Six years later

Who has gained from the past six years of conflict? We know who has lost: the Nepali people

FTER the savage slaughter in Mangalsen, it has become clear that the Maoists are more interested in carnage than in political change. Violence has now become an end in itself. The attack on the administration came without warning, and by their dastardly act the Maoists have extended an open invitation to outside forces to intervene in our internal affairs. Comrade Prachanda's wish in an interview in 1998 that he looked forward to fighting Indian forces on Nepali territory does not look insane anymore. Is there a method in the Maoists' madness?

Prachanda last week issued a bombastic press release listing the supposed achievements of his so-called People's War as it entered its seventh year. But in nearly 2,500 words, there is not a single argument that would in any way justify the loss of over 3,000 Nepali lives. What did they die for?

What the insurgency has succeeded in is undermining the limited gains of the People's Movement of 1990. Power seems to be once again shifting away from the people, and it's not just because of the say that the Royal Nepal Army has acquired in matters of the state after the declaration of an emergency in

There have always been three principal players in Nepali politics. The primacy of the military-administrative elite dates back to the days of unification. The palace represents this traditional elite, and it has kept its hold for over two centuries. Between the Shahs and their Rana cousins, the extended Gorkha family has maintained its power.

The 1815 Sugauli Treaty reduced the rulers of Kathmandu to being proxies of the British Empire in Delhi, introducing a second player in Nepal's power centres. When Jang Bahadur usurped power after the Kot and Bhandarkhal Massacres of 1846, he accentuated the authority of the empire next door in order to establish his own legitimacy. The third player for power in Nepal is the Nepali people themselves, and they didn't really count until

The restoration of the Shah dynasty to the throne at Hanuman Dhoka Palace on 18

the people and the palace had come together for the first time to chart a common destiny. However, it also legitimised the role of India The New Delhi Compromise was rammed down the throat of Nepali Congress leaders, and proved that the strategists of independent India were no different from the managers of the Honourable East India Company when it came to ways of dealing with the buffer state in the Himalaya.

The royal coup of 15 December, 1960 attempted to shift power from people to the palace, but Delhi adroitly exploited the rift between these two players. India played the palace and the Nepali Congress against each other for its own advantage and maintained its stranglehold over strategic affairs in Kathmandu. When BP Koirala chose to return from exile to try and restore democracy, India lost the card that it had used successfully for behind-the-scenes bargaining with the king. New Delhi's game of arm-twisting Nepal came out into the open and culminated in the eighteen month long economic blockade (officially called the "trade and transit impasse" in India) imposed by Rajiv Gandhi in 1988. There is little doubt that relentless pressure from New Delhi was instrumental in making Narayanhiti bow before the public clamour for multi-party

India's foreign policy pundits in South Block discovered that the shift of power from palace to the people in Kathmandu did not turn out to be of any advantage to them. In fact, it was even more cumbersome to deal with a plethora of leaders working under the pressure of facing an electorate. Hush-hush negotiations with the likes of latter-day Gooroo Gujraj Misser and Chunder Seeker Opedeea had been a lot easier

The permutations of the chronic power play at Singha Darbar were unsatisfactory no matter how the chips fell. The uncertainty of hung parliaments and revolving-door governments in the mid-1990s must have made the strategic manipulators long for the obstinate but reliable players of the Panchayat years.

Enter the Maoists with their three sets of 40 demands, the first set of nine completely devoted to matters concerning "nationalism" Is it merely accidental that it is precisely this "nationalism" that has suffered the most over



The brunt of it...

last six years? Was undermining it the hidden purpose of all the vocal name-calling of our southern neighbours? Had the fire of patriotism stoked during the Hrithik Roshan riots reached its logical conclusion. Comrade Prachanda may have been declared the dictator of the Confederation of Communist and Maoist Political Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA).

The very concept of popular rule is anathema to communists, so it isn't surprising that the Maoists failed even to mention the word "democracy" in their list of demands in 1996. In that sense, it is refreshing to read in Comrade Prachanda's recent statement that he is concerned about the weakening of democratic forces in the country. There is some merit in his judgement that unless civilian control over defence forces of the

country is unequivocally established, democratic rule by a popularly elected government can never be guaranteed. But the irony is that the longer the Maoist war lasts, the more influence the armed forces would have over the civilian government.

If a child born on 13 February, 1996 were to ask Comrade Prachanda what he did to nationalism and democracy in this country, he would probably read from his jargon-filled statement and deliver yet another lengthy apologia deriding a perceived palace-India nexus. But the bottom line is that the Maoist insurgency has weakened people power, and enhanced the influence of the palace and Big Brother down south.

