

## PAKISTAN

## Politics in quiescent mode

MB NAQVI writes from Karachi

TALK about the restoration of democracy and 'roadmap' to it seem to have subsided. Superficially, the national politics seems to comprise no more than the ongoing struggle between pro- and anti-Taliban lobbies; Pakistan's domestic politics is certainly in a quiescent mode. Or is it?

One thing is for sure: general Pervez Musharraf, holding all the offices that exercise power - the President, Chief Executive and Chief of Army Staff - is everywhere. He is the central figure of international politics today, with western heads of state or government praying for his safety and stability every night before going to sleep. The Pakistani media is feverishly projecting him 25 out of 24 hours, inviting politicians of all types to declare how right the general was in ditching Taliban and joining up with the Americans. So, is all opposition politics dead?

The answer is not quite so. The self-exiled Pakistan Peoples Party Chief Benazir Bhutto is continuously emphasizing that the generals rule needs to be strengthened by mainstream parties of Pakistan. Musharraf alone cannot meet all the challenges facing Pakistan. What she means is: give guarantees for my safe return to play a political role in support of the general - naturally with the General forming some sort of a national government. The deal is said to be ready to be signed and delivered except for one hitch. Musharraf does not want her to be allowed in. He has repeated many times that he does not wish to see Benazir and Nawaz Sharif playing any political role in the country. He is loath to let her come in and play politics.

Similarly a neatly deal was cut with the Pakistan Muslim League the biggest component of the Parliament, more than a year ago. But there were several hitches that forced Musharraf to soldier on alone. These included the demand for forcibly-exiled Nawaz Sharif's return, ousted PM's ability to retain the loyalty of 35 to 40 MPs out of 133 and many Senators and the dissension within the party having made it a laughing stock.

A hitch of hitches was the uncertainty inherent in the origi-

nal deal with the PML that was meant to consecrate and sanctify Musharraf through normal channel of Parliament amending the constitution. The general did not prefer the political process nor did he trust it could be done. So he has kept the Muslim Leaguers on tenterhooks through the implied promise of taking them in the government in some fashion one of these days.

The required deal now is on a wholly different basis: the General's position has been immensely strengthened by his coming under the patronage of George W. Bush and Tony Blair. Bush is pledged to work for stabilizing the Musharraf presidency. It means that Musharraf has to stay in power and all the western froth about democracy was so much wind.

Indeed, it does look as if the Americans wanted assurances that Musharraf would stay and not quit soon. That is how the recent statement made by Musharraf to American journalists should be interpreted as assuring the White House and White Hall. Said he: 'I will certainly hold elections to the Provincial and National Assemblies in October 2002 and restore democracy. But I will remain President for as long as I can see'. So, that is that.

What it translates into is the Army's takeover in October 1999 was a major event; it was not intended to be a temporary deviation. The Army wanted to resume its role of pre-eminence in Pakistan politics. There may be a democracy but it should be guided and controlled by it. Indeed what kind of a fish the restored democracy in October 2002 will be should now be known:

Musharraf's restored democracy will be a replay of the experiment made by Gen. Ziaul Haque in 1985, when he forced a Parliament nominated by himself to amend the Constitution to make him an all-powerful President with authority to dismiss the Cabinet, Parliament and Provincial Assemblies at will. That was known as the 8th amendment to the much mauled and distorted 'Permanent Constitution'. Five governments were sacked by two Presidents but always to please the Army Chief of the day. The last PM was overthrown

and not dismissed because he was trying to subjugate the Army. Army this time round would make sure that no such efforts is again made.

So what is the pother about? It is certainly not about restoring true democracy. The General, possibly on the advice of his civilian experts and foreign friends, wishes to make his one-man government broader based by associating some politicians as ministers under himself. Which ministers are to be chosen? There is always a long line of small time politicians, sometimes with one or two MPs in tow. The real game is to have major politicians from the mainstream parties that had so many seats in the Parliament that was.

Out of main parties, Muslim League offers not much difficulty, except that the prestige of the Like Minded leaders, Muslim Leaguers who are friends of the General, has plummeted as a result of press comments.

PPP, the next largest party, has refused to cooperate unless its Chiefs Benazir is given amnesty from arrest. That can only vex the General. The third largest is MQM. It is intensely disliked by the Army and is suspected of becoming pro-India in times of Crisis. Then, there is the bad habit of politicians to insist on some, just some, conditions like requiring words of commitment to restoring democracy and things like that. This somehow the General has not been firm up an overall arrangement, although both sides - the General and these mainstream politicians - appear to agree on the principles and the outside parameters of a national goal.

