

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

India reacts to Pakistan tragedy

Observance of formalities marks an attitude of cautious concern over the death of Gen. Zia ul-Haq.

Following the funeral of Gen. Zia ul-Haq, Pakistani President Ghulam Ishaq Khan went out of his way to express his country's gratitude for the sincere and solemn response of the Indian government and people to the tragic events of Aug. 17, when former President Zia and 29 others were killed in a mid-air explosion.

A delegation led by President R. Venkataraman attended the funeral. The delegation included the foreign minister, commerce minister, and representatives of all the political parties except the two Communist parties, who backed out at the last minute, citing the allegations of Soviet involvement in sabotaging Zia's plane.

A three-day mourning period was declared in India, and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi canceled his birthday celebrations on Aug. 20. The Indian cabinet and Parliament sent condolences, and large bouquets of tube roses were reportedly sent specially from Delhi for the funeral.

Even though Prime Minister Gandhi chose not to dump protocol in the other direction and attend the funeral himself, as Zia had done for Indira Gandhi in 1984, India's was one of the highest-level delegations at the funeral next to Turkey and some of the other Islamic states.

President Venkataraman took the opportunity in private talks with the new Pakistani President to reiterate India's desire for peaceful and friendly relations. Wide coverage of the funeral and burial of Zia was given on Indian television and in the news media generally.

As one might expect, given the

backdrop of a bloody communal partition, three subsequent wars, and still-unresolved border and other issues, the man on the street's reaction to the crisis in Pakistan is often glib, and one does not have to go far to hear communal overtones. Several incidents of communal violence—including the Srinagar fracas which is longer standing—have been reported.

Interestingly, the spontaneous view on the street is also that, for better or worse, the Russians most likely were responsible. The government was quick to dispense with allegations of Indian involvement that surfaced in some foreign press as "utterly baseless and malicious," and the rumor hasn't figured in speculations here.

Otherwise, informed response has been uniformly sober, appreciating the implications for the subcontinent of such a huge, sudden, power vacuum. As *The Hindu*, often read as the unofficial voice of the Foreign Office, put it, "The sudden exit of an effective leader anywhere is a major calamity, but for a country like Pakistan, where the norms for the transfer of power are not institutionalized, it has the potential for mighty upheavals. The main question in this case is who next and what next after General Zia."

Unfortunately, the broader discussion is conditioned by the fact that the standard view of Pakistan here, even among otherwise knowledgeable people, is hopelessly superficial, even childishly so. In this view, fixed as it is on the United States and on anti-militarist, pro-democratic sentiments, the only issue is whether or not "the people" will rise up to throw off the

military and/or sever the alliance with the U.S. This view, which India's leadership has so far found too convenient to refute, likes to ignore Pakistan's developed ties to the Islamic world and its quite independent and substantial relationship with China, as much as it prefers to ignore the fact that the military's role in Pakistan has been determined by the failure of political leadership to steer the country.

Mercifully, though, this view does not go entirely unchallenged. On a TV talk show, former *Times of India* editor Inder Malhotra implored his colleagues to drop the stereotypes and prescriptions, and put themselves in their Pakistani brothers' shoes! Malhotra, who has in the past been branded a "Pakistani agent," said the Pakistani leaders were working under duress to ensure the security and integrity of their nation in a moment of extreme crisis.

A similarly independent commentator, Inder Jit, scored the government for bowing to matters of the moment—for example, the extreme displeasure over alleged Pakistani meddling in the Punjab—and choosing cold formality instead of a genuinely statesmanlike gesture of warmth and brotherhood. Speaking for himself "and many MPs," Inder Jit argued that both houses of Parliament should have adjourned on Aug. 18, as was urged by several members. He pointed out that the excuse offered—that India's Parliament adjourns only for the leaders of countries with elected parliaments—ignores the fact that free India's Parliament adjourned for Josef Stalin in 1953! "Most of us saw him [Zia] as a ruthless military dictator, a sworn enemy and a devil incarnate," wrote Inder Jit, satirizing the popular view. "Nevertheless, we would do well to remember that he gave India what it need most in self-interest: a strong and stable neighbor."