

Dawn, 1 April 2007

US Congress team meets Nawaz

LONDON, March 31: A four-member delegation of the US Congress met former prime minister Nawaz Sharif here on Saturday to what PML N sources said get Mr Sharif's assessment of the ongoing political turmoil in Pakistan. PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif and party's information secretary Ahsan Iqbal accompanied Nawaz Sharif during the meeting with the US Congressmen. The meeting first-ever between the former prime minister and high profile US political leadership since his ouster from power in October 1999 lasted for over two hours. After the meeting, the US Congressmen left for Pakistan where they are expected to call on President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and other top government functionaries..

Daily Times, 1 April 2007

Rape victim not bound to produce 4 witnesses: CII

ISLAMABAD: The Council of Islamic Ideology CII on Saturday unanimously decided that a victim of rape zina-bil-jabr should not be required to produce four witnesses to file a complaint. The CII agreed that in rape cases, the affected woman would be a complainant, not a defendant. In this case, the woman will be a complainant and the state will be bound to investigate, arrest the rapist and punish him if the crime is proved, a press release of the CII said. The council also stressed that rape zina-bil-jabr and consensual sex with someone other than a spouse zina-bil-raza are separate crimes. It observed that a person accused of adultery should be acquitted if the complainant fails to produce four witnesses to prove their point in court. Once acquitted, the accused could not be punished under any other law unless he/she refused to give a statement under oath or confessed to the crime, the council said. In cases of 'liar' where the accused denies by swearing an oath, confesses, or the charges are proved, the court will decide such cases under the prevailing circumstances, the CII said.

Indian Express, 1 April 2007

Opinion: Hindu chief justice of Pakistan (S Sorabjee)

Under the Constitution of Pakistan, anytime the office of the chief justice of Pakistan is vacant, the most senior of the other judges of the Supreme Court may be appointed to act as chief justice. Justice Bhagwan Das is the senior-most judge. He has a fine judicial record and is highly respected. Opposition in some quarters to his appointment as acting chief justice on the ground that he is a Hindu is baseless. Justice Cornelius, one of the most distinguished chief justices of Pakistan, was a non-Muslim. That apart, there is no requirement in Article 177 2 of the Pakistan Constitution that the judge to be appointed should be a Muslim. A non-Muslim is not disqualified for being appointed as a judge or a chief justice. This is in sharp contrast to Article 41 2, which stipulates that a person shall not be qualified for election as president unless he is a Muslim. Besides the oath of office to be taken by the president requires him to solemnly swear that I am a Muslim ... The same is the position in the case of the prime minister. There is no similar provision in the oath of office of the chief justice or a judge of the Pakistan Supreme Court..

Daily Times, 1 April 2007

Opinion: No exit strategy (Dr. HA Rizvi)

Pakistani generals do not opt for voluntary extrication from power and do not work towards establishing a genuinely participatory political order. They have no exit strategy. Their efforts are directed at strengthening their hold on power and weakening the civilian institutions and processes. President General Pervez Musharraf's plan to hold on to power for another five years should take no one by surprise. It is in line with the tradition set by his predecessor ruling generals, who did not believe in voluntary surrender of power. They held on to power until forced out of office or, in one case, killed in a mysterious air crash. No Pakistani military ruler had an exit strategy. If the suspension of the chief justice was a pre-emptive move to ensure that the superior judiciary do not create problems for President Musharraf in the event of the opposition challenging his candidature for another term, it has backfired..

The Tribune, 1 April 2007

Sharing of Afghan waters (IR Rao)

APART from its eagerness to reacquire the strategic depth against its traditional rival India, in Afghanistan, which it lost with the fall of its creation, Taliban in 2001, for Pakistan the other major cause for its continued support to Taliban against the Karzai government in Kabul is to secure waters from the western tributaries of the river Indus. Pakistan supports the Taliban against the Hamid Karzai government in Afghanistan to secure waters from the western tributaries of the Indus river. Pakistan supports the Taliban against the Hamid Karzai government in Afghanistan to secure waters from the western tributaries of the Indus river. After the rebuff it received from Afghanistan in its efforts to push through a water sharing treaty, Pakistan redoubled its support to Taliban remnants to regroup, rearm and launch vigorous attacks on the NATO and Afghan forces deep into the Southern provinces of Afghanistan bordering Pakistan. Pakistani establishment feels that once the Taliban get their control over the territory in the six or seven provinces in South, it will be easy for them to negotiate a very favourable water deal with them..

Daily Excelsior, 2 April 2007

Opinion: Pakistans deadly arms acquisition (Brig. SN Sachdeva)

Pakistan's ballooning budgetary allocation on defence, free gifts of hardware received from the US and China, the balance of power in the Asian sub-continent has got skewed. And with all debate focusing on nuclear capability, Pakistan's conventional arms build-up appears to have escaped notice. Over the last 10-years Pakistan has spent as much as between \$8 billion and \$10 billion on its major recorded arms acquisitions. In terms of actual military hardware, Pakistan has ordered nearly 1,000 fresh main battle tanks MBT, over 400 short and medium range missiles, over 300 new fighter aircraft 150 confirmed, 15 new warships, 12 new strike helicopters, 100 Grifo radar and so on. In addition, Pakistan has already spent over \$1.5 billion on its nuclear and missile programmes and reports about China supplying it with 5,000 ring magnets, missile factory or furnace plant equipment for uranium enrichment and other know-how still keep coming in. As a result, Pakistan is today virtually on the brink of financial crisis which obviously has, as grave implications for its future and the future of this region..

Daily Times, 3 April 2007

Supreme Court bombarded with petitions: Delays forecast in SJC proceedings

ISLAMABAD: A petition challenging the appointment of Justice Rana Bhagwandas as acting chief justice of Pakistan C taken up by the Supreme Court yesterday could affect the constitution of the Supreme Judicial Council SJC and the outcome and length of the reference against the suspended CJP, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. The petition by freelance journalist Shahid Orakzai asks the SC to decide whether a non-Muslim can be appointed CJP, in view of the petitioner contention that the CJP is in line for appointment as acting president who the constitution says must be a Muslim in the absence of other holders of constitutional offices (the president, Senate chairman, and National Assembly speaker. Legal experts also point out that the oath administered to the chief justice, and by implication to the acting chief justice, is designed specifically for a Muslim..

Dawn, 3 April 2007

Jihad declared against Uzbeks

WANA, April 2: Religious leaders here on Monday declared jihad against Uzbek militants as local tribesmen and militant commanders continued to face stiff resistance from them. The call came at a jirga of the Zallikhel and Tojikhel clans of the predominant Ahmadzai Wazir tribe at a playground in the administrative headquarters of South Waziristan. Hundreds of tribal elders and leaders representing the sub-clans of the tribe attended the jirga. The Zallikhels had nominated a fellow tribesman, Nasib Khan, to raise a tribal force of volunteers in support of militant commander Maulvi Nazir to flush out Uzbek militants and their local collaborators from the region. On Sunday, local militants had made public announcements urging people to wage a jihad against Uzbeks. The jirga urged locals to shoot any Uzbek militants they came across. Rough estimates put the number of Uzbek militants in South Waziristan at a little over 1,000. Official sources said two men were killed and two others wounded when militant groups supporting and opposing the Uzbeks clashed on Monday near a checkpoint..

The News, 3 April 2007

Editorial: Actions, not words

President Musharraf told a seerat conference on Sunday that Islam had been hijacked by people who had no understanding of it. He may be very right in saying this but one is constrained to ask him what is he or his government doing about such people? Going by the inaction so far or as they say in Urdu, khullee chutti of the government against the lathi-wielding burqa-clad force of female extremists running rampant in the Federal Capital, it would be fair to say, not much. On Saturday, a group of these extremists came on a private TV channel and repeated their claim that they had drawn up a list of alleged brothels in Islamabad and that they would move to close them. In fact, the audacity of these students was such that they said that they would try and help anyone in the country who approached them with the help for shutting down such establishments. Their patron is Maulana Abdul Aziz, who controls Islamabas Lal Masjid and seems to have, without anyone stopping him, become a dispenser of arbitrary justice. He has threatened to prosecute any woman who, in his view, has loose morals..

Daily Times, 3 April 2007

Opinion: Citizens without a trace (Rasul B Rais)

In order to come clean on the subject of missing persons, which is of immediate concern

to their families and society in general, the government must establish a judicial commission or council to investigate each and every case of disappearance. The chilling news that hundreds of Pakistani citizens have disappeared without any information about who is holding them, where and why has prompted a suitably anguished media and public response. Families of the missing persons have held press conferences, knocked at many doors for justice and occasionally demonstrated in the streets to draw the attention of the public, government and media to their suffering. Secretly arresting citizens, whatever the accusations, real or fabricated, against them and placing them under detention or subjecting them to torture and violence are not the actions of a civilised society, which we rightly claim ours to be, nor is it good for the image of the country, society or state. But one should not protest against disappearances of citizens on grounds of image and feeling. These incidents are inhuman, unlawful and violate the human and civil rights of the individual..

The Tribune, 3 April 2007

Opinion: Judging Generals (Lt-Col GS Bedi)

Gen Pervez Musharraf like Macbeth spoke eloquently about his love for the rule of law and freedom of expression after summarily rendering Pakistan Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry non-functional. The whole episode had the trappings and intrigue of high drama. The CJ in his judges robe is summoned to the General's camp office in Rawalpindi on March 9 and made to wait for more than an hour before he is ushered into the presence of the General in his full military regalia. Charges of misconduct and abuse of authority are read out with a rare hauteur. Condescending reprieve is offered if he resigns. The CJ demurs. Reference, at once, is announced to the Supreme Judicial Council SJC. Everything went smoothly until a tactical mistake was committed by way of manhandling the CJ while escorting him to the Supreme Court. The Bar arose like a phoenix in a nation-wide protest against the humiliation and ridicule of the judiciary by the General. As many as seven judges and a deputy General resigned as per the dictates of their individual conscience..

Dawn, 3 April 2007

Opinion: What triggered the judicial crisis (A Bhutto)

AT a time when one feared that the value of truth and what is right may not have survived the crush of expediency, sycophancy and habitual sacrifice of all that is holy and worth cherishing for the attainment of narrow self-interests, the 'black coats' have risen to defend the honour and sanctity of the institution they are associated with. The question now arises whether they can sustain their movement till they achieve their ends. This will be very difficult to do since their own livelihood is being affected. After all, it is not the affluent, elite echelons of the black coat community that are bearing the brunt but those belonging to the middle and lower classes whose families break no bread if they do not earn on a daily basis. The government has also realised that the momentum of the lawyers protest needs to be broken. It is for this reason that future hearings of the reference against the non-functional Chief Justice before the Supreme Judicial Council are likely to take place at longer intervals..

Dawn, 4 April 2007

Ranjha pulls out of govt team: SJC adjourns hearing till 13th

ISLAMABAD, April 3: As the Supreme Judicial Council SJC reserved its judgment on holding an open hearing, the charged atmosphere outside the Supreme Court on Tuesday forced a senior government counsel to excuse himself from pursuing the reference against Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. Further proceedings have been adjourned for April 13, said Advocate Tariq Mehmood, who is representing the chief justice, after attending the SJC meeting. He said the council during three and a half hours of proceedings mainly discussed the request of Justice Chaudhry for an open hearing. Open trials were always considered to be fair in the world, said the chief justices counsel Hamid Khan, who briefed journalists later. The attorney general and Senator Khalid Ranjha, a member of the team representing the government, opposed an open trial and referred to different provisions of the constitution, relevant rules and the case law on the subject, Mr Khan said..

Daily Times, 4 April 2007

Tribesmen raise 900-man army to fight foreign militants

PESHAWAR: A tribal army of 900 volunteers was raised on Tuesday to support Maulvi Nazir, a pro government militant commander waging a fight against Uzbek militants and their local supporters in South Waziristan. A jirga of Ahmedzai Wazirs met again in Wanas Rustam Bazaar to consider the request for a lashkar from Nazir, the ameer of the Taliban in South Waziristan, against Uzbeks resisting attempts to be expelled from the area, according to reports reaching here. Tribal elders of Ahmedzai Wazirs gathered in the bazaar and approved raising a lashkar of 900 volunteers, said the reports. Around 200 people, mostly Uzbeks, have been killed in ongoing clashes between Nazirs supporters and the Uzbek militants and their local sympathisers in the Azam Warsak, Kaloosha and Karikot areas since last month. Around 200 volunteers have left for Azam Warsak and Karikot areas to back Nazirs men against the Uzbeks, who have put up a strong resistance so far, a tribal elder told Daily Times in Tank after returning from Wana..

Dawn, 4 April 2007

Lawyers, opposition workers hold rallies: Govt accused of sending impostors

ISLAMABAD, April 3: A large number of charged lawyers and political and social activists held a protest demonstration continuously for about six hours outside the Supreme Court, demanding reinstatement of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry as he appeared before the Supreme Judicial Council SJC on Tuesday. Heavy contingents of Islamabad and Punjab police and Rangers were deployed at various places in the vicinity of the Supreme Court SC but they kept at a distance from the protesters. However, for the first time leaders and workers of the political parties were not allowed to enter the SC building. We have received a letter from the SC registrar stating that party leaders and workers carrying party flags should not be allowed to enter the apex court premises because it harms the sanctity of the court, an official of the local administration told Dawn..

Indian Express, 4 April 2007

Opinion: State of collusion (Husain Haqqani)

Is the Pakistani state hostage to the Pakistani Taliban, or an accomplice? As the focus

shifts from the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan to the growing Talibanisation of Pakistan, can India play a role' How can the Saarc summit help in initiating a new India-Pakistan-Afghanistan conversation' The Pakistani media is clearly concerned about the expanding influence of the Taliban within the country. Hardline religious leaders and hundreds of male and female activists from Islamabad's madrasas have challenged the writ of the state by forcing their brand of Islamic justice in the federal capital. The Pakistani state, which is extremely competent at jailing elected leaders and putting Supreme Court chief justices under house arrest, has so far done little to check the vigilantism of the religious extremists. Everyone knows that the Taliban are active in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan where they behead alleged American spies and mete harsh punishments for crimes such as listening to music, watching television or shaving ones beard while being an adult male. But the influence of Taliban beyond the tribal areas was less known until recently. Now the Taliban control significant parts of the settled areas of Northwest Frontier Province..

