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GOVERNANCE WATCH

National Assembly & Senate

Amendment in PPC: Senate Clears Legislation against Grave Desecration

The upper house of parliament unanimously passed a law, making the desecration of graves or bodies a cognizable offence punishable by life in prison. "If any person without sanction of lawful authority digs up and in any way desecrates a grave, steals, damages, removes or in any way physically violates a body which is in or stolen from a grave shall, if found guilty of such an offence, be liable to punishment of life imprisonment," says the draft of the law passed by the Senate. A new section has been added to Clause 297 of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), 1860 – the statutory laws introduced during the colonial British era and adopted later after the partition with certain amendments. This has been done in order to check growing incidents of desecration of bodies and graves. Interestingly, the legislation came on a private members' day and was moved by Muttahida Qaumi Movement's Col (retd) Tahir Hussain Mashhadi. It will be now sent to the National Assembly for a vote. To transform draft legislation into law it needs to be adopted by both houses of parliament before the president signs it into an act.

There have been growing incidents of stealing, selling and removing parts of bodies. In some cases graves were also desecrated by religious fanatics and other criminal gangs. Back in December 2011, Senator Mashhadi had introduced the bill, which was referred to the Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs for consideration. Tagged as "The Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Bill, 2011," the legislation was deliberated by the Senate panel in several committee meetings. The committee unanimously approved the draft and noted that there was a dire need to formulate a stringent law to safeguard the sanctity of dead bodies. In addition, the Protection of Cyber Crimes Bill, 2014, laid before the house by Senator Karim Ahmad Khwaja, was referred to the standing committee when State Minister Anusha Rehman said the government already had a similar bill in the cabinet. Another bill seeking amendment to the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010 that aims to allot powers similar to the Federal Ombudsman and Federal Tax Ombudsman to the Woman Ombudsman was also introduced and sent to the select committee.

The Express Tribune - May 13, 2014

BALUCHISTAN WATCH**Governance Watch****Maternal Health: A First or a Final Journey for Some Babies in Balochistan**

The journey goes one of two ways: if they are lucky, the babies have a bumpy ride into the world or, in some cases, they perish with their mothers. In the absence of healthcare facilities in some districts of Balochistan, some pregnant women are forced to deliver their babies on donkey carts, the jolts from the ride hastening their labour. "Pregnant women are made to climb onto a donkey cart with the help of male members of the family, who push the animal to walk on rugged terrain as the initial labour begins. The process comes to an end within a few minutes when the child is born with the jolts of the cart," explains Yasmeen Lehri, an MPA from the ruling National Party. Lehri says that as state-run hospitals remain out of bounds for those in districts such as Bolan or Turbat, the chances of reaching a basic gynecology department in order to give birth remain slim for most women. While these births are, according to Lehri, "exceptional cases when normal delivery is impossible", she adds that such practices cannot be tempered due to a lack of funds for the development of healthcare in the province.

According to the Pakistan Demographic Health Survey (PDHS 2012-2013), the proportion of mothers reporting that they received antenatal care from a skilled provider is markedly lower in Balochistan (31%) than in Punjab and Sindh (78% each). The maternal mortality rate, according to Lehri, is 800 of 100,000 women in parts of Balochistan. Additionally, a Unicef report this year revealed that for every 1,000 live births 111 children die before their fifth birthday in Balochistan; 97 of these children die within one year of their birth. A senior gynecologist who has served in different areas of Balochistan, Dr Robina Zammarrud, said such methods of delivery can lead to various complications, such as heavy bleeding, which may seriously threaten the life of the mother and child. She adds that most families avoid taking their pregnant women to doctors for pre-delivery consultation as they believe it 'disgraces' the pregnant female and family.

Although studies say that pregnant women must consult gynecologists for at least five of the nine months of pregnancy, this practice is largely absent in the province. "It is unfair to the pregnant woman, who is not allowed to have access to doctors during her pregnancy," said Dr Zammarrud. "About 70% of pregnant women are not permitted by their husbands to see gynecologists due to the stigma that it is a disgrace," she revealed. Most of these women are from rural parts of the province. Lehri says that for those women who manage to arrive at health centres to receive treatment, the quality of care offered leaves much to be desired. "I have observed that even in areas with the health centres, female gynecologists remain absent from their jobs, leaving pregnant women at the mercy of male nurses," she said. While provincial Home Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti says donkey carts have been used as ambulances for pregnant women in his native town of Dera Bugti for decades, Dr Zammarrud points out that the use of carts as ambulances can cause unnecessary delays, and increase the risk to pregnant women.

Sangeen Gichki, manager of the non-profit Strengthening Participatory Organization in the districts of Kech and Turbat, reiterated that male or female gynecologists are available only in the provincial capital and female health workers are not available in the rural areas, while mother and child care facilities are only available in a few major cities. While more than a hundred midwives live in Turbat, only 15 of them have been given delivery kits and medicines by the health department. Some women arrive at health care centres when their case has

progressed beyond the 'Dai or midwife's control. Dr Zammarrud, who hails from Mastung, said that many pregnant women die here due to high blood pressure because Dais are unable to control it during delivery. In many cases, the family only brings the pregnant woman to the hospital for delivery when the woman is about to die. Most doctors refuse treatment in such cases. "According to the law, an untrained dai can be prosecuted for handling such delivery cases," Dr Zammarrud said.

The Express Tribune - May 03, 2014

Political Empowerment: Fencing In the Women of Balochistan

While candidates for next month's mayoral elections in Balochistan come from across the political spectrum, they have one thing in common: they are all men. More than 11,000 councilors, including women, will elect the city mayors and chairmen of local governments in June, and leaders of the two ruling parties in the province, the Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) and National Party (NP) have ruled out any possibility of putting forward a female mayoral candidate. "We have not considered any proposal to nominate our female councilors to be inducted as mayor or chairman of any district," said Jan Buledi, spokesperson for the provincial government and leader of the NP. "I don't think women who are elected through indirect vote should have any desire to be elected district head of the local government," Buledi said.

One of the two female MPAs from the NP, Yasmin Lehri, points out, "Our indirect election to the provincial assembly is a cross for us as we are always told by party leaders that we cannot claim equal status with those directly elected." PkMAP Central Secretary General Akram Shah did not mince his words on the subject: "In the presence of these competent candidates, we cannot elect any female." The PkMAP and NP clinched more than half of the seats in the local bodies polls in December 2013. "PkMAP and NP will play a decisive role in the mayoral elections," said a senior official of the Balochistan Election Commission. "NP councilors will rule in local governments in the Baloch belt of the province while PkMAP councilors will control local governments in the Pashtun belt," he predicts.

Female Councilors and MPAs

There are more than 11,000 councilors in the province. Over 6,804 were elected in December 2013 through direct polls. This month, indirect polls will be held for 4,561 reserved seats. Of this, 1,505 seats are reserved for women. There are 12 women out of a total of 65 MPAs in the provincial assembly. Eleven or so are elected to reserved seats, while one is elected through direct vote. However, there is not a single female minister or adviser in the provincial cabinet. A male MPA, the PML-N's Izhar Khoso, serves as director of the provincial Department of Women Development.

Cabinet Positions

The discrimination against female councilors is not new. The four leading coalition parties here – the PML-N, PML-Q, PkMAP and NP – have not allocated a single cabinet office to any female members of the provincial assembly elected during the general elections. The PkMAP's Shah, whose party is represented by three female MPAs in the assembly, argued that constitutional provisions curb the election of any of these three women to a ministerial or advisory position. "After the 18th Amendment, we are not allowed to have more than 15 ministers and advisers in the cabinet," he says; there simply isn't room, it appears, for a woman's voice to be included in

the cabinet. Meanwhile, NP's Buledi rationalized his party's attitude towards female legislators thus: "The female MPAs are not entitled to be nominated for a cabinet office or mayoral status as they are elected MPA or councilor through indirect elections to reserved seats."

In Name Only

Each MPA is entitled to Rs. 280 million in orders to initiate development schemes in their constituency. However, PML-Q MPA Dr Ruquiya Hashmi alleges that the JUI-F and PkMAP have denied these funds to female MPAs. "Women's empowerment in Balochistan is merely a dream," she says. "I have been asking the PkMAP and NP to appoint at least one of their female MPAs to the provincial cabinet but to no avail," she says. Dr Hashmi points out that the PkMAP and PML-N have three female MPAs each, while the NP has two. None of these parties accommodated any of these women in the cabinet. "When they were on the opposition benches, leaders of the PkMAP and NP made tall claims about their fight for women's rights," she says.

Political Proxies

Meharunisa Aurangzeb, a former central vice-president of the Awami National Party (ANP) from Balochistan, says that political leaders forcibly prevent female family members from participating at political gatherings, as they consider this a 'disgrace'. "Almost all the women parliamentarians are spouses, daughters, sisters or close relatives of the male party leaders," she says, claiming these women serve as political proxies. "These female relatives are a source of funds for their male family members as they receive billions of rupees in development schemes," she says. "One can find many women in the provincial assembly, but almost all of them are puppets, not political workers."

Dissent

"Our party has disappointed women greatly due to its discriminatory policies," said a senior NP leader, speaking on the condition of anonymity, "We should have demonstrated a flexible attitude towards women." Meanwhile, the JUI-F is vocal in its opinion on the matter of female councilors. Its spokesperson Jan Achakzai says it's unfair to treat women as second-grade citizens. "Had the JUI-F been in a position, it would have nominated at least one female councilor for the position," he said.

The Express Tribune - May 09, 2014

Balochistan LG Elections: Councilors to Elect Women, Non-Muslim Members

Councilors in Balochistan are set to elect women and minority members for their respective councils, after a lapse of almost six months since the first phase of the local government (LG) elections was held in the province. A total of 2,332 women and 743 non-Muslim members will be elected on reserved seats for local councils throughout the province. Elected members from each local council in all districts will serve as the Electoral College for the elections on reserved seats. Under the Balochistan Local Government Act, four categories have been ascribed to reserved seats in each local council, namely women, peasants/workers, professional social workers and non-Muslims. Elections on two other reserved categories – peasants/workers and social workers – have been postponed after a Balochistan High Court (BHC) order. In its local government laws, the Balochistan assembly reserved a 33% quota for women and 5% quota for reserved seats in the other three categories. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on April

14 issued a notification for the election of members on reserved seats, but petitions challenging the allocated quotas were filed in the BHC. The petitioners contended that these quotas were disproportionate to the populations these groups have. On May 23, the BHC stayed polls for seats reserved for peasants and social workers. The ECP complied with the court orders and postponed polls for the two categories but decided to go ahead as planned for election for women and non-Muslim seats. So far Balochistan is the only province to hold LG elections. Polls for directly elected local government seats were held in December, last year. Some 7,169 councilors were elected on the general seats.

The Express Tribune - May 29, 2014

Second Phase of LB Polls in Balochistan Completed

The second phase of local bodies' elections was completed in Balochistan amid tight security with voting held for 1,082 seats reserved for Muslim women and 73 for minorities. The Pakhtunkhawa Milli Awami Party and Watan Dost panel claiming to have won a majority of seats in the Quetta Metropolitan Corporation. The panel has won 10 Muslim and two minority women seats. The elections were held for 20 seats. The Democratic Alliance, comprising the PML-N, the Balochistan National Party-Mengal, the Hazara Democratic Party, PTI and JUI-N, won eight seats. The announcement of results of the District Council Quetta was stopped when an extra vote was found in a ballot box. Nine members of the council, who were elected in the first phase of elections, cast their vote for three Muslim and one minority seats, but when ballot box was opened 10 votes, instead of nine, were found.

According to reports reaching here from various districts, different political parties and local alliances, including the PML-N, National Party, Balochistan National Party-M, JUI-F, Domki alliance and PkMAP and PML-Q, shared seats among themselves. Of the 2,332 seats reserved for Muslim women in 32 districts, 1,093 candidates had been elected unopposed. According to Provincial Election Commissioner Syed Sultan Bayizeed, 157 seats for women remained vacant in the province. Polling was held peacefully in the interior of the province with heavy contingents of police, Levies and Frontier Corps deployed at polling stations. In Gwadar, the National Party and the Balochistan National Party-M won majority of seats in the Gwadar District Council and Municipal Committee. The National Party got three Muslim and one minority seats and the BNP-M won three seats. The PML-N Nasim group clinched two seats and the Ashraf Hussain group and Jamaat-i-Islami one each.

In Dera Murad Jamali, the PML-N and its allies won 10 seats, the National Party two and Progressive panel one in the District Council Nasirabad. The Awam Dost Panel won seven seats and Taraqi Pasand Panel one seat of the Dera Murad Jamali Municipal Committee. In Khuzdar, the National Party won 5 seats, the PML-N two, BNP-Mengal, NBP-Awami and JUI-F one seat each in the Khuzdar Municipal Corporation. The Domki Group clinched 11 seats in the Sibi Municipal Committee. The remaining three seats were won by other candidates. Twelve women were elected unopposed on reserved seats in the Musakhel District Council and Municipal Committee. The Babaiay Chaghi Panel won three seats reserved for Muslim women and one minority seat in the District Council Chaghi. The Islami Taraqi Pasand Panel won two seats.

Dawn - May 30, 2014

POLITICAL & ELECTION WATCH

Political Parties

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

General Elections 2013: Imran Asks CJP to Take Suo Motu on 'Pre-Planned Rigging'

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman demanded the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP) take "suo motu action" against what he claimed was pre-planned rigging in the general election of May 11, 2013. Addressing a press conference, Imran Khan said the PTI accepted the election results just for the "sake of Pakistan and democracy", and announced "we will not accept the rigging". There are 60 cases pending with the election tribunal despite the fact that almost one year has passed since the general elections. The PTI demanded the present government investigate only four constituencies where "the mandate of the masses was stolen by the returning officers (ROs)" deputed for free, fair and transparent elections by the then chief justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary who, Imran said, was involved in "match fixing". "We have completed the legal course of action we have knocked every door to seek justice, but no one heeded our voice regarding the rigging and blunders during the last general elections," Imran Khan said.

Similarly, while criticizing the role of former CJP and ROs the PTI chairman said the Supreme Court would intervene to save democracy and the system. He demanded that all those officials who "managed poll rigging" should be exposed and taken to task, as they are criminals who snatched the mandate of the people of Pakistan. Commenting on the election results of NA-118, Imran Khan said PTI candidate Hamid Zaman spent Rs 5.7 million to seek justice, while the RO of the constituency stands responsible for rigging in the election, as out of total 325 bags only 69 were sealed and others were opened. He said 170,000 registered voters were shown but there was no record of 900,000 voters. While, giving example of NA-68 Sargodha Imran Khan said on polling station number 246 there were 1530 voters while interestingly, the incumbent Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif received 8166 votes from the same polling station. He said this trend of planned rigging would destroy the electoral system.

Responding a question he said "there is no threat to democracy" as the "nation has decided to live with democracy". Answering a question PTI chairman said "this is no Democracy" and PTI will always stand with and respect democracy. He also demanded that SC should take action against a media group which was a partner of poll rigging scheme. In response to a question Khan said PTI will never take part in any scheme to derail the democratic set up but will never forgive its hard stance against the poll rigging to make the future of this nation dynamic "we will take stand against it". Imran reiterated his allegation that former chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry provided support to the returning officials involved in rigging. He said that the election tribunals did not dispose of the cases within 120 days. He said that according to the Free and Fair Election network (FAFEN), 71,000 complaints were filed against the election results. "Jang and Geo group was also part of the rigging process," the PTI chief alleged. He said that PTI will announce its future plan of action in a massive gathering scheduled on May 11 at D-Chowk in Islamabad. PTI General Secretary Jahangir Tareen, Secretary Information Shireen Mazari and other leadership of the party was also present on the occasion.

Daily Times - May 03, 2014

Imran Presents 'Charter of Demands'

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has demanded an immediate dissolution of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and its reconstitution to purge the electoral process of every kind of foul play for the conduct of free and fair elections in the future. Addressing a gigantic public rally in Islamabad, held in protest against alleged rigging in May 2013 general polls one year after their conduct, Imran voiced mistrust in the ECP and accused it of having a direct hand in the polls rigging. "If our demands are not met we would launch a mega campaign against the present system in search of justice," he cautioned. Imran Khan also presented a "Charter of Demands" during the occasion. The nine-point Charter states, "We demand the present election commissioners resign immediately as they have lost the confidence of the nation. The system of the selection of chairman and members of the ECP should be changed to ensure the ECP functions as a truly independent body as guaranteed in the constitution." The charter demands an immediate verification of thumbprints in the four constituencies identified by PTI, asking the process to be concluded within two weeks.

It says, "We demand that all perpetrators found guilty of or complicit in rigging in the 2013 elections must be brought to justice – from the identified ROs (returning officers) and presiding officers to those identified as having cast multiple votes. We demand that for future elections all ROs must be legally accountable to the ECP, as stated in the constitution, for their performance in conduct of elections." The party, in the charter, has demanded post-election appeals to be held in the time stipulated - 120 days - by law, and those not complying held accountable. It says that all future elections must be held under biometric system and EVMs (electronic voting machines) must be introduced for the voting with a paper trail. The charter states, "As a step towards genuine neutral caretakers, they must not be permitted to hold any public office for two years after their serving as caretakers. That the SC decisions of giving overseas Pakistanis the right to vote must immediately be implemented. We invite all parties who want electoral reforms to form a committee with PTI and come up with a comprehensive electoral reform package for Parliament to pass." The PTI chairman termed the poll rigging a major hurdle in the way of "democracy" and added that the present rulers of Pakistan flourished under the cover of "dictatorship" and they are even unfamiliar with the power of the political workers. He criticized the federal and provincial governments while alleging that they made every possible effort to sabotage the PTI "protest jalsa".

Imran Khan said "lie has no leg to stand upon", and the present set-up is afraid of thumbprints' verification in only four constituencies that indicates they are governing the country with "stolen mandate of the masses". He demanded the present government speak the truth and not fool the nation. Imran questioned how a person elected through poll rigging could be expected to serve the country with honesty and integrity. He lauded party member Asad Umar's initiative to move the Supreme Court against the metro bus project, while quoting the Asian Development Bank report which suggests that the project could be completed at an estimated of Rs 4 billion, as against Rs 24 billion being incurred on it. "Asad Umar, you are doing a great service to the nation," he remarked. The PTI chief said despite retiring a circular debt of Rs 560 billion, the entire country was suffering power outages. He added that the new circular debt has risen to Rs 300 billion. "Where has all the money of the nation gone? The load shedding is still there and nothing has changed in this regard," Imran asked. He said the menace of unemployment could not be eradicated without foreign investment.

