

## Army deployment at UP polls looks imperative

*Govt should comply with the EC request*

THE issue centring around army deployment for the upcoming elections to the Union Parishads has figured in the public domain for quite sometime now. This *per se* came under discussion in a context where the army's services were being utilised in aid of the civil authorities to combat crime. Given the criminalisation of politics over time and the vulnerability of local bodies polls to violence historically, the talk of army deployment for UP elections has hardly been surprising.

On the back of it all, the Election Commission on December 29 decided to approach the government to have the army pressed into service for the elections. The engagement was sought for two months to complete the electoral process without any untoward incidents that could cast a shadow on the credibility of the polls. The EC duly followed up on this decision by sending a request letter to the government last Saturday for requisitioning the army's services. In the meantime, however, Prime Minister's political secretary Haris Chowdhury said he did not think the situation warranted deploying of the army.

The constitutional position on the question is unambiguous. The Election Commission as the designated statutory authority to conduct polls should state its requirements to the government for holding the elections smoothly, freely and fairly. And the latter is constitutionally, legally and conventionally obliged to aid and assist the EC in conducting the elections accordingly. Any foot-dragging on precautionary steps needed to be taken for the polls will create suspicion in the public mind about the congeniality of the environment and, by the same token, about the credibility of the electoral process. Moreover, the 2001 electoral law reform brought about by the caretaker government strengthened the EC's hands in conducting the elections with all necessary safeguards.

Public memory cannot be too short on something that happened a little more than a year ago. When in the last general elections under the caretaker government, armed forces were deployed, BNP as the opposition party welcomed it wholeheartedly. What's more, the party even wanted the schedule of army deployment brought forward. Now, as the government party, BNP cannot make a U-turn on something fundamental that only promises to improve the quality of the polls. The prime concern here is public belief in the credibility of the process which risks being on the line if the army is not there to oversee law and order. We, therefore, fully endorse the EC's request for army deployment at the UP polls and urge the government to comply with it urgently.

## Over-aged student leadership

*Clean-up needed right now*

MOST of the leaders of the newly formed central committee of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) are reportedly either superannuated or irregular students. It is simply unbelievable to discover that one of them has even remained a student for as long as seventeen years! What a sad commentary on the prospective future leaders of our country!

In the past, non-students and outsiders dominated JCD leadership. In that context, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's repeated announcements along with the BNP Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman's express intentions to reorganise JCD with 'regular and genuine students' brought some hope for a change. Instead, what we see now, is exactly the opposite of what they professedly intended. This has been also a frustration for young students aspiring for leadership. So all those eloquent speeches on ridding the party of aged and irregular students by infusing new blood have proved to be rhetorical. This has been a ruling party student wing syndrome by turn, especially of the JCD. Is there really any hope for a country where students are encouraged by their leaders to avail of dishonest means to serve their own political agenda? We believe, there is still time for the parties and their leaders to get their acts together and eliminate this leadership perpetuation disease among old students once and for all.

At the same time, the university authorities have a key-role to play. They should tighten their grips on and plug the loopholes in the rules and regulations so that the students can't take undue advantages. Students should not be allowed to avoid appearing in the final examinations repeatedly or change departments halfway through their course. If they fail to complete their courses in due time, they should receive punitive measures. And this the authorities would have to ensure at any cost without fear from any quarters, political or otherwise.

# The invasion of Afghanistan: Never a cakewalk!



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE arid and inhospitable tract of land astride the Hindukush -- mentioned in the ancient scriptures of the Avesta and the Rig-veda as Aryana and now known to the world as Afghanistan -- has aptly been likened to a flowing river. Waves of conquerors, adventures, religious reformers and empire builders went over it leaving behind only sediments from which grew the ethnic and tribal mosaic of the country today. Some incorporated this territory in their expanding empire, a few merely looted and plundered its cities and went their way; yet others tarried for a while and went on to establish kingdoms in green pastures beyond but none indeed stayed or could stay in this hostile climate. Later the Russians had developed an abiding interest in the land in their southward thrust in quest of warm water only to be stubbornly resisted by the British -- resulting in what had come to be known as the great game between the two imperial powers during the whole period of nineteenth century. In the last quarter of the last century the Soviet Union, a superpower made a faux pas by invading this country of fiercely independent people and became a hoist to its own petard.

