Chandrika's Risky Gambit

M Abdul Hafiz explains why Sri Lankan President has sacrificed one year of her presidency for six more years in office

HANDRIKA Kumaratunga's six-year presidential term well entitles her to preside over the nation's historic transition to next millennium — a distinction any one would like to savour. Although she very much wanted to rule the country at the dawn of twenty-first century - and is still willing to do so - an embattled Chandrika has opted for an uncertain course by calling for a snap presidential election in December almost a year before it was due. The gambit is rife with her ambitions to be around both during the millennium celebra-

tion and well after it. Obviously President Chandrika has sacrificed one year of her presidency for six more years in office. But her plan is fraught with grave risks making it almost a gamble. In 1994 she and her coalition, the Peoples Alliance (PA) was accorded a popular mandate to bring peace to the war-torn island country. After five years of her presidency the peace is nowhere in sight. With the ethnic war still raging in full fury there is hardly any prospect even for another round of peace talk or ceasefire. Except the military victory achieved in 1996 when the government forces wrested control of Jaffna Peninsula, the LTTE stronghold persistently dominated the battlefield. Particularly after the setback suffered in operation Ranagosha Five, the Army has gone on the defensive and advised caution

FTER worsting the Sri

Lankan troops in a blitz

In the northern Wanni

region, the separatist

Liberation Tigers of Tamil

arrive at a national consensus

to resolve island's drawn out

moving the genuine grievances

of the Tamil people," Wick-

remesinghe promised while ad-

dressing a rally of his United

National Party (UNP). He said

he would reach an agreement

with the guerrillas to resolve

LTTE cadres in the armed

forces," he declared, adding it

was essential to deploy Tamil-

speaking security force person-

nel in the Tamil majority areas

for the maintenance of law and

"I'll offer to absorb eligible

"I'll settle the issue by re-

election.

ethnic conflict.

the conflict

order.

to the government. In the meantime Chandrika's much touted devolution package is, for all practical purpose, dead because of the opposition both from the LTTE and Sinhalese hardliners.

The country's economy is virtually in a shambles mainly as a result of continuing conflict and huge war expenditure. in last five years, there has been no noticeable expansion of economic activity in the country except brisk trade in armaments and sale of local asset to the foreigners.

There has been no new investment coming to the island. The growth rate stagnated at poor 3 per cent whereas in countries like Sri Lanka public expectations required a much higher growth rate. The chairman of the export sector of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce has recently predicted dire consequence if the fall in export is not immediately stemmed. The Colombo stock market has been languishing at a low of 500 points for the past year. The inflation was running at 14 per cent even when President Chandrika took office five

But it is not only the difficulties on military and economic front which handicap the president. To make things worse, her party has only a one-seat majority in the parliament. The main opposition, the United Nationalist Party (UNP) has consistently blocked her major reforms including the devolution packages by refusing

to cooperate in the parliament and giving her the two-thirds majority needed to push them through. Her party could not muster a two-thirds majority despite securing 80 per cent of the votes in 1994 election. Even the recent provincial council elections in seven Sinhalamajority provinces show that the PA enjoys only a thin-edge majority over UNP.

Chandrika's predicament increases with the re-emergence of once-annihilated ultra leftist party the JVP (Janatha Vimukhti Perunama) which has been fast making inroad into the PA's votebase. With the government's total showdown with the LTTE, the Tamil voters are also turning against the PA. Chandrika's relations with the moderate Tamils have suffered setback with the LTTE's assassination of Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam, the president's closest political friend among the Tamils. While this might have reconfirmed her belief in the impossibility of a peace settle-ment with the LTTE the Tamils in general see some hope in the UNP's advocacy of peace talks with the Tigers.

Consequently the president is left only with her twin track policy of 'war for peace' which aims at seeking a consensus on devolution to isolate the LTTE politically while at the same time conducting a war to weaken the Tigers for their acceptance of political settlement. But none of the objectives have so far been achieved. Under these circumstances,

