

Close encounters

ARJUN SENGUPTA

AS India-Pakistan relations begin to change, the Pakistani media, academia and business community seem to be keen on not letting the Kashmir situation block the progress. There is muted criticism of the military.

But more than that, the cleavage between the fundamentalist 'jehadis' and the rest of Pakistani society is coming out in the open, with the latter welcoming the American pressure on the military against the fundamentalists for finding a solution through talks and not through terrorism. President Pervez Musharraf also has his own compulsion for fighting the fundamentalists who are today his main opponents. Without giving up the cause of Kashmir, they all would like to find alternative ways of resolving the problem.

The prospects of economic benefits of restoring normalcy and opening trade with India only strengthen these trends. The Pakistani economy has turned round significantly in the last year-and-a-half. During this period, the Americans rewarded Pakistan with generous aid after it joined the anti-terrorist front, while the IMF and the World Bank have stepped up support. After years of stagnation, the GDP growth picked up to around 5 per cent, investment accelerated, exports expanded and foreign exchange reserves increased from about \$ 1 billion to roughly \$ 11 billion. The IMF apparently certified that Pakistan's stabilisation programme has been successful. Foreign investment seems to be picking up complementing a sharp rise in remittance. The middle-class is tasting good life again and does not want to be distracted by the jehadis any more.

The climate is clearly more conducive for a breakthrough in our relations today than ever before. This became very evident in the three-day workshop last week in Lahore organised by the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), a think-tank of well-known academics, businessmen, civil servants and social activists from all the SAARC countries. It was attended by a number of Pakistani

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ministers (including the foreign minister), civil servants, politicians, academics and business leaders. The impression emerging was unmistakable: Pakistani civil society is looking for a break from the hostility with India.

The one point from my speech as SACEPS Chairman that found wide support was that if the countries in Europe after their long history of bitter hostility and millions of death could today forge a common union and prosper, there was no reason why India and Pakistan could not do the same. No European nation has compromised its sovereignty. All have found enormous benefit in forging a comprehensive unity. India and Pakistan, which have more in common with each other, should also gain similarly. Pakistan's foreign minister picked up the thread, hoping that such a unity could be realised before millions were killed in wars, as in Europe.

The leader of the Lahore Chamber told the Pakistani audience that there was no earthly reason for Pakistan not granting the MFN treatment to India. Pakistan industry, which was opened to foreign

investment and technology much before India, was modern enough to withstand any competition. The MFN status would bring this trade under the WTO discipline and any dumping by India could then be remedied by WTO dispute settlement.

Several industrialists and management specialists highlighted the potential gains from trade and called for an open-investment regime. Pakistan is open to foreign investment, much more than India. It has little to fear in terms of Indian investments swamping its industry. If Pakistani companies are allowed to form joint ventures in India, the enlarged market would be immensely beneficial. Indeed, exploiting the combined market may prove to be the most effective method of attracting foreign investment in the region, with local multinationals spreading their production sources regionally.

Everybody talked about cooperation in infrastructure, of roads, transports, ports and communication, and of course, transit facilities. The high returns to investment in coordinated infrastructures, espe-

cially if it extends to Bangladesh and Nepal, would be lapped up by international investors.

The most promising of all would be the cooperation in power generation and laying gas pipelines from Iran or from Turkmenistan through Pakistan to India. Pakistan's petroleum minister called for an immediate dialogue and agreement on these pipelines, declaring that Pakistan was prepared to enter into any internationally guaranteed treaty to ensure the security of supply through these pipelines. He recalled that throughout all the wars and hostilities, neither India nor Pakistan ever disrupted the water-sharing arrangements, showing that we had the maturity of not indulging in useless destruction.

Others felt that if the private sector of both the countries and multinationals are allowed to build, won and operate with international guarantees -- and negotiate freely among themselves -- they would settle the prices as well as the needed investments very soon. Only the governments should not keep interfering.

It was Benazir Bhutto's foreign minister, Sardar Asif Ahmed, who set the ball rolling on the first day calling upon the Pakistan government to give up its rigid stand and engage in simultaneous negotiations on several fronts without insisting on solving the Kashmir problem first. He suggested setting up three commissions that should start working immediately and simultaneously. One on Kashmir should discuss every issue, including terrorism, demarcation of the LoC, autonomy, independence or division of Jammu and Kashmir. An agreement may not be reached soon, but the agenda should be set and the process started.

