

Commonwealth Group to be activated

By K. K. Katyal

NEW DELHI, OCT. 19. India and the United Kingdom have regained the rhythm in their interaction as is evident from the tenor and content of the foreign office consultations, involving the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Lalit Mansingh, and his British counterpart, Sir John Kerr.

Apart from the absence of jarring notes — not an uncommon phenomenon in the past — in the discussions on a wide range of bilateral issues, they had no difficulty in agreeing on other subjects like the importance of activating the Commonwealth Group, currently seized of the situation arising from the military takeover in Pakistan and the revocation of the parliamentary constitution in Fiji.

In a detailed conversation with me later, Sir John expressed satisfaction with the hierarchy of contacts, the accelerated pace of Ministerial visits from the two sides, on the one hand, and the official-level contacts, on the other, which, according to him, signified a deepening of relationship. He drew attention to the large number of visas — 160,000 last year — to Indians for visiting the U.K., the relaxations announced for information technology entrepreneurs and experts (he did not see any chance of a backlash from the local communities on this count), increase in trade and investments, cooperation in countering terrorism and efforts to reconcile to positions on the WTO-related matters.

Both Pakistan and Fiji, as is known, are barred from participating in the Councils of the Commonwealth because of the breach of the values of the grouping by them and, as such their membership is in suspended animation. Sir John and the U.K. agreed that the U.K. was charged with pressuring the delinquent countries,

needed to be more active. It was necessary, according to Sir John, that Pakistan provided a credible time-table for the restoration of democracy, as the present slow pace did not carry conviction. The Fiji case, he said, was highly complicated because of the "shocking breach of law".

Apart from repeating his support for India's credentials to be a permanent member of an expanded U.N. Security Council, he spoke of their identity of views on peace-keeping operations by the world body. The U.K., it was clear, would not seek to link India's claim for the Security Council seat with such factors as regional support, but would want it to be part of a 24-strong or 25-strong council in its own right. As for peace-keeping operations, the two foreign secretaries accepted the main recommendations of the Brahmi report (by the Deputy Secretary General) for strengthening mechanisms in New York. According to Sir John, India and the U.K. could give a lead in this regard — on matters like earmarking forces in their respective armies for peace-keeping operations, imparting them special training, including cross-training and planning other coordinated measures.

Sir John mentioned the various attractions of the U.K. for trade, especially its open economy and its liberal practices, its staunch opposition to protectionism (of the type practised by some countries of the European Union), its liquidity which made it a major two-way investor. Like the increase in British investment in India, he noted with satisfaction the upward trend in Indian investments in the U.K. Recognising the differences on WTO-related matters, he was confident that the talks on environment and labour standards could be satisfactorily finessed.

THE HINDU

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Jaswant to take part in Commonwealth meet today

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

UNITED NATIONS, SEPT. 5. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, will participate in the First Meeting of the Commonwealth High Level Group, known as CHLG, represented by Heads of Government here tomorrow. At the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Durban, the South African President suggested that a high-level group be constituted which would look at the Future Role of the Commonwealth in the context of the challenges of the 21st Century.

The CHLG consists of Australia, India, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. In the first meeting of the CHLG, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, is being represented by Mr. Jaswant Singh, and the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, takes the place of Mr. Tony Blair who will not attend the session.

Senior officials of the CHLG have had two sessions thus far — the first in Pretoria in July and now in New York for the last two days. In the latest meeting here, the officials have reviewed the developments since their last meeting and are said to have prepared a position paper for consideration by the Heads of Government of the CHLG.

There are different aspects to the position paper. At the political level, one issue relates to the role

of the Commonwealth, on whether the body had a conflict resolution and prevention role and whether the institution of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, needed to be strengthened. The focus will be on prevention.

At the developmental level, there is the suggestion that the Commonwealth should continue to assist small and least developed States and that it should continue to look after the development needs of these States, particularly in fine-tuning the Fund for Technical Cooperation. It has been recommended that the Commonwealth should take positive action in coming to grips with the problems of the digital divide.

On the economic role which is linked to the developmental imperatives, it has been recommended that the Commonwealth should liaise with other international institutions and bodies such as the Group of Eight, the World Bank, the European Union and the World Trade Organisation. And that apart from studying further the linkages with civil society, the leaders of the CHLG should look at how best to improve the structures and procedures of the Commonwealth.

