

Strident message for Musharraf

People keep faith with political parties

THE Pakistani voters have spoken. Their verdict has given stupendous food for thought -- for the whole world, really. The poll results have exploded the invincibility myth hitherto built around general Musharraf's policies and put a sop on the commonplace tendency towards finding a whipping boy in the political parties for the country's failures. The rather drab-looking election has produced an outcome loaded with meaning.

The poll results show an unprecedented surge of electoral support for a broad coalition of Islamic parties called the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). From their negligible two federal assembly seats bagged in the 1997 election, the alliance with a seemingly hardline face this time has made a deep inroad into the political landscape of Pakistan. They have emerged as the third largest winner in the polls. Not surprisingly, their massive gain came from Northwest Frontier (NWF) and Baluchistan, the two provinces bordering Afghanistan. Some of these religious parties are protagonists of the Taliban Afghan regime ousted by the US military invasion last year with the Musharraf regime extending unconditional support to it. In addition to their newly acquired clout in the national parliament the Islamic forces are likely to hold control of the provincial assemblies in NWF and Baluchistan.

The first lesson to be drawn from this soaring height reached by Islamic radicals is, the military better not tamper with democracy anymore. For, every time that they have done it, Islamic extremism has gained a newer ground; albeit with the difference that whilst in the past they were pandered to by the power that was, this time they have surged forward as a reaction to Gen. Musharraf's kowtowing to the US invasive policy against the ousted Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Come as it does as a reactionary upshot, this needs not be seen as an endorsement of any theocratic agenda. Principally, this has been a rejection of American policy towards sweeping stereotyping of Islam in the terrorist mould and her approach to the problems of Middle East and Palestine. As a necessary corollary to this, Musharraf has received his part of the public ire in Pakistan.

There are reasons to believe the government did not allow a level-playing field to all political parties. The air was rife with serious allegations of pre-poll intimidation and rigging. The treatment was step-motherly towards the PPP and PML (Nawaz), the latter so much as having been split into two well before the polls. The PML (Q), the breakaway party, even went on to acquire the infamous sobriquet of being the King's party.

The good showing by the leaderless PPP and PML (N) is a proof of public confidence in old political parties resurrecting, what the politicians might have done to them regardless.

Musharraf's real political problems may have just begun. To take guard against any possible predicament, one may see him flagging off horse-trading by his favourite PML (Q) (the winner of the highest number of seats but still falling far short of the strength to form government) among the independents who have bagged a sizable 55 seats. The independents within three days of the official announcement of results may integrate with a political party or choose to remain as they are. So, the potential for manoeuvre is there, not just for the PML (Q) but for other major political parties as well.

We are looking forward to Musharraf's promised handing over of executive powers to a duly elected government. He better live by the pristine message the verdict holds for him and avoid any arbitrary use of presidential prerogatives.

Congress' yes to Bush

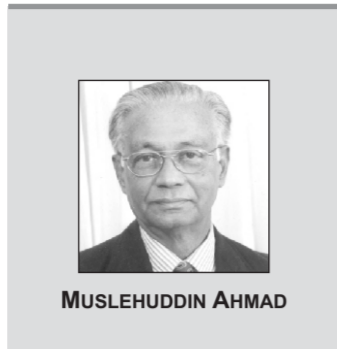
Unilateral US strike on Iraq will be disastrous

THE US Congress has given President George W Bush the authority to use force "in a manner necessary and appropriate to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq". The only saving grace in the gung-ho resolution, passed in the Senate by 77 to 23 and in the House of Representatives by 296 to 133, is that it tags the military option with enforcement of "all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq". Given the belligerence Mr Bush has so far shown and now with the Congress extending the green light to him, a strike on Iraq, multilateral or not, looks only a pretext away. All that the American president needs to do now is to darn up an excuse to "go it alone" against "Saddam Hussein and his outlaw regime".

