

TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA

Farewell to unrest

EKRAM KABIR

LET'S LOOK AT a few news items in some of the regional papers of October 9.

...Two Hizb-ul-Mujahideen terrorists, including a Pakistani mercenary, were killed in an encounter in Devar, Kupwara district, on October 8.

...One person was killed and 26 more were injured in clashes between police and Taliban supporters in Quetta, on October 8. Pakistani news reports said other parts of the province, too, witnessed fierce clashes and demonstrations.

...The Sri Lankan Army said, on October 8, that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels killed a government soldier in a grenade attack near the 126th milepost, some 9km north west of Valachchenai. Meanwhile, pro-Tamil sources said security forces arrested three persons, a woman and her two sons, in Cheddikulam, south west of Vavuniya, on October 8, suspecting that they were having links with the LTTE.

...According to media reports, on October 8, two United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) terrorists surrendered to the Jorhat district police chief. According to reports, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) terrorists trained them.

If this is a partial scenario exiting in some of the countries of South Asia, then it's obvious that this region is one of the most terrorist ridden spots in the world. Of course some elements have been added after the terrorist attack in the United States. However, our security scenario is basically affected by internal security problems of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

Growing civil strife, ethnic conflicts and religious extremism are affecting all the countries in South Asia in varying degrees. The escalation of armed conflict in Sri Lanka, the rise of Islamic extremism in Bangladesh, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, the proliferation of small arms and the menace of drug trafficking and narco-terrorism, are all causes of concern.

India holds Pakistan responsible for much of its internal conflicts. The year 2000 witnessed increasing involvement of Pakistan-based organisations in terrorist activities, not only in Jammu and Kashmir, but in other parts of the country as well. India has consistently maintained that it would not be possible to have any negotiations with Pakistan until the latter stops support to trans-border terrorism.

Ethnic insurgencies in at least four States in India's northeast Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura persist at levels of low intensity wars. Left-wing extremism in Andhra Pradesh and in combination with caste wars in Bihar, are also growing concerns. Ample supplies of sophisticated weapons and enabling technologies have increased fatalities in local confrontations to disturbing levels, and there is a pattern of proliferation that is destabilising all areas contiguous to existing conflicts.

Ethnic violence continues unabated in Sri Lanka. The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels continued their terror and intimidation tactics in 2000. Earlier in the year Sri Lankan government faced some military reverses after the LTTE threatened to capture Jaffna peninsula in June. However, with new military hardware procured from several countries, the Sri Lankan

troops managed to halt the LTTE advance. Reportedly, the rebel outfit lost 1,742 cadres during the year under review including 253 suicide cadres. A significant number of the killed cadres are women and children.

The Maoist insurgency waged by left-wing extremist groups continues unabated for the fifth consecutive year in Nepal. During this period, an estimated 1,500 people have been killed in insurgency related violence. Maoist insurgents are reported to be running a parallel government in some districts. A major consequence of the insurgency was the resignation of the then Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai in June 2000. Some informal contacts were initiated between government representatives and the Maoists in October, but these proved to be futile after the Government rejected Maoist preconditions for holding talks.

The issues of Bhutanese of Nepalese origin who are now in Nepalese refugee camps, the activities of "Ngolops" (armed Nepali dissidents), and the theft of "Nangtens" (priceless artefacts) persist in Bhutan. The "Ngolops" attempted to hold anti-government demonstrations in border towns like Phuentsholing and camps in Nepal. The government contends that these were attempts to sow seeds of discord within the country. Bhutan's problems are compounded by Indian terrorist groups operating from its soil, and these have, moreover, now attacked Bhutanese citizens (in December 2000). These outfits had entered Bhutan in 1992 following army operations against them in the Indian state of Assam. Public opinion within Bhutan on the issue of dealing with Indian terrorists is varied. While one section

argues that India has the responsibility to solve the problem, another section, the nationalists, strongly contends that Bhutan should not involve any external power in matters relating to national security.