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SRI LANKA

Any settlement in sight?

ZAGLUL A. CHOWDHURY

INALLY, the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil militants fighting for a separate homeland in the north have signed a landmark cease-fire agreement that has markedly brightened the prospects of a negotiated settlement of the long civil war that has so far claimed more than 60,00 lives on both sides. Two contending sides did reach truce before as well but it is for the first time that they signed an accord to halt hostilities brokered by the international community and vowed to honour it.

Never before, the ceasefire took a formal shape and raised the kind of expectations that the just-concluded accord has done. The government forces and the Tamil militants have begun observing the first internationally monitored truce as the country for the first time in the 18-year civil war sees a concerted move

towards ending the bloody conflict The development follows several positive measures that have helped creating a conducive environment for a dialogue to end the problem although the stage for talks is yet to be finalised since the matter is still quite contentious is nature. The scenario has changed for betterment after a new government came to power following the December 5 parliamentary elections. Among other steps, the government expressed its readiness to lift a ban on

the Tigers as the militants are known. Prime Minister Ranil Wickramsinghe, in a policy-making statement in the parliament recently, gave strong hints that the government is going to withdraw the ban. This has been a major development in the island state where the Tamil militants demanding a sepa-

rate state for them is engaged in a bloody insurgency causing havoc for the country. They entered into a truce with the new government sometime ago and also agreed to extend and honour the ceasefire with all seriousness. The rebels have shown readiness for talks with the government but insisted that the ban on their organisation would help create a congenial ground for a dialogue to resolve the thorny issue.

Indeed, all these augured well for a settlement of the problem through peaceful means despite the fact that the problem is very complex and hard task awaits for two sides even if sincere efforts are made for s solution of the civil war. The formalisation of the truce mainly mediated by the Norwegian government in Colombo the other day is seen as a step in right direction by the two sides. The installation of new government in the

island state has brightened the prospects of a resolution of the long-drawn civil war for which the small but otherwise lovely country is paying heavily. Two sides reached truces more than once earlier but never worked satisfactorily and consequently ceasefire collapsed leading to revival of hostilities. All these were occasional and half-hearted efforts towards peace. But the ambience changed after the Ranil Wickramsinghe government took over as it pledged before the polls that all avenues would be explored for a resolution of the civil war through dialogue. The triumph of his party in the elections is seen as a mandate by the electorate to intensify efforts to end the war that was bleeding to the country to white.

A three-member Norwegian delegation some time ago visited the country and held talks with both sides so that peace is given a

stroke, nine State Governments. This was

chance through dialogue. Oslo is seeking to broker a settlement by arranging talks between two sides although its efforts often ran into difficulties. The government side was keen for dialogue but the militants were luke-

Consequently, the mission by Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim could make no headway although the attempts were not abandoned. The victory of the opposition in the parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka has improved the climate as the new government is more favourably disposed to the peace process than the previous Peoples Alliance (PA) government of president Chandrika Kumaratunga. True, the president remains in the helm as per the constitution despite the loss of her party in the parliamentary elections as Sri Lanka has a presidential form of democracy which enables the head of state to remain in the position till the term is completed regardless of the outcome of the parliamentary polls But the government is formed by the party or group enjoying majority in the parliament and it also runs the country while powerful president remains a big factor.

Here, the opposition alliance led by Ranil Wickramsinghe's United Nationlaist Party (UNP) has sought president's support in its efforts to end the bloodshed through talks.

However, the president said she was not given adequate time to consider the truce deal although she favours dialogue. Now that the UNP-led alliance is in power, it is only expected that the Norwegian-mediated effort would receive a boost and it is in that line that a high-power delegation from that country had talks on the issue with various groups in Sri Lanka.Led by deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen, the team included special envoy

The outcome of the discussions and continuing endeavour by the Norwegian team resulted in the formalisation of the truce accord. The rebels have been maintaining an unilateral truce since the X'mas and the government also positively reciprocated. But the deal in Colombo is the first officially recognised formal truce accord.

The US and Commonwealth along with several other countries have welcomed the ceasefire accord. Observers from England, Norway. Sweden and other countries are arriving to monitor the truce which requires both sides to observe its strictly and sincerely like the militants can not resort to suicde attacks in any installation or government forces. Likewise, the troops have been asked to honour the deal with all seriousness.

