

Saarc meet and Indo-Pak relations

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

Government response is slow

Flood effects get severer

SINCE we have little control over floods, the best we can do under the circumstances we suddenly find ourselves in, is to try and minimise the damages they are likely to bring in their trails. Even the forecasting mechanism, a basic tool for raising the level of preparedness, has been inadequate -- thanks to its inability to gauge the areawise impact of the rivers having crossed their danger marks.

For some strange psychological reasons, it is always hoped during the initial stages of a flood that it won't turn that menacing. The result is that neither the government nor the people demonstrate the kind of preparedness that can minimise the losses when the flood assumes the character of a deluge. This time also the government gave the impression that it was in control of the situation from the beginning, but the ground reality seems otherwise.

The situation has worsened sharply over the last three days and a few crore people have been affected. It is extremely worrying to learn that the floods are being compared with the 1988 or '98 deluges. But the government has been pretty slow in responding to the challenge. Reports pouring in from the flood-affected areas indicate that the relief operations carried out so far have been, at best, fringe-touching.

Obviously, well-organised efforts are needed to reach succour to a huge number of people in varying degrees of distress. Lack of planning, coordination and correct assessment of the victims' needs has to be overcome for the sake of effective distribution of relief. For example, distribution of rice and money in areas where people cannot arrange cooking won't help the people in dire need of food and fresh water. The need for medical relief is also being felt acutely in the places where water-borne diseases have broken out. These are aspects of relief operation which the members of the relief teams should not only be familiar with but also be able to execute efficiently. But their activities so far speak otherwise.

The NGOs are fairly active in their relief operations. What we have not seen yet is an all-out relief drive by the government which is of crucial importance. It is good to know though, the government has inducted a joint secretary in each relief committee with the minister from an affected district having been given the responsibility of overseeing relief operations in his area. Thus, the decision-makers have realised the gravity of the situation, albeit belatedly. Now, they must make sure that the activities related to relief distribution are well-directed and succour reaches out to all the needy people.

Kashmir issue taken up

Facts faced in Musharraf-Natwar talks

THE continuing high-level talks between India and Pakistan following the election of the UPA government gives us hope that the political will to resolve the two countries long-standing differences over Kashmir is finally there. It is the substance of these talks, and the willingness of both parties to realistically discuss the resolution of the Kashmir issue, more than the mere fact that they are being held, that is especially encouraging to those who have witnessed the seemingly never-ending back and forth between the two countries on this issue in the past.

The Kashmir issue has now been brought to the fore-front of bilateral discussions between the countries, and the polite fiction maintained for so long, that resolution of the issue would be reserved for final status negotiations is no more. The idea that India and Pakistan could resolve all of their other differences first, and only then attempt to tackle Kashmir was fine in theory, but in practice the continued non-resolution of the Kashmir issue protracted the mutual enmity and held up the resolution of other issues. It is a good thing that this has now finally been acknowledged.

President Musharraf has stated that confidence building measures can proceed only after the resolution of the Kashmir issue. This is nothing more than the plain and simple truth of the matter. To its credit, India has finally accepted this uncomfortable reality, and agreed to put priority resolution of the Kashmir issue on the agenda. This is a huge step for the Indian side, and, in return, Pakistan has signalled its willingness to discuss issues such as cross-border terrorism that are a priority for India. Once again, the fact of Pakistan sponsored terrorism in India is a simple truth, but acknowledging this and pledging to address the issue on a priority basis is a big step forward.

It finally appears as though India and Pakistan are on the road to a meaningful dialogue. We hope, that both sides really mean business, and could create the kind of cooperative ambience that would have a beneficial impact on all other areas of the bilateral relationship.

SOUTH Asians and the Americans would have reason to be pleased if the on-going Indo-Pak talks on rapprochement continue to usher in the winds of change in sub-continental politics. Whether such optimism is well-founded remains to be seen. The Indian Foreign Minister, a former ambassador to Pakistan, told reporters on arrival at Islamabad that he has come with a message of good will from the government and the people of India. But then such public statements from Foreign Ministers trying to untangle Indo-Pak relations from the incendiary embrace of half-century-old convulsions are to be expected. The world at large is not looking at the Indo-Pak talks on the sidelines of the Saarc meetings with only voyeuristic interest. Global concern is genuine for this unstable part of the world where contestants have fought wars and have almost caused a conflagration that might not have stopped at the doorstep of conventional war.