A second commission should consider nuclear cooperation -- how to ensure mutual control over the

nuclear and missile capabilities, possibly with international involvement. A third commission could deal with economic and commercial relations. The progress there would, undoubtedly, be fast and reaching agreements there should not be held up by the lack of agreements on other fronts. There was significant support for such immediate understanding, especially on infrastructure trade and investment.

It was obvious that Ahmed's suggestion had the support of the pro-American lobby. Pakistan's foreign minister was more equivocal. He openly supported the American involvement, but claimed that Pakistan agreed to talk to India on its own and not under any pressure. His government fully agreed with the views expressed in the seminar and about the enormous benefit of normalisation of relations with India. But they needed public support and any belligerence on the Indian side would only vitiate the atmosphere. An agreement was reached between Musharraf and Vajpayee in Agra, which came loose at the last moment and he thought that agreement could now form the basis of further talks.

All these were opinions made publicly. Outside the hall, the participants were much more forthcoming. One suggestion from a very responsible quarter was that Pakistan might not agree to recognise that it was supporting cross-border terrorism, but it would agree to condemn terrorism of all sorts and help India control cross-border terrorism if asked for. But in return, India must agree openly that it is willing to discuss the Kashmir problem with everybody, including militants. To begin with, the two sides could interpret the problem differently, but they must agree to discuss it freely.

The SACEPS meeting brought out the position of Pakistani civil society. It is now India's turn to respond.

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Aung San Suu Kyi: Let her be free

HASNA JASIMUDDIN MOUDUD

SCIENCE may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all -- apathy of human beings," said US author Helen Keller, in *My Religion*, (1927). She was deaf and blind but saw through the human soul.

Nobel Laureate for Peace, Aung San Suu Kyi has been put under "protective custody" in a safe house in the north of Myanmar following a violent clash between her supporters and government supporters. Her entire entourage was also taken into the 'safe house.' Aung San Suu Kyi is not only an opposition leader but a future leader of the region. She continues to be a prisoner of conscience. World body simply cannot and should not turn away in apathy.

She was unable to see her husband who was dying of cancer and was denied permission to enter Burma to say goodbye to his wife under house arrest. Dr. Michael Aris was a renowned Tibetologist and a Professor at Oxford University. During the time I was a Visiting Scholar at Queen Elizabeth House at Oxford University; I was fortunate to have him as my advisor while I was working on ancient Buddhist mystic poems. Dr. Michael Aris, once tutor of His Majesty the King of Bhutan, was a Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford University. He had been most kind and personally assisted me in my research work. At his home I was introduced to his sons and his beloved wife Aung San Suu Kyi's photographs and books in his library. He was a most peaceful, respectful and non controversial man. When he was awarded a teaching position as Visiting Professor of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Harvard University, he told me, I am going to America so that I can free my wife.

Once when our Honourable Prime Minister was under a similar protective custody in her own house, Dr. Aris conveyed to me his wife's anguish over the house arrest of Begum Khaleda Zia.

Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Burma's national hero, Aung San, who was assassinated when she was two years old just before Burma gained independence to which he had dedicated his life. She returned to Burma in 1988 to see her dying mother. She then became the spontaneous leader of her people on her return. She founded a political party NDL and despite house arrest in 1989 the party won a landslide victory in the national election in May 1990. Since then she has been under house arrest under one pretext or another.

Aung San Suu Kyi is a honorary fellow of St. Hugh's College, Oxford University. In 1990 she received the Thorolf Rafto Prize for Human Rights in Norway and the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament. She was nominated for Nobel Peace Prize by President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia and received the



Aung San Suu Kyi: 'Protective custody'

award in 1991 in captivity. Her son received the award on her behalf. She has refused to be bribed into silence by permanent exile. Nobel prize was never before given to someone in a situation of such extreme isolation and peril, certainly not to another woman in such condition.

I remember Dr. Aris telling me that her wife was great supporter of Bangladesh Independence Movement inspite of her own ordeal with freedom movement of people of Burma. To her, her country and people were above her own family -- her two sons Alexander and Kim, and her beloved husband Michael. She had told her husband "I only ask one thing, that should my people need me, you would help me to do my duty to them".

