

Escalating Arms Race at Our Doorstep

Now that both of them possess nuclear arsenals, the possibility of a catastrophe in the region cannot be ruled out. Under such a scenario, Bangladesh will not be immune from the fallout of the conflict. Hence it is in our interest to strongly condemn the purposeless arms race being pursued by both India and Pakistan.

ALMOST a year after undermining international norms against nuclear test explosions, India and Pakistan have once again tested a series of nuclear-capable missiles in the latest round of tit-for-tat tests.

India test-fired a surface-to-air missile Trishul in response to Pakistan's testing of Shaheen-1 and Ghauri-2 missiles within a span of 24 hours. Pakistan, on the other hand, had carried out the tests in response to India's initial test of an Agni-II medium range missile.

The latest tests prove the ability of both countries to move well beyond the initial stages of nuclear-weapons development. The tests were followed by government announcements reiterating their support for a "truly comprehensive international arrangement which would prohibit testing of all weapons".

Last year, by conducting successful underground nuclear tests, India and Pakistan openly flexed their nuclear muscle in an attempt to join the world's most exclusive club of five acknowledged nuclear powers: the United States, Russia, China, France, and Great Britain. The aftermath saw a spectrum of international reactions ranging from the expression of concerns, condemnation to imposition of economic sanctions.

The latest round of tests has also unleashed a barrage of immediate condemnation from different countries. Despite adverse international reaction, both Indians and Pakistanis have reacted with understandable pride and glee and viewed it as a milestone for their respective countries.

The government of Bangladesh has so far been lukewarm in its response. Any escalation of tension between these two countries should be a source of major concern for us. With both countries flexing their nuclear muscle, and given the history of unstable governments always trying to find foreign scapegoats from their internal shortcomings, it will not be surprising if the arms race one day escalates into an armed conflict between these two countries. Now that both of them possess nuclear arsenals, the possibility of a catastrophe in the region cannot be ruled out. Under such a scenario, Bangladesh will not be immune from the fallout of the conflict. Hence it is in our interest to strongly condemn the purposeless arms race being pursued by both India and Pakistan.

The tests have to some extent detracted from the sense of optimism that pervaded the Lahore summit between Nawaz Sharif and Atal Behari Vajpayee. We can see a return to some of the hostile rhetoric that has for many years characterised the relations between these two countries.

It remains to be seen how the tests will affect their future relationship. Only recently they

have entered a period of détente symbolised by a growth in sporting, cultural and diplomatic exchanges. It is also interesting to note that both countries have tipped each other off before they carried out their respective tests, in keeping with a key point in the Lahore Declaration.

Despite recent improvements in relations and given the absence of any immediate cause for tension between these two countries, the question is: why did India conduct the initial test that appears to have launched the two countries on a path towards a full-blown arms race?

Avid followers of the Indian political scene will not be tremendously surprised by the recent turn of events. The BJP government has been forthright about its nuclear intentions. The election platform of the BJP clearly stated its intention

strated that it was prepared to jettison its nuclear capability. Citing India's refusal, Pakistan hasn't signed the treaties either.

After last year's nuclear tests, both India and Pakistan had announced their intention to sign the CTBT by September 1999. Perhaps the best indication of a long term rapprochement between them will be seen later this year when the time to sign the Treaty comes up. If by then there is still an atmosphere of tension and lack of trust between New Delhi and Islamabad, it is possible that both sides could refuse to sign.

Given the existing situation, what do the future hold for us in this region? The internationally renowned Institute for National Strategic Studies in a recent study have identified four possible outcomes in the arms race between these two countries:

"Rollback" — India and Pak-

istan are persuaded to roll back their nuclear programmes to zero and sign the non-proliferation treaty.

"Declaration and Escalation" — Both countries determine that the current state of non-weaponised deterrence is no longer sustainable and hence declare their nuclear status and accelerate their nuclear weapons and missile programmes.

