

The most crucial Pak polls

Let the people have a peaceful and fair vote

PAKISTANIS go to polls today under international gaze and regional spotlight. Many people look at this election as Pakistan's precious opportunity to transit from a disguised military rule to a civilian elected government. Given unalloyed lusted authoritarian rule in the country for a greater part of its 60-year-long history, the people's longing to see a true democracy flourish has only intensified over time into a virtual crescendo. Pro-democracy agitation centring around Musharraf's ruthless handling of highest judiciary to replace it by his own men, his dubious trickery in securing second term as president by doffing, had added a tremendous value to this election. The stakes grew even higher for the democratic forces with the assassination of charismatic PPP leader Benazir Bhutto and the events following the tragedy.

We share some of the concerns being aired by keen observers of the Pakistan's electoral scene. One of the worries emanated from the wave of suicide bombings that killed and injured hundreds, including the latest one in northwest frontier province on the last day of the polls campaign. The extremists seem to be aiming at foiling the election, or short of it, at reducing the voter turnout on the election day affecting its credibility. It is noteworthy though that the suicide bombings are concentrated in the tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

However, we attribute lack of democracy and popular support behind Musharraf's fight against terror to his failure to head off religious extremism and threats of terror from across the border.

The pre-election predictions have been a source of worry. Two possible scenarios are being talked about: first, the PPP and the PML(N) are likely to sweep the elections. Musharraf loyalist PML(Q) finds itself under pressure. Secondly, the election commission has to beware of possible rigging.

Given the make or mar potential of the election, we would urge the Pakistan government and the election commission to prove true to their pledges of holding free, fair and credible elections and the political parties to refrain themselves from all provocation to violence and maintain vigil on the possible machinations of the terrorists.

Provocative act

We condemn it

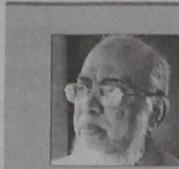
WE find the republication of a cartoon on the Prophet of Islam by a Danish newspaper extremely provocative, utterly outrageous and malicious in intent. All this is highly condemnable. The cartoon meant to hurt the sentiments of the people of a major religious faith is not only unacceptable, it is diametrically opposite to what the progressive countries of the west preach -- liberalism, tolerance, respect for different faiths and freedom of expression.

Republication of the cartoon against the backdrop of outbursts over it can be termed as a deliberate attempt to malign a major religion. It reflects not only on the mischievous motivation of the cartoonist but also on the editorial judgement in the newspaper. If freedom of expression to this particular newspaper meant undermining the faith of a billion strong people, we cannot think of any greater abuse of the concept of freedom. One's freedom ends where other's rights begin. It is on the acknowledgement of this principle that peace and harmony in the human society hinges. Let no one forget it.

The bellicose act will have resulted in no material or spiritual benefit for the newspaper authorities. On the contrary, it exposed their moral bankruptcy and inability to apprehend a possible furore over the issue like what had happened the first time around. It had taken quite a while for the matter to subside. Repetition of such vicious act is the handiwork of evil forces that are totally oblivious of the consequences of their action.

We once again express our serious outrage over the insensitivity of Danish authorities, especially the newspaper that republished the cartoon. This has hurt the sensibilities of all rational people around the world, particularly that of the followers of Islam. We believe an unconditional apology from the Danish newspaper is the least they can do at the moment.

A critical look at China as an emerging power



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

DURING the nineties, in the wake of the Cold War's demise a post-reform China had been in full focus of the West's powerful media, which seldom tired of projecting it as an economic "power house," "fast-growing nuclear military power," and "potentially a superpower" by the middle of the twenty-first century. Even today, observers sometimes describe China as a "rising great power" or "a major power," and at other times as a "dominant regional power" or a "sleeping giant which has awakened."

All of these observations may simply be conjecture, and, thus, obfuscate China's exact position in global power configuration. It would be worthwhile to critically look at some elements of the observations; China's burgeoning economic and military power projected by none other than the Western media itself.

