

Did Sharif's Luck Run Out?

Pakistan is no stranger to military coups with its oddities, says Arvind Deo

Did Sharif Ask for it?

MQM chief Altaf Hussain thinks Nawaz Sharif saw the coup coming, reports Sanjay Suri

EVER since Nawaz Sharif signed the July 4 agreement with US President Bill Clinton, political analysts of Pakistani affairs had believed that for Sharif the conflict at Kargil might have come to an end but his battle for survival at home had just begun. That battle seems to have ended, at least for the present, with the Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, General Pervez Musharraf, announcing the dismissal of Sharif's government.

Pakistan is no stranger to military coups with all their oddities. But even by Pakistani standards the events of October 12, 1999, that shook Islamabad were, to say the least, bizarre although not unexpected.

The first move of the day was made by Nawaz Sharif when he dismissed Musharraf and his Chief of General Staff, Lt. Gen. Mohammad Aziz. At the time of his removal from office Musharraf was ending his official visit to Sri Lanka and about to board his flight home. Nawaz Sharif appointed his hand-picked Inter-Services In-

telligence (ISI) chief, Lt. Gen. Khwaja Ziauddin, the new Chief of Army Staff.

Quite clearly Nawaz Sharif did not reckon with Musharraf's hold over his own juniors. Musharraf landed in Karachi within a few hours of his 'dismissal' and was welcomed by his loyal troops and then took charge by announcing in turn the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif and his government.

Even before Musharraf had landed in Karachi army personnel were deployed, quite clearly under orders of the just deposed Chief of General Staff, to take over essential strategic buildings such as radio and TV stations, to close down airports at Islamabad and Lahore and to surround the Prime Minister's

residence in Islamabad and the Punjab Chief Minister's residence in Lahore.

As of now Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shahbaz Sharif (who heads the provincial government in Punjab) and Ziauddin are reported to be under protection of their army guards (a euphemism for house arrest).

the third largest democratic party in Pakistan," Hussain said.

Sharif, he said, had suspended the Sindh provincial assembly in October last year unlawfully on grounds of maintaining law and order. "But when there was far greater violence in Punjab, Nawaz Sharif did not remove the government because his brother was the chief minister. Sharif had politicised and perverted all political and legal institutions. He twisted the courts and tried also to subjugate the press," Hussain said.

Sharif then began to launch intrigues within the army and got the chief sacked, Hussain claimed. The army had to react because it became a question of dignity of the whole military institution, he said, adding politicisation of the army was not acceptable.

"It is not the army that had been autocratic and authoritarian but the Sharif government. That is the reason all this has happened," Hussain said.

— India Abroad News Service

Musharraf's TV address in the early hours of Wednesday merely talked of Nawaz Sharif's removal as having been necessary because of "turmoil and uncertainty" in Pakistan. He made a specific reference to the deteriorating law and order situation and the near collapse of the national economy, both re-

sulting from "self-serving policies" of the Nawaz Sharif government. He did not clarify whether the new dispensation would be a martial law regime or a new civilian government which would be acceptable to the "establishment", that is the military and civilian bureaucracy.

In one sense Sharif brought about his removal because of his style of governance which was increasingly becoming despotic. Since he was swept into office in early 1997 with a massive parliamentary majority, Sharif had tempest fate on more than one occasion. He had every reason to feel confident that with his "unprecedented mandate" he could get away with almost anything.

He corralled many a state institution. He was able to manoeuvre out of office both the then Chief Justice of Pakistan, Sajid Ali Shah, and the then President, Farooq Leghari, remove naval chief Mansoorul Haq on charges of corruption, drive political rival Benazir Bhutto out of the country in self-imposed exile, put her spouse Asif Zardari behind bars and sack a serving Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Jehangir Karamat, barely three months before his date of retirement on a trivial charge of talking out of turn.

Sharif even took on the print media barons by picking on the Jang Group first and then putting Rehmat Shah Afridi, proprietor editor of The Frontier Post, behind bars on a "drugs charge". His media czar, Information Minister Mushahid Hussain, justified the incarceration of *Friday Times* editor Najam Sethi and his colleague, Hussain Haqqani. Perhaps he had begun to believe that he was in fact affording the unquestioned control of civilian authority.

