Post-Pokharan Days: Recalling a Friend

E fought for Kashmiri self-determination in 1 1948, against French imperialism in Algeria in the early 60's, roused students on American campuses in the early 70's against their government's immoral war in Vietnam, dodged arrest by the ClA in a case trumped up by Richard Nixon's government that accused him of trying to kidnap Henry Kissinger, passionately campaigned against the ethnic cleansing of East Pakistan by the West Pakistani army, and was the trusted lieutenant of the Palestinian leadership. With the passage of years, and his eventual return to Pakistan, his efforts gradually focused upon healing the wounds of Partition, and diffus- first by the Jamaat-i-Islami, ing the poison of intolerance was soon overtaken by Benazir and militarism of the post-Zia Bhutto. "She seems to have era. Challenge and adversity sensed in this national crisis left him undaunted - until that an opportunity to restore her fateful day of 11 May 1998, when the ground trembled uncontrollably at Pokharan and Pakistani politics as revolting the subcontinent was to change as her demagogic toss of forever. Exactly one year later bracelets at Mr. Nawaz Sharif",

great and powerful nation:

fluences, knowledge, viewpoints, and cultures do not converge, civilization does not thrive and greatness eludes. Nuclearisation of nationalism dambarams and Mubarikhas further degraded India's environment. The tests have of subcontinental heroes, but worsened the xenophobia of unknown entities in the world Hindutva supporters.

then should Pakistan do?", ing for them: wrote Eqbal in his weekly colout of ignorance, or more likely now appropriated to themcrass opportunism, are advocating nuclear tests, here and now. The arguments for steadying the jerking knee are compelling. For these reasons and more, it is much better for Islamabad to stay cool, calculating, and utilizing the opportunities Delhi has presented. May reason prevail!"

Astonishingly, difficult though it was, reason did stand a 50-50 chance in the first week after Pokharan. There is considerable evidence that a Pakistani nuclear test could have been avoided. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and some of his close associates in the cabinet notwithstanding what they were to claim a year later, were not enthusiastic about testing because of the heavy international sanctions that would inevitably follow. This feeling was shared by the Chief of Army Staff, General Jehangir Karamat, and it extended to many others in the governhawkish credentials, such as Riaz Khokhar, then Pakistan's ambassador to the US, told me privately that they had campaigned hard against testing. Pragmatism, not pacificism. drove them to this conclusion. But reason was soon destined to lose. By the second week the Pakistani leadership had capitulated: the Chagai tests came just 17 days after Pokharan. What the decisive factor had been may never be known, but it parties take to the one-eyed could be one of several: the stance of the Cyclops. One is Interior Minister, that Pakistan should note a change in South Asia's "strategic environment", Prime Minister Vajpayee's statement that his government might forcibly take Kashmiri territory under Pakistan's control, the handing

"Notwithstanding Delhi's provocative muscle-flexing, Pakistan's security interests have not been served by matching India show-for-

show-plus-one.... The leaders of India and Pakistan have now appropriated to themselves, as others had done before, the power that was God's alone, to kill mountains, make the earth quake, bring the sea to boil, and destroy humanity."

by Pervez Hoodbhoy

lio to the hardline Home Minister who had so enthusiastically overseen the destruction of Babri Mosque, and heating up of a limited but live conflict along the Line of Control.

