South Asia

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Kashmir It's (old) Uncle Sam again

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ILL Clinton who has just ended eight years in two four-year tenures as president of the most powerful nation in the world last month seems unwilling to be written off from the international scenario. Known for his penchant for discussing an dealing with intractable international conflicts, the relatively young former American president has entered some agreements to deliver lectures in different international seminars or gatherings which will give him big press coverage and keep in very much in international focus in a different form in addition to a good purse of money.

But Clinton has made news again by expressing his willingness for a mediator's role in Kashmir crisis between two South Asian neighbours - India and Pakistan. Like many others, he is aware of the complexity of a problem of Kashmir's magnitude. He is particularly familiar with the sensitivities attached to the tangle as he did speak to leaders of both India and Pakistan on the issue during his South Asian tour in March last year.

The devastating earthquake in western Indian state of Guiarat has caused a gloom everywhere - and Clinton seems to be deeply moved by the extent of the catastrophe. He is raising fund for the victims and is likely to travel to the worst-hit areas some time in April this year. The Gujarat devastations are colossal and it may take a long time to complete the relief operations. Clinton is expected to provide a healing touch to the affected and his plans to visit the quake-hit areas is likely to encourage many others to be involved in providing help and succour to victims of natural disasters.

However, Clinton's spokeswoman while commenting on the expected visit of the former president to Guiarat, said that he is also expected to play a role in the peace efforts over Kashmir issue. The issue is main bone of contention between arch-rivals India and

Bhutan

Pakistan. These two countries fought more than one war centring Kashmir. The dispute over the beautiful Himalayan region between the two neighbours dates back to their creation as independent nations and the problem remains unresolved. Two-thirds of the region remains with India and the rest with Pakistan under the name Azad Kashmir

Two countries maintain diametrically opposite positions on the issue with New Delhi saying that Kashmir

the Kashmiri freedom fighters whom New Delhi describes as "terrorists" International observers don't doubt that Pakistan provides all-out support to the militants including training and arms while it is also accepted that the Kashmiri organisations are mainly behind the armed struggle in the region although supported by Pakistan.

The vast divergence in the positions of the two countries on the dispute makes a settlement very difficult even though they held talks

was not certain but later he decided to go there. He spoke to Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vaipavee and Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf on Kashmir problem. But he could not make much headway in the talks with two sides because the tangle is too complicated, given its historical background and intractability.

Nonetheless, he spared no efforts as leaders of both countries pledged that they too would make efforts to lessen tensions in the

prime minister in Israel has somewhat changed the scenario making the peace once again remote although peace efforts are continu-Now that Clinton is likely to make fresh bid to help resolve the Kashmir

problem, there is no distinct expectation that he can break much ground in that front. However, there seems to be a qualitative change. although in a small scale, in hostile ties between India and Pakistan towards betterment. This came centring the earthquakes in Gujarat when Pakistan sent relief materials and what is remarkable that for the first time a direct contact was established between Prime Minister Vainavee and Pakistan's Chief Executive Gen. Musharraf. They spoke on the phone mainly on the humane aspect of the earthquake. This represents a ray of hope for an improved bilateral ties in the other wise dark cloud, Earlier, India announced a cease-fire in Kashmir region to facilitate a dialogue with the militants in the month of Ramadan and later extended it. This also cast a sobering effect on the bitter Indo-Pakistan ties despite the fact that some militant organisations rejected the truce and are continuing their acts.

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warring sides into a peace agree-

ment but certainly brought them

nearer to that possibility. However,

the election of a hard-line leader as

If Clinton's visit to India takes place and he finally hold talks on the Kashmir issue to broker a peace between two countries, the task is unquestionably daunting with little prospects for a thaw. But he may exploit on the good omens that are discernible despite the fact that Kashmir is too tough a tangle to crack so easily. Clinton had described it as a major international flash points. Now his clout is much less as a former president. Still, any effort by a person who was a popular president just the other day and is generally admired for ceaseless efforts for promoting international peace is bound to send good messages to the concerned quarters.

