

KASHMIR

Living on the line of controlled life

Life for children in Kashmir is not "life". There is a different world with different heroes and different villains. These children don't know fairy tales. They haven't seen the evening lights of the streets. They don't know how the world is like outside their homes in the night... Arjimand Hussain Talib has one of the saddest tales to tell...

It was a day as usual at a school near Sopore in July. The usual time of hullabaloo during recess time. And suddenly with a big bang, half-a-dozen students were blown up in the air, leaving three of them dead on the spot. The rest were badly injured. This was no accident during play. A landmine, having been hidden by some unidentified people under the sand dune lying inside the school premises, had blown up.

Just a few days back in June this year, in the forests of idyllic Tangmarg, near world famous tourist resort Gulmarg, five kids were blown into pieces as they ran over a landmine having been planted in the woods by the army. Similarly a bus, carrying school kids to the Pahalgam resort for picnic in August, ran over a landmine killing three girls and injuring over two dozen.

Life for children in Kashmir is not same as that living elsewhere. There is a different world that has different kinds of heroes and villains. They don't know fairy tales. They haven't seen the evening lights of the streets. They don't know how the world looks like outside their homes in the night.

Ever since the armed campaign began in Kashmir, children have developed into much

elder beings than their age. Having to bear the constraints in their movements, adhere to the "dos and don'ts" when they are out to school and live amidst the shadow of death, the innocence of children in Kashmir has died even before their birth. Being daily witness to killings, explosions, firings, processions, among other things, children in Kashmir have a different world of imagination. The words they learn with the beginning of their talking include "goli", "bandook", "mily wala", "mujahid", "boom", and almost everything that they actually should not have learnt.

Children in Kashmir, walking past the sand bunkers and army posts located everywhere, learn from the beginning that something is wrong around. The guns of the security personnel, the

high-speed armoured personell carriers and any little or big bang evoke their curiosity. The daily TV images showing the dead of the day have become part of their life. And make no mistake. Fear is seldom found in their world. They have seen the goriest face of life even as they are yet to leave the little finger of their elders! Initially in the early '90s, children were seen to have developed some kind of fear psychosis and there have been widespread cases of sleeping disorders.

But as the disturbed situation became a matter of normality, they seem to have adopted themselves to the situation. But their world is too little for them. While they leave for their school, mothers give them clear instructions about their movements almost everyday. They

have to walk away from the bunkers of the security forces. If there is any firing incident enroute, they have to get into any house for safety, and ring home instantly. And in any case, they have to be home well before 4 pm. And if any child is not home by that time, it is like heavens fall. For playing they have to confine themselves within their home premises. The children having been born during the '90s have no idea about how a cinema hall looks like. They have not seen the dazzling evening lights. And when they cry, they are made mum with "chuup, warna abhi military wala aaye ga" (keep quiet, otherwise a military man would come).

Sadly, their playing habits are different too. They have a penchant for toy guns. They would

never settle for any toy other than a gun. And they would always talk of killing and dying. They emulate the scenes shown on TV depicting military operations or masked militants.

For the children in the countryside, life is all the more dangerous and squeezed. Since vast tracts of land are mined in the Kashmir countryside, children have often become victims. So their movement is naturally restrained. On the Line of Control, children have been living under constant fear and live a miserable life. For these kids, there is no fairy tale world of dreams. They live a dreamless life which is threatened by the ghosts of death.

By arrangement with www.peacemonger.com - a fortnightly South Asian webzine.

PAKISTAN

How stable is Musharraf?

MB NAQVI writes from Karachi

THE intensity of speculation about the how stable the Musharraf regime is threatening to graduate into doubts about the state's own stability both in the international media and inside the country. The overt shape it has taken is twofold: knowing that the opposition to the regime seems to be growing and is likely to grow further with each bomb the Americans drop in Afghanistan, the ability of Islamabad's military regime to hold the fort seems to be eroding. The other shape it takes is the feverish conjecturing about the future of Pakistani nuclear warheads. The religious Right that is threatening the Musharraf regime regards itself as the champion of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent which it wants to preserve and regards Musharraf and his team as so many anti-Pakistanis who cannot safeguard it.

tests leading to even greater unpopularity of the regime along with that of the Americans. The nature and intensity of the opposition to the regime has to be watched, so say observers. It is no use remonstrating with Islamabad. It is its own sowing of the wind that has resulted in the present hurricane.

