

INDO-PAK

Why Vajpayee invited Musharraf

HARUN UR RASHID

In a surprise move India's Prime Minister Vajpayee invited Pakistan's military leader General Musharraf to New Delhi for talks in an effort to find peace in the region. Although the invitation does not specifically mention the issue of disputed territory of Kashmir, it seems logical to assume that the talks will primarily concentrate on restoring peace in Kashmir. Pakistan's Foreign Minister has responded positively to the invitation.

It is an admitted fact that Kashmir dispute is one of Asia's most intractable and long-running conflicts. Kashmir is the fracture running through Pakistan's relations with India. Former Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (now in exile in Saudi Arabia) at the SAARC summit in Colombo in July 1998 summed up its relations with India succinctly when he said, "Kashmir is the core issue. The sooner it is resolved it is better for the countries".

India has been trying hard to contain armed insurgency in Kashmir since it began in 1989. It is reported that more than 30,000 people have died in the Indian-administered Kashmir since then. India's unilateral cease-fire for a period of six months did not achieve any positive response from militant groups and India declared an end of it while inviting Pakistan's Chief Executive Musharraf to New Delhi.

The two-pronged move appears to demonstrate that while India wants to be seen as tough to the militants, it is eager to find a political settlement to restore peace in Kashmir. For India it appears a climb-down because it always said

that it would talk with Pakistan once it stopped backing separatist violence in Kashmir.

The question is: what prompted India to launch this move with Pakistan?

India seems to have failed to involve local political parties and separatists in the talks without involvement of Pakistan. Separat-

ism is diplomacy and the worst is buying bigger guns and India seems to have followed this dictum.

The 18-month-long India's 'non-communicado stance' with the military government in Pakistan since October 1999 did not appear to have gone anywhere. Rather Pakistan's military government has been dealing with major powers as

name of the game. India lags much behind in economic growth compared to China. India needs vigorous efforts to privatise and liberalise the economy particularly in the booming IT sector.

Peaceful environment is the need of the hour. Unless Kashmir dispute is settled, India is unlikely to achieve the goal. Furthermore there

and continues to be shunned by India, Pakistan-China relations are likely to be strengthened and the US may find great difficulty in curbing the influence of China in the region. The recent visit of the Chinese Prime Minister to Pakistan did not go unnoticed both in India and the US.

Finally Kashmir does not appear to be a matter only between India and Pakistan. It has a wider dimension and impacts on the region outside Kashmir. The region from Chechnya to Kashmir including Central Asia seems to be the hot bed of activities of militants and Kashmir attracts these elements as a magnet and they are willing to fight on behalf of Kashmiri militants for self-determination in Kashmir. There seems to be a call on India from Russia and other Central Asian countries (Kirghistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) to see that Kashmir issue does not fuel the activities of militants in the region.

Many suspect that India's move could be a political ploy dressed up to appease the jittery of outside powers. Stark choices now confront both nations. Perhaps the most important inhibiting factor is the perception that both remain stuck to their entrenched position on the Kashmir issue. The leaders of both countries must think beyond these positions, not deterred by timidity or anxiety. Whether the leaders are able to approach this task with commitment and imagination remains to be seen.

The author is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Text of General Pervez Musharraf's acceptance letter

This is the text of Pakistan CEO General Pervez Musharraf's reply to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's invitation to visit India for a Kashmir peace talks summit in Islamabad, May 29

"Excellency, Thank you for your letter of 24 May 2001.

I accept your invitation to me and my wife to visit India, with great pleasure.

"Pakistan has always sought to establish tension-free and cooperative relations with India, so that our two peoples may be able to devote their resources and ener-

gies to the task of economic and social development. We wish to see a stable and prosperous India at peace with its neighbours.

"At the beginning of the new century, our two countries must do their utmost to overcome the legacy of distrust and hostility, in order to build a brighter future for our peoples.

"The root cause of tension between our two countries is the unresolved Jammu and Kashmir dispute. I, therefore, look forward to sincere and candid discussions with you to resolve the issue of

Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

We are ready to discuss all other outstanding issues between our two countries as well.

"Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

General Pervez Musharraf
His Excellency Mr A B Vajpayee,
Prime Minister of Republic of India, New Delhi."

ists insisted on Islamabad's participation as a key condition of any dialogue while India was opposed. As a result, most separatist leaders had not responded positively to India's overtures.

There needs to be a circuit-breaker to end the diplomatic stalemate between India and Pakistan. India's move is likely to generate a round of talks between the two key players of South Asia. It seems talks are always good substitute even if they may not lead to fruitful conclusion.

Second there is a saying in diplomatic parlance that the best defence is friendship, the second

normally as possible. India's intention to put undemocratic government in Pakistan in isolation has failed.

