

Convene SAARC summit soon: citizens' panel

KATHMANDU, DEC. 3. The first meeting of the Citizens' Commission for South Asia here today called for the early convening of the postponed 11th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

"The Commission stresses the need to reconvene the summit and other meetings and for creating a conducive atmosphere for this purpose... The Commission is of the view that the schedule of the SAARC summit and other meetings as envisaged in the charter should be maintained," a four-page press release said at the end of the three-day meet. The 11th SAARC summit, scheduled to be held here in November last year, was put off at India's request following the coup in Pakistan.

Deputising for the former Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral, who was hospitalised after com-

plaining of chest pain, the former Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Sartaj Aziz, told reporters at the conclusion of the CCSA meeting that the "unilateral ceasefire announced by India in Jammu and Kashmir during the holy month of Ramzan and the announcement of restraint on the Line of Control by Pakistan are both good news."

Twentythree persons from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka met here over three days and unanimously adopted the four-page declaration.

"The commission shares the widespread concern over the SAARC's slow progress since its inception ... the SAARC has not had a summit level meeting since the 10th Colombo summit in July, 1998," the declaration noted.

"The Commission express great anguish over the continuing

political tensions in the region which have hampered purposeful and cohesive cooperative efforts," the statement said. The Commission also called for the finalisation and operationalisation of the SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) by the agreed deadline of December, 2001.

It further asked the SAARC member-states to "evolve common positions, where possible, on issue in a globalised economic order and a newly emerging economic architecture." "We want to create a moral pressure by strengthening civil society," Mr. Aziz said. — UNI

Gujral hospitalised

KATHMANDU, DEC. 3. The former Prime Minister, Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral, here in connection with the first meeting of the Citizen's Commission for South Asia, took

ill early today and hospitalised. Mr. Gujral, 81, arrived here on Friday for the inaugural meeting of the CCSA, of which he is the chairman, and had been maintaining a hectic schedule since then.

Doctors at the Norvic Heart and Research Centre, where he was taken after he complained of chest pain, said he had high blood pressure when he was admitted but his condition had "stabilised" and "there is no cause for concern". Cardiologists from the Escoorts Heart Institute and Research Centre, New Delhi were expected to arrive late in the evening by a "special aircraft".

According to the doctors, Mr. Gujral, an old asthma patient, has no history of cardiac ailment. The former Prime Minister was scheduled to return home tomorrow afternoon. — UNI

THE HINDU

45 JAN 02 12 00

45 JAN 02 12 00

SAARC nations urged to hold cancelled summit

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, December 4

5/12
11-13

PRESSURE IS mounting on SAARC nations to convene its eleventh summit, which was cancelled in November 1999 following tension between India and Pakistan over Kargil and army take-over in Islamabad.

The first meeting of the Citizens' Commission for South Asia that ended here yesterday urged the SAARC to adhere to its schedule.

The meeting, organised by the Coalition for Action on South Asia, was chaired by former Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral.

Briefing mediapersons on behalf of Gujral, who was rushed back to Delhi following chest pain, former Pakistan foreign minister Sartaj Aziz said, "We'll put moral pressure on SAARC nations to hold the summit in time." As regards the prevailing tension

between India and Pakistan that led to earlier cancellations, he said, "We've some good news now. Pakistan has ordered its troops to exercise restraint in view of the ceasefire announced by India on the eve of Ramzan."

The commission's call for the summit comes about a fortnight after Sri Lankan leaders started a similar campaign after a high-level meeting of SAARC officials in Colombo.

At a recent talk programme here, Indian ambassador to Nepal Deb Mukharji reaffirmed India's commitment to the SAARC. He said India had been very forthcoming as far in its involvement in SAARC activities and had given maximum concessions to other countries under SAPTA I and II.

On the contrary, in Nepal, which was to host the eleventh summit, media had blamed India for the stalemate, where as Pakistan was also equally responsible.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 DEC 2001

#D-14
9/12

Colombo for early SAARC summit

By Nityupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 8. Sri Lanka's efforts to kick-start the SAARC back to life gathered momentum with the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, reiterating her country's commitment to the grouping in a message on the 15th anniversary of its charter today.

