

INDIA-PAKISTAN STANDOFF

Breaking the Gordian knot

M. B. NAQVI writes from Karachi

AS the recent Kathmandu Summit showed, the deadlock between India and Pakistan is far deeper than a mere military confrontation; it is a clash of two ideologies based on sick nationalisms. It has lasted all of 54 years. Two things are clear: the confrontation is unsustainable and a war will result, if not resolved soon. Why it is unsustainable is because it tends to escalate and both are nuclear powers. A nuclear exchange under any circumstances will be a disaster; there can be no victory in a nuclear war: both will lose. Apart from expressing mindless bigotry, neither side can achieve any rational objective by even a non-nuclear war. The immediate consequence of the current standoff is that the issue of Kashmir has truly been internationalised. Most foreign powers have offered their mediation and good offices, with the US in the lead. India's lobbying of the US, Britain and Russia to pressurise Pakistan is inviting them to play a role in South Asia. Needless to say Pakistan wants nothing better than a third party intervention, preferably by the US. The international background is not favourable to second and third rank powers: it is a unipolar world par excellence. As the American war on Al-Qaeda and Taliban has demonstrated, the US is determined to play a strong hand in Asia — primarily for its own benefit. All others are required to facilitate it — unless they

want to risk becoming an adversary. India willingly and Pakistan under duress are a part of the American-led Coalition against Terrorism. Americans are militarily present in Pakistan, operating from four or more military bases. India had offered the use of all its available facilities for the task; that the US has not made use of them is due largely to its needs. Let no one make a mistake: Americans and the British are already playing a decisive role in restraining India from doing what it would have liked to do; they are protecting Pakistan for the time being, though they are implicitly promising to deliver Pakistan's compliance to the Indian purposes by their own inimitable ways of persuading. But isn't it a third party intervention? The other side of the unipolarity coin is on display too. Scope for freedom of action by second and third rank powers is on the decrease. India had hoped that South Asia should somehow be kept out of international rivalries; thanks to its political weight, the two cold warriors deferred to India — up to a point. There developed a tacit détente between the US and USSR over the Subcontinent — despite Pakistan having been accepted into the western alliance system largely due to its need for dollars. The superpowers thus did not conduct active rivalry in South Asia. That restraint is no more. The US feels free to do what it thinks necessary in the pursuit of its War on

Terrorism. The American military presence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, with strong political and diplomatic activities elsewhere in central Asia is threatening to suck in the Subcontinent into a maelstrom. America calls it leadership role: it is geo-strategic mastery over large parts of Asia if we remember the American influence in Japan, Southeast Asian countries and not to ignore Taiwan and South Korea. But geo-politics does not hang in the air. The leadership role is no longer an end in itself as was the case with kings of yore. It now confers financial benefits. Ignoring new names, the old fashioned concept of spheres of influences applies. Only this sphere must become a safe market for investments and WTO rules are a help. The nexus of geopolitics with economics was never absent, no matter how passionately and sincerely the political aims are articulated. It is immaterial whether the financial or economic gain is immediate aim or results from new equations. What South Asians must examine is: where do they stand and what is their true status. There is a strong undertow that is propelling them to America-ward. Their true independence of action is being pre-empted and their stature is eroding in the process, though for Indians a prize of ambiguous significance, recognised regional influential in a Pax Americana. The 'vision thing' is unavoidable reality. Can Subcontinental people

not see where they are heading thanks to Indo-Pakistan confrontation that has now become unsustainable. It is not contributing to any state's progress or enhancing stature. The two antagonists are running unacceptable risks. They are holding up the progress of the rest of the South Asia and the latter is complaining. The rhetoric about dire poverty of the masses in both countries, and indeed in the rest of South Asia with its illiteracy, ill health and backwardness is overworked. But it is true. Much of this can be traced to excessive militarisation in India and Pakistan and clearly wrong priorities that have favoured narrow elite to prosper while the masses have remained in penury and widespread unemployment. The present crisis, in essentials, is compulsive clash of the two elite that may lead to utter self-destruction if they stumble into a nuclear war. This latter threat cannot be ruled out. There is a notion abroad in India: Maybe the Americans can be persuaded to do something about Pakistan's nuclear arsenals. Suggesting the Americans do perform this near miracle, would the outcome be to India's advantage? Would it not make for the permanence of US overlordship over South Asia? Would that enhance India's greatness? Would not the US also want to take the Indian nuclear capability under its supervision? May be they would want to repeat or would want to repeat the perfor-

