

"I have no doubt that India will act"

Sri Lankan foreign minister **Lakshman Kadirgamar** spoke about the likelihood of peace moves and India's role in any such negotiations to **Waruna Karunatillake** in Colombo. Excerpts:

How would the LTTE's military gains in Jaffna affect any future peace negotiations?

It's clear the LTTE is trying to manoeuvre itself into the best possible bargaining position. Paradoxically, this is not such a bad sign if their aim is the negotiating table. To try and secure the best possible position en route the table is an old tactic. My feeling is, in some ways, the net is closing around them. I don't mean militarily, but that there's more awareness globally. The LTTE's going to find many countries breathing down its neck. How they handle it will be interesting to watch. I don't feel they can turn a blind eye to it.

What's Colombo's perception of India's possible role?

I don't think we should expect the impossible from India. In Sri Lanka there's a mood in favour of India coming in, doing something. 'Don't lie low, forget the IPKF, start all over again' and so on-all that's easily said. But it's a highly complex problem for India. Don't forget it's a democracy, they'll have to debate about it in Parliament. Then, bear in mind the armed forces' bitter memories of IPKF. Add to it the Tamil Nadu factor, which has its own dynamics.

So, I would be content if India does what it's doing now. That is, reaffirm loud and clear, notwithstanding the past, that it wholeheartedly supports our territorial integrity. Don't forget it's a position very much in India's interest, not



a divine stand taken out of some grace or favour. I don't see them budging from it. Secondly, for a variety of reasons, India makes no bones of its opposition to the LTTE. I'm very pleased to see that, apart from the Centre, we have the very significant and clear stand taken by Mr Karunamihthi. I have no doubt that in appropriate circumstances — and that's something one can't predict today — India will take necessary action to meet its stated position... (that is) if it feels Sri Lanka is seriously threatened. I can't predict what that action might be, but we can be sure it'll be a well-considered one. There are also other factors such as the Trincomalee (harbour) offer. India now has had time to digest events. I feel it's sounding international opinion, gearing itself up for assuming a role, even if it's thrust upon it by events.

In the short term, do you think there is a chance for peace negotiations?

Yes. But my optimism is not based on any change of heart on the LTTE's part. I believe Prabhakaran is still obsessed and driven by his dream of a separate state. To him that's absolutely the be-all and end-all of existence. But with all that, the awareness of realities must surely dawn on him. He must learn he can't obtain and maintain a separate state in the face of so much opposition. So I believe the LTTE is getting ready for the inevitability of negotiations. Not the desirability mind you, but the inevitability. It makes tactical sense that they would want to secure as much land as possible and they would also like to set the time-frame.

Do you feel India has to play a key role or are you looking towards Norway to perform it?

Norway has made it plain that they are willing to be the facilitator. But if events dictate otherwise, they will gracefully withdraw or play a secondary role. In other words, Norway is not taking an egoistic position on this. Therefore, in the event of India wishing to play a role, Norway will create no problems at all.

How would you respond to an Indian offer to facilitate talks with the LTTE?

I have verified that Jaswant Singh did actually say something to that effect on TV. Of course, there is still a world of difference between his saying something to the media and officially indicating it to us. Now, should we take account of the fact that he said it on TV and therefore respond to it? That's something we are reluctant to do — it is not a good way to conduct diplomacy. The point is, should we wait for an official inclination or should we make an official inquiry on the basis of what he told Star TV does not appeal much to me. I would rather prefer diplomatic channels. These channels are open and are working. So, fairly soon, we should be able to articulate a position.

Courtesy: Outlook of India

"Pakistan and India want Kashmir for themselves."

Released from jail on 4 May, **Mohammed Yaseen Malik** is the charismatic and straight-talking leader of the **All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC)**, and chairman of the **Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)**. He talked to **Himal** magazine over phone from Srinagar. Excerpts:

Do you see Article 370 as contributing in any way to a resolution of the Kashmir problem?

The question does not arise. Article 370 came into being after the Instrument of Accession was signed, which had guaranteed the people of Kashmir the right to choose their own future through a plebiscite. That was not held, so the Article is redundant. Moreover, it was supposed to be a temporary measure and is quite invalid

now, especially when the Indian government has abrogated its provisions. The Kashmir issue is a human issue and has to be resolved taking the aspirations of the people of Kashmir into consideration.

