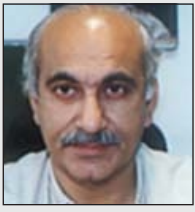


THE YEAR THAT WAS
To an unnamed friend, who smiles very often



M.J. AKBAR

It is entirely appropriate that the last column of 2001 should be about war. A world war.

How does the media cover a world war? It is a fallacy that things go boom every night. Headlines do not scream every day because there is nothing to scream about.

definition of the larger interest. Paradoxically, the clearest way to define the war against terrorism is to accept that the way forward will inevitably be through large patches of confusion.

of security, woke up a superpower and changed history. America, which was gradually edging towards some form of distant reconciliation with the same Taliban that had ravaged Afghanistan, moved and the Taliban shuffled out of Kabul and Kandahar with the speed of a pack of cards.

will to resist whoever has taken over. Others are ready to give the newcomer a chance, until it becomes too late to punish the new regime for its crimes and misdemeanours.

American technology, with American soldiers, helped by a friendly, even obedient administration, and backed (unlike in the case of the Soviet Union) by a largely friendly population cannot find two men in a cave? Are these caves so impenetrable that even a whisper never leaves them? Can you ever hide a whisper in an Asian bazaar? Something implausible is going on in Afghanistan and perhaps Pakistan.

sations, and a loose coalition of thousands of young men ready to wait for the next call to arms, exists. If it has left Afghanistan then it is searching for shelter in Pakistan and in Kashmir.



All health information to keep you up to date

GOOD health is something we can all enjoy if we do the right things. Looking after yourself now has long term benefits for the future and goes a long way towards protecting you from certain illnesses in later life.

Just making a few adjustments to your diet, taking up some kind of exercise and finding ways to relieve stress can make all the difference.

Are you fit for life?

The human body is designed for action. Yet our modern lifestyles provide little in the way of exhausting activity. We don't walk that much, sit behind a desk at work and rely on 'kajer-lok' and machines to minimise the effort we put into household tasks.

Taking up some kind of exercise brings benefits that will spill into every area of our life. You'll have more energy, a trimmer figure, find it easier to cope with stress and sleep better at night.

Getting started

There are lots of ways in which you can increase your level of physical activity without changing your lifestyle.

- Walk up stairs, don't ride or take the lift. Go for a long walk or a cycle ride on Friday/holidays. Take up a new sport e.g. badminton (winter time), swimming or jogging.

Join an exercise class. Invest in an exercise bike to burn up calories.

Fitness benefits

- A stronger, healthier heart. Increased vitality. Stronger bones. Firmer muscles. Lower stress levels. A greater ability to burn up calories.

Next: ABC of fever.

A friend who through a brilliant career in government has seen his share of war, peace and that huge space in between sent me a card on the net wishing me all the joy that he felt I badly needed. He ended with a wish: may there be more peace in the new year than in the present one. This friend of mine smiles all the time, and breaks into a laugh very often. Does this make him an optimist?

BYLINE

step. America entered the hunt for Osama bin Laden and Osama was within two hundred and fifty miles of our borders. For most Indians the return of America to South Asia was good news. The last time America fought a proxy war in Afghanistan, there were celebrations in Pakistan and apprehension in India, for the Soviet Union was our strongest ally in a jelly-world.

concluded. But no one has claimed that all the Taliban fighters are dead. The figures are not exact, because no one knows; maybe even Mullah Omar and his cliques in Kabul and Kandahar did not know since they had taken over power but had not bothered to form a government as anyone else in the world understands it.

serve as any serious answer, for the Pakistanis could not have formed more than another thin percentage. We have to keep narrowing down the options. Have most of the Afghan-Taliban simply gone home to their families? This is possible.

Mullah Omar nor Osama were alone. They had families. They had followers; according to mid-war claims, thousands of them ready to die before surrender. If Osama is dead, as President Pervez Musharraf speculated, surely his family is alive, as it should be: no human being is going to punish small sons for whatever the father may have done.

The year the Commonwealth was blown off course

DEREK INGRAM

THE dramatic events that flowed from 11 September caught the Commonwealth with its pants down. As the year ends it has yet to pull them up above its knees.

One immediate embarrassment was the position of Pakistan.

Its president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, is the only military leader left in the 54 member Commonwealth. In 1999 he broke its rules by seizing power from the democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif. Consequently, Pakistan was suspended and barred from all official Commonwealth meetings.