mance in some fashion or pretext. At all events, the stature of India and all others in South Asia would diminish. There is another vision: a people-to-people reconciliation between the Indians and Pakistanis can become a core round which all of South Asia can be made into a zone of peace and common friendship. The disputes that have dominated newspaper headlines and grabbed popular attention can then be relegated eventually to insignificance by freezing them more or less indefinitely. Should the priorities shift from purely militarised security concepts, popular weal can be directly aimed at for reducing poverty through aiming at jobs for all. In lieu of jobs a minimal kind of social security should be statutorily compulsory. This can be progressive as the economies develop. Regional principle for free trade and economic cooperation, indeed integration, needs to be taken up with zeal in conditions where the need for the Indians and Pakistanis to use the SAARC veto would not arise. Thanks to the resource base, sky can be the limit of prosperity that South Asia can achieve. There would also be political benefits. Without trying to become great powers the classical sense their inherent stature would go up; they would be admired for their cultural advances. Are there any buyers of this vision? Naqvi is a noted Pakistani columnist.

No rewards for Pakistan

JIM HOAGLAND, The Washington Post

INDIA and Pakistan have found something on which to agree: This is not the moment to challenge the United States by escalating their long and nasty conflict into a shooting war. The two rivals have moved back from the brink to play for time while American bombs still fall nearby. They shifted from rattling their small nuclear arsenals at each other to hosting Secretary of State Colin Powell this week on a trip that underscores the central role the United States has now accepted in the Asian subcontinent. That role enables the Bush administration to pursue its war against global terrorism more effectively and to seek a new strategic relationship with India, an old U.S. antagonist throughout the Cold War. Paradoxically, U.S. military strikes in Afghanistan seem to have inhibited India and Pakistan from going to war themselves. With so much American muscle in the area, even regional powers carefully calibrate their steps. India and Pakistan went on a war footing after the Dec. 13 terrorist attack on India's Parliament. India, blaming Pakistan for the attack and the United States for being taken in by President Pervez Musharraf, mobilized for a retaliatory strike. But intense pressure from Washington extracted promises from Gen. Musharraf that Pakistan's intelligence service and army will cease giving food, weapons and other logistical help to infiltrators who carry out terrorist raids into India and Indian-controlled Kashmir. The army will no longer provide mortar fire to cover the infiltrators, who have been cut adrift by Musharraf. By making those promises knowing they would be conveyed to India and monitored, Musharraf in effect declared an end to his state's support for cross-border terrorism. He hinted as much in his Jan. 12 speech. Musharraf unequivocally condemned all acts of terrorism, including those carried out in the name of freeing Kashmir's Muslim majority from Indian rule. He also pledged to combat Islamic extremism and lawlessness within Pakistan itself.



Comments by Indian officials suggest that the private pledges were the key to India's decision to treat Musharraf's speech as a major step forward and the basis for freezing their military buildup, which still stands at menacing levels. "The temperature has gone from 104 to 100," one Western diplomat says. "It will go down more, or shoot back up, depending on whether the Indians see that Musharraf is or is not doing what he said he would do to stop cross-border terrorism. It will be pretty obvious to them." The news is not India's trust of Musharraf. That still does not

go very far. The news is India's trust of a conservative Republican president in Washington. The Bush administration has scored its first clear diplomatic success abroad if it can now consolidate the uneasy standoff between New Delhi and Islamabad. American diplomacy seemed to Indians to be its old unbalanced self in the first phase of the war on terrorism. Powell courted Musharraf and showered economic aid on him in return for logistical support for U.S. attacks on Afghanistan. Indian complaints were treated as whining at the State Department. But the Dec. 13 attack and India's buildup ended the imbalance in policy. Powell relentlessly pressured Musharraf and squeezed him into making the Jan. 12 unequivocal break with terrorism. President Bush worked just as hard to calm India's fears. They in effect made South Asia the center of the next big step in the war on terrorism after Afghanistan. It is, however, still an incomplete triumph. It will take India three to four weeks to judge how fully Musharraf's commitments on infiltration are being carried out. Kashmiri extremists may respond to the Pakistani leader's reversal by trying to carry out new outrages on their own to provoke an Indian attack. There are also pitfalls on the diplomatic front. In his speech Musharraf called on the United States to reward him for his very belated recognition of the evils of terrorism and religious extremism by intervening in the Kashmir dispute and pressuring India for concessions. Powell has wisely shown no inclination to use his current trip for that purpose. Musharraf deserves no rewards for having to be hauled kicking and screaming into denouncing the evil that has flourished under his nose. He has proven that he has all along had much more room to accept significant change than he has acknowledged. There were heroic flourishes in his Jan. 12 declaration. But Musharraf's role in creating the disasters that led to the need for that speech cannot be simply forgotten or forgiven, or compensated.

