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**ELECTIONS OF 1977 AND THE POLITICS OF AGITATION AND
RECONCILIATION IN PAKISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

In a democracy, political idiom and discourse of the political leaders must reflect democratic norms of mutual respect, decency and deference towards divergent viewpoints. The differences are resolved through dialogue and accommodation rather than turning these into personal or group enmity. This paper focuses on the 1977 general elections and the developments associated with the aftermath that derailed the democratic process that had started five years before. The paper focuses on how the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) emerged out of the variant political ideologies of different political parties previously not so close in their relationship. The campaign for 1977 elections by electoral alliance of nine political parties and the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is also part of the discussion. The paper analyses the election results that proved controversial with profound impact on the future course of politics in Pakistan. A study of the course of events after the second general elections allows one to know about the undemocratic attitudes and behaviours of political leaders which were purely based on the feeling of enmity and were directed towards vested interests. The study examines whether the elections were really rigged and PNA and PPP had fulfilled their democratic obligations for continuation of the democratic process. The overall focus of this research is to highlight the role of both the ruling and opposition parties and its effects on the national politics.

Keywords: Civilian Government, Elections, Alliances, Opposition and Political Parties

INTRODUCTION

Democracy does not simply mean holding of elections and establishment of

democratic infrastructure. People who manage democratic institutions and processes must imbibe its principles and

norms so that these are fully reflected in the political system. One way to judge quality of democracy is to review the disposition and conduct of key players, i.e. political parties and leaders. How far they internalize norms and values of democracy and practice them in managing political and societal affairs. Since assuming power in 1971, Z. A. Bhutto had faced strong resistance from opposition parties and failed to develop consensus with them. The elements of accommodation, reconciliation and political large heartedness were substantially missing from politics of Pakistan during Bhutto era. Interference of federal government in the affairs of provinces was a clear violation of 1973 Constitution along with his personal style of politics which brought the rightist and leftist political forces on one page against him. Therefore, nine opposition political parties became united in a common platform for 1977 general elections, called as Pakistan National Alliance (PNA). The rigged elections of 1977 were rejected by PNA which demanded resignation of Bhutto and holding of fresh elections under an independent Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). Instead, to pay any heed to their demands, Bhutto government used coercive measures to deal with the opposition. The situation led to political

turmoil and protests erupted in violent clashes between the security and law enforcement agencies and the opposition. Unwillingness on the part of both the government and opposition to develop consensus thereby resulted in derailment of democratic process in the country and martial law was imposed by General Ziaul Haq.

Pre-Election Strategies of Bhutto Government

Coming into power in December 1971, five years term of PPP was to end in December 1976. However, five years constitutional term of National Assembly, in Bhutto's calculation had started from August 14, 1973 [1]. As opposed to parliamentary setup, Bhutto was of the view that the system had sacrificed the rights of many for protecting the privileges of the few. Therefore, as imposed some constraints on his authority, Bhutto was not satisfied with 1973 Constitution. Opposition parties had also been condemned time and again for their alleged misuse of different provisions of the Constitution thus contributing in social and economic downfall of the country.

During the year 1976, Bhutto had been visiting different constituencies, making speeches to catch attention of the people in support of his own version of ideas. In fact, by directly facing the masses, PPP's

leadership wanted a heavy mandate in next general elections that may give him absolute power to change the political and constitutional setup into a presidential system [2]. That is the only reason, Bhutto had deferred general elections until becoming sure of PPP's victory. Moreover, by the end of 1976, army action in Balochistan had ensured control of ruling party and disturbances were calmed down to greater extent. Banning of National Awami Party (NAP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then NWFP) in first quarter of 1975, the topmost leaders including Abdul Wali Khan were sent behind the bars. Other opposition parties in parliament, having no more than three seats in lower House were also in a weak position. Applying section 144 and other coercive measures, political discussion and meetings were banned thus barring opposition leaders to convey their views to the public. Contrary to democratic traditions, state owned media rarely reported the critical speeches of opposition leaders being delivered in National Assembly [3].

