

Parliament to decide on Musharraf and judges

Says Gillani

THE DAILY TIMES, Lahore

Parliament will make a decision on the restoration of sacked judges and the impeachment of President General Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister (PM) Yousaf Raza Gillani said on Wednesday.

The premier told APP after attending a South Asian Association for Regional Corporation (Saarc) seminar, 'Economic Freedom', that President Musharraf's future would be decided according to the Constitution. Gillani also visited former premier Nawaz Sharif at his Raiwind residence, Online reported.

The PM told the media that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) would continue pursuing a policy of reconciliation by taking all political

parties on board, adding that coalition partners would be consulted on all issues.

When asked whether the process of dialogue for reconciliation with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) was over, he said, "There are ups and downs in politics but the policy to seek reconciliation will continue."

About the MQM's threatening statements, he said, "We don't believe in the politics of bullying others."

Regarding the recent violence in Multan, he said, "The power and flour crises are the result of the wrong policies of the previous regime. The present government will overcome all these problems with the co-operation of the people."

Multan violence: Gillani said the

protesters involved in the violence wanted to divert people's attention from the real issues, adding that they probably targeted Multan because it was his hometown. Gillani said peace was vital for the economic development of the country, and urged people to remain peaceful and foil the evil designs of saboteurs.

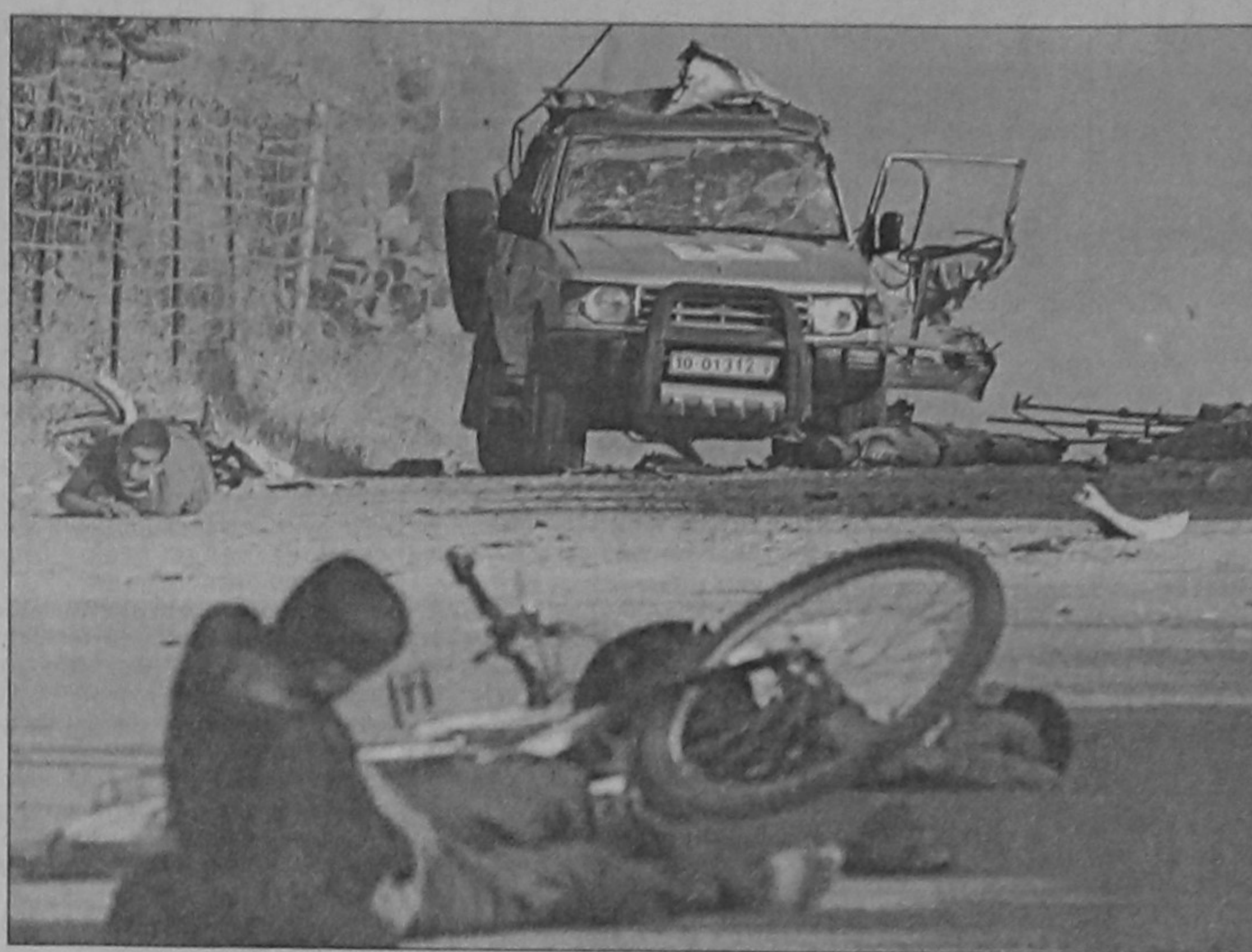
Thousands of people angered by power cuts staged a violent protest in Multan on Monday, leaving 40 people wounded and around 50 under arrest. Police fired shots into the air and launched tear gas shells to disperse demonstrators after they attacked the offices of the Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO) and torched two banks, a petrol station, dozens of shops and several vehicles.

