

# PARLIAMENT WATCH – PAKISTAN\*

## SEPTEMBER 2010



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## Proceedings of the National Assembly of Pakistan September 2010

The 24<sup>th</sup> session of the National Assembly of Pakistan was held in September 2010. It continued for three days after commencing on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2010. Due to the heavy floods in Pakistan much of the session's focus remained on the situation arisen due to destruction caused by those devastating floods.<sup>1</sup> This special session was called on the requisition of the opposition party in parliament, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz<sup>2</sup> (PMLN). The House proceedings began with special prayers for those killed by the floods and the suicide bomb attacks on a Shia procession.

Lawmakers in this session urged the government to launch judicial inquiries into why irrigation officials breached dams at critical locations, which has led to the inundation of major population centers with floodwaters. Continuing their discussion over flood disaster, lawmakers from various political parties reiterated their claim that influential politicians had forced the authorities to breach the embankments, and demanded the culprits be brought to justice<sup>3</sup>.

They urged the government to take urgent steps to facilitate flood victims in restoring their normal life<sup>4</sup> and demanded that flood aid be distributed in a fair and just manner. Prime Minister of Pakistan Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani addressing the parliamentarians said that a meeting of the inter-provincial Council of Common Interests (CCI) will chart a national flood relief strategy and revisit a stalled opposition proposal for an independent commission. He vowed to take along all political forces to face the situation and ensure transparency in the use of domestic resources and international aid for the relief and rehabilitation of an estimated 20 million flood sufferers<sup>5</sup>.

It is important to note that according to estimates, floods in Pakistan have destroyed standing crops on 1.4 million acres of land, damaged 1.3 million houses, displaced 7.5 million people, killed over 1,600 and injured 2,600 people. The estimated loss to crops, cattle and infrastructure was from 350 billion to 500 billion Pak Rupees, or four to six billion dollars, including serious damage to 1,000 bridges and more than 400 km of roads which would cost billions of rupees to repair while 30 percent of agricultural land was affected.<sup>6</sup> These floods in Pakistan in July-August 2010 caused huge devastation in all respects including loss of human lives<sup>7</sup>, properties and infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> It is being alleged that some irrigation authorities, on the command of the influential, have breached dams of rivers in order to save their lands, without caring for human

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<sup>1</sup>Pakistan floods, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gallery/2010/aug/13/pakistan-flooding>

<sup>2</sup>NA session to discuss flood situation,

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=1106&Cat=2&dt=4/8/2011>

<sup>3</sup>More MPs call for judicial probe into dykes' breaching,

[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010/09/05/story\\_5-9-2010\\_pg7\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010/09/05/story_5-9-2010_pg7_1)

<sup>4</sup>South Punjab politicians urge Centre to prioritize relief efforts, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/37762/south-punjab-politicians-urge-centre-to-prioritise-relief-efforts/>

<sup>5</sup>Gilani briefs NA on flood rehabilitation plan, <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/40288>

<sup>6</sup> Gilani briefs NA on flood rehabilitation plan, <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/40288>

<sup>7</sup>Floods kill over 1,100 in Pakistan,

[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/08/02/daily\\_brief\\_floods\\_kill\\_over\\_1100\\_in\\_pakistan](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/08/02/daily_brief_floods_kill_over_1100_in_pakistan)

<sup>8</sup> Eyewitness: Flood devastation in Pakistan,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/picture/2010/aug/15/pakistan-natural-disasters>; Pakistan floods hit 14m people, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10896849>

lives.<sup>9</sup> In the whole situation, women and children were among the most effected for being vulnerable in terms of having access to safe places, shelter, food and health facilities<sup>10</sup>. Women have had to face multiple threats including sexual harassment.<sup>11</sup>

These floods caused displacement of hundreds and thousands of people who were even unable to find food and shelter.<sup>12</sup> People staged protests for not having access to food items and other basic facilities.<sup>13</sup> It is expected that, in case timely measures are not taken, lives of more people would be at risk<sup>14</sup>, with women and children being more vulnerable<sup>15</sup>.