Reports of intelligence agencies especially that of Inter-services Intelligence (ISI) held that popularity of Prime Minister was at peak, which makes it a suitable time to encash it. Therefore, in January 1977, Bhutto announced in his address to

National Assembly that general elections will be held one and a half years earlier than mandated time. It is also alleged that the decision to hold early elections was taken as a technique for depriving the opposition of a sufficient time for election campaign. The ruling party had already been preparing itself for elections from the past several months. Immediately after the announcement of election schedule Bhutto launched a country-wide election campaign. However, some restrictions had already been imposed on opposition parties including section 144 in several districts on the pretext of law and order [4]. A major section of the society considered the possibility that a wind of revolt would topple Bhutto, to bring PNA to power, just as 1970 elections had brought him to power. Bhutto wanting no excuse and no reason either therefore, activated every channel and launched an offensive strategy against the opposition parties. Bhutto seemed more nervous this time which made him aggressive. This was because of lack of unity and discipline in his own party, disappointment with Bhutto's policies and programs and strong determination of the opposition parties to snatch the reins of power from PPP's leadership.

Bhutto had also made necessary changes in both administrative and

military structures to counter any expected challenges to PPP's victory. Federal cabinet was reshuffled in February 1976 and orders were issued for reorganization of federal secretariat and provincial structures. State owned media was made responsible for projecting image of PPP and its leadership and also exposing incapability of opposition parties. It ultimately described opposition parties disloyal to the country and projected PPP as right choice of the masses. 'The Pakistan Times' labelled PNA as an 'opportunistic alliance' and stated that voters are fully aware of its conspiracy against "the New Order." It was also stressed that the people "will reject anti-democratic and anti-people elements that are now making a desperate last-ditch attempt to stop the march of history" [5].

Formation of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA): A Counter Strategy

Bhutto was not only confident of his support base but was also sure that various opposition parties would not be able to get together and form a platform against the ruling PPP. Opposition parties however, afraid of Bhutto's dictatorial tendencies, tried to close its ranks and stand as one against the PPP in the name of PNA. Formation of PNA not only surprised but also shocked PPP leadership. In fact, Bhutto's strategy was based on the

assumption that various opposition parties would not be able to unite due to their differences. However, if got united, there would be only small adjustments for different seats. The vast intelligence network had not made any indication of such a possibility. Even political journalists of the government press, could not predict this possibility. But once the opposition alliance came true, Bhutto called the PNA as a cat with nine tails. PNA was composed of those different social and economic groups from middle class which had suffered at the hands of oppressive policies like social, economic and administrative reforms of PPP leadership in one way or another. Moreover, PNA incorporated groups from both the right and the left wing. Their viewpoints on Bhutto's nationalisation policy and provincial autonomy were divergent and not uniform. Despite this, they bargained on the enforcement of Nizam-i-Mustafa as evident from their electoral speeches. The PNA included all of the older United Democratic Front. This time it was more strengthened by coming into the row of Asghar Khan's Tehrik-i-Istiqlal which boosted the morale of the opposition [6]. PNA anxiously challenged and gave a tough time to PPP which was out of question at the time of its rule and put Bhutto and his party on defensive. The

nervousness of PPP's leadership was obvious from Abdul Hafeez Peerzada's decision to challenge the allotment of a single election symbol to PNA. This alliance, at least, set the precedent that the ruling party could be challenged [7]. Asghar Khan once referred to Bhutto's allegations stated time and again that he did not know politics, but now the nation could see who the novice was. The opposition, he claimed, had deliberately put up a facade of disunity and demoralization, so that Bhutto could be "trapped" into holding general elections. His revelations seemed quite true because the moment the ruling party announced the election schedule; the opposition got together and within forty-eight hours was able to hammer out a united alliance. Secretary General of PNA, Rafiq Ahmad Bajwa [from JUP] expressed that since the formation of the alliance, the last three days experience had convinced him that the opposition is going to "make a sweep" [8].