There has been an increasing opposition to war against Iraq across the world, including at the people's level in the United States itself. Although other veto-wielding nations have agreed in principle for a tough UNSC resolution on Iraq, they have made no bones about their opposition to any unilateral strike on Iraq. Whether their opposition can restrain the US remains to be seen. The New York Times reported on Friday that the White House has plans for occupation of Iraq that calls for an American-led military government and war-crime trials for Iraqi leaders.

A war on Iraq would expose the whole world to a prolonged spell of political and economic uncertainties, even perhaps terrorism, aside from dipping the US feet in fresh troubles. Hopefully, Mr Bush will step back from what looks like a brink of disaster.

Sharon's madness destroys hopes for peace



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel and his radical rightist associates ran amok after a suicide bomber killed six Israelis in Tel Aviv some weeks ago. Palestinian Authority (PA) condemned the killing of the innocent civilians as was done by many around the world, but the Israeli regime went for the immediate reprisals and it always does so after any suicide bombing and kills Palestinian civilians indiscriminately. So terrorism carried out by some radicals is replied to by the Israeli regime and this is nothing but state terrorism. This was done earlier in Jenin. Thereafter, Arafat himself was made the principal target and his headquarters compound came under siege several times before. In the latest attack, Israeli defence forces systematically destroyed the office buildings of PA secretariat by using dozens of tanks and bulldozers. After all the destruction, PA headquarters was turned into rubble with only one building standing where Arafat and his PA officials remained holed up for over a week.

The allegation was that several terrorists were hiding in the compound and they must surrender to Israeli forces. They refused to do so as they said there was no terrorist there -- they were all PA officials and staff.

Bush Administration found such attack and siege counterproductive to its war campaign against Iraq and therefore sent a message to Sharon to use restraint and withdraw while recognising that Israel has the right

strength of the adversaries. The Palestinians are the good example. If the Palestinians had the appropriate military strength, there would not have been any suicide bombings; there would have been an open war against Israel. Luckily for Israel, the Palestinians have zero military strength and hence Sharon has been merrily carrying on the atrocities against the Palestinian civilians in the name of an operation against terrorists, which is conveniently

on for the last two years. There were occasions when some of the Palestinian radicals agreed to stop suicide bombings provided Sharon government stopped attacking Palestinian areas and withdrew to the positions held before the present Intefada began two years ago. But Sharon and his radical associates never agreed to such a proposal.

In his latest missile attack against Khan Yunis refugee camp, 14

ica appears to bear the brunt of it because of its undue support to Israel. Israeli killing of innocent civilians in Khan Yunis in Gaza has apparently led to the recent attacks on American soldiers who are having military exercises in Kuwait - a country which was liberated by the US led forces. Indeed, the statement of Mr. Kandari, a Kuwaiti, whose brother is reported to be involved in the incident said that his brother was furious when he saw in

forces in Jenin, Ramallah, Rafa, and other Palestinian areas and now in Khan Yunis. Such atrocities are nothing but state terrorism by a member of the UN. President Bush calls Saddam a "homicidal dictator". If Saddam is a homicidal dictator, then Sharon is a war criminal and let President Bush and his Administration note that Sharon repeatedly ignored President Bush's call to show restraint, withdraw and end the siege. If Sharon can defy President of the US, he can defy the rest of the world. Indeed, he has been doing so all along.

Let the US and Britain state openly the number of UN resolutions Israel has defied so far when these two countries' governments (not all of their people) appear hell bent to go to war against Saddam for non-compliance of the UN resolutions and alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. Israel is indeed guilty of even bigger offences including possession of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Israel is also guilty of forced occupation of others' territories and systemic killing of men, women and children. These questions are now raised as the time may soon come to take stock of things when world powers will have to answer about the justices or injustices they are delivering to the occupants of this unfortunate Planet. The process is on. Milosovic is already on the dock.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Let the US and Britain state openly the number of UN resolutions Israel has defied so far when these two countries' governments (not all of their people) appear hell bent to go to war against Saddam for non-compliance of the UN resolutions and alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. Israel is indeed guilty of even bigger offences including possession of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Israel is also guilty of forced occupation of others' territories and systemic killing of men, women and children.

to defend itself. This is a catch word both America and Israel have been using to attack the so-called terrorists. Bush Administration could not send any stronger message or warning as it itself has been engaged in a similar action against another entity in the Middle East. Therefore, it seems that Sharon-Bush plans and actions in the area are similar and geared to a common goal. But unfortunately, both fail to realise that this common goal faces the counter goal from the adversaries and that is terrorism.

