

Challenges to Governments in Islamic Republic of Pakistan and their Responses: A Case Study of *Nawāz Sharīf's* Second Regime

*Dr. Qurat ul Ain Bashir

**Sohail Akhtar

***Munir Subhani

Abstract

In the second regime of Nawaz Sharif (1997-1999), the role of the establishment in politics was less prominent, even though it had facilitated PML (N) on road to success immensely. The slogan of Islamization of the society had been the main focus of Nawaz's government. The civil bureaucracy on the whole remained under the control of the government mainly due to the heavy electoral mandate of the government and its policies. This era began with a strong democratic government but ended in a confrontation between government and opposition, between center and judiciary and within government coalition partners. The interesting tenable argument related to all the dire impediments faced by Nawaz Sharif is that he did not agree with the notion of neutrality and equality towards all the stakeholders of the political system. The article sought to bring forth all defies faced by the government and its response generated to them.

Keywords: Challenge, Govt., Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif

*Assistant Professor of History, University of Gujrat, Gujrat

**Lecturer, Department of History, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan

***M Phil Scholar, Department of Education, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Dera Ismail Khan

Introduction

The Islamic phenomenon has remained a perpetual attraction in the politics of Pakistan since her happening. The 1997 elections brought the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) into power by attaining an overwhelming majority (135 seats) in National Assembly.² The sweeping electoral win had enhanced the confidence of Nawaz Sharif. If Nawaz's growth had been looked at from the historical perspective then the vivid limelight would not be anything except a blue-eyed boy of the Pakistani establishment who had been tailor-made to succumb to Bhutto's legacy/Benazir Bhutto. The striking feature of Nawaz is that being the political DNA of the military elite he had been unable to keep his government intact and safe from dismissal in the decade of the '90s. In light of the above-cited argument, it is the study of the collection of imperative challenges faced by PML (N) by the other institutions and its response to them. One of the main reasons for the bumpy ride was the problematic attitude of Nawaz towards the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) being the leader of the House. Hence, when he was looking for cooperation with the opposition he primarily received setbacks and an amplified volume of dilemmas.

The methodology used in this research is descriptive and critical. Since the research is based on actual historical events hence the historical narrative style is used. The nature of the research is qualitative. The study comprised data collected from print media, government reports, Debates of National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies, autobiographies, articles in journals and magazines, and archival material declassified by Radio

² *The News*, Lahore, February 5, 1997.

Pakistan and the National Documentation Wing, in-person, broadcasted and published interviews with politicians and civil-military officials.

The scheme of the article is based on the challenge and counter challenge approach which are as follows:

1. Challenge: Working Relationship between the Government-Opposition

Benazir Bhutto-Zardari denounced the government's policies on Kashmir, India, and the economy.³ She called for the creation of a national government that would include political parties, judiciary, bureaucracy, armed forces, and intelligence agencies. She believes it is important to have a broad consensus on issues because then-current problems could not be solved solely by political parties. She questioned the intervention of agencies in the past in the destabilization of civilian elected governments.⁴ Benazir had identified the establishment's position in the political system, and to bring peace and harmony between politicians and the establishment, she proposed the above cited national government concept, intending to keep the establishment out of politics.⁵

Response

Benazir's request was turned down by the government⁶ being undemocratic. The government claimed that she did not realize that if these institutions were provided power as per the proposed power-sharing

³ *Dawn*, Karachi, May 20, 1997. *Dawn*, Karachi, May 26, 1997.

⁴ *Dawn*, Karachi, June 30, 1997.

⁵ Senator Nawabzada Haji Mir Lashkari Khan Raisani, PPP, Personal Interview, Islamabad, 23 December 2010.

⁶ *Dawn*, Karachi, June 30, 1997.

formula then they toppled down elected governments as they did in the former. Nawaz also articulated they should be brought before the courts instead of being given authority. In the 1990s, the establishment continued its games of favoring various leaders and parties at different times in history.⁷

2. Challenge: The Tension between the Ruling Party and its Coalition Partners

Incident A

The dispute between both the Awāmi National Party (ANP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (N) erupted over the question of changing the name of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to Pakhtūnkhwā. Almost a decade-old PML (N)-ANP alliance was on the brink of dissolving because the PML (N) had supported the Kālābagh Dam project and refused to rename NWFP.⁸ Regarding the issues of renaming of NWFP and provincial rights, the ANP was unable to get assistance from other political parties such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the Baluchistan National Movement (Mengal Group) (BNM) (M), and the Jeay Sindh Party.⁹ The ANP eventually agreed to conclude its partnership with the PML (N) on February 24, 1998. The ruling party's two-thirds Senate majority had been stripped away as a result of this split.¹⁰ The strength of the ANP in the NWFP Assembly was 30¹¹ and for the continuation of the NWFP

⁷ MNA Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, PML (N), Personal Interview, Islamabad, September 14, 2011.

