

2010 March 23 CFUW WV International Affairs Group Meeting

I'd like to describe some points from an essay written in January 2010 by Saleeqa Batool, a senior member of the Civil Service in Pakistan (CSS). His topic: 'The Future of Democracy in Pakistan'.

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was a democratic statesman who envisioned a democratic and progressive Pakistan. His death was a fine blow to political stability. Not enough attention was paid after that to democratic and constitutional development of the newly born state. The result is that democracy has not flourished during the 62 years of Pakistan's existence.

Democracy has not developed because of conspiracies, unethical and undemocratic tactics in the power corridors of the country. The army has become a major stakeholder in the power game and has ruled Pakistan four times through coups.

Although the current government assumed power through an electoral process, it faces multifaceted challenges on economic, social, political and international fronts. Threats have surfaced to its existence.

The respect of a nation in the international community is directly linked to the prevalence of democracy. Pakistan has to strengthen democracy in order to earn a respectable place in the world and head towards the road of progress and prosperity. However, clouds of uncertainty are hovering over the democratic set-up in Pakistan.

Eleven threats to democracy in Pakistan:

major threat - the *absence of a sound political infrastructure*

Frequent military interventions prevented growth of a 'political culture' and encouraged the undemocratic forces to destabilize democracy.

Political parties, the nurseries of democracy, have not been established on modern and democratic lines because they have been plagued by outside influences, short term goals, one man shows, and family politics. Political culture cannot flourish until parties start functioning in a democratic manner. Pakistani political parties have to re-organize and learn to function along democratic lines. Their current structures lack democracy.

other threats - 1) *Economic difficulties* form barriers to government performance and cause public discontent. The government lacks the requisite economic resources for public uplift. Undemocratic forces intervene. Political instability along with economic difficulties have pushed the country towards foreign dependence.

2) *Political unawareness and indifference* exists among the masses.

Since the democratic system derives its strength from people, this poses a serious threat to democracy. The Pakistani public at large is not involved in the political process.

Half the population is illiterate and unaware of democratic processes. The government must join hands with media, civil society and other pressure groups to inculcate the values of freedom, liberty, human rights and democracy amongst the masses.

Many educated people also remain indifferent to political development and lack awareness of democracy. Democracy, its need and its blessings must be incorporated as part of the syllabus at all levels of education.

This allures undemocratic forces to assume power, and, to their pleasure, they are accorded a warm welcome by the nation when they assume charge.

A dedicated involvement of the people at large, especially Pakistani youth, would provide a solid base to democracy in Pakistan. Only political parties can ensure public participation in political process and inculcate democratic values. There is a need to guide our youth to take the responsibility for our tomorrow.

3) *The media is not subjected to ethics, rules and regulations.*

'Yellow journalism' is pursued.

4) *Feudalism, the negation of equality and freedom, still prevails.*

While feudalism does not hinder the electoral process, it puts curbs on the people's right of freedom. Masses are restrained to freely participate in the democratic process. People falling under the jurisdiction of feudalism are treated like subjects and can never become active participants of political process.

5) *There is a lack of normal relations with India.*

Pakistan's unfriendly relations with India overpower its domestic and international policies.

33% of Pakistan's budget is spent on defense.

If relations with India could be normalized, the resources spent on defense could be spent on public uplift, social welfare, education and health.

An increase in prosperity would strengthen the democratic foundations.

- 6) The *afflictions of terrorism are pervasive* and are engulfing the peace and prosperity of the nation. Terrorism is one of the biggest threats to entire humanity.

- 7) There is a *lack of trustworthy leadership*.

Leaders have dedicated their efforts to perpetuate their rule showing little concern for democratic development.

Political players are not setting good norms to strengthen democracy.

Power thrusts, intolerance and corruption have plagued the politics of Pakistan. The time has come to stop the old practices and follow the democratic values prevailing in developed societies.

- 8) There is a *lack of a sacred constitution*.

The constitution is not secured or safeguarded.
Man rules, not law.

The constitution was adopted and altered by military generals to secure their interests.

- 9) There is a *lack of separation of powers* (executive, legislature, judiciary) and a lack of checks and balances. Executives must be accountable before the parliament. If all decisions are made through the parliament, it would strengthen democracy.

- 10) The *lack of an independent and efficient Judiciary* has left a deplorable impact at both state and society levels.

There is a lack of merit-based, independent, upright judges

The Muslim world has failed to come to the expectation and needs of the people in imparting justice to the citizens.

Politicians, officers, influential people such as landlords, khans, waderas, nawabs and sardars have proved a stumbling block to impartial and due justice.

NB - It should be noted that the present judiciary has gained considerable independence.

Conclusion:

There is no second opinion that democracy is pre-requisite for Pakistan to earn a respectable place in the international community. In spite of facing innumerable challenges and showing unsatisfactory performance, Pakistanis have the capability to emerge as a democratic nation. Pakistan can follow the road to democracy with the dedication, determination, commitment, courage and patriotism of its political leaders if they are aptly inculcated with the true spirit of democracy. To overcome its mountainous challenges, Pakistan requires unity, faith, discipline and guidance.

source: CSS Forum 2010 January 13