Letter from New Delhi

Why is Musharraf in a hurry? Pole Com

WITHOUT mentioning the names of former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, I asked General President Pervez Musharraf why he did not allow leaders living abroad to participate in the affairs of Pakistan and its development. This was during a meeting with him at Islamabad last month. He was visibly upset and ended the conversation with a counter-question: Would their participation be in the interest of development?

I am broaching the subject at this time because the Pakistan government is in the midst of making concrete proposals on Kashmir and expecting India to respond to them. Musharraf is in such a hurry that there is a threat practically every day to go back to square one. Kashmir is an important matter. The concurrence of the two lead-

ers is essential.

No doubt, the military is in full control and there is no challenge to Musharraf's authority. But he should not forget that both Benazir and Sharif command a large following even in their wilderness. In a freer atmosphere, they may register a much larger support. They are a reality which Musharraf cannot wish away. With the release of Asif Zardari, Benazir's husband, from prison after eight years, the scenario may change. There can be an increasing support for civilian rule. Musharraf may face tough opposition, particularly when his move to retain the uniform is gathering storm.

What Musharraf says on Kashmir is his point of view and that of the military in Pakistan. Political leaders like Benazir and Sharif do not agree with him. Nor do most of the people. A referendum, if held on this point, may surprise Musharraf. But then the referendum is not his way to determine things in Pakistan. The rigged refer-

That a prime minister is a civilian does not change He things. Musharraf's nominee. While in India, Shaukat Aziz could not add even a comma to Musharraf's proposals, although he was eloquent in reenunciating them. What progress is possible when Islamabad sticks to its old line that the movement on confidence-building measures has to keep pace with advancement on Kashmir?

Musharraf's impatience with India is not understandable. It is a democratic country and has to follow the norms laid down by the constitution. People's wishes are supreme. He can get away with anything in Pakistan but Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who is answerable to parliament. Any proposal on Kashmir will need the endorsement of both the houses and it has to be within the precincts of the constitution, unless political parties decide to amend it. Such a course is difficult to imagine because parliament passed a unanimous resolution during P.V. Narasimha Rao's rule that India should get back the territories it has lost. Both Pakistan and China were in view.

However, it is time that India had a policy on Kashmir. So far it has none. New Delhi's formulations are a reaction to what Pakistan says or does. A high-powered committee of all shades of opinion should be constituted so that it is clear how far New Delhi can accommodate to Islamabad. The home ministry's department Kashmir, with a joint secretary at the top, is too inadequate for the job. For example, India should pursue the concept of a South Asian economic union to counter. Musharraf's proposal of

What Musharraf says on Kashmir is his point of view and that of the military in

endum in favour of his presidency is too recent to be for-

I wish Islamabad had torn a leaf out of New Delhi's book. The Janata Dal government kept both the Congress and the BJP informed about what transpired between pime ministers Inder Gujral and Sharif at Male. Subsequent governments have taken the opposition into confidence on their talks with Pakistan. In matters like Kashmir, the whole of Pakistan should be involved and, as such, a bipartisan policy is necessary.

Foreign Minister Kurshid Kasuri is right when he says that nobody can take the credit away from former prime minister Atal Behari Vaipayee for initiating the "peace process." In the same way, no Pakistan government can minimize the role of Sharif in pushing forward the peace process. He invited Vajpayee to Lahore and signed a joint declaration. Similarly, the Benazir-Rajiv Gandhi accord was a step India-Pakistan towards detente.

Reports are that both Benazir and Sharif have not reacted favourably Musharraf's proposal. In the face of opposition from main political parties, what does New Delhi do? Sharif told me at Jeddah last year that they would not accept any solution on Kashmir that the military regime had brokered. Moves to separate Shabaz Sharif from his brother Nawaz Sharif, even if successful, do not mean much. The real question is to involve political parties. The Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif) is not at Shahbaz's command

The Musharraf government is banking on the Muslim League (Quaid), the King's Party, for endorse-ment of the Kashmir solution in the Pakistan National Assembly and the Senate. But it has only a wafer-thin Whatever majority. decided has to have the consensus, both the Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif) agreeing to it.

is strange Musharraf says with a flourish that all Kashmiris, whatever their views, should participate in the talks. But this should hold good for Pakistan as well. All shades of opinion should be associated with the proposals that Musharraf is making or the ones which India may be offering at some stage. The military-led government in Islamabad does not represent the Pakistani opinion. Ultimately, civil society has to accept it.

Pakistan. Political leaders like Benazir and Sharif do not agree with him. Nor do most of the people.

seven regions.

The US papers, now made public, tell that John K. Galbraith, US envoy in the early sixties, had warned Washington that "Kashmir is not soluble in territorial terms but by holding up the example of the way in which France and Germany had moved to soften their antago nism by the common market."

Galbraith had also done what he called a Harvard Exercise (named after the university where he taught). He had suggested the reopening of the road between Islamabad and between Srinagar through Baramula, Uri and Murree and the resumption of trade and tourist traffic, emphasizing that India's military rights in the vale of Kashmir should remain intact.

This was more or less the that Sheikh proposal Abdullah discussed with me in 1969. His argument was that the border should be soft' so that the Pakistanis had an easy access to the valley. Strangely enough, late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto repeated the same thing during an interview with me in March 1972 at Rawalpindi. He said We can make the ceasefire line as the line of peace and let people come and go between the two Kashmirs. After all, why should they suffer? Let there be some free movement between them. Then one thing can lead to another."

Realism is thought and action based on realities. It is strange that the reality of political situation in Pakistan does not dawn on Musharral There is no doubt that he is the monarch of all that he surveys. But it is also true that the military control has suppressed the real voice of people.

Recent contacts at different levels have revived emotional ries which both sides have had before partition. Left to the people, they would like to have free travel and free

They are sick and tired of the never-ending confrontation. They want to live in peace as neighbours.

The writer is a leading columnist based in New Delhi.