



PAKISTAN
GOVERNANCE
FORUM

An Initiative of 'The Researchers'

March 2014
Edition X, Volume 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOVERNANCE WATCH	4
Government Working	4
Minister Says Education Must To Solve Militancy, Economic Problems	4
Government Slammed For Not Presenting Security Policy in Senate	5
National Assembly & Senate	5
Token Presence: Women MPs Stick To the Back Benches	5
Bill against Child Marriages Presented In NA	6
Talks with Talibans	7
Imam-e-Kaaba Urges Government, TTP to Keep Peace Talks on Track	7
Islamabad Carnage: Nisar to TTP - Condemn Attack, Identify Culprits	8
Taliban Made a Fool of Government: Khursheed Shah	8
Operation This Month If TTP Violates Truce: Minister	9
Peace Talks With Taliban: Government Committee Presses For Mini Peace Agreements	10
Peace Process: Names for New Government Committee Shortlisted	10
Taliban Peace Process Enters 'Decisive Phase'	11
Committees Agree On Venue for Direct Talks with TTP	11
Peace Process: Government Negotiators, Taliban Shura Meet Face-To-Face	12
BALUCHISTAN WATCH	14
Governance Watch	14
UN Intervention: 'Advocacy Group's Appeal Will Defame Country'	14
Malik Said To Be In Contact With 'Angry Baloch Leaders'	14
Malnutrition Threatening Lives of Marginalized Groups in Balochistan	15
POLITICAL & ELECTION WATCH	17
Political Parties	17
Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP)	17
PPP Unlikely To Take MQM in Sindh Government: Shah	17
Other Political Parties	17
MQM to Have Five Ministries, Two Advisers	17
By-Elections & Local Government Elections	18
Government Frivolity over Local Polls Irks Supreme Court	18
Electronic Voting: Election Commission Cautiously Weighing Proposal	19
PML-N Decides To Have Solo Flight in LG Polls	20
PML-N, PPP don't want to hold LG polls in Punjab, Sindh: SC	21
One Seat: ECP Issues Schedule for By-Elections in PK-86, Swat-VII	21
SC Orders Punjab, Sindh Governments to Give LB Polls Date	21
Local Government Polls in Country Delayed By another Eight Months	22
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH	24
Human Rights Related Issues	24
Addiction Rising: Pakistani Youth, High Going On Higher	24
No Pakistani Civilians Killed By US Drones in 2013: UN Monitor	25
Blasphemy Law Use on Rise, Led By Pakistan: US Group	25

Scholars Call For Protection of Regional Languages	26
Hazara Resolutions: Political Shots at the Right Time	27
Hindus Urge Government to Save Temple from Falling Prey to Underpass	28
GENDER WATCH	29
Women Empowerment	29
Entrepreneurship: Thousands of Women Marketing Home-Made Products Online	29
Promotion of Women's Rights: Punjab Assembly Female Members Form Caucus	30
International Women's Day: Speakers Stress Pro-Woman Legislation	30
Fatima Bhutto Nominated For Fiction Prize	31
Government Fails to Lay Bill for Women's Representation	31
Women Representation in Balochistan Cabinet Demanded	32
Women's Bill Scrapes through Opposition Scrutiny	32
Women's Day: 'Pakistan Second Worst in Gender Equality'	33
Direct Talks with TTP: Gulzar Khan to Represent PTI on New Committee	34
Shahbaz Sharif's Commitment for Women Empowerment	34
NCSW Expresses Concern on CII Recommendations	38
Violence against Women	39
Working On Women's Issues in Tribal Areas	39
Violence against Women Still Pandemic	40
SECTARIAN CRISES & CONFLICT WATCH	41
Conflict & Sectarian Crisis Incidents	41
Security Briefs for the Month of March	41
ECONOMIC WATCH	43
Facts & Figures	43
Inflation Lowering, Economic Progress Going Up: Dar	43
Next Defense Budget May Touch Rs. 750 Billion	43
Saudi Arabia Gives \$1.5 Billion to Pakistan: IMF	44
President Defends Government for Taking \$1.5bn Saudi Aid	45
Part of Bailout: IMF Clears Third Tranche of \$540m	46
WB To Provide \$10.2 Billion to Pakistan in Next Five Years	46
DEVELOPMENT WATCH	49
Development Projects	49
40 Development Projects in Limbo	49
Innovative Solutions: Improving Quality, Access to Education	49
Pakistan Needs To Take Steps to Fight Climatic Change	50
Country Needs More Investment in Water, Sanitation Sector: Study by WaterAid	51
Pakistan Education Atlas 2013: Education Survey Reveals Mixed Bag of Results	52
Health Projects	53
Health Reports/Controls	53
High Time Anti-Dengue Campaign Starts	53
Pakistan Fifth Among TB High-Burden Countries	54
ENERGY CRISIS	55
Government's Role in Oil and Gas & Energy Crisis	55
12 Hour Power Cuts Are Back	55
Early-Harvest Projects to Produce 22,000MW within Seven Years	55
Government Raises Electricity Tariff By Rs. 2 per Unit	56
Hague Summit: Nawaz Makes Case for Civil Nuclear Energy	57
Government to Raise Rs. 235 Billion from Power, Gas Tariff Hike	57

REGIONAL WATCH -----	59
Pakistan & United States -----	59
Obama Seeks \$1bn for Pakistan in 2015 Budget-----	59
Pakistan & India -----	59
India Agrees To Export 500MW Power to Pakistan -----	59
How Modi Will Impact India and Pakistan -----	60
Pakistan & Afghanistan -----	62
Election Observers Pull Foreign Staff Out Of Afghanistan after Hotel Attack -----	62

GOVERNANCE WATCH

Government Working

Minister Says Education Must To Solve Militancy, Economic Problems

Minister for Education Atif Khan told the provincial assembly that militancy and economic problems could not be solved without improving education system. Winding up the debate on the education system, he said that 80 percent problems would automatically solve if the education system was improved. He added this would be only possible by taking collective decisions to stop political interference in the recruitment, training and transfers of teachers. The minister said the government had increased the education budget from Rs66 billion to Rs 85 billion and development budget from Rs9 billion to Rs23 billion. He said 2.5 million students were out of school even though the schools in the province now totaled 28,500. He said there were 150,000 teachers imparting education to four million students. He said another 200,000 employees were serving in the education department, adding that it was impossible to improve such a huge department within six months.

The minister said reforming it could become possible with the cooperation of the opposition, asking it to stop interference in the education department for the better future of the coming generations. The session started at 6:41pm instead of its scheduled time. The bells were rung during all this time. The government had arranged an in-camera briefing for the parliamentary leaders of all the political parties on the law and order situation. The IGP Nasir Khan Durrani and home secretary Akhtar Ali Shah briefed the lawmakers and took questions. The participants later told that the two officials talked about the terrorist incidents and the efforts through which such attacks were foiled. The legislators were told that there were 30 terrorist groups in operation while another 20 fake ones were extorting money and committing crimes in the name of Taliban. The members said they discussed the prevailing situation in KP and Fata during the interaction with the IGP and home secretary and sought report of the Dera Ismail Khan jailbreak, which would be given to them later. They said the provincial government was accusing the federal government of not taking it into confidence over the ongoing negotiations with the Taliban and about its strategy to restore peace. They said they also discussed the government's strategy in case of the failure of peace talks with the Taliban. It was decided to arrange another briefing on March 7 for the parliamentary party leaders wherein they would discuss and draw their future line of action in the prevailing situation.

Earlier, soon after the recitation from the Holy Quran, Speaker Asad Qaiser in a brief statement said since an important briefing had been arranged for the parliamentary leaders, the questions of the members would be taken up in the session the next day as it was otherwise impossible to cover the day's agenda. Leader of the opposition and former chief minister Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan, parliamentary leader of JUI-F, Maulana Lutfur Rehman, ANP's Sardar Hussain Babak, Qaumi Watan Party (QWP)'s Meraj Humayun, PML-N's Sardar Aurangzeb Nalotha in their separate speeches criticized the PTI-led provincial government for its much talked about education emergency and argued that they have yet to observe any change in the education system. Almost all of them recalled the PTI leaders' announcements that they would ensure uniform education system in the province and posed questions as to whether their government has been able to address any of the problems facing education sector. The opposition lawmakers wondered how the students studying in Urdu medium schools could be taught in English as was being planned by the provincial government. They stressed that such changes could not be brought by chanting slogans and suggested to the government to take the issue

seriously. The opposition lawmakers observed that teachers were not performing duties and schools lacked basic facilities.

The News - March 04, 2014

Government Slammed For Not Presenting Security Policy in Senate

The opposition as well as members of the ruling coalition criticized the government for not presenting the national security policy before the Senate, which was placed before the National Assembly last week. Speaking on points of order after suspension of the normal business of the house due to the terrorist attack on Islamabad district courts, the members also vented their anger over the continued absence of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from the Senate. They alleged that the government was ignoring the upper house which represented the federation. Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed of the Pakistan Muslim League-Q regretted that Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan presented the much-awaited national security policy in the National Assembly five days ago, but the document had not been shared with senators yet. The PML-Q senator, who heads the Senate Standing Committee on Defense, said the interior minister had assured him that the policy document would be shared with all lawmakers, but so far the members of the Senate had not been provided its copies.

Urging the prime minister and the interior minister to end their boycott of the house, he asked the government to show some commitment and protect the life and property of people. He warned that the present security situation could not only destabilize the PML-N government, it could also be detrimental to the democratic set-up, since people wanted peace in the country at all costs. Despite sitting on treasury benches, Hafiz Hamdullah of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) also lashed out at the government for keeping some part of the national security policy secret. The JUI-F senator said the minister while presenting the national security policy in the National Assembly had announced that the first part of the policy was secret. He questioned how the parliament could debate on a policy which had been kept secret. He alleged that it seemed that the government was either itself committing terrorism or patronizing terrorists. Before adjourning the session for Tuesday, Chairman Nayyar Bokhari directed the government to present the policy before the house. "Why the house is being ignored by not presenting the national security policy? If the report has been presented in the National Assembly it should have been brought here. I would ask treasury benches to present the report," ruled the chairman

Dawn - March 04, 2014

National Assembly & Senate

Token Presence: Women MPs Stick To the Back Benches

Over the years, women's representation in parliament has grown through reserved seats, yet their participation in the National Assembly business is far from being satisfactory. It has been a long-standing demand to ensure that women play an active role in crafting state policies. However, a segment of female lawmakers, elected on women's reserved seats of the lower house, have remained silent and shown little interest in the proceedings of the assembly so far, the National Assembly's records reveal. Some 12 female legislators have hardly contributed anything to the proceedings. They have rarely asked any question, have neither introduced any resolution nor taken up any remarkable calling attention notice. Two ruling party MPs Marvi Memon and Ayesha Raza Farooq have also shown little interest in the house's business and

asked only one question each till the 8th session of the incumbent assembly. On the other hand, State Minister for Information and Technology Anusha Rahman Khan has introduced only one resolution during this period.

Other PML-N members Maiza Hameed, Arifa Khalid Pervaiz and Phyllis Azeem have minimal participation having drawn the attention of the house by raising one calling attention notice each – the same number introduced by PPPP's Alizeh Iqbal Haider. Against this backdrop, the PPPP's Nafisa Shah turns out to be the most active female member, who has introduced two bills – The HIV/AIDS (Safety and Control) Bill, 2013 and The Political Parties Order (Amendment) Bill, 2013, which were sent to the relevant standing committees. She has also asked 78 questions from different ministries, laid 10 calling attention notices – out of which eight were taken up – and introduced four resolutions which were adopted by the house. In addition Nafisa Shah has also introduced two motions under rule 259 which, however, were not taken up. However, she has remained vocal in the house and presented her findings on various issues.

The PTI's Munaza Hassan has also participated in most of the house proceedings and asked 69 questions. She has drawn attention of the house through four calling attention notices, three of which were taken. She has also introduced four resolutions out of which two were adopted and laid three motions under rule 259. One of the most active female lawmakers, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)'s Kishwar Zehra has introduced four bills, two of which were taken up and sent to the relevant standing committees. The opposition PPPP's Nighat Parveen and Surriya Asghar, PTI's Dr Shireen Mazari, and MQM's Tahira Asif and Saman Sultana Jafri and Dr Nikhat have all introduced one bill each. Dr Mazari has been very vocal in expressing her views and at times has taken a standpoint even against her party's policy. Dr Mazari and Nafeesa Inayatullah Khan Khattak have also drawn the attention of the chair towards lack of quorum during two sessions. In terms of asking questions, the most active member has been the PPPP's Belum Hasnain, who asked 117 questions from different ministries. She is followed by the PTI's Nafeesa Inayatullah Khan Khattak, who asked 97 questions.

The Express Tribune - March 23, 2014

Bill against Child Marriages Presented In NA

A bill was tabled in the National Assembly against child marriage, but it was resented by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F). The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill 2014 evoked a mild protest from the JUI-F, which said it went against the injunctions of Islam. Members of the Lower House of parliament tabled various important bills, which a private members' day. They were related to the welfare of children, increase in the number of seats reserved for non-Muslims in the National Assembly and facilitation of the disabled persons in the government departments and public places. However, the most distinguishing piece of legislation was brought in by PML-N MNA Marvi Memon to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929. She tabled the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill 2014, calling for the prevention of child marriages in the country which, according to the MNA, are prevalent due to poverty, illiteracy, anti-human rights social and cultural practices. "An early marriage leads to early conception, which ultimately affects the health of the teenage girl," the bill stated, while pointing out that enormous pressure is put on child brides to bear children.

It states that the practice of child marriage is common in all parts of the country, particularly the poor urban and rural areas, but the act of solemnizing a child marriage is not cognizable, and police cannot take action against the offenders. Though the government did not oppose the proposed legislation, it however agreed to consider the legislation in view of the recommendations of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) when JUI-F's MNA and CII Chairman

Maulana Mohammad Khan Sherani objected to it. The maulana said that the bill is in contravention of the teachings of Islam. Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Yousaf assured the House that the house committee would discuss the bill in the light of recommendations of the CII and teachings of Islam. Sherani noted that this bill should not have been introduced in view of the clear-cut recommendations of the CII on child marriages. However, he agreed that the committee should look into it in view of these recommendations.

JUI-F's Maulana Ameer Zaman also opposed the bill, saying that the issue is a provincial subject and should not be taken up in the National Assembly. MQM's Iqbal Qadri also said the bill pertains to a subject now in the purview of provinces. However, he announced his support for it. Marvi Memon also laid The Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill 2014, which states that corporal or physical and psychological punishment is common and rampant in our schools and also found in "care institutions". It suggested that within the institutional framework of the classroom, corporal punishment must be banned and replaced with constructive and communicative approach. MNA Asiya Nasir introduced The Constitutional Amendment Bill 2014 to raise the number of seats for Non-Muslims in the National Assembly from ten to sixteen

Daily Times - March 26, 2014

Talks with Taliban

Imam-e-Kaaba Urges Government, TTP to Keep Peace Talks on Track

The Imam-e-Kaaba, Sheikh Abdul Rahman Ibne Abdul Aziz al Sudais, has urged the government and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan to pursue peace talks, which he deems as the only way to shun violence in an Islamic state. In a crucial meeting with one of the key Taliban intermediaries – Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (S) chief Maulana Samiul Haq – Imam-e-Kaaba urged the government and Taliban committees to keep the proposed dialogue intact as "this is what Islam teaches Muslims". Key leaders of the Saudi Shura had invited the JUI-S chief, who briefed the former about the latest development in the peace process. "Maulana Sami will convey a special message of peace [to the Taliban Shura]. Imam-e-Kaaba was very happy over the latest development [TTP's announcement for ceasefire]," Taliban Committee Coordinator Maulana Yousaf.

The development came after the Government of Pakistan formally invited Imam-e-Kaaba to visit the country, requesting him to issue a religious decree (fatwa) against suicide bombings and urge militants to shun violence. An aide of the JUI-S Chief said the Grand Mufti will soon visit Pakistan as Maulana Sami also requested him to advise the government on how to deal with the growing threat of extremism in the country. When the JUI-S chief returned to Islamabad, he spoke to the media at the airport where he asked the government to establish "peace zones" in some volatile areas. Terming this a necessary exercise for conducting meetings between the two peace committees, he explained, "Peace zones will ensure our [committee members'] security – this is what we need to pursue peace talks." He condemned the suicide attack on the capital's district courts premises but added that he was glad that TTP had kept itself away from the incident. He warned against the derailment of the peace process, saying that the government and the TTP should not blame each other for any attack and should look out for the "the third enemy". The enemies of peace should be exposed and kept away from the peace talks.

The Express Tribune - March 04, 2014

Islamabad Carnage: Nisar to TTP - Condemn Attack, Identify Culprits

Following a high level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the government has pressed the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) for an explanation regarding brazen attack in Islamabad. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan told the National Assembly that the group has been asked to condemn the incident and identify those responsible for the twin attacks. "The government has conveyed, through the mediation committee, that mere disassociation from the terrorist incident is not enough," he said, adding that violence and dialogue cannot run the same course. There are three possible motivations for the attack, the minister said; the attack could be in reaction to the arrest of seven people from the city's outskirts, he explained. Additionally, TTP members may have launched the attack or terrorist groups with linkages to foreign intelligence may have played a role in the attack in order to sabotage the dialogue process, he surmised. However, Nisar added that details of the investigation would not be disclosed at this stage, saying the apex court has taken suo motu notice of the incident. He pointed out that there were discrepancies between the police and intelligence agency's version of the incident. "I assure you that we will chase these people, catch them and bring them to book," he said. "Such terrorist activities cannot shatter our confidence."

Opposition parties termed the attack a complete administration, security and intelligence failure, saying it exposed the government's inability to tackle the challenge of security. Additionally, the combined opposition in the lower house cautioned that similar attacks could be carried out on other key state institutions, including the parliament. Opposition leader in the National Assembly Syed Khursheed Shah said the incident took place less than 48 hours of the announcement of a ceasefire by the government and militants. He expressed surprise over the ceasefire, saying, "You can announce a ceasefire with any state like India and Afghanistan, but not with a faction of rebel militants, who have taken up arms and challenged the writ of the government." He added that the government's approach proved the state's weakness while highlighting that the TTP does not maintain control over all militant factions. "The incident indicates that the government has totally collapsed administratively," added PTI leader Shafqat Mehmood. "We need to implement existing laws rather than framing new ones," he maintained. He pointed out that federal capital has become more insecure place as 45 incidents of robbery have taken place in January alone and vehicles worth more than Rs 1 billion were stolen during the last year from the city.

The Express Tribune - March 04, 2014

Taliban Made a Fool of Government: Khursheed Shah

Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Syed Khursheed Shah said that the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has made a fool out of the Federal government by announcing a fake ceasefire to enter Islamabad. Khursheed Shah said that the Taliban killed innocent people when they attacked the Sessions Court in Islamabad. He said that the Opposition parties in the Parliament fully condemn the incident. At least 13 people, including a judge and four lawyers, were killed when several terrorists attacked a district court in Islamabad on Monday. He further stated that the time for peace talks has passed and a full scale military offensive should be carried out against the terrorists in the country. Meanwhile, talking to party activists from Okara in Islamabad, Khursheed Shah said the mandate given by the All Parties Conference (APC) to the government doesn't mean that it shouldn't consult the Opposition parties on fresh talks with the Taliban. He said if peace could be established within the limits of the Constitution and law, then the PPP has no objection to it. However, he made it clear that the PPP would not support talks with those who do not recognize the Constitution. He said the PPP is being under

direct attack from terrorism. He said Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto also became victim of terrorism which created a big vacuum in the country's democracy. However, he said, despite all these facts the PPP will support talks in they are held under the Constitution.