"As the chair of SAARC, Sri Lanka is committed to moving the SAARC process forward. It is with this objective in view that we initiated action to hold an extraordinary meeting of the SAARC member countries at a senior officials' level in Colombo last month," she said.

Official sources said one of the priority items on the agenda of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, when he visits New Delhi next week, would

be to explore the ground for holding a meeting of the SAARC standing committee of Foreign Secretaries early next year.

Hinting that Sri Lanka would like the summit to be held quickly, Ms. Kumaratunga said she "(looked) forward to the next SAARC summit in Kathmandu to work out new strategies to bring peace and prosperity to our peoples in the near future." Meanwhile, a South Asian "people summit" began here with calls for peace and disarmament and appeals to the Governments of the region to convene the indefinitely-postponed meeting of the SAARC heads of state. The meet is organised by the South Asian Partnership International, a private body funded by the Canadian aid agency CIDA.

THE HINDU

9 DEC 2000

Saarc summit possibilities appear remote

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 15 DECEMBER

SUMMIT LEVEL meetings for SAARC continues to be a distant possibility as member countries can only bring themselves to agree to official meetings without imparting any political force to the process. Therefore, its likely SAARC summits will be postponed indefinitely. As India engages with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, its clear that sub-regional and bilateral arrangements are taking precedence over a multilateral forum like SAARC. This was also evident during India's talks with the Bangladesh foreign minister this week.

During their review of bilateral relations on Friday, the Sri Lankan and Indian foreign ministers, Lakshman Kadirgamar and Jaswant Singh, dwelt on the internal situation within Sri Lanka.

The Norwegian facilitator to the peace process, Erik Solheim, has travelled to Sri Lanka and India a number of times in the past few months.

The peace process is hung on two things, the devolution package being worked out by the government and a tactical problem on whether the government should suspend operations against the LTTE before the talks.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh and India have decided to set up working groups to undertake the demarcation of the boundary in the contentious areas. The Dhaka-Agartala bus route will see an early opening, they decided, which will be on the heels of the restoration of the Petrapole-Benapole rail link.

Although member countries continue to swear by SAARC, the grouping has clearly gone into deep freeze. Apart from India having a problem with Pakistan's military ruler, which necessitated the first postponement last year, it is also unlikely that Bangladesh will agree to a summit with Pakistan given the current state of their bilateral relations.

However, to obscure a general disinterest in the SAARC grouping, the two countries agreed that the official meetings could be upgraded to the level of foreign-secretary level standing committee "on the strength of the outcome" of the technical committees' meetings.

The Bangladesh foreign minister and foreign secretary swung by Delhi this week and there appears to be no consensus on reviving SAARC.

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India are members of Bimstec and have concluded several bilateral arrangements between themselves, obviating the need to resume the SAARC process.

The Indo-Sri Lanka free trade agreement, operationalised in March this year, has already showed clear signs of success, with a northwards move in bilateral trade figures.

From January-September 2000, Indian exports were \$453 million (up from \$510 million for 1999) while Sri Lanka's exports went up to \$22.5 million (up from \$47 million last year, itself a 24 per cent increase).

Meanwhile, Bangladesh and India spent this week ironing out outstanding issues on boundary demarcation and

conomic Times

6 DEC 2000

H10-1
16/12

India rules out early SAARC summit

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, DEC. 15. India today ruled out an early summit of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation and put on hold its decision on a meeting of foreign secretaries of the member-countries.

In a statement after the talks between the visiting Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, and his Indian counterpart, Mr. Jaswant Singh, the Foreign Office said it was agreed to continue meetings of the grouping's "technical committees." Based on the outcome of this interaction, a meeting of the foreign secretaries who constitute a "standing committee of the grouping" could be "considered."

This decision assumes importance in the light of Sri Lanka's reported demand for an early meeting of the standing committee. Mr. Kadirgamar later called

on the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee.

