

Pakistan parties in poll mood, draft slogans, manifestoes

Former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's slogan 'Roti Kapra Aur Makan' is being revived by his Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as the nation prepares for polls, likely later this year.

There is already jockeying among politicians to get themselves or their sons and daughters nominated for the parliamentary polls.

Political parties have got into the poll mood amidst speculation that President Pervez Musharraf may opt for a snap poll. They have begun devising slogans and preparing draft manifestoes.

Musharraf held political consultations Monday even as his regime is still getting over the aftermath of two major developments this month - the operation against militants holed up in Islamabad's Lal Masjid, and an adverse ruling by the Supreme Court reinstating Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry.

With the country in a new mood, the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) wants to include 'Empowerment for All' in its poll manifesto.

Syed Sardar Ahmed, Sindh provincial minister and joint in-charge of the MQM's manifesto committee, said 'Empowerment for All' was not the only electoral slogan discussed at committee meetings. 'I think we have discussed about eight to 10 slogans...but nothing has been finalised,' he said.

PPP of exiled prime minister Benazir Bhutto is also considering three 'Es' - energy, employment and education - for its manifesto, Daily Times said Tuesday.

Raza Rabbani, leader of the opposition in the Senate, said that 'Roti, kapra and makan' (food, clothing and house) should be the PPP's electoral slogan. 'No slogan in Pakistan's history has attracted as much attention as the slogan that was phrased by Z.A. Bhutto, who contested the 1970 elections.

There is no word as yet from the two Muslim Leagues, the ruling PML-Qaid and the opposition PML-Nawaz - the latter led by exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Media reports say the options before Musharraf are either early polls that would surprise the opposition, to be followed by his own re-election to the presidency or his re-election by the present legislatures, both federal and provincial, followed by their dissolution and general elections.

There is also a third option of having a new parliament, but keeping the current provincial assemblies in office till the presidential elections.

The second and third options are most likely to be challenged by constitutional experts and political parties.

Musharraf and Bhutto are yet to work out their much-speculated alliance. According to an interview given in London, the latest from Benazir is that she is unlikely to get into it.

The principal concern for both Bhutto and Sharif is to return home and they have challenged their exile before a court Monday.

Meanwhile, a report from Lahore talks of a generational conflict among the political families. Many politicians had nominated their educated children in the last polls held in 2002 to circumvent a law that required the candidate to be a graduate.

They are not certain whether the law will apply this time. This law, which has now been challenged, affects most political parties, particularly those headed by Muslim clergy who are essentially products of seminaries and not recognised as graduates.

Media has in the past speculated that Musharraf could strike a 'deal' with the opposition parties by not opposing this law's repeal to get himself a second term in the presidency.

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