The Nation - March 04, 2014

Operation This Month If TTP Violates Truce: Minister

The government could launch a full-scale military operation against the Taliban in the tribal areas as early as this month, the defense minister said, warning insurgents against violating a ceasefire. Dashing chances of a peace deal with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, gunmen burst into a courtroom in Islamabad on Monday, killing 11 people in a broad daylight attack in the heart of the capital. The TTP denied any role in the assault and a splinter group, Ahrarul Hind, accepted responsibility. Defense Minister Khawaja Asif told in an interview that the government would not hesitate to bomb militant hideouts or send forces into the tribal areas if the Taliban did not abide by the ceasefire announced last weekend. "It will not take months now. We'll have to march in the month of March," Mr. Asif said, describing the government's response if insurgent attacks continued. "If there is a ceasefire, it has to be complete. Without that, we just can't afford to have talks with the Taliban."

Mr. Asif, long considered a pro-talks politician, is now one of a growing number of members of the federal cabinet who believe it is time for tougher military action against the Taliban strongholds. In February, the government launched talks with the Taliban to find a negotiated settlement. But hopes of a peace deal have been crushed by a series of attacks and counter-attacks by both sides. "We won't just take this lying down," the defense minister said. "If we are attacked, the state is attacked, civilians are attacked, military personnel are attacked; we will retaliate. We will retaliate in kind." For a government long considered soft for pursuing peace talks, Mr. Asif said there were now very few takers for the argument that the Taliban are truly committed to dialogue. "The Taliban have not even condemned this so-called splinter group four days after the attack. They are saying, 'we have not violated a ceasefire, these are peripheral groups, they are not under our control,'" Mr. Asif said. "But we cannot believe this."

When asked about reports that talks may be re-launched, this time with military in the driving seat, he said: "The army's input is very valuable. They are the people on the frontlines. They have to execute our decisions." The government's insistence on pushing for talks is driven, to a large extent, by the fear that the end of the US combat mission in 2014 could energize a resilient insurgency straddling the shared frontier. "If in the post-withdrawal period, the Afghan Taliban become stronger and carve out an area of influence in the south and east of Afghanistan, which is next to our border - that's a scenario we should even avoid thinking of," Mr. Asif said.

"Because then the Pakistani Taliban will have a power house behind them, to support them. This option is there and everyone should try to avoid it." For skeptics, there is another scenario Pakistan wants to avoid at all costs: an unfriendly Afghanistan backed by India. As NATO's presence fades, President Hamid Karzai has turned to India. The countries have signed a wide-ranging strategic partnership and India has pledged billions in development aid. Pakistan has for years been suspicious of the help, going as far as to say Indian consulates are surveillance posts. But Mr. Asif said Pakistan had evolved. "We have evidence that India is meddling in Afghanistan, no doubt," he said. "But I'm a believer that if the conditions in the four walls of your own house are stable, nobody from outside will try to enter. We give India the opportunity."

Dawn - March 08, 2014

Peace Talks With Taliban: Government Committee Presses For Mini Peace Agreements

The federal government is quietly pushing for peace deals with individual militant groups after some members of its peace committee have concluded that reaching an 'all inclusive agreement' with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) may not be possible. At least two members of the committee told that they expect the government to reach an understanding only with parts of the TTP. "Realistically speaking, it is not possible to strike a peace deal with all groups working under the TTP umbrella," said a member. He pointed out that the government was in the process of identifying groups which are willing to reconcile. "The government is using backdoor channels to contact such groups," said another member. Efforts to reach out to 'reconcilable elements' within the TTP stem from the realization on the part of the government that the militant group does not exercise full control on all its affiliated outfits. "Recent terrorist incidents clearly indicate that TTP may only have lost control on these groups," said the committee member. "Had all the groups been listening to TTP, these terrorist attacks would have never have taken place after the ceasefire," he added. There is also growing concern within the country's security establishment that the TTP is only 'buying time' and may not be interested in a peace deal. A senior military official insisted that the Taliban should have condemned attacks in Islamabad's district courts complex and Khyber Agency instead of merely denying its involvement in its statement.

A committee member admitted that the army was still skeptical about a positive outcome from the ongoing peace efforts since it does not think the TTP is 'sincere.' "That is why the army is reluctant about joining the peace committee," he added. Top military commanders decided not to become part of the government's new proposed committee to hold direct talks with the TTP and its affiliates. However, the committee member maintained that the army might take part in the process if it realized that a deal could be reached with certain groups. At the same time, he did not rule out the possibility of a full-scale military offensive against elements which might not enter into the peace deal. Sources said the visit by Finance Minister Dr Ishaq Dar to the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi on Saturday was also meant to discuss the army's needs in the event of a ground offensive in North Waziristan Agency. Analysts, meanwhile, say time is running out for the government to take a final decision. "With the drawdown of US forces approaching fast, Pakistan needs to make the final call on how to deal with militancy sooner rather than later," said security analyst Dr Ishtiaq Ahmed, who is Jinnah Fellow at the Oxford University.

The Express Tribune - March 10, 2014

Peace Process: Names for New Government Committee Shortlisted

A high-level huddle of civil and military leaders finalized a strategy for holding direct talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired the meeting where attendees included the ministers for defense, interior and finance as well as army chief Gen Raheel Sharif, Chief of General Staff Lt Gen Ishfaq Nadeem and ISI's Director General Lt Gen Zaheerul-Islam. According to an official statement, the meeting reviewed the 'overall security situation' where Gen Raheel Sharif and Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan briefed the prime minister on how to proceed with the dialogue process. Sources privy to the discussions told that the civil and military leadership shortlisted the names for a reconfigured government committee, which would hold face-to-face talks with the TTP. Contrary to earlier reports the new committee would comprise only bureaucrats besides representatives of the chief minister and governor of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, sources said. Interior Minister Nisar – who is the focal-person for peace efforts – is expected to unveil the new committee in a day or two.

Once the new committee is unveiled, some of its members are likely to travel to the tribal areas for holding talks with the TTP. However, a member of the recently dissolved government negotiating committee expressed doubts about the success of the new initiative. He added that the government negotiators and TTP intermediaries had suggested the prime minister formed a 'powerful committee' in order to achieve tangible results. The two committees had called for a direct involvement of the military, which is believed to be holding the key for crucial talks with the TTP. The army has already decided not to join the new committee, insisting that holding dialogue is a responsibility of the civilian authorities. The interior minister also confirmed that the army would not have any representation on the new committee. The next meeting reportedly also discussed the financial requirements of the army in case of a military offensive in North Waziristan Agency. A senior government official disclosed that a financial plan has already been worked out in this regard.

The Express Tribune - March 12, 2014

Taliban Peace Process Enters 'Decisive Phase'

Adviser to Prime Minister on National Affairs Irfan Siddiqui said that the two member Taliban talks committee would give a report about its talks with the Taliban leadership after its return from Miramshah, North Waziristan within two days. Talking to newsmen, he said the talks had entered a crucial stage and after the report from the Taliban committee, a decision would be taken on how to take forward the talks process. Irfan Siddiqui said after the report it would be clear whether the Taliban would hold direct or indirect talks. The Taliban would make some demands and some demands would come from the government, he explained. The indirect talks between the government and Taliban had regained momentum after a crucial meeting between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and PTI chief Imran Khan. The meeting at the Bani Gala residence of Imran Khan had been followed by the second round of talks between the Taliban committee and the delegation of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Taliban in North Waziristan.

Before arriving in Miramshah, the Taliban negotiating committee met Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali on Wednesday evening to discuss the future strategy for peace talks. Irfan Siddiqui said the first stage of establishing contact with the Taliban had been completed despite various hurdles. He said just one and a half month ago nobody could even think that there would be so much progress in the negotiation process with the Taliban, but the present situation was before everybody and there was hope in efforts to curb terrorism. Siddiqui said that during the process of negotiations, for the first time two members of the committee met the leadership of Taliban and the latter gave their response in writing, which was very encouraging. After the attack on a police bus in Karachi and killing of 23 detained FC personnel, the government made a demand of unconditional ceasefire to Taliban, which they did. He further said after the completion of the first stage, the government committee, with consensus, requested the prime minister to establish a new committee, which could take decisions.

Daily Times - March 14, 2014

Committees Agree On Venue for Direct Talks with TTP

Committees representing the government and Taliban met for a two-hour long session to finalize the date and venue for the next phase of peace talks. Member of the Taliban committee Maulana Samiul Haq said that key decisions were made during today's meeting. He said that the two sides have agreed upon a venue for the next phase of negotiations with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and that the government committee would very soon enter into direct

talks with the militant group. "The process of talking directly to the Taliban will start in two to three days, both sides have agreed on the venue", he told reporters following the meeting also attended by Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan. Sami further said that reports that the Taliban had rejected the notion of holding talks outside Waziristan were mere speculation. The TTP had proposed its stronghold of North Waziristan as the venue, while the government wanted to hold talks in Bannu. Maulana Samiul Haq, however, stopped short of specifying if the negotiations would be taking place in Bannu. "Both sides are showing flexibility and a willingness for success of the talks," Haq added, saying the chosen place would be declared a "peace zone" but without specifying its location.

Another member of the committee, Maulana Yousuf Shah, said that Saturday's meeting between the two committees was an important breakthrough. "The nation would soon hear good news," he said. Sources had told earlier that the meeting also deliberated on the list of 'prisoners' under government detention shared by the Taliban. The two sides also discussed the release of persons kidnapped and held hostage by the militants, the sources said. The meeting between the two committees was convened by Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan. The interior minister told a press conference that direct talks between the government committee and Taliban Shura would begin in a few days. A sensitive phase of the peace process was about to start and it would bring to an end all misgivings and misconceptions, he said. He indicated that a month-long ceasefire announced by the TTP would continue beyond the March 31 deadline but did not elaborate. The minister warned of action against elements conspiring to sabotage the peace process. He said he was hopeful about a positive development in the peace process but said it was better for the government to move quietly and avoid media glare.

Dawn - March 23, 2014

Peace Process: Government Negotiators, Taliban Shura Meet Face-To-Face

Government negotiators and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) agreed to continue talks after the first face-to-face meeting between the two sides held in a remote tribal area. However, according to sources, the fate of the month-long ceasefire as well as nascent peace process hinges on the release of 'non-combatant' Taliban prisoners allegedly in the custody of security agencies. Chief Taliban intermediary Maulana Samiul Haq, who also attended the unprecedented meeting, described it as 'positive' which 'helped reduce the trust-deficit' between the government and the TTP. "It's a huge milestone [in the peace process]. For the first time, government representatives and the Taliban sat across the table to talk peace," he told a news conference in Peshawar after returning from North Waziristan. He was flanked by his colleagues Prof Ibrahim and Maulana Yousaf Shah.

There were conflicting reports about exactly where the meeting took place. Some reports suggested it was in the Biland Khel area of Shawa Tehsil on the confluence of borders between Orakzai and North Waziristan tribal agencies. However, he learnt that the negotiations were held in the Speen Tal area of Shewa Tehsil. The five-member government negotiating team, led by Secretary Ports and Shipping Habibullah Khattak, along with a colonel from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) flew on a helicopter to North Waziristan. The inclusion of the colonel is seen as a significant move after the army refused to become part of the official committee holding talks with the TTP. The decision to include the ISI representative was believed to have been taken at the request of the Taliban intermediaries who believe this will lend more meaning to the process. There was no official confirmation of this, however.

Other government negotiators include FATA Additional Secretary Arbab Arif, Additional Secretary to Prime Minister Office Fawad Hassan Fawad, Major (retd) Aamir and former

diplomat Rustam Shah Mohmand. Maulana Samiul Haq, Professor Ibrahim and Maulana Yousaf Shah accompanied the government team. They flew into Speen Tal in a helicopter from where they left in vehicles for an undisclosed location. Government negotiators travelled on vehicles provided by the TTP. According to Maulana Samiul Haq, two rounds of discussions were held between the two sides. During the seven-hour talks, both sides discussed efforts to further the process. A participant of the meeting said that the issue of prisoners' release turned out to be the major sticking point and it would decide the future of the ongoing fragile peace process. Giving details, he told on the condition of anonymity that the TTP Shura members accused the security agencies of continuing secret operations against the group despite the ceasefire.

On the other hand, the government negotiators sought the releases of Peshawar University's vice chancellor Professor Ajmal, Haider Gilani, son of former prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and Shahbaz Taseer, son of slain Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer. However, the TTP insisted that it would only release such captives if the government frees its 'non-combatant' prisoners. It is expected that the government would take a final decision on the release of 'non-combatants' after consultations with both the government negotiators and Taliban intermediaries. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan has reportedly convened a meeting of the government committee on Thursday (today) to get the first-hand briefing about Wednesday's meeting. The government negotiators, according to sources, also urged the TTP to identify groups which are not willing to talk and responsible for some of the deadly attacks recently during the ceasefire period.

The Express Tribune - March 27, 2014

BALUCHISTAN WATCH**Governance Watch****UN Intervention: 'Advocacy Group's Appeal Will Defame Country'**

Legal experts are worried that a local advocacy group's appeal for UN intervention in Balochistan's enforced disappearances could tarnish the country's image abroad. At the same time, they voiced hope that the Voice of Baloch Missing Persons' (VBMP) plea would carry no serious legal implications. The advocacy group's leader, Mama Qadeer Baloch, who led a 2,800-kilometre march from Quetta to Islamabad for the recovery of Baloch missing persons, approached the UN last week and broached the possibility of intervention. "This application is unlikely to have any legal implication, because the UN does not act over the applications of individuals," lawyer Tariq Mahmood told. But he cautioned that the appeal for intervention could defame the country's reputation nevertheless. Mahmood called upon the government to retrace a political path for the resolution of the Balochistan issue.

Another senior lawyer Akhtar Hussain said when a state violated its own laws, and then there was no harm in approaching the UN for the redressal of grievances. "We cannot declare anyone a traitor on this ground," he added. The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president Kamran Mutaza, however, opposed Mama Qadeer's move to approach the UN, saying this might invite foreign powers to intervene in the country's affairs. "We are also concerned over the missing persons issue in Balochistan but we want this issue resolved amicably within the country without inviting the UN," he added. Kamran said the SCBA was assisting the Supreme Court in Balochistan missing persons' case and they were also convening all parties' conference on Balochistan issue in next month. A VBMP representative said they invited the UN to send a fact finding mission to Balochistan, from where, he claimed, more than 18,000 had gone missing. Interestingly, there is a contradiction between Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) office's record and the VBMP's claim regarding the number of enforced disappearances.

A senior official in the AGP office said they had collected data of Baloch missing persons from different sources. "According to our assessment, around 700 persons are missing in Balochistan." Last year, the commission inquiring enforced disappearances also revealed that the total number of cases currently stood at 621. However this figure was contested by Baloch organizations. Disagreeing with the figure of the VBMP, Defense of Human Rights Chairperson Amina Masood Janjua said the number of Baloch missing persons were in the hundreds. She said around 60 enforced disappeared Baloch persons cases were pending in the apex court as she herself was dealing with 27 Baloch missing persons' cases. Opposing the move of the VBMP, Amina said the country would be defamed all over the world due to this act. A senior government official said enforced disappearance was the crime against humanity. "Therefore, UN organizations have the mandate to intervene in Baloch missing persons issue on this ground," he said.

The Express Tribune - March 10, 2014

Malik Said To Be In Contact With 'Angry Baloch Leaders'

Balochistan Chief Minister Dr Abdul Malik Baloch is in contact with some of the 'angry Baloch leaders' for initiating a process of dialogue to resolve issues faced by the province, says provincial Home Minister Mir Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti. On the occasion of the dispatching of two

trucks loaded with bags of rice for the drought-hit people of Tharparkar, he said the federal government and Balochistan Assembly had empowered the chief minister to approach Baloch insurgent leaders and work out a process of dialogue for reconciliation. He said the chief minister had contacted some of the leaders and was trying to bring them to the negotiating table. Dr Malik Baloch returned home on Saturday after a week-long visit to London where some Baloch leaders, including Khan of Kalat Mir Suleman Dawood Ahmadzai and Nawabzada Hairbiyar Marri, have been living for years. It could not be ascertained if the chief minister could meet these leaders during his stay in London.

According to political observers here, some 'impartial people' are playing a role to persuade the leaders to hold talks with the government. Sarfaraz Bugti said the chief minister had initiated the process and the media would be informed about any progress in this regard. He said the issue of Balochistan could be resolved only through dialogue. Appreciating the federal government's decision to hold talks with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, Mr. Bugti said it was the political wisdom of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that despite strong reservations he decided to give dialogue a chance to end the war-like situation in the country. Answering a question, he said even though some Baloch groups were involved in terrorist activities, there was no harm in holding talks with them. Dialogue should be given a chance to resolve the province's issues, he added. About the reported differences among coalition partners in Balochistan over ministerial powers, Mr. Bugti said the matter would be sorted out by the chief minister and PML-N parliamentary leader Sardar Sanaulah Zehri. He said the Balochistan government had sent 1,000 bags of rice for drought-hit people in Sindh.

Dawn - March 10, 2014

Malnutrition Threatening Lives of Marginalized Groups in Balochistan

Balochistan is facing the risk of malnutrition, while mortality rate among children and women belonging to the socially marginalized groups in the province has risen alarmingly. The World Health Organization (WHO) has already declared emergency in Balochistan in view of the indicators of Global Acute Malnutrition. Ten out of total 20 high food insecure districts of the country are in this province. "Against the threshold level of 15 percent classified by the WHO, as many as 16 percent of children in Balochistan are acute malnourished, 52.2 percent up to five-year age stunted and 39.6 percent underweight," says Miss Jawahar Habib, Communication Officer, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), Balochistan, talking to APP. Besides five million children, about 70 percent women in the province are too suffering from malnutrition, nearly half of them being anemic and Vitamin A deficient, as suggested by the National Nutrition data. The province has the highest infant and mother mortality in the country and that is mainly because of malnutrition. The Nutrition Cell, along with WHO and UNICEF, has been working in nine out of 32 districts of the province, which are highly prone to malnutrition. It has only been able to cover their only 43 percent population, leaving the rest 57 percent at the mercy of diseases.

Miss Jawahar notes that the child and mother health situation in the Baloch-populated areas is turned grim. "If preventive measures were not put in place, Tharparkar-like situation may develop in these areas." Ehtaramul Haq Kabdani, District Nutrition Coordinator Kharan, says, "With available resources, we could only cover about 35,000 of the district's estimated population of 170,000." Most of the beneficiaries of anti-malnutrition drive belong to urban areas; while more than 90 percent affected people reside in remote parts of the district, who need assistance and health education. According to Akhtar Shah, District Nutrition Coordinator Killa Saifullah, less rain, growing poverty, small number of lady health workers and insufficient

funds impede access to the affected people. After Sindh, Balochistan has the highest level of food insecurity in the country. About 63 percent of households in the province are food insecure, with 18 percent of them classified as food “insecure with hunger” and 11.5% as food “insecure with severe hunger”. Overall 90 percent districts are classified as “extremely high” to “high” food insecure.

None is qualified to be “food secure”. Except the areas bordering Punjab, most of the province is mountainous, relatively barren and arid, and not suitable for agriculture. Only 15% of average household monthly income in the province comes from crops production or livestock. “There is continued high level of food insecurity in Balochistan, caused by uncontrollable factors feeding to the acute malnutrition,” says Nicole CARN, provincial chief of World Food Programme (WFP). Though the government has been striving hard to cope with the daunting challenge, but the security situation, geographic location of the province, huge swath of land and scattered population complexes the issue of malnutrition manifold, she adds. The WFP along with the provincial government has been assisting the malnourished children, pregnant and lactating women to prevent stunting and micronutrient deficiencies in the nine districts through LHWs. However, only 28 percent of households are reached by LHWs in the province as compared to a national coverage of 83 percent.

