

## Anti-terrorism campaign takes a beating

By K. Subrahmanyam

NEW DELHI: The government's decision to exchange three terrorists for 157 hostages is perhaps understandable and even explainable in terms of what other countries have done under similar compulsions. However, it has to be accepted that what has transpired is a serious setback to India in its fight against terrorism. One could even say that the international campaign against terrorism has suffered a setback on account of this exchange of terrorists for hostages.

It is quite obvious that the Vajpayee government held out for six days against the threats of the hijackers. It is said that the negotiations came close to breaking point on the night of Wednesday, the

sixth day of the hostage ordeal. At that stage, it would appear the terrorist threat prevailed and the government decided to yield.

Apologists for the decision may point out, perhaps with some justification, that the hijackers were forced to be content with the re-

### NEWS ANALYSIS

lease of only three out of the 36 terrorists they demanded and that they had to drop their demand for \$200 million. But that is only small consolation. Ultimately, the hijack is a victory for terrorism and, therefore, the nation has to guard against more hijackings aimed at securing the release of other terrorists being held in Indian prisons. No amount of verbiage or dissimulation can convert this setback into a victory

for the Indian nation.

What comes through clearly is that when it comes to the crunch, India, a country which has lost thousands of lives to terrorism, must wage a lonely battle against what is, after all, a worldwide scourge.

Those who loudly talk of fighting international terrorism put their calculations of expediency ahead of solidarity. The UN security council, which imposed sanctions on Libya for its alleged complicity in the blowing-up of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland, did not even meet once to come to the rescue of the 158 hapless victims of this hijacking, despite the drama dragging on for days.

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 JAN 2000

## Farooq upset over Centre's decision

By Dwarika Prasad Sharma  
The Times of India News Service

JAMMU: Chief minister Farooq Abdullah is "upset" over the decision of the Union government to release three top terrorists in exchange for the hostages aboard the IA plane, sources close to him said on Friday.

The chief minister was apprehensive that the release, especially the ISI-sponsored Harkat-ul-Mujahideen ideologue Masood Azhar, would boost militancy in the state,

they added.

The chief minister and top police and civil officials have been holding a series of meetings since Thursday evening to discuss the imminent and then actual release of militants and to review the repercussions on the already increasing violence in the state.

Masood Azhar was shifted from Kot Bhalwal jail near here and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar of Al Umar from Srinagar to Delhi on Friday morning before leaving for Kandahar on the plane taking ex-

ternal affairs minister Jaswant Singh in the afternoon.

There was a general air of despondency here that the Union government had to renege on the principle that there would be no bargaining with terrorists.

Though ordeal of the innocent hostages was ending, it was felt that that the already hot militancy would see a spurt and incidents like the hijacking might be repeated to secure the release of other terrorists.

## Setback for India

The nation joins the families and friends of the hostages of flight 814 in welcoming them back from their seven day ordeal and wishes them all a happy new year. The pilots and the rest of the air crew deserve our special thanks. At the same time, India has to bear in mind that their freedom has been secured at a cost which is not possible to adjudge at present. The cost can be minimised — and a repetition of such payments can be avoided — if, even at this late stage, the nation will wake up to the harsh realities of its security environment. Other nations, including a 'hard state' like Israel, have sometimes found it necessary to release terrorists in exchange for hostages. While the present decision of the government is understandable, there can be no gainsaying the harsh conclusion that the Indian republic has been outmanoeuvred by terrorists and by a neighbour which supports them and unleashes them on this country. This is the first time that ransom demands of such a dimension have been acceded to and, therefore, every precaution needs to be taken to ensure that the government's decision to yield to the terrorists' demands will not encourage more such actions in the future. What has happened is a serious setback; hence, a whole series of damage limitation measures have to be thought through and put in place. The first damage limitation measure for the nation as a whole is to ensure that our political parties and media do not attempt to politicise the issue and project the government's decision in partisan colours. Nothing will suit the Pakistani army and the terrorists it has unleashed better than that kind of development. It is quite possible, and even highly probable, that the decision to free three notorious terrorists will be hailed as a great victory by Islamabad in its proxy war and that the terrorist campaign now being waged in Kashmir will receive a fillip. Therefore, very urgent steps are called for to enhance the status of alert of our forces in that state. All the resources of our intelligence and security agencies have to be brought to bear in countering the possible attempts at escalation of the terrorist campaign being waged in Jammu and Kashmir.

In all probability, the enemy will not restrict its attention to Jammu and Kashmir but is likely to launch terrorist attacks in other vulnerable parts of India. A state of general alert against terrorism is called for and the population of the country has to be sensitised to the fact that it is under an all-pervasive terrorist threat; every citizen should be on alert and report to the authorities any suspicious move or happening. In a sense, this threat is a more insidious one than that posed by an army across the border. The threat of terrorism is intended to sap the morale of the people and undermine their confidence. The Kandahar deal is likely to reinforce the Pakistani military's traditional belief that New Delhi does not have the will to act proactively and punish Islamabad regardless of whatever damage it may inflict on India. Pakistan is likely to advertise the hijacking as revenge for Kargil and as proof that the BJP-led coalition government is a paper tiger. This will be used to boost the image of General Parvez Musharraf and his newly installed ISI chief, General Mahmud Ahmad, former 10th corps commander and loyal ally in the Kargil misadventure. Therefore, the government has to justify its decision to the people of India, take steps to counter the enhanced threats of terrorism likely to be posed by Pakistan, and launch a counter-offensive to expose that country as a terrorist state. The ruling alliance needs to enter into consultation with all political parties, explain to them the nature of the terrorist threat the country faces, and also initiate an information campaign on exposing the role of Islamabad. All information on the three extremists exchanged and their place in Pakistan's terrorist campaign should be publicised. Signal intercepts, if any, between the hijackers and Pakistani organisations should also be made available to persuade the world about the nature of terrorist aggression being waged against this country. India has been lulled into a sense of complacency for too long by successive governments. In spite of all its tall claims, the Vajpayee government has not displayed a different security culture than its predecessors. Having suffered a serious setback, let us start on our efforts to meet this grave threat unitedly.

**THE TIMES OF INDIA**

**1 JAN 2000**

## Govt. has lost its prestige, feels Cabinet

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC 31. The view that has emerged from inside the Union Cabinet is that while "the Government has won life for the hostages, it has lost its prestige."

The atmosphere at the meeting of the Cabinet this evening was grim and there was little to cheer about. The details of the "deal" struck with the hijackers of IC 814 were already known, and as one Minister said, "We were presented with a fait accompli, where was the occasion to approve or disapprove."

Mr L. K. Advani, Union Home Minister, remained morose and did not say a word. And it seems that the Cabinet Ministers had no idea why the three terrorists released from jails here in exchange for the hostages were taken to Kandahar in the plane carrying the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh.

The first hint that a deal was being struck was given at the Cabinet meeting yesterday when Mr. Singh requested his colleagues: "Bear with me tonight, I may have some good news tomorrow."

While the Cabinet had some idea that bargaining was on for the release of some terrorists and militants, ministers did not know that the hardcore Maulvi Masood Azhar was also to be released.

## ~~Annan relieved~~

UNHQ, Dec. 31. — UN secretary-general Kofi Annan is greatly relieved that the hijack ended without further loss of life, a UN spokesman said.

"The secretary-general is particularly pleased that the passengers and the crew of the hijacked plane are back in freedom."

A UN humanitarian official, Mr Eric de Mul, tried to ease the discomfort of the passengers while they were being held hostage by supplying washing materials and flying in meals from Islamabad when supplies at Kandahar ran low.

— Reuters

THE STATESMAN

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# Release of militants is no sellout: Brajesh Mishra

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, December 31

SHORTLY AFTER External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh took off for Kandahar, National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra spoke to *The Hindustan Times* about the deal with the hijackers:

**Q:** Isn't the decision to release three militants a climb-down or a sell-out, given the government's oft-repeated determination to stand firm?

**A:** Not at all. At a meeting with the opposition, we agreed that the government would take no action that would endanger the lives of passengers or harm India's long-term interests. We are convinced that we have operated within those parameters. Don't forget that the hijackers asked for the release of

36 ultras—and that is if you exclude the other demands including the one for money—but we only agreed to release three people.

**Q:** If you were going to release the Maulana anyway, then shouldn't you have done this on the sec-

airport. And even then they wanted several militants released apart from the Maulana.

**Q:** Is there any deal with the Taliban? Have we agreed to recognise them?

**A:** Absolutely not. The question of recognition does not arise. We did not offer and they did not ask for it.

**Q:** Do we know who the hijackers are?

**A:** Yes, we now have their real names and their backgrounds. There have been arrests of four people in Bombay. Our information is that the hijackers have links with the Chotta Shakeel gang and with Pakistan. We expect to be able to release more information after the hostages have landed on Indian soil.



"The question of recognition of Taliban does not arise. We did not offer them and they did not ask for it"

ond day of the hijack when this was the only demand made by the hijackers? That way, you would have spared the hostages a week of suffering.

**A:** It is simply not true that the hijackers ever made the demand for the release of only one militant. The first demands that we received came from the ATC at Kandahar

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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# The three who were exchanged

**M**ASOOD AZHAR, chief ideologue and general secretary of Harkat-ul-Ansar, claimed to be a "journalist and a religious preacher" following his arrest in February 1994. Born in an affluent family of Bhawalpur, in Pakistan on July 10, 1968, Azhar had been editing *Sada-e-Mujahadeed*, a magazine committed to spread of Islamic teachings.

He had joined Harkat to raise funds for the group and also to enrol people for *jihad*. He was rated as a strong motivator and orator.

He arrived in Srinagar on Feb. 9, 1994 and had got in touch with his long-time associate Sajjad Afghani, who at that time was heading the Harkat-ul-Ansar group in Kashmir.

**MUSHTAQ AHMAD ZARGAR**, born in Jilad Mohamma in Srinagar, was a coppersmith before joining ranks of militants. He was influenced by Shabir Ahmad Shah. Later he joined Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front — the first militant group that announced and launched armed rebellion in Kashmir.

Zargar went to Pakistan in the late 80s, where he was treated as a VIP. On his return, he float-

ed his own group, Al-Umar-Mujahadeen. He was responsible for various acts of militancy in Kashmir ranging from killings to abductions. Al-Umar-Mujahadeen was the first splinter group of the JKLF. A pro-Pakistan outfit, it organised several operations in downtown Srinagar against security forces and also sponsored parades and rallies on Pakistan's Independence Day — August 14.

**AHMED UMAR SYED SHEIKH**, is a graduate from the London School of Economics, this half-British-half-Afghan is also a black belt holder in martial arts. In 1994, he had walked into the Holiday Inn hotel in New Delhi and checked into the best room there. But two days and a Rs 25,000 bill later, he shifted to cheaper lodgings. He then scouted around for possible victims and spotted a group of four foreigners, three of whom were British.

Promising to show them what the "real India" was like, he along with three other militants, kidnapped them. The tourists were taken to Saharanpur and kept in a room. They were chained like animals and given a bottle each for

relieving themselves. They were rescued after about 40 days later.

"Our inspector Sahibabad/Ghaziabad, Dhruv Lal Yadav, had received information and we reached the hideout late in the night. There was an exchange of fire and Dhruv Lal was fatally hit. He was hit by two bullets in the chest and abdomen and could not be saved. Another constable, Ram Sevak, was also killed," recalled IG Vikram Singh, who is now in charge of the UP Police Special Task Force and who led this operation in 1994. One terrorist was also killed in the encounter, but Sheikh managed to escape. He was later rounded up in the Massouri area of Ghaziabad.

Sheikh refused to say anything to the police and was lodged at the Police Hospital. Here he locked himself in and switched off the lights. When the police constable on duty broke in, Sheikh gave him a sound thrashing. Two others who went to his aid were also treated similarly. The police had to throw a net to overpower him.

Arun Joshi/Soni Sangwan, Jammu/New Delhi

# How the bargain was clinched

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, December 31

THE MILITANTS-for-hostages swap was decided collectively by Prime Minister Vajpayee, Home Minister Advani, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Principal Secretary to the PM Brajesh Mishra, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau and the Secretary of the Research and Analysis Wing late on Wednesday.

They originally decided to free only Maulana Masood Azhar in exchange for the release all the hostages on board IC 814. This was conveyed to Indian negotiators in Kandahar immediately. But the hijackers stuck to their demand: free 36 militants. Finally, they got back to India with a deal: release the Maulana and 80 hostages would be released and for every militant subsequently released, 15 hostages would be freed. Indian negotiators refused. The hijackers called off the talks. For nearly 12 hours yesterday, negotiations were deadlocked.

The Taliban then put pressure on both sides. The moving of tanks and heavy artillery near the aircraft was to intimidate the hijackers. India was also told that if a settlement was not reached, they would force the plane off Afghan soil. The Taliban then spoke directly to the hijackers at India's urging. Nobody is sure of what transpired but late yesterday afternoon, the hijackers contacted the Indian

negotiators and said they were ready to talk again.

The settlement arrived at last night was the Maulana plus two other militants. The Indians said that they would choose the Maulana's two companions. The hijackers then said in that case five, not two, militants of India's choice would have to be released. Finally, it was agreed that two names of the hijackers' choice would accompany

Masood Azhar.

This was conveyed to a core group in Delhi which met at night informally to discuss the conditions. At 10 p.m. the core group decided to go for it.

As the militants to be released were in jail under TADA, the Government of India spent all night arranging the legal formalities for their release.

At 10 a.m. the Cabinet Committee on Security met to ratify the decision. The External Affairs Minister volunteered to go to Kandahar to receive the passengers himself. But as the deal had not been announced, it was said that he was only going "to personally supervise the negotiations".

Mr Jaswant Singh's departure was delayed because two of the militants to be freed were in Jammu and the plane bringing them to Delhi could not take off because of fog. Finally, they landed at 2.10 p.m. The plane with the External Affairs Minister and the three militants left Delhi for Kandahar 50 minutes later.

## When push came to shove ...

- The talks were deadlocked for 12 hours. The hijackers stuck to their one demand: the release of 36 militants. The negotiators in Kandahar were not authorised to agree to release anybody. The hijackers were getting edgy.
- A commando operation was impossible. The Taliban had refused to storm the plane.
- The Taliban had not set a deadline. But they had said that as there was no possibility of negotiations getting anywhere, they wanted the plane off their territory.
- IB had reported that the communal situation in India was becoming tense. If there was one more death, there could be communal riots.
- The intention behind the hijack had been to focus attention on Kashmir. So far that had not happened but if the stand-off dragged on, then Kashmir would become the focus of world attention.

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# RAW team weighed storming option

ABHIGYAN HANS  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 31. — Six officials, including two from the Research and Analysis Wing, who went to Kandahar as part of the Indian team to negotiate with the hijackers, returned two days ago.

The officials are learnt to have reached the capital on 29 December and submitted their report to senior government officials dealing with the crisis.

A senior official said the six had returned with a first-hand assessment of the ground situation at Kandahar airport and surrounding areas in Taliban territory. Their "first-hand assessment" is reported to have been an important input influencing the government decision to release the three

militants today.

The six officials are reported to have made their way back using a regular flight from Kabul.

"They could have communicated using satellite telephones, but the chances of the conversation being tapped were high. Even coded messages sent via satellites can be decoded with some effort," the official said.

A 52-member delegation, including a seven-member negotiating team led by a joint secretary in the external affairs ministry, had left for Kandahar on Monday. Among others, the team also comprised aircraft crew, doctors and engineers who rectified a fault in the auxiliary power unit.

The six officials are believed to have been included in the Indian delegation with the specific brief that they should gather as

much information as possible and rush back on any regular flight at the earliest.

The officials are stated to have assessed the role, psyche and mood of the Taliban authorities during the hijacking drama as also when securitymen laid siege to the hijacked aircraft.

They are also learnt to have explored the viability of mounting a commando operation in the hijacked IA aircraft on lines of the Entebbe commando operation in 1976.

Taliban's stand that they would not allow use of force to rescue the hostages, however, saw to it that this option stood closed. Besides, heavy deployment of personnel with anti-aircraft missiles at Kandahar airport, the Taliban are believed to have several training camps around the region.

THE STATESMAN

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# Hostages freed, back in Indig

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## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 31. — The hijack finally ended today, but not before splitting the Cabinet over its management — to the extent that the home minister offered to resign.

The hostages were flown back to Delhi tonight after India bought their freedom by handing over to the hijackers three jailed terrorists, including Maulana Mohammed Masood Azhar.

The decision to release the terrorists brought a resignation offer from Mr LK Advani before he was soothed by the Prime Minister, who today defended the trade-off in a broadcast.

Masood, Ahmad Omar Sayed Sheikh (both from Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar (Al-Umar) were taken out of their jails this morning and flown to Kandahar accompanied by the external affairs minister. They were handed over to the hijackers late in the afternoon.

Minutes later, the hostages trooped out of IC-814 that had been their prison for seven days. They were driven by bus to two Indian Airlines planes that flew them back to Delhi, with Mr Jaswant Singh, for an emotional reunion with friends and family.

The Boeing 737 carrying the first batch of 101 landed around 8.45 p.m., the Airbus A 320 with the rest some time later. As the passengers tumbled in, some were rushed to hospital in ambulances, some driven home and others put up in Centaur Hotel.

**The hijackers:** The five hijackers left Kandahar airport with the freed terrorists and drove off towards an undisclosed destination.

Mr Jaswant Singh said the Taliban had given them 10 hours to leave the country. The government had earlier said the Islamic regime would deal with the hijackers in accordance with Afghan law.

The Taliban, which didn't say

SFI

24 Dec — IC-814 hijacked, lands in Dubai after halts in Amritsar and Lahore

25 Dec — 27 passengers released. Plane reaches Kandahar

26 Dec — UN team at Kandahar after hijackers demand Masood Azhar's release

27 Dec — Special Indian plane with negotiators reaches Kandahar. Talks begin

28 Dec — Direct talks held, hijackers issue fresh demands

29 Dec — Hijackers drop some demands, doctors allowed inside plane

30 Dec — Taliban guards surround plane, UN negotiator returns from Islamabad

31 Dec — Three militants freed, hostages released.

where the hijackers and freed terrorists were headed, announced they would be forced to leave the country if they failed to meet the 10-hour deadline.

(The Taliban-brokered deal

THE STATESMAN  
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P. T. O.

# Govt fails to get Opposition support

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, December 31

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee's attempt to secure the Opposition's endorsement for his handling of the hijacking crisis ended in a fiasco today, as the all-party meeting convened by him turned out to be a complete wash-out.

With Opposition parties beginning to slam the Government for its "total failure" on the issue, in a sign of the gathering political storm, only Congress leader Manmohan Singh and Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Kanshi Ram responded to the Prime Minister's sudden invitation for an all-party meeting.

No officials were present during this interaction, when Mr Vajpayee apprised the two leaders that the "only feasible option" before the Government was to release Mohammad Masood Azhar and two other terrorists to ensure that the hostages were freed by the hijackers.

Refusing to comment whether

they were satisfied with this explanation, the two leaders however made it clear to newsmen that they were concerned about the consequences flowing from the handling of the situation.

According to Mr Kanshi Ram, the Prime Minister himself admit-

and discuss the consequences of dealing with terrorism," he said, adding that his party was "relieved and happy" that the hostages were freed.

But his party colleague Pranab Mukherjee did not hide his punches as he charged the Government

Mr Kanshi Ram too did not mince his words as he lashed out at the Government's "total failure" to deal with the situation.

The BSP leader, who asked the Prime Minister whether there was a possibility of a future blackmail, charged that the Government had bungled in dealing with the situation when the hijacked aircraft had landed in Amritsar.

"For the second time after Kargil, we have had to pay a heavy price for the Government's failure," he said adding that it was time for the government to ponder over the successive failures.

Earlier, on Monday, when the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, had convened an all-party meeting to brief leaders about the hijacking, the Opposition parties had distanced themselves from it and kept their attack in reserve.

They rallied behind the Government in the hour of crisis but made it clear that in view of the rapidly changing situation it was for the Government to take a decision on the matter.

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ted to the "danger" of a "future blackmail" when he was queried about it at the meeting.

While Mr Singh was more guarded and circumspect in his response, he too expressed concern over the consequences of the situation with regard to the country's security.

It is not a party matter. The nation will have to ponder over

with succumbing to pressure of the hijackers and maintained that the decision to release three dreaded militants will have "far-reaching implications."

He expressed apprehensions that with this development, the law enforcement machinery which is taking on the militants in Kashmir will be reduced to a lame duck set-up.

# Defence analysts slam deal with hijackers

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, December 31

PROMINENT DEFENCE analysts and experts in strategic affairs have expressed outrage at the manner in which the Government "compromised" national interest to resolve the week-long hijack drama at Kandahar.

Mr K. Subrahmanyam, Convenor of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), termed the deal struck with the hijackers as a "set-back" for India's fight against terrorism. "The hijackers," he said, "have won..."

Mr Subrahmanyam, who also headed the Committee that probed the Kargil fiasco, blamed the international community for not supporting New Delhi in getting the hostages released. He said the lesson to be learnt was that India has to fight terrorism alone and not rely on others.

Former Army chief, General V N Sharma, said the release of the terrorists would only serve to boost

terrorism in the country: "Once you give in to blackmail, you have to be prepared to give in to their demands many times over". India, according to him, was seen as a "soft State" and this would embolden the militants. "We have been proved wrong in hoping that the BJP-led Government would prove to be strong and assertive..." The turn of events at Kandahar has been contrary to the impression that the Taliban were co-operating with India, opined Gen. Sharma.

In order to help the hijackers attain their objective, they (the Taliban) made sure that no military option could be exercised by New Delhi. On the release of terrorists, Gen. Sharma said by allowing the hijacked plane to leave Amritsar "we ensured that we were driven up the wall... Thereafter, we didn't have very many options to exercise."

The ex-Army Chief also drew attention to the slow movement of law against the three terrorists despite their arrest some time ago.

## 'There was no option except releasing ultras'

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, December 31

THE UNION Cabinet endorsed this evening the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) to swap 3 militants for 155 hostages held captive at Kandahar by the hijackers of the IA Airbus.

The CCS which met here this morning at the PM's residence had okayed the deal hours before the departure of Mr Jaswant Singh for Kandahar along with three ultras.

Except for raising the IA's dubious record of 11 hijacks, all Ministers are reported to have agreed with the decision that took under "trying circumstances."

Briefing mediapersons after the Cabinet meeting, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan insisted that the quid pro quo reached with the hijackers was determined by the twin objective of defending national interest and the safe return of passengers.

Mr Mahajan denied that there had been any underhand deal either with the hijackers or with the Taliban. He said India expected the Taliban to try the hijackers under the law of their land.

"Nobody is happy with the release of the militants. But we had very limited options in the situation that we were facing," the Minister remarked.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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# PM orders inquiry into hijack drama

New Delhi, December 31

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee has ordered an inquiry into the hijack of the Indian Airlines plane, Civil Aviation Minister Sharad Yadav, has said.

"Details of minute-to-minute developments are being obtained," he said in an interview to Zee News for its 'Ru-ba-ru' programme.

A press release issued by the private TV network said Yadav gave a clean chit to officials of his ministry, Indian Airlines and the crisis management group in the hijacking episode.

Yadav said he had sent a Joint Secretary rank official to find out if there were any lapses by Indian Airlines officials at Kathmandu and found they were not at fault and that he was satisfied with their performance.

The Minister said the Government was thinking of sending commandos aboard flights going to sensitive destinations outside India and added that "loop-holes" in the security system would be removed.

(PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 JAN 2000

## They were key players in reviving militancy

By Vinay Kumar

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 31.** The three hardcore militants, two Pakistanis and a Kashmiri, who were exchanged today to secure the safe release of 154 hostages in the hijacked Indian Airlines plane, were key players in renewing the militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and were also behind several cases of kidnappings of foreigners.

While Mohammad Masood Azhar alias Vali Adam Issa was lodged at Kot Balwal Jail near Jammu and Ahmed Umar Saeed Sheikh was kept in Tihar Jail, the Kashmiri militant, Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar was held at Srinagar.

The entire operation to transport the three militants to Kandahar, was marked by secrecy. They were flown to Kandahar this afternoon by the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, after an agreement was reached with the hijackers for the safe return of the passengers.

Mushtaq Zargar was taken to Jammu from Srinagar in the early hours of today, where he was joined by Mohammad Azhar. The two were flown to Delhi in a special aircraft, sources said. Ahmed Umar Sheikh was whisked away from Tihar jail under tight security around 1 p.m.

It was Mohammad Azhar, the main fund-raiser of the Harkat-ul-Ansar (HUA), whose release was crucial. A prize catch for the security agencies, Azhar was a resident of Bahawalpur in Pakistan and the first secretary general of HUA. He was responsible for recruiting and sending regular batches of Kashmiri youth to Pakistan and Afghanistan for training in arms and explosives.

Born and brought up in a family following the Deobandi School of thought, Azhar received arms training in Afghanistan in 1989. He edited and published the monthly mouthpiece of the Har-

kat-ul-Mujahideen (HKUM) from Karachi. He visited various countries for collecting funds for the HKUM. He went to Nairobi in December 1993 to enlist support for HKUM's demand, asking Pakistan to withdraw its forces from Somalia, where its troops were a part of the U.N. forces and were acting as a 'shield for U.S. army' from attacks by 'Islamic Forces'.

He was instrumental in inducting Sajjad Afghani into Kashmir through the Indo-Bangladesh border. Azhar came to Delhi in January, 1994 via Dhaka on a forged Portuguese passport, to supervise the merger of the two militant outfits — Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-e-Jihad-e-Islami (HUJI), under a new name of Harkat-ul-Ansar.

Ahmed Umar Saeed Sheikh, a 28 year-old Harkat-ul-Ansar militant, is a British national of Pakistani origin. His brief was to abduct foreigners, to secure the release of Mohammad Azhar and other Harkat leaders lodged in the Indian jails. He was arrested on October 31, 1994 and lodged in Tihar jail.

# Taliban is the biggest gainer

By K. K. Katyal

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**NEW DELHI, DEC. 31.** The biggest gainer of the eight-day hijacking episode, that ended tonight, is the Taliban. This point stands out in any assessment of how the various parties, either involved directly or connected indirectly, emerged out of it. The advantage of Taliban contrasts sharply with the credit-and-debit entries in India's account, on the one hand, and the none-too-happy projection of Pakistan, on the other. In New Delhi, there was a tremendous sense of relief over the release of 159 passengers and crew members of the unlucky plane but, at the same time, there was the painful realisation that a political climb-down became inevitable to achieve the objective of undoubted considerable humanitarian significance. Pakistan does not conceal its glee over New Delhi's discomfiture but its propaganda machinery was engaged all these days in virulent attacks against India, obviously to counter the widespread perception of their involvement in this terrorist act and to deflect attention from it.

*J. D. S. N. S. N. S. N.*  
The Taliban conducted itself with great sophistication from the time the hijacked plane landed at Kandahar, and have good reason to be happy with the end result. Each one of its moves, gestures and stances was calculated to project the best possible image. It began with the choice of Kandahar as the destination of the plane in Afghanistan. Initially, the hijackers planned to land at Kabul but that would not have yielded the desired dividends to the Taliban — for this city conjured up visions of obscurantism and bigotry as against Kandahar with its relaxed, moderate setting, which is more acceptable to the outside world. The Taliban Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmed, along with other colleagues and functionaries, seemed to have followed a carefully-calibrated strategy with four distinct elements.

One, special care was taken not to say or do anything that could be construed even remotely as signifying sympathy with or support to the hijackers. On the contrary, it sought to detach itself

from their actions. Two, the Taliban extended full cooperation to the Indian Government and provided logistical help, in particular facilitating contacts between the negotiating team from New Delhi and the hijackers. Three, it ensured against any harm to the hostages during the period the plane was on Afghan soil (poor Rippan Katyal had been done to death at an earlier stage — and his body was taken out of the plane at Dubai). Four, it did not involve itself in the negotiations between the Indian officials and hijackers but, nonetheless, influenced the course of what from all accounts was a bumpy interaction.

Think of the images Taliban projected eight days ago and now. In the first case, its lot was unenviable, howsoever viewed. Because of its conduct during the fighting for the control of Kabul and the rest of the country and afterwards, it came out as a medieval force, disdainful of modern ideas of tolerance, equity, of gender equality, putting the narrowest, even uncalled for interpretations on the tenets of Islam. The Taliban authorities were recognised by only three countries — Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE — while the rest of the world regarded the Rabbani Government as the lawful authority even though it controlled some 10 per cent of the territory. India was amongst those countries which chose not to deal with it and, because of the suspicion of its involvement in the Kashmir violence, used to single it out, while drawing world attention to the urgency of combating transnational terrorism. Recently, the Taliban authorities were subjected to U.N. sanctions, in the wake of the U.S. embargo. For all practical purposes, they were international outlaws.

All that is changed now. Despite non-recognition, New Delhi has been dealing with the Taliban representatives this week. Diplomats belonging to the countries, the nationals of which were among the hostages, went to Kandahar, the media teams from all over the world descended on the city, primarily for covering the hijack episode but, in the process, focussing on the Taliban leaders

and their activities, as they put their best foot forward. This widespread publicity — mostly positive — is certain to have a political and diplomatic spin-off, helping the Taliban to acquire legitimacy, even respectability, and, thus, enabling it to integrate with the global mainstream. The electronic media teams do not seem to have got even a single soundbite, projecting it as a bigoted force.

And yet the Taliban has not exposed itself to the charge — by Pakistan, the ISI or others in that category — that it let down the cause represented by the hijackers. This was evident from its conduct after the hijackers made known the first list of demands. The Taliban prevailed upon them to give up two "un-Islamic" items, namely, cash transfer of \$ 200 million and the handing over of the body of a dead terrorist. The Taliban might have played a role in persuading the hijackers to scale down the third demand — for the release of 36 persons — but, obviously, did not seem to have opposed the idea of a "gesture" by India. By implication, the Taliban did not regard the use of hijacking as an instrument to serve whatever cause the hijackers sought to pursue. But that has not attracted attention, and it has got away with this negative implication.

The Taliban has succeeded in acquiring a diplomatic space which would be of considerable use to it. On its part, India will find it hard not to rethink its stand. Going by the experience of the last three or four days, there is the danger of analysts, both official and non-official, resorting to the facile assumption that the Taliban would be making a debut as a force, independent of Pakistan. As a matter of fact, its move to forge new ties will be an extension of the process, that did not go beyond its recognition by just three countries, including its creator, Pakistan.

To say this is not to suggest that Kabul, for all time to come, will accept the status of subservience to an outside power. That is the message conveyed by the conduct of this independence-loving nation. This, however, is not the immediate prospect.



## 'Gang got arms in Kandahar'

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, December 31

SEVERAL HOSTAGES on arriving in Delhi said that the hijackers got more weapons when the plane reached Kandahar.

Mr Chander Prakash Chabbara, one of the released hostages, told the Hindustan Times : "When the plane reached Amritsar the hijackers were only armed with pistols, knives and one grenade. But when the plane was in Kandahar suddenly the hijackers got more pistols and grenades. I saw one of the hijackers carrying a large number of grenades," Mr Chabbara pointed out.

He said that even though the men were blindfolded on several occasions, he could see that the hijackers had become more armed when the plane was in Kandahar. Asked where the hostages got these weapons from, Mr Chabbara said : I have no idea. But they had more grenades and pistols when the plane reached Kandahar."

Another released hostage, Prashant Kandwalkar, also confirmed that the hijackers got more weapons

when the plane reached Kandahar. A visibly tired and shaken Kandwalkar said : "Till the plane was in Amritsar I saw that one of the hijackers was carrying a pistol. Another one had knives. But after the plane reached Kandahar the hijackers got more grenades."

Prashant Kandwalkar, who is based in Bombay, had gone to Kathmandu on a business trip. His entire family was at the airport to receive him.

Asked if the hijackers were treating them well, Mr Chabbara said : "They were not really harsh. But they started threatening us whenever the Indian Government would refuse to accept their demands."

He said that the hijackers were speaking in fluent Hindi. "However, I could not see their faces since they were covered. Moreover, whenever the hijackers would get upset they would insist that we cover our eyes with blind-folds," he added.

On the food which was being given to them, Mr Chabbara said : "We were just given half an orange to eat three times a day. I could not eat the non-vegetarian food still they would give me only half an orange three times a day," he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 1 JAN 2000

# New Delhi expected too much from Taliban

By C. Raja Mohan

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 31.** The collapse of the efforts to secure substantive cooperation from the Taliban leadership in Kandahar and the political reluctance here to prolong the hostage crisis forced the Government today to swallow the bitter pill of trading with the terrorists.

The unwillingness of the Taliban leadership to get the hijackers drop all their demands, left India with the unenviable task of delivering three militants to the hijackers in return for the freedom of the hostages aboard IC-814. The terrible failure to hold the aircraft back in Amritsar and the inability to detain it in the United Arab Emirates, left India totally at the mercy of the Taliban.

Controlling the ground situation as it did in Kandahar, the Taliban was in a position to define not just the final outcome of this ugly

episode of terrorism but also the terms on which it would end.

India was totally dependent on the Taliban to ensure the safety and security of the passengers and crew of the aircraft as well their eventual release. The Taliban certainly would claim it delivered on the safety and security of the hostages. Any additional killings aboard the aircraft would have put unbearable pressure on the Government.

But India was hoping for more, much more. It led itself into believing that there was a prospect, however slim, of the Taliban facilitating an unconditional release of the hostages. This turned out to be an illusion.

But the Government's contacts with the Taliban during the initial period of the hostage crisis and the public statements issued from Kandahar generated an assessment that there

could be some political distance between the Taliban and the hijackers. The expectation that India could bank upon the Taliban to secure an unconditional release of the hostages, was based on an assumption that Kabul might be looking for a way out of its international isolation and that it could use the hostage crisis to begin a process of its own global rehabilitation.

These assumptions proved to be untrue. The Taliban, in the end, showed that it wants to be true to its proclaimed ideology and less interested in charting out a new path. After having argued for years that the Taliban is a creature of Pakistan, India in the last few days appeared ready to rethink this premise and probe the prospects for a bilateral understanding. This Indian attempt to delink the Taliban from its patrons in Pakistan proved to be impossible.

