

Special Report on PML-Q by Amir Mateen

Part-I: PML-O (O for Others)

Mohammad Ali Jinnah must be turning in his grave at the various Muslim League factions that are pandering his name and integrity for their political perpetuation, and what not.

Successive dictators have raped the Quaid's party so incessantly that it is difficult to keep track of all the illegitimate offspring. Dictator Ayub Khan used corruption to create his Basic Democrats. Dictator Ziaul Haq gathered a team with a rightist bent of mind, who in the name of Islam, were supposed to anoint him Ameerul Momineen of Pakistan. But Dictator Pervez Musharraf has beaten his predecessors fair and square by leaving behind a number of Muslim League leftovers that have nothing in common even with each other. In the waste that he left behind, there are, exceptions apart, new and old political opportunists who took another shot at multiplying their riches; lobbyists of the various cartels; industrialists who built empires on loan defaults; shrieking damsels who were raised to giddy heights despite their glaring dumbness; wheelers and dealers who thrived on quotas, leases, exemptions and licenses worth billions of rupees; real estate swindlers, stock manipulators, fraudsters, cronies — and these are just a few of the characters.

The biggest group of Musharraf's political orphans, these days, is led by the Quaid's modern day avatar, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain. He is the second Jat from the Warraich tribe of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to rule in this part of the world (a third, Warraich Aitizaz Ahsan, may have missed his chance). His prime ministership may have lasted a mere three months but this did not stop Shujaat and the cabal of his family and friends from exercising the most power during the Musharraf's years.

Come to think of it lots of bad things happened during those nine years. Billions were made in stock scams, sugar scandals, Pakistan Steel Mills irregularities, real estate concessions and arms purchases. Indeed, the commando left behind a mountain of corruption, which does need to be investigated. Musharraf is gone for good but somebody needs to answer for all those evils. It's akin in a way to the end of the Second World War when Herr Hitler committed suicide, cheating the rest of Europe from holding him responsible for the havoc that had been wreaked.

The world needed heads to roll. So his senior Nazi comrades were tried at Nuremberg and then jailed and some executed. Something of that sort seems to be happening in this country at the moment.

The Chaudhries know the game is over for them. They were at the height of their power when they were trounced in the last elections. Come next elections, they will be reduced to a Tonga party like the rest of the PML factions. They know this and they want to hang on till they are either taken back by the Nawaz group or can merge with the PPP or a third political force emerges that they can then jump over to.

No wonder then that what the Chaudhries of Gujrat face these days is not politics but a battle for survival. For too long they have survived without genuine accountability. In the last 30 years, they have been in opposition only for the three years of Benazir Bhutto's second government. Every other political family that came into the industry has had to pay the price at one stage or another. Not the Chaudhrys. How have they managed it? They kick up so much fuss over a minor accusation or criticism by the media that others back out. Pervaiz Elahi holds a press conference which their journalist loyalists ensure gets flashed in the news.

They make calls to editors-owners of media groups to make amends. They specialise in creating so much chaos that everyone gets confused over the facts. They have a documented answer for every question or every scam they have been accused of whether this be the infamous cooperatives scandal; loan defaults on their mills; human trafficking; sale of the Roberts farm in Rahimyar Khan; purchases of huge property abroad, just to name a few. Their file work is immaculate and they have used their power to extract evidence in their defence by all means possible. Hurl a small accusation, criticism or even an innuendo at them and they will provide clearance letters from banks; certificates of appropriateness from chartered accountants; court decisions; assembly records. They may even have a certificate from the Imam of their local Mohallan Bhangian mosque, attesting that the Chaudhries are Muslims who pray five times a day and are as innocent as the day they were born.

All hopes rest on the trial of the former head of the Bank of Punjab, Hamesh Khan, at the Supreme Court. He might spill the beans about the Chaudhries' possible involvement in a multi-million dollar scam. But one never knows as they have their ways of wiggling out of such situations.

Were they wise, lucky or blessed? A little bit of everything. The Chaudhries have been smart enough to devise an entire system which allowed them to rise from the ashes to become one of the most powerful and richest families in the country. Here is a slice of their wisdom as practised in handling journalists.

