

Electoral Reforms

WE are totally in agreement with the Election Commission (EC) about certain electoral reforms that we think must be carried out most urgently. To generate public debate on that urgent issue we have started an interview series from last Sunday of political leaders, which we hope will be followed by leaders of the civil society and the public in general. Following are some of the key areas where urgent reforms are needed:

First, the EC must be greatly strengthened. It should be given its own permanent staff at least down to the district level, financial independence and a much higher public profile. Second, the Election Tribunal must be made more effective and made to determine all the complaints within three months. Another three months should be set aside for appeals. The whole process must, by law, finish within six months of any election. Whatever we need to do to make this possible we should do. Third, the ceiling for election expenses should be raised to Tk 10 lakh from the present three, which everyone knows is not respected. Thus our election begins with a great lie and a fraud. But along with the enhancement of the ceiling, the EC's auditing capacity must also be raised so that returns of expenses by individual candidates must be meticulously audited. Today due to the inadequacy of the EC's auditing capacity most of the expense records submitted to the EC by a candidate after elections remain unexamined. The strategy that EC can adopt is to examine the accounts of the winning candidates on an urgent basis, with that of the rest being attended to immediately afterwards. This will reduce the EC's immediate task to examining only three hundred dossiers, a task that can be accomplished with speed and accuracy. To assist the EC, funds must be made available to enable it to hire outside auditors; the latter in turn could be persuaded to provide services for nominal charge with assurance of tax benefit and positive public image.

The EC's power, to declare any candidate's election invalid if irregularities are detected in the financial statement submitted, must be enforced with determination. The idea of having EC's own financial inspectors who will go around during the campaign time to see on the spot how the candidates are spending their money and submit reports to the EC along with pictures and video clips is worth examining. Here again private auditing houses can be invited to assist for a fee. Once the candidates — those who have won, and those who lost — see that no hanky panky is possible with election expenses imposed by the EC, then much of the financial irregularities will disappear.

The above suggestions are part of a wider package of reforms, which the EC has put forward. The FEMA has also put forward a comprehensive set of suggestions. We urge our readers to write to us with their own views on it and create a public demand for electoral reforms, which we think must be undertaken before the next election.

Border of Tension

OUR border with India has been the touchline of tension for a reasonably long period of time. We have almost lost count of the incidents of illegal intrusion by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) into the Bangladesh territory through several points along this 16 hundred-mile stretch. The BSF has entered into our territory, stolen cattle and poultry, looted crops, and killed innocent Bangladeshis. The latest incident of killings by the BSF took place on Saturday at Satyanagar in Feni district. Two young men, Ferdous, 16 and Shah Alam, 25, were gunned down in the morning. Twenty others were also injured in the shooting. The body of Shah Alam, taken away by BSF, was later returned to Bangladesh. This is one of the many incursions that the BSF has made into Bangladesh territory in recent times.

After damages are done and innocent lives lost, normally flag meetings are held between the area commanders of BSF and BDR and we are always at the receiving end — receiving dead Bangladeshis from the BSF. Hardly has our government ever tried to look into these incidents of BSF excess and hardly has there been any attempt to talk this matter over with higher authorities in India. Despite occasional assurances from the Indian leadership, the BSF has continued with their excesses.

We strongly feel that there should be an end to these cross-border incursions by the BSF. The government should hold talks with its Indian counterpart to settle the issue once and for all. Also we expect good neighbourly behaviour from the Indians.

Murders Unchecked

SUDDEN spate of murders in the capital city in the last few days or so could have anyone wondering whether law and order in the country has completely crumbled. Most of the killings reported occurred in broad daylight. On Sunday morning, miscreants shot dead a police constable in the old town. The previous morning, a constable-turned-contractor was gunned down at his own residence in the city's Badda area. Conservative count puts the number of killings, political or otherwise, in the capital city only over the last 15 days at 15; that is, one everyday. Elsewhere in the country, the scenario is more or less the same, if not worse. Also, the recently-published Institute of Democratic Rights' figures on murders during March — a whopping 260 — indicate a progressive deterioration of law and order, not the other way round as the government so happily claim. The overall situation certainly gives rise to concern over the law enforcement mechanism's ability to ensure safety and security of people.

The government must wake up to the fact that its much-publicised anti-terrorism and anti-crime drive countrywide has failed to bring about a reversal to the alarming upward trend in the crime curve. With intensification of police operations, the criminals appear to have intensified their activities as well. There is reason to believe that while scores of arrests have been made and illegal weapons recovered, many a criminal has remained beyond the clutches of law.

