

KASHMIR

No miscalculations please!

K. GUJRAL

COLIN POWELL has observed that Indo-Pakistan tensions, after getting threateningly close to a serious conflict, are out on the de-escalation ladder. This could not have been possible without the active and intense efforts of the international community. The key factor in this respect was the belated but acute realisation on the part of the world that the war on terrorism cannot be pursued in a differentiated manner, separating Pakistani sponsored terrorism in Kashmir from the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban's jihadi terrorism. More so because the ISI has been the key link in supporting both the jihadi (Al-Qaeda and Taliban) and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Sources for training, sustenance and supply of weapons of violence of both the terror operations have been the same. One could not be dealt with effectively while keeping the other alive and kicking.

Exploiting the complexity of the Kashmir issue, Pakistan persuaded the international community to believe that violence in Kashmir was a manifestation of internal alienation of the Kashmiri people. The western powers bought this as their mindset on the Kashmir issue is mired in their lingering Cold War perceptions of the subcontinental conflicts. They failed in distinguishing the terrorism that was sponsored by Pakistan since the 1990s and the persisting historical complexity of the Kashmir issue from 1947. Only after the September 11 events, the international community and more specifically the US started accepting the indivisibility of the forces of terror based in Afghanistan and playing havoc in places such as the WTC and Kashmir.

However, the fear of losing Pakistan's so-called strategic partnership and compliance in the "war against terror" kept the "commu-

nity" looking on the other side of the reality of terrorism in Kashmir. It was indeed an erroneous assumption that an Islamised Pakistani regime which was a part of the basic problem in Kashmir terrorism could be a part of the solution for the same terrorism elsewhere. It is good that at long last the international community has shed this untenable assumption and come out to plead with and pressure Pervez Musharraf that his loud promises of fighting terrorism must be acted upon credibly in relation to Kashmir as well.

Voices raised by the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, the French President, Jacques Chirac, the Almaty congregation and the G-8 powers could be recalled here.

Gen. Musharraf is a mature military commander. He should have realised much earlier that his inherently contradictory approach of fighting terrorism with the international community and promoting its perpetrators at home was bound to be short-lived and fraught with immense costs for his own country. Now the Pakistani media is pointing out that the strategy of "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds" has lost its breath. How could he fight the jihadi forces at one place and promote and protect the same forces at another. On his Kashmir strategy, a senior Pakistani journalist has said: "Although our generals have yet to swallow this bitter pill, the fact is that Kashmir cannot be liberated by force". It is therefore advisable for Gen. Musharraf, if he wishes to keep South Asia free from conflicts, that he shows courage to end the instruments of terrorism in Kashmir. This will open possibilities of constructive and cooperative engagement between India and Pakistan. It will also help him deal with his real domestic challenge of curbing effectively the destructive and dangerous forces of jihad at home.

There is no doubt that Kashmir is an impor-

tant issue between India and Pakistan and India must walk half the way to once again engage with Pakistan for the resolution of this issue in a tranquil atmosphere sans terror. One of the basic steps in this direction is to candidly deal with the misgivings and alienations of our own people in Kashmir. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has been taking some steps in this direction but unfortunately he lets his cohorts frequently change the interlocutors and the policy postures. There is an urgent need to move on the political front to sort out issues related to the nature and extent of the autonomy. The autonomy report was prepared by the ruling party's coalition partner and it has also been endorsed by the elected legislature of Jammu and Kashmir. The Constitution of India is inherently accommodative as is evident in Articles 371(A) to 371(I) that make special provisions for the States of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh etc. There is no reason, therefore, to believe that whatever applies to one State must be applied to the rest. In saying this I am not suggesting that the wheel of history be turned back full circle but surely some basic aspirations and frustrations of the people can be met through dialogue and in a spirit of accommodation. It would be advisable for the Union Government not to let the BJP's philosophies in this regard prevail over the national interest.

