

## To build democracy, let's restore it first

Shouldn't Gen Moeen's views be tested in wider public discourse?

HERE is an element of surprise with a tinge of shock at what Army Chief Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed said in his keynote speech at a regional conference of International Political Science Association on Monday. One gets the impression that he may have gone far beyond the purview of a serving CAS to air his views on the entire gamut of political issues, some of which are controversial and debatable in nature.

He dilated on the political future of the country, structure of the polity, need for 'our own' brand of democracy, presidential and parliamentary systems of government and a balance of power between the president and the prime minister. We are baffled as many of these concepts are mentioned in passing without any elaboration. We wonder, how are we to interpret his expansive views?

His observations cannot but trigger speculation and spin the rumour mill which may not contribute to stability, especially at a time when the country is looking forward to free, fair and credible elections. It is an emergency the country is going through when fundamental rights are suspended, an emergency that in public perception has been brought about to aid the process of democratic elections.

The General is for a reinvented, homegrown democracy. But democracy is a time-tested system. Least that we would like to believe the general is talking about so-called 'guided democracy' or Gen Ayub's 'democracy' suited to the genius of the people' et cetera.

The truth is, democracy is not flawed, the fault lies with its practice or implementation. That's why to correct the imbalances a whole range of reform agenda is on the table. There is also a palpable consensus over these to render elective democracy devoid of corruption and criminalisation. The catalogue of reforms being taken up by the government includes updating electoral roll with voter identity cards, transparent ballot boxes, registration of political parties, upping of the election campaign expenses and their monitoring, declaration of assets and other particulars by candidates, keeping the corrupt and bank defaulters out of the electoral race and setting up of speedy election tribunals.

The overarching fact for maligning democracy has been that our elections were distorted and the elected government indulged in abuse of power and different forms of malpractice. If these two maladies can be eliminated by reforms as we are all striving to do then the stigma that democracy has unfairly acquired will be erased.

Gen Moeen has spoken of things of far reaching implications. No individual or group can singly take decision on these. The need for an open debate on the ideas thrown open by him which cannot take place in an emergency. Only when emergency is lifted such a public discourse can be held where the validity of his thoughts can be really tested. To build democracy, let us restore it first.

## Distorted history of 1971

Setting it right is a moral imperative

It is good news that the government has decided to eliminate the distortions of the history of our liberation war from all school and college textbooks. We believe this is a crucially important task that must be accomplished to place the facts and figures of the liberation war before the nation in a neutral and objective manner.

Distortion of history amounts to intellectual dishonesty which can only confuse the new generation of people. And there is no doubt that they cannot grow up as worthy citizens without a proper sense of history. It's a matter of great regret that the political party or parties responsible for distorting the history of the liberation war could not place the glorious war above petty partisan interests. In their rather boorish attempt to present a highly politicised account of the war, they either undermined or unduly highlighted the roles of individuals.

What is most objectionable here is that the parties wanted to have more than their due share of glory or tried to hide embarrassing truths.

The liberation war is a collective possession of the nation which paid such a huge price for freedom during those nine excruciating months. The leaders and organisers of the war should remain above any controversy, and lies and falsehoods should never creep in as we remember their glorious contributions.

The new generation of people and the posterity have every right to know the history of the liberation war in its most undistorted form. It is a source of inspiration to the people, irrespective of their political affiliations. The debt that we owe to the freedom fighters would transform into a moral burden if we fail to write their history impartially. Those who fought for the liberation of this land were men and women having great courage and patriotism. We must acknowledge their contributions through writing history based on unalloyed truths.

Finally, it is indeed not possible to establish lies that have no basis, lies that can only demean their exponents. Let the liberation war remain untouched by all such things.

## European Union at 50

CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM  
writes from Madrid

MOST probably, no other period of Europe's turbulent history has been more violent than the first half of the twentieth century, when rivalry between two of its most powerful nation states, France and Germany, caused two worldwide conflagrations which killed tens of millions of its inhabitants and devastated its economies.