Weighed against the alarming rise in murders over the last few days or months, the success the government claims of its various law enforcement operations would certainly prove inconsequential. The time has surely come for an objective evaluation of the law and order scenario and rethink the government's anti-terrorism and anti-crime strategy.

THE first phase of Mr. Nawaz Sharif's trial is over. The judgment is a body blow to the Military regime's expectation. Hamstrung as the judiciary is in Pakistan, the judgment reflects a fine balance between pandering to some extent the Military Establishment's objectives, and satisfying to some extent the demands of justice and fair-play as well. Given the constraining parameters within which the institution of the judiciary in Pakistan has developed in the last 53 years, that Mr. Sharif has not been awarded the death sentence is in itself an act of bravery on the part of the judge. The last time a Pakistani Prime Minister was on the docks on a capital charge, the judgment was a foregone conclusion. I have heard stories in Pakistan that the late, but hardly lamented, General Ziaul Huq is said to have commented: "I see clearly one noose before me but two necks, and it is not mine which is going to go in that noose!" Mr. Bhutto had not endeared himself to many, by his arrogance, authoritarianism and his dubious role in the events of 1970-71 which led to the break-away of Bangladesh from Pakistan. But all said and done, as has been commented here in this country, his execution was simply "judicial murder". Many may, or may not, have mourned the passing of Mr. Bhutto, but his friends and foes alike did mourn the demise of justice in his case.

The similarity in the stand-off time, between another Prime Minister, and his appointed Chief of Army Staff is certainly palpable and striking. With one exception — this time, the civilian Prime Minister was elected with a clear majority by the people, and he continued to hold a commanding majority in the people's parliament. It is another matter that he had become so vastly unpopular. However, popularity is at best a passing phase for almost any leader in most developing and poor countries. The magnitude and dimension of the problems of poverty-ridden countries with big populations outpacing economic growth, like in the countries of South Asia but particularly in Pakistan, are so complex and so vast, that no mortal leader can deliver any miracles. The pressures of survival in such problem-ridden

countries inevitably tends to endow the public with very short memories, and they end short spurring after relatively short spans of time, the very leaders they themselves had idolized earlier and raised to high pedestals. The honeymoon period for leaders in such circumstances tends to be notoriously short.

I am no legal expert, but reading through the text of the judgment I am struck by the tongue-in-cheek manner in which Mr. Nawaz Sharif has been given "the lesser sentence". If anything, a closer reading of the sentence is a damning indictment of the Military, for the judge concedes: a) that the murder case brought by the prosecution against Mian Nawaz Sharif was not tenable since the plane in question was allowed to land for refueling;

b) that all the other co-accused with him were not guilty and he therefore acquitted them;

c) that when the alleged offense of attempting to hijacking was committed, at that time the said offense was "not a schedule offense" under the terms of the original Notification of the Law, but retrospectively included by the amendment to the original notification on December 2, 1999;

d) that "the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, who was Defense Minister also, came to know that his authority was eroded by some few army soldiers, therefore he has reacted in this manner" and committed the said offence "at the spur of the moment and in the heat of passion".

So what exactly has the "then Prime Minister who was defense minister also" been convicted of? For trying to stage off an illegal coup against his elected government, or for taking an ill-judged action "at the spur of the moment and in the heat of passion"? My layman's commonsense translates that as meaning that Mr. Sharif

up murky dealings, including the Chandrachud inquiry, have only damaged the inquirer's reputation. No one can now pretend that cricket is clean or lily white—if it ever was.

Such cleanliness as there might have been disappeared when the white flannels of slow five-day tests were replaced by luridly coloured uniforms emblazoned with corporate logos. For a quarter-century, commerce has ruled cricket.

Long ago, cricket burst upon the ex-colonial Anglophone world as a spectator sport. In the words of C.L.R. James, West Indian scholar and pioneering theoretician of the sport, cricket has been "first and foremost a dramatic spectacle. It belongs with the theatre, ballet, opera and dance."

That opened cricket to commercial interests, especially with the spread of television. The decisive change came with Kerry Packer's efforts to detach the game from test matches, and quicken its pace. Television freed cricket from its locational dependence, providing a better view of dramatic moments than the naked eye.

One-day cricket greatly increased the availability of the sport as a consumable commodity. Its audience ballooned into scores of millions and became

us responsible.

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Repair work required

Sir, It is a matter of great regret that we, the inhabitants of Noyatola area, have been suffering severely due to lack of proper sewerage system. Even though we have been paying our taxes and bills regularly, for the last two years our sewerage line have been completely out of order. And the MCC surface drains are now being used for disposal of sewer. This is indeed a threat to the environment and civic health. If the sewerage system breaks down completely, the impact would be severe.

