

Dawn, 1 July 2007

Presidents act improper: CEC: Speeches at public meetings

ISLAMABAD, June 30: Chief Election Commissioner CEC Justice Retd Qazi Mohammad Farooq said on Saturday that it was inappropriate for the president to address public meetings that were political in nature. Talking briefly to reporters after a meeting with a delegation of the Muttahida Majlis i Amal MMA, the CEC expressed the hope that a code of conduct would soon be formulated in consultation with political parties to ensure free and fair polls. In response to a question about a large number of names missing from the voter lists, the CEC said all the eligible voters would be included in the electoral rolls before the announcement of the election schedule

The Nation, 1 July 2007

Dissolution of NA an option, says Pervaiz

Punjab Chief Minister Ch Pervaiz Elahi has said that it is better that present assemblies should elect the President. He said that President in uniform is not only in the interest of the country but also the demand of present international scenario. He said that the election of the President from the present assemblies is constitutionally and ethically correct. He said that we were in favour of uniformed President as he had made remarkable contribution for the political and economic stability of the country. He said that that election of President in uniform would not only ensure continuity of development activities but it was also necessary in view of the situation in Afghanistan, the threat of terrorism as well as international scenario..

Paktribune, 1 July 2007

Division of Kashmir not acceptable, Gilgit Baltistan part of Kashmir: Attique

MUZAFFARABAD, June 30: Declaring Gilgit Baltistan part of Kashmir, Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan has categorically stated that division of Kashmir would not be accepted at any cost. Winding up the budget debate in AJK Legislative Assembly, Sardar Attique Ahmed said that State of Jammu and Kashmir consisted of five parts covered the area of 86742 square mile and any conspiracy to its division would be foiled . Commenting on Jihad, the AJK Prime Minister said that confusion was created by some elements on the name of Jihad, adding that these elements used Jihad for gaining their personal interests.

The Nation, 1 July 2007

Editorial: Heading for showdown?

THERE are enough indications that the Lal Masjid/Jamia Hafsa standoff is heading for a final showdown. A day after the Rangers were deployed around the seminary, General Musharraf told journalists on Friday that an operation could be launched but that would lead to heavy casualties on both sides because a large number of suicide bombers were inside the mosque. This was also confirmed by the Lal Masjid Administration which showed more defiance, with Maulana Abdul Aziz sounding a warning that they would carry out suicide strikes as a last resort if the government launched an operation. The Presidents assertion that potential loss of human lives has been preventing him from taking any action against the seminary is understandable.

Dawn, 1 July 2007

Opinion: Focus on Pak-Afghan relations (V Jafarey)

THERE is a strange incongruity between the affinity and friendship existing between the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the hostility, suspicion and constant bickering which characterise the relations between the governments of the two countries. At the level of the people, there has been intermingling, common history and friendly contact stretching over centuries. The first Mughal emperor, Babar is buried in Kabul. An iconic figure of Muslim rule in Northern India is Sher Shah Suri, an Afghan born in India. Numerous families in Pakistan and Northern India are proud to claim their Pashtun descent. Allama Iqbal dedicated his magnum opus, Javed Nama, to the king of Afghanistan. Lately, millions of Afghan refugees have found friendly shelter in Pakistan.

Daily Times, 2 July 2007

Lahore police claim nabbing eight terrorists

LAHORE, July 1: Police claimed on Sunday to have arrested eight terrorists, including the ringleader of a banned religious outfit, and seized a large cache of explosives. The accused, who were captured with the help of other law-enforcement agencies, were allegedly planning sabotage activities in Lahore and had rented a house in Ittefaq Town, Iqbal Park. The ringleader, Safer Ahmad alias Mohammad Azeem of Kharian, was wanted by the Punjab government with a head money of Rs1 million. Lahore police chief Malik Mohammad Iqbal said at a news conference that the accused had attacked the Missionary School Murree and committed a suicide attack in Taxila Missionary Church in 2002. The police official said the next target of the suspects was Quetta.

Daily Times, 2 July 2007

US expects free and fair elections in Pakistan

WASHINGTON: The United States has urged for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan and expects Pakistan's planned 2007 general elections to be free and fair, according to an updated report on US Pakistan relations issued by the Congressional Research Service CRS. The report notes that Congress has annually granted one-year presidential authority to waive coup related aid sanctions and that Pakistan is among the worlds leading recipients of US aid, obtaining about \$3.4 billion in direct US assistance during 2002 to 2006, including nearly \$1.5 billion in security related aid. Pakistan has also received nearly \$5 billion in reimbursements for its support of US-led counter-terrorism operations since 2001. According to the CRS, A stable, democratic and economically thriving Pakistan is considered vital to US interests..

Dawn, 2 July 2007

Thousands of villagers marooned in Sindh

LARKANA/DADU, July 1: Four people were killed as heavy rains again lashed different parts of the province on Sunday, with floodwater inundating 350,000 acres of land in Qambar Shahdadt district and over 20,000 people of 200 villages in Dadu district waiting to be evacuated. The entire population of the Qubo Saeed Khan area in Qambar-Shahdadt district have shifted to safe places, while breaches in flood protective FP bund submerged 30 villages in the district. District Nazim Nawab Shabir Ahmed Chandio urged the government to declare Qambar-Shahdadt a calamity hit area. The irrigation

authorities failed to plug the breaches because of the mounting water pressure. A breach has occurred in Qubo Shakh, near 97 bridge, which posed a threat to the Shahdadtown town.

Dawn, 2 July 2007

Opinion: Chances of another martial law (Ziaul Islam)

AWASH in a state of euphoria for the last three months, it is understandable that people do not want to spoil their new found happiness by talking about evil possibilities. This is a classic repetition of our usual mistake. Like other concerned Pakistanis I have once again started reading newspapers that I had discontinued after giving up on the elusive civil society some years ago. What one finds in short supply in the media is a dispassionate, objective and rational analysis of the situation that could educate the common citizen on what to expect and prepare for in the foreseeable future. The worst possibilities like the imposition of emergency or martial law are rarely mentioned and if so, very briefly, muffled with a hope that these steps would not be resorted to. If civil society is not even aware of what might be coming, would it be fair to expect it to galvanise itself into action and respond positively when the real defining moment arrives?

The Tribune, 2 July 2007

Opinion: Pak society turning against the military (Griff Witte)

DAULAT NAGAR, Pakistan Nusrat Riaz, a doctor for 17 years, has spent the past three directing a clinic that provides care to thousands of poor patients in this remote, wheat farming village on the plains of Punjab. So Riaz was surprised this spring when he learned the government had appointed a monitor to look over his shoulder as he worked. He was even more surprised when he learned the man had no medical background, had no experience supervising doctors and was functionally illiterate. But when Riaz learned the monitor was a retired Pakistani army officer, it all made sense. This is part of the militarisation of the entire country, said Riaz, 46. It is very insulting, and it is happening because of the man sitting at the top..

Daily Times, 2 July 2007

Editorial: Confusion of uncertain loyalties?

There exists an opposition consensus, supported by the people at large, that the Election Commission is too submissive in the face of the power of President General Pervez Musharraf. But in the midst of an anti Commission barrage, the Chief Election Commissioner CEC Justice Retd Qazi Mohammad Farooq has stated that it was inappropriate for the president to address public meetings that were political in nature. He also said that he had asserted this opinion earlier too. Of course, he might have expressed this opinion earlier as a statement of principle, but now, after a meeting with an MMA delegation on Saturday, it is significant that he has gone on record to frown on the conduct of the president.

Dawn, 3 July 2007

SC throws out scandalous report on CJ: Intelligence men barred from courts State lawyers licence cancelled

ISLAMABAD, July 2: A visibly disturbed and angry Supreme Court bench on Monday

severely criticised government lawyers and suspended the licence of the state appointed advocate on record after finding some highly scandalous material both against the chief justice as well as judges in the presidential reference placed before the apex court by the federations counsel. So upset were the 13 honourable judges who form the larger bench hearing identical constitutional petitions challenging the reference against Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry that they dealt only with issue of scandalous material and adjourned the regular hearing till Tuesday.

Daily Times, 3 July 2007

Benazir took power in 1988 under deal with army: CIA

WASHINGTON: When Benazir Bhutto became prime minister for the first time in 1988, she agreed not to interfere with Pakistan's nuclear policies as one of several conditions levied by the army on her in exchange for military support for her becoming prime minister, according to secret CIA documents released last week. A heavily excised CIA report dated May 3, 1989, says, By appointing advisers with close ties to the military, discussing nuclear matters with foreign leaders and diplomats, and making statements on nuclear issues supportive of longstanding Pakistani positions, Bhutto probably has gained entree to certain nuclear policy deliberations particularly those involving US aid requirements.

Dawn, 3 July 2007

Reinforcement around Lal Masjid

ISLAMABAD, July 2: In a bid to tighten noose around the Lal Masjid administration, the government on Monday reinforced the Rangers force deployed near the mosque with another two wings, each with 500 personnel and lodged them in apartments recently vacated by the Punjab Constabulary near Aabpara. A senior security official, however, told Dawn that the government had no intention of conducting any raid on the mosque and its seminaries. But the forces deployed near the mosque will take stern action against Lal Masjid students if they take law in their own hands or attack any massage centre or CDs shop, he added. The official said the number of Rangers deployed near the mosque had now gone up to 1,500 and they were being supported by 500 police commandos.

The Nation, 3 July 2007

Editorial: An emerging threat

THE news that India is considering the construction of four more hydropower stations on River Chenab in Held Kashmir should serve as a strong reminder to the powers that be in Islamabad that they should always be on the lookout for New Delhis moves to undermine Pakistans interests. They should have learnt a lesson from the Baglihar controversy. Pakistan should take stock of the situation to see whether India is in violation of the Indus Waters Treaty and act accordingly. On the other hand, the government needs to quicken up its plans to construct big reservoirs, which have long been lying in abeyance not for lack of technical feasibility or financial adequacy but for its failure to create consensus among dissenting provinces..

Daily Times, 3 July 2007

Opinion: Reforming political parties (RB Rais)

..Unlike many other Muslim countries, Pakistans politics have been greatly open, allowing all kinds of parties and groups to compete for power, and social and political space. Sometimes this openness is limitless, presenting a picture of anarchy, with hundreds of registered political parties. So far the political parties religious, secular, and regional have rejected armed, revolutionary struggle as a means of obtaining political power. The armed resistance by the nationalist parties in Balochistan at present and earlier is of a different kind, primarily reactive and not aimed at toppling a government. One may reject this aspect of our political heritage with cynicism, as some of us tend to do, by arguing that all politics in Pakistan have been manipulated from outside the political sphere. Perhaps this is true, but there is considerable evidence, which I have sketched above, that political parties have a positive side.

Dawn, 4 July 2007

Fierce gunbattles rock capital: Army troops deployed around Lal Masjid Curfew imposed in area Rangers man, journalist among 10 killed Go

ISLAMABAD, July 3: Paramilitary Rangers and riot police fought a daylong running gunbattle with hundreds of heavily armed and well entrenched militants around their stronghold of Lal Masjid as a six month long standoff between mosques radicals and the authorities exploded into a major clash on Tuesday, leaving at least 10 people dead and more than 150 injured. Dozens of the injured suffered multiple bullet wounds, and the condition of some of them being critical, doctors feared the death toll might rise. It was perhaps the worst, and the bloodiest, incident in Islamabads history as never before such a large number of armed militants had taken on the authorities and that too in the heart of the capital.

Dawn, 4 July 2007

Editorial: Lengthening shadow of the invisible government

EVERY state in this world has its quota of intelligence agencies and spymasters, but in Pakistan the invisible government now has become very visible. On Monday, short of throwing the Advocate on Record out of the court, the Supreme Court judges seemed beside themselves over the scandalous document submitted to them by the government. So upset were the judges that they did no other judicial business that day except fixing the AoR, whom they held guilty of misconduct or conduct unbecoming of an advocate. The court barred him from practising, recommended to the Pakistan Bar Council to cancel his licence and ordered contempt of court proceedings against him. The courts ire also fell on the law secretary because it was he who had prepared the scandalous document submitted to the court. The level of competence of government functionaries became evident when the AoR revealed that he was asked by the law secretary to submit the document to the court immediately, and therefore he did not have the time to read it.

The Hindu, 4 July 2007

Opinion: Justice on trial in Pakistan (Nirupama Subramanian)

The marble and granite building of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, positioned between the overstated Prime Ministers office and the nondescript Parliament buildings, is the centre of attention for much more than its imaginative structure. For the last six weeks, 13 of its judges deemed as constituting a full court have assembled daily in Court No 1 to

hear Iftikhar Chaudhary vs President of Pakistan. The petition by the ousted Chief Justice accuses President Pervez Musharraf of mala fide in framing charges of misconduct against him, challenges the allegations, and raises questions about the competence, composition, and constitution of a panel called the Supreme Judicial Council to which the charges were referred on March 9.

Daily Times, 4 July 2007

Pakistan, NATO agreed on better coordination

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office spokeswoman Tasneem Aslam said on Tuesday that Pakistan had clearly stated that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO forces were not allowed to conduct operations in Pakistan and only Pakistani security forces could do so, and that NATO had agreed to improve coordination with Pakistan. She told PTV that Pakistan had never compromised on its nuclear programme and would never take a decision against its national interests. She said that Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri's visit to the United States US had been successful, and that Kasuri had met US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other high US officials. She said that Kasuri had also addressed a think tank in Washington and the Pakistani community.

The Nation, 4 July 2007

How many judges butchered after 1973 (QAISER ZULFIQAR)

ISLAMABAD - How many judges including the Chief Justices were butchered after 1973, remarked Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday, heading the thirteen member full court bench during the hearing of the petition of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry on Tuesday. He further remarked, four Chief Justices were removed including Yaqub Ali, Anwarul Haq, Saeeduz Zaman Siddiqui and the case of the fourth one is in front of us. Earlier, the federation's lawyer Malik Qayyum while resuming his arguments pleaded that nothing has been said about the Chief Justice in Article 179 of Constitution but as he is one among the judges, the Constitution also involves him. Qayyum further argued that CJ could be removed under Article 209 on charges of misconduct and ineligibility. He added that in Section 3A same things are added, but CJ isn't mentioned.

Daily Times, 5 July 2007

1,200 surrender at Lal Masjid

ISLAMABAD: Five gunship helicopters hovered over Lal Masjid on Wednesday as sporadic firing between militant students and security forces continued for a second day. Several hundred students surrendered to the government as security forces surrounded the mosque complex and announced amnesty for those who laid down their arms. However, many remained holed up inside, though the chief cleric of the mosque, Abdul Aziz Ghazi, was arrested trying to escape in a burqa. The government confirmed the deaths of 16 people and injuries to 98 from the clashes, but unofficial reports put the death toll at 20 and 200 injured, some of them critically. Interior Ministry spokesman Brig retd. Javed Iqbal Cheema said 1,100 to 1,200 students had surrendered by 10:30pm on Wednesday night, but several were still inside the mosque along with deputy chief cleric Abdul Rashid Ghazi.