Daily Times - March 31, 2014

POLITICAL & ELECTION WATCH

Political Parties

Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP)

PPP Unlikely To Take MQM in Sindh Government: Shah

National Assembly opposition leader Syed Khursheed Shah demanded Muttahida Qaumi Movement's chief Altaf Hussain withdraw his statement in which he invited the army to take over the reins of power. Talking to media Shah said that Altaf's statement was unconstitutional and he believes that PPP, which is a democratic party, would not take MQM in the government of Sindh because of the MQM's track record of inviting army to run the affairs of the country. The demand of Opposition Leader is believed to be a major setback for the efforts underway for PPP and MQM alliance in Sindh government which reportedly have progressed well in the recent weeks. Shah said that the decision to take the MQM in Sindh government is a daunting task for PPP because of anti-democratic statements of MQM leadership and noted that "withdrawal of statement" by Altaf Hussain is the only way left for such a coalition government in the province. However he observed that it seems difficult that MQM leadership withdrew its statement and because of this situation it would be difficult for any coalition government because PPP didn't believe in anything except the constitution of the country.

About the peace talks with Taliban militants, Opposition Leader reiterated that time frame should be set for these talks as until this has been done, chances of failure of these peace efforts might grow. "We demanded this time frame right from the beginning when the efforts were initiated and emphasize for the same thing to avert the failure", Shah added. Shah was also critical about exclusion of politicians from the committee to hold talks and said that it is blunder on part of the government to keep the politicians aside from this process. "It appears government has no trust in politicians and has comfort with the bureaucracy by giving them the task", he quipped. He said that despite the reservations about the process of talks, he prayed for the success of this peace overture for the sake of people and country. About F-8 district court terrorism incident, he attributed it to the failure of the government and said that opposition has no faith in Interior Minister Ch. Nisar Ali Khan and he should accept his failure. On Hazara province issue, Shah declared to give the stance of the party if the resolution for it is tabled in the National Assembly.

Daily Times - March 24, 2014

Other Political Parties

MQM to Have Five Ministries, Two Advisers

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) have inched closer to announcing a formation of a coalition government in Sindh as five ministries are likely to be handed over to the MQM, party sources said. The leaders of the two parties are also expected to meet at Governor House in a day or two, where the portfolios would be finalized. The names of the potential ministers have been sent to MQM chief Altaf Hussain for approval. According to sources, the ministries of health, information technology, Auqaf, industries and

commerce are likely to be offered to the MQM. All these departments were led by MQM ministers in the last coalition government. Meanwhile, out of the important ministries - local bodies, finance, planning and development, and home department — one will be given to the MQM. If all goes well and the new coalition is formed in the province, two advisers will also be appointed from the MQM.

However, after the 18th Amendment, the Sindh cabinet can only have 15 ministers and five advisers on the board. Currently, there are 16 ministers and two advisers serving as part of the provincial government. In case a coalition government is formed and five ministries are awarded to the MQM, the PPP will have to remove six of its own ministers from their posts. Parliamentary affairs minister Dr Sikandar Mandhro said the provincial cabinet strength stands at 11 per cent of total number of the provincial assembly members after the 18th Amendment. This means the government can only appoint 15 to 16 ministers and five advisers. When his attention was diverted towards 16 ministers working in Sindh and five other portfolios reportedly promised to the MQM, he said, "I have no idea whether or not the provincial government would take back a few ministries from its own members, but we are working to merge the departments so that the cabinet size is limited." In the last tenure, the MQM parted ways with the PPP-led government just days before the general elections of May 2013 and chose to act as an opposition party in the new term. MQM party leaders had admitted that they were unable to do any development because of their 'limitations'.

Party workers were not in favour of the party joining the government. However, with the operation in Karachi and the situation in London becoming unpleasant, MQM is ready to strike a deal with the PPP. The relations between the two parties became cordial last week when their delegations met in Dubai, and the MQM had termed the talks positive. "Good news is expected in the coming days," said one of the MQM leaders. On Friday, PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari, who is in Karachi, told his party leaders not to issue any statements against the MQM. Later, MQM chief Altaf Hussain also told his leaders to maintain the friendly atmosphere.

The Express Tribune - March 23, 2014

By-Elections & Local Government Elections

Government Frivolity over Local Polls Irks Supreme Court

Expressing annoyance over the delay in holding of local bodies' elections in the cantonment areas, the Supreme Court directed the Attorney General for Pakistan to submit a comprehensive reply regarding the matter on March 10. Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani, heading a three-member bench hearing the case, said it would pass an appropriate order in view of the federation's reply. Justice Khilji Arif Hussain remarked if the government desires it could pass the law in a few hours. He said the delaying tactics were being used in holding of the LB polls in the cantonments. Additional Attorney General Shah Khawar, representing the federation, said that so far the bill regarding holding of elections in the cantonment boards could not be tabled in the National Assembly. He, however, said it would be presented in the next session. Justice Tassaduq said that in the last hearing he (AAG) had given assurance that the bill would be tabled on February 24. The court, therefore, summoned the Attorney General and adjourned the hearing of the case for half an hour. Iftikhar Gilani, appearing on behalf of Defence Secretary Lt-Gen (r) Asif Yasin Malik in a contempt case, said a five-member bench had given observation against his client. He said his client had tendered unconditional apology since the beginning, but the trial court had not accepted it. Justice Jilani said they would see how serious the government was in holding LB polls in the cantonment areas, and what role the secretary

played in it. Iftikhar Gilani contended that his client was not the government and it was not in his power to hold elections.

After the break Attorney General Salman Butt appeared before the bench. The chief justice inquired from him as to why the bill regarding holding of LB polls in the cantonments could not be presented in the National Assembly. He told the AG that the court did not stop the government from legislating new law, adding if the government wanted to use the delaying tactics, then they would direct the federation to hold the election in the cantonments in accordance with the old law and the government could insert a clause in the new law that would apply to the local bodies. The attorney general informed the court that the existing law was not democratic, so the federation wanted to frame a new law. Justice Azmat remarked what kind of democracy it was when no local government elections were held in the cantonments in the last 14 years. Justice Jilani told the AG that after the federation's reply they would pass an order. Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed remarked that it was a constitutional command to hold elections in a fair, free and transparent manner. Justice Azmat said in the last five years no local government polls were held on the plea that there was no local government law.

Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Tassaduq Hussain Jilani remarked, "Prima facie the government does not want to conduct the LG polls in the cantonment boards." He said the government should make it clear that if no legislation was done, no LG polls would be held in cantonment boards too. "People cannot be deprived of their rights for a long period. The government should hold the polls and legislation in this regard can be done later. Any new law can be reviewed," he held. The Supreme Court proposed to give district and sessions judges' appellate authority in the existing provisions of delimitation of constituencies in the Punjab Local Government Act 2013. The bench asked the Punjab advocate general to seek instructions from the provincial government in that regard and submit reply today (Tuesday). ECP Additional Secretary Sher Afgan, however, agreed to this proposal. Akram Sheikh, counsel for ECP, endorsed the bench's proposal to give appellate authority to the district and sessions judges. The bench directed the SC office to again issue notices to all the parties that had not received notices so far, saying in case the parties failed to respond even after receiving the notices, they would then decide the case.

The Nation - March 04, 2014

Electronic Voting: Election Commission Cautiously Weighing Proposal

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is not averse to the use of technology. In fact, its SMS service helped many registered voters locate their polling stations before the May 11 general elections in 2013. But after the polls, there were some allegations of rigging and fresh polls were called for a few seats. The national debate became focused on using better methods to cast and count votes, with some political parties and their supporters suggesting technology be employed to reduce the chances of traditional rigging in the electoral process. The ECP is not disinclined to the use of electronic voting machines and biometric voter authentication, but it is "cautious" in its approach to technology utilization, said one ECP official who requested anonymity. "Technology is like chemotherapy," the official said. "It should be administered slowly and gradually."

The ECP official, some of his colleagues, politicians and representatives from provincial governments were in attendance at a session on Thursday, where Smartmatic Ltd, a UK-based firm that produces elections and eGovernance infrastructure technology, pitched its products and gave a demonstration. The British High Commission and Roseace, a local electronics distributor, helped organize the session, which was titled the "Use of Technology in Electoral

Process: Biometric Voter Authentication and Electronic Voting.” Cesar Flores, the president of Smartmatic Asia, gave a detailed presentation on the way his firm’s “next-generation” voting machines work, citing Venezuela and the Philippines as examples of countries using its solutions. Flores said that in Venezuela, technology has helped the fractious government and opposition avoid conflict over elections because independent audits of the electronic voting machines helped establish credibility.

To a concern raised by Muttahid Qaumi Movement MNA Farooq Sattar about some political party buying expensive software to hack in to the machines, Flores said there were multiple levels of security in the machines. He said the machines operated in a decentralized manner, so one hacking attempt cannot bring them down. Flores also said that before his firm sells the solutions, the political parties of a country are allowed to examine the software code of the machines. On Election Day, the parties can agree on audits of the counting. Sattar said smart technology can lead to “smart elections” and said his party will send some queries to the company about their products. But ECP representatives seemed skeptical, if not totally dismissive. They said technology, if introduced in a “hurry,” can lead to unexpected problems on polling day and technological glitches can be expensive to resolve at the last minute. If the ECP adopts electronic voting or voter authentication technology, it will be the commission’s independent decision, ECP officials said.

The Express Tribune - March 07, 2014

PML-N Decides To Have Solo Flight in LG Polls

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter has decided to take active part in the local government (LG) elections without entering into alliance with any other party. This was decided at a meeting of the district presidents and general secretaries held at the party’s secretariat with provincial president Pir Sabir Shah in the chair. The central and provincial secretary generals of the party, Iqbal Zafar Jhagra and Rahmat Salam Khattak, were also present besides the district office-bearers. At the meeting the PML-N district presidents presented reports and suggestions about the party affairs and the present situation. It was unanimously decided to form committees to make preparations for contesting the local bodies’ elections without entering into alliance with other parties. Briefing the media later, Pir Sabir Shah said they would persuade all the dissidents to return to the party fold. He said they would address the workers’ grievances in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and provide them a respectable place in the party. He claimed his party would sweep the local government elections. He said through unanimous resolutions the meeting appreciated the efforts of its chief Mian Nawaz Sharif for democracy and democratic institutions and reposed confidence in the central and provincial leadership. The meeting supported the government’s efforts and peace negotiation with Taliban and resolved that under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif it would provide security and respect to the citizens. The meeting condemned the ongoing acts of terrorism and killing of the innocent people. Regarding reported differences and disappointment among the workers over the delay in appointment of new governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from the PML-N, Pir Sabir Shah said they had full faith in the party leadership and would accept whatever decision was taken by it. When the same question was asked from the PML-N central secretary general Iqbal Zafar Jhagra, he also said he had full faith in the party’s central leadership and would accept whatever decision is taken by it.

The News - March 09, 2014

PML-N, PPP don't want to hold LG polls in Punjab, Sindh: SC

The Supreme Court said on Wednesday that the Pakistan Muslim-League-Nawaz and the Pakistan People's Party do not want to hold local government elections in Punjab and Sindh. Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Tassaduq Hussain Jilani has remarked that "it is interesting aspect of our democratic government that ruling party on becoming opposition party talks of democracy but forgets democracy after coming to power". A three-member bench of the court presided over by CJP Jilani took up for hearing the case of delimitation of constituencies. He further remarked that the "provincial governments do not want cake sharing by not holding local bodies polls. The court said that prima facie sections 7 and 17 of Local Bodies (LB) laws enacted by the Punjab government run counter to each other. It said the lawmakers have not made distinction between the powers of the election commission and governments on holding the local bodies' elections. Justice Khilji Arif Hussain observed, "The PML-N and PPP do not want to hold LB polls in Punjab and Sindh because they fear this way they will have to devolve powers at grass root level. The court said such a vital case is being heard but not a single political party has dared to knock the door of the court. Only the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has approached the court but without a lawyer. The court observed that holding of local bodies elections is clearly laid out in the electoral manifestoes of all parties, including the PML-N and PPP, but no political party is sincere. Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed remarked, "The level of seriousness of the political parties is such that they have accepted the conflicting decisions of the court with reference to the local bodies' laws. No one is ready to go to the high court and the decision is sought by shifting the entire burden to the shoulders of the Supreme Court." Akram Sheikh, Athar Siddique, PPP General Secretary Latif Khosa and other lawyers appeared in the court.

Daily Times - March 13, 2014

One Seat: ECP Issues Schedule for By-Elections in PK-86, Swat-VII

The Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) office announced the complete schedule for by-elections for PK-86 Swat-VII. April 24 has been decided as the date for the by-polls in the constituency. A press release issued by the office stated that the candidates can submit their nomination papers with the provincial election commission office from March 13 to March 14. The scrutiny of nomination papers will begin on March 17 and continue till March 19. Appeals against the acceptance and rejection of applications have to be submitted on March 26. These appeals will be decided by April 1. The K-P election commission further confirmed that the candidates will be able to withdraw their nominations by April 3; the final list of candidates for the one K-P Assembly seat will be published on the same day. The ECP has appointed Swat District and Sessions Judge Shaukatullah Shah and civil judge Khwazakhela as the district returning and returning officers (RO) respectively. Karim Khan, the deputy DEO, has been appointed as Assistant RO.

The Express Tribune - March 13, 2014

SC Orders Punjab, Sindh Governments to Give LB Polls Date

The Supreme Court ordered the Punjab and Sindh provincial governments to give date of conduct of local bodies (LB) polls in their respective provinces and apprise the court about it. A three-member bench of the apex court, presided over by Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani, was hearing delimitation of constituencies' case. During the proceedings, the chief justice

remarked: "It is interesting aspect of our democratic government that ruling party on becoming opposition party talks of democracy but forgets democracy after coming to power." He further remarked: "Provincial governments don't want cake sharing by not holding local bodies' polls. Prima facie Sections 7 and 17 of Local Bodies laws enacted by Punjab government run counter to each other. The law makers have not made distinct the powers of election commission and governments on holding the local bodies' elections."

Justice Khilji Arif Hussain observed: "PML-N and PPP don't want to hold LB polls in Punjab and Sindh respectively because they fear this way they will have to devolve powers at grassroots level. Such a vital case is being heard but not a single political party has dared to knock the door of court. Only Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has approached the court but without lawyer. It is not known for what they have come here. Holding LB polls are clearly laid out in the electoral manifestoes of all, including PML-N and PPP. Such things are only for the sake of saying, not implementing. No political party is sincere, may it be matter of delimitation of constituencies or any other matter." Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed remarked: "The level of seriousness of the political parties is this that they have accepted the conflicting decisions of court with reference to local bodies laws. No one is ready to resort to high court and the decision is sought by shifting entire burden to the shoulders of the Supreme Court."

Akram Sheikh, Athar Siddique, PPP General Secretary Latif Khosa and other lawyers appeared in the court. Latif Khosa said that his party is ready to hold LB polls in Sindh. The chief justice remarked: "Study section 19 wherein mention is made about LB polls. Making delimitation of constituencies as per Section 7 by the government is in violation of Article 19, 222 and other Articles. How can Election Commission exercise these powers?" Akram Sheikh said: "This is my case." The Election Commission DG said the Commission is also ready to do delimitations of the constituencies, and it has services of the experts on its disposal. There only need of the authority to do the job. The counsel for the Sindh government said: "We have to take decision after seeing the high court's decision with reference to Punjab government." The chief justice remarked: "If the Election Commission has to conduct LB polls then 1974 Act will have to be adopted. A vacuum has been left in the 18th Amendment which has not been filled. It has not been explained who will carry out delimitations."

Akram Sheikh said Section 7 empowers provincial governments to create union councils to hold LB polls. What is left more when the EC has said that 1974 Act is only workable Act? If the ECP carries out delimitation then 18th Amendment is left with no more jobs to do. Latif Khosa said the situation is not good: "May I appear as general secretary PPP. Our party is in power in Sindh." Justice Khilji remarked: "If your party is a national party then why you are not taking stand in Sindh." The chief justice remarked: "PML-N has taken stand in Punjab. We can give you time. You should give written reply of your party. What is your view point about delimitations? When the LB polls will be held in Sindh? Justice Azmat remarked: "It is work of wonder on the part of PPP and Punjab government that they are declaring two clashing decisions correct. We are not political people. You all are sitting on the bank of river and no one is ready to enter into the river. Then what kind of decision we can give."

The News - March 13, 2014

Local Government Polls in Country Delayed By another Eight Months

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has directed the government to hold local government elections (LG) by November 15 and delegate powers for holding the LG elections and carrying out delimitation of constituencies to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The apex court directed the federation and provinces to enact the necessary legislation within the next five

months. A three-member bench of the court headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Tassaduq Hussain Jilani on Wednesday rendered this judgment on the applications filed by ECP, Punjab and Sindh governments with reference to the delimitation of constituencies and LG polls. Punjab Advocate General (AG) Mustafa Ramday appeared on behalf of the Punjab government. He requested the court to give four months for completion of the legal formalities for the conduct of LB elections. He said there are 10 phases for conducting LG polls, and 25 days are needed for preparation of local government act draft afresh, while 10 days are required for its approval. "At least 14 days are required to seek endorsement from the Law Ministry in respect of this draft law and approval from the cabinet," he added.

Giving further break-up, Ramday said five days are needed for summoning of the provincial assembly, five days for sending the matter to the relevant standing committee and one month for obtaining approval from it. Another 15 days will be required for the approval of the governor and notification of this act in the gazette, while 20 days are needed for working out the rules and regulations in respect of delimitations, the Punjab AG told the court. Meanwhile, the ECP told the apex court that since it has carried out delimitation of constituencies for the National Assembly, delimitation of constituencies for LG polls will not be a difficult job. It is noteworthy that the Supreme Court had directed the Election Commission of Pakistan on Tuesday to file a reply within 15 days on the non-implementation of nine clauses of electoral reforms during the general election besides seeking reply from the government within one month for conducting local government elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad. Chief Justice Jilani had observed that conducting elections in an equitable and transparent manner is the responsibility of the ECP and it is binding on all the institutions of the country to extend cooperation to the commission in discharging this obligation.

Daily Times - March 20, 2014

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Human Rights Related Issues

Addiction Rising: Pakistani Youth, High Going On Higher

Pakistan, once largely poppy free, has now become one of the main drug transit states in the world, with 40 per cent of the world's opium supply moving through the country. This was stated by Cesar Guedes, representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime while launching "The Drug Use in Pakistan 2013 Survey Report". The national drug use survey, conducted after ten years, is lined with worrying facts and figures, and insights into the region's current geopolitical scenario. In the 80s, poppy production was just limited to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. With effective interventions from the government, production fell from approximately 800 tons in 1980 to nine tons in 1999. However, over the years, lack of policies and weak border management has made Pakistan a transshipment point for 40 per cent of the most addictive poppy derivative. On one side of Pakistan's border is a country that cultivates 70 per cent of the world's opium, while on the other, there are companies that are advancing in chemical precursors. The frequency of shipments sneaking through Pakistan to reach the European and Asian markets has given Pakistan traffickers an opportunity to bank on the opportunity and form their own local markets. "The problem is not out of control, but could be curbed" Said Ceaser. "We are not here to point fingers, but almost all countries from A to Z are a part of this menace" He added.

