

## South Asia

## Right to Movement and Livelihood

By Farida Akhter

**SAARC** Peoples of the Saarc region met in the Second Saarc Peoples Forum to demand security of movement and livelihood. It resonates with the promise of the political leaders of their respective countries. The major objective of Saarc is to improve the 'quality of life' of the people. In the context that 11th Saarc summit is already uncertain with mounting political crisis in South Asia, there is hardly any hope to realise the promise. Nevertheless, participants coming from Saarc member-countries gathered in Nepal to put in record that they are watching the performance of their governments and political leaders. They will be held responsible if 11th Saarc summit eventually fails. Blaming each other will not be acceptable to the peoples who are committed to demilitarisation, democracy, peace, stability, personal security and collective prosperity. The Saarc, as a regional co-operation among the governments/states, is still seen as a viable forum where the governments can sit together to build up a strong South Asia with its human resources, culture and biodiversity.

Saarc has so far been limited to only government level meetings of standing committees, technical committees and finally the summits. However, there are few examples of collaboration of the Saarc with the NGOs and civil society. The purpose of convening the Saarc Peoples' Forum is to facilitate articulation of a common regional voice and to influence government policies in the respective Saarc countries. It is a coalition of popular organisations involved in broad areas of environment, development, women's issues, human rights, trafficking of women and children, livelihood security and food sovereignty in the countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In Bhutan and Maldives, such connections could not be established yet. It is hoped that the peoples' organisations in those countries will join the forum later.

Two networks, the SANFEC (South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture) and RESISTANCE NETWORK (South Asian Network to Resist Trafficking in Women and Children) have been playing leading roles in organising SAARC Peoples' Forum. Due to the realities of poverty, food insecurity and insecurity of livelihood, people, especially women and children are vulnerable to various forms of violence including trafficking. Therefore, to deal with

the issues, strong links must be made with agriculture and food production, ecology, biodiversity-based life activities and the emerging economic and social relations in the rural areas. Most of the organisations belonging to SANFEC and RESISTANCE Network work directly with local and indigenous communities or with specific constituencies of the population with focused need. On the basis of this realisation the members of the two regional networks, Resistance Network and SANFEC, came together and organised the 1st Saarc Peoples' Forum prior to the 10th Saarc summit held in Colombo, 1998. Other organisations and networks are now taking interest in the forum. Among these organisations, the most encouraging response came from the Media and the cultural activists.

The Second Saarc Peoples Forum was supposed to happen during November 1999 when the 11th Saarc summit was scheduled. But the summit was postponed indefinitely. So the organising groups decided to carry on their activities, as many issues need to be brought into attention of the governments. The Second Saarc Peoples Forum (held on 18-21 December, 2000) continued to focus on the two issues; that are, trafficking in women and children and food sovereignty. The forum kept on urging upon the Saarc governments to address economic and social inequities and political conflicts that have led to the movement of persons within each country and across the borders in South Asia.

One of the very important agenda of the Saarc Peoples' Forum is the proposed Saarc Convention to prevent and combat trafficking in women and children, which is at a final stage of signing. The 1st People's Forum sent memorandum to the standing committee members and to the heads of the state requesting them to make necessary changes in order to make the Convention useful to deal with the issues of trafficking. The Forum demanded that the Proposed Saarc Convention on Trafficking be broadened in its scope and include different forms of trafficking in women and children, (other than prostitution) in its definition. The forum has also urged the Saarc governments to see the critical connection between food security and trafficking in women and children and ensure food security at the household level as a primary measure to lessen the vulnerability of women and children for falling

prey to the trafficking Mafia. On the other hand, the right of people of movement from one place to the other must be ensured. Efforts to combat trafficking should not put any constraint on the free mobility of the people, particularly of women.

If the 11th Saarc Summit does not happen, what will be the fate of the Convention? The trafficking is happening everyday. Reports indicate that it might even be rising in number, changing its forms and becoming more rampant in all the countries of South Asia. Can the Saarc governments get away with their concerns for so-called "democracy" and not do anything with the Convention, which is just ready for signing? Some unofficial reports at the regional level indicate that the Technical Committee members. This is a good and bad news at the same time. We also heard that some of the suggestions made by the peoples organisations have been taken into account. But the question is how much of these changes are incorporated? And if the Technical Committee signs it then it may not enjoy the same status as being signed in the summit. Then what about the status of its implementation? All these questions were already raised at the Second Saarc Peoples Forum.