"Status Quo" — Maintenance of a limited ambiguous nuclear status, with both countries refusing to accept the non-proliferation treaty; and

"Regional Deterrence" — De facto acknowledgment of quasi-nuclear status for both countries, with adoption of a new international and regional approach to contain the two programmes at current levels.

Prospects of a rollback are virtually nil. Both India and Pakistan have determined that their national security requirements are well-served by at least the potential of a nuclear deterrent.

The second outcome, the most alarming of the four, would place the sub-continent's security on a hair trigger with temptation for both countries to decide upon a first strike in a crisis. The latest event suggests moving in this direction. As states with nuclear weapons monitoring of their nuclear programmes would be precluded even in the unlikely event that they are admitted to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as weapons state. This is because states with nuclear weapons are effectively protected from scrutiny under the Treaty.

Until last year, the Status Quo outcome had worked effectively for both countries. Neither country had felt the obligation to openly undertake a massive programme to move from a capability to fully developing nuclear weapons. However, after crossing the nuclear Rubicon in May 1998, events in the sub-continent have shown that this mutual self-restraint is unlikely to be sustained in the near future.

The final outcome of "regional deterrence" may be the most viable long-term strategy to improve stability and eventually lead to mutual realisation that nuclear proliferation may not be in the best interest of either countries. Focusing on this, in order to persuade them to free current programmes rather than escalate, would require extensive diplomatic negotiation between the two governments, with encouragement and participation by foreign countries and/or international organisations.

An integral component of such reassurance would be sharing of intelligence data between the two countries thereby addressing the more alarming aspects of proliferation by refuting alarming and inaccurate reports. This would help to minimise any misapprehension in these two countries about transparency. Such sharing of intelligence data is not new for either India or Pakistan. Sharing of intelligence data during the Indo-Pakistani crises in 1987 and 1990 helped to dispel inaccurate reports which were agitating both sides, and helped avoid escalation into conflict.

Given the historical lack of trust between these two countries, adopting this approach will not be easy, and will require some readjustment of existing thinking about nuclear-proliferation strategies. However, it seems to be the only viable way of diffusing a major security threat not only to the innocent billion people in the sub-continent, but also to the overall security of the region.

On previous occasions, Sheikh Hasina had used her office in trying to persuade the leaders of the two countries to settle their differences. This may be another opportunity for her to try to convince them the irrationality of their approach towards a nuclear arms race. The earlier they understand the folly of their decision, the better it is for everyone in the region.

The nightmare of a global nuclear exchange between the superpowers has receded with the end of the Cold War. But nuclear weapons and the race by smaller powers to acquire them remain a major security threat to the world. The continued pursuit of higher nuclear weapons capability by both New Delhi and Islamabad underscore the view that both countries find nuclear deterrence a more essential strategy now than during the Cold War.

Joint Chiefs

With Gen Musharraf, one can be sure of one thing: reform will take weeks, not years. One feels that the PM must correct this anomaly now on his advice and put all speculation as well as uncertainty to rest. The Armed Forces must have one Commander; the PM must make this a settled issue immediately without delay.

ONE of the living beings I respect most in this world is Gen Sharif, the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC). Not only is he upright and correct but also he remains one of our finest military minds. For many of us, Gen Sharif remains the role model of a professional soldier par excellence. Unfortunately, like MacArthur, he has chosen the adage, "old soldiers never die, they simply fade away".

Therefore, he mostly keeps his own counsel and does not find it professionally responsible to publicly comment on various issues. However, it is always a privilege to listen to his mature, considered views in private, particularly about Higher Defence Organisation (HDO), the concept of which he conceived and authored in the early 70s. In brief, Gen Sharif has always been a strong advocate of the necessity of a superior HQ to control the three Services, both in peacetime and during war. While agreeing with him about the imperatives, one begs to disagree with him on one vital issue, the question of who is to command the JCSC.

