

India and Iran sign MoU to boost trade ties

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DUBAI, Dec. 13. — In a bid to boost their bilateral economic and trade ties, India and Iran today signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance their cooperation in various sectors including petroleum, railways, power and communications.

The MoU was signed by the external affairs minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, and his Iranian counterpart, Mr Kamal Kharrazi, in Tehran, at the 13th Joint Commission meeting during which the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and stressed the need for sharper thrust to realise the full potential in two-way trade.

The MoU also covered shipping, textiles, small and medium enterprises, cement, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, and resolved to work together to enhance the pace of transfer of technology, investment and joint ventures, officials said.

Senior Indian officials were in Tehran two days prior to the minister's visit to fine-tune and finalise the terms of the MoU.

The automobile sector was particularly in focus as India was keen to set up joint ventures in Iran. Tatas and Mahindras had made a strong pitch at an

India aiding Iran in N-energy

TEHERAN, Dec. 13. — The external affairs minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, said today India has been and would continue to help Iran in its controversial bid to generate nuclear energy. "We have long record on peaceful uses of nuclear energy," Mr Sinha told reporters. "We have nuclear energy plants in our country. There are other civilian uses of nuclear energy ... most certainly between Iran and India there would be collaboration, there is collaboration," he said. — AFP

India Fair in Tehran in this regard early this month.

Addressing the Joint Commission Meeting, Mr Sinha mooted the idea of a common market with Iran and Pakistan in the context of widening cooperation with Islamabad and Tehran in recent months.

Mr Sinha referred to "the potential advantage" of a common market with Iran and Pakistan and suggested a framework agreement for free trade with Iran.

His suggestions were part of India's overall initiatives in the region and were aimed at the countries on the western flank, sources close to the minister said.

Mr Sinha recalled the friendly ties with Iran and said the recent visit of the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, to Tehran and President Muhammad Khatami to India had led to consolidation of economic ties and a strategic engagement.

Referring to the successful conclusion of India Fair in Tehran this month, he said it would result in more business between the two countries.

Mr Sinha said a bilateral investment promotion and protection agreement and avoidance of double taxation agreement were being negotiated by the two countries and texts were exchanged on the subject.

The Iranian foreign minister, Mr Kamal Kharrazi, conferred with Mr Sinha and called for measures to realise the full potential of bilateral cooperation.

On the sidelines of the Joint Commission meeting, a Ficci-led delegation is holding the Joint Business Council meeting with the Iranian Chamber of Commerce.

Mr Sinha will address the Council tomorrow.

PM push for Palestinian cause



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad receiving Mr AB Vajpayee in Damascus on Saturday. — AFP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DAMASCUS, Nov. 15. — Paying a significant visit to the volatile West Asia region, Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today assured the Arab world that India fully supported the Palestinian cause and early restoration of sovereignty to the people of Iraq, which is next door to Syria facing American sanctions.

Accused by Washington of being a "rogue nation" with ties to terrorist groups, the young Syrian President Bashar al Assad welcomed Mr Vajpayee's stand. Mr Vajpayee also told him that Israel should withdraw its forces from Palestinian cities as well as other occupied lands, including Golan Heights. Mr Vajpayee called for a lasting solution to the West Asian problem based on UNSC resolutions and the "land-for-peace" principle.

The 38-year-old Syrian President and the veteran Indian statesman, 40 years his senior, reviewed the Iraq situation and held extensive talks on the second day of Mr Vajpayee's visit to this country of 17 million. The talks were followed by signing of as many as nine documents by the two countries. Mr Vajpayee announced a line of credit of \$25m to Syria and a million dollar grant for Syria's bio-technology centre.

Addressing the disquiet in the Arab world about India's growing ties with Israel, Mr Vajpayee made it clear in an interview carried prominently by a Syrian

daily today that India has not and will not dilute its ties with Arab countries.

THE PAK FACTOR

NEW DELHI, Nov. 15. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, makes his first state visit to Syria, the government faces an uphill task on the key issue of convincing its Arab allies on Pakistan's involvement in cross-border terrorism.

At issue is the very definition of terrorism, on which the India-sponsored Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) has got stalled in the United Nations, and Pakistan's role in sponsoring terrorism against this country.

The CCIT has been stuck at the UN since 1996 because Palestine, among other countries, can not agree to the definition of what constitutes an act of terrorism. However, at the September 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, (between Israel and Palestine) all parties pledged to take action against "any threat or act of terrorism, violence or incitement." "Terrorism," according to the memorandum, "involves the deliberate killing and injuring of randomly selected noncombatants for political ends. It seeks to promote a political outcome by spreading terror and demoralisation throughout a population."

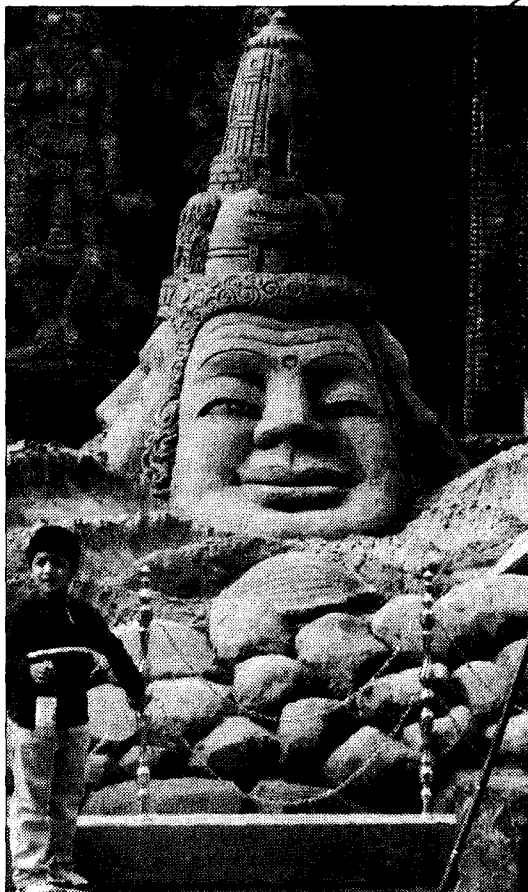
Strategically located as a frontline state in a "geopolitically sensitive area", Israel and Palestine, Syria's inputs would be crucial in determining called "our multi-layered relationship and diplomacy" with the region. This comprises "our natural relationship with the Arab world" and a growing "natural relationship with Israel", about which the government is "not defensive, foreign secretary Mr Kanwal Sibal said at a briefing on the Prime Minister's visit.

While support for the cause of a Palestinian state has been one of the bulwarks of India's foreign policy, Palestine and other Arab friends have tended to take the support for granted, senior officials said. And when it comes to J&K, none of the friends and members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, support India, because Pakistan "is our brother." — Nilova Roy Chaudhury/SNS

Inspector held in Madhumita murder case

NEW DELHI, Nov. 15. — The CBI today arrested a Uttar Pradesh police inspector for allegedly "supressing facts" in the Madhumita Shukla murder case, even as Prakash Chander Pandey, the alleged killer of the the poetess and two others were being brought here for lie detection tests.

The CBI, which was looking for inspector Yagya Narain Dixit, detained him at the railway station and questioned him about allegations that he had illegally "confined" some people, besides supressing "facts" after the murder. As his replies were not convincing, Dixit was placed under arrest and later remanded to CBI custody till 28 November, to facilitate his detailed interrogation. The CBI has accused Dixit, who was the station in-charge of Manak Nagar PS, of trying to project that Madhumita was married to an engineering student. — PTI



A boy stands in front of a sand sculpture, which adorns the Orissa pavillion at the International Trade Fair. In New Delhi on Saturday. — AFP

Assad appreciates India's stand on Israel

By Amit Baruah

DAMASCUS, NOV. 15. The Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, has reaffirmed his country's appreciation of the "distinct Indian denunciation" of the Israeli aggression against Syrian territory, India's "objective stand" towards Iraq and its willingness to offer humanitarian help to the Iraqi people.

Addressing a banquet he hosted in honour of the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, this evening, Dr. Assad, however, took a careful line on the problems in South Asia without referring to Pakistan by name. He said:

"We are hopeful that the friendly people of India will enjoy progress and prosperity in an atmosphere of peace and fraternity, and that the existing problems in your region will find proper solutions based on justice which ensures the rights of all sides.

"In this regard, we value the peace initiatives already announced for the solution of these disputes and resumption of normal relations among the states of your region, which may lead to a state of stability and to a peaceful solution of the conflict."

Dr. Assad was direct when it came to denouncing Israel for continuing to occupy Arab lands and its refusal to implement international resolutions which call for its withdrawal to the 1967 borders.

Pointing out that the difficult and complicated conditions in West Asia impacted

on global political relations, the Syrian leader said, "These conditions forebode most serious consequences to various peoples of the world."

The Israeli response to peace initiatives from the Arab world was more acts of killing, destruction and laying siege around the people of Palestine, Dr. Assad argued.

"Israel also continues to build the separation wall which grabs more parts of the Palestinian territory, consecrates an apartheid policy and undermines any effort to build peace on the basis of justice... in addition to that, Israel commits aggressions against Lebanese and Syrian territory, thus causing serious repercussions in our region and the world at large."

Dr. Assad said it was "only natural" for his country to be affected by the events in Iraq. "...We again call for ending the occupation of Iraq... so as to maintain the Iraqi territorial integrity and the unity of its people and guarantee the formation of a national Government fully and properly representative of all sectors of the Iraqi people..."

Appreciating the "wonderful progress" made by India in the economic, scientific and technological levels, Dr. Assad remarked, "I am sure that your accomplishments... will reinforce the hopes of the developing peoples to achieve... economic development mainly [based] on human capital."

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Vajpayee

said, "Our broad similarity of outlook gives us the opportunity of crafting a contemporary relationship for the present and the future, drawing inspiration from the past."

Thanking the Syrian President for receiving him during the month of Ramzan, the Prime Minister stated: "We appreciate the special honour you have extended to us..."

He maintained that India and Syria were ready to develop new areas of cooperation to exploit the potential created by the new economic environment.

The two countries could now move to create durable partnerships in areas such as infrastructure, energy exploration and services.

"The presence of Indian oil companies in Syria and the establishment of concrete symbols of our partnership in biotechnology and information technology are pointers in the right direction," the Prime Minister said.

In separate remarks at the inauguration of a National Biotechnology Centre, Mr. Vajpayee believed that this Centre symbolised the transition of India-Syria relations from their "traditional roots to the contemporary age".

"India and Syria have already been sharing expertise in this field [biotechnology], training scientists and building capacities through programmes at the institutional and national levels. It is this interaction, which has culminated in the establishment of this national biotechnology centre."

We fully support Palestinian cause, says Vajpayee

By Amit Baruah

DAMASCUS, NOV. 15. There is no change in India's position on establishing peace in West Asia, the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, assured the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, here today.

The Prime Minister, who arrived in Damascus late on Friday night from Tajikistan, said the situation in this region was a "matter of great concern" to India.

Briefing presspersons after the discussions at the Presiden-

tial Palace, the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, quoted Mr. Vajpayee as telling Dr. Assad that India was "fully" with the Palestinian cause.

Both countries also agreed on the need for an "early return" of sovereignty to the people of Iraq, a theme that had figured in the discussions Mr. Vajpayee had on November 12 with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, as well.

India, the Prime Minister said, had consistently called for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in West Asia based on

the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the "land for peace" formula.

Referring to the September visit by the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, to New Delhi, Mr. Vajpayee said that Mr. Sharon had been told that there had been no change in India's position seeking a "quick Israeli withdrawal" from Palestinian cities and other "occupied" territories.

India and Syria also signed nine agreements in the fields of biotechnology, education, small industries, agriculture, science

and technology, culture and technical cooperation.

Mr. Vajpayee announced that India would extend a credit line of \$25 million to Syria apart from a grant of \$1 million to set up a Syrian National Biotechnology Centre.

The two countries decided to set up a group of experts to discuss complementarities in the economies of the two countries as well as a group of six persons to discuss further cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector.

Asked what kind of "support" India had received from Syria on Pakistan, Mr. Sinha said neither side raised the issue. "We did not come here to ask for anything on Pakistan," he said. India could deal with Pakistan on its own and was not speaking from a "position" of weakness.

The Prime Minister told Dr. Assad that violence and counter-violence would not lead to any solution in the region, a view that the Syrian leader concurred with. Mr. Sinha said that both India and Syria condemned terrorism.

In response to a question whether the Prime Minister spoke specifically about ending the occupation of the Golan Heights, Mr. Sinha said that when India spoke of withdrawal from "occupied territories" this included the Golan Heights, taken by the Israelis in 1967.

"India has been consistently of the view that Israel has to vacate the occupied lands. So it does not have to be reiterated again and again. It was sufficient for the Prime Minister to say that India was in favour of withdrawal of Israel from the occupied lands."

"The question of the situation in this region did come up. And it was discussed. We exchanged views," Mr. Sinha said when asked whether Israel's posture towards Syria came up during the talks.

On whether the issue of Indo-Syrian defence cooperation had figured in the deliberations between Mr. Vajpayee and Dr. Assad, he replied in the negative.

Did Dr. Assad ask India to counsel Israel to exercise restraint in its dealings with Palestine? Mr. Sinha said, "No. They did not ask us to mediate. And we have no such desire either. But I think there is a far greater concern on our side on India-Israel relations than there is, perhaps, in the Arab world."

Praise for India's stand: Page 8

TERRORISTS TARGET SYNAGOGUES IN TURKEY



Rescuers gather at the site of a car bomb explosion in Istanbul on Saturday. At least 20 persons were killed and over 250 injured as explosive-rigged vehicles blew up at the same time outside two synagogues. — AFP (Details on Page 12)

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India close to investing \$1 billion in Sudan

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By Neena Vyas

KHARTOUM, OCT. 21. India is hoping to make a nearly \$1 billion investment in Sudan by buying a 25 per cent stake, currently owned by Austrians, in what is known as the 5A/5B oil project.

This will be in addition to the roughly \$750 million investment in getting 25 per cent stake in Sudan's biggest oil field six months ago from which the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Videsh, is expecting to get back its investment within three years.

During talks with the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the Energy Minister of Sudan, indicated that the 5A/5B project deal was "under active consideration", the Minister for Information and Technology, Arun Shourie, who is accompanying the President, told the press at a briefing here today.

Earlier, the ONGC Videsh Managing Director and CEO, Atul Chandra, said that the company was also looking to help Indian companies get two projects which are on offer from Sudan — an oil pipeline from

Khartoum to Port Sudan and a project to revamp an oil refinery at Port Sudan. If all these projects came through, India's total investments would go up to about \$ 2 billion, he said, adding that China had already invested about \$20 billion in Sudan.

Mr. Chandra's company is trying hard to build a strong relationship with the Sudanese people — a gift of \$400,000 to the country's football club, distribution of 10,000 footballs to children, donation for buying equipment for a cancer hospital and running two hospitals with ambulance services for rural areas around the ONGC complex here. A stadium here is to be named after the ONGC, he added.

Two of three agreements to be signed between India and Sudan tomorrow are related to providing some legal framework for the protection of these investments — an avoidance of double taxation agreement and another related directly to protection of investments. After these agreements come through on Wednesday, the President

will emplane for Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, for the third and final leg of his three-nation tour, before returning home on October 25.

Mr. Kalam has already extended an invitation to the President of Sudan, Omer Hassan Ahmed Al Bashir, to visit India. A \$50 million credit line has also been offered and some assistance for flood relief in Sudan in the form of medicines.

Mr. Shourie today said that a very important development which took place in Dubai before the President left for Sudan was the decision by the United Arab Emirates to nominate the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamban bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as the person in-charge of coordination with India. He is expected to make an early visit to India along with a business delegation. India's perception is that if it can create the confidence that investment in India is safe, and even profitable, the close to \$200 billion "parked" elsewhere by the Emirates could be invested in infrastructure projects in India.

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'Pak. need not worry about Indo-Israeli ties'

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, OCT. 20. The former Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, has said that Islamabad has no reason to be apprehensive about the defence ties between New Delhi and Tel Aviv.

In a rare interview to a Pakistan television channel, Geo, Mr. Peres, who now heads a think tank, said: "Pakistan need not be worried about Indo-Israeli ties. We do not want instability in South Asia".

He denied Pakistan's claims that Israel was involved in training Indian troops to fight the militants in Kashmir. "Israel is neither imparting training nor is it facilitating India in this regard," he said.

Asked about the constraints faced by Pakistan in recognising Israel, considering the strong anti-Jewish sentiments of the local population, Mr. Peres said Islamabad should not hesitate to have diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv as some Gulf coun-

tries, including Egypt and Jordan, had established ties.

Hinting that Pakistan had held secret talks with Israel in the past, Mr. Peres said that in order to address its concerns, Pakistan should have open, not secret talks with Tel Aviv. "Israel has no dispute with Pakistan. Israel is a well-wisher of better relations with Pakistan."

Defending the crackdown launched by the present Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, against Palestinians — which made countries such as Pakistan rethink about establishing ties with Israel — he said Pakistan should take an objective view of the West Asia situation.

The present crisis arose as the Palestinian leadership had failed to grab the opportunities provided by moderate leaders such as Edward Barak for a settlement.

Instead, the Palestinian militant groups carried on with the violence, which resulted in heavy retaliations, he added.

Oil and grateful Sudan mix well for Kalam

K. SUBRAHMANYA

Khartoum, Oct. 21: When President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam touched down at the capital of Sudan yesterday, the mercury had climbed to 40 degrees Celsius on the tarmac of the international airport here.

But the heat outside paled before the warmth inside — Sudanese President Omer Hassan Ahmed al Bashir, his deputy and senior ministerial colleagues were all lined up to extend a red carpet welcome to the Indian President.

It was unusually warm, perhaps the kind of which had not been felt during the previous two days when Kalam was in the United Arab Emirates. Kalam's UAE counterpart and his host there, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, was away in London for medical treatment during the Indian President's visit.

Kalam is the first Indian head of state to come calling in over 25 years to Sudan, which had once hosted Osama bin Laden and is still trying to shake off suspicion that "terrorists" have found a nest in the country.

The real reason for the Sudanese leadership's enthusiasm is that the visit helped break virtual global isolation.

The UN and the US sanctions — imposed in 1996 — are in place despite Khartoum's cooperation in the post-9/11 fight against international terrorism.

The US still lists Sudan as a "state sponsor of terrorism". In 1998, the US had fired missiles at



Kalam being welcomed by his Sudanese counterpart at Khartoum airport. (PTI)

a factory in Sudan it said was involved in making chemical weapons and was partly financed by Osama, who was in Sudan from 1991 to 1996. Sudan said the factory was only making medicines.

On the second day of the visit today, the Sudanese leadership extended the rare honour of inviting the President to address the country's National Assembly.

"It is not unusual for visiting foreign dignitaries to address the National Assembly. But I cannot remember when this positive gesture was made to a visiting head of the state to address the Assembly the last time," said a Sudanese foreign ministry official.

Diplomats accompanying the President were not forthcoming

on the factors that guided the planning of the presidential visit at this juncture, but they suggested that the Americans won't be too happy about the Indian diplomatic move.

However, of late, the US has appreciated Sudan's cooperation in the hunt for al Qaida members, though Washington feels that more should be done.

Energy diplomacy is being seen as a key factor that helped India make up its mind. Delhi has perceived an opportunity to enter the promising Sudanese oil economy as an early bird. The Sudanese leadership appreciated India's "bold" move last year to invest \$750 million in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company, previously owned by a Canadian group.

In his address to the 360-member National Assembly this afternoon, Kalam underscored Delhi's emphasis on oil diplomacy.

"One of the key resources of Sudan is hydrocarbon. With a large part of the country still unexplored, hydrocarbon contribution to the national economy (of Sudan) is likely to increase significantly in the future."

He underlined that India and Sudan can work together to build capabilities for oil exploration, refining, marketing and value added oil-based products.

At present, ONGC Videsh's investment is confined to one major oil field in southern Sudan. But the potential is much larger as newer oil fields are being discovered fast.

India's relations with Israel transcends the prime ministership of Sharon

Beyond cosmetic postures

The Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, visited India early in September. He had to cut short his visit and return to Israel because of incidents of excessive violence against Israeli civilians by Palestinian militants. His visit generated considerable controversy within India and critical reaction from the Islamic and Arab countries. The political significance of the visit needs no extra emphasis. This was the first visit by an Israeli prime minister to India, although the president of Israel and the foreign minister of Israel have visited India during the last decade.

While judging the validity or otherwise of the critical reaction to Sharon's visit, the basic question to be asked is whether the criticism was against the existence and expansion of Indo-Israeli relations or whether it was a reaction to the persona of Ariel Sharon. It is obvious that the criticism was not about the existential reality of Indo-Israeli relations which have evolved in a positive manner over the last decade. It is Sharon's personal background and the timing of his visit which attracted criticism.

Objectively speaking, Sharon has a hawkish and aggressive anti-Palestinian reputation exceeding even that of the former prime minister, Menechem Begin. It is clear that Sharon is the architect of policies which have destroyed the Oslo peace process that was supposed to evolve into some kind of a solution to the Palestinian problem. That such a person should come to India for high-level discussions is certainly questionable because it was the Oslo process which led to India establishing formal diplomatic and political relations with Israel.

The timing of the visit was equally unfortunate because it took place soon after the Israeli cabinet took a decision that the removal of the chairman, Yasser Arafat, from the power structure of the Palestine Liberation Organization was an imperative to resolve Israeli antagonism against the Palestinian people. The visit took place in the context of increasing violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and in the background of attempts by the United States of America and the United Kingdom to qualitatively erode Arafat's authority by compelling him to nominate Mehmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority.

Soon after Abbas's appointment, he tried to distance himself from Arafat and showed a willingness to fall in line with the Western road map for a solution to the problems of west Asia, an approach which has no support from the Palestinians. The re-

The author is former foreign secretary of India

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sult was Abbas having to resign his post and Arafat appointing the speaker of the Palestine national assembly, Quriyah (Abu Ala), as prime minister. Quriyah was not acceptable to the US and the UK, which had reservations about him which in turn led to Quriyah taking the position that he will assume charge only when his acceptability is formally acknowledged by all powers concerned.

Militants' violence, compounded by serious political instability and a threat to Arafat's position, even his life, characterizes the situation in west Asia. Sharon has not shown any inclination to adopt the middle path of a compromise. The reality is that he seems to have basic support from the US for his policy orientations, whatever obfuscatory white-washing may be indulged in by the US and the UK in rationalizing their approach. Arafat and the cause of the Palestinians are sought to be detached from the historical context of their struggle and to be converted into a part of the West's anti-terrorist campaign.

The ruling coalition of India has been critical of the Congress Party objecting to Sharon's visit, claiming that the Congress's stand on the visit is a contradiction because it was a Congress government which formalized relations with Israel. This argument is inaccurate because the rationale which led to P.V. Narasimha Rao's government formalizing relations with Israel was logical. By mid-1991, the government of India had reliable information from its diplomatic missions in the US and Scandinavian countries that confidential contacts between the government of Israel and the PLO were in progress in Spain, Sweden and Norway. India had also received reliable confirmation that contacts between the PLO and the government of Israel, led by the late Yitzhak Rabin had the support of all the major powers of the world, particularly the US and the Soviet Union.

More significantly, India had received reports that the Israel-PLO contacts have the endorsement of important Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. This change in Arab diplomatic and political attitude was manifested in many of these countries proceeding to establish contacts with the emerging Russian federation.

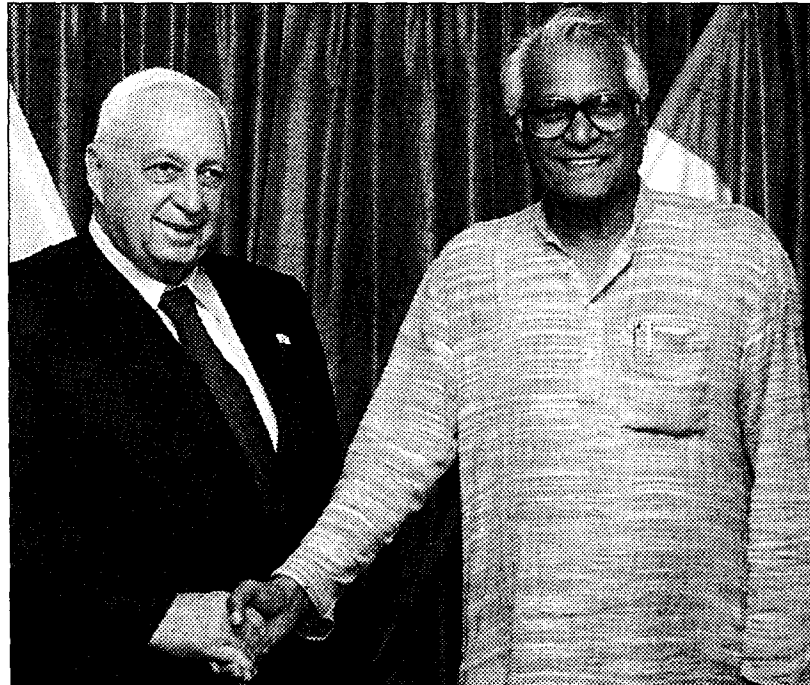
The other factors which led to the Indian decision were Israel's support to India on issues related to India's territorial integrity, particularly on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. This was despite India not having any formal relations with Israel till 1992. India had clear indications that the Oslo process would lead to a reconciliation

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between the PLO and Israel, and that the PLO will acquire a territorial identity and a recognized governmental status. Working groups were to be established following the Oslo agreement, to move towards this objective. The PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, when consulted by the prime minister, Narasimha Rao, endorsed the government of India's intention to establish relations with Israel, emphasizing that by this act, India would find a place in these multinational working groups

two countries go. It is the dimension of Israel-PLO relations which have gone beyond expectations. The peace process between Israel and the PLO received its major setback with the assassination of the prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, followed by the weakening of the moderate coalition led by him and Shimon Peres. The process continued in fits and starts till the tenure of Ehud Barak of Israel. With his departure, Israel-PLO relations have gone downhill to a point where Sharon is not interest-



and will be able to safeguard Palestinian interests.

Equally, if not more important, were considerations of mutually beneficial interests which led to the government of India's decision to formalize relations with Israel. There was a convergence of interests in countering religious extremism and militant violence. There were concrete possibilities of the establishment of substantive economic relations, including trade and investment. There were clear potentials for scientific and technological cooperation between India and Israel. Israel's agricultural experience in dry farming, desert irrigation and agro-industries could prove to be beneficial to India. Israeli experience in countering militant violence was of relevance to India in dealing with similar phenomenon in the country. But the overriding consideration, of course, was the fact that the era of confrontation between Israel and the PLO was expected to end.

The rationale of India's relations with Israel has been vindicated as far as the bilateral relations between the

Indian interests cannot be held hostage to the general political orientations of the Arab and Islamic countries

ed in a rational compromise with the Palestinians.

What is unfortunate is that the US is not interested in pressurizing Sharon to be reasonable beyond cosmetic postures. The question is whether this stalemate will result in India's tangible interests being held hostage to this situation. Indo-Israeli trade is of the order of \$1-1.5 billion, excluding the cost of the defence cooperation between the two countries.

Cooperation in the fields of defence supplies and training, science and technology and countering terrorism has steadily increased. Israel provided critical assistance to India during the Kargil war and the hijacking of an

Indian plane from Kathmandu to Kandahar. The latest example is the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh having approved consultations with Israeli security entities to beef up security arrangements in Andhra Pradesh after a bomb attack on him on the first of October.

Given the substance of the mutuality of interests between India and Israel, the visit of the Israeli prime minister to India was perhaps a logical exercise in realpolitik. The only problem was that the prime minister happens to be Ariel Sharon. Having acknowledged this reality, one feels that declarations about strategic partnerships with Israel, Indian policies having been previously affected by electoral considerations inside India made by the deputy prime minister, L.K. Advani, and the former minister for external affairs, Jaswant Singh, were ill-advised. It would have been sufficient to emphasize that Indo-Israeli relations were based on the solid foundation of mutual interests and mutual benefit.

The basic critical questions being posed about Sharon's visit is whether the visit has qualitatively harmed India's relations with Arab and Islamic countries. There are two answers: first, Indian interests cannot be held hostage to the general political orientations of the Arab and Islamic countries. The second answer is that the visit is not likely to have any negative impact on India's relations with Muslim countries because of the same logic of mutual substantive interests. The point to be remembered is that India's stance supportive of the aspirations of the Palestinian people has not changed.

India invited the foreign minister of the Palestinian Authority just before Sharon's visit who acknowledged the usefulness of India's relations with Israel on the wider issues of peace in west Asia. The concerns which he conveyed to us were mentioned to Sharon at the highest levels by the prime minister and the president of India.

It is worth noting that Arab countries like Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Qatar have governmental contacts with Israel. It should also be noted that other Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, have not done anything tangible supporting the PLO in the current critical situation. In fact, India has been more articulate about the cause of Palestinians, to the Israelis than these countries.

The important fact to be remembered is that the importance of Indo-Israeli relations transcends the prime-ministership of Sharon. It is a different matter that the government of India dealt with Sharon because of its perceptions of current needs. These perceptions were not entirely valid.