On the domestic front, a pack of opposition leaders, led flagging fortunes. I know of few gestures in the ugly repertoire of - on 11 May 1999 - Eqbal Ah- wrote Eqbal. The debate mad died in an Islamabad hos- stopped abruptly after Chagai. Eqbal was devastated. "I saw on Pokharan left Eqbal, the television a picture more aweotherwise indomitable fighter some than the familiar mushof many struggles, depressed room cloud of nuclear exploand fearful for the two countries sion. The mountain had turned he so deeply loved, Pakistan white. I wondered how much and India. It was with effort pain had been felt by nature, that he roused himself to action God's most wondrous creation". once again. Would the new nu- Alas, it was joy, not pain, which clear hysteria drive out all hope made crowds dance that day in of reconciliation and goodwill? the streets of Islamabad and Were the two countries now Lahore. Similar orgasmic celedestined to become radioactive brations had taken place 17 wastelands in the decades, or days earlier in Delhi and Bomperhaps just years, to come? In- bay. The men of faith were tridia's mindless right wing lead- umphant, although which faith ers who started it all were to had triumphed was not clear. blame, driven by their mis- Grains of holy radioactive sand guided view of nuclear weapons from Pokhran, blessed by Lord as a currency of power. "They Shiva, had been sprinkled in will soon realize that this is a temples by the Vishwa Hindu counterfeit", he wrote, arguing Parisad. In Pakistan the Jathat the religious chauvinism maat-i-Islami transported a and intolerance of the BJP cardboard "Islamic Bomb" made it ineligible for guiding around the country, while India towards becoming a truly right-wing Urdu magazines like Zindagi wrote about the won-"Each historical time has drous miracles of Chagai. They had its own temper. But one fac- told stories of divine interventor has been common through- tion that protected the mard-eout history to the attainment of momin from poison-spitting progress and greatness. Histo- snakes as they prepared the nurians of culture describe this clear test-site, of four chickens one factor variously as syn- that sufficed to feast a thousand cretism, openness, pluralism, of the faithful after the tests, and a spirit of tolerance. Where and of Prophet Mohammed ideas do not clash, diverse in- (SM)taking personal charge of protecting the centrifuges of

Now was the time of the Kalams and Khans, the Chimands. Catapulted into the role of real science, they basked in Soon the drums started beat- adulation pretending to be the ing on the Pakistant side, the Oppenheimers Tellers, and initial wave of fear giving way Bethes But it was the political to shriller and shriller cries for leadership that had it even betretaliatory tests. India's bel- ter. As the Sharifs and Vajpayligerence was no longer veiled; ees strutted and preened themit was a time when even the selves before roaring crowds, thoughtful were puzzled. "What Eqbal had sober words of warn-

"I still believe that, notwithumn in the Dawn on 17th May, standing Delhi's provocative "My advice is: do not panic, and muscle-flexing. Pakistan's sedo not behave reactively. This curity interests have not been translates as: do not listen to served by matching India showpeople like Qazi Husain Ahmad for-show-plus-one.... The leadand Benazir Bhutto who, either ers of India and Pakistan have

for such advice. Drunk with the new-found power to commit mass murder, they blew raucous trumpets and beat drums in macabre, insane, officially The missile race 1979 India begins to develop the Agni intermediaterange missile endure, Pakistan's passage from an ambiguous to an explicit nuclear power had not substantially changed its 1983 strategic position. Economically it had become weaker, its domestic situation would grow India test fires the Prithwi graver, and the forces of fanaticism yet stronger and more divisive. The illusion of security provided by nuclear weapons short-range missile would, however, have fearful consequences. In the months after Chaghai, Eqbal spoke at anti-nuclear 1989

April 1998 Pakistan tests its new Ghauri intermediate-range missile

India tests the Agni

May 1998 India carries out underground nuclear tests Pakistan reciprocates

alone to kill mountains, make awesome responsibility." the earth quake, bring the sea to hope that when the muscle flexing and cheering is over they minister Nawaz Sharif does fi-

fore, the power that was God's on how they should bear this

One wonders if in his prison boil, and destroy humanity. I cell, where he now serves a lifesentence for treason, ex-prime

selves, as others had done be- will go on a retreat, and reflect

nationalist frenzy had little use

sponsored celebrations. It mattered little that very year Pakistani newspaper had reported cases of 300 people having chosen self immolation and death to living yet another painful day of grinding poverty and deprivation. Uranium there was plenty of, but certainly not enough bread and clean drinking water. More insidiously, nucleomania was giving birth to a dangerous vision, propagated with the full force of the state media. Commentators and spokesperson daily harangued television audiences that Pakistan had become impregnable, and was now at least India's military equal if not superior. But Eqbal argued that beyond the change in atmospherics, which rarely

