

IACF Conference on Aug 17, 2002 "Kashmir Issue is closer to a solution"

A Report by Express News Service.

Kashmir issue is closer to a solution, said Lieutenant General (Retd.) Moti Dar, a Kashmir expert at the third international symposium organized by Indo-American Community Federation (IACF) and Indo-American Kashmir Forum (IAKF) held August 17, 2002 at the Logan High School conference room in Union City, California. Lieutenant General Moti Dar of the Indian Army has intimate knowledge and experience of India-Pakistan relations and his rationale is that increasing pressure on Pakistan to democratize bodes well for a solution.

The General served over 40 years in the Indian Army and has participated in strategic talks at the highest levels. He is well known to top leaders in the USA and India and has worked closely with the new Indian President. Gen. Dar gave a fascinating account of Kashmir from pre-British days to the recent border build-up, complete with anecdotes from his own distinguished career. He went on to explain that while progress may be slow in the next two years due to political pressures in Pakistan and India, on the whole the nuclear deterrent and the growing international interest in Kashmir favors a peaceful solution on mutually acceptable bilateral terms.

Earlier in the day, keynote speaker Congressman Pete Stark (D) of the 13th District opened the symposium on an upbeat note. The senior ranking Congressman, who happens to have an engineering degree from MIT, asserted, "Every American resident has the right to constitutional protection under our laws". Although the current administration was zealous to a fault and tight-lipped even in Congressional briefings, people can still "look to the courts to protect civil liberties" and minorities should not hesitate to press for their civil rights in the courts. With respect to Kashmir, noting that "the Egypt-Israel peace accord has worked," Rep. Stark expressed confidence that bold leadership on both sides will lead to a bilateral resolution of the dispute.

The audience were then treated to in-depth analyses and fresh perspectives on Kashmir, including historical insights from internationally acclaimed historian Prof. D.R. SarDesai of UCLA, bold analyses by Prof. Sanjoy Banerjee of San Francisco State University, observations on terrorism and the media by Lt. Col K. K. Puri and the Indian Army's counter-insurgency record by Col. M. M. Zaki.

Another speaker was the organizer, Jeevan Zutshi, president of the Indo-American Community Federation (IACF) and National Director of Indo-

American Kashmir Forum (IAKF). The sessions were moderated by Dr. Subroto Kundu, former president of AAPIO, and Dr. Subhash Garg, secretary of Indo-American Community Federation (IACF).

Prof. SarDesai explained that Secretary of State Colin Powell's claim that "Kashmir is now on the international agenda" is nothing new. India internationalized the issue first in 1948 by seeking justice at the UN Security Council, America in the 50s wanted to keep Pakistan in control of northern Kashmir for strategic reasons, and China traded nuclear know-how for occupied Kashmiri territory. The only new element is that Pakistan has internationalized its long-established proxy forces in Kashmir. Dr. SarDesai noted, however, that the United States recognizes the line of control as the best basis for peace. His prescription for solving many of the world's problems, including Kashmir, was to "throw out the idea that religion constitutes a basis for (creation of) a state".

The next speaker, retired Brig. M. M. Zaki, provided eloquent proof of Pakistan's hand in Kashmir by detailing the various terrorist groups in other parts of India where the Indian Army was able to control the situation, including foreign-financed movements like Khalistan. It is only Pakistan's sustained material, personnel and strategic support that make terrorism in Kashmir a nearly intractable issue. Brig. Zaki also described the strict training Indian troops receive in protecting human and civil rights wherever they go.

Some startling insights into Pakistan's motives in Kashmir, which may help in finding a solution, came from Prof. Sanjoy Banerjee. Using mostly Western sources, he concluded that the war against Al Qaeda was in hiatus because of the reluctance of the all-powerful Army in Pakistan. The Army is the biggest road block to resolution of the Kashmir issue: its existence depends on having an Indian military threat, and it sponsors terror in Kashmir as a device to incite such a threat. Dr. Banerjee said that when Nawaz Sharif offered an olive branch to the Indian PM in Lahore, the Pakistan Army decided to sabotage peace by launching the Kargil invasion, and its leader Gen. Musharraf then staged a coup to oust Sharif and to perpetuate military rule. In short, said Dr. Banerjee, the only hope for peace is a democratic, civilian government in Pakistan. Such a government will see the folly of continuing to fight India.

Terrorism and counter-terrorism measures in the local area were discussed in a special session. FBI Special Agent Eric Lamoe was informative and even entertaining as he explained that until 9/11, FBI agents had all sorts of tools against drug dealers but were not authorized to fight terrorists. The necessary authorization was provided by the cleverly-named USA

P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Act which extended and reinforced drug war provisions to the war against terrorists. Lamoe's forthright manner left no doubt that the FBI agents are bound by comprehensive rules and follow strict procedures to protect First Amendment rights and Civil Rights. This session was received very well by the curious and occasionally apprehensive audience.

The symposium concluded with the presentation by Lt-General Moti Dhar, which was a fascinating tour with a principal participant in the Kashmir and Bangladesh wars, followed by a vote of thanks by organizer Jeevan Zutshi.