

Musharraf on the verge of absolutism

A body-blow dealt to sovereignty of elected parliament

BY a proclamation -- or call it a stroke of his pen - the Pak head of state and government Pervez Musharraf has struck out the most fundamental of provisions contained in the Constitution of his country. This has to do with his annulment of the principle of sovereignty of an elected parliament which is the rock-bed of democracy.

Musharraf now has the power to dissolve an elected national assembly any time he wishes. In other words, he is ensuring that there is a rubber-stamp parliament to a point of servility or else it courts asphyxiation. This has horrendous implications even for the 'guided or controlled' form of democracy he champions for his country. First of all, an elected majority in a parliament is being asked, not by a systemically elected president but by one emerging through an optionless referendum, to be subservient to him. Secondly, and by the same token, since it becomes critically important for the majority party to enjoy the confidence of the president, the provision for no-confidence motion to be moved in the parliament against the ruling party by the opposition is rendered superfluous as well.

In Sri Lanka and France it's the duly elected president who has the prerogative of dissolving the parliament. Moreover, the exercise of such authority is envisioned under established systems in contrast to an wobbly one as in Pakistan now. So, by no stretch of imagination, can parallels be drawn, and we are sure none is trying to do so either. We just juxtaposed to highlight the ethical invalidity of Musharraf's stance on the issue.

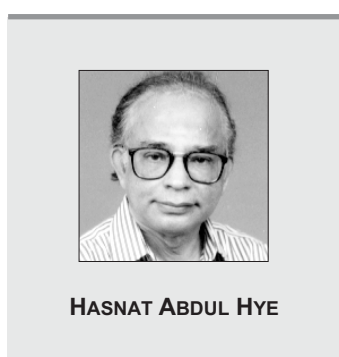
Earlier in June and July, on the back of his assumption of presidency through a controversy-tainted referendum Musharraf put across to his people an array of proposals for amendments to the Constitution basically devised to preserve and perpetuate his hold on power. He thought he needed some iron-clad safeguards for his position against the backdrop of his announcement of parliamentary polls for October. He would not rest content with having disqualified two former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif from the forthcoming parliamentary elections by an edict that made no bones about his intentions. He went further and announced a whole series of proposals for constitutional amendments which practically envisaged a hollowing out of whatever little value remained of the prospective polls sans participation of the two major political figures Ms Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

The other important constitutional amendment relates to formalisation of the previously announced national security council. As president of Pakistan and chief of army Musharraf will have two hats to wear in the all-powerful council. Besides, the supreme advisory (not 'intrusive', in Musharraf's words) council will comprise the navy and air force chiefs, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff committee and eight civilian political leaders. The council is to serve "as a forum for consultation on important foreign policy decisions and national issues", so assures Musharraf; but there are misgivings that it might wield a transcending authority. In the event that this happens and it upstages the parliament, then it could sound rather oligarchic.

Musharraf claims that he has dropped two-thirds of his original proposals thereby deserving to be seen as being responsive to criticism. Well, he has not taken the power to hire or fire the prime minister or dissolve the cabinet which one of the proposals had envisaged. The answer to that will be in the form of a question: what remains of the existence of a prime minister or a cabinet when he dissolves the parliament, a power he has assumed in terms of his self-declared constitutional amendments?

Musharraf's acceptability to the Western democracies whom he has joined in their fight against international terrorism obliges him to bring back democracy to his country. The onus rests on him to do so primarily because he had taken over power by toppling an elected government.

Meet Mr Soros



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

GEORGE SOROS is in Dhaka, not physically though. His book, *On Globalization*, is now available at Bookworm for the benefit of those curious to compare his words with his deeds. It is as a major player in the world of high finance that he made his name and reputation, such as they are. His incarnation as a writer is a later development, though he claims to have toyed with intellectual ideas since his student days at the LSE when Karl Popper made a great impact on him with his hugely acclaimed book, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. As soon as he was successful as a hedge fund manager he set up the Open Society Fund to open up closed societies and help make them more viable. Being a refugee from Hungary, a Jew by birth and living in America his concern for open societies was genuine and understandable. His interest in globalisation is a recent development, intellectually that is. For over two decades his name and globalisation has been synonymous. Not surprisingly his name evokes mixed feelings among people depending on who they are and where they live. At the time of the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98 Soros was vilified by political leaders for predatory raids on Asian currencies. As the speculator whose assault on sterling ejected Britain from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism he did not endear himself in Europe either. But in East European countries and Russia he is regarded as a kind of messiah for his generous largesse given to help them through the transition period. Besides, his role as a benefactor to black students in

South Africa during apartheid and poor blacks without homes in the post-apartheid period has helped to burnish the brighter side of his image. Overall, he has built up a formidable reputation based on both greed and philanthropy. Having been a high profile beneficiary of globalisation he has now appeared in the rather paradoxical role of an anxious reformer of the system. His latest book, *On Globalization*, is an effort in that direction.

