blocks in each circle, while each town municipal administration would comprise seven blocks. The city has been divided into six cantonment areas and 18 towns. In the cantonments, the executive officer would be made the Census District Officer and in the towns the revenue deputy district officer of the CDGK would work as the Census District Officer. The district coordination officer will act as the Census Central District Coordinator. Thus, the upcoming census would be conducted by 24 census district officers and one overall coordinator.

[The Express Tribune - March 30, 2011]

Assets of Senators

Declared Assets: Rich Senators of a Poor Nation

Despite rampant under-declaration of assets, Pakistani Senators have net worth running into the millions and even billions of rupees, according to details of asset declarations made public by the Election Commission of Pakistan which has no mechanism to verify the authenticity of claims made by the lawmakers.

Syed Nayyar Hussain Bukhari, the treasury leader in the Senate, has a 1990 model Chevrolet Caprice. He also owns 30-tola of gold valued at Rs. 1.2 million. The senator's bank account holds Rs. 1.31 million. Worth of his furniture and articles of personal use is Rs. 200,000. Bukhari, his spouse and his son own several properties in and around Islamabad. A commercial plot in Sector G-9/4 is worth Rs. 15 million; another plot for Rs. 1.8 million, which is now worth Rs. 15 million. He also owns a 236-kanal plot of land in Haripur district which he inherited from his parents. The value of his land is shown to be Rs. 23.6 million. He purchased another 231-kanal piece of land in Jandala village which is now valued at Rs. 23.1 million. Another piece of land, measuring 20 kanals in Tarlai village was purchased for Rs. 15 million is worth almost the same. His spouse owns some "ancestral land" and owns a share in a house in a posh sector of Islamabad and two CNG stations. His son owns a farmhouse worth Rs. 10 million.

Waseem Sajjad, leader of the opposition in the Senate, owns at least 10 plots, several houses and farmhouses besides shares and accounts in various domestic and international banks. The declared worth of his assets is said to be Rs. 131.6 million. He clarified that the market value he declared is approximate and the exact value can only be determined if the property is sold.

Ishaq Dar, PML-N's parliamentary leader in Senate, owns a House in Gulberg, Lahore which is, at present, worth Rs. 45 million. The Senator and his wife own 20 kanals of land in Islamabad for Rs. 7.02 million/kanal which is not the current value of this land. The Senator has a villa in the UAE which he purchased for 10.18 million dirham. Besides owning three luxury vehicles, including a Mercedes Benz said to be valued Rs. 10 million, Dar also holds shares and businesses

worth “millions of dollars” inside and outside Pakistan. The value of his furniture, fittings and articles of personal use is Rs. 250,000.

The declared assets of chief of the PML-Q Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain include “half a share in two residential houses” in posh localities of Islamabad and Lahore worth just Rs. 5.2 and Rs. 3.4 million, respectively. Shujaat declared that he owned 78 acres of agricultural land whose value, according to him, was only Rs. 376,667 while the value of another 12.5-acre land was Rs. 4.5 million. He owns shares worth Rs. 10.04 million and cash in bank accounts Rs. 51.78 million. Shujaat is among legislators who do not own a car.

MQM’s parliamentary leader in the Senate has four residential properties in Karachi. He valued his two houses in Karachi at Rs. 61 million and Rs. 37 million, respectively. He has invested Rs. 5 million in two separate businesses. Another of the businesses in which he has invested is worth 150,000 dinars and \$300,000. He owns two Toyota Prado SUVs 2005 models, some jewelry and some cash in bank accounts.

PPP Senators Gul Muhammad Lot and Ammar Ahmad Khan are richest among Senators. Lot owns property valuing Rs. 1.351 billion inside and outside Pakistan and investments worth Rs. 1.42 billion. He has nine properties abroad. The declared net value of assets of Ammar Ahmad Khan is Rs. 1.152 billion. He has shown an investment of Rs. 1.107 billion in his business. He owns four houses in Gulberg Lahore. Interestingly, his father ranks on top of the poorest Senators with net liabilities to the tune of Rs. 197.6 million.

Azam Khan Swati owns six properties valuing over Rs. 520 million in the US and has 16 million dirham in various properties in the UAE. He has declared the combined value of nine of his plots with built structures in Bahria Town, at Rs. 150 million. He owns 10 plots in Islamabad, two houses in Abbotabad and some inherited property with forest infrastructure and houses. Whereas, Federal Minister Israrullah Zehri owns agricultural land spread over 50,000 acres and valued at billions of rupees in Balochistan. He also owns a bungalow each in Karachi and Quetta and a 40-acre plot of land in Gwadar.

[The Express Tribune - March 12, 2011]

BISP Updates

BISP Completes 80pc of Poverty Survey in City

Chairperson of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Farzana Raja said that 80 per cent poverty survey in Lahore has been completed. The door-to-door poverty survey based on internationally recognized means test method is being conducted throughout Pakistan and the number of registered deserving families with the BISP will rise up to five to seven million after its completion in June this year. Owing to transparent nature of its operations, the BISP has gained support and trust of international donors and financial agencies. Rs. 78 billion had been disbursed among the beneficiary families of BISP since the start of the programme out of which Rs. 34 billion had been disbursed in Punjab. She said 192,000 free mobile phones were being distributed among the beneficiary families in four districts of Pakistan. Under the Waseela-i-Haq initiative the BISP offered Rs. 300,000 long-term interest-free financial assistance to randomly selected beneficiaries, to be recovered in 15 years. The health insurance to beneficiary families would also be introduced while the life insurance scheme had already been launched and in case of the death of bread-earner of the beneficiary family, Rs. 100,000 would be provided to the family within two weeks. The programme is serving the poor masses of the country without any consideration of caste, creed and religion.

