

C'wealth mulls Pak re-entry

Sydney, October 2/10

COMMONWEALTH IS reviewing the re-entry of Pakistan into the fold amid indications that it has softened towards the country for cooperating with the world-wide campaign against terrorism, secretary-general Don McKinnon said today.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Chogm) suspended Pakistan at its previous Durban meet following the October 1999 military coup that ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

He suspension continues with Pakistan yet to come back to a full democratic government. "However, we fully recognise the real problems that are facing Pakistan right now. ... Pakistan's entry into Chogm is currently under review but almost for a different reason."

"I have indicated that there is a tremendous amount of sympathy for military ruler Pervez Musharraf and his own fight against terrorism and staying on side with world anti-terrorism movements," he said.

The Commonwealth ministerial action group, which was to have met on the eve of Chogm and which may well have wished to amend their recommendation on Pakistan and Fiji, would have to be rescheduled before the next Chogm to be held early next year.

CHOGM rescheduled

The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, postponed in the wake of terror strikes in the US, would now be held early next year, Secretary-General Don Mckinnon said today.

Mckinnon told reporters that the international summit, which was earlier scheduled for October 8-11 in Brisbane, would now be held in February or March 2002.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was among 54 commonwealth leaders expected to attend the three-day summit in the Australian city.

On whether security was the issue in postponing the CHOGM, Mckinnon said: "There wasn't a leader who raised the issue of concern about security in Australia. We were very satisfied with the preparations that had been made. (But) you are aware of disruption of air traffic immediately after September 11. No one wants to be caught on the wrong side of the world in those sorts of circumstances, particularly political leaders. No one was expecting that but that's the only security dimension that anyone would be concerned about."

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 OCT 2001

Pak. to remain suspended from C'wealth councils

HO-12

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By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 5. Pakistan is to remain suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth until its return to democracy, according to a decision of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) which met here this week ahead of the Commonwealth summit in Brisbane next month. The Group also sought an "active monitoring role" for Commonwealth in the run-up to democratic elections in Pakistan.

The meeting, which was attended among others by the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, took note of the Pakistani President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf's "road map" to democracy but decided that it was not enough to revoke the suspension.

This means that Gen. Musharraf would not be eligible to attend the Brisbane summit of the Commonwealth Heads of Government.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don

McKinnon, has described Gen. Musharraf's "road map" announced on August 14 as a "step in the right direction" but the CMAG believes that it does not go far enough. In a statement here on Tuesday after a two-day meeting, the CMAG expressed concern over the continuation of a "non-democratic" Government in Pakistan which, it said, was in "violation of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values" laid down in the Harare Declaration. It recommended to the Heads of Government that Pakistan's status in the Commonwealth "should remain unchanged pending a return to democratic Government.

The CMAG also reviewed the situation in Fiji, which too is suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth. It was decided that if the Commonwealth Observer Group monitoring the current elections in Fiji was satisfied that they were free and fair and would result in the formation of a democratically elected government then the suspension could be revoked.

SEP 11 1998

SEP 11 1998

Commonwealth panel trying to placate protestors

By Garimella Subramaniam

CHENNAI, AUG. 11. After the World Trade Organisation negotiations in Seattle in 1999, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund meeting in Prague in 2000, the World Economic Forum meeting in Geneva earlier this year and more recently the G8 summit in Genoa, the biannual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Brisbane, Australia in October appears to be the next venue where anti-globalisation protests are once again going to be registered in a big way.

The factors behind this build-up to what could be the biggest blockade of the CHOGM are much the familiar ones such as third-world debt, violations of freedom of speech, abuse of workers and anti-women and anti-environment policies of many Commonwealth Governments, including the host country.

But as the "stop CHOGM" protests gather momentum, the Commonwealth Human Rights

Initiative (CHRI) is striving to reason with dissenting voices that the CHOGM should, in fact, be the forum where they should raise their ire on such contentious issues. The CHRI has built up a case on the basis of some of the critical interventions made by the Commonwealth in recent years.

It cites, for instance, the pronouncements of the Commonwealth Heads of State on the urgency to address basic issues of development such as the alleviation of poverty and channelling the forces of globalisation to reduce social inequalities and empowering people to lead fulfilling lives.

Among its other significant initiatives have been the appeal of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don MacKinnon, to each of the G8 heads of State to view those countries steeped in debt from a more humane standpoint.

