

A role for SAARC?

HC-8 23/12

IT MUST partly be a consequence of the rhetoric dominating the news headlines over the past few days that one is witnessing a massive build-up of forces on either side of the India-Pakistan border. The role of the rhetoric is important since both the governments have been insisting that their deployment is 'defensive in nature'. Luckily, it is in the language of the diplomatic tit-for-tat that the two sides are currently carrying on their 'dialogue'. New Delhi upped the ante by a few notches on Thursday as it announced three more measures intended to impress upon the rulers in Islamabad that they need to act against the terrorist groups operating from their soil in a far more credible manner than they have been inclined to so far.

The Pakistani police have to be terribly naïve to have picked up Masood Azhar's brother instead of the real McCoy, only to release him later. As mock theatre, this really takes the cake. However, assuming that the Pakistani police had picked up the real Masood Azhar, how does that tackle the problem of terrorism beyond dealing with it in a symbolic fashion? To begin with, New Delhi will need to spell out the measures that Pakistan must take in more specific terms. After the first hurdle of ensuring Pakistan's earnestness in tackling the terrorists is crossed, the second one would present itself in terms of the need to evolve a struc-

tured approach to tackle terrorism on a long-term basis.

Of the three restrictive measures announced by the foreign minister, the denial of access over Indian airspace could have a crippling impact on Pakistan's national flag carrier, which in any case has been going through troubled times. Further, Pakistani stock prices have tumbled by a hefty 9 per cent in a single week. It may be hoped that the sheer force of economic realities will drive home the point to Islamabad and persuade it to move in the matter.

Perhaps, it may be time to return to the SAARC Charter Against Terrorism. One reason the charter remained a non-starter was that it started with the assumption of a degree of mutual trust and transparency among the member-nations. Since, mutual trust and transparency have been conspicuously absent in India-Pakistan relations, it may not be a bad idea to constitute a group of SAARC professionals of international standing with the task to oversee implementation of the charter. The group could also look into a member's complaints, whether these pertain to providing sanctuary to a mafia don facing criminal charges in a member country or allegations of active connivance in hosting training camps. The international community could help in getting such a mechanism off the ground — especially when the SAARC summit is round the corner.

Situation in subcontinent tense: U.S.

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, DEC. 28. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld, said that the situation in South Asia between India and Pakistan was "difficult and tense" and if it became any worse it would have an impact on the U.S. conducting its military operations in Afghanistan. "It is a difficult and tense situation, obviously. The President, Mr. George W. Bush, and the Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, and others had been working with both Governments over the past days. I suppose we must have had at least one or two calls each day discussing this subject," Mr. Rumsfeld remarked at a Pentagon briefing on Thursday.

Arguing that it would be a "big disappointment" to the U.S. if Pakistan withdrew its forces from the Afghan border, Mr. Rumsfeld noted that the Pakistani troops "are performing an important task. They must have seven, eight or nine battalions along the Pakistan-Afghan border, which is a clear deterrent to people trying to escape from Afghanistan".

Mr. Rumsfeld said there could be related problems if the situation became more tense. "We could have problems with air over-

flights...in case they (meaning Pakistan) needed their airspace for that. That would be difficult for us and unfortunate."

"We have got thousands of Americans, military as well as civilians in Pakistan and clearly the bases where many of the military people are located would conceivably require different force protection arrangements. So, this is something we are keeping our eye on very carefully and we have clearly made the interest we have in this subject known to both sides (India and Pakistan) very carefully and with clarity," Mr. Rumsfeld said. He stressed that it would not be a problem to apprehend Osama bin Laden if he had escaped to Pakistan. "We have found the Pakistani Government to just be very cooperative in so many things that I have trouble believing it would be a problem at all." But he evaded a question on reports that Osama who had escaped to Pakistan was being protected by an Islamic militant leader. "We hear six, seven, eight, ten, twelve conflicting reports everyday, I have stopped chasing them," he said.

Even as the Bush administration has been urging both India and Pakistan to take steps to defuse the current tension along the

border, Washington has recognised the right of the two countries to take the steps they have.

"Each country has the right to take those diplomatic steps it believes necessary to preserve its security. We think and expect both India and Pakistan are giving careful consideration to how most effectively to resolve the situation that confronts them," the Deputy Spokesman of the State Department, Mr. Philip Reeker, said.

Osama entered Pak. in early Dec.

NEW DELHI, DEC. 28. The Saudi fugitive, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban supreme commander, Mullah Omar, are hiding in Bajaur agency of the federally-administered tribal area (FATA) in Pakistan and Gilgit in the Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK), intelligence sources said today.

Osama and Mullah Omar managed to sneak into Pakistan after the fall of Kunduz and Kandahar earlier this month. While Mullah Omar reached Gilgit on December 4, Osama is believed to have crossed over some time in the first week of this month. — UNI

THE HINDU

29 DEC 2001

Nepal ready for SAARC summit

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24. Nepal is all set to host the long-delayed summit of the South Asian nations despite the shadow being cast by the rising tensions between India and Pakistan.

The envoy of Nepal to India, Mr. Bhek Bahadur Thapa, said his country would "leave no stone unturned" to make the meeting of the chief political executives of the seven south Asian nations productive and successful.

With a military confrontation between India and Pakistan looming over the region, there is continuing speculation on whether the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, will attend the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit.

Mr. Thapa, however, said Nepal

had "received assurances from all the leaders of the region that they will attend the summit". "It is a source of satisfaction for us," the envoy added.

The SAARC summit is scheduled for the first week of January in Kathmandu. Senior officials will meet over the new year, to be followed by the Foreign Ministers. The heads of Government/state will meet during January 4-6. Having called for a postponement once, India is unlikely to insist on deferring it again and displease the Nepali Government which has invested so much energy into it.

For India, the question of Mr. Vajpayee meeting the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, on the sidelines of the summit is a secondary one.

The primary objective of Mr. Vajpayee's journey is to demon-

strate India's commitment to the SAARC process and the willingness to take the lead in promoting regional integration.

Mr. Thapa hoped the SAARC summit will give a new impetus to the moribund process of regional integration and put it back on track.

The summit was initially planned for November 1999. But after the military coup in Pakistan in October that year, India was reluctant to attend the summit and extend legitimacy to the new military regime in Islamabad.

Among the major issues to figure in the summit are the expansion of intra-regional trade, poverty alleviation, social sector advancement, cultural exchanges, and sub-regional cooperation involving one or more nations within the framework of the SAARC.

THE HINDU

2001

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2001

DEFINING NEIGHBOURLY GOODWILL

THE STARK CONTRAST between the present phase of growing bonhomie between India and Sri Lanka, on one side, and the dangerous escalation of tensions in ties between Islamabad and New Delhi, on a different front, cannot be missed at all on the larger South Asian scene. Surely, the timing of the just-concluded visit to India by Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, has had nothing whatsoever to do with the current state of the India-Pakistan equation. However, the latest Indo-Sri Lankan efforts to define neighbourly goodwill seem to light up the encircling darkness in South Asia, where the prospects of a much-postponed regional summit still hang in the balance on account of the abysmal new low in India-Pakistan interactions. Strikingly conspicuous, therefore, is the willingness of both India and Sri Lanka to sustain a high degree of mutually beneficial comfort level. This should not be misconstrued as an attempt by these two countries to foster any kind of negative sub-regionalism within a larger South Asia. In fact, Mr. Wickremesinghe is merely seeking to enhance Colombo's interactive equation with New Delhi by fine-tuning the overall resonance of bilateral goodwill that has already been attained over a period of several years since Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga became Sri Lanka's executive President. Yet, if Mr. Wickremesinghe's agenda of assigning a certain primacy to India appears to signal a new sense of direction in Colombo's foreign policy at this stage, the reason has something to do with the reality that he and the Sri Lankan President are the acknowledged political competitors at home. A related factor is the new sense of urgency which the Sri Lankan Prime Minister tends to exude in addressing his country's basic national question -- a fair deal for the island-republic's minority Tamils and Muslims.

Mr. Wickremesinghe is keen to succeed in this regard whereas Ms. Kumaratunga appeared to have run into some rough weather in recent

months. Now, he plainly wants to veer away from her recent record of arguably wayward tactics in respect of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the purposes of war and peace with it. He has, therefore, begun to outline a policy of measured conciliation towards the LTTE. It is in this context that he seems to have sought and obtained India's empathy at this stage. This does not of course imply that New Delhi is playing the favourite as regards Mr. Wickremesinghe and Ms. Kumaratunga. Moreover, the two leaders appear to be aware of the costs of working at cross-purposes in dealing with the LTTE. Viewed in this perspective, New Delhi's explicit support for his proposals for a renewed peace process in Sri Lanka is an updated reaffirmation of a policy of encouraging the proactive efforts of that country's leaders to sort out their existential dilemmas in accordance with their own national genius.

Mr. Wickremesinghe has apparently consulted the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, without actually suggesting that India play a definitive new role in respect of Colombo's latest options to engage the LTTE in a fresh and calibrated peace process. Not unacceptable to India is the indication that Norway might once again be invited to "facilitate" an intra-Sri Lankan dialogue. Not surprisingly, therefore, Mr. Wickremesinghe seems determined to make the best of India's political understanding of the sensitivities on all sides within Sri Lanka. He has gently sought to elicit Mr. Vajpayee's response to an ambitious suggestion of a land bridge between India and Sri Lanka. With the two countries agreeing to consider commissioning a feasibility study in this regard, they have also found it easier to dream of a larger South Asian common market for the future. Yet, South Asia will first need to address the terrorism issue in all its ramifications, a point which Mr. Wickremesinghe, too, has made in a different context.

THE HINDU
26 DEC 2001

Indo-Pak. tensions should not scuttle SAARC meet: Deuba

By C. Raja Mohan

KATHMANDU, DEC. 18. Indo-Pakistan tensions should not be allowed to come in the way of reviving the process of regional cooperation in the subcontinent, the Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, said here today. In a conversation with *The Hindu*, Mr. Deuba said, "the entire Nepal would be sad and disappointed" if the escalation of tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad after the attack on the Indian Parliament last week scuttled the planned summit of the South Asian leaders here next month.

As Nepal gets ready to hold the much-delayed 11th Summit of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) early next month, there is media speculation here that the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, might want to drop out of the Kathmandu meeting. But Mr. Deuba, however, said his Government had no negative indication from New Delhi on India's participation in the summit.

Mr. Deuba's Finance Minister, Mr. Ram Sharan Mahat, handed over a formal invitation to Mr. Vajpayee yesterday in New Delhi. An advance team of Indian officials has been here for the last two days to look at the preparations for the summit.

Mr. Deuba sounded confident that the summit would go ahead as planned during January 4-6 next year. The summit was originally scheduled to be held here in November 1999. But following the military coup in Pakistan, there was reluctance in New

Delhi to join the meeting. The summit was postponed.

Media commentary here is concerned that Nepal, one of the poorest developing countries in the world, will be let down one more time at the eleventh hour after investing so much into the preparations for the SAARC summit.

Mr. Deuba said there were "many issues before the subcontinent" other than Indo-Pakistan tensions that need to be addressed urgently. He added that the summit hoped to discuss cooperation in countering terrorism, expanding free trade arrangements in the region and taking up key social sector issues such as alleviation of poverty and promoting the welfare of women and children.

Mr. Deuba declared that Nepal "was fully geared up" to host the summit, and he does not expect any problems. Senior Government officials hope that "India will be as active in the region, as it has been on the global arena in the recent years".

"India's regional and global activities need not be mutually exclusive," they added. The officials also say there has been no formal proposal from any country to invite Afghanistan to join the SAARC. Mr. Deuba also said Nepal "appreciates and thanks the generous support from the Government and people of India in countering the Maoist insurgency". "We have received whatever we asked for," Mr. Deuba added. He also referred to the Indian assurances on "tightening border security to prevent the smuggling of arms and terrorists" into Nepal.

THE HINDU

No-man's-land on border occupied

Pak troops get Afghan toehold

FROM K.P. NAYAR

Washington, Dec. 9: Caught on the wrong foot last month by the capture of Kabul by the Northern Alliance and the agreement last week on a new Afghan government which is a far cry from its Taliban proxy, General Pervez Musharraf has moved his troops inside Afghanistan.

According to intelligence reports received here, Pakistani troops have occupied more than half the "no-man's-land" on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the Chaman area, which leads to the Afghan town of Spin Boldak.

These reports spoke of Musharraf's troops and paramilitary personnel occupying the erstwhile Afghan passport checkpoint at the eastern end of the no-man's-land and hoisting the Pakistani flag yesterday.

Pakistan is also controlling vast stretches of air space along Baluchistan's border with Afghanistan and its army helicopters are flying all along the Tora Bora mountains, creating an air corridor between the two countries.

Pakistan army spokesman,

Major General Rashid Qureshi, obliquely confirmed the army's moves at a media briefing at the foreign ministry in Islamabad yesterday: "We have increased border patrols and beefed up security along the border area, particularly close to the Tora Bora mountains and near Chaman.

"There is increased surveillance from the air and from the ground. We are utilising all assets, which means vehicular, manpower as well as helicopter assets."

Qureshi's excuse is that the latest steps by the army are necessary to ensure that Osama bin Laden and al Qaida forces do not cross into Pakistan.

"We have had reports and read articles about Osama bin Laden trying to cross over to Pakistan but there is no credibility that either he or his supporters have entered Pakistan," Qureshi said. He implied that the Americans were helping the Pakistanis in these military moves when he said: "I do not know the cost to cover this but, yes, there is assistance."

Pakistani occupation of Afghan land and its attempt to control air space in the Tora

Bora area are clever attempts by Musharraf to ensure that Pakistan is very much in the reckoning as the contours of a post-conflict Afghanistan emerge from the Bonn conclave.

It has been clear from Pakistan's official reactions to Kabul's interior minister designate Yunis Qanuni's trip to New Delhi and its unofficial responses to the Bonn process that Musharraf will not take any chances in protecting its interests in Afghanistan.

By creating confusion about control of the Afghan border, Pakistan also hopes to prevent the deployment of a multinational observer force to check movements across the border.

India and several other countries would like to see such a force to prevent a repetition of events which led to the creation of the Taliban by Pakistan's ISI.

The Chaman area is the most sensitive in the long porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The "no-man's-land" there runs across a width of two kilometres parallel to the border and is close to Wiesh, a big trading town, at the point where Pakistan has occupied the Afghan passport checkpost.

THE TELEGRAPH

10 DEC 2001

10 DEC 2001

Saarc meet to focus on terror

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, December 11

THE SOUTH Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is set to attach more importance to terrorism than ever before in its 11th summit that takes place under the shadow of the Afghan war and Nepal's own battle against Maoist insurgents.

The summit is scheduled to begin here from January 4 to 6, more than two years behind schedule. It was postponed earlier following the Pakistani Army's intrusion into Kargil and the military takeover in Islamabad.

A senior Saarc official said, "Poverty alleviation, social

development and economic cooperation have been and will always be on the top of the Saarc agenda. Considering the post-September 11 world opinion on terrorism and the situation in the host country, terrorism may get more attention this time."

He said, "Member-nations are also set to focus on the issue of the conversion of the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (Sapta) into the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta)."

Nepalese authorities, whose country launched a military campaign against the Communist rebels last week, were of the view that Saarc should do more than making "ritualistic refer-

ences" to terrorism as it did in its earlier summits. They felt that Saarc could play an important role in weeding out terrorism from the region. Both Nepal and India have declared the Maoists as "terrorists".

In view of possible danger from the Maoists, the Taliban, Kashmiri separatists and the LTTE, Nepal has planned elaborate security arrangements. A day before the Maoists' revived their armed struggle on November 23, Nepalese officials in charge of security for the summit had admitted having received threats to the lives of heads of State of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME.

12 DEC 2001

Chambers form S Asia forum

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Dec. 22. — The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) along with the apex chambers of commerce of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan has resolved to form a South Asia Business Forum.

In a landmark event, top trade officials and business leaders from the four nations met here yesterday to initiate an action plan for regional cooperation in trade and investment.

Mr R S Lodha, president of Ficci, told reporters here today that the meeting resolved to accelerate efforts to establish a free trade zone comprising the four countries. The private sector representatives, comprising the major chambers of commerce and industry, decided to establish a South Asia Business Forum to showcase the region to international investors.

The high level delegation from India was led by the commerce secretary, Mr Prabir Sen-gupta and Mr Lodha. This inception meeting of the working group on trade, investment and private sector cooperation was sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under its programme for South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (Sasec).

Mr Lodha emphasised the importance of quickly taking advantage of the synergies

among the four countries to enhance the competitiveness of the region in an increasingly competitive global economic environment.

The meeting discussed at length the prospects of expanding trade in the Sasec sub-region, the key impediments to growth of trade and investment in the region, and a programme for cooperative action among the four countries to address these issues.

It was noted that because of its very large size India played a dominant role in trade and investment in the sub-region. Exports from India to Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal quadrupled from about \$340 million to \$1.3 billion in the past decade, and it could rise further to \$2.3 billion by 2005 with sustained trade liberalisation.

At the same time, India's imports from Bhutan doubled from about \$15 million in 1995 to \$30 million in 1999, and is expected to rise to about \$70 million by 2005.

