

Sharif's Bold Move

AT some grave political risk, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has agreed in his talks with US President Bill Clinton to take concrete steps to restore the Line of Control between India and Pakistan in Kashmir.

All sorts of epithets are being hurled at him on his return from Washington, such as, he has committed a 'betrayal' to the people's cause or to the Kashmiri aspirations and that he has ignominiously buckled under US pressure.

The democratic and liberal forces in Pakistan whom Sharif had alienated earlier on must still come forward to help him with his initiatives to defuse tension along the Line of Control in Kashmir.

India is urged by us to see that Nawaz Sharif's initiative does not go in vain. Whatever the nuanced interpretation of the Sharif-Clinton joint statement it cannot quite drown the fact that Nawaz Sharif has provided good basis for resolution of the latest conflict in Kashmir.

Making Light of the Visit

WHILE the very rationale behind sending large delegations on official visits has been often questioned, the composition of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 65-member entourage for the four-day official visit to the United Kingdom has certainly added a new dimension to the whole debate.

Even on her trip to New York in 1996 to address the United Nations General Assembly some of her relatives were included in the state delegation, so were they on her previous visit to the UK in 1997 to attend the Commonwealth Summit.

In our view, a country like ours, which is struggling to alleviate poverty, should, by no means, plan such extravagant visits. By the foreign minister's own submission, there is no definitive bilateral agenda for the visit.

Government Still Sleeping?

TRANSPORT owners have totally shut down road communication in the northern and southern parts of the country. A 72-hour strike has been called by the Truck Owners' Association to press their 8-point demands which include withdrawal of enhanced taxes on various types of vehicles, tyre-tubes and spare parts.

The Communications Minister reportedly blamed the striking transport owners for not informing the government before going into action. But is it not the responsibility of the ministry concerned to keep tabs on such matters?

WRITING early in 1957, the late Professor Keith Callard, in his 'Political Study of Pakistan', concluded that "if representative government collapses, it will be because its legs are not strong enough to sustain its own body... Pakistan, by its constitution, is publicly committed to the operation of democratic institutions.

This is how Herbert Feldman opens the first book of his trilogy, covering the politics of Pakistan - 'Revolution in Pakistan: 1958-1962'. The second book is 'From Crisis to Crisis: Pakistan, 1962-1969', and the third, 'The End and the Beginning: Pakistan, 1969-1971'.

Feldman lived with the times and based his narrative largely on evidence collected as events occurred. He arrived in Karachi in 1947 with the hordes from across the border. He was well connected, having married Nishat, the daughter of Liaquat Hayat Khan, Sir Sikander's elder brother, and was thus able to observe at close quarters the strange and convoluted politics as practiced in this country.

China's relation with Pakistan has always been friendly and mutually beneficial to their strategic interests in the background of India's attempt to dominate the South Asian region. It is acknowledged that it is in the interests of both Pakistan and China to restrain the influence of India in this region.

To both the countries it makes political and strategic sense that no one country should dominate this region. In geo-political strategy it is desirable to maintain a balance of power in the region. Pakistan played this role with the assistance of external powers to balance India's military power.

Pakistan never accepted India's military superiority, partly because of the Kashmir territorial dispute. Furthermore, there is a perception in Pakistan that India's assistance in the birth of Bangladesh was to weaken Pakistan's vis-a-vis India. After 1971, Pakistan appears to have become more alert and sensitive to ensure that India does not become militarily superior to Pakistan. It

for that nuclear response from Pakistan attests to this military balance. Since the Kashmir flare-up from May last, China, Pakistan's traditional ally, appeared to have kept neutral position and issued statements to exercise restraint for both sides. China's position appears to be disappointing for Pakistan. Pakistan wanted vigorous and robust support from China on this vital issue at this point of time.

China did not call for a Security Council meeting at the UN to discuss the Kashmir situation which potentially threatens peace and security in the region. Instead, China, appeared to listen to the story of both sides and the visits of both India's and Pakistan's Foreign Ministers to China are instances in point. Some political analysts believe that China may be relishing this listening role from both India and Pakistan.

A question arises as to why is China behaving this way when its traditional ally Pakistan needs its support?

China appears to look at the Kashmir issue from its own perspective. The core issue in the Kashmir dispute is the right of the exercise of self-determination by the Kashmiris to decide the final status of the territory. Although the exercise of self-determination is a funda-

mental right enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, many countries interpret it otherwise and perceive it as a cause for disintegration of the national unity and cohesion. There is a view in some countries that under the guise of self-determination, new national borders are created within the existing established boundaries and the right of the exercise of self-determination could trigger instability in a country. Kosovo is an instance.

