



The GNLG Regional Meet (11 December 2008) in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Mr. Ashok Bhattacharya, Minister for Municipal Affairs, Government of West Bengal (third from left) inaugurated it. Mr. Bikas Ranjan Bhattacharya, Mayor of Kolkata (second from left) was guest of honour. Six delegates from Malaysia (standing) were among the participants.

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A new iron curtain is emerging

Winston Churchill once said, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” Democracy is a daily plebiscite. It faces a daily interrogation. It has to go through frequent negotiations, compromises, failures of talks and accords. It is through constant churning that democracy matures. The two decade-long tide of democratic consolidation is now being stalled and in some cases it has been reversed. The global economic crisis has further compounded the problem. Perhaps it is too early to call it a backlash but Larry Diamond of Hoover Institution aptly describes it as “democracy recession”. The consolidation of dictatorships is most visible in Central Asia, the Caucasus and what Russia calls “near abroad” countries of Georgia and Ukraine.

The global economic meltdown, seen by many as the failure of capitalism, is leading to a new iron curtain across Europe. This divide is made of economics, unlike the old one of the cold war era that was created by politics. Interestingly, the fault lines of this new divide are the same—between rich Western Europe and the poorer, new democracies of Eastern Europe. Several governments have fallen like a pack of cards over the past six months or so. Last December, the Lithuanians voted out their government. Governments in Hungary and the Czech Republic have bowed out of office. More significantly, in March this year, nine EU countries, which were once all on the Communist side of the iron curtain, held an unprecedented breakaway EU summit to discuss

the economic crisis. Time has come to ask why democracies respond so poorly and tamely and often work at cross purposes when democracies are under threat. The ability of established democracies to marshal economic and financial help to new democracies has left much to be desired. Many neo-democracies are suffering from their inability to give economic benefits to their citizens thus resulting in frustrations and disillusionment. In contrast, China’s growing assistance to poor, non-democratic countries in East, Southeast Asia and elsewhere has cast a shadow over democracies’ poor record in offering assistance to fellow democracies. Now that the Obama administration has virtually given a certificate of good conduct to China by saying that “the relationship between the United States and China will shape the 21st century”, the message that democracies in trouble is getting is not hard to discern. The global economic crisis has shown just how co-dependent the US has become with China. Beijing seems to be setting the agenda.

The democratic world has to find a way to deal with these new challenges. Though there are various platforms that bring democratic nations together, the community feeling is still not strong. It is imperative to convince the world that democracy, to quote Amartya Sen, “remains the only system of government that commands global respect”. It is equally important to shed a sense of despondency. The crisis in democracy is not a crisis of democracy. And the only way to remedy democracies’ imperfections is to have more democracy, not less. ■

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What's New

China Announces its first local government bond sales

For the first time in its history, local governments in China will be allowed to issue bonds. This year, China plans to float 200 billion yuan of local government bonds. This is in response to the current financial crisis where Chinese policy makers are working towards implementing proactive fiscal policies that benefit local demand and enhance public facility investment. The three year bonds issued by the Ministry of Finance are tradable on the inter-bank market and securities exchanges. The first local government bond sale amounting

to RMB 3 billion was offered by the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. It was reported that the proceeds of this bond sale would go towards financing the economic stimulus package, insulate schools and hospitals against earthquakes, build roads, renovate old districts and construct low rent houses. Following Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Anhui province, Henan province and Sichuan province offered local government bond sales. Sichuan province offered 9 billion yuan worth of local government bond sale.

Plans for the biggest single city in Australasia

A royal commission in New Zealand has proposed significant changes for the country's largest city Auckland. The commission recommends the scrapping of all councils in the metropolitan region and to replace it with one greater Auckland parliament to be headed by a powerful elected Mayor. Presently the area is governed by the Auckland Regional council and seven territorial councils. A spokesperson from the Royal Commission said that the new Auckland council would comprise a powerful mayor, 23

councillors of which ten will be elected by all Aucklanders, ten from the six local councils and three Maori councillors. The new super mayor would have significant powers. He or she could appoint the deputy mayor and chairpersons of each council committee, propose the budget and initiate and formulate major policy for the council. The proposal is now awaiting the approval of the government. If approved, Greater Auckland would come into existence by the end of 2010.

Mexico to crack down on mayors linked to drug cartel

The Mexican police recently arrested ten mayors and other high ranking officials from Michoacan state, the home state of President Felipe Calderón. They include the mayors of Apatzingan, Tepalcatepec, Arteaga, Uruapan, Coahuayana, Zitacuaro, Aquila, Buenavista, Ciudad Hidalgo and Tumbiscatio. All these mayors belong to the Mexican opposition parties. The office of the attorney general said that the mayors

were under investigation for the past six months. They were arrested for leaking information and extending protection to a violent cartel called *La Familia de Michoacan*. The influence of the Mayors on the law enforcement agencies being enormous and given their integral place in Mexican society, the arrests of the mayors have been hailed by many as a bold move by President Felipe Calderón, in his war against drug cartels.

New law on decentralization in Ecuador

A new Law on Territorial Organization and Decentralization is being finalized in Ecuador that is expected to give a boost to the ongoing decentralization process in the country. The Bill has to receive the consensus of the Local government representatives like the Consortium of Provincial Councils of Ecuador (Concope), the Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities (AME)

and the National Council of Parish Juntas (Conajuopare). The new Law specifies exclusive and concurrent competencies at every government level, specifies funding of provincial bodies that can access 15 per cent of the State permanent resources and 5 per cent of the non permanent resources. The new law is expected to enhance and take forward the decentralization process in Ecuador.

US mayors happy with Obama's 100 days in office

The US Conference of Mayors issued a statement, on the occasion of President Obama completing his first 100 days in office, praising the administration's strong focus on urban issues. Such a focus, the statement conveyed, had been lacking for many years. An important element stressed by the Conference of Mayors was the administration's initiatives in making the urban centers a significant catalyst for the nation's economic recovery. The first hundred days saw a number of significant White House initiatives like

the newly created Office of Urban Affairs, affordable housing programs and 'excellent communications' which the Mayors enjoyed with the White House. With close cooperation between the White House and the US Conference of Mayors, Tom Cochran, chief executive, the 'Conference of Mayors', said that they would work towards bringing many important initiatives on the fast track. The US Conference of Mayors is a national group representing more than 1200 medium to big city Mayors.