In a related development, the Foreign Office spokesman indicated that New Delhi was unlikely to let its stated demand on the extradition of Mr. V. Prabhakaran come in the way of possible talks between the Sri Lankan authorities and the LTTE. To a question on Mr. Prabhakaran, the spokesman said India's approach was "neither to impede peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka nor is to suggest any change in its policy." The statement reiterated India's support for the "unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Sri Lanka and for bringing a negotiated end to the conflict in a manner which would meet the aspirations of "all elements" of Sri Lankan society. On India's stand on SAARC, analysts say India's latest disposition towards the grouping has been influenced by its soured relations with Pakistan.

THE HINDU

16 DEC 2000

removed in the next 12 years.

Shrunken SAARC

HOSPITALITY RATHER than conviction led India to grant Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar a token gesture regarding the revival of the moribund South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. New Delhi's agreeing to possibly hold a foreign secretary-level meeting at some point in the future is less than symbolic. India does not wish to dilute its overriding regional foreign policy goal of diplomatically isolating Pakistan. And it is prepared to continue to apply the brakes to the SAARC in pursuit of this goal. Since SAARC's last standing committee meeting in November last year, India has vetoed all regional summits. This policy followed the Indian Airlines hijack last December and was reinforced by Pakistan's sabotaging of the autumn Kashmir cease-fire. New Delhi believes holding a summit will provide an international forum for Pakistan and give Gen. Pervez Musharraf undeserved legitimacy. Even the vague promise of a secretary-level meeting ensures Gen. Musharraf is denied a platform.

SAARC's temporary closure has attracted little public attention. This reflects the meagre accomplishments of the body. The other side of SAARC's recent paralysis has been the diversion of diplomatic energy to bilateral relations. New Delhi has signed free trade agreements with Colombo and Kathmandu. It is negotiating another with Dhaka. This has muted the protests of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, traditionally the strongest supporters of South Asian regionalism. However, India needs to recognise that this is a poor substitute for a true regional policy. Small countries balk at negotiating agreements with a much larger India. It doesn't help that when it comes to imports, New Delhi is like the proverbial elephant that ran away from mice.

Note its absurd paranoia of Sri Lankan or Nepalese imports. A collection of bilateral agreements does not allow for formulating common regional economic positions that can influence major global fora like the WTO. There may be good reasons to keep Pakistan in a diplomatic pressure cooker. It can also be argued that this policy requires SAARC to be temporarily put on ice. However, New Delhi must avoid the illusory hope that the present patchwork of neighbourly agreements can ever be a truly substantive South Asia policy.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 DEC 2000

A Citizens' Commission Strengthen Civil Society in S Asia

By K SUBRAHMANYAM

EMINENT personalities from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have formed a citizens' commission for South Asia and brought out a joint declaration after their first meeting in Kathmandu on December 1-3, 2000. The chairperson of the group is former prime minister Inder Gujral and includes personalities with both stature and credibility not only in their respective countries but also in the world outside. The objective of the commission is a very laudable one, to stress the major role and responsibility of civil society in creating a favourable opinion for promotion of regional cooperation. It has urged the governments, opinion-makers and civil society of the SAARC member countries to reaffirm their political will to work collectively for peace, progress and prosperity with a view to improving the quality of life of one fifth of humankind.

The declaration deplors the interruption in SAARC summit-level meetings and advocates that impediments to purposeful and constructive regional cooperation should be removed through appropriate confidence-building measures, dialogue and peaceful means. The declaration has stressed the need to finalise and operationalise the SAFTA treaty and to take a common stand on globalisation issues. It draws attention to the opportunities offered by information technology and the need for good democratic governance and recommends measures to enhance the role of civil society. It has also undertaken a number of studies to be assigned to various think-tanks in the region. There can be no two opinions on the timeliness and desirability of this initiative.

