

# Musharraf's four tasks

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PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf is faced with four important and difficult tasks. He has struck out along a new path for Pakistan's relations with India, particularly Kashmir. Secondly, he seeks to remain steadfast in his close alliance with the US in the war against terror abroad. He has also, of late, shown determination in dealing with fundamentalists and extremists at home. Finally, he maintains that Pakistan will not tolerate, and indeed will punish severely, any individuals involved in nuclear proliferation, irrespective of status.

Each one of these goals is difficult to achieve. The position is further complicated by the fact that in their totality they are not acceptable, by and large, by the Pakistani public because they are viewed as instigated by the US and considered anti-Muslim. This in itself should not deter the president from pursuing these goals if they are in the nation's interest. It would be a true test of his leadership qualities.

Let us briefly examine each of the four goals. There is no doubt that new approaches should be explored in our relations with India, particularly with regard to Kashmir. After more than half a century of unfriendliness and open hostility, which have resulted in three expensive wars and a major skirmish at Kargil, we are no nearer achieving a settlement. Sadly, the people of Pakistan and the Kashmiris have borne the major burden of the cost of these failures.

It undoubtedly takes leadership to approach negotiations with India with an open mind on all issues. However, no leader should publicly and unilaterally 'set aside' a long standing principle relating to the enforcement of the UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir in advance and without getting something in return, apart from a general and ambiguous statement that there will be further talks. This is true, despite the fact that the UN secretary-general has said that times have changed and much has happened since the resolutions were first passed, and even Muslim countries no longer give much support to the resolution calling for a referendum.

President Musharraf could argue that if no one cares much about these resolutions, what is the harm in accepting that they be 'set aside'. But that is not dissimilar to saying that if, after fifty years, we are unable to show much progress in social advancement, we should give up trying to make progress in that field. Pakistan needs to enter into a full dialogue with India. But why this haste to show preparedness for a settlement on almost any terms? Surely it would pay to heed the words of the English statesman and man of letters, Lord Chesterfield, who said, 'Whoever is in a hurry, shows that the thing he is about to get is too big for him'.

On the second issue of continuing in close alliance with the US in the war against terror abroad, President Musharraf would appear to

have very little manoeuvrability left. Undoubtedly, it can be argued that he succumbed too soon on one telephone call from US secretary of state Colin Powell after 9/11. Then he might have held out for a better deal, but today his options are essentially closed. No country can get into bed with the sole superpower and then hope to get out without the superpower's permission, or against its dictates.

It is part of the misfortune of Pakistan that the war on terror is viewed by the Muslims in the world as a war on them. The war on terror has come to mean the war against defenceless Afghanistan and against Iraq. It has come to mean the acceptance of India's position on the question of 'cross-border terrorism'. It has come to mean that the US can strike preemptively anywhere, be it in Iran, Syria, or for that matter, even Pakistan when our utility dimin-

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ishes or ceases. This war, as currently conducted by the US, is potentially full of grave consequences for Pakistan.

On the third issue, President Musharraf's declaration of jihad against fundamentalists and extremists is similar to President Bush's call for a 'crusade'. What is surprising, however, is that this jihad was declared so soon after the MMA lent support to the president in the passing of the LFO. The MMA might not be extremist but several of their followers are. Sooner rather than later, the MMA leadership will have to support their own followers rather than Musharraf or his appointed civilian government.

In these circumstances, to whom will the president turn, apart of course from the army? The civilian government at the centre has so far not been tested. Whether it can withstand public agitation or serious dissent remains to be seen. What is clear is that the government lacks a popular base. President Musharraf will need to widen his base of support, particularly when he sheds his uniform by the end of 2004.

In Karachi and parts of Hyderabad and other towns of Sindh, he has the support of the MQM. Elsewhere, he will require the support of the PPP, or the Nawaz Muslim League, or just possibly both. The year ahead promises to be an interesting one, if for no other reason than watching how this develops.

The last of the four issues, namely dealing with individual nuclear proliferators, is not only important but highly sensitive. It is a pity that some of the naming and shaming has come from fellow Muslim countries. It has been massively played up in the foreign press, particularly in the US.

Of the seven powers which have admitted possession of nuclear weapons, Pakistan is by far the weakest and least independent. It is

also the only Muslim country with a nuclear bomb. As Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said, no other nuclear bomb has been given a religious colour, other than our 'Islamic bomb'.

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Pakistan needs to pause for breath at this stage and not hasten to complicate our own position. It is no doubt right that no individual should be allowed to trade our nuclear secrets, even more so for personal gain. But are we opening our own Pandora's box?

Until 9/11, our nuclear assets provided our ultimate defence, if not first-strike capability in offence. Since then, all our capabilities, military, political and diplomatic, have been utilized in the defence of these assets.

If we proceed with the publicity over questioning, apart from humiliating, our nuclear scientists, and putting them on trial, who will then be in control of the fallout, and where or when will it stop? Pakistan is not the only country from which individual scientists could transfer nuclear technology; and President Musharraf has also rightly referred to western corporate suppliers for profit. What happens to

them?

One Pakistani political pundit has already said that our nuclear assets have now become a liability. If we continue in the present manner, considerable support will be provided to all those opposed to our nuclear programme. Are we succeeding in doing to ourselves what our enemies have so far failed to achieve. There is clearly every reason to pause and deliberate on this issue.

The four goals touched upon above are complex in all respects. If pursued purely on our own initiative and for our own reasons, each would be difficult to achieve. As if these complexities were not enough, there is the added complication that each of these goals is also sought by the US. Merely because the US seeks the same ends does not ipso facto make them bad. But given the prevailing mood in Pakistan, and much of the Muslim world, it is almost tantamount to the same thing.

The government can well be asked how many of these initiatives are our own, and to what extent we are attempting to fulfil the US agenda. Not only should the country ask these questions, but the government itself should examine the issues in this light. This is not intended as a masochistic exercise. It will ensure a proper and objective examination of these vital issues, to use that much maligned expression, in the national interest.

No less important, such an analysis would help in the difficult task of explaining these goals to the general public. For it is they who need to be convinced, and they who need to be carried forward when policy is implemented. Only if he succeeds in this effort will President Musharraf's leadership qualities stand tested and proven. Because, as a French statesman once said, 'It is always a great mistake to command when you are not sure you will be obeyed'.