

# The Miraculous Escape

Survivors of August 2 train tragedy recount tales of death and suffering to Kritivas Mukherjee and Syed Zarir Husain in Gaisal (West Bengal)



Results of human error

more people fell on me. That is all I know," said Hemanta Barua, 37, who was travelling to Delhi after a short holiday in Guwahati. Barua says he was lucky to escape with a broken collarbone and a broken ankle.

Doctors in the North Bengal Medical College Hospital in Siliguri town complained that there was lack of medicines in the hospital. "Many who have survived this accident will have to live with physical handi-

caps," says Shusobhan Chakraborty, a doctor in the Siliguri hospital.

Many sustained injuries to their backbone after falling from their berths. The matter might have been made worse by

the fact that when the accident occurred, people were asleep," says Chakraborty.

"We are hiring private doctors to cope with the heavy rush of seriously wounded passengers," Miran Banerjee, a doctor from the Siliguri hospital, told IANS over the phone.

Railway authorities today declared that the cabin man and the gang man of Gaisal station who could be responsible for the accident were absconding.

"Foul stench of rotting charred flesh was emanating from the area when we left the spot on Monday night," Vikram Bordoloi, a young engineer who sustained eye and leg injuries said in Guwahati.

Many of the survivors complained that rescue teams were very late in arriving. The attitude of the railway authorities was indeed pathetic as they are virtually taking no interest in speeding up the rescue and relief operations," Ashok Bhattacharya, West Bengal Minister of Urban Development and legislator from Islampur close to the accident site told IANS over telephone.

Among the fortunate few who were waiting at the Guwahati station was Pralad Singh who owns a grocery shop in the town. His wife and children were in the special train that came from the accident site and had sustained only minor injuries. "Before going home we and my family will first go straight to the temple to thank God," he told IANS at the station.

Not everyone gathered there was as fortunate. — IANS

# Road to Negotiation

Sri Lankan main opposition United National Party chairman Karu Jayasuriya talks to P. Jayaram of IANS

A top leader of Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) feels that despite the terror campaign by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a negotiated political settlement involving all parties concerned. There should be the will to talk in a democratic set up," UNP chairman Karu Jayasuriya told IANS in an interview here.

UNP chief and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is on record that the government should talk to the LTTE even while maintaining military pressure on the guerrillas through two rounds of earlier peace talks collapsed after the rebels unilaterally broke them and renewed their separatist campaign.

Jayasuriya was commenting on the killing of Neelan Tiruchelvam, the popular leader of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), by a suspected LTTE suicide bomber in Colombo on July 29. "It was very sad. He was a moderate democrat and above all a gentleman who worked for peace in the country," said Jayasuriya, a former Colombo Mayor and currently leader of the opposition in the Western Provincial Council.

He said the Indian leaders he met during his visit here — including Congress president Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) vice president K.L. Sharma — had all expressed shock over the killing of Tiruchelvam as most of them knew him personally. Jayasuriya was in the city on his way back after attending a workshop on urban management in Kathmandu.

Nepal. The LTTE has been waging a bloody separatist campaign in the island nation's minority Tamil-dominated north-east that has left nearly 60,000 people dead in the last two decades. The guerrillas have targeted not only the security forces but systematically eliminated leaders of the majority Sinhala parties and also leaders of their own community in their violent campaign.

Observers of Sri Lankan developments blame not only the LTTE but also the two main Sinhala parties, the UNP and President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), for the continued bloodletting in the island.

While the government accuses the UNP of not extending parliamentary support to its proposed sweeping constitutional reforms to end the conflict, UNP leaders counter that their party had demonstrated more responsibility as an opposition party than the SLFP had shown when it was in the opposition.

"It is the UNP which has been the most active participant in the (parliamentary) select committee" which had discussed the government's constitutional reforms proposals, Jayasuriya claimed. Unfortunately, the UNP did not get the same kind of cooperation from the SLFP to resolve the ethnic problem," he said.