Imports from Bangladesh have grown at a more moderate pace to reach a level of about \$50 million. Significant reduction of tariffs and non-tariff barriers could dramatically raise this, as observed in Nepal and Bhutan, to about \$360 million by 2005. The introduction of energy trade between India and Bangladesh could raise this even further to about \$750 million.

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THE STATESMAN

13 DEC 2000

Sumit - Asia
HD-4

SAARC leaders urged to tackle terrorism

27/12

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 21.

Parliamentarians for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) today urged all the regional leaders to focus on economic policies and tackle issues like terrorism and religious extremism. The SAARC summit is slated to be held at Kathmandu in January next after a gap of over two years.

In an identical letter to the Heads of Government and leaders of the SAARC countries, the parliamentarians said several problems of the region could be addressed through appropriate economic policies and urged the grouping to deepen economic integration and accelerate economic growth within the region. They stressed the need for the implementation of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) by all the members.

On terrorism, they said it was a major scourge that affected all

the member countries and urged them to effectively implement the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and work in a cooperative spirit to suppress finances to terrorists, eliminate supply of weapons and prevent their movement across the borders.

Releasing a copy of the letter, Mr. Eduardo Faleiro of the Congress said while stringent measures must be taken to combat terrorism, the main cause — religious extremism — must also be dealt with. "A majority community in one country is a minority in another... The majority in India is a minority in Pakistan and Bangladesh, while the majority in Sri Lanka is a minority in Nepal and India, while the majority in Pakistan is a minority in India."

The letter said in terms of social composition, all SAARC countries were pluralistic,

"multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic" and suggested the creation of an office of a Special Rapporteur, empowered to review and report to SAARC summit on the status of minorities in the member countries.

"We call upon the leaders of SAARC to arrest the growth of religious extremism in their countries and to promote the paramount values of tolerance, social harmony and equal respect of all religions," the legislators said.

Besides Mr. Faleiro, the signatories to the letter included Mr. Nilotpal Basu (CPI-M), Mr. Balram Singh Yadava and Mr. Janeshwar Misra (SP), Dr. V. Saroja (AIADMK), Mrs. Saroj Dubey (RJD), Mr. Gandhi Azad (BSP), Mr. Abdul Rashid Shaheen (NC), Dr. Arun Kumar Sarma (AGP), Mr. H.K. Javare Gowda (JD-S), Dr. R. K. Yadav (JD) and Ven'ble Dhammaviriyo (RJD-Democratic).

THE HINDU

22 DEC 2011

Pact sealed, Karzai to pilot Afghanistan on route to peace

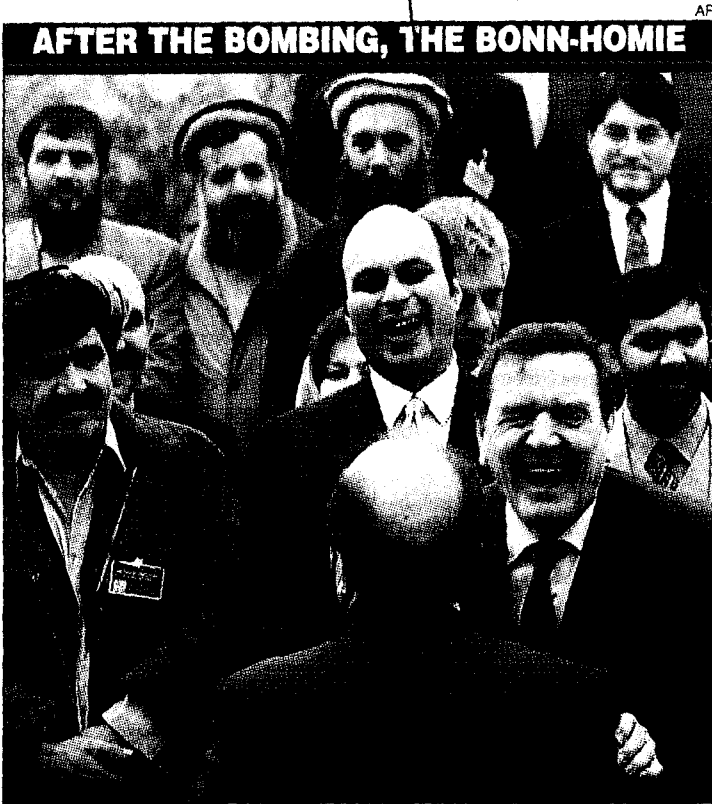
KOENIGSWINTER: After settling on the form, duties and timetable for a post-Taliban administration, four Afghan factions chose an interim prime minister early on Wednesday and neared final agreement on a 29-member multi-ethnic council to guide their country towards peaceful democratic rule.

UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi won the accord following ten hours of marathon negotiations over the composition of the interim authority which will govern Afghanistan for six months until the former king convenes a traditional tribal council or 'loya jirga'.

Under the UN plan, the 'loya jirga' will ratify a transitional government, paving the way for elections within two years. Also envisioned are steps to integrate Afghan fighters into a future national army, and the creation of a supreme court.

An annex of the draft accord formally asks the UN Security Council to deploy an international peace-keeping force to help the new administration keep order in Kabul and train a new Afghan police force and army. Western officials said France was drafting a Security Council resolution authorising such a force, which Britain is prepared to organise.

The final text includes language stating that the Afghan people have the right to determine their own political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice. With ethnic balance as the primary criterion, Mr Brahimi shuttled among the four factions throughout the night to cull 29 names from 150 candidates.



LOVE AND LEBENSRAUM IS ALL WE NEED: German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (centre right) is all smiles as he chats with Peshawar delegation leader Sayed Hamed Gailani (back to camera) while Mostapha Zaher of the Rome delegation (centre left) laughs after attending the signing ceremony in Koenigswinter near Bonn on Wednesday.

However, UN spokesman Ahmed Fawzi said ten or 11 names still had to be approved on the cabinet list. He said these had not still been filled because "they are in the process of contacting the candidates. But I can confirm Mr Karzai is chairman of the interim administration".

The Northern Alliance will get the powerful defence, foreign and interior ministries. Two women have been named to posts—Sima Samar as a deputy premier as well as minister of women's affairs and Suhaila Seddiqi as health minister. (Agencies)

200 DPC workers face the sack

Times News Network

MUMBAI: With its U.S. parent Enron Corp bankrupt and banks not willing to disburse any more funds until legal tangles are sorted out, the Enron-promoted Dabhol Power Company (DPC) is terminating the services of all its remaining 200 employees in India by the end of the week.

DPC has 65 employees at its Mumbai corporate headquarters at the Bandra-Kurla complex and 135 employees at the power plant in Dabhol. DPC said that it had already defaulted on meeting its loan repayment commitments in September and October, and has now been forced to take the extreme step of reducing staff to save costs.

A DPC spokesperson said, "We regret that DPC is severing all of its remaining employees in India. A small core team will be engaged on a contract basis to undertake certain essential activities related to site security, pursuing legal claims and asset preservation, subject to adequate funding being received."

This is the third time this year that DPC has reduced its staff. At its peak, it had employed over 500 executives and 15,000 skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Globally, Enron Corp has sacked 1,100 and 4,500 employees in Europe and the U.S. this week. However, DPC officials said that the termination of 200 employees in India was not connected to the filing for bankruptcy by Enron Corp in the U.S.

A DPC spokesperson blamed MSEB and the Maharashtra state government for the ongoing legal disputes over non-payment of dues.

Talks suspense over Saarc meeting

SI-8
5/11
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 4. - The much-delayed South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit meet, to be held from 4 to 6 January in Kathmandu, might again get clouded by the meeting of the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Pakistani President, Mr Pervez Musharraf, if the duo decide to hold dialogues on the sidelines.

Mr Vajpayee had on several recent occasions ruled out any meeting with Gen Musharraf on the sidelines of the coming UN General Assembly session. However, the foreign secretary, Ms Chokila Iyer, said a couple of days back that the two leaders would be present at the SAARC summit.

The summit was due to be held in the last week of Decem-



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

ber, but exact dates couldn't be finalised at a foreign secretary-level meeting of the seven-nation South Asian grouping held here in August. One or two countries had reservations about holding the Kathmandu conclave around 30 December and the meeting ended on the note that further consultations were necessary.

Sri Lanka hosted the last SAARC summit in July 1998, but has been unable to hand over the chairmanship to Nepal as the summit couldn't be held in the intervening years. Kathmandu was due to host it in 1999. The Kargil conflict and the subsequent military coup in Pakistan in October 1999 had come in the way of holding the summit, leading to Sri Lanka retaining the chairmanship for more than three years.



Gen Pervez Musharraf

THE STATESMAN

5 NOV 2001

Saarc echoes India's stance on WTO

21/8
STATESMAN NEW SERVICE & PTI

SR 10

NEW DELHI, Aug. 23. — In a major show of unity, Saarc countries including India today decided to forge a common front on WTO issues to influence the preparatory process for the WTO ministerial meeting at Doha in November.

A 15-point joint declaration at the end of the Saarc commerce minister's meeting here, resolved to fight unitedly, the attempts of the developed nations to deny market access to developing countries. The meeting, hosted by India, was attended by commerce ministers of Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal while Bangladesh and Bhutan were represented by their commerce secretaries.

Indo-Pak consensus: Despite their differences in almost all other issues, India and Pakistan today forged a common front to fight for their voice on matters regarding WTO. Pakistan voiced her agreement with India's firm stand on the WTO. The one-day Saarc ministerial meeting, in which Pakistan's commerce minister, Mr Abdul Razaak Dawood was present today, approved India's view on WTO in its joint declaration, which stresses on resolution of implementation concerns upfront and greater market access by developed countries.

In the joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, Pakistan reiterated India's stand that implementation issues which was a fallout of the Uruguay round, should be resolved upfront without any extraneous linkages.

The declaration also called for increased market access opportunities to be provided by the developed countries, to facilitate industrialisation in developing countries by eliminating trade distorting subsidies, non-tariff barriers and unreasonable protectionist measures.

The statement expressed deep disappointment "on the lack of any meaningful progress despite a clear decision in May 2000 by the WTO General Council, that these issues have to be addressed and decisions taken for appropriate action not later than the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference". "Any further delay was likely to erode the credibility of the multilateral trading system among the developing and the least developing nations," it said.

In agriculture, Saarc ministers which included Nepal's agriculture and cooperative minister, Mr Mahesh Acharya and Sri Lankan minister for justice, Mr Batty Weerakool besides Mr Murasoli Maran and Mr Dawood, emphasised the need for substantial reductions in tariffs and tariff escalations, reduction in domestic support and elimination of all forms of export subsidies given by developed countries to facilitate greater market access for agricultural products of developing countries.

The statement also called for a moratorium on anti-dumping, anti-subsidy and safeguard measures, resorted to by importing countries on exports from developing and least developing countries, until 7 January 2007.

THE STATESMAN

SAARC forges common front on WTO

By Our Special Correspondent

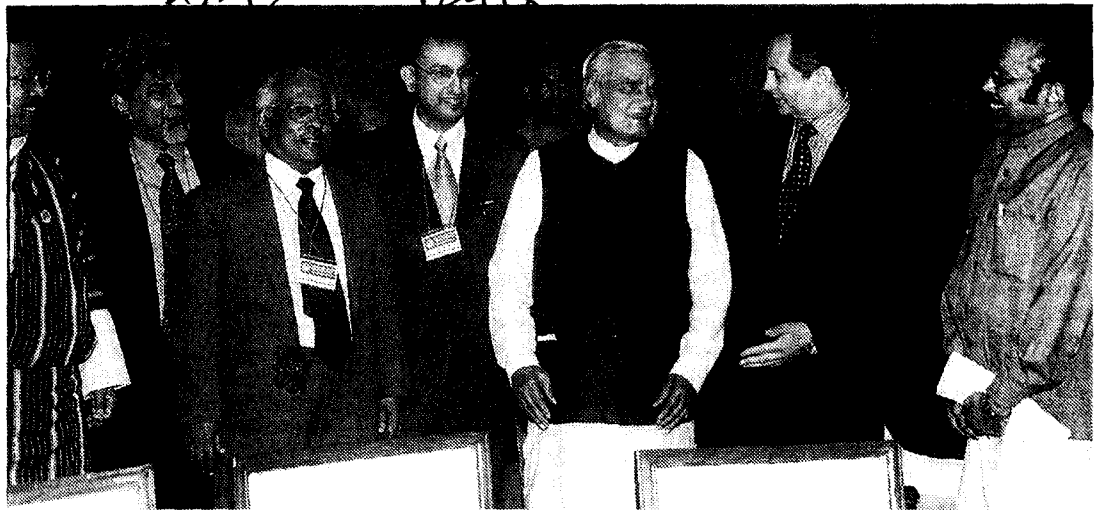
NEW DELHI, AUG. 23. Commerce Ministers of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) today forged a common front on multilateral trade issues affecting developing countries in the context of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to be held at Qatar. They underlined the importance of ensuring a consensual outcome of the conference from the standpoint of developing countries.

In a joint statement issued at the end of a two-day meeting here, the Ministers stressed that implementation issues as a fallout of the Uruguay Round agreements must be meaningfully resolved upfront without any extraneous linkages.

Simultaneously, they have resolved to discuss the issue with other developing countries to ensure that the South presents a united stand at the Doha conference. After a meeting by the heads of SAARC delegations with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Pakistan's Commerce Minister, Mr. Abdul Razzak Dawood, told newsmen that SAARC will strive to rope in other developing and like-minded countries to ensure that there is consensus among this group.

He said there was unanimity among SAARC countries about the need to effectively safeguard their interests in trade-related areas before any step is taken to broaden the agenda to include non-trade issues like labour and environment. Mr. Dawood said further discussions will be held at the proposed informal WTO Ministerial Conference in Mexico as well as at Geneva.

The SAARC Commerce Ministers meeting was attended by Sri Lanka, Nepal's Agriculture and



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Commerce Ministers of SAARC countries, in New Delhi on Thursday. (From left) Mr. Mahesh Acharya (Bhutan), Mr. Nihal Rodrigo, secretary general, SAARC, Mr. Batty Weerakoon (Sri Lanka), Mr. Prabir Sengupta, Secretary, Commerce, Govt. of India, Mr. Abdul Razak Dawood (Pakistan) and the Union Commerce Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran.

Cooperation Minister, Mr. Mahesh Acharya, the SAARC Secretary-General, Mr. Nihal Rodrigo and the Bhutan Commerce Secretary, Mr. Karma Dorjee. Maldives did not attend the meeting which was held to coordinate national positions in view of the forthcoming WTO Ministerial Conference.

At the outset, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran, stressed that it would be prudent to confine the WTO agenda to already mandated negotiations and reviews and not take on board any new issues unless there was convergence of views in the entire membership of the WTO. The Doha Ministerial Conference, he said, should make an assessment of the progress made in the mandated negotiations and reviews and give necessary policy directions besides reviewing the progress of resolution of implementation issues. It should also do stock taking and reviews as envi-

saged in the Marrakesh Agreement establishing WTO, he added.

Any further delay in the upfront resolution of the implementation concerns of the developing countries was likely to send a "wrong signal", which could lead to further negotiations in the credibility of the WTO, Mr. Maran said.

"We cannot afford another Seattle and as such no contentious issues or issues on which there has been no consensus, should be pushed into the WTO agenda as it may risk a failure, which may not augur well for WTO," he said.

Referring to implementation concerns, Mr. Maran stressed that almost all delegations in the WTO and trade policy experts acknowledged for the first time that a group of developing countries had been able to bring to the centre stage their concerns and problems. The group had also engaged the developed world to address these concerns, he added. He

maintained that it was a matter of concern that a rule-based global trading system had been unable to make any worthwhile increase in the share of developing countries in world trade and at the same time, the world's 200 richest people had more than doubled their net worth in 4 years from 1998.

"We are concerned that while wines and spirits can get a higher level of geographical indication protection, other products of interest to developing and LDCs are not given a similar protection," he said.

Speaking of medicines and drugs based on biological and genetic resources of developing countries, Mr. Maran emphasised that such patents should reveal the country of origin of biological and genetic resources and traditional knowledge used in it and there should be equitable sharing of benefits.

Musharraf's road map to democracy is not clear: U.S.

By Chidanand Rajghatta
Times News Network

WASHINGTON: Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's announcement of a road map for return to democracy is not clear enough and sanctions against Islamabad would be removed only after an elected government takes office in Pakistan, the Bush administration has said.

"We are pleased with his commitment to return of democracy, but we are still looking for more details. We want to know whether the elections would be party-based and what is the role of the President and his relations with the government," an official said.

The administration is also leery of Gen Musharraf's crackdown on domestic terrorist groups and noted that he had done nothing about outfits carrying out strikes in Kashmir. "We definitely have concerns about the Lashkar-e-Toiba and we intend to continue to work with the government of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism," the official said. The flurry of announcements from Islamabad on Tuesday contained in Gen Musharraf's Independence Day speech didn't seem to create much of an impression in Washington.

Officials pointed out that the sanctions imposed on Pakistan in the aftermath of the military coup could be removed only after the President had determined that a democratically-elected government had taken office. "Just an announcement will not suffice," the official said. Pakistan has launched a vigorous campaign to press the Bush administration into adopting an "even-handed" approach in easing of sanctions amidst signs that Washington is all set to lift some of the restrictions against India sooner rather than later.

