

# Aren't we a democracy?

**T**he Foreign Office says that democracy has been fully restored in the country. The Commonwealth thinks otherwise, however. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) that met in New York early this week has extended Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth noting that Pakistan has not fully returned to democracy. Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth following the October 1999 military coup. The Commonwealth is the association of 54 countries that were once ruled by Britain.

The 8-member CMAG is composed of foreign ministers of Australia, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Malta, Nigeria and Samoa. The Foreign Office has singled out India for playing the key role in blocking Pakistan's re-entry in the Commonwealth. The FO's accusation leads to the assumption that the CMAG has merely rubber-stamped India's bid to keep Pakistan out of Commonwealth. Our two brother Muslim countries, Bangladesh and Nigeria, and Australia, which is our partner in the anti-terrorism war, have meekly submitted to the will of India. But for India, the FO would have us believe, we would have re-entered the Commonwealth with flying colours as a born-again democracy. It is ironic that Nigeria, which not long ago was declared the most corrupt country in the world, and tiny Malta, Samoa and Bahamas are judging us whether or not we are a democracy. India of course serves as a very handy excuse; we can always attribute our failures and shortcomings to its machination.

To be certain, US too does not accept that we have a democratic system. The October 1999 coup had automatically triggered the US economic sanctions against Pakistan. The sanctions have not been lifted yet although we have an elected parliament. However, for our total support to the USA against Taliban regime and al-Qaeda, President Bush in the interest of America ordered a temporary waiver to the sanctions. The current 2-year waiver

expires on 14 March, 2004. Between now and then the US administration would determine if Pakistan has indeed turned democratic. Whether or not we regain the democratic status, President Bush would certainly extend the waiver if Pakistan were to agree to send its soldiers to Iraq.

The mere holding of elections does not guarantee the democratic status to a country. The elections have to be free and fair and conducted by an independent authority. The multi-candidacy for the key offices is another condition that has to be met for aspiring to the democratic status because the unopposed elections are looked down as undemocratic and dictatorial. And that is not the end of the matter. The commitment to the rule of law and independent judiciary are other conditions for becoming a democracy. The rule of law simply means that there are no midnight knocks and people do not disappear without a clue. We may go on arguing vehemently that we have an elected parliament, which has an elected prime minister, but for the special conditions — frequently referred to as 'ground realities' — obtaining in the country the transfer of power to the parliament would have to wait. It has to wait until the parliament attains 'maturity'. However, the USA and Commonwealth are not convinced that Pakistan is a democracy and even the European Union has its reservations on this matter. They have devised their own parameters for judging the political system of a country and by and large they adhere to it, sometimes strictly and at others softly.

The public opinion in Pakistan has fashioned itself on anti-American phobia. It is illogical because America has often been helpful to Pakistan. It may be though coincidental that every time that Americans came to our help the



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country was under the military dictatorship. Our armed forces were strengthened and modernised in the early sixties by America. It rescued us from the 1965 war by arranging the ceasefire. In 1971 it saved West Pakistan from the Indian onslaught by warning India and the Soviet Union of the consequences. Two years ago the US destroyed the Taliban and al-Qaeda thus saving us from imminent Talibanisation. In the eighties it helped us in defeating the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It helped us again a year ago by averting the Indian attack when India amassed half a million troops at our borders in an aggressive posture. Moreover, thousands of Pakistanis have obtained higher education in America and hundreds of thousands have settled there and are enriching the forex reserves of Pakistan. America is one of the very few countries in the world that publicly says that Kashmir is a dangerous dispute. It continues to press India to start talking with Pakistan to resolve this critical issue.

**I**t is payback time now. America needs us and other countries to rescue her from the Iraqi quagmire. President Musharraf has agreed in principle to help America in Iraq. Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali also holds the same view. What is needed is a fig leaf either of the UN or the OIC. Prime Minister Jamali has also said that he would seek parliament's approval for sending troops to Iraq. Mr Jamali would perform a miracle and in the process ensure political longevity if he could get the parliament's approval for sending Pak troops to Iraq.

Pakistan at the moment is enjoying unprecedented friendship with American administration. The two countries are helping each other to eliminate the last remnants of Taliban and al-Qaeda. President Bush is all praise for the wis-

dom of President Musharraf. He never misses an opportunity to laud the efforts of President Musharraf and Pakistan in combating terrorism. But we must keep in mind that Bush is not America and America is not Bush. It is not Bush alone but many other factors too that determine the policies of America. President Bush does not say it publicly but his aides and top officials of his administration still believe that Pakistan is not doing enough to stop infiltration into Occupied Kashmir and there are elements in the Pakistan establishment that are dragging their feet in flushing out the al-Qaeda. Ambassadors Nancy Powell and Richard Armitage have both sounded the alarm that infiltration into Occupied Kashmir continues.

President Bush is with us but American media is very critical of Pakistan; it is almost against us. Pakistan should never underestimate the power of the American media. It is a potent force in building the American public opinion. To be certain, even the President of United States has limitation in going against the domestic public opinion.

The recent spate of articles and news comments in the American media suggest that it is very suspicious of Pakistan's policies on terrorism. The *Time* magazine in an article has mentioned, 'Is Pakistan a friend?' The *New York Times* has called us 'A troubled ally'. The *Washington Post* has analysed policies under the her8 about an ally. When 911 raf visited Canada 113 ential *Globe and Mail* greeted him in a 9p unwelcome visit.

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