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Pakistan: Democracy failing to army, terror and ‘madarsas’

By Rakesh Kr Sinha
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The international media has been recently abuzz with the assumption of a silent coup in Pakistan reducing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to a ceremonial position and the actual power wrested by the Pakistani army. There are few incidents also to corroborate this theory.

Democracy in Pakistan has reached the point from where it had started; controlled by the army, plagued by sectarian violence and indoctrinated by ‘ulemas’ of ‘madarsas’.

The attack on Pathankot air base by Pakistani terrorists was to remind the world and particularly Indians, that the ultimate authority is vested with army in Pakistan and not with the elected Prime

Minister with regards to its strategic and foreign policy. Earlier in Oct 2015, the Army Chief, Gen Raheel Sharif had prevailed upon Nawaj Sharif to replace National Security Advisor (NSA), Sartaz Aziz with Lt Gen (R) Naseer Khan Janjua, an infamous former XII Corps Commander in Quetta and also known as 'Butcher of Baluchistan'.

Similar situation arose when Pakistani Army Chief declined to meet visiting Iranian President along with Pakistani Prime Minister and rather had a separate one to one meeting with the visiting Head of State to make it loud and clear to all as to where does the actual power rest in the matters of foreign affairs.

In the meanwhile, the 'Panama Papers' caused further damage to Nawaj Sharif. It reportedly contains names of his three family members. Gen Raheel Sharif lost no time to ask for "across-the-board" accountability and asserted that corruption should be uprooted to ensure Pakistan's prosperity. It is a case that may even give the army Chief an alibi to actually depose Nawaj Sharif. This new development has done no good to the cause of an already beleaguered Prime Minister Nawaj Sahrif.

Democracy in Pakistan has thus come a full circle now. It has reached the point from where it had started; controlled by the army, plagued by sectarian violence and indoctrinated by 'ulemas' of 'madarsas'.

Terrorism in Pakistan is a mixture of religious bigotry, 'madarsa' system, Government patronization and false propaganda.

There was a big festivity of a kind in 2013 when first time an elected Government completed its full term in Pakistan. It was not that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Government or Asif Zardari as President was unscathed or without any controversy. But somehow the Government pulled on and survived even the serious differences with the Supreme Court of Pakistan on many occasions. One reason for its completing the tenure is also said to be the less ambitious Army Chief Gen Kayani who inspite of great provocation, did not show any inclination to remove an elected Government. But this is not the case with Gen Raheel Sharif who was made army Chief superseding two senior officers by the new Prime Minister Nawaj Sharif in 2013.

After some time, Islamic cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri led a siege of Islamabad for over four months with lacs of demonstrators on 'Azadi March' (14 August 2014 – 17 December 2014) demanding resignation of Nawaz Sharif for rigging 2013's General Elections. This offered a Hobson's choice to Nawaz Sharif whether to succumb to Tahir-ul-Qadri or to General Raheel Sharif and he chose later for his political survival. Thus an elected Govt in Pakistan, once again caved in to army; democracy died an invisible and bloodless death. In any case, governing a country like Pakistan, the epicentre of world terrorism, is no mean task and possibly cannot be run by a civilian Government in Pakistan without engaging Army and ISI.

Terrorism in Pakistan is a mixture of religious bigotry, 'madarsa' system, Government patronization and false propaganda. As per South Asia Terrorism Portal, total 60,558 people have been killed in terrorist violence in Pakistan between the years 2003 to April 2016. Pakistan has been besieged with both the communal and sectarian violence ever since its inception. First

time, riots broke out in Lahore in 1953 between Shias and Sunnis and since then there is no end of it. The future is even worse. Now international religious and terrorist outfits like Al Qaida and Taliban have their affiliate organisations operating in Pakistan and funds are pouring from abroad to different militant organisations to continue their terrorist activities. The ‘ulemas’ supporting one group have issued ‘fatwas’ against others declaring them ‘kafirs’ against whom ‘jihad’ or killing them is religiously sanctioned.

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The communal violence in Pakistan is directed against all non-Muslims alike that includes Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Ahmadis (declared non Muslim through Constitutional amendment in 1974). However, the sectarian violence in Pakistan is two dimensional. One is between Shia and Sunni and another is within Sunni between Deobandi and Barelvi Sects.

In past, three historical incidents, in quick succession, can be attributed to be the reason behind the political climate as it exists in Pakistan today. These are; a) Khomeini Revolution (1979) in Iran, b) execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and c) introduction of Nizam-e-Mustafa (“Rule of the prophet”), i.e. establish an Islamic state and Sharia law in Pakistan by Zia-ul-Haq. The Khomeini Revolution in Shia majority in Iran was seen as a reflection of increasing influence of Shias in Gulf countries that included Sunni dominated Saudi Arab. Pakistani politics more than often gets affected with politics of Saudi Arab.

