

## Police as party tool

*Partisan use is sapping police morale and professional ethics*

WHAT is happening is nothing new. But what is new is that the old malaise is being continued with a vengeance and vigour rarely seen in the past. We are, of course, talking about the use of police to oppress the opposition. As we have said using police to strike down the opposition has been an old practice. Under successive military dictatorships we have seen how the police was used to maintain the rulers' grip on power. We had hoped all that would change with the advent of democracy in '91. But unfortunately it did not. In fact as time passed we saw the gradual rise in police attack on the opposition, to the extent that they can now be said to have become a tool in the hands of the ruling party of the day.

During BNP's first term in office we saw, to their credit, a relatively soft approach in dealing with the opposition, especially in using the police against the latter. While that began to change towards the end of its rule, dramatic changes occurred with AL's assumption of power. During the following five years we saw continuous oppression of the opposition which started somewhat softly but ended with a ruthless face that defied all norms of democratic practice.

Most regrettably we are now seeing a more vengeful version of the same process. With a two-thirds majority gained in the last October election BNP appears to have launched itself on a deliberate collision course as far as dealing with the opposition is concerned. Police is being routinely used as the tool of the ruling party to repress them. BNP appears to have concluded that it's first term policy was wrong and that they would go for full-scale confrontation with the opposition from the very start. The events of the last few days are perhaps the most disturbing we have seen so far. None of the opposition programmes were allowed to be held in the designated places though official permission was given for them. Repeated police attacks targeted AL leaders; many of whom were manhandled and some seriously hurt. The AL programmes of last Thursday were completely dislodged under severe police assault. Here we must register our full protest at the burning of the double-decker bus by some hooligans and condemn the perpetrators of this crime who most likely belonged to the AL.

So far the government has been extremely high-handed in its treatment of the opposition. The police brutality appears to have become a routine, and which cannot be accepted in a democracy. As we have said earlier the opposition must be given space to function peacefully, which evidently it is being denied now. We remind Khaleda Zia of her statements as the former leader of the opposition and urge her not to behave in a manner for which she so vigorously condemned the AL and its chief.

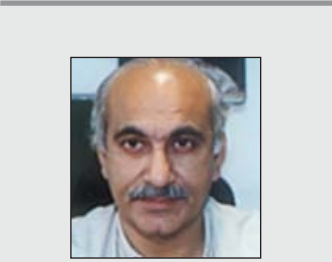
### Tel Aviv on a lunatic course

*US must stop Sharon now*

NO sooner had the Beirut summit of Arab leaders adopted a resolution to normalise ties with Israel in exchange for its withdrawal from territory captured in the 1967 Middle East war than Tel Aviv declared Yasser Arafat an enemy. And the Israeli army stormed the Palestinian leader's headquarters. The latest Israeli pounding puts paid to the hopes of a ceasefire in the conflict that has left nearly 2,000 people, mostly Palestinians dead, over the last 18 months, and virtually buries any chance of lasting peace in the war-torn region. The government of Ariel Sharon appears to believe that Chairman Arafat has instigated the series of suicide bomb attacks that killed 29 Israeli civilians in the last three days. As such Tel Aviv is bent upon eliminating the Palestinian leader from the scene, either by expulsion from his motherland or by other means. The myopic Israeli perspective hardly comes as a surprise. For, Sharon has regretted that as Israel's defence minister twenty years ago he had not finished off Chairman Arafat. Unfortunately, the United States, which has recently sent an envoy to broker cease-fire between the combatants, has extended both covert and overt support to Israel. First, it has armed Israel to the teeth and then looked the other way whenever Israel committed excesses in the occupied territory. Even now, while condemning suicide bomb attacks by extremist Palestinians, Washington has remained mum about frequent Israeli incursions into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The sole superpower is no less culpable for the volatile situation in the Middle East than Israel.

The Saudi peace plan, adopted in the Beirut summit, did open a window for Israel to shed its pariah tag and establish normal relations with the Arab world. Its latest military venture, which Mr Sharon bragged would be followed up by large-scale operations, has closed down that window of opportunity. In all likelihood, there would be more conflict and more death, and in all certainty, the toll would be heavy on the Palestinians. Overall, peace would remain elusive so long as Washington does not discontinue its passive bystander's role and really force Tel Aviv to pull back and subject itself to a peace plan.

