



Pakistan in 2005: Implications for India and Indo-Pak Dialogue

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From 2004 to 2005

2004 witnessed Pakistan managing some of its problems, facing some new ones while failing to resolve others. Internally, the two political coalitions, ruling and the opposition, were under pressure to perform; the military establishment's efforts for national political reconciliation failed. Sectarian cleavages increased to include a new set of problems especially in Gilgit and Quetta, while the problems posed by militants continued, especially in the NWFP and Balochistan. There was a rapprochement with India; frustrating for Pakistan, as it could not get any major concessions either on Kashmir or other issues.

Would there be a turnaround in 2005? Will this year be better than the last one? Would Waziristan return to normalcy? Would the violence in Balochistan turn into a 'fifth war' as a commentator in Pakistan noted? Would the sectarian violence and jihad come under control? What would be Musharraf's India policy?

Pakistan in 2005: A Forecast

Internal Politics and Democracy

Democracy as democrats understand it would remain a distant dream in 2005 and internal politics would remain muddy and opportunistic creating political chaos. Neither the political parties nor the silent majority would make efforts to restore it. What the MMA and the ARD would aim for is creating political instability to gain more concessions from the establishment. The MMA is upset with General Musharraf backtracking from his promise to shed his uniform which had been promised to them for agreeing to the seventeenth amendment.

What would the MMA do? Obviously, it would aim at forming a coalition with the ARD to agitate against General Musharraf continuing in uniform. This strategy has many problems. The ARD is not sure of the MMA's commitment, after it compromised with the military establishment in 2003. Besides, what the ARD wants is not merely that Musharraf gives up his uniform, but also his post as President, and that he organizes elections as soon as possible under an independent election commission. The MMA is not ready for another election, at least this year. An election organized by an independent election commission, with full participation from the PML (N) and the PPP, would greatly affect the fortunes of the MMA.

Second, the MMA is also aware of its growing internal contradictions, especially between the Jamaat-e-Islami and the JUI, and between its leaders. The Jamaat-e-Islami, led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed, would prefer a hardline approach vis-à-vis the military establishment, especially General Musharraf. The JUI, on the other hand, would prefer a softer approach, as the threat of dismissing the MMA governments in Balochistan and the NWFP, would alter its fortunes. The Qazi, though belonging to the NWFP, does not enjoy much support in these two provinces, and his strength comes from Punjab and Sindh. Besides these institutional interests of the MMA, the differences between its leaders are growing and would be crucial in 2005. Maulana Samiul Haq, is unhappy with getting a raw deal in the NWFP ministry formation, and has already hinted about leaving the MMA.

Third, how much popular support would the MMA be able to gain in 2005? Thanks to its deal with Musharraf and subsequent inactivity in 2004, its supporters are disillusioned. This could be seen from

the poor response it received in January for its rallies against General Musharraf. Given these contradictions, the MMA may look for other issues to unite it and revive its support base. It may pick on Pakistan's cooperation with the US; anti-American sentiments remain a major rallying point in Pakistan and for the MMA. It may wait for an incident, either inside Pakistan or the Pak-Afghan border involving the US, and exploit this to initiate a larger movement against Musharraf. Or, perhaps, it may use Musharraf's failure to wrest any major concession from India to launch an agitation. This option is likely to yield major dividends for the MMA.

What would the ARD do? Unfortunately, it would remain opportunistic and politically unprincipled. Its main component, the PPP is negotiating with the military establishment. There are numerous reports about meetings between the establishment and Benazir Bhutto; the release of her husband, Asif Zardari is a part of this process. General Musharraf is well aware that the MMA in 2005 would prepare for a major showdown and the coalition he has organized - the PML (Q) -- would neither be able handle it nor be acceptable to anyone except himself. He is trying

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to reach a deal with the secular and democratic forces, as part of his 'national reconciliation,' aiming to belittle the MMA struggle. However, he would not agree to either an immediate election under a n

independent commission or giving up his uniform, two conditions that the PPP are insisting upon. Should it cease these negotiations with the establishment and focus on its own agenda or continue negotiating for more concessions would be the primary question the PPP would be wrestling with in 2005, without deciding on either of these two options.

The PML (N) is also in a dilemma. There are reports that Shabaz Sharif is in touch with the establishment and one option is to get him back to Pakistan and make him leader of a unified PML. A shrewd leader and smarter than his brother Nawaz, will Shabaz take the bait? Would either Nawaz Sharif or Benazir Bhutto return? Nawaz would not be welcome; hence would not risk. Benazir would not return on her own and face Musharraf; perhaps if invited by the establishment after another unprincipled deal. Also unlikely.

Finally what would be the game plan of the PML (Q), the opportunistic amalgam collected by the establishment? Naturally, it is upset with Musharraf's plan for national reconciliation, as it would be its first victim. Without the military's support, it can neither survive in the present set up nor face the elections. It cannot, however, pursue an independent path, and must support the one decided upon by the establishment.

