

Democracy and dictatorship

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NOTHING but farcical and hypocritical word jugglery divides the pragmatic operation of dictatorship and democracy. Both systems are proclaimed to be in the public interest — one visible in physical contours, the other, invisible in the grotesque shadow of a so-called mighty electorate. One man ruling a country is a dictator. Two to three hundred people ruling the country through an elected parliament are not dictators because they abdicate their individual right to rule in favour of a single person called the Prime Minister, or a Caesar. What were Julius and Augustus Caesar, if not dictators although surrounded by elected Senators? What was Charles I and his successor, Cromwell, if not ruthless dictators though answerable to a mock parliament? What were Louis-VI, Robespierre, Lenin and Stalin, if not dictators. What is the US President, if not a dictator? What was Jawahar Lal Nehru trying to achieve in training his daughter to succeed him if not attempting to establish a long line of Nehru rulers in India — a precedent Indira Nehru Gandhi herself loyally followed in grooming her son, Rajiv to succeed her? In Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto passed his legacy down to his only clever child, Benazir, in the hope she would emulate Indira Gandhi. Doubtful that time would stand still for her son, Bilawal, to grow up and take up where she left off. She has probably yielded to the urges of her ambitious husband, Zardari, to pass the legacy on to him — that is to say, to a family with no claims on Pakistan and no pretensions to historic and rightful inheritance to power.

With every "democratic" country having its own version of "democracy", the deplorable authority with which India armed itself from the very beginning of its democratic experiment was the presidential power to impose Governor's rule in any province. As we in Pakistan, are despite our professed dislike of everything, Hindus, are in the habit of emulating and quoting the Indian precedent as the last word in decisive example, we devised our own 12th amendment and blessed India for providing us with a quotable quote. What is Governor's rule if not a one man dictatorship substituted for parliamentary government? What a colossal hypocrisy for democra-

cy to say it still is in power when it can create pockets of dictatorship under its own patronage? Nay, it can under its patronage even impose martial law while shouting against it all the time, as did Khwaja Nazimuddin in Lahore and Z A Bhutto in Karachi. Advocates of our peculiar democracy can, of course, claim one credit for it. They can say that while a martial law rule will seldom acknowledge that it has failed, their democracy, by imposing Governor's rule or martial law makes a frank admission of its failure and resorts to the only alternative available to it — a dichotomy and the paradoxical co-existence of democracy and dictatorship.

The inevitability of such a sit-

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uation was assured by the Government of India Act of 1935 which dealt at length with provincial autonomy but reserved for the Federal Government the right to intervene in provincial affairs and dismiss their government while announcing new elections. This provision was carried into the Indian Independence Act 1947 and was widely hailed. The fact was that the curse of provincial governments was inherited by the British from the Mughals and people had got widely used to the system. Nobody ever gave thought to the matter that the process was inlaid with the seeds of ethnal, provincial and parochial loyalties which, cumulatively, divided the country and never let the flower of one nation blossom. The provincial system had not succeeded, com-

paratively speaking of big countries, in China where it decayed into warlordism. The only big country where it has successfully worked is the United States but the Federal Government there retains a number of subjects which makes federal authority felt every where. The Governor of a State is a respected person having a wide range of subjects under him but the people of every state look up to the US President for handling the country's policies as a whole. The US Congress and Supreme Court provide checks and balances on presidential powers but eventually, the President is the country's Chief Executive. Which means, on constitutional analysis, the dictatorship of one man who pretends to be acting democratically, just because he has been elected to his office.

In view of what has been stated above, it is difficult outright to condemn what has happened in NWFP. One can say the whole process is the result of the mischievous provisions of Acts of 1935 and 1947. The Opposition claims to be fully cognisant of the Constitution but its leader has said "damn with the Constitution". He wants it changed, in any case, to Presidential form. This would mean Mr Sharif would have the kind of authority whose functions are underlined above. For support, Mr Sharif would probably quote from Islamic history to prove that the presidential system is what Muslims are used to. Maybe "Amar" is what he has in mind. Stretched further his Amar would be the Ulal Amar of the Quranic teachings and would be the supreme military commander, supreme legal authority and law giver. Here Mr Sharif should pause to consider whether any person, professional or ordinary, would be capable and competent to perform all those functions. This is not the era of the Khulfa-i-Rashideen. Nor can the ruler himself participate in a fight like Salahuddin Ayubi and Aurangzeb. If Mr Sharif has the US system in mind he should apprehend that those entrusted to exercise checks and balances on the presidential authority are most likely, in our country, to seduce the authority towards themselves and leave the President sulking in the cold.

With all said and done the dismissal of the NWFP government, is most regrettable and matters should be brought to normal without delay.