

PAKISTAN

Musharraf's 'no' to Benazir and Nawaz

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PAKISTAN President General Pervez Musharraf's latest decree banning two former prime ministers - Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif from contesting the coming parliamentary elections in the country has drawn sharp reactions not only from the political parties of these two leaders but other democratic forces as well in that country. The reason is simple. No political organisation worth their name and longing for winning power through democratic methods can accept such a decree which denies democratic rights to the politicians on unacceptable ground.

The factors cited for banning two top politicians of Pakistan from taking part in the October general elections runs counter to democratic principles and also contrary to the existing laws. The decree says that any person holding the office of the premier twice are outlawed for seeking elections for a seat in either federal or provincial legislatures because they were given the chances by the people to serve the nation but they failed in the responsibility as they resorted to corruption and plundered national wealth.

True, both Benazir and Sharif did get chances more than once to serve the people and it is also a matter of common knowledge that both as the head of the government indulged in massive corruption along with their family members. But country's laws are there to take care of the corrupts. Unless the existing

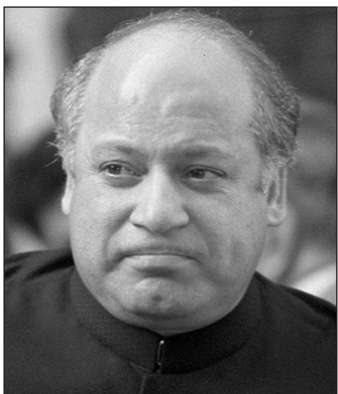


laws bar them from contesting the polls like the conviction in specific cases and ground of moral turpitude, can a sudden decree by a military ruler rid the top leaders of their democratic rights! The move is unprecedented even by Pakistan's military rule legacies.

This gives the clear impression that the military ruler can not stand his nemesis - both the ex-premiers are potential threat to his power, which he wants to perpetuate in this or that form. When the political leaders turn corrupt in power, which unfortunately has become a undesirable malaise in many democracies including in the South Asia, it is the people who would decide on these leaders through ballots while the laws must play its due role in dealing with those who betray peoples expectations after securing their mandate. There should be no cutting the corners in laws, which must be upheld without any political or other bias.



Nawaz Sharif was toppled in a military coup nearly three years ago despite the fact that he was an elected prime minister enjoying more than two-thirds in the National Assembly. He was arrested and later sent to jail terms after being found guilty in corruption and other charges. It is often said that massive majority went into his head and he and family members including his younger brother Shabbaz Sharif, as chief minister of the powerful Punjab province, began spending more time in personal and groups interests than good governance for the people. The electorate would have taken them to task in the next elections. The army take-over was not the answer to this situation in an era of flourishing of democracy. But this happened once again in Pakistan. Nawaz was sent to exile in Saudi Arabia with most members of the family after Riyadh government brokered a deal. Now after the decree, the government



says no member of Nawaz's family can contest election as they gave a bond in this regard while accepting the exile. The family members dispute that any such bond was given.

Benazir is in self-exile in London and Dubai and never tried to return home during the present military period as she is likely to be arrested. Corruption charges against spouse and her Achilles Heels Asif Zardari are galore. But both Nawaz and Benazir while condemning the undemocratic rule in Pakistan were looking forward to play a role in the coming polls. The decree of Gen. Musharraf has effectively sealed that possibility unless things are reversed.

The PPP and the PML both protested the decree, saying no laws exist that can prevent their leaders from taking part in the polls. They said if there are true polls, their leaders will take part in the process of such events.

But the ground reality is that the military regime has taken a calculated move to deprive two major political parties of their crowd-pooling leaders in the elections. The political disqualification of leaders who were twice prime ministers or chief ministers are meant to rendering two parties devoid of the leadership at the top. It is unlikely that the regime will rescind the move however tendentious and motivated it looks like in democratic spirit.

