

Dawn, 1 May 2008

MQM gets big share in Sindh cabinet

KARACHI, April 30: The Pakistan People's Party and Muttahida Qaumi Movement have finalised a power-sharing formula under which the MQM will join the Sindh government with 13 ministers, one adviser and one special assistant. With the induction of the MQM ministers, the strength of the Sindh cabinet would reach 38, including four advisers

Dawn, 1 May 2008

Militants retake Darra Adamkhel

KOHAT, April 30: The local Taliban retook control of Darra Adamkhel after talks between the administration and tribal elders to guarantee safety of the Indus Highway were deadlocked. The militants continued their activities in the area despite the presence of security forces. A military pick-up carrying two personnel of army's engineering corps was captured by militants on Monday

Dawn, 4 May 2008

Musharraf falls back on Leaguers for survival

ISLAMABAD, May 3: The president has advised Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Chaudhry Pervez Elahi to start working for the reunification of all Muslim League factions, the PML-N excluded, in order to counter potential moves aimed at circumscribing his powers and undoing constitutional changes brought about by him. The two top leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League-Q got the brief to revitalise the party during a meeting with President Pervez Musharraf at his camp office in Rawalpindi on Saturday. It was the second meeting of Chaudhry Shujaat with the president in two days. He had earlier met Mr Musharraf on Friday

Dawn, 4 May 2008

PPP's attitude towards judges issue disappoints PML-N

LAHORE, May 3: Pakistan Muslim League-N chief Nawaz Sharif has decided not to contest the by-elections. Sources said the People's Party's attitude on the judges' issue had disappointed the PML-N leader and led to his decision of not taking part in the by-poll. PML-N spokesman Siddiqui Farooque confirmed the decision in an interview with a private TV channel on Saturday but did not give any reason

Dawn, 4 May 2008

Taliban blame govt for deadlock

Taliban blame govt for deadlock KHAR, May 3: The Taliban have blamed the government's 'inflexibility' for the lack of progress in negotiations. Talks between the government and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had stalled early this week after Baitullah Mehsud accused the government of refusing to withdraw troops from tribal areas and Swat

Dawn, 4 May 2008

Kabul supports Islamabad's plans for talks with Taliban

KABUL, May 3: Afghanistan backs Islamabad's plan to hold talks with the Pakistani Taliban, the government said on Saturday, but urged its neighbour not to allow the

militants space to regroup and launch raids across the border. Pakistan's new coalition government has said it wants to open talks with the Taliban in a bid to break with the policies of President Pervez Musharraf. However, Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban, pulled out of a peace deal with Islamabad last week after it refused to withdraw the army from tribal lands. Pakistan has yet to comment on Mehsud's move

News, 5 May 2008

Why Zardari should be helped, not attacked (Shaheen Sehbai)

KARACHI: All the guns are out and ready to fire, or already firing, at Asif Ali Zardari for betraying, delaying, dragging or denying the quick restoration of the deposed judges, violating the Murree Declaration, playing games with his coalition partners, risking even a break-up of the grand coalition and, in the eyes of some, secretly helping, abetting or collaborating with President Pervez Musharraf or even insulting the intelligence of the people. Nothing could be further from the truth, if the context is properly understood

News, 5 May 2008

Militants torch girls' school in Swat

MINGORA: Suspected militants late Saturday night torched nine rooms of Government Girls High School in Charbagh in the restive Swat valley. 'Unknown miscreants forced their entry into the school, took the watchman hostage at gunpoint, collected the copies of the Holy Quran and other Islamic literature before torching the school building,' sources said

News, 7 May 2008

Four killed in Bannu suicide blast

BANNU: Four people, including two policemen, were killed and seven others sustained injuries when a suicide bomber blew himself up at a police checkpoint here on Tuesday. Police said the unidentified suicide bomber riding a Qingqi auto-rickshaw reached Kot Brada checkpoint at 8:30 am and blew him up, killing four people on the spot and injuring seven others. The suicide bomber's body was torn into pieces as a result of the deadly explosion

News, 7 May 2008

Editorial: Truce talks -- off/on

The deadlock between the government and the Taliban has ended, as a 'jirga' from North and South Waziristan approached the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan to inform them of agreement on a troop pull-out from areas of conflict. It was a refusal to withdraw forces that had led to the Taliban and Baitullah Mehsud ending the negotiation process with the government. Reports that it was in fact the military which had begun its own dialogue with militants in some places confounded the situation

Dawn, 8 May 2008

New govt bid to resume talks with N. Waziristan militants

TANK, May 7: The government made contacts with key militant figures on Wednesday in a bid to resume talks for the restoration of peace in tribal region, a source privy to the development said on Wednesday. The source, requesting not to be named, said that a

senior official approached a key militant figure based in North Waziristan to seek resumption of talks which collapsed last month. 'A high-level official has made contacts today seeking resumption of peace talks and he was told that the government needed to demonstrate its sincerity', the source said