Needless to say her personal safety and peace in Myanmar are of utmost concern in the region. Bangladesh and Myanmar are two small friendly neighbours. Peace and prosperity go hand in hand. Freedom of Aung San Suu Kyi will go a long way not only to solve the country's internal conflicts but also raise the hope for a regional balance of peace and cooperation. Aung San Suu Kyi has become a symbol of peace and freedom. Her book *Freedom From Fear* documents the author as an extraordinary brave woman and her courageous leadership of the non-violent struggle for the restoration of human rights in her country.

Aung San Suu Kyi's release from 19 months of house arrest in May 2002 had raised hopes of her freedom and a peaceful transfer of power since 1990 general election victory of her party National League for Democracy. Now that peace seems to be far away. A UN statement on 31st May 2003 said Secretary General Kofi Annan believed, "developments underline the urgent need for national reconciliation in Burma."

Today she is a prisoner of conscience in her country, totally isolated from the world.

Hasna Jasimuddin Moudud is an NGO activist.

Who are the Democratic contenders in the 2004 US presidential race?

RON CHEPESIUK and JOHN L. BARKDULL

THE first Democratic primary in the US presidential elections doesn't take place until next January in New Hampshire, but already the Democrats are campaigning hard. At this stage there are nine candidates representing all positions on the political spectrum. Some political analysts say the group of contenders is weak, but we say it's no weaker than when Clinton surged to victory in November 1992. The fact that nine candidates have emerged is a sure sign that many Democrats believe George Bush can be beaten in 2004.

Let's take a good look at the Democratic hopefuls and what they stand for. They can roughly be put in three categories: the early leaders, those having a shot and those who we need a hope and prayer.

The early leaders

In his fourth term as US senator from Massachusetts, **John Kerry** has emerged as an early leader, now that Al Gore and Tom Daschle have dropped out of the race. Kerry has many good things going for him, including the fact that he is one of the most articulate politicians in the U.S.

Kerry has lots of money. He is married to a Heinz (as in ketchup) heir, can tap into the family fortune (estimated to be over \$500 million). That's an important plus, given that having lots of money is the most important requirement for getting elected in US politics. He is a Vietnam War veteran and hero who has strong ties to veterans groups.

Kerry is a liberal from an East Coast establishment state, but he has ties to the Southern wing of the party. The Massachusetts senator has good relations with South Carolina senator Ernest Fritz Hollings and he has courted James Clyburn, the most important African American politician in South Carolina.

On the minus side, some analysts question whether Kerry can sustain the momentum needed to run a long campaign. He is supposed to have short fuse and can project an elitist image. One Republican who knows him well has said "John will blow. He will find the process degrading."

Kerry voted in favour of the Senate resolution authorising President Bush to attack Iraq, which was disappointing to many Americans who are left of centre. The Senator claims he was working on a better resolution, when fellow democrats Joe Liberman and Dick Gephardt "sold him out" by working out a quick deal with the White House.

Bob Graham, Senator from Florida, occupies the center-right on the Democratic Party political spectrum. As a moderately conservative Southern Democrat, Graham could make a credible claim to having the best chance to unseat George W. Bush. However, winning the nomination will be a major challenge.

Graham's approach to issues is to avoid specifics. Of course, he has a long Senate voting record, but he does not publish the extensive issue position papers other candidates

provide. Still, we have enough to see the direction he would take the country.

Graham is a strong advocate of a balanced budget. As Florida's governor, he emphasised job creation, especially in the high-tech sector. He favours strong economic growth, although he also claims to have an excellent environmental record. Protecting the Florida Everglades has been a high priority.

Graham has backed many of the social programmes favoured by most Democrats. He claims credit for improving Florida's schools while governor and also supported programmes to address child care, abuse, medical care for pregnant women, assistance to the elderly, and a crackdown on drugs and drunk driving.

From what we know of Graham, he would not offer a significant policy departure from the current administration. In practice, he might use the presidency to balance the budget, whereas Republicans since Reagan have called for a balanced budget while running up record deficits. But a national parks approach to the environment, modest social programmes, and strong support for economic growth are well within the bipartisan consensus on policy.

John Edwards, the first term senator from North Carolina, is on the bubble, and we don't know whether we should put him with the early leaders or the having a shot category. A lot of people believe in him. His campaign is well funded with over \$7 million in his coffers. Bush insiders have called him the most dangerous of the nine candidates. He is very smart (the equal of Kerry) and he's the best looking of all the candidates, which can't hurt.

Still, he is politically inexperienced, especially in foreign policy, a liberal from the conservative South, and a trial lawyer in a country where lawyers are about as popular as members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party.

