

PAKISTAN

## A promising first step

ARDESHIR COWASJEE

**A**LLAH be praised - slow we may be, but we have at last arrived. After 55 years of deliberations, it has finally been established that the population of Pakistan is proliferating rabbit-like and that family planning (that coy euphemism for birth control) is of primary importance without which the country cannot survive.

We have finally a leader who is able to openly state that family planning is not anti-Islamic and to exhort the family planners of the country - including the evergreen Atiya Inayatullah - to get on with the job before it is too late. In no uncertain terms he has said that Pakistan cannot be pulled out of the poverty trap unless the birth rate drastically drops. We must only hope that he will stick to his words after the cock has crowed not twice but thrice.

For many years, our politicians and statisticians relied on the mythical figure of 128 million people of Pakistan until a few months ago when the chief election commissioner informed us that in actual fact we are 140 million strong. Wapda, our great power generator, which has its own means and objectives, has calculated the population to be nearer to 160 million souls, of which a good two-thirds are poverty-stricken and illiterate.

So, it would be safe to take a mean average and assume that we stand at a cool 150 million. Intelligent estimates have it that the growth rate is ten births per minute - 600 per hour, 14,400 per day, 5,256,000 per year. It is also estimated that the environment, the available drinking water, the lack of medical facilities help reduce the annual figure by a million or so who leave us with an addition of some 4,000,000 to accommodate each year, to feed, to keep healthy, to educate. Do we have the facilities? No. Each year, illiteracy

overtakes literacy, ignorance overtakes enlightenment, poverty overtakes poverty. I would be very happy were some competent official, who knows what is what, be able to contradict and reduce these figures.

Now to those who govern and direct the lives of the 150 million. We have a confused and mangled constitution upon which to rely; efforts are now being made to somehow improve it. Just to take two articles of this document, 62 and 63, inserted by Zia-ul-Haq's PO 14 of 1985, which lay down the qualifications and disqualifications for those seeking election to our assemblies and senate, each candidate always being presumed to be a 'he'.

Surely, in view of our president's upholding of women's rights and political correctness, and the learning and knowledge of the chief constitutional amender, an overall correction in the Constitution should be made and 'he' wherever mentioned converted either into 'he/she' or 'a person'?

In Article 62 (qualifications for election), clause (1)(b) has been amended to allow for a joint electorate. Clause (c) has been added specifying that: "he, being a graduate, possesses a bachelor's degree in any discipline or any degree recognized as equivalent thereto by the University Grants Commission under the University Grants Commission Act 1974 (xxiii of 1974), or any other law for the time being in force." No loss of wisdom, for sure. But truly, by some process of manipulation all those who have held elected office from the year 1988 to 1999 should stand collectively disqualified, they being collectively responsible for the cruel losses incurred by the nation through their inordinate personal greed.

Clauses (d) and (e) of Article 62 stipulate with regard to a candidate for election that "he

is of good character and is not commonly known as one who violates Islamic injunctions," and "he has adequate knowledge of Islamic teachings and practises obligatory duties prescribed by Islam as well as abstains from major sins." Such requirements "shall not apply to a person who is a non-Muslim, but such a person shall have a good moral reputation; and (i) he possesses such other qualifications as may be prescribed by Act of the Majlis-i-Shoorra (parliament)." Should not these confusing irrelevancies be eliminated? As should be the utterly impossible to prove or uphold clause (f): "he is sagacious, righteous and non-profligate and honest and ameen." And since the 'ideology' of Pakistan has yet to be defined, clause (h) should also go: "he has not, after the establishment of Pakistan, worked against the integrity of the country or opposed the ideology of Pakistan. Provided that the disqualifications specified in paragraphs (d) and (e)."

An additional clause (2) has been added: "A person shall not be qualified or chosen against a seat in the Majlis-i-Shoorra (parliament) reserved for technocrats unless he is the holder of a degree requiring conclusion of at least 16 years of education, recognized by the University Grants Commission or a recognized statutory body, as well as at least 20 years of experience, including a record of achievements at the national or international level."

In Article 63 (disqualifications), clause (g) disqualifies a person if "he is propagating any opinion, or acting in any manner prejudicial to the ideology of Pakistan, or the sovereignty, integrity or security of Pakistan, or morality, or the maintenance of public order, or the integrity or independence of the judiciary of Pakistan, or which defames or brings into ridicule

the judiciary or the armed forces of Pakistan." This is a difficult one to enforce. It should be eliminated. The judiciary has been harshly criticized for over fifty years (it has on occasions even been subjected to justifiable ridicule), as have the armed forces who these days are being given an exceptionally rough deal by the press and media both at home and abroad.