News, 8 May 2008

Pentagon blocks Pak request for military aid

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon has rejected or deferred millions of dollars in military aid requests from Pakistan amid criticism that the Islamabad government has squandered US funding and allowed Al-Qaeda to rebuild a haven in its western tribal regions, reports the Los Angeles Times. In February, the Defence Department turned down or delayed more than \$81 million requested by Pakistan, according to a report issued on Tuesday by the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress. The rejection represents a small portion of the nearly \$1 billion a year Pakistan has received through a programme called Coalition Support Funds, launched after the Sept 11 attacks

Dawn, 9 May 2008

Cruise missile fired from aerial platform

ISLAMABAD, May 8: Pakistan on Thursday conducted a successful 'flight test' of the indigenously developed nuclear capable air launched cruise missile, Hatf-VIII (Ra'ad). The test is part of a continuing process of validating the design parameters of the weapon system. According to an official statement, the Ra'ad missile with a range of 350km, has been developed exclusively for launch from aerial platforms, enabling Pakistan to achieve a greater strategic capability on land and at sea

News, 9 May 2008

Troops to be pulled out of SWA

PESHAWAR: The Jirga tasked to negotiate peace between the government and the tribal militants on Thursday held another important meeting with Baitullah Mehsud, requesting him to stop targeting the security forces, as the government had agreed to withdraw troops from the South Waziristan Agency (SWA). 'The Jirga again came to the Ameer Sahib (Baitullah) and requested him to order his followers to stop attacking the security forces and targeting the government installations as the government had formally agreed to start withdrawal of troops from South Waziristan,' said a senior commander of the Baitullah-led militants, while talking to this correspondent on telephone from an undisclosed location

News, 9 May 2008

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Baitullah-led militants, while talking to this correspondent on telephone from an undisclosed location

News, 10 May 2008

NWFP govt, Swat militants strike ceasefire

PESHAWAR: A committee of the NWFP government and the Taliban operating under the command of militant cleric Maulana Fazlullah achieved a major breakthrough in their first-ever direct talks on Friday at Chakdara, Lower Dir, when they agreed to a ceasefire in the militancy-shattered Swat valley. According to an accord inked by the two sides, the militants would stop attacks on the security forces, the government installations and private property in the volatile district, while the security forces would not carry out any operation against the insurgents. The ceasefire agreement would come into effect forthwith and both sides would adhere to the truce until the resolution of the Swat problem through further talks

News, 10 May 2008

Akhtar Mengal finally released

KARACHI: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC-III), following the withdrawal of charges by the Sindh government, here on Friday ordered the release of the Balochistan National Party (BNP-M) chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal in the kidnapping case of security personnel. The BNP-M chief and former Balochistan chief minister was being prosecuted for kidnapping two Army personnel, making them hostage and torturing them with an intention to kill them at his house at Darakhshan in Karachi on April 5, 2006

Daily Times, 10 May 2008

Editorial: Sixty years of living with Israel

When an injustice is allowed to flourish, as was the case with the establishment of Israel in 1948, it forms negative attitudes difficult to change in the light of reality. The Arab and Muslim world was morally correct to oppose the creation of Israel and not accord it recognition. Wars were fought to undo the injustice, but Israel was backed by the West in general and the United States in particular, which never let the historical solvent of 'just war' set things right. The American sustenance of the state of Israel poisoned Washington's relations with the Muslim world and undermined all friendships formed by it with ambivalence

Daily Times, 11 May 2008

EDITORIAL: From deadline to deadlock?

The talks between the PMLN leader Mr Nawaz Sharif and PPP co-chairman Mr Asif Ali Zardari reproduced on Friday the deadlock that had materialised in the 'judges committee' earlier in Islamabad. The optimistic gloss put on the debate by the PPP lawyer Mr Farooq Naek ♦?? that the nation would be pleased to know the result ♦?? was after all not accurate. The two parties have a deadlock on their hands with the national media siding with the hardline posture of the PMLN and the lawyers' movement girding up for more confrontation with the government

Daily Times, 11 May 2008

Last chance saloon (Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi)

Last chance saloon (Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi) A military ruler can distort the constitution with the stroke of pen but political forces find it difficult to undo such distortions and rehabilitate democracy and constitutional supremacy. The people of Pakistan have given a new opportunity to their political leaders for establishing a credible democratic alternative to military-dominated centralised governance. They have reposed confidence in political leaders and parties despite the propaganda of various military regimes that the former are corrupt, incapable of managing state affairs and too divided to ensure political stability and continuity

News, 11 May 2008

Editorial: Window of opportunity

Akhtar Mengal, the chief of the BNP, has finally walked out of the Karachi Jail where he had been incarcerated for 13 months, on charges of kidnapping security personnel. The development came as an anti-terrorist court in Karachi issued release orders, several days after Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani had ordered, on a visit to Quetta, that Mr Mengal be released. Courts in Balochistan had also withdrawn a series of cases against the former Balochistan chief minister, including a treason charge which was slapped on him after he took retaliatory action in response to harassment from agents of military intelligence

Daily Times, 12 May 2008

PML-N to leave cabinet but not coalition

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Sunday failed to reach a deal on restoring the judges sacked on November 3, and PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal said his party had no option but to quit the federal cabinet. But PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif was still optimistic that the coalition government would stay intact

