

PAKISTAN

An engineered order

The general's road-map goes awry in the first phase of the much

ZAHID HUSSAIN

GENERAL Pervez Musharraf has announced a date for general elections as the much touted local governments are installed into office. Seemingly confident, the general described his election plan as a 'road-map to democracy.'

While there is still more than a year to go for the elections, at least one thing is abundantly clear, that they are unlikely to lead to restoration of full democracy.

If the results of the local government elections are any indication, the parliamentary polls due next year may swing things out of the junta's control.

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The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif) group has been wiped out, largely because of the military sponsored split. The PML (like-minded) has not been able to gain much ground despite the military's full backing.

The PPP's triumph in Sindh was more or less predictable, but its success in Punjab and the Frontier came as a surprise even to the most optimistic loyalists.

This is the first time that the PPP and Jamaat have entered into an electoral alliance. The two parties put up joint candidates for Nazims in Lahore, Peshawar and some other districts.

Besides the PPP, the Jamaat-i-Islami was another party that regained some ground. It managed to win control of Karachi, largely because of the absence of the

Muttahida Qaumi Movement, which boycotted the polls, fearing the military would not allow it a level field. The PPP's electoral performance in Karachi, however, seemed more significant as its support base in the city had long eroded.

The electoral success of these parties appears much more significant in view of the military government's effort to engineer the polls, particularly at the second stage of elections for Nazim.

The uncertainty and confusion surrounding the local governments is likely to worsen after the central and provincial elections. Most political parties have rejected the military's imposed system, saying that it may weaken the provinces and lead to further centralisation of power.

While the elections in Punjab were widely engineered, the government's options in Sindh were limited, because it had no alternative to present to the PPP in the province. Thus, despite its best efforts the military regime has not been able to instal a totally manipulated system.

There are already signs of friction between the local governments and the regime over authority. There is a lot of confusion over who controls the police and the administration. The government now finds it difficult to implement its own programme of 'devolution' of power. To make the situation even more complex, army monitoring teams have been authorised to monitor and check the functioning of local governments.

There is still more than a year left to the deadline set by the Supreme Court for the transfer of power to an elected government. That gives General Musharraf time to review his roadmap. He could, meanwhile, take some lessons from the country's history. Past experiments in 'guided democracy' have failed and in the present situation it will be even more difficult to impose quasi-military rule.

able to participate in the polls, Ms Bhutto has to step down from the party leadership and nominate another leader for the top post. This is a tough decision to take for the self-exiled leader. She faces the danger of losing control over the party in the long run if the PPP decides to participate in the elections under a new leadership.

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NEPAL

A year after Dunai

Nations need armies to go to war. But in peacetime, they need a strong and motivated police force.

C.K. LAL IN KATHMANDU

PASSING into post-traumatic stress, the United States of America has fallen for the coping mechanism of waging war on an enemy whose threat it has massively magnified. Its military buildup in the Gulf and Central Asia portends the mother of all battles.

No nation, not even a superpower or a military alliance like NATO can guarantee peace in a world plagued by increasing inequality and a vicious cycle of poverty, exploitation and injustice.

What is true of relationship between nations is equally valid for interdependence between different communities within a state. The moment a single community, or an alliance of dominant communities, decides to perpetuate the hold on power then the seeds of sedition are sown.

When the state becomes soft and ineffective, the powerful shut themselves inside fortresses. The weak, on the other hand, grow increasingly desperate and stop respecting life. Terrorism in such an asymmetrical struggle becomes inevitable.

The only long-term antidote to terrorism is to ensure justice in society. After all, the history of human civilisation is nothing but a chronicle of the search for justice.

Pursuit of justice is not just moral,



it is also practical. The way a society treats its weak is the only true measure of its civilisation, and nothing frightens away investment and trade as swiftly as a state that cannot deliver justice to the aggrieved.

The police is the social institution that helps implement laws to safeguard justice. Whether it is to get people off a burning skyscraper in Manhattan or to control anti-Maoist mobs in Biruwagadhi, Parsa, policemen are usually the first representatives of the state to arrive at a scene of carnage or conflict.

Unfortunately, the government doesn't seem to have learnt that primary lesson of carnage in Dunai exactly a year ago. Hundreds of guerrillas stormed the district headquarters of Dolpa on 25 September 2001.

nessed Dunai, the later humiliation in Holeri came as no surprise.

That is why on Saturday when the Ministry of Defence suddenly warned that it would not sit idly by if the sanctity of constitutional monarchy is ridiculed publicly it sounded more sinister than sensible.

On one year after Dunai, the Maoists are now engaged in talks. Some of their leaders are above ground. But faced with growing public backlash, their supply-lines throttled from the south, Maoists are in uncertain terrain.

C.K. Lal is a senior Nepali journalist. This piece is printed by arrangement with the Nepali Times.

WOMEN

Yes, I ask for my rights...

