

High Stakes, Hardening Positions

Diplomacy fails to make any significant headway on the Kargil front. **Sukumar Muralidharan** writes from New Delhi

FEW people expected the meeting between Jaswant Singh and Sartaj Aziz, Foreign Ministers of neighbouring countries which stood on the brink of full-scale hostilities, to produce any dramatic initiatives. And the outcome in New Delhi on June 12 was very much as expected. There were no efforts to contrive a scene of cordiality for the media, none of the customary exchange of courtesies. The atmosphere bristled with hostility as the two Ministers stated their respective positions and parted ways, each to brief the media on what had clearly been a futile effort at dialogue.

Earlier, India had rebuffed repeated suggestions from Pakistan that talks represented the only means to defuse the sharpening conflict in the Kargil region. An initial offer from Sartaj Aziz to visit on June 7 was spurned, before the Indian government indicated that June 12 would be a convenient date. The acerbic tone was unmistakable. India's official spokesman was at pains to underline that there was neither a request being made nor an invitation being extended. Rather, the intimation was only of India's "convenience".

Pakistan's ardour for negotiations was transparent in its motivations — to broaden the terrain of discussions, to utilise the vantage heights it had gained in the mountains around Kargil to prise open the long-settled question of the disposition of Jammu and Kashmir. India's disdain was in these terms entirely predictable and understandable. The early reckoning was that international public opinion had tilted India's way quite decisively, giving it the moral ascendancy in diplomatic engagements with its truculent neighbour.

The US State Department spokesman had early on recognised that the Kargil events spoke of a qualitatively new type of military engagement by Pakistan-aided insurgents. Infiltration through the porous terrain along the Line of Control (LoC) had been a common occurrence, but for the insurgents to take a position and seek to hold it on the Indian side was entirely new. Posed in this fashion, the problem admitted of only one solution — that the Pakistan-aided intruders should fall back where they came from.

The US Ambassador in India then proceeded to quash all thoughts of international mediation in the issue, insisting that it was for India and Pakistan to resolve the matter between themselves. With no effort at subtlety, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary was then quoted as saying that the country would feel free to use "any weapon" in its arsenal in order to defend territory that it legitimately regarded as its own. Although the government subsequently insisted that this had been a wrong attribution, the

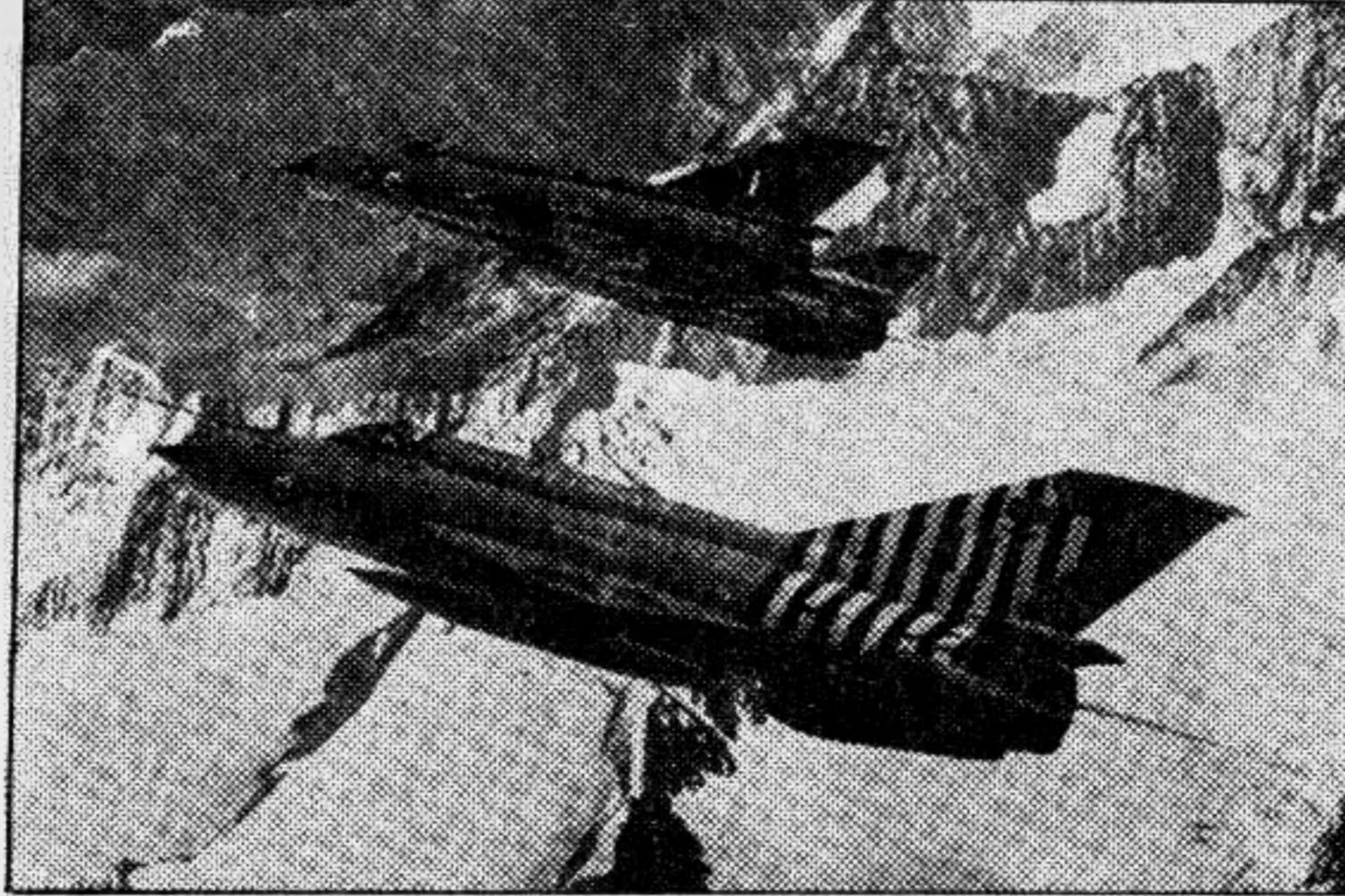
dimensions of the Pakistani strategy were clear enough by then. In the Pakistani narration, the events in Kargil were of a piece with a 10-year long history of insurgency in the State of Kashmir. India alone bore responsibility for the escalation of the conflict by bringing in its Air Force and heavy artillery. The logic of the conflict meant inevitably that the newly acquired nuclear expertise in the region would become a factor to reckon with at some point of time. This made it incumbent on the international community to intervene to cool down matters first and then address the underlying causes of tension in the region. The global response to this rather crude move was tepid at best.

