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PAKISTAN INSTITUTE FOR PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES: A NEW BEGINNING

Pakistan has alternated between democratic and military governments. Among its many programmes to strengthen democracy is the establishment of a centre to offer national and provincial Parliamentarians the information they need to provide the good governance necessary to prevent another return to authoritarian rule.

Mr Faisal Karim Kundi, MNA.

Mr Kundi is the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan. He was first elected to the Assembly in 2008 after serving as an organizer for the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians.

Summary

The establishment of a sustainable institute for legislative research and capacity building has been a long standing aspiration of Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff in Pakistan. The establishment of the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) is a major step towards the realization of this objective. The idea first cropped up in the Speakers Conference in 2005. The Legislative Development Steering Committee, headed by Mr Faisal Karim Kundi, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and consisting of Senators, MNAs and the top management of National



Mr Faisal Karim Kundi, MNA.

Assembly and the Senate, was instrumental in taking through this concept to maturity. The interim PIPS was established in existing Parliament lodges in 2006 where it started conducting capacity

building events and seminars in a small but well equipped facility. The institute has undertaken 67 independent researches for parliamentary committees and individual Parliamentarians and around 260 capacity building events on parliamentary topics such as legislation, committees functioning, legislative research, business of the house, rules of procedures, question hour, communication skills, and so on for 4,000 participants including MPs, Staff, journalists and members of civil society. While construction of a state of the art PIPS building spread over 1.5 acre of land is in process in Islamabad, the PIPS Board of Governors under the



A model of the PIPS office being built in Islamabad.



leadership of Dr Fehmida Mirza, MNA, Speaker, National Assembly of Pakistan, have finalized its financial and service rules and the institute continues to provide quality services to national as well as provincial legislators. The Institute is "dedicated to parliamentary excellence," and looks forward to develop into a centre *par excellence* by a dedicated team of professionals.

Establishing PIPS: realization of a dream

The Parliament of Pakistan, due to a chequered history of democracy marred by long decades of dictatorships, could not evolve a system of supporting legislators with an institutionalized system of undertaking research and analysis to undertake their arduous tasks of legislation, representation and oversight. Unlike its counterparts in India, Bangladesh, Australia, Canada, U.K., U.S., Thailand, South Africa, the Philippines and Czech Republic, the Pakistani Parliament had no independent research and informational support for its Members.

In this context, PIPS was formally established as an

exclusive and independent, first of its kind research and capacity building facility for the Parliamentarians, through an Act of Parliament on 15 December 2008. No matter it had started functioning in an interim facility since April 2006.

Parliament in Pakistan was deprived of the power of knowledge that comes from timely, accurate and credible information and objective analysis on the most sensitive of national matters till the establishment of PIPS.

The intense need for such an institution was direly felt and expressed in 2005 in the Speakers Conference of the National and Provincial houses.

The Legislative Development Steering Committee (LDSC) under the chairmanship of Mr Kundi chose to work for setting up the institute with the support of the USAID Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project (PLSP). Based on the deliberations of the LDSC, comprising eight MNAs and four senators in addition to Secretariat leadership of National Assembly and the Senate; various comparative studies and feasibility papers prepared by PLSP and the

LDSC steered the initiative. The LDSC visualized PIPS as an autonomous entity, functioning under the leadership of the parliament and guided by a Board of Governors (BOG).

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Cross party consensus

The PIPS Act was passed by the Senate and the National Assembly by a consensus vote by all MPs. The legislation is a true manifestation of cross-party caucusing as the Bill saw all parliamentary parties, both government and opposition,

working together to finally get it through in the 13th National Assembly as a consensus Act. In this way, the Pakistani MPs truly own the idea, concept as well as every step taken to establish and consolidate PIPS' role in providing quality research and informational services to Members and Secretariat staff of all national and provincial legislators.

PIPS Board of Governors

The establishment of the PIPS through unanimous support of the Parliament reflected the will and vision of not only the National Assembly and Senate, but also of the provincial Houses of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, who are all represented through their Speakers in the PIPS Board of Governors.