Many people remained confused by the different faces PNA had. Being consisted of political parties led by leaderships having different programs and thinking, it seemed difficult to believe that Mufti Mahmood (the president of PNA), Pir of Pagaro (Head of the Central Parliamentary Board of PNA), Asghar Khan and not to

mention other partners, would be able to pull PNA in the intended direction. However, it was their enmity towards the dictatorial powers of Bhutto that they buried all differences and stood as united force against PPP. No doubt, formation of PNA had one central theme namely, Bhutto government was dictatorial which must be weed out at once. Moreover, opposition was of the view that continuation of PPP government would be no more than the end of Pakistan's democratic dream. Although, opposition parties in its election campaign, criticized Bhutto for having dictatorial powers and used it as a major complaint against him but such powers proved to be his greatest asset for winning majority in the elections.

Campaign for 1977 Elections: Restrictions on the Opposition

Election campaign of PPP was launched by Chairman Bhutto at a public meeting held at Liaqat Gardens (Rawalpindi), while PNA started its election campaign with a public meeting at Karachi's Nishtar Park. PPP also announced its manifesto for the upcoming elections. With the March 7 as polling date for election to the National Assembly, less than one and a half months away, the vote seeking campaign throughout the country was gaining strength with every passing day. PPP was banking heavily on its achievements and

reforms introduced during its previous tenure, while opposition was trying to make out that these reforms have not, in fact, been of any real benefit to common man. They maintained that in most cases, the government measures had just opposite effects on country's economy and the standard of living of common man. The PNA leaders promised the electorate that they would bring the soaring prices back to the 1970's level.

Moreover, PNA targeted and highlighted the loopholes in the PPP government's domestic and foreign policies and especially the limiting of civil and political rights. The opposition also criticized the PPP for having cramped the working peoples' right with serious restrictions, rendering them abstract and inane. Foreign loans and alleged involvement of Bhutto in disintegration of East Pakistan were other issues that PNA discussed during election campaign. Mr. C. R. Aslam, President Pakistan Socialist Party (PSP) was of the view that the foreign policy had moved in opposite direction, claiming that the PPP talked of the third world unity and yet Pakistan is tied to the world of capitalist economy and the CENTO and RCD [9].

No doubt, the elections of 1977 was one which was contested not for the sake of grand visions about governance and

progress, but marked by libels, slanders and vilification of personalities. The opposition was cognizant of the importance of the charisma of Bhutto and considered him as the man standing their way for the realization of the attainment of a democratic form of government. Therefore, PPP in general and the person of Bhutto, in particular, was targeted by the opposition. Their attacks were exclusively directed against Bhutto's politics, his personal life style and his family [10]. There was a series of heated speeches from both sides and confrontation, each wanted to downgrade and impose its will on the other. Bhutto's announcement that the politicians imprisoned in different jails would be freed to compete the general elections was one of his campaign ploys. Another one was scaling down the size of large land holdings to make available more land to the landless tenants/farmers [11]. The PPP itself was popular amongst the populace but it was the superimposing personality and charisma of Bhutto that the PPP hoped, would win the day for them. The opposition had therefore grown pale in its appeal as compared with Bhutto. The latter had it ensured that the opposition, even if released from behind the bars, would not endanger his chance of securing the premiership for the second term [12].

Bhutto was of the view that PNA leadership is grouped together against him either “obscurantist” or “agents of capitalism” or “foreign reactionaries.” Therefore, Bhutto never respected PNA leaders and considered them as “light-weights” [13].

However, with the lifting of restrictions on holding public meetings for election campaign, PNA got an opportunity to express their opinion about people grievances against the PPP government and get support for their program. The PNA attracted an unsurprising support of the public in its meetings. They showed their loyalty to Islam and promised to put in force the Nizam-i-Mustafa in its genuine form in the country if it comes to power. Bhutto was convinced that he was sole asset and vote catcher of the party, a view with which party officials around him eagerly concurred. Moreover, by the time of elections, Bhutto had lost his old and committed colleagues and PPP’s original identity and vitality had died. Contrary to 1970 elections, a number of feudal lords and other influential were successful in obtaining PPP tickets. Majority of them had to face defeat by relatively unknown candidates of PPP in 1970 elections. PPP became a ‘Modern Muslim League’ as majority of disgruntled politicians from Muslim League had

joined it. In fact, those who could not derive any benefits from the establishment thus joined PPP. The Federal Security Force (FSF) which was established as a substitute of the army to deal with civil disturbances had become unpopular and was ineffective except pressurizing and terrorizing the opposition. Thus, Bhutto had entered the election year with a disillusioned PPP and questionable support from the bureaucracy, on which he relied [14].