Dawn, 4 April 2007

Pakistan, France agree to increase defence cooperation

ISLAMABAD, April 3: Pakistan and France have underscored the need for enhanced cooperation in various fields particularly in the area of defence. This was agreed at a meeting between Defence Minister Rao Sikandar Iqbal and a three-member French parliamentary delegation which called on him here on Tuesday. The meeting reviewed various aspects of defence cooperation and stressed the need for enhanced interaction and communication between the armed forces of the two countries. The meeting noted that it was essential to increase cooperation in areas of training and exchange of delegations by both sides. The minister told the delegation that Pakistan attached greater importance to its ties with France, which was a reliable and dependable friend of Pakistan. He briefed the delegation about the counter-terrorism measures taken by the government. He told the delegation that Pakistan had been a victim of terrorism and it was endeavouring to eliminate and curb the menace of terrorism and extremism. The French side lauded the contribution made by Pakistan against the war on terror..

The Nation, 4 April 2007

Editorial: A gathering storm

THE impression that the lawyers protest against the sacking of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry may eventually fizzle out proved wrong as the legal fraternity and almost all mainstream opposition parties staged demonstrations across the country to coincide with the third hearing of the reference against the Chief Justice by the Supreme Judicial Council on Tuesday. Islamabad saw thousands of protestors rally outside the Supreme Court, chanting anti-government slogans and condemning what they called a blatant assault on the superior judiciary. The police deployed outside the Supreme Court were jostled by angry protestors when they prevented them from entering the premises. But the demonstration remained generally peaceful as the law enforcers kept their distance from the protesting lawyers and political workers. Even though the government deserves credit for letting the Bar members demonstrate peacefully, it cannot escape the blame for a massive crackdown on political activists of whom hundreds were arrested overnight. Ms Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif were quoted as saying that their

leaders went into hiding to avoid arrests..

Dawn, 5 April 2007

Accord to pursue pipeline project: Pakistan, India to carry forward peace process

NEW DELHI, April 4: Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz had a 50 minute bilateral meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at his residence here on Wednesday morning during which they agreed to carry forward the peace process and pursue decisively the Iran Pakistan India gas pipeline project. They also agreed to grant permission to their respective banks to open branches and increase air links between the two countries. The two leaders first had a 30-minute delegation-level talks which were followed by a 20 minute one on one session with focus on bilateral relations, particularly Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek. This was the third bilateral meeting between the two prime ministers since November 2004. They met last in Dhaka in November 2005. At the delegation level talks the prime minister was assisted by Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri, foreign secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan and Pakistan's High Commissioner Shahid Malik. Additional foreign secretary Mr Zamir Akram was also present..

Daily Times, 5 April 2007

50 more killed in clashes in South Waziristan

PESHAWAR: Some 50 people were killed in fresh clashes between pro government tribesmen and foreign militants in South Waziristan on Wednesday, pushing the overall death toll in two weeks of fighting to around 250, officials said. A tribal army led by Maulvi Muhammad Nazir captured the strategic area of Sheen Warsak west of Wana after a fierce battle in which 19 Uzbeks and five tribesmen were killed, officials said. Sheen Warsak has fallen to Maulvi Nazir's men, they said by phone from Dera Ismail Khan. Reports said three paramilitary soldiers had also been killed during the fighting in Sheen Warsak, but no official confirmation was available. In a gunbattle in Zaghunday, north of Sheen Warsak, the tribal army killed 25 Uzbeks, said tribesmen reaching Tank city from Wana..

The Nation, 5 April 2007

Hafsa admin to face legal action: Sherpao

ISLAMABAD Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao Wednesday said that the government would take legal action against the administration of Jamia Hafsa. He also expressed grave concern over the alleged manhandling of Khalid Ranjha by the protesting lawyers inside the Supreme Court premises after the adjournment of hearing of Presidential Reference against suspended Chief Justice of Supreme Court Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. The minister said, We never expect such behaviour from the lawyers, as they are the most respectable and educated segment of the society. Sherpao was talking to the journalists at the launching ceremony of Ambulance, Rescue and Emergency Service ARES at Capital Development Authority CDA Hospital. He said the government has handled the protest demonstrations in a better way on the other day, as no untoward incident was reported during the whole day. .

Daily Times, 5 April 2007

Opinion: Proposing constitutional reform (Moeen Cheema)

There shall be no guarantees that extra-constitutional measures shall not be resorted to at the pretext of a false emergency at any time in the future, but such constitutional reform should seek to ensure that so long as there is rule by law the judiciary may remain sufficiently independent to keep the executive under some check. The chief justice episode, the subsequent protest movement and the governments inept handling of a crisis of its own making have resulted in the call for constitutional reform and a return to democratic governance. This is an opportune moment to critically analyse the theoretical underpinnings of the popular slogans of this movement and stress the independence of the judiciary since that would enable us to propose concrete structural reforms that may lead to the entrenchment of constitutionalism in Pakistan. Tyranny of the Executive: In all modern systems of government the executive tends towards the accumulation of too much power. .

The Nation, 5 April 2007

Editorial: Before the SJC

ON the third hearing of the reference against Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, there were again countrywide protests to voice concern over what is seen by many as an attack on judiciary. This must have come as a surprise to those in the government who were expecting that the enthusiasm being displayed by the legal community would subside over time. There was no evidence of the lawyers having rejected politics, as maintained by Ch Pervez Elahi either. While they demonstrated separately from political parties, the lawyers vowed they would continue the struggle till true democracy was restored. In Lahore lawyers pulled down hoardings on the Mall carrying portraits of government figures. It was alleged by the protesting lawyers that ruling PML workers and government employees had been sent to Islamabad to shout slogans in governments favour posing as lawyers. This led to a scuffle or two..

Dawn, 5 April 2007

Opinion: Time for a bitter harvest (IA Rehman)

Within yards of the avenue in the capital where the concrete symbols of all the organs of the state are guarded by large contingents of gendarmerie, some lathi-wielding female students take the law into their hands, and announce their assumption of authority to detain and punish the sinners, and a pathetic looking state apparatus sues for forgiveness. This is Pakistan after seven years of stability, economic progress, genuine democracy, suppression of obscurantism and enlightened moderation! One looks in vain for the establishments cheer leaders who never tire of fulminating against dissident politicians, independent journalists and human rights activists and threatening them with lime and brimstone. No reference to the writ of the state is necessary because such expressions can be used only for the misguided serfs inhabiting certain parts of Balochistan, Sindh and Frontier. They cannot be used in the context of territories the state has been ceding to holy warriors in the northern part of the country..

The Nation, 6 April 2007

Jirga seeks govts help to fight Uzbeks

PESHAWAR The traditional jirga of Ahmadzai Wazir tribe Thursday sought the government support for the tribal lashkar in its move against Uzbek militants. The

demand was made during a meeting held at Wana, the headquarters of South Waziristan Agency. The jirga, chaired by Malik Sherin Jan Khan, unanimously urged the government to extend manpower and logistic support to the tribal lashkar as due to arms shortage the tribesmen are facing hardships. In this respect, the jirga also asked for security forces cover and ground support to the lashkar. Similarly, the participants of the jirga resolved to continue fighting against the Uzbek militants. In this respect, the jirga decided to initiate an organised operation against the Uzbek militants. Mulla Nazir accused Uzbek militants of working for India and US. Similarly, he also accused them of indulging themselves in un-Islamic acts in the area. Meanwhile, fighting between the local tribesmen and Uzbek militants was going in various places in southwest of Wana. Three bodies of Uzbek militants were recovered from Daza Ghondai area whereas armed tribesmen have initiated door to door search in Kaloshah area..

Dawn, 6 April 2007

Protests in Islamabad against moral police

ISLAMABAD, April 5: Several hundred men and women protested here on Thursday against the religious militancy and ferociousness of the students of Lal Masjid madressahs who have held the capital in awe for 10 weeks. They gathered at the Aabpara Chowk in response to a call of civil society organisations to protest against Jamia Hafsa girls, and their Lal Masjid male supporters, who have launched a campaign to stop vices in the city and pave way for enforcement of Sharia in the country. Stop terrorising people in the name of religion, said one placard held by the demonstrators who were outnumbered by riot police. Jamia Hafsa girls have been on the march, and in the headlines ever since they seized a public library on January 21 and forced the city authorities to stop demolishing illegally built mosques. That success encouraged them to launch their stop vices campaign..

Daily Times, 6 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Another embarrassing development for Pakistan

An American TV channel, ABC News, says that the United States has been secretly advising and encouraging a Pakistani militant group to carry out a series of deadly guerrilla raids inside Iran. The name of the outfit is Jundullah which took credit for an attack in February that killed at least 11 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard riding on a bus in the Iranian city of Zahedan. The Iranians also have a version of their own. Last month, the Iranian state television broadcast confessions by those who helped organise and carry out the Zahedan attack. The terrorists reportedly admitted to being members of Jundullah and said they had been trained for the mission at a secret location in Pakistan. What is more, according to ABC News, when the US Vice President Dick Cheney met with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in February in Islamabad, the secret campaign against Iran was on the agenda. ABC has cited unnamed US government sources as saying that the United States did not provide direct funding for the group but had maintained close ties to its leader, Abd el Malik Regi, since 2005..

Dawn, 6 April 2007

Opinion: A blessing in disguise' (Masud Mufti)

ONE is not surprised at the presidential reference against the Chief Justice of Pakistan.

Something like this was bound to happen one day as a bitter harvest of the doctrine of necessity sown by the Federal Court in 1955 Tamizuddin Khans case and in 1958 Dossos case. Why did it happen the way it did on March 9, 2007? To understand this we need to consider the following questions. What happened? Why did it happen? Is it likely to happen again? We do not know the whole answer to the first question. The five hour secret drama at the Army House and the substance of the in camera hearings of the Supreme Judicial Council are not yet known to us. All we know is that there has been an embarrassing sequence of events public accusations and official denials, manhandling of the non functional Chief Justice, rage of the legal community, a police raid on the media, the delayed release of the references contents and the bars boycott of the oath taking ceremony of Acting Chief Justice Rana Bhagwandas. We also know that Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry had lately grown in public perception for attempting to find relief for the citizens when the state had left them to the mercy of visible and invisible mafias. But that is all we know till now..

Daily Times, 7 April 2007

Government warned of suicide attacks in case of resistance; Qazi court to work on pattern of panchayat and jirgas

ISLAMABAD: Maulana Abdul Aziz, prayer leader of Lal Masjid and principal of Jamia Hafsa madrassa, has announced the enforcement of Sharia in the premises of Jamia Fareedia, Jamia Hafsa and the Governments Childrens Library, and warned the government of suicide attacks if it launched an operation against the madrassas. Today we announce the enforcement of Sharia in the areas in our control and every decision will now be taken according to Sharia, Aziz said while addressing more than 5,000 participants of an Implementation of Sharia and Glory of Jihad Conference at the Lal Masjid on Friday. Aziz said a Qazi Court comprising 10 muftis would start working in Jamia Hafsa on the pattern of a panchayat or a jirga to settle people's problems according to Sharia. The Lal Masjid prayer leader gave the government a months deadline to close brothels and gambling dens and the sale and purchase of liquor in Islamabad. He said the government must remove all hoardings with obscene images and immediately stop the propaganda campaign against the madrassa students and administration..

Dawn, 7 April 2007

Musharraf warns Hafsa students

ISLAMABAD, April 6: President Pervez Musharraf has warned the students of Jamia Hafsa and Lal Masjid to stop their militant activities because their stick wielding actions are against Islam. The stick-wielding activity leads to lawlessness and it will never be allowed to happen in the country, he said while addressing the Lady Health Workers Convention at the Liaquat Gymnasium here on Friday. The president said the government had gone a long way in tolerating the activities of students. He asked them to keep in mind the sanctity of mosques. The president said: These people should shun narrow mindedness and should open their minds for new ideas. These people want to restrict the thoughts of other people and impose their will on them, he added. President Musharraf warned the students and the administration of Lal Masjid not to try to control the thoughts of masses. Otherwise, he said, the people of the country would respond correspondingly..

The Nation, 7 April 2007

Govt PPP talks enter semi final phase

LAHORE - Federal Minister for Railways Sheikh Rasheed has maintained that the PPP and the government are still negotiating with each other but have not as yet struck any final deal. According to him, the parleys have crossed the quarter final stage and some outcome is expected in few days. Talking to journalists at the Railway Headquarters here on Friday Rasheed refuted the statement attributed to him that the deal had been struck. He said that the negotiations were still on and no new progress had been made so far. He said that the government stood on strong footings and had the required strength to get President Musharraf re elected through the existing parliament two months before the November 16 deadline. He also debunked the claims made by the political observers that the winding up of the NABs cell, which was investigating into the PPP leadership cases, was a strong indicator vis a vis dissolution of the national assembly..

Indian Express, 7 April 2007

Opinion: Uzbeks in Wana (Mini Kapoor)

Interesting times The Daily Times reported on Friday that elders of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe have formally requested the government for air support and supply of weapons against foreign militants. This request comes after more than two weeks of fierce fighting with Uzbek militants around Wana in South Waziristan. On Wednesday, Dawn had in an editorial cautioned the government against overt military participation: Open and conspicuous support of the anti Uzbek group could arouse negative feelings among those sections of tribesmen who are neutral and like most tribesmen do not welcome the presence of security personnel in their midst. It would be more prudent, it said, to let the tribesmen take to its logical conclusion their current rethink on the advisability of having foreign militants in their midst. The newspaper reported that war drums were being beaten after nearly five years, to motivate fighters and to get more tribesmen in their ranks. By one account, Wednesdays fighting alone left 44 Uzbek militants dead..

Kashmir Times, 7 April 2007

Opinion: South Waziristan: Jihad against Uzbeks (D. Suba Chandran)

The fight against the foreigners in South Waziristan has gained further momentum during the last week. Now, the local supporters of the Taliban have declared a jihad against the foreigners and have even asked for assistance from the government, including air support. The earlier article in this column highlighted some important questions on the reasons behind the local supporters of the Taliban turning against the foreigners in this region. What are the implications of this new development in South Waziristan? First, some facts at the ground level. According to open media reports, ever since the fighting broke out, more than 180 people have been killed. The available reports also suggest the foreigners, who are being the target of local Taliban supporters are primarily the Uzbeks and do not belong to other communities. Fact two Uzbeks are not the only foreign group settled in the tribal regions. There are other communities, Chechens and Arabs, besides the pashtuns from Afghanistan. However, the local community is targeting only the Uzbeks and not the others. Fact three, the fighting is limited only to South Waziristan. That too, only the Wazir tribes settled in South Waziristan are fighting these militants..

Daily Times, 7 April 2007

Opinion: Really, what is going on' (S Qadir)

Why would Musharraf, who proudly portrays himself as Pakistans strongman, allow this episode to drag itself unnecessarily in Islamabad when he has not been averse to using force in the tribal areas, in Balochistan and in Karachi. The NWFP has already succumbed, or near surrendered, to religious extremism. Clerics in Bannu have decided to fine Rs5000 anyone listening to music; elsewhere, people are being punished or fined for not keeping beards and so on; in Tank, the last town in the settled area before South Waziristan, militants tried to forcibly recruit students for suicide missions and killed the principal when he showed the courage to intervene and prevent them from such madness. As if this was not enough. Now we have something even more serious to worry about and it is much closer to home, in fact right in the capital. The Jamia Hafsa and Lal Masjid have been unleashed on the hapless citizens of the capital. The chronology of events is known but it is important to recap it to understand whats going on..

