



## The Missed Millennium

Fate of the South Asians is still decided by the ruling elite, who always have belittled them, explains **Mansoor Mamoon**

THE first rays of the dawn of the new millennium over the West Central Pacific atolls of Kiribati is likely to take some four hours to radiate South Asia, which, however, may find its utter dismay that its components still largely remain laggards in all respects compared to the revolutionary changes sweeping not only its immediate neighbourhood, but also the world at large. The region is yet to come out with bold stride from the quagmire of endemic poverty, intense inter-state rivalry and distrust, mass illiteracy, widespread disparity between income groups, and between urban and rural areas, yawning gap in technological innovation and crisis in leadership, resulting in instability, anarchy and indiscipline with fledgling facade of democracy remaining continually fragile. South Asia could not avail itself of the ground-breaking opportunities of the last hundred years.

The last thousand years witnessed unprecedented turbulence, upheavals and violent convulsions in South Asia with the exception, to some extent, of the Himalayan Shangri La of Nepal and Bhutan. In the rest of the region, however, there had been series of invasions, conquests, disintegration of empires and kingdoms and colonialism in its extreme form. Finally, came the long-cherished independence. First to be free had been the jewel in the British crown of hegemony -- the subcontinent with the trust with its destiny in the form of two independent states -- India and Pakistan -- based not on geographical contiguity, but purely on religious considerations and then Sri Lanka ignoring its ethnic divide. The British shrewdly had sown the seeds of discontent and distrust which proved to be so disastrous and deep-rooted that their legacies still bedevil inter-state and intra-state relations causing huge wastage of scarce resources which could have been otherwise fruitfully and productively utilised for changing the lots of the teeming millions.

The emergence of Bangladesh through a war of

liberation in 1971 proved beyond any shadow of doubt that religion alone cannot be the sole basis of nationhood. A South Asian analyst has thus aptly diagnosed the ailments that characterise South Asia: "the imposition of alien political philosophies and structures without any political roots on a divided society often creates internal political strife that often tears across contrived frontiers and develop into regional and international conflicts. The ruling elite of South Asia today, be civil-military oligarchs or party political demagogues, are the new Brahmins. National resources are at the disposal of their presence of privilege and authority, synonymous with the sanctity of the state."

As a result, with the dawn of the new millennium, South Asia presents the biggest paradox and starkest irony in the contemporary history. It is a region appropriately described as symbolising 'poverty of plenty'. Albeit with all its ingredients and resources, South Asia is now the world's most prominent poverty pocket comparable only with East Africa (SAHEL region). With a combined population of nearly 1300 millions South Asia has the collective economic strength of a mega-market, bigger than EU, ASEAN and NAFTA. The countries in the region have a vast pool of world class scientists, experts, engineers and technicians. With nearly 25 per cent of the world's fossil fuel deposit, abundant mineral ores, over 250 million hectares of farmland, nearly 90 million hectares of forest, 460 million cubic kilometers of renewable water resources, South Asia should have been a serious player in the global economy. South Asia is also the citadel of three ancient civilizations -- the Buddhist, the Hindu and the Muslims -- with their rich cultural heritage which are dependable inputs for in-built resilience and inner strength to adequately meet the development challenges.

In fact, eminent economists like Hollis Chenery and Rosenstein predicted in late-50s and

early-60s that South Asia had the potentials to grow much faster than South East Asia and East Asia. But unfortunately that was not to be. In reality the reverse has taken place. While East Asia and South East Asia have developed with galloping speed and have braved the recent slumps, South Asia has been progressively reduced into an 'aid narcotic' and 'arms-addict' region. To the donors the region resembles a veritable black hole. Whatever is poured into it simply evaporates leaving no visible imprint on the economies of the countries in the region. Human development indicator in the region is one of the lowest in the world. Over three hundred million souls have no access to safe drinking water and about half of the populace (more than five hundred million) live in sub-human condition.

Notwithstanding its sorry state affairs, South Asia is the largest arms importer in the entire third world. India and Pakistan are now known nuclear powers and are poised for the inevitable armageddon after three bitter bloody encounters if there is no proper restraint upon the two archenemies.

