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अतितत्काल
MOST IMMEDIATE

भारत सरकार
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
महामंडल सचिवालय
CABINET SECRETARIAT
राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा परिषद् सचिवालय
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NEW DELHI - 110001

D.O.No.C-178/4/99-NSCS-4498

November 30th, 1999

My dear Shekar

The Committee constituted by the Government vide its order No.361/6/4/99-TS of 29th July'99 to review the events leading up to Pakistani aggression in Kargil district and to suggest measures considered necessary to safeguard national security against such armed intrusions has been holding discussions with key functionaries in Government and knowledgeable persons outside the government. The NSC Secretariat has also been regularly maintaining a summary record of such discussions.

The Committee had met you to ascertain your perceptions / views regarding the Pakistani aggression in Kargil, on 24th November, 1999 at 11.30 A.M. at NSCS Conference Room, New Delhi. A record of discussions which had been prepared by the NSC Secretariat is enclosed for your perusal. Kindly feel free to make any amendments that you wish to make in the enclosed minutes and return a signed copy of the same to Secretary, NSCS, at the earliest possible.

With regards

Yours Sincerely,

K. Subrahmanyam
(K.Subrahmanyam)

Shri Shekhar Gupta,
Editor-in-Chief,
Indian Express,
New Delhi.

RECORD OF DISCUSSIONS THE KARGIL REVIEW COMMITTEE HAD WITH SHRI SHEKHAR GUPTA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI ON 24TH NOVEMBER, 1999 AT 11.30 A.M. IN THE NSCS CONFERENCE ROOM

Chairman Shri K.Subrahmanyam; Lt.Gen (Retd.) K.K.Hazari, Member, Shri B.G.Verghese, Member, Dr.S.D.Pradhan, OSD(P) and Shri P.K.S.Namboodiri, OSD (KRC) were present.

1. Chairman Shri Subrahmanyam, initiating the interaction, stated that the Committee was interested in Shri Shekhar Gupta's assessment about the personality of Nawaz Sharif since Shri Gupta had close interaction with him. It was in his meeting with him on January 28th, 1999 that Mr. Nawaz Sharif ^{said} ~~proposed~~ that ^{he should} ~~Mr. Vajpayee should~~ travel to Lahore in the first Bus, ^{he will be awarded a welcome bid new byet}. It was important to know Nawaz Sharif as a man and his nature to make an assessment about whether he had the knowledge of the impending Kargil crisis and what motivated him. There were reports saying that Prime Minister was briefed by the Pak Army on three occasions --- October and November, 1998 and January, 1999. Shri Verghese also wanted to know how the interview of Shri Gupta with Nawaz Sharif was set up.
2. Shri Shekhar Gupta stated that he had actually sought an interview much earlier. They were old acquaintances. He knew Nawaz Sharif in the 80s when he was the Chief Minister of Punjab. At that time there was widespread impression, especially in the West, that without Benazir Bhutto and her PPP, democracy would not survive in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif was keen to change that impression.

8. It was possible that Nawaz Sharif or even the Pakistan Army had not planned exactly the way the incursions eventually took place. As and when they found more unheld areas on the Indian side of the LoC, they moved in more troops. ^{May Pakistanis expected} It was believed that only 2 NLI battalions were initially trained; but later they had to push in more. ^{But} the Pak side was shocked by the massive Indian response. According to his opinion, Shri Gupta said, ^{the well known Pakistani observer told him} Nawaz Sharif had decided to withdraw on June 8th; but the Army convinced him that he had the Indians already on the hook and they could strike a better bargain if he stayed put. In his view, Shri Gupta said, ^{it is possible may not have been} Nawaz Sharif was not apprised of the full dimensions of the crisis. Even ^{a supposedly liberal paper like The Friday Times run by} sympathetic journalists like [REDACTED] had said that what Pakistan did in Kargil was exactly what India did in Siachen and a suitably packaged trade-off, in the Pak view could have been possible.

9. Chairman Shri Subrahmanyam pointed out that when the operations began, all the Mujahideens were withdrawn and the NLI troops were put in front. Thus the Indian response could not have been unanticipated by the Pak Army.

10. Shri Shekhar Gupta said that the Pakistanis perhaps believed that once a severe blow was delivered, the Indian side would collapse like our middle order batsmen. Quoting a slogan ^{slogan often used by Pakistani supporters in hockey matches against India} ~~He~~ ^{He} said that the Pakistanis held the view that India was like a collapsing wall which needed only a push to fall down.

