

The Crossroads of Destiny

To lift the economic threshold of our downtrodden aspirant people we have to come to terms with the harsh political realities that makes co-existence necessary and confrontation a disastrous option. A vast gulf of emotions has to be overcome, it is time to take radical political steps for the economic emancipation of our people.

FOR many Pakistanis the test of winning the cricket at Chennai on Indian soil had a profound moment of poignancy within minutes of victory. Notwithstanding the insecurity unleashed by Bal Thackeray's venom, the entire audience in the stadium, though acutely disappointed at India's defeat, rose to applaud when the Pakistani team took their victory lap.

Mian Nawaz Sharif must be commended for a long and relentless crusade to establish mutual relations on a sound footing without losing sight of the core Kashmir issue, it is BJP's Vajpayee who as Indian PM crossed the Wagah border in a bus rather than a tank (despite the entreaties of loose cannon Thackeray). Taking history by the scruff of its neck, the bus ride has brought the leaders as well as the peoples of Pakistan and India face to face with a harsh economic reality in the new millennium, we will either sink or survive together.

How can one question the natural demarcation imposed by geographical boundaries enclosing the peoples of South Asia in a high, mountainous embrace of the Himalayas, Karakoram and other ranges in the North, bounded in the South by the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean? Distinct peoples and religions are enclosed within this sub-continent, despite many diverse languages one can still understand each other. Invasions bring its own dynamics (and with it many excesses), for the most part the peoples of South Asia have lived in racial and religious harmony for over a millennium till the British established their bedrock authority on a policy of divide and rule. Even the much-vilified (by the Hindus) Emperor Aurangzeb, last of the Great Moghuls, had a Hindu General as his Commander against Shivaji! Two centuries of festering hatred, assiduously nurtured by the British, resulted in a new reality in 1947, that has continued now for over 50 years, the British leaving a bone of contention in Kashmir. At worst Vajpayee's trip could end on a note of symbolic significance, at best it presents us with a unique opportunity to study the consequences of confrontation in the past and replace it with co-existence in the future.

Reality begins with identity. Hindus and Muslims are as different as chalk is to cheese in ideology, in culture there are distinct areas of conformity. While respecting each other's beliefs we must ensure that militants among the minority on either side should not ride roughshod over the overwhelming desire of the vast silent majority to live in peace. Any military analyst will confirm that wars between Pakistan and India are unwinnable — if either India or Pakistan were to gain any territory would they be able to hold ground in the face of guerrilla warfare that would almost certainly ensue? On the other hand what about the danger that either India or Pakistan, facing possible defeat in the battlefield, not turn to the weapon of last resort as a desperate measure? The nuclear potential has made victory for either side disastrous. Meaningful détente was born during the cold war out of the negative vibes to any such quay.

Ground realities demand that we work our way from confrontation to co-existence. Reality must begin with the core issue of Kashmir. Pakistan cannot abandon the long-suffering people of the valley for narrow, crass economic considerations; on the other hand

India has adopted a hard-line stance to the whole issue, shunning third party mediation to solve the dispute. Why not a radical departure from standard options? For 50 years now the Cease-Fire Line (CFL) has seen fire and bloodshed being exchanged all along the line. Why not exchange that for free movement of people and trade across a defunct CFL but with the restriction of no permanent residency for the time being so as not to upset the population count? The status quo in the Northern Areas and

through us. Our cotton is a main cash-earner, with downstream textile mills and cotton derivatives surpassing the Indians in quality. Instead of being overwhelmed by our fears let us be prepared to accept the challenges that economic opportunity presents us with. The gateway to Central Asia is Pakistan, crossroads for an unimaginable trade opportunity that will never become a reality without an amicable understanding over Kashmir.

China as well as the regions of East and South East Asia

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Azad Kashmir (AK) must be regularised as Pakistani territory and Ladakh and Jammu should go to India. Let us look for a solution for the Valley within the parameters of South Asia, bringing in SAARC troops (light infantry) from Sri Lanka (4 Brigades), Bangladesh (4 Brigades) and Nepal (one Brigade) to enforce the peace, allowing India (with a meaningful participation from Pakistan) to keep on administering the Valley for the next 10 years till 2010, with the laws of either India or Pakistan applicable to the individual as per his or her choice. India would retain a maximum of one Infantry Division concentrated at two or three locations in the Valley. SAARC troops would be stationed across the broad expanse of the vale, having right of hot pursuit to maintain law and order.