Israel Phalcon deal sealed

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Guaranteed
won't fail

New Delhi, Oct. 10 (Agencies): India and Israel signed their biggest weapons deal ever today, with New Delhi agreeing to buy strategic airborne radar systems which it hopes will boost its military edge over Pakistan.

The Israeli-made Phalcon radars will be mounted on Russian IL-76 aircraft in a deal estimated to be more than \$1 billion.

"A tripartite agreement was signed this morning at the defence ministry involving Israeli and Russian representatives for the acquisition of Awacs (airborne warning and control systems) and mounting of these," a defence ministry spokesperson said.

The trilateral deal was signed here by defence secretary Ajay Prasad with Major General Yasi Ben Hanan, head of Sibat, the Israeli defence ministry's licensing agency for Phalcon, it was officially announced.

Mikhail Denisov, the first deputy chairman of the Russian State Committee for Military-Technical Cooperation, signed the deal from Moscow's side.

An Israeli defence ministry spokesperson said the three-way agreement had laid the ground for the sale of the Phalcon systems to India. But no details about the value of the deal were given.

Pakistan has repeatedly expressed concern at growing

India-Israel defence ties and said the introduction of advanced systems such as the Awacs would lead to an arms race between the nuclear powers which came close to war last year over Kashmir. They have since restored full diplomatic relations, but further peace moves have bogged down.

"It gives you a great reach, Pakistan will certainly feel threatened," said Air Commodore A.G. Katre of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, a New Delhi-based think tank.

India will become the first country in the world after Israel to go in for Ilyushin-mounted Phalcon Awacs system, with the US using the Boeing platform to mount its own Hawkeye airborne system.

According to a defence source in Delhi, Russia would procure an old IL-76 from Uzbekistan and re-engineer it before sending it to Israel where the Phalcon radars would be mounted.

New Delhi plans to buy three Phalcon systems which officials and experts say will put large parts of Pakistan under its surveillance, including the volatile border in Kashmir. "You are looking into their territory, you can monitor what kind of flying they are doing," Katre said, adding that Islamabad was now likely to look for matching systems.

Atal seeks a UN of his vision

K.P. NAVAR

New York, Sept. 25: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today urged world leaders gathered here for the 58th General Assembly to take a realistic view of the UN's limits and called their attention to the "misplaced notion" after the Cold War that "the UN could solve every problem anywhere".

As one of the senior-most leaders at the General Assembly who has been attending its sessions year after year for decades as an MP as external affairs minister and as Prime Minister, Vajpayee said: "We need to introspect on some of the assumptions that have been made over the years on the will and reach of the UN." He said the world body's en-

thusiasm and pro-active stance after the end of the Cold War reflected laudable intentions. "But we soon realised that the UN does not possess magical powers to solve every crisis in all parts of the globe or to change overnight the motivation of leaders and communities around the world."

Vajpayee did some plain-speaking on Iraq, describing it as a major challenge to the UN. "It is imperative that the people of Iraq should be empowered to determine their own future, to rebuild their nation."

At the same time, he cautioned the international community, including those who opposed the war against Saddam Hussein, that "it is not very productive to linger on the past".

For the first time, he compre-

hensively outlined the priorities in Iraq as Delhi saw it. Vajpayee listed these as "ensuring security and stability, restoration of basic facilities and infrastructure and a road map of political processes for a representative Iraqi government".

He underlined the view that the UN has a "crucial role" in this process of political and economic reconstruction.

Referring to General Pervez Musharraf's attack on India in his address, Vajpayee stopped short of calling off any talks with Pakistan. "We totally refuse to let terrorism become a tool of blackmail. Just as the world did not negotiate with al Qaida or the Taliban, we shall not negotiate with terrorism." He said a dialogue with Pakistan can begin

when cross-border terrorism stops "or when we eradicate it".

Vajpayee did not mention by name India's claim to a permanent seat in the Security Council. But he referred to the growing assessment that "changes of form and function" were required if the UN was to play an effective role.

"The permanent members guard their exclusivity," he lamented. But most members of the UN today recognise the need for an enlarged and restructured Security Council with more developing countries as permanent and non-permanent members.

Until the council is "reformed and restructured, its decisions cannot reflect truly the collective will of the community of nations".

India attempts delicate balance in West Asia

Statesman News Service

NEW YORK, Sept. 21. — The first ever visit to India by an Israeli Prime Minister earlier this month saw a “special” relationship established between the two countries, one from which New Delhi hopes to reap benefits in anti-terror defence collaboration (and a certain meeting of minds), and Tel Aviv hopes would lead to less criticism in public forums of its policy towards Palestine.

In a bid, however, to “correct” the perceived ‘tilt’ towards Israel, the government supported, as usual, a draft resolution that would have criticised Israel for its decision that Palestinian leader, Mr Yasser Arafat, be removed. Introduced by Sudan and Syria in the UN Security Council, the resolution was vetoed by the United States because it was “lopsided” and failed to criticise “the explicit threat” to the west Asia peace process “posed by Hamas and other such terrorist groups”, US ambassador Mr John Negroponte said.

While India has not taken the lead to introduce resolutions against Israel, it has been scathing in its latest attempts to remove Mr Arafat, calling such statements “irresponsible”. The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, said Mr Arafat “was the elected leader of the Palestinian people and should remain as such”.

In New York for the UNGA, the external affairs minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, is scheduled to meet his Israeli counterpart, Mr Sylvan Shalom, on Monday. He is also meeting the Palestinian foreign minister, Mr Nabil Sha’ath, and the convener of the Arab League, Mr Amr Mussa, to convey the message that support to the cause of a Palestinian state is “a bulwark of Indian foreign policy”, but the spiraling “cycle of violence” will not help the cause of peace in the region, or advance the ‘road map’.

Today is the UN’s International Day of Peace. But the UNGA session that opens tomorrow (with a special session on HIV/AIDS) will be dominated by areas of conflict; Iraq (where the role and relevance of the UN system itself has been called into question) and west Asia (where the spiral of violence threatens to undo all peace efforts).

THE STATESMAN

22 SEP 2003

TAGORE BUST AND AVENUE IN TURKEY



Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee unveils a bust of Rabindranath Tagore in Ankara on Thursday. Turkey also named an avenue in the city after the Nobel laureate, prompting Vajpayee to laud the gesture, saying it would "remain a symbol of the friendship between our two countries". Turkey has honoured "one of India's greatest poets, philosophers; and we celebrate another valuable strand of Indo-Turkish connection", he said.

Ties between the two will receive a boost as the Prime Minister also announced flights between India and Turkey from Friday. At a joint news conference with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Vajpayee said Turkish Airways will fly from Istanbul to Delhi twice a week.

Recalling Tagore's brush with Turkey when his ship docked at Istanbul for two days on way to Europe 80 years ago, Vajpayee said it left such a deep impression that he requested then President Kemal Ataturk for books on Turkish literature and culture for his Visva-Bharati.

"History records that Kemal Ataturk sent 41 books to the university... These books remain the prized possession of the university," he said. Though Tagore and Ataturk never met, there was a strong empathy between them. Tagore admired the nationalism and reformist zeal in Ataturk, Vajpayee said. The Prime Minister said like many generations of poets, writers, scholars and reformists in India, Tagore was influenced by Turkey's great sufi mystic Jalalettin Rumi. Rumi's message of peace and tolerance, oneness of the human race and world without boundaries found a clear echo in Tagore's consciousness, he said.

Sufism and Rumi continue to enrich the links between India and Turkey. A prominent Indian director has begun a project to capture on celluloid the multi-dimensional life, thoughts and works of this universal humanist.

"I am sure this project will receive the encouragement and support of the government, business and art community in Turkey," he said. (PTI)

19 SEP 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Ankara gets a road named after Tagore

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
in Ankara

Sept. 18. — It was a programme right after the Prime Minister's heart; unveiling a bust in honour of "one of India's greatest poet philosophers". Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee got an opportunity to wear another one of his hats — that of the chancellor of Visva-Bharati University that the Indian Prime Minister traditionally wears, when he inaugurated the Rabindranath Ta-

gore Avenue in the Turkish capital this morning, "celebrating another valuable strand of the Indo-Turkish connection".

Moved by the occasion, the Prime Minister recounted a little-known anecdote about Tagore's life, one that showed his links with Turkey. About 80 years ago, on its way from Europe to India, Tagore's ship docked at Istanbul for two days.

"This brief encounter with your country obviously made a deep impression on him," Mr Vajpayee said,

"Tagore wrote letters to President Kemal Ataturk requesting him for books on Turkish literature and culture. President Ataturk sent 41 books to Viswa Bharati. As chancellor of Viswa Bharati, I can confirm that these books are the prized possessions of the university."

Mr Vajpayee said like many other poets, writers, scholars and reformers in India, Tagore too was influenced by the great Turkish Sufi mystic, Jalaleddin Rumi, whose "message of peace and tolerance...

found a deep echo in Tagore's consciousness". A prominent film maker (Muzaffar Ali), Mr Vajpayee said, would make a film on Rumi.

"The Rabindranath Tagore Avenue in Ankara will remain a symbol of the friendship between our two peoples," the Prime Minister said, mirroring the "strategically located Kemal Ataturk Marg, which runs adjacent to the Prime Minister's residence, and guards the sole public access to it".

WEST ASIAN INTERESTS

Delhi Doesn't Have To Play A Zero-Sum Game

By SWAGATO GANGULY

It has seldom been commented on, but there is an eerie similarity between the circumstances in which India and Israel were born. Both came about in civil war-like conditions, at roughly the same time.

While India became independent in August 1947, the state of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948. The birth of both nations was accompanied by massive transfers of population. The new state of Israel threw out 750,000 Palestinian Arabs, and had to accept in return a million Arab Jews expelled from their home countries. In the Indian subcontinent close to 15 million people were turned into refugees overnight. Hindus and Sikhs took over Muslim homes and properties in Indian Punjab; vice versa in Pakistani Punjab. That process is mirrored by what Israel's first prime minister David Ben-Gurion wrote in his war diary: "New [Jewish] immigrants [were] put in Arab houses."

Continuing chaos

In both cases, the British messed up. They promised Palestine to both the Jews and the Arabs, without clarifying who would get what, and walked away when things came unstuck. In India they did the same. They favoured the Muslim League by setting up communal electorates and encouraging exclusivist ambitions, then drew a line through a map and partitioned the country when riots and slaughter broke out. The chaos created by the British plays itself out in the present day, whether in Kashmir or in Palestine; UK foreign secretary Jack Straw admitted as much in uncharacteristically candid musings last year.

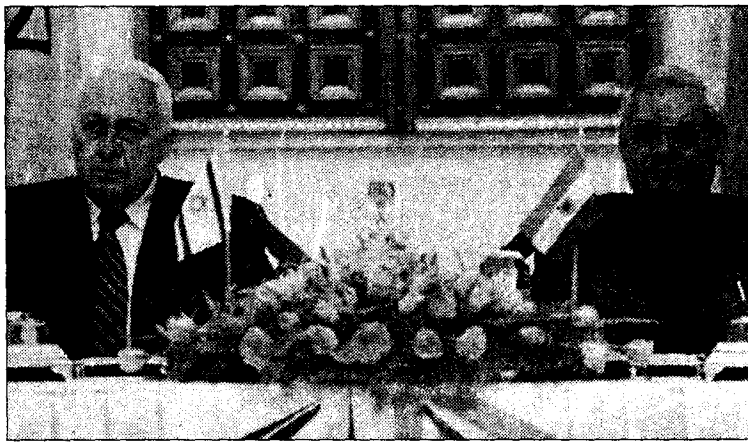
The similarities don't end there. Israel became a Jewish state where Jews who faced persecution anywhere could emigrate. Likewise, Pakistan became a Muslim state supposedly because Muslims felt unsafe in an undivided India. By contrast, Indians and Palestinians remained secular. Lately, however, fundamentalist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been making headway among the Palestinians, while a fundamentalist chief minister rules a major Indian state, Gujarat.

In the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians Delhi has by and large seen things from the Palestinian end of the prism, mostly because it has a large and influential Muslim minority but not much of a Jewish minority. Muslim-bashing saffronites, on the other hand, have often sought to emulate Israel and argued for a whole-hearted embrace of

the Israeli cause. But domestic political considerations aside, what substantive interests does India have in Israel and West Asia?

Lest that might seem too amoral, bypassing the rights and wrongs of the West Asian conflict, it's best to emphasize that there are no clear rights and wrongs, and nobody has the mo-

is offering Delhi a \$20 billion booty for *not* taking such a position). Although Arafat is an icon of Palestinian nationalism, the Israelis may have as much difficulty negotiating with him as Delhi does with the Hurriyat. Just as Delhi does not stand for mediation in its affairs, it would be pragmatic to leave the protagonists in the Mideast



ral advantage in the West Asian conflict. It's true that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has blockaded and occupied Palestinian cities, supported Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza strip, and is building a security wall that will gobble up considerable chunks of Palestinian territory. But President Yasser Arafat has done his bit to ensure the election of a hardline Israeli prime minister, by blocking moves towards a final settlement of the Mideast conflict by Sharon's moderate predecessor Ehud Barak.

Delhi's Mideast role limited

The principal rock on which the Camp David negotiations between Barak and Arafat, moderated by President Clinton, foundered was the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel. Arafat argued the right should be unrestricted, even though the alternative offered was handsome — \$20 billion in international aid to rehabilitate the refugees, who would be given three options: the right to stay where they were, to settle in the Palestinian state, or to emigrate to countries that voluntarily opened their gates such as Canada, Australia and Norway. The Israelis did offer to take in 10,000 Palestinian refugees as a gesture, but no government in Tel Aviv can afford to allow *all* refugees to return, as Israel would effectively be swamped.

For a measure of how unreasonable Arafat's stance was, consider what international reactions would be if India were to make unrestricted right to return of refugees a precondition for peace with Pakistan (and nobody

conflict to thrash out their rights and wrongs by themselves.

Delhi stands to gain considerably from cooperation with both Tel Aviv and Arab capitals, without being placed in a position where it has to choose between them. That is the policy that Beijing follows successfully, while Moscow under President Putin manages to befriend almost everybody — Prime Minister Sharon was there two years ago, in a groundbreaking trip similar to his recent sojourn in Delhi.

The veil came off Indo-Israeli military cooperation during his Delhi visit — it turns out that India is Israel's biggest arms buyer, its second biggest source of weapons after Russia is Israel. The military relationship between the two countries is said to go back to the India-China war of 1962. Defence ministry sources have acknowledged that during India's hour of need in the Kargil war, Tel Aviv made available its own armoury and urgently sent us the weapons we needed. On Kashmir few foreign leaders have been able to as forthrightly state, as deputy prime minister Yosef Lapid did during the Israelis' Delhi visit, that his country respected Indian sovereignty there.

Currently, Tel Aviv is in a position to help Delhi in some critical areas of defence and security, such as avionics, electronic warfare systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, border sensors and other surveillance technologies, missiles and anti-missile systems, equipment and training for special forces and counter-insurgency warfare. During his stay in Delhi Sharon okayed the sale to India of Phalcon airborne

radars, the most advanced early warning systems in the world. Deployed on Ilyushin-76 aircraft, the Indian Phalcons will be able to look deep inside Pakistan and warn of aircraft and missile launches.

The two sides also came to an agreement on real-time intelligence sharing and surveillance of terrorist groups in the region. Intelligence is of prime value in blunting the terrorist threat, and Indian security agencies would gain by collaborating with Mossad, one of the highest-rated intelligence agencies in the world.

More than one basket

The potential of growing security cooperation between India and Israel is indicated by General Musharraf's contemplating the previously unthinkable — that Pakistan should recognize Israel. Such a recognition would place Musharraf on a collision course with Islamic fundamentalists at home, which is in India's strategic interest.

That doesn't mean Delhi should neglect its ties with Arab and Gulf states who account for 15 per cent of India's foreign trade. They provide employment to 3.5 million Indian workers, who send home billions of dollars annually. Remittances from the Gulf are estimated to amount to half of total remittances sent by Indians abroad; they play a significant role in keeping India's foreign exchange reserves buoyant. According to some analysts, it even played a role in the rupee's recent strengthening against the dollar. Close to a fourth of Kerala's population of 32 million depend directly on remittances from Gulf countries.

Apart from the economic angle, there can be security spin-offs of cooperation with Gulf governments. Many terror groups and criminal dons operating in India obtain sanctuary in these countries. If that sanctuary and funding could be cut off, it would be a notable victory in the standoff with Islamabad. Aftab Ansari's extradition by the UAE authorities was a good first, but such arrangements ought to be institutionalized through extradition treaties.

A peace settlement between Israelis and Palestinians may come about — they were almost there during the Camp David negotiations between Barak and Arafat. Delhi will look silly if it is left holding the ball for the Palestinians when the Palestinians themselves move forward. It is a sign of maturity when Delhi refuses to put all its foreign policy eggs in one basket, recognises situations may change, and learns to play all sides — Israel, the Arab states, Iran.

There's no denying the significance

S.F. 1679

THE Israeli Prime Minister's visit created uncommon interest in India. He is a significant, though not universally admired, world figure, and with him travel controversies that reverberate strongly in India. More importantly, his visit was seen as something of a turning point, an initiative leading into new territory and opening up fresh possibilities for the future. Strategic linkages between the two countries were envisaged, bringing them together in a hitherto unexplored manner, and vastly expanding their cooperation in sensitive areas. Thus there was much to anticipate from Sharon's visit.

A section of Indian opinion has long been uncomfortable with the primacy given to Arab countries in India's foreign policy, and has tried to attach special value to the relationship with Israel. This may owe more to domestic considerations than to a desire to bring balance to our Middle East policy. In earlier days, there were occasional Indian overtures, to which Israel was always responsive, notably on the occasion of the secret visit of Moshe Dayan in the late 1970s when Atal Behari Vajpayee was the foreign minister. Matters have come a long way since then, with several Arab countries themselves having developed relations with Israel and engaging with that country in joint efforts at peacemaking. This may not have mitigated the bitter strife between Israel and Palestine, but it has made it feasible for countries like India to develop their ties with Tel Aviv. There can be little reason for us to hold back when the Arabs themselves are going ahead, and in the last decade or so there has been a steady growth in the bilateral India-Israel relationship.

Over time, a pattern has been established. Full diplomatic relations were followed by several high-level visits, most conspicuously that of Israeli statesman Shimon Peres. There was a surge of mutual discovery in the 1990s. Several Israeli companies made their entry into India, especially in the field of water management, where Israel's renowned skills in obtaining high agricultural yields through careful management of its meagre water resources found a ready market in semi-arid parts of India. Israeli companies became known not only for their tough bargaining and not-especially-easy terms, but also for their reliable delivery. At the same time, India became an important customer for sophisticated Israeli military products. Reticence about the details in such matters is customary, but it is evident that India can advantageously turn to Israel for some of its important defence needs. Essentially, it has been a buyer-seller relationship, with



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on his recent visit to India. — AFP

the visit confirmed a normal state of relations but because, to some observers, it pointed to new strategic arrangements for both parties. India and Israel are both victims of terrorism and this has induced them both to be willing partners in the US-led effort against this affliction. Indeed, some saw a tripartite understanding between these three countries in the making. But in the event, there was nothing in the visit to support such extravagant expectations. India was careful to reaffirm its long established views on Palestine, signalling distance from Israel's way of dealing with its regional problems. Similarly, there was no sign of Israel getting enmeshed any deeper in India's regional difficulties. Israel-Pak relations are poor, but there are signs of change and the possibility of diplomatic relations between the two is presently under discussion, and there is no advantage to Israel to reject this opportunity. On Iran, too, it would seem, there was no meeting of minds, with India unable to go along with the Israeli view that Iran is a fount of terrorism. Thus there seemed to have been a healthy dose of realism in the talks, at some remove from the unfounded talk that preceded the visit.

The leaders made a call for decisive global action against terrorism. While there are similar problems before the two, there are also basic differences in how they are handled. Under Sharon, Israel has relied on physical force, including pre-emptive strikes, for its security, and has shown reduced interest in a negotiated peace process. India, by contrast, while taking necessary counter-measures against terrorist attack, has simultaneously launched a major initiative for dialogue with Pakistan. These marked differences in approach will serve to reduce the scope for a joint strategy and close collaboration.

For all the limiting factors, there is no denying the significance of Sharon's visit. It was the first by an Israeli Prime Minister, and it points to the developing and expanding ties between the two countries. The clutch of agreements that came out of the visit on economic matters, cultural affairs, science and technology, and so on, are to be welcomed. But there is no sign of any strategic bridge, or any tripartite arrangement that draws the USA into the picture. Perhaps that is as it should be: let bilateral ties develop according to their own dynamic, without any false expectation of where they can lead.

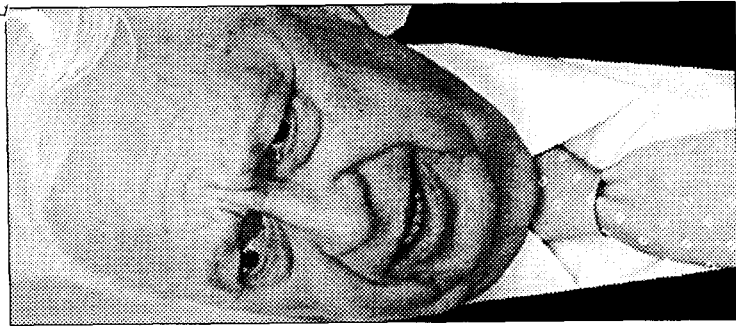
(The author is former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)

wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

India as the customer for Israeli arms supplies. Now there is talk of a different order of collaboration, more of a partnership than hitherto, with the possibility of joint development of highly sophisticated items like submarines and micro satellites. This could be a growth area for the future.

Viewed in this fashion, Indo-Israeli ties can be seen to have evolved from artificial separateness to something more normal, and Sharon's visit confirms this reality. But if that were all, the visit would hardly have attracted so much expectation. The special interest arose not because



Sharon

Delhi caught in expulsion duel

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Sept. 14: A Palestinian move to enlist Indian support in getting Israel "de-recognised" in the United Nations, probably in response to plans to expel Yasser Arafat, has put Delhi in a spot.

Early last week, India assured visiting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that it would not move an anti-Tel Aviv resolution at any multilateral forum. The Palestinian move has thus made Delhi — one of the most vocal and consistent supporters of its cause — uneasy.

Since 1992, when it established diplomatic ties with Israel, India has performed a fine balancing act between Tel Aviv and the Palestinians. But this latest move might upset that balance.

Reacting sharply to Israeli

plans to exile Arafat, India yesterday said the Palestinian President was an elected representative of his people and a symbol of their struggle. It said Arafat's forcible removal could have "serious negative consequences".

Delhi had responded cautiously to the Israeli move on Friday, but changed its tone yesterday. "India has always recognised President Arafat as an elected leader of the Palestinian people and a symbol of their cause," foreign ministry spokesperson Navtej Sarna said in a statement.

He added: "Any restriction on his movement and his forcible removal from Palestine territory would have serious negative consequences. It (India) strongly urges that no such move be contemplated."

The proposed Palestinian resolution, to be moved during the General Assembly session in

New York later this month, is believed to have been prompted by Israeli plans to exile Arafat.

Palestinian leaders have already begun sounding out "friendly countries" like India for support.

South Block officials said "de-recognising" a UN member is difficult and takes time. The move is, therefore, seen to be an attempt to make a political point and focus world attention on West Asia.

The stalled peace process in the region is bound to be one of the main issues at the coming UN session. Palestinians allege that Israel has violated or ignored every UN resolution and international agreement since Sharon came to power in March 2001.

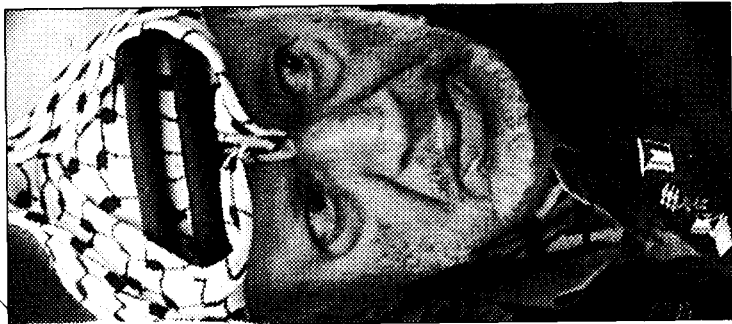
They argue that the occupation of Palestinian land is the main reason for continuing vio-

lence in the region and the main stumbling block for a return to peace.

The Palestinians hope that moving a resolution in the General Assembly might make world leaders consider steps to resolve the impasse and result in Israel ending its occupation.

India and Israel differed over Arafat's role in the West Asia peace process during Sharon's visit. Tel Aviv said the Palestinian President was a terrorist, not a peacemaker. It pointed out that he had undermined peace and encouraged acts of terror against Israel.

But though India is keen to work closely with Israel against global terrorism, it has made it clear it will not dump Arafat. Even so, if the Palestinian move to de-recognise Israel gathers momentum, it could cause Delhi some embarrassment.



Arafat

It's our war too

India
- most Asian res -

7-10
12/9

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

It is not often that a bold foreign policy initiative brings domestic faultlines to the fore. The truncated visit of the feisty Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, did just that. On the one hand was the silent applause of a self-confident India — not least in the diaspora — impatient with the inherited baggage of the Cold War and anxious to strike new alliances on the strength of shared values and common interests. On the other hand were the antediluvian voices from other centuries, a revealing combination of commissars and clerics.

The issue wasn't either the creation of a Palestine state or the controversial past of the visitor. Coming as it did on the eve of the second anniversary of 9/11, Sharon's two-day visit was deeply symbolic. It pointed to India's mental willingness to transform itself from a passive victim of terrorism to becoming an active combatant in the war against terror. The transition, needless to say, is still woefully incomplete. Yet, the very fact that a previously undercover relationship which, incidentally, dates back to Rajiv Gandhi's premiership, is now being flaunted is itself significant. In the past, India's relationship (rather, non-relationship) with Israel was governed by local Muslim sentiment — "Palestine has become the global symbol of Islamic victimhood" — and a fear of Arab retribution. Fortunately, national interests have bypassed sectarian concerns and ties with Israel have been taken beyond the purview of a hyphenated relationship.

Israel's importance doesn't merely stem from either its acknowledged expertise in counter-terrorism or its reliability as a supplier of sophisticated weaponry. It is, after Britain, the foremost ally of the United States of America. Developing special strategic ties with Israel is tantamount to accepting a role in the complex chain of relationships that define Pax Americana. The Israeli deputy prime minister, Yosef Lipid, stated this quite explicitly on Wednesday: "There is American support for this unwritten axis." Unless domestic political upheavals unsettle the process, there is a likelihood of Washington's energies being complemented by a concordat of democracies in which New Delhi, Jerusalem and, hopefully, Ankara, play important roles.

For India and its enterprising diaspora, there is an additional benefit. A vibrant relationship with Israel opens the doors for a strategic partnership with the highly influential Jewish lobby in the US. If carefully nurtured, it could end up as a mutually rewarding marriage between old and new money, with Indians providing the energy and numbers, and Jews the political clout and networking expertise. A working relationship

has already been established — as evident from the remarkably forthright speech of the principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, to the annual American Jewish Congress dinner in Washington last May — and Sharon's visit will help it acquire greater momentum. Indeed, the cementing of Indo-Jewish links at the community level should now be the priority of Indian diplomats in the US and, for that matter, in Britain. The spin-off benefits for both countries are potentially very high.

At the end of the day, however, opportunities are what the players make

able, for example, that the humiliation heaped on India by the hijackers in Kandahar — in league with the Taliban — on the last day of 1999 will be repeated. Then, the US was half-hearted in pressuring the authorities in Dubai to prevent the hijacked aircraft from taking off. Today, we are more likely to witness a US-sponsored replica of the audacious Israeli rescue at Entebbe. Israel has been quick to grasp the change in environment. Always robust in its techniques of retaliation, it has now perfected the art of pro-active counter-terrorism. The "targeted kil-

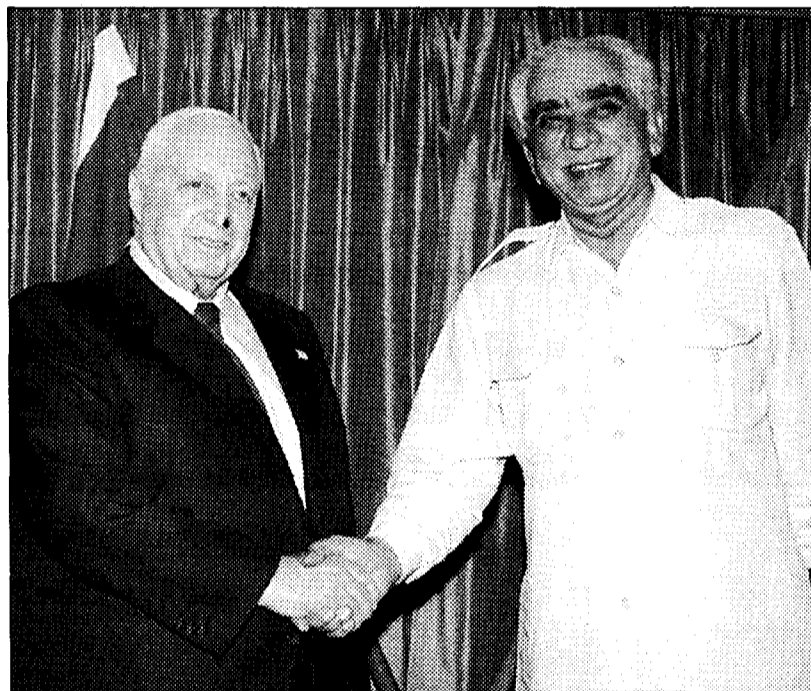
spite periodic assertions of fighting the terrorist problem on its own, New Delhi has always looked to others to facilitate a solution. It has looked to Washington to tighten the screws on General Pervez Musharraf, just as it is now looking to Israel to revolutionize counter-terrorism strategies within the country. Just as the liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban menace was secured through nominal investment in the Northern Alliance and no physical involvement in the war, there is a fond hope that something similar will recur in Pakistan. An America, exasperated by the shenanigans of the Inter-services Intelligence in Afghanistan and elsewhere, will, it is hoped, finally crack down hard on Pakistan and thereby put an end to our jihadi problem.