Daily Times, 12 May 2008

Editorial: National deadlock and national economy

When we read the statements of the PMLN leaders, it seems as if the May 12 deadline will pass too and the two coalition partners might thereafter be hard pressed to end their political cooperation. The PMLN has said earlier that it might leave the cabinet of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani without becoming a part of the opposition in parliament. The press, keen on 'inside stories', is anticipating more trouble as the lawyers' movement heats up and the PMLN finds it more irresistible than cooperation with the PPP government. Dissolution of the National Assembly, a ridiculous assessment, by the prime minister is being predicted too

News, 12 May 2008

Nation sinks into despair as talks on judges collapse

RAWALPINDI: The nation sank into despair as last ditch efforts by leaders of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to honour their commitment to restore the judges by May 12 fizzled out in London on Sunday, Geo News reported. As a result, the PPP-PML-N coalition seemed to be on the verge of collapse though the final decision in this regard would be announced by PML-N Quaid

Nawaz Sharif after his party's meeting in Pakistan on Monday

News, 12 May 2008

Forces move against militants in Darra after attack

DARRA ADAMKHEL: The security forces backed by tanks launched a massive operation against suspected militants holed-up in a private school in turbulent Darra Adamkhel town on Sunday. The building of Hamza Education Complex in Shagiwal locality was completely razed with big explosions, where at least four militants were feared dead. However, the security forces said the militants, several in number, were holed-up in the basement of the building

Daily Times, 13 May 2008

Editorial: Parting is such sweet sorrow!

The PMLN has quit the cabinet but not the coalition after reaching a deadlock with its coalition-partner, the PPP, over the modalities of restoring the judges. Thus, so far, it has not become part of the opposition in parliament. The PMLN wanted the judges reinstated on the lines demanded by the lawyers' movement, the APDM and the media, namely, through a resolution and an executive order; but the PPP wanted it done through a constitutional amendment. The basis of their discussions was the March 9 Murree Declaration which contained a deadline of thirty days from the day the government took over. After that, the view of the two parties started to diverge

Daily Times, 13 May 2008

PML-N federal ministers to submit resignations to PM today: We will not sit in opposition: Nawaz

ISLAMABAD: All federal ministers from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) will resign from their posts on Tuesday because of differences with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) over the framework for the restoration of the sacked judges, but the party will not sit on the opposition benches, PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif said on Monday. 'Our ministers will submit their resignations to the prime minister tomorrow,' he told a press conference following a crucial party meeting. '[But] we are not going to sit on the opposition benches at the moment.'

News, 13 May 2008

Commonwealth re-admits Pakistan

Commonwealth re-admits Pakistan LONDON: After being out for seven months following the imposition of emergency on Nov 3, Pakistan has regained admission in the 53-member Commonwealth organisation having met all the obligations in accordance with the club's fundamental values and principles

News, 14 May 2008

NWFP government, militants achieve another breakthrough

PESHAWAR: The negotiating committee of the NWFP government and representatives of militants operating under the command of Maulana Fazlullah in the volatile Swat valley on Tuesday claimed to have achieved further breakthrough in their second round of talks held in the historic Mehmankhana (guesthouse) of the provincial metropolis,

saying they were inching towards a peace agreement. Both the sides said they reached a consensus on most of the points and were upbeat about the success of the talks. However, the spokesman for the Swat Taliban, Muslim Khan, conditioned the success of the negotiations with the sincerity of the government and its independence in taking decisions. "We know our government is not independent in taking decisions and fear the continuing dictations from the US could end the talks in smoke," he apprehended

Daily Times, 14 May 2008

Govt agrees to enforce Shariah in Malakand

PESHAWAR: The NWFP government and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Swat agreed on Tuesday to the implementation of Shari Nizam-e-Adl Regulations 1999 in Malakand division within one month. The Taliban's demand for Shariah implementation has been settled, Awami National Party (ANP) NWFP President Afrasiab Khattak told journalists after the second round of talks with Taliban representatives from Swat. He also said the two sides decided to extend the ceasefire agreement until the third round of the dialogue. Asked about the withdrawal of troops from Swat, Khattak said the issue was discussed during the meeting, but no agreement had been reached. He said the matter might be resolved in the next round of talks

Daily Times, 14 May 2008

Editorial: Problems that lie ahead

The PPP government in Islamabad still has to do something about the judges' restoration if it doesn't want the PMLN to abandon its 'neutral' or 'non-opposition' position and come out both guns blazing. One supposes that a PPP version of the restoration would be examined closely to see if it is acceptable, but the factor of protest in the streets from the lawyers and the APDM would be crucial in deciding its acceptability. For instance, if the old and new judges are clubbed together in the Supreme Court, voices of rejection would likely be loud and the National Assembly might not be able to drown them out easily

Dawn, 16 May 2008

US toughens stance on govt's talks with militants

WASHINGTON, May 15: The United States is refusing to comment on the missile attack on Damadola but has toughened its stance on a proposed agreement with the militants, saying that any deal Pakistan reaches with them should be 'worth more than the paper it is written on'. A number of people were killed in a missile attack on Damadola, a village in the Bajaur Agency, on Wednesday. The blast, which locals and some officials blamed on a US missile strike, could affect ongoing peace talks between pro-Taliban militants and government officials