In their own areas (Northern Areas and AF for Pakistan, Jammu and Ladakh for India) there should be a limitation on number of troops and offensive weapons, particularly artillery. Siachen must be immediately demilitarised and all troops withdrawn, in fact India is spending five times what we are for this senseless war at the coldest height of nonsense, money that could well be used for giving good air mobility and reconnaissance potential to the SAARC troops policing the Valley. The complications inherent in enforcing such a plan are a far better option than continuing with the loss of precious young lives on a daily basis with no possible end result. At the end of the 10-year period, let there be a referendum to determine the real wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Today when the rumbling and crumbling sounds are coming out from that unfortunate country — Indonesia, it indicates some shocking bad news are in the making. It's a pity to note that one of the most resourceful developing countries of the world, comprising some 17,000 big and small islands, with a population of over 150 million, predominantly Muslim, having a dominant voice in Asian and world affairs being one of the four 'founding fathers' of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), is to-day facing an unprecedented political humiliation and economic ruination.

It's a sad picture, no doubt. Because emerging as an independent nation after 350 years of colonial rule by the Netherlands, it stood boldly on its feet in 1945 and followed a policy of non-alignment embodying in the NAM as a powerful 'third force' in relation to two superpowers — USA and the Soviet Union, during the chilling cold war. But its slow but steady down-hill, with a cancerous disease within, began with the grabbing of power illegally, through a bloody 'coup', by then Army Chief Gen. Soeharto, with the blessings of the West, ousting that legendary figure Dr Soekarno who had infused a new life and a new sense of direction among the Indonesian people. Somebody somewhere was not pleased with Soekarno's brilliant performance.

Following the 'coup', Soekarno's life was spared but

have had tremendous economic progress mainly because free trade has flourished in a sea of peace and stability. They have many problems between them, not perhaps on the scale of Kashmir, yet they have chosen co-existence instead of confrontation even though they are far more diverse than the peoples of South Asia. Together, we can surpass their potential, if only we do let us not fritter away our respective economic strength in escalation of conflict down the military route.

There will always be hawks and peace-niks, the hawks will always raise alarm bells about 'Balkanisation' and hold forth about a 'sell-out', the peace-niks would favour immediate disarmament, both are wrong. Have the nations of Europe reduced any of their troop levels even as they turn to political integration to match economic initiatives of the Common Market? Détente

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When we come to terms with Kashmir only then we can consider the economic benefits of co-existence for the peoples of South Asia, possible only if there is free trade without any tariffs between the participating nations, with a start made to eventually have a South Asian currency on the pattern of the "Euro" called the "Rupiah", to coincide with the final settlement of Kashmir. Some in Pakistan feel the competitive price and quality of Indian goods will overwhelm us. That makes for commercial nonsense, if Indians can produce quality goods, so can we. In any case most of our goods and services, even though suffering in price comparison due to the vast economy of scale in India, are still quite competitive. In turn we get benefit of the 'freight' advantage.

The Indians get a market for 130 million people, in contrast a market of 900 million people of India and 250 million people of the rest of South Asia (over a billion) opens up to us, a vast economic opportunity that is enhanced by the transit nature of the trade that flows

Turkey Holds Trial of Human Rights Workers

by M A Obaydullah

THE Turkish government has resumed trial against 10 executives of the Diyarbakir branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association (HRA). The 10 HRA executives were taken to Diyarbakir State Security Court on 9 February, charged under Article 7(2) of the Anti-Terror Law with producing propaganda for the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). If found guilty, they face up to 10 years of imprisonment. The prosecution is also calling for the permanent closure of the Diyarbakir branch of the HRA. Amnesty International has described the proceedings as "a shameful attempt to sabotage the work of a courageous human rights organization."

