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## **Democracy in Pakistan?**

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According to the dictator Musharraf, Pakistan will hold its parliamentary elections on February 18, 2008. The Western media consider the election as a measure to establish or restore democracy. This hope is miscalculated and misleading.

First of all, Pakistan never had real democracy that can be restored. Since its creation in 1947 until the 1970s Pakistan was run without a constitution or national elections. The baton of authority was simply handed over to selected politicians and bureaucrats who finally handed over the political authority to Major Iskander Mirza. Mirza was ousted by Gen. Ayub Khan, who in turn, was thrown out by Gen. Yahya Khan whose ouster was manipulated by Z.A. Bhutto (a feudal demagogue!) whose dictatorship was thrown out by Gen. Zia-ul-Haq who hanged Bhutto. This was followed by a civilian interlude of three elected governments (two under Benazir Bhutto and one under Nawaz Shariff) that were allowed by the hidden hands of the military, limited powers and durations. Finally Gen. Musharraf staged his coup. In 2008 Musharraf formally shed his military uniform and through political manoeuvres positioned himself as the President of Pakistan.

Democracy does not mean an occasional election (however unfree and unfair) held with limited powers and duration. Based on the political maxim, "democracy is not simply a form of government, but also a way of life," one may say that democracy is not just a form of election, but a form of national life.

There are built-in hurdles in the establishment of a genuine democracy in Pakistan. First and foremost it is absurd to hope that dictators can build democracy. Second, Pakistan never had a real democracy that is being restored. Third, will the February 18 election be both free and fair? Free elections require the availability of fundamental freedoms like freedom to think, to express, to criticize, to organize, to travel, etc. Fair elections means absence of corruption and discrimination based on race, religion, region, language, sex, status and wealth. Fourth, even if elections were declared free and fair, will they lead to majority government in the parliamentary tradition, and will the elected government be allowed to govern for the full term of five years? A civil war may ensue the February 18 election.

As to the “democratic way of life,” the structure of communal life should be supported by two pillars - one, fundamental freedoms; the other, rule of law. Fundamental rights include -the right to life, security, speech, belief, religion, economic well-being, etc., should be well established and standardized.

What if the rights are just paper promises that are violated in reality? So the democratic system should have mechanism to guarantee the Fundamental Freedoms through honest bureaucracy, representative legislature, the just judiciary, rational educational system, independent mass media and the impartial police force. These are the instruments of rule of law.

Since its creation, Pakistan has been run by “military-mullah-mandarin” complex. The mullahs have been preaching hatred, intolerance and violence, and have been calling for jihad against Christianity, communism and especially against Hinduism and Kashmir in India. In collaboration with mullahs, the military has been implementing jihad

through extreme militarization, through huge allocation of national budgets for the military, through entrapment of Pakistan in military alliances with the U.S. and China in order to acquire armaments, economic aid and diplomatic support to their anti-India military campaigns and wars. The mandarins, henchmen of authoritarianism, were pampered by dictators and in turn they pampered the politicians who supported the mullahs and the military and their policies and projects of hatred and jihad. The mass media became the hand-maiden of the complex.” A nation founded upon intolerance and bitterness and nurtured through hatred and wars, can’t remain stable or humanitarian.

To redeem the instruments of rule of law, first of all, “the complex” must be broken up and a long drawn struggle will have to be launched to purify them and to evolve them into instruments of the democratic way of life.

Thus the coming elections can’t be expected to establish and nourish meaningful democracy in Pakistan. The electoral politics is just the first major step in the process of democratization, if civil wars don’t dominate the post-election scene.

Hope is that elections will not be last step in the process of democratization.

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