Year of women in local government in Australia

The Australian local government sector has designated 2010 as the Year of Women in local government. This is to celebrate and encourage women's advancement into senior management positions. This announcement was made following a national forum organized by the Local Government Managers Australia held in Canberra and attended by representatives of local, state and commonwealth governments, local government association and professional bodies. There were five key themes in defining the Year of Women in Local Government. These

include: removing structural barriers to advancing women into senior management positions; improving the image of local government as an 'employer of choice' for women; preparing women to lead in local government; affirming women's rights to be 'at the table'; and implementing effective evaluation methods for measuring meaningful progress. A working group consisting of over ten representatives from the local, state and commonwealth government, local government associations and professional bodies have been formed to facilitate the process.

Dublin to have directly elected mayor in 2010

Dublin will have a directly elected Mayor in 2010. Earlier, the Irish Mayors were elected by the municipal councils for a period of one year. In the new set up, the Mayor will be known as the 'regional Mayor of Dublin' and will hold position for a four year period. The Mayor will have greater powers and responsibilities and stronger direct legitimacy. The powers will be expanded to the four local authorities of Dublin: the city of Dublin,

the regions of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin. This move is hailed as a significant step forward in the progress of local democracy in Ireland. It is expected that the extent of success of this initiative will deepen the interest of other Irish like Cork, Limerick, Waterford or Galway, to introduce such a change in its own local government system.

Recession hits local government jobs in UK

The economic recession has led to an estimated loss of 670 council jobs in England. A research published by the UK Local Government Association reported that three out of five councils have made staff reductions and a similar proportion is having plans to cut posts in the course

of the year. It is expected that the rate of job loss will continue next year as well. Senior and middle management posts have also been affected. The research by the Local Government Association also predicts income to drop by 2.5 billion pounds this financial year.

India and Norway to sign MoU on local governance

The ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Kingdom of Norway will sign a Memorandum of Understanding for mutual cooperation on local governance. It is envisaged that this will enable strengthening of cooperation between the two countries in the areas of local

governance and women in politics. A key element of the MoU is to encourage skills transfer between the two countries for strengthening local governance. India and Norway plan to set up a Joint Forum at the Ministerial level and a Joint Working Group at the official level.

Hiroshima, Nagasaki Mayors for complete nuclear disarmament

The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have called for complete disarmament by 2020 and supported US President Barack Obama's commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons. They conveyed this in their respective speeches at the preparatory committee session of the United Nations of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. The Mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatoshi Akiba, in his speech at

the UN headquarters coined the term 'Obamajority' to refer to the large number of nuclear abolitionists around the world. The Mayor of Nagasaki, Tomihisa Taue, highlighted the significant role played by the atomic bomb survivors, called hibakusha, in highlighting the ongoing human tragedy. The Mayor pressed for the nuclear safety summit to be held in Nagasaki, which Washington is planning to hold within a year.

Green arch initiative in Brazil

The government of Brazil will be paying small farmers up to \$51 per month to plant trees in the deforested Amazon parts lying in 43 municipalities. The plan was announced by the Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. As part of the new plan, local officials will be trained

to prevent illegal logging and land grabbing in the municipalities. Brazil plans to reduce deforestation by 70 per cent by 2018. Similar initiatives are already in place at the federal and state levels where small farmers are paid to preserve the forests.

Sweden to provide stimulus package to local governments

The government of Sweden plans to provide SEK 17 billion stimulus package to local municipalities and counties. The centre-right coalition government said that it will provide a one time payment of SEK 7 billion to local governments in 2010 and then increase the amount

by two SEK 5 billion injections in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The aim is to protect Sweden's welfare operations given the economic crisis which has affected the country's labor market and financial outlook negatively.

Forum on decentralized governance and conflict prevention

The Barcelona Forum on Decentralized Governance and Conflict Prevention was held in Barcelona from 6th to 8th July 2009. It is a joint program of the Catalan Government (Generalitat de Catalunya), the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) and the Catalan International

Institute for Peace (ICIP). The focus of the Forum was on the role of decentralized governance and sub national governments in conflict prevention, given that decentralization and local governance are instruments for conflict prevention and peace building.

■ The Big Story ■

Local Governments and Peace Building

Today the responses and strategies to prevent and resolve conflict and post conflict reconstruction are heavily loaded on the side of the national governments, military and para military forces and international interventions. The potential of local governments in peace building and conflict management is yet to gain significant attention and priority among many national and international policy decision making processes and implementation. This is despite the fact that they are the government closest to the people and represent a key instrumentality through which local communities can be mobilized for peace building, conflict management and post conflict reconstruction. For example, during the inter religious violence in the state of Gujarat, India, in 2002, the village of Hilol, was untouched by the violence¹. This was despite the fact that the village was dominated by Muslim population. To prevent the violence from spreading to their village the democratically elected village council president together with the villagers formed groups comprising both Hindus and Muslims to patrol the village throughout the night. A former president said, “Elsewhere, people may have lost the feeling of brotherhood and goodwill but we do not want to burn each other’s shops in our village”.

Peace, security and disarmament constituted one of the key priorities that the Heads of State and Government pledged at the Millennium Development Summit held in September 2000 at the United Nations Headquarters. This was reflected in the Resolution 55/2 adopted by the General Assembly on the United Nations Millennium Declaration on 8 September 2000. In discussing the strategies for countries affected by conflict, the United Nations Millennium Project report to the UN Secretary General², emphasized that without adequate strategies for preventing conflict, a large part of the national Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - based strategies will be thrown off course by violent conflict. It goes further to report that out of the countries farthest from reaching the MDG goals, 22 were in or emerging from conflict.