The PM has recently corrected two grave anomalies in the defence structure. First of all he has filled the post of the Chairman JCSC, albeit temporarily for a period of one year with acting Charge, and second and more important, he has opted for giving the charge to the Land Forces Commander, which is as it should be. Gen Sharif wanted the three Services, primarily to give the smaller Services the feeling of a vested stake in a coordinated command echelon and to avoid the feeling of being a perennial minority. While the basic feeling of Gen Sharif on the issue to create goodwill by apportioning the command hat in turn is commendable, regrettably it is not practical.

Both airpower and seapower have a vital role to play in the defence of the country. As the recent two major conflicts, the Gulf War and the ongoing Balkans war have shown, air power has a major influence on the course of battle, both to fulfil strategic objectives. Airpower has been backed by seapower, not only firing Cruise missiles and launching attack aircraft but moving men and material considerable distances. However, the holding of ground can only be accomplished by ground troops. Both in the Gulf and now in the Balkans, it is the deployment of ground attack helicopters backed by troops that will have bearing on the ultimate course of the battle.

Neither the Air Force Chief nor the Naval Chief would have the inherent professional knowledge of land conditions equivalent to that of a Corps Commander.

As such it would be a luxury, just because of their feelings, to rotate the hat of the Chairman JCSC among them. One feels that the survival of the country is more important than anyone's feelings. If we were to accept such a theory then why not have doctors, aeronautical en-

gineers, electrical and mechanical engineers as well as Control and Reporting personnel from the PAF, engineers in naval vessels etc all line up to become Chiefs in their respective Services.

In the Army, the COAS can only be from one of the fighting arms: Armour, Infantry and Artillery. There are excellent officers from Engineers, which may even be counted by some as a fighting arm; EME, ASC, Ordnance, Army Aviation, etc. What about their "feelings" because they cannot become COAS? We should be very clear about the issue, the Chairman JCSC should be from the Army. This would avoid later heart-burning among possible contenders in the Air Force and the Navy. Admiral Fasih Bokhari is a very fine professional military man; maybe he could have filled the slot, but could we take the chance against the country's survival?

Why have a single person be-

nothing to create waves for their Services. Air Chief Marshal Farooq Feroz Khan was an unmitigated disaster in the sense he did virtually nothing except play golf. He is a living symbol of how "ceremonial" that post of Chairman JCSC had become.

General Jahangir Karamat, the last Acting Chairman JCSC and COAS was one of the most brilliant professional soldiers ever produced by the Pakistan Army. It was to be expected that in the year he spent as Acting Chairman JCSC he would bring about adequate reform that would correct the present anomalies in the command structure. It was during his time that the May 28 nuclear blasts took place and the requirements of command and control are more acute for nuclear operations. As such it was also expected that a Nuclear Command Authority would function with the Chairman JCSC as the man with the finger on the button, directly reporting to the PM. However, in one crucial issue Gen Karamat was found wanting, particularly at a time of crisis.

His decision to resign symbolised this uncertainty. This indecision is fatal in command. While the way of his departure left a bad taste in the mouth, Gen Pervaiz Musharraf who succeeded him, is totally a different kettle of fish. By moving Corps Commanders within courts and days of his assumption of COAS, he showed himself to be a keen student of Richard Nixon's theory of not debating a point to death, instead he is known to be very decisive as a leader of men. It is very fitting that this thoroughly sound professional soldier, a field person as well as an above par staff officer, has assumed charge of JCSC, albeit as Acting Chairman. At least we now have a person as COAS who will take a decision when it is necessary. That is the only imperative of a superior command. The reform of JCSC with the added responsibility of the Nuclear Command should not take any length of time. It is an open and shut issue. The land forces commander must also be the man responsible to coordinate operational and administrative issues in the three Services, both during peace and war.

