

PAKISTAN

The forgotten citizens

MOONIS AHMAR

"LEAVE the task to me." This is what Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf said to a five-member delegation of Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) led by its leader M. Nasim Khan when it met him in Dhaka on July 30. The delegation had apprised President Musharraf of the plight of more than 200,000 stranded Pakistanis holed up in 66 camps all over Bangladesh since the last 31 years and appealed him to at least ensure an early repatriation of 6,000 poor and oppressed stranded Pakistanis living in Adamjee Nagar Camp, Naraynjang.

Will the "forgotten citizens" of Pakistan, who are languishing in 66 camps in Bangladesh, have a chance to go to their homeland in their lifetime? Or they will continue to live in a miserable condition and leave a bitter example of their commitment and love for Pakistan? The stranded Pakistanis, called as Biharis, are those unfortunate people who after the emergence of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971 had opted for Pakistan because they had supported Pakistani Army in its drive to suppress the liberation movement and keep the country united. Around half a million of them had opted to go to Pakistan and according to the 1973 agreement the government of Pakistan had agreed to take divided families, people with West Pakistan domicile, federal government employees and hardship cases. As per the repatriation process 160,000 stranded Pakistanis were repatriated to Pakistan in 1973-74 and another 9,000 in 1979 and 1982. Since then, the repatriation process was halted and the remaining 238,414 are still stranded in 66 camps in Bangladesh.

On July 9, 1988 a Deed of Agreement was signed between the Government of Pakistan and Rabita Al-Alam Islami, in Islamabad, which established a trust to bear the expenses related to the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis. Around 350 million dollars were raised for that purpose but the issue of repatriation remained unresolved. In March 1992, Pakistan High Commission with the joint cooperation of Rabita and the SPGRC conducted a comprehensive survey of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh but out of only 238,414 people who were listed in that survey only 325 persons were repatriated to Pakistan on January 10, 1993. Since then not a single stranded Pakistani from Bangladesh has been repatriated to Pakistan and the issue has not only become a victim of vested political interests but it also reflect total apathy of the all the Pakistani governments right from 1972 to the present to that grave humanitarian issue.

A visit to the camps of stranded Pakistanis in Mohammadpur Dhaka, where the office of SPGRC is located, is not only depressing and heart breaking but also depicts how such people, despite living in a miserable condition since last three decades, still call themselves Pakistanis. They still cherish the hope that one day they will go to their country. It may be a dream but is shared by each and every person who is living in such camps in Bangladesh.

According to SPGRC, the government of Pakistan is bound to take stranded Pakistanis according to March 1992 survey. Similarly, the government of Bangladesh has also clearly stated that the stranded Pakistanis should be taken back by Islamabad, a fact which was also narrated by its Foreign Minister Mr. Morshed Khan on the occasion of President Musharraf's visit to Dhaka. During the bilateral talks held between the Pakistan President and the Bangladesh Prime Minister, the latter had raised that issue but got the response that because of the presence of three million Afghan refugees Pakistan cannot take such people now.

The SPGRC's newspaper "Watan" in its August 2002 issue reported the meeting which took place between a delegation of stranded Pakistanis and President Musharraf in Dhaka. According to that report, the President gave a positive response to the question of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis. Giving an interview to Iranian Television after his meeting with President Musharraf, Mr. Nasim Khan, leader of SPGRC said that the Pakistan President has assured him that soon some solution will be found for stranded Pakistanis. What will be that solution has not been revealed. Will the stranded Pakistanis be repatriated to Pakistan in phases and settled in Punjab particularly in Mian Channu where some arrangements were made for them during the first tenure of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif? Or will they be asked to seek Bangladesh nationality through some financial package so that they can live a better life?