It may yet happen that way but there is little point believing that low investment will invariably fetch abundant returns. Strategic relationships are not built on gestures alone; their success depends equally, as the Israeli delegation stressed repeatedly, on reciprocity. India has enormous expectations from Israel and so does Israel from India. Yet, the process will not be assisted if the supply of the Phalcon radar system is accompanied by India maintaining its dismal record of voting for anti-Israel resolutions in the United Nations.

At the heart of the matter is India's imperfect transition from being a weak state to a nuclear power. The dreary extension of the hand of friendship to slippery dictators isn't only born out of conviction and temperament. As Robert Kagan has explained in his *Paradise and Power*, a lucid account of the US-Europe rift, tolerance is the only realistic response of weakness. America invoked it till the end of World War I when Europe called the shots militarily. Today, the boot is on the other foot with "old Europe", quite understandably, turning its back on its own history.

To translate the inspiring language of Wednesday's joint statement, therefore, necessitates a mindset change in India. It is neither desirable nor practical for India to emulate the anti-terrorism strategies of Israel. Expediency, however, demands that the new relationship with Israel is elevated to the level of a genuine strategic partnership. At the end of the day, both countries are keen that a successful war against terrorism cannot be fought without the participation of the only country whose definition of national interest is not circumscribed by geography. That means persuading Washington that our war is their war too. Conversely, it implies demonstrating that their war is our war too.

New York, Washington, Jerusalem, Hebron, Srinagar, Mumbai. We are in it together.



of them. Prior to the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, India's fulminations against terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir by *jihadis* from the Afghanistan war were hardly heeded. On the contrary, during the first administration of President Bill Clinton, US officials actively encouraged separatist forces like the Hurriyat Conference and even turned a blind eye to the Taliban menace in Afghanistan. Today, the mood in the US is different. There is a realization that Islamist terror groups, whether they go by the name of al Qaida, Hamas, Hizbollah or Harkatul-Ansar, are linked by a common antipathy to everything Western civilization holds dear. The avowed zero tolerance of terrorism is as much governed by the need to defend a way of life as with homeland security.

For India and, for that matter, Israel, Osama bin Laden is in many ways an unintended saviour. What was hitherto a lonely battle has caught the American imagination. It is inconceiv-

Developing strategic ties with Israel is tantamount to accepting a role in the chain of relationships that define Pax Americana

lings" of Hamas leaders may trigger more suicide bombers and a self-perpetuating cult of martyrdom, but in the diplomatic arena the pressure is on Yasser Arafat to dismantle terror groups as a precondition to meaningful talks on a separate Palestine state. "No dialogue with terrorists" has become an accepted principle of international relations.

If India had grasped this instantly, its response to the post-9/11 world would have been more sure-footed. De-

India-Israel ties a threat: Musharraf

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD, Sept. 12. — President Pervez Musharraf has described as “extremely” threatening the emerging friendship between India and Israel but declined to term the talk of India, Israel and US axis as anti-Muslim alliance.

Asked if he believed Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon’s recent visit to India was potentially threatening to Pakistan, Gen. Musharraf said on BBC’s *Talking Point* programme that, “Well it’s extremely (threatening) — the people here are taking it very seriously.”

“We’re watching whatever is happening and whatever statements are coming from across the border, and I think it’s a very sensitive issue. I only hope that the leadership of Israel, Prime Minister Sharon, understand the sensitivity of Pakistan to whatever happens between Israel and India.

“And I hope he is a straight man enough to understand the sensitivities of Pakistan and take all measures to address our sensitivity and maintain a degree of balance in



General Pervez Musharraf

The General said the attacks on churches and Christian institutions in Pakistan last year were a fallout of the happenings in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine

relationships,” Gen. Musharraf said. Asked whether the India, Israel and US axis could be described as an anti-Muslim alliance and whether it was time to build a Muslim military-political alliance to counter it, he said, “No, no, not at all. I don’t think they are meaning to create an anti-Muslim alliance. And if Israel and the USA are doing that, it’s extremely sad, I would say.

“But if they are trying to unite to create an anti-

Muslim military alliance, it’s the saddest day in the history of the world. I think this ought not to be done and I don’t think Israel and the USA are doing that at all”, he said.

“Now whether you are saying whether we would like to counter it with a Muslim military alliance — not at all, I think what we are trying to do is to bring this two-pronged strategy that I spoke of, that is the route forward and that is the part that we would like to take”, he said referring to his remarks on cementing relationships between Muslim countries and the West.

He said the attacks on churches and Christian institutions in Pakistan last year were a fallout of the happenings in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine.

“I think this is a most unfair comment that we haven’t done anything (to prevent attack on Christians). First of all, attacks on Christians in Pakistan never happened before, they only happened in roughly about one year ... with some churches, schools of Christians and hospitals of Christians were attacked.

India, Israel tie up to combat terror

Declaration omits Kashmir, Palestine

Saurabh Shukla
New Delhi, September 10

THOUGH TERROR cast its shadow on Ariel Sharon's visit — the bombings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem forced the Israeli premier to cut short his visit — India and Israel signalled their determination to go after terrorist groups.

Sharon's visit charted out the framework of Indo-Israeli strategic ties, despite differences on issues such as Palestine and Iran, Israel's enemy No. 1.

On Wednesday, marking the end of Sharon's visit, the two countries asked the international community to take "decisive" action against terrorism and condemn states and individuals who aid and abet terrorism across borders and provide terrorists sanctuary.

In the Delhi statement of Friendship and Cooperation between India and Israel issued at the end of the visit, the two countries omitted any reference to Palestine or its leadership or what Israel describes as Palestinian terrorism.

The statement finally took shape after protracted negotiations and made no specific reference to cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. From its wording, it was obvious that the two countries agreed to disagree on certain issues, especially Tel Aviv's perception of Yasser Arafat's leadership.

The statement said, "The two sides expressed their respective views." It called for a complete cessation of violence so that a conducive environment is created for the continuation of the dialogue. It also stressed the need for a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Describing the two countries as "partners" in the battle against terrorism, the Israeli premier offered all "material" support to destroy the roots of terrorism. This includes specialised surveillance equipment, training of personnel, cooperation in intelligence gathering, joint exercises and cooper-

Balance sheet



WHAT NEW DELHI GAINS

- ▶ Access to Israel's famed intelligence apparatus; training against terrorism
- ▶ Israeli know-how in desert agriculture, satellite technology
- ▶ Cleared air on relations with Iran — Israel's biggest enemy

WHAT SHARON TAKES HOME

- ▶ Relations have moved beyond arms deals to civilian sphere
- ▶ India to help Israel in diplomatic arena in UN and in third countries
- ▶ India warms up to democratic alliance against terrorism

ation to stop money laundering and terror funding. Sharon's visit also cemented the understanding that as "democracies" and "victims of terror" India, Israel and the US should fight the menace jointly.

That Israel would be India's long-term defence ally was clear after Sharon gave the assurance that his country would continue to provide defence equipment. The first of the big buys has already got the green light. Israel announced its decision to sell three Phalcon airborne early warning systems to India.

Earlier in the day, A.B. Vajpayee spoke to Sharon after his decision to leave early was conveyed to the PMO. Vajpayee condoled the deaths in the terrorist bombings in Israel. On the visit, he said it would "contribute greatly to the friendship and cooperation between the two countries".

Related reports on Page 4

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 SEP 2003

Sharon clears Phalcon sale

India to gain mastery of sub-continent's skies

HTC and Agencies
New Delhi, September 10

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon, who cut short his visit to India after two terror bombings back home, left only after clearing the sale of the Phalcon early-warning radar system.

Declaring that growing Indo-Israeli defence ties have come out of the "closet", Israel announced its decision to sell three Phalcons to India, but said a decision on the Arrow anti-ballistic missile would depend on US clearance.

The world's most advanced AEW&C (airborne early-warning, command and control) system, the Phalcon, mounted on the Russian IL-76 aircraft, costs \$1 billion (Rs 4,700 crore) and will enable India to have mastery of the sub-continent's skies.

"There is no major obstacle to the Phalcon deal since the US has given its approval," Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yosef Lapid told reporters here. Highlighting the immense scope for forging better and stronger business ties, Ariel Sharon said, "I see my visit to this grand country as the climax of our relations."



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at an interactive session in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Terming it a productive visit, Sharon, who called on President APJ Abdul Kalam and met Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and other key leaders, said relations between the two countries should be "based on reciprocity".

The Israeli leader appreciated the warm welcome accorded to him. "I felt that feeling of friendship here." Observing that Israel was the only democracy in West Asia, Sharon said it was a "small and embattled oasis in a hostile region". Things would have been better if Israel was surrounded by democracies, he felt.

"Struggling against brutal ter-

High-octane deals

▲ MASTERY OF SKIES:

Phalcon radar sale cleared, negotiations next

▲ MISSILE MUST WAIT:

America has to clear sale of Arrow anti-missile

▲ SKY ISN'T THE LIMIT:

Israel to mount camera on Indian satellite

rism and other grave threats to its security Israel nonetheless remains engaged in a search for a

urable peace with all its neighbours," he said.

Sharon said his government was prepared to make "painful concessions for the sake of genuine peace" in West Asia, but stated it would not compromise on the security of its citizens. He said Israel was ready to offer the benefits of its expertise to India and would welcome a reciprocal effort on Delhi's part.

CII president Anand Mahindra said India's burgeoning telecommunications infrastructure provided an ideal market for Israeli technology and companies in this field.

1 SEP 2003

Power of three will battle terror: Israel

Twin blasts force Sharon to cut short visit

By Rajat Pandit
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The spectre of violence cast its shadow on the first-ever visit of an Israeli premier to India, with Ariel Sharon returning home ahead of his scheduled departure on Wednesday night following bomb blasts in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, which killed 15 people, and a "retaliatory" Israeli airstrike in Gaza, which killed two Palestinians.

Before leaving, Mr Sharon declared that India and Israel should jointly combat the "scourge of international terrorism". Israeli deputy PM Yosef Lapid said India, Israel and the US were creating a triangular axis, in "an abstract sense", to counter this menace. "We have had to cut short our visit to India for the very same reason we came to India..that is international terror," he said.

Tuesday night's bomb blasts came days after Israel attempted to assassinate Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas. In interactions with the Indian media, Israeli leaders rejected suggestions that Tel Aviv's policy of targeting Hamas leaders for elimination and imposing collective punishments on Palestinians was fuelling terrorism.

However, that the official Indian view is different is clear from a remark Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee made in an interview to the Israeli newspaper 'Haaretz'. "Violence does not contribute to anything," he said when asked about the Sharon government's attempt on Sheikh Yassin's life.

Even as Mr Sharon and Mr Vajpayee signed a joint declaration heavily focussed on the need to jointly fight terror, the mounting cycle of violence in West Asia is making the task of New Delhi, which wants to strike a balance between traditional friend Palestine and new ally

Israel, more and more difficult.

"The two sides expressed their respective views (about the West Asia imbroglio) and called for a complete cessation of violence so that a conducive environment is created for continuation of the dialogue," the joint statement noted, in an obvious reference to the differences between New Delhi and Tel Aviv on the Palestine issue.

Significantly, the statement calls for cessation of vi-



An eye for an eye..
The window in front of a poster of English soccer star David Beckham is broken by shrapnel after the suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

olence—and not terrorism—as a precondition for dialogue in West Asia, reflecting India's traditional view that it is not just the Palestinians who have an obligation in this regard.

At the same time, however, India and Israel declared their resolve to be "partners in the battle" against terrorism. They condemned terrorism in all its "forms and manifestations", including the states and individuals who aid it, and called upon the international community to take "decisive action" against it.

Mr Vajpayee accepted Mr Sharon's invitation for a visit to Israel.

Phalcon deal on course

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Israel on Wednesday said there were no more obstacles in selling three Phalcon early warning radars to India and the deal could be "closed" in a matter of "a few weeks or months".

"There is no obstacle for the Phalcon deal to be concluded as the US has given its approval..the road is now clear for an agreement. It will ensure that India can keep its skies under surveillance," said Israeli deputy Prime Minister Yosef Lapid, declaring that the expanding bilateral defence ties had now come out of the "closet".

Earlier, a senior Israeli official had said that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had raised the issue of Indo-Iran relations with Indian leaders, including Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee.

The official said Israel was worried about the leakage of its military technology to a country it considered "the epicentre of terrorism". According to him, Iran, along with Syria, was supporting forces opposed to Israel with weapons and funding.

But, he added, "We got answers to the questions raised and we are satisfied with the answers."

New Delhi and Tel Aviv are also negotiating the possible sale of the Arrow-II anti-ballistic missile defence system to India. Mr Lapid said Israel was keen to sell the Arrow system to India but it needed American approval since the US was a collaborator in the project.

'INDIA, ISRAEL, USA IN UNWRITTEN AXIS'

Terror cuts short Sharon trip

5/11/9

9.20.03
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Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 10. — Having to cut short his visit to India for the “very reason he came here (to cooperate against terrorism)”, the Israeli Prime Minister returned to Tel Aviv tonight, but not before both countries fine-tuned their “common language” against terror in a joint statement.

Without naming any countries, India and Israel condemned “states and individuals who aid and abet” terrorism and sought the establishment of a just and durable peace in West Asia. In a statement issued at the end of Mr Sharon’s three-day visit, the two countries emphasised the need for “a complete cessation of violence” in West Asia to create a conducive atmosphere for resolving the lingering crisis in the region.

Although it skipped a mention of the defence co-operation between the two countries, the “Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation Between India and Israel” expressed satisfaction over the growth in bilateral ties.

Mr Sharon invited Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to Israel, an offer the latter accepted “with pleasure”. Mr Sharon appeared overwhelmed by the “warmth” of the reception he received, and said Indians

“would always find friends” in Israel, even if they could not reciprocate the welcome here.

Terrorism was uppermost in the series of exchanges over the past two days. Israel’s Deputy Prime Minister Mr Yosef Lapid said an “unwritten and abstract” axis with India and the USA had been created to combat international terrorism. “There is a mutual interest of the three countries in making the world a more secure place for all. There is American support for this unwritten axis.” His government was willing to provide India gadgets and electronic fences to fight terror.

On yesterday’s blasts in Israel, Mr Lapid said: “We’re cutting short our visit for the very reason that brought us to India, which is terrorism.”

On Kashmir, he outlined Israel’s stand saying: “We respect India’s sovereignty over Kashmir.” Will the enhanced defence co-operation between India and Israel destabilise the sub-continent? Mr Lapid said: “Every country has the right to defend itself.”

In Dhaka, Pakistan’s foreign minister Mr Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri said the boost in the Indo-Israeli military cooperation would affect the strategic balance in the sub-continent, PTI adds.

More reports on page 4

Phalcon eyes for India

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 10. — The Israeli Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Yosef Lapid, today said his government would sell three Phalcon radars necessary for the IAF Airborne Warning and Control System. Defence sources said while India had agreed on principle, price negotiations were on.

“There is no major obstacle for the \$US 1 billion deal on Phalcons to be concluded as the US has given its approval,” Mr Lapid said. The Indian defence ministry made no official comment on the statement though the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, is likely to bring up the issue tomorrow. Mr Lapid, however, did not specify a time-frame for closing the deal.

There is still no movement on the possible transfer of the surface-to-air Arrow-2 anti-missile missile, Mr Lapid said, as this would require US approval. Since the missile was developed with US collaboration, Washington nod was needed to effect a sale.

India, Israel plan to boost ties on agricultural front

1079
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: While Israeli arms and hardware for defence systems may be hogging the limelight, its expertise is much sought after on other battle-fronts—like water management in semi-arid conditions, combating desertification and developing drought-resistant crops.

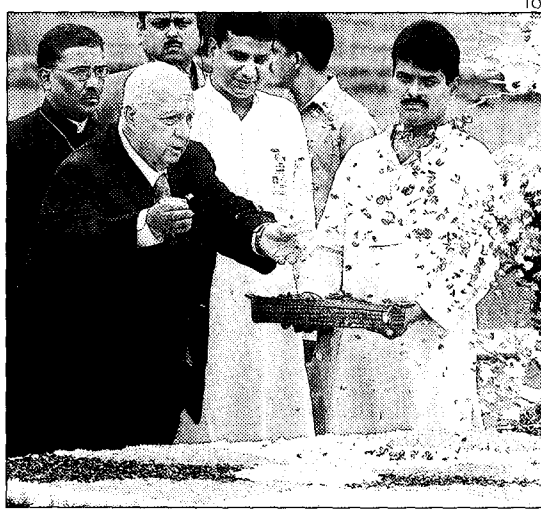
Israeli agriculture minister Yisrael Katz and his counterpart, Rajnath Singh, on Tuesday inked a memorandum of understanding, 10 years after the two countries had signed the first one which was never implemented. On Wednesday, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon is scheduled to visit an ongoing Indo-Israeli project at the Pusa campus of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute.

The project demonstrates resource-conserving technologies for intensive and commercial horticultural cultivation on urban fringes, under protected plastic house conditions.

The Pusa project is not limited to demonstration. The aim, said the agriculture ministry, was to train farmers, professionals and NGOs and conduct site-specific research to make the technology suitable for different farm realities. Erratic electricity, for example, can be tackled through a low-pressure, plastic water tank-based irrigation.

Besides, both India and Israel are hoping agricultural ties will gain momentum even as the World Trade Organisation meeting gets underway in Cancun on Wednesday. For starters they have decided on a joint committee of officers on agriculture issues, particularly the exchange of the latest technologies in horticulture, floriculture and aquaculture.

India is eyeing Israel's expertise in water management and its drought-resistant crops. Israel is also showing interest in freshwater aquaculture and is keen to take lessons on intensive fish farming and exchange genetic material.



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pays floral tributes at Raj Ghat on Tuesday.

One, apparently not very successful farm project, was in Maharashtra, where an attempt was made to focus on precision, computer-aided, drip-irrigated cotton cultivation over 250 hectares in Akola and 100 hectares in Parbhani.

A second pilot project, seemingly more successful, is on micro-irrigation in Kuppam, in Andhra's Chittoor district. In addition, there have been joint ventures with Indian companies.

On the environment front, the two sides have agreed to set up a joint working group and work on plans over three years to promote collaboration between research institutions, know-how on afforesting arid areas, pollution control, wastewater management and reuse.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 SEP 2003

All-out bid to compete with Russia in arms contracts

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: After overtaking France and the UK in the race to supply military hardware and software to India, Israel is now aiming to provide stiff competition to Russia if big-ticket deals, like the Phalcon early warning radars, materialise in the near future.

India's AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) project involves the integration of the Phalcon radar and communication system with the Russian Ilyushin-76 heavy transport military aircraft.

The recent US nod to Israel for the proposed sale of three Phalcon radars to India is a big step forward in finalising the over \$ 1-billion deal. AWACS can detect cruise missiles, low-flying aircraft and other air intrusions much earlier than ground-based radars.

Israeli defence ministry director-general Major Gen Amos Yaron, who is accompanying Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, had meetings with IAF chief Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) chief V.K. Aatre on Tuesday to review the progress of different ongoing defence projects.

Maj-Gen Yaron is slated to hold talks with senior Indian defence officials, including defence secretary Ajay Prasad, on Wednesday to discuss how to bolster defence ties be-

tween the two countries.

The two countries have several multi-million dollar contracts in the surveillance sector, with India already getting the Green Pine phased-array systems, Aerostat radars and tripod-mounted battlefield surveillance radars. Israel is

also aiding avionic and weapon upgrades for IAF fighters and helicopter gunships. India is also going in for more Searcher-II and Heron unmanned aerial vehicles or spy drones and is negotiating for joint production of the high-altitude Herons with Israel.

Curry queen causes a stir

By N. Vidyasagar
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Attractive and stately, a 5-foot-7-inch member of the Israel business delegation is turning heads for reasons that transcend trade.



Reena Pushkarna Born in New Delhi to a Jewish mother and a Sikh father, Reena Pushkarna—prominently known as Israel's curry queen—is yet another example of how the Great Indian Diaspora is playing a role in diplomacy and trade.

"My mother would have distributed sweets to everyone in Mumbai if she was alive to know that I am part of a delegation to

bridge business and cultural ties with India," smiles Ms Pushkarna, who is credited with introducing Indian cuisine to Israel a couple of decades back.

Currently, she owns a chain of seven prominent restaurants in Israel, including Tandoori, where the famous peace talks, starring former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, were reported to have first started. Ms Pushkarna also sells Indian and Thai ethnic food under the brandname 'Reena' to a 170-strong supermarket chain in Israel.

"I was jumping with joy when we crossed the Army hospital in Daula Kuan on the way from the airport. I told everyone that I was born in that hospital," says Ms Pushkarna, who will lend her expertise to help other delegates negotiate and shop in India.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 SEP 2003

Sharon visit may forge strategic axis

Bush administration assures India, Israel of its support

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Bringing the rapidly evolving relationship over the last decade firmly out of the closet, India and Israel on Tuesday decided to follow "innovative strategies" to further expand strategic ties and boost annual bilateral trade from the present \$1.3 billion.

The two countries also decided to explore new avenues like cooperation in space and other frontier areas. India and Israel, for instance, could focus on joint ventures in the field of micro-satellite technology, futuristic combat unmanned aerial vehicles or information technology.

"We are very much interested in developing and strengthening relations with India because India is one of the most important countries in the world," said visiting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Mr Sharon, the first Israeli premier to visit India since the two countries established full-fledged diplomatic relations in 1992, said he hoped his visit would contribute towards strengthening bilateral relations and help to achieve "many things together in many fields".

Terrorism figured prominently in the high-level meetings which followed soon after. The two countries agreed on the necessity for all countries to cooperate closely in strengthening the global war against terrorism, said MEA officials. What was left unsaid was filled in by an official travelling with Mr Sharon's delegation. He was quoted as saying that the 9/11 terror strikes in the US and the global campaign against terrorism had "created a new opportunity" for building stronger ties

Ariel view



Six pacts signed

India and Israel on Tuesday signed six pacts on environment, health, culture, education, visas and combating drug trafficking

Guns and grains

Israel seeks to outgun Russia in supplying defence material to India while helping Delhi to develop drought-resistant crops. P5

among India, Israel and the US in a "trilateral strategic" axis.

Meanwhile, the US has vigorously backed strong ties between India and Israel, describing both countries as "our friends" and offering to work constructively with them where US support or approval was needed, our Washington correspondent reports.

State Department spokesman R. Boucher, initially described Mr Sharon's visit as a bilateral matter, but then added that the US had excellent relations with both countries before virtually triangulating the issue. "I suppose we're always glad when our friends make friends with each other and work together. So we'll work with both India and Israel," he said. Asked if Washington had any objection to arms deal between the two countries, he said it depended on what was being sold, but pointed out that "there have been sales before that we have raised no objection to".

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 SEP 2003

Sharon in India

5-8 9/9
Delhi's concern should be common interests

After the rapprochement with Beijing now it is Tel Aviv's turn, with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in New Delhi with a high-powered delegation. The first-ever visit to India by an Israeli prime minister has aroused controversy in some quarters. The charge is that Sharon has blood on his hands, but the same quarters didn't take umbrage when Prime Minister Vajpayee shook hands with the same Chinese leaders who were around at the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre, or take a much harder line on Tibetan aspirations than Sharon does on Palestinian. Sharon has recognised that Palestinians are "under occupation" and has accepted, at least formally, the roadmap whose goal is Palestinian independence in three years.

It must also be noted that despite New Delhi's sustained wooing of Arab countries the Organisation of Islamic Conference still passes pro-Pakistan resolutions, while Tel Aviv has consistently backed India over Kashmir. Tel Aviv is now our second largest arms supplier after Moscow, and negotiations are under way to secure the sophisticated Phalcon early warning system (which Beijing wanted but failed to obtain from Tel Aviv). Perhaps the biggest prize during Sharon's current visit would be if Delhi could obtain Israel's Arrow anti-missile systems that are integrated with the Phalcon — it would give India something of an answer to the nuclear threat held out by Pakistan.

If Tel Aviv bashers constitute one fringe of Indian politics, there's another fringe that would like to rush to embrace Tel Aviv on the assumption that it is anti-Muslim. This, however, is a fallacy — Israel is actually surrounded by Muslim states and sees engaging them as an essential national interest, as long as they recognise Israel's right to exist. Thus Sharon's visit to India does not mean that Delhi gives up on its ties with the Arab world, that would be foolish in the extreme.

Rather it should maintain even-handed contacts with both, much as Beijing does. It is a question of recognising what interests Delhi and Tel Aviv have in common, and then acting on them. Other than cooperation on security issues there is also considerable scope for economic and cultural exchange. Israel is a computer as well as agricultural technology powerhouse, and bilateral trade on civilian items now comes to \$1.6 billion annually.

It is a mark of political maturity, therefore, that even Sonia Gandhi will be meeting Sharon, as leader of the Opposition. The Left may cavil, but it is testimony to growing economic contacts between India and Israel that even Jyoti Basu and Somnath Chatterjee felt it necessary to visit Israel to woo investments for West Bengal. All the more reason, therefore, to make Prime Minister Sharon and his delegation feel welcome.

Sharon in Delhi to firm up ties

Sr 1 9/9
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 8. — The Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon, arrived here this evening, amid unprecedented security, at the start of a four-day visit that is meant to pave the way for a further consolidation of bilateral ties. Levels of security akin to those made during the visit of US President Mr Bill Clinton have been made in the Capital to ensure a trouble-free visit.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was confident that Mr Sharon's visit, the first ever by an Israeli Prime Minister, would pave the way to further bolster bilateral ties, but added that India remained committed to the Palestinian cause.

"*Hamare sambandh aur majboot honge* (our relations will be further boosted)," he said at the Cabinet swearing-in this morning. Asked whether there was any dilution by India of the Palestinian cause, the Prime Minister said "We've taken a principled stand on it."

The Israeli leader — who arrived at the head of a delegation, including three Cabinet ministers and around 30 heads of defence and business organisations — will hold a series of discussions with President APJ Abdul Kalam, Mr Vajpayee and his Cabinet colleagues tomorrow.

The talks are expected to focus on international issues, especially the developments in West Asia, as well as bilateral ties.

Mr Sharon's presence in the country on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks is intended to express solidarity with a fellow democracy faced with the threat of terror.

Editorial: Sharon in India,
page 8
Photograph on page 4

9 SEP 2003

THE STATESMAN

Sharon comes calling today

7/9 11-1
 While welcoming Israeli premier, India must not ignore Arab feelings

By Manoj Joshi
 TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Arik Sharon arrives here on Monday expecting to open a new chapter in relations between the two countries. Not since the Shah of Iran came to India in 1978 has the visit of a foreign head of government been more controversial than this first-ever visit by an Israeli leader.

Accompanied by three of his cabinet colleagues, Mr Sharon will call on President Kalam and meet with Prime Minister Vajpayee and deputy PM Advani. Besides other cabinet members, he will also meet the leader of the opposition, Sonia Gandhi. His schedule also includes a trip to Mumbai.

With Israel-Palestine relations plumbing a new nadir, Mr Sharon's India-visit has expectedly aroused different emotions at home. The Sangh parivar's welcome is premised on the belief that India has a strategic and ideological identity of interests with Israel. Both confront Islamic fundamentalism and Israel offers lessons on how best to deal with Muslims. However, this worldview is both simplistic and wrong-headed.

There are good, pragmatic but unsentimental reasons for welcoming Mr Sharon, but not his ability to clamp down on hapless Palestinians. Israel is a major, though not the only, source of high technology for defence and agriculture. But everything we get is paid for in hard cash. If India needs the products, Israel needs the market since it is cut off from the lucrative Arab and Muslim

world and so the Indian connection is more than welcome.

India is a large country and its foreign policy has to be far more nuanced than that of Israel, which is peopled largely by persons of one faith.

Relations with Israel are important, but those with the Arab world are not to be sneezed at. It is not advisable for the government to ignore the feelings of the Arab world, and that of Indian Muslims, who are overwhelmingly against Israel's Palestine policy.

In a diverse country, it is not unusual for ethnic and religious groups to push foreign policy in this or that direction.

There are two important differences in Israel and India's security situation. India has to deal with not just the Kashmiri Muslim rebellion, but the radicalisation of a section of the country's Muslim population, for which the parivar bears great responsibility. Israel, on the other hand, is dealing with a conquered populace whose right to resist is paramount.