[Dawn - March 24, 2011]

Government Fighting Terrorism, Poverty Simultaneously: Farzana Raja

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Chairperson, Farzana Raja, said that war on terror and the war against poverty are intertwined; therefore, present democratic government has made poverty alleviation one of its prime focused areas. She said this while speaking as chief guest at a roundtable “Gender, Peace and Conflict in Pakistan: Knowledge, Best Practice and Research in Policy Making Processes,” organized by Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU). She said that the government believed that without empowering women, we cannot make serious progress on any front especially in building a peaceful, tolerant and developed society. Farzana Raja said that Benazir Bhutto was not only committed with the cause of uplifting the lives of poor masses but also was an ardent supporter of women rights and women empowerment. Therefore, she said, BISP was launched to provide financial assistance to the poorest of the poor and it has made women empowerment is an integral part of the programme. Hence, all benefits to the beneficiary families are being provided through the woman head of the family.

[Daily Times - March 18, 2011]

DEMOCRACY & ELECTION WATCH

ECP & Election Related Updates

ECP All Set To Prepare Computerized Electoral Rolls on CNIC Basis

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) would prepare Computerized Electoral Rolls-2011 on Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) basis in collaboration with NADRA according to the new Census Blocks devised by Census Organization. Ground work for preparation of Computerized Electoral Rolls for obtaining data about new census blocks and house-heads will start, parallel to the house-listing by the Census Organization, from April 5, 2011. The Secretary, ECP said that it is imperative and need of the day to devise a foolproof system to eliminate any possibility of bogus entries in the electoral rolls. In the first phase of preparation of Computerized Electoral Roll-2011, the existing Electoral Rolls-2007 data has been shared with NADRA and NADRA has successfully completed verification and augmentation of Electoral Rolls-2007 data. He also said that the preparation of accurate computerized electoral rolls is a demand of all the country.

In the meeting, it was unanimously decided that the ECP will obtain Census Blocks and House-heads data with the help of enumerators, hired by the Census Organization for this purpose, from 5th April, 2011 and on the basis of this data, detailed door-to-door enumeration will be started in June, 2011. For this purpose, enumerators and supervisors will be paid Rs.2500/- and Rs.3500/- respectively by the ECP. Letters about necessary instructions along with Form to be filled by these enumerators have been issued to all the ECP's District Offices for early completion of this important national task. The Secretary, ECP also told that Bill regarding declaring CNIC as mandatory for registration of vote has been passed by the Senate on 29th March 2011 and the new computerized Electoral Rolls-2011 will now be prepared on the basis of CNIC only. The Chairman NADRA and Secretary, Statistics Division assured all out support, full coordination and cooperation to the ECP at all levels including Provincial as well as at District level for achieving the national cause of preparation of error-free accurate electoral rolls.

[ECP – March 30, 2011]

SC Expresses Concern over Fake Voters' Lists

The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday expressed concern over inaction of ECP in removing fake voters' names from the electoral lists and revamping them. A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and comprising Justice Muhammad Sair Ali and Justice Ghulam Rabbani heard the case of 37.8 million fake names included in the electoral rolls of various constituencies. The chief justice asked the Election Commission secretary that on whose behalf had the bogus entries been made in the electoral rolls, and on what basis were the by-elections being held in the presence of the bogus votes.

At the beginning of the hearing, ECP Secretary Ishtiaq Ahmed Khan informed the court that the commission had chalked out a plan to delete the names of all those fictitious persons who are not on the database of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). He said under the direction of the chief election commissioner, the ECP had been making efforts for the past one year in collaboration with NADRA to prepare fresh, accurate and computerized electoral rolls on the basis of NADRA's database.

[Daily Times - April 01, 2011]

JUI-F Bags Tank Seat

Ghulam Qadir Bhattani of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) was elected as member of the provincial assembly in the by-election held in PF-69 constituency of Tank. Ghulam Israr Khan, Mr Bhattani received 16,319 votes against 13,668 votes received by independent candidate, Habibullah Kundi, who is a former provincial minister. PPP candidate, Dawar Khan Kundi, bagged 12,986 votes.

The seat had fallen vacant after the degree of the then MPA, Gulistan Khan Bhattani, was declared fake by an election tribunal over a petition filed by Habibullah Kundi. Gulistan Bhattani, who expired after the announcement of by-election, was brother of the winning candidate, Ghulam Bhattani. Both belonged to JUI-F, a component party of MMA. Polling for the by-election was held on Monday. As the date for the polling was changed four times, there was lack of enthusiasm among the voters and some of the stations were presented a deserted look.

[Dawn – March 23, 2011]

Report On Democracy

UK Report Notes Pakistan's Progress towards Democracy

The 2010 Human Rights and Democracy report prepared and released by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office has spoken of progress made by the present elected government in Pakistan to strengthen democratic institutions and address key human rights challenges. The report was launched by the British Foreign Secretary William Hague whose opening remarks were devoted mainly to events in Libya.

