Receding Prospects for Peace

THEN President Chandrika Kumaratunga called for a snap presi-dential election last month her central objective was to emerge politically stronger to be able to deliver peace to her war-torn country. She hoped for a solid mandate-better than one she was accorded in 1994 - to end the prevailing political impasse and shore up her peace mission. After the way the events unfolded during her five years of presidency she was left only with her twintrack policy of 'war for peace' which aimed at seeking a consensus on her devolution package to isolate the LTTE politically while at the same time conducting a war to weaken the Tigers for their acceptance of a political settle-

But by November 1999 none of the objectives were achieved. Swing the month the Tamil Tigers cut through the army lines in the North and regained all territories that had been taken earlier from them in past two years. The LTTE did not allow the government troops to secure a land route to their garrisons in Jaffna Peninsula through the tiger-held northern area of Wanni. On military front it was a devastation of sorts making it clear that there could not be a military solution war. The setback left in ruin Chandrika's strategy of forcing the guerillas to the conference table. Also the constitutional reforms designed by Chandrika government to devolve substantial powers to the country's provinces in a bid to meet the LTTE demand for a separate homeland in the North and the East were rejected earlier by the parliament. Chandrika's PA (Peoples Alliance) could not muster two-thirds majority required for the passage of those

M Abdul Hafiz looks at the obstacles that President Chandrika Kumaratunga may face

in Sri Lanka

Under the circumstances President Chandrika Kumaratunga was perhaps left with only option of calling for an early election. But unlike in 1994 when she was swept into office with a convincing win this time, with her dwindling popularity and a bagful of failures particularly in bringing peace the response of the electorate was lukewarm at the best. She however won the election marginally - thanks to the last hour sympathy wave generated by a LTTE attempt on her life. She lost her right eye in a bomb blast in her last campaign meeting but won with barely 51 per cent votes. Her main opponent Ranil Wickremsinghe gave credible fight to the president with his 44 per cent votes. This result is going to substantially influence the parliamentary election due soon. Unless some miracle take place - in all liketo Sri Lanka's 17 years old civil lihood - the political stalemate which Chandrika wanted break would persist.

In the meantime, the two suicide missions of the LTTE at short intervals right in the heart of the capital during the meetings of the two presidential candidates is a grim pointer to the Tigers' persistent refusal to any political settlement. The continuation of the same terror tactics in blasting yet another suicide bomb recently in front of the Prime Minister's office the LTTE unmistakably sends signal of their resolve to subvert



Chandrika Kumaratunga

the country's political process. The series of the LTTE bomb blasts are apparently intended to press hard their demand for Eelam. With both political and military setbacks the government is hardly left with an alternative to take its peace mission to a point of fruition.

During the election Ranil Wickremsinghe of the United National Party, a former prime minister portrayed himself as the only option left for peace. Wickremsinghe promised to open an immediate dialogue with the LTTE and set up an interim council of the North and

East to restore normalcy in the country. Not only his electoral defeat negates those possibilities, the observers also view with scepticism the prospect of peace under Ranil whose party. the UNP, in fact set in motion the ethnic insurgency in Sri Lanka with its harsh treatments of the Tamils under the prevention of Terrorism Act. It was during the UNP government in the late seventies that the Tamils were for the first time pushed to a collusion course with the authority. Although in an odd twist of the party's usual policy with regards to Tamil militants Ranil Wickremsinghe accepted the LTTE's demand for an international mediation few believes it to be workable. Moreover by targetting also Ranil Wickremsinghe during their latest series of assassination bids the Tigers did not show any special inclination for the UNP presidential candidate in the last election. According to the baffled

diplomatic circle in Colombo no one exactly knows what the LTTE will finally settle for; nor does anyone know whether the LTTE has reached a point of exhaustion where they will be prepared to negotiate. But the way their ascendancy in the military front continues it appears that they will negotiate only from a position of strength. It will allow them nothing less an independent homeland to settle for.

