

## South Asia

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## Cricket the Catalyst

By Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury



THE current scenario in the South Asian region is not a happy one, as bilateral relations amongst different countries have taken a nosedive in recent times contributing to overall deterioration of the political environment. Unfortunately, this situation runs counter to the positive momentum created by the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and other constructive advancement made in bringing more than one billion people of this densely populated region closer economically, socially and politically. The efforts under the aegis of the SAARC and other collaborative activities bore significant hopes given the resource constraints and other limitations of this region. The achievements may not be substantial, but not mean either. Inherent mistrust and historical difficulties often serve as an obstacle to positive ventures in the region, but recent years have shown that these problems are not insurmountable. But certain developments in recent times reversed the process, causing a kind of uncertainty and despondency in the good work in the area. Notably, the worsening of ties between two principal countries whose enmity otherwise is not unknown -- India and Pakistan -- over the last more than one year has left the SAARC movement at a standstill. It is no secret that the next SAARC summit hangs in the balance with no indication in sight as to when this can be convened after being postponed late last year owing to Indo-Pakistan hostilities.

Of late, Dhaka-Islamabad ties have chilled over the audacious remarks by a Pakistani diplomat, who, by his undiplomatic and silly comments, sought to hurt the feelings of people of this country. The matter snowballed to an extent that Bangladesh had to take a tough position and this caused further ripples in the bilateral ties which were not in good shape for some time past due to some other reasons. When problems persist at the bilateral level involving these three main countries of South Asia, overall scenario in the area becomes obvious. Conditions here at the moment are not congenial for healthy development of co-operative endeavour even though member states of the SAARC say they are sparing no efforts to bring the true spirit of the SAARC once again back to the track.

The present situation in South Asian region is also known in outside world -- even to the distant regions. I was recently in Australia on a week-long visit and conversations there with persons of different shades of opinion made me convinced that they too are aware of the current stand-off in the ongoing developmental efforts of the seven south Asian nations, mainly the discussions involve India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The importance of the region stems from its large population, some of whom live in different countries of the world. After all, South Asia is home to one-fifth of mankind.

Why cricket cannot be a force that can bind all these countries in a solid unity? John Lecenby, chief executive of 'Note Printing Australia (NPA), asked while discussing the status of cricket in South Asia. He bemoans the not-too-friendly ties now prevailing in the region and feels South Asian nations can use this game, in which four nations of

the region have excelled, as a vehicle for overcoming difficulties in developing relations. Australia has tremendous passions for cricket and most people there like to talk the game in brass tacks even if main subjects of discussions in formal or informal gatherings are different. Several other Australians stressed that the interest in cricket should be brought into play to obviate the negative trend in political climate in the region.

Expatriates from this region too give vent to their feelings on the stalemate in South Asia. Professor Mohammad Mahmud of Victoria University in Melbourne feels that positive aspects must be given more priority to neutralise the bitterness that often come to the fore due to various reasons. Dr. Amanullah Khan of University of Melbourne; and other nice and friendly Bangladeshis and my old friend Mahiuddin Humayun, too, feel that Dhaka as a pioneer of the SAARC movement must provide the leadership to sustain its success. An employee at a Guyanese seafood restaurant near the Sydney Bridge too appeared keen to know about the region, politically and otherwise. Our Australian friend Cliff Gerathy, who makes frequent trips to the region, says that South Asia occupies important position for manifold reasons. Cliff is the director of business development for the Asia and Pacific region of Security, a joint venture of the Reserve Bank of Australia and Belgian UCB company which makes films for polymer notes. He has been involved in the introduction of technologically advanced plastic currency notes in Bangladesh. Such notes are being circulated in Bangladesh from middle of this month, synchronising the month of 'victory'. Incidentally, Bangladesh is the first country in the region to adopt this technology which has been adopted by many countries by this time. Other countries in the region are also showing interest in polymer notes, which are durable, easy to handle and cheaper in cost in the long run. Australia is the pioneer of such notes as much as it is an ardent promoter of cricket.

Concerns over the South Asian situation underline the fact everyone wants positive efforts towards ensuring the wellbeing of the vast multitude living here. Cricket can be used as an effective weapon to further the cause of amity and friendship in the region. The people of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh harbour intense passion for the game. Ironically, it, too, often becomes victim of political animosity that often spreads over. Presently, this popular game has become an unfortunate fallout of Indo-Pak belligerence as the scheduled matches between the two countries are not taking place. It is undesirable, as cricket should, on the contrary, be allowed to bridge gaps among the nations of this region.