For decades religious patters and Jehadi militias were patronised by the government. Some of the preferential treatment to them survives in the shape of half-heartedness of the attempt to put the protest down. The kid gloves have not come off. Nor has the government mobilised the possible support it could have done. Indeed it is a piquant situation. Most mainstream parties a good part of the PML, PPP as a whole and ANP, MQM and various small parties support the alliance with the US mainly on the theoretical ground: religious fanaticism's misbegotten progeny, international terrorism, needs to be fought against. They are not opposed to Pakistan's cooperation with the US, though they would like the Americans to behave in a somewhat different fashion and listen to saner and wiser advice.

The Musharraf government comprises non-entities that have no political weight. The only man who matters is President Musharraf himself. The source of his power is not the consent of the citizenry. It is Army whose had to be continued to be. The only people whose advice he listens to are the senior generals. His is too narrow a base for a complex country like Pakistan and that too in the present tumultuous times. Way back in 1999 when the coup was staged, the army generals had intended to weed out all politicians and wanted to rule undisturbed virtually indefinitely, happily consigning politicians to long terms of disqualification

tion form holding political office and inducting army officers in all important civilian jobs. A cynical comment then was: the generals want to replace the corruption of politicians by those of the military officers. But that coup's cost to the state was horrible: the whole state has become unstable and the government has become a political weakling; it is totally isolated today, more so after the religious Right stopped supporting it.

The astonishing fact of the situation is that the generals are wholly incapable of comprehending the gravity of the situation. Insofar as the survivability of the military regime is concerned, its demise in normal times does not matter much. But the circumstances are such and the stakes have become so high that its downfall today can plunge the country into an uncontrollable vortex of Crises. All freedom lovers and democrats have to go to bed praying for the survival of Musharraf, not simply the Americans and the Israeli Foreign Minister. The threat to Pakistan is serious, indeed. The state itself can be dissolved in a civil war and unending strife far more serious than what has happened in Afghanistan. It will hurt the whole region. It is in this context that there is such feverish speculation about the fate of nuclear warheads.

It is a genuine concern. It is no use ceaselessly asserting that Pakistan's nuclear assets (sic) are in safe and strong hands and that there is no chance of their falling into undesirable Indian, American or any Islamic fanatics' hands. This is no more than saying that the Army regime is strong enough to ride out of all storms and shall survive indefinitely. Its actual actions and the statements of intent show that it is determined to soldier on at least until Oct 2002 unaided, if not beyond. This ability to go on surviving intact is a proposition that is now beginning to sound puerile. It is just the suspicion that it may not which is fuelling the widespread outside and inside Pakistan.

The way to go about the religious parties' protests is not to brutally suppress them. A finely-calibrated political approach is required not by an all-wise general. A government of the representatives of the people, such as they are, with real power, can tackle the situation actually better than any set of generals or bureaucrats. The representative politicians do not have any magic wand, of course. But the sheer political weight they command can be a political ballast to the Pakistani ship of state. All said and done, Pakistan's own history has shown that the generals' and bureaucrats' regimes have in fact proved to be very detrimental to Pakistan. That picking up the pieces after the 1971 war by an elected civilian underscored the elementary truth that it is the people of Pakistan who can save Pakistan and not self-important generals. This lesson has yet to be learnt. As noted, the politicians cannot magically transform a horribly difficult situation. But they can bring to bear a steady hand and political weight. That should go a pretty long way.

In most matters today the initiative is not in Pakistani hands. What has worsened matters is the Crisis in the Indo-Pakistan relationship that has weakened Islamabad's ability to make itself heard in Washington. The only logical exit strategy from this predicament would seem to be to seek the unlikely help from New Delhi and other South Asian capitals for creating a new South Asian voice, involving a radical change in foreign policy postures.

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Naqvi is a noted columnist in Pakistan.

