

South Asia

Democracy

Waiting for the Dawn

By Mansoor Mamoon



THE road to democracy in what now comprises South Asia has not been smooth. It was largely uneven and full of rude jolts and upheavals.

There had not been steady and consistent culture and tradition of real democracy or liberal democracy as is now prevalent in the west as most of South Asia was under long colonial subjugation and prior to that feudal monarchy. Under colonialism there is naturally no scope of nurturing or practice of democratic polity and values. Feudal monarchy, on its part, does not encourage democracy. The east system which is still in vogue in many parts of South Asia. Against this backdrop, democracy could not gain ground and strong moorings in South Asia as a whole.

During the last half a century or so only two South Asian countries - namely India and Sri Lanka - had the singular credit of uninterrupted democratic rule and peaceful transfer of power reflecting popular will or mandate. The rest of South Asia - Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal - could not sustain democratic norms and had to undergo long spell of autocratic rules. Bhutan is a monarchy where the King is supreme and the Moldavians cannot till now exert themselves into organised political groups.

When in August 1947 the British decided to partition the subcontinent in line with religious divide and give them independence, the two newly born South Asian countries initially decided to chart a democratic course for their peoples. Their option was parliamentary democracy in imitation to the United Kingdom - the former colonial

overlords - due to the influence of real democracy on the English educated section of the populace. India was largely successful despite its diversity of culture, race, creed and language. It adopted a constitution which is democratic and secular in character. There were regular elections. Except for a brief period of emergency rule enforced by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 the Indians more or less enjoyed democratic rule. Despite assassinations of India's founding father M K Gandhi and two Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi, the death in quick succession of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his successor Lal Bahadur Shastri, series of serious insurgencies at different places, wars with neighbouring China and Pakistan, the fall of minority coalition governments like nine pins in recent days and other turbulence, democracy in India sustained because of its inherent strength and resilience. There were, however, overt and covert attempts for changing the country's basic laws and switching over to presidential system. But in the face of stiff opposition from the civil society and democracy loving general masses these were nipped in the bud. The island republic of Sri Lanka, despite its long ethnic insurgency, continued with its democratic norms and practices, albeit the fact that to have strong central government it switched over to presidential form of government in the late '70s. One of the facts for the sustenance of democracy is high rate of literacy and high degree of political consciousness among the populace. There is, however, a long spell of emergency rules curbing press freedom and human rights necessitated by exigencies fuelled by on-going bitter Tamil insurgencies and the aborted Marxist (JVP) uprisings

in the seventies. But despite turmoil, elections are regularly held and there is no interruption in the democratic process.

But Pakistan had a different experience. M A Jinnah, Pakistan's founding Governor General, had a different mental make up. He was basically an autocrat and was averse to the demand of the people of the eastern wing as regards their cultural identity. He was also feeble in health and passed away shortly after the creation of Pakistan. Liaqat Ali Khan, the first prime minister, was a democrat and a staunch believer in parliamentary democracy. But he too could not live long and was gunned down in a mysterious way. Then started palace intrigues and civil and military bureaucrats engaged themselves in hatching conspiracies. The constitution adopted in 1956 was abrogated at gunpoint when the Army Chief Ayub Khan usurped power in 1958. He tried to subdue the Bengalees and after 10 years had to make an ignominious exit at the crest of public discontent. He brought Pakistan to the brink of disaster. Then came Yahya Khan. He gave elections - the last and first in united Pakistan. But when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League won a landslide victory bagging only two but all seats in erstwhile East Pakistan the army in connivance with Z A Bhutto, the then majority leader in Pakistan, refused to hand over power to the majority ruler and party contrary to universal democratic rule. The Bengalees revolted and the Pak army Junta perpetrated one of the worst genocides in 1971. Finally Pakistan lost its eastern wing which became Bangladesh. Negation of democracy thus resulted in the slicing down of Pakistan. The price was rather too heavy. Then followed about five years of civil rule with Z A Bhutto as Prime

Minister. Subsequently, Ziaul Haque appeared in the scene. He removed Bhutto, put him to the gallows and ruled Pakistan with an iron hand for about ten long years. Ziaul Haque was killed in a mysterious air crash. Then there followed some semblances of civilian rule. The army however continued to pull the strings.

