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2008 Parliamentary Election – Pakistan at the crossroads?

Throughout its brief history of 60 years, Pakistan has frequently witnessed turbulent times. The recent past is marked by many incidents that will have a lasting impact on the future of this country, founded on August 14, 1947. It seems that the year 2007 will go down in history as one of the most precarious years for Pakistan.

It started off with the rise of "Talbanization" in the north along the frontier with Afghanistan. There was a clear change of focus within various Jihadi groups, away from Kashmir or Afghanistan, and increasingly towards domestic aims, inside Pakistan. This manifested itself in torching CDs and Barber shops, and in numerous attacks on girls' schools. By March of 2007 the Islamists had made Lal Masjid right in the heart of the capital their stronghold. They openly challenged the writ of the State by getting involved in kidnapping and blackmail. These apparently bizarre acts developed into a major crisis, and finally culminated in a military assault, resulting in the loss of more than one hundred lives.

Simultaneously, Pakistan's Chief Justice (CJ), Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, had taken legal proceedings on a petition challenging the constitutionality of the president holding two offices at once. As a result, the president suspended the CJ on charges of misuse of authority and corruption. The CJ did not yield to pressure and refused to resign; his dedication caused him to be reprimanded in the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC). There was an unprecedented backlash within the community of lawyers, civil society and the media. This situation was aggravated further, when the SJC reinstated

the CJ in July, who returned to his office with great zeal, doing exactly as he saw fit to uphold the independence of the Judiciary. The media, especially a few private television channels, that had been reporting on the Lal Masjid and judicial crisis became very critical of the presidential side. This took the situation from bad to worse. In late October 2007, there were rumours that the Supreme Court was about to rule against the interests of the president staying another term in office. The president intervened by declaring a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, and dismissed the uncooperative judges. Many private TV channels were shut down, as well. That same evening, a new set of judges were sworn in under the Provisional Constitutional Order and subsequently confirmed the president's right to hold two offices at the same time, president of Pakistan and Chief of Army Staff. The state of emergency was lifted 42 days later on December 15, 2007, when the president retired from the post of Chief of Army Staff (COAS), became a civilian president and announced parliamentary elections for January 8, 2008. Throughout this period, the militancy in the troubled region of Waziristan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) had been on the rise and suicide attacks had become commonplace, particularly targeting law enforcement agencies. The military operations against terrorists and Islamic extremists had widened the rift between the various sections of society even further. In the meantime, the exiled party leaders, Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Nawaz Sharif of his own faction of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), were allowed to return to Pakistan to conduct their election campaigns. Bhutto was rumoured to have

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struck a deal with the president, who in turn issued a special ordinance to clear her of corruption allegations. On her return to Pakistan on October 18, 2007, Bhutto narrowly escaped a suicide attack. However, on December 27, 2007 she fell victim to a second assassination attempt after addressing a rally in Rawalpindi. The whole nation was shocked. For three days there were violent protests across the country, in which many lives were lost and property was damaged. The PPP wanted the elections to be held as planned to take advantage of the sympathy vote, but the government acted swiftly and postponed the elections to February 18, 2008.

This election, if held freely and fairly, will determine the future course of a shattered nation at a crossroads. The rise of militancy is threatening the very fibre of the nation, which is presently facing numerous challenges, domestic as well as international. The dwindling popularity of President Musharraf, the general perception of people that the election will be rigged and the power struggle coupled with a severe shortage of basic foods, are all having negative repercussions for the ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q). The PPP and to some extent the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are expected to profit from this situation.