The Chinese government itself has referred to China's "peaceful

PERSPECTIVES

The strategic partnership between China and the US -- first espoused by a former US president during his China visit and so often highlighted ever afterwards, hardly means anything. Because, on no one significant strategic issue are they on the same side; neither are their capabilities compatible for such partnership between them. However, the point missing in the whole debate is perhaps the fact that, in the revolving cycle of the rise and fall of the great powers, China is on the ascendancy. What is significant here is the full potential of China as a swiftly rising power.

rise to great power status" in characterising its emergence from economic poverty and political isolation to economic prosperity and political engagement. The world is already aware of China's post-reform miracles; its double-digit growth rate, quadrupling of its per capita GDP and an uninterupted increase in the volume of its foreign trade since 1978, making China's prospect of becoming the world's second largest economy more realistic.

Not only that, China is moving fast to balance the economy with the military, another key dimension of national power. She is now engaged in one of the most-expensive and rapid military builds-up of the world. China has been the only Asian member of the internationally acknowledged nuclear club, with its large nuclear arsenal, and has deployed her nuclear weapons of intercontinental reach.

China is the biggest military

spender after the US, and does not want to become just a second-rate military power. China's grand modernisation of the military, including her nuclear tests a few years back defying the test ban treaty, is a pointer to her great power ambition. Though limited, China already has an inventory of long-range USS-4 land based intercontinental missiles and ballistic missile submarines.

Although China's political power is yet to be clearly assessed, its economic potentials are phenomenal. China's GDP, variously measured as the second, third or fourth now, is predicted by all to become second largest in the world within a decade or so. In total exports, China, with \$989 billion worth in 2005, ranked third only after the US and Germany. Its sizable trade surplus with respect to the US, the world's largest trading economy, is a source of genuine concern and consternation in that country.

China held an astonishing \$ 1.2 trillion in foreign exchange reserve in 2007. Finally, China is currently the largest destination for foreign direct investments (FDI), attracting \$60 billion in 2005 from the corporations worldwide.

At this crucial juncture for American power, when this world is fast approaching multi-polarity, China with her power potential and growing international prestige can be catapulted to the leadership of a network of states inimical to Western objectives and interests: It is not for nothing that she is today wooed alike by both the sole superpower as well as states in Central Asia or North Africa.

All these factors taken together put her at the centre of an informal group of the states which can, at some stage, challenge the prolonged domination of the Western civilization.

But then, the limits to China's emerging power also are glaring.

In 1997, China accounted for only 3.5 percent of the world's GNP, ranking 7th in the world -- just ahead of Brazil but well behind Italy. As per the UN Human Development Index China was 107th bracketed with Albania and Namibia. In terms of international trade and investment the story in much the same. China made up a mere 3 percent of world trade in 1997, despite all the hype about its economy.

As regards investment, at its peak some of its \$ 45 million in inflow came from ethnic Chinese of East Asia and very little from the developed world.

It is also true that in strategic terms the Chinese challenge is nothing like the Soviet one. China is less like the Soviet Union in the 1950s than like perhaps Iraq in the 1990s -- a regional threat to Western interests, not a global ideological rival. China's military clout can be gauged also from the quantum of Chinese arms transfers, which stand barely at 2.2 percent of total arms transfers in 1991.

The strategic partnership between China and the US -- first espoused by a former US president during his China visit and so often highlighted ever afterwards, hardly means anything. Because, on no one significant strategic issue are they on the same side; neither are their capabilities compatible for such partnership between them.

However, the point missing in the whole debate is perhaps the

fact that in the revolving cycle of the rise and fall of the great powers China is on the ascendancy. What is significant here is the full potential of China as a swiftly rising power. But it would be a convoluted puzzle to fix where China stands in a comparative scale in contemporary global settings.

During the present period of historic transition and constant changes, national power can not be measured in term of arithmetical figures which are always in flux under the force of myriad dynamics at work.

In 1800, China itself accounted for 33 percent of world manufacturing output. By 1900 she was down to 6.2 percent. In the meantime, the United States, which was 0.8 percent in 1800 rose to 23.6 percent in 1900 and 25.6 percent in 1997.

The nation's rating as a power is hardly proportionate to any single factor. It lies in the maze of combinations and permutations of many equations of power play, which themselves keep changing. Then there are many abstract values which cannot be arithmetically measured but add to the strength of a nation.