# The Mayawati of India



M.J. AKBAR

THE inner grapevine of Delhi -- the one with the real grapes as distinct from hothouse plants -- is bristling with the news that Sonia Gandhi is preparing for a late 2002 general election. That is one of the explanations being offered for the selection of at least three candidates to the Rajya Sabha. Their rite of passage has apparently been purchased by a very reliable corporate house, a deal justified by this impending election.

It is in the nature of such stories that they cannot be verified. This does not necessarily make them untrue, but they remain suspect and must therefore be discounted. Moreover, Reliance now is accused of every sin as well as virtue on earth. Again, this does not necessarily make the accusation untrue, but since there can never really be verification of suitcase-friendship we must not rush to any judgment.

What is far more relevant, politically, is that Sonia Gandhi has given Rajya Sabha seats to two men who are convinced that she cannot win the next general elections.

Of the three "grapevine" candidates, one is a complete non-entity, Abrar Ahmad, Congress hopeful from Rajasthan. Sonia Gandhi has chosen to replace K.K. Birla with a non-entity, but that is her prerogative. This gentleman used to be a minor entity once, as some junior minister in finance, but apparently used the opportunity to make impor-

tant corporate friends who know how to repay favours. His other qualification for Congress largesse is that he keeps his mouth shut, and obedience is always popular with any political leader, not just Sonia Gandhi.

The other two are more interesting. Subirami Reddy is an amazing personality, who thrives in the Congress despite huge, rather crass five-star hotel parties; a guest list sprinkled with filmstars and brimming with starlets; and an

were shocked by their defeat. Since neither could blame himself for losing they sought external reasons. The general defeat of the Congress was not sufficient as a reason. Reddy had won from Vishakapatnam despite a Telugu Desam wave earlier and had nursed his constituency lavishly. He had spent another fortune during the elections itself. Very few Congressmen have nurtured their constituencies as caringly as Murlid Deora has nurtured south Mumbai. He has held

Sabha? They do not blame the overall political environment either. How could they? With the central government self-destructing on a daily basis, the mood is going to be fertile for anyone challenging the NDA in the next general elections. Moreover, there will be natural sympathy for both of them since they lost the last time. In that sense the next elections are ideal for them. But they have no confidence in Sonia Gandhi's ability to deliver an election that she should be able to

ing two defeated Lok Sabha candidates from eminently winnable constituencies to the Rajya Sabha. In sum, she has rewarded two politicians who have no faith in her electoral abilities. Because, and this is beyond argument, if the Congress cannot win in places like Vishakapatnam and south Mumbai in the next elections, when urban anger against the BJP and its allies will be at a peak, then the Congress cannot hope to come anywhere near power. These two are bell-

## BYLINE

**We will see a repetition of the Uttar Pradesh results at the national level, with Parliament divided three ways: the BJP, the Congress and the third front. Sonia Gandhi, like Mayawati, will lead a group of MPs searching for a bargain in the fourteenth Lok Sabha in order to prevent the constitution, very quickly, of a fifteenth Lok Sabha. Could the President of India impose President's Rule on the whole of India?**

obsessive itch for self-publicity. No one has a larger invitation card or more free photographs available to newspapers. Reddy lost from Vishakapatnam in the last general elections.

The second is the more traditional politician Murlid Deora, whose public relations is infinitely more intelligent. He lost the last elections from south Mumbai. The last elections were also the first in which Sonia Gandhi was the undisputed leader of the Congress. Both Reddy and Deora were surprised by their defeats. Both believed, with some justification, that they were more popular in their constituencies than their parties because of the work they had done for the voters. They believed that their individual goodwill would see them through even if the overall performance of the Congress was poor, as indeed it was, although less so in Maharashtra than in Andhra Pradesh.

