

## Changes signal determination to turn a corner

Advisers' council must work as a team

**A**LTHOUGH the step has come several months late, yet we heartily welcome it. A public perception had been growing over time that certain individual advisers were pulling the government down. Some were performing poorly and others were being vociferous with insensible utterances in their zeal to play to the media that undermined the image of the government and created confusion in the minds of the people. They created more problems than they solved. They neither could work as a team nor prove individual capabilities in their respective fields.

A midstream changing of 50 percent of the crew of the ship is indicative of two things: an acknowledgement of growing public concern over the performance of some advisers and, two, a new determination to turn a corner by pulling up its socks to perform better in the remainder of its tenure.

Whatever the composition of the council of advisers, it must jell as a team and work in coordination with each other on the one hand, and with the chief adviser, on the other.

Working style of the advisory council ought to change with the new-look cabinet. The chief adviser has to do some rethinking on the modalities of work. It is our view that the government looked a bit disparate in the past. Allowing individual advisers to work independently gave the impression that different advisers were moving in separate directions without any central vision.

This government is not just there to govern but to achieve certain vital goals such as restoring democracy, accountable government and better politics on a limited time scale. It has to therefore constantly evaluate the broader picture of how far it has advanced in the task of handing over power to an elected government.

We believe that the business as usual approach of holding once a week cabinet meeting is perhaps inadequate for the task. The chief adviser should meet his team oftener both to get debriefed and to give his directives to them. This is vital to bring about cohesion, dynamism and unity of purpose which were lacking so far.

There is also the factor of duality of authority which is of concern to us. There are multiple centres of decision-making which created problems in the past. If performance of this government is to dramatically improve there must be rethinking about this.

The changes were necessary and we are confident that this move will help the government to achieve its goals, the principal one being a credible election by December this year.

## Hasina's sagacious stand

A good example set

**A**WAMI League chief Sheikh Hasina has clarified her position on the next parliamentary election by putting greater emphasis on its being held on schedule, than her own participation in it. The AL chief wants timely election even if she is barred from it. We wholeheartedly welcome the position taken by her.

This is clearly a positive development from the individual-based politics that the country has experienced, and paid a high price for, in the last 36 years. Regrettably, the greater collective interests of the country or the party were eclipsed under crass individualism that greatly obstructed the growth of democracy. So somebody had to come out of this mode of politics dominated by personality cult.

By attaching due importance to the need for keeping the democratic process alive, and not her own political future, Sheikh Hasina has sent a message to all the political parties. She has also given her own party the opportunity to formulate its strategy in light of today's political reality. Her decision is a clear indication of the maturity she has attained as a political leader. Politics will be seen in its much wider perspective if the top leaders show the sagacity and acumen to place the party above the individual. The AL chief has certainly set an example worth emulating.

Without question, highly complex political riddles could be solved easily if the leaders sacrifice a little bit for the party's well-being. Unfortunately, our political history is not replete with such instances. The leaders should strive for the unhindered growth of democracy and the need is to rise above individual interests and take a broader view of politics.

If filling up the political vacuum is what the parties are aiming for to revive the democratic process, they have to come out of the politics which could only serve individuals and their families. Looking beyond that will indeed be a breakthrough.

## Time for a rethink



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**I**T is time to rethink -- to put our heads together to consider the future state of the many things that affect our lives as citizens, as political creatures, and as human beings. This is compelled by the developments since Oct 2006 -- the end of the 4-party alliance rule, but most of all because of the situation brought about by the resignation of four members of the caretaker government (CTG).

This is not the first time we have had CTG advisors put in their papers, but the circumstances of the latest resignation vary greatly from when Mr. Iajuddin's cabinet was denounced by the departure of four of his colleagues. Then, it was a protest against a highly partisan chief advisor out to implement an electoral blueprint. We are not aware of the exact reasons for the premature departure of the four advisors, but one can assume that these have certainly not come about due to the departing advisors' own volition.