The world today has come around to believe that nothing justifies terrorism, but no sensible counter-terrorism strategy can ignore the root causes that compel people to blow themselves up for a particular cause.

The goal is to see whether or not it is possible to address the ones that appear rational.

Mr Sharon will be accompanied by his deputy, Yosef Lapid, minister for education and culture Limor Livnat and agriculture minister Yisrael Katz.



Ariel Sharon

● Edit: Shalom Sharon, Page 12

7 SEP 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Shalom! Ariel Sharon



Ariel Sharon's visit to India this coming week, the first ever by an Israeli prime minister, will finally put behind us a dreary chapter in the history of our relations with the outside world. For more than four decades, until we re-established our diplomatic ties with Israel under PV Narasimha Rao's prime ministership, our 'traditional' stand in favour of the Palestinians doubtless served our interests. It enabled us to take care of our oil imports, ensured jobs for thousands of our people in the Gulf (which, in turn, kept afloat our foreign exchange reserves) and allowed us to occupy the high moral ground. We could tell the world that Palestinian aspirations for a state of their own were rooted in the principle of self-determination while Israeli actions testified to the Jewish state's vile, self-aggrandising ambitions.

But this is only part of the story. The other part, which successive governments in New Delhi were unwilling to admit, was that two other considerations also fashioned our stand: dogmatic anti-Americanism fanned by fellow-travelling academics, politicians and bureaucrats to ensure Soviet support for our foreign policy objectives and the desperate need that avowedly secular parties felt to keep on the good side of the Muslim electorate. It is this vote bank phenomenon that explained in large measure our refusal to build bridges with Israel.

Our double-speak was galling on several counts. We were willing to back to the hilt tin-pot dictators and sundry sheikhs but not a vibrant democracy. We chose to forego trade opportunities with a country whose annual per capita GNP was higher than that of many of its neighbours. We deprived ourselves of sophisticated technology, including in the field of armaments, and instead played footsie with regimes which could not manufacture a safety pin.

None of this is to suggest that Israel's policies towards the Palestinians have been above criticism. This is plainly not the case. The policies have been short-sighted, often repressive and, above all, self-defeating. But on its part, the Palestinian leadership too has been unwilling or unable to deliver on its promises to contain Hamas and other terrorist groups. Peace for Israelis and a state for Palestinians are nowhere in sight.

The fact remains, however, that as far as India is concerned, our 'traditional' support to the Palestinian cause and to the Arab world at large, has fetched a most perfunctory quid pro quo. We have received no worthwhile backing from them in the resolution of problems we face in our neighbourhood, especially on Kashmir. Israel, on the other hand, has not only given us such backing but it has also extended to us its full cooperation to shore up our security and participated actively in our economic resurgence.

More is in the offing thanks to Prime Minister Vajpayee's pro-active policies ably conducted behind the scenes by National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra. During his visit Ariel Sharon is thus expected to finalise the Phalcon deal after persuading the United States to drop its opposition to it. This state-of-the-art early warning system will allow us to gain a decisive superiority over Pakistan in air combat. Also on the cards is a deal to provide India with Arrow, the anti-missile system.

The large delegation of influential businessmen that will accompany Sharon bears witness to Israel's commitment to intensify its economic relations with India. Add to this the measures the two countries are expected to take to strengthen their already close cooperation to confront the menace of terrorism. This is why, regardless of our reservations about this or the other aspect of the Israeli PM's policies and methods, we must summon the grace to say to him loudly and clearly: Shalom! Ariel Sharon.

Delhi tempers Sharon show

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Sept. 5: Two days before Ariel Sharon lands, India has made it clear it considers Yasser Arafat — a man the US and Israel love to hate — to be the main leader of Palestine.

"We accept and recognise Yasser Arafat as the President of Palestine," a senior Indian official said, adding Mahmoud Abbas was "only President Arafat's Prime Minister".

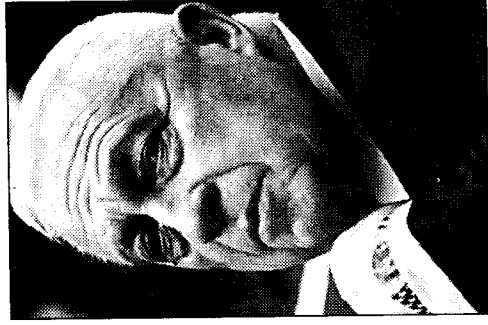
The Americans and the Israelis have made it clear that they would like the world community to ignore Arafat and start focusing on Abbas as the new leader of Palestine.

Sharon's visit to India — rescheduled to begin from Monday — will be the first by an Israeli Prime Minister to Delhi. It is also the first Asian country Sharon will be visiting.

Although his trip signals the maturing of bilateral ties in the last decade, Delhi appears to be making a conscious decision not to go overboard. This is aimed at assuring the domestic audience and the Arab world that there will not be any fundamental change in Delhi's stand on Palestine.

But it will be interesting to note the choice of words — especially on terrorism and the need to fight it unitedly — in the joint statement likely to be issued at the end of Sharon's visit.

"It is more of a plus for Israel than India," a senior official said of Sharon's four-day visit. He said India, with its billion people



Sharon

and secular credentials, was perhaps the only country where Jews had never been persecuted. So Sharon — whose hard line on Palestine has made him unpopular in several countries — was looking for legitimacy by coming to India.

During Palestinian foreign minister Nabil Sha'ath's visit to Delhi last week, a deliberate attempt was made to assure him there was no watering down of India's stand on Palestine. Today, Delhi decided to repeat it.

"Palestine is a cardinal point of our foreign policy since independence," a senior foreign ministry official said. On a possible move by Israel to get Arafat expelled from Palestine, he said: "Such speculations are only in media reports. But I think the Israelis will think very carefully before taking any such decision."

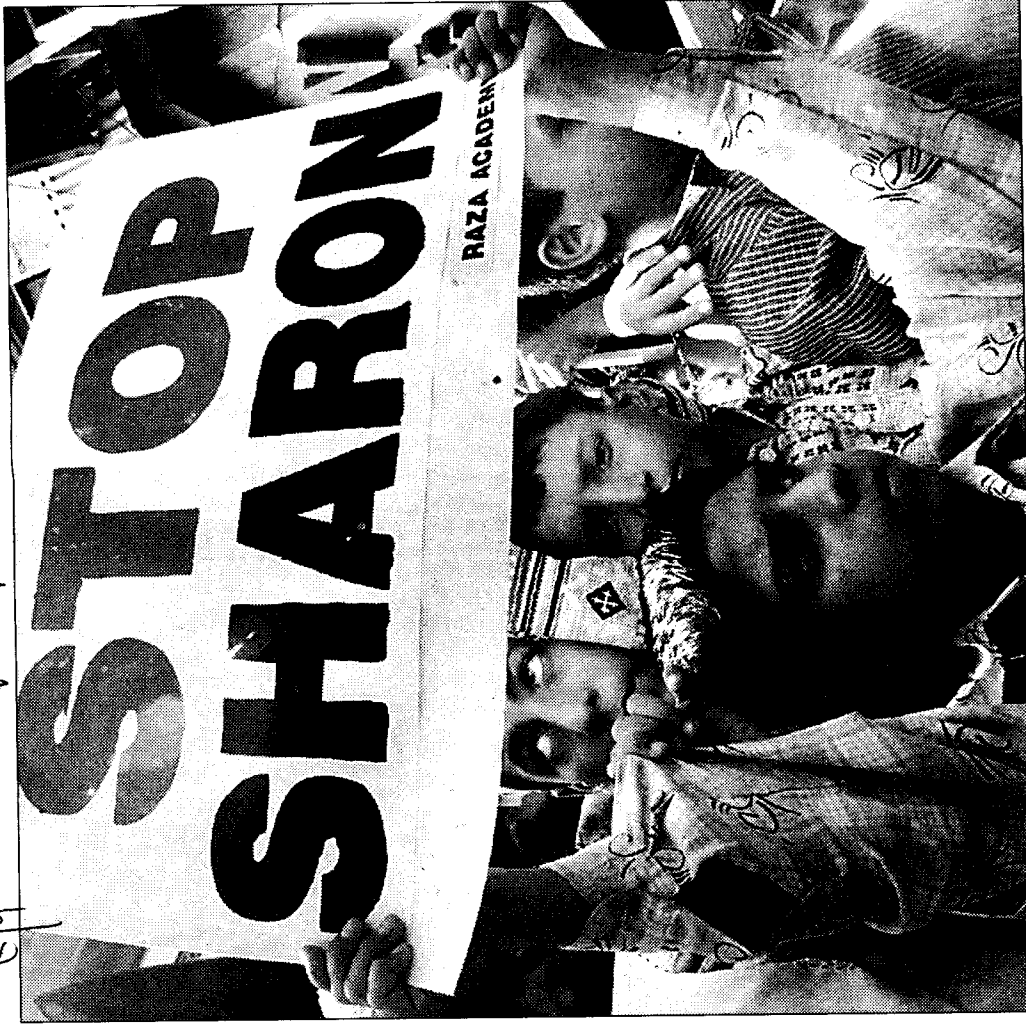
The remarks are indication that though India considers its growing relationship with Israel as important, it is not willing to nurture it at the cost of traditional friend Palestine.

A number of agreements on agriculture, education, culture and health is likely to be signed. But no defence deals will be struck through the business delegation — of some 30 members — coming with Sharon will include some persons from the Israeli arms industry.

Sharon is due to meet almost all the top members of the Indian leadership, including President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, his deputy L.K. Advani and leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi. He is also scheduled to address captains of business and industry in Delhi and Mumbai as strengthening business ties is one of the main objectives.

India has said it will not play the role of an "honest broker" between Israel and Palestine to ensure that peace returns to West Asia. But it will not hesitate to state how it perceives the situation evolving there and how the peace process can be revived.

The Indian leadership will hear out the Israeli side of the story. But it will also share with Sharon the information it has got from its interaction with Palestine and the Arab world.



A demonstration in Mumbai against Sharon's visit. (AFP)

Sonia to break ranks

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Sept. 5: The Congress has quietly distanced itself from the decision of other Opposition friends to protest the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The principal Opposition party will do nothing that will be undiplomatic and against well-established parliamentary conventions.

Sharon will be the first-ever Israeli Prime Minister to visit the country. As the leader of the Opposition, Congress president Sonia Gandhi will call on

with Israel in 1992, it would not be proper to protest the visit of Sharon, they pointed out.

They emphasised that it was the then Congress government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao which had established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992.

The leaders, however, made it clear that the party's position of supporting the Palestine cause and an independent state of Palestine remained undiluted.

Meeting Sharon does not mean that the Congress would dilute its support for the cause of the Palestinian people, they pointed out.

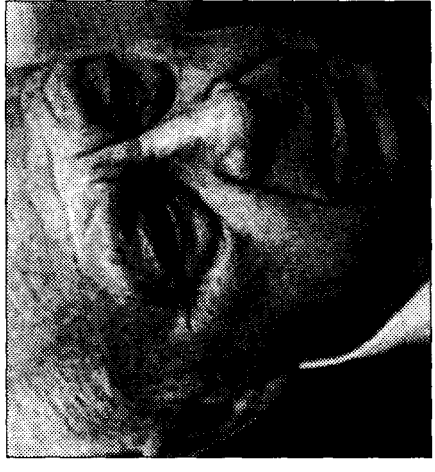
"It is a well established convention that the leader of the Opposition calls on a visiting head of a state/government. This convention will be observed when Sharon visits the country," party spokesperson Anand Sharma said today.

The Congress will not join other Opposition parties like the Left, the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Janata Dal (S) in street protests against the visit.

Congress leaders pointed out that VVIP visits were part of normal, full diplomatic relations between countries. Having established full diplomatic ties

Six pacts, but none on defence

Arif Khan News Staff



Mr Ariel Sharon

Statesman News Service

By J. J. J. J.

NEW DELHI, Sept. 5. — The first ever visit by an Israeli Prime Minister is expected to yield a joint statement, but an agreement on the wording of the statement has not been arrived at two days before Mr Ariel Sharon is due here.

And though six agreements are due to be signed during the visit, beginning Monday, there are none on defence procurement, officials said today, because talks on various defence deals have not "ripened" to the point where pacts will be signed. The defence minister will hold talks with the visiting delegation on a vari-

ety of defence procurements. The agreements, ready for signing after Mr Sharon holds delegation-level talks with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee on Tuesday, relate to environmental protection; combating psychotropic and illicit drugs and narcotics; visa-free travel for diplomats; health and medicine; cooperation in education and cultural linkages.

Besides delegation-level talks, headed by the Prime Minister, on Tuesday, Mr Sharon is scheduled to meet President APJ Abdul Kalam, while the deputy Prime Minister, Mr LK Advani, Mr Yashwant Sinha and Mr Jaswant Singh will call on Mr Sharon.

During the talks, India will take up

Palestinian concerns over the roadmap for peace in West Asia, but senior officials ruled out the possibility of India playing a mediatory role as the 'honest broker' between Israel and the Palestinians.

Asked to give details of India's position on West Asia and on the possibility of Israel expelling Mr Yasser Arafat, an official said: "We haven't seen any particular move to expel him. Israel will think carefully before it takes such a step."

Mr Sharon will be in Mumbai on 11 September and will address a CII business meet. He will also meet members of the Jewish community before flying for Tel Aviv.

Sharon visit set to fire up Indo-Israeli ties

By Rajat Pandit
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: From anti-missile systems to high-tech radars, from spy drones to night-vision equipment, Israel has rapidly emerged as the second-largest arms supplier to India after Russia over the last few years.



Ariel Sharon

This expanding defence relationship will be further consolidated when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, accompanied by several heads of defence companies, arrives in India on Monday.

The government decision on Wednesday to get seven Israeli shipborne electronic warfare systems, at a cost of Rs 480 crore, is just the latest indicator of the growing bilateral ties after diplomatic relations were established 11 years ago.

Defence sources say India's average annual purchases from Israel are now hovering around \$1 billion. "When western countries were denying us frontline technology, Israel stepped in. During the 1999 Kargil conflict, we made several emergency arms purchases from Israel...Though they

charged quite a bit, they delivered swiftly," said a senior officer.

A major chunk of the imported equipment to modernise army battalions—as part of the Rs 3,290-crore project approved by the government—is likely to come from Israel.

This will include night-vision capabilities through more hand-held thermal imagers, costing Rs 3 lakh per unit.

Similarly, Israel will figure in the army's plan to bolster its lethal firepower, anti-IED (improvised explosive device) and communication capabilities. India is already acquiring Israeli Tavor-21 5.56mm standard assault rifles, Galil 7.62mm sniper rifles and advanced VHF radios.

One big-ticket deal expected soon is the \$1 billion contract for Israeli "Phalcon" early warning radars for the Indian AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) project.

Another big venture being discussed is the Arrow-II anti-ballistic missile defence system, with Tel Aviv wanting New Delhi to invest in its development programme. But this will require a nod from the US.

The Navy, in turn, is keen to acquire 10 more Israeli "Barak" anti-missile defence systems, costing Rs 100 crore each, in addition to the seven already procured for its major warships.

India figures on Israel's radar because Israel finds connections in New Delhi useful

What's love got to do with it?

Most Indians familiar with the guest-list of presidents, prime ministers, kings and emirs who descend on New Delhi every year with the end of summer will approve of India's invitation to Israel's prime minister to visit New Delhi for the first time since the Jewish state was established 55 years ago. Many of those who have been fence-sitters on this issue have been swayed by the August 25 bombings in Mumbai and think of Ariel Sharon's forthcoming visit in terms of an Indo-Israeli alliance against Islamic terrorism.

This column has enthusiastically endorsed the idea of closer Indo-Israeli ties, arguing forcefully in favour of diplomatic relations with Israel when New Delhi was pussyfooting on the issue. It advocated a security relationship with Tel Aviv when opinion in North and South Blocks was heavily weighted towards a more cautious — and surreptitious — approach.

Time was when members of the first delegation to Israel from the National Defence College in New Delhi were told not to talk about their trip to the media and the Indian ambassador in Tel Aviv urged this writer long after the visit had taken place not to write about it. India and Israel have come a long, long way since the days when deals had to be made in secret.

Now India is at the other — and rather worrying — extreme. Many of those who are enthusiastic about a visit by Sharon make the fanciful assumption that because India and Israel are both victims of terrorism, the sky is the limit to their bilateral relations. The prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is fond of using the term "natural allies" to describe India's relations with the United States of America, but to many Indians, it is Israel which fits this definition. At the least, they would like to see Israel incorporated into this projected "natural" alliance of India and the US.

The first visit by an Israeli prime minister to India is an occasion to take a hard look at some of the misconceptions which have led to an uplift in New Delhi's bonhomie with Tel Aviv in the public domain and analyse the potential pitfalls in India's ties with the Jewish state — if only to avoid disenchantment in future or at worst, a backlash.

Those who advocate an unfettered embrace of Israel by India fail to recognize that few other countries have pursued foreign and security policies as successfully as Israel since World War II. Those policies are determined by two yardsticks: Israel's interest and protection for the Jewish diaspora. Is-

rael has been successful in carrying out such policies because they are backed by national will and a determination to see them through. Besides, few other countries have the capability, backed by a global Jewish network, to ensure their implementation.

Indians tend to overlook the reality that India figures on Israel's radar not because of any love, sentiment or romanticism of the kind fuelled in the former Soviet Union by Raj Kapoor. India is there because Israel finds connections in New Delhi useful.

One example will illustrate this. Some two years ago, when Indian *jawans* were serving as peacekeepers in Lebanon as part of the United Nations interim force in Lebanon, Israel launched a campaign to discredit the Indian army contingent there. When three Israeli soldiers were kidnapped by the militant Hezbollah, the Israelis orchestrated a disinformation campaign — first in their media, which was picked up by the international media — that the Hezbollah had bought scores of Indian soldiers with a few thousand dollars to help the militants. It was the seamiest allegation ever levelled against an Indian military unit abroad since New Delhi started taking part in UN peacekeeping half a century ago.

All this while, Israeli diplomats at the UN were apologizing to their Indian counterparts in private for concocting and then leaking the allegation, which they duly conceded, was untrue and could not, in any case, be proven. The Israeli diplomats candidly told members of India's permanent mission to the UN that their objective was to discredit the UN operation in Lebanon and not the Indian army. They wanted the UN out of the way and the Indians just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time in Israel's strategy. To call the plan diabolical would be an understatement, but it is an example of how Israel will stop at nothing to enhance what it sees as its national interest.

Because Israel has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, abjured ratification of the comprehensive test ban treaty and is widely credited with possession of nuclear weapons without being part of the nuclear club, there is a widely held presumption in India that New Delhi and Tel Aviv see eye to eye on the nuclear question. Israel prefers to be opaque on this issue and its leaders and officials

prefer not to talk about it with Indians. But if you press them on this subject, they will tell you that their stand on the nuclear issue is clearly anti-Muslim with that of New Delhi. In India, the national consensus is that the issue of non-proliferation is a global issue. India tested its nuclear weapons in 1974 and again in 1998 because the in-

was regional, not global. Another popular misconception in India is that Israel is anti-Muslim. Zionists in Israel and among the Jewish diaspora may spout anti-Muslim views and act on them, but as a nation, Israel's problem is with Arabs, primarily Palestinians, not with Muslims. George Habash was the *bête noire* of all

DIPLOMACY K.P. NAYAR

er Arafat, is a Christian. The most influential Christian in Arafat's Palestinian Authority is Hanan Ashrawi, the articulate spokesperson for Palestinians.

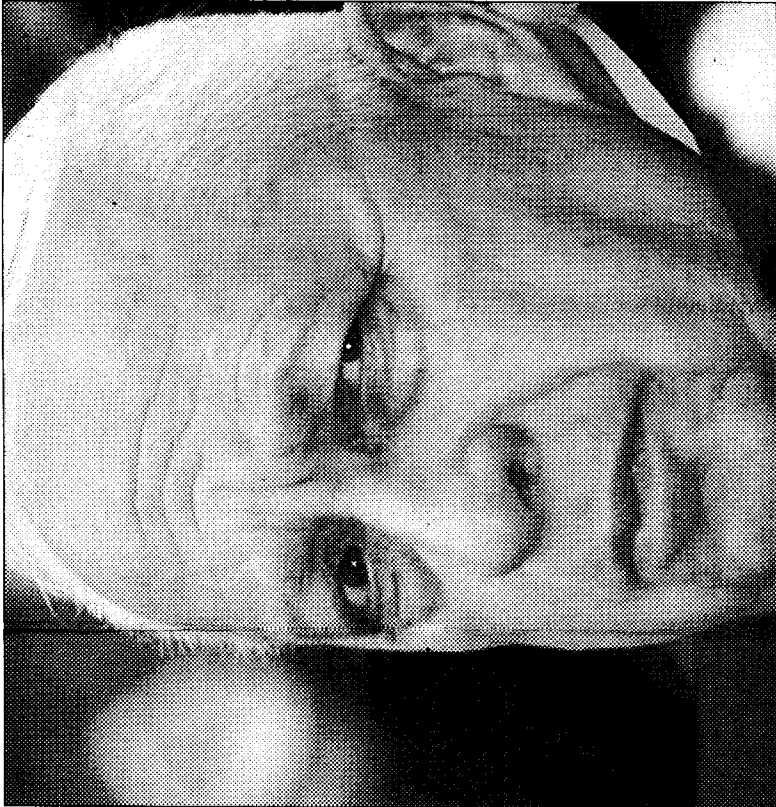
At home, Indians knew at first hand the former Israeli ambassador in New Delhi, Yehoyada Haim, whose inputs in his new job count for a lot in the shaping of Israeli intelligence. Haim, who is more well-versed in diverse Arabic dialects than many Arabs, made it a point to reach out to Indian Muslims during his very successful tenure in the capital and probably made more friends among them than most Arab ambassadors in Chanakyapuri. Therefore, when Pervez Musharraf makes noises, however feeble, on the subject of Pakistan establishing diplomatic relations with Israel or when Israel's envoy in Brussels makes conciliatory statements about stamps on Pakistani passports banning travel to the Jewish state and welcomes Pakistanis, Indians ought not to be surprised.

Israel's destiny — and its geography — demands that it should engage with Muslims and with countries which have huge Muslim populations. It has done so in Indonesia, it has fruitfully engaged Morocco, and the Israeli presence that sprouted in Doha and Muscat before the latest Palestinian *intifada* was the culmination of a long clandestine accommodation worked out with moderate Muslim states.

For India, relations with Israel are extremely valuable. The Kargil war would have been won any way, but only with far more Indian casualties, if it were not for the timely help from Israel, many details of which are still under wraps in New Delhi. India's relations with the US would be nowhere near what they are today if P.V. Narasimha Rao and Vajpayee had not courted America's Jewish lobby as ardently as they courted official Washington.

The hotheads in India who foolishly argue in favour of an all-out alliance with Israel in the false hope that it will help curb domestic terrorism do not pause to consider if Sharon's policies have increased security for Israelis.

Five or ten years ago, Israelis left home with the same amount of confidence in their safety with which Indians venture out in these days of terrorist threats. But today, no Israeli feels safe anywhere. More Palestinians may have been killed in Israeli retribution than at any time in the recent past, but it has not brought safety to the people of Israel. Indians who favour an all-out endorsement of Sharon's policies should ask themselves if that is the fate they want for the people of India as well.



India's relations with the US would be nowhere near what they are today if Rao and Vajpayee had not courted America's Jewish lobby as ardently as they courted Washington

equities of the global non-proliferation regime made it necessary for New Delhi to possess a minimum nuclear deterrent.

For Israel, on the other hand, nuclear deterrence is a regional issue. If its neighbourhood, the entire Middle East, were to become a secure, guaranteed nuclear free zone, Tel Aviv would have no problem acceding to NPT or ratifying CTBT. Not so in India's case. Ten years ago, the Americans tried to corner India into the box of regional non-proliferation and roll back New Delhi's nuclear programme. Washington wanted to organize a regional conference on proliferation: at one stage it even managed to get India to discuss the issue at an ill-fated meeting in London. At that time, Indian diplomats sounded the Israeli out on the nuclear question. Tel Aviv's reply was unambiguous. For Israel, the nuclear threat

Israel for years when he orchestrated a string of spectacular Palestinian terrorist acts, including the kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. He is a Christian. So is Navef Hawatmeh, another high profile Palestinian leader. Suha Tawil, wife of Palestine's tallest leader, Yass-

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'No need to go to Israel'

Juda. keep Ami nls

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 1. The Palestinian Foreign Minister, Nabil Sha'ath, has said that he disagreed with growing Indian efforts to coordinate anti-terrorist actions among New Delhi, Tel Aviv, and Washington.

In an exclusive interview to *The Hindu* on Sunday, Dr. Sha'ath said: "I know it is the position of some of your Ministers. First of all, I see no need to go to Israel to reach the United States. The United States is open to India. I do not think you need that intermediary."

Dr. Sha'ath, who left India at the end of a three-day visit on Sunday night, had come just days before the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, makes the first-ever visit at the Head of Government level to New Delhi from September 9 to 11.

"Many people, who felt that Israel was the address of the United States, failed. And I give the example of Central and Eastern Europe. They all went to Israel to seek relations with the United States; they found it much easier to approach NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) than to approach Israel to do their bidding."

Dr. Sha'ath, who called on the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi,

said Israel would like to make it look as if all Palestinian resistance was terrorism.

"Identifying with that puts you in a position of being anti-Palestinian when there is no need to do so. Being against what happened in New York and Washington is universal."

"President (Yasser) Arafat gave his blood to the New York victims. Why? Indonesia was not subject to terrorism? Morocco was not subject to terrorism? Why just pick Israel? Palestinians were not subject to terrorism?" Dr. Sha'ath wanted to know.

Asked if there was a message being sent out by the fact that Mr. Sharon would be in New Delhi on the second anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the U.S., he felt that, probably, this was the way the Israeli Prime Minister wanted it.

"I am not so sure this is what India chose. His propagandists are very busy trying to pick symbols for always linking him with 9/11. As a victim, of course," he said.

On Iraq, he said going to the United Nations would "probably" help. Ending American occupation of Iraq, transferring responsibility to the U.N., will eventually lead to free elections and bring about a sovereign Iraqi Government.

Stating that there was a link

between the Iraqi and Palestinian issues, Dr. Sha'ath stressed that the U.S. President, George W. Bush, seeking a road map after the "military victory" in Iraq was no coincidence.

"If the United States goes back to the United Nations, the U.N. takes over; if a U.N. force produces law and order then the lesson to send multinational forces to Palestine becomes more urgent. And, we feel that international presence in Palestine today might be the single most important requirement for peace," he said.

Declaring full support for the road map towards a Palestinian State proposed by the U.S., the European Union, the U.N. Secretary-General and Russia, he, however, had doubts about its implementation. "If it (the road map) will work, it will produce a lot of good for our people, therefore, for the whole world. Will it work is a combination of what we do, the Israelis do, what the Americans do."

Making it clear that Israel would not openly destroy the road map but undermine it in other ways, Dr. Sha'ath said: "Will the U.S., nevertheless, be able to prevail to get Israel to move is a moot question? If I were a journalist today, I would say no, it doesn't look very hopeful. As a politician, I have got to give it a real effort."

Detailed interview: Page 10

India support unwavering: PNA foreign minister

NEW DELHI, Aug 31. — At the end of his three day visit today, the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Dr Nabil Sha'ath said India had extended "unwavering support" to the Palestinian cause. *India - w dv*

Speaking at an interactive session at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, Dr Sha'ath said: "Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, have assured me of unwavering support for ending Israeli settlements on our territory."

The Palestinian National Authority's foreign minister's visit comes days before the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon, is due to visit New Delhi. The first ever visit by an Israeli PM (scheduled from 9 to 11 September) will require a delicate balancing act from New Delhi that has traditionally supported the cause of a Palestinian state, but is increasing its cooperation with Israel, especially on the anti-terror and defence procurement fronts.

Dr Sha'ath supported India's case for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and said India could play an important role in bringing peace between Israel and Palestine. "India can play a role since it is a global player and has the right to have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council," he said.

Asked about Mr Sharon's forthcoming visit to India, the PNA foreign minister said every sovereign country had the right to establish relationships with any other sovereign nation. "Many of our friends like Egypt and Jordan also have relationships with Israel. We only tell them to prevail upon Mr Sharon to bring peace to the region as per the roadmap sponsored by the US, EU, Russia and the UN," he said.

Sources in the external affairs ministry said that the PNA foreign minister, while not asking India to directly mediate in the West Asia crisis, had asked New Delhi to convey to Mr Sharon that Palestine does not seek to deny the right of the state of Israel to exist. — SNS

1 SEP 2003

THE STATESMAN

India gifts land for Palestine embassy

New Delhi: India has gifted four hectares of land to Palestine in the plush Chanakyapuri diplomatic enclave of the capital to build its embassy ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visit to India.

"We are thankful to the government of India for the gift which would have cost millions of dollars at market price," Palestinian ambassador Osama Musa told IANS.

He said the land was handed over to the embassy about two months ago and he had already got an architect to design the building.

"We hope to start construction soon but funds are going to be a problem. Perhaps, India will help us in that also," he said smilingly.

While India-Israel ties have been growing rapidly since the two countries established diplomatic ties in 1992, New Delhi would not want that to affect its historically close ties with the Palestinians and the Arab countries.