On the other side, with the return of Chandrika whose first and only peace overture was scuttled by the Tigers in 1925 the government will have a tremendous crisis of trust in dealing with LTTE whatever may be its demand. With the stakes raised on both sides and the attitude hardened the peace appears as elusive as before in Sri Lanka.

A Hijacking that Spells Trouble

India and Pakistan are once again engaged in a bitter game of accusations and counter-accusations, which bear ill for peace and stability in South Asia. Benazir Bhutto explains

ASHMIRI militants successfully hijacked an Indian airliner from Kathmandu last month. It was one of the most successful hijackings in recent history. Lasting less than a week, the Kashmiri hijackers forced India to succumb to their demands and release Kashmiri militants held in Indian jails.

Whilst the world celebrated the end of one century on December 31, 1999, the Indian government glumly gave in to the demands made by the Kashmiris militants. They had little choice. The families of those on board besieged the Indian government and forced its hand. The internal pressure was so grave that the Indian government was compelled to reverse its earlier hardline stance not to negotiate with the hijackers.

The hostages have returned home and the hijackers have disappeared into the hills of Afghanistan where the plane had landed. However, the hijacking has cast a pall over the relations between India and Pakistan. Both countries are once again engaged in a bitter game of accusations and counter-accusations, which bode ill for peace and stability in South Asia.

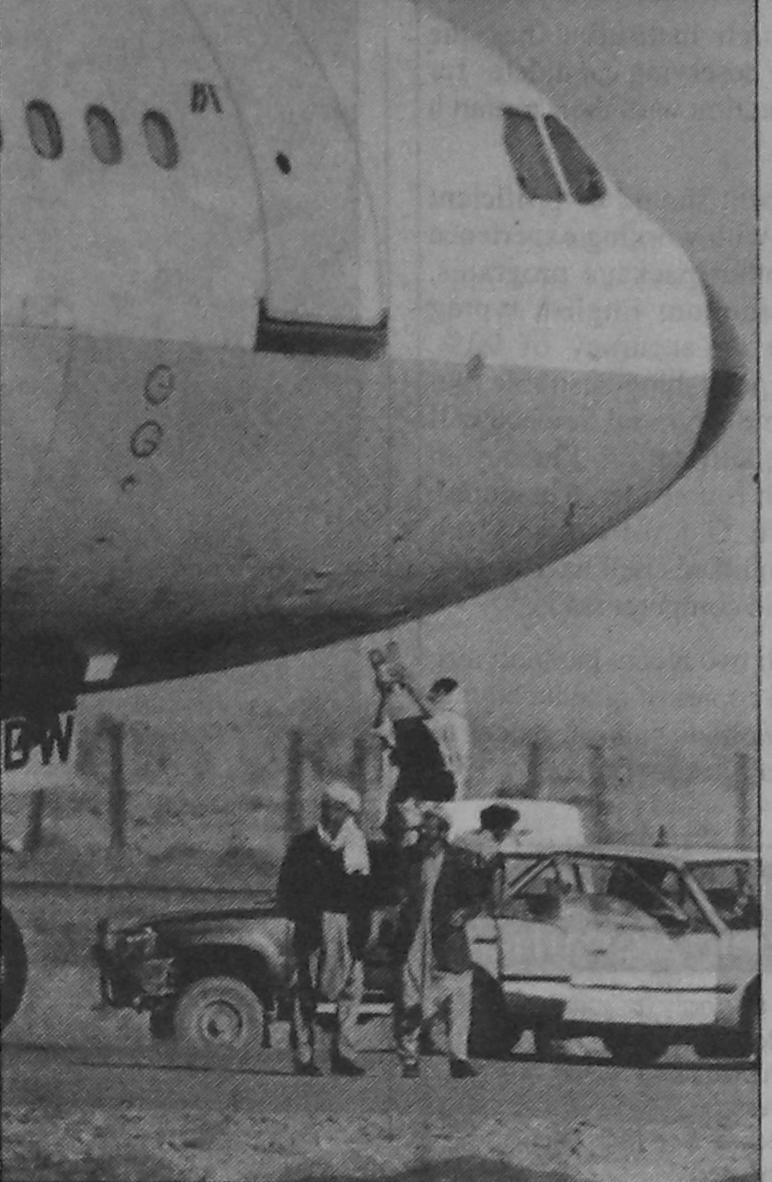
India was quick to blame Pakistan for the hijacking. It claimed, at one stage, that the hijackers had travelled by Pakistan's national airliner to Kathmandu with arms, transferring unchecked to the Indian airliner from the transit lounge. This was never proved. Pakistan, in turn, accused India of seeking to exploit the hijacking for partisan political purposes. Pakistan retaliated quickly to the Indian accusations of sponsoring terrorism. To make its displeasure known, it cancelled trade with India.