On Pakistan, the report mentioned that current administration in Islamabad did make some progress, notably ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture, reform of the constitution to decentralize power and moves towards electoral reform. The democratically elected government of President Asif Ali Zardari passed the halfway mark of its term in office, a notable landmark in a country where no elected government has seen out its tenure. According to the report, Pakistan remains one of the UK's highest foreign policy priorities, and 2010 saw ministerial visits from William Hague, Home Secretary Theresa May, International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell and Minister without Portfolio Baroness Warsi. Implementation of Pakistan's international human rights commitments is integral to ensuring long-term prosperity and stability, and is in the UK national interest.

The FCO continued to work closely with other UK government departments, the government of Pakistan, other governments and NGOs to address key human rights challenges. The support from NGOs of UK also helped the Ministry for Women's Development to make significant progress towards the criminalization of domestic violence, along with other legal measures to remove discrimination against women. They also provided capacity building and support to civil society groups to support their work in speaking out against extremism and intolerance, and in support of democracy and reform.

For 2011, the British focus would be on four key priorities: to support an end to discrimination and violence against women, to strengthen freedom of expression, religion and belief, to encourage stronger implementation of Pakistan's international commitments, and to build the capacity of civil society and bodies mandated to challenge the states' effectiveness on human rights, such as the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights.

[Daily Times - April 01, 2011]

Local Governance

Local Bodies Polls Delimitation Process Put On Hold

The provincial government had been maintaining a status quo since Feb 20 last year, when the local bodies elected under LGO-2001 had completed their tenure, which also included a couple of months extension. The authority, once vested into the elected public representatives, now rests with the government functionaries including district coordination officers, tehsil municipal officers and union council secretaries. These officials work as administrators during the current transition phase. The provincial government intends to amend the LGO-2001 and a draft Local Government Act 2010 has been prepared that aims at re-introduction of 1979 law of local governments.

Under the proposed law, the government made provisions for reviving the rural and urban divide that used to be part of the erstwhile local bodies system, the official said. Citing the example of old Peshawar Municipal Corporation, the official said it had 41 administrative wards, but right now there were 93 union councils that would certainly need reshaping. As per the proposed law, there would be one each District Council and Municipal Corporation in the provincial capital, with the former looking after rural, while the later providing civic services to the urban areas. In May last year, the official, said all the Tehsil Municipal Administrations were directed to come up with details of delimitations that were in vogue in 1988. These details were discussed but no further actions were taken for actual delimitation.

[Dawn - March 15, 2011]

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

Facts & Figures on Pakistan's Economy

Remittances Rise Over 20% to \$6.96bn in July-Feb 2011

Remittances sent home by overseas Pakistanis continued to show a rising trend as an amount of \$ 6,963.28 million was received in the first eight months (July-February) of the current fiscal year 2010-11, showing an increase of \$ 1176.17 million or 20.32 percent when compared with \$ 5,787.11 million received over the same period of the last fiscal year. The inflow of remittances in the July-February, 2011 period from UAE, Saudi Arabia, USA, GCC countries (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman), UK and EU countries amounted to \$ 1,627.09 million, \$ 1,563.00 million, \$ 1,298.26 million, \$ 820.02 million, \$ 770.91 million and \$ 220.24 million respectively as compared to \$ 1,318.33 million, \$ 1,148.86 million, \$ 1,173.21 million, \$ 826.94 million, \$ 596.26 million and \$ 171.42 million respectively in the July-February, 2010 period. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during the first eight months of the current fiscal year amounted to \$ 663.73 million as against \$ 551.10 million in the same period last year.

The monthly average remittances for the July-February 2011 period comes out to \$ 870.41 million as compared to \$ 723.39 million during the same corresponding period of the last fiscal year, registering an increase of 20.32 percent. In February 2011, an amount of \$ 845.28 million was sent home by overseas Pakistanis, up 43.50 percent or \$ 256.25 million, when compared with \$ 589.03 million received in the same month last year. During last month i.e. February 2011 remittances from Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, UK, GCC countries (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman) and EU countries amounted to \$ 209.60 million, \$ 190.04 million, \$ 152.55 million, \$ 101.21 million, \$ 98.55 million and \$ 24.58 million respectively as compared to \$ 149.45 million, \$ 138.09 million, \$ 111.32 million, \$ 45.91 million, \$ 89.22 million and \$ 13.49 million in February 2010. Remittances received from Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries during February 2011 amounted to \$ 68.75 million compared with \$ 41.55 million in the same month last year. 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 channel.

[Daily times - March 11, 2011]

Current Account Deficit Inches Higher To \$98m

The cumulative deficit is not even \$100 million so far in this year said by Invest Cap head of research Khurram Shehzad. Trade balance has held up well and remittances have posted encouraging successive month-on-month gains. The relatively tame current account position and the government's recent moves to generate more taxes will couple up as decisive reasons against another hike in SBP's monetary policy. The trade balance posted a deficit of \$724 million in February, down slightly from January's deficit of \$794 million. Likewise, the balance of goods and services stood at \$916 million, compared with the previous month's tally of \$1.036 billion. Workers' remittances sent to the country have also increased in February, standing at \$845 million, up from \$827 million in January. Rising international fuel prices are being viewed as a potential threat to the country's external accounts and reserves of foreign currency. For this reason, analysts are keenly interested in developments in the Middle East. Mr. Shehzad pointed out the impressive export growth witnessed by the textile sector saying that rising commodity prices have also helped local exporters. The analyst also pointed out that consistently rising remittances have played a crucial role in firming up the current account, and cautioned.