Daily Times, 8 April 2007

Jamia Hafsa issue: Musharraf offers talks to Mullahs

ISLAMABAD: President Gen Pervez Musharraf has invited clerics to talks to resolve the issue of extremist madrassas in Islamabad that have threatened suicide bombings if the government acts against them. The president, addressing a public meeting in Taxila, said that the administration of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa wanted to impose their own brand of Islam in the country. They are illiterate people. They always talk about killing and taking lives. This is not Islam. Let's sit and talk, Gen Musharraf he said. He said the government could take action against the mosque and madrassa at any time, but it wanted to resolve the issue amicably. I have not been trained to get scared. I was trained to fight. These few thousand girls are misguided. These misguided women wish to run the government, though they know nothing ' We dont want to kill them. We want to solve this issue with wisdom. The president said he would resist pressure from some quarters to dissolve parliament, and vowed that the assemblies would complete their constitutional term. We have brought true democracy. Some people want me to dissolve the assemblies, but this will not happen. Those in the government will win the next election, he said..

Dawn, 8 April 2007

Assemblies won't be dissolved: president

TAXILA, April 7: President Pervez Musharraf said on Saturday that the present assemblies would not be dissolved. Some people do not want the democratic system to function. They want me to dissolve the assemblies, but these will not be dissolved, the president said while addressing a public gathering at the Heavy Mechanical Complex HMC Colony in Taxila. He said the elections would be held and representatives of the present government would return successfully. President Musharraf said that with the introduction of the local government system and empowerment of women and minorities through joint electorate system, true democracy had been established in the country. It is for the first time that the national and provincial assemblies, Senate and local bodies will complete their term, he added..

Paktribune, 8 April 2007

Nawaz threatens to exit ARD over deal with government

ISLAMABAD: The head of PML (N), Mian Nawaz Sharif has threatened to quit ARD in case of any deal with PPP deal with government. Mian Nawaz Sharif has made his intentions clear to Benazir Bhutto during his talks with PPP leader at the Dubai residence of Ishaq Dar, and has warned her of PML N separating ways with PPP since principles laid down by Charter of Democracy, would be severely compromised. Responsible sources of PML N have informed Online that Mian Sahib has informed Benazir Bhutto about the doubts and reservations of other political component parties of ARD, who deem the issue as a conspiracy to weaken the ARD. Sources have informed that Benazir Bhutto has outrightly denied any instance of deal with the government, but her candid confession about mere talks and routine connections have confirmed various leaks, which were being vehemently denied by PPP, and were the main cause of Mian sahib's consternation..

Dawn, 8 April 2007

Editorial: Beyond rumour and speculation

RUMOURS are rife about a possible rapprochement between the government and what since Ziaul Haqs days has been the army's bete noir, the PPP. A mending of fences between the two has been in the air for quite some time, and even though nothing definite has emerged, observers seem to attach importance to the winding up by the National Accountability Bureau of the Special Operations Wing dealing with the corruption cases against Ms Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Zardari. Also, the other day, the government controlled PTV showed scenes of the rituals marking the execution of Mr Bhutto in April 1979. Ms Bhutto visited Washington recently in keeping with all Pakistani opposition leaders belief that a prior nod from the US was necessary before one could make a bid for power. Whether the visit has yielded any result is something that the PPP chairperson alone can say. However, according to the American press, the Bush administration doubts that a Benazir in power can tackle the challenges facing Pakistan, especially because the military will continue to dominate the scene anyway..

Daily Times, 8 April 2007

Opinion: Protest and change (Dr. HA Rizvi)

Musharraf faces a stark choice. He will have to either go on with his old ways of dismissing his opponents as non-entities or facilitate transition to a participatory and civilian political order. The status quo is untenable. The lawyers protest on the eve of the third meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council showed that the legal community has not relented on its demand for restoring the dignity and independence of the judiciary and the rollback of the military's role in civilian affairs. The protest was not limited to Islamabad and four provincial capitals; the lawyers demonstrated their solidarity with the judiciary in a large number of district headquarters also. Major political parties also joined the protest and thus strengthened its representative character. Some societal groups also protested in Islamabad and elsewhere. The latest round of protest is bad news for the official circles that had predicted its quick fading out. Provincial governments in the Punjab and Sindh had especially used their political influence and the state apparatus to discourage the people from joining the protest..

Dawn, 9 April 2007

Clerics stick to their guns: Shujaat holds talks at Lal Masjid

Islamabad April 8: President of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League PML Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain undertook what appeared to be a reconciliation process by holding a meeting with the heads of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa on Saturday night. However, no progress was reported as the two brothers stuck to their stand about enforcement of Sharia. Minister of State for Information Tariq Azim Khan said: The meeting ended on a positive note as both sides agreed to resolve the issue peacefully. Talking to party leaders after the meeting, Chaudhry Shujaat expressed optimism about success of his initiative and said it had been agreed that the contacts would continue till a solution to the crisis was found. The two religious institutions are headed by brothers Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdur Rashid Ghazi. Maulana Ghazi told media persons after the meeting that the Lal Masjid administration was not ready to budge an inch from its demands. He stressed the need for restoration of the sanctity of the mosque and seminary and providing safety to their visitors and inmates. He said everyone was obliged to respect the law..

Daily Times, 9 April 2007

HRCP says no action in Jamia Hafsa case shows military-jihadi link

LAHORE: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan discussed the dysfunctional government, growing anarchy, rising religious militancy, the disappearances of citizens and the current judicial crisis in its annual general meeting on Sunday. The commission then issued the following statement: This annual general meeting AGM of the HRCP has found that the firsthand reports of the situation in the various parts of the country point to: A strong link between state agents and militant groups that are operating in the country with impunity; and that resolving such deep seated rot in the system of governance is not possible unless unrepresentative organs of the state the military, the mullah and the all-consuming intelligence agencies are brought under control and prevented from undermining both the state and the societies. The following are some of the issues arising out of this review of the dysfunctional state and governance that have been identified..

Dawn, 9 April 2007

Iran to supply 1,000MW to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, April 8: Iran on Sunday agreed to supply 1,000MW electricity to Pakistan through a transmission line to be constructed on priority. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Minister for Water and Power Liaquat Ali Jatoi and Iranian Minister for Energy in Tehran, a fax message received here said. Both the countries also agreed to exchange technical know-how in manufacturing of 220 KV transformers and specially help Pakistan Heavy Electric Complex HEC for manufacturing of transformers, Mr Jatoi told media at the signing ceremony. Later, he called on the first Vice-President of Iran, Pervez Davoudi. They discussed bilateral cooperation in water and power sectors. Mr Davoudi assured Mr Jatoi of providing every support and assistance to Pakistan in the water and power sectors..

Daily Times, 9 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Musharraf-PPP deal or dheel

After a spate of rumours and a flurry of signs and tokens about a PPP deal with President General Pervez Musharraf, Ms Benazir Bhutto has once again opted for no deal. She met PMLN leader Mr Nawaz Sharif in Dubai and told him that her party will go ahead with the ARD protest against the government. Yet she did concede that routine talks were being conducted with government emissaries. Also, Mr Tariq Aziz, the special aide of President Musharraf, met with Ms Bhutto before she met Mr Sharif. The talks with Mr Aziz must have been inconclusive or she might not have met the PMLN leader who was said to have been greatly perturbed at the reports of the deal. She told him there was no deal with Musharraf or else she would have put him on notice as an ARD partner. Mr Sharif was not greatly persuaded by her assertions and told her that the ARD parties were worried and suspicious of the situation, and that the PPP should make its stand clear since one of the conditions in the Charter of Democracy signed by the two former premiers was that neither party would do a deal with General Musharraf.

Daily Times, 9 April 2007

Opinion: Shrouded reality (SY Hussain)

While the burqa brigade was doing their thing, the suspended Chief Justice of Pakistan was addressing a meeting of lawyers and emphasising the importance of the constitution, the rule of law and of due process March 28 was indeed a day of contrasts. In the twin cities the suspended CJ was addressing members of the legal community while at the same time, burqa clad young women supported, aided and abetted by bearded young men armed with bamboo sticks were running around the city imposing their own brand of justice. The dichotomy of our system of justice was there for all to see. Headlines in international news were of course all about the brothel raid by the burqa brigade. Fortunately the West loves militant women even if they are all hidden in black shrouds. Whether it was really women in those shrouds is entirely besides the point. The response in the West was: Militant women good; brothels bad. So it would seem that somebody in the establishment has finally come up with a politically acceptable way of providing a soft image for Pakistan!

Dawn, 10 April 2007

Govt decides to negotiate more with clerics

ISLAMABAD, April 9: The government on Monday decided to rely mainly on negotiations for resolving the Madressah Hafsa Lal Masjid standoff, but kept the option open for some administrative action. Sources privy to a high level meeting told Dawn that the president and the prime minister had directed the security agencies to take legal action for enforcing the writ of the state, but asked them to ensure that no harm came to the innocent. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, the chief of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League, and representatives of different security agencies were present at the deliberations at the president's Rawalpindi camp office. The sources said that while intelligence agencies were for an operation against the militants, the other participants counselled patience..

Daily Times, 10 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Jamia Hafsa, dictatorship and democracy

The PML chief, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, called on the Lal Masjid Imam, Maulana Abdul Aziz, and his brother Ghazi Abdur Rashid on Saturday to negotiate the row over

the enforcement of Sharia and the more complicated matter relating to the demands and activities of Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia seminaries in the capital of Pakistan. The talks went on through the night and were dubbed informal by the clerics. The two clerics have important contacts in the establishment. They have not even listened to advice from the MMA, which says that Sharia should not be enforced through the political use of women students. The governments religious affairs minister, Ejaz ul Haq, who is normally soft on the clerics and has got these two brothers off the hook in the past, has also failed to exploit his leverage to resolve the crisis. The girls of Jamia Hafsa were first instigated to occupy a government library, then to enforce the Sharia on the citizens of Pakistan. The two brother patrons of the girls have, it appears, launched a challenge to the government, daring it to take action against them and then see what happens..

The Nation, 10 April 2007

Editorial: Inflexible clerics

THE mindset that runs the Jamia Hafsa and Lal Masjid and has established a Shariat Court to dispense justice according to its version of Islam could not have been expected to wind up this new born parallel judicial system. Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdur Rashid Ghazi were not waiting for PML President Ch Shujaat Hussain to return from abroad and conduct negotiations with them. His failure looked inevitable. Nevertheless, the attempt was in order, though had the government with all the paraphernalia of intelligence outfits at its disposal made timely moves the situation would not have come to such a pass. According to reports, the two Maulanas maintained that they wanted the protection of mosques, eradication of vulgarity' and enforcement of Sharia, and refused to accept Ch Shujaats assurance that their grievances would be redressed on the ground that never before had the government taken any action on their demands, though they had been in line with the Constitution and Islam. They resented the blocking of the mosques website. In a separate development, the mosques Darul Afta has found Tourism Minister Nilofar Bakhtiar guilty of a mortal sin; for she has been seen with the paragliders of Paris in an obscene position, demanded her punishment and removal from the Cabinet..

Dawn, 10 April 2007

Editorial: Violence in Parachinar

THE resurgence of sectarian violence in Parachinar in Kurram Agency is a reminder of how important it is to quash the wave of religious extremism sweeping the country. Though Parachinar is no stranger to sectarian clashes, this fresh burst of violence is being attributed to the growing presence of the Taliban. So far 40 people have died in this senseless bout of violence that began last Friday during a Shia procession when some Sunnis allegedly shot at the participants, which led to violence. While the army has been called in and a curfew extended, these are just short term measures that will prove meaningless if not followed by concrete measures to reconcile both sides. The governments priority is to maintain law and order but it must also formulate strategies whereby there is no threat of such clashes breaking out again especially as this area is prone to sectarian violence. It is clear that past strategies promising to curb hate literature, for example have failed..

Daily Times, 11 April 2007

Focus on Pakistan, not Musharraf: US

LAHORE: Richard Boucher, US assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs, says the United States is investing more in its relationship with the people of Pakistan than rather than with President Gen Pervez Musharraf. I dont think we are investing in Musharraf; I think we're investing in Pakistan, Boucher said in an interview to Sidharth Bhatia of Indian media outlet Daily News & Analysis in Mumbai on April 6. You know, we invest a lot in Pakistan and it's not just military its probably a hundred million dollars a year on education, Boucher said. Its money on healthcare; it's money on roads. Ive been to the border areas in Pakistan, and Ive gone on roads that we built and met with villagers who say, My old mother can get to the hospital in an hour now instead of two days. Ive gone to schools that we built and seen children in those schools. Thats not working with the General, thats working with the people of Pakistan..

Dawn, 11 April 2007

Riot toll in Kurram Agency rises to 50

PARACHINAR, April 10: Despite the presence of security forces, heavy fighting between rival groups in different areas of the Kurram Agency continued for the fifth consecutive day on Tuesday. There is no respite in clashes and residential areas are being targeted with rockets and light cannons, forcing people to evacuate women and children to safe places. The region was without electricity after the main transmission line was attacked near Alizai in the Lower Kurram Agency. According to sources, death toll had risen to 50 and hospitals in Parachinar, Sadda and Alizai had received 260 wounded. Doctors said that 173 wounded had been shifted to hospitals in Parachinar and about 65 to the Sadda hospital. Security officials said the army had fired artillery rounds from its base in Parachinar on Tuesday evening and targeted suspected locations to silence guns..

The Nation, 11 April 2007

Editorial: More talks

WHILE Chaudhry Shujaats talks with the administration of the Jamia Hafsa and the Lal Masjid have failed, it is positive to note that the government is planning to pursue talks with them. Though there is talk in the capital about a crackdown, the government seems to be interested in resolving the issue through negotiations. Though talking it out is always a better idea, it would nonetheless be prudent if the government were to take more firm a stance in the negotiations. It should try to placate the clergy. However, it should never give the slightest whiff of weakness. That, unfortunately, has been the case ever since the Jamia Hafsa students occupied the Children's Library on January 21..

