

POLL RESULTS IN PERSPECTIVE

THE TRUTH ABOUT MRS GANDHI'S MAJORITY-I

BY M. R. MASANI

A CYNIC has said that voting in an election is "the privilege of standing in a queue to help decide which Party will spend your money." Having recently exercised this privilege, we shall all now watch the manner in which the taxpayers' money will be put to use during the next five years. Judging by comments in the Indian and world Press, one would have thought, however, that an event of earth-shaking proportions had just occurred.

Time Magazine referred to "the overwhelming majority of the Indian voters who had given Mrs Gandhi a firm mandate." A writer in the Sunday Standard observed: "The victory of the New Congress can best be described as fantastic." Mr Raj Mohan Gandhi, in Himmat, came to the conclusion: "The Indian people have given her (Mrs Gandhi) a massive victory. Her majority is thundering." The Soviet Prime Minister, Mr Kosygin, obviously delighted, is reported to have described it as a "historic victory." Finally, the heroine of the drama, speaking in the Central Hall of Parliament on March 19, capped it all by saying, "The entire people voted for a direction in which they want the country to go."

SENSE OF PROPORTION

In any attempt at reviewing the recent elections and their implications, it is important that we should get our facts right and maintain some sense of proportion. The need for doing so would appear to be urgent, judging by the kind of comments which have just been quoted.

How accurate are these descriptions about what the Indian people are supposed to have done? As it happens, the Election Commission of India have an altogether different story to tell. The official figures show that, of the entire electorate, only 54.81% cast their votes. Of these only 43.64% voted for the Prime Minister and her Party, which means that only 23.91% of the electorate voted for the ruling Party. To over-simplify a little, of every four Indian men and women who had the vote, one voted for the Prime Minister, one voted for other parties, and the remaining two did not vote at all. It will be seen, therefore, that the hyperbole so widely indulged in appears to be somewhat inappropriate for what turns out on examination to be a somewhat pedestrian performance.

Mrs Indira Gandhi's vote of 43%, as also the number of seats obtained by her in Parliament, are not comparable with the magnitudes achieved by her father and even he, let us recall, got only 48% and 45% of the popular vote at the earlier elections but never a popular majority. Mrs Gandhi got only 3% more than the vote of the undivided Congress in 1967.

I seem to recall that Mr Eric da Costa of the Indian Institute of Public Opinion had, before the election, forecast more or less what has happened. He had said that the ruling Party and the four-party Front had each roughly a third of the electorate behind them. Whoever got another 10% or so of the floating vote would rapture the Lok Sabha. This is exactly what has actually happened. Mrs Gandhi's vote went up to 43%, while that of the four-party Front went down to 23%.

As one instance after another of the current ballyhoo about these elections appeared in print, my mind kept turning during the past few weeks to a little poem by Robert Southey which I had read in school or college about the Battle of Blenheim which the Duke of Marlborough had won. One of the veterans of the battle, who survived well beyond his time, used to ruminate about this victory in which he had participated.

And everybody praised the Duke,
Who this great fight did win."
"But what good came of it at last?"

Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why, that I cannot tell," said he,
"But 'twas a famous victory."

Undoubtedly, the widespread misconception about the nature of the election results has been caused by the fact that the ruling Congress managed to get as many as 350 seats out of 520 in the Lok Sabha. The reason for this is that, when we drafted our Constitution, we took from the British a somewhat archaic and out of date electoral system. The Constituent Assembly of India, when drafting the Constitution, adopted, despite my own humble efforts to the contrary, the single member constituency and the candidate "first passed the post" winning the election, rather like a race-horse.

When there are two or two-and-a-half parties as in England, this system, crude as it is, works tolerably well. But where, as in India, it is combined with the existence of half a dozen parties, it makes a mockery of democracy. For 20 years now, India has been ruled by Governments with a powerful majority in Parliament, not one of which ever got 50% of the votes polled at any election. Millions of votes for parties which do not manage to carry a particular constituency are wasted and remain unrepresented in Parliament, while many winning candidates in the Lok Sabha do not get more than 25, 30 or 35% of the votes cast in their constituency.