The proposed reforms would transform Sri Lanka's unitary constitution to a federal one in all but name.

The UNP's support for the reforms is vital as major constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority in Parliament, which the ruling People's Alliance (PA) does not command. Press reports say that with the presidential and parliamentary elections due next year, the government may move

the devolution package, as the constitutional reforms are called, in Parliament to win the support of the Tamil community even if the UNP votes against it.

Jayasuriya made it clear that the devolution proposals as they were today, were not acceptable to the UNP. While the party had serious reservations about changing the unitary nature of the constitution, it was also opposed to devolution of powers on land and police to the provinces.

"We don't want Sri Lanka to become another Yugoslavia or Bosnia. We don't want new barriers to be raised in our country. What we need is to develop trust between the two communities (Sinhala and Tamils)," he said. However, he agreed that moves for a settlement of the ethnic conflict were at a stalemate and the prospects of evolving a national consensus on the devolution package impossible. "I am firmly of the view that everyone must rise above petty politics and try to arrive at a broad national consensus," he said.

Jayasuriya said the UNP's stand on the devolution proposals would not affect the party's prospects in the national elections. He said the UNP had improved its support base since the 1994 elections and the recent provincial council elections had proved that. The UNP was voted out of office in 1994 after being in power for 17 continuous years.

Jayasuriya alleged that but for widespread rigging by the SLFP and People's Alliance, the UNP would have returned to power in most provinces. Except in the North-Central and North-Western provincial councils, the combined opposition was stronger than other provincial councils, he said. — India Abroad News Service

# Democracy Dawns on Royal Bhutan

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

THE demise of cold war a decade ago brought in its wake a democratic resurgence in South Asia. It did not necessarily ensure its quality. With a sharp political decline in India, the world's largest democracy — its age-old values and norms have suffered setback. The dictatorial disposition of Pakistani rulers dealt severe blows to its institutions. The 'democratic' governments of Bangladesh have been as imperious as military autocracy before them. In war-torn Sri Lanka many of the principles of democracy are compromised in the prevailing melee while Nepal derived nothing better with the triumph of democracy over monarchy in 1990. What we see today in the name of democracy are, at the most, its subterfuge.

Given this dismal picture of our democratic experiences the news emanating from Royal Bhutan, the tiny kingdom perched on the lofty Himalaya, are indeed encouraging and interesting. Whereas the rulers all over South Asia crave for acquiring and concentrating power, its absolute monarch volunteers to give up his privileged powers to allow space for democratic practices.

Over the years since early eighties King Jigme Wangchuk of Bhutan subtly moved his kingdom towards greater people's participation and decentralisation of economic and political power. Back in 1981 the King introduced a system of devolution and decentralisation of political power by creating District Development Councils — a novelty in an old traditional society. The councils — twenty of them — with 570 elected members were great steps in the direction of decentralisation in decision-making process.

Ten years later in 1991 the king took another significant step towards devolution of power and people's participation in developmental works by establishing 202 Block Development committees with a total

of 2606 elected members. Thus, since 1991 the Kingdom has a total of 3176 elected representatives excluding its 105 members of the National Assembly. These changes in the political system are, of course, not one-time event but they are part of a continuous process.

True, Bhutan does not have as yet a multi-party system; neither has it introduced universal adult franchise. But considering Bhutan's stage of socio-political development and its geographical setting even one vote per family unit is quite a revolutionary step. This by itself has given a measure of confidence to the Bhutanese, produced a number of people capable of undertaking various responsibilities and created a base for future leadership. The

possibility of the introduction of adult franchise is also not ruled out. According to the king, every change is effected "in the interest of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people." It is up to the people to decide whether to have a universal suffrage and when. Nevertheless, the Kingdom has taken the changes already introduced in its stride.

The most significant step on the devolution of power was, however, taken in 1998 when the king abdicated his position as the head of the government and restricted his role to being the head of the state only. He no longer presides over the cabinet meetings and this function is now performed by the chairman of the cabinet — a post that rotates among its members annually.