⁸ Senator Haji Mohammad Adeel, ANP, Personal Interview, Islamabad, January 19, 2011.

⁹ Nasim Wali Khan, interview by Rizwan Qureshi, *The Herald*, Karachi, March 1998, 59.

¹⁰ *Dawn*, Karachi, February 26, 1998.

¹¹ *Dawn*, Karachi, February 16, 1998.

coalition government, the PML (N) needed to keep the contract intact. The ANP ministers resigned from the National and NWFP Assemblies on February 26, 1998, and agreed to support the opposition benches.

Response A

Later, with the help of individuals MPAs, the PML (N) established a government in NWFP. The PML (N) vowed to grant ministries to all those individuals who would collaborate in acquiring the required number of MPA to form the government.¹²

Incident B

On February 23, 1998, the political situation took a drastic turn on the eve of the president's annual address to the joint session of Parliament. Members of the MQM and the PPP chanted anti-government slogans and walked out of Parliament. The ruling party was humiliated by the MQM's anti-government stance.¹³ To get the country out of its turmoil, Benazir demanded transparent elections.¹⁴ Altāf Hussain also told the government that possibly the government did not keep its commitments to the MQM, the party would quit the alliance.¹⁵ The government's problems were exacerbated by the gaps between the PML (N) and the MQM. The main trepidations of the MQM were about no-go areas¹⁶ and large killings of its

¹² *Dawn*, Karachi, February 27, 1998.

¹³ *Dawn*, Karachi, February 24, 1998.

¹⁴ *Dawn*, Karachi, February 27, 1998.

¹⁵ *Dawn*, Karachi, February 28, 1998.

¹⁶ The no-go areas were those areas which were in the control of the MQM (H) and the MQM workers were not permitted to go into there. These areas encompassed vis a vis; Landhi, Korangi, Malir and Shah Faisal Colony. The

workers.¹⁷ The MQM believed that opponents of the MQM were employed by the agencies in the eastern part of the Karachi district against its workers.¹⁸ At that time the opponent group of MQM was the Muttahida Qaāmi Movement (Haqīqī) which rejected that the allegation of being supported by the agencies against MQM.¹⁹ The MQM announced on March 17, 1998, that if no-go areas did not end within 48 hours, it would leave the coalition.

Response B

A round of negotiation took place between the ruling party and the MQM and the disagreement ended. The government agreed to remove no-go areas in one month.²⁰ On April 18, 1998, a new agreement was reached between the PML (N) and the MQM after consultation between both parties. The agreement assured the continuation of the alliance, the formation of a new working partnership, and the repeal of Governor Rule in Karachi.²¹

The government removed all pending cases against MQM legislators on April 30, 1998, claiming that the cases were not based on reasons or evidence. The government had decided to compensate families who had lost relatives as a result of various operations.²² Nawaz had apologized to the MQM for the

MQM had demanded that no-go areas should be cleared with the help of law enforcement agencies and open up to its workers. *Dawn*, Karachi, March 21, 1998.

¹⁷ *Dawn*, Karachi, March 11, 1998.

¹⁸ Farooq Sattar, interview by Idrees Bakhtiar, *The Herald*, Karachi, April, 1998, 33-34.

¹⁹ Afaq Ahmed, interview by Azhar Abbas, *The Herald*, Karachi, April, 1998, 35.

²⁰ Idrees Bakhtiar "Going Nowhere With the MQM" *The Herald*, Karachi, April, 1998, 26.

²¹ *Dawn*, Karachi, April 18, 1998. Mazhar Abbas "Terms of Endearment", *The Herald*, Karachi, April, 1998, 52.