INDIA

Vying for the UP card

M ABDUL HAFIZ

ON September 11 last, an innocuously pre-selected date for a major political move - when the Samajwadi Party (SP) President, Mulayam Singh marched to Uttar Pradesh (UP) Assembly Speaker's office to hand over the resignations of all 77 MLAs of his party, it immediately ensued a crisis for BJP both in the State and at the centre. Later Mulayam Singh met the governor and urged him to dissolve the assembly and call for a fresh election so that a new assembly would be in place by October 17 when, according to the opposition, the term of the assembly expires.

Rajnath Singh, the BJP chief minister of UP claimed that as far as the government was concerned the resignation of SP did not pose any problem as per the constitution which allows the assembly to continue until 26 March, 2002. While the political development has once again triggered the debate also whether the five-year tenure of the assembly will be counted from the date it was constituted on 16 October 1996 or from the first day it held its meeting on 26 March 2001, everyone knows that the election is around the corner, a little earlier or later.

The debate apart, the resignation of SPM LAs was viewed with concern in New Delhi. Because the Babujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) of Mayawati, a former chief minister also threatened to resign so that SP alone could not enjoy the monopoly of garnering political mileage. The Congress also expressed the similar view though it rued the fact that Mulayam Singh had not taken the other oppositions in confidence.

In spite of all his bravado, the government of Rajnath Singh will

be quondary if Congress and BSP MLAs also resign. Also its electoral prospects will be diminished while others' will go up.

Realising the gravity of the situation Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee summoned Rajnath Singh to Delhi on September 12, ignoring the fall out of terrorists attack on the United States a day earlier. The meeting between the PM and Rajnath Singh which was also alluded by Home Minister L K Advani and Human Resources Minister Mong Mandhor Joghi took stock of pre-political situation in UP were according to Mulayam Singh, total anarchy was prevailing. In the meeting Rajnath Singh apprised the Prime Minister of the need to implement the 'quota within quota policy' before going to election.

On return of Rajnath from Delhi the State Cabinet met to approve the new reservation policy - a sign that the BJP was also anxious to catch up for election.

BJP's anxiety is not without any reason. Uttar Pradesh always determined in the past the complexion of the ruling dispensation in New Delhi. This time also it will be no different. Whenever the next election is held for UP state assembly it has the potential to determine not just the fate of Mulayam Singh and Mayawati but also that of Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi. The Congress lored over India as long as it ruled over UP. The emergence of Charan Singh and the creation of Samyukta Vidhaya Dal governments in North India almost led to Congress losing power in 1967 Lokshava election. Indira Gandhi could bounce back with her 'Garibi Hatao' slogan and victory over Pakistan in 1971. She recaptured up during the snap election of 1971 and as a matter fact, India came in

her firm grip.

However, her emergency led to the unity of all opposition parties in 1977. This wiped out congress from UP and also from India. Her assassination in 1984 generated a sympathy wave for her son Rajiv Gandhi gifting him with India's most populous state and also India. Rajiv's tragic death halfway through the election in 1991 led to another sympathy wave but the Congress barely managed to capture Delhi but UP was lost. The Congress could not recover it in last one decade and as a result it also lost Delhi subsequently.

A divided opposition in UP where Mulayam Singh and Mayabati would never unity led to the emergence of BJP as the most dominant party replacing the Congress. BJP won UP with Advani's organisational skill, Vajpayee's charisma and oratory and Kalyan Singh's symbolic representation of the OBC Hindus. As for the next election Vajpayee is there but the magic is missing from Vajpayee's oratory. Can Advani, deeply preoccupied in governance, redisplay his skill? Kalyan Singh, once the mascot of Hindutva in UP and the party is triumph card is gone. Can the government's attempt to win the backward and Dalits by implementing the Policy of Reservation compensate for Kalyan Singh's loss? Can the BJP leadership convince the electorate to give it another chance because the present coalition was ungovernable?

The Congress loss in UP was terrible. Not only it lost India as a result, it also lost direction as a national party. True, the Congress was a significant winner in the state assembly elections in May last. A logical caste coalition, local circumstances and state leadership

helped Congress win elections in the states where they are ruling. But all these three factors are missing in UP. The Congress' asset in any election including one in UP assembly has been the personality of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. The only way the Congress can become relevant in UP is if it falls back on that -- Eby launching Priyanka Gandhi as the chief ministerial candidate. If it leads to a surprise victory, only then the Congress can hope to rule UP and India for a long time. But if Priyanka flops, that will be irrevocable disaster for the party.