The Canada based International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) – Local Governments for Sustainability, in its Local Action agenda 21 highlights the areas where local governments can make a difference in

conflict prevention and in peace building. The Agenda states that within the framework of the Action Program for a Peace Culture under the UNESCO Culture of Peace Program, local governments can play a key role in the following areas:

- Promoting a culture of peace through education for all around conflict resolution without resorting to violence, access to education for minorities, dialogue and consensus building at the community level;
- Promoting sustainable economic and social development using participatory approaches to reduce economic and social inequalities while ensuring environmental sustainability;
- Improving law enforcement mechanisms/institutions in defense of human rights;
- Promoting equality among men and women, assist women-victims of violence;
- Promoting good governance: adopt participatory practices, curb corruption, promote citizen coexistence, encourage inter-sectoral dialogues, and engage the media responsibly; and
- Addressing the rights of minorities and the indigenous population.

There are various initiatives that many local governments, local government associations, academia etc. are taking for advancing the role and capacities of local governments for peace building and conflict management. Some of these are mentioned below.

The Hague Agenda on City Diplomacy is one such initiative. In June 2008, the first World Conference on City Diplomacy was organized in The Hague on the ‘Role of Local Governments in Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction’. This was organized by the United Cities and Local Governments, the city of The Hague and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, in close collaboration with the province and city of Barcelona and the Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights in the Peace Palace, The Hague. The Hague Agenda on City Diplomacy was drafted during this conference focusing on the local governments to play a proactive role in situations of violent conflict and contribute to peace, freedom and democracy. The Agenda sought to involve local governments and their associations to work in multilevel partnerships with central government, civil society organizations and government

institutions to work towards peace. A series of activities were proposed to be implemented as an outcome of this conference. These were: developing local government peace building initiative, getting recognition for the role of local governments in peace building, improving the quality of city diplomacy, promoting a culture of peace and assisting local governments in situations of violent conflict.

The Municipal Alliance for Peace in the Middle East (MAP), Jerusalem was launched in 2005. The MAP is envisioned to be a peace building initiative and a framework through which Israel and Palestine Municipalities with the support of international partners can implement projects on a variety of areas like culture and youth, environment, economic development and municipal management. This is being led by the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities, the Union of Local Authorities of Israel and is supported by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and the United Nations Development Programme as part of their Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People. The MAP continues to play an active role in their peace building initiatives.

In December 2008 they organized the Israel- Palestine Seminar on Old City Rehabilitation and the Israel-Palestine Seminar on Photogrammetry.

To support local governments to carry out their roles and responsibilities, especially in fragile states, The Hague Academy for Local Governance provides tailor made course on 'Local Governance and Peace building'. The course focuses on the role of local governments in building state legitimacy and the specific challenges local governments face in fragile situations. The course is intended for elected representatives, managers and staff members of municipalities, and national governments from fragile states. These target group are exposed to the following course modules: Security and rule of law focusing on municipal negotiation, facilitation and dialogue skills, gender & minority rights, etc.; Service delivery focusing on access to services, fair and equal distribution, health care, education, etc.; Participation & accountability focusing on community driven approaches, inclusion, resettlement rehabilitation etc.; Economic development focusing on creating a vision for economic acceleration, livelihoods, etc; Leadership focusing on empowering local leadership, financial and human resource management; Decentralization focusing on its practices, resources and allocations, aid modalities etc.

In USA, the Institute for Local Government which is a research affiliate of the Californian State Association of Counties and the League of California Cities, has brought out a pamphlet titled 'Alternative Dispute Resolution: Navigating Special Legal Issues in Public agency Disputes'. This pamphlet discusses Alternative Dispute Resolution between local government agencies and is a key resource for local governments.

This year the International Day of Peace (commemorated annually on 21 September) will focus on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. On the occasion of the One-Hundred-Day countdown to the International Day of Peace, the Mayor of the City of Hiroshima and President of the Mayors for Peace, Tadatoshi Akiba, sent a message addressed to the Mayors and Citizens throughout the World: ".....This year the United Nations is calling for the **International Day of Peace** to be focused on Disarmament with the theme: **We Must Disarm! Take action for a world free of nuclear weapons**. We welcome the United Nation's initiative and call on all our members, and citizens everywhere, to take this opportunity to draw public attention

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to this vital cause and the importance of a Nuclear Weapons Free World. We ask you to join with other activities around the world which will be observing a minute of silence at 12 noon on September 21st. As a Nuclear Weapons Free World is the very reason for the existence of Mayors for Peace and our 2020 Vision Campaign, please use the One-Hundred-Day Countdown to make outstanding plans for the period leading up to the International Day of Peace....³" On August 9, the Mayor of Nagasaki has called for a global ban on nuclear arms.

For creating a nuclear weapons free world and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and building peace, the national governments and international bodies have to integrate the role of local governments into their system. Simultaneously local governments all over the world have to take positive steps to integrate peace building initiatives and conflict prevention and management strategies into their work. This is a big challenge for the local governments indeed.

References

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The Practitioner's Page

Sunethra Ranasinghe was elected Mayor of Dehiwala-Ratmalana, a suburban community in the South of Colombo, in 2006.

Her political career dates back to 1977 when she entered national level politics. In the year 1982 she held the portfolio as the Deputy Minister of Health, Minister of Health the following year while also being appointed as the first Minister for Women's Affairs in the same year. In 1989 during President Ranasinghe Premadasa's regime she held office as the Minister of Education Services and was responsible for the implementation of welfare programs aimed at school children – State sponsored mid day meals, textbooks and uniforms.

With the introduction of the preferential system Mayor Ranasinghe faced the challenge of continuing at the national level as her electorate is small with a voter base of only 64,000. As a result she is now focusing on local government to serve her immediate constituents.

The Dehiwala-Ratmalana municipal limit covers a geographical area of 2117 hectares and has a population of 215,601 and 44,967 households. It is an urban area with a large commercial presence and houses approximately 3000 medium and large scale industries. Its main source of income is registration of lands, stamp duties, assessment taxes and commercial advertisements (hoardings, banners, bill boards etc.) and the annual income in the past year was Rs. 574 million and expenses amounted to Rs. 570 million.