nally feel the need for reflec-

tion. But all those who were

then busy stoking the fires of

meetings throughout the length and breadth of the country. I accompanied him at many such events. He spoke eloquently and passionately, as was his style, frequently drawing upon exemplars from his vast store of experiences and knowledge. He would remind listeners of the Soviet Union, and its satellites such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, which became highly sophisticated arms producers, but whose states and societies grew dis-organically and eventually collapsed. For Pakistan to avoid that fate, it must resist falling into the trap of seeking strategic equivalence with India. India-Pakistan proxy war, more than anything else, worried Eqbal. Look at the history of the Cold War, he would say. Since nuclear weapons had made direct confrontation impossible, the US and USSR had exported their conflict to the Third World where millions of Koreans, Vietnamese, Africans, South Americans, and Afghans had died soundlessly, mere pawns in the great global grab for power. Eqbal feared that bloody times were up ahead for the Kashmiris, who he predieted would be the worst losers of the nuclearized subcontinent. Safely hidden behind their nuclear shields, the leaders of India and Pakistan are perfectly willing to fight their game down to the very last Kashmiri, he said.

It was sometime in early March 1999 when Eqbal telephoned me. His usual good-natured banter was missing today there was an edge of tension. went to see him as soon as I finished teaching my class at the university. I had not seen him in such a foul mood for years. Yesterday he had a long session with a top general - paradoxically one of his many admirers

 and had come back greatly disturbed, his fears confirmed Terrible things were to happen in Kashmir but nuclear weapons would ensure that war would not spill over into Pakistan. Such was the plan. Eqbal did not live to hear about Kargil, but he already knew enough. Two weeks before the end. When we took him to the hospital he was in an awful state, although we did not yet know that it was an advanced stage of colon cancer. He was vomiting violently and feeling sharp pains in his chest but there were quiet phases when he asked about the world outside. He shook his head in silent disgust as I told him of the official preparations to celebrate Pakistan's anniversary of the nuclear tests. Little badges with mushroom clouds were to be distributed free to children, poetry competitions would extol the greatness of a newly nuclear nation, and missile replicas would be placed at major intersections. "Eqbal, when you get well I'd like you to look at an article I've just written against the celebrations", I said. No, he replied, give it to me now. He carefully adjusted the intravenous drip to take hold of his pen, asked me to crank up his hospital bed into a semi-sitting position, and then went through my article adding his editorial comments — incisive and useful as ever - here and there. It was his last political act, the final affirmation of sol-

idarity. The author is a Professor of Physics at the Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan. .

NPT Conference

How Far will They be True to Their Commitment?