The road map for the return of democracy announced by Gen Musharraf was among the latest steps Islamabad had taken to

impress Washington that it deserved to be on the same boat as India. The Musharraf regime has also been working on improving the economy and taken steps to crack down on its domestic law and order situation in an effort to regain some credibility in Washington. Against this background, Pakistan's foreign secretary Inam-ul-Haq is expected here on Friday to plead Islamabad's case. Pakistan is hoping that Mr Haq's trip, which follows the democracy road map, will offset the disastrous visit of its foreign minis-

ter Abdul Sattar some weeks back during which Gen Musharraf angered Washington by tightening his grip on the country.

Pakistani mandarins have been fervently making the familiar case before the Bush administration that easing sanctions against India while leaving Islamabad in limbo will further isolate them and strengthen the anti-American forces in their country. Pakistan's deputy chief of mission Zameer Akram was recently quoted as saying that U.S.-Pakistan relations would be further damaged if

Washington went ahead with easing of sanctions against India and left out Pakistan.

Pakistan's main argument is that it is a victim of at least five layers of sanctions against only one on India. This despite Pakistan being Washington's faithful ally for decades.

But U.S. officials say privately that no country has so egregiously violated American and international laws and indulged in so much illegal nuclear and ballistic missile transgressions. While the first layer of sanctions against Pakistan was invoked because of its clandestine efforts to acquire nuclear arms, the last sanctions took effect because of the military coup that overthrew an elected civilian government.

In fact, U.S. officials admit, previous administrations repeatedly winked at Pakistani transgressions, issuing waiver after waiver despite knowledge of Islamabad's misdemeanours. While the Reagan administration was blindsided by Cold War considerations to Pakistan's clandestine nuclear progress, the Clinton administration repeatedly failed to act on ballistic missiles transfer from China to Pakistan.

Still, there is a small but shrinking constituency within the administration that believes that Washington should not abandon Pakistan outright and should keep it engaged with drib-drib concessions to prevent it from going under. In recent weeks, this group has managed to push through a presidential waiver that will allow supply of some arms and spare parts, ostensibly because Pakistan needs them for its peace-keeping operations in Sierra Leone.

U.S. mandarins are also backing large dollops of loan from multi-lateral agencies to keep the Pakistani economy alive. In that sense, Pakistan's gambit of "save-us-from-collapse-or-we-will-go-down-and-harm-everyone" seems to be working.

Commonwealth is not impressed by Pak move

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
Times News Network

LONDON: The Commonwealth is shrugging its shoulders at Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's announcement of a road map for return to democracy, starting October 1, 2002, even as Pakistani opposition leaders here offer a similarly lukewarm response to the proposed timetable for elections.

Commonwealth sources told this newspaper that Gen Musharraf had not said anything new about democracy. "We are not hearing anything different to what we heard before," the sources said, adding that Commonwealth secretary-general Don McKinnon would tell so to Gen Musharraf when they meet in Islamabad on August 23-24.

The Commonwealth's unenthusiastic response was echoed by supporters of the three main Pakistani opposition leaders in exile.

They raised questions about the proposed timetable for elections and said it appeared to be a strategic measure to please the West, notably the U.S., the Commonwealth and the European Union.

The Commonwealth secretary-general's scheduled meeting with Gen Musharraf is meant to review Pakistan's progress towards establishing an elected government.

Musharraf's announcement comes just six weeks before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meet in Brisbane, which could, in theory, decide on full suspension for Pakistan if it is unconvinced by Gen Musharraf's promises to restore civilian rule.

Sources close to Pakistan's former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif told this paper it was significant that Gen Musharraf had waited till the very last day allowed by the Pakistani supreme court to hold elections.



Gen Musharraf

Relations depend on Pakistan: Iyer to Haq

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 10. — India's foreign secretary Mrs Chokila Iyer held talks with her Pakistani counterpart, Mr Inamul Haq, on the sidelines of the SAARC standing committee meeting of foreign secretaries in Colombo today.

Making it clear that India "rejects" any suggestion of Jammu and Kashmir as the "core" issue or "central" to the normalisation of India-Pakistan relations, New Delhi threw the ball in Islamabad's court saying: "Ultimately it would be for Pakistan to choose the kind of relationship it would like to have with India".

Mrs Iyer raised the issue of increased violence in J&K following the Agra summit. The escalated violence has created "extremely negative sentiments both at the public and politician level".

Mentioning the differences which led to an unsuccessful summit, Mrs Iyer said that eventually the "quest for a joint document had to be abandoned because of what was perceived by our leadership and people as an unacceptable and untenable fixation on the Jammu and Kashmir issue, a reluctance to address cross-border terrorism, and a negative approach towards the Shimla agreement and Lahore declaration". Even though Islamabad has claimed that it made a second search for POWs but to no avail, the foreign secretary said the issue should be pursued until the families of the 54 POWs were satisfied.

India is still awaiting Pakistan's response on the proposal for a DGMOs meeting as well as expert-level discussions on nuclear CBMs.

THE STATESMAN

11 AUG 2001

SAARC summit likely in Dec.

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 9. The Foreign Secretaries of SAARC countries today began a special two-day meeting that will discuss dates for the Kathmandu summit and a host of economic and social issues on the agenda of the grouping that have been awaiting decisions since 1999, the last time it met at a high level.

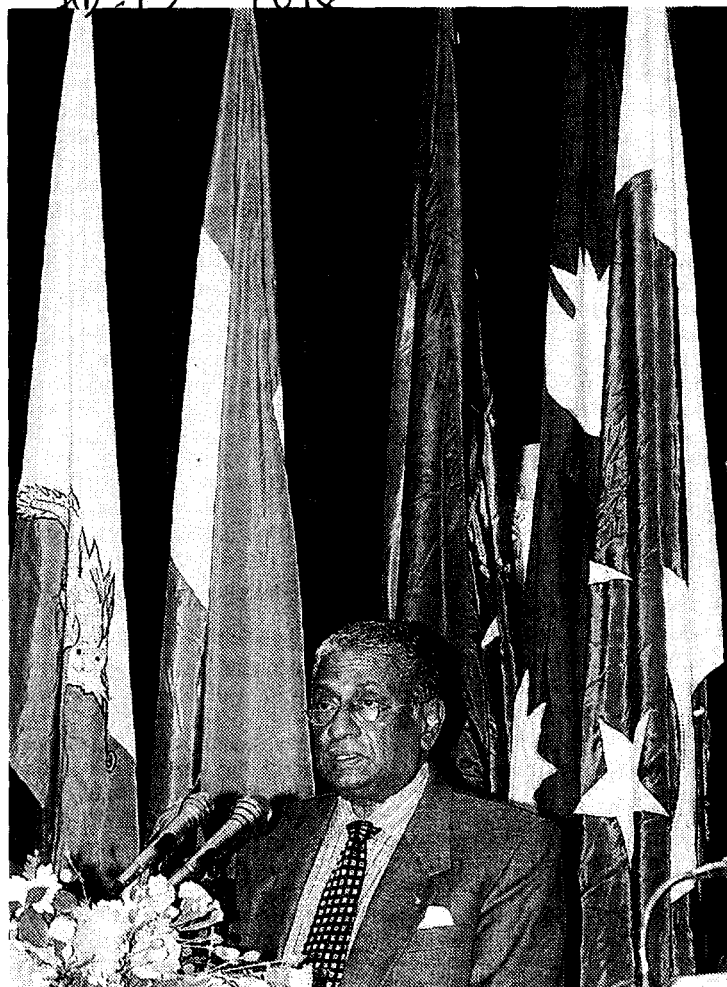
Inaugurating the meeting of the collective, called the SAARC Standing Committee, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, appealed to the Foreign Secretaries to come up with firm recommendations and time-tables to help speed up the work of the regional grouping, regardless of political developments in the region.

"The work of SAARC should not be held back. In fact, much of it depends on the decisions and the recommendations that may be made by the Foreign Secretaries at their regular meetings," he said.

This is the first meeting of the standing committee since the one in 1998 preceding the Colombo summit, and the first SAARC charter body meeting since the Council of Foreign Ministers gathered in Nuwara Eliya in 1999.

The Kathmandu summit that was scheduled for November that year was put off after India vetoed the idea of a heads of Government meeting following the military coup in Pakistan in which Gen. Pervez Musharraf took power.

Mr. Kadirgamar said the sum-



The Sri Lankan Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, speaking at the inaugural of a two-day meeting of south Asian diplomats in Colombo on Thursday. — AFP

mit — the 11th since the founding of SAARC — was now likely to be held in the last week of Decem-

ber. The standing committee is to discuss the dates for the summit. Host Nepal will propose that the

meeting be held on December 28, 29 and 30.

The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, also the chairman of the SAARC Council of Ministers, said it was fair criticism that the work of the grouping had slowed down in the three years since the last summit was held.

As there had been no high-level meeting in this time, there had been a "reluctance" to take decisions on new measures and initiatives.

"But that apart, there has been a slackening of interest in implementing directives which flowed from the last summit, perhaps because the need for a reinvigorated summit mandate is felt after a lapse of three years," Mr. Kadirgamar said.

The 10th summit that was held in Colombo had called for a framework treaty on a free trade agreement for the region (SAFTA) to be ready by the end of 2001 and for a social charter on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, population control, human resources development and the protection of children.

Mr. Kadirgamar asked the Foreign Secretaries to address themselves to the slow pace of progress on both, and on the preferential trade agreement (SAPTA), the fourth round of discussions for which has so far proved elusive.

An important item on the agenda of the standing committee will be to work out a common SAARC position for the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting at Doha in Qatar this November.

THE HINDU

10 AUG 2001

Nepal to press for early Saarc meet in Colombo

Plans to host full-fledged meet by yearend

BY GAUTAM DATT

South Asia
9/2/78
New Delhi, Aug. 8: Nepal will press for early Saarc summit when the foreign secretaries from the South Asian region meet in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo on Thursday.

Nepal's ambassador in New Delhi B. Thappa told *The Asian Age* on the eve of the standing committee meeting that Kathmandu was ready to hold the heads of government meeting of the Saarc as early as possible.

Earlier it was expected that summit might be delayed due to internal situation in Nepal which also led to postponement of the Saarc standing committee meeting. Nepal hopes that if all the member nations agreed, the full fledged Saarc summit can take place before the end of this year.

The Saarc foreign secretaries were expected to chalk out the schedule and agenda for the next summit to carry forward the process of regional cooperation which has been stalled for the last two years.

The officials from the member states will discuss the administrative and budgetary issues apart from

reviewing reports of the various technical committees. The technical committees of the group have been meeting in the past. The foreign secretaries will also discuss the time table for the Saarc summit.

Under normal circumstances, the heads of government of the Saarc nations meet six months after the standing committee meeting. The standing committee meeting is followed by the ministerial level meeting. Officials said that the ministerial level meeting is expected to take place back-to-back with the heads of state meeting. A full fledged Saarc summit will not only kickstart the stalled process but will also provide a forum for a meeting between Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf. The two leaders were already expected to meet at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York in September this year. If Saarc summit takes place by December, the two leaders will get third chance to meet within a short span of six months.

Indian foreign secretary Chokila Iyer and her Pakistani counterpart Inamul Haq are scheduled to meet in Colombo on August 10.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 9 AUG 22

Preparations on for India, Pak. talks

MD-13
8/8

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, Aug. 7. Preparations are under way here for the bilateral meeting between the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan on the sidelines of the SAARC standing committee meeting here on August 9 and 10. The Foreign Secretary, Ms. Chokila Iyer, is expected to arrive here on Wednesday evening. Officials Ms. Iyer and her Pakistani counterpart, Mr. Inamul Haq, the first official high-level exchange between the two countries after the Agra summit, were being worked out.

The meeting will take place in the backdrop of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement in the Lok Sabha today that India would find ways to improve relations with Pakistan despite the failure of the summit, but not on Islamabad's terms.

The External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said in New Delhi on Monday that the Foreign Secretaries would discuss all issues relating to bilateral relations at their meeting in the Sri Lankan capital.

Meanwhile, SAARC officials from member countries today began preparatory sessions

for the standing committee meeting. The committee, which is the SAARC charter body of the Foreign Secretaries of member countries, is expected to discuss dates for the long-postponed Kathmandu summit, officials said.

The summit was to be held in November 1999, but was put off after India vetoed it on the ground that it could not share a platform with Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who had then newly captured power in Pakistan.

Despite the failure of the Agra summit to make any dramatic breakthrough in the relations between the two countries, the atmosphere is believed to have thawed enough for there no longer seems to be any objections from any quarter to holding the summit.

SAARC officials said it was now a question of finalising the dates for the summit. The Foreign Secretary of Nepal is expected to propose the dates at the standing committee meeting.

Bombing continues

Sri Lanka's Air Force, badly hit by an attack on its main air base by the LTTE two weeks ago, carried out yet another bombing mission in the northeast today.

A Defence Ministry release said Kfir bom-

bers destroyed an LTTE base in the Thoppigala jungles in the eastern district of Batticaloa today. The Israeli-made bombers engaged LTTE bunker lines in Pallai in the northern Jaffna peninsula on Monday. "Pilots confirm that the mission was very successful," the release added.

The Air Force appears to be making the point that its operational capability remains unaffected despite the devastating attack on the Katunayake air base on July 24.

Suicide cadres of the LTTE attacked the air base and the adjoining civilian international airport on July 24, destroying eight military aircraft, including two Kfirs. Several other military aircraft, including bombers, are said to have been damaged by machine gun fire during the attack. The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation today said that a team from Israel had arrived to assess the possibilities of carrying out repairs on the damaged aircraft.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Airlines has written off one of the three Airbus aircraft damaged in the attack after assessment teams pronounced it beyond repair. Three other Airbus planes were completely destroyed during the attack.

China keen on associating with SAARC

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, JULY 30. China is keen on participating in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Track-II process. The Chinese desire to associate themselves with the SAARC, albeit in an informal fashion, was conveyed to the Indian side on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting here last week. The discussion on the issue came just before the Indian Foreign Secretary, Ms. Chokila Iyer, was to travel to Beijing for discussions on the boundary issue.

As reported in this newspaper, China is also keen on joining the fledgling Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC). This, too, has been conveyed to India as was its desire to associate itself with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC). Clearly, India will have to come out with a response on the growing Chinese interest in associating themselves in groupings where India is playing a role.

Prof. S.D. Muni, who teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and is currently a senior visiting fellow at Singapore's Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, viewed the developments as a "subtle game of competition". In his view, China wanted to "get engaged everywhere" and India's foray into South-East Asia through the MGC grouping could have led to greater Chinese interest in South Asia.

Talking to this correspondent here, Mr. Sun Yuxi, spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said he did not "have all the details" when asked if Beijing was interested in associating itself with the MGC. Asked if there was space for countries like India and Pakistan in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

(SCO), formally launched in June this year, the spokesman said: "This organisation is already established and we are open to new members."

(The SCO, earlier known as the Shanghai Five, was launched in June with Uzbekistan joining China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A focal point of cooperation in the group is the battle against terrorism, separatism and Islam-based extremism.)

"I think that some countries have already shown interest in joining it — Pakistan may be one of them and as far as I know there is also Mongolia. But inclusion of new members will be discussed by all the existing members. So far, I don't have any information on when they will accept new members," Mr. Sun said. What would be the Chinese response if India showed interest in joining the SCO? "As I said this organisation is open, but this is the first time I heard about Indians joining it. It's up to the six existing members."

To a question on the deliberations of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting, Mr. Sun said it was the "most important" forum for regional security issues and had achieved a lot since its formation seven years ago. China, he said, was happy to see the development of the ARF and wanted the organisation to go further to play a positive role in maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Asked about the Chinese perception that the relations between the U.S. and China were improving after a period of tension, the spokesman said both the U.S. and China were important countries in the world. "As we often say, the U.S. is the biggest developed country in the world and China is the biggest developing country in the world. So, we see great

importance in developing relations between the two countries," he said. "There are some differences between the two. We would like to adopt a positive attitude towards resolving differences. We can talk about it. The differences should be dealt with in a candid manner," he said.

'Ties with U.S. improving'

In what seemed to be a reference to the spy plane incident in April, Mr. Sun said not so long ago there was a period of difficulty in the relationship between the U.S. and China, but now ties were improving. Referring to the meeting here between the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, and the Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr. Tang Jiaxuan, the spokesman said they talked in the spirit of improving relations. (Mr. Powell and Mr. Tang subsequently held further talks in Beijing over the week-end). "We are also expecting President Bush to come to China, first to Shanghai for the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting and after that we are expecting him to come to Beijing for a visit. We see this visit as very important because we are now in the first year of a new century," he said.

Recently, Mr. Colin Powell had said that the U.S. does not see China as an enemy. The U.S., Mr. Powell had said, doesn't need an enemy in this area and wants to develop friendly cooperation with China, he said.

"We welcome these remarks. From our side, the Chinese people always have friendly feelings towards the American people. We don't need an enemy either. We would also like to see the U.S. play a constructive role in maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific area," Mr. Sun added.

THE HINDU

31 JUL 2001

Her visit provided the Indian state general secretary...

Chokila to meet Haq at Saarc meet

BY GAUTAM DATT

New Delhi, July 23: The Indian and Pakistani officials will get a chance to meet after the Agra summit during the special session of Saarc standing committee in August.