The underlying reason behind this tragic and glaring dichotomy was the way the British divided the subcontinent before their eventual withdrawal and transferred power to "a section, only different in colour but otherwise remaining the same. Therefore, there was a credibility gap between the grassroots and the establishment." As a result, the region was being continuously rocked by violence and upheavals -- mass exodus of minorities, frequent ethnic and religious strife, armed confrontations, planned ecological degradation and political and economic hostilities. The dismal situation is further exacerbated by the fact the nature created South Asia as a single strategic whole and relevant parts remained for long as a single undivided geo-strategic and economic unit. South Asian countries, hence, could

not flourish in isolation and through xenophobic individual efforts. They key to their progress and prosperity had been and still is cooperation and not competition, harmony and not hatred and hostilities, amity and not enmity. Complimentaries and commonalities are the essential features of the countries in this region. But "cooperation in South Asia tend to be taken as a sell out of national interest. In each country one elite government jealously guards its interests vis-a-vis other elite governments of the region. Regionalism thus becomes subservient to national politics."

Otherwise, Nepal and Bhutan would not have remained a landlocked country for barely a ten kilometre stretch of Indian territory (Austria and Switzerland with similar geographical location are not so). The Tamils in Sri Lanka would not have been engaged in an unending civil war with the majority Sinhalese (multi-racial harmony prevails in neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia). Bangladesh market would not have been swamped with Indian goods and the latter's pressure for granting transit without providing the same facilities to the former. Insurgents remaining active in India's northeastern states as well as in Kashmir, Maoist guerrillas operating in full vigour in Nepal and the feud between Bhutan and Nepal over the latter's citizens almost becoming the majority in the former resulting in their subsequent forcible ouster thereby creating a human problem of great magnitude. Pakistan's sliding back to Martial law days; continued political standoff in Bangladesh, not to speak of Delhi and Islamabad's intense arms race to the detriment of regional peace and stability causing the forum of SAARC to the limbo.

South Asia, therefore, enters the new millennium with no immediate prospect of a metamorphosis for the better. This is not a happy augury for the millions living in poverty and deprivation through genera-

tions. Is there no formula for South Asia to initiate a new beginning? To quote yet another authority: "The most important first step should be a model of economic cooperation which would bring visible signs of prosperity to the peoples. Fruits which rot in one part of the subcontinent, while the other yearn for them. Energy sources that remain untapped because the technology and resources available are lacking in one particular South Asian state, raw materials that have to be sold cheap because the South Asian states are competing in the world market, are all problems calling for a fresh approach. Together, South Asian states have a large enough domestic market to absorb goods and services at a level few regions can compete. Such a model for South Asian economic cooperation will helpfully help stop the deadly arms race and redirect the staggering amount so squandered to vital development needs and turn water into wealth which could bring immediate benefit to about 500 million people in four countries. To achieve this is not apparently a difficult task. What is of utmost importance is to change the mindset of South Asian leaders. The leadership in South Asia, it has been amply proved time and again, is not eminently qualified enough to lead.

And India is urgently required of setting the precedence of confidence-building among its smaller neighbours in this regard. Noted Indian analyst V G Verghese has so nicely put: "India must take the lead and it must not be just fair but generous in dealing with its neighbours. It will gain by giving. Many national solutions lie in regional cooperation which is the wave of the future. Ultimately boundaries do not matter, people do."

The author, a SAARC Gold Medalist, is a former Research Scholar at the Institute of South East Asian Studies and the Commonwealth Foundation for Broadcasting Development.

## Means to an End?

Pakistan will wake up to a more promising dawn on the first day of the 21st century if the Pakistani elite and the armed forces that have in the past protected it make the right choice, says **Tanvir Ahmad Khan**

THE last sunset of the 20th Century is anything but a golden splash of triumphal colours for Pakistan. Its people have been battered by harsh judgments from various quarters that it has all but failed as a nation-state. There are others, within and without, who do hesitate to describe it as ungovernable except as a military dictatorship.

Still others, who do not deny its resilience in the face of very heavy odds in its formative years, and even concede its remarkable growth rates over fairly long periods of time, see a bleak future because they find Pakistan as a country that has lost not only its *raison d'être* but also its national will and resolve. They see it as a land where the intellectual classes are incurably cynical, given to despair and unable to relate themselves to any national existential focus or purpose.