Indian Express, 5 July 2007

Opinion: Islamabads other jihad (Ayesha Siddiqa)

After violence erupted around the Lal Masjid in Islamabad, the question is: will it become a litmus test for Musharraf to prove that he can enforce the writ of the state? And the question once again is: does he want to? The fresh round of violence in Islamabad around Lal Masjid on Tuesday in which 12 people died has raised expectations of stern government action against the militant mullahs. The shoot out started after some of the madrassa students tried to forcibly occupy a government office close by in a bid to extend its tentacles and establish territorial control in the Pakistani capital. However, Wednesday morning looked different as the authorities seemed more willing to solve the issue much more amicably, raising more questions about the states capacity or its intent to punish these mullahs who have challenged the governments writ..

Dawn, 5 July 2007

Editorial: An end at last?

THE Lal Masjid drama was not fully over when these lines were written, but at least 16 people had been killed and countless injured in a bloody confrontation that could have been avoided if common sense had prevailed. The Lal Masjid high command and the government both must answer certain questions. First the chiefs of the Lal Masjid rebellion: in what way have the brothers Rasheed and Ghazi advanced the cause of Islam which was supposed to be the aim behind the government and the court they had set up in the sacred precincts of the mosque? Does Islam approve of crime raids on homes, kidnapping, attacks on shops and defiance of the law of the land to enforce Sharia? Did the raid by girl commandos on the home of a woman of presumed ill repute abolish prostitution throughout the country?

The Nation, 5 July 2007

BB, Zardari cleared in false assets case

ISLAMABAD Former Prime Minister and PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto and her spouse Asif Ali Zardari were Wednesday acquitted by the District Sessions Court, Islamabad, in the case of mis declaration of their assets before the Election Commission in 1995 to 96. The court disposed of the case by dismissing the complaints filed by the National Accountability Bureau. According to Senator Farooq Naik, Benazirs defence counsel, the allegations of mis-declaration were made under Section 42 of Representatives of Peoples Act, 1976 and Section 199 of PPC and Section 82 of the Peoples Representation Act. The court later had also issued non bailable warrants of Benazir Bhutto and asked the NAB to inform the Interpol for her arrest.

Daily Times, 5 July 2007

Editorial: Wages of late action against extremism

President General Pervez Musharraf's decision to start a military operation against Lal Masjid at 11 pm on Tuesday was right but late, late in two timelines: the first opportunity was offered six months ago when the trouble started; the second on Tuesday as Lal Masjid students opened fire on the Rangers deployed defensively after the kidnapping of Chinese citizens by the Lal Masjid vigilantes. As soon as the army was deployed, the so called jihad of Lal Masjid leader, Maulana Abdul Aziz, collapsed and the suicide bombers began to surrender. Late action cost Pakistan 21 lives in two days. The Lal

Masjid phenomenon has not been sufficiently understood.

The Hindu, 5 July 2007

Editorial: An encore in a season of blunders

President Pervez Musharraf has got little right during the last few months. The confrontation between security forces and militant students at the Lal Masjid-Jamia Hafsa complex in Islamabad, which took 16 lives, was the culmination of another blunder in what seems to be his season of big errors. It is incomprehensible that the Pakistan government took no action over the open defiance of the law by the mosque and its affiliated madrassa all this time. From January, when the students of the Jamia Hafsa womens seminary forcibly occupied a public library to protest the demolition of several illegal mosques in the capital, their mentor, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, the Lal Masjid administrator, has gained a life of his own. The government backed off from the demolitions.

Daily Times, 6 July 2007

Amnesty offer for all who lay down arms

ISLAMABAD: President General Pervez Musharraf on Thursday approved a plan to extend a general amnesty to about 100 militants still holed up inside Lal Masjid, provided they lay down their weapons and surrender to the security forces, sources told Daily Times. They said the decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Gen Musharraf at the presidential camp office in Rawalpindi. The sources said that the government had decided to withdraw all criminal cases filed since February against the 100 or so militants, including Lal Masjid deputy cleric Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi, provided they surrender. Clashes between security forces and militant students have left 19 people dead and some 100 injured since Tuesday morning, according to official figures..

Dawn, 6 July 2007

Judgment will be historic, says Ramday

ISLAMABAD, July 5: Justice Khalil ur Rehman Ramday, who is heading a 13 member larger bench hearing a petition by Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry challenging the filing of presidential reference against him, on Thursday hinted that the verdict, whenever came, would be historic. If it comes, the judgment will be historical, Justice Ramday observed, but hastened to add that it judgment would definitely come. The observation was made when federal governments counsel Malik Mohammad Qayyum said the burden on this bench was immense. No, we are not in a habit of carrying so much burden, Justice M. Javed Buttar observed in a lighter vein, adding that the judgment would not run through 500 or 1,000 pages rather we would cut it short. Justice Ramday compared the role of judiciary with that of doctors who prescribed and removed diseases from human bodies after diagnosis. But, he regretted that while in the case of doctors patients lay down happily to open their bodies for operation, the judiciary faced resistance and criticism when it did something for collective good of the nation.

The Nation, 6 July 2007

Editorial: Appeal for rationality

IT was hoped that after Maulana Abdul Azis abject escape from the beleaguered Lal

Masjid, his second in command would surrender rather than endanger the lives of hundreds of students, including children that still remain inside the seminary. It now appears that Ghazi Abdur Rasheed is unwilling to do so without being ensured of some sort of reprieve for himself and his close aides. Putting the lives of so many young people who depend on him at stake for personal reasons is highly selfish. The Lal Masjid clerics should have displayed courage to face the consequences of their folly instead of absconding or seeking guarantees for themselves. They misled the students of an impressionable age through empty rhetoric, made them undertake acts in violation of the law of the land, which created a perception at home and abroad that the government was unable to establish its writ. One of their Quixotic adventures so annoyed Beijing, which strictly avoids commenting on Pakistan's internal affairs, that it demanded stern action against them.

Indian Express, 6 July 2007

Lal Masjid blues

The tussle in Pakistan between students and President Musharrafs troops has received extensive coverage. National Herald's Qaumi Awaz, in an editorial on July 3, has criticised the occupants of the mosque for not responding to Musharrafs pleas. The paper says that the general had opened many channels, but he didn't get a response. Even the Imam of the Kaaba's fatwa that suicide was haraam un-Islamic, went unheeded. Delhi's Hindustan Express in an editorial on July 5 says, it must be remembered that Lal Masjid was established by the late Zia ul Haq, who had provided facilities for separate madrassas for men and women. It adds that Pakistani politics today is hostage to the CIA. Delhi daily, Jadeed Khabar, on July 3 says that, this is the result of the Pakistani government trying to deflect attention from the situation created by the movement around Justice Chowdhry... the power that should have been directed at ending anti-Islamic forces is being used against Muslims themselves..

The Tribune, 6 July 2007

Opinion: Why the Musharraf System will stay in Pak (Stephen P Cohen)

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is widely viewed as a military strongman who should be pressed to hold free and fair elections this year. Both the characterization of Musharraf and the policy recommendation are misguided. Musharraf's problem is that he has failed to act swiftly and ruthlessly to set Pakistan's politics on a proper course, and he knows better than his critics that given the complexity of Pakistan's internal problems, the holding of free and fair elections might not check Pakistan's drift toward extremism. Musharraf does deserve criticism for the deterioration of Pakistani civil society. About his only defense is that things were worse under his predecessor, the insecure Nawaz Sharif.

Daily Times, 6 July 2007

Editorial: Plight of expatriate Muslims

The abortive acts of terrorism in England and Scotland this week have led to arrests of suspects in which, fortunately, there are no Pakistanis. Nonetheless, despite the fact that all Pakistani organisations in the United Kingdom have condemned the car bombings, the walls in Glasgow are scrawled with kill the Pakis slogans. For once, though, Pakistan was

relieved that the car bombers were not Pakistanis and hopefully none of the men caught so far came to Pakistan to get training and orientation in a seminary, as has been happening in the past. The crisis relates to expatriate Muslim communities living in the West or in countries described as Western in civilisation. The bad news from Australia has been trickling in for some months and now the government there is inclining to the view that the Muslim youth there will probably embrace extremism to such an extent that it may affect Australian values and culture adversely..

Daily Times, 7 July 2007

Musharraf escapes yet another assassination bid

ISLAMABAD: President General Pervez Musharraf escaped yet another attempt on his life on Friday morning when around 36 rounds fired at his aircraft from a submachine gun in Rawalpindi missed their target. However, the Inter Services Public Relations ISPR denied that the presidents plane had been attacked. Police said that the presidents plane took off from the Chaklala airbase for flood hit areas of Balochistan and Sindh at around 10 15am and came under fire soon thereafter. The rounds were fired by a sub machinegun 10.62 installed on the roof of a two storey house, Fazal Manzil, in Asghar Mall not far from Islamabad Airport and the Chaklala airbase. Police, army and intelligence agencies rushed to the house soon after the attack and seized a submachine gun, two anti aircraft guns with tripods and two satellite antennas.

Dawn, 7 July 2007

Ghazi, militants vow to fight till bitter end

ISLAMABAD, July 6: Security forces persisted in their plan of softening their target in Lal Masjid on the fourth day on Friday with heavy firing and tear gas shelling amid indications that the besieged cleric, Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi, and his hardcore lieutenants had decided to fight till the end, and not to surrender. Sounds of explosions and firing were heard throughout the day in the Sector G 6 curfew zone and nearby areas with heavy exchanges of firing between the security forces and Lal Masjid militants. Movement of armoured personnel carriers continued in the areas around the mosque. The misery of the residents who have been stranded in the curfew zone for four days was compounded on Friday when the authorities suspended gas supply to the area in order to further mount pressure on Lal Masjid. The troops conducted the longest spell of firing and shelling on the mosque, lasting two hours from 10am to noon, and another attack was carried out at 6pm and two blasts were heard.

Dawn, 7 July 2007

Editorial: Image and reality

NO one has done more to defame the system of religious instruction in Pakistan and strengthen the anti madressah lobby in the world than the two Lal Masjid brothers. Since 9/11, madressahs in Pakistan have become the focus of world attention, even though nothing has been proved conclusively that the pilots and the brains behind the 9/11 catastrophe ever had any connection with madressahs in this country. As the history of madressahs in South Asia shows, these institutions barring some exceptions traditionally had nothing to do with politics or violence. At a higher level, the madressahs have produced some of the subcontinents outstanding scholars of Islam; at a lower level, they

have provided not only education but lodging and boarding to children from low income groups.

The Hindu, 7 July 2007

Opinion: The last stand at the Lal Masjid (N Subramanian)

Since January, if there was one image that dominated life in Islamabad, it was that of hundreds of stick wielding women, clad in all covering black veils with only a narrow slit for the eyes, standing menacingly on the balconies and roof of the Jamia Hafsa seminary, ready to do battle in the name of Islam. On Wednesday, that image came crashing down as one of their mentors in chief was caught trying to flee disguised in the head to toe veil known as the niqab. From television footage of the dramatic capture, Abdul Aziz, the chief cleric of the mosque, cut a pathetic and absurd figure as the head piece of the veil was pulled off, leaving him clothed in the crumpled black robe. But for five to six months, Mr. Aziz and his brother Abdul Rashid Ghazi held Islamabad hostage to their vigilantism, and their threats of suicide bombings and jihad, relayed every Friday from the minarets of Lal Masjid which they jointly ran.

Daily Times, 7 July 2007

Editorial: What next after Lal Masjid?

There is relief in the international community at the decision finally made in Islamabad to confront the clerics of Lal Masjid and hold them accountable under the law for their offences against the innocent citizens of the capital city. China and the UK, both threatened by mullah power in Pakistan in different ways, were the first to congratulate President General Pervez Musharraf for grasping the nettle before it could lead to more clerical rebellion. Significantly, the Indian prime minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, said that forward movement on the bilateral Indo Pak peace process was hampered by Pakistans internal trouble, an indirect way of saying that if you sort out the jihadis and mullahs then we can be in business again. As the decision making process in Islamabad ground on slowly at the outset of the crisis, some parts of Pakistan ruled by the clergy began to show signs of agitation.

Kashmir Times, 7 July 2007

Opinion: Lal Masjid: The state strikes back (D Suba Chandran)

July 5 is a momentous day in Pakistan's history. On this very day, Ziaul Haq organized a coup, over throwing a democratic government, ultimately leading to the hanging of Zulfikar Bhutto. More importantly, the process of misusing Islam for internal and external objectives began ever since. On 5 July 2007, exactly thirty years later, Musharraf another military ruler, decided to take action against a radical mosque. A strategic shift or a historical irony, only the subsequent events will prove on whether this event place Pakistan back on track. But the fact is, the Lal Masjid bluff has been finally called off by the State, after dilly dallying since the beginning of this year. The result was dramatic; after numerous bravado and chest thumping, Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi, the deputy head of Lal Masjid was reported to have told the Geo News through telephone: I am ready to surrender along with all the students including females, we are ready to handover Lal mosque to Auqaf department and Jamia Faraidia will be handed over to the Wafaqul Madaris.

Dawn, 8 July 2007

Musharraf tells Hafsa brigade to surrender or die

QUETTA, July 7: President Gen Pervez Musharraf on Saturday warned the militants barricaded in Lal Masjid to surrender or be prepared to get killed. The government has the power and could do everything, including killing them, but it is demonstrating great patience to save human lives, he said. The president was talking to journalists in the Sani Shoran area of Balochistan after visiting the flood-affected areas of Jhal Magsi, Jaffarabad and Bolan districts. He said the people barricaded in the mosque had defamed Islam and Pakistan, but the government had exercised restraint despite having capability of ousting and killing them.

Daily Times, 8 July 2007

Ghazi says Musharraf attacker called him

ISLAMABAD: Abdul Rashid Ghazi said on Saturday he had received a call from an unidentified man who said he tried to shoot down President Pervez Musharraf's plane in revenge for the crackdown, AFP reported. I received a telephone call from a man I did not know, Ghazi told AFP by telephone. He said, I fired at Musharraf's plane just a while ago. He said that Musharraf survived, said Ghazi. Ghazi said the man asked him to tell the media about the incident, and that he replied, I am inside, its better if you tell them yourself.

Dawn, 8 July 2007

Opinion: Clerics, generals and civilian rule (Kunwar Idris)

FORUMS of democracy and human rights all over are debating how to bring about a truly representative government. At the same time, party leaders and caucuses are busy cutting deals towards the same end. The lawyers have imparted a great impetus to this process by backing their pleadings in the Supreme Court with frequent inter city cavalcades, unprecedented in that they are led by the Chief Justice of Pakistan and never was the public ovation so spontaneous and sustained. The debates, marches and intrigues all go to fuel rumours in the marketplace and gossip in the drawing rooms. Several private TV channels have given birth to a new generation of political pundits. People of all classes and vocations are putting across their viewpoint or venting their anger. The government had to learn it the hard and tragic way not to try to silence or stop them.

Daily Times, 8 July 2007

EDITORIAL: Moment of reckoning for Musharraf, army and media

The Islamabad establishment has decided to go into denial over two incidents that were clearly linked to the operation against Lal Masjid: an abortive attempt to bring down the presidential aircraft in Rawalpindi, and the killing of a major and a lieutenant of the Pakistan army in Malakand. On Friday, President General Pervez Musharraf's plane escaped getting hit when it flew over Rawalpindi after take-off from Chaklala airport. Three bearded men had fired at the plane with a sub machine gun and an anti-aircraft gun from a house in Rawalpindi before fleeing, shouting Allah Akbar. Security personnel quickly located the house from where the shots had been fired and recovered a submachine gun, two anti aircraft guns with tripods, and two satellite antennas.