As far as the first possibility is concerned, even if Musharraf wants the stranded Pakistanis to be repatriated it will not be an easy task for him. He has clearly said that although the stranded Pakistanis should go to Pakistan but because of the existing pressure of around 3 million Afghan refugees, it will not be possible to start the repatriation process at this stage. Unfortunately, every Pakistani Government has given various reasons to justify the non-repatriation of stranded Pakistanis. Sometimes there is the excuse of floods in Punjab or the hostile feelings among native Sindhis or the lack of funds which has so far prevented such people to go to

Pakistan. Moreover, a section of politicians and others in Pakistan argue that the claim of stranded Pakistanis is not genuine and given the fact that they have been living in that part of the world since decades they are Bangladeshis and not Pakistanis. Moreover, according to such people, the government of Pakistan has fulfilled its task of repatriating stranded Pakistan according to 1973 agreement and it is not bound to take the rest.

The second possibility of seeking Bangladeshi nationality may be the only plausible option for the stranded Pakistanis but the government of Bangladesh and also a wide section of people of that country don't consider them Bangladeshis. For them, they are loyal to Pakistan and because of that reason they should leave Bangladesh and go to their country. What should such unfortunate people do now? Their two generations have lived in camps in Bangladesh in an inhuman condition and their earlier generation became a victim of atrocities committed against them in 1971. Pakistan is not willing to take them and Bangladesh is not ready to grant them citizenship. What should they do? Are they stateless persons living in unbearable condition since last three decades or they have deliberately chosen a path which can only cause more miseries and destruction to themselves and to their future generations?

It has been feared in Pakistan, particularly in Sindh that if stranded Pakistanis (Biharis) are repatriated, it will give an impetus to the slogan of "Mohajir nationalism" and cause more ethnic polarization in the province of Sindh. However, such fears were dispelled by the leader of SPGRC, Mr. M. Nasim Khan in a press conference at the National Press Club, Dhaka on July 9, 1995. In that press conference he made it clear that, "we are convinced that the division of Sindh is no solution to the problems of Mohajirs. Any such demand is sure to lead to civil war. We are firmly opposed to the new-fangled concept of Mohajir nationalism and we refuse to admit that the Mohajirs are a nation different from the Sindhis, Baluchis, Punjabis and Pathans, altogether constitute one single Pakistani nation." Perhaps the only true Pakistanis who are now without a state are the stranded Pakistanis living in 66 camps in Bangladesh. They are honorable people who despite all such hardships have remained firm and not compromised on principles.

One will not find a single beggar belonging to that community and they earn their livelihood by doing either odd jobs or small business. They don't get any financial support from either the Government of Pakistan,

Government of Bangladesh or from any international relief agency. It is strange that when in Pakistan there is no dearth of people who want to migrate to the Western countries for better future, there are people who despite all hardships want to come to Pakistan because they still owe their allegiance to the ideology and flag of that country. Perhaps, the Government of Pakistan and the Pakistani intelligentsia should ponder on why such people, who are called as Biharis (although not all of them have an origin from Bihar) and who since December 16, 1971 have burnt all their boats just to go to their homeland are still single minded in their conviction. As far as the legality of their claim is concerned, it is not the issue because successive Pakistani governments, while evading the issue, have not disputed their claim.

The solution to the plight of stranded Pakistanis is not an uphill task provided there is will and determination on the part of Islamabad to resolve that humanitarian issue. When more than three million Afghan refugees, around one million Bengalese and hundreds of thousands of people from other countries with can live in Pakistan why cannot the most patriotic and genuine Pakistanis get their right to go to their country? Fears and concerns which are held by a section of Pakistani elite and people about the return of stranded Pakistan are uncalled for. Because of their technical expertise, they will not be a burden on the national exchequer and will not become a fuel for any ethnic based organization. If the repatriation issue is resolved in a fair and a just manner without wasting any more time, such unfortunate people who have given enormous sacrifice for their country will be an asset and not a liability. The SPGRC has requested that one way to resolve the issue of stranded Pakistanis is by seriously discussing the matter by the Governments of Bangladesh, Pakistan and the leaders of stranded Pakistanis so that a respectable and fair solution could be found. It is time that people with conscious and fear of God rise and allow the repatriation process to begin with proper transparency and assistance from various sources. There is no dearth of resources required for the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in Pakistan. What is required is generosity, political will and determination.