So where does he stand on the issues? His web site touts these "bipartisan accomplishments": a major investment in America's public schools, strong antiterrorism measures, major reform of the nation's banking system, "sweeping" campaign finance reform, and legislation to fight corporate corruption. And he's come out in favour of the right of gay couples to adopt children. John Edwards is the wild card in the pack and the enigma. But he's also the most dynamic candidate who could make the race exciting.

Having a shot

Richard Gephardt offers policy prescriptions on most of the major issues of the day, but he's the typical moderate whose approach is incremental and mainstream. For instance, he says the cornerstone of his campaign is health insurance for all Americans. Great but the medicine he offers for America's ailing system is the equivalent of a couple of aspirins. Gephardt advocates a tax credit for employer-purchased health insurance, rather than the current tax deduction, while calling for a modest expansion of federal health care plans.

On the economy, Gephardt simply endorses Democratic principles to counter the failed policies of the Bush administration. On education, he advocates more pre-school, and a kind of ROTC for teachers, using scholarship assistance to encourage more young people to enter education.

The most ambitious proposals Gephardt puts forward relate to energy and labour. He proposes an "Apollo Project" to develop renewable energy so the country will be energy independent in ten years. Such an elusive objective, if attained, could transform the United States in countless ways. If Gephardt wants to attract more attention, this, rather than a tepid health care reform, could be the cornerstone of his campaign.

Gephardt's other ambitious idea is to institute an international minimum wage. An international minimum wage would ensure that all workers earn a livable income, and it would maintain the competitiveness of American labour in the global market. This is an idea that could shake up existing arrangements in the world economy, geared as they are to

Saddam Hussein. Lieberman is an Orthodox Jew and one of Israel's strongest supporters in Congress.

Recently, Lieberman has been centre stage on some important issues. He chaired the committee hearings on the Enron scandal, and he has been a leader in the fight against oil drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge.

In summing up Lieberman's chances for the 2004 nod, we say that, on the plus side: he has lots of political experience, is from the populous North East, and appeals to moderate Democrats, the largest voting bloc in the party. But many democrats think he is too close to corporate America, which is kind of ironic because his biggest problem is money. He only has \$1.8 million in his campaign coffers. That's why many analysts predict Lieberman will be an early casualty of the campaign.

A hope and a prayer

You have to respect **Howard Dean**, the governor of Vermont, whether or not you agree with his political platform. In an age of bland politicians, you know where Dean stands on the issues, and he's not afraid to battle the Bush on Iraq, tax

No matter who wins, the Democrats' best chance of unseating George Bush, Jr, is to focus on the economic issues. This means hitting home on the economy's slow growth, the weakening dollar, the soaring budget deficits, the high unemployment, and the unfairness of the president's tax cut proposals. Even if America remains vulnerable to terrorism attack and Iraq proves to be a quagmire, the Democrats' message in 2004 should be the same as was in 1992: It's the economy, stupid.

ensuring businesses can find cheap labour, light taxes, and weak regulatory regimes.

Implementing a global minimum wage would entail far-reaching changes in international institutions and governments around the world. This is a much more eye-catching idea than incremental health care reform.

A Gephardt administration that puts tax credits for health insurance at the top of its priorities is not likely to produce much change from mainstream policy. But if energy independence and the international minimum wage were made priorities, Gephardt's presidency could signal the most sweeping changes in American society since the New Deal.

Joe Lieberman, the Senator from Connecticut, is another politician who calls himself a moderate or centrist. Al Gore tried to make history when he selected him as his running mate on the 2002 Democratic ticket. Lieberman said he wouldn't run for president if Gore ran in 2004, but now the way has been cleared.

Lieberman has played a big role in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and in the blue ribbon commission that investigated the causes of the September 11 terrorist attack. He was also one of the most outspoken members of Congress calling for the ouster of

Bush would hammer that fact home in a brutal race. He's too outspoken. Yes, some analysts say this can be a plus. But let's be honest: The key to getting elected in American today is to blur the content of your political platform so you don't stick your neck out, while coming off as a nice guy.

African American **Carol Moseley Braun** says her message is inclusion and she believes America is ready for a woman president. Braun served a term as senator from Illinois before moving to the post of Ambassador to New Zealand during Clinton's administration. Her issue statements stay at an abstract level. Rather than present a raft of issue papers, Braun guides interested citizens to some of her major speeches, in which she calls for peace, prosperity, and progress.