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AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Despite the vital role of the Navy in protecting our sea frontier and the air force to keep control over our airspace, any war with our enemy India will primarily be a land war. As such, it is the Army General, like in NATO, who is the Ground Forces Commander, who must have absolute control over the Armed Forces of the country. He is the person who must call the shots, not only in wartime but also in peacetime to ensure that during times of crisis the three Services are coordinated towards a single mission: the defence of Pakistan. The mission dictates the deployment of forces. While it is true that cost dictates the size of the forces, particularly high cost ones like the Air Force and the Navy, the overall concept of threat perception in Pakistan is to have adequate land forces to counter possible enemy threat on the ground on different axes.

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As such it would be a luxury, just because of their feelings, to rotate the hat of the Chairman JCSC among them. One feels that the survival of the country is more important than anyone's feelings. If we were to accept such a theory then why not have doctors, aeronautical en-

both the Chairman JCSC and the COAS. The reason is that the Chairman JCSC must be hands-on commander of the land forces and he can only fulfil that if he has concurrent command of both. In that sense the use of the phrase GHQ (General Headquarters) as opposed to Army HQ is very significant. One feels that the JCSC structure can be modified to reflect reality and placed in the proximity of the Army HQ, both correctly as GHQ. A lot depends upon the force of circumstance as well as the personality and character of the individual who wears the ultimate hat. In 1976, when the JCSC was created, Gen Sharif was made the first Chairman. He was followed by Admiral Sharif from the Navy and then by his illustrious brother-in-law, the late Gen Iqbal Khan — another outstanding soldier of great character and integrity.

Because Martial Law was declared in 1977, a basic anomaly came up as Gen Ziaul Haq as COAS was junior to Gen Sharif but as Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) and later President, he became senior. That was the death knell of HDO as it was considered. The Chairman JCSC became largely a ceremonial figure despite his superior rank. The personalities of the Navy and the Air Force who came to the chair did

Nawaz Sharif's Moscow Visit

Significant, but May Not Resolve Everything

Pakistan's relations with Russia have always been far from perfect. These have been characterised by bitter animosity caused and accentuated by Pakistan's friendship with Washington, Moscow's enemy number one during the Cold War, and Indo-Soviet alliance, perceived in Pakistan to be responsible for Delhi's domineering regional attitude and its military build-up. The lingering legacy of the Afghan war, where the Russian suffered their most humbling military experiences, and Pakistan's support to the Taliban government fighting Russian-backed forces of Ahmad Shah Masood, has kept the two states at an uneasy distance from each other even after the end of the Cold War. Last year

Russia moved and the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Afghanistan which is by far the strongest international indictment of Pakistan's assistance relationship Moscow has with Delhi, which in Islamabad's view is further tilting the conventional weapons balance in favour of India.

It is against this background that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is starting his three-day visit to Moscow from Monday. He will be the first Prime Minister of Pakistan after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's visit in October 1974 to go to Russia. In this interview with *The Daily Star* correspondent Syed Talat Hussain, Foreign Minister of Pakistan Sartaj Aziz, who is accompanying Nawaz Sharif, talks about his government's Moscow initiative.

The Daily Star (DS): Russia has always looked at Pakistan with suspicious eyes and the feelings in Islamabad towards Moscow have not been any warmer. Now that the Prime Minister is going to Moscow after nearly a quarter of a century, is this an indication that the Russians have brought about a change in their policy towards Pakistan?

Sartaj Aziz (SA): It remains to be seen how much of a change the Russians have brought about in their Pakistan policy. On the whole in the last decades, particularly in the Eighties, the divergence of our views on Afghanistan have been creating problems and gaps. In the Cold War context, India was in the Russian camp and we were aligned with the West. Now both these events are behind us. In the new post-Cold War world, there are re-alignments. Pakistan being an important member of the Islamic bloc as well as an important South Asian country does have a strategic importance. Then it has proximity to Central Asia. I presume this fact is being recognised by the Russians.

DS: But Afghanistan is still a big bone of contention between them?

SA: In Afghanistan the ground realities have changed. Now all the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan are sitting together and working towards creating durable peace. On the whole I think convergence of our interests and common objectives is more than what I have called divergence.