Today, after the Cold War, the world is witnessing great power transition in which China has risen faster than most people anticipated. Any attempt to pinpoint its standing in the global order at a given point of time is of academic interest.

Big (red) Hafiz is former DG of BLSIS.

Reflection on book fair



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

EKUSHEY book fair, the largest and most keenly awaited annual book fair in the country, is now pulsating with life as thousands of book lover are thronging there everyday. There are 370 stalls in the fair this year, whereas there were 412 last year.

Publishers, who published 60 authentic publications in the fields of creative literature, science and researches, or 15 publications in 2007, were selected to set up stalls in the fair.

Dhaka book fair, the 14th of the kind since 1995, was held at National Parade Ground from December 1 to 16. National Book Centre, the organiser of the Dhaka book fair, invited foreign missions to take part, and three -- Iran, Pakistan and China -- had stalls with books introducing their respective country's culture and heritage.

The bigger book fairs all around the world invite publishers from different countries to come and publicise their upcoming titles, and to sell and purchase

BY THE NUMBERS

The distinctive spirit and appeal of the Ekushey book fair needs to transcend the geographical boundaries of Bangladesh to match the occasion. Books know no border. The poor standard of our books, that has been witnessed over the years, calls for internationalisation of the book fair, shaping it to fit a nationalistic and yet cosmopolitan Bangali psyche. The concerned authority should consider it seriously.

subsidary and translation rights for books from other publishers. But our book fairs are not yet comparable to the book fairs in other countries in any respect.

The Frankfurt book fair, held annually in mid-October on a 164,000 sq meter area in Frankfurt, Germany, is the world's largest trade fair for books. Representatives from book publishing and multimedia companies from all over the world go there in order to negotiate international publishing rights and licensing fees.

The fair is organised by a subsidiary company of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, and is claimed to be the largest in the world. More than 7,500 exhibitors from over 111 countries, and more than 286,000 visitors took part in 2006.

The Frankfurt book fair has a long tradition that spans over more than 500 years. Soon after, Johannes Gutenberg invented printing in movable letters in the town of Mainz (very near to Frankfurt), the first book fair was held by local booksellers.

Until the end of the 17th cen-

tury, it was the most important book fair in Europe. Frankfurt book fair-2008 will be held from October 15 to 19, and Turkey will be the Guest of Honour.

The Turin International Book Fair is Italy's largest book fair, held annually in mid-May in Turin, Italy. Founded in 1988 as a book showroom, it is claimed to be one of the largest book fairs in the world, involving more than 1,200 exhibitors and 300,000 visitors.

The London book fair is held annually, usually in March, in London. While not as large as the immense Frankfurt book fair, it has grown in size and importance in recent years. Over 23,000 publishers, booksellers, literary agents and media persons from more than 100 countries attend the fair last year.

The Tokyo International Book Fair (TIBF) opens the door to the world's 2nd largest book market in Japan. As Asia's leading book fair, TIBF is an exciting opportunity for tapping the colossal Japanese market, and is the best opportunity for the book traders to meet the publishing industry

professionals to expand their business throughout Asia.

TIBF welcomed 749 exhibitors from 29 countries and attracted 55,943 registered visitors from Japan and around the world in 2007. TIBF-2008 will be held from July 10 to 13.

The Miami Book Fair International is a premier event of the Florida Centre for Literary Arts in USA. Every year in November, the downtown of Miami becomes the centre of the literary world, when the book fair welcomes hundreds of thousands of book lovers who attend readings and discussions featuring prize-winning, best-selling, and emerging authors from the US and around the world.

Founded in 1983 by the Miami Dade College and community partners, this book fair has been recognised as the nation's finest literary event of its kind. The Miami Book Fair International-2008 will be held from November 9 to 16.

Starting on a small scale in 1976, the Kolkata book fair is now the world's largest non-trade book fair. It is also claimed to be

the world's third largest annual conglomeration of books after the Frankfurt and the London fairs. The 33rd Kolkata book, which was scheduled to be held from January 29 to February 10, was banned by the High Court from being held at Park Circus maidan on environmental grounds.