Braun asserts that the United States is strong and clever enough to defeat terrorism without giving up our civil liberties. Americans, she says, must act out of hope, not fear. Braun deplores the loss of worldwide good will the United States enjoyed after September 11. She says we have frittered away that invaluable support in a mad rush to preemptive, unilateral military action. Long-term security requires global cooperation, and the current policy of sabre rattling must stop, she says.

Braun deplores the budget priorities of the Bush administration. She calls for balancing the budget, and says today's tax cuts must not be a burden on future generations. The Clinton administration comes in for praise for its fiscal discipline, strong support for job creation, and due attention to the environment.

Beyond that, Braun's major task is to convince voters that she has a viable chance to win the presidency. This is an uphill battle against the weight of such candidates as John Kerry and Bob Graham. The United States might be ready to elect a woman president, but it might not be ready to elect a senator who failed to win reelection in her own state.

If Braun were to pull off the miracle, we could expect a return to mainstream Democratic Party policies. Braun would likely put greater emphasis on women's issues and programmes to serve minorities and the poor. In foreign policy, she would restore America's decades-long commitment to multilateral consultation. Radical change would not be her goal.

Dennis Kucinich, Representative from Ohio, represents the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. A top priority is reducing unemployment. Kucinich says there is no such thing as an acceptable level of unemployment. He says the nation has plenty of work to do. When the private sector does not provide enough jobs, the public sector should step in. Yet, Kucinich's solution is surprisingly modest. He points to the need for some \$300 billion in infrastructure needs over the next twenty years. An average of \$15 billion per year will have no discernible effect on an economy or federal budget as large as America's.

More innovative is Kucinich's call for a Department of Peace. He says that peace must be understood as more than the mere absence of

violence. It is the active presence of the capacity for a higher revolution of human awareness, of respect, trust, and integrity. Kucinich even mentions love, and a peace to end all war, rather than a war to end all wars. Kucinich advocates making non-violence an organising principle of American society.

The Department of Peace would address all forms of violence and discord, from the home to international politics. It would foster peace education as a template for all pursuits of knowledge within formal educational settings. Perhaps the first batch of students could include Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz!

Kucinich bravely asserts that the Iraq war was wrong, regardless of outcome. Despite military victory, he says, the United States suffered a complete diplomatic and foreign policy failure. He advocates bringing the troops home immediately and assisting in Iraq's humanitarian reconstruction.

Kucinich's anti-war position is likely to win him staunch support from the minority of Americans who agree, but it will also eliminate him from serious contention in the presidential race.

Kucinich is equally out front on civil liberties. He opposes the Bush administration's assault on constitutional rights and says we must challenge the rationale of the Patriot Act. Terrorism should not force the United States to abandon its constitutional principles.

A Kucinich administration would certainly augur a fundamental change in American society. Kucinich connects almost every issue to the overriding need to establish peace. He rejects a militarized foreign policy, massive spending on military preparedness, punitive approaches to maintaining order, neglect of domestic violence, and a popular culture pervaded with images of violence.

No question, the **Reverend Al Sharpton** is the most volatile candidate in the race, but he's also its longest shot. His National Action Network seeks to confront a variety of injustices in America and he has called himself the big enemy of "the pro-big business, anti-labour and pro-death penalty matrix." Sharpton has been arrested for protesting and he has gone on hunger strikes. Not exactly the middle of the road kind of candidate that gets elected to the U.S. presidency.

But is the Reverend really running for the presidency? There is strong suspicion he is really positioning himself to take over the de facto leadership of Black America from the Reverend Jesse Jackson's leadership seems vulnerable and his star, declining. So that's why we are going to stop our preview here.

The summing up

So there you have it -- the dynamic, the bland and the controversial. By this time next year, the Democrats should have their candidate, even though the primaries will not be finished. Call the nine candidates what you may, the primary should be one of most interesting in history, as long as it stays competitive.

No matter who wins, the Democrats' best chance of unseating

George Bush, Jr, is to focus on the economic issues. This means hitting home on the economy's slow growth, the weakening dollar, the soaring budget deficits, the high unemployment, and the unfairness of the president's tax cut proposals. Even if America remains vulnerable to terrorism attack and Iraq proves to be a

quagmire, the Democrats' message in 2004 should be the same as was in 1992: It's the economy, stupid.

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