As for Mayawati she became UP chief minister twice with the help of BJP. But her BSP will not always have enough vote to increase her seat share so that she can ensure and benefit from a hung parliament. Mulayam Singh Yadav is however a phenomenon to reckon with. His acceptability among the anti-Dynasty voters has increased when he stopped Sonia Gandhi from becoming prime minister in 1999. He has a sizeable vote bank comprising the Backward and Muslims. He has worked hard as an active opposition leader wooing individual leaders, painstakingly building his organisational unit in each of the 403 constituencies and trying to increase his vote share. Just now he seems to be ahead of all other parties for winning the UP assembly.

But this is an arithmetic valid for now. When the quarters interested in capturing Delhi and nor just Lucknow will be sharply in competition with each other this equation is bound to change. But what will not change is an abiding perception that road to Delhi passes through Lucknow.

M Abdul Hafiz, retired Brigadier of Bangladesh Army, is former DG of BISS.

CONFIDENCE BUILDING

Let's co-operate

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

DEFINITELY, measures to develop affinity and friendship are somewhat a complex task in South Asia - a tension-ridden and conflict-prone region. Despite the presence of the cooperative approach like the SAARC and occasional exchange of visits among the member-countries at different levels including at the top, political climate in the area remains uncomfortable and at times so much so that the region attracts headlines in international news because of flare-up of tensions.

Evidently, they seek to evaluate the tangle from their own points of view and this has resulted in new ingredients of susceptibilities in New Delhi-Islamabad ties.

However, the confidence building measures (CBMs) are necessary not only between these two neighbours, who are political and mili-

through CBMs or other constructive steps, it is certainly possible to minimise the adverse effects of these issues on the bilateral relationship and consequently in the overall regional ambience.

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in collaboration with the German

and thereby increase social and economic interactions among the nations in the area for collect benefits.

Understandably, the political scenario in the region has gone through a change between the interregnum of the previous and the just-concluded seminar due to the sudden eruption of an international flash-point in the form of the war in the Afghanistan. Obviously, this has introduced new elements of dangers in the South Asia and its neighbourhood. The seminar took note of this situation while focus of its deliberation was on the Indo-Pakistan ties and nuclearization of South Asia. The participants frankly and freely discussed many issues in the military, economic, trade and business, and social areas which affect the need for cooperation among the regional countries. They suggested many pragmatic steps to overcome the problems while keeping in mind that the inherent mistrust and belligerence can not be washed away easily. But they were unanimous that these can certainly be minimised and as such all the potentials should be utilised. They also welcomed that the holding of the next SAARC summit in Nepal in the first week of January which suffered inordinate delay due to worsening of the political climate in the region.

It was seen as a positive development. They stressed that CBMs must receive a big boost and there should be no slackening in this direction. Such seminars may not deliver great results but undoubtedly serve a constructive purpose. CBMs can effectively contribute towards creation of better atmosphere in the region although the task is difficult but not impossible.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is senior special correspondent of BSS.

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tary rivals, but also involve other countries of the area for improving cordiality at a reasonable scale for South Asia. Such measures are imperative between Bangladesh-India, India-Nepal, Sri Lanka-India, Bangladesh-Nepal and even between Nepal and Bhutan. It is not meant to say that bilateral relations between countries of the region other than India and Pakistan are hostile but there is no denying that certain issues of sensibilities often tend to bedevil their ties which need to be improved through the CBMs. Greater CBMs are the need of the hour for the region to promote itself as a collective area as far as possible. While it will be naive to think that the existence of many sensitive matters presence of which in the bilateral ties affect the desired level of cooperation and amity will disappear