Sometime ago, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organised an international seminar on South Asia. In his speech as a special guest at the opening session, Deputy Minister for Shipping Saber Hossain Chowdhury, who is also the president of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), said cricket is a 'great passion' in the region and can meaningfully and effectively bring the nations closer. It is possible that the potentials of this game as a 'passion' be exploited to the full for benefits of the SAARC when it is at a crossroads.

## South Asia

## Walled in or Walled out, the Globalisation Dilemma

by Mansoor Mamoona

Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know/What I am walling in or walling out. -- Robert Frost.



GLOBALISATION ostensibly is the demolition of all walls, breaking of all barriers. Canadian media expert Marshall McLuhan first coined the words "the global village." He had in mind the impending revolution in information technology. His futuristic view has come true. Information technology has brought about the biggest ever revolution on a global plank after the industrial revolution in Europe in the 18th century. The revolution is so sweeping that now no country can afford to live in isolation. The world has entered the age of knowledge-based economy. Internet, e-mail, e-commerce, and even e-book (as was exhibited in the Frankfurt Book Fair) have made the world smaller. Paperless commerce is increasingly making its presence felt.

Globalisation mainly relates to the new economy, which is assuming the form of liberalisation, deregulation, market economy, structural reforms and adjustments, etc. True, the world is becoming smaller, but the markets and opportunities are becoming bigger. The only quality that can survive in the age of globalisation is the one that can stand intense competitions through increased productivity and technological innovations. Globalisation also means the ability to attract and lure increasing amount of foreign direct investment (FDI), merger of companies and multinational corporations having a sharper competitive edge and joint ventures. With the process of liberalisation, co-operation among nations and trade linkages have thus widened and greatly augmented. Their interdependence has increased manifold. In short, globalisation means managing the economy well, opening up of the economy and adapting to the evolving technologies and markets for rapid economic growth.

As the process of globalisation sets in, the government becomes smaller and assumes the role of a facilitator leaving the steering wheel to private sector. In other words, privatisation and deregulation assume the dominant role. Globalisation also means good governance and ingredients that make it such as maintaining law and order, social stability, free and fair elections at regular intervals, soon and so forth.

For the countries of South Asia, the largest poverty pocket in the world, globalisation is hence at once a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is how to avoid being swept away by the currents and crosscurrents of stiff Darwinian competition for survival. The South Asian countries are still at the receiving end and are, therefore, at a greatly disadvantaged position with regards to adaptability with the evolving new technologies and market realities. Indian President K R Narayanan, in his Inde-

pendence Day 2000 message, aptly said that in the frenzy of catching up with the process of globalisation a vast majority of teeming millions in India have been bypassed. In South Asia providing food, pure drinking water, Medicare, shelter, education, etc is still an uphill task for most of the governments. There is growing world-wide antagonism against globalisation. The World Trade Organisation (WTO), which acts as the spokesperson of globalisation, witnessed angry protests when it met early this year at Seattle. The meeting ended in fiasco. These were manifestations of popular feelings of the third world countries against globalisation which consider it as a new type of economic colonialism. Under the globalisation scenario the poor countries like those in South Asia have two options -- to link up with the emerging new economic order or to get lost in the wilderness of uneven trade mechanisms devised highly in favour of the developed countries. This gross discriminatory situation has been further aggravated by creation of such strong trade blocs by developed and newly industrialised countries as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation), NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), EU (and its possible further integration in the near future) and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

The South Asian countries were grouped into SAARC. But due to bitter and strained relations between India and Pakistan, SAARC is now in a limbo. So for them there is now no viable platform for co-operation and interaction as well as a bargaining chip and clout in the age of globalisation. Yet another cogent point is the high vulnerability of the economies of the South Asian countries. When there is recession or economic slump or a rise in oil prices the South Asian countries are invariably the hardest hit as their economies are fragile.

But the crux for South Asia is -- how to effectively link up and integrate with the process of globalisation with the resource deficiencies the region is faced with, and meet the challenges not only to business but to the societies as well. It has, therefore, become pertinent on their part to strengthen dialogue, co-ordination and co-operation among one another on a strong and cohesive footing.