In 1999 General Pervez Musharraf ousted the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif and usurped power. Nawaz is now serving long jail sentences and Benazir Bhutto is forced to live in exile. Politics has literally been made out of bounds for politicians in Pakistan. It is indeed a tragedy that the people of Pakistan have been deprived of their democratic rights with one army ruler after another routinely usurping power.

Bangladesh was born in 1971 amidst a sanguinary war as a direct protest against Pak army rulers' refusal to honour their free choices - their democratic rights. Within three and half years Bengalees' long-cherished dream of democratic dispensation was rudely shattered and one-party monolithic rule was superimposed on them. This paved the way for long direct and quasi-military rule. Finally in December 1990 the long 21 years of autocratic rule was toppled by an unprecedented mass upsurge. During the last 10 years Bangladesh have had two free and fair elections. But it cannot be said that democracy has been established. There has not been an iota of cooperation between the ruling party and the opposition on any issue other than the passage of the 11th and 12th amendments to the constitution. Currently there is long standing stand off between the two sides and parliament has been tragically turned into a ruling party affair.

In the Kingdom of Nepal the

people also had to wage a relentless struggle for their democratic rights. The King was ruling the country with handpicked non-party Panchayat system. Finally at the peak of the mass uprising in 1990 the King had to retreat and bow down to popular will. Parliamentary democracy was established and the King was made a ceremonial figurehead. But the intestine feuds, greed, squabbles and corruption among politicians have largely frustrated the people about the future of democracy in Nepal. Maoist insurgency is the result of the popular despair and discontent.

In the introduction of this write up it was mentioned that democracy in South Asia could not gain ground due to various factors. What is now practised in the name of democracy may be termed as tribal democracy or supremacy of leaders and the party rather than the people. Dynastic rule in party hierarchy is still widely and assiduously practised. Black money is deciding the result of the elections. Delhi High Court's recent ruling in this regard about the play of black money and fear psychosis of the godfathers and mafias (called money and muscle power) is an eye-opener and is more or less not only in India, but also in South Asia as a whole. South Asia is in a vicious circle of corrupt politics and it is difficult for the peoples of the region to extricate themselves from it. This is why there is no peace in South Asia and the region is groping in abject poverty, in fact it is the largest poverty pocket in the world. This anomaly is due to the fact the rulers in South Asia are the new Brahmins who replaced the alien rulers without any change in their mindset. They are ruling their countries with the mindset of the colonial rulers. In such a deplorable situation democracy cannot take roots and flourish.

Interview

'US wants to act as a dada'

Asghar Ali Engineer, living in Mumbai, is involved in inculcating secularism and pluralism. Running two institutions - Institution of Islamic Studies and Centre for Study of Society and Secularism - he cares for South Asia, which he thinks is intensely diverse. Recently he spoke to *The Daily Star* correspondent Ekram Kabir in Colombo on South Asian affairs. Excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): What really is South Asian entity? Is it a concept that has been imposed by the West or has it been there from the beginning?

Asghar Ali Engineer (AAE): South Asian geographical entity was torn apart by the western colonialists and later on by our own politicians. In that way even in Asia we have some commonalities, but these commonalities are much more when it comes to South Asia: our culture, our social ethos, our custom etc. Even now some languages share some commonalities. We would have been one nation had there been no colonial intervention in 18th and 19th centuries. And during the Mughal rule, South Asia extended up to Afghanistan and Burma. Every part of South Asia was one political entity at one time.

DS: Recently, South Asia has been termed as world's most dangerous flash points. Apart from the Indo-Pak factor, what do you think other reasons are?

AAE: Basic reason is Kashmir. Even America has described South Asia as a flash point. There are two factors: one is Kashmir and the other is nuclear explosions. Both India and Pakistan have exploded nuclear devices so they are worried that at some point a nuclear war might start. That's why they are calling South Asia as a flash point. Otherwise there are no hot spot other than Kashmir and strained relation between India and Pakistan.

DS: But what about the internal factors like insurgency in Sri Lanka, Maoists' actions in Nepal etc?

AAE: These cannot lead to war between two countries; for example in Sri Lanka it's a civil war and that's why they don't describe it as a flash point; and there're no nuclear devices that may have a chance to be used. The whole thing got aggravated after India and Pakistan went nuclear. Until the nuclear explosions, even Kashmir was not called a flash point.

DS: What would be your opinion about the nuclearisation of the subcontinent?

