GOVERNMENT COLLEGE DRAMATICS CLUB
TO STAGE BANO QUDSIA

The Government College University Lahore’s century-old Dramatics Club, GCDC, is set to stage Bano Qudsia’s light comic satire *Mukhtar Nama* from April 4 to 6, here at the university’s Bokhari Auditorium. The play is being staged as part of GCU’s 150th anniversary celebrations. “GCU is the oldest seat of higher learning in this part of the world, and GCDC is the oldest theatre group in the northern part of the subcontinent. This year we wanted to stage something that would reflect this; that is why we chose to stage Bano Qudsia,” shared Prof. Dr. Khaleeq ur Rehman, the Vice Chancellor of GCU. “Bano Qudsia is a prolific writer, a noted dramatist, and most important for us, she is an Old Ravian. An Old Ravian being staged at her alma mater seemed to be a good idea to us,” added Prof. Rehman.

*Mukhtar Nama* is a play in three acts about a family led by a retired bureaucrat named Riaz Bakhtiar, who thinks he can run the country as efficiently as he runs his family. He thinks of himself as a democrat and an ideal leader; the irony is that he is neither. The opening of the play establishes Riaz’s messiah complex and his personal eccentricities. Bano Qudsia’s vivid characterization of Riaz, his repressed wife Gul, their fickle daughter Fareeda and effeminate son Haroon manages to amuse and entertain in the first half of the play. We learn that Riaz has sought premature retirement to venture into the business of agricultural implements and wants the family to move to Karachi. The second act opens with the arrival of Niaz Rasool, Riaz’s wily cousin who has come to help the family pack. This adds a bit of the conspiracy touch to the second part of the play. Niaz Rasool presents himself as an alternative to Riaz’s autocratic dominance, but in reality he is a conniving sod who uses a different set of tactics to achieve the same ends. He gradually plants dissent in the family and convinces them to stand up to Riaz. The third act becomes highly symbolic with the final faceoff between Riaz and Niaz Rasool resembling the strife between leaders contending for power in Pakistani society. Bano Qudsia’s deft use of deliberate ambiguity adds additional flair to the ending of the play.

The play is produced by VC, GCU, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Khaleeq ur Rehman and directed by Dr. Salman Bhatti and Mr. Sameer Ahmed. The GCDC plans to use extensive light effects to play with the pregnant suggestiveness of the situations in the play. Prof. Rehman adds, “I am very proud of my faculty members and students who have been preparing to stage the play in just twenty days. I am hopeful that their hard work will pay off.”