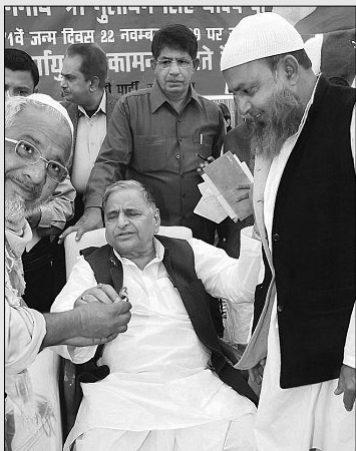


## Asia



## 'Generous' Maulana Mulayam woos the Muslims

Wooing the Muslims appears to be the main agenda of SP president Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Banking heavily on the 18.5 per cent Muslim population in UP, the 24-page manifesto of the party, which was released in Lucknow, covers almost every section of the community.

To begin with, the SP has promised to release 'innocent Muslim youth' jailed for alleged involvement in terror activities.

"They will not only be released, but also compensated. The officers involved in harassing them will also be punished," the manifesto read. It also offers a special package for technical education in madaras and the recruitment of Muslim youth in the security forces.

"We'll pressure the Centre to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee and Ranganath Mishra Commission.

"Muslims would be given reservation on a par with their population on the lines of the SC quota," it said.

The manifesto promises academic institutions in Muslim areas, empowerment of Urdu, Dargah Act for the development of shrines, a package for construction of graveyard walls, a law to safeguard waqf property, schemes for weavers and the opening of the Mohammad Ali Jauhar University.

Although Mulayam had lost the 2007 assembly poll on the issue of poor law and order - and has still given tickets to over 40 tainted candidates - his manifesto promises a 'crimefree society'.

"Criminals will be jailed... won't dare to harass anyone," it read. Observers, however, doubt the words.

"Mulayam is a good Opposition leader. But he has failed as an administrator.

"Criminals start their activities boldly whenever he comes to power," Manoj Singh, a rights activist, said.

Pakistan's prime minister appeared before the country's Supreme Court to defend himself against allegations of contempt - it is symbolic of a dispute that is on-going at the centre of the country's powerful elite.

When great institutions of state clash, history is made. It is the stuff of school history lessons - the Magna Carta, the Star Chamber, the Great Reform Act - that kind of thing.

But while in the UK such milestones have generally been once-a-century type events, in Pakistan they have become a way of life. Constitutional crises have become business as usual.

This week Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani was forced to appear before the Supreme Court. He was there to face contempt proceedings related to the president's immunity from prosecution.

I will spare you the details. But as I sat in the court's press gallery, I felt pretty sure that in 100 years, Pakistani school children would not be learning about the January 2012 contempt case.

Perhaps they will be studying something the Western journalists did not even know was happening: a debate between some clerics on what role Islam should have in the state.

But the court was colourful. There was the prime minister, alongside him his brilliant lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan and a throng of

# Pakistan's PM appears before the Supreme Court



ministers showing solidarity.

And buzzing about all of them, the journalists - representatives of Pakistan's new, irrepressible 24-hour news television culture.

For millions of Pakistanis, the constant wrangling of the elite has the quality of a TV soap opera.

I do not want to belittle the importance of politics. The failure of successive elected and military governments has left millions of Pakistanis highly frustrated. But

still the TV news shows attract massive audiences - people both despair of their leaders and want to know all about them.

Because many of the political parties are little more than family businesses, the same names have been around for decades - with power passed from father to daughter, brother to brother, and so on. All this is against a backdrop of corruption cases, the frequent imprisonment of

politicians, the "war on terror", suicide attacks, assassinations, US military incursions - there is so much going on.

Pakistani news anchors can pirouette from the big news such as "The Prime Minister's Day in Court", to the tittle-tattle - the affairs, the hair transplants, the family rows.

"Will the generals and judges force the president from power?"

"Is he really sacrificing a goat every day for good luck?"

A small number of Pakistanis - such as Husain Haqqani - have fought their way to the top without the benefit of powerful relatives. Until recently he was Pakistan's ambassador to the US. His political antennae are so acute he is normally 10 moves ahead of everyone else.

Unfortunately for him he appeared to overreach recently with a complicated manoeuvre designed to get the US administration to help the civilian government rein in the army.

It backfired, and now he is living under virtual house arrest in the prime minister's residence, saying he knows too much and fears he will be killed.

## Bangladesh authorities vow to hunt coup plotters



A senior minister in Bangladesh vowed to bring to justice those responsible for plotting a coup.

The Bangladesh army said it had foiled a conspiracy against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government.

"Anyone who attempts to overthrow the democratic system will be traced... none will be spared," minister Syed Ashrafur Islam told reporters.

Bangladesh has a history of military governments. The army ran the country for 15 years until 1990.

Sheikh Hasina took over power from a military-backed caretaker government in early 2009. Officials say she has since faced threats from Islamists and other radical groups.

"Action will be taken against them as per army regulations," said Mr Islam, who is also a senior leader of the ruling Awami League party.

"We might have differences of opinion, but there is no difference of opinion in the case of democracy. So it is the duty of all to protect the democratic system."

Military officials said that the officers planning the coup were in active military service and had "extreme religious views".

A group of up to 16 hard-line Islamist military officers - including at least two retired officers - were involved.

Some have been detained and officials say they will be presented before a military court.

Preliminary investigations showed that certain officers had been motivated by some Bangladeshi expatriates.

Meanwhile, the military confirmed that it would continue its hunt for a serving officer linked to the coup attempt.

"One serving officer Major Zia ul Haque is absconding. He did not yet report to his place of posting. That's why a move has been taken to locate him and to bring him to the book of law," Mr Shahinul Islam, Director of the Inter Service Public Relations, told the BBC.

The BBC's Anbarasan Ethirajan in Dhaka says it is still not clear how much Islamists have penetrated into the Bangladeshi army. Some retired officers agree that a small group of officers may

## Sri Lanka 'expels 161 foreign Muslim preachers'



Sri Lanka reportedly ordered 161 foreign Muslim preachers to exit the country for flouting visa regulations.

The clerics had no right to preach in mosques because they had arrived on tourist visas, a senior immigration official was quoted as saying. He also said that some local Muslims had complained that the visitors were not teaching a moderate form of Islam. The preachers - from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Maldives and Arab nations - must now leave by 31 January.

"They have violated immigration laws. A tourist visa is to have a holiday or visit friends and family, and not to preach Islam," Sri Lanka's immigration head Chulananda Perera told the AFP news agency. Mr Perera said the group belonged to Tablighi Jamaat - an international Islamic movement popular in Sri Lanka and the region.