²² *Dawn*, Karachi, May 1, 1998.

wrongdoings of his government. The government's compensation towards assassins and workers of the MQM had damaged its credibility. The government had accepted the full responsibility of doing unjust to the MQM.²³

3. Challenge: Kaālābāgh Dam Issue

Nawaz gave a national address on June 11, 1998, in which he announced the building of the Kālābāgh Dam.²⁴ Since 1984, the Kālābāgh Dam has been a constant source of dispute between Punjab and other federating units. The Anti- Kālābāgh Dam Action Committee organized a rally against the statement on June 17, 1998. Various social, political, and religious groups participated in the protest.²⁵ Anti- Kālābāgh Dam resolutions were passed in the Assemblies of Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan.²⁶

Three senators from other federating units except Punjab had denounced the government on the project of the Kālābāgh Dam. On August 1, 1998, Benazir and Walī Khan planned to keep anti-dam rallies. On August 10, 1998, rallies from Sukkur to Obara and Nowshera to Attock were scheduled. The first rally was led by Benazir Bhutto, and the second was led by Walī Khan. The opposition demanded Nawaz Sharif's resignation and the creation of a national government.

Response

²³ MNA Haider Abbas Rizvi, MQM, Personal Interview, Islamabad, February 2, 2011.

²⁴ *Dawn*, Karachi, June 12, 1998.

²⁵ Abdul Wahab Memon "Press Joins Popular Drive" *Dawn*, Karachi, June 22, 1998. *Dawn*, Karachi, June 22, 1998.

²⁶ Sajjad Ali Shah, *Law Courts in a Glass House: An Autobiography* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 568.

Because of widespread disapproval, Nawaz changed his mind about the Kalabagh Dam and proclaimed that the dam would be built only after a national consensus was reached.²⁷

4. Challenge: Islamization through The Fifteenth Amendment

Nawaz addressed the nation from the floor of the House on August 28, 1998 announcing that his government would table the fifteenth amendment bill under which the Quran and *Sunnah* would be the supreme law of the state. The bill proposed to amend Article 239 of the Constitution for providing different procedures for the passage of the amendment in the Parliament. It had removed the condition of the two-third majority to amend the constitution in the matters of Quran and *Sunnah*. According to the amendment the bill related to matters of Quran and *Sunnah* may be presented in any house of the Parliament and if it passed by the majority then could be referred to the other house. If the bill was passed by the majority of the members without any amendment then it would be conveyed to the President. If the bill did not get passed in the house or passed with amendment then it should be considered in the joint sitting.²⁸ Another provision of the proposed bill mentioned that the federal government would be responsible for the enforcement of *zakat*, *salat*, and eradication of corruption. It was also bound on the government to carry out *amer bil ma'roof wa nahi anal munkar*' (Quran 3:110), and to provide social and economic justice in the light of Quran and *Sunnah*.²⁹

²⁷ Shamim Shami, "PPP Puzzled over Dam Plan", *Dawn*, Karachi, June 24, 1998.

Zaffar Abbas "Sharif in Blunderland", *The Herald*, Karachi, July, 1998, 60.

²⁸ Sajjad, *Law Courts in a Glass House*, 572.

²⁹ Sajjad, *Law Courts in a Glass House*, 572. *Dawn*, Karachi, September 5, 1998.

Nawaz required the support of 'Ulamā' and religious leaders to tackle those who were against the bill.³⁰ The bill was severely criticized by the opposition, NGOs and human rights organizations.³¹ Some of the members of the ruling party also had reservations over the bill. Abdul Hameed Jatoui of the PML (N) cited that if the amendment in the Constitution would take place by a simple majority then smaller provinces would stand nowhere. He expressed that in the lower house Punjab was stronger than the collective strength of the other three smaller provinces. He also stated that if the bill was passed then it would be difficult for smaller provinces to defend their rights.³² Asfandyār Walī of the ANP said that the bill was against the principles of provincial autonomy. He stated that if NWFP Assembly enacted law and the federal government issued an order against it then which order would prevail.³³ Sajjād Alī Shāh believed that Fifteenth Amendment was not required because Constitution contained several provisions regarding the Islamization of the society. He said in the presence of Article 2 (religion of the state is Islam), Article 2 (a) (the provisions for Islamization), Article 31 (laws must be enacted to promote Islamic way of life), and Article 228 (set up of Council of Islam comprised of religious scholars) there was no need of such amendment.³⁴

Response

³⁰ *Dawn*, Karachi, September 6, 1998.

³¹ Sajjad, *Law Courts in a Glass House*, 572.

