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**PAKISTAN UNDER MUSHARRAF MILITARY REGIME, AND THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS
FUNDAMENTALISM**

By Aftab Hassan Khan

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It is been over four years that General Musharaf is been in power. Three years with a naked military regime and the last one year with a so-called democratic government and he as a president. General Musharaf is a lucky military dictator who realised the changed world situation after 11th September 2001 so he changed his policies overnight to become a partner of American imperialism in the "fight against terrorism". He, at least in words, changed his life time support to religious fundamentalist and to some extent abandoned them without any shame or apology.

World imperialism in return awarded him by accepting his dictatorial rule without a question or doubt. Imperialist forces rewarded him by rescheduling his loans and granting him some new loans as well. He became darling of the western rulers and a family friend of President Bush. He became the award-winning president of Pakistan who was invited by President Bush in June 2003 at Camp David, as was boasted by the Pakistani government control media.

General Musharaf wins this position by his hard work to please the international imperialist institutions like IMF, World Bank and WTO. He acted blindly on the precious advises of these institutions to implement the restructuring plan of public sector, privatization, lowering of the trade tariffs and deregulation's. "This is the painful recipe that we must adopt if to overcome the economic recession and to start the recovery of the sick economy" he boasted as he took power in October 1999 in a bloodless coup. He had overthrown an unpopular rich Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Nawaz Sharif was not able to complete his full five-year term although he had a two third majority in the parliament elected in the year 1997. Nawaz Sharfi tried his best to implement the policies IMF, World Bank and WTO. But was unable due to massive resistance by the workers and small traders. General Musharaf took power precisely to implement the unfinished agenda of Nawaz Sharif.

The result of the implementation of the imperialist guided policies is a disaster for the working class of Pakistan. The recent State Bank Pakistan report indicates an increase of at least 15% more poverty within the last three years despite all the media hype of a great recovery of the Pakistan economy under Musharraf. The government claims that there are record 11 billion US Dollars foreign reserves due to the policies of the regime.

Political Front

The masses have lost all confidence on the main capitalist political parties. You can not find any difference of policies among the two main stream parties, Pakistan Peoples Party of Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan Muslim League of ex Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The two were at one time representing quite different policies; PPP was a populist radical party, which at one time was able to attract many working classes to its fold. But Under Benazir Bhutto, the PPP has become a right wing conservative party closely linked at different times with the army generals and the American imperialism. Benazir Bhutto were elected twice as Prime Minister (1988 and 1994) but was unable to

deliver any reform agenda. She is at present in exile and since 1998, living in Dubai and running its party via emails. A court in Pakistan on corruption charges sentenced her. Her husband is in a Pakistani jail for the last seven years for allegedly corruption, nepotism, murder and attempt of murder charges. The PPP emerged the largest parliamentary party during the October 2002 general elections getting around 22 percent of the votes. The PPP is at present part of an alliance called Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) along with some other main bourgeoisie parties. The ARD has been unable to launch any mass agitation against the present regime despite all its claims of launching one.

Religious Fundamentalism

The distrust of the masses on the main political parties has led many to take political refuge under the religious parties. The religious parties have formed a united alliance called Mutihida Majlis Ammal (United organization for Action). The MMA have won over 15 percent of the votes during the October general elections. They have formed a provincial government in North West Frontier Province, and part of the provincial government at Baluchistan. NWFP province is next to Afghanistan. The formation of the government by the religious fundamentalists in this province has given a major boost to the Taliban Mujahidin in Afghanistan. It is here where Americans want Musharraf to go for a crack down on the provincial government. The central government have led many raids on the so called Alqaida hideouts in this province to please the American imperialism that the Musharraf regime is serious to have a go on religious fanatics.

The ongoing growth of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan is a serious threat to the progressive forces of Pakistan. The religious fundamentalists have several trends within its ranks. But overall they are all united in their extreme right wing, semi fascist approaches in politics. They promote conservative's family values that mean women as half of men. Their anti imperialist sloganeering does not deserve them to earn as a real anti imperialist force. It is semi fascist forces against the imperialists at this juncture of history. Religious fundamentalism has grown tremendously particularly after the collapse of Stalinism. It has provided to some extent a feeling of security for many ordinary Muslims. Some of the religious parties have build their infrastructures on a mass basis in the shape of religious

educational institutions, Mosques and charity organizations with the assistance of the American imperialism during the eighties. They also had tremendous help from the reactionary rulers of Saudi Arabia. They were waiting for their turn to become mass base. That turn has come and they enjoy massive support among the masses more than what they had got the votes in the general elections of October 2002.

The religious parties grew with the help of the army and the state. You can say that religious fundamentalist forces in Pakistan are mainly due to the heavy economic and social help by different groups within the state. But that is only a part of the whole story. They have also grown because of the tremendous disappointments by the main political parties to offer any social help to the masses during their power periods from 1988 to 1999. The religious parties have now offered an alternative to these capitalist feudal political parties.