Despite complexities, the omens for peace this time appear more genuine. It is expected that the government and the militants will fully utilise this opportunity for peace while the road to a settlement of the complex civil war issue is strewn with many impediments. Still, the formalisation of the truce offers a great opportunity to permanently end the hostilities and this needs to be exploited fully.

However, the posture taken by President Chandrika Kumaratunga that she may scrap the truce if found "unfavourable or unacceptable" may gueer the pitch of the conducive atmosphere. It remains to be seen how the prime minister deals the matter with the presi-

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INDIA

After the polls

HERE is no originality about the question but, nonetheless, it is all-important what will be the impact of the Assembly poll outcome on the Central Government national politics and the polity? In attempting an answer, various factors constitutional political and common sense-related have to be kept in mind. The issue is not that simple while the constitutional dispensation is federal, political parties are unitary, both as regards their structure and functioning. One point could be made straightaway the severe beating received by the BJP, with the prospect of ouster from power in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttaranchal, is a major blow to its credibility and that of the coalition headed by it at the Centre. However, it does not necessarily pose a threat to the survival of the Union Government. The Congress(I), the main Opposition at the Centre, has the satisfaction of re-emerging in Punjab and Uttaranchal, but it remains a rank outsider in U.P., which, in the final analysis, holds the key to power at the Centre.

There is no ambiguity about the strictly constitutional position the changes in the political complexion of the State Governments do not affect the Centre. Likewise, any upset at the Centre does not have a ripple-effect in the States. That is mandated by the Constitution, there being clear demarcation in the powers and roles of the Centre and the States. Even when we used to have, for a brief while, simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, there were instances of the electorate returning one party at the Centre, another in a State.

That the constitutional norms were not always followed in practice is a different matter. For instance, in 1977, when the Congress(I) was ousted from power at the Centre, for the first time, the new rulers, the Janata Party, lost no time in dismissing, in one done on the specious plea that the rout of the Congress(I) at the Centre had called into question its legitimacy even in the States. Three years later, when the Congress(I) returned to power at the Centre, the compliment was returned in kind with the removal of an equal number of State Governments on an identical plea. Also, there were many instances of the Centre acting arbitrarily in removing the Governments in the States. As a matter of fact, the majority of the cases where the Centre took over the administration of the States in the last five decades or so were violative of the letter and spirit of the Constitution. In strict constitutional terms, the Central Government's legitimacy is not diminished because of the ascendancy to power of the Opposition parties in the States. The Vajpayee Government, thus, does not

face any threat to its survival because of the reduced popular support to the BJP, or any other constituent of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Apart from the constitutional position, there are the considerations of realpolitik. The 22 groups, big and small, have a shared vested interest and are held together by the glue of power. It is not a question of numbers, not even of

legitimacy in the constitutional sense. A setback to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh or its partner, the Akali Dal, in Punjab, could not but cause a dent in the credibility of the NDA, its Government at the Centre and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee. He obviously sought to pre-empt his opponents when he asked the people not to treat the Assembly poll as a referendum on the NDA regime's performance. Mr. Vajpayee and the NDA are certain to be subjected to heavy attacks because of the poor showing in the States. The ruling combine will, thus, be on the defensive at a time when the Government's performance

leaves much to be desired, especially in the

economic field. George Fernandes will continue to be vulnerable to the assaults of the Opposition, which is not reconciled to his reinduction as Defence Minister. The poll outcome will, thus, compound the Government's difficulties.

What will it mean to the polity? Advance toward fragmentation. In Uttar Pradesh the political campaign from beginning to end focussed on divisions of caste, sub-castes and religion. This process received a fillip from the emergence of groups and parties seeking to thrive on narrow sectional appeals. The Samajwadi Party, for instance, leaned heavily on backward classes and the minorities, the BSP on Dalits. Not to be left behind, the Chief Minister, Rainath Singh, took up the cause of the "most backward" sections, with a view to cutting into the support base of the S.P. and its supremo, Mulayam Singh Yadav. Whatever the election outcome, society and the polity stands badly fragmented. No one now talks of national integration a worthy objective which once received the close attention of the Government and the people alike. The country's biggest State is moving inexorably towards social and political disintegration. And it may not be the only one. The political players responsible for it celebrate their victory.