India has repeatedly said that its ties with Israel in no way diluted its support for an independent Palestinian state.

Mr Musa said India has also offered medical and other relief assistance to Palestine and these would be dispatched shortly. IANS

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Protests planned against Israeli PM's visit

By Amit Baruah *Baruah*
NEW DELHI, AUG. 23. When Ariel Sharon lands here as the first-ever Israeli Prime Minister to visit India on September 9, he will be welcomed by the Government. But he will find "limits to his welcome" as several political parties are planning countrywide protests against the visit.

"Mr. Sharon will see strong protests," the CPI(M) leader, Prakash Karat, told this correspondent today. "We are against his visit at this juncture," he said stressing that the Left and like-minded parties were coordinating their plans for protest.

As a minor storm awaits Mr. Sharon, the Palestinian Ambassador in New Delhi, Omar Musa, has his own request to the Government of India.

"I have one request to the Government of India. They must ask Mr. Sharon when he

will end the occupation of Palestinian territories."

Saying that a trip to New Delhi by the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Nabil Sha'ath was likely, from August 29 to 31, Mr. Musa said ~~that~~ ^{it} would also be a visit by the Palestinian ~~Minister~~ ^{Minister}, Mahmoud Abbas, before the end of this year. India continued its support to the Palestinian cause at the United Nations and had recently gifted a plot of land for the construction of a Palestinian Embassy in New Delhi, he said.

Asked if there would be a 'dilution' of India's traditional support to the Palestinian cause by inviting Mr. Sharon, Surinder K. Arora, convener of the BJP's Foreign Affairs Committee, said: "Our position on the issue remains the same. There is no change."

Mr. Arora, a retired Indian Foreign Service officer, said there was no contradiction

in India developing its relationship with Israel, since diplomatic ties were established in 1992 with the Palestinians. "I don't think India's relations with Israel and Palestine are related," he said.

The National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, revealed plans for a Sharon visit during an address to the annual dinner of the American Jewish Committee on May 8. "India, the United States, and Israel have some fundamental similarities. We are all democracies, sharing a common view of pluralism, tolerance and equal opportunity..." he had said in Washington.

The Congress does not seem to have taken a position on the issue. "We have taken note of the proposed visit by Mr. Sharon, but we haven't taken a formal view on it," Anand Sharma, member of the Foreign Affairs Department of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC), said.

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Delhi keeps door open on troops to Iraq

PRANAY SHARMA

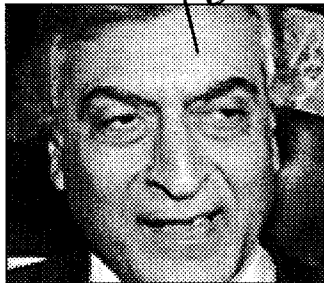
New Delhi, Aug. 21: India today said it could not be pressured into sending troops to Iraq, but added that it was keeping its options open.

India said it would keep its interests in mind and could yet send troops to the war-ravaged country, even if this involved more than conventional peace-keeping duties.

"We cannot be pushed into taking any decision that is not of our own making. Our decisions will always be arrived at after careful consideration of all relevant aspects of issues under examination and will be guided, in the final analysis, solely by our national interests," foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal said here today. He was speaking at a seminar on complex peace operations: traditional premises and new realities.

Sibal's remarks come at a time when the US is trying to persuade the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution asking member states to contribute forces for stabilising Iraq.

Foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said India, like many other countries, was following developments at the UN headquarters, but would take a decision only after a clear pic-



Sibal

ture emerges.

Sibal said the US was not pressuring India to send troops. "There has been no US pressure on India. The US would, of course, like India to contribute to the stabilisation force but to say that a request amounts to pressure would be a reflection of an undue sense of vulnerability."

The foreign secretary said India valued its relations with the US and "whenever possible", would explore areas where the two sides could work together. But it would be an "injustice" to construe that Delhi was "bending to pressure", he added.

India had said on Tuesday that it would not send troops even if the newly-formed Iraq governing council requests it to do so and would review its stand only if there is an "explicit mandate" from the UN. Delhi added

that it was not clear if its troops would be engaged in peacekeeping or peace enforcing.

However, Sibal's remarks today leave enough room for India to eventually send troops even if peacekeeping operations do not take place under a UN banner.

"We have insisted that peacekeeping operations should be considered only at the request of the member states involved and should be under the command and control of the UN," the foreign secretary said.

But he was quick to say India was "alive and sensitive" to the changing nature of peacekeeping and the growing complexity and scale of these operations.

Sibal said peacekeeping operations had become multi-dimensional in the last decade and now involved a number of activities, including establishing transitional governments.

He said because of changing realities India could not respond automatically to a UN request. Nor could it disregard requests from other quarters, Sibal said there were "too many conflicts", "too many requests" and "too few resources" for India to respond every time. A decision to commit troops was based on "...bilateral relations, regional equations and an assessment of India's interests," the secretary said.

A visitor with a past

By Hamid Ansari

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India. Near Avia

THE PRIME Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, begins an official visit to India early next month. It will be the first visit by an Israeli Prime Minister since diplomatic relations were established in January 1992 and the decision taken to have resident missions in New Delhi and Tel Aviv. In the past ten years, bilateral relations have made steady progress with a focus on the Indian side both on the acquisition of defence technology and equipment and on counter-terrorism expertise. Bilateral trade is now in excess of \$ 1 billion. There have been frequent contacts at the political and official levels with L.K. Advani being the ranking political visitor from India.

The President of Israel visited India in December 1996. There is therefore nothing unusual about the head of the Israeli Government coming to New Delhi even though its public announcement, at a Washington dinner hosted by the American Jewish Committee, did raise some eyebrows.

Nor is it unusual for Israel to have soldier-politicians. Mr. Sharon, however, has distinct traits, and a formidable reputation. He fought in the wars of 1948 and 1956 and commanded armoured divisions in the wars of 1967 and 1973. He was elected to the Knesset in 1973, was appointed Minister of Defence in 1981 and, according to his official biography, "brought about first strategic cooperation agreement with the United States and widened defence ties between Israel and many na-

tions." He resigned in 1983 in the wake of the storm caused by the massacre of Palestinians, in September 1982, at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Lebanese Christian forces that were in alliance with Israel. The sheer savagery of that incident shocked the world. It was described by the Security Council as criminal massacre and condemned through

rejected the amorphous and tentative Clinton proposals of July 2000. He provoked the Palestinians by violating the sanctity of the Al Haram al Sharief and going there in the company of 1,000 policemen. The Fact Finding Enquiry instituted by President Clinton (the Mitchell Report) called that visit "poorly timed (whose) provocative effect should

Mr. Sharon is to the politics of the extreme right. He worked to demolish the Oslo Accord. He rejected the progress made in the Taba negotiations of January 2001 and the subsequent suggestions for de-freezing the peace process through the Mitchell Report and the Tenet Plan. He prevailed upon the Bush Administration to sideline and virtually imprison on the elected President of the Palestinian Authority and to delay by several months the publications of the Road Map.

He eventually accepted it under direct pressure from the U.S. President, George W. Bush, and the American Jewish groups who came to the conclusion that the status quo is unacceptable. His effort now is to scuttle the process through the 14 objections formally raised by his Cabinet on May 25 and, failing that, to prolong the negotiations on the core issues of borders, refugees and Jerusalem to delay signing what an Israeli commentator has called the death certificate of the right wing ideology.

Some in India may discover affinities with Mr. Sharon's type of politics. They would do well to examine his track record. While exploring the avenues of a strategic relationship bilaterally or in a triangular arrangement, the Indian leadership should remember the old adage familiar to wanderers in the wilderness: "choose your companion, then choose your road".

(The writer is a former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations.)

Some in India may discover affinities with Ariel Sharon's type of politics. They would do well to examine his track record.

its Resolution 521(1982) adopted unanimously. The public outcry in Israel forced the Government to appoint a high level commission of enquiry headed by the President of the Supreme Court, Yitzak Kahan. The commission held that essential precautions were not taken: "these blunders constitute the non fulfilment of a duty with which the Defence Minister was charged." Some of the supportive evidence considered by the commission was not made public and no further action was recommended.

Despite the policy failure and the strictures the political career of Mr. Sharon, based on headline positions, continued. He opposed the Oslo Accords and took every opportunity to encourage illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. He rejoiced when the Oslo Accords collapsed. He was pleased when the Palestinians His past apart, the commitment of

Sinha sets stage for Indo-Turkish summit

India - Iran - Arab - Am. - M. N.

By Atul Aneja
MANAMA, AUG. 4. India and Turkey are set to begin a new round of engagement with the visiting External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, setting the stage for an Indo-Turkish summit next month.

Mr. Sinha's presence in Ankara on Monday is part of the effort to finalise the agenda for the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit. He is expected to play a four-day visit to Turkey in mid-September on his way to New York for the United Nations General Assembly session. On his return, he is expected to visit Syria.

Mr. Vajpayee's decision to go to Syria is significant as it is meant to reinforce the "balance" in India's ties with key West Asian countries. Mr. Vajpayee will receive the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, in early September in India. But by visiting Syria, he would be in a position to signal to Damascus, Israel's arch-rival, that India's close ties with Israel are not at the cost of its relationship with the rest of the region.

Mr. Sinha's visit, diplomatic sources said, could prove to be well timed as Turkey's perception of India is currently undergoing a transition. India's refusal to send troops to Iraq outside a U.N. mandate — a view shared by Turkey — and New Delhi's resilience to the downturn in the global economy has been well noticed in Ankara.

Mr. Sinha today met his Turk-



The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, being welcomed by the Director-General of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Halil Akinci (left), on arrival at the Ankara airport on Monday. Aloke Sen, India's Ambassador to Turkey, looks on. — PTI

ish counterpart, Abdullah Gul, and called on the President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer.

Diplomatic sources said that India and Turkey had decided that deeper commercial interaction should drive their political relationship forward. Going beyond trade, both sides had identified "project centered" cooperation in the fields of energy, construction, including

bring Caspian Sea oil to the Turkey's Mediterranean Sea port of Ceyhan for export. India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission (Videsh) and the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPAO) have signed an arrangement that allows the ONGC (Videsh) to acquire a 49 per cent stake in an oil bloc in Libya. The Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) and the Turkish National

line Company (BOTAS) have also signed an agreement for training personnel from BOTAS for running transport vehicles, which use Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) as fuel.

In the field of information technology, Apteck in a tie-up with a Turkish firm has already begun training 200 students in Ankara. The joint venture now has plans to expand its presence in most major Turkish cities.

India's emphasis on joint projects is partly driven by an assessment that expansion of trade between the two countries has its limitations. "Both countries produce a similar basket of products and it would be unrealistic to expect an unrestrained growth of trade," a diplomatic source said.

Nevertheless, trade between the two countries is growing at an impressive 48 per cent in the last two years. From around \$ 650 millions last year, trade between the two countries is expected to touch the \$ one billion mark by 2006.

The focus on economic expansion is also because cooperation in certain other fields such as defence is likely to be restrained.

The military in Turkey wields enormous political influence, but there is not much room for engaging it because of its membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. India, however, is keen to find a niche in Turkey's defence establishment, which has demonstrated a pro-Pakistan accent in the

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Overland option for gas pipeline economical, says Iran

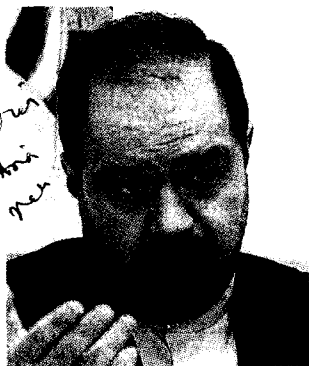
By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, JULY 23. Iran has said that "all issues" relating to the proposed overland Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, including Indian security concerns over the pipeline crossing through Pakistan, were "negotiable".

In an exclusive interview to *The Hindu*, the visiting Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mohsen Aminzadeh, said that after conducting feasibility studies of both the offshore and onshore pipeline options, the overland option (through Pakistan) was found to be more "economical". "Given the fact that Pakistan is located at the centre of this gas pipeline...there is enough economic justification for Pakistan as well."

The pipeline issue had figured in his strategic dialogue with the Foreign Secretary, Kanwal Sibal, on Monday, Mr. Aminzadeh said and added that the two countries had agreed to resume the work of the "joint committee".

"I am optimistic about the progress of this project, both because of its high economic justification as well as the...positive political development in the region. It is natural if the parties come to a conclusion to implement the project, any other attendant problems that



Mohsen Aminzadeh

might be arising will be addressed," he said at the Iranian Embassy on Tuesday night.

On whether there had been discussions on the possible pricing and volume of gas coming through Pakistan into India, Mr. Aminzadeh said these were matters to be discussed at the "final" stages. "However, in the earlier estimations, matters pertaining to the price and volume of the gas have already been assessed."

Referring to the development of the alternative land route to Afghanistan via the Iranian port of Chabahar, he said Iran was confident that the bridge over the Helmand river near Zaranj on the Iran-Afghanistan border would be completed before the end of this "Christian year".

The 213-km Zaranj-Dilaram road was India's responsibility, he said and hoped that this part of the land route would also be completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Aminzadeh also referred to the decision taken by India and Iran to build a 600-km link between Chabahar and Faraj on the Iranian national network which would lead to a point close to the Afghan border.

The eventual plan was to take the railway all the way up to the Afghan city of Herat.

On Iraq, he said: "There are close and almost identical views between Iran and India on matters pertaining to Iraq...and the future situation in Iraq...it is in the interests of India and Iran to see that there is a democratic government in Iraq."

"Yes, certainly, we welcome the elections to be held in Iraq and the coming to power of a government that is the result of such a free and general election," he said to a question.

Asked how long he thought the American military "presence" in West Asia would last, Mr. Aminzadeh said: "It has not been typical of the United States to have that much extensive military presence in different countries on a long-term

basis."

"It seems there is no interest or willingness from the side of the U.S. to prolong its military presence particularly given the recent difficulties that have been created for them in Afghanistan and Iraq."

"I have no idea about the duration of the American military presence...if my understanding of American military intentions is correct...they will make some kind of arrangement through cooperation with countries in the region to maintain stability."

Asked for his response to the recent "warning" issued by the U.S. President, George W. Bush, to Iran, Mr. Aminzadeh said this was "media rhetoric".

His "understanding" was that working within the United Nations framework on Afghanistan had been a "successful and useful" experience. "The Americans do need such cooperation (with Iran on Iraq) while they are resorting to such harsh rhetoric against us."

On Iran-India defence relations, he said these were similar to those between "friendly" nations.

There were, he added, regular contacts between defence officials and institutions of the two countries.

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DECISION ON 'BALANCE OF CONSIDERATIONS'

India not to send troops to Iraq

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 12. India will not be sending its troops to Iraq. The internal debate within the Government is over and "on balance of considerations", the decision is that it will not be in India's national interest to send its troops to Iraq.

According to authoritative sources, the Vajpayee Government will formalise this "sorry, no troops" decision when the Cabinet Committee on Security meets on July 14. The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, who was to leave for Dhaka tomorrow, has been asked to delay his departure and attend the CCS deliberations.

The Government has reached its "no troops" decision despite a clear understanding that the Bush administration will not be pleased. A number of American interlocutors have spelled it out for various Indian officials that the White

House would be extremely grateful if India were to agree to send its troops, particularly when the Bush administration was facing growing domestic opposition on the Iraq front. The Vajpayee Government is evidently willing to risk certain American displeasure.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, L.K. Advani, who appeared to have favoured the troops option during his recent American tour, is now reported to have changed his views. Mr. Advani, too, is against sending troops as is the Defence Minister, George Fernandes. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Sinha, is known to be ambivalent.

The Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, is reportedly the only senior voice currently favouring the sending of Indian troops to Iraq. The National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, is now understood to be in the "no troops" column.

Though the merits and demerits of

the troops option have been debated at length, in and out of the Government, what finally settled the issue was the reality that there was no domestic consensus in favour of sending troops to Iraq. Almost all political parties have voiced their opposition to sending troops; even the BJP has voiced its reservations.

In the absence of a domestic political consensus, the Prime Minister and his advisers are unwilling to run the risk of Indian troops getting fired at in Iraq. The Vajpayee establishment is very anxious to avoid a repeat of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) experience in Sri Lanka. "We can spare our forces that kind of divisiveness," notes an authoritative source.

In addition, the rub is that India will have to pay for its own troops in Iraq. The estimated cost for India, according to reliable sources, is Rs. 13 crores per annum. "We will be paying, ironically, to get our soldiers shot at," observed a CCS

member.

What has weakened the case for sending the troops is the fact that the United States has not yet been able to provide any kind of road-map for the future of Iraq. Also, it is understood that on his recent visit to Washington, the Foreign Secretary, Kanwal Sibal, was told that the American forces would stay put in Iraq for at least 30 months. They have been taking quite a few casualties in recent weeks and the going seems to be getting tougher by the week. As of July 8, 76 U.S. soldiers have been killed in Iraq.

Although it is argued within official and strategic affairs circles, "let us not minimise the advantages" of obliging the United States and taking what the Americans are fond of calling "a place at the high table," there is an acute realisation that the Government and the ruling party stood to lose politically by sending Indian troops into U.S.-U.K. occupied Iraq.

'Israel will help India fight terrorism'

By Amit Baruah

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NEW DELHI, JULY 10. Israel will assist India in its battle against terrorism, the visiting Israeli special envoy, David Ivry, said at a press conference here today. Mr. Ivry, who has had meetings with the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, said that a suggested "alliance" between India, the United States and Israel would not be on paper.

Asked to comment on suggestions for closer relations between India, the U.S. and Israel, Mr. Ivry said that a recent speech by the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, in Washington, implied that all the three countries should cooperate in fighting terrorism. It was very important that

"democratic societies" should cooperate in the battle to protect their societies.

"The U.S. can be the leader and we (Israel and India) can contribute as much as we can." On specific areas of cooperation between India and Israel, he said that sharing of intelligence was very important. To questions on a scheduled visit by the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, to India, he confirmed that Mr. Sharon would be coming to New Delhi within the year.

Mr. Ivry, who was the commander of the Israeli Air Force at the time of the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Osirak, said that the dates for Mr. Sharon's visit were still being worked out. Referring to the Israeli-Palestinian "road map", he said that a complex situation prevailed in the region. However, Israel wanted to give every chance for the peace process to succeed.

In his view, Israel was "giving a chance" to the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, to succeed, but he felt that there was no reduction in the level of violence. There was no possibility of a Palestinian State coming into existence if "terrorism" against Israel did not end.

Asked about the recent statement made by the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, that Islamabad was looking at the possibility of building ties with Israel, Mr. Ivry said: "It's very nice." Israel wanted to be recognised by everyone. However, he pointed out that Israel's relations with India were "very important".

In a bid to ensure that India would not "misunderstand" if eventually Pakistan and Israel were to establish diplomatic relations, he said that Tel Aviv would coordinate with India on the issue.

Delhi scout completes Iraq size-up sortie

K.P. NAYAR

Washington, July 3: In the effort to reach a decision on sending troops to Iraq, South Block appears to have taken matters into its own hands.

Unable to obtain all the clarifications New Delhi has been seeking from Washington, South Block has just completed one round of assessments of its own within Iraq on the prospect of Indian armed presence in the occupied country.

Winding up his five-day visit to Washington, foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal revealed at a briefing for Indian correspondents here that R.M. Abhyankar, secretary in the ministry of external affairs, met Iraqi leaders and obtained a first-hand impression of the situation which would face any Indian forces that may be deployed in Iraq.

Sibal said the US has a "difficult situation in hand" and that it is not easy for Washington to give all the clarifications sought by India because it has "no road

map" and is faced with a "fast-moving situation".

He said there is no deadline for any decision by New Delhi on sending troops.

It is understood that Abhyankar did a marathon road trip of 3,500 km within Iraq over four days ending last weekend, during which he met representative Iraqis of different affiliations.

In northern Iraq, where Indian troops are likely to be deployed, he met Jalal Talebani and Masoud Barzani, the two main Kurdish leaders. Barzani heads the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Talebani is the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Between the two men, they control much of Iraq's northern areas. Abhyankar has known the two for over a decade when he was India's ambassador in Turkey and prior to that in Syria.

On his way back to India from Iraq, Abhyankar met Adnan Pachachi, former Iraqi foreign minister, in Abu Dhabi, where he is now based.

Pachachi, 80, a prominent Sunni (the majority sect in Iraq) who is both secular and liberal, is fast emerging as a possible Hamid Karzai-type leader for any caretaker regime in Iraq that appears necessary in order to have international involvement in the stabilisation of the US-occupied country.

The Americans are veering round to the view that he is the best bet for a unified, self-governed Iraq.

Abhyankar's visit will also lead to India adopting a maternity and paediatric hospital in Najaf.

India will send doctors, nurses, medicines and equipment for the hospital as part of New

Delhi's efforts to build bridges with Iraqis of all religious and ethnic persuasions.

Abhyankar's trip to Iraq is an indication that India will be guided by its own judgement.

As part of the exercise to assess the situation, India's ambassador in Baghdad, B.B. Tyagi, has held talks with Paul Bremer, the US civilian administrator in Iraq, and other American officials there.

Sibal said the primary consideration in arriving at a decision would be India's long-term interest in Iraq and its concerns in the Gulf. He pointed out that 70 per cent of India's oil comes from the region, India has several million citizens in the Gulf and cultural and religious ties. The region is also a source of big remittances from Indian expatriates. He pointed out that a key question is whether India should play its role in a region that is set to see big changes.

Sibal said there is absolutely no pressure from Washington to send troops.

QUOTE

I roam about the beaches of Karachi at night, incognito I mean, just to see

PERVEZ MUSHARRAF
telling French businessmen how safe his country is

India, UAE ink accord on defence tie-up

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9 Jul -
14 Aug

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 1. India today signed an agreement on defence cooperation with the United Arab Emirates here. The widening agreement aims at providing for military training, cooperation in military medical services and jointly combating pollution caused by the military at sea.

The fillip to defence relations between the two countries came as Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Chief of Staff of the UAE Armed Forces, called on the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, today.

The two countries resolved to examine the possibility of import and export of arms, inter-act on various aspects of defence policy and security and exchange information on scientific research, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.

The agreement was signed by the Defence Secretary, Subir Datta (the new incumbent Ajay Prasad has not assumed office due to non-completion of procedural formalities), and the Ambassador of UAE in India, Saeed M. Ali Al-Shamsi.

Briefing presspersons, India's Ambassador to the UAE, K.C. Singh, said the Sheikh held the first-ever "strategic dialogue" with the External Affairs Minis-

ter, Yashwant Sinha, on Monday. He also discussed cooperation in security matters with the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani. Mr. Singh said the "strategic" dialogue would be held annually, with the External Affairs Minister identified as the Sheikh's principal interlocutor.

Pointing to the high-level meetings that had taken place, the Ambassador said the agreement on military cooperation signed between the two countries "speaks for itself".

Asked whether this agreement had implications for Pakistan, Mr. Singh said the accord "spoke for itself" and was the "beginning of a process".

On security cooperation, Mr. Singh said the two countries were working towards establishing a Joint Working Group at the "agency level".

Asked about Anees Ibrahim, brother of the underworld don, Dawood Ibrahim, being deported to Pakistan last year, he said the top leadership was out of the country at that time. Also, the case was an "old one".

"We've had a series of deportations since then, including close associates of Dawood Ibrahim," he pointed out. Separately, sources said the two countries also shared their "assessment" on the current situation in Iraq and discussed other regional and international issues.

Indian troops in Iraq will be reduced to being the US's foot soldiers

An authority to serve

BY A.G. NOORANI

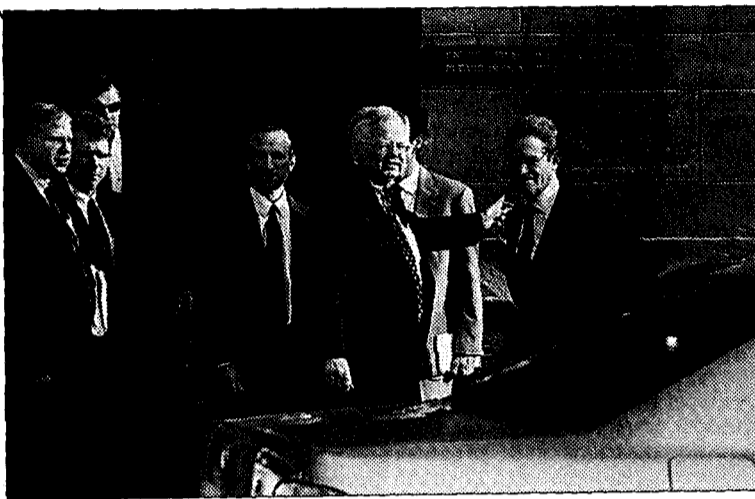
THE LOK Sabha's unanimous resolution of April 8 expressed its *ninda* (to "condemn" or "deplore") over the US military action in Iraq. It not only demanded its early end but also a quick withdrawal of the coalition troops. Not only are they staying put, but India, too, has been invited to make their stay comfortable at its own cost. It declared that military action with a view to changing a regime is "not acceptable". That change has since been accomplished at a heavy cost of Iraqi lives. It demanded that Iraq's reconstruction takes place only under UN supervision ("*dekh rekh*") and Iraq's sovereignty be assured. The UN Security Council's Resolution 1483 of May 22 ensures anything but that.

The text of the UN resolution alone should have sufficed to prompt a flat refusal from India's side. Yet, negotiations with US representatives last week were held on the basis of this very document. It legitimises "the Provisional Coalition Authority" set up by the occupying powers, the US and Britain, as the ruler of Iraq. It states: "Noting further that other States that are not occupying powers are working now or in the future may work *under the Authority*, welcoming further the willingness of member States to contribute to stability and security in Iraq by contributing personnel, equipment and other resources under the Authority..."

Thus, Indian personnel, military or civilian, will have to work 'under' the Authority, in effect, under American command. US Ambassador Robert Blackwill's assurance that Indian troops can fly their own flag is presumptuous and disingenuously evasive. They need no one's permission to do so. The issue, as he well knows, is not the flying of the flag but the identity of the command. Will it be New Delhi or the Authority? Resolution 1483 provides clearly that it is the latter.

His further assurance that "they will not be used for combat" is irrelevant and worthless. They will incur the same wrath of the Iraqi people as the occupying troops do, especially if deployed in the Kurdish areas.

Para 4 of Resolution 1483 is explicit: "Calls upon the Authority, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and other relevant



THE POWERS THAT BE: The US delegation in Delhi

international law, to promote the welfare of the Iraqi people through the effective administration of the territory, including in particular working towards the restoration of conditions of security and stability and the creation of conditions in which the Iraqi people may freely determine their own political future." Thus, the US and Britain will, as the Authority, govern Iraq, police its people and also stage trials for offences by 'the previous Iraqi regime', with which India had good relations. Our troops will be part of this scheme. They will be used to bolster any regime set up by the occupying powers.

Attorney General Lord Goldsmith, Q.C., advised the British government on March 26 that "a further Security Council resolution is needed to authorise reform and restructuring of Iraq". A resolution which encroaches on the "domestic jurisdiction" of a State in violation of Art 2(7) of the Charter is invalid.

Para 8 asks the UN secretary-general to appoint a special representative for Iraq. He is given "independent responsibilities", but only for "coordinating humanitarian and reconstruction" works, return of refugees, "promoting economic reconstruction" and the like. But he will have to collaborate with the Authority to form an "Iraqi interim administration".

This brings us to a fatal flaw. The Authority was not established by the

UN at all. It is not a UN body. It was set up by the US and Britain as occupying powers in the wake of military conquest. Its existence was merely notified to the council on May 8. Resolution 1483 of May 22 seeks to give it a dubious recognition. That will not do. The resolution itself violates the UN charter. This is what it says: "Noting the letter of 8 May 2003 from the Permanent Representatives of the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the President of the Security Council and recognising the specific authorities, responsibilities and obligations under applicable international law of these States as occupying powers under unified command (the 'Authority')..."

That letter is, therefore, crucial. It is signed only by the representatives of the US and Britain but purports to be on their behalf and that of the "coalition partners". It says that they all, "*acting under existing command and control arrangements through the commander of Coalition Forces*, have created the Coalition Provisional Authority, which includes the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, to exercise powers of government temporarily, and, as necessary, especially to provide security, to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid, and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction". It is this Authority which will "allow the delivery of humanitarian aid".

The UN is mentioned only in the last paragraph of the letter and has this very narrow remit: "The UN has a vital role to play in providing humanitarian relief in supporting the reconstruction of Iraq and in helping the formation of an Iraqi interim authority. The United States, the United Kingdom and the coalition partners are ready to work closely with representatives of the United Nations and its specialised agencies and look forward to the appointment of a special coordinator by the secretary-general. We also welcome the support and contribution of member States, international and regional organisations, and other entities, *under appropriate coordination arrangements* with the Coalition Provisional Authority."

Even on humanitarian matters, India will act under the Authority. Its personnel in Iraq, civil or military, will act under the order of the Authority and the Authority will take its order not from the UN but from the US.

There is another aspect, besides. India is a party to the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949). So are the US, Britain and Iraq. It applies to "all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a high contracting party even if the said occupation meets with no armed resistance" (Art 2). Some provisions apply from the outset of military operations, the others, "for the duration of the occupation to the extent that such power exercises the functions of government in such territory..." (Art 6).