JACKIE HAQUE

NOBODY GIVES YOU anything unless you ask for it. No matter how strongly a woman feels about her rights, it is seldom noticed that she is treated, as she should be in and out of her house. And it is very rare that a woman wants to talk about violence against her, as she is always taught by her elders, along with her surroundings, to keep quiet if someone did anything wrong to her even if it means somebody like her husband physically abused her.

like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal etc. They learn that this is a normal thing that happens to everyone's life. So when she gets beaten up by her spouse, usually she doesn't talk about it. Being tortured is like a vicious cycle that goes on years after years - viciously until a woman finally reconciles at death.

In some cases, widows suffer this type of unwanted agonies. Someone who has lost her husband becomes a victim and is usually abused by all the other family members, even at her father's house. As widows apparently have nowhere to go, they remain silent about the injuries on her by folks around her. Even if she wanted to complain, where would she go?

Who will right the wrongs done to her? An elder relative? The police? Well, as far as the police is concerned, it is unimaginable how they react when they see a woman coming to the police station for filing a complaint.

Will all admit that women are ones who make everyone's life easier to live? However, the social scenario in Bangladesh along with other South Asian countries is such that the girl child is always neglected she is brought up in an environment which teaches her to be polite, submissive and tight-lipped in different circumstances. It gives her the feeling that she should always be quiet; she shouldn't ever protest against anything even if it means being physically abused. So they learn to be "tolerant" from a very early age. In rural areas, the picture is grimmer where a girl face discrimination even at the dinner table: the major portion of the dish inevitably goes to the male members of the family whereas leftovers are good enough for females. These practices, over time, get ingrained in the women folks, and they grow up thinking that it is okay to be treated the way they have been for thousands of years.

They deserve. Each and every girl in every house has to be taught to be conscious about their rights. If she doesn't speak up for what she deserves then she may have to go on being abused by the society and by the people she cares for. It must be emphasised to all members of the society that a woman is as much human as anyone else and she has all the rights to live like a human and if anyone denies her that right then she must protest. The rights activists have always talked about women's issues but there is a need for their males to be educated on women issues as well. Only then, may be, we can somehow eradicate violence against women. Otherwise it will be confined as an important subject at seminars and symposia. Let's not talk about paying lip service to rights written down on a piece of paper and file away. Rather, let's talk about how we treat each other at home and work. Women don't want rights to be mere statements, or part of a political movement, but because they want to help create a better world, a world in which they can live peacefully - together, because it's all about dignity and honour.

Jackie Haque, an IT professional, is also a freelance researcher.

BHUTAN

Resolving the labour issue

AS BHUTAN moves into the Ninth Plan, the royal government has once again reiterated its commitment to develop the private sector into a vibrant entity. To do so, the government has recognised the need to shift its role from being a "developer to an enabler", restricting itself to guiding, framing the right policies and creating an appropriate growth environment.

But, as recent some developments indicate, despite the best of intentions some issues will be hard to resolve, right at the policy level. This dilemma is best exemplified by the current impasse on the expatriate labour issue between the private sector and the policy makers.

Confronted with visible symptoms of looming employment problem and other considerations, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to cut down on the large expatriate workforce in the country. The policy is not new but drastic reduction targets were adopted only recently. The rule has, however, greatly disturbed the private sector and large government projects which employ thousands of imported labour. In discussions they have had with the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the

Department of Employment and Labour, private sector representatives have pointed out that the rule would have grave impact on all private businesses in the country.

While they support the overall essence of the policy, the private sector representatives feel that the rule should be implemented in a phased manner because, at the moment, there simply were not enough Bhutanese workers to replace the expatriates. Besides the general dearth of national workers, business and industrial undertakings needed skilled and semi-skilled hands such as plumbers, barbers, cobblers, bull-dozer drivers and mine and construction workers all of which were hard to find among the national workers.

While their dilemma is understandable it also reinforces the need for the private sector to come up with its own alternatives and solutions. Labour shortage can be solved, for example, by mechanisation but Bhutanese entrepreneurs generally have been reluctant to embrace it citing heavy financial investments required. In the eyes of the policy makers, this justification however is

weak: if they can buy flashy Toyota Land Cruisers, why not machines? thus deepening the suspicion that they want to cling on to cheap imported labour.

Even here the private sector can play an important role in fostering the attitude change. It should offer appropriate pay scales and other incentives, and put job security measures in place because these very deficiencies had been pointed out by job seekers in the past. Complex as it is, the labour issue cannot be resolved by any one party. It calls for a serious discussion between all concerned parties - the government agencies and the private sector. To make a meaningful and lasting impact, the joint decision thus arrived at will have to be implemented with the collaboration of all involved.

Courtesy: kuenselonline.com

SRI LANKA

Why neglect natural resources ?

L. M. SAMARASINGHE

WE are truly and literally in the dark with a power cut the duration of which has been increasing gradually. At the present time it is about four hours at a stretch and this may even increase. Hydro power came down to about 29%. We do recall that there was a time when it was said that after the Victoria Dam and the Hydro Power Station at that point is established we would be able to export electricity to India.

