

So Near, but Why So Far?

The fact had begun to silently sink in that Kashmir could not be isolated from world attention. Then again, this position no longer sustains when India and Pakistan fail to move an inch towards a mutually acceptable solution on their own, writes **Syed Talat Hussain** from Islamabad



Does war pay?

A clear fall out of the recent upsurge in tensions between Pakistan and India is that both have started to re-state their rigid positions on Kashmir. The Indians have declared victory in Kargil by claiming that the last of the infiltrators had been flushed out from "our territory". Last week Prime Minister Atal Bahari Vajpayee found it fit to talk, at this sensitive time, about teaching Pakistan a lesson.

Pakistan's military and political leaders are also talking hard. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared at a rally marking the death anniversary of Pakistan's longest serving dictator, Ziaul Haq, that Kashmir will soon become part of Pakistan. As the post-Kargil stress cascades into a hardening of postures in Delhi and Islamabad, the Lahore Declaration-generated hope of a solution to the Kashmir issue has shrunk to become a vague notion. Yet it was only two months ago that the prospect of some meaningful movement on Kashmir looked real. This was because both India and Pakistan had been steadily mellowing their positions on Kashmir. This change was more evident in case of Pakistan than in India's, but there was change nonetheless in both sides' stances on Kashmir — in rhetoric and in reality.

India had begun to accept that Kashmir was a dispute that needed adjustment in one respect, taking back Azad Kashmir from Pakistan. After the Lahore Declaration, Delhi had started to realise that it could no longer fudge the real issue, Indian occupied Kashmir, by such defective tactics.

There was yet another discernible change in the way Delhi looked at Kashmir. From being emphatically averse to any international, or third party role in Kashmir, India was grudgingly coming to the point of seeing this to be an unavoidable necessity. Delhi had begun to appreciate the fact that Kashmir, because of its potential dangers to world peace had to become other interested party's business. That was why when during the Kargil crisis Delhi took its diplomatic offensive to the G-8 countries, and thus involved a third party in the dispute, other than mild criticism from the Opposition not much came out as a reaction.

The fact had begun to silently sink in that Kashmir could not be isolated from world attention. So while Jaswant Singh took great pains during his interview with BBC to emphasise that Kashmir ought best be handled at the bilateral level, Delhi could no longer sustain this position in the face of the fact that the two countries had failed to move an



The guns of Kargil

inch towards a mutually acceptable solution to the problem on their own.

A fall out of the same grudging realisation was another admission: that India could no longer hide its killings of Kashmiris behind the veil of the silly claim that it was an "internal matter". India's strong-arm tactics against the Kashmiris, its killing of civilians and torturing of the suspects involved in the armed struggle, did create a strong reaction in the world. Human rights violations in Kashmir were, and still are, an issue causing much embarrassment to India. This meant that India could not take it for granted that the world would say nothing in reaction to its ham-fisted handling of Kashmir.

Last but not least, India had to bunch Kashmir with the rest of the issues in its relations with Pakistan rather than reiterate its old position that Kashmir be put on the back-burner and other areas of co-operation and business, commerce, cultural exchanges, people-to-people dialogue, sports be promoted first. In the shape of the so called "composite dialogue" which was supposed to take place after the Lahore Declaration, Pakistan was able to wrest an admission of sort from the Indians that Kashmir centrality to the Indo-Pakistan relations could not be ignored.

Steady change was also visible in Pakistan's position on Kashmir. While the Lahore Declaration only dramatised it, long before Mr Vajpayee's visit, Islamabad had begun to unwind its decades-old stand that nothing could be discussed with India without addressing the Kashmir issue. In fact the Lahore dialogue process became possible only after Pakistan showed the willingness to alter its position. And then this Kashmir-first-or-bust stance was completely forsaken when Pakistan agreed to start the bus-service, freer business, cultural and sports exchanges with India despite the fact that India had taken no concrete goodwill initiative on Kashmir. Kashmir was vital but not the only issue, which Pakistan had to discuss with India. This was the essence of this shift.