The report is a collaborative research effort between the Narcotics Control Division, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, and UNODC. It states that a sizable proportion of Pakistan's population from 15 to 64 suffer from the devastating consequences of substance abuse. With an increase in production of drugs in the country, the highest levels of use are seen in the provinces which border the principle poppy-cultivating areas in neighboring Afghanistan. An estimated 6.7 million adults in Pakistan have used drugs in the past year, 78 per cent of whom are men and 22% are women. Cannabis - in its purified form, hashish - was found to be the most commonly used drug in Pakistan, with by 3.6 per cent of the adult population, or four million people listed as users. Opiates, namely opium and heroin, are used by almost one per cent of overall drugs users, with 860,000 chronic heroin users.

In Pakistan today, almost a quarter of the population is estimated to be living on less than \$1.25 a day. The barriers preventing access to structured treatment are exceptionally high. An estimated 4.25 million individuals thought to be drug dependent in Pakistan are in dire need of professional treatment. However, the available structure has just 1,990 beds available for drug treatment and can cater to less than 30,000 drug users a year. The report also states significant difference in consumption patterns by drug type are observed among men and women. While men are more likely to use cannabis and opiates, prescription drugs abuse is dominated by women. Some 67 per cent of women resort to misusing opiate-based painkillers, 25 per cent use tranquilizers and sedatives, while eight per cent are using other drugs which are readily available in pharmacies.

Pakistan is amongst 15 countries with the highest prevalence of HIV/Aids and other blood-borne diseases and only 13 per cent of the general population can accurately name three modes of HIV transmission. Intravenous drug use is also considerably high, with 430,000 people estimated to be injecting drugs in Pakistan, a higher estimate than ever reported previously. Moreover, 73 per cent of those injecting drugs share syringes. In 2005, 11 per cent of the

population was injecting drugs, which went up to 21 per cent in 2008 and 37.8 per cent in 2011. Another key finding is the emergence of methamphetamines use in some parts of the country. The country representative for UNODC said that Pakistan needed to take measures outlined in the Pakistan Vision 2025 plan. Moreover, all stakeholders - civil society, government, youth and international partners - needed to participate to create awareness. There needs to be increase in law enforcement agencies, especially in K-P and Balochistan with focus on synthetic drugs. Moreover, a nationwide expansion in structured treatment provision for low-threshold drug users is needed.

The Express Tribune - March 05, 2014

No Pakistani Civilians Killed By US Drones in 2013: UN Monitor

No Pakistani civilians were killed by US drones last year as Washington slashed its controversial use of the pilotless planes in the country, a UN expert said. "I am pleased to be able to report a very significant de-escalation in the use of armed drones by the United States in Pakistan," Ben Emmerson told reporters in Geneva. The total number of recorded strikes in 2013 was down to 27 from a peak of 128 in 2010, said Emmerson, who monitors respect for human rights in counter-terrorism operations. "But perhaps most significantly, for the first time in nine years there were no reports of civilian casualties during 2013 in the FATA area of Pakistan," he added. The FATA, or Federally Administered Tribal Areas, is a region bordering Afghanistan where Pakistan's military is battling the Taliban and the United States has used drones to strike at al Qaeda militants.

Drones, which beam footage to operators at distant US bases who then launch the strikes, are meant to allow precision hits. But they have caused uproar in Pakistan over civilian casualties in botched strikes, as well as concerns that their use has hampered efforts to hold peace talks with the Taliban and breached national sovereignty. Last May, US President Barack Obama raised the bar for launching attacks. But despite the change of tack in Pakistan, Emmerson said that the picture in Afghanistan and Yemen was "much bleaker". Citing a report by the UN Mission in Afghanistan, he said that there was a threefold increase in drone-related civilian casualties between 2012 and 2013. A total of 45 Afghan civilians died in drone strikes last year, he said.

"And the picture in Yemen remains cause for serious concern. The frequency of armed drone strikes appears to have intensified, particularly during the closing months of 2013, with a sharp escalation in the number of reported civilian casualties," Emmerson said. At least 12 people are believed to have died when a drone struck a wedding convoy in Yemen in December. Emmerson spoke to reporters after addressing the UN Human Rights Council, where he presented research on dozens of drone strikes where civilians allegedly perished, pulled together by his team on a special website www.unsrct-drones.com which helps reconstruct attacks.

Daily Times - March 13, 2014

Blasphemy Law Use on Rise, Led By Pakistan: US Group

Governments around the world are increasingly invoking blasphemy laws, with Pakistan by far the country that jails the most citizens for allegedly attacking religion, a US report said. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, a government advisory panel, voiced fear that the rise in laws banning blasphemy was leading to punishment of people who merely express different religious views or who have been falsely accused. The report found Pakistan used its controversial law at a level "incomparable" to anywhere else; listing 14 people on death row

and 19 others serving life sentences for alleged blasphemy against Islam. Pakistan has never carried out the death penalty for blasphemy, but the report charged that the law – and the lack of procedural safeguards – has contributed to an alarming number of mob attacks and vigilante violence against minorities. Egypt has seen a rise in use of such laws since the 2011 overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak, the report said. Citing local activists, the report found blasphemy cases involved 63 people in 2011 and 2012 and disproportionately targeted the Christian minority. The US commission opposes blasphemy laws, saying they “protect beliefs over individuals”. “This trend of greater usage of blasphemy laws will surely lead to increased violations of the freedoms of religion and expression,” said Knox Thames, the commission’s director of policy and research. “Governments will jail people, and extremists may kill others in the defense of undefined notions of religious sentiment,” he said, calling blasphemy laws “inherently problematic”.

Daily Times - March 14, 2014

Scholars Call For Protection of Regional Languages

Linguists, intellectuals, researchers and writers Thursday called for steps to preserve and promote regional languages as these can play vital role in promotion of cultural diversity and national integration and inter-provincial harmony. They were speaking at the National Assembly’s Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage meeting, chaired by Member of National Assembly, Marvi Memon. They asked the federal and provincial governments to take concrete steps for imparting education in mother tongue and establish National Language Commission as soon as possible. The speakers were of the view that the regional languages are rapidly disappearing, which is a matter of concern. They also regretted that most educated parents do not speak to their children in their mother tongues, which is contributing to the swift decline of these languages. They said that Pakistan will prosper and progress by making local languages as national languages and provincial identity will be safeguarded too. The speakers said that there is no clash of languages in any part of the country, rather there has always been a clash of interests, political ideology and thinking which led to the destruction of languages.

A scholar Razaq Sabir said that in India there are 22 national languages but here we are neglecting our regional languages. Giving example of Hebrew he said that dead languages can be revived through government protection. Hindko scholars said that Hindko was spoken by 42% population of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa but it was not given any patronization. Abaseen Yousufzai said that ruling elite discouraged promotion of Pushto language though its promotion can play key role in national integration. He said that KPK was museum of languages and there was need to build linguistic bridges to strengthen federation. He suggested that new terminologies coined for Urdu should be taken from regional languages rather than foreign languages. The committee was informed that the previous provincial government had made legislation for protection of Pushto, but the present PTI government has undone all its steps. Punjabi scholar Saeed Farani said that all the Sufi poetry was in local languages. Vice Chancellor Gujrat University Nizamuddin said that Punjabi language played important role in promotion of Urdu, but itself remained neglected. Dr Sughra Sadaf said that national language should be spoken at grassroots level which was not the case in our only national language. She said that all Sufi poetry was written in regional languages and Urdu has failed to produce any Sufi poet.

Seraiki scholar Dr Saiqa Imtiaz said that Seraiki was not a variant of Punjabi as some Punjabi scholars claim. She lamented that lack of media support was also a reason behind destruction of regional languages. She said that research has proved that multi-lingual people are more

talented, flexible and can be source of unity in diversity. Promotion and protection of regional languages will end sense of deprivation and promote national harmony, she added. She quoted Lord Macaulay as telling British Parliament in 1835 that for making Indians British slaves it was necessary to delink them from national heritage and destruction of their regional languages can be important tool in this regard.

Scholars from Balti and Sheena languages spoke in Gilgit-Baltistan and said that such languages were facing extinction and their protection was vital for national integration. Sindhi scholar Mushtaq Phulpoto said that in the past when someone talked about protection and promotion of their mother tongue, he was considered an anti-Pakistan, which was totally wrong perception. He said that English Medium schools chains reaching district level now were totally destroying the regional languages and new generation was losing link with their mother tongues. He hoped that the dream of giving the status of national languages to regional languages was likely to materialize now and credit for this should go to the present government and Parliament. Dr Aatish Durrani said that adaptation of regional languages was a complicated issue and it will take time as India took 28 years on completion of this process.

Daily Times - March 14, 2014

Hazara Resolutions: Political Shots at the Right Time

A couple of days back, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly separately passed two resolutions, asking the federal government to create Hazara province and rename Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as Hazara Pakhtunkhwa. Both the motions are contrary to each other and the move untimely is viewed as a face-saving attempt in general and a political stunt in particular. Political gimmicking as the stage is set to hold local bodies' elections in the near future. To give a tough time to rivals, the PTI has played this card at the right time. Interestingly, movers of both the resolutions - MPA Sardar Idrees and KP Health Minister Shaukat Yousafzai - belong to the ruling PTI that backs creation of more provinces in the country on administrative lines. The first resolution on creation of Hazara province evoked a heated debate and even caused divisions among the ranks of ruling three-party coalition; however, it was passed with a simple majority. Creation of a new province is not simple as it entails a long, exhaustive and complicated process. So the passage of a simple resolution is clearly an attempt at face-saving in the Hazara region, besides being a political stunt, said a political analyst.

In its nine months government, the PTI has so far done nothing for the well being of the people and that's why it needs a political slogan. To some extent, it has played well on the issue of Hazara province. The PTI fully supports the demand of Hazara province, apparently an attempt to cause damage to PML-N vote bank in Haraza division where Imran Khan's party is gaining popularity with each passing day. No doubt, this move will help attract more voters. However, it will also damage the party in Pakhtun dominated areas of the province. An MPA belonging to the PML-N openly rejected the resolution on Hazara province, while the KP CM and some PTI ministers and lawmakers left the house before the motion was put for voice vote. Surprisingly, PTI Chairman Imran Khan is supporting Hazara province, while his party is divided over the issue, as PTI MPAs from Peshawar Valley and Malakand division are not in favor of Hazara province. Moreover, the coalition parties are divided over the issue, as KP Senior Minister Sirajul Haq said on the floor of the house that instead of forming another province, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should be renamed as Hazara Pakhtunkhwa, showing his displeasure over the resolution.

So in the prevailing situation, it will be an uphill task to approve a resolution on Hazara province with a two-thirds vote from the provincial assembly, a constitutional requirement for the

establishment of a new province. It is a political gimmick and if the PTI is really interested in formation of a new province, why it has not taken its allied parties on board, a political observer said, adding that being part of KP, Hazara division was relatively peaceful. Therefore, at this stage, it will be better to avoid starting a political movement there. Nobody is against establishing new provinces but they should be formed at an appropriate time. In order to counter Hazara province resolution, Shaukat Yousafzai and Sirajul Haq moved another resolution again, asking the federal government to rename Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as Hazara Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, it was too passed with simple majority in the presence of CM Pervez Khattak who had come back to the hall when the second resolution was tabled. The PTI for now has given a general impression that it has honored the commitment made with the people of Hazara during the election campaign. Whether the province is renamed or a separate one is carved out, only time will tell.

The Nation - March 24, 2014

Hindus Urge Government to Save Temple from Falling Prey to Underpass

Hindus in Karachi urged authorities to halt construction work on an underpass, which they say endangers a 150-year-old temple. The minority community said vibrations from excavation work on a road being built just meters away from the Ratneshwar Mahadev Temple could cause irreparable damage to the building's structure. Chief Justice of Pakistan Tassaduq Hussain Jilani on Monday ordered local authorities to provide an impact report within two weeks, but a Hindu community leader said that may be too late to save the temple. "Heavy machinery is at work right now and it is our request that the court issue a stay order," Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, the patron of the Pakistan Hindu Council. The temple has long been a fixture on the city's Clifton Beach. According to the Pakistan Hindu Council, the temple holds a Grand Mela every year, attracting some 25,000 pilgrims. Construction of the underpass is being financed by developer Bahria Town, which wants a road to link up to a skyscraper it is building some hundreds of meters away from the temple.

Daily Times - March 25, 2014

GENDER WATCH

Women Empowerment

Entrepreneurship: Thousands of Women Marketing Home-Made Products Online

As many as 6,000 women entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas of Pakistan are now successfully marketing their homemade products online. This was made possible after they got digital marketing training under the “Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme” offered by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which started in 2011. Ten such entrepreneurs got together at an interactive session to share their success stories. All from middle-income families, the women said they are now using the internet to expand their home businesses to reach out to a wider clientele.

- Asma Kamran, a housewife, who initially did not know how to even operate a computer or access the internet, now uses social media for marketing her homemade food items. “I used to scramble for keys on the keyboard as I typed or waited for my husband or children to come home to help me access the internet,” she said with a laugh. Asma has now earned the moniker of “master chef” among her friends and family. She said that she started her business with a small set up in her home under the name of “Mom’s Home Made” to sell homemade foods such as samosas, kebabs and chutneys to her limited clients. After taking digital marketing and entrepreneur development courses, she polished her digital marketing skills that helped her achieve high profits in a short period of time. Initially, she used to earn Rs. 30,000 a month, but after the training, she earns around Rs. 70,000 a month. “My profits doubled just by using better packaging and marketing online,” she said.
- With all of them running their own social media pages, Afsheen Imran, who runs a mosaic business, said that the likes on her Facebook page helped her in tapping a whole new market. Women entrepreneurs said that through the initiative, they have even gained access to international markets. Profits of jewelry and textile businesses have gone up 30 to 40 per cent while some businesses have achieved 100 percent gains, according to the participants.

The “Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme” was developed in response to serious challenges to women at enterprise, institutional and government levels in Pakistan. It aims at empowering women economically through while providing them with an enabling environment. It also aims to enhance production capacities, develop market strategies, identify skills requirement and provide relevant training opportunities to women as a means to achieve its goal. UNIDO National Programme Coordinator Shahina Waheed explained that some women have also become trainers.

Shazia Nawab from Chitral was one such example. She runs her own marble business alongside four training centres in Chitral. Waheed said that some women entrepreneurs were still facing the problem of direct access to the market and a major chunk of their profits went to middle men. “My father would not let me step outside the house. He used to come to the training centre with me. Ever since my business expanded, my entire house has been converted into my workshop,” said Jabeen Siddiqui who runs her own marble mosaic business. Waheed said that a special curriculum for training polio-affected women has also been developed and will be shared with the government soon. UNIDO Country Representative Essam Alqararah said that the second phase of the programme aims to replicate the same model for women in rural areas

in fields to venture into renewable energy and other businesses. He said that FATA, Sindh, Lahore and Muzaffarabad have been identified as target areas.

The Express Tribune - March 04, 2014

Promotion of Women's Rights: Punjab Assembly Female Members Form Caucus

A group of female members of the Punjab assembly have formed the Punjab Women Parliamentary Caucus to make better legislations and to promote women's rights in the province. Members of the opposition and minority are also included in the group along with a treasury member. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) member Azma Zahid Bukhari who is an advocate by profession has been announced as the convener of the caucus while PML-N's Hina Pervez Butt will be the general secretary. The caucus' treasurer is Dr Nausheen Hamid who belongs to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), while Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) Faiza Malik and PTI's Saadia Sohail Rana are also part of the group. One minority member, Marry Gill, is also part of the caucus. Other members are Shamoona Qaisarani, Begum Khaula Amjad, Gulnaz Shahzadi, Suriya Naseem, Dr Najma Afzal Khan and Ghazala Shaheen. Commenting about the formation and objectives of the caucus, Secretary Hina Pervez told the media that the group would work to enhance the status of women economically, politically and socially and would also table a resolution in the Punjab Assembly. She said that the group wants to promote the women's rights in accordance with the vision of Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. She said that they would work to make better policies for women. Hina was optimistic about introducing new legislations in favor of women of the province.

Daily Times - March 05, 2014

International Women's Day: Speakers Stress Pro-Woman Legislation

The women of Pakistan have made significant contributions to the development of country despite social, cultural and structural constraints. However, their presence in the government structures alone cannot ensure empowerment. This was stated by the Senate Chairman Nayyer Hussain Bokhari in his inaugural address at a roundtable discussion on "Women's Empowerment - Myths and Realities", which was organized to celebrate International Women's Day at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services. "To help empower women, legal reforms, political commitment, and realigning of public spending towards gender development is required," he said. He urged the people to reject and stand up against the "forces of darkness" who, he said, were trying to impose their views on the country.

Patriarchal social structures are keeping women disempowered, said Senator Afrasiab Khattak. The chairman of the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights added that militancy and radicalization in different parts of the country have increased the vulnerability of women and children. Criticizing the jirga and panchayat system, he said these forums are exclusively run by men and often women are on the receiving end. He added that civil society should be vigilant to ensure that women rights are not compromised during the current talks with the extremist militant groups. Member National Assembly (MNA) Shaista Pervaiz Malik said the country has progressed significantly on the path towards gender equality, noting that the current ranking of Pakistan on the Gender Index is better than many developed countries. Bringing up an ongoing medical 'debate', Senator Nasreen Jalil said that DNA test should be considered acceptable evidence in cases of rape.

The Express Tribune - March 07, 2014

Fatima Bhutto Nominated For Fiction Prize

Fatima Bhutto, the niece of assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, has been nominated for the Women's Prize for Fiction. Bhutto is among 20 women on the long list for the award, which was formerly known as the Orange prize and is open to English-language novels from anywhere in the world. She is nominated for "The Shadow of the Crescent Moon", her first attempt at fiction following several fact-based books, including a memoir of her family's blood-soaked history. Bhutto is a fierce critic of her charismatic aunt, who twice served as prime minister, claiming she was power hungry and "morally responsible" for the murder of her brother, Fatima's father Murtaza Bhutto, in 1996. The winner of the prize, which will be announced at the Royal Festival Hall in central London on June 4, receives £30,000 (\$50,000, 36,500 Euros) and a bronze known as a "Bessie".

Other nominees for the 19th annual award include "The Luminaries" by New Zealand author Eleanor Catton, which won the 2013 Booker Prize. Australia's Hannah Kent is nominated for "Burial Rites", while Indian-American Jhumpa Lahiri is long-listed for "The Lowland". Penguin Books UK's managing director Helen Fraser chairs the five-woman judging panel, which will announce the short list on April 7. "This is a fantastic selection of books of the highest quality - intensely readable, gripping, intelligent and surprising - that you would want to press on your friends," she said. Former winners Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2007) of Nigeria and Suzanne Berne (1999) of the United States are on the long list, which also contains six debut novels. The other long-listed authors are from Britain, Canada, Ireland and Pakistan. US writer A. M. Holmes won last year's prize with "May We Be Forgiven".

Dawn - March 08, 2014

Government Fails to Lay Bill for Women's Representation

Due to lack of quorum after the opposition's boycott of the Punjab Assembly session, the treasury benches failed to run the government business and lay the most important bill regarding giving fair representation to women in every sector accordingly, the package announced by Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. The government was willing to induct women in policy making, giving 30 percent to 50 percent representation to women in different universities, boards, public sector companies, task forces and committees through this proposed bill "Fair Representation of Women Bill 2014", following the vision of the chief minister in connection with the International Women's Day. However, due to lack of interest shown by treasury members in government business and the assembly proceedings, the bill could not be tabled in the House despite the fact that it was on the agenda. According to the assembly agenda, the government was also willing to pass this bill within a day through a motion and without sending it to any standing committee for further considerations. The House had been called to hold a special sitting on the issue, on the International Women's Day, through a motion. However, due to lack of quorum, the said motion was also not tabled. Deputy Speaker Sher Ali called the special session of the Punjab Assembly to highlight the issues of empowerment of women in the province.

