

# POLITICAL SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan's political system has been in the transitional state ever since it emerged as an independent sovereign state in August 1947. Pakistan has not been able to establish a stable and permanent political order based on democratic norms. From the very beginning there was an acute constitutional deadlock which obstructed, for nine years, the political, social and economic development of the newly born Pakistan and which deprived the country of a respectable place in the fraternity of nations.

The first constitution which Pakistan eventually framed in 1956, could not last long and was abrogated after just two years of its coming into operation by the Martial Law regime in 1958. The imposition of the first ML in 1958 was the result of the unhappy and sorry state of affairs which attracted the military commanders to intervene and take over the reins of the civil administration. Since then the country had to face three MLs at regular intervals which led to the political and constitutional stalemates. In 1973 somehow the elected assembly was able to evolve a unanimously accepted constitution which contained the wide range of Islamic provisions. The constitution remained in force for nearly four years when another ML was imposed in the country in July 1977 with the constitution placed in abeyance. Political process and the functioning of the institutions was once again halted.

Pakistan possesses the political apparatus essential to run a democratic system in a country. The political structure exists on which the democratic order can be safely built. But unfortunately those responsible for the sacred job of constructing the edifice do not have the patience and stamina for a real democratic set-up. Besides the mercurial temperament and political leanings of our politicians, there are some other factors like disorganized political

parties, lack of stable political institutions and paucity of dedicated political leadership, which are responsible for our wobbling political system.

Pakistan today is a federal Republic, comprising four provinces. The provinces are governed by centrally appointed governors and local governments drawn from elected provincial assemblies and headed by Chief Ministers. There are also tribal areas, with a total population of 2.7 million, which are under the control of the federal government.

Primary responsibility resides, however with the central government, which is headed by an executive President, who is elected for a renewable, five years term at a joint sitting of the federal parliament and four provincial assemblies. The president was originally a titular head but following the 8th constitutional amendment of March 1985, the President was given powers to dissolve the National Assembly, appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister, the cabinet and provincial governors. He, therefore, emerged as the dominant political figure. Day-to-day government is in the hands of Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had a cabinet of minister to assist him/her in the day to day governmental business.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

Pakistan has a multiple party system. The overabundance of political parties most of which are without a substantial public backing and are regional, lacking in national roots, have consistently blocked the way of democracy. They impede the smooth functioning of the larger parties by their non-political and undemocratic tactics. These parties compromise on principles for small benefits thus damaging the political and democratic process. The political parties, shallow in their outlook, with no programme of national uplift and promotion of general

welfare and lacking in political vision are the scourge of Pakistan's political system.

The major political parties are Pakistan Muslim League, the founder party of Pakistan, which has split into several factions after the names of their regional leaders. The split of the PML has debilitated its political base and made it a target of severe criticism from its political opponents. The PML is a conservative party, traditionally viewed as the mouthpiece of large landlords and local clan chiefs. At present the PML is operating in two groups as PML(J) after the name of the Late PM Muhammad Khan Junejo and the PML (N) led by the present PM Mian Nawaz Sharif.

There are other numerous political parties. The most prominent amongst them is the PPP. The party was established by the late prime minister ZA Bhutto in 1967 and stands for Islamic socialism. At present the party is led by Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan and daughter of the late Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto.

The fundamentalist, Islamic party the Jamaat-e-Islami which was established in 1941, seeks the establishment of sunni Islamic state and is an important political force on the right wing.

The pro-Soviet Awami National Party (ANP), which was founded in 1986 by an amalgamation of socialist groups, is a notable left wing force, with a strong local base in the North western Province. The solidarity party, Tehrik-i-Istiqal dating from 1968 is a moderate party. It was the founder member of the MRD, but broke away in 1986 when it officially registered itself under the Political Parties Act.

The Mohajir Qaumi Movement which was formed in 1986, is a Sindh based party, led by Altaf Hussain and dominated by the middle class Urdu speaking Mohajir community, who migrated to Pakistan from India at the time of partition. Since then they have opposed ethnic-quota employment restrictions. Though narrowly based the (MQM) has been a rising political force during the recent years due to its advocacy for a

The military factor thus became an inseparable ingredient of the political system and statecraft of Pakistan. The incapable and corrupt politicians by their inability to govern effectively, lured the military commanders to elbow them out and snatch the political power on the pretext of saving the country from going to the dogs. Obviously the high ambitions of some of the senior army officers was also responsible for grabbing the political authority with a sometime false excuse of putting the things on rails. 'The egocentric commanders intervened to preserve the unity of motherland. The motives of some of them were in doubt *ab initio*'.<sup>6</sup>