# Hostages swapped for three militants

## Week-long hijack ordeal ends

By Harish Khare

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 31** The week-long hostage crisis ended today when the Vajpayee Government agreed to release (at least) three hardcore "Kashmiri" terrorists in exchange for the freedom of 155 Indian passengers and the crew members of the hijacked Indian Airlines aircraft. All the hostages returned home late tonight from Kandahar to freedom and the new millennium — and, to an emotional reunion with their loved ones at the Palam airport.

Speaking to the nation on the eve of the new century, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee explained that the government was guided by two concerns: "the safety of the pas-

sengers and the crew, and the long-term, overall interests of our country."

The first indication of a breakthrough in the crisis came this morning when it was known that Mr. Jaswant Singh, India's Foreign Minister, would be flying to Kandahar. It was put out that the Foreign Minister was travelling to Kandahar to add authority to the negotiations with the hijackers. Later it was revealed that the Foreign Minister was taking with him three militants, whose release was at the core of the hijackers' demand from the very beginning.

Before the fact of the Foreign Minister travelling with the three terrorists became known, there was a note of congratulation in the officials' voice. It was made out that a "deal" had been clinched yesterday itself, and that the Prime Minister had briefed the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan on the contours of the emerging breakthrough. Obviously logistical loose ends needed to be tied up before Mr. Jaswant Singh could fly to Kandahar with the militants.

Soon thereafter major international television networks were telecasting images of the five masked hijackers walking up to the car in which sat the Foreign Minister and the three released terrorists. As soon as Mr. Jaswant Singh's plane left for Kandahar, the "agreement" was made public by Mr. Brijesh Mishra, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. Mr. Mishra told newsmen that "there has been an agreement to release all the hostages in exchange for the three militants."

The three released terrorists are Maulana Masood Azhar (who was in a Jammu jail), Mustaq Ahmed Zarger, (who was in Srinagar and was brought to Jammu and flown to New Delhi along with the Maulana) and the third, Ahmed Omar Sayeed Sheikh who was lodged in the Tihar Jail here.

However, it was far from certain whether there was a "hidden" sub-script to the release drama; there are indications that New Delhi could release a few other terrorists at a later date. Nonetheless, Mr. Brijesh Mishra insisted that there were no hidden concessions. Mr. Mishra, who is also the National Security Adviser, argued that the hijackers had "excessive demands" but "we were able to whittle it down."

Mr. Mishra was not very forthcoming on the fate of the hijackers, and merely noted that "the Taliban authorities will decide. They can deal with the hijackers according to their law." However, later Mr. Jaswant Singh told a press conference in Kandahar, in the presence of Taliban's Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil that the hijackers would not get asylum in Afghanistan and had been given 10 hours to leave the country. Mr. Jaswant Singh in-

voked the assurance of the Taliban Foreign Minister. "His excellency has assured me the criminals will not receive any asylum in Afghanistan and they have 10 hours within which to go wherever they have to go," added Mr. Singh.

The Home Ministry and other officials associated with the fight against insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir were inclined to believe that the release of the three ter-

### Hijackers kill colleague

**KANDAHAR, DEC. 31.** Hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane, killed one of their colleagues during the week-long drama, diplomats quoted freed passengers as saying today. They did not know exactly when the hijacker was killed or why but said his body was found in the cockpit. — Reuters

rorists would set them back by years.

A meeting of the Union Cabinet was called in the evening, and the ministers were briefed on the latest developments. Later the Prime Minister also briefed the available leaders of the Opposition parties about the deal with the hijackers.

THE HINDU  
- 1 JAN 2000

SATURDAY, JANUARY 1, 2000

## GREAT RELIEF BUT A HEAVY PRICE

HD-1  
THERE IS A widespread sense of relief and rejoicing that there is finally a safe homecoming for the some 150 Indian citizens and the several foreign nationals who were trapped in a gruesome seven-day ordeal aboard the Indian Airlines flight hijacked last Friday en route from Kathmandu to New Delhi. By all accounts, the nightmare on board the hijacked Flight IC-814 was one of the most traumatic experiences faced in plane hijacks in the recent past. The cold-blooded murder of a young man, Rupin Katyal, returning from a honeymoon in Nepal, whose only mistake was apparently to glance up at his captors and was consequently viciously stabbed, places this particular hijacking in the category of the most brutal kind. The other passengers who apparently sat traumatised and terrified in their seats through the grim week, did not have it any easier. Blindfolded initially and asked to look downwards most of the time, they were starved of food for a full 24 hours at one point because of the hijackers' pique. It was clear that the group of deranged desperados who showed very little compassion even for the children who were trapped aboard and who did not waver even for a second from their emphatic demand for the release of a bunch of terrorists jailed in India, had planned their chilling strategy down to the last detail.

The deal that the Government was finally forced to agree to — the release of the Harkat-ul-Mujahadeen cleric, Maulana Masood Azhar, two other militants, Ahmed Omar Sheikh and Mushtaq Zargar — which came after five days of hard negotiations in Kandahar between Indian negotiators, the Taliban regime and the hijackers is certainly a bitter pill for the country to swallow. Yet it was a Hobson's choice, given the fact that more than a hundred innocent lives were at stake and could not on any account be traded in for the continued captivity of a few militants, however dreaded they were and however ominous their release was in terms of the impact it would have on the battle against cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. As the chilling story of the last seven days reveals, the country had a gun pointed at its head by a group of criminals. The hijackers managed to browbeat the Government of India, virtually spiriting the aircraft away from Amritsar where it had landed for at least a full 40 minutes, adroitly avoiding any stalling action at Lahore or Dubai and finally forcing the plane to land in Kandahar, the stronghold of the Taliban, thus virtually placing more than a hundred Indian lives at the mercy of a fundamentalist regime that has no diplomatic relations with India.

In retrospect, without taking away from the wholesomeness of the happiness that is attendant in the liberation of these traumatised hostages, the painful reality is that the Government's strategy and tactics in this period demonstrably foundered. It does appear that the Government's inability to rescue the hostages without inviting this costly trade-off, even as the hijackers are apparently walking off scotfree into the welcoming arms of their Taliban hosts, has extracted a heavy political cost and could damage India's prestige internationally. At every stage in this sordid affair, the Government seems to have squandered some crucial bargaining space and time, while investing far too much hope in the Taliban's professions of good faith. To briefly recount here the points at which it was clear that the Government's options narrowed sharply: the first fatal blunder was the failure to utilise the hijackers forced landing at

Amritsar, after being denied permission to land in Lahore. There was no attempt to storm the plane or at least stall its take-off by engaging the hijackers in some sort of tactically-dictated parleys. Thus the country's vulnerability to this criminal operation and its strategic implications, intensified to the point that it no longer had control over its own decisions in respect of the hijacking, when the hijackers triumphantly took the plane out of Indian skies to unfriendlier destinations. The second mistake was the failure to persuade authorities at Dubai to try to stall the aircraft's departure by rushing a negotiating team there. The third and fatal flaw in the Government's strategic response manifested in the approach to the negotiations in Kandahar.

The strong connections between the Afghan fundamentalist militia represented in the Taliban regime and the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups operating with considerable assistance from Pakistan, have been established and therefore should not have been underestimated. It is also well known that the dangerous dimensions acquired by the insurgency in the Kashmir Valley were the consequence of the infiltration across the border of hardcore mercenaries and militants with strong Afghan connections. Thus when the aircraft landed in Kandahar on Saturday morning after its hijacking, the Government was obviously nonplussed. Yet two critical days were wasted in pondering over the diplomatic implications of what was an unavoidable engagement with the Taliban regime. The public anger that erupted in this country at the delay in bringing the nightmare to an end, particularly fuelled by the agony of the relatives of the hostage passengers, was a result of the perception that the Government was more concerned with the implications of the negotiations for India's diplomacy. The negotiations began only on Monday, three days after the passengers had begun their nightmarish ordeal.

Another worrying indication that the Government did not seem to have a credible strategy to deal with this situation was that there was no evidence of a persistent effort to persuade the Taliban to allow a commando operation to free the hostages. In hindsight, it would seem that too much faith was placed in the Taliban which ultimately proved to be conniving with the hijackers to step up the pressure on India to place the release of the terrorists as the centrepiece of any negotiation. If indeed the Taliban was a responsible state with respect for international law, it should have unhesitatingly supported an Indian action to storm the plane. Since that was not on the cards, the Government was left with no other option but to surrender to the hijackers' demands.

Amid the rejoicing, the Government and the people of India will have to absorb the sober implications and consequences of this horrendous event. First, there can be no question of "rewarding" the Taliban for its double-dealing in Kandahar. The hijackers and the freed terrorists have now melted into the crowd of nameless and faceless militants who wander about the Afghan countryside. Second, the military and police operations to hunt down terrorists in the Kashmir Valley would have to be intensified in the wake of the release of Maulana Azhar and his companions. But most important, the formulation of a long-term strategy to deal with militancy in the Valley, including a recognition of the need for a political approach to the aspirations of the Kashmiris, is an urgent necessity.

THE HINDU

- 1 JAN 2000

# Opposition may turn the heat on Govt.

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 31.** The Government will have a tough time explaining its handling of the hijack crisis. This was evident from the reaction of the Opposition parties at an all-party meeting convened by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, here this evening.

Only two of the Opposition leaders — Dr. Mannohan Singh of the Congress(I) and Mr. Kanshi Ram of the Bahujan Samaj Party — attended the meeting convened at short notice. Their reaction was one of complete disapproval of the handling of the crisis.

Emerging from the meeting, the Leader of the Opposition in the

Rajya Sabha and senior Congress (I) leader, Dr. Mannohan Singh, said "we are naturally relieved and happy that the passengers have been released, but the nation would have to ponder over the consequences of terrorism".

The majority of the Opposition representatives were away from the national capital and, therefore, did not attend the meeting. The Congress(I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, was originally scheduled to attend the meeting, but decided against it when it was realised that the other parties would not be present.

The Prime Minister briefed the two leaders on the circumstances under which the Government was forced to agree to the release of three hardcore militants in ex-

change for the hostages. He told the leaders that the release of the militants was the only feasible option under the circumstances.

The BSP president was highly critical of the approach of the Government in resolving the crisis and said it was a reflection of its total failure. He said the Government would have to answer a number of questions beginning with its failure to hold up the aircraft at Amritsar.

Earlier, the Congress(I) expressed consternation at the Government's decision to free three top-ranking terrorists and warned that the step would have serious and far-reaching implications. The Government's action had sent the message that it could succumb to terrorists.

Speaking on behalf of the party, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee feared that the entire law-enforcing machinery in Kashmir would be rendered "a lame duck" at a time when Pakistan was carrying on a proxy war against India. "National interest does not mean surrendering to the demands of terrorists," he said. He added that if the Government's decision was faulty, then the country would have to suffer.

Mr. Mukherjee expressed happiness at the release of the hostages, but added that it was "still inexplicable" why the Government had failed to act when the hijacked plane was in Amritsar. Its explanation had been unsatisfactory and these questions would come up in course of time.

# 'An occasion for cheer and joy'

**NEW DELHI, Dec. 24.** The following is the text of the Prime Minister's address to the nation:

My dear countrymen: tomorrow the world enters a new century and a new age. A new chapter in the history of mankind begins as the sun sets for the last time in the 20th century. This is an occasion for cheer and joy. Doubtly so because the ordeal of our sisters and brothers, of the little children, held hostage by the hijackers of an Indian Airlines plane is nearing an end. They will soon be back their families to usher in the new year.

As you are aware, the hijackers had demanded the release of 36 terrorist. We were able to substantially scale down their demand.

*J. D. Desai*  
In dealing with the hijackers, Government was guided by two concerns the safety of the passengers and the crew, and the long-term. Overall interests of our country. The hijacking, diabolic and evil as it is, is but the latest manifestation. We must not spare any effort to thwart the phenomenon of terrorism itself. For two decades now, this menace has exacted a cruel price from us in India. Thousands of innocent, defenceless men, women and children have been done to death. Tens of thousands of families have lost their home and hearth.

Surely, the time has come for

the World to confront this evil, to act in concert and crush it.

The battle against terrorist, can be won. By all nations acting together. By outdoing the terrorist in patience, in technology, in strength, in intelligence. India shall join hands across nations to rid the world of this crime against humanity. Let this be our first resolution for the new century.

*A. D. Desai*  
Dear countrymen! along with terrorism, the twin curse of poverty and illiteracy have to be wiped out. We have to ensure that every Indian has a shelter and the poorest of the poor access to a life of dignity.

We have to break down barriers of caste, language and religion. We have to erase artificial boundaries that separate Indians from Indians. We have to remove all forms of discrimination, especially discrimination, against women.

The key to this new society is fast economic development and rapid social change. We have to ensure growth with equity so that every Indian benefits from India's prosperity.

India shall be a developed country, a country that reaches out and cares for the key to this new society is fast economic development and rapid social change. We have to ensure growth with equity so that every Indian benefits from India's prosperity.

India shall be a developed country, that reaches out and cares for the weakest.

Let this be our second resolution for the new century.

Dear countrymen, we have to excel as individuals and as a nation. We have the best talent in science and technology. Our sportsmen are rated among the best in the world. Our teachers are in demand in the best Universities abroad. Our farmers defy great odds to produce record harvests. Our industry has the potential to stand up to all competition. The closing decades of the 20th century have fetched a bounty of opportunities, new vistas have been opened up by discoveries that could not have been imagined even 20 years ago.

With such talent and resources, we can excel as a nation. We must seize the opportunities of the coming era to emerge as a mighty nation whose strength shall lie in her achievements.

Excellence - that shall be our watchword.

Let this be our third resolution for the new century.

On January 26, we will celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our Republic. The Constitution of India has served as the beacon for our democracy, establishing the rule of law and the supremacy of the people. In 50 years we have grown to become a vibrant democracy, and the world's largest.

But while the spirit of democracy and the faith of the people in a democratic system have survived the test of time, our institutions have begun to show signs of corrosion. That needs to be checked and rectified immediately. To ensure the health of our democracy, our institutions need to be strengthened, with your help, to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

India's institutions shall be restored to health.

Let this be our fourth resolution for the new century.

Dear countrymen, we enter the 21st century with a civilisational history that stretches back to more than 5,000 years.

From time immemorial, we have nourished traditions and values. They are our real strength. They are the gift India has preserved for the world through ages. They are the truths to which the world has now begun to turn - for direction, for solace, for wisdom. As Sri Aurobindo said: "the sun of India's destiny would rise and fill all India with its light and Overflow India and Overflow Asia and Overflow the world..." Let us

make the new century an Indian century. May 2000 and the decades beyond truly be a new age, a new era of security and brotherhood among all peoples and prosperity for all nations. Jai hind

# Hijack 'episode', a call to beef up security

110-19  
110-19  
By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 21.** While there were welcome signs of relief over the end to the eight-day-long hijack drama and safe return of hostages to the Capital tonight, security experts felt the "episode" served as a wake-up call to India to embark upon a total rethinking in its strategy towards tackling terrorism and plugging loopholes in the country's security management system.

The former Director-General of Police, Punjab, Mr. K.P.S. Gill, who had successfully handled a hijack, described the release of three hardcore militants as a "setback" in the fight against terrorism.

Without going into specific details, Mr. Gill told *The Hindu* that there was an urgent need for rethinking the strategy on tackling militancy and terrorism. Mr. Gill was firmly opposed to the idea of accepting the hijackers' demand for the release of Maulana Azhar and other militants but said there could be "no hard and fast rules" in a human situation.

In the opinion of the "supercop", options had closed after the Indian Airlines plane had taken off from Amritsar airport and parked itself in Kandahar in Afghanistan.

Describing the agreement with the hijackers as "best of the bad bargain", Mr. T.V. Rajeshwar, a former chief of the Intelligence Bureau and a former Governor, said that exchanges of this type had taken place in West Asia and Europe.

However, he cautioned that the hijack episode had given some very important long-term lessons to India on security management. In his view, security at various levels was often lax and implementations of various drills remained on paper.

Mr. Rajeshwar said that security at airports and vital installations should be tightened and in hijack-prone sectors security check should be introduced just before passengers embark the aircraft.

Referring to the release of the militants in exchange of safe return of hostages, he said it was sure to boost morale of militants in Jammu and Kashmir.

9.03/11/2000  
Mr. Rajeshwar said that India could not do much under the present circumstances as the hijacked plane was taken to Kandahar. He said that Taliban administration in Afghanistan should book the hijackers for the crimes committed by them but added that he would not be surprised if the hijackers and the freed militants were allowed to go to Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Union Home Ministry tonight advised all the State Governments to observe "perfect security drill" at all domestic and international airports. According to the official spokesman of the Ministry, the States have been asked to tighten the security network in the civil aviation sector as subversive groups may try to take advantage of "security loopholes."

The Home Ministry has also advised the States to heighten vigil in busy urban areas and keep an eye on all situations that can cause serious law and order problems. States have been advised to keep a special watch on vital installations, market places, important hotels and other venues where new year celebrations are taking place.

THE HINDU

- 1 JAN 2000

# Hijacked plane changes geopolitics



SEEMA MUSTAFA

**I**t is a new year. And a new century. But for India the focus shifted away from the millennium celebrations to the plight of the passengers on board Indian Airlines flight IC-814 from Kathmandu to Delhi. Eight days of abject terror with the fate of the passengers still uncertain, while the government at Delhi grapples verbally with the hijackers and the Taliban in a bizarre twist of diplomacy at the end of a century.

The Indian state was fast asleep when the flight was hijacked over Lucknow. It remained asleep when the aircraft forelanded at Amritsar because of shortage of fuel. It stirred slightly when the plane landed at Lahore with the foreign office swinging into the familiar mode of Pakistan bashing as a purely reflex action. It took 48 hours for the Indian government to recognise the seriousness of the hijacking but by that time the flight was in Taliban territory, impervious to international pressure and the niceties of diplomacy.

The flight should have been stopped at Amritsar and not allowed to take off. The government had a good two hours in which to act. The hijacking took place over Lucknow giving at least 75 minutes flying time for the aircraft to reach Amritsar. It was in Amritsar for another 47 minutes. The defence services should have been pressed into service, the commandos sent up to escort the plane and the runway at Amritsar blocked to prevent the hijacked plane from taking off. And immediate negotiations should have begun with the hijackers.

Nothing was done. The flight landed in Amritsar and took off for Lahore before the crisis had even registered on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Of course, now his men are making out that he was not informed about the hijacking as he was on the flight back from Patna and incommunicado like ordinary passengers. Reason enough for heads to roll and the Prime Minister to tender his resignation for not having the necessary control over his government which can keep events as grave as the hijacking hidden from him for a full "40 minutes" as the disinformation campaign suggests.

The complete incompetence of the government to manage a crisis has been exposed by the hijacking. After all, the preparedness of a country is

judged during a crisis and not in peace time and the government of India was found to be completely wanting on this front.

The cabinet was called only 48 hours after the hijacking. The crisis management group that was formed is still in total disarray. The defence chiefs were not even consulted until after they had formally lodged

**T**he flight should have been stopped at Amritsar and not allowed to take off. The government had a good two hours in which to act. The hijacking took place over Lucknow giving 75 minutes flying time for the aircraft to reach Amritsar. It was in Amritsar for another 47 minutes. The defence services should have been pressed into service, the commandos sent up to escort the plane and the runway at Amritsar blocked

their protest with the Prime Minister. Defence minister George Fernandes did not view the hijacking as reason enough to cut short his visit to the Northeast, and returned only after he was asked to by the Prime Minister three days after the hijacking had taken place.

And as if all this was not enough, the Indian negotiating team that has been sent to Kandahar is not senior enough to take any decision without

referring it back to Delhi. It is not clear why a secretary level team was not despatched, and what was the calculation behind the government's decision to keep the composition at the joint secretary level. Not a single defence officer was included in the team although now Jaswant Singh has decided to speak directly to the Taliban and by the time this appears in print he should be in Kandahar.

In the midst of it all the government's well-oiled disinformation service has started operating. The first item on its agenda was to clear the Prime Minister or his office of any blame insofar as the Amritsar fiasco is concerned. The second item was to neutralise the angry relatives of the hijacked passengers by bringing in relatives of the Kargil martyrs in a rather crass confrontation organised by the ministries of defence and external affairs.

And significantly, the third item is to mix the entire Islamic terrorism package in a Muslim mix with a former diplomat actually coming on television at the initial stage of the hijacking to ask the Indian Muslims to appeal to Pakistan etc. for the release of the passengers. He did not stop to ask: what has the Indian Muslim to do with Pakistan or for that matter the terrorists operating in this region? For if he had, and had the honesty to recognise the legitimacy of the reply, he would have had to admit that the Islamic terrorist is as alien to the Indian Muslim as he is to the Indian Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, among others. And that this dangerous nexus based on nothing but a common religion, is being drawn by fanatical groups who have unleashed a propaganda in mouthpieces like the *Organiser* and the *Panchjanya*, which is intended to have dangerous repercussions for India.

The immediate task before



the government, at present, is to secure the safe release of the passengers. The hijackers have refused to make any concessions throughout the negotiations with not a single woman or child being released after the initial gesture at Dubai, despite repeated requests from the negotiators. The hijackers dropped their demands for money and the return of a slain terrorist's coffin after the Taliban *Shura* criticised these as being un-Islamic. The Taliban has not criticised the third demand for the release of 35 terrorists imprisoned in Indian jails, some of whom are Afghan nationals and many of them have been trained in Afghanistan.

The talks presumably are revolving around this remaining demand with no breakthrough in sight. The Vajpayee government has decided to concede the demand after the negotiating team was unable to persuade the hijackers to drop this altogether. The release of even one terrorist will have very damaging consequences and this has been pointed out to the Prime Minister by the defence chiefs, amongst others.

**M**inister of external affairs Jaswant Singh has given a clean chit to the Taliban insofar as cooperation with India is concerned, as he has to consider the fact that India is now entirely dependent on Taliban hospitality. But there is need to step up the efforts to establish a higher level of diplomatic rapport so that the Taliban can be persuaded to intervene to facilitate the release of the passengers.

India is still hesitant on this front but the government will have to take a quick decision as time is running out. The decision, of course, will centre around a paradox: will eating crow bring about the end

results that India wants, or will it be left in the unhappy position of giving in to the Taliban and losing its self esteem and long held stand against terrorism per se.

It is no secret that the Taliban is reveling in its new found glory. And the fact is that openly hostile governments like India have to recognise its existence now. It

**T**he Taliban is a creation of the US and Pakistan. The proverbial Frankenstein that is ready to eat its masters. It came into existence on the ideology of terrorism and is a lawless body which does not recognise any law but its own.

It tries to draw its sanctity from religious extremism, and now that it has the run of most of Afghanistan it is keen for international recognition

obviously wants this recognition to become more official and will not step in until it is given some assurances. The very thought makes government officials here nauseous, but then the alternative very cleverly established, concerns the lives of the passengers.

The Taliban is a creation of the US and Pakistan. The proverbial Frankenstein that is ready to eat its masters. It came into existence on the ideology of terrorism, and is a

lawless body which does not recognise any law but its own. It tries to draw its sanctity from religious extremism, and now that it has the run of most of Afghanistan it is keen for international recognition which has not been openly forthcoming.

**I**ndia, through the hijacking, is now faced with choices that are odious but have been made necessary by circumstances. The hijackers have not put forward a single request for their safe passage, leading to the assumption that they are assured of this by the Taliban. The hijackers are supposed to be members of the Harkat-ul-Ansar, a terrorist outfit banned by the US after it claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and murder of western tourists in 1994. The Harkat is known as the Pakistani Taliban as it shares its ideology, cadres, mentors and training camps with the Taliban. The only difference is that the Taliban is Afghanistan-centric while the Harkat brand of terrorism concentrates on Kashmir.

The Taliban has openly refused to allow any commando operation against the hijackers from its territory. It is clear from their shared history that the Taliban, while not necessarily endorsing the hijacking, cannot allow any military operation against the Harkat terrorists as all these outfits are on the same side of the terrorist spectrum.

Latest reports suggest that the Vajpayee government, despite its brave assertions to the contrary, is actually negotiating the release of some of the 36 terrorists as demanded by the hijackers. And that Jaswant Singh has flown to Kandahar to just formalise the deal. Obviously, all options had run out for the Vajpayee government, to either convince the hijackers to surrender or allow a commando operation of any kind.

The release of the terrorists has been agreed to, if initial reports are true, despite the defence chiefs' strong objections to this. (The decision will fuel terrorism in the region, besides destroying the morale of the security forces engaged for long in counter insurgency operations in and around Jammu and Kashmir.) They have lost hundreds of good men in the process and cannot be expected to respond favourably to a deal which can only encourage terrorism and lower the spirit of the soldiers who will be the ones to pay with their lives for the government's failure on this front.

It is the classic Catch 22 situation with stakes that can bring about far reaching changes in the polity, of not just India, but the region. It is not a simple hijacking. It is a hijacking to change all existing political equations, with the hostages probably being the only innocents in the grueling and nerve racking drama that is unfolding itself very gradually but very systematically.

# Govt. has bungled: Left

By Our Special Correspondent *M*

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 1.** The knives were out for the Vajpayee Government today for its handling of the hijack crisis, with the Left parties accusing it of bungling and then attempting a "cover-up." The Government, they said, must take the responsibility for letting the crisis spin out of control and narrowing down its options to a point where it was left with few choices.

They hastened to clarify that their criticism did not imply that the lives of 160-odd people should have been put to risk, but was directed against the way the situation was handled, starting with the goof-up in Amritsar and culminating into relying "too much" on the Taliban and their expression of good intentions. Not enough was done to mobilise international opinion against the hijackers, and their sponsors.

The CPI(M) demanded a "high-level independent inquiry" to "uncover all facts" and fix responsibility for the "blunder." The Government tried to suppress facts even after a decision had been taken to release the militants in exchange for hostages. The "overall interests" of the nation had been "ignored" while releas-

ing the militants, the party said. The party's general secretary, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, said the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, called him up in Calcutta at about 2 p.m. on Friday to invite him for an all-party meeting, but did not say a word about the "deal" though by then the Foreign Minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, was already on his way to Kandahar with the released militants.

On the contrary, the Prime Minister told him that Mr Jaswant Singh was going there to negotiate the release of hostages. "When I told him that the Government should try to bring international pressure on the Taliban and hijackers he said that's why the Foreign Minister was going to Kandahar. One hour later I learnt that he was going there with the militants as part of an agreement," Mr Surjeet said.

He charged that even at that late stage a "cover-up" was going on, and the Prime Minister himself was guilty of "hiding facts." He also questioned the decision to call an all-party meeting after the Government had taken a decision at the back of the Opposition. "What was the idea of calling a meeting then?" he asked.

Calling the decision a "big betrayal of the cause of Kashmir", Mr Surjeet said that the release of militants would have a debilitating effect on the security environment in Kashmir and undo the efforts that were on to curb militancy in the State.

The CPI general secretary, Mr A.B. Bardhan, said the Government could not simply shrug off the "bungling" at Amritsar after which the situation really got out of hand. "The Government landed itself into a situation in which it had to the yield to the hijackers' demand for the release of some of the most notorious terrorists," he said.

It was "strange", he pointed out, Mr Jaswant Singh personally travelled with the militants. "What kind of signal does this send out?" he asked. Mr Bardhan said he hoped that the Government would take a close look at the security environment and ensure that this sort of incident did not occur again.

The CPI(M-L) general secretary, Mr Dipankar Bhattacharya, expressed satisfaction over the release of the hostages, but charged the Vajpayee Government with "callousness" in "not taking the initiative at Amritsar."

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2/1

# Hijackers, militants Quetta-bound: Taliban

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 1. The five unidentified hijackers along with the three released militants, Masood Azhar, Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar and Ahmad Umar, left for Quetta (Pakistan) from Kandahar last evening, the Taliban Information Minister, Mr. Abdul Hai Mutmaen, was quoted as saying by the *Jang* newspaper today.

The report came as informed sources confirmed that the "Taliban hostage" taken by the hijackers while making their getaway had been freed. The identity of the hostage is not known.

The sources also suggest that the deal to allow the hijackers a 10-hour time-frame to get away was agreed to by the Government of India, the Taliban, the Western nations who had citizens on board the hijacked aircraft as well as the U.N. representative at the Kandahar airport.

The U.N. Coordinator for Afghanistan, Mr. Eric de Mul, today did not confirm a news agency report that the body of a hijacker, who was apparently killed by his colleagues, was found in the cockpit of the hijacked aircraft.

"No, I cannot confirm that (report of the body being found). That's a rumour I think. Nobody saw that," Mr. de Mul told the two Pakistan-based Indian correspondents at the Islamabad airport upon arrival from Kandahar.

Asked if he was aware of what had been done with the released militants and the hostages, the U.N. official said they were given 10 hours to leave Afghanistan (a deadline which expired at 4 a.m. this morning).

To a question if he believed that the Taliban's

image had been enhanced by the fact that the hostages had been allowed to go scot-free, Mr. de Mul replied: "I think the Taliban's image has been enhanced because they have done a good job, they have been cooperative and helpful in solving the (hijacking) problem."

Given the fact that the Taliban Information Minister and official spokesman has told a Pakistani newspaper that the hijackers and released militants have crossed into India, it is clear that Pakistan was their ultimate destination. In a related development, Allah Buksh Sabir, the father of Masood Azhar, was quoted as telling *The News* from Bahawalpur that Masood would return to Pakistan.

"My son has not committed any crime in Pakistan and he will come back. We cannot go anywhere else. This is our soil, we have to return here no matter where we go...I am a satisfied man. My son is not a terrorist. I do not need a certificate from anyone. My son never talked against Pakistan, against the Kashmir movement during his six years in jail," Sabir was quoted as saying.

For the past one week, Pakistani spokesmen have repeatedly made the charge that the hijacking was a "stage-managed affair" and India was not bothered about the safety and security of its nationals.

Today, all those charges have fallen flat on their face after New Delhi released the militants in exchange for the hostages. The statements' validity has disappeared and the propaganda effort has come to a naught. Clearly, the effort was to pin the blame on the Indian intelligence agency, RAW, only to deflect attention from a possible Pakistani role in the hijacking affair.

THE HINDU

- 2 JAN 2000

# At the Taliban's mercy

119 14  
**Once the hijackers took the plane to Kandahar and landed among the "friendlies" of the Taliban heartland, India's options were severely reduced, says C. RAJA MOHAN.**

**T**he unpardonable incoherence in its immediate response to the hijacking of IC 814 and the inordinate delays in decision-making thereafter severely constricted India's options in ending the hostage crisis on its own terms.

At the mercy of the Taliban in Kandahar, India was ultimately reduced to bargaining with the hijackers on their demands and eventually trading three hardcore militants for the freedom of the hostages.

Three major blunders at the beginning forced India into the unenviable position of being helpless against a set of brutal hijackers, who had the advantage of being in a country that serves as a home base for international terrorism and in constant contact with their patrons in Pakistan.

The first failure was in taking preventive action against terrorism. The biggest weapon of any terrorist group is its ability to choose the time and place of an attack. Despite being a major victim of terrorism over the last two decades, India seemed unwilling to or incapable of maintaining a continuous vigil against terrorism.

For nearly a month before the hijacking of IC 814 took place, the Clinton Administration had been putting out public warnings against the possibility of a spectacular terrorist strike at the turn of the millennium.

But in a typical fashion India failed to get its system geared up against this threat. If India had taken even the most elementary precaution, the week-long misery of the hostages as well as the humiliation of bargaining with the terrorists could have been avoided.

The second failure was in the

inability to respond rapidly to the hijacking of IC 814 and the terrible blunder of letting the aircraft fly out of Amritsar. As in the early phases of the Kargil conflict and the reaction to the super cyclone that hit Orissa, so in Amritsar the Indian bureaucracy could not get its act together in a crisis and as a consequence the country had to pay a heavy price.

Though the passenger aircraft stayed at Amritsar airport for nearly an hour, standard procedures for hijacking contingencies were ignored and a paralysed system allowed the aircraft to take off. That was the moment when India



**The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, being congratulated on arrival in New Delhi on Friday... success at what cost?**

lost control of the hostage crisis and could never regain it.

There was brief moment of hope when the aircraft landed at a military airbase in the United Arab Emirates. Quick decisions then could perhaps have ensured that the crisis would be played out in a country that is part of the civilised world and friendly to India.

storm the aircraft.

Given the state of the isolation of Afghanistan there was very little that the international community could do in pressuring the Taliban. There was talk for a while by the Russians of convening a meeting of the Security Council, but India had its usual but often needless apprehensions about an "internationalisation" of the Kashmir dispute and was reluctant to get the Security Council activated.

With no diplomatic relations or even contacts with the Taliban, and having recently conducted a serious international campaign against its support for international terrorism, India was on a weak wicket dealing with the mullahs of Kandahar.

The initial positive statements of the Taliban and its assurances that it will prevent any harm to the hostages raised expectations in India that the Taliban leadership would, for some political gains from New Delhi, force the hijackers into an unconditional release of the hostages. But these hopes turned out to be self-delusion on India's part.



**The Afghan Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, briefs the press in Kandahar... pressure tactics.**

If India had come up with reasonable ideas then, the hijackers' bluff could have been called. But India did not.

Once the hijackers took the plane to Kandahar and landed among the "friendlies" of the Taliban heartland, India's options were severely reduced. For India the terrain was hostile and the choices were few.

India apparently did consider a military option of storming the aircraft. That could have been a very costly one in terms of the lives lost. If ever there was a window for such an exercise, it was rather brief. The Taliban quickly ensured that India would not dare

All that the Taliban did by sounding positive on the safety of the passengers was to step up the pressure on India to bargain with the hostages.

As India played for time, the Taliban put up a deadline for the resolution of the crisis. There was no longer the political will in New Delhi to call the bluff of the Taliban. And all that was left was to deliver three hard-core terrorists and get the passengers back.

If the Government it does not initiate comprehensive reforms in the security sector, India will become even more vulnerable to terrorist threats in the future.

# The unanswered questions

<sup>WV HD-14</sup>  
**T**HE HIJACKING of IC-814 has raised more questions than there are answers for. With the hijackers being allowed safe passage to wherever they might want to go as part of the deal with the Taliban, it has been ensured that the full story may never emerge.

The Taliban, after projecting itself as an "honest broker" in the hijacking episode, has lost out. The militia did do an excellent job in looking after the passengers while the aircraft was stationed at the Kandahar airport for a full week; but its handling of the situation left much to be desired. Yes, it helped in freeing the passengers, but on its terms and conditions.