"We don't believe in the politics of rigging and coercion. We are a peace loving people and want peaceful resolution of all issues," he said.

Replying to another question, Gillani said he was not aware of Justice Palak Sher being promoted as the chief justice of Pakistan. He said the coalition of the PML-N and the PPP was committed to reinstate the sacked judges as per the Murree Declaration.

The declaration stated that parliament would pass a resolution to restore the sacked judges within 90 days of its functioning.

Former Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, Punjab Chief Minister Dost Muhammad Khosa, former Punjab governor Zulfiqar Khosa, Hussain Nawaz and Hamza Shahbaz were also present.



Wounded Palestinians lay near Reuters news agency reporter Fadel Shaana's car after it was hit by an Israeli missile on Wednesday in the central Gaza Strip. The Israeli airstrike killed a Palestinian cameraman working for the Reuters news service and two other civilians.

Sharifs obtain nomination papers for by-elections

THE DAILY TIMES, Lahore/Islamabad

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif on Wednesday obtained their nomination papers to contest the June 3 by-elections from Lahore and Rawalpindi.

Nawaz and Shahbaz will contest from Lahore's NA-123 and PP-154 constituencies respectively. The two leaders were also among 13 candidates who obtained nomination papers to contest election from the NA-52 and NA-55 constituencies in Rawalpindi. PML-N lawyer Khalid Hussain Bhatti obtained nomination forms on behalf of Nawaz and Shahbaz for NA-55 from Returning Officer (RO) Khalid Mehmood Raja.

PML-N's Hafiz Abdullah and Tariq Mehmood, and the Pakistan Freedom Party (PPP)'s Sardar Naseer Ahmad also obtained nomination papers for the NA-55 constituency.



Burqa-clad Afghan women receive food donation from the World Food Programme (WFP) in Kabul yesterday. International aid groups have stepped up food aid to more than two million Afghans in the wake of soaring prices of basic staples, officials said on Wednesday. Food prices in Afghanistan have increased by almost 100 percent since January last year, leaving millions of already impoverished Afghans struggling, an official of WFP said.

'US committed to nuke deal with India'

Delhi still hopeful despite Left's pressure

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

The US says it is "very committed" to the India-US civil nuclear deal and is "still working on it" even as it has been stalled due to opposition from the Indian government's Leftist supporters.

"We're still working on it and are very committed to it," White House press secretary Dana Perino said on Wednesday when asked about the status of the agreement that President George W. Bush considers a major foreign policy achievement of his administration.

The White House comments came a day after a senior official of the Congress Party leading India's ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) told his interlocutors in Washington that New Delhi had not given up on the agreement that would resume nuclear commerce between India and the US after 30 years.

"We want the deal but the ruling coalition was also con-

scious that there can't be a deal without a government," Congress party spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said in a talk on "Perspectives on the US-India Civil Nuclear Deal" at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank.

Singhvi, who is here to tell the American government and the foreign policy establishment why the deal has been put on the backburner, said: "It's important to carry all constituents along."