DS: Is Prime Minister Sharif's visit to Moscow a pointer to the fact that Pakistan is trying to introduce more balance in its foreign relations and is looking for new sources of diplomatic support at the global level?

SA: We have always had diversified sources of diplomatic support and our relations with China are an example of that. It has all along been an important counter-balance to our relations with the US. The gulf between Russia and Pakistan was created by peculiar circumstances, some of which I have just mentioned while others included Russia's strong links with the Indians. With those circumstances gone we can now build on the potential of our relationship with Moscow.

DS: What sort of potential do you see which Pakistan can explore?

SA: There are many things. Trade is one. The present volume of trade between the two countries is minuscule, even though the potential is far greater. It is for this reason that during his visit the Prime Minister two important agreements will be signed, one on economic and trade co-operation and another on co-operation between the national chambers of commerce and industry of the two countries. The aim is to foster both government to government links as well as between the private sectors of the two countries. We will also focus on ways to develop mutually beneficial interaction in the fields of science and technology and defence related areas.

DS: On defence co-operation, is Pakistan planning to buy some weapons system from Russia?

SA: Not yet. It is too early for that. Our first aim is to purify our relations with Russia on a self-sustaining basis. Once that has happened other things will fol-

DS: Indians are particularly sensitive to any thaw in Pak-Russia ties, and has formulated a plan to counter through its lobbies in India. Have the Russians given Pakistan any fresh signal that they want to build their relations with Pakistan irrespective of their relations with India?

SA: The signal is implicit in the diplomatic interaction we have had with the Russians. It is going to be our effort to emphasise that Pakistan's relations with the Russian Federation should develop irrespective of their relations with other countries.

DS: There is a feeling that perhaps the timing of the PM's visit to Moscow is amiss because of what is happening in Kosovo?

SA: We need to understand that this visit part of a process. Nobody should expect that everything will be resolved and the relationship will take off due to one visit. The visit will provide us something to build on, after all it is taking place after a gap of 25 years. It is a significant start.

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Hopes and Fears about Indonesia's Election

by A S M Nurunnabi

INDONESIA is approaching a general election to be held in June next. A year ago the country was ruled by a dictator, Suharto, whose military kept an iron grip on the scattered archipelago. Politics then, was a joke. Suharto allowed only three parties to function, his own and their platforms were pre-determined.

Today, with Suharto in forced retirement, and the far-flung provinces being gradually de-militarised, some 140 political parties have materialised to contest the upcoming general election in June, which is considered to be the country's first genuine electoral exercise since 1955. 'Reformasi' (reform) is the national slogan at present. If all goes well, Indonesia, with a population of 210 million and an estimated 120 million eligible voters, could become the world's third-most populous democracy, after India and the United States.

The election campaign is already reported to be building upstream across the archipelago, from the tiny hamlets in Sumatra to the major cities of Java, candidates are setting up local headquarters. Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of Indonesia's fabled ruler Sukarno, has kicked off her campaign lately. While the next three-and-half months will see many campaign promises, political partnerships and shifting fortunes, it will also be a time of trepidation and national breath-holding.

In the context of the general election, some very pertinent questions have been raised. Can the nation re-invent itself in the short period of time left to the run-up to the election with virtually no democratic experience and few truly national institutions? The loosening of Suharto's control has already resulted in waves of violence against minorities, migrants and soldiers in several parts of the country. Lately there have been some unsavoury developments.

In January last, the government of President B J Habibie announced that East Timor might be given independence if

it so chooses. Next, the government allowed separatist leader Xanana Gusmao to trade his jail cell for house arrest in central Jakarta, where he had to entertain supporters and foreign diplomats. The threat of internal squabbles among political groups to fish in troubled waters following independence, if granted, looms large in East Timor.

