

'Pakistanis know I can be tough'

Since Benazir Bhutto's assassination weeks ago, Pakistan has been plunged into one of the worst crises in its history. President Pervez Musharraf, having recently given up control of the nation's army, remains firmly in charge and as reluctant as ever to share power, despite a rising tide of criticism. He spoke to Newsweek's Fareed Zakaria from his camp office in Rawalpindi.

NEWSWEEK: What do you make of reports that the United States is thinking about launching CIA operations in Pakistan with or without Pakistan's approval?

Pervez Musharraf: We are totally in cooperation on the intelligence side. But we are totally against (a military operation). We are a sovereign country. We will ask for assistance from outsiders. They won't impose their will on us.

How do you take Hillary Clinton's suggestion that the United States and Britain help Pakistan secure its nuclear weapons?

Does she know how secure (the weapons) are and what we are doing to keep them so? They are very secure. We will ask if we need assistance. Nobody should tell us what to do. And I'd ask anyone who says such things, do you know how our strategic assets are handled, stored and developed -- do you know it?

Have you told the American government that?

No, why should we? We have said we are totally under control.

Graham Allison of Harvard says that these weapons must be disbursed for them to have survivability, which means that they could also fall into the wrong hands, because there might be a local command structure that is weak.

He doesn't know anything--how disbursed they are, and he shouldn't think that we don't know these things. We are from the military, we understand how to handle things, whether they need to be disbursed or concentrated.

But you understand that due to past episodes there is concern.

Yes; the past has (caused) some concern, but we must understand the difference between past and now. Before we were a declared and overt nuclear state, we had to hide everything. Everything was covert. Only the scientists and the president of Pakistan knew what was going on. Now there is a national command authority. It is the top body, headed by the president and the prime minister, and there are

members from the military and the civilian side.

And there's a huge strategic planning division, a full secretariat headed by now-retired (Lt. General Khalid) Kidwai. He is in charge of this Strategic Planning Division that is the secretariat arm of the National Command, responsible for development and employment. Then we have army, navy, air force, the strategic force command. If anything happens, indeed it's a failure of everyone from myself to SPD to the Army Strategic Force Command.

But it would need the collusion of several people, up and down the chain.

Absolutely. It's like an army unit. Can one rifle be taken away from an army unit? Can the bullet of a rifle be taken away from an army unit? I challenge anyone to take a bullet, a weapon, away from an army unit. You've said that Benazir Bhutto took risks. Surely it's normal for a politician to stand in a car's sunroof. If this is taking a risk, then politics is impossible in Pakistan.

This gathering she addressed was maybe 25,000-to-30,000 people. I have addressed gatherings of hundreds of thousands. She was given security. (But) you have to be conscious of security. The man in charge of security should be conscious.

The man in charge of her security was her own handpicked superintendent of police. This area was known to be dangerous. There was a death threat, intelligence that there would be an attack, and we told her, yet she wanted to go, she was intent about it. She went into a dangerous place, and if you get out of the vehicle, you are responsible.

All the others sitting inside the vehicle were safe.

But there is a widespread view in the country -- and I've talked to many, many people, including supporters of yours -- that in some way the government was complicit.

I refuse to listen to such accusations. I refuse to, I am the government, OK? I am not feudal, and I am not tribal. May I ask you, would

you, if you were at the head of affairs, ever think of killing somebody like that? It didn't appear in our minds. Would it appear in your mind that you could get rid of a person through a bomb blast?

What do you do to give credibility to the government at this point? Do you think your investigation should be enough? Do you think they should exhume the body and do a post-mortem?

Yes, exhume it. A hundred percent. I would like it to be exhumed. Because I know for sure there is no bullet wound other than on the right side. Whether it was a bullet or a strike, I don't want to comment, I don't know.

But you've seen the x-rays... Yes, I've seen the x-rays.

Does it appear there was a bullet entering and exiting? I am a soldier, I've seen a lot of bullet wounds. A bullet wound is a small hole, and if the bullet goes through it makes a big hole on the other side. Now that is what I understand to be a bullet wound. This was not that, although I'm not an expert. But how does it absolve the government if it was a bullet or not?

If you or anyone else were to accuse the government, the issue of the bullet (versus) explosives is not significant. The media and everyone are involved in an issue that is not very pertinent. Why would he be hiding (the cause of death)? It's ridiculous, and when I read these comments, I laugh at them.

Why not order a post-mortem? You can do it; you're the chief executive.