On the frigid night of December

24, 1979 the Soviet airborne forces landed in Kabul airport and seized it without any resistance. Their elite group of commandos then stormed the presidential palace and gunned down President Hafizullah Amin. Simultaneously, the Soviet tanks crossed the border and raced south towards Kabul. Within a matter of days the Soviet forces occupied Afghanistan and installed their puppet ruler, Barbak Karmal. Moscow proclaimed that it had invaded

dated the troubles began to crop up. The Afghans had then risen against their Soviet-liberators and started a low-intensity guerrilla war that gradually made Soviet occupation untenable. Unable to control their pinpricks throughout the country the Soviet brought in more and more troops into Afghanistan. The Soviet-run Afghan Army had poor morale and fighting skill. Turned away from the battlefield, the Soviets, through Khad, the Afghan police trained by

same rosy agitprop stories the Soviets did -- freeing the women, educating children, providing health care and so on -- to vindicate the conquest of Afghanistan by a Western coalition. The invaders have changed but the propaganda remains the same.

The US-led coalition's invasion of Afghanistan was painted as an epoch-making military victory in Western media. It was also billed as a model of future imperial expedition

attacks on US occupation forces. Even as the CIA is tasked with the assassination of nationalist Afghan leaders of the likes of Hekmatyar Gulbuddin, the US forces are virtually under siege even in their strongholds like Bagram and Shind and from where they retaliate, like the Soviets, against the attackers by heavily bombing nearby villages.

In the meantime, the captured 'terrorists' are routinely tortured by Afghan security forces under Ameri-

has revived the illicit trade and since Taliban's overthrow its cultivation has soared from 185 tons a year to 2700 tons. The Northern Alliance which dominate the Kabul's puppet regime, finances its arms buying and operations with drug money. President Bush's war on drugs has now collided his war on terror and the US is now practically colluding in the heroin trade.

Anti-US Afghan forces -- the nationalists, Taliban, al-Qaida and others -- are regrouping and mounting attacks on US troops. There are reports even of their re-opening of the training camps. Taliban are using the same sophisticated early warning system they developed to monitor Soviet forces in the 1980s to warn the American search and attack missions before they leave the base. As a result, the US troops only chase the shadows.

The ongoing cost of Afghan operation is a closely guarded secret. Earlier this year the cost of stationing 8000 US troops backed by war planes and naval units was estimated at five billion dollars monthly. In addition, the CIA spends millions every month to bribe Pushtun warlords. The cost will rise as the US expands bases in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan -- all placed along the planned US owned pipeline that would bring central Asian oil south through Afghanistan.

As the Taliban and al-Qaida are again on the offensive, Afghan women still remain veiled and the country is in a terrible mess. In retrospect, declaring victory in Afghanistan, as it seems now, may have been both premature and preposterous.

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## PERSPECTIVES

**Anti-US Afghan forces -- the nationalists, Taliban, al-Qaida and others -- are regrouping and mounting attacks on US troops. There are reports even of their re-opening of the training camps. Taliban are using the same sophisticated early warning system they developed to monitor Soviet forces in the 1980s to warn the American search and attack missions before they leave the base. As a result, the US troops only chase the shadows...The ongoing cost of Afghan operation is a closely guarded secret. Earlier this year the cost of stationing 8000 US troops backed by war planes and naval units was estimated at five billion dollars monthly.**

Afghanistan to liberate the country from 'feudalism', 'Islamic extremists' and 'nests of terrorists and bandits.' The whole exercise went, as if according to a prepared script, and with no finger raised against the invasion, it was a *fait accompli*.