The Nation, 8 July 2007

Editorial: Firing on plane

IT is a matter of satisfaction that President Musharraf is safe and sound. There were rumours on Friday of a rocket attack on his plane, which were denied by the DG ISPR. Later in the day, however, it was confirmed that machine gun shots had been fired from a house right beneath the flight path when the Presidents plane was either airborne or about to take off. Security agencies subsequently recovered two anti aircraft guns, a light machine gun and about 30 fired shells from a house rented out to a man whose ID card was found to have been fake. In view of the fact that a rocket attack was launched on Gen Zias plane also from a nearby locality, one had expected that security agencies would have kept a special eye on the sensitive area from which planes taking off can be targeted. That this has not happened is a comment on their efficiency..

Daily Times, 9 July 2007

Eight top terrorists inside Lal Masjid

ISLAMABAD: Eight high value terrorists wanted by Pakistan and other countries are holed up inside Lal Masjid, while another was killed by security forces in the ongoing operation, Religious Affairs Minister Ejazul Haq said on Sunday. Nine suspected terrorists said to be far more dangerous and harmful than Al Qaeda and Taliban operatives were hiding inside the mosque compound, Haq told a press conference here. He refused to reveal the identities of these militants. He said that security forces killed one of these suspected terrorists inside Lal Masjid on the second day of the ongoing operation. He was the mastermind of the failed suicide attack on Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz in Attock in 2005, he said..

Dawn, 9 July 2007

MPC declaration asks Musharraf to resign: PPPs stand accommodated

LONDON, July 8: The two day Multi-Party Conference MPC concluded here on Saturday without causing any serious damage to the unity of the participating opposition political parties in the face of bitter disagreements over vital issues among some leading parties, as the conference in one voice asked General Pervez Musharraf to immediately resign to pave way for fair and free elections under a neutral caretaker government. The MPC reached a consensus resolution called the APC declaration after a four hour delay during which leaders of a number of parties were seen trying to bring the PPP on board on the issue of resignation in case President Musharraf carried out his threat to get himself re elected by the current assemblies and also to join a united front from which to launch agitation against the military led government. The PPP succeeded in having its way, more or less.

The Nation, 9 July 2007

Editorial: Standoff continues

With a death toll of at least 24, including a Pakistan Army Lt Colonel, the Lal Masjid standoff continues, with no sign of compromise on either side. Ghazi Abdur Rasheed, earlier thought to be the more pragmatic of the two brothers running the Lal Masjid, has repeatedly expressed that he would rather face martyrdom than give up. He is open,

however, to the option of a safe passage. The government, on the other hand, has taken a break from its six-month-old attitude of near paternal indulgence to the mosque by being absolutely intransigent on the issue, despite the fact that there are scores of hostages holed up inside the Mosques compound.

Daily Times, 9 July 2007

SSG commander killed in Lal Masjid stand off

ISLAMABAD: A tense calm prevailed at the besieged mosque after a Special Services Group SSG commander was killed while trying to blast holes in the outer walls of the mosque complex overnight. Lt Col Haroonul Islam was killed, while a major and two soldiers were injured, as commandos tried to breach the walls to allow women and children kept hostage by hardcore militants inside to escape in. There were fewer gunbattles between militant students holed up in Lal Masjid and security forces on Sunday compared to previous days. Rangers stormed the press club camp office in Islamabad and took away two employees. The ISPR director general later ordered an investigation.

Daily Times, 9 July 2007

Opinion: Musharraf has to go (Dr Siddiq)

President Musharraf is delaying the growth of the political process by continuing in power. He might have a vision about the nation's interest but the fact remains that he is now hindering the growth of the political system. Leonid Brezhnev, former Soviet president, once went to Bulgaria. To make him happy, the Bulgarian government decided to arrange for him his favourite sport of bear hunting. Unfortunately, the animal captured for the purpose managed to escape. To avoid diplomatic embarrassment, the bureaucrats quickly got hold of a bear from a near-by circus. But the circus bear, as trained, snatched a bicycle from one of the men and started to ride it. Brezhnev, who by then was sitting atop a tree, swooned from astonishment and fell down. The fall caused a greater diplomatic disaster.

Indian Express, 9 July 2007

Editorial: Generally speaking

Whatever may be the true dimension of the last weeks assassination attempt against Pervez Musharraf, there is no denying that he has put himself at greater risk after his belated confrontation with the radical clerics of the Lal Masjid in Islamabad. Last Fridays incidents constitute the most serious threat to Musharrafs life since the two bold attempts on his motorcade in December 2003. In the charmed life that Musharraf leads, the greater the threat to his life the stronger the international support to him. India, which used to resent this trend, now finds itself in the same position as the US and the West too heavily invested in the persona of Musharraf. It is tragic that Musharraf has not put the generous Western backing and peace on his eastern borders to more productive use at home.

Dawn, 10 July 2007

Breakthrough in sight: Lal Masjid Jamia Hafsa standoff

ISLAMABAD, July 9: The government on Monday agreed to allow safe passage to Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi and his family to end the eight-day standoff. In a late night

decision, President Gen Pervez Musharraf was reported to have asked the ulema committee and PML president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain to offer safe passage to the cleric, who is holding hundreds of students hostage in the mosque-madrasah complex. It is expected that Abdul Rashid Ghazi and his elder brother Maulana Abdul Aziz, who was arrested while trying to escape wearing a burqa, will be sent to their ancestral village Rojan in Rajanpur district along with their families.

Daily Times, 10 July 2007

Militants want to split Musharraf from China

ISLAMABAD: Militants linked to a besieged Islamabad mosque have targeted Chinese nationals working in Pakistan in an attempt to split President Pervez Musharraf from his all weather ally, analysts say. Musharraf faces growing pressure from Beijing to protect the reported 5,000 Chinese in the country after three Chinese citizens were shot dead by suspected militant gunmen near Peshawar on Sunday. Security officials said it was a targeted killing, with immediate suspicion on a hardline group from northwestern Pakistan with close ties to Lal Masjid in Islamabad, the Tehreek e Nifaz e Shariat e Mohammadi. The siege of the Lal Masjid, which has so far claimed 24 lives and thrown the country into crisis, was sparked when its students kidnapped seven Chinese acupuncturists who they accused of prostitution.

Dawn, 10 July 2007

Editorial: The opposition unites

IN spite of the differences, some of them acute, the opposition parties have finally managed to come out with a common strategy against the military led government. The four hour delay in signing the joint declaration was due to differences over the resignation issue in case President Pervez Musharraf decides to have himself re elected by the existing assemblies. The PPP already believed to be in secret negotiations with the government did not wish to be categorical about its parliamentarians quitting the assemblies, as the other parties apparently seem determined to do if the general president goes ahead with his plans. The result was a vague paragraph which pledges united action, including the use of the option of resignations.

The Hindu, 10 July 2007

Pakistan promises security for Chinese nationals (N Subramanian)

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan said on Monday that it was taking steps to provide security to Chinese nationals living in this country following the killing of three Chinese men in Peshawar in the North West Frontier Province, with the government not ruling out that it was in retaliation to the stand-off at the capital's Lal Masjid. Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam said at her weekly briefing that nothing could yet be said of the link between the attack and the Lal Masjid stand off. That would be premature to say [that there was a link]. Investigations are continuing into the attack, she said. President Pervez Musharraf expressed condolences to Beijing for the killings. He condemned the attack and promised to act against the culprits.

Indian Express, 10 July 2007

Opinion: Generally undisturbed (Ayesha Siddiq)

The All Parties Conference in London is unlikely to give Musharraf a sleepless night. It framed the faultlines dividing the opposition to the general The All Parties Conference APC organised by Pakistans former and now exiled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took place in London on July 7 to 8 in which about seventy odd politicians from all kinds of parties participated. After about two days of deliberations the participants managed to produce a watered-down declaration in which there was consensus on two major points: that is, condemnation of the ethnic party, MQM and that Musharraf must take off his uniform and hold free and fair elections. The other noticeable aspect of the conference was the input of the Baluch nationalists who behaved maturely and gave balanced statements on their position vis a vis the regime.

Daily Times, 10 July 2007

Editorial: APC's anti-climactic roadmap

Unfortunately, the all parties opposition conference in London has not delivered on the money spent on it by Pakistan's politicians. The joint declaration issued on Sunday had to be longwinded on the statement of already known political emotion of the opposition politicians because it could not produce a terse action plan on how to get President General Pervez Musharraf out of the driving seat in Pakistan and start the democratic system again. The APC declaration repeats the contents of the ARD Charter of Democracy with condemnatory frills attached to make up for the lack of a consensual chronology of joint action. After the acceptance of the Charter of Democracy by the opposition parties, it was anticipated that the anti Musharraf emotion would be translated into a movement with clear milestones pointing to the ouster of the declared enemy. But the idea of the movement itself was left vague to allow for a variety of interpretations by the participating leaders.

Dawn, 11 July 2007

Its all over as Ghazi is killed

ISLAMABAD, July 10: Rebel cleric Abdul Rashid Ghazi was killed as a blitz led by army commandos almost crushed the last stand of religious militants at Islamabad's Lal Masjid Jamia Hafsa compound on Tuesday after the failure of last minute peace moves led to fierce battles that the government said took at least 58 lives on both sides. Sporadic gunfire and blasts were still being heard, till our going to press, from the curfew bound complex in the centre of the capital, after government spokesmen said at least 50 militants and eight troops were killed on a day of the most intense fighting of the week old operation, which sent shockwaves across the country and whose handling could cost the government politically.

Daily Times, 11 July 2007

Govt right in confronting militants: BB

ISLAMABAD: Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto told the British Broadcasting Corporation BBC on Tuesday that the Pakistan government was left with no choice but to use force against the Lal Masjid administration, and it had been right in confronting the militants. She said that Pakistan was facing being taken over by militants if President Pervez Musharraf's dictatorship continued. She said she was frightened for the future of the people of Pakistan. Unfortunately, a military dictatorship needs the external crutch of

a militant threat to justify its existence to the international community, she told Sky News television.

Dawn, 11 July 2007

Security alert all over country

ISLAMABAD, July 10: The government tightened security in major cities and at sensitive sites immediately after gunbattles between law enforcement agencies and the Lal Masjid militants ended on Tuesday. According to sources, security along the Pak Afghan frontier was beefed up while areas along borders between Punjab and the North West Frontier Province NWFP and tribal areas were under strict surveillance to stop the entry of supporters of the Lal Masjid militants, they added. Foreign nationals, especially Chinese, have been advised to restrict their movement and avoid going to public places and gatherings without adequate extra security, the sources said. They said that major cities, including the provincial capitals, had been put on high alert to avert any untoward incident. Police and paramilitary forces have been posted at police stations, sensitive installations, places of worship and airports.

Daily Times, 11 July 2007

Editorial: Lessons of Lal Masjid

As the Lal Masjid saga moved to its endgame on Monday, the clergy represented by Wifaqul Madaris of the Deobandi school of thought decided to split from the Musharraf government. The delegation of clerics led by the old Taliban admirer Maulana Rafi Usmani of Darul Ulum Karachi announced that it was disappointed by the way the government had reacted to their efforts to resolve the Lal Masjid standoff. They kept the agreed plan secret but the federal state minister of information Mr Tariq Azim disclosed that the government could not accept the clerical position that the abandoned seminaries of Lal Masjid be handed over to the Wifaq instead of the law. As the troops finally broke into the seminary held by Maulana Abdur Rashid Ghazi and his foreign terrorists, the nation was agonised over what should have been done.

Dawn, 11 July 2007

US supports Lal Masjid operation

WASHINGTON, July 10: The United States on Tuesday regretted the loss of lives in the Lal Masjid operation but blamed militants for not choosing a peaceful solution. Talking to Dawn, a State Department official also noted that the Pakistani government and security forces showed remarkable restraint since the situation began in January, providing many opportunities to everyone inside the Red Mosque to resolve the crisis peacefully. The official described the operation as Pakistans internal security matter, adding that each government, concerned about the security of its citizens, must make its own decision about when to end negotiations and when to act to end a crisis.

Indian Express, 11 July 2007

Post op care

In the immediate reckoning, Pervez Musharraf's move to decisively storm Islamabad's Lal Masjid Operation Silence in the early hours of Tuesday is a courageous one. This is not because of the timing. Hindsight is a cruel interrogator, and it is bound to

show up the governments action as coming months too late. Clerics and students at the complex have been thumbing their noses at the writ of the state all this year, announcing their parallel courts and regularly abducting persons in their anti vice campaign. All this within a miles radius from Pakistans key federal offices. And certainly, in the last week, with talks failing between government and mosque emissaries and with Musharraf talking of dreaded militants being present in Lal Masjid, there was the inevitability of armed action. Musharrafs move is courageous, nonetheless, because its very delay will be seen to commit him to a sterner campaign against militants and vigilantes elsewhere in Pakistan.

Dawn, 12 July 2007

Mystery shrouds exact casualty figures: Resistance wiped out: ISPR Media visit put off

ISLAMABAD, July 11: The government said on Wednesday that army commandos had wiped out all militant resistance in Islamabads Lal Masjid compound after an eight day operation, but withheld from the media some vital information about the civilian casualty toll. A witness, who had access to the two buildings, told Dawn of having seen piles of bodies lying on the floors. A promised media trip to the site was put off for a day, fuelling speculation that the government was buying time to remove some telltale signs. The top military spokesman put the death toll of militants since the start of the operation on July 3 at 73 and that of troops at 10. But other accounts, including one by a witness, said the civilian toll could be much higher.

Indian Express, 12 July 2007

Opinion: Death of a cleric (Mira Sethi)

Like Danny Pearls abductor Omar Sheikh, Abdul Rashid had an unlikely start. As a child, his father Maulana Abdullah enrolled him at a madrassa but the young Rashid ran away. Later he went on to study at Pakistan's prominent Quaid e Azam university, graduating with a masters degree in international relations. He applied for a job at the Ministry of Education and got it. Unlike his elder brother Abdul Aziz who complied with his father's wishes, Rashid refused to grow a beard and refrained from using the title Hafiz someone who has memorised the Quran. His behaviour irked his father to the extent that he made Abdul Aziz the sole heir in his will. Rashids behaviour changed after his fathers death. In 1998 Maulana Abdullah was assassinated by a gunman from a rival Islamic sect in the courtyard of Lal Masjid.

The Nation, 12 July 2007

Editorial: Now that its over

REFLECTION on the Lal Masjid crisis centres around two themes; one looking forward, the other a bit more retrospective. The first is an expression of concern about any possible fallout in the future, the second is an evaluation of how the government handled the issue. A day into the action against the Lal Masjid, voices from within the renegade mosque threatened of suicide attacks conducted by associates all over the country if the operation was not stopped immediately. The government called the bluff. Sure enough, the attacks never took place. With growing casualties, however, the sympathies of the militant right kept growing. These sympathies have sustained spoiler episodes like the Khateeb

attempted escape in a burqa and reports of students being held inside the mosque against their will.