They became adept at the art of media management much before the Sharif brothers learnt the ropes. Zahoor Elahi bought the progressive papers trust, which owned The Pakistan Times and Imroze at the time when Ayub nationalised them. But that did not deliver results because the journalistic greats of that time did not submit to their demands. Since then, the family has been applying the philosophy well expressed by Sheeda Tully (no relation to Mark Tully) in a short sentence. When asked why he never got married, he said: "Why buy a cow when you can purchase milk in market?"

The Chaudhrys have always been generous to journalists. The crude lot receives every month's papers along with the photo of their Quaid, hence Q League while the honest ones are obliged in kind. In Ramazan, a truckload of ration is delivered at the homes of the "needy journalists", sweets and fruits on Eid, and "envelopes" on special occasions. They share the happy and sad moments of our community with a religious zeal. Salami money given on our family weddings can range from 25 grand to six digit amounts,

depending on the journalist's worth. They lend a helping hand during health emergencies, burials and even auspicious events such as circumcisions.

I have known Chaudhry Shujaat to compensate a hapless hack who has lost his car, furniture or wife. He paid for the medical tuition of an overly tanned Lahore editor and there are his counterparts in Islamabad who are misfortunate enough to conveniently get burgled every year. Robbers have never been known to miss the annual pilgrimage to these journalists' houses. The news is then flashed with regular monotony in the papers and the generous Chaudhry coughs up enough dough to account for the entire loss. But the crude lot is liked the best because the Chaudhries can count on them.

A known TV anchor was invited by Shujaat at his residence. He suggested a political line of thinking that he wanted to be conveyed. And then he tried to give her a bag full of money, saying that she should accept it "because you are my sister." She got upset and walked out in protest. She says next day, half of TV anchors were parroting the exact quotes that he wanted her to convey. There have been many occasions when lists got distributed about journalists and their "earnings". A register is maintained by one Sufi Anwer for every transaction made and I once had the honour of going through the list; Sufi was dozing.

But their generosity is spread far and wide. Be it a CSP officer or one from the Army, or a politician with potential who has passed by 50 miles of Gujrat -- everyone has been obliged. Such people are cultivated through their career for one never knows when they may pay back in kind. One Tariq Aziz led to more profit than could be reaped by investing in promising kids with bright futures ahead of them. There are many more like him all round to help Chaudhrys in future crises.

Such devout and God fearing people and here I am defaming them, as poet, writer, diplomat, journalist, Pir Attaul Haq Qasmi has pointed out so well in his column about me. Munoo Bhai's peom "Hajay Qayamat Nahi aai" seems so relevant. And to find out how this Gujrati Cosa Nostra is now crumbling down, you will have to wait till tomorrow.

Part-II: Once impregnable, is the Gujrat fortress finally crumbling?

The Chaudhrys of Gujrat are more a phenomenon than a political dynasty, bequeathing three ruling generations of politicians. If anyone has struck gold in Pakistan, it is the Chaudhrys.

The founding Chaudhry, Chaudhry Zahoor Elahi, according to published accounts (both local and international and which were never denied by his scions) was a simple policeman who was dismissed from service in dubious circumstances in the United India in 1930s.

But, lo and behold, seven decades later, his son, Chaudhary Shujaat, became the prime minister of a country born from the loins of a divided India. And somewhere in between, the family had become one of the most powerful and richest in the country.

Could there be a better or more beautiful testimony to this being a land of offered, created, and taken opportunities? There is no doubt that the successive generations of the Chaudhrys continue to grow smarter. One just has to contrast the first generation with the second to realise this.

Chaudhry Zahoor Elahi spent a lifetime in politics, which included a fair share of hardship and political victimisation. He spent six months in jail for opposing Ayub Khan though he later joined the dictator to become the Secretary General of his Convention League. He also confronted the Nawab of Kalabagh, prompting Ameer Mohammad Khan to warn that if Zahoor Elahi tried to replace Khan as the West Pakistan Governor, Khan would reinstate him as police constable.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto lodged a case against Zahoor Elahi for allegedly stealing a buffalo; threw him out of the National Assembly; and put him in jail on charges that are believed to be fabricated.

