

# Some stray thoughts on war

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WHEN India and Pakistan conducted their nuclear tests in 1998, even those of us who condemned them, balked at the hypocrisy of western nuclear powers. Implicit in their denunciation of the tests was the notion that Blacks cannot be trusted with the Bomb. Now we are presented with the spectacle of our governments competing to confirm that belief.

As diplomats' families and tourists disappear from the subcontinent, western journalists arrive in Delhi in droves. Many call me. "Why haven't you left the city?" they ask. "Isn't nuclear war a real possibility? Isn't Delhi a prime target?" If nuclear weapons exist, then nuclear war is a real possibility. And Delhi is a prime target. It is.

But where shall we go? Is it possible to go out and buy another life because this one's not panning out?

If I go away, and everything and everyone - every friend, every tree, every home, every dog, squirrel and bird that I have known and loved - is incinerated, how shall I live on? Who shall I love? And who will love me back? Which society will welcome me and allow me to be the hooligan that I am here, at home?

So we're all staying. We huddle together. We realize how much we love each other. And we think, what a shame it would be to die now. Life's normal only because the macabre has become normal. While we wait for rain, for football, for justice, the old generals and eager boy-anchors on TV talk of first strike and second-strike capabilities as though they're discussing a family board game.

My friends and I discuss Prophecy, the documentary about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The fireball. The dead bodies choking the river. The living stripped of skin and hair. The singed, bald children, still alive, their clothes burned into their bodies. The thick, black, toxic water. The scorched, burning air. The cancers, implanted genetically, a malignant letter to the unborn. We remember especially the man who just melted into the steps of a building. We imagine ourselves like that. As stains on staircases. I imagine future generations of hushed schoolchildren pointing at my stain...that was a writer. Not She or He. That.

I'm sorry if my thoughts are stray and disconnected, not always worthy. Often

## INDIA

# Volatile days ahead in Uttar Pradesh

M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has embarked on yet another political journey along with Bahujan Samajwadi Party by propping up its mercurial leader Mayawati as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for the third time. Evidently the BJP has done it, among other things, to benefit in the Lok Sabha election due in 2004. Besides, the BJP hopes that its tie-up with Mayawati will adequately counter-balance attempts by any of its allies to rock the boat of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre with her block of 13 BSP MPs, particularly after the BJP narrowly survived such an eventuality in the wake of Gujarat violence which is still far from over. The BSP has already announced that in exchange for the BJP's support in Uttar Pradesh it will support the NDA government from the outside.

Yet the pact that the experiment is going to be tumultuous one as on earlier occasions was clear at the outset. There were visible signs of it in the composition of Mayawati's ministry, in her announcements immediately after taking oath on May 3 and in the changes she made in the top level of bureaucracy even before taking over her office.

The 24-member council is heavily weighed in favour of her party. Eleven of the cabinet ministers are from the BSP, seven from the BJP and 2 from Ajit Singh's Rashio Lor Dal. There are two ministers of state from BJP and BSP. None of the other allies the Janata Dal (U), the Uttar Pradesh Loktantuk congress, the Samata party has any ministerial berth.

The composition of the ministry has come as a disappointment for senior BJP leaders who had hoped that there would be an equal

ridiculous. I think of a little mixed-breed dog I know. Each of his toes is a different colour. Will he become a radioactive stain on a staircase too? My husband's writing a book on trees. He has a section on how figs are pollinated. Each fig only by its own specialized fig wasp. There are nearly a thousand different species of fig wasps, each a precise, exquisite, synchrony, the product of millions of years of evolution. All the fig wasps will be nuked. Zzzz. Ash. And my husband. And his book.

A dear friend, who's an activist in the anti-dam movement in the Narmada valley, is on indefinite hunger strike. Today is the fourteenth day of her fast. She and the others fasting with her are weakening quickly. They're protesting because the MP government is bulldozing schools, clear-felling forests, uprooting hand-pumps, forcing people from their villages to make way for the Man dam. The people have nowhere to go. And so, the hunger strike.