No serious evidence has been produced to support the allegation that these HRA officers engaged in illegal or inappropriate activities. Amnesty International believes that they should not be standing trial. The 10 human rights defenders are not accused of violent offences. Therefore, should they be imprisoned as a result of the current trial, Amnesty International has said it would adopt them as prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International members worldwide will campaign for their immediate and unconditional release.

The HRA is Turkey's largest independent human rights organization, with offices throughout the country. It carries out its work against the backdrop of a bitter conflict be-

tween the state and the PKK in Turkey's southeastern provinces. As one of the key HRA offices in the southeast, Diyarbakir has had a prominent role in investigating and reporting on human rights abuses committed in the region.

The HRA has openly condemned human rights violations committed by both the state and the PKK, but its work is often presented by the government as undermining Turkey's reputation and damaging public confidence in the country's security forces. In such a highly-charged context, the HRA has been repeatedly targeted for attack. Its officials have been threatened, arrested, prosecuted, abducted and killed, and its offices have been ransacked and bombed. In May 1998 the Turkish authorities began ordering the closure of branch after branch of the HRA in an apparent bid to stifle its activities permanently.

The Diyarbakir branch — as several others — remains closed, and its archives were confiscated by the police. The Turkish authorities have used a range of pretexts to justify these closures. The Diyarbakir branch was closed on the grounds that "its" activities threaten the unity of the state". Other branches were closed because they were "acting outside their authority" or because "illegal publications" had been found during police searches. Alongside these closures, national and regional HRA officials face a string of prosecutions under repressive legislation which restricts peaceful freedom of expression.

The autonomy plan will be finalised in April, then presented to the Timorese. If they reject it, the process of cutting East Timor loose will be taken over by next October's session of the People's Assembly. Indonesia's highest legislative body, to be formed after the elections in June. The assembly will decide whether to revoke the 1978 res-

Foes Talk Friendship

In substance, their talks may not go too far in terms of solution of bilateral problems, but their moves to improve ties either through the bus diplomacy or any other method are being well received by their peoples, other South Asian countries and the world at large.

INDIAN Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Paki-stani counterpart Nawaz Sharif wrapped up the summit in Lahore Sunday with a number of steps, especially nuclear confidence building measures for what they said "avoidance of conflicts between the two countries". The joint declaration issued at the end of the two-day talks set the tone for the two countries to work for shared vision for peace and stability in the region. However, it is obvious that the burden of the past and the political compulsions cannot be wished away. Lahore declaration has emphasised the need for settlement of all problems between the two countries including the Kashmir through discussions. Vajpayee's visit to Lahore was marred by a strike called by the religious parties and groups who are opposed to the peace moves taken by the two prime ministers. They feel no purpose will be served by Vajpayee's visit as India is unwilling to resolve the Kashmir issue. In India too, extremist parties behaved in the same way as some of them called upon their premier to "invade" Pakistan and take over the "Azad Kashmir," which is under Pakistan control but India claims as its territory, rather than visiting Pakistan by bus. In the midst of this situation, Vajpayee's visit has been a bold step and the warm welcome he received from Sharif is praiseworthy. There are hawks in both countries even within the ruling parties. It is also true that the visit will not dramatically change the nature of the bilateral ties. Nevertheless, the tenor set by the visit, which took place under great fanfare from both governments with several well-known figures from cultural, sports and literary arena accompanying the

Indian prime minister, is likely to cast a sobering effect on the New Delhi-Islamabad relationship.

Vajpayee is the second Indian prime minister to visit Pakistan specifically for peace talks. Earlier, late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made a trip to Pakistan in 1989 to discuss ways and means to improve ties between the two uneasy neighbours. Vajpayee's visit takes place at a time when relations between New Delhi and Islamabad have taken a

nuancing the current positive initiatives?