Nuclear weapons have gone so far beyond the pale of legitimacy that defence analysts worldwide have not as yet begun to factor it into calculations on the potential scope of the current conflict. Rather, what has been accepted as the legitimate basis for negotiations in the current context is the military line of control between India and Pakistan.

In this respect, Pakistan's initial effort was to question the clarity of demarcation of the LoC. When this manoeuvre failed, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz entered the qualification that there was a difficulty in reconciling the demarcation on the map with the actual realities of a terrain dominated by sheer peaks and ridges. By early June, Pakistan's international standing had clearly taken a beating. All hopes of a favourable response were scuppered when Bruce Reidel, the US President's special assistant for national security with responsibility for the region, lent his authority to the demand that Pakistan pull back its raiders before any further progress could be achieved.

The conspicuous tilt in international public opinion stiffened India's determination not to open negotiations without its minimum condition being met. By June 8, there was a slight relaxation in this posture. That this was more formal than substantive was underlined by Jaswant Singh's own intervention in the matter on June 11.

Rarely has a government engaged in border skirmishes that threaten to explode into full-scale hostilities released sensitive intelligence material in its possession, least of all when it involves the chief of staff of the opposing army and one of his principal aides. Questions remain about the source of the transcripts that Jaswant Singh released on June 11, documenting two telephone conversations between the Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, General Pervez Musharraf, and his Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant-General Mohammad Aziz. But apart from a rather feeble effort by Pakistan's In-



Old, but still working ...

formation Minister Mushahid Hussain and the fine technical point drawn by Sartaj Aziz about the inadmissibility of tape-recordings as evidence, there has been no convincing rebuttal of their authenticity. On the face of things, the two transcripts seem to lend support to the early reading put forward by Defence Minister George Fernandes that the Pakistan Government and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate are innocent of culpability in the Kargil affair. But in Jaswant Singh's hands, the evidence that Fernandes had enigmatically referred to an occasion acquired a whole new thrust.

