

THE BATTLE FOR PAKISTAN

By Imran Khan

The imposition of martial law under the garb of emergency should make it abundantly clear to everyone that dictators cannot afford even a semblance of either an independent judicial system or a free media. And neither can the assortment of criminals camouflaged as politicians who collaborate with dictators.

No one is fooled by Gen. Musharaf's latest deception to hang on to power. The war on terror has served him well so far and so why change a successful strategy; spread fear in the western capitals by invoking images of bearded men with guns and in the meanwhile brutally crush all dissent within the country, as was recently done by the Burmese Military. Having inducted pliant and amoral judges through the PCO, the next step would be to massively rig the elections while keeping the media muzzled. What he hopes is that he will again have a rubber stamp Assembly, a controlled majority and a friendly opposition, while real power will rest with him for another 5 years.

So, what we are witnessing is the first phase of the plan. Massive crackdown on the genuine opposition, lawyers, human right activists and the civil society. He is hoping that the police brutality will induce enough fear in the people for him to crush all dissent within a couple of weeks, before he takes the next step of getting himself endorsed by his pocket judges.

Unfortunately for Musharraf, everyone can see through his latest power grab attempt. No one believes that the judges were an impediment in his fight against terrorism. He has had absolute power for the last 8 years and yet terrorism and militancy is rising rapidly. What is he going to do that is different? He has had Pakistanis abducted and handed over to the U.S authorities without allowing them their right to prove their innocence in a court of law. Others have simply disappeared. Many tortured. Our own people have been bombed by helicopters and jets and when women and children have been killed, it has been shamefully called "collateral damage". No one to this day knows how many Pakistani (soldiers and civilians) have been killed since 9/11.

Most significantly his liberal credentials stand exposed completely, something he needed to make his dictatorship palatable to the west. Gimmicks like “enlightened moderation”, “soft image” and “sufi Islam” stood exposed as the nation saw police boots and sticks shower on peaceful human rights protestors, lawyers and the media. All laws whether it was through PEMRA, PCOs, the 17th amendment or the disgraceful NRO were only to consolidate his power.

The time has come for the people of Pakistan to decide their destiny. If Musharraf succeeds in destroying the independent judiciary through his PCO, then I am afraid it is all down hill. His “pocket” judges will assist him in suppressing the media and in rigging the elections.

A Government formed from this unholy alliance will be a disaster for Pakistan and will ensure that it heads towards becoming a failed state.

For a start there will be a quantum leap in terrorism. His policies have alienated the Pushtuns in general and the tribal Pushtuns in particular. There are around a million armed men in the tribal areas. Does it make any logical sense that to capture a couple of thousand Al-Qaeeda we invoke the hostility of around a million armed men – all natural guerilla fighters? And that is why history tells us the British lost more soldiers in the tribal areas than the whole of the sub-continent during their raj.

Moreover fundamentalism is on the rise in most of Northern Pakistan because of Musharraf’s “enlightened moderate” media policies. There is great reaction amongst the masses who perceive this as a license to be vulgar. The Lal Masjid “warriors” belonged to this category. While in Swat & Dir, there has been a rising discontentment due to the poor governance system ever since the two regions became a part of Pakistan in 1974. Thanks to Musharraf being perceived as an American Stooge imposing an anti-islamic agenda on the country, all these movements are morphing into one.

Another 5 years of Musharraf will mean that certain discontented sections of the society will lose faith in the democratic process and will also join the militants; thereby raising the prospects of Pakistan turning into another Algeria – the Army against its own people.

The other disaster of Musharraf dictatorship would be a further diversion of the country's resources away from the people. During his 8 years 1.8% of the GDP was spent on education – the lowest ever in our history and consequently today Pakistan's state school education system has collapsed. According to the U.N Human Development Index Pakistan has the worst social indicators in South Asia. Even Burma is ahead. On the other hand in 2006 Pakistan spent US \$ 5.1 billion on arms. A new GHQ is being built on 2500 acres in Islamabad at the cost of billions of Dollars.

Equally disastrous is the collapse of governance in Pakistan. According to Transparency International this is the most corrupt Government in our history. Hardly surprising since crooks, criminals and even terrorists (according to the Canadian Supreme Court the MQM is a terrorist organization) are sitting at the helm of affairs. The biggest scams in our history have been during the past 5 years. Rs.55 billion loans to the rich and powerful have been waived off while the common man has been crushed by unprecedented inflation.

Hence it is imperative that all sections of Pakistani society stand behind Chief Justice Iftikhar and demand his restoration along with the other honourable judges. We should not accept the PCO or those judges who have taken oath by it.

Only if Justice Iftikhar is restored will we have an independent judiciary, which is the bedrock of a genuine democratic system. The independent judiciary will protect the Media's freedom and ensure free and fair elections that are vital for the country's survival only. Free and fair elections can throw up a Government that can start a political dialogue with the Militants. The war against terrorism can only be won if the people from within whom the terrorists operate from also consider them to be terrorists. If on the other hand they are perceived as heroes or freedom fighters than it is a never ending war – and

history tells us that it cannot be won. Moreover, a democratic Government which comes through free and fair elections has to invest in the people. Otherwise no matter how high the growth rate it will lose the elections – as happened to the BJP despite “shinning INDIA”

Above all only an independent judiciary will stop criminals from entering politics. At the moment they know that once they are part of the power structure they are safe from the courts. The NRO is a classic case in point which under Musharraf’s pocket judges will absolve politicians of their crimes that includes plunder of the country’s resources as well as assassinations and target killings. Once a P.M. or President are not above law only then can this country develop a governance system that will make it achieve its great potential.

What needs to be done is for all sections of the society – especially the students whose future is at stake, to demand the restoration of Chief Justice Iftikhar and a total boycott of the PCO judges. Until our demands are accepted we should agitate throughout the country. The APDM should immediately give a call to its workers to join the lawyers and the civil society in the streets.

And finally it brings me to Benazir and Maulana Fazal ur Rehman. They are the only two “opposition” leaders who are allowed to freely roam around. The former is even given protocol. Both of them have played a major role in strengthening Musharraf by undermining the opposition at every stage. Both have used the opposition to strengthen their bargaining position with the Government for their personal ends. Most regrettably neither has demanded the restoration of Chief Justice Iftikhar. The APDM should tell them that we have had enough of their “Noora Khushti”. If they want to be part of the genuine opposition both must demand the restoration of Chief Justice Iftikhar and announce a street movement immediately. But they should not be allowed to sabotage the opposition movement for their personal gains again.