Chandrika was approaching a point where she would have to lose whatever little edge she still enjoys over her opponents. The longer the political impasse and economic stagnation continues — let alone the battlefield reverses - the less will be her electoral prospects in 2000. For her own political survival, Chandrika was fast running out of her options. Everyday her support base had been inexorably eroding. Before the entire electorate was disenchanted with the government Chandrika had to pre-empt her total fall. And she has done exactly that hoping for a solid mandate to end the prevailing political impasse and shore up her peace mission. Considering her limited options President Chandrika's gambit for a snap election is both bold and prag-

political arithmetic, the observers feel, that the PA will be able to make it because of the popularity enjoyed by the charismatic Kumaratunga over her chief adversary Ranil Wickremasinghe of the UNP. Although both belong to the wellknown political families of Sri Lanka, Chandrika is considered taller in stature. After all, her five-year presidency is not all blank. She has been commendably courageous in adopting an approach to the political solution of the country's

ethnic conflict for the first

Apart from Chandrika's own

at home and abroad by openly proposing politically risky de-volution package which apparently cost her the support of Sinhalese hardliners. Even on economic front, she could keep the inflation under tight least reducing it to 8 per cent. Despite heavy increase in war expenditure the budget deficit too was kept under 10 per cent. On the other hand, Wickre-

time. She earned applause both

masinghe might have played his role well in taking fall control of the party, but at national level he lacks the popular ap-peal of his predecessors in the party. In any election to be fought among the Sinhalese candidates, the Tamil votes are crucial indeed. By supporting a common cause of a negotiated settlement with the LTTE the UNP has at long last made a dent in Tamil vote base, but it will be long way for the party to be able to win it over. Chandrika's foreign minister, Laksman Kadirgamar, himself an ethnic Tamil has substantial influence on Tamil community to thwart an UNP effort to divide Tamil votes.

All said and done, however, it is not for nothing that Chandrika Kumaratunga has chosen to take a plunge at this time. If her calculations go right, she may re-emerge as the country's stronger president next month to chart the nation's course for the next millennium.

The author is a retired Brigadier of Bangladesh Army.

Now What?

What really is waiting for Pakistan's deposed prime minister? Mansoor Mamoon, looking back, has a possible analysis

HE Chief Executive in Pakistan has at last laid ▲ his plan bare — no election before the trial of the dismissed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Certain other apparently populist preconditions have also been set like weeding out corruption from the bodypolitick of Pakistan, realisation of thousand of dollars of loan defaulters, establishing true democracy, ensuring accountability of the politicians etc. Whether the new redoubtable military ruler would succeed in the mission spelt out by his administration is debatable. It. however, appears that Nawaz Sharif's fate is almost sealed. If the past history of Pakistan any a guide, it can be safely deduced that Nawaz is likely to be dealt with in the manner in which ZA Bhutto was taken

care of by General Ziaul Haq.

the predecessor of General

Pervez Musharraf.

In fact, there are a lot of similarities between Sharif and Bhutto. The two were equally haughty, arrogant and autocratic in their manner of running the country. Both of them stood isolated from the masses and angered the armed forces. the judiciary and the Punjabi feudal power base as well as the opposition political parties. While Bhutto infuriated the powerful armed forces by laying on them the entire blame of Pakistan's debacle in its 1971 War with India (reference the Justice Hamidur Rahman Commission's report on the events of 1971 which however did not see the light of the day) resulting in the loss of erstwhile East Pakistan and its emergence as independent and sovereign Bangladesh, Nawaz Sharif in an identical fashion tried to malign the army for Pakistan's ignominious retreat from Kargil earlier this year. Nawaz went a step further and made an aborted bid to divide

cally backfired and proved to be suicidal. Nawaz has already been charged with treason. He has also been accused of conspiring to kill the country's military ruler as well as for what has been stated as kidnapping and attempting to hijacking the plane which was carrying General Musharraf and 198 other passengers in its journey from Colombo to Karachi. If proved true, the charges would be enough to send Nawaz comfortably to the noose.

the army. His strategy tragi-

Will Nawaz be pushed to the

gallows, as was done in the case of ZA Bhutto? Nawaz has already been shifted to Karachi and is being put to the dock. He will tried in the anti-terrorism court in the port city. Though General Pervez has assured that the former Pakistani prime minister would receive a fair trial, it is a foregone conclusion as to what could be the likely verdict of a court with the country under military rule in the garb of the proclamation of the state of emergency with all fundamental rights being kept

in limbo. Albeit the fact that Nawaz's party — Pakistan Muslim League — is preparing for a legal battle, it is unlikely that it will succeed in saving him from the vendetta and vengeance of the army which is, by and large, taking advantage of the sacked premiers unpopularity with the

masses and the power base. The military administration is reported to be moving swiftly in the trial of Nawaz because of external pressure for a definite timeframe for Pakistan's return to civilian rule. With its fragile economy, Pakistan will not able to long remain isolated from the international community, particularly the western donor countries and agencies. However hard General Pervez may try to have the backing of the sympathetic Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf states it will be just his bargaining clout with the United States and its allies in the West, all of whom are gradually taking a somewhat softer attitude towards him citing mass support behind his takeover (largely because of the Islamic card the General is currently playing).