The prospects of PNA success in the polls were also dark. It was due to the natural incoherence and differences among the alliance partners, lack of access to mass media, restrictions imposed by government for preventing PNA members from contacting people and PPP’s one sided propaganda through controlled communication media. The opposition got a short period of only two months for campaigning when Section 144, prohibiting assembly of more than four persons was lifted. Sensing the situation, some of PNA favourites had admitted that it would not be able to give a tough time to PPP [15]. However, members of PNA also knew in advance that elections would not be fair and free. They knew that PPP’s leadership would not be satisfied with simple victory. Bhutto, they knew, was determined to put an end to all challenges

to his authority and position. Prior to elections, M. Asghar Khan had also alleged that ruling PPP had been engaged in manipulating election results [16].

Election Results: A Surprise for Opposition and Masses

No doubt, the charisma of Bhutto maintained the same level of insurmountability in the eyes of the observers as it had been enjoying couple of years before in the eyes of the populace. They were dead sure about the PPP's

victory by a landslide. Both PPP and PNA contested the elections like vicious battle in which score of people lost their lives and many more got injured. PPP ministers facilitated its supporters to have an easy access to polls but created hindrances for the supporters of PNA from casting their votes [17]. The victory of PPP as predicted came true when the results of National Assembly polls were announced. The ruling PPP had obtained 155 out of 200 seats, however, PNA bagged 36 seats only.

The following table shows the party position in the National Assembly [18]

Political Party	Constituencies Contested	Number of Seats Secured
PPP	191	155
PNA	168	36
PML (Qayyum)	37	1
Independent	324	8
Other Parties	21	0
Women & Minority Seats	-	16
Total	741	216

The ruling PPP had won the elections in three of the four provinces by securing nearly four-fifth of the National Assembly seats. In addition, the 8 independents candidates from FATA were quasi-PPP in some sense as in the past practice and were

expected to join the ruling party thus increasing PPP's seats to 81.5% of the total. It was a victory more than enough, required for amending the Constitution and altering and overhauling the political system.

The following table shows province-wise party position in the National Assembly [19]

Province	PPP Seats	PNA Seats	Independents Seats	Total
Punjab	107	8	-	115
Sindh	32	11	-	43
KP (then NWFP)	8	17	1	26
Balochistan	7	-	-	7
Islamabad	1	-	-	1
Tribal Areas	-	-	8	8
Total	155	36	9	200

Though, PPP's victory was expected by the people, yet the exceptional party score was beyond their imagination. The opposition alliance was believed to secure at least a modest number of seats in the parliament

so as to resist the would-be ruling PPP's excesses. But, surprisingly for the public and the opposition, and unsurprisingly for those observers who had stuck to the belief that the PPP would win elections by a huge

margin, it came out as occupying an absolute majority in the parliament. In fact, the huge attendance at the public meetings of the PNA had given the hope that it would surely catch more seats than the opposition captured in the first general elections of 1970. When election results were announced, Bhutto held a press conference declaring that the results were as he expected. However, PNA did not accept results and charged PPP's leadership of rigging. Without any delay, opposition opened a campaign against incumbent government which got strengthened quickly. General Council of PNA unanimously decided to reject the National Assembly elections, "rigged" and "stolen" by the PPP. Moreover, to register protest, PNA decided to boycott the provincial assembly elections. The General Council also demanded the elected members of PNA to resign immediately [20].