A second change, or a sign of a changing Kashmir stance, was on the issue of plebiscite. Quietly but surely Pakistani decision-makers did admit that the demand for plebiscite had become unrealistic even though just and principled. From hammering on the issue of plebiscite to be the only means to ascertain the wishes of the Kashmiris, Islamabad had begun to concede that any other "fair way" can be used to give Kashmiris the right to choose their future. This meant that Pakistan could live with a nationally supervised elections in Kashmir. This also meant that Islamabad, for all practical purposes of purposeful negotiations with the Indians, was not glued to the position that the road map of a solution to the Kashmir was drawn up only in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. "Pakistan was open to other suggestions", was the signal.

The effrontery sustaining these bizarre notions is colossal. A military and bureaucratic class which has made a mess of its own country's affairs, turning a land of promise into a permanent basket-case, and what to talk of anything else, not even able to manage its cricketing affairs, swept by

Battle Lines Redrawn in Nepal's Politics

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

WHEN democracy was restored in Nepal in 1990, the mood was obviously celebratory in the Himalayan kingdom. With democracy dawning in Nepal's absolute monarchy the public perception of it was that of a bonanza. The Nepalese, long deprived of democratic privileges, dreamt of milk and honey flowing together in their impoverished country. It did not however take long for their hopes to fade.

Contrary to the expectation, the decade long experience of democracy for the Nepalese had been anything but sweet. In the newly introduced multiparty democratic system while a plethora of political parties squabbled among themselves to form as many as seven governments in less than 10 years, the public grievances remained largely unattended and the ordinary Nepalese continued to lurch in chronic poverty and deprivation.

As the politicians remained more preoccupied in the horse-trading of the legislators particularly during the last four years of the hung parliament the country's economic activities stagnated and the consolidation of democracy suffered setback. Two months ago when the 8th democratic government was sworn, in the bitterness

persisted. In their quest for a stable government during the third general election held in May last, the Nepalese electorate proved to be rather discreet in casting their votes. Embittered with prolonged political instability in the country they wanted to give mandate to one single political party. As a result the Nepali Congress, the country's oldest political party secured clear majority with 110 seats in a 205 strong parliament in spite of its dismal performance in the past.

The NC's unexpected success owes a lot to its commitment to stability. The second largest party Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) — UML now bereft of its astute leadership with the death of Man Mohan Adhikari came a poor second. Unlike in 1991 and 1994 — the voters were cautious enough to keep their electoral choice confined only to a few political parties.

The NC's victory has been widely attributed to the unity forged between the 'Big Two' of the party — Koirala and Bhattarai — both of whom had their stints of premiership earlier. While both them had been rival to each other in the party, Mr Girija Prasad Koirala the

party president in an extraordinary gesture in projected Mr Krishna Prasad Bhattarai a respected senior leader of the party as Prime Ministerial candidate before the election. Bhattarai was the kingdom's interim prime minister during 1990-1991 and is known to be well-nigh incorruptible in financial affairs. The NC could create a positive image of itself by projecting its prime ministerial candidature. The party's credibility soared when some of the deserving candidates from Koirala family were denied tickets and rebel candidates of the party were strictly dealt with.

In retrospect, all these factors combined to bring about the NC victory. But the unity factor, it now seems, was only an election winning stratagem of party president Koirala who was well aware of the party's sagging popularity.

After the NC government was sworn in, that unity seemed to be torn apart. As the new prime minister Mr Krishna Prasad Bhattarai finally took oath of office in front of Nepal's constitutional monarch, King Birendra, the real challenge of the new government had just

begun. The perennial rift between the NC's two heavyweights has resurfaced. Earlier although the party president cautioned the party legislators for a rapport between the government and the party for survival, those warnings seem to have fallen on deaf ears. A visible line of division has already come up between Bhattarai cronies and Koirala loyalists. The lack of rapport and coordination between the ruling party and the government of Nepal congress is nothing new. Although the NC alone has ruled the country for nearly seven years since 1990, it failed to function like a vibrant and well-organised entity.