A foreign diplomat said to me recently that he knew of no other society where journalists and analysts quote W.B. Yeats' "centre cannot hold" and "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity" more frequently than in Pakistan. What centre, he wanted to know, has unravelled for us and would 'the worst' that 'are full of passionate intensity' be a reference to those who have subverted Jinah's moderately Islamic democratic Pakistan.

It is never easy to deconstruct a vision that regarded as fading away or a dream that is dying. Then the end-of-the-millennium angst in Pakistan is only partly of an intrinsic origin; a significant part of it flows into Pakistan from outside sources that seek to undermine Pakistani self-esteem and confidence in pursuit of their own global agendas.

It does not also take into account the stoic heroism of its teeming millions who continue to grapple with life's adversity without any erosion of their faith in, and commitment to, the country they carved out of an inhospitable subcontinent. They may not be able to articulate it but they know instinctively that the crisis of being is largely that of an elite that deludes itself into thinking that it has choices other than Pakistan. For them, there is the pain of backwardness, denial and repression but no confusion of identity, no crisis of loyalty.

This is important as many of the doomday scenarios are built around the alleged failure of national integration in the post-colonial multi-ethnic nation-state of Pakistan. On closer examination, the real deficit seems to reside not in the inability of the ethnic and regional groups to relate to each other but in the internal tensions and stresses of the elite class. The elite flourished and expanded in Pakistan's peculiar approach to economic development and then competed acrimoniously amongst its own segments for the spoils of economic growth. Ethnicity, language and even religion became but tools in this competition which passed for politics for most of our history.

The peculiarity of Pakistan's development process came from its deep linkage with the international choices made by the emerging elite, in particular the incorporation of the country in a system of political and military alliances that dictated the economic policy as well. The young state became, simultaneously, a domestic enterprise for the creation of an upper class that ruthlessly appropriated capital accumulation, and an international enterprise for global projects that brought no dividend to its people. While the elite broadened its power base by co-opting the elements that lay beyond the

original feudal fiefdoms, especially in the civil and military bureaucracy, it had no compunction in assigning the vast majority to a new underclass with little access to instrumentalities such as education and health care that would alleviate their condition.

Few people in Pakistan worked as hard as late Dr Mahbubul Haq to draw attention to the dangers lurking in the resultant disparities but in 1963, even he was prepared to concede that economic growth was "a sordid process" and that its essence lay "in making the labourer produce more than he is allowed to consume for his immediate needs, and to invest and reinvest the surplus thus generated".

He was never comfortable in the years that followed with the manner in which that reinvestment took place or, for that matter, with the callous transfer abroad of the capital thus generated.

The decade-long confrontation between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif is capable of being analysed in many narratives. But at the heart of those narratives would be the contention for a near exclusive appropriation of the wealth of the country by one segment of the same elite at the expense of the other. The politics of this contention was couched in ethnic, cultural and regional metaphors but the actual interests of the people were essentially irrelevant to the process.

A more enlightened elite committed to long-term interests of the nation would have seen much greater merit in a more benign redistributive economic culture. But all it wanted was to prevent the political awareness of the people attaining a critical mass that would translate into an irresistible demand for radical social and political changes. Ethnic and sectarian strife provided the easiest tools for the dissipation of the energies of the people for authoritarian rule did not suffice by itself.

Mr. Roedad Khan, who once wielded power available to few career civil servants, has recently reminded us in a newspaper article of the reasons behind the prophecy made by him two years ago. He had forecast that "in spite of the Mandate of the Heaven - or perhaps because of it - Nawaz Sharif's destiny (could) end in a puff of smoke". Even in an article splendidly embroidered with Latin and French quotations, the writer's reasoning can be comprehended in a stark Anglo-Saxon simplicity. Ultimate power in Pakistan, he tells us, continues to reside where the coercive power resides. This is the power to abrogate the Constitution, dissolve the parliament, and sack elected governments with impunity even if article 58-2(b) stood repealed.

In short this coercive power resides with the armed forces. "Our history, Roedad Khan observes, can be summed up in one sentence, it is the sound of heavy boots coming up the stairs and the rustle of satin slippers coming down. Will it ever be possible to break out of this vicious cycle of corrupt political governments followed by military dictators, who usurped power for power's sake..."