The foreign secretaries from the Saarc nations will meet in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo on August 9 and 10. The meeting will provide forum for the India and Pakistan foreign secretaries to hold bilateral dialogue.

The special meeting of the foreign secretaries will also pave the way for the revival of the Saarc process which was stalled in 1999 due to row between India and Pakistan. The standing committee meeting was earlier scheduled to be held before the Agra summit (on June 8 and 9) but it was postponed. It was put off in light of the killings in the Nepalese royal family. India and Pakistan wanted to use it as a preparatory

meeting for the Agra summit.

It is expected that top foreign ministry officials from India and Pakistan will now meet at the sidelines of the standing committee meet in Colombo.

The meeting between Indian foreign secretary Chokila Iyer and Pakistani foreign secretary Inamul Haq is expected to set the stage for the future interactions between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and President Pervez Musharraf. An official of the Indian foreign said that it was not ruled out that bilateral exchanges will take place during the Saarc standing committee meeting.

Official said that schedule for such meetings was being chalked out. Apart from the Pakistani foreign secretary, Ms Iyer will meet her counterparts from other nations of the region.

Even as Pakistan has invited Prime Minister Vajpayee and external affairs minister Jaswant

Singh to Islamabad, there was a possibility of the meeting between the two leaders in the sidelines of either Saarc summit or the UN General Assembly meeting in September.

The Saarc foreign secretaries will assemble in Colombo to give final shape to the draft of the agenda for a full fledged summit of the regional body of South Asian nations. The next Saarc summit is scheduled to take place in Nepal.

Officials said that under normal circumstances a summit might take place within six months of the standing committee meeting. Two days before the standing committee meeting, the Saarc joint secretary level officials will meet in Colombo on August 7 and 8.

The two sides agreed on holding the standing committee meeting of the Saarc last year. The last such meeting was held in 1999, after which the process was stalled.

THE ASIAN AGE

Leap of Imagination

A South Asian Seat in Security Council

By HARIS GAZDAR

11-10 9/77
IN and around the meetings between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf, there will be talk of 'core issues'. The Indo-Pak relationship is the core issue in South Asian security, Kashmir is the core issue in Indo-Pak relations, and terrorism or state terrorism (depending on your point of view) is the core issue in Kashmir. It will be easy to forget that underlying all these 'core issues' is a core structural problem. Briefly stated, it is the improbability of South Asia as a region in a world that is rapidly organising itself into regions. This core problem is structural because it is tied up with geography.

Solutions to structural problems require magnificent leaps of the imagination — true paradigm shifts. Try this one out for size: Imagine a South Asia permanent representative at the UN Security Council with veto powers. Imagine these powers being contingent on consensus-evolving mechanisms within South Asia. Imagine what this does for regional identity and for global governance.

History and culture have provided complacent explanations for the resilience of the India-Pakistan 'problem'. The history-culture analysis has ruled minds for too long and with too little scrutiny. The fact is that the India-Pakistan 'problem' is structurally very similar to the India-Bangladesh 'problem', the India-Sri Lanka 'problem', the India-Nepal 'problem', and even the India-Bhutan 'problem'. The relative power of each of these smaller neighbours vis-a-vis India is no doubt different, but their threat perceptions are more or less the same. And the reverse is equally true. If India's imperious size sustains the small neighbour's fear of its supposed imperial ambitions, protective action on the part of the smaller neighbour, such as its cultivation of extra-regional ties, makes India feel insecure.

The India-Pakistan problem is the most conspicuous manifestation of this structural problem: In any South Asia-wide meeting, regional issues always get bogged down in the Rann of Kashmir. At a recent such event, a Sri Lankan participant remarked laconically that South Asia turns out to be a Himalayan enclave where there are difficulties between Muslims and Hindus. But the same person and other colleagues from Bangladesh and Nepal also admitted privately that the India-Pakistan imbroglio is not entirely a matter of dismay for their

countries. Pakistan's 'standing up' to India provides them with bargaining space.

A South Asia identity will face a structural constraint even if India and Pakistan found a way of getting along. There are few regions in the world with a comparably dominant 'lead-player'. North America is one example, and here the US is unchallenged due to its global power. In South Asia, however, India's predominance will remain challengeable for a simple reason. In a world of power blocs, the smaller neighbour will always gain leverage vis-a-vis India by building relations with extra-regional powers. The latter lot will always find it expedient to patronise the small neighbour in order to maintain pressure on India. This was precisely the strategic logic of

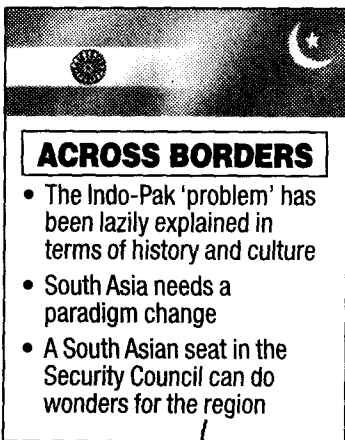
tries are cautious because SAARC gives legal expression to a region that will be dominated by India due to its sheer size. The weakness of SAARC is not remarkable. What is remarkable is that the organisation should exist at all. However, this comes at a cost. The global system rewards states and peoples that have succeeded in constructing regional blocs and punishes those that have failed.

South Asia needs a paradigm change. Regional identity can become a serious proposition if it is associated with regional power in the world. Citizens of South Asian states and others interested in regional peace should demand a region-based reform of global institutions, particularly the UN. They should demand a permanent veto-wielding delegate for South Asia on the Security Council. They should demand the South Asian veto to be contingent on acceptable mechanisms for intra-regional consensus.

Changes in the incentives for regional and global cooperation can be dramatic. India, more than the other regional states, has strong views on global governance. A South Asian seat at the high table will impart an Indian flavour to debates on security issues but also derivatively on other matters of concern such as WTO. The Indian view of the world at large is not too different from the perspectives of other regional states. At the same time, any intra-regional mechanism for evolving consensus will make India mindful of the concerns of her neighbours. The outcome will not be Bhutan getting a Security Council veto, but Bhutan getting better bargaining positions vis-a-vis India, and India (and South Asia) getting better bargaining positions vis-a-vis the rest of the world. The details can be worked out, but as a general scheme this proposal can be a win-win game for the states and for the region as a whole.

Mr Vajpayee and general Musharraf should get down to serious bilateral business but in their spare hours they can do worse than indulging in some mental acrobatics. Alas they will waste that time in trying to get to know each other better, ruminating over Urdu verse, or visiting each other's ancestral homes. In short, history and culture again, unless there is a leap of the imagination somewhere between Islamabad and New Delhi.

(The author is a political economist with the Social Science Research Collective, Karachi.)



the Cold War.

Some Indian analysts expect the current warmth in US-India relations to free India from her neighbourly vulnerabilities. This expectation is unrealistic. The US would not simply forsake its leverage with India even if India were an ally. America's switch from Pakistan to India is not the dumping of Pakistan. The end of the Cold War does not mean that the US will abandon Pakistan. It simply means that Pakistan is available more cheaply. The same holds true also of other neighbours as well as other extra-regional powers.

The weak regional identity of South Asia is manifest in the failure of the regional organisation (SAARC). But SAARC is weak because member states assign a low status to it. India remains wary because she suspects (correctly) that a regional organisation will become a forum for India-bashing. The other six members have bilateral relations with India and none (except Nepal and Bhutan) even share borders. The smaller coun-

Nepal wants better Indo-Pak ties

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, July 12

THE NEPALESE people, who often find themselves caught in the crossfire between India and Pakistan, are waiting for the upcoming Indo-Pak summit with their fingers crossed.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) ideologue Pradeep Nepal said, "We're concerned that we might be made a victim of Indo-Pak hostilities. The RAW and the ISI can't be as active here as they are in each other's country," he added. "Though we don't expect much from the summit, we hope that we will be spared of unnecessary allegations if India and Pakistan improve their ties."

Differences between Nepal and India grew following the December 1999 hijack of an Indian Airlines jet by Kashmiri ultras from here to Kandahar. As the incident lent credence to Delhi's suspicion that Nepal has become an ISI hub, IA withdrew all its flights to the kingdom for six months. This proved disastrous for Nepal whose tourist arrivals declined by over 30 per cent.

The Nepalese felt equally offended when the 11th Saarc summit to be held here in November 1999 was cancelled following India's disapproval of the military coup in Pakistan. Columnist Dhruvahari Adhikary, in his dis-

patch in Nepal Samacharpatra, explained, "Preparations were at the last stage and millions of rupees had already been spent when the summit was stopped. The talks can revive the process of holding the Saarc meet."

Likewise, former Nepalese ambassador to India Lokraj Baral said, "The Agra meeting can help in the Saarc's activities, though it may take a long time to resolve the Kashmir issue. It is too early to guess on its impact in Nepal."

The GP Koirala Government has already described the Agra summit as a "positive development." India and Nepal were divided in their views about the outbreak of anti-Indian riots over Hrithik Roshan here in December last. While the former suspected the ISI's role in the violence, the latter ruled it out.

Not only this, the occasional seizures of fake Indian currency notes and RDX from people attached to the Pakistan embassy here also greatly embarrass Nepal. As late as April, Mohd heema, a Pakistan diplomat, was caught with a huge quantity of RDX. Prior to this, another embassy employee A Saboor was deported to Pakistan after fake Indian notes worth over Rs 50 lakh were recovered from him a week after the IA hijack.

But Pakistan dismissed the incidents as a conspiracy hatched by the RAW.

Nuclear risk reduction

By Michael Krepon

Nuclear risk reduction will be a far more complex undertaking in southern Asia than was the case for the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

THE COLD War experience with nuclear risk reduction was obviously unique, playing out in the context of a bipolar strategic and ideological competition. A great distance separated the antagonists. Both the United States and the Soviet Union accumulated huge and diverse nuclear arsenals, which were limited by treaty constraints. And both superpowers managed alliances under protective nuclear umbrellas.

Clearly, none of these factors apply to southern Asia. And yet, the key elements of nuclear risk reduction during the Cold War still appear to be applicable. As during the Cold War, regional stability and risk reduction in southern Asia requires tacit or formal agreements not to change the territorial status quo in sensitive areas by military means. Nor can India, Pakistan and China reduce nuclear risks if they engage in brinkmanship along national borders or lines of actual control. In southern Asia, no less than along the inter-German or Korean borders, there is an evident need to minimise or avoid dangerous military practices. Nuclear risk reduction between India and Pakistan or between China and India is very hard to envision without special reassurance measures directly related to weapon systems that are most worrisome.

The absence of trust in the faithful implementation of agreed obligations is no less corrosive between India and Pakistan or India and China than between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Proper implementation of risk reduction agreements reached is therefore required. Proper implementation can build trust, but monitoring and verification are also necessary. It is also self-evident that nuclear risk reduction, regardless of region, requires reliable lines of communication across borders, as well as redundant command and control systems.

While the Cold War experience can provide useful lessons for India, Pakistan and China, it does not provide easy answers. India and its neighbours must adapt lessons learnt to the unique strategic and political cultures, geography, and nascent nuclear and missile programmes now under way in the region.

The regional competition in southern Asia consists of two dyads — India versus Pakistan, and China versus India — and one triangle. In each of the dyads, the

riable during the formative and most dangerous phase of their nuclear competition, India, Pakistan and China do not have the independent, redundant means to monitor treaty obligations, the willingness to accept the transparency necessary for treaty verification, or a serious interest in accepting intrusive monitoring by third parties. The role that treaties played in reducing nuclear risks during the Cold War is therefore unlikely to be available to national leaders in China, India and Pakistan. In this event, stand-alone nuclear risk reduction arrangements become more essential, but also more difficult, given the absence of trust that verifiable treaty obligations might generate.

The rhetorical declarations of peaceful intent and negotiated confidence-building measures that Islamabad and New Delhi have relied upon instead of treaties provide a completely inadequate basis for nuclear risk reduction. Rhetorical pronouncements have usually been advanced to place "the other" at a political disadvantage. The impulse for negotiating confidence-building measures (CBMs) has mostly followed wars or crises on the Subcontinent. This impulse usually wanes after a crisis has passed.

The subsequent record of existing CBMs — where obligations are initially honoured and then forgotten — hardly builds confidence. If this dynamic is applied to nuclear risk reduction, India and Pakistan face a very troubled period ahead. Existing CBMs could provide a solid foundation for nuclear risk reduction — but only if there is a sea change in Pakistani and Indian implementation practices.

Pakistan has been the demagogue of a nuclear restraint regime, while engaging in a Kashmir policy that increases nuclear dangers. The basic incompatibility of Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy and Kashmir policy is widely understood. Now it will be tested anew in bilateral diplomacy. Much common ground to reduce nuclear dangers has already been cleared in diplomatic exchanges before Kargil. If both sides are serious about reducing nuclear dangers, they will not hold new nuclear risk reduction agreements — or their proper implementation — hostage to wrangling over Kashmir.

(The writer is president emeritus of the Simson Center.)

undertaking in southern Asia than was the case for the U.S. and the Soviet Union. As bad as Cold War nuclear dangers were, bipolarity provided a measure of simplification. The nuclear balance could be codified in treaties predicated on equality. A common understanding of stabilising and destabilising activities could also be negotiated. Competition was pervasive, and yet aspects that were most dangerous were placed off limits. After initial jockeying, the divisions of Berlin and Korea were accepted; Washington and Moscow did not exchange artillery fire across these lines, and military planning was not predicated on daily, violent interactions between soldiers.

India, Pakistan and China are very far from these stabilising conditions. In Central Europe, there were no 'lines of actual control'. Not so in southern Asia. Even the relatively quiet, poorly demarcated border area dividing India and China is the scene of occasional jockeying between military patrols. Until last fall, the situation along the Line of Control dividing Kashmir was far worse, with Indian and Pakistani troops over-running each other's posts, engaging in small arms, mortar, and artillery fire, and regularly taking casualties. Nothing in Cold War experience remotely replicates these patterns of ritualised violence.

Indian and Pakistani Government officials and strategic analysts assert that they will not fall into the traps of U.S.-Soviet competition. To avoid these traps, restraint in deployment and force sizing is necessary, but insufficient. Unilateral actions to improve command and control and cross-border monitoring are also essential, but insufficient. Nuclear risk reduction is southern Asia — as was the case for the U.S. and the Soviet Union — can only succeed if this agenda includes collaborative elements.

In South Asia, triangular or bilateral treaty obligations relating to nuclear capabilities would be very difficult to negotiate since neither equality nor formalised inequality is likely to be acceptable to one or more parties. Even if treaties were nego-

stronger of the two antagonists does not outwardly acknowledge the competition, making cooperative nuclear risk reduction extremely difficult. Nor do Pakistan and China acknowledge their previous collaboration against India. A triangular effort at nuclear risk reduction would be plagued by this history, and by the lack of symmetry resulting from three-cornered interactions. As a result, formalised bilateral or trilateral arms control treaties would be very difficult to negotiate in the complex security architecture of southern Asia. In contrast, the U.S. and Soviet Union made treaties the centrepiece of nuclear stabilisation and risk reduction.

National leaders in China, India, and Pakistan have all declared their firm intention not to repeat the nuclear excesses of the U.S. and Soviet Union. No one expects them to accumulate the liabilities that come with bloated nuclear arsenals. Large nuclear arsenals, however, carried the presumed benefit of risk reduction by providing insurance against a surprise attack. Because arsenals were so large, preemption was not a plausible option.

Small nuclear arsenals might not provide that much of an insurance policy, particularly in the early phases of a nuclear competition. Put another way, limited arsenals might generate risks, rather than guarantee risk reduction. Indeed, the historical record suggests that security concerns have been particularly worrisome to states possessing small nuclear arsenals. This was certainly true for the U.S.-Soviet experience, when nuclear risks were greatest in the early phases of arsenal-building, when vulnerabilities were evident, verification weak, and command and control untested. The brief, crisis-filled record since India and Pakistan acquired covert nuclear capabilities seems to confirm this proposition. If China, India and Pakistan are to demonstrate a superior wisdom that resists ever-increasing nuclear capabilities, they must first demonstrate a superior wisdom to reduce nuclear risks.

This analysis suggests that nuclear risk reduction will be a far more complex un-

'India, Pak. must reduce n-risks'

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JUNE 24. India and Pakistan continue to face significant nuclear dangers that mandate prompt negotiation and proper implementation of nuclear risk reduction measures; and the two countries face far greater difficulties in establishing nuclear safety and stability than other states with nuclear weapons, a report of the Stimson Centre says. Messrs Michael Krepon, P.R. Chari, Chris Gagne, Kent Biringer and Ms. Harinder Baweja have contributed to the report.

Titled "The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia", it says India and Pakistan find themselves in the stability-instability paradox — nuclear weapons are supposed to prevent major wars and stabilise relations; but they may also prompt provocations, instability and even conflict at lower levels.

"The stability-instability paradox is marked by wars and near-wars such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Berlin Crisis, the Korean War, clashes between Soviet and Chinese forces along the Ussuri River and the Kargil conflict," the Stimson Centre said in a press release.

The President Emeritus of the Centre, Mr. Michael Krepon, says

that more harrowing experiences are in store for India and Pakistan unless they get serious about cooperative nuclear risk reduction. "If India and Pakistan are to demonstrate a superior wisdom that resists ever-increasing nuclear capabilities, they must first demonstrate a superior wisdom to reduce nuclear risks."

