

## Deteriorating party politics BNP continues its attack on AL and the later responds with unpopular hartal

BNP men attacked the opposition leader's motorcade, threw bricks and shoes and hurled abuse at her in the Kolaroa incident. Armed party cadres also fired shots in the air and roughed up journalists on the spot and later at the police station where they had gone to take shelter. The question that needs to be asked is what is BNP's game plan in doing all this. Does the ruling party believe that it can intimidate and beat the opposition to submission? Doesn't it remember how the AL failed in this very tactics and instead of growing weaker the BNP became stronger. That has been the fate of all ruling parties making arrogant use of its electoral power.

The BNP is proceeding in a course of action which is fundamentally confrontational and destructive. It seems to be replicating what the former ruling party did -- giving no space to the opposition. A direct attack on a leader of either the BNP or the AL is no mean incident and we in the media cannot ignore it. We recall attacks on Khaleda Zia when she was in the opposition and how virulently we condemned it. We do so today with equal gusto. We condemn this attack on Sheikh Hasina's motorcade and consider it to be a serious blow to the growing parliamentary democracy in the country.

We also condemn the attack on the local journalists by the BNP activists. Media men have been targets of politicians for some time. Regrettably the incidents of such attacks are on the rise and we have noticed a sort of ambivalence on the part of the government to redress it. This constitutes another setback for our growing democracy. Why a democratically elected government should be so indifferent to the plight of journalists is something beyond our understanding.

We can repeat what we said when Sheikh Hasina went on opposition bashing that this will never work. For our desperately needed development we need social and political peace. That peace can only begin if political tolerance grows, and that must start with tolerance between the BNP and the AL.

As for the AL, it responded to the incident by resorting to the increasingly unpopular and fundamentally destructive weapon of hartal. What public sympathy it gained through BNP's highhandedness, it threw away by this unpopular move. Will our self-destructiveness ever stop?

## Pakistan's polls puzzle

Looks increasingly tailored to perpetuate Musharraf's reign

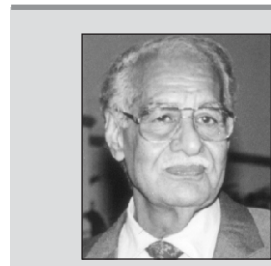
OUTRIGHT rejection of Benazir Bhutto's nomination leads to one obvious conclusion: the October 10 general elections in Pakistan will only reflect President Pervez Musharraf's wishes, not the people's verdict. There could well be an argument that had rejection of Ms Bhutto's candidature been part of the general's greater political design, another former prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif would have met a similar fate. Preliminary approval for Mr Sharif's nomination looks a bit surprising indeed; however, it only brings to fore the "double standards" of the election authorities. Had conviction in corruption charges been the yardstick, Mr Sharif would certainly have not made past the preliminary scrutiny. The fact is it is not.

What looks to be the standard here is how ready the candidates are to fit into President Musharraf's plan. The general claims that the Sharif family has promised to stay out of politics for ten years when the former prime minister went into exile to Saudi Arabia in 2000. Meanwhile, Pakistan media carried reports on Thursday that special Saudi envoy had met the general the day before and assured him that the Sharifs would not return. Apparently, the general no longer deems Mr Sharif as a potent threat to his grips on presidency. On the contrary, Ms Bhutto doesn't seem to have inspired similar confidence in him. Hence, the arm-twisting continues.

President Musharraf has made it amply clear that, no matter what it takes, he would cling to power as long as possible. Last week, he unveiled a set of constitutional amendments that will allow him to wield overriding power even after a civilian government is elected. The changes, which empower him to dismiss parliament and chair a civilian-military National Security Council to oversee government, have been viewed as a ploy to keep the army happy, thereby decimating possibility of a coup.

His position constitutionally cushioned and threats from the army reasonably contained, President Musharraf has turned his attention to international relations, of which holding the elections is a major part. He just wants to make sure that whoever wins will toe his line. Outright rejection of Ms Bhutto's candidature, and preliminary acceptance of Mr Sharif's nomination are only part of the process.

