

Pakistan

Prisoner of the past

EKRAM KABIR

PAKISTAN'S military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, seems an insightful follower of the past. He understands the inability of the political parties to get organised against his (military) rule.

But democracy is important for Pakistan. But all indications say that General Pervez Musharraf may follow the footsteps of his predecessors - Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haq - and is likely to stay in power longer than is expected, even after push for restoration of democracy at various levels in that country.

This gives a depressing political culture in Pakistan as far as democracy is concerned. Political culture and conventions are products of a social milieu which strengthen with the democratic commitment and time.

When Pakistan became independent, say historians, Muslim League started losing its influence and prestige and was involved in bureaucratic and military policymaking.

Bangladesh

Why not untie the knots?

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE publication of this piece is likely to be synchronised with a major rally in the capital under the aegis of the ruling Awami League.

True, there seems to be no permanent foes or friends in politics. In our next-door neighbour, Indian state of West Bengal, all political calculations are being shattered ahead of state assembly elections.

Notes on the creation of crorepatris

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI

SOME time ago, I wrote about the deeper social risks of Kaun Banega Crorepati. I stand by my views; but last week's videotapes have placed them in a new perspective.

This makes it almost irrelevant which party is in power, whether the charges are entirely true, whether indeed the tapes are a fraud.

A crore is still a magic sum to most people: hence the appeal of the title of Amitabh Bachchan's show. Most middle-class citizens today think in terms of lakhs; relatively few advance to seven figures, and virtually none to eight.

A crore is still a magic sum to most people: hence the appeal of the title of Amitabh Bachchan's show. Most middle-class citizens today think in terms of lakhs; relatively few advance to seven figures, and virtually none to eight.

hand, the then East Pakistan formed its own party Awami League under the leadership of H S Suhrawardy.

In 1967, Pakistan People's Party was formed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which emerged as the party with new vision.

However, it remained as "West Pakistan's party" and Bhutto as "West Pakistan's leader". When erstwhile East Pakistan emerged as an independent country, People's Party emerged as the single-largest party in Pakistan.

Although Pakistan was founded as a democracy after the partition of the subcontinent, the army has remained one of the most powerful institutions of the country. This is in spite of the fact that in recent years the army has stressed that it has no desire to become embroiled in politics.

After Pakistan formally became a republic in 1956 under President Mirza, it faced an array of serious threats to its stability. Its conflict with India over Kashmir remained unresolved, relations with Afghanistan were poor, and the country suffered continuing economic difficulties.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the new president, introducing a new constitution which came into effect in 1973. But after elections in 1977, the opposition challenged Bhutto's victory, and widespread riots ensued.

This remained in force until 1985.

Despite the subsequent return to civilian government, the politics of Pakistan have remained closely linked to the military. Now the army's actions appear to herald an end to what has been the longest period in Pakistan's turbulent history in which the military has remained on the sidelines.

The influence of feudal and power-hungry people destroyed the party and ruined the political values in the country. So when a military man Ziaul Haq deposed Bhutto, Bhutto's party was not in a position to resist.

Eventually, Benazir became the victim of the 8th Amendment to the 1973 Constitution, which was Ziaul Haq's quid pro quo for lifting the martial law.

Zia himself used it against Junejo, the prime minister of his choice, and dissolved the very National Assembly, which had passed it. Two years later, in August 1990, it was used by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan against Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

The arrival of Nawaz Sharif, though in a way was able to revive the popularity of Muslim League who has been split up into various sections. However, the imbalances within the League remain there and he was not able to convey a transparent political system within the country.

Despite being the popular leaders of their time, neither Benazir nor Sharif made any attempt to strengthen their respective political parties. In fact, they neglected their parties throughout their tenures as prime ministers.

Parliamentary democracy in Pakistan has repeatedly failed only because its political leaders have not been able to build up well-organised and strong political parties. Given the performances of the weak pillars democracy, can one blame the army? And what would really happen when democracy returns to Pakistan in the same way it did in the past?

Ekram is a Daily Star staffer.

Bhutan

Improper growth?

KENCHO WANGDI in Thimphu

IMPROPER growth, congestion, lack of parking space and bad state of sanitation are some of the problems that metropolis grapple with have begun to rear their ugly heads in Bhutan.

According to the Thimphu thronpon, Phuntsho Wangdi, shortage of parking areas and congested traffic are some of the problems begging immediate attention. Then there are the concrete structures which are not always built according to plans and have begun to dominate whatever little available space.

"Thimphu city has grown without a real comprehensive plan," said the thronpon, pointing out that the developments in the city have far out-paced the response the municipal body could provide.

One of the mandates that the City Corporation had been asked to fulfill when it became an autonomous body in February, 1995, was to maintain proper sanitation and the aesthetic beauty of the town. It was felt, at that time, that the direct involvement of the residents and the autonomy given to the newly established town committee would ensure that the responsibilities in administering, maintaining and developing Thimphu would reach a standard which would make all Bhutanese proud of their nation's capital.