Mr. Krepon contends that while none of the conditions of the Cold War experience on nuclear risk reduction is applicable to South Asia — or Southern Asia — yet there are key elements that prevailed then which still appear to be applicable.

"Regional stability and risk reduction in Southern Asia obviously require tacit or formal agreements not to change the territorial *status quo* in sensitive areas by military means...In Southern Asia, no less than along the inter-German or Korean borders there is an evident need to minimise or avoid dangerous military practices," he says.

"The essential question, then, is not whether, but how the key elements of nuclear risk reduction should be best adapted to Southern Asia's unique strategic and political cultures, geography, geopolitics and nascent nuclear and missile programmes."

It is stressed that nuclear risk

reduction will be an extremely complex undertaking in Southern Asia as opposed to what it was between the U.S. and the then Soviet Union.

It has been argued that bipolarity provided a measure of simplification; nuclear balance could be codified in treaties predicated on equality; the understanding of stabilising and de-stabilising activities could be negotiated and the U.S. and the Soviet military planning was not predicated on daily and violent interactions.

"India, Pakistan and China are very far from these stabilising conditions," Mr. Krepon says.

"The United States and the Soviet Union were fortunate to manage their competition without the use of nuclear weapons. Perhaps India, Pakistan and China will be similarly lucky but they would be wise not to depend too heavily on faith, good fortune or divine protection. It took Washington and Moscow two decades to pass through a dangerous opening phase of nuclear competition to establish treaty-based and less formal risk reduction arrangements. India, Pakistan and China are now in this difficult passage, but without the key prospect of treaties to curtail regional nuclear dangers," is one of Mr. Krepon's conclusions.

COMMON GROUND

Three S Asian Nations Make Meaningful Contacts

FOR the Himalayan landlocked state of Bhutan, May was the month of interacting with its two neighbours: the South Asian core state India, and another Himalayan landlocked state Nepal. While interactions with the Indian Foreign Secretary, Chokila Iyer, and the Joint Secretary (North), Meera Shankar, helped Bhutan and India strengthen the existing bilateral ties further, talks with the Nepalese Ambassador to Bhutan, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, helped the two Himalayan kingdoms iron out several differences that had cropped up of late. Incidentally, Dr Thapa, Nepal's Ambassador to India, is also accredited to Bhutan. But his visits to Bhutan are not very frequent.

In an interview, the Indian foreign secretary described the Indo-Bhutan relationship as being "both intensive and extensive". Significantly, it was the first visit of the new Indian foreign secretary to any country. She stressed that she had chosen Bhutan for her first official visit because of its importance as India's closest neighbour and development partner. Ms Iyer said that the two governments' officials had held close consultations on a number of issues of mutual concern, of course focusing on development projects like the Kurichu and Tala hydro electric projects.

CONCERNS

The Indian foreign secretary averred: "We are proud to be involved in Kurichu, which will bring socio-economic developments to the eastern region." Not less significantly she said that the Tala project "will greatly benefit both Bhutan and India" once it is completed around 2004 or 2005. Besides, the governments of India and Bhutan were working together on a number of projects like roads, hospitals and scholars, she stressed. Indeed, India has been providing all kinds of infrastructural and welfare assistance to the mountain kingdom ever since its first five-year development plan was launched in 1961. In 1958, Jawaharlal Nehru had visited the tiny kingdom and promised all economic assistance in its development.

Unsurprisingly, the problems of the ULFA and the Bodo militants, who have been staying in Bhutan for quite some time now — to the utter embarrassment of the Royal Bhutan Government — would have figured in the talks. Asked about discussions vis-a-vis these militant groups, Ms Iyer said that the issue was of concern to both the countries. Any relationship sometimes, she said, "has concerns", and added that "we have to deal with it. We have to work together with each other".

The Bhutanese foreign minister, Lyonpo Jigmi Hozar Thinley, who had the distinction of becoming the first chair-

man of the kingdom's Council of Ministers under the changed political dispensations, during 1998-99, described the Indian foreign secretary's visit to Bhutan as "very successful".

Alluding to the dynamism of globalisation, Lyonpo Thinley stressed: "We agreed on the need for close consultations at all levels in the light of the dynamism of the globalisation process and its implements on the two countries and on the region."

Ms Iyer also had talks with

member last year and emphasised that it heralded a new era in the process of finding a solution to the refugee problem. In fact, he averred that the ministerial level meeting added substance to bilateral relations between Nepal and Bhutan.

The Nepali Ambassador stated that the level of diplomatic ties between Nepal and Bhutan needed to be upgraded and the frequency of contacts increased. Dr Thapa allude to the visit of the Kathmandu mayor to Thimphu in the recent past and the increasing cooperation between the airlines of the two countries: the Royal Nepal Airlines and the Druk Air.

Dr Thapa said: "We have so much in common in terms of geography, size and the level of development compared to other countries in the world," and added that while Bhutan had done better in some areas of development, Nepal has prospered in some others. "So", the Ambassador suggested, "we should promote consul-

tation and cooperation in all aspects."

Dr Thapa, who has been involved in solving the refugee problem for a long time, described it as a "just little rupture" on which there was now good progress. He referred to the visit of Nepali foreign minister, Chakra Prasad Bastola, to various refugee camps in Nepal's Jhapa district and said that the latter was impressed with the degree of understanding with which the joint verification team was working. The Nepali Ambassador underlined that the two sides were working as "colleagues rather than counterparts".

WELL-MEANING

The Bhutanese foreign minister Lyonpo Jimi Yozer Thinley underscored the point that the two countries which shared close ties going back many years, were renewing their relations now in modern times. Thinley also stressed that while the refugee problem had dragged on for some time, the two countries were able to overcome all obstacles in a spirit of friendship. Stating that Nepal and Bhutan share same strengths and vulnerability and challenges in socio-economic development, Thinley added that there were many reasons why the two countries should strengthen relations. "We are children of the same Himalayas", the Bhutanese foreign minister emphasised.

In 1997, the then Nepali foreign minister, Prakash Chandra Lohani, had propounded a thesis that the three countries should try their best to enhance cooperation in economic development at the sub-regional level under the Saarc framework. That was welcomed by many well-meaning people at that point of time. It appears that positive and meaningful cooperation between the three countries of South Asia would become a reality in the beginning of the new millennium and that would stand all of them in good stead.



Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, finance minister and present chairman of the Council of Ministers (Lhengye Zhungtshog in Dzongkha). In an interview Lyonpo Zimba stated that the two countries enjoyed "problem-free relationship". He also emphasised that the close friendship and understanding between Bhutan and India is characterised by the free and frank exchange of views between the leaders and officials of the two countries.

Though nothing has been said recently of any proposed official visit of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck to India, these interactions and exchange of views would eventually lead to a royal visit. King Jigme visited India last in October 1998. Though under the framework of changes effected by the King himself in June 1998, the monarch has ceased to be the head of government — restricting his role to the head of state — there is no doubt about his immense significance within the Bhutanese political system and in the outside world.

COOPERATION

A week-long visit by the Nepali Ambassador to Bhutan, Dr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, and Ms Rita Thapa, and talks between the two Himalayan kingdoms, helped bring the two sides closer to each other. The migration of a large number of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan to Nepal and living there as refugees in various camps of eastern Nepal had contributed to strains in their relations. In an interview in Thimphu, Dr Thapa, who had earlier been Nepal's finance minister as also its Ambassador to the USA, said that Nepal and Bhutan are expanding their views on cooperation and enhancing their understanding of each other's interests and needs.

Dr Thapa referred to the 10th ministerial level bilateral meeting between Nepal and Bhutan in Kathmandu in Dec-

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THE STATESMAN

S. Asian forum against communalism launched

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, JUNE 9. Civil society leaders of five South-Asian countries formed a "South-Asian People's Union" as a platform against fundamentalism and communalism at the end of their two-day conference here recently. "... Hence we ... establish a South-Asian platform, South-Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Colonialism to join hands in resisting all forms of fundamentalism and communalism in the region," the leaders announced in a unanimous resolution, the Dhaka Declaration.

The declaration called upon states, Governments, political parties and civil society organisations to uphold inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-faith equality as inalienable democratic principles.

Leading politicians, academics, professionals and cultural activists of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal who exchanged opinions on communalism and fundamentalism also pledged to "harness their energies for promoting social justice, peace, gender equality and secular democratic values" and work together for bringing all perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes to justice.

The 10-point declaration affirmed the need to de-communalise and secularise South-Asian societies, through active reconstruction of ethnic and religious identities in a spirit of equality, interdependence and mutual respect.

It noted that fundamentalism and communalism have been undermining the vitals of the socie-

ties of the region, eroding democratic values, norms and institutions. "Women, children and people belonging to ethnic and religious minority groups are particularly being victimised by fundamentalist and communal forces," the declaration stated.

The declaration acknowledged that some political and social groups were using fundamentalism for their petty interests and urged all political parties and groups to fight such attempts. It also stated that a section of the media is increasingly becoming the means for propagating fundamentalism, communalism and extremism.

The declaration called upon media institutions and personnel to uphold the principles and ideals of democracy, pluralism and secularism in order to promote values of diversity and tolerance.

Earlier, taking part in the conference, the former Pakistan Air Force Chief, Air Marshal Asghar Khan, blamed "debauch Generals and landlords" for the genocide of 1971 in the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, even as speakers at a session called for trial of the war criminals. He said in the last elections, 74 per cent of Pakistanis did not exercise their franchise marking their protest against the political parties.

Prof. Riyaz Panjabi, chief of Indian Information Centre for Peace Studies, warned of the trend of using religion as a tool in power games. "The lessons learnt from the Afghan experience also cautions us against efforts to use fundamentalism for political purposes", he said.

SAARC meet called off, setback to Indo-Pak summit

H BULA DEVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 2. - The third special session of standing committee of foreign secretaries of SAARC countries, scheduled to meet on 8-9 June in Colombo, has been postponed due to the massacre of Nepal's royal family.

On the sides of the seven-member-nation South Asian regional grouping meeting the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan were likely to discuss the Kashmir issue, preparing the ground work before the India-Pakistan summit meet here in the first half of July.

Mrs Chokila Iyer and Mr In-

amul Haque were to set the tone for the summit meet. But, with the postponement of the meeting, it is viewed by many as a set back to the Vajpayee-Musharraf summit meet before it could even take off.

Though not much result is expected from the meeting of the heads of the two sovereign countries, the Iyer-Haque meeting was expected to set the tone for the "existing composite dialogue". India wasn't a "realistic" and sustained dialogue and not an "impatient" dialogue.

According to ministry of external affairs officials, the standing committee meeting of SAARC stood postponed until mutual convenient

dates were fixed.

The Sri Lankan foreign ministry today called off the meeting as a mark of respect for Nepal's King Birendra Bir Bikram and Queen Aishwarya. By the postponement of the Standing Committee meeting it is also a set back to the SAARC summit which had been on the hold for last two years because India did not want to share the same platform with General Pervez Musharraf.

The seven-nation grouping of India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were to prepare the ground for holding the main summit in Kathmandu shortly.

SAARC meet put off

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 2. The special session of the SAARC standing committee, which was to take place here next week, has been postponed indefinitely following the assassination of the King and Queen of Nepal and other members of the royal family, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry said today. No new dates have been fixed. The standing committee, which is the charter body of SAARC Foreign Secretaries, was scheduled to meet on June 7 and 8. The special session, called after much diplomatic exertion by Sri Lanka, which currently holds the chair of the grouping, was expected to kick-start the process for the SAARC summit, which has not been held since 1998.

Pak. in a dilemma

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JUNE 2 The postponement of the SAARC Standing Committee meet has left the Pakistan Foreign Office in a dilemma in the context of the proposed summit between the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Pakistan Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

India and Pakistan are looking forward to the SAARC meet as it would have provided them an opportunity for a dialogue on the nitty-gritty of the Vajpayee-Musharraf summit. The Foreign

Secretary of India, Mrs. Chokila Iyer, and her Pakistani counterpart, Mr. Inamul Haq, were scheduled to meet on the sidelines of the SAARC meeting. Though neither side had made any formal move for the meeting, they were looking forward to it.

"It has indeed put us in a bit of a spot. We were looking forward to the meet in Colombo to kick-start the preparations for the summit meeting. Now that the conference has been put off indefinitely, we would have to seriously consider ways and means to establish a contact," a senior Pakistan Foreign Office official said.

As a senior diplomat said a great deal of preparation is necessary before any summit meeting. The job becomes all the more difficult if it involved heads of two hostile neighbours such as India and Pakistan.

The Colombo meeting could have provided the right opportunity and atmosphere for the two Foreign Secretaries to do some ground work. "If not any thing else, it would have helped the two Foreign Secretaries know each other and establish a rapport", a senior Pakistan diplomat said.

The two sides could now consider establishment of contact in some other way. One possibility is for a team to visit New Delhi for talks with the Foreign Office since the invitation for the summit came from the Indian side.

'China has role in S. Asian peace'

By Our Special Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, MAY 20. The military ruler of Pakistan, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and the President, Mr. Rafiq Tarar, have reiterated that China had a role to play in the stability and peace in South Asia.

In two separate messages issued to commemorate 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations, both made it a point to note how friendship between Pakistan and China had grown from strength to strength and how they expected it to take a leap in the years to come.

The military government in Pakistan has employed every conceivable adjective in recent weeks to describe the close nature of relations with China. The hyperbole on its ties China reached a new height during the recent visit of the Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Zhu Rongji, to Islamabad. The chant of 'historic' nature of relations between the two countries became so loud that some of the commentators in the Pakistani media deemed it necessary to counsel the Government to get out of the 'time wrap' and move on with the times.

In his message today the President said that "the comprehensive partnership that we have

developed between our two countries covers a vast and growing spectrum ranging from the political and defence spheres to the economic and cultural fields and to science and technology. Our close friendship and cooperation has also been a pillar of peace and stability in the region and we will continue working closely together in the pursuit of this objective.

"Our two countries oppose international and regional hegemony and have been striving for a just international political and economic order. We consult each other on international and regional issues and cooperate closely in international fora".

Echoing the sentiments Gen.

Musharraf said that "a strong partnership between Pakistan and China has been an important factor in the peace and stability of the region. As we develop and reinforce this partnership in the new century, there will also be a positive impact on the peace and stability of South Asia and beyond. We will continue to work with China for durable peace in the region and the world and for the development of a just world order based on international law, equity and justice."

The Chief Executive said that as a close neighbour, China has always played a crucial and positive role for the peace and stability of South Asia and this role will remain vital.

Sattar, Powell to discuss n-issues

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MAY 20. Nuclear and security issues would be part of discussions between the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, and the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, when the former visits Washington in the third week of June. In a talk with correspondents here, Mr. Sattar said the lifting of sanctions, the Kashmir issue and the plight of Afghans would figure in the discussions. His programme is tentatively scheduled between June 18 and 20.

Mr. Sattar welcomed the statement of the Secretary of State that the U.S. would encourage Pakistan and India to find a peaceful and just solution to the Kashmir issue. He said Pakistan would welcome any offer of mediation.

THE HINDU

21 MAY 2000

US defence chief to visit India

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 22

GENERAL HENRY H. Shelton, chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, is expected to visit India on May 31. Confirmation of the trip has raised expectations of resumption of Indo-US Defence ties, kept on hold by Washington after the Pokhran nuclear tests of May 1998.

General Shelton, the highest operational head of the US forces, will inspect a tri-service guard of honour. He is expected to call on Defence Minister Jaswant Singh and hold meetings with the three Service chiefs.

Sources in the Ministry of External Affairs said resumption of the Expert Group on

Defence, which met annually before the Pokhran blasts, cannot be ruled out in the near future.

However, in the structure of dialogue formalised during former US President Bill Clinton's visit to New Delhi last year, there is scope for interaction between Service chiefs. The commander of the Pacific Command of the US forces, Admiral Dennis C. Blair, had visited India last year but that trip did not lead to the resumption of military ties.

Customs officials held: The CBI today arrested three senior officials of the Customs department on charges of having aided Uzbek smuggler Olga Kozireva in bringing Chinese silk into India. The three officers allegedly cleared her baggage without collecting any duty payment.

Indo-Pak talks on Saarc sidelines

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 22

THE SAARC foreign secretaries' meeting, to be held in Colombo over June 8 and 9, holds the exciting prospect of an Indo-Pakistan bilateral on the sidelines. Neither side, however, has made the first move till date by "requesting" the other for such a meeting, though much could change between now and June 8.

Till now, only Nepal has formally requested a meeting on the fringes of the "special session" of Saarc. Indian officials said it was

"not unusual for foreign secretaries to meet on the sidelines of multilaterals". Even if Pakistan requested one and India's foreign secretary Chokila Iyer agreed to meet her Pakistani counterpart, it would not amount to much.

That's because India is not interested in any substantive talks with Pakistan outside the framework of the Composite Dialogue Process, which got off with much fanfare in late 1998 but got suspended after the Kargil conflict. India has linked resumption of the process to Pakistan

reining in the militants and stopping "hostile propaganda".

At Sri Lanka's request, India has agreed to participate in the upcoming meeting so that a long-delayed review of the recommendations of the expert groups can be made.

India has made it clear that its agreement to go for the multilateral is a one-off gesture.