It is quite obvious to everyone in the South Asian region that all these measures of cooperation are dependent crucially on mutual confidence and trust among the governments and populations of the concerned countries. Nor can it be disputed that last year's initiative undertaken by Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to develop confidence-building through the Lahore process and the Kargil military adventure which came in the immediate wake of it had done grave damage to confidence-building. While it would be appropriate to attempt to move beyond Kargil and to initiate new confidence-building measures it is unrealistic to

ignore the events in Kargil and to talk of cooperation as though Kargil did not happen and more than 1,200 lives were not lost on both sides. Therefore, mere advocacy of confidence-building and regional cooperation without addressing the problem of why Kargil happened and how to avert its recurrence is not likely to take us far. This is not to advocate an exercise in apportioning blame but to instil optimism and faith that confidence-building can be sustained.

We have before us the experience of detente between the East and the West and the confidence-building measures undertaken by two sides of divided Europe through the Helsinki process that finally led to the end of the Cold War, the establishment of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Europeans were able to overcome the animosities created through two world wars and cen-

should be a commitment not to violate the existing lines of control but respect them. Though this important and basic point has not found a direct reference in the declaration, the commission's efforts to study the removal of impediments to purposeful and constructive regional cooperation would inexorably lead it to the conclusion that without the countries of the region renouncing the use of violence to alter borders and lines of control, there is absolutely no chance of the process starting. As long as there are fears of violence being used against each other in the region, no efforts either at the state level or citizen's level will succeed.

The second important factor that is creating tension in the region is the non-acceptance of the value of secularism by states and societies. It is unrealistic to talk of civil societies unless they are committed to a basic secular approach in governance. A majority of states in South Asia have very serious internal tensions arising out of religious and sectarian factors. Secularism does not mean irreligiosity but that religion is a purely personal and private matter and should not interfere in one's relationship with another citizen of the same country or a neighbouring country. A common affirmation of the values of secularism is a basic imperative for cooperation among nations.

These are very basic issues that need to be debated and on which consensus needs to be evolved. In most Track-II discussions, there is a tendency to avoid tackling these basic issues and to skirt around them to keep the process going. While that is good for the process, it does not help in making any progress towards solving the issues. Some people argue that the breakdown in peace and resulting violence has some underlying causes that should be tackled. If that is to be done through confidence-inspiring dialogue, the first step is to renounce violence and accept the territorial status quo while attempting to find a solution. One hopes the citizens' commission will come to grips with this basic question if it is to be any more successful than other Track-II attempts. It has to be recognised that in all those areas in the world which have prospered in the last half a century, interstate violence has been collectively abjured. Regional cooperation and the implicit threat of violence, direct or proxy, cannot go together.

IN BRIEF

- The newly-formed citizens' commission has urged SAARC nations to work together to improve the lives of their citizens
- Cooperation is crucially dependent on building trust among the countries
- The non-acceptance of the value of secularism by states is another cause for tension in the region

uries of intra-European wars. Underlying this development was the basic commitment of two adversarial sides to renounce the use of force to alter the borders and lines of control inherited from World War II. Simultaneously, Germany under the leadership of Chancellor Willy Brandt initiated the *Ost Politik* which involved the expansion of trade and tourism between the two sides. Some 15 years later, the Cold War ended.

In this region, we had the Simla pact of 1972 which enjoined on both sides that irrespective of the positions adopted by each side on the Kashmir issue, they should respect the line of control and not resort to use of force. In other words, the Simla agreement was an earlier analogue of the Helsinki agreement. If confidence-building is to be sustained in this region and cooperation should be nurtured, there

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 DEC 2000

Prospects for SAARC summit bleak

By K. K. Katyal

NEW DELHI, DEC. 18. A SAARC summit in the near future is not on the cards. There is little doubt about it, given New Delhi's tough line, but the lingering hope of second thoughts on its part vanished when Sri Lanka's latest bid to resolve the deadlock failed to work.

Revival of the summit process was one of the two major subjects of discussion between the Sri Lanka Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, and his Indian counterpart, Mr. Jaswant Singh, during his visit last week. Sri Lanka, which had hosted the last summit in Colombo in July 1998, and in that capacity was the chairman of the grouping since then, was keen to pass on this responsibility to Nepal, the next host. With that end in view, Mr. Kadirgamar took up the issue with Mr. Singh but there was no advance, with the two sides restating the known arguments.