Under the Act, the Chairman, Senate and Speaker National Assembly were charged with the responsibility of nominating the members of the founding BOG. Considering the importance of the institute and the role of the BOG, they tried to pick up the best of the lot keeping in view their background and experience for



Prime Minister of Pakistan, Hon. Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, MNA, (left), talks with National Assembly Speaker, Dr the Hon. Fehmida Mirza, MNA, Speaker of the National Assembly.

taking up this onerous responsibility. The Board, chaired by Chairman of the Senate or Speaker of the National Assembly by three-year rotation, has the overall control of the institute and it guides its functioning. The Executive Director is the chief executive of the institute and works under the control of the Board.

Dr Mirza is the founding President of the PIPS Board of Governors.

The Speaker played a decisive role in acquiring a 1.5 acre piece of land at a picturesque setting on Ataturk Avenue in Pakistan's serene Federal Capital. She, along with Deputy Chairman of the Senate, Senator Mir Jan Muhammad Khan Jamali, inaugurated the official construction launch of PIPS building in June 2010.

The state of the art four-storey building would house offices of around 55 researchers, trainers and drafters, a 200-seat auditorium, training rooms and a spacious library. It is scheduled to

be completed in the latter part of 2011.

Speaker Mirza inspired the Board to work in unison and thoroughly draft, debate and approve comprehensive sets of financial and recruitment rules for the institute. That has laid a sound foundation to build a centre of excellence based on professionalism and merit, which reflects integrity and accountability in its functioning. The Board also appointed former Secretary General of the National Assembly Mr Khan Ahmad Goraya as its founding Executive Director.

Functions of PIPS

According to the mandate of the institute as mentioned in the PIPS Act, the functions of the institute are as follows:

- i. To maintain the national, provincial and international data, information and statistics to provide to the Parliamentarians for the efficient performance of their duties;
- ii. To undertake research in respect of the Federal and Provincial laws and also to have a study of international laws to help the Parliamentarians in the law making process;
- iii. To provide technical assistance to Parliamentarians in performance of their duties;
- iv. To provide training to the Parliamentarians and parliamentary functionaries for performance of their duties;
- v. To arrange seminars, workshops or conferences;
- vi. To take measures for the development of law making;
- vii. To maintain a record of all the existing Act, Ordinances and other enactments in force in Pakistan and in each Province;
- viii. To assist Parliamentarians and legislative bodies in their efforts to ensure the public's understanding of working of Parliament;
- ix. To arrange legislative drafting courses with special emphasis on parliamentary practices;
- x. To manage the internship

programmes for the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies;

- xi. To establish and maintain resource centers for the Parliamentarians;
- xii. To support the parliamentary committees in the performance of their duties; and
- xiii. Any other function as may be assigned to it by the Parliament or the Board.

PIPS research and outreach services

A prime goal of the institute is to provide non-partisan and expert opinion on a range of subjects, and to help the legislators in making informed policies about the national challenges. Leading scholars and researchers based in reputable academic institutions, think tanks and civil society organizations across the country are members of a 50 member network of specialists to provide informed policy inputs such as in-depth background notes, assessing bills, briefs, legislative summaries, consultations and other services on the request of parliamentary committees and Parliamentarians.

PIPS launched its "research on request services," in April 2007, which offers timely, accurate and objective bipartisan informational and research services to the legislators across Pakistan. Whereas the deadline of such researches varies from one to 15 days, the researchers include prompt informational and research analysis done on 24 hours notice for Parliamentarians. PIPS have produced 67 comprehensive research papers exclusively for individual MNAs, senators as well as MPs working in various standing committees. These services are offered to Parliamentarians in confidence and kept confidential as and till their direction.

PIPS have developed a cadre of around 50 PIPS network of



“PIPS envisions establishing an appropriate forum to equip Parliamentarians with cutting-edge strategies and tools to perform their representative, legislative and oversight functions effectively and efficiently.”

legislative researchers, trainers and drafters to support the legislators. The institute has also developed 24 policy resource guides on topics relevant to respective standing committees of the national and provincial Houses. The institute has developed and uploaded its official website at: www.pips.org.pk which is indigenously designed in a user-friendly format. It introduces the audience to various dimensions of the Institute such as its vision, mission, areas of services offered to the MPs. The institute has an elaborate outreach programme where it intends to provide an interface between civil society and the legislators for consultations on public policy matters, assessing legislation as well as holding public hearings.