It is nobody's case that the national parties have some special rights and there is no place for regional groups. Both have to co-exist, there being the need for a correct balance (of course, not easy to define) between them. But just as over-centralisation is not good for the country's political health, an undue tilt towards regional groupings is not a happy development. In Punjab, the decline of the powerful regional force, the Akali Dal, is accompanied by the ascendancy of a national party, the Congress(I), but in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress(I) has been shown to possess a nominal appeal and the BJP suffered a setback, while the regional groups remain a

reckonable factor. One only hopes that the Uttar Pradesh trends do not turn out to be contagious. The campaign rhetoric, expectedly shrill

may pose difficulties in the way of the nascent

moves for a broad alliance of non-BJP forces.

Some time back, the meetings, at the social level, between two adversaries, Sonia Gandhi and Mulayam Singh Yadav, gave rise to hopes of a patch-up, with the promise of the reversal of the hard attitudes that had prevented the formation of a non-BJP Government in 1999. As was known, the bid for an alternative in 1999 collapsed because of Mr. Yadav's refusal to cast his party's lot with the Congress(I). As a result, the relationship between the two parties and their leaders was badly damaged and a deep sense of hurt was evident in both the camps. The hope that the old controversy may have been settled was dashed during the election campaign Ms. Gandhi talked of Mr. Yadav's "betrayal" and he, in turn, charged her with seeking to monopolise power, on the strength of support from others. The old wounds were, thus, reopened. Under the compulsion of the post-poll arithmetic and to keep the BJP out of power those who had been working for a non-BJP front at the Centre are certain to get active now with an eye, immediately on Lucknow and later on New Delhi. It may not be an easy job because of a basic contradiction between the Congress(I) and the S.P. The Congress(I) cannot hope to re-emerge as an all-India force, unless it captures Uttar Pradesh. And this State happens to be the stronghold of Mr. Yadav. The Uttar Pradesh election has served to emphasise this point. The repercussions of the Assembly results are bound to be farreaching indeed.

PAKISTAN

The next phase

M. B. NAQVI writes from Karachi

HE next phase in Pakistan politics has just begun and all concerned appear to believe that Indian armed forces massed on the borders do not presage the imminence of a war. The attention has therefore shifted to other matters of Pakistan politics that had remained virtually unattended for so many months due to development in Kashmir and the tensions in Indo-Pakistan relations. Now the domestic political situation is beginning to come centre-stage

Let's see the major factors that are going to influence the outcome. The first one is the regime's political plans for survival in power. It is a military regime and, as has become usual, it is intent on major political restructuring of the system of governance. It is going to amend the Constitution. It has been leaking its thinking through press stories without attribution and only a few things have been authoritatively stated. The first one is that the Army Chief who took over power in October 1999 intends to remain, indefinitely, the Army Chief and also the President of the country. Indeed he has said that the country needs his leadership and for that reason alone, and not for any personal ambition, that he wants to remain the President for another five years after the October elections.

The legal procedures through which he would remain President for the next five years have not been disclosed. But they should be treated as being in the pipeline and the most likely method would be incorporation of this fact in the constitutional amendment to be made by CE under his own authority.

These amendments include various other items of so-called reforms Musharraf fancies. It is going to increase the number of seats in the National and Provincial Assemblies, for instance, thereby starting various controversies over what is the basis on which increases have been made.

The main part of the next chapter in politics is one of controversies of constitutional nature. It appears that the country is fated to get back to Square One every now and then. It has happened several times during these 54 years of independent life; Pakistan has tried to make four or five new distinct beginnings. After some years, each effort proves infructuous and a new begin ning was required to be made, as is now the case. The trouble about constitutional amendments is that first of all there has to be a constitution to be amended. Which Constitution is to be amended is the first question to be attended to

A constitution that has been put in abeyance by two dictators for many many years each time and politics and governments came and went without reference to that Constitution can only be a dead one. No doubt, there was a constitution made in 1973 --- about which there was no basic controversy most of the time. But that was before 1977. What is so called is a published document that had held sway as a constitution in the past. That paper document can be amended by any Tom, Dick and Harry. Now, it appears that the Chief Executive is going to amend it. Who can stop him in doing that? The next relevant question people pose is who has the authority to amend a Constitution and on what basis and authority the amendments are to be made? These questions require answers.

The next factor is that an election campaign is already on. The regime is being seen by all commentators and analysts as going flat out to ensure that some of his friends should win these elections. Most politicians and analysts regard the regime's efforts to amend the constitution as no more than gerrymandering the political system to achieve preconceived results. Among these measures are included the externment from Pakistan of Benazir Bhutto, the PPP Chairperson, who is thought to be the chief vote-getter for her party.