The Kargil-bitten India, it was clear, was not inclined to change its stand in the absence of evidence of Pakistan ending cross-border terrorism. It was on this count that India did not want to be in the company of Pakistan and decided against participating in the December summit last year. Another reason, adduced then, was the Army action of dismissing the democratic Government in Pakistan with India not quite relishing the prospect of an Army general at the summit. Under the SAARC charter, all decisions, including that on holding the summit meetings, are to be taken by consensus.

It was on these two counts that New Delhi also chose not to resume the bilateral dialogue with Pakistan. With the passage of time, contacts with the military ruler were not consid-

ered a taboo; besides, India had dealt with military dictators in Pakistan in the past, from Field Marshal Ayub Khan to General Zia-ul-Haq. With the improvement in the ground situation in the wake of New Delhi's cease-fire in Jammu and Kashmir, talks with Pakistan, at an official-level, to begin with, are considered in the realm of possibility. But it is difficult to be equally optimistic about the SAARC summit.

Some months ago, India did not accept the idea of a SAARC ministerial meeting at New York, a customary get-together at the time of the U.N. General Assembly session. Mr. Ka-

NEWS ANALYSIS

dirgamar now suggested a new beginning with a meeting of the "standing committee", comprising foreign secretaries of the member-countries. India was not quite enthusiastic but agreed to consider it in the light of the experience in the meetings of the technical committees, relating to different subjects, which had not been suspended. The review could be held, as seen by New Delhi, if the progress of the technical committees in the first quarter of the next year is considered satisfactory.

According to India, Pakistan had even used the technical committees to push forward its agenda, with suggestions for changing the SAARC procedure and the charter and widening the scope of its functioning. It was only at the last officials-level meeting that Pakistan did not voice the familiar objections but that get-together was informal.

In India, an important section of non-official opinion favoured an early resumption of the summit process which was considered necessary for a desirable objective -- of gener-

ating a new momentum for cooperative activities in various areas, particularly in trade and economic matters. At the Colombo summit, the South Asia preferential trade regime received a big push, while some decisions were taken on preliminary steps for the next stage -- of a free trade regime. That progress has slowed down. The change in New Delhi's line on the summit could revive the earlier interest.

Pakistan which has been crying hoarse over India's "obstructionist" role needs to rethink its attitude. Going by its past approach, it had invariably been lukewarm to suggestions for increased economic cooperation and a hassle-free trade regime. It had not been apologetic about mixing politics and economics and had sought to link an advance on the economic front to a solution of political problems, in other words, to the solution of the Kashmir issue (on its terms). That being its record, it does not lie in Pakistan's mouth to blame India for the setback in SAARC affairs.

Pakistan has not fulfilled even an elementary requirement of multilateral trade relations under the WTO, and withheld a decision on accorded the most-favoured-nation treatment to India which, because of its misleading misnomer, is not palatable to most political parties, and comes handy to them in spreading misunderstandings about what is a routine arrangement for economic dealings.

In Pakistan, India's opposition to a SAARC summit is ascribed by the ruling establishment, including General Pervez Musharraf, to India's "design" to deny legitimacy to the military regime. New Delhi's stated willingness to deal with the present rulers in the bilateral field should serve to remove such feelings.

THE HINDU

19 DEC 2000

Pak won't insist on its involvement in initial talks: Sattar

ISLAMABAD/NEW DELHI: In an apparent softening of stand, Pakistan has indicated that it will not insist on its involvement in talks with India on the Kashmir issue right in the initial stage and suggested Indian leadership first hold talks with the Hurriyat Conference (HC).

"India should invite Hurriyat leaders for a discussion which will be preparatory to the Pakistan-India dialogue," Pakistan foreign minister Abdul Sattar told *The Voice*, an Islamabad-based English language magazine.

Pakistan had earlier demanded tripartite talks among it, India and Hurriyat leaders on Kashmir issue, an idea firmly rejected by India.

Mr Sattar said Pakistan has been "encouraged" by Indian government's indications that it might allow Hurriyat leaders to travel to Islamabad.

