

Pakistan: Fine tuning of democracy



Musharraf: On which side of democracy?

The Human Rights International Desk of the Pakistan Peoples Party would like to draw your attention on the recent statement given by General Pervez Musharraf, the self proclaimed President of Pakistan.

In October 1999, when the Army for the fourth time seized power, dismissed the assemblies and suspended the constitution, it pledged to the nation to hold election and restore democracy. The Supreme Court of Pakistan under the Doctrine of Necessity gave the military regime three years of time to hold election and hence the year 2002 was marked the election year.

But as expected the Army is having a second thought about holding the promised free and fair elections under the 1973 Constitution. The statement given by General Pervez Musharraf on the 24th January to "fine tune democracy and adjusted according to our requirement" has raised many doubts and apprehensions about the forth-coming elections. He said, "every country has its own requirement to practice democracy, therefore we will have democracy of such kind as suited us and fulfilled our requirements." (Dawn January 25, 2002).

He has also expressed his intentions to continue as President of the country for the next five years." It is important for the future of the country and democracy that I remain there," he confided to The Times. In this connection, his government's legal department is seeking constitutional methods to formalise his stay in power, the newspaper reported.

As the political forces of the country have been betrayed by the armed forces many times before, this statement of the President signals that the forthcoming elections would not only be engineered, but the elected assembly would not be more than a rubber stamp body. During the former military dictator's period a special kind of amendment were made which was tailor-made to the requirement of the then army chief. The amendment provided the President sweeping powers over the parliament, including the right to dissolve the assembly, which is a negation to the spirit of Parliamentary Democracy.

During the 11 years rule of parliamentary democracy, the whole country is witness to the gross misuse of this power; no single majority party could complete its tenure. They were dismissed on the whims of the President. As a consequence, the country's economy suffered, a kind of instability became a permanent feature of our society, and democratic values could not be nurtured. Ad-hocism was the order of the day. The Human Rights Int. Desk of the Pakistan Peoples Party is of the view that the Military Regime is not authorised to make constitutional changes and fears that these changes might kill the essence of Parliamentary democracy as perceived and evolved by the nation's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Fiaz Chaudry
Paris

Explain healthy JS environment

The Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina has explained that the environment of the JS is not healthy enough to join the JS. When the environment improves they will join the Parliament. Would the AL chief please explain their demands in the national dailies so that along with the government the general people also know what kind of environment they need to join the JS?

Md. Awal Hossain
Electrical Engineering
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Viva in medical admission test

I had been involved in the admission process of the medical colleges in the past and I am writing this letter from my personal experiences. The experiences I am talking about are of the period of the present government during their last tenure in power. The viva marks in the admission test were being phased out from 50 to a mere 10 in the final year of their last tenure with a commitment that it would be completely withdrawn from the coming year. If that were the stand of the party in the last

tenure, it is ill understood why the viva was re-introduced in the first year of their current tenure.

Let me share a few incidents of my experience in those days. The viva boards for 20 examinees each were announced quite in advance so that the students knew in which board they will be examined and where the location of the boards would be. What the examinees did not know was who the examiners would be. In the morning of each viva examination day, the names of the examiners for each board were announced and the examiners were asked towards proceed to their respective rooms. Now the real game started. By the time they reached their rooms, each and every teacher had a list of references in their pockets to take care of the examinees. It so happened that if the three examiners of each board compared their chits, they would probably have anywhere from 15 to 30 references between themselves, some of whom were common to all three.

My question is, why this viva again? We, the teachers of medical colleges underwent our lessons in Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology anywhere from 5 to 30 years ago depending on our present position and we learnt

these at the same level we are being asked to judge. The syllabuses have changed and we do not remember any of these because we no longer need to read them. So what we teachers conduct is a big farce. Quite reasonably, viva questions are limited to general knowledge (in which for some strange reason we ourselves are often ignorant), religion, sports etc interspersed with some very basic and often stupid questions on the subjects the examinees are supposed to be specifically judged upon. I also observed that in particular boards the maximum number given was only 14 while in other boards the minimum number given was 16. The teachers could give no rational behind such erratic markings except mentioning that the chairmen of these boards were of different personalities.

Paradoxically, many of us do like to have the viva imposed because it gives us a feeling of 'importance'. We also have a feeling that this is an opportunity to make some room for our wards to get admitted in medical colleges. What we fail to recognise is that the whole procedure is a waste of time, and in all probability, at the end of the day, all examinees stand an equal chance of having been unduly favoured. If we really think that our wards deserve a special favour, then maybe a specific quota for our wards be ensured rather than pursue this futile effort. We take all the blame for the corruption without really helping anyone.