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SRI LANKA

The Vikings with horns of peace

EKRAM KABIR

AT LAST, the end of the tunnel may be near for Sri Lanka. After 18 years of civil war and a long drawn-out mediation process, the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers' organisation - the LTTE - are to meet for direct face-to-face peace talks in Thailand from 16-18 September. As an added support towards the peace talks, the government meanwhile will lift a four-year ban on the rebels on September 6, trying to make the atmosphere more peace-friendly.

And this could be the final process to ending the ethnic war. Apart from many Sri Lankan and international efforts for ending the conflict, the Norwegians must be given the highest credit for their relentless devotion for peace mediation. It was their tireless effort for which the truce between the warring parties became a reality on February 23. Now the news of direct talks comes as another milestone in peace-making in South Asia.

By any means, the conflict in Sri Lanka has been one of the most bloodiest one, lasting for 18 years. It killed more than 63,000 people and has produced refugee flows of great magnitude. A flood of Tamil refugees went into the countries of the developed world. In addition, the conflict itself, though characterized disingenuously by the state as a purely terrorist conflict, was soon perceived to be a war of independence waged by a nationalist secessionist movement for the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Had the efforts by the Norwegians were not mediating for Sri Lanka, the country would have taken much more time to get settled in its war front. More lives would have been wasted. However, many have been asking: Why Norway? Of all countries, what made the Norwegians to take so much interest in ending the Sri Lankan war?

Now, not only in Sri Lanka, Norway has emerged as a global peacemaker. Although the Israeli-Palestinian peace effort - one of Norway's greatest triumphs - is now in tatters, yet from Afghanistan to the Balkans, from Guatemala to the Middle East, it seems that wherever there's trouble these days, there's a Norwegian peacemaker. Since Norway came on the peacemaking scene with the 1993 announcement that it brokered an Israeli-Palestinian treaty

through a secret "Oslo channel," requests for peace envoys have streamed into this peaceful Scandinavian country. Many explained that Norway was a credible peacemaker because of it's a country with no colonial past. Therefore it was believed that Norway could be successful in mediations where any superpower could not. Like, Hilde Henriksen Waage of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, was quoted to have said: "We have a positive image, seen as a small friendly, peaceful, bridge-building land."

However, their Lankan journey wasn't that peaceful.

It was first announced by President Kumaratunga in December 1999 that the Norwegians had agreed to help the government and work towards a solution to the war through negotiations. Shortly after the announcement, the LTTE had its largest military success in the war. Quietly, the discussions began with the help of Eric Solheim, the designated Norwegian facilitator. On November 27, 2000, in the annual Heroes' Day speech, the LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran emphasised his desire to end the war through negotiations. More momentum in the negotiations came from the Paris aid group, which hinted that aid could be dependent on progress toward peace.

In December, 2000, the LTTE announced that it would observe a one-month unilateral cease-fire in an effort to encourage moves toward peace. The government refused to reciprocate, although the LTTE renewed the cease-fire for a total of four months. But the cease-fire flunked with a major assault by the army which the LTTE repulsed, inflicting heavy casualties.

But Solheim didn't give up and kept on working. He prepared a memorandum of understanding which would lead to direct negotiations between the two sides. An understanding foundered, however, on the army's blockade of Tamil areas and the composition of international parties to observe any halt to hostilities. During this period, Britain passed anti-terrorism legislation and the Sri Lankan government lobbied hard to have the LTTE included in the proscription list.

In June, 2001, Solheim was removed as facilitator. Later in the month, Kumaratunga's government entered a period of instability which led to elections on

December 5, in which the United National Party took control of the parliament in Colombo. A coalition of Tamil parties also won 15 of the 18 seats in the Tamil areas on a platform of support for the LTTE and its positions.