One of the main causes of terrorism is the absence of military

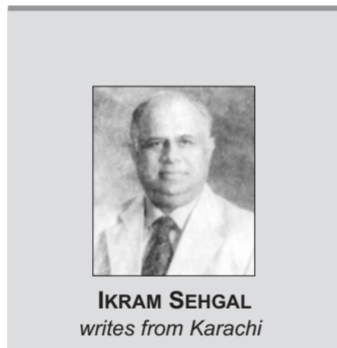
defence. Sharon regime miserably failed to protect Israeli civilian population against suicide bombings within its own borders. Sharon, therefore, finds it convenient to go beyond his country's border and attack people of another entity -- Palestinian territory though the real terrorist, the suicide bomber, was already dead there. He orders bombing of the civilian areas dead at night where innocent civilians including women and children are killed, who have nothing to do with the suicide bombings. This is the state of affairs that has been going

on innocent civilians have serious repercussions elsewhere and particularly in the Middle East and can only lead to increase in the terrorism. And unfortunately Amer-

the killing by Israeli forces of 14 innocent Palestinians in Khan Yunis. He said, his brother "jumped up and shouted, 'I'm going to kill you like you are killing our brothers, you pigs.'" This is unfortunate but this indicates something that needs to be kept in view by the US before going for more bloodshed in the M-E. In a war Saddam will not be affected; it will again be the innocent Iraqis including the children who will be killed and this will certainly plunge the entire world and particularly this region into serious turmoil.

The world appears helpless over such atrocities carried out by Israeli

Mixed trend



IKRAM SEHGAL

writes from Karachi

ACCORDING to a pre-polls survey conducted by Research and Collection Services (RCS) on behalf of The Nation, despite winning 18-20 per cent of the nationwide vote, the alliance of religious parties Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), was not translating this vote bank into seats. This wrong surmise was the only real casualty of the survey with respect to NWFP; MMA confounded skeptics in the province by sweeping the polls, and doing far better in Balochistan than expected. The alliance was far more potent electorally in these two provinces than in Punjab and Sindh. Not to say that they did not cause a couple of upsets in Sindh, particularly in Karachi where, despite controlling the Local Bodies in an election boycotted by the MQM, they were not expected to create any dents in the MQM vote bank. Other than their traditional strongholds in the mountains the MMA swept aside the liberal ANP and the PPP-P in their Peshawar valley fiefdom. The local alliance between ANP and PPP-P proved fatal for the two political parties. Only Aftab Sherpao's faction of PPP survived this onslaught, and that only because of seat adjustment with MMA.

The MMA emergence is a great blessing in disguise for Pakistan. For the first time since 1947, the Shia-Sunni divide has been bridged, they voted for the same cause. And Iran's model gives us hope, to stay the pace of the modern world, the Mullahs had to come into line, including the treating of women as equal to men. Things went more or less as predicted in the rest of the country, except that in Lahore PML (Q) was routed because of the clean seat adjustments between PPP-P, PML (N) and MMA. Electorally the results in Balochistan remained as mixed as usual. The MQM lost ground very slightly in Karachi and Hyderabad but was compensated by the almost 30 per cent increase in urban seats. By the time this goes into print, the final results will be in but these are hardly likely to be so dramatic as to change the political kaleidoscope predicted by the

Nation's pre-polls.