Dawn, 16 May 2008

'Damadola attack not to derail peace process'

KHAR, May 15: There was no evidence that any high-ranking foreign militant was killed in a missile attack on a house in Damadola on Wednesday, sources said on Thursday. They said that the funeral of eight of about 18 people killed in the attack was held on Wednesday and all of them were local people. They said that among the deceased three were from the adjoining Mohmand tribal region, including the brother of a militant

commander and chief of the Qandahari group, Abdul Wali Raghieb. His funeral was held in Mohmand on Thursday

Daily Times, 16 May 2008

PML-N ministries to remain vacant, Zardari, PM decide

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) will not bring new ministers in place of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) ministers who resigned on Tuesday due to differences over the framework of the restoration of the sacked judges, PPP Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani decided on Thursday

Daily Times, 16 May 2008

Editorial: Zardari puts his cards on the table

The Islamabad press conference by PPP co-chairman Mr Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday has made clear the position of his party on the issue of the judges' restoration and other matters. The ambiguity presiding over policy when the PPP and the PMLN were trying to square their thinking as coalition partners is thus about to go away. This could be a prelude to mutual understanding based on realism or it could be the final parting of the ways, depending on how the PMLN charts its course after the 43-day 'honeymoon'. Needless to say, both parties have their strong and weak points

Dawn, 17 May 2008

Protest against missile attack on Damadola

ISLAMABAD, May 16: Pakistan on Friday lodged a protest with coalition forces in Afghanistan against the recent missile attack on Damadola in Bajaur Agency in which at least 10 people were killed. Pakistan has activated the tripartite commission comprising senior military officers and diplomatic representatives from Isaf, Afghanistan and Pakistan on the attack, a diplomatic source told Dawn. The tripartite commission is the agreed mechanism for addressing such complaints and it meets whenever required

Dawn, 17 May 2008

Asif attends ISI briefing for PM, ministers

ISLAMABAD, May 16: Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari visited the headquarters of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) on Friday to attend a briefing on the security situation, sources told Dawn. The presence of Mr Zardari, who is neither an elected lawmaker nor a government official, in the important briefing surprised observers here because such briefings are held exclusively for people under oath. Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Minister for Defence Chaudhry Ahmad Mukhtar also attended the briefing given by ISI chief Lt-Gen Nadim Taj

Dawn, 17 May 2008

Mukhtar defends talks with Taliban

KARACHI, May 16: Defence Minister Chaudhry Ahmad Mukhtar has said that the talks being held by the government with the Taliban would be of benefit to not only Pakistan but the entire world, adding that it would be prudent for the US not to raise objections to the initiative and wait for the process to be completed. The minister was talking to media

personnel at the PIA headquarters here on Friday

Dawn, 17 May 2008

Troops vacate Mehsud area's key positions

TANK, May 16: The government has withdrawn security personnel from three strategic positions in the Mehsud area, meeting a key demand of the militants in South Waziristan for a peace agreement in the region. Local people said the army removed barbed wires and mines before pulling out of Chag Malai, Spinkay Raghzay and Kotkai areas. But a government official said the military was being relocated to positions from where it would be easy for them to re-occupy the vacated positions within four hours of any incident

News, 18 May 2008

Reinstatement of deposed judges: Lawyers' long march from June 10

LAHORE: The All Pakistan Lawyers' Representative Conference on Saturday resolved to start a 'Long March' across the country on June 10 to press for the reinstatement of the judges who were 'deposed' under the garb of Nov-3 Pervez Musharraf's PCO. Representatives of the Pakistan Bar Council, the Supreme Court Bar Association, provincial Bar Councils, High Court Bars and District Bar Associations from all over the country, after six-hour discussions also decided to hold the All Pakistan Lawyers Conventions on May 24, May 31 and June 9

News, 18 May 2008

Kidnapped ambassador freed: Taliban claim Mulla Obaidullah, others swapped for Tariq Azizuddin; govt denies deal

PESHAWAR: Militants in South Waziristan Agency on Saturday set free Pakistan's envoy to Afghanistan, Tariq Azizuddin, in return for the release of 12 Pakistani and Afghan Taliban. However, Pakistan government sources flatly denied that there had been any deal whatsoever for the release of the ambassador. Taliban sources claimed former Afghan defence minister and deputy Taliban leader Mulla Obaidullah was among those freed in exchange for the ambassador. Despite denials by the government, a Taliban commander maintained that Mulla Obaidullah had been freed

News, 18 May 2008

Kayani briefs PM on troops repositioning

ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani on Saturday briefed Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on the prevailing security environment in South Waziristan Agency saying it was the repositioning of troops and not the withdrawal, taking place there. The briefing held at the Prime Minister House and attended by Information Minister Sherry Rehman, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Interior Rehman Malik, DG ISI Nadeem Taj and senior army officers

Daily Times, 18 May 2008

EDITORIAL: New political alignments?