It is quite firm that the time is not ripe yet for a summit or any form of political meeting. Saarc operates on the basis of consensus and unless all the members agree to a summit, one cannot be held.

India not to veto move for SAARC summit

By K. K. Katyal

NEW DELHI, MAY 7. India does not intend vetoing the move for the SAARC summit nor is it averse to the use of that opportunity for top-level contacts with Pakistan.

The indication to this effect, available in bits and pieces in the recent past, was confirmed by high authoritative sources.

New Delhi is, thus, prepared to let the SAARC process, beginning with next month's meeting of Foreign Secretaries, take its course. This means, it is agreeable to the next two higher-level contacts — the meeting of the Foreign Ministers and then the summit.

The current chairman of the SAARC, which completed its tenure towards the end of 1999, will be passing on the mantle to its successor, Nepal.

The forthcoming get-together of the Foreign Secretaries, or the standing committee in the SAARC parlance, marks the beginning of a significant shift in the tough line, adopted by India after the military coup in Pakistan in October 1999.

The SAARC summit, that was due to be held in Kathmandu two months later, had to be cancelled because of New Delhi's objection to the presence of a coup leader among the South Asian heads.

India kept up this stance till the end of last year — because of which SAARC activities were confined to meetings of technical committees, there being conscious efforts to discourage conclaves of the Foreign Secretaries and of Foreign Ministers.

Even the customary meeting of the SAARC Foreign Ministers,

held in New York on the occasion of the U.N. General Assembly session, had to be skipped because of India's objection.

This rigidity was relaxed earlier this year, just as the peace process in Jammu and Kashmir, was initiated through the announcement of cease-fire.

New Delhi agreed to the meeting of the Foreign Secretaries but even then the question whether this new beginning would be allowed to take its logical course and the subsequent contacts, culminating in the summit, would materialise, remained doubtful.

It could now be stated on the basis of firm evidence that New Delhi has no plan to come in the way of the summit schedule and even though the time-table will take time to be worked out,

it could well take place in the last quarter of the year in Kathmandu, of course, barring unforeseen developments.

India will be agreeable to talks between the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Pakistan chief, General Pervez Musharraf on the sidelines of the SAARC.

At one stage diplomats of the SAARC countries attached significance to the choice of the venue for the standing committee — a meeting at Colombo, so went the argument, would suggest continuation of the stalemate, while Kathmandu would signify advance.

Later, this view was modified and even though Colombo is to be the venue, there are no doubts about the progress. Ironically, Pakistan has not shown enthusiasm about a process, meant to lead to the

top-level contact, it was keen about from the time of the military take-over.

There is nothing to suggest Islamabad's disapproval of the anti-India activity of the jihadi outfits there, let alone concrete steps to prevent or even to discourage it.

This at a time when New Delhi has modified its earlier stand — of setting the end of cross-border terrorism as a pre-condition for talks.

India now would be satisfied if Islamabad indicates its willingness not to encourage terrorist violence.

Then there is the firm evidence to show that Pakistan has gone out of the way to prevent a section of the Hurriyat from responding positively to talks with Mr. K. C. Pant, New Delhi's interlocutor for Kashmiri representatives.

THE HINDU

8 MAY 2001

Finally India, Pak likely to talk

■ India agrees to meeting on condition that Islamabad not raise any bilateral issues

JYOTI MALHOTRA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

96-5
27/1

INDIA appears to be shedding its inhibitions over meeting its counterparts in Pakistan in a public forum, such as SAARC, especially after being reassured by Sri Lanka that Islamabad will not raise any bilateral issues, such as Kashmir, at the SAARC meetings.

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is said to have recently conveyed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that Islamabad, keen on participating in a SAARC process, had promised not to raise any contentious, bilateral issues with India at the meetings.

Colombo's reassurance seems to have helped calm India's mind with highly placed sources in the Government pointing out that

New Delhi is "no longer averse to the SAARC process."

The sources felt that the number of "civil exchanges" between India and Pakistan over the last four months indicated the increasing "normalisation" of relations and that India could not afford to be forever cross with Pakistan. The first such exchange took place after the Gujarat earthquake this January, when Pakistan's Chief Executive General Musharraf called Vajpayee to commiserate with him over the loss of life.

Earlier this month, on the way to Iran and back home, the PM had sent felicitatory messages to Musharraf while overflying Pakistani airspace, the sources said.

New Delhi has already agreed to participate in a SAARC For-

eign Secretary-level meeting, to take place in Colombo in the second half of May this year, about the time the three-month unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir expires.

The sources were not willing to say whether the meeting would be followed, in the natural process of things, with a Foreign Ministers' meeting and consequently, a summit.

"Let us take it one step at a time," the sources said, agreeing that the Colombo meeting will be the litmus test for further such interactions at the SAARC level.

India has single-handedly blocked the SAARC process since Musharraf came to power in October, 1999, because New Delhi has argued that a meeting between Vajpayee and Musharraf—

considered to be the architect of the Kargil invasion — would amount to the Pakistan Chief Executive "grandstanding" across the Indian sub-continent.

If the SAARC summit is not held this year, then prospects for a meeting between Vajpayee and Musharraf dim considerably.

A Commonwealth conference in Australia at the end of September does not help since Pakistan is expelled from the Council of Ministers of the Commonwealth and will therefore be unlikely to attend the summit in Australia.

India's return to SAARC is likely to be greeted with substantial enthusiasm by the rest of the region, with the smaller countries increasingly voicing the view that New Delhi's problems with Islamabad could not hold the rest of the sub-continent to ransom.

SAARC

MEET

INDIAN EXPRESS

27 APR 2001

SAARC meet on social charter begins

Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 24. The first meeting of the Inter-Governmental Expert Group on the SAARC Social Charter got under way here today with a call by the grouping's Secretary-General for the need to address the "dark, neglected spots" of South Asia's social situation.

"The SAARC social charter would need to frankly address historical injustices which have been heaped on vulnerable groups and discriminated communities in South Asia in addition to deep-seated economic and other factors which affect delivery of social equity," the Secretary-General, Mr. Nihal Rodrigo, said in his opening remarks.

The charter is expected to focus on poverty eradication, population stabilisation, the empowerment of women, youth mobilisation, human resources development, health and nutrition and the protection of children.

Mr. Rodrigo suggested that the charter could draw up targets or objectives to be achieved in these areas by the member countries. He said the Charter would be based on the various international and regional conventions and declarations to which the member states are signatories.

The Secretary-General also stressed the importance of involving civil society of the member states in the drafting of the social charter. "Such an inclusive process would be at least as significant as the end result of our work," he said.

The report of this first meeting of the expert group is to be submitted to the SAARC standing committee comprising the Foreign Secretaries of the member nations, who are scheduled to meet in June after a gap of more than two years.

THE HINDU

25 APR 2001

Police nab Pak envoy with RDX in Kathmandu

'Diplomat was involved in IC 814 case'

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Pakistani diplomat Mohammed Arshad Cheema, who has been caught with 16 kg of RDX in Nepal, was also involved in the hijacking of Indian Airlines Airbus IC 814 in December 1999, home ministry sources said here on Thursday.

A first secretary at the Pakistani embassy in Nepal, Mohamad Arshad was caught with the explosives on Thursday in a bungalow in Baneshwor near downtown Kathmandu after the Nepalese police raided the house.

Home ministry sources here expressed satisfaction that their long-standing claim, based on intelligence inputs, that Nepal is a hotbed of ISI operations, had been upheld with the arrest of the Pakistani diplomat, caught red-handed with the RDX.

Sources told *The Times of India* that the intelligence agencies had opened dossiers on suspected ISI agents and their activities long before the hijacking of Indian Airlines' flight 814.

According to intelligence inputs, on December 24, 1999, a vehicle from the Pakistan embassy had driven to Tribhuvan Airport in Kathmandu, carrying Cheema, his assistant Zia Ansari and a Nepali Muslim, Abdul Rias Khan. Two airport officials had noted down the registration number of their vehicle.

Officials had also noticed that the first secretary carried a briefcase. They walked into the departure lounge unchecked, using their diplomatic immunity. One of the Pakistani officials handed over the briefcase to the hijacker. Two

Nepali airport staff officers had said that Cheema did not have the briefcase when he returned from the airport.

This is not the first time that Cheema, alleged to be an ISI agent in the Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu, has been found involved in such activities, sources said. He was also suspected to be actively involved in the supply of counterfeit Indian currency in Rs

500 denominations. Again, in October 1998, Yakeer Singh, a militant who was arrested in Kathmandu with 20 kg of RDX, had confessed that Cheema had handed him the packet, sources said.

On December 24, 1999, when the Indian Airlines plane was hijacked, intelligence gatherers had reported that five Pakistani nationals had walked straight out from the Pakistan International Airlines aircraft

into an Indian Airlines Airbus sitting on the tarmac. After the hijackers took control of the plane, with 178 passengers and 11 crew aboard it, it was commandeered in a zig-zag trip to the Middle East and back and finally to Kandahar in Afghanistan. A 25-year-old passenger, Rippan Katyal, newly married, had been ruthlessly killed by the hijackers in the presence of his helpless wife.

There were six hijackers aboard the plane—four Pakistanis, one Nepalese and one from Afghanistan. The hijackers had demanded the release of Pakistani Islamic cleric Maulana Masood Azhar, who had been in a high-security jail since 1994, as well as a number of other militants.



The Nepalese police arrest Pakistani envoy Mohammed A. Cheema (right) in Kathmandu.

India boycotts Sharjah series

HTC and PTI
New Delhi, April 1

INDIA WILL not play in the Sharjah cricket series starting from April 8, a Sports Ministry release has said.

The Centre has decided, after careful consideration, that the Indian team should not participate in cricket tournaments at non-regular venues like Sharjah, Singapore, Toronto etc for at least the next three years. The BCCI has been informed that India will not play in the forthcoming tournament at Sharjah, the release said.

Reacting to India's decision, the Pakistan Cricket Control Board today said it stuck to its decision to boycott India in all

future tournaments. The board's decision would be forwarded to the Pakistan Government for approval.

The Cricketers' Benevolent Fund Series (CBFS) termed India's decision as regretful. The CBFS is saddened at the Government's decision not send its cricket team to Sharjah for three years, CBFS spokesperson Bikram Vohra said.

"We would still like our association with Indian cricket to continue despite the unnatural breach of clause... we would like to clarify the points on which the Indian Government is raising objections on playing in Sharjah. We are still in the dark about this and are most willing to set the record straight."

The BCCI, according to its president AC Mutthiah, accepts and abides by the Government's decision. The biggest losers, Mutthiah felt would be the former Test cricketers who were beneficiaries at Sharjah. The BCCI will ensure alternative arrangements in this regard.

PCB director Brig Munawar Ahemmedrana said it is evident from the public reaction that Pakistan's decision not to play India enjoys popular support. But the final decision rests with the Government. Earlier this week, the board's chairman Gen. Tauqir Zia told a meeting of South Asian umpires that Pakistan would not play against India henceforth. "Enough is enough," he said.

Online betting racket busted

A scan of records on computers seized in a crackdown on a betting racket has shown that betting was carried out to the tune of Rs 11.34 crore during the India-Zimbabwe cricket series last November, Police Commissioner R S Sharma has said.

One person was arrested yesterday and sophisticated equipment seized. The India-Australia match at Indore was under way when the crackdown took place. It will take some time to decode the entries, besides cross checking and verification of 600 entries in the computer.

Cases have been registered against the bookies under the IPC and Indian Telegraph Act.

HTC & Agencies, Nagpur

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 APR 2001

'Pakistan has edged past India in N-capability'

RISLAMABAD: Pakistan has edged past India with regards to nuclear weapons capability since the two countries conducted nuclear tests in May, 1998, London-based *Janes Intelligence Review* reported.

India moved at a slower pace in deciding and completing delivery systems, evolving procedures, tactics and doctrine for nuclear use as well as for ensuring effective control over nuclear forces.

Pakistan, on the other hand, moved quickly to implement effective systems and procedures for its more modest nuclear arsenal, according to excerpts from the weekly published in the Pakistani daily *The News*. "In all these areas, New Delhi proceeded at a slower pace, insisting on creating an original Indian system. Pakistan has more fully implemented the lessons that it has learnt from already established nuclear powers," it said.

"India views nuclear weapons as necessary for their political utility; their ability to bring international prestige and provide deterrence vis-a-vis Pakistan and China." But the political leadership has not fully thought through the specifics of nuclear use or doctrine and does not view such weapons as possessing military utility and discounts the possibility of them being used on the battlefield, *Janes* said.

Contrary to this, Pakistan's nuclear forces are controlled by the army and have been more fully incorporated into the country's overall military strategy. Pakistani officials believe Islamabad's nuclear

capability gives it the option of strongly supporting insurgency in Kashmir. The view is based on the belief that India would not dare hit back with strong conventional weapons for fear of a nuclear exchange, it commented.

Official proclamations by India's nuclear scientists notwithstanding, it has not proceeded to develop an effective missile-based nuclear deterrent as quickly as Pakistan and is yet to deploy a missile force in quantity, the weekly said. India's nuclear delivery system consists of Mirage 2000h fighters, which will be supplemented by Sukhoi su-30mk multi-role fighters along with a limited number of Prithvi-I and II short-range ballistic missiles and medium range Agni missiles. None of these systems are capable of providing a deterrence against China, it noted.

Pakistan has nearly completed development of solid fuelled missile that could strike key Indian cities from deep within Pakistani territory. Its Ghauri series of liquid fuelled missiles can be used for offensive operations while the Shaheen series would be retained for defensive purposes.

As part of its efforts to put in place a command and control system, Pakistan established the Nuclear Command Authority and the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority. Despite all these moves, Islamabad is yet to fully develop its nuclear force structure and steadfastly refuses to quantify the nuclear weapons it requires for minimum deterrence, the weekly said. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

27 MAR 2001

CTBT and south Asia 519

PERHAPS IK Gujral's most acclaimed decision during his tenure at the Ministry of External Affairs was his refusal to sign on the dotted line of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Big and important countries pressed India hard. They lined up overwhelming international support but India refused to be pressured. The country was enthralled.

It cheerfully paid the price of widespread international disapprobation, including sanctions and loss of development aid. These were shrugged off; more important by far was the maintenance of the country's independent judgment and the retention of its nuclear option.

India's keeping out, faithfully mirrored by Pakistan, meant that the treaty could have no practical value, for it could not come into force. Ironically, the chief sponsor, the USA, itself proved unable to ratify the treaty, for reasons that had more to do with its internal politics than its international policy. Though it remains inoperative, the CTBT continues to feature on the international agenda.

Hopes for a reversal of the US failure to ratify are not extinguished, and the south Asian holdouts are repeatedly persuaded to come on board. In the case of the latter, there is the inducement that signing up would ease the sanctions that their nuclear policies have attracted.

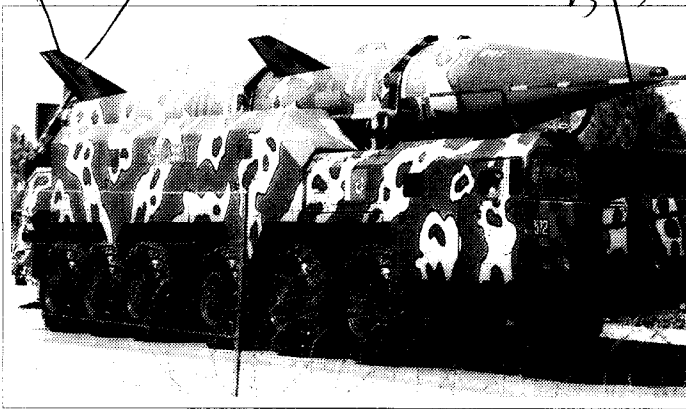
Now there are reports that Pakistan has moved towards a turnaround and the army has given General Pervez Musharraf leave to sign the CTBT. He is to seek a political consensus on the issue, which one imagines should be readily attainable, clearing the way for signing.

If this comes about, it would represent a measurable new development in the sub-continent. Pakistan's nuclear policy has always been simple and predictable — follow India's lead. If India kept out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, so too did Pakistan; and the same applied to the CTBT.

When India tested nuclear weapons, Pakistan was hot on its heels. The bitter military rivalry between the two permitted no other course. Neither could be permitted to steal a march on the other. This remains true, and a change of position

WIDE ANGLE

SALMAN HAIDAR



A Pakistani-made Shaheen II missile, capable of carrying nuclear warheads ranging 700 km, rolls down a street during the national day parade in Islamabad on Friday. Nuclear weaponry available to Pakistan can compare with that of India. — AP/PTI

on the CTBT does not signify any reduction of Pakistan's military posture.

Senior generals are reported to be satisfied with the nuclear deterrence their country has achieved. Other recent accounts have reinforced the view that the nuclear weaponry available to Pakistan can compare with that of India. Pakistan would appear to have no immediate need for further nuclear tests. It seems to be in a position to accept the CTBT without reducing the ability to refine its nuclear armoury.

There is no great doctrinal content in Pakistan's nuclear policy. Its purpose is narrow and tight, concentrated only on India. Not for Pakistan anything comparable to India's Nuclear Doctrine,

which deliberately challenges an unequal global nuclear order and sets India's requirement in a world-wide context.