Bhutto, however, severely criticized boycott of provincial elections and

appealed to the electorates to come out for casting the votes with full vigour and enthusiasm, no less than they showed at National Assembly polls. Bhutto emphasized on the people that a vote for PPP was a vote for democracy and would frustrate boycott of PNA. However, the people positively responded to appeal of PNA on March 10, 1977. The masses did not go to the polling stations as more than half of those who had voted during National Assembly election remained absent. The patrolling military witnessed that turnout was so poor that at some polling stations there were more law enforcement personnel than voters. Kausar Niazi, a close colleague of Bhutto and cabinet minister, admitted the fact [21]. Abdul Hafeez Peerzada also expressed similar opinion that PNA boycotted provincial elections and its boycott was very effective [22]. However, boycott of PNA resulted in securing larger seats by PPP in all the four provinces.

Following table shows the number of seats secured by PPP in provincial assembly elections [23]

Name of Province	Total Number of Seats	Seats Secured by PPP
Punjab	240	232
Sindh	100	89
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	80	63
Balochistan	40	35
Total	460	435

Accusations and allegations were natural in Pakistan's politics. However, to make the matter worse, hugely inflated turnout was announced by government. Members of PNA from the very outset blamed PPP for fraud and voter manipulation. PNA

candidates also reported that local administration did not allow them to submit nomination papers. Unopposed election of 19 members to National Assembly and of 66 members to provincial assemblies turned the suspicion of rigging

into a reality. Bhutto was well aware of the fact that election results on 30-40 seats were fabricated in favour of government [24]. However, Bhutto paid no heed to demands of PNA, declaring it just a facade created by opposition parties. He also declared it as a general attitude of losers of elections in third world countries [25]. The sealing of 80 constituencies' results by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had convinced PNA that rigging, fraud and other malpractices were committed on a large scale [26]. Responding to insistence of opposition, Justice Sajjad Ahmad Jan, the CEC ordered recounting of votes at some disputed polling stations. When it became clear that malpractices existed, PPP government withdrew the authority from CEC to announce revised results. The CEC came out on various occasions stating that the elections were indeed rigged and expressed his helplessness to put an end [27]. An opportunity for ascertaining the truth about level of rigging was discouraged by PNA leaders. They rejected idea of being any help to ECP in probing into the matter on the basis of their shaky trust on ECP. PNA itself was not innocent either and such malpractices were committed on both sides.

International observers and correspondents reported that rigging and other

malpractices were circumscribed to a limited number of constituencies. However, they were clearly mistaken as rigging was not confined to limited constituencies and was at a scale unprecedented in electoral history of Pakistan [28]. PPP had actually been doing homework for winning the elections, irrespective of whatever opposition might come in its way. Prime Minister's Secretariat, Intelligence Agencies and Ministry of Information were collectively engaged in recommending candidates for different seats and advising various secret moves for PPP's win. Few ministers were reported to have attacked voters and stamped the ballot papers.²⁹ However, according to Miraj Muhammad Khan, Bhutto having confidence in himself and in his party, never made any plan for rigging. However, there were black sheep in his party foreseeing their future in danger. These few people were involved in rigging which damaged not only PPP but also Bhutto [30].

Politics of Agitation and Reconciliation between PNA and Government

Independent newspapers had predicted that post-election period would not be that of a success but of trial for PPP leadership. The masses, having seen and participated in political campaign for PNA, were flabbergasted by the landslide victory of

PPP. People's misgiving about the results was in large part, the outcome of their preconceived notion about PNA as being one of the most favourites before elections. PPP could not have been expected to win the elections with such a large majority. Fingers were raised on transparency and fairness of the elections. Whatever the scale of rigging might have been, PNA and its supporters rallied for altogether cancelling of election results and holding fresh elections the supervision of army and judiciary. After results of provincial elections, PNA leadership called for a strike to demonstrate the nation's loss of confidence in its present leadership. Bhutto, very disturbed with unease of the opposition, warned PNA leaders to approve the results. In otherwise case, they would not be allowed to bring death and destruction to the people and country. Despite Bhutto's warning, a successful strike was observed on March 11, 1977. Having gathered large crowds prior to elections, PNA had already expected the strike to be one of the same. The countrywide strike assured them of public support. However, rallies and procession organized by PNA against government compelled Bhutto to negotiate with opposition. Therefore, next day, Bhutto offered the opposition to have a dialogue. He also made an impassioned plea that