For the General it is all a secondary matter. Generals are always supremely self-confident and think they can handle any situation. Musharraf too thinks that even if he cannot sew it up, so what; everything will still be OK. Politicians, on the other hand, tend to paint gloomy and dangerous scenarios about polarisations and Crises in the country. Perhaps a government comprising PPP and PML Ministers, in addition to one or two other parties may yet be on the road in a month or so, if General Musharraf finds time to tie up the loose ends.

Naqvi is a Pakistani columnist.

## SRI LANKA

## Negotiations with the LTTE

K. GODAGE in Colombo

THE UNP manifesto refers to the ethnic issue only after an extensive reference to the economy. No doubt, considering that the economy is indeed in shambles it should be given the importance it deserves but by the same measure it should have referred to the 'Peace Process' as a priority issue, but the mention seems to be in passing, after references to 'Foreign employment', 'Youth Development', 'Women's Rights etc, etc. This was the same mistake that President Jayewardene made. He too put the emphasis on the economy and neglected this fundamental issue. Mr. W may perhaps have been told by his advisors that the 'people' are not interested in the ethnic problem. He may learn that the truth is otherwise, if he makes a wrong decision on that issue.

As for the PA they could not possibly have any new ideas on the issue. Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe has been at pains to point out that the UNP has no agreement with the LTTE. This may be strictly speaking, true - he has also stated that he would immediately enter into negotiations with the LTTE, (we have no quarrel with that but would it not be wiser to do so after consultations envisaged in the Liam Fox Agreement) but now the UNP spokesman and other UNP leaders have stated that they would agree to the interim Council envisaged in the 13th Amendment for a period of two years.

They appear to take comfort from the fact that the PA too offered the LTTE control over the North and East for five years. This is not the answer. Let us think through this for the benefit of Mr. W and his party and in our own interest as this is a matter that concerns us all. It would be recalled that the LTTE rejected

the 13th Amendment and even the Chairmanship of the Interim Council in 1987.

They preferred to fight even the Indian Army to secure Eelam. Thousands have died since then fighting for Eelam so what makes us think that Prabhakaran has changed his mind. Why should Prabhakaran now agree to something he rejected out of hand 14 years ago? Let us for a moment recall what happened when President Premadasa thought he could do a deal with them. They played for time-negotiated until such time as they were ready and commenced Eelam war 11 with a lightning Pearl-Harbour-type operation. We all agree that we should end or at least scale down this wasteful war but is this the way to set about it? The primary objective of the LTTE at present is to have the proscription lifted and if the UNP can be used for this purpose why not? Has Mr. W read or studied about Prabhakaran-do you have an idea of how the man thinks? Let us here pause to see what someone who has met him about ten times has to say of the man.

Anita Prathap in her recent book states of Prabhakaran, that he was only 17 years of age when he shot Inspector Bastianpillai between his eyes! She states on page 68 "Prabhakaran came across as ruthless, cunning and brutal, he was also clearly a master tactician and a brilliant strategist. There were no cobwebs in his mind. It was sharp, clear and incisive.

No doubts, no fears, no worries clouded his vision. His foresight was amazing as well. He would see today what his opponents would do years later. He would have made a brilliant chess player". Elsewhere on the same page she states "THE OTHER THING ABOUT PRABHAKARAN THAT MADE A DEEP IMPRESSION ON ME WAS

HIS UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF EELAM. IT WAS A DEEPLY ROOTED, NON-Negotiable CONVICTION". This is the impression of Anita Prathap, the journalist who had met him over ten times. Does Mr. W doubt her judgement of the man? Mr. Premadasa sent the IPKF away believing he could settle the issue but they 'carried' him for one and a half years and struck when they were ready. Mr. Premadasa also paid with his life for his folly later on... If he alone died because of his folly that would have been understandable but thousands of our youth have died and continue to die because of what he did.

Today we have Ranil Wickremasinghe attempting to follow President Kumaratunge in seeking to negotiate without first obtaining internationally guaranteed assurances that whatever Prabhakaran agrees to would not be violated by him on any excuse. On form, any agreement could merely be a tactic, to strategic position himself to move on from there to establish Eelam. Could Wickremasinghe obtain a guarantee from the international community that they would intervene if the country's unity is violated by Prabhakaran. In any case what good is any 'unilateral' agreement with the LTTE. Any negotiations with the LTTE must only come after the two main essentially Sinhala parties forge a common position. They owe it to the Tamil people of this country who will not forget the lessons of 1958 and '68.