Daily Times - May 12, 2014

Electoral System: PTI Wins PML-Q Support for Reform

The efforts of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) to reach out to friends and foes in a bid to demand resignations from members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) have yielded partial results. A PTI committee had a busy day of meetings, as it contacted the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) leadership as well as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The PTI delegation, which included Vice President Shah Mahmood Qureshi, President Javed Hashmi and General Secretary Jahangir Tareen, were on a mission to form a grand alliance against the government. As expected, the PML-Q endorsed the viewpoint of the PTI. Although the leader of opposition in the National Assembly, PPP's Khursheed Shah had demanded resignations from ECP members earlier this week, the opposition party agreed with the PTI to the extent of electoral reforms.

It was perhaps Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's meeting with former president Asif Ali Zardari in Karachi earlier in the day that dampened a favorable response from the PPP. "We have agreed with the PTI for electoral reforms," said Shah at a joint news conference after meeting the PTI delegation at the Parliament House. He said the process of reforms was taking time; therefore, it should start at the earliest. The opposition leader shied away from announcing the actual demand behind the move and it was Qureshi who said, "All political parties are of the opinion that general elections were rigged and that the ECP members should step down." After a meeting with the PML-Q leadership, Qureshi said the PML-Q shares PTI's concerns over the integrity of the 2013 elections.

"Both parties agreed that the current election commission has been unsuccessful in fulfilling its constitutional responsibility of conducting a free and fair election," Qureshi said. "Both parties agree that [members of the Election Commission of Pakistan] should step down." Asked whether the PTI's demand was constitutional, Qureshi said, "We are not asking for dissolution and removal of ECP members. We are [saying] that they have failed to perform their constitutional duty of holding a free, fair and transparent election and those they should step down." In response to a question, Hashmi said, "We had given the government one year to improve things but it failed to utilize the opportunity and things were getting worse."

Committee to Review Election Laws

The PTI vice-chairperson announced that a committee was being formed to examine existing laws and to develop a course of action on the basis of the 2013 elections, adding that the committee will also work on developing a national consensus about electoral reform. He said that the PML-Q has named Senator Kamil Ali Agha and Tariq Bashir Cheema for the committee, while the PTI has nominated Dr Arif Alvi and Shafqat Mehmood. Syed Khursheed Shah from the PPP, however, said his party would announce two members after consultation.

The Express Tribune - May 15, 2014

Elections & Stakeholders

FAFEN Unfolds Reforms for Transparent, Accountable Election System

The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) has released its preliminary recommendations for wide-ranging electoral reforms geared towards achieving a transparent and accountable election system that can ensure equal representation of citizens and strengthen democracy in Pakistan. FAFEN's recommendations are based on the observation of general and by-elections

from 2007 to date and address the key issues that have been marring the quality of elections in the past, thereby raising questions about their credibility. The network of 42 civil society organizations has already shared these recommendations with the political parties and relevant parliamentary committee, urging them to initiate a political dialogue to improve the election system through wide-ranging reforms.

FAFEN's recommendations cover 10 broader areas that are critical to the entire electoral cycle, seeking complete control of the Election Commission over all electoral processes and providing prerequisite insulation from executive and judiciary that is essential to ensure independence of election-related decision-making. Unless the independence of Election Commission is translated into authority, the quality of elections cannot be improved. The first step to any reforms effort is unification of all election-related laws that govern various types of elections in Pakistan. This will ensure electoral transparency and access to laws to citizens and candidates and removal of inconsistencies among these fragments pieces of legislation.

FAFEN proposes the unification of the Election Commission Order 2002 (Chief Executive's Order No. 1 of 2002), the Conduct of General Elections Order 2002 (Chief Executive's Order No. 7 of 2002), the Political Parties Order 2002 (Chief Executive's Order No. 18 of 2002), the Representation of the People Act 1976 (Act No. LXXXV of 1976), the Delimitation of Constituencies Act 1974 (Act No. XXXIV of 1974), the Senate (Election) Act 1975 (Act No LI of 1975) and the Qualification to Hold Public Offices Order 2002 (Chief Executive's Order No 19 of 2002).

While amendments to the constitution are needed to review qualifications for the Chief Election Commissioner and a Member of the Election Commission as well as to protect their term in office, FAFEN proposes the CEC and Commission members should be selected on the basis of professional qualifications and management experience in overseeing large-scale activities roughly similar in scale to election exercise in Pakistan. Additionally, female representation on the Commission should be ensured.

Moreover, the Constitution should also define the time frame for the appointment of the CEC and Commission members. It proposes that the appointment of CEC and members must conclude in no more than 3 months and before the last day of the incumbent in office. In the case of decapitation, leave or travel of the CEC, the acting CEC shall be nominated from among the Commission members on the basis of rotation.

To ensure insulation of the Election Commission from the executive, FAFEN proposes that the election law be amended to authorize the Commission to approve rules and regulation. In addition, it should be established in election law that the ECP will have authority to alter its organizational structure, hire personnel and to manage its own budget, giving it authority to approve that budget, maintain accounts, create posts, and authorize supplementary grants. A new Election Service Cadre shall be introduced in order to attract most competent citizens to the service of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Moreover, legal amendments are required to grant authority to the ECP to appoint District Returning Officers (DROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) from among all citizens, including from amongst its officials. FAFEN's reports suggest that the elections managed directly by officials of the ECP are better managed as compared to the ones that are administered by judicial officers. The ECP order, directives, notifications given to executive during the election process must be binding, breach of which must carry a penalty. In addition, election law must also grant full authority over seconded staff to direct, sanction, and remove such staff while conducting elections on its behalf. Election staff found guilty of illegal practices must be terminated from government service, in addition to penalties already prescribed in the law.

To ensure insulation of the election administration from judiciary, FAFEN proposes legal bar on the appointment of judicial officers on election duty as it causes a situation of conflict of interest as well as an issue of independence of judiciary when it hears election appeals and petitions. Any decision made by the Election Commission or any of its designated official or tribunal after the announcement of the election schedule shall not be subject to judicial review until the announcement of the election result. Similarly, any petition under review of an election tribunal after the announcement of official Gazette shall not be subject to the any scrutiny, review or stay by the higher judiciary pending the decision of the tribunal. Moreover, election law shall include provision for candidates to file petitions in tribunals against the officials on election duty and government officials for unduly breaching election laws.

On the issue of institutionalization of election reforms as a continuing process, FAFEN proposes the constitution of a joint parliamentary committee with an overall mandate to engage with the Election Commission in meeting their legal, financial and organizational requirements to ensure quality elections. The committee should also review the quality of elections on the basis of reports of the commission, observers, media and other sources to sustain the process of reforms. The Committee itself may be formed with proportional representation of the parties in the two Houses, providing that all parties in the parliament have at least one member. To address the issue of skewed allocation of National Assembly seats across Pakistan, FAFEN proposes that amendments to the relevant law wherein while constituencies may vary in size according to legal parameters, the size of constituencies within and among districts, provinces and territories should vary by more than 10% only under exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the reasoning for this decision should be made public.

The non-conduct of census has created serious voter-to-constituency and population-to-constituencies discrepancies that are undermining citizens' representation. Until census is held, the ECP must undertake, under section 10A of the Delimitations Act 1974, delimitation of constituencies within districts and across districts to bring proportionality. Moreover, the process of delimitation must be made transparent by ensuring public input into the redrawing of boundaries. To improve and enhance voter registration, FAFEN proposes legal changes to allow ECP to engage any public sector institutions in preparing and maintaining current, accurate and complete electoral rolls in advance of electoral processes. The law should establish that, in doing so, the ECP may coordinate with other government agencies, including Nadra regarding the removal of deceased and exclusion of persons declared of unsound mind. While the civil and voter registries are integrated with control of electoral rolls resting with the ECP, the process of registration of voters must be simplified. The consent of a citizen to be registered as a voter and his/her preferred address-permanent or current as on the CNIC- must be sought at the time of the registration of the CNIC. The Election Commission shall also be allowed to employ any technological solution that it deems suitable to ensure free, fair, transparent and honest elections such as biometric system.

FAFEN also proposes an extension of the period from three to six weeks during which provisional electoral rolls for electoral areas are displayed publicly at polling sites and claims and objections may be lodged. Moreover, it should be established in the election law that electoral area-wise voter lists are posted at individual polling sites. In turn, the law should stipulate that voters would be able to verify their place on the voters' list. On the nomination process, the candidate qualification and disqualification should not be subject to the interpretation of the Returning Officer. There should be a standardized system in place for candidate scrutiny to ensure the uniformity of the process. The candidate qualification should be revised in the constitution to be the resident of the contested constituency or alternatively limit one candidacy per person per election.

The ECP must be legally bound to proactively make public information acquired from contesting candidates on their nominations forms to enhance voter interest and scrutiny. The duration of the candidates' scrutiny process must be extended up to three weeks to enable the ECP to verify and validate the documents submitted by the candidates. Similarly, allocation of an election symbol to any political party shall be subject to provision of record of annual audits, inter-party-elections and membership register. The law should also define parameters and conditions for the allocation of symbols to alliances of political parties as the existing Political Parties Order is silent on the issue.

One of the critical amendments being proposed is the protection of Codes of Conduct for political parties and contesting candidates, election observers and media under the election law. The codes shall be revised annually in consultation with the country's political parties or the joint parliamentary committee and shall be issued without further consultation once an election has been called. It is necessary to establish in the election law that codes of conduct for selected stakeholder groups will become part of the election regulations overseen by the Election Commission while providing the Commission with the authority to issue warnings and impose fines or binding orders. Calling for the establishment of permanent polling stations, FAFEN proposes that the list of polling stations shall remain valid for three years and be revised through a consultative process involving public.

Moreover, the election law must define a process and conditions under which a polling site location is altered in advance of an election. Such changes will be permitted, but only with the approval of the Election Commission and following publication of the site's location on the Election Commission's website in order to announce the change to voters within the constituency. However, no change should be allowed once the parties and candidates are issued symbols during the election process. Wide-ranging legal and procedural reforms are required to improve the quality of voting and counting processes. Ballots printed should be marked with unique and secure features for each constituency to deter fake ballots and to minimize conditions that may willfully be created by election officials that lead to rejection of votes.

Moreover, a regulatory framework is required for ECP to exercise punitive aspects of election laws dealing with malpractice and malafide of the election officials and other individuals violating the sanctity of the electoral processes. The ECP-designated officials may be authorized to exercise these penalties. Similarly, the process to penalize government officials and security personnel influencing election needs to be spelled out. The penalties by the Commission or its designated officials may only be challenged in high courts. FAFEN has also emphasized the need for the rationalization, enhancement and enforcement of penalties established in the election laws for illegal practices, corrupt practices and canvassing and campaigning in restricted zones in and around the polling station.

Transparency of the vote counting, consolidation and documentation shall be ensured through legal amendments including mandatory issuance of the Statement of Count and Ballot Paper Account to the contesting candidates, observers and media and shall be displayed outside each polling station for the public. The same shall be published by the ECP on its website to deter the practice of post-polling election irregularities and malpractices. The official Gazette of the returned candidate shall only be published after these documents have been made public. A mechanism shall be put in place to address any post-poll irregularity before the announcement of the Gazette.

The election law shall provide specific time frame and guidelines for timely announcement of the formal result (FORM XVII) and mandatory recounting of the ballots in constituencies such as in instances where margin of victory is less than 200 votes or where the margin of victory is less than the number of rejected votes etc. Mechanism to deal with situations at polling stations

where the turnout is either zero or over 100 percent, or the turnout is minimal owing to a known case of voter suppression such as violence or agreements between local influential to bar voters shall be defined in the law. Discretion of election officials in cases of recounted shall be eliminated.

The News - May 13, 2014

ECP to Take Action for Casting Multiple Votes

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has registered 11 more political parties, which takes the total number of political parties registered with the commission to 281. In its meeting, the commission registered 11 new political parties. It rejected an application against the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) by an independent candidate who sought a ban on the party due to an electoral dispute in a National Assembly constituency in Punjab. The commission claims it has also decided to take action against those voters who cast more than one vote in the last year's general elections. The move is seen as face-saving exercise by the ECP as political parties are demanding its dissolution. In this regard the commission has sought data of the constituencies whose record had been verified by the National Database and Registration Authority. Election Commission of Pakistan Additional Secretary Syed Sher Afgan has said that those found guilty of casting more than one vote would be dealt with under the criminal laws and would be punishable by up to three years.

Daily Times - May 20, 2014

ECP Says 40 Presiding Officers Were Replaced at PTI Candidate's Request

A letter submitted by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to the Supreme Court disclosed that over 40 presiding officers in NA-125 had been replaced three days before the May 11, 2013 general elections at the request of a candidate belonging to the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Khawaja Saad Rafique of the PML-N had defeated Hamid Khan in that constituency. The letter signed by Khalid Mehmood Bhatti, returning officer of NA-125, was submitted along with an ECP report on a petition filed by the PTI seeking verification of voters' thumb impressions in four key constituencies secured by PML-N candidates. National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq had defeated PTI chief Imran Khan in NA-122 (Lahore), Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was elected from NA-110 (Sialkot), Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique defeated PTI's Hamid Khan in NA-125 (Lahore) and Sadiq Baloch won the NA-154 (Lodhran) seat by defeating PTI's Secretary General Jahangir Tareen.

Returning officer Khalid Bhatti said in the letter: "Appointments of polling staff, including presiding officers, were made from the available staff provided by the office of the district returning officer, Lahore...About three days before the polling, Mr. Hamid Khan, the PTI candidate, visited the constituency (NA-125) and expressed reservations over the appointments of presiding officers belonging to the LDA (Lahore Development Authority) and PHA (Parks and Horticulture Agency). "To alleviate his concerns and ensure impartiality and transparency, despite acute shortage of staff and the electoral exercise having reached its fag end, more than 40 presiding officers belonging to aforesaid departments and their sister organizations, i.e. WASA (Water and Sanitation Agency), TEPA (Traffic Engineering and Transport Planning Agency), were replaced."

When contacted, Hamid Khan said it was the job of a returning officer to replace presiding officers since the Supreme Court had in an identical matter ruled that employees of provincial

governments could not be deputed as presiding officers. "I only brought the apex court's direction to the knowledge of the returning officer after that he replaced about 40 of the 265 presiding officers of NA-125. "My concerns were genuine because being employee of the Punjab government led by Shahbaz Sharif the officials of LDA, WASA and other departments could manipulate the election process," he said. Despite his reservations, Hamid Khan alleged, the returning officer had deputed a number of employees of the Punjab government in polling stations.

Dawn - May 31, 2014

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Human Rights Related Issues

May 1: Pakistan Renews Pledge to Protect Rights of Laborers

Like other parts of the globe, the International Labour Day was observed in all cities of Pakistan with a renewed pledge to protect rights of workers. The day is celebrated all across the world every year on May 1, which has been declared as the traditional spring holiday in Europe and Pakistan. All government and private organizations, educational institutions and markets remained closed to observe the Labour Day. Different political and labour organizations particularly the labour wings of political parties and professional bodies organized programmes to highlight significance of the day and rights of the workers. Seminars and rallies were held in different cities to pay tribute to those who laid down their lives in Chicago in 1886 for the rights of the laborers. Many people sacrificed their lives during the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago during a strike of workers in favor of their rights. May Day is celebrated to commemorate the event of Haymarket Massacre as well as to promote the social and economic achievements of the working group people.

Pakistan's first labour policy was devised in 1972, in which May 1 was declared an official holiday. This policy also formulated the creation of the Social Security Network, Old-Age Benefits Schemes and Workers Welfare Fund. Pakistan's constitution also contains various provisions and articles about labour rights. May 1 is a national holiday in more than 80 countries. It is also celebrated unofficially in many other countries. In Lahore the Labour Day was observed with seminars, rallies, conventions and conferences by different labour organizations, civil societies and political parties. The Lahore Press Club (LPC) was the main hub of rallies where different rallies merged and recorded protest for labour rights. Traffic was jammed in the surroundings of LPC for several hours due to the rallies. The Women Workers Help Line (WWHL) took out a rally from the Lahore Press Club to Lakshmi Chowk in which a large number of labour union workers, home-based workers and civil societies' members participated.

WWHL Chairperson Azra Shaad led the rally, while WWHL General Secretary Rifat Maqsood, Razia Ansari, Nusheen Asif, Jahan Ara, Razia Ishaq, Asma Ashraf and Salman Ali were also present. Azra Shaad said that the labour class has been exploited in the last few years and women laborers have fallen victim to violence by some in the ruling class. She criticized the government and said that violence against laborers is increasing in Punjab due to non-imposition of labour legislation. She said the government should make a policy for legally recognizing the domestic workers, and immediately apply ILO convention 189 should. Speaking on the occasion WWHL General Secretary Rifat Maqsood said the government should make a clear policy for domestic workers and ratify the ILO Convention No 177 on home-based work and amend the relevant domestic legislation. Other speakers of the rally said that the government should take serious action for registration of the domestic workers and against child labour. At the end of the rally they demanded the government set the minimum wages for a single woman worker at Rs 30,000, provide jobs to youth, recognize the home-based woman workers and give the judicial right for the formation of unions.

The All Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF) also arranged a rally from the Headquarters to the Punjab Assembly and recorded a protest in which hundreds of laborers participated. Speakers of the rally said that the factory labour was working in terrible conditions in the

absence of safety laws. They also said that most of the industrial laborers were treated badly. Another seminar rally was held at the Mayo Hospital by paramedical staff and trade unions. Speakers said that laborers are facing many problems and living in poor conditions. They said that the government should make proper legislation for labour workers and ensure their implementation.

Daily Times - May 02, 2014

Pakistan Struck by Terror with 'Worrisome' Sectarian Trend: Report by US State Department Country Report

Pakistan continued to suffer from significant and deadly terrorist attacks, including a dangerous upward trend in sectarian violence, according to the US Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism Country Reports 2013. In its South and Central Asia Overview chapter, it claims that South Asia remained the front line in the battle against terrorism in 2013, adding that Pakistan and Afghanistan continued to experience most of the aggressive attacks in the region. The report manages to sum up the horror Pakistan faced: "Terrorists organized armed assaults on police stations, judicial centres, border check posts, military convoys, and polio vaccination teams. Terrorists plotted against and attacked judges, police officers, lawyers, intelligence officers, and elected officials." A staggering 1,025 civilians and more than 475 security forces personnel lost their lives that year as the country was pummeled with terrorist-related incidents. Terrorists also assassinated a high-ranking army general in the tribal areas – GOC Swat Major General Sanaullah Khan – Karachi top cop Chaudhry Aslam, and the then-president Asif Ali Zardari's chief of security, Bilal Sheikh.

Meanwhile, Karachi has a special mention, especially the fact that militant groups have amassed on the city's outskirts. The State Department writes that Karachi was a matter of grave concern for the President, Prime Minister, Supreme Court and law enforcement officials. Many of the terror-related incidents took place during the months leading up to the May 11 national elections, where terrorists attacked and killed political party workers and candidates, bombed political rallies, and, after the elections, killed newly elected and appointed officials.