If the BJP firebrand L K Advani threatened to draw the sword from the scabbard, President Musharraf had threatened to draw blood. In this volatile situation the necessity of Confidence Building Measures (CBM) between the two arch-rivals cannot be overemphasised. Pakistan continues to harp on the Kashmir issue as the *cassis belli* of Indo-Pak tensions and thereby arrests any development of intra-Saarc growth as a cohesive politico-economic regional arrangement. Pakistan's portrayal of the Kashmir issue being a diasporic quest for identity of the Kashmiri Muslims distinct from the "domination" by Hindus, based on the two nation theory which formed the basis of the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, has lost relevance because India houses as many Muslims as Pakistan does.

One must, however, agree that religions have too often been used to justify the violation of human rights, in part through hierarchical and selective use of role ethics and postponement of temporal justice to divine judgement. The carnage in Gujarat, if one were to be amnesiac about the slaughter of millions of

people in Punjab and Bengal as a consequence of the partition of India, is the harshest reminder of the result of religion based politics. Indeed one of the reasons of the defeat of BJP in the recently held general elections in India could be attributed to popular disillusionment with Hindu nationalism as a social movement and as reflective of majoritarian nationalism.

Amrita Basu (of Amherst College) in her study of the dialectics of Hindu nationalism concluded that by opposing the safeguards of minority rights, the BJP had effectively redefined democracy as majoritarianism, and minority rights as a case for special bargain-

among them citizens who pray to different divinities but salute the same flag.

It has been argued that the importance of self-determination is accepted as a right in Articles 1 and 73 of the UN Charter. But the discrepancy between this right and the right of the state to self-defence and to the preservation of territorial integrity has never been clearly resolved since both the rights are equally enshrined in the UN Charter. One can, perhaps, explain away UN Charter's inclusion of the right of self-determination on the ground that the framers of the Charter had in mind the inevitable process of decolonisation which was to follow the

role. Like Japan and Germany, these rising powers are nationalistic, seek redress of past grievances, and want to claim their place in the sun. Asia's growing economic power translated into increased political and military power raises the spectre of conflict.

India and Kashmir looms large on Hoge's radar screen. Though India and Pakistan have recently softened their hawkish rhetoric towards each other, James Hoge apprehends that economic and political instabilities within Pakistan could easily ignite another Indo-Pak conflict. Hoge advises the ruling Congress party to follow its secular tradition in governance which would assist the US campaign to counter the influence of

Fischer and his Indian counterpart agreed that enlargement of the UN Security Council should include permanent membership for countries of the South and industrialised world that make key contribution to international peace and security. Germany and India, both declared, should be natural candidates for permanent seat in the UNSC, and both pledged support to each other.

Realisation of India's growing importance is not fragmentary. Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin has embraced the idea of elevating to heads-of-state level the meetings of G-20 that is composed of ten industrialised and ten emerging economies (including India).

Cold War. Dr. Kapila's apprehension has found echo in President Clinton's autobiography in which he spoke of the American national security people's conviction that unlike the US and Soviet Union in the Cold War, India and Pakistan knew little about each other's nuclear capabilities and policies for using them. Besides the US and then Soviet Union were separated geographically by thousands of miles while India and Pakistan are contiguous. Additionally while India has announced "no first use" policy of nuclear weapons Pakistan refuses to follow suit. Then again Pakistan's nuclear weapons remain under the control of the army and given Pakistan's fifty odd years' history it would be unrealistic to believe that there would ever be total civilian control of the nuclear weapons and their use. Assumption of civilian control is irrelevant at best and arrogantly stupid at worst. In such tremulous situation that contains animosity towards India as an inherent factor in Pakistani power structure, American engagement in Indo-Pak dispute should remain robust.

On this, one cannot but agree with the conclusion of K.S. Bajpayee (former Indian ambassador to Pakistan, China and the US) that whatever name Washington's role might be given, it has become a crucial player and will remain so. What distinguishes the US role today, adds Bajpayee, is the virtual impossibility of seeing any lasting Indo-Pak tranquillity without US efforts. The US at the same time should rein in Pakistan because India's overwhelming economic and technological endowments can impose on Pakistan an arms race that would spell disaster for Pakistan's economy. Therefore for the sake of sustained peace and security in this region the Bush administration should not let its immediate interests now being served by Pakistan's tactical support to the US war on terror to cloud its vision and ignore the quest for peace and development by people living in the world's hottest nuclear flashpoint.

