

Story of the clandestine billions

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DURING the 1980s, Pakistan received about \$25 billion (a conservative estimate) from various sources and most of these resources were totally unencumbered. Every country in the so-called free world as well as China was giving us generous assistance in cash and kind throughout this period in return for the 'services' we were rendering to the US in its war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

During this period, Pakistan was getting at least \$3 billion on an average annually in remittances from overseas workers, who would send another \$3 billion in kind as well every year. One recalls a State Bank of Pakistan circular in those days which had asked NCBs not to make public the amount of remittances they were receiving from overseas Pakistanis. When enquiries were made to find out why this circular was issued, it was explained in hushed tones that the government did not want the multilateral agencies to know how much we were getting from this source. The reasons for this secrecy were obvious.

Meanwhile, in those days Pakistan was one of the major producers of poppy and was siphoning off weapons from supplies going through Pakistan to the Afghan 'jihadis' and selling them in the open market. The Ojhri camp incident is quoted as evidence of the post-Afghan war cover-up of this trade. However, when Ziaul Haq died in August 1988, there was nothing on the ground to show where all these resources had gone. The then caretaker finance minister, Dr. Mehbubul Haq, had to rush to the IMF for emergency assistance to save the country from certain default.

The assumption, therefore, is that most of the resources, legitimate as well as illegitimate, that we received during the period of the 'free lunch' were siphoned off and were spent on our nuclear programme. The total amount spent on the bomb, the missiles and the two-low intensity conflicts would certainly be more than \$10 billion — more likely about \$15 billion. The rest (from the \$25 billion) was perhaps pocketed by the people who ran the first Afghan war from Pakistan on behalf of the US and the CIA. It is likely that after the Pressler Amendment was invoked and other avenues of incomes dried up in the 1990s, a large part of the \$11 billion of FCAs (confiscated after the nuclear tests) were also diverted to the two clandestine programmes and the two low-intensity wars.

And who was in charge of these clandestine funds for the

programme during the 1980s and early 1990s? Well, we all know that Mr. Bhutto, when he launched the programme, had constituted a three-man committee, comprising the then defence secretary, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the then finance secretary, A.G.N. Kazi, and the then foreign secretary, Agha Shahi. Mr Agha Shahi was sidelined after General Zia's take-over and in his place came General Arif, one of Zia's close confidantes. At some later stage, Sahibzada Yakub Khan was also associated with this committee.

All these names make it very clear that no one, not even the resourceful Dr. A.Q. Khan, could have fooled them, at least in the matter of finances. So, the money in private bank accounts and privately owned properties which is now being cited as evi-

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dence of the involvement of Dr A.Q. Khan and other scientists in proliferation had actually been accumulated by following the dictum of 'everything is fair in love and war'. The underground that the CIA claims to have uncovered did not come up to help Pakistan proliferate, but to assist us in making the bomb.

Many in the world and even inside the country wonder why, after having established that Dr A.Q. Khan was the main source of proliferation over the last so many years, the international community led by the US is not blaming this country or its government. The reason is simple. The US in its present war against terrorism needs us as badly as it did in the 1980s when it was fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. It was during this period that we were trying to acquire nuclear capability. The US knew about it. And like now, then too the US media would frequently run stories about our covert nuclear activities.

In fact in 1985, we told the world ourselves that we had perfected a basement bomb. Dr. A.Q. Khan had claimed in a secretly arranged interview to an Indian journalist (of all persons) that he had cold tested a device. On November 1, 1986, *The Washington Post* ran a banner headline saying Pakistan had hot tested its device. This story was filed by Bob Woodward of Watergate fame, whose connection with the then

CIA chief William Casey was revealed by Woodward himself in his book *The Veil*.

Meanwhile, successive US presidents were giving us certificates (under the Pressler amendment) that we were not making the bomb. Like now, then too the US administration had ostensibly disagreed with its own media because it needed our help in Afghanistan. But, intriguingly, at the same time, as today, the CIA was also leaking to its media in the 1980s stories about Pakistan's nuclear programme. Why? Perhaps to keep India from threatening Pakistan's security at a time when its army is engaged in Afghanistan.

The Sikh crisis of the 1980s in India also seems, in retrospect, to have been handiwork of the CIA to keep India engaged in a bloody, divisive crisis on the domestic front. India as everyone knows was at that time in the Soviet camp and had taken a position on Afghanistan which was not in consonance with that of the US. America perhaps suspected Indian intentions and therefore tried to neutralize it with Pakistan's basement bomb and the Sikh crisis.

Today the situation is different. India has become a good friend of the US. So, before implicating Pakistan publicly in the nuclear proliferation scandal, using the Khan angle, the US saw to it that tensions between India and Pakistan were replaced by a peace initiative. Apparently, the US has managed to keep Pakistan free of worries on the southern borders while Washington keeps us engaged in the north. This time it seems the US will not walk away from this region in a hurry as it did in 1990. Its forces are likely to remain in the region for another 10 to 15 years. During this period at least, Washington is not likely to see anything happen to Pakistan. But let us keep our fingers crossed at least for the next couple of years.

Now that our programme has become 'overt' (in the words of President Musharraf), and the underground network is in the process of being smashed, it would be interesting to know what route our establishment will take to import the raw material and hardware requirements to sustain our deterrence capability. We obviously cannot open an L/C with a bank to import these items. But even if we did try this route, which country would sell any material to us? And even if they did, would not the bilateral and multilateral donors cut off all flows of concessional assistance to Pakistan?

However, if we have acquired what is called a sustainable 'full fuel cycle' and are no longer dependent on supplies from outside to sustain it, then we are safe and through to the exclusive nuclear club. It may still turn out that all's well that ends well.

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