

Bangladesh : Between Two Civilizations

by Kazi Khaleed Ashraf

Bangladesh is actually in a cultural interstice, right in the middle of two great civilizational matrices. Being in the middle, being in-between has its natural tension : Am I this, or am I that? Should I adopt this, or should I adopt that? ... seeking purity of this or that kind may be a futile exercise; what is perhaps profitable and creative is an amalgamation of desires, a composite of ideas, or even a collage of identities. But at least we must know what these are.

BANGLADESH and for that matter Bengal, has always been considered part of the Indian subcontinent. The history, culture, language, and institutions of this region are intricately tied with the broader development in the subcontinent. The making of Bengali identity and character is implicated here in a major way. In fact, this fact of the subcontinental intimacy is so well entrenched in our thinking that it needs to be sharply deconstructed. It is possible that an understanding of Bengali identity is still very much an incomplete project.

We often say deep-rooted tradition or deep-rooted experience, but what do we mean? There are certainly two strong traditions (I am calling them "streams") which have largely determined the cultural fabric of Bangladesh. One is the Sanskrit, and the other is the Islamic stream. This much we all take for granted.

The Sanskrit stream is basically formed by the Aryan-Vedic-Brahmanic cultures. Its roots are largely in the tradition that was brought in by Indo-European tribes into India, and which was slowly amalgamated, with varying degrees of contest, conflict, and conflation, with existing non-Vedic traditions. By the current Sanskrit stream, I don't mean the Vedic/Brahmanic/Hindu religious traditions, although there is always the shadow of that in anything Sanskrit, but its most important offspring — language, and all that has followed it. What finally gives a continuity to South Asia, or actually northern South Asia, is language. One can note here the interrelatedness of political development and language. Despite current differences and linguistic conflicts, there is a great structural unity among Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu. It is the structure of language that shapes our mental world, harbours many persistent concepts and ideas, and gives sense and meaning to societal existence. If we take for granted that we are largely consti-

tuted by language (as per the post-modernist claim), then we have to take this seriously. The land of the Aryas comprised mostly what is northern India, extending from the Karakoram mountains to the eastern plains of the Ganga centered around Pataliputra (current Patna). The region now called Bengal was either outside or at the periphery of Aryavarta, the land of the Aryas. In fact some old texts mention that from the dominant Arya centers, Bengal was considered an impure land and any Arya son venturing there had to be purified before he could reenter his society. It is this tension, being a part of and apart from mainstream Arya culture, that characterised the relationship of Bengal with northern India. This is not just a historic miscellany now but perhaps a persistent northern perception that continues even today.

The other deep rooted experience in Bangladesh is that of Islam and its religious ethic. The main Muslim entry into the subcontinent took nearly the same route as the Indo-European — the north-western passes of the Himalayas (besides some sea-faring contacts). Similarly, the consolidation of the Central Asian and Turkic-Persian Northern India meant the principal seats of Muslim power remained in the north. The principal Turkic-Persian perception of the eastern region curiously resembled the Arya perception: Vanga was "dusakh pur-i-niamat" (hell full of boons), and so forth.

But the important fact is that there is a great degree of confluence of the Islamic ethic and the Arabic-Turko-Persian cultural stream. One can see the shadow of the other without realizing that there are many cultural practices in Persia, or even in Arabia, which are extra-Islamic in origin, or there are major differences between Persian and Arab culture. Who is going to decipher and filter out what is truly an Islamic

ethic and what is perhaps only a local cultural production, a Turkish, a Persian, or a Central Asian practice. And yet such practices have taken a major hold on our own values and imagination.

There is a third stream, which is always there but again somewhat unacknowledged, and that is my concern here. For lack of any appropriate term, let me call it, a bit superfluously perhaps, the "aquatic" stream. The "aquatic" stream is actually shared by a broad geographical matrix that stretches roughly from Bangladesh to Burma and onwards to Thailand and Vietnam. From Bangladesh it also dips down towards southern India and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh could be seen as a fulcrum in his cultural matrix.

A number of common features characterize this "aquatic" matrix : a civilization created by an almost common geographical and climatic condition. The principal economic and cultural occupation in this matrix revolves around rice.

What is common about both the Sanskrit and Islamic stream is that they are primarily a historical experience in the context of Bengal, that is, they originate at a specific moment in Bengal's political history. Unlike these two historical streams, the "aquatic" stream cannot be so easily located historically. In fact, the character of the aquatic is not historical but, more accurately, prehistorical or even transhistorical. Although it would be a mistake to say that "history does not happen" with the rice-culture matrix, that it has been like this all along since time

immemorial, the ingredients of its makeup is made up of not human constructs, that is, history and language, but primarily the terrain, the land, or water if you like.