the fate of Nawaz? The answer is not difficult to find. The Constitution of Pakistan provides for mandatory death sentence for any extra-constitutional attempt to topple an elected government. Naturally, General Pervez would not risk his own neck in allowing Nawaz to go scot-free. So the dilemma is either Pervez or Nawaz. The two can no longer co-exist

Nawaz has both wealth and organisation like Bhutto to stage a comeback. Hence General Pervez is not likely to take any chances. Against this backdrop physical or political liquidation of Nawaz will have to be ensured first for a safe bail out of the military ruler from Pakistan's cockpit of power.

Can possible international pressure help Nawaz escape the wrath of the army ruler? The US has already appealed for the safety of its old ally. But that did not cut much ice with the General who is not likely to take any risk on his own safety however heavy such pressure might be.

There is yet another striking similarity between ZA Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Both were the products of the army (Bhutto was handpicked by Ayub Khan while Nawaz Sharif was groomed by Ziaul Haq as his possible successor) and both subsequently appeared in the roles of Frankenstein. Hence they only had to blame their nemesis.

The Writer, a SAARC Gold Medalist, is the former Research Fellow of the Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore and the Commonwealth Foundation for Broadcasting Development.

After the Blitz...

... Tamil guerrillas may play a crucial role in December presidential election. Sugeeswara Senadhira writes from Colombo

Eelam (LTTE) has propelled itself to the centrestage of the December 21 presidential The LTTE had overrun a series of army camps in the north Opposition leader Ranil last week in the worst debacle Wickremesinghe, President suffered by the government Chandrika Kumaratunga's forces in the 16-year-old conmain rival in the poll, started flict. Hundreds of soldiers were his campaign today with a killed and wounded in the ofpromise to talk to the LTTE and

tensive. Tamils parties have long demanded the creation of a Tamil regiment in the army, a move staunchly opposed by the hardliners of the Sinhala ma-

jority. Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera accused Wickremesinghe of plotting to enlist the support of the LTTE to install himself as president. Speaking in Parliament, Samaraweera alleged that Wickremesinghe had sent an editor of a weekly newspaper close to the UNP to the north to discuss the matter with the LTTE leadership.

He also accused the UNP leader of plotting a plan to force

the postponement of the presidential election and become president with the LTTE's sup-

Wickremesinghe dismissed the charge as ridiculous and said it was aimed at discrediting him as the government was nervous because he was forging ahead in the election campaign.

Kumaratunga had earlier urged the people to give her a clear mandate to implement the proposed devolution package aimed at solving the ethnic problem. She said she decided to call elections one year ahead of schedule to enable the people to endorse her government's performance in the last five years and get the necessary mandate to implement the devolution package in order to end the ethnic conflict.

"As we promised (in the 1994 elections) all pledges except the ending of the war have been fulfilled and we need the people's

mandate to fulfil the last promise because the opposition is blocking all our moves to solve the vexed issue," Kumaratunga told a public rally.

Political analysts are of the opinion that although Kumaratunga is likely to stay ahead of Wickremesinghe, she may have to depend on second preference votes to get elected for a second term. They are of the opinion that up to 10-15 per cent of votes would go to minor party candidates.

"Kumaratunga polled a record 62 per cent in 1994, but it had gradually reduced to 30 to 40 per cent in all provincial and local government polls held thereafter," pointed out Victor Ivan, editor of Sinhala daily 'Ravaya'. "Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe will end up getting 38 to 45 per cent each, but will not be able to get 50 per cent required for an outright victory. Kumaratunga will have

votes to get elected," he said.

to depend on second preference

"In these circumstances Tamil votes are very crucial, said Dr Jayadeva Uyangoda of Colombo University. "The two main candidates are likely to canvass heavily in areas under government control in north and east," he said.

Analysts feel Kumaratunga is likely to get a bulk of moderate Tamil and Muslim votes. Kumaratunga has a clear edge over the UNP as two of the main minority parties, Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) of Indian origin Tamils and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), have already pledged their support to her. Before his death last month, CWC leader Saumiamurthy Thondaman had urged his people to support Kumaratunga.