The coming elections in Jammu and Kashmir provide an excellent opportunity to the Central Government to show its political resolve to address the question of alienation of the Kashmiri people particularly when Mr. Powell has asked Gen. Musharraf to ensure that these elections are free from cross-border terrorism and externally instigated sabotage.

The Prime Minister has promised that the elections will be transparently free and fair. These have not only to be free and fair but also seen to be so, both by the people of the State as well as, and this is even more important, the international community. According to the media, the Election Commission had at one stage said that there would be no bar on any prospective observers', including foreign nationals and the foreign media, access to the polling stations, except of course that such persons will not have, nor may claim, any official status or recognition. The presence of credible observers will ensure transparency and acceptability of the results to the world. We have to understand that if anything goes wrong regarding the credibility of the elections, neither the Kashmiri people nor the international community will take it lightly. It is interesting to see the opinion of the enlightened civil society and the Pakistani media.

The editorial of the *Daily Times* of Lahore says, "the holding of elections, especially the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir, should be the necessary prelude to the initiation of the bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan. It is very obviously in India's interest to hold discussions with credible interlocutors from the Kashmiri side whether the subject to the discussed be described as devolution of powers or greater autonomy. An election, which foreigners and especially the international media are free to observe just as they would elections elsewhere in India is without doubt the proper mode for identifying such interlocutors".

I. K. Gujral is a former prime minister of India, and this piece is printed by arrangement with The Hindu of India.

PAKISTAN

What if BB comes home?

EKRAM KABIR

PAKISTAN confronts another test in the country's struggle for democracy. The country is also headed towards political turmoil, as President Parvez Musharraf seems unsure of his success in stopping the opposition from the way to his ambitions. It became clear when last week Musharraf struck a deal with Nawaz Sharif and the former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto said that she would defy a ban on her and contest the general elections in October.

But Benazir, who is currently living in Dubai and London, faces arrest if she comes back to Pakistan. She was recently sentenced for failing to answer corruption charges in court. She is also barred from becoming premier for a third time under a decree issued by Musharraf. The President had decreed that prime ministers who have served twice cannot run for a third term. This move excludes both ex-premiers from resuming power.

However, in her strive to come back to Pakistan, Benazir has formed a new party wing to overcome legal obstacles to contesting the forthcoming elections in October. The newly-formed wing is called the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians and it has elected Makhdoom Amin Fahim, the former deputy leader to Benazir, as its new leader.

Meanwhile, President Musharraf reiterated that he was confident about the country's democratic future by making necessary amendments in the constitution. He referred to the 11 years of democracy was bad experiences, making it clear that the government would not strike any deal with corrupt politicians.

But he had to strike a deal with ousted and exiled prime minister Nawaz Sharif whom he calls corrupt - in his attempt to manage and manipulate the general elections he has promised in October.

This time Musharraf needed Sharif and he had to give the Sharif family some concessions, which could be extended further as confidence and trust between the two grows. The immediate outcome was permission to Nawaz's daughter Mariam and son-in-law, Capt. Safdar, to travel to UK. Reports say that other members may also be allowed soon. In return, Nawaz Sharif sent a clear message to his party that he was rejecting the offer by Benazir of the PPP to fly together in the same plane to Pakistan and confront General Musharraf jointly.

This means that the politicians of all hue and kind just lost their chance to get back into some action and fight the military domination.

Musharraf has been making noteworthy attempts to forge some consensus within the anti-PPP political ranks and create a "king's party" but has failed miserably so far. With Benazir's PPP becoming increasingly hostile towards the regime over the past few months, Musharraf's cabinet, as a last resort, wanted to strike a deal with the exiled former premier Nawaz Sharif, in order to unify the two major factions of the league. This, they thought, would effectively block PPP's march to power.

Now, will the PPP climb to power in Pakistan again?

Benazir even said she was also prepared to go to jail.