Further both main parties MUST be represented at the negotiating table. Incidentally whatever is the status of the Fox Agreement?

Does Wickremasinghe not realize that he is treading on dangerous ground - perilous not so

much for himself as for the country? Is he doing this to win the votes of minorities so that the balance could be tilted in his favour? Surely not! I sincerely hope it is not power at any price, or is it? We must not underestimate what happened in July of 1987. Hope our politicians have not forgotten that lesson. We do understand and appreciate Mr. Wickremasinghe's predicament and the fact that the options are few but we must not therefore commit national suicide. The vast majority of the people of this country do not believe or accept that the North and East have been the traditional homeland of any particular community in this country.

Certainly the Tamils have lived for hundreds of years or more in the north some Sinhalese too have lived there for generations, just as Tamils have lived in the south for centuries - the Hindu Temples or Devalas around the country testify to this. Anyone who knows Sinhala history would know that the Kandyan kingdom extended to and beyond Batticaloa. King Sathatissa's many edicts are carved in stone in the Eastern Province and are there for you to see.

The Indians held a gun to President Jayewardene's head and made him agree to the temporary merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces. The Indians have a "North east region" whereas we have never had any such region. Conceding such a mono-ethnic region at the expense of the Muslims and Sinhalese, who form a third each of the Eastern Province will not only endanger their very existence (has Mr. RW forgotten the ethnic cleansing indulged in by the LTTE and also the fact that they oppose the Sinhala settlements in the EP) but equally important is the fact that an eventual mono-ethnic region would endanger the security of the

entire hill country where a Tamil fifth column are in a majority.

What may I ask does that mean for the rest of the country? The creation of such an entity could also endanger the security of hundreds of thousands of Tamils who have made their home in the South. What is Mr. Wickremasinghe's position on the LTTE retaining their weapons, which constitutes a threat to the security of the entire country? Would the UNP demand the international supervision of de-commissioning of weapons, over a period of time of course, as a part of any agreement?

Is the UNP for the eventual merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces of our country? We should have an answer to this from the PA too. How could such a merger be ever dissolved? The country is committed to the devolution of power as the basis of a settlement but would the UNP agree to a Confederation? That would be a stepping stone to Eelam. Would the UNP agree to closing our bases in the north such as Palaly and removing our troops from the North and East? Finally how would the UNP, and for that matter the PA, deal with any request for extradition of Prabhakaran by the Indian government, after an Agreement is reached with the LTTE?

At the end of the two years what would happen if they refuse to hold elections and let the people decide who shall represent them? Is it not more likely that on form they would consolidate their position and resort to UDI? Has the UNP taken that into account? What could we do then - go to war again?

We must have categorical answers to these questions.

This piece first appeared in The Islander of Sri Lanka.

## NEPAL

## Peace dividend

The government is finding it hard to win donor hearts and minds

BINOD BHATTARAI in Kathmandu

THE government is looking beyond the peace talks at a massive hearts-and-minds programme to accelerate development in Maoist-affected districts, but is running into serious donor reluctance to back it.

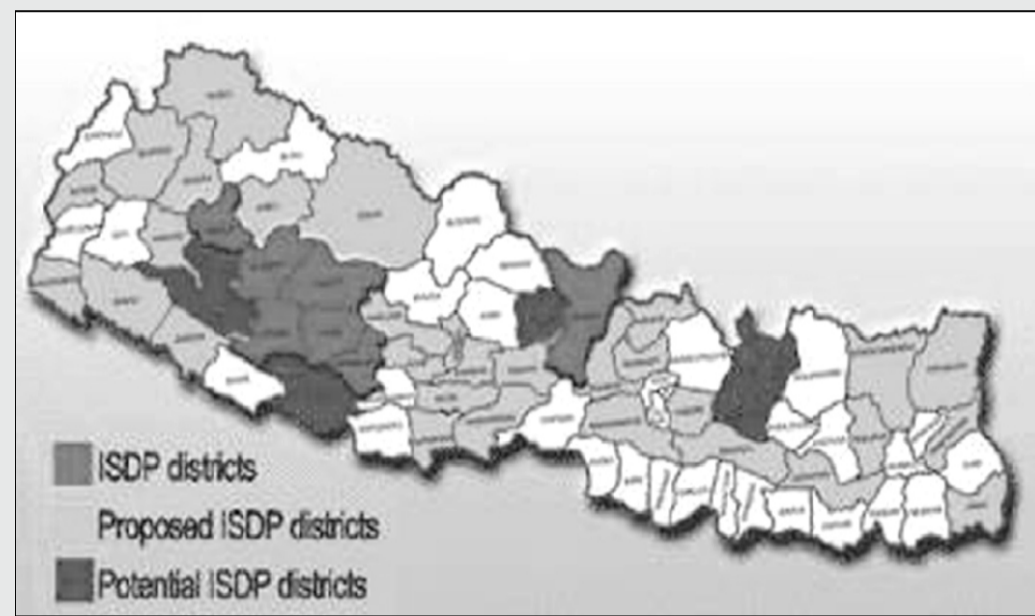
The Integrated Security and Development Programme (ISDP) is patterned after a post-Vietnam counter-insurgency strategy, but its price tag of \$114 million for three years is way beyond the government's own capacity. Last week, the National Planning Commission (NPC) presented what appears to be a hurriedly-prepared 13-page proposal to a consortium of donors, most of whom were sceptical about the government's ability to implement it.