According to keen observers, once in full swing, the election campaign is unlikely to be peaceful. The country is now in the depths of an economic meltdown; the economy has shrunk 13.5 per cent and the number of unemployed totals about 20 million. The army of civil servants who long benefited from membership in Suharto's ruling Golkar party continue to pull the levers of administrative power. Some analysts see it as a fight between those who want to re-establish democracy and those who want to suppress the people and take away their sovereignty. In other words, there was fear that Suharto's crowd isn't as vanquished as it had appeared to be. There should be no overlooking the fact that Suharto is still in power.

This may perhaps be an exaggeration but it needs to be understood that at a time of political transition with no obvious precedent, such apprehension may not be quite pointless. Unlike other cases of transition to democracy, for example, in India and the Philippines, Indonesia is more unwieldy. Its transition with Suharto's hand-chosen successor, Habibie, governing mostly under the dictator's laws, has been less than decisive. Therefore, there is strong feeling in some quarters that the country is in for a larger middle.

Observers, however take note that the biggest sign of progress so far is that the June elections will be conducted under enlightened electoral laws passed last month. For the first time in decades, anyone can start a political party, and candidates will no longer have to be approved by Jakarta's intelligence agency. The country's 5

million civil servants have been formally relieved of their duty to vote for Golkar. In drafting the new electoral laws, members of the house of representatives conceived two major points to Habibie and the ruling elite: they allowed the military to retain 38 appointed members in the house-still a big reduction from the 75 seats reserved under Suharto and ensured that government representatives will equal those of political parties on the important Election Commission. Certain anomalies however still remain. Indonesia's private-TV stations, far from being independent, are still owned by Suharto's children and two cronies. But electoral liberalisation has come a long way fast.

Currently there are four main parties, distinguished less by ideology than by the personalities of their leaders. The main contending parties are: The PDI or Indonesian Democratic Struggle Party led by Megawati. She has lately been keeping a low profile. Less shy is Amien Rais, a pro-Muslim candidate who joined the student protests in May last and, more recently showed up at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland to display himself to the global elite as a potential Indonesian leader. His party is the National Mandate Party. The third contending political party is the National Awakening Party of moderate Muslim leader Abdur Rahaman Wahid who is popular as well. Many of his followers are, however, baffled by his increasing closeness to the reclusive former President Suharto, whom he visited a number of times since last December. Next in importance is the Golkar Party which can probably hold on to a sizeable share of the national vote especially in remote areas where other groups have yet to establish a presence. Through the decades, it became a vast umbrella shielding a variety of interests: Suharto's, Habibie's and those of cronies, civil servants, and most importantly, the still powerful military. If civil servants decide not to vote for Golkar this time, the party could lose those 5 million votes.

Student activists tend to view Habibie and Golkar as the biggest threat to democracy. A radical student group leader expressed his suspicion by saying: "How can you expect a corrupt government to carry out a clean election?"

When the new house of representatives is elected next June, it seems sure to be split among a number of parties. Then the big democratic gamble will begin. Indonesia's next president will be elected by the 700-member People's Consultative Assembly, which comprises the house's 462 elected officials, along with the military's 38 appointed members, and 200 additional figures representing regions and interest groups. With power split among at least four parties, appointed military legislators and others, the most important elements of jousting, cajoling, bribing and threatening will begin in the run-up to the presidential race. In these circumstances, we may just wait and see how Indonesia's fling with democracy works out in the end.

In the opinion of analysts, for Indonesia, the stakes have never been higher. Against the backdrop of an economic crisis and spreading civil violence, the country is said to be moving closer towards concluding the shaky post-Suharto transition. When Indonesia goes to the polls in June, its people will have an opportunity to throw the ruling Golkar party out of power. And when national parliamentarians and others convene in October to elect a new President, there is a chance that they would choose a credible and legitimate leader. If all of this happens, there will be renewed confidence—not only in Indonesia's ability to restore law and order, but also in its prospects as a viable place to do business. New play to try to turn the tide of economic crisis now bedeviling the country.

But what if Indonesia fails? It is considered by many that this is the country's last chance to check waves of violence and money-politics threatening hopes for a free election.