In order to build a bridge between France and Germany and to lessen the risk of another Franco-German war, in May 1950, a French economist and civil servant called Jean Monnet and the then French foreign minister, Robert Schuman, put forward the

## LETTER FROM EUROPE

Of course, this is not the first time that the EU is facing problems. It has had problems before and some of them were quite serious. However, in the past, the members' common quest for peace and prosperity, has always forced them to negotiate until reaching agreements which may not have been entirely satisfactory for everyone, but this willingness to negotiate has saved the union time and again from breaking apart or disappearing.

idea of setting up a new economic framework for Western Europe.

An independent supranational authority, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was set up in 1951 by France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg to administer a common market for coal and steel, two essential items for the purpose of waging prolonged warfare. For three years, from 1952 to 1955, Monnet served as the ECSC's first president.

Today's European Union owes a debt of gratitude to Monnet. He was a visionary leader. He did not believe in petty rivalries among nation states. As far back as in

## A new South Asia: Will it remain a dream?

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## STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

The underlying thought that drives the initiative, to not only imagining but also creating a new South Asia, is that there is need to craft a win win situation for all in whatever policy that is formulated by the implementers of the dream, the respective governments. There is a consensus that being the largest country India must not shy away from taking unilateral policy decisions; it is for India to show the way.

HAT is a very pertinent and relevant question that South Asians should ask themselves. It has been sixty years since the region was decolonised. The Brits are no longer there to be blamed for all our failings. Hardly do we stop to ponder why the region was colonised in the first place. It was a land of gold and the colonisers from the West seeking greener pastures by setting up new colonies found a divided subcontinent, not yet become a country, much less a nation, easy to consume. And there were always some locals too willing to act as turncoats against their own people.

That was a world order then, dictated by the West and supported by their industrial and technological achievements of the time. It is still a land of gold. Look at the interest that large and medium powers are showing in the region.

Unfortunately, we have been thrust into a new world order. The hazards of globalisation with selective employment of the principles of market economy bodes badly for the least developed countries, and

unless the least developed countries and regions put their acts together they will face a new kind of colonisation, but the effects and the anguish and the pains will be no different than what our forefathers had endured under the old colonisers. For Saarc countries the danger is even more grave.

And what is the order that prevails in the globe today? The current world order is characterised by a unipolar world, with the USSR in 1991 under Gorbachov compelled by circumstances to abdicate its global role, as a balancing if not a global power, thereby allowing a free hand to the US to dominate the world through, what has now come to be established as the policy of pre-emption.

The end of the Cold War era promised a transformed world and a New World Order that has now given way to New World Disorder where international law is interpreted to suit the interest of the great powers. Ethics have been thrown out of the window to give way to serve the narrow national interests of larger nations, and where threat of use of force has become the major foreign policy

instrument. Islam has replaced communism as the major threat to the West.

Linked with the West are the international lending institutions, whose policies, dictated too by the West particularly the US, have done more harm than good, whose prescription for "good governance" is obligatory on the part of the recipient countries to follow. And their definition of good governance means following their advice of structural adjustments and other prescriptions that are not only anti-poor, they generally go against the interest of the developing countries.

September 2001, and how the US and its allies have chosen to pursue their foreign policies since, focusing against one ideology as their threat. The so-called war on terrorism has been used to validate all manner of illegal actions by the US, both at home and abroad. The countries of South Asia have unwittingly become US partner on President Bush's war on terror that has thrust the world into terrible uncertainties.

The current global environment demands a new South Asia that will truly be for the people and by the people of the region.

A new South Asia we had ventured upon a quarter of a century ago, through the instrument of Saarc. But we have been disappointed by its progress, hamstrung by the negative fallout of Indo-Pak strategic equation. After all, a group can progress only as fast as the slowest member in the team. And it was not the smaller countries of the region but the two bigger ones that really were the deadweights on the association.