AAE: I am totally against it. Nuclearisation should not take place. Nuclearisation doesn't help any country; it even does not increase defence mechanism. But it certainly increases sense of insecurity. Since both India and Pakistan have nuclear devices, if one country increases its nuclear capability, the other will also go for more. So this competition will never end. Look at them: the same competition led Russia and America to disastrous pile of nuclear weapons which can destroy the world several times over. Therefore nuclear weapons do not help.

DS: Since nuclearisation is a reality now, as a peace activist what do you think we can do to limit India and Pakistan?

AAE: We can do that through popular agitation; we must build up pressure on both the states to de-nuclearise themselves. I would say not only they should not go for weaponisation, but I would say all nuclear devices should be destroyed. They should sign the international treaties not to increase their weapons pile. Some of us have been protesting against nuclear weapons in India. Earlier in November, we had a big conference participated by intellectuals and peace activists in New Delhi. These are the means through which you can put pressure. I know there have been anti-nuclear movement in Pakistan also and they are opposing nuclearisation of Pakistan.

DS: Why do you think the US wants India and Pakistan to sign CTBT without signing it itself?

AAE: It's because the US want monopoly of nuclear power; it wants to act as a *dada*, it want to dictate terms over other nations. As I have dedicated myself in promoting peace and harmony, I am against nuclear weapons anywhere in the world; all nuclear weapons should be destroyed. And America should take the lead in doing so.

DS: What does the recent interest of the US in South Asia imply? Is there anything more than the market factor?

AAE: Basically it is the 'market factor'. In fact, President Clinton came to visit India, but for political reasons, he went to Bangladesh and Pakistan. And especially his visit to Pakistan was extremely sensitive. It was nothing to do with business interest, but if he didn't go there, the US influence would have decreased considerably. Moreover it also wants to mediate in Kashmir dispute. So, South Asia has acquired important strategic value for America. The US was very friendly to Pakistan when Russia was there; it wanted to use Pakistan against India, because India was so friendly to Communist bloc. But now that the Communist bloc has disintegrated, they are not worried about that any more. And in order to keep their influence in South Asia, friendship with Pakistan is not at all enough. So, they want to increase their influence in India both for economic and political reasons. And sometimes they may have to use India as a counter balance. But of course, India is not ready for sale in that way. But according to their strategic calculation, on some occasions, India could be used against China in various conflicts. So, there's this political reason as well.

DS: Given the present Indo-Pak ties, what could be the next steps for conflict resolution?

AAE: It is civil society which is more often taking roles in conflict resolution activities and confidence-

building measures. But it has not been seriously at the political level. Of course, India did show its gesture when Vajpayee went to Lahore last year and extended friendship, but Pakistani armed forces are not interested in peace with India, because peace with India would be their decrease their interest, their importance in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif was also interested to develop friendship with India because he is a businessman and with pressure from the business people of Pakistan he tried to use his business acumen in building peace. That's why he wanted to sell surplus sugar to India. But the military was not interested and they started Kargil and the whole process of peace was destroyed. **DS: Coming back to the core problem of South Asia - Kashmir - it's ultimately the people of Kashmir are suffering. What do you think regional leadership can do about it?**

AAE: It is true that people of Kashmir are suffering. Since arms rebellion started, their suffering increased many manifold. That's why when some supporters of the rebels approached me, I told them I cannot take up your cause unless you lay down your weapons. I also spoke to the people in Kashmir valley and they told that militancy has totally destroyed them. Pakistan definitely has a hand in this militancy. It is a very serious matter that Pakistan wishes good of the people of Kashmir. **DS: Do you think the peace process can again be revived with the SAARC initiative? What do you think is the future of SAARC? Can we hope anything from it?**

AAE: No. SAARC initiative would not be welcome by both the countries, because they particularly India - do not want any third party intervention. As far as SAARC is concerned, the current stalemate is unfortunate, but we should not despair. I see a good future of SAARC, because European Union, which has now become a reality, started with very vague concepts. It has been a significant step towards a confederation in Europe. I am very hopeful about SAARC; it may not be in my lifetime, but SAARC unity will become more concrete and it may lead to confederation ultimately. I have a strong plea to make that 'visa should be abolished among our countries'. We are culturally so close to each other, therefore people should have freedom to move around in different countries in SAARC area. SAARC will economically benefit the countries, and other regions will give more importance to us if all of us are united. We'll have much more economic potential if this unity comes about. Look at how America now gives importance to Europe!