[The Express Tribune - March 18, 2011]

Development of Microfinance Banks, SMES Can Boost Economy: Husain

According to State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) former Governor Dr. Ishrat Husain Pakistan can boost its economic growth by encouraging development of microfinance banks, small farmers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Husain said the ongoing economic reforms and economic agenda should target the agriculture sector, particularly small farmers, to begin a new journey towards economic progress. He said Pakistan was the first country to introduce a microfinance regulatory system in the world. Highlighting the growth in economy over the past 60 years, Husain said that Pakistan has not only fed its huge population of over 170 million but it has also been a leading exporter of rice, cotton and other commodities.

[The Express Tribune - March 12, 2011]

Net Foreign Aid Flow Turns Negative

In recent years, the net official aid flow disbursements from multilateral institutions and governments have turned negative because the Government of Pakistan has been paying more in debt servicing principal and interest than it has been receiving in new loans or aid. For example, the total aid received by the government (excluding borrowings by the private sector) was \$4,143 million during the financial year ending June 30, 2010 but during the same period, the government had to pay \$5,107 million in debt (principal and interest) repayments. It means that the net impact of the aid is actually negative on Pakistan's economy because the government had to pay a net amount of \$964 million to the external donors. This shows that while Pakistan has been piling up debt, it has not used the borrowings properly as is reflected by its growing incapacity to service the debt. Pakistan's only practical way out is to seek cancellation of part, if not, whole of the debt. Another major reason for the rise of external debt has been mismanagement and incompetence.

According to the Debt Policy Statement 2010-2011 published (November 2010) by the Ministry of Finance, "the currency exposure of foreign debt originates from two sources: dollar/ other foreign currencies and rupee/dollar. This two-pronged exchange rate risk has been a major source of increase in the stock of external debt over a period of time in contrast to actual inflows.

[Dawn - March 21, 2011]

Rs. 1 Trillion Taxes Collected In Nine Months

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has collected over Rs. 1 trillion in taxes in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year. The collection represents a 12.8 per cent increase over Rs. 886 billion collected in the corresponding period of the preceding year. Documents available reveal that authorities collected a total of Rs. 123 billion in the month of March, a 30.4 per cent increase over Rs. 95 billion collected in the same month last year. Of the Rs. 123 billion, income tax, contributed Rs. 55 billion while Rs. 43 billion was collected as sales tax, Rs. 9 billion as federal excise duty and Rs. 16 billion as customs duty.

However, the collection for March stands Rs. 37 billion lower than the Rs. 160 billion target set for the month. Despite expectation of the shortfall dropping in the coming days, when final figures are released by the board, it is unlikely that the Rs. 160 billion targets for the month will be met. It is also unlikely that the tax collection target for the fiscal year of collecting Rs. 556 billion in the final quarter will be achieved.

[The Express Tribune - April 1, 2011]

Power Tariff Increased 52.5% in Just 3 Years

A document presented in the Senate revealed that power tariff was increased by 52.5 percent to Rs 7.29 per kWh till November 2010—from Rs 4.78 per kWh on March 2008. The document showed that power tariff was increased three times during the year 2009 and reached Rs 5.96 per kWh at the end of the year. During the year 2010, the power tariff was hiked four times reaching Rs 7.29/kWh on Nov 1, 2010. The average increase in electricity tariff during the last three years was Rs 2.51/kWh. The Ministry of Water and Power said that there are several factors which influence at the time of determination of electricity tariff which include variation of inputs cost, for example furnace oil, gas, currency fluctuation, generation mix and inflation.

At present, while there is an acute energy shortage of electricity in the country and hydel resources are not sufficient to meet the growing demand of electricity. Consequently, generation is being made on thermal resources, which leads to un-favorable generation mix. Moreover, increase in oil prices, increase in inflation also contribute towards increase in electricity rates. It is however based on cost of supply, and takes all stakeholders on board through public hearing. However, due to its public policy decision and socio-economic conditions, the government notifies low tariff as compared to tariff determined by the NEPRA and the same is being charged to consumers.

The Ministry of Water and Power also informed the Senate about outstanding amount of WAPDA/PEPCO against the defaulters in the country. The Senate in written was informed that total outstanding amount against governments/ private is Rs 210.784 billion by 31st Jan 2011. In Punjab province, the government has to pay Rs 18.127 billion while private sector has to pay Rs 39.404 billion; the total outstanding against the province is Rs 57.531 billion. In case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including FATA, the total outstanding of WAPDA/PEPCO is Rs 54.166 billion. The provincial government has to pay Rs 15.247 billion while private sector has to pay Rs 38.918 billion. Sindh province has total outstanding amount is Rs 67.605 billion. Sindh government has to pay Rs 36.669 billion while private sector has to pay Rs 30.936 billion. Similarly, Balochistan province total outstanding amount is Rs 31.480 billion. The concerned provincial government has to pay Rs 13.478 billion while private sector has to pay Rs 18.002 billion.

The provincial finance secretaries were being pursued for recovery of outstanding dues against the major defaulting departments of provincial governments. The officers have been entrusted with the competency to initiate recovery from defaulting government/private consumers in installments. The PEPCO computer centers regularly issue equipment removal orders against the defaulting connections in order to recover the outstanding dues, the ministry of water and power informed the Upper House of the Parliament. Field formations have been directed to use tool of disconnection, where it necessary. Incentive for waiver of late payment surcharge was given to the government defaulting departments if, they clear the outstanding dues up to 30th June. Divisional as well as circular level committees have been entrusted with the competency to settle the dispute out of court in order to reduce the receivables.