Tomorrow's meeting comes at a time when there is the consensus that the Commonwealth has played an important role not only in taking a clear position on such issues as racism and decolonisation but on the economic and sustainable developmental fronts

as well. With this comes the realisation that at the different stages of the Commonwealth there have been marked progressions.

Although there have been milestones — such as the 1971 Singapore Declaration against racial prejudice, the 1991 Harare Declaration that defined democracy and human rights as fundamental values or the Millbrook Action Programme of 1995 that spelt out the steps to be taken if there were any abrogations of democracy — there is also the apprehension that some of the issues are coming back in different forms.

For instance, at the Pretoria Meeting, India stressed that while democracy should remain the core value of the Commonwealth, the assumption that democracy was overthrown only by military coups was not true. Rather a multitude of factors would have to be reckoned with as in the case of Fiji where a bunch of criminals had derailed the system and the process. Further Fiji had again pointed out the revival of racism when there was the general feeling that this phenomenon had seen its end with the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa.

Also, in the Pretoria meeting a number of delegates asked why the Commonwealth had not been even in applying the Declarations of Harare and Millbrook and why Nigeria and Sierra Leone were dealt with harshly by the Commonwealth for their abrogations of core values, while countries like Pakistan were let off lightly.

THE HINDU

6 SEP 1995

Commonwealth reviews its role

By M. S. Prabhakara

CAPE TOWN, JULY 28. The "High Level Group" of Commonwealth countries established at the Durban meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to review the role of the grouping and formulate proposals on how best it could respond to the challenges of the new century met in Pretoria earlier this week.

The South African President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, addressed the meeting which was also attended by the Commonwealth Secretary General, Mr Don McKinnon. India, represented by the Foreign Secretary, Mr Lalit Mansingh, is among the 10 countries in the HLG.

Though the HLG meeting was supposed to be concerned with the broad issues of the direction of the Commonwealth in the 21st Century and formulate proposals and suggestions in this regard for a meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of State and Government at the forthcoming U.N. General Assembly session in September, the developments in Fiji were very much part of the discussions. Indeed, Fiji, included in the HLG, was not represented at the Pretoria meeting as it currently stands suspended from the "Councils of the Commonwealth" (like Pakistan) though it continues to be a member of the body.

One of the points highlighted during the discussions was that apart from the threats posed by military interventions, democratic governments also faced new challenges from "criminal elements", the developments in Fiji being the most striking example. In the context of the developments in Fiji, there was a recognition of the continued relevance of the content and spirit of the Singapore Declaration of 1971, also reaffirmed in the Harare Declaration of 1991, underlining the perils that racism posed to democracy.

Fiji crisis likely to dominate Commonwealth meeting

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 5

THOUGH THE coup in Fiji is poised to dominate the agenda of the crucial Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting tomorrow in London, it will be interesting to see how Pakistan is dealt with.

Both members have seen forcible eviction of democratically elected governments and risk expulsion from the Commonwealth. But events in Fiji over the past three weeks seems to have pushed Pakistan in the backburner.

The political culture of the Commonwealth, as stated under the Harare and Millbrooks declarations, calls for expulsion of members ruled by undemocratic regimes. Commonwealth Summit in Durban in November saw Pakistan's suspension from its Council after the October coup.

The Durban Communiqué issued at the summit stated that the CMAG would closely monitor how democracy is brought back in Pakistan and discuss the issue at its next meeting. And tomorrow will see the first CMAG meeting since November.

India, currently not in the CMAG, is keen to see the select grouping of eight member-nations, take some hard steps against Fiji.

The fate of the 4,00,000 ethnic Indian minority, particularly the Prime Minister of Indian origin, Mr Mahendra Chaudhry, who is held hostage in the Suva Parliament since May 19, appears central to the Indian concern at the present juncture.

Britain, Australia, Canada, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Malaysia and Nigeria are members of the CMAG. India is in touch with all their governments as it is keen to isolate Fiji by invoking Harare and Millbrooks.

A spokesman of the External Affairs Ministry said here today that only the restoration of the legitimately elected constitutional government at Suva would be acceptable to the international community.

Already, Fiji is under stiff Australian sanctions and if the CMAG imposes greater strictures, the country's export market could vanish.

