

# Saarc summit called off

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec 30.— With two of its seven members ravaged and one severely hit by the tsunami waves, the summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), scheduled for the second week of January in Dhaka, was today put off indefinitely. While Sri Lanka, worst hit by last Sunday's tsunami,

informally sought a postponement of the summit, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, decided to postpone the meeting till a later date.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Mr Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, called the Indian foreign secretary, Mr Shyam Saran, this evening and informed him that, keeping in view the tragedy hitting some of the member countries, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had

decided that next month's Summit is being postponed, the MEA spokesman said. India appreciated the gesture. A proposal to curtail the duration of the summit was turned down and the meeting postponed. The three-day summit (from 9 to 11 January) was due to be preceded by meetings of Saarc foreign ministers (7 to 8 January), foreign secretaries (5 to 6 January) and the Programming Committee (3 to 4 January).

31 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

# India, Pak discuss divided families

## Five meeting points on LoC, IB mooted

Press Trust of India  
Islamabad, December 28

IN A major step towards promoting people-to-people contact, India today proposed to Pakistan five designated places along the border for interaction between divided families on both sides of Kashmir, during specified periods. Concluding the two-day foreign-secretary level talks here, the two sides decided on a host of measures to mitigate sufferings of apprehended fishermen, civilian prisoners and missing defence personnel.

Building on the existing contacts between directors-general of military operations (DGMOs), foreign secretaries Shyam Saran and Riaz Khokhar decided to promote regular contacts at designated places and explore further confidence building measures (CBMs) along the international boundary and Line of Control (LoC).

The five identified meeting places on the LoC and international border are Mendhar, Poonch, Suchetgarh, Uri and Tangdhar, Saran told reporters at the end of the second round of the Composite Dialogue process.

New Delhi suggested such interactions could take place at designated time under joint security. "This will be a big step towards promoting contacts between divided families and people of Kashmir on both sides," Saran said. Pakistan said it would consider the Indian proposal.

Observing that the talks



REUTERS

Pakistan's foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar (right) greets Indian counterpart Shyam Saran in Islamabad on Tuesday.

had ended on a "positive and optimistic note", Saran said India had assured Pakistan that it was serious on continuing the dialogue process, including on Jammu and Kashmir, to find a solution to the vexed issue. Both sides discussed the Jammu and Kashmir issue and agreed to carry the process forward in light of the joint statement issued after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's meeting with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in New York on September 24.

The two sides "narrowed further" their differences on the draft agreement on pre-notification of flight testing

of ballistic missiles, and agreed to work towards its finalisation, a joint statement on the Saran-Khokhar talks said. The foreign secretaries also agreed on technical meetings, including of the joint study group on trade matters headed by the commerce secretaries, Indian Coast Guards and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, Pakistan Rangers and the BSF, expert-level dialogue on nuclear and conventional CBMs, technical-level meetings on bus service between, and through, Amritsar and Lahore and meeting between the Narcotics Control authorities, in 2005.

29 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

96-8

# At SAARC, in charge

**A**s he packs his bags for the first foreign policy venture in the new year — the annual summit of the South Asian nations in Dhaka — Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has two options. The default one would be to let the foreign office bureaucracy work out an anodyne declaration of good intentions on future cooperation. Such a statement would be full of rhetoric, bereft of substance. Or he can choose to inject some life into the feckless process of regionalism in the subcontinent, by putting forward some bold ideas on the future of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on the twentieth anniversary of its founding. Singh might not be able to get many of his proposals translated into agreements in Dhaka, but he could lay down the agenda for the SAARC in the coming years. In defining a new direction and in demonstrating the commitment to walk down a different path, Singh would take charge of the SAARC process.

The SAARC has been crying out for Indian leadership. While the political class in India has acknowledged the importance of South Asian regionalism since the mid 1990s, New Delhi has been reluctant to vigorously lead the organisation. There have been leaders, like Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha, who thought boldly about the future of SAARC. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee threw up some forward-looking ideas like open borders and a common currency for the region. Yet promoting regionalism never gained the prominence it deserved in India's diplomatic agenda during the last few years. The challenges of nuclear policy, the imperatives of engaging great powers and the roller-coaster ride in relations with Pakistan since the mid 1990s, meant there was little room for a purposeful strategy on regional integration.

In fact, the annual SAARC summits could not even take place



Manmohan can rewrite the script of regional integration

■ C. RAJA MOHAN

28/12  
Sun. Asia

because of Indo-Pak tensions. Until a few weeks before the last summit in Islamabad, New Delhi would not even announce the participation by the Indian PM. And when summits did take place after considerable delays in Kathmandu in 2002 and in Islamabad in 2004, issues relating to Indo-Pak relations overshadowed the regional agenda of SAARC. At Kathmandu, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's antics of walking up to Vajpayee and shaking his hand, stole the thunder. In Islamabad, the formal talks between Musharraf and Vajpayee robbed the headlines.

At Dhaka this time, Singh has the opportunity to conceive of a dif-

ferent script for the SAARC summit. For one, Musharraf will not be there to represent Pakistan. The low key prime minister, Shaukat Aziz, will be deputing for him. More importantly, there is a peace process, slow and frustrating as it might be, underway with Pakistan. This gives an opportunity for India to focus on the future of SAARC. Equally important is the fact that Dhaka takes pride in initiating the political effort to create SAARC and would like to see the 20th anniversary become a significant milestone. Used as they are to unproductive summitry, South Asian leaders proclaimed the 12th SAARC summit at Islamabad a big success,

less of a reality at this moment.

thanks to the signing of the framework deal for South Asian Free Trade Agreement.

But that claim was rather deceptive. What the South Asian leaders did in Islamabad was to announce marriage but postpone the consummation. SAFTA is expected to kick off on January 1, 2006 and be fully implemented only by 2016. The Islamabad summit also left difficult issues under SAFTA like rules of origin, sensitive lists, dispute settlement and compensation for least developed countries unresolved. Negotiations on these will be contentious and protracted. No deadlines have been set. South Asian free trade is more of a dream and

Asia. And none of the others have common frontiers.

If India has liberal bilateral trading arrangements with all other states in South Asia, a de facto free trade area will emerge in the region. India does not have to wait for the SAFTA to materialise over the next decade. India already has some sort of free trade with Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Action, however, is needed on trade ties with Bangladesh and Pakistan. Both these countries complain bitterly about India's protected market and its tariff and non-tariff barriers. For all of India's rhetoric about protectionism in the developed world, its own market is the least open in the region. Despite enjoying massive trade surpluses with its neighbours, India has been niggardly in offering better market access to them.

If Singh dusts up the files on previous prime ministerial visits to Bangladesh, he will find the promises on market access made by New Delhi, but not kept. At Dhaka, Singh has an opportunity to change this. A simple unilateral offer by India to grant duty free access to all goods from its neighbourhood which have a reasonable content, by value, of Indian material — say 30 or 40 per cent — will dramatically promote regional economic integration. Such a move should allow all round growth by opening the door for the movement of Indian capital to its neighbourhood, create market access for the smaller countries and generate regional interdependence.

If the objective is to achieve free trade, the initiative is in India's hands to create a more liberal trading order and lift all boats in the subcontinent. The SAARC summit at Dhaka provides an unprecedented opportunity for Singh to leave a firm imprint on India's foreign policy towards the neighbourhood. He should be grabbing it with both hands to unveil a long-term vision for regional cooperation as well as unilateral steps to begin its realisation.

**If India has liberal bilateral trading arrangements with all other states in South Asia, a de facto free trade area will emerge in the region**

28 DEC 2004

INDIAN EXPRESS

# India, Pak begin talks on CBMs, Sir Creek

*Shankar*  
*Hyder*  
*12/11*

**Islamabad:** India and Pakistan on Tuesday began separate talks here on nuclear confidence-building measures (CBMs) and to work out modalities to conduct a joint survey of pillars at the Sir Creek area of the Gujarat coast.

A five-member Indian delegation led by additional secretary (international organisations) in the external affairs ministry, Meera Shankar, and her Pakistani counterpart Tariq Osman Hyder will deliberate on nuclear CBMs, including a possible agreement on giving advance notice to each other before conducting missile tests.

Ahead of the talks, officials here said the discussions were aimed at reducing the risk of accidental war and promoting strategic stability.

"The two sides will discuss proposals on nuclear CBMs, including the draft agreement on pre-notification of flight-testing of missiles," Pakistan foreign office spokesman Masood Khan said on Monday. Tuesday's meeting would be followed by the first round of two-day expert-level talks on conventional issues on Wednesday.

*12/11*

Top defence officials from both the countries are also meeting here to discuss modalities to conduct a joint survey of pillars at the Sir Creek area, over which the two sides have differences.

Brigadier Girish Kumar, deputy surveyor general, is leading the Indian delegation, while Major General Jamilur Rehman Afridi, surveyor general at the defence ministry here, is leading the Pakistani side.

The two sides will discuss various modalities regarding the joint survey of the boundary pillars laid in the Sir Creek area in the past. Sir Creek has been part of the composite dialogue process but the two countries have not made any headway so far.

During the last foreign ministers' meeting in September, it was decided that the two sides would conduct a joint survey of the boundary pillars in the horizontal segment (blue-dotted line) of the international bound-



**Meera Shankar (right) and Tariq Osman Hyder (extreme left) in Islamabad on Tuesday**

ary in the Sir Creek area. The two sides will conduct a survey of pillars erected to demarcate between Sindh and Kutch in 1924.

India believes that the centre of the navigable channel of Sir Creek should be the boundary line while Pakistan's stand is that the eastern bank of Sir Creek should be the line of demarcation.

The survey of pillars was expected to be completed before the two sides begin talks on Sir Creek under the second round of the composite dialogue process. PTI

12 DE 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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## BOLSTERING INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE

30/11 South Asia 110-1

NEARLY TWO DECADES after its formation, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is unable to shake off its fetters and ensure the early implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). The meeting of Commerce Ministers last week in Islamabad marks another step in the struggle to enhance intra-SAARC trade. It is true other regional trade groupings have taken their own time to make headway in forming a Free Trade Area. Many of them have set target dates, but gone in for soft options to protect some of their "sensitive" domestic producers. But the problem in SAARC seems to be more political than economic. While India and a couple of other countries feel that progress in economic cooperation will harmonise political equations, Pakistan wants to see substantive progress in its political relations with India before it can make tangible concessions on the trade front. This is why SAFTA is fumbling and it is up to SAARC leaders to break loose from the political shackles and see that all member-states comply with the requirements of SAFTA deadlines.

The problem, it appears, is that some of the SAARC countries are intense competitors in global trade because of their largely similar export baskets. Instead of looking at closer markets in the region, most of them look to the West for export opportunities, the United States and Europe remaining the major markets. As Union Commerce Minister Kamal Nath has noted, it is unfortunate that intra-regional trade in South Asia is just about \$6 billion out of the region's total global export of \$200 billion. Likewise, the South Asian countries still prefer to import most of their requirements

from the West and the east rather than sourcing it from within the region. The earlier attempt to encourage intra-regional trade through a South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) failed to boost trade among the member-states. This is probably why India has gone in for a parallel exercise to sign bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with its neighbours, including Sri Lanka, in the South Asian region. The bilateral FTAs seem to be working better than the regional agreements because the latter necessitate the participation of all member-states.

At a time when the agreements and commitments under the umbrella of the World Trade Organisation are forcing countries to open their doors to free trade, it will be in South Asia's interests to break down the barriers and encourage intra-regional trade. It will be much more cost-effective for governments and consumers to source their import requirements from neighbouring countries rather than from the U.S. or Europe, if non-trade barriers are removed and duty rates brought down to realistic levels. India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are not only the major players in the region but are also competitors for a share in world trade in some goods such as tea, garments, gems, and jewellery. Sri Lanka has repeatedly suggested the formation of trade cartels and joint marketing in third countries, an idea that merits serious pursuit. The possibility of value addition within the region, by sourcing raw materials or products from neighbouring countries can also be considered. South Asia must learn a few lessons from South East Asia and ASEAN. SAARC must also look at the advantages of forging closer links with its eastern neighbours.

30 NOV 2008

THE HINDU

# Border brouhaha

Neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh is a match for India in conventional war. And because they are chary of entering into a frontal military confrontation with India, they prefer to wage a low-intensity war as a strategy to destabilise this country, writes BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

**I**N many parts of the world today, there exist vague conditions and uncertainties, situations hovering between peace and war. Such a situation can be called low-intensity war, a politico-military confrontation between contending states and non-state groups that is neither conventional war, nor peaceful competition. Such low intensity conflict can range from subversion and sabotage to use of armed forces.

As a potent weapon of the weak against the strong, terrorism is a low-cost, high-leverage method that enables small nations, sub-national groups and even individuals to circumvent the conventional projections of national power. Few, if any, dissident or subverted groups dare to confront a powerful state by way of conventional war, recognising that terrorism and guerrilla warfare are a more effective way of fighting against a superior military power. Embargoes, blockades, military power projections, inciting and supporting of insurgents, harassment at borders, incursions and intimidation have long been significant aspects of international affairs and active elements in the conduct of international relations. State-sponsored, cross-border terrorism against hostile neighbouring countries has become an increasingly popular covert instrument to promote foreign policy interests among countries around the world. Conflict is purposely kept at a low level when the resources of at least one of the belligerents are limited or when both sides want to avoid either the greater risk or greater cost of conventional war.

As neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh is a match for India in conventional war capabilities, Islamabad and Dhaka are chary of entering into a frontal military confrontation with this country and thus prefer to use low-intensity war as a strategy to destabilise India. Having repeatedly failed to annex Kashmir by high-intensity conventional war, Pakistan launched a covert cross-border proxy war in Punjab in 1984 - by sponsoring the guerilla war of militant Sikhs for Khalistan - and an Islamic *jihad* in Kashmir in 1989. While the Khalistani secessionist uprising has since ebbed, the bloody insurgency continues to devastate Kashmir and has also spread to Jammu region.

As a part of the sinister Pak-Bangla game plan to destabilise India, Dhaka and Islamabad have conjointly stoked ethnic insurgencies in the North-east Indian states. Beginning in the 1950s and through the 1960s, Pakistan sheltered and trained Naga and Mizo rebels in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Following the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971 with India's support, there was a let-up in cross-border militancy for some years. During the prolonged military rule in Bangladesh in the wake of the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, and de-secularisation and Islamicised polity, Pak-Bangla relations warmed up and Indo-Bangla relations correspondingly suffered a setback. Around the time Pakistan launched the "liberation war" in Kashmir in 1989, Gen. Ershad's military regime courted the North-east insurgent groups in Bangladesh, providing them a base and training facilities.



Insurgent outfits like the Ulfa, National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M), People's Liberation Army of Manipur, National Democratic Front of Bodoland, All Tripura Tribal Force and National Liberation Front of Tripura have camps of varying size in the border districts of Bangladesh like Sylhet, Maulavi Bazaar, Habiganj, Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong Hill Tracts. These they use for training and as launching pads to attack targets on this side of the border.

Bangladesh acts as a conduit of arms supplies to Indian insurgent groups. Weapons imported from third countries by sea to Chittagong port and Cox's Bazaar coastal belt are carried cross-country to the insurgents' operational grounds inside India, with

establishing a transnational Islamic state consisting of Bangladesh, Assam, Tripura, Rohingya Muslim inhabited Arkan Hills of Myanmar and the Muslim majority districts of West Bengal, has heightened India's national security concerns. The unrestrained illegal immigration of Bangladeshi nationals has acquired the proportions of demographic invasion in the eastern and north-eastern peripheries of India, adding yet another dimension to the problem.

The Bangladesh government has started giving financial incentives to the stranded Pakistanis for settling down on both sides of the Indo-Bangla border. Known as Bihari Muslims, these people had collaborated with the marauding Pakistani army in perpe-

**Surrounded on three sides by India, Bangladesh is wary of the economic and military might of its neighbour. India's crucial role in liberating Bangladesh from Pakistan is a standing reminder of what India can do to that country.**

trating genocide on the Bengalis in 1971. The majority of the stranded Pakistanis (8,50,000) have covertly migrated to India. By relocating the residual 2,50,000 in the border belt, the BNP-Jamaat regime wants to position a well-motivated fifth column to be used as a force multiplier in the Pak-Bangla low-intensity war against India.

The mushrooming of Islamic terrorist outfits like Harkat-ul Jihadi Islam, Sahadat Al Hikma, Jamaat-ul Mujahideen and Jagrata Muslim Janata comprising Jamaat-run *quami*-madrasa alumni and focused on

trating genocide on the Bengalis in 1971.

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The BNP-Jamaat government's persistent denial of the existence of Indian terrorist camps in Bangladesh and illegal immigration is an insurmountable roadblock to a peaceful solution of these problems. This and the stepped-up anti-India campaign by members of the ruling clique in Dhaka presage a potentially difficult period in bilateral ties. Bangladesh foreign minister Morshed Khan's unprovoked public out-

burst was a telling illustration of Dhaka's unremitting hostility towards India. His crude threat that Bangladesh could corner India in the North-east region was in effect a declaration of war of terror against this country. The killing of over 60 people in serial guerrilla bombing by the NDFB in Assam and Nagaland last month was its defining image.

There are other signals that Dhaka is bent upon pursuing a decidedly inimical policy on India. In order to shield the Islamists responsible for the terrorist onslaught on an Awami League rally in Dhaka on 21 August, instead of ensuring objective investigation, Khaleda Zia publicly insinuated that India had perpetrated the high crime. The commission of enquiry set up for the event has simply parroted what Zia has alleged. Sections of the Bangladesh media have also chimed in to bolster the anti-India canard. In yet another act of calculated hostility, the incumbent regime has embargoed the movement of Indian diplomats outside the municipal limits of their respective missions in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi. Recently, the Indian high commissioner in Dhaka was not permitted to visit Gopalganj district. All these portend a difficult time in Indo-Bangla relations.

For reasons of geography and history, the threat perception of Bangladesh is entirely India-centric.

Surrounded on three sides by India, the country is wary of the economic and military might of its neighbour. India's crucial role in liberating Bangladesh from Pakistan is a standing reminder of what India can do to that country. By continually projecting India as an enemy at every twist and turn of domestic politics, political parties and a large section of the Bangladesh media have sharpened this phobia. In conducting training and field exercises, the Bangladesh army invariably projects India as the enemy. No wonder, hostility towards India is a compulsive, ubiquitous and overpowering phenomenon in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is determined to use the North-east rebels and illegal immigration as a leverage in dealing with India. In due course, it will not hesitate to use the burgeoning Al-Qaida-linked Islamic terrorist groups to bolster its ongoing proxy war against India. Successful counter-insurgency operation by the Bhutanese army last December inflicted heavy losses on the Ulfa and NDFB, heightening their dependence on Bangladesh. Huge investments made by Ulfa leaders in Bangladesh have also increased the BNP-Jamaat government's hold on the insurgent outfit.

In this scenario, it is a safe bet to conclude that for India Bangladesh will continue to be the gadfly it is, and consequently all peace initiatives involving Ulfa and NDFB will come to naught. For the same reason, it is futile to talk about Bhutan-like counter-insurgency operations in Bangladesh.

Clearly, our policymakers can avoid taking tough proactive action including military reprisal against the insurgents and their sponsors, but only at India's peril.

(The author is former Additional Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing.)

# Nath for Indo-Pak free trade

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov 23.—Bilateral trade between India and Pakistan can be increased to \$5 billion in two years if there is free trade and the existing trade barriers between the two countries are removed, the commerce and industry minister, Mr Kamal Nath, has said.

"Both sides must not carry the baggage of the past but look forward. Both India and Pakistan are somewhat like two passengers waiting in the departure lounge with boarding cards. Now they should have the courage to board it," Mr Kamal Nath told a reception last evening at Islamabad, hosted by six chambers of commerce representing different regions of Pakistan.

The minister pointed out that India's total two-way trade with Pakistan was \$175 million, comprising \$75 million worth of exports from India and \$100 million worth of im-

The two-way Indo-Pak trade was thus less than \$400 million, a miniscule percentage of the global trade of the two countries

ports from Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan's two-way trade was \$25 million, consisting \$12 million worth of exports to India and \$13 million of imports from India, an official communique today said.

The two-way Indo-Pak trade was thus less than \$400 million, a miniscule percentage of the global trade of the two countries. Yet, indirect trade between the two countries — that which is transacted through a third country — amounted to roughly \$2 billion annually.

To overcome this, Mr Kamal Nath, who is in Islamabad to attend the Saarc commerce ministers' meeting, advocated a greater focus on trade and economic cooperation.

24 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

# Saarc must build economic framework: India



**ECONOMIC COOPERATION:** Pak commerce minister, Mr Humayun Akhtar (C) looks on as his Bangladeshi and Indian counterparts, Mr Altat Hossain Chowdhury (F) and Mr Kamal Nath shake hands prior to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) economic ministers' meeting in Islamabad on Monday. — AFP

Press Trust of India **5/10**

ISLAMABAD, Nov. 22. — Regretting that more than 90 per cent of requirements of South Asian countries were still sourced from outside the region, India today asked Saarc nations to build a strong framework of regional economic cooperation which should be "workable" and "programme-based".

"It is imperative that the Saarc countries devise a concrete, positive, workable and programme-based agenda centering around economic cooperation. The logic of mutual economic benefit must triumph," the commerce and industry minister, Mr Kamal Nath, stressed.

Addressing the Saarc commerce ministers' conference here, the minister said there was an urgent need for introspection.

"It is a matter of regret that over 90 per cent of the requirements of South Asian countries are still sourced from outside the region. And conversely, a major part of our exports are also destined for countries outside our grouping," he contended.

Despite the limited concessions of Sapata, the regional trade had failed to register the kind of growth which would give the member nations satisfaction, he said.

He said the total intra-regional trade among Saarc countries was barely of the

order of \$6 billion "It is a drop in the ocean when compared to the total volume of our combined international trade of over \$200 billion," he said.

Noting that the meeting of the Saarc commerce ministers was taking place after a gap of almost six years, Mr Nath also felt the regional grouping, compared to others, had a long way to go.

**Underpinning the importance of taking up "fresh initiatives" to expand cooperation, Mr Nath said there was need to explore and identify complementary features of each other's economies and utilise them to develop a strong regional character**

"Why should we in South Asia lag behind?", he asked while observing that two-thirds of global trade today was taking place within regional groups. The most visible of these are EU, NAFTA, Asean, Mercusor and Sacu," he said.

Mr Nath said it was heartening that Saarc member countries were becoming conscious of the fact that there was a huge potential for permitting trade within the region and enhancing economic interaction to their mutual advantage.

"It is not enough for governments to

realize this. It is very important that people feel this need. After all, trade is not expanded on the mere whim or desire of governments, but rather by the conviction of the captains of industry and the actions of leaders of business," he said.

The minister emphasised that it was time when "we depart from endless rounds of meetings, seminars and conferences and move concretely to collaborative projects that could bring tangible results to our people".

He said it was in this context that India has proposed the reestablishment of a Saarc High Economic Council and the setting up of a Saarc Infrastructure Fund. He said concept papers on these subjects have been circulated and discussed.

"We see these measures as a way forward, and are confident that once implemented, these measures will give further impetus to the Saarc movement," he said.

Underpinning the importance of taking up "fresh initiatives" to expand cooperation, Mr Nath said there was need to explore and identify complementary features of each other's economies and utilise them to develop a strong regional character.

Mr Nath said cooperation on international trade issues could benefit all the countries in the region as they shared common concerns and expectations from the WTO regime.



# Beyond Siachen

Freeze contentious issues,  
start doing business

If reports are correct, Pervez Musharraf has told Manmohan Singh that Pakistan wouldn't capture Siachen even if India vacated it. You can choose to take that at face value or dismiss the claim: It is almost certain that New Delhi won't pull troops back from the glacier on the basis of the president's offer. Yet, it is hard to find a rationale for why soldiers armed to the teeth should perch on a glacier 20,000 feet above sea level, ducking shells and lobbing an occasional grenade back at adversaries below. It costs the Indian taxpayer about Rs 1,500 crore per year to keep soldiers at Siachen: The cost of a chapatti, by the time it reaches the highest battlefield in the world, is reckoned at Rs 10,000. Manmohan Singh is back from hardselling India to Britain and the US. His meetings with Musharraf have gone off remarkably well. A joint statement, read out by the Pakistan president and drafted by the two leaders personally, is remarkably free of the rancour and bile that characterised previous exchanges between the subcontinental neighbours. Singh wants relations between India and Pakistan to move forward, if necessary, through unconventional routes. The fact that the two leaders did not spout the cliches of Kashmir and cross-border terrorism inspires hope that Musharraf shares some of Singh's ideas.

Given that, it makes sense for India and Pakistan to move fast on issues which we can agree on, and shelve contentious issues for later. This is precisely what India and China have done. Though the two nations have an old boundary dispute — India objects to Chinese control over Aksai Chin, China claims parts of Arunachal as its own — the two decided in the early 1990s to set up committees to deal with these but move on with trade and investment. As a result, trade between the two countries has jumped, Chinese companies invest in India, some Indian manufacturers have bases in China. Similarly, we should hand over issues like Kashmir and approaches to tackle terrorism over to joint India-Pakistan committees, while the two governments concentrate their energies on doing business, expanding cultural and human ties. If the joint Iran-India gas pipeline goes through Pakistan, all three nations stand to prosper; if India's healthcare, financial or IT services can benefit Pakistan, no one's the loser. Once cross-border wealth creation replaces cross-border terrorism and capitalism gets talked about more than Kashmir, India and Pakistan will be on the high road to global prosperity.

Pak amenable to terror talks as pre-condition

# Historic, say both leaders

NILOVA ROY CHAUDHURY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW YORK, Sept. 25. — "Historic" was the word both Dr Manmohan Singh and General Pervez Musharraf chose to describe their first meeting.

Terming the meet thus at a press conference today, Dr Singh said: "For the first time, we have a statement that commits us to moving forward on all substantive issues of the composite dialogue process." Sharing Dr Singh's perception, Gen. Musharraf told CNN after the meeting, that his talks with the Indian leader marked a "historic day" in bilateral relations and the joint statement covered "aspirations" of both the sides.

The Pakistani media, however, was not so charitable. Terming the joint statement issued after the meeting, as an "important diplomatic document", two dailies, *Dawn* and *The Nation*, today said the absence of reference to cross-border terrorism was a "notable omission".

While Dr Singh and Gen Musharraf did not "go into details of solutions" (to the J&K issue), General Musharraf said: "there were many options." Dr Singh mentioned "unambiguously" the need to stop terrorism as a "precondition" to the success of the dialogue process, something to which the Pakistani President, who claims to be "grossly misunderstood" in India, was amenable. "We cannot have any meaningful dialogue unless terrorism is stopped," the Prime Minister said.

## BALLOONING TIES

NEW YORK, Sept. 25. — Dr Manmohan Singh today floored all saying he could "consider" undertaking a balloon flight with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, but he was not aware of the "risks" involved in it. To a question if Dr Singh would take the ride, which the General had agreed last year to take with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, the unfazed Prime Minister replied: "I don't know what risks are associated with it but I will certainly consider it," drawing peals of laughter from the journalists in the press conference. — PTI

The USA "is a global power" and "we do not expect their and our interests to always converge," Dr Singh said, but within those divergences, India and the USA put forward their positions, which converge in many areas.

Referring to the "outsourcing" (of jobs to India) controversy in the USA that Democratic candidate, Senator John Kerry, has raised during his campaign, Dr Singh said: "In the heat of election campaigning, many things are said," so he did not anticipate any problems, whatever the character of the administration. "Political parties come and go," the Prime Minister said: "national interests remain." The Bush regime carried forward "to new heights" the tenor of Indo-US relations.

THE STATESMAN 26 SEP 2001

# Historic day, says Manmohan

South Asia HPI-1 2579

S. Rajagopalan  
New York, September 24

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf have agreed to implement all "practical" confidence-building measures and explore "possible options" for a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Kashmir issue.

Holding their first summit meeting here on Friday, the two leaders reiterated their commitment to continue the bilateral dialogue to restore normalcy and cooperation between the two countries.

In what the Prime Minister termed "a historic day" and "a new beginning" for Indo-Pak relations, the two leaders also discussed the possibility of a gas pipeline to India via Pakistan.

