

FOCUS

Pakistan Diary

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

book in Urdu, Will Pakistan Break up?, has an interesting passage which suggests that Islamabad had a hand in the 1993 bomb blasts in Mumbai. The author, Munir Ahmed, a journalist, quotes Pakistan's former President Ishaq Khan as having said that one top officer was indulging in such dangerous activities as were harmful and disconcerting for Pakistan. "I had to tell the prime minister that the particular officer wanted to push us into a war with our neighbouring country," said Ishaq Khan.

The pertinent passage reads thus: Former President said that on March 23 the situation became so serious that foreign secretary Sharif came to him in a disturbed state of mind and said that the relationship with India following the bomb blasts had deteriorated so much that it had threatened to go to war... "I told the prime minister to get in touch with New Delhi to stop further deterioration in our relations. He said he (the prime minister) would do it. But he only talked to the Pakistan High Commissioner in New Delhi..."

Once in a while a book comes out in Pakistan to tell something startling but frank. For example, Altaf Gauhar's book on Ayub Khan, Pakistan's Martial Law Administrator, tells a blow by blow account of Islamabad's involvement in starting the 1965 war. A day before Operation Gibraltar, the code used for the 1965 infiltration, was approved by Bhutto, who had been re-appointed as foreign minister. He wrote a letter to Ayub in which he advised him that India was "at present in no position to risk a general war of unlimited duration for the annihilation of Pakistan." According to him, "Pakistan enjoyed relative superiority... in term of quality and equipment."

Ayub, although a reluctant participant to what Bhutto did, said "to expect quick results in this struggle, when India has much larger forces than us, would be unrealistic. Therefore, our action should be such that can be sustained over a long period. As a general rule Hindu morale would not stand more than a couple of hard blows at the right time and place. Such opportunities should, therefore, be sought and exploited."

The fundamentalists seem to

FUNDAMENTALISTS in Pakistan do not forget and forgive. They have killed Lahore High Court judge Bhatty for having released two years ago a Christian boy, who was wrongly indicted for having cast aspersions on Islam. The boy is living safely in Germany, where he had sought refuge. The judge has, however, paid the price for giving the verdict which the fundamentalists did not like.

People in Lahore recall the judge's assassination with regret. This incident and some other instances of brotewalling has made the liberals afraid of fundamentalists. There is fear in the air, although people generally feel that the type of Islam the fundamentalists represent has hamstrung their way of living. But they are too timid to speak out.

When it comes to relations with India, the fundamentalists are intractable: Even a tinge of indication of thaw between the two countries is damned as a surrender to Hindus. That is the reason why the relationship is stuck where it was 50 years ago. That also explains the absence of Pakistanis on the Wagah border on the August 14-15 night from the celebrations of the 50th year of the subcontinent's independence.

While in Lahore, I complained to many who had promised to come to the border but did not. They said that the Jamiat-e-Islami threatened to kill anybody who would go to the border. Threats were followed by telephone calls to prominent persons and leaders of several organisations. The propaganda unleashed was that the celebrations were an attempt to undo partition. Still more than 10,000 people would have reached the Wagah border. But then the Punjab government at Lahore stepped in and issued an order under Section 144 to ban the assembly of more than five people and also sealed the roads leading to the border.

While talking of migrants, the Muhajir Qawmi Movement

have frightened Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as well. He has issued an order that women appearing on television should cover their head and that boys and girls should not sit side by side in public. There is also an unofficial word that records of Indian songs should not be played in public. However, a recent study done in Pakistan indicates that from Karachi to Peshawar stocked 92 per cent of records and video cassettes from India.

Government, more so the establishment, puts all the time spoken in the path of relations with India. However, it is amazing to find the warmth a Pakistani has towards an Indian. He goes out of the way to shower his affection and hospitality. One hears them talking about their friends living across the border and wishing further relaxation in the visa system. There were complaints from some that their applications for visas were rejected without any rhyme or reason. But the delay was mentioned by many.

Surprisingly, when it comes to political hold, the fundamentalists have very little to show. It seems that the Pakistanis do not vote in the name of Islam. In fact, candidates with such planks are roundly defeated. The Pakistan National Assembly does not have even five members of fundamentalists. Pakistanis do have a swipe at us by pointing out that the BJP appealing in the name of Hindutva has 30 per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha. *****

Jinnah characterised the communal riots as a deep-rooted conspiracy, the main purpose of which was to shake the foundation of the new state of Pakistan. The remedy to this agonising situation, Jinnah asserted, was that India should crush the demon of communal riots with an iron hand and break the web of conspiracies woven in this regard. He regretted the mischievous propaganda that the Muslim League had betrayed the Muslim minority in India, where it would continue to suffer in the future and that Pakistan would not be able to take care of them.

THE old Dingha Singh building at the Mall in Lahore is due to be demolished. After partition, scores of people occupied the building and became owners over the years. Their demands for ownership were so many that the court could not reconcile them. It ordered that the building be auctioned and the money collected from it be distributed among the claimants.

While talking of migrants, the Muhajir Qawmi Movement

(MQM) is quiet. When I was in Karachi some time in 1996, they almost dictated terms. The city was tense and there was flight of capital. This has almost changed. Now there is no fear even when you walk through the MQM congested areas. There is normalcy. However, hundreds of MQM leaders and followers have been physically eliminated. In some cases, it has been a cold-blood murder. But then the argument is "how do you deal with violent movements?" It is the same question which is posed in India at disturbed places. I still believe that the law protectors cannot take the law into their own hands. There is something called human rights and they should be protected.

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