Resistance Network members know very well that in the act of trafficking in women and children there is definitely a criminal nexus. But that does not explain everything. Trafficking in persons, particularly of women and children, is integrally linked to the globalisation process, that disintegrates communities and community relations in order to institute market relations. As a result, women, children and sometimes men from Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, are victimised by the criminal acts of human trafficking that is now rampant in the region. They are being trafficked through land, water and/or air routes out of the country to the countries of South Asia as well as to Middle East, Europe and North America. Globalisation has encouraged the free mobility of capital, technology, experts and sex tourists. This has created a demand for trafficking of persons. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for commercial gains.

There are also other complex and complicated issues such as 'statelessness' of the affected persons and the process of determining their nationality and the assumption about 'rehabilitation'. It is often assumed that the best solution for the affected persons,

particularly the women in all cases, is to send them back to their countries and communities. But for the victimised persons that may not always work in their favour. Can there be any way where they can get recognition and live a life with dignity? Therefore, it is true that a Convention to combat the crime of trafficking alone cannot solve the problem. The activists working with the affected persons feel the necessity of having a Convention for making our governments take responsibilities both for prevention and rehabilitation of the affected persons.

SANFEC members felt the need to intervene at the Saarc level on issues of agriculture and rural development policies. It is clear to the network that trafficking of women and children is directly related to the erosion or disintegration of the agrarian economy, ecological relation and ethical and cultural bond between and among the community members. These are consequences of profit-based restructuring of the economy dictated by the logic of market and capital. The situation is worsening rapidly to the point of crisis because of Structural Adjustment and trade liberalisation policies. The signing of the multilateral trade agreements, particularly the Agreement on Agriculture as well as the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), to be implemented under WTO regimes, is the apex of crisis. The question of biotechnology and genetic engineering in food production and the interventions of the MNCs controlling our food production have been brought into focus as causes of vulnerabilities of the farmers and of disempowerment of women. Thus, the question of livelihood security, food sovereignty and the future of rural poor in the new global order are the fundamental challenge of the popular organisations in the Saarc region. The two networks joined together in exposing the fact that WTO agreements must also be seen in the context of trafficking of women and children and migration. The promoters of globalisation consistently hide the ugly and violent side of the global economic process, such as trafficking and commodification of human beings and human relations. It is crucial that popular organisations mobilise public opinion to activate their governments to address the critical challenges of the time.

The author is a member of Resistance Network.

## A To-Be-or-Not-To-Be Summit

By Mansoor Mamoon

**SAARC** DARK clouds that thickened and hovered over Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) and put it in virtual limbo are likely to dissipate, albeit in a gradual process. With the advent of the New Year the silver linings are becoming more visible due to somewhat softening of the rigid stand taken by India and its warlike situation with Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir that has stalled the forum since 1999. India's unilateral cease-fire and its subsequent extension in the highly tensed Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir and Pakistan's reciprocity in the form of troops withdrawal along with New Delhi's conditional feeler to Islamabad for a possible dialogue have, to some extent, eased tension between the two feuding neighbours. This has in its turn brightened the prospects of holding the long-postponed Saarc summit and reactivating its different committees designed to accelerate intra-regional co-operation and co-ordinated approaches in South Asia.

Formally launched through an unprecedented summit of the seven South Asian nations in Dhaka in December 1985, Saarc also earlier faced some jolts. At least on two occasions its annual summit had to be postponed. But the events that led to the sudden postponement of the scheduled summit in Kathmandu in November 1999 had no precedence. In October of that year the army Chief General Pervez Musharraf toppled the elected government in Pakistan. India abruptly called for the postponement of Kathmandu summit showing the reason that it could not sit with a military regime around the same conference table. According to Saarc Charter there must be consensus decisions on all points and if a member-country opposes there cannot be any summit. Since then the summit remained postponed. As a result, the activities of many of its committees also bogged down. Even the pleading by the Clinton administration through its Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth failed to melt the ice between India and Pakistan and for resumption of



Stories of the past...

co-operation under the umbrella of Saarc.