"I sincerely believe that to-



ONE-ON-ONE: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf prior to a joint press conference at the Roosevelt hotel in New York on Friday.

day is a historic day. We have made a new beginning and I feel confident that despite difficulties on the way, I and President Musharraf will together work and succeed in writing a new chapter in the history of our two nations," Singh noted.

Musharraf, who read out the agreement in a joint media appearance, commented that his deliberations with Prime Minister Singh and the agreement "augurs well for the future of India-Pakistan relations."

The one-to-one meeting, lasting an hour, was held at the Roosevelt Hotel on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session. It was marked by a "constructive and frank spirit" and the two welcomed the opportunity of making each other's acquaintance during the first meeting.

Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, briefing Indian journalists, said the two struck easy personal chemistry at what was an "extremely relaxed and pleasant" meeting. Both leaders extended invitation to visit each other's country. Both have accepted the invitation and dates would be worked out in due course.

As for the gasoline project on which India has had reservations in the past, the agreement said it could "contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the people of both countries and should be considered in the larger context of expanding trade and economic relations between India and Pakistan".

On CBMs, the two committed themselves to their implementation "keeping mind practical possibilities".

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25 SEP 2001

# A meeting ground in Afghanistan

By C. Raja Mohan

*There is no reason why India and Pakistan cannot construct a mutually beneficial engagement around their shared interests in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf.*

10-10  
22/9

ONE PROPOSAL that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could offer to President Pervez Musharraf, when they meet this week in New York on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, is cooperation in the reconstruction in Afghanistan. The notion that India could work with Pakistan in Afghanistan would seem far-fetched even for those in New Delhi who tend to be hopeful about the future of bilateral ties. Dr. Singh, however, has been demanding ideas from outside the box.

What sounds heretical today often becomes policy tomorrow. That has been the pattern of India-Pakistan relations in the recent past. The idea of discussing issues relating to natural gas pipelines with Pakistan was taboo for many years. Today, India has agreed to start talks on the subject. The suggestion of bus services perforating the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir would have been dismissed as crazy some moons ago. It will soon be considered by the two sides. Promoting a free trade area in the subcontinent was a fool's errand until recently. In a little over a year, the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) will kick in. Foreign policy debate tends to stay behind the lines drawn by official positions at any given moment. But in recent years, India's political leadership has steadily broadened permissible limits of discourse on foreign policy. Dr. Singh has everything to gain by putting creative ideas on bilateral cooperation on the table and attempting a transformation of the discussion on both sides of the border.

Sceptics would insist that any discussion on regional security with Pakistan would be premature at this stage. An India-Pakistan peace process launched earlier this year has just about survived the first round of consultations. New Delhi and Islamabad are continuing to squabble over the Kashmir question — on how to conduct negotiations on the contentious question and its relationship with the rest of the peace process. India remains concerned about the continuing cross-border terrorism.

The proposed meeting between Dr. Singh and Gen. Musharraf could yet be derailed if the "annual Kashmir itch" overwhelms the latter in his address to the UNGA. Given the fragility of the current peace process, realists would argue that the principal objective of Dr. Singh in his first encounter with Gen. Musharraf should be to consolidate the peace process rather than identify new elements of cooperation. Nevertheless, there is consid-

erable merit in the argument that Dr. Singh should not limit himself to a narrow agenda that the two nations are currently coming to terms with. India has nothing to lose by unveiling an offer for cooperation with Pakistan on Afghanistan. It would certainly gain international support and provide a benchmark for the public debate on India-Pakistan relations.

The idea that India and Pakistan should cooperate on Afghanistan may be bold, but it is not new. In the wake of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, the then External Affairs Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, travelled to Islamabad offering a joint approach to the new security challenges in the subcontinent. Pakistan, which was riding high then as the newly declared "frontline" state in Washington's Cold War against Moscow, predictably rejected the proposal.

The regional situation since then has radically altered. The war against the Soviet Union degenerated into a civil war in Afghanistan which produced the Taliban. The Pakistan Army, which instrumentalised radical Islam to bleed the Soviet Union, under the American mandate, has now been given the task of cleaning up the mess. The war in Afghanistan, meanwhile, has shifted to the territory of Pakistan. The Army had entered areas that it had never been in before in pursuit of Al-Qaeda. That war, for example in Waziristan, has been both costly and unpopular.

The changed conditions in the north-western parts of the subcontinent provide an opportunity for rethinking many of the traditional premises of enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. That India and Pakistan have eyed each other warily in Afghanistan ever since the Partition of the subcontinent is a fact. Pakistan has been deeply uncomfortable with the active diplomatic presence of India in Afghanistan since the ouster of the Taliban. But that does not necessarily suggest that this rivalry must remain eternal.

Pakistan has long seen Afghanistan as constituting its strategic depth. It has dreamt of putting in place a regime that is politically close to Islamabad. These dreams have shattered

amidst an unprecedented internationalisation of Afghanistan's security after the ouster of the Taliban regime. There might be sections of the Pakistan Army that still hope that once American attention is no longer riveted upon Kabul, it could go back to the old ways in Afghanistan.

But the history of Afghanistan and in particular the tragic consequences of Pakistan's own approach to that nation over the last quarter of a century should suggest that Islamabad cannot hope to control the destiny of its western neighbour. International involvement in Afghanistan is likely to continue for quite some time and New Delhi, which enjoys good standing in that country today, will be an important partner for Kabul.

India, on the other hand, cannot wish Pakistan away in Afghanistan. The simple geopolitical reality of a long and uncontrolled border between the two nations will always provide political opportunities for Pakistan. The emphasis on short-term interests and a sense of rivalry have meant New Delhi and Islamabad undercut each other in Kabul.

Whether India and Pakistan acknowledge it or not, they do share an interest today in promoting a stable, independent, politically moderate and modernising Afghanistan. A recognition of this reality should help change the way India and Pakistan have related to each other in Afghanistan. The long-term regional economic interests of both India and Pakistan demand that they cooperate in Afghanistan.

Gen. Musharraf has indeed begun to articulate the view that Pakistan could benefit as a potential bridge state between the subcontinent, Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. A stable Afghanistan, then, holds the key to Pakistan's own geo-economic future. Pakistan could then become a transit hub for trade and communications between India and the regions to the west and the north.

For India, too, the simplest routes to the west and the north-west, are through Pakistan. Given the current hostility with Pakistan, which is reluctant to provide transit facilities to India, New Delhi is exploring alternative access routes to these vital regions. If Pakistan and India choose

to cooperate, rather than compete, they would at once enhance their individual weight in a region that is critical to the whole world.

If there is political will, a range of possibilities for India-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan and beyond presents itself. The two sides could take up joint economic projects in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Both New Delhi and Islamabad are already involved in many projects such as road-building in Afghanistan. Creating synergy should not be impossible.

Two, India and Pakistan could jointly work out a trade and transit treaty with Afghanistan. Such an arrangement would benefit all three and link the subcontinent with Central Asia. Similar arrangements could also be negotiated with Iran. India has agreed to study a free trade arrangement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, comprising six Arab Gulf states. There is no reason why such an arrangement should not include Pakistan.

Mutual cooperation has not been a principal feature of India-Pakistan relations in the past. The imperatives of globalisation and regional integration have put economic cooperation squarely on the India-Pakistan agenda and have created a broader framework in which to consider their own longstanding disputes. Similarly, political and security cooperation between the two sides would also help overcome deep distrust that has accumulated over the years.

Ideas on political cooperation have already begun to impinge on the India-Pakistan agenda. At their meeting a few weeks ago in New Delhi, the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Secretaries hinted at cooperation on global nuclear issues when they demanded a conversation with all the nuclear weapon powers. If India-Pakistan cooperation is conceivable on the nuclear front, there is no reason why a mutually beneficial engagement cannot be constructed around their shared interests in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf.

Gen. Musharraf is likely to respond to any Indian proposals on political cooperation in Afghanistan and beyond by suggesting that he could consider them only after a resolution of the Kashmir conflict. If Dr. Singh and Gen. Musharraf manage to find a way in New York to reassure each other on Kashmir and terrorism and come up with a mutually acceptable negotiating format on the subjects, they should not find it difficult to start thinking the unthinkable on regional security issues.

# Delhi fires Bangla camp salvo at Pak

## OUR BUREAU AND AGENCIES

Sept. 14: India has accused Pakistan of moving militant training camps to Bangladesh to avoid world attention even as the US urged the three nations to cooperate in the war against terror.

Border Security Force chief Ajai Raj Sharma said: "There are firm reports that ISI has set up new training centres for terrorists in Bangladesh." Most militant groups operating in Kashmir now are being trained in Bangladesh, he added.

The allegation came as the US suggested that the three

countries "discuss the issue (terrorism) to fight terrorism in South Asia" and a team led by home secretary Dharendra Singh readied to leave for two-day talks in Dhaka.

Indications are that India, which is seeking the custody of militant leaders operating out of Bangladesh and the closure of 195 insurgent camps, does not expect a breakthrough in the joint working group discussions.

US deputy assistant secretary for South Asia Torkel L. Patterson, who was in Dhaka today, expressed concern over the seizure of a large cache of arms in Chittagong this April, which India suspects was

meant for militant groups operating in the country, including Ulfa.

The 1975 guidelines, which bar erection of defensive structures within 150 yards of the zero line, are likely to come up for discussion. Delhi would like Dhaka to agree to fencing within the 150-yard mark in some villages and allow 31 development projects, including minor irrigation schemes, village roads and schools, near the zero line.

Playing down expectations of a breakthrough in the two-day talks, officials expressed concern over fundamentalist forces tightening their grip on the Bangladesh Nationalist

Party-led four-party coalition. According to India's assessment, the Jamaat-e-Islami appears to be the prime mover in the Khaleda Zia government unwilling to resist fundamentalist influence. "It appears that senior people in the government are linked to extremist organisations," an official said.

Sources said the home secretary would raise internal security issues but suggested that in view of developments in the recent past, the delegation knew what to expect.

Singh is likely to bring up India's concern about Bangladesh emerging as a transit point for arms smug-

gling. Dhaka had promised to share details of its investigation into the Chittagong weapons haul. "They have not got back to us but we understand that they have filed chargesheets against some people on the fringes of the conspiracy, like drivers," an official said.

Delhi is also unhappy about Dhaka's non-cooperation in handing over Indian nationals arrested in Bangladesh for violating their laws and is likely to press for Ulfata leader Anup Chetia's deportation after he completes a jail term next month.

There are fears that Chetia might disappear as quietly as

Sanjeev Dev Burman of the All-Tripura Tiger Force. Dismissing Indian demands that he be deported, Dhaka had handed over Dev Burman to a non-governmental organisation headed by the wife of a senior minister in the Khaleda Zia government. Delhi fears that the same NGO — which is opposing his deportation to India — would be given Chetia's custody.

"The last time when the government could not make up its mind on Chetia, it was found that he had not paid a fine and was kept in jail for an extended term in lieu of the fine amount," an official pointed out.

15 SEP 2004

# Musharraf says Pak won't give up Kashmir

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
ISLAMABAD, SEPTEMBER 12

**V**OWING that Pakistan would never give up Kashmir, President Pervez Musharraf has said he would convey his country's stand in this regard to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in "unequivocal terms" when they meet in New York later this month.

"We will not give up Kashmir, we have fought wars over it. Pakistan will have to ensure the interest of Kashmiris. I will meet Manmohan Singh (on September 22) and tell him in unequivocal terms about our stand on the issue. We will not give up Kashmir," he told a meeting of Army officers and sol-



diers at a garrison darbar in Quetta yesterday.

However, Musharraf said there was general apprehension in the outside world that whatever was happening in Afghanistan

and Kashmir was originating from Pakistan. Pakistan is also being accused of nuclear proliferation, he said. About sending troops to Iraq, he said the country would not send its soldiers under prevailing condi-

## Jamaat-ud Dawa leader shot dead in Lahore

**ISLAMABAD:** A senior leader of Jamaat-ud Dawa, the parent organisation of banned Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Toiba, was on Sunday shot dead by unidentified assailants in Lahore, police said. Maulana Ibrahim Salafi, 55, was killed while returning home after offering morning prayers at a mosque, police in Lahore said. Salafi was sprayed with bullets by gunmen astride a motorcycle, who fled after the incident. Salafi died on the spot. Salafi's murder followed reports in Pakistani media that a number of Jamaat-ud Dawa leaders, including its founder Hafeez Saeed, apprehended violence following the recent split in the organisation. —PTI

## Pakistani prisoners, who fought with the Taliban, await their release from Pul-i-Charkhi prison in Kabul on Sunday. Reuters

tions in that country, but would consider it when other countries, specially India send troops. "If ... India sends its troops to Iraq, it would not be wise for us to stay away," Musharraf said.

He also said Pakistan would not roll back its nuclear capability and added that during the past four years it spent more amount on improving these capabilities than in the past 30 years.

# Help us fight Maoists, says Deuba to Delhi

■ NEPAL | New oil pipeline from Bihar to Kathmandu will ensure supply is unaffected by road blockades

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 9

**N**EPAL Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba today sought Indian assistance to deal with the threat posed by Maoist insurgents to his country. Taking note of the situation, particularly the recent blockade of Kathmandu by Maoists, the two countries also announced they would build an oil pipeline to ensure uninterrupted supply of petroleum products to Kathmandu valley.

According to a MoU signed between Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), a joint venture company will be formed to build a 35 km pipeline from Raxaul to Amlekhganj in the first phase. The pipeline will be extended to Kathmandu in the next phase.

Sixty per cent of Nepal's requirement of major petroleum products is supplied by IOC from its Raxaul depot via Amlekhganj. With insurgents threatening blockades, it was felt that a pipeline should be laid to maintain regular supply. The pipeline will transport petrol, diesel and kerosene.

Sources said the pipeline will be designed for a capacity of 1.1 million metric tonnes per annum. To start with, the capacity will be kept at 0.7 million metric tonne per annum. The pipeline, the sources pointed out, would ensure that Maoists do not

## What the 2 countries discussed today

- Oil pipeline to run from Raxaul (Bihar) to Amlekhganj (Nepal) in first phase, will be extended to Kathmandu later
- Prospect of increasing military assistance to Nepal
- Securing borders along Uttaranchal, UP and Bihar
- Improving trade relations
- MoU on weather forecasting signed, INSAT ground receiving facility to come up in Nepal

choke Nepal as they tried to did last month by enforcing a road blockade to cut off Kathmandu.

Apart from talks on firming up Nepal's energy security needs, Deuba and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh discussed in detail the possibility of increasing Indian assistance in other spheres.

According to the Nepali delegation, Deuba briefed Singh on the threat posed by the insurgents, the step-up in their activity and efforts made by Kathmandu to counter the Maoists who since 1996 have been engaging government troops to overthrow Nepal's constitutional monarchy.

Deuba also met External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Home Minister Shivraj Patil. The prospect of increasing military assistance to Nepal, securing borders along Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Help us fight Maoists, says Deuba to Delhi

and Bihar as well as improving trade relations were discussed at length at these meetings.

India has so far provided the Royal Nepal Army with arms, ammunition, helicopters besides increasing the scope of cooperation in intelligence sharing and training of troops and officers. India is also Nepal's largest foreign investor and accounts for almost half its total trade.

Further, India and Nepal had delegation level talks today during which an MoU on weather forecasting was signed. It provides for the setting up of an INSAT ground receiving facility in Nepal under grant assistance from In-

dia.

An agreement on cooperation in the fields of culture and sports was also signed between Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and his Nepali counterpart Madhuraman Acharya.

On Friday, Deuba is slated to meet Water Resources Minister P R Dasmunsi and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha L K Advani. He will meet former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Saturday before leaving New Delhi the next day.

The Nepal PM is travelling with a fairly large delegation that includes five ministers. Most belong to different parties of the coalition government Deuba heads.

# Indo-Pak talks

## forge ahead

### 'Forward Movement' In Many Areas

By Rajat Pandit/TNN

New Delhi: With India and Pakistan notching up "forward movement" in several areas, ranging from trans-border bus and train links to military and nuclear confidence-building measures, the stage is now set for another round of the composite dialogue process.

The two countries on Sunday exhibited "commitment and determination" to take the eight-subject composite dialogue process forward. This came after external affairs minister Natwar Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri "assessed positively" the results of the meetings held in the first round.

Vast differences over festering issues like Jammu and Kashmir and Siachen Glacier-Saltoro Ridge, of course, still persist. India also "very clearly and unambiguously" conveyed to Pakistan on Sunday that terrorism was "a very critical issue" for it, said official sources, pointing to the spurt in infiltration and terrorist incidents in J&K.

But the overall mood was "optimistic" that a "good beginning" had been made. Singh and Kasuri are, in fact, likely to come up with a joint statement on Monday to reflect the forward movement in several areas.

Both countries, for instance, have agreed on the need to "opera-

tionalise" the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus link and the old Munabao-Khokhrapar train line as soon as possible. Technical-level talks will thrash out the differences over the modalities for these links.

Sources said another meeting of the expert-level talks on nuclear CBMs will be held in the next couple of months to act on the proposed dedicated hotline between the two foreign secretaries to reduce risks and the agreement on pre-notification of flight-testing of missiles.

Both sides also agreed that conventional military CBMs, like regular interaction and enhanced communication links between the two armed forces, were "useful". "Pakistan will come forward with its

own CBMs on this," said a source. The Coast Guards of the two countries are also all set to sign an MoU on cooperation across maritime borders by setting up a hotline and regular flag meetings on their warships, among other things.

There is even some "incremental progress" on contentious issues like Sir Creek and Wullar Barrage/Tulbul navigation project. The two sides also agreed to exchange visits by foreign service probationers. As for commercial and economic cooperation, India will soon receive a Pakistani delegation to discuss issues like non-traffic barriers and a level-playing field for businessmen.



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AGENDA: Natwar Singh with Kasuri



10-10  
1/9

## THIS IS PARADISE?

South Asia  
Maldives

FOR ALL HIS talk of political reform, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has once again demonstrated a reluctance to loosen his absolute grip over the Maldives. Following a protest against his regime in the capital city of Male on August 12 and 13, President Gayoom proclaimed an Emergency and jailed several prominent figures in the country's incipient pro-democracy movement, including the former Secretary-General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Ibrahim Hussein Zaki. Such a response is characteristic of a police state rather than a nation that counts itself as a respected member of the international community. It causes justifiable concern that Mr. Gayoom is not serious about the constitutional reform process he announced in June 2004, months after anti-government riots took place in Male. The week-long rioting in September 2003 was the first open expression of dissatisfaction with the Gayoom regime. The resulting international spotlight on governance in the Maldives seems to have been one of the reasons for the President's sudden decision to bring about democratic changes in the Constitution. But his open hostility to the energy with which people began mobilising for the promised changes gives the lie to his self-proclaimed commitment to democracy. Much before he cracked down earlier this month, a government ban on public meetings raised serious doubts about Mr. Gayoom's sincerity towards the reform process.

In a country where political parties are banned but elections are routinely held to re-elect a ruler who has been in power for 26 years, the proposed constitutional reforms are nothing less than radical: a President will not serve more than two five-year terms and will lose the right to appoint members to the *Majlis* or Parliament; people will enjoy freedom of association; women can contest elections; there will be separation of

powers between the executive and the legislature; and there will be a Prime Minister. A Constituent Assembly was recently set up to debate the reforms. President Gayoom says he was forced to proclaim the Emergency in order to thwart an "orchestrated attempt" to scuttle his reforms agenda. But such an explanation raises more questions than it answers, considering that those who stand to lose the most from the proposed reforms are the President and his supporters (among whom are several members of his immediate and extended family) and certainly not the pro-democracy activists who now find themselves behind bars. The real test of Mr. Gayoom's commitment to the reform process lies in his willingness to lift the Emergency, reconvene the Constituent Assembly — some of its members were arrested in the crackdown — and begin the debate on reforms at the earliest.

The alacrity with which the regime dispatched emissaries to various countries to "clarify" the situation shows that despite the cool exterior President Gayoom projects, he is rattled enough by the prospect of attracting international opprobrium. The special envoy to India, the Maldivian Health Minister, Ahmed Abdulla, returned from his meeting with the Minister for External Affairs, K. Natwar Singh, with an assurance of New Delhi's continued friendship. For sure, India recognises Mr. Gayoom's contribution to the development of the Maldives over the past two decades and more. In the interests of good neighbourliness, India has refrained from saying anything about his variant of guided democracy. But the President's continued reliance on repressive methods to rule his country makes it increasingly embarrassing for India to proclaim its support for his regime. The popular movement for democracy in the Maldives cannot be suppressed; the harder Mr. Gayoom tries, the more it will blow back on him.

# Ending the regional drift

By C. Raja Mohan

*India might have no option but to develop a pro-active policy to encourage internal political change within the subcontinent.*

110-12  
27/8

**T**HE MUSCULAR message on Nepal put out by New Delhi over the last weekend might not be the sole reason behind the decision of the Maoists to temporarily lift the weeklong blockade against Kathmandu. Clearly, the blockade shook the Indian Government into signalling that it would not allow the collapse of the state structures in Nepal. If the Maoists were testing India's resolve in preventing the emergence of a radical dispensation in Kathmandu, the answer from New Delhi has been both strong and unambiguous.

India's muscle-flexing on Nepal has only helped postpone the final denouement in the once tranquil Himalayan kingdom now trapped in a brutal civil war. India will need a lot more than the commitment to use force to defend order in Nepal. It will have to address the sources of the deepening crisis in Kathmandu. New Delhi should combine its will to intervene militarily in Nepal with a whole range of other policy instruments to get all the three elements in Nepal — the monarchy, political parties, and the Maoists — to resume the stalled dialogue on fundamental political and social change.

A calibrated use of the full range of India's diplomatic tool kit may also be necessary for New Delhi to address the other crises that are staring it in the face. Crises, it is said, often come in threes. India's political and diplomatic attention is also being sought in Bangladesh where the gathering storm has been dramatically showcased by the latest assassination attempt on the Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina. The democratic opposition in Maldives, which now faces a crackdown by the long-serving authoritarian President, Abdul Gayoom, is seeking external intervention to restore at least minimal freedoms.

The triple crisis in India's neighbourhood should hopefully force the Government to take a long hard look at the deeper challenges confronting it in the subcontinent. Strange as it may seem, India's diplomacy with its two most difficult neighbours — China and Pakistan — is in reasonably good shape. It is the approach by the smaller neighbours that is crying out for some focussed thinking. Over the last decade, India's policy towards these neighbours has suffered from lack of sustained attention and a seriousness of purpose. Distracted by the post-Cold War debate on global

issues, great power diplomacy, nuclear weapons, and the traditional security challenges with China and Pakistan, India has been unable to devote the time and energy required for transforming its regional policy, particularly towards the smaller neighbours.

The word, "smaller," in fact, is a misnomer. Bangladesh with its 130 million people is one of the largest nations in the world. Nepal is not one of those mini- or micro-states that dot the world map today. Population alone does not define the importance of these countries to India. While Maldives might be a micro-state, its location astride the sealanes of the Indian Ocean underwrites its geopolitical importance. Bangladesh is the sixth largest

destination of Indian exports and shares a border with India that is longer than the one with China. Nepal's only borders are with India and China. Nepal's open frontier with the heartland States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal makes India extremely vulnerable if a hostile regime takes over in Kathmandu.

Nepal and Bangladesh might not have threatening armies but their potential to act as safe havens to forces hostile to India is unlimited. By just closing their eyes to anti-India activity on their soil, they can hurt New Delhi badly. Small countries in South Asia have a huge capacity to unravel India's security paradigm. The developments in Nepal and Bangladesh in recent years have repeatedly pointed to this threat.

In ending the accumulated drift in its regional policy, India has to recognise that state failure is a real possibility in the subcontinent. Decades of misgovernance, absence of adequate economic growth, widespread poverty, and the decay of political institutions have all combined to make state failure a real security challenge in large parts of South Asia, including some in India. While the role of failing states and their ability to threaten both regional and global security has been debated after the events of September 11, 2001, it is only now that India is facing up to the issues involved. To be credible, India's latest message that it will not allow state

failure in Nepal must be accompanied by fresh answers to a whole range of questions.

First, the Nepal crisis has brought back into focus the question of India's use of force in the neighbourhood. Since its military intervention in Sri Lanka during the late 1980s, India has been extremely cautious in committing its troops to defend its security interests in the immediate neighbourhood. Prudence on use of force is always a sensible policy. But to suggest it will not be considered at all, as the recent Indian foreign policy tended to, is not wise.

Bringing some ambiguity into when and how India will use force in its neighbourhood could have a salutary effect on the various extremist forces in the region as well as on states that follow policies that accentuate internal and regional security threats. Use of force is obviously the

final option, one that would be undertaken reluctantly. India however needs a specific policy framework on a whole range of related issues such as military assistance, supply of arms, training of security forces within a broad rubric of defence cooperation with friendly neighbours.

Second is economic diplomacy. Until now, India's commercial policy towards the neighbours has been bereft of strategic content. The penny-pinching mindset of the Commerce Ministry has meant India has squandered its natural advantages in shaping the pace and direction of regional economic cooperation. India has a huge stake in the rapid economic development of its neighbours. Without the creation of widespread prosperity in the region, the non-military threats to security such as migration and rise of political violence will undermine India's stability.

Despite the huge trade surplus that it enjoys with Dhaka, New Delhi has held back on providing access to Bangladeshi goods to the Indian market. In tying up mutually beneficial cooperation to concessions on either the economic or security front, New Delhi has hurt its own interests. A unilateral gesture from New Delhi on duty free access to goods from Bangladesh with specified Indian and third party content could help

rapidly transform the nature of economic integration between the two countries.

Third, without a more effective border management India will not be in a position to ensure its own security or provide substantive assistance to its neighbours. India has allowed the infrastructure on the borders with Nepal and Bangladesh to rot to fourth world standards. While the infrastructure for trade and communication across the boundaries is dismal, in most places there is none at all for mobility along the borders on the Indian side.

Building fences as on the Bangladesh border is unlikely to help. What is needed is improving the capacities of security forces to world standards. Equally important is to end the pitiful levels of governance in the border districts in India's heartland as well as the remote Northeast. State failure is a reality on the ground on our own side of the border. Unless the Centre takes up the question of border management in its entirety on a war footing, India's ability to respond to crises in the region will be severely circumscribed.

Fourth, and most difficult, will be to develop the political gumption in New Delhi to insist on positive political change within the neighbourhood. The crisis in Nepal cannot be addressed through military means alone. Unless India brings sufficient pressure on King Gyanendra to end his futile effort to strengthen his own power, push the political parties to get their act together, and initiate serious internal reform, the Maoists will continue to gain the upper hand. In Bangladesh, too, India must press the two main political parties to end their bitter rivalry, which has allowed the growth of extremist forces in that country. And in the Maldives, New Delhi must warn President Gayoom to either shape up through democratisation or ship out.

Non-intervention in the internal affairs of the neighbouring countries is indeed a sensible proposition. Yet given the deepening crises in the region and the long-term consequences of state failure, India might have no option but to develop a pro-active policy to encourage internal political change within the subcontinent. That is part of the burden of being a responsible power in the international system. India will have to develop both the instruments of persuasion as well as define the limits to its use of force in the region.

# India and Pakistan at SAARC

By K.K. Katyal

**B**EFORE HE left for Islamabad earlier this month, the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, made known — during informal discussions — his strong feelings against letting India-Pakistan problems overshadow the review of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) activities, the main purpose of the visit.

Mr. Singh was keen that SAARC discussions remain on centre-stage. In practice, it did not work that way. On all the four days that he was in Islamabad, discussions by India and Pakistan on bilateral problems, rather than SAARC activities, grabbed the headlines.

True to the uneven pattern of the bilateral dealings after the January 6 joint statement, the outcome of Mr. Singh's talks with the leaders of the host country — President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Shujaat Hussain and Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri — was a mix of the positive and the negative. The negative was clearly reflected in the official press release issued after Mr. Singh's talks with Gen. Musharraf. What stood out in the Press release

was Gen. Musharraf's stress on "simultaneous" progress on all issues, especially Jammu and Kashmir, and the need for its final settlement within a "reasonable" time frame.