What is also common about the Sanskrit and Islamic stream, is that both are primarily metaphysical in their philosophy, something that is not tied up with or related to a specific land or locality. The Indo-Europeans brought much of the proto-Sanskritic stuff with them somewhere from Central Asia, while the Islamic stream came from the Arabian peninsula. In the lands of their origin, they might have ties with the land, but once it was abstracted it could literally be transported anywhere.

The aquatic stream does not propose portability of ideas; its significance comes from the particularity of a place, in the real and phenomenal world, a counterweight to actual land, water, and air. It is the picture of the most primordial encounter of man with nature. Man and nature. There is a particularly about this encounter; it is not the same everywhere, the nature of the encounter depends on the specific nature, the specific place.

What are the main features of his water civilization? First of all, it is an existence in a particular kind of geographical and physical environment. Deltaic land condition, heavy rainfall, and lush vegetation characterize that environment. One thinks of the land-water terrain created by the Ganges-Padma, Irrawaddy, Chao Praya, Mekong, and so forth. The river-related delta leads to conditions of flooding, and all that is a consequence of it.

What all these mean is the heavy presence of water, on the land and in the atmosphere. If one stands still for few hours one will have fungus growing all over. It is just rashness to think that one can fight water.... one can live on it, with it, even partially underneath it, but hardly against it. One look at an aerial photo of the delta during flood should tell us how puny we are with all our economic might, development fantasies and millennial myths. One cannot emphasize that too much at this time.

The second most important thing is the cultivation of rice as the mainstay of life. In the Bengal delta, rice cultivation is an existential occupation; the production of rice is the production of a world-view. Here rice is not something which is merely produced and consumed, but is the basis of value-creation, of the creation of a collectivity, and of the articulation of self-identity. With the nurturing of rice comes what is held dear, what is valued, and what is celebrated. The Japanese anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (in the book *Rice as Identity: Japanese Identities through Time*) has described how the Japanese have defined their identities through the rituals of production and consumption of rice. It is no common matter that wherever Chinese goes, he takes with him a rice cooker. In the Bengali anguish for eating rice in a foreign land is also quite well known. The phrase "machhe bhat bangali" says enough. Adaitya Malla Burman, in his novel *A River Called Titash*, identifies two model human figures in the deltaic landscape of Bengal : the

man with the plough (*langal*) and the man with the net (*jab*). We often argue that language is the truest depth of our culture, but one should look at how our whole lifestyle, life ethic, and belief patterns revolve around the preparation, production, and consumption of rice. The early Muslims understood this. This American scholar Richard Eaton has studied how Sufi literature in Bengal adapted Muslim narrations to local beliefs and practices (before it became an uncompromising ideology). The early Sufi masters became involved in agricultural explorations, basically rice cultivation, even if they themselves came from a very different occupational value-system. Sufi literature specifically contained myths, narrations, and eulogies of rice; examples abound about the Prophet (SM) eating rice rather than dates as expected. Rice cultivation became gateway for penetrating the heart of Bengal, a metaphor for the delta. It may be necessary to point out that the practice of wet rice cultivation has been known to exist in this region from 2000 BC, much much before the region came under Sanskrit domination, and much before we invested our identity in language and literature.

Other than common hearsay, there has not been much anthropological study of peasant myths and values in Bengal/Bangladesh that will shed light on the "aquatic" stream and "rice culture". Moreover, we have a remarkable ability to disown and disregard those values in a single generation once we move to an urban situation. It may be consciously disowned but is never

completely forgotten. It appears and reappears in unselfconscious ways, in moments when we least expect it. And that is also a cause for anthropological inquiry. Take *alpaha* drawing for example. Alpaha has now become an urban decorative art when it was actually a ritual drawing down with rice paste to irritate the spirit of abundance (*laxmi*) in the house. And that spirit always had to do with rice. If you have rice (*danu*), you had wealth (*dhon*). *Dhonodhan* *pushe bhor*, as the poetic sentiment goes. In Vietnamese, I am told, the term for wealth and abundance comes from the word denoting rice.