Nepal

A saffron lady in white

CK LAL in Kathmandu

ATIONS need friends abroad to serve their national interests. The more highly placed such friends, the better. A Ryutaro Hashimoto in Japan, or an Edmund Hillary in New Zealand can do more for Nepal and Nepalis than a flurry of visits by high-level dignitaries, or a rustle of self-important diplomats scurrying around.

Vijavaraje Scindia, queen mother of the former Indian princely state of Gwalior, was one such friend. She died on 25 January at the age of 82. She was the highest placed and most influential friend of Nepal in the hierarchy of India's ruling coalition. The influence she had in Bharativa Janata Party (BJP) can be gauged from the fact that Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee delayed his visit to earthquake-hit Gujarat by a day in order to attend her funeral in Gwalior. After all, his party owed its prominence to liberal funding from this benevolent lady

Vijayaraje Scindia was born Lekha Divyeshwari to Thakur Mahendra Singh and his Rana wife. But she was brought up by her grandparents Khadga Shumsher and Dhankumari Devi at the Nepal Palace in Sagar when her mother died just nine days after her birth. Agonising over a crisis of identity during her childhood, Vijayaraje Scindia later wrote in her autobiography: "Since children customarily took on the citizenship of their fathers, I was unarquably Indian: a cuckoo in the Nepali nest...to the normal confusion of growing up, was added the difficulty of reconciling the pride of my Nepali connection with the same of being born an Indian."

Rajmata gave a continuity to her Nepali link when her son, Madhavrao Scindia, married a Rana girl from Nepal in 1966 and her daughter Usharaje was married to Pashupati Shumsher Rana in 1967. Though a Thakur by birth and a Maratha by marriage Vijavaraje took pride in the fact that she could trace her roots to the only independent Hindu kingdom in the world

When India gained independence, it was natural for the likes of the dowager maharani of Gwalior to stray into politics. But she gained prominence during the Emergency when Indira Gandhi made her Prisoner No 2265 at the dreaded Tihar Jail in New Delhi. There she had more royal company, in a cell next to her was Gayatri Devi of Jaipur, reputed to have been one of the most beautiful women in the world much before India made storming international beauty pageants a matter of dull routine.

Once out of jail, Vijayaraje Scindia played a crucial role in funding the electoral adventures of the rag-tag band of persecuted politicians who had come together under the banner of the Janata Party to fight Indira Gandhi and her Congress. The triumphant Janata Party government of 1977 had her favourite politician, Vajpayee, as its foreign minister. The much-touted Janata government's tilt towards Nepal wasn't due to Chandra Shekhar's influence alone. It owed a lot to Vijayaraje Scindia. Even though she wasn't in the best of terms with her son

Madhavrao Scindia, she appreciated the fact that Nepal had offered shelter to her children, and her son-in-law had played a role in her release on parole from the dreaded confines of Tihar.

An indefatigable fighter, Vijavaraje Scindia kept her faith even when her son Madhavrao made his peace with the Gandhi family. In the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination by her own bodyguards and the anti-Sikh riots that followed in 1984, the Bharatiya Janata Party was all but wiped out from the electoral scene. It appeared as if the Nike-clad Ray Ban-sporting bright guys of the Rajiv Gandhi bridade would succeed where Sanjay Gandhi had failed earlier, and drive the saffron-saints of Hindutva politics into oblivion. But they hadn't reckoned with the staying power of one particular lady of Nepali Rana extraction

Contemplating those days in the political wilderness, Vijavaraje Scindia was later to write: "The mist clears. The flames in the butter-lamps become brighter. The idols gleam. I get up from the puja feeling cleansed of doubts and uncertainties and ready for the day, knowing that outside tearful widows and half-alive children wait. True, I may not ever be able to do anything for them. But that does not mean I must not go on trying." She kept on trying to improve the lot of the impoverished in Gwalior with noblesse oblige. Whatever be the circumstance, this tough granddaughter of Khadga Shumsher never gave up hope, never stopped fighting.