Last June Musharraf elevated himself from chief executive to president. He was condemned for doing so by the Commonwealth and its secretary-general Don McKinnon, who remanded Musharraf that the Commonwealth had given Pakistan till October two years after his coup to return to civilian rule.

Musharraf said he could not achieve this till 2003. In August, McKinnon flew to Islamabad to discuss Musharraf's 'roadmap' to democracy.

Just a month later, Musharraf was centre stage internationally, alongside the Western alliance in the so-called war against terrorism, wooed by United States President George Bush, visited by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and regaled with offers of aid from those who had earlier imposed sanctions on him.

When the World Trade Centre in New York was destroyed by a terrorist attack the Commonwealth was within 25 days of holding its biennial summit - the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM), in Australia.

For a while it looked as if the Commonwealth meeting might find itself providing the first international platform after 11

September from which leaders could sound off about what was happening to the world.

It was not to be. One leader another said they could not leave their country to attend. CHOGM was postponed till March 2002 and the rest was silence.

The Commonwealth's 1.7 billion people include just about all races and creeds, of which about 450 million are Muslim, yet no statement on terrorism was made until 25 October - more than six weeks after the New York attack.

Ethnic and racial diversity at every social and economic level is seen as one of the features that makes the Commonwealth such a valuable body with potentially powerful influence and support for the advance of global harmony.

Its members across the world include large countries like India, where live almost as many Muslims as the entire population of Pakistan, and small states like Trinidad and Tobago, whose people of African and Indian descent live alongside those of European, Latin American and Chinese origin.

A People's Festival, planned by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to take place alongside the summit, went ahead in Brisbane, Australia. Conferences, seminars, workshops, dance, song and drama made up a brave show.

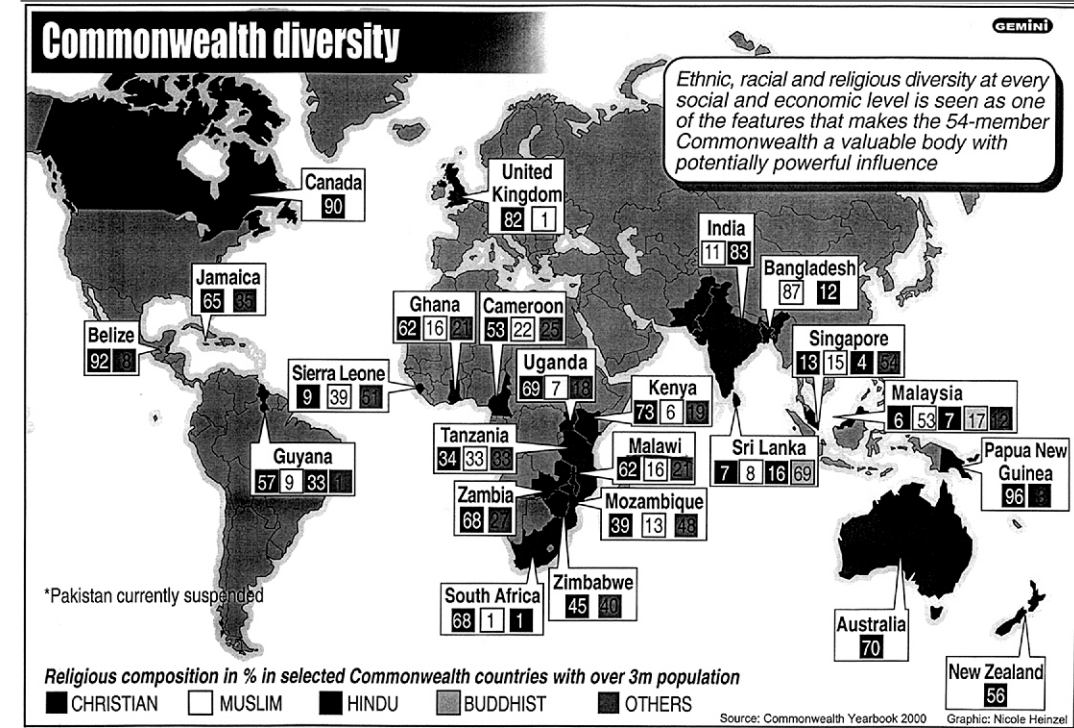
Nonetheless, many NGOs were angry and felt the politicians had sold the Commonwealth short by not turning up.

