

Is poor Mukhtar Mai the catalys

VERY OFTEN HAVE I CAUTIONED THE PRESENT junta to not become too complacent just because Dubya is "tight" with the Biggest General — because it is not only the White House that exercises influence on what happens in this country, there are other very powerful forces in the world that can. Very often have I asked it to pay heed to what the great American newspapers (no, the favourite of all Pakistani dictatorships, the *Washington Times* of the cartoon fame is not one) say and not just get chuffed up with what middling US officials tell them just to buck them up, for these papers are read in high places.

I have also pointed out many times that the Biggest General should please stop saying one thing and doing another because the danger of getting caught out sometime or the other is very great indeed. That what happens in this country is far more important to his longevity in power than *Amreeka Bahadur's* support.

I have for long years now beseeched those that would listen to please start doing their jobs with something bordering on efficiency and good sense and not think that because they work under the wing of an all-powerful Big General/Chief of Army Staff/President they can get away with murder all the time.

But we well know the propensity of Pakistani governments, in particular those that think they are above the rest of the hoi polloi like the present one, to take all the liberties they think they can get away with; of shooting themselves in the groin (shooting themselves in the foot would be far less grievous so they have to do the worst to themselves, don't they?) with a Kalashnikov, indeed a self-propelled medium artillery gun. We well know, do we not reader, the penchant of dictatorships to take the messiest, worst way out of any given situation?

Look at the Mukhtar Mai case, for heavens sake. Out of the blue, and just because she was on her way abroad to receive an award or two for showing the courage that she did in facing up to her rapists and their colluders, and in this backward country actually having the gumption to put up a school in the same village in which she was shamed, the government goes berserk and makes a spectacle of itself by first stopping her free movement in her village and environs and then putting her on the Exit Control List to prevent her from going abroad.

The governments acolytes, many of them from the so-called "educated" assemblies, have come to its aid by giving press statement upon press statement on how it was just the thing to do because Mukhtar Mai's going abroad and the media attention she would get will spoil Pakistan's "image". How stupid could anyone get? For the Mukhtar Mai gang-rape has been much written about all over the world, particularly in the United States and Britain. Stopping her from going abroad has given us a far worse "image" than we already had. The question to ask is why this is so difficult for the managers of the regime to understand?

Just see what Nicholas D Kristof, the noted *New York Times* columnist, a friend of Pakistan's and one who has written on Mukhtar Mai earlier had to say on June 14: No wonder the Pakistan government can't

VIEW



KAMRAN SHAFI

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catch Osama bin Laden. It is too busy harassing, detaining — and now kidnapping — a gang-rape victim for daring to protest and for planning a visit to the United States.

"Last fall I wrote about Mukhtar Mai, a woman who was sentenced by a tribal council in Pakistan to be gang-raped because of an infraction supposedly committed by her brother. Four men raped her, then village leaders forced her to walk home nearly naked in front of a jeering crowd of 300... then Mukhtar Mai, who believed that the best way to overcome such abuses was through better education, used her compensation money to start two schools in her village, one for boys and the other for girls. She went out of her way to enroll the children of her attackers in the schools, showing that she bore no grudges.

"Readers of my column sent in more than \$133,000 for her. Mercy Corps, a US aid organisation, has helped her administer the money, and she has expanded the schools, started a shelter for abused women and bought a van that is used as an ambulance for the area. She has also emerged as a ferocious spokeswoman against honour killings, rapes and acid attacks on women. (If you want to help her, please don't send checks to me but to Mercy Corps, 3015 S.W. First, Portland, Ore. 97201.)

"A group of Pakistani-Americans invited Mukhtar Mai to visit the US starting this Saturday (see www.4anaa.org). Then a few days ago, the Pakistani government went berserk.

"On Thursday, the authorities put Mukhtar Mai under house arrest — to stop her from speaking out...

Human Rights

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st for change?

the police cut off her land line... after she had been detained, a court ordered her attackers released, putting her life in jeopardy. That happened on a Friday afternoon, when the courts do not normally operate, and apparently was a warning to Mukhtar Mai to shut up... at dawn yesterday the police hustled her off, and there's been no word from her since. Her cell phone doesn't answer. "Even if Mukhtar Mai were released, airports have been alerted to bar her from leaving the country. According to *Dawn*, a Karachi newspaper, the government took this step, 'fearing that she might malign Pakistan's image'.

"Excuse me, but Mukhtar Mai, a symbol of courage and altruism, is the best hope for Pakistan's image. The threat to Pakistan's image comes from President Musharraf...

"I've been sympathetic to Mr Musharraf till now, despite his nuclear negligence, partly because he's cooperated in the war on terrorism and partly because he has done a good job nurturing Pakistan's economic growth, which in the long run is probably the best way to fight fundamentalism. So even when Mr Musharraf denied me visas all this year, to block me from visiting Mukhtar Mai again and writing a follow-up column, I bit my tongue...

"This is all because they think they have the support of the US and can get away with murder", Ms Jahangir said. Indeed, on Friday, just as all this was happening, President Bush received Pakistan's foreign minister in the White House and praised President Musharraf's 'bold leadership'.

"So, Mr Bush, how about asking Mr Musharraf to focus on finding Osama, instead of kidnapping rape victims who speak out? And invite Mukhtar Mai to the Oval Office — to show that Americans stand not only with generals who seize power, but also with ordinary people of extraordinary courage."

So there! While the Big General takes stock of his plummeting (plummeted?) stock — if I were him I would be very worried — he should take note that Senator Kulsoom Parveen of the King's Party has said that 'cases' like those of Dr Shazia (the Sui rape victim, now escaped from the Fatherland) and Mukhtar Mai should not be highlighted. "Mukhtar Mai should seek justice from Allah, and being an Eastern woman should not go abroad", she said. Surely something that will blacken Pakistan's face in the international community even more.

There it is then, this government of "Enlightened Moderation" and its shenanigans.

Bushism of the Week: "I thought how proud I am to be standing up beside my dad. Never did it occur to me that he would become the gist for cartoonists" — President George W Bush; *Newsweek*; February 28, 2000.

PS: What happens when Dubya invites Mukhtar Mai to the White House? Will the Big General's regime still keep her on the ECL? How stupid can people get?