What systems are in place to manage council finances? And what measures are being taken to curb malpractices and corruption?

We are presently in the process of computerizing the finance department and related operations. Staff personnel have



Sunethra Ranasinghe

been asked to approach private service providers so as to decide the best software to suit our day to day operational requirements. At present, assessments and tax payments are recorded in a database. This has expedited the services to the public and improved the revenue of the council.

I, together with the respective heads of departments, strive to provide the best services to the public. In the process we are trying to put an end to certain malpractices and ensuring the adherence to rules and regulations. As a result I may have lost the favours of some staff as well as Council members, but I am only sticking to transparency and fair play. After all, when I took up office, my mission was to serve my constituents and improve the operations and resources of this Local Authority. The Dehiwala-Ratmalana area is urban with

many commercial buildings. In the past certain malpractices led to the approval of structures that cannot be supported by existing infrastructure such as drainage, sewage, recreational facilities etc. As a result of these previous corrupt practices, we are today faced with the challenge of continuing service delivery or taking necessary legal action against unauthorized ventures. This has been a drag on both human and financial resources of the local authority.

What mechanisms are adopted by the Local Authority to engage citizens' concerns and needs?

My constituency consists of 29 wards and there are community development committees set up by the Local Authority to bring citizens together where they can raise their demands and concerns. Since the area is largely urban and consists of people with varying income levels, the committees do not function the way they do in a more rural Local Authority. This gap is being bridged to a large extent by welfare societies formed by a group of neighbours coming together. I personally receive various complaints, concerns regarding LG services and public's needs through these welfare societies.

I have also allocated every Wednesday as public day; where anyone can walk in to meet me, air her/his grievances or clarify concerns over Local Government related services. When I first took up office, people used to walk in with varying concerns and most of them had no relation to Local Government. There is lack of political education in our society. Consequently the public assumes that local authorities are a resource to find employment, hoodwink regulations and jurisdiction, an entity that can solve personal disputes

etc. A large part of my time during 'public day' was initially spent to educate the public and clear misconceptions.

This is my third year in office and I'm pleased to note that people who come to me are more aware of what Local Government is and their concerns and needs are specific to the services provided by us.

A 'city development plan' was approved and gazetted recently. This plan has been a result of years of planning and designing by the Urban Development Authority in collaboration with the Local Authority and carries views of both the public and private sector. This plan defines commercial and residential areas and provides an outline of improvements and developments that would take place within the municipal limits.

Despite being a woman in a patriarchal society you've had a long political career. What in your opinion is the biggest challenge for a woman interested in political career in Sri Lanka? Irrespective of class, race or gender, an individual keen on a political career should have the courage and strength of character to face challenges whatever be the circumstances. Also one has to have a strong financial stability as during the election campaigns the public expects the candidate to be able to spend extravagantly. Sadly, this has become a tradition in Sri Lankan politics.

A woman must be able to stand up against mud slinging, character assassination and political bullying. If one has a strong will and strong personality, then one would be able to lead a political career.

Interviewed by
Nirmi Vitarana, Colombo, Sri Lanka

THE PRACTITIONER'S PAGE

Global News

African mayors adopt Nairobi declaration to combat climate change

At a conference organized in Nairobi by the UN-HABITAT, Mayors from 33 capital and major cities from Africa resolved to integrate climate adaptation and mitigation plans into their city development strategies. The conference was organized to discuss the regional and global roles of Mayors. The Mayors pledged their active participation in the global climate change development processes that will culminate in the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December. Through this, they hope to make

the voices of African cities heard in the global arena. The Mayors voiced concern in the meeting that though Africa has contributed very less to the global warming, the African cities are severely affected by the increased green house gas emissions in other parts of the world. Samba Faal, the mayor of Banjul, a coastal area, raised the concern that even a one meter rise in sea level close to his city would lead to a 50 per cent loss in landmass thus affecting human settlements, health and food security.

Raanana municipality leads in Israel's recycling efforts

The Raanana municipality is credited to be the first Israeli city to recycle plastic bags and still continues to lead in Israel's recycling efforts. In its efforts at functioning as a green city for protecting the environment, the Raanana municipality focuses on investing huge resources to ensure environmental protection, maintaining a high quality of life in the city and encouraging its

residents to follow an environmentally friendly lifestyle. Through recycling of the plastic bags, the Municipality seeks to reduce the grave ecological damage caused by these non-biodegradable bags. Raanana is also the first city to recycle paper, cardboard, expired medications, CDs and DVDs and hopes to include recycling of clothes as well in the near future.

Largest municipal solar project in California

A five mega watt solar photovoltaic plant that will be set up in California will be the largest municipal solar project in the state. To be constructed by Recurrent Energy, the objective is to provide energy to the city at a cost of about 2 million dollars annually. The Mayor of the State has announced that through this one of the major commitments to reduce greenhouse gases will be met. The project once commissioned will triple San

Francisco's solar energy production helping the state move towards more clean and renewable energy. Recurrent Energy will be developing the project and bears the cost of installing and operating the plant initially. California however will not incur any upfront cost but will enter into a purchase agreement with the company buying the plant's energy at a cost of 23.5 cents per kilowatt hour and an additional three per cent per year.

Online municipal library

A new online Municipal library, www.bibliotecamunicipal.org, has been launched in the website of the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations (FLACMA). It has over 3500 downloadable documents dealing with local governments. The library has

reports, studies and projects on local governments sorted by themes. They include decentralization, local finances, culture, human rights, municipal diplomacy, economic development etc. the languages include English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, German and Italian.

Eurocities review role of cities in European neighborhood policy

The Eurocities conference was held on 25th and 26th June 2009 at Tbilisi, Georgia's capital city, to review the role of cities in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The conference was attended by the European Union and eastern ENP cities, associations of local authorities from the region, and local NGOs. The following areas were identified by the eastern cities where key learnings

could be gained through cooperation with western cities: how to build the professional capacity of city administrators, how to develop city infrastructures and management, how to improve the provision of social services at local level and how to make local level and central governments work better together.