NEPAL

One week in Rolpa

The people of Rolpa desperately need help. Not to fight the Maoists, but to give the Maoists nothing to fight about. Kashish Das Shrestha writes from Ghartigaun

IT JUST TAKES a few hours walk out of the Rolpa district headquarters of Libang to get the first indication that you are entering Maoiland. Two young lads approach us and ask where we are headed. They note down our names, refuse to answer questions about who they are. Later, we are told they belong to the Maoists' "Company D". Further on, we run into three more Maoists in civvies, they greet us with the *lal salamu*.

On the hilltop of Budagaun, there is a festival in progress. There are food stalls, including one selling local "ice cream". People are making sacrifices at the local Shiva temple. The Maoists don't seem to have banned the Hindu festival as they have in other parts of the midwest.

A young Maoist who looks 15, but says he is 18, is on patrol carrying a musket that is taller than him. A certain Comrade Burma steps up and, taking advantage of the crowd that had gathered for the festival, gives a little speech. He is on sick leave recovering from a bullet wound on his lower back, and he tries to justify why the Maoist leadership decided to break the truce and attack the army in Ghorahi.

"The government refused to agree to our demands for an interim government, constituent assembly and the establishment of a republic," Burma says, gesticulating vigorously with his forefinger. He plays down Maoist casualties, and plays up the defeat of security forces at Gam, Satbaria and Mangelsen earlier this year.

Later, Burma grants an impromptu interview to three visiting journalists. "I have nothing to lose, I'll fight to the end. Why shouldn't I?" he asks. Then he launches into a tirade full of Maoist jargon from the 1960s.

We reach Ghartigaun late in the evening to be told that a large Maoist group had just left, heading south. This used to be a bustling township six years ago. Today, most shops are closed, it is impossible to bring in supplies and foodstuffs. The police post at Ghartigaun was moved out four years ago. In November the security forces returned, but stayed for only three months. There used to be a local administration office, a forest range post, a depot of the Food Corporation, an agricultural extension office, and a veterinary clinic. All have been destroyed or abandoned.

The scars of war are all around: gun-toting young Maoists, burnt down government buildings, landrovers reduced to ashes, households with only children, young widows, and old people. "We are harassed by both sides. We just listen to whoever is there at the moment," one villager told us with an averted gaze. He looks scared, and whispers about threats, interrogation, beatings by both sides. "You could be arrested on a suspicion, and if you don't have a good explanation once you're taken in, you could be killed."

Ghartigaun has the look of no-man's land. There is no security, no marketplace, no electricity, few drinking water taps. The local school still has some classes, but the two teachers there fled after being threatened by Maoists.

We seek shelter in a house. Our host used to run a tea shop until one day the Maoists came and took him away. He was held captive for six months, handcuffed, blindfolded and beaten almost every day. He has three daughters and two sons, the youngest was born 16 days after the rebels had taken him away.

He was finally released after he sold his cattle and all household utensils and paid the Maoists a ransom of Rs 25,000. The family is still paying a Maoist "revolutionary tax" of Rs 50 every month. Other villagers pay the tax in cash or kind. Our host can't afford to pay any more, and is heading off to India to find work the day after our visit.

Another day's walk, and we wait on a house on a hilltop for a promised meeting with a local commander. Comrades Sushil and Ashok arrive, accompanied by the



Interestingly, she has been proven quite determined in her plans. The stubbornness for which she is renowned was first seen after her father was imprisoned and charged with murder by General Zia ul-Haq in 1977. She was also imprisoned just before her father's death and spent most of her five-year jail term in solitary confinement. When she came out, she set up a Pakistan People's Party office in London, and began a campaign against Zia. Then she returned to Pakistan in 1986 and attracted huge crowds to political rallies. After Zia's death in 1988, she became one of the first democratically-elected female prime ministers in an Islamic country.

As a ground work for making a comeback, Benazir is also seeking foreign help. She wrote a letter to Christina Rocca, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, on July 30, saying: "To sabotage the election result, a new absentee decree was passed to prevent my contesting the elections. The new decree is violative of the Pakistani Constitution that permits citizens, other than those convicted for a crime, to contest."