Meanwhile, UNP and radical Janata Vimukthi Peramnuna (JVP) have called for international observers to oversee the elections, saying they teared the government would indulge in malpractices and use the government machinery to help Kumaratunga win the election.

-India Abroad News Service

A Change in Foreign Policy?

There are good reasons for India to be wary of the military ruler in Pakistan. K. K. Katyal writes

FTER A long suspense induced by the elections, New Delhi's stand on major foreign policy issues has been articulated through an institution which symbolises national consen-sus, presidency. By sheer coincidence, Mr. K. R. Narayanan provided the much-awaited enunciation on two occasions - in his address to the two Houses of Parliament and during his visit to Austria.

There was no - there could not have been any - departure from the stand of the past, given that the political complexion of the Union Government remained unchanged. But the positions on various issues of concern - relations with Pakistan, the nuclear policy and the menace of terrorism had to be updated because of fresh developments. All these added a substantive new dimension, giving a new - and daunting - look to the challenges confronting the foreign policy establishment.

The military coup in Pakistan confronted New Delhi with a totally new situation. As noted in the President's Parliament address, "the recent takeover in Pakistan is a matter of grave concern. Democracy

alone can best guarantee peace, understanding and cooperation among nations. We are watching the situation with careful

The next step? "We had initiated the composite dialogue process and sought to reinforce it through the Lahore Declaration. Pakistan must stop crossborder terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and other regions of India and also put an end to hostile propaganda against India." The statement during the Austrian visit, while referring to Pakistan's Kargil misadventure, said: "The intruding forces were driven back by the Indian armed forces. This was followed by a military takeover in Pakistan. India, today, is watching the situation in Pakistan and is prepared to engage in peaceful discussions with Pakistan, once the atmosphere of trust destroyed by armed intrusions has been restored.

If meaningful progress is to be achieved in the dialogue, it would, however, be essential for cross-border terrorism to cease." The challenge posed by the Kargil episode was formidable enough, and the coup made it doubly so. Before the coup, New Delhi was mainly concerned with the need for

In the No-man's Land!

restoring the trust, rudely shaken by the Pakistani intrusion. The modalities for resumption of substantive discussions were not clear though there were vague hopes that the snapped contacts might be reestablished. Then there was the "back-channel" diplomacy, which continued to work even during the Kargil crisis and could well have been resumed. The military takeover shat-

tered these faint hopes. There are good reasons for India to be wary of the military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. He had conceptualised, planned and executed the Kargil operation and had not taken kindly to the civilian government's decision to agree to the withdrawal of troops from the Indian side of the LoC.

After the initial shock over the coup, the western powers came out with proforma statements expressing dismay over the demise of democracy in Pakistan but, thereafter, were quick to give certificates of good conduct to Gen. Musharraf. They seized on his smart phrases about his intent to usher in "true" democracy and, even though he carefully avoided setting a deadline for the end of the military rule,

were impressed with his noises on clean public life. In this mood, they would want India to engage itself with the new regime - in fact, such suggestions have already been made even though there is a ring of defensiveness.

India, as of now, is in no mood to deal with the architect of the Kargil invasion who could well try to cover the humiliation of defeat by stepping up incursions in Jammu and Kashmir and raising the level of militancy. The new ruler does not seem particularly enamoured of the Lahore process or of the earlier agreements on a comprehensive dialogue. Also, despite the seeming consolidation of his hold, the situation is yet to stabilise. How it finally settles down will there-

fore have to be watched. At the same time, New Delhi could not keep rejecting the idea of talks with the armyruled Pakistan beyond a limit. How long could it stretch the argument that there can be no dialogue unless the democratic step-up is restored or the timetable for it is announced? Whether they are to be ruled by the army or the civilian democratic Government is the business of the people of Pakistan.

India dealt with both - the Generals, Zia-ul-Haq, Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan, and the civilian Prime Ministers, Ms. Benazir Bhutto and Mr. Nawaz Sharif.

This pessimistic assessment was at odds with the encouraging accounts given by the two sides after the last meeting early this year between the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, and the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott. This was partly because Washington took a serious view of India's nuclear doctrine. The present government's task in negotiations is. thus, going to be tougher than before. This emphasises the need for credible moves for a national consensus which, despite official professions, have not been undertaken seriously. As regards terrorism, New

Delhi could have the satisfaction of a greater realisation in the world of the dangers of its international brand but there is no case for a facile assumption that others would join india against Pakistan's export of terrorism. New Delhi's job in this and in the two other cases may, if anything, be tougher.