DS: But presently, by observing the disinterest of India and Pakistan, the smaller nations of SAARC are thinking about sub-regional cooperation. Wouldn't there be negative impacts in terms of greater unity of the region?

AAE: Yes, the idea should be to carry all the countries together. If India is excluded, SAARC unity will not have much of an impact. I am not saying that India should act as a big brother, no. There's a big population in India, therefore excluding India would not help. Then again when India come in the picture, naturally the Pakistan factor becomes important. So, other SAARC countries should also use their influence in to bring about resolution of conflict between India and Pakistan. Well, of course that has to be without intervention, I mean in friendly manner, with nice negotiation.

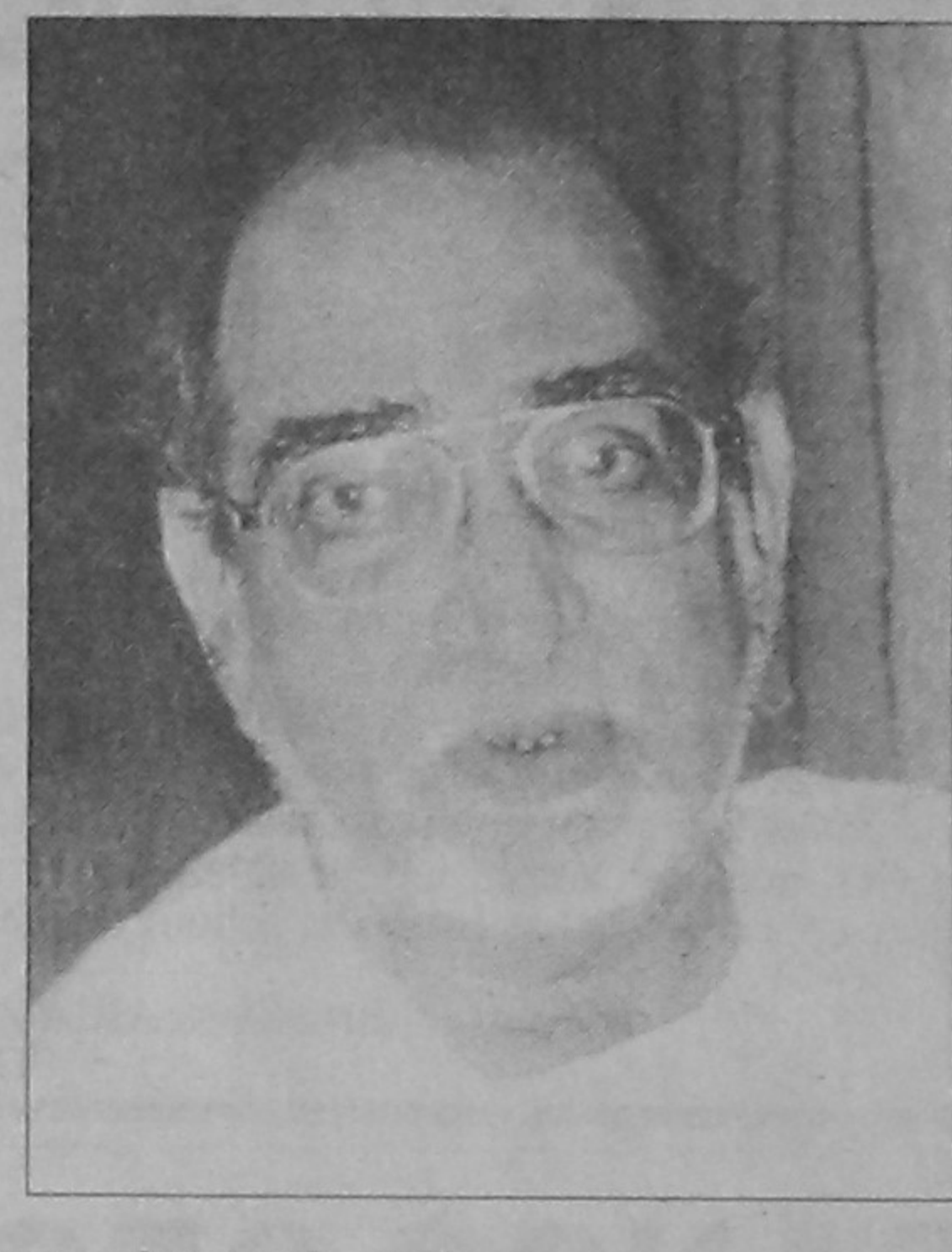
DS: You talk about economic cooperation, but at the same time there's a lot of military activities going on in the region.