It was because of this enmity that Chaudhry senior reportedly took the pen used by General Ziaul Haq for signing the execution orders of Bhutto as a souvenir. Chaudhry senior was assassinated in 1981 and his heirs believe that Murtaza Bhutto, and Al-Zulfikar, was behind the murder.

The younger Chaudhrys, in contrast, have done what can be called politics of comfort. They have stayed in provincial and federal cabinets for a record 25 years topped by a brief -- very brief -- stint as prime minister.

The present times are the second occasion, ever, that the Chaudhry brethren have suffered opposition benches; the earlier being Benazir Bhutto's second government when they even had to endure a few months in jail. We are told that their brief imprisonment was quite luxurious; all the prisoners and inmates were treated to dishfuls of roasted partridges (bateras).

This was courtesy a mutual deal with embedded sleepers in PPP who had been equally well looked after in their bad times. And the power they enjoyed in the Punjab during the Musharraf regime had no parallel since Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled the land of the five rivers.

Pervaiz Elahi, after all, is the only Punjab Chief Minister to complete five years in office. He was omnipotent at Takht Lahore while the elder Chaudhry held the fortress in Islamabad. Stories abound about their unfettered powers; excessive nepotism on behalf of their relatives and the larger Jat community; their penchant for luxury and abandon; and the alleged shenanigans of Pervaiz Elahi's son Moonis Elahi. Billions were spent on

official residences; official planes were used for evenings shin dins in Dubai -- the stories are endless.

But while politics and economics, it was said, were overseen by Shujaat and Pervaiz, the militant wing was said to be controlled by younger brother Wajahat Hussain. He was known as "Commander" among his private militia called, the Wajahat Force. Power was used ruthlessly.

But like all good things, this came to an end and now the Chaudhrys have to reap what they sowed from 2002 to 2008. The excessive use and abuse of 'thana-katcheri' has left a blazing trail of personal enmities in almost every district of the Punjab and some very angry people -- the Makhdooms in Rahimyar Khan; Chaudhry Anwer Aziz and his son, Danial, in Sakargarh; the Kanjus in Lodhran; the Dastis in Muzaffargarh, to name a few. In other words, the Chaudhrys stand completely isolated from within and without.

Outside, the mainstream parties such as the PPP and the PML-N hate them to put it politely and the smaller parties like the ANP, the MQM, the JUI and the JI detest them. Inside their PML fold, the Kashmayun bloc, comprising the one who uses glasses and the other who breaks them on television screens, has parted ways.

The Chaudhrys, once known for their 'wazaadari,' are now seen to have backstabbed every benefactor of theirs. They betrayed Ejazul Haq whose father was their original mentor. They betrayed Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi and then Mohammad Khan Junejo by joining the Nawaz camp. They then betrayed Nawaz Sharif by joining Musharraf. They betrayed Zafarullah Khan Jamali who had proposed Shujaat's name for the prime minister's position. They betrayed Shaukat Aziz by issuing statements against him and holding him responsible for everything once he had exited politics.

They were the deciding factor in Shaukat not even getting a party nomination to contest in the 2008 elections (and he should be grateful to them now). Finally, they even betrayed Musharraf. They give the impression that they helped the commando general rather than the other way down. Insiders say that Musharraf had such a low opinion of them that in his early days in power that at the wedding of Tariq Aziz's daughter, the host had to ensure that the army chief did not come face to face with the Chaudhrys. What it must have taken for the Chaudhrys to charm him, one can only imagine. But charm him, they did. And the rest, as they say, is history.

All the enemies of the Chaudhrys are now banding together for the final push against the once impregnable Gujrat fortress. Will the Chaudhrys survive this assault, is the critical question?

Part-III: PML-Q: The myth of growing stronger!

The PML-Q clarification (carried in Saturday's edition) accuses me of several things but basically proving the main point that I had made: that the Chaudhrys of Gujrat have little tolerance for criticism.