It is unfortunate that the PPP-PMLN partnership seems to be floundering in rough seas. It is in trouble because the political principle on which it is founded is neither well thought

out nor even well understood. The judges' case should not have been allowed to create a rift, it shouldn't even have necessitated the signing of the Murree Declaration delimiting the extent of cooperation in the light of certain points of law. Instead, the coalition should have been reared on the political gut feeling that Pakistan cannot suffer another bout of polarised politics without permanent damage

Daily Times, 19 May 2008

PML-N to join lawyers' protests

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) will join lawyers in street protests to press for the restoration of judiciary sacked on November 3, 2007, PML-N spokesman Sadiqul Farooq said on Sunday. Leaders of the lawyers' movement said this weekend that they would organise a 'long march' starting on June 10 to demand that the judges be reinstated. The route will include the cities of Multan, Lahore and Islamabad

Daily Times, 19 May 2008

Bugti rejects talks offer

LAHORE: Barhamdagh Khan Bugti has rejected the government's offer for talks, saying that the government's claims of providing relief to Balochistan were designed to secure an 'honourable retreat for the defeated forces', BBC reported on Sunday. Talking to the channel from an undisclosed location, the grandson of Baloch nationalist leader Akbar Bugti claimed that 10,000 Bugti tribesmen were living a miserable life in Afghanistan because of the military operation in Balochistan. He said the resistance against the military operation was increasing. He said the Baloch people would only be pacified by a full withdrawal of the military. He denied receiving any support from India or Afghanistan to fuel his movement.

Dawn, 21 May 2008

Hundreds watch execution of tribal elder

LANDI KOTAL, May 20: Militant group Lashkar-i-Islam publicly executed an elder belonging to a rival group in Bara tehsil on Tuesday. Maulana Mastamin had been kidnapped on Dec 20. Initially, the Lashkar denied it had kidnapped the maulana. The execution was watched by hundreds of people in Gogrina village of Bazaar-Zakhkhel area near Tirah valley. A squad of Lashkar-i-Islam gunned the maulana down after the death sentence' was announced by the Lashkar's Shura based in Gogrina

Hindu, 22 May 2008

Pakistan for 'grand reconciliation'

ISLAMABAD: Signalling an important policy shift, Pakistan on Wednesday agreed with India to push for an improvement in bilateral economic relations simultaneously with efforts to resolve all outstanding issues, including Kashmir. At the end of talks with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi declared that his government was ready for a 'grand reconciliation' with India through dialogue to resolve all outstanding issues 'with self-respect and dignity.' Both sides strongly reaffirmed that they would not permit terrorism to impede the peace process and, in a joint statement, 're-emphasised the need for effective steps for the complete elimination of this menace.' The statement said the two Ministers reaffirmed the

importance of the ceasefire in place since November 2003 and the commitment of both sides to safeguard it. The countries also signed an agreement on consular access to prisoners, an important step in ensuring the early release of nationals of the two countries from each other's jails after they have completed their sentence. At a joint press conference, the Ministers said that in their review of the fourth round of the composite dialogue process, they concurred that significant progress had been made on several fronts.

Daily Excelsior, 22 May 2008

Ease restrictions on LoC travel: Farooq

Mendhar, May 21: Former Chief Minister and patron National Conference Dr Farooq Abdullah today called upon both India and Pakistan to ease restrictions on travel between Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Poonch-Rawlakote to provide relief to thousands of divided families on both sides of border. "I urge both India and Pakistan to ease travel restrictions and formalities so that the people can be benefited at large", he said adding that the people of both countries should come closer to understand each other so that atmosphere of peace, goodwill and confidence could be created. "We want travel between the two parts to be eased on the pattern of European Union without any restrictions ", he said adding instead of travel permit the visitors on both side of border should be allowed to move freely across the border by using their Permanent Resident Certificate (PRC)

News, 22 May 2008

Pakistan, India sign accord on consular access to prisoners

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and India have agreed to continue discussions to build on convergences and narrow down divergences on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. The two countries also agreed to continue with the implementation of cross-LoC CBMs, with a view to enhancing interaction and cooperation across the LoC. In this regard, it has been decided to increase the frequency of Muzaffarabad-Srinagar and Rawalakot-Poonch bus services from fortnightly to a weekly basis, to finalise modalities for intra-Kashmir trade and truck service as early as possible, and to implement other measures to expand and facilitate travel. A meeting of the working group on cross-LoC CBMs would be convened within two months.

Daily Times, 22 May 2008

Editorial: Talking about Kashmir

It was rather disappointing on Tuesday to see 'expert discussions' on most TV channels about Kashmir against the backdrop of the ongoing round of talks between the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan in Islamabad. No effort was made to put the Indo-Pak talks in perspective and study the present state of the Kashmir issue in the light of the regional and global changes that have come about; nor were the post-Kargil internal changes in Pakistan objectively studied. Indeed, no 'expert' was willing to fairly interpret Pakistan's decision not to link the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project with the resolution of the Kashmir dispute

Daily Times, 22 May 2008

Militants launch offensive in Swat

MINGORA: Militants attacked Matta Police Station, the Ningolay checkpost and the houses of police personnel in various areas of Swat late on Tuesday night, leaving one policeman dead and three injured. They also partially damaged a Sui gas plant in the Balogram area with a bomb, and set fire to two girls' schools in Matta tehsil and two tourist points in Kalam. Tehreek-e-Taliban Swat spokesman Muslim Khan denied their involvement in the violence. He told Daily Times elements that wanted to sabotage the government-Taliban process were behind the incidents. staff report