AAE: As far as my individual opinion is concerned, I feel that military should be disbanded in all South Asian countries. There should be voluntary services, if there's any threat all citizens should defend their countries. Military is a waste of our precious wealth. Be it in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh - we are spending so much on military that sometimes it appears that we are keeping tensions alive because we want to favour military. Many have vested interest as well in building powerful armed forces. This of course I am talking about an ideal world. In reality every country has military, and as far as India is concerned military had to be praised for Kargil operation but that does not mean that military has acquired political clout in India. It is the only country where military has not shown any political interest, but the military machine is becoming bigger and bigger as in other countries. The best thing is to solve the disputes - Kashmir or Eelam - should be resolved peacefully. And here the citizens can play important role. They should be more vocal in saying that after all it is taxpayers' money which is being spent after military.

DS: What do you think could be the regional approach of poverty alleviation?

AAE: I am not an economist, but in a way I would prefer the Gandhian way; our economy should be a need-based economy. I know nobody is going to accept this proposition because the ruling class is going to roll in luxury and usurp all the resources. I am sure if everyone's need is satisfied there will not be any poverty in South Asia.

DS: Thank you very much for your time.



Pakistan

Women Conductors Uncertainty Looms

By Harun ur Rashid



A political storm has developed between the right-wing Islamic parties and the government in Sindh on the appointment of women conductors in the Bus.

The Sindh Governor inaugurated the Bus service last week. It is reported that the Bus service (called New Shauharat-majestic-Bus Service) between Landhi suburb to central district, Saddar in Karachi has put on first-ever women bus conductors that sparked protest from the fundamentalist forces. They consider it 'immoral'.

The service is reported to be a collaboration between the Sindh government and a private enterprise. Haji Mohammad Iqbal, the Chairman of the bus service justifies the appointment of women conductors for various reasons. They are: a) it is a luxury bus service with more than average fare and the passengers will be less and therefore it is conducive for women to work, b) women conductors would attract women passengers in the bus, c) it relieves the women to travel in an uncongested bus without being victims of eve-teasing and finally d) the employment of women is a step towards restoring their self-esteem by encouraging them to be economically independent.

The fundamentalist forces, on the other hand, argue that being used as bus conductors is degrading women and they should be given jobs as teachers or other noble professions. They argue further that women bus conductors are degrading the profession and not enjoined by Islam. Some threatened to bring down the women conductors from the bus. It is reported that Massoda Banu, 40, one of the bus-conductors and a widow with four young children said that while the job was a new experience, she was earning a good salary and wished that the company would not sack her due to pressure from the right-wing parties.

Meanwhile the commuters have been enjoying the bus service and it is reported that men behave in an orderly manner in front of the women conductors. As a precaution, the Bus company has not taken any chances and stationed one male guard on the bus to avoid any untoward incidents.

Why is this furore in Pakistan? What do they tell us? Ordinarily, the attitude and the treatment of their womenfolk know a

society. There is a saying that one way to judge good governance is whether a young lady would be able to walk alone after dark from one end of the city to other without being harassed or molested.

One could argue the more inequalities a society heap on their women, the more discriminatory way they treat their women. All men and women are endowed with human dignity and have the inherent right to life and to work. Only denying them the humanity of the other can carry out ill-treatment or unjust treatment to women.

Napoleon's words are memorable when he said some thing like this: 'Give me good mothers, I shall give you good soldiers'. During the recent visit to India, World Bank's President James Wolfensohn has underscored the empowerment of women that has multiplying effects on the society.

David Landes in his book 'Why Women are rich and Some Poor' (Amazon: 1998/US) argues that Christianity encourages a greater assertion of political and economic rights for men and women. This in turn helped, according to Landes, to develop a split between secular and the religious, unlike Islamic societies where the two remained virtually one in many countries. He further argues that in the later part of the 20th century Western culture has encouraged the maximising of wealth through the empowerment of women. One may disagree with him on his provocative statements but the truth is that in many Islamic countries the women are grossly discriminated in the society as to what they can do and cannot do as against male population.