Why did the Taliban let the hijackers off? If their action was un-Islamic, why were the hijackers not made to stand trial in a Taliban court of law? Given the fact that the hijackers murdered a passenger (and one of their colleagues as well), why did the Taliban not take action against these terrorists?

For all their "espousal" of the Kashmiri cause, the hijackers did not once speak to the international media corps that had assembled in Kandahar. Since the hijackers were able to secure "safe passage" for themselves, they could have also got some coverage in the international press for "their cause". Why did they choose not to do so?

It is clear that the identity and nationality of the hijackers could have been a source of great embarrassment for Pakistan, since independent sources corroborate the theory that the hijackers were Pakistani nationals.

During the siege of the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar in 1993, the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) activists were finally told by their colleagues outside (after a deal was struck with the Narasimha Rao Government) to come out of the shrine since their cause had received enough publicity.

In the present case, the hijackers were embarrassed to reveal their identity. Even a masked press conference or comments to a selected international channel would have sufficed. Why did they, then, opt for this course? Presumably because it could have embarrassed Pakistan and also the Taliban.

Though it would be absurd to argue that the responsibility for the actions of individual citizens should be laid at the door of a nation-state, will Pakistan now discard its own "diplomatic, moral and political" support to the separatist cause in Kashmir? Will Pakistan make any move to arrest the murderous

*For all their "espousal" of the Kashmiri cause, the hijackers did not once speak to the international media. AMIT BARUAH probes the reasons.*

hijackers in its own territory?

Had the hijackers been Kashmiris, they would have revealed their identity. Since they were not, they slinked away from the hijacked Indian Airlines aircraft, without the "oxygen of publicity". Clearly, if their intention was to embarrass the Government of India and its policy on Kashmir, they lost what for them was a golden opportunity.

The demand for the release of Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar alias Latram is a curious one. A Kashmiri militant, Zargar, who operated in downtown Srinagar, was arrested way back in 1992. He has no known links to the present terrorist outfits operating in Kashmir from Pakistan. The obvious inference is that given that the other two released militants are Pakistan-born, one "pure Kashmiri" had to be included in the hijackers' demands.

The linkages in the "jehadi network" that straddles both Afghanistan and Pakistan have also been exposed following the "departure" of the hijackers and the three released terrorists. Will the Taliban choose to inform the world where the hijackers were let off? Which border did they cross? Did they enter Pakistan?

If the experience of the hijack itself is any indication, not much will be heard about the hijackers. They will simply melt away. Both the Taliban and Pakistan will make loud declarations against terrorism; that the hijackers are not on their soil. The question, however, will still remain —

where did they go? For Pakistan, there is a parallel. When asked where the "Kashmiri freedom-fighters" had gone after the Kargil crisis ended in July this year, Pakistani spokesmen said they were not aware of this. The "freedom-fighters" had, however, not retreated into Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) was the stand taken. This time, too, Islamabad will strenuously deny that any of the hijackers have entered their territory.

As far as the hijacking itself was concerned, the Taliban had set itself a deadline of Friday when the *shoora* or ruling council met in Kandahar on Wednesday. It wanted the hijacking drama to be over within that time-frame. This deadline was conveyed both to the hijackers and India.

If the information provided by the passengers in New Delhi is any indication, the hijackers were getting increasingly restive on the last day and had threatened to take action against them. Was this on account of the Taliban deadline?

It is also becoming clear that the Taliban did fear "military action" against the parked Indian Airlines aircraft. It had also been "tipped off" against an impending military response. Doubts were also cast about some members of the "rather large", 52-strong Indian team that arrived in Kandahar in a relief plane.

The Taliban were also rattled by a meeting between the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, and the Indian Air Force (IAF) chief, Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis. Also, information made available to the Taliban suggested that India had got in touch with Iran as the current OIC chairman to help end the hijacking. All this prompted the Taliban into setting a "deadline" for itself. For all intents and purposes, this deadline applied to the Government of India and the hijackers as well.

It is with this backdrop that the Taliban moved tanks, heavily armed commandos and a multi-barrelled rocket launcher to Kandahar airport on Thursday. It was an unequivocal show of strength and a signal to India that a commando action would be repulsed. Earlier, the Taliban *shoora* had said no foreign power would be allowed to storm the hijacked aircraft.

In the final analysis, India found itself negotiating from a weak position. India which had been working on the Taliban to obtain the storming option found that the student militia was not playing ball. The Indian decision to contact the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, two of the three countries that recognise the Taliban Government, was a sure sign that the militia was not playing ball.

The surrender at Kandahar on New Year's Eve was a direct consequence of the inability to detain the aircraft at Amritsar's Raja Sansi airport.

## Hijackers' J&K plan failed, says Vajpayee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA 2/1

NEW DELHI, Jan. 1. — The Prime Minister today claimed that the hijackers' efforts to internationalise Kashmir had been defeated.

"Rather the hijacking has attracted international attention" to the issue of terrorism, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee remarked while meeting the released hostages at his Race Course Road residence.

India had not taken the matter to the UN as this would have internationalised Kashmir, he said. "But steps taken by the government had isolated the hijackers."

What's more, the efforts to disrupt communal harmony had also been defeated with various Muslim groups dubbing the hijacking "un-Islamic", Mr Vajpayee said.

The Prime Minister told the passengers how it had been "a very difficult situation for the country as we wanted you back safely".

He promised them that stern steps would be taken to strengthen airport security in the country so that such a nightmare would not be repeated.

The government's two main objectives had been to ensure safety of passengers and not compromise on national security, Mr Vajpayee said and expressed happiness that the entire country had stood united on the hijacking issue.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 JAN 2000

# Advani puts off meeting PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 1. — Mr LK Advani, who had expressed severe displeasure over the militant-hostage trade-off, today left for Jhunjoli (Haryana) with his family, reportedly postponing a meeting with the Prime Minister.

Mr Advani is expected back tomorrow.

The Union home minister had apparently pushed for a strong line against the hijackers right from the beginning, and the decision to release the three terrorists came over his protests.

He had felt some further hard bargaining would force the hijackers to free the passengers without any terrorist being released from Indian jails. The armed forces had independently reached a similar conclusion.

But Mr Advani's view was strongly opposed by senior Cabinet ministers, including Mr Jaswant Singh. They backed a softer option and felt it was worth handing over three militants to end

the hostages' ordeal.

These ministers felt that resolving the crisis would be a difficult job, for two other countries were involved — a hostile Pakistan and an ambivalent Afghanistan. The hijackers paring down their demand — from freedom for 36 militants to three — had in a way put more pressure on India, they argued.

The trade-off, however, may have caused rifts within the BJP itself with the hardliners opposed to the decision. What adds to the Prime Minister's problems is that the coalition partners too have their own points of view.

The Cabinet was sharply divided on the matter on Thursday night, when the deal was okayed by Mr Vajpayee. Mr Advani reportedly offered to resign and was dissuaded by Mr Vajpayee.

Since then the government — including the Prime Minister, Mr Jaswant Singh and Mr Pramod Mahajan — has scrambled to defend the move against criticism.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 JAN 2000

'THERE WAS A THREAT TO BLOW UP THE PLANE'

# Hijack footprints lead to Pakistan, says Jaswant

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 1. Holding Pakistan responsible for the ugly hijacking of the Indian Airlines Flight IC-814, the Government today said credible threats from the hijackers to blow up the plane had forced the decision to hand over the terrorists and get the hostages back.

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, today launched what appeared to be the first salvo of a political offensive to nail down Pakistan's complicity in the hijacking of the Indian passenger aircraft from Kathmandu. While avoiding a definitive assertion on Pakistan's role in the most traumatic episode of terrorism ever faced by India, Mr. Singh suggested at a press conference here that all the footprints in the hijack are leading towards Pakistan.

On the basis of the preliminary assessment of this week's events, Mr. Singh declared that all the five hijackers and the three terrorists released by India had left Kandahar for Quetta in Pakistan. He insisted that the five hijackers are Pakistani nationals. He also revealed that a majority of the 35 terrorists, whose release was sought by the hijackers, are also Pakistani nationals.

Referring to the intercepts of communication between the captors of IC-814 and their masters in Pakistan, Mr. Singh said the hijackers were in constant touch with their controllers. About the frequent breaks the hijackers took during negotiations with the Indian team, he said, "It was as if they were taking instructions from a



The pilot of Flight IC-814, Capt. Dev Sharan (third from left), giving an account of the hijacking to the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, at his residence in New Delhi on Saturday, watched by Flight Engineer, Mr. Anil Jaggia, and other crew members.— Photo: V. Sudershan

third force, other than the Taliban." The Government may soon come out with more details of the monitored conversations between the hijackers and their minders.

Mr. Singh today explained the difficult circumstances under which it had decided to trade with terrorists to secure the freedom of the hostages. Adding a new dimension to the final stages of talks between India and the hijackers in which the Government had to climb down, the Minister pointed to the credible threat to blow up the plane along with the passengers.

Mr. Singh said, "We had reports from the beginning that there was RDX in the hold of the aircraft," and that this might have been checked in as baggage in Kath-

mandu itself. Before leaving the aircraft with the terrorists, the hijackers were insisting on the retrieval of the suitcase with the explosive from the aircraft.

Mr. Singh conceded that the threat from the hijackers on December 30 to blow up the plane had dramatically raised the stakes. The Government then "examined the issue in totality and came up with the decision" to release the three terrorists.

Defending the decision, he said, national honour and national security "have not been diminished by saving the lives of 150 people".

Asked why he had to personally hand over the terrorists, Mr. Singh said his presence was required in Kandahar to ensure the implementation of the agreement

that had been negotiated with the hijackers "without a last-minute hitch". This required someone at the political level "to take decisions on the spot", he added.

On the Government's exploration of the possibility of storming the aircraft in Kandahar, Mr. Singh said "India did examine the military option," and "discuss it with the Taliban authorities". Despite a widespread sense here of having been let down by the Taliban, he refused to criticise the regime that effectively controlled the final outcome in Kandahar.

Asked whether he would review his positive statements about the Taliban during the crisis, Mr. Singh said, "We received cooperation from the Taliban throughout the episode." At the same time he insisted there is no change in the "fundamentals" of India's Afghan policy.

Mr. Singh thanked the all the Governments that had extended cooperation to India in handling the crisis. Reiterating India's determination to continue its war against terrorism, he said the Government wants the hijackers "retributed and justice sought".

While the Minister did not indicate how the Government would go about getting the hijackers to book, his renewed focus on the Pakistani role is likely to escalate the war of words between New Delhi and Islamabad.

In an understatement on Indo-Pak relations after the hijacking incident, Mr. Singh said, "Indo-Pak relations have not improved since the Kargil crisis and the military coup in Islamabad."



# Taliban disowns statement

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 2. In a sudden shift of tack, the Taliban today denied that any of its functionaries had stated that the five hijackers and three militants had left Kandahar for Quetta in north-west Pakistan.

A report in the *Jang* newspaper on Saturday quoted the Taliban Information Minister, Mr. Abdul Hai Mutmaen, as saying that the hijackers had left Kandahar for Quetta after *Iftar*.

Today, the Taliban said Mr. Mutmaen was not the Information Minister. Whatever his status, Mr. Mutmaen is certainly an officially-designated Taliban spokesman. Interestingly, the militia denied a report that had appeared in a Pakistani newspaper yesterday.

The Taliban also made the rather bizarre claim that under the agreement reached between the militia, the Government of India and the hijackers, the three parties were bound not to reveal the "destination" of the desperadoes. This belated denial by the Taliban appears to be an obvious consequence of the negative publicity for Pakistan after reports that the hijackers had left for Quetta on Friday evening.

## Pak. denies charge

In another development, a Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman

ists would not be allowed to enter Pakistan. "In case they sneak into NWFP (North-West Frontier Province) or Balochistan, they will be detained and tried according to law and rules."

## 'Harkat behind hijack'

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 2. The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, a Pakistan-based militant outfit, was responsible for the eight-day-long hijack of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 which ended in Kandahar on Saturday, information exclusively made available to *The Hindu* said.

With this information, it is clear that the individual identities of the hijackers, though important, are not as significant as the identity of the group which was behind the daring operation.

Highly-placed sources also said the operation was meticulously planned over two years in order to ensure that nothing went wrong. This information tallies with the hijackers' inordinate interest in freeing Maulana Masood Azhar, an ideologue of the Harkat-ul-Ansar, as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen was previously known.

In fact, on the second day of the hijacking, the only demand that was made was for Masood Azhar's release. It was only later when the

Indian negotiation team opened talks with the hijackers did the demand for the release of 35 additional militants surface.

Given that finally the hijackers agreed to only Masood Azhar, plus two, shows the importance this man holds for the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, which figures in the list of terrorist organisations of the U.S. State Department.

According to background information released by the State Department's Office of Counter-terrorism, on October 8, 1999, the Harkat leader, Fazlur Rehman Khalil, had been linked to Osama bin Laden, wanted for terrorist activities by the U.S. The Harkat operates "terrorist training camps in eastern Afghanistan and suffered casualties in the U.S. missile strikes on Bin Laden-associated training camps in Khost (Afghanistan) in August 1998".

The group has several thousand armed supporters in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Pakistan, India's southern Kashmir and the Doda region. "Supporters are mostly Pakistanis and Kashmiris, also include Afghans and Arab veterans of the Afghan war." According to the paper, the group had "conducted a number of operations against Indian troops and civilian targets in Kashmir."

**POK PM welcomes militants: Page 13**

GOVT. EXPECTED TO RELEASE INFORMATION SOON

# India ready to back claim on Pak. role

By C. Raja Mohan

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 2.** India is getting ready to present both direct and circumstantial evidence to back its claims on Pakistan's involvement in the hijacking of Flight IC-814, according to well-placed sources in the Government.

India is in the process of assessing the valuable information and leads gained during the hostage crisis. The Government is expected to release some of this information — sooner than later — to prove the assertion on Pakistan's complicity by the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, on Saturday.

If the Government can indeed demonstrate that the footprints on the Christmas-eve hijacking of the Indian passenger aircraft are Pakistan's, it can salvage something from the hostage crisis and gain worldwide support for its war against terrorism.

If India does not quickly and credibly justify its allegation against Pakistan, Mr. Singh's statements will be dismissed by the international community as typical, knee-jerk reactions from India. The world is tired of the usual trading of charges between New Delhi and Islamabad. There has been considerable negative reaction to the incredulous attempts in Pakistan, for example, over the last week to portray the hijacking as a "plot" by Indian intelligence agencies to "defame" Pakistan.

The international reaction to India's allegations on Pakistan's involvement would be similar, if New Delhi does not lay out its case

in public as well as in formal communications with other interested Governments.

## Substantiating the claim

It is unlikely that any Government in the world would fall for the claims of the Taliban and the military regime in Islamabad that the hijackers and the terrorists have disappeared into thin air along the Pak-Afghan border. Nevertheless, India appears determined to fully reconstruct this ugly incident of terrorism, and put out all the relevant information to show the nature of the relationship between the hijackers and their controllers in Pakistan.

India's charges on the Pakistani aggression during the Kargil crisis gained considerable international credibility when the Government released the tapes of conversations between Gen. Pervez Musharraf, then Army chief, who was travelling in China, and his deputy, at Rawalpindi in late May 1999.

It would be surprising if India has not managed to intercept the communication between the hijackers and the "third force" that Mr. Singh referred to on Saturday. Some key interested states like the U.S., too, would have tracked the crisis very closely.

The Clinton administration has already documented the basic linkages of the notorious Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), whose leader Maulana Masood Azhar the hijackers have now got, with Pakistan and Afghanistan. While Pakistan claims that it only provides

"moral and diplomatic support" for the militant groups like the HUM, the U.S. has asserted that Pakistan provides them "material support".

In a testimony to the U.S. Senate in November, Ambassador Michael A. Sheehan summed up the facts on Pakistan's support to terrorist groups, in particular the HUM.

"Within the territory of Pakistan," Mr. Sheehan said, "there are numerous Kashmiri separatist groups and sectarian groups involved in terrorism which use Pakistan as a base. Pakistan has frequently acknowledged what it calls 'moral and diplomatic support' for militants in Kashmir who employ violence and terrorism against Indian interests."

Mr. Sheehan went on to make the crucial point. "We have continuing reports of Pakistani material support for some of these militants. One such group, the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, was involved in the still-unresolved July 1995 kidnapping of four Westerners..."

The U.S. has since designated the HUM as a terrorist organisation. Mr. Sheehan added that "the HUM cooperates with (Osama) bin Laden and receives his assistance in maintaining training facilities in Afghanistan".

The background of the hijackers and their links to the masterminds of terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan are well understood. India now needs to come up with specific details on the hijacking that can establish the relationship beyond doubt.

# Release of hostages is not the end of matter: U.S.

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JAN. 2. The Clinton administration has not said much officially on the whereabouts of the hijackers of the Indian Airlines flight 814; but is expected to be following the situation very carefully. For the record the administration has made it plain that while it is relieved that the sordid drama in Kandahar had ended without further loss of life, the larger story was far from over.

"The release of the hostages is not the end of the matter. We will work with other Governments to see that those responsible are brought to justice," said the State Department. And the focus will be for the most part in Pakistan where it is generally believed that the hijackers had slipped into from neighbouring Afghanistan.

Islamabad's contention that it is on high alert for the hijackers and the three freed terrorists, and will put them on trial if arrested will be put to test in the next several days. One view is that their whereabouts will be known in the next several days. "They cannot vanish" has been one refrain.

Right from the moment the final "deal" was being put together, it was clear that the hijackers' destination was going to be Pakistan only. The Taliban Representative at the United Nations, Mr. Abdul Hakeem Mujahid, had said in a conversation with *The Hindu* that the hijackers and the three freed terrorists would "never" be allowed to stay behind in Afghanistan. The fate of the hijackers and their freed "friends" was apparently one of the most difficult issues that had to be sorted out in the final phases.

If the Taliban Representative was repeatedly firm and adamant that the hijackers and the freed terrorists had "to get out" of Afghanistan, some of this had to do with media reports circulating that somehow the hijackers and the freed terrorists would be staying back in Afghanistan to face the local law. The Taliban also wanted to put down any speculation that it was about to grant asylum to those who in their view had committed a very un-Islamic act.

Politically there is no doubt that

the Taliban expects "something" in return from India for the role it played in the hijacking crisis. In fact, he said it was only moral and the Islamic duty of the Taliban to extend the hand of cooperation during the crisis period. At the same time he argued that the vision for the future of Taliban-India relations was in the hands of New Delhi. "The Taliban wants friendly relations with every country; and in the past Afghanistan has had good relations with India," he said.

Officially too there will be keen interest on how the Clinton administration will go about in dealing with the Taliban. But if the last three days are anything to go by there is hardly anything to indicate of any change in stance vis-a-vis Washington.

And it is expected to remain this way. Although the administration has an official channel open with the Taliban, there is actually no love lost for this outfit, especially when it relates to Osama bin Laden and the persistent demand that he should be handed over to the U.S. authorities.

THE HINDU  
- 3 JAN 2000

# Defeat at Kandahar — I

By Prem Shankar Jha

Since Mr. Jaswant Singh decided to accompany the three released terrorists to Kandahar and bring back the released hostages himself, we can assume that the Government regards the end of the hostage crisis as a feather in its cap. The truth is rather different. India has just been handed its most serious psychological defeat of the entire Kashmir war. Worse still, it has been humiliated before the eyes of the entire international community.

First, India has been forced into a *de facto* recognition of the Taliban regime despite its close links with organisations like Osama bin Laden's.

Al-Badr and the Harkat-ul-Ansar. Second, the selection of the three hostages whom India agreed to release was a resounding victory for Pakistan. Mushtaq Latram is a genuine Kashmiri militant, whose release could breathe a new life into the Al-Umar Mujahideen and other pro-Pakistani groups. Given the popular disenchantment with the Farooq Abdullah Government in Kashmir, it might do more.

Maulana Masood Azhar is the founder — no less — of the Harkat-ul-Ansar, and the master architect of the Afghan incursion into Kashmir that began in 1992 and 1993. The release of Ahmad Umar Sayeed Sheikh, a British national, will boost international recruitment for the *Jihad* in Kashmir, for it will confirm that India is a soft target.

The third and most humiliating part of the debacle is that India sent Mr. Jaswant Singh, its most respected External Affairs Minister in decades, to make the surrender to the hijackers. And India got literally nothing out of the "deal". After five days of negotiations, the Government has failed even to establish the identities of the hijackers. All that the world has are conflicting claims, by India — that four of them came from Pakistan on a PIA flight the same day and were smuggled into the IA flight's departure lounge, and by Pakistan — that they were Sikh and Hindu militants whom it had nothing to do with.

Pakistan was lying, as usual. The hijacking had all the audacity of planning of the Kargil invasion, and all the well-prepared disinform-

mation that went with it. However, it is also clear from the many zigzags that occurred, that the hijackers had a high degree of autonomy, and planned the outlines of the operation at least on their own. In this they were only following the practice of their counterparts operating in Kashmir. Where they entered new ground — and therefore blundered — was in assessing the impact of the hijacking on international opinion, and working out how they would proceed in the face of the international response. Having been given all the infrastructural support they needed in Kathmandu by Pakistan's Intelligence network, they assumed they could simply take the plane to Lahore.

They received their first shock when, Janus-faced as ever, Pakistan refused them permission to land. In their confusion they accepted the pilot's suggestion to land at Amritsar.

## OPINION

Their panic and fear — that they were losing control at that point — were the most probable causes of Rupin Katyai's death.

But something changed at this point that Indian negotiators were at a loss to understand. After Captain Dev Sharan had fooled the hijackers into thinking that he was desperately low on fuel and had to land in Amritsar, why did the hijackers suddenly decide to force him to take off even as a fuel tanker was on its way to refuel the plane? Why did they then try to fly to Afghanistan? When they were not allowed to land in Afghanistan what made them choose Dubai? And when they had been refused permission to land in Afghanistan the previous day, what made them fly directly to Kandahar the second time? Why, for that matter, did the Taliban refuse permission the first time, but grant it the second time?

It could not have been concern for the safety of the passengers since the plane was already on the ground in Dubai. Even if it took off from Dubai without permission to land in Kandahar, the Taliban was not obliged on humanitarian grounds to let it do so for the plane now

had all the fuel it needed to fly to a dozen destinations. Even after the plane landed in Kandahar, why was the Taliban so distinctly cool to the hijackers, threatening even to storm the plane if they killed any more passengers, but end up as their protectors, forbidding an Indian commando assault and throwing a protective cordon around the plane? If the Taliban viewed the hijacking with distaste why did it agree to speak on their behalf to the Indian negotiators? For that matter, why did the Taliban take such pains to protect the identity of the hijackers?

All these anomalies disappear like wraiths the moment we make one simple assumption: from Amritsar onwards, the hijackers, and a little later the Taliban, were in constant touch with Pakistan. The little electronic marvel that made this possible is the satellite phone.

Here is what probably actually happened. When the plane landed in Amritsar, the leader of the hijackers in a panic, called his controller in Islamabad or Kathmandu. The latter must have screamed at them to take off immediately at any price, as the fuel tanker the Indians were allegedly sending to the plane could block its exit.

The controller may have told them to head for Afghanistan, saying that he would work something out. But the Taliban was either not available in time, were slow to decide what they wanted to do, or were sufficiently annoyed by Pakistan freezing their bank accounts and arresting a key Taliban aide, to make them beg for favours. At any rate, the plane was forced to continue to Dubai which may have been chosen because the UAE was among the only two countries, other than Pakistan, that had recognised the Taliban regime.

But Dubai did not want to get involved. Captain Dev Sharan undoubtedly saved the passengers' lives by forcing a touchdown at the airport, but thereafter it is a fairly sure bet that it was serious pressure from Pakistan, and perhaps an assurance from the Taliban, that made Dubai allow the plane to take off a third time.

# Pak says it'll deny entry to hijackers

*But reports from Chaman outpost on Pak-Afghan border suggest contrary*

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has said it will not allow hijackers of the Indian airliner to enter the country and that they would be nabbed and tried under international laws as soon as they cross into its territory. However, the prime minister of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir said he would allow them to cross over.

Reports suggested that the five hijackers, who were set a 10-hour deadline by Taliban to get out of Afghanistan, had crossed into Pakistan from the border outpost of Chaman, a busy crossing on the international divide between the two Islamic countries.

Chaman is the closest border-crossing to Kandahar and logically the most likely point for crossing into Pakistan. Quetta is a couple of hours drive from the border and the most popular route to the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) which borders Kashmir.

Border officials at Chaman, however, told reporters that nobody could have crossed over at night as surveillance had been stepped up. "Under no circumstances would

these persons be allowed to enter Pakistan," interior minister Moinuddin Haider said on Saturday amid reports that the hijackers and the three militants who had been swapped for 155 hostages were headed for the Pakistani city of Quetta.

"Pakistan is on high alert, and in case they enter Pakistani territory, they will be apprehended and tried as per established international rules and conventions," he said. However, PoK prime minister Sultan Mahmood Choudhury said he would consider any request from the hijackers to enter.

External affairs minister Jaswant Singh had told reporters in New Delhi on

Saturday quoting the Afghan information minister that all the eight Pakistanis had left for Quetta after attending an iftaar in Kandahar.

Mr Haider said he had issued clear orders to officials and agencies of the border provinces of NWFP and Baluchistan to arrest the hijackers.

He said, "Hijacking and terrorism are not acceptable and condonable, in any form. This is highly abhorable crime condemned by the entire civilised world." However, Mr Choudhury said Maulana Masood Azhar,

one of the three militants, was a Pakistani and "he would come to his home town". Azhar hails from Bhawalpur in Punjab province.

A senior Taliban official said, "The hijackers are no longer in Afghan territory and they left the country within the 10-hour deadline" given by the militia.

Significantly, Pakistan denied that the hijackers were Pakistani nationals and accused New Delhi of levelling "baseless and false" allegations against Islamabad. "Levelling of baseless and false accusa-

tions against Pakistan is part and peculiar element of Indian tactics," Pakistani foreign office spokesman Tariq Altaf alleged in a statement on Saturday, reacting to Mr Jaswant Singh's remarks hinting at Pakistan's role in the hijacking.

Mr Altaf said Pakistan had made all efforts for safety and welfare of hostages. "Initially, India alleged that four Pakistani nationals were on board the hijacked plane but finally this allegation proved wrong," he said, adding there was no transit passenger on the Kathmandu-bound PIA flight from Karachi for the Indian plane. (Agencies)

► See Edit: No Ordinary Threat, Page 12

## **Britain will allow entry to militant**

**LONDON: Britain will not refuse entry to Islamic militant Ahmad Omar Sayed Sheikh, who was among the three militants released by India in exchange for the freedom of 155 hostages on board the hijacked Indian Airlines plane.**

**A British national of Pakistani origin, Sheikh was detained in Delhi in 1994 and was awaiting trial. The British foreign office had been providing him with consular protection. (PTI)**

## ***'Agni II has given boost to India's defence system'***

The Times of India News Service

**NEW DELHI:** India's intermediate range ballistic missile Agni-II has given a big boost to its defence, said George Fernandes here.

"Operationalisation of this missile is symbolic of a strong nation... peace comes with strength," said Mr Fernandes on the occasion of release of a special commemorative stamp on Agni-II at Vigyan Bhawan on Saturday evening.

Mr Fernandes recalled that he was a witness to the successful test-firing of Agni-II on April 11, 1999. The function was organised by the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the Department of Post.

Paying tributes to the services of former scientific advisor to defence minister A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who was behind India's missile programme, Mr Fernandes expressed the nation's gratitude to him for his leadership in overcoming the embargo and control regimes.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 3 JAN 2000

# Plane hijack was pre-planned by ISI: Afghan envoy

By Mahendra Ved  
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Does the Kandahar visit of external affairs minister Jaswant Singh to secure the release of the Indian Airlines plane and hostages amount to India recognising the Taliban government?

Afghanistan's ambassador to India Masood Khalili, who represents the exiled government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, does not think so.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had said earlier this week that India had no plans to recognise the Taliban regime. However, the diplomatic community has noted the change in the manner in which India addressed the interlocutors from "authorities in Kabul" to "the Taliban Government." Mr Singh interacted with his Taliban "counterpart", Mullah Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil during his stay in Kandahar.

The Taliban regime is recognised by only three countries — Pakistan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, while others, including the Islamic nations, have withheld recognition.

"You have to look at the circum-

stances under which the visit took place. It was essentially to secure 159 innocent persons," Khalili told *The Times of India* on Saturday.

On the other hand, these circumstances and the handling of the hijacking crisis by the Taliban government in Kabul "should convince the world community that it was the handiwork of Pakistan's ISI."

"It was pre-planned over four to five months and pre-arranged. Without the ISI help, the militants could not have embarked on hijacking," Khalili said.

"The bottle was old; only the label was new. Instead of the ISI doing anything directly, it brought in the Taliban and operated through them," he said.

Quoting diplomatic sources, Khalili argued that Lahore was never on the hijackers' plans, but Kandahar was. But Lahore halt was needed since there was not enough fuel to fly to Kandahar, "the Kaaba of terrorism."

Khalili said, during the Lahore halt, the hijackers tried to offload some passengers, but the Pakistan authorities refused to entertain their plea.

# J&K may be headed for bloody days

Arun Joshi  
Jammu, January 2

DELHI HAS bungled once again. Jammu and Kashmir was delivered the shock of the millennium with the release of three top militants in exchange of the passengers held hostage by the hijackers of an Indian Airlines aircraft for eight days in Kandahar in Afghanistan on Friday. This has come at a time when the State was looking forward to some bright spots after having seen over 25,000 killings and expanding graveyards in the last decade of 20th century.

The Central Government released the three militants -- Maulana Masood Azhar, Ahmad Umar Syed Sheikh and Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar -- despite stiff opposition by Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah. He had cautioned Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Home Minister Lal Krishan Advani and Defence Minister George Fernandes of the "long-term dangerous consequences of such an act," the informed sources said.

Mr Abdullah had told *The*

*Hindustan Times*: "It would be wrong to set free militants in exchange of hostages." He was certain that the Centre would not relent until the same evening when he was asked by a special emissary of the Prime Minister to fall in line. He refused, the sources said, and told the emissary that Delhi could take its decision and he should be kept out of it, these sources revealed.

Security analysts believe that a

9-D 3 N Sindh  
security analysts, who have seen the decade-long secessionist militancy and its various faces. They further argue that none would stop and die to arrest Afghanis and Pakistanis when in the final turn of events they would be treated as "VIPs," travelling in a State aircraft in the company of ministers.

Senior officials to whom this reporter spoke were unanimous that the decision was fraught with "dangerous consequences" for

defended icy heights in Kargil where not even a blade of grass grows. Why didn't we accept the ceasefire proposition of Nawaz Sharif then and save the lives of our young soldiers and officers," these officials say.

The delight of the separatists is unhidden. There had been no public expression of jubilation following the release of five Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front men in December 1989. The separatists, security analysts feel, would now be preparing for more such acts and the people in Jammu and Kashmir would have to suffer this.

Already groups like Harkat-ul-Mujahadeen, Hizb-ul-Mujahadeen and Lashkar-e-Toiba, having more than 70 per cent of their ranks filled with rebels trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan, have been targeting Army and police camps, killing almost every day soldiers and policemen. During the past week alone, they have killed 15 policemen and soldiers. "Many bloody weeks and months are ahead and, ironically, we have soared their spirits," these officials say in one voice.

## The Aftermath of Ultras' Release

"resoundingly bad message has been conveyed by the leadership that ours is a weak nation." Refusing to buy the argument of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his colleagues that this was the "best bargain," especially when there existed a precedent of "release of five militants in exchange of Rubiya Sayeed," daughter of then Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, in December 1989.

"One wrong cannot make another wrong a right," argued these

Jammu and Kashmir. They said that the assessment that the militants already attacking the Army and police installations and killing soldiers and policemen would get emboldened was "mild."

"This may open floodgates for abductions and killings," they fear. They find no justification for the release of three militants. "Does Delhi know how many women became widows and children were orphaned because of these militants' acts or preaching," they asked. "And what about those who



# Pak pledges to block hijackers' entry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA & UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 2. — Pakistan today strongly denied that the hijackers were Pakistani nationals and accused India of levelling "baseless and false" allegations. Foreign Minister Mr Abdul Sattar denied that the hijackers had entered Pakistan and said they would face court proceedings under international law if they did.

"Under international hijack laws, we will arrest them and put them before court. I can say with full responsibility that they have not entered Pakistan," he said.

Quoting the Taliban, Mr Sattar said hijackers had left Afghanistan for an unknown destination after the expiry of the 10-hour deadline set by the militia to leave the country, and added that no one knew their whereabouts. He also praised the Taliban for sensibly handling the hijacking crisis. "I think the Taliban have gained the most from the episode."

571 371  
The hijackers are now believed to have crossed into Pakistan from the border outpost of Chaman, a busy crossing on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Earlier reports indicated that they had reached Quetta en route to PoK.

Border officials at Chaman, however, said they were ordered by the government to prevent the hijackers from entering.

Taliban authorities had yesterday announced that the hijackers and the militants had left Afghanistan on the expiry of the deadline. Taliban spokesman Mulla Abdul Hye Mutmain declined to speculate where the hijackers might have gone, saying it was none of their business as their only objective was to ensure that they should not remain on Afghan soil.

But Hakim Abdul Mujahid, Taliban's representative in the US, said the destination of the hijackers and the militants would be Pakistan. "It is not exactly known where they are headed, but since no other coun-

try wants them, the only guess is that they are headed towards Pakistan. Since some of them were Pakistanis, one can guess that they would go to Pakistan, Mr Mujahid told a news-based website.

Pakistan, however, sticks to its stand that the hijackers had not entered its territory. Echoing the Foreign Minister, Interior Minister Mr Moinuddin Haider said Pakistan was on high alert and if the hijackers entered the country, they would be arrested and tried.

Back home, the BJP refuses to buy this line and today said Pakistan should hand over the hijackers to India, along with the three militants, if it is "as innocent as it pretends to be".

Rejecting the Opposition criticism of the handling of the crisis as merely "political", BJP general secretary Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said parties should now debate on bringing in stringent anti-terrorism laws. "We need a more stringent law than Tada."