Under these circumstances, we urge the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to sort out this problem.

On behalf of the inhabitants of Noyatola
Md Minhaj Uddin
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The Nawaz Sharif Judgement

Quo Vadis, Pakistan?

by Ahmad T. Karim

The international community will have a very important role to play. They must consciously decide now, are they friends of the ordinary people of Pakistan, or of the Pakistani military. In any action they take, they must put those contemplated actions to a litmus test: will such action benefit the military regime, or will it ultimately benefit the needs of the ordinary people of that country. . .

as the legal Head of Government, his perceived unpopularity notwithstanding, was merely taking defensive action in averting a coup d'état, an illegal act, by the Army Chief of Staff who is supposed to be subordinate to and loyal to the constitutionally elected government. The charge on which Mr. Nawaz Sharif has been convicted is, I presume, itself open to ridicule by any clever criminal lawyer. Moreover, as some mischievous people in Pakistan have pointed out, the General's plane could have landed in any of the country's several military bases, had the General so chosen, since he so thoroughly controlled the levers of military power as demonstrated by him as soon as he landed. So was the whole exercise in indicting him with those specific charges a conspiracy, as Mrs. Kulsoom Nawaz, the wife of the hapless Prime Minister has openly contended? In Pakistan, one can never be sure that it is not, since the history of that country is replete with instances of "conspiracies" cooked up by highly imaginative minds in the military or quasi-military establishment, to suppress any perceived civilian encroachments upon their exclusive turf.

The General and his regime are not likely to let this case go. Their own survival is at stake here. The co-accused who were acquitted have not been released yet. Both parties can and will, appeal against the judgment to the Sindh High Court first, and then to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, if Mr. Sharif's brother, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, who is the real political animal in the Sharif family, is allowed to go free, he might well succeed in re-inventing his brother's image as a martyr, and once again rally and polarize popular support around Mr. Nawaz Sharif.

In the South Asian tradition, such leaders do not simply fade away, and today's villains can well bounce back as tomorrow's heroes. Remember Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was written off in 1977? It took her less than a year to return with triumph to center stage.

The Military Establishment in Pakistan has transformed into a law unto itself, right from the very birth of Pakistan in 1947. Pakistan's political institutions have been so weakened by the rapacity of the Military that, contrary to what the Military claim as an excuse for their latest coup, 10 years were not enough for the democratic process to establish sustainable roots and take off on a mature course. Democracy is a process, and every country must evolve it to suit its own genius and needs. Institution building and a great deal of investment in education and public awareness programs, for developing intrinsic resilience.

The democracies in the Western world also evolved through their own processes, taking centuries before graduating and transforming gradually from feudalism to people's power. Pakistan is still very far away from such a defining moment. Its politics is still overwhelmingly feudal based. And the Military Establishment, in collusion often with an elitist-based bureaucracy, never really gave the process a fair chance. The paramountcy of the army in Pakistan is directly antithetical to the growth and development of the democratic process in that country. The army's raison d'être is the threat perception from and continuing confrontation with India. Therefore, it has deeply entrenched vested interest in keeping active, and prolonging, this confrontation. If a civilian, or even a quasi-civilian government, even with limited mandate of the people, dared to edge towards a rapprochement with the enemy, the army would immediately scuttle such efforts, if necessary by removing

the government. And every successive military rule has only resulted in turning the clock back. Every successive conflict, or confrontation in an arms race, or missile race, or the nuclear race, with India has dragged the country's economy further down, leaving progressively less and less for the country's economic development and societal needs.

The Military has always ignored the basic truth that if the economy was in shambles, it was largely so because of pandering to the jingoism of the extreme right and the Military, pouring the bulk of the nation's resources into an arms and missile race, and finally the nuclear race as well. If anything, these were really the root cause for the country's endemic economic malaise. Perhaps Nawaz Sharif was playing a desperate balancing game, trying to keep the military and the right fringe happy, hoping to contain them by pampering them, while at the same time proceeding as fast as he could to normalizing relations with India, which was part of his popular mandate anyway. It did not work. Appeasing fanaticism, or megalomania, never does. Remember Munich?

