SOUTH ASIA

The good, the bad and the ugly? | Celebrating South Asian-ness

MB NAQVI writes from Karachi

OW that the SAARC's Kathmandu Summit is behind us with all its significant and protocol utterances, three main conclusions can be drawn among others: first that the SAARC Summit did take place was a gain in itself. But that it was held after nearly three years rather than remain the yearly event bespeaks its vulnerability to India-Pakistan relations. As it happens, SAARC, and with it the whole idea of regional cooperation and integration, remains hostage to these relations that have always described a roller

Secondly, the Indian Prime Minister has put his foot down on the Musharraf idea that bilateral issues be brought within the ambit of SAARC Charter; no bilateral matter will be allowed to be raised in it. Thus the wishes of the people of the seven countries that the SARRC should produce results that other regional cooperation organisations have produced will remain elusive.

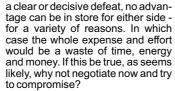
Thirdly, although there were informal and rather preliminary discussions that did take place between the Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan and the two Summiteers during the Summit, no breakthrough was achieved. Obviously the two sides are sticking to their guns in both the literal sense and figuratively. Animosity as usual is the outcome. For South Asia the issue of issues is whether or not India and Pakistan will allow free trade and close regional cooperation in economics to begin with. Their Kashmir dispute, other sec-ondary or derivative disputes and bad blood are a solid and huge hurdle that SAARC remains unable to overcome. Thus the SAARC looks like remaining a stunted growth that might even wither away if the relations between the two largest states of the region do not improve. Is this the issue of issues? Superficially yes. At a deeper level, it is possible to argue that the main problem facing South Asia is politi-

In an ambience created by extreme poverty of the masses, their widespread illiteracy and social backwardness, the politics that has flourished has been, in the name of nation building, based on a malignant kind of nationalism in many of the seven states. Malignant? One terms is so because of two main characteristics.

It is primarily xenophobic and militant. This combination becomes lethal when it is remembered that the societies are traditional and rigid where, contrary to the fib promoted by respective publicists, intolerance is a dominant attitude and tendency. And this intolerance manifests itself in most fields of politics, culture and religion. This is what puts states in perpetual disputes and encourages a politics that leaves the basic human problems of the society unattended, while the ideological and political clashes with neighbours occupy all the energies of the governments. Indeed this politics flourishes because of the narrow social and political backwardness which pre-empts of all people friendly politics. That is why the ruling ideologies can be termed as a malignant kind of nationalism.

However, the Indians and the Pakistanis are back to square one of the last month or so with its high military tension. Although a slight easing of the situation was noted by this correspondent earlier than many others, no one should be complacent even today that the danger of a war breaking out by accidental escalation has passed. True, the government leaders in both countries do not consciously want war. But they may not have full control over the forces that have been generated.

The experts one believes in say that the danger of a nuclear war has been underestimated by many people on both sides of the divide. While it is entirely possible that, thanks to innate good sense on both sides, there might be no use of nuclear weapons at all, the possibility cannot be ruled out. The situation is too fluid and emotionally charged on both sides. Some think that the danger of a nuclear exchange(s)



It is unlikely that those who have taken the situation to this height of tension and inimical passions will be easily willing to sit down and compromise. The immediate likelihood of reduction in tension. despite the common knowledge that at least the Prime Minister of



might even have increased and it is more fearful than is ordinarily sup-

They think that the only meaningful use of this dread weapon in the special conditions of the Subcontinent can only be a preemptive strike by either of the two sides. For, no de can afford to let the other strike first and then it would bestir itself to retaliate. Flexible responses are too theoretical and ignore the passions that wars intensify. Thus, while there may actually be no strong likelihood seen of this happening, but, if its use has at all to take place. the two sides might race to be the

All of it, underlines the gravity of

the situation with its manifold ugly possibilities. The task for all people of good sense and goodwill for the common people of both countries is to prevent this unnecessary and ruinous war. Ordinarily all wars should be prevented because they solve no problem. There is no reason to suppose that the fourth or tiπn war between India and Pakistan will produce any final or satisfying results; on the contrary, it may produce grievous losses for both if a nuclear exchange does take place. Even otherwise no lasting solution to any problem, difficult or easy, is ever produced by a war. After every war, the two sides have still to sit down and negotiate some kind of a settlement. It is true that if the war is clearly decisive, the settlement might be to the advantage of the winner. But if it remains inconclusive in the sense of no side suffering

