

Memogate versus Democratic Yearning

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THE INSTANTANEOUS selection of 50-year-old Sherry Rehman, former journalist and now Chairperson of Jinnah Institute, a think tank based in Islamabad, in place of Hussain Haqqani as the Pak Ambassador to the USA following the latter's resignation as a sequel to the 'memorygate' controversy—or call it a scandal—proves that the Pak democracy is still subordinate to military-feudal nexus. But the ruling PPP government fell foul of the military. Little wonder, the Pak media is mum. It's not that Rehman is pro-army. After putting in his papers as Minister for Information in 2009, as a sequel to the tussle between the government and the judiciary over the government's clampdown on television coverage, Rehman set up her think tank and retained her position in the National Assembly. She is an eyesore of right-wing communal forces for her steadfast campaign for amendments to the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan.

'Friday Times' Editor Najam Sethi snapped fingers at the army in an intrepid style in his editorial commentary (18-24, Nov 11). "The military has been gunning for Hussain Haqqani for over a decade. He ran afoul of General Musharraf in 2002 for his critical newspaper columns in Urdu and English. So he decamped to the US where he wrote his seminal book on the unholy historical nexus Between the Mosque and Military in Pakistan. After he was appointed Ambassador to Washington in 2008, the military embarked upon a campaign to defame him. He was accused of acting against the "national interest" by manipulating the insertion of "pro-democracy" clauses in the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation that committed \$7.5 billion to Pakistan over five years as a "strategic ally." He was blasted for enabling CIA operatives to get visas despite the fact that authorization for over 90 percent duly came from the Pakistan Foreign Office/ISI or the Prime Minister's secretariat. He was criticized for pledging an impartial and public investigation into how OBL came to be lodged in Abbottabad in contrast to the army stand there be no more than an internal secret inquiry at best. Ijaz is suspected to be an "American agent" for recommending a pragmatic and responsible Af-Pak and US-Pak foreign policy."

In the subsequent issue of same weekly, Wajahat S Khan, painted a profile of Mansoor Ijaz, chairman of Crescent Investment Management in New York. "He negotiated Sudan's offer of counterterrorism assistance on Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden to the Clinton administration in 1997 and coauthored the blueprint for the ceasefire in Kashmir between New Delhi and the Hizbul Mujahideen et al in 2000. Among other media outlets, he's worked closely as a foreign policy contributor to Fox News, where he's usually leaned a hard right of centre. He's rich and infamous. Now, he's Memogate's starring secret emissary/coup-maker/whistleblower/revanchist. Furthermore, Khan notes, Ijaz became disappointed—key players in Pakistan's foreign policy establishment with the passing of the Brown Amendment (which allowed Pakistan to reclaim stalled payments for F-16 fighters from Washington). His

anti-Pakistan tirades in conservative publications like the *Wall Street Journal* would elicit responses from figures like Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Sheikh and Pakistan's Ambassador to the US, Maleeha Lodhi; both those offices counter-claimed that Ijaz, basically, just wanted to derive financial benefits from Islamabad. While *Dawn* published Lodhi's comments ("it was illegal") about Ijaz's compensation demands for helping out with the passage of the Brown Amendment, Ijaz shot back and questioned Lodhi's intentions regarding the US legislation, claiming in the WSJ that her brother, Amir, would gain from a Mirage jet deal with the French, thus her interest. Thus, the Pakistani infighting on Washington's embassy row got ugly long before Memogate. Even the Israel card (Ijaz allegedly wanted Pakistan to formally recognise that country) was played." Frankly speaking, Ijaz's plunge into sensationalism and the *Financial Times*, faithful mouthpiece of neo-liberal capitalism by prominently carried the piece by Ijaz attacking Haqqani. Scandals are a part of history as reveal more than suppress. In that sense ,the memogate scandal should benefit the students of history. Mosharraf Zaidi in an opinion piece in *Foreign Policy* where the so-called secret memo was published inferred that it brought "a perfect opportunity to discuss the country's real problems". The author of the scandal Mansoor Ijaz, reportedly conveyed in secrecy the ruling Zardari government's plea for US hedge against his country's own military.

