

## Final Call

Today's repolling in 122 voting centres of 27 constituencies, necessitated by disruptions during the June 12 general elections, marks the much-awaited culmination of a historic electoral process. By the day's end we shall have the full verdict of the people with us rounding off the figure-work on party positions and composition of the new parliament. The air of finality was missing thus far.

In a wider and deeper sense, it will be the crowning glory for the assertion of popular sovereignty through the ballot. The process had gone so very well for the most part through the superbly held elections to 273 parliamentary constituencies on June 12. The tiny residual part left now should be a guaranteed success.

With any climactic phase, especially of an election, that has, by and large, already overturned the outcome of the 1991 general elections, the political parties tend to latch on to probable last-minute gains to their strengths. Thus there could be a tendency for a hype or an overkill. So, our first word of caution would be for the political parties to exercise restraint on their activists.

The second note of caution one would very much like to sound to all and sundry is not to lose sight of the fact that when the main bulk of the election had won us the applause of the world community we should not let ourselves down now by even fractionally mishandling a perfectly manageable exercise. Many foreign observers have stayed back to monitor this last phase of polling so that the obligations to that extent are greater.

Wizened by the experience of June 12 elections, the caretaker government and the Election Commission have perfected the arrangements for re-poll at the appointed places. But we agree with the Chief Adviser that it is popular vigilance which will count infinitely more than the government's security measures.

Then as the poll results are announced adding on to the already known outcome of the June 12 elections, we want the winner to be magnanimous and the loser to be gracious — to the logical end.

## Support for Palestine

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's brief stopover at the Zia International Airport on way to China occasioned an exchange of views between his government and the government of Bangladesh. Chief Adviser Muhammad Habibur Rahman received the Palestinian leader and reaffirmed to him Bangladesh's strong support for a Palestinian state. Ever since the Palestinian cause came up at the international fora, Bangladesh has steadfastly remained supportive of it. The most turbulent days over, Palestine as a sovereign state was fast becoming a reality, thanks to the Dayton Agreement reached between Arafat and Israel's slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Just at a time when the peace process — despite occasional flare-ups — was moving forward and well, the Israeli election has upset all the calculations with the defeat of Rabin's successor Shimon Peres. Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu, who is known for opposing the peace process on the ground that the Palestinians were given too many concessions at the cost of Israeli interests, has cast a long shadow of doubt on the whole peace process. Arafat knows that the international support is behind him but as a seasoned leader he feels that the support has to be vociferous and translated into a robust backing for him so as to create a decisive pressure on Netanyahu.

So Arafat is on a diplomatic mission to enlist support of those countries that can exert pressure on Israel. In that mission we wish him all the luck he needs. From what Arafat said at the airport, we understand that the international community — particularly those in it who matter the most — are favourably inclined towards the Palestinians. Bangladesh has made its position known in unambiguous terms. We invite others to do the same. Let the Palestine state emerge with good wishes from all across the globe.

## SADF Takes off

The formal launching of the South Asian Development Fund (SADF) has been a landmark in the seven-nation regional co-operation. The fund opens with an initial core capital of five million US dollars and other sources outside the regional forum will be explored to raise the capital. The region had two funds — SAARC Fund for Regional Projects and SAARC Regional Fund. From now on those two funds will have no separate existence with their merger into a new one.

The realisation of the idea of this fund, first mooted by King of Bhutan in 1991, let us hope, is going to fulfil a long-felt demand of this region. Clearly, there is an attempt now to bring in coordination. It is precisely for this that the SADF has been charged with three distinct but closely related tasks: a) identification and development of projects; b) institutional and human resources development; and c) developing social and infrastructural projects. The clinching factor is that the SADF aims to promote projects in one or more countries of the region with the emphasis that more countries enjoy economic benefits.

Now that the fund has come up, the member countries should attach enough importance to contributing their shares regularly. In no circumstances should the fund be relegated to secondary importance. Our past experience with quite a number of SAARC initiatives has not been very happy. Let the economic initiative, particularly the one serving multilateral interests within the forum, realise its full potential. Regional collaboration for raising industrial productivity is most welcome because that way the member-countries get the best deal possible among themselves.

