

Kashmir syndrome

Humera Niazi

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News

The "atoot tang" syndrome has become an integral part of the statements emanating from the Indian side. This has happened at a time when Pakistan and India are 'engaged' in dialogue for achieving a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue. The atoot ang talk has made it quite difficult to analyse the Indian approach. It would seem that there is no Indian policy in sight in order to find a solution to the conflict in Kashmir.

The recently concluded Indo-Pakistan foreign secretary level talks have been seen as a positive step, and resulted from the commitment to take the peace process forward and explore other confidence building measures. Significantly, the positive aspect came about in the backdrop of Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran's statement stressing that 'Kashmir is an integral part of India.' This does not send a good signal, and creates doubts about the Indian approach on Kashmir, as it could be utilising dialogue as an instrument to push forward a well-conceived strategy on the Kashmir issue.

The present peace process has come after a volatile standoff between the two countries that led to an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. As expected, the international community was perturbed given the nuclear capabilities of both. The possibility of 'miscalculation' was there and the situation was likened to the

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Cuban missile crisis of 1962. This is precisely why both countries are talking. But it is important for the talks to be meaningful and the time factor respected in order to achieve a solution. Pakistan has stated that 'talks' were positive and will continue. It rightly declared that India's persistent claim that the entire Jammu and Kashmir was its territory would not be helpful in carrying forward the dialogue process. Also All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Syed Ali Gilani, in a television comment, did not appreciate the Indian expression of 'atoot tang' on Pakistani soil.

Regarding the Indian foreign secretary's assertion that India is representing Kashmir, it should be noted that at the conclusion of these talks Pakistan stressed for the need to associate Kashmiri representatives with the dialogue process regarding the disputed state, and also to end the repression and violent suppression of human rights of the Kashmiri people.

At the end of talks Saran returned "with a sense of optimism that there is sincerity and commitment on both sides to take this process forward." And yet, nothing has been achieved on Kashmir. Both sides speak of flexibility on the issue, but the only point of convergence visible is the agreement "to make life easier for people on both sides."

India's stress on the people-to-people approach gives rise to the feeling that there may be more to this than meets the eye. Five locations at the LoC for family reunions is not no solution, and far too little although it is certainly appreciable that families on both sides of the divide will have this opportunity.

India has offered making the LoC soft, to boost humanitarian CBMs before addressing the sensitive issue of Kashmir. But this proposition is creating suspicions. While buying time, it also creates the impression that all is well in Kashmir. This helps India in conveying internationally that it is sticking to the dialogue process while allowing it to carry on with human rights abuses in the occupied territory.

The Kashmir issue is caught between hope and time. The limited optimism related to it will suffer if the time span in finding a solution is too long. The recent failure of the Baglihar dam talks is a case in point. Reports suggest that India has expedited work on the project and recruited hundreds of additional engineers for its early completion, while Pakistan has decided to move World Bank on the issue.

India feels that with time it could change the situation in Kashmir or contain the conflict. But this will not work, as the Kashmiris' struggle for self-determination has stood the test of time. On the other hand, time will internationally expose Indian intentions.

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A city without guns

In the '60s, Karachi was a peaceful city. Back then, even the criminal underworld used to obey certain rules

By Shaikh Aziz

a more respectful manner.

Underworld gangs are a worldwide phenomenon. As in any other expanding city, Karachi too has its own kind of underworld. In the '60s and '70s it held sway all over the town, influencing everyone, from normal businesses to showbiz. Many individuals were hand in glove with the people belonging to underworld, yet the common man never felt as unsafe as he feels now.

As far as objectives go, the criminal underworld of that era was not different from its successor. The only difference is the mode of operation, targets, products under transaction and the end result. For instance, heroin did not exist in those days and since safer intoxicants were available, there was no question of dealing with such businesses with a small margin of profit.

The most lucrative business was smuggling of gold, silver, foreign cloth and electronic goods. By applying a strict import policy, such things used to reach the market through the backdoor. The system worked like a well-knit network with informers, carriers and distributors ensuring safe transaction of money.

Smuggling of gold

dadas) were jailed. Secondly, their links with influential men was never severed.

In the same era, Lyari and other parts of the old city produced an underworld that would not entangle itself in these "high investment" businesses. They had two categories: one that used to run gambling dens, pick pocketing, cover up for prostitution and earned profit called *Aanki* or the 16th part of a rupee of the profit. Rising from street mug-

bars and a number of off-licence shops. These entertainment places had their own staff to run the business but there were always some trouble-makers. These business houses employed *dadas* and deployed them to shoot troubles. There were always squabbles and quarrels but these men handled them deftly without disturbing the various businesses.

Bhatta was in vogue, but not on a large scale. It was the syndicates' informers who would point out probable targets for

stab wounds.

In those days, kidnapping for ransom was a rarity. While in the interior Sindh banditry was a common scourge, kidnapping had not gained popularity with the bandits. Highway robberies were the worst crime that occurred, while in Karachi there was no such activity that would alarm the rich who used to visit night clubs and places of amusement of their own choosing without the help of guards. Burglary was considered an inferior crime, therefore Karachi ban-

al rituals. In those days, a large number of cars, mostly belonging to affluent families, could be seen outside his house where he performed certain rituals. He made enough money, but when some other syndicates came to know about him, he left the city.