Certain writers have pointed out the similarity in attitude of the upper-class, both Muslim (the so-called *ashraf* class) and Brahmanic. Both classes held a disdain for the agricultural ethos, that is, the physical and spiritual tie to the land. While they benefited from the produce of the land (being much of the owners of the land), they maintained a safe distance from their *prajas*. "Chasha" basically became and has remained a pejorative term among the elite.

Architecture reveals much of this significance. More than anything else, architecture is the most genuine expression of man's location in and relation with nature. If it rains, there is a solid roof. If it is humid, there is a perforated wall. If it is dry and hot, there are thick, windowless walls. And if it is cold, the spaces are sealed off. One single architectural model circulates in the "aquatic" matrix as the ideal dwelling. It is the "pavilion" structure, an independent building with an overhanging umbrella-like roof, and porous walls that allow a free movement of air. Again, with Bangladesh as the fulcrum, this model can be seen in southern India, and in the east, from Burma to Japan. The model has also affected the fabric of settlements. It has been argued that the location and formation of isolated homesteads has largely been determined by the nature of rice

cultivation. In conclusion, what can be said is that there is a striking correspondence among the Indo-European, Turkic-Persian and even European colonial systems which have largely defined our dominant or explicit cultural values, and given the legal, theological, and social structure (despite the inalienable differences in the systems). In a geographical sense, all these can be termed "western." But that is not the complete picture. Outside it, beneath or beyond it, there is an older and unexplored system that defines us in a more basic existential way. That system is deeply rooted with the land, and has a far greater structural correspondence with south-east Asian cultures than we actually realize or acknowledge.

Recently, Bangladesh has been endeavouring to create trade linkages with countries of south-east Asia. What might appear as only an economic link could point to other connections. The issue of identity has never approached this. If there is any identity conflict, it may be this : the meaning of our collective identity may not lie to the west of us, but more to the east.

Bangladesh is actually in a cultural interstice, right in the middle of two great civilizational matrices. Being in the middle, being in-between has its natural tension : Am I this, or am I that? Should I adopt this, or should I adopt that? Firdaus Azim, professor of literature and writer of post-colonial topics, pointed out in a recent seminar that being in-between may be a privilege. She argues that seeking purity of this or that kind may be a futile exercise; what is perhaps profitable and creative is an amalgamation of desires, a composite of ideas, or even a collage of identities. But at least we must know what these are.

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A Challenging 1999 for the UN

Farhan Haq writes from New York

The US and British strikes on Iraq point to the increasing divisions between the United States and the United Nations at a time when the latter strongly needs Washington's support.

IN a perceptive moment, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned on his return from Europe and the Middle East this month that if the Kosovo and Iraq crises were not resolved soon, "we have reason to fear the worst by 1999."

Two days later, the United States began bombing Iraq.

The chaotic state of world affairs in general indicates how challenging 1999 will be for the United Nations, with some of its most recent diplomatic efforts — in Iraq, Angola, Central Africa, Kosovo, and Afghanistan — all foundering badly at year's end.

More importantly, the US and British strikes on Iraq point to the increasing divisions between the United States and the United Nations at a time when the latter strongly needs Washington's support.

But from its more than one billion dollars in unpaid UN dues to its opposition to an international Criminal Court (ICC), the US government is more inclined to go it alone and snub the United Nations than it has been for years.

With US President Bill Clinton facing an impeachment drive by the harshly anti-UN Republicans — in the US Senate, any turnaround in Washington's stance on the world body is unlikely.

The immediate consequence is that the United Nations goes into 1999 with a full plate of world crises, but little US backing to help take them on.

Particularly daunting is the fallout from the ongoing financial crisis which began in East Asia in 1997 and spread to Russia and parts of Latin America this past year. Annan cited the financial crisis as one of the

main challenges of the coming year, and pledged that the United Nations will be involved in discussions on reforming the world "financial architecture". Yet for all the sincerity of UN officials' desire to be involved in that debate, the main industrialised states, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund seem as unwilling to include the world body in international financial decision-making as ever.

Even in the areas where the United Nations has considerable authority diplomacy and peacemaking, 1999 is already shaping up to be a difficult year.

Central Africa is in turmoil, with at least eight nations tangled in the inconclusive fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire. Supporting DRC President Laurent Kabila are the governments of Angola, Chad, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The rebels who have worked for his ouster, and who now threaten the country's mineral-rich centre, are backed by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

UN diplomatic efforts earlier this month have brought all sides together in a commitment to ending the war and an informal cease-fire. But dozens of armed factions, from Rwanda's former genocidal militias to anti-Uganda armed groups, are also snared in the fighting and UN officials believe that a peacekeeping force must eventually be deployed to monitor any lasting truce.