SAARC summit: another ritual?

SHAMEEM AKHTAR

IT was after a lapse of two years that the SAARC heads of state and government met at Kathmandu, with the South Asian horizon darkened by war clouds. The Indian troops numbering 300,000 have moved into the forward areas poised for an attack on Azad Kashmir, Sindh and Punjab while 60,000 Pakistan troops are deployed astride the Durand Line, reinforcing the US expeditionary force engaged in the mopping up operation against the remnants of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants. Another 35,000 Pakistan troops are reportedly escorting three thousand American troops in north-western Pakistan busy in the witch-hunt of fugitives from Afghanistan. If war were to break out, Pakistan will send its troops from the north-west to the vulnerable eastern front. Pakistan's foreign minister has left New Delhi in no doubt that his country may have recourse to nuclear weapon to thwart the onslaught of the Indian juggernaut. There has been continuous exchange of fire across the LOC and the India-Pakistan border. This was the moment for the SAARC leaders to quit quibbling on the admissibility of contentious issues and take immediate steps to de-escalate the rising tension in the region in order to avert the impending nuclear war. The SAARC Declaration enjoins upon the nuclear states in particular to work for nuclear disarmament in the context of complete and general disarmament on a universal basis. In fact, what is needed at the moment is the denuclearization of the South Asian region where two rivals have built up nuclear arsenals and are trading threats of nuclear exchange. It may be recalled that the SAARC nations were so alarmed after the nuclear test explosion by India and Pakistan in May 1998 that they condemned it. Taking cue from this, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan agreed to take immediate steps to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized nuclear war and "discuss concepts and doctrines with a view to elaborating confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields aimed at prevention of the conflict". This was reiterated in the joint statement of the two governments and the memorandum of

understanding signed at Lahore on February 21, 1999. According to para 3(a) of the joint statement, India and Pakistan foreign ministers were to meet periodically "to discuss all issues of mutual concern, including nuclear-related issues". The two sides met at Agra during the last summer but could not make any headway and have not met since - thanks to New Delhi's intransigence. Jaswant Singh and Abdul Sattar met on the sidelines of the Kathmandu summit for ninety minutes after Pervez Musharraf's dramatic handshake with Atal Behari Vajpayee. This is one advantage at least of summit diplomacy that those who are not on speaking terms have to talk to each other. It is indeed regrettable that the Indian leadership is not prepared for formal talks unless Islamabad fully complies with New Delhi's conditions which are in the nature of an ultimatum. The Kathmandu declaration recognizes the value of informal consultations in promoting mutual understanding among member states, a far cry from the SAARC addressing the contentious and bilateral issues as demanded by Gen. Musharraf. It seems that India is strongly opposed to any amendment to Article X(ii) of the SAARC charter that taboos any reference to "bilateral and contentious" items. On the other hand the declaration vows to join the NAM in pressing for the reform of the UN charter aimed at the democratization of the world body. How can SAARC justify its call for the reform of the UN when it does not permit similar reform of its own charter? The ASEAN



Regional Forum permits its members to discuss bilateral issues with each other. The Declaration has added a new dimension to the 1987 SAARC convention on the suppression of terrorism by referring to the Security Council Resolution 1373 - a veiled attempt by New Delhi to equate Taliban with the Kashmiri resistance. It is indeed amazing that no reference was made to state terrorism although the convention expressly mentions "terrorism in all its forms and manifestations". The human rights organizations have recorded massive violation of rights in Kashmir by the Indian occupation forces which should be taken into account while implementing the provisions of the convention. If Jaish-i-Mohammed and Lashkar-i-Tayaba could be declared terrorist organizations without any conclusive evidence why can't India be held responsible for directly perpetrating state terrorism in the occupied territory despite overwhelming evidence? If SAARC condemns the Kashmiri resistance and omits blatant massacre of the Kashmiris by Indian troops, the organization will be guilty of adopting double standards and will lose its high moral ground. The considerations of realpolitik dictate the member states to initiate mutual confidence-building process through adoption of concrete measures but so long as one side is opposed to tackling the core issue that has bedevilled their relations for over half a century, there will neither be any progress towards disarmament nor alleviation of poverty for the simple reason that the meagre resources will be diverted towards the purchase and produc-