Embassy held an international seminar here on the CBMs in South Asia when different issues that afflict the political climate in the region came to the fore. Scholars from the regional countries as well as some from outside the area but keep a close watch and interest on the regional developments and scene took part in the three-day deliberations. Its is a welcome gesture from a country which is a leading nation in Europe and appears keen to see a tension-free South Asia as far as possible since one fifth of humanity lives in this region and most of the people are mired in poverty. Improvement in the political atmosphere of the region can effectively help the teeming millions living in abject poverty here and the seminar's main objective was to bring into focus the need for effective CBMs

NEPAL

Is Crown Prince Paras mending his ways? He's writing poetry, so he must be

KUNDA DIXIT

DEPENDING on who you talk to, King Gyanendra's appointment of his son and heir apparent, Paras, as Crown Prince on Dasain Tika day was either a masterstroke or callous disregard for the sentiments of the Nepali people.

Five months after the 1 June royal massacre, most Nepalis had just started coming to terms with the numbing reality of the killings. Even those still sceptical about Dipendra's involvement were getting on with their lives. King Gyanendra, who had the throne thrust on him, had been subtly trying to change public perception in his favour through carefully calibrated media exposure. This is why everyone thought he would wait before doing the inevitable: naming his unpopular son crown prince.

After all, Paras had been in the news for all the wrong reasons. Known as a royal brat, he had been involved in hit-and-run incidents, the latest on the night of 6 August 2000, when his Pajero allegedly ran down musician Praveen Gurung. There was a public outcry, angry editorials and street protests calling for the wayward prince to be stripped of his title. Praveen's family decided not to pursue the case, and there were reports that his widow was offered Rs 1 million.

Paras later earned some measure of public goodwill when the Keshab Upadhyay probe committee report detailed how he had saved the lives of several royal family members on the night of 1 June by shielding them from Dipendra. And lately, Paras has been seen more frequently on television, at official and religious functions. Many in Kathmandu were following the palace's efforts to rehabilitate Paras, but were



surprised it happened so soon. Sources said even palace and government officials only heard it on Radio Nepal's morning news on 26 October.

It was shrewd timing. The country was closed for Dasain, and most political parties were in hibernation. Immediate reaction was muted. Most surprising was Bam Dev Gautam of the Marxist-Leninists, the very party that staged anti-Paras demos outside Nirmal Niwas last August. Gautam said: "The declaration of the Crown Prince has happened according to royal traditions and constitutional provisions."

In a measured response, Narahari Acharya of the ruling Nepali Congress: "Nepalis have the right to be assured of the character

and behaviour of a person who will sit on the throne."

The main opposition UML's Madhav Nepal, who had no comment last week, did one of his rapid turnarounds: "The royal family should move with the times, the monarchy needs to be more transparent, especially in the post-massacre phase when it is insecure."

Although he knows his son's reputation, King Gyanendra didn't have any other choice. He and his son are the only male members left in the royal family after the massacre, and the prolonged absence of a line of succession would have been highly unusual. Said one source close to the royal family: "There are so many procedures and traditional functions that need a crown

prince to be present, and this is why there was a degree of urgency." One of these was the need to name a royal caretaker when the King and Queen Komal travel abroad, which would be soon for the Queen's health check-up in the UK. Even so, critics of the decision to name Paras crown prince are not satisfied. "Here is a man who at the very least owes the Nepali public an apology," says academic Pitamber Sharma. "And doing it hurriedly, during Dasain, without political consultation, was like hoodwinking the people."

Several others took the decision as proof of the constitutional ambivalence about palace affairs, and agreed that as a modern monarchy there should have been an effort by the palace towards more transparency. One left-leaning politician told us: "We understand that the king really had no choice, all we are questioning is the procedure and timing." Said another: "What it showed is that the people trust the monarchy, but the monarchy still does not trust the people enough to take a decision like this without consulting parliament." Whatever the case, both supporters and opponents of the decision agree that Crown Prince Paras has a public relations challenge ahead of him, and needs to be careful about his behaviour here on.

Already there are signs that he is mending his ways. The Himalaya Times Wednesday printed a front page piece with excerpts of verses penned by Paras after the royal massacre:

*Before my eyes, I lost all
What did my helpless eyes have to see.
My luckless eyes,
Their luckless ears,
They believe what they hear
Not what they see.*

By arrangement with the Nepali Times.