This time, too, she seems to have a game plan and Musharraf is anticipating trouble from this Harvard- and Oxford-educated Bhutto. But how far would Benazir be able to convince the electorate that she "can make a different" this time, is the question everyone asking.

After all, she is not a saint either; she has twice been prime minister, from 1988 to 1990, and from 1993 to 1996. On both occasions, she was dismissed from office for alleged corruption.

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INDIA

Bollywood and the don

SULTAN SHAHIN

THE release last week by Mumbai police of two-year-old tapes of conversations between film personalities and underworld figures has focused India's attention once again on the deepening nexus between politics, the film industry and the criminal underworld.

As the police action was in violation of judicial norms and may have had ulterior motives, the Mumbai High Court has banned the publication and broadcast of the tapes. But this could only be done 48 hours after their widest possible publication and broadcast, thus bringing into question the role of a sensation-hungry media treating police version of events as the gospel truth.

The conversations were taped in December 2000 when film actor Sanjay Dutt and some of his friends were at a hotel in Nasik, near Mumbai. Their taped conversation with underworld don Chhota Shakeel, allegedly based either in Dubai or Karachi, along with his boss Dawood Ibrahim, has been submitted as evidence in the case of top film producer and diamond merchant Bharat Shah, who was arrested last year on the basis of a similar tape.

Mafia don Chhota Shakeel figures in the controversial "list of 20" handed over by New Delhi to Islamabad for extradition, though Pakistan denies he or his boss are in that country.

No action has been taken against any of those who figure on the tapes. The police defend themselves by pointing to the casual nature of the conversation. But perhaps the frightening thing is that the conversation is too casual. It is peppered with expletives and laughter, pointing to a close relationship.

The Mumbai film world, popularly called Bollywood, has long been a victim of the shenanigans of the underworld. Entertainment mogul Gulshan Kumar was murdered in Mumbai in 1997, allegedly by underworld don Abu Salem's men. The same year, film producer Mukesh Duggal was shot dead by Chhota Shakeel's gang. There was an

attempt on the life of Rakesh Roshan in 2000, and threats were issued to actor Ajay Devgan from the underworld to delay the release of his home production, *Raju Chacha*, since its premiere happened to coincide with another film, *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*, financed by Mafia-supported director Nazim Hasan Rizvi. Mumbai police established Rizvi's links with Chhota Shakeel in 2000, and Rizvi was subsequently booked under the Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime Act. More arrests followed, most notably of diamond merchant Bharat Shah, the financier of the current hit, *Devdas*, made with a record budget of US\$10 million.

The Bollywood threats come mainly from three quarters - the Dawood-Shakeel gang, the Abu Salem gang and the Chhota Rajan splinter groups. Though the police have provided protection to 40-odd film personalities, the Bollywood biggies have a lot to fear from the underworld. Among those who face threats are filmmaker Rajeev Rai, actor Amir Khan, actress Manisha Koirala, Manmohan Shetty and Rakesh Roshan.

The newspaper Pioneer comments, "In an almost surreal 45 minutes of taped conversation between actor Sanjay Dutt [along with friends] and Chhota Shakeel, practically everything that was ugly about Bollywood and had been sought to be brushed under the carpet by the film world in the last few years, was swept out."

Observers of the Bollywood scene have interpreted the tapes to mean that the control of the mafia on film production is near total. Even the fact that the Dawood-Shakeel gang is now in exile in Dubai or Karachi or, according to one report, Pakistan's tribal belt in the North-West Frontier Province, has not made much of a difference.

Much of Bollywood today lives in dread of the underworld. Several well-known actors and actresses, film industry sources concede, are known to have spoken over the telephone with the underworld because they are totally terrorized. Explains noted film director Mahesh Bhat, "The Gulshan Kumar murder is one telling way in which the under-

world has told the film fraternity that we can get you by cutting through any security cover." Perhaps that is why there is a resounding silence from the industry. Bhat explains this as the "herd instinct of a silent crowd".

