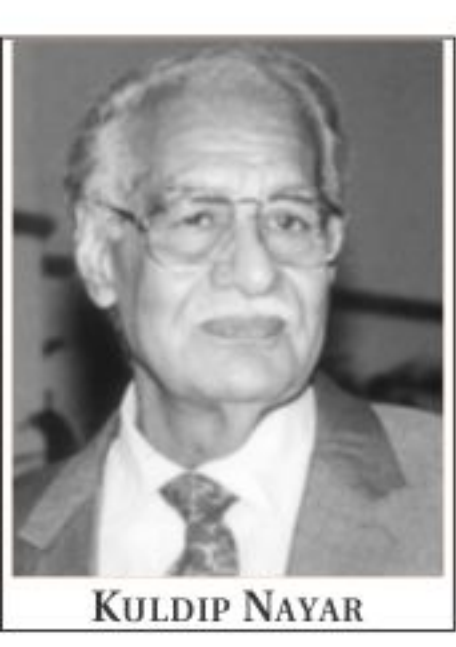


BETWEEN THE LINES

I.K. Gujral: A gentleman in politics



KULDEEP NAYAR

IT was a small town of Bon-Bon in Germany which Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral chose as the venue for a meeting of Indian envoys in Europe. As High Commissioner to the UK, I attended it. During the discussion, Gujral wanted our comments on the future of relations between India and Pakistan. I said the solution of Kashmir was important. Gujral snubbed me. Yet when he was the prime minister in 1997, he announced at Srinagar that India was willing to accept Kashmir's solution outside the constitution. There was so much pressure on him that he retracted the statement. But he remained steadfast on his proposal of a status for Kashmir outside the constitution but inside the Indian Union.

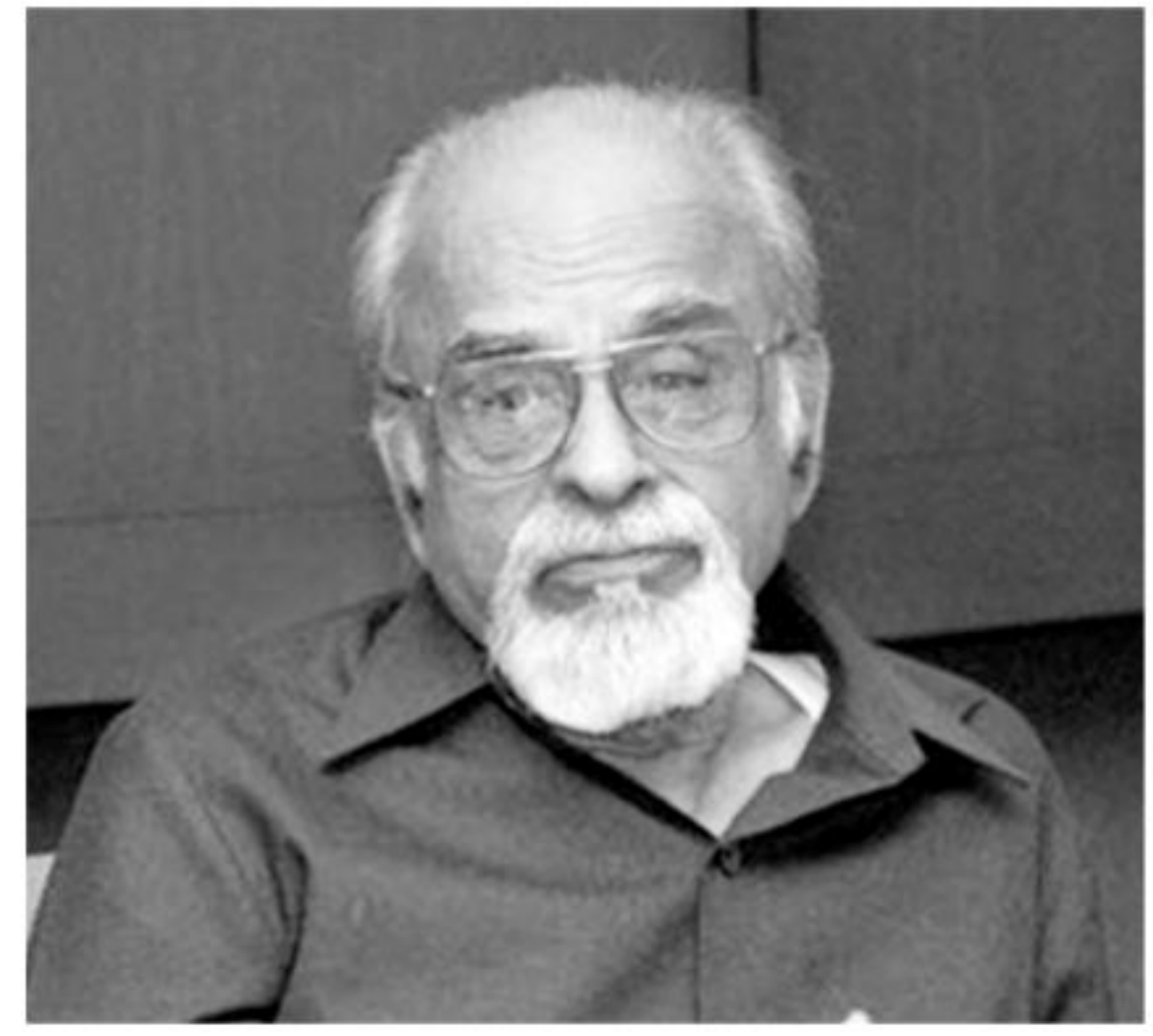
Gujral constituted a Kashmir group and we visited Srinagar many a time. There came a time when the Hurriyat leaders were willing to sit across the table with Indian leaders to settle the issue. But despite Gujral's efforts, New Delhi did not change the policy of a military solution.