The military president is planning to amend the 1973 constitution which will give him power to sack the elected prime minister. In such a case, the elected prime minister is unimprisonable any way. Gen. Musharraf some time ago will a referendum to remain in the helm for another five years. He is evidently giving the parliamentary elections because of a supreme court ruling that he must stage national elections within three years of taking over power. He is taking steps one after another to cling to power and turning the coming polls almost unworthy in democratic set-up.

Admittedly, corruption and mismanagement by the elected leaders turned many in Pakistan disenchanted with representative governments for the time being but even for them this could at best a temporary phase. Pakistan needs to revert to unalloyed democracy. The banning of Benazir and Sharif from taking parts in the coming polls will only raise further questions on the credibility of the coming elections in Pakistan.

NEPAL

Lessons from another emergency

CK LAL writes from Kathmandu

THE Right to Freedom is enshrined in Clause 12 of Part 3 of the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal (1990).

By coincidence, the Indian press was commemorating Indira Gandhi's dreaded "Never Again" Emergency when King Gyanendra arrived in India. Here was a foreign dignitary whose country was also in an internal emergency, visiting during the anniversary.

A lot has changed in the structure of Indian media since the fateful night of 25 June, 1975, but the memory of midnight knocks on the door still makes senior journalists in New Delhi shake their heads.

The glamorous youngsters of corporate India's tabloid TV wouldn't know it, but it was the Emergency that tested the resilience of press freedom in their country. And barring exceptions such as the Indian Express and the Statesman, much of the mainstream press easily succumbed to authoritarian pressure. The tycoon press, symbolised back then by The Times of India and The Hindustan Times, willingly transformed themselves overnight into the mouthpieces of Indira Gandhi's propaganda machine.

The dissenters were all from the margins: stalwarts of the alternative media like Nikhil Chakravarti's Mainstream, Ramesh Thapar's Seminar, and Raj Mohan Gandhi's

Himmat kept the lamp of freedom flickering during the long night of the Emergency. Lal Krishna Advani once rued that the Indian press shamelessly crawled on all fours when all they were asked to do was bend a bit. It is an irony of history that Advani is today deputy prime minister of a right wing government in New Delhi that is hounding Time's Alex Perry and tehelka.com's Tarun Tejpal.

To be fair, Perry's salacious gossip was unfair, and Tejpal's tehelka often crosses the thresholds of entrapment journalism. But there are more appropriate methods of fighting motivated reporting than serving summons to international columnists on flimsy grounds and raiding the premises of a web publisher under specious pretexts. Especially in a country that likes to call itself the world's largest democracy.

Unfortunately, the authorities do much worse when they have emergency powers at their disposal. Vidya Charan Shukla used to make Indira Gandhi's critics disappear. And here in Nepal, under a "partyless" prime minister, the

government seems to be borrowing from Shukla's dreaded emergency handbook. The Krishna Sen episode is an example of the low respect that the authorities have for the personal freedom of those that they perceive to be "enemies".

In this instance, let me say that Krishna Sen was no journalist in the

sure of the literary merit of Krishna Sen's poems either. Sen was a pamphleteer masquerading as a journalist and a litterateur. (Full Disclosure: I was often the target of the editorial witch-hunts in Janadesh for being a consistently vocal critic of the Maoists.)

But that hardly matters. Pamphleteering is no sin in any civilised society, much less a crime in a democracy. In democratic countries, dissenters expect to be heard. However, democracy in Nepal is in a state of suspended animation. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba obviously doesn't feel the pangs of conscience when he is advised by his security forces to insist that the facts about Krishna Sen will be made public in due course.

There are credible reports in the media that Krishna Sen died in detention. A diplomat in Kathmandu is quoted by the 28 June edition of the London-based daily The Independent as saying: "There is a body and it has marks consistent with torture." This is too serious an allegation to wait for an appropriate time for an official explanation. It is

no more the credibility of the prime minister alone that is at stake. Our rule of law itself is now under international scrutiny. Such censure at the international level can severely impair the government's resolve to fight Maoist insurgency with full force.