This may not work. The time is to reduce tensions, not exacerbate them. The hijacking may have ended. The phase of its

repercussions has only begun. The new row clearly indicates that India, humiliated over the hijacking, will make every effort to retaliate. That retaliation will take the form of a new international campaign to declare Pakistan a terrorist state.

The hijacking could not have come at a worse time for Pakistan. It was just beginning to come out of the shadow of last spring's Kargil crisis when the two countries nearly went to war. Pakistan's new military ruler had been keen to send messages of goodwill to India, even reducing troops symbolically at the border. But India found it hard to trust the general whom they viewed as the mastermind of the Kargil con-

That distrust has deepened



Part of the drama at Kandahar

lations between the two countries takes place against the ongoing discussion on the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Both countries have separately declared their intention to sign the treaty but are vet to do so.

Despite calls from the Pakistani opposition to sign the treaty in May 1998, following the nuclear detonations by both countries. Pakistan chose not to do so. The delay has put Pakistan into a corner. Pakistan, with its focus on India, needed a much smaller nuclear capability than India, with its focus on China and Pakistan. Were India to undertake a series of fresh tests, it would put pressure on Pakistan. To respond in kind would be damaging internationally. Not to respond would be the public failure of the policy of parity-to do what India

Pakistan already faces a host of difficulties. The country is being run by an unelected and unrepresentative regime. The major political forces in the country, capable of uniting the people, have been marginalized. The Constitution has been suspended, the Parliament silenced and the judiciary threatened with "accountability" (a

does not toe the line. More ominously, the economy refuses to respond to the measures taken for its revitalization. The new regime has been unable to come up with an economic policy that could give confidence to the market or bring in foreign investment. Take away the numerous statements of goodwill towards foreign investors and one is left

euphemism for corruption) if it

without a policy. This regime, like the one it replaced, is banking on IMF loans rather than the entrepreneurial skills of its people to turn the economy again in a dangerous, potenaround. Meanwhile, unemployment continues to grow. Daily, scores of government employees are laid off, increasing social dissatisfaction and threatening discontentment. To

ward off the discontentment, the regime keeps arresting people on unproven charges of corruption to offer hope to the people that money from corrupt elements will soon flow in to fuel the economy.

This is a dangerous policy. India understands the internal difficulties that a politically divided Pakistan faces as it teeters on the verge of fiscal bankruptcy. Under pressure from the West to resume dialogue with Pakistan, India has seized the hijacking as the stick with which to beat Pakistan.

The hijacking succeeded in putting the Kashmir dispute again at the centre of international relations. There are many who will argue that daring actions are needed to awaken the world and only a threat of a potential nuclear conflict can force the international community into action. Certainly, the international media and the world politicians come into play every time there is a danger point. Witness the international focus on Kashmir when India and Pakistan went nuclear in 1998, or the G-8 interest when the Kargil fighting broke out in 1999 and the renewal of interest, though on a smaller scale, over the hijack-Yet, this is a dangerous ar-

gument. And an even more dangerous route. It has been tried for the last fifty years and failed to resolve the differences between the two countries. It has led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 and the humiliation of the unilateral withdrawal from Kargil in 1999. India and Pakistan need to take a leaf out of the Middle East. There, intractable problems are being resolved through dialogue and discussion. The latest round of talks between Syria and Israel should be an eye-opener for the subconti-

But can a military ruler, bogged down in a difficult domestic situation, obsessed with hunting internal enemies through special laws and special courts, give peace the attention it deserves? Can he have the foresight to take advantage of President Clinton's South Asian visit to make possible a breakthrough in Indo-Pakistan relations?