New disqualifications have been added, with which none to whom they do not apply could possibly disagree: "(p) he has been proclaimed as an absconder, or convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for having absconded by a competent court under any law for the time being in force; or (q) has obtained a loan for an amount of two million rupees or more, from any bank, financial institution, cooperative society or cooperative body in his own name or in the name of the spouse or any of his dependents, which remains unpaid for more than one year from the due date, or has got such loan written off; or (r) he or his spouse or any of his dependents has defaulted in payment of government dues and utility expenses, including telephone, electricity, gas and water charges, for over six months, at the time of filing his nomination papers."

President General Pervez Musharraf is here to stay. 'I am not power hungry; Musharraf' screamed one press headline last week. For what does he need more power? We all know that many who surround him are weak or bigoted.

Since he is open to reason, and the voices from on high seem to have receded, he remains the best of all the worst options, and should thus be helped and encouraged to do right by the people of Pakistan.

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INDIA

## The new president

ZAGLUL A. CHOWDHURY

**T**HE choice of Abul Pakir Jainulabedin Abdul Kalam as the new president of India was something a surprise. In the last Monday's election, the eminent nuclear scientist was elected 12th president of the Republic of India and third Muslim to adorn the highest but largely ceremonial position. His victory was a cakewalk because only challenger Dr. (Col) Lakshmi Shagal's fight was more a symbolic in nature.

Barring the communists, all major political parties - ruling National Democratic Front (NDA), of which the BJP is the driving force and the main opposition Congress supported Kalam, who says one does not necessarily have to be a politician for the highest position of titular head of the Indian Republic. The members of the Lokshaba and the those of the state assemblies voted in the elections for president and the win for Kalam had been expectedly overwhelming.

The new president, who is described by his countrymen as "father of Indian missile technology", assumes the responsibility following the retirement of K.R. Narayanan on July 24.

The 70-year-old reputed scientist, who hails from southern Tamil Nadu state, was nominated for the presidency by the ruling NDA and paradoxically, supported by no less a party than the main opposition Congress led by Sonia Gandhi. The main opposition is not generally expected to support the candidate nominated by its bitter political enemy but not only the Congress but some other key regional opposition parties supported non-political Kalam, who helped India raise its standard to a new height through atomic and missile technology.

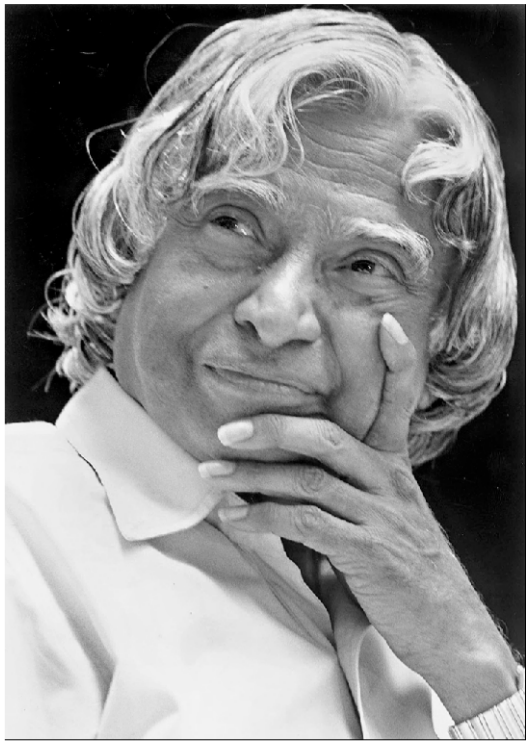
However, his election was not without a challenge since the leftists parties fielded Lashmi Shegal, an 87-year-old elderly freedom fighter and an associate of Netaji Subash Bose as their nominee for the highest position of the nation. The communist parties say that certainly Kalam is a pride for India but they do not feel comfortable with a nuclear and missile scientist as country's president because his contribution is mainly in the destructive field. Besides, they alleged that Kalam, despite being a member of minority community, is close to communal "Hindu nationalist" forces which is undesirable.

But Kalam, who has been awarded with highest "Bharat Ratna" by the Indian government, denied the charges of being an aggressive person in "destructive" field and says his contribution in the atomic and missile technology is essentially development of science and technology. He maintains that he is a secular person who can rectify with ease from both holy Koran and Gita. It goes without saying that Kalam is seen by the Indians as a worthy son of the country and as such opposition parties like the "Swajwadi Party" in Uttar Pradesh and AIMDM of Jayaram Jayaalitha in the southern Tamil Nadu state threw support to Kalam along with the main opposition Congress despite the fact that he is the nominee of the ruling NDA.