The year 2000 was largely peaceful in Bangladesh. But the first half of 2001 saw a resurgence of violence with separate bomb blasts almost all over the country. Resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and their alleged external links have emerged as a threat for Bangladesh's internal security.

Analysts say that internal security problems in South Asia and their ramifications for regional security have been influenced by a host of international and internal factors. The destabilisation of cold war equations and the haphazard emergence of a variety of conflicting international 'strategic interests', the acquisition of nuclear weapons by both India and Pakistan, and a paradigm shift in the nature of international conflict have all exacerbated tensions here in this region.

But can South Asian countries really afford to live in this state of affairs? At least when majority of the peoples here fighting to overcome poverty. Anybody who cares for the region will not wait a second to say 'no'. Since solutions to many of these crises depend on strategies formulated by the big powers, South Asian leaders and policy makers must remember that they should refrain from being used in serving others' interests. If we even unknowingly serve others' interests, it will only make us weaker. Therefore, there must be a united effort among all the South Asian countries to end the unrest all over the region.

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INTERVIEW

India and Pakistan see their relations with the US as a zero sum game'

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The best place to start is ask whether you foresee any substantial reorientation of American policy vis-à-vis the South Asian region after the events of September 11.

No. What has happened is that the policies that were already in train are being accelerated. For example, efforts are being made to restore more normal relations with Pakistan. The Indians, of course, feel left out, but I don't think that any of this will undercut the larger economic, political and strategic relationship that has been established with India.

One of the setbacks for India is that it has once again been equated with Pakistan, what with the simultaneous lifting of the nuclear test sanctions. So India's patient lobbying against sanctions has succeeded - but rather inadvertently!

Well, one of the problems faced by America in dealing with South Asia is that both India and Pakistan see their relations with the US as a zero sum game vis-à-vis the other. This is epitomised in the use of the word "tilt" - if we tilt toward one, then we implicitly tilt away from the other. This has not been American policy for a long time, even though it is a widely-held South Asian view. All I have to say is that this is a misperception - there will be no zero sum game unless one or the other South Asian country insists that we see things in the region the way they do, or one or the other concludes that the US is an implacable enemy. Fortunately, the leadership in both States seem to have a more realistic grasp of America's diverse regional interests and its priorities.

Moving on, let's consider the rapid changes in US-Pakistan relations. There have been conflicting signals: some Congresspersons have argued for greater economic aid, while others have criticised its role in supporting terrorism. How do you categorise this new phase of US-Pak relations? We are still not sure what sort of cooperation we will get from Pakistan. There are some big issues that remain - one would be the degree of support that they offer the United States; another would be whether rolling up their relationship with the Taliban will also extend to those *jehadi* groups that are oriented toward Kashmir. The latter, of course, is of great importance to the Indians. I also think that the Pakistanis will try and extract from us as good a deal as they can, but they are very suspicious of the United States - they are persuaded that we have let them down in the past and might do it again.

Would you like to elaborate on something that you recently said: "Pakistan is part of the solution, just as it is part of the problem."

Pakistan has pursued a quasi-imperial policy in Afghanistan, pushing toward Central Asia. They have been doing that since the late 1980s. They thought that they beat the Soviets, and that the Indians would also fall. Then they also opened a new front in Kashmir, which the Indians made possible through their mishandling of the situation. For a weak country that's had tremendous political instability, and whose economy is in shambles, this is simply imperial overreach. To the degree that Pakistan pursues such grandiose objectives, employing various *jehadis* in their service, they will remain part of the problem. To the degree that they work with us to cleanse Afghanistan of these groups, they are part of the solution. Frankly, because of their location, they have to be part of the solution. And because of their domestic weakness, they don't have much choice, except do the right thing. They'll benefit in the long run.

I think it is hard for anyone to ignore the link between sections of the Pakistani State and the Taliban.