Dawn, 12 July 2007

Counsel told to wind up arguments by 20th

ISLAMABAD, July 11: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it would wind up by July 20 the hearing of the petition of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry challenging the filing of the presidential reference against him. Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday, who heads a 13 member larger bench of the court hearing the petition, observed that the legal counsel for both the government and the petitioner should conclude their arguments by July 20. The bench said the governments counsel, Malik Mohammad Qayyum, Sharifuddin Pirzada and Attorney General Makhdoom Ali Khan, should complete their arguments by Wednesday to give an opportunity to Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan, the counsel for the chief justice, to reply to the points raised by them from Thursday.

Daily Times, 12 July 2007

Opp parties form alliance without PPP

LAHORE: A special meeting of the all parties conference APC held in London on Wednesday by the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz PML N has formed an All Parties Democratic Alliance APDA for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, Geo news reported. The channel reported that Makhdoom Amin Fahim, leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party delegation, rejected his partys participation in the APDA, saying that the formation of a new alliance was not on the APC agenda. The channel said that PML N chief Nawaz Sharif, who was chairing the meeting, said the APDA was not an alliance for the forthcoming general elections. Sharif denied that the PPP delegation had refused to become part of the APDA, saying that the PPP team wanted some time to discuss the issue with the party leadership.

Daily Times, 12 July 2007

Editorial: Lal Masjid and the APC

The MMA chief, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, has taken umbrage at Benazir Bhuttos support of the Musharraf governments operation against Lal Masjid and has declared that he will not attend the APCs supplementary meeting in London as a token of protest. He did it as an afterthought during a TV interview, as if he was looking for an excuse to take himself out of a gathering where he was being shanghaied into adopting tough anti Musharraf postures. First of all, what was it in the text of Ms Bhuttos statement that offended the Maulana She told the BBC that the Pakistan government was left with no choice but to use force against the Lal Masjid administration, and it was right in confronting the militants. But she also said that Pakistan faces being taken over by militants if President Pervez Musharraf's dictatorship continues. Clearly, the good Maulana conveniently seemed to focus on the first part but not the second that would have satisfied the APC participants.

Dawn, 13 July 2007

Seminaries use as terror haven won't be allowed: Musharraf says operation was

inevitable

ISLAMABAD, July 12: President Gen Pervez Musharraf on Thursday defended the Lal Masjid operation and declared that no mosque or seminary would be allowed to be misused like Jamia Hafsa. This is our resolve. I appeal to the moderate forces and ulema of the Wafaqul Madaris to support the governments efforts to deal with terrorism and religious extremism, he said in an address on television and radio. He said that after the discovery of links between the Lal Masjid militants and radical elements in the NWFP and tribal areas, the federal government had decided to reorganise police, Levies, Khasadar, Frontier Corps and Frontier Constabulary, making them formidable organisations capable of dealing with militants..

Daily Times, 13 July 2007

Reference transfer to SJC: Aitzaz wants president, PM in the dock

ISLAMABAD: Aitzaz Ahsan, counsel for Chief Justice of Pakistan CJP Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, told the Supreme Court on Thursday that if the reference against his client was sent to the Supreme Judicial Council for adjudication, he would seek to summon the president and prime minister as witnesses. I will ask the court to let me summon the president and prime minister for cross examination if the reference is left with the SJC so that I can contest my case on all available evidence, said Ahsan, after Malik Qayyum, counsel for the federation, said that he would rely solely on documentary evidence if the case were referred to the SJC.

Dawn, 13 July 2007

Operation likely in tribal areas

TANK/PESHAWAR, July 12: The army started deploying troops in NWFPs southern districts, adjoining the Waziristan region, amid reports that an operation to curb militancy and extremism was imminent. Sources told Dawn on Thursday that 12,000 troops, backed by artillery units, were moved to Tank and Dera Ismail Khan districts from Okara. Troops took over the building of a vocational college in Tank city and were stationed in paramilitary forts in the remote district. Security forces were also being deployed in Lakki Marwat and Bannu districts, considered to be hotbed of militancy.

Indian Express, 13 July 2007

Opinion: So many roads from Lal Masjid (N Sethi)

The military operation has only sharpened the choices before Pakistani state and society. The military operation against the Lal Masjid extremists is over. But most Pakistanis are worried about its fallout. Indeed, a post mortem reveals disturbing fissures in Pakistani state and society with far reaching consequences. One, there is a split among those Pakistanis who say they had it coming, that the writ of the state must be enforced at all costs, that religious extremism is a curse, and those who nevertheless insist that the militants should have been given safe passage in order to save the lives of women and children. Naturally, the latter include mullahs and conservatives of all shades. But anti Musharraf politicians are also trying to exploit the situation. The only divergent voice is that of Benazir Bhutto.

The Hindu, 13 July 2007

Opinion: The Masjid & the mindset of despair (Robert Jensen)

The Lal Masjid story is framed as crazed radical Islamist forces challenging relatively restrained government forces. But there is much more to it. For my first three days in Pakistan, no conversation could go more than a few minutes without a reference to the crisis at the Lal Masjid compound. I had landed in Islamabad on July 8, and by then it seemed clear that government forces would eventually storm the mosque and the attached women's seminary to end the confrontation with fundamentalist clerics and their supporters. The final assault was finally unleashed as two companions and I drove to Lahore as part of a lecture tour. During several hours of intense discussion in the car, they gave me background and details that explained the real tragedy of the conflict.

Daily Times, 14 July 2007

Musharraf orders crackdown on religious extremism

ISLAMABAD: President General Pervez Musharraf on Friday directed all federal and provincial governments to crackdown on religious extremism and militancy in the country, reiterating the governments determination to free the country from terrorism. Chairing a high level meeting to review law and order in the country, the president directed the provincial governments to ensure law and order by any means necessary, adding that the federal government would support them in this regard. Referring to growing extremism in NWFP, he directed the provincial law enforcement and intelligence agencies to combat militancy by carrying out coordinated efforts in the tribal and settled areas of NWFP.

Dawn, 14 July 2007

European Parliament urges re election by new assemblies

LONDON, July 13: In what appeared to be an unusual move, the European Parliament has sounded a warning to President Musharraf through a 19-point resolution to desist from getting himself re elected from the outgoing parliament and also asked him to give up his army post. The relevant clauses of the resolution said: The European Parliament urges the government of Pakistan to return to democratic government by holding free, fair and democratic elections by the end of the year and warns against the imposition of emergency rule or other measures to suppress freedom of speech, association, assembly or movement and Encourages President Musharraf to respect the existing Constitution by allowing the new assemblies to hold presidential elections and by relinquishing his post of army chief, which he had previously agreed to do in an undertaking to the EU..

Dawn, 14 July 2007

Editorial: Finding the way forward

AS the dust settles on the Lal Masjid operation, the direct link between madressahs and militancy becomes apparent. The country is at a crossroads and decisive action against militant madressahs and preachers calling for jihad within Pakistan can be delayed no longer. If clerics running a mosque in Islamabad can stockpile weapons, turn their madressahs into hideouts for hard core militants and engage the security forces in a fight to the finish, the activities of their counterparts in more remote areas can only be imagined. In his address to the nation on Thursday, President Pervez Musharraf declared that establishing the governments writ had become inevitable. Here it can be asked why

this was not the priority from day one.

The Nation, 14 July 2007

Editorial: Reforming seminaries

THE President did well to admit in his TV address delivered on the completion of the Lal Masjid operation that this was an occasion to mourn rather than rejoice. That only 3,300 of the nearly 5,000 seminary students managed to get out alive and over 1,000 remain unaccounted for have led some to claim that the casualties are much higher than 75. It is therefore not enough to express remorse. What is needed is to seriously take into account the acts of omission and commission that led to the tragedy. It would not do to urge people to forget the blunders and support the operation, which according to Gen Musharraf had become inevitable for Pakistan. Had the government acted firmly when the students occupied the Children Library they would not have been encouraged to challenge the writ of the state again and again.

Daily Times, 14 July 2007

Editorial: Pakistan's madrassa troubles

President General Pervez Musharraf told the nation Thursday that his government would not allow any madrassa like the Lal Masjid complex to exist. He pledged that seminaries spreading militancy, extremism and terrorism in the country would be crushed. He also referred to his old stance on the subject, saying that not all madrassas were seats of defiance and revolt against the state, and lamented that his defence of the seminaries to the outside world was undermined by Lal Masjid. It is unfortunate that many Pakistanis, however well meaning, still think that unless a madrassa declares its defiance of the state and mobilises its acolytes as vigilante groups, it is actually making a positive contribution to the task of educating the poor population of Pakistan. The argument is that since the state is unable or unwilling to provide for the poor, the madrassas fill this void and thereby perform a useful educational function.

Dawn, 15 July 2007

Troops come under fire across NWFP: 24 soldiers die in Waziristan suicide bombing Malakand varsity attacked

MIRAMSHAH, July 14: Twenty four soldiers were killed and 26 others wounded in North Waziristan on Saturday after a suicide bomber rammed an explosives-packed car into a convoy of the Frontier Constabulary. The attack coincided with a dramatic surge in attacks on government and security agencies installations across the NWFP, including a failed attempt to detonate a car bomb in Peshawar near a bank run by armed forces personnel. The escalation in violence came barely a day after local religious hardliners vowed to avenge the Lal Masjid killings.

Daily Times, 15 July 2007

Musharraf has failed to contain Al Qaeda: US

LAHORE: President Pervez Musharraf has failed to contain Al Qaeda and must regain control over areas bordering Afghanistan, said Stephen Hadley, President George Bush's national security adviser. Answering questions in an interview with Bloomberg Televisions Political Capital with Al Hunt, Hadley said Musharraf's strategy of giving

tribal leaders more autonomy has not worked the way it should have. The US is working with the Pakistani government to thwart the latest threats, Hadley said, adding that the Musharraf government is beginning to take some moves that will reassert control in those areas.

Dawn, 15 July 2007

Hearty welcome for CJ in Lahore

LAHORE, July 14: Lahorites accorded a warm welcome to Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry when he arrived here from Islamabad on Saturday to address the District Bar Association. From the airport, he was taken to the district courts at the head of a huge procession consisting of hundreds of cars, wagons and motorcycles. The motorcade of the chief justice moved towards the venue at a snails pace as a large number of people, raising slogans and dancing to the beat of drums, lined the route. Justice Chaudhry was to address the Bar at 6pm, but his motorcade could cover only one third of the 25-kilometre distance when this report was filed at 11pm. Earlier, the plane carrying Justice Chaudhry landed at 2:51pm, an hour behind schedule.

The Nation, 15 July 2007

Editorial: Talks versus deal

IN her interview with The Nation Ms Bhutto has reiterated some of her familiar positions while taking an ambivalent stand on a number of vital political issues. She has categorically ruled out any compromise with General Musharraf while maintaining that the back channel talks are only aimed at ensuring transparent elections and the restoration of democracy. Politics being the art of the possible, bargaining is an inevitable part of it. There is nothing wrong therefore with attempts at brokering a deal provided this ensures fair and free elections and leads to a genuine transfer of power to the civilian government. The question is if the positions she is taking are going to be helpful in achieving the twin objectives. Ms Bhutto has taken a pragmatic stand over the issue of talks. Pragmatism however carries the danger of tuning into realpolitik sometime characterized by surrender or collusion.

Daily Times, 15 July 2007

EDITORIAL: Bite the bullet

Even as President General Pervez Musharraf told a high level meeting in Islamabad that extremism had to be fought on all fronts, and asked the federal and provincial governments to take tough action against madrassas which are potential Lal Masjids, the clerics and their zealots were out in the streets of all the cities of Pakistan, challenging him to match word with deed. Coupled with this is the fact that 35 people have died at the hands of extremists, many of them soldiers of the Pakistan army and local administration, in the tribal and northern areas of the country since July 3 when the siege of Lal Masjid was ordered and the extremists vowed revenge. Yesterday another eight soldiers were killed when a car loaded with explosives rammed into an army convoy in North Waziristan. Thus, even as troops are being deployed in Swat and the Northern Areas, there is more alarming live coverage on TV channels of bearded zealots shouting defiance.

Daily Times, 16 July 2007

45 dead and 108 injured in suicide bombings in Swat and DI Khan: Religious extremists carry out revenge attacks

PESHAWAR: Up to 45 people were killed and over a hundred injured in suicide bombings targeting security forces in NWFP on Sunday in apparent revenge attacks by extremists for the Lal Masjid operation. Eleven security personnel and six civilians were killed and 47 others injured in Matta, Swat, when suicide bombers smashed two cars packed with explosives into an army convoy, officials said. And 25 people were killed and 61 injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up in the Dera Ismail Khan Police Lines on Sunday, police said. On Saturday, a similar attack on an army convoy in North Waziristan killed 23 paramilitary soldiers. The latest attacks mean some 100 people, mostly from the security forces, have been killed in attacks since July 3, when troops laid siege to Lal Masjid in Islamabad.

Dawn, 16 July 2007

Waziristan peace deal scrapped by militants

MIRAMSHAH, July 15: The local Taliban on Sunday announced scrapping a peace deal they had reached with the government in September last year, warning Khasadar and Levies personnel against performing duties with the military and paramilitary forces in the restive North Waziristan. A Taliban shura statement released here accused the government of derailing the peace process in the region. The government and militants had on September 5, 2006 signed the controversial accord to restore peace in the North Waziristan Agency. The statement said: Taliban had signed the agreement with the government to ensure safety of the life and property of the people. Now, we have decided to scrap the deal for the sake of people. It said that despite the accord, the Taliban had come under attacks in the agency.

The Nation, 16 July 2007

US backs Musharraf

WASHINGTON - The United States Sunday backed President Gen Pervez Musharraf's decision to send troops to regain control of the tribal areas along the Pak Afghan border where al Qaeda and the Taliban are reportedly regrouping. We have provided all appropriate support that we can consistent with Pakistani sovereignty, President George W Bush's National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley said on CNN's Late Edition. On ABC news show This Week, he said he was concerned over suicide bombings in Pakistan as well as reports that militants in the Afghan border region were pulling out of a peace pact with the Pakistan government.

Dawn, 16 July 2007

Editorial: The view from the West

CONSIDERED advice from foreign quarters need not be dismissed as interference in the country's internal affairs. There are solid reasons why the world is interested in Pakistan and its role at any given time in the comity of nations. First there is the country's geopolitical worth, determined not by physical size but location. This was important in the Cold War era from a strategic perspective but is of equal significance in an age dominated by the exigencies of free trade. Much of the oil heading east from the Gulf, for

instance, must pass through or near Pakistani waters. Then there is the question of the country's nuclear assets and who may come to control them in the worst-case scenario. It needs to be examined why Pakistan is seen as a hotbed of Islamist militancy an ally in the war on terror as well as a breeding ground for terrorists. The country's image, which is something of an obsession with the current administration, is not entirely divorced from reality.