What happens now will as much depend on "outside advice" as on internal compulsions. No matter who controls the levers of power in Islamabad he has to depend on the goodwill of international donors for the economy's very survival.

With foreign exchange holdings running dangerously low, the rulers of Pakistan cannot afford to ignore words of "well intentioned counsel" from donor countries and international financial institutions.

Less than a month ago an official of the US State Department had expressed the hope that there would be no unconstitutional transfer of power in Pakistan. In a manner of speaking this was a tacit signal

Transcript of Pak COAS's Speech

Below is the complete transcript of the short address to the nation in English by the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Army Staff, General Pervez Musharraf that started at 02:45 PST (21:45 GMT) on October 12, 1999

My dear countrymen, As-salam Alaikum

You are all aware of the kind of turmoil and uncertainty that our country has gone through in recent times. Not only have all the institutions been played around with, and systematically destroyed, the economy too is in a state of collapse. We are also aware of the self-serving policies being followed, which have rocked the very foundation of the Federation of Pakistan.

The armed forces have been facing incessant public clamor, to remedy the fast declining situation from all sides of the political divide. These concerns were always conveyed to the Prime Minister in all sincerity, keeping the interest of the country foremost. It is apparent that they were never taken in the correct

spirit. My singular concern has been the well being of our country alone. This has been the sole reason that the army willingly offered its services for nation building tasks, the results of which have already been judged by you.

All my efforts and counsel to the government it seems were to no avail. Instead they now turned their attention on the army itself. Despite all my advice they tried to interfere with the armed forces, the last remaining viable institution in which all of you take so much pride and look up to, at all times, for the stability, unity and integrity of our beloved country. Our concerns again were conveyed in no uncertain terms but the government of Mr. Nawaz Sharif chose to ignore all these and tried to

politicize the army, de-stabilize it and tried to create dissension within its ranks. I was in Sri Lanka on an official visit. On my way back the PIA commercial flight was not allowed to land at Karachi but was ordered to be diverted to anywhere outside Pakistan, despite acute shortage of fuel, imperiling the life of all passengers. Thanks be to Allah, this evil design was thwarted through speedy army action.

My dear countrymen having briefly explained the background, I wish to inform you that the armed forces have moved in as a last resort, to prevent any further destabilization. I have done so with all sincerity, loyalty and selfless devotion to the country with the armed forces firmly behind me. I do not wish to make a lengthy policy statement at this mo-

ment. I shall however, do that very soon. For the moment I only wish to assure you that the situation in the country is perfectly calm, stable and under control. Let no outside forces think that they can take advantage of the prevailing situation.

Dear brothers and sisters, your armed forces have never and shall never let you down. INSHALLAH. We shall preserve the integrity and sovereignty of our country to the last drop of our blood. I request you all, to remain calm and support your armed forces in the re-establishment of order to pave the way for a prosperous future for Pakistan. May Allah guide us on the path of truth and honor. Allah Hafiz. Pakistan Pandab.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

Perhaps a first task of the new management would be to restore a new edition of the Eight Amendment which would allow for some checks and balances on a polity which has had no experience of having a balance wheel in its running mechanism.

These developments have serious implications as much for India as for Pakistan. For peace and security in the region, a Pakistan which is stable, democratic and at peace with itself is an imperative of the day. Only time will reveal whether Pakistan will stabilise soon or has other convulsions in store for its luckless people.

The author is a former diplomat and a commentator on South Asian Affairs.

— India Abroad News Service

The Congress at Its Alltime Low

M Abdul Hafiz explains how the Congress Party in India failed to stop the BJP from winning the Lok Sabha elections

IN 13th Lok Sabha election of India, the 114 years old Congress Party has been dealt with its worst ever electoral defeat. As poor second it trailed far behind BJP-led NDA with only 112 seats — 29 seats less than its last year's tally.

As the party was approaching the D-day of the polls its stalwarts were all too clear about the coming catastrophe, although they put up a brave face till the end. Indeed, after the fresh polls were announced in May last, hardly anything went in favour of the Congress. Rather a series of mistaken steps on its part hastened to rein in the party's electoral prospects. While the Congress would lick its wounds for some time to come, several questions have already been raised about the future of the party and particularly its president, Ms Sonia Gandhi, who however has urged for all 'introspection'.

