

The Pakistani Riddle or a Ruse?

I. K. Gujral writes from New Delhi

It is reported by the Pakistani media that the duly elected Prime Minister is now languishing in the torture cells of Attock Fort charged with an "attempt-to-Murder Gen. Musharraf" while the "Public Opinion" is once again applauding return of disciplined army to the helm.

Right to Demonstration

LAST Thursday's dawn-to-dusk hartal saw violence on an unprecedented scale. It might well have exceeded the sum-total of mayhem one had witnessed in a 48-hour or a 72-hour hartal staged by the opposition not very long ago. It is not just the mounting casualty figures that give a worry but what strikes as extremely fore-boding of a disaster is the forced derailment of any opposition-sponsored agitational programme by the ruling party's hell-bent game-plan to resist it. This is not to say that some in the opposition were not itching for trouble nor was there any dearth perhaps of a self-defensive streak of a preparation to face any eventuality. But the dominant thought must have been the exercise of a democratic right to peacefully assemble, take out processions, hold rallies and stage demonstrations in protest against government's policies the opposition wanted to make an issue of. Things could get wrong if all attempts were made to foil them as have been the case with a few hartals, this one included.

On Friday, the day after hartal a trouble broke out when the police swooped on two rallies organised by Al-Markazul Islam near Baitul Mokarram and Paltan crossing. They were protesting the arrest of some of their leaders implicated in the recent bomb-planting incidents. What if they were allowed to carry out their programme so long as they remained peaceful? Surely the sky would not have fallen. On the contrary, clashes could be avoided, arrests averted and investigations pursued quietly and effectively.

A gist of newspaper reports on Thursday's hartal incidents can be extremely educative. In Chittagong trouble actually began when police prevented a BNP-Islami Oikkya Jote procession at Amtali from heading towards the New Market area at noon-time. Second time round, at 3 pm, when the demonstrators tried to advance towards Laldighi Maidan they came up against police obstruction once again. In Dhaka the story was basically no different, only that at Bijoynagar some bombs burst from the rear of a procession.

While the number of anti-hartal and that of pro-hartal processions in Dhaka city have more or less evened out it is however the very high incidence of clashes between the police and the opposition demonstrators that must be our biggest worry now.

Police and Photojournalists

WE are infuriated and, at the same time, appalled by the latest incidence of police atrocity on photojournalists. We cannot but view Friday's attack on the on-duty lensmen as a direct assault on freedom of the press, which is so robustly upheld by the Constitution of the land. The police action was simply just another facet of police high-handedness. We condemn it.

In recent times, we have watched with grave concern a disquieting intensification of police hostility towards journalists in general and photojournalists in particular. People, in an ideal democratic set-up, enjoy absolute right to information. We, the media, only facilitate the enjoyment of that right by exercising our professional freedom. In other words, we try to honestly portray to our readers what has actually taken place. Friday's incident, and similar ones in the past, strongly suggested that the police do not quite appreciate our role, thereby the very concept of transparency. Simply put, they appear to be of the belief that whatever action they take or whichever means they employ in an agitation ought to be off-limits to the citizenry.

Let this be a reminder to the authorities, and especially the home ministry, that in a living democracy the police are no more than just public servants, employed to maintain law and order and the people have unquestionable rights to know how they discharge their duties. The media only takes account of their performance and present it to the public, no more, no less. At a recent roundtable in the capital, ironically arranged by the photojournalists, the inspector general of police himself committed to remedial measures to end police highhandedness against journalists. The latest spate in police excesses only proves hollowness of his promise.

East Timor Needs Peace

THE fall of 'strongman' Suharto having provided an impetus to the struggle for freedom in East Timor a beleaguered Indonesian President B J Habibie agreed to a referendum on the question under UN supervision. But the vested quarters that grew in the country over the years opposed the government decision tooth and nail. Despite all provocation by the East Timorese militia, strongly supporting Indonesian rule in the island, the referendum took place on August 30 with an overwhelming majority voting for the independence of East Timor, a former Portuguese colony which Indonesia had occupied in 1974. People opposing the vote have been trying to destabilise the situation and negate the results of the popular vote.