[The News - March 31, 2011]

Government Policies

Government Unveils 'Mini-Budget'

The Federal Government imposed a 15 percent income tax surcharge, increased federal excise duty from one percent to 2.5 percent. General sales tax (GST) exemption on tractors has been withdrawn and 17 percent GST has been imposed on tractors with immediate effect. In this regard, President Asif Ali Zardari has promulgated three ordinances, which have allowed the federal government to impose these taxes. The ordinances would come in to force at once and taxes imposed through these ordinances would stand imposed on taxpayers of the country with immediate effect.

The net impact of the these tax measures is roughly estimated at Rs 45 billion in the remaining three and a half months of the current fiscal year. Income tax surcharge is expected to generate Rs 32 billion, increase in special excise duty will generate additional revenue of Rs 12 billion and withdrawal of GST exemption on tractors will help generate additional revenue to meet the tax collection target of Rs 1.604 trillion during the ongoing fiscal year 2010-11.

Income Tax Surcharge: The president has promulgated Income Tax (Amendment) Ordinance 2011 and empowered the government to levy 15 percent surcharge on the payable tax of all income taxpayers in the country. The 15 percent income tax surcharge is to remain applicable on incomes from March 15 to June 30, 2011. The surcharge is to be paid, collected, deducted and deposited at the same time and manner as the income tax is paid, collected, deducted and deposited under the Income Tax Ordinance. The issued ordinance further clarified that this surcharge shall not be payable for the tax year 2010 and prior tax years and shall be applicable for the tax year 2011. The income tax surcharge is to be applicable on the salaries of all the public and private sector employees, corporate taxpayers, all imports, and cash withdrawals from banks, electricity, POL products and oil imports, contracts and other withholding stages as explained in the income tax legislation.

Special Excise Duty: The president has also promulgated the Federal Excise (Amendment) Ordinance 2011, and empowered the federal government to increase the rate of special excise duty on all notified imports and locally produced items subjected to federal excise duty. Prices of cigarettes, POL products, electricity, cosmetics, beverages and other things are to go up immediately.

17 percent GST on tractors: The president on Tuesday also issued a Sales Tax (Amendment) Ordinance 2011, and empowered the government to levy 17 percent GST on imported and locally produced tractors, fertilizers and pesticides. The facility of zero-rating on plant, machinery and equipment including parts thereof has also been withdrawn. Zero-rating on five major export oriented sectors (textiles, carpets, leather, sporting goods and surgical goods) has been restricted to registered exporters and manufacturers-cum-exporters for export purpose only.

GST on Sugar: Government will charge 8.5 percent GST on the actual ex-factory price of sugar instead of the existing Rs 28.88 per kilograms. The government also notified a 2 percent increase in power tariff on Tuesday and with the issuance of three ordinances and imposition of the income tax surcharge, increase in special excise duty from one percent to 2.5 percent and the withdrawal of GST exemption on tractors, the IMF authorities are expected to visit again in the month of May and might approach their Executive Board in early June for ending the suspension of \$11.3 billion SBA and restore the issuance of the Letter of Comfort for obtaining fresh loans from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

[Daily Times – March 16, 2011]

Government Announces 50 Percent Cut in Expenditures

To save Rs 120 billion in the remaining three and a half months of the ongoing fiscal year, the federal government announced several measures, including a ban on all fresh recruitments, purchase of durable goods, and announced a 50 percent cut in expenditures on POL entitlements, purchase of stationary and travelling allowance. A Ministry of Finance statement stated that the government was committed to stabilize the economy and pursue its reforms agenda despite the shocks of unprecedented floods and rising oil prices. The determination of the government is beginning to show visible results.

The budget deficit, which some observers had predicted to cross 8 percent, has been reigned in and will be under 5.5 percent of the GDP. The government has decided to further control expenditures and to raise revenues to secure public finances. The following expenditure control measures for the remaining part of the budget year will be effective immediately:

- Cut in POL entitlements, purchase of stationary and travelling allowance. The expenditures on these heads are cut by half. There will be a complete ban on the purchase of durable goods.
- There will be a ban on fresh recruitment unless process is already initiated through proper advertisements.
- Surrender of budgetary allocations beyond last year's level. An exercise was undertaken successfully to secure surrender of excessive budgetary allocations over and above last year.
- Other savings: Numerous other small heads of account relating to grants to entities and bodies outside the government have been closely examined and their savings affected.
- The combined impact of these measures will be Rs 120 billion. Revenue measures: The following additional revenue measures have been adopted to partially offset the increase in expenditure demands on account of floods, foregone revenues due to postponement of RGST and to remove inequities in the tax system:
- One-time surcharge of 15 percent on income tax payable for the remaining period of tax year 2010-11.
- Additional special excise duty (SED) of 1.5 percent on items already subjected to SED for the remaining period of tax year 2010-11.
- Withdrawal of exemption of sales tax on fertilizer, pesticides and tractors.
- The facility of zero-rating on plant, machinery and equipment including parts thereof has also been withdrawn.
- Zero-rating on five major export oriented sectors (textiles, carpets, leather, sporting goods and surgical goods) has been restricted to registered exporters and manufacturers-cum-exporters for export purpose only.