To add a human dimension to the brute invasion the Soviet propaganda charred out films of Red Army soldiers playing with Afghan children, building schools and dispensing medical care. The Afghan women were shown to have been liberated from their veil and other 'backward Islamic customs.' The Soviet conqueror and its local allies seemed poised for bringing Afghanistan into twentieth century.

However, within years when the Soviet-conquest was just consoli-

them, jailed and savagely tortured tens of thousands of 'Islamic terrorists' -- then called Mujahideen or freedom fighter and cheered by the West. By 1989 a negotiated settlement marked the Soviets' humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan -- and subsequently their collapse and finally the disintegration of Soviet Union itself.

Disregarding the lessons of the history, the history was repeated in Afghanistan a little over two decades later when the Afghans were caught with a sense of *deja vu* as a new band of 'liberators' had easily occupied their country in the freezing cold of December last year and overthrown 'feudal' Taliban and installed a puppet regime in Kabul. The western media churned out the

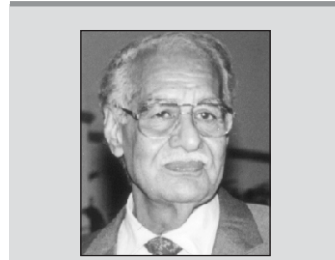
to pacify Third World malefactors. Nevertheless, since that victory the news about the war-ravaged country has grown scarce -- possibly because the subsequent news is no more thrilling for the audience in the West. Also the American attention has now been focussed elsewhere. However, now one year on it will be in order to pry into Afghan abyss.

As a matter of fact the US Afghan adventure has gotten off to as poor a start as that of the Soviet Union. The US-installed ruler of Afghanistan, veteran CIA 'asset' Hamid Karzai himself is a liability because he has to be protected from the wrath of his own people by upto 200 bodyguards. The country is once again in chaos fought over by warlords and drug barons. There are almost daily

can supervision. Last fall, the US troops presided over the murder by Northern Alliance forces of some 3000 captured Taliban soldiers, a major war crime at a time when the UN is trying Serb soldiers for similar grave offences. North of the Hindukush mountains, the US Afghan ally, the Tajik-Uzbek Northern Alliance has long been proxy also of the Russians. The chief of the Russian General Staff and Head of the Intelligence directed the alliance in its final attack on Taliban last fall. Therefore the alliance has at the best a split allegiance to the US, its later-day benefactor.

Taliban, according to the UN drug agency had almost shut down opium-morphine-heroin production. The US ally, the Northern Alliance

# Democracy, Pakistan and India's intractability



KULDEEP NAYYAR  
*writes from New Delhi*

NOT a soldier, not a tank on road, not even the picture of General Parvez Musharraf beams from street corners. Pakistan looks like a country where the military does not have to do anything except to manage the 'elected' leaders to stay put in power. A 16-crore nation is resigned to the khaki domination which it believes it cannot change on its own. Even seminars, much less demonstrations, to register their protest, are absent. Yet people ventilate their anger whenever they get an opportunity. The referendum which Musharraf held to get an approval of his rule was boycotted by some 90 per cent Pakistanis despite the persuasion and pressure used. Even in the recent rigged elections, the majority voted for the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which they consider some shades better than the others. The military not only blessed the Pakistan Muslim League (Qaide), called the king's party, but also partially helped dini (religious) parties to depress the pro-democracy vote. Defection and division were also effected in the anti-Musharraf combinations to demoralise them.

Still all is not well with the Zafraullah Khan Jamali's government which Musharraf has revetted by poaching small political parties

and even individual members from their age-old allies. The shaky government survived the no-confidence motion a few days ago. But it is an open secret that behind the scenes the military won, not Jamali. I was at Islamabad when the arm-twisting of members was going on. Some should have made money because the asking rate per member was Rs. 2 crore.

