

Nilufar Choudhury

CHALLENGES IN PAKISTAN'S NEW ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

Pakistan has tried since its independence several forms of governance including parliamentary, presidential, basic democratic, martial law and shurocratic¹. But all have failed to achieve abiding political stability. The root cause of Pakistan's vulnerability has been the absence of democracy. For Pakistan with its heterogenous peoples and culture, with its distorted economic structures and low level of education, democratic institutions with full popular participation are *sine qua non* for politico-economic stability and development. Over the years authoritarianism has rendered the political institutions of the country extremely fragile.

Pakistan is typical of countries where political institutions have for decades been victims of experimentations by the Generals in political power. In the process transfer of power as a critical aspect of democracy has almost as a rule been traumatic. This created opportunities for praetorian intervention recurrently. As a result the problem of disengagement of the military from politics has been entrenched in a vicious circle. When General Ziaul Huq died in a plane crash in August 1988, the nation apprehended that a military strongman might again emerge and defer the whole process for an unspecified span of years. It did not, however, happen. What

1. This is a commonly used term drawn from the *Majlis-e-shoora* (advisory council) which General Ziaul Huq convened in January 1982 in his bid to find additional civilian source of legitimacy and to provide the facade of popular participation stressing on Islamization.

happened instead was a restrained and responsible role on the part of the government. The army has since behaved with circumspection and reticence with its chief General Aslam Beg repeatedly expressing a disinclination to involve the armed forces in politics. An interim administration announced party-based elections earlier scheduled for November 16, 1988. The central issue in Pakistan's general elections was democracy itself and the outcome only reconfirmed that the voters were rejecting a decade of dictatorship. Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) won the most seats while most politicians associated with former military ruler Zia-ul-Huq were rejected at the polls. A popular mandate buried the pretensions of military and civilian dictators to exercise autocratic power and laid a foundation for democratic rule. The people, seasoned by years of eddying back and forth from democratic experimentation and autocracy realized that they have been provided with an opportunity to move towards stabilizing its political institutions. And the need has been greater than ever particularly when economic pressure have mounted and the society itself is gravely threatened by sectarian conflicts, proliferation of illicit arms and narcotics.

Benazir Bhutto has emerged confident and determined from one of the worst political periods in Pakistan's history. Her clear victory is a remarkable achievement but beyond it lie mountainous challenges. At stake is the chance for her country at last to realise its economic potential and to complete the process of transition to unfettered parliamentary democracy. How Pakistan goes through this transition remains to be seen. The present paper attempts to focus on the daunting list of challenges the country faces in its new road to democracy.

Praetorianism : A Frequently Inovked Pursuit

It is commonplace wisdom in Political Science that liberal democracy is not an easy system to establish or maintain. A high degree of national consensus, advanced educational and information

levels, gradual historical experience in political development, conditions of relative prosperity and a degree of socio-economic equity are the basic prerequisites for its proper functioning. In contrast most Third World nations have suffered from continuing illiteracy and low educational levels, serious urban-rural gaps, economic and social cleavages, unequal patterns of income distribution, sharp ideological conflicts and lack of consensus over national issues. These contribute to political polarization and institutional decay.

Pakistan is a case in point. Formation of consensus on structuring of appropriate democratic institutions has remained a dilemma in Pakistan. The failure to successfully rehabilitate politics and establish stable constitutional arrangements is rooted in asymmetry of the federal units, the centralized authority structure of the state as it has evolved over the decades and the personality orientation of political parties. The vacuums created by sharp divisions among politicians and their inability to compromise and mediate political tensions have frequently paved the way for praetorian interventions.² The military intervention as an alternative to civilian rule has been invoked so frequently that it has become almost a regular part of Pakistan's political process. On three occasions so far, October 1958, March 1969 and July 1977, the military has intervened overtly and imposed martial law throughout the country and justified its extreme action on the grounds of chaotic conditions prevailing in the country. Pakistan has essentially been ruled by men in uniform for twenty-three years during the forty years of its existence. The fact that institutional weakness created conducive conditions for praetorian pursuits does not negate the political ambitions of the Generals to intervene in domestic politics. It only suggests that without created opportunity by political rifts that generated social strife the men in uniform could not step in. From its independence

