

Renewed tension in South Asia

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THOUGH international attention now appears to be exclusively focused on Iraq in recent past, tension in South Asia has not abated. Most recently at the Kuala Lumpur NAM summit Indian prime minister Vajpayee sharply retorted to Pakistan president's unexpected allegations against India (NAM summit was not the appropriate venue to raise bilateral issues) in favour of the "oppressed people of Kashmir". Vajpayee reminded the international audience of the free and fair elections recently held in Kashmir despite terrorism unleashed upon the voters by "terrorists aided and abetted by Pakistan". In early March Indian prime minister told the parliament in an unusually strong criticism of Washington's inability to put pressure on Pakistan to stop cross border terrorism into Kashmir. He warned that if the assurances given to India were not honoured then "we will factor this while formulating our policy in future". A few days earlier foreign minister Yashwant Sinha (interview in *Outlook*, 24 February 2003) said that Pakistan having nuclear weapons "are already in wrong hands". Responding to a question whether it was prudent for two nuclear powers to have such poor relations, he reiterated India's intention to have good relations with Pakistan but insisted that Pakistan must stop sponsorship of cross border terrorism. He regretted "Pakistan's continuing attempts to use the territories of some of our neighboring countries to launch anti-India and terrorist activities". He categorically stated that Pakistan must abandon its approach of compulsive hostility towards India.

Although the barometer of tension has been undulating over decades, what makes it worrisome now is that both the combatants are nuclear powered nations. Both are geographically contiguous, majority population of both countries profess different religions, often with extreme intolerance and sometimes with vitriolic hatred towards each other. No one knows how good are the command and control structures of the nuclear weaponry in the two countries. How safe are the safeguards? not unreasonably the

USA considers South Asia as the most dangerous place in the world. While presidents Bush and Putin have agreed to slash their nuclear stockpile by two thirds during the next decade, in South Asia people are counting who has more. Indeed protest marches were few and muted. People on both sides of the border mostly unaware of Chernobyl, Hiroshima and Nagasaki (which were of Lilliputian proportion compared to the modern nukes) were beating drums and distributing sweets among friends. The developed countries despairingly looked at the spectacle of animus in countries, which at one time in history was considered the jewel in the crown of the British Empire.

Is Kashmir the sole reason of this madness? Or is it the great

"the Indian (princely) states after the lapse of Paramountcy of the British crown would not be able to enter into military or any other fresh treaties with Britain. And the British government (shall) use its influence to persuade the states to join one or the other of the two dominions". In effect besides the Congress and the Muslim League, the third party--the princely states -- were faced with special problem as they wanted independence -- opposed by Congress but supported by Mr Jinnah-- since most of these states fell within the Hindu sphere of influence. As the partition was based on religious ground all princely states, except Kashmir and Hyderabad, joined either of the two dominions. Hyderabad, the most populous of the states, was entirely surrounded

like were centrifugal by definition from intra-South Asian perspective and roused deep suspicion in India. Non-aligned Movement of which India was an architect along with Egypt, Indonesia and Ghana was a political answer of sort and not taken seriously by the cold war warriors because these people were disparate and different by language, creed, culture and geography. Pakistan's search for identity among the Muslim countries did bring some dividend -- money in particular -- but she was not totally accepted as a Middle Eastern country by the Arabs. For example, in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Arabic, English and French speaking groups remained each supporting the

Million dollar question is what happens next! Is the Pak president really in control or people are calling the shots from behind the scene? Can India conduct a limited war across the line of control without risking a full scale war with all its attendant horrors? Since the other countries in South Asia do not have the requisite clout who will counsel these recalcitrant as both are convinced of their "just" causes?

Ironically the world is now looking at those very countries for a fair and just solution of the Indo-Pak disputes who had helped India and Pakistan build the awesome weapons. True it was China factor, which inspired India's nuclear tests as much as any direct threat from Pakistan.

nuclear explosion in a crisis leading to an all out nuclear war; (d) day after could see some of the world's most densely populated cities destroyed and water and land resources could be rendered toxic forever; (e) Indo-Pak nuclear war could remove the nuclear taboo set after Hiroshima and Nagasaki with devastating effects on international relations; and (f) USA could play a major role in averting a nuclear disaster in South Asia.

In conclusion it may be said that the expected devastation would not be confined within the borders of the combatants as we had seen after the Chernobyl accident. SAARC, SAPTA and all other forms of South Asian cooperation would be dead. We would become international pariah. If Pakistan insists on cross-border terrorism as "justifiable fight" of the so-called Mujahideen to "liberate" what is "theirs" then there would be no solution. Equally if India insists on finishing the unfinished business of taking back "Azad" Kashmir then the problem remains intractable. Perhaps, line of control could be converted into an international border. Intransigence would get us nowhere and South Asia would remain pitched in the darkness of underdevelopment and poverty. Whichever is the pigeonhole we have been allotted to in the present day world, the inheritors of thousands of years of rich culture and tradition should not, indeed cannot consign the lives and future of billions of people into eternal darkness.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and former Ambassador.

