

**India relives midnight "tryst with destiny".**By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

597 words

14 August 1997

Reuters News

English

(c) 1997 Reuters Limited

NEW DELHI, Aug 15 (Reuters) - India's leaders gathered in their parliament's majestic Central Hall on Thursday night to relive their nation's "tryst with destiny" a half-century ago.

The vast domed chamber, its thick warm air stirred ineffectually by ancient fans, was packed with lawmakers and the steep visitors' galleries were crowded with the world's envoys.

The sandstone-tiled courtyard outside was festooned with garlands of marigold flowers and the plaintive notes of the shehnai, a reed instrument, wailed from loudspeakers as the midnight hour approached.

The historic ceremony was punctuated by patriotic hymns sung by classical musician Bhimsen Joshi and Lata Mangeshkar, a playback singer who usually lends her voice to actresses in the country's prolific Hindi film industry.

Inside the same chamber, as midnight struck on August 14-15 1947, the leaders of the vast subcontinent had taken power from their British rulers in a solemn and peaceful ceremony.

"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially," the new nation's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru said on that night.

"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom," Nehru said in a speech replayed as the clock moved to Friday in the hot, humid hall.

Silence gripped the assembly as the frail voice of Nehru's mentor Mahatma Gandhi, who led India's campaign for freedom, crackled from the loudspeakers.

"Were it not for our servile attitude and selfishness leading to inner conflicts, would the British power, however great, have been able to dominate, subjugate and humiliate us for so many years? Now that we are enlightened, we have realised our goal, they cannot alter it," Gandhi said in a May 13, 1947 speech.

But there was loud thumping of desks as the lawmakers listened to a speech by Subhas Chandra Bose, a charismatic politician who led the rebel Indian National Army in an alliance with the Japanese until he was killed in mysterious circumstances in 1945.

"Brace up without delay to sacrifice yourselves with united strength, peace and non-violence," said Bose, called "Netaji" or leader by his countrymen. "Brace up unitedly now to break the shackles of subjugation. India can no longer remain servile, nor can any power force it to remain so."

The solemnity was relieved by rightwing Hindu lawmaker Nitish Bhardwaj who was clad in a colourful tunic woven in the saffron, white and green of the Indian flag. Bhardwaj was elected to parliament last year chiefly because of a popular role he played in a televised mythology serial.

Minutes before midnight two trumpeteers in a balcony heralded the entrance of President K.R. Narayanan.

A military band struck up the national anthem as Narayanan stood flanked by six turbaned bodyguards with India's tricolour flag hanging from their lances. Near Narayanan was speaker P.A. Sangma of the Indian parliament's lower house or Lok Sabha and Betty Boothroyd, the speaker of Britain's House of Commons.

"I am painfully aware of the deterioration that has taken place in our country and in our society in recent times," Narayanan told the silent lawmakers.

"Sheer opportunism and value-less power-politics have taken over the place of principles and idealism that had been the hallmark of our social and political life...corruption is corroding the vitals of our politics and our society."

(c) Reuters Limited 1997





Document lba0000020011002dt8e01a94

By Chalkley's Railway  
702 2226  
28 July 1997  
Factiva News  
English  
(c) 1997 Reuters Limited

NEW DELHI, July 28 (Reuters) - India's Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral has caused anger and confusion in his own country and neighbouring Pakistan with an apparent about-face on talks with Muslim militants in Kashmir.

Gujral stunned friends and foes alike on Saturday by announcing during a trip to the troubled Himalayan region that he was willing to hold discussions with the militants.

He said on Sunday to clarify that he would not negotiate with the guerrillas unless they laid down arms.

Gujral, making a speech in Parliament on Monday with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main opposition group.

It strongly opposed any such move that I say was wrong in the morning and another in the evening. Gujral told the lower house, the Lok Sabha.

Gujral said his offer for talks was aimed at young men who have been misled by separatist propaganda.

"During the speech I had said I was prepared to talk to all those young men who have been misled," he said.

"The new policy statement has been made," Gujral insisted.

Pakistan denied joining the Kashmiri militants and said it provided only moral and diplomatic support. Analysts in Islamabad were quick to attack what was termed Gujral's "surrender".

"The surrender is nothing new because the Indian leaders have never translated their words into any serious action," Asgha Mumtaz Poonia, a former head of the Islamabad-based Institute of Strategic Studies, told Reuters.

"It is heading nowhere. The Indians are just living on cloud nine... while continuing to intensify their barbaric and corrupt Kashmiri," Poonia said.

Ghani Jaffer, a research analyst at Islamabad's National Institute of Strategic Studies, said India felt compelled to find a political settlement in Kashmir because of international expectations but it really wanted time to crush the militants.

"There is considerable international expectation for justice and a political settlement for which negotiations with people in Kashmir are an essential part," Jaffer said. "On the other hand, they wish to crush the struggle and buy time without engaging in meaningful dialogue with Kashmiris and Pakistan."

The BJP's Vajpayee said Gujral's statement had been broadcast by India's state television, causing doubts about the government's Kashmir policy.

"The manner in which the statement has been published and appeared on the television says a lot," Vajpayee said.

Gujral said there had been several skirmishes involving militants and Indian security forces along the Pakistan border for the past three or four months. He said his offer for talks was not aimed at militants trained across the border.

India has steadfastly refused to negotiate with the militants, who have been waging guerrilla warfare since 1990 for Kashmir's independence or merger with neighbouring Pakistan.

Asgha Mumtaz, a senior fellow at New Delhi's Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, said India's Kashmir policy was not a threat in the direction he felt India's handling of the situation in the volatile region might