What an act of faith and hope! How brave it is to believe that in today's world, reasoned, closely argued, non-violent protest will register, will matter. But will it? To governments that are comfortable with the notion of a wasted world, what's a wasted valley? The threshold of horror has been ratcheted up so high that nothing short of genocide or the prospect of nuclear war merits mention. Peaceful resistance is treated with contempt. Terrorism's the real thing. The underlying principle of the "War Against Terror", the very notion that war is an acceptable solution to terrorism, has ensured that terrorists in the subcontinent now have the power to trigger a nuclear war.

Displacement, dispossession, starvation,

poverty, disease - these are now just the funnies, the comic-strip items. Our home minister says that Amartya Sen has it all wrong - the key to India's development is not education and health but defence (and don't forget the kickbacks, O Best Beloved).

Perhaps what he really meant was that war is the key to distracting the world's attention from fascism and genocide. To avoid dealing with any single issue of real governance that urgently needs to be addressed. For the governments of India and Pakistan, Kashmir is not a problem, it's their perennial and spectacularly successful solution. Kashmir is the rabbit they pull out of their hats every time they need a rabbit. Unfortunately, it's a radioactive rabbit now, and it's careening out of control.

No doubt there is Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. But there are other kids of terror in the valley. There's the inchoate nexus between jihadi militants, ex-militants, foreign mercenaries, local mercenaries, underworld Mafiosi, security forces, arms dealers and criminalized politicians and officials on both sides of the border. There's also rigged elections, daily humiliation, "disappearances" and staged "encounters." And now the cry has gone up in the heartland:

India is a Hindu country. Muslims can be murdered under the benign gaze of the state. Mass murderers will not be brought to justice. Indeed, they will stand for elections. Is India to be a Hindu nation in the heartland and a secular one around the edges? Meanwhile, the International Coalition Against Terror makes war and preaches restraint. While India and Pakistan bay for each other's blood

the coalition is quietly laying gas pipelines, selling us weapons and pushing through their business deals. (Buy now pay later). Britain, for example, is busy arming both sides. Tony Blair's "peace" mission a few months ago was actually a business trip to discuss a one billion pound deal (and don't forget the kickbacks, O Best Beloved) to sell Hawk fighter-bombers to India. Roughly, for the price of a single Hawk bomber, the government could provide one and a half million people with clean drinking water for life.

"Why isn't there a peace movement?" western journalists ask me ingenuously. How can there be a peace movement when, for most people in India, peace means a daily battle: for food, for water, for shelter, for dignity? War, on the other hand, is something professional soldiers fight far away on the border. And nuclear war - well that's completely outside the realm of most people's comprehension. No one knows what a nuclear bomb is. No one cares to explain. As the home minister said, education is not a pressing priority. Part of me feels grateful that most people here don't have any notion of the horrors of nuclear war. Why should they, on top of everything else they go through, have to suffer the terror of anticipating a nuclear holocaust? And yet, it is this ignorance that makes nuclear weapons so much more dangerous here. It is this ignorance, that makes "deterrence" seem like a terrible joke.

The last question every visiting journalist always asks me is: Are you writing another book? That question mocks me. Another book? Right now? When it looks as though all the music, the art, the architecture, the literature - the whole of human civilization means nothing to the fiends who run the world - what kind of book should I write? It's not just the one million soldiers on the border who are living on hair-trigger alert. It's all of us. That's what nuclear bombs do. Whether they're used or not, they violate everything that is humane. They alter the meaning of life itself. Why do we tolerate them? Why do we tolerate these men who use nuclear weapons to blackmail the entire human race?

This piece first appeared on the Z-Net. The writer is an Indian novelist and a leading anti-war activist.

## NEPAL

# Past imperfect, future uncertain

Will King Gyanendra be a rational king or an emotional ruler? CK Lal writes from Kathmandu

KING Mahendra had the courage to marry the girl of his choice. Unencumbered by the self-doubt that formal education invariably generates, he didn't hesitate in translating his impulses into action. His methods were in a way "fundamentalist", but his goals were quite modern. He aspired to do in decades what other countries had taken centuries to accomplish. Rather than follow the Divine Counsel of Prithvi Narayan Shah, King Mahendra chose to follow the isolationist path of another illustrious ancestor Jung Bahadur Kunwar-Rana.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that King Mahendra began his direct rule after the 1960 coup by revising the civil code that Jung Bahadur had framed, which was itself modelled after the Napoleonic Code that Jung saw in France. Apart from a promise to ban untouchability, there isn't much in King Mahendra's Muluki Ain that can be called progressive.