India and the President of Pakistan do not want war and would prefer peace, things are likely to remain much the same as they have been during the last one month. Cynics say that tensions will begin dissipating from the middle of February next. At any rate, neither side seems to have strong enough will to fight while neither side feels strong enough need to make any serious concession - at least as of now. Peace is likely to continue to hang by a slander thread. Fear of the consequences of war and some residual good sense might prevent disaster, possibly for both. Insofar as poor SAARC is concerned, what is clear is that it has no future so long as India and Pakistan cannot compose their differences. So long as politics in India and in Pakistan remains what it has been, a relationship of friendship and cooperation can be ruled out. With that the SAARC hopes can get thrown out of the window. Why India-Pakistan relations cannot improve is predicated on the politics of antagonism they seem to love. This is at bottom based on religious intolerance and extremism. Even if they are fake extremists, on either side, their militant outlook yield narrow political objectives. For much the same reason, the solution of the problems between India and Pakistan would remain hard to find. They can be termed in the current ambience virtually insoluble and the ambience shows no sign of changing. It is only a basic change in politics that can

soluble.

If the methodology of a people to-people reconciliation is adopted and the political and economic priorities are shifted from a misconceived national security, as is being conceived by the two governments today, to the goal of doing something concrete, on the requisite scale required, to eradicate poverty and to begin improving the actual living conditions of the people, the whole ambience in the Subcontinent can begin to change. But it must be admitted that, despite being a possibility, it is a distant one.

The immediate task for the two governments for selfish reasons remains to bring down the political temperature and to begin military withdrawals from the forward positions on the borders. That will be difficult for Vajpayee in the absence of Pakistan demonstratively providing satisfaction on the Indian demands. It is true that Musharraf government has embarked on rounding up major activists of some of the extremist religious parties. But it is not related to what the Indians call cross-border terrorism. Those being arrested are associated with parties that indulge in sectarian violence inside the country. That they have their soulmates among the Jihadis and in some cases there is an overlap is true enough. But, on the whole the Kashmir Jihad is not being wound down; apparently Pakistan government seems to have no intention of interfering with what has been going on - certainly not without some quid pro quo. That is the crux of the current deadlock between the two countries

The Indians hope that the Americans and the rest of the major western countries will put enough pressure on Pakistan to stop 'all cross-border terrorism' may not be as realistic as may have been supposed. Doubtless India is a major attraction for all western countries and its importance cannot be underrated. But it is still inconceivable that the west will ignore all the other facts about Kashmir dispute and will help in India getting all it wants. Despite all sympathy and support that India would continue to receive, it might not be a 100 per cent endorsement from the

It does look as if Pakistan would be under tremendous pressure · indeed it already is - to wind down Kashmir jihad which is what the west regards as terrorism, quite the way Indians see it. But they would also want India to be more flexible politically and make concessions. What concessions and how many of them and on what scale are questions that will depend on a variety of factors over which little can be said with any certainty. Whether India would be flexible and regard a solution that is less than 100 per cent satisfactory to it as acceptable is hard to say. But if that proposition is not acceptable, then the alternative would be the continuation of the present series of tensions and more or less political collisions that cannot promote peace, stability and progress even if there is no war.

Both governments face tough choices. Indeed both are required to make concessions from their maximal positions and accept some compromises. Having gone too far it would involve some loss of face on both sides more on Pakistan's side than on India. But some retreat from the exposed forward positions is necessary and seems inevitable.

Nagyi is a noted Pakistani columnist.

May be by the time we have the 12th SAARC Summit, there will be a simultaneous Parliament of Cultures taking place between Pashtuns, Awadhis, Bengalis, Tamils, Nepalis, Assamese and Kashmiris, rather than just the so-called eminent persons of the region

CK LAL from Kathmandu

NE of the very first acts of the post-Taleban regime of Kabul was to send an SOS to New Delhi for musical instruments to record Afghanistan's new national anthem. If ever there was anv doubt about Kandahar being a part of South Asia, it was dispelled by the request of Hamid Karzai's cultural ministry for a set of harmonium, tabla, sarod, sitar, tanpura, surmandal, sarangi, pakhawaj, flute

There is a fundamental unity between the cultures of this region, the inheritor of a civilisation that once extended from Kashmir to Colombo, and from Bamiyan to Burmaand exported its beliefs across the seas to Bali, and beyond the Himalaya to Beijing. Despite millennia of natural upheaval and the rise and fall of several empires, the civilisational commonality of our cultures remains intact. Had Jawaharlal Nehru not appropriated the name India for his republic. perhaps we would all have been proud to call ourselves "Indic".