by Ekram Kabir

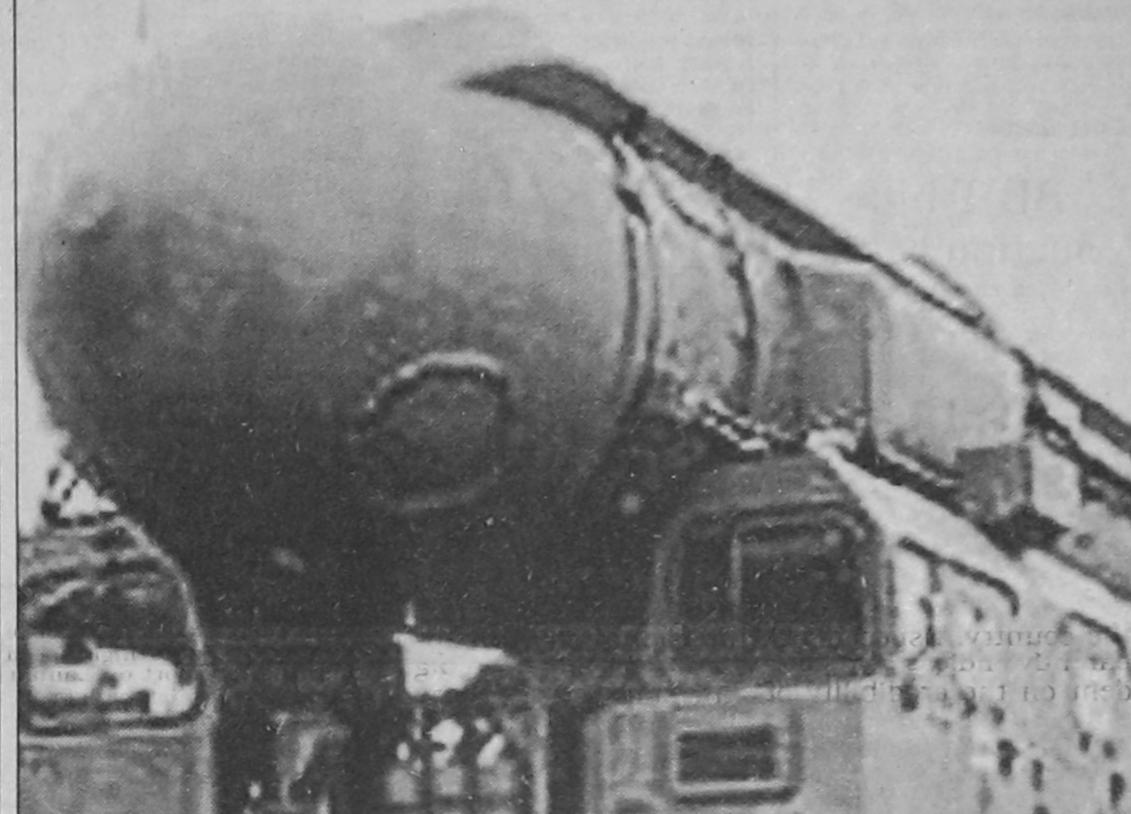
A ference on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) concluded in New York on May 19. The five nuclear-weapons states. America, Russia, Britain, France and China reaffirmed their "unequivocal commitment" to the ultimate goal to scrap their stockpiles of nuclear weapons. But they did not provide any timetable. The non-nuclear states dismissed their statement as "a lame attempt to excuse the inexcusable: the failure of the nuclear-weapons states to take meaningful action on

disarmament." The NPT signatories, numbering 187, took a decision in 1995 to review the progress by arms control. Pakistanis think April 2000. The treaty entered that there is no fundamental into force on March 5, 1970, contradiction or conflict beand was hailed as a central tween Pakistan's nuclear capapillar of global security. In bility and the objectives of the broad terms, it constitutes an NPT. Islamabad's nuclear poliagreement of non-nuclear cles have been consistent with states to forgo nuclear weapons. the key provisions of the treaty. to put peaceful nuclear facilities That without being a signatory under the international safe- to the NPT; Islamabad has been guards of the International fulfilling its obligations. On Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) non-proliferation matters, Isand to promote technical coop- lamabad has also been willing eration in the peaceful uses of to sign legally-binding agreejectives were: to prevent the So. apart from other factors, related technology; to promote ing here. But these two councooperation in the peaceful uses tries must remember that it was of nuclear energy and, to ex- "rivalry" that led to the huge And that may lead Russia to

A month-long Review. Con- as their political leaderships cherish a perceived sense of ence was the performance of global superiority. In a word it is a 'law of the jungle - might is right'. In the post-cold war world of the 21st century Nuclearism is a psychopathological syndrome - an expression of lack of self-confidence about potency. It is a genocidal mentality of people to participate in a worst form of authoritarianism despite claiming to be ideologically committed to highest forms of democracy," said Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Bangladesh Freedom Foundation, Dhaka, talking to The Daily Star.

