

What an Anniversary!

K. K. Katyal looks back at Lahore initiative, as he analyses the reasons behind its collapse

ON February 21 last year, India and Pakistan signed the Lahore Declaration in a climax to a bold new move, the bus diplomacy, which promised to reverse adversarial trends in bilateral dealings. What an anniversary! There are few instances in recent history where the gains of a major agreement were washed away in a matter of months. The two countries now find themselves transported into a different era as it were. What went wrong and why? And what lies ahead?

First the scene last year. This is what I reported from the Pakistani side at the border on February 20, 1999, a day before the two sides committed themselves to the Declaration and the memorandum of understanding on confidence-building measures: "The giant gates at the Wagah border checkpoint flung open... a sleek golden coloured bus glides in and comes to a stop within a few yards. The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, is seen waving from behind a glass window: moments later, he emerges from the bus, steps onto the Pakistani territory - and into history. His counterpart, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, receives him with a brisk handshake. There is a quick hug but they stop short of a tight embrace. Guns boom the formal salute."

What happened behind the scenes was no less significant. The three services chiefs, including General Pervez Musharraf, were not there at the venue of the reception. This, a local daily, News, told its readers, was because of differences between Mr. Sharif and the military leaders over the visit. The three chiefs were, however, present at the helipad in the Governor's House in Lahore, where they saluted Mr.

Vajpayee as he alighted after a short hop from the border. They went through the protocol formality, away from the public gaze. Earlier in the day, the Jamat-e-Islami, organised a hartal in protest against the visit and later its "sainiks" rained lathis on the cars of foreign diplomats and other guests.

It was a day of contrasting pictures and the one that had a lower visibility - of screaming protesters and hesitant services chiefs - was ignored. Months later, it turned out to be the truer picture, the real image. It manifested itself in diverse ways - Kargil, coup, hijacking and spurt in militancy. With hindsight, it is easy to blame all those who went by the main image. Those who hailed the bus diplomacy vastly outnumbered the sceptics. The notes emanating from the Government and the ruling alliance were the loudest in the welcome chorus. That was understandable - though, somewhat inappropriately, they sought to make a partisan use of the initiative. The media too lauded the gestures and symbolism, finding promise of substantive advance.

Why did the Lahore initiative collapse? Because of the internal dynamics of Pakistan. The civilian Government of Mr. Sharif was its main architect but neither the armed forces nor religious fundamentalists were for it. The uncertainties of the uneasy equation took a heavy toll inside Pakistan - and also wreaked havoc on India-Pakistan dealings. Opinions differ on whether Mr. Sharif was fully in the picture when the Generals planned the Kargil misadventure but there is un-

animity that the armed forces were not for the bus diplomacy and all that flowed from it.

Ironically, indeed, is the contrast between the impact of the Lahore Declaration and the earlier substantive move, Shimla Agreement. The Shimla document was finalised by two unequal parties, the victor and the vanquished. There was wrangling as its text was being finalised - so much so that the talks, at one stage, appeared to break down. Yet it was effective for over 15 years. True, it did not achieve the intended objective - to start an era of peace and stability - but it did help to prevent a full-scale war and, for a long time, keep the low-intensity conflict within manageable limits. As against that, the Lahore Declaration was negotiated by two equals and without much hassle. And yet it collapsed within a few months. This was due to the deadly mix of religious fundamentalism and military adventurism which distorted the polity. That was not the case in 1972.

Pakistan analysts, reflecting the official viewpoint, give a different reason for the failure of the Lahore process - lack of preparations. It is not fully explained. If it means there were no sufficient consultations among those representing the different power centres in Pakistan, the point is well taken. But any suggestion that the representatives of the two governments did not do their home work is factually incorrect. The Lahore Declaration, in a way, was the culmination of the contacts begun in the first half of 1997, with the then Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral's meeting with Mr. Sharif in Male - and it acquired a new dimension after the two sides became nuclear. The earlier momentum helped

Mr. Sharif establish a rapport with Mr. Vajpayee (after the change of government in India).