Sympathetic to the minorities, Gujral also floated a Punjab group. The purpose was to bring round the Akalis, representing the Sikhs, to renounce their demand for the Anandpur Sahib resolution which sought Punjab's autonomy. Once again we were able to persuade the Akalis to give up the demand which had germs of separation. The government let us down at that time also. We were told to find a solution to all problems with the Sikhs at one go, while the government was preparing for Operation Bluestar. Gujral felt betrayed.

In fact, my long association with Gujral tells me that he fought for the lost causes and got satisfaction in having put up resistance. People in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir recognise him as a friend. His tenure as prime minister, although for a year, shows how he went out of the way to accommodate the neighbouring countries. Towards the end of his life, he was disillusioned with Pakistan. He said that he wasted his life in pursuing the mirage of building bridges with Islamabad and had realised rather late in the day

that the Pakistani leaders were anti-India to the core, never wanting to bury the hatchet.

Gujral always took pride in having brought Russia and India closer. As the Indian envoy, he stayed in Moscow for a long time, first serving Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and then Prime Minister Morarji Desai. That the non-Congress regime retained him as ambassador at Moscow spoke volumes about his outstanding contribution that made the Soviet leaders appreciate India's problems, although with no substantial result. He was on a first-name basis with almost all top persons in the government and the Communist Party.



Inder Kumar Gujral

Understanding the ideology and its drawbacks was Gujral's forte because, when in Lahore as a young man, he was a member of Indian communist party. After partition, he strayed away from it and joined the Congress. But he was a leftist in his leanings. Some linked this tendency of his with the abnormal hike he gave to the civil servants when he was the prime minister. The states vehemently criticised him but had to follow suit. When I conveyed him the angry comments made by members of the government, he said: The bureaucracy is the backbone of the government and it should be kept happy.

Probably, the finest hour of Gujral was when he refused to serve as minister of Information and

Broadcasting during the emergency. The sparring with Sanjay Gandhi ended his agony. When Sanjay gave him instructions on the phone how to tackle the press, Gujral said he was his mother's minister and not his errand boy. Mrs. Indira Gandhi sent him to the Planning Commission to share his grief with P.N. Haksar, already shifted from the Prime Minister's Office for his "leftist views."

I recall travelling with Gujral to South Africa to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi's early days of struggle. Gujral had another purpose: meeting Nelson Mandela whose photo he had on his table. Mandela took Gujral to the floor and had him dance during a banquet in his honour. He would travel by car some 17 hours every day to touch all the places where Gandhiji had lived. He was particularly moved when he visited the railways station at Pietermaritzburg where Gandhiji was thrown out of the first-class compartment for being a non-white.

Three years ago when he brought out his memoirs, I told him that the book did not reveal any secret when he had occupied top positions in the government. His reply was: "I am not a journalist." Still I think that he should have told the story of the Congress split in 1969 because he was an insider and the attitude of the Soviet leaders when they smelt defeat during the Cold War.

But then the trait of Gujral was not to tread on anybody's toes, not to annoy people. Posterity will know him as a prime minister who was humble and who won the hearts of even his rivals through humility. He was a gentleman in politics and this is imprinted on his long work of more than six decades in the service of his nation and the people.

No doubt, the country has lost a great leader. But I have lost a close friend who shared his inner thoughts. We were together in Punjab and Kashmir groups and visited together Pakistan, Punjab and Kashmir many times. His amiable temperament had brought members of the two groups nearer to one another. There is nobody to pick up the thread from where he has left. The work is important. His absence would be felt. I personally feel lonely because he was at the telephone end to advice. Always.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

SHIFTING IMAGES

Selling garments, or your soul?