Bhutan is now expecting, as a result of this gesture a reciprocal response from Nepal

where in its eastern region a large number of its citizens of Bhutanese origin are living in the camps as refugees. Bhutan has been attempting to resolve the nagging problem with neighbouring Nepal through people's participation and not just royal decree.

Though backward and one of the least developed countries of the world, it is highly endowed with resources. Particularly in view of its highly favourable

land-population ratio, it enjoys a per capita income of \$545 which is higher than that of many third world countries. Its forest cover stands at an enviable 72 per cent of the country's land space. More important is that the government has so far been able to preserve it in sharp contrast to dwindling forest cover in neighbouring countries.

Bhutan's economy which has been looking up receives a new impetus from the country's present democratic dispensation. Anchored to a traditional past, the country is fast approaching a state of modernisation. The school enrolment has reached 80 per cent and primary healthcare is provided to 95 per cent of the people. Annual budget spends a substantial part on the social sector and human resources development. All these have been made possible through decentralisation and people's involvement in the country's progress and prosperity. Bhutan thinks today even of doing away with external aid.

The king also gave up his position as chairman of the Planning Commission in 1991 and increasingly involved his subjects in the planning process. The villagers are now enthused in participating in the developmental works of their own area. The workload of the king who turns 44 this year has, according to him, been reduced by 60 per cent as a result. He is left with enough time to conceptualise his theme of 'per capita happiness' which he now wants to provide to his people.



The Finance Minister of Bhutan in the Assembly

# Building Trust in the Region

by Dr Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti

FOLLOWING the withdrawal of the Kashmiri Mujahideen from the heights they had occupied above Kargil, on the appeal of the Pakistan prime minister, the way should be clear for the initiation of the dialogue between India and Pakistan in accordance with the Lahore Declaration signed in February this year. However, the Indian leadership is already talking of conditions which must be satisfied before New Delhi agrees to the resumption of a dialogue.

Prime Minister Vajpayee referred to the damage done to the trust between the two countries as a result of the Kargil "intrusion". Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh has talked about Pakistan demonstrating its sincerity in seeking good relations with India before the Lahore process can be revived.

In a statement made at Singapore on 25 July, after his meeting with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Mr Jaswant Singh specified three conditions which Pakistan must fulfil to demonstrate its sincerity:

i) Complete withdrawals from the Kargil sector; ii) Showing respect for the inviolability of the Line of Control; and iii) An end to aiding and abetting "cross-border terrorism."

This approach obviously seeks to capitalize on the impression created in the western capitals that Pakistan is responsible for injecting conflict into Kashmir by enabling Kashmiri Mujahideen to cross the Line of Control in the Kargil sector to disrupt Indian communications with Ladakh and

sumption that India's *de facto* occupation of most of Jammu and Kashmir is irreversible, and that the Line of Control has virtually become the boundary between the two countries, the violation of which is treated by India as aggression.

Considering that the US, Britain and other G-8 countries recognize that the state of Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory, on which the UN involvement finds expression in Security Council resolutions, as well as in the continued presence of UN Military Observers, their current bias towards India can be attributed to two main considerations.

i) The outbreak of military confrontation is viewed with serious concern since both India and Pakistan are now overtly nuclear, and have gone to war over Kashmir in the past; ii) The major powers wish to encourage a peaceful dialogue which had apparently received a boost through the Lahore Declaration issued in February last following a summit meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries.

The history of 52 years since independence has demonstrated that the main hurdle to building trust in South Asia has been the ambition of New Delhi to assume the hegemonic mantle of the British raj. Pakistan, whose very separate existence as a sovereign state took place in the teeth of the opposition from the Hindu elite, has been a particular target of Indian hostility. The failure to fulfil obligations, assumed voluntarily with regard to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, is a prime example of policies that militate against the emergence of trust in the region.