Now even after four months of the general election the party seldom functions as a coherent body. The NC infighting stems mostly from the arbitrary ways in which the senior leaders of the party behave. And an intraparty democracy is, of course, a far cry.

Before the election the prime minister Koirala announced the name of Bhattarai as the future Prime Minister without discussing the issue with his party's central committee. He single handedly spearheaded the election, fulfilled his

promise by acquiring a majority for the party and made sure that Bhattarai was elected unopposed as the parliamentary party leader. The NC parliamentary party did not have any say in the entire episode.

When it was the turn of Bhattarai as the country's Prime Minister elect he also behaved in the same imperious manner. As he formed his cabinet the party president came to know of it only through a letter sealed in an envelope. According to the party insiders, Bhattarai's ministerial team is composed of his hard-line supporters whose primary objective would be to reduce the power of Koirala family in the party. For Koirala, who played a key-role in securing a majority for the party in the election, the disposition of the government is a shock.

likely to work as long as there is a crisis of confidence between Koirala and Bhattarai themselves. The present cabinet has 16 Central Working Committee (CWC) members in it. Yet the problem persists because there are rarely any consultation and understanding between the two top leaders. Although, according to analysts, the balance between the party and the government can be maintained even by allowing the prime minister to exercise his prerogatives.

After the 1991 election the opposition, UML took to the streets to bring down the NC government headed by Koirala in less than 100 days. Ever since, Nepal's political scene remained turbulent with the struggle of various parties to grab power. The situation worsened after 1994 mid-term polls which gave the country a hung parliament. Now even after a single party — the NC, has acquired a comfortable majority to run the government all by itself, the power struggle however continues — this time within the Nepali Congress.

While the battle lines ran between the parties before, now it has assumed an intraparty disposition.

Dynasties Everywhere

The presence of a large number of sons, daughters, brothers and other relations of leaders in the electoral arena is a natural and inevitable extension of the large phenomenon of family tradition in Indian public life. And by now the tradition is well-entrenched, well-established and, perhaps, well-accepted. **Harish Khare** looks at the scenario.

NOTHING symbolises the family phenomenon better than the electoral contest. Of all places, for the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency, where Ms. Mehbooba, a daughter of Mufti Mohammed Syed, former Union Home Minister and former Pradesh Congress(I) president, is challenging Mr. Omar Abdullah, a son of the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah. The USP of both the candidates is their family name.

The presence of a large number of sons, daughters, brothers and other relations of leaders in the electoral arena is a natural and inevitable extension of the larger phenomenon of family tradition in Indian public life. And by now the tradition is well-entrenched, well-established and, perhaps, well-accepted. It can be said to have begun at Lahore as early as 1929 when a 12-year old girl, named Indu, watched her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, take over the reins of one of the greatest parties, Indian National Congress.

Forty years later, that girl grew up to take over the party. She also garnered the political legitimacy for India's most durable dynasty. In Nehru's own life time, his sister, Dr. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, claimed — and was accorded — deference and political acceptability only because she happened to be Nehru's sister. However, the Madame Pandit syndrome mercifully did not prove infectious in the immediate years after independence. The top slate of nationalist leaders simply did not like the idea of promoting and facilitating family members in public life. Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, Purshottam Das Tandon and C. Rajagopalachari

each one of them as tall as Nehru but none sought to sponsor his children in public life. Even the later generation leaders — K. Kamaraj, B. C. Roy, D. P. Mishra, Gulzari Lal Nanda and Atulya Ghosh — were above the temptation. No doubt, there was an oddity like Mr. K. C. Pant, who could get a break only because of being his father's son, or, there were the two sons of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla — Shyama and Vidya — who were politely given the time of the day. But the idea of family connection did not acquire a life of its own until the Sanjay Gandhi phenomenon erupted in all its full glory in the mid-1970s.