To give one or two examples of the distortion of the popular will that takes place, it is only necessary to recall that in the 1969 elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly, the CP (Marxist) polled 19.96% of the vote and got 80 seats, while the undivided Congress Party of that time polled 41.1% of the vote and got only 55 seats! In Tamil Nadu, on this occasion, the DMK-led Progressive Front in the Assembly Elections polled 52.78% of the vote and won 209 seats of the 234 Assembly seats whereas the Democratic Front of the Congress (O) and Swatantra polled 36.65% of the vote and got only 21 seats.

P. R.

If, in the recent Parliamentary elections, we compare the number of votes polled by the ruling Congress Party and the Swatantra Party and the number of seats obtained by each of them in the Lok Sabha, we find that it took the Congress (R) 180,444 votes to get one M.P. elected, while it took the Swatantra Party 553,683 votes to get a seat—or more than three times as many! It is to avoid this kind of distortion of the popular will that various systems of Proportional Representation have been invented and form part of most of the Constitutions which have been drafted in the twentieth century.

One of the variants of this system is known as the List System, in which the whole country is treated as one constituency and the elector votes for one or other Party list which is published in advance. The seats are then divided between the parties in proportion to the number of votes cast for each Party list. If this system, which has been in operation in countries like Italy or Israel, had been used here during the recent General Elections, the new Lok Sabha would have been entirely different in composition and balance. The Congress (R) would have got only 226 seats, the Congress (O) 53, the Jan Sangh 37, the CP(M) 26, the CPI 25, Swatantra 14, SSP 12, PSP 5, and Independents and others the rest. In the result, the Prime Minister would have got only six seats more than what she had prior to the dissolution and she would not have been able to remain Prime Minister unless she had managed to form a coalition group.

sion while giving due weight to the Prime Minister's advice.

When all is said, however, the fact remains that the Prime Minister has managed to secure a vote of confidence from a large minority of the electorate, that the Opposition Front has failed to do so and that, in consequence, she has the power to rule this country, for good or ill, for the next five years.

There has been a great deal of speculation regarding the reasons for the outcome of these elections. Some of the discussion on this question has strayed into somewhat esoteric fields and into the realm of witchcraft. I would prefer to confine myself to purely political factors. After all, to get 43% of the votes cast is not such a startling achievement as to need any magical explanation! There were undoubtedly two or three important factors that were at work. There was the cult of personality, which has always been very strong in a country like ours. There was the use of money power, in proportions beyond anything we have known since Independence. There was block voting by Muslims, Harijans and women.

NO ALTERNATIVE

Above all, there was the absence of a credible alternative which would ensure stability to the country. It was this which, in my view, practically clinched the elections and gave the Prime Minister the extra 10% of votes which went her way and gave her success. This is not a matter of hindsight; some of us had foreseen this quite early. My own party had consistently argued for a principled approach and against attempts to "topple" Mrs Gandhi. Nearly nine months back, speaking in the Lok Sabha on a motion of no confidence on July 28, 1970, I observed:

"You cannot fight something with nothing. You have got to fight something with something better. I do not want to remove Mrs Gandhi until I can put in her place a better Prime Minister and a better Government. I do not want to bring chaos to the Centre as there was chaos in the States of Northern India under the SVD. We, therefore, want an alternative Government to come into existence before we can remove this Government."

It is a sad commentary on the compromises that are inevitable in political life that the party of which I was the head participated in exactly the course of action that we had consistently ruled out earlier.

If there was ever an example of how not to form a Front to fight an election, here was a classical model provided to students of history. The June 28, 1970, Resolution of the AICC(O), with which the whole effort started, was followed by six months of interminable delay, dicker and vacillation on the part of the leaders of the very party which had invited others to join in the Alliance. Finally, when at last it was decided to make the necessary announcement on January 3, 1971, by which time the Prime Minister had already seized the initiative by dissolving Parliament, the SSP successfully gatecrashed into the alliance that day and, as aptly described by a Delhi newspaper the following morning, "it was like a demolition squad to finish off the 'Grand Alliance' castle". The President of the Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh were somehow persuaded on the spot to drop the common programme which provided the cement of principle to the Front.

My declining to go along with this coup on January 3 provided the Swatantra Party with an option to keep out but, faced with an eleventh hour choice of evils, the National Executive of my party decided on January 8 in Madras that half a loaf was better than no bread.