In a country where the death sentence is constitutionally prohibited, all killings are extra-judicial. Prime Minister Deuba is right: nobody is above the law if he is a terrorist. But he must remember, that the law of the land doesn't permit his agencies to execute anyone either.

What is also at stake now is not just the freedom of the press, as it was for the media in India during Indira Gandhi's emergency. Freedom of opinion and expression were both suspended with the declaration of the state of emergency. The bigger challenge before the Nepali press is to raise a united voice to protect the Right to Freedom enshrined in Clause 12 of Part 3 of the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal (1990). Sen is just one name; the right to life of every other Nepali is equally sacrosanct. The Maoists are terrorists, so they are not bound by the laws of the land. But if the state doesn't respect the life and dignity of its citizens, its own legitimacy would be in serious jeopardy.

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usual sense of the term. The publications that he edited Janadesh and Janadishwere Maoist propaganda sheets. That they came out at all was a tribute to the freedoms that our press enjoyed before the emergency. They were not "newspapers" because no attempts were ever made to separate news from views in any of the content. I am not too

INTERVIEW

"Self-respect comes with self-reliance"

As a devout Muslim, he prays twice a day. But he is also a Ram bhakt, plays the veena, loves the shri raga, writes poetry in Tamil and, like every proud Indian, swears by Pokhran II and self sufficiency in science and technology. At 67, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, is not just another Dr Strangelove having a torrid affair with the bomb. He is clever, sensitive, amazingly creative and, above all, a soft spoken patriot. India's answer to Western technological arrogance.

What is your vision of India in the next millennium?

I have three. Three visions for India. But before that I speak about them, I have one question to ask of you. Can you tell me why, in 3000 years of our history, people from all over the world have come and invaded us, captured our land, conquered our minds? From Alexander onwards. The Greeks, the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Dutch, all of them came and looted us, took over what was ours. Yet we have not done this to any other nation. We have not invaded anyone. We have not conquered anyone. We have not grabbed their land, their culture, their history and tried to enforce our way of life on them. Why?

Because, I guess, we respected the freedom of others.

Absolutely right. That is why my first vision is that of freedom. I believe that India got its first vision of this in 1857, when we started the war of independence. It is this freedom that we must protect and nurture and build upon. If we are not free, no one will respect us.

My second vision for India is development. For fifty years we have been a developing nation. It is time we saw ourselves as a developed nation. We are among the top five nations of the world in terms of GDP. We have a 10 per cent growth rate in most areas. Our poverty levels are falling. Our achievements are being globally recognised today. Yet we lack the self confidence to see ourselves as a developed nation, self reliant and self assured. Tell me, Sir, is this right? Read the last chapter of my book, India 2020, A Vision for the Next Millennium and you will get what I mean.

I have a third vision. That India must stand up to the world. I have written 12 chapters on that. Because I believe that unless India stands up to the world, no one will respect us. In this world, fear has no place. Only strength respects strength. We must be strong not only as a military power but also as an economic power. Both must go hand in hand.

These are visions. What about the reality? What do you see as the most significant achievements of your rather distinguished career culminating in a Bharat Ratna in your lifetime?

My good fortune was to have worked with three great minds. Dr Vikram Sarabhai of the department of space, Professor Satish Dhawan, who succeeded him. And Dr Brahm Prakash, father of nuclear material. I was lucky to have worked with all three of them closely and consider this the greatest opportunity of my life.

I see four milestones in my career. One: The twenty years I spent in Indian Space Research Organisation. I was given the opportunity to be the project director for India's first satellite launch vehicle, SLV3. The one that launched Rohini. These years played a very important role in my life as a scientist.

Two: After my ISRO years, I joined the Defence Research and Development Organisation and got a chance to be part of India's guided missile programme. It was, you could call, my second bliss when Agni met its mission requirements in 1994.

Three: The department of atomic energy and the DRDO had this tremendous partnership in the recent nuclear tests, on May 11 and 13. This was my third bliss. The joy of participating with my team in these nuclear tests and proving to the world that India can make it. That we are no longer a developing nation but one among them. It made me feel very proud as an Indian.