Until the beginning of this year, the Congress was doing rather well — much better than its critics on the right and the left could have imagined. The resounding triumphs in three state assembly elections in November last seemed harbinger of positive change. More important was an air of freshness and commitment that the party exuded in the wake of Panchmari convention.

After its debacle also in 1998 election, there were some serious attempts at reviving the organisation. The Sangma report

and amendments in party constitution were some indications. It also gave the indications of the party's resolve for a long haul and shunning of the opportunistic alliance for recapturing power. It also earned admiration for supporting the government on selective issues.

All those good records of the party was set at naught when the Congress chose a course of suicidal brinkmanship with the help of notoriously unreliable ally like Ms Jayalalitha. The CPI (M), Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Subramanyam Swamy unsuccessfully tried to broker a dodgy deal which would also otherwise been unstable and paralytic. Some of the Congress secular supporters also abandoned the party half way. This was the beginning of the problems that doomed the Congress ultimately. At its own costs the Congress opened the door for the BJP to escape from the accusations of enormous 'internal contradictions' heaped on it.

It was evident in even Sonia Gandhi herself winning landslide victory with the stigma of her foreign origin. The Nehru-Gandhi name is a blindly accepted national brand which has never been deterrent to winning election. The state assembly elections last year were won with, among other things, its magic even if Sonia Gandhi, a 'foreigner' was at the helm.

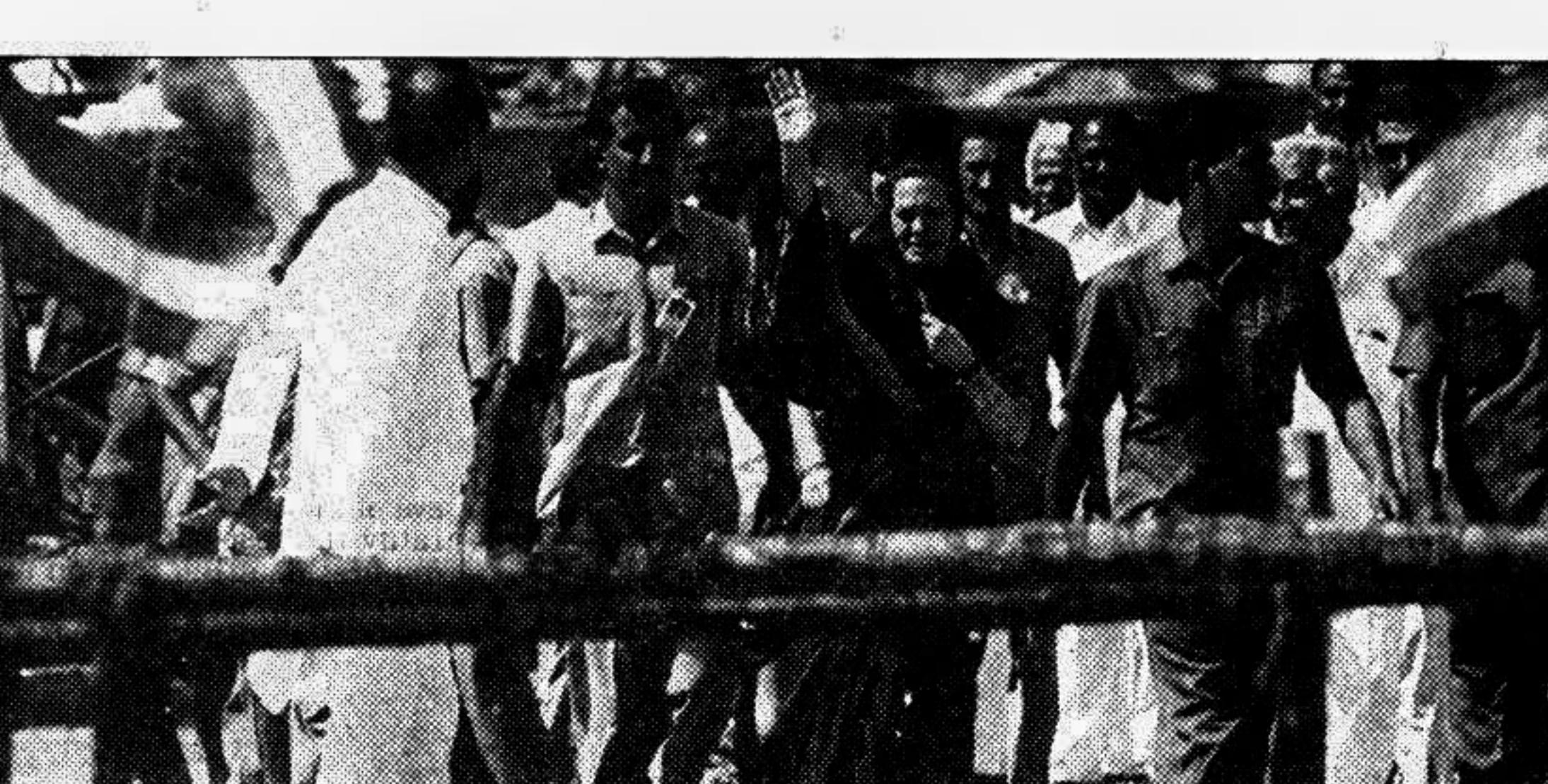
The Congress was a grand coalition ... representing the Indian nation in most of its essentials," so wrote Rajni Kothari, the eminent Indian political scientist. During the last one decade when the Congress' fortune was steeply dipping, the party still commanded a pan-Indian following. Both in 1996 and 1998 it polled more votes than the BJP which however emerged the largest single party. As non-doctrinaire and pragmatic party it could cut across all segments of the soci-