As I had claimed the moment you utter a single critical word, it evokes a stormy reaction so severe that it clouds everything else. Some of the counter charges are nothing short of sardonic humour. Like the part where they ask me to spend my energies on working for Dr Aafia Siddiqui's return rather than worry over Hamesh Khan's trip home. If my memory serves right, the honourable Chaudhrys of Gujrat were very much in power when the poor woman was sold away by the Musharraf led dispensation to the Yanks. Talk of ironies of life.

I have also been accused of writing "against" them on the behest of their political rivals. Funny again. If it's PML-N they are referring to, then they have obviously not read the PML-N profile preceding this one and as for the PPP, I have yet to write my profile series on the PPP, so I should be judged only after its publication. I am neither a friend nor a foe of the PPP.

But the PPP is hardly a rival of the PML-Q itself. The PML-Q did try to flirt with the PPP to make a coalition government in the Punjab at the time when Governor's Rule was imposed in the province; though the communication level of the mighty Chaudhry was a lowly personal assistant of Asif Zardari.

It is also true that this time around, the PPP has not been keen on holding the previous regime accountable; largely because they are so much stuck in the rigmarole of the NRO, which is more about their own accountability than of others. It is said the PPP was, in relative terms, similarly soft on the Chaudhrys in their previous government, which was the only other time they were in opposition. I have not accused anyone of corruption but have only advocated greater scrutiny of their years in power and whether any executive authority has been misused for personal gains. Is this asking too much? They have been in power for 25 long years, more than half of it under dictatorships. The Chaudhrys are the only notable political family in Pakistan, which has the distinction of serving all three dictators while occupying the front rows.

In fact, like the Sharif brothers, they would be well advised to take pride in their humble origins. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain beats Bill Clinton's struggle in life because he rose to become the prime minister despite being the son of a simple police functionary.

About their other major rival, the PML-N could not have motivated me to write against the Chaudhrys. I have written a four-part strongly worded critique on the party recently. The PML-N, I must say, has absorbed it with a lot of grace, which shows the party has matured over the years. They have, as they say, learnt to take it on the chin. Maybe because they do not have any Mushahid Hussain in their midst who cannot resist taking out 'karakas' to please his bosses.

Shujaat and Mushahid make perfect bedfellows or so the wily Syed had the naïve Chaudhry Shujaat believe. Here is my theory on them. Shujaat, wise in conventional politics, was doing well until Mushahid came along. Insiders say the Syed never leaves his side from dawn till the Chaudhry hits the bed. He had the Chaudhry so much in awe

of his Georgetown English, the clash of civilisations, non-proliferation theories and 'yahood-o-hanood mishmash' that the elder Chaudhry Sahib obviously started believing that the Syed was crucial for his survival. Along the way, he lost his political basics. Many say this has been the single largest factor in the PML-Q's fall. The Syed would still have the Chaudhry believe that the party is on its grand march to a glorious victory and that the enemies continue to fall by the way side.

This brings us to the accusation that the piece was an attempt to stop the PML-Q from going from strength to strength. Facts belie the PML-Q claims. The party may already have been reduced to a bunch of political orphans looking for new political umbrellas. Most of them have rebelled against the Chaudhrys. The party has, on paper, 53 members in the National Assembly. As many as 29 members showed their resentment against the Chaudhrys by opposing Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and chose Faisal Saleh Hayat as their parliamentary leader. Faisal, it should be remembered, accused the Chaudhrys of human trafficking while he was the Interior Minister. One minority and seven female members stayed around only because the party president has the authority to cancel their seat. A petition against Marvi is pending at the Election Commission because she is on a Punjabi quota but her home province is Sindh. Donya Aziz, soon to be clubbed with Nausheen Saeed, also faces the charges at the EC that they are Islamabad residents adjusted on the Punjab quotas.