And, finally, four: The fact that we have now developed for Agni a re-entry structure, for which we have developed this new material. A very light material called carbon-carbon. One day an orthopaedic surgeon from the Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences (in Hyderabad) visited my laboratory. He lifted the material



and found it so light that he took me to his hospital and showed me his patients. There were these little girls and boys with heavy metallic callipers weighing over 3 kg each, dragging their feet around. He said to me: Please remove the pain of my patients. In three weeks, we made these Floor Reaction Orthosis 300 gram callipers and took them to the orthopaedic centre. The children could not believe their eyes! From dragging around a 3 kg load on their legs, they could now move around freely with these 300 gram callipers. They began running around! Their parents had tears in their eyes. That was my fourth bliss.

Apart from science and technology, what else interests you?

Poetry and music. I have this big library at home and my favourite poets are Milton, Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore. I write poetry too. My book of poems, Yenudaya Prayana, has now been translated into English. It is called My Journey. You must read it. I will send you a copy.

Who are your favourite poets in Tamil, the language you write in?

Bharatidasana, who died in 1965. And Subramaniya Bharathiar, who died in 1939 at the age of 35, killed by an elephant while giving it a coconut. I also enjoy Carnatic music and play the veena.

What is your favourite raga?

The shri raga. You know my favourite kirtan? It is the one that Swami Thyagaraja, a Ram bhakt like me, recited in the shri raga when he was called by this powerful Tanjore king to sing a poem in his sabha. He sang: "In this gathering whoever are great in front of God, I salute them." He never said: I salute the king. That is strength of conviction. That is courage.

I guess we grew up with the maxim that good news is no news. The right to publish bad news has become synonymous with freedom. That is why our press is so strong, so fiercely independent if not always encouraging of success stories.

Another question: Why are we, as a nation so obsessed with foreign things? Is it a legacy of our colonial years? We want foreign television sets. We want foreign shirts. We want foreign technology. Why this obsession with everything imported? Do we not realise that self-respect comes with self-reliance?

Courtesy: www.rediff.com

"I'm fighting for a cause"

The first woman candidate to contest the post of India's President, the Left parties' nominee, Dr [Colonel] Lakshmi Sehgal, ranks among the legends of the Indian freedom struggle. An associate of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, she led the Indian National Army's Rani Jhansi regiment. After Independence she started practicing medicine in Kanpur, became active in Left politics after 1971 and was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1998. Touring the country to garner support for her candidature, Sehgal, who will turn 88 on September 24, looked relaxed at the Bihar state guest house in Patna after a busy day-long schedule. Without any hesitation or formality, she shared her views with Anand Mohan Sahay about the state of India and where it is headed.

The National Democratic Alliance nominee for the Presidency, APJ Abdul Kalam, is supported by almost all political parties except the Left Front.

Yes, this is why I am here and contesting against this person. The fire inside me to safeguard Indian interests has forced me to contest against the BJP candidate, A P J Abdul Kalam. I was a fauji [soldier], we never fight to win or lose, and I am fighting for a cause. Unlike Kalam we have to prove our stand on all issues concerning India.

What is your grievance towards the BJP and Hindutva forces?

The BJP is trying to destroy communal harmony which may threaten our national unity and integrity. In fact, the BJP's Hindutva will kill the Hinduism of millions of Indian including us. The BJP's one point agenda of pseudo nationalism is harming the country's interest and giving a bad name to the country outside. What happened in Gujarat is not a fact to hide from the world media.

What is your reaction to the suggestion made by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Vishwa Hindu Parishad to divide Jammu and Kashmir?

The division of Jammu and Kashmir is the thought of an anti national. By suggesting the division of Jammu and Kashmir, the RSS and VHP have proved that they are pseudo nationalists. The division of Jammu and Kashmir on religious grounds is the worst thing for India's national unity and integration because it will communalise the situation in India further. The outfit demanding the division of the crown [Jammu & Kashmir] of India is not only the betrayal of the freedom struggle won by Indians, it is also an anti national act.