Since the elections, there has been significant movement towards de-escalation of war. The new Prime Minister, Ranil Wikremesinghe and the LTTE asked the Norwegians to reactivate their facilitating role. Then in doing so, the Norwegians shuttled between the two sides. In fact, the new government lost no time in reviving the Norwegian connection. The LTTE was equally interested. An informal cease-fire unilaterally imposed by each side that came into force in late December 2001. Both sides then sought the good offices of the Norwegian government to upgrade it to a formal, mutually agreed cease-fire.

The chase for peace was almost over. Solheim was quoted as saying that "we started in Sri Lanka with the idea of copying the Middle East process, but we very quickly came to the realisation that every conflict and every country is different... so we try to build confidence. We are neutral and have no other agenda than to try to resolve a conflict."

However, Norway does not always take up every peace challenges. One key condition in Sri Lanka was that both sides must be sufficiently committed to reaching an agreement. When they accepted, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry provided resources, while non-governmental organisations and others provided ideas. Peace talks are always like deactivating mines, and therefore they have to be tackled with care, as one small mistake can scuttle the whole process. So were the Norwegians, as they kept the continuity of the process, caring for understanding on the both sides. That's how the Norwegian peacemakers have assumed many roles in Sri Lanka: broker, facilitator, go-between or simply host.

While we congratulate the Norwegian efforts in the run for peace, we equally urge the parties involve here to be prudent enough to make the talks next month a permanent achievement.

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Elections without politicians?

ZAGLUL A. CHOWDHURY

THE much-talked October 10 elections in Pakistan is to be an event without the participation of the key figures of country's political scene. It appears that the campaign for the polls as well as the voting itself will be marked by the absence of two leading politicians - chief of the Pakistan Peoples Party Benazir Bhutto and former president of the Pakistan Muslim League Mian Nawaz Sahrif. Both were twice prime ministers of Pakistan and both are barred from contesting the coming elections under the new electoral laws imposed under the decree of president General Pervez Musharraf. The laws also require internal election the political parties as mandatory for taking part in the polls.

Benazir has become the chairperson of the PPP while being away from the country. In case of the PML, Nawaz did not become the chief of the organisation sensing trouble from him under the laws as he is in exile in Saudi Arabia and the government dropped enough hints he would be disqualified as the party chief because of manifold complication. Instead, his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif, former chief minister of the Punjab province, has been chosen as the new president of the PML.

The election laws bars both Benazir and

Nawaz from participating in the polls as anyone serving twice as nation's prime minister are not allowed to seek for membership in the parliament. Two leaders are disqualified on other counts as well since both have been convicted in criminal offenses and candidates with such background cannot seek elections.

Both the leaders, Benazir in self-exile and dividing time mostly between Britain and UAE, and Nawaz, who was sent to exile following an understanding brokered by the Saudi government, are not taking the laws lying down. They maintain that nothing prevents them from taking part in the elections and the laws have been tailored only to harm them politically and this could not be accepted. Benazir has vowed to return to home and campaign for her party and she herself intends to contest.

But this does not look to be plausible under the ground realities as she is barred from contesting and the authorities have made it clear that Benazir would be arrested on return since she is an absconder in the eye of law. The PPP chief has been found guilty by courts as she has been sentenced to several years imprisonment for corruption during her tenure in power. Benazir said she would return home in the first week of September come what may but her decision is being viewed with scepticism by political quarters. Lately she was blowing hot and cold on the issue of coming back to Pakistan and said he would even

contest polls from jail. Her party men have submitted nominations on her behalf but it seems that the nominations likely to be cancelled. Whether she will be able to return to Pakistan or finally decides against, will be clear in next few days. However, one thing is certain that her home coming bid is fraught with the dangers of landing in the jail.