The assembly session started two hours and 20 minutes late for its schedule time under the chair of Deputy Speaker Sher Ali. After reciting verses from the Holy Quran, the House took up the question hour about the Home Department. Parliamentary Secretary Nazar Hussain replied to the queries, but most of the legislators remained unsatisfied over his replies, as the department did not answer most of the questions correctly. On this, the chair ordered the parliamentary secretary that he should take strict disciplinary action against the responsible officials for wrong or incorrect answers within a week and inform the House about it.

Opposition party (PPP) member Khuram Wattoo wanted to table an out-of-turn resolution about the issue of Kashmiri students, but the chair did not allow him, so he walked out. Later, the law minister laid the Punjab Public Private Partnership Ordinance 2014. While laying this, an opposition member from the PTI, Arif Abbasi, on a point of order criticized the Metro Bus Service project in Rawalpindi. When the deputy speaker tried to snub his voice about his people's reservations over the project, he along with other opposition legislators boycotted the session. Resultantly, the chair adjourned the session.

Daily Times - March 08, 2014

Women Representation in Balochistan Cabinet Demanded

Speakers at a seminar here have urged the Balochistan government to ensure their representation in the provincial cabinet by inducting a female minister or adviser. The seminar was held by the Department of Women Development in connection with the International Women Day. The provincial government is a coalition of three parties and the cabinet comprises of 15 ministers and five advisers. However, there is no woman in the cabinet. All three political parties claim to be champions of women's rights but even the women development portfolio rests with MPA Izhar Hussain Khoso, who presided over the seminar, while women MPAs and representatives of NGOs expressed concern at lack of their representation in the cabinet. Mir Izhar admitted that no society could progress without the participation of women. "The role of woman cannot be ignored because men and women play their role jointly for the development of the society," he said, adding that Islamic teachings also supported the role of women and suggested giving them rights. He announced that women's centers would be set up in all divisional headquarters. The Aurat Foundation's Saima Haroon Durrani and MPAs Yasmeen Lehri and Samina Khan also spoke. Ms. Durrani demanded that a 'commission for women' should be set up in Balochistan, as had been done in two other provinces. A spokesman for the Balochistan government, Mir Jan Muhammad Buledi, said the government was facing challenges in connection with women's rights. "We are living in a tribal society in which boosting women's role is a big achievement," he said.

Daily Times - March 09, 2014

Women's Bill Scrapes through Opposition Scrutiny

The Punjab Assembly unanimously adopted the Punjab Fair Representation of Women Bill 2014 which is aimed at amending certain laws to ensure representation of women in the decision-making bodies. At least 25,000 women would become part of different departments/bodies in the province under this law. In some, women will have 33pc representation. A special session was held to mark the International Women's Day and to adopt the bill. A good number of women from all walks of life also attended it. The treasury said the passage of the bill was a "landmark step" to empower women while the opposition said it had nothing for "ordinary women". Although the opposition had reservations on the bill which it described as a step to empower "certain class," it did not vote against it. It was of the view that some women MPAs from treasury would be accommodated in different departments like the Punjab Privatization Board, the Punjab Procurement Regulatory Authority, the Punjab Daanish Schools and Centers of Excellence Authority, the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children and the Punjab Examination Commission under this bill.

Opposition Leader Mian Mahmoodur Rasheed said the bill was not aimed at benefitting ordinary women. Every year there had been a 10pc increase in violence against women; he said

and called for practical measures to improve the plight of the women in the province. PPP's Faiza Malik asked the chief minister to first give rights to the women of "his house" (Punjab Assembly). "The chief minister must put his house in order first. Give development funds to the women MPAs and representation in the district coordination committees. Don't ignore us for being women elected on reserved seats," she argued. Complaining about shortage of space in the house, PTI's Dr Murad Ras asked Sher Ali Gorchani, who was in the chair, to note the presence of almost all the treasury members (because Shahbaz Sharif is in the house). Several PML-N legislators rose to their seats and shouted at Mr. Ras for his "unworthy comment." Amer Sultan Cheema of the PML-Q said his party's government was the first to give 33pc representation to women. "The present government reduced the women representation in the local body which is unfortunate," he said. Rahila Anwar said the bill for "privileged women" had been passed today but the bill on domestic violence was still pending.

Addressing the house, Shahbaz Sharif said the bill was a big step towards women empowerment. He said 60pc of the 200,000 laptops had been distributed among women. Similarly, 50pc of the small loans had been given to women for business. He said the government would regularize the services of the lady health workers and he would present the findings of the inquiry into their torture during their protest on The Mall. The focus of the chief minister's speech was China and Turkey where he said women were contributing a lot to the economy and Pakistani women should follow suit. The house also passed a resolution presented by PML-N's Hina Pervaiz Butt recommending establishment of a Punjab Women Parliamentary Group that would work for protection of women rights.

Dawn - March 09, 2014

Women's Day: 'Pakistan Second Worst in Gender Equality'

"Pakistan is ranked second lowest among 136 countries in gender equality according to the Global Gender Gap Report," University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF) Vice Chancellor Iqrar Ahmad Khan said. He was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of UAF Ladies' Circle in connection with the Women's Day. Khan said the Ladies Circle would serve as a platform for addressing women's issues and enhancing their role in socio-cultural development. He said the UAF planned to provide bicycles to girl students for easy commute on campus. "The gender ratio in the postgraduate programmes at UAF is 47 women to 53 men... a day care centre, a women's complex comprising four hostels with state-of-the-art residential and sports facilities, a career development centre and a hostel have been established for women at the university," he added.

Anjum Alam Shah of the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) said women were an asset. She said the APWA had been working for economic, social and moral welfare of women. Institute of Rural Home Economics Chairperson Naheed Abbas said the UAF was facilitating women. Abbas also requested the participants to take steps for raising awareness among the masses about the importance of women's empowerment. Noureen Rana from the Zoology Department said the UAF Ladies Circle would hold activities including counseling and mentoring sessions. She said a gymnasium would also be set up for women. Husna Cheema from the Aurat Foundation said Faisalabad was the worst city in the country in terms of women's empowerment. She said women faced challenges in every male-dominant society. She said her organization was doing its best to tackle women's issues.

Mahrukh Saeed from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, said women played a pivotal role in the society. Saeed said that a lack of decision making freedom was one of the barriers to progress. Tahira Iqbal said Islam gave great importance to women and provided them equal rights. She called for stepping up efforts for the women empowerment in the society. Sadaf

Zahra Naqvi from Engro Foods said women were on par with men. She urged the women to prove their mettle. Fatima Mustafa said women's empowerment could help poverty alleviation. She said equality in socioeconomic, political and legal rights were necessary for the country to compete with the rest of the world.

The Express Tribune - March 10, 2014

Direct Talks with TTP: Gulzar Khan to Represent PTI on New Committee

Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) nominated Gulzar Khan for a reconfigured committee that will be tasked to hold dialogue with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. At the same time, a senior army officer will have indirect involvement in the process. A senior official of PTI said that Imran's party wanted to support the government over the issue. Gulzar Khan was elected MNA from NA-4 in the May 2013 general elections. He is also chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Training and Standards in Higher Education. The development came a day after Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan – who has been tasked by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to reconstitute the four-member committee – contacted Imran Khan and asked for nomination of his party's representative for the new committee.

The four-member committee headed by Adviser to Prime Minister on National Affairs Irfan Siddiqui has virtually been dissolved on the proposal of its own members. The proposal for direct talks with the TTP was floated after the group announced a one-month ceasefire. Some reports suggest that the proposal came due to difference of opinion among government negotiators. Army is to help government committee; indirectly. The interior minister said in a television interview that Pakistan Army would have no representation on the reconfigured committee. Source told that a high-ranking military officer will be in contact with the new committee. Sources said the army would make all-out efforts to make the dialogue process a success – but the political government would have to lead the negotiations.

They said secret information – about the TTP groups, which were really serious in pursuing dialogue and those who were using it as a delaying tactic – was vital for the success of the process. The army officer would play an important role in providing information to the committee, they added. Sources said that there was a possibility that the negotiation process would be kept secret and the names of a few or all members of the team might not be made public. Such backchannel talks had proved a success in the past and helped in persuading the TTP to announce a ceasefire, they said, adding that the government might use the strategy in the future.

The Express Tribune - March 11, 2014

Shahbaz Sharif's Commitment for Women Empowerment

Punjab government's pronouncement for bringing necessary amendments in laws related to women and making these laws up-to-date in accordance with the present day requirements, is a manifestation of strong commitment of Chief Minister Punjab, Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif for empowering women folk. As a matter of fact, throughout his stint as Chief Minister Punjab, he has always been busy in trying to remove injustice from the society and especially the discriminatory treatment being meted out to women. Only two years ago the Chief Minister introduced a comprehensive package of measures - "Punjab Women Empowerment Package 2012" that corroborated the government's firm commitment to addressing the social and economic rights of women who make up half of the population of Punjab. Much headway has

been made in achieving the objectives set forth by him for empowering the women during this period and new vistas of opportunities were being opened for them.

Again a few days ago, while addressing the Punjab Assembly session on 8th March, which is celebrated as International Women's day, the Chief Minister broke the good news that the Punjab government was introducing vital improvements in legislations pertaining to Child Marriage Act, Dower Act, Guardian and Ward Act, Marriage Registration Form and Inheritance Laws. A comprehensive policy was also being formulated for domestic servants. Birth registration fee was being done away with for encouraging registration of births of girl child. Women will be given mandatory representation in trade unions. Only female contractors will run canteens in girls' schools and colleges. Provincial commission has already been set up in Punjab and its chairperson was also being nominated. The government has also decided to arrange veterinary training for women and technical training for the wives of industrial workers. Topics regarding equality between male and female are also to be included in the curriculum.

Protecting the rights of women, redressing their social and legal grievances and expanding opportunities available to them has been at the heart of the Government of the Punjab's commitment to the people, under the leadership of Chief Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif. The announcements made by the Chief Minister have two aspects: first, it will provide ways and means to effectively safeguard women's rights and second, it is expected to have far reaching effects on their socio-economic status by expanding opportunities available to them. A workable, publicly accountable system shall be put in place that ensures that these measures are implemented not just in letter but in their true spirit. The salient features of the Women Empowerment Package presented by the Chief Minister are:

1. **Amendment In Inheritance Laws:** It has been observed that rights of the female heirs are not properly safeguarded due to existing lacunas in the laws and rules governing land administration. Hence, after Inheritance Mutation, partition of the property is being made mandatory through amendment in the law for protecting rights of women.
 - a. Upon the death of a land owner, proceeding for inheritance mutation shall proactively be initiated by the Revenue officer forthwith, without moving application by any of the parties, and shall sanction the mutation as soon as possible.
 - b. Reference to CNIC and B form will be mandatory while sanctioning inheritance mutation so as to ensure that no legal heir is deprived of his/her Fundamental Right to Property.
 - c. Upon sanctioning of inheritance mutation and without application from any of the parties, the Revenue Officer shall forthwith commence proceedings for partition of land.

In order to ensure that there is appropriate operation against those delinquent officers who due to collusion, non-exercise of due diligence or malafide intention deprive a legal heir of his/her right or award less share or less valuable land in the mutation/partition.

2. **Women Protection Laws:** Comprehensive legislation will be enacted to provide assistance to the female victims of violence covering all kinds of gender based violence including domestic violence.
3. **Harassment at Work Place Act:** The following measures are being taken forthwith for the effective implementation of the law:
 - a. The Government appoints an Ombudsperson under Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace.

- b. 'Code of Conduct for Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace' shall be implemented in all public offices.
 - c. A Provincial Committee is established to oversee implementation of the Act.
4. Offence of Acid Throwing:
- a. An amendment will be made in the Poisons Act,1919 to discourage acid throwing incidents on women.
 - b. Acid throwing shall be dealt with under the anti- terrorism laws.

A Provincial Board for Acid Burns Survivors and a Fund shall be established to recommend specialized medical and psychological care and its monitoring.

- 5. Home Based Workers: Government of the Punjab has formulated a policy for the Home based Workers covering the strategies, plans and programs for the protection and promotion of rights and benefit of Home Based Workers who mostly comprise of female workers.
- 6. Women Crises & Rehabilitation Help Desks: Women Crises & Rehabilitation help desks at district level providing Legal, psychological and basic health referral services shall be provided under the supervision of the DCO and legislated accordingly. A 24/7 toll free help line shall be established.
- 7. Property Rights: The Punjab Government is giving proprietary rights under following schemes:
 - a. Jinnah Abadi Scheme in rural areas of Punjab (approx 90,000 households)
 - b. Residents of Katchi Abadis (approx 110,000 households)
 - c. Regularization of residential occupants of state land in village abadis (approx. 700,000 households)

In all the above mentioned schemes, joint title is being given to husband and wife (50% share each).

- 8. 8. Equal Wages for Work of Equal Value: Amendments shall be enacted to relevant laws to enforce the right to equal remuneration/wages to men and women for work of equal value.
- 9. 9. Media Campaign: A Media Campaign shall be launched for raising awareness of women on legal issues and rights.

Public Sector Employment and Economic Empowerment

- 1. Public Service: The following steps are being taken to encourage the role of women in public sector employment:
 - a. Quota for women in public service employment including posts recruited through PPSC shall be enhanced to 15%.
 - b. Women will fill 25 % of general seats as Members of the Punjab Public Service Commission.
 - c. All Boards of statutory organizations, public sector companies and committees as well as special purpose task force and committees shall have at least 33% female representation.

- d. There shall be at least one woman in all selection and recruitment committees for regular and contractual employment.
 - e. Government shall take affirmative action to radically increase women representation in all administrative leadership positions (including departmental heads and key field offices).
 - f. 33% of consultants in Provincial Ombudsman Office shall be women.
 - g. All women contractual employees shall be entitled to avail an additional chance of transfer to place of residence of spouse in case of marriage
 - h. House rent of only one spouse will be deducted if government accommodation is allotted and both are government servants
2. Maternity Leave: The following changes shall be made in rules:
- a. Application of maternity leave shall deem to be approved as soon as maternity leave application is moved to the immediate superior
 - b. Women will not be required to provide fitness certificate on joining after availing maternity leave.
 - c. Maternity leave shall not be less than 90 days. Condition to avail 45 days before and 45 days after will be abolished.
 - d. One week paternity leave will be admissible for male employees for two children.
3. Age Relaxation: Age relaxation up to 3 years shall be allowed to females for fresh induction over and above normal upper age ceiling including existing general relaxation, for the purpose of encouraging employment in the public sector and to enable women to join professional career after marriage & childbearing.
4. Daycare Centers: The Chief Ministers Day Care Initiative is being announced with the following elements:
- a. A Punjab Day Care Fund is being established to support working women to make workplaces women friendly on a co-finance basis.
 - b. An initial grant of Rs. 100 million is being provided to the Fund for disbursement through an open proposal mechanism from NPOs, NGOs/CBO and public organizations. The Fund will comprise of independent trustees with Women Development Department working as its Secretariat.
 - c. The Punjab Civil Secretariat will set up a Flagship Day Care Center.
 - d. Day Care Centers will be mandatory in all public sector offices (including universities, colleges, hospitals and other organizations) with 5 or more than 5 female employees.
 - e. Amendment in appropriate laws will be enacted to make it mandatory for all commercial/industrial establishments to have a Day Care on their premises.
 - f. Daycare shall also be an eligible category for financing out of the Workers' Welfare Fund.
 - g. Guidelines and standards will be developed and communicated by the Women Development Department.
 - h. Punjab Skills Development Fund, as per its mandate, shall finance training for developing skilled workforce for the Day Care Centers.

5. Women Entrepreneurs: The Bank of Punjab announces a “Women Entrepreneurship Financing Scheme” for loans for commercial ventures by women for initiatives including: Day care Centers, bakeries, eateries, catering, furniture, interior designing, boutiques, fitness gyms, event management, vocational institutes, driving schools, jewelry, clothing and accessories, and any other feasible projects.
 - a. Rs. two billion has been allocated to this scheme.
 - b. Business Development Services will be extended by BoP. A panel of experts will be engaged for initial advice followed by feasibility study & business plan preparation.
 - c. Job creation shall be one of the criteria for approval of loan application by the Bank of Punjab.
 - d. Green field projects shall also be eligible.
6. Interest Free Loans for Women: Government of Punjab will allocate an additional Rs. one billion for the year 2012-2013 for disbursement of loans through Akhuwat with a target to support at least 33% women of its total beneficiaries.
7. Other Measures:
 - a. Amenities for women shall be provided in all public offices: separate washroom and prayer room be designated in existing buildings.
 - b. All new buildings should incorporate proper facilities for women. (Washroom and prayer room).

Daily Times - March 11, 2014

NCSW Expresses Concern on CII Recommendations

Chairperson National Commission for Status of Women (NCSW) Khawar Mumtaz expressed grave concerns over the recent recommendations of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) that the laws related to minimum age of marriage were un-Islamic and that children of any age could get married if they attain puberty; and that permission of first wife for second marriage by the husband is against the tenets of Islam. In a statement issued to the press NCSW chairperson pointed out that the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 was promulgated after serious and in-depth deliberations by an eminent committee representing all schools of Islamic thought. The committee reviewed personal status laws of other Muslim countries in the light of contemporary conditions and challenges and then made its recommendations in keeping with the spirit of justice and fairness. Khawar called upon CII to give attention to curbing practices like vani, swara and karo kari and ensure that women get their due constitutional rights instead of unnecessarily re-opening settled matters. She drew CII’s attention to the fact that marriages in Islam are contracts between two consenting adults and any recommendation that violates that basic principle is not acceptable. Furthermore it has been medically established that early age marriages have far reaching damaging consequences for the health of young girls and their children and therefore must be avoided at all cost. She added that CII’s opinion is also in contradiction of Pakistan’s international commitments. Khawar recalled that Pakistan is signatory of CEDAW that provides for the prohibition of Child Marriage in Article 16.3. “The Convention contains a provision calling for the abolishment of practices prejudicial to the health and future of children,” she said adding, “Child marriage is connected to children’s rights, such as the right to protection from all forms of abuse, and the right to be protected from harmful practices.” More pressing in Pakistan is the forcible marriage of girls to resolve family feuds

which is a gross violation of human rights and CII should focus its attention on this subject," she said.

Daily Times - March 20, 2014

Violence against Women

Working On Women's Issues in Tribal Areas

Maryam Bibi is working on women's issues in Pakistan's most difficult areas – tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan - where men find it almost impossible to work. "Educated women have made progress towards achieving rights and continuing the march for extending the territory under control," the women's rights activist working with Khwendo Kor, or Sisters' Home told on the eve of International Women's Day marking the struggle for equal rights for the women. The women's rights champion stated: "Many women are progressing. But they are those who are educated." Maryam Bibi has no hesitation to acknowledge the fact that education is making the difference. The outside world finds it harder to accept that Pakhtuns are liberals in relation to women's rights given the current situation concerning the Taliban phenomena. However, Rukhshanda Naz, one of the country's leading women's rights activists, challenges this notion. "Increasing incidents of oppression are not just because of Pakhtun culture. It is a result of religious extremism. I believe religious extremists used patriarchal norms within the Pakhtun culture to reinforce a particular ideology," she said after her return from England where she did her LLM degree.