It is a wrong perception that the two nation theory was invented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah who founded Pakistan, the fact is that RSS and Hindu Mahasabha leaders were the first to raise the issue of the two nation theory in the early twentieth century. On the basis of this today, the RSS and VHP are demanding the division of Jammu and Kashmir into three or four parts.

What will be the consequence of the division of Jammu and Kashmir on religious lines?

The division of Jammu and Kashmir on the two nation theory will lead to the disintegration of India. Nobody would be able to safeguard its unity after that blunder. The separatist movement will get a moral boost from Khalistan to the northeastern states.

What is the solution to the Kashmir problem?

More autonomy not only for Jammu and Kashmir but to all states. By strengthening federalism India will become stronger than ever. If we give more autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, do developmental work and have pro-people policies instead of turning it into an



army camp, we may pave the way for resolving the Kashmir crisis.

The people of Jammu and Kashmir have always wanted to remain in India except a few. During the last fifty years the Kashmiri people helped the Indian army in the time of war with Pakistan. In fact, they are no less Indian than any one. It is unfortunate that they have been seen with suspicion which alienated them.

What about dialogue with Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue?

Dialogue must be continued, it should not be stopped. If we stop talking with Pakistan it will further complicate the matter of solving the Kashmir problem. War is not a solution, it has not solved any problem in world history.

You mean to say dialogue with Pakistan should not be stopped.

Yes, why should we stop dialogue with a neighbouring country like Pakistan? Unfortunately in the last three years, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee sometimes behaves like a friend with an over zeal to improve relations with Pakistan, at other times he behaves arrogantly. It will not work.

We have to prepare ourselves before holding an Agra type summit with Pakistan and discuss every issue carefully and with minute to minute progress.

It is alleged that America is dictating terms to the Vajpayee government over Kashmir and other issues.

This government is working under American pressure that is why it is reflected everywhere. Netaji told us that more than political freedom, economic freedom is important to function like a free people. Today apparently America is posing as super boss in the economic front. This government has even opened FDI in the print media.

This interview first appeared on www.rediff.com of India.

INDIA

Communal violence and role of the civil society

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER writes from Mumbai, India

WHEN Gujrat riots were going on full blast some people thought that to check these riots we need a 'vibrant civil society'. It is certainly very relevant remark. However, the question is will such communal carnage take place in a vibrant civil society? Does a vibrant civil society exist in India at all? These are very relevant questions if we have to understand the role of civil society in our democracy?

It should also be noted that a clean division between political and civil society is not always possible. It is essentially a western concept. The relation between political and civil society is quite complex and should not be oversimplified. After all what is political is a reflection of what is social and vice versa. When I met a politician after Janta Party was elected to power in 1977 and solicited his support for our Bohra reform movement he said expressing his inability that we are led by society, we do not lead the society. If society is conservative and orthodox we also tend to be so.

I met several Prime Ministers to solicit support for legislation against social boycott, which the Bohra High Priest resorts to, to persecute reformists and all expressed their inability to do anything, as society was not prepared to accept reforms. Thus our politicians do not lead society but are led by it.

We often talk of 'political will' to bring about social changes but such a political will does not exist for fear of fact that there will be social turmoil and politicians will be thrown out of power. Our politicians visit temples and dargahs because it is expected from politicians from our civil society. Politicians, it is well known, do not visit these religious places, especially ones that do not belong to their religious tradition, out of any faith; they visit these places to placate their voters.

It must be noted that democracy has not grown from our society as in the west after the authority of the Church crumbled. Also, Europe went through great turmoil and a civil

society had already come into existence led by commercial bourgeoisie before democracy was ushered in. However, it was not so in India. The growth of democracy was a very complex process from a colonial society, which was also essentially feudal. Capitalism had not become strong and vibrant before we adopted democratic form of governance.