No one knows the answer to that yet, perhaps not even the general himself. But in that answer lies the outcome of the worsening relations between two nuclear-capable states. They nearly brought about a nuclear confrontation last spring. And last month's hijacking could culminate once tially nuclear confrontation.

· The author is former prime minister of Pakistan. This piece first appeared in The Dawn of Pakistan.

Choc-a-bloc Buses

ALKS between India and Bangladesh on several

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have failed, with no agreement on starting a night service or increasing the number of buses

Officials of the two countries met here for discussions on starting a night service and increasing the frequency of the service in view of increased demand, but no agreement could be reached, officials dis-India proposed running a to-

tal of 15 buses on the Calcutta-Dhaka route to cope with a growing demand and suggested developing an alternative route to avoid traffic snarls. Sources in the West Bengal

Surface Transport Corporation (WBSTC), which runs the service on behalf of India, said a decision on increasing the number of buses could not be reached because Bangladesh did not agree to India's proposal to run an equal number of buses. They said the Bangladeshi delegation, led by Road and Rail DeIndia and Bangladesh fail to agree on bus service expansion. Krittivas Mukherjee reports from Calcutta

partment Joint Secretary Asad Zaman Bhuiya, argued that as 90 per cent of the users of the service were Bangladeshis, Dhaka should be allowed to run a higher number of buses. The Indian team at the talks is led by K.R. Bhatti, Joint Secretary in the Surface Transport Department.

At present, four buses ply each day. India runs its two buses on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, which return on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The service is unavailable on Sundays. About 80 people can be accommodated in the two buses that have been running choc-a-bloc since the start of the service in July.

The proposal to introduce a night service also had to be shelved for the time being because of security reasons, the sources said.

Under the Indian proposal, three to four buses could run during the day and an equal number could ply by night. Sources said the proposal made business sense as the service was very popular among the middle class in both countries A round trip costs about \$22 in fare, besides documentation

The need for a night service was felt following suggestions from frequent travellers. It was also left that the thin traffic at night would help ensure a speedier journey. According to the sources, Bangladesh also ruled out any

hike in the present fare. The meeting discussed the possibility of adding some halts en route as it would help people board from convenient points. Currently all passengers have to board from the starting

points-Calcutta and Dhaka. Some agreement was reached on developing an alternative route through the Bongaon-Chakda road. Though the proposed route would mean circumventing a distance of about 20 km, the journey time could be brought down by about 30 minutes. The present route through Barasat-Bongaon is a congested one, passing through busy marketplaces and as many as six railway crossings.

The meeting also discussed streamlining the cumbersome and time consuming checking and immigration methods. Sources said India would install an x-ray machine at the border point for faster clearance of

The meeting is part of the agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka to sit every three months to discuss the service to ensure its smooth functioning. Though the two countries are scheduled to meet again today it is unlikely that any significant decision will emerge, officials here said. -India Abroad News Service

to the detriment of South Asian stability. The downswing in re-

A Circle Squared in Kandahar

The 'hijack drama' showed that India needs to go out of its way in improving its relationship with

neighbours, says Pran Chopra

HERE ARE lessons to be drawn from every single A scene of the "hijack drama", from Kathmandu, where it showed up a longstanding diplomatic failure; to Amritsar, where it started a frenzy of self-deception and self-flagellation; to New Delhi, where it triggered an exercise in squaring a circle: to Kandahar, where unjustified recrimination clouded diplomatic possibilities; to the epilogue, which once again shows India's formidable ability to shoot itself in the

The pilot of the ill-fated plane, Captain Devi Sharan, says that at the last checkpoint at Kathmandu airport, where a camera X-rays the hand baggage, he saw that the staff member manning the monitor, whose mind and eyes should have been on the screen, was busy knitting away. But that apart, four things have been known to Indian authorities for years. First, Indian Airlines has been hit most often by hijackers; second, it is the favourite target of Pakistanrelated hijackers; third, Nepal has become a notorious base of Pakistani operations against India: and fourth, security at Kathmandu is extremely lax.