The radical Islamization of Pakistan on the lines of Sunni fundamentalism is believed to be a retort to the Khomeini Revolution of Iran. Also the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Shia, caused a deep scythe between Shias and Sunnis in Pakistan. Pakistan has 20% of population of Shias who are the largest in number in any country after Iran. The situation worsened because of the highly provocative act of Zia-ul-Haq in 1980 to promulgate the Ordinance regarding the payment of ‘Zakat (Property Tax) and ‘Ushr’ (Agriculture Tax) by non Muslims that included Shias too. Immediately over one lac Shias gathered in Islamabad and forced the withdrawal of the ordinance in respect of their sect. However, the foundation of a perpetual Shia-Sunni conflicts in Pakistan had already been laid by these incidences. Now many militant organizations belonging to both these sects are active and locked in to a bloody war since then, the prominent amongst them being Shia-a-Mohammadi (Shia) and Lashkar-a-Janghawi (Sunni).

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There have been 443 instances of violence against Shias since the 2001 till date killing 2552 and injuring over 4517 as per South Asia Terrorism Portal. The total 3021 numbers of incidences of sectarian violence have taken place in Pakistan since the year 1989.

The second zone of conflicts exists between Deobandi and Barelvi Sunni Muslims. Deoband school came into existence in 1867 in India after the end of Mughal empire for the purpose of reconstruction and rejuvenation of Islamic values. Its ideological centre point was Kuran, ‘Hadith’ and ‘Firab’ (jurisprudence). Deobandi philosophers were pro-reform within the

orthodox Islamic tradition. In India, Deobandis stood up against the British colonial empire alongside the majority Hindus. However, post independence the Pakistani chapter of Deobandis turned out to be highly fundamentalist, rejected 'Bida' (inventions) and advocated for the religious teaching alone. As against this, the Bareilvi's tradition is based on village folklore, sub continental traditions and spiritual leanings that included the Sufi philosophies. The intellectual and spiritual span of Barelavis predates the advent of Islam. The clash of ideology was, thus, imminent between these two sects, now represented by 'Ahle-sunnat-wal-jamaat' (Deoband) and Tahri-a-Bareilvi (Sunni).

'Madarsas' have been a throwback to medieval times, an anachronism that has survived the passing years in the Islamic world. They were the only centres for religious and academic learning in the Northern Africa and Central Asia. Presently there are 16,000 'madarsas' in Pakistan which have 20,00,000 students enrolled in them. The details of these 'madarsas' are kept in the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Pakistan.

Every religious sects and groups have their own 'madarsas' and it shows their political and social standing. The sects which has maximum numbers of 'madarsas' would be the most dominant...

However, about 18% 'madarsas' are running without any registration believed to be the nursery of creating 'jihadi' mindset. These 'madarsas' do not teach economics or science and, as such, the children passing out from these 'madarsas' only manage to get low category clerical jobs including those of 'ulemas' in mosques and defence establishments. Those who fail to get even these jobs would get lured to militant and 'jihadi' organisations. The poverty stricken Pakistani parents send their children to these 'madarsas' where they are provided free education and food. In some cases, the children manage to get little scholarships too.

The Sheikhs of Gulf countries and rich and powerful of even Pakistan would donate money to these 'madarsas' as a part of their religious duty, seen as a pious work of charity in Islam. Even top army officers, businessman, politician, bureaucrats of Pakistan would donate to these 'madarsas' but send their children to English medium schools only.

These 'madarsas' are from Deobandi, Bareilvi, Ahel-a-Hadith, Jamaat-a-Islamic and Shia groups. It is said that Deobandi alone have 65% of these 'madarsas'. Every religious sects and groups have their own 'madarsas' and it shows their political and social standing. The sects which has maximum numbers of 'madarsas' would be the most dominant and resourceful in an area, and that sect will have a corresponding higher position of authority to negotiate with other religious sects or Government agencies.

The weak civil society in Pakistan can do nothing except haplessly watch the democracy fade in their country.

The democracy in Pakistan is governed by the forces which are non-existent and belie any classical political theory. Western democracies are historically influenced by intelligentsia, business houses, media and organised labour. Indian democracy has a bit of role of media and of business houses sometimes only up to political donations but has nothing to do with the remaining two. Indian elections are personality, caste, region and demography based and of late

with slight inclination to governance and development. But Pakistani democracy was, is and shall remain perennially ailing by an overbearing army, obfuscated 'jihadis' and obscurantist 'ulemas'. These monsters have never let democracy find its roots in Pakistan.

The weak civil society in Pakistan can do nothing except haplessly watch the democracy fade in their country. India will be well advised to keep a close watch on the developments in Pakistan and not to rush with any proposal to the negotiating table at this stage.