11. Pakistan appeared to have believed that the ~~Indian~~ ^{in assault} soldiers would never climb those hills. Secondly the notion of mass artillery – 100 Bofor guns ~~slammed~~ ^{slammed} them.

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many mid-level Indian officers had to be complained to him that the

12. Shri Gupta also pointed out that Pakistani jawans were more equipped and clothed and their skill levels were better than the Indian side. ^{These officers - with the brigades level} Shri Gupta said that Pakistan wanted to put Siachen on the bargaining table after achieving a major breakthrough in Kargil.

13. ^{and involved in the operation, so felt that somehow we had lagged in the area of upgrading the equipment, outfitting, training and skill levels of our jawans} How hopeful Pakistan was about such prospects was evident in a meeting Shri Gupta had with an important Pakistani journalist [redacted] who had close links with Pak foreign office. That was the day, June 12 when Pak Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz arrived in Delhi ^{Carriage,} in an upbeat mood. [redacted] told Shri Gupta that the Indian Army was not able ^{human,} to fight any more; the Indian brigade in Kargil had run away and that the only solution now was for India to compromise so that Nawaz Sharif, who was keen to find a lasting solution to the Indo-Pak problems, would eventually work out something to the satisfaction of both sides. ^{"If Indians you Indian," want bullet talk}

^{he added that just in time we will have bullet talk} ^{he said threateningly} ^{in Indian side there was a military appreciation of the situation in Pakistan side as well}

14. Chairman thereafter ^{he said to} ^{that} queried Shri Gupta why the Indian media had not responded adequately to the crisis and why there were such serious distortions in their reporting. Rejecting the theory that the Army's response was slow, the Chairman said that it was actually an Army intelligence man who first detected the intrusion on 3rd May and within a matter of week of the first ambush on 6/7 May 5 battalions had been on the move and whole of the Northern command, the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy went on full readiness by 26th May.

^{realised the gravity of the situation only}

15. Shri Shekhar Gupta replied that that was a complex question. ^{but} The media ^{coverage} started only after the Air Force went into action. He said his Newspaper had a Jammu edition and therefore, was supposed to have been close to the scene of events. ^{repeatedly the idea} The Army authorities had ^{dismissed} that any serious incidents were taking place. For the media persons, like the Army, Kargil was not in focus. The J&K militancy generally and areas like Doda and Siachen were the focus of action. As for Kargil, the only thing mattered to them was exchange of artillery fire.

16. Many excuses could be provided intellectually but the fact was that there was a great deal of credibility gap. Reports were coming about the shifting of the DC's office, the ammunition dump explosion and Pakistani firing being directed from the Indian side. ^{but each time questions were raised at with the army authorities they draw bland, sunny responses like, nothing unusual is going on. Shelling takes place every summer as snow melt.}

17. Shri Subrahmanyam responded that the Army was structured to react to events at various

levels and wondered why media was unable to find out how the Army was responding. *His view was that the Army had responded with great privacy and in maximum military style build-up was massive but somehow the media failed to get to the bottom of it.*

18. Shri Shekhar Gupta admitted that it was a colossal failure on the part of the media not to have ~~woken up in time~~. But he said it was apparently because of the Army's own slow way of letting the outside world know what was happening in an until then exclusive domain of theirs. *He said, yes, it and kept on blaming the threat for being long, army for being complacent.*

19. Shri B.G. Verghese said that it had something to do with the initial briefing by the Army when it dismissed Kargil as a local event. The Kargil was India's first TV war (and hopefully the last). The media played a front role. He wanted to know what were Shri Gupta's views on media/army interaction and feedback.

20. Shri Subrahmanyam added that the entire Northern command was in full readiness by 17th May. The Air Force action began by 25th. The other Commands had gone on alert and the Indian Naval ships had begun to move out of their peace time ports. He said media management was important in getting such information across as part of deterrence. *Reinforcing his view that the Army's response had been more than adequate, to choose Karachi.*

21. Shri Shekhar Gupta narrated that how he detected a PTI story reporting the movement of naval ships. He had to bring that report to the notice of the PMO. It was eventually withdrawn. Things were apparently hotting up for a war, yet the media knew nothing. There was an effort on the part of the Government to pretend that nothing had happened. *How come the media left missed all this and kept blaming the armed forces, he asked said, rather than release details of the build-up the list?*

In conversations with uniformed persons, Shri Gupta, explained, he was told until 26/27 May that there was no 'big deal'. Briefing at highest levels (DGMO) also underplayed the crisis saying that only there were incursions in 3 small pockets which would soon be cleared. The MEA briefing also said that a few incursions had taken place and they were being pushed back. *by the Foreign Secretary*

On the front week of June the Defense Ministry was already claiming that in certain areas Indian troops had already reached the LoC.