The Local AIDS Council Stakeholder Seminar

The eThekweni Metro in collaboration with the Centre for Municipal Research and Advice (CMRA) conducted the local AIDS Council stakeholders' seminar on 24th and 25th February 2009. Seven municipalities from South Africa, who are part of the CMRA's project on 'Decentralized Response to HIV and AIDS in South Africa', gave a presentation on their structure and functions. The South African National AIDS Council, Provincial Councils on AIDS from North West,

Limpopo, Kwa Zulu Natal and Eastern Cape provinces and the South African Local Government Association also provide their inputs and policy frameworks that could be used as guidelines to address HIV and AIDS issues at the local level. CMRA is an initiative of two associations of municipalities - the South African Local Government Association and the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities.

National conference of municipalities of Mexico launched

The *Conferencia Nacional de Municipios de México* (CONAMM) (National Conference of Municipalities of Mexico) was established on 6 February through an agreement between the *Asociación de Autoridades Locales de México* (AALMAC), the *Asociación de Alcaldes de Acción Nacional* (ANAC) and the *Asociación de Municipios de México* (AMMAC). The National

Conference intends to become the meeting point for and the first step towards unification of all Mexican local government associations. The conference aims to provide municipalities in Mexico a single voice to advocate with the central and federal governments. This year the CONAMM will be chaired by the AMMAC and in 2010 by the AALMAC.

Municipal local economic development summit 2009 in South Africa

The Municipal Local Economic Development Summit 2009 of South Africa was held on 20th and 21st July 2009 at the Negotiating Chamber Council at Emperor's Palace. The summit titled 'A New Era: Service Delivery through Local Economic Development' was organized by the Local Government Business Network in association with the National Department of Provincial and Local Government, National Treasury and the Gauteng Provincial Department of Local Government. This summit is considered to be the biggest ever summit

in the country to focus on local economic development and infrastructure at the Municipal level. The summit provides an opportunity for local economic development practitioners and decision makers from local government, non governmental organizations, entrepreneurs, business development consultants, regional economic development organizations, provincial and national governments, to network, share and learn from best practices in South Africa and across the world.

The XII march of municipalities to Brasilia

The XII March of Municipalities to Brasilia was organized by the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) on July 14-16 with the goal of strengthening the municipal movement in Brazil. The event was attended by thousands of mayors, councilors, municipal secretaries and international participants. President Lula addressed the closing session which was also attended by senators, governors, state and federal parliamentarians and ministers. The March provides a platform of

debate to address the demands of municipal administrators. This March is a yearly event. A significant achievement has been the consolidation of an increase of 1 per cent on transfer of income tax and tax on industrialized products for the Fund for Participation of Municipalities. This aid enabled the payment of salary and other expenses of the employees. Paulo Roberto Ziulkoski, President (CNM) was the chief architect of the March.

The international conference of innovative cities

The International Conference of Innovative Cities, IC-IC 2010 will be held in the city of Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, from the 10th to the 13th of March, 2010. The conference aims to create a global network of people engaged in innovations in cities and searching for a permanent exchange of innovative technologies among connected cities. The Conference is co-promoted by the

Federation of Industries of the State of Parana, the City Hall of Curitiba, the City Halls of Maringá, Ponta Grossa and Cascavel, all from Paraná State, Brazil, with partnership of the City Hall of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State, with UNDESA Institutional Support and some other innovative cities from other continents.

Bolivia to decentralize powers under the new constitution

Through a referendum Bolivia has provided for decentralization of powers to the Municipalities. The decentralization of powers will be both from the centre and the country's nine departments to its 320 municipalities. Despite conservative opponents to the measure, the new Bolivian constitution received 60 per cent of the votes. Some of the important measures included in

the new constitution are the removal of term limits, the altering of the composition of the congress, provisions to affirm state ownership of natural resources and the location of the national capital to be open to interpretation and enhance municipal autonomy so as to act as a check on the powerful regional government.

Asia Pacific cities summit to be held in Korea

The Asia Pacific cities summit 2009 will be hosted by Incheon, from 15th to 17th September 2009. Incheon is the third largest metropolitan city in Korea and leads in creative urban development in the areas of transport infrastructure, urban and natural environmental integration and international trade. Incheon is also considered the most dynamic and innovative Metropolis. The summit will have various streams with the Mayor's

stream to focus on issues specific to Mayors worldwide and the Business and Young Professionals' Stream to focus on the issue of creating vision both personally and within business that will aid the future of the Asia Pacific region summit. Mr Chang-Koo Lee, Incheon's Deputy Mayor, visited Australia last month to officially launch the Summit in both Brisbane and Sydney.

Report on local government lessons from past recessions

The Washington based International City/County Management Association released a report titled "Navigating the Fiscal Crisis: Tested Strategies for Local Government Leaders". This report analyses successful strategies local governments had adopted and implemented during past recessions and also recommends ways that can help stimulate the current economy. The report was commissioned by the International City/County Management Association and

developed by Alliance for Innovations (a partnership of ICMA, the Innovation Groups and Arizona State University). An online resource has also been created to track the strategies of twelve communities and how they fare the recession. Visitors are welcome to track their progress, participate in discussions and share strategies on the **Alliance for Innovation's Navigating the Financial Crisis Wiki**.

The Copenhagen local government climate change summit

The Local Government Climate Change Leadership Summit was held from 2nd to 4th June 2009 at Copenhagen. The summit saw over 700 representatives from municipalities and regions from more than 60 countries engage in national and local dialogues on the climate roadmap. A key outcome of the summit was a call from local and regional governments to the Parties of COP 15 to encourage the mayors and local governments to accept the challenge and responsibility to lead actions to combat

global warming. This call was coordinated by the local government associations present in the summit. It was presented by Kadir Topba^e, Mayor of Istanbul and David Cadman, the Vice Mayor of Vancouver. The summit was organized by the local government Denmark in close cooperation with ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability and United Cities and Local Governments, and other global and regional local government associations and international organizations.