2. Rasul B. Rais, "Pakistan in 1987: Transition to Democracy", *Asian Survey*, February 1988 p. 26

in 1947 to 1958, the politicians were in command in Pakistan, but they failed to hold general elections. Instead, they indulged in political opportunism and intrigue. They formed and dismissed governments—eight federal governments were appointed during those eleven years and a pack of sixtyfour ministers were shuffled in and out of office and they never once had the courage to go to the people for a mandate³. The governmental powers were centralized and the civil military bureaucracy got upper hand during the first decade of Pakistan. They considered the politicians to be superfluous and impediments to modernization.⁴

Similarly Z.A. Bhutto, the head of the first democratically elected government since 1947 failed to sustain democracy in Pakistan. Bhutto was overthrown by General Zia because he could not change the basic structure which gave rise to military praetorianism. Instead he tried to replenish the same defence establishment (the increased allocation to defence after 1971).⁵ Although Bhutto took several steps to erect some barriers against the return of the Generals to Pakistan's political scenario, he at a later stage was unwilling to tolerate opposition from even those who were democratically elected like himself. He extended his personal control over the bureaucracy as well as the military, the party and the national and provincial assemblies. The irony was that an elected government at the centre failed to respect the wishes of the electorate in the provinces. The two provinces of North West Frontier province (NWFP) and Baluchistan were in a state of rebellion. The law and order situation came almost to a breaking point clearing the way for praetorian intervention.

3. *South*, October 1988, p. 5.

4. Md. Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, "Military Regimes of Indonesia and Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis", *Asian Affairs*, Volume IX, Number-4, October December 1987, Dhaka, p. 44.

5. Kalim Bahadur, "Military and Politics in Pakistan" in Urmila Phadnis, S. D. Muni, Kalim Bahadur, eds. *Domestic Conflicts in South Asia*, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p. 128.

Once in power the military rationalized their intervention as necessary in Pakistani politics to save the country in the wake of the total collapse of civil authority to restore order and to create the conditions required for democracy. This had been the pet explanation of General Ayub Khan, General Yahya Khan and also General Ziaul Huq. But return to democracy and participatory politics subsequently turned out to be anything but a matter of serious commitment. Rather, facade of economic development and political stability became the ideologies and tools of the military rulers. There have also been deliberate attempts to de-emphasize the importance of building and nurturing of political institutions. Emphasis on non-political models of socio-economic change had two objectives, first, to depoliticize the national environment by deflecting attention from political to economic issues and second, to gain legitimacy through developmental symbolism.⁶

Although Pakistan is regarded as a model for development in the Third World this development was actually based on fragile superstructure. Pakistan's development is a story of distorted nature of development in favour of elites leading to a polarization in society. The fundamental economic problems were to a large extent cushioned by generous aid and loans from the US and the Arab world and large amount of remittances from the Gulf. But this was a part of short term amelioration of the economic problems. The oil bonanza soon leveled off, closing down employment opportunities and encouraging fast falling remittances. An economy without a sound industrial base and fatally dependent on external aid, credits and remittances showed signs of collapse and bankruptcy.

Another approach to divert the society from politicisation was through Islamisation. With a long term interest in view and to strengthen his position internally and externally General Ziaul Huq put primary emphasis on making Pakistan a theocratic state by initiating a process of Islamisation in the society. It is true that

6. Rasul B. Rais, *op. cit* p. 27.

Zia, on coming to power, said that the introduction of Islamic system was "an essential prerequisite" for Pakistan. But his initial support to "Islamisation" was to gain the full support of Jamaat-i-Islami and other fundamentalist religious groups. He did not pursue the theme seriously, it was based on rhetoric. Zia's policy of Islamisation received financial support and intellectual assistance from Saudi Arabia and provided an ideological ground for actively participating in politics in the country.⁷ According to an analyst, General Zia's attempts to establish a *Nizam-e-mustafa* is simply another variant of the unabashed use of Islam to cloak the illegitimacy of his regime.⁸

