

COMMENTARY

SAARC sans terrorism

AFTER many a hiccup, the SAARC summit scheduled for 4-6 January may finally happen at a difficult time in the entire region's history.

Look out over the political landscape of South Asia, and you find governments all-too-willing to try and finish the 'terrorist' problem once and for all.

of a well-known Colombo analyst, "to define itself in a discourse of anti-terrorism as well as Sinhalese patriotism."

extremely inappropriate. While the irrationally violent must always be tackled with a firm hand, the governments should not misuse SAARC for this purpose.

INDO-PAK

Between war and peace

The international diplomatic dimension will be as important as the military moves that India and Pakistan may make in the next few days.

C. RAJA MOHAN

THE RELATIONS between India and Pakistan may have reached a decisive fork in the road - one path leading to war and the other to peace.

ists and their sanctuaries across the border. It could signal to the world that India is deterred by its own fears of an escalation of tensions with Pakistan.

between low intensity conflict and a full-scale nuclear war. Recognising that wars will be imposed on it in spite of the restraint, India began to debate conventional military options under the concept of a "limited war".

tive investigation by India and Pakistan into the attack on Parliament last week. This is like asking the fox to inquire into the raid on the chicken coop.

The attack on Parliament has breached the threshold of tolerance in India for the proxy war against the nation from across the border.

India is now confronted with the possibility that its restraint in the face of nuclear escalation is taken as a fundamental weakness.

Is a war then inevitable? Not necessarily. The intensification of military tensions between India and Pakistan inevitably brings in the international community, in particular the United States.

Unless there is strong and unremitting pressure from the U.S. on Pakistan, Gen. Musharraf will have no incentive to curb the activities of terrorist groups.

India

Jayalalitha's return

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE verdict of the Madras High Court clearing former Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayaram Jayalalitha of conviction in corruption cases by the Lower Court has come as a shot in arms for the controversial supremo of the AIADMK regional party in the Tamil Nadu.

minister of the important state more than once, has now bounced back in the political arena when many had almost written off her top role in the Tamil Nadu state.

couldn't continue as the chief minister without being a member of the state assembly and as a convict in corruption cases.

stage a comeback to the chief ministership as the obstacles have been removed. And yet, Jayalalitha this time did not take any hasty decision.

But Jayalalitha did not hesitate to become chief minister after her party won a landslide. Her becoming chief minister drew criticisms since she was not a member of legislature and more so because her nomination papers were rejected due to her conviction in the corruption cases.

As chief minister Jayalalitha too was known for her comfortable style. The number of guests and cost of a marriage festival of her adopted son was a matter of talks in India in those days since it was simply unbelievably enormous.

Indeed, this had been a momentous judgement which made many politicians in India sit up. While becoming chief minister, Jayalalitha had argued that people had given a massive mandate in favor of the party which she leads and this should be seen as verdict of the people against the conviction that the court had handed down.

She played a key role in the formation of the first National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government by AB Vajpayee but was instrumental to bring it down later.

This has cleared the decks of her taking over at the helm of the government again.

Jayalalitha was not a legislator but was willing to take up the position of the chief minister as the constitution permits a non-legislator to head the government provided he or she becomes a member of legislature within six months.

Jayalalitha resigned immediately after the verdict. Many eyebrows were raised when she was sworn in as the chief minister despite the conviction. Her own willingness to head the state government was seen by many as an irresistible greed for power.

Zaglul Chowdhury is senior special correspondent of BSS.

BHUTAN

Living history

AS we watch history unfold before our eyes, it is no surprise that the drafting of the Bhutanese Constitution continues to draw comments.

The growing number of internet readers, for example, need to separate rhetoric and sometimes wild remarks from the substantive discussions. We need to make reasoned judgments because many of us are logging on for the first time into a medium which is now being effectively used to disseminate information and misinformation.

executive authority to an elected government, the Council of Ministers has assumed full responsibility for governance. With this latest royal initiative the Druk Gyalpo has conferred on his people an unprecedented responsibility which, for most Bhutanese, is both an exhilarating and sobering experience.

tenets inherent in a Constitution.

We expected, and there were, some negative reaction from critics who choose to disregard - even distort - most events taking place in Bhutan. But it is inevitable that there will be skepticism because there are people who do not know and who do not identify with the real developments in the country.

Meanwhile, as the news filters through rural Bhutan, we can expect that the change will be painful for many people. It is not that Bhutanese people resist change. Many people do not see the need for change today because they are happy with the system.

The kingdom of Bhutan has come a long way through its colourful, sometimes turbulent, history. We have been reminded this week that in the distance ahead lies a future which promises to be equally exciting.

With a Constitution established, the people are given the opportunity to shape the destiny of the country. This is the sacred responsibility that the Druk Gyalpo has placed on his people, based on the premise that he has full faith and trust in their integrity and capability.