Among the donors, Japan, Germany, Canada, Finland and Denmark as well as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank appear to have serious doubts about the ISDP, while the United Nations Development Programme was fence-sitting. However,

difference, to which the prime minister is said to have hinted that if there was money to back the new defence and development plan, he could do it.

Donors keen to back the ISDP had their reasons. DfID, for instance, felt an efficiently implemented ISDP could be critical in delivering basic services and infrastructure to districts where development has come to a standstill because of the insurgency. USAID, on the other hand, is said to prefer a more cautious "transitional" approach, first testing out the programme in reasonably safe areas. The Norwegians, for their part, appear convinced that conflict resolution has to go hand-in-hand with development.

Among the multilaterals, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, who have their own performance criteria and are generally against doles, had no fresh commitments. Other bilateral donors told the government it may be wiser to use the money already in the pipeline better, while some said the government could change priorities rather than seek new commitments.



the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the British Department for International Development (DfID) and the Norwegian Development Agency NORAD were for it.

"Few of us disagreed with its goals and the intense service delivery the government wants to make," one donor source told us. "But the political and security aspects made many uncomfortable." Those that said no were reportedly polite, but the message seems to be that donor support is not going to be easy. Added our source: "It will be a waste of time for the NPC if it still thinks it could get broad-based support for the program."

The ISDP was launched earlier this year in seven districts and this year the government allocated Rs 600 million for it, but much of this was budgeted with the expectation that the donors would come through. The ISDP is being implemented in seven districts: Gorkha, Rukum, Rolpa, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Salyan and Pyuthan and the government would like to extend it to six more as soon as possible: Dolakha, Ramechhap, Surkhet, Dailekh, Dang and Lamjung. Prithvi Raj Legal and his team at the NPC also told donors that the situation was getting so bad that it may ultimately have to extend the ISDP to another 30 of Nepal's 75 districts.

The idea for the donor fund-raising meeting for ISDP is said to have come up after a group of Western ambassadors met Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba a month ago. The diplomats reportedly warned Deuba he would have to produce results to make a

NPC officials played down the importance of the meeting. Lital told us: "It was not a pledging meeting but one to update donors on the ISDP, its rationale, how it works, which programs we were taking forward and the overall status." He added that last week's meeting was the first round, and that Nepal could go to donors formally if it needed assistance, through the finance ministry.

The government plans to spend Rs10 million in each Village Development Committee under the ISDP to achieve noble goals, such as 100 percent literacy and school enrolment. It also wants to speed up infrastructure building, and launch income-generation activities. The government says it will chip in half the Rs10 million and wants donors to help with the rest, including purchase of communications and rescue equipment not guns for security agencies.

Patterned after the US government's Integrated Defence and Development (IDAD), the ultimate goal is to win the people away from the insurgents, ensuring stability so that further development can take place. Security is to be provided by the police, the new paramilitary and the Royal Nepal Army under a co-ordinated chain of command.

The prime minister heads the ISDP implementation team, which includes a number of ministers and the Chief of Army Staff. The program has four sub-committees: political, publicity, programs and security.

By arrangement with Nepali Times.