Why did India fail to do anything about this deadly mix, when Indo-Nepal relations are a dense network of mutual inter-dependence and means of mutual persuasion? Does the failure lie with the masterminders of our foreign policy or lower level operators? Many political parties have ruled each country. All of them owe an answer to both peoples. How do they propose to improve matters? Our responses also failed us

at Amritsar. There was time enough to block the plane but because it was allowed to escape a howl of protest went up from virtually all "experts" in the security. strategic, media fraternity, who called it a blunder.

But the protest proved only two things: first, how utterly wrong famous experts can be, and second, how thoroughly a frenzied pack can smother dissenting judgement and distort policymaking.

It is very clear that till the

time some of the hostages were released at Dubai the Indian authorities, through no fault of theirs, had not had any chance to assess the number, the nationality, the aims, the demands, the weaponry of the hijackers, the levels of their determination or desperation. These assessments emerge only, and then also slowly, when a dialogue begins with the hijackers to probe what would be their price for releasing how many hostages, what price they would be determined to pay for holding on to how much of their "catch", and what would be the likely loss of life if the negotiations broke down and violent action against them became

unavoidable. But none of this was known in Amritsar, and in such a void of information it would have been most unwise to take any of the other three available options: first, to block the plane; second, to storm it and hope for the best; third, to storm it and bear the worst as best we may. It is obvious that the first option would have triggered the second if the hijackers became desperate, and the cost of the third would have been limited only by the number of the hijackers and the destructive power of their weaponry.

Captain Devi Sharan was therefore quite right when he said to me that his plane was in a different situation from the one which, at the same airport, in Amritsar, was stormed by. K.P.S. Gill, because that plane, it was fairly well known by then, had only one hijacker and he was lightly armed.

In these circumstances, the "failure" to block this plane turned out to be a blunder "averted", not "committed", to quote the headline of a piece which, without the gift of hindsight. I wrote in one newspaper the day after the plane landed in Kandahar, and which attracted only derision at the hands of the same fraternity. But hindsight has further vindicated the headline. The pilot has expressed clear agreement with it, and his account of later events has confirmed that the first option would have surely

led to the third. He says when the delays in refuelling the plane at Amritsar aroused the suspicion of the hi jackers they demanded he must face death or take off at once for Lahore. He pleaded lack of fuel for that, but the captors told him they would rather die in a crash landing in Pakistan than fall into Indian hands. Again when the Lahore airport refused to let the plane land, the hi-

jackers decided that whatever the loss of their own or the hostages' lives, the plane must crashland on some road but must not turn back to Amritsar. He was only a minute or two away from a crash landing when, seeing such desperation, the Lahore tower allowed him

Given such a mood among the hijackers, he says, an indian assault on the plane in Amritsar, a logical outcome of blocking it, could have cost scores of lives. Would the "experts" have preferred that? If so, they should say so out loud and prepare the country for such sacrifices in the future.

On the other hand, what was on display on all media channels was total unpreparedness of another kind, and the display probably aggravated it. The anxiety and grief of the relatives of the hostages certainly needed and deserved the display it got. It made everyone more aware than some might have been of what India is up against and must be ready for. What the authorities needed to do, failed to do, and must not neglect in future called for pointed comment, particularly their failure to provide more reassuring and comforting treatment of the relatives.

But the noisy demonstrations by them, their dharnas, the denunciation by them of everyone in any authority, addedfuel to the fire, distracted attention from policy choices, put pressure on the Indian negotiators, encouraged the hijackers to step up their demands because their handlers in Pakistan knew how much pressure was building up on the Government in New Delhi. But when the relatives became quieter and said national interests could not be sacrificed, the question hung in the air what made the change and why it could not be made earlier. Clearly, despite the many hijackings India has had to face, no procedures are in place for handling such situations. They must be, soon.

