

## **Babak Khalatbari: Transformation in Pakistan? Events in the Year Preceding the Elections, Election Preparations, Election Results, Outlook**

The judicial crisis that began in March 2007 marked the beginning of the political downfall of General Pervez Musharraf. Before he was deposed by Mr Musharraf, chief justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry had made himself the advocate of the politically powerless, summoning high government officials before his court, demanding that persons who had 'disappeared' ominously should be tracked down and released, and offering resistance to the questionable privatisation of Pakistan Steel. Mr Musharraf feared that judge Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry might examine the legitimacy of his presidency and deliver a negative verdict. The fact that the judge was personally deposed by Mr Musharraf in a very rude manner gave rise to a protest movement that started in the spring of 2007 and continued until the elections in February 2008. Causing a stir throughout the world, the events taking place around the 'Red Mosque' in Islamabad and the subsequent wave of suicide attacks against the country's security forces further undermined the president's authority. Public pressure finally induced Mr Musharraf to resign from his office as Chief of Staff in December 2007. The president lost his uniform. The background of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto remains obscure to this day, which further weakens the president's authority. The evident loser of the elections held on February 18, 2008, was the PML-Q party which supports Mr Musharraf. The winners were the PPP of the assassinated Benazir Bhutto and the PML-N of the former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif. Both parties have announced that they intend to form a coalition government in March 2008. It is doubtful whether Mr Musharraf will be able to hold on to the presidential office much longer. As a political compromise, however, he might be granted a term of grace as interim president.