In the words of President Clinton, who came on a visit to the three South Asian countries (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), the region symbolised a veritable armageddon due to possession of deadly nuclear arms by two of the countries and their unabated mad race for stockpiling arms which could not only annihilate each other but would also disturb peace and stability in the region and beyond. Five other countries, particularly Sri Lanka, the current chairman of Saarc and Nepal, the summit organiser, all-through relentlessly tried to make India agree to the holding of the postponed summit as well as for the restart of the stalled Saarc process of co-operation and interaction in a bid to diffuse tension and restore peace and stability in the region. There were hectic lobbying and parleys towards that end. At the Non-aligned Foreign Ministers Conference in Colombia representatives of Saarc countries in their regional meeting tried to convince India. Yet another meeting followed in Havana at the South-South Summit.

Finally India agreed to restart the functioning of different technical committees but continued its embargo on the summit and the meeting of the Saarc standing committee (at the foreign secret-

ary level). It was decided that seven technical committees of Saarc would meet during the four months period from December 2000 to April 2001. A meeting of the technical committee has already been successfully concluded. Meetings of the six other committees have been projected during the next three months. Among the committees are also on Sapt and Safta (South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement and South Asian Free Trading Arrangement). Both of these agreements and arrangements proposed to have been effective by the year 2002 have not progressed much. In March a Saarc trade fair is also being arranged in the Pakistani city of Karachi.

All these no doubt happy signs towards activating Saarc and observers strongly believe that if the trend continues and in the event of a thaw in the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan the much vaunted Kathmandu Summit may possibly be held later this year. Meanwhile, at the civil society level in all the South Asian countries there is a strong pressure on their leadership for the holding of the summit and for strengthening regional co-operation. There is a citizens' committee working towards that direction. The recently-concluded moot of the People's Forum comprising members of the profes-

sional and representatives of NGOs stressed the imperative for immediate collective regional approach to avoid further marginalisation under the highly exploitative mechanism of globalisation controlled and directed by the multinationals. The global trend is clear: countries are forming regional trading blocs for better competitive edge in the open trading and market era.

South Asia cannot afford to remain isolated from the global trend and instead of co-operating and interacting with one another should not have the foolhardiness of exhausting their energies in meaningless internecine quarrel to the detriment of the welfare of the teeming millions. In the final analysis, it will be in India's advantage to revive and reactivate the Saarc process. Its economy is already having a downward slide. If India wants to be a regional trading and economic power it must first look towards its immediate neighbourhood. To this end Saarc will be the best platform. India should follow Indonesia's example in ASEAN and stop thinking in terms of dominating the Saarc. Such an attempt has already backfired. The earlier New Delhi recasts its policies and reviews its stand towards Saarc the better for India as well as for the entire region.

## Another Setback for the Region

By Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

**INDIA-NEPAL** CLOSE on the heels of a marked deterioration of the Bangladesh-Pakistan ties in the recent times, the relationship between India and its small neighbour Nepal has also worsened in the last few weeks. New Delhi-Kathmandu relations are close but sensitive. The sensitivities constitute an important element for any nation in governing its domestic matters and conducting foreign policies. This particular aspect has definitely played an undeniably key role in bilateral ties in both the cases - Bangladesh-Pakistan in one hand and India-Nepal on the other. In both cases national pride has been at the heart of the problems.

It is wellknown that Dhaka-Islamabad ties worsened sharply after a Pakistani diplomat made audacious comments at a seminar here against Bangladesh's liberation war and this expectedly inflamed passions in this country. As a logical corollary to the development, Bangladesh asked Pakistan to withdraw its diplomat whose reckless and undiplomatic remarks were criticised and condemned in this country. As Islamabad took time to transfer the official in its high commission here within a short time despite its decision to withdraw him, Dhaka expelled Irfan Raja as per the provisions of Vienna Conventions relating to dealings with the diplomats. The development certainly has come as a setback to the bilateral ties.

The Indo-Nepal ties are not characterised by any bitter back-groove like that of the Dhaka-Islamabad. However, India's relations with the Himalayan kingdom have not been strains-free. In fact, the ties have often been 'not very friendly' despite close cooperation in various levels. The border between the two countries is both unique and peculiar as it is mostly open and anyone can walk in the other side. When such proximity exists between the two countries, the magnitude of the depthness is understandable. Paradoxically, there is also the other side of the coin.