# Messages, Loud and Clear

**Most politicians live by the adage that you can fool all the people all the time. That may be true to an extent as the masses are usually loath ... There is a general air of resignation among them about their plight that is not only pathetic, it is disconcerting**

followed in Lahore by the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, seemingly two unrelated incidents that seemed to be a sort of warning. One cannot have doubt that while for multiple reasons in line with his principles and professional pre-occupations Judge Nizam was already a prime potential target, the main motive 'to terminate him with extreme prejudice' as well as his son was to send a clear, unambiguous message to all 'conscientious dissenters' among the judiciary who have been actively militating against the influence of executive rule that for decades has vitiated the concept of justice, the signal being to either 'play ball' or join the indispensable among the ever increasing population of the graveyards of Karachi.

Our law enforcement agencies (LEAs) cannot be expected to find a motive, their administrative penchant is to shy away from the obvious and the influential. What one need only ask is that in addition to the brutal murder of Judge Nizam Ahmed and his son, 'What is the common factor behind the killings of Special Terrorist Court Judge Junejo, Landhi Jail Warden Abdul Rahim Shaikh and Newspaper Editor Maulana Salahuddin?' While the IG Sindh Police remains intermittently busy, among other pre-occupations promoting the crass commercial interests of a particular ethnic 'brother' in Karachi owning a private security agency, he seems to discreetly ignore parallel outfits not in conformity with the ethical aims and objectives of law enforcement agencies (LEAs), i.e. they clearly operate outside the ambit of the laws of the land (i.e. they have nothing of-

official about it, see The Nation May 30, 1996). On the other hand, the respected Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and his brother Chief Justices of the various Provincial High Courts have not been found wanting in giving a correct and suitable rejoinder to the crude message delivered to them by the murder of Judge Nizam and his son. By sending the unapproved judges home, their clear message is that they refuse to be cowed down by threats, intimidation, blackmail, verbal abuse and now — murder.

The other message was even less subtle, it was delivered bluntly by the present Government of Pakistan (GOP)

mental peace of Pakistan's millions, was commendable. That the budget would be tough was obvious to the whole country, when one lives beyond one's means, the world finally does catch up. However, instead of the rich and infamous bearing the tax burden, the salaried class from the highest executive to the lowest peon have been bludgeoned with such a heavy tax club (*danda*) that they will separately be able to feed or clothe themselves, what to talk of affording the utilities as well as facilities for medical cover, education, transportation, housing, etc.

The common man will find that other than the basket of utility charges that have gone

million rural population. The PPP government needs the feudals and the rural areas, what these sacred cows pay as pittance to the Federal and Provincial Treasuries is a joke that is not funny anymore.

Most politicians live by the adage that you can fool all the people all the time. That may be true to an extent as the masses are usually loath in the last decade to take to the streets with any great frequency and/or enthusiasm as was seen in the 60s, 70s or in the middle 80s. There is a general air of resignation among them about their plight that is not only pathetic, it is disconcerting. There remains a limit to the abuse that human beings can absorb at the hands of their leaders. Over the past several years, our countrymen have changed from being a demanding protesting mob to becoming a simmering, sullen crowd who are hard put to survive as individuals and thus bear their sulking resentment just beneath the surface. Likened politically to angels, they accept their lot with equanimity and mostly without protest.

Unfortunately for the government, while the public may tolerate their own sorry plight they remain restless about corruption, stories about the rolling acres in Surrey have surfaced at a particularly bad time for the Bhutto government. There are too many coincidental circumstances to ignore, particularly the 'mangoes' consignment that was transported free from London to Karachi by PIA and which did not contain mangoes but among other personal effects, antique arms (at least according to Kamran Shafi, the Press Minister at the Pakistan High Commission in UK) that

is supposed to have ended up in this fairy tale (no pun intended) Estate. The British Press is very used to being the target of libel action but it seldom takes up a tough stand so early as has the 'Sunday Express' resolving to fight any legal action initiated against them on behalf of the Zardaris. In effect, Sunday Express has thrown down the gauntlet, i.e. it is upto the Zardaris to pick it up. In the circumstances where Pakistan has been adjudged to be the second most corrupt country in the world, it is incumbent upon the PM or her husband to take the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and sue the print media in question so as to absolve this country from this embarrassment. What has been alleged in the newspapers i.e. other than the ownership and the price, about the landing strip, security lights, etc would only be applicable to a Middle Eastern potentate having oil wells to spare. While it is true that Mian Nawaz Sharif's request does have a political angle, that should hardly restrain the PM (or her husband) in taking legal action against the recalcitrant British newspaper for the sake of millions of her supporters and for the good name of this country.

