



The Rise, the Fall

Be that as it may, but it is not yet time to completely write off Nawaz Sharif from Pak scene, says Mansoor Mamoon

BARELY three years ago the city of Lahore was literally gripped with the euphoria of Nawaz Sharif's unprecedented landslide victory in the general elections in Pakistan. The ecstasy resembled a high-pitched popularity fever riding at the crest of which Nawaz assumed the office of the Prime Minister of Pakistan for the second time. Before him no other Prime Minister in Pakistan had bagged such massive mandate — more than two-thirds majority. But on October 6 last, when the Anti-terrorist Court in Karachi pronounced its verdict against him, life imprisonment along with varying fines and compensation amounting to thirty lac rupees and confiscation of all his moveable and immovable properties — excepting a handful of his hardline supporters and close relatives, there was the slightest murmur neither in his home city Lahore nor anywhere in Pakistan.

The tragedy of Sharif was that the majority in Pakistan described the verdict as fair and well deserved. Some even went to the extent of hailing it as 'the fruits of reckless politics' which the deposed Prime Minister of Pakistan pursued during his tenure and that he needed a lesson. Where did all his past support go? How could it melt so quickly? Why the apparent glee and widespread public indifference to the tragic fate a popularly elected leader at the hands of a military regime that usurped power in an unconstitutional manner brandishing guns? The reasons are not far to seek. It is said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Sharif's popularity proved to be his *faid accompli*.

Instead of using his popularity for building strong democratic institutions in Pakistan, he started exercising it for monopolising his firm grip over everything and against his political opponents. He would not tolerate any dissenting voice and started behaving like bull in China shop hitting at the very base of the existing democratic institutions. He first clipped the wings of the President of the Republic turning him into a mere figurehead and then forced him to resign along with the Chief Justice entering into open hostility with Presidency and the judiciary. As already stated he would not allow any opposition and came down heavily on his dissenters.

The leader of the opposition former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had to live in exile and her husband Asif Zardari was thrown behind bar for long years. Jehangir Karamat, the army chief, was abruptly removed as he was not going well with him on certain policy matters. In his place he appointed Pervez Musharraf, his nemesis. He constituted Anti-Terrorism

Courts for speedy disposal of cases mostly to harass the opposition leaders initially without any right to appeal. The Supreme Court of Pakistan later intervened and provided for the incorporation of the right to appeal. Ironically, Nawaz himself is availing of this right to appeal to the High Court against the verdict of the Karachi Court. He then proceeded towards introduction of the draconian Sharia Law — a retrogressive step in a bid to turn Pakistan into a fundamentalist Islamic state.

Nawaz also greatly frustrated the people of Pakistan. He could not curb ethnic strife which was increasingly taking heavy toll of life. He had promised eliminating corruption, but instead encouraged it through cronyism, nepotism and favouritism. His pledge for making Pakistan self-reliant by stopping aid-dependency proved to be a stunt and bluff. During his premiership he instead sought more foreign aids. The millions that he collected from the masses as his election funding simply evaporated, leaving no trace.

This way Nawaz made lot of powerful people his enemies and in the process became isolated from the masses. Even inside the party not many like the style of his leadership. In 1998 after the series of nuke tests in response to India's similar experiments Nawaz's standing among the euphoric masses sky-rocketed and not long after that he made the blunder of his life. The Kargil episode with India proved to be an expensive misadventure. The retreat of the Pakistani troops at the best of Clinton administration (which was a ploy to ensure the victory of the BJP-led NDA coalition in the 1999 Indian general election) sealed the fate of Nawaz. The Pakistani troops were not agreeable to accept a stage-managed defeat and when Nawaz smelt of an imminent military putsch he made the pre-emptive strike against Pervez Musharraf, who was not the person to accept it lying down like his predecessor Jehangir Karamat.