Last week witnessed violent anti-Indian protests in Kathmandu and some other places in Nepal. The immediate reason for the reactions were remarks by a politician and a top film actor. A senior BJP leader M.R. Malkani commented that Nepal should have acceded to India in 1950 when Jawaharlal Nehru was the prime



minister and King Tribhuvan was the monarch in Nepal. These remarks, unsurprisingly, tremendously hurt Nepal's sovereign sentiments, as the nation likes to see itself as a respected independent country like any other nation.

People from different walks of life reacted sharply. A spokesman of the Indian government made it clear that the comment of Malkani was on his own and New Delhi does not subscribe to this view. This clarification notwithstanding, the

sentiments caused by the comment did not subside much as he is a leader of the ruling BJP. Then came the alleged derogatory remark against Nepal by current heart-throb of Mumbai films Rihith Roshan. Angry students burnt his effigy and attacked Indian properties wherever they found. Rihith denied having made any such remarks but not many took it seriously. As a counter reaction, the Indian films featuring Nepali actress Monisha Koirala was obstructed in some Indian cities. These involved film personalities but the issue is essentially political and diplomatic.

Nepal is the only Hindu nation in the world whereas overwhelmingly Hindu majority India is a secular country. Nepal's population is only 23 million compared to vastly big more than 1000 million of India. The two countries have commonality in many matters but it is possibly Nepal's small size and

a feeling of "big brotherly" attitude by India that makes Kathmandu see New Delhi with a suspicious eye. At the same time, India often looks askance at Nepal because of the nation's close ties with New Delhi's neighbour rival China and also possibly Kathmandu's close ties with other countries in the region. When Kashmiri militants from Kathmandu hijacked an Indian airline plane's Tribhuban airport in 1999 and the hijackers succeeded in extracting their demands, India blamed security lapses in Nepalese airport for the incident. India also stopped several flights to Nepal which Kathmandu saw as unkind causing losses to its tourism industry as many visitors are from India. Any country takes pride in hosting conference of world leaders, but Nepal is somewhat frustrated by the indefinite postponement of the next Saarc summit in Kathmandu due to Indian unwillingness to attend the event at present stage.

There are other reasons stemming from past to present souring the bilateral ties. Many Nepalese feel that India had not been much friendly in trade matters with it while goods from that country flooded Nepal. When P.V. Narasimha Rao was the prime minister in 1993, today's prime minister A.B. Vajpayee as opposition leader charged that New Delhi soured its ties with even Hindu Nepal! But now the opposition asks what is the situation when Vajpayee's BJP, widely seen as communal, is in power? Indo-Nepalese ties are marked by ups and downs over the last few decades.

The two-day strikes observed in Nepal on January 2 and 3 at the call of the leftists opposition parties was mainly against Koirala government but it was also linked to anti-Indian protests. The opposition had demanded resignation of the home minister since several persons were killed in the anti-Indian demonstrations. This phase of extreme anti-Indian feelings will subside. Things may move normally. But it is important that bigger countries take great care in making comments about others and deal accordingly so that the national feelings of any country is not hurt as demonstrated in Bangladesh in Irfan Raja episode and in Nepal about India. This affects the general political climate in the region. After all, a friendly atmosphere should be the desire of all.

## War! It's Colder than You Think!

By Sharif Atiqur Rahman

**NUCLEAR ISSUES** JUST two years short of the new millennium, nuclear-weapons and ballistic missile tests in 1998 by India and Pakistan jeopardised the hope for peace in the subcontinent and set the stage for the danger for a nuclear war. Since then, one after another, events took place - Kargil War, shooting down of an unarmed Pakistani naval reconnaissance aircraft, release of India's draft nuclear doctrine, hijacking of an Air India flight, military coup in Pakistan and finally the postponement of all bilateral talks between India and Pakistan - all contributed towards making the Indo-Pak relations most bitter since 1971. With the addition of the nuclearisation and recent dramatic developments, the conflict between India and Pakistan, continuing for more than half a century, has become more intense and dangerous, in many ways, than the cold war itself.

The cold war, between the USA and the former USSR, which reigned the history of international relations for more than four decades, was regarded as the most threatening event for the mankind. The combined yield of the nuclear arsenal possessed by these two powers was capable enough to destroy several planets like the Earth. The ideological war between capitalism and communism resulted in a number of proxy wars on almost all the continents. The creation of military alliances like NATO, CENTO, WARSAW etc., eventually divided the world into two rival blocs. Both sides spent billions for getting the upperhand in possessing the most modern and advanced weaponry.

