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## Perils of Pakistani Politics

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### 1. Background Details:

Pakistan's 170 million inhabitants continue to agonize over the fate of five dozen judges sacked for not supporting the state of emergency President Pervez Musharraf had imposed on November 3, 2007. They also view with skepticism and frustration the inclusion of the Karachi-based ethno-political Muttahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM) in the provincial government.

Before the February 18 elections, major political parties – Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) of the slain premier Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) of Nawaz Sharif and Pashtun nationalist Awami National Party (ANP) had vociferously campaigned for the restoration of all judges. But the post-election scenario, embedded in a deal that Musharraf had struck with Ms Bhutto early October last year, forced the PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari to digress from earlier public commitments, thereby causing unrest among major coalition partners i.e. PML-N and ANP, which continue to press for unconditional restitution of judges including Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, who Musharraf had feared could strike down his reelection as President on October 6 as illegal.

Sharif had even threatened to walk out of the coalition comprising PPP, PML-N and ANP if judges were not restored by April 30th, the deadline all coalition partners had agreed on.

PPP's emerging coalition in the Sindh province with the MQM also remains another thorn for the coalition at the centre. MQM virtually controls Pakistan's largest city Karachi – also called Pakistan's commercial life-line for its location on the Arabian Sea. The party has been at loggerheads with all other political rivals and even demonstrated its might on May 12 2007, when it attempted – and succeeded – to block Justice Chaudhry's entry into Karachi. This caused the loss of at least 40 lives and then also on April 9, the alleged MQM activists torched offices of pro-Chaudhry lawyers in Karachi killing more than ten people of whom seven were torched alive.

### 2. Situational Analysis:

Continued divergence of views and the implicit conflict of interest on the judges' issue brought both Zardari and Sharif together in Dubai on April 28 for another round of talks; burdened by the U.S. sponsored Musharraf-Bhutto deal, Zardari and his colleagues promised to fulfill their commitment, yet dithered on the deadline. They also want a "constitutional package" that should restrict the tenure of the Chief Justice to a certain number of years, unlike many other democracies where once appointed, Chief Judges retire voluntarily or until a time when they are unable to conduct business.

Driven by expedience and certain invisible compulsions, the PPP wants more time to hammer out a face-saving compromise which, on the one hand, will endeavor not to annoy its sponsors – the pro-Musharraf US administration, and on the other will protect President Musharraf from a possible onslaught led by Sharif's PML-N, which wants him impeached and tried for violating the Article 6 of the constitution twice ; Oct 1999, when he seized power and ousted Sharif, and then Nov 3, 2007, when he imposed the state of emergency to muzzle legal and political opposition to his reelection.

As far the PPP-MQM coalition in the southern Sindh province, both PML-N and ANP have been expressing reservations on MQM's membership in the Federal Government. Yet, driven by the realpolitik of Pakistan, where the new government has inherited a host of serious economic and political problems, coalition partners have largely agreed to PPP's power-sharing with MQM in the Sindh province.

While politically sensitive issues such as the restoration of the senior judges and judges is consuming almost all the attention of the government, the nation watches in awe as to whether they could expect any relief at all in an environment loaded with inflation, soaring fuel prices, wheat flour shortages and acute power crises, which is threatening to lead to social unrest as the temperatures soar. Low productivity and with that job losses are the likely consequences of this vicious cycle that Pakistan is caught in.

Frustration and anger, therefore, are already writ large. Most Pakistanis view the PPP in particular, as dragging its feet on the Judges' issue "for the sake of power only" and are therefore growing restless and angry over their fate.

### 3. Recommendations of CRSS:

Keeping in view the problems that the Pakistanis are facing, CRSS strongly recommends the following:

1. The political parties must immediately resolve all of the outstanding political and constitutional issues so as to concentrate on peoples' problems.
2. The political leadership must exhibit a sense of urgency in addressing the problems that an ordinary person faces on the street – from the broken law and order apparatus to power and food shortages.
3. The Parliament must demonstrate legislative activism to remove grey areas in the constitution and focus on people-friendly legislation that can provide them cover from institutional excesses as well as guard them against criminal gangs and cartels.
4. The civil society organizations and the non-government sector should also assume socio-political responsibility to ease the present level of tension between various political powers.
5. The political parties in power should expand their consultation circle to include the views from different tiers of the society to reach consensual conclusions and thereby creating the ownership of government policies and actions.
6. Legal and constitutional recourse must be the bedrock of governance and conflict resolution