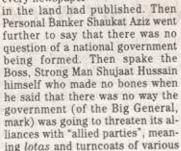
The strongman rules ok Chaudhry Shujaat's onslaught did not stone attempts to the attempts to the stone of th

o, all it took to pour cold Rashid saying water - scorn actually on two rays of hope held out by the government of the Big General was for Pakistan's strong-man, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain to get back to the Fatherland, make a strong statement or two and that was it. That is all, just one statement, and everyone who expected some improvement in the country's image abroad and its internal politics, came crashing back to good old Pakistani terra firma. Terra firma that is rife with differences amongst the various nationalities and segments of society, and mired in hate for the next person specially one who is a member of a minority.

The release of Asif Ali Zardari after an unjust and cruel incarceration of eight full years under trial in cases in which he had been granted bail in the most serious of them, and more than that the declaration by the Big General himself Muslim League (N) should support Pakistan's foreign policy specially its fight against terror and terrorists, and that what the country needed most of all was a "national government" came as a breath of fresh air. It left the door open for a reconciliation of sorts with the leaders of Pakistan's biggest political parties, let us not be afraid to name them. Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. This was the best news in a long, long time, giving us heart that the General was at last doing what he should have done when he took over: bring the country together so that all Pakistanis could put their shoulder to the wheel and pull in one direction to make this country a better place.

But no, in jumped the Chaudhry and his men, first Shiekh 'Tulli

the General did not say what evhad eryone heard him say on TV, and what every newspaper





Kamran Shafi

and a freelance columnist kshadi 1@yahoo.co.uk

The writer is a retired army officer. Chowdhries that General Musharraf make a pact with the PPP and/or the PML(N) for they would be the first to be

that it is not in

the interest of the

sent packing. But is it not in the General's direct interest to rid himself of the baggage he has collected over the five years he has been in power, and which now hangs like the proverbial albatross around his neck? I mean, look at the untenable position he has put himself in: at the top of a pyramid with the shakiest foundations ever. For what are they made of? Tehsil

does not have a reliable and effcacious defence in parliament Little wonder when you have the likes of Ljazul Haq defending youl

Chaudhry Shujaat's onsiauth did not stop at scuttling the General's attempts to unify the country through its political parties. He also nullified the much appreciated step of removing the relicon column from the new machine readable passports. This too ap peared a step away from what had come to be known as the Pakistan State's discriminatory attitude to wards minorities. For what is the point of informing a foreign limit gration agent that the bearer of a particular passport is a Musim or a Non-Muslim? Are Muslims treated better than non-Muslims (the opposite is true now, is it not?). Attal Sherpao, the Minister for Interior even went public explaining # length that because the applicant was asked what his religion was a the time of applying for the pass port, there was no reason to urclude it in the document them

Chaidhry Sahib's interventions have reaffirmed my belief that the senior scion of the House of Zahoor is the most powerful min in Pakistan today, one who can even reverse anything the Big General's government intends to do or does, any time he jolly well pleases, his is he the most powerful man this country you might well as Simple: it is only the Chandries and their cohorts, lotas and turncoats though they be, who kees the Big General where he is in the Presidency; in the Chief of Amo Staff's uniform; in the position of so-called absolute power in which he revels today. Can you imagita what would happen if the Chaudhries withdrew their support to the Big General and went had to the Sharifs?

Chaudhry Sahib's interventions have proved once again, my belief that the senior scion of the House of Zahoor is the most powerful man in Pakistan today, one who can even reverse anything the Big that the Peoples Party and the General's government intends to do or does a segood

> hues, by getting into a compact with the PPP and the PML(N).

> He was so forceful that not only did everyone jump to attention and say "Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full sir", but Asif's bail in the Justice Nizam murder case was cancelled, on the day he was to lead a large rally in Rawalpindi; he was arrested upon arrival at the Islamabad airport and whisked back to Karachi and jail. The scenes at Islamabad airport as shown by CNN proved beyond doubt our wildness: women political workers were thrashed by police and tear gas was fired inside the airport building, effectively shutting it down for over two hours, resulting in long delays in flight schedules.

One can perfectly understand to stay in uniform because he

and Thana level politicos and looters of the Cooperatives who got to where they did by dint of being loyal followers of the Sharif Mafia.

Nothing more.

Importantly, what sort of message does Zardari's re-arrest send to the country and the world? That the Big General's government, which postures so when it comes to battling great big terrorists, is petrified of a politician? That one person sends it into paroxysms of fear? That it is true that politi-cians belonging to the smaller provinces are dealt with differently than those belonging to the Punjab?

Look at what the Big General has reduced himself to: desperate