So the inevitable happened: Nawaz had to bid an ignominious exit. Nawaz's bid for hijacking the plane carrying the returning general from Colombo was aborted by (Nawaz) instead found to his dismay that his own government has been hijacked. Whatever might be the reaction in the outside world, the people in Pakistan, by and large, had welcomed the change over. It is said that three As — Allah, America and Army — determine the course of Pakistan's politics and state of affairs. After her second dismissal former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had reportedly quipped that it was difficult to be in power in Pak-

istan if the USA and the country's armed forces are displeased. During the last one decade Prime Ministers were dismissed and replaced one after another as in a game of musical chair. During over half of the 52-year period of independent entity of Pakistan the army had been in direct and full control of state power. Pakistan has come to be known in the outside world as a coup-happy country — either there is the army coup or presidential coup — contributing to dismissal of several governments.

Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan was assassinated in a mysterious way in October 1951 in the garrison city of Rawalpindi. Another elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged after being implicated in a controversial murder case in April 1979. Ten years later army dictator Ziaul Haque, who took over power from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was himself killed in a plane crash along with several other high ranking army officers.

Nawaz Sharif was inducted into politics by his mentor Ziaul Haque some two decades back. He started as the Finance Minister of the Punjab — the province which in every respect dominates Pakistan. In the eighties he rose to become the province's Chief Minister. Side by side the wealth of his family registered a fabulous upward swing. When he became Prime Minister in the early nineties his family's wealth burgeoned to over 112 million US dollars. Wealth and power blinded Sharif and helped him in establishing his family rule with his brother Shahbaz becoming the Chief Minister of the Punjab.

Sharif still has a long way to go in his cumbersome legal battle in courts in filing appeals and counter appeals. He has been spared the death sentence not because President Clinton had asked for clemency, but mainly to show to the outside world that the procedure of his trial was not influenced by the military ruler. Keeping this in mind the six co-accused were given the not-guilty verdict. But none of them is, however, going to be released soon. Volley of charges like evasion of taxes, misuse of official power, corruption and kickbacks will follow. Had the era of Nartial law of Ziaul Haque brand persisted Nawaz would have been sent to the gallows.

Meanwhile, Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League is already in the throes of intense inner-party squabbles for leadership. A triangular fight has ensued among the aspirants — Sharif's wife Kulsum, the present Chief Coordinator of the party Raja Ziaul Haque and Vice President Iqbal Haque, who happens to be the son of late Ziaul Haque, as to who will act as the party chief during the confinement of

Nawaz. His brother would have been a good choice but there is little possibility of his early release due to litany of charges being framed against him to keep him along with his brother continually in the dungeon. His party is also seeking to enter into some sort of alliance with the opposition parties which Nawaz through his high-handedness had earlier antagonised. Since the people are not at all interested to go for movement against the military rule Sharif supporters have started to woo their opponents so as to unduly pressure General Pervez to restore democracy.

Sensing no immediate backlash among the masses against the verdict the military ruler will have every reason to be extra-happy. General Pervez Musharraf has already made it known that he will start building leaderships from the grassroots — tehsils and zillas — for what he termed as establishing real people's democracy free from the pervasive influence of feudal and wealthy politicians.

By the middle of next year the phase-wise elections to local bodies are expected to be completed. After that the general will be required to give a time-frame for the national elections. When the reckoning will come at long last he will not be able to stop Sharif's party from participation in the fray. Yet another dynamic leadership like that of Benazir Bhutto might emerge with Kulsum in the vanguard. A jailed Nawaz might appear to be stronger than a free Nawaz. How will General Pervez Musharraf encounter such a possibility of sympathy vote for Nawaz? This will evidently pose to be a dilemma for the Pakistan's Chief Executive. Nawaz's son has already announced that the day his father comes out of jail it would herald the political death of General Pervez.

Be that as it may, it is not yet time to completely write off Nawaz from Pakistan's political scenario. He is likely to continue to influence the turn and twists of his country's volatile politics from inside his cell. The leaders of Third world countries which are experimenting with fledgling democracy have a lesson to learn from Sharif's case — it is indeed to be a dilemma for the Pakistan's Chief Executive. Nawaz's son has already announced that the day his father comes out of jail it would herald the political death of General Pervez.