Significantly, the newly-elected Parliament of Indonesia has endorsed the result of the referendum paving the way for its implementation. This has enhanced the image of Indonesia internationally. The attitude of a handful of armed rebels condemnable as it was brought bad name to Jakarta. Let Indonesia set an example by being a benefactor rather than a tormentor of East Timor. This will enhance the prestige of the new democratically elected government of Indonesia and also go a long way towards improving relations with her neighbours, particularly Australia, which is essential for the peace and prosperity of the south Pacific nations.

THE hoary details of the gory Pakistan coup are as well known as the party known. It is antediluvian since it has happened so often. Time and again the Generals in uniform have taken over promising Shangri-la to the people but ended in wars and conflicts that the men in uniform understood better than the intricacies of finance or urgencies of social justice.

It was General Ayub — the first man to unceremoniously oust a bureaucrat turned authoritarian ruler Sikandar Mirza who had crowned himself President of the Islamic state. As victim of the coup he saw safety in escaping to London to manage a small Soho restaurant. His courteous successor did not hound him further.

Ayub's 'Basic democracy' — as he chose to call it, despised the knitty gritty of governance. He needed a clever man who could project his suavity to the outside world. A Berkeley trained Zulfi Bhutto — as his youthful Foreign Minister, made him believe that a simple looking Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri would hardly know how to lead a Nation in war. India would easily collapse in the face of Pakistani guns. With this belief it launched the operation 'Gibraltar' — a code name for terrorist intervention in J.K. The valour of Indian army

surprised the General. The diplomatic intervention by the major world powers ended the conflict at a time when the Indian forces had made even Lahore vulnerable. The widely spread public resentment forced Ayub to pass on the baton to the ill famed Yahya Khan who — on Bhutto's advise again, preferred to split the country than let a duly elected Prime Minister — Mujeeb, take over. The dictator in uniform inflicted a terrifying genocide on his fellow country men in East Pakistan for the only crime of voting for a party of their own choice. The war that followed humiliated him and his country. While the dream of Kashmir remained distant, Pakistan lost a major part of the country.

The author of a 'thousand-years of war' — Zulfiqar Ali Bhuttos' experiment with democracy was brief. It ended ignominiously yielding to yet another General whom he had trusted as a loyal aide. Zia-ul-Haq — a 'maulvi' in uniform was very conscious of his 'Islamist mission'. But he had to first physically eliminate this mentor. He needed a war to

wade of the date off the promised polls. This time it was the doddering Breznev who obliged. The Afghan war was more than a blessing for General Zia. The Regan-Bush regimes needed him more than he needed them. Hard bargains got the General an endorsement for his nuclear ventures and also got him an endorsement for his authoritarian rule. Washington had its own priority of parceling out the dithering socialist state than worry about democracy in Pakistan.

When end of the Cold War was in sight and the collapse of Socialist experiment became imminent, the much favoured General Zia quit the scene in mysterious explosion of his personal plane. The off and on excursions in democracy had their own colorations but always under the shadow of Army Head Quarters. The men in uniform would not worry about the academic debates in Parliament so long as the 'duly-elected-Prime Minister' understood and respected the invisible lines of demarcation. A Cambridge trained Benazir

who thought Margaret Thatcher was her role model paid a high cost for not understanding the fine differences in the ground realities of U.K. and Pakistan.

Nawaz Sharif — a blue eyed boy of General Zia, did not appreciate the difference between a patrician and a plutocrat. Money could be acquired but Nawaz Sharif was late in learning that Blue Blood comes only by birth and not by adoption. The cantonment did not mind his family and friends acquiring wealth so long as a part of the earnings were channeled to the 'Fauji foundation'. Nor were they worried by his brazen interventions in the spheres of judiciary or intolerances of any voice of dissent — whether in the Parliament or the media. The army was not too happy when he stripped the President of his special powers bequeathed by General Zia. The elected Prime Minister, for the first time in chequered history of Pakistan was able to get rid of a President, the Chief Justice and even the Chiefs of Armed Forces and I.S.I. He exiled the leader of opposition and put her

spouse in jail on various charges. Reactions to his acts were slow in coming. The Chingal tests gave him a day's glory. He should have known that the day of reckoning was inevitable when even Clinton's influences would not help. The White House can use its Hot Line to urge Vajpayee to talk to Pakistan. But surely it does not (read can not) send Mushraf back to barracks or restore the 'Humpty-Dumpty' back on the wall.