There is a link - there has always been one. If we agree on that, how then do you think America will cope with the backlash that emerges from within the Pakistani State against American intervention? We have already seen, for example, anti-America demonstrations throughout Pakistan. What's more, we also know that certain retired Pakistan Army officers were instrumental in forming the Taliban...

I think this is Pakistan's problem, but one they can manage. Pakistanis, especially in the military, have to decide what sort of Pakistan they want to have in the future. Is it going to be a State that supports outlaws, and becomes identified with those outlaws, or does it want to become a State that moves to political openness and stops using *jehadis* as an instrument of their diplomacy? The problem is that the Pakistanis see the *jehadis* as the only way to get Indians to the negotiating table.

I think the Pakistanis will back off in Afghanistan, as it is clearly very dangerous for them to support radical Muslim groups there. But will they find it in their interest to stop supporting *jehadis* and terrorist groups in Kashmir? Most modern westernised Pakistanis are worried about a backlash in Pakistan itself, and even some of the military are worried about this. So, I don't think the question is one of America pressuring the Pakistanis, but one of Pakistan making the right decisions about the future of their own country. Does this argument suggest that the number of *mujahideen* in Kashmir will increase, as they are diverted from locations in Afghanistan?

India can take care of itself. It is a major country, and it is five times the size of Pakistan. I do think that India will find ways of defending itself against these threats. In any case, if the camps are closed down in Afghanistan, this reduces the number of "guest terrorists", who can be funneled into Kashmir. However, the situation does run a risk of an escalation to a larger war.

New Delhi does not want the US to be involved in the Kashmir issue. It rejects any American role. Although it insists we pressure the Pakistanis, India seems unwilling to even discuss any concessions themselves. This is a formula for perpetual conflict, and it means that this issue will drain both India and Pakistan for another five decades. If that is India's policy, I don't think the US should get involved in Kashmir, and the Indians will have to deal with the ebb and flow of such visitors in their own way. But so far, I have not seen any coherent Indian political or military strategy that does not run great risks. On the contrary, I would argue that if anything, we have not seen any Pakistani political or military strategy that does not run great risks. Which country in a cold war situation attempts anything like Kargil? Surely you are being one-sided in your condemnation?

No. I've written at length on the many strategic mistakes committed by Pakistan. In my most recent book, *India: Emerging Power*, I do provide an assessment of the overall success (or failure) of India's use of military power - it is a mixed record. But this shouldn't be seen as a competition as to who is worse! I was suggesting an analogy between Iraqi attacks, and the *mujahideen* trained in Afghanistan. I see your point but I don't think we can get involved in that manner in South Asian politics to be able to make that distinction and enforce it. I think, at best, we can urge that Pakistanis to cease in their support for "guests" (rather than Kashmiri) militants. Indians have told me



that they would be able to know if this happens. But the problem is that the Pakistanis will ask: why are we easing the pressure on India, when their negotiating policy is that all of Kashmir belongs to India? I think there are a lot of things that the Indians can do, but so far, I haven't seen any willingness to address this argument.

Then again, why should India, or indeed the West, continue to believe this doomsday scenario? If anything, the West's intransigence is breeding extremism in India, quite of the sort that we are also seeing in Israel. So, is it not time for the international community to come down on one side of the fence?

Many countries use this argument. Because there are some radical Palestinians, or Israelis, should we only support one or the other? In Pakistan's case, there are plenty of sensible people, who do not want to live in a permanent state of war with India, nor do they want to end military rule forever. These are India's (and America's) "natural allies" in building a Pakistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbours. However, many of these same people believe strongly that India is an overbearing and abusive neighbour that has acted unjustly in Kashmir. They are also angry with the United States for having let Pakistan down many times.

My view is that the dangers of a war between the two States, combined with the existence of reasonable people, who are willing to compromise, makes it imperative that the two States begin the dialogue begun at Shimla, Lahore, and Agra should point the way forward, not Kargil, 1971, nuclear threats, or terror bombings.