But "We haven't given up. Nor do we accept it as end of the road," he said, noting that the Indian government still had 10 to 12 months to complete it though it would like to finish it with an administration that started it.

"We are fully conscious of time lines from both US and Indian sides," Singhvi said. It was only to save time that New Delhi had negotiated an India specific safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency without a formal go-ahead from the deal's left opponents.

Singhvi also reiterated that India was bound by only the bilateral 123 agreement and not the prescriptive provisions of the US enabling Hyde Act. The US president too had made an explicit declaration that provisions relating to a congruent foreign policy, dealing with Iran, sending troops to Iraq or non-proliferation were non-binding.

India and US agree on what binds India, and fears about the Hyde act in India and some interpretations of it in the US should not be a cause of worry, he said asking the critics "not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good" by judging it with non-existent standards.

Singhvi, who arrived in Washington on Sunday, has met with officials at the Pentagon and participated in a closed-door briefing with members of Congress and their senior staff. He also spoke on the issue at the World Affairs Council, another US think tank.

Re-voting smooth in Nepal

Maoists extend lead in polls

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's former Maoists extended their strong lead on Thursday in landmark elections that will decide the nation's future, as voters in five constituencies peacefully recast their ballots.

"No problems have been reported" in the five areas, election official Dilliram Bastola said.

Voting irregularities on election day, April 10, meant re-polling was required in 22 out of 240 constituencies. Two others have already been re-pollled and voting will be done in the other constituencies in coming days.

With vote counting under way in the dual first-past-the-post and proportional representation system, the Maoists had won a total of 116 seats out of a total of 220 seats already allocated, election officials said.

Their nearest rival, the centrist Nepali Congress, the nation's oldest party, has won just 33 seats

for the constituent assembly that will rewrite the constitution and likely abolish the monarchy.

In counting for 335 seats to be awarded by proportional representation, results -- based on roughly 50 percent of returns -- showed the Maoists in the lead with 32 percent of the votes tallied.

"Hopefully we'll have the final results of both systems by next week," Bastola said.

In a move that confounded predictions by analysts and diplomats, the Maoists are poised to emerge as the biggest single party by far in the new 601-member assembly.

Last week's polls were the climax of a 2006 peace deal between Nepal's former rebel Maoists and the government. The peace pact ended a 10-year guerrilla war that killed at least 13,000 people.

Nepal's Maoists have urged the king to step down before his dynasty's 240-year-old rule is ended by the assembly.

Lankan jets bomb rebel supply base

Fresh fighting kills 16 rebels, 1 soldier

AP, AFP, Colombo

New fighting between Tamil separatists and government forces across Sri Lanka's northern region killed 16 rebels and one soldier, while air force jets bombed a rebel supply base, the military said yesterday.

Air force pilots confirmed they hit the Tamil Tiger logistics base Thursday, military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara said. He did not have details of casualties or damage at the jungle base in the rebel-held Mullaitivu district.

But the rebels said that bombs had instead hit civilian homes, killing a child.

However, the Tigers countered that the aircraft had hit "several civilian huts."

"One child was instantly killed and several civilian huts

destroyed," the LTTE said in a statement.

In infantry clashes Wednesday, soldiers killed six rebels and wounded nine others in the northern Vavuniya district, just south of the rebels' de facto state, Nanayakkara said. One government soldier died and eight others were wounded in the fighting, he said.

Separate clashes in the north-eastern Weliya region killed five rebels and wounded nine soldiers and 47 rebels, Nanayakkara said.

Other fighting elsewhere in the region killed five rebels and wounded four soldiers, he said.

Rebel spokesman Rasiah Ilanthirayan could not be reached for comment.

Both sides commonly exaggerate their enemy's casualties while underplaying their own. It was

not possible to independently verify the military's claims because the fighting took place deep in the

northern jungles where access is restricted.

Fighting has increased in recent months following a government pledge to capture the rebels' de facto state and crush them by the end of the year. But diplomats and other observers say the army is facing more resistance than they had expected.

The Tamil Tigers have been fighting since 1983 for an independent homeland for minority ethnic Tamils, who have been marginalised for

decades by governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority. More

than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

Thai martial law to be lifted, says PM

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister Samak Sundaravej said Thursday that martial law, imposed after the 2006 coup, would be lifted in most of the kingdom after his party swept to victory in last year's polls.