Going by insider accounts of Mr. Singh's talks with Gen. Musharraf, the positive elements were not alto-

gether absent. The very comprehensive nature of the discussion was one, and the evidence of flexibility about the "reasonable time frame" was the other. Pakistan, according to the General, was doing all that it could do to counter acts of terrorists. The criticism of India by Pakistan was ascribed to the sense of hurt, caused by "human rights violations" in Jammu and Kashmir. Mr. Singh drew attention to India's democratic set-up, the elections in Jammu and Kashmir and the steps to initiate dialogue with the State's leaders.

Obviously not convinced by Pakis-

tan's version, he made a case for concrete steps to check infiltration, which, in July, had exceeded the level of the corresponding period last year.

Why this dissonance between the actual discussions and the account given in the press release? Why was the normal practice of giving an iden-

dia's stress is on confidence-building measures, like starting a bus services between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad in the Pakistan-held part, steps for peace and tranquillity along the Line of Control. Pakistan, on the hand, seeks to focus on the "final settlement." Gen. Musharraf wanted the two sides to zero in on this point. New Delhi was "disappointed" by the tone and substance of the press release but limited its reaction to a one-liner. Informally, it made no secret of its unhappiness on various counts. One, the Islamabad statement did not reflect the importance of the Indian stand on the need to end terrorism. Two, it talked of the "comfort" of the Kashmir people but in actual practice, was instrumental in subverting it. Three, it referred to their "legitimate aspirations" but had subverted the electoral processes in PoK.

The SAARC platform, too, witnessed a mild clash. At one stage, it looked ominous, with a revived controversy threatening to introduce a jarring note in the dialogue. Later, however, Islamabad toned down the rhetoric, even seeking to underplay its conduct.

## *Despite the posturing by the two neighbours during the recent SAARC meet, the bilateral dialogue goes on.*

tical version by the spokesmen of the two sides not followed?

There are various theories. One, Pakistan sought to reassure the domestic constituency that there had been no let-up in the advocacy of the "core issue." Two, it reflected an intense debate in the ruling establishment on dealings with India, with different sections in the army and the political set-up taking positions suiting their respective narrow concerns. Three, the fundamental differences on Kashmir have come to the surface now that the two sides have begun to address the substantive aspect. In-

# Natwar, Shaukat review ties

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, JULY 22.** Taking forward the spirit of the understanding arrived at on Wednesday to stay engaged with each other on a sustained basis, India and Pakistan today agreed on the need for both sides to 'get together' for the good of the people of both countries and the region.

This was the crux of the informal interaction the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, had with Pakistan's Prime Minister in-waiting and Finance Minister, Shaukat Aziz. The meeting provided an op-

portunity to them to review the current state of India-Pakistan relations. Mr. Singh spent some time with Mr. Aziz who is expected to take over from the transitional Prime Minister, Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain. A trusted lieutenant of the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, Mr. Aziz' elevation to the highest post has been delayed, as he is not a member of the Pakistan National Assembly.

Mr. Aziz is contesting the by-elections scheduled on August 18 from two of the National Assembly constituencies to make himself eligible to occupy the chair of Prime Minister.

# India to consider SAFMA plea

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, JULY 22.** The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, has assured a delegation of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) that India would consider grant of multiple one-year visas to the National Executive Body members of SAFMA. He also promised to take up the issue of liberalisation of the visa regime in the composite dialogue process between India and Pakistan.

Talking to a SAFMA delegation, Mr. Singh appreciated the initiative taken by the association and assured the delegation of his Government's moral support to SAFMA's conferences and activities promoting bet-

ter understanding among the nations of South Asia.

The delegation had sought facilitation of visas and allowing SAFMA to hold its conference on interstate conflicts and second parliamentary conference in New Delhi. It asked for help in exchange of delegations between the two Punjab and exchange of journalists across Kashmir. On SAFMA's demands to adopt its protocols on free movement of mediapersons and media products across the South Asian region and on freedom of information, besides granting a status of an Apex Regional Body of SAARC, the External Affairs Minister said he would do his best to accommodate these proposals.

VK  
for 28/7

28/7

# SAARC meet to fight terrorism

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, JULY 21.** The two-day SAARC Council of Ministers' meeting ended here this evening without taking note of the idea mooted by Pakistan for inclusion of issues related to peace and security on the Council charter.

A brief report adopted by the Ministers resolved to step up joint efforts to combat terrorism, eradicate poverty and enhance economic cooperation. Five Indian proposals, including the setting up of an infrastructure fund for the region, were incorporated in the report.

The Pakistan Foreign Minister, Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, who briefed the press on the meeting in his capacity as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, played down the sen-

timents expressed by the Pakistani delegation that SAARC had no future if it did not involve itself in conflict resolution in regional and bilateral issues.

In the face of a volley of questions about the relevance of SAARC as long as political conflicts in the region are not resolved, Mr. Kasuri maintained that such criticism could be levelled against any body, including the United Nations, as inter-state cooperation was riddled with "imperfections."

On whether it would be possible to implement the decisions of SAARC without resolution of Kashmir, Mr. Kasuri said that the ice-breaking meeting between the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, and the then Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, took place on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit in January.

"Once again this morning, I had an opportunity for nearly two hours of interaction with my Indian counterpart, K. Natwar Singh, on the sidelines of SAARC meeting. Undoubtedly, SAARC is helping the process of India-Pakistan peace process," he said.

## Bangladesh proposal

In their report, the Ministers agreed to the proposal made by Bangladesh to host a ministerial meeting on cooperation among the seven-member grouping to combat terrorism and trans-national crimes.

Mr. Singh proposed the setting up of a South Asian parliamentary forum to deliberate on issues pertaining to regional cooperation endeavours under SAARC, and India's offer to host the next meeting of this forum was readily accepted by other

countries.

The Foreign Ministers also supported India's proposal for the establishment of a SAARC High Economic Council formed with the Finance and Commerce Ministers of the member countries to promote ideas and initiatives related to regional integration in economic, trade, financial and monetary areas.

The SAARC Award for 2004 will go to late Bangladesh President, Zia-ur Rahman.

Mr. Kasuri said the deliberations were imbued with a new spirit of dynamism.

The South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), approved by the SAARC Summit in January, is to be operationalised by January 1, 2006, and the Committee of Experts has met thrice to sort out various issues related to it.

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# সন্ত্রাস নির্মূল করতেই হবে, ফের বলল ভারত

ইসলামাবাদ, ২০ জুলাই: সন্ত্রাসবাদের প্রশ্নে কোনও রকম সমঝোতা করা চলবে না বলে সার্কের বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের সম্মেলনে ফের দ্ব্যর্থহীন ভাষায় জানিয়ে দিল ভারত। অন্য দিকে, পাকিস্তান কিন্তু সেই দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয় এবং অবধারিত ভাবে কাশ্মীরের প্রসঙ্গ তুলেছে। তবে সরাসরি নয়, ঘুরিয়ে। পাকিস্তানের বক্তব্য, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় শান্তি ও সংহতির জন্য সার্ক দেশগুলির নিজেদের রাজনৈতিক বিবাদ আগে শান্তিপূর্ণ ভাবে মেটানো উচিত। এটা আদতে কাশ্মীর-প্রসঙ্গের দিকে ইঙ্গিত করা বলে মনে করছে কূটনৈতিক মহল।

পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ ভারতের বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ-সহ সার্ক বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের সঙ্গে দেখা করে বলেন, সার্ক সদস্যদের মধ্যে আত্মবর্ধক ব্যবস্থা চালু করতে হবে। সমস্যার শান্তিপূর্ণ সমাধানে সদস্যদের আরও মনোযোগী হতে হবে।

নটবর আজ সম্মেলনে বলেছেন, “সীমান্ত যেখানে মানুষের সঙ্গে মানুষের মেলামেশার ঐতিবন্ধক হয়ে ওঠে না— দক্ষিণ এশিয়াকে এমন একটি অঞ্চলে পরিণত করতে হলে সন্ত্রাস নির্মূল করতে হবে। কোনও সমঝোতা নয়।” তাঁর মতে, বিভিন্ন আঞ্চলিক গোষ্ঠীর মধ্যে সার্ক এখনও বেশ দুর্বল। গোষ্ঠীভুক্ত দেশগুলির মধ্যে সহযোগিতা বাড়াতে সমবেত ওয়াসের কথাও বলেছেন তিনি। সম্মেলন উদ্বোধন করতে গিয়ে পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী খুরশিদ মেহমুদ কাসুরি বলেন, “সার্কের ভবিষ্যত সুগম করতে এই অঞ্চলের রাজনৈতিক বিতর্ক-নিবাদ বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ ভাবে মীমাংসার উপায় বার করার দিকে দৃষ্টি দিতে হবে।” কাসুরির মতে, শান্তি ও ঐক্য থাকলে তবেই দক্ষিণ এশিয়া আর্থিক ভাবেও বিশেষ শক্তিশালী হয়ে উঠবে।

বস্তুত, সন্ত্রাসবাদের বিপদ কতটা বিশাল চেহারা নিচ্ছে, সেটা বোঝানোর উপরেই আজ সব চেয়ে বেশি জোর দিয়েছেন নটবর। তাঁর কথায়, “বিশ্ব জুড়েই বিভিন্ন দেশ সন্ত্রাসবাদের কবলে পড়ছে। দক্ষিণ এশিয়া নিজেই তার করুণ দৃষ্টান্ত।” বিভিন্ন বিষয়ে বিরোধ থেকে দেশগুলির অভ্যন্তরে এবং আঞ্চলিক স্তরে সন্ত্রাসবাদ জন্ম নিচ্ছে। নটবর বলেছেন, “সন্ত্রাস উপড়ে ফেলতে গেলে সার্কের সব স্তরে আরও সহযোগিতা বাড়াতে হবে।”

সন্ত্রাসবাদ নিয়ে ভারত এবং দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয়গুলি নিয়ে পাকিস্তান সেই চিরাচরিত মত ধরে রাখলেও আগামী বছরে ঢাকায় সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলনের আগে দারিদ্র দুরীকরণ কর্মসূচির কথা বিশেষ ভাবে উঠে এসেছে বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের সম্মেলনের প্রথম দিনে। এই ব্যাপারে সার্ক গোষ্ঠীভুক্ত দেশগুলির আরও নিবিড় যোগাযোগ রেখে কাজ করার কথা বলা হয়েছে।

সম্মেলনের ফাঁকে নটবর কাল কাসুরির সঙ্গে কথা বলবেন। ভারত-পাক আলোচনা এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া নিয়ে তাঁদের মধ্যে কথা হবে। কাশ্মীরে সীমান্ত-পার সন্ত্রাসের বাড়বাড়ন্ত ও পাক অধিকৃত কাশ্মীরে জঙ্গি শিবির চালানো নিয়ে নয়াদিল্লির উদ্বেগ-আপত্তির কথা কাসুরিকে জানিয়ে দেবেন নটবর। এ ছাড়া, শ্রীনগর-মুজফফরবাদ বাস চালানো নিয়ে মতভেদ, পারস্পরিক নিরাপত্তা ও শান্তির বিষয়গুলিও আলোচনায় আসবে বলে জানা গিয়েছে। বিদেশমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠকের পরে নটবর আগামী শুক্রবার মুশারফের সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ করবেন। তবে ২৫ অগস্ট দিল্লিতে দু'দেশের বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের যে-বৈঠক হওয়ার কথা ছিল, তা পিছিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। নটবর সিংহের অন্য কর্মসূচি থাকায় বৈঠক পিছোনো হয়েছে এবং ইসলামাবাদও তা মেনে নিয়েছে বলে সরকারি ভাবে জানানো হয়েছে। — পি টি আই

# Pak insists on mechanism to resolve bilateral disputes

Press Trust of India

## Meeting postponed

ISLAMABAD, July 20. — Ignoring India's reservations, Pakistan today insisted that Saarc should devise mechanisms to resolve bilateral differences and disputes, a veiled reference to Kashmir, even as India warned of the danger posed by terrorism and called for collective efforts to combat the menace.

President Pervez Musharraf, who had a meeting with Mr K Natwar Singh and other Saarc foreign ministers, said there was a need for Saarc to institute a process of confidence-building among member countries and that they should "pay increased attention to preventive diplomacy and peaceful settlement of disputes."

Earlier, addressing the

ISLAMABAD, July 20. — India and Pakistan have put off their foreign ministers' meeting scheduled on 25 August in New Delhi by a few weeks with mutual consent, officials said today. The meeting is now expected to be held in September. — PTI

foreign ministers' meeting, Mr Natwar Singh said that while the scourge of terrorism was plaguing many nations, South Asia was a "tragic" example of this. "We need to resolve not to compromise with terrorism, if we wish to realise South Asia's dream as a region where boundaries cease to be barriers separating our peoples."

Gen. Musharraf's comments came on top of the Pakistani foreign minister,

Mr Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri's speech at the inauguration of the two-day meeting, in which he said: "In visualising Saarc's future, we must give serious thought to devising ways and means whereby political differences and disputes within the region are settled amicably."

India has already rejected the idea of Saarc evolving any mechanism to discuss bilateral issues.

Inaugurating the foreign ministers' conference Pakistan Prime Minister Mr Shujaat Hussain said his country was committed to pursuing peace with India.

The next Saarc summit will be held in Dhaka from 9 to 11 June. The new secretary-general will be Mr Chenkyab Dorji, Bhutan's ambassador to Thailand, who succeeds Mr Q Rahim.

# Natwar in peace progress pledge

IMTIAZ GUL

Islamabad, July 19: Natwar Singh landed here this afternoon in time for tomorrow's meeting of Saarc foreign ministers, but promised to use the opportunity to do whatever possible to take dialogue with Pakistan forward.

Scheduled to meet Pakistani counterpart Khurshed Mehmood Kasuri on the Saarc sidelines, Singh said: "I will do whatever I can to create an even better climate for taking forward the dialogue process."

The foreign minister is also expected to call on President Pervez Musharraf and interim Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain.

Earlier, the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries Shank and Riaz Khokar met for an hour over breakfast to review the peace process and discuss proposals that would be placed by their foreign ministers in a later meeting.

"We had good talks. The spirit was good, the discussions were good," said Khokar after the talks, their fifth this year, that have paved the way for the foreign ministers' meeting.

"We discussed some ideas and foreign ministers may announce them after discussing them in detail during their next meeting scheduled on August 25."

Khokar said the neighbours had agreed to continue the talks according to schedule. "There has been no talk that things



Natwar Singh with Khurshed Mehmood Kasuri in Islamabad on Monday. (Reuters)

aren't moving forward. Talks are making progress and they will continue to make progress," Shashank said.

Singh and Kasuri are due to meet again in late August following a series of six meetings dedicated to specific disputes, inclu-

ding Siachen and the Wullar Barrage. The meetings will be held in New Delhi and Islamabad between July 28 and August 12.

On July 28-29, talks on the Wullar Barrage and Tulbul Navigation Project will be held in Is-

lamabad. The venue will then shift to New Delhi where discussions on promotion of friendly exchanges will be held on August 3-4; Siachen on August 5-6; and Sir Creek on August 6-7.

This will be followed by talks on terrorism and drug traffick-

ing and economic and commercial partnership in Islamabad on August 11-12. The two countries had held talks on peace and security, including confidence-building measures, in New Delhi on June 27-28.

About this morning's meeting, Shashank said: "The main focus was on Saarc-related issues but we were also able to review the decisions taken during the foreign secretaries-level talks in New Delhi. We will carry forward the process."

A statement issued by the Pakistan foreign ministry said the diplomats had reviewed movement in the processes of composite dialogue and confidence building.

"They expressed satisfaction over the commencement of talks between their foreign secretaries on peace and security and Jammu and Kashmir." The talks also focused on agreed nuclear CBMs and further explored "enhancement of these measures in the field of communication".

## Kargil probe

The Pakistan government has ruled out any probe into the Kargil conflict, saying it would open a Pandora's Box, and rejected deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's claim that he was not informed about it by the then army chief, Pervez Musharraf.

Whatever happened was a "collective responsibility" of the Sharif government, Prime Minister Shujaat Hussain said.



# China and SAARC

By C. Raja Mohan

**NEW DELHI, JULY 18.** As the South Asian Foreign Ministers meet this week in Islamabad, the idea of associating China with the plans for economic integration in the subcontinent should get some serious attention.

Any proposal to bring China into the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) would bring strong protests from the traditionalists of the Indian security establishment. After all, preventing China from expanding its influence in the subcontinent has long been a major strategic objective of India.

It is precisely for this reason that sections of SAARC believe they can needle India by proposing collective cooperation with China. If India turns the conventional wisdom on its head, it could in fact say "yes" and derive huge benefits from an association between SAARC and China.

There already is some diplomatic engagement between China and SAARC. In the last few years, Beijing has begun to communicate its interest — through formal channels — in joining hands with South Asia.

At the Twelfth SAARC Summit in Islamabad last January, the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, sent a formal message of greetings. The Pakistan Prime Minister, Mir Zafurallah Khan Jamali, did not read out the message but referred to it in his opening address at the summit.

In their Islamabad Declaration, the South Asian leaders agreed to "establish dialogue partnership with other regional bodies and with states outside

the region, interested in SAARC activities." In other words, India has already accepted, in principle, a potential engagement between SAARC and other states such as China.

The Secretary-General of SAARC, Q.A.M.A. Rahim, visited Beijing in April at the invitation of the Chinese Government. During his visit, the Chinese leaders expressed their desire for a productive engagement with SAARC. The question no longer is whether China should be associated with SAARC but how and in what form.

The SAARC Foreign Minis-

## DIPLOMATIC NOTEBOOK

ters could indeed begin by authorising a study by the Secretariat on how the association with China could be developed on the basis of experience from other regional organisations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Sino-Indian economic relations are in a phase of explosive growth. From a few hundred million dollars of bilateral trade in the mid-1990s, Sino-Indian total trade is likely to touch \$10 billion this year. In a few years, Sino-Indian trade will soon be larger than the total trade turnover in most of the South Asian countries.

India is now negotiating a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement with China. New Delhi and Beijing are also working out separate free trade arrangements with ASEAN. There is no reason then

for India to oppose, for example, a free trade treaty between China and SAARC. Such an association will be another building block in the construction of a larger Asian economic community.

India's outward push and the inviting pull of the Chinese market could reinforce each other and drag the rest of the region into ever tighter economic embrace.

In fact, promoting China's participation in the economic development of South Asia could be one way of overcoming the political inhibitions in the region towards economic integration.

Would China's association with SAARC encourage other countries to raise contentious bilateral political issues? Unlikely. In fact, India and China today have similar attitudes to the question of the relationship between economic and politics. Unlike some of India's neighbours, Beijing is with New Delhi's argument that economic cooperation should take precedence over the focus on political disputes.

Some in India will fear that letting China into SAARC will result in its rising economic profile south of the Himalayas. But can the world's third largest economy be kept out of the subcontinent, particularly when it neighbours the region?

The fear of a rising Chinese profile must be balanced by the prospect of India gaining economic access to parts of China — Tibet, Xinjiang and Yunnan — with which it had historic contacts.

Formal cooperation between

SAARC and China will also result in ending an important political anomaly. Bhutan is the only country in South Asia that does not have diplomatic relations with China.

India denies it is preventing Bhutan from having regular state-to-state relations with China and it is up to reclusive Thimpu to decide which countries to have ties with. In any case, every year officials from China and Bhutan meet to discuss their boundary dispute.

And those occasions have become the vehicle for a substantive engagement between Beijing and Thimpu. It should be far simpler for the two sides to have more formal and open relations.

China has a crucial role in dealing with an important question that affects the lives of people in the subcontinent — the frequent flooding of its eastern parts.

The Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, has touched the heart of the matter when he wrote to the Ministry of External Affairs recently, suggesting talks with China on the subject.

Most of the major rivers in the subcontinent start their journey in Tibet.

China holds the key to a more efficient management of Brahmaputra's waters that devastate eastern India and Bangladesh every year. India and China already exchange hydrological data on the Brahmaputra every year. Now is the time to think more boldly about bringing China into the consultations on river management in South Asia.

## CPI (M) team to visit Kumbakonam

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JULY 18.** Members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) will visit Kumbakonam where 90 school children were killed in a fire on Friday. Led by the party's Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury, they are scheduled to reach the site of the fire on Monday morning.

The team will include the CPI (M) Tamil Nadu secretary, Nalasisivan, and the Lok Sabha member, Mohan Ponnuswamy (Madurai).

## Kesrinath Tripathi to take over from Katiyar

By J.P. Shukla

**LUCKNOW, JULY 18.** The Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party president, Vinay Katiyar, today submitted his resignation in compliance with the directive of the BJP high command, to pave the way for the appointment of another leader to give the organisation a new look in the aftermath of the party's defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

Mr. Katiyar told newsmen here that he had sent his resignation letter to the party presi-

dent, Venkaiah Naidu, in New Delhi. The former Uttar Pradesh Assembly Speaker, Kesrinath Tripathi, will succeed Mr. Katiyar.

The ouster of Mr. Katiyar follows an orchestrated campaign by his rivals in the State unit, who held him responsible for the party's humiliating defeat in the polls. Mr. Katiyar had indicated that he would not submit meekly to the campaign and that he would present his case after he was relieved from the party post.

Refusing to accept that he was responsible for the party's poor performance in the elections, Mr. Katiyar said he failed to understand why he had been asked to resign.

Even a criminal was given a chance to explain his case before his conviction, but he was never allowed to give an explanation, he said.

The campaign had been managed by an election committee headed by the former State party chief, Kalraj N, he added.

# Pakistan plays out Saarc ritual

1918 T-8  
South Asia

Islamabad, July 18 (PTI): In the midst of the peace talks, Pakistan has raised an old bogey that spooks India.

It pitched for expansion of the Saarc charter to allow discussion on bilateral disputes. Delhi believes it is a euphemism to rake up Kashmir.

"Later or sooner, we will have to move in this direction," Pakistan foreign office spokesman Masood Khan said after the first day of the two-day standing committee meeting of Saarc foreign secretaries here.

The Saarc charter does not allow discussions on bilateral and political disputes.

In his address to the 12th Saarc summit here early this year, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf had made a strong plea for including disputes.

Earlier, the Saarc foreign secretaries reviewed progress on the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (Safta), poverty alleviation and steps initiated to stop financing of terrorist organisations. This meeting will be followed by one between foreign ministers.

Safta is to come into force on January 1, 2006, and will be made



Shashank with Riaz Khokar at the Saarc meeting on Sunday. (PTI)

fully operational by 2016. The secretaries, including Pakistan's Riaz Khokar and India's Shashank and foreign secretary-designate Shyam Saran, reviewed a report on Safta.

Delhi is keen on faster movement on Safta, which en-

visages phased tariff liberalisation.

Khan said the Pakistani delegation proposed expansion of the charter during the meeting. But, he conceded, the move at this stage is "premature".

"Let us move step by step in-

crementally towards this destination," the spokesman said.

"As of now, the Saarc charter does not allow any detailed discussion on political issues. But I think the potential is there," Khan said, observing that the underlined need was to promote and foster greater economic and regional co-operation.

## Natwar wife

Pakistan foreign minister Khurshheed Mehmood Kasuri today called his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh to invite his wife to visit Islamabad.

Singh will be travelling to the Pakistan capital tomorrow to participate in the Saarc foreign ministers' meeting.

The Indian foreign minister thanked his Pakistan counterpart, with whom he shares a warm personal rapport, but told him that his wife would not be able to accompany him as she has to look after their grandchildren at home.

During his stay in Islamabad, Singh is expected to call on President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister-designate Shaukat Aziz, besides holding talks with Kasuri.

# India, Pak take *Sumitran 11.1 29/6* 'good first step' To Reopen Mumbai, Karachi Missions, Free Jailed Civilians

By Rajat Pandit/TNN

**New Delhi:** Even though no new ground was broken on the festering Jammu and Kashmir dispute, India and Pakistan took some steps on Monday to inject confidence in each other and resolved to take the peace process forward "in an atmosphere free from terrorism and violence".

The confidence-building measures included immediate restoration of the strengths of their respective high commissions to 110 from the present 75; immediate release of all fishermen in each other's custody; and initiation of steps for early release of civilian prisoners. At the conclusion of the two-day dialogue between foreign secretary Shashank and his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Khokhar, held after six years, the two sides agreed in principle to reopen the consulates in Mumbai and Karachi.

The two nations also stamped their approval on the nuclear CBMs, which include a dedicated hotline between the two foreign secretaries to reduce risks, decided by the expert-level meeting last week. They also decided to reach a formal accord on pre-notification of missile tests, which exists at an informal level at present.

Both sides described the talks as a "beginning in the right direction", with Khokhar calling it a "good first step". External affairs minister Natwar Singh, in



**New Delhi:** General Pervez Musharraf has extended invitations to President APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi to visit Pakistan.

Manmohan Singh, in turn, handed over a message to Pakistan foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar for Musharraf when the latter called on him. TNN

turn, said the talks were "positive and the outcome was concrete". But it was clear that the main stumbling block remains the Kashmir dispute, with both sides sticking to their stated positions.

A two-page joint statement issued after the talks, said the two countries "reiterated their commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, and their determination to implement the Simla Agreement in letter and spirit".

# Islamabad scorns Natwar's China model

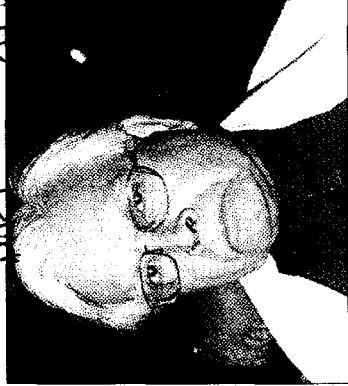
31/5  
G. V. P. S.

Agencies  
Islamabad, May 30

ISLAMABAD HAS said that Indian external affairs minister Natwar Singh's reported suggestion that the Sino-India model should be followed to improve ties with Pakistan has "logical fallacies". It said that all bilateral differences were central to the Kashmir issue which could not be "sidelined".

"The Jammu and Kashmir dispute is not a border issue; it is not about empty spaces," Foreign Office spokesman Masood Khan was quoted as saying by the official APP news agency. "It is about the aspirations and political future of the 13 million Kashmiris living in a territory that is roughly 85,000 sq miles."

He said the "advisability" of modelling Indo-Pak engagement along the lines of Sino-India talks had "logical fallacies".



**Natwar Singh**

While the Sino-India model may be good in its own right, it bore no comparisons to Indo-Pak differences over Kashmir, Khan said while reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to continuing the dialogue process.

"The (Kashmir) issue cannot be sidelined," said Khan. "All India-

## Delhi's worries

INDIA ON Sunday expressed concern over Pakistan's testing of its medium-range nuclear-capable missile Hatf V or Ghauri, saying it would escalate an arms race in South Asia. Ghauri has a range of up to 1,500 km and can strike most major cities in northern India. Pakistan said it had notified Delhi about the test.

AP, New Delhi

Pakistan differences centre on Kashmir. A quest for the solution of this problem is the key to a genuine detente, a sustainable rapprochement and a peaceful neighbourhood. The question is not of putting the Kashmir issue on the backburner or the front-burner, the object les-

son is that it cannot be swept under the carpet."

Khan was reacting to Singh's suggestion in a recent media interview that the approach adopted by India and China to improve their ties in all spheres while attempting to resolve the border dispute should be applied to Indo-Pak relations.

On Singh's remarks that the Simla Agreement constituted the basis for India-Pakistan relations, Khan said, "If invocation of the Simla Agreement was meant to maintain status quo, then that is not suggesting a solution but a way of perpetuating the problem."

He said the status quo was part of the problem. "It is not a solution. It is not a question of which instrument is to be invoked selectively by which party," he said and recalled that there were UN Security Council resolutions which, he claimed, gave a clear blueprint of a solution.

# Push peace process ahead: Gen

Gen Musharraf 11/11/21

**Islamabad:** In yet another contentious statement, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said he would "not be a party" to the present Indo-Pak peace process if there was no forward movement especially on Kashmir by July-August this year.

"If peace process does not move forward, then I will not be a party to it," he said in an interactive meeting with a select group of journalists, officials and intellectuals here on Tuesday. "If we do not move forward, I am not in the process. They know that. I told everyone absolutely unambiguously that if you think that I am here to sell Kashmir, you are talking to the wrong man," Gen. Musharraf said.

