

# End of 'Exemption from Democracy'

BY DR FAROOQ HASSAN

The Bush Administration's recent pronouncements on democracy have received a powerful expression in the latest Report issued by the new Secretary of State. Whatever doubts remained in respect of identifying America preferences with regards to democracy in Pakistan and Musharraf's continuity as a military general in charge of this show has now been made abundantly clear. On March 28<sup>th</sup> a new Report on the "human rights situation and democracy" was released by the US Department of State, in which Pakistan is prominently discussed. The text is a scathing blow to any pretensions the General might have had with regard to his genuine image within the Bush Administration. The salient features of this publication produced by the Secretary of State deserve to be specifically noted in the context of this column.

The second Bush term was inaugurated on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005 followed by his address to the Congress. In his State of the Union message he stressed that his foremost goal was to ensure that "democracy became manifest goal of American foreign policy". In the first twenty minutes of his address according to the Washington Post he used the word democracy 26 times. He further said that the US "security interest" needed this foundation for its subsistence as "absence of democracy threatened it". He more than once extolled the virtues of a "democratic" Iraq and of having ushered in democracy in Afghanistan.

In this context the pivotal question requiring serious concern is to see if Pakistan will be really called upon to change its futile pretenses of being "democratic" while Musharraf as the chief of its armed forces remains for all practical purposes the holder of all state powers. The extent of this military control is clearly evident when we see that in June 2004 three prime ministers were appointed by general Musharraf from the same parliament, something unheard of in the annals of parliamentary history.

One school of protagonists, headed by Musharraf and ministers assisted by a large group of media sycophants asserts that whatever now exists in Pakistan is acceptable to Washington. It is further emphasized that the constitutional system that now exists in the country is both "democratic" and "parliamentary". The contrary view is espoused by a ma-

sound relationship with the US. Democracy as such is tied up with the future course of relations with Washington. In this context the Report pointedly states that "success of Pakistan's democratization process efforts is critical to the strength of our long term relations." I for one find this most invigorating for the prospects that this time the ethos of the addresses of President Bush with respect to democracy mentioned in both his important addresses to the American people was not rhetorical. Indeed this Report issued to the world by the Office of as high as the Secretary of State, the senior most cabinet member of the US President means what it apparently asserts.

It may further be mentioned that the Report clearly mentions the demonstrations and political rallies of religious parties against Musharraf's rule and points that the cries against "dictatorship" are an indication that ordinary people are not satisfied with the present state of their civil and human rights. This is an important endorsement of the political right to hold public disapproval demonstrations against policies of the present government.

I may in passing point out at this juncture that the presentation of this Report has had a prelude of a demonstrative kind in the US for the last several weeks. The theme of important TV talk-shows and newspaper editorials in the US has constantly focused upon this point about the nature and desirability of keeping relations as usual with foreign regimes considered by a section of the US intellectual community as being less than democratic.

The Washington Post observed: "When opposition to tyranny has been at odds with security or economic policy - in Pakistan, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, in Russia, in China - the Bush administration of the past four years consistently chose to ignore and excuse oppression". The designation of Musharraf Administration in Pakistan as "tyrannical" or "oppressive" is a most serious castigation and condemnation. Coming as it does

from conceivably the most prestigious American daily does suggest that Bush will be forced by this *a priori* determination of Musharraf's lack of representative credentials to persuade him that the time has come for him to allow proper functioning of the representative institutions in the country.