Many political analysts believe that China appears to be uncomfortable about the exercise of right of self-determination by the Kashmiris in the disputed territory. There is a lurking fear that if it is accepted in Kashmir, then it could be applicable to the people in Taiwan and Tibet. This appears to be China's concern in the Kashmir issue and could be the reason for its being cool and neutral in the present Kashmir situation.

Another reason could be that China wishes to mend its relations with India. China realises that in the next century India and China have to face the might of the US in a bipolar world. Both have common strategic interests to reduce the influence of the superpower - the US. If Asia and India come to stand on each other's role in Asia, it will be beneficial to

both of them. After NATO's attack on Yugoslavia, no country could be certain to what extent the leaders of a country could do or take actions with their nationals in respect of their human rights within the national boundaries. The barrier of domestic jurisdiction appears to have withered away under the new international norms of humanitarian laws. A new world order seems to emerge in which the concept of "just war" is incorporated.

China's opposition to NATO's war against Yugoslavia appears to rest on the emergence of the new world order. There is a suspicion that any action by China against the wishes of Tibetan and Taiwanese people could provoke a war-like response from the West and this trend, to many countries, appears to be uncomfortable and goes against the sovereignty of a nation.

There is a view that Kosovo war might have an impact on China's attitude towards the right of self-determination by the Kashmiris in the disputed territory. China's response to Kashmir dispute appears to be guided by its own perspective of the likely situation in Tibet and Taiwan and Pakistan needs to acknowledge this fact.

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Zero Minus Fifty-two

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

To those who hold that the Vale of Kashmir has to be a part of Pakistan, despite the desire of the Kashmiris to be independent, and to those who feel that we can achieve this end by sending in freedom fighters, we say, this is an expensive exercise in futility.

which met with a negligible response from both." (From Crisis to Crisis)

"His [Altaf Gauhar's] promotion in September 1963... to be the civil head of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting placed him in close connection with Ayub Khan... He became almost at once a member of the small top-level group which advocated a 'forward' policy with respect to Kashmir, and there is no doubt that he was a member of the intimate coterie which vigorously pressed such a policy on Ayub Khan. The others, including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and the late Lt General Akhtar Malik, were not civil servants... At the time of hostilities between Pakistan and India in September 1965, Altaf Gauhar became very prominent in promoting and guiding a markedly aggressive war-time propaganda in which pro-Peking sentiments received emphasis." (From Crisis to Crisis Appendix I).

1969-1971: "It is evident that Palt's suggestion was an unsuccessful attempt to conceal the real explanation. So brief a period had been imposed on Aurora because India was relying, no doubt by prior arrangement, on the Soviet Union's veto in the Security Council. It was plain that once hostilities began in earnest the issue would be raised in the United Nations, and India intended that there should be no interruption in the fighting until its purpose in East Pakistan had been achieved.

"But while the Soviet Union could, by means of the veto, hold the ring, it could not do so indefinitely, and the swift capture of Dacca, even if not the final destruction of Niaz's army, was necessary. The Soviet Union exercised its veto three times, thereby providing time for General Aurora to encircle Dacca and force a surrender. It was accomplished in twelve days and was no mean feat of arms. Had he not succeeded, the political situation might well have become adverse for India. Further, if Yahya Khan and his advisers had been relying on China, or the United States, or the Security Council, they were cruelly deceived." (The End and the Beginning)

"Perhaps the most interesting fact at sea was the appearance in the Bay of Bengal of a task force sent by the American Seventh Fleet comprising the aircraft carrier Enterprise, with nuclear-armed Phantoms, an amphibious attack ship, a guided missile frigate, dock-landing ships, and supply vessels. The United States government explained that the presence of this force was to facilitate the evacuation of such American citizens as remained in the newly declared state of Bangladesh, but whether those citizens were present in such numbers as to require so formidable a squadron, whether they desired to leave, and whether they were in any real danger seems extremely doubtful. It is evident that the American ships were sent to remind the Soviet Union, then occupying a prominent position in the drama, that the United States was not indifferent to events in this theatre of war and had not lost interest in the sub-continent. As it happened, India declared a cease-fire and the American force steamed without ostentation towards other waters." (The End and the Beginning)

"It was learned that the United States had informed Pakistan that if India continued this war on the western front, they would give all material help and support, but that if India declared a cease-fire, Pakistan would have to accept it. The Soviet Union is understood to have informed India that, after taking Dacca, a cease-fire must be declared. Since, as it appears to me, India had no other intention than to do exactly this, the two super-powers, each according to its own logic, made their respective contributions to crystallising India's purposes." (The End and the Beginning)

