

Playing foul with mental patients

A culpable offence

WHAT is going on at the Pabna Mental Hospital? It is reeling under all sorts of irregularities and corruption. The probe into the December 25 robbery has made it clear that the hospital is infested with looters thriving on the sufferings of the mentally deranged.

It has also been found that fake injections were used to treat the patients. The hospital is running without some essential drugs following the robbery and it is obviously the patients who have to bear the brunt. It seems the authorities have not only failed to stop pilferage and robbery, but they have also not been able to procure the medicines and injections that the patients have to be given regularly.

Mental patients form the most vulnerable and helpless segment of humans deserving sympathetic treatment. And they get it in any civilised society with a modicum of sensitivity to their plight. But that was not to be in this case. How could spurious injections be administered to the mental patients, as alleged by some local people? Who knows how much damage has been done to the patients. And who are accountable for their sufferings?

The probe body has done a good job. The gross violation of medical ethics and theft of medicines had to be detected in the interest of all concerned. But we believe such detection is not enough, the culprits who have looted medicines and cheated the patients in many ways deserve much tougher punishment than routine departmental action, which they are often subjected to, in such cases. The deviousness of a crime like pushing fake injections needs little elaboration.

It is a matter of great worry that professional criminals have made inroads into places like hospitals. They must be evicted from such places if we want healthcare to retain its meaning. A poorly run mental hospital, with a bunch of thugs entrenched at its heart, is by no means the answer to a sharp rise in the number of mental patients.

Waste of money in the street

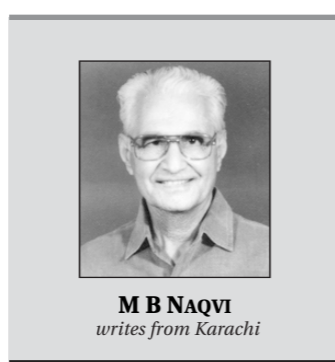
Somebody must be held responsible

A divider is supposed to be an aid to traffic management, not a public tormentor. It is an elongated fixed part of a road constructed to assist two-way traffic. But we are making it, albeit bemusedly, movable -- or shall we say, removable! The cruel joke does not stop short there -- the once-removed concrete shards are having to be put back again on the wrecked mid-section of the road.

The case in point is the on-going, off-going demolition-cum-restoration work on the Airport Road. When the breaking of the quarter of a kilometer divider had been in progress, the public rued it as experts openly questioned the purpose behind such demolition activity. It had to be a prime ministerial directive to stop the dismantling. For, the idea of dismantling dividers was linked to having new, wider dividers with all its obvious implications. This sounded untenable on grounds of narrowing down the thoroughfares oblivious of traffic load on them, let alone a huge waste of public money it entailed.

The alternating demolition and restoration works are basically wasteful, whichever way one looks at it. Give the commuters a break, the government must. The latter owe it to the public to get to the bottom of playing around with the dividers in the name of streamlining traffic and beautifying the city. The criticism or admonishing will not be enough; some heads must roll and people made answerable for their ill-conceived, unplanned actions.

Musharraf's life at stake?



M B Naqvi
writes from Karachi

MURDER attempts on President Musharraf, three by official count and quite a few more mentioned by western media, strongly suggest a backlash of his policy reversal on Afghanistan. Is it just anger against one man that motivated the would-be killers? Anyway, the idea that a foreign power (most mean India), jealous of high achievements of Musharraf, is anxious to destabilise Pakistan needs to be ticked off for its non-ostensibility.

Certain rightwing stalwarts, uniformed and civilians, have used this foreign hand explanation so often that it has become a reflex action for well-connected publicists. And yet a wee bit of thinking will show that Pakistan for all its crime and violence is crawling with sleuths of countless intelligence services. A friend counted 24 and gave up as many seemed to have remained; it is quite impossible for India or even Russia, China, UK, France, Germany and many others to be able to set up terrorist cells of committed fanatics, provide logistical support and mastermind them. One does not include the US intelligence services in the list of those who cannot directly mastermind the destabilisation of this country. Why? because the track record of the CIA -- a sort of holdall name for all American secret capabilities -- includes top ranking Pakistani names as its 'men' who, in their turn, can do much. No other country, by itself, can cause upheavals. India certainly cannot find such committed men who would knowingly die doing India's bid. Paid agents do not sacrifice

their own lives.