While President Zia, like his predecessors attempted to build a coalition of economic and political interests around them, the main base of authority had been the military and civil bureaucracy which projected an image of the guardian of national integrity. This coalition of elites had a negative view of popular politics and politicians. Apart from group interest perpetuated through dominance over the state apparatus, the bureaucratic military elites have nurtured a messianic self image about their role and their capacity to restructure social, economic and political institutions in the expectation they will grow, stabilize and attract participation.⁹ Although politicians have failed to prevent a reshaping of the political system by the bureaucracy, they have succeeded in withholding legitimacy of this system among the general masses. The politicians have effectively exploited this resentment and discontent of the masses. They launched political movements to defy the long hands of authoritarianism. Thus the pattern of controlled and centralized institutionalization had turned into social unrest and political chaos.

7. Chintamani Mohapatra, "Political Upheaval in Pakistan", *Strategic Analysis*, October, 1988, Vol. XII, No. 7, P. 716.

8. Gowher Rizvi, "Pakistan : The Domestic Dimensions of Security", in Barry Buzan and Gowher Rizvi, *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, The Macmillan Press Ltd. London 1986, p. 71.

9. Rasul B. Rais, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Pakistan in Transition : Challenges Ahead

When General Zia ul Huq died in a plane crash in August 1988, the nation was at crossroads. At that critical juncture it was widely believed that Pakistan would regress into military dictatorship and the possibilities were not all that remote considering the chequered history of praetorian pursuits. Skepticism about the military's ambition was high but the military leaders kept their promise to hold elections. Quite clearly, most Pakistanis were eager for a change. The election was largely peaceful and to all appearances honest, an accomplishment of no small measure for a nation with a long history of fraud at the ballot box. The holding of elections paved the way for the transfer of power to the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) at the centre, Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) in Punjab, the PPP and Mohajir Quaomi Movement (MQM) in Sind. Awami National Party (ANP) and PPP in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and IDA and PPP in Baluchistan.

In spite of a decade of depoliticisation and an insidious impairment of constitutional rule, the popular verdict favoured a democratic system. The elections in November 1988 reiterated more forcefully than ever before that popular will is the only arbitrator for the political system in the country. If a durable system of political rule is sought to be constructed then it should be ensured that it continues to draw its strength from the people. Benazir Bhutto, the newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan draws her greatest strength from her electoral mandate. She is close to securing what few Pakistani leaders have had since the country's earliest days—legitimacy untainted by coup, assassination or electoral fraud. This does not however reduce the magnitude or the difficulty of governing a country which has been pushed to the brink by years of misrule.

There is no doubt that the new government has inherited an unenviable legacy of explosive problems from the past. These problems are the product of long years of authoritarian rule. And they are

not confined to any single field or aspect of life. Indeed whether it is the economic realm or the political and social arenas, there is an enormous backlog of problems to deal with. The task of the new government of presiding over Pakistan's transition to a participatory, a more open and an egalitarian system is circumscribed by a number of factors.

Political

As already indicated, from its very inception Pakistan has suffered from the endemic fragility of its political institutions. The Muslim League, the main political party struggling for an independent Pakistan failed to transform itself from a nationalist movement to a national party which could lead the nation on the road to democracy, stability and prosperity. During the crucial period of 1951-58 following the assassination of the country's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, the political system rapidly eroded. The armed forces started playing an influential role in national decision making, significantly in the fields of foreign policy, internal politics and administrative structures even before they formally took over. In fact following the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, the political stage was dominated by four civil-military bureaucrats—Ghulam Muhammad, Chulan Husain, Major General Iskander Mirza and General Ayub Khan—who made an utter mockery of parliamentary democracy.¹⁰ The parliamentary institutions were never given a fair run and the civil-military bureaucracy got heavily entrenched in decision making. The attempts by General Ayub Khan to do away with both liberal parliamentary democracy and mass participation through adult franchise resulted in chronic political instability in Pakistan, alienated the representative elites, denuded the government institutions of legitimacy and led to periodic outbreaks of violence. Except for a brief period under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto when