JUDICIAL CRISIS

It all started with sue moto notices by the independent minded Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, opposing dubious actions of certain departments of the Government, chiefly the issues of the privatization of one of the largest public enterprises, Pakistan Steel, and of missing persons. *"He had antagonized the executive when he halted the privatization of the steel mill, and challenged the Government when he demanded that the disappeared people, especially in Baluchistan, who had allegedly been kidnapped by state agencies and put in detention for months, be released under the habeas corpus rule. He also subpoenaed and admonished the former inspector general of the Punjab police, when it was ac-*

*cused of not implementing 90 percent of SC directives."*¹

In the meantime an open letter to the Chief Justice (CJ) of Pakistan by fellow Supreme Court advocate and well known television presenter, Naeem Bokhari, published on February 16, 2007 created a controversy by levelling allegations against the CJ. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz now filed a reference against the CJ to President Musharraf, accusing the CJ of misuse of power and corruption. General Pervez Musharraf suspended the CJ, and directed the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) of Pakistan on March 09, 2007 to consider legal actions against him. It was announced that if the Chief Justice was found guilty, he would be removed from office, in accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan. Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry was summoned to Army Camp Office, and was urged to resign. He refused, however, and opposed his own suspension by the president on legal grounds.

In response to this development, there was an unprecedented reaction from the community of lawyers, which gradually grew more popular within civil society and among political activists. Many senior judges of the High Courts and Supreme Court resigned in protest, and many lawyers boycotted the courts and actively took part in peaceful rallies and protests through-out the country. Thousands of cases piled up in the courts and the entire judicial system came to a standstill. The ousted CJ started rallying the people by addressing the Bar Councils. Public approval for these rallies increased daily, with private television channels reporting extensively and voicing support. A number of international institutions supported the Lawyers' movement and the International Commission of Jurists sent a delegation to monitor the situation in Pakistan in April 2007. President Musharraf was strongly criticized for his actions to remove the CJ. Many suggested, they had been undertaken, because the President was afraid that the CJ

¹ Kamran Mohammad, in: The Daily Times, March 11, 2007, Lahore.

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would not support him for a second term in office as the president of Pakistan.

On the evening of May 12, 2007 the CJ and his delegation reached Karachi by air, but were held up at the airport for many hours and then ordered to return back to Islamabad. That same day some political parties started violent demonstrations in Karachi, where many innocent lives were lost. The law enforcement agencies looked helpless. Again, the executive was strongly criticized of across society. As a result, the government prohibited some TV channels from reporting live from the lawyers' rallies. However, the CJ was not deterred, and visited many Bar Associations throughout the country. On July 18, before the CJ arrived to address the Islamabad Bar Council, a suicide attack took another 15 innocent lives.

The CJ was finally reinstated on July 20, 2007 by the order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He had not been changed, and as expected he ordered the relevant agencies to release many missing persons. Proceedings were brought against the president, challenging his intention to hold two offices simultaneously. However, before the Supreme Court could issue its verdict, General Musharraf declared a state of emergency November 3, 2007, suspended the constitution and issued a new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO). Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry reacted promptly, convening a seven-member bench, which issued an ad interim order against this action. He also ordered the armed forces of Pakistan not to obey any illegal orders. However, it was too late and the Pakistan army entered the Supreme Court building and removed the CJ and several other judges from the premises. A total of 13 judges were suspended and the CJ and many others were put under house arrest.

LAL MASJID CRISIS

The Lal Masjid (red mosque), built in 1965 by Maulana Qari Abdullah has always been a centre for the Deobandi school of Islamic teaching. After the assassination of Qari Abdullah inside the Lal Masjid in 1998, his two sons Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana

Ghazi Abdur Rashid took over the administration of the mosque and the madrassa. In their Friday prayers' sermons, they issued calls to jihad, openly denounced President Musharraf and the occupation of Afghanistan, and voiced support for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Over the years they illegally occupied government land and expanded the madrassa by constructing a number of buildings. The complex is known as Jamia Hafsa. In early 2007, a group of militant girls even occupied the building of the Government Children's Library and converted it into an Islamic children's library. At the same time they began harassing unveiled or bareheaded women, as well as the owners of music and CD shops. Historically these clerics have maintained good relations with a number of influential people within government and political circles, and were thus able to smuggle many weapons and ammunition into the mosque. The two Maulana brothers proclaimed the right to enforce Sharia (Islamic Law) in Pakistan by coercion and blackmail.