The annual Hong Kong book fair is organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, selling and exhibiting books, printed matter, compact discs and other multimedia publishing. The fair is intended to promote the international book trade in several different languages.

Our glorious Martyrs' Day, February 21, has now got the status of International Mother Language Day, and around 118 countries across the world are expected to observe the day with due solemnity. The declaration of our Martyrs' Day as the International Mother Language Day by Unesco has not only glorified us, but has also enjoined on us the responsibility for equipping people with the necessary linguistic and intellectual strength to tackle the outside world.

The most important aspect of Ekushey is the book fair in the Bangla Academy premises. While books have been a passion of mine, to be really honest, I did not quite enjoy the fair, having visited it twice in the last week after waiting in the long queue for security checks. I am, like many

others, eager to see a higher level of intellectual enrichment in the book fair.

Take India for instance. India has seen a boom of writers in English, many of whom have acquired international recognition winning Booker and other literary prizes. The popularity of Indian books increased astoundingly after India was nominated the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt book fair in 2006.

The distinctive spirit and appeal of the Ekushey book fair needs to transcend the geographical boundaries of Bangladesh to match the occasion. Books know no border. The poor standard of our books, that has been witnessed over the years, calls for internationalisation of the book fair, shaping it to fit a nationalistic and yet cosmopolitan Bangali psyche. The concerned authority should consider it seriously.

The country indeed needs a knowledge-based society to acquire science and technology for facing the new global challenges. But such an endeavour is sadly absent in the publication of books. The publication of books on a wide range of subjects is quite inadequate.

The Ekushey book fair, so far as its elevation in academic and research areas is concerned, cannot be advanced by emotional exuberance.

others, eager to see a higher level of intellectual enrichment in the book fair.

Take India for instance. India has seen a boom of writers in English, many of whom have acquired international recognition winning Booker and other literary prizes. The popularity of Indian books increased astoundingly after India was nominated the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt book fair in 2006.

The distinctive spirit and appeal of the Ekushey book fair needs to transcend the geographical boundaries of Bangladesh to match the occasion. Books know no border. The poor standard of our books, that has been witnessed over the years, calls for internationalisation of the book fair, shaping it to fit a nationalistic and yet cosmopolitan Bangali psyche. The concerned authority should consider it seriously.

The country indeed needs a knowledge-based society to acquire science and technology for facing the new global challenges. But such an endeavour is sadly absent in the publication of books. The publication of books on a wide range of subjects is quite inadequate.

The Ekushey book fair, so far as its elevation in academic and research areas is concerned, cannot be advanced by emotional exuberance.

A.N.M. Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Punishing parochial hate-mongering



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

THE PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

Mayhem ruled in Mumbai as the Sena thrived, terrorising South Indians and Gujaratis -- whose business leaders quickly bought off its opposition -- and then, the even more vulnerable Muslims. Mumbai became a city of prejudice and hatred, fear and loathing, character assassination, and lynching of innocents.

Hindi-speaking vegetable-vendors and taxi-drivers for their "disloyalty" to Maharashtra. Mr. Azmi only issued statements against him.

After inciting violence, Mr. Thackeray turned up at the wedding of the daughter of the Mumbai Police Commissioner, who welcomed him -- showing high mutual comfort.

The Maharashtra government has never punished hate speech directed at "outsiders" or religious minorities. It has failed to implement the Srikrishna report, which recommends prosecution of the culprits of Mumbai's 1992-93 post-Babri violence.

It has decided not to reopen the 1,371 cases pertaining to murder and arson instigated by Sena leaders. These include 9 "open-and-shut" cases against

Mr. Bal Thackeray for murderously inflammatory writing.

Now, a deplorable contest has erupted between the SS and MNS to claim the chauvinist "sons-of-the-soil" mantle. Sena leaders are blackening English signboards at Mumbai airport, and demanding jobs exclusively for Maharashtrians.

Why did the MNS take to anti-North Indian rabble-rousing at this time? Mr. Raj Thackeray is worried that his sickly outfit won't survive. He's looking to the coming assembly elections. Under fresh delimitation, the number of constituencies in Mumbai's suburbs, where the Northern presence is strong, will rise.