[Daily times- March 16, 2011]

DFID to Provide 80m Pounds for Education Facilities

The Department of International Development (DFID) of UK will provide 80 million pounds over the next five years to augment educational facilities in Sindh and to provide quality education to one million poor students through primary and middle level schools in the province. The fund will be disbursed through the Sindh Education Initiative Fund (EFS), which is to be set up as a non-profit company under the Companies Ordinance 1984. This was discussed during a meeting on educational issues with reference to Sindh province at the Presidency. The meeting was attended among others by Pakistan Education Task Force (PETF)

Co-Chairman Begum Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar, PETF Co-Chairman Sir Michael Barber, Sindh Education Minister Pir Mazharul Haq, senior officials of the government and spokesperson to the president, Farhatullah Babar.

[Daily Times – March 12, 2011]

Government to Go For another \$3-5bn IMF Bailout Package

Pakistan is left with no option but to seek another \$3-5 billion IMF bailout package, with the harshest terms ever, right after the coming 2011-12 federal budget in June. These terms include immensely unpopular but inevitable measures like laying-off thousands of employees of the loss making state enterprises, which need to be run according to revised efficient management plans. But prior to seeking the next bailout package, the economic managers first need to meet the IMF's earlier demand of a successful implementation of the Reformed General Sales Tax (RGST) regime. The next IMF program is expected to be in the range of \$3 to \$5 billion depending upon the projections of external gap over the medium term. Having no IMF program is not an option despite the fact that presently Islamabad is quite comfortable on external account side in view of increased remittances, which have resulted in beefing up foreign currency reserves to \$17.4 billion. The government's woes are sired by mainly two factors: first, the government must start repaying the existing IMF loan from February 2012, and second, any blow to investor and public confidence can see the reserves evaporate quickly.

The IMF's management was ready to discuss options of new program with Pakistani authorities, but they wanted to put in place a 'saleable' program before its executive board members because in the past there was a lot of criticism on the Fund's staff mission responsible for executing the ongoing Standby Arrangement Program (SBA) of \$11.3 billion. Regarding the stringent conditions attached with the new Fund program it would become clearer when Pakistan would formally seek the new IMF program, and both sides would sit together to finalize quantitative and structural targets, but it was hoped that the government would come up with a clear cut plan to clear this mess of cash bleeding public sector enterprises (PSEs), including the option of lay-offs to run these organizations in a more professional manner. The Minister for Finance Dr. Abdul Hafeez Sheikh would discuss all options with the IMF high-ups on the occasion of the spring meeting of Breton Wood Institutions (WBIs) but formal negotiations on the new IMF program are all set to commence after the budget 2011-12 as the budget will set the direction of the country thus pave the way for finalizing modalities of the fresh IMF loan.

[The News - March 28, 2011]

REGIONAL POLITICS & PAKISTAN

Pakistan's Foreign Relations

Gilani, Manmohan Take Forward Dialogue Process

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and his Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh agreed to resolve all issues through dialogue and give their nations peace and prosperity. The two leaders termed their meeting as “positive” as they briefed media about their daylong interaction since Gilani arrived in Chandigarh to join Singh to watch together the semi-final between their cricket teams in Mohali. The two premiers held brief talks during the match, as they used the fixture to promote better bilateral relations.

The Prime Minister said his talks with Dr Singh on “all outstanding issues” focused on resolving them through dialogue. He said it was agreed to continue the “Thimpu spirit”, which had been a success since last year. He said the same spirit helped Pakistan and India to successfully conclude the interior secretary-level talks on March 28-29. He hoped that the upcoming commerce and foreign secretary-level and the foreign minister-level talks would also be a success. The premier said there was a consensus on both the sides that the two countries had the will and ability to resolve their problems, and stressed the need for giving the world this positive message. “We need to focus on dealing with our common enemy – the issues of inflation, poverty, hunger, disease and unemployment for the prosperity of the two countries,” Gilani averred. He also invited Prime Minister Singh and Indian National Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, to visit Pakistan.

In his speech during the talks, Singh said the two countries should be working together to find cooperative solutions and need permanent reconciliation to live together in dignity and honour. “We should put our ancient animosities behind us to attend to the problems of our nations,” he said. Singh termed it a “very good beginning”, and said whatever the differences between Pakistan and India, the two governments had to find ways to resolve them. “It is our commitment to give peace to our nations,” the Indian premier avowed.

[Daily Times – March 31, 2011]

India Moves to Improve Trade with Pakistan

A Pakistani delegation will meet Indian authorities on March 25 to chalk out a strategy for construction of infrastructure along border areas to facilitate traders. According to a senior official of the Ministry of Interior, the check post will become operational from April and it will be built on no man's land at the Wagha border to boost trade between the two countries. Representatives of both countries will also discuss deployment of soldiers on the check post as well as increasing the strength of the currently deployed forces on various check posts.

Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a historic memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2009, which allowed Kabul to export its goods to India via Pakistan. However, Pakistan has not yet allowed its territory to be used for export of Indian goods to Afghanistan. India will spend up to Rs2 billion on the check post due to its importance to Indian traders and businessmen. The establishment of the integrated check post will lead to promotion of trade and business between Pakistan and India. At the meeting the delegation will request Delhi to remove non-tariff barriers to facilitate Pakistani businessmen who wish to export goods to Indian cities. Currently, Pakistan imports products such as fruits, vegetables, cotton and maize from India, but is unable to export high quantities due to presence of non-tariff barriers. India is interested in establishing more check posts to facilitate traders of both countries.