# The dilemma is not political, but moral



**KULDEEP NAYAR**  
writes from New Delhi

As a Member of Parliament, I am ashamed that the very first effort to cleanse our politics has been defeated by the MPs themselves. They have been criticising for years the nexus between criminals, bureaucrats and politicians. But when it came to action they have united to stall it. Nearly all political parties have opposed the Election Commission's (EC) order to make it obligatory for the contestants to disclose their assets and their criminal past at the time of filing their nomination papers. This was on the Supreme Court's directive.

I am not surprised over the reaction of leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party. They wallow in the dirt of politics and their sights are limited to winning an election, not how they do it. But I did not think that he would go to the extent of running down the President, the highest authority in the country, for having returned the government's ordinance meant to undo the commission's order.

Mulayam Singh has attacked the "so-called intellectuals" for not knowing the reality on the ground. A bit of that reality has come to light from an official statement in UP that some hardcore criminals, who contested on the Samajwadi Party ticket in the last assembly election, are absconding. True, the "so-called

intellectuals" can never come up to the expectations of Mulayam Singh Yadav and his likes and who equate reality on the ground with mafias and moneybags.

What has surprised me is the support of the communists to the ordinance. I expected better moral standards from them. At stake is not the authority of MPs but their reputation. The general impression is that politicians are corrupt and mixed up

the ordinance right now?

In fact, the Attorney General has been unfair to the public because the ordinance has retained clause 33(a) of the draft bill: "Notwithstanding anything contained in any judgment, no candidate shall be liable to disclose any such information in respect of his election..." This denies a citizen the fundamental right to know guaranteed under Article 19. The Supreme Court has

submit the statement to the president officers of two houses and state legislatures. Any contravention will not come before the court but the Privileges Committee of the house. This is, indeed, an anti-climax. People are laughing at this because political parties have found an easy way out for the corrupt in their ranks.

The Supreme Court was, however, clear on the subject. In a judgment on May 2, it directed the

Some of us, who met the President to request him to return the ordinance, did not press for educational qualifications. He included them on his own in the elucidations he sought from the government. We believe no candidate should be disqualified because he is illiterate. Lakhs of people in India are so poor that they cannot afford schooling. To declare them ineligible because they have no educational qualifica-

least, the Congress is beginning to distance itself from the ordinance. President Sonia Gandhi's statement is categorically against the ordinance.

During my tenure in the Rajya Sabha, now five years old, I have found that the disclosure of assets is a touchy subject. At the time of discussion on the jurisdiction of Ombudsman in the standing committee of Home Affairs, there was an uproar on the proposal that MPs would be under him. They wanted to be guided by the House alone. The proposal was rejected straightaway.

I agree with the contention that returning officers should have no authority to reject any candidate's paper on the basis of false statement of assets or criminal antecedents. If this was allowed, the nomination papers of many would be rejected because of personal vendetta leaders have towards one another. A state ruled by one party can play havoc with the nominations of the opposition. The veracity of the statement filed by a candidate can be a basis for an election petition. In the same way, "convictions" as a result of offences relating to trade union activity or demonstration cannot be treated as "conviction."

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Returning officers should have no authority to reject any candidate's paper on the basis of false statement of assets or criminal antecedents. If this was allowed, the nomination papers of many would be rejected because of personal vendetta leaders have towards one another. A state ruled by one party can play havoc with the nominations of the opposition. The veracity of the statement filed by a candidate can be a basis for an election petition. In the same way, "convictions" as a result of offences relating to trade union activity or demonstration cannot be treated as "conviction."

with criminals. By opposing the EC's directive they have only strengthened the impression. They have also proved that when the question of politicians arises there is no difference between left and right.

I believe that the Prime Minister was in favour of modifying the ordinance to meet the President's suggestion that candidates should divulge their assets before seeking election. But Attorney General Soli Sorabjee had his way. He reportedly told the Prime Minister that if the ordinance was modified, the President could take it as a new one and again send it back. Subsequently, the Attorney General went to Rashtrapati Bhawan to assure the President that the modification he had suggested would be incorporated in the bill before it was introduced in parliament. If this is the case, what is the harm in modifying

held in a number of cases that the right to information is derived from the concept of freedom of speech in Article 19.