While Fernandes had used it to absolve the civilian establishment, Jaswant Singh used it as an accusation: 'This establishes beyond doubt the involvement and complicity of the Pakistani establishment in this misadventure...'. It raises doubts about the brief that Minister (Sartaj) Aziz carries and at whose dictates he is actually working." Jaswant Singh's references were clearly to the directions that Lt-Gen. Aziz thought it appropriate to convey to the Foreign Minister, as revealed in the transcript of his conversation with General Musharraf on May 29: "... in short, the recommendation for Sartaj Aziz Saheb is that he should make no commitment that Pakistan pull back its raiders before a patrol mission on May 14 were returned to India on June 9. Initial examination revealed that all the bodies bore torture marks. On June 11, Jaswant Singh had the autopsy reports with him, which confirmed, in his words, "that the soldiers were tortured and then shot at close quarters". Such conduct," said the Indian Foreign Minister, "is not simply a breach of established norms, or a violation of international agreements; it is a civilisational crime against all humanity; it is a reversion to barbaric medievalism."

ISPR in Pakistan was quick with its denials. It was simply inconceivable, said a military spokesman, that the Pakistan Army would return the bodies of soldiers killed in action if they bore the incriminating evidence of torture. But in the heightened climate of suspicion and unease about the Pakistan Army's determination to set the agenda in the neighbourhood, these proved rather unconvincing.

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General and former ISI Director-General, sought to set at rest these apprehensions in an article in *The Nation* (July 12): "We must have faith in our military brass that they would not land the political leadership in lasting trouble for temporary gains. And by the way, it is time that we started believing that the military in Pakistan [is] firmly under political control... Frankly, does it really matter 'whodunit' in Kargil, as long as it serves our purpose; and as long as we can get away with saying what suits us the best?"

Jaswant Singh's dramatic disclosures of June 11 focussed attention rather ruthlessly on this cleavage in Pakistan's apparatus of governance between the military command and the elected civilian establishment.

They also served as advance intimation that the Foreign Minister of Pakistan was also the government he represented enjoyed little freedom to negotiate with India. In making these points Jaswant Singh also went further. The bodies of six Indian Army personnel who had disappeared while on a patrol mission on May 14 were returned to India on June 9. Initial examination revealed that all the bodies bore torture marks. On June 11, Jaswant Singh had the autopsy reports with him, which confirmed, in his words, "that the soldiers were tortured and then shot at close quarters". Such conduct," said the Indian Foreign Minister, "is not simply a breach of established norms, or a violation of international agreements; it is a civilisational crime against all humanity; it is a reversion to barbaric medievalism."

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An Effective Game Plan

By creating a serious military problem for India in Kargil without "its direct involvement", Pakistan believes that it has played a winning card.

Amit Baruah writes from Islamabad.

"To take such action as will defuse Kashmir problem, weaken India's resolve and bring her to a conference table without provoking a general war. However, the element of escalation is always present in such struggles. So, whilst confining our action to the Kashmir area we must not be unmindful that India may in desperation involve us in a general war or violate Pakistan territory where we are weak. We must therefore be prepared for such a contingency." — Directive from President Ayub Khan to General Mohammad Musa, Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army, on August 29, 1965, quoted in *A History of the Pakistan Army* by Brian Cloughley (Oxford University Press, 1999).

Not much seems to have changed in the 34 years since Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar in 1965 by sending "hired Mujahids" and regular soldiers to take over Kashmir. The aims and objectives laid down by Ayub Khan seem to remain in place. This is evident from what India now experiences in Kargil. Since the start of the Foreign Secretary-level dialogue in April-May 1997, Pakistan's objective has been clear. The Kashmir issue, along with matters of peace and security, came to the fore in the agenda agreed upon for discussion in June 1997 in Islamabad.

As Brian Cloughley, a writer sympathetic to Pakistan, points out in his book on the Pakistan Army, the Delimitation of the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir Resulting from the Cease Fire of 17 December 1971 in Accordance with the Simla Agreement of 2 July 1972 is an "unambiguous" document. "Its territorial dimension is remarkable," writes Cloughley, whose book reflects the access granted to him by the Pakistan Army.

According to Cloughley, it contains these descriptions: "The Line of Control runs from NR 313861 to NR 316865, thence to NR 319867, thence EAST to NR 322868, thence NE to NR 318172, thence to a monument on ridge line at NR 336874 approximately 500 yards SE of Point 10008 (NR 3387) thence to a point NR 338881 on the Nullah, such that point NR 336874 and point NR 338881 are connected by a counter-clockwise arc with a radius of 500 yards, thence NE to junction."

However, it was part of a composite dialogue process, a part of the "two plus six process". The first substantive round of discussions in October 1998 between the Foreign Secretaries must have made it clear to Pakistan that India would not yield on the Kashmir issue. In fact, India made it clear that the first confidence-building measure Pakistan needed to undertake was to stop pushing infiltrators across the Line of Control (LoC).

