

# Deeper into political contradictions

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THE anointment of Shaukat Aziz as prime minister will mark the formal consummation of the technocratic-authoritarian order in place since the October 1999 coup. If nothing else, it is likely to drag Pakistan deeper into the realm of political contradictions.

The move should not have come as a surprise though. The antecedents of techno-authoritarianism in Pakistan dates as far back as the mid-1950s. With a helping hand from the United States, the country's civil-military-bureaucratic elites have typically favoured authoritarian route to development on the grounds that democracy is antithetical to economic reform. Depending on the perception of international aid circles, we have heard them talk about replicating a Chile, a Singapore, a South Korea or even a Malaysia.

While the ostensible goal of each successive authoritarian dispensation has been the promotion of economic development, the real rationale has been to subvert popular demands for representation and to consolidate military control over the state. It is therefore crucial that we systematically examine the intellectual assumptions that inform the basic authoritarian development model, and explore its validity in Pakistan. Repopularized by Farid Zakaria's "Illiberal Democracy," thesis, its blueprint goes something like this. An authoritarian-led government, insulated from populist pressures, seeks to stabilize, privatize and liberalize the economy. This results in economic growth which trickle

frogged to development, many more failed miserably to do so. Even the authoritarian success stories especially those involving military regimes are not very pleasant when looked at closely. Take the example of the Chilean economic miracle under General Pinochet (1973-1990). At the onset of the debt crisis in 1982, Chile experienced one of the largest per capita GDP declines (14.5 per cent) in Latin America.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, per capita income (in 1998 dollars) grew at an average annual rate of one per cent between 1981 and 1990. Then there is General Suharto's Indonesia (1966-1998). While the 1997 financial crisis exposed a myriad political and social problems, it also showed conclusively that his economic juggernaut masked a cesspool of cronyism and corruption, not to mention the brutal political repression unleashed on

rule strains the uneasy balance between the competing demands of federalism and centralism. In the past, festering grievances against the central government have resulted in the violent secession of Bangladesh and in unrest in Balochistan and Sindh.

The new wave of attacks on government officials and installations in Balochistan is only the most recent response to the growing marginalization of that province under what is widely perceived as Punjabi-dominated military rule. It goes without saying that if Pakistan is to manage its internal conflicts peacefully, it needs a consensual democratic political system (predicated on meaningful provincial autonomy) rather than a centralized, military-led hybrid.

That brings us to the Musharraf regime. Like other authoritarian rulers who supplanted democratically elected governments, the general's claim

Economic development rests on political stability and democratic legitimacy. Even if policy-makers get the economic 'fundamentals' right, authoritarian regimes are by definition doomed because they lack mass democratic consent. The models espoused by Ayub and Zia floundered mainly because they lacked a base of popular support. The Musharraf regime too stands on shaky ground because it lacks domestic legitimacy.

to legitimacy is largely based on better macroeconomic performance than his civilian predecessors. While no one anywhere denies his regime's efficient implementation of IMF-dictated "reforms," its overall record is hardly a testament to economic growth and development. It is easy for his economic advisers to dismiss the triple scourge of inflation, poverty and unemployment as necessary adjustment pains because they don't have to bear any political or personal consequences for their policies. But the fallout (social unrest, crime and violence) of deteriorating economic conditions is clearly detrimental to societal cohesion, and as a consequence, to sustainable economic progress.

Ultimately, economic development rests on political stability and democratic

and liberalize the economic system. This results in economic growth which trickle down to produce an educated and politically articulate middle class. In turn, the middle class invariably demands political participation and democratization.

At this critical juncture, the authoritarian regime can either introduce democracy or apply repression. Repression is counterproductive as it can derail economic gains. Thus authoritarian rulers yield to the pressures exerted by a pro-democratic society. In sum, get the economics right first and the politics will take care of itself.

This thesis is flawed on multiple counts. First of all, the "democracy after development" sequence is not borne out by history. Contrary to popular belief, political democratization preceded broad-based socio-economic development in the West where democracy first took root. Right up to the end of the 19th century, the democratic constitutional state was essentially a political arrangement. It did not concern itself with providing economic welfare, nor was its existence contingent on economic growth.

To the extent that democracy was possible without economic preconditions at the start, it is possible in poorer countries, including Pakistan. Second, there is no reason to believe that any two countries should follow identical political and economic paths. Even if we assume that a few authoritarian regimes leap-

civil societies (in both Chile and Indonesia).

Third, the "trickle down" effect is little more than a neo-liberal myth. Periods of rapid economic growth are known to have coincided with persistently high levels of inequality in many South American and Asian economies (including Pakistan in the 1960s). Even if growth were to percolate, it does not automatically result in a democratically-oriented middle class. Because of state cooptation and/or coercion, the middle classes have often supported authoritarian regimes in South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Lastly, sustained transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, in many Asian and Latin American cases have been the result of the military's self-executed withdrawal from power. Musharraf's cop-out on the uniform, the military's continuing manipulation of the political system and the creation of the NSC are clear indications that the Pakistani military is in the political arena for good.

There is more. The authoritarian model has no solutions for complex political problems like ethnic nationalism. Unlike ethnically homogeneous Chile or South Korea (or even bi-ethnic Malaysia), Pakistan is home to several politically 'awakened' ethnic nationalities. In this multi-ethnic context, military

development rests on political stability and democratic legitimacy. Even if they get the economic "fundamentals" right, authoritarian regimes are by definition doomed because they lack mass democratic consent. The centralized models of authoritarian governance espoused by our two previous US-supported military dictators, Ayub and Zia, floundered mainly because they lacked a base of popular support. The Musharraf regime sustained by US backing and the military's coercive power too stands on shaky ground because it lacks domestic legitimacy.

A legitimate, representative government may not instantly redress economic inequalities or guarantee a high quality of life for everyone, but it can better sustain difficult institutional reforms through consultation and consensus-building as opposed to an authoritarian regime devoid of access to broad social bases of support. In addition, economic actors hedge their bets on the continuity of economic policies not on the personal goodwill of an authoritarian ruler. Thus, as it can technically create lasting legislative and constitutional guarantees for reforms, a democratically constituted government also provides a far more reliable way of satisfying the "rational expectations" of economic actors than its authoritarian counterparts.

In other words, authoritarianism is not just bad politics; it is a bad economics.