Both were confident of pulling through till the last minute. Both

the seat in the face of tidal waves, let alone waves. Both Reddy and Deora realised, privately, that the decisive factor in their defeat was that Sonia Gandhi had become unacceptable to their largely urban constituencies. Obviously they would never say that publicly. But they knew that they could not handle what might be called the "post-272" electorate in a television-savvy region. Moreover Deora discovered that the Muslim vote, a critical element in his vote-accrual, had left him because of the Congress and that Sonia Gandhi had not been able to bring it back.

Reddy and Deora are practical politicians who cannot survive without membership of Parliament. The one thing that they are certain about is that Sonia Gandhi cannot bring them back to the Lok Sabha from Vishakapatnam and south Mumbai. They do not blame themselves for this situation. In their own eyes, they remain the best of nurses, and what better credentials can a candidate have for the Lok

pick up without an effort. If they had faith in her they would have waited. If a much-older Rajiv Gandhi had been leader of the Congress now, they would have waited; in any case he would have dismissed their suggestion for a Rajya Sabha seat with a characteristic smile and asked them who would come to the Lok Sabha if not them. Congressmen like Reddy and Deora would have been expected not only to finance their own campaigns to the Lok Sabha but also to help others by dipping into their moneybags.

But both Reddy and Deora preferred to grovel and slip into the Rajya Sabha rather than wait and fight for the Lok Sabha. Nor would they have had to wait much longer. The general elections may not come this year, but it will be difficult to prevent them from taking place next year. Reddy and Deora preferred humiliation and a seat today to Sonia Gandhi and uncertainty tomorrow.

Sonia Gandhi of course had no clue about the implications of send-

weather constituencies, in the south and the west from which any reasonable Congress candidate should romp through. These seats will now go to comparatively inexperienced candidates while Reddy and Deora delight in their well-paid good fortune in Central Hall.

The irony of course is that Reddy and Deora may be right in their scepticism about Sonia Gandhi's abilities. They have, with their actions, made explicit what others know implicitly -- that the results of the Assembly polls will not automatically convert into a victory in a national election. There are many reasons for this, both subjective and objective. It is the Congress governments, for instance, who will be facing the anti-incumbency factor in the states where they are in power. In Punjab for instance the Akalis will do much better the next time than they did this time. In Uttaranchal, the Congress will be split leaving opportunity open for the BJP. In Madhya Pradesh even Digvijay Singh will not be able to pull off a miracle again.

# Musharraf likely to hold referendum in May



M.J. ZAHEDI

PEOPLE were expecting President Pervez Musharraf, in course of his Pakistan Day speech (on March 23), to announce that elections would be held in coming October. But he didn't. He just, almost casually (as if the matter is already decided), mentioned October polls.

It can be taken that it is decided that polls will be held accordingly. A Corps Commanders conference has approved the plan, the cabinet too has endorsed the view that President Musharraf needed to be in power for five years more to ensure continuity of the policies about which foreign world, specially the investors, have been expressing apprehension. So it can be said that it is decided that a referendum would be held in May next to seek public opinion on Musharraf's continuation in office for a full term of five years. Gen. Musharraf also told a delegation of one section of the Muslim League on March 20 of his decision to hold the referendum in May.

Referendum was considered necessary to acquire people's approval for ensuring that the stability and reforms that the regime has introduced would continue. Also for a sheaf of amendments that he intends to make in the constitution. These include providing constitutional recognition for the National Security Council and the powers sought for the President's office.

The News stressed the need to not only thoroughly publicise the exercise and all what it implies but also throw open the doors for a popular nationwide debate. This is important, the daily said, because of the importance of the amendment agenda Musharraf has in mind. It is vital to treat the referendum with much greater consideration, than as what many might be inclined to see as a shortcut to the presidential office. Extensive consultations should be held with all political parties, opinion makers, representatives of civil institutions and others to elicit national consensus on the crucial issue.

One of the major hurdles faced

by Generals who seize power for a limited period but later decide to continue in the topmost office under a non-military system, is effecting a change of dress without appearing to remove their clothes. Of the three earlier military rulers (Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan and Ziaul Huq), two who decided to continue in power without the protective canvas of the army, evolved two different modes. Ayub created the Basic Democracy system, and used the limited and pliable electorate to vote him into power through an indirect system. Zia stage-managed a referendum to have himself hoisted into the presidential office while, ironically, retaining the COAS office. Both these systems attracted considerable odium at home and abroad as they replicated in different ways what the traditional 'life-long' presidents in the third world states did.