Counterterrorism Efforts

The report, to a certain extent, commends Pakistan's efforts to curb terrorism. "Pakistan's government is in the process of implementing four significant laws passed in 2013: the National Counterterrorism Authority Act, the Fair Trial Act, amendments to the Antiterrorism Act of 1997, and the Protection of Pakistan Ordinance of 2013 (PPO)," it mentions. But there is a caveat: the judiciary moved slowly in processing terrorism and other criminal cases despite the government making use of reinforced counterterrorism legislation. Meanwhile, Pakistan's regional and multilateral efforts were appreciated, as the country "actively participated in counterterrorism efforts in both regional and international venues". The country is an active member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), it participated in SAARC and UN Security Council meetings on counterterrorism and sanctions.

Criticism

However, Pakistan was blamed for 'still not doing enough' to curb terrorist activities taking place "from safe havens". Even though the entire chapter of the report is on South and Central Asia, Pakistan was mentioned at least 78 times, even under the India and Afghanistan sub-sections of the chapter. "In 2013, Indian sources continued to attribute violence and deaths in

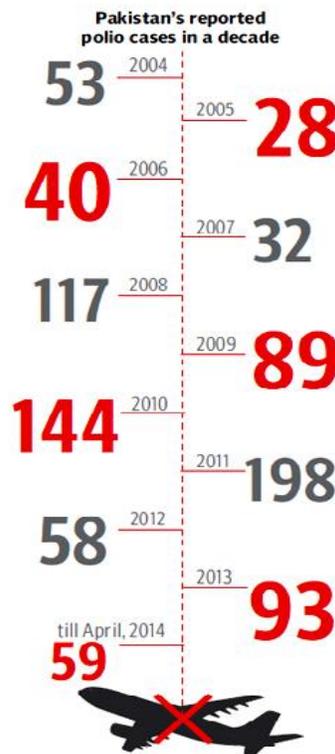
Jammu and Kashmir to transnational terrorist groups that India alleges are backed by Pakistan” was one of the many accusations. The State Department does acknowledge that the Pakistani military undertook operations against groups that conducted attacks within Pakistan such as the TTP, “but did not take action against other groups such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT)”, Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network leadership. Major armed combat tactics used in Pakistan in 2013:

- remote-controlled improvised explosive devices (IEDs)
- vehicle-borne IEDs
- suicide bombers (including females)
- targeted assassinations
- rocket-propelled grenades

The Express Tribune - May 02, 2014

Embarrassment: Pakistan Faces Global Travel Curbs

Pakistan’s failure to stem the spread of polio triggered global emergency health measures, with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommending all residents to show proof of vaccination before they can leave the country. The emergency measures also apply to Syria and Cameroon, which along with Pakistan are seen as posing the greatest risk of exporting the crippling virus and undermining a UN plan to eradicate it by 2018. The statement issued by WHO Assistant Director-General (DG) Dr Bruce Alyward is based on recommendations of the Emergency Committee and is effective from May 5. “This has been recommended under International Health Regulations so it will be mandatory on all countries to seek certification of anti-polio vaccination from all Pakistanis travelling to their lands,” the WHO chief coordinator for polio eradication in Pakistan, Dr Elias Durray.



According to the statement, the governments of these three countries shall ensure that all residents and long-term visitors (even foreigners) visiting for more than four weeks should receive a dose of the OPV or inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) between four weeks and 12 months prior to international travel. The heads of state should officially declare that the interruption of poliovirus transmission is a national public health emergency. The government must also ensure that individuals undertaking urgent travel (within four weeks) who have not received a dose of OPV or IPV in the previous four weeks to 12 months, receive a dose of the polio vaccine at least by the time of departure. It must also ensure that such travelers are provided with an 'International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis' to record their polio vaccination and serve as proof.

Government Caught 'Unawares'

While the possibility of international travel restrictions loomed for days before Monday's announcement, the government appears to be largely unprepared for the situation – a predicament evidenced by officials' cluelessness regarding vaccination of people who will be travelling following these restrictions. "Currently, Pakistan has no plan to facilitate polio vaccinations for those travelling or any details about locations where certificates can be obtained. Therefore, it is too early to talk about it," National Manager of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) Dr Ejaz Khan said. He is of the view that Pakistan cannot eradicate polio from the country unless it strengthens routine immunization and merges it with the National Polio Eradication Programme. A senior official at the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination (NHSRC) who requested anonymity said, "Like always, this time, too, Pakistan has not planned anything beforehand although it had a clue that travel restrictions would be placed on the country." The official said the restriction gives a clear message to the government to get serious and start working on polio eradication on practical grounds. "At present, Pakistan has polio vaccines in stock for the national and supplementary anti-polio drives but do not have supplies for vaccinating every single person who will be going out of the country," said the official. He said that vaccine procurement is a lengthy process and will take time to acquire.

Furthermore, in each district of the country there is a need to have adequate health facilities where people could get vaccinated against the crippling disease, which could be conducted at tertiary hospitals, basic health units (BHUs) or rural health centres (RHCs), said the official. "Currently, Pakistan does not have trained people who can issue certificates for polio vaccination which meet international standards," he said. International wire agencies quoted Saira Afzal Tarar, the deputy minister for health, as saying that she had called a meeting of health officials to consider how to respond to the new travel measures, and in particular how to ensure the supply of vaccine and health workers to administer the drops. An emergency meeting is being held with all provincial ministers for the introduction of special measures following the restrictions. The measures will include the establishment of mandatory immunization counters at all airports, on border crossings and at seaports, and health officials will ensure that every single person going out of Pakistan has been given polio drops.

WHO national campaign coordinator in Pakistan, Zubair Mufti, said: "It is worrisome that travel restrictions have been placed on Pakistan due to the continuous surge in the number of polio cases." "The Pakistani government should immediately formulate a mechanism regarding vaccination for people going out of Pakistan," he said. Implications for travelers:

- The government must ensure that all residents and long-term visitors receive a dose of the polio vaccine (IPV) between four weeks and 12 months prior to international travel

- Those who are leaving the country within four weeks must receive a dose of the vaccine at least by the time of departure
- Travelers must be given an 'International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis' to record their vaccination as proof
- It is mandatory for all countries to ask travelers from Pakistan to show proof of polio immunization
- PM must officially declare that the interruption of poliovirus transmission is a national public health emergency.

The Express Tribune - May 06, 2014

Offence of Any Religion Comes Under Blasphemy Law: CJP

Chief Justice of Pakistan Tassaduq Hussain Jilani remarked that according to the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) Article 295, offence against any religion comes under the blasphemy law. The CJ also expressed annoyance over non-registration of cases against the culprits involved in temple infernos in Sindh. Hearing suo motu case of the Peshawar church blasts, Chief Justice Jilani also observed the Constitution of Pakistan and the Objective Resolution provide full protection to the fundamental rights of minorities. "Providing protection to the minorities and their worship places is the constitutional responsibility, so the apex court would fulfill it," the chief justice said, while heading a three-member bench.

The bench, also comprising Justice Azmat Saeed Sheikh and Justice Mushir Alam, heard the suo motu case of the Peshawar church blasts and miscellaneous applications, seeking protection to minorities' worship places. Chief Justice Jilani said the desecration of the minorities' worship places was a serious crime under Section 295 of the PPC. The chief justice pointed out that articles 20 and 22 protected the rights of minorities and observed the relevant authorities did not ensure the protection of their rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The chief justice said that in the light of these articles, the court would set guidelines for the law-enforcing agencies so that they could ensure protection of worship places of the minorities. The chief justice, appointing former attorney general Munir A Malik, Khawaja Haris and Hassan Aurangzaib as amicus curiae (friends of court) to assist in chalking out guidelines for the protection of minorities' worship places, said they would examine whether to direct the law-enforcement agencies to ensure full protection to the temples and churches or establish a separate force for the purpose.

The court directed the Sindh inspector general of police (IGP) to submit a complete report on the recent waves of attacks on temples in the province within a week, besides ordering the Punjab advocate general to submit a report in the first week of June on non-registration of marriages of the minority community. The chief justice, however, asked the parties concerned, including representatives of the minorities, to provide the court written suggestions for the protection of their worship places so that the court could address these issues. During the proceedings, Ramesh Kumar, representative of Hindu community, informed the court of the recent attacks in which several Sindh temples were set on fire. He said that in March, 2014, six incidents of the desecration of Hindu temples took place in Shikarpur, Larkana, Tharparkar, Khairpur, Mithi, Hyderabad and the most recent on May 7 in Lee Market, Karachi. Kumar alleged the authorities did not take action against the miscreants and no case was registered against them.

The Sindh additional advocate general, Sindh, however, rejected the allegations, saying the cases in all the incidents had been registered. The court asked him whether the cases had been

registered under the PPC section concerning desecration of worship places. The Sindh AAG replied that there was no section in the PPC regarding the sacrilege of worship places. The court asked him to read Section 295 of PPC in which it had been clearly written that desecration of worship places was a crime. The court then directed the Sindh inspector general of police to submit a complete report on the attacks on Hindu temples within a week. Michael Javed, representative of Christian community, told the court that YMCA, an institute in Karachi, was in bad condition and, presently, being run by an unauthorized authority. He said the matter had been pending with the Sindh High Court since 2005 and that the SHC had appointed the court naazir to look after the institution.

Sindh Additional Advocate General Mir Qasim Jath assured the court of submitting a report before the court within a week. Dr Ramesh Kumar said that according to Liaqat-Nehru pact the chairman of the evacuee property trust should be a Hindu. On this, the chief justice remarked that the political situation among the two nations was not good so that the accord was not implemented on both sides but the apex court is trying to facilitate them on humanitarian grounds. A representative of Churches of Pakistan informed the court that the issue of non-registration of marriages of minorities still persisted, on which the court issued a notice to the Punjab advocate general, with the direction to submit reply by the first week of June and adjourned the hearing. At the beginning of the hearing, Chief Justice Tassaduq Jilani said that the court would share the grievances of the minorities. The court also directed Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to submit a detailed report regarding a Hindu samadhi in Karak district. During the hearing, the chief justice also hailed the role of Indian Supreme Court for the welfare of minorities in India.

The Nation - May 14, 2014

GENDER WATCH**Women Empowerment****Sexual Harassment Laws for the Workplace**

Many women in our society are the sole breadwinners in their families. In their struggle to support their families and to provide them with a reasonable standard of living, they step out of their homes but end up becoming the victims of sexual harassment. Threatened and harassed by their workplace colleagues, bearing the fear of losing their jobs in mind, women often do not have the courage to report such cases. In order to curb these despicable actions by men, which are spreading like a deadly virus in our society, the government needs to sit up and ACT. Passing a law against sexual harassment at the workplace (2010) will not suffice. Criticism is heaped whenever there is discussion on implementation of this act. As educated citizens, we should play our part to enforce this important legislation. In order to prove harassment, you need to have a series of rigorous sessions to rule out even an iota of doubt about both the victim and the accused. In most instances, such cases are unheard of or are brushed under the carpet to save the reputation of the institution.

It is thus incumbent upon every organization and institution to create awareness amongst both the genders to curb sexual harassment by forming committees. The committee should constitute a panel usually consisting of three members preferably from the senior management, one senior representative of the concerned department and one member from the human resource department to take action against the notorious act. After a case is reported, both parties should be heard separately without biasness towards any gender. Sexual harassment does not constitute only the touching or making of sexual advances. It has many different aspects to it, such as sharing of explicit content which makes you uncomfortable, uncalled for spoken or written words etc. It is advised that the victim and accused should be supported by all forms of documentary evidence in the shape of messages, texts or pictures to institute a strong claim. If the person is found guilty, he/she should be fired from the organization right away. Social security numbers need to be introduced wherein such cases can be reported at all levels. In this regard the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority is playing a pivotal role to redress this issue and create awareness amongst women where they can lodge a complaint against this issue on www.fos-pah.gov.pk.

The Express Tribune - May 06, 2014

Call for Women's Part in Politics

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus has initiated a series of seminars on women's participation in politics. The first seminar in this series focused on women's representation within political parties. It was jointly supported by UN Women and UNDP. Representatives of all key political parties attended the seminar. Moreover, Abdul Mannan, chairperson of National Assembly parliamentary affairs committee, Jahangir Badar, chairperson of Senate committee on parliamentary affairs, representatives of National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW), ministry of law justice and human rights, civil society organizations and international partners, and government officials were also in attendance.

Joana Merlin Scholtes, senior advisor UN Women, assured the continued support of UN Women to Pakistan for bringing forth women in all spheres of life. Twenty per cent of women are now in

parliament worldwide, Scandinavia has the highest number with 42 per cent whereas Asia has 18.5 per cent women representation; however this has been a substantial increase from 1995 when there were only 11.5 per cent women in parliament worldwide. This is an extremely positive measure. Tracy Vienings, deputy country representative UNDP, said that UNDP in Pakistan is continuing to assist the government and the situation is extremely optimistic and women have come a long way.

Shaista Malik, secretary Women Parliamentary Caucus, emphasized that there is need to change the mindset of people including the political parties "so that we are able to bring forward more and more women." She asked all political parties and politicians to join hands beyond political parties for the cause of empowering women. Abdul Manan assured the Women's Parliamentary Caucus of his full support for legislation on women empowerment. He further stated that the bill on 10 per cent quota of women for tickets on general seats is key and the National Assembly committee on parliamentary affairs will be supporting it.

Senator Jahangir Badar also assured the caucus of its continued support for bringing about legislation for ensuring women's participation in politics. Khawar Mumtaz, chairperson National Commission on Status of Women, said that women empowerment is a long journey and in Pakistan it has come a long way. Aamina Qadir Adham, senior gender advisor of UN Women, said that even though there were an unprecedented 448 women who filed papers for contesting elections on general seats yet this constituted only 3.4 per cent of the total candidature. The participants gave key recommendations for ensuring women's effective participation in political parties which included; increasing the number of women in decision-making platforms, strengthening grassroots women representation in party, giving more tickets to women for contesting elections on winnable seats, women should be brought in mainstream politics and not marginalized.

The Nation - May 08, 2014

Report On 'Women in Politics' Launched

Women representation in the parliament has increased over the years, but this has not necessarily led to greater diversity or empowerment as most have their campaigns run by the men of their families. Majority of the woman members of the national and provincial assemblies come from political families. These were some of the key findings and recommendations made by the study report 'Women's Political Participation and Leadership for Effective Democratic Government', which was conducted by Women's Initiative for Learning and Leadership, an NGO. Former Member of National Assembly (MNA) Shahnaz Wazir Ali said despite a consensus by several political parties that 10 per cent of general seat tickets for the National Assembly be given to women, this has yet to be implemented. "At the moment 17 per cent of national and provincial assembly members are women, but their seats need to be increased. No woman is a full minister in cabinet, however there are two state ministers," she said. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) MNA Shafqat Mehmood said despite having elected a woman prime minister, such trends do not reflect in Pakistani society.

"It is difficult to award tickets for seats in the National Assembly to women, but the trend is changing since people have started voting for parties rather than personalities," he said. "PTI held intra-party elections and the women who were elected were allowed to contest elections," he added. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MNA Maryam Aurangzeb said there was a 'mind-set' problem. She said women play a better role in parliamentary committees than men, and that the situation would improve. Senior Vice President of the Awami National Party (ANP) Bushra Gohar criticized the report and said it was based on faulty assumptions that women

were less knowledgeable than men. "During the former government's tenure, Speaker National Assembly was a woman and there were women in important parliamentary committees. Now we have returned to a low point and women have a smaller role in government," she added.

Ajmal Wazir of PML-Q said during the PML-Q government women were encouraged to participate in politics. Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (F) (JUI-F) representative Jan Achakzai praised the recommendations made by the report, but said studies were done for western interests. Human rights activist Farzana Bari said there was approximately 20 per cent representation of women in parliaments around the world. "Even in western countries women are not encouraged to participate in politics since men dominate the field," she said.

Dawn - May 15, 2014

Gender Based Violence/Violence against Women

Women Encouraged To Fight Domestic Violence

"My husband threw me and my children out of the house in the middle of the night, because I could not produce a son," said R, who suffered both physical and mental abuse in what she initially thought was a 'love marriage' when she approached Dastak charitable shelter home for first time. But even after she gave birth to two sons her husband still beat her up. This is the third time she has come to the shelter. Three other women told similar stories to an audience comprising mostly students and teachers of social work department of the Lahore College for Women at a seminar. It was attended by representatives of AGHS Legal Aid Cell, Dastak, Interactive Resource Centre and Interfaith Youth in Action. The case studies pointed to the violence that women endure in their daily lives. The seminar was meant to discuss how Dastak was helping these women deal with such situations and how other women should help.

Dastak Crisis Manager Robina Shaheen said women of all ages should keep in mind that violence could come from any side, including close family members. In fact in most cases sexual abuse and violence began at home, she added. Shaheen said most women who seek help from Dastak were those who were threatened by their husbands that they would snatch their children, especially if they had no family to support them, whose sons were given education but not their daughters, sexually abused by family members and no one believing in their complaints at home, forcibly married off, or could not marry of their own free will etc. She gave practical solutions to the college students on how to tackle a potentially threatening situation at a public place. She advised them never to leave the public eye and go into deserted, dark areas, especially where there were bushes; if someone was stalking, harassing or threatening them the matter should be made public at once, and complain to the police if need be.

She said anyone could be a potential threat to personal security and therefore to never let out personal information, especially online. She said in case of public place harassment a complaint could be lodged at any police station under Section 509 of the Pakistan Penal Code or the police could be called at 1215. The "ring the bell" campaign in India was also beneficial. When domestic abuse could be heard in a house, someone must 'ring the (door) bell' or cause some other distraction to help break it up. She said though police often claimed domestic violence was a 'domestic affair', it was not. She also advised the audience that if a child suddenly became quiet, inhibited and did not eat or sleep well the matter must be given immediate attention as s(he) may be a victim of abuse.

AGHS Advocate Sabahat Riaz deplored that women rarely used the laws available for their own security. She said apart from Section 509, marriage contracts (nikah namas) had clauses giving

women certain rights but these were crossed out by the family or cleric. She cited the Cyber Crime Ordinance (Telegraph Act), where FIA could be sent complaints, the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act etc, in this connection. Meanwhile, Muhammad Waseem from IRC said men often resort to violence because they themselves were caught in a vicious cycle of expectations. This pressure of fulfilling societal expectations often led to violence. He said it took time but social practices always changed. Shahid Ahmed Ghauri briefly told about his work in the Interfaith Youth in Action group where they also focused on spreading literacy among women.