Daily Times, 11 April 2007

Opinion: Some unanswered questions about the judicial crisis (Ijaz Hussain)

We may not have an answer to the genesis of the judicial crisis but we certainly have an answer to its impact. It is true that the crisis did not unleash a people's movement against the regime, but it certainly showed that Musharraf had lost the moral claim to power. The Musharraf regime is in a real soup as a result of the judicial crisis. For the first time in seven years it is engaged in an existential struggle. When Musharraf, the commando, reportedly met Kamran Khan for the Geo interview following the manhandling of the

chief justice and the attack on the Geo office in Islamabad, he for once really looked worried and defensive. He kept pleading his innocence by completely disassociating himself from these reprehensible acts. The present crisis, which apparently started out of the blue on 9th March, remains a mystery till today. It raises a number of questions that need to be addressed if we want to fully comprehend its genesis and dynamics..

Dawn, 11 April 2007

ECC approves price formula: Work on IPI pipeline to begin next month

ISLAMABAD, April 10: The Economic Coordination Committee ECC of the cabinet on Tuesday approved gas-sharing with India and the gas-pricing mechanism at the Iran-Pakistan border under the \$7.4 billion Iran-Pakistan-India IPI gas pipeline project. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz presided over the meeting which also constituted a committee to oversee the project implementation, including feasibility studies, inter-governmental agreements, framework agreement and other related discussions on the pipeline. The committee, headed by minister for petroleum and natural resources, would comprise prime ministers advisers on finance and energy, Planning Commission deputy chairman, Central Board of Revenue chairman and secretaries of finance and petroleum..

Daily Times, 12 April 2007

Lal Masjid breakthrough soon: Shujaat

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League PML President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain held another round of talks with the administration of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa here on Wednesday, saying good progress had been made and there could be a breakthrough in three or four days. The talks were held at the residence of Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and also attended by PML Secretary General Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed. The talks aim to end the standoff between students of Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia madrassas affiliated with Lal Masjid and the government following the formers vigilante actions in the capital. The mullahs that run Lal Masjid have vowed to resist any attempt by the government to bring them in line through force, and have even threatened suicide bombings. The Islamabad administration was later also invited to attend the dialogue to find an amicable solution to the standoff. Wafaqul Madaras General Secretary Hanif Jullundhri and Qari Amar Yasir also attended the meeting..

Dawn, 12 April 2007

Three-tier deployment along Afghan border

WANA, April 11: Pakistani security forces operating in the South Waziristan tribal region have made a three tier security deployment to stop cross border infiltration by militants into Afghanistan, a senior military commander said here on Wednesday. He also said that Pakistan would shortly commence fencing of its borders along a 12 km stretch with Afghanistan to choke off cross border infiltration. No regular movement is taking place between South Waziristan and Bermal of Afghanistan. It is very less; if at all there is any movement. If someone proves it through satellite imagery, I am responsible, Major Gen Gul Muhammad told a group of Pakistani and foreign journalists visiting the region. Mr Gul, who commands Pakistani troops operating in most of the tribal region straddling the Pakistan Afghan border, said he had made what he described as coercive deployment of troops to stop cross border infiltration..

The Nation, 12 April 2007

Aziz warns US against critical legislation

ISLAMABAD Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz Wednesday warned United States that any legislation by Congress against Pakistan would harm bilateral relations and would prompt public reaction. Given the sacrifices Pakistan has made in the war on terror, any legislation critical of Pakistan would invoke a negative public reaction and would prove counter productive, he said. He was addressing the inaugural session of international ground forces symposium titled, Common Security and the Global War on Terror, organised by the Pakistani and US armies at National Defence University Islamabad. He emphasised the need for addressing the differences between the two countries quietly. To ensure and preserve the cooperation it is necessary for both of us to prevent any action that can impact bilateral relationship adversely, Aziz said..

Daily Times, 12 April 2007

Opinion: Neither, thank you very much (Kamran Shafi)

Both the Ms, the Mullah and Musharraf are unacceptable: the Mullah for insisting on thrusting his own bigoted, narrow and cruel dogma down our throats, and Musharraf for his one step ahead five-back approach in all matters to do with the Mullah A leading member of civil society and the so-called liberal/protesting/stand-up-and-be-counted platoon asked my wife whom she would prefer lording it over us, Musharraf or the Taliban/Mullahs. The question was prompted, obviously, by the antics of the Lal Masjid Mullah Brothers and their burqa clad storm troops, some among their number reportedly men. While my wife answered unthinkingly, Musharraf, she agreed with me when I said that they both are one as bad as the other, that both must be fought by those like my friends and I who cherish the freedom to live their lives according to their own lights so long as what they do does not impinge on the freedom of association, thought, movement, and expression, of any other. And because the Hafsa women/men are obviously egged on by the Establishment should be DIS-establishment, actually, for all the damage it has done of this blighted but hapless country, whose biggest boss the Commando is at the present time..

Daily Times, 12 April 2007

15 more killed in Kurrum Agency sectarian violence

PESHAWAR: At least 15 people were killed as sectarian violence erupted again in Kurrum Agency on Wednesday bringing the death toll from fierce clashes between Sunni and Shia Muslims to at least 55, security officials and residents said. Rival groups clashed in two villages near the curfew bound tribal town of Parachinar, leaving twelve people dead, security officials said. Residents said at least 40 houses were torched in Jalime and Char Dewar villages on the outskirts of Parachinar. Women and children fled to the nearby town of Alizai, they said. Political Agent Sahibzada Anees confirmed the violence erupted after two days of lull but gave no casualty figures. We have sent troops to the area and are collecting details of the casualties, Anees told AFP. An exchange of gunfire also took place in Sadda town in which three people were killed, officials said..

Dawn, 12 April 2007

Editorial : Ahead with the IPI

A MAJOR hurdle seems to have been crossed on the Iran Pakistan India gas pipeline project when on Tuesday the Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet took two major decisions: it approved the gas sharing formula with India and agreed on price mechanism on the Iranian gas. The details of the price mechanism have not been made public because Tehran and New Delhi have yet to give their views on it. But gas sharing has been approved. According to the formula, Pakistan and India will share it equally when Iran starts delivering 2.1 billion cubic feet of gas a day BCFD in the first phase. In the second phase, the total gas delivery will go up to 5.3 BCFD which Pakistan and India will share 2.1 and 3.2 BCFD respectively. Both countries need more gas for their expanding industrial, commercial and domestic needs, but the current levels of their domestic gas production are unlikely to meet their future needs. Pakistan especially requires more gas for producing electricity to tide over the acute power shortage. At the moment, there is a gap of 1,300MW between demand and supply. The situation is likely to worsen unless Pakistan augments its power-generation capacity..

Dawn, 13 April 2007

President warns of quitting war against terror

ISLAMABAD, April 12: Pakistan on Thursday threatened to quit the international coalition against terrorism if its partners, particularly the United States and its media, continued to accuse Islamabad of dragging its feet. If we are bluffing each other, if I am bluffing and if Inter-Services Intelligence is bluffing, then we must be out of the coalition, President Pervez Musharraf declared at the concluding session of the Land Forces Symposium 2007 being attended by senior military officials of 22 countries. He warned that if the blame game continued, it would be impossible to defeat terrorism and extremism, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first sign of defeat is to blame each other, the president said, calling upon the US and its media to realise the gravity of the situation. We have suffered the maximum and we have contributed the maximum. Therefore, we will not accept that Pakistan is not doing enough in the war against terror, the president asserted..

Daily Times, 13 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Divided government fights on many fronts

Even as the PML president, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, was negotiating with the Lal Masjid mullahs on Wednesday over their threat to start their own sharia court, the cabinet of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz found itself divided over whether or not to take direct action against the law breaking clerics. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, whose technique in negotiations is based on giving concessions to the clergy, also slammed those who insisted that the government was in the process of making a deal with the PPP. The top cleric of Lal Masjid made it very clear what kind of negotiations were going on when he said that the mosque has guns on the premises and it will defend itself if the government attempts a crackdown. The concessions already given are: a pledge to rebuild the illegal premises pulled down, and recognition that the vigilante moral squad of Hafsa was doing the right thing. The police record presented at the meeting with the Lal Masjid clerics showed offences committed by 56 people, including acts of violence and assault of citizens by the students of Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia and the Lal Masjid khateeb,

Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi..

Dawn, 13 April 2007

Islamabad braces for protests

ISLAMABAD, April 12: The stage is set for another day of protests outside the Supreme Court building here on Friday when 'suspended' Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry will appear before the Supreme Judicial Council for the fourth hearing in the reference filed by President Pervez Musharraf. Political parties and civil society organisations will gather outside the Supreme Court building to hold a demonstration planned by the lawyers' associations to condemn an assault against the independence of the judiciary. This time our protest will be more effective, though peaceful, the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association SCBA, Munir A. Malik, said after chairing a meeting of the association. The vice chairperson of PBC, Ali Ahmed Kurd, appealed to the lawyers to observe a complete strike on Friday. Heavy contingents of the Rangers and police have been deployed at all points of entry into Islamabad and approaches to the Supreme Court building will remain closed to traffic..

The Nation, 13 April 2007

Editorial: Democracy and terrorism

WITH more voices from within the USA taken by the idea of democracy in Pakistan, or expressing dissatisfaction in the country's performance in the War on Terror, the prospect of American legislation against Pakistan seems likelier than before. Mr Shaukat Aziz talked against such legislation while speaking at an international symposium at the National Defence University. Given the sacrifices Pakistan has made in the War on Terror, any legislation critical of Pakistan would invoke a negative public reaction and would prove counter productive, he said. He emphasised the need to addressing the differences between the two countries quietly. Worth noting is the cause of our sudden petulance. After all, hasn't this government been more than pliable to all American demands' It took a U-turn on the Afghan front, brought about the fundamental shift in our Kashmir policy, entered into a bloody war in its own tribal areas and its intelligence agencies have allegedly been picking up scores of individuals from across the country on vague and misguided presumptions..

Dawn, 13 April 2007

Jirga negotiates truce in Kurram Agency: Forces from across border blamed for unrest

PARACHINAR, April 12: Guns went silent in most areas of the Kurram Agency on Thursday after a jirga brokered a ceasefire between warring groups to end week-long bloody clashes which have claimed about 65 lives. Syed Hussain Ali Shah, a member of the jirga, told Dawn that elders from both the sides had agreed to a ceasefire. According to AFP, tribesmen have blamed elements in Afghanistan for a week of fierce clashes between rival groups. Tribesmen have blamed extraneous forces from across the border for the unrest, said a statement issued by the office of the NWFP governor, which oversees affairs in the tribal region. The 33-member jirga, comprising elders from Aurakzai and Bangash tribes of Hangu, arrived in the troubled town on Thursday and held negotiations with the local administration and notables of the area. Before proceeding

to Parachinar, the jirga members held talks with elders in Alizai and Sadda towns and a formal truce was reached. The jirga held separate meetings with representatives of Sunni and Shia groups and the political authorities in Parachinar..

Dawn, 14 April 2007

Defence terms two SJC judges hostile

ISLAMABAD, April 13: The counsel defending Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry in a reference before the Supreme Judicial Council SJC on Friday described two members of the council as distinctively hostile. The attitude of Justice Javed Iqbal and Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar was distinctively hostile towards Justice Chaudhry during the SJC proceedings, Supreme Court Bar Association SCBA President Munir A. Malik told reporters after attending the over two hour session of the council. He had been asked to comment on the atmosphere during the proceedings of the SJC where Justice Iftikhar appeared for the fourth time to face the reference filed against him by President Pervez Musharraf. Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan, leading the six member defence panel, closed arguments on the question of alleged bias of three judges of the five member council. Specific allegations of bias were levelled by the respondent, raising preliminary legal objections and questioning the presence of the three judges in the council..

Daily Times, 14 April 2007

Countrywide protests for CJP

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE/ PESHAWAR: There was a significant increase in the number of people protesting against the suspension of Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry here on Friday as several small parties joined the protest campaign of lawyers and opposition parties in front of the Supreme Court. Lawyers and opposition parties also held protests and demonstrations across the country as the CJP attended the fourth hearing of a presidential reference against him before the Supreme Judicial Council. Participation of the Khaksaar Tehreek, the late Nawabzada Nasarullah Khans Pakistan Democratic Party, the Peoples Rights Movement, the Tehreek-e-Inqalab and human rights groups gave impetus to the daylong protest of the Pakistan Peoples Party PPP, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz PML N, the Muttahida Majlis e Amal MMA and the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf PTI. The families of the people reported missing by their relatives also participated in the protests. However, the PPP kept itself at a distance from the other political parties who held separate protests on the Constitution Avenue..

Daily Times, 14 April 2007

EDITORIAL: A question of trust

President General Pervez Musharraf told a seminar in Islamabad Thursday that mutual trust was a pre-requisite for fighting terrorism, and Pakistans allies must not doubt its sincerity and commitment to the fight. He declared: Our sincerity must not be doubted. We have contributed a lot and suffered a lot, but we are not disillusioned. If anyone thinks that I am bluffing or if the ISI is bluffing, we should be out of the coalition. The meeting was attended by senior military delegates from 21 countries, hence the message was planted in the right place at the right time. He knew that the Bush Administration still supported him although the press in Washington and the US Congress had their

knives out for him. His most steadfast supporter was the last US ambassador in Islamabad, Mr Ryan Crocker, but even Crocker used to refer to Mr Musharraf's incapacity rather than his lack of sincerity in fighting the war against extremism and Talibanism..

The Nation, 14 April 2007

Pak, Russia for opening up new chapter in ties

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and Russia on Friday reaffirmed their commitment to fight against terrorism while resolving to expand the level of cooperation in economic sphere and other fields. The Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail E. Fradkov called on the President before concluding his three-day visit to Pakistan. In the meeting, the two leaders exchanged views on important regional and global issues as well as ways and means of consolidating bilateral relations, according to foreign office spokesperson. The President of Pakistan conveyed that Pakistan recognized Russia's important role and influence around the world and it was our desire to consolidate further its relations with the Russian Federation and to open up new areas of collaboration, she said..

Dawn, 14 April 2007

Editorial: Increasing disappearances

WHILE it is difficult to verify the claim of the Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz that more than 7,000 Baloch and Sindhi nationalists have been arbitrarily detained by the intelligence agencies, there is no doubt that the figure for involuntary disappearances in the country runs into the hundreds if not more. HRCP office bearers recently noted that there had been no let-up in the number of such cases and that if some people were released by the agencies, many others were whisked away and held in custody. Unfortunately, in the midst of the current judicial crisis, and now the Lal Masjid episode, this issue is in danger of losing its urgency. This simply must not be allowed to happen. It affects hundreds of families, many of whom have actively tried to ascertain the whereabouts of missing relatives..