The institute has developed numerous publications in an otherwise short span such as the *Members Orientation Booklet 2008*, *Senators Orientation Booklet 2009*, and *Discover the Parliament – PIPS guide for the Youth*. The PIPS also intends to run a youth awareness programme across all provinces of Pakistan with regard to enhancing their understanding of role and working of the Parliament and role of youth to engage the legislators.

Curriculum and capacity building services

The PIPS has to date developed modules in 21 areas of parliamentary significance since 2006. These include modules on legislative research, assessing and drafting legislation, question hour, parliamentary history, conflict resolution, Business of the House, budget process, parliamentary privileges and code of conduct,

constituency relations, basic computer skills, software module for librarians, etc. and a youth guide on Parliament.

Most of these comprehensive training modules consist of a facilitator's guide, a participants' book and a powerpoint presentation developed according to the PIPS Training Standards and Procedures. Accordingly no less than 260 workshops for Parliamentarians, journalists, members of civil society and staff of the six houses, have been held since 2006.

2008 saw the commencement of a more robust system of trainings by the PIPS.

For the first time in Pakistan, PIPS successfully conducted orientation programs for the elected legislators of the National and provincial assemblies on topics, such as: "Politician to Parliamentarian", "Constitutional Authority of Parliament", "Parliamentary History", "Rules of Procedures", "Business of the House", "Parliamentary Privilege", "Question Hour", "Committees of Parliament", "Legislative Process", "Research and Informational Support for Legislators", "Parliamentarians and the Budget", "Parliamentarian as Legislators", and "Constituency Relations". During these interactive sessions, members engaged in lively debate.

PIPS has hosted different modes of professional development programmes like policy seminars, issue workshops, skill enhancement courses for Members & Secretariat staff of Senate, National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies. More than 4400 participants, including MPs and Secretariat staff as well as journalists covering the Parliament,

have attended these programmes in the last three years.

The Parliamentarians' Resource Centre (PRC)

PIPS is also facilitating a modern Parliamentarians' Resource Center at the Parliament Lodges, Islamabad, the first of its kind in Pakistan's parliamentary history as it is housed along with residences of the MPs. The Centre is providing exclusive on the spot informational services seven days a week. The facility is exhaustively used by Parliamentarians especially during the session days. In addition Parliamentarians are provided round the clock printing, scanning and internet facilities as well as a compact meeting room and newspapers, magazines and journals for their day to day needs.

PIPS challenges and opportunities

Human resource is the soul of an institution that takes it to excellence. In this context, putting together a seasoned, committed and merit based human resource, including the key positions of Directors of Research and Outreach, HR and Finance, Training and Curriculum development, and their respective staff, remains the most demanding challenge. The PIPS would be concentrating all its energies in the next few months towards development of a well-knit team of professionals well versed with the parliamentary tradition of the country and institutional memory of the PIPS and the Parliament.

PIPS envisions developing academic and policy linkages and affiliations with universities, think tanks, international and national civil society organizations to

strengthen itself as an institution, which has access to some of the best minds and informational resources available. The PIPS has established collaborations with USAID who are supporting by construction of PIPS building and UNDP with whom we have held numerous capacity building events since August 2010. PIPS has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), a German foundation regarding support to PIPS activities for three years. It has committed 60,000 euros for the first year (2010).

PIPS intends to seek similar national and international linkages in addition to continuing development of its team to undertake its multiple role of undertaking quality research, capacity building and informational services as well as provision of legal drafting support for all legislators. PIPS look forwards to collaboration with similar institutions in the region as well as internationally and it cherishes to be a model facility assisting such initiatives.

In a nutshell, PIPS envisions establishing an appropriate forum to equip Parliamentarians with cutting-edge strategies and tools to perform their representative, legislative and oversight functions effectively and efficiently. Institution-building is a task that needs untiring efforts and the PIPS Governors under the leadership of its founding President, Speaker Mirza, as well as the leadership of all national and provincial legislators, acknowledge the need for a proactive role by them and the PIPS team to develop it into a centre of excellence. The onus for the optimum utilization and consolidation of a quality-oriented parliamentary institute lies with almost 1,000 MPs and thousands of staff in the six national and provincial Houses who should make use of this rapidly developing team of professionals.