While these actions augur well, more important CBMs relate to nuclear weapons. Dr. Subash Kapila (of South Asian Analysis Group) points to the striking differences between South Asian nuclear weapons environment from that of the

What distinguishes the US role today, is the virtual impossibility of seeing any lasting Indo-Pak tranquillity without US efforts. The US at the same time should rein in Pakistan because India's overwhelming economic and technological endowments can impose on Pakistan an arms race that would spell disaster for Pakistan's economy. Therefore for the sake of sustained peace and security in this region the Bush administration should not let its immediate interests now being served by Pakistan's tactical support to the US war on terror to cloud its vision and ignore the quest for peace and development by people living in the world's hottest nuclear flash point.

ing, BJP also redefined Nehruvian nationalism by excluding Muslims from majoritarian definition of the nation. Such polarisation of the electorate along Hindu-Muslim lines paid BJP rich electoral dividend in the past on several occasions, but the party's umbilical relationship with RSS and VHP, both intolerant of political pluralism, cost BJP the election in India.

But then BJP's religious alignment should not be cited by Pakistan as a reason for seeking a solution of the Kashmir problem just because the people in the valley practise Islam. Such projection of an external problem citing internal political policy of BJP would be asinine. The emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign independent state and the disintegration of Yugoslavia constitute impeccable evidence, if one is needed at all, that religion alone cannot be the basis of nationalism. India itself is a shining example of being a country that is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic. Indeed most of the developed and developing countries have

end of the Second World War and the West's continued subscription to this right was embedded in its expectation for eventual realisation of the aspirations for freedom by then occupied units of the Soviet Union.

Though it is difficult to argue for a totally secularist basis for nationalism in the post 9/11 era, strengthened by sociologist Peter Berger's contention that the world today is massively religious and it is anything but a secularised world that had been predicted by so many analysts of modernity, one can give in to the devilish forces of religious extremism which would partition the world along the lines of bigotry and hatred and tear asunder the global architecture which had served the world well, albeit with occasional tremors of fear and unease, for the greater part of the last century. Equally, as pointed out by James Hoge (editor of Foreign Affairs magazine) one should be cognisant of a global power shift in the making. This time, asserts Hoge, the populous states of Asia are the aspirants seeking to play a greater

radical Islamists because aberrant religious ideology of al-Qaida variety is yet to contaminate the large Indian Muslim population. The mid-July visit to Delhi by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, "the first visit at broad policy level from the US after the assumption of office by the new government in India," was seen by the Indian authorities as a "renewal of the commitment to maintain the momentum of bilateral relations" and as "an opportunity of going beyond the purely bilateral framework and discuss regional issues and concerns." Bangladesh, inter-alia, figured in the discussions Armitage had with Indian leaders in which "concerns were expressed about rising fundamentalist forces (in Bangladesh) and their support for terrorism." Obviously Armitage visit covered at length Indo-Pak relations and he was briefed on CBMs that are being expanded as well as widening of the areas of cooperation.

Most recently, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer endorsed India's growing global role during his recent visit to Delhi. On the question of the reform of the UN

Similar sentiment was harboured by President Bill Clinton who felt that "Cold War and clumsy diplomacy" had kept India and the US apart for too long and with the Cold War being over he felt an obligation to improve Indo-US relations. Kashmir, however, remains the sticking point. President Musharraf has made it abundantly clear about the centrality of a solution of Kashmir issue for any fundamental improvement in Indo-Pak ties. That is why it is so difficult to see how the Indo-Pak differences can be bridged in the talks now being held and ones that will follow. Roads and air links have already been restored. Pledge has been made to restore the original strength of the diplomatic missions at Delhi and Islamabad. Discussions are taking place to start bus service between the capitals of the disputed territory.

While these actions augur well, more important CBMs relate to nuclear weapons. Dr. Subash Kapila (of South Asian Analysis Group) points to the striking differences between South Asian nuclear weapons environment from that of the

Nagaland: India's Waziristan



KULDIP NAYYAR writes from New Delhi

herode was that of a minister. Since independence there have been a series of talks between New Delhi and the "underground" who surface and disappear at their will. The ceasefire is effected during negotiations. The current one is the seventh in the series.

The endless talks are meant to determine the "relationship" between India and Nagaland. Strange, this should be a topic when Nagaland is one of the states of the

happy that its flag flies. But all those who rise against the established authority play the same hide-and-seek game.

Pakistan calls the territory by the name of "autonomous tribal areas." India has the satisfaction of listing Nagaland as one of its states. The question the two countries have to ask themselves is: Are the areas over which they claim their sovereignty ever been their part? Does their writ really run? Why is there insurgency

and underground at the same time. A ceasefire is any day preferable to hostilities, limited or large. But the government has to ensure that the ceasefire is not used to collect arms, have fresh recruitment and force the opponents to submission. The NSCN has done all this.

