

**Press Statement by Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, former Finance and
Planning Minister**

A Four-Point Formula for Political Stability

For five years now, our political leaders have tried the politics of confrontation, with disastrous results for the stability of the country. Isn't it time to try a new politics of accommodation? The entire nation is holding its breath and praying that the political leaders will show the necessary wisdom and maturity to establish a stable political system despite the split mandate given in the recent elections.

Now that various promising power-sharing formulas have already collapsed, there is still time to agree on a four-point agenda to create political stability.

First, all political parties should voluntarily accept at least a one-year moratorium on any no-confidence move against the governments that finally emerge in the Centre and the Provinces. Let these governments get a breathing space to manage the affairs of the state rather than be preoccupied all the time in stage managing the assemblies. Let the opposition explain to the nation the alternative policies they would have liked to implement. The only way to bring down the governments which will be established now is through constant horse-trading. This will be a disastrous

tradition to perpetuate for both the opposition and the government. In fact, the political parties should display the foresight not only to enact the floor crossing legislation, but to also include in it a deeming clause stipulating that if once any independent member or any member belonging to a group with less than three representatives in an assembly (national or provincial) chooses to join a larger party in the formation of a government, then such a member will deem to be a member of the larger party throughout the entire period of the assembly for purposes of the application of the defection clause.

Second, let us institute a system whereby the opposition's right to be informed and consulted is fully recognised. The concept of a "shadow cabinet" should be formalised at the Centre, consisting of the Leader of the Opposition and about ten members from the National Assembly and the Senate nominated by him. The shadow cabinet should meet each week with chosen ministers of the government, under the guidance of the President, to be informed about policy matters relating to defence, foreign affairs, economic management and internal security. The Leader of the Opposition should be placed next to the Leader of the House in the Warrant of Precedence, as the caretaker government is already arranging, and members of the shadow cabinet given privileges equivalent to the members of the real cabinet.

This will not only establish a healthy tradition of consultation on all important national issues, it may restrain the struggle each opposition wages to topple the ruling party.

Third, let us establish a framework of mutual consultations which can help avoid the constant fight over important national appointments. The President should seek the concurrence of both the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition in the appointment of Provincial Governors, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Chief Election Commissioner. Similarly, it should be agreed that Chief Secretaries and Inspectors General of Police will be appointed, replaced or removed only with the prior concurrence of the provincial governments.

Fourth, the election of the next President should be arranged through a complete consensus between the two major parties--PPP and PML(N). It will be simply tragic if the President--who is supposed to be a symbol of the continuity and stability of the State under our constitution--is selected through a bruising and divisive battle between the two major parties. On his part, the consensus President should voluntarily agree never to dissolve the national assembly except through the joint consent of the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition, to make important national appointments through intensive consultations with both sides, and to institutionalise

meetings between the real and the shadow cabinets. The full energies of the Presidency should be engaged in stabilising the political system, not in destabilising it.

Despite the failure of the sincere efforts of many well-meaning intermediaries to arrange a workable political compromise between the PPP and PML(N), it is not too late to establish some minimum understandings for political stability. Such understandings will be a major tribute to our growing political maturity and a reassuring signal to the international community.