That India should assume the role of a major player in this region, Asia and eventually the world is perhaps warranted by its size, population and economic potential. However, whether such a role should mean imposing its will on its smaller neighbours through force or the threat of it clearly runs counter to the norms of inter-state relations, and produces tensions rather than trust. A cursory historical survey of India's policy towards its neighbours in general, and Pakistan in particular, shows that its rulers have sought to exercise hegemony, rather than pursue the path of "Panchsheel" principles of peaceful co-existence enunciated jointly by prime ministers Zhou Enlai and Nehru at Bandung in Indonesia in 1954.

Indeed, as the New York Times once calculated, India is the one country which has been involved in the largest number of conflicts since its independence. The country which still glorifies the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi has increasingly resorted to the use of force in pursuit of national objectives. In Jammu and Kashmir, the size of forces deployed to keep down the freedom struggle of its people has mounted steadily since they launched an indigenous movement in 1989 till it has now reached the level of 700,000 troops.

We might trace the implementation of major accords that were concluded after the conflicts of 1965 and 1971 to promote a relationship of trust and confidence.

Despite the Tashkent Declaration signed in January 1966, India availed itself of what Mrs Gandhi called her "opportunity

of the century" to dismember Pakistan by intervening in the then East Pakistan in 1971.

That conflict was followed by the Simla Agreement concluded in July 1972. This writer was a member of the Pakistan delegation at Simla that spent nearly a week on hammering out a text acceptable to both sides. Having scored a military victory in 1971, and holding 90,000 prisoners of war, India was inclined to dictate terms. However, the Pakistan side stood firm to safeguard the national interest. Though India constantly harps on its successes in relation to that agreement, which gave primacy to bilateral negotiations, and converted the UN-drawn ceasefire line into a bilaterally agreed Line of Control, it conveniently ignores three vital safeguards secured by Pakistan:

i) Their relations are to be governed by the principles and purposes of the Charter of the UN. Under the Charter its provisions overrule any bilateral accords. Therefore, New Delhi's contention that the Simla Agreement rendered the 1948-49 UN resolutions on Kashmir obsolete is not valid.

ii) Article IV provides that the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir shall be respected by both sides "without prejudice to the recognized position of either side." Pakistan's recognized position is based on the UN resolutions.

iii) Article VI requires the two sides to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of durable peace and normalization of relations including "a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir."

The post-Simla realities are

that India never agreed to a substantive discussion of the Kashmir dispute, insisting, on the one hand, that it could not be raised in the UN, and maintaining, in bilateral contacts, that Jammu and Kashmir was an "integral part of India." So far as respect for the Line of Control is concerned, it occupied Chhorbatla in 1972, Siachen in 1984 and Qamar in 1988. Its stance that the LoC does not extend to Siachen Glacier ignores the provision of Article I that "neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation" obtaining on the ground.

India's actions after the Simla Agreement were far from being conducive to promoting a relationship of trust. It carried out a "peaceful" nuclear explosion in 1974 that compelled Pakistan to develop its own nuclear capability as a deterrence. It occupied Siachen in 1984, in a major violation of the Simla Agreement, which led to the creation of the highest battleground in the world, since this incursion threatened the strategic Karakoram Highway between Pakistan and China. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, India responded favourably to Moscow's request to exert military pressure on Pakistan on account of its support to the Afghan Mujahideen.

Even before the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the people of Indian occupied Kashmir launched a movement for freedom, as India proceeded with measures to integrate the state and stepped up repression. Pakistan's political and diplomatic support to this indigenous struggle further exacerbated tensions.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

CLAIMS of deft handling of the crisis and a sense of relief over the ultimate outcome notwithstanding, the Kargil confrontation has in its immediate aftermath raised questions over the lack of vigil along the Line of Control in Kashmir and the naivete of those in power who trusted the peace overtures from Pakistan.

But once these election-time debates are over, the policy makers would have to confront the new realities of a nuclearised South Asia and a situation when the old, institutionalised formulations on foreign policy and long held notions can no longer be regarded as carved in stone.