Daily Times, 16 July 2007

Editorial: Lal Masjid blowback and the opposition

Two attacks in two days have put the government on notice about the backlash to the Lal Masjid operation. At least 12 security men were killed and over 20 wounded in a suicide attack against a convoy of the Frontier Force and army troops in Swat on Sunday July 15. At least 24 paramilitary troops died and 27 others injured when a suicide bomber rammed an explosives packed car into their convoy on Saturday July 14 in one of the deadliest attacks on the security forces in North Waziristan this year. Army troops also came under attack in Bannu and Dir districts in which a paramilitary soldier was killed by masked gunmen on the Miranshah Bannu road. Suicide bombing has gone up another notch. It is now the explosives packed car which is being used, an Al Qaeda trade mark known in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Daily Times, 17 July 2007

More troops to deploy in NWFP and Tribal Areas

LAHORE: A high level meeting chaired by President Pervez Musharraf on Monday decided to deploy additional forces in NWFP and the tribal areas to combat a surge in militancy in the region, television news channels reported. According to Aaj TV, the government decided to expedite the recruitment of 15,000 troops in the security forces to maintain law and order in NWFP. Some 100 people, mostly security personnel, were killed in three suicide bombings in NWFP and the tribal areas over the weekend, in attacks believed to be linked to the government operation to clear Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa in Islamabad of militants.

Dawn, 17 July 2007

Misconduct charge against CJ withdrawn: Lawyer wants entire reference dropped

ISLAMABAD, July 16: The federal government on Monday withdrew the charge of judicial misconduct against Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. The once voluminous reference with annexure is now reduced to just allegations that the CJ abused his office for securing a government job for his son and privileges/protocol for him. I have instructions from President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz that paragraph 34 at page 14 as well as paragraph 36 g at page 16 may be considered deleted, senior advocate Sharifuddin Pirzada, representing the president, told a 13 member larger bench hearing the CJ's petition. The paragraph 34 deals with the charges of judicial conduct and accuses the chief justice of giving written orders at variance from the verbal orders earlier announced in the open court. It says two such cases have acquired particular notoriety. One of the cases even involves Rs55 million, the deleted paragraph states.

The News, 17 July 2007

Editorial: End of the mullah-military alliance?

The grisly suicide attacks over weekend are not only a reaction to the assault on the Lal Masjid complex but in all probability also the outcome of the end of the so called agreement in North Waziristan where local Taliban and militants have unilaterally scrapped a so called peace deal between them and the government. The devastating death toll of the three attacks seventy and rising inflicted mostly on law-enforcement and security personnel is a strong indication that the militants are looking for a fight with the government. Indirectly, though, the attacks only confirm what sceptics of the Waziristan peace accord had been saying all along: that the area in FATA among others ended up providing a de facto sanctuary to pro Taliban militants and who used the deal to regroup and strengthen themselves.

Daily Times, 17 July 2007

Editorial: Waziristan: all bets are off!

In the aftermath of the Lal Masjid operation, the Taliban militants in North Waziristan Agency have announced an end to the peace deal they had signed with the government last year. They have asserted that the deal committed the government to removing the army and its check posts from the agency and compensating those affected by hostilities, but this undertaking was violated when the Taliban were attacked in a number of incidents and the check-posts were remounted. The Taliban dont want the army and paramilitaries in their areas. They also want the civilian administration through a political agent, the tribal elders and the levies called khasadars, to be practically wound up..

The Nation, 17 July 2007

Editorial: Seek political solution

PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto has expressed fears that the government might use the events after the Lal Masjid operation to postpone the elections. Similar views have been expressed by Leader of the Opposition in NA Maulana Fazlur Rehman. There are many who think any move in the direction would give birth to yet another crisis of great magnitude which would, among other things, hinder the government from dealing with militancy. The security situation which was already unsatisfactory has suddenly deteriorated. The ill conceived and ill conducted Lal Masjid operation has been widely resented in tribal areas and the adjoining settled districts of the NWFP from where the large majority of the seminary students were drawn. There have been deadly suicide attacks on security forces sent to maintain peace.

Dawn, 17 July 2007

Editorial: Give terrorists no quarter

A WEEK after the crackdown on the Lal Masjid and three days after Ayman al Zawahiri asked his followers to hit Pakistan, his suicide bombers have struck. Even though the blasts occurred in Fata and the NWFP, everyone in the country has been shaken to the core. With over 100 dead in the Lal Masjid shootout, the death toll from two days of suicide attacks is too high to bear for this traumatised nation. Deeply troubled, people are appalled that some fiends should resort to barbarism in the name of Islam. Taking exception to the governments handling of the Lal Masjid stand-off is one thing,

massacring innocent people quite another. The way the security forces had a go at the well armed militants holed up in the sacred precincts of a mosque has been widely criticised in the country. This paper has been strongly critical of the governments policies on many vital issues. But it has never believed that killing innocent men, women and children can make the rulers change their policies.

Daily Times, 18 July 2007

Suicide attack kills 16 at CJP rally

ISLAMABAD: A suicide bomber struck outside the venue of a lawyers rally here on Tuesday, killing 16 people and injuring at least 63, including 10 police officials, according to hospital sources. The powerful blast went off at about 8:27pm outside the main entrance of the corridor leading to the venue of the event in F8 Markaz, shortly before Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry was to pass through the site to give a speech to lawyers of the Islamabad District Bar Association. The site was littered with body parts and blood, and at least 13 people died at the scene. Ambulances rushed the injured to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences PIMS and Federal Government Services Hospital, the two major government hospitals of the city. Nine of the injured are in critical condition.

Dawn, 18 July 2007

Why SJC was convened in dead of night, asks SC

ISLAMABAD, July 17: The Supreme Court on Tuesday grappled with the question why the Supreme Judicial Council SJC had restrained Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry ex parte in the dead of night not realising that by doing so it was also depriving a judge of his honour, respect, name and whatever he had. Even when dealing with the case of Mohammad Din euphemism for commoners, courts always gave prior notice to him, but here no notice was issued to the CJ before passing the restraining order, observed Justice Khalilur Rehman Ramday, who is heading a 13 member larger bench hearing a petition filed by Justice Iftikhar challenging the presidential reference against him.

Indian Express, 18 July 2007

Revisiting Lal Masjid

The latest issue of Peoples Democracy has a lengthy article about the storming of Lal Masjid in Islamabad. The fact is that even though the US administration has conveyed its satisfaction, rather approbation, over the way the Musharraf regime handled the situation, doubts still linger in peoples mind about the actual worth of the whole operation. The first and foremost question agitating the people is: why was such a situation allowed to develop in the first place? Wasnt it that the hobnobbing of the countrys militarys rulers with fundamentalists has simply boomeranged? It further points out that one may note that fundamentalist parties have a big base in the province and may at any time incite the tribal people to create trouble. And while it is clear after the Lal Masjid showdown that the fundamentalists are definitely down at the moment, it may be disastrous to presume that they are out.

Dawn, 18 July 2007

Opinion: Lal Masjid: what next? (NA Shaikh)

AND so it has come to pass. The Lal Masjid complex, or as much of it that survived the military onslaught, is now in the hands of the government. The death count is said to be 102, of whom 11 are soldiers and other members of the security forces. Were these deaths avoidable? Could the government have achieved the liberation of the mosque complex through a longer siege and through a continuation of the use of stun grenades and other non lethal devices designed to intimidate and harass the inmates? Could they have been starved out? Pending a fuller investigation, it would seem that the government was right in believing that all those who were in the mosque at the time of the assault were either being held hostage or were intent on martyrdom.

Daily Times, 18 July 2007

Editorial: Where are the liberal fascists?

Some Urdu newspaper columns and one particular TV discussion on Monday came to the ridiculous conclusion that while the world talked of religious extremism in Pakistan, there were liberal fascists also in Pakistan. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Lal Masjid operation, there was much emotion behind the accusation by a particularly motivated breed of commentators that those who wanted society to be liberal and progressive were coercive and violent in their thinking. In this shallow discussion, no distinction was made between state and society, and much of the time it seemed that the discussants were lumping the Musharraf government and civil society liberals in one bag, despite the fact that most liberals are law abiding democrats averse to any military or illegal or unconstitutional dispensation.

Daily Times, 19 July 2007

No emergency, elections on time, media must not sympathise with religious extremists: Only politico-military moderates can thwart radicals: Musharraf

ISLAMABAD: President General Pervez Musharraf hoped the general elections would return moderate forces to parliament with whom he would work to develop a greater national consensus to restore credibility to the political system and take on the forces of religious extremism. That is why, he said, the next general elections were critical for Pakistan and had to be free and fair in order for their results to be accepted as legitimate and representative of the popular will. President Musharraf was talking to a select group of owners and editors of the print and electronic media at his Camp Office in Rawalpindi on Wednesday morning.

Dawn, 19 July 2007

34 killed as govt forces clash with militants

PESHAWAR, July 18: Seventeen soldiers were killed on Wednesday after security forces fought fierce gunbattles with militants, triggered by two separate ambushes in Ghazlamai and Mir Ali areas, the army said. Seventeen soldiers died and 12 wounded in the first ambush by militants in Ghazlamai area. According to an agency report, the army said it had killed 12 militants in the clash at Ghazlamai and another five in a firefight about six hours later in Mir Ali. There were no military casualties from the second clash, the army said. It was a classical guerrilla tactic, a senior government official said while describing the first militant attack. The militants occupied heights, first triggered a roadside bomb to

halt the military convoy and then opened fire on them, the official said.

Dawn, 19 July 2007

US sends conflicting signals on Fata

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK, July 18: The Bush administration is sending conflicting signals to Pakistan on what action it may take against suspected Al Qaeda hideouts in the tribal belt, with the White House saying that the US will not launch direct strikes on those targets and a senior presidential aide saying that no option is off the table. You dont blithely go into another nation and conduct operations, said White House Press Secretary Tony Snow when asked at a briefing whether the US could send troops into the tribal areas to root out Al Qaeda. The way to look at this is that there are no options off the table if that is what is required, said Frances Townsend, Homeland Security Adviser to President George Bush, when asked if the US could send troops into the tribal zone.

The Nation, 19 July 2007

Editorial: Deathly reverberations

MORE than a week since the military operation against the militant stronghold of Lal Masjid ended with a toll of over 100 official figure, its deathly reverberations have not only continued to be felt in different parts of the country but have also grown in intensity. There has been, as a result, a loss of more than 135 other precious lives, most among them innocent people. Only the last two days tally has notched up to 45, 17 of them in Islamabad where the PPP had set up a camp close to the site of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhrys address to welcome him to a lawyers convention on Tuesday. He was on his way to the venue when the suicide attack occurred, but after the brutal incident he decide to offer fateha and did not deliver his speech. The latest attack on the security forces occurred on Wednesday morning when gunmen shot and killed 16 soldiers in Data Khel area, about 40km from Miranshah, North Waziristan; the armys retaliation cost the lives of several attackers.

Daily Times, 19 July 2007

Opinion: Thank God for the Chinese! (Kamran Shafi)

The Mullahs were doing exactly what the Establishment wanted, diverting the publics attention away from the juntas brutal but very stupid assault on the judiciary, until the Chinese government issued several statements that it expected the Pakistanis to protect its citizens in more effective manner and to punish the criminals. Well friends, I certainly am not surprised that the Establishment, led ably as it is by the Commando, has done it, yet again. Yet again has it proved to us and to the world at large that it is ill intentioned and inept and foolish and has two left feet. And that it has neither mind nor will of its own, acting only when kicked in the teeth by one or other of its benefactors, and/or nemeses.

Dawn, 19 July 2007

Editorial: A state of emergency?

TUESDAYs bomb blast that killed 18 persons coincided with a remark by a state minister that the imposition of emergency was one of the options before the government. Speaking on television, Minister of State for Information Tariq Azim said the declaration of a state of emergency was one of the options to enhance the peoples security and

improve the law and order situation. While Mr Azim was perhaps giving us an inkling of the governments thinking, Ms Benazir Bhutto saw the blast as a conspiracy to precipitate the imposition of emergency. Giving her reaction to the carnage in Islamabad that killed many PPP workers, Ms Bhutto said that a hidden hand was trying to create anarchy to pave the way for an emergency.

Daily Times, 20 July 2007

Bombers target Chinese, police, military, 51 killed

QUETTA/PESHAWAR: Suicide bombers struck in the industrial town of Hub in Balochistan, and at a police training centre in Hangu and at a mosque in Kohat in NWFP, on Thursday, killing a total of 51 people and injuring several dozen others. At least 29 people, including seven police officers, were killed and around 50 injured in a suicide attack at the Gadani Bus Stop in Hub at around 8 40am, police said. It was a suicide attack that was targeted at Chinese engineers working in Balochistan, Tariq Masood Khosa, Balochistans Inspector General of Police, told Daily Times. It is premature to say who masterminded the blast. One cant say if it was to avenge the military operation in Jamia Hafsa or was carried out by Baloch insurgents or Taliban elements. All options are under consideration.

Dawn, 20 July 2007

Reference mother of all evils: Aitzaz

ISLAMABAD, July 19: The lead counsel of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry on Thursday described the reference against the CJ as the mother of all evils which would continue to create instability unless squashed completely. Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan opposed the reference by terming it malicious on a clear indication that the bench was going to hand down a judgment on Friday. Mr Ahsan will conclude his reply before the 13 member Supreme Court bench, hearing the CJs challenge to the reference against him, to the points raised by the government counsel after which the bench is likely to close its 42 day long hearing with a short order.

Daily Times, 20 July 2007

US might strike in Pakistan: White House

NASHVILLE: The White House on Thursday refused to rule out striking at suspected terrorist targets inside Pakistan and would not say whether US forces would first seek permission from Islamabad. Asked whether US President George W Bush had ruled out US military action inside Pakistan, spokesman Tony Snow replied: We never rule out any options, including striking actionable targets. Asked whether Bush would first seek authorisation from President General Pervez Musharraf, Snow told reporters: Those are matters that are best not discussed publicly. Bushs top counter terrorism adviser at the White House recently suggested that the United States did not get all of the cooperation it hoped for from Pakistan in the global war on terrorism.

Dawn, 20 July 2007

Editorial: Fighting terrorism

LET us accept it: the government has been unable to contain the backlash vowed by the Taliban as a revenge for the Lal Masjid crackdown. Not that the various deals struck with

the recalcitrant elements had worked satisfactorily. There were attacks on the security forces here and there, besides bomb blasts at public places. Nevertheless, the understanding worked out by Governor Ali Jan Mohammad Orakzai in September last and earlier this year had to some extent a positive impact on the security situation. However, after the successful operation against the Lal Masjid militants, the Taliban and their supporters, egged on by Ayman al Zawahiri, have unleashed a new wave of suicide attacks from Fata and the NWFP to the federal capital, and evidently Pakistans military establishment is unable to do anything about it..

The Nation, 20 July 2007

Editorial: Drawing battle lines

UNCERTAINTY generated by rumours of a possible declaration of state of emergency and postponement of elections should end after the categorical assurance by the President that nothing of the sort was being meditated. According to General Musharraf the biggest challenge faced by the country comes from Talibanisation. This is indicated by the way extremists were spreading their influence from the tribal areas to the adjoining settled districts. While many would agree with the diagnosis of the malady by General Musharraf, few are likely to concur with the remedy he has proposed. It is ironical that the President who sidelined the mainstream parties by hounding out their leadership from the country is now calling on the moderate forces to unite and contest the elections..

Daily Times, 20 July 2007

Editorial: Why are the Chinese being targeted?