THE STATESMAN

- 3 JAN 2000

## *51* **MIXED RELIEF** *3/11* *9.08.2000* *Hostages are home, but what follows?*

**T**HE nation is entitled to a sigh of relief now that the hostages, bar one, are safely home. But that relief cannot be unmixed with trepidation, as the manner in which their release was secured, by releasing three wanted terrorists, could pave the way for more hijack or other hostage situations. It is clear from the manner in which the situation developed that government were caught flat-footed; since the aircraft took off from Amritsar airport and went to Pakistan and later Afghanistan, the initiative lay with the other side. The Taliban played an extremely dubious role in the negotiations that followed: they ruled out the option of mounting a commando operation to release the hostages, returned a hostage back to the aircraft after medical treatment. It is also noteworthy that an item usually present in demands made by hijackers worldwide was missing in this case: request for asylum in a friendly country. This is probably because the country in question was behind the operation. The finger points to Pakistan, which adopted a similar ploy during the Kargil war, denying any connection with intruders till the cover was blown. Pakistan and media version of the affair is an interesting one: they claim that the affair was stage-managed by Indians to discredit Pakistan. If this were so, one would have to believe that the affair was concocted by India so that it could release three pro-Pakistani militants from Indian jails!

On the Indian side, there are some lessons to be drawn, coupled with the incursions in Kargil which went unnoticed till intruders started bombarding the Leh-Srinagar highway. We are faced by a ruthless and determined enemy with whom there are key ideological differences: Pakistan believes in the two-nation theory and therefore entitled to Kashmir. If given opportunities, it will exploit them to the hilt. It is therefore necessary to be far more security conscious than before. Despite eight previous hijacks of Indian aircraft, there were too many lapses in the handling of the present episode. If security at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan airport was too lax, Indian Airlines could have had its own security arrangements for boarding passengers. Borders with Bangladesh and Nepal are too porous and ISI agents operate freely across them; security there should be beefed up and the utmost pressure put on Bangladesh and Nepal to curb ISI activities on their territory. Moreover, the best way to curb future hijack and hostage situations is to operate on the assumption that these are likely, and institutionalise procedures and drills to deal with them before they happen. A faster response time, for example, would have allowed Indian authorities to ground the aircraft at Amritsar, in which case the initiative would have remained here. Apart from security measures, there also needs to be a political response. If India's differences with Pakistan is that it is a multicultural society which doesn't view the world through a grid of religious differences, it should go the whole hog in this respect and close the door to fundamentalisms of all sorts, no matter what their provenance. The VHP and the Hindutva right do the work of the ISI, by sowing divisions among the populace for separatists to exploit. Agendas such as destruction of mosques and assaults on minorities need to be put down with a firm hand.

**THE STATESMAN**

• 3 JAN 2000

# Hijackers not likely to face trial

S.S. Anoop

NEW DELHI 2 JANUARY

INDIA MAY have vowed retribution on the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane but experts say little, if anything, can be done to bring the air pirates to justice.

The five hijackers, masked and carrying pistols, sped away in a pick-up after alighting from the Airbus A-300 at Kandahar airport in Afghanistan, having secured the release of three jailed extremists from India.

That may well have been the last time the world set its sights on the hijackers, despite New Delhi's assertion that the men had reached Pakistan and it would try and bring them to justice.

Former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey, for one, was not optimistic about the prospect of the hijackers ever facing trial.

He says any request to Is-

lamabad, which New Delhi says masterminded the hijacking, to extradite the five men would be futile.

Pakistan is committed to extending moral and political support to extremist groups active in Kashmir.

"It (an Indian request for ex-

tradition) would be a mere formality," Mr Dubey said, adding that any expectation that Pakistan would adhere to international conventions would be misplaced.

Mr Dubey cited the fact that Pakistan, despite being a member of World Trade Organisation (WTO), had not extended most favoured nation (MFN) status to

India, which it is obliged to do under the provisions of the treaty.

"Everything boils down to politics. We will have to wait and see if the hijackers dare to enter Kashmir again. Then only can we get them," said Mr Dubey.

— IANS



A hijacker in Kandahar

*The Economic Times*

- 3 JAN 2000

# Pak should hand over hijackers to India: BJP

Chennai  
2 JANUARY

**T**HE BJP on Sunday said Pakistan should hand over to India the hijackers of the Indian Airlines aircraft, along with the three militants, if it was really "as innocent as it pretended to be."

"If Pakistan is really innocent as it pretends to be, let it hand over the hijackers, along with the militants, back to India and prove its innocence," BJP general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu told newsmen here on Sunday evening.

The BJP was making this public demand as the hijackers' identity was already known and they were all from Pakistan.

The hijacking episode, he said, underscored the need for "a more attentive, assertive and aggressive public opinion," against

such heinous crimes. "This should be an eye-opener to all of us. We should really resolve to act tough against terrorism. There is a need for a joint effort by the international community to deal with such crimes."

Naidu said political parties should now debate on bringing in stringent laws to combat terrorism. "There is need for a more stringent law than Tada, and all state governments should come forward for a consensus on this."

Rejecting the opposition criticism over the handling of the issue as merely 'political,' he said the government had tackled it in an appropriate manner and it had no other option but to act in the way it did.

Naidu said this was not the first time that militants were swapped for hostages. He recalled the release of Kashmiri

militants in 1990 in exchange for Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of then home minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, and nine extremists to procure the release of kidnapped official Doraiswamy.

During the siege of Hazratbal shrine at Charar-e-Sharif, the then government had ensured safe passage for Mast Gul and other militants who had been holed up inside the shrine. "Terrorism is a legacy which we have inherited from the previous regime," Naidu said.

Dismissing as "immature" the Opposition's reaction to the government's handling of the episode, he said: "Hard realities are not black or white and always have a shade of grey. Nobody is happy that terrorists were released, but there was no other way."

Referring to the CPI(M)'s

criticism, he said the party seemed to have no concern for the safety of the passengers and did not give any constructive suggestion at the meeting convened by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

On the charge that the government had not revealed all details, he said it would be unwise to reveal strategies on such sensitive issues. "strategies are never revealed."

Disagreeing with a suggestion that the release of three terrorists will give a fillip to militancy in Kashmir, he said it will only strengthen the government's resolve to crush terrorism.

Describing the hijacking incident as the "biggest challenge to democracy and civilisation," Naidu called for a debate by the government and the political parties to evolve a more stringent

law to deal with terrorism and militancy.

"It is high time that the Indian government took up this issue in various international fora to expose that Pakistan is engaging itself in aiding and abetting terrorism in India with a view to destabilising the nation." The world community should come forward to face the menace unitedly, he said.

Responding to a question on the role of the Taliban regime and of western countries in handling the crisis, Naidu said India expected much more concern from the western countries. "Taliban's response to this episode was much more than expected," he said.

However, India expected that the Taliban government will deal with the hijackers according to their law, but "that did not happen."

—PTI

120-13  
Mamata defends  
PM on  
hijack issue

**CALCUTTA, JAN. 2.** The Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, today said the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, had no alternative but to release three militants to secure the release of the 155 hijacked passengers.

"The (Union) Government had no choice. The militants were carrying explosives and threatening to blow up the aircraft. Mr. Vajpayee had no alternative," Ms. Banerjee told presspersons here, when asked whether the Centre had taken the right step in exchanging the militants for the hostages.

The Trinamul Congress chief, however, said that the Centre had delayed in taking the decision. "The hijackers must be punished," she said.

Ms. Banerjee refused to comment when asked about the reported difference between the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and the Prime Minister over the means to secure the release of the hostages.— PTI

**THE HINDU**  
- 3 JAN 2000

# Advani furious with Jaswant, Brajesh

BY SEEMA MUSTAFA

New Delhi, Jan. 3: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee entrusted the entire management of the crisis created by the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 to external affairs minister Jaswant Singh and national security adviser Brajesh Mishra. Mr Jaswant Singh took the lead role to the point where the ministry of defence and the chiefs of the armed forces were completely kept out of the initial deliberations.

Defence minister George Fernandes remained in the North-east for the first three days after the hijacking because he was not asked to return. Mr Vajpayee, following some criti-

cism in the media, finally asked him to return to New Delhi but by that time the Prime Minister's Office and the foreign office were in sole charge of operations. Union home minister L.K. Advani, who was in New Delhi, was not consulted, and his strong views against the release of the terrorists totally disregarded.

The government at no stage even considered commando or other action to stop the hijacked flight at Amritsar. The initial chaos following the announcement did not yield any concrete policy plan from the political authorities or the hastily set up crisis management group, which is now bearing the flak for the indecision.

The defence authorities were not approached by either Mr Brajesh Mishra or Mr Jaswant Singh in the first hour of the hijacking to ascertain their preparedness in dealing with the situation. In fact, the defence chiefs were not even consulted later and

## HIJACKS: HOME FRONT

Tomorrow: The military fallout

had to lodge a formal protest with Mr Vajpayee about their deliberate exclusion. The Prime Minister, according to reports not denied by the government, had no idea about the hijacking for 40 valuable minutes.

The failure to stop the hijacked air-

craft at Amritsar was taken up at the BJP national executive meeting at Chennai. Mr Advani was visibly unhappy with the decision and, according to party sources, did not even attempt to defend it, merely recognising the criticism and stating that there were "several reasons" for the government decision. He did not elaborate.

The decision to release the terrorists was also managed entirely by Mr Jaswant Singh and Mr Mishra. The Cabinet was taken into confidence but reportedly the objections voiced by Mr Advani completely disregarded. The Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, Dr Farooq Abdullah, was not consulted and his

publicly stated views that there should be no deal with the terrorists discarded. There is strong criticism within the government, and the BJP, about Mr Jaswant Singh's decision to carry the three terrorists aboard the aircraft, he took to Kandahar. The three imprisoned men were released and the deal clinched by the foreign office and the PMO on the basis of the negotiations being carried on by the Indian negotiating team with the hijackers at Kandahar. Mr Jaswant Singh justified the decision by claiming that there was not suffi-

Turn to Page 2

Decision to release militants was unanimous, says Vajpayee: Page 2

Advani in Maitthoon: Page 9

# Rabbani envoy questions Taliban role

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

**New Delhi, Jan. 3:** Afghan ambassador in Delhi Masood Khalili has suggested that the five hijackers and three Kashmiri militants released by India may still be in Kandahar, or somewhere in Afghanistan, and not in the Pakistani town of Queda.

"One should also doubt the claim of the Taliban that the hijackers were given 10 hours to leave Kandahar and had indeed left the country," he said.

Khalili, who represents Burhanuddin Rabbani's government which is recognised by India, said the Taliban was part of the conspiracy hatched by the ISI to hijack the Indian Airlines aircraft from day one. "The hijacking was masterminded by the Pakistani ISI and the Taliban was a

willing partner in it," Khalili said. Anyone who thinks the Taliban unwittingly got involved "must be naive", he added.

Speaking to **The Telegraph**, Khalili said Kandahar was chosen by the hijackers because it is a safe place. "Hijacking is a crime which no country would have condoned and Kandahar was the only choice for the hijackers who were prompted by the ISI," Khalili said.

He said since the aircraft first landed at Amritsar and later at Lahore, crucial hours were lost by the hijackers. They could not land in Afghanistan as neither Kabul nor Kandahar has night-landing facilities and were forced to go to Dubai.

Khalili asked if the Taliban, as they claimed, were not supporting the hijackers why did they not force the release of the hostages.

"If the Taliban can force them to give up the demand for payment of \$200 million and digging up the body of Sajjad Afghani, as both were un-Islamic, couldn't they have forced them to give up the hostages? Is hijacking Islamic?"

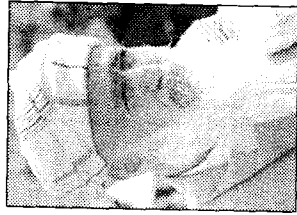
The ambassador dismissed the claim that the Taliban was fed up with toeing the Pakistani line and was desperate for an independent foreign policy. "It would be suicidal for the Taliban to delink from Pakistan at this juncture," he said.

Khalili said the Taliban, under severe sanctions, was dependent on Pakistan for its fuel, essential items, fighting gear like boots and jackets and also for the safe-

keep of its money. "Who is lobbying to give recognition to the Taliban at various international fora but Pakistan? How can one ignore the deep-rooted connections that Taliban has with the Pakistani establishment?"

He felt the Taliban could not have expected much from India. He argued that even if Delhi was to recognise the militia and establish diplomatic relations with it, it could not have forced other countries to do likewise. "Not even Nam members would have followed India's example."

Khalili feels that the Taliban was asked by Pakistan to exploit the situation created by the hi-



**Rabbani**

the militia and establish diplomatic relations with it, it could not have forced other countries to do likewise. "Not even Nam members would have followed India's example."

Khalili feels that the Taliban was asked by Pakistan to exploit the situation created by the hi-

jacking. He said perhaps the militia wanted to show the world that they are civilised people and not barbarians by giving public assurances that they will not allow the hostages to be harmed on their soil.

"But then why did their Shura put pressure on India to resolve the issue by December 31? Why did they surround the aircraft with heavy artillery and armed soldiers if not to prevent an armed action by the Indians to free the hostages?" he demanded.

The ambassador, however, is not apprehensive of a change in India's Afghan policy because of the hijacking. "I think the decision taken by India — once the aircraft reached Kandahar — was not only the right choice but also a courageous one."

Khalili, though, felt the plane

could have been stopped at Amritsar and not allowed to leave Indian soil as this would have given Delhi a stronger bargaining position. "Once it left India, the initiative had gone out of its hands."

Khalili is of the view that when the hijacked aircraft had landed at Dubai, the Indian leaders should have made all attempts to persuade the UAE to detain the plane.

The ambassador feels that India should now get into a regional agreement with the central Asian countries, Iran, Russia and also the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, to fight terrorism. The effort by these countries, which has to be later backed by other countries like the US, alone can minimise the chances of hijacking or hostage-taking in future and pressure terrorists and their backers.

## Released ultras likely to enter PoK

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 3. The three militants released by India to secure the freedom of hostages on board the hijacked Indian Airlines aircraft are expected to come to Muzaffarabad (Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir), a spokesman for the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen was quoted as telling the *Dawn*.

"God willing, they (the released Kashmiri freedom fighters) will come here," a Harkat spokesman, Sajjad Shahid, was quoted as saying, adding that the "freedom fighters" were still in Afghanistan.

The newspaper reported from Muzaffarabad that two office-bearers of the Al-Omar Mujahideen had gone to Afghanistan to "receive" Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar alias Latram, one-time boss of Al-Omar, who was among the three released by the Government of India. An Al-Omar spokesman maintained that Naeem-ul-Haq, acting chief of the group, and Latif-ul-Haq had gone to Afghanistan to receive Zargar, a militant active in Srinagar during the early years of militancy in Kashmir.

There were conflicting reports on whether or not Masood Azhar, the cleric who was also released, had telephoned his family or not. The Associated Press claimed in an Islamabad-dated report that Masood had telephoned his family from Kandahar late on Fri-

day, the day the hijacking ended. However, Masood's father, Allah Buksh, told *The Hindu* on telephone from Bahawalpur in Pakistan's Punjab province that the militant had not yet contacted the family. "*Koi telephone nahin aaya*" (we have not received any call), Masood's father claimed. The militant's father was, however, hopeful that his son would return soon. By all accounts, Masood Azhar appears to be a charismatic cleric with quite a following. Though only 31 years old, Azhar was an ideologue for several militant groups. He was said to be instrumental in securing the merger of three groups — Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Harkat-i-Jihad-Islami and Al-Omar Mujahideen — to form the Harkat-ul-Ansar.

Azhar, who studied at Karachi's Jamia Uloom-i-Islamia, Binori town, edited a journal *Sada-i-Mujahid* before being arrested in Kashmir in 1994. Apparently, he was still writing for another Karachi-based journal from his cell in the Jammu jail.

Clearly, Azhar was considered a big enough fish for his colleagues to launch a major operation such as the hijacking of the IA aircraft.

The third militant who was released, a Pakistani-born British national, Ahmed Umar Saeed Sheikh, also belongs to the Harkat.

**Difficult to arrest them: Page 11**

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2000

## APPROACH TO COUNTER TERRORISM

MANY UNION MINISTERS, the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, the security forces and other agencies of the Government dealing with terrorism are understandably upset at the release of three top militants in exchange for the passengers on board a hijacked Indian Airlines flight. It is futile to continue the debate on whether these militants should have been freed. Though Maulana Masood Azhar may have been a key catch, the authorities concede that no major charges were framed against him and a special court rejected the grounds of detention under the erstwhile anti-terrorism laws. This raises serious questions on what the Governments — both at the Centre and in the States — should do with similar cases. It is one thing for the armed forces or the police to be convinced that a person is a terrorist, militant or an accomplice, but quite another to prove it in a court of law. It is quite possible that some of these 'organisers' and leaders of cross-border terrorist outfits who are caught in India cannot be charged for specific offences, except for violations of the Passport Act. That cannot attract a deterrent punishment, but this appears to be a genuine problem the authorities face.

In the aftermath of the plane hijacking and the release of three hardcore elements, it is quite likely that militancy and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and some of the border States may increase in the months to come. There is, therefore, an urgent need to refashion the Government's policy and approach to counter terrorism. The best course will be to step up the vigil along the borders to contain infiltration of foreign elements and also Kashmiri militants trained abroad. But experience has shown that this cannot be stopped altogether. That makes the function of the intelligence agencies more important and difficult. They have to look for

new entrants, the links with existing outfits and unearth their plans in time to scuttle them and apprehend the conspirators. Before nabbing the militants or soon after they are caught, it becomes imperative to collect enough evidence against them to stand the test of law. Given the modern and sophisticated devices now available, it should be possible for the enforcement agencies to gather the required material to support their case. It may be very difficult to get witnesses to depose against known militants, especially in a troubled State like Kashmir. Similarly, the judges functioning in such a State will face extreme pressure from both sides.

Taking into consideration all these problems and the need to meet the requirements of the law, the Ministries, Central agencies and terrorist-affected States must evolve a new approach to combat terrorism in any form. Even while stamping out militancy, they must strive to address the basic issues that have nurtured these activities — be it in Kashmir, the Northeast, Bihar or Andhra Pradesh for example. Terrorists are not bound by any laws or human considerations, but Governments are. Though India may be seen to have succumbed to terrorism at Kandahar, it has succeeded in bringing cross-border terrorism to the centre stage in global fora. As terrorist groups have grown, died and regrouped over many years, any fight to stamp them out will also be long drawn. The Governments will have to keep the people on their side and not alienate them while fighting terrorism. Even under extreme pressure, the temptation to turn to extra-legal devices or to bring in draconian measures must be avoided and human rights norms and legal processes must be scrupulously observed. The security forces must redouble their efforts to track down the terrorists and their accomplices and bring them to book.

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# Govt. under fire for 'mishandling' hijack issue

By Angana Parekh

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 3.** In a taste of things to come, the Government today came under fire from the Congress(I), the Nationalist Congress Party and the Janata Dal (Secular) for its handling of the hijacking crisis. The Opposition came down heavily on the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, for personally "escorting" to Kandahar the three dreaded terrorists exchanged for the release of the hostages.

India had become a "weak, faltering and hesitant" state under this Government, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, senior Congress(I) leader, said. The party demanded a "credible" explanation on why the plane was not stopped in Amritsar; why it was necessary for Mr. Jaswant Singh to go to Kandahar when the negotiations were over and when India does not recognise the Taliban regime; and why the Prime Minister was not informed of the hijacking for a full 40 minutes.

Severely criticising Mr. Singh's action, Congress(I) spokesman, Mr. Ajit Jogi, said the Government had accorded respectability to terrorism and had "bent backwards" to appease the hijackers — a totally uncalled-for step. "This once again demonstrates the weakness and immaturity of the Government," Mr. Jogi observed.

The Congress(I) said that the proof of the impetus that terrorists and their activities had received was immediately apparent in Srinagar when a bomb blast this morning killed 13 persons.

The Nationalist Congress Party demanded a 'White Paper' on the issue. Nuclear status per se did not increase the power of a country to protect its national interests unless there was a cohesive, institutional mechanism to plan and execute important decisions.

According to the NCP spokesman, Mr. Devendra Dwivedi, the episode raised serious questions about the Government's crisis management abilities. The delay in informing the Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister's personal handling over of the terrorists had serious implications. Describing the handling as "ham-handed", he suggested the setting up of a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) to examine crisis management preparedness.

The former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) president, Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda, has demanded a high-level, independent inquiry to uncover all the facts and fix responsibility. In a statement, Mr. Gowda termed the decision of Mr. Jaswant Singh to accompany the three terrorists as "most disgusting humiliating".

## 9-Defence Security

"What made the Prime Minister take such a decision when he himself had earlier rejected the advice of Ms. Mamata Banerjee to lead a political delegation to Kandahar? This kind of dignified passage to known terrorists is a rare phenomenon which really brought down the honour and the reputation of the nation in the eyes of the international community. I am wondering why a farewell party was not arranged in honour of the terrorists before handing them over to Taliban authorities", he asked.

Mr. Gowda said the handling of the crisis clearly established lack of coordination in the Government. It had lost a very good opportunity when the plane was in Amritsar and the demand of the hijackers was limited to the release of a single terrorist.

Criticising the Prime Minister's stand that the crisis had been resolved keeping in mind the long-term interests of the nation, Mr. Gowda wondered why Government could not arrive at the same compromise in the very beginning.

He said there was no rationale in delaying the despatch of the Indian team to Kandahar. It was astonishing that the Home, Defence and Civil Aviation Ministers were kept away from the decision-making.

# Defeat at Kandahar

By Prem Shankar Jha

The Government has been severely criticised for allowing the plane to get to Kandahar and not blocking it at Amritsar or Dubai. Most of the criticism is unjustified. Stopping the aircraft at Amritsar would have almost certainly made the hijackers start shooting the passengers. For, at that point they were in a panic, had not got to know their hostages and had not yet begun to savour the possibility of getting away with their lives not to mention their freedom. Delhi would have had to back down, or storm the plane. With fully keyed-up hijackers, this would have led to a bloodbath and possibly to the plane's destruction.

Where Delhi went badly wrong was that in its relief Delhi seems to have read too much into the Taliban's warning to the hijackers not to kill any hostages. It failed to remember until it was too late, that the Taliban was not going to help 'a country of Kafirs, that had been arming their arch enemy, Ahmed Shah Massoud, and oppressing true Muslims in Kashmir'. New Delhi should also have assumed that the Taliban would never let "Hindus" shed Muslim blood on Afghan soil.

One did not therefore have to go to Kandahar to know that the Taliban would permit only one solution — an exchange of hostages for the acceptance of the major part of the hijackers' demands. Where the negotiating team failed miserably was in not having a clear bottomline and exit strategy for the negotiations. For this it is the feebleness of direction from Delhi that is entirely to blame.

For this the television revolution is at least partly to blame. Just as it brought the Kargil war into peoples' homes, television went into a tasteless feeding frenzy over the hijack episode. Lacking drama at the Kandahar end, it filled its news segments with the grievances of the relatives. And all that they had to say was that if Dr. Rubaiya Sayeed could be exchanged for five militant leaders just because she was a Home Minister's daughter, then what were just a few more in exchange for 160 Indians and an Airbus A-300? So utterly overwhelmed and demoralised was the Government by this incessant media barrage, that getting the hos-

tages home quickly gradually became the only issue on its agenda. It did not occur to a single Indian spokesman to respond that the release of the leaders of the IKLF in December 1989 started an insurgency and a proxy war that has claimed 25,000 lives.

Sensing this weakness during the negotiations, the Taliban began to threaten not the criminals who had hijacked a plane and killed two human beings — an un-Islamic act by their own definition — but the Government that was trying to free them. If India did not come to some agreement with the hijackers, they would send the plane with all of the hostages out of Afghanistan. Thus, the option of sweating the hijackers' demands down to a simple exchange of freedom for hostages was ruled out — by the Taliban!

Delhi's second mistake was to leave the satellite phone out of its calculations. When every important terrorist in Kashmir has an INMARSAT phone, this was unforgivable. The manner in which the hijackers' demands

## OPINION

developed indicated clearly that they were in constant touch with their ISI controllers in Islamabad. Firstly, they did not do what nearly all other hijackers have done — release at least the women and children. Had they wanted to retain a credible option of killing all the remaining passengers and blowing up the plane, this is the first thing they would have done. Who advised them not to do this?

Secondly, their demands were equally atypical. They first asked for the release of only Maulana Masood Azhar. Only later did they raise their demands to 36 prisoners and \$ 200 million. Did this not strike the Indian negotiators as strange? The only logical explanation is that this error, too, was "rectified" after more instructions were received on a satellite telephone. The ISI controllers clearly understood that India would need a large fig leaf to hide its surrender. How right they turned out to be was shown by none other than the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, who claimed that

# Defeat at Kandahar — II

India had "succeeded" in whittling down the original list of 36 to three!

Did India have another option? It did: the moment the negotiators realised that they were being manipulated, they should have withdrawn from the negotiations and told the Taliban that since the hijackers had sought shelter in their country it was their duty to see that the hostages came to no harm. But what if the Taliban too called India's bluff and told the hijackers to leave Afghanistan? Would India not have had to start all over again in yet another country? Would the imprisonment and torture of the hostages not have been prolonged? And might not the hijackers have done what they could so easily have done at Amritsar — killed many more of the hostages to press their demands, or blown themselves and the plane up?

Some element of risk would have remained, but as Mr. K. P. S. Gill, former Punjab police chief, has been pointing out, it had all but vanished. By the fourth day the hijackers were feeling so safe that they were allowing the passengers to move about freely in the plane, and not even bothering to guard them any longer. They had also come to know many of the hostages and that curious empathy, known as the 'Stockholm Syndrome', had developed between the hostages and their captors.

As for flying away, would any of them have wanted to go back into the nightmare of uncertainty and terror they had known at Amritsar, over Lahore and at Dubai? And which country would have offered them a safe haven for a crime against India? Thus, if India had withdrawn, Pakistan would have faced the choice of letting them land on 'humanitarian grounds' and thereby have the operation backfire, as did the kidnapping of six foreign tourists by Al-Faran in 1995, or advising them to release the passengers, blow up the plane and vanish into Afghanistan.

The truth is that India had a winning hand and did not even know it. As a result it succeeded in snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory.

(Concluded)

# Looking beyond the hijacking

By V. R. Raghavan

THE HIJACKING of the Indian Airlines' aircraft to Afghanistan is a major success for international terrorism. International attention would no doubt focus on the methods adopted in this hijack and even more on the steps each state must take in the light of this experience. India would also need to improve its technical and systemic shortcomings shown up by this event. The more important issue, however, is about the real meaning of the incident.

The hijack is on one hand the result of a small group pulling off a major terrorist success. On the other hand, it is demonstrative of a major nation state, with all its military capabilities, looking helpless in the eyes of its people and the world. That is what terrorism is all about. Terrorism applies violence against innocent citizens to obtain political ends. It gains political credibility by making the state look incompetent and incapable of protecting its citizens. The Government is even now wasting time on trivialities. Repeated assertions that India is not a soft state, or, that the hijack is the handiwork of Pakis-tani, or, that the Taliban assisted the hijackers in escaping, does little to increase the Government's dented credibility. Pompous phrases by political leaders and inefficient administration combine to further damage the credibility of the state. That is exactly what the terrorist wants to happen.

The latest hijack was unique in many ways. It was masterminded in one country, put into action in another and taken to its successful conclusion in a third country. It made use of security inefficiency in Nepal and of a slow and tardy response by the Government of India. It was ended in Afghanistan, in the safety of the Taliban's protection. The Government of India could not use its capability of armed action against the hijackers. Its well-trained anti-hijack force, raised and maintained at great cost, was left stranded. Retaining control is the essence of crisis management. Once the aircraft was allowed to leave the airport at Amritsar, both control over the situation and the major advantage of a quick, armed response were lost. It could not, thereafter, mount an armed action to storm the aircraft and free the

*The war against terrorism will have to be continued and won. That war cannot, however, be won solely by the sword-arm of the State... Involving the people in governance is the need of the times ahead.*

hostages, which could have been easily done on Indian soil. The Government was then left with the sole choice of coming to terms with the hijackers' demands.

The Government remained paralysed for about twelve hours after the hijack began. Apparently there was confusion on who was behind the hijack and what their demands were. Notwithstanding that, by a process of elimination a conclusion could have been reached on the main issue with which the hijack was linked, i.e. Jammu and Kashmir. That would have allowed a faster decision on the bottom line which the Government was prepared to accept from the hijackers. This was essential since the armed response option was no longer a feasibility. Yet after the aircraft landed at Kandahar, there was no urgency to get in touch with the crew, the hijackers or the Taliban. Instead, time was wasted in contacting the Governments of other countries to seek their help. Even after one dead man was given out by the hijackers, things continued without urgency. When the U.N. was brought in by the Taliban, the Government at first almost disassociated itself from that initiative. A military option was being considered well after that option had been lost. The list of things that went wrong is long and is likely to get longer with time. The majority of the passengers in this hijacking were from or around Delhi. Their relatives acted in unison to ask some hard questions of the Government. They even forced an entry into the corridors of power to raise their voice. What would the situation have been if the passengers were from other and distant parts of India? Who would have taken up their cause? The meaning of this should be read carefully. There is a widespread sense in the public mind of double standards applied by the political leadership. The perception that there are different yardsticks for those in authority or with influence, and for the common citi-

zen, is a warning about the gap now existing between the leaders and those they profess to lead.

In the cacophony of noises which were made about the well-being of the passengers, national interests were mentioned, both by the Government and its well-wishers. The argument was astounding in its assumption that the interests of the state are different from those of the lives of the passengers and the crew were dispensable in national interest. No one bothered to state which interest would have been served by the Indian state forsaking not only its citizens but those of other countries on board the aircraft belonging to India's national carrier! The juxtaposition of impossible choices for the state is the strategy of the terrorist. The speed and the confidence with which the political leadership makes the choice can to a great extent deny the psychological advantage to the terrorist. That is the sign of a responsible government. There was a moment in this episode when the Government came close to being seen as accountable to itself, rather than to its citizens. Sadly, the Government fell short of its people's expectations on this account.

The hijack and its aftermath can be far reaching in its ramifications. There is greater awareness of Indian vulnerabilities on account of terrorist activities. This will encourage more attempts at terrorist acts. The success of the hijack will bring more individuals fired by the jehadic spirit to the terrorist cause. Other elements within India with a sense of deprivation, and disgruntled with the state's apathy to their needs, will be encouraged by the success of terrorism. The security forces will be disheartened. Their leadership will have a job convincing the rank and file of the need to continue risking lives in fighting and apprehending terrorists. A contin-

uing attempt to place the blame outside the Government will only highlight the gulf between political courage and that of the men in the security forces. It will not be an edifying experience.

As for Jammu & Kashmir, the inspiration for the hijack, the urgent need to improve governance in that State cannot be over-emphasised. It would suffice to cite just one indicator of the public perception of governance there. In the 1996 Assembly elections, nearly 50 per cent of the electorate risked life and limb to come out and vote. In the 1999 Parliament elections, the percentage was only a little over ten. That is the measure of the goodwill lost through misgovernance. The meaning is clear. Large packages of money pumped into the system cannot correct people's alienation, if the system does not care for the citizen. The warning should be clearer still. A political system which is unable to comprehend the relationship between the good of its citizens and that of the state, makes the job of the terrorist easier.

The hijack and its success, in the long run, is no more than a tactical setback to the Indian state. The war against terrorism will have to be continued and won. That war cannot, however, be won solely by the sword-arm of the state. A total reliance on security forces for keeping peace limits the state to merely keeping the level of terrorist activity down. A huge security apparatus cannot protect the state's interests indefinitely. Reliance solely on the security apparatus creates complacency amongst political leadership and bureaucracy, of the kind which led to failures in the hijack drama. Involving the people in governance is the need of the times ahead. That involves greater public accountability of the government apparatus. It needs building people's confidence in the political leadership's greater concern for the common man than for the privileged segments. A truer understanding of national interest, devoid of high-sounding phrases but rich in effective governance, will be the key to winning the war against terrorism.

*(The writer is Director, Delhi Policy Group, and a former Director-General of Military Operations.)*

# India trying to design ABM system on US lines: Kalam

Pune, January 4 *RGV*

INDIA IS trying to design a state-of-the-art Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) system on the lines of the US Star-War system, according to Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, the architect of Indian missiles programme.



While the country's first Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) would be tested before the end of this month, efforts were on to operationalise within two or three years all missile systems, besides Agni and Prithvi, which had already been operationalised, Dr Kalam said.

"The country can pursue Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) programme if adequate funds are made available for the project," he told the plenary session of the 87th Indian Science Congress here last evening.

The ambitious LCA project, initiated about a decade ago by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd and Aeronautical Development Agency, both in Bangalore, to meet the requirements of the Indian Air Force for carrying out low-altitude warfare training, is already behind schedule. So far India has produced a prototype of LCA, considered the world's smallest fighter aircraft.

Dr Kalam, who recently assumed charge as the Chief Scientific Adviser to the government, was sharing the platform with ISRO Chairman K Kasturirangan and Atomic Energy Commission Chairman R Chidambaram, unfolding 'The Indian strategies of science and technology in the 21st century'.

Dr Kalam said the unmanned supersonic aircraft being developed by ISRO would go a long way in defence application and help save the lives of pilots.

The aircraft would combine critical technologies used in missiles and satellites too. In case of a nuclear warhead attack by the enemy, the aircraft would be automatically activated to neutralise the weapons, he said. *(Agencies)*

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES**

- 5 JAN 2000

# No trace of hijackers yet

■ Pak says they haven't entered Pok and Taliban won't tell where they are

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI/ ISLAMABAD, JAN 4

**W**HEREABOUTS of the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane continues to be a mystery even after four days of the end of the eight-day drama at Kandahar with Pakistan saying they have not yet entered into its territory and the Taliban government saying it would not disclose their destination as per an agreement.

On its part, India today asserted that Pakistan was obligated to act to apprehend and try the five hijackers even if they made their way to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Under international law, "Pakistan is obligated to act in respect to what happens on its soil or territory controlled by it even though illegally," an External Af-

airs ministry spokesman said here, when asked whether Pakistan was obliged to act against the hijackers if they sneaked into PoK.