Mr Soros makes it clear that he is an ardent supporter of

fundamentalists that globalisation is a desirable development in many ways. But unlike the market fundamentalists he also recognises the negative side of globalisation.

Mr Soros does not agree with the market fundamentalists that financial markets tend towards equilibrium and produce optimum allocation of resources. In today's integrated world economy there are multiple equilibria rather than an equilibrium point. It is therefore, risky to place excessive reliance on market mechanism. Moreover, he

and reforming existing international institutions Mr Soros acknowledges the important roles of the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO but questions some of their policies. For instance, he is very critical of the Washington Consensus - the cocktail of liberalisation, privatisation and fiscal rectitude, which the IMF has been preaching for 15 years with support from the World Bank. He has criticised the faith placed on the self-correcting nature of financial markets terming it as misplaced. Since financial

His proposal involves new issues of the SDR that the rich countries would provide to be spent in international assistance. Half of this additional SDR will be used as donations for provision of public goods (health, environment, etc) and the rest will be added to the reserves of developing countries. In his words "it is an initiative that could make a substantial amount of money available to finance the provision of public goods on a global scale as well as to foster economic, social and political

may include credit rating of member countries by the IMF, opening of credit line by central banks in developed countries with guarantees from the IMF, translation of the IMF ratings in capital requirements under the Basle Accord and more vigorous use of the Contingency Credit Line. The main opposition to these proposals has come from market fundamentalists who are pre-occupied with the issue of moral hazard. Mr Soros denies the possibility vigorously and asserts that the IMF would be taking risk, not creating a moral hazard.

Reform of international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF cover one plank of his reform package. Mr Soros also considers regulation of the international financial system as equally, perhaps more, urgent. But here he founders on confusion, hesitation and uncertainty. After contending again and again for the need of a visible hand to guide the financial markets to keep them from going off the rails he merely concludes that today the visible hand is that of the United States, supported by the Washington Consensus. His lack of fresh ideas and practical solution in this area comes as a disappointment. Perhaps he was too much pre-occupied with the centrepiece of the reform proposal, i.e. new issues of the SDR. His failure to properly mesh in the implications of the post-September 11 with the main burden of his proposal is another weakness of an otherwise excellently written book. Shortcomings notwithstanding, the significance of the book should not be missed. Mr Soros may have been a modern day robber baron but he has written a book about the system that throws up people like him. It deserves serious reading.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

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globalisation. He supports it not only because of the extra wealth it produces but even more because of the freedom it can offer and the possibilities it has thrown up for a global open society. But he considers the present international arrangement in which capital is free to move around but social concerns receive short shrift as a distorted form of a global open society. The purpose of the book is to identify the distortions and to propose some practical steps towards correcting them.

Mr Soros has defined globalisation narrowly to mean development of global financial markets, the growth of transnational corporations and their increasing domination over national economies. According to him, the salient feature of globalisation is that it allows financial capital to move around freely which undermines the ability of governments, particularly in developing countries, to exercise control over the economy. Consequently, not only the welfare states have become unworkable, even the modicum of safety net in developing countries has been shattered. Mr Soros shares the belief with market

argues that markets are designed to facilitate free exchange of goods and services among willing participants, but they are not capable on their own of taking care of collective needs or the maintenance of the market mechanism itself. He is convinced that globalisation of markets without a corresponding strengthening of international political and social arrangements has led to a very lopsided social development as well as to intermittent financial shocks. The situation has aggravated because far too few resources have been devoted to correcting the deficiencies of globalisation. As a result, the gap between the rich and poor countries continues to grow. Mr Soros has bemoaned the fact that the unwitting coalition between the left and the far right threatens to weaken the few financial international institutions that exist today. He argues that the world needs stronger international institutions, not weaker ones and that there is a need to form a different coalition whose aim is to reform and strengthen international arrangements and not to destroy them.