The commonwealth local government conference 2009

The Commonwealth Local Government Conference was held in Freeport, Grand Bahama from 11 to 14 May 2009. The main objective was to highlight some of the recent thinking and innovations in local government, exposure to the good practices from across the Commonwealth and see case studies of successful local government projects in Grand Bahama. By hosting the conference in the Caribbean region for the first time, it was expected to provide a unique opportunity to politicians and practitioners from the region to meet peers from across the Commonwealth,

and the rest of the Commonwealth an opportunity to hear about local government innovations in the region and examples of small states successfully running local governments. The conference was attended by 550 participants from 48 countries. The Freeport Declaration on improving Local Governance: the Commonwealth vision, the outcome of the conference, focused on the following areas: the local government improvement agenda, consolidating the reinforcement of local government at a time of world economic downturn and resource constraints, and strategies to improve local government.

UPAZILA PARISHAD ELECTIONS HELD IN BANGLADESH

In January 2009, Upazila Parishad elections were held in Bangladesh after nearly two decades – such elections were last held in 1990. Upazilas are sub-districts and there are 481 Upazilas in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh Constitution mandates the formation of elected local government bodies at each administrative unit. Zila, upazila and unions are already declared administrative units as are Paurashavas and City Corporations. Nevertheless, no elected government in the past came forward to set up the Upazila Parishad. It was the military dictator, General Ershad, who first introduced the Upazila in 1983. Despite constitutional compulsion, Zila Parishad elections were never held in Bangladesh.

The first BNP government abolished the Upazila system in 1992, mainly because General Ershad, its arch enemy, introduced the system. However, in the last decade and a half, the idea of a strong local government, particularly an elected Upazila Parishad, gained much popular support in Bangladesh.

During its two-year (January 2007 – December 2008) reign, the Caretaker Government (CTG) set up a “Committee to Revitalize and Strengthen Local Government.” The Committee, in addition to recommending specific measures to strengthen the local government system, drafted laws for Zila, Upazila and Union Parishads as well as Paurashava and City Corporations, which were promulgated as Ordinances by the CTG.

The Committee also drafted a law to set up a Local Government Commission. The CTG accepted the draft, promulgated another Ordinance and actually formed a three-member Commission.

In August 2008, during the CTG reign, elections were held in nine Paurashavas and City Corporations. Although the CTG insisted on holding the Upazila elections before the Parliament elections scheduled to be held on December 29, 2008, all the political parties vehemently opposed the idea. Finally, after much negotiations, Upazila elections were held on January 22, 2009 following the Parliament elections.

To the dismay of many, the newly elected government, under the Premiership of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, refused to ratify the local government Ordinances promulgated by the CTG, which is a legal requirement. Instead, the ninth Parliament, in its first session, revived, with some amendments, the Upazila Parishad Law enacted in 1998 by the previous Awami League government. The law designated the Members of Parliament (MPs) as advisers to the Upazila Parishad, and made it mandatory for the Parishad to heed their advice. Thus, the Upazila Parishad in Bangladesh is now under the controlling authority of the MPs. This has caused widespread uproar in the country.

Because of the non-ratification of the Local Government Commission Ordinance, the Commission also became defunct. This was also viewed by many as an ill-conceived decision.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has clear provisions for a strong local government. It calls for a local government system led by persons elected specifically for local bodies. In addition, separation of powers among the executive, legislature and judiciary is one of its fundamental features. Thus, giving the controlling authority of the Upazila Parishad to MPs is a clear violation of the country’s Constitution.

As for the other local bodies, the terms of the Union Parishad and many of the Paurashavs have already expired. The terms of the Dhaka City Corporations, the largest local government body in the country, have also expired. The Parliament has not yet passed laws for these local government bodies, and as a result, the elections of these bodies are uncertain at this time.

- Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar



Election News

Elections in Jaffna and Vavuniya councils

The Sri Lankan Election Commission announced the elections for the Jaffna Municipal Council and the Vavuniya Urban Council to be held on August 8. This would be the first such elections in the north in the post-Prabhakaran scenario. In Jaffna alone, the number of registered voters in the Municipality area is over 100,000. On the

last day of filing the nominations, the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance submitted its list of 29 candidates' who would be contesting the Jaffna election. The ruling United People's Freedom Alliance, United National Party, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and two independent groups also filed their nominations.

Armenian mayoral election monitor arrested

Arshaluys Akobyan, the press photographer of Helsinki Association (participating organization for World Movement), was arrested in Yerevan, Armenia on June 5, in relation to his observing the Yerevan mayoral election on May 31. Mr. Akobyan and several others were denied entry into the polling booths and were physically threatened while trying to observe the election. Later in the day, Mr. Akobyan reported the matter in a statement addressed to the Special Investigation Department of the Office of

Prosecution General of Armenia. In the events that followed Mr. Akobyan was provided a summons late in the night which had no reference to his statement and was not officially signed. On questioning the validity of the summons on these grounds, he was forced to sign, taken to the police station and beaten. It has been reported that a suit has been brought against him as per Article 316, Part 1 of the Criminal Code of Armenia for violence against a representative of authorities. His arrest is upheld as 'preventative punishment'.

Malawi to conduct local elections in 2010

The government of Malawi has announced that it will hold the local elections in May 2010. This will be the first time that local elections will be held in a ten year period. A spokesperson for the country's electoral commission informed that the local elections will cost around US \$ 25 million and that they are looking to the government and foreign donors to finance the polls. The first ever local polls in Malawi were held in 2000 when the ex-president Bakili Muluzi was in power. The then governing party won nearly all the 680 seats

with a voter turnout of less than 15 per cent. The subsequent election in 2005 was cancelled by the government due to lack of funding and the claim that an election could not be held during the worst famine in the country's history. The presidential election was held this May and won by the incumbent President Bingu Wa Mutharika. This election which cost around 50 million dollars was funded by Britain and the United Nations Development Programme.