The convention imposes onerous duties on the occupying powers. The US and Britain, as the occupying powers, will be answerable under the convention. So will India if its troops are in Iraq. What national interest will be served by getting into this sordid mess?

In the past, request for deployment of Indian troops always came from the UN. It now comes from the US which negotiates with us the terms of engagement. It will run the whole show. Only a fool will be attracted by the prospect of a siege on the inner board of directors. India cannot become a regional power by serving as a foot soldier of the US.

24 JUN 2003

Troops to Iraq

By Chinmaya R. Gharekhan

The Americans are in Iraq for a long haul, at least a couple of years. The wise course for India might be not to rush into a decision.

THE GOVERNMENT in New Delhi seems to be facing a tough decision on the question of participating in the U.S.-led and U.S.-commanded enforcement mission in Iraq. Instinctively perhaps, it would like to respond positively to the American request to send a contingent of Indian troops to Iraq. The consideration could be that such a gesture on our part would be sufficient to act as the final seal on the vastly improved relations between the two countries. After all, a friend is one who extends his helping hand in time of real need and the Americans are in genuine, even desperate, need of help in Iraq at this stage. On the other hand, there is the public opinion, the resolution of Parliament and, most important of all, the Assembly elections to think and worry about.

There is little doubt that Iraq is proving to be a far more difficult nut to digest than was expected by the American planners, or by anyone else for that matter. Iraq is unlikely to turn out to be what Vietnam was for them in the 1960s or what Afghanistan became for the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Rather, it could become similar to what Sri Lanka was for India in the 1990s. The Indian peacekeeping contingent went to Sri Lanka as friends and saviours of the Jaffna Tamils and ended up provoking their hostility to India to such an extent that they murdered our youthful former Prime Minister. Whatever may be said about the Indian performance in Sri Lanka, there were and are no two opinions about India's intentions, which were strictly honourable. In any case, India was invited by the legitimate Government of Sri Lanka to send its troops.

The American intervention in Iraq, on the other hand, was prompted by self interest, some would say imperial considerations. One, and not the dominant one, factor was to "liberate" the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein's oppressive rule. The Americans are learning the hard way that the "liberated" are not

necessarily grateful to the "liberators". Nations, like individuals, do not learn from the mistakes of others.

If the proposal were for India to send troops or police as a part of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, the Government would not have hesitated for a moment in deciding in favour. However, this is an entirely American enterprise and any country that might wish to help the Americans out in restoring order and stability in Iraq will have to operate under the command of the American General. This has been made absolutely clear in Security Council resolution 1483. If the resolution had been drafted in a diplomatically less offensive language, it would have made life easier for many. Nevertheless, there is a precedent of sorts, in case the Government was looking for one, which might help.

In 1992, the situation in Somalia had attracted the sympathetic attention of the entire international community. The complete absence of law and order had made the warlords virtual masters of their respective turfs. There was no government in the country. Humanitarian aid could not be reached to the needy since the warlords looted it and collected hefty fees for allowing at least a part of it to be distributed. The Security Council had authorised the deployment of around 500 peacekeepers to ensure the unhindered distribution of humanitarian assistance, but they could not be deployed because they did not have the authority and lacked the means to impose discipline on the unruly elements.

There was enormous pressure on the American Government of the day, the administration of Bush Sr. "to do something". The President

was willing but insisted on endorsement from the United Nations. The Security Council, of which India was a member, passed a resolution in December 1992, welcoming the willingness of "a member-state" to send forces to Somalia to help in the humanitarian situation. The U.S. Marines, with CNN and other news media covering the event, mounted operation 'Restore Hope' around Christmas time.

Although not a blue-helmet operation, countries around the world readily joined in it and functioned strictly under American command. The Government of the day in India decided that it would well serve India's interests if it were to participate, however symbolically, in operation 'Restore Hope'. Accordingly, a small task force of the Indian Navy, comprising a guided missile corvette, an LST and a tanker, was deployed off Somalia as soon as the operation was launched. The Indian Navy spent a total of 347 ship days maintaining vigil along the Somali coast and ports during 1992-93.

Subsequently, when the U.N. deployed a full-fledged peace enforcement force in Somalia in which an Indian Army brigade performed with great distinction, a naval task force, consisting of two guided missile frigates and a tanker with their organic air elements, successfully de-inducted the last of the Indian forces from Kismayu in southern Somalia in December 1994 and later supported the de-induction of the Indian brigade from the capital, Mogadishu.

Though the two situations are vastly different, the Somalia precedent could be relevant in the sense that India participated in a U.S.-led and commanded military operation. The question of who will finance our participation is also important since taking part in a peacekeeping oper-

ation does not come cheap. The most crucial aspect to consider, of course, is the reaction of the Iraqi people to India's participation as an American ally and the fear of our troops or police getting bogged down and even losing lives in an unfriendly and hostile environment. Domestic Muslim reaction could be negative, as could the reaction of other Muslim nations.

If possible, the Government should consult with the leaders of the Iraqi opposition within the country such as the Shia leadership, people like Ahmed Chalabi as well as with the leaders of Iraq's neighbours and countries such as Egypt. Ideally, India should have company of some Muslim or Arab country in such an exercise.

If at all India opts for sending a security contingent to Iraq under the U.S. command, we should be clear in our minds about the motivation. Doing this simply to earn American goodwill would be wrong because we are not likely to get much from the U.S. except a "thank you" and a public acknowledgement of our help from the American President. We should not expect any *quid pro quo* in our problems with Pakistan. We have interests in West Asia; will sending troops to Iraq enhance India's image in the region? Will it help protect our investments in Iraq's oil-fields? Will it lead to increased chances of our participation in Iraq's reconstruction as and when it happens? On the other hand, if our contingent gets stuck in Iraq's quagmires, how much damage can it cause to our prestige and interests?

According to present indications, the Americans are in Iraq for a long haul, at least a couple of years. The wise course for India might be not to rush into a decision. In addition to carrying out consultations as suggested above, we should convey to the Americans that it would be a great help if they could persuade one or more 'like-minded' countries to join us in helping them.

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA
NEW DELHI

YOU could call it neighbour's envy, buyer's pride. India's negotiations with Israel on a \$ 1.5 billion deal involving the purchase of the Phalcon airborne early warning radar system has given Pakistan the jitters but has strategic analysts in New Delhi exultant.

A product of American-Israeli cooperation, the Phalcon's sale to India has recently been cleared by Washington. The US administration took its time—a whole year—deciding, citing sanctions imposed on India after the Pokhran nuclear tests in 1998. When President Pervez Musharraf visits President George Bush at Camp David later this month, he is bound to lobby hard to scuttle the deal. Chances that he will succeed are, however, fairly slim.

An acronym for Phased Array L-Band Conformal radar, the Phalcon is considered the world's most advanced airborne early warning command and control system. It supersedes conventional rotodome radars, currently used by most AWACS systems.

The Phalcon has several panels of phased radiating elements. These are mounted on the fuselage of an aircraft and provide 360 degree coverage. The Phalcon is based on four sensors: phased-array radar; phased-array IFF (identification of friend or foe); ESM/ELINT (electronic surveillance or electronic intelligence); CSM/COMINT (communication surveillance or computer intelligence).

A unique fusion technology continuously cross-relates the data gathered by all sensors. When one of the sensors reports a detection, the system automatically initiates an active search on the other three.

The radar can detect even low flying objects from distances of upto 400 km, day and night, under all weather conditions. Not just that, the system also generates verification beams at newly detected targets to

Oh Jerusalem

Whatever weapon system the US administration doesn't want to sell India directly is promptly routed through Israel. Uncoding the Phalcon pattern



Mutual defence: Prime Ministers A.B. Vajpayee and Ariel Sharon have firmed up ties

Shopping from Israel

What Delhi's picked up from Tel Aviv in recent years

- Phalcon
- Green Pine radar system
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: Searcher-I, Searcher II, Long endurance Heron
- Night vision devices
- Ongoing upgradation of 130 mm medium guns to 155 mm
- Medium and short range radars
- Ground sensors to detect infiltration
- Tethered balloons: these carry sensors and can be let up in the air (up to 50-100 metres) for better observation
- Electro-optical observation systems
- Israeli company Soltam is among the bidders for India's requirement of 155 mm towed gun system

eliminate false alarms. The tracking is initiated in two to four seconds as compared to 20 to 40 seconds in the case of a rotodome radar.

The Phalcon makes real-time decisions an almost absolute reality. It can be ze-

roed in on a specific battle-zone to provide inputs on enemy movement, be it on air, sea or ground. This creates possibilities of shaping the battlefield dynamics. In conflicts like Kargil (1999), the Phalcon would have

been a killer application.

India has chosen to mount the system on Il-76 D aircraft. While the body will be bought from the former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, the engines will be from Russia. On arrival, it will be fitted with Phalcon-compatible Israeli avionics. Since this will entail the sharing of the blueprint of the Ilyushin aircraft with Israel, Russia has objected.

Moscow's alarm may have another trigger too. With the Phalcon deal, Israel is second only to Russia in terms of supplying India military hardware. There is a pattern to growing Indo-Israeli defence cooperation. Whatever America can't sell India directly—due to domestic or Pakistani objections—is now simply routed through Israel.

Though some sources insist the Indian army's 160 mm mortars were actually

bought from the Israelis in the 1970s, a serious—and official—defence relationship was forged only in 1992. That year senior Indian defence ministry officials travelled to Switzerland to look at unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The UAV demonstration was, it turned out, being conducted by an Israeli team.

The Indian contingent advised the Israelis to negotiate directly and avoid the third party route. This would be mutually profitable, especially since New Delhi was on the verge of opening full diplomatic ties Tel Aviv.

Even so, the real boost to the military relationship came only after the Kargil war. In 2001, India and Israel formed a joint working group on defence. Defence deals, till then a hush-hush affair, received a degree of formalisation. India was in the market for advanced surveillance equipment and an anti-ballistic missile defence system against Pakistan's short and medium-range ballistic missiles. Israel also supplied the Indian Navy the Barak anti-missile system.

While a range of small arms and surveillance equipment—from sensors to night-vision devices—were bought from Israel as part of cooperation on counter-terrorism, the turning point came when Washington agreed to India's procurement of Israeli UAVs Heron and Searcher.

The Phalcon is only the latest symbol of the America-Israel-India axis. It is understood that the Phalcon can be integrated with the Green Pine radar system, used in the US-Israeli Arrow 2 anti-ballistic missile mechanism.

Interestingly, Tel Aviv has already provided the Green Pine radar system to India for R&D purposes. The Defence Research and Development Organisation is using it to build an indigenous anti-missile defence system. The Phalcon, then, will be among friends; as are, no doubt, India and Israel.

India 'studying' U.N. resolution

By Amit Baruah

The UN
India from
HD-1
24/5

NEW DELHI, MAY 23. India is studying the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1483, according to the Foreign Office spokesman. He was asked whether the NDA Government would send troops to Iraq.

He said he did not have a "specific response" to questions on deployment of Indian military personnel under a non-United Nations command. However, India welcomed the adoption of the new resolution since the long-suffering people of Iraq deserved all help. His remarks about the absence of a "specific response" and that the Government was studying the resolution suggest that a certain thinking is going on within the Government about whether or not to commit troops to Iraq. As far as the Security Council resolution itself is concerned, it is quite clear that no troops can be sent as of now under the U.N. flag, but under the "authority" of the "occupying powers" — the United States and Britain.

The preamble to the resolution says: "Welcoming further the willingness of member-States to contribute to stability and security in Iraq by contributing personnel, equipment, and other resources under the Authority..." So, if troops are to be sent under the current resolution, they will not

India - W Asia

be a "blue helmet" United Nations peacekeeping force, but a private arrangement under the "authority" recognised by the Security Council.

Also, the unanimous resolution passed by Parliament should set the tone for Government policy on Iraq — it would be rather strange for the troops to be sent outside the U.N. framework after both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha described the American-led military action in Iraq as "unacceptable" and called for a speedy withdrawal of the coalition forces.

On the adoption of resolution 1483, the spokesman said this showed that despite differences on the issue of war, all members of the Security Council had "come together on post-war issues". It also reaffirmed the principles important to India — reiterating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, the right of the Iraqi people to freely determine their political future and control their natural resources.

"Further, there is now to an extent an internationally accepted road map for rebuilding and reconstruction activities in Iraq. We also welcome the elements in the resolution which recognise that it is for the Iraqi people to determine their political future after an interim period and with the involvement of the U.N. Secretary-General's representative," the spokesman said.

'No troop reduction on LoC now'

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, MAY 23. There has been no reduction of forces on the border following the minor forward movement in India's relationship with Pakistan, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, told presspersons here. "Not just now," he said, when asked if the Army was planning to bring down troop deployment along the Line of Control and the International Border with Pakistan. He was addressing the media after the investiture ceremony at the Coast Guard Air Station today.

Confidence-building measures initiated between the two countries were yet to have any effect on the border situation. "It has just begun. The CBMs

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are in the process of being built," he said. Asked if the Government was happy with the response, he said that Pakistan too had taken some decisions.

Mr. Fernandes said that since the CBMs had just begun, talks between the two countries "will take some time. That time is not very close." Asked if infiltration had gone down, he said it was too early to reach any conclusion. "This question (of infiltration) keeps propping up everyday, every hour. And I have said that insofar as infiltration is concerned, there have been ups and downs. There are days when efforts at infiltration are on and our troops on the border have gunned down such intruders and there are days when there isn't any kind of

problem on the borders when no one manages to come in. So one can never say the last word on this at this present time."

India had not asked any third country to help sort out its problem with Pakistan. Mr. Fernandes said India's position had been that bilateral issues should be settled bilaterally.

Asked if India was considering sending a division of the Rastriya Rifles to Iraq, Mr. Fernandes countered: "No. How can we send? Why should we send?" When it was pointed out that there had been some discussion on India's participation in peacekeeping operations in Iraq, he said there had been no such thought. Asked if he would support any such move, he replied he would not.

24/5 2003

India mulls sending troops to Iraq

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 23. — As it mulled the prospect of sending troops to help restore order in war-ravaged Iraq, India welcomed the United Nations Security Council's resolution to lift sanctions from Iraq after 13 years.

Defence minister Mr George Fernandes however denied there was any move to send Indian troops to Iraq to help rebuild the country.

"We welcome the unanimous adoption of the UN Security Council's resolution for several reasons. The long suffering people of Iraq deserve all the help they can get," the external affairs ministry spokesman said today.

He, however, was non-committal on the question of Indian troops being sent for "stabilisation duties" in Iraq outside the UN command. Asked about the

prospects of India sending its troops to Iraq to help ensure the "stability and security" of that country, the spokesman said: "We are studying the resolution."

Observers have said that India was asked to contribute a division of its armed forces to patrol a sector of Iraq, but officials denied it. According to observers, such a move would give India a level of "strategic" control that would be to its benefit. India has frequently contributed troops as part of joint peacekeeping forces under UN command, but is wary of sending its armed forces in a situation where so called "occupation forces" would determine what to do. The adoption by the UNSC resolution yesterday authorising the writ of the coalition forces in Iraq provides the government with a face saver.

On whether the government saw a contradiction in the resolution adopted

by the Indian Parliament that sought the immediate withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq, the spokesman, Mr Navtej Sarna, said the latest resolution was "not about the war but about the post-war situation".

"In a way, it (the resolution) conveys acceptance of the present realities of the situation in Iraq and is made up of elements in which the international community would help the people there," he said.

The resolution, the spokesman said, reaffirmed the international community's commitment to ensure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

The resolution also spoke of the international community's desire to see that the Iraqi people determined their political future and had full control over their natural resources.

24 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

Phalcon deal flies again

US clears sale of Israeli radar to India

By Chidanand Rajghatta
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Washington: The US has cleared the sale of the Israeli Phalcon airborne radar system to India following a combined New Delhi-Tel Aviv pitch and a dramatic shift in Washington's export control regulations announced earlier this week.

India's Awacs (airborne warning and control systems) project involves the integration of the Phalcon radar and communication system with the Russian Ilyushin-76 heavy transport military aircraft. Awacs can detect cruise missiles, low-flying aircraft and other air intrusions much earlier than ground-based radars.

Several sources—American, Israeli and Indian—confirmed the US green signal, which was reportedly conveyed by US deputy secretary Richard Armitage during his recent visit to India, but was reported from the Israeli perspective in the Tel Aviv newspaper *Ha'aretz* on Wednesday. The administration was expected to publicly affirm the clearance later in the day.

Congressional and administration sources told this correspondent that Washington did not strictly have an ability to stop the Phalcon sale because it did not fall under the third country rule, which prohibits the sale of weapons in which the US has a technical and financial input. But the restraining US hand on Tel Aviv had been lifted following

improvement in the regional situation and relentless lobbying by Israel and India.

Washington had okayed the deal in principle more than a year ago, but later prevailed on Israel to stall it because of regional tensions.

Officials in Washington said they do not see the Phalcon supply as a prelude to the sale of the Arrow missile defence system, which is more substantially a product of joint US-Israeli cooperation.

In fact, while confirming the US clearance, some US officials, referring to New Delhi's agonisingly slow decision-making process with regard to the advanced jet trainer and aircraft carrier purchase, suggested it would still be a long while before India acquired the system, considering the byzantine procedures and time lag that accompany any Indian arms purchase.

India has yet to enter into a formal contract for the purchase of the Phalcon system that could cost up to \$1 billion, they said.

US sources also appeared to relish the fact that India's purchase of the Phalcon could tick off China—which was denied the same system because of similar US pressure on Israel at a time when ties between New Delhi and Beijing were warming up.

But news agencies from Beijing quoted officials there as suggesting they were not particularly alarmed over the US clearance and it was a matter between New Delhi and Washington.

23 MAY 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Sub. Bangla

Khaleda offers hand of friendship

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, May 22: Begum Khaleda Zia's trusted aide, Bangladesh finance minister Saifur Rahman, has delivered an unambiguous message to Delhi: "We are not anti-India and we're no less a friend of India than the Awami League."

The visiting minister made it clear that Bangladesh wanted a prosperous India and hoped the Indian economy would continue to do well. "We would rather be

the neighbour of a rich country than a poor nation — the prosperity of Bangladesh also depends on how well our neighbour does," he said.

Rahman is one of the senior-most ministers in Zia's Cabinet and the number two in the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party. During the last three days he has met top Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to smoothen ties which have been under a cloud of late.

"There is a perception in India that the Awami League is its only friend in Bangladesh. This is not true. The BNP is not anti-India. We are no less a friend of India," Rahman said last night.

Rahman is here on an invitation from his counterpart, finance minister Jaswant Singh. But he took the opportunity to meet other important

ministers as well. Rahman met Vajpayee this morning and later spent time with foreign minister Yashwant Sinha. He met commerce minister Arun Jaitley yesterday.

Rahman denied the presence of Northeast rebels and at Qaida operatives in Bangladesh. "I am a politician and keep moving around in my



Khaleda

country. So far I have not come across any outsiders hiding in our country," he said.

Rahman said the neighbours should be able to resolve any problem that crops up at the political level.

"We should have a mature relationship in which such problems can be sorted out over a telephone call between senior leaders of the two countries," he said.

But this proposal did not figure in his talks with Indian leaders. "There is no specific agenda for my talks. We discussed the big picture — something that will help us understand each other better and create an atmosphere for closer co-operation," Rahman said.

The talks predictably centred around the huge trade gap between the neighbours. The trade gap is over \$1.2 billion in India's favour. Dhaka wants Delhi to help narrow the gap by removing existing tariff and non-tariff barriers and giving Bangladesh goods freer access to the Indian market.

"We know that with India's huge economy and market, the trade gap will always be in its favour. But some urgent steps

should be taken to improve Bangladeshi exports," the finance minister said. "One sure way of doing this is by selling Bangladeshi gas to India."

The BNP government is not averse to the idea, but domestic political compulsions have forced it not to take any decision as yet.

"The moment we take a decision to sell our gas to India, Opposition parties led by the Awami League will create a big hue and cry. In a democracy you cannot totally ignore the views of the Opposition," Rahman said. But he admitted that the government will soon have to decide on what to do.

Though Rahman has not spelt it out, Bangladeshi officials said Dhaka hopes to be given ready access to the Indian market. This would create the impetus in Bangladesh towards building stronger economic ties with India.

"There is a feeling in Bangladesh that though we have opened our market to Indian goods, Delhi has not reciprocated the gesture. Despite assurances, too many roadblocks exist in improving Bangladeshi exports to India," Rahman said.

India opposes lifting of curbs on Iraq

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: In a stand that may be at variance with the latest US thinking on the subject, India has shed its earlier position of being in favour of the immediate lifting of sanctions against Iraq and sought a "new approach".

Asked about India's position on the return of UN weapons inspectors, a move that the US has rejected in favour of the immediate lifting of the curbs, an external affairs spokesperson said on Friday the developments had thrown up several issues, including that of the sanctions. "India has always said that

sanctions should be lifted because of the suffering caused to the Iraqi people. But in the new situation, new approaches have to be taken to several issues, including the sanctions. It is our earnest hope that the issue will be resolved within UN resolutions and international legality at the earliest so that the vital work of Iraq's reconstruction can begin without delay," he said.

If the sanctions are to be lifted "within UN resolutions", UN inspectors will first have to certify that Iraq no longer has prohibited weapons. For this, they will have to be let in to Iraq, something the US doesn't want to do.

External affairs minister Yashwant Sinha spoke to his Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov about the Iraq developments. India expressed the view that it was important for the UN to play a role in the evolving situation so that humanitarian relief could be facilitated and stepped up. The primary significance of humanitarian aid was also stressed in the talks, which also dwelt on Prime Minister Vajpayee's recent statements on the Pakistan issue. Mr Sinha will have an opportunity to discuss the issues when he travels to Moscow for the meeting of the inter-governmental panel in May.

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Sinha, Straw discuss Iraq aid

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 21. — Anxious to get a first hand assessment of events in war-ravaged Iraq, the external affairs minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, called on the British foreign secretary, Mr Jack Straw, while a senior official was sent to Syria, Jordan and Turkey, a day after the Indian mission in Baghdad became functional.

Mr Sinha today spoke to Mr Straw for around 15-20 minutes to get details on the situation in Iraq, including plans for reconstruction and delivery of humanitarian aid. Mr Sinha intends speaking with several of his counterparts to discuss what



Mr Sinha: Jump start

they plan to do for Iraq and the role United Nations could play.

Mr RM Abhyankar, secretary (ANA) in the external affairs ministry, left to-

day for equities neighbouring Iraq, and will hold talks with senior officials in Damascus, Amman and Ankara. He will attempt to get a sense of what areas India can participate in immediately to aid in the reconstruction of Iraq.

In another development, Mr MC Pandey, first secretary in the Indian embassy, returned to Baghdad from Amman yesterday, and although it is not business as usual there, the mission is working, ensuring that India does not miss out on the reshaping of Iraq's future. As in the case of Afghanistan, the foreign ministry is moving swiftly to make sure India's presence is felt.

The Indian embassy, manned by Mr Pandey and an Indian assistant, besides local staff, issued a passport to an Indian who was in prison when the coalition raids began. The man will return to India shortly. The embassy building did not suffer any damage, either in the bombing or subsequent looting, except for some broken windows, a spokesman for the MEA said.

India's Ambassador to Iraq, Mr Brij Bhushan Tyagi, however, has not returned to Baghdad. With no official government in place in Baghdad, the Ambassador is unlikely to return until there is a recognised government in place.

Mr Sinha

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Cadre bares Ufa's Bangla link

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, April 20

ASSAM POLICE have reasons to believe that Bangladesh allows its notified firing ranges to be used by the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) and other militant outfits of the North-east to practise shooting of arms ranging from pistols to mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.

The information, extracted from a dreaded female operative belonging to the United Liberation Front of Asom's elite suicide squad, has established what New Delhi has long suspected

Dhaka of doing — aiding and abetting various militant outfits of the region besides providing asylum to their leaders.

The unassuming Dwipamani Kalita alias Sima Biswas (22), prime accused in Ulfa's mortar attack in the capital complex at Dispur and Ambari area of the city last year, formally surrendered before Assam director-general of police Hare Krishna Deka on Sunday. With her surrender, the case involving the twin attacks in the city, that claimed three lives and injured 19, has been solved, police said.

Kalita was handpicked by

Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Barua and sent to Bangladesh for training in mortar firing in 2001. She told intelligence sleuths that she and two others — Pranay Roy and Dilip Roy — completed training at an unknown location in Misanpur area of Dhaka. But practical mortar practice took place at an officially notified firing range some three hours from Dhaka.

Kalita, an Ulfa explosives expert of the dreaded Engima B Group, further said that those who imparted training were Muslims and appeared non-Indian and non-Bangladeshi. Her state-

ment seems credible in the wake of New Delhi's constant accusation that Dhaka was harbouring North-east militants and allowing them access to Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and al-Qaida operatives.

On April 8, security forces seized a huge cache of arms, including 96 RPGs, in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

The weapons, smuggled through Bangladesh and destined for Ulfa hideouts in Bhutan, were supplied by the Inter-Service Intelligence. Most of these weapons were Russian-made and had apparently been sold by the al-


Qaida. Earlier, the Army's 4th Corps in Tezpur had established the al-Qaida and Taliban stamp on Ulfa arms.

Notably, New Delhi has been exerting pressure on the Begum Khaleda Zia government to ferret out militants from Bangladesh despite the latter's denial of fanning insurgency in the North-east.

The BJP-led NDA government had almost imposed an economic blockade on Bangladesh to drive home its point after a customs official and six traders were abducted by Garo militants and taken to the neighbouring country in February this year.

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Delhi readies Syria team


PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 15: After "exploring" US military action in Iraq through a parliamentary resolution, India has decided to send an official delegation to Syria — the country Washington accuses of harbouring key members of Saddam Hussein's regime and of building weapons of mass destruction.

Syria has denied both charges, but is coming under increasing US pressure.

The decision to send a team led by R.M. Abhayankar, secretary (east) in the foreign ministry, to Damascus at this juncture has raised eyebrows both within and outside South Block.

Abhayankar and his team-mates will also visit Turkey and

Jordan to make an assessment of the situation in the region after Saddam's fall. The trip is scheduled early next week.

The resolution passed by Parliament criticising the US war has already strained relations between New Delhi and Washington. The decision to engage with the Syrian regime will not go down well with the Bush administration either.

While some members of the Indian establishment argued that the trip to Syria could have been avoided, others said that as the US has shown little sensitivity to India's concerns over Pakistan, Delhi should take steps in its national interest.

Another reason for sending Abhayankar to Syria could be Delhi's inability to decide on

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's official visit to Damascus. Vajpayee was due to visit Syria and some other countries in the region when it became clear that the US would attack Iraq and the trip had to be called off. By sending a senior diplomat, India wants to reassure Syria that it will continue to engage with the country despite America's charges.

India's humanitarian aid to Iraq appears set to be put on hold. Delhi had announced a \$20-million food and medicine package.

But the UN, through which the foodgrain will be routed, has said its warehouses are full. This means the 50,000 tonnes of wheat India plans to send will take some time to reach Iraq.

18 APR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Sibal on Dhaka peace mission

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ISA
Sibal

PRANAV SHARMA

New Delhi, April 14: In a bid to iron out differences that strain the country's ties with Bangladesh, foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal will visit Dhaka later this month to hold wide-ranging discussions with his counterpart Shamsher Mobin Chaudhury.

The three-day talks, scheduled to begin from April 28, will allow the two neighbouring countries to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations, with special emphasis on issues related to security.

The foreign secretary-level talks will be preceded by a high level meeting between the directors-general of the Border Security Force and the Bangladesh Rifles, the focus of which will be boundary related disputes.

The meeting between Sibal and Chaudhury is of special significance given Delhi's concerns over the growing activities of Pakistan's ISI and the Northeast insurgents in Bangladesh.

The fact that BSF and BDR top brasses will also be holding parallel meetings in Dhaka has raised hopes in the two capitals about possible resolu-

tion of some of the long-standing disputes.

Relations between Dhaka and Delhi face considerable strain, particularly on the issue of illegal immigration into India from across the border.

In February, a week-long standoff between the security forces of the two sides over the nationality of 213 snake charmers in Cooch Behar ended only after Bangladesh decided to take them back following a failed attempt to push them into India.

Bangladesh foreign minister Morshed Khan, who arrived in Delhi within a few days of the incident to hold talks and resolve the crisis, met with little success.

The standoff between the security forces ended, but Morshed failed to strengthen bilateral ties.

The Indian leadership, that

told the Bangladeshi minister some home truths, felt Morshed's unwillingness to accept Delhi's security concerns stood in the way of progress during the talks.

Arguing that Pakistani intelligence operatives were also present in India, the visiting foreign minister had downplayed growing ISI activities and presence of Northeast insurgents on Bangladesh soil.

South Block hopes that Sibal will have better luck when he meets Chaudhury later this month.

The main thrust of the discussions will be on how to further bilateral relations. The Indian side will highlight security-related issues and Dhaka's indifference towards Delhi's concerns.

The standoff between the BSF and the Bangladesh Rifles

in Cooch Behar was an indication of the strain in relations between the two neighbouring countries.

The firm stand taken by India to "push back" the Bangladeshi snake charmers also suggested that Delhi would no longer take a soft view on the issue of illegal immigration.