Regarding the policy response at higher levels the hap-

penings at Amritsar and Lahore had made it clear that India would either have to see scores of passengers die in a violent end to the hijacking or agree to release a few chosen militants. The PM, and some of the opposition leaders consulted by him, thought the latter would be a more humane course. But given the feverish pitch of public opinion, as reflected in the media and partly built up by them, few dared to say so in public except the former Prime Minister, I. K. Gujral, who confirmed his opinion in a speech in Meerut. The proclaimed mantra was: The passengers will return home safely and "national interest" will not be compromised.

Fortunately this circle was squared in Kandahar. All hostages came home (barring a most unfortunate fatality earlier on), and there is not much reason why the release of the three militants should fuel the vigour of the militants or depress the morale of the security forces any more than the reverse happened when the three were arrested. But there is no reason why

another gain which was within our reach in Kandahar should have been allowed to slip through our fingers while the government tried to appease the same domestic cacophony. For the first time in a decade a window opened between India's abiding interests in Afghanistan and the authorities in charge over there, and without whose help the safe return of the hostages would have been a lot more difficult. For every one voice in India that appreciated this help there were ten which complained the Taliban did not do more (some even said it should have handed the hijackers over to us!). forgetting that for years we have been hostile to the Taliban and friendly with its toughest enemies, America and Ahmed Shah Masood:

This is not to suggest that we should shut our diplomatic eyes and get cozy with Kabul. We have also to look to our relations with Russia (and with Iran, though it has recently reopened its border with Kabul). But there is no reason why we should not have used the window to survey future opportunities before we shut out the view with our untimely and unnecessary complaining.

By arrangement with The Hindu of India.

Yankees Look East

America's South Asia policy is based on its self-interest. It wants this region to be peaceful to allow trade and investment to its industrial concerns, says Khalid Mahmud Arif

MONG other factors, the high temporal rise in the A short US history is due to the quest for knowledge by its people. This yearning created the most pre-eminent superpower in the world from the ashes of a civil war. The people of America deserve credit for this commendable achieve-

Conversely, the Muslim world declined when it distanced itself from the fountains of knowledge. The result of this self-denial is too obvious to miss. The Muslim countries sank low — rock bottom — and will need a Herculean effort to regain their past glory in the fields of science, technology and higher learning. For selfserving reasons the developed countries have created technological barriers against the developing states to maintain their monopoly and control on technology, power and authority. The students from developing states are denied admission in the institutions of higher learning located in the western countries. A determined effort is made by the developed states to create a few oases of prosperity in an ocean of poverty.

Pakistan was victimized by the US discriminatory policies. Her relations with the US in the early fifties developed on misplaced hopes and unrealistic expectations. Tactical necessity brought the two countries together despite a diversity in their political calculus. In the Dulles era, the US tried to contain communism by creating a security parameter around China and Soviet Union and formed alliances like Baghdad Pact and SEATO with Pakistan

included in both. Pakistan's sole interest in joining these pacts was to seek security from a hostile India. In this marriage of convenience. Pakistan received economic and military aid from the US and acknowledged it with gratitude with traditional Islamic humility and Eastern culture. As a quid pro quo, Pakistan gave political support to the US policies that earned it the ire of erstwhile Soviet Union, India and some other countries. While the US taunted Pakistan of the aid given to it, it underplayed the high political price paid by Pakistan for siding with it against a close-by super-

power. This unhealthy relationship caused some annoyance to the US and a great damage to weak Pakistan. The induction of Soviet military forces in Afghanistan in 1979 took the US by surprise despite adequate prior warning given to Washington by Islamabad at the highest level.