PNA should accept defeat in elections and rejected their demand for re-election [31]. Bhutto expected a positive response from Maulana Mufti Mahmood. However, due to an air of mistrust and lack of approval of Bhutto's idea i.e., election being regarded as a settled matter, Maulana Mufti Mahmood, instead of a nod denied the invitation until their basic demands were accepted. PPP's leadership also expressed its intention that government "would not hesitate" to invite army, if found "necessary" to "restore order." As a reaction to this threat, both General Gul Hasan and Air Marshal Rahim Khan, who had played main role in supporting and helping Bhutto's coming into power wired their resignations, as ambassadors to Greece and Spain respectively. They contended that previous regime had held free and fair elections but Bhutto, a power hungry man didn't, which may lead the country towards another civil war. The resignations were a bad omen as what was next in pipeline proved to be disastrous. Both of the officers were never stopping to be game changers and masterminds for military [32]. Later in March 1977, National Assembly session was called on but opposition did not participate due to their boycott. As most of opposition leaders were arrested and sent behind the bars, the session was considered unilateral

decision. Later in March, the 168 members National Assembly voted Bhutto to power. Denying demand of PNA for dissolving National Assembly, Bhutto held that there was no moral or political justification for such action [33]. Bhutto admitted that some individuals had violated rules of the game and committed malpractices in the elections for which the premier can't be held responsible. Bhutto also maintained that it did not mean that government had made a plan for rigging. Nonetheless, Bhutto rejected allegations of planned rigging and held that by conceding to demand of re-elections, history will remember him as rigger of the elections [34].

Opposition rallies were attracting people from different sections of society mainly involving students, youth, women, lawyers, professionals, business community and the Ulema. Deliberate violation of law and order and confrontation between opposition and law enforcement agencies became a routine. Political agitation spread throughout the country in the form of strikes and protests which soon transformed into a political movement. Now opposition demanded that holding of fresh elections be preceded by resignation of Bhutto. However, Bhutto was prepared to correct only the minor irregularities. To deal with, such a

situation needed magnanimity of both sides, but unfortunately that could not happen. However, Bhutto, based on such demands, declared that a foreign hand especially that of US was involved to aggravate the situation thus accusing opposition leaders as foreign agents [35].

Bhutto government, however, imposed section 144 and retaliated with oppressive measures like using tear gas, baton charge and even firing on protestors. Top opposition leaders were put behind the bars, thus providing religious groups with an opportunity to lead the movement. To deal with section 144, religious opposition groups used mosques and accused Bhutto of faithlessness in religion. Bhutto denying the claim, ordered FSF to punish those who, according to ruling party negated will of the masses and expression of democratic process. Bhutto government lost patience and the police and FSF entered the mosques, harassed demonstrators thus beating and arresting them as well. It sparked a great resentment and consolidated an impression about the government's intention to use all measures of repression. The real problem surfaced with failure of FSF and police in restricting agitation of protestors in April 1977. Now PNA-led politics of agitation was transformed into a confrontational politics. The results were that Bhutto,

although striving to assert his grip over military vis-à-vis opposition forces, decided to declare martial law; though under the Constitution in Lahore, Karachi and Hyderabad in April 1977 [36].

Concerns about fairness and transparency in election process are raised almost everywhere where there is democracy. What made 1977 elections so contentious was the fact that malpractices of every sort were committed on too large a scale to be overlooked as being a routine in democratic form of governments. Bhutto was not willing to resign and planned to hold referendum as an evasive tactic. PPP government passed 7th Amendment Bill in May 1977 which was aimed to seek legitimacy for ruling party through a referendum. Opposition parties had boycotted the assembly session as things were not yet settled between PPP and PNA. Bhutto aimed that if situation got worse, holding of referendum would bring adjustment by taking a vote of confidence directly from the nation. Referring to the referendum, Bhutto insisted that as PNA had turned down all his reconciliatory efforts, let the people decide his fate. However, PNA leaders declaring it a device for supporting PPP's illegitimate rule and ensuring one-party hegemony, condemned and rejected this move [37].