King Mahendra's faithful courtiers extolled the virtues of the divine king as outlined by Kautilya in his Arthashastra, and missed seeing the futility of discovering a new utopia in nostalgia for an imagined past. Fortunately for King Mahendra, there was a school of thought in the United States at that time which believed that controlled dictatorship was preferable to the pitfalls of communism in emerging Third World democracies.

Those were the days when political scientists at the Center for International Studies at MIT were fashioning the template of the Land and Climate Theory of governance to check the contagion of communism from spreading in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It wasn't surprising that Americans picked up even the salaries of government employees in the wake of the overthrow of parliamentary democracy. King Mahendra's direct rule was bankrolled by greenbacks.

The region's geopolitical environment had changed by the time King Birendra ascended to the throne in 1972. After the setbacks

in Vietnam, the Americans were on the verge of withdrawing from world hot spots. The Non Aligned Movement was running out of steam as countries like Egypt and India drifted into the Soviet camp. To continue cautiously with the status quo was perhaps the only choice that King Birendra had, and conservatism became the defining feature of his rule. Let's face it: King Birendra was a likeable person and a good king. But it is no disrespect to his memory to say that he was not cut out to be a great ruler.

Monarchs are compared to their successors and predecessors. King Mahendra was often measured unfavourably against his democratic father. The administrative reign of King Birendra was often unkindly juxtaposed with the paternalistic rule of the pioneer of the Panchayat. The intention of those who extol the democratic virtues of the late king may be to create an ideal for the present ruler to live up to. But history can't be a casualty to these worthy exercises. King Birendra respected the status quo, and when changes had to be made, he ensured that they were orderly and gradual. Call him constitutionalist if you will, but he was no progressive.

It was due to King Birendra's extreme cautiousness that the referendum he declared turned out to be an instrument intended to buy time for the Panchayat regime. Had he been more accommodating, BP Koirala wouldn't have died a broken man, with his life's mission of restoring democracy not even partially fulfilled. It took a People's Movement ten years later to force King Birendra to bestow sovereignty upon his people. As it turned out, his own son, the crown prince, lacked the patience to wait for a favourable decision from his parents. King Birendra shines like a beacon today partly because of the post-1990 political leadership that squandered the freedom he ushered in.

Just when King Gyanendra is about to come out of the traditional period of mourning, Prime Minister

Sher Bahadur Deuba has brought about a virtual political paralysis by dissolving parliament. King Gyanendra is now forced to weigh his options and act. A return to Mahendra-style fundamentalism is not possible because democracy has by now struck roots deep in the Nepali soil. The people may have rejected politicians for the moment, but politics continues to rule their hearts. With the insurgency raging in the countryside, conservatism of the doing-things-the-done-way can't be the escape route either. King Gyanendra has the task of finding a way forward, taking into account these hard realities.

I didn't take notes when I was granted an audience with King Gyanendra some months ago. But I remember coming out of Nirmal Niwas with the distinct impression that the king had already made up his mind about what he intended to do. His purpose in meeting people like us was not to hear what we had to say, but to share his vision of the future. We were his sounding boards.

Given the mess we are in at present, the king will be hailed if he were to take bold and progressive steps to strengthen the fruits of the People's Movement. Then, the threat that Deuba has brought to face democracy can turn out to be an opportunity.

There are enormous risks involved in democratic reversal. Will King Gyanendra be a rational king or an emotional ruler? Time will tell, but one thing is certain: there is no room for any kind of extremism in this politically charged atmosphere. A constitutional monarch, by definition, has to be a judicious mix of the wisdom of contemplation and the power of emotion. The responsibility of a true leader is to resolve the conflicts and manage the contradictions inherent in any system.

CK Lal is a senior Nepali journalist and this piece is printed in by arrangement with the Nepali Times.

number of berths in the Ministry for the major parties notably the BSP and BJP. They could not stomach the fact that the BJP being a major party had been relegated to the sidelines in the government formation process. At the end of the day it was a BSP show all the way. It's blazing blue, elephant symbol and huge cutouts of Mayawati loomed over every corner of Lucknow city. Even the oath taking venue the La Martinier school was bathed in blue. There was hardly a trace of partnership between the equals.

