

The strongman rules ok

Chaudhry Shujaat's onslaught did not stop at scuttling the General's attempts to unify the country through its political parties

*Pak Pol. and
Ext Aff
News
24-12-04*

So, all it took to pour cold water — scorn actually — on two rays of hope held out by the government of the Big General was for Pakistan's strongman, 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 that the Peoples Party and the 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'

Rashid saying the General did not say what everyone had heard him say on TV, and what every newspaper

in the land had published. Then Personal Banker Shaukat Aziz went further to say that there was no question of a national government being formed. Then spake the Boss, Strong Man Shujaat Hussain himself who made no bones when he said that there was no way the government (of the Big General, mark) was going to threaten its alliances with "allied parties", meaning *lotas* and turncoats of various



Kamran Shafi

The writer is a retired army officer and a freelance columnist
kshafi1@yahoo.co.uk

that it is not in the interest of the Chowdhries that General Musharraf make a pact with the PPP and/or the PML(N) for they would be the first to be 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 efficacious defence in parliament. Little wonder when you have the likes of Ijazul Haq defending you!

Chaudhry Shujaat's onslaught 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 religion column from the new machine readable passports. This too appeared a step away from what had come to be known as the Pakistani State's discriminatory attitude towards minorities. For what is the point of informing a foreign immigration agent that the bearer of a particular passport is a Muslim or a Non-Muslim? Are Muslims treated better than non-Muslims (the opposite is true now, is it not?). Aftab Sherpao, the Minister for Interior even went public explaining at length that because the applicant was asked what his religion was at the time of applying for the passport, there was no reason to include it in the document itself.

Chaudhry Shujaat's interventions have reaffirmed 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 General's government intends to do or does, any time he jolly well pleases. Why is he the most powerful man in this country you might well ask? Simple: it is only the Chaudhries and their cohorts, *lotas* and turncoats though they be, who keep the Big General where he is: in the Presidency; in the Chief of Army Staff's uniform; in the position of so-called absolute power in which he revels today. Can you imagine what would happen if the Chaudhries withdrew their support to the Big General and went back 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 General's government intends to do or does

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

and Thana level politicians 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 politicians 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 to stay in uniform because he