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China's Support For Pak Army Action Beyond Doubt

From Our Political Correspondent
NEW DELHI, April 13.—China has made it clear beyond doubt of its full support to General Yahya Khan in the West Pakistan Army's action in East Bengal. This is borne out by an article in the People's Daily on Sunday under the pseudonym of "Commentator", a traditional Chinese method of expressing authoritative views. Two things stand out in the article. India is charged with interfering in East Pakistan's affairs and with colluding with the super-powers. Secondly, the major thrust of the Chinese attack is also against the Soviet Union—a point underlined by a dig at the Soviet Union for its intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The People's Daily has signified Chinese support for Islamabad in the following words: "The Chinese Government and people will always vehemently support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle for safeguarding national independence and State sovereignty and against foreign aggression and interference."

By coming out on General Yahya Khan's side against East Bengal, the Chinese have decided that it would be more advantageous to them to continue to promote good relations with Islamabad.

Perhaps, Peking believes that after the Army is able to establish control over the major towns in East Bengal, Islamabad would

install a puppet Government.

Since such a course would merely extend the war in East Bengal, it is presumably Peking's belief that the leadership of the freedom-fighters would pass on to the extremists. At that stage, Peking could make the switch to supporting East Bengal's struggle.

Our Special Representative adds: In a midnight broadcast on Monday, monitored in Calcutta, Peking Radio obliquely referred to the events in Bangla Desh in its "weekly review of international events". The main point that the radio highlighted was "Indian interference in Pakistan's internal events". Not a word was said about Pakistan Radio's claim that the Prime Minister, Mr. Chou En-lai

had given an assurance that China would help to her to safeguard her sovereignty and

Peking Radio also mentioned the Pakistani Army's action in Bangla Desh against the uprising there. The article also mentioned the Pakistani Army's allegations against the latter's intervention in East Pakistan. It also mentioned the Soviet President, Mr. Khrushchev's reply to the UN's appeal for the Government to stop the troop movements in the north-eastern front.

The sources were commenting in a section of about Chinese troops as a follow-up of the Chinese support to President Khan on the Bangla Desh

Aid Body To Send Mobile Hospitals

NEW DELHI, April 13. — The Bangla Desh Assistance Committee announced today that it had arranged to send five mobile hospitals to attend to refugees pouring in from across the border, reports PTL.

Reports received by the committee, which has been set up here to coordinate relief measures at the all-India level, say thousands of refugees have been coming in through various border points. They require immediate medical attention.

Miss Padmaja Naidu, vice-chairman of the committee, told reporters that the mobile health care units would operate on "our side of the border". Three of them are being sent to the Bengal border and one each to Assam and Tripura.

Miss Naidu said that each hospital would be manned by three doctors besides attendants and nurses adds UNI. The hospitals would operate round-the-clock in the border areas in three shifts of eight hours each.

Miss Naidu said that Indian Red Cross and Saint John's Ambulance had assured the committee that the operation of the committee at the borders for relief to the victims would be supervised by these organizations.

She said that recruitment for the noble cause would also be made locally with the assistance of the Red Cross and Indian Medical Association under the supervision of the members of the committee.

She added that the committee had so far received only Rs 70,000, including Rs 50,000 donated by the Union Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister, Dr. Karan Singh.

Meanwhile, the All India Women's Conference today decided to donate one ambulance to the committee to be sent to the border areas to help the refugees from East Bengal.

Meanwhile, the Rajasthan Cabinet today decided to contribute Rs 10 lakhs to provide relief to the refugees coming from Bangla Desh.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Mohan Lal Sukhadia, told the Vidhan Sabha that it had also been decided to establish a 400-bed mobile

surgical hospital for the refugees.

He said all the men Ministry had volunteered a day's salary every month for the struggle in Bangla Desh.

CHAGLAH COORDINATION COMMITTEE

NEW DELHI, April 13. — Coordination for Bangla Desh, prominent political party formed today under the leadership of Mr. M. C. Chagla, Minister, Mr. Karpool, is the working chair committee and Prof. S. the convener-secretary.

The committee, with offices at Calcutta, will meet at Delhi and Bombay.

Prof. Guha told reporters that the committee would call a national convention to make all efforts for assistance and relief to the people of Bangla Desh.