Many liberals in Nepal may have found it a little difficult to swallow Vijayaraje Scindia's Hindutva brand of politics. But that does not detract from recognising her contributions in forwarding Nepal's national interests in India.

Nepalis shed copious tears when Princess Diana died in a car crash during an escapade with her paramour. Miss Nepal wannabes still swear by her name when asked about role models. Vijavaraje Scindia may have been closer home, and closely related to Nepal, but her passing away hardly got a mention in the Nepali press. A perfunctory condolence message for Rani Usharaje Rana, in the form of an advertisement, was inserted in Kantipur by the employees of Nepal Gas Industries.

We Nepalis are more adept at antagonising our friends. Waving black flags at George Fernandes and chanting slogans against Chandra Shekhar come more naturally to us. We do not make an attempt to understand that having friends in foreign countries is cheaper than hiring lobbyists, and often the friends are far more effective (and cheaper). This dedicated lady with nerves of steel was one of the symbols of resistance to Indira Gandhi's dreaded dictatorship under Emergency. Later, she played an important role in transforming an opposition party of the fringe into India's ruling party. Vijayaraje Scindia is no more, but her memory will continue to remind us of an old maxim: when the going gets tough, the tough get going.



Breaking the ice?: APHC leaders who are expected to visit Pakistan

is an integral part of India and lays claim on the Pakistan-control onethird. On the other hand, Islamabad says that India is occupying Kashmir by sheer force, disregarding the demand by the indigenous people for their right to self-

determination. Several Kashmiri militant organisations are carrying out armed struggle to free themselves from Indian control which according to New Delhi is fomented by Pakistan. Islamabad says it only gives moral and political supports to

at bilateral levels. India is opposed to involving third party in the discussions on Kashmir while Pakistan wants international mediation for a solution Bill Clinton as the president of the

United States paid a visit to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in March last year: he spent five days in India and a short visit to Pakistan. The duration of the visit to Pakistan was brief due to the presence of a military regime in power there. Initially, Clinton's visit in Pakistan

of jingoistic postures. In mid 1999, India and Pakistan came close to another war on Kashmir but international pressures mainly from the United States thwarted the possibility. Kargil conflict nose-dived their bitter ties taking them to one of the lowest ebbs. Bill Clinton, as the president,

made untiring efforts for a settlement of the Middle East crisis and continued his endeavour in that direction till last day in the office. He

region while accusing the other side

Killings on Highway 31

VEN in the perspective of the subcontinent's violent Northeast, which provides such fertile soil for militancy, there must be more than one eyebrow raised at the recent killing and injury of Bhutanese citizens by extremists on Indian soil just south of the border. On 20 and 21 December, a number of Bhutanese buses and cars were fired at indiscriminately by

surprised than hurt. For the last few years, the use of Bhutan's dense southern forest by

its innocents were painful for continue to populate and control the Bhutan, a country which rarely sees southern flanks of the Bhutanese violence of this kind, and certainly state. Added to that, the highly not on this scale. And as troubling armed and motivated militant for the authorities in Thimphu were groups have the ability to violently destabilise Bhutan, and that is what the murky reasons behind what seemed to all observers to have was most worrying about the been a pre-meditated exercise. In December killings. that sense, Thimphu was more Two prominent insurgency

groups from Assam are currently camped in the southern Bhutanese forests, driven there under pressure

stretch of dense forest, does not appeal to the Druk government. The militants, meanwhile, have been made to understand that they are not welcome on Bhutanese soil. The long sessions of the Tshongdu (National Assembly) in Thimphu has repeatedly declared that they have to be evicted, by force if necessary. The Bhutanese government has also been building a military force,

aggressive

If the killings were carried out by the BLT, as stated by the Bhutanese police, the situation is even more complex. It would seem that the Bhutanese authorities would have had to be rather certain before the Thimphu police was allowed to air its speculation. What adds to the intrigue is that the BLT is not in any way threatened by the Bhutanese at present, and is in fact presently aned with the Indian a

India

Hills are burning

gunmen, leading to the death of 13 and injury of many more.