The saffron of BJP was conspicuous only by its absence. The gathering at the venue comprised mostly of BSP workers who cheered throughout for their 'Behen Kumari Mayawati', there was no slogan for BJP whose senior leaders attending the ceremony started to wonder if their party was really in the government. Mayawati in her characteristic was let it be known as before that those were the privilege of the party producing the chief minister.

Mayawati was forthright in letting all concerned know that the coalition was going to be essentially a BSP show and laid bare on the table her agenda: attack the previous Rajnath Singh government and make people realise that it is BSP and not BJP that is dictating terms. By rejecting its demand for the post of Deputy Chief Minister Mayawati made it known to the BJP that it was the junior partner. She emphasised the point after taking the oath, by launching a frontal attack on the incompetence of Rajnath Singh government as if she came prepared for it, without naming any one she denounced the outgoing government for the State's present financial troubles, corruption and poor law and order situation. More significantly she made no effort to conceal her pro-dalit

agenda. Only the schemes that are in the interest of Dalits and other downtrodden section of people would be carried forward, she declared. Mocking the previous government's ineffectiveness in controlling corruption she said the moment it was known that she was going to become chief minister, the corrupt officials had either gone out of the state on deputation or proceeded on long leave.

The prognoses are indeed ominous for BJP's smooth sailing together with the BSP. For the BJP all this is a poignant reminder of Mayawati's stints in 1995 and 1997 when despite being the Chief Minister with its help she attacked the then BJP leader Kalyan Singh in public. In 1997 after she stepped down as part of rotational arrangement of the chief ministership she did not allow Kalyan Singh to function even for month. As soon as he took charge she launched a campaign against him accusing him of being anti-dalit.

Amidst fresh gloom around BJP circles the former chief minister Rajnath Singh who was all also opposed to a tie-up with the BSP still believes that the BJP may not reap any long term advantage from this alliance. But according to BJP insiders the aim of the alliance was very short term one: to save the Vajpayee government on the eve of vote in the Lok Sabha on Gujarat.

The BJP leaders are however unanimous in their view that Mayawati wouldn't contest the next Lokshava election in alliance with the BNP. According to a senior BJP leader her (Mayawati's) political ambition will compel her to dump us when Lokshava elections approach and not allow her to leave even a single seat for BJP. Many even think that the alliance will not last that long.

Mayawati's arrival as UP chief minister

has other ominous portents. The political vendetta has already begun. It is obvious that a lot of witch hunting is about to take place. The fact that the entire opposition boycotted the oath taking of Mayawati made it clear that the political situation in the state was going to be murky as before. Ominously, the Somajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh, the BSP's main rival observed the day as Dhikkar Diwas (The condemnation day).

In the meantime more interesting political lines-up are taking place across the state. Moreover, running a coalition government with BJP is a challenge for Mayawati who was overwhelmingly voted by the Muslims. Can she risk losing them in Lok Sabha election either to SP or Congress? Political observers agree that balancing her secular credentials while running the government with the BJP support will be Mayawati's biggest challenge. Her steps are being already closely watched by the Muslim prostiutency which has given her our last chance to prove her minority friendly credentials. Myawati would have to do it minimum by initiating action against powerful union ministers L K Advani, Muri Monohar Jashi and Uma Bharti in the Babri Mosque demolition case. She would also have to be seen to be dealing with Sangh Parivar outfit such as VHP and Bajrang Dal with an iron hand if they persisted with their temple agenda.

In Uttar Pradesh it is a test of survival for BJP and a test for its pro-minority credential for the BSP. Can both succeed?

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# A proposal for peace in South Asia

AN outcome of any military misadventure would only mean a lose-lose situation for all concerned. The current military standoff between India and Pakistan makes South Asia highly prone to a nuclear crisis. Tensions have continued to rise sharply in the past six months making the threat of warconclusion as well as nuclear very real. The last couple of weeks saw hostilities soaring to peak levels. Subsequently, however, the gravity of the situation prompted the leaders to demonstrate a notably positive shift in their positions and some easing of tensions appears to be underway. Nonetheless, as long as the million men on either side remain in a state of war-readiness, the danger remains clear and present. Border skirmishes including heavy shelling have resulted in a high number of casualties and intense damage to property. Despite official declarations of concessions including removal of economic sanctions and resumption of transport and communications, the confrontational posturing at the frontlines remains provocative.