Pakistan's decision to send in hundreds of infiltrators in the Kargil-Drass sector was part of a plan to put the spotlight on Kashmir and simultaneously undermine the LoC as a frontier that had basically

subvert the process of dialogue between the governments.

At his media conference in Delhi, Sartaj Aziz repeated the denials that the ISPR had issued. But the Indian Foreign Minister provided a different construction: the issue of torture had been raised in discussions and there were no denials from the Pakistani side. Facts were clearly being tailored to suit conflicting agendas. Sartaj Aziz insisted that he had provided concrete proposals to the Indian government to defuse the tension in Kargil. Jaswant Singh claimed that no such suggestions had come. On landing in Islamabad, the Pakistan Foreign Minister spelt out the nature of these proposals: that India should stop its air

strikes and artillery firing. The Indian side, however, had only one point to make: that the incursions across the LoC should be reversed.

In the reading across the border, these incursions are a natural outcome of a 10-year-long insurgency in the State of Kashmir, which the Pakistan government has little control over. While responding to questions in English, Sartaj Aziz used the term "freedom struggle", though in his native tongue he chose the more provocative characterisation of "jehad" to describe the Kashmir insurgency.

These are imbedded features of the official discourse in Pakistan which it would be a folly for any Minister to depart from.

But they convey rather starkly what precisely is at stake in the Kargil offensive. Afghanistan is the theatre where the Pakistani Army and the ISI most recently lent their muscle to the cause of "jehad". Even there, the fatal consequences of rivalry between different wings of the military establishment and the political dispensation were always apparent. The ISI, for instance, was committed, till very late, to supporting the Mujahideen faction headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, even when it launched a campaign of devastation against the civilian population of Kabul and the regime headed by a rival grouping of "holy" warriors. In the mid-1990s, over the objections of the ISI, the Pakistani

Army switched its patronage to a little known cabal of Islamic radicals called the Taliban. The ISI resisted for a while but then gave in. The consequences, in terms of the complete collapse of the Afghan state and the reversion of the entire country into the brutish conditions of medieval barbarism are today apparent to even the Western powers which sponsored the Taliban's rise. It is this rather baneful record of meddling in neighbouring states that underpins Pakistan's international isolation today. And Afghanistan is a monitoring region for Kashmir and the entire region of what is at stake in the Kargil conflict.

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Better 'Net' Than Never

As Bhutan leaves behind a history of self-imposed isolation and joins the world of television and the Internet social change is inevitable, **Thuji Lhamu** writes

"THE net is an open platform where intelligent ideas can be discussed," says Dr Eric Loo, Head of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Wollongong (UOW) and a lecturer for Online Journalism. "It empowers the Bhutanese to put forward their ideas and be part of discussions taking part around the world. There is greater interaction between people on the net and it has, today, become an increasingly used social tool."

For a country practically cut off from the rest of the world the Internet will prove to be a valuable research tool giving Bhutanese access to diverse information from a library of worldwide resources.

Like other countries linked to the Internet, Bhutan's tourism and fledgling music and movie industries are areas that would benefit from the exposure brought on by television and the Internet.

The Internet will also help counter the anti-Bhutan propaganda posted on various international websites — a contentious issue among Bhutanese students overseas.

David Blackall, television producer and lecturer at UOW, says that television as a powerful medium with a wide reach can be an effective tool to showcase Bhutan's rich culture and traditions. "The Bhutanese can show the world the beauty of their country in their terms, through their eyes, instead of foreigners coming in and doing it for them," he said.

While studies have shown that television and the Internet can be addictive, it dispels the myth that they create mentally passive beings.

The couch potato syndrome is silly because viewers may be physically passive while watching television but their minds are active, constantly disseminating information, forming opinions and analysing situations," Mr. Blackall said. "It is an interactive medium."



New learners showing eagerness

Recent high school massacre in Colorado, where two classmates gunned down their fellow students leaving 17 dead and 25 injured, has sparked debates about the dangers of television and forced policy makers to acknowledge that television, the Internet and violent video games do lead to violent streaks.

An article by psychiatrist Dr Brandon Centrewall in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, says that violence in South Africa rose by 130 per cent after the introduction of television. He further estimated that half the homicides in America are related to violent television exposure.

Television is a powerful medium because the use of sound and visuals portrays emotions which people can relate to realistically, Mr. Blackall said.

"Most often families watch television together in an environment of false security and that's when people are most vulnerable. The seductive images of American culture can penetrate the family unit and people can be manipulated without being aware of it."