How the South Asian countries could avoid further marginalisation in the age of globalisation? How could they successfully integrate their entire populace with the benefits of economic development that might accrue due to globalisation and not to leave them in the lurch to the detriment of social and economic stability? Since globalisation cannot be avoided, only by employing a practical strategic option; making reasonable and effective use of opportunities; and finding the best way to cope with the challenges can the South Asian countries avoid further marginalisation and become impoverished, make progress by keeping pace with time and reap the benefit of prosperity along with the rest of the world. The governments and enterprises in South Asia will be required to give due attention to the task of constantly improving

economic judgement, their capacity for decision making with regards to economic management and continuously strengthen their economic stability and growth capability if they wish to succeed, reduce the risks arising out of economic fluctuations and share the fruits of economic globalisation.

Globalisation requires a process of adaptation and readjustment. South Asian countries now at varying degree of development should respond to the new economic trend and should increase exchanges and share successful experiences among the member states.

The following steps are recommended to maintain their pace of development so as not to be swept away in the whirlpool of globalisation:

- Generate through high level interaction between the governments and business leaders, strategic initiatives for deepening of trade, investment and technological partnership;
- Develop an enabling environment for creating business synergies for comprehensive and sustainable economic progress;
- Promote region-wide strategic alliances to seize trade, industry and investment opportunities emerging from a globalising world;
- Nurture the concept of intra-regional institutional networking for identifying new global trade and investment opportunities in the context of global digital revolution;
- Provide intellectual leadership for developing capital and conducting research on areas of special importance;
- Enhance inter-cultural understanding and fostering a deep sense of social responsibility;
- Flourish good governance and liberal democracy;
- Downsize the government and remove bureaucratic hassles;
- Free the media from state control;
- Foster and promote of cultural straits; and
- Reform laws and regulations that hinder social and economic advancement.

All these will go a long way in helping the South Asia region in adjust and adapt with the process of globalisation and at the same time sustain its development in the desired direction. There is, however, no shortcut to rapid progress. The road is arduous and the terrain is rugged. But through sustained efforts South Asia can successfully march along the road to progress, prosperity and rapid development in this age of globalisation withstanding and successfully overcoming all challenges. The very first task will, therefore, be to revive and restart SAARC. There should be combined pressure on both India and Pakistan to bury their hatchet and stop blocking the process of integration of South Asia region for the collective benefit of all member states.

## Kashmir

## Long Road after Cease-fire

By V. R. Raghavan



INDIA'S declaration of a cease-fire in Jammu & Kashmir has, not unexpectedly, generated a range of responses. On the military level, it has apparently brought some respite to the population of the State. It has provided a breather to the militant groups from the pressures of security forces chasing them. The major impact of the cease-fire is to be seen at the political level where each week brings forth new developments of considerable potential for peace and stability. If the potential being created for peace is to be fulfilled, an understanding of future possibilities is necessary. It is therefore all the more important that the cease-fire is seen as a means, and not an end in itself.

The Indian Government's cease-fire initiative had evoked a positive international reaction. That forced Pakistan to make a constructive response. After absorbing the unexpected surprise, Pakistan has come forward with a promise to demonstrate maximum restraint on the Line of Control. Its senior officials have followed up the promise of military restraint with a political clearance for the All Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to join negotiations with the Indian Government. These steps are indicative of the way Pakistan views its role in the final outcome of the Kashmir issue. It has indicated two things by these initiatives. It intends to use the APHC to speak for Pakistan's locus in future negotiations, until the latter itself joins such talks at some indeterminate stage. This is important for Pakistan since there are few signs of tripartite negotiations coming through soon. This also elevates the APHC to a special status in the negotiations hitherto not quite warranted by its political strength in Jammu & Kashmir. The APHC, from being unsure of how to handle the negotiations with New Delhi, has been anointed a major player on the table. On the other hand, the Hizbul Mujahideen which has played a major role in the militancy over the years, is apparently being sidelined. There is a message in it for other militant groups, about their allegiance to Pakistan's interests.

Second, the response from Pakistan indicates its unwillingness to stop armed militant activity. It has not asked the Hizbul Mujahideen or the Lashkar-e-Taiba and other groups to abide by the cease-fire. Pakistan quite clearly views the trans-border terrorist activity as a meaningful instrument in influencing the peace process, or to abort it if needed. The conditional response from Pakistan can be better understood if one heeds the views being expressed in the Pakistani media. India's cease-fire is

described as an admission of the failure of its policy to "crush the uprising." The cease-fire and the offer of talks are seen as means to engage the Kashmir leadership while keeping Pakistan out. Indian initiatives are also viewed to be designed to create differences between the Mujahideen, Kashmiris and the Government of Pakistan. There are comparisons made between Pakistan's role in Kashmir, and its being reduced to the status of Mr Yasser Arafat as the leader of a local authority!