The Indian president, a largely ceremonial position, is elected by the members of the lower house of the Lokshaba and the state assembly members. More than 4,800 voters cast their votes. The ruling NDA has a major-thin majority in the electoral college and a hard contest could have been in the card if the combined opposition fielded a joint candidate to challenge Kalam. But his position became unassailable because of support by major political parties. The fight by the leftist parties against him was more symbolic than any real business.

Kalam's nomination was a wise and calculated move by the NDA leadership, mainly prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who is known to have floated the name of scientist Abdul Kalam after the NDA was split over the choice of candidate for the post of president as the BJP as well as the NDA were divided between two nominees - vice president Krishna Kant and Maharashtra Governor P.C. Alexander. The former was supported by a section of BJP and Telegu Desam party, a constituent of the NDA from southern Andhra Pradesh while the latter by an influential section of the BJP and its key ally "Shivsena" in Maharashtra. Finally, the differences persisted and the prime minister opted for the scientist, who carried unanimous support within the NDA.

The NDA government in India has benefited in more than one ways by the decision to field Kalam as nation's president. First, the win of its candidate was



certain and the ruling alliance did not suffer from the strain of an uncertain future in the election even if though the alliance enjoys slender majority in the electoral college where not necessarily all vote strictly on party line as there could be some aberrations.

The Indian presidency, although largely ceremonial, assumes critically important role in certain occasions like claims and counter claims of majority in the Lokshaba for formation of a government or during unstable situation when a government struggles for existence although nothing unethical is expected from the president who goes by democratic norms and ethics. The BJP and the NDA can count normal support from Kalam since he is their nominee. Besides, the NDA can rightly claim that its choice of the nominee has been such that it could get the major opposition parties along with it and this a kind of national consensus that India should have on such important issues. But the biggest advantage of the government and the prime minister will be obviating the impression that they are communal in nature - a notion gained in the aftermath of the communal carnage in the western Gujarat state.

The reputation of India and NDA government has been largely scarred by the Gujarat situation and now they will seek to dispel this idea on the ground that by choosing a minority Muslim for the highest post of the country, the NDA or for that matter its driving force BJP has shown that they are not at all communal.

Indeed, the choice of Kalam as president will gladden the hearts of many Muslims and this will help the government. The Congress and other opposition secular parties which supported the scientist also evidently kept in mind the issue of their countless supporters from minority community.

The person who once sold newspapers in his childhood in an obscure village in Tamil Nadu in southern India, is the 12th president of India and third Muslim to adorn this position after late Dr. Zakir Hussain and late Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. Kalam says he is the symbol of an ordinary Indian and feels that he would be able to contribute to the nation as president and a scientist since it is the age of science and technology.

However, the new president faces certain tasks like rallying around the Indian along with him because he is apolitical head of government who needs to prove his impartiality in dealing with different issues. While remaining a secular person, he needs to give the impression that he would not side in every issue with those, who sponsored Kalam's candidature. Because many feel that by making a member of minority community as the president, the hard liners in the BJP, and such organisations like the "Sangh Parivar" which are known as "communal" may seek to pursue their communal policies with relative ease. In one hand, he has to dispel this impression and one the other Kalam also needs to take along with him all segments of the people regardless of political, religious and other divides.

SRI LANKA

## Muslims in the peace process

EKRAM KABIR

**W**ITH the guns of war falling silent, the prospects for peace appear bright in Sri Lanka. Heralding the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, the Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the two protagonists in the country's conflict: the Government and the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam. At last, the time may not be very far for the Sri Lankans to award more attention in building their nation. Every Sri Lankan is hopeful and is awaiting the upcoming direct talks in Thailand between their Government and the LTTE, which the Lankans think, would be appropriate for the country future.

The Norwegian special advisor on Sri Lankan peace process Eric Solheim had also said on June 11 that Tamil Tiger supremo "Velupillai Prabhakaran had indicated that neither the government nor the rebels could win the war". Now, if Prabhakaran is honest about what he said the platform for new grounds certainly lie ahead. Mr. Solheim sounded quite confident about Prabhakaran's sincerity for peace.

Truly, nothing can be more deserving for the Sri Lankans than to see an end to the long-running ethnic war, which has claimed over 64,000 lives since 1983.

But that's not all.

Unfortunate events in the country have not altogether disappeared with the signing of the MoU. Recent clashes between Tamils and Muslims in eastern Sri Lanka have left seven people dead and at least 50 injured. When the situation was going out of hands, curfew had to be imposed in Batticaloa and Amparai to quell the violence and to prevent it from spreading.