What should an average person infer from the ordinance and the cabinet's re-endorsement so as to bind the President to sign it? Probably no single task has tarnished the image of politicians so much as the ordinance. Imagine the common man's disappointment. He has been told over and over again that elections will be free and fair. When all parties unanimously resolve that their candidate will not disclose the assets before getting elected, they throw down the gauntlet to the voters. Why shouldn't all candidates come clean on their assets and criminal background, if any?

Like the draft bill, the ordinance does not face the question of assets squarely. The elected candidate will

EC to ask candidates contesting parliament or assembly election to compulsorily furnish details of their criminal antecedents, if any, and to allow voters to know about candidates before making their choice. The court spelled out five points: one, whether the candidate was convicted, acquitted or discharged in any criminal offence. If convicted, whether he or she had been sentenced, imprisoned or fined; two, whether the candidate was accused of any offence punishable with imprisonment for two years or more. Three, candidates and their spouses should declare their assets (immovable, movable, bank balances, etc.); four, disclosure of liabilities -- whether there were any dues to any public financial institution or government body; and, five, the candidate's educational qualifications.

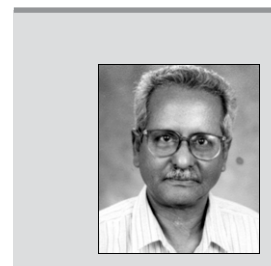
tion is elitist. Lack of literacy is a fault of successive governments, which never implemented the constitutional guarantee of free education for all children up to the age of 14.

The worst thing that the government has done by issuing the ordinance is to stop the electoral process, which has a strategic role in a democracy. Once again the ordinance will be challenged in the court and once again the court will have to go over the same exercise. Suppose, it were to reject the ordinance or the act which the Vajpayee government is determined to get through parliament? What would the political parties do? Would they have a confrontation with the judiciary? The judgment is under Article 19, a fundamental right. Are political parties contemplating an amendment to the constitution to bypass the Supreme Court's judgment? At

The real dilemma is not political, but moral. The Mulayam Singh Yadavs cannot appreciate it. Their way of functioning is different. Their thinking is peculiar. The President has put the finger on the right spot when he asked us: "How do we bring purity to life?" That is a question Mulayam Singh Yadav will do well to ponder.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

# Cannot be challenged in court!



M.J. ZAHEDI

PRESIDENT General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan has made some fundamental changes in the constitution of the country. At the same time he has made himself president for the next five years. He has given a constitutional role to the forces. And he has armed himself with the power to dissolve the national assembly. The *Daily Times* said that by pushing through two of the most controversial amendments in his originally proposed package, he has stuck to his guns, although according to him, he has abandoned two-thirds of his original ideas. The paper thought that he began from an extreme position so he could eventually sell his 'compromise' to the public.

He has institutionalized the military's political role. That he has done quite cleverly, without seemingly doing so. It has been on the argument that if you allow the army into the corridors of political power and heed its advice, it won't have to

order the 111 brigade into action every decade or so. Instead, having gained entry, it can nudge out governments through legal internal machinations and threats and install the decrees, 'without being tarred by the opprobrium attached to a coup d'etat.' But the *Daily Times* raised the question of actual fragility of the 'so-called iron' system that Gen. Musharraf has seemingly put

ter. The vacuum and instability created by the court's verdict allowed the real power, the COAS, to walk in and get rid of both the prime minister as well as the president, who, incidentally, was also the supreme commander of the armed forces. All this has been managed, says an editorial in *The News*, in the face of opposition and criticism of all concerned public quarters. This was

editorial. But if the decision had already been taken, the prolonged national debate on the amendment packet, which was encouraged by the government, consequently seems as entirely unnecessary exercise. The other proposed amendments, which are to be dropped, become political placebos to test the impact on the nation. Article 58(2)b is sufficient to prove

The National Security Council was virtually on the cards ever since the army took over power; its interpolation, in the constitution, is therefore not surprising, experts say. Among its many virtues it is considered as a device to prevent future takeovers by the chiefs of army staff. This has been achieved by inducting all the military chiefs as superior stakeholders in civil affairs.

