

Pakistan collapsing under Musharaf — He has to go

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Pakistan is on fast rout of collapsing under Musharaf dictatorship. The state is in immense crisis. The infrastructure, industrial and social, is in total chaos. The economic crisis is showing its muscles. The price hike is uncontrollable and unemployment is ever increase.

The vast majority of ordinary people of Pakistan are praying day and night that Musharaf be killed or at least he should die. Majority believe that he will never leave power without giving his life. « *If he is not killed, he will kill us all one by one* ». He has become the most unpopular president of Pakistan.

Musharaf is widely seen as a person who has orchestrated the murder of Benazir Bhutto. « *Qaatal Qaatal Musharaf Qaatal* » (« Murderer the murderer, Musharaf the murderer ») was the main slogan of the mass reaction. All the twist and turn of Musharaf dictatorship after the murder has strengthened the doubts of the masses in this regard. « *He asked her to come to Pakistan by negotiating and let her be killed* » is a remark you hear very often.

Despite that, Musharaf has consistently shown the trends that he will stick to power by any mean. « *He is the ultimate power* », « *Pakistan needs me* », « *Pakistan first* », "*Pakistan, my top priority*" are some of his regular sloganeering. However, many do not trust him anymore here in Pakistan.

The desperation of masses to remove Musharaf by a mass movement is clear everywhere. They had attempted to throw him out of power after assassination of Benazir. That was an unprecedented movement for five days from 27 December 2007. Not a single shop was open, no wheel on the move, no factory working, no bank open, no office functioning, no restaurant or hotel open, no train on the move, flights cancelled, schools and colleges closed and thousands and thousands were on the road protesting. This was the most unexpected outburst of mass anger after the killing.

Nevertheless, unfortunately, Pakistan Peoples Party leadership had not learnt from history. They saw this an important occasion to show that are the responsible defender of the system. They went to appeal the masses to cool down, go back to their work and turn your anger into vote for Pakistan Peoples Party.

This was the time when majority of the political parties had announced to boycott the elections and demanded an immediate resignation of Musharaf. Had PPP joined the other parties in boycotting the general elections, Musharaf would have gone by now.

They had not realized the post Benazir killing scenario. They had not anticipated the total collapse of economy in the days ahead. They had not thought of the tactics of Musharaf supporters to rig the election if they were given chance. Over 4000 First Investigation Reports (FIR) has been registered by police against a record number of half a million PPP and other opposition political activists in Sind alone. Many PPP activists were arrested to be released on bail later. Many thousands have gone for bail before arrest. The tactics of PPP leadership has put PPP in defensive position.

The PPP is on the run after three weeks of Benazir Bhutto assassination, it was Musharaf who was on the defense after the killings. He must have been relieved when the PPP leadership had taken a decision to contest elections.

At a time when the consciousness of the whole of Pakistan was anti Musharaf with active participation in mass movement, the PPP leadership announcement to participate in elections was like putting cold water on the boiling heat, was like a fire brigade bus active in stopping fire spreading by showering water.

Moreover, what an elections that is taking place on 18 February 2008 ? Before the announcement of the general elections, top judges, 60 of them were put under house arrest on 3 November 2007 when martial law was imposed on the name of emergency ; many are still in house arrest particularly the chief justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Ahmed Choudry. On 14 January, all public meetings and election rallies are banned for a month on the name of security. Thus, effectively, there is not going to be any mass mobilization by the political parties. Most of the opposition parties that are taking part in the elections are already complaining that it will rig and that they have proofs of rigging in the electoral role.

All the rules laid out by Election Commission of Pakistan about the size and width of the posters, pamphlets, stickers, hoarding boards and banners have been widely violated by most of the candidates belonging to the government and the opposition.

It is a race of money among the candidates. It is like a business competition. It is not a democracy that is going to be restored by the elections but a farce of democracy. The general elections have given a chance to the masses to choose among the exploiters. The condition that a candidate must be at least a university graduate meant that only less than one percent of the whole population had a chance to become candidates.

Three weeks after the assassination of Benazir, on 17 January 2008, there is unprecedented price hike of everything. Wheat flour is the most used food item in Pakistan. It has gone up from Rupees 13 a kilogram to 25 to 50 Rupees, if you can find it in shops. There have been suicide attempts by women after failure to buy the wheat flour from the government concessional utility stores. There has been food riots reported in many parts of the country.

There is regular news on television and newspapers that "smugglers" of wheat flour have been arrested. Earlier smuggling was normally restricted to gold and electronic items. Now wheat flour "smugglers" are the main enemies of Pakistan. Almost every province has restricted the transportation of wheat flour. Thus making more problem for the people North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and many in Afghanistan who are dependent on wheat flour from Punjab and Sindh.

There are massive electricity crises. The electricity is released on load shedding basis, in most cases there is electricity available for 10 to 12 hours a day in most parts of the country. The countryside is worst hit by this. There is no commercial gas available to all the industries for the last two weeks. Thus closing down of many hundreds of factories. Even hospitals are not spared from this. Hundreds of thousands of workers are laid off from the factories and they are asked to wait when the electricity and gas is restored to full capacity.

LPG gas has disappeared. The price has gone up from 50 Rupees a kilogram to 100/110 Rupees a kilogram if you can find one LPG gas shop open. The price of one kilogram of vegetable has gone up to 125 Rupees from 100 earlier. Almost there is a 25 percent price hike of everything available in the shops and super markets.

Yet there is neither wage increase nor any temporary compensation for the people.

This is a very good ground for the very rich politicians from Muslim League Q, who are main supporters of Musharaf. They will buy votes in bulk for the scheduled 18 February general elections. The objective reality of hardship of life under Musharaf with PPP taking part in elections may cut across the massive sympathy wave for PPP that they are counting on. However, there is a limit to that tactics.

Musharaf dictatorship has failed to curb the ongoing incidents of suicidal attacks. The religious fundamentalists groups in Waziristan and Swat are not budging down despite a heavy military operation. They are striking back repeatedly. On 16 January, a group of religious extremist occupied a fort in North Waziristan, which was used by Pakistan military. The newspapers reported eight army men killed while 20 disappeared, while unconfirmed reports put the casualties much higher than the official announcement Government reported the killings of 50 militants as well.

There are several incidents where most of the suicidal attackers were less than 16 year of age. The completely new young generation has been motivated by the religious fundamentalists to take an all out war against the friends of imperialism and "enemies of Islam".

There is lot of discontent among the police force and bureaucracy in Pakistan. They are sick and tired of their usage against the masses and movement. Many police officers are very often speaking against Musharaf government to their friends and contacts. There is no support among the public employees for the military dictatorship, but they are forced to go on.

Musharaf dictatorship is isolated and very much hated. It is a dictatorship supported by none but by American imperialism and its allies. It is trying its best to survive. However, the day of the military regimes are numbered. It cannot survive for long despite all the help of its political friends. It is the most hated dictatorship in the history of Pakistan. Day by day, it is loosing. Musharaf has survived by the most modern security arrangements available at present time. However, these will not work all the times in the wake of tremendous hatredness building up.

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