This absolutist view of the power of Pakistan's military has many precedents. In an article entitled "The Zia legacy", Dr Maleeha Lodhi wrote in August 1997: "Zia also avoided Ayub Khan's mistake in not snapping his umbilical cord with the army, retaining the post of C.O.S along with that of president. That made him absolute ruler wielding unfeigned power". While this identification of the source of absolute power explains many past events, it should not become a deterministic view of our future as that would be a denial of the



dynamics of change from which no human society can be quarantined.

I have witnessed the total destruction of established power, including that of the military of the ancient regime, in two Muslim states:

Afghanistan and Iran. Present trends in Pakistan, fortunately, carry the promise of peaceful change. Consider the shift in our parameters. There is a clear majority in the traditionally dominant province of Pakistan, Punjab, that yearns for political accommodation with the smaller provinces. In fact, it was critical of Nawaz Sharif as being too Lahore-centred. It is not likely to oppose any remedial measures that promote equality of federating units.

Secondly, the military still thinks of itself as the Praetorian Guard but is also anxious to signal changes of style and substance. Pakistan cannot survive as a viable federation without a nationally acceptable federal balance and a *modus vivendi* in civil-military relations. It may take time for these realities to manifest themselves but we can watch the last sundown of the millennium without too much pessimism on these two counts.

What is less hopeful, however, is that the economic elite in all the provinces is still not sensitive to the imperatives of a change in the ownership, enhancement and distribution of wealth. This attitude is reflected in the continued failure of a social conscience that would sustain a tax and investment culture, enhance the capacities of the state and promote poverty alleviation programmes.

At present the politicians have an easy alibi and the armed forces are yet to demonstrate that they aim at anything other than a more efficient management of the existing economic structures. A major determinant of the Iranian revolution was the breakdown of the three-way social compact of the state, the affluent class and the burgeoning slum-dwellers. Islam provided the rhetoric and the spiritual energy for the revolution.

The last extended military rule in Pakistan showed that an obscurantist use of Islam to cover up social injustice does not work.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

## CTBTing

Will Pakistan sign CTBT before India? asks **C. Raja Mohan**

IS Pakistan getting ready to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ahead of India? Media reports from Islamabad indicate that the regime of Gen. Pervez Musharraf is moving in that direction. Questions remain on the credibility of the reports suggesting that Pakistan might sign in the next few weeks. But it was certainly expected here that once India began the national debate on the CTBT, Pakistan would inevitably follow suit.

Islamabad's track record on arms control suggests it is more comfortable staying right behind New Delhi than getting ahead. But India cannot rule out the possibility of an early Pakistani signature on the CTBT.

Pakistan has always tied its position on nuclear arms control treaties to that of India. The theme song of Islamabad for long has been that it will sign any nuclear treaty New Delhi is prepared to accept.

This clever diplomatic pos-

turing allowed Pakistan to proclaim its commitment to nuclear arms control, even while leaving the onus of the first move on India.

But in the recent years, Pakistan has often debated the virtues of de-linking its position from that of India in return for possible diplomatic and political gains. But in the end, it has found it safer to follow India than lead it.

Islamabad has often suitably adjusted this basic nuclear strategy. Unlike India, Pakistan did not reject the CTBT when it was presented to the United Nations in September 1996. Islamabad voted for the Treaty, while insisting that it would be prepared to sign it when India did.

This line helped Pakistan avoid the international opprobrium for rejecting the CTBT, while retaining the basic linkage to the Indian signature.

When India conducted the Pokhran-II tests in May 1998, Pakistan followed suit. Like India it also announced a morato-

rium on further tests.

At the United Nations General Assembly in September 1998, the Nawaz Sharif Government adopted a line on the CTBT similar to India's. Like New Delhi, Islamabad also called for the lifting of sanctions before signing the CTBT.

Worried that India might work out a favourable separate nuclear deal with the United States, Mr. Sharif proclaimed that Pakistan would expect a similar package from Washington when it signed the CTBT.

Pakistan could conceivably gain some political mileage now by signing the CTBT ahead of India. This would leave India, along with North Korea, the last of the hold-outs.

Islamabad could also hope that its early signature would get it some badly-needed political credit in Washington and end the current exclusive American diplomatic bargaining with India on the CTBT.