Dawn - May 16, 2014

Gender Based Violence: Husband of Woman Beaten to Death Demands Justice

The husband of a pregnant woman who was beaten to death outside Lahore High Court for marrying against her family's wishes vowed to fight for justice. Farzana Parveen, 25, was attacked outside the court building by more than two dozen brick-wielding attackers including her brother and father, who have been arrested, police said. Three-month pregnant Parveen, whom police earlier identified as 'Farzana Iqbal', had gone to testify in defense of her husband Iqbal - who was accused by her relatives of kidnapping her and forcing her into the marriage. The husband of the deceased speaking on telephone from his home village of Jaranwala where he had gone to bury Parveen said: "We demand justice. We were being threatened since we got married." The 45-year-old said he and his wife had survived a previous attack during the first hearing of the case on May 12.

"As we were going to court from our lawyer's office almost 30 people attacked us, including her father, brothers and cousins," he said. The group of 10 or so people accompanying him were overwhelmed by the suddenness of the attack and fled in all directions, he said. "One of her brothers shot at her but missed, then the women in their group fell upon her and her brother and father finished her off," said Iqbal. "The most painful thing is that nobody came forward to save my wife, the police were there and hundreds of lawyers were there along with ordinary men, but they all just watched like spectators." Police officer Mushtaq said Parveen's father Azeem had been detained while five others - two brothers and three cousins - remained at large.

Another police officer, Rana Akhtar, told AFP police were launching raids in the Nankana Sahib to arrest the accused. Despite the gruesome and public nature of the killing, media reaction has been relatively muted indicating what activists said was a growing apathy within society amid rising extremism. "The court's regular resident police force was mysteriously absent from the scene, unable to take preventive action - or to provide protection or pre-emption to this and countless other foregone and foretold dishonor killing cases," said Tahira Abdullah, a women's rights campaigner. Samina Rehman added: "The incident occurred in front of hundreds of people but nobody stepped forward to save them because people are afraid of mob justice. "People don't speak up because they fear that they would either be framed for blasphemy or declared un-Islamic."

Last year 869 women died in so-called 'honor killings', according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. In a statement, the rights commission said Parveen's father had shown no remorse when he surrendered to the police, adding, "Such brazen actions have been encouraged by the authorities' failure to fulfill their duty to protect citizens' lives." Iqbal, however, was undeterred. "There are no hurdles.

Daily Times - May 29, 2014

NCSW to Finalize Indicators for Violence against Women

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Chairperson Khawar Mumtaz said that the commission would soon complete the indicators for collecting data on violence against women (VAW). "Once the indicators are finalized, we would share it with the international community and hand it over to the Bureau of Statistics for conducting a survey on women rights violations in country", she said while talking to the media personnel. The indicators would be finalized in a week or so, after that, they would start working on the methodology and designing for conducting the survey, she informed. She said that once they get the data from grass-root level and collect actual facts, it would unveil the real situation in front of them which would help develop strategy for protecting women rights in the country. Mumtaz said that the commission would involve provinces for the implementation of women rights laws in the country. She stated that there is a need for monitoring the enforcement of sexual harassment at workplace act to ensure a safe environment for the women working. The chairperson added that there is a need to create awareness among the people regarding the women rights a law as the responsibility of the parliament is to work on legislation, but if people do not have information, they would not be benefited through it amicably. The capacity building of relevant institutions like police, lawyers is also as much important because if they do not have the knowledge that which clause would be applied on which offence and what is the punishment for that, they would not be able to plead the case properly. The women should also know on which complaints they can file a case and what is the legal procedure for that, besides the punishment for these offences. She said that the women rights violations are increasing but still a number of incidents were not registered as women do not have complete information of legislation and their rights, especially in the rural areas. Mumtaz said that the institutions at the union council level monitor and collect data that at which level people have awareness regarding the women rights laws and which areas need to be worked more.

Daily Times - May 30, 2014

PM Orders Immediate Action in Woman Murder Case

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif demanded "immediate action" over the brutal murder of a pregnant woman who was bludgeoned to death with bricks outside a court in Lahore while police stood by. "This crime is totally unacceptable and must be dealt in accordance with law promptly," Mr. Sharif said in a statement. He directed the chief minister of Punjab to take immediate action and submit a report to his office. Farzana Parveen was attacked outside the Lahore High Court building by more than two dozen brick-wielding assailants, including her brother and father, for marrying against the wishes of her family. Women are often murdered by relatives supposedly to defend family 'honor', but the brazen nature of Tuesday's attack has shocked rights activists. UK Foreign Secretary William Hague describes the murder as barbaric and calls for full investigation. The fact that police officers guarding the court apparently did nothing to intervene to save the 25-year-old has added to the outrage.

Farzana Parveen, who was three months pregnant, had gone to court to testify in defense of her husband Mohammad Iqbal - who was accused by her relatives of kidnapping her and forcing her into marriage. Mr. Iqbal, 45, said the couple had survived a previous attack during the first hearing of the case on May 12 and demanded justice for his wife. He told the BBC that police officers at the court were "watching silently" while his wife was beaten to death, despite desperate attempts to get them to act. "One of my relatives took off his clothes to catch their attention," he told the broadcaster. "A naked man was crying for help in front of the High Court but nobody intervened." The incident gained prompt attention from the global media and

international human right activists reacted to it. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay condemned the killing on Wednesday, urging the government to take “urgent and strong measures” to put an end to so-called honor killings in the country.

UK Calls Killing Barbaric

British Foreign Secretary William Hague described the murder as “barbaric” and urged the government to fully investigate it. “I am shocked and appalled by the death of Farzana Parveen: both for the appalling manner of her death, and the unspeakable cruelty and injustice of murdering a woman for exercising her basic right to choose who to love and marry,” Mr. Hague said in a statement. “There is absolutely no honor in honor killings and I urge the government of Pakistan to do all in its power to eradicate this barbaric practice. “I call on the Pakistani authorities to investigate this atrocious murder fully and bring those responsible to justice.” Last year 869 women died in “honor killings”, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Dawn - May 30, 2014

SECTARIAN CRISES & CONFLICT WATCH

Conflict & Sectarian Crisis Incidents

Security Briefs for the Month of May

Date	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Total
May 02, 2014	Three people, identified as Haqdar Khan Niazi, Sultan Khan Niazi and Yousuf Khan Niazi, were killed in a clash between two groups, following a protest call by the MQM against extra-judicial killings of its party members, at Daryaabad area of Lyari Town in Karachi.	3	0	3
May 03, 2014	A local TTP 'commander', Irfan Mehsud, and six other militants were killed in a fighting with SFs in the Babor Mountains of Ladha sub-division in South Waziristan Agency of FATA.	7	0	7
May 05, 2014	FC personnel claimed to have killed at least 10 militants during an operation in Panjgur District of Balochistan	10	0	10
May 06, 2014	At least 13 militants were killed as infighting between rival TTP groups restarted in Shawal tehsil of North Waziristan Agency of FATA.	13	0	13
	SFs killed seven militants in Banjot area of Swat District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after an attack left two soldiers injured on May 5.	7	0	7
May 07, 2014	Five militants were killed and three injured as clashes between two factions of TTP continued in Shawal area of NWA in FATA.	5	3	8
May 08, 2014	An IED exploded killing at least nine FC personnel and injuring several others near the Miranshah road in Ghulam Khan Tehsil of NWA of FATA.	9	NS	9
May 11, 2014	A suicide attack targeting internally displaced persons from the Tirah Valley of Khyber Agency in FATA killed at least five persons and injured 14 others in the Arbab Niaz Stadium of Peshawar in KP.	6	14	20
May 13, 2014	At least five militants were killed and three others were injured as rival TTP militants, belonging to Shehryar Mehsud and Khan "Sajna" Said factions, clashed in Shawal area of North Waziristan Agency in FATA.	5	3	8
May 17, 2014	Four unidentified men were killed when some armed men opened fire on them in Khameesa Goth area of New Karachi in Karachi.	4	0	4
May 21, 2014	At least 60 militants including foreign fighters were killed when Air Force warplanes bombarded	60	0	60

Date	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Total
	militant hideouts in Mir Ali and other areas of North Waziristan Agency in FATA in the early hours.			
	At least 15 persons including, 11 militants and four SF personnel were killed during a clash in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan Agency in FATA.	15	0	15
	Six people, including a government school teacher, were shot dead when unidentified militants entered the residence of a school teacher, identified as Master Hameed, and opened fire at his five relatives in Dasht area of Turbat District.	6	0	6
May 23, 2014	Four suspected militants were killed and several others were injured when SFs intensified military action in the Machis Camp area of North Waziristan Agency in FATA.	4	NS	4
May 24, 2014	At least eight militants, including a 'commander' and two SF personnel were killed in the evening, in a clash in Landi Kotal tehsil in Khyber Agency of FATA, after a security vehicle was ambushed by the militants.	10	0	10
	At least six SF personnel were killed and three injured in an IED blast in Mohmand Agency of FATA.	6	3	9
May 25, 2014	As many as eight officials of Balochistan Levies were killed and three others injured as unidentified assailants attacked Jauhar check-post along Quetta-Karachi Highway in Wadh tehsil of Khuzdar District in Balochistan.	8	3	11
	Five militants were killed in a clash with SFs in the Manro Jangal area near the Pak-Afghan border in Bajaur Agency of FATA.	5	5	10
May 26, 2014	Five dead bodies were discovered in Uthmanzai area in the Pandiyali tehsil of the Mohmand Agency in FATA.	5	0	5
	Three dead bodies were recovered from Surjani Town area of Karachi in Sindh.	3	0	3
	Three Lyari gangsters were shot dead in an encounter in Ittehad Town area of Karachi in Sindh.	3	0	3
May 27, 2014	At least six militants were killed and seven others sustained injuries in a fierce clash between rival factions of TTP at Taunda Darra in Shawal tehsil of NWA in FATA.	6	7	13
May 28, 2014	Three 'commanders' of the Lyari gang war, Abdul Waheed alias Pappu (32), Zubair Baloch alias Bhaiyya and Arif Patni (30), were shot dead in an alleged encounter with the Police and Rangers near Gabol Park area within the limits of the Kalakot	3	0	3

Date	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Total
	Police Station in Lyari Town of Karachi in Sindh.			
May 29, 2014	Four persons including Levies Force official were killed in a sectarian attack as militants attacked a convoy of Sipah Tribe, a predominant Shia clan returning from a funeral in Lal Pura area of Orakzai Agency in FATA.	4	0	4
	Three security officials were killed while two others were injured in an IED explosion in Seen Tanga Towda Chena area of Frontier Region Bannu in FATA in the morning.	3	2	5
	Three soldiers were killed and another two wounded in a roadside IED blast near Miranshah in North Waziristan Agency of FATA.	3	2	5
May 30, 2014	At least 16 militants were killed as SFs backed by gunship helicopters thwarted a cross border militant attack on a checkpoint situated on Nao Top in Bajaur Agency.	16	0	16

Compiled from different dialies

News & Updates on Crisis Incidents

MQM Warns of Shutting Karachi down for an Year

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) on Monday warned that Karachi would be shut down for an year if the government didn't issue a passport and ID card to its London-based chief Altaf Hussain. Speaking in the Senate, MQM Senator Tahir Mashhadi said the government had not responded even a month after Altaf Hussain had filed an application for his passport and ID card. He said NADRA officials had lied in the Senate Standing Committee meeting about not receiving Altaf Hussain's application. After making a short speech in the Upper House of Parliament, Mashhadi staged a walkout from the House along with other party senators in protest. Angry words were exchanged between the PML-N Senator Mushahidullah Khan and Mashhadi on the issue of the non-issuance of a National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis (NICOP) to the party leader Altaf Hussain.

The MQM staged a token walkout from the House after Mashhadi's fiery speech to lodge a protest over a senior Ministry of Interior official misinforming the House Standing Committee on Interior that no application had so far been received from the MQM leader. Mashhadi mentioned the tracking number and token given to Altaf Hussain by a NADRA team that took his thumb impression and a photograph on April 4. He protested the NICOP and passport was not issued to the leader of Pakistan's third largest party. He alleged injustice and discrimination was being meted out to a patriotic Pakistani citizen and his party leader. Then he led the party senators' walkout from the Senate. Mushahidullah, who was given the floor by Deputy Chairman Sabir Baloch, said he was expecting from Mashhadi to throw light on who were the killers of innocent people on May 12.

The PML-N senator questioned why a person who fled Pakistan in 1992, today wanted to have NICOP and passport. About Mashhadi's contention that the top leaders of two others parties also stayed abroad for several years but this treatment was not meted out to them, he pointed

out that those leaders never opted for any other country's citizenship. He alleged: "Their ministers had guns in their hands and many political leaders were saved by the ANP people." And the House echoed with laughter when the chair asked him to now bring back MQM senators, who had already exited from the House. Meanwhile, in a press release issue from London, MQM chief Altaf Hussain expressed his concerns about a statement of additional interior secretary and DG Passport regarding his NICOP issue, saying that if his NICOP was not issues MQM workers will protest worldwide.

The News - May 13, 2014

ECONOMIC WATCH

Facts & Figures

World Bank Approves \$12 Billion Loan for Pakistan

The World Bank's board of directors, in a consensus decision, approved a total of \$12 billion loan for Pakistan to be disbursed in the next five years, says the Finance Ministry. The Pakistan Day was celebrated at the World Bank the other day, and in the Development Policy Credit (DPCs), \$1 billion was approved for energy and revenue support during the current financial year. The other landmark achievement of the day was the approval of the Country Partnership Strategy under which Pakistan will get \$11 billion in the shape of project loans and budgetary support. It may be mentioned that the World Bank loans are purely concessionary in nature with repayment schedule spanning over a period of 30 years, including five years grace period and the interest rate will be nominal at the rate of 2% per annum. It is expected that \$1 billion will be transferred to Pakistan during the next week and it will increase Pakistan's forex reserves substantially. On receipt of \$1 billion, an equivalent amount of Rs100 billion will be reduced from the domestic debt, which is much more expensive at 12.5% per annum. The WB loan will incur 2% interest per annum and the Government of Pakistan will be saving net 10.5% in payment of interest on Rs100 billion. Resultantly, there will be no net increase in overall public debt.

The World Bank's board of directors, support and commitment with Pakistan reflects their confidence in the leadership and vision of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his team led by Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar. The finance minister has congratulated the whole nation on this success and observed that the Country Partnership Strategy is aligned fully with the vision of Pakistan's development challenges around the four Es "Energy, Economy, Extremism and Education," based on the manifesto of the PML-N and its commitment to the nation. Mehtab Haider adds that after the approval of financing plan of \$12 billion through budgetary support and CPS for Pakistan in the next five years, the World Bank's Country Director Rachid Benmessaoud said that the government was committed to pursuing key reforms in energy, revenue mobilization, privatization and regional cooperation. But the CPS for 2015-19 approved by the World Bank does not include any financing for the much-awaited construction of the Diamer-Bhasha Dam.

The WB's country director said there was no quick fix solution to Pakistan's energy crisis but the bank was helping the government to come up with medium to long term solutions. The WB's assistance, he said, was not associated with tariff increase as it was the domain of the government and regulator to rationalize tariff in a transparent manner. To a query about the exact number of people living below the poverty line, he said the number was not much important than trends and the latest trend showed that the incidence of poverty was on the declining side. To another question regarding the direction of the economy set by the incumbent government, the WB's country director said they were much encouraged with the set of reforms as the government was committed to enhancing regional cooperation, privatization plan by conducting well-thought-out diagnosis of ills being faced by the country. "What the government has already done is appreciable and now right direction has been set for the economy," he added.

The News - May 03, 2014

Upcoming Budget: Ambitious Government Hopes To Achieve 5.1% Growth

The federal government may announce a Rs. 3.744 trillion budget outlay for the next fiscal year with an ambitious economic growth rate of 5.1% that is expected to be achieved through the completion of unfinished economic reforms agenda in the second year of the Nawaz administration. The budget framework for fiscal year 2014-15 revolves around the pillar of restricting the overall budget deficit at 4.8% of Gross Domestic Product – or Rs1.4 trillion – aimed at continuing fiscal consolidation during the second year. The deficit will be filled by borrowing from domestic and external sources. Attainment of the 4.8% target will hinge on the ability of the four provinces to save over Rs110 billion out of their shares in federal receipts, which they will receive from the federal government, officials said. By excluding provinces' surpluses, the federal budget deficit will be 5.2% of GDP, they explained.

Meanwhile, the tax revenue target is to be set at Rs2.801 trillion, non-tax revenues' target at over Rs675 billion, and the petroleum levy target is expected to be over Rs125 billion. The tax target will be 23.5% higher than this year's twice-downward revised target of Rs2.27 trillion, while the non-tax revenue will be lower than this year's. Officials said gross federal receipts are likely to be around Rs3.6 trillion. Out of that, the provinces are expected to get about Rs1.7 trillion, including straight transfers, as their share in federal taxes, leaving the federal government with a net income of Rs1.9 trillion. The proposed budget outlay is Rs158 billion higher than the Rs3.591 trillion budget of the outgoing fiscal year, according to Ministry of Finance officials. The planned budget expenditure was shared with the federal cabinet, while discussing the Budget Strategy Paper. The government seemed to have more trust in bureaucrats than the cabinet ministers, as after the meeting, the strategy paper was taken back, two federal ministers confirmed.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar briefed the cabinet ministers about the economic achievements in the first year of the government. Officials said the budget will be presented with an objective to increase the tax base through the withdrawal of Statutory Regulatory Orders, cutting power subsidies and deepening economic development. The government will announce development schemes under the Pak-China Economic Corridor project, according to officials. Out of Rs525 billion proposed development budget, the government is considering to set aside Rs100 billion for new initiatives, including Lahore-Karachi motorway, building jetties and roads to link China with Gwadar. The government will set 5.1% economic growth rate target for the next fiscal year, they informed. The inflation target is likely to be set around 7.8% to 8% that will be achieved by controlling expenditures and ensuring price stability.

As a price stability measure, the government is expected to keep the rupee-dollar parity at Rs99 to a dollar aimed at avoiding the rupee-depreciation impact on prices of electricity and petroleum products. Because the government could not achieve the goal of increasing FBR's tax-to-GDP ratio to 9.5% this year, it has decided to introduce reforms during the next fiscal year. It will announce the aim of bringing in 100,000 people in the tax net – a goal that it could not achieve this year. The main focus of the government will be on withdrawing tax exemptions. On the energy side, officials said the government is expected to allocate over Rs190 billion in power subsidies, which are lower than this year's revised estimates of around Rs300 billion. For paying fertilizer subsidies, Rs25 billion may be allocated while Rs35 billion will be given in subsidies to Pakistan Railways, officials told. For servicing the domestic and foreign debt, the government is considering allocating Rs1.29 trillion next year. Meanwhile, the defense budget is expected to be around Rs690 billion, according to officials. An amount of Rs294 billion is expected to be allocated for running the civilian government.