Daily Times, 15 April 2007

No joint Pak-US anti-terror raids

WASHINGTON: President General Pervez Musharraf has rejected absolutely and totally the prospect of joint US-Pakistan military operations to pursue retreating insurgents inside Pakistan. The whole population of Pakistan will rise against it, he told CBS news channel in an interview. Pakistan is being maligned by the West unfairly in criticism that it is not doing enough to root out terrorists on its soil and to help crush the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, he said. He blamed the criticism on a total lack of understanding of the environment and reality by President Hamid Karzai himself. Asked if he was angry with Karzai, he replied: Yes, indeed. Very angry. Musharraf dismissed as absolute nonsense a claim by Karzai that Taliban leader Mullah Omar was hiding in Pakistan. He is in south Afghanistan somewhere. He is not in Pakistan, although President Karzai and everyone keeps saying he is in Quetta absolute nonsense, absolute total nonsense he has never been in Pakistan..

Paktribune, 15 April 2007

Students of Lal Masjid torch obscene CDs in a video shop at Bhara Kahu

ISLAMABAD: Students of Lal Masjid raided a video shop in the area of Nai Abadi at Bhara Kahu, took out all the CDs and set ablaze them on the road. The incident followed the announcement made by the students earlier that no video shop would be allowed to run. Confirming the incident SSP Islamabad, Capt Retd Zafar Iqbal told he had received information that one Arif, owner of CDs shop had burnt the CDs voluntarily. Police is however investigating if the owner of the shop is under some one's pressure. Police have found a pick up from the site and it is being suspected that the students had reached Bhara Kahu on board this pick up. Some unknown students reached Al Awan video shop in the area of Nai Abadi at Saturday evening. They dislodged the owner of the shop forcibly..

Dawn, 15 April 2007

SC takes up cases on SJC tomorrow

ISLAMABAD, April 14: The Supreme Court will take up on Monday identical petitions, challenging formation of the Supreme Judicial Council and sending of a reference by President Pervez Musharraf against non-functional Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. During the last hearing a three member bench comprising Justice Sardar Mohammad Raza Khan, Justice Chaudhry Ijaz Ahmed and Justice Hamid Ali Mirza had served notices on the president's secretariat, SJC and the federal government through the ministry of law. Now the case will be taken up again on April 16. The petitions had been filed by the Watan Party through Barrister Zafarullah Khan and Adliya Bachao Committee represented by Dr Farooq Hassan..

Daily Times, 15 April 2007

Opinion: Dilemmas of governance (Dr. HA Rizvi)

Musharrafs attempt to dispose of the chief justice represents a negation of constitutionalism, disregard of the autonomy of civilian institutions and a negation of democratic ethics. The Musharraf government represents the dilemmas of a typical military regime that has been in power for some years. Such a regime views itself as the guarantor of the states internal stability and external security. It demonstrates some successes in the administrative and management domains and records achievements in some sectors of the economy. However, a military regime cannot address the weaknesses and deficiencies of the political structures that destabilise the civilian governments and make it possible for the top brass of the military to assume power..

Dawn, 15 April 2007

Editorial: Helping the due process

THE fourth hearing of the case against the non-functional Chief Justice before the Supreme Judicial Council on Friday saw more rallies by lawyers in Islamabad and elsewhere. Inevitably, the opposition parties, too, took part in the demonstrations, as they did on the previous three occasions. Is this going to be the pattern all along till the case is finally decided? Will the lawyers and the political activists demonstrate in the streets, while the judges hear the case inside? No doubt, the legal community was shocked by the way the government treated the nations top judge. But the issue needs to be looked at from a larger perspective and concerns not transient matters but such fundamental values

as the rule of law, constitutionalism, civilised conduct and the countrys long-term interests..

Dawn, 16 April 2007

Massive rally against Lal Masjid Sharia

KARACHI, April 15: The Muttahida Qaumi Movement on Sunday staged a massive rally in the city against what it called the threat of Kalashnikov Sharia of Islamabas Lal Masjid clerics and asserted that Islam did not allow enforcement of Sharia by force and Pakistan had not been created to be turned into a theological state. In a telephonic address from London, party chief Altaf Hussain quoted profusely from the Holy Quran and Hadith to substantiate his attack on religious extremism. He said that extremists were defaming Islam and maligning the name of Pakistan and because of their acts of violence and terrorism, India, Afghanistan and other countries were describing Pakistan as a sanctuary of terrorists. He described the scholars supporting the Sharia of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa as Ulema i Sou and said they were misleading the country and the people..

Daily Times, 16 April 2007

Foreigners leaving N Waziristan: Taliban spokesman

ISLAMABAD: Foreign combatants are leaving North Waziristan over fears that tribesmen may launch an operation to evict them, an alleged Taliban spokesman said on Sunday. Around 50 families of foreigners have departed for their respective countries in the last month,' the spokesman, Gohar Ayub, told NNI from North Waziristan. He said he was speaking on behalf of local Taliban spokesmen Abdullah Farhad and Tariq Jamil. President Gen Pervez Musharraf informed army generals from 22 countries on Friday that tribesmen had killed 300 foreigners in South Waziristan and that he expected similar action in North Waziristan. The foreigners decided to leave North Waziristan after the tribal operation against the Uzbeks in South Waziristan. The foreigners said they did not want their women and children to become targets, the Taliban spokesman said. He said that around 50 families, including Chechens, Turks, Tajiks and Arabs, had returned to their countries..

The Nation, 16 April 2007

Karzai says relations can improve if Pak changes policy

JALALABAD - Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said that the Pakhtuns living on both sides of the Durand Line are being killed through a pre-planned conspiracy and are portrayed as terrorists and extremists before the world. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan could be improved only after the former mends its policy and stops throwing dust in the eyes of the world, Hamid Karzai said while addressing a gathering after inaugurating the Baacha Khan Complex and renovation work of the mausoleum of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in Jalalabad on Saturday. Karzai, while paying rich tributes to Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan, announced that Baacha Khan Peace Award would be given to those who work for peace and non-violence across the world. The Afghan president said that the Pakhtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan were not involved in terrorism but certain elements were portraying them as terrorists before the world. However, the international community had come to know that some hidden hands were busy in terrorist activities in the region..

Daily Times, 16 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Nature of extremism in Pakistan

President General Pervez Musharraf, speaking at the Pakistan Military Academy PM Kakul, said Pakistan was at a critical stage and the biggest threat to it was internal extremism and sectarianism. He said: The country is passing through the worst ever critical moment and is facing two major threats of religious extremism and sectarianism. Since sectarianism emanates from religious extremism there was some tautology there. Why has religious extremism spiked on his watch? The chief minister in the NWFP, Akram Khan Durrani, under siege from desperadoes determined to snatch away his administrative outreach, speaks a different language. On Saturday he went on record as saying that the resurgence of Talibanisation in southern districts of the province Bannu, Tank and Lakki Marwat was the work of external forces, including several secret agencies. He blamed outsiders for Talibanisation in his territory and said his government would not allow anyone to take the law into their own hands. But surely Mr Durrani isn't accusing the Taliban because his party manifesto pledges loyalty to their ideology.

Dawn, 16 April 2007

Editorial: For Pakistans own stability

ADDRESSING a symposium attended by senior military officials from 22 countries in Islamabad the other day, President Musharraf said all the right things about Pakistan's role in the global war against terrorism. It is Pakistan which has captured and handed over the highest number of militants to the US so far, yet there seems to be only a grudging acknowledgement of this fact. Gen Musharraf warned the US-led coalition forces trying to restore peace in Afghanistan of quitting the war on terror if they did not stop questioning Pakistan's role and intentions in the fight against terrorism. Instead, he proposed that the coalition and Afghan forces, together with those of Pakistan, should jointly fight against the threat posed to Afghanistan's stability by the resurgent Taliban. This makes good sense because the enemy being fought against in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan is a common one..

The Nation, 16 April 2007

Editorial: Abuse of power

THERE is no disputing Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's assertion that the rule of an individual is in conflict with the basic principles of human liberty, insight, expression and religion. Addressing a gathering of lawyers at the annual dinner of the Sindh High Court Bar Association's Sukkur Chapter on Saturday, he said abuse of power often happened in a society where there was the centralisation of power in one person or one institution. The Chief Justice avoided speaking about his suspension and the filing of reference against him and focussed his speech on 'some of his achievements that included the clearing of a huge backlog of cases, taking suo moto action on several issues of public concern and fundamental rights and conducting hearings of the missing persons case. Praising the legal fraternity for its commitment to the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law, he very rightly observed that the legislature, judiciary and executive had their distinctive roles and responsibilities with respect to one another.

Daily Times, 17 April 2007

Musharraf vows check on Taliban

RAWALPINDI: President General Pervez Musharraf on Monday acknowledged that the Taliban enjoyed support in the tribal areas and said the government was making efforts to neutralise this support. Our strategy in the tribal areas is succeeding, he said while addressing the 60th four day Formation Commanders conference at General Headquarters here. Referring to recent clashes between militants and local tribesmen, Musharraf said the operation had been conducted with the army's support. Pakistan faces the menaces of extremism, obscurantism and religious bigotry, he said. Musharraf said that due to its geo-strategic location, Pakistan would continue playing an important role and contribute positively towards peace and harmony in the region. The president praised the sacrifices of the army, Frontier Corps, intelligence services and other security agencies in operations against terrorists. He said Pakistan was fighting the war against terrorism in its own interest..

Dawn, 17 April 2007

PPP, government make conflicting claims over deal

ISLAMABAD, April 16: The government and the Peoples Party made conflicting statements on Monday about a 'deal' between them. The PPP poured scorn over claims that the party had agreed to support President Pervez Musharraf's re election from the present assemblies, but the railways minister asserted that an agreement is in the final stages. A spokesman for the PPP said the party believed that the president's re election from the present assemblies would be unconstitutional. On the other hand, Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed went so far as to spell out details of the deal, saying it would be implemented in three phases. He said the sequence would be: i the president's re-election; ii withdrawal of cases against Ms Bhutto, and iii her return to Pakistan. He said the deal would be finalised on the basis of quid pro quo. The signs of a deal will be visible in two months..

The Nation, 17 April 2007

Pakistan, China to sign 25 agreements

ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has expressed his confidence that his visit to China will open up new avenues of cooperation between the two countries. He was talking to newsmen before departure for Beijing for a week long visit to China Monday. Shaukat Aziz said that he looks forwards to his talks with the Chinese leadership to further cement bilateral friendship. The Prime Minister said Pak China relationship is multifaceted covering trade, economy, defence and security, politics, diplomacy, investment, science and technology and people to people contacts. He is accompanied by Federal Ministers Jehangir Tareen, Nauraiz Shakoor, Zahid Hamid, Minister of State Aamir Liaquat Hussain and senior officials. Mr. Shaukat Aziz said he will have wide ranging talks with the Chinese leadership including President and Prime Minister and discuss all aspects of our relations besides regional and international issues of common interest. He said he will also have meetings with a number of Chinese entrepreneurs to encourage them for investing in Pakistan..

Daily Times, 17 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Is Shaukat Aziz to be the fall guy'

Something ominous happened on Sunday. Several ruling PML Central Working Committee CWC members held a meeting that was presided over by the PML President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, in which it was suggested that the presidential reference against the suspended Chief Justice of Pakistan Mr Iftikhar Chaudhry should be withdrawn to stop it from becoming a political issue. During the meeting, the party's deputy secretary general, Iqbal Dar, charged that the party had not been consulted before the filing of the reference against the chief justice and demanded that an inquiry committee be formed to discover the motives behind the reference. The reference should be withdrawn for an amicable solution to the judicial crisis, Dar said. Is this the language of Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain? The remarks about the government of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz were revealing. It was characterised as arrogant and incompetent; it was alleged that the government had mishandled the chief justices case and made it difficult for the party to defend the step..

Dawn, 17 April 2007

Editorial: Rally and the dichotomy

THE Muttahidas rally in Karachi on Sunday seems to be an expression of the nation's disapproval of the Lal Masjid episode in Islamabad and the rising wave of religious extremism it symbolises. The shock over the Hafsa girls' illegal action in raiding a home, beating a woman and her daughters and kidnapping them was worsened by the government's failure to take action against those who had violated the law of the land. Not only did those behind this condemnable act not repent, they even glorified their criminality and have pledged to continue that way in the future. Side by side, the Lal Masjid drama has continued, and the clerics inside seem to be dreaming of the day they will conquer the whole of Pakistan and run it the way the Taliban ran Afghanistan, which they conquered after a bloody civil war in which they and other Afghan factions shed Muslim blood for the sake of power. The government is now talking to the defiant, and, one might add, triumphant Lal Masjid clerics..

The Nation, 17 April 2007

Editorial: A mammoth rally

THE rally organised by the Mutahidda Qaumi Movement at Karachi on Sunday showed a massive turnout that established more than one ground reality. It demonstrated the party's organising skill and ability to call forth a huge crowd; it was a show of strength against the oppositions PPP and religious parties; it reflected the MQM's anti-theocratic stand enjoying widespread support among its adherents; and, indeed, it was an indirect message to the US that the government, whose coalition partner MQM is, remained committed against fanatical religious forces. Addressing the audience on telephone from London, MQM leader Altaf Hussain made a pointed reference to the danda bardar school of thought as represented by the ongoing Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa crisis and severely castigated those ulema who were in favour of enforcing Sharia by force. He copiously quoted from the Quran and Hadith to substantiate the point that extremist and barbaric methods were against the spirit of Islam, which, as he rightly pointed out, spread because of its virtues of humility and tolerance..

Daily Times, 18 April 2007

Lal Masjid cleric agrees to resume negotiations

ISLAMABAD: The Lal Masjid administration on Tuesday withdrew its decision to suspend talks with the government and announced that they had resumed negotiations to try and find a peaceful end to the standoff in the capital. Lal Masjid chief cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz on Monday announced the suspension of the talks after two army helicopters flew over the mosque and adjacent Jamia Hafsa madrassa, took pictures of unveiled girl students and sprayed a gas on them that caused suffocation. He saw the incident as a prelude to a crackdown on the mosque and its two madrassas. However, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, Aziz's brother and deputy, told Daily Times on Tuesday: We hope the talks will move forward in the right direction.

Dawn, 18 April 2007

27 pacts signed with China: N cooperation discussed: Aziz

BEIJING, April 17: Pakistan and China have signed 27 agreements and memorandums of understanding to re energise their strong bilateral cooperation in all fields, including defence, space technology and trade and economics. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz confirmed at a news conference here on Tuesday after holding talks with his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao that they had discussed nuclear cooperation but declined to comment further. When asked about proposed development of six new nuclear power plants in Pakistan with Chinese cooperation, Prime Minister Aziz said routine discussions on the subject were going on. Responding to a question, he said the Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Project had not been discussed in the meeting. Talks for financing the project by Chinese development banks had been going on for the past two years and a Chinese consortium had been declared the successful bidder about eight months ago to construct the project. Non implementation of the project may deprive Pakistan of its rights over the Neelum waters..