New Delhi is in the midst of formulating a reply because the ceasefire ends on July 31. Some high-ups believe that the demand can be considered by the States Reorganisation Commission which the new government contemplates

Some defiance against the NSCN

beholden to their peace efforts. The fact is that New Delhi does not want to face the ever-smouldering situation.

What may give the opening to New Delhi is the reason why the NSCN was opposed to the celebrations of Phizo's birth anniversary? There can be two: one, the NSCN does not want anyone else to claim his mantle. Those who held the celebrations at Kohima must be posing a challenge to the NSCN. Two, Phizo had come to the end of the road before his death and told his colleagues that the Nagas must find a solution within India.

I was India's High Commissioner in London when Phizo died. Khodao-Yanthan, his old comrade-in-arms, met me. Since the days of the insurgency in Nagaland, both of them had been staying in the UK. Khodao-Yanthan said that Phizo had "changed" and wanted "to settle the Nagaland question with the Indian leaders." But he did not live long enough. However, before dying, Phizo advised his friends in Nagaland "to give up violence and seek a solution within the framework of a united India."

My meeting with Khodao-Yanthan was a friendly one. I was confident that he would be a moderating force on the extremists. I informed New Delhi about his visit. Unfortunately, the V.P. Singh government fell a few days later. New Delhi should have established contact with Khodao-Yanthan.

India has to draw a line. It cannot allow the NSCN to dictate terms. No solution is worth considering if it means watering down India's sovereignty. New Delhi should have realised this by now.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

A ceasefire is any day preferable to hostilities, limited or large. But the government has to ensure that the ceasefire is not used to collect arms, have fresh recruitment and force the opponents to submission. The NSCN has done all this. On the other hand, the Nagas want to lead a normal life. They are sick of the underground's parallel rule of duplicity and dictation.

Indian Union. Every five years Nagaland elects its assembly through the Central Election Commission. The turnover of voters over the years has averaged 60 per cent. Seldom the polls have been boycotted or disturbed. The state has two parliament members, one sitting in the Lok Sabha and the other in the Rajya Sabha. Still both the Indian government and the underground Nagas go over the exercise to reach a "settlement" every now and then.

In a way, Nagaland may well be India's Waziristan, an unruly part of Pakistan's northwest area. The problems are similar: too many guns, too many mixed-up bureaucrats, too many foreigners, and too many central agencies to disburse money. New Delhi, like Islamabad, is

all the time? Islamabad pursues the policy to let the sleeping dogs lie. But New Delhi has asserted its authority through a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) which the new government has enunciated "for maintaining the territorial integrity" of the "existing" northeast states.

This has led to a tiff between the NSCN's two top leaders, Issac Chesi Swu and Thungaland Muivah (I-M), conducting the talks and interlocutor K. Padmanabhaiah, representing New Delhi's point of view. The I-M reportedly told him that the Indian army, already stretched from China's border to Kashmir, was in no position to fight their 5,000-strong cadre. They want New Delhi to define what "the territorial integrity" means. It goes counter to their

to appoint to consider the claim for separate states like the Telengana, part of Andhra Pradesh, and Vidarbha, part of Maharashtra. The appointment of another States Reorganisation Commission may give an indication of New Delhi's procrastination. It does not want any confrontation with the underground Nagas. But the fact it does not want to face is that the NSCN is not yet accepting India's total sovereignty over Nagaland. True, any government has to reckon with the well-trained and well-armed men that the NSCN commands, besides the links it has with Myanmar, China and the ISI operating from Bangladesh. The fallout can be protracted guerrilla warfare, not a savoury situation. Yet, New Delhi cannot allow the NSCN to be overground

beginning to take shape. For the first time, some 5,000 people celebrated, at the centre of Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, the 100th birth anniversary of A.Z. Phizo, the most respected Naga leader. The "underground" threatened to wipe them out but they still assembled. Two bombs exploded at the venue but none left the meeting which continued for three hours.

A few among them traveled to Delhi to tell allike the old lady appealing to the emperor. No leader met them, neither from the Congress nor from the BJP. For some time, both parties have developed a cosy relationship with the NSCN. When Issac and Muivah came to Delhi one and a half years ago, the two parties were on the best of their behaviour as if the country was

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Gross disparity in pay

My younger brother joined BWDB as a sub-assistant engineer with a starting pay of Tk 3,400/= and has been serving in the same post with the same pay for 10 years now. It seems there is little possibility of promotion even after further 10 years. Because an almost similar state of (non) promotion prevails in PWD, RHD, LGED, DPHE, T&T and other such organisations.