10. Gowher Rizvi, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

democracy was given a chance, the military successors of Ayub have tried, with disastrous consequences, to institutionalise their regimes through methods which denied popular participation.¹¹

The Yahya Khan interregnum led to the secession of Bangladesh. It is often speculated that the continued denial of political participation to peoples of other regions in Pakistan might well provoke further attempts at secession. It would be no exaggeration to say that future political stability, indeed, even the integrity of Pakistan would require strengthening of democratic institutions.

The political system the PPP has been called upon to operate in, is the legacy of the system that General Ziaul Huq had fashioned with a powerful President presiding over it and the military machine feeding important inputs from the sidelines. The salient features of the 1985 constitution (or the 8th amendment) which Ziaul Huq incorporated included a strengthening of the powers of the President *vis-a-vis* those of the Prime Minister and the creation of a National Security Council to give the military a formal role in major crises.¹² This amendment was tailor-made to suit the demands of an authoritarian system of government. It did not contain provisions which could promote a multiparty system. Instead all its provisions negate the values of the parliamentary system.¹³ The Baluchistan crisis exemplified the excessive powers of Governors granted by the amendment where the provincial Governor without the knowledge of the Prime Minister dissolved the assembly which led to a chain of constitutional chaos. This crisis underscored the need for amending the constitution to save not only provincial cabinet and assemblies but

11. See for details, Gowher Rizvi, "Riding the Tiger : Institutionalising the Military Regimes in Pakistan and Bangladesh" in C. Clapham and G. Philip (eds), *The Political Dilemmas of Military Regimes*, London 1985, p. 201-36.

12. Veena Kukreja, "Military Politics in Pakistan : Ten Years of Zia's Rule", *Strategic Analysis* August 1988, Vol. XII, No. 5, p. 462.

13. *The Muslim*, 25. December, 1988, p. 5.

also the federal set-up. It is a mighty challenge for Benazir to function smoothly or promote parliamentary democracy in the given system. The crucial question is whether Benazir will be able to muster enough strength to dismantle the Eighth amendment. It will be a long grueling and absorbing process whose outcome will have a decisive bearing on the future of Pakistan.

A reality of Pakistani politics is that the role of army in government has quietly been institutionalised. Pakistan is incidentally not alone in having this experience. Countries that have gone through a period of army rule have discovered that even when civilian government has returned the armed forces have remained an important political factor. There is always an in-built potential for a clash between politicians and military in view of their totally different perceptions on various issues. Although the Chief of Staff of Pakistan army Mirza Aslam Beg has declared that the armed forces will not obstruct the political process, the feeling persists that the army has staged a tactical retreat and will not fail to rediscover its political role at the opportune moment. It has withdrawn from the political scene because it could not override the constitutional process without large scale bloodshed. But the enormity of problems including ethnic tensions and unresolved issues of centre-province relations hovering over Pakistan ensure that the military remains closely in the background, politically discreet now, but capable of asserting itself later. As it is, the military cannot accept undiluted rule by Benazir and the PPP. Despite Benazir's efforts to minimize PPP's left orientation and apparently to come to some accommodation with the military heirarchy, the party is considered anti-military,¹⁴ and this may be an important factor in determining the fate of the PPP government.

On account of *realpolitik*, Benazir's most important and delicate job as Prime Minister would be to cement her relations with the

14. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 December 1988, p. 12.

armed forces. At present there are four crucial areas of policy where the military would not accept any major changes. These are: support for the Afghan Mujahedeen, continuation of Pakistan's nuclear programme, rejection of India's regional preeminence and an adequate budget allocation for defence.¹⁵ From her policy announcements Benazir appears willing to give the military some leeway in running its own affairs. She will have to work out a rational equation with the armed forces which will put the spectre of military intervention to rest. But at the same time she will have to resist the strong influences that the military may try to impose which may ultimately ruin the democratic set up. This will require a very balanced and cautious approach in dealing with the military.