But the Indian government seems to be holding out an olive branch by releasing the APHC leadership, and the chief minister is citing the Puri Commission report as a model.

The Indian government has put a precondition that the APHC leadership abandon their agenda and talk within the framework of the Indian Constitution. That is not acceptable to us because we do not see ourselves as an integral part of India.

What do you think of Pakistan's proposed solution to the problem? Is it acceptable to the APHC?

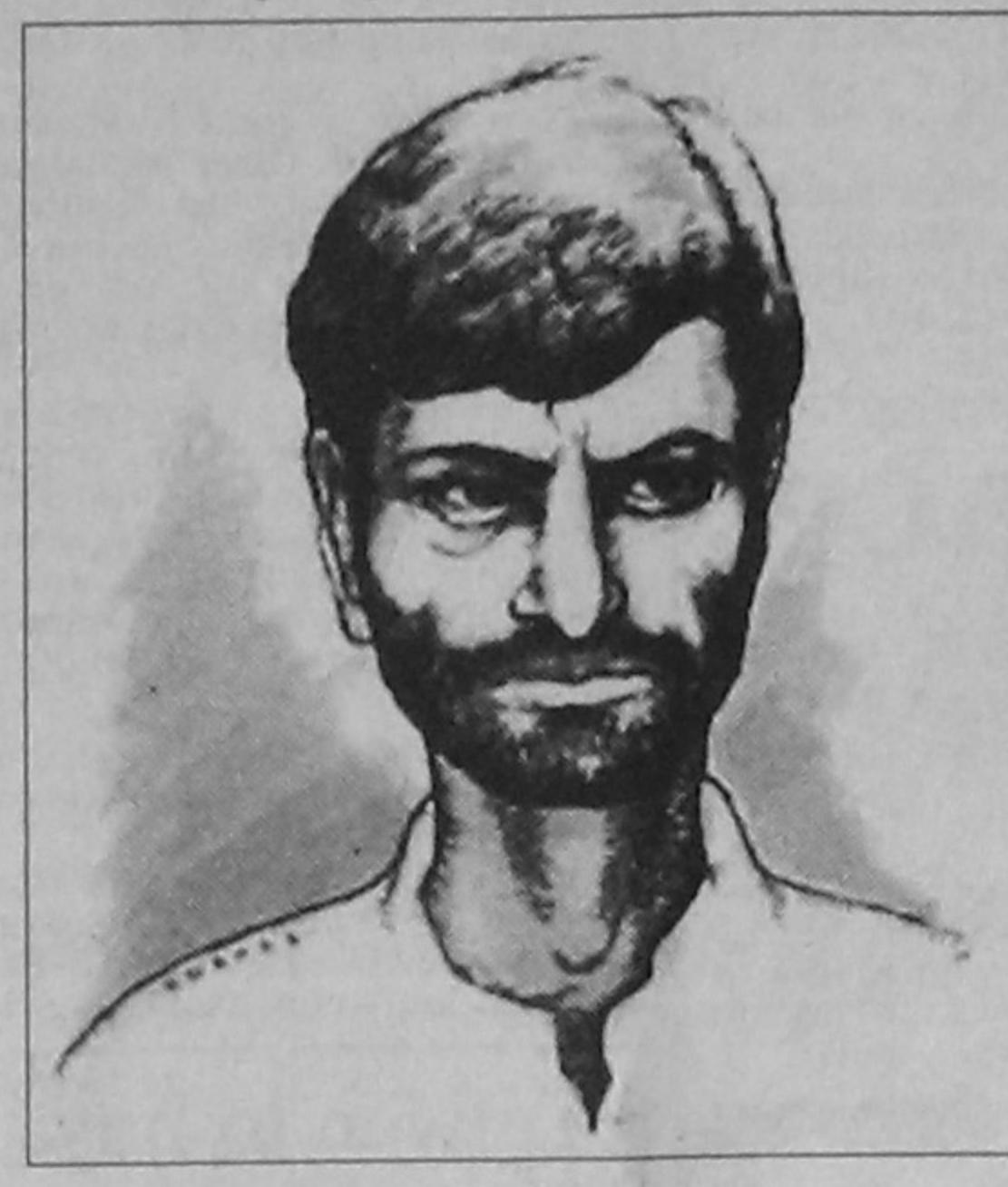
Pakistan wants Kashmir for themselves, just like India wants Kashmir for themselves. The JKLF stands for total independence for Kashmir but there is an important proviso. A democratic decision is acceptable to all. If the people of Kashmir are allowed to decide their future in a free and fair manner, and they opt for union with either India or Pakistan, we will go along with that.