The senior bureaucracy in Pakistan was far from enthusiastic about the new beginning. This was evident from the course of discussions in Lahore after the arrival of Mr. Vajpayee and the Indian Government's representatives. The officials of the two sides could not agree on the draft despite protracted discussions because of the intransigence of the Pakistani side. It was only when the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, during an informal conversation at the banquet, drew Mr. Sharif's attention to the deadline that there was a forward movement. Mandated by their Prime Minister, Pakistani officials were flexible and the draft was finalised without much ado. Is it the view of the military establishment that the former Prime Minister forced the pace of discussions?

At present, there is only one power centre - the military ruler - and it should be easier for it to decide its India policy. Does Gen. Musharraf intend continuing the present state of confrontation, what with the "jehadi" outfits threatening a crusade against India and the intelligence agencies stoking the fires of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir?

The present regime says it is keen on engaging India but it is realised that this will not be possible so long as the insurgency operations continue. There is very little difference between Gen. Musharraf's revised formulation - discussions on Kashmir, along with other issues - and steps to intensify efforts to resolve all issues including Jammu and Kashmir, in terms of the Lahore Declaration.

However, engagement and insurgency could not co-exist.

On its part, New Delhi, with the passage of time, appears to have modified the earlier stand of not doing business with the military ruler. India worked for the postponement of the SAARC summit because it did not want that platform used by the coup leader to get respectability. It, along with some African countries, spearheaded the move for Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth. Now New Delhi may not let legitimacy considerations come in the way of substantive contacts with Pakistan provided the atmosphere is conducive. This stand needs to be made explicit in the same way as the insistence on ending trans-border terrorism.

A clearer definition of India's stand would help to remove misunderstandings abroad. While the world community appreciates India's concerns over terrorism, the Kashmir policy is not understood. In the run-up to the visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, and during his talks here, there may be no escape from a close focus on Indo-Pakistan problems, notably Kashmir.

The Prime Minister, the other day, reiterated India's opposition to third-party intervention. That message went home - as was evident from Mr. Clinton's remark that a mediatory role would not be intended unless it was acceptable to the two sides. But it did not mean that the situation on the subcontinent would not be on Mr. Clinton's agenda. New Delhi could pre-empt it by spelling out its stand on the resumption of dialogue. The sooner it is done the better.

Courtesy: The Hindu of India.

What If Clinton Skips Pakistan?

The US President knows what message to carry if he visits Pakistan. But what legacy for democracy he will leave behind before he quits the White House? asks Aziz Siddiqui



THE latest is that President Clinton is awaiting some move towards restoration of democracy before he decides to come Pakistan. Is this a prelude to an announcement that the signal has been given that though it could be more specific, the president will nevertheless stop over for an informal chat with an old ally on bilateral cooperation and peace in the region?

One thing is certain. However the flip-flop ends it cannot please every side involved. And while it lasts, the only good it seems to have done the US is to have added a nip of controversial interest to what would have largely been just a diplomatic event. Within the subcontinent it has been another trigger for abundant bile.

The assurance required of Gen. Musharraf isn't however important just because a visit hangs on it. It wouldn't become irrelevant if the visit is called off. Its need is much larger and more vital than that. And it will remain pressing whether or not Mr. Clinton calls.

The American posture itself is hard to hail as a blow for democracy. You do not suddenly serve a cause by making only a gesture of a principle. You also do not do that if you seem to be making the gesture at least as much because the other side happens to be weak as because your practical commitment to the principle is strong. Will the US make an issue of democracy elsewhere and on other occasions too? Sound moves become counter-productive if they are seen to be discriminatory in a heated atmosphere, if they are selective of target. The Pressler Amendment did nothing for declaration of nuclear race in the subcontinent. Rather than check Pakistan in its tracks, it spawned resentment.