Whether CHOGM could have gone ahead, perhaps with the aid of video conferencing and with some real political vision and imagination, will long be argued about. Realistically, calling it off was probably inevitable.

In the history of these longest running of international summits tracing back to 1885 this was the first postponement.

The Pakistan problem and summit postponement were not the only setbacks for the

Pakistan, Zimbabwe and Fiji presented the Commonwealth with tough choices in 2001. Ambitions to move its 54 members along the road to democracy and rights were being frustrated - a country suspended from membership was suddenly centre of the world stage. For the first time the biennial summit had to be postponed. Gemini News Service looks at the Commonwealth's difficult year.



Commonwealth in 2001. Another was the steadily worsening situation in Zimbabwe.

It was not in doubt by mid-year that the violent takeover of farmland, intimidation of the press, and breakdown of law and order contravened the principles of good governance and human rights set down in the Commonwealth's 1991 Declaration and further rules of good behaviour agreed at its Auckland summit in 1995.

Yet its watchdog body the

Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) of eight foreign ministers was not fully empowered to take up the Zimbabwe issue. Unlike Musharraf, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was a democratically elected leader, making direct intervention difficult.

When CMAG tried to send three ministers, Mugabe refused to let them in.

Eventually, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria convened a meeting in Abuja of nine

Commonwealth minister, including Foreign Minister Stan Mudenge of Zimbabwe. A deal was agreed under which Zimbabwe undertook to end the violence and proceed with land reform in an orderly manner, in exchange for financial help from Britain and the United Nations.

The deal changed nothing. The situation on the ground actually worsened and when seven Commonwealth minister went to Zimbabwe in October they were subjected to a verbal tirade from Mugabe, and went away empty-handed. The same thing happened to European Union commissioners.

This was the same president who in 1991 had presided over the summit that adopted the Commonwealth principles.

Other problems on the road to good governance and democracy in the Commonwealth persisted. Elections in August in the Fiji Islands, which had also been suspended from the Commonwealth following the coup by businessman George Speight in 2000, returned the caretaker Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. But he proceeded to form a government without Fijian Indian participation, arguably violating the constitution. The matter went to the courts and this delayed Fiji's return to full membership.

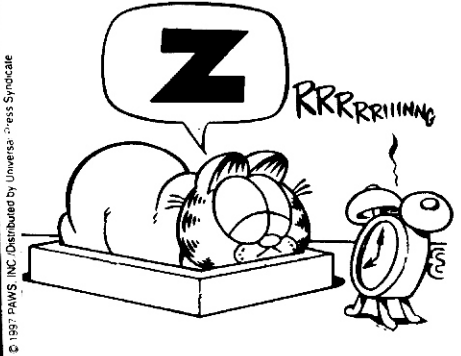
But the year was not without its pluses. In January power in Ghana was peacefully transferred, after a well-run election, to the opposition leader John Kufuor. The 20-year-rule of Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, who had first come to power by coup, was at an end.

Other pluses included Commonwealth backup for the UN effort to restore peace in Sierra Leone with strong British military involvement; abolition of a critical decree inhibiting political activity in The Gambia; and victory in a battle with the Organisation of Economic

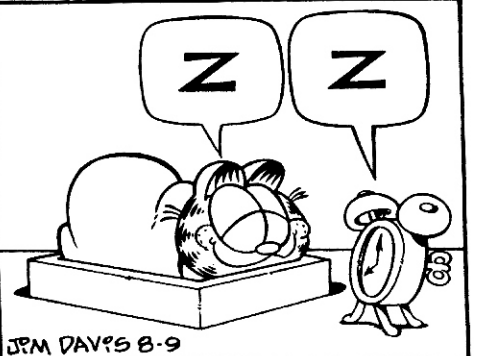
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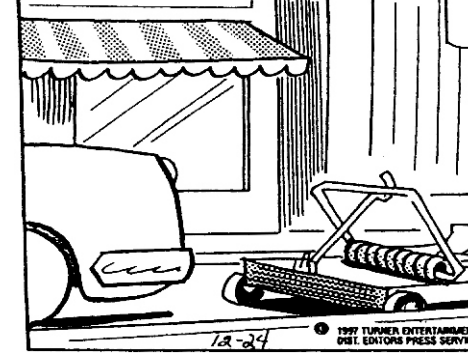
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TOM & JERRY



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