Among the messages being transmitted to and fro, one reply that has yet to be delivered is the extreme frustration of the people of Pakistan at the Budget proposals. With deep anxiety about our likely pitiful future and a burning resentment for those who have placed us in this predicament, there is also a simmering anger among our countrymen that is becoming worse by the day. The calm and quiet presently prevailing seems to be a lull before the storm. The downtrodden masses can be equated to angels in their present behaviour mode, one must nevertheless beware of the 'rage of angels'.

## AS I SEE IT

**Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi**

to the urban population of the country, the Via-media being the Minister of State for Finance Makhdoom Shahabuddin in presenting the Federal Budget on Thursday June 13, 1996. With scant knowledge of what he was boisterously reading out, one cannot but admire Makhdoom's delivery since he remained totally impervious and only intermittently oblivious to the commotion in the National Assembly. One must also commend the PM Ms Benazir in the choice of such a thick-skinned one-track delivery weapon, symbolizing the perfect auctioneer. The Makhdoom's loud voice, rhetorical manner and absolute unconcern of the item being auctioned off, in this case he

up inordinately, he will have to pay more for everything that is of his common daily use, within a pay packet that has not only been taxed more but is that worth much less in terms of original value due to galloping inflation. While the increased taxation was very much on the cards, the callous way that it has been structured has sent a strong unambiguous message to the urbanites who form 99.9 per cent of those paying taxes, the ruling regime does not need them and as such hardly cares what happens to them or how they react. The PM lamented that there were only 800,000 taxpayers in 120 million people, perhaps she should have also stated that there is not one single taxpayer among the 70

# Legacy of Corruption Must End

by Md Asadullah Khan

**The gesture shown by former president Chun of South Korea and the way Korean people exonerated Chun, although differences of opinion exist, can undoubtedly be a way to protect and nurture our fledgling democracy. The country's interest will be best served if our leaders act with farsightedness, courage and magnanimity**

from the parliament on issues of instituting parliamentary commissions about the alleged irregularities in the Magura by-election and corruption charges against certain ministers, the party hierarchy and the President of the Republic, instead of dissolving the parliament and calling for a fresh general election, allowed the one-party government to rule the country. The opposition's call for a caretaker government for holding the general election which later turned into a mass movement was hoodwinked by the government through different pretexts. This total indifference to feel the pulse and sentiment of the people ultimately brought them down right after the result of the voteless farcical election of 15th February was made public.

A haughty spirit, as the saying goes, precedes a fall. BNP chairperson and her team of ministers were so much confident and euphoric about the party's landslide victory in the polls that they could hardly see that wisdom also existed outside their fold. BNP chairperson did not try to meet the press or the public to counter the charges of corruption, nepotism, authoritarian rule and non-fulfilment of the commitment made earlier to the nation in the 1991 election manifesto. Lastly, BNP chairperson was conspicuously absent from the 'Sabinaye Jante Chai', a very important programme arranged by BTV before the polls. When the whole nation was eagerly waiting to hear from the BNP chairperson, she was nowhere to be seen. She could not for one reason or other, her absence in this mass contact programme perhaps did all the harm conceivable.

All these taken together, the 12th June election result dealt a serious blow to the party's already tarnished image. BNP stalwarts, namely the ex-ministers were humbled down by the voters, despite the fact as was reported in the dailies, that they begged votes from door to door and apologised to the voters for the misdeeds, if any, their wives, sons, nephews and other relations had committed during the tenure of their ministership.

