

## 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 year of election.

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  
AIUB

## 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 chairman 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 from 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 American 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 independence-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 drivers 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

## Compulsory Arabic ?

I could not control my hysterical laughter when I read Mr. Mustafizur Rahman'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

he sees these treacherous roads in these passes, he coolly replies "mei vaa khae band kar data hoon!" (pardon my Hindi)!

Dr. Ali will always remain one of the most enlightened writers of Bangla literature. His matchless

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

prayers knowing it is mandatory will still go ahead, even if Friday is declared a working day.

J. Taher  
Banani, Dhaka

## Football, Patal and our Sports

This has reference to your Sports report on the above subject. I cannot but wholly agree with the observation that our Sports Minister has got neither a sports mind nor a sporting background. But I do not find it either regrettable or anything strange for the Minister not having been endowed with these qualities.

What I find impossible to fathom is the infinite wisdom of the Government to appoint a man who is more of a dealer in kitchen vegetable isn't that what his name means--in charge of the Ministry of Sports and Culture. The inevitable has therefore happened and the country has to suffer the ignominious ouster from international arena of football.

And as if that is not enough, the Head of the Government has appointed a lobbyist to look after the cricket affairs of the country and the latter in his zeal to show his loyalty has made the PM's son, Arifat, the Chairman of the development wing of BCCB.

We the common citizens of this country aren't familiar with his skill or experience in any field other than commerce. Incidentally the lobbyist on being questioned by a BBC commentator had to divulge that the cricket credential of Arifat did not go beyond his association with a second division cricket team. Thus the day is not far off when we will wake up one fine morning to see that Bangladesh cricket has been stripped of its Test status. So what! The countrymen should remember that the Test status to Bangladesh was the result of the persistent efforts of a few individuals, the notable among whom was no other

The government has taken a very bold step to discontinue very old baby taxis from Dhaka City in order to improve our polluted environment. This is a good decision and

(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 11th 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 busting 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 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.

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

## 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.

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

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

public. Mr. Shahabuddin was AL's nominee, but he did not toe the AL line; he remained neutral and true to his conscience, and faithfully and unfailingly discharged his duties to the best of his ability. His choice as President of the country was by far the best decision of the AL government. Funny, AL, a party once led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and a party that once captured the hearts of the people, is inadvertently and rather callously disowning its superb choice of President and is also permanently tarnishing its image by disavowing Mr. Shahabuddin's immense contribution to this country. Sad indeed!

Finally, I assume, the former President is not perfect, but I challenge both Mr. Ishaq and Mr. Soharab to name another person in this country who has shown more honesty, integrity, and courage; who bore his office with more dignity; and who has wider public acceptability than Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

Dr. Rafat A. Quyyum Khan  
Dhaka



Shahabuddin: Ex-President, present debate

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 6th parliament is rather naive 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 incident 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 mean ness.

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-