

When Benazir Bhutto opposed a Kargil-type operation!

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New Delhi: Pakistan Army had planned a Kargil-type military operation much before the summer of 1999 when Benazir Bhutto was the prime minister but she stood her ground against the idea, a new book by a former diplomat says.

In his book, "Where Borders Bleed: An Insider's Account of Indo-Pak Relations" Rajiv Dogra, who was Consul General of India in Karachi from 1992 to 1994, talks about a number of contentious issues between the two countries.

Covering historical, diplomatic and military perspectives in almost 70 years of conflict, the book chronicles the events leading up to Partition, reflects on the consequent strife, and provides a perspective on the figures who have shaped the story of this land - from Lord Mountbatten and Muhammad Ali Jinnah to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh.

Dogra, a 1974-batch Indian Foreign Service officer who served as ambassador to Italy, Romania, Moldova, Albania and San Marino besides India's permanent representative to the United Nations agencies based in Rome, terms Benazir as "liberal by temperament" and whose western education "had made her more receptive in her relationship with the outside world."

"It is true that she was swayed by low-level intelligence gossip... But it is also a fact that on occasion she stood her ground against the army. This may have prevented the Kargil invasion at least once during her spell in office," he says.

Quoting from an interview given by Benazir, Dogra goes to say how she dismissed the idea of Major General Pervez Musharraf, the then DGMO, about such an operation. Though Musharraf painted a rosy picture of Pakistan winning the war and taking over Srinagar, Benazir apparently told him, "No, General, if I say that they (India) will tell 'withdraw from Srinagar'.

"Not only withdraw from Srinagar but withdraw from Azad Kashmir too. Because under the UN resolution first the plebiscite - we have to withdraw even from Azad Kashmir where the plebiscite had to be held."

Dogra says Benazir's assertion was a "rare instance where a Pakistani leader took an army general to caution him against a misadventure."

The author also goes on to claim that Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif knew that Pakistani soldiers were occupying Kargil heights when he welcomed then Indian Prime Minister A B Vajpayee, who made the historic Delhi-Lahore bus ride.

"Close to the bus, Nawaz Sharif was looking distinctly uncomfortable as he bent to embrace Vajpayee. Sharif had reason to look sheepish as Pakistani soldiers were already occupying the heights in Kargil," the book, published by Rupa, says.

- PTI