It is obvious that the political fallout of New Delhi's cease-fire initiative has been meaningful. It has triggered a wide range of responses from major nations, from Pakistan, and the militant groups supported by it. Some militant groups have expressed unhappiness at Pakistan's decision to display maximum restraint on the LoC. The cease-fire and the possibility of negotiations are indicating the inherent contradictions in the agendas of those who have had to react to the cease-fire condition. Such contradictions are not being made any easier to resolve by the Indian offer to extend the cease-fire, if Pakistan ends trans-border terrorist activity. Above all, the jockeying for positions on the negotiating table has begun. It may well turn out to be an unseemly spectacle, with Pakistan trying to keep some of the horses in its stable from bolting, and preventing others straining at the reins from upsetting the apple cart.

There are some other developments which can have an impact on the success or failure of the negotiations, as and when they start. The first is the possibility of change of opinion in Pakistan itself. General Pervez Musharraf had met Mirwaiz Omar Farooq at the recently-held meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). He is reported to have indicated that the U.N. resolutions on Jammu & Kashmir, and particularly the one about a plebiscite, are no longer practicable. This report has not been denied by Islamabad. If this is indeed a reflection of thinking in Pakistan's ruling establishment, it is a pragmatic position of considerable importance. When juxtaposed against the Indian position of greater autonomy to Jammu & Kashmir in a future negotiated arrangement, the position offers real hope for constructive possibilities. It would also mean that Pakistan would need to do much more than to ensure the success of negotiations. It will need to offer matching constitutional rights to the portions of Kashmir under its occupation.

The second development of some significance is the formation of an Alliance for Restoration of Democracy in Pakistan. It brings together most non-religious parties of Pakistan, including the Pakistan Muslim League (Shari) and the Pakistan People's Party.

General Musharraf's Government has lived out one of its three judicially sanctioned years of tenure. The General says he is determined to hold elections on time. There are also elections to be held in Jammu & Kashmir in 2001-2002. The conjunction of electoral compulsions offer interesting possibilities in structuring the negotiations, on which all eyes are focussed. The APHC has so far chosen not to participate in the electoral process. It would have enough pressures to take a position on the subject even as negotiations are continued. If Pakistan can bring itself to ask the APHC to negotiate with New Delhi, it can also ask it to prove its credibility in a fair and free elections to the State Assembly. In fact, the APHC's negotiating position would be strengthened by participating in elections, just as its credibility would be denoted by keeping away from them. It would be interesting to watch Pakistan's and the APHC's response on this. The negotiations will gain greater legitimacy by the Kashmiri people being truly represented in it. Who would represent the militant groups, the people of Ladakh, Jammu and other minorities at the negotiations? What position would the elected Assembly and the Government in Srinagar have in the negotiations? What issues are to be negotiated is another major issue which would need clarifying and some understanding before long. Are negotiations conditional upon New Delhi reducing the security forces? This cannot happen without a demonstrated capacity on Pakistan's part to order a cessation of hostilities from militant groups who have not accepted the cease-fire so far. Pakistan's capacity on this count remains suspect, as seen from the reactions to its offer of restraint on the LoC.

There is a long journey beyond the cease-fire. It is on an uncharted road and in uncertain company. The destination is also not clearly spelt out. That does not mean that talks and negotiations cannot start. It does, however, require that those who want talks and negotiations be prepared to indicate, where they wish to reach through the negotiations route. It is better to know the destination and then work out the routes to it, instead of the other way around. The time to make such positions clear is imminent. Once negotiations start, it would be best to refrain from a public discussion of its every nuance. Talks and negotiations cannot be made a platform for posturing and scoring debating points. In the meanwhile, every move of the Governments in India and Pakistan will be examined closely to know if they, as nuclear weapons states, seek peace or continuing conflict.