He termed as a "welcome half-step" Indian government's announcement of Ramzan ceasefire and said the "full step would be to abandon the use of force once and for all."

Mr Sattar spoke about "a three-stage framework" of talks. "First, stabilising the ceasefire at the Line of Control (LoC). Secondly, a preparatory process that involves the HC in a process of dialogue with Pakistan and India. The third is a dialogue to find a solution to the Kashmir problem acceptable to the people of Kashmir."

Meanwhile, home minister L.K. Advani on Sunday indicated the possibility of talks with militant organisations like Hizbul Mujahideen and did not rule out dialogue with Pakistan after an "assessment" of its behaviour dur-

ing the extended ceasefire peace initiative in Jammu and Kashmir.

"That possibility is there," he said when asked about the chances of the Centre starting a dialogue with militant groups in the state in the wake of its bold peace measures.

In a free-wheeling hour-long interview to PTI, the minister said the situation with regard to the ceasefire would be reviewed after the Republic Day, when the extension is set to end.

On the possibility of talks with militant groups, Mr Advani said, "I would like to emphasise that dialogue with our people in J&K would naturally have to include all sections like the ruling National Conference, the main opposition Congress, the BJP and leftists and

representatives from Jammu and Ladakh.

"And if militant organisations like the Hizbul Mujahideen are prepared to

lay down arms and become part of the dialogue, they are also welcome," the home minister said.

Mr Advani said, "The Hurriyat Conference must realise this. They have been issuing statements as if they are the sole representatives of the people of J&K."

He maintained that resumption of the stalled dialogue with Pakistan was contingent upon Islamabad stopping the support and assistance it has been giving to cross-border terrorism in India.

In a related development, Hurriyat Conference denied playing any "mediatory role" between India and Pakistan in resolving the Kashmir issue but said it wants to apply the "keys with a purpose of unlocking the doors of goodwill and understanding." *PTI*

SOFTENING STANCE

- Sattar suggests a 'three-stage framework'
- Talks with ultras possible: Advani
- 'Ceasefire would be reviewed'

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 DEC 2000

SAARC summit will help defuse tension: Gujral

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, February 2

THE NEED of the hour is to defuse tension in South Asia by convening a SAARC summit at the earliest and reviving the Lahore peace process in India-Pakistan relations, former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral has said.

Mr Gujral said postponing the SAARC summit indefinitely would do no member country any good.

India had been instrumental in getting the summit postponed because a military coup had overthrown the elected and legitimate government of Pakistan. By calling for a summit, Mr Gujral has indirectly said that SAARC should not be held hostage to any particular occurrence in any member coun-

try. On the Lahore peace process, Mr Gujral alluded to a declaration made by 20 eminent South Asian personalities here on Monday. He said the process had to be revived because India, Pakistan and indeed the entire region, was on the brink of war, which threatened to cause "unimaginable" destruction.

The declaration said South Asia, home to a fifth of mankind, was already marginalised in the world, and warned it would get further marginalised if it was economically weakened by war and political tension. It called for urgent steps to defuse the tension.

Mr Gujral said the Lahore process had been derailed by forces in Pakistan opposed to peace with India. The "Lahore process" had been replaced by the "Kargil process" of

which the hijacking of the IA aircraft and the abatement of terrorism in Kashmir were a part. It was time Pakistan realised that abatement or promotion of terrorism was not in its interest.

The intellectuals who had signed the Colombo Declaration were here to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam, a Sri Lankan Tamil humanist, who had fought for peace and ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka. He was killed by an LTTE suicide bomber in July last year.

Mr Gujral commended the Indo-Sri Lankan Free Trade Pact to be made operational soon as a "technology demonstrator" for the SAARC region, saying that such bilateral agreements should be entered into whenever possible without waiting for a collective SAARC decision. He urged Sri

Lanka, the current chairman of SAARC, to expedite action on the decision to link all SAARC capitals by air, to reduce inter-SAARC air fares to domestic rates and make postal and telecom rates common and cheaper.