She enlists the women who excelled to prove they are equally capable of doing works in areas where men are supposed to be proving mettle. "We have a woman as prime minister, speakers, governor and general in Pakistan Army, 64 in the (national) Parliament and 134 in the four provincial assemblies, 19 women in the Senate, and woman governor of State Bank of Pakistan, five women pilots in Pakistan Air Force and one woman fighter pilot." "Pakhtun women have led and actively participated in political struggles, often under the most difficult circumstances. It is, therefore, not unusual to have Pakhtun women leading in areas which are traditionally regarded as male domains," former MP Bushra Gohar joined other champions of women rights to stress the need for continued efforts. Bushra Gohar, who is activist of Pakhtun nationalist Awami National Party, pointed to the political movement her leader Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan led. "Khudai Khidmatgars placed women's rights, especially right to education and inheritance at the centre of their movement attracting many women to join as members," she said. "Women have fought for their legal, social, economic and political rights.

Bushra Gohar seconded Rukhshanda Naz underlining the "greatest threat" religious extremism and terrorism was posing to the Pakhtun social values and way of life. "It threatens to reverse the gains made by women through years of hard work and uphill struggle. By targeting girls' schools they attack our future." She said the wheels of progress and back pushes the Pakhtun women to darkness would not be let happen. "I am convinced the Pakhtuns will continue to resist the wave of extremism and Talibanisation and women will be at the forefront of this movement. The example of Malala Yousafzai and many others like her are before us who stood up for their rights a challenged the forces of darkness. "Malala has become a symbol of resistance against religious extremism and Talibanisation," Bushra Gohar proudly declared adding that Malala story is changing the world's perspective about the Pakhtun's culture.

Daily Times - March 08, 2014

Violence against Women Still Pandemic

At least 1,601 women were killed in the country in the name of honor and other reasons in 2013. According to data provided by Madadgar National Helpline founder Zia Ahmed Awan, at least 370 women were raped while 185 incidents of gang-rape were reported in the country. He said that 2,133 women were tortured during the same year, while 887 faced tortured by police. Similarly, 608 women were abducted and 406 were forcefully married, including 176 cases of vani. He said that of all the victims, 217 were killed after being raped, 220 killed after being accused of karo-kari, and 1,164 killed for unknown reasons. The year also saw 452 women committing suicide. He said that 193 women were burnt alive, 205 were smuggled and 220 ran away from their houses for different reasons. He said that at least 6,516 incidents of crime against women were reported, including 2,602 in Punjab, 1,883 in Sindh, 1,181 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 864 in Balochistan. He said that the given figures were compiled from different news reports and clients coming to the helpline for aid. There was no such data of crime against women with ministries at provincial and federal level. He claimed that the given data was only 10 percent of the incidents occurred in the country. People especially women who faces such situations were not able to register their cases with police due to their behavior, he said adding that women who face torture were also reluctant to register criminal cases and only insist on getting divorce. He said that the country could not progress until 51 percent of the population of the country is given its due respect and rights.

Daily Times - March 08, 2014

SECTARIAN CRISES & CONFLICT WATCH

Conflict & Sectarian Crisis Incidents

Security Briefs for the Month of March

DATE	INCIDENTS	KILLED	INJURED
Saturday, March 01, 2014	12 Security Force personals (Khyber Khasadar Force), which were providing security to a polio team, were killed in two separate blasts in the Lashora area of Jamrud tehsil in Khyber Agency of FATA. A child was also killed in the firing by the militants after the blasts.	13	0
	Three FC personnel were killed and six others wounded in a remotely controlled IED blast along RCD Highway in Sorab area of Kalat District in Balochistan.	3	6
Sunday, March 02, 2014	At least 10 militants were killed during an exchange of fire in Darinjan and Rustam Bazar areas of Sui tehsil in Dera Bugti District of Balochistan.	10	0
	In response to the militant attack on a polio team in the Lashora area of Jamrud tehsil in FATA which left at least 13 persons dead on March 1, Security Forces launched an assault on March 2-morning on militant hideouts in Kalanga and surrounding areas of Bara tehsil and killed five militants.	5	0
Monday, March 03, 2014	At least 12 people, including Additional District and Sessions Judge Rafaqat Awan, a woman lawyer, and a Policeman, were killed and 24 others were injured when militants attacked the courthouse complex in Islamabad.	12	25
Wednesday, March 05, 2014	Six FC soldiers were killed and eight others sustained injuries when an IED detonated through a remote control targeted a SF's convoy near Warmagal area in Hangu District of KP.	6	8
Monday, March 10, 2014	Five people were found dead in the Brohi Mohalla area of Mawach Goth area in Baldia Town of Karachi in Sindh.	5	0
Wednesday, March 12, 2014	At least 19 civilians, including 10 women and four children, were killed and more than 50 others were injured in gang war clashes among rival gangsters, Uzair Baloch, Ghaffar Zikri and Baba Ladla in Gahribshah locality of Lyari Town in Karachi of Sindh.	19	50
	The Rangers claimed to have killed at least nine suspects and arrested 56 others in Lyari area of Karachi in Sindh after the clash. According to sources the suspects killed by Rangers were affiliated with Baba Ladla group.	9	0
	Unidentified assailants shot dead four people, including three militants, in Miranshah Bazaar of North Waziristan Agency in FATA.	4	0

DATE	INCIDENTS	KILLED	INJURED
Friday, March 14, 2014	At least 11 persons were killed and 45 others injured in a suicide attack targeting Police in Sarband area of Peshawar (Peshawar District), the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.	12	45
	At least 10 persons, including nine civilians and one SF, were killed and 35 others were injured in a bomb explosion targeting FC vehicle at Science College Chowk area of Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan.	10	35
Wednesday, March 19, 2014	At least six persons were killed in the morning when a mortar shell exploded in a house in the Shawal tehsil of the North Waziristan Agency in FATA.	6	0
	Three mutilated dead bodies which were recovered 20 days ago from Nooriabad area near Super Highway that lies between Karachi and Hyderabad Districts were identified as that of the workers of the MQM.	3	0
Sunday, March 23, 2014	Three gangsters associated with the Faisal Pathan group of Lyari were killed in an encounter with Police and Rangers in Aath Chowk area within the remits of Kalakot Police Station in Lyari Town of Karachi in Sindh.	3	0
	At least five militants were killed and eight others were arrested during a search operation by SFs in Turbat District of Balochistan.	5	8
Sunday, March 30, 2014	Three more dead bodies were recovered from a mass grave in Totak area of Khuzdar District of Balochistan.	3	0
TOTAL		128	177

Compiled from different dialies

ECONOMIC WATCH

Facts & Figures

Inflation Lowering, Economic Progress Going Up: Dar

Finance Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar said that the ratio of economic development was increasing and the ratio of inflation was registering an upward trend. He said this while chairing a meeting to roll out the preparation of the next year's budget at the Finance Ministry here. Dr Waqar Masood, Finance Secretary, gave a detailed presentation on the next budget. The finance minister expressed satisfaction on fiscal results for the first eight months of the current year, which showed a deficit of 3.2 percent as compared to the proportionate target up to February of 3.5 percent. He stressed the need for continued vigilance on expenditure in line with revenue receipts so that the budgetary targets are achieved without fail.

Commenting on the preparatory exercise presented in the meeting the finance minister emphasized that austerity will continue to remain the hallmark of PML-N's budget strategy and fiscal management. He further underlined the need for clear and meaningful indications of budgetary ceilings to all federal ministries and for Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) so that they can prioritize and formulate their expenditure proposals well in time. Meanwhile talking to Philip Barton, British High Commissioner to Pakistan accompanied by Richard Montgomery Head of UK Department for International Development Pakistan who called on the minister here at the Finance Ministry on Friday Ishaq Dar urged international investors to grab huge potential and opportunities in Pakistan's energy and infrastructure sectors.

The minister informed the delegation that Pakistan's economy is performing much better as all the economic indicators are on the positive side. He emphasized that there is a great potential for trade expansion with the United Kingdom in the light of prime minister's vision for consistency in economic policies and creating an atmosphere where foreign investors can invest in energy hydrocarbons and infrastructure projects. The minister also briefed the High Commissioner about his recent visit to Afghanistan and development projects including Torkham-Jalalabad Highway and Kidney Hospital undertaken by Pakistan. The High Commissioner said that making Pakistan more prosperous is key to our relationship. He said that we are very keen to work with Pakistan on enhancing our commercial and economic relations. He said that we are impressed with the transparency and merit oriented policies the government is pursuing. He expressed his government's resolve to work with Pakistan in bringing peace and prosperity to the region.

The News - March 08, 2014

Next Defense Budget May Touch Rs. 750 Billion

The government has decided to increase national defense budget for the upcoming financial year 2014-2015 after Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif met with Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar, who termed it a routine meeting and did not reveal level of increase to be made. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif at GHQ (General Headquarter) Rawalpindi and they discussed issues related to development programmes of Pakistan Army and the upcoming defense budget, the official statements issued by finance ministry and ISPR (Inter Services Public Relations) stated, without dropping any hint at the

expected level of increase in defense budget. The finance minister acknowledged the need to ensure fulfillment of the requirements of the defense in the light of current security situation and reassured that the necessary resources will be allocated. It was a routine meeting and we have not finalized the defense budget yet, as we are trying to work it out in next couple of months. "How can I inform you about the defense budget in the month of March when annual budget is to be finalized and announced in May or June," he replied to a question.

Sources informed that military chief has asked to enhance the budget keeping in view the soaring inflation that increased the expenditure of the defense sector. The finance minister said that government would provide every possible financial support to the armed forces so they could carry out their mission of defending the motherland. Sources were of the view that government might increase the defense budget by 15-20 percent for the next financial year 2014-2015. Defense budget might go around to Rs. 700 to Rs. 750 billion for the upcoming fiscal year, against the Rs627 billion of the ongoing year, he said. However, these figures are speculative yet. The government cut the expenditure of all ministries by 30 percent last year but no reduction was made in the defense budget. The finance ministry is most likely to not cut the defense sector expenditure for next financial year as well and increase the overall volume of defense budget instead.

The Nation - March 09, 2014

Saudi Arabia Gives \$1.5 Billion to Pakistan: IMF

The government has shared details with the IMF of foreign inflows of \$1.5 billion received from a friendly country into the Pakistan Development Fund (PDF) after which the country's foreign reserves went up to \$9.357 billion. "In the last couple of weeks, Islamabad received \$1.5 billion in the shape of two installments from one Muslim country that resulted in the appreciation of the rupee against the dollar in a big way," official sources confirmed. It is yet to be seen how the exchange rate will stabilize in the days ahead and stability will be crucial for the economy. The sharing of these details with the IMF is crucial because in the '90s the Saudi Oil Facility (SOF) on deferred payments had always been questioned by the IMF high-ups for being treated as tax revenue or non-tax revenue. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had already stated that the country's reserves would cross \$10 billion on March 31 and would touch \$16 billion by the end of June 2014. His claim is backed by the launching of Eurobonds worth \$500 million in April and expected inflows from other multilateral and bilateral donors in the coming quarter (April-June) period of the current fiscal year.

The exchange rate slightly depreciated but it will remain stable in the range of Rs100 against a US dollar in the days ahead, said the sources and added that more injections of foreign inflows were expected within this month mainly in the shape of the release of a tranche worth \$540 million from the IMF in its scheduled board meeting on March 24 in Washington DC. When contacted IMF spokesperson in Washington DC stated in a written reply: "Fund staff has been made aware of the disbursements to the Pakistan Development Fund on a timely basis. However, the government would be better placed to provide details". However, the economists say that there could be no economic justification for this sharp decline of dollar against rupee in recent days that paved the way for reduction of public debt by Rs800 billion in one go. But now the government would have to pass on the benefits of appreciation of rupee against dollar in terms of reducing the prices of POL products, electricity and other imported items.

Meanwhile a report from Islamabad says Saudi Arabia loaned \$1.5 billion to Pakistan last month to help Islamabad shore up its foreign exchange reserves, meet debt-service obligations and undertake large energy and infrastructure projects. Pakistani officials told the Saudi assistance

has contributed to a sharp recovery of the Pakistani rupee, which rose to a nine-month high of 97.40 from 105.40 against the dollar between March 4 and 12, its strongest rally in 30 years. "On a personal guarantee of the prime minister, Saudi Arabia has given \$1.5 billion, which has helped bail out the rupee," one senior Pakistani government official close to the deal told Reuters, requesting anonymity as he was not authorized to disclose the source and purpose of the funding.

The governor of the Saudi central bank declined to comment, and officials gave no details of the loan terms. Another top official who is based in Lahore said the money went into an account known as the Pakistan Development Fund set up to channel money from "friendly countries" like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "We have a promise of a total \$3 billion, of which \$1.5 billion has been received so far," the second official said. "Most recently, we got \$750 million from the Saudis. "Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has long enjoyed close relations with the Saudi royal family. After his second term as prime minister was ended by a military coup in 1999, he was sent into exile in Saudi Arabia. Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, the Saudi financier and member of the House of Saud, has described Sharif as "Saudi Arabia's man in Pakistan". Finance Minister Ishaq Dar confirmed on Wednesday that \$1.5 billion was received under the development fund but declined to comment on the source. "Why do you want to expose our friends?" he told reporters.

The News - March 14, 2014

President Defends Government for Taking \$1.5bn Saudi Aid

Amid controversy over \$1.5 billion received by the Nawaz government from Saudi Arabia, President Mamnoon Hussain backed on Tuesday the government's policy and expressed the hope that it would help overcome the prevailing economic crisis. "The aid has not been received from a smuggler but from a friendly country and it will be used for the welfare of the country and people," the president said during a meeting with newly-elected office-bearers of National Press Club (NPC) who called on him at the Presidency. Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs and National Security Sartaj Aziz told parliament that the \$1.5 billion aid had been given by Saudi Arabia. "The hue and cry is being made on the aid given by a brotherly country," the president said. He said the government was trying to rid the country of crisis and, therefore, different steps were being taken. The opposition has strongly criticized the government for obtaining \$1.5 billion grant from Saudi Arabia at the cost of Pakistan's foreign policy on Syria. According to a press release issued by the NPC, the president said that borders should not become a hurdle in the way of friendly relations among different countries.

"Sometimes one has to adopt hypocrisy in international relations," the press release quoted the president as saying. The president said that it was the desire of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that Pakistan should have friendly relations with all neighboring countries. "Aman Ki Asha is a slogan of an organization, but the prime minister wants friendly relations with all neighbors'," he added. Talking about his recent visit to China, the president claimed that China would invest \$32 billion over the next five years in Pakistan which included investment in 22,000MW electricity generation facility, in a nuclear power project in Karachi, a 4,000km rail and road link from Kashgar to Gwadar to Karachi, the Karachi Motorway, the Gwadar International Airport, Development of Gwadar Port and the Orange Train project in Lahore. Besides, he said, some defense agreements would also be signed between Pakistan and China in near future. He said once Pakistan became an economic corridor it would benefit several countries of the region.

Dawn - March 19, 2014

Part of Bailout: IMF Clears Third Tranche of \$540m

The waivers, second in as many reviews of the \$6.7 billion bailout package, reflects IMF's leniency towards Islamabad. However, raising speculations over the programme's future, analysts are linking the continuous US support for the bailout package with the upcoming withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan. According to credible sources, Washington has recorded certain negative comments on a staff level report prepared by the IMF team following the second review programme. During meeting in Washington, IMF's executive board members were presented with a report card on Pakistan's economy for the period of July-December 2013 by a team led by Jeffery Franks, the Washington-based mission chief for Islamabad. With the approval of the third tranche, the Washington-based lender has so far given \$1.65 billion to Pakistan out of committed \$6.7 billion, which will be disbursed over a period of three years in twelve equal tranches. While talking to an upbeat Finance Secretary Dr Waqar Masood confirmed that the third installment will be disbursed within this week. The release will further shore up the country's foreign currency reserves, which have recently received a lifeline from Saudi Arabia via a \$1.5 billion "gift".

According to a finance ministry official, IMF's executive board also approved Rs. 11 billion or 15% reduction in spending on targeted cash-transfer programmes under the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). The reduction was allowed after Pakistan could disburse only Rs16 billion among BISP beneficiaries by end of December as against the target of Rs. 32 billion. The end-March target has also been slightly revised downwards to Rs. 48 billion. However, the official insisted that the Rs11 billion spending will be made on other poverty eradication programmes announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Earlier, the IMF's executive board waived the end-December condition of reducing the government's borrowings from State Bank of Pakistan to Rs. 2.56 trillion. The actual borrowings remained at Rs. 2.611 trillion, Rs51 billion higher than the IMF's ceiling. The borrowings swelled after the tax collection fell short of the target.

Additionally, the IMF board also waived the condition of lowering SBP's borrowings of US dollars from the commercial banks and China, known as forward contracts, to \$2.255 billion, set for end-December 2013. The actual SBP's borrowings under forward contracts stood at \$2.6 billion, \$345 million higher than the IMF's ceiling. It has now asked Pakistan to reduce the forward contract limit to \$2.255 billion by end March and further to \$2.150 billion by end-June. Following the first review of the programme, IMF granted waiver on the condition of building Net International Reserves (NIR) target, set for end-September of last year. Sources privy with the development said the IMF was irked by Pakistan's blanket tax amnesty scheme, granted to affluent industrialists. The Washington-based lender was of the view that the amnesty scheme may in short term increase the state revenues but will further create distortions in the longer run. The IMF also raised concerns over the government's intervention in the exchange rate market and observed that in the long run playing with the rupee-dollar parity will create balance of payment problems.

The Express Tribune - March 25, 2014

WB To Provide \$10.2 Billion to Pakistan in Next Five Years

The World Bank (WB) will give Pakistan \$10.2 billion during the next five years - from 2015 to 2019. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has, meanwhile, assured the World Bank that the government was going to eliminate tax exemptions in Pakistan in the next budget. He extended this assurance here on Sunday to Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Managing Director (MD) World Bank Group. The minister informed the WB's top functionary that changes were being contemplated in the

relevant tax laws to permanently eliminate the discretion of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to issue special tax exemptions. These measures will, he argued, lead to enhanced revenue generation and the country will be able to spend more on development programmes. "The Privatization strategy is in place to provide a holistic framework for disinvesting public sector assets." The minister said that good governance, transparency and zero tolerance for corruption remains the hallmark of the government in pursuing the strategic partnership with the private sector in PSEs (public sector enterprises).

The statement says the minister highlighted that the macro-economic situation was improving as reforms were making progress, growth was picking up and inflation was in single digits. Ishaq Dar informed the World Bank official about the steps taken by the government to put the country's economy back on track. He said the new government was pursuing a three-point priority agenda, focused on addressing the economy, energy and extremism. Senator Dar also spoke about landmark steps the prime minister recently announced with the objective to generate business opportunities for youth and assist them in attaining educational excellence. "Our efforts have started yielding results in addressing long-delayed issues and pulling the country out of its economic woes," Dar told the WB official. The minister said the premier has an agenda of addressing the core impediments hampering economic growth in consonance with its true potential. He said besides appropriate economic measures, the government was working on a plan to develop infrastructure and meeting the requirements of energy demand in the country.

The minister thanked the official for her personal interest in Pakistan-related programmes viz CASA-1000 and the Dasu hydropower projects which are in the process of approval by the Board and clearance of two DPCs on March 19 by the operations committee which the MD herself chaired. The WB official while appreciating Pakistan's economic policies said that the World Bank will help Pakistan in poverty alleviation and promoting shared prosperity for the people of Pakistan. She said Pakistan has an encouraging macro-economic framework and this will lead to enhanced confidence in Pakistan by the international community and institutions. She also appreciated increased allocation for social safety network programmes. She also informed the finance minister that the World Bank will be considering the Country Partnership Strategy (2014-19) for Pakistan on May 1 this year and this reflects the WB's commitment to the country. She underlined that participation of the private sector in energy sector reforms will be a strong message to the foreign investors and one success in this regard will lead to another success. She hoped success for Pakistan in launching of Eurobonds in the international market and auction of spectrum licenses.