Any kind of a military incursion on either side of the border, could escalate to a full-scale war. This could happen by accident, miscalculation or even by intent. Ironically, an outcome of this kind of a military misadventure would only mean a lose-lose situation for all concerned. Losses may be relative on both sides but damage would be irreparable. Lahore, Delhi, Islamabad, Calcutta, Mumbai, and Karachi are a few of the cities that could come directly in the line of fire. What to speak of how radiation would travel to the rest of the world in the event of such a disaster making no discrimination between east or west, caste, colour, or creed.

The tragedy and human misery would be unheard of. History would be witnessing the unknown.

Leaving aside the nuclear dimension, both nations are already beginning to face serious economic and political repercussions. The stock markets in both countries (not to mention Wall Street) have been adversely affected. Foreign investors are winding up, tourists are steering clear, and diplomats and other foreign nationals are packing to leave. The climate is not conducive for economic growth, neither for the two nuclear rivals nor for the rest of South Asia, which remains highly volatile and unstable.

The South Asian Forum for Security and Cooperation, represented by citizens of the region, would like to make the following recommendations as a strategy for conflict and crisis management to be implemented immediately:

Track I Government to government contact to de-escalate tensions and eliminate the risk of war

- Electronic surveillance and joint monitoring of the LoC by India and Pakistan, under the auspices of the UN to check cross-border infiltration
- No compromise on peace: both India and Pakistan should sign a no-war pact and a nuclear no-first use agreement.
- Significant cuts in defense expenditures of both countries.
- Agreement on making South Asia a nuclear free zone.
- Agreement to develop a problem-solving mechanism for addressing existing and future disputes.

Track II Involving people influencing public policy and opinion An academic conference at the Track II level (could be convened by SAARC or a country like China, Russia or Iran having demonstrated a commitment to help defuse tensions) on "Resolving Conflicts in South Asia" to be attended by key

decisionmakers, academics, journalists etc. This could serve as a forum for jointly generating options for problem-solving unofficially. This should provide our leadership, in the first instance, the flexibility to face each other, and secondly to negotiate with each other unofficially and informally. The conference may address issues concerning other South Asian countries so that neither India nor Pakistan feel they are being cornered.

### Track III Bringing people together

Pakistani and Indian Governments should agree to the following:

- Joint research on security issues by Indian and Pakistani scholars.
- Student exchange programmes at various universities across the border.
- Relaxation of restrictions on visas and travel to facilitate cultural and social exchange.
- Building the capacity of the media to play a positive role in influencing attitudes and perceptions.
- Promoting linkages between civil society organisations in both countries to pool expertise and resources towards the following areas of common concern:
  - Poverty alleviation
  - Fighting disease and epidemics
  - Responding to emergencies such as natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, inter alia)
  - Addressing governance issues such as multiethnicity, terrorism, sectarian and communal conflict etc.
  - Ensuring civil society's participation in monitoring Track I agreements and dispute resolution mechanisms

### Track IV Promoting economic cooperation

Economic strength rather than military power is the key to development and sur-

vival. Strong linkages between the government and the private sector will generate the pressure and political will conducive for an enabling environment. Our leaders need to start moving towards South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). Some of our recommendations in this regard include facilitating the public and especially the private sector to have free trade in goods and service across borders. Suggested focus areas would include transport and communications, power and energy, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and food security, IT, and eco-tourism. The specific measures that need to be implemented to promote free trade in goods and services include the following:

- ! no informal trade
  - ! zero duty on regional goods. This, in turn, would strongly deter informal trade
  - ! significant bilateral trade imbalances to be eliminated
  - ! harmonisation of trade regulatory practices (eg opening of LCs)
  - ! customs facilitation for easier movement of goods and services
  - ! regular trade fairs
  - ! enabling environment (presence of political will)
  - ! removal of non-tariff barriers
  - ! reciprocal complementarity
  - ! aggressive promotion of regional tourism
- It is hoped that dialogue and open channels of communication between the parties would provide the premise for progress towards these objectives.

These deliberations have been formulated by concerned citizens of South Asia who have recently formed the South Asian Forum for Security and Cooperation, a non-affiliated civil society group, to address the region's problems.