Its proactive role, led by the largest country in Saarc was what was needed to stem the deleterious

ous consequences of globalisation from which, as an erudite South Asian diplomat said very recently, only a few countries are benefiting while the rest of us are being globalised.

It will be difficult to answer in one word the degree of difficulty to achieve a new South Asia. But many in the region have started to "imagine" a new South Asia, started to dream about what might become if the region were to de-link from old mindset and shed the baggage of history and commenced jointly towards establishing new and prosperous region.

The underlying thought that drives the initiative, to not only imagining but also creating a new South Asia, is that there is need to craft a win win situation for all in whatever policy that is formulated by the implementers of the dream, the respective governments.

There is a consensus that being the largest country India must not shy away from taking unilateral policy decisions; it is for India to show the way. The Indian prime minister's announcement at the 14th Saarc summit in New Delhi on April 3, to allow access of duty-free goods from other Saarc countries without reciprocity is a very good beginning.

One came away from the Insa meeting with the very encouraging thoughts. The people of South Asia are sharing their dreams of the future. So long it has been a case of having different dreams while sharing the same bed.

People's mindset is beginning to change, so will South Asia, we hope.

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The greatest harm done to the globe and which has the potential to destroy the world eventually is global warming to which the West is the biggest contributor. In this regard the biggest defaulter is the US, which contributes almost 25 percent to GHG effect. Yet it refuses to sign the Kyoto Protocol, and in fact has disassociated with it entirely, under pressure from its corporate bodies motivated by its unbridled consumerist culture.

The world has changed since 9/11, for what happened in

September 2001, and how the US and its allies have chosen to pursue their foreign policies since, focusing against one ideology as their threat. The so-called war on terrorism has been used to validate all manner of illegal actions by the US, both at home and abroad. The countries of South Asia have unwittingly become US partner on President Bush's war on terror that has thrust the world into terrible uncertainties.

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executive, the government, the head of the judiciary, the head of the military and the head of the religion; absolute obedience would be required from all and sundry.

This would be a blow to the normal expectations of the citizens to enjoy all human rights, including the right to gainful employment and some old age pension system. The regime, as it happens, comprises essentially an unavowed partnership between the fanatical religious elements and the military.

The civilian part of the government is under occupation by this combination. The common people have to struggle to undo it. The people are entitled to look up to the political parties. Unfortunately, political parties are badly divided and there is little hope of their uniting on the necessary one

point: to bring back an ordinary democracy without any ideological qualifications or debates and power, in all senses of the words, gets transferred to the people through their freely elected representatives.

The parties, therefore, have to fight the next election with just one aim: restoration of an ordinary democracy that is neutral in all ideological debates. There would be time and occasion later for ideological debates to be conducted non-violently and politically at the mass level before another general election that can be brought forward at an early date after democracy has been restored.

But this is not the time to quarrel over ideology. The unity should be unconditional: there would be no

ideological commitment of any party that gets elected; this will not be just another election; it is, should be, intended only to effect transfer of power from the army to the people. Its specific purpose is to elect the true representatives of the people who can then later organize democratic party politics.

People can then engage in a wide ranging ideological debate. Otherwise the parties will fight their separate battles over ideology and lose. Power will stay where it is. As it is, the chances are not too bright of overcoming the resistance from the Military-Mullah combo. If parties remain disunited, the chances of success diminish.

It must be clearly understood that it is for the common people of Pakistan to rid the country of the crises that faces it. Those who are for the Talibanisation of Pakistan should stand up and own the commitment. They should fight the next election along with the Q League and the General-President President Pervez Musharraf.

Let others fight the battle for a democracy that carries no adjective. Power is for the people, and not for the military or the mullahs. The goal is clear: human freedoms, as comprehensive as had been made clear by two charters on human rights passed by the UN, one of which was not favoured by leading western powers but is a required reading for all Pakistanis.

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Taliban are elaborate political acting: whenever western pressure becomes excessive, a fight with militants is staged. Does it show that there is no Military-Mullah Alliance?