Secondly, let us consider for a moment which countries would like to destabilise Pakistan and if possible to destroy it. If someone is not blinded by hatred, it would be hard to find a country that actually can countenance Pakistan's serious destabilisation. US would be the last country to wish it; it needs Pakistan so much for its various purposes in central Asia. Emotionally, both India and Afghanistan may contain many who hate Pakistan. But no reasonably organised

power has been resolved in 56 years, except perhaps one: out of the three major factors one has counted, one contradiction may have been resolved: the military, as an institution, has emerged which has produced absolute kings, four of them already, who concentrated all powers at the centre (or in intervals military has chosen the role of king-makers for itself); all others have been powerless and seem fated to remain so. Other factors remain to play mischief unexpectedly.

Americans and the Indians; he did not have his heart in it. Which is why he failed to reorient state policies to be in consonance with the spirit and ethos of the new line he had superficially adopted.

To be specific, Mr. Musharraf should have allowed maximum political space to the two mainstream parties, adequately conservative and Army-loving, so that the clergy should not have had a virtual political vacuum to expand into. It is possible to wonder over how much state aid had MMA received

to carry out the line that would have gone down well with Army's officer corps but with one caveat: they would have perhaps insisted on, this time round, non-inclusion of Article 58(2)(B). Perhaps, but one is not sure if they would have made it their criterion, especially if Musharraf had used the bait of allowing safe return of Benazir and or Nawaz Sharif. For all one knows these parties would have repeated the mistake they made in 1985 negotiations with Zia. At any rate, PPP and or PML(N) in office, with

to take serious risks in removing him from the political stage. If somehow one could ask questions from those two suicide bombers who rammed their pick-ups into the presidential motorcade, it is probable that they would turn out to be voters and supporters of the more extreme Islamic groups.

Mr. Musharraf is personally a brave man. But his definition of bravery seems to suffer from the notions of a young soldier: physically overcoming an opponent and shooting him before he shoots. By politicians and statesmen a different kind of bravery is needed: it is a higher kind of courage in giving up harmful but fond notions and common illusions and accepting new ideas that will rid the society of various dangerous and harmful notions while winning over common people's hearts and minds. No tricky or political gimmicks are required that generally boomerang. It requires adopting a politics that will, over time, change common ideas and preferences of the citizenry or at least a substantial part of society by normal democratic processes. No short cuts, please.

Situated as Mr. Musharraf is, he still has options. Only moral courage is required to adopt a different purpose from that of a coup making general. Let him start worrying about a Pakistan he will leave for posterity, no matter when or how he leaves the scene. That is how the conversion of a squalid politician into a statesman begins. He should aim at building an ordinary -- without any adjective -- democracy and hand over power to elected representatives (whoever they are) that emerge from an early and fair election. Let him ensure two things: the special constitutional provisions he has now forced on the present flawed National Assembly need being withdrawn and secondly intelligence services are asked not to go anywhere near the electoral processes. Pakistan needs a democracy that is understood as such in Europe, UK or US; nothing more and nothing less.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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government in India, and also Afghanistan, can wish to harm the state of Pakistan. India badly needs a stable Pakistan for a variety of reasons -- including its utility as a punching bag for political advancement.

Pakistan's own record of conspiracies at the very top, resulting occasionally in murders and usually in dismissals of constitutional Prime Ministers -- including having four glaringly illegal military governments -- suggests strongly an entrenched force that has already given an ugly image to this country; some say it is a failed state and all agree that it has been an unstable state for lack of agreement on the precise identity of a Pakistanis. The ultimate purposes of entrenched ruling elites are in fact unacceptable to a majority of Pakistani. Main among these are: (a) a love of an overly strong centre, (b) opposition to regional nationalism and (c) a fascination for the rhetoric of a basically non-consensual Islamic State.

The point being made is that Pakistan is quite self-sufficient in forces or factors that lead to instability. These contradictions could

But the rise in the last two decades of religious groups has raised the spectre of Militant Islam. They have acquired well-armed militias, thanks to the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan Army. Their joint efforts have made them emerge today as 20 per cent of the polity. It is this sore thumb that actually does not like the face of General Musharraf, who has betrayed its darlings: the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The would-be killers could only admire and venerate this Islamic leadership. But do not mistake murder attempts as a revolt against military rule as such. They are only after Mr. Musharraf; the Army as such would be acceptable to them.