As the world begins to observe, analyse, and comment on issues through various media it provides us broad, often useful, feedback. But, while we welcome constructive comments, it is also important that we understand all these views in their right perspective.

The direction is now crystal clear. The policy of decentralisation has slowly but steadily moved the average citizen into the centre of development and governance. The establishment of the DYT in 1981 and the GYT in 1991 has given people the opportunity - even forced them - to be actively involved in the decisions which affect their lives.

However, most of us are looking forward to the contents of the Constitution, not the procedures. And here, again, we should have no doubts. Last week, as the drafting of the constitution was formally launched, His Majesty the King himself outlined some basic

As the debate goes on the optimists welcome the future as a challenge, the cynics continue to doubt every move, and many people deal with the anguish of change. But, caught up in an important moment of Bhutanese history, all of us have some profound food for thought.

Interview

Absolutely secure

Pakistan's president has a new role as a key U.S. ally. But concerns such as Kashmir, nuclear security and the pursuit of democracy haven't gone away

Security is tight around the old prime minister's home, perched on a hill behind the parliament building in Islamabad, where Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf keeps one of his offices.



Are you worried about a domestic extremist backlash against your policy change on the Taliban in mid-september?

No. What is worrisome is more in Afghanistan. Everything is moving well up till now. But there are certain areas of tension - of concern, I would say.

The government has embarked on a programme of transforming the religious schools, or madrassas, which helped promote Islamic militancy. How will this work?

The madrassas were being manipulated by certain extremists. So therefore we saw the strength of the madrassas - the strength is free board and lodging for hundreds and thousands of poor children, which Pakistan can't afford, certainly.

You are set on elections for October 2002? Yes indeed.

What kind of arrangements have been made? Will you prepare an autonomous Election Commission? The election commission will be absolutely autonomous.

The heads of both mainstream parties, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, are not in Pakistan for the election. Do you envisage a role for either of them?

No, I don't see any role for these party leaders... In the next election. Their parties will have a role. It will be a party-based election.

What will be the composition of the planned National Security Council?

We haven't decided on the composition. It has to be representative. It has to be a balanced composition which can ensure checks and balances on the function of the government without being intrusive.

On broader security issues: Are Pakistan's nuclear weapons and technology secure?

I can say they are absolutely secure. We have no doubt. We have institutionalized arrangements. We have a national command authority, which oversees everything. There are custodial safeguards.

What about reports of two Pakistan nuclear scientists who may have fled to Burma?

This is news to me. This is the first time I hear of it. I have no such information. Nobody has told me.

SRI LANKA

Is there a long-term remedy to election-related violence?

PROFESSOR S T HETTIGE

WE witnessed the most violent General Elections in post independence Sri Lanka a few days back. The response on the part of civic organizations, religious dignitaries and peace loving politicians has been to appeal to those who perpetrated election related violence before, during and after the polls.

though it is not necessarily in keeping with their contribution to the public welfare. Those who get into high political office have almost total command over the institutions, that come under their purview, the public resources that come under the above institutions, etc.

revamping of the debased political culture that exists today, will help.

Therefore, it is very much hoped that the newly elected leaders will take serious note of this fact and take concrete measures to stamp out election related violence in the country.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

It is against the above background that winning and losing elections for many politicians and their followers is a matter of retaining or losing all that is highly valued and jealously guarded by them.

Here the new leadership has a major challenge and an opportunity. Some of the concrete steps that the new government may consider taking are:

As we all know, for some people, politics has become the source of every - thing they value; i.e. wealth, power, influence, privileges etc.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

1. Ensure that politics is not the source of excessive privileges, wealth and undue influence.

As we all know, for some people, politics has become the source of every - thing they value; i.e. wealth, power, influence, privileges etc.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

2. Legislate against the abuse of public resources before and during elections.

As we all know, for some people, politics has become the source of every - thing they value; i.e. wealth, power, influence, privileges etc.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

3. Introduce legislation to prevent the abuse of state media by the ruling party for its political campaign.

As we all know, for some people, politics has become the source of every - thing they value; i.e. wealth, power, influence, privileges etc.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

4. Develop and implement policies that prevent the distribution of public goods and resources on a political basis (jobs, permits, contract, poor relief etc.).

As we all know, for some people, politics has become the source of every - thing they value; i.e. wealth, power, influence, privileges etc.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

5. Depoliticize public institutions and state sponsored development programmes such as Samurdhi.

As we all know, for some people, politics has become the source of every - thing they value; i.e. wealth, power, influence, privileges etc.

Therefore, a solution to this problem has to be found in the revamping of this political culture, itself.

6. Appoint the Cabinet taking into account the needs of the country, qualifications and capacity of persons selected and do not use it as a mechanism to bestow privileges, perks etc. on as many party activists as possible.