Bangladesh, on its part, is likely to draw India's attention to the huge trade deficit that exists between the two sides in favour of the latter.

The country also has complaints about lack of access for Bangladeshi goods to the Indian market.

Last month, the commerce secretaries of the two sides identified more items on which India could remove tariff barriers and narrow the wide trade gap that exists between the two sides.

India has made it clear that it is more than willing to accommodate Bangladeshi concerns in this regard.

However, at the same time, Delhi insists that Dhaka should take some urgent steps, particularly those relating to India's security concerns, to show that it is willing to improve bilateral ties.



Sibal

'Hard realities dictate relations with Iraq'

RAKESH SINHA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

TWO weeks after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Inder Kumar Gujral took a circuitous route to Baghdad. Grappling with the problem of evacuating 170,000 Indians from conquered Kuwait, then External Affairs Minister stopped over at Washington. Secretary of State James Baker told Gujral: "Mr Minister, oil is our civilisation and we will not let any demon sit on it."

Thirteen years later, with Gulf War II underway and Baker's words still ringing in his ears, Gujral has joined the anti-war brigade though he

want my 200,000 people out but I won't touch you? Parliament gave me a standing ovation when I got back."

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Gujral said India "walked the tightrope" in the last war. "We had 170,000 of our own stuck in Kuwait and another 35,000 in Iraq. For us, the evacuation of these people was of supreme importance. Imagine what would have happened if war had begun with the bombing of Kuwait. How would we have pulled them out?"

"There was pressure but we kept in tune with the UN sentiments. There were some differences but I permitted American overflights. Their forces were coming from the

Far East, from bases in the Philippines and elsewhere, to get into West Asia. Our biggest achievement was we succeeded in evacuating everyone who wanted to get back before war began."

Hard realities, he said, dictated Indian relations with Iraq. "I cannot think of a more foolish person than Saddam. For 10 years, he fought the Iraqis. Then he went to Kuwait. And then there was another 10-year spell of post-Kuwait sanctions before this war. He was an authoritarian dictator, someone who would not let anything grow under his feet."

"We have our interests in Iraq and the stand in Parliament represents the senti-

ments of the people. We don't decide our foreign policy on the basis of what Washington does. Saddam was a dictator but remember he was on our side when it came to Kashmir. Also remember that the oldest democracy in the world supports the largest number of dictators. We have to watch our interests."

"We were opposed to war and were in favour of taking all action under the auspices of the UN. We were in favour of inspections, destruction of weapons of mass destruction if they were found. Our parameters were defined. I supported our government stand."

"And I can't think of any other war, where reaction has been so universal. Even during its resources."



INTERVIEW

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Gujral - w April 13

'Hard realities dictate relations with Iraq

RAKESH SINHA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

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INTERVIEW

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"And I can't think of any other war, where reaction has been so universal. Even

in the US, there are protests. Public sentiment is definitely not in American policy."

Gulf War II, the prime minister said viewed in the back Israeli-Palestinian attempts at "de-Russification" of Central Asia and particularly Kazakhstan. The post-Saddam Iraq, Gujral pointed out, would pose new challenges given the sharp divides. "Speedy set people in a democracy should be in every place. The new government should be enough, particularly its resources."

Iraq War unjustified: George

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 12. — The US war on Iraq is unacceptable. That's what George Fernandes, Indian defence minister, said at the inauguration of the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce in Kolkata on Saturday. Mr Fernandes said the Bush administration for having started the war without consulting the nations and stop describing it as a 'double-edged sword' to rein in Iraq. He said the sponsor of the war, the USA, had not been treated as a partner in the post-war reconstruction of Iraq. He said the USA should cooperate in post-war recon-

struction of Iraq. He expressed concern for the Iraqis who, he said, had borne the brunt of attacks for the past 12 years. "Who says the war is just 25 or 30 days old? It has been going on since 1991. Isn't it that sanctions had been imposed on Iraq several years ago? Isn't it that Iraqi planes had been asked not to transgress airspace defined by the USA. It appears that might is right."

There's no doubt that Mr Fernandes's remarks would be music to Marxist ears, particularly so because the minister said that the plea on which the USA declared the war on Iraq was unacceptable. Mr Biman Bose, Left Front chairman, had said recently that all chemical and biological weapons in Iraq had been destroyed between 1994 and 1998.

Mr Fernandes too questioned the USA's justification of the war. "Where are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? ... What will be America's answer? What cannot be glossed over is the USA's gradual shifting of stand. They started the war by saying that WMD should be destroyed and the world saved from deadly weapons. Now they are saying that Iraq should be saved from an authoritarian despot. I find it wholly unjustified." Should India resume bilateral talks with Pakistan? Mr Fernandes said ground-level preparations should be a prelude to such talks.

In his welcome address Mr Sunil Kanoria, Merchants' Chamber of Commerce president, stressed on the need for public-private participation in key sectors of the economy.



Mr George Fernandes and Mr Tapan Sildar at the AGM of the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce in Kolkata on Saturday. — The Statesman

THE STATESMAN

13 APR 2003

India's stand on Iraq

By K. K. Katyal

Those in India who feel Washington may be annoyed if New Delhi favours a U.N. role (in Iraq after the war) need not worry. There will be voices in the U.S., and more so in the U.K., supporting a role for the world body.

THE DEBATE on the Indian stand on Iraq threw up two words, "middle path" and "flexibility", often used by the Government and its critics in support of their viewpoints. The "middle path" lost its validity after the United States-led invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent fast changes in the ground situation. This much is conceded by the Government impliedly, if not explicitly. What else is the meaning of the BJP national executive's resolution in the presence of top Government leaders on the "unjustified war", criticising the role of the U.S. and the U.K. and demanding that the solution be found within the United Nations framework? However, it is only a change of emphasis, not policy. The official side feels that it retains the "flexibility" acquired through the cautious stand, which could be used to play a positive role, though its precise nature cannot be forecast for obvious reasons.

There was an opportunity for the Government to exploit the advantage of its resilience in the run-up to the attack, especially during the intense diplomatic activity at the U.N. and elsewhere. It was not found possible, perhaps, because of the inexorable march of events towards the brink. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, did take one significant step — he wrote to the heads of the P-5 Governments, pinpointing the responsibilities cast on them by their privileged position in the world body and stressing the urgency of making collective efforts to find a solution through means other than recourse to war. Had the Prime Minister's letter and similar other activities been publicised, the criticism of the Government would have been muted.

The Government defended its cautious line on pragmatic grounds. Its mutually contrasting approach consisted of low-key statements in public, and emphatic expression of views in private. The idea was to remain firm on the side of peace but not to let differences with the U.S. come in the way of strengthening the "strategic partnership" with it. As was stated by Mr. Vajpayee at the last all-party meet on March 22: "Our words, actions and diplomatic efforts should be aimed at

trying to achieve pragmatic goals rather than creating rhetorical effect. Quiet diplomacy is far more effective than public posturing." In any case, there was to be no occasion for this policy to be tested in practice — unlike in the case of the 1991 Gulf War. The U.S., then, sought New Delhi's permission, first, for overflight of its military aircraft and; later, for refuelling facilities. The Janata Dal Government — I. K. Gujral was the External Affairs Minister then — conceded the first request, while taking care not to make it public, and the Chandra Shekhar Government agreed to the second. The second permission became known, as mentioned in these columns, accidentally, raising a storm of protest by vast sections. No such requests are expected now.

How can the "flexibility" be made use of in the coming days and weeks? It all depends on the emerging situation. Let us take the most likely case scenario — military success for the U.S. and its occupation of Iraq — after large-scale destruction, death of thousands, injury to much larger numbers and untold sufferings. This, coupled with the hostility of the general mass of people and guerrilla activities, may make the situation highly unmanageable. There may, thus, be an occasion to bring the U.N. back in the picture, despite its dismal record in failing to avert the war or bringing about a ceasefire. The U.S. could be expected to seek legitimacy for its invasion with retrospective effect, with the implied blessing by the world body of the unilateral step. After an initial spell of military administration, the U.S. may like the U.N. to be associated with a new dispensation, consisting of Iraqis — needless to say, confirmed anti-Saddam elements and dissidents in exile. If and when reached, it could be a tricky stage. The U.S. may prefer a nominal association of the U.N. with a set-up

essentially controlled by it and the U.K. Others may oppose this extension of unilateralism from the military to the civilian field. They would like the U.N. to play an effective role in relation to the new dispensation in Iraq. That could be an occasion for India to make credible use of its "flexibility".

But before the shape of the future administration is finalised, there will be the immediate, urgent task of relief, supply of essential items and medicines and treatment of the injured. Here again, the question may arise whether the control of the humanitarian effort should be with the U.N. or the U.S. and the U.K. Washington may not like, say, France and Germany to have an equal say in matters related to the humanitarian effort. India, along with like-minded countries, could well throw its weight on the side of the U.N. A challenging task for Indian diplomacy.

It would require total concentration and, as such, there has to be no distraction by the controversies of the past. Some of the issues, that held the key to peace, have become irrelevant. For instance, the controversy over the role of weapons inspectors, mandated by the U.N. under the Security Council resolution 1441, has become meaningless. Similarly, issues — such as whether the U.S. action is to be "deplored" or "condemned" — do not have the same topical validity as they did last month. The deed has been done. The "middle path" is not relevant now, as already stated.

The essentials of the Government's position are spelt out in the official statements on the commencement of military action and just before that. On March 18, it said "our counsel has been against war and in favour of peace. We have emphasised that all decisions on Iraq must be taken under the authority of the United Nations. We have stated that any move

for change in regime in Iraq should come from within and not be imposed from outside. We have also been drawing attention to the precarious humanitarian situation of the Iraqi people which war would only aggravate. We are deeply disappointed by the inability of the U.N. Security Council to act collectively, especially the failure of the Permanent Members to harmonise their position on Iraq."

Two days later, on the day of the attack, the Government, repeating the earlier concerns, expressed "grave concern that continuing differences within the Security Council prevented a harmonisation of the positions of its members, resulting in seriously impairing the U.N. system. The military action begun today lacks justification. It also appears from the pronouncements of Hans Blix and Al Baradei (U.N. inspectors) that military action was avoidable."

It would be unrealistic, on the face of it, to expect the U.S. to be accommodative of the U.N. now, when earlier, at a more difficult stage, it chose the unilateral path. With Iraq under its control and having paid a heavy price in monetary terms, \$ 75 billion according to official estimates, and having suffered casualties, it would not be inclined to let the U.N. — and, through it, France and others — have a finger in the Iraq pie. But there is the other side of the coin. Washington may need the world body for political and other reasons. The U.S. and the U.K. are widely seen as occupation powers, not as liberators, in the Muslim world. The public opinion in these countries is already agitated and things may get worse when the extent of the damage in Iraq — death of thousands of civilians and destruction of infrastructure — is known. The "allies", in that case, may require the U.N. cover to save themselves from the consequences of people's wrath. Those in India who feel Washington may be annoyed if New Delhi favours a U.N. role need not worry. There will be voices in the U.S., and more so in the U.K., supporting a role for the world body. In any case, India will be operating within the set parameters — of preserving, deepening and expanding relations with the U.S.

7 APR 2003

THE HINDU

Iranian special envoy meets PM

By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 21. The Iranian President's special envoy, Ali Akbar Velayati, called on the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and handed over a letter from his leader, Mohammed Khatami.

Mr. Velayati, who also met the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, is said to have exchanged views on the "evolving situation" in Iraq.

The special envoy, who was in Islamabad yesterday, had travelled to Indonesia as part of his apparent Iraq-related mission.

Asked about the Velayati visit, the Foreign Office spokesman said he was not aware whether issues other than Iraq came up for discussion.

Given India's close ties with the United States, New Delhi appeared to be "proper" when it comes to dealings with Iran, especially since it is part of what the U.S. President, George W. Bush, calls the "axis of evil."

In his Navroz message, the Iranian President was forthright in his condemnation of the U.S. invasion of Iraq: "(This) is a threat against humanity and global peace, since it is based on



Ali Akbar Velayati, Special Envoy of the Iranian President, Mohammed Khatami, with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Friday. — AFP

a horrible illusion of a super-power which (thinks) since it has force, it has the right to impose its demands at will...."

"Today, it is America which is alone; it is America whose actions lack legitimacy...." Mr. Khatami said, adding that Iran had opposed the war from the outset. Iran would coordinate with other countries on developments taking place in Iraq.

In another development, the Foreign Office spokesman said the Acting Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, was understood to have conveyed to the Indian High

Commissioner in Malaysia Veena Sikri, his apologies for the ill-treatment of Indian IT professionals.

Stating that Mr. Badawi's sentiments would have a positive effect on bilateral relations, the spokesman said the Malaysian leader had also stated that such incidents would not recur.

Separately, King Gyanendra of Nepal held talks with the political leadership on issues of bilateral concern.

The King, who will visit Chennai and Kancheepuram, also attended a banquet hosted by the President, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam.

Leave Iraq, India ^{11/3} tells ^{11/3} its ^{11/3} citizens

New Delhi: As the threat of a US-led war loomed large, India on Monday asked its citizens, including embassy officials, to leave Iraq immediately.

"There are about 50 Indians, including embassy staff in Iraq and they have been asked to take immediate steps to leave that country," external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha said here after a two-hour meeting of all parties on Iraq convened by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee.

Observing that the situation was "developing very rapidly", Mr Sinha said India is ready to meet any contingency that might arise in the event of a military conflict.

"We have taken all precautions to ensure the safety and security of Indian nationals in that area," he said adding that on the question of oil supplies "we have built our reserves. There is no cause for concern".

On Sunday, top officers of the armed forces briefed Mr Vajpayee and his deputy L.K. Advani on the situation that may develop if the US attacks Iraq.

The two-hour briefing, which took place in the defence ministry in South Block, was aimed at giving the top leadership an overview of the possible scenario and its effects on India and the region, official sources said on Monday.

Earlier, agitated Congress members on Monday had heated exchanges in the Lok Sabha with those from the ruling BJP on the Iraq crisis after they alleged that the NDA government was being "guided" by the US on the Iraq issue. They also asked Mr Vajpayee to make the government's stand clear on various aspects of the issue.

Stating that the government was concerned about the evolving situation in Iraq,

BJP chief whip Vijay Kumar Malhotra said Mr Vajpayee had convened an all-party meeting and accused the opposition of trying to gain "political mileage" by raising the matter before the meeting.

When Congress chief whip Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi and some of his colleagues charged that the NDA government was being "guided" by the US, Mr Malhotra retorted "I say you and your party are being guided by the US."

Mr Malhotra wanted to know from Sonia Gandhi, leader of the opposition, as to why has she not made a statement clarifying her party's stand on the Iraq issue.

"You do not read newspapers," Mr Dasmunshi reacted angrily saying the Congress and the Left parties were among the first to issue statements that the UN security council resolution must be adhered to in finding a solution to the crisis. PTI

The countdown..



- No cause for concern over oil supplies, says Yashwant Sinha
- Top defence officers brief PM, deputy PM
- US guiding NDA on Iraq stand, alleges Congress
- Demands Lok Sabha resolution opposing war on Iraq

Emirates deport Dawood brother

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 19: In a blow to D-Company, the United Arab Emirates today deported most-wanted don Dawood Ibrahim's brother and a close associate to India.

An Air-India plane carrying the duo landed in Mumbai shortly after 11 pm. Dawood's brother Iqbal Hassan Sheikh is an accused in six criminal cases being investigated by Mumbai police and Ejaz Pathan is wanted for his alleged role in the 1993 Bombay blasts, believed to have been masterminded by the don.

A close associate of Dawood, Pathan was looking after the D-Company's fake currency and narcotics business. He was working with Aftab Batki, another underworld operative based in Dubai. The CBI had, through Interpol, issued a red corner notice against Pathan a couple of years after the blasts.

Alleged to be one of the prime conspirators, Pathan is believed to have supplied explosives for the blasts as well as pumped arms for the riots that followed.

The deportation — which comes after another Dawood brother, Anees Ibrahim, was allowed to go scot free by Dubai — suggests that negotiations with the United Arab Emirates government are paying off.

Pathan and Iqbal have been in and out of Dubai ever since the police there launched a crackdown on criminals after the murder of Sharad Shetty, another Dawood associate. Iqbal had been living with his wife in Al Garhood, opposite Dubai airport. He owns an electronics shop in Dubai — Al Barka Electronics. Unlike Dawood's four other brothers, Iqbal continues to hold an Indian passport that was issued in Mumbai on October 31, 1986, and renewed twice.

Besides Anees, who was arrested by Dubai authorities a couple of months ago but freed, Noorul Haque alias Noora, Mustaqim and Humayum are Dawood's other brothers. The don has four sisters — Hasina, who lives in Mumbai, and Saitoon, Farzana and Mumtaz, who are Dubai residents.

Sources said Iqbal plays an important role in the D-Company's business and has been deliberately kept out of the illegal activities, most of which are handled by Anees.

Iqbal manages many front companies, financial firms, showrooms and bars. It is learnt that he was in the process of investing in a big way somewhere in Europe for which \$50 million was being sought in loans from foreign banks.

Dawood's brother, carrying Indian passport, kept back in jail

Dubai-Delhi deal on fugitives

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Dubai, Feb. 13: Ravindra Rastogi, wanted in connection with the "duty drawback" scam, was deported to Mumbai after India and Dubai worked out a landmark deal last week which will govern their treatment of criminals and fugitives in the future.

Two of Rastogi's accomplices in the case are being sent to India, it is learnt.

As part of this deal, Noora Ibrahim, a brother of mafia don Dawood Ibrahim, continues to languish in jail in Dubai. Several alleged criminals with Indian passports are also in jail with Noora.

Mustaqim, another brother of the don, was released along with his lieutenant, Ijaz Bhatki, after Pakistani consular officials here confirmed to Dubai authorities that they were Pakistani nationals and their Pakistani passports were genuine.

These two men have subsequently left for Karachi.

The deal, which was outlined by Dubai's strongman Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid to Indian ambassador K. C. Singh last week, envisages speedy deportation of Indians wanted by New Delhi for economic offences.

Shaikh Mohammed said Dubai was willing to hand over to India anyone whose guilt could be convincingly made out to au-

thorities in the emirate.

He cited the example of Imran Rehman Khan, an activist of the Students' Islamic Movement of India, who was deported to India in January within a month of his arrival in the emirate.

Khan allegedly masterminded a bomb blast that killed two persons in Ghatkopar, Mumbai, on December 2 last year. He was handed over to India by Dubai police within weeks after a request was made by New Delhi to Dubai authorities for his arrest and deportation.

To prove Dubai's bona fide in cooperating with India against terrorism, Shaikh Mohammed said he had ordered the closure last fortnight of the Lashkar-e-Toiba's office in the emirate.

Long after the US proclaimed the Lashkar as a terrorist outfit and Pakistan banned its activities, Dubai had allowed a Lashkar office to function.

Lashkar activists in the emirate have now been rounded up and deported to Pakistan, thereby closing what was probably the last public window of the group, the Dubai strongman told the ambassador.

He also gave Singh a detailed briefing on what Dubai authorities had so far done in the war against terror, mostly working with American law enforcers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Dubai

► FROM PAGE 1

Shaikh Mohammed, however, said India had failed to make a convincing case for any action against Dawood and some others.

He said what the CBI was touting as evidence of their involvement in the Mumbai serial bomb blasts in 1993 was only the testimony of witnesses in the custody of the authorities in Mumbai.

Such testimony lacked credibility since it was not freely given in court and could have been obtained under duress.

He defended the release of Mustaqim, Ijaz Bhatki and some others with Pakistani passports, when Singh pointed out that they were Indians.

He said they may have been Indians at one time, but were now holding Pakistani passports, the validity of which had been confirmed by Pakistani consular officials in Dubai.

He said Noora and several others were still in jail because they had Indian passports, some of which had been revoked. Therefore, their cases were different.

Shaikh Mohammed retorted that if Singh's argument was accepted, all Pakistanis who were born before August 14, 1947, and those who migrated from India since then could be considered Indian nationals.

The deal between Singh and Shaikh Mohammed, which may form the basis for future deportations, appears to have been prompted by the intervention of United Arab Emirates president and Abu Dhabi ruler Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan.

Shaikh Zayed was briefed in detail in December about India's problems with Dubai by former prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral, who was in Abu Dhabi to address a thinktank.

14 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

U.N. consent must for action against Iraq: India

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, FEB. 12. Any unilateral attack by the United States on Iraq will be viewed with considerable concern by India, which remains convinced that military action, if any, must take place with the consent of the United Nations.

India sticks to the position it has adopted in recent months that the U.N. Security Council is the correct forum to decide on what is to be done with Iraq.

According to informed sources, the Government will have to come out with a public response to any unilateral attack by the American "coalition of the willing" against Iraq.

The sources point out that the Left parties have already taken to the streets and even the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief has spoken out against any attack on Iraq. Given such a situation, India will have to respond to these concerns.

New Delhi is keenly watching the Iraq developments — the differences on the issue between the U.S. and France and Germany — and the report to be presented to the U.N. Security Council by Hans Blix, chief weapons inspector, on Friday.

The view here is that whatever Mr. Blix says will be of paramount importance to the future course to be adopted by the U.N. Security Council on the Iraq front. Public opinion in Europe, including that in the United Kingdom, was not in favour of a unilateral American attack on Iraq. India is also concerned about the strategic implications of an attack on Iraq and believes that not all of them can be anticipated immediately.

Apart from an increase in oil prices, the sources do not rule out the possibility of a break-up of Iraq. If the U.S. establishes a full-fledged democratic regime in a post-Saddam Hussein scenario, then the impact on

neighbouring, non-democratic regimes will be significant.

The territorial integrity of Iraq, they believe, could be affected in case an unstable regime takes power in the aftermath of military action. The Indian position on Iraq — the preference for the U.N. route — was spelt out when the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was in New York for the U.N. General Assembly session last September.

In response to a question whether India would throw open its bases and military facilities to Iraq in the event of military action, Mr. Vajpayee had said that the question did not arise. The sources are not unaware that the U.S. would like unstinted and unqualified Indian support for its position on Iraq. However, India continues to stick to its substantive view that the future course on Iraq must be charted by the Security Council.

13 FEB 2003

Indian diplomats in Baghdad stay put

DUBAI, FEB. 4. Indian diplomats in Baghdad are staying put in the Iraqi capital amid reports that some other missions here are leaving the country as fear of the U.S.-led war on Iraq mounts. "We have no schedule to leave Baghdad," B.B. Tyagi, India's Ambassador in Iraq, said. The diplomats would stay to coordinate assistance to the Indian nationals there.

"There are about 50 Indian nationals here from both private and public sector companies in India," Mr. Tyagi said.

Reports said the American interests section in Baghdad would close tomorrow and the three Polish diplomats who work there would leave by road for Amman and then to Warsaw. Representatives of Yugoslavia and Spain have already left Baghdad.

India has ongoing trade with Iraq under the oil-for-food programme allowed under United Nations sanctions to procure essential items such as medicine and food.

Iraq recently approved a deal to buy Indian wheat which was once earlier rejected on the ground it was infected. —PTI

Detained U.S. aircraft cleared

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 4. The authorities are understood to have cleared the crew of the U.S. cargo aircraft detained in Mumbai of any mischief and asked it to file a fresh flight clearance plan prior to allowing it to proceed to Male.

The aircraft was ordered to land on Monday after it deviated from its flight path after taking off from Karachi and entered the Indian air defence zone without prior clearance.

The interrogation of the 11-member crew, conducted by civil aviation authorities and intelligence agencies, revealed that the deviation was unintentional, informed sources said here.

However, this was not the case on Monday evening. The flag went up after the plane from Karachi was detected by military surveillance radars at 5 p.m. to have deviated from its flight path.

Since it was flying inland over Gujarat and could have headed for some sensitive installations such as Bombay High, the mil-

itary liaison unit informed the Mumbai air traffic control (ATC) of the air space violation.

As the plane initially did not make radio contact with the ATC, standard operating procedures, including ordering MiG-21 fighter jets from Bhuj air base to get airborne, came into effect.

But the Conco Corporation-owned plane subsequently established radio contact with the ATC and confirmed that it was regaining the original flight path. "Force was not required to make him land," said sources.

However, the authorities asked it to land since the aircraft had taken off from Pakistan and such deviations normally do not take place.

Moreover, they did not want to take a chance and wanted to question the crew because of a couple of recent alarms.

An aircraft refused to identify itself near Chennai last week and a fracas over flying of a Lufthansa cargo aircraft over the Prime Minister's residence took place a few days earlier.

THE HINDU

5 FEB 2003

Common interests

Delhi tangos with Teheran 5-8

Delhi and Teheran have a number of common or complementary interests, and they have been collaborating on strategic issues, not least in facilitating "regime change" in Kabul by backing the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, where the lineup for a long time has been Delhi-Teheran-Moscow against Riyadh-Islamabad. India's energy needs are slated to go up, and Iran is the nearest big producer of oil and natural gas, which is another good reason to cultivate Teheran. The decision to go ahead with joint naval exercises between Indian and Iranian navies would leave India's footprints in the strategic Persian Gulf region. The regime in Islamabad is unstable and keeps itself going with anti-Indian rhetoric, a situation not likely to change dramatically in the short term. Hence Delhi needs a counterweight in the Muslim world to Islamabad, which has wealthy and influential sponsors in Riyadh; Teheran fits the bill, as there is little love lost between Sunni and monarchical Saudi Arabia and Shia and revolutionary Iran. All this needs to be done subtly, of course, there is no point taking explicit sides in the Riyadh-Teheran feud, or for that matter the Iran-West feud — a model to follow in this respect is Beijing, which maintains good relations with both Western countries and the Arab world. As a moderate reformer who is popular inside Iran, President Mohammed Khatami was a good choice to have over as chief guest for the Republic Day celebrations.

Khatami may have hoped to persuade his hosts about the feasibility of a pipeline project which would pump gas to India through Pakistan, but events almost simultaneous with his visit have put paid to those hopes, when Pakistani tribesmen on the western border attacked and blew up pipelines not once but three times, disrupting gas supplies within Pakistan itself. The only options now would seem to be to package the gas and ship it as LNG, or an undersea pipeline, both of which would push up costs and hence need to have their commercial viability carefully evaluated. Delhi has made headway in its diplomatic campaign against Islamabad, getting Teheran to agree countries "that aid, abet and directly support international terrorism" must be condemned, and "double standards" on the issue must cease. Skeptics could argue that Teheran is following double standards itself by supporting groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, but there is a debate ongoing inside Iran on this issue, with Khatami and the moderate camp arguing that this support must cease if Teheran is to mend its fences with the West. Be that as it may, the Delhi declaration seeks to boost ties on a broad variety of fronts, including economic, technological, military and strategic cooperation. That surely is the way forward.

Avoid war on Iraq: PM

Rathin Das
Ahmedabad, January 28

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee has urged the superpowers to avoid a war with Iraq. The Prime Minister instead favoured United Nations-mediated talks to avert the war-like situation.

Addressing a gathering after dedicating the Ahmedabad-Nadiad section of the National Expressway I to the nation, Vajpayee said that the superpowers must exercise restraint in Iraq as nobody wants a war.

Without naming any country, the Prime Minister said, "I have no idea what the superpowers are thinking, but it is time for them to show super restraint."

Vajpayee said that Iraq and the European countries do not want a war and expressed the hope that the issue would be solved through

WARNING ON ANTI-WTO STAND

THE PRIME Minister on Tuesday gave clear and loud signals to the Swadeshi Jagran Manch to tone down its anti-WTO stand and its demand to ban foreign goods. He was speaking at the AJ Somaiyya College Grounds at Sion after inau-

gurating the Mela. The mela has been organised by the Jagran Manch to promote Indian manufacturers and traders. He said self-reliance was important than the narrow concepts of Swadeshi.

HTC, Mumbai

talks involving the United Nations.

War would adversely affect the economy and hamper the country's development process as India imports a bulk of its crude oil from Iraq and the Gulf region. The Prime Minister said that the price of oil has already gone up and would go up further should a war

break out in the Gulf.

Vajpayee also stressed on the need for oil conservation as India spends around Rs 90,000 crore in importing the precious fuel every year. The completion of one side of the Golden Quadrilateral joining the four corners of the country would help save Rs 8,000 crore on petrol alone, he added.

29 JAN 2003

World must heed Gandhi, says Khatami

Qudus

*H10-13
2/26/11*

By Our Staff Reporter

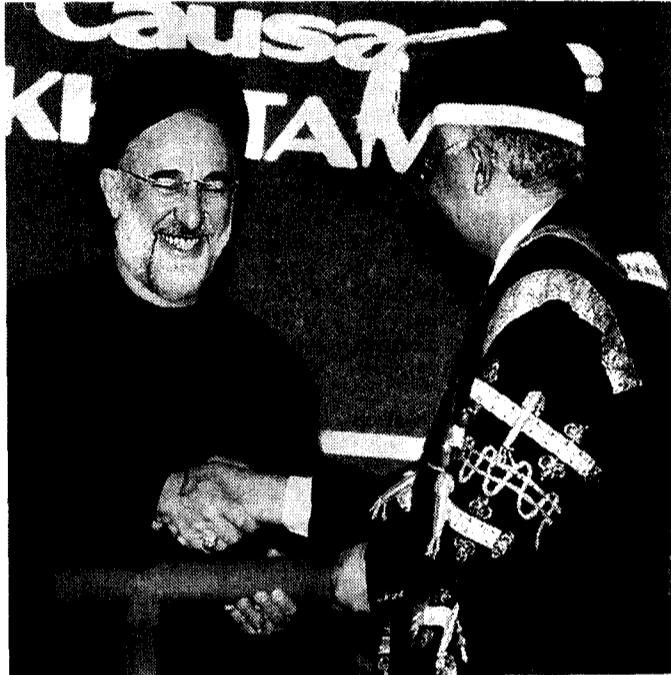
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27. The visiting President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, said here today that Mahatma Gandhi belonged not only to India but to the entire world and "had the present world not seen Gandhi, it would not have believed that politics could possibly blend with ethics and morality".