I urge all the teachers of medical colleges not to conduct this viva examination or give 20 marks to each and every candidate to make this exercise useless. If the viva is still retained, maybe we can ask teachers of the relevant subjects to be the examiners rather than make fools of ourselves. Kindly remember that one single mark unjustifiably given often deprives more than one hundred candidates who probably were more competent than we could judge!

A very disturbed teacher of a medical college

Immoral US politics

This is in reference to Akbar Hussain's letter "Lack of morality in Bangladeshi politics" (February 1). The writer has mentioned that "In that Western world the question of morality in politics is a fundamental one".

Hasn't he heard of the recent Enron scandal? I am living in USA for the last 27 years. I have seen enough. I could name this country as "the land of scandals and cover-ups". In fact morality is a fantasy in Western world. Each year I read at least 100 major corruption cases (involving millions of dollars) at the state and national level.

I am sure Mr. Akbar Hussain is aware of corporate culture and evil practices by the multinational companies in USA and Canada. The American "think tank" is basically the "house slaves" for the big corporations, Pentagon and CIA.

The American intelligentsia is totally sold-out to the many vested groups. Just read any newspaper form Boston Globe to Miami Herald, from Philadelphia Enquirer to New York Times--you name it. These are only a few examples. You will find sold-out intelligentsia in every sphere of American life. Of course there are exceptions: there are honest politicians, bold thinkers and selfless intelligentsia. But their number can be hand counted. But in reality morality is a backbencher in American politics and culture. In America money talks.

Abdul Jalil Pramanik
Pearl River, New York, USA

Sarwat Chowdhury on Dr. Mujtoba Ali

I read with great interest and pleasure the concise but insightful article "Remembering a pundit" by Sarwat Chowdhury on Dr. Mujtoba Ali. I found it funny and interesting to note that both the writer and I had come, in the aftermath of

September 11, to basically the same conclusion that the world needed only one expert on Afghanistan and that is Dr. Ali! I wish he were alive today! Then the so-called pundits showing up in CNN, BBC would have been ashamed of the shallowness of their knowledge about the Afghan people!

Both in *Deshe Bideshe* and *Shabnam*, his profound knowledge of the Afghan people, their customs and traditions have found a remarkable exposition. He had a deep insight into their society, analysing their idiosyncrasies with exceptional precision. Many a times, when I hear or read about their fierce independent-mindedness or shifting loyalties etc I cannot help but chuckle, since Dr. Ali wrote about many such traits 6/7 decades earlier!

Some of his characters are part of the Bangla psyche! Who can forget his house-help Abdur Rahman! The "*peja tular moto*" snows of Panchshir? Or the drives through the passes! Colorado is in the Rocky Mountains and quite often while driving here I remember his conversations with the Sardarjee driver of the bus he was riding from India to Kabul. Young Mujtoba Ali was so scared of the roads in those high elevation passes that he just closed his eyes. When he asked Sardarjee driver, doesn't he get scared and what does he do when

Why not name one of the educational institutions (since he and also his wife dedicated their lives to education) after this great son of our country! It probably would be more appropriate to name such an institute in Sylhet after him, since he very often fondly remembered sitting in Kabul what his mother was doing in Sylhet!

Alamgir
Colorado Springs, USA

Weekly holiday

Friday is the day of weekly holiday in Bangladesh. Is it that we can afford to lose business on Friday and half day Thursday like the Arab countries only because we are a gas-rich country like these oil-rich Arab countries!

We, being one of the most backward nations are losing three and a half days in a week. Even in the days of Islamic Pakistan we used to work on Friday. Sunday was the weekly holiday.

In the biggest Muslim country Indonesia followed by Pakistan, Friday is a working day with an hour or so of break. Bangladesh is a developing country, if we work on Friday we can move along with the rest of the world including our neighbour India. For Bangladesh, it will be ideal to convert Friday into a working day (break for prayers and lunch can be merged for two hours

Compulsory Arabic ?

I could not control my hysterical laughter when I read Mr. Mustafizur Rhman's letter "Make Arabic compulsory in schools (January 28) advocating for Arabic to be a compulsory subject in our schools. Probably Mr. Rahman lives in a fool's paradise when he mentioned that by learning Arabic, our young generation would practise more Islamic culture.