But both India and Pakistan have their own versions on nuclear energy. The prime ob- ments if New Delhi also does so. spread of nuclear weapons and there is an 'India' factor work-

ever, revolved in at the conferthe big five. They have squandered, non-nuclear states believe, the opportunity offered by the end of the cold war for the complete dismantling of the nuclear arsenals. The US helped Israel in acquiring nuclear weapons. France helped build Israel's plutonium-producing reactor, outside of international controls, many years ago. Even earlier, the former Soviet Union gave China blueprints of a plant to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium, apart from supplying a whole range of facilities for nuclear research and development. There is a long list of example which proves the five nuclear-weapons states were never really honest about arms control. They encouraged nuclearisation in other countries as a result of 'their' own disagreements. For example, Russia still has a major disagreement with the US that concerns the 1972 ABM treaty on antiballistic missile systems, which Washington wants to revise in order to develop its proposed National Missile Defence system (NMD). If the latter does develop NMD, it would decisively bury any notion of nuclear parity between Moscow and Washington.



simple bargain. In return for Pakistan can join the treaty as giving up any desire to develop a non-nuclear weapons state. nuclear weapons, countries are Since they cannot be admitted afforded access to civil nuclear within the present framework technology. Nuclear installa- and since there is no possibility becoming nuclear-weapons both of them in reality possess states. Of the 187 signatories, nuclear weapons. What could 182 do not have nuclear be the possible status for them? weapons; among the big five, the US, the former Soviet Union and the UK were original signatories to the NPT. China and France joined it in 1992. Only four countries — Cuba, Israel, India and Pakistan - have declined to sign the NPT. Cuba has no nuclear weapons programme but its refusal to sign the NPT is related to the continuing American military presence at the Guantanamo base on its soil. Israel, India and Pakistan fall in a category of their own as none of them is likely to give up nuclear weapons and there is very little the NPT can do about it.

If experience is any guide, actually no serious efforts will be taken by these states to make any progress towards nuclear disarmament as required by the NPT. The centrality of the nuclear weapons in for an agreed period, while durthe security system of the major ing this agreed period the five powers has increased since the nuclear-weapons states come indefinite extension of the up with a specific action plan treaty in 1995. This may well on a phased timetable for unibring out in light the dualities versal nuclear disarmament. in the policies of the major More than what they seem to

never admit openly, one of the mitment must indicate a clear building the enormous arsenal main reasons for the double roadmap towards global nuclear of nuclear weapons, missiles, standards is the status symbol disarmament. In the interim submarines, aircraft, etc? Now attached with the possession of period leading to achieving the they would have to spend addinuclear weapons. The reality is zero level, while India and tional sums of money for disthat nuclear-weapons states Pakistan cannot be clearly mantling the nuclear weapons. have more clout in the interna- recognised as nuclear-weapons. And of course there will be new tional system just because they states under the existing have nuclear weapons. They framework of NPT, they could form a club of their own for be persuaded to sign a protocol which the club members think under which they would comthat they are taken more seri- mit to the obligations of the ously worldwide. They also re- NPT, including safeguards and spect each other more, their export controls." defence establishments as well

WON RICHTER HIS WAY HOME ..

AT HIS BOAT

Explains Dr. Iftekharuzza-

man: "It is impossible to determine a particular status of India and Pakistan in the context of NPT. After their tests they have assumed a self-acclaimed position of nuclear-weapons states posing a formidable new challenge to the non-proliferation regime. The dilemma is that the parties to the NPT cannot ignore emergence of new nuclear weapons states, while it is also impossible to open the treaty for renegotiation, and increase the number of the nuclear-weapons states from five to seven or more. One possible way forward in the present context is that India and Pakistan freeze their nuclear programmes at current levels without progressing towards 7,000-fold increase in the global weaponisation or deployment have agreed to do at the NPT "Although the big five would Review Conference such com-The main questions, how-

pedite nuclear disarmament. stockpiling of weapons among embark on a new cold war The NPT regime rests upon a the big five. Neither India nor Presently, these cold-war rivals alone possess an estimated 20,000 or more warheads.