There is a view that there has been a phenomenal growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. Since 1980s it is contended that fundamentalism has spread in the military establishments. It is alleged that some of the top military officers have been bankrolling Islamic fundamentalist groups to fight a proxy war in the Indian-administered Kashmir. A preview prevails that in Pakistan these days radical Islamic groups wield power out of all proportion to their size.

Although Pakistan's Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf (56) is known to be liberal and secular, he appears to be under pressure from the fundamentalist forces not to take initiative in matters uncomfortable to the right-wing forces. Often it has been seen that the military governments succumb to the blackmail to the right-wing parties for their popularity and survival.

Nepal

Uncertainty Looms

By Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury.



Nepal is rocked by a four-year-old insurgency by Maoist rebels who want overthrow of the ceremonial monarchy and the parliamentary system of democracy in the country in addition to changing the social and economic

structures. The Maoists have gained strength in recent times and war with the security forces has so far claimed more than 1500 lives. Efforts are continuing for a settlement of the problem through discussions but so far no tangible headway could be made. The country's opposition party has also lent its support towards a negotiated settlement of the insurgency which has become a major headache for the government of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. Nepal's main opposition - Nepal's Communist Party - United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) have offered to mediate between the government and the rebels on the issue for a resolution of the conflict.

The government has favourably responded to certain demands of the Maoists like release of some of their leaders from jails. The government says the ball is now in the court of the rebels for a meaningful dialogue to end the insurgency. But this developments, notwithstanding, no concrete advancement has taken place towards a negotiation between the two sides. The situation casts a shadow over the peaceful atmosphere of the relatively calm South Asian country, which also houses the secretariat of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It also draws big number of tourists from across the world.

Maoist rebels earlier said they are ready for fresh peace talks if the government reveals the whereabouts of top four guerrilla leaders who had been taken in custody. The Maoist - identifying themselves as Nepal Communist Party have time and again accused the government of repression and killings of their ranks and leaders. Several of their key figures were arrested either during combats or from the hideouts. The general secretary of the group, who uses the 'Prachanda', said the whereabouts of their leaders and restraint from the authorities in dealing with the

rebels constituted one of the pre-requisites for the discussions.

Last month, the government released Dinesh Sharma, a high-ranking rebel leader, after the Maoist leaders wanted to know his whereabouts as a condition for talks. Soon after his release, he told a press conference that he was quitting rebel politics since he was disenchanted with 'killings and destruction' and was joining mainstream regular politics. He later issued a statement saying that he was tortured to give earlier views and that the government had forced him to make the statement. The rebels, who model themselves after Peru's Shining Path guerrillas and describe themselves as Lal Sherras. They announced that they would not talk to the present government. The government then accused the rebels of using the proposed talks as a publicity stunt. Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel said two weeks ago that the government is always ready for talks and the ball was in the court of the rebels.

Earlier, general secretary of the opposition Nepal Communist Party (NCP-UML) Madhav Kumar said some of his party leaders met Maoist chiefs in an insurgency-hit district in mid-west Nepal and it is his belief that the rebels are keen for dialogue. He said Maoist themselves are doubtful about the success of their violent campaign. Some sources said Madhav Kumar himself held talks with rebel leader Prachanda. The opposition leader had expressed his willingness to broker the peace talks between the government and the rebels.

The government and the rebels were in touch on the problem before but without any progress. Any future talks needs both sides giving concessions to the demands of other party. But given the complexities of the issues involved in the discussions, it will be rather naive to expect any breakthrough in the fresh peace talks. Given Nepal's geographical closeness to China, Maoists influence there is not unlikely. The present insurgency has been intensified over the last two years. Many people are attracted to the ultra-leftist's campaign but many are also getting disillusioned with the prospects of the violent insurgency. The insurgency is a serious problem for the government which obviously will want to see an end of this situation.

Sri Lanka

Signs of Emerald Hope

By Ekram Kabir



COLOMBO has recently found itself the focus of a flurry of diplomatic activity. Last week British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Peter Hain, breeched through Colombo talking of Irish-type solution to Sri Lanka's long ethnic strife. Then came US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Karl Inderfurth. In the meantime, the Norwegian peace envoy, Erik Solheim, has been in Sri Lanka for quite some time, mediating peace between the government and the LTTE. So, it's not merely Norway but the US, the UK and also India are actively interested in forging a solution to Sri Lanka's problem and are willing to shoulder part of the burden of negotiation and facilitation.