Similarly Mian Nawaz Sharif has been banished from Pakistan under a sordid three way deal among Saudi Arabia, the regime and Sharif himself. He too was the chief vote-getter for the Muslim League faction he had

There is now a new Muslim League faction with Jinnah's name attached to it which is otherwise called the Like Minded. These are Muslim League leaders who deserted Nawaz Sharif and began to hang around the regime. They are the darlings of the generals. The regime wants these Like Minded Muslim Leaguers to win. It is also anxious to do a deal with the PPP leadership promising total freedom of electioneering and its Benazir, to keep out of Pakistan, leaving the country's governance to the top General.

There are other minor parties that have also hitched their wagon to General Musharraf's star. The election campaign has still to hot up and one of the dampers on it has so far been the uncertainty about the overall political framework in which they have to operate and chall out their stances, attitudes and policies and programmes. Meanwhile it is not even clear as to how much freedom the politicians have to start the tours and whether they can hold rallies and the rest of the elec-

Then the Americans are massively present in Pakistan with several bases under their use. More are being negotiated. The US civilian agencies, particularly dealing with intelligence, are active in the country; they are taking part in pursuing the remnants of Taliban regime, members of the Al-Qaeda and also supposedly Osama Bin Laden and Mulla Muhammad Omar.

Pakistan is also said to be a strategic partner of the US. Its economy is now picking up thanks to the American connection. Islamabad boasts that the corner has been turned and everything is hunky dory. Moreover the American connection is actually intended mainly to help General Pervez Musharraf to remain in the gaddi. US President George Bush has gone on record as having said that he is committed to stabilising the Musharraf Presidency -- and not Pakistan. This is seen as a big and overshadowing factor. Somehow the famous establishment of Pakistan is very much in tune with the American wishes and the knowledgeable regard the Bush commitment as some kind of a sentence to the people of Pakistan to go on living under a military dictatorship for a decade or so -- as in the earlier dictatorships.

There is another undefined presence in Pakistan. These are the Jihadis. How many are they is hard to know. Their estimates run from 40-50 thousand to several lacs of well-armed men with modern small arms. They are ideologically keyed up. Observers call them fanatics, obsessed with Jihad, specifically against India. Their religious zeal has been channeled into a ready-for-dying cause of Kashmiris' freedom which is supposedly the Jihadi aim. They are opposed to Musharraf's modernising and moderate policies

Hitherto they have remained quiet, more or less shell shocked. But they are now coming out of the woodworks. Daniel Pearl's brutal murder is a warning to President Musharraf, as one of the accused is supposed to have said. Their opposition is to be reckoned with There are undefined and undefinable dimensions for it. These do enjoy the support of all the voluble religious leaders who themselves are re-emerging into the election field. How much support can the Mullahs and the Jihadis mobilise in the society is the question and whether it would be reflected in the election results. Or would they opt for para parliamentary politics, if rejected in polls. This factor occasions many uncertainties.

As it happens, there is, in a manner of speaking, a political vacuum in the country. The parties have not been allowed to engage in or organise rallies and address people in the open for two and a half years. The only liberties so far available to them are to address press conferences, issue statements and to meet indoors among themselves. That is al the freedom available to them, with conditional support from the de facto freedom of the press -- which is real enough so far. The mainstream parties have been hamstrung by various subtle official policies. Once more freedom is available, there is no knowing what new forces may be thrown up. Other uncertainties have already been

The regime is trying to fill the vacuum by its favourites. That wish is not easy to be fulfilled. Full range of controversies that the regime is stoking -- may be with a view to confounding the confusion -- is not yet known. But amendments to the Constitution and the kind of ideas that the regime has are sure to open the Pandora's box.

Pakistan would truly be back at the starting point of reshaping the whole political structure of governance. The President wants to have more powers, sack the government and Parliament while certainly reducing the future Prime Minister's powers. CE also wants to impose a National Security Council, that can in effect, suspend the Constitution, dismiss the government and enable the President or the Army Chief to rule by decree. This kind of restructuring of the political structure is, to put it mildly, not acceptable to aware citizens.

A red herring has been thrown across the people's path by the generals by using a misleading term: they want new "checks and halances". This has nothing to do with the basic checks and balances on the executive that the Parliament ensures through its supremacy in a parliamentary system. What generals mean by checks and balances is to constrain the Prime Minister and make him virtually subordinate to the generals will through unusual powers to the President Gen. Zia of 1980 had had written for himself. The tenor of politics promises to be fairly stormy. The American Americans are not a silent spectator and they are in contact with most of the political leadership; their contacts are extensive and they are not merely taking notes of what is happening

There is more to it than has met to the eye of the common man.