³² Abdul Hameed, Jatoui interview by Faraz Hashmi, *The Herald*, Karachi, September, 1998, 41.

³³ Asfandyar Wali, interview by Faraz Hashmi, *The Herald*, Karachi, September, 1998, 42.

³⁴ Sajjad Ali Shah, interview by Idrees Bakhtiar, *The Herald*, Karachi, September, 1998, 38.

The ruling party had amended the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment Bill by dropping the proposed amendment in Article 239.³⁵ The bill was adopted by the National Assembly and transmitted to the Senate on October 14, 1998. The ruling party had done a vigorous campaign to get the required number of votes in favor of it.³⁶

5. Challenge: Continuation of Opposition's Protests

The opposition (particularly the PAI and PPP) launched a nationwide anti-government campaign in August 1999.³⁷ The PTI has offered its support to the PPP in its bid to depose the regime.³⁸ MQM and JI also staged anti-government protests, calling for Nawaz Sharif's resignation.³⁹ The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) was established in September 1999 with a single goal to overthrow the government. PPP, MQM, ANP, HJ, IDF, JM, JUAH, MKP, MUF, Pakistan Christian Party (PCP), PDP, PLM (C), PML (J), PML (Q), PML (Qayyūm), PSF, UDF, PAT, and PAI were among the nineteen political parties that made up the GDA.⁴⁰ To put pressure on the government, the GDA organized nationwide rallies.⁴¹

Response

³⁵ *Dawn*, Karachi, October 9, 1998.

³⁶ *Dawn*, Karachi, October 15, 1998.

³⁷ *Dawn*, Karachi, August 4, 1999. *Dawn*, Karachi, August 5, 1999.

³⁸ *Dawn*, Karachi, August 5, 1999.

³⁹ *Dawn*, Karachi, August 5, 1999.

⁴⁰ Syed Ali Dayan Hasan, "Understanding the Opposition", *The Herald*, Karachi, October 1999, 32-33.

⁴¹ Amer Ahmed Khan, "Desperately Seeking Solutions", *The Herald*, Karachi, October 1999, 34.

The government banned rallies in Sindh on September 10, 1999, after the GDA organized a series of rallies in Karachi. The government's decision was opposed by the PAI and the PAT.⁴² The leaders of the GDA were detained on September 11, 1999, by police acting on orders from the federal government. In response to the arrest of top leaders in Sindh, the united opposition has called for a two-day strike.⁴³ The GDA attempted to organize a rally from Schon Chowrangi to Regal Chowk on September 25, 1999, but the government refused to allow it, and over 1000 political activities were arrested in Karachi.⁴⁴ PPP staff attempted to stage anti-government rallies in Sindh on September 27, 1999 but were thwarted by police.⁴⁵

6. Challenge: The PAI's Anti-Government Campaigns

An understanding had reached between the Pakistan Awami Ittehad (PAI) and ANP on December 4, 1998, to start a campaign for dislodging the government;⁴⁶ and on December 8, 1998, the PAI was converted into an electoral alliance.⁴⁷ The Pakistan Oppressed National Movement (PONM) agreed to join PAI in the anti-government drive on December 11, 1998.⁴⁸ In the meantime, the MQM and opposition parties in the National Assembly have agreed to work together on four issues: the government's

⁴² *Dawn*, Karachi, September 11, 1999.

⁴³ *Dawn*, Karachi, September 12, 1999.

⁴⁴ *Dawn*, Karachi, September 26, 1999.

⁴⁵ *Dawn*, Karachi, September 28, 1999.

⁴⁶ *Dawn*, Karachi, December 4, 1998.

⁴⁷ *Dawn*, Karachi, December 9, 1998. Until that time the PAI had incorporated 20 political parties.