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Hindu-Muslim divide? If one delves into history one would find Kashmir was originally a stronghold of Hinduism. Buddhism was introduced in the 3rd century B.C. From 14th to the 16th century Muslim rulers dominated the country. Emperor Akbar conquered Kashmir and made it a part of the Mughal empire. In early 19th century Maharaja Ranjit Singh conquered Kashmir. But it was Maharaja Gulab Singh's treaty with the British, which confirmed him as the ruler of Kashmir.

While the history of the partition of the sub-continent is of common knowledge certain developments pertaining to the subject could be relevant. British prime minister Attlee's declaration that transference of power in India would take place by a date not later than June 1948, a policy dubbed by Winston Churchill in the house of Commons as "operation scuttle", the partition plan as it was known inter alia, included the following:

by India with an overwhelming Hindu population but a Muslim ruler. Eventually it became a part of India. Kashmir, on the other hand, had a Hindu ruler with a predominantly Muslim population. The situation was further complicated by the fact that some of the Muslims led by Kashmiri political leader Sheikh Abdullah opposed inclusion in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the civil services and the armed forces throughout India were being split essentially along religious lines. One, therefore, may assume that the partition of India brought about the great divide among most of the people who practiced the two major religions -- Islam and Hinduism -- at that time.

The cold war period cast its long shadow on the sub-continent. Being conscious of the fragility of its existence based only on religion, Pakistan sought solace and security in the arms of John Foster Dulles and other cold war warriors. SEATO, CENTO and the

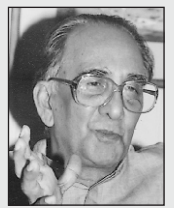
common minimum agenda with the Arabs dominating the organization as the main paymasters. However, among non-Arab countries Pakistan always received a special place which changed into adulation after the so-called Islamic Bomb.

India, unfortunately, could not soar on the wings of religion as it was the only Hindu state in the world (Nepal and a few others not being significant economic and military powers). Indeed one was never very sure till the advent of BJP whether India housing about two hundred million Muslims in its midst consciously courted religion as an instrument of its internal and external policy. Some would argue that communal riots in Gujarat, horrific as they were, did not truly reflect Indianism of unity in diversity. Many Indians continue to believe that secularism has to remain the basis of Indian nationhood without which the centrifugal forces would tear asunder an entity dating back thousands of years.

One would, therefore, hope that in the present nuclearised South Asia president Musharraf would heed the words of the wise and rein in the so-called Mujahideens and their sympathizers to the satisfaction of international scrutiny. Mere words of assurance would not assuage aggrieved India, which sees it bleeding every day by wounds inflicted from across the border. However both president Musharraf and Indian prime minister have their own constituencies to satisfy. Many fear that both may need a war of whatever scale to harness divergent forces in their favour.

China, one of then five declared nuclear states, detonated its first atomic device in 1964. India tested nuclear device in 1974 and Canada responded by suspending nuclear cooperation with India. The USA allowed continued supply of nuclear fuel but later cut it off. Soviet Union assumed the role of India's main supplier of heavy water. In Pakistan's case despite Canadian suspension of supply of nuclear fuel, a German company (in 1977) provided vacuum pumps, equipment for uranium enrichment and Britain sold Pakistan 30 high frequency inverter for controlling centrifuge speed. China reportedly supplied Pakistan with bomb design, signed pact on peaceful use of nuclear energy, including design, construction and operation of reactors. Pakistan acquired tritium purification and production facility from Germany. Despite Pressler amendment Pakistan conducted its nuclear explosion in 1998.

Belying the hopes of many the resulting balance in terror in South Asia did not have a sobering effect on the adversaries. The spectre of nuclear war remains. Center for Defense Information in the US in one of its programmes discussing the possibility of Indo-Pak nuclear war made the following points: a) wherever there are nuclear weapons there is an implied willingness to use them; (b) neither India nor Pakistan has sophisticated intelligence capabilities to read what each other is doing with its missile programmes; (c) lack of established safety and control measures increases the risk of accidental or unauthorized



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

What is that toy?

Daughter said, "Dad! Look at there,
So many toys in the fair."
Dad said, "A great, great fun, dear?"

To buy or not to buy,
That idea comes and goes.
Even with one's open hands
One cannot buy all those toys.

Father consoled the daughter,
"We'll see to that later."
Many a toy got the label, "See to that later."

At last the daughter
Stood leaning to her father
Gave a fixed gaze to a toy.
Both of them exclaimed, "Boy! Oh my boy!
What a wonderful top."
"Dad!", said the daughter,
"Shall we see to that later?"
Dad said, "No, no, no,
We must buy it now."

What was that toy?
To which father didn't say, "See to that later."
Both overjoyed father and daughter
Said together with a laughter,
"Now! Now! We must buy it now."
What was that toy?
It must be a beauty for everybody to enjoy.

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