The middle term Indian policy of diplomatically isolating the military regime in Islamabad is a subject not brought up officially by India at this juncture, seized as it is of the more pressing concerns in Fiji.

However, sources here say that if CMAG does not address itself to the situation in Pakistan, it may send out the signal that somewhere between Durban and London, the Commonwealth has softened its posture on Islamabad.

It may also be interpreted as a victory of sorts by the Musharaf regime. The military chief executive in Pakistan has pleaded before the world community that he wants to cleanse the country's body politic before restoring the democratic process.

He has promised to give the country's Election Commission more teeth, carry out electoral reforms under a specially set up commission and ensure proper delimitation of constituencies.

The US President, Mr Bill Clinton, had said during his Islamabad stopover in March that the announcement of local body elections was not satisfactory.

He had wanted General Musharaf to commit himself to a "roadmap" for the return to democracy in Pakistan.

Subsequently, the country's Supreme Court had passed an order for elections within three years.

During his recent visit to the sub-continent, the US Under-Secretary, Mr Thomas Pickering, commented that Washington would like more convincing statements.

6 JUN 2000

Harare heat on Commonwealth

London, May 2 (AP): Under pressure from Britain to take a tough stance on the crisis in Zimbabwe, Commonwealth ministers met today to decide how to respond to the occupation of White-owned farms and harassment of opposition groups in the southern African state.

Foreign ministers from eight Commonwealth countries, including Britain's Robin Cook, also were expected to discuss the failure of Pakistan's military rulers to set a date for civilian elections.

Before the meeting, Cook said Britain hoped the committee members would agree on "a clear

statement that they share entirely Britain's concerns about the breakdown of the rule of law in Zimbabwe and the atmosphere of intimidation that surrounds the forthcoming elections, if indeed they take place."

"That statement from the Commonwealth will have a considerable impact around Africa, but perhaps particularly in Zimbabwe, where President (Robert) Mugabe had tried to pretend that the problem is only Britain," Cook told British Broadcasting Corp. TV.

"What President Mugabe is crying out for is for us to treat him

as a martyr so he can then try to present himself, in elections, to his own people as somebody who is standing up on their behalf against the old colonial master," Cook said.

Cook said the committee would not consider imposing economic sanctions on Zimbabwe or suspending it from the 54-nation club of Britain and its former colonies. But such punishments may follow if Mugabe fails to hold elections by August, as Zimbabwe's Constitution requires, he said.

Last week, Britain refused to provide Zimbabwe with £ 36 mil-

lion for land reform until Mugabe holds free elections and halts the violence that erupted after armed Black squatters began occupying White-owned farms in February. At least 13 people have died.

Mugabe has supported the occupations, saying they are a justified protest against the unfair distribution of land in a country where 4,000 Whites own one-third of Zimbabwe's fertile land.

Officials on Saturday announced Mugabe would invoke special presidential powers to seize White farms without paying compensation. Commonwealth leaders also have expressed con-

cern that the generals who seized power in Pakistan in October have so far refused to name a date for elections.

The Commonwealth suspended Pakistan after the coup and secretary-general Don McKinnon said earlier this month it must maintain the pressure on coup leader Gen. Pervez Musharraf to hold a ballot.

In Harare, hundreds of self-proclaimed war veterans marched through central Harare today, chanting and singing in a demonstration that ended at the High Court, where their leader was on trial for fraud.

THE TELEGRAPH

3 MAY 2000

Commonwealth stops with scolding Mugabe

HARARE, MAY. 3. Britain secured a harsh condemnation of Zimbabwe on Tuesday from the Commonwealth, which ordered Mr. Don McKinnon, its Secretary-General, to fly to Harare and deliver the rebuke in person to the President, Mr. Robert Mugabe.

Although the Foreign Ministers of the eight-member Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group — meeting in London — declined to consider sanctions seriously, their message will come as a blow to Mr. Mugabe. The Ministers expressed “deep concerns”, citing “the ongoing violence, loss of life, illegal occupations of property, failure to uphold the rule of law and political intimidation in the run up to Zimbabwe’s Parliamentary elections”. The group also resolved to send observers to monitor the elections.