It has now become de rigueur when anything goes wrong to criticise the 'coterie' around Sonia Gandhi and blame it for 'misleading' her. The message, intended or unintended, is that the Congress(I) president is innocent of the nitty-gritty of politics and politicking and can be led by the nose by her advisors. Congress(I) culture demands that the leader lead from the front. So far, party leaders have stopped short of criticising Sonia Gandhi directly but they are champing at the bit now.

Kapil Sibal, a Rajya Sabha

The RSS' Tactical Retreat

M Abdul Hafiz looks at recent problem regarding Sangh Parivar in India

INCE Mr Atal Behari Vajpeyi assumed office as India's prime minister for the third time in October last year, not a day passed without the BJP patriarch being embarrassed by some activities or other of the members of the Sangh Parivar. The most prominent among them are, of course, the activists of the RSS — the oldest, largest and best organised. Their pinpricks become unbearable at times even to Mr Vajpeyi who himself is the product of the RSS. Only during his third government the RSS created problems that plunged the BJP in deep controversy and first serious deadlock in the parliament.

The RSS unceremoniously asked the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh to oppose the 'anti-Swadeshi' policies of the Vajpeyi government. The Sangh Parivar as a whole organised 'Chintan Boothak' to oppose the BJP's economic policies. The RSS also called on Centre to follow Gujarat government's footsteps and lift ban on participation in RSS. The Sangh disrupted the shooting of Depa Mehta's film Water in Varanasi after the central government cleared the script. In a bizarre display of patriotism the Bajrang Dal activists went on the rampage in Kanpur, hounding boys and girls on Valentine's Day. The VHP raised alarm by announcing a *rath yatra* from Somanath to Ayodhya, brushing aside BJP's plea for status quo. The RSS chief Rajendra Singh termed the government decision to exchange terrorists for hostages in the Indian Airline hijacking as 'soft' and blamed it on 'cowardice' of Hindu society. The RSS mouthpiece the organiser taunted Home Minister L K Advani for saying that the BJP

had given up the 'contentious' issues on its agenda.

But nothing had been more damaging to BJP government than Gujarat government's decision to lift the ban on the participation of the state government servant in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Initially the opposition to January 3 order of Gujarat government remained feeble within the state and it emboldened the BJP government at the Centre to broker it out. Both Prime Minister Vajpeyi and Home Minister Advani made pronouncements amounting to the empowerment of the action of Gujarat government. At the national level the Congress-led opposition attempted only to expose BJP's hidden agenda and drive a wedge between the BJP and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over the issue. Surprisingly it did not strike a harmonious chord even with the stridently secular elements within the NDA.

Telegu Desam Party (TDP) of Chandra Babu Naidu had been, at the worst, lukewarm on the question of supporting Vajpeyi government on this issue. The Dravida Manectra Kazhagam (DMK) first endorsed Vajpeyi's clean chit to RSS then changed the tone and wanted the government only to rein in the RSS. Ms Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress showed its flexibility. The TMC supremo opposed Gujarat government's order but committed itself to back the BJP government.

Intoxicated with new found power for themselves within the NDA, no one seemed willing to put the government in jeopardy. Only Ms Sonia Gandhi, the Congress President crisscrossed the country even with her image badly dented after Congress continuing bad

performance in four state assembly elections to garner support against what she called grand conspiracy of the BJP for saffronising the nation.

However there was a crisis in Lok Sabha which was held hostage to Gujarat government's decision and its messy aftermath. During its budget session from 23 February the lower house of the parliament remained virtually paralysed. The RSS issue held up the proceedings in the Lok Sabha although the Finance Minister Yashwant Singh was allowed to present his economic survey on February 28 and the union budget the next day. As regards Gujarat government's order on RSS issue the opposition parties, mainly the Congress insisted on a debate under Item 184 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha. But the government wanted to discuss the issue under Rule 193 which would have merely debated the issue and returned for the day. But under Rule 184 the discussion would necessarily have to be rounded off with a vote. The differences between the alliance partners — so far discussed only privately or in the NDA meetings — would then be out in the open for the opposition to cash in on later.