Besides this, an important Bill, the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2010 was also introduced in this session. Parliamentarian, Naseer Bhutta introduced this Bill.<sup>16</sup> Statement of reasons of this Bill states, "It has been seriously felt by the legal fraternity and the public at large that the agencies having committed havoc to the society and individuals thereby curtailing their liberties and subsequently misusing and abusing their authority, bulldozing the spirit of the human respect and regard therefore the agencies cannot be given an open license to regal out the liberties of the gentle citizen; therefore it looks appropriate that an inherent provision be made part of the code coping with the given situation more importantly in the present scenario when the number of missing persons<sup>17</sup> stands multiplied and the police atrocities are being seen to have escalating tendency therefore when need arises that the agencies are to be mandated to deal with the in-human actions of the criminals with iron hands simultaneously it is equally important to protect the honor, life, liberty and dignity of the law abiding citizens hence the cited amendment and the given provision is imperative, appropriate and expedient under the circumstances. That the above mentioned provision was introduced by an Act XIII of 1976 in the peculiar circumstances with the mind set to having an effective control and to curb the menace of crime effectively but unfortunately this addition of the provision did not serve the purpose rather it added to the agonies of the people at large causing serious discriminations at the ends of the law enforcing agencies; the courts also felt handicapped to extend relief to the serving and aggrieved persons; a countless number of people devoid of any remedy fell victim of the

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<sup>9</sup>Irrigation officials responsible for flood devastations, <http://www.thefrontierpost.com/?p=23414>

<sup>10</sup> Women and children most at risk in flood-hit areas, <http://socialistpakistan.org/?p=537>; women and children more vulnerable to diseases,

[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C09%5C18%5Cstory\\_18-9-2010\\_pg12\\_9](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C09%5C18%5Cstory_18-9-2010_pg12_9);

Women Caravan has a bumpy ride, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/176147/women-caravan-has-a-bumpy-ride/>

<sup>11</sup>Women experience sexual harassment in flood-hit areas,

<http://pakistancriminalrecords.com/2010/10/01/peshawar-women-experience-sexual-harassment-in-flood-hit-areas/>

<sup>12</sup>Pakistan says flood has made more than 4 million homeless,

<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/849718--pakistan-says-flood-has-made-more-than-4-million-homeless>

<sup>13</sup>1,000 protesters flooded with rage, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/58599/1000-protesters-flooded-with-rage/>

<sup>14</sup>Five million Pakistanis at risk from floods, says U.N, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/22/us-pakistan-floods-un-idUSTRE75L22720110622>

<sup>15</sup> Women and children more at risk in flood-hit areas, [http://sdpi.org/sdpi-old/SDPI\\_in\\_the\\_press/media%20coverage%202010/media\\_coverage\\_august\\_2010.html](http://sdpi.org/sdpi-old/SDPI_in_the_press/media%20coverage%202010/media_coverage_august_2010.html)

<sup>16</sup>Code of Criminal Procedure Amendment Act 2010,

[http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1302324854\\_539.pdf](http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1302324854_539.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> missing persons are those who are either kidnapped or picked up by security agencies

police culture causing stinking situations so for and so on; this is, therefore, appropriate time that legislative move to be initiated to protect the good ones and to nab the evils of the society.”

The introduced Bill provides for granting bail to a person not in custody, in court or against whom no case is registered. This is an important area that should have been addressed in the House many years earlier. Anyway making any legislation on the subject can help resolve the issue of missing persons. In Pakistan, it is a major issue as many people are missing and nobody knows what happens to them or want to talk of their release or appearance.<sup>18</sup> Many of those missing persons are also found dead at different places.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, relatives of missing persons continue hoping that authorities<sup>20</sup> will recover their loved ones. Even, politicians and parliamentarians along with common citizens in Pakistan have demanded the government to take effective steps for the recovery of missing persons.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Amnesty: Reveal details of missing persons in Pakistan,  
<http://southasia.oneworld.net/todaysh headlines/amnesty-reveal-details-of-missing-persons-in-pakistan>;

Missing person found in police station,  
[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C05%5C28%5Cstory\\_28-5-2010\\_pg7\\_30](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C05%5C28%5Cstory_28-5-2010_pg7_30)

<sup>19</sup> Six missing persons found dead,  
[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C11%5C20%5Cstory\\_20-11-2010\\_pg1\\_6](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C11%5C20%5Cstory_20-11-2010_pg1_6)

<sup>20</sup> Families of missing persons pin hopes on reinstated CJP,  
[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C03%5C23%5Cstory\\_23-3-2009\\_pg7\\_20](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C03%5C23%5Cstory_23-3-2009_pg7_20)

<sup>21</sup> Government should solve missing persons issue,  
[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C07%5C08%5Cstory\\_8-7-2010\\_pg7\\_16](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C07%5C08%5Cstory_8-7-2010_pg7_16)