One thing is clear, despite all the sour grapes about the formation of the king's party PML (Q) by pre-polls manipulation, the voting was free and fair. Given the environment of insecurity over the past year, the security forces did an excellent job in preventing any terrorist attacks. The three who were killed, and the dozen or so injured, were due to direct clashes between political opponents. Quite a number of alleged agent provocateurs from India's RAW were caught by the law enforcement agencies in the week preceding election day. Always on the receiving end, the security forces must be congratulated on a job well done. The Sindh Home Secretary, Brig (Retd) Mukhtar Ahmed, broke new ground by incorporating the personnel of private security agencies through All Pakistan Security Agencies Association (APSAA) in guarding polling stations all over Karachi on election day. This was not only innovative, it was extremely effective, it bolstered the local security and has become now a model for future public sector-private sector cooperation in the field of law enforcement. A definitive role for incorporating APSAA in the civil defence structure exists.

The proliferation of private TV channels increased the number of analysts and critics who got a chance to air their views. Most broadcasts being live, some of the assessments were mind-boggling, some channels stared projecting winners within hours of the cessation of voting on the basis of exit polls by an unknown organization and based on unknown sources. One must guard against such speculation, our public being naive and gullible are always ready to accept the first news that comes their way, as the truth and when later the real picture emerges, they are to believe that as a lie. The national penchant for conspiracy theories gets force-multiplied. TV channels must exercise greater discretion in choosing experienced and knowledgeable analysts and critics, avoiding those visibly aligned with political parties. One gentleman

went to the extent of saying that people in Pakistan called Pervez Musharraf "General" Musharraf and not "President" Musharraf because they did not accept him as President! The stating of the fact and the logic thereof was not only totally hogwashed, it was blatantly politically motivated. A friend of mine who should have known better, repeated the Northern Alliance-cum-Indian canard about the overnight evacuation of 4500 Taliban by air to Pakistan from Kunduz including "two generals". The US with all its air-lifting resources, cannot do this even over several nights from an unlighted airfield without proper instrument landing facilities. Such an operation would be considered a major feat. Why aid the vicious Indian propaganda being directed to tarring and feathering Pakistan in the court of world public opinion?

Given the increase in number of seats in the Assemblies and the

disqualification due to any number of reasons, it is surprising how many old faces still turned up to try their luck with the electorate. This was paired down because of rejection of nomination papers and withdrawal of cover candidates but the enthusiasm of the aspirants, if not the voters, was evident in the large number of filings. Despite the predictions of the political pundits that the military regime's period had created a political vacuum, democracy seems alive and well in Pakistan. And as much as many would like not to accept it, it is to the credit of the military regime that it nurtured democracy by first bringing in "Local Bodies" for a quantum of self-governance and thus laid the groundwork for the electoral process to come through on devolution of powers to completion through natural evolution.

A lot of former MNAs and MPs were eliminated because of the

"graduation" condition, a number of new entrants into politics came through on the Nazim/Naib Nazim route to test how the electorate has graded their performance. A lot more than half the incumbents of the Assemblies will be newcomers and relatively free of the scandals tainting a major percentage of our politicians. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has become something of a bogey, if not exactly driving the fear of God into those who have looted the nation's till at will. NAB has certainly made a dent in the "loot squad". While corruption rages unabated at the middle and lower levels, at the higher levels it has diminished considerably. No one can accuse Pervez Musharraf or any of his cabinet colleagues of lining their pockets at the expense of the State. This is no mean achievement in a country where anybody among the hierarchy who fails to line his pockets is considered "stupid"

and "ineffective". I reserve my comments about the second/third tiers because I am engaged in preparing the legal groundwork for making an example of at least one of them who survives because the President out of misplaced loyalty chooses to look the other way. This is endemic, what is shocking is that politicians of great integrity, education and knowledge continue to give their loyalties to leaders whom they know to be corrupt to the core.