In January last year, in these very columns, we had said that the gov-

ernment of Mr. Ahmed was "caught between determining what the minimum that his government should do to put things right for holding a free and fair election, and the obligation to hold the election within the shortest possible time. The former was a compulsion that stemmed from popular demands; the other was the constitutional constraint to return the reins of the government to the people's representatives. He can overlook neither."

While we are waiting eagerly for the next election, to be organised by a reorganised and revamped Election Commission (one would like to see it reformed as well), aided by a CTG that had to take over the reins of the government under very painful circumstances, we find the government embroiled in issues that are extraneous to its mandate, yet which it cannot but address because of the prolonged duration of its tenure.

It appears that the general election and an elected government may not be in place for almost another year. Although a roadmap

and time line have been formulated by the Election Commission, with the performance record of the CTG, December 2008 doesn't appear near enough.

And that is exactly what we must rethink about -- whether we should have, in future, a system of non-elected governments running the affairs of the state for any length of time, even three months. It's time to revisit the issue of the caretaker system as a whole.

There is no argument that the second installment of CTG, and the changes in January 2007, were inevitable, and the change was welcome; the question is, having welcomed a unique arrangement that had neither been foreseen by the framers of the Constitution nor by those who devised the system of CTG, the absence of an elected government and of politics, and the political parties becoming near redundant as of now, the nation is now faced with an eerie situation that cannot bode well for us. A stopgap measure cannot be opened, as we had stated in this

column very soon after the CTG of Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed was formed.

And there are many that would like to see the government fail. And, surely, they must be taking delight in the many faux pas of the government and errors of judgment in some of its actions, for which it finds itself in the dock, in spite of the entreaty of one of the ex-advisors to not hold the CTG accountable for its actions. And this is exactly the reason why the idea of an unelected government -- albeit validated by the constitutional provisions -- running the affairs of the state for any length of time appears incongruous with the norms of democracy.

If 1/11 was inevitable, it was made so by a very unholily aspiration of the 4-party ruling alliance that power could not be allowed to pass on to their political opponents. The attitude was so hardened that, eventually, political opponents came to be considered enemies. The CTG arrangement all but collapsed -- laying us open to so many possibilities.

The current CTG was perhaps the

best of all the possibilities. There could have been other options that would have been justified by the turn of events leading up to Jan 11, 2007, and the near systemic collapse at the national level.

1/11 saved the nation from a political disaster. Just imagine what would have happened had the January elections been allowed to go on. Notwithstanding the above, my position on the system of CTG needs to be restated, for whatever it is worth. In spite of the accolades the system has received internationally, and replicated in at least one of the South Asian countries, it remains an undemocratic arrangement.

I have said before, the CTG system is an arrangement that stands as a sad testimony to the immaturity of politics in our country and pettiness of our polity; it is a reflection of the inherent mutual mistrust of the political parties. It is disheartening to think that we have not come of age politically.

The natural question is that when the two previous CTGs had come and gone after holding successfully the parliamentary elections, which was their only task, have we not demanded and expected too much of an unelected government, whose only mandate should have been to give us a free and fair election, but which has taken too many issues in hand to be able to address all of them efficiently.

One of the reasons that militates against inordinately long existence of an unelected government, is the possibility of the government getting

embroiled in issues that it may not be necessarily well-equipped to deal with, not because of an intellectual shortcomings but because such issues are best dealt with by the elected representatives of the people.

Moreover, an unelected government has no political stake, which creates a psychological state that makes it feel that it is not accountable to anybody. At least that was the impression one got from the sometimes offhand and most of the times tawdry remarks of a few of the advisors. This state of mind obstructs proactive actions on their part on issues of national importance.

Some would like to see the present government fail. And not all of them belong to the same camp. They have their own reasons for wanting to see Mr. Ahmed and his team fail to deliver on the commitment made to the people. Failure to provide a free and fair election with a cleansed political ambience cannot be an option for the government. In fact, holding a free and fair election is the only thing it must devote its energy to.

And it is for the politicians to ensure that they not only reform themselves but also reform their way of conducting their business as politicians in future, that would allow us to dispense with the system of CTG altogether and preclude the chances of extra-democratic forces intervening directly in the politics of the country.