Mr. Musharraf can be faulted for two mistakes. One, he decided to be the latter day king and is even now hankering after retaining those powers that only kings of yore had. Aslam Beg, Janjua and other COAses had the advantage of having their wrists signed on by showpiece PMS; Musharraf had to come out into the exposed position of an anointed king. Secondly when he decided to fight Islamic terror it was only to appease the

in the last election; most people believe so, and it seems to have been partly corroborated by the Musharraf choice of the MMA as a ruling partner (on Musharraf's terms that the military willingly accepts as the datum line for future civil and military relations). It is significant that Mr. Musharraf has tacitly accepted the politics of MMA as a better option than PPP's or PML(N)'s politics.

It is for thinking Pakistanis to ponder over Mr. Musharraf's preference of MMA over PPP and or PML(N). Everybody knows that MMA mainly comprises JUI in two main factions and Jamaat Islami with many front organisations; the rest have far smaller street or electoral power. Now, it is JI and JUI that provided many Jihadis in both Afghanistan's two consecutive wars and for Kashmir. All others involved in Jihad have some links, emotional or political, with JUI and Jamaat. What MMA will want to do can be guessed.

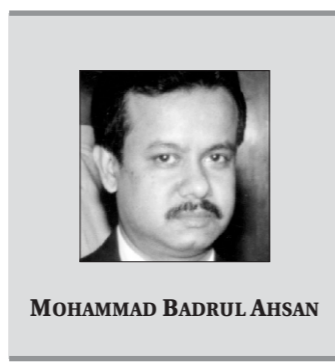
What PPP and or PML(N) would have done in sharing power with Musharraf, as a possible option that was not exercised, is no mystery. They would have been happy

or without MMA on board, would have filled the political vacuum to an extent. To that extent MMA's growth would face a dynamic obstacle. Now, thanks to the Musharraf choice, MMA faces relatively less of an obstacle for growth.

Let the country not forget where the Taliban, soul mates of al-Qaeda, came from and who their godfathers were. The country today has many who have voted MMA into what it is. These voters are also those who admire both Taliban and al-Qaeda. The support and help that Taliban and al-Qaeda receive -- which is why they are here in considerable numbers -- is from this gentry. The point is how far can a government effectively and politically fight the threat from Islamic extremism, if it has to keep MMA in good humour all the time?

Doubtless one cannot think of accusing MMA leaders, some of whom likeable, of designs on the life of President Musharraf. But one does think that there are a large number of voters and supporters who range from being coolly indifferent to the fate of Mr. Musharraf to extreme opponents who will like

Alternative stream of leadership, not politics



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

history. What direction have we got from our leaders, who appeared in that anniversary? What are they going to do that they haven't done already? They have been in politics for most of their lives, and two of them have held the highest office in the country. Are they going to float a new political party now? Are they going to introduce a new stream of politics?

Of course, they came to indicate that they would do something. And we must appreciate it. Most people of their age would retire from

tive stream of politics?

They are not going to replace democracy with another pluralist ideology, we suppose. They are not going to give up elections, parliament, ministries, party conventions, and the whole shebang of exercise that makes politics what it is. Or are they? Are they going to change the style or the substance of politics? Are they going to take an alternative course to get to power, or are they going to create an alternative recourse to it?

In all fairness, the leaders haven't

or a rebellion. Spartacus' army marched to lay siege to Rome, but it halted and wavered within sight of the sacred walls. The slaves were happy to overthrow their masters but not the institutions, which were mastered by them. They failed to accomplish the change, and reduced their sacrifice to a mere act of protestation.

The question is if the change comes, how far should it go? That is going to be largely determined by the leaders who will drive it. If they want to change power, that is one

ability and then persuade and move them to make it happen. Every leader is a product of his time, his destiny forged by place and circumstances in which he lives. It's not enough for leaders to do the right thing, but they must also do it right.

Our leaders, who are willing to bring change, must not fail in the test of this dichotomy. This is where they stand at the crossroads of footsteps and history, this is where all their sound and fury might make a difference or signify

There is a great deal of speculation as to what would happen as the term "alternative stream" is gaining popularity. It may mean different thing to different people, but we definitely need an alternative to the existing gloom where politics breeds nothing but more of the same anarchy. What breeds that anarchy are crime and corruption, committed by the politicians whose footsteps echo the rumble of rapacity.

The leaders who have vowed to save this country will best save it by exemplary living. They don't need to topple a government, float a new party or go for confrontation on the streets. They just need to be different, leading the way for future leaders, who will be able to make politics honourable again. They can fight against crime and corruption as they have announced, which will at once be an example of courage, honesty and decency.