The like-minded group, popularly known as 'Kashmayun bloc', claims to have 16 members. The figure stands disputed but MNAs like Hamayun Saifullah, Israr Tarin, Arbab Zaka, Riaz Fatiana, Ahmadan Bugti, Saeed Zafar, among others, emanate anti-Chaudhry vibes. Sumera has been reported lost and missing in the PML-Q annals. Others like Farooq Laghari hang out not for their love for the Chaudhrys but because he has nowhere else to go.

Similarly, the Senate is all but lost for the Chaudhrys. Of the 21 PML-Q Senators, eight of them — including Salim Saifullah, Haroon Akhtar, Mohabbat Khan Marri, Gulshan Saeed and Fauzia Fakhruzaman — seem blatantly rebellious. Senators Tariq Azeem, Seemi Zaidi, Saeed Hashmi, Jan Jamali and Mohammad Ali Durrani have distanced themselves from the Chaudhrys. Shujaat may just have four or five Senators like Naeem Chatha, Khalid Ranjha, S M Zafar and Wasim Sajjad. But then insiders say the lawyers among them are getting increasing number of government cases, an interesting development one must say and one not without inherent consequences.

The PML-Q has already lost 53 of 84 Punjab MPAs to the likeminded group. Come elections, many others want to jump the fence. Interestingly, the leader of the rebel gang Tahir Ali Javed had cases of the biggest outbreak of hepatitis in the US and yet Pervaiz Elahi protected him as his, of all the ministries, Health Minister. Now, Chaudhrys are reportedly pushing the very cases against him that they blocked earlier. The situation in other provinces is equally dismal for the party. Herein lies the myth of the PML-Q's progression to victory. The PML-Q is more than welcome for this debate but I must say that Mushahid's copy was much better when he was in our ranks. Anyway, tomorrow we

move on to the ‘glorious’ Musharraf era and the roles various political players played in it.

Part-IV: Exit the politicians, enter commando Musharraf!

Shakespearean tragedy is what we have all read about but the ‘once almighty’ General Pervez Musharraf is actually living it, a mere 90-minute flight away from a country he once ruled like his private fiefdom but cannot even enter today.

The grand mansion that he built in the leafy Islamabad suburb, on the pattern of Shadad’s heavens, for his power dinners and musical highs, remains unoccupied. And you can’t really blame it, because his fancy to live his once planned life there could cost him exactly that: his life. Article 6 is becoming a real threat after all in the new Pakistan. So, now’s the time we get to see the real mettle of the self-proclaimed commando, who said Pakistan first, but always acted on me-first doctrine. Will he ever dare come back?

Within months of his rather unceremonious fall from grace, he has landed in a situation where his once sworn loyalists are not taking his calls. One finds them using overly harsh language against him to prove that they are no longer in his camp, even in touch. Most of his political grandees, dotting TV screens to harp lectures on morality, are lost and missing from the public eye.

The rag tag of his political leftovers is desperately looking for new umbrellas to get under. Some pray that Nawaz Sharif’s heart softens and he accepts them back; others hope sneak into the PPP camp. Others with nowhere to go would still like to test the waters before they completely abandon the general’s bandwagon.

An office in F/6 block of Islamabad stands opened in the name of an outfit called Pasdaaran-i-Watan. A visit to the place revealed that two political ‘nobodies’ who sit there are off to Dubai. Barrister Saif is the head of the outfit and Brigadier (retd) Rashid Qureshi is once again, God save us, the media spokesman for Musharraf. One staffer claimed he worked in the government-owned APP and the other introduced himself as one Zaman working for the Intelligence Bureau. The IB chap was told that he could be in trouble, either way, if he was lying or not. Another staffer claimed that Senator Mohammad Ali Durrani sat there earlier and even took away the furniture when he left.

Durrani was traced in the sand dunes of Bahawalpur where he said he was working for the Saraiki province. The idea seems to have come to him a little late in his career, perhaps out of desperation for nursing a constituency. It could also have been a cover to avoid Musharraf and the ever intrusive media. He denied the furniture story and the rumours that he was assigned by Musharraf to open the offices for what would later be announced as the All Pakistan Muslim League. As if we were already short of the PML factions.

