

# The 'destiny syndrome'

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"PAKISTAN will be worse after Musharraf" is a headline in a leading western current affairs magazine. Though it looks like a very innocent observation, it is loaded with disastrous meanings. A banana republic may afford the luxury of having an image like that, but by no means a nuclear power. This image is not there by some accident but is an outcome of a concerted effort and campaign by General Musharraf to convince the people at home and folks abroad that he alone is the destiny of Pakistan.

The president tells his benefactors abroad that if he fell, Pakistan will fall into the hands of the Taliban and scares his own people by portraying that if he

of rule have instead of building national institutions further weakened them. But, there is a silver lining in all this.

There is a tendency to criticize the past democratic governments but we fail to acknowledge the gains of the democratic process which lasted from 1988 to 1999. We must bear in mind that this was not a free democratic process. First of all, we must bear in mind that it was not a free democratic process. It was run under the shadows of the military establishment through Article 58-2 (b), the presidential power to dissolve parliament arbitrarily.

Despite that, because the system continued to run uninterrupted for eleven years, some positive political developments took place and have become irreversible. These developments give us hope and confidence that Pakistani state is not a one-man state. It has developed strong foundations for evolving its institutions. If the democratic process is allowed to continue

parties. Even though Gen Musharraf did manage to break some elements of both parties in the shape of PML-Q and PPP-Patriots through the arm-twisting tactics of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and intelligence agencies, he couldn't destroy the main structure of the two parties.

Due to political consciousness of the masses, Gen Musharraf's king's party, PML-Q, failed to take off as a political entity despite heavy showering of official and intelligence agencies patronage. It breathes as long as it remains connected to the oxygen supplied by Gen Musharraf's machinery. For a political party to become a popular entity it either needs an ideology or a charismatic national leader. The PML-Q has none. Likewise, the MMA is a product of an accident. Gen Musharraf used its rise to blackmail the West in order to resist pressure for more democracy.

Moreover, due to the absence of national leadership from the country, there was a temporary vacuum in the national politics which the MMA found easy to fill. It is the fear of the return of the national leadership that makes both Musharraf and the MMA strange partners. So those who doubt that Pakistani politics can be swayed by extreme elements are thoroughly mistaken. Unlike India, where politics has fragmented in favour of regional parties, in Pakistan the democratic process has consolidated in the shape of two national parties, which is a very positive development.

The third development is that we see the beginning of a maturity process in Pakistani politics. From 1988 to 1997, the two polit-

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stop a punitive strike by the US against Pakistan's nuclear assets. Some international lobbies, which are uncomfortable with the nuclear capability of Pakistan, also try to portray a similar image of Pakistan to convince the US policy makers that Pakistan can't be trusted with nuclear technology because after Musharraf the bomb could fall into the hands of the terrorists.

These assertions by both Gen Musharraf and some international lobbies need to be examined closely. If Pakistan, after fifty-six years, still remains so fallible that without one man it could lose sense and go bizarre then maybe one has to also admit that it

doesn't deserve to exist as a state. But if it is a viable state then its destiny can't be tied to one individual.

What Musharraf is trying to project is not a new phenomenon. Every military dictator in history, regardless of time and space, has thrived on this kind of image. From Africa to Asia to Latin America every military ruler has suffered from the "destiny syndrome" by first convincing himself that Providence has brought him to power in order to change the destiny of his country and then tried to tell the people that after him the state will fall into undeserving and wrong hands and he alone is the country's saviour.

But, what history tells us is that all such dictators considered themselves to be the last chance for their countries took a fall but their states survived. We heard his sermons for ten years from Gen. Ayub Khan, for three years from Gen Yahya Khan, and for seven years from Gen Ziaul Haq. While they were in power they also tried to confuse the nation about their indispensability but once they were gone a consensus emerged among the opinion leaders and historians that their rule did more harm than good to the nation. In order to justify their rule, these dictators commit an unforgivable sin by shattering the nation's self-image and confidence. They pick on all institutions and leaders, whom they perceive to be a threat to their rule, by casting them as corrupt, rogue, incompetent, and opportunist. They manipulate the national institutions to make them timid, destroy the civil institutions by inducting a battery of army officers into civil institutions, introduce politics of horse-trading and bribery to create a new constituency for themselves.

Gen Musharraf's rule has been no exception. During the four years, he has mercilessly subjugated the judiciary through the 13th Amendment, shamelessly rigged the referendum and October 2002 elections, consistently inducted over a thousand military officers in various departments, lavishly doled out residential plots and agricultural land to his military officers, covertly manipulated the media, and continues to disfigure his own graduate parliament. As a result, his four years

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without manipulation, we will see a consolidation of these trends.

The first most powerful and positive development that has taken place is the freedom of the media, which has become so powerful that in my opinion it alone possesses the power to check any democratic leader or government from misusing power. The media has performed this role very effectively during the governments of both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto.

It was on account of this newly acquired power of the media that Gen Musharraf couldn't impose full censorship on the media and had to intimidate it in a clandestine manner. On top of this, the globalization of information revolution has virtually made it impossible for even the most closed societies to censor information today. So, we Pakistanis can take pride that ours is one of the most developed media in the context of developing societies.

The second major development is the emergence of a stable mainstream two-party political system. The threat of regional nationalist parties challenging the federation receded during the '90s and most of the regional parties joined national mainstream politics. The roots of the two-party structure became so strong that despite his full effort, which involved full administrative and military resources, Musharraf was not able to dislodge the two major parties from the scene.

Today, all independent experts admit that the PML-N and the PPP still remain the two leading parties of the country. The leaderships and cadres of these parties have successfully resisted the persecution and bribes of Musharraf government giving birth to a new political culture of principled politics.

Mr. Javed Hashmi, acting president of the PML-N, and some other leaders are still behind bars. The senior leaders of these parties had an open offer to change their loyalties and become ministers. But, they chose to remain loyal to their

political parties were locked in a fierce political battle. Both pursued politics of victimization against each other. The horse-trading tactics and the presidential power to dissolve the parliament were the two major factors which allowed the president to resort to conspiracies against democratic governments by playing off the two parties against each other and also provided a short cut to the opposition parties for lobbying with the establishment to get its adversary dislodged.

Finally, as a result of several setbacks, all democratic parties came to an understanding to cooperate with each other in fighting this menace through the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments in the Constitution, which removed the president's power to dissolve the parliament and put a restriction on floor crossing or horse-trading.

This trend has further consolidated in the last four years through participation of both the PML-N and the PPP, the arch rivals, in the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD). Both contested elections against each other in October 2002 elections but despite the heat of the election campaign they continued to remain partners in the ARD. Both have signed a declaration apologizing to the nation about their past mistakes and agreed upon a code of ethics for the future. There is much more tolerance among the cadres of the two parties for each other than ever before. These are some positive signs in our political system which augur well for the future of democracy in Pakistan.

The fourth major development is the empowerment of the judicial process which took place during the eleven years of democracy. Although democratic governments are often charge-sheeted for not respecting the judicial institutions, we should not confuse democratic governments with the democratic process. It's the same as discarding Islam for the wrong doings of the Muslims. The democratic process has its own dynamics, which is evidenced by the activism shown by the judiciary during that period.

To be concluded