At 9 30 am on Thursday, a time bomb blast at Hub Town in Balochistan killed 24 policemen and local citizens. The target was the moving van of Chinese engineers travelling from their location of work zinc mines to Karachi. The person on the spot who probably pressed the button to ignite the bomb missed the front van and hit instead the security vehicle full of Las Bela police guard following the Chinese engineers. Hub Town is located on the Quetta Karachi road known as the RCD Highway. Initial reactions from those who observe Balochistan is that the blast is not connected with the ones that took place in the north of the country. Most recently, someone killed the Chinese mechanics in Peshawar providing back up services to Chinese rickshaws plying in the city. Since it followed the Lal Masjid operation, it is easy to presume that the friends of the Lal Masjid clerics who were punished for kidnapping some Chinese nationals in Islamabad have taken revenge and sent a message through the killing to Islamabad.

Dawn, 21 July 2007

Judiciary turns the corner: SC voids presidential reference against CJ First verdict against a military ruler

ISLAMABAD, July 20: In what has been billed as a defining moment in the countrys otherwise chequered judicial history, the Supreme Court on Friday struck down the presidential reference against Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry and restored him to the seat of Pakistans top adjudicator. The annulment of the presidential reference was a majority decision 10 in favour and three against. Justice Faqir Mohammad Khokhar, Justice M. Javed Buttar and Justice Saiyed Saeed Ashhad dissented and will give the reasons later. The bench ruled, in no uncertain terms, that the orders to suspend

the chief justice, or to even send him on forced leave, and the appointment of an acting chief justice in the present situation were illegal. It is the first time in the countrys history that the Supreme Court has ruled against a sitting military ruler.

Dawn, 21 July 2007

Musharraf will respect verdict

ISLAMABAD, July 20: President Gen Pervez Musharraf has accepted the Supreme Courts ruling reinstating Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, saying it will be honoured, respected and adhered to, according to his spokesman Maj Gen Retd Rashid Qureshi. When asked on Friday for the presidents reaction over the Supreme Court decision, Brig Qureshi said: The president respects the decision of the Supreme Court. He added, The president has stated earlier that any judgment the Supreme Court arrives at will be honoured, respected and adhered to. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz called for accepting the Supreme Courts judgment, reassuring governments firm resolve to uphold rule of law and democratic order in the country.

The Nation, 21 July 2007

Editorial: Destabilizing Pakistan

UNMINDFUL of the destabilizing impact it would have on Pakistan, Washington has threatened to launch attacks against suspected al-Qaeda hideouts inside the tribal areas and has suggested that it did not need permission for the action. This is yet another instance of acting as a bully. Discarding President Musharrafs assessment that the al-Qaeda has been in the main taken care of and the biggest danger lies presently in Talibanisation, Washington has declared al Qaeda as the major threat. It has peremptorily asked Islamabad to discard peace initiatives and take military action in the tribal areas. Consequently the security forces have reoccupied checkpoints in North Waziristan in violation of the accord with the tribal elders and militants which had turned the region into a zone of peace.

Daily Times, 21 July 2007

Editorial: Lessons of a historic victory

The 13 member full bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has given a great verdict on the presidential reference filed against the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. It has found him not guilty of the charges and restored him to his rightful position as the CJP of Pakistan. Naturally, the decision has made lawyers, civil society actors, political parties in the opposition and all democracy loving people very happy. All of them have a lot to crow about, given their peaceful struggle in favour of the CJP and in protest at the ham handed manner in which the government tried to get rid of him. Undoubtedly, this is a great moment in the history of the judiciary and, by corollary, of Pakistan.

Indian Express, 21 July 2007

Opinion: Back to the future (Murtaza Razvi)

Not all may be lost for Musharraf just yet, but the restored CJ is bound to turn the heat on his government. With the mullahs vying for his blood and threatening to enforce a Taliban style theocracy in Pakistan and all major opposition parties save Benazir Bhuttos

Peoples Party coming together on the singular agenda to depose the army general, the restoration of the suspended chief justice by Pakistans Supreme Court was the last thing President Pervez Musharraf needed. But, Faiz Ahmed Faiz's prophecy after being released from prison in a treason case filed against him and others back in the fifties rings true again: The situation in this country may not get better or worse; the ups and downs will continue. Not all is lost for Musharraf just yet.

Indian Express, 21 July 2007

Opinion: Why the Chinese? (Mini Kapoor)

Fridays Dawn capsuled Pakistans post Lal Masjid days into figures: The series of bomb attacks mostly targeting the security forces has claimed more than 285 lives this month at least 180 since July 14 alone. Thursday saw three suicide bombings taking a combined toll of more than 50 lives. At Hub, Balochistan, 50 km from Karachi, a car bomber rammed into a security vehicle accompanying a convoy of Chinese mining workers, killing seven security personnel and 23 bystanders. Another targeted personnel guarding a police parade ground in Hangu in the NWFP. A third bombing in a mosque compound in Kohat, also in NWFP. These followed a wave of bombings in, most notably, Waziristan, NWFP and Islamabad. Diplomacy: Why are the Chinese being targeted? The Daily Times asked in its Friday editorial, concentrating on the first incident.

Daily Times, 22 July 2007

US and Pakistan united against Al Qaeda: Bush

WASHINGTON: US President George W Bush on Saturday linked the US global campaign against Al Qaeda to Pakistans efforts to quell Islamist violence, including the storming of a pro Taliban mosque last week. In his weekly radio address, Bush expressed full US support for President Pervez Musharraf's efforts to rid all of Pakistan of extremism including an Al Qaeda safe haven in tribal areas. Bush called the establishment of such harbours, detailed in a recent US national intelligence estimate, one of the most troubling setbacks to the US war on terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. The US president, weighed down by the unpopular Iraq war, said Musharraf recognised that a September 2006 deal with tribal chiefs to police their own region had failed and that he was taking active steps to correct it.

Dawn, 22 July 2007

Opposition may move court on uniform

ISLAMABAD, July 21: Declaring that the real test of the independence of the judiciary is yet to come, the leaders of the All Parties Democratic Movement APDM have announced that they will file constitutional petitions with the Supreme Court challenging various acts of President Gen Pervez Musharraf. We are considering moving several constitutional petitions and the Supreme Courts actions on them will decide whether the judiciary has really become independent or its verdict of restoring the chief justice was merely a show of solidarity, said Muttahida Majlis i Amal MMA president Qazi Hussain Ahmed at the first news conference from the APDM platform here on Saturday. The MMA chief said the APDM had made full preparations for challenging President Musharraf's decision to get himself re-elected while keeping his army post from the present assemblies. He said legal panels had been constituted for the purpose..

Daily Times, 22 July 2007

Opinion: Problem, not solution (Dr HA Rizvi)

General Musharraf views his rule as a pre-requisite for addressing internal threats. The opposition political forces and independent observers view him as part of the problem and expect no significant improvement as long as he retains his plans to contest elections for another term. The military is drawing flak for its expanded role in the political and other non professional domains. The intensity of anti army feeling and the frequency of its expression are unprecedented in post 1971 Pakistan. The slogans and banners of the lawyers protest movement demanded time and again that the top commanders of the army return to the barracks. Some protesters were seen burning General Pervez Musharrafs effigy in army uniform.

Dawn, 22 July 2007

Editorial: After the verdict

WITH the landmark judgment on the CJ reference case issue delivered after 43 agonising days, it is time all sides sobered up and looked to the future. The time for recriminations and bitterness is over; what lies ahead is the more challenging task of building and strengthening democratic institutions. The judiciary will also have to prove that it will not allow the present state of euphoria to interfere with the norms of justice, especially in an election year when it may be required to sit in judgment on matters of vital constitutional and political significance. The legal communitys struggle shows that the challenges to the rule of law and perhaps to the very essence of democracy can be addressed by legal and constitutional means. Barring some exceptions, where over enthusiasts among the protesting lawyers behaved in a way that was beneath the dignity of their profession, the campaign against the presidential reference..

Daily Times, 22 July 2007

Opinion: The real Chaudhry conspiracy (Khalid Hasan)

A PPP loyalist drew me aside and asked in a whisper if I knew about the Great Chaudhry Conspiracy. Yes, indeed, I replied, the Shujaat and Pervez conspiracy against the party. Not that one, he said, you dont know a thing. The real Chaudhry Conspiracy features Aitzaz and Iftikhar. The All Parties Conference that ended in London on July 8 may have been Hamlet without the Princess of Dubai, but having been there I can attest that she was present throughout in cyber spirit, for which visitation all nerds should click their mice twice and refrain from pressing the delete button. The Princess of Dubai, once the Daughter of the East who for some time now has been trying to become the Daughter of the West was summoned through cyber space by the Laptop Lady, indisputably the PPP high priestess of the Exalted Order of Electronica.

Daily Times, 23 July 2007

Deal with Musharraf would damage PPP: Benazir plans early challenge to Musharraf

LAHORE: Pakistans exiled former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, is to make an early return to challenge plans by General Pervez Musharraf, the military ruler, to secure a new term as president without waiting for elections. In an interview with The Sunday Times,

she said the logic for a political deal that she had been contemplating with Musharraf had been significantly weakened by the Supreme Courts decision last week to reinstate Iftikhar Chaudhry, the chief justice he suspended earlier this year over claims of nepotism. Critics said the real reason for the suspension had been that Musharraf believed Chaudhry would overrule his plans to be reappointed by the current parliament, in which he has a majority, rather than wait for a new assembly that is due to be elected by the end of this year.

Dawn, 23 July 2007

Washington hints at strikes on Al Qaeda bases

WASHINGTON, July 22: A senior White House aide and a top leader of the Democratic Party said on Sunday that the US would consider using military force to destroy alleged Al Qaeda hideouts in Pakistan. Just because we dont speak about things publicly doesnt mean were not doing things you talk about, said Frances Townsend, Homeland Security Adviser to President Bush. Reporting on a related development, Boston Globe said on Sunday that the Bush administration was struggling to get congressional approval for millions of dollars in aid to a tribal paramilitary force for policing a troubled tribal region bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Daily Times, 23 July 2007

Editorial: After the celebrations are over

Now that the Supreme Court SC has established that it can hand down decisions independently, the All Pakistan Democratic Movement APDM, a formation of all opposition parties except the Pakistan Peoples Party PPP, decided on Saturday to move the apex court on various legal and constitutional issues, including the re election of President Pervez Musharraf and the killing of 50 people in Karachi on May 12. Such are the ironies of the lawyers campaign that once again the petitioners are liable to expect that the verdict in these petitions would be predictable and in favour of the people of Pakistan. The Supreme Court Bar Associations leaders, Mr Muneer A Malik and Mr Ahmad Ali Kurd, have stated in a TV interview that their battle for the independence of the judiciary was not yet over but that they expected the SC to find in their favour again when cases relating to President General Pervez Musharraf came up later in the year.

Dawn, 23 July 2007

Opinion: Why do we need democracy? (S. Sharfuddin)

THE Lal Masjid nightmare is finally over and so is the All Parties Conference. But the soul searching that has just begun will remain with us for a long time to come. If we address these questions correctly and draw the right lessons from it now, there is hope for the future. If we ignore the aftershocks and carry on doing business as usual, the problems that underlie the surface will not vanish on their own. The next showdown with the discontented sections of society may be uglier and far more costly in terms of national interests. During 2005 to 06, I visited the Maldives many times to facilitate a Commonwealth-brokered dialogue between the government and opposition political parties on democratic reforms. Opposition political parties believed that as long as President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was aiming a gun at the political opposition, a dialogue with the government would achieve nothing..

The Nation, 23 July 2007

Editorial: Fortified or on the run?

THAT the two heads of state and allies in the war against terrorism, President Musharraf and President Bush, have sharply contrasting perceptions about the state of Al-Qaeda's strength in Pakistan's tribal areas bordering Afghanistan calls for cool calculation on the basis of circumstantial evidence and verifiable intelligence to put the record straight. The American assessment contained in the National Intelligence Estimate that Mr Bush, in his weekly radio speech, thought most troubling was its conclusion that Al Qaeda had regained strength. Taking advantage of the government's tribal elders' peace agreement, he observed, it had established a safe haven in Pakistan's tribal region. He went on to say that General Musharraf recognised that the deal had not been successful or well enforced.

Kashmir Times, 23 July 2007

Editorial: Musharraf's miseries

Talking to the press during the failed Agra meet Musharraf, still new to real power, admitted with apparent humility that he was still a novice in the field of politics, while the people he was interacting with were veterans in that game. But, since then, he had time and again demonstrated that, though a novice, he could still teach a lesson or two to the grey-haired veterans in this dirty game. Like a superb commando leader he has so far, always succeeded in keeping the initiative in his hands, leaving his adversaries at home or abroad to react to the actions he took. But, of late, especially since March 9, his near proverbial sense of timing and ability to assess and to anticipate events have deserted him. He wanted to get rid of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary before he could safely go ahead with taking liberties with the constitution and the norms of law. But, scarcely could he imagine that the Chief Justice would refuse to be browbeaten into resignation and not only the legal community but almost the entire intelligentsia would rally in his support.

Dawn, 24 July 2007

No invasion, US assures Pakistan

WASHINGTON, July 23: The White House assured Islamabad on Monday that it had no plan to carry out an invasion, but at the same time it said that the United States retained the right to attack actionable targets inside Pakistan. I think there has been this notion afoot, or at least an attempt or an inclination, somehow were going to invade Pakistan, noted White House press secretary Tony Snow. We always maintain the option of striking actionable targets, but we also realise that Pakistan is a sovereign government and a very important player in the war on terror, he added. Mr Snow was commenting on a statement by the Foreign Office in Islamabad that Pakistan would resist any attack on a target inside its territory.

Indian Express, 24 July 2007

Opinion: Whither unified command? (Hussain Haqqani)

For more than five decades Pakistan's military rulers have depended on the country's judiciary to provide a fig leaf of legitimacy for their arbitrary decisions. Last week's judgment by the Supreme Court to restore Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as chief justice,

and General Musharraf's decision to remove him from office as unlawful, brings to an end that arrangement between the courts and the military. The Supreme Court ruling weakens an embattled Musharraf further and demonstrates the unwillingness of Pakistan's civilians to endlessly obey the military's commands. Musharraf now has two options. He could recognise the emerging reality and initiate a process of national reconciliation that allows civilian institutions to function independently within their respective spheres. Or he could persist with the doctrine of the military's supremacy that has polarised Pakistan along several lines.

Daily Times, 24 July 2007

Editorial: Ms Bhutto and the politics of return

The chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party PPP, Ms Benazir Bhutto, said in London on Sunday that she would make an early return to Pakistan to challenge plans by President General Pervez Musharraf to secure a new term as president without waiting for elections. She also seemed to bring closure to her efforts to reach a firm understanding with him on the post-Musharraf set up that would allow her party to fully realise its voting strength without being rigged out of reckoning. She says the logic of a political deal that she had been contemplating with President Musharraf has been significantly weakened by the Supreme Court's decision last week to reinstate the chief justice of Pakistan, Mr Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. She also acknowledges that her party could court unpopularity by continuing to pursue a political understanding with the president.

