

Pre-requisites of democracy-II

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According to Pakistan Institute of Legislative Independence (PILdAT), democracy failed in Pakistan because elected representatives were not aware of their rights and responsibilities. The political process came to a halt several times due to military intervention, the educated classes mostly from the middle class remained largely unconcerned about the political process and the citizens did not take any initiative to monitor the performance of elected representatives. Besides these reasons which are all relevant and to a great extent true, PILdAT has also raised the following points:

"India, which also became independent with Pakistan in 1947, continuously enjoyed a democratic system of government and peaceful transfer of power became a part of its democratic practice. Even Bangladesh, which initially went through martial law has attained the political maturity to transfer power from one to another political party through elections generally regarded as free and fair."

Why India and Bangladesh succeeded in maintaining democratic system of government while Pakistan failed is in my view due to the following reasons:

a) Shortly after independence, India framed a constitution, which is the blue print for parliamentary democracy.

b) The front line congress leadership which inherited about one hundred years of democratic traditions in the party, was totally committed to parliamentary democracy and was trained to work with selfless devotion for this purpose.

c) Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India was a hard core democrat and had the good fortune to lead his country for 16 years which laid a solid foundation for sustained democracy and the style of governance.

d) By the time Nehru died, democratic traditions had become so ingrained in the psyche of the Indian people that the armed forces did not have the courage to usurp power at any stage. It was decided for ever that India will be ruled by civilian leadership, while armed forces will defend the frontiers. The political process, therefore, continued

throwing up new and vibrant leadership through regular elections.

e) As a first step of great courage, the Indian government abolished India's large feudal estates and carried out comprehensive land reforms because they were convinced and rightly so, that true democracy cannot take root in a feudal environment.

f) Indian leadership had the wisdom to grant full autonomy to its states in their internal affairs to ensure a workable federal structure.

As regards Bangladesh, the Bengalis of East Pakistan had always had a powerful democratic mindset as against the people of West Pakistan. It was not a feudal or tribal society like the Western wing and had no powerful and ambitious army to grab power. That is why after initially going through martial law, Bangladesh has gone back to the democratic track peacefully transferring power through elections which are held under the supervision of a caretaker government.

In the first decade of Pakistan's existence, the country's political leadership failed to strengthen democratic institutions because, unlike Indian leadership, it was not tutored in the democratic culture and was not sincere in establishing a democratic system of government. After Mr Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination, the ruling party agreed to accept a bureaucrat Mr Ghulam Mohammad, as Governor General of Pakistan, who, in connivance with the Chief Justice, cast the first stone on democracy and paved the way for Ayub Khan's martial law. As Ghalib said "*Meri tameer main mazhar hai ek soorat kharabi ki*" (there is an inherent malaise in my creation) Pakistan was born with an "inherent malaise" which made it shaky and non-viable from the very beginning. The burgeoning differences between the political leaders of East and West Pakistan on many vital issues such as the quantum of autonomy to provinces, the parity, the system of

electorate and above all the mutual distrust and suspicion between the people of the two wings on economic, cultural and linguistic issues, it became next to impossible to form a stable democratic government at the centre. Besides it is also true, West Pakistan politicians who came mostly from feudal and tribal classes were themselves not interested in serving the people in a democratic framework.

If President Musharraf wants sustained democracy for which he has made certain far reaching amendments in the 1973 constitution, he also needs to take immediate steps to abolish feudal, tribal and "*biradari*" systems which have not and will never allow democracy to flourish.

The voters who are under the umbrella of feudal lords and tribal *sardars* will never be able to vote freely and independently for any candidates other than the feudals. They will always vote for their lords and masters and their progeny, generation after generation and return them to parliament to plunder the nation. Mr Bhutto made some half hearted efforts to abolish feudalism and tribalism, but he did it only as a propaganda ploy.

In Sindh, luckily, educated people from middle class entered the political arena on MQM ticket for the first time in Pakistan's history which is a good omen and a hopeful sign for democracy. Other provinces should also follow suit and organise educated classes to take part in political activity.

Print and electronic media should also launch a sustained campaign to educate the voters about their rights and duties. Similarly, elected representatives too should be educated about their rights and responsibilities. Political leadership should monitor the performance of the representatives elected on its ticket. NGOs should also keep a watch and expose their failings. Endemic corruption, religious radicalism, and sectarian violence has to be curbed to let democracy thrive. It is hoped that the President and the Security Council will ensure that momentum of political process is not broken and elections are held on schedule.

In case, this is not done, martial law will always be around the corner.