By arrangement with The Hindu of India.

Heading East

Demand makes West Bengal mull more buses to Dhaka. Krittivas Mukherjee reports from Calcutta

Now what will possibly be

HE West Bengal state government has proposed raising to 15 the number of buses plying the Calcutta-Dhaka international route to meet the growing demand for the service. It has also suggested developing an alternative route to avoid traffic snarls.

Santanu Goswamy, managing director of the West Bengal Surface Transport Corporation, which runs the service on behalf of India, said the state government had written to New Delhi to consider increasing the frequency of the bus service as there is a "good market".

At present four buses ply the route each day. India runs its two buses on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, which return on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The service is unavailable on Sundays. About 80 people can be accommodated in two buses that have been running choc-a-bloc since the start of the service in July. Each trip

takes 10 hours. Goswamy told IANS, "As about 2,000 bona fide people travel to Calcutta from Dhaka every day by air or the land route, there is scope to tap this market by increasing the number of buses plying daily." He said seats are reserved weeks ahead and many travellers have to make alternative arrangements for travelling to or from Calcutta.

The state government has suggested that the two countries could run a total of 15 buses daily to cater to the "fairly large market". The proposal also included operating night services. The West Bengal government has suggested that three to four buses could be run during the day and an identical number could ply at night. Sources said the proposal made business sense as the service was very popular among the

middle class of both countries. A round-trip costs about \$22 in fare, besides documentation State Transport department sources said the Indian government was likely to take up the

matter with Bangladesh during this month's scheduled meeting between the officials of the two countries. New Delhi and Dhaka have agreed to sit every three months to diccuss any problems in the service.

State transport secretary D.S. Kanowar said the proposal for an alternative route had also been sent to the Surface Transport Ministry. The present route, through Barasat-Bongaon, is considered unsuitable for international traffic because of the narrowness of the arterial Jessore road in the North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal.

According to the proposal, an alternative route could be along the Bongaon-Chakda road. Though the proposed route would mean circumventing a distance of about 20 km, the journey time could be brought down by about half an hour. The present route is congested, passing though markets and as many as six railway

- India Abroad News Service

Hope for Nepal

Nepal hopes to cash in on UAE ban on Indian and Pakistani labour, reports Deepak Gajurel from Kathmandu

TEPAL, which suffers from a high rate of unemployment, is hoping to cash in on the recent ban by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on visas for unskilled labourers from India and Pakistan.

Employment of Nepali workers in the UAE was one of the key issues that figured in talks between the Nepali Minister for Labour, Bal, Bahadur KC, and his UAE counterpart, Humed Al Tayar, during the former's recent visit to the

"Minister Tayar informed me that the UAE had suspended a large number of working visas from some countries of South Asia which were sending excessive workers 'in order to maintain a balance in number of foreign workers in the country,' he said. "We can capitalise on the situation," he said, as Nepal has not been included in the list.

The UAE had frozen visas for unskilled workers from India and Pakistan saying there was a huge surplus of manual workers from the two countries and that demand was less than Foreigners account for as much as 85 per cent

of the UAE's 2.7 million population and more than 90 per cent of the workforce, with Indians and Pakistanis at the top of the list. The number of Nepali citizens going to the

Gulf region for jobs has more than doubled in the last two years, according to Department of Labour statistics.

Almost 90,000 Nepalis are currently employed in the region, including some 70,000 in Saudi Arabia and about 15,000 in UAE. Others are scattered in Bahrain, Qatar and elsewhere in the region. In 1997, only 40,000 Nepali workers were employed in the region, according to the de-

With labour demand in the oil-rich Gulf countries going up, Nepal is gearing up for a more focussed approach on sending more unemployed Nepalis to the region.

partment.