The situation began to escalate in January 2007, when the Islamabad Police tried to prevent a consignment of ammunition on its way into the mosque. They arrested the culprits who were later not only released, but the ammunition was also permitted into the mosque by the orders of a top level minister. Afterwards law enforcement agents were kidnapped and CD shops not only in Peshawar, but also in Islamabad were burned down. In early March 2007 they kidnapped a lady named 'Auntie Shamim' and one of her relatives. They had a different faith and were held hostage for many days. In a press conference the ladies were accused of managing a brothel and were forced to confess their sins before they were released. The situation further escalated, when the students of these seminaries raided an acupuncture clinic run by Chinese nationals and kidnapped the employees, among them women. To prove their power, the supporters of the Lal Masjid clerics killed three Chinese in Peshawar. The Chinese foreign ministry called on Pakistan to *"mete out severe punishment to the*

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*criminals responsible.*² The Lal Masjid was completely under siege in the first week of July 2007, while negotiations went on with the insurgents inside. Instead of using as much restraint as the security forces, the militants set fire to the building of the Ministry of the Environment nearby. The government was left with no option but to retaliate. Gradually the fighting intensified and the older of the Maulana brothers was captured while trying to escape under a Burqa. The government negotiated the release of over 1,200 students held hostage in the mosque. Maulana Ghazi Abdul Rashid refused any other form of compromise, however. Even Maulana Fazlur Rahman, leader of Jamiat-e-Ulema-e Islam, accused Ghazi of being obstinate. Those who tried to negotiate with him included Maulana Abdul Sattar and Bilqees Edhi and some of the country's other respected Ulema, but Ghazi remained adamant. He and the militants with him fired on parents who came to the mosque to see their children. Ghazi and his group were severely isolated from the nation as a whole. No leaders of eminent madrasas in the country came to their support. The support they did receive came from the politically motivated Ulema and those Pro-Taliban elements in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) who were already in a virtual state of war with Pakistan's security forces. A final but inconclusive round of talks was held between the Lal Masjid clerics and the Interior Minister, Aftab Ahmed Sherpao, on July 10, 2007, in which the clerics demanded the release of a number of wanted Taliban, whom the agencies had in custody, and safe passage for certain militants, including foreign nationals.

In "Operation Silence" a special counter-terrorism unit entered the Lal Masjid complex in the early morning of July 11, 2007. After heavy resistance by the occupiers, the compound was taken. In this operation more than one hundred lives were lost and many were injured. The Lal Masjid tragedy had severe repercussions. Firstly, it strengthened the ranks of the Jihadi organizations, especially the Taliban, and trig-

gered a series of suicide bombings that is still ongoing. Secondly, a large segment of the population in Pakistan (wrongly) saw this as a struggle of the state versus religion. The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a conglomerate of six religious parties forming the NWFP Government and is well-represented in the National Assembly of Pakistan, declared a three-day mourning period for those killed during Operation Silence, while various Ulema blamed General Musharraf for failing to negotiate with Maulana Ghazi Abdul Rashid and the students remaining inside the mosque.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

The state of emergency had its genesis in the judicial crisis where the executive feared the independent minded and powerful chief justice who had been actively engaged in legally pursuing unconstitutional, corrupt or generally dubious acts of the state executive and the intelligence apparatus in particular. The situation came to a point of no return, when the Supreme Court initiated hearings on a petition, which challenged the constitutionality of nominating General Pervez Musharraf to run for president. Islamabad was abuzz with rumours that General Pervez Musharraf will be declared ineligible to hold two offices at once. The court gave a preliminary ruling that polling for the election for president (held on October 6, 2007) may be carried out. However, it also stated that the official confirmation of the result will be contingent upon the final ruling of the Supreme Court on the matter. Meanwhile the deadline of November 15, 2007, by which the president was to relinquish the post of COAS was approaching fast. In this context it can be said that when General Pervez Musharraf imposed the state of emergency, he was reacting to prevent any such move by the Supreme Court, rather than acting out of his own initiative. In the evening on November 3, 2007 a Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) was issued by the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, declaring a state of emergency, which included the dismissal of Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry along with 13 other justices. Another sitting justice of the Supreme Court of

² The Dawn, July 10, 2007.