On Indo-Sri Lankan relations, he said the ethnic problem in the island was an internal matter and India had no role to play. The Kumaratunga Government's devolution proposals were a "technology demonstrator" for the other countries of the region, including India. On efforts by the Norwegians to facilitate talks between the Government and the LTTE, he said if someone could facilitate a dialogue, there should be no objection to it. Indirectly opposing the LTTE's fight for a separate Eelam, Mr Gujral said a nation's unity must be maintained.

Clinton may visit Pak too

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, FEB 4

US President Bill Clinton has indicated that he has not ruled out a visit to Pakistan during his South Asia tour next month.

"Well, I probably will visit Pakistan," Clinton told former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto during a prayer breakfast meeting here yesterday.

Bhutto who was one of the invitees to the meeting urged Clinton to visit Pakistan during his tour to India and Bangladesh beginning March 20.

Clinton's advisers, it is learnt, are wrestling with the problem whether he should go or not go to Pakistan. On one side is the argument that he will cut a sorry figure if he seems to be "coddling" a dictator.

However, the CIA and defence intelligence chiefs have warned publicly that the subcontinent may explode into another war on present trends.

Congressman Douglas Bereuter has also advanced the argument that Clinton must go in order to ensure that the US will remain influential there.

Clinton also said the Indian subcontinent has become "the most dangerous place in the world because of the confrontation between two nuclear-armed neighbours over Kashmir".

Clinton, however, spoke about the Indian subcontinent in the context of other seemingly intractable ethnic problems in the world and differences among people within nations, those who attended yesterday's breakfast meeting and who met with the President later told PTI.

Clinton said he was troubled, looking around the world, at the "resurgence of society's oldest demon, the inability to love our closest neighbours as ourselves if they look or worship differently from the rest of us.

"Today, the Irish peace process is strained by a lack of trust between Republican Catholics and Protestant Unionists. In the Middle East, with all its hope, we are still having to work very hard to overcome the profoundest of suspicions between Israeli Jews and Palestinian and Syrian Arabs," Clinton was quoted by them.

He also cited discord between India and Pakistan and between Christians and Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The invitees included members of Congress and prominent officials and non-officials and dignitaries from abroad, who this year included Lok Sabha member Margaret Alva and former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto as well as representatives from Bangladesh and Nepal.

Meanwhile, the US Congress will press the Clinton administration for scrapping the remaining post-nuclear sanctions against India. US Congressman Senator Sam Brownback, during a meeting with Lok Sabha member Margaret Alva yesterday, said "I wanted to suspend all of them (sanctions) but President (Bill) Clinton insisted on keeping the levers in his hand through waiver authority."

Brownback said he was one of those responsible for the legislation which resulted in the partial scrapping of the sanctions.

Alva said that many of the key policy makers in Washington have become "remarkably pro-India" under the current circumstances.

Earlier, Alva met Clinton and requested the first family to visit Bangalore on his trip to India, which will commence on March 20.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 5 FEB 2000

Vajpayee pegs Kashmir talks to PoK pullout

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JALANDHAR, Feb. 6. — Flanked by the chief ministers of the country's four northern states, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today told Islamabad that Kashmir — the "only problem" it wanted resolved — was really the problem of Pakistan's unlawful occupation of a third of the state.

The Prime Minister laughed off General Pervez Musharraf's threat of using nuclear weapons on India — Pakistan's ruler did not know what he was talking about, he said.

And Jammu and Kashmir is not, and will never be, a theatre where third parties can hope to chase peacemaking dreams.

One of Mr Vajpayee's strongest-ever attacks on Pakistan came at a function where the Hind Samachar group presented him with Rs 10 crore for the Kargil War Heroes' Shakti Fund.

The function was attended by Union ministers of state, Mr Arun Shourie and Mr Chaman Lal Gupta, and the chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh — Dr Farooq Abdullah, Mr Parkash Singh Badal, Mr Om Prakash Chautala and Mr PK Dhumal.

Mr Vajpayee took off as Dr Abdullah beseeched him to take "decisive action" in Jammu and Kashmir: "How long will we allow this (Pakistani terrorism) to go on?"