Musharraf faces a dilemma. He had got the so-called 'tonga' factions of Hamid Nasir Chattha, Kabir Wasti and Millat Party of Farooq Leghari merged into the PML-Q. The party that he helped nurture and was supposed to be his baby after his retirement from office is no longer there. Chaudhry Shujaat refused to hand over the party to him or his nominee, Hamid Nasir Chattha. He has got only a handful of sleepers like Marvi Memon, Sher Afgan, Sarwar Khan and Ameer Muqam in the PML-Q. Marvi Memon had more of her own posters plastered in Gilgit than that of the party president in the recent elections. The elder Chaudhry had ignored it, because if he pursues her disqualification at the EC, Marvi will be replaced by Tanzeela Cheema, who is next on the nomination list. Tanzeela's family is related to the Chaudhries, but her husband, Amir, has switched over to the Nawaz League.

The Kashmayun bloc is indecisive. The only commonality among its top office-bearers, like Chairman Hamid Nasir Chattha, President Senator Salim Saifullah, Senior Vice-President Khurshid Kasuri, Vice-President Kabir Wasti and Secretary-General Hamayun Akhtar, is that they do not have a safe constituency. Its members are meeting Musharraf in Dubai in ones and twos but are not likely to make up their minds until he shows his cards.

Musharraf, during whose rule several shady deals were made, is told exaggerative stories about his popularity. One such presumption is that the people, hard pressed because of inflation and loadshedding, are getting fed up of both the PPP and the Nawaz League and the situation is ripening for him to stage an entry. The super presumption is that Musharraf is the only person who could replace them. Incidentally, the discussion was being held appropriately on April first.

A politician, who met Musharraf recently, said he could not resist thinking about the joke about that Mirasi who was told that he would never become the Chaudhry even if the entire village died. What a befitting fall for a person who exercised ruthless power and led the most extravagant and colourful life among the Pakistani rulers. The stories we hear about his evening parties surpasses Yahya Khan by lengths.

His word was the law and his whims could turn a pauper into a billionaire overnight or the other way around. A crony put up a few billboards in town to catch Musharraf's fancy and the next thing we heard he was made a senator. A swindler, who deliberately lost in a bridge game with Musharraf, was made the head of a corporation.

A politician invited Musharraf in music parties in his house with choicest female singers; he was given a ministry of his choice. One of the three prime ministers is also believed to have got the top job through this route. The question is that where are all those luminaries who swore by his word round-the-clock: his mouth pieces Durrani and Tariq Azeem; the most powerful intelligence chief, Ejaz Shah; the cigar-totting Sheikh Rashid; the loud-mouthed Raza Hiraj and a whole menagerie that would consume reams of paper, if listed.

We may have forgotten about them and the whole era too early. Perhaps there is a need to shed a little light on all these characters, most importantly, on top honchos-civilian Tariq Aziz and military man Hamid Javed.

Part-V: PML others

All Pakistani dictators have bequeathed a team or individuals who defined their character and class. Ayub Khan's legacy, which included Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, continues even after 40 years. Men of that era may have been anything but they were not corrupt. Zia's leftovers continue to dominate the entire conservative wing of Pakistani politics. They now resent their dictatorial roots and are trying to, exceptions apart, mould themselves to democratic politics.

Dictator Musharraf's legacy stands exposed within months. One really has to think hard to name even one great political or otherwise that the nine years of Musharaffian regime may have produced to symbolise his rule. One of his prime ministers left behind a trail of scandalous deals. Another one always claimed to be -- the loyal servant to Boss Musharraf.

The rest were mostly a strange mix of cronies, wheeler-dealers, turncoats who may have already faded into a haze of oblivion. Some in the Senate like Tariq Azeem, Mohammad Ali Durrani, Gulshan Saeed, Khalid Ranjha and Jahangir Ashraf Qazi are seemingly ordained to die out once their tenures end. The politics of a whole bandwagon of their counterparts in the National Assembly started with Musharraf and is likely to finish with him. Easy come, easy go.

The myth of Musharraf's honesty needs to be scrutinised by a much larger forum, perhaps a judicial and parliamentary forum, which should provide declassified record of those years for journalists and the public to investigate. For all we know that there was a powerful friend of family and friends that controlled everything. At the top of the power ladder were military man Hamid Javed and civilian Tariq Javed.