Undeniably, the visit of the Indian prime minister to Lahore is different in many ways and is being described as "historic", "remarkable", "significant", so and so forth. It is because of the mechanism and modalities of the visit that has long been dubbed as bus diplomacy between two countries and for several other factors which include the first direct peace talks after the nuclear detonations over nine months

in 1947. They fought wars while tensions along the border are a normal affair. Still, there are pressures at home and abroad to normalise ties as far as possible. There has been pressure, political and financial, on them after the nuclear blasts and both said they were moving towards signing the CTBT and the NPT. International sanctions, imposed in the aftermath of the nuclear explosions, are being relaxed. There are political parties and other socio-cultural organisations in both countries in favour of peace efforts since the people of the two countries have so many things in common. However, there are also Shiv Sena or similar parties in India and forces like Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan which always seek to thrive on communal and hostile nature of politics for their own existence. Fortunately, their strength is not much to reckon with. Vajpayee's trip to Pakistan and talks with Nawaz Sharif in Lahore is in line with the current trend of de-escalating tensions in different regions of the world. Their talks do not mean that something will emerge overnight and result in disappearance of tensions and the problems will be resolved. To expect that one will not call the other a "spade" on "Kashmir" issue will be fallacious. In substance, their talks may not go too far in terms of solution of bilateral problems, but their moves to improve ties either through the bus diplomacy or any other method are being well received by their peoples, other South Asian countries and the world at large.

MATTERS AROUND US
Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

new twist following nuclear explosions by both in May last year. Both are, however, under increasing international pressure to de-escalate tension in the region. Besides, Vajpayee and Sharif appear keen to leave behind a legacy of peace.

Vajpayee flew to the border city of Amritsar in Punjab and then joined a convoy of buses to cross travel 37 kilometres to reach the border where Sharif received him.

What is going to be the outcome of the visit in concrete terms? Can the two countries hang on to the kind of goodwill that has been broadly generated in recent months to improve the ties? Can the two leaders hold on to their positions of continuing efforts to develop the links while keeping the main bone of contention at the back-burner? Will the two governments at later stage not seek playing to the gallery since there is existence of extremist groups in both the countries de-

not only been 'politised', it has also been 'baptised' to some extent.

Sword of Damocles

President Habibie had already taken several steps to meet the demands of the East Timorese people, such as, partial withdrawal of the army from the territory, release of all political prisoners, including the separatist leader Xanana Gusmao who was earlier sentenced to 20 years prison-term on criminal charges. Recently, the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal who met in New York at a UN-brokered meeting, had ended on an inconclusive note, disagreeing on the formation of a "consultative mechanism" that would enable the East Timorese people to eventually gain independence. It may be a 'sieve-saving device' for Indonesia which seems, in all respects, to be mentally and physically prepared to part with East Timor, proved to be the most costly 'province' of Indonesia. However, the two Foreign Ministers are again scheduled to meet in New York on March 10 next under UN auspices to reach a final deal.

Meanwhile, President Habibie has indicated that East Timor's political future could be determined by the end of this year. That's a hopeful note, no doubt. But achievement of independence by East Timor will undoubtedly throw a big question mark for peoples in other parts of Indonesia who had raised their voice against racial discrimination as a young Barrister in South Africa and who ultimately sacrificed his life in the hands of a fanatic for preaching peace between Hindus and Muslims in a riot-stricken India following partition. Do you get the message? There has been a bit diversion from my main point, but I think there is some food for thought for those who reach the bottom line — that the Nobel Peace Prize has

In reality, the fundamental structural dependency created over the period of more than two decades of hegemonic oppression must be recognised, Indonesians at every layer of governance and in the private sector have succeeded in securing for themselves a privileged position at the expense of the native Timorese through a process of subordination and in the name of security.

Impressive physical infrastructure has been built up but the social, cultural and spiritual infrastructures have been systematically dismantled. The sense of belonging to a community has disintegrated. Even the social cohesion has been rent asunder by a policy of divide and rule. The pro-integration forces have been armed to the teeth to subdue the majority Timorese.

In this backdrop, it is generally felt that if independence comes, a strong UN transition authority would be needed for at least two years backed by peacekeeping troops from Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and possibly Indonesia. It is also believed that it is important for Indonesia to play some sort of role to ensure it doesn't sabotage the process and to show its good faith. Everything has to have the blessing of Indonesia, otherwise it is useless. Some among the Indonesians feel that despite all the money and sacrifices, Indonesia has failed to win the hearts and minds of the Timorese, in much the same way as the US failed to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese.