Do you see India and America working more closely on terrorism hereafter? There has been much frustration in India over the conflicting signals emerging from America on the issue of joint action against groups that have close links with Al-Qaida.

This is a big question. The Indians can't really offer much to the US by way of their intelligence capabilities, which are focused primarily on groups that have attacked India. Furthermore, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has (at last) been allowed to operate in Delhi, and I assume that the two States are sharing intelligence and doing other things. Nevertheless, I think we know what kind of groups these are, and I personally think they should be put on the banned list. While this would certainly benefit the Indians, there is little that the Indians can do in return for us on the issue of terrorism. Few people remember, as you recently remarked at a conference, that the US welcomed the Taliban when it first appeared on the scene, supported almost entirely by Pakistan. Isn't it time for the US to atone its own sins of commission and omission?

Well, we only welcomed the Taliban until they made apparent that they were demonstrably primitive in their outlook, and when they began to house Osama bin Laden and his group. Our real mistake was in pulling out of Afghanistan after the Soviets left, and leaving Pakistan as the dominant power. Their imperial ambitions got them into trouble, and we have all paid the price.

What are the long-term solutions to the problems of Afghanistan? Do we support replacement of the Taliban by an Afghan king, by a straggly Northern Alliance, or a United Nations (UN) mandate?

Many US specialists on Afghanistan and Central Asia have argued over the past 10 years for an international meeting, probably UN-sponsored, that would bring as many Afghan factions together as possible (including non-radical Taliban elements), to form a government that would be non-threatening to its neighbours, and would be able to accept relief and reconstruction assistance. I think India can be of great help here if it supports such an international framework for the neutralisation of Afghanistan, and makes it clear that it would not seek to have an advantageous position in that neutral Afghanistan. This threat of Indian encirclement is the primary fear of Pakistani strategists who have dominated this policy for years. I believe this Pakistani fear is overblown, though India could help by putting these fears to rest.

A few US Congresspersons have spoken of supporting the Afghan king's attempt to summon a "loya jirga" or tribal council meeting. However, can we really expect the warring factions to maintain any sort of stability within Afghanistan?

Loya jirga is the traditional way that the Afghans have dealt with the problem of balancing the interests of Afghan tribes. You establish a weak government at the center, and the tribal leaders would dominate their own regions. In this case, the traditional pattern produced a weak Afghanistan that had some degree of internal conflict, but which was not a threat to its neighbours.

Finally, let me ask you about what you think will happen to the US' relationship with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Will we see pressure brought upon those who are guilty of funding the Taliban?

I would personally like to see that but unfortunately those people who have done a lot of oil business with the Saudis and who see energy security as a very high priority dominate the current Administration. I hope that we will put a lot more pressure on the Saudis and the UAE who lavishly supported these groups in Pakistan (and in India) and use charitable organisations as a front for vicious propaganda. Once again I would say that these States are part of the problem and also part of the solution.

ELECTIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

Democracy: better late than never

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY AND EKRAM KABIR

ELECTIONS arouse great enthusiasm in South Asian countries. Elections raise hope for establishing democracy. In fact, South Asia is the most important region among the developing countries as far as the practice of democracy is concerned because most of the countries here have representative governments. Certainly, India, the largest democracy in the world, is in the forefront of nurturing democratic institutions, while Bangladesh too is marching confidently towards the goal of consolidating democracy despite the fact that the system of rule by popular mandate has intermittently been obstructed here since the country's independence. Bangladesh's just-concluded elections, which have been described by international and domestic elections observers as broadly free and fair barring some stray incidents, will hopefully further invigorate and embellish the noble features of democracy not only in our country but in South Asia.