The Express Tribune - May 16, 2014

New Taxes of Rs. 255bn in FY 14-15 Budget Likely

The Pakistan Muslim League-N government is all set to introduce a number of revenue-generation measures in the budget for financial year 2014-15, including new taxes that are expected to yield an estimated Rs. 255 billion. Sources in the finance ministry say these measures are likely to hit the middle class the hardest. The new proposals, guided by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, aim to bring down the budget deficit to 4.8 per cent next year from this year's 5.7pc. The burden of this decrease will largely be shouldered by the middle class and non-industrialists as the cost of living is expected to increase as a result of the new indirect taxes. The revenue measures are tailored to fulfill the conditions attached with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Extended Fund Programme for Pakistan. The new revenue collection target was agreed upon by both sides at a recently-held IMF review meeting in Dubai.

Revenue Generation Measures May Hit the Middle Class Hard

In order to qualify for the next IMF tranche, the government has proposed a revenue generation target of Rs. 2,810 billion for FY 2014-15, an increase of 24pc or Rs. 535bn from this year's revised target of Rs. 2,275bn. The IMF had given clear indications to Pakistan's economic team regarding the finalization of budget proposals if Islamabad wanted to bring down the fiscal deficit as per the plan agreed upon with the IMF. On the orders of the finance minister, the tax proposals for the next budget are being based on three key pillars: the withdrawal of tax exemptions granted through Statutory Regulatory Orders (SROs); an increase in existing tax rates; and the bolstering of revenue collection by widening the tax base. Additional revenue, over and above the current fiscal target of Rs. 2,275bn, would have to be met through other measures and the withdrawal of tax exemptions. The exemptions granted through SROs currently stand at Rs. 480 billion. Of this, Rs. 103.96bn is expected to be withdrawn in the budget for FY 2014-15.

However, the total amount of exemptions that can be withdrawn is Rs. 240bn. This means that the remaining Rs. 136.04bn in exemptions will be withdrawn over the next two years – FY 2015-16 and FY 2016-17. New taxation measures may include an increase in the federal excise duty rate to 17pc, new adjustable taxes aimed at bringing the undocumented sector into the tax net and higher rates for non-taxpayers. The expected measures also include the introduction of a string of new withholding taxes as well as an increase in the rates of existing ones and the withdrawal of customs exemptions and concessions. However, it is yet to be determined whether the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) can raise this money simply by imposing new taxes or will some part have to be collected through administrative measures, by plugging the many loopholes in the taxation system and improving revenue generation. The finance ministry has projected growth in the rate of inflation at 8.5pc in FY 2014-15 and expects the economy to grow by 5.5pc. Due to inflation and economic growth, nearly Rs. 280 billion is expected to be raised in FY 2014-15 outside of the tax measures.

Finance ministry sources say a proposal to introduce asset-based taxes is on the table, but it may be difficult for the PML-N to implement it because of the real estate mafia, which is an influential lobby within the party. It is a similar story with sugar, as general sales tax on the commodity stands at 8pc instead of 17pc, due to the influence of millers. This year, FBR's tax-to-GDP ratio is expected to fall to 8.8pc from the budgetary target of 9.9pc. Former Finance Minister and Institute for Policy Reforms Managing Director Dr Hafeez A. Pasha says that Pakistan today has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in all of Asia; lower than Bangladesh's 10pc, India's over 16pc, Sri Lanka's 12pc, Malaysia's 14pc, Thailand's 18pc, the Philippines' 12pc and Turkey's 21pc. He said Pakistan's taxation system did not collect as much revenue as it should and that there were far too many concessions and exemptions granted, which cut into

the overall revenue generation figures. Mr. Pasha suggested that the principal focus of the tax proposals for FY2014-15 should be on the development of a direct tax regime, in order to make federal taxation more buoyant and progressive.

Dawn - May 19, 2014

DEVELOPMENT WATCH

Developmental Projects

The Positives & Negatives of Metro Bus Project

A meeting organized by the newly formed, 'Green Islamabad' in collaboration with Kuch Khaas and Subh-e-nau, attended by some concerned citizens of the capital and its sister city Rawalpindi, came to the conclusion that a Metro Bus service was, without any doubt, a need of the hour but should not be rushed through without proper planning and environment assessment. The panelists included artist and green activist, Fauzia Minallah who has been working for the preservation of the green heritage of the city for many years; Cristina Afridi, activist and concerned citizen; Imrana Tiwana, architect and urban specialist and Bilal Haque, of Subh-e-nau. The meeting was moderated by Dr Dushka Syed who along with her other commitment's is also trying, as a concerned citizen, to preserve Islamabad's beauty by keeping an eye on projects that impact the environment.

The discussion began with Dr Dushka stating emphatically that they were not against the Metro Bus Project per se but at the speed at which it was being implemented without proper assessment of the damage to the environment; ignoring the needs of pedestrians and cyclists and awarding of the project to a company which was doing its own EPA — something unheard of anywhere in the world. "This project is being rushed through to garner votes for the next election," she said "without caring for the consequences and the overall negative impact it will have."

Imrana Tiwana gave examples of Metro Bus services around the world and how they had been developed to keep the beauty of the city intact while taking care of the transportation needs of citizens. "Concrete is no longer the favored material for building," she said. "This project reflects the national psyche - diving in headlong without thinking of the results and other much needed development projects." She went on to lament that Lahore which was known as the city of gardens was now a concrete jungle with only thirty gardens left of the 360 which existed earlier. Christina Afridi asked the questions everyone is asking, "Why the hurry?" She cited examples of transit systems that had been built slowly and steadily with the entire necessary infrastructure and were used by millions of commuter's every day.

Fauzia Minallah said the impact on the flora and fauna as well as the environment would be very negative as hundreds of trees were to be cut and greenbelts eaten up. "I'm afraid we are too late as the bull dozers are already in I-9 and are causing havoc." Bilal Haque of Subh-e-nau gave a detailed presentation which covered all aspects of the project — violation of the master plan of the capital; ignoring requisite approvals; CDA and EPA side-lined and pressurized; the lacking EIA report; learning from other success stories; CDA's planned bus system: ignored, misaligned with the Metro plan; alternatives to the Metro Bus and its elevated expressways; current issues in Rawalpindi; visual appeal; reducing sound and vibrations; replenishing underground water reserves; wildlife, flora and fauna sanctuary and saving green belts. A participant said that the sister cities were inter-connected and the damage that is being done to Rawalpindi is beyond measure, not to say anything of the noise and dust pollution that is making citizens lives miserable. How did the civic authorities allow a project that is ruining the cantonment and city areas to take place?

The News - May 03, 2014

NEC Move to End Disparity in Development

Giving a new orientation to the economic policy of the country, the National Economic Council (NEC) approved a Rs. 36bn initiative for strengthening national unity and the federation by removing disparities in development between the developed and under-developed parts of the country. Under the initiative, Rs. 15 billion will be invested in Balochistan, Rs8bn in Sindh, Rs4bn each in KP and Fata, Rs. 3bn in Azad Kashmir and Rs. 2bn in Gilgit-Baltistan. A meeting of the council, presided over by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and attended by all chief ministers, the prime minister of Azad Kashmir, the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhawa and ministers for finance and development from federal and provincial governments, also approved federal and provincial development plans of Rs. 1.175 trillion, a marginal increase of 1.7 per cent over Rs. 1.155trn for the outgoing year. It approved macro-economic framework for the next fiscal year, envisaging 5.1pc growth in gross domestic product, to be supported by a 3.3pc growth in agriculture, 6.8pc in industrial output and 5.2pc in the services sector. The framework put exports target of \$27 billion for the next year, investment at 15.7pc of GDP, savings at 14.6pc of GDP and current account deficit at 1.1pc of GDP or \$2.8bn.

Rs1.175 Trillion Uplift Plan Approved

Under the development programme, the federal government has earmarked Rs. 525bn against current year's allocation of Rs. 540bn, showing a decline of about 2.8pc. The four provincial governments will, however, spend Rs. 650bn against combined allocation of Rs. 615bn for the current year - an increase of 5.7pc. In addition to federal and provincial budgets, the power sector organizations like WAPDA and the National Transmission and Dispatch Company will spend another Rs. 135bn out from their own resources. The power sector has been given top priority with the highest allocation of Rs260bn. Power generation sector has been given a lion's share of Rs. 155bn – Rs. 84bn for hydropower, Rs. 23bn for thermal power and Rs48bn for nuclear power. Another Rs. 105bn will be spent on improvement and expansion of transmission lines. Some of the key power projects are Diamer Bhasha dam, Karachi Coastal Power Project, Dasu hydropower project, Neelum-Jhelum hydropower project, Chashma Nuclear, Jamshoro power project, Tarbela Extension IV project, Nandipur power project and Chichon ki Malyan power project. The prime minister said the allocations showed the seriousness and commitment of the government to tide over the power scarcity.

The transport and communications sector got second priority position with an allocation of Rs. 163bn, including Rs. 114bn for the National Highway Authority and Rs. 40bn for rehabilitation and revival of Pakistan Railways. Some of the important infrastructure projects are Lahore-Karachi Motorway, Hasanabdal-Havelian-Mansehra road project, Peshawar Northern Bypass, Raikot-Islamabad project, Gwadar airport, Gwadar Free Economic Zone and construction of a jetty and infrastructure development at Gadani Power Park. The prime minister said Rs. 53.5bn was the cost of land acquisition for the Lahore-Karachi Motorway project and of that Rs. 25.5bn had already been released. The federal government will continue supporting education, health and population welfare projects throughout the country, despite these being devolved subjects with an allocation of Rs. 51 billion. While discussing development projects in his province, Balochistan Chief Minister Abdul Malik Baloch pointed out delays and corruption in the Quetta water supply scheme. He said Rs. 10bn had been spent, but there was no visible progress.

The prime minister ordered an inquiry into the matter and asked the chief minister to monitor the projects himself. The NEC approved five cancer hospitals – four to be set up in the provincial capitals and one in Islamabad. Mr. Sharif said a plan should be prepared for one cancer hospital each in Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK and Fata. Senior Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhawa Sirajul Haq raised the issue of delay in completion of Lowari Tunnel project due to paucity of funds. The prime

minister said he would look into the matter and would visit the project area along with the chief minister and the governor of KP to see the situation on ground. The KP governor is reported to have complained about lack of development funds for tribal region affected by the war on terror. Mr. Sharif said that special attention should be given to Fata in overall development strategy. The Balochistan chief minister raised the issues of funding for transmission lines in far-flung areas in his province and power shortage and a water supply scheme for Gwadar. The prime minister said vast resources of solar energy should be tapped and a feasibility report should be prepared for installing solar power panels in Balochistan.

Dawn - May 30, 2014

Educational Projects

Free and Compulsory Education Is Now a Law

The Punjab government has finally accepted its responsibility of giving right to education to all children between 5-16 years of age in the province by promulgating The Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Ordinance 2014. Punjab Governor Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar promulgated on Tuesday evening the ordinance to make necessary provisions for the implementation of Article 25-A, which was inserted in the Constitution in 2010 binding the state to provide free and compulsory education to children aged 5-16 years. Since 2010, the Punjab government was supposed to legislate and provide free and compulsory education to children. The governor has now promulgated the ordinance as Punjab Assembly is not in session and he was satisfied with the existing circumstances making it necessary to take action.

The ordinance has repealed the Punjab Compulsory Primary Education Act 1994 and declared that all such laws to be brought into conformity with the scheme and objectives of this ordinance within five years. According to a copy of the ordinance obtained by Dawn, every child has a right to free and compulsory education from Class-I to X, non-formal education, vocational education or a combination of all considering the needs, capability and age so as to ensure completion of education. It states that a child or parent shall not be liable to pay any fee or charges or expenses for completing education in a school owned or controlled by the government or local authority.

Local Authority

The ordinance seeks creating local authorities (local government or an autonomous or a statutory government body exercising administrative control over a school) to establish requisite number of schools. It will also devise a scheme for using the schools in evening hours. The ordinance states the government and local authority shall devise a system of grants-in-aid to encourage admissions and support attendance of a disadvantaged child. The ordinance also binds parents to get their children admitted to schools and help them attend, except in the case of a reasonable cause, until the said children would complete education. If a parent failed to admit and keep the child in a school, according to the ordinance he/she would not be entitled to any subsidy or poverty-targeted support of the provincial as well as federal government.

Private Schools

The ordinance has made it binding on private schools, which are not receiving any kind of aid from the provincial or federal governments or a local authority, as well as government-recognized seminaries or schools offering religious education, to admit 10pc students of the

strength of each of Class-I to X, including disadvantaged children of the neighborhood or other children determined by the government, to offer them free and compulsory education. Similarly, according to the ordinance, the private schools receiving aid or grant to meet whole or part of its expenses from the provincial or federal governments or a local authority will be required to provide free education to such proportion of children admitted therein as its annual aid or grant so received bears to its annual recurring expenses. The private institutions will be required to provide information pertaining to students admitted to the government and local authority.

Early Education

The ordinance has also made it binding on the government or local authority to establish a kindergarten school or childcare centre in a local area or consolidate or merge such schools or centres for providing free pre-school education and early childhood care for children above the age of three years until they join a school.

Management

The government or the local authority shall establish a school management body and assign it powers regarding a school.

Fund

The government may permit a school management body to establish Farooq-i-Taleem Fund for the school. All contributions from philanthropists, alumni, students and parents shall be credited to the fund and maintained at a scheduled bank. The fund shall be utilized for the welfare of students.

Admission/Expulsion

The ordinance requires that no school will deny any child admission for lack of proof of age. No school will expel a child until arrangement is made for transfer or assessed in two consecutive annual examinations as being below standard or a reasoned judgment passed by the disciplinary committee or the child or parent fails to fulfill any prescribed condition, including non-payment of fee of a private school.

Corporal Punishment

The ordinance says the in-charge of a school shall ensure a child is not subjected to corporal punishment or harassment. A person found contravening provisions of admission, expulsion and corporal punishment shall be held guilty and liable to disciplinary action.

Duties

The ordinance has also discussed duties of teachers, including maintaining regularity, timely completion of curriculum, assessing students' learning abilities, trying all-round development of a child, building up a child's knowledge, adopting learning through activities, keeping a child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and holding regular meetings with parents. It says the teachers failing to perform their duties in a satisfactory manner shall be liable to disciplinary action.

Dawn - May 15, 2014

Health Projects

Health Reports/Controls

Mysterious Disease Kills 14 Women in Bajaur

Some 14 women died while many others got infected from a mysterious disease broke out at Warah Mamound area of Bajaur Agency, locals of the area told. They said that the disease had hit the mountainous areas of Dabar, Badan, Saro Sha and surrounding areas of Warrah Mamond of Bajaur Agency. "At least 14 women have been died within a week while many others infected from the mysterious disease spreading speedily in the area," Tahir Khan, a local of the area told. The locals also complained about lack of health facilities in the local hospital for patients and expressed concern over the alarming situation. They said that the situation might become more alarming if immediate steps were not taken. They demanded the local authorities and health department to immediately send medical teams to the areas. Dr Zakir Hussain, Agency Surgeon, has confirmed the outbreak of mysterious disease and subsequently women's death caused by it in the area. He said that the disease broke out in different areas of Warrah Mamond one week ago and killed several women. He said that several health teams comprising senior doctors and paramedics were sent to the affected areas to control the situation and identify causes behind the outbreak of disease. To a question, he said that the health department is making all-out efforts to control the situation in the area.

The Nation - May 02, 2014

Polio: Unprecedented Number of Cases Surface in First Quarter

Abdul Wali is a 14-month-old and has been diagnosed with polio, confirmed by the Prime Minister's (PM) Polio Monitoring Cell, Wali's case takes the country's total to 59 – one more than the total number of polio diagnoses reported in all of 2012. This brings Pakistan to another dark milestone. There have not been as many cases of polio in the first four months of a year since 2000. PM Focal Person on Polio Eradication Ayesha Raza Farooq confirms, "We have never seen so many cases in the first quarter – it is unprecedented." More than 90% of these originate from the tribal areas, and, she tells the reason is very obvious, "We have not been able to vaccinate in our tribal areas – North and South Waziristan and Khyber Agency."

What Went Wrong?

"These numbers are not the result of the last two or four or eight months but the result of a lack of vaccination for two years." Farooq explains the concentration of cases lies in "areas which are highly compromised security wise or where there is active militancy." Citing Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and Karachi, she said the attacks on polio teams at the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 made it particularly difficult to carry out immunization activities. Farooq said 2013 was a particularly bad year. "The interim government dismantled polio bodies so we lost two to three months but now we are doing a few things differently," she said while answering a question about strategies to stem the spread.

Possible & Plausible Solutions

Work to secure and strengthen transit points all over the country where vaccinations will take place is going on. Already 3.4 million children have been vaccinated at these points," said

Farooq. Inter-provincial meetings were held between bordering districts where migratory and travel patterns were discussed, she said, adding it was then decided where to place the transit vaccination points and how often to vaccinate. A similar conference was held with Afghanistan to discuss how to prevent the poliovirus from being transmitted across the border, shares Farooq. But the biggest 'if' remains North and South Waziristan. Farooq claims some headway is being made to create access to the children there.

"We are talking to the army and paramilitary forces there. Recently, we started negotiating with civil-military coordination committees, which have been in place in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) since 2011." "The civil administration and army will provide security to our teams so people going in and out of Fata are vaccinated," Farooq said. "Our teams will vaccinate wherever they have access – parts of NWA, SWA and Khyber." She accepts there is minimal reach in those areas. "We have some routine immunization centres, with some self-administration of vaccines, but they are very low in number." But she insists peace talks will result in giving us better and consistent access in these areas.

Carrying a Virus

Though Fata does not come under the purview of the Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) K-P, the proximity of the two regions makes coordination key. EPI K-P Director Dr Janbaz Afridi confirms children born after June 2012 in Waziristan have not been protected by the oral polio vaccine (OPV). "This is a direct result of a ban on vaccinations by the Taliban. Even in the ones under the age of five, a majority have not had many drops." With a strong geographical nexus, the presence of poliovirus in Waziristan automatically puts Frontier Region Bannu and Bannu at risk, says Afridi, "The implication cannot be avoided – there are five cases in Bannu." "People move back and forth between Waziristan and Bannu every day. The immunity of the children who enter is so weak that they carry the virus across to Bannu. Thus, the risk of spread keeps multiplying." K-P has and will have consistent polio campaigns, especially in the southern districts, claims Afridi. "We cannot speak for Fata but we have teams at transit points."

How Many Drops?