But like in India, the CTBT has been demonised in Pak-

istan. There might be some domestic political risk for Gen. Musharraf in signing the CTBT before India.

The government in Pakistan is now clarifying that the national obligations under the CTBT are limited to restrictions on nuclear testing. It is trying to inform the public opinion that the CTBT does not affect either the possession of nuclear weapons or the production of more nuclear weapons material.

There is concern in Pakistan, however, that if it gets ahead of India on the CTBT, it might be put at a disadvantage if India either conducts more nuclear tests before signing the Treaty or simply rejects it.

Pakistani officials are suggesting that Islamabad will reserve the right to conduct more tests if India does surprise the world with resumed testing.

These explanations suggest that Pakistan might be moving towards an assessment that it has little to lose and something to gain by preempting India on

the CTBT.

Having never linked its positions on arms control to those of Pakistan, India rightly insists on assessing its nuclear dialogue with the US on its own merits.

But New Delhi needs to analyse the likely diplomatic consequences of a Pakistani decision to either preempt the Indian move on the CTBT or ride piggyback.

New Delhi must indeed pursue a resolution of the nuclear dispute with Washington and explore the prospects of a new relationship.

But it should firmly reject any attempt to push, either directly or indirectly, the Pakistan factor back to centre-stage of Indo-US ties.

India must also communicate to Washington that any effort to whitewash and rehabilitate the military dictatorship in Pakistan after the signature on the CTBT will be unacceptable to India.

Courtesy: The Hindu of India.

The effort by the BJP-led Government to resurrect the debate on the CTBT process could involve a drastic revision of India's long-held nuclear position.

**Sukumar Muralidharan writes**



now confident of conducting sub-critical tests as also other non-explosive R&D activity necessary for the purpose." (The Hindu, November 30, 1999).

For anybody who is familiar with all facets of the Indian position during the CTBT negotiations, these locations must seem uncomfortably simplistic. "National security" came into the reckoning as a motivating factor for India virtually at the last gasp, when the draft of the CTBT had been agreed at the Conference on Disarmament (C.D.) in Geneva, and every nation was required to state an unambiguous position. Even so, it was hedged around by a number of other commitments, notably those towards ending research on nuclear arms and working out a time-table for the elimination of these weapons of mass destruction.

In March 1996, Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar put India's case before the C.D. in the following terms: "We do not believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security, and we have followed a conscious decision in this regard. We are also convinced that the existence of nu-

clear weapons diminishes international security. We therefore, seek their complete elimination."

Just a few months earlier, India had put forward an impassioned plea before the International Court of Justice at The Hague, as the court deliberated on the legality of nuclear arms: "Use of nuclear weapons in any armed conflict... even by way of reprisal or retaliation... is unlawful... Since the production and manufacture of nuclear weapons can only be with the objective of their use, it must follow that... their production and manufacture cannot under any circumstances be considered as permitted... The threat of use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance, whether as a means or method of warfare or otherwise, is illegal and unlawful under international law."

Clearly, the dialogue on the CTBT will also involve an effort by the Government to win broad political endorsement for the doctrine of "minimum credible deterrence". The naysayers in this context take their inspiration from two diametrically opposite points of the political

spectrum. The right-wing element insists that the Pokhran tests have not yet validated the range of weapons options that India will need to explore in order to establish a deterrent force. And since the momentum for a global nuclear test ban has faltered on account of the Senate's rejection of the CTBT, they insist that India should retain its options for a while longer.

The political parties are yet to articulate clearly their positions, since they claim to be awaiting a formal invitation to dialogue from the Government. K. Natwar Singh, convener of the Congress(I)'s foreign policy cell, insists that it is for the Government to state its position first. The kind of "private enterprise" practised by Jaswant Singh in his dialogue with Strobe Talbott has no place in evolving a policy consensus, says Natwar Singh.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, another influential foreign policy commentator within the Congress(I), believes that the Government's motives in seeking accession to the CTBT are fundamentally flawed. Jaswant Singh's brief in negotiating the terms of accession has obviously been to secure the relaxation of the sanctions and technology denial regimes that the US put in place after India's nuclear tests.

By arrangement with the Frontline of India.



Who holds the height, anyway?