Resorting to politics of reconciliation, Bhutto compromised with PNA and agreed to hold fresh-elections in November 1977 and offered them five ministries during interim period. Later on, the insistence of PNA for 50% cabinet ministries and holding elections before August 14, 1977 was also accepted. However, it seems that PNA had decided in advance that in case of their victory in elections, the Constitution would be respected. In case of PPP's victory, elections were to be considered completely rigged and results would be rejected altogether. One illustration of such behaviour of opposition was Air Marshal Asghar Khan's press interview in Karachi held a few days before the elections declaring that he was not ready to accept victory of the government. He did not advance any proof of government's intention of rigging on that stage which seemingly was not an issue. Blatantly refusing PPP victory, Asghar Khan declared it to be disaster for country if PPP rule will continue. He did not express the need for strike and violence and said that it would not serve much purpose but would simply refuse to sit in the parliament.

The press conference became a base for full-fledged agitation. Later on, it stirred up the opposition supporter's emotion and they were on the streets with much the

same motto as that of the Air Marshal. Their sole purpose was to bring Bhutto's government down. It was their sheer demand and they were ready to pay any price for it. The fact that rigging in reality did take place in certain constituencies had served purpose of those PNA groups very well, in that had been able to carry with them the parties which stood to lose a great deal by refusing to seek a political way out of that deadlock. It seemed that some of PNA hard-line leaders had decided to use other means to topple Bhutto's regime. But what these people had in mind about fresh elections by Army, could not happen and everyone lost. The open letter of Asghar Khan to three services chiefs not to accept unlawful directive of prime minister gave impression in favour of military takeover [38]. Moreover, refusal of Bhutto to appoint another prime minister of his own choice until holding of fresh elections also eliminated hopes for peaceful settlement of political crisis.

End Results of the Political Crisis

Actually, political developments in aftermath of 1977 general elections, for most of PNA factions, represented as a last chance to get rid of Bhutto. They believed that if Bhutto could not be detached from power at this time, it was uncertain that they would ever be able to oust him. In

case Bhutto would be allowed with a two-third majority in National Assembly, he would become stronger and even more secure. Opposition leadership speculated that in case PPP was allowed to form government, Bhutto would bring in new constitutional amendments so that he could slip back to establish presidential system for pursuing his dreams [39]. If Bhutto's government machinery had not committed rigging and other malpractices, PPP would yet win 1977 elections but with little margin. Allowing this would mean respect for votes, respect for popular choice and respect for democracy but sorry to say PPPs' autocratic leadership wasted the chance. Due to boycott of opposition parties from provincial elections, 1977 elections lost its credibility. It became very difficult for Bhutto to keep his standing either in media, courts or in other democratic institutions.

Both ruling party and the opposition came to conclusion that democratic process cannot open for them, the door to power. They decided to work on a policy of creating crisis of such dimensions that it becomes necessary that military be called out so as to maintain law and order. Some PNA leaders thought that once the military comes in, it would deal with the political crisis. Therefore, they assumed and hoped that military regime would speedily evolve

a new constitution presumably like that of Yahya Khan and hold elections in a manner that would make it easy for them to realize their ambitions. PNA leaders did not hesitate to confess that in their view only military intervention could get them rid of Bhutto. They agreed that they could never hope to attain political power through ballot box. Some of their partners, known for political integrity and faith in democratic process, seemed to have resigned themselves to the view that in that situation, nothing could be done and they had to go along with partners. Even though they did not share confidence of the self-appointed Army lobby that such a development would lead to a quick takeover of power, followed by an altruistic handing over to the opposition [40].

Opposition leaders aimed at ousting Bhutto from power and introducing Nizam-i-Mustafa in the country. After 1977 elections, PPP and PNA failed in settling the allegations of rigging thus military under General Ziaul Haq took over the power. But with the end of PPP rule, PNA also disintegrated and thus lost chance of becoming a viable alternative government. Its first aim, the ousting of Bhutto, got fulfilled and the vested interests persuaded its leaders to withdraw from the second one i.e., establishing

Nizam-i-Mustafa. Actually PNA regarded opposition as a stepping stone to achieve greater influence in politics of the country rather than acting as a torch bearer.