Apart from the military, Benazir's claim to power is also threatened by the country's Islamists. Although she is the only politician to enjoy support in all four provinces of Pakistan she does not seem to have found her position as head of a democratically elected government readily acceptable to a section whose faith in parliamentary democracy is lukewarm, if not doubtful. Despite Benazir's undoubted qualities as a political leader, with favourable national verdict to govern, this group finds it emotionally hard to accept her as the country's leader. The group comprises a section of the fundamentalist clergy and their reactionary supporters to whom it is difficult to accept a woman as head of the government. These people are anxiously waiting for an opportunity to invoke Islam to challenge the current political arrangements. The second group comprises the vested interest which has grown up during Zia's rule reportedly keen to keep his tradition and pattern of rule alive.¹⁶ Despite limited electoral strength Islamist groups command considerable street power which could easily be mobilised if an Islamic issue is raised. So any attempt by Benazir to radically reverse Zia's Islamization programme will meet resistance.

15. *ibid*, p. 13.

16. A. M. Sadullah, "Time for a Policy of Goodwill", *Dawn*, 29 December 1988, p. 7.

Ethnic and Regional

Pakistan has always had a fragile base of nationhood with its four provinces, many ethnic groups and numerous tribes. In addition to four indigenous nationalities, i.e., Baluchis, Sindhis, and Punjabis the Pakistani population also includes some four to six million Urdu-speaking Muslim Indian refugees who have settled primarily in Karachi. These ethnic groups have over the years been competing among themselves for greater autonomy and power. The main source of concern comes from the three smaller provinces Baluchistan, NWFP and Sind. Although each of these regions has its own individual and complex problems, they all share certain common grievances: denial of political participation, undue interference by the federal government, insufficient economic assistance and a resentment against the Punjabis. The Punjabis, in turn look upon them as traitors and fifth columnists.¹⁷

The history of the tussle between the centre (which is largely Punjabi) and the provinces is as old as Pakistan itself. The track record of the central government's attitude towards the provinces is one of almost callous insensitivity and gross neglect. Although accustomed to enjoying leadership in the country, Punjabis had this time to concede the Prime Ministership to Sind. Interestingly this is the first time in Pakistan's history that two different parties control the governments in Islamabad and Lahore. After the by-elections for the national and provincial assemblies on 28 January 1989, Punjab has emerged as the opposition party's stronghold. Notably Punjab is the most populous province comprising about 55% of the population and the Punjabis have great influence in the army, bureaucracy, industry, and thereby in policies at the national level.

Now that the Punjab Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif has secured the IDA government in Punjab, the Islamic fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami party's hard core activists are trying to lead the fight against

17. Gowher Rizvi, *op. cit.*, p. 72

PPP. This was evident during Benazir's by-election campaign in Punjab, where during her election tour she faced a partial boycott from Sharif's provincial administration.¹⁸ The confrontation between Punjab and the federal government is a major problem for Benazir. Moreover the widening gulf between the two main political parties the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) and PPP is alarming from the national security perspective. Nawaz Sharif will now have to rein in the Jamaat ideologues, if he wants an accommodation with the centre while Benazir will also have to restrain her PPP members in the Punjab assembly so that acrimonies are not blown out of proportion. If the centre-Punjab confrontation continues it could have a long term destabilizing effect for the Benazir government. The sensitivities in centre-province relations were manifested within a month of Benazir's coming to power when a crisis erupted in Baluchistan. The Governor of that province Mohammad Musa, on advice of the embattled Chief Minister, who was finding it difficult to cobble together a working coalition dismissed the Baluchistan assembly, thereby causing an uproar throughout the country. There were stormy protests in the national assembly with opposition MPs accusing PPP of engineering the move, while the PPP leaders counter-charged that the uproar was a deliberate attempt by the opposition and conservative vested interests to undermine the new national government. Although a lot of sting has been taken out from the Baluchistan situation, the episode provides a grim indication of the fragility of the present democratic set-up.