When an ex-minister publicly apologises for the wrongdoings on his or her part, the matter cannot and should not be dismissed so easily. People may be demanding that all these persons who had apparently abused power and allegedly indulged in corruption and nepotism should be dealt with the laws of the land to project the influence of morality and honesty in public offices as a guiding lesson for others assuming public office. In an oblique reference to the TV programme 'Sabinaye Jante Chai' that created a lot of fuss, as reported in the dailies, one could say that politicians and state functionaries have to have a good deal of patience, tolerance and strength of mind even if they are subjected to visceral criticism. Some time in the past, in France its politicians named Rocard, Giscard and Mitterrand were subjected to scathing criticism by Michel Tournier, a leading writer of France. Tournier went so far in saying, 'France is a pile of cowdung and its politicians, named Rocard or Giscard or Mitterrand are just flies walking on the crust. They never look beneath to find out what is really going on.' Sur-

prisingly, in return of the unsavory compliments paid to Mitterrand who must have taken note of it, President Mitterrand paid several visits by helicopter to Tournier in his village home. Tournier further says, 'Mitterrand and I don't talk about politics, just about books. Sometimes I tell him funny political anecdotes but I don't think he appreciates them.' Predictably, the press in all countries is an important instrument and aid in the governance of the country in as much as it reflects the opinion of the toiling masses.

Instances are there that even prime ministers and head of state have not been spared for their past wrongdoings and their efforts to abet the scandals they themselves or their near relations were involved in. In India, in the recent past, the joint Parliamentary Committee, while indicting B Shankarananda on the stock scam recommended a deeper probe into the Goldstar company involving former PM Rao's son. CBI has also started interrogating Rao's son, Probhakar Rao on shady deals in urea import cases. Yielding to persistent opposition demands, Chun Doo Hwan, former General and President of South Korea, admitted his wrongdoing, abuse of power and official corruption and brutality that took place during his regime. Chun, before departing to a 'boot camp for sinners' in a Buddhist monastery east of Seoul, said over TV, 'I confess here I feel unbearable pain and distress in disclosing my shameful inner mind. I am not standing here to defend myself or make an explanation.' He said he 'felt tremendous responsibility' for the 1980 massacre in

Kwangju, in which at least 200 people were killed when the military crushed a popular uprising. He admitted that he failed to stop some of his relatives from using their high connections to enrich themselves through a host of lucrative scams and that businessmen 'felt invisible pressure to contribute money to foundations that ultimately benefited' the Chuns.

As compensation, Chun offered to turn over to the government all his assets, his fortress like home in Seoul, a ski-resort condominium and more than \$ 3m in cash and securities. He also turned over to the government \$20m in funds that had been designated for use in his post-presidential position as chairman of the Advisory Council of Elder Statesmen. The aim was not necessarily to have Chun jailed almost in a thinly populated area just south of demilitarised zone but to expose his peridy and thus damage and alert Roh, his successor. Standing grimly before cameras in the drawing room of his home, the former President apologised to the country and accepted responsibilities for abuse of power during his administration from 1980 to 1988. 'I myself will be subjected to the trial and judgement of the people for all the wrongdoings,' said Chun, his voice firm but humble.

Corruption in public offices, misdeeds, wrongdoings and abuse of power are very common in our country. The trial of former President Ershad indicted in several corruption cases has been dragging on for the last five years. The previous government for reasons best known to them, dithered over the

trial of Ershad and people are still in the dark as to the criminal cases against all the charges have been instituted against Ershad or there are some more cases still pending to be filed. The gesture shown by Chun of South Korea and the way Korean people exonerated Chun, although differences of opinion exist, is undoubtedly a way to protect and nurture our fledgling democracy. The country's interest will be best served if our leaders act with farsightedness, courage and magnanimity. May be, there would be a lot of people who believed that a simple apology could not undo all the past wrongs.

Whatever the immediate outcome of such apology and exile by such leaders while in public offices indulging in corruption, their public shame will have a lasting effect on the country's politics. On the positive side, it offers a warning that power won by irregular means and exercised in an irresponsible manner will neither be tolerated nor go unpunished. In retrospect, future elected government and its leaders will have greater incentive to lead a clean government. When the trial of the corrupt officials drag on for years without the assets being recovered or the damage repaired, the other option that people would like to throw is that, these leaders, when they are indicted, by themselves admit their misdeeds and ask for forgiveness as President Chun of South Korea did. Leaders betraying the democratic aspirations of the people by forcibly clinging to power and crushing down mass movement against the authoritarian regime they perpetrate, only hasten the gloom and stall the progress of the country. What happens in an authoritarian rule is that the growing national economy, in absence of proper control and accountability, presents tempting opportunities for corruption to those in power and their friends and relatives.