While grading up sub-assistant engineers from 3rd class to 2nd class, their earlier received selection grade is cast aside. And being 2nd class officers, there is no provision of getting time scale. After serving for another one year following (7+11) 18 years of service in the same scale, that is, after 19 years, they will receive pay in the next scale. On the other hand, 3rd class officers appointed at the same time with an initial pay of 2,550/= received selection grade in 3 years & 1st time scale in 8 years and are now getting higher salary than 2nd class sub-assistant

engineers. I would urge the authorities concerned to look into the matter. Md Minhaj Uddin Nayatola, Maghbaraz, Dhaka

Public schools not competing

How the government (public) schools are competing with the modern schools in the private sector? In the latter, English-medium schools are hugely popular, specially with the affluent classes (as is studying abroad). The government schools have to compete-keeping within the parameters of national policies.

This is no reflection on patriotism, but it reflects the market conditions, (demand and supply), and changing mores of the fast-changing proficiency in English, the world's sole international language. Recently, the government has announced some measures to beef up the teaching of English from

lower classes. Still these public schools are not competing-the new measures are a basic step. Of course there is huge rush for admission in the government schools and colleges, due to much cheaper cost of education. How the products of these institutions compete with the English-medium students? The disparity (on the average) is embarrassing.

This situation has to be analysed and corrective steps taken urgently. Even the education minister pointed out (DS report July 16) that the new computers installed in schools were being used as mere typewriters due to trainers being weak in English!

There is no point in being too patriotic and miss the international connections! The students in the government schools and colleges should be allowed options, and alternative arrangements made on optional studies, including deeper use of English in daily teaching and writing. Draw more clients, away

from the competitors! How to do it? No comment. AMahseen Dhaka

Why special savings certificates?

The Daily Star on July 1, 2004 reported that the government had introduced a new pensioners' saving scheme for retired government, semi-government and autonomous body employees. In the new scheme, retired employees of the above categories will be able to buy saving certificates worth up to Taka 20 lakh at the interest rate of 11 percent, and the government is contemplating to slash the rates of other saving schemes.

We would like to protest this step of the government. There are millions of people who are not the employees of the government but are solely dependent on their savings. They are widows, divorcees, old and sick people who are unable to do any work, and have to live on the

money they get from their savings. It will be a hard blow to them and make their lives miserable.

We do not understand why the retired government employees will get this additional benefit, they are getting 70% of their basic salary, medical allowances, festival bonus. They must have raised children who will also look after them, so why create this disparity and make the general public unhappy?

We are requesting the government not to cut the interest rates of the saving certificates of the common people; they are entitled to get the same rate as the pensioners. Nur Jahang Chittagong

Wastage of foreign exchange

The finance minister rightly condemned the superfluous import of petty items such as packed food, juices, toilet and cosmetic items from the Saarc and other Asian

countries, when these items are produced in Bangladesh, and the quality is acceptable to the consumers.

Imagine a mini bottle of fruit juice imported from Indonesia, thousands of miles away. If the retail price is Tk 10-12, then calculate the low export price and huge shipping cost for carrying 90 percent water in the juice, when import of fruit powder would have been more economical.

This sort of dumping is possible due to faulty import policies followed in Dhaka, without protective tariff, to minimise wastage of foreign exchange. Add large scale smuggling from the neighbouring countries, and the overall picture is dismal.

Why readymade furniture has to be imported by a country low down in the economic list? A large number of retail shops in the modern shopping centres in Dhaka do not stock local products ("No demand", is the pet answer). The secret of the pur-

chasing power of luxury, and non-essential and expensive imported goods is suspected to be black money in the grey market. Ready made garments are also imported, as the labels indicate! What has happened to our anti-dumping laws?

The monitoring and regulatory bodies have no comments on these questionable trends in the local market. There is more than politics in good governance. Abdali Dhaka

Poor garbage collection

The DCC has contracted garbage collection from homes in each mohalla to small contractors with rickshaw vans, who are paid monthly by the residents. But there appears to be no DCC monitoring and supervision on this essential service.

Our garbage collector has not come for two days, and several bags

of kitchen garbage are stinking. The ward commissioner's field staff is nowhere in sight. How does the DCC obtain feedback on this service? A publicity campaign may be launched for awareness. The contractors may be issued proper money receipt forms. WC staff may go door to door for listening to complaints and problems, and open a complaint centre near the bazaar. Even the location of the WC office is not publicised. What is his telephone number? The DCC is always on the lookout for civil works projects, most of them unnecessary (like beautification schemes, and building shopping complexes at the wrong locations, as per press reports).

The DCC may issue a press note clarifying the issue mentioned above. Garbage collection is a daily essential service seven days a week. Contingency arrangements have to be made in case of absence or breakdown. Md. Abad Dhaka-1207