Even in the 59 cases, some who contracted the virus had received a couple of OPV doses which goes to show, one or two or four doses are not enough. Afridi confirms, "The more the doses, the better the child is protected. In routine practice we administer four doses but when it comes to eradication of a virus, any child under five in an epidemic environ has to keep getting doses...till we get rid of polio completely." If the virus is in the environment, even if no one has it, someone can get polio, says the director solemnly. "Even those who have previously had OPV administered."

The Express Tribune - May 03, 2014

Pakistan 'Most Perilous Place' For Mums in South Asia

Though Pakistan has halved maternal mortality, the state is the toughest place in South Asia to be a mother, says a Mothers' Index that documents conditions for mothers around the world. Save the Children's annual State of World's Mothers Report 2014, now in its fifteenth edition, compares 178 countries around the globe, showing which are succeeding - and which are failing - in saving and improving the lives of mothers and their children. Overall, Finland was ranked the best place to be a mother for the second straight year and Somalia came in last. Finland, Norway and Sweden top the ranking this year. The top 10 countries, majority of them European

countries, in general attain very high scores for mothers' and children's health, educational, economic and political status. While the 10 bottom-ranked countries-all but one of them from West and Central Africa- are a reverse image of the top 10 countries. The United States ranks at 31st. Dr Qudsia Uzma, Director Health & Nutrition at Save the Children sharing key findings said, globally Pakistan ranks 147th out of total 178 countries while 20th out of 45 fragile states affected by conflicts and natural disasters.

Sri Lanka is the best place to be a mother in South Asia. While Pakistan performs the worst in the region as all neighboring countries score high leaving Pakistan at the bottom-Sri Lanka ranks 89th, Nepal 116th, Bangladesh 130th, India 137th and Afghanistan 146th. This year's State of the World's Mothers report focuses on mothers in humanitarian crises in order to better understand and respond to their needs. Mothers in humanitarian crises are often faced with many obstacles to keep their children healthy - such as physical and economic access to essential services - while their own vulnerability to poverty, malnutrition, sexual violence, unplanned pregnancy and unassisted childbirth greatly increases.

'More than half (59 percent) of maternal and deaths worldwide occur in fragile states, many of them affected by conflict and recurring natural disasters. And Pakistan and Nigeria had the largest numbers of people affected by conflict-28 million and 19 million respectively'. Worldwide, women and children are up to 14 times more likely to die in a disaster. Disasters affect states where poverty is an existing problem. The issues that result are further compounded by the lack of access and delivery to the health needs of the people, and failing to cater to these basic human needs becomes a cause and consequence of such disasters. Mortality risk is the highest; during labour, childbirth and the first week after delivery, says the report.

In Pakistan, maternal mortality has been cut by almost half, child mortality decreased by a quarter, expected years of schooling increased by 3.3 years and gross national income per capita rose 270 percent over the past 15 years. Pakistan has seen improvements on child and maternal well-being over the past 15 years, but conflicts and natural disasters have marginalized these improvements, said David Skinner, Country Director for Save the Children in Pakistan. 'We should be concerned that we have fallen behind our neighbors because we are not making improvements for mothers and children quickly enough. Many children are still dying from preventable causes, mothers are giving birth alone at home and children are not staying in school' the country Director said.

The report states that around 80 percent of countries are unlikely to achieve Millennium Development Goals of 4 and 5, related to reducing maternal and child mortality rates, are affected by conflict or natural disasters or both and Pakistan is one of them. To protect mothers and children in the aftermath of disasters in Pakistan, the report calls upon the federal and provincial governments, and civil society to ensure that every mother and newborn living in crisis has access to high quality health care, including family planning services, and breastfeeding counseling. It recommends building the resilience of health systems to minimize damaging effects of crises on health and develop national and local preparedness plans tailored to respond to the specific needs of mothers, children and babies in emergencies.

The Nation - May 07, 2014

Punjab Brings In Own Polio Restrictions

Following imposition of travel sanctions on Pakistan by WHO, the biggest federating unit in the country has come up with the same idea of making compulsory presentation of polio vaccination certificates for entering Punjab from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Punjab

government will depute polio vaccination teams at 41 entry/exit points from Khyber PK and entrances from Sindh to administer polio drops to children. Those refusing to take polio drops will not be allowed to enter Punjab unless they present polio vaccination certificates. "Either they have to take polio drops or present a polio vaccination certificate for entering Punjab. Those who refuse to take polio drops and at the same time failed to present a polio vaccination certificate will not be allowed to enter Punjab," said an official at Health Department. As per the World Health Organization, Karachi, Peshawar and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are three main reservoirs of polio virus from where it can be transported to other areas of the country.

The government has failed to carry out a single polio vaccination campaign in FATA since 2012 and as such this region is the main source of exportation of polio virus. WHO and Khyber PK government has carried out rigorous campaign in Peshawar and other sensitive districts but lack of any polio eradication activity in FATA has rendered these a futile exercise. Same is the situation with Baldia and Gadap Town in Karachi where polio teams have little or even no access to administer polio drops. So far 59 polio cases have been reported from across the country during the current year, majority of these were from FATA, Khyber PK and Sindh. Though no case has been reported from Punjab, wild polio virus has been detected from the sewerage water of Lahore about 3-4 days back. As polio cases continue to surface from Sindh, Khyber PK and FATA, there is a risk of transportation of crippling virus to Punjab, the officials said.

The Punjab government's decision comes a day after the WHO imposed travel restrictions on Pakistan, Syria and Cameroon, warning that the crippling disease has re-emerged as a public health emergency. The Punjab Health Department has also decided to establish special centres at all teaching and DHQ hospitals for vaccination of intending travelers. Medical Superintendents of teaching and DHQ hospitals would issue polio vaccination cards to intending travelers. The Punjab Health Department has decided to carry out strict monitoring of polio vaccination drive in 10 sensitive districts of the province. An emergency meeting of Polio Monitoring Cell held on Tuesday with Adviser to Chief Minister on Health Kh Salman Rafiq in the chair discussed in detail the post sanctions scenario. Director Health EPI Dr Munir Ahmed, WHO representative Dr Obaid-ul-Islam and Dr Aslam Chaudhry attended the meeting.

Kh Salman Rafiq said that WHO's sanctions were unfortunate as Punjab Government has strived hard to combat the crippling virus. He said that the polio could not be eradicated unless all the provinces took sufficient measures. The virus currently affects 10 countries worldwide and is endemic in three countries including Pakistan. Federal government has also announced to set up mandatory polio vaccination points at all international airports in response to the WHO's recommendations. "Special measures will include establishing mandatory vaccination counters on all airports, border crossings and seaports for all travelers," the officials said.

The Nation - May 07, 2014

Polio Certificate Must For Travelers from June 1

Polio vaccination certificates will now be mandatory for all people travelling abroad from June 1, the government announced as traces of the poliovirus were found in samples taken from the sewers of Karachi and Lahore - the two largest cities in the country. In a meeting held in Islamabad, officials from the Ministry of National Health Services assured delegates from the World Health Organization (WHO) that from next month, all international travelers would be required to obtain a certificate of immunization before embarking. Sources in the ministry said

the immunization certificate would be a necessary travel document for all Pakistanis, as well as foreigners who stayed in the country for four weeks or more. A statement issued after the meeting said: "Recommendations made by the WHO director general... are expected to be fully implemented in two weeks. Federal and provincial governments are collaborating with WHO, UNICEF and health development partners to mobilize (all) available resources and ensure the availability of vaccine, vaccination certificates and human resources."

Samples Test Positive

Also, officials of the Prime Minister's Polio Cell in Islamabad confirmed that samples taken from the areas of Gadap and Gulshan-i-Iqbal in Karachi had tested positive for the poliovirus. A previous test of sewer-water in these areas had also yielded similar results. In addition, sources in the Sindh Health Department revealed that samples taken from the Machar Colony and Khamiso Goth areas had also tested positive for traces of the virus. However, they claimed that the results announced by the PM's Polio Cell were based on samples taken in March and that the results of the tests carried out on samples taken in April have yet to be announced. In Lahore, samples from the Main Outfall Road pumping station had tested positive for the poliovirus, while those taken from the Multan Road disposal station had turned out negative. WHO Senior Polio Surveillance Dr Zubair Mufti told that the virus detected in Lahore was a strain that originated in Fata. Samples taken from the Sabzi Mandi in Islamabad, as well as those taken from Peshawar, had tested negative for the virus, he said. Of a total of 60 reported cases of polio this year, 47 were from Fata, five from Karachi and eight from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To put the enormity of the numbers into perspective, only 80 cases of polio have been detected worldwide so far this year. Officials from the PM's Polio Cell claimed that the virus found from Lahore was a 'low grade one' and less likely to infect the population. However, according to them, the situation in Karachi was just as alarming as it had been last year, when eight of the 10 cases of polio reported from Sindh were detected in the metropolis. Sindh Health Department officials told that they had already made arrangements to vaccinate travelers and issue certificates at international airports, as well as all DHQ hospitals across Sindh.

Dawn - May 14, 2014

Government Imposes Polio Travel Ban on FATA

The government announced that residents of the restive tribal belt would not be able to travel to other parts of the country without getting vaccinated against polio. The move came days after Pakistan said it would set up mandatory immunization points at airports to help stop its polio outbreak spreading abroad, in response to new guidelines by the World Health Organization (WHO). "(The) Prime minister decided to involve (the) army to ensure security on all FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Area) border points to regulate ingress of people from FATA into settled areas only after polio vaccine has been administered," a statement from prime minister Nawaz Sharif's office said. The World Health Organization warned that the crippling disease has re-emerged as a public health emergency - with the virus currently affecting 10 countries worldwide and endemic in three, including Pakistan - and urged infected nations to implement vaccine requirements for all international travel. The Taliban and other militants violently oppose polio vaccination campaigns, seeing them as a cover for foreign spying and regularly attacking immunization teams.

Meanwhile, the National Coordinator for Polio Eradication Ayesha Raza Farooq called on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad and briefed him on efforts made by the government to eradicate polio. Ayesha was directed to meet Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governor to ensure polio

workers had better access to masses. Polio workers continued to administer polio drops on Thursday under the protection of the army in the Bara tehsil of Khyber tribal region during the fourth phase of polio vaccination drive in the tribal region. The vaccination campaign had begun in July 2012 after the security forces cleared parts of the area from militants' control. Under the protective cover of the army and Frontier Corps personnel, the polio workers administered polio vaccines to children less than 10 years of age in the Khyber Malakhdin Khel area. Militants' activities in the region had rendered Malakhdin Khel volatile and a no-go area for some time.

The polio workers said that each phase has a target of about 75,000 children. The fourth phase is currently in progress and, despite adverse circumstances, the polio campaign had achieved 60 percent of the target so far and about 120,000 children have been vaccinated in various parts of the Khyber region since the campaign started in 2012. Dr Wazir Akbar of the National Staff Transmission of Polio in the Khyber tribal area sent a detailed report to the head of the polio campaign which states that polio drops were administered to about 26,878 children during the current phase, which started on May 6 and will go on till the end of this month. He further said that "the army and the Frontier Corps (FC) were providing security cover to the teams that are carrying out the campaign".

Daily Times - May 16, 2014

12-Day Province-Wide Drive against Measles

The provincial health authorities are set to launch a 12-day measles immunization campaign across Sindh to inoculate 13.33 million children aged 6-10 against measles and administer them an additional vitamin A booster. Officials said that Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah would officially launch the campaign in the provincial capital, which would continue till the end of May. The campaign is planned to cover Sindh's 1,120 union councils in 29 districts. A total of 13,330,529 children aged 6-10 will be targeted for which 1,539 fixed centres have been set up. Some 6,959 skilled professionals, 5,296 outreach teams, 124 mobile teams, 10,000 team assistants and 130,000 social mobilizers will participate in the gigantic exercise, which will continue except on Sundays from 9am to 4pm. The volunteers will also visit door-to-door to vaccinate children.

Dr Sagheer Ahmed, Sindh health minister, said at a press conference that 14 children had died of measles in the province thus far this year out of a total of 133 confirmed cases. The figure of deaths was in sharp contrast to reports published in a section of the media, for which the minister insisted that he shared whatever his ministry had officially gathered. The government functionaries admit that almost half the population was not being immunized for a host of factors, major among them being limited manpower and resources. Dr Ahmed termed it dangerous that just 29 per cent of children in Sindh had received both the boosters for measles while just 47pc of children were vaccinated against the disease in the first booster. Asked to comment on reports about six measles deaths in Karachi, the minister said the secretary for health should investigate the matter. The police and paramilitary rangers have ensured all-out support to provide security during the campaign.

Seeing it as an excellent opportunity to bolster the provincial government's effort to eradicate polio, he said the officials had planned to also administer polio drops during the campaign. Dr Ahmed said he had contacted Islamabad for the provision of additional boosters of polio vaccines to immunize international travelers under the World Health Organization restraints from the beginning of next month. He said around 13,000 travelers went abroad everyday from Sindh thus at least 10,000 additional polio doses were required. He said officials in the

secondary and tertiary hospitals and grade-19 officers of the expanded programme on immunization in Sindh would be eligible to issue polio vaccination cards.

No private hospital had been allowed to issue such certificates while the government hospitals would issue them free of charge. He rubbished the reports that polio drops could adversely affect pregnant women. "Polio drops are completely harmless," he said. He said his department had recorded some cases of rubella in some lower parts of Sindh. However, rubella could not cause death as compared to measles. Haleem Aadil Sheikh, provincial president of the PML-Q, on Sunday warned the government that its measles campaign could face failure because of the worst power outages in Thatta district. He claimed at a press conference held at the Karachi Press Club that hundreds of children were in a precarious condition in Thatta because of measles contrary to the official figures.

Dawn - May 19, 2014

Centre 'Not Allowing' KP to Purchase Anti-Polio Vaccine

The reluctance of federal government to allow Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to purchase oral polio vaccine is hampering the plan of provincial government to carry out need-based immunization, according to sources. "We have been asking the federal government to allow us to buy vaccine as after the passage of 18th Amendment all matters relating to polio and other health subjects should be transferred to the provinces," the officials concerned said. They said that all the provinces were demanding of the centre to allow them to buy vaccine for their own needs but all requests fell on deaf ears. They added that ministry of health didn't exist after the amendment and it was the legitimate right of the provinces to ensure availability of the vaccine on their own. The officials said that federal government's decision to create Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (MNHSRC) after the passage of 18th Amendment caused problems for the provinces. "The ministry has been tasked to oversee the polio campaigns in the provinces and keep contact with the donor agencies but it is stuck with purchase and procurement of the OPV on behalf of the provinces because of the financial benefits," they said.

Pakistan requires vaccine worth about Rs8 billion to immunize its 35 million children below the age of five every year. All the provinces look towards the federal ministry to buy vaccine and supply the same to the respective health departments but the provinces continue to suffer for want of timely provision of the OPV. The provincial government has communicated to the centre that it is ready to purchase OPV from international market in line with the WHO's guidelines to make sure immunization of all children. "The massive purchase of vaccine entailed financial benefits to people," sources said. They added that federal government had already shifted other vertical programmes to the provinces after 18th Amendment but kept polio-related matters with it because of the benefits associated with it. "For instance, MNHSRC is keeping liaison with the donor agencies like WHO, UNICEF, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others on behalf of the provinces.

The people in the Prime Minister Polio Cell, working under MNHCO, negotiate with the donors on the behalf of the provinces," sources said. According to them, these people also go on foreign tours where they discuss polio-related problems in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administered Tribal Areas where the disease have become endemic. "The donor agencies are also comfortable to meet MNHSRC's people in Islamabad and discuss the problems there instead of travelling to the provinces to meet the relevant officials and have true picture of the problems faced by them," sources said. They said that the province was required to run immediate

vaccination campaigns in the areas from where cases were reported as rapid response to the situation but the province had to look towards the centre for provision of vaccine.

The WHO's recommendations to administer OPV to all passengers flying abroad is the latest problem faced by the provincial health department. The province needs additional OPV doses to ensure immunization of about 12,000 people taking flights from here every day but its current stock is only for routine immunization activities. "Even the local people flying abroad from other airports of the country will get vaccination at the hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," officials said, adding that the department needed 14,000 additional doses per day. MNHSRC spokesman Mazhar Nisar told Dawn that provinces were free to buy vaccines on their own but he didn't explain as to why the federal government was not allowing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other provinces to acquire the stock on their own. "About 27,000 people leave Pakistan via air every day for which we need only 90 million doses that isn't a big issue," he said. Sources in the health department said they had stock to immunize children below the age of five but they could face problem to ensure adult immunization in line with the WHO's recommendations. The province had technical expertise to purchase, stockpile and distribute the vaccine, they added.

Dawn - May 19, 2014

Crippling Disease: UAE, Pakistan Join Hands In Fight against Polio

The UAE government has joined hands with the Pakistan government and the army in the fight against polio. This was announced by the director of the UAE-Pakistan Assistance Programme (UPAP) Abdullah al Ghefli at a symposium on polio eradication held on Wednesday in Islamabad. The event was organized by UPAP in collaboration with the Pakistan government, army and World Health Organization (WHO). Al Ghefli announced the launching of the Emirates Polio Campaign in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) under the motto of 'healthy and bright future for all'. Sharing details, he said that the three-month anti-polio drive will start from June this year and vaccinate 3,643,678 children in 13 districts of K-P and 11 districts of Fata. "The Emirates Polio campaign will be executed in coordination with Pakistan Army, government health departments of Pakistan and WHO under the supervision of special medical cadres from respective authorities," he said. A media campaign will also coincide with the polio campaign to alert the public about the risk posed by such diseases and epidemics, he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Nima Abid from WHO said 110 children in Fata alone got paralyzed due to polio last year. He said it is impossible to eradicate polio from Pakistan without reaching to children in Fata. "The improper use of vaccination campaigns by certain agencies has adversely affected public health activities in the region, leading to declining participation of the locals," he said. "The first and foremost aim is to restore the trust of people of the region and we are positive that participation of UAE government will go a long way in building confidence in these public health activities." Dr Abid appreciated the role of Pakistan Army for providing secure environment to the polio workers and running an effective media campaign to educate people about the risk posed by polio.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Muhammad Ayub, commandant of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, said it is commendable that the army has joined hands with the Pakistan government for eliminating polio from the country. He said there were many areas in the tribal region where people were unwilling to vaccinate their children because of the fear of militants. But now terrorists in North and South Waziristan are asking locals to provide them polio vaccines for their own children, he added. Prime Minister's Focal Person on Polio Ayesha Raza Farooq said it is a privilege for Pakistan that the UAE government has lent its support in the fight against polio.

She said 90% of Pakistan is already polio free and the army was aiding polio workers in reaching out to people in inaccessible areas. "The efforts made by army have brought down a significant decline in the number of parental refusals for the polio vaccine," she added.