Feudal relations of production were somewhat weakened but not quite knocked out when our constitutional document was framed and adopted. The constitutional document represented best from many other constitutions from highly developed democracy. However, ground reality was far from constitutional ideals. Our society, at the dawn of independence, was quite backward, conservative and traditional. Though political awareness existed among the masses thanks to the mass struggles launched by Mahatma Gandhi, real democratic traditions did not exist.

There was widespread poverty, illiteracy and backwardness among the people of India and caste system was its bane. Caste hierarchy has not broken down even after more than fifty years of independence; it has been, on the contrary, reinforced further. Caste based parties are thriving. It is not congenial to a qualitative democracy. Thus Dr. Ambedkar's priority was removal of caste - based hierarchy and not independence in a hurry. He wanted to usher in a qualitative democracy, not just formal democracy.

In addition to caste hierarchy in our society communal division is its greatest weakness. Communalism in fact is a product of colonial society. It is the British rulers who created communal consciousness among Indian people. One can even say that religious identity began to emerge as principal identity during the colonial period. Thus communal consciousness slowly seeped through our civil society and communal division became so real that it became nearly impossible to avert partition of the country on the eve of independence.

By late thirties communal discourse became the dominant discourse in our free-

dom movement. Though Gandhi-Nehru-Azad triumvirate stuck to secular discourse it was considerably weakened. Communal frenzy could not be prevented at the time of partition despite all the efforts by this dominant triumvirate and its secular discourse. More than a million people lost their lives on the eve of independence thanks to communalisation of our civil society.

Thus the society we have inherited from colonial period was a communalised society and no conscious efforts were made in post-independence period to get rid of this communal legacy. On the one hand, our society was communally divided, and, on the other, politicians reinforced this communal division for their electoral purposes. A communally divided society, though mainly at the level of middle classes, cannot become a vibrant civil society. A vibrant civil society has to be secular in nature avoiding caste and communal divisions. A vibrant civil society is united by ideals but divided in political opinions.

The Indian civil society can hardly said to be united by ideals and hence political majority and political minority are less important than religious majority and religious minority. The whole dynamics of our society is based on religious majority and religious minority. Communal and caste divisions are very deep rooted indeed and this is great stumbling block of our civil society.

Also, the whole nature of our politics is status quoist and not transformative. Thus identity politics assumes great importance over social and economic transformation. It must, however, be admitted that ethnic and religious identity in post-modernist society has assumed new significance. Even post-communist societies in Russia and China are now experiencing a new resurgence of ethnic and religious identities. The western societies are also tending to become pluralist and mosaic model of identity is overriding the melting pot model.

Ram temple issue was raised by BJP during late eighties and it became deeply divisive political issue as the communally

conscious civil society responded to it zealously. The communal politicians are of course guilty of raising such issues and for polarising Indian society on communal lines but civil society also cannot escape its responsibility altogether. They mutually reinforce each other.

The Sangh Parivar in its lust for power crossed Lakshman Rekha (line of caution) and exploited Ram temple issue beyond all limits and violating constitutional values. Communal carnage in Gujrat itself is a result of communalisation of civil society by the Sangh Parivar. Many observers of Gujrat scene have said that there is no sense of guilt among those who perpetrated this communal carnage in that stronghold of Hindutva. Thus communal consciousness has seeped so deeply in a section of civil society in Gujrat that it considers this carnage quite 'natural' and an question of remorse does not arise.

This communalisation of civil society is spreading faster now as Sangh Parivar is in power through coalition in the Centre also and its resources are being cleverly used by the Sangh ideologues to disseminate communal ideology. It is spreading now in rural areas also as RSS, with its enhanced strength is sending its pracharak throughout the nook and corner of the country.

It is for the secular politicians to take on this communal challenge. But it must be admitted that secular forces are deeply divided and seriously weakened. The response of secular politicians to the communal menace is piecemeal rather than comprehensive, much less confrontational. Left politicians are an exception. Their priority is to take on communal challenge head on. However, Left forces are confined to few states and have no influence in most parts of India.

A vibrant civil society has to be secular and committed to democratic ideals rather than to religious fundamentalism. Then only Gujrat like carnage can be prevented.

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