Courtesy: The Hindus

## India

## A Suddenly Sputtering ULFA

Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz



AFTER suffering a series of setbacks following arrests and killings of several of its activists during Operation Bajrang in 1990, the ULFA had been lying low for years. The surrender of nearly 1,500 of its cadres since 1998 bulled the administration in Assam was bulled into believing that insurgency in the state was on the decline, if not completely over. As if to substantiate this notion, an important member of ULFA's military wing, Luit Deuri, surrendered with 300 rebels as late as on August 13. The security forces claimed that they had shattered the backbone of ULFA during the last few months and, as a result, violence had stopped. It was indeed a savoury bit of news for the Indian authority against whom this largest outfit of insurgents in the Northeast had been fighting since 1979 for an independent Assam. Just when the Assam Gano Parishad (AGP) government was becoming buoyant and within a week of its Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's statement that peace was restored in the state, the ULFA struck.

In its very first strike after several years the ULFA unleashed an orgy of violence claiming 25 lives in three separate incidents in upper Assam's Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Nalbari districts. In two separate attacks on October 22, ULFA rebels shot dead 11 people in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts. On October 27, suspected militants of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) now closely linked with the ULFA killed three policemen in Nalbari district. The recent spate of violence has obviously left the authority stunned and startled. This is for the first time during their militant activities for the cause of independent Assam that the ULFA has resorted to large-scale massacres in the manner similar to that of Kashmir militants.

The ULFA, however, denied its involvement in the killings and instead blamed them on state agencies. The state government, on the other hand, came out with its own interpretation of the incidents. It said that the killings were committed by ULFA militants but in tacit understanding with the opposition parties who have been demanding the position's rule in the state. The government forecasts many similar incidents before the state assembly election due early next year. It is firm in putting the blame on ULFA although a hitlerite unknown group called Assam Tiger Forces (ATF) in a statement on October 30 already owned the responsibility for the massacres.

Amidst these claims and counterclaims the speculations abound as to the motives behind ULFA's violent restart. The ULFA took maximum advantage of the suspension of Operation Rhino in January 1992 following an 'assurance' from ULFA that it would abide by the Indian constitution and shun

violence. However, only months later Arabinda Rajkhuwa, the ULFA chairman, announced that the "top leadership of ULFA never committed itself to talks on India's terms." While the authority was caught off guard at this volte face, the ULFA itself quickly regrouped, made fresh recruitment and restructured the organisation. By the end of 1992 it grew in size with the hard-liners expanding their base of operations from upper Myanmar to Bangladesh. The phenomenal growth of ULFA both in terms of strength and size severely affected the life in the entire Northeast. With mounting evidences of ULFA's links with foreign agencies and its members being trained by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence it wielded considerable influence in the north-eastern region. Now, there are also evidences of a ULFA-China nexus.

Now that Bangladesh and Bhutan have taken initiative to flush out ULFA militants from their soil, the organisation seems to be losing their vital sanctuaries. Also forced to the wall by the Indian security forces with the unified army command, the paramilitary forces and police closing in on the ULFA, it is fast losing ground. The ever-increasing surrender of its cadres is also a reason for the anxiety of its exiled leaders. To stop further desertion from the organisation's rank the top ULFA leader who are in exile, feel that unless ULFA takes recourse to fresh activities the morale of the leftover cadres will be adversely affected. The ULFA chairman and Paresh Barua, the chief of ULFA's military wing have recently issued a statement warning that the ULFA would retaliate by killing state ministers and top security-men if Unified Command of the Army persists with its action plan against the ULFA. By all reckoning the wild and desperate attacks carried out by the ULFA in recent months are efforts to boost its sagging morale.

What has, however, been a fresh anxiety for the authority is a series of disclosures made by the ULFA's arrested activists about the group's China connection. During the 1960s the Chinese armed and trained Naga, Mizo and Manipuri rebels, but it was discontinued later. After the splits within the Naga and Mizo rebel groups and large-scale surrender to Indian authorities the Chinese lost faith in tribal guerrilla armies of the Northeast. Having always valued political manoeuvrability, more than military prowess the Chinese saw those rebels politically inept and ideologically confused. But they have, according to recent revelations, made an exception for the ULFA whom they find a potent force with political capacity undiminished despite the military battering it has taken and large-scale defection from its ranks. So, the ULFA seems to have been receiving Chinese weapons on regular basis for last one decade. This can as well be reason for ULFA's sudden sputtering although apparently quiet prevails in the rest of the Northeast.

## Pakistan

## Nawaz's Saudi Connections and Army

By Masood Haider



SPECULATIONS are about the *quid pro quo* deal which sprung former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family from their predicament and sent them into exile. Some say the chief executive was told by the White House that to secure an IMF tranche they would have to strike a deal with the Sharif family through the Saudi government. Others believe that the Saudi rulers themselves offered Pakistan money to strike a deal? Whatever the deal, it has become abundantly clear that it is not the first time Mr Sharif's Saudi connections came through.