Now we have to make do with the expression South Asian so as not to offend the patriotic sensibilities of people insecure about their identity in the young nation-states of this

Sadly, ever since Bill Clinton declared South Asia "one of the world's most dangerous regions", it has become even more dangerous National politics has played havoc with the civilisational unity between the peoples of this region. To forge a

common identity based on politics is thus fundamentally flawed. The likelihood of a United States of South Asia any time soon does not appear to be a realistic possibility.

Future unity based on the economic commonality of nation-states in this part of the world is also a mirage. Despite all talk of SAPTA and SAFTA, the emergence of a South Asian Union patterned after the European Union looks remote. Forget about a union, even an association like ASEAN is difficult to achieve when there is so much acrimony between the top leaders of SAARC member states. When even Indians need a passport to fly smoothly into Kathmandumercifully. a visa is not a requirement as yetyou can rest assured that not even religion is a unifying factor in a region dominated by parochial

Ironically, to chart a common future, all we need to do is look at our collective pasts where empires competed with each other, even while accepting the harmony between their cultures. Aurangzeb is an aberration. It was not the sword of Islam that conquered Hindustan, but the service of Sufis that did the trick. Christianity did not arrive in South Asia riding the wave of the Crusades, it was brought by missionaries who spread their word through exemplary service to society in education and health. Despite the massacre that marred the partition of British India, no culture of South Asia has to bear the guilt of mass murder on the scale of the

Controversial Harvard professor Samuel P Huntington is a muchmaligned man, perhaps deservedly so. All he sees is the conflict between cultures along civilisational fault lines. Actually there is an element of unity between the cultures within a civilisation, which could be an important factor for global peace. Most contemporary conflicts are within civilisations, not between them. Hamid Karzai may have fought his war with the help of CIA money and American B-52 bombers, but he and Mullah Omar differ only in their beliefs, not culture. Come to think of it, even the Crusades were intra-civilisational: Christians and Muslims worshipped the same book as far as the Old Testament was concerned. All they fought for was the finality of their respective prophets, a conflict that was later to emerge with equal

Protestants, and Shias and Sunnis. Nothing exemplifies the unity between the cultures of our region as strongly as our food. Picture an Oriya Swami Agnivesh, a Nepali Dipak Gyawali, and a Kannada Pradeep Sebastian longing for home-food in a small town on the France-Belgium border. And then imagine all of them ending up in a 'Kashmiri' restaurant owned by a Sialkoti Muslim from Bangladesh with a cook from Peshawar in Pakistan. Then a lovelorn Bollywood star is in perfect lip-sync with the soulful voice of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan on a video in the restaurant, and vou realise the absurdity of LK Advani's rhetoric of "Hot Pursuit" followed by

ferocity between Catholics and

General Musharraf's thundering "Lay Off". How can you ask a Sindhi in hot pursuit of Baigan Rogan Josh to lay off Kabuli Nan, Saffron Rice, Machher Jhol and Mango Pickle?

After the music and the food, there are the reform movements of every religion that emphasise the unity of purpose inherent in every faith. Sindhi Sufis, Bengali Bauls, Bhakti Panth Swamis in the Indo-Gangetic plains, neo-Buddhists blessed by broadminded Maharashtrian or Andhra Bhantes. reforming Christian Fathers preaching in the backwaters of Kerala or the tribal areas of Meghalaya and Madhya Pradeshthey don't teach patriotism, they spread the word of humanism. They display a concern for the underprivileged that doesn't recognise the artificial lines drawn on maps by agents of an imperial power in retreat.

Cultural identity goes to the very soul of a person, an identity that national boundaries cannot erase. It is this identity that the leaders of the region must re-emphasise while reconceptualising South Asia. Without that, SAARC will continue to remain periodic jamborees.