He should rather come into sense that the Arabs (people of Saudi Arabia) even after having the prophet's language as their mother tongue can be such a miserable Muslim and racist to the Non Arab Muslims. Any Expatriate Bengali knows how our so-called Islamic

brother treats us as *miskin*. And wow they speak Arabic! These Arabic speaking people employ little children from our

love your own language, it's more sacred than Arabic. And you are bashing the worldly subjects like Arithmetic, Geography! Well our

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Less holy than Arabic?

lands for jockeying the camels. They have even changed the name of the peninsula (please note) to Saudi Arabia in the name of Ibn Saud, not even in prophet's name. My dear Mr. Rahman, please

people do not need to learn Arabic for employment reasons any more as the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia is already in financial trouble. They cannot even offer employment of tk 7000 for our poor people migrating to their country.

"NAM Suites for MP's"

Although my heart bleeds for those MPs with acute housing problems, I can't help but wonder how these brave souls managed to raise the

the citizens welcome it.

From newspaper reports we have come to know that the government has permitted some new baby taxis to operate in the city which are eco-friendly. These will operate with CNG.

I would request the Government Transport Dept./BRTA to kindly ask all new baby taxi operators to fix fare meters in these baby taxis before route permits are granted. This will immensely help the people using the baby taxis. It is a common fact that baby taxi operators charge exorbitant fares from the public as there is no meter in the vehicle.

All over the big cities of the world baby taxis have fare meters. This helps the tourists and other people. But unfortunately in Bangladesh there is no fare meter in baby taxis. In the past Ershad government the authorities once tried to install fare meters in baby taxis but failed.

I would earnestly request our Transport Minister to look into this matter and take steps for installation of fare meters in all baby taxis of the major cities of Bangladesh. I am sure people will welcome this and thank the government.

I. Haq
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India's expanse

Mohsin Meer's letter "Israel enters South Asia at India's expense" February 2) commenting India's growing friendship with Israel is unwarranted.

India never had friends in the Muslim bloc. Rather it was a wrong political decision for last so many years that India had been supporting Palestine. The so-called Muslim Bloc especially the Arab world always supports Pakistan when it matters. All under world don, Mafia leaders wanted by India are getting a safe haven in the Gulf countries.

India had realised that the Muslim bloc will never come its side. But Israel, even India's consistent supports to Palestine

(even today) wish to have a very cordial bilateral relation.

Mr. Meer should not shed tears foreseeing India's bleak future. The Arab world needs India more than India needs them. The Arab world cannot afford to loose the support of Indian Technical manpower or the supply of various other commodities.

Today India has that courage and capacity to face oil embargo if the Arab world try to impose. And by doing that the Arab world shall harm their won image and interest than India's.

So Mr. Meer should think about his won country, which is now facing "Hundred kicks and Hundred onions" As Ayaz Amir has written in 11" January edition of Pakistan's most popular newspaper Dawn.

M. K. Barua, on e-mail

Criticising with or without knowledge?

A most imperfect Muslim I may be, but a letter published in your daily "Does God Support Islam?" compelled me to react.

I never believed that the teachings of Islam are "medieval rubbish". The moral teachings never get old, be those Socratic or Platonic. It is true that the madrassah education needs reform, but the Muslim world is not a madrassah. Not all the people hold the most extreme form of belief. Even though a lot of people did not stop short of condemning the September 11 attacks, it failed to attract the attention of the writer. She must understand that the five fingers of the hand are not the same. She cannot blame the shorter one because the another one is taller. And when she says that the Muslim world is "morally bankrupt", it also comes round to her like a boomerang, because she is also part of that community (unless she has already denounced Islam).

The Western world, on the other hand, is not exactly bustling with morals. They are spending millions for their pets while people on the other parts of the world die of hunger.

Islam was created on the order of God. If God gave the Muslims all the wealth of the world, it probably would have convinced Ms Nasreen on which side God is. But could she then figure out who was pursuing Islam and who was pursuing wealth?

I am not an example of a good Muslim, but at least I do not try to disgrace my religion without proper knowledge. Reading her letter I felt relieved that I am not the worst kind of follower of Islam after all.

Ahmed Sharif
Student, BBA
East West University, Dhaka

Sex instincts and Burka



Face of the less?

I have been following with interest the letters and reactions on *purdah* for quite sometime. The recent one by Mr. Enamul's (January 30) reaction has been what I ultimately expected when he expressed that "... *Burkha* is a religious decree of the Muslims. It means to protect chastity of women..." . Without going into detail about rest of the content of his letter, I must say

that *purdah* and *Burkha* is not synonymous. No where in Islamic literature they have been made synonymous. This is a gross misinterpretation or a distorted perception of the practice of *purdah* preached by the so-called Mullahs in South Asian subcontinent.