What is your response to the argument of some in India that if Kashmir is allowed to go, it will have a domino effect on other constituent units?

We feel that is not a sound argument. Kashmir was never legally a part of India, so there is no question of comparing it with the other units. Real integration is not a question of keeping someone with you by force. Besides the integrity of the Indian nation-state is surely not so fragile that it will fall apart just like that.

What implications will a resolution to Kashmir have on the rest of South Asia?

If Kashmir is resolved, it will make for permanent peace and stability in the whole region and allow it to develop. But as of now, we cannot talk of any form of resolution because there appears to be no scope for tripartite talks to discuss the future of Kashmir. The Indian government refuses to provide a forum for talks because of its precondition of holding talks only within the Indian Constitution. As for implications for other parts of South Asia, the problems of Kashmir cannot be compared with the domestic problems of Pakistan or India. Kashmir is a separate entity and a special case. It is an internationally recognised disputed territory so the question of it being compared to other states within nations does not arise.



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Saarc

Re-activating the Unloved Organisation

Holding summits is necessary for the South Asian body to advance. Powerful states must not poison the Saarc spirit with their hostility and inherent suspiciousness, which makes it difficult to create a powerful trading bloc, writes **Ekram Kabir**

THE Saarc Secretary General Nihal Rodriguez's visit to Dhaka was quite an opportunity to zoom in on the regional body's prospects. His observations provided some serious food for thought as far as the region's priorities are concerned. His optimism proves that "despite delay in holding the 11th Summit, the informal system of consultation among its members as a matter of routine and tradition shows that the regional organisation is still functioning".

Nihal Rodriguez sounded quite sure about the future of the organisation, which is unloved by its two obvious powerful member-countries — India and Pakistan. He was in Dhaka for consultations with government officials as part of his efforts to give the organisation a fresh encouragement after the summit scheduled to be held last in November in Kathmandu was postponed due to reported objection by India to sit with Pakistan's present head of state. He felt that the organisation holds tremendous potential, particularly in addressing the common issues of poverty alleviation, illiteracy, and removing tariff barriers for promoting intra-regional trading.

Saarc is now focussing on core economic issues. This, despite the apparent slow pace, proves that member-countries feel that economic problems are core issues which should be addressed immediately for the benefit of their own people and for the entire South Asia," Rodriguez was quoted as saying. True, the Saarc has brought together

countries, which, in combination, offer a wide range of opportunities for development. South Asia is already the powerhouse of manpower to the Middle East and to the burgeoning economies of Southeast Asia. It would not be unfair to say that labour inputs from Saarc nations provided the boost these economies needed in order to reduce labour costs and to remain competitive.

Holding summits is necessary for the South Asian body to advance. The 10th summit, held in Colombo in July 1998, was a landmark event. Saarc's efforts to boost economic development through regional cooperation was taken a step further when all member-states agreed to finalise a treaty regime on the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) by the year 2001. The completion of the Third Round of Trade Negotiations under Safta and decision to commence the fourth round are also noteworthy in this regard. On the social front, efforts are underway to draw up a Convention on Regional Arrangements for the promotion of child welfare in South Asia. A draft on Regional Convention on combating trafficking of women and children for prostitution has already been finalised and is expected to be signed at the 11th summit. One of the most important decisions taken on the social agenda of Saarc in Colombo was the agreement by Saarc leaders on the necessity for Saarc to develop a social charter which would focus on drawing up targets with a broad range to be achieved across the region in the areas of poverty

eradication, population stabilisation, empowerment of women, youth mobilisation, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition and the protection of children.

Other events of significance include the completion of the comprehensive review of Saarc undertaken by the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) as well as the finalisation of the recommendations of the Independent Expert Group on IPA. Together these recommendations provide a useful blueprint for addressing the challenges ahead as we march forward. The action plans on media and information, and on telecommunications adopted by the information ministers and the communication ministers respectively, also reflect the commitment of member-states to further promote people-to-people contact within the region.