The Nation, 18 April 2007

Editorial: Harmful ambivalence

WHILE Ms Benazir Bhuttos interview with The Sunday Times has caused visible unease in government circles, it has also confused the opposition and led PPP spokesmen to issue clarifications. She is reported to have told the paper it would be in Pakistans interest for General Musharraf and herself to reach an accord. The remarks have led Federal Minister Sh Rashid to claim a three tier agreement was on the anvil. The PPPs Mr Farhatullah Babar has maintained Ms Bhutto had not pledged support to General Musharraf's bid for re election from the present assemblies while Mr Raza Rabbani has categorically maintained the PPP would not accept the General as President with or without uniform..

Daily Times, 18 April 2007

EDITORIAL: A deal is a deal, or isnt it'

Another report of a deal between President General Pervez Musharraf and the PPP leader Ms Benazir Bhutto has gone up in Islamabad like a fireworks rocket. The report on Monday claimed that top emissaries of President Musharraf and Ms Bhutto had finalised the draft of a deal between their bosses. The deal says the PPP will first support the re

election of the president by the present assemblies, and later endorse him in the assemblies after the general elections. In return, the National Accountability Bureau NAB will stop pursuing corruption cases against Benazir and Asif Ali Zardari in the Swiss courts. The emissaries are supposed to have held four rounds of talks in Dubai and Islamabad over a week and finally agreed on the above terms..

Dawn, 18 April 2007

Opinion: Where is Pakistan headed' (NA Shaikh)

IN an interview to CBS last week, President Musharraf maintained that it was not because of the governments weakness that no action had been taken against the two madressahs adjacent to Islamabad Lal Masjid so far. On Saturday speaking at the PMA in Kakul, he said that Pakistan was passing through the worst ever critical moment and was facing the two major threats of religious extremism and sectarianism. He then added, in an apparent reference to the Lal Masjid stand off, that the government would have to be careful in the use of force against extremist elements: We will be rational before using might, as we will have to face our own brothers and sisters. In the meanwhile, raiding parties from the Lal Masjid and the Jamia Hafsa are fanning out into the city shutting down video shops and burning videos not only in the principal markets in Islamabad but also in the suburb of Barakau. Members of the Islamabad police force were kidnapped and held hostage..

Dawn, 19 April 2007

CJP challenges reference in Supreme Court: New twist to raging controversy

ISLAMABAD, April 18: Chief Justice Mr Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry on Wednesday filed a constitutional petition in the Supreme Court challenging President Pervez Musharraf's move to file a reference against him. A three member bench will take up the petition on Thursday. Never before in the country's history has an incumbent chief justice filed a petition in his own court to defend his position in the wake of a judicial or administrative action. In a clear demonstration that these were unusual times for the judiciary, Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry filed the petition through his counsel on a day when his fate as the highest adjudicator was being discussed by the Supreme Judicial Council SJC in the same premises, but not in a court room. The petition was filed after the SJC rejected a request by the defence team seeking a decision on questions of bias levelled by it against three members of the SJC..

Daily Times, 19 April 2007

No to Talibanisation: Civil society rallies today

LAHORE: Human rights, civil society and womens organisations have jointly planned antiTaliban rallies in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad today, to protest the suicide threatening students of the Jamia Hafsa and their two militant leaders. The rally in Lahore will start from the GPO Chowk at 2 pm and end at Assembly Chambers. Lahore DCO Muhammad Ijaz has withdrawn Section 144 and will provide security to protestors. The Womens Action Forum, in support of civil society organisations and moderate political parties, has organised the rally. Thousands of citizens from all walks of life, especially women, are expected to attend. The rallies aim is to protest the countrys Talibanisation, said a WAF member, Khawar Mumtaz. I and many of my classmates are going because

we refuse to bow before these self-proclaimed Islamists, said one modestly dressed girl from a women's college in Lahore. Many other young women echoed her sentiment. The rally in Islamabad will start from the Parade venue in the afternoon. We condemn the policing of innocent citizens by extremists, said Shahnaz Bukhari of the Progressive Womens Association..

The Hindu, 19 April 2007

Opinion: Military Inc. its big business in Pakistan (N Subramanian)

AS ELECTIONS in Pakistan draw closer, and the agitation over the removal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary widens, and talk of a deal between Benazir Bhutto and President Pervez Musharraf picks up, there is intense speculation about whether the General who certainly wants another term in office will shed his military uniform and go civilian. That he must step down as army chief if he wants to contest the presidential election for another term is one point on which the entire Opposition, including Ms. Bhutto, is united. The Opposition suspects that a continuing standoff between militant Islamists in an Islamabad mosque and the government has been orchestrated by the regime to convey to its western backers that Pakistan needs a ruler in uniform to keep extremist elements tamped down. General Musharraf may or may not make the transition to plain Mr. Musharraf..

The Nation, 19 April 2007

Editorial: Energy, please

THE warmth of a time-tested friendship like Pakistans with China is something the nation has always relied upon in its checkered history. The Peoples Republic has supported us through good times and bad. Tuesdays set of 27 agreements between the two countries is a continuation of that spirit of cooperation. Signed at the Great Hall of the People, the agreements ran across a wide array of subjects, including cooperation in space technology, avoidance of messy trade issues like double taxation, judicial assistance on criminal matters, and the construction of a cross-border cable system. Though these are all healthy signs, it would be pertinent to note the stagnation on a particular front: energy. Agreements on the development of three energy sources were put on the backburner. First, Mr Shaukat Aziz declined to comment on any nuclear deal. Are we seeing trouble on that front'

Indian Express, 19 April 2007

Opinion: Deal ya no deal' (M Razavi)

Musharraf needs Benazir. Both are cast in the lead roles of someone elses script. Who cares about democracy' With General Musharraf calling the shots theres hardly a dull moment on a given day in Pakistan. Even if accusations of infiltration by India and Afghanistan are just that, the armys intrusion into day to day politics at home remains a daunting fact. Heres a general who has got even the shirt and tie clad lawyers shouting Go Musharraf, go in the streets from Peshawar to Karachi. These are no fanatics threatening Pakistan with Talibanisation if Musharraf were to go tomorrow; they do not make very flattering pictures for the generals enlightened moderation. Nor does the demand for the restoration of the Chief Justice of Pakistan further the democratic credentials of this regime. Benazir Bhutto is just about the only one who seems to think

otherwise. The political fault lines are moving again and there's bound to be some damage done. The well-meaning there are fewer by the day, hope it will not affect the stability of Pakistan. Deal or no deal with Bhutto's Peoples Party, Punjab is one constituency that the general cannot afford to lose..

Dawn, 19 April 2007

Editorial: Better cooperation with China

THE 27 pacts and memorandums of understanding signed between Pakistan and China during Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's just concluded visit to Beijing aim at widening cooperation between the two countries in various fields. This time round the emphasis has been on strengthening business to business relations between the Pakistani private sector and various Chinese development agencies and institutions. The existing cooperation between the two countries involves sectors such as infrastructure, development, defence, space technology, trade and economics. It has been agreed that the volume of trade between the two countries will be expanded from the existing five billion dollar per annum mark to \$15 billion over the next five years. The most significant development project to have passed through the recent top-level exchange between Islamabad and Beijing is the construction of an international airport at Gwadar.

Dawn, 20 April 2007

Pakistan, Afghan troops clash: Matter reported to tripartite commission

KABUL, April 19: Afghan troops tore down a new anti-Taliban fence erected by Pakistani soldiers on the border between the two countries on Thursday, sparking a gun battle which caused no casualties, officials said. The clash was the first since President Pervez Musharraf announced plans earlier this year to fence 35 kilometres of Pakistan's border with Afghanistan to stop the movement of Taliban militants. The Afghan defence ministry said in a statement that the fighting happened between the Afghan border town of Shkin and Angoor Adda in Pakistan's troubled tribal belt. A TV channel quoted the ISPR chief as saying that Afghan forces indulged in unprovoked firing across the border into Pakistani territory. The Afghan troops retreated after Pakistani forces returned fire, Maj-Gen Waheed Arshad said. He said Pakistan had reported the incident to the tripartite commission made up of senior military officials from Pakistan, Nato and Afghan force.

Daily Times, 20 April 2007

Civil society rallies against extremism

LAHORE/ISLAMABAD/ KARACHI/PESHAWAR: Thousands of Pakistanis staged rallies in major cities on Thursday to condemn extremism and exploitation in the name of Islam. Rights activists organised simultaneous protests in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi and Peshawar to denounce extremist actions by students of the Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia madrassas, affiliated to Lal Masjid, in the capital. Several thousand Lahoris marched in blistering heat on The Mall the first time a large crowd has rallied against religious extremism in the city in a rally organised by the Womens Action Forum WAF in collaboration with other non-governmental organisations. The protestors including civil society and human rights activists, minority groups, political workers, lawyers, trade unions, journalists and students gathered at the Lahore High Court building and began marching towards the Punjab Assembly building at 2:00pm.

Dawn, 20 April 2007

Pakistan, Iran agree to launch bus service

ISLAMABAD, April 19: Pakistan and Iran have agreed to launch a bus service between the two countries through the Quetta-Zahidan-Mashhad route to further strengthen trade relations and people to people contact. The International Road Transport Agreement and commencement of passengers transport services were agreed with Iran during the recent visit of Pakistani Minister for Communication Mohammad Shamim Siddiqui and Iranian Minister for Roads and Transport Mohammad Rahmati..Mr Shamim said that it would go a long way in further strengthening brotherly relations between the two countries, bringing the people of both countries closer and increasing mutual and transit trade, and added that it would especially facilitate pilgrims interested in visiting holy shrines in Iran.

Daily Times, 20 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Learning from India and China

..Mr Aziz signed a large number of treaties with China during his visit. But of course, much will depend on how he is able to create the right conditions for Chinese investment and expertise in Pakistan. China is the only country keen enough at the official level to come and invest in Pakistan. It is no surprise, therefore, that they have been targeted by militants or terrorists, twice in Balochistan and once in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas FATA. The came into the copper project in Balochistan at Saindak but were chased away a long time ago. Now they are back.Mr Aziz met the Chinese President Hu Jintao and thanked him and the people of China for initiating joint mega projects in Pakistan, such as Gwadar, Chashma Power Plant, Saindak, and Karakoram Highway..

The Nation, 20 April 2007

Editorial: Usurping rights

STRICTLY speaking, Pakistan has never really had democracy. The freedom to choose or express oneself is always discouraged somehow or the other. It was ridiculous to beat up the sole supporter of the ruling coalition in a massive protest of lawyers and PMLN workers, just because he was chanting slogans in favour of the President. The majority cannot suppress an individual voice simply because it is not harmonising with theirs. The lawyers and opposition parties are unanimously raising their voices against the government's unconstitutional act.

Daily Times, 21 April 2007

No deal, no alliance

ISLAMABAD: President General Pervez Musharraf on Friday rejected that the government had any deal in place with the Pakistan Peoples Party and announced that elections would be held this year in a fair manner. In an interview with Arabic TV channel Al Arabia, the president said, Theres no deal at all ... no alliance, no deal. He said elections would be held by the years end in a transparent manner, and political action could be considered after viewing the outcome. I will not remove the uniform till the election because I have been constitutionally allowed to remain as president and Chief of the Army Staff till the end of the year, he added. The president said parliament had decided with two thirds majority that he could keep the two offices at the same time. He

said, The elections will take place this year and we will follow the Constitution. The president said Pakistan was against nuclear proliferation and believed in the use of nuclear technology for peaceful means..

Dawn, 21 April 2007

Court summons top officials over disappearances: DAG accuses ministry of non-compliance

ISLAMABAD, April 20: In a step by step approach, the Supreme Court on Friday summoned the secretaries of the defence and interior ministries and the head of the government's Crisis Management Cell to appear before it next week for a hearing in the case of missing persons. The heads of the intelligence agencies would be called later, the court said. Heading a three member bench, Justice Javed Iqbal made known his intention to call chiefs of intelligence services by observing that the situation had become very sensitive, but asked to let the court examine the issue step by step. He then summoned the top government officials and adjourned the matter till April 27..

Paktribune, 21 April 2007

PM Aziz calls for US, NATO collective efforts for eradication of Afghan terror network

CHENGDU: Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz has said that Afghanistan was the hub of terrorism and drugs and the US, NATO and other countries would have to make collective efforts for its eradication. Addressing the Sichuan University students here in the Chinese city on Pakistans Perspective on Contemporary Issues of Peace, Security and Development on Friday, Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz said that the acquiring of nuclear civil technology was everybodys rights and all the countries should get the opportunity for this. The prime minister said that Pakistan didnt initiate nuclear weapons race in South Asia instead Pakistan went for a nuclear test, following the nuclear blasts conducted by India at Pokhran..

Daily Times, 21 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Extremism of the few and dereliction of the state

Citizens of Pakistan rallied on Thursday against religious extremism in general and the blackmailing clerics of Lal Masjid in particular. Citizens rights activists organised simultaneous protests in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi and Peshawar to denounce the campaign of vigilantism and intimidation unleashed by the clerics in the heart of Islamabad. The rallies were taken out against the criminal action taken by scores of boys and girls from the seminaries of Hafsa girls and Fareedia men run by the clerics of Lal Masjid in Islamabad. Armed students went into the house of one Shamim Akhtar and bound her and her daughter and daughter in law in ropes and dragged them to the seminary where they were kept for three days while the government in Islamabad wrung its hands and didn't take any action..

Dawn, 21 April 2007

Opinion: Reaching out to Russia (Tariq Fatemi)

IT was a most appropriate coincidence that on the very day that Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov was visiting Islamabad, the Russian stock exchange was registering one

of its most successful performances. In fact, the former superpower that had literally fallen into the dustbin of history and was the victim of an economic meltdown has not only staged a remarkable recovery but is showing growth rates that would be the envy of any country. It was, however, somewhat disappointing to note from the manner in which Fradkov's visit was handled that as yet there appears to be a lack of planning and vision in Islamabad's approach to relations with Moscow..

Daily Times, 22 April 2007

Lal Masjid issue resolved: Shujaat

ISLAMABAD: Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Pakistan Muslim League president, told a meeting chaired by President Gen Pervez Musharraf on Saturday that negotiations with the Lal Masjid administration have been successful, and the matter would be settled peacefully, Daily Times has learnt. Our talks have been successful and only one issue remains to be resolved, Shujaat told the meeting, referring to the occupation of a children's library by students of the Jamia Hafsa madrassa. The vacation of the children's library is linked with the reconstruction of the demolished mosques and this issue will also be resolved, he added. Shujaat said the Lal Masjid administration had agreed that no one except students would be allowed to stay inside the Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia madrassas..