The amendments, most constitutional analysts say, do not ensure stability in the future, rather they have opened the door for more political instability and chaos in the country, an editorial in *The News* said. Another daily, the *Daily Times*, commented why Gen Musharraf has not risked introducing the amendments through the institutional body despite putting together a political coalition favourable to the regime. Such a course would have addressed the issue of legitimacy but it was fraught with risks, experts feel. Whatever the President might do, the dynamics of a civilian elected house precluded him from taking that course, an editorial in the *Times* said. If the Supreme Court (if the issue is taken to that forum), the *Daily Times* editorial said, in a feat of objectivity, were to strike down the amendments, would Musharraf be ready to accept the court's verdict, or would he respond in the same manner in which he says he will respond if the parliament undo his amendments (that is sack parliament). The editorial says that could he be absolutely confident that the court would never negate his views? The question is why should anyone even think of taking the issue to the court when the legal framework order 2002 says clearly that it cannot be challenged in court?

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

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

### Spray the patients!

This is simply pathetic to see the DCC to spray antidiabetic in human presence.  
**Farhan Dhaka**

best and long term interests they must encourage a democratic system of government in Pakistan.  
**Akbar Hussain Toronto, Canada**

"ever" get done in this country, are done by the officers of public and private sectors. It is impossible that all of them are thieves and corrupt.

Their employment is not redundant. I am afraid the same can not be said of our 'Great army'.  
**M. A. Kalaim NY, USA**

### "Musharraf on the verge of absolutism"

Thanks for your editorial "Musharraf on the verge of absolutism".

It seems that the main reason behind Musharraf's swift intention to become a despot is his conviction that America is behind him. The double standard of American democracy of promoting despot abroad has perhaps become too old now. In a very unsettled nation like Pakistan where democracy never had a chance to take root, the United States can't expect that a military ruler like Musharraf will be in a stable position for a long time to serve its interests.

The very unpredictable nature of the Pakistani military establishment where antagonistic ideas are at play, encouraged Musharraf to keep himself at the helm of the military for next five years. From a practical point of view there is a very strong potential for a fundamentalist take over in Pakistan and this threat can only be thwarted if a truly democratic government is allowed to work there.

It is expected that the United States will soon realise that in their

### "Great Army"

Most of us who are sympathetic to the army, consider them as the last resort to solve any serious internal problem e.g. election fraud, flood, public and political unrest etc. though their fundamental role is that of a defender.

A police officer with his current salary should not be expected to be as disciplined as an army officer with all his perks and amenities inside and outside the garrison. And while the argument can be made that army is "sometimes" doing what the police should be doing "all year" long, it makes sense to divert some fund from the defence department to where it is really needed.

Every four-year, the change of government (vicious cycle of JP, BNP, Awami, BNP?) unearths billions of dollars of fraud in army purchases like frigate, MIG-29 etc. So argument of Mr Faisal Hasan that first class officers misappropriated more than taka 11,200 crore, may be true, but just might be a photo finish with army's own misappropriation.

Our public and private officers serve a purpose. They have a defined goal. Most of the work that is

\*\*\*

This is in regards to Azad's letter (August 24) about the army. Azad agrees to Naureen Khan's letter where she wrote that the army, the bureaucracy (the civil service people) and the tycoons are all the same. Well if they are all the same then where is the problem in posting army officers in bureaucratic posts? Don't they work for the same government and have to follow the same basic rules and regulations. Our immediate past Inspector General of Police is serving as a secretary in a ministry, what's wrong with that?

Azad also agrees to Nureen writing army indulges in many privileges, well if they already have so many privileges then why would they be lobbying for Directorships at public institutions. They don't get any facility from the army once they are posted on deputation. There is no retired army officer serving as director of any public institution. The age of retirement from the army is about 3 years earlier than the retire-

ment age of the civil service, they may be retired from army but according to the civil service rules they will still be on service. As far as MP nominations are concerned well when they have retired they are free to do anything aren't they? Not that they don't have the qualifications to contest for the election.

Azad also says that Junior Foreign Service officials have second jobs. Well I am sure he doesn't know that having a second job in addition to a government service is illegal. This only proves how endless the demands are of some of our Foreign Service officials and to what extent they can go to satisfy them. Had it been so that they had to live in such horrible conditions as Azad states, then I am sure they wouldn't be lobbying for their next foreign posting long before they finish their compulsory 3-year posting in Bangladesh. If some of them still think they are poorly paid for a poor country like Bangladesh then they should try for some other job.