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Pakistan, Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar was appointed to Chief Justice of Pakistan. Several other judges were appointed as Justices. They took the oath of office under the PCO that very evening. Simultaneously, the Chief Justices of Lahore, Peshawar and Sindh High Courts, along with several judges, were dismissed and new Chief Justices and Associate Judges were appointed to the high courts. The state of emergency also suspended civil rights and imposed restrictions on several TV news channels. The newly constituted Supreme Court later on confirmed the election of Pervez Musharraf as president of Pakistan.

There was an immediate backlash and the community of lawyers, led by the bar associations, media and members of civil society, began to protest the imposition of the PCO, but nothing could deter the president. Finally under national and international pressure, on 29th November 2007 the president stepped down from the post as Chief of Staff and passed the baton on to the new COAS General Parvez Kayani. The state of emergency was lifted after 42 days on December 15, 2007 and the constitution was restored, including the new amendments made by President Musharraf, securing certain additional powers for himself. It is quite clear that since the imposition of the state of emergency, everything has worked according to the president's wishes. He imposed emergency rule while still army chief and put the constitution on hold. The judiciary was shackled, the freedom media was restricted and all extra-constitutional powers assumed by the army chief under emergency rule were transferred to himself as president.

He abandoned his military uniform only after the post-PCO Supreme Court endorsed his re-election as the head of state in uniform by the outgoing parliament. He amended the constitution to cover all actions taken by him since November 3, 2007, before finally restoring the constitution in an amended form. All these actions remain highly controversial.

THE ASSASSINATION OF BENAZIR BHUTTO AND ITS AFTERMATH

When viewers turned on their televisions in the evening of December 27th 2007 in Pakistan, they were shocked and horrified to learn that Benazir Bhutto had been assassinated at a public rally at Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi. Educated at Oxford and Harvard, two times Prime Minister of Pakistan and charismatic leader of the largest organized political party of the country, Benazir was the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, another charismatic former Prime Minister. The PPP was and is the only large political party in Pakistan with moderate and secular tendencies that is clearly committed to tolerance and takes an anti-terrorist position both domestically and internationally. Benazir Bhutto went into self-imposed exile in 1999 to avoid corruption charges and had recently returned thanks to a USA-brokered deal with General Musharraf, under which he issued a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) aimed at nullifying the corruption charges pending against her and other persons in Pakistani and Swiss courts, in return for her support for his "Enlightened Moderation Agenda" against extremism and terrorism.

Bhutto eventually distanced herself from the alleged agreement and took a clear position against undemocratic actions of the president and the establishment, and demanded his resignation. By her own assessment on October 19, 2007 after the suicide attack on the welcoming rally for her in Karachi, where nearly 150 innocent lives were lost, Bhutto said that no fewer than four different groups wanted her dead within hours after her return. *"There was one suicide squad from the Taleban elements, one from al-Qaeda, one from Pakistani Taleban and the fourth – a group I [Benazir Bhutto] believe, from Karachi."*³

Incidentally in a letter to the president dated October 16, 2007, she explicitly accused

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www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article2696680.ece, February 07, 2008.

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high ranking officials from within the establishment, such as Punjab chief minister Perwaiz Elahi, former Sindh chief minister Arbab Ghulam Rahim, Intelligence Bureau chief Ijaz Shah and former Inter-Services Intelligence chief Hameed Gul of having plotted against her. The Taliban issued a formal denial of being involved in the assassination; there was a strong indication that it could have been the work of Jihadi groups, as they have many objectives in common. Bhutto's assassination led to a wave of violent protests all over the country, in which at least 47 people were killed and property worth millions of dollars was destroyed. The violence was particularly severe in the province of Sindh, a PPP stronghold. The PPP recovered quickly from this immense loss and on the third day after the assassination, the leadership of the PPP announced the name of Benazir Bhutto's 19 year old son Bilawal as the new Chairman and Bhutto's spouse Asif Ali Zardari as Co-Chairman.⁴ The PPP wanted elections as soon as possible in order to take advantage of what could be a big sympathy vote. If the election had gone ahead as planned in January, the PPP would have probably emerged with a sweeping majority. However, on January 02, 2008 the Chief Election Commissioner announced the postponement of the elections, stating that violent protests had directly affected the organisation of the poll and that, after consulting its staff around the country, the election commission had decided the situation was "not conducive" to holding the election on time. The new date for election day was set for February 18, 2008.