Pakistan's concern is to satisfy its basic security perception vis-a-vis India, and once that is done, it can shift its stand on issues like the CTBT if it seems advantageous to do so. That is what seems to be under preparation right now. There would be no incentive for any change of approach if Pakistan's economic condition were not so precarious.

It has been teetering on the edge of insolvency, and all the corrective measures taken by the military regime have not yielded much. Sanctions dating back to the nuclear tests and lingering disapproval of the military

regime have had their effect. The aid package has shrunk and the country has been put to shifts to meet its international obligations.

Immediate easing of some of these problems will surely be sought as the reward for finally lining up with those who have signed the treaty. Doubtless, Pakistan will also see advantage for itself if it comes on board and India does not. Seeking international approval to the detriment of the other is a well established practice between these two.

Yet, that particular stratagem may by now have little value. A move by Pakistan will not create many complications for India which now has to be dealt with in rather different terms, having effectively outpaced its rival through its steady all-round progress.

The equations in south Asia have changed, so that the old ways of matching one country with the other are no longer relevant. Besides, the CTBT would not be a good yardstick, for no matter what others may do, it will remain in limbo until such time as the USA agrees to ratify it.

The treaty provides a final fallback for all signatories: in the event that "supreme national interest" so demands, they will withdraw.

This is obviously regarded as an unlikely eventuality, but it gives the comfort to the signatories that they are not casting away their rights for all time and that they are not without recourse against threatening developments that cannot be anticipated at the time of signing.

Should Pakistan now decide to sign, it will no doubt have this ultimate escape hatch very much in mind. It may well be used in the event that India resumes testing. Beyond the CTBT and whatever advantage may or may not be derived from adhering to it lies the more direct issue of a stable nuclear balance in south Asia. This affects the lives and welfare of very large populations on both sides, so that the containment of nuclear risk needs must be a priority for both India and Pakistan.

For this, sustained dialogue and effort by both of them will be needed. If adherence to the CTBT encourages Pakistan to concentrate on this question, so much the better.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary.)

100 YEARS AGO

TODAY

MARCH 25, 1901

HOCKEY IN CALCUTTA

THE greatest interest was attached to the meeting of the hockey teams representing these clubs, which took place on the Calcutta ground last evening, before a very large attendance of spectators. Splendid weather prevailed, and, with the ground in good condition, everything pointed to a keen and exciting game. St James, having lost against the Y.M.C.A., while Calcutta had beaten the latter club, the match was voted a good thing for them. Unfortunately, however, Calcutta were not fully represented, Pike, Ismay, and Coxon, three of the best players, being absent. St James managed to win by two goals to love.

EDEN GARDENS

On Tuesday next, at the Eden Gardens, the band of the 7th Rajpoots, under the direction of their bandmaster, Signor Tullio Manzato, will execute a musical programme made up entirely of selections from the operas of the late composer Verdi. At the close of the performance a Grand March, composed by Professor Antonio Manzato, will be played for the first time in India by the band. The programme of the selected items of operatic music will appear in due course.

25 MAR 1901

TROUBLED SAARC

Members Must Learn From Other Regions

By PARMANAND

THE South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is more than 15-years old now. But it is today facing questions about its achievements and even its future. Some well meaning, not necessarily cynical, observers are even wondering whether it would be able to survive. Article III of the Saarc charter, adopted at the organisation's inauguration at Dhaka on 8 December 1985, says: "The heads of state or government shall meet annually". Normally, then, there should have been 15 summits but so far only 10 have taken place. Unlike other inter-governmental organisations, Saarc attaches great significance to summits. Not that the 10 summits held in capitals of all member states, excepting Thimpu, have had a magical impact. But the indefinite postponement of the 11th summit, scheduled for November 1999 in Kathmandu, has created a great deal of uncertainty.

TUG OF WAR

On 4 November 1999, the ministry of external affairs had issued a press release saying: "On account of the military coup d'etat in Pakistan and the consequent concern and disquiet expressed in the region and beyond, the government of India has informed the SAARC chairperson and Nepal, as the host country for the next summit, that in the interest of the Saarc and of a productive meeting, it would be appropriate to defer the summit for the time being".

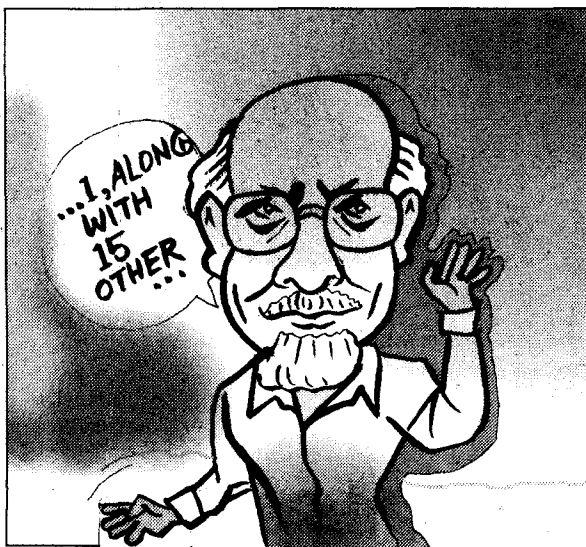
Efforts are being made to revive the SAARC process. Former Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral announced in New Delhi on 17 February an initiative called the South Asian Community. Gujral said: "I, along with 15 other prominent political and civil society leaders of all seven Saarc countries, have set up the SAC last December with a specific objective to revive the Saarc process".

Article IV of the Saarc charter creates a "Council of Ministers" consisting of "foreign ministers of the member states" to formulate policies of the association, review the progress of cooperation under the association, decide on new areas of cooperation, establish additional mechanisms and decide on matters of general interest. The council of ministers, according to this Article, "shall meet in regular session as often as possible" and an extraordinary session "may be held by agreement among member-states". So far the council has held 21 meetings — the last having been held in Colombo on 18 and 19 March 1999.

On the other hand, former Pakistan Prime Minister and chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party, Benazir Bhutto, said in an interview to *The Gulf News* on 27 January that Pakistan ought to come to terms with Saarc in a trading bloc to enhance its own economic interests. In an interview to an Indian English daily she said in January: "SAARC is an important platform to develop and the European Community is an example of how nations

become stronger as a bloc when they work together."

At the institutional level, on the other hand, the current chairperson of SAARC, Sri Lanka (the 10th summit was held at Colombo on 29-31 July 1998) has taken concrete initiatives to restart the process. In a significant development, Sri Lanka succeeded in



holding a three-day (13-15 November 2000) meeting of Saarc senior officials in its capital. However, there were reports that delegates from India and Pakistan were engaged in a tug of war over its purpose before agreeing that it had been a "useful" opportunity to exchange views.

In an interview, several days after the meeting, the Sri Lankan foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said he was "optimistic" that as the meeting had gone off "reasonably well, within its limitations", a meeting of the standing committee could be held soon. Kadirgamar, the initiator of the meeting, said that notwithstanding the "prophets of doom" he had found both India and Pakistan according high priority to the concept of Saarc. Not less significantly, the meeting concluded with tentative dates for various meetings of Saarc's technical committees.

COMPARISON

Continuing his efforts, Kadirgamar met his Pakistani counterpart Abdul Sattar at Islamabad on 17 February. An official statement issued after the meeting said that the two sides reviewed bilateral relations as well as regional and international affairs, including the revival of the Saarc process which has been "stalled because of India's opposition" to the holding of meetings mandated by the Saarc charter. On the other hand, Nepal has, through its Prime Minister and various other officials, showed its eagerness to hold the summit.

The ground realities of regional cooperation between South Asia's seven states — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — do not generate much enthusiasm. Though the region constitutes about 22 per cent of the global population, it possesses only 3.36 per cent of the world's land area.

The region has abundant natural resources. Bangladesh has huge reserves of natural gas. Bhutan and Nepal have excellent hydropower potential. India and Pakistan have coal, ingot, iron ore, bauxite and other minerals. Sri Lanka has precious and semi-precious stones. Despite all this, regional cooperation has not picked up.

Whereas the intra-regional export share has reached 22 per cent in the Association of

South-East Asian Nations, 51 per cent in the North American Free Trade Agreement and 64 per cent in the European Union, intra-Saarc exports have reached the figures of only 4.3 per cent. Intra-Saarc imports have so far only reached the figure of four per cent of the total imports. All this despite several bilateral concessions.

If intra-regional trade is on the increase in other regional arrangements of the globe, it is primarily due to the lifting or at least the easing of restrictions. It is not for nothing that the European Union has reached the Euro, and Asean is thinking seriously of having a common currency.

In South Asia, however, even the concept of a South Asian Free Trade Area is yet to become a reality. At the Colombo summit, the heads of state or government had emphasised that Safta should become a reality by 2001.

CONCESSIONS

There were chances of Safta being taken seriously at the Kathmandu summit. Many in India, however, do not see a bright scenario inasmuch as Pakistan has not even signed a Most Favoured Nation Treaty with India — which, in any case, is required under the provisions of the World Trade Organisation. Optimists, however, think that after Safta becomes a reality, Saarc could move in the direction of a South Asian Business Union and a South Asian Customs Union.

There is room for optimism, though, on South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangements. Safta came into operation on 7 December 1995. The first round of negotiations under Safta in 1995 was symbolic in nature, and covered only six per cent of the intra-Saarc trade. SAARC states identified 226 items for mutual tariff concessions, and India, as the largest member, offered concessions ranging from 10 to 100 per cent on 106 items.

The second round of negotiations concluded in November 1996, and resulted in concessions being exchanged on about 2,000 tariff lines by all member states. Unlike the first round, the second round of Safta covered both tariff and non-tariff barriers, and was much more comprehensive.

The third round of negotiations, which concluded on 23 November 1998, had tried to proceed on a sector-to-sector basis, with the ultimate goal of ensuring tariff-free trade among Saarc members. On its part, India had lifted all quantitative restrictions and allowed free import of more than 2,000 products.

It was decided that during the fourth round, the delegations would endeavour to conduct trade negotiations, preferably chapterwise or sectorwise or across the board, with a view to making more substantive progress on trade negotiations within the region, and keeping in mind the special interests and concerns of the Least Developed Countries.

Essentially, South Asian states have to concretise the benefits that could accrue from the regional framework and arrangements. They would do well to learn from developments in other regions. Time is running out.

The author is Hon. Director, South Asian Studies Foundation, New Delhi.

ATESMAN

MAR 2001

Saarc ~ time to rethink?

WIDE ANGLE

SALMAN HAIDAR

SRI Lanka President Kumaratunga's visit has served to revive attention towards the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation which seemed quietly to have gone to sleep. For some time, nobody has said very much about it except to express scepticism about its relevance and its future. The presidential visit has come as a reminder that Saarc is not without its own constituency, and that, despite India's lack of enthusiasm, the regional organisation is not yet dead and buried.

The immediate cause for Saarc going into its present hibernation is the acute distaste in the region, especially in India, for the military government in Pakistan. New Delhi was unwilling to have bilateral dealings with Islamabad, or even to risk a meeting with the Pakistani military ruler in the margins of a Saarc summit. These summits are reasonably intimate affairs, there being only seven principals involved, so if any head of state wishes to avoid one of the others, then its best to keep away from the meeting. Now, Saarc works by consensus, which means that its activities require the acquiescence of all its members. Should any of the Heads decide not to attend, then the summit cannot take place.

India's current unwillingness to take part is the reason why Saarc has been forced virtually to put up its shutters. The slight easing of Indo-Pakistani relations as a result of the events of the last few weeks could have a beneficial fallout on Saarc. After more than a year of studied apartness, the leaders of the two countries have spoken to each other on the telephone. Pakistan has sent relief supplies for Gujarat. With these exchanges, a small chink has appeared in the wall.

In these circumstances, avoidance of any face-to-face contact begins to seem somewhat odd and it appears as if India's strategy of ostracising Pakistan's leader may well have run its course.

It has proved easy enough for us to suspend our involvement in Saarc with little cost to ourselves. In the past, too, we have taken similar action, so what we are currently witnessing is not anything new. Despite its decade and a half of existence, Saarc has not become critical to India's regional concerns, and we can afford to be in

51-9
tened by attempts to inject a problem-solving capacity into Saarc processes, which could mean that regional disputes might come within its ambit in one form or other.

A tentative effort in this direction a few summits ago had to be resisted and greatly watered down under Indian insistence. The fact is that whatever the members may wish for it, Saarc cannot be cocooned from the

demands on us. This is an important interest for India that can be advanced under Saarc. Similarly, the water resources of South Asia need to be seen in a regional perspective. The whole question of water is sensitive and needs to be

handled with great care, but a greater readiness to cooperate on this issue on a regional or sub-regional basis could bring

great benefit to us and to our partners in the organisation. There are many more subjects, including easier regional access for industrial products, where multilateral effort would offer tangible possibilities for the benefit of the country.

The smaller countries have never been in need of persuasion about the benefits they can obtain from a fully functional regional organisation. To Bangladesh goes the credit of thinking up

the concept in the first instance, and Nepal and Sri Lanka have always been active in promoting it. They are sometimes re-resentful of what they see as our cavalier ways of dealing with Saarc, in the thick of it one day, turning our back to it the next. As we grow in strength and capacity, with an expanding role in regional and global affairs, we need to take greater note

of the sentiments of our close neighbours and try to take them along with us in our endeavours. That will greatly enhance our standing and our strength.

It is time for a change in the way we handle Saarc. It is reported that we have agreed to let the Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries meet in May, and will decide thereafter whether or not

to permit the summit to go ahead. This is better than nothing but we should shed our reluctance and let Saarc get on with its appointed task. No useful purpose is served by ignoring regional sentiment which is very much in favour of the early restoration of Saarc's activities.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary.)



Indian porters load tents brought from Pakistan into a truck at the India-Pakistan Wagah Border on Tuesday. The tents will be sent to Gujarat for the earthquake victims. With these exchanges, a small chink has appeared in the wall. — AP/PTI

and out of its processes at will.

Saarc remains highly vulnerable to political relationships within the region, primarily, but not exclusively, the Indo-Pakistani relationship. Nor should one forget that even though India has made a considerable contribution to the evolution of Saarc, it has never quite shed its wariness about the possibility that it may become a forum where the smaller countries of South Asia make common cause against the regional giant India. Such apprehensions are heigh-

regional realities. It is bound to remain vulnerable to the tensions and problems that divide its members. Even so, for India Saarc offers some real advantages and it is not the smaller countries alone that have a stake in it. India is hemmed in to both east and west by the lack of overland transit facilities. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh, for rather different reasons but to much the same effect, do not permit Indian goods and people free transit across their territory.

Our neighbours have their own transit

THE STATESMAN

Optimism over SAARC summit

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 26. The decision to hold the meeting of the SAARC Foreign Secretaries in May this year has renewed optimism about the regional grouping, but officials said it was too early to say whether it would lead to the much-delayed summit.

"There could be a meeting of the council (SAARC Foreign Ministers) some time after the Foreign Secretaries meet, but even that is not automatic. We have to work our way slowly," said an official.

The Foreign Secretaries of seven countries, who form the SAARC Standing Committee, are to meet in Kathmandu in the second half of May after India agreed to the meeting.

Sri Lanka has been pushing hard to restart the SAARC process, and the break-through came during the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga's visit to New Delhi last week.

Officials are hopeful that besides some urgent housekeeping business of the SAARC secretariat that has been held up since 1999 along with the summit, the Standing Committee will also be able to take up other stalled issues, such as a social charter for the regional grouping and a free trade agreement for South Asia.

A programming committee of SAARC officials from the seven countries will meet ahead of the Standing Committee to do the groundwork.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, has been stressing the signing of two conventions, one against trafficking in children and women and the other on child welfare, as a priority. The conventions were finalised during the July 1998 Colombo summit for signing by the heads of State at the 1999 Kathmandu summit that did not take place.

At the "extraordinary" meeting

of SAARC officials here last November, there was an agreement that the two conventions need not be held up for the summit, but could be signed in Kathmandu by the envoys of the member-countries to Nepal.

However, officials from Pakistan said they would need a higher-level clearance. It is expected that the Standing Committee would have the necessary authorisation. While the SAARC political process remains paralysed since March 1999, when the Council of Ministers met in Sri Lanka, technical committees on various aspects of regional co-operation have held regular meetings.

Also, the two years have seen a plethora of "people's meetings"

THE HINDU

27 FEB 2001

PM, Pak CEO may meet at Nepal Saarc

BY SEEMA MUSTAFA

New Delhi, Feb. 15: India is likely to give the green signal for the heads of state Saarc summit, which has not been held since it was cancelled in November 1999 following Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's reluctance to share a platform with Pakistan Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf.

The summit could be held in Nepal, which was to have been the last venue, or any other member country willing to host it. It would provide the opportunity for Mr Vajpayee to meet Gen. Musharraf in a third country. Sources pointed out that India's reservations about the summit did not exist as both the leaders of India and Pakistan have been not voiced any serious objections about meeting each other now. The Indian government has long since given up its objections to a military regime in Pakistan, which were cited at the time as a major reason for India's unwillingness to participate in a Saarc summit attended by the neighbouring country.

A Saarc heads of state meeting, sources admitted, would provide an "excellent opportunity" for a summit on the sidelines between Gen. Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee. Several Cabinet ministers here have reservations about a visit by Gen. Musharraf to India at this stage but are not expected to raise any objections to an "incidental" meeting in a third country. Gen. Musharraf has expressed his willingness for a direct dialogue with Mr Vajpayee, who has not ruled out the possibility till date.