Democracy usually goes through a process but is often weakened when this process is hindered. Bangladesh is a clear case where the pattern of rule by people's mandate has suffered body blows several times since 1971. One-party rule, martial law, quasi-military governments etc., queered the pitch of democracy which finally found a sound shape following the national elections in 1991 that gave a truly representative government in the country. This was followed by 1996 polls and again this year on October 1 - and all three took place under non-political neutral governments. The conduct of the elections was generally acclaimed by the outside world as free and fair despite allegations of rigging and malpractices by the losing parties. True, there might have been some cases of wrong doings and irregularities but there is no denying that the elections were largely credible in 1991, 1996 and 2001.

India has been practising democracy since its independence in 1947 but this cannot be said that the path has always been without obstacles. No doubt, unlike Pakistan, India has consistently remained faithful to democratic governments but occasional political instability has contributed adversely to the development of representative government there. For many years New Delhi saw political stability as the Congress party that was at the vanguard of the freedom movement ruled the country with considerable degree of political stability. Strong leadership also helps to grow political stability which in turn also helps economic and social development of a nation. However, this pattern did not remain unaltered because the Congress in the late-70s failed to remain in power giving way to the culture of coalition governments as no single party other than the Congress was in a position to replace it in the helm and hence was the need for several parties coming together to form a government. Over the years, this coalition culture has developed a pattern in India and the present government headed by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is also a rainbow coalition of as many as 21

parties ranging from large Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with nearly 200 seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha to smaller regional political organisation with as low as five seats in the house. This was necessary to muster support of 272 seats which alone can give the right of a political party or alliance to rule the nation.

But this culture of several parties forming a government often causes political instability as the government remains weak being under strain of different and at times divergent views of the coalition partners. In the process, the governments collapsed several times much before the expiry of the term. A government even lasted for only 13 days because it could not win the no-confidence motion in the house after coming to power. Incidentally, that government, too, was headed by Vajpayee, who is heading an Indian government for the third time.

But this has to be admitted that political crises created by instability of the governments triggering fluid situation and also leading to snap elections have been resolved democratic procedures incorporated in the Constitution. Although this has

undoubtedly contributed negatively to the objectives of strengthening democracy but what has been laudable that no undemocratic rule crept in taking the advantage of the unstable political flux. However, this cannot be overlooked that in a coalition government smaller parties often seek to call shots and play a role highly disproportionate to size and strength. This tendency unfortunately affects the policies of larger parties which secure bigger mandate of the people. Bigger parties at times succumb to the pressures for the simple reason to remain in power because the existence of the government precariously rests on the supports of these tiny organisations. Such instances were galore in India when regional or smaller parties delivered threats of pulling out of the government. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) collapsed because AIADMK of Tamil Nadu led by Jayalalitha Jayaram withdrew its support. Likewise, Mamta Banerjee of West Bengal with eight to nine members of her Trinamool Congress blew hot and cold in the Vajpayee government and finally quit before the last state assembly polls in West Bengal. But her scheme of things did not work and she returned to the NDA fold but this time only after herself begging to rejoin the ruling coalition. By contrast, massive mandate in democracy at times can also cause problems towards good governance since the vastness of the verdict of the people makes a political party or alliance over-zealous in performance in the sense that it develops a penchant of over-confidence and consequently, self-complacency creeps in. However, mature and prudent leadership uses such mandate for true good governance since this helps to take bold decisions as

no spectres of instability to the governments exist. It largely depends on the leadership how to make best use of crushing defeats over the opponents in elections for bettering administration and pursuing effective welfare-oriented programme rather than only basking in the glory of great success. Hopefully, the big mandate that has been achieved in the just-concluded polls in Bangladesh would encourage those at the helm to act against terrorism, corruption and abuse of powers which were largely seen by the commentators and observers as main factors for the electoral setbacks for the immediate past government. Sri Lanka elects representatives to parliament from multi-member districts through a proportional preferential election system. Voters select a party on the ballot, then rank order their top three preferences on the party's candidate list. Introduced in 1977, this system replaced a British-style "first past the post" (FPTP) system in which candidates competed individually to represent smaller single-member constituencies. Some analysts believe that the

