

Wali Khan is up to no good, again

by Ramtanu Maitra

The recent statement by Pushtun leader and president of the Awami National Party (ANP) Khan Abdul Wali Khan, that elections in Pakistan should be postponed for three months to complete the process of "accountability," has drawn sharp response from both the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML).

On the face of it, the demand for "accountability" is clearly an effort to discredit some PML members and weaken that party's prospects in the coming elections. Since Wali Khan's ANP is a member of the coalition that opposes the PML, it would seem to be a clever ploy. PML members, though not the party as such, have been governing Pakistan since 1985.

Reacting to Wali Khan's demand, the spiritual leader of the PML, Pir Sahib of Pagara, told newsmen in Lahore on Sept. 3, "The elections could be deferred for three years, provided the process of accountability covered the period from Aug. 14, 1947 [the day Pakistan was born] and was to be completed in letter and spirit." If the administrators are to be made accountable for their misdeeds, then every administrator who had ever been entrusted to serve Pakistan should be scrutinized and all wrong-doers punished. To target the PML members alone would be a politically motivated act, he pointed out. The Pir is not one to be taken in by clever ploys.

More insightful observations came from the Amir (chief) of Jamaat-e-Islami, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, who described Wali Khan's recent demand as a "replay" of his activities following the fall of the Bhutto regime in 1977. It is well known that Wali Khan had crossed swords with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and came out the loser. So when Gen. Zia ul-Haq removed Bhutto in a coup on July 5, 1977, Wali Khan threw his support to the martial law regime. But at the same time, when General Zia announced fresh elections within 90 days, the Pushtun "progressive" insisted: "Accountability now, elections later."

What the Pushtun leader apparently had in mind was to haul all the top Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leaders to court and finish them off. Now, since Wali Khan is planning an electoral alliance with Benazir Bhutto's PPP, the names have been changed but the game is the same: *destabilization*. As the JI leaders recalled, in 1977 it was Wali Khan's campaign that led responsible people to claim that it was not General Zia's military regime that postponed the promised elections, but the political leaders who demanded it in the name of

"accountability."

Is there a deeper motive lurking behind Wali Khan's antics? Qazi Hussain Ahmad thinks so. Since the ANP would not be able to win even a single seat anywhere in Pakistan outside the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), he points out, elections are of no interest to Wali Khan. They might even cut his high profile down to size. But since he cannot openly oppose elections, he is "creating confusion in the minds of the people." One might expect the JI leader to be harsh with Wali Khan, since they have been sworn enemies for almost a decade, but one needn't take his word for the Pushtun politician's ulterior motives.

A known quantity

Wali Khan's commitment to Pakistan's well-being has come into question before. The son of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Wali Khan has always been a proponent of establishing a Pushtun state spanning the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. In 1978, following the takeover in Kabul by a pro-Moscow party, Wali Khan regularly met Afghan President Babrak Karmal and other officials seeking to collaborate in establishing the Pushtun state.

Dr. Najibullah, the present Afghan chief who ousted Karmal, is a friend of Wali Khan, dating perhaps prior to his tenure as head of the Afghan Secret Service, when Najibullah lived in Peshawar and joined the ANP. The ANP leader also keeps in contact with the pro-Moscow lobby in India. But every indication is that the leftist coloring is only skin deep. Like most of his fellow ANP leaders in Pushtun areas, Wali Khan is a relatively big landholder.

Wali Khan's forte, even his most sympathetic observers acknowledge, is creating chaos and confusion. As the pro-Khan analyst Selig Harrison has emphasized in his book *In Afghanistan's Shadow*, "Wali Khan and his venerated father, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, leader of the anti-British Redshirt movement, had never indicated clearly whether their concept of Pushtunistan meant an autonomous Pushtun State within Pakistan, an Afghan-linked Pushtun State, or an independent Pushtun State." He has to this day kept all the options open.

His penchant for fishing in troubled waters is well known, and he, along with his late father and wife, were denied entry to Sind province for the past year or so following violent clashes between the Mohajirs and Pathans there. Wali Khan loudly accused the Zia government of anti-Pathan sentiments. And, in August 1986, he told ANP party workers that if democracy was not restored, they would have to organize "a violent revolution."

On Sept. 3, the ban lifted, Wali Khan marched into Sind where he defended in a press conference the policies of the Soviet Union and Afghanistan against Pakistan, justifying the recent Afghan bombing raids 40 miles inside Pakistan. He portrayed the Pakistan Army and the mujahideen guerrillas as "intruders" trying to block the exit of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.