On a practical plane, the boycott will be anomalous. The US visit was initially inspired by one consideration above - or at least on a level with - others: that of peace in the region. The major development that has taken place since a US president last came out is that the subcontinent has gone nuclear. It is a development of worldwide concern. The present visit was seen as an effort to induce the two countries to settle down to their new acquisitions, and to become warring and more accommodative in their relations. It was hoped that some impetus could be imparted to their mutually tackling the one issue that thwarts the normalization of their relations, that of Kashmir. Even before the nuclearization, Mr. Clinton had been saying that his one hope before he laid down the reins of office was to make a contribution to a movement on this one explosive dispute still on the international agenda.

The unstated reason of New Delhi's adamant opposition to Clinton's visit to Pakistan is just this: to prevent any suggestion of his having become any sort of a go-between on the issue. That is a short-sighted view. But even outside of the Kashmir dispute, there is the requirement of nuclear restraint and of improved behaviour across the Line of Control. This cannot but be of concern to the rest of the world. It has to be high among the preoccupations of a visiting American president. And it will be ridiculous if while he is around he has only India to talk to

about it. If as India argues in effect, the perils have increased with the military's coming in Pakistan, it is more reason, not less, that these new leaders are engaged; that the objective is not denied whatever weight the personal presence of the American president and his one-on-one exchange may lend it.

It has been argued that the visit to Pakistan will signify American endorsement of the military government. It will do no harm if the visit is called off. Others have argued - the trip to India will signal US approval of that country's breaking into the nuclear club, and careering full tilt since then on that and the ballistic course. It is important to weigh the strength of relative concerns before this diplomatic exercise gets under way.

The issue of democracy in Pakistan is of course vital. But it is a larger and longer term one. Democracy needs as much international support as it can get. It is usually much easier to signify that support by punishing departures from it than giving strength to it while it exists. Historically, Pakistan has suffered a worse fate. Here much of the rewards have come during the time of dictators, and more of the punishments in the days of representative rule. More foreign resources went into strengthening the sinews of war than sustaining the tissues of peace.

Military regimes scored well because they enforced law and order in the streets, banned agitation and strikes in workplaces, enabled the rich to multiply their capital and investments. They also served the strategic interests of outsiders better. Political leaders, on the other hand, were in effect treated with indifference because often - thought not always - they tended to be weak, indulgent and indecisive. Some were also corrupt: some not equally compliant with outsiders' wishes. The failures of the factors that sustain a political order were admittedly mostly indigenous. But the muscles that have enabled military interventions were largely gifted.

It will thus not be enough that the regime offers a timetable for the return to democracy. It should do that, and not just for the benefit of Mr. Clinton, but in recognition of the right of the people of this country. In addition, since it seems resolved to take a number of other steps before that transition, the government has, as far as possible, to involve the people in that process.

Some of the ways to do that are as follows: First, the regime should adhere to its pledge that the country will continue to be governed as nearly as possible in accordance with the Constitution. The modifying phrase should mean what it says. It should not be interpreted as a licence for wilful departures.

Second, the judiciary should be allowed to function in full independence. It was unfortunate that the judges were made to take a fresh oath to the PCO, which virtually took away the courts' power of judicial review, a power now considered basic to maintenance of a just rule. The information minister feigned surprise at the critics of that oath. He apparently wants everyone else also to believe that this government, unlike any other in the world, can commit no mistake: that its laws, though made even without the

help of a parliament, should be above all legal scrutiny.

Third, the government plans to hold local bodies elections this year. Good. But any changes it wants to make should not be outside the purview of the ideas and recommendations already evolved by the studies done under various elected governments. These should be fully empowered bodies. And they should not be placed under the tutelage or influence of any non-representative appointees or nominees.

Fourth, any reforms the regime intends to undertake, as in the field of women, judiciary, education or labour, should similarly be based on the recommendations already on record where available, and with the participation and concurrence of representative organizations of the profession, service or sector concerned.