Prof. Guha said both Soviet Union should accord immediate recognition to the Bangla Desh Government and start a diplomatic support of Bangla Desh upon the East European countries and other Communist countries including Cuba. He also called for immediate recognition of the Swadhin Bangla Government.

The committee also appealed to the Ceylon Government to put an immediate use of its national troops against Pakistani troops.

Among the other members of the committee are Mr. N. G. Gorey, Mr. Dr. V. K. R. V. R. Subag Singh, Mr. S. Prof. Hiren Mukherjee, Mr. Prakash, Mr. Atal Behari, George Fernandes, Manipur Chief Minister, Singh.

The National Front Trade Unions, in a letter to the Prime Minister, have demanded the recognition of Bangla Desh Government. They also expressed the fear that an influx of a million refugees from Bangladesh would cause a crisis on the Indian economy.

The Asiatic Society note issued in Calcutta, expressed deep concern about the killing of unarmed Bangla Desh as well as discriminate destruction of life and other institutions and cultural parts of Bangla Desh.

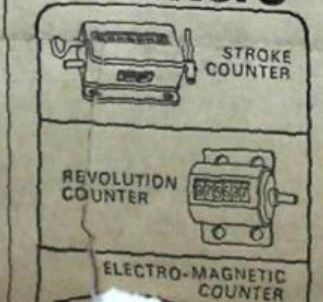
Time To Speak Up, Says U.K. Paper

LONDON, April 12.—The Observer, commenting on the happenings in East Bengal, yesterday warned that the "difficulties of any practical international action to prevent limit or settle a civil war are notorious" says UPI. It added: "Vietnam is an awful warning of just that!"

In its editorial entitled "Time to speak up" the paper said now that the full gravity of the situation in East Bengal is apparent, there seems something horrifying about continued lack of any serious international effort at mediation there. "It is in striking contrast with the successful effort made by the UN Security Council backed by Russia and the USA to settle the war between Pakistan and India in 1965."

"The legal position is, of course, very different because the present war can be claimed by Pakistan as an internal, not an international matter. But the kind of appeal already made by President Podgorny to the President of Pakistan for moderation and a negotiated settlement might carry more weight if made by the whole Security Council including its other permanent members, the USA, Britain and France. No doubt such an appeal has already been made by the British and American Governments privately. It may now be time for quiet diplomacy to be supplemented by a public declaration," the Observer said.

metro counters



Controversy At CPI Council Meeting

By Our Special Representative

The CPI's West Bengal Council began its three-day session in Calcutta on Monday. A controversy has arisen in the Council about the party's attitude to the Congress (R) the CPI(M) and the Naxalites. The party's election reverses have led many to think that its policies have not been correct. A section, which is bitter about the CPI(M)'s "sectarian and adventurist" line, maintains that the party needs to be "more militantly left" to be politically effective in West Bengal.

Others in the party hold that the CPI should have "adequate strength" to be able to withstand the attacks on the party by the CPI(M) on

POLL RESULTS IN PERSPECTIVE

No Scope For Alibis Or Excuses—II

By M. R. MASANI

WHAT has broadly happened as a result of the recent parliamentary elections is that in some ways we have gone back to the days of Mr Jawaharlal Nehru. The Prime Minister turned this into something of a Presidential election. It was she, and not her somewhat anonymous candidate, who fought you at constituency level. It was her portrait that faced yours on the walls.

On the night of March 1, after the voting in Rajkot was over, when addressing an eve-of-the-poll meeting for a colleague in the neighbouring constituency of Surendranagar, I was asked: "Who will win in Rajkot—you or Mr Ghanashyam Oza?" I answered quite truthfully: "The real question is: who will win in Rajkot—Mrs Indira Gandhi or myself?"

A GAIN

The implications and consequences during the next few years of this turn in Indian politics are likely to be both far-reaching and crucial. One good thing, however, that emerges from these elections is that there can be no more alibis or excuses for what the Union Government does or does not do. The Prime Minister has a majority, a very convincing one, in Parliament. Whatever she does now will be of her own free will and cannot be explained away by saying it was done to please this or that party or element. It is a gain that the new Government is so clearly accountable to the people of India. In the months and years to come, this will have its impact on the course of events.