The idea was immediately pirated by Sheikh Abdullah in Jammu and Kashmir, who began initiating his son, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, a reluctant medical student. And like for many other aberrations (e.g., criminalisation of politics, corruption), the great democratic legitimacy of electoral approval is used to cement the "family connection" in political life. Once the family connections enable a young man or woman to get a break of party, securing the nomination of a major party and he or she gets elected, his or her place in political life will *ipso facto* get ensured. In traditional sectors of Indian society the idea of the son wanting his father's Lok Sabha seat is not seen as illegitimate at all. And, then, the daily ritual of a politician's life provides the requisite training for the newly-elected family member to get fully baptised as a "leader".

For example, Mr. Ranjan Bhattacharya, foster son-in-law of Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is very much part of the Vajpayee political and personal entourage; he has already figured in a number of controversies and accusing fingers have been raised at him for being an "extra-constitutional" authority. It would only be a matter of time before he is persuaded by the Pramod Mahajan to acquire "legitimacy" by entering the electoral arena.

Similarly, Mr. L. K. Advani is going round the country, with his daughter in tow; the "political-training" she is now getting can at a later stage be hawked as electoral asset. Or, take the mind-boggling phenomenon of Mr. Navin Patnaik. He has emerged as a leader in Orissa just because he is a son of the formidable Biju Patnaik, who for decades presided over the political destiny of the State. Till 1998, Mr. Navin Patnaik was the most unlikely politician; he is "high society", and can hardly speak Oriya (some say his command over his native language is no better than Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's mastery of Hindi), and has had no reason to develop any rapport with the "unwashed masses".



But a break came his way in 1998 when the opponents of the then Chief Minister, Mr. Janaki Ballabh Patnaik, were looking for a name that could be electorally encashed; the uninitiated Navin met the requirement. He was coopted to break the Janata Dal, and during the general election the anti-Congress(I) mood instantly elevated him to the ranks of "leader". Bingo. Mr. Patnaik, a caricature of an Indian politician at best, is an honoured member of the Vajpayee ensemble. Success in one more election would render Mr. Patnaik useless for being a productive member of society.

Before Mr. Navin Patnaik, there was the America-educated Mr. Ajit Singh, who made a political transition straight from Manhattan district in New York to the Meerut division in Uttar Pradesh, from jet set to Jat set. Being the son of the legendary Chaudhary Charan Singh, the most respected leader among the farming community in the entire north, Mr. Ajit Singh overnight found himself propelled into front-rank leadership after his father's death. He, too, has had no reason to try to rediscover his skills and training as a computer scientist; he is now undisputed political heir to his father. And before Mr. Ajit Singh was Dr. Jagannath Mishra, who got to become the Chief Minister of Bihar at the young age of 38 in 1975 just because his elder brother, the very resourceful Lalit Narain Mishra, strong man of the Bihar Congress, was killed.

Dr. Mishra was able to get Indira Gandhi anoint him as Chief Minister in the place of Mr. Abdul Ghafoor. The principle of "politics as family business" was incrementally being accepted. Since it pays to be in politics, it is only natural and in the best of our social traditions that a father should want his son or daughter to be on a paying arrangement. Indeed, the business of politics has become so lucrative and so ego-satisfying that almost all parties concede the principle that sons and daughters of leaders have a claim to the organisation's attention and recognition, a claim which would be denied to other young men and women. Election time becomes the occasion to perform the legitimising rites.

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The 'Other' Gandhi

THE 'other' Gandhi son has stepped out of the shadows to help his mother Maneka Gandhi in the campaign trail in the parliamentary elections in India next month. Feroze Varun Gandhi, the 19-year-old son of Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Maneka Gandhi, estranged sister-in-law of Congress president Sonia Gandhi, has taken his first tentative steps into the world of politics in the campaign this year. He has been spotted at scores of campaign meetings addressed by his mother. He has introduced him to her constituents on several occasions.

The youngest member of the Nehru-Gandhi family has so far limited himself to acknowledging the greetings of the crowds at campaign rallies with palms pressed together in the traditional Indian greeting, only occasionally venturing to talk to the people of Pilibhit constituency in Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state. But he is scheduled to go one step further and make his debut political speech this week, reports say.