The vehicles were using Highway 31, which is an important transportation artery linking the Northeast's economic hubs like Siliguri and Guwahati. For the Bhutanese, this road also provides a vital link between the country's eastern and western regions.

While it was intriguing that the incidents along Highway 31 did not attract the international media's attention, the killing and maiming of

Bodo militants fighting Assamese domination has been a major source of worry for King Jiame Singve Wangchuk and his subjects. The challenge has been to maintain the country's prized sovereignty by keeping the Indian Army away from operating within Bhutan, and yet keep New Delhi satisfied that everything is being done to flush out the militants.

Meanwhile, the Bodos can hardly be wished away, for they will

from Bangladesh when Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina and West Bengal's chief minister Jyoti Basu came to a painfully-negotiated understanding on the sharing of water from the Farraka Barrage. The Indian Army has made it quite clear that it would like to 'flush' the militants out of Bhutan. Thimphu, by the looks of it, has not agreed. A bloody conflict between the Indian

imply that the NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) is worried about Thimphu's pressure for a negotiated departure from the Drukvul forests. The open threats of military action emanating from the Tshongdu also certainly have them military and the militants, if it is at all

concerned. The killings may have been meant to provide a sampling of what awaits the Himalavan kingdom possible across the 300-kilometre if Thimphu does decide to get

ostensibly for this purpose

Thus, the tension has been Allegations by Assam's Chief

building, not only along the Duars but also between New Delhi and Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta Thimphu, quite uncharacteristic o the long-professed mutual understanding between the two capitals There are no obvious adversaries here but there are several potential motives. So who killed the Bhutanese? And why? This is high intrigue, and the only plausible theories remain unspoken

Courtesy: Himal of Nepal.

The GLO's hand has also been strengthened by the Kamtapuris. These two organisations feel that together if both can create a disturbing situation, it will compel the West Bengal government to meet their demands. As a result of which, both have established a network between them. And as things stand now, the situation can only deteriorate further.

SAKYASEN MITTRA in Kolkata

HE hills are burning and this time the fire looks like continuing. The shooting of the GNLF leader in Siliguri has set the time bomb ticking in that particular area of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Siliguri, And this time the battle lines are clear. It will be the GNLF versus the Gorkha Liberation Organisation. The latter is a breakaway faction from the GNLF and is being led by Chattre Subba, a person who once upon a time was one of the closest associates of Subhas Ghising.

But then why is the peace in the area being disturbed. Darjeeling has witnessed violent episodes in the late '80s and the early '90s when the GNLF fought for an autonomous body for the Gorkhas. When the Left Front Government finally relented. peace had returned to the area. Tourism, the main earning of the entire belt in North Bengal, had regained its lost glory. Now once more the violence has been ignited. Ghising and his convoy was attacked by the members of the GLO simply because they feel that he has betrayed the cause of the Gorkhas. The Gorkhas had wanted an autonomous independent state. However, that did not come about. Subba and his group of fanatical supporters had wanted a separate state called Gorkhaland which would not have any relation with the West Bengal government.

Since that did not come about. they separated from the GNLF. Subba had been lying low for the last couple of years. However, he had not been inactive. He had established contacts with militant groups both in Nagaland and Sikkim. He took the help of these groups to train the members of the GLO in guerrilla warfare method. Also he had slowly built up a base amongst some of the other tribes leaving in the area. And then he struck. Subba. under him now. has at least a minimum of 2,000 welltrained armed soldiers, who can carry out ambushes and attacks on even the highest security zones. The reason why the GLO attacked Ghising was they thought that if they could kill him, then the GNLF would suffer and be too shocked to take any counter-action. However, they had not accounted for the survival factor

Indrnaryan Pradhan, who is the second in command to Ghising at the moment has already promised severe retaliation. This GNLF leader, talking over the phone from Siliguri said on Feb 12, "The act that the GLO has committed is one of the most atrocious in the history of the Gorkha people. They have tried to kill a man, who stood for the cause of Gorkhaland. They will not be spared."

