

Sunday November 27, 2011



ISLAMABAD: Shehla Raza, Deputy Speaker, Sindh Assembly, addressing a press conference here on Saturday.—Recorder photo

## Amendments to Political Parties Act

# Women MPs ask political parties to evolve consensus

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ISLAMABAD: Women Parliamentarians from four provinces have demanded of the political parties to develop consensus to amend the Political Parties Act to provide mandatory quota of 10 per cent on general seats to women in the Assemblies.

Shehla Raza, Deputy Speaker of Sindh Provincial Assembly, while addressing a press conference here on Saturday, said that it had become the need of the hour to provide mandatory quota of 10 percent general seats to women to mainstream them in electoral processes before the next elections.

Shehla Raza, Deputy Speaker, Provincial Assembly, Sindh, Dr Ruqiyah Hashmi, Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination, Balochistan, Ghazala Gola, Minister for Women's Development, Balochistan, Heer Soho, MPA (MQM), Sindh, Nusrat Saher Abbasi, MPA (PML-F), Sindh, Humaira Alwani, MPA (PPPP), Sindh, Shameela Aslam, MPA (PML-N), Punjab, Faiza Malik, MPA (PPPP), Punjab, Amna Buttar, MPA (PIF), Punjab, Deeba Mirza, MPA (PML-N), Punjab, Ms Shazia Tehmas, MPA (PPPP), KP Nargis Samin, MPA (PPP-Sherpao), KP, Noor-us-Sehar (PPPP), KP are among those parliamentarians who have endorsed

the above-mentioned demand through a declaration to provide 10 percent quota general seats to women.

Shehla Raza said that the declaration endorsed by women Parliamentarians says, "We, Women Parliamentarians from Provincial Assemblies of Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Punjab and representatives of civil society organisations re-affirm our commitment to protect and preserve the provision of reserved seats given in the Constitution for women in the National Assembly, Senate and the Provincial Assemblies.

We, Women Parliamentarians, would also like to demand that political parties develop consensus to amend the Political Parties Act, in addition to the already available reserved seats for women. We believe that the provision of the reserved seats for women is the constitutional right of women under Articles 25, 34, 51 and 106, e.g. Article 25 (3) states: "Nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.

We would also like to reiterate the commitment made by the Women's Parliamentary Caucus at a Roundtable on September 29, 2011, "We further commit to enhance and strengthen women's representation in legis-

latures by working within our respective political parties and elected representatives and examining how the systems of nominations to the reserved seats could be made more democratic and transparent; and that women are represented at all levels of decision-making in political forums".

The status of women in Pakistan varies considerably across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide due to uneven socio-economic development and the impact of tribal, feudal, and capitalist social formations on women's lives.

The need is to ensure that women and men enjoy the same legal rights, to take steps to end discrimination against women in the workplace, create micro-finance programmes to support women's business development and entrepreneurship, guarantee women's land and property rights, increase girls' access to primary and secondary school, promote non-formal education for girls and women, such as vocational skills training and literacy programmes, and support public awareness campaigns to prevent violence against women and girls, she added.

Shehla said that it was not easy to change the system, as there were some forces that did not want to change the status quo.