The military regime was able to carry out its Supreme Court-mandated promise to hold 'free and fair' elections. Despite predictions to the contrary, the October 10 elections are now history. If the polls had been rigged, would the MMA have been able to gain such a sweeping majority in NWFP and the border areas of Balochistan? Moreover faced with the possibility of governance and the "Taliban" example, why jump to the conclusion that MMA will hold the country's foreign policy (and some domestic issues) to ransom? Instead of rank pessimism, why not be optimistic about the future? A new crop of leaders has emerged to exercise governance over the country, why not support them in this great challenge?

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

Despite predictions to the contrary, the October 10 elections are now history. If the polls had been rigged, would the MMA have been able to gain such a sweeping majority in NWFP and the border areas of Balochistan? Moreover faced with the possibility of governance and the "Taliban" example, why jump to the conclusion that MMA will hold the country's foreign policy (and some domestic issues) to ransom? Instead of rank pessimism, why not be optimistic about the future? A new crop of leaders has emerged to exercise governance over the country, why not support them in this great challenge?

OPINION

Some disturbing thoughts

SEEMA H. CHAUDHURY

HE thought that overpowers my mind these days is about my country. The power is so strong that at times it ceases my capacity to function. Or is it fear? Do I fear my own beloved country? I do not know. I had been born, brought up and educated in Dhaka. Naturally I am influenced by the mixed culture of the city. I had been taught at home and at educational institutions about the great image of our country, the sacrifices of our people, the virtues of our great martyrs, the great liberation war, the victory, the scenic beauty of our land as beheld in the eyes of our great poets. To some extent I could relate with the text of history and reality, the rhetoric and the beauty of my land. Today I am a mother. I sit in the afternoon, after my day's work at

office, to help my daughter with her homework. The text of Bengali literature appears to be the same as it used to be during my days, except for some stylistic changes. I feel a strange twist in my heart while reading out the lessons to her. I feel being nostalgic, or like a hypocrite? I feel helpless before her simple questions: "Is my country so beautiful with such greenery? How come I do not notice? Are our people so nice and virtuous? How come we do not go out and socialise? Why am I confined within the four walls of our home?"

My daughter is extremely sensitive to city pollution. Since she is a young girl, even if she was a boy, we do not feel safe to leave her (or him) roam around with maids or other companions. We shall let her go out only with ourselves i.e. her parents and that too if and when we are

available. Again, I am perplexed. Am I being extra protective or is it the reflex to our social security system? After all you cannot take chances with your children.

The bottomline of my daily chores, which I am sure reflects that of many more, is, should we write about "things" objectively or should we escape from reality? Escape from our motherland and be an immigrant in a place which will kindly allow us to be so?

We are sick with the headlines in national dailies, the images of sobbing near and dear ones beside a gunned down body; the gruesome chopped parts of body of a young child; the innocent face of a kidnapped kid; the blank faces of rape victims; burnt faces of acid victims; and the current phenomenon -- the glorified photograph of Aedes mosquito. Can you beat all these? Are we educating the children to

survive all these or to fight all these? Are we educating them to be corrupt citizens? To be a doctor in name and not in spirit, to be a lawyer to be flamboyant and not committed to social cause, to be an engineer to build faulty buildings under the supervision and instruction of a corrupt employer? Or to be a software expert just to leave the country and serve in U.S.A or any other place abroad?

I know I am only ventilating my thoughts without framing solutions. Well I am an ordinary person and I do not have any theory of solution to these. But I am able to understand that our bravery is not quite short of our martyrs' who fought the heroic war, for we are constantly at war against our own helplessness in the hands of our own people just to beat one day out and then again another and yet another. May God bless us.

Are we educating the children to

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Political hypocrites

The Daily Star devoted a full-page readers' opinion on the occasion of the one-year completion of the BNP led 4-party alliance. It's a very laudable initiative indeed. But I doubt whether BNP and its allies have the willingness to take into consideration the opinions expressed by the non-partisans.

I have a feeling that BNP and its allies would be able to complete their five-year-term if they pay heed to the opinions of the general readers expressed in different newspapers, especially in The Daily Star. It can be a guideline for a healthy governance.