Everything is not black and white here. It would have very big political ramifications. If I just ordered the body exhumed, that would be careless, unless (Bhutto's) people agreed. But they will not.

Why? Because they know it's a fact there is nothing wrong.

So you think Mr. Zardari (Bhutto's husband) is playing a political game? Everybody is trying to gain political

advantage; the entire opposition is trying to take political advantage. I know what (Bhutto's opponents) used to say about her, but all of a sudden... it makes me laugh, actually. And then there's the cultural factor. Somehow, in our culture, a post-mortem of a woman is not done. When the body was at the hospital, Zardari himself said it could not be done; he didn't want the post-mortem done.

Now he says if there were a United Nations investigation he would allow a post-mortem.

There cannot be a UN investigation. There are not two or three countries involved. Why should there be a UN investigation? This is ridiculous.

You said in one of your comments afterwards, "I told (her) to be careful and I told her that this was not the Pakistan that you left. It's a different country." Is it fair to point out that for most of that period you have been in charge of Pakistan? Why has Pakistan gotten so much less safe under your presidency?

Because of terrorism and extremism, which we have been facing since 1979, for 30 years. We fought a war in Afghanistan in coalition with the Americans against the Soviets for 10 years. We trained the Taliban and armed them and sent them in (to Afghanistan). Was I doing this? The West was doing it, the United States was doing it. Then what happened between 1989 and 2001? Mayhem and destruction. Did I do this?

But in the late '90s a politician in Pakistan could have addressed a rally without fear for her life. Within Pakistan there has been a rise of militancy and suicide bombings under your presidency.

You have to see it in context. How did suicide bombing (start)? Who started it? The LITTE (the militant group in Sri Lanka), and then it was taken up by the Palestinians. And then Iraq, I would say we were the last to adopt it. Even your own (US) intelligence says that Al Qaeda or the Taliban -- whatever you want to call them -- are now moving east into settled populations. Why?

It doesn't seem that your effort to control extremists is working. It is working on the Taliban. Now the issue is the locals and extremists. The extremists are Pakistanis, and I think many do come from South Punjab. They have a lot of madrassas. They are hiding, but they are there. But there are some foreigners. Al Qaeda is using these people.

I can't say (with certainty) that

every act of theirs is Al Qaeda-guided -- I'm not sure. But we know that a person like Baitullah Mehsud (the Taliban commander in Waziristan) is training suicide bombers. And we know that they were sending suicide bombers for me, against Benazir and other political leaders. We have caught many people in the last two weeks. These people had explosives -- many, many caches of explosives.

Who would they target? Politicians who (make up) the political system, the democratic system.

Why have they turned to Pakistan now?

They are turning against Pakistan because they are against me. They are against anyone who is supporting me. So therefore, they want to weaken the government, they want to weaken me. (Perhaps) they think they can take over Pakistan.

Your tribal agreements didn't solve the problem? No, they didn't.

Do you think they were a mistake? There are some who think that the government didn't follow through on them, that you didn't keep your word.

We have to try everything. We have started dealing with everyone, including religious people, who we think are to be jihadis. Now, if they turn out to be double-crossers, and it is possible, and you ask me, "Have you succeeded?" I'll say, "No." Maybe we'll succeed 25 percent. But if you say then we should stop it, no, we should not stop it. We must persevere.

There are people who say though, that on the political side that you suppress the political parties, and so only the religious parties and the extremists have gained as a consequence.

No, we have not suppressed political parties. Nobody is allowed to go into tribal agencies. Tribal agencies have a different structure. They have their own system. In fact, we have introduced elections to them. These political parties never used to go into the tribal agencies. They come directly under the governor and the president.

But that's almost a colonial system. Shouldn't there be real politics?

Yes, I agree. And that is what we tried in '99. But then, all hell broke loose with 9/11. Every tribe had its own army of machine guns and mortars and rocket launchers. Whenever a tribe fought another tribe, they would dish out weapons from the armory and fight, and



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then make some kind of truce, and the weapons went back to the armory.

With the emergence of the Taliban, this whole system has been disturbed. We, in our political management, are trying to bring the (tribal authorities) back again. But this puts us in a fix. To fight the mullahs we need the old structure. But to modernize we need to get rid of the old structure.

Do the Americans want to undertake some operations that you are reluctant to undertake in these areas?

No. If the American troops came into the mountains, they would curse the day they came here. I know these areas, and I know American troops. I know our troops. This is not easy. American troops don't have any magic wands.