Foreign secretaries and foreign ministers are slated to meet in July-August to hold talks on all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. In a recent statement, which was contested by India, the general had said that Kashmir was the central issue. He said that the foreign ministers at their meeting needed to break the

deadlock, otherwise the confidence building-measures (CBMS) initiated in the current detente would come to an end.

Replying to a question about India's response to Pakistan's peace overtures and its sincerity towards addressing the Kashmir issue, he said he



**If peace process does not move forward, then I will not be a party to it**

—Gen. Musharraf

had made it clear to the Indian leadership and the international community that, for the peace process to be successful, the two countries must address the issue. Sections of the media here quoted Gen. Musharraf as saying that Pakistan would reconsider its

position if the expected results were not delivered by July-August. He said CBMS and dialogue process would have to move ahead in tandem to resolve Kashmir and six other issues including differences over Siachen. Pakistan, he said, believed in meaningful and result-oriented talks on the Kashmir issue and that addressing it was imperative for any realistic forward movement in the relations between the two countries.

"I am confident that things will move forward when two countries go into the next round of talks," he said. Asked whether anything went wrong after the joint statement issued by the two countries in January to make him apprehensive of the peace process, he said it should come into full gear after elections in India. He rejected the Indian charge of cross border terrorism and reiterated that militancy in Kashmir was a freedom struggle and Pakistan would not hesitate to provide moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris. Agencies

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 APR 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Kashmir to be a key issue in Indo-Pak talks

V. Mohan Narayan  
ISLAMABAD 18 FEBRUARY

**C**HALKING out a timetable and a roadmap for resumption of the composite dialogue, India and Pakistan on Wednesday agreed to discuss eight major issues including Jammu and Kashmir and other issues, besides, nuclear confidence

dian correspondents and added that "some elements have been included from the MOU" on the nuclear issue signed by the two countries in 1998. "We are trying to move together in the spirit of the decision taken at the highest level by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and in the joint statement issued here



**GROUND ZERO:** Pakistan foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar (right) with his Indian counterpart, Shashank, in Islamabad in Wednesday. — Reuters

building measures.

A joint statement issued after talks between foreign secretary Shashank and his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Khokhar here said: "Both sides agreed that they would approach the composite dialogue with the sincere desire to discuss and arrive at a peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides."

Shashank and Khokhar who announced the agreed modalities and timeframe for the composite dialogue at separate press briefings, will now meet in Delhi in May/June for talks on peace and security, including CBMs and Jammu and Kashmir.

The foreign secretaries of the two countries will meet again in August a day before the meeting of their foreign ministers. The venue of this meeting will be worked out through diplomatic channels. "Essentially, this is a process that has been going on from 1997-98. We are picking up from this," Mr Shashank told In-

on January 6 which spoke of removing the atmosphere of violence, hatred and terrorism."

President Pervez Musharraf earlier announced at a clerics conference that India and Pakistan foreign secretaries will meet in May-June immediately after the elections in India which would be followed by a meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries.

"I am hopeful a solution to the Kashmir issue, in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiris will be found," he said adding he would never "sell out" the Kashmiri people. Mr Musharraf said: "we have to take the dialogue process forward. We are moving ahead in a good manner."

Mr Shashank said he had invited Mr Khokhar to New Delhi for the May-June meeting and the Pakistan foreign secretary has accepted the invitation. After the meeting, both sides would hold talks in July on six other issues like Siachen, Tulbul navigaton project, Sir Creek.

# Virus all-clear in hand, Saarc still on alert

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT  
AND AGENCIES

*Sun 17/2*  
*G. S.*

**New Delhi, Feb. 16:** Amid calls for continued caution, the Saarc region was today declared free of the virulent form of bird flu after an emergency meeting here of officials of the South Asian grouping.

"The Saarc region is free of the highly pathogenic strain of the influenza virus (H5N1)," health secretary J.V.R. Prasada Rao told reporters at a briefing after the meeting, also attended by officials from the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation.

The resolutions adopted also declared that the region's poultry and poultry products were safe for human consumption, Rao said.

Pakistan is the only Saarc country affected by a mild strain of the virus. The country's offici-

als today said they were confident of being able to "control" it. Millions of chickens have already been slaughtered in Sindh province as a preventive measure.

Hans-Gerhard Wagner of the FAO said the situation in Pakistan was under control though the virus could mutate into the virulent strain. He, however, added that "based on experience in Vietnam and Thailand, we can say that the outbreak will not be contained in the next one to two months".

N. Kumara Rai of the WHO's Southeast Asia office said as much. A vaccine, which is in the making, would take six months to a year to be ready for use.

India has so far not reported a single case of bird flu. Though thousands of chickens were slaughtered in north Bengal, they were found to be free of the H5N1 strain of the virus, officials here said.

They maintained that the

states bordering Pakistan were still on high alert. Passengers on the Samjhauta Express running between India and Pakistan were being screened to prevent smuggling of poultry into India.

"I can only hope that the present variant of Avian influenza does not mutate to virulent heights," health minister Sushma Swaraj said in her inaugural address. The virus has killed 20 people in Vietnam and Thailand. But, so far, no human-to-human transmission has been reported.

The meeting also discussed the measures taken by Saarc to control bird flu and decided to continue the ban on import of poultry from affected countries and exotic birds. The surveillance would be tightened.

"An unfortunate offshoot of global interdependence and shortening of physical distances has been the inevitable threat of spread of infections," Swaraj said.

16 FEB 2004

# Post-nuke expose, Pak battles Delhi arms list

Islamabad, Feb. 15 (Reuters): With Pakistan's nuclear proliferation scandal exposed and peace moves with India under way, South Asia should be a safer place these days. But even as the US vows to crush the atomic weapons black market and make civilian nuclear programmes safer, it is being seen as at least partly responsible for a growing arms imbalance between India and Pakistan that could have alarming consequences.

With the US' blessing, analysts here say, India is seeking to build its conventional and non-conventional weapons defences, making Pakistan feel increasingly vulnerable and driving it to make more and better weapons to counter its rival.

Pakistan is on the backfoot after its top scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan admitted leaking technology and hardware to North Korea, Libya and Iran via a sprawling nuclear black market. Analysts believe the scandal could make it harder for Pakistan to expand and upgrade its arsenal.

India is soon to sign a \$1.1-billion deal with Israel for the delivery of three Phalcon early-warning radar systems. India also

wants the \$2.5-billion Arrow anti-ballistic missile system from Israel, though no US clearance has been given.

"India's interest in the Arrow is precisely to challenge Pakistan's nuclear deterrence," said Gary Samore of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

"Pakistan is right to worry about the longer-term nuclear and conventional weapons threat from India, which is being allowed by Washington to acquire dual-purpose technology and increasingly sophisticated early warning systems."

For its part, Pakistan seeks to acquire second-hand F-16 fighters from Belgium after the US refused to deliver 28 of the fighters in the 1990s due to concerns over Islamabad's nuclear programme.

Pakistani officials make no secret of their concern of the arms build-up by their neighbour.

"These are new elements being introduced in the India and Pakistan scenario," said military spokesman Major-General Shaukat Sultan. "They are going to result in an arms race and tilt the balance back in India's favour."

India already has a bigger army, a far more effective air force and more nuclear warheads.

According to Duncan Lennox, editor of *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, India has around 50 nuclear warheads and Pakistan 25, though estimates vary widely on the secret arsenals.

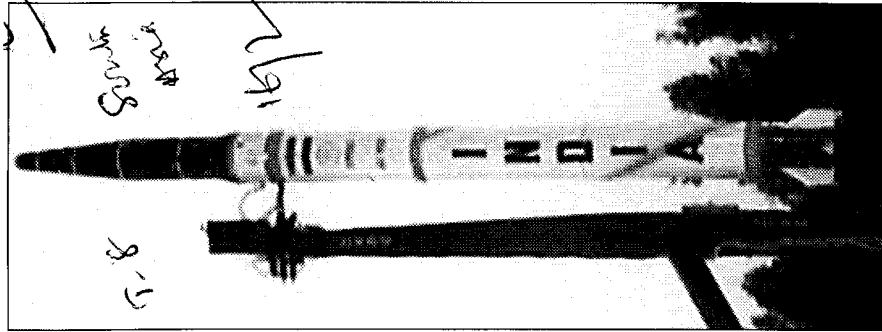
The warheads can be fitted either to aircraft as bombs, or, more recently, to ballistic missiles. Lennox said India's defence acquisitions are made with China in mind, not just Pakistan.

Pervez Hoodbhoy, a physicist and prominent anti-nuclear campaigner, doubts the effectiveness of anti-missile systems.

"The anti-ballistic missile system doesn't really work," he said. "India is making a mistake."

But he agreed that it did have a destabilising effect and could fuel the arms race nonetheless. "Here the US has much to be blamed for," he said.

As the imbalance widens, Pakistan will be encouraged to build more warheads and missiles to maintain what it calls its "minimum deterrence", analysts say.



The AFP file picture shows a short-range, nuclear-capable Agni surface-to-surface missile at the Chandipur launchpad.

Defence minister George Fernandes said on Sunday that after Agni-II, India will test-fire this year another longer-range Agni-III capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

# Islamabad date to chalk out dialogue details

PRANAY SHARMA 5.8

New Delhi, Feb. 15: India and Pakistan are likely to announce the dates and the timeframe of the stalled composite dialogue, which affords the opportunity to discuss all outstanding bilateral issues, including Kashmir, this week.

The announcement is expected on Wednesday, at the end of the three-day talks between the two countries beginning tomorrow in Islamabad.

The dialogue has been stalled since November 1998 as bilateral relations nose-dived till the April 2003 peace initiative of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee helped improve ties.

The governments have sent out a signal that these are only talks about future talks. This is in line with an agreement during the Vajpayee-Pervez Musharraf summit in Islamabad, confirmed by foreign minister Yashwant Sinha here last month, that the media will not be allowed to set the India-Pakistan agenda.

But India will try to explore Pakistan's willingness to abandon, once and for all, the UN route for solving Kashmir and

sound out Islamabad on expanded people-to-people contacts. This apart, the Islamabad meeting — talks will be held at the joint secretary level on the first two days and between foreign secretary Shashank and his Pakistani counterpart, Riaz Khokar, on the final day — will allow the two countries to finalise the items to be made part of the eight subjects in the composite dialogue.

It is not clear when the dialogue will resume, but India has made it clear that the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections will not come in the way. According to the September 23, 1998, agreement, peace and security, including confidence-building measures, and Kashmir are to be dealt by the foreign secretaries. The remaining six issues — Siachen, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, Sir Creek, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields — are likely to be handled by secretaries and senior officials of other ministries.

The two sides will also decide how to sequence the dialogue. In other words, whether peace and Kashmir should be taken up first or the less controversial items should precede the more contentious ones.

In 1998, when the dialogue began — in October between the foreign secretaries in Islamabad and a month later in Delhi when the other secretaries and officials met — there was not much progress on any of the eight listed subjects. One of the reasons was Pakistan's insistence that unless there is progress on Kashmir, there can be no agreement on the other issues. The mood is buoyant this time as there has been a significant upswing in relations. But India, though satisfied with the significant drop in infiltration in the past three months, remains watchful about the terrorist infrastructure that Pakistan has put on hold but not dismantled yet. Delhi wants Islamabad to establish that it is serious about stopping hostilities against India.

Indications are that these concerns are not going to be raised by the team in Islamabad. But they may well become part of the discussions during the composite dialogue.



# S Asia on a free trade high

PHUKET (Thailand), Feb. 8. — India and five other countries of the BIMSTEC economic grouping signed a free trade agreement today which is expected to bridge the crucial markets of South Asia and South-east Asia.

Bangladesh was the only member of the seven-nation economic group that did not sign the pact. The treaty has to be approved at the group's summit, which Thailand has suggested could be held in July.

Commerce minister Mr Arun Jaitley and his counterparts from Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka inked the agreement after two days of deliberations.

Bhutan and Nepal, which joined the group 48 hours ago, decided to sign the pact as it worked towards furthering trade, sources said. Bangladesh apparently wanted some sort of a compensation before joining the treaty, since it felt reduction of tariff would re-

sult in loss of revenues.

With a combined market of over 1.3 billion consumers and an aggregate GDP of almost \$800 billion, the free trade area is expected to greatly increase both inter-regional and intra-regional trade.

**Indo-Thai pact against crime:** Foreign minister Mr Yashwant Sinha and his Thai counterpart Mr Surakiart Sathirathai today signed the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters. — PTI

# After Islamabad, Saarc heads for Jakarta

**Sudeshna Sarker  
in Kathmandu**

Jan. 15. — After a successful Islamabad Summit with agreements on key economic and social issues, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is now ready to forge links with the larger regional bloc, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for trade facilitation, a stronger front against HIV and

AIDS and a bigger boost to tourism in Asia.

A Saarc delegation, headed by its secretary-general Mr Qama Rahim, will meet ASEAN foreign ministers in Jakarta from 19-21 January to discuss establishing formal relations.

Since the seven member countries in Saarc and the 10 in ASEAN are also UN members, the NAM and G-77 and share cultural and geographical affinities, the Fifth Saarc Summit in

Colombo in 1991 had discussed the possibilities of forming an alliance with ASEAN. However, though ASEAN has cooperation pacts with Japan and China, two countries outside the bloc, it had not immediately responded to Saarc overtures, Mr Rahim said.

The foreign ministers of both organisations started holding dialogues from the 53rd Session of the UN General Assembly in 1998 on the initiative of Sri

Lanka. Since then, they have been meeting regularly on the fringe of the UN meeting. But both sides had been feeling the need for more tangible relations. In January 2001, when Indian prime minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Jakarta, the then Indonesian president Mr Abdurrahman Wahid had emphasised the need for more trade ties between the two organisations and greater dialogue.

There has been a breakthrough finally with ASEAN agreeing to a meeting with the Saarc secretary-general, who will be accompanied from Kathmandu by four Saarc country directors.

Mr Rahim said on the eve of his departure both blocs are interested in learning from each others' experience. An alliance should be welcome by ASEAN in view of the need for more foreign invest-

ment and a more unified front against terrorism and the HIV/AIDS scourge.

After the Saarc-ASEAN meeting, Saarc finance ministers fly to Colombo in end-January to discuss establishing a Poverty Alleviation Fund for the Saarc region. At the 12th Summit in Islamabad from 4-6 January, it was decided that poverty alleviation would be the priority activity area. While an independent committee presented its

recommendations for poverty alleviation, the SAARC secretariat tabled a poverty profile of the region, which is going to be updated every year.

Also under discussion was the plan of action drawn up by the finance and planning ministers to combat poverty with implementation programmes at the national, regional and international levels. India has pledged \$100 million for setting up the fund.

South Asia (SAPARC)

# SAFTA: a perspective

By Muchkund Dubey

*The SAFTA agreement can make South Asia a magnet for foreign investment and lead to a restructuring of the economies.*

**T**HE SIGNING of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Agreement at its Islamabad Summit can be regarded as a landmark in the evolution of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. This represents a movement away from the mere tinkering with tariffs under South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement to establishing a free trade area in the region. The commodity-by-commodity negotiations under SAPTA were proving highly laborious and time-consuming and had hardly made any impact on the intra-regional trade transactions still languishing below five per cent of the global trade of the member-states. The SAFTA agreement has the potentiality of going beyond its stated objective of freeing trade in goods. It can make South Asia a magnet for vastly enhanced foreign investment and lead to a restructuring of the economies making the region one of the fastest growing and most competitive economic blocs.

Another significance of the Treaty is that it finesses the dispute over non-extension of most favoured nation (MFN) treatment by Pakistan to India. For, the extension of the MFN principle is implicit in the concept of free trade. If Pakistan unduly delays the SAFTA process, or seeks to negotiate an excessively long negative list to put items of export interest to India outside the scope of free trade or makes any caveat deliberately designed to discriminate against India, it will either be violating the Agreement or be clearly held responsible for sabotaging it.

In spite of its representing a breakthrough and its great potential, the Treaty is a far cry from the vision projected by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) in its report to the SAARC Heads of Government in 1998. The vision document laid out a road map with distinct milestones — achieving an FTA by 2008, a Customs Union by 2015 and an Economic Union by 2020. More than five years later, the SAARC leaders are still unable to muster the political courage to embrace it. The Treaty makes no mention of a customs union or an economic union. The Islamabad Declaration issued at the end of the Summit no doubt makes reference to the vague commitment at the Kathmandu Summit in 2002 for the creation of a South Asian Economic Union. At Islamabad, the leaders could not go beyond and agree on a time limit, or the schedule for realising this objective. The goal of an

FTA itself is going to be reached in 12 years, if everything goes well. The member-countries are going to take two years to ratify the Agreement. The SAFTA process will commence only after that.

A major limitation of the Treaty is that it leaves out trade in services. Considering the sensitivity of this issue, the EPG report did not recommend the liberalisation of trade in services. But it suggested regularisation of the informal labour movement on the basis of regional norms and mechanisms and evolving rules and procedures to make things easier for the service providers and consumers in the social sector, particularly health and education.

Another major deficiency and element of uncertainty in the Agreement is that it leaves unnegotiated far too many things critical for the success of SAFTA. These include the formulation of rules of origin, the preparation of the "sensitive" or the negative list, the creation of a fund for compensating the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for loss of revenue from the elimination of customs duties, and the identification of areas for providing technical assistance to these countries. No datelines have been fixed for concluding the negotiations on these items, except for the compensation fund that must be in place before the commencement of the Trade Liberalisation Programme from January 1, 2006.

Yet another major flaw of the Agreement is that it does not subscribe categorically to phasing out the negative list or eliminating non-tariff barriers, let alone prescribing time limits for doing so. It only provides that the negative list "shall be reviewed after every four years" ... "with a view to reducing the number of items." Moreover, a lot will depend on the size of the list. If it is too long, it will detract from the provision of Article XXIV of GATT which lays down that a free trade area should cover substantially all trade.

On non-tariff barriers, the positive feature is that the Agreement provides for the elimination of all quantitative restrictions (QRs) in respect of products included in the Trade Liberalisation Programme. This means that QRs will go as soon as a 0-5 per cent tariff level is reached. This is according to the ASEAN Free

Trade Area provisions. However, on the negative side, the Agreement does not prescribe, let alone set the dateline for, the elimination of other non-tariff and para-tariff restrictions. In the absence of a clear-cut time limit and the sequence for the phasing out of the negative list and non-tariff barriers other than QRs, it is doubtful whether the Agreement, when it comes under scrutiny in WTO, will be adjudged as being consistent with Article XXIV of GATT which prescribes the inclusion of a time and a schedule for reaching the free trade stage.

The Agreement makes a number of provisions for according special and differential treatment to the LDCs of the region — Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Maldives, though not figuring in the U.N. list of LDCs, is treated as such in the Agreement. These countries will reduce duties to 30 per cent during the first two years, as compared to 20 per cent by others. They will take eight years thereafter, instead of six years by Sri Lanka and five years by others, to reach the free trade level of 0-5 per cent duties. The non-LDCs will reduce their duties for the products of the LDCs within three years compared with five years for reducing duties on each other's products. The LDCs have been permitted to seek exclusion of products of their export interest from the negative list. They have also been authorised in critical circumstances to exercise greater flexibility for continuing QRs and other non-tariff barriers. There is also a provision for non-LDCs considering taking "direct trade measures" in favour of the LDCs. These include long and medium-term import or supply contracts, buy-back arrangements and special dispensation in state trading operations, and government procurement. Finally, the provisions relating to technical assistance and the compensation fund referred to earlier.

These provisions do not go far enough to ensure that the LDCs will be able to derive equitable benefits from SAFTA. At the penultimate stage of the negotiations, the Agreement got held up because Bangladesh wanted it to go further towards securing special and differential treatment to the LDCs. At the final stage of the negotiations, a compromise was reached that only partially

meets the demands of the LDCs. For example, instead of the LDCs' demand that the non-LDCs should refrain from imposing anti-dumping and countervailing measures against them during the period of negotiation, the Agreement contains the vague formulation that special regard shall be paid to the situation of these countries while considering the application of such measures.

The Agreement also does not include the far-reaching suggestion made by the EPG for the creation of a reasonably large-size fund for the development of the infrastructure, human resources and export production and diversification capacity of the LDCs. Without these structural changes, the LDCs are unlikely to derive equitable benefits from SAFTA. In the European Union for raising the level of the economic development of the less developed members such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland, the European Commission had created a development fund for each of them that amounted to 3-5 per cent of their GDP.

All recently established regional groupings provide not only for the freeing of trade but also measures for deeper integration of the economies. The SAFTA Agreement indeed includes such provisions under the heading "Additional Measures" under Article 8. But they do not measure up to the Eminent Persons Group's recommendations. Some of the important measures recommended by the EPG and missing from the Agreement are: finalisation of the pending draft investment agreement, the creation of a SAARC Investment Area, a South Asian Development Fund, a South Asian Development Bank, and an Asian Energy Grid; vertical industrial integration, harmonisation of fiscal and monetary policies. A crippling drawback of the SAFTA Agreement is that it does not provide for the creation of any mechanism for pursuing the "additional measures" under Article 8. This casts doubts on the seriousness of the contracting parties to pursue these measures.

The SAFTA Agreement could not but have reflected the consensus that prevails among the SAARC member-countries. For the present, they have decided to go only this far. But it is still far enough to put regional cooperation on an entirely new footing. Given the political will, this Agreement has the potential to acquire a momentum of its own, which can lead to the transformation of economic relations in the region.

# SAARC and an idea that has currency

But before a common currency, south Asia needs to free its trade, its economy, its human capital

SALIL TRIPATHI

AS THE leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, who together with Pakistan make up SAARC, return to their capitals after a successful summit in Islamabad, the mood in south Asia is jubilant. Officials are promising a free trade area by next year, and some, including Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, have begun talking of a common currency.

Regional rapprochement in nuclear-armed south Asia is not coming a moment too soon, but talk of a common currency is premature: it puts the cart before the bullock, south Asia's beast of burden. Significant CBMs will have to be in place for a sustained period before the region can think meaningfully about a common currency.

A common currency follows deepening trade, not the other way around, and such a currency needs a regional anchor. South Asia must facilitate greater intra-regional trade, leading to a possible customs union, a common market, freer movement of people and then moves toward an economic union.

Four decades after its formation, the far more outwardly oriented and investment-friendly ASEAN is not there yet. In contrast, in its 18 years' existence, SAARC has had to

cancel its annual summit eight times because of politics. To be sure, a currency union is a good idea. It would reduce risks for investors and traders. Transaction costs would decline. It would enforce discipline in the economies and increase transparency.

While Europe has successfully introduced the euro, there is five decades of history behind it. And the jury is still out on the European Central Bank's ability to enforce discipline.

lightyears away from that. Intra-regional trade (about \$ 6 billion) is less than five per cent of the region's trade with the rest of the world. And even this trade is overwhelmingly (some 70 per cent) dominated by Indian traders. Trade between Bangladesh and the Maldives, for example, is minuscule; the two often compete with one another in attracting industries



The SAARC Seven: Will the Indian rupee eventually drive their collective destiny?

SAARC, such as Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. And it would provide a significant boost to trade, which would attract investment and increase jobs. Who could argue with any of that?

Nevertheless, there are significant hurdles. Even if politics is kept aside for the moment,

Institutions succeed if they respond to the people's, businesses', and the market's needs. As countries in Europe and east Asia traded more with one another, they felt the need for lower barriers, and ultimately, in the European case, a common currency. South Asia remains

that require cheap labour.

To be fair, SAARC has tried to focus on economics almost since its inception in 1985. Its free trade area was to have come into being by 1997. In the first three rounds of tariff concessions, SAARC members agreed on 4,900 products,

cheaper for Pakistani consumers. India, too, ignored economic logic, importing pig iron but not tapping Pakistani supplies.

At heart is the original SAARC dilemma: India fears its neighbours will gang up against India; the neighbours want to tie India down, fearing it will dominate the grouping. But there is no escape. If SAARC members are worried about their widening trade deficit with India (currently \$ 2.2 billion), they must recognise the deficit would still remain if they were to procure their imports from elsewhere.

What's more, SAARC members can market themselves as a low cost, less bureaucratic manufacturing base (as Sri Lanka tried before its internal strife worsened) to tap the large Indian market. SAARC states cannot wish away India's inevitably large footprint.

In the context of currency union, then, the Indian rupee will have to be the anchor. But is the rest of south Asia ready for the rupee to be the region's deusiemark? That brings us back to politics.

International experience shows QRs and tariff barriers only increase costs. With its large poor population, south Asia cannot afford to continue that.

But economic liberalisation can only proceed if there is political confidence. Striving toward a common currency remains a good idea, but for it to be taken seriously, the region must liberate its goods, services and people.

Wall Street Journal

# Pak to unveil anti-terror policy

Saurabh Shukla  
Islamabad, January 8

PAKISTAN IS all set to unveil its new policy to fight terrorism, and if implemented, it may have major impact on ending cross-border militancy. "People of both India and Pakistan are suffering, let's have a serious dialogue on the issue of terrorism. We will soon implement the Saarc additional protocol on terrorism seriously," Pakistan's Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat said.

"It is in the interest of Pakistan to dismantle infrastructure of terrorism from its roots, we will not allow terrorism against India or any one," he said.

The attack on the life of Pervez Musharraf seems to have its impact on the Pakistani leadership. Hayat, Musharraf's key man who is charged with cracking down on terrorist groups in Pakistan, said infiltration levels will dip when the snows melt, while indicating that a key part of Pakistan's reforms against terrorism will be its new madrasa policy. "These terrorist groups are working against Islam... they have suicide bombers, take any covenant of Islam it doesn't allow any Muslim to take his

## 'Successful summit'

THE SAARC General Secretary QAMA Rahim said on Thursday that he was satisfied with the outcome of the Islamabad summit as it provided India and Pakistan an opportunity to break a barrier and set the tone for bilateral dialogue. Rahim entered India through Wagah land route and before leaving Amritsar he paid obeisance at the Golden Temple. The couple is planning to pay a visit to a village near Sirhind on way to Bangladesh.

HTC, Amritsar

life for whatever cause... most of our people are illiterate and our misled by such people we want to take them away from supporting these *jehadi* groups," he said.

"The madrasa policy is on the anvil, we are discussing it with the ministry of religious affairs and education and then it will be passed by Parliament," he said.

However, he added a note of caution. "The problem of extremism cannot be resolved overnight, our com-

mitment is there, it has to be done in a phased manner, we don't want to take a hard or radical line that may backfire, we are taking a policy of enlightened moderation, Hayat said.

He said there were 10,000 madrasas in Pakistan, with about 600,000 students and said economic depravation and illiteracy was the main cause for the growth of such madrasas.

"All madrasas will be documented and reformed and we will introduce subjects like mathematics, foreign languages, information technology. We will also fund and monitor them," he said.

He also said once talks begin with India, talks on issues such as extradition of criminals could begin on a parallel track. "These accusations, counter-allegations need no where, we feel that many people are sitting in India, Pakistan and India can discuss extradition treaty. I would like to invite Advani to visit Pakistan to discuss these issues," he said.

HT had first reported this it on Thursday, the invitation may be routed through diplomatic channels, although Indian officials say they have not received any communication.



Pakistani boy Md Talha Shahzad, who was born blind, and his mother at New Delhi on Thursday. He was donated a pair of eyes by an Indian woman in Chennai.

## Islamabad to invite Advani for talks on extradition

Agencies  
Islamabad/Dubai, January 8

APPARENTLY KEEN on sustaining the momentum generated by the recent thaw in Indo-Pak relations, Pakistan said it would soon invite Deputy PM L.K. Advani to discuss a "structured dialogue" to work out an extradition treaty between the two countries.

Islamabad also said on Thursday that it was willing to look at options other than UN resolutions to settle the Kashmir issue. But it made it clear there were no plans to "abandon Kashmir".

"The ice in the relations between India and Pakistan has melted and I would like Advani to visit Pakistan to discuss the areas related to the internal security of both countries," Pakistani Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat said in an interview to *The News*. Hayat said a formal invitation would be sent to Advani through diplomatic channels.

