

US-Brokered 'Democracy' Gives Way to Emergency in Pakistan

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In the course of implementing a US-brokered rapprochement between Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto, President Musharraf has now declared a state of Emergency in Pakistan. As the Pakistani military steps up its operations, Benazir Bhutto who had just been greeted with a massive bomb blast on her return to Pakistan after spending years in self-imposed exile has once again gone back to Dubai. Meanwhile the declaration of Emergency has been greeted with spirited protests all over Pakistan, with lawyers at the forefront. Lawyers who were the mainstay of the recent pro-democracy upsurge in Pakistan, have staged rallies in several major cities, and have been greeted by baton-wielding riot police. More than 1500 people have been arrested in Pakistan in protests against the imposition of emergency.

Musharraf has justified the emergency as necessary for fighting terrorism. While the US has advised Musharraf to 'shed his uniform' and restore democracy, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has emphasised that President Bush's "first concern" is "to protect America and protect American citizens by continuing to fight against terrorists."

The imposition of emergency so soon after the much-touted restoration of democracy and return of Benazir only goes to show the fragility of US-brokered democracy. The forces of democracy in Pakistan are on the streets - and among them, Musharraf's policy of compliance and active collaboration with the US naturally remains a source of tremendous mass anger. Simultaneously, there is a visible yearning for restoration of democracy, for a real end to military rule and not just a civilian facade. We in India hope for a coalescence of the struggles for these two concerns into a real anti-imperialist democratic resurgence in Pakistan that alone can bring some meaningful political change in that country and lasting peace in the subcontinent.

P.S.

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