The unusually strident criticism of one of the Commonwealth’s key members was welcomed by Britain’s Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook. “The object for us is to make clear that it is not just Britain expressing some form of post-colonial imperialism towards Zimbabwe as Mr. Robert Mugabe would have his people believe,” he said. Mr. McKinnon did not disclose when he intended to visit Harare, but Mr. Cook said he expected the visit “imminently”.

Zimbabwe has insisted that it is outside the CMAG process and Mr. Mugabe will launch his Zanu-PF party’s manifesto for the forthcoming general election on Wednesday, promising “revolutionary change”. In 42 pages of hysterical prose, Mr. Mugabe pledges to continue the present economic policies, though these have led to inflation of 50.8 per cent and unemployment over 50 per cent.

“Globalisation is another unacceptable face of imperialism and neocolonialism”, the manifesto says, promising to “reintroduce price controls on basic foodstuffs and commodities”. The Opposition is blamed for all the pre-election violence and dismissed as “cowards trying their luck, plagiarists, sell-outs, shameless opportunists and merchants of confu-



The Zimbabwean President, Mr. Robert Mugabe, addressing supporters in Harare on Wednesday. — AP

sion”. The manifesto adds that more than 12 million acres of land will be taken from white farmers without compensation and given to “our people”. The vote must be held before August, but mid-June is seen as Mr. Mugabe’s preferred choice. Despite the truce between the Commercial Farmers’ Union and Chenjerai “Hitler” Hunzvi, the leader of the squatters, white farms were swept by renewed violence on Tuesday.

In the Karoi area, 120 miles north-west of Harare, four more properties were invaded.—
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THE HINDU

MAY 2000

A backward step for Fiji: Commonwealth

By Thomas Abraham

LONDON, MAY 26. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don McKinnon, has called a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers to discuss the attempts to overthrow the Government in Fiji. Mr. McKinnon, who had flown to Fiji in an unsuccessful attempt to get the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Choudhury, and the other hostages released, said that the reported attempts to legitimise the coup by the country's ethnic Fijian leaders was "a major backward step for Fiji." He said that "aiming a loaded gun at the Constitution to marginalise sectors of Fiji Island's society is totally unacceptable."

Britain has also strongly condemned moves to legitimise the current coup in Fiji and has urged the country's leaders to respect the Fijian Constitution.

The British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, in a blunt statement, said "the use of armed force to achieve political ends cannot be tolerated", and expressed concern that there were moves to include the coup leaders in an interim administration.

Britain was responding to reports that Fiji's traditional leaders, the Great Council of Chiefs had agreed to more or less endorse the coup and replace the Government of Mr. Mahendra Choudhury.

The British Foreign Secretary

urged the Fijian leaders to "resolve this crisis in a manner consistent with democratic and constitutional principles and to bring to justice those responsible for the forcible take over of the Fijian parliament and the kidnapping of the People's Coalition Government."

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, also weighed in with a strong statement criticising the Fijian Chiefs Council for "well beyond the scope of its powers" by suggesting that the elected Government be replaced.

"It is only by upholding the democratic process that the long-term stability and prosperity of the population of Fiji as well as the international standing of Fiji can be secured."

Attention will turn increasingly to the Commonwealth to take step if the crisis is not resolved.

THE HINDU

27 MAY 2000

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COMMONWEALTH MEET / VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Call to address gender equality

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 16. Despite international efforts to combat violence against women, it continues to be a serious problem. The Commonwealth Secretariat has appealed to countries to adopt an integrated approach and accelerate action to eliminate and effectively address its social costs and economic consequences.

This would be the underlying theme of a three-day Commonwealth meet of Women's Affairs Ministers beginning here tomorrow. This is the sixth such meeting and India is hosting it for the first time.

Women's Affairs Ministers from 32 countries have already arrived for the meet, which will be inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. In all 48 countries are participating in the meet to formulate strategies for implementing the recently-endorsed 'Update to the Commonwealth plan of action on gender and development (2000-2005)'.

A total of 46 Commonwealth Governments, including India, have endorsed the 'Update to the plan' which seeks to address persisting gender equality issues such as poverty alleviation and violence against women and also redefine the priorities for action on the basis of its areas of comparative advantage, such as gender integration into macroeconomic pol-

icies. Besides discussing implementation strategies, the conference will also focus on monitoring the plan of action. A steering committee of senior officials will draw up the recommendations. It is expected that the meeting would forge close synergy and open avenues for further collaboration with United Nations agencies, Commonwealth associations, regional organisations, non-governmental organisations and other social partners.