Throughout the session of the parliament the Treasury and Opposition benches lashed out each other while the Speaker Mr GMC Balayogi remained a helpless spectator. For obvious reasons the Treasury could not agree to a debate that words end up in voting. But the opposition exactly wanted a division in the house. Finally the Speaker, in an extraordinary move, asked the prime minister to resolve the issue himself. By hurling the ball into PM's court the Speaker

who was a TDP nominee, in fact betrayed the feeling of his party chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandra Babu Naidu who said earlier in no uncertain term that the RSS was a problem that the BJP — and not the NDA partners must tackle.

But the BJP top brass continued to justify the action of Gujarat government. L K Advani asserted that the central government did not have any constitutional authority to ask the state government to rescind its order. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister Promod Mahajan talked of the concept of the federalism and said that it was a question of the centre interfering in the rights of the states. Prime Minister Vajpeyi only defended the Gujarat case he justified the lifting of the ban on the ground that the RSS was only a patriotic cultural outfit. He, in his meetings with the coalition partners harped on the fact that his party already abandoned its core issues like uniform civil code, abrogation of Article 370 and Ayodhya in the national agenda. In the meantime the deadlock in Lok Sabha continued.

After two weeks of deadlock in the parliament, the government, inediately under pressure for a debate under Rule 184 asserted that the central government had committed itself to back the BJP government. The opposition exactly wanted a division in the house. Finally the Speaker, in an extraordinary move, asked the prime minister to resolve the issue himself. By hurling the ball into PM's court the Speaker

Sonia and a Season of Discontent

Sonia Gandhi's probationary period is at an end. Now, writes Angana Parekh, Congressmen want results — those that translate into power

IT'S THE season of discontent in the Congress(I). Small eruptions that threaten to spawn bigger ones are bursting forth and disturbing the superficial inviolability of the 10, Janpath bastion. And Sonia Gandhi, still tentative after over two years as Congress(I) president, seems unable or unwilling to quell indiscipline with an iron hand as her predecessors were wont to do.

Never before has the authority of a Congress(I) president been challenged to this extent and allowed to go unpunished as it has in the cases of mass cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha elections in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka. The Delhi, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh State units are already in a ferment; and Orissa is waiting to happen.

Sonia Gandhi's probationary period, when indecision and aloofness were tolerantly overlooked, is at an end. Now Congressmen and women want results those that translate into power. And since she took over as Congress(I) president, Sonia Gandhi has not displayed the one virtue that, in the Congress(I) scheme of things, outweighs all other considerations: vote-getting ability.

It has now become de rigueur when anything goes wrong to criticise the 'coterie' around Sonia Gandhi and blame it for 'misleading' her. The message, intended or unintended, is that the Congress(I) president is innocent of the nitty-gritty of politics and politicking and can be led by the nose by her advisors.

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It has virtually become a practice now to get protestations of loyalty whenever there is a hint that Sonia Gandhi's leadership is being questioned.

This time, too, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, issued a statement

swearing by her leadership and criticising those who dared to think differently. The Rajasthan Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, and the Haryana leader, Balram Lal, followed suit.

But even members of the inner circle, like Natwar Singh, Pranab Mukherjee and Manmohan Singh have been alienated for one reason or another.

Singh because he was not given a Rajya Sabha nomination; Mukherjee because of the embarrassment he is facing over the nuclear deterrent issue during the Gandhi-Clinton meeting; and Singh because he is under fire from within the party over economic reforms and the impending threat posed to his position by Arjun Singh who is now in the Rajya Sabha.

Consulting ?

But the larger issue is what exercises others. The Rajya Sabha nominations, they say, have sent out the message that no effort is being made to rebuild the party. Choosing candidates such as Inder Khosla, D. P. Roy, Bimba Raikar and Jamuna Berupal at a time when the party desperately needs good parliamentarians has gone down well.

For many, the disillusionment set in when Sonia Gandhi reconstituted the CWC and revamped the party set-up three months ago and again chose those without a mass base. Instead, if younger, more dynamic leaders such as Digvijay Singh and S. M. Krishna (the Karnataka Chief Minister) were included in the CWC, this would have sent out a positive signal that sincere efforts were being made to revive the party and its top decision-making apparatus.