But it is also true that indefinite postponement of the 11th summit seems to question the future of the seven-nation grouping. What poisons the Saarc spirit is the low-grade hostility and inherent suspiciousness in the relationships between India and Pakistan. Their relationship makes it difficult for developing the organisation into a powerful trading bloc.

The postponement of the summit signals that India-Pakistan's "as-usual" strains are spilling over into Saarc. This certainly is an injustice to the region at large. On the other hand, the present balance of forces within Pakistan and its history suggests that the Chief

Executive of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, has entrenched himself, and with the passage of time, the whole world have started to do business with Pakistan. It is not a sacrifice on India's part to do the same!

The situation is very tricky for the Saarc and its future seems to be at peril, because Pakistan's military leader does not seem to be in a hurry to leave — that is why India does not want to start a dialogue — and if India decides not to talk to him at all, then the summit might remain postponed indefinitely. This scares the other member-nations. Again, what if India asks: "Who does the General represent - the brigade commanders, or the people of Pakistan?" India may well say that it is the brigade commanders and argue that it joined the Saarc when there was at least a semblance of democracy in all the seven nations.

Well, if Pakistan's former military强人 Zia-ul-Haq's facade of democracy and Nepal's Panchayat Raj system are any semblance for "democracy", then India certainly does not have a strong point not to join the scheduled summit, putting the future of the sub-continent at stake. However, it would be too early to write off the position of Saarc. The body has a chequered history of summitee inconsistencies. For example, the 1991 summit in Colombo had to be deferred for a month, because Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk expressed his inability to attend. The King reportedly did so at India's behest because the then

Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao was unhappy with Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa's action in unilaterally asking Indian troops deployed in Lankan north and east, under a bilateral pact, to leave. And in 1993, the Dhaka summit was almost cancelled as India objected to the hostile attitude of Pakistan and Bangladesh towards New Delhi over the demolition of Babri mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu zealots.

Again, when the late Bangladeshi president Ziaur Rahman first raised the idea of regional cooperation in 1980, the response was not very enthusiastic because most of the countries had bilateral problems, especially with India, the predominant regional power. Only countries like Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives, with nothing to lose and all to gain, welcomed the idea. Ultimately, the bigger and more powerful countries had to give in to the enthusiasm of their smaller neighbours, and Saarc was formally launched in New Delhi in August 1983.

Now, South Asian nations are faced with this prickly test of their resolve to promote regional cooperation as India and Pakistan bicker over the timing of the next Saarc summit. After the 10th summit in Colombo on July 29-31 last year, amid clear tension, South Asia's outlook is again faced with instability and seems unpredictable. India and Pakistan are again at each other's neck, blaming each other for everything that goes wrong.