So the brief melodrama of democracy is once again over. But the coup has left some perplexing riddles. Is it merely a 'Generals revenge' or is it a coup whose Act two is still to be staged. Who is the real power centre, General Mushraf or General Aziz? How long can they be partners in authority? Why the Generals had felt so insecure. Was it the tale telling revelation by Niaz Naik at Karachi regarding the so-called 'Back-stage diplomacy' where he and his Indian interlocutor had agreed to solve the Kashmir imbroglio in a matter of months. Was this viewed as

an act of treachery on part of Nawaz Sharif? Or were the gravity of difference between the General and the Prime Minister rooted in Vajpayee's bus journey to Lahore? Or was it Nawaz Sharif's message to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to stop further training of the Mujahids who are playing havoc in several countries? Do the new rulers really believe that the intercepted Mushraf-Aziz call was passed on to Delhi by Prime Minister or on his behalf by the ISI? It is reported by the Pakistani media that the duly elected Prime Minister is now languishing in the torture cells of Attock Fort charged with an "attempt-to-Murder Gen. Musharraf" while the 'Public Opinion' is once again applauding return of disciplined army to the helm.

It may be too early to judge the emerging scenario. In the meantime let us join the small group of mourners who are lamenting ending of this sordid chapter while taking note of what Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Asghar Khan has said. "...country had a bogus and I.S.I. manipulated democracy as the I.S.I. had always been playing an active role in buying politicians and forging alliances since 1988..." The author is former prime minister of India.

Bangladesh and the Security Council

by Harun ur Rashid

Its primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security and the members of the UN is obliged to accept and carry out the decisions of the Council. The Secretary General may bring to the attention of the Council any matter which in his/her opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

BANGLADESH has been elected for the second time as one of the 10 non-permanent members in the Security Council of the UN for a two-year term from 1st January, 2000. The very fact that Bangladesh on this occasion was a consensus candidate from Asia for the membership of the Security Council demonstrates the abiding trust and confidence reposed on Bangladesh by Asian countries and by definition by the international community. It is a rare honour for which every Bangladeshi should take justifiable pride.

The trust and confidence was not built in a day. Bangladesh earned it through its consistent and moderate stand on the issues at the UN since its admission on 17 September, 1974 to the UN. Bangladesh has been active in multilateral diplomacy and gained a reputation among its members. It has taken its UN obligations earnestly. Although Bangladesh is not a rich country, it continues to pay its dues regularly to the UN and never defaulted once. It has responded always to the call of the UN in providing peace-keeping troops/police or civilian personnel for which the present Secretary General Kofi Annan admired the role of Bangladesh.

The international agenda continues to expand dramatically in both range and complexity and our diplomats/officers at the UN Missions continue to assess and consider the policy shifts of other countries on which our policy on multilateral issues has to be based. And there is the actual bargaining or negotiating the issues at the multilateral level in which our officers have proved capable of persuading pre-minded countries to see the point of view and achieve success.

Bangladesh is the chairperson of the Least Developed Countries (48 countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America) and in that capacity continues to canvass many programmes for the alleviation of poverty in the UN forums.

While advancing the cause of the Least Developed countries, it has taken into account the overarching philosophy of the aid programme which requires to be based on ecologically sustainable development. This is a holistic concept which integrates the ecological, economic and social dimensions of development. Another major priority for the aid programme which Bangladesh has promoted is the equal participation of women in development which has the greatest multiplier effects in terms of improvement in socio-economic and health indicators and overall development. As a member of the Council Bangladesh will be able to carry extra weight in firming up the UN programmes towards these objectives.

Earlier Bangladesh served as a member of the Council in 1979-80. At that time Bangladesh had to contest with Japan. Bangladesh gained more votes than Japan in the General Assembly and was elected to the Council. It was a remarkable achievement for the country. In 1988 Bangladesh contested again against Malaysia but was not successful.

At present the Security Council consists of 15 member-states, 5 are permanent and 10 are non-permanent which rotate after every two years. The Chairperson of the Council rotates in alphabetical order and Bangladesh will have the opportunity to chair the meeting of the Council. The 10 members represent the five geographical regions — Asia, Africa, Latin America, Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Each member represents a region and Bangladesh will represent Asia which has two members in the Council. One member represents West Asia

and the other the rest of Asia. The non-permanent member, such as Bangladesh, does not possess veto power. That is the privilege of the permanent members, such as Britain, the US, France, China and Russia. (China is the only permanent member of Asia with a veto power.) If any one of the permanent five casts a vote in the negative (exercises veto power) to any resolution in the Council, the resolution is not adopted.