The hard evidence from the structure of today's politics in Fata and elsewhere is that the Mullahs are ruling harmoniously with the military regime in Balochistan and Frontier. There has been no friction between them, all the hard statements of Qazi Hussain Ahmed notwithstanding.

The way the fanatics from the Lal Masjid seminaries were treated by the government is a clear indication that the police can be brutal against the lawyers and can vandalise a media conglomerate, but is unable to tackle Madrasa students. The press has given detailed reports on how the government feels so crestfallen and paralysed when faced with Islamic fanatics in the very heart of the capital.

The political face of the crisis is that the government is clearly unpopular, and most of the aware citizenry as well as common people are becoming alienated from it. It is not doing what the people want. All it is interested in is promoting globalised free trade, carrying out the WTO, IMF, World

Bank prescription of all economic ills and pursuing a purposeless arms race with India when it is abundantly clear that there is going to be no war with India.

The government should remember its own words: atomic weapons are a deterrent against war. It is supposed to continue to believe in that dictum. Why then is the conventional military expenditure not coming down? Insofar as the more than merely creeping Talibanisation of Pakistan is concerned, it is now manifest that it is advancing quite rapidly -- even as the state apparatus is increasingly inefficient and vulnerable.

The Talibanisation is not a threat to the military, which appears to have much tolerance for it. It is a threat to the freedoms of the common citizens. The MMA and the Taliban, and all the other extremist organizations, aim at one thing: to establish a system of governance that would be like what the Taliban had established in Kabul after 1996.

It would be a Caliphate, and one of the venerable leaders of the religious parties might become the next absolute ruler, or maybe another general would lead Pakistan into becoming another Sudan: The "Amirul Momineen" will simultaneously be head of the

take peace for granted. This has been the single most important contribution of the EU to the Europeans.

The EU's single market framework has been responsible for ending cartels and monopolies, introducing competition, pushing privatizations and generally promoting the market over heavily managed capitalism. Spain's transformation from a poor agricultural country to one of Europe's most developed nations has been almost miraculous. More than \$190 billion -- an astronomical figure -- has been devoted to Spain by the EU to develop its economy and infrastructure since 1986 when Spain joined the EU. In 2006, GDP in the EU grew by 2.9%. 12 million new jobs have been created over the last 8 years in the euro area. True, productivity growth is still lower than in the US, but it has started picking up.

The EU's phenomenal success in its capacity to attract so many new members with diverse political and economic backgrounds (11 from the former Soviet bloc) has also been the cause of some of its current problems like how to deal with the tensions created by the Iraq war or how to address the issue of the American missile shield. While the Czech Republic is willing to accept the US offer to build a radar base in its territory and Poland wants the deployment of interceptor missiles on its soil, most old members of the EU consider this policy as a clear provocation to Russia. Looking back, one wonders whether it was a good policy for the EU to expand so far and so fast.

The most vexing issue that is confronting the union today is how to agree on a new constitution which would streamline its current cumbersome decision making process. One can not deny the fact that a sense of crisis has gripped the union after the rejection of the draft constitution by the French and Dutch voters in the summer of 2005.

Of course, this is not the first time that the EU is facing problems. It has had problems before and some of them were quite serious. However, in the past, the members' common quest for peace and prosperity, has always forced them to negotiate

reaching agreements which may not have been entirely satisfactory for everyone, but this willingness to negotiate has saved the union time and again from breaking apart or disappearing.

Fifty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the European Union is not only alive but still expanding. Croatia and Macedonia may enter the union in the next decade. Leaving aside Turkey, there are others like Serbia, Montenegro and soon-to-be independent Kosovo waiting in the queue to join the EU.

However, as the EU grows in size, political integration of all its members into a United States of Europe will become more and more difficult. But looking at the union's achievements so far, the Europeans have every reason to celebrate its 50th birthday with modest pride and quiet satisfaction.

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