

# Democracy, where are you?

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**T**he whole world was stunned when democracy was wrapped up and put in a dungeon to rot for many years. The so-called champions of democracy at home and abroad started threatening the new military regime with dire consequences if democracy was not restored immediately. Pakistan's relations with America, the Commonwealth of Nations, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and a number of other countries suffered a severe setback because all these countries and international organisations had started raising slogans in a chorus for the restoration of democracy. They insisted that the military regime must produce what they called a "road map". At home, many political parties joined hands to indulge in their favourite hobby of slogan mongering and veiled threats. And then some clever guy referred the matter to the highest judicial authority in the country to force the new military ruler to quit the throne and take his troops back to the barracks. The three-year period allowed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to the armed forces for holding general elections and handing over political power to the people's representatives brought a sigh of relief to some politicians but a number of them still insisted that the transfer of power should be effected earlier than three years. Even international organisations like the British Commonwealth of Nations remained dissatisfied with the declared road map. The suspension of Pakistan's membership of the Commonwealth was, therefore, not revoked.

The period between the decision of the Supreme Court and the holding of general elections was fully utilised by the military rulers to evolve and implement a grand strategy with the intention of ensuring that: Power is not transferred in full to the people's elected representatives and the head of the elected government. The armed forces continue sharing power with the civilian rulers in such a way that they retain the upper hand. Continuity is maintained in policies implemented by the military regime.

The grand strategy encompassed a number of measures, each one of which speaks volumes for the foresight of military planners. These measures included the setting up of the National Security Council, the holding of a referendum to give a legal status to a President still on active service in the armed forces, the raising of a king's party expected to loyally obey every edict issued from the presidential palace, the treatment of the Legal Framework Order as a part of the national constitution without its endorsement by the newly elected parliament by a two-thirds majority, the inclusion in the new cabinet of important king pins that had served as ministers and advisors during the military regime, and one may go on counting such measures. In the meantime, the "referendums" president and his obedient servants wasted a lot of breath to assure the nation that the



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elected prime minister would have all the powers of a democratic head of government and that the national parliament would continue to be all-powerful despite the newly ordained rigmarole of laws and byelaws.

The process of restoration of democracy commenced on October 10, 2002 when general elections to the National Assembly were held, only to produce a hung parliament. Here again the military regime came to the rescue of the king's party and boosted its strength in the National and some provincial assemblies by providing official pa-

democracy and the modernisation of the country's gigantic police force. In the meantime, the middle class is shrinking fast, creating an unhealthy imbalance in the composition of the population. And yet, there are many naive Pakistanis who firmly believe that we have once again become a democratic, hence civilised, country. Who can tell these simpletons that a country having a president wearing the gorgeous uniform of a serving General, with all the glittering decorations on his chest and the rod of authority in his hand cannot be grouped with the democratic countries of the world.

In spite of all the claims that General Musharraf and his advisors have been putting forward about the distribution of powers between the president and the prime minister under the new setup, the world at large is quite aware of the actual situation. Those singing the songs of democracy under an elected prime minister would be

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tronage to the "Lota culture" that had remained banned for many years due to its evil impact on the working of democracy in the country. In the absence of this official connivance, it would not have been possible for the king's party to entice members of other political parties by lavishly throwing them the bait of ministries and advisory appointments. In consequence of these manipulations, the formation of government at the centre and in the provinces was inordinately delayed. Even now, four months since the process of democratisation started, the upper house is nowhere to be seen. Hence, no issue can be taken in hand as yet if the constitution makes it mandatory that a decision on that issue be taken by a joint session of the parliament.

**H**as democracy been really restored in Pakistan? A vast majority of the people of this country is least interested to know. As far as they are concerned, neither democracy nor military rule has ever made any difference to their run of the mill lives. Under both types of regime they feed themselves and their dependents on promises that are never fulfilled. Poverty continues to spread, prices keep spiralling at an alarming rate despite the magnificent reduction of 12-paisa per unit in the power tariffs declared by the worthy people's prime minister, suicides are on the increase, law and order situation is worse than what it was before the induction of grassroots

well-advised to ask the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, why, instead of inviting General Musharraf, he did not invite the elected prime minister of Pakistan to visit Russia for highly important talks in which decisions of far-reaching importance are expected to be taken. Apparently, he still considers the General to be the man who is all in all as far as important policy decisions are concerned. And Musharraf too has no doubts about his authority to take decisions on important matters. No wonder he sent Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali on a visit to the Persian Gulf states to merely convey a message to the rulers in connection with the impending Anglo-American attack against Iraq. Apparently, no policy decisions were involved.

People more observant than others have been talking about the frequent meetings that have been taking place between the President and the Prime Minister at the President's house ever since the latter took the oath of office. They interpret this also as an indication that Mr Jamali has to take the blessing of the President in all matters affecting the day-to-day working of the government. If this is really the case, it will have unhealthy repercussions on the working of democracy in Pakistan. If nothing else, it will embolden the president to claim more and more unwritten powers to his own person, gradually turning the prime minister into a mere titular head of the government.