It was a "valid question," the Prime Minister said.

"The Kargil war is over but the battle is still on. This battle will continue till Pakistan leaves its designs of capturing Jammu and Kashmir. Kargil was a sudden war, but now we are fully prepared. The battle has been continuing for the last 50 years and will go on till we live, till we win".

In 1947, the Prime Minister said, "Jammu and Kashmir

CLINTON PAK VISIT

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6. — The US President is pondering a "formula" to visit Islamabad during next month's South Asia tour after Gen. Musharraf wrote to US Senator Tim Johnson his government would wage an "unequivocal fight" against terrorism and hold local elections before year-end, *The Washington Post* has said.

Mr Clinton, "backed by the state department's South Asia Bureau, is eager to find a formula that would allow him to touch down in Islamabad, if only for a few hours", for talks with Gen. Musharraf, the daily said. But "counterterrorism officials are sceptical... because they fear it would reward Musharraf without reason and also because of concerns for Clinton's safety in Pakistan". — PTI

sidied with India of its own free will. Pakistan now says Kashmir is the only issue, but we have been talking of Kashmir for the past 50 years. We too want to talk of Kashmir, but when we talk, it will be about the one-third of Kashmir which is under Pakistani occupation. And they will have to vacate it. We do not buy the argument that Kashmir is a Muslim-majority area. There are more Muslims in India than in the whole of Pakistan.

"Pakistan's attempts to build international pressure on India will not succeed. Kashmir is not the issue today, terrorism from across the border is, and Pakistan is in the dock. We are building international opinion as well as preparing for the worst eventuality. But India will not take any decision under international pressure.

"Those threatening a nuclear strike on India, do they understand what that means? We

are committed to a no-first-use of nuclear weapons, but if anyone uses those weapons against India, we will not wait to be destroyed. Let Pakistan announce like us that it too is committed to a no-first-use ... But its intentions are different ... (and) we are prepared for any eventuality".

Mr Vajpayee took his attack to the core of Pakistan's raison d'etre in Kashmir: the two-nation theory.

He said he was told by the Pakistanis during his Lahore trip that Partition had been based on the differences between the Hindu and Muslim nations, but he had informed them they were mistaken. Muslims had stayed on in India of their own free will — India is a "mila-jula" (composite) nation belonging to all communities.

On the Pakistani obsession with "referendum," Mr Vajpayee said the Indian condition for agreeing is that Pakistan first withdraw all its forces from PoK. "Did Pakistan occupy one-third of Kashmir after a referendum or after consulting Kashmiris residing there?"

Speaking before the Prime Minister, it was Dr Abdullah who fired the first shots.

"Pakistan hasn't understood India's language of friendship ... how long will we tolerate this? They (the Pakistanis) think that President Bill Clinton will bring a gift for them during his visit. But it's we who will decide (on J&K), not the USA. The time has come for the General (Musharraf) to be told that enough is enough, stop your terrorism. Nobody should have any doubts that we will always remain a part of India".

His views were echoed in the speeches of Mr Shourie, Mr Gupta and Mr Dhumal.

THE STATESMAN
- 7 FEB 2000

India denies Pak. accusations

By Our Special Correspondent

S. Anwar
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7. India has rejected the accusation by the Pakistan military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, that New Delhi was creating tensions between the two neighbours and said that Islamabad was responsible for making South Asia volatile by supporting cross-border terrorism and indulging in anti-India propaganda.

A spokesman of the External Affairs Ministry said that Pakistan's armed aggression in Kargil and unabated support for cross-border terrorism had generated tensions in the region. He said it was ironic that Pakistan had blamed India for increasing tensions and pointed out that the military regime had unleashed a barrage of hostile propaganda against New Delhi.

119.12.92
The spokesman was reacting to remarks by Gen. Musharraf that the recent observations by the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and other Indian leaders had increased tension between the two countries.

The spokesman pointed out that India had always maintained that Jammu and Kashmir was an integral part of India.

THE HINDU

- 8 FEB 2000