Significantly, Hayat said that Pakistan was willing to conclude a bilateral extradition treaty with India. "We are certainly prepared to discuss the modalities of a bilateral extradition treaty with India, as we want to discuss all those issues which could obviate mistrust between both countries".

Pakistan is also ready to discuss with India the issue of granting the most favoured nation status to it, *The News* quoted a senior official of the Pakistan ministry of commerce.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri spoke to *Gulf News* on Kashmir: "We're willing to look at options other than the UN resolutions. We realise these are what give Pakistan's position legitimacy in Kashmir but the UN resolutions were made 50 years ago. Have they solved the Kashmir issue? We must explore the option of talks with India". He, however, hastened to add that Pakistan would not abandon Kashmir.

## Saarc: A case of the missing central issue

Pramit Pal Chaudhuri  
New Delhi, January 8

LAHORE WAS scuttled by Pakistani hardliners. Agra was holed by their Indian counterparts. Have India and Pakistan found a golden mean at Islamabad? The answer seems to be yes. And it is Pakistan that's done most of the shifting.

Lahore fell through because Pakistan's military, led by one Pervez Musharraf, said the declaration failed to say Kashmir was the central dispute between India and Pakistan. He launched Kargil to kill Lahore.

Agra never made it to the deal stage. Pakistan insisted on a line that implied Kashmir was the central dispute. L.K. Advani objected to this and the lack of a link between Kashmir and cross-border terrorism. Agra died stillborn. In the two-and-half years between Agra and Islamabad, Indian diplomats insisted Lahore was the last word in bilateral ties. Pakistan held up an Agra draft declaration whose first paragraph said a Kashmir settlement "would pave the way towards normalisation of relations".

Western diplomats have banged their head on the wall

### NEWS ANALYSIS

over Pakistan's refusal to budge on Agra — in other words insist on Kashmir's centrality. Now comes the Islamabad joint press statement. There is no reference to centrality of Kashmir. The nemesis of Lahore and Agra is history. And this from Musharraf, the man who sabotaged Lahore over this issue.

But there's more. Musharraf had hinted before the summit that UN resolutions on Kashmir were passe. It

seems he meant it. The joint press statement refers to "all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir".

That is about as upfront as a government gets. Kashmir is no longer about the UN or a plebiscite. It isn't about vague "representatives" of the Kashmiri people. It is only about India and Pakistan. The shape of the table won't be triangular. There'll only be two seats. There's no mention of Kashmiri self-determination or that much-maligned term "disputed territory".

This doesn't mean Islamabad has surrendered either position. And remember, this

is a press statement, several notches below in diplomatic consequence than a declaration — as was issued at Lahore, or a communique — as was not issued at Agra.

Many in India would also downplay Pakistan's concessions. The UN resolutions were dead. It was doubtful if third parties would work in Pakistan's favour. And the international community increasingly saw Islamabad as bone-headed for insisting on the failed Agra formulation. India made a few concessions of its own — note that terrorism is mentioned minus the "cross-border" modifier.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2004

## ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT SAFTA

HISTORIC IS PERHAPS an exaggerated description of the decision taken by the leaders of South Asia to make this region a free trade bloc by 2006. This is the third and not the first time that the member-countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have laid down a target date for setting up a free trade area. However, there are two reasons to be optimistic that the latest attempt at creating a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) area will succeed unlike the previous ones. The first is the new hope that political relations between India and Pakistan are set for an improvement. With the two biggest member-states of SAARC at daggers drawn during much of the 1990s, the earlier moves towards a free trade zone could make no headway. The second ground for optimism is that the Islamabad summit has seen the adoption of a framework agreement on SAFTA that contains specific schedules for the lowering of tariffs and meets some of the concerns of the three least developed countries (LDCs) in the region, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

The case for closer economic ties among the countries of South Asia does not bear repeating. Intra-SAARC trade accounts for barely five per cent of the value of exports and imports of the countries in the subcontinent. Economic fears and political hostility have constrained the growth of trade and these obstacles have not been confined to ties between India and Pakistan. South Asia is one of the few regions without an effective economic grouping in a world where bilateral and regional trade pacts are proliferating by the year. The agreement signed in Islamabad this week visualises a graded reduction in import tariffs over the next decade. The

first milestone will be in 2006 when the more advanced members of SAARC will have to bring average tariffs down to 20 per cent and the LDCs will have the flexibility of retaining customs duties at 30 per cent. That will still be a far cry from the minimal tariffs that characterise a free trade area, but it is a more realistic target considering that the SAARC member-states now have some of the highest import duties in the world. The stiffer task will be to cut tariffs after 2006 to between 0 and 5 per cent over five to eight years.

There are, however, many daunting challenges that must be met if the new effort at promoting trade in South Asia is not to fail as well. The first and most obvious one is to maintain the momentum in improving bilateral political relations between India and Pakistan. The second is to address economic insecurity among the smaller countries of South Asia. This requires both India and Pakistan to make unilateral trade concessions of some substance, something that the two countries have been loathe to do. In general, the way the existing preferential trade agreement has been implemented shows that no SAARC country is willing as yet to make major tariff concessions. The third challenge is quickly to create the basic economic infrastructure required to handle higher volumes of trade. With just one land crossing point at present between India and Pakistan, it is extremely ambitious to plan for free trade between the two countries. Finally, the fears of specific sectors in each country — for example, tea in India, textiles in Bangladesh and light engineering in Pakistan — that they have more to lose than to gain from SAFTA can be assuaged only with a more gradual reduction of tariffs on "sensitive" products.

# All-weather ties

Celebrate the new Indo-Pak cheer but walk down the road from Islamabad with care

WHILE Lahore did not turn out to be defining moment that it had at first promised to be, Islamabad must become one. Because opportunities like it, invested as it was with a great deal of diplomatic and political energy, do come but rarely. Consider the long, arduous climb out of the pit that the Kargil interregnum put Indo-Pak relations into, and the enormity of the stakes involved becomes clearer. Neither India nor Pakistan; neither South Asia — once characterised internationally as the most dangerous region in the world — or indeed the world, can afford another slide down that slippery slope. But to keep on that highway to peace and stability would need navigators with sureness of purpose and the stamina to achieve it, as well as a well-paved, all-weather road network.

The reason for the breakthrough achieved at Islamabad has been attributed to the skillful spadework that preceded it. It follows then that the composite dialogue process that is to begin in February would require a continuation of that process of preparation with no slackening of pace whatsoever. Prime minister Vajpayee has already signalled the seriousness with which he is addressing that task. The first thing he did on returning to New Delhi was to convene a meeting of the cabinet committee on security to discuss the modalities of proceeding further. This melding of political will and administrative method may

be more difficult to achieve as time goes by and the exigencies of a general election kick in. The NDA government should therefore put in place a blueprint for future movement on this score regardless of whether its leaders can pay close attention to it, regardless even of whether Vajpayee and his team comes back to power or not. What should help achieve this is the fair amount of national consensus on the desirability of a composite dialogue and lasting peace with Pakistan. While the Opposition has generally welcomed it, even the hardliners within the Sangh Parivar have desisted thus far from singing another tune. What is needed now is to decide at what level such a dialogue is to be conducted and how the most tricky aspect of all — that of Kashmir — is to be tackled. Some insights on how to proceed on this sensitive issue should come in once the home minister's proposed dialogue with the Hurriyat gets going.

Going by the soundbites emanating from Washington or Tokyo, Paris or London, the world has recognised this moment as a historic turning point and one that is important for international peace and stability. It would need sincere efforts on both sides of the border to ensure that the turning is for the better, not worse; that it is truly a win-win situation, not just for the ruling elites of the sub-continent, but the people.

INDIAN EXPRESS

08 JAN 2004

# 'Irritants' to Indo-Pak ties removed, says Jamali

Press Trust Of India  
Islamabad, January 6

PAK PM Zafarullah Khan Jamali on Tuesday said India and Pakistan should make progress now that "political irritants" of the past few years have been set aside.

He, however, sidestepped a question on differing perceptions between Pakistan and India on the definition of terrorism in the context of Kashmir where Islamabad viewed it as a freedom struggle and New Delhi as terrorism.

Stating that Saarc was not individual nation-oriented but a collective forum, he said that the whole world had come alive to the threat posed by terrorism and in this region, too, efforts were on to get rid of this menace.

On Indo-Pak relations, terrorism and Kashmir, Jamali said terrorism was a problem faced by all countries in the region. "There is need for peace and we need to sit together to discuss all questions related to it," he said.



Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf addresses a Press conference in Islamabad on Tuesday. AFF

Asked about President Musharraf's suggestion for amendment of the Saarc Charter to include taking up of bilateral issues, he said this cannot be done by one country and has to have the agreement of all. To a question

that Indo-Pak meetings had overshadowed Saarc, he said there is an improvement in relations. "The PM has come after two years and the Summit has taken place, he said.

On his talks with Vajpayee, he said, "Many things were discussed" keeping in view

the Saarc framework." He hoped that progress would be made in Indo-Pak ties. To a question whether India by its sheer size would "swallow" other countries South Asia, Jamali said all member countries had come to stay and as far as anyone swallowing was

concerned was difficult.

Jamali said that it had been decided to reactivate pending Saarc Committees and to form a new group to report within three months on their implementation. When a Pakistani journalist pointed to India's contribution of \$ 100 million for the Saarc poverty alleviation programme, Jamali said Pakistan would not lag behind and "we will give a decent and proper contribution."

When asked whether the group involved in the recent assassination attempts on Musharraf and attack on Indian Parliament was the same, the Pakistan Prime Minister described the attempt on Musharraf as "unfortunate" and said the group behind it had been identified.

On India and Pakistan going in for rupee trade instead of taking the hard currency route, Jamali said such a move would be "abrupt and not viable for Pakistan. It would take time".

## Kasuri calls it a 'historic' meet

Press Trust Of India  
Islamabad, January 6

OBSERVING THAT Saarc had so far been held "hostage" to Indo-Pak relations, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri on Tuesday said the decision by the two countries to resume composite dialogue process in February would make the Islamabad Saarc Summit "pathbreaking and historic".

Asking the media to play a constructive role by not focussing on "whether it (the decision) is a victory for India or Pakistan", he told journalists. "Get out of that mindset. Please do not try to look for something which will derail the process."

"It is a victory for common sense, for moderation, for statesmanship, for India and

## PARTING SHOTS

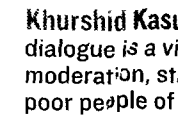


**Pervez Musharraf:** There are no winners or losers. I would say victory is to the moderates in India and the moderates in Pakistan

**Yashwant Sinha:** There would have been no joint statement if we had not been satisfied (with Pakistan's assurances)



**Brajesh Mishra:** There was no meeting between me and the ISI chief. It is for the Pakistani side to disclose who my interlocutors were



**Khurshid Kasuri:** Decision to resume dialogue is a victory for common sense, moderation, statesmanship and the poor people of South Asia



Pakistan and particularly for the poor people of South Asia," he said. Kasuri also read out the joint Press statement issued by the two countries or the meeting Prime

Minister A.B. Vajpayee had with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf here on Monday. Earlier the statement was read out to the media by Yashwant Sinha.



AP-5 6/1/04



## Saarc Diary

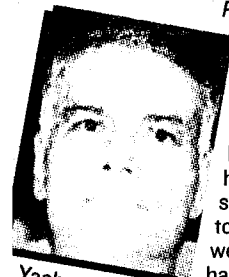
### Not even murmurs of Kashmir cause

Vinod Sharma/ Saurabh Shukla  
Islamabad, January 5

■ The Aabpara Chowk is Islamabad's version of the Hyde Park. For years the "Kashmir banega Pakistan" slogan reverberated across the world from that crossing near the Indian media centre at the Holiday Inn. The clarion calls of yore are now on hold. With Pakistan's religious right-wing having decided to lend qualified support to General Musharraf to carry Saarc forward, banners welcoming the visiting leaders have replaced graffiti promoting the Kashmiri cause. One would have to wait and see whether this ceasefire is temporary or permanent.

■ In fact, the select gathering at the Saarc inaugural on Sunday had a fair sprinkling of rabble-rousers, bomb makers and peaceniks. Of particular interest for the old-timers was the presence of Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan and Jamat chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed. Khan is best known as the father of the Pakistani bomb and the Qazi, the torchbearer of the Kashmir movement. In the wake of the Lahore Summit, the Jamat Amir had had the Minar-e-Pakistan cleaned up by his supporters in protest against Vajpayee's visit to the memorial to the Pakistan Movement.

Knowing that music is Vajpayee's passion and food his weakness, the Pak President's banquet had enough to engage the Indian Premier's attention. Musharraf's choice of Music? The *Bajju Bawra* number underscoring love and togetherness: "tu ganga ki mauj main jamuna ka dhaara". And the menu? Shrimp cocktails followed by grilled fish, spring chicken, chicken raisin pulao, white chicken *korma*, fish *tikka* and chicken *reshmi kabab*. The vegetarian fare included *saag*, *makki roti*, *dal maash*, baked spinach, *roghni naan*, *raita* and mint chutney. For deserts, it was *kheer* and walnut pie.



Yashwant Sinha



Khaleda Zia

# Silence on Mishra-ISI meeting

Press Trust of India  
Islamabad, January 5

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister Yashwant Sinha, when asked what transpired at the reported meeting between National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and the ISI Chief, said, "That is not necessary". He was speaking at a crowded Press briefing on Monday morning. The reported meeting between National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and ISI chief Ehsanul Haque generated considerable interest here with both countries today parrying all questions on this issue. Later, at his Press meet, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Masood Khan, too, said, "I have no information about that".

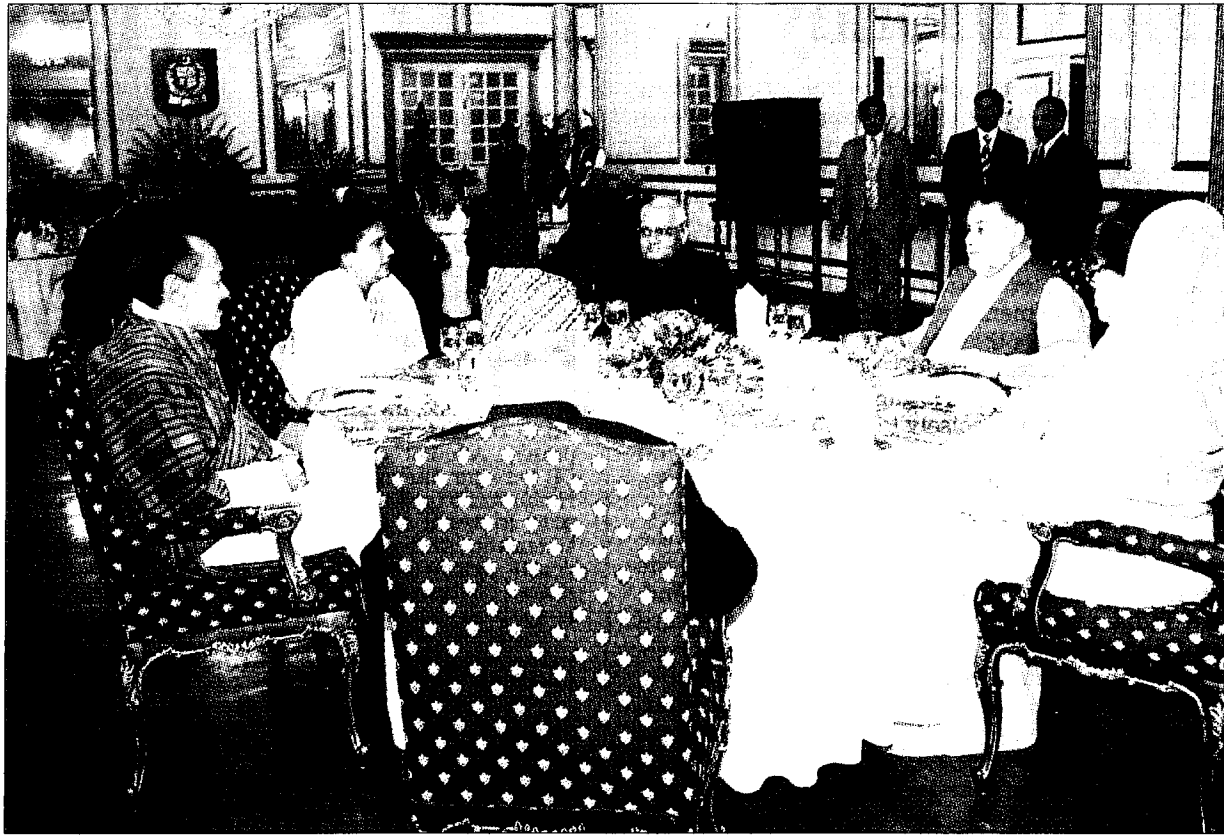
When pressed further on the activities of Mishra who came to Islamabad on January 2, triggering media speculation, he said, "Mishra is part of the Indian delegation. So, he is having meetings."

To a question with whom, "Meetings with officials here," he promptly replied. Khan went on to add that he was not sharing the itinerary of the meetings of members of the Indian delegation.

Sinha refused to answer persistent queries on what had transpired at the meeting on the plea that it was a "sensitive issue". Sinha stressed that the two countries were dealing with "very sensitive issues".

To a question on whether the issue of terrorism had figured in the Vajpayee-Musharraf parleys, he said, "I'm not in a position to go into details. On the talks, I said what I had to say. So, please do not ask me to share the details with you. "Sometimes, as I said, it is not in the interests of the cause to share the details. The cause is furtherance of the process that has been started by Prime Minister Vajpayee on April 18", when he extended a hand of friendship to Pakistan during a speech in Srinagar.

Asked whether the Prime Minister invited Musharraf to India, Sinha said, "This did not figure." He said, "As a responsible person, I



Heads of state of the Saarc nations during a lunch hosted by Pakistani PM Zafarullah Jamali in Islamabad on Monday.

AFP

### Islamists reject Kashmir talks

ISLAMIST POLITICIANS in Pakistan on Monday rejected the talks between their government and India, accusing both of sidelining the Kashmir issue. "Both Indian and Pakistani leaders have tried to sideline the main issue of Kashmir, but the people of Pakistan will not allow this", Qazi Hussain Ahmed, who heads Pakistan's largest Islamic party Jamaat-i-Islami, said. Ahmed, who also heads

the six-party Islamist alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), demanded that parliament be consulted on the latest moves to resume dialogue with India, stalled since July 2001.

"We'll raise this issue in parliament and it's the responsibility of the Prime Minister to take the nation into confidence," he said.

Meanwhile, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin denounced the Saarc as a "failed organi-



Syed Salahuddin

sation" because it failed to deal with Kashmir's "reality".

AFP, Karachi

### Saarc takes a backseat

Meanwhile, the Saarc summit on Monday took a backseat - completely overshadowed by the India-Pakistan meetings at the top level aimed at furthering the peace initiatives taken by the two countries.

At briefings by both the

Indian and Pakistani sides, journalists from all over the world seemed just not interested in what was happening in the ongoing summit and focussed only on interactions between Vajpayee and Musharraf and Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali.

Leaders attending the

## Jehadis in Pak continue to spew venom

HT Correspondent  
Islamabad, January 5

THE PAKISTANI civil society is optimistic about the 12th Saarc summit. The expectation that the summit could result in a major breakthrough with India is high among liberals. Progress on Safta and the additional protocol on terrorism is viewed by the mainstream Press as a very positive development that could bring India and Pakistan closer.

However, jehadis and Right-wing elements are looking at the summit in a negative manner. One of the most popular Pakistan dailies, *Nawai Waqt*, has analysed the entire situation in an outrageous manner. In its editorial (Jan 4), the daily equates the proposal of Yashwant Sinha of a single currency, economic union, and political union for South Asia with India's oldest dream of *Akhand Bharat*.

In its current issue (Jan 7), the weekly *Takbir* — a hard-line publication of Jamaat-e-Islami — admits that Saarc has been a fiasco because of India's arrogance and superiority complex. The weekly says Pakistan has sacrificed Kashmir to make Saarc successful.

summit, which opened on Sunday, went for a retreat at Jamali's official residence here on Monday, but again queries from journalists with regard to what had transpired between the Indian and Pakistani Prime heads were stonewalled.

Right from the time Vajpayee arrived here on January 3, Pakistani electronic and print media have been agog with headlines speculating on whether there would be any meeting between Vajpayee and Musharraf and the nature of such interaction. Leaders of member states have gone on record saying the summit has assumed a fresh vigour owing to the thaw in Indo-Pak ties.

The three-day summit ends on Tuesday after a concluding ceremony, which will be attended by leaders of the seven states, including Vajpayee and Jamali. The latter has assumed chairmanship of the grouping till the next summit in Dhaka in January 2005.

Jamali is also scheduled to address the media after the summit ends.

# সাক্ষাৎ: দায়িত্ব ভারতের

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৩১/১২/৮৫

২০০৬ সালের জানুয়ারি মাস

নয়াদিল্লি বাংলাদেশের

হইতে দক্ষিণ এশিয়া একটি মুক্ত

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চুক্তিসাধনের প্রয়াস। তবে এখন

গতিরেকার উপর। ইসলামাবাদে সার্ক-

সাফটার মতো বৃহত্তর আঞ্চলিক চুক্তির

এর চলমান বৈঠকের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে

প্রেক্ষিতে দ্বিপাক্ষিক চুক্তির

তাই সাফটা-আলোচনা সমানেই

প্রয়োজনীয়তা যে অনেকাংশেই কমিয়া

পর্যবসিত হইয়া যাইতেছে ভারত-

যাইবে, তাহাও বলা বাহুল্য।

পাকিস্তান সম্পর্কের রাজনৈতিক

অর্থনৈতিক আঞ্চলিক এক্যের জন্য

উত্থান-পতনের বিশ্লেষণে। সম্মেলনের

অর্থমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহের আহ্বান

আগে ক্রমাগত জল্পনা চলিয়াছে, এ বার

কিংবা সমগ্র দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় ভারতীয়

ইসলামাবাদে অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অভিন্ন মুদ্রা প্রচলনের

পারভেজ মুশারফ দ্বিপাক্ষিক ভিত্তিতে

স্বপ্ন— সবই এই একই সামগ্রিক

পারস্পরের সঙ্গে মিলিত হইবেন কি না,

আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতার লক্ষ্যে উদ্বুদ্ধ।

পাকিস্তান এখনও কাশ্মীর-সমস্যাকেই

সাফটা প্রস্তাব বাস্তবায়িত হইলে যে

ভারত পাকিস্তান সম্পর্কের কেন্দ্রবিন্দু

সমগ্র অঞ্চলের সঙ্গে বৃহত্তম অংশী

মনে করিতেছে কি না, সীমান্তবর্তী

ভারতেরও লাভের খাতায় প্রাপ্তিযোগ

অঞ্চলে সন্ত্রাস বিষয়ে দুই দেশ কোনও

ঘটিবে তাহাতে সন্দেহ নাই। ভারত-

একমতো আসিতে পারিল কি না

শ্রীলঙ্কা চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরিত হইবার পরই

ইত্যাদি। সম্মেলনের পরেও অনেক

এক ধাপে দু দেশের বাণিজ্য এক বছরে

জল্পনাই অমীমাংসিত থাকিবে। এই

১.৬ শতাংশ বর্ধন সেই ইঙ্গিতই করে।

সকল প্রশ্নের উত্তরের সঙ্গেই সাফটা-র

পাশাপাশি, ইন্দো-চীন বাণিজ্যের

ভবিষ্যৎ সাফল্য ও কার্যকারিতা এখন

কথাও উল্লেখযোগ্য, দু দেশের মধ্যে

অনেকখানি জড়াইয়া। ইতিমধ্যেই দেখা

সামান্য বোঝাপড়া স্থাপিত হইতেই

গিয়াছে যে আঞ্চলিক সংগঠন হিসাবে

তিন বছরে দুই দেশের বাণিজ্যের

সার্ক-ও যে তাহার প্রতিশ্রুতি অনুযায়ী

পরিমাণ প্রায় সাত গুণ বাড়িয়াছে।

কাজ করিতে পারে নাই, তাহার কারণ

দক্ষিণ এশীয় দেশগুলির অর্থনীতি

আর কিছু নহে, তাহার কারণ ভারত

একই ধাঁচের বলিয়া মুক্ত বাণিজ্যে

পাকিস্তানের তীব্র বৈরিতা, পরস্পরের

উপকারের আশা কম বলিয়া যাঁহারা

প্রতি অনিশ্চেষ্ট সন্দেহ-অবিশ্বাস।

যুক্তি দেন, তাঁহাদের স্মরণ করাইয়া

বৈরিতা তো কেবল রাজনীতি ও

দেওয়া কর্তব্য যে ইউরোপীয়

কুটনীতিতেই আটকাইয়া থাকে না,

ইউনিয়নের ক্ষেত্রেও এই সাদৃশ্য থাকা

অর্থনৈতিক, বাণিজ্যিক, প্রাত্যহিক

সন্দেহও সেখানে কিন্তু আঞ্চলিক মুক্ত

কার্যক্রমেও তাহার রেশ ক্রমাগতই

বাণিজ্য ফুলিয়া ফাঁপিয়া বাড়িতেছে।

পড়ে, এবং সম্পর্কে সার্বিক অর্থে

ইন্দো-শ্রীলঙ্কা চা ও বস্ত্র বাণিজ্য প্রমাণ

ধ্বস্ত করে। ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের

করিয়াছে যে, কোনও ক্ষেত্রে কোনও

মধ্যে সামান্যতম বাণিজ্যিক

বিশেষ দেশীয় শিল্পকে বাঁচাইতে

আদানপ্রদান চালাইতেও বিপুল

হয়তো সাময়িক ভিত্তিতে কিছু

‘পেপারওয়ার্ক’ বা ‘বোঝাপড়া’

সাময়িক শুল্ক প্রয়োগ করিতে হইতে

প্রয়োজন। সুতরাং এখনকার

অর্থনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি, যাহা করবদ্ধ বাণিজ্য হইতে মুক্ত

উৎসাহিত হইবার কারণ নহে, মুক্ত

বাণিজ্যে উত্তরণের এই মধ্যপর্যায়

বাণিজ্য অঞ্চলের প্রস্তাব গুণিতে

সংস্করণ পার হইতে সাহায্য করিবে।

লোভনীয় হউক, দুই প্রতিবেশীর মধ্যে

মোট কথা, সকল সমস্যারই ক্রমে

হিমালয়-প্রমাণ অসহযোগের যদি

সমাধান আসিবে, যদি দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার

আজও কোনও মীমাংসা না হয়, তবে

এই দ্বন্দ্বদীর্ঘ ভূগোলে একটি বৃহত্তর

তাহার প্রভাব পুরা অঞ্চলের

রাজনৈতিক তথা অর্থনৈতিক

অর্থনৈতিক আদানপ্রদানের উপরে

সহযোগিতার আবহ নির্মাণ করিয়া

পড়িবেই, এবং শেষ পর্যন্ত কোনও

তোলা সম্ভব হয়। তবে বাণিজ্যের

আঞ্চলিক বোঝাপড়াই স্থায়ী হইতে

ক্ষেত্রে উদার নীতি অনুসরণের প্রধান

পারিবে না।

দায়িত্ব ভারতের। কারণ সে কেবল বড়

মুক্ত বাণিজ্যের স্বার্থে ইতিমধ্যে

দেশ নয়, অর্থনৈতিক গুরুত্বও

ভারতের পক্ষ হইতে কিছু প্রতিবেশী

প্রতিবেশীদের তুলনায় অনেক অগ্রসর।

দেশের দিকে হস্ত দ্বিপাক্ষিক

সেই দায়িত্ব ভারত পালন করিতে

ভিত্তিতেও প্রসারিত হইয়াছে। ভারত

পারিবে কি না, সাফটা-র সাফল্য

ও শ্রীলঙ্কার মধ্যে চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরের পর

নির্ণয়ের ক্ষেত্রে তাহা একটি বড় প্রশ্ন।

# সমঝোতার লক্ষ্যে এবার কাশ্মীর

## ফেব্রুয়ারিতেই বৈঠক, সত্ৰাস বন্ধে কথা দিগেন মুশারফ

সুন চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • ইসলামাবাদ

৬ জানুয়ারি: বঙ্গবন্ধুর নতুন পথে ভারত-পাকিস্তান এই ফেব্রুয়ারিতেই থমকে থাকে আলোচনা ফের শুরু করতে চলেছে। কাশ্মীর-সহ দ্বিপাক্ষিক সব সমস্যাই আলোচনার মাধ্যমে মিটিতে পারে বলে দু'তরফই আশা প্রকাশ করেছে। সেই সঙ্গেই ভারতের দীর্ঘ দিনের দাবি মেনে পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ প্রকাশ্যেই প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন, পাকিস্তানের জমি থেকে কোনও রকম স্বত্বস্বাব্দী কার্যকলাপ তিনি চলাতে পারেন না।