Pradhan, is already accumulating the die-hard Ghising fans in a bid to start an underground war against the GNLF. And the battle promises to be a bloody one. Simply because the armed cadres on both sides are adept at what one may call a 'hillfight'. The problem, however, lies elsewhere. Subba has now managed to place a number of his men in Ghising's entourage. People who could inform the attackers through their cell phones the change of route that had taken place on Saturday. The GNLF, will first have to flush out these men from their own ranks before they can think of achieving success against the GLO. Investigations have revealed some stark facts. They are 1) The attackers knew exactly in which car, Ghising was traveling; 2) Their first

target was to kill the drivers of all the

cars, so that Ghising would be

immobilised; 3) Two cell phones

recovered from the area show that

conversations had gone on

between the attackers and a couple of women who were close to Ghising on the day of the attack; 4) The dead attacker, in all probability was a person who belonged to the Nagas: 5) AK-47 rifles, grenades and molotov cocktails were used to launch the attack on the GNLF leader. Sophisticated weapons which the GLO have already declared that it possesses; and 6) That security in the area is not up to the standards. So it will be against such odds that the state government along with the GNLF, will have

to wage their war.

The Director General of Police Deepak Sanyal and the state urban development Minister. Ashok Bhattacharya are both in the area, supervising the entire "Operation Flush Out" at the moment. However, both have agreed that it is difficult to protect anybody against fanatics. Bhattacharya, talking over the phone from Siliguri said, "In this area, Ghising had the maximum security. But even then he was attacked. Both Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi probably have the best security network for themselves. But then they also did not survive the assassination attempts. So it just proves that everyone is vulnerable." At the time of writing this piece, 23 people have been taken into custody for questioning. However, other than asserting the fact that the GLO was behind the attack, the police have not been able to identify anybody. The GLO's hand has also been

strengthened by the Kamtapuris also. The two organisations feel that together if both can create a disturbng situation, it will compel the West Bengal government to meet their demands. As a result of which, both have established a network between them. And as things stand now, the situation can only deteriorate further.

Time for a clean break with the past

AMEER BHUTTO

Pakistan

T is a sad, unfortunate feature of Pakistani politics that within two or three years of being elected, every government reaches such a state of irredeemable incompetence. moral degeneration and bare faced corruption that it becomes an intolerable, stifling burden upon the people.

Eventually, in a funeral pyre of hopes and expectations, these popularly elected governments are, one way or another, booted out of power to the relief, indeed jubilation, of the same people who had voted them to power in the first place

There can be no doubt that successive elected governments in the post-Zia period have repeatedly and shamefully let down the people of this country. They betrayed the trust and confidence vested in them at the polls and not only did they fail miserably in conforming to and implementing their own manifestos, but they also failed to live up to the most basic principles of decency and propriety, indulging in all forms of corruption imaginable, political victimization, nepotism and selfaggrandizement. Besides, they have proved to be highly incompetent to solve urgent issues facing us. They must shoulder the blame for bringing the country to the present state of ruin. But, at the same time, an equal share of the blame must also fall upon the voters who habitually flock to failed and disgraced leaders and parties and bring them again to power.

Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have twice been dismissed from power on charges of corruption and maladministration, but have repeatedly crept back into power. The sins they have committed are not hidden from the eves of the people. The man in the street cannot plead ignorance of the political and moral crimes for which Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have been thrown out of power. Yet we have a propensity to demonstrate a great deal of generosity in forgiving their misdeeds of the past. We don't seem to realize that in being so generous and forgiving we are playing into the hands of these corrupt and self-serving politicians who never hesitate to barter away our future for the sake of their own self-advancement and self-aggrandizement

Alternative leadership cannot be thrust upon the people merely by issuing ordinances. Ordinances only succeed in creating puppets who last just as long as the ordinances last. The creation of a genuine alternative leadership is the sole ambit of the masses. Never before has Pakistan needed new leadership more than now. We need able people with clean

hands and a fresh and novel approach to lead us, if not to the promised land of milk and honey, then at least out of this swamp that we have been wallowing in for more than a decade to a point where we can see some hope in the future.