Now we come to May 1999 when the Indians discovered the presence of a few hundred well-armed, well-trained Mujahideen entrenched on the Himalayan heights of the Drass-Kargil sector on their side of the LoC. The Indian army, caught napping, was embarrassed and its government, as weak and fragile as is ours, reacted as it did. Let us believe

our side of the story. We do not know who the infiltrators are, we do not know who armed and trained them, we do not know how they managed to scale the heights and occupy vantage-points. We know they are Kashmiri Mujahideen engaged in Jihad, local freedom-fighters from Indian occupied Kashmir, continuing their fight to deliver their brethren from Indian oppression and occupation. The Indians are attacking them. We have nothing to do with them, yet in the interest of peace, we would like a cease-fire and to talk to the Indians via the back door, the side door, or the front door, and in the interest of humanity at large we are seeking the help of the international community to bring about an honourable way out of the impasse. In the bargain, we would like back some of the territory of Azad Kashmir and Jammu in the Siachen area lost to the Indians many years ago. The Kashmir issue has to be globalized and to prevent the use of nuclear weapons we expect the global powers to step in and ensure that peace prevails, on our terms. In the region and not world at large. Now, let us not believe the big wide world's side of the story.

Credit goes to the Pakistan army for its tactics and strategy and for the accomplishment of a tactical manoeuvre which took over six months of prior planning, reconnaissance, the high-altitude acclimatization and intense training of the infiltrators, and the supply of special equipment. Presumably, this operation was given the OK by the prime minister

despite reservations from certain quarters. He probably assured the army that as soon as vantagepoints were secured our subtle diplomacy would come into play. The world powers and our allies of the Ummah would stand by us, and we would end up better than when we started.

Strife-torn Europe is tired and does not want another war on its hands. America has just won a war without bringing home one single body bag. No mean achievement. If a war can be stopped by merely tightening the economic screws, the tightening should start. This would be the cheaper option.

Now, the Ummah in Ouadadougou has not sneezed, the Chinese have not coughed, America is enjoying the long 4th of July weekend, Europe is busy watching Wimbledon, and Big Boris is ill and, having suffered the Taliban in Afghanistan, does not want to look our way. Our emissaries are running round the world like headless chickens whilst our men and brothers are dying on the heights.

To those who hold that the Vale of Kashmir has to be a part of Pakistan, despite the desire of the Kashmiris to be independent, and to those who feel that we can achieve this end by sending in freedom fighters, we say, this is an expensive exercise in futility. If we want the Vale we will have to fight for it and we can only embark on a fight if there is a reasonable chance of winning. To embark, we must be strong, powerful, and equal in all respects to the adversary. This might happen after fifty years, starting as of now, of sustained good governance. What is fifty years in the life of a nation?

For the present everything possible must be done to get out of the mess, claiming we have won and letting India do the same.

China's Attitude towards Kashmir Situation

by Harun ur Rashid

There is a view that Kosovo war might have an impact on China's attitude towards the right of self-determination by the Kashmiris in the disputed territory. China's response to Kashmir dispute appears to be guided by its own perspective of the likely situation in Tibet and Taiwan and Pakistan needs to acknowledge this fact.

Pakistan Prime Minister's brief visit to China at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart signalled to others the manifestation of the close bilateral ties between the two countries. This is more so when Pakistan is fighting a low-key local war with India in Kashmir.

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To both the countries it makes political and strategic sense that no one country should dominate this region. In geo-political strategy it is desirable to maintain a balance of power in the region. Pakistan played this role with the assistance of external powers to balance India's military power.

Pakistan never accepted India's military superiority, partly because of the Kashmir territorial dispute. Furthermore, there is a perception in Pakistan that India's assistance in the birth of Bangladesh was to weaken Pakistan's vis-a-vis India. After 1971, Pakistan appears to have become more alert and sensitive to ensure that India does not become militarily superior to Pakistan. It

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To the Editor...

Don't get confined

Sir, The intellectuals and women organisations of Bangladesh only see the events of 1971 and 1975. They do not say anything beyond 1971 and 1975. To them murders and crimes mean the events of 1971 and 1975. Now murders and heinous crimes are being committed on women and children (some of them worse than 1971) and women are publicly being humiliated both inside and outside the Jatayia Sangsad. Our so-called intellectuals and women organisations (except for one or two) mysteriously do not utter a single word as they do not have the courage to do so.

I fervently urge the intellectuals and women organisations to wake up and not to confine themselves only to 1971 and 1975. See what is happening nowadays. Please vehemently protest against all sorts of crimes. Come forward and help to make our country a happy Bangladesh.

Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka-1000

"Stain on Parliament"

Sir, Thank you very much for the thought-provoking editorial under the above caption published on June 30, 1999. The DS appeared to be very much anguished but a bit surprised by the unmanly and vulgar outbursts of the Prime Minister. We, the unfortunate onlookers of the political happenings (and attended backerings) in Bangladesh especially since the last three years or so are all with the DS when it has rightly pointed out that 'by doing that she (Sk. Hasina) has lowered not only the sanctity of the highest forum of elected representatives but also the prestige of her office.'