One popular view is that a frightened Bollywood has no option but to try and ingratiate itself with the godfathers. This is also what film director Mahesh Bhat told the media. Incidentally, he is the only film personality to have come out and talked to the media. This fact in itself, he suggested in a TV discussion, indicates the dread the Bollywood feels. In his most offensive and patronizing tone, the don makes it clear that he and his men are forced to issue threats - and also to carry these out - only when a film personality "betrays" them on payments.

The Sicilian Law of Omerta, a conspiracy of silence, made famous by the Hollywood film *Godfather* is clearly at work. Incidentally the book *Godfather* by Mario Puzo is a favorite of Dawood Ibrahim. None of the leading Bollywood figures dare tell the police anything about the mafia's doings. This is not just a reflection on the atmosphere of fear in which they live, but also on the competence and integrity of the police and judiciary.

Bollywood and the Mumbai mafia used to be completely free from the communal cancer. These were the only industries where Hindus and Muslims would get jobs purely on grounds of merit. The Mumbai serial blasts of 1993 changed all that. This was the first time a gang leader had allegedly acted on his communal impulse. The Dawood gang - known simply as the D company - is also said to have received support from Pakistan's ISI in his bid to avenge the anti-Muslims massacres of 1992-93.

The Mafia system draws its "legitimacy" from providing an alternative system of justice to the victims of an unjust establishment. The Dawood gang explain the serial blasts as retaliation in the same way as Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and other officials justify the anti-Muslim Gujarat car-

nage as revenge for the Godhra train burning in which 58 Hindus were killed.

The rivalry between Dawood Ibrahim and his former aide, Chhota Rajan continues to be a destabilizing factor for Mumbai and for Bollywood. Several attempts have been made by both sides to eliminate the opposing gang leaders. In September 2000, Shakeel allegedly organized an attack on Chhota Rajan in Bangkok. Chhota Rajan began as a part of Dawood's gang, accused of murder, extortion and smuggling. But the split came in March 1993, with the Mumbai blasts engineered by Dawood. Chhota Rajan accused his mentor of targeting Hindus and left the Dubai base with all the Hindu gang members for Kuala Lumpur in 1994. Bombay's gangs now became redrawn on communal lines, with Chhota Rajan being supported by Babloo Shrivastava and Chhota Shakeel with the backing of Dawood Ibrahim and Ashwin Naik. Both sides now started targeting each other's gang members. Rajan targeted all those he suspected to be behind the Mumbai blasts, while Shakeel targeted the accused in the 1992-93 Bombay riots in which many Muslims had been killed.

Even at that time Sanjay was said to have paid the price for his father's uncompromising secular politics. Then a member of parliament from Mumbai, Sunil Dutt had tried (unsuccessfully) to save the lives of some Muslims in his constituency. Among his many other achievements, Dutt is best remembered and loved for his role in Mother India, the only Indian film to have been ever short-listed for Oscar awards (until this year when another film, *Lagaan*, got this honor). At great personal risk Dutt had also organized a peace march through strife-torn Punjab at the height of Sikh militancy during the decade-long Sikh campaign in the 1980s for a sovereign Sikh state to be called Khalistan.

Courtesy: Asia Times Online

SRI LANKA

PM's visit to the US

K. GODAGE in Colombo

THE PM's visit to the US would no doubt have come about because of Minister Moragoda's influence in Washington and also due to the indefatigable efforts of the US Ambassador Ashley Wills.

There are certain measurements by which we judge the success or failure of any visit whether it be a State visit an official visit or a "working visit" which this was in the immediate aftermath of one. What were the PM's aims? They were in the first instance to strengthen the relationship between our two countries. This was the first visit by a Lankan leader in 18 years and we have had no visits from American leaders to this country either. That certainly says it all on the state of our relations. High on the PM's priorities would no doubt have been the strengthening of the country's security. Perhaps a unique feature of our approach to the peace process this time around has been the diplomatic offensive to line up the international community and particularly those countries that matter for the resolution of our problem behind the government. This the PM and Minister Moragoda have done most skillfully. They appear to have unfurled a security umbrella over the country. Never before has the LTTE faced such a situation.