The other two provinces of NWFP and Sind has also the potentials of ethnic eruptions. In the NWFP the PPP has managed to form a government in alliance with the Awami National Party (ANP). In the province of Sind only, the PPP has an overwhelming majority. However it must not be overlooked that only last year hundreds of people have been killed in severe ethnic confrontations when the Mohajirs, loyal to MQM clashed with PPP members. In

18. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 February, 1989, p. 26.

such a climate of political polarisation Benazir faces the task of convincing her provincial rivals that she will not ride rough over them.

In the vital interest of the nation both Benazir and the opposition parties should now look for ways to turn the situation of having different political parties at the centre and the provinces to the advantage of the people and the democratic process.

Economic

Benazir Bhutto's government has inherited what some economists call the worst economic crisis in the country's history. It is widely believed that the absence of a democratic polity led to the lopsided development in the country. The military-bureaucratic and feudal-capitalist elite which had come together to control the power in the country produced a blueprint for Pakistan's development based on their own interests and advantages. By openly following the capitalist strategy of industrialization the economy took a course of uneven growth. The traditional areas of export remain almost the same and after forty years of independence, Pakistan is yet to be self-sufficient in food-grains, though the majority of the population is involved in agriculture and agriculture-related activities.¹⁹ The same is true for the industry sector where self-sufficiency remains a far cry. A study of a 20 year trend from 1960 to 1980 shows that imports and exports were together around 24 percent of the Pakistani GNP. Thus a quarter of her economy is critically exposed to the vagaries of world market.²⁰

Pakistan has often been referred as a model for other developing countries to follow as she has been maintaining a relatively high growth rate of nearly 5% during the period 1965-80. In the years

19. Aabha Dixit, "Pakistan's Economy : Survival or Catastrophe?" *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XII, No. 9, December 1988, p. 1091.

20. A. A. Athale, "Roots of a Security Dilemma", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XII, No. 7, October 1988, p. 788.

1980-85 the rate of growth of GNP has been 6% as compared to India's 5.2%. The interesting point of the Pakistani economic miracle is that while in 1985 her growth rate was 6% of the GNP, the contribution of domestic savings was a bare 5% of the GNP. The economic miracle thus was a phenomenon totally dependent on external aid and credit. Foreign aid has been financing upto 40% of developmental expenditure in Pakistan.²¹ Moreover, in a country like Pakistan growth rate *per se* is hardly a comprehensive indicator of development, the more so, because, as already indicated, whatever growth took place in the economy assumed a grossly distorted character.

Since the oil boom of the 70s inward remittances from Pakistanis working in Gulf and other West Asian countries have been forming nearly 80 percent of Pakistan's external earnings.²² However in the last 3 months foreign remittances have fallen by 18%.²³

Tariffs contribute most of the government's revenue earnings and ingenious smugglers limit the scope for increasing them. Only one million of Pakistan's 100 million people pay tax.²⁴ Farmers are exempt. That not only deprives the government of revenue from a quarter of GDP, but also provides a convenient avenue of tax evasion. Since almost all the politicians are landlords, they resist any attempt to tax agricultural income. Defence expenditure, administrative expenses and the debt servicing consume over three quarters of the national budget. It will not be an easy job to divert funds from these sectors to socio-economic development.

All capital spending is financed by borrowing, mostly high interest bonds sold to the public. That means more debt to be serviced. Excessive government borrowing in a country with a 7% savings rate

21. *ibid*, p. 789.

22. *ibid*,

23. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 December 1988, p. 14.

24. *The Economist*, 26 November 1988, p. 19.

is squeezing out private borrowers.²⁵ High tariffs protect the domestic market and thus reduce industry's international competitiveness. Foreign companies tempted by the growth figures and the size of the market are put off by corruption, street violence and political uncertainty. Taking a total view of the circumstances one comes to a picture of an economy that lacks sound industrial base and is fatally dependent on external aid, credits and remittances. Any changes in these variables can lead to an economic collapse and its attendant political fallout.