This, the CHRI claims, is due to the fact that the Commonwealth is, in relative terms, not an organisation of the world's most af-

fluent nations. After all, nearly one third of the Commonwealth member States count amongst the world's least developed countries and 60 per cent of its population lives on less than \$2 a day and 270 million people lack access to improved water supplies and almost 60 per cent of Commonwealth citizens lack access to essential drugs and adequate sanitation facilities.

Thus, the Commonwealth predominantly represents the very interests and concerns that the protestors propose to voice outside the CHOGM in October.

Appropriately therefore, their ire should be targeted not at the Commonwealth, but instead they should use the October meet to evolve strategies and mechanisms for these interests to be articulated at the world trade negotiations in Qatar later this year.

For the Commonwealth Secretariat was empowered in 1995 as the mechanism to facilitate consensus-building among member nations at other international fora.

THE HINDU

12 AUG 2001

Can the Commonwealth become more responsive?

HD-19 577
By Garimella Subramaniam

When the Commonwealth heads of government meet in Brisbane, Australia in October to consider how to make the body relevant to the new millennium, they would probably do well to swallow a bout of internal criticism about their past role in not enabling the voices of civil society groups being echoed in some hallowed circles. The question of change becomes especially important considering that the Commonwealth is essentially an organisation of the poor. Eighty five per cent of the population lives in developing countries and 60 per cent are among the world's poorest.

Admittedly, there was some recognition of this when the group of 10 heads of government, known as the High Level Review Group, was constituted during the 1999 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in South Africa to come up with strategies to address existing and new challenges to the body. The HLRG is chaired by the South African President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki; the Prime Ministers of Australia, India, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom and the Presidents of Tanzania and Zimbabwe are its other members. The HLRG met in New York last September during the United Nations millennium summit. Its meeting in London in March led to the constitution of three working groups to address issues concerning conflict prevention and the future mandate of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group,

the Commonwealth's developmental role including narrowing the digital divide among member nations and issues concerning structures of governance. The working group concerned with development issues is aided by an expert Information Technology Committee drawn up of members nominated by the HLRG Governments.

The mandate of the high-powered body is to make the Commonwealth more participatory of

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member countries by involving non-governmental organisations and representatives from civil society.

Going by a recent note prepared by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) however, the goal to secure greater participation could make all the difference between rendering the Commonwealth a relevant or a redundant institution in the next millennium.

The CHRI's note claims that both the organisation's leadership and administration have hitherto kept their people at a distance from their deliberations and decisions. The plea for change notes that "egalitarian and human rights values are central to the post colonial world. They are central to the Commonwealth's own charter articulated in the Harare Declaration a decade ago. The Commonwealth, more than any other international organisation, needs to repudiate its patriarchal, discriminatory past if it is to be relevant in the

future. It must be able to demonstrate the values of human rights, inclusiveness, and equality unequivocally. In particular its leadership, which itself has arisen out of struggles against hierarchical colonialism, must aggressively assert these values to distance itself from old systems. Refusal to embrace civil society participation whole-heartedly at every turn signals that new leaderships — and especially their bureaucracies — are really very comfortable with the old ways; that the master and subject paradigm remains valid; and that power relationships will remain unchanged regardless of the century or the ruler." The CHRI contrasts the functioning of the Commonwealth with the United Nations, where public interest groups enjoy access to its various committees and conferences.

Ironically, the theme for the Brisbane meet is "continuity and renewal" and the CHRI feels citizens' groups can infuse a spirit of change by making their voices heard in the next HLRG meeting in Singapore this month. The other potential arena is the study being carried out by the Commonwealth Foundation on the interaction between NGOs and the Commonwealth Secretariat. But then, there is a feeling that the former Ghanaian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, in-charge of the study, may have had only a limited interaction with NGOs in India and the Caribbean. The Singapore meeting and the Foundation's study are expected to supply the Secretariat with the criteria for the accreditation of NGOs.

THE HINDU

7-0-14 Pak. faces stiffer C'wealth sanctions

LONDON, MAY 6. Pakistan faces stiffer sanctions and prospects of "full suspension" of Commonwealth membership if it fails to announce the schedule for democratic elections in the country before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Brisbane in October, Commonwealth sources said today.