In 1995, a Commonwealth 'Plan of action on gender and development (1995-2000)' had provided guiding principles for attaining gender quality within the framework of fundamental values of democracy and good governance, human rights and the rule of law and people-centered sustainable development. The 1995 plan is a blueprint for the update plan, which is described as "innovative, complex and forward-looking for mainstreaming gender issues in order to ensure social justice, equality and fulfillment for all".

The Commonwealth plan aims at a twin-level operation — strengthening institutional capacity to mainstream gender issues into all sectors of society and focussing on critical issues in the areas of political and human rights, social and economic development. The results of the discussions here on implementation strategy for the update plan would be present-

ed at the Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly to be held in Beijing in June as a special Commonwealth contribution to agenda setting on priority issues of gender equality.

A background paper circulated on the eve of the conference notes that in many countries gender violence is dealt with the help of Government focussing on legal measures and NGOs providing services for the victims. "But many countries lack the overall policy and current strategies to address the issue and thereby fragment the international efforts," it pointed out.

A World Bank report has also estimated that women continued to be the largest target of physical and psychological violence, which is as serious a cause of death and incapacity as cancer.

The Commonwealth meet will call for representation of women at the highest levels in organisations such as the National Human Rights Commissions and Ministries of Foreign and Home Affairs given the fact that armed conflict too is a critical gender issue. It will call for active involvement of women in formal conflict-mediation processes.

The need for research and analysis to identify gender gaps for both males and females and ensure equal benefit from opportunities of globalisation is another aspect to be dealt with in detail.

11 APR 2000

11 APR 2000

Commonwealth group may debar Pak from cricket circuit

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 18 APRIL

WHEN THE Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meets in London on May 2-3, the pressure points on Pakistan will increase exponentially. With no real evidence of a "roadmap" for restoration of democracy in the country, the Commonwealth may take stringent measures against Pakistan.

At the very least, it would continue keeping Pakistan out of the commonwealth council of ministers, but if the group decides to get tough, more extreme measures could involve sanctions, or, as the secretary general of the Commonwealth Donald Mckinnon said, a ban on Pakistan playing cricket.

While sanctions may not have the desired effect, given the fact that Pakistan is already reeling under sanctions imposed by the US, any decision to stop Pakistan from playing cricket would bring the international displeasure from the governmental level down to the common man.

The man playing an important part in framing the Commonwealth stance is the British foreign secretary Robin Cook. He was first off the block

criticising the coup last year and has been relentlessly campaigning for Pakistan to return to democratic rule. Mr Cook, in his talks with the Prime Minister on Tuesday, reiterated this point.

In fact, the Pakistani interior minister Moinuddin Haider and information adviser to the chief

executive Javed Jabbar, who were recently in London to lobby with the British government failed to meet anybody of consequence.

Cook, who has taken the strongest line on democracy in Pakistan regretted the lack of any serious effort on Pakistan's part to go back to democracy. In fact, the absence of the "definite time-frame" was reiterated even after Musharraf's public announcement last month that he would hold local elections by the end of this year.

A ban on cricketing ties would put a whole generation of really talented cricketers out of the ambit of international cricket, which had been the fate of South Africa during the apartheid years.

It was during the CHOGM summit in Durban last November that the Fancourt declaration debarred Pakistan from the council of ministers in keeping with the Millbrook Action Programme.

General Musharraf's recent trip to southeast Asia also contained a lobbying effort with Malaysia, a member of the CMAG. But Malaysia read out the riot act to Musharraf on restoration of democracy, a message he has had to hear from various quarters in the world.

Prosecutors seek death for Nawaz Sharif

Karachi

18 APRIL

PAKISTANI PROSECUTORS on Monday said they had filed an appeal in the Sindh High Court in Karachi demanding the death penalty for deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on hijacking and terrorism charges.

Chief public prosecutor Raja Qureshi told reporters that he had also challenged the April 6 verdict of an anti-terrorism court ordering the acquittal of six co-accused including Sharif's brother Shahbaz. — AFP

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 APR 2000