Of the country's 23 million population, more than 14 per cent are unemployed, according to the National Planning Commission. Around half of the total population is believed to be underemployed as 82 per cent of the people are involved in agriculture which does not provide year-round employment. To facilitate easy movement of workers,

Nepal has requested the Saudi government to open its diplomatic mission in this Himalayan country. During his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, Bal Bahadur requested Saudi Minister for Labour and Social Affairs Ali Ibrahim to establish a

to facilitate the employment process for Nepali labour. Currently, Nepali labourers seeking foreign employment in Saudi Arabia have to go to Bangladesh to get their visa. The Saudi Arabian Embassy in Dhaka looks after Nepal affairs. In

residential diplomatic mission in Nepal in order

the process, job seekers face many hurdles. The root cause of irregularities for Nepali labourers seeking employment in the Saudi kingdom is the lack of a diplomatic mission in Nepal. So this is on top of our agenda." Bal

Bahadur said after returning from the Gulf. "I also requested Minister Ibrahim to provide necessary training to our labourers seeking employment in his country so that they can efficiently conduct their duties. I am happy to inform that the Saudi Minister has responded

positively." Bal Bahadur said the Saudi Labour Ministry and the Saudi Arabian Chamber of Commerce had shown interest in Nepal's proposal to send Nepali women to work as domestic helps in that country. There is a high demand for domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, he said. Asked whether he was aware of South Asian domestic workers being abused in Saudi Arabia, he said "such

cases were exceptions rather than the rule." - India Abroad News Service

The matter wrong in Pakistan is institutional breakdown, says Ayaz Amir he service chiefs, beginning with General Pervez Musharraf, have set a good example by disclosing details of the properties they and their

immediate families hold. While this is a step in the right direction and one which should be followed by all fat cats - political, bureaucratic and commercial - it also goes some way to reveal one of the things wrong with the Pakistani elite: it is over-privileged and over-pampered.

The army chief has six plots, an under-construction house in Karachi and two squares agricultural land in Bahawalpur. This is besides a house owned by his parents in Islamabad and a house in the name of his daughter in Defence, Karachi. The naval chief has three sizeable plots, a flat in his wife's name in Islamabad and the obligatory two squares of land in Bahawalpur. This is what he must have acquired while in

service. What he inherited were four acres (repeat four acres) of barani land in Rawalpindi and six acres in Multan. The air chief has six plots and the inevitable two squares in Bahawalpur. At this rate there will not be any land left in Bahawalpur. While a grateful nation

would not grudge the leading defenders of the motherland these privileges, a person in a shantytown would be forgiven for thinking that there was a plot too many in all these lists. As Tolstoy asks in his famous short story; how much land

does a man require?

A great deal will depend on how bank defaulters are tackled after November 16. This date has been built up so much, not least by newspaper ads which no one seems to realize are always an exercise in futility. that if the action against defaulters does not come up anywhere near the hype, no one

should be surprised if disillusionment sets in early. Especially among the civic-minded sections of the middle class who are always more concerned about the country than anyone else and who, in this instance, are looking upon the military takeover and its threats of reform as signs of the final com-

Vagueness is also visible in the monitoring mechanism which the army is setting up to ensure, as has been stated, good governance. This will function under the chief of the general staff. General Aziz, and go from the corps, which will keep an eye on the provinces, to progressively smaller units down to the district level. Even in theory this sounds like a halfbaked idea. The CGS should run GHQ and keep an eye on the army. How can he monitor, much less understand, the

functioning of government?

The matter wrong with Pak-

down. Nothing, apart perhaps from the post office, works the way it should: not the provincial secretariats, not the district management group, the criminal justice system, the revenue departments or, indeed, the lynchpin of all, the criminal Justice system. This breakdown will scarcely be helped by any 'monitoring'. It requires a serious effort at reform of which the military, at least for now, seems to have little clue. The army can jump-start the process of reform by banging

istan is institutional break-

knows what it wants and where it wants to go. Part of the problem of course is that this batch of reformers is learning on the job. There is nothing wrong with this except that if the pace shown thus far is anything to go by, we are in for a fairly extended appren-

heads together and cracking a

few eggs. This is what it can be

good at, provided of course it

ticeship. Who will defray the expenses of this exercise in learning? Obviously the nation which over the last 52 years has had more than its fill of seeing where good intentions lead when not backed by understanding and vision. Part of the problem also is that the public's honeymoon

with General Musharraf (and let it be stated for the record, that of General Musharraf's with the public) is still going strong. As long as this mood lasts there are not many people willing to hear criticism of the army, especially when in defence of the army it can be said that it has not had time to prove itself. To disarm criticism further people looking enthusiastically at the military takeover are saying that this is the country's last chance and that if after the failure of democracy the army too fails we are done for and our future is sealed.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Paktistan.