

### Amnesty offer

EDITORIAL (November 29, 2012) : As if Taliban and their extremist genre were on the run, the government has offered amnesty to the proscribed organisations - only to be promptly rejected. If they renounced terrorism and agreed to cooperate with government, the Interior Minister Malik has promised 'they would be removed from the list of banned organisations'. Their response took no time in coming. They blew the offer off their palm, with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) vowing to fight till the last end. The TTP will not end fight 'till the ouster of secular rulers imposed by foreign powers to rule an Islamic country,' said TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan. He even reportedly accused the interior minister of being a 'foreign agent not worthy of granting forgiveness to the Taliban'. This was not the first-time offer to the TTP, which comprises over a dozen radical Pakistan-based outfits, or to be rebuffed then and there by militants. But to a discerning mind there is one difference, however. A kind of back-patting is going on since the end of relatively peaceful Ashura, for which the credit is being heaped at the doorstep of Rehman Malik. No wonder then an excited Interior Minister even challenged the TTP chief: "Hakimullah, don't hide in one bunker or another. Today, I announce a general amnesty for you if you stop killing innocent people. The enemies you are working for will kill you too, one day". And the minister also said he knows the forces that are using TTP; they are the same who assassinated Benazir Bhutto - a vital piece of information that should help reach the culprits and their backers involved in the BB's murder. Things are not as simple and straightforward as Rehman Malik would like us to believe. Over the years, extremists have become a formidable force, and we the Pakistanis know it first hand. Consider the amount of effort mounted to secure a peaceful Ashura. A force on the run and willing to lay down arms and surrender to the writ of state would seek out intermediaries to cut a peace deal, but the Taliban have yet to do it. Of course, they were driven out from the Swat, but they are not finished; they continue to launch forays into Pakistan from their safe havens in neighbouring districts of Afghanistan. Quite a chunk of tribal area remains in their control despite very heavy military deployment to contain them. And over the last couple of months their attacks in settled districts have significantly increased, and despite maximum security they had succeeded in striking a Muharram procession in Rawalpindi and a Majlis in Karachi. The truth is the religious extremists, whatever their nomenclature, have joined hands to destabilise Pakistan. On the face of it, there is no plausible reason to hope that they would surrender to the authorities anytime soon. The techniques employed to ensure peaceful Muharram were force-oriented, essentially based on strategy of denial of space to militants - which cannot be used over a longer period of time. The threat the Taliban pose to our national existence warrants a multidimensional response; in the words of the late Chairman Mao it has to 'fight fight, talk talk'. The TTP and its affiliates bear deep imprints of al Qaeda, and their war of ideas has been joined by their like-minded groups all over the Muslim world. No doubt, quite a few suicide bombers may be hired assassins, but there are many more in that class of extremists who feel honour-bound to defend their ideology. They are not hired, nor are they afraid of death. They have to be won over by superior logic through a sustained dialogue. If they couldn't be defeated in war doesn't mean they cannot be defeated on the negotiating table. Therefore, in addition to security measures and military operations, the government must work out a parallel strategy based on talks. When you say lay down arms and come over for talks you presume that militants are on the verge of collapse and would bite the bait in order to save the face. But it's not the case, yet. We hope the amnesty offer should be held back for the time being, and focus is shifted from

dialogue with the TTP, its affiliates and likeminded groups. [Copyright Business Recorder, 2012](#)