Charting a course similar to his cousins Priyanka Vadra nee Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, Feroze Varun Gandhi seems to be paving the way for a place in Indian politics. His cousins have been supporting their mother, Sonia Gandhi, in her whirlwind campaign tour of the country to bring the Congress back to power.

Varun Gandhi is currently a student of the London School of Economics and is reportedly applying for a transfer to the prestigious St. Stephen's college in Delhi. The *Indian Express* newspaper said. The move is seen as the first step towards his involvement in politics.

Maneka Gandhi, widow of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's younger son Sanjay, has little to do with sister-in-law Sonia Gandhi or her family. Differences within the family surfaced even while Indira Gandhi was alive, but they sharpened after her death when Maneka moved closer to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main rival of the Congress party that three generations of the family she married into have headed.

Varun Gandhi's sudden appearance in the limelight has enthused the people of Pilibhit, many of whom have been suggesting that he take greater interest in the constituency so he could one day think of joining electoral politics. "Beta" (son), you should look after your constituency, maybe you too can contest the election one day," the *Express* quoted a Pilibhit resident as telling Varun Gandhi.

It is good that you are getting to know your mother's constituency better," an elderly villager in the constituency told the youngest Gandhi. The paper said Varun Gandhi has been showing signs of political maturity in his response to crowds at election meetings. At times he has stepped out to mingle with the people. "It is not tiring at all," he was quoted by the paper as saying, adding that he found the campaign experience "very exciting" and "rewarding". He felt it was "a natural step" for him to help his mother because "I am practically the only family she has".

"I do not believe in charisma. In the long run people respect the work you have done," said Varun Gandhi, obviously referring to the larger than life image that all members of the Gandhi family have in India. In terms of profile, the Gandhi family is the nearest to royalty that India can have as a democracy and is perhaps comparable to the Kennedy family in the U.S.

In last year's parliamentary elections, Maneka Gandhi's independent candidature in Pilibhit was supported by the BJP. She subsequently joined Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government. This time the BJP is trying to project Maneka Gandhi and Arun Nehru, a cousin of Sanjay and Rajiv Gandhi, to counter the dynastic appeal that might help the Congress president to a certain extent. Arun Nehru has joined the BJP and is contesting elections in Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, at one time Indira Gandhi's constituency. The Congress party is banking heavily on its president's appeal and frequently recalls the "sacrifices" her family has made for the country, referring to the assassination of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, both former prime ministers.

— India Abroad News Service

The Albatross Round Our Neck

Ayaz Amir looks at why Afghanistan — not Kashmir — is the real problem for Pakistan

BATTERED and bruised as a result of Kargil, humiliated in Washington, at this juncture in our history the last thing we need is to have the burden of albatross round our neck — a burden weighing Pakistan down for the last 20 years.

Need it be recounted how our ham-handed involvement in Afghanistan has bled us white? Refugees kept not in controlled camps as was done by the Iraqis but allowed a free run of the country. Kalashnikovs, drugs, a surge in crime and, perhaps most ominously of all, a fillip to fundamentalism — these are the foremost gifts of our Afghan adventure. It might have been supposed that after reaping such a bitter harvest our ambitions would have been tempered by realism. But, plainly, ordinary rules of prudence do not apply to us. Even the Americans cut their losses in Vietnam and went home. But in pursuing foolish ventures we are mightier than the best of powers and continue to be stuck in our own little Vietnam, obsessed by half-baked notions of strategic depth, of installing a friendly regime in Afghanistan and opening a pathway to Central Asia.

The effrontery sustaining these bizarre notions is colossal. A military and bureaucratic class which has made a mess of its own country's affairs, turning a land of promise into a permanent basket-case, and what to talk of anything else, not even able to manage its cricketing affairs, swept by

dreams of Mughal glory. If only we had the humility to see ourselves as others see us: a drawn sword in one hand, a begging bowl of iron in the other. The world is full of beggars (otherwise the IMF and the World Bank would be out of business) but none more audacious than us. Even as we shout for alms (pleading not being our forte) were main smitten by a sense of our own importance.