Fifth, no one should be denied his or her liberty except in accordance with just laws, and the detained person should have all the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Finally, there should be no restraint on the freedoms of association and assembly. Political parties and all sections of civil society should be able to publicly debate current developments, and educate and mobilize public opinion in relation to public policies. Freedom of the press should be extended to electronic media, particularly so since suspension of the parliament and provincial legislatures has reduced the space for popular involvement. Public access to all information should be guaranteed.

It may be argued that these conditions were not fulfilled even by the elected governments. True. But those governments also ran the risk for that reason of losing votes in the next election. This one functions under no such constraint. Secondly, since this one justifies itself by damning the others, it has a responsibility to show that it is free of their failings.

It is basically for the people of a country itself, not for outsiders, to press democratic regimes in the democratic direction. Outsiders can help. They ought to do nothing to reward such set-ups. They need to address the factors on their own side which breed them. But they have also to make sure that in seeking to penalize the government they do not end up punishing the country. The more they drive a country into a corner, the more conviction they lend to the rallying calls of the undemocratic rulers.

They have to maintain political and diplomatic pressure however. They should be strongly critical of excesses committed. And they should do whatever they can to lend support and strength to the civil society. Over the longer run, their aid programmes should place primary emphasis on human development, education, health and well-being of the people, so that the latter can assert and defend their rights better.

Mr. Clinton knows what message to carry if he comes. He should also know what legacy for promotion of democracy to leave behind him as he prepares to quit the White House. Gen. Musharraf meanwhile owes a reply to Mr. Clinton. He owes one even more to his people.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

Bangla in West Bengal

West Bengal to have Bangla as official language from April. Kritivas Mukherjee reports from Calcutta

AFTER umpteen false starts, the West Bengal government has once again announced a deadline for adopting Bangla as the official language in the eastern Indian state - Bengali New Year's Day in April. Though the necessary notification on the official language status exists and Bangla is used in some government departments, English continues to be the language of official business for all practical purposes.

But from Palla Baisakh (the Bengali New Year), the use of Bangla would be made mandatory at all levels of the administration and for all sorts of communication. Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya said, all bills, instructions and government transactions would be in Bangla once the relevant 1961 law is fully implemented.

Talk of adopting Bangla as the official language has been on for some time now. But the fact that the state bureaucracy comprises mainly non-Bengali officers held up the matter. Over the years the number of Bengali bureaucrats has declined, further hampering the state government's plans to officially adopt Bangla.

But this time the government seems to have taken care of that problem by announcing that concessions would be considered in the case of non-Bengali bureaucrats.

However, the state has already made arrangements for training non-Bengali administrative staff and police officers for improving their Bangla

reading and writing skills. The Rabindra Bharati University in the city would house the language coaching centre for officials.

To ensure that use of Bangla is all-pervasive, the state government is also seeking to conduct proceedings in the Calcutta High Court in the language. However, it appears headed for a tussle on the issue with the Supreme Court, which has shot down the proposal.

The government says it will see Bangla through in the high court also as the apex court does not have any constitutional authority to reject the state's proposal. Bhattacharya announced

that the government would soon constitute a committee comprising academics and scientists to suggest ways to make the use of Bangla more extensive in government functioning. This committee will supplement the work of an already existing official committee for the purpose. He said Bangla was already in use in official work in the districts.

According to official sources, apart from having to deal with the case of non-Bengali bureaucrats, the state government would also have to tackle the problem of shortage of stationery in Bangla in its efforts to establish it as the official language.

