

'No general dare impose military rule in India'

Pak. F. rel - India

By Roedad Khan

"WE have marital law today", I told Morarji Desai. "You will have it tomorrow. We share the same weaknesses. Indians are as good and as bad as we are". Morarji reacted sharply. "No general [will] dare impose military rule in India", he retorted. "And if he does, Morarji will be the first to face the Indian bullet".

Morarji was visiting Pakistan as a guest of the government of Pakistan. I was escorting him to Utmanzai for a courtesy call on Bacha Khan. More than 40 years have passed since that thought-provoking conversation, but Morarji's words still ring in my ears.

Three years ago I was digging up the treasure trove buried in the archives at the British record office when a very interesting paper on this very subject attracted my attention. It was a note dispatched by Major-General J. D. Lunt, the British defence adviser in Delhi, to the Foreign Office in London. Just before this paper was received in London, the British high commissioner had met General J.N. Chaudhry, the Chief of Army Staff, who revealed to the high commissioner that Mr. Chavan, the

cuss such a delicate topic with the high commissioner shows that it was not so far below the surface in the minds of the government and of the army. This was confirmed by a speech made by Kamaraj, the Congress president, in Madras, in which he said that if violence continued on the scale recently seen in Punjab and Bengal, the military might conclude that democracy was unworkable and themselves take over the government.

In an accompanying note on the subject, the defence adviser summed up the position as under:

a.) The new generation of Indian officers is more deeply involved in politics than its predecessors were.

b.) The Indian army is badly paid. A large part of it is deployed in operational areas — Kashmir, Ladakh, Sikkim and NEFA where families are not

trying to leave and join business firms. All this can have an effect on the nation's view of the army and the army's view of the nation.

h.) The Indian army inherited from the British the tradition that the army must always be subordinate to civil power and that officers should keep out of politics. Despite the example of the neighbours, Indian officers have so far managed to follow this admirable precept, although there are differing views on how much longer they will continue to do so. To some extent, they have been helped by the innate suspicion of the Indian politician for the soldier, who for nearly 200 years represented an army of occupation.

The Indian journalist is equally ignorant and equally despised by the soldier. Moreover, the Indian army is stationed mainly on the frontiers in awkward and uncomfortable garrisons which offer no inducements for visits by the politicians, and to this extent it is isolated from the main trends of political thought.

i.) I have been told that General Thimayya, the most popular and probably the most competent of all the Chiefs of Army Staff, who was forced to throw up the sponge, was urged in 1949 to head a coup but lack of support from the navy led to the abandonment of the plot.

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seize power. The Indian army has not intervened in politics. De Tocqueville and other theorists have argued that democracy and a large standing army are incompatible, but India has managed both. Indian democracy has stood the test of time.

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In conclusion, the defence adviser wrote: "It is difficult to sum up a paper such as this and I am not going to attempt to do so. I hope I have not been unduly cynical in my approach, nor over-inclined to pour cold water on the optimist who regard the Indian army as the last bastion of democracy in Asia. It has survived the stresses and strains of past 48 years with remarkable success and in the course

that Mr. Chavan, the defence minister, had consulted him during March 1966 on the possibility that circumstances might exist in which the Indian army would seize power from the civil authority.

The COAS told the high commissioner that they had discussed this matter at some length and he had expressed the categorical view that such a possibility did not exist. General Chaudhry based his belief on:

a.) His view that there was a deep-seated respect in India for constitutional government at all levels in the country.

b.) The size of India and the degree of decentralization of its government machine. From this he argued that it would be administratively and operationally impracticable for the army to seize power from both the Union and the state governments in a single operation.

c.) If the army were to attempt a coup against the Union government without seizing power in the states simultaneously, the Congress machine would remain operational and the coup would almost certainly be ineffectual.

d.) If the coup were directed against one or more of the states, it would involve the same weaknesses as above in even greater measure. Moreover, the army commander who directed such a coup would place a critical strain on the loyalty of the army, since state loyalties and rivalries are a real factor in the army. In these circumstances, the organizer of a coup would find himself in a civil war situation.

e.) The COAS agreed that there would probably be no great difficulty if the Union government directed the army to take over a particular state or region — though even then he would require reasonable time to redeploy troops and assemble a select force whose loyalty would be strained as little as possible. The COAS agreed that there would probably be no great difficulty if in a situation of political and administrative chaos, the president of India might, independently of the Union government or even against its wishes, order the army to take over from the civil authority. If this ever happened, he would do his best to execute the order. He believed that presidential authority would be an adequate cover and that the operation could probably be carried out successfully. But he was thankful that there was no prospect of such an order being given before his retirement.

The fact that General J.N. Chaudhry was prepared to dis-

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permitted. Even in peace time garrisons, married accommodation is not easy to come by. Officers serving in New Delhi are particularly hard hit since rents are high and there are not enough quarters to go round.

c.) Pensions are absurdly meagre: a major can expect 500 rupees, and a general officer not much more than 1,000 rupees a month.

d.) It is said that senior officers, who have reached the highest ranks in the army, are so concerned during the last few years of their service with securing for themselves lucrative employment in the government or in business that they have little or no time to worry about their subordinates. On several occasions I have heard criticism levelled at General Chaudhry, the former Chief of Army Staff, as well as at others. Lack of confidence in the integrity of their senior officers had led to the un'ing of many armies, and not only the Egyptian.

e.) The Indian army is finding it difficult to maintain officers' messes as an economic proposition. f.) A marked lowering of the social status of the officers in a country such as India, where great emphasis is placed on "izzat", could give rise to discontent. This will be even more the case if there is a great and growing difference between the facilities provided for the generals and those provided for junior officers. Perhaps nothing has struck me so forcefully than this general lowering in status and the widening of the gap between an army officer and his equivalent in business.

g.) Marriage of one's daughter to an army officer is no longer sought after by ambitious parents. She would be far better wed to some up-and-coming young businessman. A former Chief of Army Staff is finding it extremely difficult to find a bride for his eldest son, a promising young captain in the army, whereas his youngest son was quickly snapped up by Burma-Shell.

A corollary to this is that well-to-do parents or those coming from army families, are no longer keen to put their sons into the army. Many young officers are

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of doing so has developed its own personality. I feel certain that elements exist within it, which could set it off in pursuit of political power, as has been the case in Pakistan, but I would judge that conditions would have to be far worse than at present before it took the plunge."

Fiftyfive years after independence, the Indian army remains bound by tight constitutional and political constraints. There has been no coup, no colonels' or brigadiers' conspiracy to seize power. The Indian army has not intervened in politics. De Tocqueville and other theorists have argued that democracy and a large standing army are incompatible, but India has managed both. Indian democracy has stood the test of time. The constitution has kept the country united, allowed its democracy to survive and kept the armed forces at bay. The structure of the Indian civil-military relationship is still intact, largely because the legitimacy of the political system remains high.

The lesson of history is that the only defence against a military coup in any country is strong political institutions and nothing else. A democratic government can be given to any people, but not every people can maintain it.

It is now abundantly clear that Pakistan cannot survive: i) except as a democratic state based on the principle of the sovereignty of the people. There is nothing intermediate between the sway of democracy and the yoke of a single man; ii) except under a constitution which reflects the sovereign will of the people, not the whims of one individual person; iii) except under a system based on the supremacy of civilian rule; iv) except as a federation based on the willing consent of all the federating units. v) if the rule of law gives way to the rule of man because the dykes of justice and law will then break and revolution will begin.

Pakistan cannot survive under military rule, with or without a civilian facade, because military rule lacks legitimacy and is an anachronism in a world of global markets, information and media.