Going nuclear has made things worse. Now our begging is accompanied by the rattling of our atomic sabre. As if the world will be impressed and will think that it is in its own self-enlightened interest to give us a living, Kargil was the outcome of this world view and this mindset. We obviously thought a military intrusion in the Himalayas would bring India rushing to the negotiating table.

One reason for this amnesia is the kind of governing class we have. What matters to it if

the country suffers? If successive leaderships stoop to folly who carries the burden of this adventurism? The hapless people in their boundless misery. As for internationalizing Kashmir, it is a phrase which makes you want to reach for your gun. Another victory like Kargil, another triumph like the one Nawaz Sharif secured in Washington, and we could wash our hands of the whole business of Kashmir. Kargil, however, was not just the expression of a blinkered warrior mentality. It had a strong connection with our Afghan experience, its inspiration coming from the winds of jihad blowing across the scorched landscape of Afghanistan. If the Soviets could be evicted from that tortured country, why not the Indians from Kashmir? Some of the brilliant military minds who conceived the Kargil operation are old Afghan hands.

On the ISI itself Afghanistan has left a lasting imprint. The Soviet retreat from the mountain fastnesses of that country

being the ISI's finest hour. It is another matter that the CIA, which along with the Saudis funded the Afghan jihad, has moved on to other fields and other conquests. Pakistan's command centres remain stuck emotionally in the mud of a country which has taken a giant leap backwards into the middle ages. Nor is Pakistan's obsession with Afghanistan purely of a military nature. The Afghan experience has spawned a whole new culture of conservatism and orthodoxy in Pakistani society. Consequently, we are witnessing a strange blurring of the Durand Line.

While the Taliban under Mullah Omar rule most of Afghanistan, their ideological hinterland is in Pakistan, the Sandhurst of Afghan revivalism being the Madrassa Haqqania, Adora Khattak. Will Pakistan not be touched by this experience? It is already feeling the heat from it. As the so-called mainstream parties retreat, the forces of fundamentalism advance. Their rhetoric

is influencing political discourse while outside their training camps the waiting lines are long. On the other side of the divide, the PPP is bankrupt, its leadership tarred by the brush of corruption.

The Muslim League government, impaled on the lance of its own ineptitude, is in the process of bankrupting itself. The people are tired — tired of politics, tired of the old slogans, tired of the same old faces. Is there hope amidst this gloom? There but it turns upon a slim possibility. Pakistan's military and bureaucratic elites have to sweep the cobwebs from their minds. The warrior mentality must be purged, foolish thoughts of conquest given up. The refrain that with our nuclear toys our defence has become impregnable should be made a cognizable offence. We should learn to look within, to converse with ourselves quietly and with a measure of dignity instead of shouting from the housetops and beating a drum all the time.

None of this will happen as long as Afghanistan keeps tempting the Pakistani bureaucratic spirit to messianic zeal. As long as the Taliban hold sway in Afghanistan, there will

be officials in Pakistan spouting obscure theories of strategic depth and of liberating Kashmir by replicating the experience of the Afghan civil war. Regarding one thing we should be clear. Kashmir is not the albatross around our necks. To its liberation, whether by word or deed, we are committed and the day we forsake this commitment some of our *raison d'être* as a nation will be lost. This does not mean we must go to war for its sake. But either should it mean that we do a Yasser Arafat over its burning remains. The albatross is Afghanistan, which has burdened us cruelly and, worse, has clouded our thinking (or what passes for thinking in this neck of the woods).

To set ourselves free this burden must be cut loose. But if at all this has to be done, we must bring to the task the spring of the tiger. Half-way measures will not do.

Twenty years is a long enough time. What the Afghans do with their country is their business. Let them settle their affairs by themselves as they have done throughout history. If they want the Taliban and mediaevalism, so be it. In any event, it is not for us to play Tallyhairs abroad when our own house is in such a mess. If it be objected that we owe a duty to the people of Afghanistan who are our neighbours, we must remind ourselves that the first duty we owe is to ourselves.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan