

PAKSITAN AT THE CROSSROADS: NEED FOR A SUSTAINABLE STRATEGY

The Dawn

13 November 1999

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Pakistan at the crossroads: need for a sustainable strategy

By Prof Khurshid Ahmad

THE way the whole nation has expressed its satisfaction over the dismissal of Nawaz government and the solidarity of the army and the manner in which every segment of the society has approved the action, exposed that the ousted government had lost the nation's confidence. Such a martial changeover is 4th in the entire 52-year political history of Pakistan. Contrary to what occurred in the past, the army takeover this time is exceptional in that military leadership acted collectively in absence of chief and the move cannot be attributed the action of one single person.

The responsibility that the army has now accepted demands that matters be settled after thorough consideration, consultation, keeping in view experiences of the past and the challenges ahead. The targets spelled out by the Chief Executive in his second speech (Oct 17) and later elaborated in his press conference (Nov. 1) truly make a national agenda, but all these challenges cannot be solved overnight, nor the military leadership could be expected to do so. Whereas it is necessary to have clear understanding of the problems and the possible immediate solutions, it is also imperative that the need of a proper strategy and working machinery is realized to lay a long lasting foundations for change.

The first question to be thoroughly considered in this connection is why the democratic system fails again and again. Why a situation emerges after a given period that army steps in and winds up the political chess mat. Quite understandably, the conditions which resulted in the present military takeover are unique. However, the changing hands between the civil and military governments over the past 52 years demand deep thinking and an in-depth analysis.

Looking at the political struggle of the Pakistan movement, one finds that Muslim League was instituted in 1906, but it took quite some time before becoming a truly popular Muslim force. When Quaid-e-Azam took its leadership in 1936, the party was mostly representing specific interest groups. The untiring strenuous efforts of the mature leadership of Quaid-e-Azam made Muslim League a popular force, which then set for itself in 1940, a clear goal in the form of independent Pakistan. With Partition becoming a reality and independence approaching, all types of elements rushed to join Muslim League, but they had little

these are a few thousand individuals from hardly a few hundred families who have been mastering not only the politics, but trade, industry, banking, administration, police and the military during the 52-year history of Pakistan. Democracy thus got hanged at the altar of family politics and a governance based on self-interest. The political parties herded the people like sheep, but never established any political organization based on the people's strength, which could ensure participation and position for all those eligible, and work within a system of consultation and accountability. This is the fundamental cause that kept the country deprived of the democratic culture and politics and government remained an exclusive playground for a few families and opportunists. The administrative machinery, the police, the judiciary and even the army have been used for personal / group interests. The system could never see the rule of law, the consultation, the responsibility and accountability that make the essence of democracy. The Constitution was drafted, but never respected. A tradition of constitutionalism could thus never be established.

Along with this political rot, another cause of decay is the rebellious deviation from the objective and vision, which made the moving force for the creation of Pakistan. More than a territory, Pakistan provides the sign of an ideology and a way of life. The great struggle made by the Muslims of the subcontinent was for the revival of their Deen and to frame afresh their lives in accordance with their faith, values and Islamic culture and civilization. The Quaid-e-Azam said in clear words that our real aim was to shape the system in conformity with Islam. That was the reason that even those Indian Muslims who knew their areas will remain out of Pakistan, offered sacrifices, so that a center and abode is provided for Islam and the Muslims of the subcontinent to get a chance for resurgence. It is only Islam that gives rise to emotions that unites the nation. When this bond is weakened, the chain effect of division disintegrates the Millat.

Islam and democracy were the dynamic forces that gave life to the freedom movement. This was, and could be, the only ultimate goal, whose love could lead Pakistan to the highest stages of development and progress. Today, after a lapse of 52 years and having lost half of the country, when one pauses, recalls

to sit as judge over it; 7) For smooth running of the country's system, the press is to be given freedom, undue control over means of information and communication be avoided, people be kept properly informed on the country's situation and allowed to listen to every view-point and to form opinion through free dialogue; 8) The state system should be based on the ideology that is accepted by the majority. The minority view-holders should be able to avail all opportunities to gather public support and come to power. Never should a situation be allowed to prevail in which people feel pressed to look for extra-constitutional means for change."

Pakistan today is once again perplexed looking for some political way out in future. Every sincere and wise person would agree that the above given eight points provide the foundation of sound restructuring of the house.

To complete this discussion of the principles and true foundations of democracy, one specific aspect needs a little more elaboration: The rule of the spirit of law means equal rights of citizens and their protection, free judiciary and respect for a system of balance of authority. This is the framework within which, formation or ousting of the government with popular will, existence of an effective accountability mechanism at all levels - the parliament, the judiciary, people's court in the form of elections - provide security for a healthy democratic system. For the civil administration and army, to refrain from indulging in politics and to stay alert only to accomplish their own assigned tasks is also an important component of it. All these elements brought together make the democratic process effective and fruitful.

An authority emerging out of some election drama is no democracy. No doubt, elections are an important pillar and a clear sign of the present-day democracy, but the electoral system itself needs to be effective, non-partisan and transparent. Election system should deliver the objectives for which it is constituted. The dilemma of democracy in Pakistan is that for well over 23 year (up to 1970) no national elections were held, and when the process was started, the whole system was so deformed that it was no more the true expression of public opinion rather it become a tool to make the people's will ineffective. Money, bluff and rigging thrive

it will be able to protect its power, its freedom, the ideology and the country's security. The way the nation has welcomed the military action gives good promise that it will not compromise its freedom and ideology. To put things right, four steps are essential:

Transparent and across-the-board accountability: That on the one hand fulfils the Islamic requirements of justice and on the other lets no one escape who has plundered national wealth. Accountability should start from the top and should cover politicians, bureaucrats, the army, the police, the administration, the Judiciary, traders, industrialists and the ulema. A completely free and authorized machinery be set up immediately by availing services of such former judges of the Supreme Court whose trustworthiness and integrity are above doubt. They should be authorized to work out their regulatory system and provided the necessary financial resources and honest supporting staff. This will enable them to undertake investigation and prosecution through their own free field staff. The conventional legal procedure is time-consuming and very lenient for the culprit. This is one of the reasons why actions, by way of accountability in the past whatsoever, proved fruitless. If the process is started by employing proper persons, the result can be seen in a few months. The Islamic principle should be applied here, that any one living beyond his known means, should be compelled to prove his sources of income. Thus the onus of proof is upon the respondent.

A New Economic Strategy: A new strategy is needed which ensures the common man's participation in economic activity, paves the way for progress through indigenous resources, and gradually rids the country of external loans. If the vicious circle of loan-based economy is not broken in one go, the nation shall never get out of the clutches of slavery. Pakistan must not let its economy stand mortgaged in the hands of Western money-lenders. Doing away with interest based system is also needed. God Almighty has blessed this country with a human and material resource endowment which can make the economy very strong and progressive. But this needs confidence in the people, truthfulness about facts, austerity, hard work, and a model leadership. If such decisions are not made at this juncture, it will be a tragedy.

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The first question to be thoroughly considered in this connection is why the democratic system fails again and again. Why a situation emerges after a given period that army steps in and winds up the political chess mat. Quite understandably, the conditions which resulted in the present military takeover are unique. However, the changing hands between the civil and military governments over the past 52 years demand deep thinking and an in-depth analysis.

Looking at the political struggle of the Pakistan movement, one finds that Muslim League was instituted in 1906, but it took quite some time before becoming a truly popular Muslim force. When Quaid-e-Azam took its leadership in 1936, the party was mostly representing specific interest groups. The untiring strenuous efforts of the mature leadership of Quaid-e-Azam made Muslim League a popular force, which then set for itself in 1940, a clear goal in the form of independent Pakistan. With Partition becoming a reality and independence approaching, all types of elements rushed to join Muslim League, but they had little in common, nor were they associated with the masses, as the original leadership was.

When Pakistan came into being, Quaid-e-Azam and his reliable companions could not get enough time which was required to re-construct the new state on fresh foundations and according to the objectives in sight. Quaid-e-Azam breathed his last in one year and Liaquat Ali Khan was caused to give way to the plotters, who grabbed the reins of power through a retrogressive step.

In a matter of a few years the true representatives of the Muslim masses were deprived and state authority taken in hand by the bureaucracy and self-seeking elements. They were only suspending governments, abrogating constitutions, silencing the press, strangling political freedom in the name of Safety Act and fanning regional bigotry and prejudices. The first Constitution took nine years and even that was annulled within thirty months and military dictatorship imposed. The foreign powers, more particularly the United States played a special role in this anarchy and got Pakistan tightly bound in military pacts and the world imperialist order. The sincere workers of the Pakistan Movement either had to leave the Muslim League or were made ineffective. The party leadership got transferred to landed elite, capitalists and the civil and military bureaucracy. This is that Qabza Group that got hold of the Muslim League and its derivatives like Jinnah League, Awami League, Republican Party, Convention League, People's Party, Nawaz League etc. This is the mimic group that every now and then changes the garb and controls the country politics.