introduction of this system has led to an increase in election-related violence, and a decrease in the connection and accountability of representatives to their constituencies. In response to this concern, the People's Alliance was supposed to draft a proposal to amend the Constitution and replace the current system with a German-style system that would elect some representatives through FPTP single-member constituencies, and others proportionally from a national list. As the focus shifted from the battlefield to ballot papers, attention in Sri Lanka was on the issues and problems that dominated the October 2000 parliamentary elections. The dominating issue in the last election in Sri Lanka was the new Constitution Bill. The opposition had lost no time in branding it as a "sell out" to the minorities. Buddhist monks were mobilising the Sinhala rural voters who are the traditional vote banks. The campaign was being launched equating "voting for ruling People's Alliance is endorsing the new Constitution". The government of President Kumaratunga was accused of failing to bring peace within "six months" as promised in 1994. The PA was trying to convince the electorate that the reform package is the only way to bring peace. To Kumaratunga, "as long as injustices are caused to Tamils and Muslims, they will join hands with people like Probhakaran for their own liberation." But the point is, if the President was sincere about the package to bring peace, why did she go in for an alliance with the hardliner Sinhalese party, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, which is bitterly opposed to the new Bill? Does this not show that the PA crave for political power rather than the common interest? Two problems confronted the elections are: election-related violence

and the threat of LTTE attack. Buddhist monks said "everybody knows who is behind the violence" pointing to the government. Large-scale violence and rigging in the provincial polls in 1999 was still fresh in people's memory. Kumaratunga's re-haul of security measures was certainly a right step. It was her responsibility to allay the fears of the opposition and people to ensure free and fair polls. The voters could also play a major role in this regard. Irrespective of party affiliations, they rejected candidates who perpetrated violence to gain victory. The issues were carefully chosen to cut the opposing parties as much rather than on the priority for public debate. They revealed "democratic immaturity" in the island which once stood out as a "model of democracy in the third world". On the other hand the third general elections to the parliament in Nepal held in 1999 has decisively ended the coalition politics of the past five years and provided a clear majority to the National Congress (NC). The results of the elections were significant because they negated all predictions of a hung parliament.

What Pakistan needs is a system of checks and balances, with its associated institutions. Democracy itself may not be part of this equation. Democracy is often unpalatable with countries like Pakistan. The real question to ask is when will Pakistan get an effective system of checks and balances? Democracy can be made consolidated in South Asia only when the mandate of the people is respected and honoured with making sincere efforts to implement the electoral promises that are made to win votes. Arguably, it is understandable that because of resource constraints and other problems it proves to be a difficult task to fully fulfil such pledges incorporated in the manifesto.

The Nepal Congress was marked by inner party squabbling that had on more than one occasion brought down its government. With power clashes taking up most of the leaders' attention and time, very little has been done by the NC, whenever it was in power, for the welfare of the people. Since it had such a poor image, many analysts did not expect the NC to fare better in the election. Political analysts predicted a hung parliament. Though not foreseen, NC's poll victory was attributed to a few reasons. Firstly, the unpleasant coalition experience appears to have prompted the Nepalese to vote decisively for stability; if the NC managed a comfortable majority it has to do with this factor. Considering the many splintered parties around it was the only one that managed to display an external unity despite having leaders with disparate views. Notwithstanding their differences, both Bhattarai and Koirala reconciled them. Koirala's pre-arrival announcement that K. P. Bhattarai would be the PM if NC won proved to be a clever strategy. It helped the NC to project a united front.

On another corner of the region, Parvez Musharraf - who seized power in a 1999 - has announced a timetable for general elections next year. General Musharraf, who made himself president in June this year, announced that provincial and federal elections would be held starting on 1 October 2002. The Pakistani leader said the election would cap a democratisation process during which, according to his plan, federal and local institutions would be rebuilt. But it is not yet clear what role General Musharraf will play in the new democracy, but the planned constitutional amendments might allow him and the army a wider role.

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