[The Express Tribune - March 18, 2011]

Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan Agree To Boost Trade

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani and his Kyrgyz counterpart Almazbek Atambaev at a joint stake-out following a round of formal talks, agreed to remove obstacles for smooth and effective functioning of Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA) signed between Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in 2004. He discussed with his Kyrgyz counterpart ways to exploit the potential of cooperation in trade, infrastructure and communication.

Prime Minister Gilani and his Kyrgyz counterpart also witnessed the signing of an agreement on military training and a Memorandum of Understanding on enhancing the volume of bilateral trade. The agreement on defense training was signed by Secretary Defense Lt Gen (Rtd.) Syed Athar Ali and his Kyrgyz counterpart. The agreement between the two defense ministries facilitates the Kyrgyz military personnel to get training in Pakistan's defense institutions.

The MoU on trade was inked by President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Senator Ghulam Ali and Marat Sharshekeev, Head of Kyrgyz Commerce and Industry Chamber. The MoU focuses on enhancing the volume of bilateral trade and exploring the business potential in diverse areas. Prime Minister Gilani said Pakistan desired to see bilateral cooperation with Kyrgyzstan flourishing in all spheres, by institutionalizing consultations between the two foreign ministries and exchange of parliamentary delegations on regular intervals.

[Pak Tribune - March 16, 2011]

Pakistan, Tajikistan Ink Bilateral Pacts to Strengthen Ties

Pakistan and Tajikistan signed bilateral agreements to enhance cooperation in the areas of food, agriculture, health and sports. The decision was reached during wide-ranging, one-on-one, as well as delegation-level talks between Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon at the PM's House. The two sides, while expressing a determination to enhance friendship and partnership between the countries to "new heights" through increased cooperation in diverse fields, including trade and economy, infrastructure, communication, energy, agriculture, health and sports, inked a comprehensive joint declaration in this regard.

[Daily Times – March 9, 2011]

Looming Water Wars in South Asia

On the assertion of Indian Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1948, Pakistan showed a flexibility to discuss the water issues separately from the Kashmir dispute. This act of Pakistan was the biggest blunder in our history. Earlier, India stopped the flow of water to Pakistan, as all the head works, regulating the water flow were situated in the areas located under Indian control. Keeping these head works on Indian side was part of the same strategy. Starting from April 1948, India intermittently stopped the flow of water to Pakistan, until the finalization of the IWT-1960.

From early 1980s, India started manipulating the water of the Western rivers. Pakistan kept a policy of silence, until the construction of the Baghliar Dam, once it resorted to a futile effort of the international arbitration. In a recent report, entitled, "Avoiding Water Wars" in South and Central Asia, the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations projected likely wars between Pakistan and India. The Senate report reveals that, each water dam or water storage by India on the Western rivers; exclusively dedicated for Pakistan would have long-term effects on Pakistani agrarian economy. The report absolutely clarifies that; "The cumulative effect of these projects could give India the ability to store enough water to limit the supply to Pakistan at crucial moments in the sowing season."

Apart from the 33 projects, nearing completion, India is planning to construct over sixty water dams and reservoirs, on the western rivers. These would cause serious water shortages for Pakistan, a lower riparian country. Effects of some of these are already visible on the agricultural sector of Pakistan. This huge number of dams has seriously threatened Pakistan's agrarian economy and its potential capacity for the production of hydroelectricity. Due to the sensitivity of the issue and its impact on Pakistan, the issue if not resolved could lead to a confrontation between these nuclear armed countries.

Pakistan's inability to preserve its water by constructing dams and water reservoirs, cannot give India an excuse to stop or divert the water of Pakistani rivers. While betraying the international community on this excuse, India is planning to permanently deprive Pakistan from its share of water, thus converting the agricultural fields of Pakistan into the barren land. Besides, the current electricity requirements of the people of Occupied Kashmir is 5000 megawatts, whereas, India is planning to produce over 43,000 megawatts of electricity, through these dams and hydroelectric projects. This additional electricity in turn would be used to sustain the heavy industrialization of the India, otherwise, causing environmental degradation in the region. It is because of the growing industrialization of India, which is causing a rapid meltdown of the Himalayan glaciers.

As per Senator John Kerry, the chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Water security is vital in achieving our foreign policy and national security goals and provides recommendations to foster regional cooperation and long-term stability." The US Senate however feels that, "A breakdown in the treaty's utility in resolving water conflicts could have serious ramifications for regional stability. "Pakistan would appreciate if US could play a role for bringing India to a negotiating table for the result oriented talks between both countries on all the disputes, water being one of them.

[The News - March 16, 2011]

Indian Politics

India's Opposition Demands PM Resign over Cash-For-Votes Scandal

The Hindu newspaper, citing US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, said a ruling Congress party official told a US diplomat they had a fund of 500-600 million rupees to pay off lawmakers in 2008. The WikiLeaks report said the Congress official had showed the diplomat two chests of cash and said four lawmakers of a regional party had been paid 100 million rupees each to secure their support. Analysts said the report was unlikely to affect the stability of the government, given the charges were old and that the new revelations could be written off as the personal perception of a diplomat that could not hold in a court of law. But it added to the woes of a government already under fire for a slew of corruption cases. "It is embarrassing for the government, but it is not that serious. Nobody is going to vote against the government on this," said D.H. Pai Panandikar, head of New Delhi-based think tank RPG Foundation.

