

Report from New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Spotlight on troubled Kashmir

The kidnaping drama has ended, but the hard work of resolving the problem has just begun.

Toward midnight on Dec. 13 the dramatic terrorist kidnaping of Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's 23-year-old daughter, which began Dec. 7, came to an end. Rubaiya was released by her captors of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in exchange for the release of five leading JKLF activists in police custody. She was flown to Delhi for a reunion with her father.

Mufti Sayeed is from the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and his family lives in Srinagar, where daughter Rubaiya, a medical doctor, interns at a local hospital. On Dec. 7, just days after Mufti Sayeed was sworn in as the new government's Home Minister, the first Muslim to hold that crucial portfolio in independent India, Rubaiya was taken hostage by armed men as she was returning from duty at the hospital.

The JKLF, the hoary old secessionist outfit kept alive by infusions from London and Rawalpindi, quickly demanded the release of five compatriots as ransom. The JKLF, whose representatives just completed a tour of anti-India congressmen and other groups in Washington, seek accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. During the days of anxious waiting, there was an outcry from political groups spanning the communal divide, condemning the barbarous act. A plea for Rubaiya's life came from the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, while other Pakistani groups condemned the act as "un-Islamic." Even JKLF Amanullah Khan, from London, put in a word for her life.

But the aftermath points to the

challenge facing the V.P. Singh government in the strategic state of Jammu and Kashmir. The cheering crowds that paraded throughout the city of Srinagar and several others were not celebrating Rubaiya's release—they were celebrating the victory of the JKLF terrorists!

As a *Times of India* correspondent described it firsthand, "It appeared as if Kashmir had ceased to be a part of India as rampaging crowds with flags of Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir could be seen in a joyous mood swaying in processions." There was no sign of any state or central police in the state.

In a press conference Dec. 13, following his daughter's release, Home Minister Sayeed described the situation in Jammu and Kashmir as "worse than Punjab." As the Home Minister frankly acknowledged, the state has been in turmoil for the past two years and there is a "complete collapse of law and order."

Located south of the Sino-Soviet borders, the strategic area of Kashmir has been disputed territory since the 1947 partition of the subcontinent between India and Pakistan, and it remains the major roadblock to improvement of relations between the two neighbors. Just as the Maharaja Hari Singh in 1947 announced his decision to bring his princely state of Kashmir into the Indian Union, the state was invaded by Pakistanis in tribal dress. The western half of Kashmir, or Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, is called Azad Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian half of the state, has never been fully

integrated into the Indian nation, though this was masked as long as the state was in the hands of the powerful political figure, trusted by the Muslim majority of the state, Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah. It was the Sheikh who, himself, it seems, maintained his people's faith in the wisdom of acceding to India. The political vacuum there since his death in the early 1980s is no small factor in the present crisis.

Even so, over the years, sins committed in the name of Kashmir's "special status," had the cumulative effect of almost totally alienating the state's Muslim majority from India. The Congress Party has never had much strength of its own in the state, but instead worked through Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference. The Sheikh's son and successor, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, does not begin to have the political stature of his father, and it is not surprising that under his weak and vacillating leadership since 1982, the political processes within the state have deteriorated sharply.

According to the latest detailed reports from the state, it is the extremists who call the tune, with the mainstream political organizations almost completely marginalized and their once-respected leaders vying to strike the more extreme posture.

In this context, the open funding of fundamentalist groups, mainly by Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Pakistan, is only one of the more conspicuous avenues for foreign meddling. Among other things, it is reported that as Pakistani godfathers seek to reorganize their agents and assets under a "Kashmir Liberation Alliance" umbrella, denying funding to those suspected of less than 100% loyalty to Pakistan, a section of the militants, including a faction within the JKLF, is opting for a straightforward "Kashmir independence" fight.