The CEB at present generates hydro power from a few rivers tapped at certain places and some of them connected with irrigation projects. There is also an ongoing debate on the possibility of setting up other power generation units using imported raw material such as coal.

Hydro power

Prior to the establishment of the CEB most tea and rubber estates in the up country had their own mini hydro power units to provide energy for the needs of such estates. They tapped the streams and rivulets close to their estates to generate this power. They provided electricity to work their factories and also for their bungalows and offices at no cost.

To facilitate the satisfactory flow of waste in these water courses they conserved the forest cover in the upper reaches of these streams and rivulets. The CEB made it illegal for anyone to generate hydro power and all those mini hydro power generators throughout the up country estates were closed down. After the closure of these mini hydro power units much of the forest cover in the upper reaches of these

streams and rivulets were also damaged by illicit fellers.

The better course would have been to levy a reasonable tax from all private mini hydro power units and encourage such generation of power in other rural areas as well. In China they even tap irrigation channels to generate power. One single such unit may generate only a little amount of power. But when you have thousands of them they certainly would make a major impact.

River basins

It would be useful to examine the ground condition which has led to this disastrous situation. Mother nature has been very generous to Sri Lanka and we have 103 rivers flowing down to join the sea at points right round the island. The hills are in the centre. There are very few countries in the world which enjoy this ideal and most desirable situation of land and water resources.

The upper reaches of almost all the rivers have been cleared of the forest cover mostly by illicit fellers. Without forest cover the supply of water to the streams and rivers would fall. This disastrous situation must be arrested if we are to survive. The only solution is to declare the river basins as our administrative areas. Each such area could then take necessary prevention and conservation measures to protect the upper reaches of rivers and streams and also protect the forest cover to ensure the conservation of water. This could help us to set up many more hydro power generation points and have a surplus of hydro power.

New Zealand is another country which has been gifted with a similar land and water resources system. They have taken advantage of this

unique gift of nature and set up the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council in 1941. They set up administrative local government areas according to river basins. Due to this far sighted and prudent course of action they are able to control floods, facilitate the even flow of water in rivers, conserve the forest cover in the upper reaches of the river basins and utilise the land for agricultural development while conserving the soil and also produce hydro power in abundance.

It is a pity that we have so far failed to take advantage of this unique gift of nature. The ancient hydraulic civilisation that we had in the past was the result of proper management of our resources. The forest cover that was well maintained in the central hills ensured the flow of water in all the rivers which were tapped at various points to feed the network of reservoirs and irrigation systems.

Forest cover

We had 70% of forest cover around 1900 and 44% in 1956; we have less than 20% at the present time. There is an accepted standard that there should be a minimum of 25% forest cover to maintain the required climatic patterns. We are therefore already in the red and disasters would visit us more often. Unless wisdom prevails to conserve the water courses and forest cover we would have a desert in about another hundred years of mismanagement of natural resources.

Administrative divisions

It is a shame that we have not had the courage of our own convictions even after half a century of independence to change our administrative boundaries which was a strait jacket foisted on us to punish the

people who rebelled in 1818. The Colebrook Commission divided this island in 1833 into five provinces. They were the Central, Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western provinces.

Later on the North Western Province was established in 1845, the North Central Province was established in 1873, the Uva Province in 1886 and the Sabaragamuwa Province in 1889. These were sub-divisions of the original five provinces and were so established for the convenience of the colonial administrators. We now have 24 districts which are all sub-divisions of the five provinces created by Colebrook in 1833. This country can never prosper on the basis of this most unreasonable and undesirable pattern of administrative divisions.

We need to establish administrative divisions according to the river basins. With the 103 rivers that we have we can have any number of administrative divisions to suit our requirements. Two or three smaller river basins could go into one administrative division if it were considered necessary. This is the only way to ensure the conservation of the upper reaches of the river basins and the forest cover and maintain the even flow of water.

Report

The report of the Land Commission appointed by the President in 1985 (Sessional Paper 111 of 1990) has devoted an entire chapter consisting of 42 paragraphs highlighting the importance and the need for redefinition of administrative boundaries based on river basins. They have recommended the early appointment of a Boundaries Commission to establish the

administrative boundaries according to river basins.

It is quite unfortunate that this most crucial and important recommendation of that commission has not yet received the attention of the government.

This is a vital and urgent need for our survival and progress. The South West monsoon has never failed before as it did this year. The monsoon winds need ground support to saturate and provide rain. Who cut our forests? The forest cover has suffered tremendous damage. We are supposed to treat our gifts of nature as resources borrowed from the next generation and conserve them with utmost care and attention.

Land Development Scheme

The setting up of Land Development Schemes necessitated the clearing up of forest areas particularly in the dry zone region. Apart from that there had been large scale illicit fellings during the post independence period particularly during the last two decades.

It would be the responsibility of the authorities to probe into these irresponsible destruction of essential resources and adequately punish those responsible for such damage and disaster to the nation.

It would be desirable to provide legislation to facilitate the confiscation of the wealth and property of persons responsible for causing such irreparable damage to the country and next generation.

Courtesy: The Sunday Observer.