The cold war drew the highest international attention because of the economic and military superiority of these two powers of the time and also as a result of the involvement of other medium and small powers in this rivalry. But the geo-strategic environment of the subcontinent seems more alarming, which has made the region very unstable.

The US and the USSR did not share any common border; they were apart by the distance of the width of an ocean. But India and Pakistan share a long (and disputed) border. This geographic reality dramatically shortens the time frame either country would have to decide, during a crisis or war, whether to use nuclear weapons. Even in case of a false alarm, this time constraint will not allow any of the countries concerned to make a second check before opting to go for the nuclear strike.

The entire province of Kashmir, the source of the two of the three wars (rather three of the four; if we include Kargil) India and Pakistan have fought since in 1947, remains a bitter contention, whereas the Russia and US had no direct territorial dispute. There is not a single example of direct war between the US and the USSR on their territory during the whole period of the cold war; they fought all their proxy wars on foreign territories. Contiguity permits India and Pakistan to meddle in each other's territory on a scale that was never an option for Russia and America during the cold war.

India also shares a long border with nuclear-armed China; it too, is disputed. This introduces a third element of territorial tension into the strategic equation, which was never the case in the cold war. The situation in the subcontinent worsens further due to the alleged Chinese support in Pakistan's nuclear programme and military preparedness.

The stability of the cold war deterrence rested on credible second-strike retaliatory capability, which means that both the parties concerned were in possession of defensive and offensive capabilities to make the counter-strike even in case of a surprise first-attack. Stockpiles, command and control centres and military-political leadership were protected against a surprise attack that could destroy all of them in one strike. So the fear of getting counter-attacked was always there which prevented from initiating the nuclear war. Neither India and nor Pakistan has even the most rudimentary basing, command and control systems in place that could survive a nuclear assault. This gives the temptation to go for the surprise first-attack and eventually win the war.

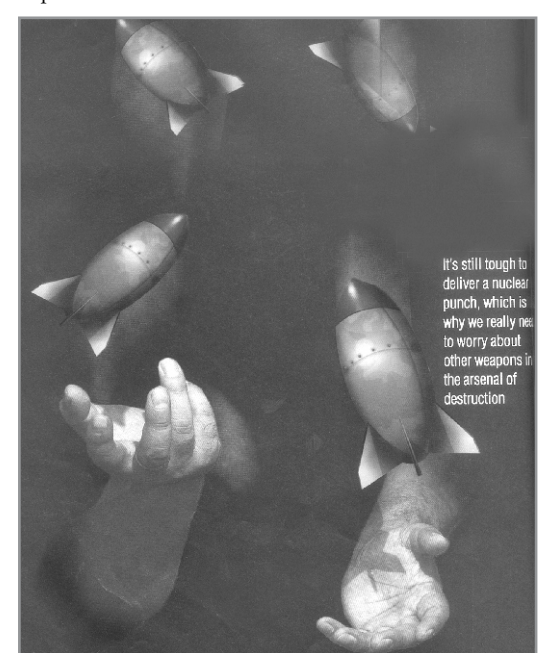
Moscow and Washington spread their stockpiles across land (on missiles), sea (on submarines) and air (on planes). This three pronged dispersal made the

detection and strike on nuclear stockpiles more difficult for an enemy and so buttressed second-strike capability. India and Pakistan lack this stabilising triad of weapons platforms.

Because of the lack of survivable forces and command centres, both nations are highly vulnerable to a pre-emptive strike. But there is an inherent asymmetry in the way each calculates the risks. Pakistan cannot match India's conventional superiority. However, a successful first strike could destroy India's nuclear capability and paralyse its conventional superiority, thereby allowing Pakistan to avenge its defeat in the 1971 war over Bangladesh and wrest Kashmir from India - or so a government in Islamabad might conclude. Conversely, a government in New Delhi might conclude that since reciprocal nuclear capability rules out their actual use by either country, it is safe to launch a military strike against Pakistan in punishment for its provocation in Kashmir. There is nothing in the history of the US-USSR relationship that indicated the eventual outcome of such an adventure.

