

No alternative to democracy

History

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Democracy

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THE struggle for Pakistan by the Muslims of the subcontinent, under the inspiring leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, met with success only as it was waged in accordance with the principles of democracy and by adopting constitutional means to attain their goal.

Regrettably, however, after its establishment in 1947, Pakistan failed to get into that spirit owing to the weak civil society structure it inherited and continued authoritarian regimes that stunted the growth of democratic culture in the country.

For more than half its life, Pakistan has been under military rule, which made a mockery of democracy. However, the politicians must also bear. Their part of the blame for eroding the democratic norms in the country. Since independence, the successive rulers, with feudal and tribal background, not only suppressed democracy in the country but also encouraged the anti-democratic forces. They indulged in confrontational politics, abused their power for personal gain and failed to address the nation's myriad political and economic problems. When out of power, they even clamoured for military interventions which Pakistan's judiciary, acting uncharacteristically, frequently condoned by inventing the "law of necessity".

The self-seeking politicians, owing to their ineptitude, also rocked the very foundation of the federation of Pakistan. Many factors made varying contributions to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. However, the most profound one responsible for that catastrophe was the non-adherence to the principle of

he remains reluctant to forgo the army's primacy and is keen on retaining its dominant role in the governance of the country, at least for the foreseeable future. His decision to continue as president and army chief till 2007, confirms this assertion.

As things stand, the army is now behind the scene in the decision-making on all, important national and international issues. Since the Pakistan army comprises predominantly of people from Punjab, its role in the governance in the country may unnecessarily create a friction between Punjab and other three provinces that could impinge upon national harmony and integration. It is, therefore, imperative to avoid this situation, particularly at the present juncture when inter-provincial rivalries and bickerings are at their height and have assumed an alarming proportion.

Some orthodox Muslims tend to perceive democracy as a western concept, which, they believe, is at odds with the values and principles of Islam. Some western scholars and media also portray Islam as anti-democratic. This perception is not, however, shared by the Muslim scholars and intellectuals who see no contradiction between Islam and democracy. They argue that the principle of Shura, or consultative decision-making process, is an immutable source of democratic ethic in Islam.

Pakistan has become a test case for the compatibility of Islam with democracy. Fortunately, its people, despite prolonged totalitarian rule, which adversely affected the democratic process in the country, never abandoned the quest for democracy and persistently demanded democratic reforms in the country. The next few years will be crucial for democ-

for that catastrophe was the non-adherence to the principle of majority rule by the then ruling elite which generated frustration among the people of the eastern wing that ultimately led to the break-up of the country.

Evidently, the rulers have not learnt any lesson from the 1971 debacle as they continue to follow the policies, which, in the past, had given rise to regional tendencies and separatism. *7 P*

The absence of a true democracy has also polarized the present-day Pakistan along ethnic and sectarian lines and its disparate regions are pitted against each other on the federal policies, which, they accuse, are unjust and discriminatory. Balochistan, in particular, is feeling more and more alienated from Islamabad and has even turned to violence which has dealt a blow to the country's stability.

Islamabad should, therefore, rectify the situation politically, in a democratic manner. Its aggressive reaction to the untoward happenings in Balochistan will only exacerbate the situation. Needless to say, it will take years to restore the confidence of the smaller provinces in the federal government. *Donez*

When General Pervez Musharraf, who is reputed to be an enlightened and reform-minded military leader, dismissed Nawaz Sharif's government it was hoped that he will return the country to democracy after clearing up the mess. Though he has transferred the power to a civilian government,

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One hopes that pro-democracy elements in society, regardless of their political and religious affiliations, will push hard for democracy through peaceful means. They should insist on the introduction of democratic reforms in the country and the establishment of enduring and credible political institutions that was the only way to transform Pakistan into a true and liberal democratic state. Being an important pillar of the state, the media should also play a meaningful role in making Pakistan a genuine democratic state.

The writer is a former ambassador.