The basic tasks before this country and this Government are two-fold—one political and the other economic. The political task is to restore law and order and to protect the lives and liberties of the people, particularly in West Bengal. Alongside of this must come the restoration of some discipline, the absence of which we see in every department of our national life and of which the wretched and interminable disruption of IAC services has been a symbol for some time now. According to the Chief Labour Commissioner, the number of man-days lost in India in 1970 owing to strikes and lock-outs reached an all-time record of 19 million man-days, a rise by as much as three and a half times in the last decade. There are thousands of people who voted for Mrs Indira Gandhi not because they agreed with her policies but because, in the absence of an alternative, they thought she would provide stability. They will demand that this political task of restoring order and discipline be now performed.

The economic task is how to pull this country out of the morass into which it has landed as a result of 20 years of bad policies and planning. In particular, this will resolve itself into two specific challenges—to secure stable prices and larger employment opportunities. Neither of these objectives can be achieved without increased production of agricultural and industrial goods and services. It is good that, in a speech in Parliament on April 2, the Prime Minister mentioned the need for higher productivity to be attained. It is to be seen whether she fully appreciates the implications.

We cannot as a nation produce

more unless we work harder, unless we save and invest more, and unless we show greater enterprise. The "German Miracle" was not produced through any magical process but precisely by hard work, enterprise, savings and investment. Some years after World War II had ended, the new Government in West Germany had to publish a "communiqué against work fury" which, in all seriousness, advised employers and workers not to work too hard because it was bad for the health of the community. There is, of course, no danger of Mrs Gandhi or her successors in title having to issue any such communiqué!

People work harder if hard work is rewarded. If hard work is discouraged, people become more lazy. Similarly, people take more risks and show more enterprise if enterprise is rewarded. If, as has happened only too often in India, enterprise is punished, if a discount is placed on honest investment and a premium on slackness and the enjoyment of monopoly provided by a system of permits and licences, then savings, investment and enterprise dry up. Basically, economic and planning policies in India have deprecated hard work, honest enterprise and saving while putting a premium on laziness, tax evasion and the making of the quick rupee by obtaining licences and permits and evading competition. Unless the basic economic policies of the Socialist Establishment of the last 20 years are radically changed, we as a nation cannot be expected to become a more hardworking, enterprising or prosperous people.

The big question, therefore, is whether the new Government will have the courage to go in for an almost complete reversal of the disastrous Statist policies which have failed for the last two decades. We should await an answer to this question with an open mind. Soon the sound of cheers will recede in the distance and the flowers in the garlands will wither away. But "the poor we always have with us", and we are likely to have them for many many years to come. Unless the expectations that have been aroused through an appeal to mass envy during the recent elections are met by more food and more of the comforts of life, those suffering from privation and poverty can hardly be blamed if they turn sour or angry.

A WARNING

It would be a mistake to believe that, at that point, those who have been misled and let down will turn automatically to appreciate the virtues of middle-of-the-road liberal democracy or of competitive enterprise. It is just as likely, indeed more likely, that in their ignorance they will become even more bloody-minded and "Bolshy". The sweeping aside of Mrs Gandhi in such circumstances may lead to even more chaotic conditions. It was none else than Professor Harold Laski who referred to the "idolization of leaders who might later be mercilessly attacked as the incarnation of evil" as part of the "normal behaviour of Communists all over the world". Mrs Indira Gandhi might well ponder over that thought and the warning it contains for her.

The real crisis is not now upon us. The real crisis caused by these elec-

tions may come a couple of years from now. It is against that day that those who love freedom and free institutions have to plan and prepare. A massive campaign of political education is what India needs. "Educate our masters" was the old British maxim. We politicians have woefully failed to perform this task.

I have a feeling that it is not the political parties of today—certainly not under their present leadership—who are going to liberate the country from the Statist strait-jacket or the mounting threat of chaos. I believe that, when a leadership has failed, it should step aside and make way for younger, fresher and more dynamic elements to take over. It is a sound principle of administration—whether in civil, military, political or business life—that, when a disaster overtakes a country, army or organization, the men at the helm should step aside and hand over power to those uncommitted to the mistakes of the past who may be able to resuscitate the organization and bring it again on top. That is why I have stepped down from the presidency of the Swatantra Party.

