

Democracy versus

Down delivery Democracy

16/9/09 By Dr Iffat Idris

WHAT is more important: democracy or delivery? Is the manner in which a government comes to power more important, or is what a government does in power — whether it delivers — more important? Ideally, of course, one would have both. But in a world where getting it all is too much to hope for, which should one choose?

Listen to politicians and commentators in this country, and the answer would definitely be 'democracy' — the process by which governments and leaders come to power. This is perhaps to be expected in a land that has known more military rulers than civilian elected governments. Democracy has featured especially prominently in political discourse here since the October 1999 coup that ousted Nawaz Sharif and brought Pervez Musharraf to power.

Anti- and pro-Musharraf camps have been engaged in a vicious battle ever since for ownership of the term 'democracy'. The opposition parties claim the moral high ground, presenting themselves as democracy's soldiers desperately trying to ward off the military 'invaders'. Musharraf and the PML-Q claim to be democratic too, but their claim is less to the substance of democracy as the form. The referendum, local government elections (especially for district and tehsil nazims), the October 2002 polls and the recent election of Shaukat Aziz are justified more on procedural than moral grounds. The letter of the law

down to the grassroots. These debates have little relevance to the daily grind of their lives. For those who populate Pakistan's multitudinous villages and urban neighbourhoods, delivery is the only thing that matters.

But not the "delivery" that Musharraf and Shaukat Aziz boast of: burgeoning foreign currency reserves, debt write-offs and reined-in Islamists. No, those at the grassroots are focussed on more basic indicators. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's old campaign slogan "*Roti, kapra aur makaan*" pretty much summed up their definition of "delivery". The one element he omitted was security: of life, person and property. These are the aspirations of ordinary people: this is what they expect from their government — be it civilian or military.

If they had to choose between a government elected democratically but not delivering, and a military/undemocratic government that delivers on these issues, the overwhelming majority would go for the latter.

There is evidence from international practice to back this assertion. Compare Singapore with India under the last Vajpayee government. Singapore is an island city whose economy is among the strongest in the world. It is a clean, modern efficient country in which the government surpasses itself in meeting the "*roti, kapra, makaan* — and security" needs of its people. Yes, it is far from tolerant of opposition and it does bear a very strong resemblance to "Big Brother", but that doesn't seem to bother most Singaporeans. They have a government that delivers: they can manage without full democracy.

India, by contrast, has a