Addressing a gathering at the India Habitat Centre here after being conferred the degree of Doctor of Letters by the University of Delhi, the Iranian President said "Today, the world is more than ever in need of the voice of Gandhi. If 'today' we listen to the voice which liberated India 'yesterday', we will then be in the position to salvage our tomorrow."

Mr. Khatami said that it was Gandhi who with his philosophy and policy, poverty and contentment, showed to the "helpless men of power that they were really weak and wretched", while adding that "Gandhi does not belong to India. He is the Gandhi of the world of mysticism of both the Iranians and the Moslems. Although he had a hand in politics, his hands did not have the taint of politicisation."

Describing Gandhi as the figure India had presented to the world to dispel the age of darkness or "Kaliyug", he said Gandhi's life was proof of his deep-rooted beliefs, and that the thinker had taught us that real victory was not the victory over opponents but a victory along with the opponent.

While noting that many believe that Gandhian thoughts and concepts were not applicable today, he said



The Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, being conferred the honorary degree of doctorate by the Vice-Chancellor of the Delhi University, Deepak Nayyar, at a convocation in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: S. Arneja

our world was simply incapable of comprehending his notion and vision.

"If we are incapable of listening to such great personalities, instead of admitting to our mental inability, infirmity and delirium, we must not attribute our shortcomings and frailties to them," he said.

Stating that Gandhi's greatness lay in the fact that he deprived himself of the joy of triumph over his adversaries and endeavoured to bring about his own victories, he observed that "following such a great figure is no easy task. The power one needs to overcome violence and wrath is not of the same nature as the force

applied to bring forth destruction to the world and humanity.

"That is why history has to wait and watch for a thousand years before another person like Gandhi can emerge."

Speaking on the occasion, the Delhi University Vice-Chancellor, Deepak Nayyar, said that "at a time when we hear the political cymbals proclaiming the clash of civilisations, 'President Khatami has changed the terms of the discourse into a dialogue between civilizations.

"His message has always been one of peace and democracy and of openness and tolerance: a message that we in India share, understand and appreciate."

Iran offers more crude to India

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 27. Iran has offered to supply more crude oil to India in the backdrop of war clouds over Iraq and possible disruptions in oil availability. The gesture came from the visiting Iranian President, Syed Mohammad Khatami, who said his country was "fully prepared" to raise the volume of crude exports to India.

Describing India as one of the best customers of Iranian crude, he welcomed "all sorts of investments" by Indian petroleum companies in Iran's oil and gas industry.

Addressing Indian industry at a meeting organised by the FICCI and the CII, he sought more cooperation between the two countries in the energy, information technology, education and tourism sectors as well as reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Expressing optimism over the proposed Iran-India gas pipeline project, Mr. Khatami simultaneously suggested the two countries explore "all other possible ways for the supply of Indian energy by Iran and chalk out ways for implementation".

He was probably referring to supply of gas in the form of LNG (liquid natural gas)

about which the Petroleum Minister, Ram Naik, will be visiting Iran shortly.

On the pipeline project, he said it was at the feasibility study stage. The project could play a significant role in providing India with an inexpensive and perennial flow of energy.

Mr. Khatami also declared his country's readiness to cooperate with Indian counterparts in the investment and implementation of projects for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Mutual proposals have been presented to raise the infrastructure for the routes of Chahbahar-Fahraj and Delaram-Zaranj to be carried out in cooperation with India.

"Fortunately, a trilateral conference of India, Afghanistan and Iran has recently been held in Teheran which will certainly pave the road for the further interaction and cooperation among the three countries", he said.

Regarding the North-South corridor and the conclusion of the transit agreement by India, Russia and Iran, he said this had given an impetus to the existing opportunities for implementing common projects and investment by both countries as well as ex-

port of goods to Central Asia and Europe. "We are fully prepared to provide all the required facilities for export of Indian commodities and products to the world market," he said.

Referring to the need for promoting tourism in both countries which have many tourist attractions, he said new measures had been taken to establish new air routes between the two countries.

On the need for increasing cooperation, he said both countries must try to remove obstacles that were hindering the process of cooperation through dialogue, reviews and resolution.

Earlier, the president of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, A.N.S. Khamoushi, pointed to the need for Iran to enter into a trade agreement with India to eliminate discriminatory tariffs. He noted that India was a member of the WTO and had also entered into many trade agreements with other countries. In this scenario, it was difficult for many Iranian products to find a market here owing to higher tariffs being levied on them. The solution to this problem, he felt, was for the two countries to enter into a bilateral trade agreement.

THE HINDU

29 JAN 2003

Khatami's visit strengthens old ties

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
in New Delhi

Jan. 27. — A significant aspect of Iranian President Seyyed Mohammed Khatami's visit has been the "vision for a strategic partnership" in which cooperation in issues of strategic interest will be promoted through the "mechanisms of a strategic dialogue". This includes ongoing foreign office consultations and "institutional interactions between the National Security Councils of the two countries", outlined in the crucial MoU on a "road map to strategic cooperation".

Seeking to build upon the ancient intercourse that formed the mainstay between the two civilisations, the New Delhi Declaration signed by Mr Khatami and Mr AB Vajpayee outlines the areas in which the bilateral relationship will go forward. These include energy security (though that is of vital importance), cooperation in oil and gas

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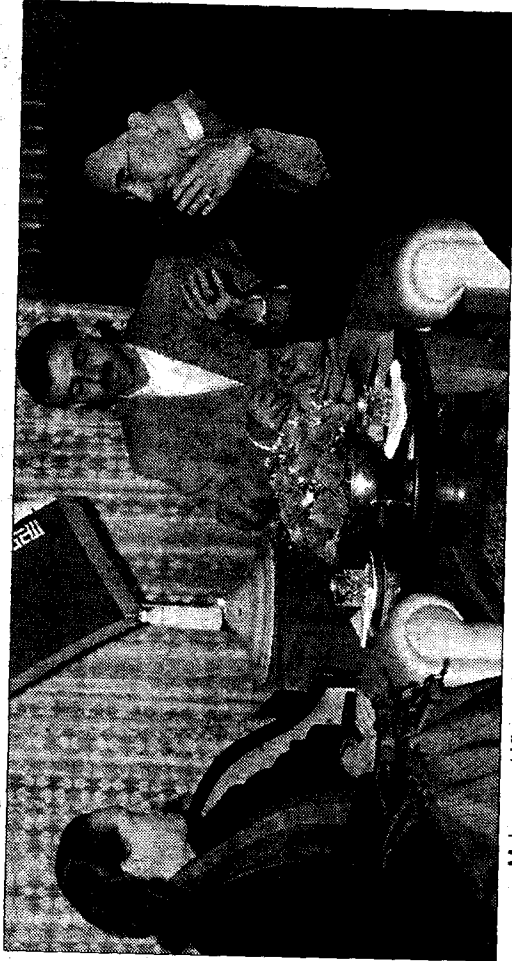
NEW DELHI, Jan. 27 — After watching the Republic Day parade on Rajpath, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam invited the Iranian President to an impromptu, exclusive, one-on-one lunch at his residential quarters in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Mr Khatami would otherwise have eaten lunch alone at the 'Dwarka Suite' at Rashtrapati Bhavan, where he stayed on the trip. The President served his guest mostly Indian non-vegetarian specialities; pulao, fish curry cooked in coconut sauce (with limited spices), fish fry, mutton curry and *rasmalai*.

An intensive discussion of their prolific literary output and achievements was the highlight of the 90-minute luncheon tete-a-tete, with Mr Khatami explaining his view of Islam as outlined in his book, *Dialogue among Civilisations: Role of Islam in Civil Society*.

Dr Kalam had been specially impressed by a passage comparing a statesman and an artiste; both needed to be creative in handling developing situations.

Dr Kalam outlined his vision for a developed India by 2020 and presented Mr Khatami an autographed set of his books, *Ignited Minds and India 2020*. — SNS

supplies, cooperation in defence activities, and strategic collaboration in third countries, primarily Afghanistan. Iran, directly affected by the Iraq crisis, holds no brief for Saddam Hussein's government but, like India, wants any action to be under the direct UN purview. Mr Khatami's inputs on the situation in the Gulf gave the Indian leadership a crucial view, excluded as they are from the Security Council's deliberations.



Mohammad Khatami (right) with Mrs Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

That the relationship aims to bypass Pakistan, with whom both nations share uneasy ties (despite Iran being an Islamic nation, it is predominantly Shia) and move ahead to bolster the economic aspect of the relationship is clear from the nature of collaboration both nations envisage; long term and active. For India, Iran is also a vital transit country to link it

to the North-South Corridor, cutting across the huge energy reserves of Central Asia. Using the country as a transit hub would help reduce the length of the land route to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan by almost 1,500 km, while the sea route through Chahbahar (avoiding Bandar Abbas) would cut the distance by 600 km, significantly lowering the cost of trade and transport of

goods to that region.

Seeking joint collaboration in energy, information technology, education and tourism as well as reconstruction of Afghanistan, Iran is prepared to increase the volume of crude oil exports to India.

Speaking at a business session organised by CII and FICCI today, Mr Khatami invited Indian businessmen to invest in his country.

India, Iran share views on Iraq situation

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, JAN. 26. India and Iran have a considerable degree of similarity on a possible American-led war against Iraq apart from the congruence of views on Afghanistan and other regional issues.

According to informed sources, India and Iran have been able to discuss key issues and also broadbase their bilateral relationship in the energy, transport and trade sectors during the ongoing visit of the Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami. On Iraq, the two countries agreed that the situation should be resolved peacefully under the auspices of the United Nations. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, Iran stressed the importance of reconstructing the devastated nation.

It is significant that Mr. Khatami is the first-ever Iranian leader to grace Republic Day celebrations at a time when the Americans see Iran as part of the axis of evil and Indo-U.S. relations are on the upswing.

During the official talks on Saturday, the two countries

agreed to discuss the idea of a bilateral preferential trade agreement, which is to focus on the areas of pharmaceuticals, automotives, information technology and food-processing.

Bilateral trade between the two countries currently stands at \$ 2 billion, of which \$1.4 billion comprises Indian oil imports from Iran. The sources made it clear that the India-Iran gas pipeline was certainly not "dead" and that the report of the joint technical committee on both the undersea route as well as overland through Pakistan was awaited. Looking at a

"pipeline plus" model in the energy sector, the sources said that the Indian Oil Corporation had sought Iranian permission to set up a marine oil tanking terminal. India, they said, was also interested in gas and oil exploration as well as investing in refining capacity. Pointing to the importance of an MoU on a "road map to strategic cooperation", the sources said that this pointed to India and Iran giving concrete content to their "growing strategic convergence". The two countries, under this framework, agreed to work out a "joint mechanism" on broad-

based cooperation in the energy sector. Iran and India also agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in the defence arena, including training and exchange of visits.

They also declared that their defence cooperation was not aimed at any "third country".

The sources stressed that Iran was now interested in involving Indian companies in the development of the Chabahar port, not just the road route from Chabahar that link Afghanistan.

Iran is also keen that India take up the construction of the Chabahar-Fahraj-Bam railway link. India, Iran and Afghanistan had expressed their determination to develop the road links from the Chabahar port to Afghanistan, which will provide a secure land access for Indian goods being exported to Afghanistan. During the talks on Saturday, India and Iran also agreed that the campaign against terrorism should not be based on double standards. They were interested in working for early finalisation of a comprehensive convention against international terrorism.

Kalam has private lunch with Khatami

By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 26. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, today invited the Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, for a private lunch at his Rashtrapati Bhavan family apartment. The lunch, at which only the two Presidents were present, lasted for nearly an hour-and-a-half, official sources said this evening. In a gesture of goodwill, Dr. Kalam invited Mr. Khatami for the one-on-one lunch during which the books written by the two Presidents came up for discussion. The lunch was unscheduled and took place after the formal banquet hosted by Dr. Kalam in honour of the visiting Iranian leader, who is also staying at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

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27 JAN 2003

HINDU

India, Iran unveil road diplomacy

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 25. In a move that could radically alter the geopolitics of the region, India and Iran today agreed to step up work on transport projects that link the subcontinent with the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe.

The projects announced today by the visiting Iranian President, Syed Mohammed Khatami, and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, as part of a new road map to strategic cooperation, would increase the leverage of India and Iran in the Great Game for accessing the landlocked resources and markets of Eurasia.

Ever since the Partition in 1947, Pakistan had blocked India's access to Afghanistan and beyond. The new transport corridors through Iran could liberate India from the geographic constraints imposed by the division of the subcontinent.

The transport links reinforce Iran's claim as the natural gateway between Eurasia and the Indian Ocean littoral. An early completion of these transport corridors could give Iran an edge over Pakistan which wants to control access routes and energy pipelines from land-locked Central Asia.

At a press conference here, Mr. Vajpayee stated that the two countries are determined to "consolidate, expand and diversify" the bilateral relations with clear targets to be achieved over the next five years.

In the New Delhi Declaration



The Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, being welcomed by the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, during the ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Saturday. The Minister of State for External Affairs, Digvijay Singh, is also seen. — Photo: V. Sudershan

they signed this evening, the two leaders recognised that their "growing strategic convergence need to be underpinned with a strong economic relationship".

In boosting the economic content of the relationship, the focus is on building transport corridors and deepening energy cooperation. Among the three transport projects to be taken up in Iran is the development of a new port complex at Chah Bahar on the coast of Iran, from where a road goes north to the border with Afghanistan.

India has agreed to build a link from Zaranj on the Iran-Afghan border to Delaram on the

garland road that connects all major cities in Afghanistan.

This road also links up further north with the Central Asian republics. The second project involves the linking of the Chah Bahar port to the Iranian rail network which is connected to Central Asia and Europe.

For Iran, the Chah Bahar complex could become the main entrepot for energy and commercial trade with Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Caspian region. Islamabad, too, has been pursuing a similar objective and has plans to develop the Gwadar port not too far away from Chah Bahar on the Makaran coast of Pakistan. A

third project is about building marine oil tanking terminal in Iran.

The "full significance" of the joint projects between India and Iran, Mr. Vajpayee said, "will come out after some time". Mr. Khatami said, Iran "welcomes the presence of India in scientific and commercial fields in Central Asia".

As they laid out the contours of the strategic partnership, the two leaders assured the world that their cooperation was not directed against any third party.

The two sides agreed today to develop a mutually-satisfactory mechanism to transport natural gas from Iran to India by overcoming the remaining obstacles. They are also exploring the prospects for broader defence cooperation.

HD-11
25/11

India, Iran to explore prospects in Eurasia

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 24. The President of Iran, Syed Mohammed Khatami, arrived here today on a four-day visit that could help consolidate the new political partnership between two ancient civilisations. Mr. Khatami comes here amid recent efforts by the two nations to physically link India to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe through Iran.

Capitals in the region are closely monitoring the cooperation between India and Iran, which has the potential to alter the geopolitics in their shared neighbourhood.

The political cooperation between the two countries has rapidly expanded since the mid-1990s as they found common interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Building on that political convergence, India and Iran are now considering joint infrastructure projects that give India vital access to the Eurasian heartland. For India, Iran is emerging as the highway to strategic regions in inner Asia. The joint development of transport corridors with India will allow Iran to underline its claim as the natural gateway be-



The Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, who will be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade, being welcomed on his arrival at the Palam Air Force station in New Delhi on Friday by the Minister of State for External Affairs, Digvijay Singh. — Photo: V. Sudershan

tween Eurasia and the Indian Ocean littoral.

Mr. Khatami, who will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations, will hold substantive consultations with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vaj-

payee, and interact with other leaders, businessmen and intelligentsia in the next few days. He will also travel to Hyderabad.

In a special gesture, Mr. Vajpayee, who had visited Iran in

April 2001, hosted a private dinner for Mr. Khatami. He will receive a ceremonial welcome on Saturday morning. The Iranian President is accompanied by a powerful delegation that includes the Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, the Defence Minister, Rear Adm. Ali Shamkhani, the Oil Minister, Bijan Zangneh, and the Minister of Science and Technology, Mostafa Moeen.

A number of agreements for cooperation have been finalised. These touch on information technology, water resources and the financing of economic cooperation.

The unfolding military confrontation between the United States and Iraq, in which Iran holds the pivot, is expected to figure prominently in the talks between Mr. Khatami and the Indian leaders.

The two sides will also review progress in the efforts to bring the abundant natural gas resources of Iran to the energy-hungry Indian market.

A Joint Technical Committee is evaluating various options to move natural gas between the two nations. The studies are expected to be completed before the year-end.

Khatami: exciting and enigmatic

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 23. There is no other political leader in the world who can emulate the President of Iran, Syed Mohammed Khatami, by launching into a discourse on Montesquieu, the influential French philosopher of the 18th century who examined different forms of government.

Mr. Khatami, who arrives here tomorrow to be the chief guest at the Republic day celebrations, is imbued with a deep understanding of the history of the Western civilisation and the evolution of its political culture.

That should make Mr. Khatami part of a rare breed in the modern world. For, he is a trained Islamic theologian and holds the rank of *Hojatoleslam*. He is also the child of the most militant anti-Western revolution the world has ever seen.

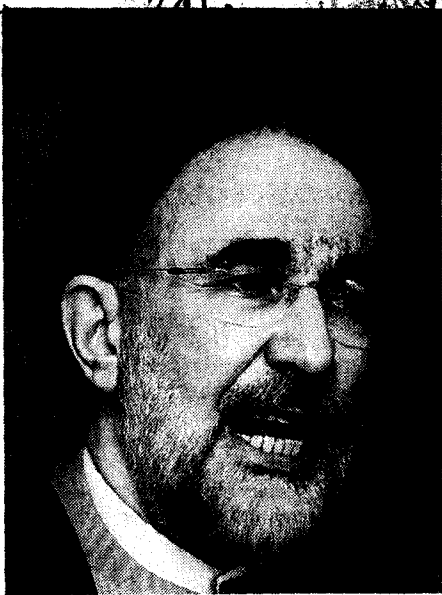
Mr. Khatami, who is here to consolidate the emerging strategic partnership with India, is more than a scholar and one of the most charismatic political leaders the world has seen in recent years.

Riding a wave of popular enthusiasm for change in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Khatami won 70 per cent of the popular vote in the presidential elections of 1997 and 2001. No! it is not one of those elections (like in Pakistan) where the leader gets close to 100 per cent of the vote.

He won the elections against intense opposition from the Islamic establishment in Iran. The youth and women of Iran, excited by his call for more democracy and openness, propelled him to power with massive mandates.

Since 1997, Mr. Khatami has struggled to steer the Islamic revolution in Iran towards a different destiny. Questioning the claims of the clerical establishment to rule Iran without accountability, he insisted that people matter.

Unlike the Islamic and other religious



radicals who reject the relevance of Western values, Mr. Khatami has demanded that oriental societies must learn from the best practices of the West.

Implicit has been a profound message not just for Iran, but the entire West Asia. Mr. Khatami insists that Islam and the idea of democracy are not incompatible. While the message is powerful, Mr. Khatami has not had an easy time getting the establishment in Iran accept his ideas.

Many of his supporters and colleagues are in prison are facing charges. His attempt to restructure Iranian society have been repeatedly obstructed by the hard line clerics, who have shut down reformist press, and blocked progressive legislation offered by the Khatami's supporters in the Majlis, the Iranian Parliament.

That brings us to the enigmatic side of Mr. Khatami.

His critics on the right and the left see

him as Iran's Gorbachev. Among the conservatives he evokes the memory of the Russian leader who destroyed the Soviet Union in an attempt to reform it.

The liberals in Iran and their supporters abroad argue that Mr. Khatami, like Gorbachev, is incapable of reforming the system from within. Moving within these extreme positions, Mr. Khatami has constantly sought to create room for political reform.

Many of his youthful supporters are increasingly frustrated at Mr. Khatami's refusal to confront the establishment despite the fact that his own closest aides have been targeted by the clerics.

Mr. Khatami knows that a premature confrontation would end in the defeat of those who want change and a re-consolidation of the hardliners. But time is running out for Mr. Khatami who is entering the last two years of his second term.

Mr. Khatami has also tried to move Iranian diplomacy away from ideological dogma towards pragmatism. He has engineered a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, sought to improve relations with the West in general and the United States in particular.

The *pas de deux* with the U.S. has not gone far, thanks to the resistance from the conservatives.

Nevertheless, Mr. Khatami has positioned Iran to gain maximum political benefits from the current confrontation between Washington and Baghdad.

When Mr. Khatami chooses to challenge the old order and whether he will come out successful are questions that reverberate way beyond Iran.

But no one can doubt the historic contribution of Mr. Khatami in transforming the debate in Iran and injecting change into the discourse about political Islam. In New Delhi, he will be a fascinating interlocutor for the Indian leaders.

India, Israel sign new defence deal

Statesman News Service & Agencies

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20. — India and Israel, already close defence allies, have signed a new defence deal. This relates to the marketing of the civilian version of the advanced light helicopter (ALH), one of the attractions at the fourth Aero India show beginning in Bangalore on 5 February.

The Hawk, in the running for the advanced jet trainer, will be at the show as will be Russian training aircraft that India has been offered, the MIG-AT. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Israel Avionics will start marketing the 14-seater plane from the show itself, a defence ministry official said.

The certification by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for the civilian version will come soon. Meanwhile, some

countries like Iran, Mauritius and Sri Lanka are keen on buying the military version of the ALH. Mr Tapan Ray, joint secretary (exports) in the defence ministry, said Aero India would ensure that Indian companies, both public and private sector ones, caught the eye as India was slowly becoming a force in aviation in both the defence and civilian sectors. The number of countries participating in this year's event was the highest ever.

THE STATESMAN

21 JAN 2003

India, Iran moving towards defence cooperation

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 19. Those who believe geography is destiny have no difficulty understanding the blossoming relations between India and Iran in recent years. The Iranian President, Syed Mohammad Khatami, is arriving here this week to consolidate this partnership.

Despite the great difference between their ideological and political moorings, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been driven closer to each other by geopolitics.

Both New Delhi and Teheran were rattled by the policies of the Taliban, which rose to prominence in Afghanistan in the mid 1990s. Preventing the territorial consolidation of the Taliban became a shared objective between India and Iran.

Besides becoming a key factor in India's energy security calculus, Iran has emerged as India's potential gateway to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe. New Delhi and Teheran are working together to develop transport corridors from India to these destinations through Iranian territory.

A missing link in bilateral relations has been defence cooperation. The two sides are now moving to fill that gap. This week the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Madhendra Singh is in Iran as part of high-level defence exchanges. Ship visits and other military cooperation is expected to follow.

If India wants an insight into brutal geopolitics of the Persian Gulf, it could not get a better interlocutor in the region than the Iranian President.

Mr. Khatami has successfully positioned Iran to take full advantage of the confrontation between the United States and Iraq. Recognising the centrality of Iran in shaping the dynamics of the war and the political future of Iraq after Saddam Hussein, Washington is quietly reaching out to

Teheran.

The Iran-based Iraqi Shia dissident groups have joined the international coalition put together by the U.S. as a political alternative to Saddam Hussein.

The Iraqi Shia form nearly 60 per cent of the population and have nursed strong grievances against the regime of Saddam Hussein. An early revolt by the Shia groups could shape the dynamics of the American war against Iraq. Being the majority, they are also likely to have a say in determining

DIPLOMATIC NOTEBOOK

Iraq's political future.

Whatever might be the public rhetoric, Iran is unlikely to shed any tears at the ouster of Saddam Hussein. Teheran holds him responsible for the decade-long war in the 1980s between the two countries, which saw the death and disabling of thousands of Iranian youth.

Iran has become an important factor in India's efforts to reorder the geopolitics of its troubled Western neighbourhood. New Delhi in the past was wary of the close relations between Iran and Pakistan.

Now India sees its expanding cooperation with Iran as an instrument that could help nudge Pakistan in the direction of political moderation and regional economic integration.

While Pakistan denies India overland access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, Iran is opening an alternative route. The early creation of such a transport corridor should hopefully convince Pakistan to move away from its negative approach to regional economic cooperation.

Teheran has been eager to build an overland pipeline to ship its natural gas to India through Pakistani territory. India is signalling that it is ready to drop its objections to such a pipeline if Pakistan addresses New

Delhi's security concerns and proposals for normal trading relations.

If commerce flows across the Indo-Pak border and raises New Delhi's comfort level with Islamabad, a pipeline linking the three countries could indeed become a reality in the near future. It depends on how much of economic common sense the Iranians can din into the heads of the Pakistani establishment.

In publicly ticking off the Hurriyat leadership and demanding that it stop support to violence and join the political mainstream in Kashmir last week, the British High Commissioner, Rob Young, has drawn London closer to New Delhi on one of India's most sensitive security concerns.

When Mr. Young came here a few years ago to represent Great Britain, the two countries were scraping the bottom of the diplomatic barrel. He helped New Delhi and London in putting aside the bitterness generated during Queen Elizabeth's visit in 1997.

But even the most ardent supporters of Indo-British relations would not have predicted that London would ever be supportive of India on Kashmir. Indians have long held Britain responsible for the Kashmir imbroglio.

In the last two years, British position has rapidly evolved. London was the first to ban the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad as terrorist organisations.

After the attack on Parliament on December 13, it joined Washington in putting pressure on Gen. Pervez Musharraf to renounce terrorism and end cross-border infiltration.

In Srinagar last year, it urged the Hurriyat to participate in the elections to the State Assembly and endorsed the elections as free and fair. Mr. Young's remarks come on top of this welcome change in British attitudes on the Kashmir question.

India warms up to gas pipeline via Pakistan

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Jan. 13: India may finally agree to the Iranian proposal to lay the gas pipeline through Pakistan.

After consistently turning down the proposal for months, India is now veering round to the view that it has more to gain than lose if the pipeline comes through Pakistan.

A fresh proposal would be made by Iran during President Mohammed Khatami's state visit to India from January 24.

Khatami, in Pakistan last month, discussed the proposed pipeline deal with President Pervez Musharraf and other senior Pakistani officials in Islamabad.

The Musharraf regime is keen to see the pipeline pass through Pakistan because it would allow the country to earn at least \$50 million in transit fee.

A final decision is yet to be taken by Delhi. But indications suggest that in the next few days the Indian leadership would discuss the issue threadbare so that it can clearly state its position to Khatami and the Iranian delegation.

"A lot will depend on the conditions that Iranians attach to the proposal," authoritative sources said. It was learnt that Iran recently proposed a low price and a new multinational corporate if India agreed to lay the gas pipeline through Pakistan.

Teheran is also talking of a

consortium of international bankers and energy majors, led by Australia's BHP, who would own and operate the pipelines. It would be their responsibility to ensure the gas reaches India.

The Pakistani leadership is keen on being involved in the proposed deal and this position has often been stated by Islamabad. So far, the hostile India-Pakistan relations had stood in the way of involving Islamabad in any agreement that was essentially struck between Delhi and Teheran.

Hawks in the Indian establishment had been arguing that the money Pakistan would earn in transit fee would be used to sponsor terrorist activities against India in Kashmir and elsewhere in the country. So Delhi, they said, should not agree to any proposal that involved Islamabad.

But there is now a growing view in the Indian establishment that Delhi would gain if Pakistan were to be involved in the proposed pipeline.

"Our attempt is to defeat Pakistan on the centrality of the Kashmir issue by engaging with it in trade and other issues," sources in the government said. It is argued that if the Pakistani-based terrorists tried to disrupt the supply of gas, it would be a loss of face for the Pervez Musharraf regime.

"More than India, it will be the Iranians who will raise hell if such a thing were to happen,"

sources said, while indicating that if they enter into an agreement, Pakistan would ensure gas supply without disruption.

Agreeing to the Iranian proposal would also help India in strengthening its ties with Iran, both in the political and economic spheres.

Policy-makers in Delhi feel that if India agreed to the Iranian proposal of laying the pipeline through Pakistan, it would also silence India's detractors, who have been criticising its leadership of obstinacy for not resuming the stalled dialogue with Islamabad.

"If Pakistan agrees to the proposed pipeline, it will not have much of an argument left for not normalising trade relations with India. And once this happens, it will dilute the centrality of the Kashmir issue in India-Pakistan relations," sources said.

The proposal for the pipeline came up during then Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh's visit to Teheran in mid-2000. The proposal was discussed again when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Iran the next year.

But though Delhi and Teheran agreed on the supply of Iranian gas to India, the two countries differed on how it would be brought to India.

Teheran is now willing to deliver gas onland at \$1.8 an mmbtu (million metric British thermal unit).

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THE TELEGRAPH