"It is a vote of confidence in my favour", the prime minister cor-

staff. 'It is up to him to decide,' Jamali said. Musharraf has the presidium of Corps Commanders where all affairs of the state are discussed and decided. The National Security Council, the apex body which has the prime minister as a member, is only a formality.

Will the obedient Jamali last? If self-effacement and humility are the criteria, he should since he ideally combines the two. But it will depend on political pressures which

Musharraf considers him his 'personal enemy'. The hatred is mutual, according to the people who have met Nawaz Sharif in Saudi Arabia. They, however, felt encouraged by Sharif's reported remark that "the contracted period of his banishment is over".

New Delhi is probably aware of all this. Therefore, its attitude towards Jamali is that of indifference. It knows he cannot deliver the goods on his own. This was reflected in the

representing democracy, could have had some impact. But it is seen as Musharraf's ally. Although people are conscious that Washington has bailed them out economically by writing off part of the country's debt and by giving Pakistan straight aid, the anti-US feeling is very strong. The general belief is that Pakistan is the next target after Iraq. Jamali's government has come through a process, even though managed and manipulated. True, it is Musharraf's

purely military set-up.

Democracy is going to be a long haul for people in Pakistan. The military is unpopular but looks as if it cannot be pushed out. It is not prepared to vacate the territory it has come to occupy. And it is using the space with a vengeance. Most of the top civilian jobs are with the military. The perks for service officers are numerous. For example, a Major-General gets 50 acres of land as soon as he is promoted to the rank of Lt.General. Orderlies are available to all military officers even after retirement. More than anything else, a person in uniform has become an authority unto himself.

The military is bad enough. But India's intractability is worse. It is hurting those who want to have contacts with people across the border. Rubbed on the wrong side are the liberal elements: lawyers, doctors, artists and human rights activists. Activists like Asma Jehangir and I.A.Rehman, dubbed India's agents in their own country, have not been given a visa. Because of cross-border terrorism, the scrutiny of visitors' credentials is understandable. But New Delhi's new policy, implemented by the Home Ministry, is keeping out those who have been fighting against military regimes and who have been endeavouring for normalcy with India. But then the BJP-led government is using the Pakistan card to serve its domestic politics. It labours under the impression that the more intransigent it is towards Pakistan, the more will it gain votes in India.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**The military is bad enough. But India's intractability is worse. It is hurting those who want to have contacts with people across the border. Rubbed on the wrong side are the liberal elements: lawyers, doctors, artists and human rights activists. Activists like Asma Jehangir and I.A.Rehman, dubbed India's agents in their own country, have not been given a visa...But then the BJP-led government is using the Pakistan card to serve its domestic politics. It labours under the impression that the more intransigent it is towards Pakistan, the more will it gain votes in India.**

rected me when I said how serene he looked two days before the no confidence motion. Indeed, he did not have to work. Musharraf's men did all. But this has exposed the government further; it has been proved again that Musharraf is its saviour. Jamali does not even claim to be his own master. During the interview, he made it clear that the constitution, amended as it was, gave Musharraf powers (General Sahib, as he refers to him) which the prime minister must uphold. There is no conflict", Jamali said when I emphasized that a parallel authority could lead to problems. Jamali left me in no doubt that Musharraf was the boss.

The prime minister did not see anything wrong in Musharraf combining the two positions: the President's and that of chief of the army

Musharraf faces at a particular time. The National Assembly, as it has emerged after the polls, is not to his liking. He had planned the PML(Q), to get a majority. Both the PPP and the Muttahida-Majlis-i-Amal(MMA), a combination of six religious parties, won too many seats for his comfort. He cannot unscramble the situation although he has the power to dissolve the National Assembly. This is what makes Jamali insecure. If and when pressured, Musharraf may bring in someone else. Even Benazir Bhutto is not ruled out. The release of her husband, Zardari, on parole, is significant. She is reportedly willing to accept the pre-eminence of military provided it withdraws the cases of corruption against her and her husband. Nawaz Sharif has practically no chance because