Recently, the Shiv Sena, too, joined the SP and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in wooing this group. This offered an easy target to Mr.

Thackeray, who has been looking for an emotive platform.

In adopting this low-level tactic, Mr. Thackeray was only following his uncle, who, in the 1960s, cynically forged Marathi chauvinism, coupled with Hindutva, into an instrument to create a profoundly reactionary force, with terrible consequences for India, Maharashtra and Mumbai.

The Shiv Sena represents a violent attempt to roll back the social gains Maharashtra made through its relatively early embrace of modernity and enlightenment values, including reason, liberty, equality and tolerance.

Some of these came from the social reform movement going back to the 19th century and the legacy of Shahu Maharaj, Phule

and Ambedkar, which strongly opposes communalism, parochialism, intimidation and violence.

The Sena concentrates all that's rotten within the dark culture of a narrow-minded, insular, insecure middle class, with a propensity for blaming "outsiders" for its own shortcomings.

The Sena exploited rancour among a section of Maharashtrians at the fact that their struggle for a Samyukta (unified) Maharashtra succeeded politically, but they remained "subalterns" economically; Mumbai, the "jewel in the crown," wasn't "Marathi enough," its economic levers were controlled by Gujarati and Marwari businessmen.

This resentment exploded into violent attacks on South Indians, although they didn't control the levers. South Indians (especially Malayalis) active in Mumbai's vibrant trade union movement were especially targeted.

Mr. Thackeray exploited discontent among the Marathi working class youth at the multiplying closures of textile mills and growing unemployment.

He gave it a malignantly paro-

chial expression designed to undermine Mumbai's unique cosmopolitan culture, a melange of different influences bound together by an urbane modernism. He tried to reduce Mumbai to a provincial town.

The Sena smashed trade unions and weakened the Left -- at the behest of Mumbai's industrialists. There's hardly a business house that didn't use SS goons as strike-breakers. The Sena set up countless rackets -- collecting "protection" money from "vadapav" stalls all the way to big builders, financing films, and running bogus "ambulance services."

Mr. Thackeray succeeded spectacularly thanks to the indulgence of Congress-led state governments, which were keen to liquidate the Left. He sang the virtues of fascism and built a Hitler-like personality cult around himself.

Mayhem ruled in Mumbai as the Sena thrived, terrorising South Indians and Gujaratis -- whose business leaders quickly bought off its opposition -- and then, the even more vulnerable Muslims. Mumbai became a city

of prejudice and hatred, fear and loathing, character assassination, and lynching of innocents.

The Sena forged a macho Hindu-chauvinist identity masquerading as nationalism, of the kind that takes pride in branding all Muslims as "traitors." The Bharatiya Janata Party bestowed respectability on it by becoming the Sena's junior partner in Maharashtra, and drafting it into the National Democratic Alliance as its sole ideological ally.

The Sena is now in steep decline, which will accelerate after Mr. Bal Thackeray's death. The MNS split was a result of this decline.

The Sena-MNS anti-immigrant campaign is unlikely to find much resonance. This is because the proportion of migrants in Mumbai's population sharply declined from 66 percent in 1961 to 43 percent in 2001.

The proportion of migrants from within Maharashtra fell from 27 to 16 percent. Migrants from other states declined from 34 to 26 percent. Particularly sharp was the decline of Southern migrants -- from 10 to 6 percent.

By contrast, the proportion of

migrants from UP and Bihar rose one-and-a-half times, but its magnitude is very low -- 12 percent. These are largely rural, unskilled and poor people, who do low-paid jobs like delivering newspapers and milk, vending vegetables, carrying headloads, or doing domestic chores.

Most old settlers, helped by skyrocketing property values, refuse such work. Without Northern migrants, Mumbai would grind to a halt.

That's one reason why attacks on them don't evoke sympathy. Another is that they have assimilated themselves in Mumbai's culture -- although language remains a problem. Perhaps even more important, few people want chaos and violence in Mumbai today. Even Mr. Raj Thackeray can't afford it as a builder-property developer.

The government shouldn't drag its feet over prosecuting Mr. Thackeray. Bringing him and his co-practitioners of hate politics to justice in an exemplary manner is a Constitutional, moral and political imperative.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.