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## Does the US pursue a flawed policy toward Pakistan?



HARUN UR RASHID

### BOTTOM LINE

**Deficit in genuine democracy is the root of all political problems in Pakistan. Mere resurgent economy cannot replace the urge for freedom and liberty of human beings. US President Woodrow Wilson once said: "The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty." These words hold true for Pakistan today.**

Pakistan

President Musharraf became dictatorial over the years with the support of the US, and his greed for power is unbelievable. He had to dismiss the chief justice and about 40 judges of the higher courts on November 3 under the guise of emergency to retain his power.

President Musharraf's political life-line depends not on events in Pakistan but what happens in Afghanistan, where the US-led "war on terrorism" has been continuing since 2001. The more trouble occurs in Afghanistan, the more American support increases for Musharraf. This is a reality that President Musharraf understands very well. He had seen how American ignored Pakistan once Soviet soldiers left Afghanistan in 1989.

Since Musharraf aligned with the US in the war on terrorism, Pakistan received more than \$10 billion dollars from the US. With that money, Pakistan's economy got stronger, so also the army's influence in the country. But terrorism has increased within Pakistan. The New York Times recently reported that the Pakistan military had diverted half of this assistance for use against India (Pakistan has learnt from experience that the US does not monitor its assistance).

Similar things happened when General Zia ul Haq came into power through a coup in 1977. He survived politically because of events in Afghanistan when, in 1979, the Soviet

Union occupied the country. The US was hell bent to oust the Soviet Union from strategically located Afghanistan, and General Zia ul Haq was the man to assist the US to wage a Mujaheddin war against the Soviet soldiers by enlisting Islamic militants led by Osama Bin Laden.

At that time, US had been oblivious of the fact under President Haq's regime (1979-1988), Pakistan had tilted towards an Islamist country with Shariah courts and enactment of controversial laws for women that enhanced gender inequality. It was this regime that gave roots to Talebans in Pakistan.

The US made the same mistake in the '50s, when it supported "the wrong horse" in Iran, the Shah, instead of Dr. Mossadegh who attempted to restore democracy in Iran in 1953. The consequences have resulted in the development of current confrontational relations between the US and Iran, that have injected volatility in the region.

**Why did the US policy fail?**

The US bombed Afghanistan, routed some camps, chased bin Laden to the border with Pakistan, then moved on to Iraq -- the wrong war against the wrong enemy -- leaving the nourishment flowing from Islamabad to the extremists.

Butto's advice after 9/11 to the US was straightforward, and not followed. "Islamabad," she said, "is the jugular vein of Kabul. Clean up Islamabad and the Afghan (al-

Qa'ida) camps start falling like dominoes."

Instead, the US looked to Perviz Musharraf and accepted a face value his strongman guarantees that he would crack down on extremism. After eight years of Musharraf's rule, terrorism has increased in Pakistan, and democratic norms, such as free media, independence of judiciary and independent state institutions, have disappeared totally.

During Musharraf's rule, the US ignored the fact that Jamaat ul Islam (JUI), and other Islamist parties had formed an alliance (MMA) and increased their influence in the 2002 election and ruled two out of four provinces, including Balochistan. Some say Musharraf allowed Islamist militant groups flourish within Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas.

The Bush administration continued to ignore other political players in Pakistan to restore stability and democratic rule in the country, until last year. Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister was believed to have fallen foul with the US administration because he was perceived as an Islamist.

The Bush administration conveniently forgot that in 1999 Sharif cooperated with the US in defusing tension in Kashmir, in what was known as "Kargill war." This infuriated the army in Pakistan and the result, according to many analysts of South Asia, was the coup in October 1999 by the army chief Musharraf.

The US administration does not

appear to realise that, in developing countries, especially in South Asia, political parties are much more about strong, powerful individuals, or individuals with powerful family names, than about the parties themselves. Nawaz Sharif will continue to be an important political player in Pakistan because his family has extensive business in the Punjab, the largest province in Pakistan, where 60% of its population lives. For the US to have ignored Sharif appears to be a political blunder in Pakistan.