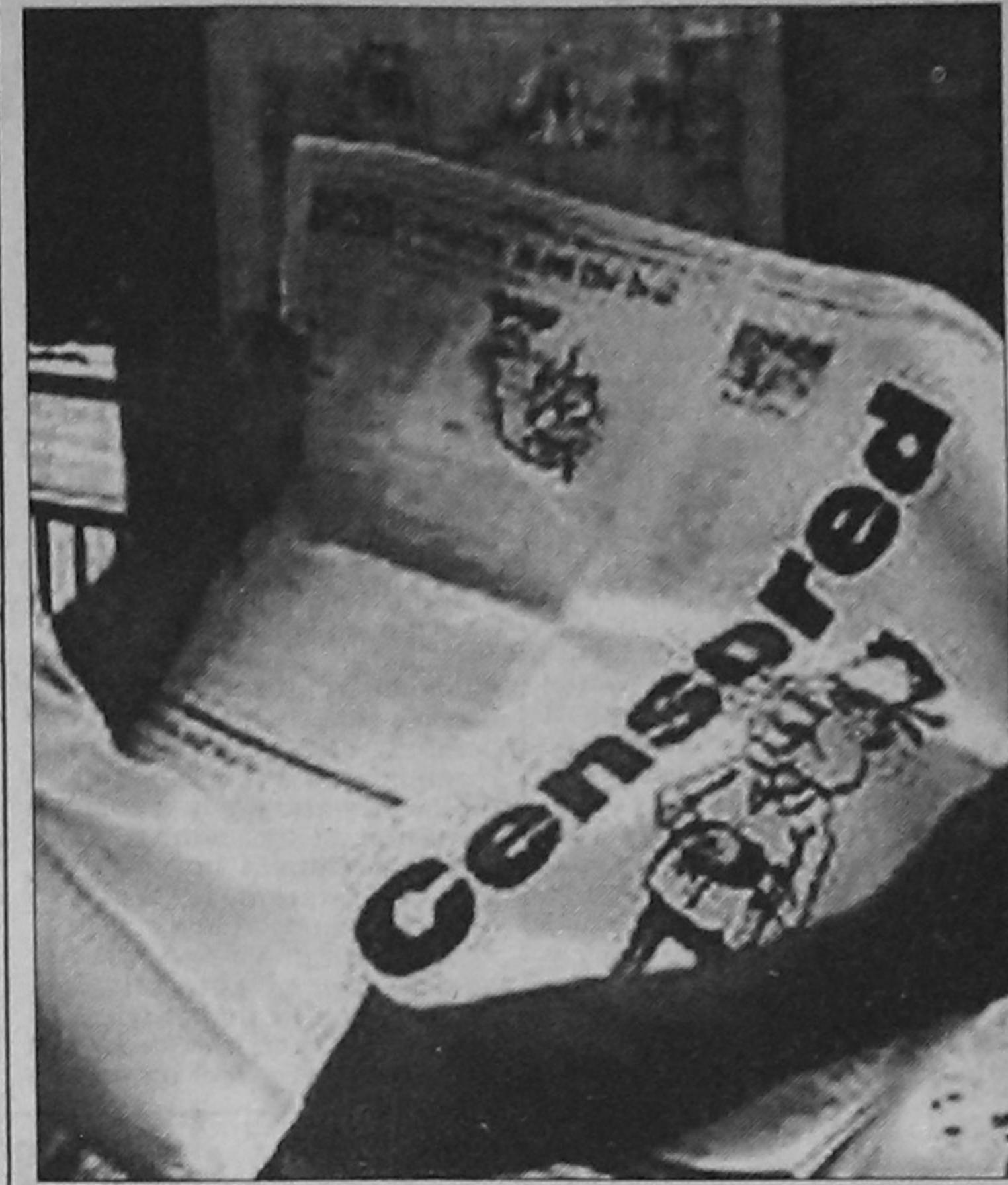
There are two opposite views

as far as the regional cooperation is concerned. One hopes that in pursuing what they believe, India and Pakistan will not jeopardise the interests of other member-nations. The importance of holding such summits is basically to reinforce relationships at a more personal level. Such meetings open grounds for dialogue and help each member-country to understand others better. It unites the member-states to work for a common goal, namely progress for all, and understand each other's constraints. India and Pakistan have to realise that for Saarc to have any future.

It is certainly a good news that Saarc foreign ministers had informal consultations before the start of the United Nations General Assembly in the last two years. They also met on the sidelines and discussed many issues during the recent NAM meeting at Cartagena. Their foreign secretaries also met during the South Summit in Havana.

The South Asian nations together can build a bright future for themselves if they can stay away from the internal conflicts that keep propping up now and then. They have to move away from geopolitics and focus more on pressing issues that need immediate attention (poverty, political instability, widespread disease and epidemics, women trafficking etc.). Regional leaders must not give up the task of thinking creatively and innovatively, either out of fear, incompetence or animosity. They should not waste any opportunity to hold the scheduled Saarc summit.

There are two opposite views

Lanka lifts ban, but...

THE Sri Lankan Government has announced that it is lifting a ban on public meetings and rallies imposed last month as part of emergency war regulations with immediate effect. Other regulations, which include stringent censorship of the media, still remain in force. The government said the restrictions were needed to protect the national interest as the Tamil Tiger rebels captured a large area of land in the northern Jaffna peninsula. But its critics said the measures were to stifle criticism of the ruling People's Alliance.