congratulatory message prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sent to Jamali. Vajpayee used the word 'appointment' on his assumption of prime ministership. Islamabad feels cut up. If the matter was confined to proving that Jamali was a rubber stamp, New Delhi would have been probably justified in its behaviour. But the real problem is that the Jamali government, however restricted, represents the toot phooti (broken) democracy, as a top Pakistan analyst puts it. A country which has gone through one martial law after another for more than four decades, and which has no independent institution, is looking for a respite from military rulers. New Delhi should be adopting measures to help the democratic forces in Pakistan to gain strength. America,

creation. But Should India be putting it more in Musharraf's lap? The fissure, however small, can embarrass him when he is telling the world that he has restored democracy in Pakistan. Besides, the Jamali government has some able and liberal people. Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri has been part of Track 2, which has been working towards building people-to-people contact. By not taking any notice of them or by not even recognising the shape of the National Assembly, New Delhi may be showing its toughness but not farsightedness. Dealing visibly and frequently with the Jamali government may be one way to make Musharraf realise that the democratically elected government, though not up to the mark, is far more acceptable to India than a

# South Asia came across a tumultuous and eventful year

ZAGLUL A. CHOWDHURY.

THE year 2002 has been a period of big occurrences, both eventful and tumultuous in nature for South Asia, and only seldom a year for this region was so much cynosure of all eyes. The new year carries the hang-over of the preceding one in matters of tensions and alarms, which pose a big threat to peace and stability here in the coming days. All the five major regional countries barring the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and tiny Indian island state of Maldives witnessed events of international interest and importance during the year that we have just come across. The issue that will remain to be seen in the 2003 is whether the new year would also be a phase of curiosity and matter of discussions for the South Asia either in positive or negative perspective. But one thing is certain -- the region would continue as an international flashpoint at least for some time to come in the new year while not much domestic events in the individual countries are expected in the new year warranting wide scale attention. The rivalry between two south Asian neighbours -- India and Pakistan -- remained a major concern for the region as much as it has been for the international community.

their internal developments like elections in Pakistan in October 10 leading to the installation of a civilian government while the military strongman remains at the helm in a somewhat complex situation. The last months of the year saw Sri Lanka, afflicted by a longdrawn civil war, inching towards a permanent settlement of the "Tamil" problem despite differences between the president and the prime minister of the country on the basic approach towards the Tamil rebels. Political stability remains a mirage for Nepal, where the King dismissed an elected government and appointed a Royalist prime minister disregarding the clamour of protests by most politicians amidst a deteriorating law and order scenario caused by the Maoist insurgency. For Bangladesh and India, the elected governments faced no major trouble but opposition sought to keep the pot boiling. Main Indian opposition party Congress won in several state assembly polls raising prospects of a comeback in power at the centre when the national elections take place after about two years but the ruling BJP won massively in Gujarat, scene of one of the worst communal disturbances in recent times, despite allegations that its state government turned a blind eye to the minorities during the communal trouble, and controversial chief minister Narendra Modi returned in the same position taking a pro-

## MATTERS AROUND US

**How South Asia would look like in the new year? Fears of a war between India and Pakistan have not receded as the two neighbours continue to toe their respective positions on their known disputes and tensions may again flare up surrounding any incident. The region may remain volatile for a considerable period of time although it is now relatively better. In Sri Lanka, the prospects of resolution of the longdrawn civil war with the Tamil militants have brightened significantly although the task is still difficult. Nepal is fighting Maoist insurgency for which a state of emergency was declared and later withdrawn...**

Hindu stance in the polls. India's secular political forces described this as a setback to secular fabric of the country and cautioned all about the rise of communalism.