Recently Russia's ratification to START-II has been globally acclaimed. But is that enough tions are inspected and the of the treaty being amended to for global arms control? STARTwhole regime is intended to accommodate them, the ques- Il treaty is going to force some prevent other countries from tion arises about their status as difficult questions. It will take the Russian and US nuclear arsenals down to some 3.000 to 3,500 warheads respectively. This certainly is a new dimension, but how low can the US and Russia go? At what point would the other declared nuclear-weapons states have to join in the same type of negotiations regarding reducing arms? And if arsenals are reduced to what some might see as a minimum, is there any chance of moving towards the complete elimination of this category of weapons?

> Perhaps not. Because in 1945 when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world had less than 10 such bombs - all with the US. In the '80s the total number of nuclear weapons was about 70,000, mostly with the US and the erstwhile USSR. In some 35 years, there was a nuclear destructive capability! No other human activity has led to such a massive build-up in so short a time. Have these countries — particularly the US which claims that it has tirelessly worked for global peace for the past 50 years or so were ever asked how much of resources was wasted on funding for developing new types of weapons.

With these developments in the offing, how far will they be able to be true to their commitment made in NPT Review Conference?

Pre-election Symptoms

by Alif Zabr

NTIMATIONS of pre-election don'ts:symptoms in Dhaka metro-Apolis are already sending feelers through the political stock exchange, which is gearing to take off (or veer off); dramatized by the well-timed (?) resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, due to the unhealthy state of the body (as certified by Harvard).

For the political parties, the pre-season is a time for analyses, evaluation, sorting and consolidation; and presenting old wines in new bottles. A colour-coded system is generment. Some with impeccable ally followed for such exercises (supposed to be in public interest): more black than white; with the intervening grey areas predominating.

In the mixed areas, the shadow-fighting is subtle; which are normally decoded with spice and venom by the opponents, for the benefit of the people. The parties excel in hyperbolic presentations; while discretion is thrown to the kalbaishakhis; and the major warning by L.K. Advani, India's reminded of the college text

book story 'The Selfish Giant' To touch certain areas is taboo; while in the other areas baits are dangled to entice the voters (old or potential), and powerful groups or lobbies

(bureaucracy, CBAs).

— The academia is a sacred place, and practically untouchable, if the going is good; and a battlefield, to get a foothold. The front offices of the student cadres enjoy the boosted inflationary market; resulting in more session jams. Education becomes a casualty, and even the High Court seemingly become alarmed ("Why inducing ter." students to politics should not be declared a crime: HC showcause", DS front-page, May 11). One observer (DS, same issue) likened the situation to educational harakiri.

Iron becomes tempered steel after passing through the baptism of fire. The conscientious objector might be wondering about the prematurity of the noble exercise right within the world of the academia during the formative phase of studentlife. Practising short-cuts becomes a philosophy of life; the latest offspring being mass open cheating during examinations, backed by powerful godfathers (the one-eyed watch).

- The new culture of bureaucratic manchas (political platforms) is driving out the principle of neutrality in the civil service. Today this institution stands damaged and divided and no hard feeling, is the indirect verdict of the political To form some idea, here are leaders. One moment's gain over of Kashmir affairs portfo- some examples of the do's and brings about a lifetime of repen-

tance. Who care?

- The mobility of the political leaders in the acrobatic art of changing floors is — perhaps - to suit the people's will! Flexibility has no meaning in the absence of boundary conditions. The spirit soars — there is no upper limit. Spirit and substance: "What's matter?' 'Never mind.' 'What's mind?' 'No mat-- Forget about solving the

traffic jams in Dhaka: the cycle rickshaws have the right to pedal; the 2-stroke autorickshaws the right to belch smoke. As for the political smokescreens, this is a 'standard practice', isn't it?

Coming: wage hikes for public sector workers (DS front-page news, May 11). Footnote: government borrowing heavily from the banks for recurring expenditure. — Are the freedom fighters

— Are the SOEs a liability?

also colour-coded? No com- Administrative and Judiciary reforms: left for the next

- De-centralization: first the political centre must be strong enough to develop the necessary political will for the unpredictable flight of capital (pun intended).

The diagnosis is a fruitless exercise, repeated many times. It is boring to be repetitive.







