

NYT flays Bush over Bangladesh developments

The Bush administration has come under media attack for the first time for 'ignoring' the emergence of military rule in Bangladesh.

Suggesting that the mass arrests of political activists in Bangladesh and the hounding of its two top politicians could lead to a creeping authoritarianism, the New York Times said military rules offers no answers to grievances that can fuel Islamic radicalism.

Pakistan, it said, was a clear example of this.

Commenting on the situation in Bangladesh, which is now virtually under army rule, the newspaper faults the Bush administration for raising 'little protest'.

'Washington is being dangerously short-sighted. Democracy can be messy, and in Bangladesh it was extraordinarily so. But military rule offers no answers to the grievances that fuel Islamic radicalism, as can be seen from nearby Pakistan.

'By stifling authentically popular mainstream parties and their leaders, military regimes often magnify the political influence of religious extremists,' the editorial argued.

Last week, the newspaper pointed out, Sheikh Hasina Wajed and leaders of her 14-party alliance were charged with murder in connection with violent pre-election protests.

Her rival, Khaleda Zia, is now under virtual house arrest. More than 150 other senior politicians have been detained on corruption charges 'and the timetable for new elections keeps receding'.

'This concept of a militarily guided democracy without democrats is familiar in South Asia. Pervez Musharraf has followed the same script in Pakistan and his countrymen are still waiting, with increasing impatience, for the real democracy he promised them nearly eight years ago,' NYT said.

Both former Bangladeshi prime ministers have much to answer for, including tolerance for corruption and a bitter personal rivalry that has kept the country in permanent turmoil.

But the answer cannot lay in an unaccountable military dictatorship, it said. 'And President Bush, if he truly cares about democracy in the Islamic world, needs to say so.'

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