May be by the time we have the 12th SAARC Summit, there will be a simultaneous Parliament of Cultures taking place between Pashtuns, Awadhis, Bengalis, Tamils, Nepalis, Assamese and Kashmiris, rather than just the socalled eminent persons of the

By arrangement with the Nepali Times.

A step forward for the fragile forum?

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

INALLY, the 11th summit of the leaders of seven South Asian countries was held at Kathmandu putting behind all speculations about the much-delayed gathering. The three-day conference of the heads of the government was reduced to a two-day affair, but the bottom line is that it eventually took place.

Indeed, it is a great leap forward for the 16year-old South Asian association for regional forum, which is no longer a nascent organisation but failed to blossom in the manner many had

The summit hung in the balance for more than two years as an unfortunate fallout of the bitter ties between two major member of the forum -India and Pakistan. Uncertainty surrounding the event stemming from the tensions between rival South Asian neighbours has delayed the event which was to take place in the capital of Nepal in November, 1999.

The gains so far made by the forum in not mean because it has covered several fields under the integrated programme of action (IPA) over the years covering varied areas like trade and commerce, education, sports, culture etc.

The delay in the holding the summit has delivered a body blow to the SAARC because activities of the forum remained near moribund during this period although the SAARC secretariat carried out routine business.

SAARC lacked the necessary political thrust during the period causing frustration about the functioning of the forum. The bottlenecks were slowly removed with the improvement of the ties between India and Pakistan following the Kargil conflict in mid-1999, and the Indo-Pakistan summit in Agra further created a positive climate for the SAARC summit since the multilateral event could not be held as leaders of two countries were not ready to meet each other. However, this good ambience too was

reversed due to the Afghan situation and nosediving of the Indo-Pakistan ties particularly after the attack on Indian parliament on December 13 which created a near-war situation along their borders. The summit once again appeared uncertain

but the leaders demonstrated wisdom as all travelled to Nepal, where, however, the Indo-Pak issue remained the cynosure of all eyes. SAARC is mandated to discuss contentious bilateral matters but fact remains that this aspect of the overall regional political climate often dampens the spirit of the forum. Going by the charter, SAARC has to take

decision on the basis of unanimity. It cannot discuss vexed bilateralism. Undoubtedly, this is a good condition to make the forum workable. For, consensus is important for such an organisation like SAARC for the reason that it has only seven members and nothing can move in the absence At the same time, the region is riven by bilat-

eral disputes among members nations although main differences exists between India and Pakistan. As such, thorny issues have been kept out of the forum's purview. The founding fathers of the forum realised this difficulty and agreed that only multilateral approach is the vehicle of the forum. Any voice again in the Kathmandu summit for including bilateral matters do not conform the asic spirit of SAARC. For, it may derail the main

The Kathmandu summit adopted a 56-point agenda of which curbing terrorism and eliminating poverty represent key areas of priority. Both are noble ideas but reality is that it is difficult to achieve them since poverty is a massive area for more than one billion people living in the region and differences prevail on the definition of terror

ism while there is no disagreement to stamp it

However, persistent efforts with pragmatic measures and sincerity will certainly give some results howsoever big is the challenge. Similarly, other areas are nothing much new but what is needed greater push to achieve them as far as possible since many programmes remained on the backburner for long.

The economic union in the region has a new approach which should be helpful in gaining collective economic growth. Big concepts like the SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement), SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area), SADF (South Asian Development Fund) are laudable but once again their progress towards implementation is contingent upon constant touch among the member-states with a serious view to implement them as early as possible.

Resource constraint is a big problem for which the SAARC needs greater cooperation with international organisations and agencies. There may be endless debates and discussions on the progress of the SAARC and its future capability but the very fact that the 11th summit has taken place at a difficult time is a big shot in the arms of fragile organisation which is still grappling with the mandate to stage one summit annually.

The SAARC has withstood a major challenge to its existence, which in turn, should embolden the forum in its future march regardless of the scale of progress.

The Kathmandu summit would help attain this goal but the member states must maintain bigger vigil on its effectiveness and pursue a line to follow up the decisions in all earnestness.