MILLIA ALI

THE world is in a state of turmoil. In September, it was the Prophet Mohammad video which sparked protests in the Muslim world. This was followed by an armed attack on the US Diplomatic Mission in Ben Ghazi, Libya, killing four Americans. In October, we were rocked by the anti-austerity demonstrations in Spain. In November, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalated, resulting in the Gaza death toll soaring past the bloody milestone of 100. Add to this the continuing unrest in Syria, the resurging dissent in Egypt, and we have a scenario of economic upheaval, social unrest, terrorist attacks and the possible threat of a full-scale war in the Middle East.

Apart from the calamities initiated by rivalries and ideological differences, we have also been hit by Mother Nature with tornados and cyclones causing havoc to human lives. In the midst of all the chaos there is, however, one recent tragedy that has shaken all of us-- even those who are practically immune to violence and suffering. Yes, I am referring to the fire in the garment factory (Tazreen Fashions) in Ashulia, Bangladesh, which killed 111 workers trapped inside with no fire exit.

One cannot assign ranks and grades to catastrophes that result in the loss of innocent lives. But this was not a case of sparring ideologies or collateral damage or even a natural disaster. It was willful murder resulting from extreme greed of the factory owners who consciously decided to overlook basic safety standards to minimise their investments and locked the doors during the fire to prevent "theft." The loss was caused by a callous lack of compassion and disregard for human life. And, of course, due to the confidence that unethical businessmen in Bangladesh nestle in -- that they are not accountable to anyone since money can buy anything!

The fact is that these profiteering men and women know, as do we, that the furor and protests will last only a week. Leaders and politicians will vow to take suitable actions and make amends. A few feathers will be ruffled, some sentimental speeches will be delivered to pacify the protesting voices and the affected families. Finally, the efforts will taper off until the next calamity. It's all sound and fury signifying nothing.

Don't dehumanise the people at the bottom because they are the ones who are making it happen for all of you at the helm. You, the elected officials, need to ensure that minimum safety conditions are provided for these workers who are the backbone of your economy!

Sadly, the human angle is always missing in the entire process. The power brokers don't seem to care that there are real people behind these real tragedies. And they get hurt in the real sense. The heroic effort of the man who broke the window, jumped to an adjacent building and helped his fellow workers to escape is, for me, the "real" story. And the fact that 111 people couldn't escape because the doors were locked is the "real" issue. But these narratives are lost in the political rhetoric which is already diverting attention from the "real" problem.

My request to the leaders of the country: Can you please stop propounding your preposterous conspiracy theories? We really don't believe you anymore and we don't care. If you know who the culprits are, punish them and do your job. What we care about is why 111 under-paid, hard working, honest workers had their lives cut short because no one considered them to be of any consequence! They are an integral part of your country. Listen to the voices of their families and peers rather than the corrupt few at the top who have muscle and money power. Don't dehumanise the people at the bottom because they are the ones who are making it happen for all of you at the helm. You, the elected officials, need to ensure that minimum safety conditions are provided for these workers who are the backbone of your economy!

As for the garment factory bosses sitting in your golden cages -- come down and feel the pain you have caused to the many families. Look at them with empathy (if you are at all capable of feeling empathy) and you might be able to understand the total impact of what you have done. And, stop justifying your heinous acts by passing the buck on to others and making unforgivable, lame excuses. Take a little time off from your leisure and pleasure and reflect on the last few minutes of the woman who was trapped inside because of your willful callousness. The woman who sent that last text message to her husband, saying she knew she was going to be burnt alive. Put yourself in her position -- think of her children, her family. Next time you hug your own child spare a few thoughts for her child -- it may help you regain some of your moral bearings which you have lost in the quagmire of greed and avarice!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

New guards in China

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN

IT is under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) that China today has emerged as a most vibrant and strong nation, and the second largest economy in the world. This phenomenal rise of China in the last three decades is like a miracle. It happened because of CPC's correct and able leadership, its pragmatic policies and pursuit, following Deng Xiaoping's dictum: "Shi shi qiu shi" (seek truth from facts).

CPC did commit some mistakes, but also learnt lessons from them. In the 1950s the Great Leap Forward Policy was adopted, which was a mistake, as was the Great Cultural Revolution in 1960s. The decade-long Cultural Revolution seriously hindered progress in China, bringing chaos and disorder and sufferings to the people. It was Deng Xiaoping, the great architect of modern China who, from successive big falls during the Cultural Revolution, rose like the legendary Phoenix from the ashes and lifted China to its present state.

Deng is a second generation leader after Mao, and succeeding leaders were all his proteges. Deng charted a dual-track policy of economic reforms and retention of the communist regime. He adopted market economy, and called it socialism with Chinese characteristics. He said: "It does not matter whether the cat is black or white so far it can catch mice." He also said: "To remain poor is miserable, to be rich is glorious." It is interesting that Deng assumed no formal party position except as the Chairman of Central Military Commission (CMC).