⁴⁸ *Dawn*, Karachi, December 12, 1998.

undemocratic acts, the imposition of Governor Rule, the formation of military courts, and the invocation of Article 245 (A).⁴⁹

Dissension between the PAI and the Pakistan Awāmī Tehrik (PAT) erupted in March 1999. Until the next step of the anti-government campaign, PAT Chairman Tāhirul Qādrī believed that the contradictions between the two parties should be resolved.⁵⁰ The PAT had chastised the PAI for not forming a committee to debate its position. Another point of contention was the PPP's unwillingness to choose the Premier's name if the PAI won the elections. The PAT, the Awāmī Qiādat Party (AQP), and the Pakistan Muslim League (Qāsim) PML (Q) requested that all matters be resolved instantly.⁵¹ The PAI had disintegrated into two parts as a result of the aforementioned discrepancies. The AQP, Markazi Jamaat Ahle Hadith (MJAHA), Tehrīk-e-‘Ulmā‘-e-Pakistan (TUP), and Markazī Jamā‘t Sawād-e-A‘zam made up one segment (MJSA). Whereas, the PPP, PDP, Jamī‘at ‘Ulamā‘-e-Ahl-e-Hadith (JUAH), Pakistan Solidarity Front (PSF), the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Hizbe Jihād (HJ), the Islamic Deenī Front (IDF), the Pakistan Mazdoor Kisan Party (PMKP), the Pakistan Christian National Party (PCNP), the Pakistan Muslim League (Jinnah) PML (J), the Pakistan Muslim League (Chatta Group) PML (Q) and the Muttahida ‘Ulamā‘ Forum (MUF) combined to form another political group.⁵² On November 28, 1998, Benazir Bhutto and Mawlānā Qādrī

⁴⁹ *Dawn*, Karachi, December 25, 1998.

⁵⁰ *Dawn*, Karachi, March 3, 1999.

⁵¹ *Dawn*, Karachi, March 7, 1999.

⁵² *Dawn*, Karachi, March 11, 1999.

addressed a PAT rally in Lahore in which he criticized the government's results.⁵³

Response

The government conjectured that rallies may happen to be futile became true. The rallies did not attract more crowd so the pressure could not be built on the government. The integrity of the government was due to the disagreement among the parties on the formula of power-sharing. The government silence over the anti-government campaign was the wise strategy for understanding the fact that parties would finally collapse on the question of political marks scoring and share of power.⁵⁴

7. Challenge: Nawaz-Musharraf Relations

On the afternoon of October 12, 1999, the differences involving Nawaz and Pervaiz Musharraf reached a boiling point. Musharraf was returning from an official visit to Sri Lanka at the time when Nawaz retired him and replaced him with Lieutenant General Zia-ud-din Butt, the Chief of the ISI as COAS.⁵⁵ Sensing trouble on Musharraf's return, Nawaz directed Musharraf's plane to be diverted to Muscat but chose to lend it to him in Karachi due to a shortage of fuel.⁵⁶ Nawaz's action of removing Musharraf and replacing him with a junior General annoyed the senior Generals who acted against with speed on a plan already hatched by Musharraf.⁵⁷

Response

⁵³ *Dawn*, Karachi, November 27, 1998. *Dawn*, Karachi, November 30, 1998.

⁵⁴ *Dawn*, Karachi, December 20, 1998.

⁵⁵ Rai Asad Khan Kharal, *Sachha Kon?* (Lahore: intelligence Publishers, 2001), 13.

⁵⁶ Saeed Mehdi interview by Mazhar Abbas, *ARY News*, "Do Tok", May 30, 2010.

⁵⁷ *The News*, Karachi, October 15, 1999.

Nawaz surrendered to this challenge as he was placed under house arrest and the army got control of all important buildings.⁵⁸ This time Nawaz had faced the music of his own decisions. Nawaz was accused of interfering in the affairs of the armed forces, politicizing and subverting the army, and creating divisions within its ranks. Under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO), Musharraf assumed the powers of the Chief Executive and declared a state of emergency on October 14, 1999. The President remained in power, the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies were dissolved, and governors, ministers, and advisors were no longer in office as a result of the PCO.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In this government most of the time the tussle was between the ruling party and opposition, the main reason being the arrogance of Nawaz, the stubbornness of Benazir and the incompetence of the government to carry their coalition partners with them. The conflict became gigantic largely due to Nawaz Sharif's "heavy-handed" style and legal inadequacies. His feuds with Benazir Bhutto cost him and the country dearly. The press remained a government stronghold, serving as both an agent and a significant threat and challenge. The role of opposition was traditional, and at times undemocratic (e.g., supporting the military to depose the government; unparliamentary practices). The opposition's lack of confidence and mistrust in the government was an important factor in ending democracy and bringing out challenges to the Nawaz.

⁵⁸ *The News*, Karachi, October 13, 1999. *Dawn*, Karachi, October 13, 1999.

⁵⁹ *The News*, Karachi, October 15, 1999.