In his strategy for strengthening

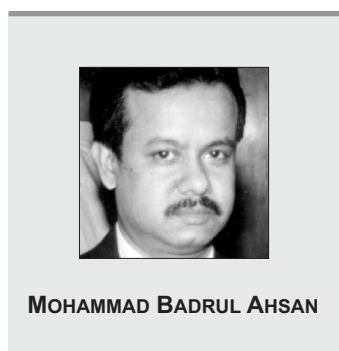
capital moved freely worldwide crisis has followed crisis prompting the IMF to come with bailout packages which have proved to be mere palliatives and even counterproductive. If stability is to be achieved financial markets need regulation and there is a need for a lender of last resort. None of these proposals will make him popular with the authorities in the international institutions. Regulation of the market is anathema to them because it is the opposite of what they have been recommending as a mantra. As regards lender of last resort, expansion of the role and funds of IMF will not find sympathetic ears. In fact, the IMF has already rolled down its bailout strategy as a matter of routine intervention. Its new 'taught love' policy - for which Argentina became the guinea pig recently - has other consequences. If the bailouts were meant to be a welfare system for Wall Street, the new strategy will dry up credit to poor.

The centrepiece of Mr Soros's proposal for reform of the international financial structure is the redefinition and use of the SDR as international development assis-

progress in individual countries". The merit of the SDR-centred proposal is that it does not involve creation of a new institution and offer anything like a 'free lunch', nor involve the problem of free riders. So it is in a way an improvement over the IMF's conventional bailout package that gave no prior incentives for sound macroeconomic policies. He also considers this a better antidote to the problem of moral hazard implicit in the old bailout package as well as a more pragmatic approach to the supply of fund than is envisaged in the involvement of private sector financial institutions in risk sharing.

While critical of the World Bank's bloated bureaucracy and its dependence on intergovernmental lending Mr Soros does not consider a major overhaul of its lending programme urgent at this stage. His reform proposals focus mostly on the IMF which is faulted for creating a crisis (bail-in of private sector) to resolve another crisis (moral hazard of bailouts). He argues that the IMF should have contingency plans that meet the emergent needs of developing and other countries without the previous pitfalls. These plans

All about conscience



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

CONSCIENCE is the mirror in which people look when they dress up their souls to face the world. In some cases it happens afterwards, when the soul returns from an outing and undresses in front of the mirror before going to sleep. Conscience is the anxiety of the punctilious soul, which keeps it on its toes. It is the quality control inspector, which ensures that each job is done within the specs of moral and ethical orders so that one has a happy customer within one's soul.

American journalist and literary critic HL Mencken defined conscience as "the inner voice which warns us that someone may be looking". In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the young prince organised a play, because it was the thing in which he wanted to catch the conscience of the king. Thus conscience is real and tangible. It is the immune system of the soul, a complex of moral and ethical principles that controls or inhibits the actions or thoughts. It sifts through the concourse of human considerations and separates the right from the wrong.

As a matter of fact, conscience is a trial court, which is always in

session. It is a debate that goes forever when instincts and intellect are engaged in tussles. Conscience is the compass at crossroads that directs a distraught traveller which way to go. It is the lodestar in the night sky that guides a ship, the lighthouse of courage and conviction on the moral shores.

In 1787, the framers of the US Constitution had stood on the stretch of that moral shore to debate the issue of slavery at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

calamities, by the judgement of many, began when the first African was enslaved on the American soil, which continued to rumble down the decades towards the Civil War.

Thus the underlying precept of conscience is an equation that what goes around comes around. It is also the flip-flop equivalent of the Kantian philosophy that a man mustn't do to others what he doesn't like done to him by others. Conscience is the resident philosopher inside every soul. It is the idealistic

instincts and impulses that constitute mentality. Mind is conscience when character arrives on stage from the wings, when the soul of a man interacts with his faculties and enacts the drama for the audience. What the world thinks of a man is what his mind speaks of him, and what the mind speaks of him is how his conscience writes the script.

Which equates man with society and one influences another through conscience. Man does to his society what society does to him, and vice

exploitation in the hands of other men.

But man has failed to reconcile his economic freedom with political freedom within the limits of conscience. Feudalism subverted the political freedom of many to facilitate the economic freedom of few and socialism undermined the political freedom of few in the economic interest of many. Capitalism meant to create a balance by fostering political aspiration for economic freedom.

new culture and a new conscience. It was once customary amongst the Hindus of India that wives would die in the pyre of their husbands until the British imposed their own culture to create a counterculture and thus set up the moral ground that the custom of Sutte was wrong.