Dawn, 22 April 2007

Iftikhar had knowledge of reference

ISLAMABAD, April 21: Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry was aware of President Pervez Musharraf's decision to file a reference against him much before meeting him at the presidential camp office in Rawalpindi on March 9, Dawn has learnt. A well placed source said it was not unexpected for the chief justice to hear a list of allegations which he seemed to be well prepared to contest at the meeting where the president appeared in army chiefs uniform. Another source said a tip off originating from a federal cabinet minister enabled the chief justice to be mentally prepared to effectively respond to the allegations. Asked how the information could have been conveyed to the chief justice, the source said it was possible the minister had shared the news with a family member who then passed it on to the judge. The source had no information if the leak was deliberate or a case of lack of caution..

The News, 22 April 2007

Youngster filmed beheading US spy

KILI FAQIRAN, Balochistan: The boy with the knife looks barely 12. In a high-pitched voice, he denounces the bound, blindfolded man before him as an American spy. Then he hacks off the captive's head to cries of God is great! and hoists it in triumph by the hair. A video circulating in Pakistan records the grisly death of Ghulam Nabi, a Pakistani militant accused of betraying a top Taliban official who was killed in a December air strike in Afghanistan. An Associated Press reporter confirmed Nabi's identity by visiting his family in Kili Faqiran, their remote village in south western Pakistan. The video, obtained by AP Television News in Peshawar on Tuesday, appears authentic and is unprecedented in Jihadi propaganda because of the youth of the executioner..

Daily Times, 22 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Fearful attrition of being in office too long

President General Pervez Musharraf on Friday rejected reports of any deal with the Pakistan Peoples Party and announced that elections would be held this year in a fair manner. Then he said: I will not remove the uniform till the election because I have been constitutionally allowed by parliament to remain as president and Chief of the Army Staff till the end of the year. The president has also said earlier that he would offer himself for another term to the old parliament, thus giving himself another five years in office, till 2012. But he did not make one thing clear when he said that he would wear his uniform as president till the end of the year. Will he seek re election by the old parliament for another five years as president in uniform or president without uniform'

The News, 22 April 2007

Editorial: In the name of religion

One is absolutely shocked at the details of a video acquired by the Associated Press Television News which shows a Pakistani boy, dressed as an Islamic militant, slaughtering a man. The footage which AP said it obtained from Peshawar shows a boy whom the news agency described as a babyfaced boy who was barely twelve years old. He spoke in a highpitched voice, calling a tied and blindfolded man held before him as an American spy. The video then shows the boy literally cutting the mans throat as he is held by older men, all dressed in military fatigues. The shot then shows the boy hacking at the man's throat till he is decapitated. Amid cries of God is great, the boy then holds the mans head by the hair, telling the camera that others who spy for America will meet the same fate. The man who is killed in this most gruesome manner was a militant himself but accused by his killers of betraying a senior Taliban official who was killed in an air strike in Afghanistan last December..

Daily Times, 23 April 2007

Pakistan and China cooperating on nuclear energy: PM

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said on Sunday that the government of China and Pakistan agreed to enhance cooperation in conventional and nuclear energy during his recent visit to China Briefing journalists on the visit at Prime Ministers House, Aziz said Pakistan's energy needs were increasing by 10 to 12 per cent annually due to economic growth and the country was examining options to meet the energy needs. He said nuclear cooperation with China would only be for peaceful use of energy. Referring to Iran, he said the country had a right to civil and peaceful use of nuclear energy under strict IAEA guidelines. He said Pakistan was against nuclear proliferation and Iran should also avoid it. The PM said that record growth would be achieved this year with per capita income approaching \$950..

Dawn, 23 April 2007

Presidential election to be completed this year: Aziz: Meeting discusses judicial crisis, Lal Masjid

ISLAMABAD, April 22: Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz chaired a high-level meeting held at the Prime Ministers House on Sunday to discuss the judicial crisis and the lingering issue of Jaamia Hafsa and Lal Masjid. Speaking at a press briefing after the meeting, the

prime minister said that the next elections would be held according to the programme this year and president's elections most probably would be completed within the tenure of the present assemblies. Answering a question, he said President Gen Pervez Musharraf would himself decide whether and when to doff his uniform and become a civilian president. He said the constitutional provision adopted by parliament allowed Gen Musharraf to remain president in uniform till December 2007.

Daily Times, 23 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Pakistans trans regional hub pipedream

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has spent two days in the Hainan province of China attending a conference on New Approaches and New Ideas at a place rivalling Switzerlands Davos. The Boao Forum for Asia, as opposed to the World Economic Forum, was founded in 2001, and challenges its invitees to think of new ways to advance trade and commerce at the global level. The world responded by sending 1300 participants to Boao this year. Among the 600 wealthiest businessmen present was Bill Gates of Microsoft. Pakistans prime minister is a good communicator and shines at conferences and seminars. Speaking as chairman on a special session on Pakistan Trans regional Hub, linking Asia to the Middle East and Beyond, he said Pakistan was open to investment and could serve as a trans regional hub in transportation, trade and energy for the Middle East, China and other regional countries, offering lucrative incentives, competitiveness and low cost of operations. He presented an elegant scenario depicting the coming together of three remarkable factors needed for economic take-off.

The Nation, 23 April 2007

Editorial: Welcome optimism

PML Q President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussains optimism that the Lal Masjid Jamia Hafsa issue is nearing resolution is welcome, especially as the points of agreement already reached between the two sides reportedly listed by him included the removal of pickets by the madrassah students and unlicensed weapons from the premises and the assurance that no one other than the students would be allowed to stay there. He apprised a meeting chaired by the President at Islamabad on Saturday that there would be no provocative speeches by the clerics, nor the display of objectionable banners, nor raids at the music and video shops. The madrassah administration agreed that the offenders would be dealt with in accordance with law. The only point to be sorted out, he disclosed, was the lifting of siege of the childrens library, which had been made contingent upon the reconstruction of demolished mosques. And that too he believed was about to be resolved. While one would very much like to hope that the long drawn out standoff comes to a peaceful end, Chaudhry Shujaats assurances have to be taken with a pinch of salt..

Dawn, 23 April 2007

Editorial: Disappearance cases

JUSTICE Javed Iqbals observation that religious groups, by admitting men in their ranks to fight jihad, were contributing to the phenomenon of disappearances in the country echoes the sentiments of both Gen Musharraf and Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao. No one can dispute their claim. Extremist organisations successfully use religious indoctrination to win over hundreds of young recruits. Some go to the extent of abducting

young men to train them for carrying out terrorist attacks. But this should not be allowed to gloss over the tragedy of those who have been picked up, kept incommunicado and tortured by the state's intelligence agencies. Not all of them have religious affiliations and a large number are political activists whose links with nationalist parties makes them suspect in the eyes of the state. Those who are released have terrifying tales to tell of their incarceration..

Daily Times, 24 April 2007

CJPs challenge to presidential reference in SC: Sharifuddin to represent govt

ISLAMABAD: Prominent lawyer Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada has agreed to represent the government in the Supreme Court during the hearing of the constitutional petition filed by Chief Justice of Pakistan CJP Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. Daily Times has learnt that Pirzada, who had declined to plead the presidential reference against the CJP in the Supreme Judicial Council SJ, has now agreed to represent the president in the SC, where the CJP has challenged the validity of the presidential reference. He will be assisted by Maqbool Illahi Malik, a former advocate general of Punjab, former law minister Syed Iftikhar Gillani and Advocate Ibrahim Satti. The SC is to take up the CJPs petition today, as well as 12 similar petitions. The SJC is also due to meet today to take up the presidential reference..

Dawn, 24 April 2007

PPP to resist Musharrafs re election in uniform

ISLAMABAD, April 23: Peoples Party Parliamentarians chairman Makhdoom Amin Fahim on Monday said the PPP would never accept General Musharraf in uniform and would resist his re election as president for the next term. He said the partys central executive would take a decision whether to accept the general as the civilian president. Talking to newsmen at the parliament house, the PPP leader described reports about deal with the government as deliberate leaks to divert peoples attention from the real issues. Rejecting the notion that the PPP had reached a deal with the government, he said: Whatever we have done we have not deviated an inch from the Charter of Democracy. Replying to a question, he said all options including resignations from assemblies would be open for consideration..

Dawn, 24 April 2007

Editorial: Why this inaction'

THE Lal Masjid clerics are at it again. Denying reports attributed to the PML chief Chaudhry Shujaat that progress has been made between the government and the clerics to settle the outstanding issues, the latter have reiterated their original demands: that all illegally built mosques in Islamabad must stay; those demolished should be rebuilt and the Sharia enforced all over the country. Reports that the occupation of the children's library building would end anytime soon were also debunked. Meanwhile, another report in yesterdays newspapers enlisted the extent of illegal occupation of public land that the two Lal Masjid allied madressahs have been guilty of. The occupied land by the seminaries now exceeds 17,000 square yards against the original, combined, legal allocation of 1,000 square yards..

Daily Times, 24 April 2007

Pakistan and Poland to enhance ties in defence production: Musharraf

WARSAW: President Gen Pervez Musharraf and his Polish counterpart Lech Kaczynski expressed their complete satisfaction over their broad-based interaction on Monday and said they looked forward to enhancing ties between the two countries in various fields of common interest including defence production. Addressing a joint news conference in Warsaw, the two leaders termed their wide ranging talks very fruitful. The two sides discussed investment opportunities, interaction in the field of education and cultural exchanges. President Musharraf said Pakistan holds Poland in the highest esteem because of its performance in political and economic fields and its present position in the European Union..

The Nation, 24 April 2007

Editorial: Four nation tour

WHILE the judicial crisis continues to snowball in Pakistan, General Musharraf has reached Warsaw on the first leg of a week-long four-nation tour. He will thus be the first Pakistani head of state to visit Poland. While Poland and Bosnia play a relatively minor role in trade and economic relations with Pakistan, Spain is important as one of Pakistan's largest trading partners in the EU. Of the four countries being visited, Turkey has a special significance for Pakistan due to their close historical and cultural ties. Among the issues being taken up during the visit are trade links, defence cooperation, terrorism and international and regional issues. In parliamentary democracies such visits are normally undertaken by the concerned ministers and, if very important, by Prime Ministers. The visit to Turkey would provide General Musharraf and President Hamid Karzai an occasion to review their relations, which continue to be marked by bitterness on account of unending accusations by Kabul..

Daily Times, 24 April 2007

Opinion: A critical moment for Pakistan (RB Rais)

Our weak political institutions and conspiratorial politics converted our victory against the dictator into political defeat. We failed to translate our struggle into democratic transformation. The failure of democracy and the military leaders unwillingness to allow it to function according to its fundamental norms and institutions has disappointed many thinking and politically aware Pakistani men and women. This discontent is widely shared by people of all classes, who share experiences of corruption, poor governance and denial of justice on a daily basis. Both civilian and military regimes have made hardly any difference to the poverty of governance. Their indifference to citizens has resulted in an unresponsive, unaccountable and unrepresentative elite and state..

Daily Times, 25 April 2007

Judge declines to hear CJP petition

ISLAMABAD: Justice Sardar Raza Khan on Tuesday declined to hear the constitutional petition of Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Chaudhry against his suspension and referred the matter to Acting Chief Justice Rana Bhagwandas for constitution of a full court or a larger bench for the hearing. Justice Khan, heading a three member bench, said he felt uncomfortable hearing the petition since he was a signatory to the SJs March 9 orders

suspending the CJP. How can I be a judge against my own order' I feel embarrassed, he said. The CJP counsel Aitzaz Ahsan said he had no objection to Justice Khan hearing the petition. The government's lawyers Sharifuddin Pirzada, Malik Qayum and Attorney General Makhdoom Ali Khan . also expressed confidence in the judge, but he refused to hear the petition. Justice Khan was initially a member of the SJC when Justice Javed Iqbal was appointed ACJ and headed the council.

Dawn, 25 April 2007

Govt accepts Lal Masjid demands: All issues settled: Shujaat

ISLAMABAD, April 24: The government has agreed to accept all demands put forward by the Lal Masjid management, including the enforcement of Sharia in the country. The second round of talks started on Tuesday night when Pakistan Muslim League president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain paid a surprise visit to Lal Masjid and met its in-charge Maulana Abdul Aziz and deputy in-charge Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi. The PML chief assured the mosque administration and girl students of Jamia Hasfa that the government was ready to accept all their demands, including the enforcement of Sharia. Talking to journalists after the meeting, Chaudhry Shujaat said all contentious issues between the government and Lal Masjid clerics had been settled, adding that he would tell details of the talks before the parliament on Wednesday. Responding to a question about the situation inside the mosque, the Pakistan Muslim League president denied the presence of activists of banned outfits and illegal arms in the mosque..

Daily Times, 25 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Pakistanis abroad in dire straits

The National Assembly was told on Monday that 3,050 Pakistanis were imprisoned in foreign jails for carrying fake travel documents or committing other fiscal and violent crimes. Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri said that 2,835 Pakistanis were jailed in Saudi Arabia for illegal stay, drug smuggling, travelling on fake documents, alcohol consumption, violating traffic rules, rape and illegal financial transactions. Most Pakistanis languishing in jails abroad were found guilty of such crimes as overstaying after the expiry of visa/work permits, drug smuggling, travelling/working on the basis of forged documents, liquor consumption, violation of traffic rules, rape, non-observance of Islamic tenets, invalid travel documents, theft, illegal border crossing, murder or attempt of murder, illegal transaction of money, etc. The detainees were being encouraged to become Hafiz e Quran as, according to the Saudi Law, one period of imprisonment was condoned for memorising one chapter of the Holy Quran. Otherwise, the embassy in Saudi Arabia was constantly in touch with the Saudi authorities to get these Pakistanis off the hook.

The Nation, 25 April 2007

Editorial: Protests all around

PROTESTS against the sacking of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry showed no sign of abating, as lawyers and political activists staged large rallies across the country to coincide with the separate hearings of the presidential reference by the Supreme Judicial Council and of the Chief Justice's petition by the Supreme Court on Tuesday. Islamabad witnessed the largest demonstration since the March 9 judicial assault with

thousands of lawyers and opposition workers braving all obstacles to reach outside the court building, chanting anti-government slogans. Similar protest were also held in Lahore and Karachi. The government tried to add a new dimension to the ongoing crisis by organising a counter protest in the federal capital, but failed to create any impact not just because the baton wielding political lawyers were far outnumbered by genuine demonstrators but also because of the lack of conviction of this 'crowd' drawn from all over the Punjab..