Political development is possible when all political parties irrespective of their differences sit together to debate and discuss national issues, build consensus and find solution of common problems. It was lack of consensus developing mind-set of politicians that allowed military to take over the government. Politicians including ruling and opposition were supposed to realize seriousness of post-1977 elections situation. They should have found solution to their differences within the democratic framework. Unfortunately, some of the extremist elements in opposition were not willing to seek a peaceful solution of the problem. There was a division among opposition as a section wanted to reach a peaceful solution of the issue and others thought of resorting to politics of agitation. Care should have been demonstrated for the sake of continuity of political process that had been restored after thirteen years of military rule. The opposition got an opportunity to boost its prestige but it could not muster enough support to take a formidable stand with regard to different controversial issues. Mufti Mahmood, Professor Ghafoor Ahmad, Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Abdul Wali Khan and Attullah

Mengal were seasoned politicians from opposition. Becoming united, they fulfilled requirements for becoming an effective opposition but failed in the process to be so. Thus opposition could not present itself as a viable option of an alternative government. Due to internal differences and rigid attitude adopted by some hardliners, opposition parties in post-elections period could not contribute much to the healthy growth of democracy.

Though Bhutto started a democratic process, the opposition had equally supported democratisation. Similarly, it was not only Bhutto and his party but also the opposition parties that hampered political process. During Bhutto regime, opposition parties got an opportunity to emerge and grow as united force but by resorting to politics of confrontation it failed to do so. Therefore, as demanded by democracy, opposition could not offer a viable alternative to the ruling party thus making their loss in elections as obvious. If, on one hand, Bhutto was suffering from personality cult and wanted to establish a one party rule, on the other hand, opposition too appeared to be least interested in establishing a truly democratic system.

CONCLUSION

Adoption and persistence of undemocratic attitude and practices on the part of

incumbent government has always been limiting the efficiency of opposition in different ways. That was what PPP practiced during 1977 elections. During election campaign, PPP tried its best to block, weaken, suppress and also divide the opposition parties. In fact, PPP established rules for electoral contest which favoured it the most. The ruling party sought to limit or disallow access of opposition to media. All available resources were used throughout election campaign to manipulate and influence voters. Different tactics were used to keep the potentially dangerous opposition leaders away from contesting 1977 elections.

Bhutto should have ensured fairness and smooth conduction of elections so that the country would remain free of any trouble that had been forecasted by a band of rumour mongers. He had to have made such arrangement that would eliminate the possibility of clashes during elections. An understanding should have been reached with the PNA leadership at earliest which could have kept the democratic process intact. The political deadlock created in aftermath of 1977 elections could only be resolved by resorting to political process. Peaceful means could have been found to expunge electoral record of all constituencies results of which were

considered doubtful on reasonable ground. Irrespective of PNA's stance, ECP had to probe irregularities in elections and vacate all seats with suspected rigging. Those found guilty of malpractices, whether officials or ministers, should have been dealt with severely. Political parties should have arrived at an early settlement for re-elections on suspected seats and that fresh elections would be held without any fear of rigging or malpractices.

Both PPP's leadership and that of PNA would have realized that ultimately a mutually acceptable, negotiated settlement had to be found for resolving the issues. Opposition parties, as claimed to have been interested in true democracy, should have realized that the situation had provided an opportunity to move forward to this goal, and also prove their estimated strength by accepting the proposal for provincial re-elections. That would have created conditions for elimination of political crisis. In case, opposition parties had secured majority in all or most provinces, this would have helped them to strengthen demand for fresh elections to the National Assembly. Though, there were seasoned politicians on both sides, advocating for establishment of true democracy, yet there was a need to join hands and bring Pakistan out of political crisis. Both PPP and PNA did not move on

the path of reconciliation and created a situation that facilitated military's coming back into the corridor of power.

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