The WikiLeaks report seemed to back earlier charges by the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that the vote was bought, and adds pressure to Singh, reeling from the corruption charges against his administration. "This government has been under attack for the last three months, but this is a hammer blow that it cannot recover from," Swaraj said in parliament. "It has lost all moral responsibility to govern." The speaker of the house was forced to suspend proceedings for the day after BJP lawmakers' nosily demanded Singh resign.

Opposition on Offensive

The WikiLeaks report adds to a long list of scandals, led by charges the former telecoms minister took bribes to dole out lucrative phone licenses at rock bottom prices. That cost the state coffers as much as \$39 billion in lost revenue, the government auditor has estimated. Political protests over the scandals have led to economic reforms, such as opening up the

supermarket sector for foreign investors and the deregulation of diesel prices, being put on the backburner. “(The aide) mentioned money was not an issue at all, but the crucial thing was to ensure that those who took the money would vote for the government,” the newspapers quoted from the cable. Another Congress leader told the diplomat “PM Singh and others” had tried get a businessman to persuade a regional official to support the government, but had failed the newspaper reported.

Ahead of the vote in 2008, BJP lawmakers had brandished in parliament wads of currency notes they claimed Congress officials had given them to support the government. The government narrowly won the vote, which was forced on it after Communists pulled their support due to a landmark civil nuclear cooperation deal between the United States and India. Singh has been attacked by the opposition for appearing to pander to US interests, and staked his political career on the landmark nuclear deal. The four lawmakers whom the Hindu report said were paid bribes by the Congress official actually voted against the government. A committee set up to probe the charges in 2008 gave an inconclusive report.

[Dawn - March 17, 2011]

Security Situation in Afghanistan

Afghan Security Transition to Start In 7 Areas

Afghanistan’s leader announced seven areas would be included in the first phase of a gradual transition of security from NATO troops to Afghan forces in July, including volatile cities in the south and north. The announcement was the first tentative step in a long process that will end with the withdrawal of all foreign combat troops from Afghanistan by 2014, a process agreed by US and NATO leaders last year.

The handover will be a crucial test of the readiness of Afghan forces, which face a knot of recruitment, training and battlefield challenges despite a big push by US and other Western trainers in recent years. The transition was agreed last year at a time when the war had reached its bloodiest phase since the Taliban were overthrown by US-backed Afghan forces in 2001, with European leaders in particular under pressure from a war-weary public. Civilian and military casualties are at record levels, with the insurgency spreading out of Taliban bastions in the south and east into once peaceful areas in the north and west.

US military commanders have warned of a tough spring campaign ahead with a renewed offensive expected from Taliban-led insurgents. Karzai said the relatively peaceful provinces of Bamiyan and Panjshir, the western city of Herat, areas around the capital Kabul, and part of Laghman province nearby were included.

Also on the transition list were Mazar-i-Sharif in the north and Lashkar Gah, capital of volatile Helmand province in the south and long a stronghold of the Taliban. Analysts had warned putting Lashkar Gah on the list as a showpiece would risk a backlash from the Taliban, with the Islamists keen to show the fragility of Afghan control. Reuters

[Reuters – March 22, 2011]

Political Situation in Myanmar

Myanmar Military Rule Ends, But Army Retains Grip

Myanmar’s military handed power to a nominally civilian government after almost half a century of army rule on March 30, as the junta was disbanded and a new President sworn in. But the army hierarchy retains a firm grip on power in the resource-rich Southeast Asian country, and many analysts believe strongman Senior General Than Shwe will attempt to retain some sort of control behind the scenes. The handover came after widely-panned elections last

November — the country’s first in 20 years — which were marred by the absence of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and claims of cheating and intimidation. Quoting an order signed by Than Shwe, Myanmar state television reported the junta’s State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) “has been officially dissolved”. Than Shwe, who has ruled with an iron fist since 1992; is apparently no longer in the hitherto most powerful position of head of the army.

The formation of a national assembly in Naypyidaw, convened for the first time at the end of January, takes the country towards the final stage of the junta’s so-called “roadmap” to a “disciplined democracy”. But Maung Zarni, of the London School of Economics, described the changes as “cosmetic”. Thein Sein’s junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) bagged 388 of the national legislature’s 493 elected seats the election. Suu Kyi also has no voice in the new parliament. Her National League for Democracy party was disbanded for opting to boycott the vote because the rules seemed designed to bar her from participating.

[AFP – March 30, 2011]

LG Polls in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka Holds First Local Polls since War

Sri Lanka held its first local elections on March 17 since the end of its long ethnic war two years ago, in a test for the all-powerful government of President Mahinda Rajapakse. Since government troops defeated the Tamil Tiger separatist rebels in 2009 after decades of warfare, Rajapakse has tightened his grip on power by securing a second presidential term and winning parliamentary polls. Voting was under way in rural areas where 9.4 million people were eligible to elect more than 3,000 people to serve on local councils. Polls in urban areas were put off until the cricket World Cup, currently being co-hosting by Sri Lanka along with Bangladesh and India, ends in April.

Rajapakse, who heads the United People’s Freedom Alliance and is seen as a hardline Sinhalese nationalist, voted on Thursday at his home constituency of Hambantota district. He has vowed to speed up post-war infrastructure development across the island, but minorities Tamils accuse him of ignoring their needs.

[Daily Times – March 18, 2011]