Raising concern, the leader of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress,

Mr. Rauf Hakeem, said that his party has appealed to all Muslims in the Eastern Province to exercise maximum restraint with respect to the LTTE. However, he also warned that if things in the Eastern Province did not improve, the SLMC would be compelled to demand a decommissioning of arms by the LTTE prior to any talks. Mr. Hakeem held the lower level LTTE cadres responsible for the tense situation.

The Muslim-Tamil conflict could be another pointer for the government to seriously think about the country's Muslim population alongside dealing with the interests of the Tamils. Although the Government is aware of the problem and trying to device ways to solve it, yet the efforts, say the Muslims, are not up to their expectations. The "Eelam war" has already left a large number of Muslims in dire straits. And that's why they expect the Government to do more in regards to Muslim-Tamil relations.

Muslims constitute Sri Lanka's third-largest ethnic group. About 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 19 million people are Tamil and the Muslims number about eight per cent. But the two groups are about equal in the east of the island. Unlike the Buddhists, Hindus and Christians, the Muslims in Sri Lanka draw their identity from their religion. They are scattered all over the island but are found mainly in the east. They speak the language of the area in which they live but the culture and political aspirations of the Muslims who live in Tamil areas are quite distinct and do not converge with that of the Tamils.

It has recently been talked about in Sri Lanka that the MoU did not address the issues of the Muslims who, over the years of the civil war, had been displaced from their homes.

The leader of the Muslim

Congress, representing the Muslims of the North and Eastern Provinces and a large section of the Muslims in the rest of the country, is reportedly, faced with the "dilemma" of how to solve the Muslim problem. As he said "changes may be needed to the truce agreement to protect Muslims". The noteworthy point here is, the Government wouldn't be



able to do much if the Muslims themselves are in a dilemma.

However, SLMC leader also identified four major problems, in a speech delivered at a recent seminar of Muslim intellectuals at the Renuka Hotel. The issues he identified are: a) SLMC's original demand of a contiguous entity - a separate unit of administration; b) an autonomous south-eastern Council comprising of Muslim majority electorates of Pottuvil, Sammanthurai and Digamadulla; c) two ethnic councils with an apex council; and d) a package deal authored by the late Muslim Congress leader, the late Mr. Asharraf.

These issues are to place for a solution to be presented to both the Government and the LTTE.

Meanwhile, local residents say the LTTE has imposed taxes on

Muslims in the east for some time but the Muslims have refused to pay. Therefore, the Government needs to develop a way to protect the Muslims from being exploited by the Tamil population there. In the process of long-cherished peace in the country, the Tamils should not be allowed to take advantages over their fellow neighbours, who are Muslims.

Almost 100,000 Muslims have been driven out by the LTTE from their homes and are now living as refugees across the country without any hope of getting back to their original homes. These people should be rehabilitated with proper social security. The Government needs to help the Muslims in implementing the accord signed between SLMC leader and Prabhakaran which underlined the scope for the internally-displaced Muslims to return to their homes.

The understanding with the main warring party, the LTTE, to give up violence and come to the negotiating table was a big step for the Government to solve the ethnic long crisis. This is a good augury in the country. However, given the country's political scenario, the Muslims who constitute the second largest minority community remains mired in problems. The Muslims of the North and Eastern Provinces are the ones who would most affected if something concrete is not mentioned in the MoU.

The Muslims as a community would want to have their own characteristics. They become quite disheartened when the Tamils claim that Muslims are a part of Tamil community and that they were originally Tamils who had converted to Islam. The Muslims say that throughout Sri Lankan history they had maintained their separate identity during the Sinhala Kings

period, the Portuguese, Dutch and the British periods. To them, this is very important to have a definite identity. They want this important fact must be taken into consideration, when determining the status of Muslims in the newly merged north-east Province. Under these circumstances, the Muslims may prefer to have a referendum to determine their future in the East.

The Muslims are facing the problem to sensitise the Sinhalese of the South. There are still some elements in the country who are trying to gain some political mileage by spreading the rumour against the Muslims, saying that they also demand a separate state for them. This is creating unwanted tensions for a country at crossroads. By now, every Sinhalese know that Muslims do not tend to further divide the emerald island of South Asia. In this respect, the Muslim community itself needs to come forward to sensitise the people in south Sri Lanka to avoid any sort of misunderstanding with the Sinhalese. If they do not do so, they might face the risk of being an endangered community. The Muslims must remember that while demanding their right to live as a separate entity, they must ensure their existence in the Sinhala areas.

The chances of peace in Sri Lanka have never been brighter. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is sincere in his effort to bring back peace in Sri Lanka. Following the earlier efforts by President Kumaratunga, he has already demonstrated his sincerity has gone to great lengths in solving the ethnic problem.