The spokesman said Indian authorities were trying to ascertain from various sources the whereabouts of the five hijackers, who had reportedly been given ten hours by Taliban authorities to leave the territory held by it in Afghanistan.

Moreover, well-informed sources in New Delhi described as "red herring" claims by Pakistani intelligence agencies that the hijackers and the three released militants including two Pakistani mercenaries had split up.

The sources said the claims that released militants were trying to sneak into PoK and the five hijackers were making their way to Iran via Herat where a ploy to di-

vert international pressure, anger and dismay over the inhuman hijacking act.

However, Pakistan has dismissed India's charge that Islamabad was involved in the hijacking, saying it is a propaganda to cover its own "state terrorism" and influence the United States.

"The latest accusations appeared designed to divert domestic denunciations for delay, inefficiency and insensitivity of the Indian government to the pain and suffering of hijacked Indian airliner," Pakistan foreign Minister Abdus Sattar said yesterday.

His reaction came following Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's remarks yesterday that Pakistan's role in fomenting terrorism in India has now been exposed and that India would strive to get Pakistan declared a "terrorist

state". Sattar told the official APP news agency that "in doing so, India no doubt wants the world opinion to ignore India's abhorrent record of state terrorism".

He also accused India of launching this propaganda campaign against Pakistan in a bid to get closer to the US saying, "Vajpayee's statement also points to a pre-conceived objective of building a strategic relationship with the US on trumped-up charges of terrorism against Pakistan".

Sattar's comments came as Pakistan virtually expressed its unwillingness to nab the hijackers of the Indian airlines plane even if they enter Pakistan while accusing India that new Delhi had not provided any details of the hijackers despite holding negotiations with them during the eight-day long drama at the Kandahar airport.

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 JAN 2000

# India cries foul, but US wants proof

## Washington yet to take India's charges seriously over Pak complicity in the hijacking

CHIDANAND RAJGHATA  
WASHINGTON, JAN 4

THE United States is examining New Delhi's charges of Pakistani complicity in the hijacking and Indian demands to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. "It's too early to say yet — the jury is still out on this one," an administration official told *The Indian Express* when asked if Washington accepted India's contention about Pakistan's role in the hijacking episode.

According to knowledgeable experts, the US has the technical means to listen in to every conversation the hijackers had with their handlers, given that the aircraft was parked stationary for several days. Washington could also have tracked the hijackers and their getaway vehicle as they made their way out of Kandahar to the Pakistani border.

However, officials declined to reveal if the US had deployed resources for this purpose while acknowledging it was technically feasible. Said an official: "We would not want to second guess the In-

dian government yet and we will wait to see their evidence." There is now pressure from influential circles in Washington on the Clinton administration to help India with intelligence inputs. "I call upon the Administration to give India every possible assistance, including relevant, time-sensitive intelligence data," said Congressman Gary Ackerman, co-chairman of the India Caucus. He also called for a "review into the role of Pakistan's military junta and the illegal Taliban regime in supporting various violent Kashmiri outfits."

But the administration is not exactly keeling over to nail Islamabad down with any evidence it has procured. There was a distinct tone of scepticism from officials who responded to the Indian tirade about Pakistani complicity with the bottomline being: Show us the evidence.

Officials also said the Indian demand to designate Pakistan a terrorist state was "not new" and there had to be more than just insistence to make such a determination. The Secretary of State has to conclude

that a state has repeatedly officially supported terrorist activities, one official said.

Publicly though, the administration itself has adopted a fairly tough line ahead of what promises to be a bitter diplomatic season as far as the subcontinent is concerned. In fact, the US State Department said: "...All parties to the relevant international convention on aircraft hijacking are obliged to prosecute or extradite those who committed this hijacking and the murder of Mr Katyal during the course of it. This should be our highest priority in the days ahead."

It was only after this statement that Islamabad promised to arrest and prosecute the hijackers if they were caught while crossing over Pakistan. While US officials are not taken in by the Indian diatribe about Pakistani complicity, some experts here are also less gung-ho about the role of the Taliban than New Delhi, which lavished praise on the fundamentalist outfit in the wake of the settlement.

Analysts here point out that the hijackers at no point sought safe

passage out of Kandahar, secure in the belief that they were in safe territory. More recent reports about the hijackers getting better and more arms when the plane was parked in Kandahar suggests Taliban connivance, some analysts said. "The Taliban let them go free... their complicity is clear," a Congressional staffer said, suggesting that India's gratitude to Kabul was premature. However, a state department official pointed out that the Taliban probably stuck to the bargain that the Indian government had struck with the hijackers.

Analysts familiar with intelligence operations say even if the hijackers were being handled by an outside force, it may be difficult to find official Pakistani fingerprints on the episode. One congressional aide said there appeared to be an element within the Pakistani intelligence service that was operating independently and reporting to no one. "They may have perfected the art of operational independence so it cannot be traced back to the official dispensation," the aide said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 JAN 2000

## 'Masood can come to Pak.'

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4. Masood Azhar, a Harkat-ul-Mujahideen cleric who regularly propagated global "jihad", can return home if his Pakistani identity is established, a Pakistan military spokesman has said. Azhar was released on Friday along with two other militants for the freedom of the hostages aboard a hijacked Indian Airlines plane.

"He has a right to come back to Pakistan but only if he is the genuine one. He has not committed any offence," Brigadier Rashid

Qureshi, chief of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate, was quoted as saying in Karachi on Monday.

"Nobody knows whether the gentleman who was released was Maulana Masood Azhar or not. Afghans don't, the Pakistanis have not seen him. One needs to establish the identity of the hijackers and of the Maulana," Brigadier Qureshi said.

### 'Diversionsary tactics'

In a related development, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, has alleged that the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vaj-

payee's demand that Pakistan be declared a "terrorist state" was intended to divert domestic attention from the IA plane hijack.

"The Indian Premier's statement also points to a preconceived objective of building a strategic relationship with the United States on trumped-up charges of terrorism against Pakistan," Mr. Sattar was quoted as telling the official APP news agency.

"In doing so, India no doubt wants world opinion to ignore India's abhorrent record of state terrorism," Mr. Sattar said.

THE HINDU

- 5 JAN 2000



## Pak. promises to arrest hijackers: U.S.

**SHEPHERDSTOWN (West Virginia), JAN.**

4. Pakistan has assured the United States that it would act in compliance with international aviation agreements and arrest the hijackers of the Indian Airlines jet should they be found on its soil, the State Department spokesman, Mr. James P. Rubin, has said.

Mr. Rubin, who is here for the talks between Israeli and Syrian officials, told presspersons on Monday, "Pakistan has told us that it will meet its obligations under the international convention to apprehend the hijackers and bring them to justice.

Mr. Rubin said Washington was not aware of the current location of the hijackers but called for any country having information on their whereabouts to act appropriately.

In Washington, reacting to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement calling upon the U.S. and other world powers to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, the State Department said that in order for a state to be designated a terrorist state, the Secretary of State must determine that its Government had repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.

The Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, "has not made such determination with respect to Pakistan. However, the list of state sponsors of terrorism is under continuous review," a spokesman said. — AFP, AP

**THE HINDU**

**- 5 JAN 200**

## 41-11 Pie in the sky

THE STATEMENT by the government's chief scientific adviser, Dr Abdul Kalam, that India is designing an anti-ballistic missile system is likely to be greeted with a mixture of pride and bemusement. The pride stems from the fact that the country's defence establishment is now in a position to embark on a mission which even the US has found difficult to accomplish. Indeed, it was Mr Ronald Reagan's celebrated Star Wars programme to build a shield in the sky against incoming Soviet missiles which provided fresh evidence in the eighties of America's technological prowess and the kind of resources it can mobilise. That was the first step which led to the Soviet Union's unravelling because of the realisation in Moscow that it cannot match its adversary's firepower. However, the shield was never really constructed, not so much because of the disappearance of the Soviet threat as because even Washington balked at the formidable technological challenge which the programme presented. In this context, if India is now seemingly capable of building a similar shield "if adequate funds are made available for the project," it suggests a remarkable advancement in our scientific capabilities. The proposal to launch a lunar mission, too, underlines tremendous progress in the field of rocketry, which is also evident from the intention to opt for intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The fact, however, that observations such as these were made before the Indian Science Congress, which is now meeting in Pune, suggests that they were more in the nature of theoretical formulations than practical application. Evidently, programmes of this nature, especially Star Wars and a mission to the moon, cannot be at the top of India's current priorities if only because it will mean the diversion of resources from other more urgent projects, of which the one relating to the Light Combat Aircraft tops the list. Besides, there is a clear mismatch between these scientific ambitions and India's glaring failures in areas such as health, education and civic infrastructure which are also in dire need of resources. While applauding Dr Kalam, the science congress may have to pay attention to India's unflattering indices of human development. It may also be necessary to consider why no Indian scientist since Sir C.V. Raman has received a Nobel Prize or have a subatomic particle named after him, as bosons were after Satyendranath Bose. Interestingly, scientists like Raman or Bose did nearly all their work in India, something which only J. V. Narlikar among internationally known academics does at present. Aren't our research facilities good enough at present? These are aspects which the science congress has to consider while remembering that genuine scientific progress has many facets other than the military one.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 JAN 2000

## U.S. wants hijackers brought to book

WASHINGTON: The United States has asserted that it will not rest until the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane are brought to justice and vowed to strengthen cooperation with India in combating terrorism.

"The United States, as a government, will not rest until those who perpetrate those kinds of activities (hijacking and terrorism) are brought to justice," White House press secretary Joe Lockhart told reporters on Wednesday.

"As far as the hijacking... We support a full investigation that is aimed at apprehending and prosecuting the hijackers. We do that, and what is important here, is that those who were responsible are brought to justice," he noted.

When a correspondent suggested that though the U.S. and India are discussing how to combat ter-

rorism together, why was the latter left alone in fighting the menace, Mr Lockhart retorted, "No, I think those people who say that are wrong. I think we were in close touch with the Indian government throughout the (hijacking) incident... We're also continuing to work with India on a series of efforts to strengthen our cooperation on fighting terrorism."

Asserting that the U.S. will curb perpetrators of all kinds of terrorism domestically and internationally, he said, "Whether it is an act of terror directed against Americans or whether it is directed against others... We can find a way to support their investigation."

Meanwhile, Britain and other members of the European Union have also vowed to continue their support to India and other states

in fighting international terrorism. "We condemn without reservation international terrorism in all its forms," British foreign office minister John Battle said in a statement issued in London on behalf of the 15-member EU presidency on Wednesday.

"We are relieved that the hijack crisis was resolved without further loss of life, and that the remaining hostages have now returned home safely," he said in the statement.

"Our thoughts are with the family of (Rupin) Katyal, the hostage who was murdered during the incident," he said, noting that foreign secretary Robin Cook passed a personal message to external affairs minister Jaswant Singh to this effect on December 31, after speaking to him on telephone earlier on the crisis. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

: 7 JAN 2000

# Mumbai arrests reveal Pak hand in hijacking

*Govt. will build world opinion against Pak efforts: Advani* *West Asian terrorist helped in planning operations in city*

The Times of India News Service

By S. Balakrishnan and Somit Sen

NEW DELHI: The government on Thursday announced the arrest of four accomplices of the Pakistani hijackers in Mumbai leading to unearthing of evidence of what Union home minister L.K. Advani called "deep involvement" of Islamabad in the incident.

Security forces recovered from the arrested persons, among other things, photographs of the five hijackers who were identified as Ibrahim Athar (who hails from Bahawalpur), Shahid Akhtar Sayed (Gulshan Iqbal, Karachi), Sunny Ahmed Qazi (Defence colony, Karachi), Mistri Zahoor Ibrahim (Akhtar colony, Karachi) and Rajesh Gopal Verma alias Shaqir (Sukkur city).

Ibrahim Athar, who was referred to as 'chief' by other hijackers inside the hijacked plane, is brother of Maulana Masood Azhar, one of the three militants released in exchange of the passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines plane.

Mr Advani told a crowded press conference that the arrested persons were activists of the now banned Harkat-ul-Ansar terrorist group, which is based in Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Those arrested are: Mohammad Rehan, Mohammad Iqbal, (both Pakistani

nationals), Yusuf Nepali of Nepal and Abdul Latif, an Indian.

Armed with the evidence recovered, Mr Advani told *The Times of India* later, the government would now try to build world opinion against Pakistan's concerted efforts to engineer terrorist violence in different parts of India.

What led to the breakthrough, said Mr Advani, was the interception by central intelligence agencies of a message from the hijackers while in Kandahar to Abdul Latif in Mumbai that he should convey to a certain journalist of an international TV network in London that if their demands were not met they would blow up the plane.

MUMBAI: A top terrorist from the West Asia had arrived in Mumbai some months ago and briefed the hijackers of the Indian Airlines and their associates, including Ibrahim, brother of Maulana Masood Azhar who was released from a Srinagar jail in exchange for the hostages at Kandahar.

Police sources said the terrorists had established a unit of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen here several months ago. According to reports, some of the Harkat members had even obtained Indian passports and other documents so as to conceal their real identities. "This development has laid bare corruption in several government departments," an official said.

In fact, one of the hijackers was caught in Jammu a month ago by the local police, but he talked his way out by saying that he was a citizen of Mumbai!

The plot to hijack the IA airplane was hatched in Pakistan with active help from the ISI, but its operational aspects were

worked by in Mumbai by the hijackers with the help of the terrorist from the West Asia. It is learnt that this terrorist preferred Mumbai since there was relatively less possibility of his being caught in the metropolis. It may be recalled that a British diplomat was gunned down on a

Mumbai street some years ago by an international terrorist with impunity. After working out the details in Mumbai, five Harkat activists, who were all Pakistani nationals, left for Kathmandu to board the ill-fated IA aircraft while their four associates (including two Pakistanis, an Indian and a Nepali) stayed back in Mumbai for further instructions.

The four men were later nabbed by the Mumbai crime branch team on December 30. But their identities were kept under wraps for security reasons. "The hostages were still on board on December 30. We did not want to alert the hijackers that their associates have been arrested in Mumbai," a senior officer explained.



The photos of the five hijackers of the Indian Airlines IC-814 aircraft which were released at a press conference by home minister L.K. Advani in New Delhi on Thursday. The hijackers are (from left) Ibrahim Athar (brother of Maulana Masood Azhar), Sunny Ahmed Qazi, Shahid Akhtar Sayed, Mistri Zahoor Ibrahim and Rajesh Gopal Verma alias Shaqir.

# We entered Pak unhindered: Azhar

Karachi, January 6

ALL THREE militants freed by India to end the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan and the five hijackers were last seen on the road from Kandahar heading towards this country, one of the freed militants, said here today.

Maulana Masood Azhar, who surfaced here last night, said that all three men (militants) had crossed together into Pakistan from Afghanistan.

"The hijackers said you do not know us. We have never met. We are from India...", Azhar told reporters, providing the first eyewitness account of what happened after the window-blackened vehicle carrying the five hijackers and three freed militants roared out of Kandahar airport on Dec 31. Their safe passage was part of the deal to end the hijacking.

The hijackers parted company with the freed militants in Afghanistan. The hijackers remained with Azhar and his companions for 25 minutes in a vehicle that was heading in the direction of Pakistan. Then they stopped the vehicle, got out and got into another vehicle, said Azhar.

It was also then that they freed their

hostage, whom they had taken to guarantee their safe passage out of the airport.

"They said 'we are returning to India but we can't travel with you. We will get there another way'," recalled Azhar.

Then they were gone. He refused to say in



what direction the vehicle headed.

Pakistan said its border security had been put on alert, but Azhar said there was no attempt by border police to stop his vehicle.

"I am a Pakistani citizen who has done nothing wrong. There is no reason to stop me," said

Azhar. He parted company with the two other freed militants after crossing into Pakistan. He said he didn't know where either was headed. Another freed militant, Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, surfaced in Muzzafarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The whereabouts of the third freed militant, Ahmed Umar Sayeed Sheikh, a Pakistani-born British citizen, were not known.

London: Britain and other members of the European Union today said their work with the India and others against international terrorism will continue.

"We condemn without reservation international terrorism in all its forms," British Foreign Office Minister John Battle said in a statement on behalf of the 15-member EU presidency.

"We are relieved that the hijack crisis (of IA plane) was resolved without further loss of life, and that the remaining hostages have now returned home safely," the minister said in the statement.

"Our thoughts are with the family of (Rupin) Katyal, the hostage who was murdered during the incident," he said noting that Foreign Secretary Robin Cook passed a personal message to External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh to this effect on Dec 31, after speaking to him on telephone earlier on the crisis. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JAN 2000

# Policy after Kandahar

ANAND K. SAHAY on the recent hijacking

**T**HE KANDAHAR hijack crisis can be viewed at two levels. The first is a sense of cathartic relief at the safe return of Indian citizens dangerously trapped in hostile foreign territory. But remarkably this became possible only because of some serious compromises on the country's foreign policy. That sets out level two of the phenomenon. Its most curious — indeed embarrassing — marker and low point, which detracted from our national dignity, was the external affairs minister's joint flying buggy ride to Kandahar with three notorious international outlaws whose contribution to spreading terrorist mayhem in this country is substantial and beyond dispute.

On this count alone, if nothing else, the extraordinary ending of the hijack will be remembered with the feeling of being let down. Were that all, the country would have been able to live it down in the end. But there is every likelihood that the foreign minister's undistinguished foray into Afghanistan was not a spur-of-the-moment act at all, and may well constitute the first early steps of a wide-range policy overhaul on the basis of a refreshed understanding of the international system. As such, at the level of high policy, the nerve-racking hijack is likely to be recalled as a watershed in India's interactions with the world.

In its complexity, Kandahar would seem to overshadow Kargil, the other shattering event of last year. The product of a lack of watchfulness on our part, Kargil had essentially impacted on the already tenuous India-Pakistan relations, and drawn Indian policymakers to the US in an uneven relationship, which dragged this country deeper into the cobweb of Washington-generated international security dynamics to New Delhi's disadvantage.

For clear-sighted reasons of its own, in the Kargil context, the US had stepped in decisively to urge Pakistan to withdraw from Indian territory. But this country was more than happy to tout this as a conscious pro-India act and the correction of Washington's traditional pro-Pakistan tilt, though it was nothing of the kind. Having established the obligation of an act of supposed friendship in a time of need, Washington quickly moved in for the

kill. It promised to reward India with a presidential visit if this country would favourably consider signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). And that was the broad track on which India-US ties lay till the skyjack terrorists struck IC 814.

The hijack went one further than Kargil. It more clearly underlined the sour nature of India's ties with Pakistan and also reinforced this country's subordinated status in relation to the US. But it went considerably beyond just these coordinates. For a start, the end game in Kandahar provoked serious policy-related ambiguities to emerge in respect of our attitude to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan which, if carried to its logical end, is likely to bear serious regional as well as supra-regional implications.

Commentators have noted appropriately that Mr Jaswant Singh flying into Kandahar gave the Taliban regime an implied legitimacy. Since the Taliban is recognised neither by India nor by the UN, the world will no doubt see it as significant that a country which has been a direct and constant victim of fundamentalist terrorism unleashed by the Pak-Afghan Joint Stock Company should show solicitude enough to despatch to the Afghan regime a dignitary no less than its foreign minister. Such stamp of approval is bound to go a long way in improving the Taliban's standing in the world, and in changing its barbarian brand image. Lifting of the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council might then follow as a matter of course. Can US recognition then be far behind? And this is the crux of the matter. It directly links India and

the US.

Seeking normal relations with the established authority in Kabul has been an important element of America's Central Asia policy since, in recent years, this region has emerged as being both economically and politically important on account of its staggeringly impressive gas finds, and its geographical location abutting Russia, China and India. A year or so ago it appeared Washington was about to recognise the present Kabul regime, but had to hold back on account of the howls of protest in the West that greeted the Taliban's sorry human rights record. Now, through its seemingly off-handed diplomacy, India has once again given the US its much-sought entry into Taliban's Afghanistan.

So, was Mr Jaswant Singh's sudden departure about to change its own Afghan policy and extend formal recognition to the Taliban in preference to the Rabbani regime which the UN still recognises? If so, is India looking for a way to speed its way into Central Asia on the back of the US? Will the US really allow this? Should it do so, is New Delhi getting ready to re-evaluate its ties with Russia and Iran, its traditional friends in the region whose political aims diverge from that of the US. Any change vis-a-vis Russia would, of course, mean a sea change in India's outlook to the world.

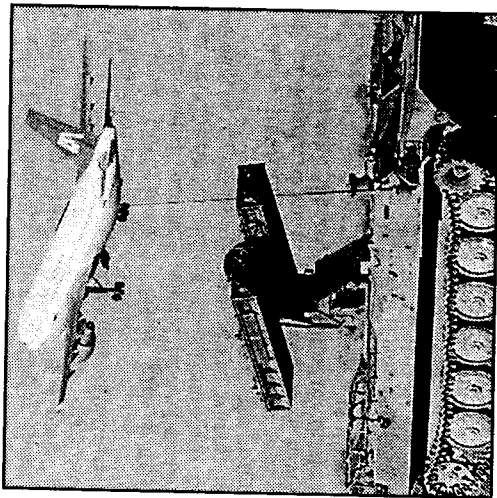
Thanks to the energetic role played by the Islamabad-based UN coordinator for Afghanistan in the overall denouement, although behind the fig-leaf of humanitarian assistance, the Kandahar

hijack brought the UN dangerously close to the doorstep of the Kashmir question which India has maintained must only be addressed bilaterally between this country and Pakistan. Clearly, the United Nations representative would have had little to do if India had diplomatically resisted the world body's involvement, as it has so often done in the past.

Since the hijack was symbiotically linked with the Kashmir issue, as its perpetrators made obvious when they harangued the Indian negotiating team on their "struggle", India may have been better advised to urge the International Red Cross to help out with the humanitarian aspect of the hostage crisis, rather than allow the more directly political arm of the UN to intervene through Mr de Mul. There should be no surprises now if one day in the not too distant future, Pakistan, and more crucially the US, cite this de facto involvement to press their case for an international solution to the Kashmir dispute. Is that the way the Vajpayee government wishes Kashmir to go in its search for a viable solution to this time-defying question? Are there likely to be trade-offs between this and the Western acceptance of India (and Pakistan) as a nuclear weapons power?

Lastly, the hijack nightmare starkly revealed that there was virtually no link between this country's fight against international terrorism and its relations with Washington, even though the US coos the *mantra* of "a concert of democracies" in our ears. Humiliatingly for us, we failed to remind it that international terrorism was democracy's deadliest political enemy today.

Coincidentally, that day in Kandahar when the hijackers were expatiating on their Kashmir struggle, Clinton was telling CBS Television that Kashmir was the most dangerous spot in the world. And he has got away with it scot free. India is understood to have only asked for clarifications through diplomatic channels! In similar circumstances some years ago, this country had erupted in protest. Clearly, on the eve of the Clinton visit we are prepared to be bulldozed by the US administration on Kashmir, quite possibly as a ploy for our less than reluctant signature on the CTBT.



# Sensitive information 'excised' from Kargil panel report

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JAN. 7. The K. Subrahmanyam Committee, that probed the "intelligence failure" which led to the Pakistani incursions in the Kargil sector in April 1999, submitted its report today to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. However, the Committee said that it has "excised" from the report sensitive information as "the disclosure of some of this information would not be in the public interest for reasons of national security". On an explanatory note, the Committee has argued that this excision "has followed a well-established procedure prevalent in many democracies".

Government sources, however, insist that they would study the voluminous document (running to 2,000 pages in 17 volumes) and decide whether the report — or parts of it — ought to be made public, though Mr. Subrahmanyam himself expressed confidence that the contents of the (sanitised) report would be shared with Parliament. After the report is "processed", it would be discussed in the Cabinet Committee on Security, before a final decision on making or not making it public is taken, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

The Subrahmanyam Committee was constituted in the wake of criticism by the Opposition parties and in the media that the Vajpayee Government had failed in its duty to be sufficiently vigilant in defending the integrity of the nation's borders. The charge against the Government was that there was a massive intelligence failure, which allowed a large Pakistani military contingent to occupy strategic heights in the Kargil sector, and which required a major military offensive — and international intervention — before the intruders were allowed a safe passage.

However, the Government chose to call it a "review" committee. The committee had only two terms of reference: "(1) to review the events leading to the Pakistani aggression in the Kargil district of Ladakh in Jammu and



The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, receiving the Kargil report from (L to R) Mr. K. Subrahmanyam, Mr. Satish Chandra, Mr. B. G. Verghese and the National Security Adviser, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, in New Delhi on Friday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

Kashmir; and, (2) to recommend such measures as are considered necessary to safeguard national security against such armed intrusions."

Besides Mr. Subrahmanyam, the members of the Committee were Mr. B. G. Verghese (media personality), Lt. Gen. (retd.) K. K. Hazari, and Mr. Satish Chandra, Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat, who also acted as the Committee's member-secretary.

The Committee was constituted on July 29, 1999 (though the decision to appoint it was announced on July 24 by Mr. Pramod Mahajan, then minister for Information and Broadcasting, after a Cabinet meeting), and it was expected to submit its report by October 31, 1999. Still, because of the Lok Sabha elections, the Committee found it difficult to interact with a number of "key actors", and therefore requested — and got — an extension till December 15, 1999.

According to the probe panel, despite the fact that it was not a statutory body, it was gratified that the Government had issued "specific directions to the concerned Ministries and agencies to provide it the widest possible access to all relevant documents including 'Secret' and 'Top Secret' papers and to officials of the Union and the Jammu and Kashmir Governments".

Those who interacted with the Committee include Mr. Vajpayee; the former Prime Ministers, Mr. V. P. Singh, Mr. I. K. Gujral and Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao; Cabinet Ministers in charge of Home, Defence, and External Affairs; the National Security Adviser, Mr. Brajesh Mishra; the Cabinet Secretary and three Service Chiefs, besides officials of intelligence agencies.

The Committee says it also interacted with "young Army officers who were directly involved in the operations".

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2000

## BRINGING THE HIJACKERS TO JUSTICE

THE PAKISTANI ESTABLISHMENT stands fully exposed, its complicity in the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight IC- 814 determined beyond doubt by the identification of the criminals responsible for the cruel act of air piracy on Christmas Eve, following the arrest of four accomplices in Mumbai. All five hijackers are Pakistanis, and according to the Government, their identity has been confirmed by some of the passengers and crew of the plane to whom their photographs were shown; so are two of the nabbed accomplices described as operatives of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. With this major breakthrough India must now press for international action to bring the criminals to justice. It is now incumbent on the international community to ask the Taliban authorities in whose territory the men disembarked and their spiritual mentors now ruling Pakistan to deliver the hijackers to face trial in this country. It was astonishing to see the criminals walk to their freedom from the hijacked aircraft, escorted to a waiting automobile by the guntoting men controlling Kandahar airport. Equally shocking is the Pakistani-Taliban charade as to the destination of these desperadoes. Never since the early days of hijackings has the world witnessed the grant of such total immunity to pirates who had not hesitated to knife a civilian passenger to death.

The identification of the hijackers, making some amends for the earlier lapses in intelligence gathering and analysis, must boost this country's effort to mobilise international opinion against whichever state provides them shelter or sympathy. After the understandable low-key reaction in the initial days of the hijacking, most countries have spoken out against it. The United States, not fully ready to accept India's demand that Pakistan be declared a terrorist state, has said categorically that it wants the hijackers brought to justice. All developments

following the hijacking which culminated in the hostages-militants swap at Kandahar on December 31 confirm the hand of the Pakistani establishment in masterminding the piracy. The sponsor had provided the blueprint, meticulous planning and the logistics support required for an operation of this magnitude in a third country, as the Union Home Minister has revealed. The return of the freed militant and Harkat ideologue, Maulana Masood Azhar, to a triumphal welcome in Karachi, the vitriol that he has poured out, and the harsh rhetoric that Pakistan's Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, has employed against this country hold but one message: support to militancy across the border is part of the official agenda of the military government in Islamabad.

110-10 871  
An agenda that neighbouring Afghanistan, under the control of the Taliban, obviously shares. During the tense days of the hijacking, the ragtag army of religious volunteers which took the world by surprise by seizing control of the country five years ago displayed a benign face that one never suspected existed. While it is not clear if the Taliban had a role in the hijacking, there was no doubting where its sympathy lay as the men in the armoured trucks at Kandahar stood back and piled pressure on the Indian negotiators. There were suggestions that in cooperating with India to peacefully resolve the hijack crisis the Taliban may have been seeking legitimacy for its regime in Kabul, recognised by only three countries now, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. But there can be no legitimacy through acts of piracy. It is the Taliban, in fact, which holds the primary responsibility for handing over the hijackers to India. The obscurantist elements comprising the Taliban though may not understand that no motive can sanctify such dastardly crimes as the killing of a defenceless civilian passenger on a flight.

THE HINDU  
- 8 JAN 2000



# USA pulls up Pak for Masood's jihad call

DESIKAN THIRUNARAYANAPURAM  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7. — The USA today warned that it would hold the Pakistani government responsible for any fallout of the anti-American remarks made by Masood Azhar in Karachi.

"We would hold the Pakistan government responsible for Masood's actions, which threaten the lives of our citizens," said state department spokesman Mr James Rubin.

In a fiery speech to his 10,000-odd supporters in front of a Karachi mosque yesterday, Masood had said: "Muslims should not rest in peace until America and India are destroyed."

The US administration, however, is still unmoved by India's call to declare Pakistan a rogue state for the "clear evidence", as India claims, that Pakistan masterminded the IC-814 hijack.

Home Minister Mr LK Advani yesterday declared that evidence provided by four recently-arrested Kashmiri militants established that the five hijackers were Pakistanis.

Mr Rubin said: "We find Masood Azhar's speech deplorable and his reported remarks about destroying America and India unacceptable. Such language feeds a climate of hostility against both countries and incites violence. Pakistan must

assure the safety of Americans, Indians and all foreigners in Pakistan."

He also called on Pakistan to investigate whether Masood's activities were legal, and said no country should "permit terrorist activities to be organised from its soil".

## KAPIL KIDNAP PLAN

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 7. — The Al-Omar Mujahideen group says it once tried to abduct Kapil Dev to secure its leader Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar's release.

"In 1996, we tried to kidnap Kapil Dev but our plans didn't work out," Naeemul Haq, head of the outfit's PoK office told the *News*. Haq said the hijack was the third attempt by the group to secure Zargar's release. "In 1993, we kidnapped Congress MLA from Bihar, Pankaj Kumar Sinha, during the Amarnath yatra in Kashmir and held him for 355 days." — PTI

"We urge Pakistan to investigate carefully whether his actions have violated any Pakistani law. If so, he should be prosecuted accordingly," Mr Rubin said. But he said he would "not speculate on the future", when asked if the USA planned to heed India's call to place the military regime on the rogue state list.

US analysts say Pakistan

might not be completely responsible for the militants' actions. "To say that Pakistan, in an official state action, actively planned and carried out the terrorist strike seems highly unlikely to me, if only because it is so clearly not in Pakistan's own interest now with its economy in crisis," said Mr James Clad, a professor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University in Washington.

"I haven't seen any convincing evidence directly linking the Pakistan government with the hijacking," said Mr Stephen P Cohen, a South Asia expert and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. "Whether there were some covert elements involved or some people just looked the other way, we don't know yet."

India has termed as "entirely understandable" Mr Rubin's statement. A spokesman of the external affairs ministry said such statements had not emanated for the first time from terrorist groups allowed to thrive in Pakistan. He recalled that Lashkar-e-Taiyaba, during its recent convention in Lahore, had called for "jihad" against the US and India, adds SNS Delhi.

The US reprimand had little effect on Masood. At a prayer meeting today, he repeated his call for "jihad" on India.

■ More reports on pages 3, 4 and 8

# Pak must try or deport hijackers: India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, Jan. 7. — Pakistan should either prosecute or deport to India the five hijackers as Islamabad is a signatory to a number of international conventions on hostage taking, the external affairs ministry said today.

The onus has always been on Pakistan as the hijackers were widely believed to be in that country, a spokesman for the ministry told reporters here.

Asked if any country had questioned the evidence relating to the hijacking made public by New Delhi, he said: "We

have no feedback from anywhere which questions the veracity of what we stated."

**White Paper:** Mr LK Advani today said the process of bringing out the White Paper "on activities of ISI in India" would be expedited.

"I have not dropped it and it is still in mind. It will now be expedited," the home minister told reporters.

Asked if the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, and two other ultras was a setback to the government's efforts to combat militancy, Mr Advani said: "For a brief while, it tended to give a boost to the terrorists."

Replying to questions on the investigations into the hijacking case, he said: "We are aware that some more people are involved."

To a question whether the hijacking episode pointed to gaps in the Intelligence system, he said "it is not so".

Advani, however, admitted that intelligence agencies did not have the identity of the hijackers before the breakthrough came following the arrests in Mumbai.

**Seizure:** Security and Intelligence agencies have seized the passenger manifest and other documents of flight IC-814 that

was hijacked to Kandahar.

The agencies are looking into whether SA Qazi, one of the hijackers, was upgraded to business class. Airline officials declined to comment.

**Court notice:** A local court has issued a notice to the Jammu Central Jail superintendent for failing to produce Maulana Masood Azhar in a jailbreak case.

**CRPF personnel killed:** At least four CRPF personnel were killed and two injured when militants attacked their camp at Rambagh on the Srinagar-Airport road here this morning.

# Kargil inquiry report cites security snags

*'Too many agencies, too little coordination'*

By Mahendra Ved  
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Subrahmanyam Committee, which probed Pakistan's intrusion into Kargil last summer and India's response to it, is understood to be critical of the multiplicity of agencies concerned with security and intelligence and has recommended that the communication gaps among them be plugged.

It has also reportedly concluded that the evaluation of the intelligence inputs about the ground situation in Kargil and along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir was inadequate.

One of the reasons was that there had been many false alarms earlier and the information available in the early part of last year was not taken seriously enough.

Many experts had pointed to an "intelligence failure", a charge conceded by the political and military leadership on different occasions. The government, in its own way, had defended itself.

However, the term "failure" does not figure in the report, that runs into 2,000-odd pages and is bound in 17 volumes. The main report itself is 228 pages.

The report is learnt to have called for an integrated approach to national security management and better coordination among the three services, the paramilitary forces and the intelligence.

The report was submitted on Friday to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee with the recommendation that it should not be made public "for reasons of national security".