tion of military hardware. Unfortunately, the SAARC has so far adopted an ostrich-like policy by shutting its eyes to the festering disputes in the region. For the implementation of the convention on terrorism, it is imperative that there should be a meeting of minds among its members on its definition otherwise they would not sign extradition treaties without which the fugitives cannot be handed over to any state. The international law on extradition exempts political offenders. There is a tendency among certain states to use the Security Council resolution on terrorism to pressure dissent and human rights. India's anti-terrorism law is case in point. It gives the occupying Indian army absolute power to detain the militants in Kashmir and deny them the opportunity of a fair and open trial. One may well ask: whether the extrajudicial killings, disappearance of persons in the custody of security forces, the demolition of homes and the burning down of bazaars by the Indian army and the security forces constitute terrorism. If so, why shouldn't the SAARC heads of state and government take notice of it? It is indeed double standard on the part of the international community to act against the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament building and blame Pakistan for that on the one hand, and keep silent on the ongoing murder, rape, arson and desecration of places of worship by the Indian occupying army, on the other. Clearly this kind of state terrorism comes within the purview of the SAARC convention on "terrorism in all its forms and manifestations". There is a touch of irony in the Declaration's emphasis on facilitation of intra-regional movement of persons in view of New Delhi's severance of communication and travel by land and air between India and Pakistan. Moreover, the deployment of troops and the military manoeuvres along the borders do not facilitate travel as envisaged by the Declaration. The SAARC has done nothing to halt the arms race in the region except passing resolution on disarmament. Therefore, the talk of social charter and economic union sounds wishful and unrealistic. Courtesy: The Nation of Pakistan.

SRI LANKA

Peace-process flickers hope

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE installation of new government in Sri Lanka has brightened the prospects of a resolution of the long-drawn civil war that is causing havoc in the small but otherwise lovely country. The nearly two-decade-old war over the demand of a separate homeland for the minority Tamils in the northern region so far only shed blood in both the rebels and government sides. A truce which is now in force has at least stopped the fighting and in the process has opened up opportunities for a negotiated settlement of the complex problem. A three-member Norwegian delegation has just visited the country to expand the mediatory efforts to bring the contending parties to negotiations so that peace is given a chance through dialogue. Oslo is seeking to broker a settlement for some time now, but its efforts have run into rough weather as the government was enthusiastic for a dialogue subject to certain conditions but the Tamil militants proved lukewarm to the endeavour. Consequently, the mission by Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim could make no headway although the attempts were not abandoned. The victory of the opposition in the December 5 parliamentary elections has changed the scene for the betterment as the new government headed by Ranil Wickramasinghe is more favourably disposed to the peace process than the previous Peoples Alliance (PA) government of President Kumaratunga. True, the president remains at the helm as per the constitution despite the loss of her party as Sri Lanka has a presidential form of democracy which enables the head of state to remain in the position till the term is completed regardless of the outcome of the parliamentary polls. But the government is formed by the party or group enjoying majority in the parliament and it also runs the country while powerful president remains a big factor. In this case, the opposition alliance led by Ranil Wickramasinghe's UNP made a pledge before the polls that it would give serious push to the peace process which in its view was totally lacking under the PA government. Now that the UNP-led alliance is in power, it is only expected that the Norwegian-mediated effort would receive a boost and it is in that line that a high-power delegation from that country held talks on the issue with various groups in Sri Lanka. Led by deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen, the team included special envoy Erik Solheim. The outcome of the discussions that the team had may not be anything very substantial but definitely it has created

positive ambience and the delegation has spelt optimism about the prospects of the peace efforts. A main task of the team to make both side agree to formalising the present ceasefire that came into force from the X-Mas without any serious violations. Truce came before as well during the civil war but was mostly broken in a hostile atmosphere where sincere efforts for a solution of the problem was largely absent. Although no one really knows where the present ceasefire will eventually lead to, an impression is gaining ground that the current truce holds much better promise than anytime before to facilitate the ground for a dialogue. After all, ceasefire has always been meant for diminution of fighting and facilitating talks between the two parties. Unfortunately, the discussion never took place so far and at one stage the ceasefire had to collapse. It seems this time both sides are unwilling to break the truce and derive any big advantage under the pretext of a halt in the fighting. According to the Norwegian team there is an increased level of confidence among the parties involved in the conflict. The new prime minister has indicated that the government would spare no efforts to facilitate a dialogue with the rebels while stressing that the other side too needs to shake off much of its earlier positions which bedevilled the peace attempts in the past. Wickramasinghe has also paid a visit to India for talks on the issue as the vast neighbour in a way plays a role in the Sri Lankan conflict. The Tamil militants have close religious and cultural links with the people of the Tamil Nadu state in southern India where there is a natural goodwill for the Sri Lankan Tamils. But rather paradoxically, India had sent its troops to the embattled country more than a decade ago taking the side of the government in fight against the militants and Indian soldiers returned home after an unhappy experience. Later, New Delhi banned the Tamil militants after their outfit was found responsible for the killing of former Indian Prime Minister and Congress President Rajiv Gandhi whose government had sent the troops. The militants consider the present Indian government favourable to them and suggested India as a likely venue for any future dialogue with the Colombo government. However, this is still in primary stage. While there appears a marked improvement in the climate for a dialogue for the solution of the vexed civil-war, the road to peace is certainly quite bumpy and may still prove difficult to kick off the talks. Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior special correspondent of BSS.