Charles de Gaulle summarised his lesson on leadership in his book, *The Edge of the Sword*. If a leader has mystery, character and grandeur, he can acquire prestige. If he can combine prestige with charisma, he can command authority. And if he can add prescience to authority, he can become a leader who can make a difference in history.

We need leaders who can make that difference, not politicians who can widen it.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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politics, play with their grandchildren between prayers and prophylaxis, and not worry about fighting to save the country. But these men are amazing. They are still driven by their sense of duty. They would still like to do what they feel for their country.

The question is what can they do? They can form a new political party, if they want but may not live long enough to celebrate its fourth anniversary. They can formulate an alternative stream of politics, but how will they do differently in the remaining years of life what they couldn't do during most of it? And what does it mean by alterna-

talked about any of these. It's our hyperbolic minds that have stretched their words to resonate what we believe. If politics is about enrolling people in a vision or an idea, we must say the leaders have done it. They have already got us excited to believe in a new possibility. Yes, we need a change in our politics.

But how will that change come and who will bring it? Is it going to come through a new political party or is it going to come through a new brand of leadership? That depends on what we want, whether we want to change the government or the politics, whether we want a revolu-

thing. Then they should be strategic, planning it out short and sweet, spending more time on campaign and fundraising. If they want to change history, they should be prophetic. Then they must have vision and the force of will, laying the foundation of courage, honesty and decency.

Benjamin Zander is a former conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, who is now working as a management consultant. He believes that a leader is lot like a conductor, who is the only one in an orchestra who does not make a sound. The leader's job is to awaken people to the art of possi-

nothing. It will not be enough for them to do it right unless they have done the right thing. They might be able to change the government but not the politics.

And for the change of politics we need to start with the leaders, men and women whose footsteps would resound the rolling thunders of history. Churchill once commented Britain's nineteenth-century Prime Minister Lord Rosebery that he had the misfortune of living at a time of great men and small events. We need great people for great events, people who would have great visions for a great cause for a great country.

France and other democracies practicing hypocrisy!

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

HYPOCRISY is the deceitful act of saying something and doing something else. A verse in the holy Qur'an ("Munafiqun") warns mankind against the mischief of the hypocrites. By invoking the sanctity of France's secularism to ban Muslim women from wearing the headscarf ("Hijab") in the schools and government offices, over the objection of France's Roman Catholic establishment, French President Jacques Chirac has proven himself to be a hypocrite. Firstly, schools that allow nose piercing are in no position to set dress codes. Secondly, although Muslim headscarf for devout girls and women have been banned outright because it has been categorised as a "conspicuous" religious symbol, Christian and Jewish religious symbols, such as small crosses, Star of David and hands-of-Fatima pendants, have not been banned. For those who had deduced from France's opposition to Iraq war that it was a pro-Islamic gesture, comes the shocking revelation that France is curtailing religious expression of the Muslims in ways that are unthinkable in the UK and the USA. Twice, over the last several weeks, *The New York Times* has criticised France's banning of the headscarf as an overt anti-Muslim act.

In its editorial on December 20 *The Times* wrote: "President Jacques Chirac made the wrong decision on Wednesday when he announced his support for a legal ban in state-run schools on what he called 'conspicuous' religious symbols. He offered Muslim scarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crucifixes as examples, but the dispute into which he stepped is about the scarves worn by devout Muslim women and girls. Mr. Chirac cast his decision as a reaffirmation of France's commitment to rigorous separation of church and state. But it is not that at all. Banning believers from following the discipline of their religions would amount to imposing the view of the state upon them. One fallacy stems from the fact that a Christian wearing a cross is not analogous to a Sikh wearing a turban, a Muslim wearing a headscarf that does not speak highly of French manhood! Of course the real reason is different. Mr. Chirac was trying not to surrender all the racist, xenophobic votes to the racist and xenophobic Le Pen, who finished second to Mr. Chirac in the last French Presidential election. One does not know whether to feel sorry or contempt for Mr. Tony Blair. This much is certain: he will eventually support to the hilt all of President Bush's policies. Either Mr. Blair feels exactly the same way as Mr. Bush does on all issues on earth, or he has no choice but to toe the American line. That 'special relationship', rings so hollow here. Actually it does not ring here at all, because it is never mentioned in the

served to separate and not unite. The danger, he declared, was division, discrimination and confrontation. But the French understand full well that the discussion is essentially about Muslims, so any law is certain to be perceived by the Muslims precisely as divisive, discriminatory and confrontational. The streets of France are richly festooned these days with Christmas decorations, and major Catholic holidays are official state holidays in France. In his speech the president also came out against adding a Muslim (Eid-ul-Adha) and a Jewish (Yom Kippur) holiday, a decision that is also an error in our view." If the French feels intimidated by a few Muslim women wearing the headscarf that does not speak highly of French manhood! Of course the real reason is different. Mr. Chirac was trying not to surrender all the racist, xenophobic votes to the racist and xenophobic Le Pen, who finished second to Mr. Chirac in the last French Presidential election.