The Bush administration appears to have disregarded the fact that there is a substantial, moderate middle class that is an important force for progress, and the backbone of democracy in Pakistan. They have been agitating against Musharraf's dictatorial rule for a long time.

The Bush administration did not take any interest in the chief of the lawyers' movement, and a forceful critic of Musharraf's government, Cambridge-educated and articulate lawyer, Aitzaz Ahsan, who was jailed on November 3 after the emergency was declared. He was the lawyer for the dismissed Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry at the Supreme Court.

The anti-Musharraf movement is not only a courageous movement but also signal to the US that Musharraf is deeply unpopular and the US should not back him. By totally backing Musharraf, the US has become unpopular with the middle class and civil society in Pakistan. The US has failed to sense that public opinion is moving against Musharraf.

The US has failed to realise that Pakistan under Perviz Musharraf suffers a political void and is, at the same time, the emergent centre of Islamist fundamentalism globally. When terrorist acts happened in Madrid or London, they were linked to Pakistan. Some US analysts believe that the centre of gravity of Islamist

fundamentalism is shifting from the Arab world to Pakistan.

In a report on Bhutto's assassination, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, a research think-tank, called upon the Bush administration to recognise Musharraf as a "serious liability, seen as complicit in the death of a popular politician" Bhutto, although President Musharraf, on January 4th in a 90-minute meeting with foreign correspondents in Islamabad, strongly rejected assertions that he had "blood on his hands" over Benazir Bhutto's assassination, and denied that the country's powerful military and intelligence agencies were behind the murder.

Pakistan has become a dangerous and violent country under eight years rule of President Musharraf. Military coups, rigged elections, and bitter political battles have impeded stabilisation of the country. Weak or failed states are the source of many of the world's most serious problems, from poverty to drugs to terrorism. Pakistan's turmoil has injected uncertainty and tension in South Asia.

Foreign policy analysts say that if there is one thing that Butto's assassination has made clear, it is the inability of the Bush administration to influence internal political affairs in Pakistan towards democracy and stability. The Bush administration's approach towards Pakistan lacks credibility, purpose and competence.

Deficit in genuine democracy is the root of all political problems in Pakistan. Mere resurgent economy cannot replace the urge for freedom and liberty of human beings. US President Woodrow Wilson once said: "The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty." These words hold true for Pakistan today.

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## Learning security lessons



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writes from Karachi

**W**HILE public memory remains fresh, what better example to illustrate the predicament of security forces and those they protect than the brutal assassination of our charismatic Ms. Benazir Bhutto? The October 18 blast only underscored that this was a tragedy waiting to happen but, unfortunately, either the protectors or the protected did not use it as a wake-up call. A correct analysis of some of the security lapses that led to (and including) December 27 could mean the difference between life and death for others in the future.

One must concede that it is extremely difficult to reconcile the requirements of a political campaign

with the security protection that is a must for potential target of assassins. Security is not an exact science, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to cope with motivated attacks. With the advent of the suicide bomber, deterrence has become exponentially more difficult, and almost impossible in providing any protection for innocent bystanders.

Ms Benazir's supporters crowded around the armoured car at the gate of Liaquat Bagh, and it came to almost a dead stop. As befits any popular leader, she spontaneously stood up through the sunroof to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd. Even a cursory study of videos and still photographs will show one person firing a pistol at Ms. Benazir from fairly close range while another behind him,

wearing a chaddar pulled around his head, is taken to be the person who set off the blast. Only experts in photo interpretation can really decide the sequence and track, viz the shots being fired, Ms Benazir seen disappearing into the vehicle through the sun-roof and simultaneously, the blast goes off killing nearly two dozen persons and injuring many more.

The govt claimed initially, on the basis of the medical report, that Ms Benazir was killed by the lever of the sunroof compressing into the side of her head because of the blast, and not because of a bullet. Those who were sitting next to her, and in the car following, maintain she was killed because of bullets hitting her.