LEADERSHIP

But where is this new leadership to come from except from among the ranks of the citizens? Here the record of our intelligentsia and of our business class leaves a great deal to be desired. In so far as providing natural leadership and solidarity to those less educated and less prosperous than themselves is concerned, there has been, since the birth of independent India, a lamentable absence of what the Americans call "grass roots democracy". For too many of us, democracy consists of five-yearly elections after which they may subside into somnolence, grumbling and querulous complaints. Democracy is day-to-day vigilance and day-to-day fight for the basic freedoms of the people, against corruption and misgovernment, arbitrary action and tyranny. Whatever view one may take of the results of the elections, the problem comes back to each of us and what we are going to do about it.

Sometimes we set an alarm clock to wake us in the morning but we fail to respond because we are too sleepy. Too many of us have been like that in India these past years. There has been the alarm of unemployment ringing louder every year, since unemployment has been increasing with each Five Year Plan, but we have slept through it. There has been the alarm of inflation and rising prices, but we have managed to sleep through that also. There has been the alarm of indiscipline which we see in every walk of our national life. That too we have accepted and managed to sleep through. There has been, particularly in Bengal, the alarm of violence where innocent people have been butchered in broad daylight, but too many have slept through that also. And now one can hear the alarm of national disaster and the end of freedom ringing loudly. Judging by the concern being expressed about the country's present plight and its future, I believe there are thousands upon thousands of men and women in this country who hear it. The question is what they are going to do about it.

(Concluded)



People fleeing Dacca in panic with their meagre belongings after wanton killing and destruction of property by the Pakistani Army.

U.S. OFFICIALS FEEL ...

No Danger Of Imminent Intervention By China

U.N. H.Q., April 14.—U.S. officials tend to discount any danger of imminent Chinese intervention despite the Premier. Mr Chou En-lai's strong support to Islamabad and pledge of help against India, reports PTL.

The general reaction at the U.N. to the Chinese statement has been that despite all its talk and gibes against Moscow for betraying "proletarian revolution", China, too when it comes to choosing between ideological aims and State aims behaves like a great power and is willing to sacrifice ideology.

The U.S. view is apparently based on an assessment that the Chinese are "usually long on words and short on action", and also on the view that New Delhi itself has been acting with great caution and moderation in a very difficult situation.

Press reports from India and

from reporters travelling from India into East Pakistan all testify so far that "there have been no systematic or large-scale supplies of Indian arms" to Bangla Desh.

A despatch in the Washington Post speaks of extreme caution and moderation shown by Mrs Indira Gandhi, partly because of her landslide election victory. The despatch also brings out the fact that Muslim leaders in India have reacted to West Pakistani massacres in the east "by maintaining a silence that has been conspicuous".

SEND ARMS TO BANGLA DESH

Thakur Reiterates Earlier Plea

PATNA, April 14.—The Chief Minister of Bihar, Mr Karpoori Thakur, yesterday stressed the need for helping the people of Bangla Desh with arms and ammunition, reports PTL.

Addressing a meeting at the Bihar Hindi Sahitya Bhawan, Mr Thakur, who has already paid several visits to the border areas, said: "If we want Bangla Desh to remain independent, free from the clutches of dictatorship, we must help its people with arms which are their greatest need."

He urged writers and poets to help the people of Bangla Desh by writing in favour of their struggle for freedom and democracy.

Mr Subhas Chandra Sarkar, editor of the Searchlight, lent support to the Chief Minister's plea and said that India must also recognize the Provisional Government of Bangla Desh.

Poet Rajendra Prasad Singh said India should not hesitate to recognize the Government of Bangla Desh now since the Provisional Government had already been announced.

Kumar Vimal, well-known Hindi writer and director of the Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, and several other speakers expressed similar sentiments.

Mr Thakur also appealed to the people of Bihar, immediately to donate 25,000 pieces of military

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Sudan Asks Pakistan To Use Restraint

NEW DELHI, April 14.—Sudan has asked Pakistan to exercise "restraint and wisdom and avoid bloodshed" in an apparent reference to the events in East Bengal, reports PTL.

Addressing a gathering on National Unity Day at Khartoum recently, President Nimeri said: "We in revolutionary Sudan are regretfully watching events in friendly Pakistan."

"We call upon Pakistani people to exercise restraint and wisdom and avoid bloodshed. We desire integrity and unity of nations to dispel Imperialist plots against developing nations. We sympathize with the plight of the people in brotherly Pakistan."

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