The erosion of Sonia Gandhi's authority is obvious after last month's Rajya Sabha elections. No disciplinary action has been taken against the MLAs who cross-voted nor against party members who contested as independents or worse, as candidates of other parties. Of the three candidates who were seen as Sonia Gandhi's 'personal' choice — D. P. Roy in West Bengal, Inder Khosla in Uttar Pradesh and R. P. Goenka in Rajasthan — only Goenka won.

All this is in marked contrast to Sonia Gandhi's uncompromising attitude in 1998.

when her advisor, R. D. Pradhan, was defeated because party MLAs cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha election in Maharashtra. At that time, two Lok Sabha MPs and half-a-dozen MLAs were issued show-cause notices and one MLA was suspended. But as a party leader remarked tellingly, 'There is a vast difference between Sonia Gandhi's authority in 1998 and now.'

In West Bengal, the situation has gone beyond Sonia Gandhi's control. Though the Congress(I) had enough MLAs and more to spare, to ensure the victory of its Rajya Sabha candidate, D. P. Roy, nearly two dozen MLAs defected the party and voted for Bhatiacharya. This was followed by a spate of public statements by State Congress(I) leaders blaming the 'central leadership' for 'messing up' the nominations and foisting an unpopular candidate on the MLAs.

A shocked Sonia Gandhi summoned the West Bengal PCC president, A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary, and his predecessor, Somen Mitra, to Delhi for an explanation earlier this week. But far from being repentant, they said in turn threw a bombshell. They said the State unit was in favour of forming an alliance with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, an ally of the BJP, with the objective of ousting the CPI(M) from Bengal when the Assembly elections are held early next year.

Courtesy: *The Hindu* of India.

Pakistan: Time for Citizen's Action?

The sole reason behind the October 1999 cyclical return to military rule wasn't just democracy deteriorating into mediocrity. Zafarullah Khan explains

stances but what they establish beyond doubt is sole truth that no institution, be the Executive, the Judiciary or the Army can claim to have stable and clean track record of performance. It is a crisis of governance in the era of weakened nation states. Why to blame the politics alone for the failure? Especially when it has transpired on many occasions that none of the four general elections we had in 1985, 1990, 1993 & 1997 respectively were free and fair from the manipulations of 'secret hands'. Secondly the caretakers during 1988 and 1993 signed the Structural Adjustment Programs with the International Monetary Fund and the so-called representative government had to live within the predefined economic boundaries.

More shockingly today we have reached the stage that anybody who can exhibit his/her skills to be a successful international beggar could be placed in the driving seat, either by abrogating the constitution or through staged elections. We have reached this situation because the country's revenue base is not sufficient enough to foot the bill for defence and honour commitments on the repayment of foreign debts worth US \$ 32 billion.

Now, the military government is rather over-enthusiastic especially following the IMF agenda by imposing the GST, privatisation, down-sizing etc, without the fear of becoming unpopular at the polling booth. And its 'borrowed' economic wizards will one day return to Washington like Shahid Burki and Moeen Qureshi to receive their salaries in dollars, perhaps with increments for further tightening the shackles of economic slavery around poor

democratic revenge on the incompetent lot by voting them out forever. Despite unnecessary erosion of trust by the political leaders and military dictators, the majority of Pakistanis would still prefer democracy whenever they will be consulted independently.

It's democracy will be delayed or denied the risks in nuclearised, economically weak, donor-dependent Pakistan is that it may become vulnerable to something like Talibanism.

Secondly, the military government is raising the temperature vis-à-vis India, which means more expenditure on defence and less on education, health and civic infrastructure. In this scenario what we need to learn is that in the post-cold war period countries can't be conquered or captured, one example is Iraq's invasion

of Kuwait and we know what happened) rather internal impositions have destroyed a few countries, like the former USSR, Rwanda, Somalia, Burundi, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia etc. Can we afford such

Let's break the spiral of silence and instead of muddling in the muck should try to rekindle some hope in hell. In this regard if the so-called military regime is enthusiastic to give us what it claims 'real democracy', then why can't it reform the rot through an executive order or a provisional constitution order-the instruments until now used only to molest the already over-matured constitution. Why not a series of reforms to:

• Make tenure in power term-specific. Maximum two terms for the President and the Prime