Earlier in 2001, the Afghan crisis triggered by the massive terrorist attack in the United States shifted global attention to South Asia and its neighbourhood as world's only superpower led an "anti-terrorism" coalition which toppled the Taliban regime in the embattled Afghanistan and sent its leader Mollah Omar into hiding. But far more important is the main suspect of the terrorist attack in the USA, Osama Bin Laden, the Saudi dissident sheltered by the Taliban in Afghanistan, whose whereabouts remain shrouded in mystery after his men along with the Taliban have almost been reduced to ground by the mighty United States in collaboration with the anti-

Taliban Afghan forces. The whole thing began with the terrorism in New York and Washington on September 11 and the subsequent tough but anticipated American response made Afghanistan and its surroundings the area of attention for the world. Then came the Indo-Pakistan tensions leading to a near situation which has put the whole world in a state of fear and anxiety because both the South Asian rivals are equipped with dangerous atomic weapons and the consequences of possible use of such arms are wellknown. True, the belligerence between these two countries is not anything new but this time the tensions have acquired alarming proportions because they are atomic powers. A war has been averted but the possibility of use of nuclear weapons in any Indo-Pakistan conflict remains still dis-

tinct in the event of a war.

The Indo-Pakistan tensions were the matters of anxiety for the international world for sometime past and it was only in late 2002 that the two countries have largely withdrawn their troops from the borders and this helped reduce the danger of a war. Earlier, several developments infuriated both sides and the consequent outcome is simply an explosive condition along their borders with both taking all preparedness for a full-blown conflict. Finally, the tensions subsided but as far as their main bone of contention is concerned, the stand-off continues even though none is talking of the possibility of a war at this stage.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had their governments changed in 2001 through general elections and the line up to the polls in both the countries was violent claiming many

lives. However, in Colombo, president Chandrika Kumaratunga remains at the helm despite the defeat of her party-led alliance because of the presidential system of government that constitutionally allows the powerful president to remain in the office till the term is over regardless of the outcome of the parliamentary polls although the government headed by the prime minister runs the country. A co-habitation government is working in the country under great uneasiness since the president is known to be not much favourably disposed to the current peace process with the Tamils while prime minister Ranil Wickremasinghe is determined to carry forward the peace efforts.

Certainly, South Asia hogged headlines in the international media several times during the 2002, particularly in the last half

because of a variety of reasons. These reasons were both positive and negative in nature but fact remains that the region was very much at the focal point of the international attention. On one hand, healthy political and other developments occurred and on the other, spectre of serious tensions is still persisting. The growing global tensions centering United States-Iraq imbroglio has had its share in this region as well since Iraq is not far away from South Asia and any war there would have colossal impact here in many ways as much the Afghan situation had although Afghanistan is not exactly in South Asia. However, there is also a qualitative difference between Afghan and Iraq tangles.

How South Asia would look like in the new year? Fears of a war between India and Pakistan have not receded as the two neighbours continue to toe their respective positions on their known disputes and tensions may again flare up surrounding any incident. The region may remain volatile for a considerable period of time although it is now relatively better. In Sri Lanka, the prospects of resolution of the longdrawn civil war with the Tamil militants have brightened significantly although the task is still difficult. Nepal is fighting Maoist insurgency for which a state of emergency was declared and later withdrawn. Political parties there

are impatiently waiting for polls for a representative government replacing the present handpicked one by the king. Nepal faces twin problems of Maoist challenge to dismantle the monarchy and establishing a republic while reconciliation between the political parties and the King remains a major problem for the nation. In Pakistan, mainstream opposition seems to have taken a back seat at the moment following the last general polls in which two main political leaders could not contest and remained abroad. The pro-military new civilian government is working well with president General Pervez Musharraf. Other countries may not witness anything very serious internally but will not be without incidents and events. The next SAARC summit which was scheduled to take place in Pakistan in January 2003, has been called off indefinitely. The postponement was once again due to Indo-Pak differences. It remains to be seen when this summit is reconvened. Much will depend on the fate of the summit as far as the good neighbourliness and furtherance of cooperation among South Asian nations are concerned. The region will continue to be the focus of interest in the new year.

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