But it was easier said than done. The City Corporation could not carry out "many of its planned activities" for lack of funds. Facilities like suitably located car parks had to be identified and built but the implementation was difficult because the parks would have encroached on the private lands.

The past planners might not have been farsighted; the new constructions in the already congested areas are symbolic of their shortcomings. With the increase in the number of vehicles, the problem today has aggravated. The area behind the Norzin Lam, locally known as the Hong Kong market, is one such place needing prompt attention.

Despite these hurdles, the City Corporation has initiated several projects aimed at improving the city by seeking loans from the Asian Development Bank.

A parking area is being developed at the milk booth area while the redevelopment of Changlam and the taxi parking areas had been completed. The latter has a two-way lane with a divider separating the parking, which can accommodate 28 cars, 43 taxis and five buses, and the carriage way.

To encourage the use of the river side the City Corporation has begun the construction of what it calls the walk-way riverside. Scheduled to complete by the end of June, through the use of the walk-way, the City Corporation aims to increase environmental awareness of the public in keeping the city clean.

The City Corporation also begins this month the development of the Clock Tower Square which it claims will be the "heart of the city". The Square will serve as a civic center offering, among others, a venue for public awareness campaigns and cultural shows.

The problem of garbage has absorbed a great deal of the City Corporation's efforts and resources but a permanent solution is yet to be found. Rinzin Namgyel, Head of Environment Division at the City Corporation, laments the lack of progress while the thronpon threatens to implement the "carrot and stick" rule so that anybody found littering will be



A slice of Thimphu

penalised.

In former times, the ecological cycle attended to whatever people churned out. Garbage largely constituted edibles which were consumed by dogs, cats and birds, leaving no traces. With the advent of plastics, rubber, metal, glass and chemicals which are not edible nor biodegradable, the problem has left people anxious for solutions.

In what it calls the solid waste management, the City Corporation has various initiatives up its sleeve. The door-to-door collection will be increased and dust bins provided to the households at a nominal charge.

This move, said Rinzin Namgyel, will gradually remove the concrete bins. An over-stuffed concrete bin with stray dogs foraging about it has become symbolic of the garbage situation in Thimphu, particularly the town.

Meanwhile the educated lot can better themselves and the city by educating their children about civic sense and not blatantly throw 'dome'-stained papers and plastics on the streets. The so called 'modern people' are quick to distance themselves from the ugly heap but they couldn't care less if distancing themselves means throwing an empty cigarette case out of their car.

"If the capital town of Thimphu, with its importance, infrastructure, and concentration of educated people cannot be kept 'clean and green', it would be unreasonable to expect other towns to do so," these words, spoken by Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Choden Wangchuck during the Keep Thimphu Clean and Green workshop in 1992, are yet to be valued.

This piece first appeared in the Kuensel of Bhutan

Nepal

In memory of hope

C. K. LAL in Kathmandu

IN this all-pervasive gloom, it is getting increasingly difficult to keep the memory of March 1990 alive. But we must remember that Springtime of the People. It was a season of hope, an extraordinary time when Nepalis rose up spontaneously to express their determination to build a new future for themselves and their children.

On 16 March 1990 (3 Chaitra), Nepali litterateurs wore black bands over their mouths, marched through the streets and were hauled away in police trucks. A movement led by students was snowballing into a wider protest. Poets, novelists, artists, singers, theatre personalities breathed new life into the Jan Andolan. Those were the days when every little action mattered and even minor protests sent out a powerful symbolic message.

Then on 20 March (7 Chaitra) a professional solidarity group organised a seminar in Kirtipur, another in a series of protests that were becoming routine in the Kathmandu Spring of 1990. It was in fact an assembly of techno-dissidents/legal eagles, academics, engineers, career consultants, physicians and journalists. They were there at Tribhuvan University not just to protest, but to examine the possibility of alternatives.

The despair and recklessness of our political class (all erstwhile freedom fighters who offered us so much promise in 1990) is something we the people can force them to overcome. Politicians are experts at taking their cue from the political

It's yesterday once more. This time, a crucial difference instead of hope we have foreboding. There is ominous talk of the Ides of March.

Everyone is protesting something, some are protesting everything, but the common denominator is that they are all 'against' something, not 'for' anything. The fundamentalists of Balkhu have issued a fatwa that the prime minister must resign, and these Stalinists think democracy means holding parliament to ransom to oust a legitimately elected government.

Despair is not the monopoly of the main opposition. Their comrades-in-arms are in hot pursuit of utopia with a "Peoples' War" which has consumed nearly 2,000 lives, spread misery and brought development to a standstill. It's like a suicide bomber, this terror. The sacrifice is there, but it is meaningless. To die for a pie in the sky is fanaticism born out of a sense of rejection.

The despair and recklessness of our political class (all erstwhile freedom fighters who offered us so much promise in 1990) is something we the people can force them to overcome. Politicians are experts at taking their cue from the political

windsock, and if the mood of society changes from dejection to anticipation, leaders will once again come back to the fore to be what Napoleon called "dealers in hope".

