



IN A SELF-DESTRUCT MODE

THE turning back of missile-carrying Indian naval ships from the northern Arabian Sea signals the end of turbulence. In the past few months, we seem to have over-reacted to minor incidents. But if, and when, the real crisis dawns, are we adequately prepared for that?

Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf insists that he has taken enough measures to curb terrorism. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of difference in what he says and what he does. His government banned five dreaded terrorist organisations in January this year. But we have read reports in Pakistan's Urdu press about how activists of one of the five, Lashker-e-Jhangvi, were instrumental in mobilising the turnout during his referendum. And representatives of the other two, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, were present at a meeting of the United Jihad Council, the federation of militant groups in Pakistan, in March. Also, Musharraf has chosen to keep mum about the five terrorist organisations that he has not formally banned — the Harkat-al-Jihadi Islami, Tehrik-e-Mujahideen, Al Badr, Tehrik-e-Jihad and Hizbul Mujahideen. Blessed with benign neglect from the General, these groups are growing stronger every month.

Currently, there are about 2,00,000 armed militants in Pakistan. They are supported by two million students and recent graduates of religious seminaries with no exposure to education other than the orthodox version of Islam. Pakistan's GDP growth rate has declined from 6% in the 1980s to 2.6% in 2000-01 and 3.5% in 2001-02. Even this growth in 2001-02 is artificial as it is attributed to expansion of public expenditure and creation of plant capacity, not productivity. With a population growth rate of 2-2.5%, the per capita increase in income is around 1%. In comparison, poverty is growing by 5% per year. Thanks to the growing unemployment, a larger amount of cannon fodder of unemployed youth is being made available to religious extremist groups.

Why cannot the president of Pakistan control these extremists, especially since he also heads the army? Or doesn't he want to? The religious extremists have sympathisers in the Pakistan army. If Musharraf has to maintain the unity of command, he must drive consensus among corps commanders. This results in giving a free run to the US security forces and FBI agents to chase Al Qaeda to please pro-Western officers, and being flexible to the *jihadi* groups to satisfy the pro-extremist segments of the Pakistan army. With this double-edged strategy, Musharraf remains in power, but

the Pakistani state deteriorates day by day.

The game played by Musharraf is short-sighted. With the neglect of the law and order situation and the economy, he is, in fact, fast losing his popularity. Most of the political parties are clamouring for his resignation. And the growing unpopularity of the chief is, in turn, leading to a credibility problem for the army. So it may not be surprising if the corps commanders remove the General by next year. Every single Pakistani head of the government from Iskander Mirza in the late 1950s to Nawaz Sharief in the late 1990s, has been removed by his or her beneficiary. The present leader cannot take comfort from the fact that his corps commanders are loyal to him. They are more loyal to the army as an institution.

With an imminent crisis of leadership in the Pakistani army and conflict between pro-West and pro-extremist officers, the unity of command will be under strain. In the meantime, the militants will increase in numbers and get better organised. The unity of provinces is already under stress due to a water dispute between Punjab and Sindh. The latter has accused the former of cutting water supply to its area by 30% each year for the last three years.

Clearly then, Pakistan is reeling under crisis on all fronts. And as it reaches boiling point around the middle of this decade, Pakistan will have a great temptation to launch a war against India. It is in that war, when nothing is at stake, that the country will resort to nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, there will be terrorist attacks once every few months. They will not be so frequent as to justify a conventional warfare from India. But they will be frequent enough to bleed India.

How should India respond? First of all, we need a long-term strategy, not a knee-jerk reaction every time there is a terrorist attack. Secondly, we need to win the hearts of the Kashmiri people by launching various initiatives for reconciliation and reconstruction and not depending on the Americans to declare the line of control as the border. Third, we need to understand Pakistan's internal developments rather than being obsessed with Kashmir. Finally, we need to consolidate our social and communal fabric and expand the economy. Pakistan's likely collapse proves that dependence on religious orthodoxy, rather than economic productivity, impairs the state.

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PAKISTAN'S CRISIS IS SET TO GET WORSE TILL AROUND THE MIDDLE OF THIS DECADE, WHEN IT WILL DRAG INDIA INTO A WAR