The Express Tribune - May 29, 2014

Negligence: Measles Vaccine Claims Yet another Life in KP

Yet another death was attributed to the measles vaccine when 11-month-old Hazrat Umar died in Shabqadar, Charsadda after reportedly having a reaction to the vaccine, pushing the death toll to five. According to Sher Muhammad, father of the deceased, Umar fell ill a few days ago after receiving the measles shot and died on Thursday after suffering from high fever. Umar is the second casualty from Shabqadar in the past 24 hours. Two-year-old Mazhar died after reportedly having a reaction to the vaccine as well, while three others died in the provincial capital late that night. Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) Charsadda In-charge Dr Farhad continues to deny that the deaths of the two minors occurred due to the vaccine, claiming it could be a disease.

However, a medical specialist in Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Shabqadar told on the condition of anonymity that the deaths were caused by the vaccine. He claimed the medicine lost its efficacy due to prolonged outages in the hospitals. According to the specialist, the hospitals where the vaccines are being stored face almost 20 hours of outages. "The cold chain for all vaccines needs to be maintained; since the hospitals face outages the quality of medicine is affected," he added. He added EPI staff in the tehsil has stopped participating in the vaccination drive fearing people might attack them.

Students Fall Unconscious

Around 70 more students fainted after the administration of the measles vaccine in a school in Swabi. District Coordination Officer (DCO) Kamran Afridi told that the incident occurred in Working Folks Grammar School at Industrial Estate Gadoon Amazai and the children were rushed to Topi hospital. Afridi added the district health authorities have informed the provincial health department of the situation in writing and requested that an enquiry be conducted.

Health Department Releases Report

Meanwhile, a report prepared by the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Directorate of Health issued on Thursday claimed that the deaths of four children were caused by untrained staff administering the measles vaccine. According to the report prepared by the technical unit of the department, the deaths occurred because assistants administered the injections to the children instead of health technicians. "The deaths of children have nothing to do with the quality of vaccines," states the report which has been forwarded to the K-P health secretary. "Assistant-level staff was used to vaccinate the children due to whom several deaths have occurred," the report added, while recommending that the measles campaign currently under way be stopped immediately. The document claims that the vaccines were injected into the flesh instead of the skin which is the proper procedure of administering the measles vaccine, adding the additional responsibility placed on the assistants caused them to inject the medicine incorrectly.

The report reiterated that the vaccines being used by the health department are perfect in potency and efficacy and the reactions being reported are not related to quality. The 12-day province-wide measles campaign began on May 19. Four children had died in the province and hundreds have been rushed to hospitals during the ongoing measles drive, after they had an

adverse reaction to the vaccine. A senior official at the health department said the report has been forwarded to the health secretary and his instructions were awaited. He added all those found to be involved in using assistants and unskilled workers would be terminated by the health department.

The Express Tribune - May 30, 2014

ENERGY CRISIS

Government's Role in Oil and Gas & Energy Crisis

10-Hour Load Shedding For Next Two Months

Minister for Water and Power Khawaja Asif has said that the masses will have to bear 10 hours of load shedding a day during the next two months. Addressing a joint press conference with Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid and Minister of State for Water and Power Abid Sher Ali in Islamabad, Khawaja Asif said majority of the people who were protesting against blackouts were power thieves and defaulters. He said electricity shortfall has increased to 3,200 megawatt this week due to use of air-conditioners and government will discontinue electricity supply to feeders incurring massive losses. The minister urged power consumers to clear their dues on time; otherwise, his ministry will take action indiscriminately. He said free of cost electricity could not be provided and "the merchandise will be sold to only those who pay for it". Khawaja Asif said circular debt has again surged to 197 billion rupees due to power theft and slow recoveries. He however said due to aggressive campaign against pilferage, over 3.2 billion rupees have been so far recovered from the defaulters of electricity bills. He reiterated government's resolve to settle all electricity disputes with provincial governments through dialogue. He said serious efforts had been put in place to ensure full recovery from government departments and private sector by June 30, which would improve power situation.

Khawaja Asif added the masses had to brave tough time of over three months but the situation would gradually improve with additional power supply of 2,200MW from power projects including Gaddu, Uch and Nandipur projects. Moreover, he said, the power situation would further improve when imported gas would start flowing by end of 2015 and the domestic and industrial sector would have sufficient power supply. He also said that Sehr and Aftar times will be exempted from load shedding during month of Ramazan. He said a control room was being set up in the ministry to provide real time information about 8,900 feeders in the country with regard to load shedding, demand and supply gap etc. He said the government was making earnest efforts to add more power supply to system. Last year in May the generation stood at 8,200MW but it had gone up to 10,058MW. He said agriculture was a vital sector and efforts were being made to observe minimum load shedding and added tube wells head was reflecting Rs72 billion as outstanding. He said finance ministry recently released Rs20 billion to the PSO for fuel supply to power plants as a part of efforts to ease load shedding.

After a rigorous campaign against defaulters and illegal connections in KPK and Sindh, the ministry of water and power has finally realized that only provinces but different departments of federal government are also responsible for the load shedding. "The government itself is a big defaulter," Khawaja Asif said. He was referring to the recent disconnections of power supply to top government buildings including President House, Prime Minister's Secretariat, Supreme Court, Parliament Lodges and official residence of Chief Justice of Pakistan, on non-payment of huge electricity bills. According to the Constitution of Pakistan, the prime minister is the executive authority of the country who presides over the cabinet and is head of the government. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's promises to end load shedding after coming into power are still fresh in the minds of the citizens and archives of media houses are full of them. "PML-N would resolve all issues including load shedding, terrorism, extremism, poverty and unemployment, if given a chance to form government", Nawaz had said while addressing a large crowd at Aabpara on May 5, 2013 during his election campaign. But after coming into power, it seems that ending load shedding is no more a priority of the PML-N.

When PM Nawaz was recently reminded of his promises to end load shedding he came up with a new answer. "Yes, I promised to end load shedding but never gave a date!" Khawaja Asif also said in his press conference, "People should be ready to face this hardship of load shedding for another couple of months." Passing the buck of prevailing long load shedding to illegal connections minister said that because of a few electricity thieves millions of people were suffering. With the rise in mercury from last few days, ghost of load shedding has already started haunting the length and breadth of the country. On total power generation was 11,300 megawatts, while demand was 14,100MW, resulting in a shortfall of 2,800 MW. The electricity shortfall on April 29 was 2,600 megawatts. According to reports from all over the country, eight to ten hours of load shedding is already being observed in cities whereas indefinite blackouts are common in rural areas.

The Nation - May 03, 2014

Pakistan, Iran Agree To Complete Gas Pipeline

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani agreed to continue with the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, terming it beneficial for the peoples of both countries. Nawaz informed the Iranian president that he was there with his team of finance, petroleum and interior to resolve all the matters which were creating hindrance in the project. Both leaders reiterated their commitment to enhance trade between the two countries. Nawaz said there was lot of scope of increasing the trade volume between the two countries and they wanted to enhance it to new levels of \$5 billion. He said Pakistan-Iran relations were bound by historical and religious linkages. "I am here to open a new chapter in Pakistan-Iran relations," he said, adding, "As a prime minister, I visited Iran first in 1999 and have always found the Iranian more affectionate on every visit to Iran." President Rouhani said Iran-Pakistan relations had historical connections. Apart from being neighbours, both Muslim countries have the common traditions and relations based on the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (SAWW), he said.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit would further boost the brotherly relations between the two countries, he added. The prime minister told the Iranian president that some miscreant elements were trying to sabotage the brotherly relations between the two countries. He said they would deal with all such elements firmly and would not let them sabotage these relations. He said, "We want security for development and development for security". President Rouhani affirmed his government's support, adding that peace in the region was their common goal. He said they would support Pakistan to develop and become more secure. Both the leaders discussed the border security matters between the two countries. They agreed that better border management and improved security measures would result in increased bilateral trade and strengthening of relationship and cooperation between the two countries. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif extended invitation to President Rouhani to visit Pakistan which was accepted by the latter.

Later, the Iranian president hosted a luncheon in honor of the prime minister and the visiting delegation. Earlier upon arrival, the prime minister was given a warm welcome at the Mehrabad International Airport. The prime minister was received by Minister for Economic Affairs and Finance Ali Tayyabnia. The official welcoming ceremony was held at the Saadabad Palace where a smartly turned out contingent presented guard of honor to the prime minister. The prime minister also held a meeting with First Vice President of Iran Eshaq Jehangiri in which matters of mutual and bilateral interest were discussed. Federal Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Petroleum Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Governor Balochistan Mahmood Khan Achakzai,

and Advisor to PM on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatimi were also present. Meanwhile, Pakistan and Iran signed eight MoUs to enhance their cooperation further in various fields. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Iranian First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri witnessed the signing ceremony.

The following agreements were inked:

1. Agreement on Transfer of Offenders (Transfer of Sentenced Persons), signed by Iranian Justice Minister and Advisor to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz.
2. MoU on Anti-Money Laundering signed by Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar and his Iranian counterpart.
3. MoU on Statistical Cooperation signed by Minister for Finance and Iranian Finance Minister.
4. Renewal of the Cultural Exchange Programme signed by Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Iranian Minister for Culture.
5. MoU on Sports Cooperation signed by Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Iranian Minister for Sports.
6. MoU on Cooperation in Preventing and Combating Pollution from Ships signed by the Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources and Iranian Minister for Roads and Transport.
7. MoU on establishment of Joint Border Commission signed by Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs and Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif.
8. MoU between TDAP and IIEC signed by Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran and Managing Director of Iran International Exhibition Company (IIEC).

Daily Times - May 12, 2014

REGIONAL WATCH**Pakistan & USA****Pakistan Allows Use of Air Route for NATO Supplies**

Pakistan has approved transportation of NATO supplies to Afghanistan by air. The arrangement has been made to facilitate rapid delivery of vital military cargo to the brotherly country to enhance its security and stability. The first flight of the commercial multi-model operation from the Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, carrying 15 military vehicles on board took off for the Bagram Air Base. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has released the Customs General Order 2014 allowing the US to transport 1,628 vehicles to the security forces in Afghanistan. The permission to use the airspace was granted on the US request, an FBR official said. The transportation by air has been allowed to airlift the vehicles meant for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) as special gesture by the Government of Pakistan. The vehicles are of vital importance and urgently required by the Afghan forces. The arrangement is part of Pak-US Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in July 2012 which deals with the use of Pakistani lines of communications to and from Afghanistan. The defense ministry said the operation would be treated as commercial and would continue for the next couple of weeks. The vehicles are of vital importance and urgently required by the ANSF. Lt Gen (retd) Asif Yasin Malik, Secretary Defense, witnessed the launch of the operation. This effort is expected to contribute towards strengthening the existing relations with Afghanistan.

The News - May 06, 2014**Pakistan & India****Indian Elections****Standstill: Indian Kashmir Shuts Down Over Election Killing**

Indian Occupied Kashmir largely shut down on over the shooting death of a man during protests one day earlier against the country's ongoing mammoth election, residents and police said. Schools, shops and other businesses were mostly closed in the Kashmir Valley after leaders opposed to Indian rule of the region called for a general strike over the shooting by security forces. Authorities also imposed a curfew in the main city of Srinagar in the wake of the shooting, which occurred when police fired on protesters during clashes after polling ended in the latest leg of the election. One person was killed and two others were critically injured in the incident in Srinagar's old town, police have said. "No one is being allowed to move out or even peer out of the windows," Abdul Rashid, a resident of the old town, told over the phone from his home of the curfew. The University of Kashmir indefinitely postponed examinations scheduled and tensions remained high in Srinagar and the wider valley, where an insurgency has long been waged.

In the northern town of Bandipore, police used tear smoke and batons against scores of protesters who were shouting anti-India slogans, a police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity. "Restrictions have also been imposed in Baramulla (a major town in northern Kashmir) and the shutdown is peaceful across the valley," inspector general of police Abdul Gani Mir told. Voter turnout was low when the central Kashmir constituency of Srinagar went to the

polls. Separatists have called for a boycott of the election and militants have threatened violence against those voting. Elections end on May 12 with results four days later when Hindu nationalist hardliner Narendra Modi and his opposition party are expected to vault to power over the ruling Congress party. Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan, with both claiming the disputed Muslim-majority territory in full since 1947 when the two countries gained independence from Britain. The insurgency has left tens of thousands, mostly civilians dead since 1989.

The Express Tribune - May 02, 2014

Political Rivalry: Modi is Greedy for Power

Campaigning in Amethi, Priyanka also alleged that books with baseless material written about her family were being dumped a night before at places where her public meetings were scheduled. "Politics is seen with a sense of service, but few leaders in the country do not think about that," she said. However, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi's politics was not that to demand, but that of a sense of service, she said. Taking a swipe at Modi, she said, "There is a leader in the country, who wants power for himself. He keeps on demanding to strengthen him." "My father had a political vision and Rahul has learned from him. The parameter and strategy of Amethi's development was prepared by Rajiv Gandhi 35 years ago, this is the reason barren land is not visible here," she said. Priyanka said that books containing false accusations against her family have been found at places where her public meetings have been scheduled. "I have come to know that at places where my public meetings are scheduled some books are thrown a night before in which dirty and false things are written about my family.

Those indulging in such activities are cowards," she said at Shahgarh Shaheed Chowk in Gauriganj Assembly area. "If they have to say something, they should come in front of me and talk. Indulging in such activities at midnight is not justified," she said. Addressing an election meeting attended mostly by women in Amethi, Priyanka said the party has made many efforts to provide 24 hours power supply but despite that it could not do so. In an attack on BJP's Smriti Irani, she charged, "A candidate has come here. Her party people filed a case and got round-the-clock power supply stopped." "It was asked in the case as to what was special about these two areas that power should be supplied for 24 hours. That is why the case is stuck here and our hands are tied. Until the case is resolved, 24-hour power supply cannot be resumed," she said. Targeting women voters, she said, "This is election time and one should say what can be done for women empowerment." She also said the election fight should be done on "principles" and it should be done openly and not in a clandestine manner.

The Express Tribune - May 03, 2014

Modi Tries To Cash In On Assam Massacre

Communal appeal is meat and drink to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and last week's carnage of Muslims in Assam will be handy for the rightwing Hindutva party in West Bengal where a whopping 23 of its 42 seats are still to go to polls. In the main battlefield of Uttar Pradesh the BJP seeks to corner Rahul Gandhi on May 7 in the Amethi vote. Nearly everyone opposed to Narendra Modi has a candidate in Varanasi for the May 12 voting, the last leg of the polls. West Bengal's ousted Left Front was never too comfortable with the influx of Bangladeshis, a volatile issue in Assam where the massacre happened over more or less those resentments. However, the incumbent Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee gets useful support from all manner of Muslims, including those that are suspected to have arrived from across the border.

On cue, Mr. Modi was mopping up potential votes in West Bengal from the Assam killings. Not surprisingly, he said Bangladeshi infiltrators who were allowed into the country for vote bank politics would have to go back, while Hindu refugees thrown out of Bangladesh on religious grounds would be greeted with open arms. "BJP's position is very clear; vote bank politics has destroyed the country. Those who are Bangladeshi infiltrators will have to go back," Mr Modi said in West Bengal's Bankura district. "Two types of people have come from Bangladesh - the refugees who have been thrown out in the name of religion and the infiltrators," he said at an election rally in the district, which goes to polls together with five other West Bengal seats.

In an openly communal call in apparent deference to the Assam massacre of 34 Muslims, he said: "Those who are thrown out of Bangladesh, should they come to India or not? ... Those who are thrown out of Bangladesh, those who observe (the Hindu ritual of) Durgastami and speak Bengali, they are all our Mother India's children. They will get the same respect just as any Indian." As a potential dark horse in the race for the country's top job, Ms Banerjee needs to keep her flock together till the results are out on May 16 while the BJP is desperate to breach it. Uttar Pradesh on the other hand sends 80 MPs to parliament, of which 33 races are still to be decided in the remaining two stages. On May 7, Mr. Gandhi will take on a determined challenge from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the BJP, and his cousin Varun Gandhi, a vitriolic BJP speaker, features in the neighboring contest in Sultanpur.

The most sensitive constituency is of course Varanasi where the Congress and the AAP are giving a tough fight to Narendra Modi, the BJP's prime ministerial hopeful. The constituency's Muslim votes could tilt the balance if they so decide, which seems unlikely at present. AAP workers in Varanasi are hoping to convert their leader Arvind Kejriwal's clean and anti-communal appeal to woo votes in this constituency of 1.5 million voters. But, they told me unequivocally on Sunday: "We fear serious trouble after May 7." The reference was to the completion of the penultimate round of elections. "We fear everyone will be rushing to Varanasi, to the main battleground for the BJP, and this may not be good news in the background of what has happened in Assam," said an AAP spokesman.

According to reports, the main trigger for this round of anti-Muslim violence in Assam was that the community didn't vote for candidates of their attackers' choice. "Imagine the plight of the Muslim voters, not only in Varanasi, but in other parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal where polls are to be held," warned the AAP spokesman, adding that his party feared some "untoward thing" happening before the Varanasi election on May 12. The city is crawling with Hindutva groups who have sought to terrify election campaigners from other parties, having targeted AAP activists most viciously, local reports say. In the meanwhile, Ms Banerjee has contradicted communist leader Mr. Prakash Karat, who had claimed that she could join the BJP after the polls. Dismissing the claims that her Trinamool Congress would ally with BJP, Ms Banerjee said: "It will never happen".

Dawn - May 05, 2014

Causing Divide: Modi Rails Against Illegal Immigrants after Muslim Killings

Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi, the prime ministerial front-runner in India's mammoth general election, on Sunday reiterated his strong stance against illegal immigrants, just days after a wave of sectarian killings in the north-eastern state of Assam. India is in the home stretch of a five-week election in which Modi's opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) looks set to emerge as the biggest group and which has heightened ethnic and religious tensions in many parts of the country. India deployed troops in Assam on Saturday after more than 30 Muslims

were gunned down in three days of what police said were attacks by Bodo tribal militants, who resent the presence of settlers they claim are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Modi has repeatedly called for tighter immigration controls and recently said illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in the state of West Bengal should have their 'bags packed' in case he came to power, accusing the state government of being too soft.

At a rally in West Bengal he accused the state government of looking to secure votes from ethnic and religious minorities. "You are concerned about infiltrators and not your own people they must go back, they are robbing the youths of India of their livelihood," Modi told the rally in West Bengal, which borders Assam. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has condemned the attacks in Assam and his ruling Congress party accused Modi of making divisive comments. "Modi is a model of dividing India," said Law Minister Kapil Sibal on Saturday. Critics have long accused the BJP of deep-seated prejudice against India's Muslims, who make up more than 12 per cent of the country's 1.2 billion population. The BJP says it only opposes preferential treatment for any community. "This violence has a long history," said BJP spokesperson MJ Akbar, referring to the Assam attacks. "This knee-jerk reaction of blaming Narendra Modi for everything is absurd." Bangladesh's Information Ministry did not immediately respond to request for comments on Modi's latest speech.