But pervading all these, LTTE

leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's offer for peace talks has come to the fore as a breakthrough development in the country. Prabhakaran - who recently met Norwegian facilitator Solheim in the Wannu jungles - in his annual Heroes' Day speech on Monday last offered unconditional talks with the government that aimed at ending the nearly two-decades-long conflict which has taken over 60,000 lives. We are not imposing any preconditions for peace talks, Prabhakaran was quoted to have said. Yet we insist on a cordial atmosphere and conditions of normalcy conducive for peace negotiations. What does this mean?

However, there has been no formal reaction from the Sri Lankan government to the rebel offer, but senior administration officials were quoted as saying that the guerrillas have listed conditions that were unacceptable. Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremesinghe has already expressed opposition to any treaty before talks can begin. Military

officials said the Tuesday's bomb attack that killed 7 persons strengthened their belief that the rebels were still bent on violence.

Ratnasiri said there is no controversy over the issue that the rebels should be crushed militarily. I said it then and I say it even now. It's the government policy that the LTTE should be defeated militarily, he was quoted by *Agence France Presse*.

But reacting to Prabhakaran's offer, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said the government must seize the offer. This is the first time the LTTE has not laid any conditions for talks, and the government must respond accordingly. Talks must begin without further delay, said V. Anandasangare, MP, and party vice-president.

Indeed it is an opportunity for talks, and also a significant development in ending South Asia's longest war in Sri Lanka which escalated over the course of May this year to a point where the military balance in the

island's north has shifted dramatically in favour of the LTTE. The LTTE operation launched last November last year, titled *Oyatha Alaigal* (Unceasing Waves), engulfed the greater part of the northern mainland of Wannu, and vital areas in the Jaffna peninsula, including the Elephant Pass, the strategic territory that links the mainland to the peninsula.

On the other hand, the government was sounding increasingly optimistic about its chances of making the long-awaited devolution package a reality. President Kumaratunga unveiled her plans to give more autonomy to the region in a bid to erode support for the Tigers more than four years ago, but there has been little progress since then. In January this year, the leader of the United National Party (UNP), Ranil Wickremesinghe, said he would extend his support for the devolution plans, which need a two-thirds majority in parliament. But later he refused to lend

support to Kumaratunga's plan.

Tigers have also expressed their opposition to the package in the past. And analysts in Sri Lanka are also of the opinion that Kumaratunga's package does not go far enough to protect Tamil minority rights in the country.

Now, Sri Lanka has come a long way, and this opportunity to sit across the table must not be missed. Talks should be held. However, on Saturday, Kumaratunga said she was ready to hold talks but ruled out ending military operations against the Tigers.

Previous attempts to find a peaceful settlement have all ended in failure. Some of the reasons were evident, because some of the parameters of peace were quite disarmingly laid down by the facilitating parties. Both Norwegian envoy as well as British Minister were quite categorical in their insistence that any settlement of the war must be within the framework of a single Sri Lankan state entity control-

ling the whole island - whether a unitary, federal or confederal state being negotiable.

However, following international pressure and unequivocal statements by Hain and Solheim on the ethnic issue, the majority of the Tamil Diaspora which hitherto wanted the LTTE to fight for a separate state is now may have been divided over this demand. Hain, who was in Sri Lanka last week said the LTTE must accept a solution in which considerable autonomy is devolved to the north and east but a separation was out of the question. The same was conveyed to LTTE supremo, Hain, through Foreign Affairs Minister Lakshman Radhakrishnan had reportedly told the government that the LTTE cannot be defeated militarily and it has also been conveyed to the LTTE that the security forces cannot be defeated by the LTTE either.

Meanwhile the Karl F. Inderfurth on Tuesday 'strongly

backed" Norway's efforts to facilitate a dialogue between the government and the LTTE, and called upon the LTTE to abandon terrorism and instead, to pursue its political aims through peaceful means."

According to Colombo-based observers, this ground situation seems to have been accepted by the Tamil Diaspora who feel that a negotiated settlement to the conflict could save the sufferings of the Tamil-speaking people of the north and east. However, given the present situation, both on the ground as well as the political front, the both the government and LTTE would do well to consider a course of peaceful action which excludes hostility. But no matter how much outside help and advice pour in Sri Lanka must formulate its own solution to the prevailing ethnic crisis and should not plant any other country's experiences in solving its ethnic issues.