Dawn, 22 May 2008

US objects to talks for peace deal with militants

WASHINGTON, May 20: After watching from the sidelines for a few weeks, the United States on Tuesday finally raised objections to Pakistan's efforts to negotiate a peace deal with militants in the tribal areas. In a written testimony submitted to a congressional panel, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte also indicated that Islamabad did not consult Washington before making the new peace move as the US learned about it from the media. 'The media has reported that the government of Pakistan has been exploring peace agreements with certain groups in the tribal areas,' he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. 'Given past failures, we have raised our concerns about these negotiations with Pakistan's leaders.'

Hindu, 23 May 2008

Zardari for troop reduction in J&K

ISLAMABAD: Following up on Pakistan's commitment of working for a 'grand reconciliation' with India, the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on Thursday made two proposals - reduction of the Army's presence in Jammu and Kashmir and creation of economic zones along the border. The PPP, however, suggested that any cut in Army deployment could be compensated by India by posting more paramilitary forces and police which would be 'more humane.'

News, 23 May 2008

Zardari gets tough with Musharraf

ISLAMABAD: Hardening of Asif Ali Zardari's tone towards President Musharraf is the reflection of behind the scene tensions between the Presidency and the Zardari House. A source having close contact with the PPP co-chairman confided to this correspondent that the Presidency is not approving the proposed constitutional package being prepared by the Zardari House. To be specific, the source claimed, the president is not willing to surrender his powers to dissolve the National Assembly under Article 58(2)(b) of the Constitution and to appoint services chiefs, including the chief of the Army staff

Daily Times, 23 May 2008

UN and PPP's (il)logic (Ejaz Haider)

Logic was banished from the proceedings of the press conference Thursday by the ministers of law and foreign affairs. The meet was convened to inform the media that the Pakistan People's Party has prepared a letter of request to be presented to the United Nations Secretary General for constituting a Commission to investigate the December 27 assassination of Ms Benazir Bhutto. One of the points the critics of the move, foremost

among them this scribe, had raised was the inadmissibility of the analogy with the Commission constituted to investigate the assassination of Lebanese prime minister, Rafik Hariri

Daily Times, 23 May 2008

Editorial: Negotiating two kinds of peace

Pakistan is handling two peace negotiations at the same time and facing common factors in both that look sometimes like obstacles and sometimes like reversals. The peace talks with India have gone on for very long, if one counts also the days when the Muslim League was in power under Mr Nawaz Sharif. They were repeatedly disrupted, the last time for a period of two years when President Musharraf was trying to cope with a Supreme Court 'rebellion' followed by a civil society movement against him. The other peace process is ongoing with the Taliban

News, 23 May 2008

Swat peace accord in danger

PESHAWAR: The future of the peace agreement signed on Wednesday between the NWFP government and the Swat militants is in danger as the Taliban on Thursday threatened a unilateral withdrawal from the accord if the ongoing talks between the federal government and the tribal militants did not succeed. "The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan is a Taliban movement which is operating in the whole country, and the Swat Taliban are also the integral part of it," the spokesman for the Swat Taliban, Muslim Khan, told The News by phone. He threatened that they would pull out of the peace accord if the talks between the government and the Waziristan-based Taliban failed

News, 24 May 2008

Presidency snaps backdoor contacts with PPP

Presidency snaps backdoor contacts with PPP ISLAMABAD: The Presidency has decided to end all backdoor contacts with the Pakistan People's Party after taking notice of Asif Ali Zardari's remarks about President Pervez Musharraf given to Indian news agency Press Trust of India. President Musharraf will express his reservations over the situation to Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani in a meeting either today or tomorrow. According to sources, the president has serious reservations over PPP's proposed constitutional package and he would not like to be a figurehead president

Daily Times, 24 May 2008

Editorial: Musharraf: fly in the ointment?

Editorial: Musharraf: fly in the ointment? Unless conspiracy experts want to read all sorts of deceit and make-believe in it, the latest opinion expressed by the PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari about President Pervez Musharraf marks a significant turn in national politics. From the stance that 'we can live with President Musharraf' to his being 'a relic of the past' is a journey that is not without its ups and downs. And somewhere in the foundation of any possible equation, there is President Musharraf's unremitting ambivalence that has come back to haunt us

News, 25 May 2008

Quit or face impeachment, Musharraf told, PPP CEC endorses constitutional package

ISLAMABAD: The Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the PPP on Saturday endorsed the draft of the proposed constitutional package that would do away with all the powers of the president, reduce the chief justice's tenure to three years and rename the NWFP as the Pakhtoonkhwa. 'It is not final and now I will start dialogue with the coalition partners, the lawyers' fraternity and the presidency for creating a consensus on the constitutional package to strengthen democracy and to ensure the supremacy of parliament,' said Co-chairman PPP Asif Ali Zardari while addressing a press conference here on Saturday at the Zardari House.