Meanwhile, Economic Affairs Division Secretary Nargis Sethi in a briefing told Finance Minister Ishaq Dar that the World Bank is going to allocate the share of \$10.2 billion for Pakistan under Country Partnership Strategy (2015-19). She said the financial envelop for Pakistan, which was around \$9 billion in the previous Country Strategy Partnership 2010-14, has now been proposed to be considerably enhanced to \$10.2 billion, a senior official told. Dar was told that the World Bank Group (WBG) was preparing a new strategy for Pakistan, which will guide the engagement of its three institutions (World Bank, International Finance Corporation, Multilateral International Guarantee Agency) for the next five years and will be designed to focus on the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity.

Sethi said that during the consultations process over 30 meetings, the WBG team met more than 400 individuals from civil society organizations, media representatives, parliamentarians, political leaders, chief ministers and cabinet members, civil servants, academics, think tanks, youth groups, the private sector, and other local and international development partners. She mentioned that the focus of the international donors remained tackling the energy crisis, increasing economic opportunity for women and youth, improving service delivery, addressing

inequality, and combating climate change. The finance minister appreciated that for the first time the country's partnership strategy has been developed through a consultative process based on national development agenda and in line with the national interest and priorities.

The News - March 31, 2014

DEVELOPMENT WATCH

Development Projects

40 Development Projects in Limbo

About 40 major infrastructure projects of the federal government worth more than Rs. 847 billion have hit snags because of a host of political, financial and managerial shortcomings, causing huge cost overruns. These 40 projects have officially been described as problematic and slow-moving as shown in a report prepared by the Planning Commission. In some cases, the project costs have increased by more than 400 percent. There may be genuine reasons, but the situation puts a question mark on the country's planning, implementation and monitoring mechanism for development. The latest situation about these projects had been brought to the knowledge of the Prime Minister and the Public Accounts Committee. The prime minister would announce speeding up of some of these infrastructure projects when he visits the provinces shortly. A countrywide tour of the prime minister is reportedly being arranged. The report shows many projects had missed their implementation schedule and completion deadline because of design problems, inadequate funding, land acquisition problems, the law and order situation and court cases. The official, however, said it would be unfair to attribute delays to these factors alone because often the projects are slowed down when the government decides to reduce the size of the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) in an attempt to contain fiscal deficit amid stagnant tax collection. Over the last two decades, the tax targets were never achieved and PSDP allocations were fully utilized only once or twice, he said.

Critical Projects

Among the projects that were moving slowly or missed their completion deadline include critical schemes like the Makran Coastal Highway, Lyari Expressway and Chashma Nuclear Power Project. For example, a bridge over the river Indus at Larkana worth Rs. 9.22bn, launched in 2005, was not completed by the deadline of Nov 2009 because of design problems and inadequate funding.

The Rs. 129bn Karachi Circular Railway project, which was supposed to be completed by June this year, has also been included in the 'problematic projects'. Due to rehabilitation issues, the grant allocation for the project has already been cancelled by the Japanese government. The official said in some cases the projects were included in the development programme due to political considerations without completing procedural formalities and then faced delaying tactics at the ministries of finance and planning. Cost overruns, project delays, waste of public money and missed benefits are a few outcomes of slow-moving development activity. This is a classic example of misdirected public investments. The quality of development carried out in the provinces is also poorer than federal projects.

Dawn - March 09, 2014

Innovative Solutions: Improving Quality, Access to Education

The word innovation usually conjures up high-tech or state-of-the-art facilities, but sometimes a fresh perspective can help achieve the desired results with minimum expense. This was in evidence at Kuch Khaas, where members of the Education Innovation Alliance: Kitabon Se Agay,

shared ideas for improving the quality of education and accessibility. Arafat Majeed from National Rural Support Programme discussed the benefits of a second shift for girls from one to eighth grade in boys' schools in Shikarpur. He stated that cultural constraints in rural Sindh were a real obstacle to co-education but starting a second shift in boys' schools for girls was an initiative that not only increased enrollment in that shift but also in the morning shift.

"Community mobilization, greater social interaction and government support led to education of 1,500 girls who had no access to education even though there were boys' schools nearby," he remarked. Under the Children Global Network Pakistan's programme, over 300 youth from urban and rural areas of Swabi, Mardan in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, have been trained. Mehnaz, one of the programme leaders said they trained youth to open, run or be part of low-cost private schools. "Firstly, my parents would not allow me to participate in the programme and we also received threats but the experience changed my life dramatically. I'm now running a school in my area with support from locals," said Inaz Begum, a trainer from Mardan who shared her story enthusiastically.

Children are either not going to school or if they are, they are not learning anything. As a result, they are not equipped with the tools required to succeed in the 21st century. To address this issue, Power 99 FM radio channel has also started a programme, Broad Class-Listen to Learn for kindergarten and grade one in English and Mathematics in Haripur, Vehari and Islamabad. In this programme four characters teach students in 45 minutes basic words such as commands, actions, colors and modes of transport. Fakhra Najeem, who is a part of the project, stated that they were in talks with schools of Federal Directorate of Education to expand the programme. "Now we are also branching out in regional languages."

Ilm Ideas, a programme funded by UKaid, supports and funds innovators who develop solutions for issues like poor quality of education in schools, high drop-out rates and teacher absenteeism. Zehra Zaidi, team leader for the Ilm Ideas programme stated that the projects aims to improve education for over 70,000 children and will eventually grow to benefit many more." Education adviser at UKaid-Pakistan, Atif Rafique said, "It is important that the lessons we learn as a result of implementing these innovations are adopted by the government." Tele Taleem team shared their project in remote areas of KP-Ilm on Wheels by giving access to children through online learning content through a satellite-enabled mobile van. Sarah from Family Educational Services Foundation shared idea to help hearing-impaired teens through development of a standard Pakistan Sign Language including visual dictionary, a book, and a mobile phone app.

The Express Tribune - March 13, 2014

Pakistan Needs To Take Steps to Fight Climatic Change

Oxfam has called for action to tackle the climate change to ensure that everyone has enough to eat and enjoys a safer climate. Climate change is already affecting the farmers in Pakistan and is set to devastate their ability to grow food if left unchecked. A time when people are already facing hunger and the demand for food is rising, the unpredictable and extreme weather in Pakistan and around the world threatens the production and the nutritional value of both the crops and livestock. The human health is at risk and the food prices are likely to rise. The speakers and the panelists highlighted these facts during Oxfam's event on 'Resilience and Climate Change' held on Wednesday. The panelists emphasized that there is a strong need to realize that the climate change is one of the major factors for the rise in temperatures, intense rains, droughts and production losses in the agriculture sector. Oxfam's Country Director in Pakistan Arif Jabbar said: "Climate change is a real threat to the food production but it is within our power to ensure that everyone's right to food is ensured.

Urgent action is needed to build the resilience of the food system by helping farmers to adapt to the changing weather while at the same time requesting the government and the companies to cut their emissions." In Pakistan, the devastating flood in 2010 destroyed over 570,000 hectares of farmland in Punjab, affecting more than 20 million people and destroying 80 percent of the food reserves. The climatic models have already predicted more floods in Pakistan. According to Iftikhar A Nizami, Oxfam Pakistan, the flood caused a massive 75% reduction in the total income of the families who were affected. Extreme weather conditions associated with the climate change are causing heavy pressure on land and the water resources which is likely to get worse in the near future if these issues are left unchecked. According to a World Bank study, western Himalayan glaciers would retreat for the next 50 years causing increase in Indus River flows. Then the glacier reservoirs will be empty, resulting in decrease of flows by up to 30%. Both of these scenarios are posing serious threats to livelihoods of the people.

However, there is still time, knowledge and resources to improve the situation. In Pakistan, Oxfam and its local partners in the coastal belt of Sindh have shown that the adaptation is possible with better planning, effective and efficient utilization of resources and active participation of communities. The fishing communities in Badin have restored their livelihood with participatory planning, involvement of government and adaptation measures including construction of an embankment. The embankment has resulted in reviving of the livelihoods, protection against cyclones and floods, thus ensuring food security for them. Oxfam shared this on the same day when the research from the BBC media action revealed opinions and experiences of ordinary people on the frontline of the climate change.

Daily Times - March 13, 2014

Country Needs More Investment in Water, Sanitation Sector: Study by WaterAid

On an average Pakistan received a paltry amount of Rs. 53 in water and sanitation aid for each of its citizens between 2010 and 2012, said a report released by international development charity WaterAid. According to the report, 15.1 million Pakistanis (9 per cent of the population) do not have access to drinking water and those who have are often forced to drink contaminated water. In 2010, Pakistan was provided \$221m in aid for the sector. It has now been put on the map of developing countries most in need of investment in water and sanitation, according to the report entitled "Bridging the Divide". In Pakistan 92.8m (53pc of the population) do not have access to improved sanitation facilities and nearly 23pc (40m) of the total population defecate in the open. Pakistan will miss its MDG target for sanitation.

International aid remains a key element in the fight against water and sanitation poverty, because it complements household and national government resources. The most recent data confirm that fall in 2010 and 2011 in global aid for water and sanitation from countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) were reversed in 2012. Japan has consistently, and by some margin, been the largest donor to the sector over recent years, providing an annual average of \$2.1 billion between 2010 and 2012. Major increases in aid from the World Bank through the International Development Association (IDA) from Germany, the EU and France have meant that for the first time commitments for water and sanitation sector have reached more than \$10bn.

Despite this increase to \$10.7bn in 2012, most other DAC donors still allocate relatively low priority to water, sanitation and hygiene. Between 2002 and 2012, DAC donors made annual commitments with an aggregate total of \$81.2bn. They only released \$53.6bn, however, leaving a shortfall of \$27.6bn over the 11-year period. The report says the consistent annual shortfall may be a result of donors failing to follow through on commitments, unmet conditionality,

corruption concerns, financial absorption and capacity issues in developing countries, consistency between government accounting codes or categories and those tracked by DAC, or gaps in reporting.

Dawn - March 23, 2014

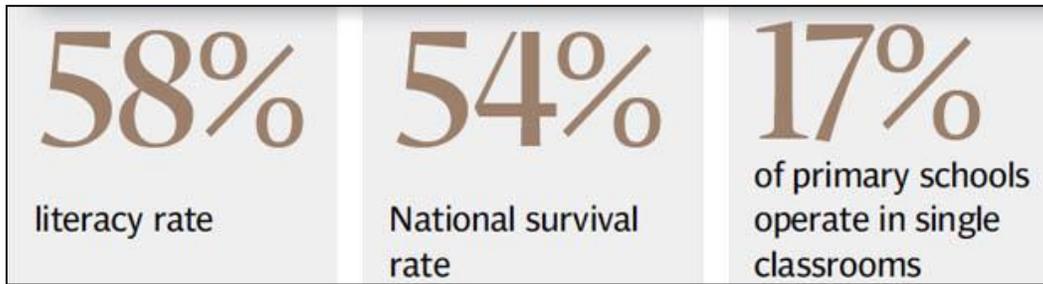
Pakistan Education Atlas 2013: Education Survey Reveals Mixed Bag of Results

For the last few years, Pakistan's adult literacy rate has stagnated at 58% – almost half the country's adult population is unable to read or write. The figure is not surprising when you consider that only 50% of the country's rural population has ever attended school; the number is higher for urban populations, at 73%. According to the Pakistan Education Atlas 2013, launched on Tuesday, improvement in the education sector moves at a snail's pace, with 32% of children aged 5-9 years out of school. 17% of primary schools consist of a single room.

PROVINCE	Survival % to grade 5	Gender wise survival %		Primary to middle transition	Schools with single teacher
		Boys	Girls		
Punjab	56	56	55	87	17
Islamabad	96	93	97	100	0
K-P	64	71	57	72	21
FATA	48	56	36	61	10
Balochistan	43	45	39	67	58
Gilgit-Baltistan	95	89	99	89	36
Sindh	43	44	41	59	45
AJK	65	66	63	69	6

It's not all grim news, though – 91% of girls make it from primary school to middle school (higher than the number of boys, at 78%). State Minister for Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education Balighur Rehman formally launched the report on Tuesday and reiterated the government's pledge to improve education in the country. Even though education has been devolved to provinces, he said, they 'have agreed to the constitution of a National Curriculum Commission to bring the education system on the same page across Pakistan'. Speaking at the launch, World Food Programme Representative and Country Director in Pakistan Lola Castro said the WFP had contributed to the report as it wished to 'support and promote this important educational undertaking' in the country.

According to the report, almost seven million children are out of primary schools in the country. "The quality of education across multiple levels is also lagging by most standards," the report states. Some provinces fare relatively better than others in the education sector, with a 'survival rate' – the percentage of students completing primary school education – of 96% in Islamabad Capital Territory and a robust 95% in Gilgit-Baltistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa clocks in at 64%. The number is lowest in Balochistan and Sindh – 43% each. Survival rates in Punjab stand at 56%, 48% in Fata.



From Primary to Middle School

The results are encouraging with regards to the number of students able to reach middle school in Pakistan, particularly in Fata, where the number has crept up from 44% in 2010 to 61% this year. 100% of Islamabad students make it to middle school and 87% in Punjab. The number stands at 89% in G-B, 72% in K-P, 69% in Azad Jammu Kashmir and 67% in Balochistan. Sindh has the lowest number of students reaching middle-school level, at 59%.

Poor Grade

Students in 64% of primary schools in the country have access to drinking water – in Azad Jammu Kashmir, the number plummets to 27%. In Islamabad, 185 schools out of 191 have access to clean water. Meanwhile, 49% of government primary schools have electricity. Of more than 10,000 schools in Balochistan, only 1,662 schools are provided with electricity. Furthermore, only 58% of schools in the country have facilities for toilets – only 2,000 schools in Balochistan provided such access to students. When State Minister for Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education Balighur Rehman was questioned about the report's findings, he said a 188-billion rupee National Plan of Action has been earmarked over three years to target out-of-school children and missing facilities in schools across the country.

The Express Tribune - March 26, 2014

Health Projects

Health Reports/Controls

High Time Anti-Dengue Campaign Starts

Anti-dengue campaign has not been started so far in the city despite heavy showers reportedly owing to staffs' engagement in anti-polio campaign. Sources said anti-dengue campaign was not being focused because it had to be run out of local funding while polio campaign was being run on foreign funding. Statistics reveal that one anti-polio phase had been completed against funds ranging between Rs 7 million and Rs 7.5 million in which every member of polio team was paid Rs 1,000. As many as 1,763 teams were formed during the last phase of the anti-polio campaign. A sum of Rs 352,600 was paid to all the polio teams. Foreign funding is stated to be the main reason for non-accomplishment of anti-polio campaign in time. In anti-dengue campaign, all the funding, medicines and machinery is provided by the government of Punjab, therefore it could not be started in time during the last year and this year the campaign is facing the same hurdle. The citizens have demanded for launching anti dengue campaign immediately before this fatal epidemic starts claiming lives.

Pakistan Today - March 13, 2014

Pakistan Fifth Among TB High-Burden Countries

Tuberculosis is one of the major public health problems and Pakistan is said to have the fourth highest prevalence of multi drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) globally. Talking to the media on the eve of the World Tuberculosis Day, Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre's infectious disease consultant Dr Ashraf Ali Khan urged the government and the public as well to help curb the TB through maximum awareness. The world TB Day was also observed in the provincial capital where a number of public and private sector health institutions and NGOs arranged activities to sensitize the public about the impact of the disease and its preventive measures. "Pakistan ranks fifth amongst TB high-burden countries worldwide. It accounts for 61pc of the TB burden in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region," Dr Khan said. He said at least 420,000 new TB cases emerged every year and half of them were sputum smear positive.

Crowded living compounded by mass immigration, poverty and poor nutrition was quite challenging in developing countries. These social factors led to spread of tuberculosis, he said. Dr Khan said tuberculosis was an infectious bacterial disease caused by mycobacterium tuberculosis, which most commonly affected the lungs. "It is transmitted from person to person via air from throat and lungs of the people with an active respiratory disease. In healthy people, infection with mycobacterium tuberculosis often causes no symptoms since the person's immune system acts to "wall off" the bacteria. Symptoms of active TB of the lung are coughing, sometimes with sputum or blood, chest pain, weakness, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Tuberculosis mostly affects young adults in their most productive years. However, all age groups are at risk. Over 95pc of cases and deaths are in developing countries. It is treatable with a six-to-nine month course of antibiotics," he said. He said standard anti-TB drugs had been used for decades, and resistance to medicines was growing. "Multi drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) is a form of TB caused by bacteria that do not respond to first-line (or standard) anti-TB drugs. The primary cause of MDR-TB is inappropriate treatment.

Inappropriate or incorrect use of anti-TB drugs, or use of poor quality medicines, can cause drug resistance in developing countries like Pakistan. Tuberculosis can be activated, if present in the dormant state in the body, by any immune-compromising illness, including cancer. The MDR-TB is treatable and curable by using second-line drugs. However, second-line treatment options are limited and recommended medicines are not always available. The extensive chemotherapy required (up to two years of treatment) is more costly and can produce severe adverse drug reactions in patients. People should know that TB is curable provided one is getting proper information, precise drug supervision and support from society," Dr Ashraf Khan concluded. Meanwhile, addressing a seminar at a local hotel, Adviser to Chief Minister on Health Khwaja Salman Rafiq said the mortality due to tuberculosis in Punjab had been reduced by 53pc which was a great success of the Punjab TB Control Programme. The seminar was organized by Punjab TB Control Programme, Health Department.

Dawn News - March 25, 2014

ENERGY CRISIS

Government's Role in Oil and Gas & Energy Crisis

12 Hour Power Cuts Are Back

Along with summers comes twelve-hour load shedding to torment the country as the mercury hovered around the thirties in southern Punjab and Sindh while plants with a combined capacity of over 3,000MW remained idle for one reason or the other. Power generation remained restricted to around 8,800MW for the better part of the day and touched 10,000MW during peak hours (from 6pm to 11pm), leaving a gap ranging between 4,000MW and 5,000MW. Planners were left with no option but to enforce 10-12 hour load management in major cities. According to an official of the National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC), the demand during the day was around 13,000MW. The peak hours added 1,500MW during the evening. The generation, however, was much lower for a variety of reasons. An instant increase in demand came because of the rising temperatures in Sindh and southern Punjab.

Karachi recorded a maximum temperature of 35 degrees Celsius, Hyderabad 32 degrees and Larkana 29. Even Bahawalpur and D.G. Khan went close to 30 degrees Celsius. People in these areas have switched their fans on and, in some cases, even air conditioners. It has added to the demand around 3,000MW instantly. On the other hand, plants of over 2,000MW though available but remained idle because they are neither getting oil nor gas for the last many days, even weeks in some cases. Even available ones were not being run while plants of around 1,000MW were on routine maintenance. "This gap could have widened grossly had provinces not drawing water heavily to save their standing crops," says an official of the NTDC. They are getting around 80,000 cusecs, which are released during the peak hours to generate additional electricity. The power planners fear the worst to come in the coming days, as both dams were depleting fast and may hit the dead level in a week's time, leaving the entire generation to a paltry run-of-the-river flows and widen the gap between demand and supply.

Pakistan Electric Power Company (PEPCO), along with all generation and distribution arms, is preparing for the worst summer for a number of reasons - declining recoveries, mismanagement at the top level, receding writ of the state and un-dependable generation. Of all the mismanagement, the top cause is that none of the companies operating in the sector has professional management. All of them are being run by ad hoc heads who are more interested in saving their jobs and pleasing bosses than concentrating on their work. Ever since the present government took over, its campaign against theft has been a stupendous failure. The bill recoveries have dropped to 86 percent. The tariff issues in AJK and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa still persist. None of the heads of any power company has been appointed. All these factors are haunting the sector and would continue till government shows serious commitment to the sector.