One senior UN official, speaking off condition of anonymity, estimated recently that the world body would need to send in at least 15,000 troops to maintain any cease-fire.

Considering that the United

Nations now fields fewer than 17,000 soldiers in all its peacekeeping operations worldwide, garnering support in the UN Security Council for such a large force could well prove an uphill battle in early 1999.

Yet that challenge almost pales in comparison to the need to rally international attention to the unfolding blood bath in Angola, where for the second time this decade the rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has turned its back on a UN-sponsored peace plan.

Annan conceded that Angola has returned to war, following several years of peace after a 1994 pact was signed in Lusaka, Zambia. Experts here believe that UNITA has successfully kept some 30,000 fighters from turning in their arms in recent years, and is now ready to bring them back into action against Angola's army, already stretched thin by its commitments in the DRC and Congo-Brazzaville.

The UN Observer Mission in Angola, or MONUA, has been forced by the recent fighting to redeploy to "safer" areas like the capital, Luanda, leaving central Angola a largely unmonitored battleground between the rival forces, who have fought with only a few interruptions since independence in 1975.

Some 400,000 Angolans have already been driven from their homes in recent fighting, causing UN officials to warn of an impending humanitarian crisis.

Like the collapsing Angolan peace process, the Iraq fiasco which until the US attack had seemed a major diplomatic tri-

umph for Annan — demonstrates how little authority the world body has if it is not strongly supported by the major world powers.

For the past year, a majority of nations on the 15-member Security Council, including permanent members China, France and Russia, had resisted US desires to attack Iraq and had urged a timetable for lifting the eight-year-old sanctions.

Annan carefully trod a middle path, promising Iraq that it would earn a "comprehensive review" of sanctions and other concerns in the Council if it cooperated with UN weapons monitors. In turn, Iraq occasionally sparked rows with the inspectors but always backed down in time to avoid US attack and leave its Council supporters.

That cycle of slow diplomacy and intermittent crisis was abruptly broken on Dec 16, when US President Bill Clinton responded to a mildly critical report from chief UN weapons inspector Richard Butler by immediately launching airstrikes.

In an instant, months of Iraq diplomacy and the promise of a comprehensive review were thrown out the window, along with any hope for cooperation in the Council between the pro-Iraq bloc of Russia and China and the two attacking nations, Britain and the United States.

Chinese Ambassador Qin Huan's angry insistence that there was "no excuse, or pretext to use force" and Russia's recalling of its ambassadors in London and Washington herald a difficult time for the Security Council in coming months.

Bangladesh is expected to get little respite from the endless mass protests which have more to do with the continuing ego clash between the two women who control the destiny of one of the world's poorest nations, than with genuine popular complaint. And in Nepal, the youngest member of the regional democratic club, King Birendra will continue playing referee in the mainly male political arena, supervising the game of musical chairs which is soon expected to give the small Himalayan nation its sixth government in five years, say political pundits.

— IPS/APB

Where Business is Nonsense

by Nikhat Jamal Qaiyum

Even as the global community is concerned by global warming, influential US industries have tried in the past to downplay the threat, trying to discredit environmentalists with their advertising blitz and political arm-twisting. But some industries are now singing a green song. Why?

IN 1995, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that global warming can lead to years of climatic instability and "widespread economic, social and environmental disruption" in the future. It recommends a 60 per cent reduction in emissions to stabilise concentrations at current level, to prevent such a frightening scenario. A worrisome future indeed. But industries, the biggest contributors to global warming, are pooh-poohing this theory as, if taken seriously, it would alter the lucrative status quo they currently enjoy.

Since 1991, many industries have spent millions, says US Internal Revenue Service data, to persuade the public and policymakers that there is too much uncertainty about climate change and to warrant changes in energy policy. With huge funds and extraordinary access to the media, they have been able to create the general perception that the issue is hopelessly mired in doubts.

Their modus operandi involves setting up coalitions, pumping in huge funds, launching impressive advertising campaigns, and even hiring scientists to discredit global warming as a hoax. The US-based Global Climate Coalition (GCC), founded in 1989 with American Petroleum Institute, Shell Oil, Exxon, General Motors (GM) and more than 40 other corporations as members, is the biggest and most powerful of these corporate anti-environment "think-tanks". Since 1994, it has spent more than \$1 million annually to downplay the threat of global warming and climate change.