"Conscious of the fact that the disclosure of some of this information would not be in the public interest for reasons of national security, the committee has itself excised the same from its report," a press release issued by the National Security Council secretariat said.

K. Subrahmanyam, the noted defence analyst who headed the committee, and its three other members, journalist-writer B.G. Verghese, former vice-chief of army staff Lt. Gen. (retd) K.K. Hazari and senior diplomat and member secretary of the National Security Council

Satish Chandra, presented the report to Mr Vajpayee.

"The committee undertook its work in a spirit of complete openness, objectivity and transparency," the release said.

None of the committee members, when contacted, commented on the contents of the report. "I shall say nothing more than this press release," said Mr Subrahmanyam.

The committee has done fast work compared to the Henderson Brooks Report on the 1962 Sino-Indian war and the histories of the 1965 and 1971 wars that were compiled over a number of years. All these remain beyond the public gaze. Owing to its sensitive nature, this committee report is also unlikely to be made public.

The committee, whose briefing included a review of the events leading to the Pakistani aggression in Kargil and the recommendation of measures considered necessary to safeguard national security against such intrusions, commenced its work on October 31 last year.

There was, however, a delay on account of the Lok Sabha polls and the new government's taking office. The committee was unable to interact with a number of key actors in time and, therefore, had requested the government for an extension up to December 15, 1999, the release said.

The secretariat took another three weeks to organise the compilation, printing and binding of the report, including annexures and appendices.

Although the committee was not statutory in nature, the government had issued specific directions to the ministries and agencies concerned to provide it with the widest possible access to all relevant documents, including secret and top secret papers, and to officials of the Union and Jammu and Kashmir governments.

The committee held over 100 meetings and interacted with eminent political leaders, senior civilian and military officers, present and former diplomats, journalists, members of the public and others.

► Picture on Page 7

# Stringent anti-terrorism Bill to be tabled in Budget session

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 7 NOVEMBER

THE GOVERNMENT plans to introduce a stringent anti-terrorism Bill along the lines of the lapsed Terrorist & Disruptive Activities Act (Tada) in the Budget session of Parliament. But the new Bill will have a "human face."

According to sources in the government, the Union home ministry is finalising a draft Bill to combat terrorism and subversive activities in various parts of the country. The keenness to table it the coming session, likely to begin in the last week of February, is being linked to the recent hijacking episode that culminated in the release of three hardcore terrorists in exchange for 161 hostages aboard the Indian Airlines flight.

Shortly after the hijack or-

deal — four of the hijackers were identified as activists of the banned militant outfit Harkatul-Ansar with three being Pakistani nationals — BJP demanded an anti-terrorist law stronger than Tada, based on a consensus among state governments.

Interestingly, the home ministry was working on such a legislation long before the hijacking

## HIJACK EFFECT

took place. The MHA had even sought the opinion of the Law Commission on the "safeguards" needed to prevent the new anti-terrorism law from becoming "draconian," like its predecessor.

The Law Commission, in its working paper, endorsed the need to enact a permanent anti-terrorist law as proposed by

MHA. Observing that the security situation both within and around the country had indeed worsened and international terrorism was assuming alarming proportions, the panel, headed by Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, said several countries, including the US, had enacted statutes assuming jurisdiction to deal with acts of terrorism while terrorist groups continued to perceive India as a soft and indolent state.

However, the commission was of the view that although the law to be enacted must be capable of dealing with the evil and must have the teeth to effectively tackle the menace, it should contain effective provisions for safeguarding the rights of the accused and providing him/her enough opportunity to defend himself/herself.

*The Economic Times*  
8 JAN 2000

## Follow the Spoor

The Indian government's release of pictures of the five hijackers of IC 814, together with data about their identities, is a distinct step forward towards tracing the origin of the hijack and fixing responsibility on various organisations outside India. By identifying the five hijackers as citizens of Pakistan and members of the terrorist organisation Harkat-ul Mujahideen, the government has made out a plausible case for the involvement of Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence agency. Four of the hijackers' associates, two Pakistanis, one Indian and one Nepali, are in Indian custody and are said to be members of Harkat-ul Ansar, now known as Harkat-ul Mujahideen. Maulana Masood Azhar, an Islamic cleric, who was exchanged for the hostages, is a prominent member and office bearer of Harkat-ul Ansar. This outfit has been widely recognised as an international terrorist organisation. Normally, a country which permits terrorist organisations to operate freely within its territory is defined as a terrorist state. As such, Pakistan ought to explain why it has allowed Harkat-ul Ansar/Mujahideen to function within its jurisdiction. According to reports in the Indian media, Ibrahim Athar, Maulana Azhar's brother, travelled through India to reach Kathmandu. Since the others involved are also Pakistani citizens, Islamabad is obliged to give details of when they left Pakistan and what their destinations were. A state which has not initiated action against an international terrorist organisation, while citizens belonging to it are accused of hijacking and of obtaining the release of a prominent office holder of the same outfit, cannot pretend that it has nothing to explain to the world. Pakistan challenged India to identify the hijackers. India has done so and now the ball is in Pakistan's court. In a welcome move, a spokesperson of the US state department has indicated Washington's resolve to bring the hijackers to justice.

While New Delhi has done right in exposing the identities of the hijackers, this can only be a first step. A lot more information of what happened at Kathmandu airport, including the way in which the hijackers succeeded in getting arms past the security check, has to be collected, presented and explained in a comprehensive manner. Leakage of piecemeal information creates a lot of confusion, most of it avoidable. While New Delhi ought to harness all its resources to this task, various government organisations and officials ought to exercise restraint and not outdo each other in spawning contradictions. The televised pronouncements of law minister Ram Jethmalani represent a case in point. While he has every right to advocate his strategy about enlisting Washington's support, or taking the issue to the Security Council, he ought not to violate the discipline of cabinet procedure and collective responsibility by publicly advocating moves that contradict the government's current policies. There ought to be much greater coordination among members of the government on a matter as sensitive as hijacking and its aftermath. The way New Delhi handles its information campaign and its international diplomacy will largely determine the extent to which global opinion can be mobilised in support of India's legitimate stand against transnational terrorism. Handling information to one's own advantage is a managerial skill which the government has apparently yet to acquire.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

8 JAN 2000

# Is India a soft state?

*It is rather pathetic that a regime that proudly armed itself with the vocabulary of a nuclear state allows itself to be outfoxed by a bunch of hijackers. But this should not detract from the fact that the Indian state remains equipped to get the better of those who challenge its sovereignty, writes HARISH KHARE.*

IT WAS left to Mr. Devendra Nath Dwivedi, the very articulate spokesperson of the Nationalist Congress Party, to write the finest epitaph of the Vajpayee Government's handling of the recent hijacking crisis: "Let no situation arise in which it is said by anybody in future that Prime Minister Vajpayee talks like Churchill but acts like Chamberlain."

If Mr. Dwivedi had wanted to add a touch of irony he could have also expressed his enormous relief that throughout the week-long crisis the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, kept his cool and never even once threatened to publish a White Paper on the ISI activities in India.

In view of the gap between the Vajpayee Government's apparent helplessness and its own tough rhetoric all these months ("we licked Pakistan in Kargil", "the terrorists are on the run in the Kashmir Valley", etc.) a question can be legitimately asked: has India become a soft state?

It is a *sine qua non* that a state should be able to enforce its writ throughout the territory over which it claims to have sovereignty and should be able to extract the allegiance and loyalty of all its citizens. The Indian state has faced a continuous challenge to its authority from the periphery, in Kashmir and in the entire north-east region; to the extent New Delhi has been able to impose its laws, if not its will, on these truculent regions, it can be said to be fulfilling a basic criterion. It is this demonstrated ability that prompts the international community and international law to recognise India *de jure* sovereignty.

However, doubts arise about a state's hardness when it is seen as helpless in prevailing and thwarting those organised individuals and forces which challenge its laws or otherwise refuse to render unto Caesar what is due to Caesar. Admittedly, the Indian state has been refused respect and compliance from many sources, internal and external. The most obvious refusals are disinclination to pay taxes to the state; in this respect the most prosperous sections are probably the biggest defaulters. So much so, each successive Union Finance Minister is now reduced to declaring "amnesty" for this or that group of tax evaders, and striking a bargain in order to make this group contributing less than one per cent of the population) comply with the laws of the land.

The defiance of the magistracy of the state system is, of course, most rampant in the states. Most of the State Governments, irrespective of the colour of the ruling party, are

unable to collect taxes. In Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, organised groups such as the Peoples War Group and the Ranvir Sena openly challenge the authority and competence of the law and order system; in Gujarat and Maharashtra, organised criminal gangs have almost institutionalised their operations and frustrated all attempts of the "state" to reclaim the underworld.

Merely, the Constitution provides for Article 356 which can be invoked whenever such a challenge is deemed to have become intractable at the state-level; remember Mr. Advani's famous words to the effect that the "state has withered away" in Bihar, when he wanted to misuse the Constitution at the behest of the second-rate politicians of the Samata Party.

However, questions about the softness/hardness of the state acquire an altogether different meaning when the challenge emanates from an external source or groups aligned to external powers. For example, there was this Purulia Arms Drop incident three years ago when a group of mercenaries and professional gun-runners surreptitiously entered Indian air space and air-dropped arms for their still unidentified accomplices. It is true that almost every state in the world finds its writ occasionally questioned; the Russian state, for example, has to periodically deploy its armed forces to tame rebellious regions.

Questions about the hardness of the Indian state become persistent when defiance of and challenges to its authority, especially from assorted terrorist groups, are seen to be untamed. The balance between the Indian state and its challengers is largely a matter of perception; and, is seen to get tilted against the state when something like the Kandahar surrender takes place.

It is rather pathetic that a regime that proudly armed itself with the vocabulary, if not the arsenal, of a nuclear-state allows itself to be outfoxed by a bunch of hijackers. But this particular bungling should not detract from the fact that the Indian state remains equipped with the instruments and wherewithal to get the better of all those who challenge its sovereignty and the magistracy of its laws.

Though it is not politically fashionable to remember her, it was Indira Gandhi who insisted that the country be invested with institutional resources in forging and perfecting the instruments of a

modern state. There is now an enviable plethora of agencies and organisations which are collectively capable of meeting the challenges of internal and external subversives and terrorists: the Intelligence Bureau, the RAW, the National Security Guard, the Border Security Force, the Defence Intelligence, the CRPF, the ITBP, etc. These instruments, of course, are in addition to the more overt tools of sovereignty, the three wings of the armed forces. By and large, these resources have been sufficient to defeat the various challengers — the Khalistanis, the separatists in Jammu and Kashmir, and the insurgents in the North-east.

However, if there is one lesson in the recent hijack drama it is that the availability of instruments is one thing and the ability to put them to efficacious use is quite another. The instruments, after all, are only as good as the quality of those who use them and the processes they put in place for the use of these instruments. The erosion in the efficacy of these instruments has been going on steadily, but so preoccupied are we with petty politics and venal pursuits that the loss is noticed only when the country is handed something like the Kandahar humiliation. No one, for example, wants to be reminded of the A.S. Sandhu affair a few years ago; a very fine and very brave officer had to commit suicide because the petty men who operate the state system were unwilling to protect him from harassment and persecution for acts he performed in the service of the state.

It is also unfashionable to talk of the casteist considerations that crept into appointments/transfers in the armed forces during the United Front regime; and, though the Vajpayee dispensation does not want to be reminded of the Vishnu Bhagwat affair, there is no getting away from the fact that the dismissal of a serving Naval Chief suddenly put a premium on mediocrity, pliability and second-rateness at the highest level in our national security set-up. This softness and vulnerability at the very core of our national security had been swept under the carpet by the exaggerated tom-tomming of our presumed "victory" in the Kargil conflict; now we have all the time in the world to rue the all-round ineptness that was exhibited on December 24.

Above all, let us be honest enough to understand the most important lesson of the hijack drama: second-rate practitioners of third-rate politics do not produce the requisite first-rate political will for an efficacious hard state.

# Hijackers will be tried if they are nabbed, says Pakistan <sup>9-03 N. S. (Hijack man)</sup>

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, which has steadfastly maintained that the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane were not on its soil, has said, "If we can get hold of the hijackers, we will try them in accordance with the law. This is our firm commitment and we are absolutely intent on it."

But in the same breath foreign office spokesman Tariq Altaf, in an interview to CNN on Friday night, accused India of not providing any information about the hijackers and instead launching a campaign to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. "We had, in fact, expected that India would give us some evidence...India has not contacted Pakistan at all since the ending of the hijack drama," Mr Altaf said.

"They (Indians) were in touch with us

during the hijacking and we gave them all assistance as required by them," he claimed, "but since then, they have not contacted us. Pakistan had to publicly call for information if any was available with India as they have been claiming."

"We had said that they should provide us whatever information they have or identity of the hijackers, or transcripts of their negotiations which they were exclusively holding with the hijackers, so that we can pursue those. But they had not given us anything at all," Mr Altaf.

He alleged New Delhi's accusation that Islamabad was behind the recent hijacking was part of a plan to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state. "The accusations are not new. They have been flying around right from the beginning of the hijacking of the Indian Airlines

plane. Even before the news of the aircraft was heard while it was on its way to Dubai and from there to Kandahar, they (Indians) started accusing us. So this is not new," Mr Altaf said.

Meanwhile, buckling under pressure from the U.S., Pakistan has asked Maulana Masood Azhar — one of the three militants released by India in exchange for the hostages — to desist from making outbursts against foreign countries, including the U.S.

Masood Azhar, who reached his home town Bahawalpur on Friday, was advised by Pakistan's interior ministry to lie low and not to agitate public sentiments. The ministry took the decision after the U.S. warned Pakistan that it would be held responsible for all acts of terrorism by Masood Azhar. (Agencies)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 9 JAN 2000

# Photo-ops and slaps on the wrist

POST-HIJACK, INDIAN  
DIPLOMACY HAS  
BLUNDERED BEHIND  
THE US, SAYS RAJESH  
RAMACHANDRAN

WHEN EXTERNAL affairs minister Jaswant Singh boarded his plane to Kandahar on New Year's Eve with the three militants he was swapping for the hostages aboard IC-814, some of his intended co-passengers were missing: TV crew.

To recap. A deal had been stitched in Kandahar. As a result, three militants lodged in Indian jails were whisked out bypassing judicial procedure. The foreign minister decided to be on the spot. He invited a couple of camera crew — it was too great a photo opportunity. Appalled senior officers rushed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who ordered the foreign minister to drop the cameramen. The last thing the nation needed was images of the ignominy of the country's foreign minister accompanying terrorists and handing them over to the victorious hijackers.

On returning to Delhi, Singh expressed profound gratitude to the Taliban, displaying new-found affection for the regime which allowed the militants and hijackers to drive off into the sunset.

These incidents sum up the style and content of India's diplomacy in the last fortnight.

## An appeal to Supercop

THE NEW Year began with Singh's reiteration of Pakistan's hand in the hijacking and his appreciation for the Taliban. Two days later, Vajpayee followed up by asking the US to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. The US slap on the wrist was quick.

First, a US official said Washington needs evidence. Home minister LK Advani's "evidence" was not enough. Then, state department spokesman James Rubin sternly reminded Vajpayee: "It doesn't behove other countries to tell us how to exercise our law." This was followed by British high commissioner to India Rob Young saying it was not the UK's practice to designate states in that way.

The US response, say analysts, was no surprise. All through the hijack drama, it had maintained a curious silence. It took Rubin four days to condemn the hijacking, and US "intervention" with the Taliban did not amount to much. Then, the US has an independent strategic relationship with Islamabad. Hence, say insiders, it was absurd for New Delhi to expect the US to declare Pakistan a terrorist state.

"Why should the US do our bidding," asks a highly placed source, "when we ourselves haven't withdrawn our high commissioner from Islamabad? We are a sovereign nation; if we are so enamoured of the US practice of declaring other countries terrorist states, Vajpayee should declare Pakistan as one."

Also, with this move, South Block has accepted the US as the sole arbiter of the world. Any US allega-

tions of human rights violations in Kashmir will now carry more weight since India has virtually invited it to play Supercop in its backyard.

Amitabh Mattoo of Jawaharlal Nehru University, however, feels it was right to appeal to the US. "Our long-term policy should be to isolate Pakistan and expose its links with terrorism. Asking the US to make a declaration might seem like a discontinuity in our foreign policy, but it is a welcome one since it is based on reality."

New Delhi's US tilt could get more pronounced. Pressure is already building for India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) prior to Singh's next round of talks with US

The government has ignored the Taliban's questionable role, and pointed fingers only at Pakistan. But the Pakistani connection can best be established by linking the Taliban's actions with its known nexus with Pakistan

deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbott, beginning next Sunday in London.

A high-power US delegation, including the commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Dennis Blair, four senators and a trade mission is visiting India shortly. All to pave the way for a "successful" visit by President Clinton, whose top priority, with an eye on history, is to "resolve" Indo-Pak tensions.

WHAT NEW Delhi missed during its tirade against Pakistan in the last week is that it is anything but a pariah state. China nurtured it to balance India in the region, and it was a vital cog in the US' Cold War apparatus. Its role in containing India and Russia, regulating Islamic fundamentalism, and as a gateway to Central Asia remains. Further, Washington does not want Pakistan to collapse and trigger instability in a region rife with nuclear weapons, drug money, fundamentalism and terrorism.

The Vajpayee government obviously read too much in the US intervention in Kargil. But Washington did so for two reasons: One, the Lahore declaration and Vajpayee's bus ride were prompted by the Jaswant-Talbott talks, hence the US was obliged to intervene when Pakistan upset the process. Two, the US wanted to prevent a fullscale war between two nuclear-weapon countries. India was losing lives in its own territory, and was under public pressure to cross the Line of Control. This could have panicked Pakistan into pressing the button.

At Kandahar, Washington had no

such obligation or compulsion. And, in his hurry to get both New Delhi and Islamabad to sign the CTBT, Clinton wants to visit Pakistan as well. (The Pentagon, say sources, is insistent that Clinton go there so that US influence is maintained.) But Pakistan will sign only if India does so. Hence the US pressure on India; and its need not to shun Pakistan.

## With the US in Kabul

THE GAINER in the hijack drama was the Taliban. India gave it *de facto* recognition when Singh decided to land at Kandahar. India's tactic of distinguishing between Pakistan and the Taliban haven't gained it any foothold in Kabul; on the contrary, its ally in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance, has grown suspicious.

Sources say New Delhi's post-hijack Afghan policy will only alienate the Northern Alliance, which was cultivated to counter the Taliban's influence among anti-India militant organisations. Thus, India's Afghan policy will be more in consonance with the US', which has nurtured the Taliban and has a quarrel only with Osama bin Laden.

Again, absolving the Taliban completely of complicity in the hijacking has only weakened India's case against Pakistan. All of Advani's "evidence" against Islamabad is circumstantial. On the other hand, consider the "evidence" of Taliban involvement:

One, from the very start, the hijackers wanted to land in Taliban territory. Two, on reaching Kandahar, they suddenly got more weapons. Even if this was from their own baggage in the cargo hold, it only means that the local airport helped the hijackers open the hold. Three, safe passage for the hijackers was never part of the negotiations — obviously, it was taken for granted. Four, at one point, armed Taliban militia surrounded the aircraft — was it to put pressure on the hijackers as has been let out, or to send a signal to India not to try anything adventurous? Five, the hijackers and released militants were allowed to drive away in a vehicle provided by the Taliban; no government ever helps terrorists in this way.

Yet, the government has ignored the Taliban's questionable role, and pointed fingers only at Pakistan. But the Pakistani connection can best be established by linking the Taliban's actions with its known nexus with Pakistan. In this case, negotiating along with the hijackers to get the militants released, and helping the released terrorists reach Pakistan safely.



# BUSINESS OF SECRECY!

A doctored report on Kargil presented?

THE special committee on Kargil, under the Chairmanship of defence analyst, K Subrahmanyam and comprising a former journalist, a retired military expert and Secretary of the National Security Council as Member-Secretary, is reported to have handed over its report to the Prime Minister, but the accompanying note of the secretariat of the Council where retired bureaucrat Brajesh Mishra rules the roost, raises more questions than it answers. We are told that Government held back nothing relevant, correspondence, notes, reports, whether classified or not were made available. This is as it should be and Government need to be complimented on keeping the word given when the Committee was set up. The issue is different. The Secretariat of the NSC would seem to suggest, that the Report handed to the Prime Minister has already been subjected to a form of censorship. Information, held by faceless men not to be in the public interest to disclose, was excised before it was presented to Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Surely there is something <sup>Sib</sup> wrong here. The Prime Minister is not a security risk, it would be equally absurd to treat any Cabinet Minister in this light. Then why were the cuts carried out before the Report was handed over to the Prime Minister. The proper procedure would have been to hand over the Report as written and then perhaps the exercise undertaken to make it public, to the extent necessary and no more. If there has been a mistake in stating what actually happened on the part of Brajesh Mishra's Secretariat, the wrong impression should be promptly corrected; if indeed they have dared to practice censorship on the Prime Minister of the country then whoever authorised this abuse must be exposed and the country informed.

There has been talk in the air <sup>9-08-98</sup> about a Freedom of Information Act. It has been the view of this newspaper that in the absence of a healthy climate of openness and transparency, such a move could indeed backfire. There would be lip service paid to free access to information but the bureaucrat would ensure that there was a long list of exceptions, disclosure of which would be visited by penalties. There is the recent example of Minister Ram Jethmalani, in charge of Urban Affairs, wanting to make departmental files of permissions granted and refused being made public. This was frowned upon and the Cabinet Secretary issued written instructions countermanning the Minister's fiat. Today, newspapers are free to get hold of material the government do not want made known, they are subject only to the Official Secrets Act, though this is bad enough. There is no point adding to laws which in fact inhibit free speech.

This Report was not under the Commissions Of Inquiry Act. Even Reports which come within the scope of this legislation are not made public taking advantage of the provision that the Report together with a report of action taken be tabled in Parliament, which in effect means publication. By simply refusing to get on with reports of action taken, government have avoided publication of the reports themselves. This has happened too often to need recount.

Will the Cabinet please consider the Report as written, not only as allowed to be seen by the National Security Council Secretariat, and take the country into confidence as to what, if anything, went wrong. The action taken against a Brigadier during operations is common knowledge. In fact details have been leaked to a political party which has, through spokesman Kapil Sibal, not hesitated to make political capital of it. Isn't it better to let the country know?

THE STATESMAN

- 9 JAN 2000

V.R. RAGHAVAN

# Terror at Kandahar

1-8  
19  
If the citizen feels dispensable, he will not offer the cooperation the government needs to fight terrorism

┌ Jammu and Kashmir was the malaise of which the hijacking was the symptom ┐

A widely quoted definition of national security comes from the American analyst, Walter Lippmann. It is, "A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain the war." The definition was crafted during the years of World War II, and reflects the emphasis on war or the military as the means of ensuring national security.

Things have changed greatly since then and in the last decade of the century a host of non-military issues are acknowledged to have a bearing on national security. Some countries nevertheless continue to view security through the Lippmann lens and successive Indian governments have held this belief as the core of their security policy. The hijacking of IC-814 should bring home the fallacy of such a policy.

The actions of the Indian government did little to permit waging war against the hijackers. The government's anti-hijack forces were left flat footed even as the hijacked aircraft traversed across half the country's air space. The military option having been squandered, the government dithered and delayed a quick response, thereby endangering the lives of the hostages.

It allowed itself to be caught on the horns of an avoidable dilemma by debating whether militants should be released in exchange for the safety of the hostages. It has now been made clear that the government kept examining — till very late and foolishly — a military option against the hijackers in Kandahar. That option had been foreclosed the moment the aircraft was allowed to get away from Amritsar.

The government was then confronted with the anger of the relatives of the hostages and a rising wave of public criticism. It then shifted blame on to the pilot's talk from the cockpit at Amritsar. When that did not work, it put out through its admirers the argument that national interest was more important than the lives of the hostages. None amongst its worthy leaders or its spin

doctors deigned it fit to explain the specific interest which was more valuable than the lives of 150 citizens. It was conveniently forgotten that there were citizens of other countries on the aircraft belonging to the government owned air carrier. In the end, the government could neither wage war nor maintain the values it set out to guard. It is now reduced to pointing fingers at other countries and reiterating that India is not a soft state.

Why do governments so often lose to the terrorist? The answer lies in the way governments define victory and defeat. Most governments view arresting, jailing or killing the terrorists as victory. The Indian government is no exception to this misplaced notion of dealing with terrorism. As for the terrorist, every bomb that goes off is a victory. A successful hijack against a country like India is a colossal victory. A govern-

ments run to protect buildings, bridges, airfields with sandbags and barbed wire. It protects its interests by heavily protecting the political leaders while leaving the citizen to the mercy of the terrorist. It protects objects but does not defend values. Governments acquire the security hardware but care nothing for the security software.

In its hasty and unwise action of suggesting that it cares more for its image than for its citizen's lives, the government of the day demonstrated what the citizen already suspected. The citizen now knows that in a crisis he would be dispensable. Why would the citizen respond to a government's exhortations in the future for sacrifices in the national interest?

In the long war against terrorism which India will need to wage, the role of the citizen would be critical. No government, least of all an alliance government, can win this war without the full support of the citizen. The state and the citizen need to be brought closer than they are now, if they are to cooperate against terrorism. There can be no state without the citizen.

The citizen would also be bereft without a state. The state represented by the

high and mighty leadership and governed through the bureaucracy cannot therefore be above the citizen. The trust between the state and the citizen badly needs to be restored. Ask the lad who waves the tricolour when Sachin Tendulkar scores a century. He will say he waves it for India, but cares little for the state represented by the governments of the country.

That sentiment was also echoed by a released hostage, who felt ashamed that representatives of other countries had reached Kandahar before the Indian officials reached there. What would be the consequences of this outcome of the hijack? There would certainly be an upsurge in the confidence of the terrorist organizations and their foreign mentors.

They now have confirmation of the vulnerabilities of the Indian security structures. They know now that it is the political leadership which is the Achilles heel of Indian security. What the terrorist cannot win by taking on the Indian military or other security forces, he would now attempt to obtain through exploiting the chinks in the politician's armour.

Security cannot be predicated solely on the security forces. Years of over reliance on security forces have led to a false sense of security in the political leadership of the nation. The answer to every security incident is to raise yet more battalions of police and para-military forces. In some states the chief ministers have abrogated their responsibility by stating that the Centre should give them more battalions.

Ultimately the answer to terrorism is to build the confidence in people's minds that the state cares for them. That care and concern will be demonstrated when the governments become accountable.

Jammu and Kashmir is the malaise of which the hijacking was a symptom. The deeper malaise is of governance overtaken by a venal official system. It is a political rather than a security problem. More and ever more packages of thousands of crores of rupees are given unto the state with no perceptible difference in the quality of life. The repeated slaughters of innocents evoke only a flying visit by a Central minister and promises of more battalions. These are the fields insensitive governments sow and terrorists reap.

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir is far from the minds of the political leadership. The hijacking has brought it into the people's minds. Kargil had earlier brought it into the citizens' hearts. That is where the terrorist seeks to reach.

Through the hearts and minds of the people the terrorist and his masters hope to get at the Indian state. The terrorists are professionals. The hijacking has shown them that the state is being handled by amateurs.

The author, is director, Delhi Policy Group, and former director-general military operations

THE TELEGRAPH  
10 JAN 2000

# Systemic Collapse

## Bungling All Around on the Hijacking

11-12/10/11  
By K SUBRAHMANYAM

*"If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you" — Rudyard Kipling "If".*

THE recent hijacking of IC 814 was not only a traumatic experience for the passengers but also tested the mettle of this nation to stand up to such incidents of terrorism. The hijacking was an act of political terrorism and the available indicators point to Pakistani organisations as being active promoters of this outrage. Political terrorism has been defined by Grant Wardlaw, a scholar, as the use or threat of use of violence by an individual or a group whether acting for or in opposition to established authority when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety and/or fear inducing effects in a target group bigger than the immediate victims with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political demands of the perpetrators.

### Terror and Anxiety

Aircraft hijacking has become a preferred terrorist act because it is able to subject a large number of people — millions watching television sets — to extreme anxiety or fear and gives the terrorists total control over the lives of 100 to 300 passengers in an extremely fragile environment. Since aerial hijacking is often a transnational crime, it is highlighted by the international electronic media and flashed all over the world. Since most airports in industrialised countries have effective checks against weapons being taken into the aircraft, terrorists often look for vulnerable points in aircraft routes where the security system can be subverted or bypassed. In this respect, developing countries provide greater opportunities for the hijackers. The induction of wide-bodied jets have also compelled hijacking operations to become a team effort involving four or five people.

The main objective of this act of terror is to obtain the publicity accompanying it and to secure the release of other terrorists in custody in the target state. The hostages when taken are assets to the terrorists and are meant to be used as bargaining chips. There have been cases in which a hostage or two has been killed but those cases are more the exception than the rule. However, terrorists have to resort to frequent threats to kill during the hijacking in order to heighten the anxiety and fear of the viewing

audience and generate pressure from them on the state with which the terrorists are negotiating.

The terrorists' attempt to listen to international radio channels to ascertain public reaction and then calibrate their moves to generate a further sense of terror and anxiety through application of pressure on the victims and the public announcement of the same. These are standard features of any hijacking. The Kandahar one was somewhat different from others since the hijackers and the aircraft were in a territory not totally hostile to them. The hijackers had no worries about their getaway. While there were declarations about storming the aircraft if they harmed the hostages, there were also reassurances to the hijackers that no foreign forces would be allowed to operate in that airfield.

In these circumstances, the first duty of the state and media committed to thwart the designs of terrorists is to reduce the anxiety and concern of the families of hostages and of the public at large. In this respect, both the Indian state and media, with some minor exceptions, failed miserably. On the very first day, the government should have taken steps to brief the media about the profiles of hijacking, and set up a centre to provide correct, authentic and the latest available information to the relatives, the media and the public. An effort should have been made to contact former airline captains and crew members who have had experience of earlier hijackings.

### Media Callousness

Similarly, passengers who have been through this ordeal before could have been called to reassure people. The ambassadors and high commissioners of countries which had their nationals in the hijacked aircraft could have been interviewed on television to show that the international community was with India and shared our ordeal. The government and government-owned media should have solicited the help of people with real expertise to comment on the hijacking. Above all, the government should have arranged accommodation for all the concerned families and organised prayer meetings and counselling. If these measures had been adopted there would have been no public demonstrations.

The government machinery was incompetent and indifferent. The

media as a whole cannot be expected to be more competent than the government since they come from the same segment of society which produces the bureaucracy and politicians. Instead of reassurance the public got a whole set of commentators, who, by and large competed with each other in deepening the anxiety and concern of the families and the nation. No attempt was made to go into the history of hijackings and highlight the low probability of the hostages coming to serious harm. Pakistani propaganda was freely quoted in sections of our media to show that the hostages were on the verge of collapse. The callousness of sections of our media and their flagrant violation of the privacy of grief were beyond belief. This reaction of the media was undoubtedly conveyed to the hijackers in the aircraft by Pakistani channels and the hijackers calibrated their pressure on the hostages and the government.

### Enhance Competence

Having never gone through the history of hijackings, the government and the media never told the country that even the toughest states have given in and yielded to the demands of terrorists on certain occasions. The issue was posed in the black and white terms of victory or surrender. Only three years ago, Israel was compelled to release the head of Hamas in a hostage exchange.

The mutual recriminations during and after the hijacking is a sign of incompetence both of society and the nation as a whole. As a young and developing nation, only 53 years old, we have our limitations. The first step in enhancing our competence is to recognise that as a nation, all sections of our society need to enhance their respective competences and this needs collective and cooperative effort, constructive and not destructive criticism and, above all, a binding sense of unity of purpose. This hijacking was a wake-up call to the nation as a whole. It revealed not only the incompetence of the government machinery but serious flaws in the way in which we function as a society.



# Hijackers didn't drive away, they came back

FROM K.P. NAYAR

New Delhi, Jan. 9: The negotiators who bought the release of 160 passengers aboard Flight IC 814 allowed the five sky pirates to hijack the Indian Airlines plane a second time after external affairs minister Jaswant Singh and the freed hostages left Kandahar for Delhi.

The second hijacking of the Airbus 300, whose flight originated in Kathmandu, took place within minutes of Singh leaving and TV crews and journalists pulling out of Kandahar airport.

Helpless officials of Indian Airlines and Alliance Air witnessed the second hijack as the sky pirates told them to stay away from the plane as they took possession of the Airbus once again.

The hijackers were accompanied on their return to the plane by the Taliban official who they had ostensibly taken hostage at the end of the negotiations to ensure their safe passage out of Afghanistan.

Gone was the gun which the hijackers had put to the head of the Taliban official — the brother of military commander Akhtar Usmani — for the benefit of the world media at the end of the hijack.

Instead, alarmed Indian airline officials found that the hijackers and their so-called hostage from the Taliban were joking and

laughing among themselves.

This made the Indians realise that the hijackers had not gone anywhere after releasing the hostages, but had stayed back at the airport.

More chilling was their realisation that the Taliban and the hijackers were in the terrorist plot together and that taking Usmani's brother as an Afghan hostage was a drama staged to fool the world. The Indians on the Kandahar airport tarmac were then scared to death.

The Indian negotiators had left the airline staff at Kandahar airport to bring back the hijacked plane after checks and servicing. But what shocked and frightened these officials who stayed back to answer the call of duty was that the negotiators, led by Vivek Katju, joint secretary in the ministry of external affairs, had left them at the mercy of the Taliban without any arrangements for their safety. Nor did Katju and his colleagues obtain any guarantee from the Taliban for safe return of the hijacked aircraft.

According to eyewitness accounts of these Indian aviation executives, the hijackers dis-

mounted from the same blue Land Rover in which they had ostensibly driven into the Afghanistan at sunset after releasing the passengers and told the Indians that they wanted to retrieve a suitcase from the cargo hold of the Airbus.

The Indians, who had by then started work on the plane, offered to get the cargo themselves. But the hijackers brusquely said they needed no help. The airline staff were then asked to keep safe distance from the plane.

What happened then in front of their eyes the Indians could not believe. Two of the hijackers got into the aircraft and operated the sophisticated equipment to activate the plane's cargo doors.

While Ibrahim Athar, alias Chief, brother of released militant Masood Azhar, kept an eye on the goings-on, the two hijackers entered the cargo hold.

