

**BOYCOTT – MEANS NOT AN END**

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**PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD**



## **BOYCOTT – MEANS NOT AN END**

By Professor Khurshid Ahmad

The large segment of population has rejected the regime's call for elections, scheduled for 18 February, 2008. It is evident from the movements launched by different political parties, lawyers and the media persons that the people in general are more interested in the restoration of the rule of law and freedom of judiciary and press. This is why there are evident signs of lack of interest and a total disenchantment with the façade planned in the name of elections.

Often it is said that boycotting of elections is a violation of the democratic traditions. Let us examine in the following paragraphs the background of this boycott and the real demands of democratic traditions.

Boycott of elections is in a way the negative use of vote. If the objective is to preserve the sanctity of the ballot box and the individual's right of franchise and prevent it from being misused to serve the dictatorship, then it is, definitely, a genuine democratic practice. In such an event it cannot be dismissed as an emotional or negative approach, but would remain a genuine mode of protest against an autocratic regime. Those who think that our stand to boycott Elections-2008 would prove futile for ridding of the country of a dictatorial regime, we invite them to ponder and rethink and join hands in this democratic struggle. Once they seriously and objectively reconsider their own stance, they would realize that to participate in elections, which they are themselves clamoring are going to be rigged, means sacrificing the people's democratic right to vote at the altar of expediency. Are those who favour taking part in elections really sure that they would be doing service to the cause of democracy by their participation in an engineered electoral process? Can't they do it more effectively by joining hands with those who are boycotting these elections? Do they think that by taking part in sham elections they will lend strength to the ongoing movement against the regime and force it to arrange transfer of power to an elected parliament as provided by the constitution? Are they sure Musharraf Govt will hold elections in a free, fair, transparent and peaceful manner? Do they think, the Election Commission as it exists today, is competent enough to conduct these elections?

When we look up in Black's 'Law Dictionary', the authentic lexicon of law terms, and try to determine the meaning of the word 'boycott' and its legal connotation, we find the following definition:

"Concerted refusal to do business with particular person or business in order to obtain concessions or to express displeasure with certain acts or practices of persons on business". (P. 169)

The Penguin 'Dictionary of International Relations' describes the word boycott as follows:

"It involves a systematic refusal to enter into social, economic, political or military relations with a particular state or group of states in order to punish or bring about compliant behavior". (p.55).

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Political Science explains the term as follows:

"An orchestrated way of showing disapproval, such as by not attending a meeting or not purchasing a country's or company's products, so as to punish or apply pressure for change of policy, position, or behavior". (p. 42).

Be that commerce, politics, international relations, or social interaction and contact, the element of boycott has been a well-established means for peaceful achievement of the desired objectives, protests and show of political power. Strictures, closures and boycotts are the tools of the same age-old practice. This has been effectively used for years against the occupation forces and the Apartheid governments of Israel and South Africa. Today, liberation movements going on in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Kashmir have successfully used the weapon of total or partial boycott which has put the imperialists in a hot spot. The history of our own sub-continent has witnessed successful use of this tool during the colonial days. The boycott process started here in 1920 with the Nagpur Congress and it had four pillars of its strategy:

- (i) boycott of law making institutions
- (ii) boycott of law courts;
- (iii) boycott of educational institutions; and
- (iv) Rejection of civilian positions and awards and returning them back to the British government.

The lawyers and political parties are today using the same weapon to restore judiciary's prestige and independence and prevent sham elections for the cause of democracy. The measure can in no way be interpreted as a sentimental or negative move. History is a witness that this and similar other peaceful political weapons, when used properly and with perseverance, have borne the desired results.

This should, however, be kept in view that the boycott in itself is neither a political objective nor a permanent strategy. It is only a means of protest and political pressure against an unlawful regime's designs to render the nation helpless and seek protective over of the law for all its illegal

steps and anti-national projects. This has left the nation with no other option but to stand upright and block untidily the rulers' sinister designs. Boycott is the only peaceful means under the present circumstances to thwart the agenda of one man's rule and bring the country back from the brink of lawlessness to the blessings of the rule of law. Instead of becoming pawn in the rulers' hands, it is imperative for us to forge unity in our ranks, reject the govt's unconstitutional and undemocratic agenda and untidily strive for a free, fair, impartial and transparent electoral process.

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