— India Abroad News Service

Sri Lanka's Quest for Peace

M Abdul Hafiz looks at problems that are plaguing the South Asian island-state and how difficult they are to overcome

IN 1994 when Chandrika Kumaratunga became Sri Lanka's president for the first time there was visible euphoria generated by the prospects of talk between the People's Alliance (PA) and Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However the euphoria dissipated soon as the Tiger's supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran scuttled those prospects by accusing Kumaratunga government of 'bad faith' and starting the third Eelam war in April 1995. The peace process thus derailed could never be put back on track; neither could President Chandrika get the cooperation of opposition United National Party (UNP) to push through her devolution package in the parliament.

An embattled president both on political and military front called for an early presidential poll on 21 December 1999 with the hope of obtaining a fresh endorsement of her peace policy. She assumed the over all war situation to be in her favour. The LTTE had lost its stronghold in Jaffna and, despite some reverses, the government forces extended its control also over the Eastern Province. Politically, Chandrika wanted to take risk before her popularity further plummeted due mainly to her failure in delivering peace.

Unfortunately her calculations went awry. There was a dramatic turn in war situation when from early November last

year the Tigers started inflicting stunning blows on the Army in Wannai region resulting in the loss of all areas brought under government control since 1996. The Army suffered heavy casualties and lost huge arms and equipments. The forces' morale was low with revolts surfacing in its ranks. With such reverses coming only a few weeks before the election Chandrika's popularity took a nosedive. To make things worse for Kumaratunga government, the opposition UNP not only mounted a scathing attack on the establishment, it extended an olive branch to Prabhakaran ostensibly to garner Tamil votes in the election. As a result, the support of the electorate for two main contestants for presidency was almost evenly divided on the eve of the election. However, thanks to sympathy wave stemming from an assassination attempt on her life Chandrika Kumaratunga could retrieve her position but with a truncated mandate. With her charm offensive now attenuated can she shore up her peace offensive?

At the turn of the century amidst a new wave of violence marked by the Tigers' frequent suicide missions Sri Lanka is indeed at a fork. With its insuperable urge for peace the baffled nation does not know which approach would it adopt to achieve it. After a series of failed attempts at peace Sri Lankans are today anything but

hopeful of its prospect. The first serious peace attempt was made as early as in 1985 only two years after the ethnic mayhem targeting the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka. During the months of July and August of the year two rounds of talks were held at Thimphu with the LTTE participating in the talks. But Prabhakaran was convinced that the talks held under the auspices of New Delhi would not lead to anywhere because his demands of Eelam were too radical to be cut by an ultra-nationalist UNP government of the time which viewed even federalism to be a step towards separatism. The Thimphu talks were a fiasco.

The second futile exercise of peace was undertaken by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister late Ramaswamy Venkatasubramanian who attempted to bring about a meeting between President Jayewardene and Prabhakaran during second SAARC Summit in November 1986. Although Prabhakaran went to the summit in Bangalore he refused to meet Sri Lankan President who did not accept the Tigers' Eelam as pre-condition. Another important phase of peace process began with Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord of 1987.

Notwithstanding LTTE's reservation over the imposed peace accord they wanted to benefit as much as possible from its provisions. Prabhakaran received financial incentives from New Delhi and

was assured of majority representation in interim administration. Yet he made only 'symbolic gesture' of surrendering arms and the peace process remained at the most a non-starter because of Prabhakaran's obsessive commitment to Tamil Eelam. The peace negotiations with LTTE turned opaque when President Premadasa provided during 1989-90 'secret supply of money and weapon to LTTE to fight their common enemy Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). As soon as the IPKF left with a bruised nose the vacuum was filled by LTTE and the Second Eelam war commenced.

The LTTE's peace negotiation with President Chandrika Kumaratunga during November 1991-April 1995 again revealed that the two parties were speaking on different wavelengths. While the LTTE wanted the restoration of normalcy and peaceful environment first, Colombo, on the other hand, maintained that there should be simultaneous talks relating to day-to-day problems of the people with the aim of finding a political solution. It did not suit LTTE strategy and the talks were abruptly withdrawn from the table to resume the agency with renewed fury and vigour.