### Acitizen Dhaka

### Stop this politics

The *Daily Star* on August 23 published a report on the latest conspiracy regarding AK-47 rifles. It is surprising to see how a police officer manipulated the whole thing. Where did this police officer get such courage to commit such an act? We

even came to know that he had all the support of his superiors except his subordinates who were a bit scared in supporting him.

In fact, it is a trend with all the offices, departments -- those who can please the present regime get promotions, suitable postings and other benefits. The present government has gone beyond all the norms of democratic practices in every field. We read in the newspapers that the opposition lawmakers were implicated stealing railway fishes in the northern district. The Communication Minister was saying on a television channel that the auto-rickshaw drivers were being instigated by a certain political party to create chaos. We listened in the same programme some drivers were saying that they were not concerned about political parties, it is question of their survival. They want rehabilitation before their two-stroke engine vehicles were banned from the city streets.

### Our Russian Mig-29s

We purchased eight Russian Mig-29s for Taka 719.00 crore in the year 1999 i.e. Taka 719 divided by 8 = Tk 89.87 per Mig-29. The area of our country is very

small and the Mig-29 is such a powerful, speedy and sophisticated fighter aircraft that when it flies in the sky it covers and completes our air space within a few minutes. According to our military air-force experts Mig-29 does not fulfil the requirement of our air defence.

The average maintenance cost of a Mig-29 aircraft is Taka 100 crore per year and one Mig-29 worth Taka 89.87 crore is out of order.

Can a poor and small country like Bangladesh afford such costly and expensive aircraft? Against whom -- Nepal, Burma, India, Pakistan, China, the Maldives, Sri Lanka or Bhutan are we going to use these Mig-29s?

### O H Kabir Wari, Dhaka

### The problem is within

It is with deep anguish that every day I read some story about how Bangladesh, its trade and its people have been unduly affected by the enhanced scrutiny by the United States in regards to commerce and travel.

Such measures understandably give rise to hurt feelings and a sense of anger. I urge my countrymen, however, to vent their frustration and anger where it can actually make some positive changes: their social and political environments.

Consider you are the Bangladeshi policymakers, whether in Dhaka or at one of our missions

abroad. In country X, you witness daily sermons blasting Bangladesh and its society. Would you go out of your way to welcome goods and people from country X under the circumstances? I know I would not.

Those abroad who are frustrated by the new measures and attitudes of the US need to put pressure on their own politicians, their clergy, their journalists, and their neighbours to tone down the upsurge of anti-American rhetoric. That is where the problem lies, not at the doors of the American Congress or the American Embassy.

### ES Missouri, USA

### Only end of violence will lead to Israeli withdrawal

I am writing with reference to "Spotlight on Middle East: End of occupation will end violence," Muslehuddin Ahmad (August 17).

Tashib Sayyed, Editor in chief of weekly *Pakistan Today*, recently wrote: "Yasser Arafat is supposed to be the leader of his people (Palestinians)... But if the bloody events in the region are any indication of who has the authority over the Palestinians, even a blind person can see that it is not Yasser Arafat. The masses follow the instructions of Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad. These groups do not want

any peace with Israel. They want its destruction."

He then went on to elaborate: "This mindset manifests itself regularly in the form of homicide bombers. According to a recent poll, a majority of Palestinians believe the aim of their 20-month-old uprising should be to eliminate Israel and not just end Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The reluctance on the part of Yasser Arafat to guide the Palestinians' energies in a peaceful direction suggests two things. Either he is also controlled by organisations like Hamas and Hezbollah, or he himself shares their agenda."

This is a surprisingly candid and eloquent statement by a prominent journalist in a Muslim country like Pakistan where Israel is blamed for the plight of the Palestinian people and suicide bombers are eulogised as freedom fighters and martyrs and where non-Muslims and foreigners are routinely attacked by various terrorist groups. But it seems that moderate voices are making themselves heard.

It is violence, which is responsible for the Israeli occupation and not other way around. Once the Palestinians give up suicide bombing in favour of non-violent political movement, there will be no excuse for Israel to delay withdrawal from the Palestinian territories.

**Mahmood Elahi Ottawa, Ontario, Canada**