Dawn, 24 July 2007

Opinion: Failure to tackle militancy (M Shehzad)

THE Lal Masjid saga is another endorsement of the fact that Pakistan is fighting the war on terror without having a solid strategy in place. Terrorism is being fought half heartedly and in a stopgap manner. A few military operations here and there in the tribal belt adjoining Afghanistan and the capture of a handful of mid-level Al Qaeda members for subsequently handing over to American authorities around the time of visits of important US officials to Islamabad has been our strategy. This has not only failed to impress the international community, it has strengthened suspicions about the seriousness of Pakistan's resolve in fighting terrorism. A week after the end of the Lal Masjid episode, the US stated it could launch direct attacks in the tribal region to destroy extremist hideouts.

Dawn, 24 July 2007

Opinion: The tragic showdown at Lal Masjid (IA Kadir)

THE implications of the showdown at the Lal Masjid are tragic, bewildering, shameful and utterly outrageous. They are symptomatic of our general state of affairs. That this particular incident came to pass when warning signals were discernible earlier this year denotes culpable negligence if not mala fides. The primary responsibility for the disaster lies with the party best able to control the outcome that is the regime headed by President General Musharraf, who is facing the most difficult year of his rule, followed by smooth-toned Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and a special team, including the ubiquitous trouble-shooter, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, ministers Aftab Sherpao, Muhammad Ali Durrani,

Tariq Azeem and the Minister for Religious Affairs, Ejazul Haq. This colourful crew is monitored by a matrix a shadowy cabal of sorts structured on the three special agencies, the ISI, the MI and the IB and the Corps Commanders.

Dawn, 25 July 2007

Jirga members peace efforts end in failure

PESHAWAR, July 24: The grand inter tribal jirga has for the time being given up its efforts to revive the agreement reached between the government and the militants in September, as the two sides have refused to budge from their stands, according to mediators. The government wanted the militants to furnish guarantees to implement the Sept 5 deal in its totality, whereas the militants have linked talks with the complete withdrawal of troops from check posts in the troubled region, said a mediator. Members of the jirga, who returned from Miramshah on Monday, went into a huddle on Tuesday. Later in the day they met the NWFP governor after which they dispersed, without reaching any conclusions. The bottom line is that the jirga has dispersed without reaching any conclusion, because both sides are reluctant to show flexibility, a tribal elder told Dawn.

Daily Times, 25 July 2007

Abdullah Mehsud blows himself up

QUETTA: Taliban leader Abdullah Mehsud blew himself up to avoid arrest after he was surrounded by security forces in a house in Zhob, Balochistan on Tuesday. Police arrested three of Mehsud's accomplices, including his brother Abdul Rehman Mehsud. Anti terrorist Force ATF commandoes raided the house of Sheikh Ayub, a district leader of Jamiat Ulema e Islam Fazl, before morning prayers after learning that Mehsud was inside. A gun battle ensued, and Mehsud was surrounded. The ATF asked Abdullah Mehsud to surrender and take off his shirt when they had almost overpowered him. However, he refused to surrender and blew himself up with explosives, said a source in Quetta..

Daily Times, 25 July 2007

Editorial: Foreign strikes on Pakistani territory

The Foreign Office spokesperson, Ms Tasneem Aslam, said at a press briefing Monday that Pakistan would not tolerate any attacks within its territory by foreign forces. Implying that Pakistan had its own strategy against terrorists, she added that Pakistan did not want external elements to undermine its counter terrorism efforts. She dubbed any foreign intervention in the countrys Tribal Areas against international law and contrary to the popular emotion in Pakistan. Ms Aslam also referred to the US Pakistan partnership against terrorism and feared that it would be marred if the US began to evolve its own plan of action at variance with the policies adopted by Pakistan. She said Pakistan relied on its own intelligence sources to inform its strategy, and if the US had any actionable information about the whereabouts of Al Qaeda elements in Pakistan, Islamabad should be so informed.

Kashmir Times, 25 July 2007

Opinion: Challenges for the nations future (William Dalrymple)

All this upheaval would have been unimaginable even six months ago. Islamabad has long been viewed as a dull city where lobbyists and industrialists bribed politicians, and civil servants shuffled papers and wove great cocoons of red tape amid huge concrete courthouses, ministries, and palaces a sort of Islamized version of the center of Washington, D.C., air dropped into the foothills of the Himalayas. Since 1999, when Musharraf seized power in a bloodless coup he is still Commander in Chief of the Army promising to bring true democracy, law and order, and economic revival, Islamabad has been unusually quiet, even by its own somnolent standards; indeed, across the country the government has faced surprisingly little opposition. So disastrous were the tenures of Musharraf's two democratic predecessors Benazir Bhutto, who has confronted a litany of corruption charges, and Nawaz Sharif, her inept, unpopular, and autocratic successor..

The Hindu, 25 July 2007

Opinion: A court verdict heralding change? (N Subramanian)

We have witnessed the birth of a new Pakistan. Supreme Court Bar Association president Munir A. Malik may have sounded hyperbolic as he said those words minutes after the court delivered its historic verdict reinstating Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary and annulling President Pervez Musharraf's reference against him. But those words could well turn out to be prophetic. The judgment has overnight changed the way people in Pakistan think about themselves, their politics, governance, and judiciary. There is euphoria in the air. We are now 10 feet tall, wrote analyst Nasim Zehra. In a common cause, in a national cause, in an institutional cause, in the people's cause everyone had won. The legal community and politicians have been quick to pronounce that the days of the military ruler and martial law are over.

Dawn, 26 July 2007

US tries to ease fears of direct action

ISLAMABAD, July 25: The United States on Wednesday moved to ease fears that Washington was considering a unilateral action against militants in the tribal area. The reassurance coincided with meetings between the United States ambassador to Islamabad and two senior Pakistani officials the defence minister and the chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee JCSC. A spokesperson for the US Embassy, Elizabeth Colton, commenting on reports that US had given any ultimatum to Pakistan, said: Pakistan and the US are allies in the war on terror and we cooperate closely. US AMBASSADOR Ambassador Anne W. Patterson on Wednesday visited the Joint Staff Headquarters and called on Gen Ehsanul Haq, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. It was her first visit to the Joint Staff Headquarters. Ms Patterson held discussions with Gen Ehsan on matters of mutual interest, a press release of the Inter Services Public Relations ISPR said.

Dawn, 26 July 2007

Miliband arrives

ISLAMABAD, July 25: British Foreign Secretary David Miliband arrived here on Wednesday, leading a high level delegation on his first visit to Pakistan after assuming office last month. He is accompanied by Sir Mark Lyall Grant, former British high commissioner to Pakistan, who is now political director at the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office. His official engagements will start on Thursday morning with a meeting with President Gen Pervez Musharraf. Later, he will hold delegation level talks with Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri at the Foreign Office which will be followed by a luncheon. Before his departure in the evening, the British foreign secretary will also call on Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz.

Daily Times, 26 July 2007

Editorial: Future of Lal Masjid

Islamabad has decided that Lal Masjid in the capital city will resume its Juma prayers under a new prayer leader, Maulana Ashfaq, already khateeb in one of Islamabads proliferating mosques. The new Lal Masjid prayer leader is known to be impartial and uncontroversial, but he ended up saying on TV that he would be justified in opposing the government if it went against the sharia. One may ask: what was Maulana Rashid Ghazi doing when he went down fighting? How can anyone avoid the legal obligation of adjudicating the states conduct under sharia at the Federal Shariat Court? Any sane government would have made the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa area into a public utility to save the population living around the area from another khateeb driven trauma.

Indian Express, 26 July 2007

Opinion: Vacuum after victory (Ayesha Siddiq)

The chief justices case is the first time in more than 30 years that the militarys power has been challenged in Pakistan. But the road from here is not clear at all. On July 19, the full bench of Pakistans Supreme Court restored the deposed chief justice in a 10:3 decision, causing tremendous jubilation in the streets over the victory of rule of law. The general perception is that the decision is the defeat of a military dictator. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called it the death of the doctrine of necessity invoked in the past by the Supreme Court to legitimise military rule. From a legal perspective, the decision indeed heralds a new chapter in the otherwise sad history of the countrys superior court. For the common Pakistani, the restoration of the chief justice is not just a decision but a symbol of the strengthening of an institution that has the capacity to check authoritarian leadership.

Daily Excelsior, 26 July 2007

Opinion: Chief Justice gets justice (Suba Chandran)

Ironic it may sound, but the truth is, the Chief Justice finally got justice in Pakistan. Some judgments are considered vital and some historical. Some are epic, for they have the potential to change the course of an entire nation. On 20 July 2007, the Supreme Court delivered such a verdict, when the full 13 member full court reinstated Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. Consider the following reasons and implications of this verdict, its significance will become crystal clear. First, what the Supreme Court has done, is remarkable, given the history of Pakistans apex courts performance vis a vis the military rulers. The verdict is unanimous and unambiguous. The three orders passed by the President including restraining the CJP from acting as Chief Justice and his compulsory leave order were considered by the Supreme Court as illegal and to have been passed without lawful authority.

Dawn, 26 July 2007

Opinion: Time for change is now (IA Rehman)

THE lull in attacks on security forces, the supersession of the Lal Masjid confrontation by other concerns, the conclusion of the Chief Justices case and a mood of resignation to the havoc caused by rain and flood could breed complacency in the establishment that the hydra headed crisis of the state has abated. In the present situation nothing could be more dangerous to the state than indulgence in such wishful thinking. Pakistans increasingly severe tribulations have not entirely been due to the nature of the problems confronting it; they have also been due, and perhaps to a greater degree, to the way these problems have been handled. A possible change of the guard through the coming general election alone is unlikely to put the country on the path of redemption; much more essential is the need to change the system of governance and to do this soon enough.

Dawn, 27 July 2007

Apex court asks EC to register all voters

ISLAMABAD, July 26: The Supreme Court has instructed the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure the registration of the names of all eligible voters in the electoral rolls through a fresh and comprehensive scheme by convening a special meeting of the commission. The ECP should inform the president that the condition of the computerised national identity cards for registration in the electoral rolls is not only against the Constitution but also contrary to earlier orders of the Supreme Court, observed a Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, Justice Rana Bhagwandas and Justice Ghulam Rabbani. The new voter lists would disenfranchise millions of people across the country, the bench observed while hearing a challenge by PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto against the draft rolls.

Daily Times, 27 July 2007

Pakistan test-fires nuclear capable cruise missile

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan said it had successfully test fired a nuclear-capable radar dodging cruise missile capable of reaching New Delhi, on Thursday. The successful testing of Babur or Hataf VII missile would strengthen national security, a military statement said. The military says it has increased the range of the missile to 700 kilometres 435 miles. The Babur, which has near stealth capabilities, is a low flying, terrain hugging missile with high maneuverability, pinpoint accuracy and radar avoidance features, the statement said.

Dawn, 27 July 2007

Pakistan, UK resolve to quell terrorism

ISLAMABAD, July 26: Pakistan and Britain on Thursday resolved to work together with a holistic approach to effectively meet the common challenge of terrorism and to ensure greater stability in the region and around the world. These views were expressed by the visiting British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri at a joint news conference after their two hour discussions that covered bilateral, regional and international issues. Mr Miliband, who is on his first visit outside Europe as the new foreign secretary of the UK, said at the outset that they had excellent discussions which followed a very productive meeting he had with President Gen Pervez Musharraf. We

agreed that defeating terror requires a long term strategy and a coordinated and cooperative approach and resolved to continue our excellent cooperation in the area of counterterrorism, Mr Kasuri declared.

The News, 27 July 2007

Opinion: Why force does not work (Dr M Bano)

During the past week, the Bush administration has continued to make statements that if need be the United States will attack Pakistans tribal areas. The officials from the US embassy in Islamabad have, however, tried to provide some reassurance. The main reason for the statements being made in Washington might only be to build psychological pressure on General Musharraf and the Pakistanis in general to do more in the name of war on terror. Action has already started. The Pakistani military has stepped up operations in the tribal areas, with the death toll rising again. The government claims to be killing the militants but who they are and how many civilians are being killed in the operations remains extremely vague, as has always been the case in the past. The question really is that what these operations will deliver now when they have failed to deliver in the past.

Dawn, 27 July 2007

Editorial: Opposition: a house divided

QAZI Hussain Ahmads decision to quit parliament and Maulana Fazlur Rahmans criticism of the MMA chiefs resignation tend to highlight the utter chaos in the opposition camp. The JI chief resigned in violation of the MMA's collective decision not to exercise the resignation option. However, Qazi Hussain Ahmad has often toed a line independent of the MMA, disregarding the fact that his party, the Jamaat i Islami, is part of the six party alliance. This prompted Maulana Fazlur Rahman to ask whether Qazi Hussain had joined the MMA in his personal capacity or the Jamaat itself was an MMA component. The JI chiefs hard line on a number of issues has often been in sharp contrast with the MMA's policies, and the pragmatism which the JUI chief has shown on some key issues has been missing in Qazi Hussains case. On the Lal Masjid issue, for instance, the JUI leader had publicly accused the Aziz Ghazi duo of showing lack of flexibility during the negotiations.

Daily Times, 27 July 2007

Editorial: Al Qaedas drive into the NWFP

Bannu city came under renewed terrorist attacks Tuesday, with rockets fired indiscriminately into the population. At least nine people, including a woman, were killed and 40 others injured. Everybody is guessing, as usual, about who did it. Was it in retaliation against the suicide of Abdullah Mehsud, a deputy of South Waziristans Al Qaeda warlord, Baitullah Mehsud? Was it a part of the ongoing post Lal Masjid assault ordered by Al Qaedas second man in command, Ayman al Zawahiri? The districts of Bannu and Kohat are important army posts in the NWFP. They lie on the way to the tribal agencies of Aurakzai and Kurram and have been a well-beaten path for local militants aligned with Al Qaeda and the Taliban. A police recruiting centre and a mosque inside the cantonment were recently targeted..

Daily Times, 28 July 2007

Suicide attack on police claims 14: Taliban back at Lal Masjid

ISLAMABAD: A suspected suicide bomber killed at least 14 people including seven policemen and injured more than 50 others on Friday at a hotel near the Lal Masjid, after baton wielding students of Jamia Fareedia madrassa and congregation members loyal to the slain Abdul Rashid Ghazi and former prayer leader Maulana Abdul Aziz occupied the mosque briefly and demanded Aziz's return. Aziz's supporters stopped the government appointed prayer leader Maulana Ashfaq Ahmed from leading the Friday prayer at Lal Masjid after the mosque was reopened to the public after three weeks. They demanded that authorities bring Maulana Aziz to Lal Masjid to lead the prayers. Maulana Ashfaq then left for his home in police security. Maulana Atiqur Rehman, a teacher at Jamia Fareedia, then led the prayer at Lal Masjid.

Dawn, 28 July 2007

Musharraf, Benazir discuss future

ISLAMABAD, July 27: President Gen Pervez Musharraf and the country's top opposition leader, Benazir Bhutto, flew into the UAE capital Abu Dhabi from Islamabad and London on Friday for an unannounced meeting that was aimed at ending eight years of extreme hostility and to give the Pakistani politics a new direction, but highly informed sources told Dawn the talks remained inconclusive. Another source privy to the talk process preferred to call it a deadlock, saying differences over the timing for the general to doff his uniform, and Ms Bhutto's insistence on returning to Pakistan before the general election remained the contentious issues. But neither he nor any other person close to the process of talks of the last few months was prepared to describe it a failure. In fact, one of them called it the most significant move in the direction of forging a new understanding of moderate and liberal forces which are able to form a future government, with the possibility of President Musharraf being the civilian head of state.