But the people of this country doggedly cling on to either Nawaz Sharif or Benazir Bhutto despite their disgraceful conduct, corruption, incompetence and epic failures and letdowns of the past. In any enlightened society, the conditions created by Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto would not only nave automatically thrown up a new breed of leaders but most likely would have led to an open revolt. But we the people of Pakistan, continue to silently acquiesce in the misdeeds of our elected leaders and mindlessly cling on to them while at the same time wailing bitter laments about this cancer that is steadily devouring us right before our eyes.

This silent acquiescence of the people sends out a loud but very sad, poignant message: that not only is it all right but ndeed it is preferable for political leaders to be corrupt, incometent and insincere, that moral decay and lack of any trace of ntegrity are, in fact, endearing qualities in political leaders while honesty, a sincere desire to earnestly serve the people and doing what is deemed to be right count for nothing. It is human nature to try to get away with whatever one can. The deterrence against corruption and other moral and legal misdeeds in politics is the fear of the people's verdict through the medium of direct adult franchise, where all misconduct can be punished

But if this crucial check upon the conduct of political leaders and parties becomes defunct, then only time-servers and selfseekers will come to the fore while capable, honest, sincere and dedicated people would find it hard to compete with them in such an environment. What is the incentive for honest and sincere politicians to remain honest and sincere if it counts for nothing and is not appreciated? If self-satisfaction and a clear conscience are the only motives for remaining honest and sincere, then one can honestly and sincerely serve the people through a number of other less hazardous professions like becoming a doctor, architect or lawyer. Why go through the grind of jails, political victimization and humiliation that is part of political life here and at the end of the day fail to even earn the respect and appreciation of the very people you are trying to serve?

There was a time when honesty and sincerity was appreciated and applauded. But now these qualities seem to have become a handicap in politics rather than an asset. Even historians and journalists, who shoulder the grave responsibility of recording current events for the benefit of generations to come, distort the truth and sing the praises of corrupt, incompetent leaders in their books, newspapers and journals, in order to extract personal benefits from these leaders.

With a long-term view to the future, the picture looks quite bleak. We have an entrenched ill-reputed leadership that is illprepared and ill-suited to lead. Then, we have a nation that is afraid to make a break with the past and adopt a new course under a new leadership, even though the past has brought nothing but pain and misery.

It remains to be seen how much success current well meaning efforts to drain the tainted old blood from the system through the process of legal accountability encounters. After all, how many politicians were disallowed to take part in politics by rejecting them at the polls. If they want someone to lead them then the verdicts of a hundred disqualification tribunals can form no obstacle. That is the way it should be in a democracy. The people cannot be told who is good and who is bad or whom they can vote for and whom they cannot vote for. The people are the judge and jury in democracy and must decide for themselves

While the country stands at the edge of a perilous precipice the people remain complacent. This sleeping Leviathan must awaken and take stock of reality before it is too late. The future lies in the hands of the people and it is so important for them to understand that they need not depend upon any historical necessity or any ties with the past to guide them in their choices for the future. A return to the past can only bring us more of the same agony and disgrace that has very nearly destroyed the social and political fabric of this country and wreaked havoc on the economy. A clean break with the past must be the order of the day.

If we are to move in a new direction, under new, vigorous leadership then the past and those responsible for making the past what it was must be buried once and for all. But time is running out. We must not sit around waiting for saviours and messiahs. None will come. We have to take the initiative ourselves. There is no other way. As Shakespeare wrote in his play. Julius Caesar, "Men at some time are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars. But in our selves, that we are underlings.

Courtesy: Dawn of Pakistan