Opposition party wins mayoral election in Japan

The opposition Democratic party of Japan won the mayoral election held in Chiba city. The new Mayor, Toshihito Kumagai is the youngest mayor at 31 years old. The election was held following the arrest of the former mayor in a

corruption scandal. The opposition has earlier won two other major cities, Nagoya and Saitama, in April and May. The election to the Tokyo metropolitan assembly was held in July.

Women gain in the local election in Morocco

In the local elections held on June 12, the new Moroccan political party comprising King Mohammed's staunchest supporters won most of the seats. Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa announced that the governing Istiqlal (Independence) party received 5292 seats (19.1 per cent) and the Authenticity and Modernity Party won 6015 seats (21.7 per cent). The voter turnout was 52.4 per cent. A key element of this local election is the prominent role played by

women. Twelve per cent of the seats in the local council ballot were set aside for women in the electoral reforms that were brought out last year. A total of 20,458 women out of 130,223 applications were candidates in the local elections. The interior minister announced that 3406 women were elected in the polls as against 127 in 2003. Also, 18 per cent of the winners are under the age of 35.

Municipal elections delayed in Saudi Arabia

The state media has reported that municipal elections in Saudi Arabia will be delayed by two years. This two year delay will begin from October. The last municipal elections were held in 2005 which was also the country's first nationwide polls since its foundation in 1932. Women in Saudi Arabia were looking forward to taking part in the coming elections. Women have been traditionally barred from voting or standing

for office. But this time round they were allowed to stand in the next vote. A local newspaper quoted Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz, the interior minister and half-brother of Abdullah, as saying that Saudi Arabia had no need for women members in parliament or elections. Human rights and opposition activists in Saudi Arabia have sent a petition to Abdullah advocating political and judicial reform and holding of elections.

Local elections in Croatia

This was the first election that allowed voters to directly elect Mayors, county prefects and municipal heads along with the county assemblies and over 550 city and town councils. While the ruling conservative Christian Democratic Union won majority of the rural counties, it was the Social Democrats and the centre-left parties that received a majority in the larger cities. In the

second round of local elections only two winners have had previous experience as Mayor, while the rest will lead for the first time. The capital city of Zagreb saw its incumbent Mayor, Milan Bandic, of the Social democrats win for the fourth time in office receiving more than 62 per cent of the votes. The voter turnout in the second round of elections was 26.5 per cent.

Conservative party wins in UK local government elections

The opposition conservative party had a clear sweep of the partial local government elections in the United Kingdom held in June to the 34 councils and the mayors of Doncaster, North Tyneside and Hartlepool. The ruling party lost the remaining four counties it was holding and the two Mayoralties. The last time the opposition parties had control over these areas was in the late 1970s.

The election results are reported to be a reflection of the poor performance of the Prime Minister. The conservatives won 1531 seats with a gain of 244 seats. The Labor party won 178 seats with a loss of 291 seats. It lost its traditional strongholds like Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire.

Local government election in Guyana to be held in November

The government of Guyana is planning to hold the local government election by November 30 this year. Dr. Roger Luncheon, Head of the Presidential Secretariat, informed that the Local government elections 2009 will be held under a new statutory framework. A special committee has been established to consider the Bills relating to

the statutory framework of local government. The last local government election was held in 1994. The five pieces of legislation before the Special Select Committee are the Fiscal Transfer Bill; Municipal and District Councils (Amendment) Bill; the Local Government Commission Bill; and the Local Government (Amendment) Bill.

Latin American election statistics

A major work has been done to catalogue elections in Latin America since independence at the municipal, state and federal levels. This electronic resource consists of a series of volumes on selected Latin American countries. The statistics for each election cover number of seats won in congressional elections, or numbers of municipalities won by specific parties. The focus is on identifying sources of electoral statistics and information on events affecting election outcomes; on the emergence and development of political parties; on electoral code changes; and on the roles of women, indigenous populations, and religious organizations in each country's electoral politics.

Each volume includes general information covering more than one election; a chronology from that country's date of independence to the present with elections, events, and sources of statistics; a list of related acronyms; and a bibliography of sources referred to in the chronology. A separate glossary provides English definitions of Spanish terms used in relation to elections.

Latin American Election Statistics is based on the extensive collection on Latin American elections in the Social Sciences and Humanities Library at the University of California, San Diego. Most of this material is readily available through interlibrary loan...

Local Government Election Calendar

Date	Country	Type of Election
October 2009	Botswana	Local government
October 2009	Mauritius	Urban local government
December 2009		Rural local government
October 2009	Portugal	Municipal
13-27 October 2009	Tasmania (Australia)	Local government
15 October 2009	Yukon (Canada)	Municipal
October 2009	Luxembourg	Municipal
15 November 2009	Kosovo	Local election
1 November 2009	Quebec-Canada	Municipal election
November 2009	Peru	Municipal election
November 2009	Denmark	Municipal election
November 2009	Namibia	Local government election
December 2009	Uzbekistan	Municipal council election
December 2009	Azerbaijan	Local council
6 December 2009	Bolivia	Municipal election