প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই এক যৌথ বিবৃতিতে আজ এখানে এই সমঝোতার কথা ঘোষণা করা হয়েছে। মুশারফ এই সমঝোতাকে 'ঐতিহাসিক' আখ্যা দিয়ে বলেছেন, "পারস্পরিক আস্থা ও বিশ্বাস থাকলে কাশ্মীর-সহ সব বিবাদের সমাধান হওয়া সম্ভব। ফেব্রুয়ারিতে আলোচনা শুরু হলেও কোথায় এবং কোন স্তরে হবে, তা এখনও পর্যন্ত চূড়ান্ত হয়নি। এই আলোচনায় কাশ্মীরিদের প্রতিনিধিত্ব থাকবে কি না, তাও পরিস্কার করে জানানো হয়নি। তবে মুশারফ ও পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী খুরশিদ মেহমুদ কাশুরি, দু'জনেই বলেছেন, কাশ্মীরিদের আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষা উপেক্ষা করে কোনও সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হবে, এমন আশঙ্কার কারণ নেই।

সমঝোতাই আসাবে

**ইতিমধ্যেই একমত...**

- ক্রিকেট-সহ সমস্ত খেলা পুরোদমে চালু হবে।
- বিমান চলাচল শুরু হয়েছে; দিল্লি-লাহোর বাস, সমঝোতা এক্সপ্রেস চালু হবে।
- সংঘর্ষবিহীনভাবে স্থায়ী রূপ দেওয়া হবে।
- উপকূলরাজীদের মধ্যে সরাসরি যোগাযোগ স্থাপন করা হবে।
- উপকূলে গীর্জার আটক করা হবে না।
- দু'দেশের নাগরিকদের যাতায়াতের স্বাধীনতা বাড়ানো হবে।

**...অতঃপর**

- কাশ্মীর-সহ সব বিতর্কিত বিষয় আলোচনা শুরু হবে ফেব্রুয়ারিতে।
- পাকিস্তানের সার্বভৌমত্ব চূড়ান্ত-নিরোধী কার্যকলাপ চাপাড়ে দেওয়া হবে না।
- পাকিস্তানের মধ্য দিয়ে ইরান থেকে তেলের লাইন আনার চেষ্টা চলবে।

শান্তি: সিমাস মেস

বাজপেয়ী-মুশারফের কাল সকালের এক ঘণ্টার বৈঠকেই আলোচনার নির্ধারিত চূড়ান্ত হয়েছিল। আজ সকালে যৌথ বিবৃতি তৈরি হওয়ার পরে বাজপেয়ী আবার টেলিফোনে মুশারফের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন। একে অপরকে অভিনন্দন জানান। এর পরে দু'দেশের বিদেশমন্ত্রী পৃথক সাংবাদিক বৈঠক করে যৌথ বিবৃতিটি প্রকাশ করেন। সন্ধ্যায় আওয়ান-ই-সদরে সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে মুশারফ বলেন, "আগরা থেকে আমি হতাশ হয়ে ফিরেছিলাম। আজ আমি যাবপরিমাই সন্তুষ্ট।" আজকের সমঝোতাকে পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট শুধু ঐতিহাসিক বলেই আখ্যা দেননি। তাঁর মতে, ভারত-পাক সম্পর্কে এমন সুসময় আর কখনও আসেনি। একটিও বিতর্কিত বিষয় নিয়ে তিনি মুখ খোলেননি। বার বার বলেছেন, "আমরা একটা শুভ সূচনা করেছি। কিছুতেই তা নষ্ট হতে দেব না।" এই সমঝোতা সম্ভব করার জন্য বাজপেয়ীর ভূয়সী প্রশংসাও করেছেন তিনি। মুশারফ বলেছেন, বাজপেয়ীর দূরদৃষ্টি, নমনীয় মনোভাব এবং প্রকৃত রাষ্ট্রনায়কের মতো আচরণ ছাড়া এই 'ঐতিহাসিক' সমঝোতা বাস্তবায়িত হত না।

ভারতীয় শিবির চেয়েছিল, আপামী লোকসভা নির্বাচনের পরেই আলোচনা শুরু হোক। কিন্তু মুশারফ অত দিন অপেক্ষা করতে রাজি ছিলেন না। তাঁর বক্তব্য ছিল, দু'তরফের নানানিধি আস্থার্ককে ব্যবহার এর পর পড়ের পাতায়

পরস্পরকে একটা কটু কথাও কেউ বলেননি

সুন চট্টোপাধ্যায় • ইসলামাবাদ

৬ জানুয়ারি: দীর্ঘ কুটনৈতিক ধেরথের শেষে জিতল কে? ভারত, না পাকিস্তান? আজকের সমঝোতায় কে ছাড়ল বেশি জমি? নয়াদিল্লি, না ইসলামাবাদ?

আজ সারাটা দিন ধরে এখানে সাংবাদিক বৈঠক হয়েছে একের পর এক। প্রথমে পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী শিব জাফরুল্লাহ খান জামালি। তার পরে ভারতের বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিংহার। তারও পরে পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী খুরশিদ মেহমুদ কাশুরি, এবং সব শেষে সার জনাব পারভেজ মুশারফের। কিন্তু একটি বৈঠকেও আজ এমন একটি প্রাসঙ্গিক প্রশ্ন উত্থাপন করা যায়নি কিছুতেই কেন? না দু'পক্ষ থেকেই প্রতিটি বৈঠকে প্রায় হাত জোড় করে সাংবাদিকদের বলা হয়েছে, "দোহাই, হারজিতের বিশ্লেষণে যাবেন না। এটা সে সময় নয়।"

অবশ্য তার মানে এই নয় যে, যশবন্ত-কাশুরি-মুশারফ এ ব্যাপারে তাঁদের ব্যাখ্যা শোনাননি। যশবন্ত বলেছেন, "এটা দু'দেশেরই জয়। দু'দেশের শান্তিকামী মানুষের জয়। বচনবাগীশ, আবেগপ্রবণ কাশুরি আর এক ধাপ এগিয়ে বলেছেন, "এটা শুভবুদ্ধির জয়, নরমপন্থার জয়। স্টেটসম্যানশিপের জয়। এবং দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার গরীব-গুর্বে আমজনতার জয়।" আলোচনার বসতে বাজপেয়ীকে রাজি করানোর পরে আল্লাদে আটখানা হয়ে সবাইকে ছাপিয়ে গিয়ে মুশারফ বলেছেন, "শুধু দক্ষিণ এশিয়া কেন, এটা গোটা বিশ্বের শান্তিকামী মানুষের জয়।"

এক দিকে উজ্জ্বল, অন্য দিকে সন্মের এমন যুগলবন্দী দেখা যায়নি দীর্ঘদিন। যে যাঁর অবস্থানে অবিচল থেকে পরস্পরকে গালমন্দ করাটাই যাদের প্রায় মজ্জাগত অভ্যাসে দাঁড়িয়ে গিয়েছে, আলোচনার ব্যাপারে মটেকা হয়ে যাওয়ার পরে সেই ভারাই আজ বোকাপড়া আর 'ভাইচারার' অনন্য নজির গড়লেন। ভারত-পাকিস্তান সম্পর্কে ইতিহাসে ইসলামাবাদের এই সমঝোতা উল্লেখযোগ্য মাইল ফলক হিসাবে চিহ্নিত হয়ে থাকবে অবশ্যই। তার পাশাপাশি, ২০০৪ সালের ৬ জানুয়ারি স্বরণীয় থাকবে এই কারণে যে, এদিন দু'দেশের কেউ পরস্পরের বিরুদ্ধে একটা কটু কথাও বলেননি। পা' দেননি কোনও

7 JAN 2004

OTO

# ফেব্রুয়ারিতেই বৈঠক, সম্ভ্রাস বন্ধে কথা

প্রথম পাতার পর

ফলে এই মুহূর্তে বন্ধের যে-পরিবেশ সৃষ্টি হয়েছে, আলোচনা শুরু করতে দেরি হলে তা নষ্ট হতে পারে। দু'দেশেরই কট্টরপন্থীরা শান্তি-প্রক্রিয়া ভেঙে দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করতে পারে। শেষ পর্যন্ত মুশারফের এই আর্জি মেনে নেন বাজপেয়ী। পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট নিজেও সাংবাদিকদের বলেছেন, “দু'দেশেই এক দল কট্টরপন্থী আছেন, যাঁরা শান্তি ও মৈত্রী চান না। তাঁরাই আসল বিপদ।”

অন্য দিকে, ভারতের আর্জি মেনে মুশারফ কাশ্মীরি জঙ্গিদের বিরুদ্ধে কঠোর ব্যবস্থা নিতে রাজি হয়েছেন। ভারতের পক্ষ থেকে আলোচনা শুরু করার ব্যাপারে এটাই প্রধান পূর্বশর্ত ছিল। মুশারফ বলেছেন, কাশ্মীরি জঙ্গিদের উপরে তাঁর নিরঙ্কুশ নিয়ন্ত্রণ আছে, এ কথা মনে করা ভুল। তবু তাঁদের নিরস্ত করতে তিনি যথাসাধ্য করবেন। বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসার আগে এখানে তিনি যে কাশ্মীরি নেতাদের সঙ্গে এক প্রস্তাব আলোচনা করেছিলেন, মুশারফ তা-ও জানিয়েছেন। প্রসঙ্গত, ভারত চাইছে, সীমান্তে সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির পরে এ বার কাশ্মীরেও জঙ্গি সংগঠনগুলি সংঘর্ষ-বিরতি ঘোষণা করুক। এবং এ কাজে নয়াদিল্লিকে সাহায্য করুন মুশারফ। বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে আলোচনায় মুশারফ এ ব্যাপারে স্পষ্ট প্রতিশ্রুতি দেওয়ার পরেই সমঝোতার পথ অনেক মসৃণ হয়ে যায়।

মুশারফের কথায় ভারতীয় শিবির যে আস্থা রাখছে, বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহা তা স্পষ্ট করে দিয়েছেন। এর আগে নয়াদিল্লি বার বার বলেছে, কারগিল, লাহোর এবং আগরার পরে পাক নেতৃত্বের উপরে আস্থা রাখা খুবই কঠিন। বাজপেয়ী নিজেও বলেছেন যে, শান্তির পথে এগোতে গিয়ে তিনি বার বার হাত পুড়িয়েছেন। স্পষ্টতই মুশারফ সম্পর্কে ভারতের সেই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিতে বদল হয়েছে। বিদেশমন্ত্রী যা বলেছেন, তাঁর মর্মার্থ, পাক প্রেসিডেন্টের কথায় বিশ্বাস না-থাকলে এই যৌথ বিবৃতি আদৌ সম্ভব হত না। মোদ্দা কথায়, বাজপেয়ী আরও এক বার মুশারফকে সুযোগ দিতে চান।

আগরা শীর্ষ বৈঠকের পরে গত আড়াই বছর দু'দেশের মধ্যে আলোচনা সম্পূর্ণ বন্ধ ছিল। ফেব্রুয়ারিতে আলোচনা শুরু হলেও তা আমলা স্তরে হবে, না কি রাজনৈতিক স্তরে, তা এখনও চূড়ান্ত হয়নি। ইসলামাবাদ চাইছে, রাজনৈতিক স্তরে আলোচনা। তাদের দাবি, চিনের মতো তাদের ক্ষেত্রেও বাজপেয়ী আলোচনা চালানোর জন্য ব্রজেশ মিশ্রকে তাঁর প্রতিনিধি মনোনীত করুন। কিন্তু এখানে

বসে প্রধানমন্ত্রী চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে চাননি। মুশারফকে তিনি বলেছেন, দিল্লি ফিরে তিনি বিষয়টি আলোচনা করবেন। শুনবেন দলীয় নেতাদের বক্তব্যও। প্রসঙ্গত, মুশারফের সঙ্গে তাঁর আলোচনার ব্যাপারে গত কালই বাজপেয়ী উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণীকে বিস্তারিত জানিয়েছেন। আগরার সঙ্গে ইসলামাবাদের এখানেও মৌলিক পার্থক্য। আগরায় আডবাণী মুশারফের বিরোধিতা করেছিলেন। কিন্তু এ বার বাজপেয়ীর শান্তি-প্রচেষ্টাকে তিনি সর্বান্তঃকরণে সমর্থন জানাচ্ছেন।

পাকিস্তান সম্পর্কে কী করণীয়, দিল্লিতে বসেই দলীয় সতীর্থদের সঙ্গে কথা বলে তা চূড়ান্ত করে এসেছিলেন বাজপেয়ী। আজ এখানে মুশারফও বলেছেন, বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে বসার আগে তিনি এ দেশের সবার সঙ্গে বিস্তারিত আলোচনা করেছেন। তাঁর কথায়, “দু'দেশের মানুষই চায় শান্তি। তাঁদের এই আকাঙ্ক্ষাটাই শান্তি-প্রক্রিয়ার সব চেয়ে বড় চালিকাশক্তি।” তিনি এ-ও জানান যে, আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়া শুরু হওয়ার পাশাপাশি দু'দেশই আগামী দিনে আরও কয়েকটি আস্থাবর্ধক ব্যবস্থা নেবে। ইতিমধ্যেই দ্বিপাক্ষিক নানা সমস্যার ব্যাপারে পাকিস্তান সহযোগিতা করতে রাজি হয়েছে। যেমন, পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী জামালি বলেছেন, ইরান থেকে গ্যাস পাইপলাইনের ব্যাপারে নয়াদিল্লির সঙ্গে সহযোগিতা করতে তাঁরা প্রস্তুত। শান্তি-প্রক্রিয়া শুরু হলে ভিসার কড়া কড়িও শিথিল হবে।

আগরায় যেটা সম্ভব হয়নি, ইসলামাবাদে কী করে তা সম্ভব হল, আজ সম্ভার সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে মুশারফকে তা জিজ্ঞাসা করা হয়েছিল। তিনি বলেন, আগরার পরে এবং ৯/১১-এর পরিস্থিতিতে পরিস্থিতির আমূল পরিবর্তন হয়েছে। এই পরিবর্তিত পরিস্থিতিই আমাদের সকলকেই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি বদল করতে বাধ্য করেছে। কেনও নির্দিষ্ট সময়সীমার মধ্যে কাশ্মীর সমস্যার সমাধান করার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে কি না, তা-ও জানতে চাওয়া হয়েছিল। তিনি পরিস্কার জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, দু'তরফের কেউই তাড়াহুড়া চাইছে না। কিন্তু পারস্পরিক বিশ্বাস ও আস্থা অটুট থাকলে সমাধান খুঁজে পেতে অসুবিধা হবে না। মুশারফ দীর্ঘ সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে তাই বারে বারে এই আস্থা ও বিশ্বাসে অবিচল থাকার কথাই বলেছেন। এ কথাও মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছেন যে, শান্তির পথে বাধা-বিপত্তি আসবে, সমঝোতা ভেঙে দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করা হবে। কিন্তু সেই ফাঁদে পা দিলে চলবে না।

# সন্ত্রাসবাদ রোখার অঙ্গীকার করে প্রস্তাব অনুমোদিত সার্ক সম্মেলনে

ইসলামাবাদ, ৬ জানুয়ারি— প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই সার্ক শীর্ষ বৈঠকে সন্ত্রাসবাদ নিয়ে প্রস্তাব অনুমোদিত হল। সার্ক সদস্যদেশগুলি একযোগে জানিয়ে দিল, সন্ত্রাসবাদ সব দেশের পক্ষেই বিপজ্জনক। সন্ত্রাসবাদী কার্যকলাপের পিছনে কারণ যা-ই থাক না কেন, সন্ত্রাসবাদ যে চেহারাতেই আসুক না কেন, ভারত, পাকিস্তান-সহ সার্ক সদস্য সাত দেশ তার বিরোধিতা করতে অঙ্গীকারবদ্ধ। একই সঙ্গে সার্ক দেশগুলি নিজেদের মধ্যে বাণিজ্যের ক্ষেত্রে আমদানি করের হার কমিয়ে (সাফটা) মুক্ত বাণিজ্য অঞ্চল গড়ার দিকে এগিয়ে যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে। এই দু'টি বিষয় নিয়েই গত কয়েক বছর সার্ক সম্মেলনে কোনও মতৈক্য হচ্ছিল না। অবশেষে ইসলামাবাদ সম্মেলনে দু'টি বিষয়েই ফয়সালা হয়ে যাওয়ায় উদ্ভাসিত পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী মীর জাফরুল্লা খান জামালি এবারের সার্ক সম্মেলনকে 'ঐতিহাসিক এবং যুগান্তকারী' বলে অভিহিত করেন। জামালি বলেন, সার্ক প্রস্তাবে উল্লিখিত বিষয়গুলি যাতে বাস্তবায়িত হয়, সে জন্যে চেষ্টার ক্রটি রাখবে না পাকিস্তান।

সাত পৃষ্ঠার এই প্রস্তাবে দক্ষিণ এশিয়াকে যে ভাবে বর্ণনা করা হয়েছে, তা চিরকালের কাঙ্ক্ষিত এক বাসভূমি। দক্ষিণ এশিয়া এমন এক জায়গা, যেখানকার প্রতিটি দেশ তার পड़শি-দেশের সঙ্গে সম্ভাব রেখে চলে, শান্তিতে থাকে। মতবিরোধও রয়েছে। তবে সেটা তারা পারস্পরিক আলোচনার মাধ্যমে, শান্তিপূর্ণ উপায়ে মিটিয়েও ফেলে। গোটা দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার শান্তি আর সৌহার্দ্যের পরিবেশ অটুট রাখতে এই প্রস্তাবে বলা হয়েছে, দেশগুলি নিজেদের মধ্যে আঞ্চলিক ঐক্য, সার্বভৌমত্ব, জাতীয় স্বাধীনতা বজায় রেখেই চেষ্টা করবে যাতে কোনও ভাবে নিজেদের মধ্যে বল

প্রয়োগ না করতে হয়। অন্য দেশের ঘরোয়া মামলায় মাথা না গলিয়ে শান্তিপূর্ণ পদ্ধতিতে যাবতীয় সঙ্কটের মোকাবিলার চেষ্টা করবে এই সব দেশ। ভারত, পাকিস্তান, বাংলাদেশ, শ্রীলঙ্কা, নেপাল, ভূটান এবং মালদ্বীপ, এই সাতটি দেশের পরস্পরের মধ্যে সুসম্পর্ক বজায় রাখার স্বার্থে নিজেদের মধ্যে মাঝেমাঝেই ঘরোয়া রাজনৈতিক আলোচনা-আলোচনার প্রয়োজনের কথা স্বীকার করা হয়েছে এই প্রস্তাবে।

প্রস্তাবের মতে, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার সামনে একটাই সমস্যা। সন্ত্রাসবাদ। সার্কের তরফে সন্ত্রাসবাদের তীব্র সমালোচনা করে বলা হয়েছে, কোনও যুক্তিতেই সন্ত্রাসবাদী আক্রমণকে সমর্থন করা যায় না। সন্ত্রাসবাদের যে কোনও চেহারাি একই রকম ভয়ঙ্কর। সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলির সামনে তাই সবথেকে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ সন্ত্রাসবাদের মোকাবিলা। সন্ত্রাসবাদ আদতে কতটা ক্ষতি করে সেই বিষয়েও বিস্তারিত ব্যাখ্যা করা হয়েছে এই প্রস্তাবে, "সন্ত্রাসবাদীরা রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মৌলিক নীতিকেই লঙ্ঘন করে। আন্তর্জাতিক শান্তি এবং নিরাপত্তা বিঘ্নিত করে। এই বিষয়ে আন্তর্জাতিক কমন্ডেনশন মেনে চলার শপথ নিচ্ছে আমরা।" সেই সঙ্গে অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার মধ্যে যোগাযোগ ব্যবস্থা আরও উন্নত করার কথাও উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে এই প্রস্তাবে।

সন্ত্রাসবাদের বাইরে আর একটি সমস্যার কথাও উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে প্রস্তাবে। দারিদ্র। এই সঙ্কটের মোকাবিলায় কার্যকরী দারিদ্র দূরীকরণ কর্মসূচির প্রয়োজনীয়তা স্বীকার করা হয়েছে। বিশেষ ভাবে দারিদ্র-কবলিত অঞ্চল বেছে নিয়ে সেই সব জায়গায় এই কর্মসূচি প্রয়োগ করতে হবে।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

7 JAN 2004

# Saarc facilitated historic bilateral

Statesman News Service

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 6. — Although the Pakistani President, General Pervez Musharraf, credited Indian Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's "vision and statesmanship" for the 'historic' agreement to begin a composite dialogue process between the two countries, the facilitator was the little-heralded Saarc, largely ignored, but significant in that it provided the platform for Mr Vajpayee to visit the Pakistan capital.

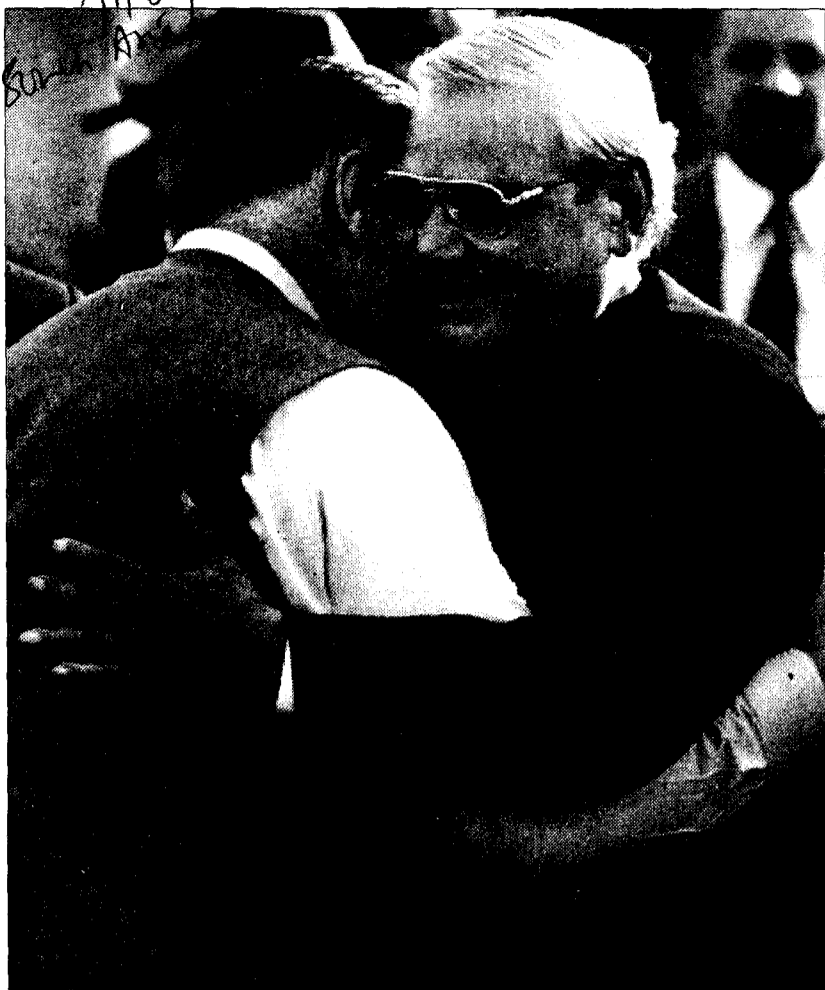
The 12th summit of the Saarc ending today with the adoption of the Islamabad Declaration and the signing of the framework Safta agreement has probably been the most successful ever; not just in terms of the regional momentum, but also for the landmark bilateral India-Pak agreement.

"Saarc," the Pakistani President said, "provided the normal and natural opportunity to take these historical strides" in bilateral relations.

"If it had not been for Saarc, the PM would not have been available in Islamabad," a senior official said, and "a meeting was necessary" to take the process forward. "Saarc facilitated the bilateral and vice-versa," the official said.

"The successful conclusion of Saarc" including the adoption of the framework Safta agreement and the additional protocol on the suppression of terrorism provided the "sincerity of purpose" the Indian government wanted to see, a senior official said. "The success in pushing through all the contentious issues at Saarc was the biggest CBM (confidence-building measure)," the official said.

"The eagerness to ensure that



Mr Vajpayee and Mr Jamali at Islamabad airport on Tuesday. — AFP

Saarc" happens smoothly forced the Pakistan government to "rethink some of its public postures" and to restate them without the "use of unnecessary rhetoric," an official said.

Once Safta and free trade in the

region comes into effect, on 1 Jan 2006, and economic stakes increase in each other, "it is bound to have a salutary effect on all bilateral relations, not just India-Pakistan," an official said.

## Pledge to end terror, permit free trade

Press Trust of India

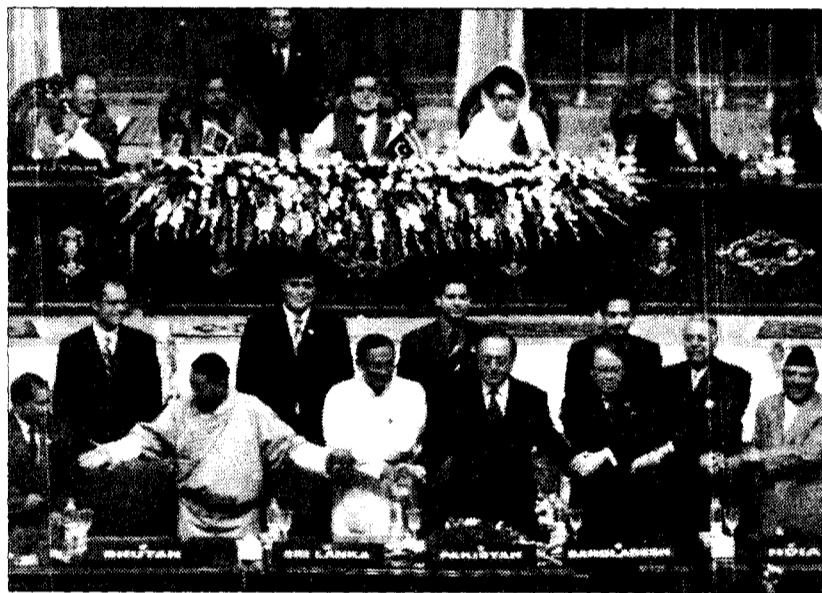
ISLAMABAD, Jan. 6. — The 12th Saarc Summit concluded here today adopting the 'Islamabad Declaration' and landmark agreements committing the member nations to eliminate terrorism in all forms and provide for free trade in the region.

The documents were signed by the foreign ministers in the presence of their heads of state and government, including Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, at the concluding session of the 3-day summit of the seven Saarc nations — India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives and Bhutan.

The Islamabad Declaration contains the road map for South Asian cooperation and has a historic significance, Pakistan PM Mr Zafarullah Khan Jamali, said adding that Pakistan would do its utmost to implement the declaration collectively and individually.

The additional protocol on the review of the Saarc convention on Suppression of Terrorism, 1987, which pledges itself to elimination of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations in the region, was described by Mr Jamali as "another landmark" agreement.

Terming the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement as a "watershed" accord to reinvigorate regional cooperation, Mr Jamali said Saarc had made good progress and South Asian Preferential Trade Agreements would benefit the people of the region immensely.



Foreign ministers of the Saarc nations (front) perform a cross group handshake after the signing of the SAFTA agreement in Islamabad on Tuesday. — AFP

Mr Vajpayee, Mr Jamali, Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, Bangladesh Premier Mrs Khaleda Zia, Nepalese Prime Minister Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa and Bhutanese Prime Minister Mr Lyonop Jigme Y Thinley later posed for photographs. Maldives President Mr Maumoon Abdul Gayoom flew home yesterday after the retreat.