Musharraf is opting for referendum rather than go through the electoral system the National Reconstruction Bureau is putting together. The compulsion is understandable (*The News* said) as, given the political mood in the country, one can never be too sure of the results once the polls are declared an open house. But, while Gen Musharraf theoretically has the authority to use whatever system of contesting election he desires -- direct, indirect (as at present) or referendum -- it would be important to realize that a referendum will poorly impact on the political temper in the country. It will unnecessarily agitate a sheaf of questions about the intentions of the military regime which till now has been repeatedly assuring about holding the elections.

Filling the President's slot through a referendum before the country goes to polls will send a wrong message, *The News* said. It could mean that the proposed elections that will follow could also likewise be affected, and raise grave doubts and resultant public disquiet. It will be difficult also to have the result popularly accepted as Zia's exercise in this field marks a particularly dismal chapter in Pakistan's history. Musharraf's enterprise risks acquiring a similar repu-

## LETTER FROM KARACHI

**The only legitimate route for the General to take is the democratic route for the transfer of power. The Supreme Court has directed not only for holding general elections by October next, it also has bound him to transfer power from the military to the elected representatives of the people by that date. After retirement from the army, he can contest a presidential election to run and build the country in his image. A referendum would fool no one, least of all the world at large.**

tion. It will be best for him to avoid such a probability when he is determined to ensure the continuity of the reforms his regime has introduced. Considering the elections will help securing the popular credibility, he needs to ensure a safe transition of systems, the writer in *The News* said.

Daily *Dawn* has called it the 'old and tested referendum route to retain power'. An editorial in the paper thought that 'the present military government has no need to adopt the farical route to legitimacy'. The editorial referred to both Ayub and Zia and said that both had won their respective referendums hands down 'like so many dictators regularly do in the Middle East and Africa'. Ayub secured more than 95 per cent votes in the February 1960 referendum in which the nation's 80,000 basic democrats constituted

the electoral college. In Zia's farce, the entire nation was supposed to have given him a 97.71 per cent 'yes' vote. Actually, less than 15 per cent of the eligible voters cast their votes. 'All these devices failed to satisfy the world that the two got what they wanted -- legitimacy. Instead, these farcical referendums made the task of restoring democracy more difficult.

President Musharraf sincerely believes, *Dawn* said, that the nation needs him at least for another five years to consolidate the reforms he has introduced and to ensure that they are not discarded by his elected successors. But if he were to exempt himself from its purview, then he would be failing in establishing the supremacy of the very reform he is trying to introduce in this country. Nation building, it said, is a long and continuous process in

which the whole nation participates. In the process, at times the nation may be led by charlatans and at others by brilliant individuals. But, basically, it is a collective, long and arduous struggle.

The *Dawn* said the President and his advisers should do well to have faith in the collective wisdom of the nation. If the nation sees, the *Dawn* said, President Musharraf himself honouring all the genuine nation-building reforms he is introducing, it would ensure on its own that the elected representatives do not take liberties with them. Thus the only legitimate route for the General to take is the democratic route for the transfer of power. The Supreme Court has directed not only for holding general elections by October next, it also has bound him to transfer power from the military to the elected representatives of the

# Easter Sunday: Victory over sin

REV. FATHER PATRICK GOMES

TODAY is a special Sunday. For Christian community today is Happy Easter Sunday, the great solemnity of the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today the whole Christian world sings in one echo, "Alleluia" a Hebrew originated word meaning "Praise the Lord!" Today the Churches are decorated and joyful liturgy is performed presided by the priest who acts as the "other Christ" by his ordination to the ministerial priesthood. Delicious food is being prepared in every house and is shared; and the members of Christian community greets each other. These external but meaningful characteristics of Easter run hand in hand with the spiritual depth of the Easter event.