In fact, a culture of vulgarity and abuse has recently been germinated on the sacred soil of Bangladesh by the very people pledged-bound to eradicate

these ill from the society. As far as I can remember, the DS (and a few others, too) have time and again implored the Prime Minister to be careful about her behaviour and utterings.

I think, the members of the parliament need a soul-search.

An Agonized Citizen Dhaka

'Genetically engineered seeds'

Sir, The letter published in the DS on the 24th June entitled, 'Genetically engineered seeds' is confusing. The point that the author is trying to make is not at all clear. On the one hand he talks about genetically engineered seeds killing butterfly populations, and on the other, about the World Trade Organisation; and lastly about scientists moving away from the supreme corn plant.

I would like to put the issue of genetically engineered seeds on the proper perspective, since our subject deals with the matter. The genetically engineered crop in question is transgenic maize which produces an insecticidal protein taken from bacteria that has been reported to cause death of butterflies. This is not of butterflies in general but one particular species only. The reason for producing and growing insecticidal corn plants is so that these would not succumb to the insect called corn borer which can destroy the whole maize crop population. Before the advent of genetic engineering technology, farmers used to spray their crops with the Bt protein to control these corn borers. If any particular butterfly species is also killed by the Bt protein, it would also die and would have nothing to do with genetic engineering. What happens is that whereas any spray of toxic protein is washed away by rain in the case of ordinary plants, transgenic plants have been designed to produce the toxic protein themselves, leading to noticeable reduction in the butterfly population in question.

All scientists now have to do is design plants to cause expression of the toxin protein only upon wounding or some other stimuli. The research advancements are at such a stage that the latter can easily be done. This was not the case when the transgenic plants above were produced at first.

Therefore when there are problems with a certain product, these have to be analysed and solutions found out. It would be extremely foolish on our part to label genetic engineering as evil and have nothing to do with it. Actually pesticide use is much more dangerous, because as we have found out to our immense misfortune that leaching of pesticide into the environment has caused a lot of damage to our fish population and other organisms. But farmers find it difficult not to use pesticide in order to protect our rice crop which is essential for our survival. Awareness has increased however and efforts are now being made at integrated pest management.

As for moving away from the creator, genetic engineering is no such thing. Man is simply using his intelligence to try and add or subtract a few genes into one organism for the benefit of mankind. These genes are already present due to the benefaction of our supreme creator. Crop genetic engineering can be easily compared with breeding of better crops, with the difference that the former has overcome barriers of cross-species compatibility and is more precise. If the human population had not increased so much, the present agricultural scenario of vast tracts of land planted with one or two types of high yielding varieties of crops would not have existed. The latter situation has resulted in encouragement of pest growth to uncontrollable levels leading to pesticide application. Pesticide use saved our crops but caused damage to the environment. Controlled genetic engineering, particularly in the case of crops is an environment-friendly technology, one in which the

government needs to encourage further research, investment and growth to solve major problems afflicting our crop populations. Only then we would be able to stand on solid ground and be able to understand, protect, counteract and even use to advantage, any decisions of WTO or commercial giants like Monsanto, which could affect us adversely.

Zeba I. Seraj (Ph.D.) Professor Dept. of Biochemistry, DU.

Income-tax on car

Sir, Income-tax is a tax on a person in relation to his income. The possession of a car does not necessarily create any income, rather it presupposes expenditure on the car, as it is not an income generating instrument when it is used for personal purpose or for family purpose. Now-a-days, possession and maintenance of a car is not a luxury but a necessity, and its maintenance cost is lower than the cost of conveyance by rickshaw, scooter etc., if it is maintained and driven by the owner or by his family members. Many middle-class - even lower middle-class - people have purchased cars because it has become a burden to bear the increasing cost of conveyance by rickshaws etc.

Does the Finance Minister think that persons having cars are all rich people? If they earn an income exceeding the exemption limit they will have to pay income tax on their income, but why income tax on car? It is a clear deviation from the basic principles of taxation. If the government wants to expand tax-base to increase internal resources, there are fields which the government as well as the people know and that should be in a logical, legal and proper way.

M Nurunnabi Kajla, Rajshahi

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Can You Hear Me?

I was walking down Fifth Avenue the other day when I saw the strangest sight - a man who was not talking into a cellular phone. No one walks in New York without a telephone stuck to their ear.

OPINION

Building Construction Rules

Reference is made to the roundtable transcript on 'How Environment Friendly Is Our Building Construction Rules?' published in the DS. Thanks to all the participants and the organizers for identifying such an important issue for the attention of the city dwellers. YEP forum has put forward a number of recommendations. Some of these directly relate to the activities of RAJUK. YEP members also expressed their opinions to form an advocacy group to mobilize public opinion to protect the interest of the city dwellers.