Zaglul Chowdhury is a senior special correspondent of BSS

Free trade still a long way off

EGIONAL cooperation remains only on hoardings' this headline of a despatch on the SAARC's record in a Nepalese daily, The Kathmandu Post, may be too harsh a commentary on the working of a grouping which has several in-built handicaps, but it shows the widespread exasperation of the people in South Asia over its tardy progress. Sixteen years constitute a long enough period for the Government leaders of the seven member-states to have made a credible beginning in the core area of trade and economic cooperation. The Kathmandu summit set a new schedule for quick movement towards free trade but, because of the hiccups in the past, it is difficult to be optimistic even about the delayed achievement of the goal.

Unlike other regional groupings, SAARC has experienced several problems, some of which could not be helped, some others which were man-made. In the first category is the asymmetry between India and the rest (India has land or maritime borders with others, while none of the rest has any such links). Common borders, often, are a source of tension, as shown by the experience elsewhere in the world. India thus finds itself in an unenviable position, because of the operation of the two factors - territorial contiguity and disparity in sizes and resources. Compounding these problems is the adversarial relationship between India and Pakistan which casts a dark shadow on the functioning of the SAARC. It was amply demonstrated at Kathmandu.

SAARC countries lack identity of views, even minimal understanding, on political and security issues. There have been suggestions from the SAARC at Dhaka in 1985, to widen the scope of its functioning and for the revision of the charter which excludes bilateral and contentious issues. India is opposed to any such change because preoccupation with bilateral disputes, in its view, would kill the main objective of the SAARC.

Pakistan has favoured a revision of the charter, in the belief that it would help in the "regionalisation" of the Kashmir problem, the core issue for it. In the past - especially at the eighth summit in New Delhi in 1995 - it initiated a concerted drive and was able to secure the support of some other members but India remained steadfast in its opposition. Pakistan projected the backing of its viewpoint within the grouping as a case of India's isolation.

That was factually not correct because of the understanding of New Delhi's stand in the past - and now. A sample. The comment of a former Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. K.P. Bhattarai, on the eve of the Kathmandu summit: "It is not necessary to review the charter. It is, in fact, essential not to bring about changes in the charter. What is important is to bring changes in the thinking of the region's leaders. There are antagonistic feelings and differences among the leaders. Such differences and problems have to be addressed through other ways. The SAARC has to generate the 'we-feeling' among its membernations to work for the collective good. If the SAARC nations are able to instil such a feeling, all thought about reviewing the charter will fade

That India and Pakistan have differing priorities and concepts about the SAARC was evident at week's summit. The Prime Indian viewpoint thus at the summit inauguration: "It is important that we recognise the primacy of the economic agenda in the SAARC. Our region is home to one-fifth of humanity. With a market of this size, our natural wealth, our human resources, our technical skills and our intellectual strengths, an integrated South Asia can be an economic powerhouse, by using its synergies creatively and building on the mutual complementarities of its constituent's economies. We have to increase our intra-regional trade... The progression from SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement) to a free trade area and then to a South Asian Economic Union has a self-evident economic logic"

Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, put the

The Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, however, felt that the SAPTA process remains incomplete because of mutual mistrust and the absence of a level playing field". His priority was different -`Our seriousness and sincerity about making SAARC a genuine agent for cooperation and economic integration among South Asian countries will be judged by our determination and ability to resolve disputes". He commended the proposal, made by Pakistan in the earlier summits, to devise a SAARC mechanism. "It is time that we reopen and formalise the proposal",

It is odd that a specific suggestion in the SAARC declaration (now and in the past) for "informal political consultations in promoting mutual understanding and reinforcing the confidence-building process among the member-states" has not been seriously tried. The latest declaration commended this process in the belief that it would help foster goodneighbourly relations, relieve ten-

sions, and build confidence. The Indian representatives when queried about the prospects of India-Pakistan talks, took the position that the SAARC, a regional forum, was not the occasion for bilateral discussions. This argument was untenable, however viewed More than once in the past, the two countries held discussions on the sidelines of the SAARC - with useful results. In 1997, the two Prime Ministers of the day, Mr. I.K. Gujral and Mr. Nawaz Sharif, agreed on a mechanism for resolving outstanding issues (on the occasion of the Male summit) which did make a good start and set in motion a concrete process (later scuttled by mistrust). And the Lahore initiative would not have materialised but for the meeting at the time of the Colombo summit in 1998 between Mr. Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif. The Indian side could have avoided "no bilaterals at the regional forum" stand at Kathmandu.