Furthermore, India seems to realise that after the end of military rule in Pakistan, General Musharraf is not likely to fade away. Political architecture in Pakistan is being realigned in a way that General Musharraf may have a significant influence in decision-making process during the term of an elected government in the country.

Third, India seems to acknowledge that in the era of globalisation and modern technology, economic and social advancement is the

is a danger that India will be slipping behind China in terms of both an economic and military power to provide a counter-weight to China in Asia Pacific. There are important signposts to political as well as trading relationship in international global scene and India must seize the opportunity.

Fourth, the US appears to put diplomatic pressure on India to open a dialogue with Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute to remove tension in the area. This seems to be a strategic move of the US to enable US-India military cooperation to proceed to "contain" China. If Pakistan remains isolated

SRI LANKA

Is the gap too wide to bridge?

J. S. TISSAINAYAGAM in Colombo

HERE are three imperatives that dictate what type of constitutional arrangements will pave the way for a political settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Such constitutional arrangements where the rights and aspirations of the minorities, principally that of the Tamils' will be met, and the second class status that they are now accorded, despite cosmetic constitutional guarantees to the contrary, are removed.

The first imperative is that of the interpretation of the concept of 'unity in diversity.' Sri Lankan constitutions in the post-colonial era have laid emphasis on the concept of 'unity', while paying only lip service to the 'diversity' that is vital for any plural society to survive. All three constitutions that became supreme law in Sri Lanka in the independence period, whether they be of the Westminster system or the presidential system, ensured that the principle of 'majoritarianism' the majority community having a greater say in the affairs of state due to its numerical preponderance was exploited cynically and deliberately to override the aspirations of the minorities.

The second imperative is military the balance of military power on the ground. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been waging a war for a separate state in Sri Lanka. And any constitutional arrangement that will ensure a realistic political solution will be determined to a great degree by what military power is in the command of the Tigers to enforce their will to form a separate state.

Third is the international opinion, which influences greatly on the national affairs. It will decide that whether separation (that the LTTE till recently, and all the Tamil militant groups before 1987 were fighting for) or the unitary form of government (that successive Sri Lankan governments have been adamantly defending so as to exercise the majoritarian principle effectively) would eventually succeed in the country?

It is the two extreme positions that have given rise to various constitutional responses after 1983. They were preceded by the various political agreements between Sinhala leaders and Tamil moderates, which were attempts at devolution of power such as the Bandaranaike Chelvanayakam pact (1957), Bandaranaike Senanayke

pact (1968) and district development councils scheme (1981). They were all essentially attempts at resolving the ethnic problem within the unitary form of government, but which all came a cropper because of the intransigence of vocal sections of the Sinhala Buddhist majority.

In 1985 certain important principles that governed the Tamil struggle were formulated. They became known as the Thimphu principles that were to underpin Tamil demands for political institutions that met Tamil aspirations. The Thimphu principles are: Tamils are a nation, the northeast of Sri Lanka is the traditional homeland of the Tamils, the Tamils have a right to self-determination and that Tamils have the right to Sri Lankan citizenship.

Historically, the Tamil demand was for a federal system of government where Tamils could look after their own internal affairs. However, resistance by successive Sri Lankan governments has led to the fear whether even conventional federalism might be insufficient to ensure the physical security of the Tamils and control over land that they consider vital if their aspirations to self-determination are to be realised.

There is no single model of confederation. They differ from state to state. Switzerland is one such, while Belgium is another. The LTTE has shown an interest in this model that has been taken note of because it is a compromise from its earlier rigid stance of separation. Various bodies with direct and indirect links with the Tigers have come up with different models of confederation the contents of which have also been communicated with the Sri Lanka government.

The government however has been adamant against devolving power within a federal or confederal system. It has so far presented constitutional models where devolution is permitted only within a unitary system of governance. What is frightening is whether the gap between the political aspirations of the majority and minority communities might be too wide to bridge. If this persists, a political solution will remain elude and the conflict will continue to wreak havoc on the island even if it is possible to bring the fighting to a close.

This will mean that except for the loosest ties where subjects such as foreign affairs, external defence, post and monetary affairs, all other matters, including internal law and order and land alienation, will be controlled by the entities that form the confederation.

INDIA

Women who won and lost

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE recent state assembly elections in India have turned out to be triumphant for two women politicians who needed success to keep themselves as factors in country's politics. And the third woman cut a sorry figure to the extent that her own political career now stands at the crossroads. The results of the elections impacted positively on Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, whose party won in three of the five states and this has come as a big shot in the arm of Italian-born widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Jayaram Jalalitha in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu was fighting with a number of corruption cases as the former chief minister of the state but the outcome of the elections in Tamil Nadu has put her on the top. Not only she has become chief minister again after her AIMDK party won more than two-thirds seats but her opponents have little to criticise her on the issue that she has become chief minister despite the fact that she was barred from contesting the elections on the ground of being convicted in corruption cases. Her supporters say conviction in the cases is less important when a leader receives massive mandate from the people and it is in this

strength that Jayalitha was not hesitant to take up the top position. Indeed, her political career showed a tremendous upswing at a time when she needed it most.