One crime that never came into the limelight was the trade of flesh. Although its main market was located in the centre of the city, it had many dealers. Perhaps it was the only crime which was operated from outside Karachi. There were professionals who used various methods to keep the business going. One style was to lure girls from the poor segment of society into getting them good jobs and were sold in the red light area. The other form was to marry an innocent girl, bring her to Karachi and turn her into a prostitute. Then there were girls who would join the profession because of abject poverty. But all these forms had the blessings of the police and the *dadas* of the red light area. The system worked with such intricacy that once the girl was brought in she couldn't get herself freed. The system still prevails, but on a larger scale and with more cruelty.

The whole scenario changed when a movement was launched against the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1975. Violence took over Karachi. Fire arms became showpieces and were used frequently. Killings were rampant. *Bhatta* became a part of the system. New *dadas* came up with guns in their hands, and the old *dadas* followed suit. In 1977, when Ziaul Haq took over, a new



Illustration by Huzefa Younus

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WHAT would the world look like without weapons? Very safe. At least Karachi would be a peaceful, more colourful and safer city, with no gun-toting individuals around.

Forty years ago, Karachi was a completely different city from what it is now. Imagine a couple returning from a marriage ceremony on a motorbike after midnight. It would neither be waylaid nor robbed by anyone, and safely reach home. Think about a lonely person sitting on a rock near an old church in Clifton, recalling his romantic past and trying to reconcile himself to the gloomy sight of a setting sun. Or for that matter, spare a thought for young boys returning from a cinema hall, walking to their homes commenting on merits and demerits of a film. No policeman would stop and ask them why they were roaming around at an ungodly hour.

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Four decades back, night club-goers lived in their own world and no one would leave till the attendants put the lights off. On their way back, neither their cars would be flagged down nor would they be hounded for being squiffy.

This doesn't necessarily mean that Karachi in the '60s and the '70s was a peaceful city. It had its fair share of good and evil like any other metropolis of the world. This also does not imply that back then the criminal underworld did not exist. Individuals and gangs were there. The only difference was that of 'values'. While the ordinary white-collared man stuck to his moral values, criminals adhered to their own ethics — perhaps in

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As far as objectives go, the criminal underworld of that era was not different from its successor. The only difference is the mode of operation, targets, products under transaction and the end result. For instance, heroin did not exist in those days and since safer intoxicants were available, there was no question of dealing with such businesses with a small margin of profit.

The most lucrative business was smuggling of gold, silver, foreign cloth and electronic goods. By applying a strict import policy, such things used to reach the market through the backdoor. The system worked like a well-knit network with informers, carriers and distributors ensuring safe transaction of money.

Smuggling of gold created a huge circle of giants who manoeuvred smuggling of precious metals. Most of the names that were linked to this business included some people from Thatta having easy access to the sea. The business flourished to such an extent that Ayub Khan had to use martial law to put a leash on it and when he acted harshly some smugglers threw pretty good amount of gold into the sea. Some of it was retrieved by the divers of Pakistan Navy.

Some smugglers were put in jail and others disappeared. But the fact of the matter is that their networks remained intact. Reason being that they had organized syndicates that did not become inactive once the smugglers (many known as

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gers, these men became masters of risky trades that always faced police action if proper connections were not maintained. They came up with syndicates and provided various services. For instance, one *dada* used to provide cinema publicity work, linemen (responsible for a disciplined ticket sale at cinemas and ensuring the bulk of tickets to be sold in black market) to be shared by these *dadas* and cinema administration. No new *dada* would dare disturb this system. Even contracts would be awarded for such tasks.

The other syndicate dealt with bars, casino-like clubs, night clubs and bingo clubs. Only the city's Saddar area had five popular night clubs, 12

bhatta. No poor man or a man with limited means would be targeted. Only the rich businessmen and tycoons were to be aimed at. And that too in a very secretive manner. In exchange, the syndicates would provide the so-called security or become henchmen for the rich.

The most astonishing factor was the use of arms. *Dadas* had guns but rarely used them. Their henchmen never even kept a gun. The only weapons they had were either a knife or a *khurdam*. *Khurdam* is a hunter of mild steel with a hammer at one end and can be tied to the waist concealed by a long shirt. Daggers would be used very rarely. It would be big news if someone died from

hits did not practise it. Instead, they would prefer breaking into houses, calling it a symbol of bravery. But it too had its masters. This kind of organized crime was not committed by a group of desperadoes, but was designed properly and accomplished according to a certain plan. In such an operation, as usual, no single group would get involved, instead *dada*, the police and some influential people would be partners.

Interestingly, there was a bandit who acted without any support from outside the ring. He was a bearded man who used to live on the Allama Iqbal Road. He used to call himself a saintly person, commit robberies and in the evening would perform spiritu-

phenomenon of heroin and Kalashnikov was introduced into Karachi. And thus began a new story of the criminal underworld that's yet to reach its end. Nobody knows what will happen to the crime culture in vogue.

The world of crime can never come to an end. It can only be controlled. But that's not an easy thing to achieve; it is closely related to society, its standards, values and above all the economic conditions that it lives with. The Karachi of the '60s and the '70s was less volatile because of the social conditions and economic pattern that were prevalent at the time, quite in contrast to today's Karachi which is a haven for criminals.