The composition of the Security Council of 15 members do not represent the existing power realities in the world. The UN has now expanded into 188 members and Germany and Japan are economic giants. The membership of the Security Council needs to be increased considerably, at least 4 or 5 from each region to reflect the present-day world. The issue is at hand with the member-states but because of the disagreement among the permanent members, no progress could be achieved till now.

The Council is the most important body of the UN. It is more or less the "cabinet" of the UN, the General Assembly being the Parliament. All key decisions are decided at the Council on behalf of the member-states. The admission of any country to the UN can be effected only upon the recommendation of the Council. Any amendment of the UN Charter needs the concurrence of the Council. The Secretary General is appointed upon the recommendation of the Council. If the Council fails to recommend a candidate, that person cannot be appointed by the General Assembly by-passing the Council. The Council may seek advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on any legal question. The sanctions imposed on any country are de-

vised by the Council and all member-states are bound to carry out such decision.

Its primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security and the members of the UN is obliged to accept and carry out the decisions of the Council. The Secretary General may bring to the attention of the Council any matter which in his/her opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council carries out its functions continuously and each member of the Council shall be represented in the Council at all times. That is why an Ambassador to the UN is known as Permanent Representative. The meetings of the Council are generally held in New York but it may hold meetings at other places as it deems appropriate to facilitate its work. A few Security Council meetings were held in Geneva as well.

Since peace and security is its primary responsibility, it may investigate any dispute or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute endangering the maintenance of international peace and security. The emphasis should be laid on the word "international" peace. This is because it has been argued that any dispute may not endanger international peace and security. The Council members have to be satisfied that a particular dispute or situation is to threaten international peace as distinct from peace in local situations. There are hundreds of decisions of the Council as to what situation constitutes danger to international peace and security.

The Council is mandated to secure the settlement of disputes peacefully through negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration or judicial

means. For maintenance of international peace and security, the Council may dispatch UN peace-keeping troops or even wage a war to eliminate threat to international peace. The Gulf war in 1990 against Iraq is the recent example. The peace-keeping troops of the UN were placed in many trouble spots, such as in Kosovo, Cyprus, Lebanon, Sudan, Mozambique, Peru, Cambodia etc.

All these functions of the Council show that its powers are pervasive and significant. Therefore Bangladesh, as a member of the Council, has to shoulder a heavy responsibility to perform its duties. It not only has to judge any issue from its own standpoint but also on behalf of the region it represents. Generally speaking the Permanent Representative (Ambassador) of Bangladesh in New York will attend the Council meetings. An important issue or while Bangladesh acts as Chairperson of the Council, Bangladesh may be represented at the level of the Foreign Minister.

Bangladesh will play a high-profile role as a member of the Council for the next two years. At the Council Bangladesh will be confronted with all the key global and regional issues and Bangladesh has to vote on any issue in the affirmative or negative or it can abstain from voting depending on the ramifications of the issues debated in the Council. Bangladesh will have the opportunity to work closely with the secretary-general on the issues before the Council. This will provide an excellent rapport with the Secretary General and other top UN officials. During the membership period, Bangladesh has the potential to gain a great advantage to highlight the issues of the developing countries.

On political issues, Bangladesh will have to consider regional and global ramifications of any matter debated in the Council. The member-states which are directly involved in the issues at the Council will lobby with Bangladesh to support their case at the Council and Bangladesh may offend a member-state if it does not support their point of view. For instance, the allegation of abuse of human rights against a member-state will be a delicate issue for Bangladesh in the Council. Whether humanitarian intervention can disregard the sovereignty of a state is another provocative issue for Bangladesh. The continuing of economic sanctions on Iraq might come up in the Council. These are some of the issues on which Bangladesh, as a member of the Council, will have to take a stand at the Council. Bangladesh foreign policy will be exposed publicly and tested frequently at the international forum. If the donor countries are involved and Bangladesh does not endorse their views at the Council, it may have an adverse impact on its relations with Bangladesh.