The first shift is the obvious internationalisation of the Kashmir dispute. Despite the Government of India's protestations, it is clear that the crisis was resolved as much through diplomacy in the executive offices in Washington, Islamabad, New Delhi, Beijing and elsewhere as through military operations in the mountains of Kargil. The diplomatic approach is certainly not a bad option but it does mark a change of stance. Not since Tashkent in 1965 when India signed a Soviet-mediated agreement have the good offices of any outside power been used in dispute with Pakistan as was done in ending Kashmiri bilateral discussions. Pakistan had become the established formula of the Indian foreign policy apparatus and at Lahore earlier this year, Pakistan too seemed to have become reconciled to this approach. The bilateral track was regarded as desirable for pursuing an independent policy towards Pakistan that would be free of the pressures from outside powers.

It also stemmed from a sense of confidence in being able to deal with Pakistan both diplomatically and militarily. Even after 1989 when Pakistan stepped up its cross-border incursions and sponsorship of militancy in Kashmir, international attention and pressure were of manageable proportions. The low intensity conflict in Kashmir did not raise much alarm and the situation was described as one in which neither outright war nor peace prevailed. International perception, however, underwent a drastic change after May 1998 and Kashmir from then on began to be looked upon as a potential nuclear flashpoint. In an earlier period, Kargil would certainly not have raised so much alarm worldwide or triggered so much of diplomatic movement in Washington, London and Beijing as well as in Islamabad and New Delhi as was seen in the last few weeks. Despite India's aversion to internationalisation of the Kashmir question, it had to immerse itself in an active, high-level diplomatic engagement with the U.S., China, Britain, the G-8 and much of the international community.

Not that there was much to complain about. If in 1971 there was widespread public resentment over the American tilt towards Pakistan, this time round the country was basking in the favourable turn of opinion that saw Pakistan as the provocator and was appreciative of India's restraint. In terms of the U.S. attitude to an Indo-Pakistan dispute, Kargil definitely marked a change from its attitude during previous conflicts. With Pakistan no

longer a frontline state in the campaign to contain the Soviet Union, the tendency to support an ally under all circumstances was pushed to the background. For once, the U.S. was judging the issue on its merits, found Pakistan to be the unprovoked aggressor and pressed for its pullout from Kargil.

Efforts since the early 1990s to remove the suspicions and place India-U.S. relations on a footing of openly discussed and clearly understood goals and approaches seemed at last to have paid off. Yet, it would be unrealistic to premise foreign policy on Pakistan's isolation. For the U.S., close ties with Islamabad established under difficult circumstances cannot be ignored. There is additionally concern that unless the democratic government there is strengthened, the fundamentalist and the ethnic groups there may lead to the creation of another Afghanistan.

Once the elections in India are over and a new government assumes office, it will have to engage Pakistan as well as the US and the rest of the international community in a serious diplomatic exchange. The new realities of a post-nuclear South Asia would then have come home to roost.

At the back of the American strategic mind is always the nightmare of Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling into the hands of religious extremist groups or of radical Islamic nations. Under the circumstances, neutrality of the U.S. and the international community or the absence of a hostile tilt would seem to be the most India could ask for, nor would it seem justified in seeking anything more. Even such neutrality, however, would not let India sit back now that Kargil is behind us, but would result in a constant international pressure to start a serious dialogue on Kashmir. For the international community, a permanent agreement between India and Pakistan on Kashmir would seem to be the only means of averting more Kargils.

The American President, Mr. Clinton, has expressed his personal interest in the continuation of the Lahore process and if the U.S. is not trying to become a mediator, it is in deference to Indian sensibilities. Short of obtrusive mediation, there would be no dearth of suggestions, no end to calls for a substantive dialogue, finding a permanent solution would be the nagging refrain in the rest of the world's diplomatic engagement with India. The second major shift in the post-Pokhran, post-Kargil situation would therefore have to be towards a substantive dialogue on Kashmir. For long, Indian foreign policy had been predicated on India being an integral part of India, not calling for a serious dialogue.

Courtesy: The Hindu of India