## INDIA

## The return of the NDA's mascot

M ABDUL HAFIZ

IT was more like home coming for George Fernandes when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee re-inducted him in the cabinet early last month. He remained in political wilderness for over six months following tehaka.com scandal in March last. The video tapes of Tehelka journalists which were broadcast on a satellite television network on March 13 showed, among other things, the then Samata Party President Jaya Jaitly accepting 'donation' from Tehelka journalists masquerading as arms dealers, at Fernandes' official residence. As a result, not only the rot in the ministry of Defence, the Portfolio Fernandes held was exposed, the NDA government was faced with a full blown political crisis.

Amidst uproar of pungent criticism and as mercurial Trinamul Congress leader Mamta Banerjee pulled out of NDA in protest, the Defence Minister George Fernandes, also the convener of NDA announced his resignation over television. Prime Minister Vajpayee was initially reluctant to ask Goerge to quit but had to do so under the pressure of some constituents and supporters of NDA. Now his almost unopposed return - and to the same ministry vindicates his indispensability for the alliance and focus on his standing with the Prime Minister.

Indeed, Fernandes had been the prime minister's informal trouble shooter even when did not hold any office. When Vajpayee threatened to resign after Shiva Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam's insinuations against his foster son-in-law's family member in the parliament, Fernandes mediated between Shiva Sena chief Bal Thakare and the Prime Minister. Although he was vicerily attacked by Mamta Banerjee after Tehelka, it was Fernandes who later brought Trinamul Congress back to NDA fold. He was also responsible for bringing back Patai Makkal Katchi into NDA. He stood by the DMK in Chennai when its President Karunanidhi and the Party's representative to the Union Cabinet

Murasoli Maran and TR Ballu were unceremoniously arrested and manhandled by the police in apparently an exercise of vengeance by Jayalalita during her brief chief-ministership. The role played by Fernandes during these instances made him the mascot of the alliance and ensured his reinduction in the cabinet without any opposition by the NDA allies.

Fernandes' exit after Tehelka however helped the government salvage its images to some extent. It enabled the prime minister to refer to the incidence of Fernandes' resignation as the highest standard of political conduct during the several of the former's addressees to the nation. So far as Fernandes' possible return to the government was concerned Vajpayee message was clear from the beginning. The Venkatswami Commission which was set up under commission of Inquiry Act to probe the Tehelka affair was given only four months to complete the job, although no one either in government or NDA believed that it could be done within the given time frame. But it was presumably done so to assuage Fernandes' displeasure.

Moreover, contrary to general impression Fernandes' return to the cabinet was never contingent on his being exonerated by the commission. Secondly, during the long absence of Fernandes from the government, the Prime Minister did not fill the defence portfolio even as he expanded the cabinet after the parliament's monsoon session. Thus, Vajpayee sent enough signal that he was waiting for an opportunity to facilitate Fernandes' reinduction in the cabinet.

The return of Fernandes has however not been as smooth as it was thought earlier. It created a furor in the political circle. Many have questioned the propriety of prime minister Vajpayee's decision pointing out that little had changed in the circumstances under which Fernandes left the government in March. They have alleged that Fernandes resigned in the wake of revelations made by Tehelka.Com about massive irregularities in defence deals with the involve of top

political leaders in it. The commission set up to probe into it is yet to complete its work. But the NDA does not seem to have any compunction for the whole scandal and tend to overlook the sleaze. The Trinamul Congress and the DMK which were most vocal about the scam in March have been so much obliged by Fernandes during their days of crises that they are now totally silent.

Neither Shiva Sena nor Telegu Desam Party, two of the NDA's uneasy partners on two extreme poles are averse to Fernandes' return. Shiva Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam in a statement expressed confidence in Fernandes' integrity although, according to him, Fernandes should have wanted for the commission's finding before he rejoined the government. The Telegu Desam Party is apparently not opposed to Fernandes' return even if it had reservation in March about Fernandes' continuance in the office. Fernandes himself did no less in preparing ground within and outside the NDA for his return. The aftermath of September 11 terror strike in the USA also when the need for a fulltime defence minister was strongly felt, came as a boon for his re-appointment. The general political mood prevailing in the country where even the key victim of Tehelka.Com, Bangaru Luxman was rehabilitated also helped Fernandes staging a comeback. Bangaru has recently been appointed chairman of the Housing Committee of Rajya Sabha.

Yet, the moral dimension of the whole affair surrounding Fernandes' return will continue to cast a dark shadow over the country's political spectrum. Reacting to the return of Fernandes' return Congress (I) spokesman said that Vajpayee displayed more cynical disregard for political morality than any other prime minister in India. The (P)(M) India viewed the prime minister's decision as another "opportunistic nature of NDA". However the government's present reprieve on the issue may come to an end with the beginning of the winter session of the Parliament.