ety and was instinctively at ease in managing power. Yet it inexorably precipitated from its commanding height touching its rock bottom in just-concluded poll. The Congress ranks are still trying to grasp where they have gone wrong. Was it their over inclination for the dynasty which failed them?

But the dynasty has never been an aberration for the Congress; neither has it been a liability for the party. From Jawahar Lal Nehru to Rajiv Gandhi, it has rather been a source of inspiration and strength for the Congress. Although it proved to be an anathema to some from the Syndicate in 1969 to Sharad Pawar early this year the dynastic democracy in India has its numerous devotees whose devotion is not based on sycophancy alone.

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Sonia Gandhi at a campaign rally

uncertainty, surprisingly Sonia Gandhi remained the Congress' best bet even at that time.

As president of India's oldest party and a prime ministerial aspirant, Sonia Gandhi was admittedly more handicapped than any Gandhi-Nehru before her. As a patriot, patriarch and an internationalist, Nehru had a different kind of appeal for the Indians. Indira Gandhi combined in her the charisma with realpolitik. Rajiv had his own charm in bearing the burden of the first family's obligation. With its arithmetic going wrong it lost more in electoral term.

Can Sonia lead the Congress after her poll disaster the question was asked also earlier when the party was in no better shape in spite of its better showing in numbers. The numbers had been dwindling for Congress since 1989. When Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991 and the party plunged into

predecessors from the people. Once out of that web Sonia has enough potential to effect a whale-jaw grip on the Congress. Despite Pawar revolt in May last Sonia's Congress was for less ridden with despair and dissidence that it was under Rao or Kesi.

But for a recovery or success in national politics the Congress with Sonia or without her perhaps has to go for a long haul — something the Congressmen are un-used to. To hold the party together during that critical period will be the supreme test for the party and its leadership. The infusion of young blood in the party after jettisoning its old leadership will be a painful process but a must for the party to be on a comeback trail. And in addition a dynamic touch — perhaps with Priyanka Bhadra — will be an asset for the party.

It is a paradox health planners call a 'double burden' and it is expected to come into sharper focus in the early part of the next century. The country's problem is that while infectious disease is no longer the leading cause of deaths, it is far from eradicated. And its place as killer is being rapidly taken by lifestyle disease.

That Sri Lanka has made

remarkable progress in health-care delivery is beyond doubt. The figures speak for themselves: the infant mortality rate of 16.5 per 1,000 live births is better than that of many wealthier countries and few mothers die at childbirth.

Fernando points out that only 17% of the health budget in 1996 was spent on community health services, which play a major role in preventing the outbreak of diseases.

But resources are hard to find. A decades-old civil war places a severe burden on the healthcare system — much money has to go into the conflict and the health service is called upon to attend to the wounded. War injuries have disabled hundreds for life, draining scarce funds for their rehabilitation. In addition, there are over one million internally displaced people.