In fact *purdah* applies to both male and female believers. It is not merely "to protect chastity of women" as the writer says. When Mr. Enamul says that "A young girl without a *Burkha* attracts everybody and that surely means a constant struggle with one's sexual instinct" - does he mean that Men (and Muslims) are sex maniacs? If you have that instinct you are not observing your own *purdah* sanctioned by Islam, if you cannot control your instinct (nafs) you are violating your belief as a Muslim.

In this connection, I would like to draw Mr. Enamul's attention to a scene broadcast in the international media/TV channels where *Burkha* clad women were being openly beaten with a stick by the Jobba-Turban adorned Taliban members in the street. Do you think this is sanctioned by Islam in the name of *purdah*? Surely, this kind of acts and interpretation about *purdah* are putting our young generation away from the path of Islam. People like Mr Enamul is doing more harm to Islam than the non-believers.

We are too much engrossed with the debate on *purdah* and *Burkha*. Do people like Mr. Enamul know how many women in our country can simply afford to buy one piece of sari not to speak of other essential pieces of garments? Think about it and instead of targeting women's chastity and *purdah* fight against women's repression in the form of social and economic depravity and various forms of discrimination they encounter in our society. Islam, no doubt, does teach us about these things.

K. Maudood Elahi
Professor, Jahangirnagar University

sense of humour and wit, his deep knowledge of comparative literature, religion, history and the arts are hard to come by in the works of a single writer. He was such a sophisticated man and writer!

government can solve this issue. The Chittagong Chambers has already put some effort for converting Friday to a working day and Sunday into a weekly holiday. The pious Muslims who offer Friday

money for their campaigns.

MA
Dhaka

Fare meters for baby taxis

country and a nation because this man stayed his course.

As for Mr. Soharab, it is rather interesting that he impetuously misconstrues support for the former President as "pure AL bashing." He seems also to suggest that because "AL is still the single most popular party of the country," it is or should be above criticism. I am rather disturbed by the implication of this statement. I would be similarly troubled if someone substituted BNP for AL in Mr. Soharab's statement. The statement depicts a patently dangerous mindset, because it disdainfully relegates people's fundamental rights to naught. This mentality poignantly brings to the fore that "eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." I say, we the people reserve the right to judge a government or a political party, its actions or inaction on important issues, and its successes and failures in governance. It is we the people who will make the judgement and render verdict, not an individual or a group or a committee, no matter how lofty. Mr. Soharab, it is not about AL, BNP, JP, or Jamaat, it is about Bangladesh, it is about people's right to know, live, choose, decide, and prosper.

Mr. Soharab's feeble attempt to assail the former President's character by citing the example of his speech in the opening session of the 8th parliament is rather naïve and misplaced. Does he not know that it was AL, which passed a bill that robbed the resident of any say in presidential speeches? Does he not know that it was this unseemly legal binding that tied the President's hands and muzzled his mouth? BNP took advantage of this bill passed by AL and frankly, this incidence did not elevate BNP's prestige at all.

While both AL and BNP leadership were busy damaging their images by pettiness, Justice Shahabuddin's stature was further elevated in the public eye by his dignified stand above all meanness.

Mr. Soharab has put forward a rather unconvincing argument against Justice Shahabuddin's recent public rejoinder. Here is an honourable man, who has been verbally slain in the public forum by the worst epithets by the opposition and their wayward intellectual gurus. The relentless onslaught against this man was orchestrated without a modicum of decency and the onslaught contin-

ued unabated for many days before it reached a deafening crescendo. The former President went mute and tried to be as patient and forgiving as humanly possible. But when the verbal harassment exceeded all bounds of human decency and courtesy, then only, he reacted, but that too, rather reluctantly. He did not equivocate; he did not prevaricate; he just stated the plain facts. If that's a crime and a dishonourable thing to do, so be it!

I fail to understand Mr. Soharab's remark, "It was an insult to the neutrality of our beloved President when the CTG promulgated a rule providing him with the SSF security." How so? One may argue about the desirability of providing former Presidents with SSF security, but it is rather astonishing to conclude that such an arrangement would be "an insult to the neutrality" of such dignitaries.

I do not know whether BNP lionises Mr. Shahabuddin or not, but we the people, do. And the rationale Mr. Soharab suggests for BNP not choosing someone like Justice Shahabuddin for President, is precisely the reason why the former President is so much admired and respected by the



Problem of cooking sports or vegetables

than Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a prominent Awami Leaguer.

Rezaul Karim
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