Our troops, who are the locals, who understand groups and customs, are very hardy. Our troops can go on roti and water. American troops would need chocolate. And logistic support to them would be very difficult. Military men won't say it. The politicians don't have the complete information. President Bush gets the information and intelligence every morn-

ing and praying that (the election) is fair and transparent and is seen to be fair and transparent.

Many people think it will not be. That's because you people are writing that way. No, it's not us. Every political party is making that accusation. How could we not report that? On what basis?

You've seen Benazir's document? Should you believe that? That's the question. It's always the opposition who is talking of unfair (elections). Why do they do that? When you lose you're going to (say) that the polls were rigged.

In the past, has there been any manipulation of elections? Is there a history here?

I would like to talk of 2002 because this election was fair. Although I know nobody believes it. It was fair. If we were manipulating (ballots), would we have manipulated them in such a stupid way that we elected a parliament where we couldn't form a government? Am I that stupid? No sir. There was no arrangement with anybody.

Do you know that your personal credibility is on the line with this election?

Yes. But at the same time the media is saying that I am going to rig the polls. What kind of logic is this? Why should I do this? Whoever says this, I would like to say, prove that I am going to rig it.

What did you think of Benazir's document? She sat in a drawing room making this document. I would like to make a document against her and give it to someone. This is just not proof.

Who is your preferred prime minister? I can't say, I'm not going to say that at all.

But you must have some preference. No.

But are you willing to accept a kind of diminished role as part of a trioka?

My constitutional powers have been the same since 2002. But what I am fortunate to have is my influence over everyone, over the political leaders, over the coalition. My influence is not (the result of) constitutional powers I have. If somebody listens to what I am saying, don't grudge me that. I am not using any force.

Could you work with the Pakistan Peoples Party in a post-election scenario? I can work with anyone. I am hop-

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Withdraw cases against Dhaka University teachers, students

The University of Dhaka is the conscience of Bangladesh, and has played a significant role in all great achievements of our country. We trust that the high executives, some of whom were also DU teachers, are very much conscious of the fact.

DELWAR HOSSAIN ARIF

THE demand for withdrawing the cases against the honourable teachers of the University of Dhaka has been growing progressively. According to the news media, most of the eyewitnesses of those cases have not given specific testimony against the accused teachers before the court. We believe, on good faith, that the government will not appeal to the higher court if the teachers are released by the court.

On the other hand, if the teachers are convicted and seek mercy from the president the government will expedite the process. But it is apparent that the accused teachers and their families will not look for bail or mercy from the government.

The accused teachers are extremely confident that they did not violate the Emergency Power Act (EPA) throughout the August 2007, events on the Dhaka University campus.

If, for the sake of argument, we say that their statements to the different TV channels, or speeches in the Shahid Minar premises, were considered as breach of Emergency Power Act, it is also true that there are lots of instances of violation of EPA where the government remained silent or ignored the matter. For example, recently a report has published in different newspapers on a meeting of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) held in Narayanganj

violating the emergency, as indoor politics is banned outside Dhaka. The same man went to Manikgonj with a large motorcade to distribute relief to the flood victims.

We also observed that when some people held a meeting against Prothom Alo in Dhaka, the government did not do anything. The former general secretary of BNP, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, held a meeting in the parking area of his house using microphones, which is also barred according to the emergency rules. Sadly the government decided to punish the university teachers, the most esteemed segment, and opinion leaders, of society. This type of twofold application of emergency rules has received much criticism.

It is heartening that the government has heard the voice of the nation and reshuffled the advisory council, replacing a number of advisors. We were shocked to hear some previous advisors talking maliciously about the university teachers. Therefore, at this moment, it is time to begin with new enthusiasm with new advisors. The government should understand that the they are human beings, not angels. There is every possibility of making a mistake, as well as correcting it.

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teachers, are very much conscious of the fact.

Irrespective of all sorts of divisions, the teachers and students are gathering under a single umbrella. It is high time for the government to comprehend the pulse of Dhaka University. The time is indeed opportune to free the teachers and students of Dhaka University unconditionally, and withdrawing the cases could be an excellent resolution of the issue.

There is scope in the existing criminal laws for withdrawing case during the trial. We can categorically declare that the government will be benefited, and regain its trustworthiness and image, like it was in 1/11. The call by the chief adviser of the caretaker government for generating a knowledge-based society can, thus, be heeded.