But policy makers have been forced to sit up and take notice of possible threats, television and the Internet can pose on impressionable minds.

The American government has been insisting on television companies using a V-Chip, a technology that parents can use to block out programs they don't want children to use, while Australia is going for stronger television ratings with violent or sexual material being relegated to late night hours.

However, there is only so

much that regulatory bodies can do.

While it is easier to regulate the content of television it is not easy to do the same for the Internet. The concept of the World Wide Web itself denies censorship privileges. Information packages are passed from one electric node to the other so while service providers can block the download of offensive material onto the web, the user can still download the information from another site outside Bhutan.

While adult ratings can restrict minors from watching adult programs on television it is much more difficult to regulate the content of the web.

Although most adult Internet sites have a disclaimer stating users have to be over 18 years to access the information the system does not work too well. As the Internet system is based on computer links actual contact between the user and the provider is minimal. The over 18 years clause protects the provider but not the underage user.

How does Bhutan handle these issues especially when Internet and television savvy users, like America and Australia are still unable to do so?

Mr Blackall says self-censorship is the way to go. "As journalists and producers of a powerful medium we must be careful not to overkill issues which depict extreme violence. We have to tell the truth but it has to be done tastefully."

Courtesy: The Kuensel of Bhutan

Human Bombs, Again

An LTTE human bomb kills a "Tiger Hunter" in Batticaloa, leaving the future of the anti-LTTE campaign in the East uncertain. **D. B. S. Jeyaraj** writes

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has a reputation for the use of suicide killers. Members of its suicide squad, called 'Black Tigers', have driven explosives-laden vehicles onto military and economic targets. The first Black Tiger was Miller, who rammed a truck into a Sri Lankan Army camp at the Neliyaddi Madhyam Vidyalayam on July 5, 1987.

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumpudur in Tamil Nadu on May 21, 1991 was carried out by a suicide killer. There were five significant 'first time' aspects to that operation: it was the first time that the LTTE targeted an Indian political leader; it was the first time that it conducted a major operation outside Sri Lanka and on Indian soil; it was the first time that a woman suicide killer was engaged; it was the first time that the belt bomb, a device strapped to the body, was used; and finally, it was the first time that a human bomb was used for the purpose of assassinating a single individual. Sri Lankan Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, who was killed on March 2, 1991, was the victim of a car bomb.

Initially the LTTE plan was to use human bombs only to target important personalities, such as President Ranasinghe Premadasa or Opposition leader Gamarai Dissanayake. In recent times, however, it has lowered its sights as far as targets are concerned. A female cadre was used as a human bomb in an attempt on a mid-rank police investigator a few months ago.

On May 29, for the first time the LTTE killed a leader of a rival Tamil group using a human bomb. The target was 35-year-old Muthulingam Ganeshkumar, whose name 'de guerre' was Razeek. Based in Batticaloa, the capital of the Eastern Province, and leading an unorthodox entity called the 'Razeek Group', he had acquired a name for himself as one who had dedicated himself to fighting the Tigers in the east.

Razeek himself had a simple, unambiguous approach towards the LTTE. Unlike some Tamil groups such as the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), which align

themselves with the Sri Lankan Army on the one hand and act sympathetically towards the LTTE on the other, the Razeek Group fought along with the Army while retaining operational autonomy. The group formally belonged to the National Auxiliary Corps and was designated the ninth battalion of the Sri Lankan National Guards. The 250-strong unit was trained in the North Central Province Infantry Training School at Minneriya.

Razeek himself had undergone an officers' training course. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant but refused to accept formal appointment saying that he was entitled to the rank of Major or at least Captain. Razeek was posthumously promoted Lieutenant. Razeek had a fascination for guns and motorcycles. On the day of his death, he had gone with some of his cadres to a motor vehicle workshop called Iyan's, situated in the heart of Batticaloa town, to purchase a motorcycle from a trader, Mohammed Ali Thahir. Another motorcycle, which was seized from a Tiger cadre, was being repaired at Iyan's.

Around 12.30 p.m. a teenager came cycling on the Trincomalee road. Razeek was standing in front of the garage, chatting with Thahir. His bodyguard, Chandran Jeyakumar, stood a few yards away. Alongside Razeek was 27-year-old Paramanathan Thayaram alias Thaya. Further away was a double cab vehicle with four armed cadres. The teenager suddenly entered the garage premises, pedalled towards Razeek and jumped on him. The human bomb exploded. Razeek, Chandran, Thahir and the killer died on the spot. Nine to others, including five of Razeek's cadres, were injured. Of them Thaya succumbed to his injuries in hospital.