Dawn - March 09, 2014

Early-Harvest Projects to Produce 22,000MW within Seven Years

The government has signed early-harvest energy generation projects with China to produce 22,000MW of electricity within the next five to seven years, Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal said. "The government is focused to overcome the development lag witnessed after Musharraf," said Iqbal, adding that the government is trying its best to turn the

political Sino-Pak relationship into an economic one and boost Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Pakistan. To further strengthen the economic bound between the two countries, Iqbal said, Pakistan has signed agreements with the Chinese for the development of the Karakoram Highway, construction of six lane Mansehra-Islamabad and Lahore-Karachi Motorways. The construction of a modern airport in Gwadar, linking Gwadar's deep seaport with the rest of the country is also part of the plan, he added. "Pakistan will become the connecting bridge of North-South and East-West in the region and play a pivotal role in regional connectivity and development." "The development projects of Gwadar and Gaddani will end the deprivation of the people of Balochistan and herald a new era of prosperity and economic development for them," Iqbal said. Similarly, Thar Coal power generation project will change the fate of the people of Sindh, the minister said while speaking at the second session of International Marketing Congress.

Ahsan Iqbal went on add that the vision of the PML-N government is to bring an industrial revolution in Sindh through Thar coal, which could generate electricity for the next 200 years. "Poverty, unemployment, law and order, hopelessness and energy shortage are the main challenges faced by the government and the PML-N is committed to turn these tides during the next five years," he said. The government is focused on producing and exporting items which are required in the international market, said Iqbal. "The government has adopted an outward approach for export led growth model to achieve our target." He urged the media to play its role in creating a positive image of Pakistan. "Extremists only make up one per cent of our country so the media should only give them one per cent of their total airtime. The rest of the time should be dedicated to highlighting positive things happening in our country as well as criticism on the government's wrongdoings." He went on to add that there would be a sea change in Pakistan if the media boycotted coverage of extremists for the next six months. Talking about Vision 2025, Iqbal said that it was in its final stages and the government had invited the Marketing Association of Pakistan to submit suggestions on branding. "We will include a chapter with the title 'Branding Pakistan' in the Vision 2025 and for this the marketing people of this committee will submit their suggestions," he added.

The News - March 11, 2014

Government Raises Electricity Tariff By Rs. 2 per Unit

The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) recommended hefty increase in power tariff by Rs 2.1916 per Kwh for the consumers of eight WAPDA distribution companies. The proposed increase in power tariff seeks to increase the power tariff slab of Rs 9.548 per Kwh to Rs 11.77 per Kwh for the consumers, for the month of January based on automatic fuel adjustment. However, this increase would not be applicable to consumers of the Karachi Electric Supply Corporation. Total generation amounted to Rs 6,196.56 Gwh worth Rs 72.974 billion requiring the power tariff to be jacked up to Rs 11.77 per Kwh from existing Rs 9.584 per Kwh, revealed the NEPRA decision officially released for seeking public comments or grievances against this decision. The power regulator has announced this increase in power tariff on the request of the power distribution companies seeking fuel adjustment for the month of January 2014 and power consumers would be bearing the additional burden in their power bills for the next month. According to the official sources, rising prices of generation fuels like furnace oil, diesel coupled with depreciation of Pak rupee against US dollar in the month of January and rising distribution, line losses and power theft were the main causes for seeking this massive increase in power tariff.

Daily Times - March 14, 2014

Hague Summit: Nawaz Makes Case for Civil Nuclear Energy

“Energy deficit is one of the most serious crises facing Pakistan,” PM Nawaz told delegates at the third Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague. “As we revive our economy, we look forward to international cooperation and assistance for nuclear energy under IAEA safeguards,” he said. Leaders from 53 countries, US, EU, International Atomic Energy Agency and Interpol are attending the nuclear summit. The prime minister also called for Pakistan’s inclusion in all international export control regimes, especially the Nuclear Suppliers Group. International treaties and forums, according to him, should supplement national actions to fortify nuclear security. At the same time he reiterated “the highest importance” that his country attached to nuclear security because it was directly linked to the country’s national security. The prime minister paid tribute to US President Barack Obama for launching the nuclear security summit process four years ago. Pakistan has been running a safe, secure and safeguarded civil nuclear programme for more than 40 years and the country has the expertise, manpower and infrastructure to produce civil nuclear energy.

Eminently Qualified

Pakistan’s nuclear security is supported by five pillars – a strong command and control system led by the National Command Authority; an integrated intelligence system; a rigorous regulatory regime; a comprehensive export control regime; and active international cooperation. Pakistan’s security regime covers physical protection, material control and accounting, border controls and radiological emergencies. Pakistan is a party to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and worked closely with the IAEA to deal with safety and security of radioactive sources and illicit trafficking of nuclear materials. The prime minister said Pakistan regularly submitted reports to the UN Security Council 1540 Committee on the measures the country has taken to exercise control over transfer of sensitive materials and technologies.

“Looking back, we can say with confidence that our decisions and commitments have spurred national action, promoted international cooperation and fostered nuclear security culture,” the prime minister said, adding that Pakistan has constructively contributed to this process. He said Pakistan’s nuclear materials, facilities and assets were safe and secure and the country’s nuclear security regime was anchored in the principle of multi-layered defense for the entire spectrum – insider, outsider or cyber threat. Islamabad has established a centre of excellence that conducts intense specialized courses in nuclear security, physical protection and personnel reliability, he said, adding that Pakistan was ready to share its best practices and training facilities with other interested states in the region and beyond.

Dealing with Radiological Threats

He said his country had also deployed radiation detection mechanisms at several exit and entry points to prevent illicit trafficking of radioactive and nuclear materials. Similarly, he said, all countries should continue to take measures to secure their nuclear facilities and materials and prevent any perceived nuclear terrorist threat. “We all need radioactive sources for hospitals, industry and research; but should be vigilant about radiological threats,” he added.

The Express Tribune - March 25, 2014

Government to Raise Rs. 235 Billion from Power, Gas Tariff Hike

The government plans to raise additional revenues of Rs. 235 billion through increases in electricity and gas tariff in the next budget in accordance with an understanding with the

International Monetary Fund to take further steps for fiscal consolidation. This will be part of additional fiscal adjustments amounting to between Rs340 billion and Rs400 billion that the government has pledged to take under the IMF's \$6.8 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The overall cost of the fiscal consolidation effort has been estimated by the government at about Rs595 billion per year that the finance minister committed to achieve over two years through a combination of revenue addition and expenditure control. "In the context of the fiscal year 2014-15 budget we will further rationalize subsidies by roughly 0.4 per cent of GDP. We will undertake additional action in the fiscal year 2015-16 to reach a maximum of 0.3 per cent of GDP thereafter," says the memorandum of economic and financial policies (MEFP) submitted by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar to the IMF.

An official said this meant a power tariff increase in 2014-15 to generate Rs120 billion at an estimated GDP size of Rs29.7 trillion. The government said it was preparing the third round of three-year subsidy plan to bring tariff to cost recovery level. "We will finalize details of this round by end-April 2014 based on the fiscal year 2013-14 tariff notification. We have already incorporated the cost of servicing the syndicated term credit finance facility into the tariff petition," said the MEFP. The IMF said the increase in the gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC) and higher than envisaged quantities was expected to deliver additional revenue of around 0.36 per cent of annualized GDP. The government said it had already reached closer to 0.4 per cent of GDP with a recent notification after the Supreme Court rescinded a stay against GIDC, thus helping the government to actually retrieve the tax for the full financial year.

Finance Minister undertook in his letter of intent to the IMF to "continue to work on a comprehensive gas price rationalization plan". This has been necessitated by about 300 per cent increase in gas producer prices allowed under the recently announced petroleum exploration policy and also to factor-in expected import of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) later this year at a cost expected to be more than 500 times the current domestic producer prices. "As new production and additional gas supply from imports come on line, the cost of this gas will be fully reflected in the base tariff on a semi-annual basis, beginning with the next adjustment in end-March 2014," said the government in the MEFP. It said it was also considering unbundling the two gas utilities to introduce efficiency in gas transmission and distribution system under a market-based mechanism.

Moreover, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has also identified a series of statutory regulatory orders (SRO) for elimination in the coming budget to yield about 0.35 per cent of GDP (about Rs105 billion). The overall cost of tax exemptions under such SROs is estimated at about Rs480 billion but most of it will be protected in the new budget. The IMF has, however, demanded that additional revenue from the broadening of tax base, including SRO elimination, would need to total at least 0.5-0.75 per cent (Rs148 billion to Rs225 billion) of GDP per year over the next two years in order to achieve the fiscal consolidation targets without increasing tax rates.

Dawn - March 31, 2014

REGIONAL WATCH**Pakistan & United States****Obama Seeks \$1bn for Pakistan in 2015 Budget**

The Obama administration is seeking one billion dollars for Pakistan in its budget proposals for fiscal 2015, which were sent to Congress. The \$3.9 trillion budget package includes \$46.2 billion to fund the State Department and US Agency for International Development. US assistance for other countries, including Pakistan and Afghanistan, comes from this fund. Although the requests for these two government agencies reflect a 0.2 per cent decrease from 2014, the administration maintains funding for many of its key priorities and also seeks a sizeable increase in funds for Syria. The budget proposals set aside \$5.1bn for programmes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. This too is a significant reduction from previous years. Experts appearing on various US television channels attributed this to the Obama administration's plan to reduce its military engagement in Afghanistan and the end of war in Iraq. The \$1bn sought for Pakistan includes \$280 million for supporting Pakistani security forces. The rest is economic assistance.

The Obama administration is seeking \$2.6bn for operations in Afghanistan and \$1.5bn for Iraq, including \$250m to support the Iraqi military. A document released by the White House describes "responsible transition" from "military missions to political and security support for a unified Afghanistan government" as one of the administration's main goals in 2015. The United States plans to withdraw most of its troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year but intends to keep a small residual force if Kabul signs a bilateral security agreement. In its budget note, the White House says that it wants the Afghan government to take "full responsibility for its own future" as the US withdraws. The \$1.5bn requested for Syria will be used to help Syrian refugees and moderate opposition forces trying to defeat President Bashar al-Assad.

The spending plan asks Congress for \$1.5bn to support democratic transitions in the Middle East and North Africa as well as to ease the humanitarian crisis in Syria. It would set aside \$400m to support an anticipated transition in Syria. The Pentagon has requested \$496bn for 2015 budget, which does not include money for operations in Afghanistan. The war-funding measure is being delayed because the Afghan government has not signed a security pact. Despite US troop levels in Afghanistan falling 40 per cent between 2013 and 2014, the Pentagon's spending request did not decline much. The Pentagon requested \$88.5bn in 2013 and Congress approved \$85bn in 2014, adding \$5bn to the request.

Dawn - March 05, 2014

Pakistan & India**India Agrees To Export 500MW Power to Pakistan**

Pakistan and India have agreed to form a joint working committee to finalize a 500MW electricity project after a successful visit of a Pakistani delegation to India this week, according to sources in the ministry of water and power. Ministry sources, told that Pak delegation has come back after having successful talks with Indian counterparts in New Delhi. The two sides agreed to constitute a joint working committee to resolve the matters related to technical, commercial, construction and regulatory issues involved in import of 500MW electricity from

India. During the two-day technical talks held on March 5 and 6, India expressed its willingness to follow the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which was earlier approved by the federal cabinet of Pakistan, and agreed to supply electricity with high-voltage, direct current (HV, DC) system via Wahga to Lahore, they added. "After finalizing the nitty-gritty of proposed 500MW power import from India, power ministry would seek final approval from the federal cabinet to bring power to Pakistan", a senior official at power ministry said. He also said that formal signing of an agreement regarding power trade would be made in near future.

Pakistan is facing severe energy shortages and had sought as much as 500MW electricity from India through a transmission line from Indian Punjab to Lahore. The incumbent government is very keen on importing power from the neighboring country. Initially, 500MW power would be imported from India and the quantum would be expanded later on. Pakistan is already purchasing electricity from western neighbor Iran. Pakistan's four-member delegation comprising experts of water and power ministry went to New Delhi on March 4. The delegation was led by Additional Secretary Sohail Akber Shah and included Joint Secretary (Power) Zargham Khan, NTDC (National Transmission Dispatch Company) Planning Division General Manager Rehan Shafiq and NTDC Deputy Director Muhammad Wasim. It is learnt that Grid Corporation of India Limited would construct the interconnection falling in Indian side while National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) would construct the Pakistani part of the required transmission system. Both countries would finance the cost of infrastructure to be established in their respective territories.

Energy experts, when contacted, said that viewing current enormous power shortfall being faced by India, it has become necessary to get government guarantee from New Delhi for sustained and smooth supply of power to Pakistan. They feared that India might not be ready to export demanded (500MW) electricity to Pakistan due to widening gap between supply and demand of power. In August, Indian and Pakistani experts had agreed to conduct feasibility studies and identify points for the proposed import of electricity. Later on, the World Bank (WB) funded pre-feasibility and also worked out the delivered cost of electricity to be imported from India at 10-11 US cents per unit. However, the feasibility study would be done after the experts of both the government finalize the issues relating to the system compatibility and the points of transmitting the electricity from India and receiving the electricity in Pakistan. Reportedly, one interconnection would be established in the suburbs of Wagha/Attari border and it would be on 400 kV DC or 500 kV DC depending on the joint determination of experts of NTDC and Grid Corporation of India Limited. The interconnection would run on 22 kV AC in the beginning phase but would convert to DC on commissioning of back-to-back converter station.

The Nation - March 08, 2014

How Modi Will Impact India and Pakistan

As the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leads the electoral race the specter of Narendra Modi becoming the prime minister of India is beginning to haunt many - not necessarily in India. Pakistanis are more concerned as they know Modi mostly through bad news. Most Pakistanis hold him responsible for Gujarat riots in 2002. Questions lurk about how Modi will impact India's secularism; if he will escalate tension between India and Pakistan and roll back the existing confidence-building measures; how he might resort to jingoism in Kashmir, interfere in Balochistan or restart a proxy war in Afghanistan. But not all Pakistanis think the same way. Tiny Pakistani intellectual elite also sees better chance of détente under a strong BJP leader than was possible under a weak Manmohan Singh. This duality of views was reflected in the recently

held India-Pakistan Track-11 dialogue, organized jointly by Sherry Rehman's Jinnah Institute and Rajmohan Gandhi's pacifist Centre for Reconciliation and Dialogue in New Delhi.

Kashmiri participants believed that Modi would appease RSS cadres by escalating tensions in Kashmir. The BJP supremo may reverse the ongoing peace initiatives with Pakistan. However, some like businessman Rakesh Vaid opined that India's foreign policy rested on sound institutional framework and it would not be easy for Modi or anybody to change it drastically. Other participants did not rule out the possibility of a "Nixon moment" if Modi came to power. The reference was about US President Nixon's visit to Peking to break ice with China in 1974 (though this heightened the Cold War with the former USSR). The argument was that, in recent decades, the best peace initiatives with Pakistan were taken by the BJP. Vajpayee's symbolic visit to the site of Pakistan Resolution at Minar-i-Pakistan in Lahore was meaningful. And so was Advani's homage to Jinnah's mausoleum in Karachi. Still others argued that Corporate India has invested heavily in Modi and would like him to maintain peace so that business could flourish.

Not so easy, says senior journalist Vinod Sharma. He believes that if Modi will try to re-invent himself the RSS will not allow him to drift away from core issues. "Modi will have to be a Trapeze artist to appease the two opposing camps," he said, adding that Modi is sandwiched between his gung-ho rhetoric and the practical compulsions that will come with the job. The middle way is that Modi will adopt a gradual approach. He will first consolidate himself before risking any change. He may not have problem with trade initiatives with Pakistan but will not touch the core issues in the earlier years of his government. If there is no repeat of Mumbai-style attack, that is. Most Indians agree that the reaction of the BJP government to a major subversive attack from across the border will be much more drastic. BJP leader Subraminiam Swami did not mince any words about this: "If one Mumbai happens, you can rest assured that a BJP government will react by (orchestrating) six Mumbais." Scary, isn't it. This might be a little far-fetched but any major Pakistani provocation will be a sure dead-ender for years in Modi Raj.

A lot will depend on how many seats BJP will win and who will be its allies in a coalition government. A weak coalition will keep him as compromised as Manmohan Singh. Modi's biggest plank is development and good governance. He is supposed to be a 'doer' who will bring back the Indian economy on track. "Indian youth sees in him an iron man, more in the fashion of Margerate Thatcher," said journalist Rahul Pandita. "This support is not necessarily because of Hinduvta." Modi's reputation of a good administrator will be tested in a coalition government. It was easier in Gujarat because he always had a majority government. Delhi Sarkar will be a different ballgame. The compulsions of a coalition government might pose the biggest challenge to a unilateralist Modi. The problem has compounded in recent years with the states' ever-growing autonomy, almost bordering on interference in external affairs. A case in point came up when West Bengal's chief minister Mamta Bannerji stalled India's border treaty with Bangladesh. Tamil Nadu's chief minister Jayalalita went a step ahead in pressuring New Delhi to castigate Sri Lanka for not investigating war crimes against Tamils.

So far the BJP offers no policy, as it will shape up only after coalition partners are decided. But one can see the contours of Modi's leanings here and there. He may have moderated his tone lately but the appeal for Hinduvta remains the crux. Many see subliminal message in selecting Varanasi (Benaras) as Modi's constituency. Some see it as a spiritual journey from Somnath (in Gujarat) to the shrine of Sarnath near Varanasi. This invokes the Hinduvta underpinnings in Kashi. One will not be surprised if the controversy of Alamgiri Mosque heats up again. The mosque remains under siege as the next target after Babri Masjid. The fact that the BJP has not given a single ticket to a Muslim in UP, which has 12 per cent Muslim population has compounded the communal moorings of the party.

Therein lays the biggest concern about Modi Raj. The BJP had to replace Advani with Vajpayee to reassure Indian voters and coalition partners about its moderation. But this time around Advani has been replaced by a bigger zealot. Pakistan does not have high hopes from a possible Modi Sarkar - definitely not in near future. Given a chance, Modi may not have time to wait on Pakistan. The first test will come soon as US draws down its forces in Afghanistan. If India and Pakistan did not forge unity in their policies, as agreed by most participants in the JI-CDF dialogue, this will restart another proxy war that might misdirect the whole agenda.

The News - March 26, 2014

Pakistan & Afghanistan

Election Observers Pull Foreign Staff Out Of Afghanistan after Hotel Attack

Two major foreign election observer and support missions have pulled staff out of Afghanistan after a Taliban attack on a Kabul hotel, observers said, in a move which could undermine confidence in the outcome of the crucial vote. The April 5 vote is less than two weeks away and could mark the country's first democratic transfer of power. Many fear a repeat of the widespread fraud that discredited the poll in 2009 when about 20 percent of votes were thrown out. "It's really bad news," said Jandad Spingar, director at the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan, the largest Afghan monitoring group. "Having international observers in the election are really, really important... (to) give legitimacy to the process." The National Democratic Institute (NDI) said it had pulled its observers from the country, while a senior European diplomat said observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) had been pulled out to Turkey. The European Union's international monitoring mission will be the only major one to remain in Afghanistan after the Taliban attacked the heavily fortified Serena Hotel in central Kabul, where most foreign observers were staying. "We have withdrawn our staff that was staying at the Serena, and we are assessing our election monitoring activities," said Kathy Gest, public affairs director at NDI. NDI observer Luis Maria Duarte was among the nine people killed and many of his colleagues were in the building when four gunmen with pistols sprayed diners at the hotel's restaurant with bullets.

Daily Times - March 24, 2014