There, they again operated the plane's switches to move the baggage containers. The Indians realised that the hijackers knew how to operate an aircraft.

In the light of home minister L.K. Advani's revelation of the id-

entity of the suspected hijackers — two of them are from the Defence Area in Karachi — there is speculation that the sky pirates included Pakistan Air Force personnel.

The Indian Airlines and Alliance Air officials also realised as the baggage unloading was in progress that the network which the hijackers had in Kathmandu was extensive.

Athar knew precisely which container in the cargo hold had his checked-in baggage. Three containers were brought out, but Athar knew without opening any of them that the suitcase he was looking for was in the third.

No one — except the hijackers — knows what the suitcase contained. But once it was retrieved, all the containers were put back, the baggage hold was closed and the hijackers left after saying their goodbyes to the Indians.

This time, with the TV cameras absent, the so-called Taliban hostage did not go with the hijackers. He probably went to the warmth of his Kandahar home, although Taliban officials continued to fool the world a day later by announcing that their hostage had been ultimately released by the hijackers.

Also the next day, a weary and frightened Indian crew returned to Delhi with the Airbus which had dominated TV screens across the world for a full week.



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# Plan to improve intelligence co-ordination

Kalyani Shanker  
New Delhi, January 9

RESPONDING TO the wake up call sounded by Kargil and the recent hostage crisis, the Prime Minister's Office is, at present, engaged in finding ways to ensure better co-ordination between various intelligence agencies, including RAW and the Intelligence Bureau.

A top government source confirmed that the "necessity has been established" and that the government is in the process of finding how to achieve better co-ordination.

"If there is a piece of intelligence information, has anyone acted on it and if not, why not? Also, whether the agency which has reported the information has followed up its own report", all these issues have to be sorted out, the source

said. It is pertinent to note that the K.C. Pant Committee on National Security has suggested the amalgamation of the Joint Intelligence Committee with the National Security Council (NSC) for better functioning. The JIC has no powers as of now and the intelligence agencies, as a rule, do not share all their information with it. This has resulted in considerable weakening of the body.

The NSC, on the other hand, is aimed at removing the problems posed by the multiplicity of the agencies. Another way to achieve better co-ordination is to get the heads of all agencies co-ordinate with each other.

The other option could be to let the secretariat of the National Security Council handle the co-ordination. "One thing is certain, we are not thinking of setting up any new department or a cell for this," the source said.

While military intelligence, the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing are some of the agencies engaged in intelligence gathering, they send their reports individually to various departments. The JIC, as a result, does not have much powers and mostly prepares research papers based on the intelligence information. There is also rivalry between the various intelligence agencies and they do not share all their information with each other or with the JIC.

"There is need for co-ordination of action and somebody has to take responsibility for each piece of intelligence information", a government source said.

The Subramanyam Committee report is yet to be made public. The panel was set up after criticism from the Opposition that the Vajpayee Government had failed in its duty to be sufficiently vigilant in protecting the borders.

# The hijack episode

By P. V. Indiresan

100-12

**B**ASICALLY, AN effective administration will exhibit three features: efficiency, fidelity and promptness. Efficiency is defined as output divided by input and will be the maximum when for any given input the output is the largest, or for any desired output the input is the minimum. Fidelity is a measure of how good, rather than how large, the output is. Fidelity may be lost due to contamination of three kinds — interference, noise and distortion. Interference is an extraneous or irrelevant factor added to the desired output. A telephone kiosk set up on a footpath is an interference in the utility of the footpath even though the booth by itself is a useful civic amenity. Noise is a different problem altogether. It is a disturbance which, unlike interference, has no intrinsic value. Litter on the footpath is an example of noise. Distortion is bad output — a hole in the footpath is a distortion. Finally, promptness is the opposite of delay.

In the recent hijack episode, the response was evidently not prompt. It took 40 minutes to inform the Prime Minister and another 40 for the Crisis Management Group to convene. Meanwhile, by all accounts, the Government stood paralysed. The problem was probably not one of individual failure but of a faulty system. Suppose a senior Minister suddenly falls ill while travelling in a car. That crisis will not be handled by the Health Secretary, let alone by the Health Minister, but by a doctor. In such a situation, the driver himself will decide to take the Minister to the nearest doctor and not await instructions from above to do so. Crisis management has two crucial features: one, it should be entrusted to specialists and two, the first response to the emergency must be taken by persons on the spot, at the lowest level, and not by top people far removed. In other words, a crisis may be unusual but the system should be so tuned that the response is automatic, prompt.

Consider, for example, an intrusion from across the border. A lowly havildar who happens to notice the intrusion will not wait to get clearance from his superiors before taking appropriate action. The

before responding to the crisis. Incidentally, that havildar has the freedom to kill, has the right to kill, has the means to kill, and also the skill to kill. No one at the top has any such capability! In other words, crisis response requires that people on the spot will have the freedom, the right, the means and the skill to take extreme steps, whatever they are.

Those at the top, whether bureaucrats or Ministers, are all generalists. They can

can have neither, not even experience. The experience needed for handling a crisis is not doing different things at different times but doing the same thing again and again until the response becomes automatic, so automatic that it requires little or no conscious effort. No generalist can have experience of that kind. Being Education Secretary one day, Textile Secretary another day and chairman of a bureau some other time will not provide a

*Crisis response requires that people on the spot will have the freedom, the right, the means and the skill to take extreme steps, whatever they are.*

propose how much resource should be allocated for each function and also what kind of output is desired. They may only decide what the allocation may be or what the output should be, but not both.

Once either of these is fixed, the decision on the other should be that of the specialist and no one else. In turn, the specialist should take the sole responsibility for the outcome. If what the specialist offers is not satisfactory, the generalist may choose another specialist. Such a selection is, indeed, the primary duty of the generalists. Further, once the financial allocation is made and the output decided, the generalists should not get involved with actual implementation. They should confine themselves to monitoring the operation at mutually-accepted check-posts and stay away from day-to-day management. Unfortunately, the importance of these basic principles has not yet been recognised in India, particularly by politicians.

Delay is one of the most important weapons in the armoury of the generalists of the bureaucratic variety. To delay fuelling the hijacked aircraft in Amritsar was typical of such reaction. When in doubt, the bureaucrats delay! Thus, paralysis by analysis is likely whenever they get involved. It is often said war is too important a matter to be left to generals. By the same token, fighting a battle is too ticklish a matter to be left to the generalists.

Handling any crisis requires both experience and skill. As a rule, the generalists

However, if anyone is truly interested, there is already one successful example of crisis management within the Government itself. Soon after the devastation by the super-cyclone in Orissa, normal rail traffic was restored without any fuss. That happens any time and every time the operations of the Railways are interrupted in any way. If the Government is keen on learning about crisis management, it need go no further than its Railway Board to find out how that should be done.

Whenever a hijack occurs, the response lies between two extremes: Get rid of the hijackers at all costs or save lives at all costs. In the recent episode, the decision was to place the highest priority on saving the passengers' lives. There is no way of judging whether that was right or wrong. However, the Government's response can be, and should be, faulted on three grounds: one, the delay in putting together the Crisis Management Group; two, the vacillation at Amritsar; and three, the manner specialists were kept out of the picture. Letting the aircraft go was possibly a mistake but, about that, one can have two views.

Prediction being the fashion, let me make one. Just as Ghazni invaded India 14 times to be bought off every time and did not return for the 15th time only because he died, hijackers will come again and again and will stop only when there is no Indian Airlines left. Of course, we may change; some day, we may gather our nerve to take calculated risks. However, that does not appear to be in our character. Look at the on-going Australian tests. We are supposed to have the world's top three batsmen but we have been losing badly because our players are scared. Sorry to say, as the relatives of the hijack victims amply demonstrated, courage is not in our nature. There was one extraordinary exception. Some years ago, Mr. Yugandhar, an IAS officer in Andhra Pradesh (who later became Secretary to the Prime Minister), volunteered to enter a navalite den as a replacement for the hostages they had captured. One wonders what would have happened had either the External Affairs Minister, or his critic, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, made a similar offer.

# CBI forms team to probe hijack

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. — CBI has set up a special investigation team to probe the 24 December hijack of the Kathmandu-Delhi Indian Airlines flight IC 814.

All aspects, including the alleged goof at Amritsar's Raja Sansi airport, the reported security lapse at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International airport, and involvement of Pakistani High Commission officials at the Nepalese capital, will be investigated.

The team, headed by agency joint director, Mr ML Sharma, will go into the possible involvement of Pakistan's ISI in the hijacking. Over 150 passengers and flight crew spent eight days as hostages of the five hijackers on board the plane.

The SIT's first priority would be to interrogate the four Harkat-ul Ansar men arrested in Mumbai on 30 December. The hijackers had sent a message to one of them from Kandahar, asking him to convey to a certain London-based journalist that the Airbus would be blown up if India did not meet their demands. Police found photographs of the hijackers on the arrested quartet, besides seizing arms, ammunition and explosives.

Helping the CBI team would be Central Intelligence agen-

cies, and the Union home and external affairs ministries. The investigators will travel to Dubai and Kathmandu, officials said. Indian Intelligence reports about Kathmandu being an ISI base will be followed up, and the team will try to establish the possible direct link between the ISI and the air pirates.

The SIT will study the dossiers of all 36 militants whose release the hijackers had initially sought. Three —

## FAKE PASSPORTS

MUMBAI, Jan. 9. — A city travel agent and two of his staff have been arrested by the crime branch for allegedly supplying fake passports to the four ISI agents picked up on 30 December for having links with the hijackers of IC 814.

Investigators swooped on Suresh Bhatt Nathe's central Mumbai shop, Seven Travels yesterday, and arrested him and two employees, Prakash Jadhav and Vishnu Yeram. A local court has remanded all three in 14 days' police custody. — PTI

M a u l a n a Masood Azhar, M u s h t a q Ahmed Zargar and Ahmed Omar Sayed Sheikh — were ultimately released.

**Extradition:** India is likely to seek the extradition of Ahmed Omar Sayed Sheikh, the British hijacker of Pakistani origin, should he surface in Britain, adds IANS. from London.

Britain has indicated Sheikh may be tried under the Indo-British extradition treaty or the anti-terrorists Act, says PTI.

IANS reported that India has presented evidence to contradict an argument by the British foreign office that Sheikh can return to his family because he had not been convicted of any offence.

New Delhi informed London the hijacker had been convicted of two charges in India.

■ Masood calls for mediation on J&K, page 8

# India for extradition of hijackers

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 5. The Indian Government would soon seek the extradition of the five militants responsible for hijacking an Indian Airlines aircraft from Kathmandu in Nepal to Kandahar in Afghanistan, according to the Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani. Talking to *The Hindu* here today, he said, "whatever might be the pretensions of Pakistan, nobody has any doubt that the hijackers are Pakistani agents. I have no doubt that Pakistan is in conspiracy with the hijackers who are serving its cause. The inference is that they had taken refuge in Pakistan, where they are now heroes. As that country is a signatory to the Hague and Montreal conventions on hijacking, it was its duty to try the hijackers, if not extradite them to India."

He said, "already there is plenty of evidence to show that they are Pakistani nationals. However, once we are sure that the hijackers have been given protection in Pakistan, we will make a formal request for extraditing them to India as there is no chance of their being tried in that country."

Asked why no storming operation was carried out to rescue the hostages, the Minister said, "if the plane had been crippled at Amritsar, we would have been in a better bargaining position. When we failed in Amritsar, how can we expect this to be done in Kandhar. To my knowledge no request was made to the Taliban regime to carry out a storming

operation. However, if only some pressure had been brought about by the United Nations Security Council, the Taliban forces might have conducted a storming operation to save the passengers."

He said though India did not take any initiative to convene the Security Council, the Council could have suo motu discussed this problem and exerted some pressure.

If a resolution had been adopted condemning the incident, storming operations would have gained legitimacy. He regretted that the Council did not take any action in this regard. Also no international pressure was exerted by the Western countries.

Mr. Jethmalani felt that the Taliban regime, which claimed it was the de facto government in Afghanistan, had an obligation under the international conventions (to which Afghanistan was a signatory), to capture the hijackers and hand them over to India.

"But Taliban forces have a practical problem. They are indebted to Osama Bin Laden who has helped and encouraged them to take control of most areas in Afghanistan" he said.

On the steps the Government proposed to take to prevent such incidents, the Minister said some measures had already been introduced to strengthen the security at "suspicious airports", particularly where no visas were required.

**Bill on Law Commission  
soon: Page 15**

THE HINDU

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# A circle squared in Kandahar

By Pran Chopra

*Clearly, despite the many hijackings India has had to face, no procedures are in place for handling such situations. They must be, soon.*

10-10 (1)

THESE ARE lessons to be drawn from every single scene of the "hijack drama", from Kathmandu, where it showed up a longstanding diplomatic failure; to Amritsar, where it started a frenzy of self-deception and self-flagellation; to New Delhi, where it triggered an exercise in squaring a circle; to Kandahar, where unjustified recrimination clouded diplomatic possibilities; to the epilogue, which once again shows India's formidable ability to shoot itself in the foot.

The pilot of the ill-fated plane, Captain Devi Sharan, says that at the last checkpoint at Kathmandu airport, where a camera X-rays the hand baggage, he saw that the staff member manning the monitor, whose mind and eyes should have been on the screen, was busy knitting away. But that apart, four things have been known to Indian authorities for years. First, Indian Airlines has been hit most often by hijackers; second, it is the favourite target of Pakistan-related hijackers; third, Nepal has become a notorious base of Pakistani operations against India; and fourth, security at Kathmandu is extremely lax.

Why did India fail to do anything about this deadly mix, when Indo-Nepal relations are a dense network of mutual interdependence and means of mutual persuasion? Does the failure lie with the master-minders of our foreign policy or lower level operators? Many political parties have ruled each country. All of them owe an answer to both peoples. How do they propose to improve matters?

Our responses also failed us at Amritsar. There was time enough there to block the plane but because it was allowed to escape a howl of protest went up from virtually all "experts" in the security, strategic, media fraternity, who called it a blunder. But the protest proved only two things: first, how utterly wrong famous experts can be, and second, how thoroughly a frenzied pack can smother dissenting judgement and distort policy making.

It is very clear that till the time some of the hostages were released at Dubai the Indian authorities, through no fault of theirs, had not had any chance to assess the number, the nationality, the aims, the demands, the weaponry of the hijackers, the levels of their determination or des-

levels the happenings at Amritsar and Lahore had made it clear that India would either have to see scores of passengers die in a violent end to the hijacking or agree to release a few chosen militants. The Prime Minister, and some of the Opposition leaders consulted by him, thought the latter would be a more humane course. But given the feverish pitch of public opinion, as reflected in the media and partly built up by them, few dared to say so in public except the former Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral, who confirmed his opinion in a speech in Meerut. The proclaimed mantra was: The passengers will return home safely and "national interest" will not be compromised.

Fortunately this circle was squared in Kandahar. All hostages came home (barring a most unfortunate fatality earlier on), and there is not much reason why the release of the three militants (as of Hamas by Israel) should fuel the vigour of the militants or depress the morale of the security forces any more than the reverse happened when the three were arrested.

But there is no reason why another gain which was within our reach in Kandahar should have been allowed to slip through our fingers while the government tried to appease the same domestic cacophony. For the first time in a decade a window opened between India's abiding interests in Afghanistan and the authorities in charge over there, and without whose help the safe return of the hostages would have been a lot more difficult. For every one voice in India that appreciated this help there were ten which complained the Taliban did not do more (some even said it should have handed the hijackers over to us), forgetting that for years we have been hostile to the Taliban and friendly with its toughest enemies, America and Mr. Ahmed Shah Masood.

This is not to suggest that we should shut our diplomatic eyes and get cozy with Kabul. We have also to look to our relations with Russia (and with Iran, though it has recently re-opened its border with Kabul). But there is no reason why we should not have used the window to survey future opportunities before we shut out the view with our untimely an unnecessary complaining.

die in a crash landing in Pakistan than fall into Indian hands. Again, when the Lahore airport refused to let the plane land, the hijackers decided that whatever the loss of their own or the hostages' lives, the plane must crashland on some road but must not turn back to Amritsar. He was only a minute or two away from a crash landing when, seeing such desperation, the Lahore tower allowed him in. Given such a mood among the hijackers, he says, an Indian assault on the plane in Amritsar, a logical outcome of blocking it, could have cost scores of lives. Would the "experts" have preferred that? If so, they should say so out loud and prepare the country for such sacrifices in the future.

On the other hand, what was on display on all media channels was total unpreparedness of another kind, and the display probably aggravated it. The anxiety and grief of the relatives of the hostages certainly needed and deserved the display it got. It made everyone more aware than some might have been of what India is up against and must be ready for. What the authorities needed to do, failed to do, and must not neglect in future called for pointed comment, particularly their failure to provide more reassuring and comforting treatment of the relatives.

But the noisy demonstrations by them, their dharmas, the denunciation by them of everyone in any authority, added fuel to the fire, distracted attention from policy choices, put pressure on the Indian negotiators, encouraged the hijackers to step up their demands because their handlers in Pakistan knew how much pressure was building up on the Government in New Delhi. But when the relatives became quieter and said national interests could not be sacrificed, the question hung in the air what made the change and why it could not be made earlier. Clearly, despite the many hijackings India has had to face, no procedures are in place for handling such situations. They must be, soon.

Regarding the policy response at higher

# Black comedy of errors

The grim story of bungled negotiations during the hijack of IC 814 yields a few moments of bizarre entertainment

■ There is little sympathy among New Delhi's diplomatic community for Indian diplomacy which is now whining that the Americans let India down ■

**F**or journalists reporting one grave crisis after another, life would have been grim if it were not for situations which are bizarre in the midst of these crises.

When innocent Sikhs were being butchered in Delhi after Indira Gandhi's murder, orders went out from the army headquarters to move a unit to the capital to reinforce the inadequate security arrangements. It was only after the unit set out from Pune that the army's top brass realized that the regiment which was being sent to the capital was made up of Sikhs. Half way into their journey, the unit was diverted to another city.

After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the authorities similarly despatched an army unit to Ayodhya, but discovered too late that there was a problem. The battle cry of the unit was "Jai Sri Ram". Once the unit reached Ayodhya, it was ordered to change its battle cry to "Har Har Mahadev".

**T**o be fair, such bizarre situations are not unique to India. When the president of the United States, Bill Clinton, decided to send his troops into Mogadishu to check the disintegration of the Somali state, the US army started looking for American citizens who spoke the Somali language. It was not easy, but ultimately a young marine called Hussain Aideed was appointed as the interpreter and liaison officer.

It was not until many weeks later — and after the Americans had suffered casualties — that the Pentagon realized Hussain Aideed was the son of Mohammed Farah Aideed, the very Somali warlord whom the US forces were trying to subdue.

Of all the stories which one has heard about the recent hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814, the most bizarre is the one about how the ministry of external affairs first heard of the sky piracy.

The airport control tower in Lucknow was the first to pick up the message from IC 814 that the aircraft had been hijacked. Simultaneously, the prime minister's aircraft, which was returning from Patna to Delhi, also picked up the radio message.

Not surprisingly, the airport control tower in Lucknow was at sixes and sevens over the emergency message. How-

ever, that did not prevent air controllers from talking about the hijack to all and sundry at Lucknow airport. They did a thorough job of gossiping, but took their own sweet time to convey the message to the right people in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, one lowly police constable on duty at the airport was among those who had picked up the gossip. He was beholden to a senior officer in South Block who had once done the constable a good turn. The officer, Ajay Singh, joint secretary (security), needless to add, is not a professional diplomat. The external affairs minister, Jaswant Singh, who has known him for many years brought him to the MEA to clean the Augean stables of South Block's security.

Ajay Singh, who has a reputation as a cop with a heart, is also said to command extreme loyalty across the board — and cutting across ranks — in the police force, wherever he has worked. The loyalty of the constable at Lucknow airport was, on Christmas eve, a godsend to South Block.

As soon as the constable picked up the gossip at Lucknow airport about the hijack, he went to an STD booth in the terminal building, spent his own money and called up Ajay Singh in the hope that the information may be of use to him.

Ajay Singh, who was completely taken aback, straightaway informed the foreign secretary, Lalit Mansingh. The foreign secretary, the cautious diplomat that he is, naturally asked Ajay Singh to confirm the tip-off so that he could act on it.

Since South Block had come to hear about the hijack in so bizarre a fashion, it is not surprising that its mandarins were way off the mark in their assessments of the crisis or in their efforts to find a way out of it.

There is little sympathy among New Delhi's large diplomatic community for Indian diplomacy whining in the aftermath of the hijack that the Americans let India down. And the attitude of these diplomats reflects the considered opinion of their governments that India's recent expectations from the US have been not only unrealistic but also immature.

**T**ake, for instance, the landing at Minhad air base near Dubai. Officials of the US administration are now putting out the story that they tried to persuade Dubai to detain the plane at Minhad and terminate the hijacking there. According to these officials, Dubai did not want to get involved in the hijacking lest it should subsequently be at the receiving end of an Islamic backlash for any help given to India.

The tragedy is not that the Americans are putting out this story, but that the Indians — including some ministers whom the US envoy, Richard Celeste, has met recently — are swallowing it hook, line and sinker.

Minhad, for the uninitiated, is an air base located in Dubai, but it is not controlled by Dubai authorities. Originally meant to be Dubai's second airport, it was converted into an air base during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and placed totally under the charge of the US air force for operations against Iraq.

After the Persian Gulf war, the air base reverted to local authorities, but only nominally. But meanwhile, the armed forces of the United Arab Emirates were unified, liquidating the central military command which was Dubai's fiefdom. What this means is that although Minhad is in Dubai, it is actually under the charge of the unified UAE defence command.

**T**he chief of the unified command is Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed, son of Abu Dhabi ruler and UAE president, Shaikh Zayed. The chief of UAE's secret police is Shaikh Hazaa, another son of Shaikh Zayed. It is one of the worst kept secrets in the Persian Gulf that the US played a key role, post-gulf war, in unifying the UAE defence command. An apocryphal story in the Persian Gulf is that these two sons of Shaikh Zayed do not even rearrange the furniture in their offices without consulting Martin Indyk, US assistant secretary of state for the Near East, a former ambassador to Israel. It indicates the kind of influence that the US has over the UAE defence set up, of which Minhad is a part.

The Americans are, therefore, correct in saying that Dubai was not in a position to detain the Indian plane. They could not have, even if they wanted to. Only the two sons of the Abu Dhabi ruler, who are in charge of defence and the secret police, could have stopped the plane. The million dollar question is: was India able to persuade Indyk to talk to either of these princes?

When India opened the high profile anti-terrorist dialogue with the US some months ago, this column had warned that New Delhi was chasing a mirage. The UAE experience involving the US during the hijack should be an eye opener to those in the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government who believe that India and the US are potential allies.

The US did not become a super power by protecting the interests of other countries. It remains a super power by ensuring that its own interests are well taken care of. America will go along with India in New Delhi's efforts to contain and fight terrorism. But it will not fight India's battle against terror. IC 814 has, hopefully, disabused any illusions South Block may have had in this regard.

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## Compelling proof of Pak terrorist activities: envoy

NEW YORK: Evidence of Pakistan's involvement in the recent Indian airlines plane hijack and other terrorist activities is "overwhelming" and India has provided "conclusive proof" of that, Indian ambassador to the U.S. Naresh Chandra has said.

Talking to reporters on Tuesday, he said terrorism from Pakistan was not Kashmir-specific and that its effects had been felt worldwide, including New York where World Trade Centre was bombed.

"Even if the Kashmir issue were to be resolved today, Pakistani terrorism would not stop," he said. "The hijackers were Pakistanis, they sought the release of Pakistani terrorists and escaped into Pakistan along with released prisoners," he said, wondering what more proof was needed to show Islamabad's involvement. Mr Chandra said terrorism was being encouraged by rogue agencies in Pakistan and the common man had nothing to do with it. In fact, they themselves were as much victims of these terrorist activities as those outside, he said.

He strongly rejected the criticism of the Indian government's han-

dling of the hijacking crisis, saying that in such situations there were no clear cut solutions but often murky options. The only thing that could be done was to select the best possible option, he said.

Asked on India's inability to convince the U.S. about Pakistan's involvement, Mr Chandra said Washington didn't require convincing as there were several reports from its own agencies detailing terrorist activities from Pakistan.

The only thing the U.S. did not do under its law was declare Pakistan a terrorist state, but the administration's spokesmen have all along been saying that the case is under constant review, Mr Chandra said. "However, that does not mean that Washington does not believe in what India has been saying," he said.

Mr Chandra also objected to Maulana Masood Azhar being referred to as a religious leader. "He is a terrorist and not a religious leader. Which religion teaches terrorism?" he asked. Mr Chandra said Masood Azhar initially spoke against both India and the U.S. However, after the U.S. sought action against him, he toned his criticism down. (PTI)

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

13 JAN 2000

## Kashmiri group asks Pak to arrest hijackers

LONDON: A London-based Kashmiri group has asked Pakistan to arrest the hijackers of the Indian Airlines aircraft and try them if Islamabad wanted to convince the world that it was not involved in the hijacking.

The immediate arrest and trial of the five hijackers by Pakistan would go a long way in convincing the world that its intelligence agency ISI had nothing to do with the hijacking, M. Anwar Khan, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Peace Committee for Europe, said in a statement here.

Pakistan's failure to trace the hijackers would certainly give the impression that authorities in Islam-

abad have not only left the sky pirates free but have also facilitated Maulana Masood Azhar and two other militants, freed by India, in planning a mass recruitment drive for a fresh 'jihad' (holy war) against India in Kashmir, he said.

Immediately after his release Azhar declared his 'jihad' on both India and the U.S. But a few days later he suspended the call against the U.S. without giving any reason, Mr Khan said, adding perhaps the reason was known to Pakistan military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf.

Countering Pakistan's charge that the hijacking was master-minded by the Indians themselves as

part of their ongoing conspiracy to have Pakistan declared a terrorist state, Mr Khan asked, "If India had masterminded the hijacking, would they not have done all in their power to publicise affiliation of the hijackers to one of the known Pakistani terror groups."

Again, if India was itself responsible, then why were only three mullahs to be released. Were they really Indian undercover agents, Mr Khan asked in a statement.

"If, as according to Mr Khan, the hijackers were indeed Indians and were carrying out a plan devised by the Indian authorities, then surely he should be thanking them for this act of irrationality. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 JAN 2000

# Nepal hijack report delayed

**Kathmandu, Jan. 13:** A report by a Nepalese inquiry team into how five Muslim militants were able to hijack an Indian Airlines Airbus flying from Kathmandu to New Delhi on Christmas eve has been delayed. Official sources said the findings of the hijack probe committee would be released in two weeks' time. The team, headed by former police inspector general Hem Bahadur Singh, had been due to hand over their report on Monday.

Nepalese hoteliers and tourism bosses have urged an early release of the findings into how the militants boarded a passenger plane carrying about 200 people at Kathmandu. The hijack eventually ended in southern Afghanistan a few hours before New Year's eve, when India released three Pakistani militants from jail. The hijackers were also allowed to

leave Afghanistan unhindered.

During their eight days on board, they stabbed one passenger to death and criss-crossed the middle-east flying to northern India, Pakistan, and Dubai before being granted permission to land at Kandahar.

During the hijacking, India alleged the hijackers had flown from Pakistan to Nepal and walked on to the Indian Airlines plane unchallenged with their weapons. Indian Airlines has suspended regular flights to Kathmandu. Meanwhile, tourism bosses blame the incident for a downturn in the number of Indian tourists visiting Nepal.

A senior official of the Hotel Association Of Nepal and an official of the ministry of tourism and civil aviation said on Thursday that Indian tourist numbers were down to 70 per cent. (AFP)

THE ASIAN AGE

14 JAN 2000

# Tough anti-terrorism law in pipeline

Jay Raina

New Delhi, January 14, 1982

**T**HE GOVERNMENT intends to enact a new anti-terrorism law providing for severe punishment for terrorist-related crimes, including offences connected with hijacking of an aircraft.

"The new legislation, which is essentially aimed at combating international terrorism, will take care of all hijacking incidents that flow from such criminal activities," highly placed sources told *The Hindustan Times*.

A draft legislation on this count is presently being finalised in consultation with the Law Commission of India and the Government is expected to ensure its enactment during the ensuing Budget session of Parliament.

Senior officials involved in the drafting of the new legislation are understood to be looking closely into similar anti-terrorism legisla-

tions operating in some of the developed countries, the US and UK in particular.

The sources maintained that India's security forces involved in combating terrorism sponsored from across the borders were feeling seriously constrained in the absence of a comprehensive anti-terrorism law. According to rough estimates the number of casualties in this violence during the last 15 years stands at 30,000.

"Anti-terrorism laws in the West are extremely stringent though the number of people killed in such violent incidents in these countries is akin to peanuts," the sources averred. The new Indian law would address itself to twin objectives - providing severe punishments and also taking care of protecting the human rights.

However, even before the new legislation is enacted, the existing law of the land, including three international conventions, could take care of the offenders involved

in the recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines Airbus.

India has already enforced (legally) all the three international conventions against hijacking, passed in Tokyo (1963), the Hague (1970) and Montreal (1971) respectively through the Suppression of Unlawful Activities against the Safety of Civil Aviation Act, 1982.

Over 100 countries, including India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, are signatories to these conventions. Section (4) of the Montreal Convention provides for life imprisonment of the hijackers and others abetting such a crime, besides other severe penalties.

The sources said that Pakistan had already breached the convention by providing shelter to the five hijackers and three dreaded terrorists swapped against the safe release of the IA plane's hostages. "We have details over the movement of the eight offenders from

Kandahar to their safe havens inside Pakistan," they indicated. "We are awaiting the response of the international community (read the UN Security Council members especially the US)," the sources said, while asserting that India was in possession of irrefutable evidence of Pakistan's involvement in the hijacking episode.

The sources maintained that Pakistan had no choice except for either prosecuting the offenders or responding favourably to India's request for their extradition under international conventions.

The sources indicated that Pakistan could face severe sanctions from the international community if it continued to breach international conventions both in letter and spirit. "India is in touch with the World powers over Pakistan's breach of international law as spelt out in the UN's conventions over the issue," they added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 JAN 2000

# India asks Pak to extradite hijackers

By Seema Guha

NEW DELHI: After publicly pointing a finger at Pakistan's complicity in the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane and asking the international community to brand Pakistan a terrorist state, India remembered that Islamabad should also be formally informed of its role in the hijacking.

Foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh summoned Pakistan high commissioner Ashraf Jehangir Qazi to his office and issued a *note verbale* on the hijacking. Pakistan has been asked to apprehend the five hijackers, assumed to be in Pakistan, and hand them over for prosecution in India.

Significantly, Pakistan was also reminded that "India reserved the right to take further measures as appropriate." What these measures could be are open to interpretation. Could they be diplomatic or military? Would it mean a U.S. or Israeli style attack on terrorist camps operating in PoK. U.S. missiles had attacked Osama Bin Laden's camp in Afghanistan in retaliation for the bombing of its embassies in Africa.

In a statement, the ministry of external affairs said Pakistan had a legal obligation as a party to UN conventions against hijacking to hand over the men to India.

Pakistan is a signatory to the Montreal (1971) and Hague (1970) conventions as well as a SAARC document for suppression of terrorism. Islamabad therefore had "a clear legal obligation" to "report to the International Civil Aviation Organisation all relevant information in its possession regarding the hijacking and the action taken against the offender," the MEA statement said.

MEA spokesman Raminder Singh Jassal explained why India took so long to put across its suspicions to Pakistan. "These things take time. We were engaged in completing all the legal and official formalities before presenting our case," he said.

Islamabad has from the start said that it had no hand in the hijacking. Mr Qazi rejected all charges that his government was linked to the hijacking.

India pointed out that the released terrorists had been spotted in Pakistan and PoK. "Given that a large number of terrorists whose release was sought were Pakistani nationals and that the first destination chosen by the hijackers was Lahore, there was strong ground to believe that the hijackers were currently in Pakistan."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

16 JAN 2000

# Increase in ISI activity in N-E: Gen Kalkat

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA  
CALCUTTA, JAN 15

THE ISI has stepped up its activities in the North-East, especially in North Bengal and Assam, Lt General HRS Kalkat, GOC-in-C, eastern command, said today.

Addressing mediapersons here after an investiture ceremony on the occasion of Army Day, General Kalkat said the ISI was making inroads to the areas through the Siliguri corridor over a period of time.

He said with the large immigrant population in the areas, the ground was very fertile for the ISI

to operate, which was also providing assistance to different insurgent groups in India.

Expressing concern over the ISI activities in the region, General Kalkat said it was making special efforts to prop up militant groups in Assam and cautioned, "It is high time to check its sinister activities in India." Referring to overall law and order situation in the North-East, General Kalkat said insurgency continued to be a problem in Manipur while it was at low-key in Assam and Nagaland.

General Kalkat said to ensure a smooth system of disposal of mili-

tancy, the unified command was considered as the best model which had helped control insurgency in Assam and Nagaland and wondered why some of the states in the North-East like Manipur were not inclined to accept this model.

Termining the law and order situation in Manipur as "the worst", he said there were reports of linkage of politicians with terrorists in that state and advocated establishing the unified command structure there to combat insurgency.

He regretted that on several occasions, apprehended insurgents had been released by the civil ad-

ministration despite being confirmed criminals, which posed a problem to the Army.

Earlier, General Kalkat presented gallantry, distinguished service and other awards to the officers and jawans in recognition of their acts of exceptional courage.

The highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of the Sena medal to the mother of late Lt Kanad Bhattacharya who had sacrificed his life in the recent Kargil conflict.

General Kalkat also released a book titled *Defenders Of The Dawn* on the occasion.



# Security panel for restructuring of armed forces

Shishir Gupta  
New Delhi, January 18

117-10  
1911

**T**HE NATIONAL Security Advisory Board has recommended that the country's defence budget should be increased to three per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The current figure is around 2.3 per cent. 9-02 N Security

The board has given the recommendation in its strategic defence review (SDR). It is understood that the review has also called for the setting up of a defence planning and strategic group under the National Security Council. The group will be for integrated planning and budgeting, and a restructuring of the armed forces.

Mr K. Subrahmanyam heads the NSAB. It had submitted the review to the Vajpayee Government in mid-December. The document is presently being studied and evaluated by the Government.