Dawn, 25 April 2007

Pakistan, Spain to boost cooperation against terrorism

MADRID, April 24: Pakistan and Spain agreed on Tuesday to step up their cooperation against terrorism and human trafficking during talks in Madrid between the leaders of the two nations. Both parties agreed to promote cooperation in the field of combating illegal immigration and human trafficking, said a joint statement issued after the talks between President Pervez Musharraf and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. The parties also agreed to start negotiations to sign an agreement on cooperation in the fight against organized crime, terrorism and illegal immigration, which would contemplate mutual cooperation and technical assistance, it added. Spain and Pakistan will hold yearly meetings between government officials from both nations who work on illegal immigration, it said..

Dawn, 26 April 2007

Musharraf sees early Kashmir settlement

MADRID, April 25: President Pervez Musharraf has said that the world may see the resolution of Kashmir dispute earlier than expected. A reasonable progress on this account has already been achieved, President Musharraf said while addressing the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Spanish Congress on Wednesday. He said military option was not the answer to the problem. The option of using force to settle bilateral disputes between Pakistan and India had never worked, he said. He said people of both the countries wanted peace and harmony so that their resources and energies could be utilised in the socio-economic sector. He said the two countries had taken several confidence building measures, but the CBMs alone would not be enough to achieve the objective of peace and normalisation of their relations. The two countries must move towards conflict resolution, the president emphasised..

Daily Times, 26 April 2007

Lal Masjid denies breakthrough in talks

ISLAMABAD: Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, president of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League, declared on Wednesday that the stand off with Lal Masjid in the capital had been amicably resolved, but the mosques administration denied there had been a breakthrough in talks, saying several issues were yet to be resolved. Shujaat told journalists at the National Assembly that all issues had been settled amicably during his talks with the clerics that head the mosque on Tuesday. They had two main demands; reconstruction of mosques and enforcement of Islamic Sharia, he told reporters, according to Reuters. We have agreed to rebuild the mosques and as far as Islamic Sharia is concerned, Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and measures can be taken to improve the laws, he said..

Indian Express, 26 April 2007

Opinion: Runaway general (Hsain Haqqani)

Pakistan's establishment has developed a mindset that considers foreign policy a substitute for evolving national cohesion and improving the life of citizens. It is hardly surprising that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert politely turned down General Pervez Musharraf's offer of mediation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Given Musharraf's current problems at home, it was his offer of mediation and the expression of willingness to visit Israel to help bring peace to the Middle East that was unusual. Musharraf's mediation offer reflects a longstanding belief of Pakistan's civil-military establishment that the road to the country's survival and prosperity lies overseas..

Daily Times, 26 April 2007

EDITORIAL: An ill advised official pro Musharraf rally

On Tuesday, around 1,000 Pakistan Muslim League workers held a pro Musharraf protest rally in Islamabad. It was led by the party president, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, who wanted to march towards Constitutional Avenue and the opposition protestors, but on the advice of the police agreed to stop the march at Parade Ground. Marching up to the opposition protestors would have resulted in violence. Separated by barbed wire fences, the two sets of protestors traded slogans. In an isolated encounter, three pro-government lawyers were roughed up. But anyone familiar with Pakistani lawyers would take that in his stride..

Dawn, 26 April 2007

Opinion: The charge of the Hafsa brigade (QF Isa)

ZEALOTS of the Hafsa and Lal Masjid Brigades are a mock at the nation's face. Petulant General Musharraf is exasperated with the Chief Justice of Pakistan and shows him the door. And now the president of the ruling political party prescribes murder for the critics of the army. Circus events never make headlines, let alone history, but then circus masters have never before cracked the whip at 150 million people. Hafsa and the Lal Masjid Brigade and Shujaat Hussain both want to harm and kill people who don't agree with them. Today they parley. Earlier, Federal Minister Ijazul Haq met the administrators of the Jaamia Hafsa and the Lal Masjid..

Daily Times, 27 April 2007

Wasi paves way for CJP debate in NA

ISLAMABAD: A resolution moved on Wednesday by Law Minister Wasi Zafar condemning the opposition's attitude over the CJP's suspension is set to backfire, as 22 opposition members have enlisted for a debate on the resolution. Since the NA session began last Monday, the opposition has been pressing for a debate on the issue, but Speaker Amir Hussain and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sher Afgan Niazi have said this is not allowed under assembly rules because the matter is sub-judice. Zafar moved the resolution without the consent of the prime minister and PML President Shujaat Hussain. State Minister for Law Shahid Bhinder had hurriedly drafted the resolution despite the fact that some cabinet members including Niazi raised reservations over it..

The Nation, 27 April 2007

Army gets Ghaznavi missiles

ISLAMABAD - The last batch of Hataf-III Ghaznavi missiles was handed over to Army Strategic Force Command ASFC here on Thursday. Hataf III Ghaznavi missiles have now become a key component of Pakistan's strategic land delivery system. The system also included Shaheen series missiles and medium range Ghauri missiles. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was the chief guest at the ceremony, in which Ghaznavi missiles were handed over to the Army Strategic Force Command. Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Aziz said, Pakistan seeks peace through strength in South Asia and will never compromise on its nuclear programme or its minimum deterrence needs..

Dawn, 27 April 2007

Handling of judicial crisis criticized: Threat to constitutional order: ICJ

ISLAMABAD, April 26: The International Commission of Jurists ICJ observed on Thursday that the current judicial crisis could worsen and cause irreversible damage to the constitutional order in Pakistan. The commission urged the government to address the underlying causes of the crisis and restore the fundamental democratic principle which is pivotal to the rule of law in the country. It said the public show of strength by the government by bringing pro-Musharraf people on streets could not resolve the crisis. The commission considers that such public show is an inappropriate and ineffective way to resolve the current judicial crisis. This was seen clearly in the government demonstrations of March 24, said a written statement of ICJ..

Daily Times, 27 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Needed: Benazirs political wisdom, not populism

The PPP chairperson, Benazir Bhutto, spoke at a seminar on the Current political situation in Pakistan organised by the Pakistan Society at the London School of Economics, on Wednesday and clearly stated that although her political credibility would suffer if she joined the military led government in Pakistan, it would be good for the country's democratic, constitutional and development interests. This is a clear signal of how far Ms Bhutto is willing to go if President General Pervez Musharraf is ready to accommodate her point of view on the shape of things to come in Pakistan. What she said next made clear what she wanted to achieve through an understanding with President Musharraf: 'the time has come to reform the military and intelligence agencies of Pakistan..

Daily Times, 28 April 2007

56 missing people identified by HRCP traced

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court has decided to prepare policy guidelines to control the operational role of intelligence agencies until the government enforces a law or the parliament legislates on the matter. SC Justice Javed Iqbal said this on Friday while hearing the case of people reported missing by their relatives. He said it was not clear under which law the intelligence agencies lifted a person and which authority they reported to. Defence Secretary Kamran Rasool said apart from operation command channel, the intelligence agencies were answerable to the government through the Defence Ministry and the armed forces. He did not explain the operation command

channel.Rasool said that 56 out of 148 people identified by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan HRCP had been traced..

Dawn, 28 April 2007

Missiles fired from across border kill four in N. Waziristan

MIRAMSHAH, April 27: Four people were killed and three others wounded when missiles fired from Afghanistan struck a seminary in Saidgi area of North Waziristan on Friday, residents and officials said.According to some residents, at least five missiles fired from Afghanistan hit Darul Uloom Hassania near a house. The attack took place at about 3.30am when people were sleeping in the courtyard.A resident of the area, Abdul Ghafoor, said a drone had been seen hovering over the town 3km away from the Afghan border.A security official claimed that the drone had fired missiles on the seminary. One missile did not explode.Sources said the nearby house of a tribesman, Habib Khan, had been damaged..

The Nation, 28 April 2007

Lal Masjid's give and take offer to govt

ISLAMABAD Maulana Abdul Aziz, Imam of Lal Masjid, has made an offer to the government that if it enforces Shariat in the country, they would not only vacate the children's library but also surrender the Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Faridia. While delivering his Jumma sermon at the mosque here, Aziz, however, warned that if the government cracked down on Lal Masjid, the situation would go beyond the control of both the government and the Lal Masjid administration.He said that the dialogue process had been moved forward to a considerable extent but so far not at the concluding stage..

The Tribune, 28 April 2007

I plan to return to Pakistan this year irrespective of whether there is an understanding or not

Benazir Bhutto signals her determination in an exclusive interview with The Tribunes Washington Correspondent Ashish Kumar Sen. Ashish Kumar Sen General Musharraf has shut down a committee that was looking into corruption charges against you. Benazir Bhutto: First, a clarification: the department established to pursue a political vendetta against me has not been shut down. It is called the National Accountability Bureau and is still pursuing fabricated criminal cases against me. An official was changed but that is neither here nor there, as officials were changed several times over the last decade.I am the only political leader in Pakistan, with my party supporters, who are being persecuted. The rest of the politicians who had cases against them have either been pardoned or had the cases dropped. The nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan who admitted to selling nuclear parts internationally admitted guilt has been pardoned..

The Nation, 28 April 2007

Editorial: President's interview

GENERAL Musharraf must have realised that whether he is here or abroad, in media encounters he cannot escape questions about his plan for another term in the Presidency and the fairness of the next elections. In Sarajevo he told a Bosnian newspaper that he expected to be re-elected by the outgoing Parliament ahead of general elections which he

estimated would take place in November. The interview covered domestic, regional and international issues with specific reference to the global effort to eradicate terrorism. In his remarks in a Spanish daily earlier on Thursday, the President rightly pointed out that the Afghan Government was losing the war against the Taliban because of its inaction. Even though he did not specifically name anyone while asserting that those who say that the ISI helps the Taliban' are liars, Mr Karzai said that despite being accused of lying he would be meeting General Musharraf in Turkey to find solutions to the mounting Taliban unrest..

Daily Times, 29 April 2007

Suicide bomber targets Sherpao, 25 killed

PESHAWAR: Twenty-five people were killed and Federal Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao Khan and his young son Sikandar Sherpao Khan were among scores injured in a suicide attack on Saturday, moments after the minister finished a speech at a public rally in his hometown Charsadda. NWFP Inspector General of Police Sharif Virk said five policemen were among the 25 dead. Unofficial sources put the death at more than 30. The head of the suicide bomber, who had a brown beard and was aged 30-35, was found at the site of the blast near Station Koroonaa in Charsadda, and he looks like an Afghan, Virk told reporters.

The Nation, 29 April 2007

Musharraf, Karzai set for summit talks

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and Afghanistan are set to hold crucial summit talks in Turkey to ease friction and develop a joint strategy on fighting the Taliban insurgency, officials said Saturday. President Pervez Musharraf and his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai were due in the Turkish capital Sunday, the Pakistani embassy in Ankara said. The two leaders would attend a dinner meeting hosted by Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, followed by a formal round of bilateral talks on Monday. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, whose country has troops with NATO in Afghanistan, would also host a working lunch for them.

The Nation, 29 April 2007

Editorial: Missing persons

THANKS to the determination shown by the Supreme Court, 56 missing persons out of the list of 136 prepared by the HRCP have been traced, while 45 were found present in their homes, in other words discreetly set free. Out of Ms Amna Janjuas list of 43, only nine now remain untraced. The court was told by the DG National Crisis Cell that the remaining persons in the first list could not be traced because information was scanty and did not give the parentage and addresses of the missing persons. This led the HRCP counsel to claim that this was an empty excuse, because the government could have declared whether a person by a certain name from the province mentioned was in its custody or not. The Court also directed that a nine year old boy picked up by the Frontier Constabulary earlier this month be reunited with his family by Monday..

Daily Times, 29 April 2007

Opinion: The crisis and its remedies (Dr HA Rizvi)

The judicial crisis will not simmer down in a month or so because it has raised a host of constitutional and political issues inside and outside the Supreme Court. The traditional strategies of fragmenting the opposition and co-opting some political party may offer Pervez Musharraf immediate relief, but cannot address the crisis of legitimacy. With doctors organisations, trade unions and labour organisations joining lawyers and political party activists, more people are expressing solidarity with the chief justice than ever before. In Islamabad and Lahore, too, these sections of civil society were newly visible in the protests. The lawyers protest is slowly becoming more representative of various sections of the populace.

Dawn, 30 April 2007

Musharraf, Karzai in Ankara for crucial talks

ANKARA, April 29: President Pervez Musharraf and Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrived here on Sunday to discuss the Pakistan Afghanistan relationship, especially the cooperation of the two countries in the fight against terror, at their crucial meeting on Monday. After the arrival of the two leaders, Turkish President Ahmed Necdet Sezer held an informal meeting at the Presidential Palace on Sunday to discuss the Pakistan Afghanistan relationship in the context of their efforts to fight terror. The Turkish president also hosted a banquet in honour of president Musharraf and president Karzai. When president Musharraf arrived, the Turkish president received him at the Presidential Palace and embraced the Pakistani leader..

Daily Times, 30 April 2007

Teams formed to probe Sherpao attack: Russian explosives used at Charsadda

CHARSADDA: Russian-made explosives were used in Saturday suicide attack targeting Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao Khan, a police official said, as investigators launched a formal probe into the bombing. All the federal government agencies will assist the team, said Information Minister Muhammad Ali Durrani at a news conference in Peshawar after returning from the funerals of nine victims of the blast in Charsadda. He said that the bomber used eight to 10 kilograms of explosives and the death toll from the attack has risen to 28. NWFP Additional Inspector General Investigation Fayaz Toru, who heads the joint investigation team, told Daily Times that the explosives used in the attack were known as MUV2 and were of Russian origin. Sherpao sustained minor injuries on both his legs from shrapnel in the attack.

The Tribune, 30 April 2007

Opinion: Media still in the line of fire (S Nooruzzaman)

THE Musharraf regimes drive to make the media fall in line remains unabated. The latest sufferer is Aaj Television, owned by the prestigious Business Recorder group. Its crime: extensive and critical coverage of the controversy surrounding the removal of Pakistan Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority PEMRA has threatened to take it off the air if it failed to explain why it violated an order of the Supreme Judicial Council, which is hearing the case against Justice Chaudhry, by telecasting news and talk-shows on the sub judice case, according to The Daily Times. But the media has not taken it lying down.

Daily Times, 30 April 2007

EDITORIAL: Message in attack on Sherpao

Yesterday a suicide-bomber tried unsuccessfully to kill the federal interior minister, Aftab Sherpao, and his son during a meeting at Charsadda. Instead, the bomb killed 25 and injured scores of others. TV footage showed Mr Sherpao and his son walking around with blood stains on their faces and clothes. The intelligence agencies think the assassination plan was made in Waziristan and the bomber too could have come from there. It is a measure of the administrations incompetence that it let the bomber come so close to the minister. This is not the first time that the attack is said by the agencies to have come from Waziristan. In other words, we are being told that Al Qaeda is trying to intimidate Pakistan into submission.