**Christ's Death and Resurrection:** After the Prayer of Consecration during the Eucharistic Liturgy (Holy Mass) the worshipping community profess its fundamental Christian faith singing: "Keep in mind that Jesus Christ has died for us; He is risen from the dead; he is Lord for ever." This profession of

faith clearly emphasises the close connection between the redemptive death of Jesus on the cross and his glorious resurrection. Through his death Christ manifested his great love for mankind and obtained a tremendous power to place the universal salvation for mankind of all ages. Thus his death becomes the source and origin of universal salvation and his glorious resurrection made him most glorified and exulted. Without his resurrection his cross and death would have no significance in the Economy of Salvation.

**Easter Liturgy:** In fact according to the tradition the liturgical service culminating Easter Sunday begins with the long but beautiful Easter Vigil traditionally to be held around 11 o'clock in the night of holy Saturday. Among the significant parts of this liturgy the Preface, in Latin called the *Exultet* carries the central theme, the salvation of mankind through the death and resurrection of Christ. The readings from the Holy Bible highlight the creation story and the Exodus i.e. the story of the liberation of the people of Israel from the Egyptian slavery. The

worshipping community then sings *Gloria* "Glory to God in the Highest..." a song which liturgically announces the Resurrection of Christ. The faithful then renew their baptismal promises, thus spiritually clothing themselves with the garment of new life of the Risen Lord. In the morning of Easter Sunday there is in the Church the Eucharistic Celebration of the great solemnity of Christ's glorious Resurrection attended by a big community. It is done with much festivity loaded with Easter songs and hymns, Easter centred Bible reading, and is concluded by Consecration and Eucharistic meal.

**Call to be Renewed:** An authentic celebration must reach to the actual life of a person. The celebration must play the role of deepening faith of the person as well as it must bring meaningful renewal to his life. We are celebrating Christ's resurrection, one of the greatest feasts of the Christian community. If Christ's resurrection is the cause of man's glorification, then a person's life must turn to that glorified or purified state. Christ's resurrection must make such an impact in his personal

But the big unspoken dread of course is about the impact that Sonia Gandhi's own personality makes on the voter. In the states the voters were not electing her; they were electing others as chief ministers. Congressmen like Reddy and Deora, and so many others less fortunate than them who cannot get into the Rajya Sabha, do not want to take a chance on the results of another clash between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi. They are not ready to bet that "strange-accent" Sonia will be able to take on the homespun Atal when the struggle comes to the bone. Her enemies claim that Sonia Gandhi rewarded the Reddys and Deoras because of lucrative pressure from corporate power. I would prefer to believe that she was merely gullible, but that is not good news for the Congress either. The jury is still out, and more evidence will be available to decide whether the reason is corporate pressure or gullibility.

The Congress could, if handled correctly, win a simple majority in the next general elections: the central coalition government has done enough self-damage to ensure this. But if the Reddys and the Deoras are right, and Sonia Gandhi is incapable of winning in Vishakapatnam and south Mumbai, then Sonia Gandhi could end up as the Mayawati of India.

In other words, we will see a repetition of the Uttar Pradesh results at the national level, with Parliament divided three ways: the BJP, the Congress and the third front. Sonia Gandhi, like Mayawati, will lead a group of MPs searching for a bargain in the fourteenth Lok Sabha in order to prevent the constitution, very quickly, of a fifteenth Lok Sabha.

Could the President of India impose President's Rule on the whole of India? I will need to check with some Constitutional lawyer. One, that is, who is not in the Congress.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

people by that date. After retirement from the army, he can contest a presidential election to run and build the country in his image. A referendum would fool no one, least of all the world at large.