East Timor: How Far is the Tremor Felt?

by A M M Shahabuddin

Achievement of independence by East Timor will undoubtedly throw a big question mark for peoples in other parts of Indonesia, who had raised their voice against Jakarta for independence. How far the East Timor tremor spreads, only future will show.

his able and most influential Foreign Minister Dr Subandrio, and about half-a-million ethnic Chinese were massacred on the plea of 'cleansing' the country of the communists. The whole nation was terrorised and a silence of grave-yard prevailed.

Annexation of East Timor : Soeharto's Gimmies

As an act of bravery and patriotism for his nation, Soeharto invaded East Timor in 1975, after it achieved independence from its colonial power, Portugal in 1974. And in 1976, East Timor, with a population of some eight lakhs, mostly Christian, was declared as the 27th province of Indonesia. Since then it has become a prickly thorn in the throat of Indonesia. The people's resentment and anguish against robbing them of their newly-gained independence, that was suppressed by the iron-hand army rule of Soeharto, proved to be fatal in the long run both for Soeharto and his country. The people's wrath that was brewing underneath like a dormant volcano burst out at the right time when that so-called 'Life-President' Soeharto was thrown out in May last year in the face of violent street demonstrations crying for establishing democracy and implementing economic reforms for the welfare of the people. His successor, Vice-President Habibie, and a former protege of Soeharto, took over as Acting President.

Although he is said to have 'dismantled' many features of Soeharto's rigid political legacy, he has so far failed to meet the demands of guerrilla-wrecked East Timor for independence.

For now, it's not even clear if matters will reach that stage. Popular opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri has threatened to scrap the independence offer if she wins Indonesia's June elections. Although the vast majority of the 830,000 Timorese want to go it alone, Indonesian settlers and some sections of Timorese fear they may be targeted for reprisals if the Indonesian army pulls out. Meanwhile, in United Nations-brokered talks, Indonesian and Portuguese negotiators are still hammering out a wide-ranging plan to give autonomy — rather than independence — to the former Portuguese colony.

The autonomy plan will be finalised in April, then presented to the Timorese. If they reject it, the process of cutting East Timor loose will be taken over by next October's session of the People's Assembly. Indonesia's highest legislative body, to be formed after the elections in June. The assembly will decide whether to revoke the 1978 res-

olution that made East Timor an Indonesian province, opening the way for an Indonesian withdrawal from East Timor by July next year.

Most Timorese, however, say they want a period of autonomy under Indonesian rule to build institutions and disarm the populace before independence. Frei, an resistance leader, now under house arrest from jail, has advocated five to ten years of autonomy followed by a referendum. Like many of the initiatives by the Habibie administration, the offer of independence to East Timor seemed too sudden and too simple. "This is too premature," said Nobel laureate Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, spiritual leader of the predominantly Catholic East Timorese. "This process will be carried out respectfully. All but the most radical Timorese worry deeply that if the Indonesians leave abruptly, history could repeat itself. The Portuguese left behind a civil war when they withdrew in 1975.

Habibie's offer confronts the East Timorese with a stark choice: broad autonomy with no hope of independence, or independence next year. Many Timorese are convinced that Habibie's proposal was designed to fail. They see it as a ploy to show that East Timor — ruled by Indonesia since 1975 — cannot govern itself. "We've been of-

ficer saying that Canberra would change its policy and join the chorus urging self-determination for East Timor. "Why don't we just let East Timor go," Habibie told his aides. "Haven't we suffered enough character assassination as a nation because of this?" There was also a growing sense that the loss of East Timor would not fracture the Indonesian republic and even remove one obstacle to the foreign aid Jakarta so desperately needs. President Habibie's eight months in office have been chaotic, marked by ethnic and economic turmoil. Granting independence to East Timor relieves Habibie of a major headache and could win him support both at home and abroad. "This has been more than a pebble in our shoe," said one Indonesian diplomat, repeating Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas's oft-quoted complaint. "It's been a millstone around our neck."

According to reports, Alatas