There is a view that if a country, such as Bangladesh, which depends heavily on aid from outside sources adopts a principled stand at the Council which is not to the liking of a donor country, it may incur the risk of being cut off from monetary aid by the donor country. I would argue that a central element in any country's foreign policy is consistency and in the long run it pays dividends despite accompanying risks. The world is fluid and new power relationships continue to emerge around the globe. How substantial and effective role Bangladesh plays at the Security Council will depend on its credibility as a nation. Credibility is to be earned and much will depend on the strength of our democratic institutions within the country.

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Back to Civilian Rule. How Soon?

Developments in Pakistan have come as a setback for democracy in South Asia. Here, even the monarchy in Bhutan is relaxing its authorities to facilitate people's participation in future governance. Pakistan's new rulers have assured that they will not be in power for days "more than necessary", and democratic rule will be restored. But when? They should set a timeframe for this.

SEVERAL days after the army take-over in Pakistan, developments there remain the cynosure of all eyes not only in the South Asian region, but also elsewhere in the world. While the world has moved swiftly to castigate the dismissal of an elected government, like the Commonwealth has suspended Pakistan's membership, the new rulers in Islamabad are also not sitting idle. They are slowly trying to strengthen the power base and are taking steps, like appointing governors in the four provinces of the country.

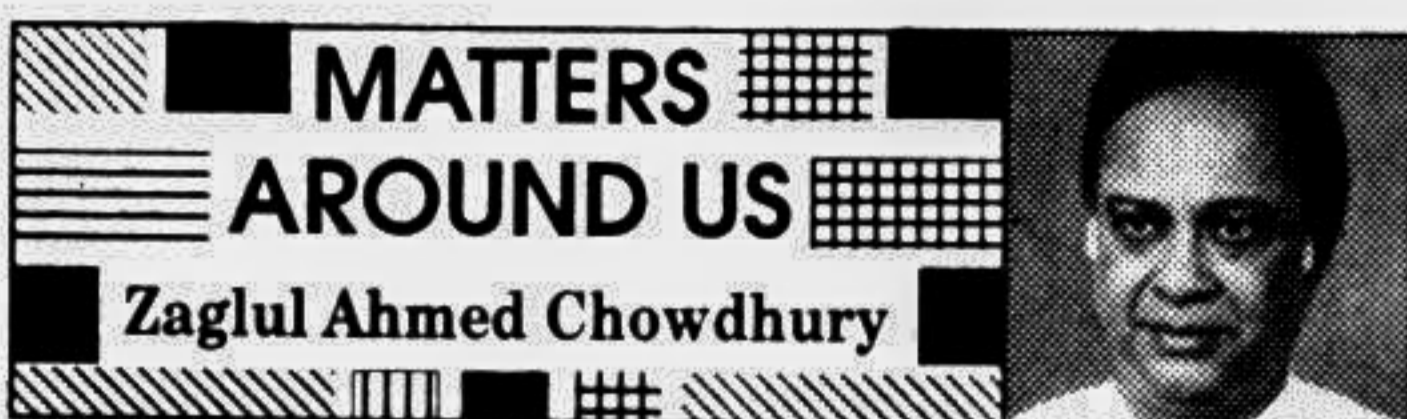
Members of the civil society, not exactly stunned by the ousting of the civilian government, have begun giving vent to their feelings. An indication of these was available when a case has been filed at the high court in Karachi against the sacking of the elected government. The political organisation of the deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan Muslim League (PML), after initial hesitation and bickering, is now demanding release of the deposed PM. His son is also seeking international intervention to free his father from house arrest while questioning the right of the military to overthrow the civilian administration.

Undoubtedly, the chief executive of the country General Pervez Musharraf has established his authority in the country but the very action of the military is coming under serious introspection. At the moment, no free expression of views is expected in Pakistan where martial law has not been declared, but in practice, it is a full-fledged military government. Rigours of such an administration are obviously tough, and

against the fundamental rights, since the constitution is suspended and parliament stands dissolved.

The military rulers, after remaining somewhat tight-lipped during the initial period following the take-over, showed their claws when they declared the state of emergency and took other measures. They are unveiling their scheme of things, like taking on leaders of the government that they overthrew and many other politicians on corruption and other charges. It is only expected that people generally welcome actions against corrupt persons even if they are opposed to the very fundamental development involving the character of the governance.