Much has been written in the Pakistan and international media about the sighs of relief and joy, which greeted the coup in Pakistan. Of the wide unpopularity of the Prime Minister. The undisputed fact remains that Nawaz Sharif was an elected Prime Minister, the first one in Pakistan's history to have been elected with a convincing mandate. He was the Head of government, and in that capacity, he had the prerogative of hiring or firing the service chiefs. But as has happened so often in Pakistan, the tail wagged the dog. The military coup was illegal. Merely having indulged in it so often in the past and quoting precedence does not give it legal status or justify it. If military coups could have been the panacea to

the problems of a country or its peoples, its virtues would have supplanted democratic, or other institutions of governance in many parts of the world. We would still have Marcos in the Philippines, and Suharto in Indonesia, and an Abacha in Nigeria, and many more such dictators in other African, Asian and Latin American countries.

The instruments of fanaticism which Pakistan helped create in Afghanistan are now, like the proverbial chicken, all coming home to roost. Rumblings of how little General Musharraf has progressed on his many promises, all old wine in new bottles, are beginning to be muttered. The General is riding a tiger, and therein lies the danger, for this will leave him with no option but to cling on desperately to it and prolong his ride for as long as he can.

Because of the information revolution, the time span between rumblings and outright outbursts of dissent is, however, likely to become progressively shorter. The General may not get as much time as his illustrious predecessors did, the eleven years of Ziaul Huq, or the ten years of Ayub, or even the less than three years of Yahya Khan. So we shall, in all likelihood, witness more attempts on the part of the General to roll back the judgment, to deny the Sharif family an opportunity to re-invent themselves as political entities to reckon with and bounce back to center-stage in Pakistan.

Given the situation, the international community will have a very important role to play. They must consciously decide now, are they friends of the ordinary people of Pakistan, or of the Pakistani military. In any action they take, they must put those contemplated actions to a litmus test: will such action benefit the military regime, or will it ultimately benefit the needs of the ordinary people of that hapless country, in building their devastated institutions and giving them an intrinsic resilience which, in the ultimate analysis, is the best security of any state.

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Cronje, Cricket, Corruption

The Real Game is Money

Pratul Bidwai writes from New Delhi

In cricket-in-action, three processes are played out simultaneously. There is the sport, of course. Then, there is the money game. And there is the reproduction and perversion of values that define our elite. Cricket's popularity is explained partly by the aesthetics of the game, and partly by voyeurism. Many people without great athletic prowess play the game and can substitute themselves for the players. That popularity is also driven by glamour, and by cricket's function as a vehicle of nationalism.

Corporate sponsorship became the "natural" form of business incursion into cricket. Cricket's internationalisation with Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka coming in raised its visibility, audience and commercial profile.

Cricket offers enormous scope for "star" performances. So it becomes especially amenable to commercial exploitation, not just through sponsorship but also gambling.

The exceptional importance of subjective and intangible factors — individual skills, weather and ground conditions, and other "glorious uncertainties" — also facilitate speculation. From here, it is but a small step to corruption. Bribery is nothing but business "by other means".

Many cricketers too have become models of greed, ready to

violate the collective interest for personal self-aggrandisement. The dramatic rise and equally dramatic decline of Sri Lankan cricket is the story of sheer greed ruining the game.

Even more malign has been the influence of cricket control boards. These are the preserve not of genuine patrons of the game, but of devious power-brokers. They too are more susceptible to corporate manipulation.

In all this, cricket reflects or mimics the evolution of the Indian elite, with its growing corporatisation, avarice, amenability to influence, individualism, and moral debasement. Like other elite institutions such as stockmarkets, exclusive schools or posh clubs, cricket structures also dutifully reflect compromised values.

If you embrace the greed

creed, and buy your membership of the gymkhana with Rs. 10 lakhs in black money, then what's wrong with making a few lakhs through corruption? As Manoj Prabhakar says: "Why will anyone want to win a match for a mere Rs. 1 lakh when they can earn 20 times more for losing it?"

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The Two Koreas, the Summit and the Dilemma

by Ekram Kabir

FOR a long time, especially since the end of the cold war, North and South Korea have kept the world guessing on their relationship. However, the announcement of first-ever summit meeting of the two Koreas, since the peninsula was divided in 1945, did not come as a surprise. But this historic meet of South Korean President and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang scheduled for June 12-14 this year, may demonstrate some major changes and newer tensions in international politics.

Powers like Japan, US, China and Russia have welcomed the initiative, saying that if the summit is actually held, it would be "epoch making". BBC's Caroline Gluck reports there are many difficult issues that need to be resolved between the two sides, but the breakthrough is seen as a historic chance "to end the world's remaining legacies of the cold war. Indeed, these cold-war rivals are technically still at war after their three-year bitter conflict in the 1950s ended in a truce. And so far the West is concerned, it may only look forward to removing the remains of the cold war."