Nawaz Sharif is unlikely to make an attempt to return to Pakistan before the polls. It is believed that he had given a pledge not to take part in politics in next 10 years when a deal was struck for his release from jail and dispatch to Jeddah. But Nawaz and family members deny this and are keen to play a role in the polls. Nominations papers have been filed on his behalf as well as his wife Kulsoom who sought to keep the pot boiling after her husband was toppled from power along with his government in the military coup on October 12, 1999 led by army chief Gen. Musharraf.

Nawaz was taken to custody, later found guilty in several crimes and sent to Saudi Arabia on exile. His younger brother Shahbaz too was arrested and sent on exile. It is not clear whether he is qualified to contest polls although he was elected chief of the PML. Nominations have been filed in their home city Lahore in their absence. Bhutto's nominations were filed in her home constituency Larkana in the Sindh province. Obviously, the two main political figures are seeking to

contest polls in defiance of the decrees of the president. It is likely that their nominations would not be declared valid.

Sources of both PPP and the PML say that their leaders are popular with the people and the "self-made" military President is seeking to bar them from securing peoples mandate. Other politicians are in the fray but they are not vote-catcher or that prominent. Cricket celebrity Imran Khan, who heads a political party that drew a blank in the last elections is expected to create some attractions in the election campaign. But the elections scene in Pakistan is likely to be devoid of the presence of key politicians. Its is something like having a parliamentary polls in Bangladesh without BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami league chief Sheikh Hasina! Or without Atal Bihari Vajpayee or Sonia Gandhi in India or for that matter without Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickramasinghe in Sri Lanka!

However, Pakistan's elections are not exactly on line with the genuine polls that take place in the democracies. Nonetheless, the voting is not without significance. The absence of top politicians may reduce the event into a largely unattractive affair. Without going into the debate of merits of disqualifying the leading figures of the scene, one can conclude that such elections would lack the sound and fury of normal electioneering.

INDIA

The importance of being Vajpayee

RAMTANU MAITRA

AN air of change is blowing across the corridors of power in Delhi. It is evident that the dominant party in the 24-party coalition that has reigned for three years, and hopes to reign for another two, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is in the process of preparing for the next general elections in 2004.

In addition to the usual problems all ruling parties face following a weak and listless performance, the BJP has a few additional ones. One of the most important is the fact that their magnetic vote-catcher, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, will not be contesting the elections. He may lead some rallies, but it will not be the same as leading the party. People in India always vote for the leader, and then for his or her party.

Under the circumstances, the responsibility of leading the BJP falls on the perennial number two, Lal Krishna Advani, the powerful home minister and now deputy prime minister. Among the more important re-positioning of leaders, the selection of Arun Jaitley, the youthful BJP leader and the former Delhi University student leader, as party spokesman, is most significant. No doubt, the BJP has begun electoral preparations.

These preparations, however, were not brought about by Alex Perry, the Time magazine correspondent now infamous in India, whose "Asleep At the Wheel" article about septuagenarian Vajpayee was not only wide off the mark, but showed some of the problems that the firegees (foreigners) have in understanding how Vajpayee, and some other Indian political leaders, function.

Accustomed to high-profile Western leaders often obsessed with physical fitness, and possibly goaded by some of his well-wishers, Perry made the mistake of believing that Vajpayee's slow reaction to most events meant that he had lost control, or lost interest, of the country's affairs. If Perry's intent was to undermine Vajpayee and promote L K Advani, it was an even bigger mistake. No matter what people may say in private, the personal relationship between Advani and Vajpayee is as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar; one Time magazine article cannot crack that bond.

Winds of change
What is happening within the BJP cannot be labelled as a power struggle, but rather the beginning of a process to put the "right people" in the right places to assure that the large vacuum created by the retirement of Vajpayee is filled.

If one keeps one's ears to the ground, one can hear the rustling within the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the so-called brain trust of the party and the vanguard of propagating a philosophy of Hindu supremacy in the country. Once a monolith headed and dominated by the Chitpawani Brahmins from the Konkani coast of Maharashtra, the RSS is only a shadow of the past. Like every other political party in India today, the RSS is nothing but a conglomeration of factions. The old guards from Maharashtra are virtually powerless and the RSS's strength has shifted far and wide, particularly to the south. But the south does not have much to show politically for the BJP, nor can the party boast of a political leader of stature in southern India.