To hit the nail on the head, conscience is about restraint, as society overcomes one to become trapped in another. It is through the spheres of these restraints that history moves from era to era, and mankind evolves its journey from the Fall to the Final Redemption. And in every sphere men fought to restrain individual freedom to enhance collective freedom, sort of social contract when each man gave up some of his freedom for the freedom of all.

Until freedom lost its own restraint and turned it into a culture. The force of that culture increased immeasurably as men accumulated wealth and power, thus giving rise to an environment when morality negotiates with opportunities and the most admirable virtues are demonstrated by the acquisition of wealth and fame without very much regard to how they have been acquired.

These days, conscience has been reduced to a bunch of clerks, which is busy calculating the price of soul for the highest bidder. It is a new kind of slavery, when soul is enslaved by conscience and conscience is enslaved by greed. This time the profound Virginian isn't around to warn us that providence punishes national sins, by national calamities, which may have already begun since the first amongst us was enslaved on this soil.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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When Luther Martin of Maryland asserted that slavery was dishonourable, John Rutledge of South Carolina lashed back coldly that religion and humanity had nothing to do with the question of slavery, because interest alone was the governing principle with nations.

The profound Virginian, George Mason, himself a slave owner, delivered a stirring rebuttal to Rutledge topped by this thunderous conclusion: "Slaves bring the judgement of heaven on a country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world they must in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, providence punishes national sins, by national calamities." Mason and Martin lost in that debate in Philadelphia, and the

rebel that unceasingly protests against the tyranny of the soul.

So conscience is as true for an individual as it is for the collective soul of a nation. What isn't right for an individual is wrong for a nation, and the decadence and eventual fall of the Roman Empire brings that point home amongst many examples. The seven deadly sins: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth, sit on the conscience of one man so much as it does on the same of an entire race. Conscience is the dorsal column of character, the seed of personality, the bud that blooms into the flower of passion, which drives the human engine.

Conscience is then the most sensitive aspect of the human entity, one that mirrors and magnifies our

versa. And one must never doubt that conscienceless man makes conscienceless society, and the converse is equally true no matter if one wants to debate till the end of the world whether the chicken or the egg comes first.

The history of mankind, therefore, has been the history of conscience. It has advanced through a dialectic process when the threat to the existing level of conscience led to a higher level of conscience. That is how the social order evolved from supremacy of one to few to many, from monarchy to feudalism to democracy. It is the collective conscience that unfolded in history as dignity of man came to the centre of everything and man learned to fight for right in the struggle to resist

Throughout the ages, the shape of conscience shaped the destiny of man. In the 18th century Russia, feudal lords exchanged their slaves for animals. In communist China, it was once encouraged that children criticised their parents, teachers and other elders in order to uphold the ideology of the state. In democracy, people are free to choose their leaders, while the divinity of king is no longer acknowledged.

The way it worked is that conscience created culture, and culture created civilisation. When the civilisation degenerated to evoke a counterculture, it created a higher level of conscience. It was once believed that the king could do no wrong until the French sent their king to the guillotine to promote a

Saddam may be smiling

MUKSITUL ISLAM

INSIDE the repaired Pentagon, military tacticians and strategists are busy preparing a battle plan for America's next upcoming war let's call it Gulf War II. War in Afghanistan lacked convention and was too much dependent on air power and maybe to Pentagon's dismay was too quick to end. It did not give out the flavours of a conventional warfare - regular armies fighting from behind the trenches, wearing combat outfits, having artillery divisions, fighter planes, helicopters and all. It somehow did not fit America's military stature to hit upon patched-up, old relief tents or modest mud structures with million dollar bombs. So much for the defiant Taliban resistance. With intelligence gathered from eleven years of continued reconnaissance flight over Iraqi air space the WestPoint Generals are restless to put it to some use. Finally, their prayers seem to have been

answered. Mr. Bush has spoken -- "Saddam must go".

Mr. Bush believes he has the mandate from the people. The Gallup poll is very much on his side - an impressive 80 per cent approval rating. Public opinion matters in the US. Bush is pretty much playing it to the wire. On declaration, there was a flurry of activity in the electronic media, what better story is there to capture the highly fragmented TV viewers than a live coverage of a war drama. With an added spice of America going alone to finish off Saddam, the coming events have all the promises of a box office hit.

What is America's case against Saddam? He has plotted to develop weapons of mass destruction namely anthrax and nerve gas. Whether these are the very anthrax that caused the nation to go jittery a few months back remains to be proved. He continues to flaunt hostility to America; his is a regime that does not hesitate to kill its own

people. One wonders whether the plight of the Chechens came to mind when Mr. Bush uttered those words in the State of the Union address or shrugged it off with seeming indifference.