If I am asked about the achievements of the present government, well the closure of the Adamjee Jute

Mills is one of them, although we do not know in detail how the mill workers have been compensated and rehabilitated. But it is appreciable that the present government has been able to close down this white elephant without any major setback.

The second achievement is its bold step to make people aware of environment issues, although there are many stories of underhand dealings of lakhs of taka in the name of environment.

The list of failures has surpassed all these achievements. Rape, the most heinous crime of all, has become a regular practice in the country and that too by the ruling party cadres. Once terrorism was an urban affair. Now it has penetrated remote villages. To sum up I'll say BNP has no

achievements except extortion, illegal money making by the ministers, torture on girls, killing, raping, terrorising the minorities, politicisation, increase of utility charges, price hike of daily necessities etc. When will they learn their lesson? Haven't they turned into political hypocrites?

Kamaluddin Ahmed Shamoly, Dhaka

"Assessing the alliance"

It was very interesting reading the two "Annual report card(s) of the coalition government" (October 11). The Daily Star deserves a pat on the back for printing those letters. After the assessment of their one-year rule all I can say that the gov-

ernment should hand over power to the last caretaker government and go on a holiday. By the way, they should leave the Finance and Communication ministers behind so that they may work with the caretaker government.

AA, California, USA

One year ago, just before the election, the BNP led 4-party alliance put forward hundreds of promises, albeit ascending the throne they forgot what they swore to the countrymen. A jumbo cabinet along with their stalwarts derailing away becomes engrossed in propelling the wheels of their own lot.

I didn't see any notable success during this one-year tenure. But I don't mind praising our honourable PM and her intransigent personality.

Initially she was very much adamant but with the passing of time adaptability and flexibility diminished her laudable strictness. So nothing good has come out and a series of failure is apparent. The government completely failed in curbing crimes and terrorism. Four commissioners of the ruling party has been assassinated lately. Isn't it a clear evidence of the government's ineptness? The law and order situation has deteriorated alarmingly. The murder of Shihab and Bappi still haunts us. The role of the parliament is at stake. One-fifth of the total working hours in parliament is spent to make law for the welfare of the people and the rest for futility. This is not at all expected. Summing up, the government should overhaul the whole system and devote themselves to

serve the people sincerely and honestly. The alliance government should keep in mind that history repeats itself.

S M Anisur Rahman, Dhaka

It is too early, not to judge but to give points on the performance of the 4-party alliance government in its first year of the five-year term. Men of determinations like Barrister Nazmul Huda, Barrister Maudud Ahmed, Advocate Mr Mohammad Nasiruddin, Mr Shahjaban Siraj, Mr M Saifur Rahman, A K M Mosharrif Hossain and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid are relatively discharging better duties than others. It is not only the State Minister for Home Affairs but also the entire Bangladesh Police Department is facing the question of integrity and perfor-

mance. It is unfortunate that the elected ward commissioners are now under police escorts.

In this context, I would like to remind that when Late Zakir Hossain IPS and the former Inspector General of police (IGP) became the governor of East Pakistan, he sought co-operation from the then President and the Chairman of Public Service Commission (PSC), for creating a better image of the police department. Instead of third ten, the first ten qualified candidates of the Central Superior Service (CSS) were recruited and trained and they became the most efficient batch of Police Service of Pakistan (PSP). These days people are clamouring for improvement of law and order situation but have we given our

police department the efficient Command, Staff, Intelligence and Logistics (CSIL) support that are inevitable for every police department?

Golam Ashraf, Gulshan, Dhaka

"Deaf & dumb girl raped in Bagerhat"

In the October 06 issue of The Daily Star under Regional News section there is a report headed "Deaf & dumb girl raped in Bagerhat".

I found the term "Deaf and Dumb" an outdated and insulting term for deaf people who are not necessarily "Dumb". Just "Deaf" would have been sufficient, girl with hearing impairment would be even better. Dr. Ashfaq Chowdhury, Dhaka