In addition, the RSS is faced with a much more complex factor - that of the large lumpen crowd belonging to its extremist and militant offspring organizations, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal. The RSS cannot ignore this factor because of the BJP's political exigencies - the two outfits have "helped" the party before, by such acts as putting L K Advani on a pilgrimage to stoke the fires of the Ayodhya issue in the late 1980s.

Hardliners claim that it was in fact this duo that brought the BJP out of the mortuary and infused it with sufficient new life to form a government. The failure of the party in the 1984 elections, when it won only four parliamentary seats, and its success in the post-Ayodhya general elections of 1989, when it won more than 80 seats, are held up as irrefutable evidence.

The hardliners, particularly the VHP, celebrate the Gujarat riots that have seen thousands of Muslims killed in sectarian fighting, and want to use the incident to launch yet another aggressive pro-Hindu political movement. But the Gujarat riot is clearly more complex and definitely more brutal than the Ayodhya campaign. Its use may cut the BJP both ways. Nonetheless, one cannot rule out the possibility that the tainted former Gujarat chief minister, Narendra Modi, will emerge as the hardliners' choice for the next leader of the BJP. That is only a possibility if the BJP fares badly in the 2004 general elections under the leadership of Advani.

It would, however, be naive to assume that the hardliners will have their way no matter what. There are also others, such as cabinet minister Pramod Mahajan, a Maharashtra, who will vie for leadership of the less-orthodox members of the party. Regional factionalization within the RSS will also play a role in determining who would wear the mantle if it was passed on by Advani following an election fiasco. But at this

point in time, L K Advani is the undisputed leader (and Vajpayee's input over the years in this must not be underestimated).

The Vajpayee factor
The Vajpayee factor will continue to cast its shadow over the BJP throughout the preparatory period, and even after the man leaves the scene. Like the long shadow that Jawaharlal Nehru cast within the Indian National Congress, which shaped and challenged later Congress leaders, Vajpayee's shadow will also be a determining factor in making or breaking the future BJP.

But as long as Vajpayee remains on the scene, domestic and foreign policies will remain very much under his control. That does not, however, mean that the policies will be dynamic or radical; it means that no other policy maker, in the real sense, will prevail. For instance, if disinvestment is given a stronger push in the coming days by minister Arun Shourie to cure the ills of the failing public sector enterprises, one can be certain that he has the blessings of Vajpayee. If such a policy is abandoned, it means that the premier Vajpayee has changed his course and has asked Shourie to go slow.

Often, Vajpayee acts immobile. Reminiscent of the sphinx-like former Indian premier Narasimha Rao, he also believes that the most important decision is often not to make any decision. He believes that such a pause is the essence of statecraft, and may often act as the healer. This inaction must not be mistaken for confusion or lack of direction or a sign of failing health. The non-policy option is by no means a guaranteed success, but it is an intentional political choice, the result of which evolves only over a period of time.

On the Kashmir issue, some tend to believe that the tough line that New Delhi recently adopted was generated by Advani. While there is no gainsaying that Advani has a major input in the matter, the final policy is always Vajpayee's. Vajpayee was India's foreign minister from 1977 to 1980. He visited both Pakistan and China - two of India's hostile neighbors at the time. He came back from both places with flying colors. It is no secret that he wants to go down in history as the one who "resolved" the Kashmir issue. Whether he succeeds in his mission depends on many slippery factors, but it is a certainty that he will not let control over the issue pass into some other hand while he is still in power.