The schedule, however, is a resumption of a summit planned six years ago, in 1994 when Kim Jong Il's father, Kim Il Sung, was to meet Kim Young Sam of the South. But that never happened because of the sudden death of Kim Il Sung just 17 days before the summit.

Even long after the end of bipolarism in the global power axis, concerns about North Korea, the last outpost of Stalinism, continue to persist. For example, South Korea, America and Japan met last month to coordinate policies regarding what to do about North Korea. They are all concerned about its missile production. Moreover, it is also believed that Pyongyang is working with Iraq to build a new ballistic missile plant in Sudan.

But in recent months, this secretive Stalinist state has begun to show signs of coming out of its diplomatic isolation. In doing so, Pyongyang held a series of high-level talks with Tokyo and Washington. And, given the latest announcement, that seems to bear results.

Now, the question is: will the June summit herald an end to security and political turmoil related to North Korea?

Nobody is sure, say the Korea observers, and more events will unfold once the South Korean parliamentary elections are over and the two sides discuss the details of the summit later this month. While they do so, the timing of the announcement of the summit has not been received without scepticism among analysts. The decision for summit may seem like a fundamental shift in inter-Korean relations, but the timing and haste in which the decision was made suggest a different angle. A certain "dependence" between "government factions" in North Korea and the party of Kim Dae Jung in the South seemed obvious. The oppositions to this development in both the Koreas are also clear.

Since the announcement came just days before general elections were due, on April 13, in South Korea, President Kim Dae Jung has been criticised to have taken advantage in showing that his North Korea policy is paying off as a statement of South's opposition. Grand National Party was quoted by the BBC: "No regime in history has turned to such a blunt and shameless trick to win an election."

However, the gloom did not last as the Grand National Party strengthened its position as the biggest party in parliament in last Thursday's general elections. And the Millennium Party of President Kim Dae Jung did win some extra support in some areas after the news of the historic summit with North Korea.

On the other side, it is a chance for North's Kim Jong to show that it is the South's policy that has worked and Pyongyang was not under duress while agreeing to hold the summit. Kim Jong Il is not without trouble as well. There are splits within the North Korean government on foreign policy issues that are likely to stir controversy in Pyongyang. For example, in 1998, as Kim Jong Il took power, Pyongyang began to reduce its diplomatic overseas staff by 30 per cent, until "food and economic problems" in the country were solved. At the same time, there were several (unconfirmed) reports in the western media that North Korea was under a near state of martial law following an attempted military coup. By the end of 1998 and into early 1999, North Korea had again reversed the course, seeking to

increase the number of diplomats stationed overseas.

North Korean officials, with reported deep links to the economic opening to the South, wished to see the Kim Dae Jung government remains intact, or they may lose their power. Kim Dae Jung's own party has been relying on the apparent softening of North Korea's regime to retain its mandate in the South. Pyongyang has repeatedly fought over its diplomatic policy, particularly whether to remain isolated -- and thus insulated -- from the rest of the world. This struggle may again be coming to a head, analysts expect, prompting the sudden announcement of the leader's meeting as a way to legitimise the role of those advocating economic ties in the face of the isolationists.

Now, does this "mutual dependency" indicate the collapse of North Korea? If so, then how would its neighbours and other powers react to that?

The collapse may start a huge refugee influx across the borders into South Korea, Russia and China. And then, since the US maintains a military presence in the Sea of Japan, there could be a serious escalation of tension between China and the US. The emergence of a unified Korea would cause deep unease in Beijing.

It remains to be seen whether these powers are looking at this summit, as BBC's Caroline Gluck said, as a historic chance "to end the world's remaining legacies of the cold war" or they want something more from it.

function as a vehicle of nationalism.

The commercialisation of sports has three major consequences. It makes sports universally vulnerable to malpractices like match-rigging. This means sports must be corporatised and limits placed on sponsorship and fees/bonuses.

Secondly, we have unwittingly become victims of the controllers of the sports business and media. They decide which game to promote and how. They ran down a great game like hockey, while hyping up golf. Tomorrow, it might be the turn of polo or baseball. We'll still be consuming whatever is promoted — passively.

And third, sports will increasingly lose the two things that make them attractive to ordinary people. The first is the thrill in using one's physical and mental skills in controlled and innovative ways. Winning a game is as important as playing it well — even while losing. The second is the unique ability of sports to do "poetic justice" in real life, the underdog loses. On the playground, s/he can win.

Continued corporatisation of sports will leave no room for such role reversal, for imagination itself. That would be a far graver tragedy than match-fixing!