Both Sonia and Jayalalitha are

Evidently, Sonia Gandhi was fighting an adverse situation since her leadership could not demonstrate any "magic touch" of the Nehru family. Sonia could not accomplish the expectations of her

party to win comfortably in Kerala, Assam and Pondicherry.

The victory in first two states has been viewed as big success as the party wrested powers from the allies of the centre-ruling BJP. In

for Mamta as the ruling Left Front won quite comfortably belying most assessments.

Mamta had earlier come out from the NDA at the centre led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP and she had also quit as a central minister. But this decision caused rupture within her Trinamool Congress as senior party leader Ajit Pant along with some other MPs resented the decision to quit the NDA and form alliance with Congress in West Bengal. The electoral alliance with Congress did not pay dividends and now both Congress and Trinamool are blaming each other for the debacle in polls. Mamta is faced with a difficult situation - whether to go back to the NDA or fighting it alone.

As such, the state assembly polls in India brought varied fortunes for three women politicians who had big stakes in the elections. The results have brightened the prospect of Sonia Gandhi for a bigger role in national politics and she can now eye for the prime minister's seat in the future. Jayalalitha is restricted within regional politics but is a big name in India. She has come out of the problematic cycle and is now comfortably sitting in driver's seat. Unfortunately for Mamta, she has an uncertain and bumpy road ahead and it remains to be seen how she negotiates this journey.



the biggest gainers of the May 10 elections as the results have put them in a vastly advantageous situation. Mrs. Gandhi, as the party chief, had so far failed to give any big success to Congress in the polls although she herself got elected comfortably in the last Lok Sabha elections from two constituencies - one from late Rajiv's traditional Amethi in the Uttar Pradesh and other from, lower house of parliament, which is the lowest by the traditional political organisation since India gained independence in 1947.



party men and people because she suffers from certain handicaps - the main being a foreigner who married Rajiv Gandhi while the two met in London. She was made the Congress president several years after Rajiv was killed in a bomb explosion in southern India in 1991. To many, Sonia was seen as a non-starter in politics - largely failing to inspire the party and making any tangible impact in national politics. But the recent elections have changed the impression. She campaigned actively and provided encouragement to the Congress that saw the



sharp contrast, the polls spell doom for firebrand politicians from West Bengal Mamta Banerjee who was expected by many to win the polls and become chief minister of a culturally and educationally advanced state like West Bengal. Mamta was confident of beating the leftists who have been ruling the state for last 24 years and were predicted to face tough challenge this time to retain power. Opinion polls and the press had foreseen that leftists may scrape through but a defeat was not unlikely. But the result came as big disappointment

INTERVIEW



Senior leader of the Hurriyat Conference **Abdul Ghani Lone** has welcomed India's offer to hold talks with General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's chief executive. Lone, along with Maulvi Umar Farooq, one of Kashmir's most prominent religious leaders, will be returning to Srinagar, where they will sit with other leaders of the Hurriyat Conference and issue a formal response to the moves made by the Indian government. "I hope sooner or later they will involve the Hurriyat Conference in order to make the talks successful," Lone told Onkar Singh in an interview in New Delhi with rediff.com. Excerpts:

The Government of India has withdrawn the cease-fire in Jammu & Kashmir. What is the thinking in the Hurriyat about this step?

Much has been made of the decision of the Indian government to withdraw the cease-fire. I would like to ask you, where was the cease-fire? For the first month, there was a cease-fire, but later it became a fraud. People were being harassed by the security forces. Citizens were being killed in custody. House were being looted. Women were being raped. From our point of view, since the cease-fire did not exist, its extension or withdrawal means nothing to us.

It was a big joke for the people of Kashmir. The government has done well to withdraw it.

The Government of India has extended an invitation to General Pervez Musharraf to hold talks on the Kashmir issue.

If they have called him to talk to the Indian government on the issue of resolving the Kashmir problem, it is a welcome step. Both India and Pakistan have been caught in their own web. Pakistan has been saying all along that it will support the people of Kashmir to exercise their right to self-determination. India on its part had put a condition that it would talk to Pakistan only when it [Pakistan] stops trans-border terrorism. If they hold talks, it is good for the two countries. But we have to see whether it is good for the people of Kashmir as well.

It will be important to note what decision they take for those who are the principal party to the dispute the people of Kashmir. A *nawabi* attitude in this matter will not do.