"If Pakistan fails to announce a date for elections before CHOGM, there is a good chance of its full suspension from membership and even if it does announce a date and the date remains October 2002, there will be pressure from a number of countries to have sanctions, a higher level of sanctions," they said quoting the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group of Foreign Ministers

(CMAG). Though for long, the Commonwealth has stressed speedy restoration of democracy, signals emanating from Islamabad are "don't tell us what to do, whatever we do, we will do at our own pace and what we judge is in the best interests of our country...democracy has done only disservice to Pakistan," the sources told P11.

This is a very dangerous argument and the Commonwealth leaders have effectively rejected it, they added.

"The next step will be suspension of membership - its name will not appear any more in Commonwealth conferences and its flag will not fly in Commonwealth meetings and NGOs will have injunction in dealing with it," they

said. Pakistan is currently suspended from the Commonwealth Council and cannot participate in official meetings - ministerial, official and inter-governmental - but can take part in Commonwealth games, cultural events and NGOs can continue to have links with the country.

India has been pressing for implementation of the Millbrook action programme which stipulates a two-year time-frame for restoration of democracy (in countries where institutions are not in place to permit holding of elections, the sources said.

A maximum of six months is given to States where institutions such as the Election Commission and voters list are in place. Pakistan has an Election Commission,

though the voters list is stated to be faulty. "India is making the point that if you have a Millbrook action programme, then you implement it. You can't seem to be going against a code of conduct that you have agreed upon," they said.

As a prelude to CHOGM, the Commonwealth Secretary General, Mr. Don McKinnon will undertake a four-nation tour from tomorrow, starting with India, to discuss issues including restoration of democracy in Pakistan, constitutional rule in Fiji and topics currently being reviewed by a high-level group of which Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is a member. Besides India, Mr. McKinnon will visit Sri Lanka, Australia and New Zealand.

THE HINDU

7 MAY 2001



Kofi Annan was lauded for finding in the Lahore Declaration, rather than the resolutions of the UN Security Council, the key to forward movement on Kashmir. — AP/PTI

THE Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) has just met in London to review what is happening in those Commonwealth countries that have fallen away from democracy and need to be urged to come back in line.

CMAG is the Commonwealth's high-level watchdog for this purpose, with the responsibility of keeping a constant eye on the maintenance of democratic standards. Democracy is acknowledged by all members of the Commonwealth to be the basic shared value within the organisation, and there is less and less room within it for those who flout democratic norms. Thus, when Pakistan came under the sway of its latest generals, it attracted much sharper Commonwealth opprobrium than it had faced after past such takeovers.

Moreover, its declared effort to restore democracy has had to face stringent monitoring by CMAG. Commonwealth action as seen here and in other comparable cases has not been limited to routine declarations and pious wishes, and continued membership of the Commonwealth cannot be taken for granted by those delinquents that fail to restore democracy.

The rather scanty reports that have come out from the last CMAG meeting suggest that it provided little comfort for Pakistan. CMAG is pushing for quicker revival of democratic processes, and seems to have

been rather sharp in its observations. There is no readiness to compromise on standards or to condone what is regarded as political wrongdoing.

All this is to the good. To add to Pakistan's discomfiture, the Commonwealth Secretary-General is reported to have said that General Pervez Musharraf's honeymoon with his people is over and that the euphoria that greeted his coup in 1999 has come to an end. Unusually direct remarks, perhaps, but giving emphasis to the Commonwealth's hostility to military rule.

The Commonwealth has often taken the lead in shaping international opinion on matters of high significance — it was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle, for example, and it had a pathfinding role in the global economic dialogue aimed at a better deal for the developing countries. Its uncompromising support for democracy contributes significantly to international norms and values.

However, Commonwealth processes do not ordinarily permit matters to be taken to extremes. The Commonwealth remains something of a club, with many unifying links that can survive political estrangement. Nor do groups like CMAG remain fixed forever in a faultfinding posture towards one or other country.

Commonwealth and democracy

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WIDE ANGLE

SALMAN HAIDAR

One can recall the indignation about the coup in Fiji of more than a decade ago which led to the ostracism of that country, but long before the effects of the coup were undone, the Commonwealth — save India alone — was clamouring to let Fiji back in.

In the present instance, too, notwithstanding CMAG's uncompromising stand, not all the members seem to feel that Pakistan can realistically be expected to do a great deal more at this stage. So despite CMAG's forthrightness, Pakistan may not be feeling too much heat from the latest move. Perhaps, there is even a slight blunting of the edge of Commonwealth disapprobation. Several of the Commonwealth countries have in effect maintained normal relations with Pakistan. New Zealand is currently engaged in playing cricket with that country.