22. There was, of course, the fact that some of the young journalists who had had close interaction with the younger elements in the Armed Forces on the battle front, had reflected their/ complaints against senior officers. This was a problem for all the professions and not peculiar to the Armed Forces. He himself had come in for criticism when he had to stop stories which contained information helpful to the enemy. *Shri Gupta said it was necessary to*

but out substantive issues have from a phenomenon that could be true of all professions. All students think their teachers are stupid, children think their parents are stupid, and certainly the media editors are not. He said editors should be careful.

any - media relation

23. Shri Verghese asked what kind of improvement in ~~coverage~~ Shri Gupta suggested to which he replied that there must be much better transparency on the government side. There must be background briefings to senior editors who could be taken into confidence when it came to the question of the nation's security. At that stage, the Chairman explained what happened in January, 1987 when senior editors were given background briefings regarding Brasstacks; but ^{he said,} the younger reporters resented their not being briefed, and ~~filed negative reports.~~ *spilled the beans.*

24. Shri Shekhar Gupta said that till 30th of May no one in the Government had told media that the Kargil intrusion was more than a Mujahideen affair and was an invasion. There were statements saying that a war-like situation had arisen. The seriousness of the situation was not shared between the Government and the media. *In fact the Government at all levels, seemed to show more confusion than the media.*

25. Shri Verghese asked Shri Gupta whether in the past 12-13 years of his constant contacts and conversations with Nawaz Sharif whether at any time the nuclear issue had come up during discussion. Shri Gupta replied that the only time Mr. Sharif mentioned the nuclear factor was that in his interview Nawaz Sharif explained that he had to respond to India's nuclear test as an equaliser. *Mr. Nawaz also said he was pushed by certain ~~both~~ provocative statements by Indian leaders, particularly Mr. Arun Jaitley.*

26. When Shri Verghese asked Shri Gupta how he looked back on the media responsibility, Shri Gupta replied that ~~the~~ Zee and Star TV had ~~done~~ exceedingly well and even the Pakistani came to trust the Indian TV channels more than their own. *Said that by and large the media had been highly responsible. Small a part impact* He had an occasion to visit Pakistan in the Post-Kargil period and he had heard the Pakistanis grudgingly *and quite creditably so* admiring the Indian media saying that it had become a part of the national effort. On the other hand, in Pakistan people were kept totally uninformed and even such informed persons like Najam Sethi had believed, till quite late in the day, that there was no real war and that it was only a Mujahideen episode. The Pakistani elite remorsefully admitted that they had lost the media war, especially the one on the TV. *This was mainly because of the higher credibility the Indian media had, much like the BBC in our previous wars.*

27. Shri Verghese asked about the impressions still left in the Army minds in Pakistan, whether they really believed that they could have retained their territorial gains, if US had not intervened. *The fact that we also carried out a critical*

particularly to at a time when Pakistani papers were not even admitting there was a war on.

28. Shri Gupta replied that the Pakistanis, including the Armed Forces generally believed that they had had a brilliant tactical military victory in Kargil and that 85 % of the territory they seized could have been retained by them. By that time everyone knew that it was the Pak Army and not the Mujahideen which was fighting. He said in his view many Pakistanis honestly believed that only the Army could save the country. This was regardless of what was perceived as Ayub's 'betrayal' in 1965; loss of half of the country in 1971, which they interpreted as due to Russia's help to India. Siachen rankled in their minds. Hence there was pressure on the Pak Army to demonstrate some kind of a tactical victory which led to the Kargil crisis.

29. When Shri Verghese questioned about the prospects for Track-2, Shri Gupta replied that though there was a mood of apology in Pakistan on the military takeover they all wanted India to talk to the new military leader. Generally, most Pakistanis supported the coup since in their view the Army was still the only surviving institution in Pakistan despite the fact that because of the Army, the country had lost 60% of its territory with not an inch gained in the last 50 years. ^{the mess in Afghanistan and} the continuing involvement of ^{8% of} Pakistan's G.D.P. & Shri Gupta said each time ^{he} raised this question with his influential Pakistani interlocutors they looked the other way. ^{It was therefore necessary for India to understand this mindset and mould its foreign policy accordingly.}