So Apparently Zardari-Gilani government's decision on a 'high-level, impartial' probe into the 'memogate' scandal and the graceful step-down by the US Ambassador to the USA Hussain Haqqani reflects a good democratic gesture but it proves that the military-feudal-communal command breathes down the neck of Pakistani democrats who crave for a powerful democracy. Lahore-based daily *Express Tribune* in its editorial, captioned Memogate claims its first victim states that although Haqqani "maintained that he had no role in authoring or sending the said secret memo, the government and (let's not beat about the bush) the military thought otherwise." The Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani reportedly asked the diplomat to step down for a transparent inquiry. Haqqani too offered to resign to keep his slate clean. If the probe is transparent, it should reveal the integrity of a Pakistani-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz. The editorial threw up a set of queries about him –"what made him go public with his claims on the memo and its authorship? Why did he see fit to meet, as reported in a section of the media (and not denied) with the head of the ISI and present the 'evidence' to him? Wouldn't it have been better to submit this before an inquiry or the prime minister?"

The Pentagon spokesman John Kirby's revelation that the former US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen was confident that the memo not sent by President Asif Ali Zardari, is not going to help the army top brass and their feudal collaborators. In fact, Mullen neither knew Pakistani American businessman Ijaz, nor had communications with him. Those who want a camaraderie between defenders of unfettered democracy in Pakistan in the SAARC region look forward to the outcome of the inquiry and be assured that it would be made public. But many people in Pakistan smell a rat .If the memo is true, why it was done in a ham-handed and downright silly way of reining in the powerful military that refuses to consider democratic order supreme. An academic, Haqqani earned the wrath of army overlords for his controversial book

Between Mosque and Military that unnerved the military establishment of both Islamabad and Washington ? Haqqani wrote in acidic tone, "The United States appears to accept the Pakistani military's falsified narrative of Pakistan's recent history, at least in public. It is often assumed that the military's intervention in politics is motivated by its own concern over national security and the incompetence of politicians. That the military might be a contributor to political incompetence and its desire to control national security policies might be a function of its pursuit of domestic political power is hardly ever taken into account."

After all, Washington 's credibility is open to doubts, judging by the past history of fostering military coup in as many countries as possible. Since the 1950s, the US has been backing Pakistan's armed forces to seize power, and most nakedly during the 1970s and '80s , when it backed the bloody dictator General Zia ul-Haq, who hanged Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, his civilian, democratically elected predecessor. Islamisation of the polity too was backed by the US imperialism that coddled General Pervez Musharraf in the 1990s.

The threat to process of consolidation of democratic order came from the very beginning of Pakistan. Mohammed Ali Jinnah could smell this and expressed this obliquely in his famous speech on 11 August 1946. There were hardly half a dozen of large industrialists such as the Adamjis and Ispahanis unlike over two dozens in India like the Tatas, Birlas, Thapars, Sahu-Jains, Singhianias, Khataus, Bazazs and Sundarams. On the contrary, there were a few dozens of army higher-ups in Pakistan with powerful feudal lineage. They didn't want a democratic order flourish in Pakistan and opposed secular state that Qaid-e-Azam craved for. A leftwing weekly, *Viewpoint* (now defunct), edited by Majhaar Ali Khan, father of Tariq Ali, carried a series of articles by a Marxist economist in the early 1980s explaining this hidden opposition to democracy as a prelude to the military coup, led by General Iskander Mirza in 1956. General Mirza abrogated the constitution and termed it as "unworkable" and full of "dangerous compromises." He dismissed the Sir Feroz Khan Noon ministry, dissolved the National Assembly of Pakistan and the provincial legislatures. All political parties including the Muslim League were banned and then Commander-in-chief General Ayub Khan was designated as the Chief Martial Law Administrator. Pak radicals made no bones of their chagrin against the irritating " Pakistan bugaboos: secrecy and backstabbing, coups and the invisible hand. It's a long and resplendent tradition now; the hackneyed and voluble moral outrage is predictable. Like controversies past, this too will be seen from two extreme angles: a product of a plot hatched by intelligence agencies and their hyper-nationalist enablers, or of the turpitude of civilian politicians and their ultraliberal enablers", Zaidi aptly states out of agony and anger. Indeed, the most crucial question for democracy in Pakistan is gradual reduction in the civil-military imbalance. □□□