By arrangement with The Hindu of India

Slipshod Indian diplomacy

INDER MALHOTRA

ANDSHAKES - or lack of them - have been leaving their imprint on diplomacy long before the SAARC summit at Kathmandu. The story begins with the first Geneva Conference on Indo-China in 1954 at which Zhou Enlai, as accomplished a diplomatist as there has ever been, made his first appearance on the wider

world stage. Suavely, the then Chinese Prime Minister went round the conference hall, shaking hands with every delegate. He also offered his hand to the then U.S. Secretary of State, the redoubtable John Foster Dulles. who not only refused to take it but also exclaimed that Beijing was evidently "unaware of the change of administration in Washington.' Zhou, characteristically, did not bat an eyelid and moved on. But he neither forgave nor forgot Dulles'

SAARC KATHMANDU

Twentyeight years passed. On would be neither a dialogue February 21, 1972, Richard Nixon arrived in the Chinese capital on his historic visit - the first by a U.S. President to the People's Republic. Let Dr. Kissinger tell the rest of the tale. "Nixon had read about Zhou's sensitivity (about the 1954 incident). The President was determined to have no other American distract the viewer's attention while he rectified this slight. Rogers (then Secretary of State) and I were to stay on the plane until the handshake had been accomplished. We had been instructed on this point at least a dozen times." But this was not all. "When the time came, a burly aide blocked the aisle of Air Force One." Nobody could disembark until after the historic Nixon-Zhou handshake had been consummated in splendid solitude.

Compared to this, the handshakes at the Kathmandu summit. generally unexpected, were - shall we say - no great shakes. But they had their uses and conveyed messages of sorts.

From TV images it was clear that when Pakistan's military ruler and President, Pervez Musharraf, at the end of his speech, walked up to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and extended his "genuine and sincere hand of friendship." the latter was taken by surprise. But he rose to the occasion remarkably well. Mr. Vajpayee graciously took the General's hand and shook it warmly, but wasted no time before tersely telling him - and the world that such gestures wouldn't do. Pakistan's leader must match his words by deeds. Otherwise, there between New Delhi and Islamabad nor any diminution of tensions along the border and the Line of Control.

So far, so good, But after that, Indian diplomacy seems to have slipped into its slipshod mode. Particularly regrettable was the Indian delegation's bland denial of an ``informal meeting" between the Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh and his Pakistani counterpart, Abdul Sattar, Later, it was forced to dilute the denial but maintained the pretence that "no separate and substantive" discussion had taken

Meanwhile, the Pakistani media had gone to town about the 90minute interaction between the two Ministers. Nobody failed to notice that it had materialised after a timely phone call from the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, to Mr. Singh, Nepali sources quietly disclosed that a Minister of the Himalayan Kingdom had arranged for a ``secluded" room for this private meeting. But this, too, failed to prevent the Indian side from vainly trying to draw a red herring across the trail.

It claimed that the two Foreign Ministers had run into each other at a narrow point of egress and that, in any case, there was no bilateral meeting because others were present in the room. On this Gen. Musharraf's reported comment was 'yes, there were others. The waiters for instance, who served them

Pettifogging denials of the undeniable do not reflect diplomatic deftness but crass clumsiness After all, wasn't the whole game documents between Mr. Sattar and the Prime Ministers' National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, that was captured on the camera by every TV channel in the world?

given away by the exchange of

Since the papers exchanged could not be laundry lists, there is intense speculation about their content. However, once again, South Block is tight-lipped about this, with the result that all kinds of rumours are rife. Pakistani newspapers, quoting high diplomatic sources, have claimed that Mr. Mishra gave Mr. Sattar the ``Indian version of the summary record of the Jaswant-Sattar meeting."

Another cause for disappointment is the apparent inability of the decision-makers to think things through. For instance, there may have been good reason to deny Pakistani aircraft the use of Indian airspace. But while making the ban effective from New Year Day, did no one remember that this would interfere with the flight of the Pakistani President and his delegation to the SAARC summit? An exemption for their flights could have been announced along with the prohibition. But this was not done. The offer was made several days later. Gen. Musharraf turned it down and utilised the opportunity to fly to Kathmandu via Beijing where barely a fortnight after his official visit - China and Pakistan underscored that their "all- weather" friendship was "deeper than the seas and higher than the moun-

By arrangement with The Hindu of India