INDIA

The flourishing defence purchase scam

M ABDUL HAFIZ

GEORGE Fernandes' controversial reinstatement in October last, even as the investigation into Tehelka bribery scandal in defence procurement continues, is now once again questioned by the opposition politicians. Several senior politicians along with defence officials and a clutch of army officers resigned after they were filmed accepting bribes and 'favours' in a 'sting operation' launched by news website journalists. To tide over the storm of criticism it evoked George Fernandes, the defence minister also was asked to resign in March last year which he did. But his recent reinduction in the same portfolio has emerged as a major embarrassment for the NDA government when in the last session of the parliament the former socialist was introduced to the two Houses of the Parliament. The Lokshava, the lower house, witnessed an unusual scene as the entire opposition boycotted him — even during the question hours — for what it describes as his "immoral reinduction into the Union Cabinet. The opposition to Fernandes intensifies as a fresh scam over coffin purchase has once again highlighted the helplessness of India's defence ministry in streamlining its graft-ridden procurement process. The opposition members hold Fernandes responsible also for the extravagant importation of coffin and body bags for slain soldiers in the wake of Kargil conflict and other serious irregularities pointed out by Comptroller and Auditor-General of India in his report. Last month the opposition leaders forced the

adjournment of Lokshava on this issue for the second day in reaction to a report that the coffins imported from the United States at around \$2500 a piece were substandard, consequently, there grew a demand for the resignation of George Fernandes, the defence minister reinstated in October last. "I am astounded by the (coffin) scam that they (the NDA government) can do it with the martyrs. This is totally unacceptable," said Sonia Gandhi, the Leader of the Congress Party which leads the opposition in parliament. On November 22 the CPI (Marxist) member Prabodh Panda refused to ask the minister his listed questions saying, "I do not wish to ask him any question as the minister is illegally occupying the chair". Although Fernandes, one of the most vocal parliamentarians, was rendered ineffective and speechless a few of his Samata Party loyalists unsuccessfully came to his rescue. According to Pramod Mohajan, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, however, the opposition had no right to question the Prime Minister's prerogative to choose his team. It only prompted angry rejoinders from the opposition benches with the members asking if the Prime Minister was free to induct in his cabinet even the forest brigand like Veerapan. The opposition moved a censure motion in Lokshava under Rule 184, which involves voting, and it also insisted that Prime Minister Vajpayee should explain why he had asked Fernandes to resign in the first place and then under what circumstances he brought him back while the investigation into Tehelka affair was still under way. The oppo-

BHUTAN

Government on-line

WITH AN estimated 16 government organisations hosting web sites the Bhutanese officialdom is on-line. Since some of these sites are hosted by key organisations there could be a significant impact on the functioning of the civil service. The government sites potentially have much to offer. It might be the long-awaited opportunity to enhance transparency and services, developments which would go well with the trends set by a society rapidly opening up. We anticipate that the RCSC site, opened this week, will save thousands of students and job seekers much time, energy, and money; the audit site will be an example of transparency; education will provide digital libraries for schools; central agencies will transmit their services to the people through the dzongkhags. In practical terms, a civil servant in Gasa would fill in a promotion form and send it to Thimphu, a candidate for training in Paro would seek audit and other clearances from his

digital world every day. We hope it will not be long before the government sites are maintained and updated by trained and creative professionals. We hope that IT will contribute to the national goal to enhance good governance by promoting efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Tourists who visit Bhutan are given a long list of items they need for their survival. High on the list are ear plugs. These are meant to be used when they sleep at night because our dogs keep them awake. Disturbing the US \$ 200-sleep of a tourist, however, is not the issue. Our stray dogs are still thriving, and their numbers increasing. This problem has been growing on us and there is no solution in sight. And it is not just the tourist who is disturbed at night. The cacophony of dogs howling can be heard every night, from the door of the hospital wards to the corridors of apartment blocks, from the town's main streets to the new Thimphu suburbs. Courtesy: kuenselonline.com