

Pakistan: Victory At Last! Dictator Humbled

Friday 22 August 2008, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 21 August 2008).

It was all hugs and celebrations, in Pakistan, on August 18. After nine long years, Pakistan's fourth military dictator, General Musharraf, had been humbled by the masses. History was repeating itself yet again: yet again a US-backed military ruler had to bow out in the face of mass democracy movement. Never mind if such images were not flashed on CNN screens. Never mind if corporate media was predicting chaos in Pakistan-after-Musharraf instead of glorifying the "judicial Intifada" in Pakistan that caught hold of Pakistan last year and forced general Musharraf to resign.

Thousands across Pakistan took to streets to distribute sweets as Musharraf announced his resignation in an unscheduled nationally televised address. Had he not resigned, he would have been impeached by the parliament. Hence, August 18 resignation came as no surprise to the people of Pakistan. A leading, pro-Musharraf daily, The Times, had already informed its readers on August 13 that Musharraf would resign in 24 hours. On August 18 morning, all newspapers in Pakistan had predicted his exit. He might have resigned a week ago. But he wanted a "safe exit" from the country.

The popular mood in Pakistan was/is to have him in the dock for violating the constitution, corruption as well as killings and disappearances in the name of "war on terror". The trial may have led to the death penalty. Though deserted, of late, by his mentors in Washington yet his mentors thought his demand for a "safe exit" was genuine. It was, in fact, a message to other third world dictators that Washington ensures a safe passage for its satraps even when they have been humiliated out of power.

Secret mission

Hence, chief of Saudi intelligence agency, Prince Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz, was dispatched to Pakistan on a secret mission. The royal Saudi carrots (of financial bribes) and sticks (of oil-embargo) always work in Pakistan. Hence, a safe exit was guaranteed.

All four provincial assemblies had passed resolutions a week prior to his resignation, urging Musharraf to resign. The president in Pakistan is elected by four provincial assemblies and federal parliament. Such was the public hatred against Musharraf that even his cronies in these assemblies did not dare vote against these resolutions.

Musharraf loses his grip

Musharraf started losing grip on power March last year when he impeached the Chief Justice of Supreme Court, Iftikhar Chaudhry. Iftikhar had become popular among masses for his radical decisions against privatisation and on women and environmental issues. His removal triggered a mass movement for his restoration which in fact became a movement for the restoration of democracy. Musharraf was forced to restore him on July 20 last year.

Meantime, Musharraf's presidential term expired. He then got himself "re-elected" through unconstitutional means. His re-election, though approved by his friends at White House, was seen as illegal in Pakistan. It was challenged in the court. Musharraf fearing that Supreme Court, headed by restored Iftikhar Chaudhry, might go against him, he declared Emergency on November 3 last year besides suspending eight Supreme Court judges including Iftikhar. It led to protest resignations by

60 Supreme Court and High Court judges.

In October last year, Benazir Bhutto, after having struck a deal with Musharraf, returned from exile. The deal was brokered by the USA. The US plan was to assign Benazir Bhutto the slot of prime minister ship so that she could mobilise support for an otherwise unpopular “war on terror” while Musharraf was supposed to conduct the military operation against “terrorists” even ruthlessly.

Benazir murdered

Benazir was murdered on December 27, 2007 leading to a five-day general strike in Pakistan. The country had been paralysed. Musharraf would have been lynched had Condoleeza Rice not given a call to Bhutto’s widower, Asif Ali Zardari, to co-operate with Musharraf and participate in the general elections that Musharraf was forced to hold in view of the growing democracy movement.

The outcome of the general elections on February 18, 2008 was a ballot-box coup against a military dictator. The pro-Musharraf PML-Q lost badly.

A four-party coalition, headed by Benazir Bhutto’s PPP formed the government in the wake of elections. The new government was threatened by US time and again to keep co-operating with Musharraf as he was still the US guy in Pakistan. The PPP, having given up its traditions of resistance since long, slavishly obeyed the US commands. But it annoyed the masses who wanted the chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry back at the helm of Supreme Court while Musharraf out of presidency. The PPP’s coalition partner, PML-N, headed by former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, quit the coalition in protest as it was the party that had contested election on the promise of restoring the deposed judges.

Musharraf encouraged

Meantime, highly unpopular economic policies by the new the PPP-led government made the PPP lose popularity at a lightning speed.

The falling popularity of the new government encouraged Musharraf. He began mustering support among PPP dissidents and oppositional forces to remove PPP governors. Had the PPP-led coalition not taken a decision to remove Musharraf, he could have decided to remove the PPP-led coalition government. He had the constitutional powers to dissolve the parliament or remove the government. The PPP, now cornered, took the popular decision to save its skin as well as restore its popularity.

Hence, Musharraf delivered his only popular speech on August 18. Now he is under an unofficial house arrest at Army House. He cannot talk to media. He had sanctuaries in Manhattan or Texas in mind, but the Rice on August 18, announced that Musharraf will not be granted exile in the USA. Most likely this unholy dictator will be packed off to Islam’s most holy lands, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: a befitting sanctuary for any dictator!

P.S.

* Farooq Sulehria is a member of the Labour Party Pakistan based in Sweden.