This brightest opportunity for lasting peace should not be spoiled by another looming conflict.

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NEPAL

## Politically uncertain

ANJU GROVER

**I**T'S been one year since King Birendra and other eight royal family members were massacred by late king's own son Dipendra, who also died after the incident. But normalcy is yet to return to the Himalayan Kingdom. In fact, the country has gone through a rough patch over the last one year due to political instability and escalation of Maoists violence. There is no clear sign of normalcy returning to this landlocked nation in near future.

Questions are being raised over the prevailing political and economic situation in Nepal. A recent split in Nepal's oldest political party, the ruling Nepali Congress Party on June 17, after weeks of internal wrangling, has badly damaged party's image in the political circles.

The split occurred following differences between party president and former Prime Minister G.P. Koirala and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba over the continuation of emergency. Koirala had expelled Deuba in May, after the latter refused to tow the party line. Deuba who was in favour of extending emergency beyond May 26, managed to win confidence of substantial number of party activ-

ists, with the help of his supporters and got Koirala removed from the president's post.

Well, it could be a victory for Deuba but his problems are far from over. Reports that some of his supporters switching loyalties completely exposed Deuba. Koirala supporters have deplored his expulsion saying it was illegal.

Hence, Deuba's government has so far been unable to contain insurgency. However, the government sought international support to tackle the insurgency problem. Subsequently, United Kingdom organised an international meet to chalk out anti-Maoist strategy with the help of India, China and the United States. These countries offered support to contain the insurgency in Nepal which has taken nearly 5,000 lives since 1996. An international support to contain insurgency can be a morale booster for the isolated Prime Minister Deuba, who has not been able to tackle basic problems facing the country. There hasn't been any improvement in the sagging economy of the Himalayan Kingdom which has actually gone from bad to worse. The tourism industry has been hit badly. No major development project has been executed so far. Maoists insurgency too has

taken a deadly twist.

Under the given circumstances, it is extremely difficult to predict as to when the insurgency problem will end? Or when will the emergency be lifted? On record, Prime Minister Deuba recently stated that the emergency would be lifted during mid-term polls scheduled to be held in November. Assuring that the forthcoming elections would be free and fair, Deuba maintained the polls would a sort of referendum for the people to chose between peace and violence. Experts said that Deuba's move was just a 'public relations' campaign saying that he was trying to justify his actions.

But Nepalese journalists were not convinced. On the contrary, they complained that more than a hundred media personnel had been arrested under provisions of emergency. According to the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the government had taken 105 media workers into custody. They included journalists, publishers, computer operators and composers. In most cases, the arrests had been made to extract information about the Maoists, the Federation has charged. Experts said that the government failed to fulfil its other responsibilities. The continued violence has deepened the woes of

Nepal's aid-dependent economy, hitting tourism and business confidence in this scenic but poor South Asian country. Experts said that the government has taken no step to restore peace. Even the first anniversary of the Royal massacre turned out to be a muted affair. There were no major functions to mark the death anniversary. The memory of massacre which left Nepal shattered is still fresh in the minds of the people. Although the inquiry report blamed drunken Crown Prince Dipendra for killing his parents, the King and Queen of Nepal, and seven other royals before killing himself. But the mystery surrounding King Gyanendra's son role the massacre has not been unravelled.

Meanwhile, the government claimed that more than 500 rebels, fighting to topple the Himalayan nation's constitutional monarchy, were involved in a raid camp of security forces. Since the revolt began over 4,700 people have been killed - 2,800 of them since November, when peace talks broke down and the government imposed a state of emergency. The government soldiers recently raided a guerrilla training camp in Rukum district near the scene of the latest battle in which officials said over

200 rebels were killed. There has been no independent confirmation of the death toll from the fighting and the rebels themselves do not usually comment on casualties.

An increase in the number of casualties has not deterred rebels, as they have been waging fierce fighting with military personnel in different parts of Nepal. Hence, the current national scenario suggests that the state and society are moving dangerously towards a civil war. There is no sign of a rapport between the state and the society. And no country can hope for good governance in the absence of a healthy balance between civil society and political state. The manner in which the emergency was ratified vividly showed that Parliament was only a rubber stamp. While endorsing the state of emergency, the state should have done introspection over its own past record and over the causes of its failure in maintaining a healthy balance in society. But nothing of this sort happened. The people of Nepal are unhappy with both the government and Maoists. If the state aggravates the situation further, there is a possibility of mass discontentment erupting in Nepal.

Anju Grover is a freelance journalist. And this piece first appeared on AsiaTimes Online.