A few weeks before elections, Ishaq Khan's caretaker government signed a package deal with the IMF, which offered US \$ 1 billion over 3 years in return for stringent conditions that could hem in the newly elected regime. The IMF's conditions included across-the-board price increases, an end to subsidies on agricultural products, import liberalisation and hiking of utility charges. These steps could further fuel inflation and public unrest. Already sensitive to foreign nagging, Pakistanis may no longer appreciate having their economy run by the IMF. And they will not enjoy a sales tax and austerity. If it cannot cut down non-productive expenditure, the IMF and other loan givers will force the government to raise larger tax increases and rise in prices of various goods and services, inviting widespread social and political upheaval. The Prime Minister hopes to ease the pain of the series of unpopular new belt-tightening measures by encouraging foreign investment. Such investment will be slow to arrive, however, until her government demonstrates that it has firm control over the country. At the moment, government needs to practice economy effectively, cut waste and embezzlement of official funds all round and persuade the country to become austere and consume less particularly of the imported items so as to reduce the staggering trade deficit and increasing balance of payment gaps. The situation calls for real

25. *Ibid*, p. 19.

crisis management on all the fronts even before the PPP government can deliver promised welfare services to the masses. The government has to come up with an integrated remedy package and practice it earnestly, otherwise the critical deficits in varied fronts will become graver and put the economic growth of the nation in reverse gear. A great deal needs to be done to restore the country's economic stability, so dangerously undermined in the past decade by financial indiscipline and absence of accountability. But the dilemma for the new government is critical. Benazir said that she would not renegotiate the agreement with the IMF, despite calls from leading economists to do so. All the commitments have already been made by the last government to the IMF. She remarked that until the next budget in June, her ministries would just have to make do, which makes it next to impossible for the PPP to start its promised economic and social programmes for the poor.

The economy is under severe strains and the government faces an uphill task of tapping new resources to translate its socio-economic programme into reality. What is needed now is a thorough restructuring of Pakistan's long term strategy of development keeping in closer view the welfare and interest of the general masses. Pakistanis are expecting all sorts of goodies from this long awaited democratic government. But the new Prime Minister should remember that stern measures will be easier now, when democracy is still fresh, than after a couple of disillusioning years. A brave government would accept a couple of years of pain as it reduces the budget deficit and increases savings. It should cut subsidies and shift public spending to investment in infrastructure and education, cut tariffs, push an agricultural tax through and slap on a sales tax.²⁶

Foreign Relations

To take a coherent foreign policy course is no less an important task for the new Prime Minister. Rather it is a matter of con-

26. *ibid*, p. 19.

suming importance for a nation caught up so deeply in regional and superpower politics. In the recent pronouncements by the new Prime Minister the element of continuity with the past was far stronger than any indication for major change. PPP's decision to keep Shahibzada Yakub Khan as Foreign Minister merely emphasized the link between past and present. A great deal in Pakistan's foreign policy posture under the new government will depend upon how Benazir relates to the essential issues affecting subcontinental security — its Afghanistan policy, the nuclear weapons issue and its policies towards India. At least two aspects of foreign policy, India and Afghanistan should be given due importance and a positive outlook brought in. There are expectations for a better Indo-Pakistan climate on the aftermath of the Rajiv-Benazir meeting in Islamabad in December 1988. Pakistani Prime Minister's overture to her Indian counterpart and the latter's encouraging remarks, provide a potentially significant basis for making refurbished efforts on both sides to defuse or at least reduce politico-military tensions in the subcontinent. This is clearly evident from the proclaimed commitment of both Benazir and Rajiv to the Simla agreement signed in 1972 and also from the agreement signed between the two countries during the Islamabad meeting, not to attack each others nuclear installations. One can discern a pragmatism in Benazir's recent interview published in "*Sunday*" that "Pakistan and India should make efforts to be a part of the worldwide trend of "defreezing" or "coming together" and moving away from "military options."²⁷ On the other hand Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal is equally volatile as it was earlier. The spectre of internecine conflict within the Afghan groups which has the potential to destabilise the fragile democracy that exists in the country haunts the Pakistan Foreign Office.