Political analysts estimate that

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Islam and democracy were the dynamic forces that gave life to the freedom movement. This was, and could be, the only ultimate goal, whose love could lead Pakistan to the highest stages of development and progress. Today, after a lapse of 52 years and having lost half of the country, when one pauses, recalls the past and considers the future course, one realizes that only Islam and true democracy provide a secure basis for the existence and progress of the country. It would be worthwhile to quote here what a great scholar of our times, Maulana Maududi, said when the 1962 Martial Law was lifted:

"When a country is governed in disregard to the natural principles of justice and rationality, the result is repeated errors, mistakes and stumbling leading the country to such an end again and again. So, I warn you in clear words that unless the democratic system is based on correct, sound, natural and rational principles, the country will remain vulnerable to dangers. If we are sincere in not committing the blunder of destroying the God-gifted free state that we got after two centuries of slavery, then we must accept that: 1) The country belongs to the people. It is not the property of some persons, group or clan. Its system, therefore, should be framed and run as the people wish; 2) Only those should be allowed to rule who have been elected by the people through their free choice; 3) The only valid election will be the one in which every adult citizen has the right to vote. Indirect election is only an instrument of dictatorship; 4) The election engineered through money, coercion, rigging and intervention of the state officials, is not an election at all. It makes no difference whether people have or do not have the right to vote in such a system; 5) The state functionaries, both civil and military, have no right to rule. They are to administer state affairs under the command of public representatives; 6) All authority should rest with the representative parliament or assembly whatsoever. No one is

equal rights of citizens and their protection, free judiciary and respect for a system of balance of authority. This is the framework within which, formation or ousting of the government with popular will, existence of an effective accountability mechanism at all levels - the parliament, the judiciary, people's court in the form of elections - provide security for a healthy democratic system. For the civil administration and army, to refrain from indulging in politics and to stay alert only to accomplish their own assigned tasks is also an important component of it. All these elements brought together make the democratic process effective and fruitful.

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day democracy, but the electoral system itself needs to be effective, non-partisan and transparent. Election system should deliver the objectives for which it is constituted. The dilemma of democracy in Pakistan is that for well over 23 year (up to 1970) no national elections were held, and when the process was started, the whole system was so deformed that it was no more the true expression of public opinion rather it become a tool to make the people's will ineffective. Money, bluff and rigging thrive more in such elections. Starting from the preparation of voters' lists right up to the act of voting, political and economic mafias control all steps. Over and above is the interference of government machinery. Then the single representative constituency approach of the British parliamentary system is so inadequate that it never helps reflection of true public opinion at the parliament forum. That is why 72 countries of the modern world have opted for proportional representation through which the parliament can be made to look more representative. The 1999 elections for the European Union held in UK were totally based on the principle of proportional representation.

To establish a sound democratic system demands that structural changes be made in the electoral system. Proportional representation as a whole, or at least for 50 per cent seats, should be adopted. The Election Commission should be absolutely free to ensure maximum national consent. Voters' lists be prepared honestly and updated every six months. The voter's identity card must have the picture or signature or thumb impression. The whole system be computerized. The Constitutional articles 62 and 63, which are as important as any other provision concerning elections, should be put to meaningful practice. The decay of the democratic system is much attributed to the inadequate and rotten election system. Many Third World rulers including those of Arab and Muslim countries reached the seat of power by getting 90-98 per cent public votes. Yet such elections were never considered democratic. The same is Pakistan's problem.

The real challenge before the Pakistani nation today is, whether

staff. The conventional legal procedure is time-consuming and very lenient for the culprit. This is one of the reasons why actions, by way of accountability in the past whatsoever, proved fruitless. If the process is started by employing proper persons, the result can be seen in a few months. The Islamic principle should be applied here, that any one living beyond his known means, should be compelled to prove his sources of income. Thus the onus of proof is upon the respondent.

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National Security and Foreign Policy: Without Kashmir Pakistan is incomplete ideologically and physically. The leadership have to support the freedom movement in Kashmir at all costs and have to guide it to success. The limits of friendship with India should be made quite clear in this respect. Without a just solution of Kashmir problem, in accordance with the UN resolutions and aspirations of the people, no trade or friendship with India is possible. No compromise is acceptable on the nuclear programme. As a responsible state, Pakistan will decide itself how this capability is to be used. The US has itself failed to ratify CTBT through its Senate; how can it demand the same from Pakistan! These are the constants of national security and foreign policy.

Electoral Reforms: This is the core point, which will decide Pakistan's ability to embark upon a new course. If the electoral system is not corrected, the nation will remain deprived of its true and genuine leadership exactly as it failed to have in elections over the past 12 years. The steps that are required in this regard have already been spelled out.

The seven points of General Pervez Musharraf's agenda are all important. Yet he and his team should give priority to the above-said four points. They cannot deliver all what is required. If, through these four basic steps, they enable the country to move in the direction of a pure democratic system, that will be a memorable and heroic deed. But, if they address too many things without realizing the imperatives of a fundamental change, they will not be able to take the nation out of the quagmire it finds itself in, no matter how well-intended their actions may be.