Finally, all these worries are exacerbated by political impulsiveness in both countries. Since its independence, there has been no democratically elected government in Pakistan, which could complete its full term. The democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif was overthrown by a military coup (a very common feature in Pakistan's political history) in October 1999 and since then uncertainty over Pakistan's political future persists. The leaders of two most popular political parties, both of which are ex Prime Ministers of the country (Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif), are charged with corruption and now are living in exile. On the other side, India had to go for three general elections between 1996 and 1999. Still the sitting government is in an uneasy coalition of an intensely nationalist party that bases its legitimacy in religion and mythology, and a number of disparate parties that pursue different, and sometimes incompatible, regional agendas.

All these factors contribute towards making the subcontinent the world's likely nuclear flashpoint. To mediate crisis situations, direct communication and negotiation between the conflicting parties are the utmost priority. But at present, all direct government level talks between India and Pakistan have been suspended. The effects of political and military rivalry are now spilling over to other areas like regional organisation, as SAARC could not hold its summit meeting, and to sports, as both barred its cricket teams to play matches on each other's country. At the present situation, "track two diplomacy" requires the highest priority to melt the ice-cold relationship between India and Pakistan. Otherwise, we might see more and more intense rivalry, even resulting in a nuclear war. The geo-strategic reality of the sub-continent predicts so. The author is a researcher and columnist. The views expressed are of the author's own.



It's still tough to deliver a nuclear punch, which is why we really need to worry about other weapons in the arsenal of destruction.

## When the Ice was Broken

By Shujaat Bukhari

**KASHMIR** THE YEAR 2000 was a year which started with a bloodbath claiming scores of lives in massacres, but ended with a peace initiative (though violence continues unabated). From Chattisinghpore to the resolution on autonomy, and to the aborted ceasefire in July, Jammu and Kashmir is set to enter the new year yearning for a peaceful resolution of an over-50-year-old issue.

When the visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, was announced, despite apprehensions over what the lone super-power would say on Kashmir, there was hope that it would impress upon India and Pakistan to resolve the issue. However, violence overshadowed such concerns. The massacre of 35 Sikhs in Chattisinghpore, south Kashmir, competed for headline space with the presidential visit.

It was followed by the killing of five civilians who had been allegedly picked up by the security forces soon after the incident. They were killed in an "encounter" at Panchalthan as the "murderers" of the Sikhs; a charge yet to be proved. When the relatives of these civilians demanded a probe into their disappearance, police and the CRPF fired at the demonstrators, in the process killing nine

persons at Brakpora. The Justice S. Rathavel Pandian Commission which probed the Brakpora killings held the Special Operations Group and CRPF personnel responsible.

The autonomy debate As militancy-related incidents continued to be a permanent feature in the 11th year of strife in the Valley, the ruling National Conference, after a week-long debate in the Assembly passed the autonomy resolution asking the Centre to revert the State to 1953 status. It was summarily rejected by the Vajpayee Government pushing its ally, the National Conference, to the wall. Even as the party came close to parting ways from the NDA, the death of the Chief Minister's mother, Begum Akbar Jehan, provided the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with an opportunity to visit Srinagar and invite Dr. Farooq Abdullah to Delhi for talks, which, however, did not take the NC anywhere.

What followed was surprising - the unilateral ceasefire announced by the front-ranking Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in July, which generated hope that matters could be sorted out at the negotiating table. However, it proved to be short-lived with the Hizb insisting on the inclusion of Pakistan in the talks, apparently under pressure from across the border.

The All-Party Hurriyat Conference also did not encourage the

step, perhaps finding itself marginalised. The thirst for peace was most evident when people openly welcomed the ceasefire announced by Mr. Vajpayee on the eve of the holy month of Ramzan, which now stands extended till January 26. The overwhelming response from the people forced the APHC to term it a positive step, even leading to its participation.

The mood certainly is in favour of peace, but the Kashmiris at the same time want a political solution which would be lasting. Both the Government and the Hurriyat have announced steps to take the peace process to a logical conclusion. The APHC has decided to send a delegation to Pakistan to talk to militant leaders and the Government there.

Since the ceasefire stands rejected by the foreigners-dominated militant organisations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, it becomes imperative for a forum like the Hurriyat to "convince" them to dialogue. The Hizb, on its part, has neither rejected the offer nor welcomed it. As efforts are under way, the coming months may see the ice breaking on the Kashmir tangle and the year 2000 will be remembered as the one in which the search for peace genuinely began.

Courtesy: The Hindu of India.