News, 25 May 2008

Package does not reflect Murree Accord

ISLAMABAD: The constitutional package unveiled by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) will not end the unconstitutional Nov 3 actions of the then General Pervez Musharraf but it does include some 'attractions' for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to cut the president to size. The two major political parties may agree to pass the 18th Amendment to completely disarm Musharraf, making him a mere figurehead, but there are no signs that they will not continue to lock horns on the question of the restoration of the pre-Nov 3 superior judiciary

News, 25 May 2008

Editorial: At a critical juncture

As it has so often in the history of the country, democracy in Pakistan stands once more at the crossroads. In the distance, some already hear that familiar, but dreaded, sound of the tread of marching army boots. Others insist that the military will not intervene in the country's political process and that the message in this regard has already been conveyed to key quarters. Most of us can only hope that this indeed is the case, that there will be no further instability or disruption of the democratic process and the current crisis that lingers will dissipate peacefully. Certainly, the army chief has actively distanced himself and his institution from politics and this is the way things should be. The army has gained little as an institution from its waltz with politics and indeed has lost much in terms of its professional standing and prestige

Daily Times, 25 May 2008

Tough choices ahead (Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi)

The PPP can multiply its political clout by working closely with other democratic parties and rectifying Musharraf's unconstitutional actions. Any political arrangement with the presidency is not a viable option. The federal government plans to present a constitutional amendment package in Parliament to demonstrate its commitment to expanding the scope of democracy and undermine the planned 'long march' by the lawyers and others for restoration of the ousted judges. Details of the package are not yet available at the time of writing, but some information can be tracked from the statements of the law minister and other press reports

Dawn, 26 May 2008

Asif agrees to 5-year CJ tenure, says Dar: PML-N praises gesture

ISLAMABAD, May 25: Pakistan People's Party co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari has agreed to a proposal put forward by the Pakistan Muslim League-N to increase the tenure of the chief justice of Pakistan to five years in his party's constitution amendment package. According to PTV, Mr Zardari assured PML-N leader Ishaq Dar during a meeting here on Sunday that the tenure would be increased to five years from the proposed three

Hindu, 26 May 2008

Srinagar rocks to Pakistani band Junoon's music

SRINAGAR: Despite threats from militant organisations, thousands of Kashmiris, mostly youth, turned up for a musical concert organised by the South Asia Foundation (SAF) here on Sunday. The star attraction was the Pakistani rock band Junoon, which performed in Srinagar for the first time and turned thousands of music lovers hysterical. The event was to mark the opening of the Institute of Kashmir Studies at the Kashmir University funded by the Foundation. It was aimed at spreading the message of peace, love and harmony

News, 27 May 2008

Pakistan must 'strike back at terror': US

BAGRAM AIR BASE: Pakistan should strike back at 'terrorism' or it will see more attacks like the one that killed ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, US Homeland Security head Michael Chertoff said on Monday. Extremists in Pakistan are a threat to that country as well as Afghanistan, he said when asked about Islamabad's peace talks with pro-Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked rebels which have raised concern in Nato and Kabul

News, 27 May 2008

Mohmand militants, tribal elders ink peace accord

GHALANAI: Local militants and tribal elders on Monday signed an accord with a pledge to maintain peace in Mohmand Agency. Sources said after the accord signing, the political administration released militants affiliated with regional Taliban commander Maulvi Abdul Wali, alias Omar Khalid. They were taken into custody by the authorities on charges of terrorism and attacks on security personnel in the tribal region

Daily Times, 27 May 2008

Sectarian violence leaves six dead in DI Khan

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Unidentified assailants opened fire on a car killing four Shias hours before a member of the rival Sunni sect was shot dead in northwestern Pakistan on Monday in apparent sectarian violence in which a policeman also died, police said. The officer died in a shootout while pursuing the car's attackers, Dera Ismail Khan police chief Salahuddin Khan said. He said the attackers were riding on a motorcycle, and the slain men included two brothers and two of their friends. 'It seems to be a sectarian attack, but we are still investigating,' Khan said. He said the victims were in conflict with an outlawed Sunni militant group accused of targeting Shias across the country. Hours later, an attacker wearing a mask and riding on a motorcycle shot and killed a Sunni

Muslim member of Dera Ismail Khan city council, and wounded two of his friends, Khan said

Daily Times, 27 May 2008

Editorial: Radicalism versus realism

Speaking to a convention in Faisalabad, the ousted chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry said that the 'officials who bowed to President Pervez Musharraf's declaration of emergency rule and ouster of judges last year will be punished'. He was quoted in the press on Monday as saying that that 'the judges who had taken oath under Musharraf's Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) had violated the Constitution and would be held accountable'

News, 28 May 2008

Pakistan swapped Dadullah for Tariq Azizuddin

ISLAMABAD: Two senior Taliban leaders, Mullah Obaidullah Akhund and Mullah Mansoor Dadullah, have been released by the Pakistan government in a prisoner swap with the Taliban, The News has learnt from credible sources. Despite the fact that the government authorities have repeatedly denied the release, both the militant leaders reached Afghanistan around two weeks back. Sources added that both were released along with hundreds of other militants to secure the release of Pakistani Ambassador to Afghanistan Tariq Azizuddin and 35 Army officials