## To the Editor...

**Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.**

### World's corrupt states?

Sir, PTI report detailed Washington in your esteemed daily of June 2, 1996 about world's corrupt states carry an exaggerated account as figures given therein seem to be just a figment of their imagination. The survey report does not seem to be based on a serious study and ratings are quite exaggerated.

Washington establishment's assessment is made with a jaundiced eye on the economic development of Pakistan and other Third World countries as the West cannot bear economic growth of these countries except at the loss of West's or America's own interest and downward swing to their balance of trade.

A non-partisan/non-aligned observer can very well see now how prosperity is knocking at the door of Pakistan and other developing countries and they

will soon be among the most prosperous of the developing states. Example of Korea and Malaysia are quite obvious.

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### AIDS in Bangladesh

Sir, With the present official figure of 44 HIV positive patients, Bangladesh is one of the high risk countries of South Asia which may suddenly experience an outburst of AIDS turning the nightmare into a reality.

As we know, the main reasons of getting infected are the practice of unnatural physical relationship, visiting red-light areas, use of dirty needles while taking injection, unscreened blood transfusion, etc. Already a few persons have died in our country of AIDS and the rest are counting their

last days. A statistic shows that around 300,000 persons from some red-light areas have been tested for the disease and found negative. In a country with a population of 12 crore, 300,000 is quite a negligible figure and thus it is absolutely important for the authorities concerned to take measures in screening a larger amount of people throughout the country and isolate those found positive. Permanent screening centres should be set up in all the red-light areas with compulsory testing of the inmates at regular intervals free of cost. Mass public awareness campaign about the dangers of this fatal disease should be done using the media, educational and religious institutions, NGOs, etc. Exemplary punishment should be given to those engaged in providing unscreened blood in transfusion cases.

Let us begin an anti-AIDS movement before this fatal monster engulfs us, going out of control.

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### BNP and AL

Sir, In our final test held on 12th June 1996, we have all come out successful in first di-

vision. Never in the history of our country, general elections were held in so free, fair and peaceful manner.

Variety is the spice of life. We wanted a change. The 12th June general elections and the verdict of the people have proved our intense desire and quenched our thirst for transfer of power of the government to the elected representatives of the people.

Does the BNP require any consolation for its fall? Victory or defeat in the election is a part and parcel of democracy like winning or defeat in sports. It is easier to win elections than to retain the love and affection of the people. Similarly it is easier to win the championship but it is difficult to hold the championship for long. BNP's rise and fall in 1991 and 1996 general elections have amply proved that. Will the AL's victory in 1996 general elections also prove the same in the future?

There is no need for the BNP to shed crocodile's tears now. It must accept the will of the people. Time and again we have advised the BNP government to mend its ways and policies but the BNP failed to prove its worth by not following the wise words: 'A stitch in time saves nine'.

We are happy that we have entered into a new age of so-

cio-economic and political life wherein no political party would be able to do and act anything whimsically at its own sweet will. We also strongly believe that the days of 'opposition for opposition's sake' are over. It is time that all our leaders including the newly-elected MPs work unitedly, sincerely and honestly for the welfare of the country and the people, without fear, favour or ill-will towards anybody.

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### Respect the democratic choice of the Israeli people

Sir, The recently delivered victory speech by newly-elected Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu has created some confusion among the Muslim nations. It may be mentioned here that Netanyahu has in the past opposed peace deals between Israel and the PLO that launched Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, I fully support Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat's sentiments as he recently expressed while talking to the reporters at the

London's Heathrow airport saying, 'We are respecting the democratic choice of the Israeli people.'

And peace-loving people all over the world are hopeful that the people of Israel and their elected leader will continue the peace-process initiated by the previous Israeli government for establishing permanent peace in the Middle East.

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### New government

Sir, I would like to make a request to Sheikh Hasina the president of Awami League who have just got the majority seats (MPs) elected in the parliament and is most probably going to form the next government. 'Please do not induct any defeated candidate in the cabinet. That would be a big mistake, perhaps.'

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