A known politician was recently requested by Musharraf to join his party. The politician asked the general that why he did not ask the two gentlemen, Tariq and Hamid, who exercised the maximum power to carry his torch. Musharraf, he said, took a deep breath and responded that they had become reclusive and were not interested. The politician told him that it was quite a convenient time to be reclusive.

The reclusiveness of Hamid Javed, chief of protocol to Musharraf, seems true. The burly general was smart to use power while keeping himself in the background. The only time he got clubbed with Tariq Aziz in a controversy was when both of them showed interest in the regularisation of Islamabad's zone four. MNA Faisal Saleh Hayat confirms that he lost his job as Interior Minister because he refused to budge before Tariq Aziz's pressure to oblige.

Tariq Aziz is anything but reclusive. He continues to relish official accommodation with all the perks that he enjoyed under Musharraf. He remains on the panel of Asif Zardari's advisers, thanks for brokering the NRO, and has gladly passed on his whole gang of, among other assets, wheeler-dealers to the presidency.

There is no parallel to one person, Tariq Aziz, enjoying so much power in any government, dictatorships or otherwise. He flaunted arrogantly the extent of his power by which he could make or break ministers, party presidents, ministers, governors, bureaucrats, you name it. And he did make and break many on his whim. He made the Chaudhrys the supreme family of this country and then put them in the doldrums when he developed a liking for Hamayun Akhtar. This made the Chaudhry cry out about his being their one time manager. Stories of his pomp and shenanigans were known widely but no one dared to publish because there was a goon club to manage his media. He remains the President of Lahore Race Club where under him even the names of national heroes, the awardees of Nishan-i-Haider, were tarnished as trophies for what was more gambling than racing.

A brief mention of Musharraf's cabinet stars who were dearer than others is merited. Sher Afgan Niazi was the first one stand up on the first day of the 2002 National Assembly to say that he would die but not take oath under a Constitution which has the dictator's name. It took only a few months for the 'darvesh' to become the biggest supporter of the general -- for a small crumb of a ministry.

There was nobody more arrogant than Sheikh Rashid while he was in power. Once known as the hero of the people behaved as if he was the son of Donald Trump. Raza Hiraj made his first entry into politics as a lota and one may never know where he will turn his coat next time -- may be Nawaz Sharif. Khurshid Kasuri, Aftab Sherpao, Hamayun Akhtar — all cut a sorry figure in the dictator's hall of shame.

Musharraf's media team was one the most vocal. Rashid Qureshi and Mohammad Durrani had a simple rule: they would deny first and deal with things later. Former bureaucrat Anwer Mahmood enjoyed more power than any information minister ever did. He relished banning TV channels like Geo; destroyed the careers of some of our finest journalists. Yet he always maintains good relations on the surface. The finesse with which a singled out the cream of journalist to be pressured, defamed or exiled deserves credit.

There was a whole gang of Musharraf's family and friends who were known to be the keys to power. Deals for leases, exemptions, quotas, ministries and top jobs were struck in the drawing rooms of a selected few. Former ADBP president Istaqbal Mehdi was powerful because his wife Maryam got adopted by the dictator's mother. Wasim Haqqi, who was made Board of Investment chairman, posed as if he decided the menu for Musharraf's dinner. The report on the role of Musharraf's Samdhi about the award of Royal Palm Golf Club is soon to be furnished before parliament. The list of those who

could 'get things done' from Musharraf includes his friend Ehsanul Haq, relative Adnan Asad topped by his so-called mentor Brigadier Niaz.

Finally, my favourite Nasim Ashraf. I did a story on him identifying a pattern where in five cases he would create hype about a project followed by financial irregularities and then dumping of the project, leaving behind a trail of mess. He got a fake report published in my name and made sure that I was out of job for two years. Two more projects have been added in series since then. Similar pattern was followed in the case of National Commission for Human Development and Pakistan Cricket Board. About this, a new series some other time.