The board suggests overhauling of the network for better synergy in collection and collation of human and electronic intelligence. The SDR has recommended that the Government should think in terms of a national intelligence set-up encompassing external, internal, para-military forces and armed forces' intelligence wings.

The SDR had attracted a lot of hype after the Pokhran-II tests. It was conceived to be the document that would shape India's future defence posture. It was mandated to plug gaps in strategic affairs, technological requirements and defence planning of the country. However, this NSAB document appears to be an exercise in gener-

ality with a few innovative sparks.

For instance, the SDR recommends that a board be set up to identify strategic technologies for future development of the defence profile of the armed forces. The proposed board will give directions to the defence research and development units to work on these identified strategic technologies so that these can be indigenously developed or imported.

Defence analysts point out that there is nothing new in the recommendation. The Indian Army has had a Strategic Technologies Environment Assessment (STEA) Board for the past decade or so. The primary purpose of the STEA Board is to identify critical technologies that need to be acquired by the Army for its future growth.

The NSAB document also differs from the Indian Navy's perception of energy security on the "Silk Road" of this millennium (from nine degree channel in Lakshadweep to Malacca Straits near the Malaysian peninsula). The Navy's view that was formulated in the form of Indian Navy's SDR (submitted in April 1998) was that this route could be used as a lever for defence diplomacy as 50 per cent of the world's oil passes through this route.

Instead, the NSAB document has called for the setting up of an energy management group.

This suggestion is based on the theory that country's energy demands will spiral if India is to achieve a target of 6-7 per cent growth per annum. Thus, it lays emphasis on the management of energy resources of the country rather than energy security.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES  
19 JAN 2000

## India steps up pressure on hijackers issue

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JAN.19.** India today sought to intensify international pressure for the extradition of the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane, which was taken to Kandahar, Afghanistan.

In an official letter to the President of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the Indian representative at the headquarters of this organisation, Mr. A.P Singh, cited the legal grounds on which the hijackers could be extradited. Mr. Singh pointed out to the relevant articles of the 1971 Montreal Convention and the Hague convention which could be invoked for the extradition of the hijackers of IC-814.

According to the note verbale, India is legally empowered to exercise jurisdiction over the hijackers as the hijacked plane was registered in India.

Pakistan, the note said, was legally obliged to take the hijackers into custody as there are "strong grounds" to believe that the desperadoes were Pakistani nationals. The ICAO is empowered to insist that Islamabad locate the offenders and take them and their accomplices into custody and extradite or prosecute them in accordance with Pakistani laws based on the two conventions.

India, according to a foreign office spokesman, has moved the ICAO to highlight the hijack episode worldwide and to facilitate the apprehension of the hijackers should they be outside Pakistani territory.

### Passport agents held

PTI reports from Mumbai:

In a major development, city police yesterday arrested seven persons for issuing bogus driving licences and passports to the hijackers of the IC-814 and their associates, including ISI agents.

Police today said four of those arrested in the bogus passport racket were Mahmood Sadai, Sultan Vani, Junaid Belam and Dilip Navani, while those involved in issuing bogus driving licenses to the ISI agents have been identified as Mehboob Khan, Ismail Chunnawala and Abdul Mulla.

**THE HINDU**

20 JAN 2000

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2000

## WANTED, A POLITICAL STRATEGY

IN ITS RESPONSE to the rise in terrorism and militancy in Kashmir, the Centre has focussed only on what it calls an 'offensive strategy' to meet the security challenges. Whatever the new or revised ingredients of this counter-insurgency operation, there can be no let-up in the violence unless New Delhi evolves a political strategy to address the peculiar problems of this border State. Any counter-offensive by the security forces is limited to the point of containing the violence and the spread of terrorism in the State. It is obvious that militancy in the post-Kargil phase has become more strident thanks to the large-scale intrusions of foreign mercenaries and terrorists trained abroad. But it cannot be denied that post-Kandahar, the militant groups have upped the ante, having secured a morale booster in the trade-off of jailed terrorists for innocent hostages of an Indian Airlines flight. The offensive strategy worked out at a special review chaired by the Prime Minister himself must be viewed in this scenario. The Centre must realise that security is but one thread in the complex matrix in Kashmir that has to be dealt with carefully, but swiftly.

The decision to set up another unified command north of the Zojila Pass may be imperative in the post-Kargil scenario. But the question remains, has the unified command proved effective in dealing with increased militancy? The Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, has stuck to his usual demand — release more funds for development and security. He must realise that during the past three years and more, he has not been able to bring the situation under control. No policy can succeed unless the people are convinced that it is in their interests. Dr. Abdullah has neither been able to contain militancy nor has he provided an efficient or responsive administration. He cannot hope to do that with funds alone. Too

much focus on security and counter-insurgency is bound to alienate the people even more. It is high time the Centre looked for credible political initiatives to wean the people away from terrorism and militancy. With no development taking place, no jobs in sight, no revival of the tourism industry and continued pressure from both the security forces and the militant groups, where can the people turn for comfort and succour?

110-12 2/11  
All this does not minimise the security challenge in Kashmir. In the post Kargil and Kandahar scenario, suicide squads and bombs are becoming commonplace and they are targeting not only Army establishments but also markets and bus stands. True, Dr. Abdullah warned of the large-scale intrusions of militants even as the operations were on along the Line of Control last year. The impact of that incursion is now being felt in Kashmir and the militants have been emboldened by the success at Kandahar. India cannot afford to give the impression of being a 'soft State', but it cannot also give a handle to the campaign from across the border that the situation in Kashmir is repressive and the people are being terrorised in the name of counter-insurgency operations. That is why it becomes imperative to tackle this sensitive problem from various angles — political, social and economic — without compromising on security, law and order. The Centre and the State must segregate the moderates from the hardliners, open a political dialogue and strengthen the hands of the moderates. It may be useful to initiate an all-party dialogue in Kashmir to deal with the people's problems instead of depending only on the National Conference or the security forces. What is needed is a pro-active policy on Kashmir that puts the people first and involves them in both development and security.

# NAG missiles made more accurate

■ 'Fire and Forget' technology used is first of its kind in world: DRDO official

R SHANKAR  
HYDERABAD, JAN 22

INDIA has developed a new 'Fire and Forget' (F&F) technology for the NAG range of anti-tank missiles.

Announcing this at the annual meeting of the Aeronautical Society of India here on Friday, Dr A. Sivathanu Pillai, chief controller of research and development (R&D), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), said the F&F technology was unique and first of its kind in the world.

According to him, the special infrared-seekers first hunt for the target following which the missile 'recognises' the target and slams into it using special guidance techniques.

"With this, NAG would be-

come the first third-generation anti-tank missile in the world," Pillai said in a special talk on 'Advances in Missile Technology'.

The F&F guidance system uses special imaging infrared-seeker and millimetric wave-seeker technologies capable of hunting targets with great precision.

The next step would be to provide to NAG special embedded 'on-board hunters' that can hunt for targets using 'day seekers' and 'day-and-night seekers'.

Efforts are on to miniaturise these frontline technologies to be in tandem with warfare technology, according to Pillai.

He said it would make NAG more accurate and deadly.

The DRDO research chief said Defence scientists had also developed a unique 'Anti-Sea

Skimmer' missile for the Navy which could automatically recognise an incoming missile, lock on to its pathway and destroy it.

This would be added to the Trishul range and would give the Naval vessels and key installations in Naval bases a protective shield, he added.

Pillai also said AGNI-II would have a unique on-board energy management system and an on-flight guidance process using navigational sensor technology.

The Akash range of missiles too would get multi-target capability, playing the dual role as a shield against incoming missiles.

In an indirect reference to the US sanctions, Pillai said: "Today, we have operational AGNI-II and Prithvi. We have mastered propulsion technology, guidance

and control and introduced innovative software packages, algorithms and new devices.

These developments have taken place in spite of Missile Technology Control Regime and technology denial from certain industrially developed countries.

"Each technology has given us important clues to develop a unique hypersonic reusable missile. This is the dream and mission of Dr Abdul Kalam, the chief architect of India's missile programme," he said.

The hypersonic futuristic missile would combine features such as stealth, speed, accuracy and can spew fire on targets far and beyond.

The delivery system can automatically come back and be reused.

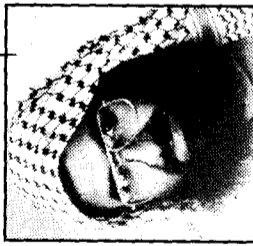
INDIAN EXPRESS

23 JAN 2000

# Taliban laid out red carpet for Azhar Masood

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, January 23

WHEN MAULANA Azhar Masood, the militant freed in return for the passengers of IC 814 landed at Kandahar airport, he was accorded a ceremonial welcome by the Taliban. The Taliban's Minister of Civil Aviation waited at the foot of the ladder near the special Alliance Air aircraft to receive the Maulana. The minister warmly hugged the released militant and escorted him to a motorcade. As soon as the Maulana and the other two released militants had entered their cars, the motorcade sped away.



Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh then alighted from the aircraft and found that there was nobody there to receive him on behalf of the Taliban. Singh waited on the tarmac for 15 minutes before the Taliban greeted him. Their explanation for the delay: they were busy praying.

Three weeks after the hijacking that shocked the nation, details of what really happened in Kandahar are finally emerging. An assessment by the security services suggests that the Taliban were, if not hand-in-glove with the hijackers, then certainly favourably disposed towards them.

In the light of this assessment, questions are certain to be raised about Jaswant Singh's eagerness to hold hands with Taliban leaders for the TV cameras. Nor is it clear why Singh, after being snubbed on his arrival, felt obliged to thank the Taliban so effusively.

It now transpires that after the two special aircraft carrying Singh and the released pas-

sengers flew off, the Taliban refused to let the Indian Airlines engineers enter the IC 814 aircraft.

Several Taliban soldiers tried to open the plane's baggage hold but discovered that it was electronically operated. Undeterred, they forced it open and waited till a Pajero drove up. They then waited for somebody inside the Pajero to identify a suitcase belonging to the hijackers which had been placed in the hold. Only after the bag had been removed, was the plane handed over to Indian Airlines.

The obvious inference is that at least one of the hijackers was inside the Pajero.

The Taliban's claim that the hijackers left Kandahar immediately has also been shown to be false. A West European diplomat has told the Indian government that the hijackers spent at least the night of December 31 in Kandahar. Ironically, they were accommodated in the same barracks where the Indian negotiators had been staying.

The security services are now convinced that the passengers were telling the truth when they said that the hijackers got fresh arms in Kandahar.

Till the plane landed in Afghanistan, the hijackers had only one pistol and two grenades. But at least six other guns were provided by the Taliban in Kandahar.

In retrospect, the negotiators can pinpoint the moment when the arms were handed over. The Taliban told the Indian team that they were sending a packet of toilet rolls to the aircraft.

According to the passengers, no toilet rolls were received. In fact, the packet contained the guns.

The Taliban's affection for the Maulana, whom they treated as their honoured guest, is no secret.

Last week, after the US put pressure on Islamabad, the Maulana announced that he was leaving Pakistan. Nobody was surprised at his choice of a new base: Kandahar.

# George rips govt veil on Taliban hijack role

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 24: Defence minister George Fernandes today announced that the Taliban was hand in glove with the hijackers of the Indian Airlines Airbus, the first statement by an Indian minister which ripped the veneer off the government's public stance on the militia's role.

"There was not only sympathy but much more than that for the hijackers in Kandahar," Fernandes told a seminar on Asian security.

No Indian leader has so far gone on record criticising the Taliban. Foreign minister Jaswant Singh, India's main negotiator who went to Kandahar to bring back the hostages, had expressed Delhi's gratitude towards the Tal-

iban for its cooperation.

Though Singh maintained that there would be no "fundamental" change in India's Afghan policy in the aftermath of the hijacking, he refrained from making any adverse remarks about the Taliban.

But Fernandes, known for plainspeak on bilateral issues, said: "Everyone knew of the Taliban's involvement with Pakistan and the hijackers. At that point Taliban had facilitated the Indian negotiating team, and beyond that we have not gone to compliment the Taliban regime."

The defence minister said the Afghanistan-Pakistan region had become the epicentre of trans-national terrorism and drug trafficking. He called for building an international coalition against terrorism in Asia.

Reacting to Pakistani junta

leader Pervez Musharraf's threat to teach India a lesson if it crossed the Line of Control, Fernandes said: "It appears Pakistan is still smarting under the Kargil blow. It is time they got over this syndrome." He said instead of issuing threats, Pakistan should create conditions for bilateral talks. "It is a pity there is no dialogue."

The defence minister drew the attention of the assembled international security experts to the threat being posed by Pakistan, particularly its military and the Inter-Services Intelligence.

Fernandes said Pakistan was trying to rationalise the use of terror as a legitimate activity sanctioned by Islam. He added that this "intellectual and ideological" justification started in the late 70s when Pakistani military officers "in obvious misinterpretation" argued that the Quran teaches the

use of terror to fight a total war.

On the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Fernandes said the failure of the US Senate to ratify it has pushed the pact towards "coma".

He argued that coupled with this was the Chinese friction over ballistic missile defences, which has introduced "serious uncertainties" about nuclear weapons control regimes.

## Pak threat to respond

The Pakistani army has threatened to "respond appropriately" to what it termed "intolerable Indian attacks" across the LoC, adds Reuters. The threat was issued in a statement after an army commanders' meeting chaired by Musharraf. Pakistan has asked the UN to intervene and summoned the acting Indian high commissioner to lodge a protest.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 JAN 2000

# The hijack and the ISI

*The mission in Uganda in one short hour, strengthened the backbone of the Jewish people and the whole Free World. This was the time when the fate of a nation was determined in one hour by a small band of brave men — Israeli Defence Minister Shimon Peres after the Entebbe raid*

GEN ASHOK K. MEHTA on Nepal's crucial role

Many imaginative versions of how the hijackers deplaned from the PIA aircraft are now doing the rounds in Nepal. The most popular is the one about ISI operatives whisking them off the earlier PIA flight to the Pakistan embassy and putting them on board the delayed IC 814 without violating the departure SOP assisted by Nepalese airport and Indian Airlines officials.

So how have the ISI and the Pak embassy come around to exercising influence and enjoying importance and size, disproportionate to their stated interests and official

activities in the Hindu kingdom of Nepal? And why does Nepal generally ignore Indian complaints of ISI activities in Nepal beyond ritually reiterating it will not permit any activity inimical to India's security from its soil?

The ISI made its formal debut in Nepal in 1989 as part of its third proxy war in J&K. At the time, due to the Indian economic blockade of Nepal which led to the restoration of democracy, relations between the two countries were at their lowest ebb. Nepal was badly hurt by the economic crisis, especially the poor. Its China card was also gradually weakening. So, as a shortsighted gain, Nepal chose to play the Pakistan card instead. There were other spin-offs: Funds from Islamic countries and a growing Muslim vote bank. By 1994, the seven-member Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu which included a defence advisor had become the hub of ISI operations.

The ISI game plan flowered in late 1993 with a secret anti-India project called Operation Tufail run from the premises of the two-star Hotel

Karnali in Kathmandu, managed by a Pakistani couple who were taking orders from one Brig Anis Bajwa of ISI in Rawalpindi. This name elevated in rank for services in Nepal, resurfaced during the Kargil war. On January 9, 1994, Nepalese intelligence and revenue officials were forced to raid Hotel Karnali. They recovered a cache of photographs and secret documents pertaining to Tufail and the Nepalese Press was inundated with the details.

Operation Tufail was traced to Dawood Ibrahim in Dubai and the chain of Habib Banks in Pakistan. Ganglord Yaqub Memon was caught in Kathmandu and the notorious Mirza Dildash Beg, once Nepal's minister for science and technology and avowed ISI supporter was gunned down in the heart of Kathmandu.

As a result, Indian military intelligence and RAW were able to decipher a comprehensive network of ISI activities, ranging from business ventures to Islamic organisations and NGOs overseen by the Pak embassy, with PIA as its flag carrier. Much of the money laundering, drug running, gold smuggling, counterfeit currency and small-arms trade in Nepal are controlled by ISI. So are the cable and international communication networks. It has also established field bases in the Terai on the Indo-Nepal border stretching from Dhangarhi in the west to Biratnagar in the east.

Following the Tufail blow-up, Indian defence and home secretaries visited Kathmandu and voiced concerns over ISI activities but Nepal insisted on proof-specific details of ISI activities before it could confirm or deny them. There have also been

several subsequent complaints but they have not been emphatically delivered and pressed by India. The result: ISI has grown from strength to strength and so has the Muslim population in Nepal.

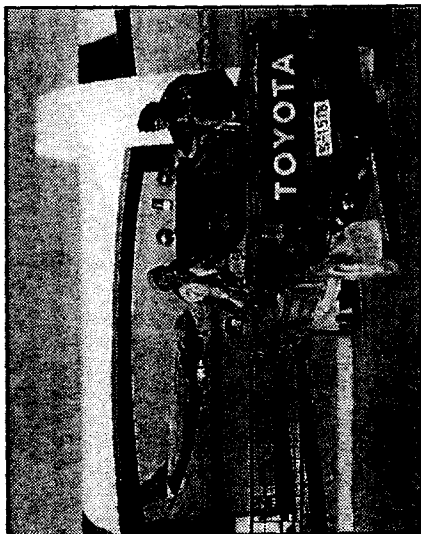
India and Nepal have a deep and abiding special relationship without parallel in the world. This includes Nepali Gurkhas fighting under the Indian flag and nearly a lakh of Gurkha pensioners and an equal number of serving soldiers from Nepal whose welfare is the prime responsibility of the military wing of the Indian mission in Kathmandu.

Last month, there was a distress call on account of a landslide from Syangja district, the heart of Indian Gurkha recruitment in Nepal. Although the Indian relief package arrived first, Pakistan's substantive contribution was not far behind. This overt display of humanitarian concern by Pakistan is worthy not only because the ISI has broken new ground — their traditional beat is Terai — but also because of its capacity for subversion.

In his book *Road to Kathmandu*, written after the Karnali raid, Prakash A. Raj, a former Nepalese civil servant who has worked with Afghan refugees in Pakistan, says: "Recent events demonstrate that Nepal has become a terrorist base." In his sequel, *The New York Connection* published last year, he indicates Nepal is being used by Pakistan to export drugs, explosives and the cult of violence. But the Nepalese do not seem to be bothered about these developments.

Moreover, IC 814 was not the first aircraft to be skyjacked from Nepal. There was at least one domestic flight which was pirated over Nepalese airspace. The lessons of that outrage have been forgotten by the present regime in Kathmandu.

It is, therefore, imperative that Nepal be made to realise that the ISI threat is foremost to itself with its adverse spillover into India. The ISI network must, therefore, be immediately dismantled, the Pak embassy prevented from indulging in unlawful activity and post-1990 Kashmiri migrants verified and regulated. The open borders should also be monitored and the construction of new religious institutions regulated as has been done recently in UP. The time has come for India to be firm with Nepal and for Nepal with Pakistan.



# Fernandes unveils 'limited war' doctrine

By C. Raj Mohan

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 24.** As military tensions with Pakistan continue on the Line of Control in Kashmir, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, today unveiled the Government's new doctrine on fighting "limited wars" with Islamabad. *9-10-73 N. S. Mohan*

Addressing an international conference on Asian security here, Mr. Fernandes reassured the international community that India remains committed to a policy of nuclear restraint even as it sharpens its ability to resist Pakistan's nuclear blackmail.

While doing its utmost to prevent the escalation of tensions with Pakistan into a nuclear war, Mr. Fernandes declared that India had shown during the Kargil crisis that "its forces can fight and win a limited war, at a time and place chosen by the aggressor".

The Defence Minister was summing up India's post-Kargil security dilemmas vis-a-vis Pakistan and New Delhi's readiness to fight a limited conventional war under

the nuclear shadow.

After acquiring nuclear weapons, the military leadership in Pakistan embarked on a course of confrontation with India in the mistaken belief that the latter would be paralysed from an effective response because of the nuclear factor, Mr. Fernandes said.

Reaffirming India's determination to resist such nuclear blackmail, Mr. Fernandes declared India's readiness to fight any limited conventional war imposed on it by Pakistan.

Referring to Pakistan's bid to create military tension on the border and step up cross-border terrorism in Kashmir, Mr. Fernandes said Pakistan has convinced itself that "under the nuclear umbrella, it would be able to take Kashmir without India being able to punish it in return."

He added that the belief in Pakistan that "India would be deterred in any war imposed on it, and will not fight back" was a serious error of judgment.

Pointing to Pakistan's nuclear

threat during the Kargil conflict, the Defence Minister said Islamabad had not understood the "real meaning of nuclearisation" in the sub-continent.

India's own reading of the Kargil war, according to Mr. Fernandes, is that an atomic arsenal "can deter only the use of nuclear weapons, but not all and any nuclear shadow, a 'conventional war' remained feasible though with definite limitations if escalation across the nuclear threshold was to be avoided".

Arguing that a conventional war "has not been made obsolete by nuclear weapons", Mr. Fernandes said India "must possess conventional capability of a sufficiently high level in order to lift the nuclear threshold as much as possible".

Although India's restrained handling of the Kargil crisis was widely appreciated by the international community, the renewed tensions between India and Pakistan have revived international

concerns about South Asia as a "nuclear flashpoint".

Mr. Fernandes' remarks a few days ago on fighting a limited war have reinforced these concerns, and there is considerable scepticism in the West about the ability of India and Pakistan to contain their conflicts below the nuclear level.

It is in India's interest to elaborate in greater detail, its compulsions in adopting a strategy to fight a limited war and commitments to maintain nuclear restraint.

Equally important, India would have to gear itself to deal with the increased international attention to the Kashmir dispute in the wake of the talk in the sub-continent about a war, limited or otherwise.

For Pakistan has calculated that greater the fears of an impending war in the subcontinent, the more successful it will be in drawing in the international community to intervene in the Kashmir dispute.

**Pak. charge rejected: Page 11**



# Insat-3B launch in mid-March

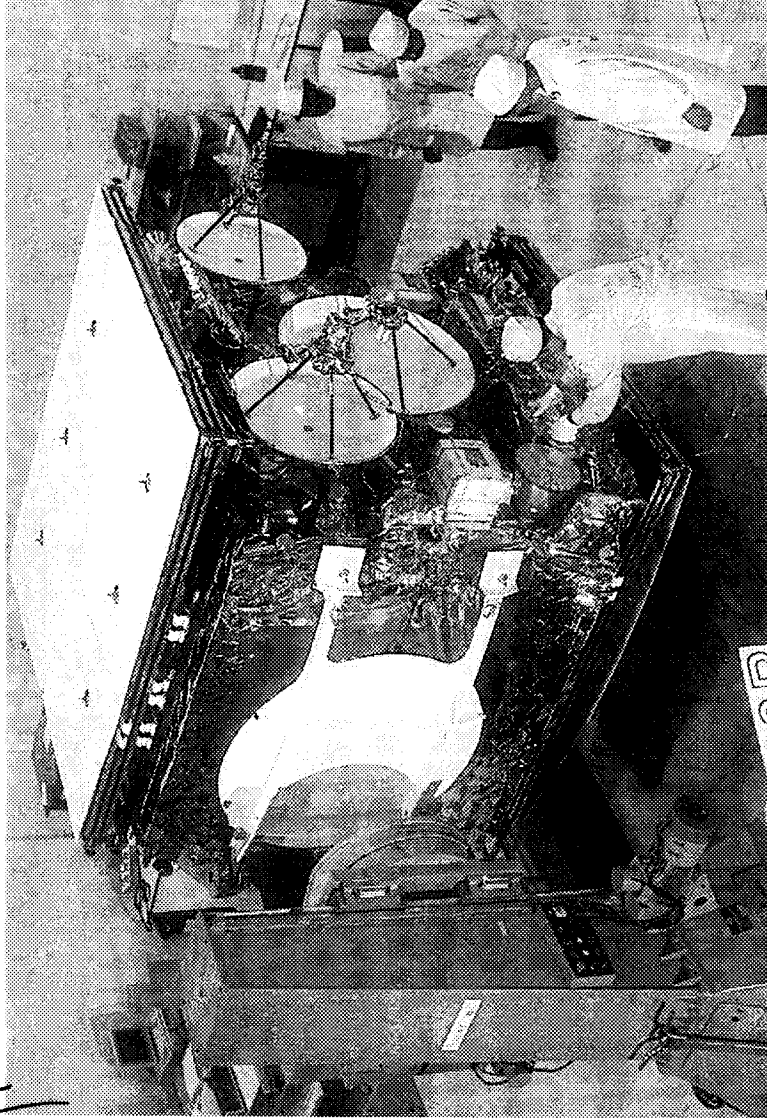
By Our Science Correspondent

**BANGALORE, JAN. 24.** The Insat-3B, the first of Indian Space Research Organisation's third generation communication satellites, is expected to be launched on an Ariane 5 launch vehicle around the middle of March this year.

This 2,070-kg satellite is primarily intended for business, development and mobile communications, the ISRO Chairman, Dr. K. Kasturirangan, told presspersons here today. Development of the Insat-3B had been accelerated after the failure of the Insat-2D in late 1997 depleted the Insat system's extended C-band capacity used for Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) communications.

Once the Insat-3B was commissioned, it was expected to further boost the VSAT services which had started less than five years ago and had since seen rapid growth, Dr. Kasturirangan said. Today, there were 7,500 VSATs, serving 300 corporates in some 400 locations, he added. It was estimated that Rs. 10,000 crores worth of stocks were traded daily over VSAT networks. Now, seven extended C-band transponders on the Insat-2B and the Insat-2C were being used for VSATs. The Insat-3B, with 12 extended C-band transponders, would almost double the transponder capacity for these services. In addition, Ku-band frequencies had been cleared for VSAT use in India and the Insat-3B carried three Ku-band transponders. The Insat-3B would provide the first set of transponders for interactive training and developmental communication as part of the Vidya Vahini programme announced by the Prime Minister. It would also be used for experimenting with telemedicine so that the expertise of specialists could be made available in rural areas as well.

The Mobile Satellite Service (MSS) transponder on the In-



Final touches being given to the Insat-3B at the ISRO in Bangalore on Monday — Photo: K. Bhagya Prakash

sat-2C had provided vital communication capability in the wake of the recent Orissa cyclone, he said. The Insat-3B also carries an MSS transponder, and a number of users had expressed interest in these services. A company had started manufacturing Type-A suitcase-sized terminals capable of handling telephone, fax and data. There was already a requirement of 200-300 such terminals. The MSS could also provide one-way messaging.

Air France would be transporting the Insat-3B satellite to French Guiana. The satellite would leave Bangalore on February 1 and reach French Guiana on February 3. Checking and preparing the spacecraft for launch would take about six weeks. The

Insat-3B had cost about Rs. 150 crores to build. The launch cost came to Rs. 276 crores and insurance added another Rs. 66 crores, he said.

Dr. Kasturirangan said the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) was in the final stages of preparation. It was hoped that integration of the GSLV could begin in March-April and that the first launch could be carried out during June-July this year.

Dr. P. S. Goel, Director of the ISRO Satellite Centre, Dr. S. Rangarajan, Director of the Satellite Communications Programme Office at ISRO Headquarters, and Mr. P. S. Nair, Project Director for the Insat-3B, were present at the press conference.

launch was currently scheduled for March 14, although the launch window would extend till March 21, Dr. Kasturirangan said.

The Insat-3B would be the first of the Insats to fly on the Ariane 5 launcher. The Ariane 5 would place the satellite in an elliptical transfer orbit, 560 km by 35,865 km. The higher perigee (distance closest to Earth) of 560 km, compared to 200 km provided by the Ariane 4 launchers, meant that less propellant would be consumed when the satellite's own liquid propellant engine was fired to move it into the final geostationary orbit. This saving in propellant would increase the satellite's life by about six months, he said. The Insat-3B was designed for a life of 10 years.

# U.S. believes hijackers were backed by Pak: NYT

NEW YORK: The United States believes that a terrorist group supported by the Pakistani military was responsible for the hijacking of an Indian Airlines jet last month, Tuesday's *New York Times* reports, quoting Clinton administration officials.

The judgement puts Pakistan at risk of being placed on Washington's list of nations that support terrorism, according to the unnamed officials, the paper said.

The new military leader of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, was asked in a meeting with three administration officials in Islamabad last week to ban the group, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, but the request was rebuffed, senior officials in Washington said.

Administration officials said they received information that Harkat-ul-Mujahideen was responsible for the hijacking after it became clear

er who made arrangements for the escape of the hijackers.

The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen is the new name for Harkat-ul-Ansar, a radical Kashmiri nationalist group, which was put on the state department's list of terrorist groups in 1997, officials said. After being put on the list, the group changed its name.

The *Times* said administration officials declined to give details of precisely what they knew about the group's role in the hijacking that ended with 155 hostages freed in exchange for the release from prison of three members of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen by the Indian government.

"Indications came through intelligence channels, and I don't know anybody around here, including the skeptics, who don't find that credible," an official was quoted as saying about Harkat-ul-Mujahideen's involvement in the hi-

jacking.

U.S. assistant secretary of state for South Asian Affairs Karl F. Inderfurth, who was one of the three officials who met with General Musharraf, told the General that the United States was concerned about the links between the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and his military and intelligence services, officials said.

The General was told that the United States believed Harkat-ul-Mujahideen "was responsible for the hijacking and that the U.S. believed the group operated openly and clandestinely" with the support of the Pakistani military and intelligence services, a senior official said, according to the *Times*.

In response, General Musharraf is reported to have said he would consider the administration's request to shut down the group, but left the impression that no action would be taken soon.

## No proof of Pak hand in hijack: Clinton

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON, Jan. 25. — President Bill Clinton today said the USA had no evidence linking the Pakistani government to last month's hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane.

Earlier, a US official had said the USA "has credible information" that a Pakistan-backed militant outfit active in J&K was behind the hijack.

But later, Mr Clinton said at a White House press conference: "We do not have any evidence that the Pakistani government was in any way involved" in the hijacking.

Naming Harkat-ul Mujahideen as the group behind the hijacking, the unnamed official had told *New York Times* that "indications came through Intelligence channels, and I don't know anybody around here, including the sceptics, who don't find that credible."

US officials had said they realised Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (new name for Harkat-ul-Ansar) was behind the hijack after it became clear who had arranged the hijackers' escape.

NYT, quoting officials, had said a US team led by Mr Karl Inderfurth during a recent visit to Pakistan told General Musharraf the USA believed that Harkat "was responsible for the hijacking and that the group operated with the support of Pakistan's military and Intelligence services."

Gen Musharraf was asked to ban the outfit but the request was rebuffed, it said.

THE STATESMAN  
26 JAN 2000

# Clinton visit hinges on Pak. response

By Amit Baruah

**ISLAMABAD, JAN. 25.** The United States has identified the Harkatul-Mujahideen (HUM) as being responsible for the hijack of the Indian Airlines aircraft and has called upon the Musharraf regime to take strong action against the outfit, among other groups.

Informed sources told *The Hindu* that during his two-hour-long meeting with the Pakistani Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, on Friday, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. Karl Inderfurth, linked the visit of the U. S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton,

to Islamabad, with strong Pakistani action against terrorist groups.

Mr. Inderfurth, who repeatedly raised the hijacking-terrorism issue during his discussions, told Gen. Musharraf that a "positive" decision on Mr. Clinton's visit was possible if his Government launched a "crackdown" on the "jehadi groups".

According to the sources, Gen. Musharraf told Mr. Inderfurth that "immediate action" against the groups may not be possible, but indicated that such a move may be possible in the next few months.

Ironically enough, these sour-

ces also stated that owing to the sharp nosedive in relations between Pakistan and India, the chances of a Clinton visit to Pakistan had actually improved. "Soon after the October 12 coup, it looked as if Mr. Clinton would not be visiting Pakistan, but now we have a situation where India and Pakistan are locked in conflict," they maintained.

According to the sources, no final decision had been taken in Washington about the visit, adding that an announcement about the U.S. President's tour of the region, which looks likely in March this year, could be made any day.

It is also clear that the U.S. looks at the Musharraf Government as the "last chance" for Pakistan to "rescue" itself from the growing spectre of fundamentalism.

If, in the coming weeks, the U.S. does not see any tangible movement, then it's relations with Pakistan could be in for further turbulence.

The all-crucial question for the U.S. is — Can Gen. Musharraf deliver? Can he curb the various outfits that operate in the name of Kashmir? As of now, there does not appear to be any real answer to this question.

# PM constitutes panel to look into defence pay anomalies

Shishir Gupta

New Delhi, January 27

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee has constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by Home Minister L. K. Advani, to consider the anomalies in the pay and allowances of the Armed Forces following the Fifth Pay Commission report.

Defence Ministry sources said the GoM is expected to meet in the middle of February, shortly before the budget session of Parliament. Others on the GoM are: External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Defence Minister George Fernandes, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister Suresh Prabhu and Minister of State (Personnel) Vasundhara Raje.

The Govt's decision to constitute the GoM comes after the armed forces apparently expressed dissat-

isfaction at the suggestions made by the Committee of Secretaries (CoS) that was set up to sort out the grievances of the forces as far as pay and allowances were concerned. The CoS was mandated to study the financial implications of the revised allowances which in turn had been recommended by the Ajit Kumar Committee report. The latter, which had the vice-chiefs of the three services as members, submitted its report on April 23, 1998.

It is understood that the matter was referred to the GoM as the Committee of Secretaries negated the armed forces' proposal of "one rank, one pay and one pension". It was also found that if the entire recommendations of the Ajit Kumar Committee were to be implemented, it would cost the exchequer some Rs 2,500 crore.

Sources said the CoS apparently turned down most of the recom-

mendations, and suggested minor changes in the pay and allowances as recommended by the Fifth Pay Commission report.

In order to bolster support for its case, the armed forces in its representation to the CoS had cited the allowances that are being given to Pakistan Army officers. For instance, it was cited that the Pakistan Army offers land schemes to officers of the rank of Major General and above. The pay and allowances of some ranks of even the Bangladesh Army have been referred to in the representation.

Highly placed sources said the GoM will look into the existing anomalies, identify and recommend those allowances that could be given to the Armed Forces without disturbing the relativity to the civilian set-up. Obviously, the GoM will come under pressure as it will have to look into allowances post-Kargil.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 JAN 2000