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American media! "Special relationship" with the US for Mr. Blair is strictly for home consumption. Clearly, Mr. Blair is not as foresighted a leader as the late Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Mr. Wilson was the only British Prime Minister since World War II to go against the wishes of the United States and refused to send British troops to Vietnam.

President Bush's shifting of the goal post in Iraq continues. The first rationale for the preemptive war

capture of the tyrant. But it should be the Iraqis, the recipient of his brutality, who should try and punish him, not Americans or anyone else. After all, Saddam had not invaded America.

Yet, according to *The Washington Post's* Richard Cohen: "President Bush has already endorsed the death penalty for Saddam. 'I think he ought to get the ultimate penalty,' he told ABC's Diane Sawyer. But Bush, a primitive in such matters, was somehow not the first to

him," Lieberman said in response to a question from Tim Russert on "Meet The Press." Calling Saddam evil, the Connecticut Senator said, "This man...has to face the death penalty." It turns out that for Lieberman, the single most important legal and moral issue is whether Saddam can be executed."

Everyone knows by now that the stated reasons for attacking Iraq were not the real reasons. In another manifestation of hypocrisy the real reasons were hidden from the public. Whenever America makes a paradigm shift in foreign policy, it is usually announced by that ultimate establishment figure, Dr. Henry Kissinger. In July of 2002, Henry Kissinger announced the paradigm shift in an article in *The Washington Post*. The new strategy, as enunciated by Kissinger, called for an attack on Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein!

Few questions for Reporters Sans Frontiers

I have no reason to doubt the Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) claim that more than 110 journalists were physically attacked, 130 threatened and 25 arrested in Bangladesh in 2002. Fortunately, no one seems to have been killed. I also understand that Reporters Sans Frontiers representatives met with our Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to

voice their concern. Anyone who truly knows Bangladesh also knows of the passion of Bangladeshis for writing. There are literally thousands of daily, weekly and monthly publications in cities and towns all across Bangladesh. The overwhelming majority of the writers are part-time journalists and full-time something else. Do the RSF figures refer to full-time journalists, or the part-time ones? Also, were the journalists persecuted for what they wrote, or for crimes committed unrelated to journalism? Do the RSF believe that if, for instance, a Bangladeshi is caught spying for Israel or for any other nation, the fact that he claims to be journalist should be sufficient to exonerate him? Why did RSF representative meet with our highest executive the Prime Minister, and not, more appropriately, with Bangladesh's Information Minister? (Colonial arrogance?)

It is gratifying to learn that RSF is "a vocal critic of Israel's suppression of the press in the Palestinian territories." Did the RSF take the matter up with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon? Somehow I doubt it! (Colonial arrogance?) It is reassuring to hear that RSF, "a non-partisan international organisation committed to promoting press freedom" do not succumb to "Zionist stranglehold" in the media. Although I have not seen RSF's constitution, I hope they not only

demand a guarantee of the physical safety of journalists worldwide, but also are vigorous in their condemnation of countries where certain opinions, such as anti-Israeli views in America, are generally suppressed. Former Speaker of the Israeli Knesset Avraham Burg said recently: "Israel is a thunderously failed reality that rests on a scaffolding of corruption, and on foundations of oppression and injustice." Why are such truths not kosher in the American media? If Mr. Burg can stand up to Sharon, why can't Mr. Bush? Has the RSF taken this up with President Bush? Somehow I doubt it! (Colonial arrogance?)

As an organization with a French name, one must assume that Reporters Sans Frontiers not only cares about how Bangladesh government treats its own citizens; it cares equally about how the French government treats its own citizens. As the first part of this piece vividly illustrates, according to *The New York Times*, no less, the new anti-headscarf law announced by French President Jacques Chirac is meant to discriminate against France's 5 million (8 per cent of French population) citizens of Islamic faith. Has the RSF protested the unjust law in a face-to-face meeting with President Jacques Chirac? Somehow I doubt it! (Colonial arrogance?)