

Lend him your ears, Mr President

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SHAHID NADEEM, the television and stage director, playwright and human rights activist, has made the following points in a letter he wrote to President Pervez Musharraf on January 16.

The establishments controlling the electronic media and the performing arts are mostly ill-equipped and are not committed to the projection of an enlightened, modernist and tolerant image of Islam and Pakistan. The professionals in these organizations need to be educated and sensitized.

Enlightenment and progress cannot take place in a culturally barren society, where freedom of expression is neither assured nor encouraged. The culture of extremism and hatred can only be countered by a culture of love, peace and tolerance.

Television is a vital instrument for the promotion and projection of this new image of Pakistan at home and abroad. However, it is controlled by people who are indifferent, if not hostile to the President's policies. At a time when the international and Indian channels have invaded our space and are capturing vast audiences in Pakistan, our national TV networks are behaving in a schizophrenic manner by either totally insulating themselves from the revolutionary changes taking place in the media worldwide or aping rival channels immaturely and clumsily. In short, they scoff at Gen Musharraf's policies openly in their offices just opposite to the President's House. They may be averse to change but they are experts at making their immediate bosses happy. No wonder then, that in the past two years, everything has changed except the top TV management.

Citing his own case, Shahid Nadeem makes the following additional points:

He is one of the founders of the country's leading non-commercial and socially committed theatre group, Ajoka. He has worked for Amnesty International as their communications officer. He has only recently completed a fellowship in Los Angeles where several of his plays have been produced by leading American Arts organizations, which has been a breakthrough for Pakistan.

He is a Sopore-born

writer and as a producer. If he visits PTV offices to meet old friends, explanations are sought from the latter. If someone interviewing someone so much as mentions his name, it is expunged.

Shahid Nadeem's TV serial on honour killings, *Beghairat* (2001), was not allowed to go on air in spite of the government policy on educating the people on the issue. His TV serials are not allowed to be retelecast. His name on the list of general managers has been removed in Lahore, the only instance since the PTV's inception in 1964. Even his press conference welcoming Mr Nawaz Sharif's removal from office has been held against him. When the ministry of information ordered his reinstatement, the order was not complied with on one pretext or the other.

Since October, 1999, he has moved all authorities concerned but in vain. It appears that a public snub by Mr Nawaz Sharif has been enough to excommunicate him for more than two years after the

elections.

"Those who attacked (the Indian) parliament would have been happy if there was a war, for then they could have harmed India and got rid of Musharraf. As for the decline of 'Islamic Pakistan,' suicide bombers do not count their losses, they think of the harm they can inflict on enemies."

In another letter, Mohan Punjabi writes:

"It is wise to accept the Pakistani president's words at face value, whatever the caveats. Pervez Musharraf has no choice. People will back him for the progress of a dialogue."

Yet another correspondent, Chandan Prashar wrote:

"Pervez Musharraf has stolen the show once again with the media, politicians and the international community praising his speech which was an example of double standards."

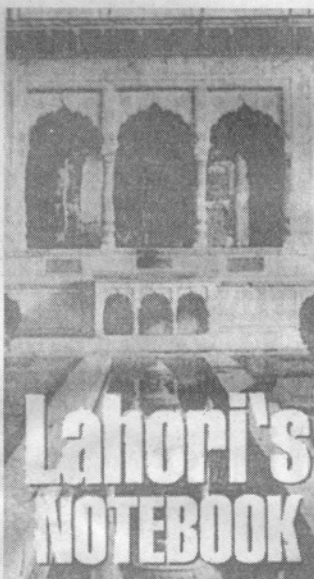
"Musharraf said on January 12 that he would not allow terrorists to use Pakistani territory to spread terrorism, nor allow any Pakistani to spread terrorism in any part of the world. It is ridiculous that we relate his speech to Kashmir because the general never said there was terrorism in Kashmir or that it was sponsored by Pakistan. Instead, he attacked India by saying that we should stop State terrorism in Kashmir."

In an article, written for *The Indian Express* on January 17, PV Indiresan wrote:

"It is important for us to do some introspection and consider why we have quarrels with all our neighbours, why we have so few friends and why we annoy as many as we do. ...

"Therefore, it does not surprise us that the US President ... would thunder that he will pursue terrorists wherever they are, that he will treat anyone who shelters terrorists as terrorists themselves, and, in the same breath, advise us to compromise with Pakistan."

"If a poll were taken, it is likely that most countries would advise us the same. If India were to move a resolution to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, how many would side with us? Let us be clear, when it comes to the crunch, we have few friends. That is so because we are poor and dirty, too — dirty the way we run our



former prime minister's ouster from office.

Shahid Nadeem ends his letter on a personal note to the president. He says:

"I do hope that this letter reaches you and that you find time to glance through it. ... I will continue to support your *jihad* against extremism and obscurantism, which is crucial for the survival of our country."

Well, I hope so, too. May

in Los Angeles where several of his plays have been produced by leading American Arts organizations, which has been a breakthrough for Pakistan.

He is a Sopore-born Kashmiri and was the first producer to come up with trend-setting serials on Kashmir in the early nineties.

He has been associated with PTV as a producer and as a playwright since 1979. He was the general manager of the Lahore centre of PTV in 1997, when the newly elected prime minister, Mr Nawaz Sharif, visited the station and publicly threatened him with drastic action for writing and producing a PTV serial, *Zard Dopheer*, which he (Mr Nawaz Sharif) regarded as an attack on his person and politics. Soon afterwards, he was sent on leave, demoted and transferred to Quetta. Eventually, he was dismissed in August, 1998, for a press interview in which he had criticized the misuse of PTV by the government then in power.

Since then, Shahid Nadeem has been banished by PTV as a

will continue to support your *jihad* against extremism and obscurantism, which is crucial for the survival of our country."

Well, I hope so, too. May Shahid Nadeem's travails come to an end soon. But Gen Musharraf has so much on his plate that I don't think he has the time or the inclination to attend to problems like Shahid Nadeem is facing. It's like hoping against hope.

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IN a letter written to the editor of an Indian newspaper, a correspondent, N Kunju, says:

"... India cannot go to war against Pakistan as the international community will not remain a silent onlooker when the two nuclear weapon States are fighting. The UN would order a stop to the hostilities. Also, Pakistan has no reason to initiate a war when India is the aggrieved party. Therefore, all the sabre-rattling and movement of troops to the ... front is for the political mobilization for the coming state assembly

orist state? how many would side with us? Let us be clear, when it comes to the crunch, we have few friends. That is so because we are poor and dirty, too — dirty the way we run our politics and dirty the way we run our diplomatic relations, dirty even the way we keep our streets. ...

Mr Indiresan concluded:

"The Prime Minister is right in his plea that poverty and illiteracy are common enemies of both India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, almost all of our political parties view the same poverty and the same illiteracy as vote banks — and their criminal associates as bank tellers. One wonders, therefore, who poses the greater threat — Pakistan or our own political parties."

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ITEM: "Only educated persons, with the minimum qualification of graduation would be able to contest the general elections."

FORECAST: The price of bogus degrees will increase a hundred-fold.