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A Pakistani's re-assessment of 1971

Now I know what Pakistan did to Bangalis in 1971," Malik tells me. "That's because most Pakistanis, I suppose, are unaware of the background history of 1971. All they know about it is that it was a fight between India and Pakistan," I say. "Not most," Malik says, "almost 100% of Pakistanis are unaware. Only the old people know about it." I notice an expression of guilt in Malik's face. He requests me to e-mail him all the online links of 1971 so that he could send them to his fellow Pakistanis and friends. "Certainly, with pleasure," I assured him.

JAHEED AHMED

As a humanist, I hold this belief in my heart that most common people are good everywhere -- across every race, religion and ethnicity. This is not just a hypothesis for comfort. I have seen this from my own observation.

Yet, I must admit, sometimes my mind defies what my heart holds dear. One such case is when every time I think of the horror which Pakistan inflicted upon my country and people in 1971. During my conversation with a few Pakistanis, I discovered that their version of 1971 was distorted; it was mostly "a conspiracy by India" to split Muslim Pakistan.

"OK. For argument's sake, India exploited 1971 to corner Pakistan, but tell me, who gave India this opportunity?" I contend. "Was it India that denied the rights of Bangalis for 23 long years, and refused to hand over power to the Bangalis in 1970 as per the mandate by the people of East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh)?"

Therefore, I was not surprised when I heard a similar refrain on 1971 from Mr. Naeem Ahmed Malik, an expatriate Pakistani in New York, although I noticed that Malik hates mullahs and blames them for today's miserable situa-

tion in the Muslim world in general, and Pakistan in particular.

"I saw the violent nature of Bangladeshi mullahs on TV during their anti-Quadiyani movement. They are no better than the Mullahs of Pakistan," Malik tells me. His view is less dogmatic than that of probably most Pakistanis. Maybe it is because he is a Quadiyani Muslim, and has witnessed the persecutions, killings and sufferings of fellow Quadiyans in Pakistan itself.

His curiosity about 1971 grows further. "Tell me about 1971. What happened exactly? Wasn't it a war between India and Pakistan?" Naeem Malik asks me. "It was a nine-month long bloody war -- from March '71 to December '71 -- and India did not involve itself until December of 1971 when Pakistan attacked India. It all started in the dark night of March 25, when Pakistani soldiers abruptly started killing several thousands of people in Dhaka following the collapse of Sheikh Mujib's meeting with military President Yahya," I said.

I then tell him about the 1970 general election, Awami League's landslide victory, and General Yahya's refusal to allow Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib to become the prime minister of Pakistan. I also briefly narrate to him the political unrest and tur-

moil that preceded 1971. "I know almost nothing about it," Naeem Malik tells me.

With internet access at my work place, I decided to show Malik some of the pictures and documents of the 1971 war of liberation and genocide, which had I compiled, edited and kept on our website (www.mukto-mona.com). "Here is a 1972 report from American NBC news channel on the Bangalee women who were raped by the West Pakistani soldiers."

I also show him a few other foreign video footages -- the massacres at Dhaka University and Khulna. Amid pin drop silence, Malik watches and listens -- how millions of Bangali men and women were killed and tortured, and several million were forced to flee to neighbouring India.

I notice Malik's eyes filling with tears. While watching the gruesome tale and pictures of the 1971 genocide, he repeatedly says astakhfirullah, meaning, God's disgrace be upon them, the perpetrators of this heinous crime. "I always wondered why Bangalis dislike Pakistanis so much but nobody told me the reason behind it. Now I know what Pakistan did to Bangalis in 1971," Malik tells me. "That's because most Pakistanis, I suppose, are unaware of the background his-

tory of 1971. All they know about it is that it was a fight between India and Pakistan," I say. "Not most," Malik says, "almost 100% of Pakistanis are unaware. Only the old people know about it."

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I feel good that I have made at least one Pakistani aware of 1971. I hope Naeem Malik will inform his friends and other Pakistanis about the truth of 1971. "Whether the figure is one million or three millions is not an issue. It was a crime against the humanity -- plain and simple," I tell Malik. He nods his head in agreement.

I tell him about some Pakistani intellectuals and journalists offering apology to Bangladesh for Pakistan's massacre in 1971, but so far no Pakistani government has apologise for 1971. "People with conscience would not, and cannot, support this kind of atrocity," Malik tells me.

He is right. People of good will and conscience do exist; however small in number. And that's probably the best reason for all of us, whether humanists or not, to remain optimistic about the future of mankind. I am thankful to Naeem Malik for reinforcing this conviction in my mind.

Jahed Ahmed is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

Corrigendum
The name of the university, SEU, was inadvertently not printed in the credit line of the article "Application areas of ICT" by Dr. R. L. Sharif. The error is regretted.