There is no denying that America is capable of launching a unilateral strike on Iraq. It has military bases in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar all of which are fully operational. Its fifth fleet is stationed at Persian Gulf. But a regime change requires committing ground forces. America perhaps will ponder the number of body bags that will take a return trip home from the battle zone - the corpse of a US soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu still haunts Washington policy makers.

Surely Saddam had anticipated this American sabre rattling a long ago; that a moment of a final American showdown is just to appear on the horizon. Given his wily nature and cautiousness, Saddam must have had a contingency

plan in place. He knows best the dire straits of his armed forces. Since the end of Gulf war his military had lost hundreds of tanks, armoured personnel carrier, combat aircraft and the vital air defence system. What's left is a wasting and increasingly obsolete collection of arsenal. Defection is another area of concern. During this eleven-year interlude scores of military and civil personnel went into self-exile. When America starts rattling its weapons more will follow for sure. Diplomacy is not working either - America categorically turned down the offer of sending any more weapons inspectors that Saddam invited recently. So what's left up his sleeves? Israel of course.

Israel has become a synonym for evil to the Arab eyes. From the dark alleyways of Jerusalem to the busy streets of Cairo, there is a burning desire to avenge Israeli intransigence. This simmering anger can manifest itself into a region wide call for Jihad against

Israel and its staunchest ally given the right elements of provocation are there. How is that possible? Compel Israel to use its nuclear arsenal. The impending American attack may provide Saddam just this sort of opportunity.

Israel's longstanding policy of "deliberate ambiguity" concerning nuclear weapons does not help deter Arab fears over its nuclear capabilities. Its Dimona Reactor at Negev desert is a full-scale nuclear weapons manufacturing plant. Its arsenal of Jericho missiles and F-16 fighters could carry the nukes to any target ranging from the coasts of Persian Gulf to the very heart of Cairo. It is said that the Israeli nuclear command and control module is always kept on highest state of alert in anticipation of any eventuality. Experts estimate Israel has about 200 nuclear arsenals at its disposal.

Most of us remember watching on CNN live pictures of Scud missiles hurtling down on Tel-Aviv

during the Gulf War. Faced with the prospect of defeat, that was Saddam's last desperate attempt to engage Israel into the conflict. It took George W. Bush's old man a lot of convincing to prevent Yitzhak Shamir from giving the nod for the eventuality - a preemptive nuclear first strike. Retaliation from Israel would have definitely swayed the course of events on his side. Saddam hoped that an Israeli retaliatory strike would convert Arab opinion to his cause and thereby break the coalition. That did not happen. Saddam may be contemplating to resort to the same strategy if things go out of hand. Things will go out of hand if the US launches a full-fledged attack. If Saddam still retains chemical or biological weapons, as the US alleges, there is a very good chance that he may somehow transport and spread them in and around Israel. One can expect that this time the attacks will be much lethal and clandestine in nature. Will Israel sit

back and watch the Black Death taking its toll? I doubt it. Will there be protests from the Arabs? Hardly.

In the event of a war Iraq has three strategic advantages over Israel. Unlike the Gulf war, this time there will be no grand coalition. There is a clear rift between America and its European allies over this issue. The crack first appeared with the disagreement over the uneven battle in West Bank. With a trade war looming overhead between the two, the rift is unlikely to mend in the near future. Furthermore, last March Iraq met its peace at the Arab Summit Meeting in Beirut. The picture of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah, and Iraq's second-in-command, Ezzat Ibrahim embracing each other sent shockwaves down Washington's spine. On its part Iraq promised to respect the "independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait". In return, it got a categorical Arab rejection of any attack on them.

Finally, the carnage and devastation of the second Intifada is still scathingly fresh in people's minds. Feeling the heat Egypt, Jordan and even Turkey condemned Israeli atrocities in the West Bank. An Israeli response to an Arab land in the midst of an American attack may prove too much for the region's leaders to swallow. The long cherished Arab unity may finally emerge.

What will America's response be if certain Arab countries declare war on Israel? Is it going to side with it? What if Israel out of fear for its survival, releases nuclear missiles on Arab populace? Can we imagine the collateral damage that would ensue? Will America embroil itself in a deadly war against the whole Arab world? Calculations are going on in full swing on both sides. Only time will say. For Saddam Hussein, this maybe the beginning of good times.