

A stable Pakistan is key to defeating terrorism

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Published: August 9 2010 15:19 | Last updated: August 9 2010 15:19

Financial Times

Catastrophic floods have ravaged Pakistan, killing thousands and rendering millions homeless. Epidemic and water-borne diseases pose yet another challenge. Some may ask: why did I make the unpopular decision to travel away from my homeland at this time of crisis?

There is a very specific reason. Pakistan's sacrifices must be told to the world. For historical and cultural reasons, London is vital for generating global political and humanitarian awareness.

It has been two and a half years since democratic government came to power in Pakistan and less than two years since I assumed the presidency. We inherited socio-economic chaos. Fanatics and terrorists were challenging our people's way of life, which is rooted in the principles laid out by our founding fathers for a democratic, liberal, tolerant, progressive and forward-looking Pakistan.

Decades of neglect by dictators had caused a weakened civil society, while social, educational and health sectors had descended into disarray. Power generation was drastically curtailed, while food silos were ransacked for the first time in our history. The country was still grappling to recover from the assassination and martyrdom of Benazir Bhutto, the country's most popular leader.

My party was determined to save the federation and rebuild our economy. In spite of facing terrorism from within and without, we moved quickly to reshape a new Pakistan.

Our economic planning has reduced the fiscal deficit, gross domestic product growth is improving, while inflation has decelerated. Foreign investment and foreign exchange reserves are increasing. To kick-start our economy, we have organized an international consortium, called the Friends of Democratic Pakistan, in which the UK is a lead partner. We want trade not aid, MOUs not IOUs.

My party pledged to undo the last vestiges of dictatorship. We have done away with anti-democratic distortions in the constitution which had made the parliament a rubber stamp. I voluntarily relinquished powers in favor of the prime minister and parliament. Continuing Benazir Bhutto's vision for national reconciliation, our government successfully gave a National Finance Commission Award for the equitable distribution of resources among the provinces – previously a bone of contention. Our landmark achievement has been granting provincial autonomy to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

In the war against extremism and terrorism, we have played the role of a frontline state, losing 2,700 soldiers, including senior officers, and more than 27,000 civilians. Collateral losses total more than \$50bn and are still being incurred at the expense of our economy and prestige. No one can match our determination, resilience and sacrifices. We do not need to be lectured as to how to conduct the war against violent extremism.

Terrorism is not just Pakistan's problem. The Kabul conference last month acknowledged that the problem in Afghanistan was regional and needed a regional solution. Stability in central and

south Asia will depend on regional and international co-operation to attack the terrorist threat politically, economically and militarily.

We must seek to undo the environment under which terrorists thrive, from hunger to hopelessness to poverty. And we should remember that as long as the human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir remain unaddressed, peace and stability in the region will be elusive.

These are challenging times for the world, most particularly for Pakistan. But we have every intention of prevailing militarily, politically and socially to defeat the forces of obscurantism. A viable Pakistani economy that addresses the social needs of our people will ensure political stability, which in turn is the key to containing the terrorist menace. A democratic, strong and economically stable Pakistan, in partnership with Britain and the west, can emerge as a role model for one and a half billion Muslims.

The writer is the president of Pakistan who has just concluded his visit to the UK