The Information Council for the Environment (ICE), another US-based corporate coalition, was formed in 1991. Comprising the National Coal Association, the Western Fuels Association and Edison Electrical Institute, ICE launched a \$500,000 advertising campaign, roping in Patrick Michaels, a leading scientific "naysayer" on global warming from the University of Virginia's department of environmental services, to reposition global warming as theory, not fact.

Fredrick Palmer, chief executive officer of the \$400-million Western Fuels Association Inc, launched the Greening Earth Society, which is dedicated to the proposition that, as Palmer says, having more CO₂ in the atmosphere will be good. Not bad. It will lead to greater plant and animal diversity and abundant crops.

Palmer also thinks the climate change treaty has no future because it has no real political base in the US. The very idea of nothing happening on the treaty appeals to him. He has spent the last several years financing papers by some scientists who dispute the scientific projections that underlie the global warming projections. In 1991, the consortium went so far as to announce in its annual report that it was launching a direct attack on mainstream science and enlisting several scientists who are sceptical about climate change.

Bob Burton, an Australia-based journalist, and Sheldon Rampton, associated with Washington-based group PR watch, in a report published by



the *Earth Island Journal* this year, wrote that even environmental organisations such as the Environmental Defence Fund, the Natural Resources Defence Council, the Union of Concerned Scientists and the World Wide Fund for Nature do not spend this much on all their campaigns taken together.

In December 1998, when the third Conference of Parties (COP-3) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Kyoto was to adopt an international treaty to curb GHG emissions, the industries embarked on a massive advertising and public relations blitz, trying to convince the public and arm-twist the government to shun a protocol.

As the countdown to the conference began, the Global Climate Information Project (GCIP), an industry front launched by some of the most powerful US trade associations in September 1997, spent more than \$3 million in newspaper and television advertising opposing the meet.

The Coalition for Vehicle Choice (CVC), a front for automobile manufacturers, with a budget of \$2.2 million (all of which came from Ford, General Motors and Chrysler), launched its own campaign, blasting the climate agreement as an assault on the US economy.

The National Center for Public Policy Research, another industry-funded think-tank, established the Kyoto Earth Summit Information Center and issued anti-treaty quotes to the media.

On the eve of the Kyoto Conference, Steven Milloy, executive director of the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASCC) another industry-funded organisation, announced that more than 500 physicians and scientists had signed an open letter to world leaders opposing any climate change treaty.

The American Policy Center (APC), a far-right Washington-

based organisation with similar motives, mobilised a "Strike for Liberty", calling truckers to stay off roads for an hour and farmers to drive tractors into key cities to "shut down the nation" as a protest against the Kyoto treaty.

The opponents have so far ensured that their long-term economic interests are safeguarded, even if that means melting snow-caps and rising global temperatures. Consequently, the treaty that emerged from Kyoto proposed a reduction commitment of only 5.2 per cent in global GHG emissions from the industrialised nations by the year 2012, far below the 30 per cent reduction proposed by low-lying island nations that fear massive flooding as melting polar ice leads to rising sea-levels.

Since late 1996, these industries have shifted their thrust and are now trying to scare the masses with questionable visions of impending economic doom if GHG emissions are reduced by cutting down fossil fuel usage.

Wharton Econometrics Forecasting Associates Inc (WEFA), financed by GCC as part of its anti-Kyoto moves, says if the treaty were adopted, it would force a \$2,061 fall in the GDP by the year 2010, and \$1,715 by 2015. The economy would lose 2.4 million jobs, energy prices for business would double, and average estimated income per household would fall by \$2,700, while cost of basic necessities like food, healthcare and housing would go up by 7-14 per cent.

In this American chaos, there are some sensible voices. Journalist Ross Gelbspan is one of them. In a recent issue of *Monthly*, he wrote: "While the climate crisis contains staggering destructive potential, it also contains an extraordinary opportunity to expand the wealth and stability of the global economy."

To save planet Earth from overheating itself, nations will

ultimately have to cut down their emission levels by as much as 50-70 per cent. This means every petroleum-driven car and every fossil fuel-fired power plant would have to be junked. Industries, he says, should recognise this for what it is: a remarkable opportunity to "sell" alternative technology to cope with the challenge of an unpolluted future. In other words, where industries are seeing losses today, they should try to see profits.

