

PAKISTAN: THE OMNIOUS PORTENTS

The mayhem and massacre of minorities, particularly the members of Shia community in the commercial capital of Pakistan, Karachi appears to have assumed a pattern. The violence against the community has become a daily feature of life in this part of the country. The situation has come to a pass that the two political parties, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP), the coalition partners of the ruling Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) have demanded the imposition of emergency and a military operation ' to deal with the terrorism' in the province. These parties staged a walk out in the recent sessions of the Senate and National Assembly against the prevailing terrorism in Karachi. These parties have threatened a boycott of Parliament in case the government failed to take action on urgent basis to stop the gruesome massacres. The opposition Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) also lent its support to the demand of military intervention and observed that military operation had become unavoidable. This development of seeking the military intervention helps to comprehend the current ominous portents which have large implications.

In another development, the Pakistan Supreme Court gave its detailed judgment in what is known as *Asghar Khan's* case. The court found that former President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, former Chief of Army Staff, General Aslam Beg and former ISI chief, General Asad Durrani had rigged the 1990 elections against the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). All the three were held to have violated the Constitution (of Pakistan). The court observed that the government should proceed to try these individuals to 'determine their guilt through due process and beyond a shadow of doubt, with appropriate punishment to follow.'

The judgment of the Supreme Court reveals the role that army and ISI played in patronizing the fundamentalist-extremist groups to settle scores with the political parties in the country. Thus, in the backdrop of this situation, Karachi gradually emerged as a sanctuary which sheltered the dreaded extremist terrorists. The 9/11 terror attack mastermind Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Ghani Baradar and *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* operational commander Asif Chottu had taken sanctuary in Karachi at one point or another. Even Mullah Omar is reported to have

been in Karachi at one point of time. The operational headquarter of Mumbai terrorist attack was traced to Karachi.

The role of army in general and the ISI in particular in the political manipulations has been a perennial theme in the strategic and analytical discourses in Pakistan. However, much attention is not being paid to the role of politicians in engaging these institutions for their own short term political gains. The fact that political cell in ISI was formed by the former PPP Prime Minister late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in May 1975 has been consigned to the political history of Pakistan. The cell continued to flourish during the subsequent regimes and acquired a clout to dictate its terms to the succeeding political governments. It is axiomatic that this development enlarged the role of army considerably in the political affairs of the country.

The military-intelligence nexus introduced a vicious trend of engaging and utilizing extremist- fundamentalist groups to take on the political parties and ensuring the political advantage of the former in forming the governments. The process started with Zia-ul- Haq and reached to its culmination with the defeat of PPP for which the indictment has come from the Supreme Court in *Asghar Khan's* case.

It is ironical that the established political parties, instead joining hands to stem the rot, followed the similar machinations to garner political gains. In Punjab, for instance, the militant-sectarian outfit, *Sipahi Sahiba Pakistan* (SSP) renamed itself as *Ahle-Sunnat-Waljamaat* and entered into political alliance with the PML(N) in the by-elections which returned the brother of PML(N) leader and former Prime Minister, Nawaz Shariff's brother Shahbaz Shariff to power. This game of terrorist groups wearing political cloaks at will and performing diverse roles with the blessings of security as well as political establishments, both, is shaking the political stability of Pakistan. However, it has the ramifications beyond Pakistan as well.

The judiciary in Pakistan appears to be taking a proactive role in cleaning the system and redefining the boundaries of different institutions of the country. However, the role of army in making forays in the political institutions of the country remains the moot issue.

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