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(The NST diary)

DKL

US must play a tune more pleasing to Musharraf's ear
AS you read this, the Diarist has just arrived back at KLIA after interviewing General Pervez Musharraf, the strongman of Pakistan, at his office in Rawalpindi yesterday morning. The interview will appear tomorrow.

Going to Pakistan required a sense of adventure as well as a sense of humour. The Diarist received the message that the general had agreed to see him only late Wednesday evening. He and his associates managed to keep the appointment despite bad airline connections to Karachi and from there to Islamabad. It was not easy, but they managed it.

Musharraf is the fourth general to rule Pakistan since its independence 56 years ago. The Pakistani military has behaved extremely well with respect to nuclear weapons and is the only Muslim state which has them.

Few American allies have had more headaches, but what did Musharraf get in return? For sure, Pakistan is no longer Washington's "strategic partner". The Diarist is not altogether surprised. The American media diminished him and yet Washington needs his help in Afghanistan and in the fight against universal terrorism. Perhaps Washington, un-less it treats Pakistan with greater esteem, should look for other ways to reduce its so-called "dependence" on Pakistan at this crucial time.

It remains a lynchpin in the war against the Taliban and terrorism. Musharraf is playing a deft game exploiting his leverage over the Americans while doing just enough to curtail overt "US criticism", says Ahmed Rashid, an authority on the Taliban.

The Americans say Pakistan has fallen short of what they expect from an ally. Have the Americans been fair to Pakistan? No, they haven't.

Washington talks about democratisation, but why pick on Pakistan and Myanmar, not on Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and other US allies? Why the double standard? Democracy should be practised according to each nation's situation and political land-scape. The trouble is that the sole superpower thinks everyone in the universe is a dunce.

President George W. Bush now cajoles Musharraf and Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali to help in the fight against terrorism, religious bigotry and extremism and also to provide Pakistani troops for peacekeeping in Iraq. A welcome recognition, though belated, that the US needs credible Islamic nations such as Pakistan (Malaysia and Indonesia) to acquire legitimacy for what it is doing (and not performing) in Iraq.

Friends in Pakistan say Musharraf would not dare make Pakistani soldiers "butchers" of their Iraqi brethren. On this, Pakistan must get it right. It has little strategic interest there, unlike Turkey, which has agreed to send troops but was immediately opposed by the interim American-led Iraqi Government.

A wrong decision by Pakistan could backfire. The US, of course, will maintain the pressure on Musharraf. As always, it could easily walk away once it achieves its objectives.

Muslim endorsement, which is wisely withheld, can give American occupation in Iraq the legitimacy that Washington badly needs. But perhaps it really doesn't matter to the the Americans.

Pakistan, like Indonesia, Myanmar, China, Thailand, Egypt and Turkey, among others, has a military caste which is heavily involved in politics. The question everyone has asked the Diarist is: Who controls the "Islamic

bomb"? Your guess may be right, but you might also be wrong. Get the NST tomorrow.

Finding Time For Work, Play

AT the three small parties (of two dozen persons each) the Diarist attended last week, Tengku Pushy was not there. She was travelling. Even if she was in town, she wouldn't have been invited to the best of the three parties because it wouldn't have been frivolous and fun enough for her.

The Diarist was also a guest at several weddings and kenduri, and attended a ceramah in a kampung in the upper reaches of Sungai Klang. Managing time while still working and having fun isn't difficult if one is well organised.

At the ceramah, for all the speaker's harshness in exposing alleged political intrigues and corruption et al, one sad truth emerged: He couldn't provide specific cases, much less concrete evidence. Still, unless countered convincingly, the speaker has done much damage and could be doing greater harm in the run-up to the general election.

Of the accusations, perhaps not all were baseless and could be wished away. Many voters have a single, fixed obsession with corruption born out of a flood of propaganda cleverly articulated by the Opposition. The fact that Transparency International has stated that things are improving will be blithely ignored. The Diarist wonders if Tengku Pushy has ever masuk kampung or listened to political speeches.

Harsh Realities Of Globalisation

THE Diarist wasn't able to present his paper at Wacana Minda Melayu organised by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka on Thursday because he had to rush at short notice to Islamabad. Berita Harian deputy group editor Mior Kamarul Shahid read the speech on his behalf: "The Malays must join others all over the world (not with narrow ethnic or religious agenda) because their fate is inextricably linked to them, who are just as vulner-able to the predators of globalisation."

The Diarist recalled what Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in New York last year: "The challenge is to influence the thinking on globalisation, to reshape it, to reduce the chances of it going awry and destroying economies and nations".

It was a Malay with a sharp mind and courage who has been an eloquent critic of globalisation - long before it became quite fashionable to do so. As a result, more countries are lending their voices of discontent in support of the anti-globalisation movement.

The New Empire wants to impoverish the developing world, seeking to open and liberalise their economies while it stubbornly continues to deny access to its own market by erecting unfair tariff walls and subsidising food produce by up to US\$310 billion (RM1.178 trillion) a year - while fully aware that 100 million and more hungry Africans go to bed hungry every night.