Eyewitness account is always important, and the controversy can

be conclusively confirmed by an autopsy. The determination will give pointers to the perpetrators of the outrage.

Instead of slowing down, the gate should have been kept clear, the vehicle should have been accelerating to quickly clear this obvious place for ambush. In the video, we do not see uniformed police around the vehicle; at this constricted exit there should have been a double cordon. Someone in the security chain is responsible for "severe dereliction" of duty. The local administration, the immediate head of Ms Benazir's security detail, and whoever in the federal government who was immediately overseeing this responsibility, is all culpable of criminal neglect.

At the very least, some govern-

ment officials are guilty of looking the other way. If this indifference was deliberate, the stakes become much higher and it becomes a conspiracy. Only an independent investigation can exclude the far-out possibility that this atrocity was deliberately engineered.

Ms Benazir paid with her life for being loyal beyond reason to her political aides, but the so-called "security experts" (none of whom have any credible security credentials) criminally let her down. The security management of any popular charismatic leader is always going to be difficult, all the more reason why she should have been counselled and protected by security professionals.

Oversight by political appointees notwithstanding, for their own selfish interests, her aides kept her cocooned from good security advice. Any VIP's life depends upon his (or her) listening without debate to the express instructions of a professional head of the security detail, someone with adequate training, expertise and experience.

Armoured vehicles do not have sunroofs, why did her armoured car have a sunroof? Why did the company in Dubai, entrusted with

armouring the vehicle, put in the sun-roof; or was this done at the express instructions of someone in Karachi? Addressing conspiracy theories, why not question the person or persons who insisted on the sunroof being installed?

In a rush of adrenaline, Ms Benazir spontaneously popped out through the sunroof to acknowledge her admiring followers. She always reacted to adoring crowds and was difficult to keep in check, all the more reason to ensure that she was not given such an opportunity.

The collection, collation, dissemination and distribution of information by the various intelligence agencies need to become "actionable intelligence" quickly. The excellent expertise and capability among our intelligence community has been compromised over the years. The first compromise is "official," a lot of time and public money is wasted in targeting of those in opposition to the government.

The major compromise is "unofficial," the personal vendettas of some intelligence officials, not only on behalf of vested interests but also on personal likes and dislikes. There have to be two benchmarks, one to differentiate between anti-state and

anti-government activity, and the other to check if the reports are patently fake, and/or motivated, and/or fabricated.

If an intelligence ombudsman checks the veracity of the reports and finds them false they should be taken as perjury, and those making and/or initiating them or signing-off up the line must be prosecuted and sent to jail, whatever their rank and seniority. Fabrication of reports is a major business for some, and it must be punished severely. Most times, effort and money are spent on non-professional activities.

If they dare to play with the lives of those they hate, they not only need to face the same consequences but also have to reimburse the government revenues wasted. They must be made accountable! What quality of information and analysis does one expect from such people? The "great really silent majority" in the intelligence services are quality people, one expects from them the credible "actionable intelligence" that this country desperately needs.

Mr. Asif Zardari made a remark in passing about his selection of guards in the inner cordon around Ms Benazir from among his former prison-mates; this was shocking.

Irrespective of the personal loyalty he built up among his fellow prisoners, and irrespective of whether the person was innocent or guilty of the crime that put him in jail, nowhere in the world would those having a criminal record be allowed near a security detail, i.e. unless he or she had absolute security clearance.

Any employee, what to talk of security personnel, must be verified as to his (or her) antecedents; how this was carried out needs also to be checked. Could the loyalty of any of the party cadre in the inner cordon have been subverted?

The president has assured Scotland Yard's detectives a free hand in examining all clues and questioning anyone; ascertaining the facts as they were, and elaborating on the glaring weaknesses in our security practices and procedures. This must be done in letter and spirit, prosecuting anyone who obstructs the investigation as being part of the crime. If the lessons learnt save the lives of others in the future, it will be well worth it. Are we ready to heed the lessons learnt?

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