2008 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The parliament of Pakistan has two Houses: the National Assembly and the Senate. The

⁴ Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, born September 21, 1988 attended Froebels International School in Islamabad, Pakistan. Later he attended Rashid School for Boys in Dubai, where he was Vice President of the student council. Currently he studies history at Christ Church, the same Oxford University College that his grandfather attended. His mother also was a graduate of the Oxford University.

National Assembly consists of 342 Seats including 60 seats reserved for Women and 10 Seats reserved for Non-Muslims. The Senate consists of 100 Members including 17 Seats reserved for Women and 17 Seats reserved for Technocrats and Ulema. The members of the National Assembly are elected for a term of five years whereas the members of the Senate are elected for a term of six years with alternating elections every three years. Members of the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies are elected in a direct election by secret ballot in a constituency on a first-past-the-post system. The candidate who receives the highest number of votes in a constituency, is declared as elected as a Member of the National or a Provincial Assembly.⁵ Although the total number of political parties registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan is 59, out of these only 5 parties can be considered as major actors, based on the results of the last parliamentary elections. These major political parties are the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q), Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) which includes the influential Jamiat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM).

The **PPP** is a centre-left political party and was founded in 1967 by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a former prime minister of Pakistan and the father of the recently assassinated Benazir Bhutto. The PPP was the ruling party from 1972-1977, 1989-1990, and 1993-1996. Although a Federalist Party with roots in all four provinces, Northern Area & Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the PPP is particularly strong in rural Sindh, southern Punjab and the areas with a dominance of minorities. In the 2002 general election, the PPP won 25% of the votes.

PML-N: The Pakistan Muslim League was founded in 1962, as a successor to the previously disbanded Muslim League. The 'N'

⁵ www.elections.com.pk/partylist.php

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was added in 1993, and stands for its leader, Nawaz Sharif. His party was in power in 1999 when Chief of Army Staff and current president of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf removed him from office and sent him into exile. Primary support for the PML-N comes from the urban centres of central Punjab, some constituencies in Southern Punjab and Hindko speaking areas of Eastern NWFP. In the 2002 general election, the PML-N won 9.4% of the votes.

The **PML-Q** was formed as a breakaway faction of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) by Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain (its present head) in 2001. It enjoyed the full support of President Musharraf as the so called "King's Party". It has its vote bank in the non-urban centres of Punjab. In the last legislative elections of October 20, 2002 PML-Q won 25.7% of the votes.

The **MMA** was formed by the two large and four small religious parties before the elections in 2002 in order to give them a stronger representation both at the National Assembly and Provincial assemblies of NWFP and Baluchistan. Banking on failures of the previous governments, attacking the government's war against terror on a religious platform and conducting an aggressive ethnically tainted election campaign, this conglomerate managed to form a government in NWFP for the first time, joined the ruling coalition in Baluchistan and became a strong opposition party in the National Assembly. Due to consistent policies and well organized cadres of the Jamiat-e-Islami, its leader Qazi Hussain Ahmad was elected president of the MMA. Maulana Fazlur Rehman was elected as General Secretary. He leads the main section of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), the largest component party within the religious alliance MMA. It has its roots in pre-partition Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam of India and bases its teaching, philosophy and ideology on the Deobandi creed of Sunni Islam. The party's main vote bank is located in the Pashto speaking areas of western NWFP and northern Baluchistan. It is regarded as being the ideological godfather of the Taliban movement, as almost all the Taliban subscribe to the Deobandi creed and a substantial ma-

majority of Taliban has been educated /indoctrinated at religious seminaries run by various leaders of MMA. In the 2002 general election, the MMA won 11.3% of the votes.

