

Path of reformation

New Democracy
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The first question that comes to the mind of an ordinary Pakistani following the announcement of constitutional package is that what interest President Musharraf and for that matter the armed forces behind him have in the restoration and then strengthening of democracy? And then, don't the armed forces want a role, as usual, to keep a direct check on the state authority apparatus — whosoever is in control at a given time, whether an elected civilian set-up or an interim arrangement of selected people — given their decades-old scepticism of the non-armed forces' structures, the scepticism owing its origin to the considered opinion, almost deeper than belief, that the civilian regimes are not capable of meeting the threats to the country's security both at the external and internal level? These are two pertinent questions that have shot into limelight with specific focus on the armed forces functionaries' sophisticated training and orientation for regimentation and strict discipline that has given birth to the common perception or misperception that the politicians tend to be over-lenient and undisciplined or less disciplined.

Actually, for years and years the country's officialdom has tended to consider the political administrations quite incapable of running the government affairs at the home front. As for the external sector or front, the armed forces in particular have been having a peculiar attitude or observation that the country is in a state of incessant belligerency and thus faced with formidable threats from the powerful (now nuclear capable) hostile neighbour and its numerous influential supporters in the outside world. This thinking has actually been necessitated by many considerations including the inimical attitude of India although much of belligerency is an offspring of a grand strategy that is pursued like a game of musical chairs by the parties concerned and at times by the key players of global politics. Whatever the background or the causes that can be myriad, the situation is certainly exceptional that can be described as an oddity and it calls for exceptional measures. The problem is that lack of exercise of necessary care and caution during the course of such exceptional measures has usually been instrumental in the disruption of smoothly running systems

Chairman National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), is putting checks and balances in place for the same declared goal that is strengthening of democracy. So, whatever decisions are being made, amendments announced and steps contemplated and taken, all are being labelled as sincere endeavours in the direction of restoration of enduring democracy to be free from all the shortcomings and inadequacies as has been the cause of upheavals and martial laws in the past.

Simplifying the whole matter, it can thus be said that the government aims at providing a mechanism that would act as a safety valve for all times to come against martial laws, military rules and disruption of a system coming into existence through a democratic process. The price is increase in the powers of the President who would be a powerful monitor — and a captain too — equipped with the powers to maintain strict control over the government allowing it little room to go wayward. Certainly, the idea of more powers for the president — though not a new one — revolves around President General Pervez Musharraf who is in view of NRB the architect of draft amendments and further amendments that are likely to be announced shortly in line with the government's promise to change what is not desirable in the eyes of the people whose opinion has been sought on the proposed amendments. It is the incumbent head of state whose reforms and whose programmes' continuity is desired that the supporters of Musharraf regime's reforms and naturally, President Pervez Musharraf himself consider justified because of the sitting government's bold and drastic action against the extremist

elements whose wrath and vengeance is apprehended any moment to end up in a mishap that might not be bearable even to an ordinary man whatever the grievances of different sections of society and polity against the Musharraf regime. This is certainly no trivial matter and deserves attention, though not compromise on principles.

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Surprisingly, despite the majority Pakistanis' preference for democracy based on their awareness of the prestige and rewards that this system of governance has brought to modern states especially the neighbouring India, a good number among them have been acquiescing in, if not explicitly endorsing, the armed forces' scepticism about civilian rulers particularly the political administrators and leaders. The conviction or the common perception within this group — a loose assemblage of different segments — has been that politicians tend to be too much inclined to a wayward and irresponsible attitude that ultimately leads to the spoiling of things and increase in corruption. This observation might be Pakistan-specific or better focused on those few politicians who had a little chance to prove their mettle and thus their sincerity towards their compatriots otherwise, politicians all over the world have even handled some of the trickiest situations involving sophisticated technical know-how with the help of political insight, farsightedness and decision power that is normally the domain of top political hierarchy. Here, the things have been quite the reverse of that, the politicians responsible to deliver sticking themselves to narrower views and immediate gains — not strictly the goals. Actually, they alone are not to blame for this shortsighted or short-range governance. The culprits essentially and predominantly have been the decisions taken under the influence of scepticism and misperceived images, no one trying in earnest to give credence to one another's point of view and the circumstances confronted during any given period of time. In fact, complaints, grievances and apprehensions have been at the bottom of every major decision in the country, even the strongest and most organised structures making their forward movements under the influence of these factors. They might not have been afraid of the power or effectiveness of the institutions and individuals in the opposite camp, the latter being categorised and as such practically placed in the governed and controlled classes but the fear of losing the battle of wits has always been a constant disquieting factor and thus a source of all trouble. This is what is being avowedly targeted through the announcement of constitutional amendments that the government claims to have drafted for the purpose of protection of reforms and ridding the country of irritants and ills impeding the smooth functioning and thus the strengthening of democracy.

The aim as declared time and again by the Musharraf administration and its trusted lieutenant Lt Gen (Retd) Tanveer Naqvi,

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the country out of trouble that it becomes an instrument of continuity of governance — something that is direly, promptly and permanently required. Had there been continuity of governance through any party in power, it would have ultimately led to good governance courtesy the prevalence of the factors of selection and rejection in a democratic system. It is heartening to note that the amendments are still in the proposal stage and have been put to public debate.

It is widely believed that the government will entertain suggestions and adapt or mould itself accordingly taking encouragement from its experience of taking bold or unusual decisions, albeit under the pressure of exceptional circumstances. The regime can still be expected to take further bold steps by changing itself according to the aspirations of a people for whom such a big endeavour like that of constitutional package, reforms and their protection are being undertaken. Taking a risk in a direction that can possibly lead to greater socio-political integration and removal of misgivings, leading to the restoration of mutual trust can be definitely helpful to the country in all respects. Iconoclastic that President Pervez Musharraf has come to be known following his departure from the old conventions and practices of Pakistani military structures — under whatever circumstances — he is once again expected to depart from the old path followed by many of his ilk by making only those amendments that really reflect the government's will to lay the foundation of a structure of durable democracy that could withstand the pressures of time, scepticism and mistrust. The opportunity is good and the time is ripe for taking some more bold decisions. The responsive attitude of the incumbent administration rather encourages the cross section of the society to come forward with their valuable suggestions and put things once again on the right track. Their advice must be heeded and amendments smacking of further mistrust and dislike for any class must be done away with. The people have many expectations of the Musharraf regime and there is no way why a government avowedly committed to good governance and people's benevolence should demonstrate inflexibility when it has time and again declared that it wants strong and uninterrupted democratic system for the country.

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