The *News* advised the president to not only thoroughly publicise the exercise and all what it implies but also throw open the matter for a popular nation-wide debate. It advocated extensive consultations with all political parties, opinion makers, representatives of civil institutions and others to extract national consensus on the crucial issue, i.e. making amendments to the constitution. The Constitution of 1973, it said, enjoys popular support and any amendments in it must likewise enjoy popular consensus. Zia's 1984 referendum badly tarnished this opinion eliciting procedure, it said, and the former military rulers used the powers acquired through the farcical exercise to seriously impair the constitution the negative impact of which has still to be corrected. The nation cannot go through a similar farce again, it said. The solution lies in testing popular opinion on the critical issues involved, the paper said, so that future steps can be taken in the light of the message the people give.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the *Khaleez Times*.

life that he becomes a person freed from the bondage of all sins. This is true also for a family, for a society, for a community; this is true universally. The call of Easter is a call to embrace Christ's resurrectional state in our life and realizing this we reach to a profound new life.

**Conclusion:** If we really believe that Christ has died and is risen for 'me' we too then will obtain victory over sin. Our society, our country need to be purified and continually be renewed by new values. There are various types of sins and the society is very much affected by these sins. Yet we are not discouraged. Christ's resurrection shows firmly that change is possible. The transformation from sinful to graceful state is the call of Easter. May the grace and blessing of the risen Lord Jesus Christ be on each one of us. To all our friends, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, may this greeting, "Happy Easter" bring a true renewal in personal and social life and make an authentic fraternal bond of love and friendship.

honour for him.

We have so many people who made sacrifices for Bangladesh, all of them can't be called as the Father of the Nation. This is absolutely unrealistic for the present government to waste time on this question, when there many pressing issues to be solved. I hope some sense will prevail on our leaders to put the matter in their quick conclusion.

Akbar Hussain  
Toronto, Canada

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

### I pity the political leaders

Isn't there any other and more urgent need in the country than making laws on portraits? While the parliament is on session it costs tens of thousands of taka to operate the house. Is this money is to spend and make such laws which brings no good to the country?

We do not have an effective education policy, our economic structure is breaking down, we do not have safety and security of life and yet our political leaders make laws regarding portrait. What a silly

game! When a leader doesn't have a vision for the nation, fails to identify the needs of people and is unable to diagnose the priority of problem, that leader will certainly fail to serve the country and the country unfortunately will suffer. I hope the leaders of Bangladesh will be able to understand these issues.

Leo Pereira  
University of Portland, Portland

#### ETV's licence

What axe do the three petitioners have to grind against ETV? Why does *The Daily Star*, to help

enlighten its readers, not give a brief summary of all the shareholders of ETV?

I see a lack of transparency in the reports being published. There are machinations and vendettas going on behind the scenes and I want to know who is trying to hurt whom.

Bastiat  
Dhaka

### Hand over power, Khaleda

After almost six months of BNP rule or should I say misrule, the nation is in dire straits. The economy is in

shambles, law and order situation is deteriorating everyday, corruption and poverty (not unrelated) are spiralling out of control and the education and health systems are disaster areas.

The government rather than focussing on the urgent needs of the country are concentrating on persecuting the Opposition and mismanaging the administration. They are pursuing destructive politics by passing bills in Parliament that are meant to infuriate the Opposition and distract the masses from the government's total failure to achieve any of its economic and social

agenda thus far.

Bangladesh has so far achieved the tag of a "Taliban-sympathiser". Hence, even countries, like Singapore, that used to grant Bangladeshis visas without much ado, have in recent months imposed very strict visa restrictions on Bangladesh.

Surely, this course of things cannot continue. The nation is desperately seeking a saviour to step in and set things right. None seem to be on the horizon so far. My fellow Bangladeshis and me want Khaleda to announce another 100-day programme. No fantastic grand

plans required, just one goal-- hand over power to a non-party caretaker government within the next 100 days!

Shams Suman, on e-mail

#### Regarding history

If the aim of politics is to distort history, then this is not politics, this is vandalism with a nation's history. No sensible person can share the views of the present government of Begum Zia about the long solved question of who is the founding leader of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman despite his multi-

ple failures as a leader of post independence Bangladesh, this truth can never be denied that it was he who was the spirit behind the struggle for freedom. His love and dedication to this noble cause has been recognised by the whole world. This is ridiculous to say that late Zia is the Father of the Nation because he declared independence on the night of March 25, 1971.

Begum Zia must show some respect for history as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. A nation's history can't be the history of some one's family or husband. Even when Zia was alive he did not claim this