Our intellectuals have turned into prophets of doom, but that does not dismay me either. To keep crying wolf is a part of their calling, they are expected to show us which way not to go, raising a red flag when society does so. Public intellectuals are expected to preach Camus' neither/nor. Neither the capitalist order riddled with inequalities. Ivory towers are not places to start digging new roads, it's good enough that they are just watch-posts.

What we should really worry about is the apathy of the intelligentsia. Wealth according to the gospel of Adam Smith is created primarily by capital. Marx said that it was labour that made and multiplied wealth. To those two factors of production, social democrats added the dimension of communication. It is communication that synthesises capital with labour, inspires innovation, and establishes harmony for the well being of the society.

Members of the intelligentsia perform that very crucial function of communication. They don't merely add, but multiply value. All of us have motives that makes us do what we do. For the ruling class, it is grandiose dreams of power. Fear fuels intellectuals, that is why they agonise so much. For the petty bourgeoisie, pretensionkeeping up with the Koirals. For the masses, the challenge of survival is so urgent that nothing else matters. But the motive that keeps intelligentsia 'productive' is hope. Snuff out hope, and it loses its light.

It is the death of hope that has immobilised the Nepali intelligentsia today. It must be resurrected if social democracy is to have a future. Here are you, all you doctors, engineers, artists and authors of the 1990 Kathmandu Spring? Where are you when the country needs you again? It is easy to curse politics and politicians, but show us the path of reform. Show us, and rekindle hope.

VIEW FROM KOLKATA

grandparents did not. They may not have thought of owning a car, any more than we think of owning a private jet. We want more things these days; those wants are translated into needs, above all by the wives of the global publicity machine; hence we end up wanting or needing more money. As a rule, our wants are specific and, at any given stage, finite. We buy a TV, then a fridge, then a car, then a flat... The list may keep lengthening till we lose count; but it remains a list of concrete wants nonetheless.

This consumerist ambition which extends to educating one's children expensively and marrying off one's daughters marks the economic agenda of most members of the salariat. In this respect, the MBA with a seven-figure salary is soul-brother to the pen-pushing babu. The former has climbed higher up the ladder; but it is the same ladder nonetheless. Common-or-garden corruption involving ten rupees or a few lakhs

and family, who can savour the delights of wealth without its cares. Innumerable ways, having money is clearly more pleasurable than having none; that's why people who preach the contrary are routinely disbelieved. Nonetheless, some rich men tell us that it grows ever harder to find safe and novel ways of enjoying very large sums of money. The possession of such wealth generates its own stress and ennui.

This has nothing to do with the stress of avoiding taxes and concealing one's ill-gotten gains a crude burden by comparison, by which our super-rich seem little afflicted. The insouciant candour of the taped dialogue clearly proclaims as much. Yet we are still thinking of specific acquisitions and activities to satisfy concocted needs after the real ones have been amply met. Money is viewed as the means of obtaining them. We are some distance yet from the true mystique of wealth. Hardy describes a woman

who views a banknote only for the design, as though it were a work of art. Metaphorised, this suggests the mindset of the true-blue tycoon which is not to say any jack-in-trade who might have amassed a few or a few hundred crores.

The prince among plutocrats pursues wealth with a disinterested, almost aesthetic purpose. Of course he does not forgo the pleasures, comforts and powers afforded by wealth (though a sprinkling of millionaires have eschewed these frivolities). Nor does he disown the crooked deal, the tax dodge, the mega bribe, the hired gun in fact, he might admit all these with greater zest, as an artist dispenses with cogently, how much money can we think of spending on ourselves and our near ones, or doing things in our name? At what point does a stated sum of money cease to represent the equivalent of defined wants and dreams, becoming instead a mere abstract figure? What would a middle-class person do with a crore?

The answers received by Bachchan range from the absurdly modest (buy gifts for the family, take a holiday) to the unrealistically ambitious (set up a speciality hospital). Clearly, these people have no practical notion of what the sum signifies. It's a romantic concept that literally means nothing to them. To possess a crore would be like owning a magic carpet or the elixir of youth. At what height, I wonder, is a crore of rupees a matter-of-fact sum, one in a series you receive and store privately, and then (presumably) spend to some tangible benefit for yourself, as opposed to a social end or public work? And how does one keep track of this vast unrecorded wealth, like an elephant hiding in a jungle? A man I know, an honest member of a suspect profession, once said to me, "Every man has his price; no doubt I have mine. I have been offered sums that, though substantial, were not too much for me to resist. I can imagine being offered an amount so large as to scare or bewilder me. But somewhere in between, there's a point where I am vulnerable. I don't know where it is. Only hope no one finds it out." No one ever did, as far as I know. But it is perturbing to think that for very many people in the upper reaches of our public life, that level of vulnerability is pitched too high for the nation to gauge.

Chaudhuri is a professor of English at Jadavpur University, Kolkata