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Can Musharraf make it?

T is not for nothing that the madrasas are a phenomenon in Pakistan's body politic. Over the years multiple factors worked behind it to produce through these madrasas a powerful religious Right which now challenge the government's writ in Pakistan. The number of these religious seminaries, considered the fountain head of Islamic 'fundamentalism' and fertile recruiting ground for extremist groups such as Taliban. Sipah-i-Sahaba and Jaish-e-Muhammad, rose from barely 150 at the time of independence to 11,000 now making them virtually a state within state. Some six lakh students enrolled in just the larger

madrasas are highly indoctrinated with the fundamental tenets of the desbandi ideology and wield enviable influence in Pakistani society.

President Pervez Musharraf, in his new vision of Pakistan as outlined in his January 12 televised speech to the nation, has precisely been pitted against this formidable socio-religious force to carry forward his fresh wave of reforms hinged to which is the success of his promised curb of terrorism both within the country and beyond. Notwithstanding, Musharraf's own assertion for a shift of Pakistan's fortune in the creation of a prosperous, moderate and Islamic welfare state the clerics produced by the large number of madrasas dotting the whole country however insist that Pakistan is destined to be Islamic republic with truly Islamic system of law and government. Can Musharraf, a self appointed president with modern secular outlook assume the role of an arbiter on this sensitive issue in a country

immersed in deep religious sentiments? All of Musharraf's predecessors played their part in Pakistan's gradual slide into theocracy while Musharraf's Kargil image is yet to be washed out many of his associates bringing him to power also once subscribed to the ideology they are now ready to cast off. Even the country's powerful Inter Services Intelligence the ISI - once used impressionable madrasa students for its military interests in Afghanistan and Kashmir. How an 'about turn' from the same lot will be acceptable to the nation is a matter still undetermined. In the past, however, Musharraf's efforts to rein in the militant clerics met little success. The military government's attempts to revise the hardline Islamic laws enacted during his period like one on Blasphemy was stiffly resisted. They openly defied government instruction not to flaunt or brandish fire arms in public and often marched towards Islamabad demanding Shariah rule. Only recently they gunned down the brother of tough-talking Interior Minister, Moinuddin Haider who was trying to discipline

the unruls Islamic zealots. It was however primarily the law and order problem created by widescale sectarian killings that prompted the government to initiate reforms of madrasas thought to be the breeding ground of extremists even before the current drive against the clerics in the wake of its war on

terrorism. It produced poor result. On August 18 last year Musharraf government issued an ordinance banning foreign funding of the madrasas without government approval. It also circulated a questionnaire asking the madrasa administra-tion to provide certain details about their functioning. Only less than 10 per cent of the madrasas complied On the contrary major madrasas of the country got together to form what they called 'Difac Deeni Madrasa Council (Defence of religious school council) which met in Lahore to announce their policy of non-cooperation. They rejected the attempted reform as 'Western

Conspiracy', and 'threat to religion and religious values'. This being the mood of the clerics, Musharraf's road to reform is bound to be rocky, particularly when vast majority of these madrasas are not dependent 64 government support for their survival. According to a study conducted in 1996, in the province of Punjab alone there were 1700 foreign funded madrasas.

Musharraf government has already launched its campaign to purge the madrasah education of its militant character. The plan is already under way to deweaponise the religious seminaries and widen the syllabi to provide broad-based education in them.

Musharraf has banned seven major religious parties and introduced reforms for regulating the politicoreligious group so that they operate only within the given parameter. For several weeks now the police mounted huge operations across the country arresting several thousands militant belonging to various terrorist outfit many key militant and religious leaders are already under arrest. Bank accounts have been frozen, offices raided and sealed. The initial impact of Musharraf's crackdown seems to have been effective

But then, many remain at large and recalcitrant as before. Those who have gone underground are likely to be hard core and as such defiant. Some even threater to launch guerilla warfare. Irrespective of the consequences, good or bad, Musharraf has however no chance to retreat. As far as the populace is concerned Pakistanis are remarkably adept in adapting to new situation. And for moral and material support Uncle Sam will be firmly behind Musharraf to rid Pakistan from 'fundamentalism' and obscurantism to ward which the country was fast drifting. Musharraf's sore point will however be his obligation to bring back democracy because his proposed reform can come to its efflorescence only under an elected civilian government.

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