Taking the war factor into account, I would say we are actually confronted with a triple burden," says Dr Ariyaratne, whose organisation works closely with the government in providing relief to people in the conflict-affected areas.

Economists and development planners are well aware of the challenges. In its recent annual report on the state of the economy, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has drawn attention to the emergence of non-communicable diseases, urging more resources for preventive health.

The challenges are considerable, not least because the health gains themselves need building upon. For instance, a Sri Lankan male can expect to live for 70 years and a woman for 75 years. Both will add five more years to their life expectancy by 2025.

Clearly, a major challenge before Sri Lanka is how to add life to the years, not just years to life.

Third World Network Features/PANOS

Regional Priorities

Khadija Haq hopes that South Asian ruling elite are smart enough to read the writing on the wall as far as the governance is concerned

SOUTH Asia is at a turning point. The region today faces a clear choice: adopt a carefully designed and concerted series of policy and institutional reforms to address the problems of growing debt burden, eroding institutional capacity, social disintegration, weakened law enforcement and fledgling political leadership, or permit the crisis of governance to deepen and face a collapse of democracy.

In part one of this article on Oct 8 I discussed the key governance problems faced by South Asia today. In this second part, I will discuss the measures that can help prevent further deepening of this crisis of governance.

South Asian countries maintain considerable institutional and human resources that can be mobilized to advance humane governance in all dimensions (political, economic, and civil). However, much of this capacity is unused and misused because of multiple obstacles. The measures required to remove these obstacles are quite clear.

First, South Asian states need to redirect their priorities. This would entail liberal investment in basic human needs of the poor, provision of efficiently targeted social safety nets and a major redistribution of such productive assets as land and credit. While the states should provide social safety nets, the real focus should be on empowering the people. The poor do not just

need charity, they need equitable access to market opportunities. But, the poor may not benefit from the market if they have no access to productive assets, such as land and credit.

An effective land-reform package should be the best answer to such a skewed distribution of land and access to credit should be treated as a fundamental human right. Much of the credit needs of the poor can be met by recovering defaulted loans from powerful businessmen and influential politicians.

Second, the governments also need to provide a major stimulus to economic growth, without which the past social neglect cannot be rectified. There is a need to design a new economic system based on a new balance between the public and private sectors, fair taxation, pro-poor expenditures, an innovative strategy to engineer industrial and agricultural breakthroughs, an export-led growth system, rapid privatiza-

tion of public assets, and new framework of high growth and better distribution. The development partnership between the public and private sectors should be based on competition, and not patronage. The private sector in South Asia has so far survived on state crutches — through inefficient subsidies, easy credit, tax breaks, and commercial permits. But this support has become both inefficient and unsustainable in present times. The key task be-

ing is to help make the private sector more competitive and to prepare a level playing field for those who remain disadvantaged in the market place.

Finally, new partnerships between the state and society have to be forged for any major turnaround. Government must provide a supportive framework to aid meaningful civil society initiatives and private sector enterprise. Civil society organizations can serve as im-

portant intermediaries between citizens and the state. They have already taken a lead in reaching the poor. Similarly, the private sector can play a vital role in generating incomes, providing employment opportunities, and fulfilling social responsibilities. However, such a progressive climate of cooperation can develop if South Asian states provide a proper set of incentives within a well-defined regulatory framework.

At the same time, these agents of change should be actively involved at each stage of policy formulation and implementation.

The effectiveness of the proposed reforms will rest on the three basic virtues of transparency, accountability, and decentralization that cut across all dimensions of governance. No proposal can be successful unless the state and civil society act in a transparent way, are accountable for their actions, and are closer to people. This will require collective action by five important sets of actors: civil society organizations, media, the academic community, international institutions, and committed political leaders.

A committed leadership, with a clear and long-term vision, is undoubtedly the most important factor in this framework for change. High integrity, skillful diplomacy, and political commitment are essential leadership qualities in achieving these goals. In the

case of politicians, this requires looking beyond the next elections and basing decisions on public interest. For civil servants, this means honestly advising and questioning politicians, while improving service delivery to citizens. For judges, this entails impartiality and justice to all citizens brought before law. In the case of the media, business, civil society organizations, and even ordinary citizens this involves concentrated efforts to complement the state's role in enlarging people's choices.

Without courageous leadership