How popular would be General Musharraf? The silent majority may or may not support General Musharraf, but it may not oppose him or the establishment. At least, not this year. Unfortunately, there is no political alternative for them, around which they could rally. None of the political parties instill confidence as yet. General Musharraf would therefore continue to enjoy their support by default in 2005, as was the case with Ayub Khan and later Zia-ul-Haq. They enjoyed an element of popular support in the beginning; only to lose it completely later. Has this phase started for General Musharraf? Perhaps not yet, as could be seen from the popular reaction to his decision to continue in uniform. His control over the military would continue, with occasional planted stories on brewing divide from within. So would be the stories about the fundamentalist elements within the military taking over it; but would remain professional, though would increasingly become political.

Tribal Violence in Balochistan and Waziristan

Besides politics, internal peace would be a crucial issue. With conditions in Afghanistan not stabilizing and the tribal jirgas failing to make any progress with the foreign militants, Waziristan would continue to simmer in 2005. There was an agreement with one group, led by Baitullah Meshud. It was reported that crores were spent to bribe him. Abdulla Meshud is yet to agree and is

unlikely to do so. If government or independent analysts believe that these tribes would remain bound by such agreements, they are mistaken. Last year, there was an agreement with Nek Mohammad that was broken, leading subsequently to his killing. Any student of tribal history in the Frontier province from the British period would understand the duplicity of these tribals; though their brutal way of life has been romanticized, especially by western scholars.

The establishment, like all the militaries before them -Sikhs and the British believe they would ultimately be able to control the tribes. But, history would only repeat itself. There would be no quick solutions, as their social, economic and political problems and grievances are complex and yet to be addressed. (See Suba Chandran, "War in Waziristan: Implications for Pakistan and India," Issue Brief 23, June 2004 and Suba Chandran, "Military Operations in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications," Issue Brief 17, January 2004) The lack of immediate success would lead the government to impose greater censorship by not allowing people outside the tribal region to know what is happening inside. This would only give the establishment more freedom to make further mistakes, as there would be no critical independent inputs for its policies.

If 2004 was the year of the Waziri tribes, 2005 would be the year of Balochi and Brahui tribes, unless the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan comes out with radical proposals that are acceptable to the establishment and the Sardars of Bugti, Marri and Mengal tribes. Nawab Akbar Bugti and Nawab Khari Bux Marri have already announced that armed struggle is the only way out. If the threat issued by Musharraf to the tribal leaders ("...this time you will not know what hit you") is taken as the establishment's policy, then one could expect more bomb blasts, attacks on Sui gas fields and pipelines and its officials in 2005. This may not be organized, as doomsday scenarios suggest, by the much hyped Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), but would remain random and sporadic. In 2005, there would neither be peace nor stability in Balochistan. The government would obviously blame foreign elements, especially India's RAW.

Sectarian Violence and Jihadi Threat

The root causes of sectarian violence and threats

from jihad are yet to be addressed (See Suba Chandran, "Madrassas in Pakistan," Issue Brief 11, September 2003 and Suba Chandran, "Sectarian Violence in Pakistan," Issue Brief 09, August 2003), and would continue in their traditional strongholds. The establishment seems to believe that it would be able to differentiate between the jihadi groups fighting in Kashmir and sectarian and jihadi groups inside Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to combat the latter without controlling the former.

Pakistan's India Policy

What would be General Musharraf's policies vis-à-vis India in 2005?

The pressure is already building on him for failing to get any major concessions from India, either on Kashmir or on other issues. Internal political instability, which is increasing due to his bizarre dealings, would only increase his vulnerability vis-à-vis India. He may be forced to take measures which would be seen as 'doing something', especially on Kashmir.

When 2004 ended, the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad was deadlocked; there was no agreement on gas pipelines; and Baglihar dam was seen as a potential threat. Importantly, despite his willingness to go beyond stated positions (emphasis on UN resolutions, for example) Musharraf has not got any concessions from India. His only achievement has been India's acceptance to start the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. India's decision has certainly been made when Musharraf had lost hopes and was under tremendous pressure.

What are his options? If India proceeds further and signs a deal on gas pipelines, it may strengthen his position. If India, after signing the bus deal, backtracks at a later stage and does not reach an agreement on pipelines, it would give the impression inside Pakistan that India is not serious, hence no further concessions be made. Pressure

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would build further to revert to the old policy with intensified militant attacks in J&K and elsewhere in India. The level of infiltration may be low, but the intensity of the attacks may increase, in terms of the targets chosen.

One factor that may either stop this madness or increase Pakistan's hostility would be the forthcoming Indo-Pak cricket matches. If the Indian state would permit more Pakistani fans to attend the matches, and if the Indian nation could win their hearts like the Pakistanis did when the Indian team toured Pakistan, it may play a crucial role in keeping the hardliners under control in 2005. On the contrary, if the saffron brigade goes berserk, with the Indian state refusing to grant permission for the Pakistani fans or a minor communal riot takes place during the matches - any of these events or a combination of them would further polarize the two nations, helping the respective establishments to continue their hostility.



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