- ◆ A conference focusing on “Creativity – the power to change the world” will take place at Korea Press Centre, Seoul on August 12, 2009. This is jointly organized by the Seoul Metropolitan government, Seoul Development Institute, Samsung Economic Research Institute, Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations and Syracuse University. The conference seeks to address issues regarding sustainable growth with reflections on Seoul Creative city governance focusing over the last three years.
- ◆ A conference was organized on 10 March 2009 at the embassy of Japan in London involving representatives from fifteen UK local authorities and local government related organizations plus a number of representatives from UK based Japanese organizations. The objective was to discuss issues on the local authority links between the UK and Japan. The conference was organized in the context of the year long events to celebrate Japan-UK 150, the 150th anniversary of the first diplomatic ties between the two countries.
- ◆ The Metropolitan Council of Dunkerque and the European Cities & Towns (ESCT) Campaign is holding the 6th European Sustainable Cities & Towns Conference, in Dunkerque, France, from 19 to 21 May 2010. This conference will review and push forward the progress and achievements of the European local governments in the field of sustainable development, explore ways in which local sustainability can provide an answer to the ongoing economic, social and climate crisis and how it can be implemented at the European level. Local government leaders, representatives of local government networks, European institutions and NGOs are expected to take part in this conference.
- ◆ The Local Government New Zealand Annual Conference was held at the Christchurch Convention centre, New Zealand from 26th to 29th July 2009. The theme of the conference was Local Government: Our Place in the World.
- ◆ An international conference on ‘New Towns in Egypt: the Way Ahead’ was organized from 28 to 30 March in Alexandria, Egypt. The conference provided a platform to evaluate thirty years of the Egyptian experiences in new urban communities, the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats as compared to existing cities and towns. It also compared local and international experiences with regard to new urban communities and proposed mechanism to promote development of new urban communities
- ◆ The Nicis Institute, Amsterdam Innovation Motor, Delft University of Technology, Transumo and Velo Mondial have developed a master class on Sustainable Urban Mobility. The class will be held Amsterdam the Netherlands on September 14-16, 2009. The key question that will be addressed in the master class is how can sustainable mobility contribute to quality of life in urban areas?

NETWORKING

The **EUROCITIES** is the network of major European cities. Its areas of active intervention are economic development and cohesion policy, provision of public services, environment, transport and mobility, employment and social affairs, culture, education, information and knowledge society, governance and international cooperation. <http://www.eurocities.eu/main.php>

The Association of Austrian Cities and Towns represents the cities of Austria (250 cities), local authorities and towns. In 1998 this Association was officially recognized in the Austrian Constitution. In accordance with tradition, the Mayor of Vienna is the President of the Association. The office of the Association is housed in Austria's embassy to the European Union. The Association focuses its main task on communal lobbying in the federation and the provinces, cooperation in negotiations for the financial distribution of federal resources, observation of legislation enforcement and acting as spokesman in EU institutions. <http://www.staedtebund.gv.at/>

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) founded in 1901 comprises of Canada's larger cities, small urban and rural communities, and 18 provincial and territorial municipal associations. It has more than 1775 members and is the national voice of the municipal government. <http://www.fcm.ca/english/view.asp?x=1>

The Australian Local Government Association is a federation of state and territory local government associations and represents more than 609 councils across the country. It is the national voice of the local government. Its major activities include representation of local government on national bodies and ministerial councils, providing submissions to government and parliamentary inquiries, raising the profile and concerns of local government at the national level and providing forums for local government to guide the development of national local government policies. <http://www.alga.asn.au/about/>

The Japan Association of City Mayors comprises of the mayors of all Japanese cities. It was formerly known as the United Council of Western Regional Cities. They promote decentralization of powers, activities that expand the sources of local tax revenue and obtaining part of the national budget. The Association is legally entitled to submit to the Cabinet a written opinion or recommendation on a legislation that may affect local autonomy. <http://www.mayors.or.jp/jacm/forenglish/jacm-index.html>

The South African Local Government Association enjoys the mandate of South Africa's new Constitution which provides for a vital role for organized local government in South Africa. They can participate in intergovernmental structures and can thereby influence national and provincial legislation. Their major roles include transforming local governments to enable it to fulfill its development role, raising the profile of local government, ensure full participation of women in local government, provide legal assistance to its members etc. <http://www.salga.net/home.asp?pid=2>



News in Brief

GNLG Secretariat & Editorial Office
 Institute of Social Sciences
 8, Nelson Mandela Road
 Vasant Kunj
 New Delhi - 110070
 India
 Tel: 91-11-43158800
 91-11-43158801
 Fax: 91-11-43158850
 Email:
 issnd@vsnl.com
 www.issin.org

Editor:
 Ash Narain Roy

Assistant Editor:
 Dinoo Anna Mathew

Layout & Design:
 Joshy Jose

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- A new UDiTE award 2009 has been announced by UDiTE European Federation of Local government Chief Executives. The award aims at encouraging knowledge sharing between European municipalities. It recognizes innovative local government projects that have resulted in real and sustainable improvement. The awards are for four categories that show improvements in social well being, economic well being, environment well being and management. The awards will be announced on 5 October 2009.
- The Mayor of London Boris Johnson has officially launched the Story of London to celebrate the centuries of the capital's history. This would be a month long series of events with over 400 activities and would take place across London. Other activities include walking tours, film and jazz events, lectures and historical enactments including a Tudor river pageant traveling up the Thames from the Tower of London to Hampton Court Palace to commemorate the 500th anniversary of King Henry VIII's coronation.
- A study tour was organized for a delegation of mayors and town councilmen from Guatemala and Honduras to the Mexican municipality of Huamantla, by the International Republican Institute. Huamantla is designated the Magic Municipality by the Mexican federal government, a designation which is enjoyed only by 35 of Mexico's 2443 municipalities, that meets tourism, lodging, industry and agricultural standards.
- A settlement between the municipality of San Juan, Puerto Rico and the US Environmental Protection Agency was reached following a complaint against the municipality under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. The municipality had failed to determine whether the solid waste generated at the facility was hazardous waste leading to the improper handling and disposal of hazardous waste and used oils at one of its facilities. The municipality has now agreed to comply with the federal laws. Additionally it has paid a penalty of \$25,000 and agreed to spend more than \$100,000 to educate the public and other municipalities across the island on the environmental and health risks of improper handling of hazardous waste.
- To encourage people to use bikes instead of their cars and to provide support to local business during the current economic crisis, the Rhine city of Mannheim introduced a scheme where citizens can swap their old bicycles for new ones. The scheme is a joint initiative of the Mannheim city hall and Biotopia, an organization that focuses on unemployed and disadvantaged youth. The inspiration for the scheme came from the German government's 2500 euro offer to citizens who exchange their old bangers for more environment friendly cars.
- The Central European University in Budapest is organizing the summer course on Public Management of Urban Change in Transitional Cities from June 29 - July 10, 2009. This course will analyze the theoretical underpinnings of current urban policy, planning and management practices and provide course participants with a broad range of international case studies and practices that reflect the current state of the discipline.