The Region This Week**A grinding halt**

IFE in many parts of Sri Lanka, including the capital, came to a grinding halt for two minutes on June 7 morning when the nation paid silent homage to soldiers killed in the raging ethnic conflict. Motorists stopped vehicles and stood on the roadside in silence while all official and commercial activities stopped for two minutes starting at 9:30 a.m. "Let us bow our heads in homage to those who are making the supreme sacrifice so that you and I may live in comfort and peace," said President Chandrika Kumaratunga in her message to mark "War Heroes Day." She concluded the message, which underlined her gratitude to those who donated funds and material for the welfare of soldiers, with the promise, "We shall overcome. Together we will win. Let us pledge ourselves to peace".

Lankan minister killed

INDUSTRY Minister CV Gooneratne and 20 others died in the attack which took place during celebrations honouring the country's war heroes on June 7. The military is battling a Tamil Tiger rebel onslaught in the northern Jaffna peninsula. Dozens of people are reported to have been wounded in the attack including the minister's wife.

(In)security in Tripura

INDIAN Home Secretary Kamal Pande is in the north-eastern state of Tripura to assess the law and order situation there. Nearly 50 people, mostly migrants from West Bengal, have been killed in ethnic violence in Tripura over the past month. Hours before Pande arrived in the state capital Agartala, separatists killed a leader of a new tribal party that won the recent elections to the tribal areas council.

Big bucks for Bangalore

THE southern Indian state of Karnataka has attracted billions of dollars worth of foreign investment. At the end of a two-day global investors conference the Karnataka Government says it has attracted deals worth about \$1.7bn. Prominent among the long list of overseas investors is News Corporation, owned by media tycoon Rupert Murdoch. On Tuesday the state government officially welcomed a News Corp announcement that it was setting up a digital software facility in Bangalore for its global networks.

Agreeing on security

A senior Indian official has said on June 7 he is satisfied with assurances received from Nepal in talks on security. Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi, held two days of official meetings in the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu. Last week, Indian Airlines reported flights between the two countries after a gap of five months, after the hijack last year of one of its aircraft.

Pak journalist dies

THE veteran Pakistani journalist, Aziz Siddiqui, who rose to national prominence in the 1980s, has died at the age of 66. His frequent criticisms of the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq made him one of Pakistan's most influential journalists. After a round as editor of *The Pakistan Times*, Siddiqui joined the country's Human Rights Commission as joint director.

Bihar politician jailed

FORMER chief minister of the northern state of Bihar, Jagannath Mishra, has been remanded in judicial custody in a multi-million dollar fodder scam. The case pertains to the misappropriation of funds meant for the state's animal husbandry department. Mishra was sent to jail after he surrendered before a court in the state capital, Patna.

Rapped for remarks

A statement by a senior Tamil politician in India, M Karunamihthi, suggesting that Sri Lanka be divided as a way out of its ethnic conflict, has been widely criticised. Karunamihthi, who is the chief minister of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, said that Sri Lanka should either devolve more rights to the Tamils or follow the Czech model and split into two nations.

-- Compiled by Navine Murshid

Indo-Pak

Prescriptions and Prejudice

The International Monetary Fund seems to have saddled on both India and Pakistan like the hunchback of Sindbad. The two governments are facing the challenges of whom to please - the people or the Fund? **Mansoor Mamoon** writes

Nomadic sectors.

India is no longer dependent on IMF doles as it has a sizeable foreign reserve of 4,000 crore US dollars. During the tenure of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1991, India had to take a loan of US dollars 600 crore to resuscitate its economy. Under the pressure of IMF as a pre-condition of its loan India had agreed to open up its economy, which so long had been a command one. Liberalisation was pursued in right earnest and there was at that time a publicity bonanza that India might emerge as the third largest economy followed by China and Japan by the year 2020 if New Delhi continues with its reforms and restructuring. According to Indian Finance Minister opposition is reported to be coming from within the ruling party -

geoned, the number of billionaires got inflated but more people fell in poverty trap.

On completion of his visit Horst Koehler appreciated India's ongoing reform programmes and said India's contribution to the global economy has been substantial. He agreed that keeping in mind its track record India deserves more international assistance. He was also unanimous on the point that New Delhi is not getting the quantum, which it should get in view of its contributions to the world economy.

He, however, said that India is currently facing some problems with regards to its reforms and restructuring. According to Indian Finance Minister opposition is reported to be coming from within the ruling party -

section of hardcore BJP leadership - which does not like the government's hobnobbing with and too much