Samak, whose People Power Party is closely allied with ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, said the restrictions were no longer needed.

"At today's (Thursday's) meeting of the (Thursday's) meeting of the Internal Security Council, we agreed to lift martial law in 179 districts of 31 provinces," he told reporters.

Martial law will remain throughout the three southern provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, which are in the grip of a separatist insurgency, and in parts of southern Songkhla province, he said.

The army toppled Thaksin on September 19, 2006, and swiftly imposed martial law throughout the kingdom, provoking the ire of the international community who demanded it be repealed.

The military gradually lifted it, region by region, but when elec-

tions were held last December, nearly half of Thailand's 76 provinces remained partially or completely under martial law.

Despite the restrictions, the population gave a damning verdict on military rule, voting back in Thaksin's allies. Thaksin has since returned to Thailand from self-imposed exile.

Samak said that a new security law -- which human rights groups warn gives wide, sweeping and ill-defined powers to the army -- would suffice.

"The reason we are lifting it is because there is another law, the Internal Security Act," he said.

The controversial security act, drafted under the military junta headed by coup leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, was passed in December during the last days of the military-appointed parliament.

The bill gives sweeping powers to the powerful Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), which is now headed by army chief General Anupong Paojinda.

Martial law could take months to actually be lifted, as a new law will have to be passed and granted royal approval.



US Democratic presidential candidates Illinois Senator Barack Obama and New York Senator Hillary Clinton stand on stage at the close of their Democratic debate hosted by ABC in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Wednesday.

Hillary changes course on Obama's electability

AP, Philadelphia

Hillary Rodham Clinton said emphatically Wednesday night that Barack Obama can win the White House this fall, undercutting her efforts to deny him the Democratic presidential nomination by suggesting he would lead the party to defeat.

"Yes, yes, yes," she said when pressed about Obama's electability during a campaign debate six days before the Pennsylvania primary.

Asked a similar question about Hillary Clinton, Obama said "Absolutely and I've said so before," a not-so-subtle dig at his rival who had previously declined to make a similar statement about him.

In a 90-minute debate, both rivals pledged not to raise taxes on individuals making less than \$200,000, and said they would respond forcefully if Iran obtains nuclear weapons and uses them against Israel.

"An attack on Israel would incur massive retaliation by the United States," said Clinton.

Obama said, "The US would take appropriate action."

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Ahmadinejad boasts over Iran's military might

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday proclaimed Iran as the "most powerful nation" on earth as the country's air force showed off its prowess at a time of mounting tension with the West.

"Iran is the most powerful and independent nation in the world," Ahmadinejad told a military parade outside Tehran marking the Islamic republic's annual Army Day, reaffirming one of his favoured slogans.

Ahmadinejad said all the branches of the armed forces would react forcefully in response to any attack against Iran's soil and boasted that no one would dare to launch a strike on the country.

"The army, the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij (militia) will resist with force and coordination and respond strongly to the slightest aggression," he said.

"I am proud to announce today that the Iranian nation's power is of an extent that no major power can dare jeopardise the security and interests of the Iranian nation."

To mark the occasion, dozens of fighter jets and other aircraft flew over the parade ground in a bid to show the power of the air force, which has struggled for years under the effects of US sanctions.

Among them were US-made F4 and F-5 fighter jets whose construction goes back to the 1960s and 1970s when Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi went on a massive military spending spree.

Also shown were several Saegheh fighter jets which Iran says is an entirely home-produced model but Western experts classify as a derivative of the F-5.

Washington imposed the blanket embargo after the pro-American shah was toppled in the 1979 Islamic revolution, and the country must work intensely to find spare parts to keep its fleet in the air.

Iran is at odds with the West over its disputed nuclear programme, which the United States and its allies fear could be used to make nuclear weapons. Iran insists it only wants to produce nuclear energy.



James P. Grant School of Public Health BRAC University

BRAC University invites applications for the post of Senior Research Associate, Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium

The Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium works to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa and South Asia. The Senior Research Associate will support the RPC's research, communications and capacity development activities across all five international partners. Tasks include supporting monitoring of research impact, production of different types of research outputs, organisation of meetings and workshops and project cycle management

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