The strongest reservations come from India, as well as sustained aloofness from any contact with the military regime, and this may well be regarded by some observers as a product of the historical Indo-Pakistani relationship rather than a manifestation of disinterested support for the democratic

principle.

The head of another, and more significant, world organisation, Kofi Annan of the UN, was in India just a short while ago. He was applauded — rightly so — for finding in the Lahore Declaration rather than the resolutions of the UN Security Council the key to forward movement on Kashmir. Obviously, the UN Secretary-General cannot turn his back on decisions of the Security Council, and the explanation he gave about their significance today was delicately structured.

Nevertheless, what came across clearly enough in his observations was the belief that the two countries had to get together to talk about the issues between them. Bilateralism was the appropriate method, and dialogue was the need of the hour.

There are also indications that we may see revived interest in academic circles and think-tanks about Indo-Pakistani issues. The sub-continent received a great deal of attention last year of the Clinton administration. A major shift in the relationship between India and America was seen, something that was no flash in the pan but would endure.

The change in the ruling party in America was not expected to reverse the trend, and indeed there are positive, early indications from the new US administration. It is thus only to be expected that the academic specialists on South Asia will find the incentives to renew their activities. In Europe, too, something comparable seems to be on the anvil.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's initiative on Kashmir that attracted so much appreciation seems to have gone into recession. After a promising start, nothing much seems to have been happening. The situation on the ground has deteriorated and in the absence of any positive moves, a sense of scepticism has replaced the initial expectation.

There is need to bring about talks with the Kashmiri Opposition and other parties, and also to engage with our neighbour Pakistan. Mr Annan's visit and CMAG's activity serve as a reminder to this effect. If the opportunity is not to slip away, something will have to be done very soon.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary.)

100 YEARS AGO

TODAY

APRIL 1, 1901

VITAL STATISTICS OF CALCUTTA

SIR, — The daily mortuary returns published in the papers, and apparently supplied by the Municipality, afford no basis of comparison with the mortality of former years. For the last three years there has been an outbreak of an epidemic of plague at a particular season of the year, and each year it is growing in intensity, and there is reason to believe that the maximum death-rate is also rising. But the total mortality of a single day and the previous quinquennial average of the same day present so common features of comparison while we are following the course of a recurring epidemic. For instance, the death rate during last week has varied between 270 and 198; whereas the previous quinquennial average has been shown at the stationary figures of 107. This is not only unsatisfactory, but gives absolutely no information for purposes of comparison. What ought to be done, and I believe is the practice in Bombay, is to give the figure of the corresponding date last year, if not also of the year previous, and the quinquennial average. Thus, the total mortality from all causes, on the 27th instant, was 223. It is essential to state that the mortality from all causes was on the same date last year, as well as the average of the previous five years. Then only can we have some date for comparison.

— Yours, etc., N. GUPTA.

THE STATESMAN

1 APR 1901

C'wealth warns Pak to hold early polls

BY NABANITA SIRCAR

London, March 21: The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on Tuesday warned Pakistan that severe action would be taken against the country if it failed to give a definite commitment with a specific timetable for an early election and a complete restoration to democracy.

The Commonwealth secretary-general Don McKinnon said that the regime in Pakistan has been warned that a date for free and fair elections should be announced on October this year. If that does not happen, CMAG "would find it necessary to recommend to the heads of government that stronger measures be taken by the Commonwealth against the military regime." The military regime has also been told of CMAG's concern regarding the harassment of various parties and illegal detention of people. The CMAG meeting held at the Commonwealth Secretariat in Marlborough House, noted complaints made by political parties and civil rights groups.

Elections for local councils start in Pak

Islamabad, March 21: Polling began in Pakistan on Wednesday to elect local councils in 20 districts of the country in the second phase of the military rulers' plan to establish democracy at the grassroots level.

Some 14.4 million voters are to elect nearly 30,000 members to 1,459 union councils from the 61,990 candidates in the field. One-third of the seats are reserved for women. Political parties were barred from the election but have been active in the background.

Unofficial results will be announced by local election officers immediately after the close of polling at 5 p.m.

In the first phase, 956 union councils were elected on December 31, 2000 in 18 districts.

THE ASIAN AGE

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