Third generation leadership of China includes Jiang Zemin, a Deng protégé who was head of CPC for 10 years. It was during his time that extensive economic reforms took place and China made phenomenal progress in economy and modernisation that surprised the world. The torch of fourth generation leadership was passed down to Hu Jintao in the 16th CPC Congress held in 2002. Hu embraced scientific progress as a means of modernisation. He championed a more balanced growth as the way to creating a harmonious society.

In the 18th Party Congress, apart from confirming 205 members, 171 alternate members and 25 Politburo members, the 2,270 delegates also announced a seven member Standing Committee (since the last party congress in 2003 the number of Standing Committee members was nine). President Hu Jintao has been replaced by Vice President Xi Jinping, who was elected secretary general of the Party. He will be elected president of the country in the National Congress to be held in March next year. President Hu has also handed down the chairmanship of the most powerful

party military organ, the Central Military Commission, which his predecessor retained for two years after relinquishing the president's post.

Xi is the son of an old revolutionary, Xi Zhongxun, who was vice premier under Mao Zedong but was purged during the Cultural Revolution. Xi has had a relatively long tenure in rural China. His national image is high as being clean and tough on corruption. His ties with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) are very close as he served in it and his wife is a serving major general, a famous singer and a national celebrity. Xi came to prominence when he was given the overall responsibility of organising the Beijing Olympiad of 2008, which he very successfully accomplished, earning fame and projecting China's high image internationally.

In his first address after getting elected Xi outlined the internal challenges that China faced. He said: "The CPC is increasingly being divorced from the people. There is corruption in high places. There is also increased bureaucracy among the Party officials. These pressing problems must be resolved quickly if the Party is to

We hope the new guards will lead China to newer heights of peace, prosperity, honour and respect, and also contribute to make the world at large more peaceful, more harmonious and more habitable.

survive and the country to move forward." Widespread corruption at very high level surfaced in Chong Qing Party chief Bo Xilai's scandal. Xi said: "A large body of evidence has shown us that the issue of corruption is growing more intense and it will kill the Party and the country."

The new leadership has to curb corruption and the growing inequality in income between people and among the regions of China. The distribution of the benefits of development has to be even and widespread and the gap between rural and urban, developed and under-developed, rich and poor has to be bridged. China's economic growth in recent years has slowed down. From a torrid 11% to 13% annual growth it is now 8%, or even less.

President Hu, in his inaugural speech to the Party Congress, unveiled an ambitious plan for China to double its per capita income by 2020. China's per capita income stood \$4,260 in 2010 -- close to Thailand's and less than one-tenth of the US' (\$47,140). The target of higher per capita income reflects China's aim to catch up with the high living standard of the West and reduce social tensions by providing higher income to the populace.

Many challenges await Xi. He is likely to direct China's economic policy towards more inclusive growth. The great Chinese export machine is losing steam. Europe no longer has purchasing power. Trade relations with the US are deteriorating. China needs to keep its giant economy growing through domestic demand. It has to try to offset its export markets in the developed economies by expanding trade in Asia, which still enjoys some economic dynamism.

China will wait for the right opportunity before turning its yuan into an international reserve currency. Then the yuan will become part of a new regional financial architecture. China has to further beef up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the less known economic grouping whose members are China, Russia and former states of the Soviet Union. Soon India, Pakistan, Iran and other countries may join the group. Asean, which is currently in the dollar bloc, will be pivotal to China's tie-up. China would like to include it in the yuan bloc and encourage the regional grouping to reduce the traditional alliance with the West.

China will strengthen its military forces, especially the PLA and the navy, more as a deterrent. China rose in peace, believes in peace and pursues peace. It believes in peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and non-interference. But it has its own security concerns.

The world today is seething with unrest, tension and war. There are civil strife, terrorism, ethnic hatred and persecution. There are poverty, hunger and disease. Peace and amity are still far removed, stability is disturbed. Equality, justice and equity are not commonplace.

China comprises one-fifth of all humanity. It has indeed has come a long way in achieving phenomenal economic growth and development. It has eliminated poverty and remarkably improved quality of life of the people. China has played a big role in world peace and stability, and in the progress and prosperity of mankind. The world is understandably focusing on the new leadership in China. It has high expectations. It looks forward to China's even greater role under the leadership of Xi Jinping and his team.

We hope the new guards will lead China to newer heights of peace, prosperity, honour and respect, and also contribute to make the world at large more peaceful, more harmonious and more habitable. The writer had the privilege of meeting Secretary General Xi Jinping in recent years. He is a calm, composed, most passionate and assuring personality, and is always smiling and radiating warmth. I found Premier Zhou Enlai's image in him. He invites admiration and love. I wish Xi Jinping all success. I wish him Godspeed.

The writer is a former Chief of Army Staff.