Can they come to power in Pakistan? Would it be like Afghanistan or like Iran? It is difficult to say that the religious parties will come to power through elections. The bourgeoisie and American imperialist forces will not allow that to happen. They can become junior partners in the power but not as the sole representatives of the people of Pakistan. The religious fundamentalist provincial government is already under threat from the Center and is not being tolerated. The ongoing popularity of these religious fundamentalist groups has also increased the hopes of the masses to solve their economic problems. Yet in the province of NWFP, the MMA government have failed to address the question

poverty and unemployment. They have tried to compromise with the Center to be able to continue their government. Although a Sharia bill is been introduced in the assembly that will give maximum powers to the fundamentalist groups to monitor the Islamic functioning of the state and the public. But generally they have carried out policies dictated by the Center. The result is not very good in their favor and many questions about their credibility have arisen. But despite this experience in this province, they are making headways in the most populated province of Punjab. They are also controlling the largest city of Pakistan Karachi. At this city the Mayor elected during the year 2001 is from Jamaat-I-Islami. At the time when the armed forces of the country are trying to find out the remnants of the Taliban in Waziristan and other parts of tribal belts, they seem to have forgotten that these Taliban also exist in the City like Karachi. It is not the slum of this city where they have been regrouping but in fact it is the seat of learning, the University of Karachi, where they demonstrated their power on November 5 2003, at the Student Teaching Center hall. Sources said that around eight to ten activists of Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba, the student wing of Jamaat-I-Islami, the main religious fundamentalist party in Pakistan, attacked the hall, smashing the things on display. The attackers alleged that the exhibition was promoting obscenity and vulgarity, said a frightened student at the condition of anonymity. "I do not know what is their idea of obscenity. You can see that we had clothes on textile display, computer and posters on graphic and products on industrial designs, said a female student of final year. She said that they did not even bother to look at the materials on display but they stormed the place and smashed anything that was in their range. Incident like this are very common where the religious fundamentalist have taken control of the educational institutions. The semi fascist thugs are found in every major cities and are in growing numbers.

There are over 24000 religious institutions called Madrassas in Pakistan. Over a million students are registered in these schools. The Musharraf regime are in full support of these religious schools pleading

that not all religious schools promote Jihad. The education in Pakistan is becoming more and more a business. Private schools have taken over the public schools in numbers. There are more primary school students in private institutions than the public primary schools. This is the natural result of the ever reducing government spending on education. Less than 2 per cent of the national income is spent on education in Pakistan. But military regime can not keep the same old relationship with the religious fundamentalists as were before September 2001. Gradually, there is a bitter taste in their relationship. The MMA, the major alliance of these religious fundamentalist parties, is threatening to launch a nationwide campaign. That is on the question of democracy. The MMA alongside with ARD is demanding that Legal Framework Order (LFO) announced by General Musharraf be brought to the parliament. Under LFO, through a presidential ordinance, General Musharraf have legalized its three-year of military government and several amendments have been made in the constitution.

Relationship with India

Pakistan and India has fought three wars during the last 56 years of so-called independence from the British imperialism. At present a peace fever has taken over the main policies of Musharraf regime and Vajpai's Bharatiya Janata Party government in India. The sour relationship between India and Pakistan was at its peak during the last three years. No road, train or air link was allowed by the two governments until three months before. Now all the routes are going to be open within next three months. This is mainly due to the pressure of the American imperialism and also from a masses to open up the borders.

The American imperialism at present does not favour a war between India and Pakistan. It wants Musharraf regime to take on the religious fundamentalists rather than a war on India. That is why Musharraf regime is now bringing most of its army from the front line with India to the front line with

Afghanistan. It has carried out military operations in the tribal areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan that was unthinkable in the past. The priorities of American imperialism at this juncture of history is to put all efforts to stop Assam and its allies forces to take over Afghanistan. But since the Pakistani religious fundamentalists have taken over the province next to Afghanistan, the guerrilla activities are on the increase. There is an increase in activities of the Taliban Jihadis against the NATO forces in Afghanistan.

The other factor is a tremendous desire of the masses to a peaceful atmosphere between the two countries. The both countries are economies of less than \$ 400 per capita. But their main spending have been and still is the expenditure on the name of defense. That is at the cost of the social sector on both sides. The infrastructure remain absolute weak and unstable in economic, political and social basis.

The political situation is quite volatile. The present set up of a mixture of military and civil politicians is not very strong one. The government is a weak government and is still not been able to legalise itself in the eyes of the masses. It is still considered mostly by the masses and rightly so a puppet government of the military with Musharraf as president. The prime minister Jamali who hails from Baluchistan is heading a break away group of conservative Muslim League. The ML has a long history to work together with the establishment to retain and remain in power.

The present government will find itself very difficult to complete its full five years of term. Now almost a year in government, it has faced crisis after crisis. The elected prime minister Zafarullah Jamali has been already forced to resign by the Gen. Musharraf and the former employee of the IMF current Finance minister would be the new prime minister. One of the best comments on the present government has come from one of its ministers of information, Sheikh Rashid. He told a reporter that the best success of this government is that it is still in power after even a year. The civilian set up under a general has tried its best to avoid any confrontation with the military by obeying all its orders without any question. But this situation can not last very long. It is possible that the present so-called civilian government be overthrown by General Musharraf if he feels at unease with the setup. He wants to have absolute powers like a dictator but with a civilian prime minister, he had to share some of its authority. General Musharraf can become even more dictator by declaring an emergency or even a martial law. A new military rule is not at all ruled out. With or without Musharraf, the military will be part of the power for some more time until a real mass movement erupts to challenge the power.

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U.S FUELLING ARMS RACE IN SOUTH ASIA

By Lalith

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Article Resource www.himalayanaffairs.org

The increasing military assistance by US for Pakistan is raising concerns for India and other South Asian countries. Pakistan the joint ally of US in the "war against terror" is reaping benefits in the form of military assistance.

According to official reports US has massive plans of military supplies worth more than \$1.5 billion to Pakistan in the next five years. As quoted in "Times of India", "According to details available in the Mission Performance Plan for financial year 2004 of the US embassy in Islamabad, and updated on the US State Department website, the Americans persuaded Pakistan government to establish an Interior Air Wing in Quetta with five American helicopters".

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