

# The state of democracy report

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A report on the state of democracy in Pakistan prepared by NGO PILDAT (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency) was presented and discussed in a meeting in Lahore last week. The report claims to present an "objective non-partisan, impartial and factual analysis of the state of democracy and the process of democratisation during the first 100 days of the parliament". A credible steering committee consisting of eminent intellectuals finalised the contents of the report drafted by political analyst Dr Hasan Askari Rizvi.

The report gives "credit to the military regime for holding elections on time". It, at the same time, refers to the constitutional and political engineering undertaken by the military government to achieve a planned transition to elected governance by a co-opted political elite that was prepared to work within the parameters set by the rulers. This planned transition is anchored on the ensured continuity of the chief of the army as president and major policies. Some of the other salient points of the report are:

1. The elections produced a split mandate with the pro-military PML(Q) winning the largest number of seats in the National Assembly followed by PPP and MMA — MMA gaining the largest number in the NWFP and Balochistan.

2. The split mandate delayed the formation of governments at the federal and provincial levels.

3. The president occupies a pivotal position because of the LFO amendments in the constitution.

4. Pakistan's democratic transition can move ahead smoothly if the newly elected civilian governments and the president — COAS — work together.

5. The federal cabinet held its first meeting on December 10, 2002 — two months after the elections. It met for six days only during the period under review. Performance of provincial assemblies and governments was a little bit better.

6. Political parties continued with oligarchic structures, internal incoherence and weak organisation. The switch over of elected party members was facilitated by the President's decision not to revive the constitutional provision that debarred floor crossing. Six of the 10 defecting PPP-patriots were inducted in the federal cabinet.

7. The election of a leader from Balochistan as Prime Minister is a positive development. For the first time, the province with the smallest population got this office which is expected to promote greater inter-provincial harmony and confidence

9. It can be said that the first hundred days of democracy represent a significant change from the period of military rule. The sustainability of democracy depends on how earnestly the civilian/elected leaders and the military top brass work towards strengthening the democratic process. The political leaders need to develop a consensus amongst themselves on the operational norms of democratic governance, make the Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies as the focal point of the political system, and adopt policies to restore the confidence of the people in the capacity of

the situational factors and counselled patience for the process to yield desirable results. Mr Hamid Khan dilated at length on how the military had manoeuvred and managed to bring in a powerless parliament. He disputed the report's statement that there was even a sharing of powers with the civilian set up. In his view all the levers of power remained in the president's hands. He questioned the credit given in the report to the military government for holding the elections. He minced no words in stressing that the judiciary had become a partner with the military. The three year period given, was fixed in consultation with the then government and that the judges were being duly rewarded with an extension of three years. His assessment was that the political parties had been deliberately weakened and split. Not patience but a sustained struggle was needed to win back the civilian supremacy and restoration of the national institutions.

While it may be a little early to judge the performance of the government, the way the elections were managed and the governments manoeuvred into shape, not much can be expected by way of an expeditious democratic process, wholesome traditions and good governance. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the political process has been corrupted right from the start. Mr Jamali may be a nice chap but can he deliver, pushed around as he is by a dominant military, overbearing coalition-partners and an assemblage of asserted opportunists? This is all you have, says Mr Shami. Make the best of it suggests the PILDAT report. Launch a struggle to bring about a real change, counsels Hamid Khan.

A dark cloud hovers over a beleaguered Pakistan. The rays of hope are the Press, the independent TV networks, the lawyers, other civil society organisations and may one add, a handful of the bright, upright and hopefully bold Senators and MNAs.

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among the political leaders of Balochistan. Furthermore, the presence of seventy-two (72) women members (reserved seats: 60, general seats: 12) and their strong representation in the Provincial Assemblies is also a unique feature of the new civilian arrangements and it can contribute to empowerment of women in Pakistan, depending, of course, on the performance of these women representatives.

8. Pakistan's experience suggests that the transition from military to civilian rule involves constitutional and political engineering in the form of some significant changes in the constitutional and political arrangements. This involves co-option of a section of the political elite who is prepared to play politics in accordance with the rules set out by the ruling generals, the use of the electoral processes to legitimise the co-opted leadership, and the continuity of major policies and several key personnel, especially the head of the military government, from the military rule period.

democratic institutions and processes to solve their socio-economic problems.

In the discussion that ensued after the presentation of the democracy report Syed Fakhar Imam, Hamid Khan (Supreme Court Bar Association) and Mujibur Rehman Shami made significant observations.

Mr Imam was critical of the performance of the federal government and of the parliament — the latter in his view in particular had to be active and assertive of its role if the democratisation process is to move ahead expeditiously. In his view the parliament enjoyed much more freedom during Zia's regime and he regretted that no debate in the Assembly was held on the enormous tragedy of the crash of the Pakistan Air Force. Besides LFO, many important issues should have by now been taken up for discussion in the house.

Mr Shami provided a quick review of Pakistan's political experience to emphasized weight and relevance of