Thanking the heads of state and government for their cooperation in reaching the agreements, Mr Jamali said Saarc symbolised the aspirations of the people of the region for progress

and for a better future.

He said Saarc should also play a role in greater mutual understanding and good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation for peace and stability — essential for facing multifarious social challenges.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Mrs Khaleda Zia, who will takeover the post of chairperson of the meet,

thanked members for their decision to hold the next summit in Dhaka in January 2005 and hoped the agreements reached would lead to greater cooperation in the region.



### PM sherwani

NEW DELHI, Jan. 6. — The Prime Minister has evinced interest in getting a sherwani stitched by a Pakistan fashion designer. Karachi-based designer Amir Adnan told a TV channel that he met Mr Vajpayee in Islamabad this morning and took his measurements. — PTI

### Brajesh denial

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 6. — Ending widespread speculations, national security adviser Mr Brajesh Mishra today denied meeting ISI chief Ehasanul Haque. — PTI

### Movies irk Pak

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 6. — Opposing Bollywood films depicting Indo-Pak wars, Pakistani foreign minister Mr Khurshid M Kasuri today said such films should not be made and people should not patronise them. — PTI

## World hails talks decision

Press Trust of India

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6. — The USA, Britain, Japan, Germany and UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan today hailed India and Pakistan's decision to resume dialogue saying it boded well for peace and stability in South Asia.

"It's an act of statesmanship," was how a state department official described the decision of India and Pakistan to begin composite dialogue next month and said it looked forward to helping in the process. The Indo-Pakistan joint statement was a step forward towards peace between India and Pakistan, which was important for regional stability and for the whole world, he said.

In London, British foreign secretary Mr Jack Straw said in a statement the announcement to start composite dialogue sho-

wed the neighbours' "commitment to building a mutually beneficial relationship".

Terming the decision to resume dialogue as "wonderful news", Mr Annan told reporters in the UN that improved relations between the two countries would mean a lot for the region, "not just in terms of reducing political tensions but also in economic and social terms" and would be beneficial to all smaller countries in the area.

### Jamali to visit India if and when required

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 6. — Pakistani PM Mr Zafarullah Jamali today said he would visit India when required or if he is asked to. But he would be visiting all the member countries in the region in the capacity of Saarc chairman.

Asked whether the Kashmir issue was being kept in the box in the interest of progress in the Saarc, he said, "It (box) is not locked. President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee have the master key and they can open whenever they desire." — PTI

# Teeing for peace

**G**olf, it can safely be said at the conclusion of the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, is now a vital element in the conceptualization and execution of Indian diplomacy. A little known aspect of the diplomacy which preceded the visit of the prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to Islamabad is the chats which the Indian high commissioner, Shiv Shankar Menon, and General Pervez Musharraf had at the Islamabad Golf Club since Menon moved from Beijing to the Pakistani capital some six months ago.

Golf allowed the two men to talk without being hamstrung either by protocol or by the presence of cautious, baggage-ridden foreign ministry officials in Islamabad. These chats helped each of them to figure out what the other thought about what lay ahead for south Asia after Vajpayee's surprise initiative in Srinagar last April to attempt peace with Pakistan once again.

Of course, this is not the first time that golf has played its part in catapulting India's vital interests to the realm of the possible. After the 1998 nuclear tests, when even New Delhi's paid lobbyists in Washington had written off India, the diplomatic ice with the Americans was broken on the putting green between T.P. Sreenivasan, then India's deputy chief of mission in the capital of the United States of America, and Thomas Pickering, who was the equivalent of foreign secretary in Bill Clinton's administration.

Another little known element in the parleys which made it possible for an Indian prime minister to go to Islamabad after a gap of 15 years is the role the Chinese played in bringing it about. It is a shame that American dominance over the global media makes it appear that even an insignificant remark by no more than the US state department's deputy spokesman about India and Pakistan gets played up as an initiative, but painstaking diplomacy by the Chinese president, Hu Jintao, or the prime minister, Wen Jiabao, in bringing together south Asia's biggest neighbours gets no credit or notice.

**V**ajpayee was one of the first foreign leaders to meet Hu and Wen after they took over the levers of power in Beijing last year. Vajpayee's visit, which took place when many of China's friends were hesitating to go to Beijing so soon after SARS, left a deep impression on the two Chinese, new at the top. Pakistan was a subject of extended discussion during Vajpayee's stay in Beijing, in part because the Chinese have an identical problem as the Indians: infiltration of religious radicals into Sinkiang province from across the border with Pakistan.

Musharraf fears the US and has no love for the leadership in Washington, which orders him about and gives him ultimatums. But he trusts the Chinese and believes that Beijing has the good of Pakistan at heart when it deals with Islamabad. So, when Hu and Wen coun-

7-10  
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selled Pakistan's president to make up with India during Musharraf's visit to China in November, he took that advice very seriously.

This newspaper had reported in its news columns in April last year how China readily responded to a request from Britain's foreign secretary, Jack Straw — when he and the US secretary of state, Colin Powell, were busy with the war in Iraq — to play a role in defusing yet another crisis between India and Pakistan.

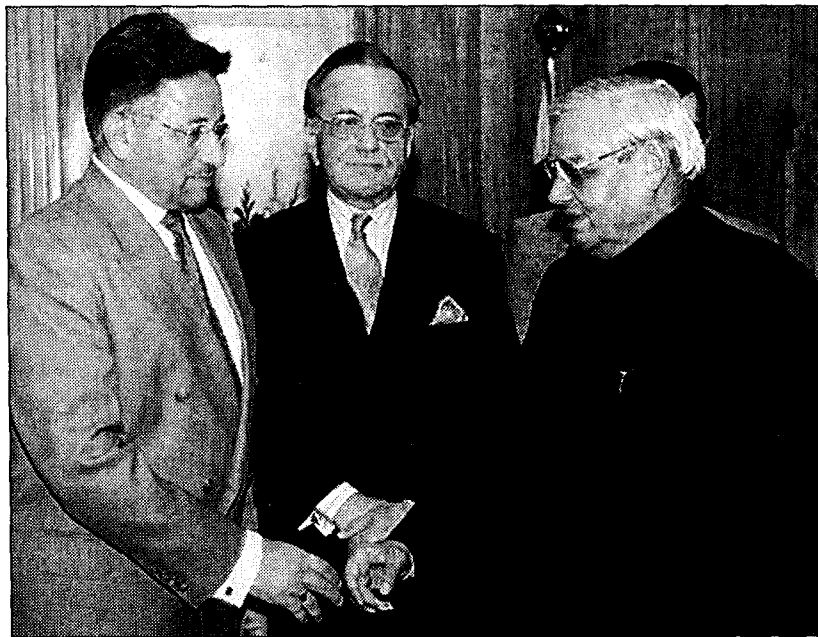
Musharraf was often fascinated by Menon's deep understanding of China: Menon's grandfather, his uncle and his

discuss in Mandarin other matters of interest to them over tea and biscuits.

A third, little-known ingredient in Vajpayee's journey to Islamabad is Khokar. When Khokar arrived in Beijing as ambassador in late 1999, he was pleasantly surprised to find that missing at the Indian mission in Beijing was the severe hostility he had encountered in Washington, both from the Indian mission and the Indian community in the US, and earlier, from South and North Blocks during his posting as high commissioner in India. He and Vijay Nambiar, then India's man in Beijing, established a correct, but cor-

## DIPLOMACY

K.P. NAYAR



Ready to shake hands

father-in-law were all Indian ambassadors to China and his mother went to college in Chengdu. Menon himself had three tours of duty in Beijing, the last and most recent as ambassador.

Naturally, the chats between Musharraf and Menon at the Islamabad Golf Club covered China too. The general was very much interested in how India had handled its messy relations with China. One story which is said to have captivated Musharraf was an account by his foreign secretary, Riaz Khokar, about how Menon, as joint secretary in South Block dealing with east Asia, dealt with the Chinese ambassador, who was protesting against India's decision to hold elections in Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing does not accept as Indian territory.

Menon would not accept the Chinese protest and a protest note was pushed back and forth across the table between him and the then Chinese ambassador to India, Cheng Ruisheng, until the note lay exactly in the middle, equidistant from the two men. Their diplomatic duty thus out of the way, Menon and Cheng then proceeded to

dial working relationship.

A decade ago, Khokar angrily told this columnist during a 45-minute chat on the lawns of the German ambassador's residence in New Delhi that Indians must accept that for the next 14 years they would have to deal with him. "I am not the kind who can be exiled to Dakar or Lagos", he boasted then. His outburst was in reaction to a news story written by this columnist. The story, Khokar wrongly concluded, was written at the behest of South Block, which was, at that time, giving him a particularly rough time.

Although Khokar's boast came true, the initial months after Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri became Pakistan's foreign minister were consumed by turf battles between the minister and the foreign secretary. Khokar, typically, asserted himself. He conclusively demonstrated that he was the boss when he chose Munawar Bhatti — who earlier worked with him in New Delhi — as acting high commissioner in India to succeed Jalil Abbas Jilani, who was discredited for channelling money for Kashmiri separatists.

Having scored decisive victories against the minister, those familiar with the ways of the Pakistani foreign office say Khokar now wants to leave his footprint as the best foreign secretary his country ever had. Indians who went to Islamabad for the 12th SAARC summit insist that as Pakistan's foreign secretary, he is a different man from the Khokar they have known over the years. Without that change — whether it is real or put on for the time being — much of what happened between the Indian and Pakistani delegations in the last few days would have been impossible.

**T**he Pakistanis were considerably handicapped in their ability to manipulate the foreign media by the absence of the veteran Musharraf spokesman, Major General Rashid Qureshi, who fell out with his boss last year and was removed from his post. Two years ago, in Agra, Qureshi became the darling of the foreign media when he freely handed out his cell-phone number to correspondents starved for news because of a mutually agreed news blackout.

This time, the Indians left nothing to chance. Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary to the prime minister, took a personal interest in the interview of Vajpayee by Naseem Zehra on behalf of Pakistan Television in the knowledge that she speaks for the army general headquarters in Rawalpindi and is, therefore, assiduously courted by the American establishment.

Of course, none of what took place in Islamabad would have been possible if Vajpayee did not have a vision about India's place in south Asia and the world or if he was not determined to push through that vision in his own, inimitable style. The closest of Vajpayee's aides insist in private that they were taken completely by surprise when the prime minister announced in Srinagar last April that he would embark on one final peace initiative with Pakistan. The decision was entirely his and Vajpayee kept the cards close to his chest until the public announcement.

For the first time since SAARC was created 18 years ago, an Indian prime minister succeeded in transforming it from a platform against India into an organization which held out the promise of common good for the region. In the process, Vajpayee was able to use SAARC as an instrument of Indian foreign policy, much the same way New Delhi used the non-aligned movement in the Seventies and Eighties.

**I**f SAARC keeps up the momentum it picked up in Islamabad, Pakistan will have no option but to keep up with the engine of regional change and seek a rapprochement with India. History will sit in judgment on whether this would have been possible if the Americans had not changed Pakistan from a "failed state" into a "non-state", considerably diminished in its capacity for any independent decision-making, be it on Afghanistan or, as the Indians hope, on Kashmir very soon.

## FRIENDSHIP VISTA

<sup>1/10</sup> **A** new phase of India's engagement with Pakistan has begun. The decision by India's prime minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to meet Pakistan's president, Mr Pervez Musharraf, and its prime minister, Mr Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, has, as expected, overshadowed the rest of the proceedings of the summit of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation countries in Islamabad. Ever since the prime minister, Mr Vajpayee, took the decision to visit Islamabad for the SAARC summit, expectations that the visit could lead to a breakthrough in India-Pakistan relations have been very high. However, India, till the very last, had maintained that bilateral talks were not on the anvil. This caution may have been exercised to prevent the kind of hype that was generated before the Agra summit and also because New Delhi was not clear, till the eve of the summit, if an engagement with Pakistan would be fruitful. A variety of factors have obviously played a role in ensuring that the SAARC summit did not remain a mere setting for a multilateral dialogue. *G. M. M. ✓*

India seems to have realized that the policy of "no talking" with Pakistan has not yielded any results. Mr Musharraf no longer needs India's endorsement to secure his legitimacy. There has been an ongoing process of normalization, since April last year, leading to a gradual warming of bilateral relations. The extraordinary level of enthusiasm at the civil society level had created the right atmosphere for the revival of official talks. The recent decision to observe a ceasefire at the line of control by both sides has also proved to be a catalyst for talks. There has been some pressure from the international community, especially the United States of America, for some time now. Washington and its interlocutors, who have visited south Asia, have been seeking to ensure that India and Pakistan begin bilateral talks before another crisis erupts in the region. If India was still cautious about the engagement with Pakistan's military regime, it is because there was still a great deal of apprehension about Mr Musharraf. While most Pakistanis who visited India have argued that Mr Musharraf is a leader with whom India can do business, New Delhi's own experience has been different.

Mr Musharraf has been blamed for the war in Kargil and the failure at Agra. However, it seems the prime minister's closest counsellor on foreign policy, the national security adviser, Mr Brajesh Mishra, reassured Mr Vajpayee on this count. Mr Mishra travelled to Pakistan before the SAARC summit and met Mr Musharraf as well as the head of the Inter-Services Intelligence. The breakthrough in Islamabad should not suggest that there will be a dramatic resolution between the two countries. The best that can be hoped is that both Islamabad and New Delhi will continue to engage each other even while recognizing the certainty of encountering several hurdles on the road to peace.



# 'Let us do it now, but ...'

**Islamabad/New Delhi, Jan. 6** (Reuters): A new warmth between India and Pakistan has rekindled a longing for peace on both sides, but that hope is tempered by half a century of distrust and hostility.

"It is good that these two people are talking," said Rajendra Paswan, a 32-year-old auto-rickshaw driver in New Delhi, referring to the meeting between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf.

"We want both people, Pakistani and Indian, to live in peace. But I am afraid this (peace process) will fail because we are used to these failings in the past."

"Enough is enough," Moshin Ali, a 17-year-old student in Pakistan's port city of Karachi, said. "We need peace in our region. I don't want to spend my whole life in fear of war with my neighbour."

"I am happy that our leadership is now showing willingness to discuss all core issues. I think this is the right time; let's do it now."

"We should not get carried away by what has happened in Islamabad," said Razia Aziz, a government employee in Indian Kashmir. "These things keep happening between India and Pakistan and finally end up in situations like Kargil. But let us pray this time the peace efforts... do not fail."

Many fear the latest thaw, prompted by the 79-year-old Vajpayee's offer of one last stab at peace in his lifetime last April,

could easily be derailed.

"What is happening now is good for both our countries," said Gulzar Singh, a taxi driver in Mumbai.

"But the militants and fundamentalists in Pakistan will never allow Musharraf to keep his side of the bargain. Terrorists will not stop attacking Kashmir."

Ashok Pundit, an Indian film-maker and spokesman for a group representing thousands of Hindus forced by militant attacks to flee the Kashmir Valley, sees no hope of a peaceful solution.

"I don't trust these handshakes," he said in Mumbai.

"They are like a romantic couple — one promising the moon to the other. But when reality dawns, they will be fighting against each other. Kashmir will never be resolved."

Said Ashraf Khan, a Karachi driver: "Nothing will happen."

"Neither Musharraf nor Vajpayee Sahib has the courage to resolve the Kashmir issue. We have seen suffering in Kashmir... for the last 56 years and I am sure my next generation will also see what I have seen."

But in Islamabad, teacher Noosheen Hasan was more optimistic.

"I hope it... does not end up in new tensions and fighting," she said. "I think the majority of Indians and Pakistanis want to live peacefully, raise their children, send them to school. They don't want to fight. Only insane people want war."

# Brajesh meeting mystery

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**Islamabad, Jan. 6:** Did he or didn't he? That is the question.

Media circles were rife with speculation if national security adviser Brajesh Mishra had called on Lt Gen. Ehsan-ul-Haq, the head honcho of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Yesterday, foreign minister Yashwant

Sinha had said that he felt no need to comment on the veracity of such a meeting. Today, Mishra first blandly denied having met the ISI chief. "I haven't talked to any intelligence people here," he said.

And then, for good measure, further confounded the confusion by saying: "I have had several meetings to tie the loose ends which made today's statement possible. I cannot disclose to you who my interlocutors were. If the other side wants to do so, it is for them to decide."

Niaz Naik, who had gone public with the details of the meeting on television, has not retracted his statement.

But the result of Mishra's various meetings were there for everyone to see — Pakistan's assurance about not allowing any of the territory under its control for terrorism and India agreeing to restart the bilateral dialogue.



Mishra

# Trade breaks free of Big Two bear hug



Khaleda Zia at the closing ceremony on Tuesday. (AFP)

ister of Bangladesh, described the signing of the Safta treaty as an "historic development", saying it would pave the way for accelerated regional cooperation.

"The document signed at Islamabad will constitute a building block on the way to achieving the Saarc objectives," she said, referring to the Islamabad Declaration adopted by the summit.

The deal has been eluding the group for several years, mainly because Pakistan had linked a breakthrough to the resolution of the Kashmir issue. However, this time, Islamabad did not stand in the way.

CII said in Delhi that the

agreement would help ensure economic integration among the Saarc nations. "We welcome the development that will surely increase trade among the South Asian countries who currently do not have very strong business relationship," S. Sen, deputy director-general of the industry chamber, said.

The Islamabad Declaration reaffirmed the centrality of Saarc for promoting regional cooperation and emphasised the need to enhance its efficacy.

The Saarc leaders also renewed their commitment to the objectives, principles and provisions of the charter of the organisation. The charter had been a bone of contention with Pakistan feeling that it should be altered to include bilateral issues and India, certain that bilateral could only mean Kashmir, opposing it. But in the run-up to the Islamabad summit, Pakistan had made it clear that it would not force a discussion on the issue.

Though President Pervez Musharraf referred to the need to change the charter during a summit banquet speech, he clarified today that it was his "personal opinion". Jamali, too, today ruled out the possibility of revising the charter, saying it is not possible until all member states agree to a change.

Jamali also hinted at a possible visit to all Saarc countries in the near future as chairman of the organisation but added that he does not plan to undertake a bilateral visit.

IMTIAZ GUL

**Islamabad, Jan. 6:** Away from the blinding glare of the Indian-Pakistan diplomatic breakthrough, the Saarc members today signed an agreement to bring down the trade barriers in the region.

The South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) framework treaty, inked by the foreign ministers of Saarc's seven members, seeks to eliminate tariffs in phases.

The treaty will operationalise the free trade area by January 1, 2006, by when tariffs would be brought down to 20 per cent in non-least developed Saarc countries and 30 per cent in least developed countries (LDCs). The rates will be brought down further to 0 to 5 per cent in non-LDC countries in the subsequent five years and in LDCs in eight years.

The pact also has a provision to establish a ministerial mechanism for administering the treaty and dispute settlement among the members.

Pakistan Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali said the Safta pact and other agreements concluded at the summit represented the collective resolution of member countries on the need for economic and social progress in the region.

"Saarc symbolises the aspiration of our people for peace and progress... of hopes for better future, fostering of mutual understanding and good neighbourly relations," Jamali said.

Khaleda Zia, the Prime Min-



External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha (second from right) with his counterparts from other Saarc countries at the signing of the SAFTA treaty on the concluding day of the 12th Saarc summit at Islamabad on Tuesday. PTI photo

# Saarc says no to terror

Declaration calls for choking funds flow, denying refuge

V.S. CHANDRASEKAR &  
V. MOHAN NARAYAN  
ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 6

**I**N A significant accord on tackling terrorism in South Asia, leaders of seven SAARC countries, including from India and Pakistan, today pledged to eliminate the menace in all forms and manifestations in the region and to deal effectively with financing it.

The Islamabad Declaration, adopted at the end of the three-day summit, hailed as a "historic and landmark" agreement by Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali, followed the signing of an additional protocol to the SAARC regional convention on combating terrorism and the far reaching Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

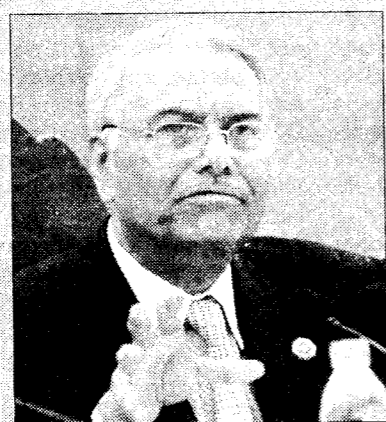
The declaration also affirmed the member states' determination to create an inclusive, just and equitable partnership for peace, development and prosperity and described the signing of the framework agreement on SAFTA as a "major milestone".

It also noted that satisfactory progress has been made in South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA).

The seven-page, 43-point declaration envisioned South Asia to be a peaceful and stable region where each nation is at peace with itself and its neighbours and where conflicts, differences and disputes are addressed through peaceful means and dialogue. It reaffirmed its pledge to promote good neighbourly relations on the basis of principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and national independence, non-use of force, non-intervention and non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes.

There was also a mention of the security of small states in the declaration which said the SAARC nations were particularly mindful of the problem that arises from particular vulnerabilities that should be firmly addressed by scrupulous adherence to the UN charter.

Noting that the people of South Asia continue to face a serious threat from terrorism, the summit condemned terrorist violence in all its forms and manifestations. "We are convinced that terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is a challenge to all states and to all of humanity, and cannot be justified on any ground, whatsoever. "A terrorist violates the fundamental



## Member nations sign SAFTA treaty

**ISLAMABAD:** The seven SAARC countries on Tuesday signed a treaty that would lead to free trade and movement of goods paving the way for South Asian economic Union along the lines of EU in future. The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) framework treaty signed by Foreign ministers of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives seeks to remove trade barriers and phased elimination of tariffs and establishment of a ministerial level mechanism for administering the treaty and dispute settlement among members. The treaty will operationalise the free trade area by January 1, 2006. —PTI

values of the UN and the SAARC charter and constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. We agree to fully implement the relevant international conventions to which we are parties," the declaration said.

Condemning terrorist violence in all its forms and manifestations and noting that people of South Asia continue to face a serious threat from it, the declaration said the countries were convinced it was a challenge to all of them and cannot be justified on any ground whatsoever. The declaration said it was important to maintain the momentum of the progress on economic issues and to move towards further broadening of economic cooperation and to ensure equitable distribution of benefits of trade and cater to the special needs of the small and least developed countries by providing them special and differential treatment. —PTI

Reiterating the commitment of the Kathmandu Summit for the creation of South Asian Economic Union, it underlined that creation of a suitable political and economic environment would be conducive to the realisation of this objective.

The grouping decided to continue to safeguard their collective interests in multilateral fora on various issues. Recognising poverty alleviation as the greatest challenge facing the peoples of South Asia, it said this was the "overarching goal" of all SAARC activities. It was imperative to relate regional cooperation to the actual needs of the people.

The SAARC leaders emphasised the need for undertaking effective and sustained poverty reduction programmes through pro-poor growth strategies and other policy interventions with specific sectoral targets. The SAARC leaders decided to continue to collaborate with international organisations and UN agencies on the issue of poverty alleviation.

The leaders underpinned the need to establish a network of centres for higher learning, training and skill development institutes across South Asia. They decided to strengthen scientific and technological cooperation across the region as fundamental to accelerating the pace of economic and social development.

Hailing the SAARC social charter as a historic development having far-reaching impact on the lives of millions of South Asians, it stressed that issues covered under the charter like poverty alleviation, population stabilization, empowerment of women, youth mobilisation, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition and protection of children were key to the welfare and well being of all South Asia.

The declaration asked the member nations to move towards an early ratification of the two conventions on child welfare and trafficking in women and children for prostitution.

The leaders agreed to work on a SAARC plan of action in the shortest possible time on cooperation in medical expertise and pharmaceuticals as well as in the field of traditional medicine. On the issue of environment, they welcomed the early establishment of a coastal zone management centre in the Maldives. The leaders also agreed to the establishment of a SAARC information centre in Kathmandu. —PTI

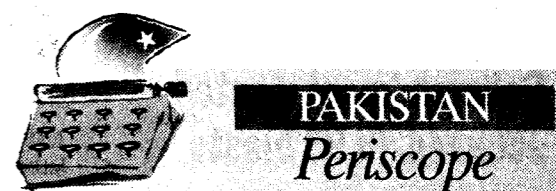
## Pak must stop cross-border transgression

For any talks to start, Pakistan must address itself to the issue of cross-border transgression. It is true that the General has promised to tackle this issue and it is also true that cross-border movement has ceased very largely but...it is apparent that the problem has not been fully curbed. The General, being the commander of the Pakistan Army, must tighten the reins of the ISI. It is like the CIA in the United States, which is a state within a state. If the cross-border issue is controlled, it is certain that talks between India and Pakistan will begin.

If and when they do begin one must remember what has already been agreed to. The dispute in Kashmir is between the Kashmiris and the Indians...the matter must be left to the Kashmiris to resolve. Pakistan can continue to render diplomatic support to the Kashmiris but must cease to interfere in Afghanistan. —The News

## Silence reveals lot more than it conceals

That the real, substantive contents of the "courtesy call" of the Indian PM on President Musharraf have not been disclosed in detail...indeed is highly significant and augurs well for dialogue between the two countries. It, indeed, reveals a lot more, than it conceals. It reflects the highly fruitful nature of the "mega" event... (In fact, journalists were begged not to ask further questions because it may not be conducive to furthering the process started). —The News



## No more concessions till India acts on Jammu and Kashmir

It is instructive that Mr Vajpayee spent double the time with General Musharraf than with Mr Jamali. This indicates the true power relationship in Pakistan, and also that the Indian government recognises this. This can be looked at positively, as indicating an Indian desire to move forward, rather making a childish attempt to create differences as it did while trying to differentiate between Mian Nawaz Sharif and General Musharraf over Kargil.

Mr Yashwant Sinha's reticence about whether the Musharraf-Vajpayee meeting went beyond platitudes can also be interpreted both ways, as concealing matters of great import, or covering a failure to move forward. Rasheed's revelation that Kashmir had figured in the conversation was not appreciated by Mr Sinha, but it was not just inevitable that the topic came up, but essential. Whether Indians like the phrase "core issue" or not, Kashmir is central to the Indo-Pak relationship...There must be no more unilateral concessions until India shows it is serious about solving the Kashmir issue. —The Nation

## Let cricket show the way

The official announcement that India and Pakistan will be playing cricket should be seen as another long overdue step in the direction of opening the doors of the people-to-people interaction of the two estranged neighbours. While it is true that

sports ties cannot be the precursor to any conflict resolution, it is also a fact that they are a perfect conduit to clearing bad vibes...It could also boost political relations. This route has been taken before in this region when in 1986 Zia-ul-Haq...went to India to enjoy a Test match in Jaipur which helped in defusing the border situation and cleared the war clouds. —The News

SAARC / PLEDGE TO ELIMINATE ALL FORMS OF TERRORISM

# Leaders adopt Islamabad Declaration

By Amit Baruah and B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 6. In a major concession to Pakistani sensibilities, the Islamabad Declaration adopted by the SAARC Heads of State/Government today said the creation of a "suitable political and economic environment" would help the birth of the proposed South Asian Economic Union.

Other than the declaration, the 12th SAARC summit also adopted the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Agreement as well as an additional protocol to the existing convention on the suppression of terrorism.

As per the Agreement, SAFTA will come into force from January 1, 2006, and the "developing countries" in SAARC will reduce their tariffs to between zero and five per cent for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) beginning from January 1, 2006.

The declaration said the SAARC nations condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and noted that the people of South Asia continued to face a "serious threat" from this scourge.

"We are convinced that terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is a challenge to all states and to all of humanity, and cannot be justified on any ground, whatsoever.

"Terrorism violates the fundamental values of the United Nations and the SAARC Charter and constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and

security. We agree to fully implement the relevant international conventions to which we are parties," the declaration said.

It reaffirmed the commitment of SAARC to the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, which, among others, recognised the seriousness of the problem as it affected the security, stability and development of the region.