The meetings with the Secretary of State Colin Powell at the State Department and the National Security Advisor Condoleza Rice' across from the Oval Office would also have been most valuable. The geo-strategic situation in the subcontinent has changed with the emergence of regional nuclear powers. There is no doubt that US interests in oil rich Central Asia are affected. She has to

formulate a new policy towards South Asia. And it is in this context that the US would need long term allies. The threat of terrorism and the targeting of US interests world over would also require stronger US presence in the region. There could always be some convergence of interests. No doubt these factors would have been discussed.

On this visit the PM and Minister Moragoda may not have been able to wrap up the ACSA but they, from reports coming out of Washington, seem to have certainly laid the foundation for greater diplomatic and military support for the resolution of the problem. In fact it may not be necessary for us to have any formal agreement such as ACSA to either service the ships of the US Navy if they wish to call at our ports or if the need arises for us to acquire any weapons from the US. A formal agreement would of course have its advantages but not having one should not be a hindrance to securing the means for our country's defence. This time around the LTTE will not be able on any excuse to return to war without inflicting on itself grievous consequences.

Thousands have died because of the buffoonery of the MOD and our so called National Security Council. I do hope that if such an opportunity is afforded us after the visit of the PM we would grab it with alacrity and not say "we know more about training for our war than any American". There are many who are vested with decision making power in our governmental structure who have the attitude of the Gomarankadawela Dor, perhaps even he may be more enlightened.

The decision to send Deputy Secretary of State Armitage to Lanka to make an assessment of the situation here is a significant one.

It is also a signal to the LTTE, which is suspected of being involved in international terrorism. The visit of Armitage would also send message to the political parties in the South that enough is enough and that the international community has suffered our "dirty war" for far too long. They demand that the political parties in the South reach a consensus to enable the achievement of a durable peace. A fact often forgotten is that the international community has not and will not give us a blank cheque. They are convinced that the rights of Tamil people must be conceded within unitary state. They wish to see fair and just solution, which would allow the Tamil people to live in peace with dignity, in security as equal citizens! Deciding on their own destiny to the furthest possible extent consistent with the security of the other communities inhabiting this country.

The PM has stated that besides security assistance development aid is to be increased. In this regard it would be of interest to recall that after the 1977 elections the USAID office in Colombo, which had a staff of perhaps fifteen till then, including Sri Lankans increased exponentially, to over one hundred Americans. This was perhaps because the US has understandably been more comfortable with the UNP than with our Socialists. I have no doubt that the US aid Mission here would be strengthened in the months to come.

The PM in addition to meeting the important officials of the US government had been invited to an important breakfast meeting with group of leading Senators! An honour not extended to every visiting dignitary. He has also spoken at the Woodrow Wilson Centre and at the Washington Press Club. It

must be mentioned here that the press coverage in the US itself has been unprecedented with Editorials in the prestigious Washington Post! The Washington Times and 'Op Ed' page reports in the prestigious New York Times and other papers. The Mission should be complemented for the publicity obtained in the US.

The PM has also been given assurances of support by the IMF and the World Bank. Whilst such assurances of support are indeed valuable! I sincerely hope that their so called economic reform or Structural Adjustment programme will not further exacerbate the poverty gap in the country and set us up for easy JVP picking. I hope we would not unthinkingly follow IMF recipes which have led many a country into disaster. In this regard we should take a page out of Mahathir Mohamad's book of self-prescribed painful remedies not remedies imposed by the IMF unless they are prepared to assume responsibility in the event of the failure of their remedies.

To say that the PM's mission appears to have been a resounding success at this point of time seems an understatement. Minister Moragoda had described the visit as "a working visit to explore possibilities and opportunities". Well it does seem that more opportunities than ever have been opened for us. It is now left to us to follow up and use 'the possibilities and opportunities'.

The ball is now in our court.

K. Godage is a former deputy foreign secretary to the Government of Sri Lanka, and this piece first appeared in The Island of Colombo.

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