MQM: The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (Mohajir People's Movement) was established by Altaf Hussain in Karachi in 1984. It politically represented the Urdu speaking population (Mohajirs) which had migrated to Pakistan at the time of partition. It was supported by the Military Regime of Zia-ul-Haq as a counter-weight against the PPP in Karachi. On July 26, 1997, MQM officially removed the term Muhajir from its name, and replaced it with Muttahida (United). As a large number of the Urdu speaking population lives in Karachi and some parts of Hyderabad, the party is extremely strong in those areas. Altaf Hussain lives in exile in the UK, as he is wanted in numerous cases pertaining to the law and order situation in Karachi previously. In the 2002 general election, the MQM won 3.1% of the votes, but was chiefly successful in the commercial and industrial parts of Karachi.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

In the upcoming elections the PPP, currently riding a wave of sympathy throughout the country, is expected to achieve very good results in Sindh and Southern Punjab. The death of Benazir Bhutto can add sympathy votes to the PPP vote bank, which however, might be reduced by the emergence of Asif Ali Zardari, nick-named Mr. 10%, for his corrupt practices as party leader while Benazir Bhutto was prime minister. During its tenure of 5 years, the ruling PML-Q conducted substantial development work in its constituencies. In the upcoming elections the PML-Q intends to succeed by fielding strong individual candidates (the winning horses), most of them having a track record of winning in previous elections. On the negative side the party is perceived as the "King's Party" due to its strong ties with and blessings of President Musharraf and the ruling military-bureaucratic establishment. The PML-N's main strength is the image of being the "true opposition" to the existing ruling elite whereas both PPP and PML-Q are

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perceived as being in some kind of deal or understanding within the present set-up. Whether it can transfer that perception into a substantial number of votes, still needs to be seen. The PML-N suffers from a lack of strong party structures at the grass roots level, as well as from the exclusion of its key leaders, namely Mian Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif from the Parliamentary Election.

Due to massive defections of its former leadership to PML-Q and other parties, the leaders were not able to maintain a solid presence of the party in the political landscape of the country. The JUI-F was the major component of the ruling alliance in the province of NWFP and had nominated the Chief Minister of the province. The JUI-F was also part of the ruling alliance in the province of Baluchistan. The parties' success in the 1992 election was a direct result of the anti-American stance of the party and its strong emphasis on the enforcement of conservative religious teachings in those regions of the country where the religious ethos is particularly strong. This time the party will not again be able to translate these sentiments into votes in the same numbers as previously, as it has not managed to keep its economic election promises particularly, and has had a tendency to mutate from an opposition party into an establishment party. The MQM enjoys strong influence and control of electoral politics in the city of Karachi and some parts of Hyderabad. It is known to use a wide spectrum of measures to further its interest, including terrorist acts, corruption and various forms of intimidation. Presently there is no factor which can challenge the massive dominance of the MQM in the areas mentioned above. It is therefore expected to retain its hold on the traditional areas in the upcoming elections.

pected to win seats in their traditional strongholds. This will allow the present ruling elite and the military to continue playing their role as the final arbiter of electoral politics in Pakistan. The real challenges to Pakistan, like keeping the Taliban at bay, eliminating poverty, empowering civil society and establishing a participatory democratic dispensation may remain un-resolved for some time to come. Free, fair and impartial elections are of utter importance, as they would reveal the wishes of the people, be it enlightened moderation in an inclusive spirit of tolerance or Talibanization and religious extremism as the essence of the national psyche.⁶

Recent events, including withdrawal of military officers from civilian posts by the COAS and a declaration of intent for non-involvement by the armed forces in civilian state affairs are a welcome gesture. Many hope that this chance for political reform in Pakistan is not wasted, as has happened so many times before, and that the country can take some steps forward for the benefit of the nation.



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CONCLUDING REMARKS

Keeping the above analysis of the current political situation in mind, it can be concluded that most likely none of the parties participating in the elections will win an absolute majority. All main parties are ex-

⁶ The catch phrase "enlightened moderation" was used the first time by Pervez Musharraf during the Islamic summit conference in Putrajaya, Malaysia in October 2003.