What are the questions that are coming to the fore and intensely discussed and debated upon surrounding Pakistan more than ten days after the ouster of the elected government? These are broadly, can the armed forces topple a legitimately elected constitutional government particularly at a time when the tendency for such ambitions are on the wane due to the flourishing of democratic values? Did the civilian government commit any such mistakes or offences that should warrant such an action? How have most of the opposition politicians in Pakistan responded to this action against democracy? How rational is the endorsement and even support of some opposition politicians



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like cricket-star-turned-politician Imran Khan to the military regime? What are the effect of the coup in South Asia, and most importantly, is the reaction of the most powerful democratic nation, the United States, right and adequate in the Pakistan event, or is Washington's policy on the issue at variance to similar cases? And of course, how long the non-democratic government will last?

All these questions are pertinent and are being talked about in the wake of the October 12 military take-over. The questions can be answered in short without going into details of the issues concerned. Whatever offences are committed by the government, only people can punish the offenders and this is generally done through another election. If Nawaz Sharif's government was not functioning well and was submerged in corruption, then he and his party would receive the crunch in another polls. His government was in half-way through its five-year term. What happens if the opposition parties are united and clamouring for his ouster and early elections?

Initially Nawaz's government was reluctant for advancing the polls, but later showed olive branch to the opposition alliance for talks, which might have resulted in early polls. After all, his party had two-thirds majority in Assembly and it is only likely that he would like to complete the full term. The pressures for midterm elections were changing government's attitude and early elections could be the best answer to the political unrest largely stemming from 'Kargil' debacle.

Most of the opposition politicians failed to denounce the ouster of the civilian government, which they should have done from ethical point of view. They are asking for Sharif's exit, which was possible through immediate polls. Benazir Bhutto, whose party fared very badly in last elections by bagging only 18 seats, even showed keenness to share power with the new regime. The latter, however, did not demonstrate any inkling to accept her readiness for co-operation. Tainted by corruption and wrong doings of her Achilles' Heel, her husband Asif Zardari, Benazir --

once a media darling and charismatic political figure -- has lost much of her clout in Pakistan. Their positions in the aftermath of the army coup are not in line that was expected from seasoned politicians. Evidently, they will be happy at Sharif's ouster, but they should have seen to it as it would have done through constitutional and democratic process.

Imran Khan's Insaaf Party failed to secure a single seat in last elections. Khan may have done exceedingly well with the game of cricket, but his eagerness for above shoulder-height bouncers in the political pitch will only put him in the bad light in the days to come.

International reactions are to the developments were expectedly tough but they appeared softened after it was somewhat clear that the US has not wholeheartedly condemned or opposed the take-over. The subsequent American response led many to believe that there might have been a "green signal" from Washington to the change-over, even though the US is supposed to be against sacking of any elected government. Sensing the attitude of White House and Pentagon, the US media has also largely, of late, become mute against the coup. The policy of Washington in this regard is certainly at variance since in some cases before the US had demanded the restoration of the elected government including the de-

posed leader but here they seem to be only asking for an early return of civilian rule.

If the prime minister was at fault or not to their liking in many counts, then the Americans should have endorsed it tacitly! When president Bill Clinton was on the brink of being removed from office for perjury leading to violation of the constitution and involvement in myriad sex scandals, could anybody in the US even remotely thought that a military General can occupy the White House and seize all power? All that happened there were entirely constitutionally. The US policy cannot be termed as rational as the leader of a democratic set-up regardless of the fact that the new regime in Pakistan earned support of people or how corrupt were politicians. This approach cannot be encouraging for democracy and even prompted the defence minister of Nigeria, where democracy has just been restored, to warn against possibilities of army coups in his country.

Strategic expediency should not be given precedence over moral and principled positions and here the US may be seen faltering with the declared stand on democracy. Development in Pakistan has come as a setback for democracy in South Asia where even the monarchy in tiny Himalayan state of Bhutan is relaxing its authorities to facilitate the participation of people in the future governance. Finally, Pakistan's new rulers have assured that they will not be in power for days "more than necessary" and democratic rule will be restored. But when? They will be well advised to give a timeframe for the objective.