Considering these past realities the question arises whether Prabhakaran is at all interested in finding a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict within the framework of a

united Sri Lanka. According to observers Prabhakaran's peace overtures are only aimed at projecting its 'soft face' as an aggrieved party. The preconditions laid down by the LTTE for talks indicate that the negotiations would be extremely difficult. The LTTE still insists that negotiation can take place only in an atmosphere of peace and normalcy and free from conditions of war and economic blockade. Such a condition will not find favour with Sri Lankan Army for it will amount to its committing a hara-kiri. Giving an explanation of her negative response to such pre-condition the President said that the LTTE would do what they always did - that was to drag on until they built themselves up militarily and then strike.

It is in this backdrop that the Norwegian Foreign Minister recently visited Sri Lanka yet another peace effort after he talked to LTTE ideologue Autou-Balasubramaniam in London. The Norwegians are reputed peacemakers with their record of crafting 'Oslo process' for Middle East peace. Given the intractability of Arab-Israeli conflict the effort has been a great success, if not all success. It, however, remains to be seen how would they proceed with the world's most deadly insurgent group even if the scale and dimension of the conflict is small when compared to West Asian imbroglio.

However, he said, what was significant on July 4 last year in terms of Clinton's intervention was that he spoke not only to then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif but also to Vajpayee by telephone to laud India for its restraint and brief him about Sharif's willingness to withdraw Pakistani troops from India's side of the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir.

While noting that at the time of the Kargil conflict the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had made an assessment that India and Pakistan had 'come close to a nuclear exchange', the official said that "a new confidence" developed between the leaders of the US and India.

—India Abroad News Service

A Centre of Multipolar World

by Aziz Haniffa

A SENIOR White House official says India will soon become a significant pole in an evolving multipolar world and President Bill Clinton believes there will soon be a global diffusion of power, with India emerging as one of the power centres.

The official, a senior White House aide, said India has a role in the balance of power throughout Asia - be it in Central Asia or Southeast Asia or even the Persian Gulf.

He noted that for the first time, besides the common interests of New Delhi and Washington in matters such as combating terrorism and narcotics trafficking, US cooperation with India was imperative "for an unimpeded flow of energy resources through the Indian Ocean."

The official, who did not want to be identified, said Clinton was in sync with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's view that India and the US are "natural allies."

According to the official, who was delivering a special lecture on 'New Directions in Indo-US Relations' at President Clinton's Visit to India on Monday at the University of Pennsylvania's Centre for the Advanced Study of India, Clinton's trip - the first by a US president in nearly a quarter of a century - would be a tangible manifestation of his "long time vision of a new kind of relationship" with India.

The official said Clinton had undertaken "a comprehensive policy review of South Asia early in his second term" and at the end of it decided "there

should be a multi-basket approach to India" in which not only non-proliferation but a variety of other issues from trade to regional security should be incorporated "without any issue being held hostage to another."

He said Clinton himself had explained this approach to former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral in 1997 and subsequently, with the advent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition, even though the administration had qualms about a "Hindu nationalist" government, decided to engage it and sent then US Ambassador to the U.N. Bill Richardson over to New Delhi.

The 1998 nuclear tests, the official acknowledged, dealt the

envisaged strategic dialogue "a severe blow" and led to sanctions and the relationship hitting a nadir. "But the President was determined to overcome the problems" and the high-level talks between Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh had not only resurrected the strategic dialogue but led to an imminent strategic partnership.

"Now India and the United States spoke not past or around each other but to each other," the official said, noting that the discussions were "unprecedented in nature and scope." While Vajpayee's historic trip to Lahore, which Clinton encouraged to the hilt, led to a new high, the official noted that the Kargil conflict was "unfortunate."

—India Abroad News Service



Family members pay their last respects to police Inspector Shriram Acharya, who was killed by the Maoist guerrillas, before his cremation in Kathmandu 20 February 2000.