The Nation, 28 July 2007

Raziq Bugti shot dead

QUETTA Abdur Raziq Bugti, the spokesman for the government of Balochistan and media consultant to Chief Minister Jam Muhammad Yousaf, was gunned down in broad daylight by unknown armed men Friday. However, Baloch Liberation Army, the banned organisation claimed to be struggling for Baloch cause, has owned up the murder. According to eyewitnesses, two persons riding a motorcycle approached his moving vehicle and opened indiscriminate fire. They told the police that when Raziq Bugti was shot at, his vehicle went out of control, hit the footpath and stopped. The attackers again sprayed volley killing him instantly. Raziq Bugti, who was driving his black five door Parado Land Cruiser, was alone when ambushed in front of St Grammar School, some 500 yards off the CM House.

The Nation, 28 July 2007

Editorial: Ending confrontation

GENERAL Musharraf's meeting with Benazir Bhutto in Abu Dhabi on Friday is significant in the backdrop of the Lal Masjid operation, CJs reinstatement and the President's recent statement that moderates in the country would have to work together to

jointly fight extremism. Speculations of imminent changes in political command were already rife for some time. Last week the President reportedly met his top military aides, Ch Shujaat Hussain was urgently summoned from abroad and then he suddenly decided to visit Saudi Arabia and UAE. Since the government lost the case against the CJ, he has kept an uncharacteristic silence and shunned public engagements, giving rise to all sorts of rumours. Vital issues continue to be ignored in the meanwhile, the foremost being the arrangements for holding fair and free elections. In order to avoid fresh litigation and protests ultimately leading to a new crisis, the government needs to review some of its decisions.

Daily Times, 28 July 2007

Opinion: Urban military operations (Shaukat Qadir)

Lal Masjid, like Kargil, is an ongoing operation. Once things had been allowed to get to the stage where the militants could force the security forces hand, the citizens of this country were bound to pay a price for whatever the government decided to do. Despite the extensive media coverage devoted to the Lal Masjid operation, its military aspect appears to have given rise to an unending stream of questions. I shall try to answer them in this article. In approaching urban military operations, it is important to understand two aspects common to all insurgencies. A British Lt Col wrote a book about the Malayan insurgency. I read it many years ago and don't remember much about it except that its central theme was that if the object of insurgency is to terrorise, the object of counter insurgency must be to terrorise even more.

Dawn, 28 July 2007

Opinion: The lengthening shadow of Lal Masjid (AR Siddiqi)

ARE the nation and the armed forces drifting apart in a hostile mode? Could the two, proverbially like two hearts in one body, be viewed as approaching a state where harmonious coexistence within the bounds of the Constitution and the law might be becoming increasingly difficult each with a different heartbeat and pulse rate? Does the Lal Masjid crackdown, in any way, epitomise the widening divide between the army and the nation and a bridge too far linking them? Would it be hard to deny that the army and its sartorial armour, the uniform, never showed so many chinks as to become a target of public protest and anger? I was shocked beyond belief to read a boxed item in an English daily headlined: No uniform in public. The text ran as follows, President Musharraf directs armed forces personnel not to wear their uniform in public in the NWFP for fear of a backlash from the Lal Masjid operation.

Dawn, 29 July 2007

Bush to sign bill linking aid to anti-terror fight: US Congress adopts measure

WASHINGTON, July 28: The White House said on Saturday that President George W Bush would sign into law a counter-terrorism bill that also proposes new conditionalities on US assistance to Pakistan. The US House of Representatives passed the bill on Friday night by 317 to 40 votes. The Senate had endorsed it on Thursday night by 85 to 8 votes. The provisions require Pakistan to make demonstrated, significant and sustained progress towards eliminating terrorist safe havens from Pakistan, said Gary Ackerman, chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. The section on Pakistan

also ties US assistance to democratic reforms, extension of the rule of law, and the conduct of parliamentary elections scheduled for 2007..

Daily Times, 29 July 2007

Constitution may be amended for BB

LAHORE: The government will make amendments to the Constitution and remove the hitch for Benazir Bhutto to become prime minister for a third time, Federal Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Sher Afgan Khan Niazi said on Saturday. He told Geo News via telephone that the Friday talks between President General Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan Peoples Party chairwoman Benazir Bhutto were successful. Both leaders openly expressed their reservations before each other, he added. He said Musharraf and Bhutto also discussed the appointment of a new army chief, as Musharraf might remove his uniform in his next presidential term. Pakistan Muslim League leader Hamid Nasir Chattha might become the next caretaker prime minister, he said..

The Nation, 29 July 2007

Unconstitutional steps won't be allowed: CJP

ISLAMABAD Chief Justice of Pakistan CJP Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry Saturday affirmed that everyone, including the judiciary, civil society and especially over 90,000 lawyers of the country are ready to render any sacrifice for upholding Constitution and save the country from any extra constitutional and unlawful step. Addressing a workshop held under the banner of Access to Justice Development Fund AJDF, he said the four month long struggle in recent past in support of independent judiciary has given a new ray of hope to the country. The CJP, however, conceded that judiciary in country suffered setbacks due to repeated deviations from Constitution in the past.

Daily Times, 29 July 2007

Opinion: Table for two? (Dr HA Rizvi)

Can Pakistans political actors work in harmony and respect the constitution in letter and spirit if the PPP comes to power through a backdoor deal? Other political parties can then be expected to return to the old tactics of leaving no stone unturned to dislodge the political rival from power. The reported meeting between Benazir Bhutto and General Pervez Musharraf in Abu Dhabi on July 27 is the latest effort by the two leaders to cultivate a working relationship. Benazir Bhutto said in an interview given a week ago that her past dialogues with the presidency did not result in any understanding on the Presidents re-election and her return to Pakistan. She maintained that such an understanding might no longer serve the interest of the Pakistan Peoples Party PPP, as the Supreme Courts rejection of the presidential reference against the chief justice has made Musharrafs credibility crisis more acute.

Dawn, 29 July 2007

Editorial: Seminal meeting?

SO, finally, they have met. The much talked about deal may nowhere be on the horizon, but the very fact that they have met is itself an achievement. The reported deadlock between President Pervez Musharraf and Ms Benazir Bhutto at their first ever meeting in Abu Dhabi on Friday is not that despairing. The more relevant point is that the two have

had the good wisdom of meeting and talking things over. Given that a gulf has existed between them, it would have been illogical to assume that they could have come to an instant understanding on the kind of complex, explosive situation facing Pakistan today. Many observers have called the meeting a climb down for the general in view of his repeated declarations in the past that Ms Bhutto and Mr Nawaz Sharif would not be allowed to return home in the immediate future.

Daily Times, 29 July 2007

EDITORIAL: Lal Masjid replay was avoidable!

The governments enthusiasm to reclaim ideological credentials at Lal Masjid led to another clash between Islamabads seminarians and the police on Friday, ending in 14 dead, nine of whom were policemen. The government could have taken its time reopening the mosque for Friday prayers after a proper cleanup of the precincts, a cooling of passions and fading of memories, but it jumped headlong into decision making and is now responsible for the death of innocent people at the hands of an Al Qaeda suicide bomber. Significantly, there was more planning on the part of the 88 madrassas in Islamabad than in the cabinet of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. The intelligence agencies failed once again to give proper advice..

Dawn, 30 July 2007

Uniformed president not acceptable: Benazir: Extremists plotting to overthrow government

ISLAMABAD, July 29: President Gen Pervez Musharraf must quit his military post if he is to continue as the countrys ruler, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto said on Sunday, after officials confirmed the two held secret talks on a possible power sharing pact. The PPP chairperson said she was interested in returning to the country and becoming its premier for a third time if the opportunity presented itself. In an interview to a German magazine to be published on Monday, Ms Bhutto said there were ongoing talks with Gen Musharraf about her possible return to Pakistan. She could be jailed on charges of corruption upon re entering the country, which she said she planned to do by December. But I will go back regardless of whether the talks with Musharraf are successful or not, she said, adding that she would seek protection against prosecution from Pakistani courts..

Daily Times, 30 July 2007

Al Qaeda divided over Pakistan strategy

LAHORE: Al Qaeda is divided over the wisdom of the networks revenge tactics against the Lal Masjid operation, as one side favours more retaliation, while the other is concerned that further strikes will force the Pakistan Army to attack their safe havens in the tribal areas, reported the Sunday Telegraph. According to the British weekly, radical Pakistani Islamists allied to Al Qaeda have revealed that Osama Bin Ladens deputy, Ayman Al Zawahiri, continues to advocate retaliatory attacks on Pakistani targets. However, it adds, some senior figures within Al Qaeda are alarmed that Al Zawahiris mission to topple and kill General Pervez Musharraf could provoke a military backlash that could jeopardise their safe havens in the tribal areas along the Afghan border..

The Nation, 30 July 2007

New Lal Masjid rises in Mohmand

MOHMAND AGENCY - The local militants claiming themselves Mujahideen Sunday took control of the shrine of freedom fighter Haji Sahib Turangzai in Lakaro area of Mohmand Agency. The Mujahideen, after occupying the shrine, renamed the mosque as Lal Masjid and announced the construction of Jamia Hafsa on a site adjacent to the shrine. It is part of our strategy to initiate an organised struggle on the pattern of late freedom fighter Haji Sahib Turangzai to get rid of those who have made the country a US colony, remarked Mujahideen chief Omar Khalid after getting control of the shrine and the mosque. Masked and armed Omar Khalid, leading a squad of around 150 militants, has got control of Turangzai Sahib mosque in Lakaro Area, some 40 kilometers, north east of Ghalani, headquarter of Mohmand Agency.

Dawn, 30 July 2007

Editorial: Uniting against extremism

THE Lal Masjid showdown may be the catalyst for the current upsurge in terrorism but the roots of the problem go far deeper. Though the effects of Fridays suicide attack in Islamabad the second in ten days are being felt in the here and now, its causes have been years in the making. The genesis of today's bitter harvest can be traced to what was sown in Afghanistan with the help of the Americans and the Saudis, as well as the patronage bestowed on Islamists within the country by Ziaul Haq in pursuit of his pro American policy. But Pakistans strategic depth misadventures did not die with Zia, and support for jihadi organisations and the Taliban regime continued.

The Nation, 30 July 2007

Editorial: A defining moment

ONE cannot more agree with Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry that this is a defining moment in the countrys history that must be seized to build a well merited, bright future. From a crisis of deepening despair the struggle spearheaded by the legal fraternity and willingly joined by the civil society for the preservation of judiciarys independence has infused the people with a sense of real hope. The publics enthusiastic support that saw throngs of people out in the streets to defend a just cause put the government on the back foot, precluding the chances of putting pressure on the Bench and compelling it to tamely accept the verdict. It might have been relieved of the scenes of demonstrating public, but the haunting fear of unpopularity would continue to dog its existence.

Daily Times, 30 July 2007

Opinion: Governments and media control (Dr. Ayesha Siddiq)

The Pakistani media, like anywhere else in the world, will continue to work and cooperate with the government as long as the latter has the sense to use a well measured approach rather than haphazard bureaucratic methods to control opinion and discussion. There are two opposing points of view about freedom of the press in the country. The government argues the media are absolutely free; indeed, press has never been freer. Critics disagree. The difference in the two arguments, it seems, is one of quantity versus quality. The government cites the growth of TV channels and publications as evidence of

media freedom and its generous attitude towards the media. It also points to its tolerance of criticism: pick up any newspaper and at least one article will be critical; also, editors are not gagged or stopped from writing.

Daily Times, 31 July 2007

Present assemblies will elect president in uniform: Rashid

LAHORE: President General Pervez Musharraf will seek re election from the current parliament in uniform, Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said on Monday. The government has enough votes to re elect President Musharraf from the existing assemblies, Ahmed told a press conference at Pakistan Railways Headquarters here. He added that the Pakistan Peoples Party PPP would support the presidents re election. He said the government does not want any major party to quit from the parliament during the presidential elections, but added that if the opposition does opt to resign, one of the major political parties will not do so. Asked about the PPPs reservations regarding the presidents uniform, he said All matters are settled, and the uniform is no big problem.

Dawn, 31 July 2007

Six soldiers die as militants renew attacks

MIRAMSHAH, July 30: Militants renewed their attacks on security forces in the North Waziristan Agency on Monday, killing six soldiers and wounding five others, while a Cobra helicopter fired rockets on a suspected car in Bakakhel area of the adjacent Frontier Region, officials and residents said. Witnesses said that the helicopter attacked the car which was following an army convoy in the Bakakhel area. The convoy comprising several vehicles was going from Mirali to the Bannu district. The driver of the car had been warned to keep away from the convoy, but he ignored the warning. The helicopter fired rockets destroying the car. The witnesses said that four people had jumped out of the car before it was hit by the rockets. They said that troops also had fired several shots to warn the driver against coming close to the convoy. A truck coming behind the convoy was also hit and its driver Samar Gul was injured. He was taken to a hospital in Bannu.

Daily Excelsior, 31 July 2007

Opinion: Will Musharraf play old game (Atul Cowshish)

Washington is said to be deeply worried about the fate of its trusted friend in Islamabad, Gen Pervez Musharraf, who suffered a rare humiliating defeat at the hands of the chief justice of the supreme court as his attempts to sack him were frustrated by the court itself. For Musharraf the court verdict came even as Pakistan faced a series of bombings and suicide attacks after Operation Silence at Lal Masjid Red Mosque. Musharraf is no more the darling of the Pakistani media and its middle and upper classes that he was when he staged his coup in October 1999. The religious parties of fanatics and mullahs who had supported him in the National Assembly Parliament have become his strongest critics after the military raid on the infamous Red Mosque in the heart of the Pakistani capital. But there are no bets on his early exit. That may prove to be a bit premature.

Daily Times, 31 July 2007

Editorial: Democracy and religious extremism

If there is going to be a deal between the PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto and President General Pervez Musharraf, the issue of the uniform has to be resolved. Ms Bhutto says she is not ready to support a uniformed president at any cost. This is understandable. Given the anti Musharraf mood in the country, she simply cannot risk alienating her passionately pro democracy and anti military vote bank. Some leaders from the ruling PML have welcomed the possibility of an understanding between Ms Bhutto and the president; others have not, insisting that if a deal is to be made it should be made with the entire opposition, not with the PPP alone. Clearly President Musharraf's party is not taking the current moves kindly even though the president may have taken clearance from its top leadership before going to Abu Dhabi..

Dawn, 31 July 2007

Opinion: The threat of US intervention (Dr Tariq Rahman)

IN the last few days, the United States has threatened Pakistan with military action in parts of the tribal areas. The US National Intelligence Estimate report says that the Al Qaeda is regrouping. This makes the US feel threatened and, as usual, the giant is lashing out, vowing vengeance. This is not entirely unprecedented. In 2006, President Bush made a similar statement. However, the timing is a little odd in the present context. In the immediate aftermath of the Lal Masjid episode, with bomb blasts taking place and civil war staring us in the face is this the time to threaten ones ally with war? And now that it has happened, what will be the fallout of such a threat? These are the questions which need to be discussed. First, is the United States correct?