At that time the diplomatic ties between the US and Iran were disrupted and Washington could physically reach Afghanistan only through Pakistan. The assault on Afghanistan was universally condemned and Pakistan took an active part in this censure. Washington seized the opportunity to settle scores with Moscow. The US did in Afghanistan what the Soviet Union had earlier done to it in Vietnam. General Zia, criticized earlier for being a dictator, was eulogized in superlative terms by the US-led West for leading a modern, front-line state with commendable courage and determination in the face of heavy odds. Pak-US differences on Pakistan's nuclear programme and its form of government were relegated to the

back burner. The US provided money, material and political support to Afghan freedom-fighters and their foreign sympathizers to fight Jihad against the violators of their freedom. The Afghan territory was used to destabilize the Soviet Union. The Afghanistan war expedited the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The 1988 Geneva Accord, a half success, achieved the US objectives in Afghanistan. Thereafter it not only distanced itself from Kabul but also labelled the Afghan freedom-fighters as 'fundamentalists.' Pakistan was accused of interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The US-led western critics criticized Pakistan's nuclear pro-

gramme. Henry Kissinger once told Agha Shahi, 'It is dangerous for a country to befriend the US and fatal for her to oppose it.' The US that once called Pakistan its 'most allied ally' now does not miss a chance to hurl political brickbats at it. Is

might right? America's South Asian policy is based on its self-interest. It wants this region to be peaceful to allow trade and investment opportunities to its industrial concerns and business enterprises. It is more interested in Asian markets than in its peoples. It is not opposed to nuclear weapons so long as these are held by the P-5 to the exclusion of other states. The nuclear non-weapon states feel betrayed because the P-5, despite a commitment made by them under Article 6 of the NPT, have not taken any step to achieve total and complete elimination of

nuclear weapons from the world. On the contrary they, with the exception of China, have declared to retain their respective stockpile of nuclearweapons for an undeclared indefinite period in the interests of their national security. The security of the other countries is perceived differently by the Big Five. This has created a cri-

sis of confidence. A world order based on a discriminatory foundation is neither just nor fair, nor indeed it can endure. Hitler met his doom. Berlin Wall fell. Pressler Amendment shall also go. Imagine a country having a declared and sanctioned budget to destabilise another country? And yet those preaching democracy are mum at such a provi-

sion. No less ridiculous are the religious and ideological prejudices that exist in the psyche of those who ought to be leading from the front. In 1990 US vicepresident Dan Quayle had listed Nazism, Communism and Islam as challenges to the western civilization.' With Nazism dead and communism humbled, it has become fashionable for the high priests of today to find faults with other religions and faiths. The thesis - Clash of Civilizations - is based on religious intolerance. A world order based on a philosophy of hate is a rebuke to mankind.

ogy and far from condemning

Pope John Paul-II's call for a 'harvest of faith' in the next millennium by baptizing Asia has evoked criticism. During the Pontiff's October visit the militant ultra-right extremists. Vishwa Hindu Parishad, had demanded an apology for the alleged forced conversion of the low caste Hindus in India by the Catholic missionaries. The Pope ignored the call for apol-

conversions he encouraged them. One of his aides also expressed concern at the expansion of Islam which he was candid to confess, did not preach extremism. That, the Pope's 'harvest of faith' is planned to be achieved at the cost of other faiths shows religious intolerance of one religion against the others.

The voices are feeble but the US is not devoid of people who are guided by principles and moral values. Two former CIA chiefs - Milt Bearden and Anderson - in an article that appeared in the International Herald Tribune have criticized the 'disengagement policy' of the US against Pakistan arguing that it will be unwise to isolate this country. Significantly, the US policy for Pakistan was recently announced by the US ambassador to India, Richard Celeste, confirming President Clinton's visit to India next year while his trip to Pakistan remains on hold. He is also stated to have said that India and Pakistan will no longer be treated uniformly.

Thanks for the clarification. But, this was hardly necessary. Pakistan is familiar with the US policies. It is the transfer of dual purpose hightech to India and McDonald's burgers and Kentucky Fried Chicken to Pakistan. President Jimmy Carter visited India, decades ago, but skipped Pakistan. Heavens did not fall then. Nor, will this happen in the future if any US president decides against visiting this country.

During my visit to the US in October this year a group of eminent American scholars asked me how many present day senior Pakistan army officers had attended courses in the military training institutions of their country. The reasons for the clarification was writ large on their faces. They had something to ponder about when I told them that if the IMET programme is kept suspended they may be spared the trouble of seeking this information in the

Courtesy: The Dawn of The author is a retired General of Pakistan Army.