Poll Rigging

The BJP leader also accused the Election Commission of being biased and failing to prevent booth rigging in West Bengal, Bihar and western Uttar Pradesh. "Why are you not acting? What is your intention? If you feel wrong about what I am saying now, then you are free to lodge another case against me," The Times of India quoted Modi as saying. "It is your responsibility to ensure impartial polls. I am making very serious allegations," he said accusing the Election Commission of having failed to take action. Accusing the EC of being biased, he said, "I am putting serious allegations against you. You have failed to stop rigging and violence in these areas. False cases have been filed against our candidate Babul Supriyo. Election Commission's work is to protect people. I request you to fulfill your responsibilities in the right way."

The Express Tribune - May 05, 2014

Building Partnerships: Pakistan Show in Amritsar to Kick off On May 8

Businessmen of Lahore in collaboration with India's PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry will organize their first Pakistan Show in Amritsar from May 8-12 in an effort to increase engagements between business communities of the two sides and expand business relations. Announcing this at a press conference here on Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Engineer Sohail Lashari said a large business delegation comprising leading members of various chambers in Pakistan would participate in the exhibition. "This show is an affirmation of the LCCI's belief that increased trade and investment will go a long way towards improving relationship between India and Pakistan besides achieving the common goal of inclusive growth," he remarked. The five-day event will showcase the best of Pakistan in the 21st century and also feature cultural shows. The positive vibes are expected to translate into a significant leap in transactions and flow of goods across the border.

Trade has already accelerated with formal exchange of goods between India and Pakistan increasing from \$250 million in 2003 to \$2.4 billion in 2013. Experts put the trade potential at 10 times the current figure. In a bid to build partnerships and promote inclusive growth, Lashari said, a strong presence of Pakistan's industries had been ensured with more than 90 companies participating from diverse sectors such as value-added textile, agriculture and allied services,

healthcare, gems and jewellery, steel, warehousing, construction equipment, jute products, wedding concepts and consumer durables. The show offered great benefits to all stakeholders and had the potential to expand trade networks between India and Pakistan, bring down costs, generate employment and expand regional trade, he stressed. It offers a gateway to a huge potential market in the region, an opportunity for businesses on both sides to explore investment and joint ventures and a platform for forging business linkages in the region. The show will see the convergence of business leaders, government officials, artists and journalists whose presence along with high-level sessions on trade and strategies will ensure rich deliberations and help in dissemination of information and knowledge. "It is time to take practical steps to tap the region's potential for the sake of progress and prosperity," Lashari said.

The Express Tribune - May 06, 2014

Another Job: BJP's Hate Politics Will Not Take India Forward

Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi said the hate politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will not take the country forward, and blamed the Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the BJP for lack of development in Uttar Pradesh. "If you listen to the speeches of the opposition leaders, then they are always abusing and criticizing us. They have never appreciated anybody, not even their own party leaders. They indulge in the politics of hatred. This type of politics will not take India forward," Rahul told. Raking up the issue of Muzaffarnagar riots, Rahul said, "The riots happened in Muzaffarnagar because these parties wanted to gain mileage from the riots. So everybody has to stand up together, and without this the country will not go any further." Rahul blamed the SP, the BSP and the BJP for lack of development in UP, and alleged that these parties have only spread communalism and casteism in the state. "The issues like education, poverty, unemployment and development were put on a backburner. They have wasted 25 years," he said. He also targeted the BJP and the Shiv Sena on the issue of UP people being thrashed in Mumbai. "Here they say that they will change the face of the UP. But in Mumbai they thrash the people of UP. Here they show one face and in Mumbai they have a different face," he added. He also said that the Congress party believes that both industrialists and farmers should work towards development, and added that the party has always encouraged them to do so.

The Express Tribune - May 06, 2014

Battle of Hearts: Modi 'Tsunami' Forecast on Banks of Ganges

As he contemplated the vast crowds that greeted Narendra Modi in India's holiest city, the would-be prime minister's top aide proclaimed the wave of support for his boss had become a 'tsunami'. Rather than deny the opposition's assertion, the governing Congress party shot back that tsunamis leave a trail of death and destruction. The salvo was typical of the war of words being waged in Varanasi, one of the final contests in the world's biggest election and whose combatants include two of India's most talked-about politicians. If his Bharatiya Janata Party's plan comes off, Modi will emerge next week as Varanasi's Member of Parliament and India's prime minister. But opposing him is anti-corruption champion Arvind Kejriwal, who six months ago prevented the BJP from taking charge of Delhi's state assembly in a stunning electoral debut. The expectation this time is of a win for Modi in Monday's poll, the last day of voting in the whole six-week election.

“Everyone in Varanasi, everyone in India, knows that Modi is the frontrunner,” said T P Singh, a politics professor at the city’s Banaras Hindu University. “The people of Varanasi are excited that they won’t just be voting for their MP but also for their PM.” A sacred city around 420 miles east of Delhi, Varanasi is a perfect platform for Modi to present himself as a sound administrator and proud Hindu. More than 100,000 people lined the streets as Modi crawled through on an open-top truck, prompting top aide Amit Shah to forecast a “tsunami... that will wipe out” his rivals. Modi’s pitch has been to revive a city whose famous silk industry is fighting for survival. A BJP “vision document” includes pledges to clean up the filthy Ganges and make Varanasi an education hub. Uttar Pradesh state, which is home to Varanasi, accounts for 80 out of 543 seats in the parliament, making it by far the most important state.

Congress appears to be an also-ran in Varanasi after fielding a former BJP cadre who is accused of attempted murder. While his campaign events have been dwarfed by Modi’s, Kejriwal has drawn support from Muslims, who account for around 13 per cent of Varanasi’s population. Named along with Modi as one of Time magazine’s 100 Most Influential People, Kejriwal has been telling voters that all parties have been guilty of fostering corruption in Varanasi. “This is not my fight, it’s everyone’s fight who wants India to be free of corruption, who wants decent roads in Varanasi, who wants to see poverty eradicated from this country,” he said at one rally. There are few signs of a similar upset this time.

The Express Tribune - May 09, 2014

Final Phase: Last Day of Grueling Indian Election

Polling for 41 seats is under way mostly in the decisive hot seats of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, including Varanasi, where the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi is contesting. In a raid at Modi’s election office in Varanasi, the Election Commission claimed to have detected violation of the model code of elections as they found banners, leaflets and other publicity material. BJP workers said these were merely kept in the office as leftovers, however, rivals said the distribution of materials was going on well after 6pm when campaigning was officially stopped. If pursued, the raid could lead to the cancellation of the election itself, though this seems unlikely. With four days to go for counting – which will begin early morning on May 16 – all eyes are on the exit polls traditionally telecast at the end of the polls. These will come out today and will give an indication of the electoral alignments. Meanwhile, left parties and the Congress have already established contact to explore ways of working together should there be a window of opportunity. The BJP, on the other hand, has begun discussing the constitution of its council of ministers. All eyes are now on May 16 – which will witness the announcement of India’s new prime minister.

The Express Tribune - May 12, 2014

Why Is the Election Commission Effective In India?

Election Commission of India allowed the government to go ahead with the appointment of the country’s new army chief hours after the polling ended in the last phase on May 12. The commission had actually allowed the Ministry of Defense to forward the file to the appointment committee headed by the prime minister two weeks ago but the government sought its explicit permission again to be doubly sure. Has the commission a role in appointment of the army chief in India? Certainly no, but there is no uncertainty in any mind here that the constitutional body becomes the supreme de facto government of the country as soon as elections are announced. The commission in India does not only have all the powers that it needs to organize this biggest

electoral exercise in the world, it is willing and ready to use it as well. The size of electorate in India is a colossal 810 million, ten times the one in Pakistan and multiplying it with the geographical, linguistic and other diversity factors, the sheer mechanics of the exercise become mind boggling.

Yet, the commission comes out victorious from this labyrinth as the participants generally do not contest its impartiality or capacity. The commission has faced some criticism in the present hotly contested elections but that has largely focused on it being not quick in responding to calls for action. From Pakistan's point of view where the commission is mistrusted and always deeply embroiled in controversies, the more surprising is the fact that the commissions in both countries enjoy roughly the same constitutional powers. There are however some differences as well. "The courts can't intervene in our working in any manner. The constitution guarantees this non-interference that many subsequent court rulings have further reinforced. That gives us the required agility," said S.Y. Quraishi, the former Chief Election Commissioner of India in an interview with Dawn in New Delhi.

"Then we assume total control over bureaucracy, cutting its links with the political governments completely. We purge the entire state machinery of political bias by ordering transfers and postings following our own assessments of each individual functionary or in response to complaints," says Mr. Quraishi. He adds: "The commission invites every party individually in every area and each of them gives us their lists of suspected, biased functionaries. We act after summary inquires." "We also insulate the officials appointed to perform election duties from their political masters. No minister or chief minister is allowed to call them for a meeting. We suspend them even if we come to know that the chief minister has talked to them on phone," says the former commissioner who belonged to Indian Civil Service.

Quraishi whose book on Indian elections 'An undocumented wonder' has been published last month believes that once under the commission, the government functionaries have no option but to behave. "They are our main force but we cannot trust their impartiality and have put in place many safeguards," says Quraishi elaborating that as a last measure, "we order re-polling following the report of our own observers or complaints from candidates of say booth capturing." The four-day gap between the last polling and result announcement is to facilitate re-polling before the final tabulation. The commission in India does not require army to perform any election duty and in fact keeps it "miles away from the process". It instead lists police, paramilitary and other armed forces for assistance and once they are assigned they come under the commission's 'command'.

Quraishi is all for the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and rubbishes the criticism on this "illiterate-friendly" machine that has replaced paper ballots in India. The machine was first introduced in one state on experimental basis as early as 1984 but it was provided the requisite legal cover only in 1998. It was then put to use in all the state assembly elections before being used for the entire Lok Sabha elections in 2004 for the first time. He believes that EVMs not only save the commission from the hassle of printing paper ballots, it also makes the contentious counting process as easy as one, two, three. "Another matchless advantage is obliteration of votes rejected for being marked erroneously," says Quraishi. (According to a FAFEN report the number of rejected votes in 2013 elections in Pakistan exceeded the margin of victory on 35 of the 266 contested seats.) The commission in India is also experimenting with introduction of biometric system for voter identification.

'The money power' however is the biggest and burgeoning challenge that the commission is faced with. It not only places a legal bar on the candidates to not spend beyond the prescribed limit, it makes them open separate bank accounts dedicated to their campaign expenses. "Then our flying squads video graph the campaign activities and maintain a shadow account of each

candidate,” says Quraishi. “The candidates have to submit their expense accounts three times during the 14-day campaign and they are not allowed to report the cost of a cup of tea that they offered to their supporters at rupees two if its market rate is rupees seven.” The commission carries a list of the market prices of all the items that a candidate can possibly use in his/her campaign and has powers of disqualifying them on wrong reporting.

The commission places a ban on the movement of cash, intended to be distributed among voters as bribery. It has raided suspected places, including ambulance vans and coffins in funeral processions, to check violations and confiscated currency worth hundreds of crores of rupees during current elections. The banks are directed to report any ‘extraordinary withdrawal of cash’. The commission also bans movement of liquor that is another favorite item of bribery for voters. Quraishi believes that the use of money in elections is the fountain head of corruption in governance system and has led efforts to check it and the best they could do is to make “the life miserable for them”. The commission has stretched itself to the limits. It has very encouraging stories to tell but aren’t all its victories pyrrhic? “The challenge is formidable,” admits Quraishi, adding; “the crime is always ahead and they keep finding ways to get around but rest assured the commission is at it. The best thing about the Indian election body is that it learns quickly, devises new creative solutions and implements them. Every election is better than the previous and the best ever in Indian history.”

Dawn - May 14, 2014

Pakistan Hopeful of Thaw in Ties after Modi Victory

The election of Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi has sent shivers through many among India’s 150-million strong Muslim communities but neighboring Pakistan is cautiously hopeful for a thaw in long-fraught ties. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has hailed Modi’s ‘impressive victory’ which saw the hardliner gain an outright majority in India’s parliament for the first time in 30 years. Sharif has cited his working relationship with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India’s last prime minister with the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a reason for optimism, according to diplomatic sources. It was during Sharif’s second term in 1999 that Vajpayee rode a bus to Lahore to sign a peace accord, raising the prospect for normalization between the two-nuclear armed neighbors that have fought three wars.

Three months later, the countries embarked on the Kargil conflict in the Himalayan region of Kashmir - though Sharif has blamed his then-army chief General Pervez Musharraf who went on to overthrow him in a coup, for provoking the fighting without his knowledge. With both leaders currently enjoying a strong mandate - Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won a big majority in elections last year - members of parliament and experts say the stalled peace process could get fresh impetus. Sherry Rehman, a member of parliament for the opposition Pakistan People’s Party and former ambassador to the United States, told AFP: “The blockbuster numbers should give Modi the parliamentary muscle and confidence to work with Pakistan for stability in the region. If his policies are driven by economy, then Pakistan would find it easier to do business with Modi’s India, but the ball is in India’s court.”

Key issues confronting the relationship remain the disputed Kashmir region, as well as militancy inside India which New Delhi frequently accuses Pakistan of backing. Bilateral ties have only slightly recovered from the rock bottom they hit after the 2008 Mumbai attacks in which 166 people were killed. For its part, Pakistan accuses India of funding a long-running insurgency in Balochistan. Simbal Khan, a former Pakistan fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, said the unpopularity of the outgoing Congress party had

hindered its ability to thaw ties, despite its more secular and liberal outlook. "There is a general feeling that coming from a right-of-centre platform and riding on this wave of popularity, any overtures or steps taken to mend relations or to take the subcontinent out of old constructs is more likely to happen under Modi's rule than Congress," she said. Simbal cited as an encouraging example the warming of ties between Punjab province, which is governed by Nawaz Sharif's brother Shahbaz, and the Sikh-centric Shiromani Akali Dal party, a BJP ally which rules India's Punjab state.

The analyst said she was hopeful that Sharif may soon grant "Most Favored Nation" status to India and open land borders in an effort to kick start trade that would particularly benefit Pakistan's stuttering economy. Sharif, a pro-business industrialist, is widely seen as being in favor of such a move though reports have suggested opposition by the all-powerful army has so far prevented him - and could conceivably block future attempts. While Pakistan's civilian leaders and business community are in favor of closer ties, many ordinary people revile Modi, who is tainted by communal riots in his home state of Gujarat 12 years ago that killed 1,000 people, mostly Muslims. His campaign manifesto included pledges for a more muscular foreign policy, vowing a re-think of India's no-first strike nuclear policy and a hard line on Kashmir. "There are two sides to Modi - a dark side based on bigotry and violence against Muslims, and a positive side on development. If he is willing to bid goodbye to the politics of hate, then are grounds for optimism," he said.

Daily Times - May 20, 2014

Government Denies PM Nawaz Charge Sheeted In India

Rejecting the impression that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was "charge-sheeted" during his visit to India, Pakistan on Wednesday described the tour as reflective of "dignified diplomacy", which "went well beyond the expectations". "The meeting was much better than expected," stated Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz while sharing the details of the prime minister's two-day visit to India with the media. He was referring to the meeting between the two countries' prime ministers on Tuesday. "We did not expect much from the outcome of this visit but it went beyond our expectations," Aziz said in response to a query. He said the prime minister undertook this visit with a clear vision in mind, based on strategic calculation and "not just for a photo-op". "In order to make this vision a reality, the starting point was for economic revival and development.

Both the leaders agreed that they had the mandate and their respective tenures ahead of them to meet the hope and aspirations of one and half billion people of the two countries." Faced with an array of pressing queries suggesting that the Pakistani premier took a lenient view on what is being termed as an "aggressive diplomacy" on part of his Indian counterpart, Aziz said, "It was dignified diplomacy. The issues were discussed in cordial atmosphere, and both sides shared their views." Media reports have made headlines that the Indian prime minister talked "tough" with the Pakistani premier on the thorny issues, especially cross-border terrorism and the Mumbai attacks.

Responding to these reports, Sartaj Aziz said, "There are media reports that they (India) handed over a charge-sheet to the PM. This is not correct. The visit was ceremonial in nature and we discussed the issues in an appropriate manner." The adviser said the issue of Kashmir was discussed during the meet-up. "The issue was raised and to say that Kashmir was sidelined is not correct. Pakistan has a clear stance on Kashmir as without its resolution the objective of long-lasting peace could not be achieved." On the issue of terrorism, he said, "The prime minister informed his Indian counterpart that terrorism was a mutual concern and Pakistan had

suffered enormously from this menace. The people and government of Pakistan are serious and committed to fighting terrorism in their own national interest.”

“Questions have now been raised on whether the issue of Mumbai trial, Samjhota Express and other terrorist attacks were discussed. As you all are aware, all aspects of terrorism have been discussed at different levels in our region. We believe that such issues can be handled only through constant interaction between the concerned authorities of the two countries. Brief discussion also took place on trade and other confidence building measures.” When asked about the timeframe regarding the Indian PM’s visit to Pakistan on the request of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the government functionary said, the dates would be worked soon. He said the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan would meet on mutually convenient dates.

Expressing the mutual desire of the two sides to make up to each other, Aziz said, “Although the government was only one-day old, the Indian prime minister recognized the need for a dialogue process to address all bilateral issues that stand in the way of the good relations between the two countries. The prime minister agreed that it was a historic opportunity for both the countries to mark a new beginning in bilateral ties. Both felt the need to turn a new page in our relations.”

Daily Times - May 29, 2014

Pakistan & Afghanistan

Afghan Elections

Afghan Election Results Delayed Over Fraud Probe

Afghanistan’s presidential election result was delayed as authorities said they had not completed fraud investigations into the first-round vote to find a successor to Hamid Karzai. Full results from the April 5 election were released late last month, but the final declaration will factor in the outcome of weeks of deliberation over fraud allegations. “The final result has been delayed for an unknown number of days,” Independent Election Commission spokesman Noor Mohammad Noor said. “We still have not received the ECC (Election Complaints Commission) decisions and findings. We hope we receive them as soon as possible.” In the preliminary results, none of the eight candidates appeared to have gained more than 50 per cent, pointing to a second round run-off between the two top names as Afghanistan undergoes its first democratic transfer of power. The head-to-head contest would pit former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, who took 44.9 per cent of the first-round vote, against ex-World Bank economist Ashraf Ghani, on 31.5 per cent.

Dawn - May 15, 2014