Of late, the multinational corporations, including some oil companies, are also clamouring to prove how "eco-friendly" they are, demonstrate their concerns, and take action to curb GHG emissions. The collective denial of climate change seems to have crumbled amongst oil companies.

The GCC has also been losing some heavyweights. British Petroleum (BP) left the GCC more than a year ago and in April this year Shell too pulled out saying that it had irreconcilable differences with it, particularly with its opposition to both the ratification of the protocol and targets for GHG emissions linked with climate change.

During 1997, both Shell and BP acknowledged climate change was an issue and oil industry solidarity cracked a bit. But the return to Kyoto, BP and Shell have announced major new investment in renewable sources of energy. Earlier this year, Shell joined the European Wind Energy Association and hopes to capture 5-10 per cent of the world wind power market by 2010.

Peter Bijur, head of Texaco, now feels that the debate really isn't about the science anymore. It's about what companies are doing, and what they are doing is to look at the next generation of technologies and improving efficiencies.

Michael Marvin, executive director of the Business Council for Sustainable Energy, a group that includes electric utility, energy efficiency, natural gas, and renewable energy companies, said solar manufacturing plants, for example, are opening up across the country, employment is increasing at 30 per cent per year, and new improvements are being made in solar photovoltaics, solar pool heating, and solar thermal technologies.

It all seemed to happen so quickly. Only last September, the heads of Chrysler, Ford and General Motors were motoring down to Washington to warn President Clinton about the perils of signing a strong global climate change treaty. December 1997 brought the Kyoto climate change conference, and with it the first signs of collective will to come to grips with the problem. Then in comes the New Year, and suddenly here are the Big Three auto manufacturers front and centre stage, loudly singing a green song," wrote Carl Frankel, editor of *Tomorrow*.

What's really happening is that the Big Three executives are riding a word that is spinning like a top, doing their best to manage a dramatic and difficult technological transition. The new initiatives are really about the age-old business virtues of success and survival," concludes Frankel.

— CSE/Down To Earth Features

South Asia: Chaos May Deepen in '99

Manav Chandra writes from New Delhi

Ruling coalitions in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will continue to be under siege from foes and temperamental allies, say political observers. The only bright spot is seen in Bhutan where King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has let his tiny Himalayan kingdom gets its first real taste of democratic rule.

FIVE women from political families and two kings will be at the centre of political action in South Asia in the closing year of the 20th century which, observers believe, will be another year of shaky democratic governance in the region.

Ruling coalitions in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will continue to be under siege from foes and temperamental allies, say political observers. The only bright spot is seen in Bhutan where King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has let his tiny Himalayan kingdom gets its first real taste of democratic rule.

After 25 years on the throne, the monarch, revered by his people as Druk Gyalpo, has decreed that his council of ministers will no longer be hand-picked by him, but chosen by secret ballot in the elected National Assembly.

Sectarian and provincial passions are expected to continue dominating politics in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In the world's largest democracy, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing Hindu party, will continue to face charges of mixing politics with religion in India.

Although forced to dilute its pro-Hindu party, agenda by the

realities of coalition politics, the BJP would be hard pressed trying to please its radical Hindu affiliates who are accusing the Vajpayee government of deviating from the Hindu and economic nationalist philosophy to which the BJP is committed.

In Pakistan, former foes are expected to close ranks to take on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his alleged bid to subvert democracy and secularism. Opposition parties, led by Sharif's arch-foe and predecessor Benazir Bhutto are accusing him of misusing Islam and federal powers to further his authoritarian ambitions and stifle provincial aspirations.

schools. Over 1000 stores got roped into the campaign. A condom manufacturer distributed 100,000 condoms with the White Ribbon message on the package. Seven national unions and a number of provincial federations of labour distributed White Ribbon materials. Campaigns were run in at least seven large uni-

versities and many high schools. Across Canada over 100 municipalities formally proclaimed White Ribbon Week, legislatures in three provinces and the federal parliament called on their members to wear white ribbons. Even the members of the police force got into the act.

— WFS/News Network

White Ribbons against Violence

IT began in Canada as an organisation of men working to end men's violence against women. The main campaign materials were a large poster, an information pamphlet, both in English and in French, and white ribbons. Today the White Ribbon Campaign, involving awareness and education activ-

ities concentrated in the months of November and December, has unfurled in many other countries, in novel ways. In its Canadian campaign last year, 11,000 posters, 350,000 pamphlets, and 650,000 white ribbons were distributed through retail and union partners. Five hundred education and action kits were supplied to