Courtesy: Asia Times Online

PERSONALITY

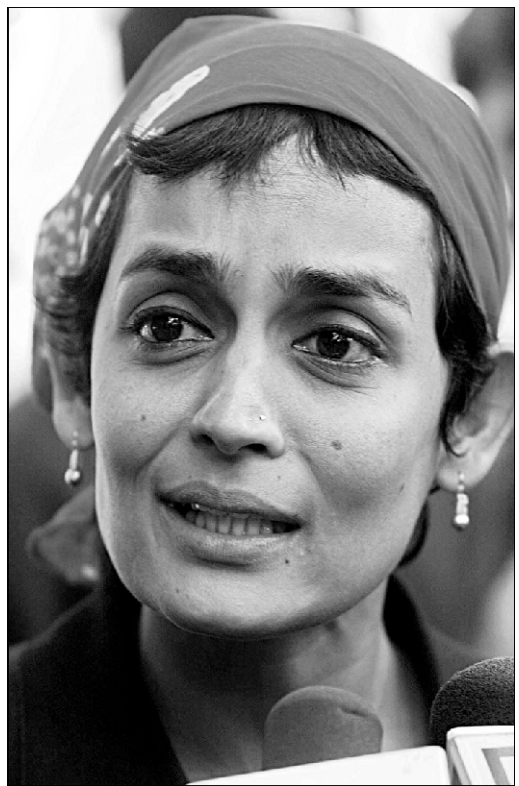
The woman

"It is far easier to make a bomb than to educate hundreds of millions of people," Arundhati Roy remarked during her recent visit to Pakistan to address seminars on 'Peace and Freedom in South Asia'. Anna Khaishgi was among the bedazzled crowd...

Is this the same Arundhati Roy who has fascinated the whole country?" disappointment was obvious in the voice of the lady sitting next to me in the over crowded pendulum on that warm Sunday noon of Aug 18. The elderly lady had come to listen to Arundhati Roy, the iron lady from India who was on a five-day visit to Pakistan to deliver a series of seminars on peace and freedom in South Asia. "I am disappointed too Mrs. Qamar, I thought she must be at least attractive if not as beautiful as Aishwarya Roy." Mrs. Qamar's companion murmured. These were the first reactions of the ladies around me when Arundhati entered along with other personalities and hosts. The people of Pakistan were stunned by the coverage that Roy managed in the local press on her arrival and lectures in Islamabad and Lahore. Karachi was her last destination. I was among the crowd that thronged the highly secured elite over-crowded gathering in a hotel in Karachi. The arrangement was indeed as fascinating as the speakers were.

This small, wheatish and short-haired woman sat quietly on the stage and gave shy smiles to the crowd who was still struggling to reconcile that this is the woman who taken on the Indian establishment time and again. The moment she stepped on to the podium; she hypnotized the invitees that instinctively gave her a standing ovation. But all that descended into pin drop silence when she began her speech. She was quickly on the mark. Calling the nuclear bomb the most "anti-democratic" thing, Roy said, "War was the agenda of governments but the common man suffered." Instead of fighting for some abandoned glacier we should fight for our rights and to end social injustices," she remarked referring to the Siachen Glacier that has kept the Pakistani and Indian armies engaged for a long time.

"We should set our sights on small practical things," Ms Roy said referring to intensive art and cultural exchange and free travel across the borders. "Open the gates," said the winner of the 1997 Booker Prize for her novel "The God of Small Things". Rejecting the idea that globalization could somehow prevent wars, Ms Roy said, "It's not McDonalds that's going to bring peace (between India and Pakistan), "it's our stories, our sorrows our jokes." She said these small practical things will make their way into the other country once travel from Amritsar to Lahore and Karachi to Bombay becomes common. "It is far easier to make a bomb than to educate (hundreds of millions of) people," she



remarked.

Following her 35 minutes address to the people of the subcontinent, Roy declared while she could do nothing to stop the Indian government from doing so, "if I had prior information that India was going to send nuclear missiles (into Pakistan), I would be here to receive them." This is how this tiny woman won the hearts of millions in her neighboring county. The final round of applause had the sentimentality that can be seen among a broken family. Mrs. Qamar's eyes conceded Roy as the most beautiful woman of South Asia.

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