When in July of 1999 Mr Sharif wanted to come to the United States to meet President Bill Clinton as a face-saving measure to avert the Kargil fiasco from becoming a catastrophic war, he solicited help from the Saudi Arabian government to secure such a meeting. The Saudi ambassador, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who has been Riyadh's ambassador in Washington for the last 25 years, is known to have enviable contacts with the White House and the State Department, and he came through for Mr Sharif.

Mr Sharif and his entourage then flew to Washington after striking a deal with the Indian government of Atal Behari Vajpayee and then flew to New York from where he and his family boarded the private jet owned by Prince Bandar bin Sultan to London.

The rise and fall of Mr Sharif is a classic tale of the maxim 'you live by the sword, you die by the sword' only in his case it could be paraphrased -- you live by the army, you die by the army. Mr Sharif's fortunes were inextricably linked with the army. He rose to power in 1981 as a protégé of former dictator Ziaul Haq and with vital connections with the army.

In fact, it was Lt-Gen Hamid Gul, the former chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), who in an off-the-record conversation (which has become public knowledge now) with the journalists some six years ago, revealed the extent of the army's sway over the political fortunes of the Sharif family, indeed the country.

Gul, who thought that he still had some more time to give to his country as ISI chief to achieve his vision of Pakistan, was angry at being removed by the army under pressure from former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in March of 1990. Gul mined no words. He was candid. He acknowledged that just before the 1988 elections the army brass was perturbed that the impending elections would give Benazir Bhutto a heavy mandate.

Gul said he was given the mandate to create IJI and to ensure that Ms Bhutto did not sweep the election.

"We funded the campaign of IJI and Nawaz Sharif. If we were not to act, Ms Bhutto would have become a mighty force unpalatable to the powers that be. Hence we ensured a truncated mandate," said Gul.

Nawaz Sharif was prodded on by his father, the Abbaji, and his talented brother Shahbaz Sharif to accept the army's help and infusion of money in electioneering. The result was a split mandate for Ms Bhutto who then succumbed to every demand made by the army in order to become the head of the government.

After Ms Bhutto was removed from office in 1990, the army again feared that she might still make a comeback, so they ensured that this time the newly-created Pakistan Muslim League, headed by Nawaz Sharif, got the mandate to rule the country.

Similarly, during the 1995 visit to New York after being ousted from power, ostensibly by the then President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Mr Sharif felt that the army was behind his removal. Both were dubbed the looters of national wealth as stories after stories were floated about their dalliance and corrupt practices. Any journalist who was up for sale for money or power was used to undermine the ill-fated regimes of Ms Bhutto and Mr Sharif. Of course, these politicians were no saints, but were they as corrupt and incorrigible as they have been made out to be?

The endgame for Mr Sharif came in 1997 when he garnered the so-called overwhelming mandate. The army felt it would allow him to create a stable political structure in Pakistan still dominated by the army. But Mr Sharif rebelled seeing that he could become the unquestionable leader of Pakistan by consolidating his mandate. He took on the Supreme Court and won and then he took on the army and won round one by removing Gen Jehangir Karamat who caved in and gave the reins to Mr Sharif.

But the Kargil affair sealed his fate. After the visit by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee who promised to work for the Kashmir solution, there was a glimmer of hope that ultimately a solution to the 50-year-old Kashmir dispute could be at hand. With Mr Sharif enjoying the overwhelming mandate and in India a Hindu nationalist party (BJP) could find a viable solution without incurring great harm to their governments. But it was not to be. The Kargil operation from all accounts came as a surprise to Mr Sharif. In fact, we are told that when Gen Pervez Musharraf went to inform him about the operation, Mr Sharif refused to listen to the details and instead asked the general: "Just tell me when will we reach Srinagar."

In the second encounter with Gen Musharraf, when being updated on the operation, Mr Sharif reportedly told the general: "Everything is OK. Let's just pray for the success of the operation." That was the end of Mr Sharif's rule. The rest is history. But what has become crystal clear that Mr Sharif, a creation of the military rulers, who was expected to serve as a humble servant of the establishment, decided to become a iconoclast. He wanted to become the supreme leader which ultimately led to his fall from grace. In time while in exile Nawaz Sharif will tell his side of the story. It will not take him 10 years to break his silence.

Courtesy: Dawn