Reports say Pakistan wants the involvement of the Hurriyat Conference and Pak-occupied Kashmir leaders in the talks.

If this is true, this is a welcome move. We are not saying we should be involved in the talks from day one. Even at a later stage we could become a party, because only tripartite talks will find an amicable and permanent solution.

But the Government of India is firm on its stand that there will be no tripartite talks on Kashmir. Does it mean the talks might run into problems before they take off?

If that happens, it would be unfortunate. This would expose both India and Pakistan.

But there are people like Shabir Shah and Hashim Qureshi who are also looking for an opportunity to have their share in the cake.

The Hurriyat Conference represents the wishes and aspirations of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. Nobody else can claim to represent the people of the state.

But Farooq Abdullah wants to hold elections in the state. If he does that, will you participate?

We are not running away from elections. But what is the point of having a wooden cat? If we participate in the election, will Farooq [Abdullah] let us win? He will rig the election like he did in 1996. He wants to install his son as the chief minister of the state and then become president of India.

Is it correct that the Hurriyat wanted Jaswant Singh as the interlocutor instead of K C Pant?

We wanted a man of stature to be the interlocutor. Since Jaswant Singh as foreign minister had that standing, we thought it would be better if he became the negotiator. But instead the Government of India chose K C Pant.

Is it true that someone had promised you that after the Government of India announced a unilateral cease-fire, if you welcomed the move, Vajpayee would invite the Hurriyat leaders for a cup of tea?

This was not said in so many words, but a suggestion was made that Prime Minister Vajpayee would invite us for a cup of tea after he announced a unilateral cease-fire.

The talks between the Government of India and Naga insurgent leaders have been going on for years now. If the talks between India and Pakistan do start, how long do you think it will take to conclude?

What is going on in Nagaland is of no interest to us. We are interested in a solution to the problem of Jammu & Kashmir. Of course negotiations take time. No time frame can be fixed for that.

Do you think there will be a reduction in violence once talks between India and Pakistan begin?

There are two key parties to the dispute. I am sure if they want violence can be reduced substantially.

NEPAL

To whom it may concern

Destroying is easy. Harder, and more important, is building a vision for the future, says Paul D. Grossman

SINCE my first visit to Nepal in 1991 I have not seen a level of discontent with the current political and social environment as I am seeing in the last year and especially the last six months. In the last month alone I have seen bands which closed traffic and the entire city, and attacks on schools, individuals and police. There appears to be an overwhelming need, often competitive, to demonstrate and consolidate power among political groups in a negative and destructive way. Obviously, there is overwhelming anger and frustration, but these are negative ways of dealing with this: strikes and bandhs which demonstrate no positive vision, no effort, and result in... nothing.

Attacks which are violent and destructive prove that the acting parties are frustrated and have gained some power, but that is all. Strikes affect all people, but considering that the communist groups' greatest support comes from rural areas and the poor who live hand to mouth as it is, these actions have a profound effect on those they are intended to help. Being unable to work for one day brings them one day closer to disaster. Crippling the economy is not a viable method of bringing the current administration to its knees. Members of the govern-

ment are the least likely to be affected while members of the police force, for example, who are not rich or powerful and likely have taken a dangerous job to support their families, will be affected greatly.

A viable political movement must act according to their values and in a manner which demonstrates something about their ability to use power. It is about character. It is about "walking your talk", brothers and sisters. Imagine a political group calling a new kind of bandh as an act of positive change: cleaning up Kathmandu's streets, a music concert in which the proceeds benefit some worthy group or area, repainting schools, planting gardens, a bicycle repair workshop, a day of repairing auto rickshaws and motorcycles to make them less polluting. Such actions are not concessions to the government, they are acts of leadership and civic mindedness. A true leader is one who sees what needs to be done and does it, one who does not wait for conditions to be perfect or expects it to be easy, or waits for others to begin first.

It may be true that agents of meaningful change must necessarily begin with demonstrations of discontent and expressions of frustration. But such things are

merely an early stage. After that, organisations must move ahead with the far harder work of creating something new. The power achieved is far more solid and profound. Anger is a deep yet fleeting emotion, but the forces that drive positive change are vision, will-power and tenacity, elements of character, not temporal emotions like anger or frustration.

There has never been a better opportunity for political parties to demonstrate positive political will and leadership. No one wants Nepal to become a blank spot on the tourist map like Kashmir, or be like Bangladesh where too-frequent bandhs have become a barrier to foreign investment. But that may be the future. I have no interest in which movements gain power and lead this country; only in that whoever does so leads Nepal down a positive path in accordance with their values and with the legitimate support of their constituents. We need leadership based on a persuasive vision for the future, not on fear, violence, coercion, destruction and short-term thinking.

This piece first appeared in this week's Nepali Times.