News, 28 May 2008

10 killed in Orakzai militants clash

HANGU: At least 10 persons were killed and 11 others injured when armed men of Lashkar-e-Islam and Ansarul Islam exchanged fire in Utmankhel area of Kalaya Tehsil of Orakzai Agency on Tuesday. Sources said armed men of Mangal Bagh group and Pir Mahboob group, a subsidiary of Ansarul Islam, opened fire on each other when they came face-to-face in Andara Kalley that killed eight persons on the spot and left 13 others injured from both sides. Later, two of the wounded succumbed to injuries, raising the death toll to 10. Eyewitnesses said the armed men of Mangal Bagh group were on their way to Maidan area of Khyber Agency from Dabori area of Orakzai Agency. They came across the rival Pir Mahboob Group of Ansarul Islam in Andara Kalley that led to the clash

News, 28 May 2008

Editorial: Goodbye Kalabagh

The decision made by the federal government to shelf for good the Kalabagh dam is an immensely sensible one. If it had been taken many years sooner, the federal friction we see today in the country may not have been so acute or so potentially dangerous. Though the move is already coming under criticism, the fact is that building a dam at the cost of national unity simply makes no sense. Whatever the benefits of KBD, the reality is that anything we gained would be lost due to the anger it would create in all the smaller provinces. After all, no infrastructure project should come at the cost of national unity. Debate over whether this opposition to the dam is based on reality or on perception, or on technical details regarding the dam and difference of opinion over areas that would be

flooded, are largely futile given the degree of distrust that exists

Daily Times, 28 May 2008

Taliban vow to keep up cross-border attacks

KOTKAI: The Taliban will not accept any government condition to stop cross-border movement to finalise a peace deal, a militant commander declared last week. 'First, we will not accept such a ban. But we hope the peace deal will be inked without a clause that puts restrictions on mujahideen to cross the border (into Afghanistan),' Abu Zakwan, Taliban commander in the Kotkai area of South Waziristan, told Daily Times on Saturday. Using the alias of Abu Zakwan, the commander said that government negotiators are asking for a pledge to stop cross-border attacks, but the Taliban were not committing to such an agreement

Daily Times, 31 May 2008

Success of present govt is in national interest: Musharraf

LAHORE: The present government should succeed as its continuance is in the national interest, President Pervez Musharraf said on Friday. Speaking informally at a dinner hosted in his honour by Senator Nisar Memon in Islamabad, he said that he wanted to see the present government complete its tenure as it had the mandate of the people. According to Dawn News, he said he would extend full support to the government

Daily Times, 31 May 2008

Elders demand FATA council

PESHAWAR: Tribal elders from various tribal agencies on Friday demanded an independent and autonomous FATA council to solve the problems of people. Addressing a press conference at the Peshawar Press Club, they demanded that preference be given to dialogue for peace in the Tribal Areas; colleges be established at the tehsil level; students be granted scholarships for higher education; three universities be established in FATA; quota be fixed in federal jobs; all agencies be linked through a FATA highway; families of people who lost their lives in bombings and blasts be compensated; and the Political Parties Act and reform package be implemented in FATA. zakir hassnain

Daily Times, 31 May 2008

EDITORIAL: Future of army intervention

In the midst of all kinds of opinion about the 'sincerity' of the PPP government in pursuing the cause of the judges and its 'concealed sympathy' with President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani has spoken at the National Defence University in Islamabad, and explained the stance of the partisans of democracy in the country vis-à-vis military intervention. He told the class that Pakistan had a few officers in the army who got together with 'a class of politicians, bureaucrats, judiciary and affluent members of the civil society' to block the process of establishing democratic institutions in Pakistan

Daily Times, 31 May 2008

Bush assures Musharraf of support

Bush assures Musharraf of support WASHINGTON: US President George W Bush

offered renewed backing on Friday for Pakistan during a telephone call he made to President Pervez Musharraf. Bush said the United States looks forward to working with the entire Pakistani leadership in fighting terrorism and advancing democracy. 'The president reiterated the United States' strong support for Pakistan and he indicated he looked forward to President Musharraf's continuing role in further strengthening US-Pakistani relations,' White House spokeswoman Dana Perino told reporters

News, 31 May 2008

End of the road for president? (Rahimullah Yusufzai)

President General (r) Pervez Musharraf is fighting a losing battle to survive in office. But to expect him to go down without a fight is naïve. It will be uncharacteristic of the man to give up easily after having ruled Pakistan for more than eight years on his own terms and in a manner that wasn't unlike running a personal fiefdom. It was, therefore, not easy to believe the latest news that the embattled president was on his way out. Journalist colleagues in their excitement have raised false alarm on quite a few occasions in the recent past about Musharraf's resignation. All their reporting turned out to be wrong. It is true that majority of journalists, like most Pakistanis, want the discredited president to step down but to expect him to voluntarily resign appears unrealistic. He will have to be forced out of his ill-gotten job. And going by his record, he will listen to only the Pakistan Army and the US, both of which sustained him in power all these years even after it became obvious that he had lost the trust of his nation