For the last ten years Islamabad has been the organising centre of the campaign to get the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. Although

27. *The Bangladesh Observer*, March 4, 1989, p. 1.

the Soviet withdrawal has been completed now, it is unlikely that this will remove the Afghan factor from Pakistani politics. The three million refugees will not leave Pakistan unless they are convinced that peace has really returned and there is a massive effort by the West and the USSR to reconstruct the country's economy. If a new civil war erupts between different factions of the Mujahideen, it is bound to spillover into Pakistan. The grim spectre of Lebanon in the neighborhood confronts a regime trying desperately to democratise the country. If there is continuing unrest in Afghanistan and it leads to open clashes in Pakistani cities, the armed forces are unlikely to remain passive spectators.²⁸

General Ziaul Huq's Afghanistan policies brought rich dividends as well as dangerous liabilities to Pakistan. It certainly improved Pakistani military capabilities, both conventional and nuclear. Pakistan achieved the status of a "frontline" state and became the fourth largest military and economic aid recipient from the United States. On the other hand, being host to three million Afghan refugees, her internal peace and stability is clearly threatened. Drug trafficking, illicit arms (a large number syphoned off from US supplies for Mujahideen), ethnic conflicts, etc., now threaten to destroy the very fabric of Pakistani society. Some contending groups in the society have acquired the habit to resort to intense violence to pursue their goals facilitated by the availability of deadly weapons in the underground arms market in the country. Terrorism is rampant and corruption and crime are common.

Pakistan is reportedly one of the major suppliers of illicit drugs on the international market. Addiction is spreading at rates which are considered unprecedented. According to official estimates, Pakistan now has 1.9 million addicts and more than 630,000 of them are hooked on deadly heroin. Likewise foreign drug experts had estimated some months ago that narcotics worth 3.5 billion US dollars

28. *The Guardian*, 19 February 1989, p. 6,

had been smuggled out of Pakistan in a year.²⁹ A commitment to deal with the drug issue on a priority basis was made by the Prime Minister in her first news conference. But the drug abuse problem may not be easy to tackle without suppressing the drug lords who control the trafficking. Survival of democracy itself might depend on the ability of the representative government to tackle the dark forces of drug trafficking and addiction and drug-retailed corruption and crime.

Conclusion

Given the chequered history of 41 years of the country's independence, it would be premature to conclude that political pluralism has been permanently established in Pakistan. Democratic practices and institutions are still weak and must be carefully nurtured. A stable democratic system is essential at this moment to face the enormity of problems. This is extremely essential to prevent the country from reverting back to authoritarianism. It cannot be denied that the military actions of 1958, 1969 and 1977 were partly encouraged by the weaknesses in the existing political system. The inability of Pakistani politicians to provide the civilian rule a self sustaining institutional framework contributed to repeated military intervention. Benazir Bhutto is fully alive to the stark realities and the multitude of problems facing the reborn democracy in the country. So far she has showed balance and pragmatism in her approach of governance. But she cannot be oblivious of the fact that there are people waiting in the wings, whether these be the fundamentalist, the army or interest groups who are too eager not only to magnify even the smallest of errors but to cash in on these. On the other hand, although the masses are still largely euphoric about the peaceful transition to democracy the mood is not going to last long unless tangible benefits of democracy accrue soon to the masses. Fragility of political institu-

29. *Dawn*. 30 December, 1988, p. 7.

tions, gross economic mismanagement, Afghan refugee problems, regional and ethnic tensions are problems that cannot be glossed over, and perceivable solution to most of them are likely to alienate large segments of people. Coming to grips with the country's deep-rooted domestic problems would require genuine political courage and determination. How deftly Benazir handles these will be the real test of her popularity and will have a definite bearing on the future of Pakistan. Much will of course depend on the role the military chooses for itself in the coming months. If it decides to leave management of government affairs to the duly elected civilian authorities, there is reason to hope that democratic institutions can be consolidated.