India has been under tremendous pressure from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal in particular, to agree to a Saarc heads of state meeting. A senior envoy

■ Turn to Page 2

George destroyed institution, claims Bhagwat memoir

BY SHUBHABRATA BHATTACHARYA

New Delhi, Feb. 15: Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, who was removed from the post of Chief of Naval Staff in December 1998 by the NDA government, is releasing the chronicle of his experiences with the "powers that be" — his memoirs, titled *Betrayal of the Defence Forces* — to coincide with the international fleet review of the Navy, which begins in Mumbai on Friday.

The gist of the book has been summed up by the author in the last chapter, "A Matter of Honour," in which he quotes from the autobiography of the Royal Navy's Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham: "It takes three years to build a ship, three hundred years to build a tradition and an idiot-hour to destroy it all."

"George Fernandes has not dismissed Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, he has destroyed an institution. No Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Staff could look into the eyes of his men. They had reduced themselves to pygmies from being leaders overnight," says the author.

"An officer who had risen to be the chief, on the basis of his professional credentials, could be relieved of his post



The Bhagwat book cover

in an unlawful manner by a coalition government, subject to political compulsions and blackmail," he says about his removal. (It may be recalled that the present Navy Chief, Admiral Sushil Kumar, who was then posted in Cochin, was secretly airlifted in a RAW aircraft and asked to take over — information on the officer's movement by air was kept from the armed forces.)

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■ 'Navy paying double price for Admiral Groshkov'

THE ASIAN AGE

16 FEB 2001

16 FEB 2001

India may not object to Pak. presence at SAARC meet

By K. K. Katyal

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49-14
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9. There is a renewed interest in the moves to revive the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit process, which has been at a standstill because of the developments in the wake of the army coup in Pakistan. India, which holds the key to end the stalemate, is having second thoughts and may well give up its objections to the presence of a military ruler at a meeting of the South Asian heads. Sri Lanka, keen on transferring the burden of presidency of the association to Nepal, kept up its bid to persuade New Delhi. It was not deterred by lack of encouragement from New Delhi.

Some time ago, the "Citizen's Commission for South Asia", meeting in Kathmandu, stressed "the need to reconvene the summit and other meetings" (of the SAARC) and "for creating a conducive atmosphere for this purpose". The Commission felt that the summit schedule, as envisaged in the Charter, needed to be maintained.

The former Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral, chairperson of the Commission, sent the conclusions of the Kathmandu meeting to all South Asian heads. The Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, acknowledged receipt of the letter by the Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf. "Members of the Commission," Mr. Sattar's reply said, "are eminent persons, enjoying respect for their sagacity and public service not only in their own countries but throughout Asia. Their vision should inspire and guide both peoples and governments... We look forward towards its continuing contribution towards building a future better than the past." It added: "Over recent months, General Musharraf's Government has taken initiatives which served to reduce

tension and promote peace. Also, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's New Year Day Musings, counselling settlement of long-standing legacy issues, will, no doubt, hearten the members of the Commission."

The Citizen's Commission, set up by the Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation (CASAC), 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" of the people of the region. Noting that the SAARC process had largely remained inter-governmental, the Commission wanted a "people's focus" given to its activities.

Some of the specific recommendations of the Commission related to:

(a) The vision of South Asia becoming an integrated community for purposes of trade, investments and movement of goods, services and labour. For this the Commission stressed the need for finalising and operationalising the SAFTA treaty by December 2001. It emphasised the importance of bilateral or sub-regional arrangements for freeing trade as building blocks for liberalising trade, taking into account the special needs of the least developed countries.

(b) The challenges of the multi-dimensional process of globalisation and its many complexities. The Commission noted the role of both the governments and civil societies in working together to enhance efficiency and competitiveness of our economies to cope with the challenges of globalisation. It would be highly useful for the SAARC countries to share experiences and information and evolve common positions, where possible.

THE HINDU

10 FEB 2001

India clears last hurdle for SAARC meet

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. India today cleared the last hurdle for a meeting of the South Asian leaders later in the year that could bring the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, face to face with Pakistan's Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

In agreeing to convene a meeting of Foreign Secretaries of the seven South Asian nations in May, India has demonstrated its flexibility on reviving the mecha-

nisms for regional cooperation. At the same time, it appears to have retained the political discretion to launch a new engagement with Pakistan if Gen. Musharraf can end cross-border terrorism.

India today told the visiting Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, that it was ready for a meeting of the Standing Committee of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation in the second half of May.

The Foreign Secretaries of the seven South Asian nations form the SAARC Standing Committee.

As the head of SAARC, Ms. Kumaratunga has been pressing for an early summit of the South Asian leaders. The SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Kathmandu in November 1999, was put off after Gen. Musharraf's coup the previous month.

Since then, India has been reluctant to signal support to the SAARC summit. Mr. Vajpayee has also gone to great lengths to avoid meeting Gen. Musharraf at various multilateral fora.

The meeting of the Standing Committee was "a necessary but not sufficient condition" for the convening of the SAARC Summit, informed sources said here. The Standing Committee might open the door for a SAARC summit and a Vajpayee-Musharraf meeting but does not ensure either.

India has "offered no commitment" at this stage beyond a readiness to attend the SAARC Standing Committee, the sources said. If Gen. Musharraf could demonstrate a capacity to rein in the jihadi groups over the next few weeks, India will have the SAARC framework ready to facilitate a substantive engagement with Pakistan, they added.

The Indian and Pakistani Foreign Secretaries will have an opportunity to meet on the margins of the meeting of the SAARC Standing Committee in mid May.

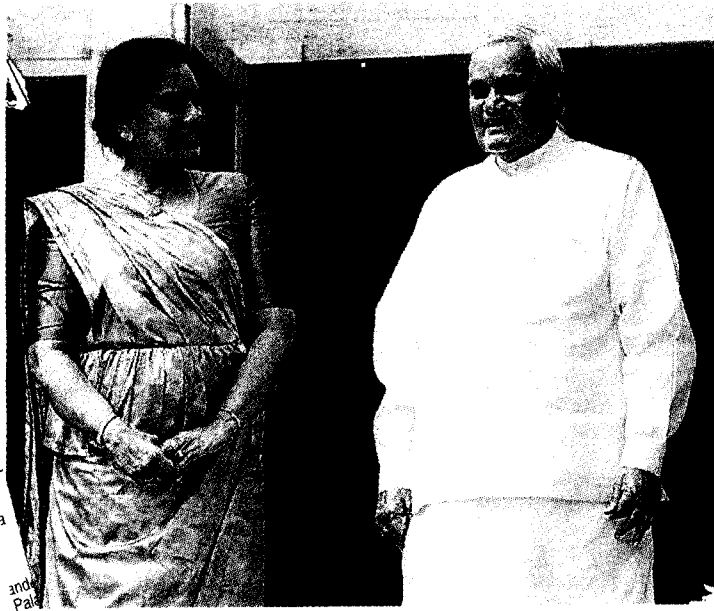
As it happens, the time-frame for convening the SAARC Standing Committee now runs parallel to the ceasefire in Kashmir, extended until the end of May.

Diplomatic observers say the "political onus" is now on those clamouring for a SAARC summit to convince Pakistan to create the appropriate conditions over the next few months for an Indo-Pak dialogue.

Today, Ms. Kumaratunga apprised Mr. Vajpayee of her efforts to initiate talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and pursue constitutional reforms to address the demands of Tamils

for political devolution. India reiterated its commitment to Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity.

Ms. Kumaratunga also briefed the Indian side on the "concept" of a mechanism to monitor any future agreements between the Government and the LTTE. There has been speculation about Indian concerns on the participation of troops from other countries in the monitoring mechanism. The two sides agreed to "further discuss" all issues relating to the implementation of a peace accord in Sri Lanka, a Foreign Office spokesman said here.



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with the Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, at his residence in New Delhi on Friday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

THE HINDU

20 SEP 2000

Pak.-Sri Lanka talks on reviving SAARC

H08
18/2

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 17. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, called on his Pakistani counterpart, Mr. Abdul Sattar, here today and held talks on matters of interest between the two countries.

An official statement said the two sides reviewed bilateral relations as well as regional and international affairs including the revival of the SAARC process which has been "stalled because of India's opposition" to the holding of meetings mandated by the SAARC Charter.

"Ways and means of increasing bilateral trade and enhancing economic cooperation was also discussed. To that end it was agreed to hold an early meeting of the Pakistan-Sri Lanka Joint Economic Commission. The sides will continue discussions on increased air services between the two countries. It was agreed that bilateral consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries should be held at the level of Foreign Secretaries", the statement said.

The Sri Lankan Minister, here on a three-day official visit, had called on the Pakistan Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, on Friday and appraised him of the efforts being made by Sri Lanka for revival of the SAARC process.

Mr. Kadirgamar was scheduled to address a joint press conference along with Mr. Sattar this evening but it was cancelled on the ground that the talks between the two leaders went on beyond the fixed time. The Pakistan Foreign Ministry statement said Gen. Musharraf lauded the efforts of the Sri Lankan Minister for revival of the SAARC process "stalled by India" since November 1999 and assured him of support for his efforts.

Gen. Musharraf briefed the visiting dignitary on the efforts of the Pakistan Government for "resumption of dialogue" with India and resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and 'aspirations' of the Kashmiri people.

Air strikes condemned

In a separate statement the Pakistan Foreign office expressed deep concern at the U.S.-British air strikes on Iraqi installations near Baghdad and deplored the civilian casualties and loss of property.

"Pakistan calls for immediate halt to such air strikes which are in violation of international law and are not mandated by the U.N. Security Council. Pakistan calls for the preservation of Iraq's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and for the alleviation of the sufferings of the Iraqi people through a review of the continuing sanctions", the statement said.

THE HINDU

18 FEB 2001

Indian Sub-Continent



(L to R) Research professor at US-based Foreign Policy Institute Shirin Tahir Kheli, former Prime Minister I. K. Gujral, *The Boston Globe* columnist H. D. S. Greenway, UN bureau chief of *The New York Times* Barbara Crossette and Pakistan Human Rights Commission Director I. A. Rehman at the IPI World Congress in New Delhi on Sunday. Photo: Arvind Yadav

'Need to revive SAARC for peace'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 28

SPEAKERS AT a panel discussion on "Tensions and conflicts in the Indian sub-continent", organised by the International Press Institute as part of its World Congress here today, stressed the need for reviving the SAARC.

This point recurred in the submissions of all the members of the panel, comprising former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, I.A. Rehman, director of Pakistan Human Rights Commission, J.N. Dixit, former Indian foreign secretary, Shirin Tahir Kheli, former JS diplomat, Barbara Crossette, bureau chief of *New York Times* and Peter Preston of the *Guardian* Foundation.

Mr Gujral described SAARC as the best route to regional co-operation. By 2002 the SAARC Free Trade Zone is to be implemented and by 2005 the SAARC communi-

ty. But this schedule is threatened by the Indo-Pakistan conflict. He said he had written to the heads of all the governments of the region to reactivate the process which began with the 1997 Mali summit.

He highlighted the need for people-to-people contact through the Track Two process. A heartening feature, despite SAARC being in limbo, is the continuation of the Lahore-Delhi bus service, the Samjhauta Express and the flights. But he warned against the rise of the Jihad kind of intervention in Pakistan. "This is a great destabilising factor which threatens democracy and civil societies everywhere in the region".

Ms Kheli said the absence of normal relations in the South Asian region is legendary and this has had a negative impact on regional institutions.

South Asia is the only region without an active regional institution, she said. "It is ironic that we are still talking about rejuvenating

SAARC 15 years after its founding", she said.

She warned that if the present deadlock continues, not only would great opportunities be missed in economic collaboration but future conflicts over water and the sharing of natural resources could explode. She called for restraint along the Line of Control, commended the Pakistan government's step in the direction in recent weeks and stressed that normalisation of bilateral relations is an absolute must. "There must be hope for reengagement despite the setback of Kargil".

Ms Crossette said the impasse in SAARC could lead to South Asia losing out on development under the aegis of the United Nations. In recent times, the UN is finding itself working increasingly with regional organisations like the Organisation of African Unity in Africa, ASEAN and other regional groupings.

Mr Rehman, while stressing the

importance of Track Two initiatives, was critical of the roles played by the Indian and Pakistani media during the Kargil conflict. "There were reports of mothers expressing pride at the lives laid down by their sons. This promoted war as a means of conflict resolution. The pen should be used to promote peace, not war", he said.

Mr Dixit analysed the reasons underlying tension in South Asia and fit them under seven broad categories.

These, according to him, are: The emergence of three big nations out of a colonial whole expressing territorial inadequacies which lead to disputes; the collective national identity problem faced by each; the problems of development and management of natural resources which is embedded in national worries; growing demographic problems; nuclear weaponisation; internal contradictions in civil society and asymmetry between India and its neighbours.

THE HINDU

29 JAN 2001

Summit
8/2/01

South Asia's deep freeze

Is SAARC still breathing?

8/1

THE South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), since its inception in December 1985, has had a chequered career. The current state of inactivity of the SAARC should be of particular concern, not only because the summit meetings have not been held for two years but also, from all indications, they may not be held in the foreseeable future.

SAARC, as an idea, was mooted by the late President General Zia-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh in January 1981. India's initial reaction was of caution because of the apprehension that the organisation could be utilised as a platform for its smaller neighbours to combine and exert pressure on India on issues they felt strongly about. Ultimately, India agreed to join SAARC, provided that its own interests were not to be compromised with. The SAARC charter, therefore, stipulated specifically that the forum would primarily function to enhance regional cooperation in the economic, technological, cultural and social fields. Bilateral political disputes were not to be brought up.

Fifteen years down the line, and its success in moving towards the objectives for which it was established can at best be described as sporadic. SAARC summits and ministerial deliberations had been interrupted or postponed on several occasions. More recently, General Pervez Musharraf's coup in October 1999 led to India's reluctance to participate in SAARC meetings in which a military regime of Pakistan was represented. The official level meeting of SAARC representatives in Colombo in November, which was chaired by Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, came to the conclusion that given the current political atmosphere, the foreign minister-level meetings of the SAARC, as well as the SAARC summit, may not be held even in the year 2001.

The disappointment over SAARC's performance has given a fillip to non-

governmental initiatives by eminent leaders and intellectuals of the region. The idea is to activate processes of cooperation through non-governmental channels through the interaction of the civil societies of the various SAARC states. The latest initiative is the creation of a forum of eminent persons of South Asia, chaired by former prime minister, I.K. Gujral. The first meeting of this group was held in Kathmandu last month. The nuclear weaponisation of India and Pakistan has, of course, lent such initiatives a certain urgency. There is also the general agreement in most countries of SAARC that regional cooperation is not only desir-

able but essential to overcome the critical problems of poverty, health, illiteracy, development and distributive justice in the region. But the success of such initiatives depends on the extent of concrete cooperation that already exists between SAARC countries. Briefly, it can be said that SAARC has provided a platform for sharing information on social, cultural, economic, developmental and technological issues. There has been some progress in formulating suggestions and terms of cooperation in the fields of agriculture, tourism, creation of databanks as well as integrated plans for poverty alleviation in the region. Technical level discussions have been completed and consensus has been developed for the creation of a South Asian

Preferential Trade Area, which should lead to the creation of a South Asia Common Market and then a South Asian Economic Community. While the constituent elements in arrangements for these objectives have been agreed upon, there have been differences of opinion about the time-frame within which this project should be completed. More importantly, Pakistan keeps chanting the mantra that unless the problem of Kashmir is solved, it cannot participate in these processes. It is in this context that the November 2000 meeting of SAARC officials in Colombo decided that the discussions on these subjects and ot-

are subjected to political, socio-cultural apprehensions about their own national identities and security, because of the overlapping phenomena of ethnicity, language and religion. These apprehensions have led countries of the region to search for links with other powers to counterbalance the overarching influence of India. Therefore, we find that Pakistan is keen on assuming an Islamic identity rooted in relations with countries of the Gulf and West Asia. Bangladesh has similar aspirations in its relationship with Malaysia and Indonesia. Sri Lanka, at one point of time, was more keen to be part of ASEAN than SAARC. Indian strategic thinkers are similarly inclined towards having closer ties with ASEAN.

That the prospects of SAARC cooperation are not encouraging is clear from the current drift and delay in the institutional political discourse between the governments of the region at the requisite high levels. One has also to acknowledge that despite the Track-II initiatives taken, none of them have impacted on the policies of the governments in the region. The basic predicament that emerges is that none of the member countries of SAARC seem to have a profound and deep commitment to SAARC, or the conviction that it is an important institution for our future well being.

Two requirements have to be fulfilled if SAARC cooperation has to be meaningful. First, there should be a purposive effort at resolving all the major political disputes between the member countries of SAARC. Unless this happens, the necessary atmosphere of trust and mutual confidence will not come about. Secondly, the shared feeling of the need for South Asian cooperation must manifest itself among the governments of the region which should then translate itself into required policy decisions. But all this appears to be a very distant prospect at present.



J.N. DIXIT

The basic predicament is that none of the member countries of SAARC seem to have a deep commitment to it, or the conviction that it is important for our future well-being