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## HUMAN RIGHTS

## A step in the right direction

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE first general congress of South Asian for Human Rights (SAHR), held in the Indian capital on November 11 and 12, can be described as a remarkable event since the gathering took a firm and sound collective decision by the human rights activists of the region to work in close concert for protection and promotion of human rights in the most densely populated area of the world. Needless to say, the task is very difficult although noble since South Asia has more than one billion people, most of whom are mired in abject poverty and the area is ridden with bilateral conflicts among the countries of the region.

Furthermore, the countries themselves have myriad problems in the political, economic and social planes which unfortunately seek to retard expected progress of these nations. True, some of these countries have made considerable progress in the certain fields including defence and science and technology but a minimal decent life for a large segment of their people remains a distant goal.

The region lags behind even to adjacent South East Asia where nations have made much better progress in improving the quality of life. South Asia often makes headlines in the international news and ironically, not much on positive note but on conflicts, dangers and tensions. Two of the seven countries in the region possess nuclear power and this has turned the area also

volatile since these two nations are known for enmity and rivalry.

However, one good sign is that most of the countries here are democratic which is meant to ensure at least a representative government which in turn is expected to respect fundamental rights. But the picture of guaranteeing such rights in the region - whether in democratic or undemocratic pattern of governance - is not very encouraging. Human rights are trampled upon in different ways curtailing the essence of the life of human beings, who are born to enjoy certain basic rights despite the yawning gap among individuals in various forms.

When viewed in this context, the New Delhi gathering of several hundred activists from five countries - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka - was a step in right direction to discuss the human rights conditions in the region and how best to work in collective endeavour to protect such rights. The two-day deliberations saw meaningful speeches from United Nations High Commissioner for human rights Ms. Mary Robinson, a former president of the Ireland and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.

The importance of the conference can also be judged from the fact that Indian president K.R.Narayanan hosted a reception for the large number of delegates at the "Rastrapathi Bhavan". Delegates were drawn from recognised human rights organisations and included jurists, academics, public figures, media persons etc. and special attention was paid to gender balance and to allow represen-

tation to ethnic minorities and indigenous people.

The 45-member Bangladesh delegation comprised persons of eminence of different professions and human rights activists. Among them were Justice Nayeemuddin Ahmed, chairman of the law commission and supreme court's appellate division's Justice Fazlul Karim. As a media person, I was delighted to be in the team which was active in different working sessions of the conference. Bangladesh delegates took initiatives on many matters till the resolutions were adopted aimed at promoting human rights in the South Asian region on line with the dignity of the individuals.

The convention in the Indian capital was the follow-up of a smaller gathering in Neemrana Fort, Rajasthan, India in July, 2002, which formed a five-member committee made up of I.K.Gujral of India, Dr. Kamal Hossain of Bangladesh, Dr. Davendra Raj Pandey from Nepal, Radhika Coomarswamy from Sri Lanka and Asma Jehangir from Pakistan to organise a convention which finally took place in New Delhi. Several issues inextricably linked with the human rights matters like "conflict and peace", "including the excluded: human rights", "crisis of the state", "integrity of women" came up for discussions in the working sessions when notable figures took part.

The deliberations were at times marked but debates but the objective was to reach consensus on issues that serve the purpose of promoting human rights. The participants

showed spirit of accommodation and respect while discussing the matters relating to own country vis-à-vis the situation in the region as a whole. The Afghan situation - both the killing of innocent people in the terrorism in the United States on September 11 and lately massive bombings of the country victimising once again a large number of innocent people figured prominently in the discussions. There was a view that Afghanistan and Myanmar be included in the SAHR.

However, there were differences of opinion on the matter and the issue was referred to the newly elected 19-member Bureau. I think the SAHR must remain confined within the SAARC because Afghanistan is considered broadly in central Asia and Myanmar in the South East Asia. Inclusion of these two countries will give unnecessary controversy about the geographical character of South Asia, which is now accepted with seven countries that are members of the SAARC.

The SAHR has to deal with a number of issues connected with the human rights and this obviously makes its task daunting. But the challenge is for the greater good of the region and its mankind. How far the task can be accomplished remains a matter to be seen and judged but it goes without saying that the emergence of the SAHR is a noteworthy development in South Asia.

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