"The signing of the Additional Protocol... to the Regional Convention... to deal effectively with financing of terrorism is a further manifestation of our determination to eliminate all forms and manifestations of terrorism from South Asia," the document said.

Interestingly, concerns on national security have been extended to the SAFTA Agreement, which allows member States to take action and adopt measures in the interests of national security.

The SAFTA accord also allows any contracting state to pull out of the treaty at any time after it comes into force on January 1, 2006. "Such withdrawal shall be effective on the expiry of six months from the date on which a written notice thereof is received by the Secretary-General of SAARC..."

A SAFTA Ministerial Council comprising Commerce/Trade Ministers and a Committee of Experts have been envisaged in SAFTA for the administration and implementation of the agreement.

The accord envisages that states shall

"give special regard" to the situation of LDCs when considering the application of anti-dumping and/or countervailing measures and allows consultations with LDCs in this regard.

The SAFTA Agreement also "suggests" a number of measures that members may adopt, including the removal of barriers to intra-SAARC investment, harmonisation of customs facilities, transit facilities for efficient intra-SAARC trade and simplification of procedures for business visas.

"Any dispute that may arise among the contracting States regarding the interpretation and application of the provisions of this [SAFTA] Agreement or any instrument adopted within its framework concerning the rights and obligations of the... States will be amicably settled through a process initiated by a request for bilateral consultations," the document said.

Describing SAFTA as a major milestone, the Declaration said: "It is important to maintain this momentum and move towards further broadening of economic cooperation and to ensure equitable distribution of benefits of trade..."

On enhancing political cooperation among SAARC nations, it said: "We envision South Asia to be a peaceful and stable region where each nation is at peace with itself and its neighbours and where conflicts, differences and disputes are addressed through peaceful means and dialogue."

THE HINDU

07 JAN 2004

## Atal-Pervez meet dominates Islamabad summit

11-12  
VIEW 11/04

### SAARC can succeed as a multilateral forum

General Musharraf's suggestion that the SAARC charter should be amended to provide for the resolution of bilateral issues will spell the death of this multilateral regional forum. The original charter of SAARC as proposed by General Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh excluded bilateral issues from the agenda for two very valid reasons. Firstly, in similar fora such as the EU and the ASEAN, bilateral issues are excluded. Secondly, the SAARC region is unique in that while five SAARC countries share common borders with India, none of them has a common border with each other. Nor do they share language and ethnicity with each other. Therefore, the proposal to discuss bilateral issues in effect means that each member will bring to the forum its problems with India rather than with its other neighbours.

If this is permitted, then all of India's problems with its neighbours, the LTTE issue, the expulsion of the Nepalis from Bhutan and Bangladesh harbouring ULFA militants, will come to the SAARC forum. Instead of promoting economic and technological co-operation which was the purpose of the SAARC charter, it would become a forum for continuous acrimony. It is not correct to say that without the bilateral issue — Kashmir — being discussed, SAARC cannot advance. In fact, the other six members of SAARC were moving towards the free trade status and that compelled Pakistan finally to yield on SAFTA. The idea that economic, social and technological issues should be given a higher priority over political wrangles is gaining ground and only success in those areas of cooperation will generate enough mutual confidence and a conducive atmosphere to tackle difficult bilateral political problems. In a historic departure from the past, this SAARC summit in Islamabad has broken new ground by finalising the SAFTA agreement and adopting the additional protocol on terrorism. Let us consolidate on this gain and not kill SAARC by introducing bilateral political wrangles into a forum meant for economic and technological advance.

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COUNTERVIEW

### It only means Pakistan, India and their tensions

SAARC, did you say? SAARC in the South Asian context is just India and Pakistan. More to the point, it is just Kashmir. And the more the nuclear neighbours waltz around Kashmir, the longer SAARC will take to emerge as a free-trade zone with a common currency. Look at the tamasha in Islamabad — the venue of the just concluded SAARC summit. And yet, in all the excitement around whether or not Atalji will shake hands with the general, hardly anyone noticed that little Bangladesh and littler Nepal were nowhere to be seen. Reporters filing copy on the alleged SAARC summit swiftly dismissed the SAFTA trade agreement that was signed, concentrating instead on the nature of the Atal-Pervez meeting. They speculated on what might have been exchanged between the two men, and painstakingly interpreted the paltry information that Indian external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha most reluctantly gave out. Yet more correspondents debated on whether or not peace was at all possible between India and Pakistan.

Pakistani journos focused on Atalji's charms to the exclusion of other visiting dignitaries. SAARC may have been envisioned as a bloc in the nature of the ASEAN and the EU, but unlike the latter two, it has always been held hostage to the moods and temper tantrums of the big two. For an economic bloc to succeed, it is important that no single country dominates the region the way India does in South Asia. Equally, it must be accepted by all of them that bilateral issues will not be brought to the forum. Yet, the burden of Pervez Musharraf's song was that the SAARC charter must be expanded to include bilateral issues. In other words, let Indo-Pak bilateral tensions completely overshadow SAARC. No wonder, analysts have suggested separate bilateral trade agreements between India and each member country, excluding Pakistan. This makes a mockery of the concept of a multilateral forum. Forget an EU-like South Asian bloc, SAARC will always be India, Pakistan and their unending love-hate affair.

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# Nuclear neighbours step up pace for peace

7/11/04

## Composite dialogue to resume from February

By Manoj Joshi  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Islamabad:** Peace was the theme of Tuesday as India and Pakistan outlined through a joint statement a framework to resolve all outstanding disputes. Pakistan persuaded India to resume the stalled composite dialogue, which also addressed Kashmir, while India received assurances that Pakistan would not allow its territory to be used for terrorist acts. At a press meet later, President Pervez Musharraf declared, "History has been made."

The joint statement encapsulating the deal was released by external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha and his Pakistani counterpart Khurshheed Mehmood Kasuri in back-to-back press briefings on Tuesday afternoon. It summed up the meeting held by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Gen Musharraf on Monday and their agreement "to commence" their stalled composite dialogue from February 2004. It said that the resumption of the dialogue would lead to a peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, "including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides".

When speaking to the press, Gen Musharraf repeated a phrase that had cropped up in Mr Sinha and Mr Kasuri's briefings as well: That there were no winners and losers in the process, that the winners were the people of South Asia.

National security adviser Brajesh Mishra, who was present at Mr Sinha's briefing, said

this was a "win-win" situation for all. He also took the opportunity to deny that he had met the ISI chief during his meetings in Pakistan.

The statement noted that Gen Musharraf had "reassured" Mr Vajpayee that "he will not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner".

In response to questions as to whether India was satisfied that Pakistan would dismantle terrorist training camps or that

not take into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

According to him, the agreement comprised three inter-linked issues—forward movement in confidence-building measures, initiation of the composite dialogue on all issues, including Kashmir, and the Pakistani resolve not to allow its territory to be used by terrorists.

Asked whether he could obtain a ceasefire in the Valley as well, the General clarified that while he could order his mili-

### War and movies don't mix: Kasuri



**Islamabad:** Pakistan's foreign minister K.M. Kasuri is miffed with Bollywood's affair with Indo-Pak wars. "Such films should not be made and people should not patronise them," he said at a press conference on Tuesday. "If India can make 10 such movies, Lahore and Karachi can produce three to four. If we go back to 1949 and put forth Pakistan's

case on Kashmir, it won't help. Let civil society play its role..such movies should not be made," Mr Kasuri said. PTI

the level of violence would indeed come down, Mr Sinha maintained that the wording of the joint statement provided all the answers.

In his briefing, Gen Musharraf took pains to assure the Pakistani people that he had not "sold out" Kashmiri interests. Maintaining that there was no "secret deal", he said he had been in touch with Kashmiri leaders and said that while the joint statement spoke about India and Pakistan, there could be no viable settlement if it did

tary to do so along the LoC, he could only act as a facilitator for any ceasefire in the Valley.

Gen Musharraf injected an element of gallows humour when he described his telephone conversation with Prime Minister Vajpayee on Tuesday after they had finalised the agreement. "I wished the best of health to Mr Vajpayee while the Indian PM wished me 'protection'," said the general with an embarrassed chuckle.

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# Add Spark to SAARC

## Economics First, Rest will Follow

By Mahendra P Lama

The 12th SAARC summit has generated some unusual interest. There are expectations that South Asia will try to come out of the long practised shallow regionalism. It's after 15 years that Islamabad is holding the summit where the much talked about Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was ratified by member countries in 1988. This convention has not come into force mainly because Pakistan and Bangladesh have not framed the required enabling national laws.

Though this summit may inject some life into this convention, there are strong views that in the post-convention period terrorism, in fact, flourished in the region. The ongoing anti-militancy operation in Bhutan is being conducted without any convention. The most critical agenda item is the framing of the instrument of negotiation leading to a treaty for a free trade regime in the region.

SAARC put the core issue of trade on its agenda only in 1995 when it operationalised the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA). In the last couple of years, intra-SAARC trade has increased significantly from \$1.59 billion in 1990 to over \$6.54 billion. As a percentage of South Asia's world trade, it has recorded an upward trend from 2.42 per cent in 1990 to 4.56 per cent in 2001. However, this jump is triggered by all three parallel and simultaneous processes of trade liberalisation under the World Trade Organisation (WTO), bilateral trade arrangement and SAPTA.

Despite extensive liberalisation, there are a large number of tariff and non-tariff barriers in force in member countries that block trade flows. Indian importers are finding it much cheaper to import goods like vegetable ghee, acrylic yarn and copper scraps via Nepal and Sri Lanka as their tariff barriers are much lower than in India. This tariff-hopping by exploiting the unscientifically managed rules of origin criteria has created visible distortions. All the three rounds of SAPTA operationalised so far have been too tedious and ineffective. The tariff cuts have not been deep enough to de-attract their imports from other countries.

The country bias in the product identification is distinct. Could tariff concessions alone raise the level of trade interaction and exchanges among South Asian countries? This is a fundamental question. There are three clear options. First, the conclusion of a clearly targeted free trade area regime where the interests of the four least developed countries in the region are protected. Second, a unilateral free trade gesture to be extended by India. The goodwill generated by this exercise will offset the negligible loss of customs revenues. And third, to straightaway adopt a customs union treaty.

In all these, the extension of most

favoured nation <sup>sumit</sup> treatment by Pakistan to India is inevitable. As in ASEAN, there should be a clear integration of trade and investment activities. This implies an in-built mechanism that allows free access to the products of these investor companies in any of the member countries' markets. The Poverty Commission Report of 1992 set formidable macro-economic targets for the eradication of poverty in South Asia by 2002 AD. The region will require an annual growth rate of 9.1 per cent, doubling of per capita income from \$300 to \$600, lowering of incremental capital-output ratio from 4:1 to 3:1 and increasing the marginal savings rate from the current level to 27 per cent or more. Every summit stuck to the unrealistic deadline for the eradication of poverty.

However, in the 2002 Kathmandu summit the leaders quietly appointed a new Poverty Commission. They failed even to implement the most basic recommendation of the last commission regarding the exchange of views, ideas and sharing of experiences of a range of successful micro-level interventions across South Asia's grassroots. Poverty has become more intensive in the post-reforms period. And despite its serious impact

on regional security issues, the concerns at the regional level have been lacklustre.

Further, not a single project under the non-controversial areas of cooperation known as Integrated Programme of Action has been implemented. Where is the regional effort to harness the tremendous potentials of hydro-electricity and gas? Hardly 14 per cent of total hydro potentials of

2.31 lakh megawatt has been harnessed. Bhutan's Chukha project which annually fetches it almost \$33 million is worth emulating. The Mahakali Treaty, gas from Bangladesh through Pakistan and power trading in the region need to be brought upfront at the regional forum.

Bilateralism cannot be a substitute for regionalism. Prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's vision of an economic union and common currency goal can never be achieved without transforming the entire approach and policies of member states towards SAARC. Unlike the existing practice of devoting a small section of the foreign affairs ministry to SAARC, this summit should work towards creating an exclusive SAARC affairs ministry. The SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu and other regional institutions should be given the full mandate and resources to operationalise the decisions taken. What SAARC requires is one or two regional projects to break the mind-sets of apprehensions and gain some institutional credibility. Therefore, the biggest challenge is to make the mainstream SAARC process a dynamic exercise with a multiplicity stakeholders and institutions.

(The author is professor, South Asian Economies, at JNU)



# আজ মুখোমুখি বসছেন অটল-মুশারফ

ভুটান জঙ্গি  
দমন প্রসঙ্গ  
তুলল সার্কে,  
খুশি ভারত

সুমন চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও  
জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● ইসলামাবাদ

৪ জানুয়ারি— ভুটানের জঙ্গলে আলফা এবং কে এল ও বিরোধী অভিযান আজ সার্কে'র মধ্যে উঠে এল। কেন ও কী ভাবে জঙ্গিদের জঙ্গল থেকে উৎখাত করা হয়েছে তার বিস্তারিত বর্ণনা দিয়ে ভুটানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী লিওনপো জিগমি খিনলে সন্ত্রাসবাদের বিরুদ্ধে কার্যকর ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার জন্য সকলকে আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন। অন্য দিকে ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ীও এ কাজ করার জন্য সার্কে'র মঞ্চ থেকেই ভুটানের রাজা ও তার সরকারকে ধন্যবাদ জানিয়েছেন। বাজপেয়ী বলেছেন, এ কাজ করে ভুটান যে শুধু নিজের নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিত করেছে তাই নয়, প্রতিবেশী ভারতের নিরাপত্তার কথাটিও মনে রেখেছে। বাজপেয়ীর মতে, এটি দুই প্রতিবেশীর সহযোগিতার মনোভাবের অনন্য নজির।

আলফা-বিরোধী অভিযানকে ভুটানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী সার্কে'র মধ্যে নিয়ে আসায় দৃশ্যতই সন্তুষ্ট ভারত। ভুটানের এই আচরণ বাংলাদেশের উপরও পরোক্ষ প্রভাব ফেলবে বলে অভিমত নয়াদিল্লির। কাল এখানে বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার সঙ্গে বাজপেয়ীর যে বৈঠক হবে তাতে সে দেশে ঘাটি গাড়া জঙ্গিদের প্রসঙ্গ উঠবেই। বাজপেয়ী যে ভুটানের দৃষ্টান্ত অনুসরণ করার জন্য খালেদাকে আর্জি জানাবেন তাতেও কোনও সন্দেহ নেই।

পাকিস্তানের মাটিতে ভুটানের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এই আচরণ অন্য কারণেও তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ। কাশ্মীরি জঙ্গিদের মদত দেওয়ার বিষয়টাই ভারত-পাক সম্পর্কের সবচেয়ে বড় কাঁটা। এই জঙ্গিদের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার জন্য দীর্ঘদিন ধরেই দিল্লি ইসলামাবাদের উপর চাপ সৃষ্টি করে চলেছে। ভুটানের দৃষ্টান্ত পাকিস্তানকেও কিছুটা অস্থিত করে ফেলেছে।

তাদের জঙ্গলে আলফা এবং কে এল ও বিরোধী অভিযানকে ভুটানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী তাঁর ভাষণে এতটা গুরুত্ব এর পর সাতের পাতায়

## জুনের পরে সচিব স্তরে কাশ্মীর নিয়ে ফের কথা

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● ইসলামাবাদ

৪ জানুয়ারি: পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফের সঙ্গে আগামী কাল প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী মুখোমুখি একান্ত আলোচনায় বসছেন। সমস্ত জল্পনা-কল্পনার অবসান ঘটিয়ে বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহা আজ এক সাংবাদিক বৈঠকেই এ কথা ঘোষণা করে দিলেন। তার আগে সার্কে'র সম্মেলনের উদ্বোধনী অনুষ্ঠানের অব্যবহিত পরেই পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী মির জাফরুল্লা খান জামালির সঙ্গে বাজপেয়ী বৈঠকে বসেন। কাশ্মীর নিয়ে এখনই আলোচনা না-হলেও মে-জুনের পরে বিদেশসচিব পর্যায়ে ফের কথা শুরু হবে বলে ঠিক হয়েছে।

রাতে পাক প্রেসিডেন্টের নৈশভোজেও বাজপেয়ী অন্যান্য রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানের সঙ্গে সামিল হয়েছেন পূর্বঘোষিত কর্মসূচি অনুসারে। যেমন একই ভাবে কাল জামালির বাড়িতে 'রিট্রিট' অনুষ্ঠানেও বাজপেয়ী পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে ফের কথাবার্তা বলবেন।

নৈশভোজের আসরে মুশারফ বলেন, সার্কে'র সদস্য দেশগুলির মধ্যে দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয় নিয়েও আলোচনা করার জন্য সার্কে'র সদস্যদের সংশোধন করা দরকার। জম্মু ও কাশ্মীর প্রসঙ্গের কথা না-তুলেও পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট বলেন, "দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয়ের আলোচনা করার জন্য সার্কে'র সদস্যদের পরিধি আরও বাড়ানো দরকার।" তাঁর

মতে, সাধারণ মানুষের স্বার্থেই সমস্ত অবিশ্বাস, তিক্ততা ও টানা পোড়েন ভুলে দ্বিপাক্ষিক প্রশ্নে আলোচনা হওয়া উচিত।

নৈশভোজের জন্য ব্যাকোয়েট হলে ঢোকান আগে অন্য শীর্ষ নেতাদের উপস্থিতিতেই প্রধানমন্ত্রী বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে করমর্দন করেন মুশারফ। এর পরে অতিথিদের অভ্যর্থনা জানাতে দশ মিনিটের বক্তৃতায় পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট বলেন, "শান্তিপূর্ণ উপায়ে যাবতীয় বিতর্ক-বিবাদের মীমাংসা

না-হলে দক্ষিণ এশিয়া কখনওই পূর্ণ শান্তি অর্জন করতে পারবে না।" শান্তি প্রতিষ্ঠা না-হলে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার উন্নয়নও যে সম্ভব নয়, সে কথা স্মরণ করিয়ে দিয়ে পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট যোগ করেন, অর্থনৈতিক ও বাণিজ্যিক ক্ষেত্রে সহযোগিতা বাড়ানোর প্রক্রিয়ায় সূচনা হয়ে গিয়েছে।

অন্য দিকে, দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কের বরফ গলার কথা স্বীকার করে নিলেও বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহা বলেছেন, ভারত-পাক

দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকগুলি সার্কে'র সম্মেলনের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে সৌজন্য সাক্ষাৎকার। কিন্তু কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আলোচনার উদ্দেশ্যে কোনও দ্বিপাক্ষিক আনুষ্ঠানিক বৈঠক নয়। বৈঠকের কূটনৈতিক পরিভাষা নিয়ে ভারত-পাক বিতর্ক যাই হোক, এটা স্পষ্ট যে, কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আনুষ্ঠানিক আলোচনা শুরু করার প্রক্রিয়া আজ থেকেই শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ থেকে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে সচিব পর্যায়ে ফের দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা শুরু করার প্রস্তাব পেশ করা হয়েছে। ভারত প্রস্তাবে সম্মতিও জানিয়েছে। তবে কবে এই বৈঠক হবে, তা ঠিক হবে মুশারফ-বাজপেয়ী বৈঠকের পরেই।

বিদেশমন্ত্রী আজ বলেন, দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কের অগ্রগতি হচ্ছে। এই অগ্রগতি কী ভাবে অব্যাহত রাখা যায়, তারই আলোচনা হবে। সার্কে'র সম্মেলনে এসে এ নিয়ে বিস্তারিত আলোচনা করার সুযোগ নেই। তবে পরিশেষে যে যথেষ্ট ইতিবাচক, সে ব্যাপারে যশবন্ত সিনহাও আর সঙ্কীর্ণ নন।

সকালে সার্কে'র সম্মেলনের উদ্বোধনী বক্তৃতায় নজিরবিহীন ভাবে পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী কাশ্মীর প্রসঙ্গ উত্থাপন করেননি। কাঠমান্ডুর সার্কে'র সম্মেলনে গিয়ে নাটকীয় ভাবে মুশারফ কাশ্মীরে\*মানবাধিকার লঙ্ঘনের অভিযোগ তুলেছিলেন। সে বার বাজপেয়ী এ ধরনের আকস্মিক আক্রমণের জন্য এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়



রবিবার একান্ত বৈঠকের আগে হাতে হাত দুই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর। — রয়টার্স

## একই অঙ্গে এত রূপ, অটলের প্রশংসায় জামালি

সুমন চট্টোপাধ্যায় ● ইসলামাবাদ

৪ জানুয়ারি: কবি। লেখক। দক্ষ রাজনীতিক। দূরদ্রষ্টা। এক অঙ্গে এত রূপ থাকতে পারে কার? অবশ্যই অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ীর। আবার কার?

এইটুকুতে কোনও চমক নেই। যেখানেই যান, নিজের সম্পর্কে তখন চোখা চোখা বিশেষণ শুনতেই হয় প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে। কিন্তু খোদ পাকিস্তানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী যদি তাঁর সম্পর্কে এমনতর বিশেষণ বর্ণন করেন? চমকে যাওয়ার মতো ঘটনা অবশ্যই।

অথচ আজ জিমা কনভেনশন সেন্টারের সার্কে'র সম্মেলন মঞ্চে মির জাফরুল্লা খান জামালি ঠিক এই অপ্রত্যাশিত এবং অভূতপূর্ব ঘটনাটাই ঘটালেন। নেপাল, ভুটান, বাংলাদেশ, মলদ্বীপ ও শ্রীলঙ্কার প্রধানমন্ত্রী কিংবা প্রেসিডেন্টদেরও প্রশংসা করলেন তিনি। তবে বাছা বাছা বিশেষণগুলি প্রয়োগ

করলেন বেছে বেছে একমাত্র ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ক্ষেত্রে। পোয়েটা। রাইটার। এবল পলিটিশিয়ান। ভিশনারি।

সংযমের লক্ষণরেখা অতিক্রম করে কাশ্মীর আর সীমান্তপারের সন্ত্রাস নিয়ে কর্কশ কাজিয়ায় নামাটাই যেখানে যে কোনও আন্তর্জাতিক মঞ্চে ভারত-পাকিস্তানের দ্বন্দ্বের হয়ে উঠেছে, সেখানে দ্বাদশ সার্কে'র শীর্ষ সম্মেলনের মঞ্চে এই ঘটনা যে উজ্জ্বল ব্যতিক্রম হিসেবে চিহ্নিত হবে তাতে কোনও সন্দেহ নেই। দু'বছর আগে কাঠমান্ডুতে নিজের আসন থেকে উঠে এসে পারভেজ মুশারফ ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে করমর্দন করেছিলেন ঠিকই, কিন্তু তাতে নাটকীয়তা যতটা ছিল, উষ্ণতার ছিটেফোঁটাও ছিল না। তারও আগে বাস নিয়ে বাজপেয়ী যখন লাহোরে এসেছিলেন তৎকালীন পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী নওয়াজ শরিফ তখন ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী সম্পর্কে অমন আবেগমগ্নিত উচ্চস্বা প্রকাশ

করেননি। ভারত-পাক ভাই ভাইয়ের নতুন আবহে সে দিক থেকে দেখতে গেলে এই ইসলামাবাদে আজ নতুন নজির গড়লেন মির জাফরুল্লা খান জামালি।

কবি-লেখক বাজপেয়ী অবশ্য আজ তাঁর ভাষণে কবি-প্রতিভা প্রদর্শনের কোনও চেষ্টাই করেননি। চম্রিকা কুমারতুঙ্গা, এমনকী ভুটানের প্রধানমন্ত্রীও তাঁদের লিখিত ভাষণ পাঠ করেছেন বাজপেয়ীর চেয়ে অনেক ভাল ভাবে। তবুও কনভেনশন সেন্টারের গ্যালারি থেকে দু'দু'বার স্বতঃস্ফূর্ত হাততালি উঠল একমাত্র বাজপেয়ীর সময়েই।

যেমন বাজপেয়ী যখন বললেন, "গত কাল ইসলামাবাদে পৌঁছে বিমানবন্দরের কাছে লাগানো একটা হোর্ডিং আমার চোখে পড়েছে। তাতে লেখা আছে 'টুগোদার উই স্ট্যান্ড এ ব্লেটর চাঙ্গ ইন দ্য ওয়ার্ল্ড।' এটা নিছক শ্লোগান নয়, একটা গুঢ় সত্য। আর এই সত্যের মর্ম দক্ষিণ এশিয়া এখনও

সম্যক ভাবে উপলব্ধি করে উঠতেই পারেনি।" চোখ কান খোলা ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এমন উপস্থিত বুদ্ধিদীপ্ত মরমী মন্তব্য নাড়া দিল উপস্থিত সকলকেই।

দ্বিতীয় বার হাততালি শোনা গেল যখন বাজপেয়ী আন্দামান প্রসঙ্গ উত্থাপন করলেন। "কিছু দিন আগে আমি আন্দামান গিয়েছিলাম। পরাধীনতার সময় এখানেই রাজনৈতিক বন্দিদের নির্বাসনে পাঠানো হত। সেখানে সেলুলার জেলের গায়ের ফলকে আমি এমন অনেক সাহসী শহিদ ও স্বাধীনতা যোদ্ধার নাম দেখেছি, যারা দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার তিনটি দেশ থেকেই এসেছেন।" অর্থাৎ ভারত, পাকিস্তান, বাংলাদেশ।

এই তিন প্রতিবেশী দেশের পূর্বপুরুষেরা যে ধর্মীয় ভাষাগত এবং আঞ্চলিক বিভেদ ভুলে গিয়ে কাঁধে কাঁধ মিলিয়ে ইংরেজের বিরুদ্ধে লড়েছিলেন এবং সেই কারণেই ভারত, পাকিস্তান, এর পর সাতের পাতায়

# ভুটান জঙ্গি দমন প্রসঙ্গ তোলায় খুশি ভারত

প্রথম পাতার পর  
দেবেন তা কিছুটা অপ্রত্যাশিত ছিল। শুধু তা-ই নয়, এই দুঃসময়ে তুলে ধরে তিনি সার্কেরের অন্তর্ভুক্ত অন্য দেশগুলিকেও একই রকম ভাবে সন্ত্রাসবাদের বিরুদ্ধে কার্যকর ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার জন্য প্রকাশ্যে আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন। নয়াদিল্লির সন্ত্রাসের সেটাও একটা বড় কারণ।  
ভুটানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী আজ তাঁর ভাষণে বলেন, “পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ও অসম থেকে আসা তিনটি সশস্ত্র জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী আমার নিজের দেশে ঢুকে বেশ কিছু দিন ধরে সমস্যায় ফেলেছিল। ভুটানের মধ্যে ঢুকে তারা ঘন জঙ্গলে তিরিশটি শিবির গঠন করে ফেলেছিল। এই শিবিরগুলি জঙ্গিদের প্রশিক্ষণ দেওয়ার কাজে ব্যবহৃত হচ্ছিল। এ ছাড়া অস্ত্র ও বিস্ফোরক সঞ্চয় করা ও ভারতে সন্ত্রাসবাদী কার্যকলাপ চালানোর পরিকল্পনাও নেওয়া হয়েছিল এখান থেকে। তাদের উপস্থিতি আমাদের বাণিজ্যকে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত করছিল। এ জন্য সাতটি বড় শিল্প কারখানা ও বহু শিক্ষাক্ষেত্র বন্ধ হয়ে যায়। অসম, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ও ভুটানের নিরীহ সাধারণ মানুষ এদের হুমকি, অত্যাচার, ও টাকা আদায়ের জ্বলমের শিকার হচ্ছিল। আমাদের দেশে বা অসমের ভিতর দিয়ে চলাফেরা করতে গিয়ে বহু নিরীহ ভুটানিও জীবন হারিয়েছেন। শুধু তা-ই নয়, এর জন্য আমাদের সঙ্গে ভারতের মধুর সম্পর্কে ভুল বোঝাবুঝির সৃষ্টি হচ্ছিল।”

তিনি বলেন, ছ'বছর ধরে আমরা জঙ্গিদের বুঝিয়ে দেশ ছাড়াতে চেয়েছিলাম। কেননা আমরা কখনওই সেনা অভিযানের পক্ষে নই। কিন্তু কিছুতেই যখন তারা আমাদের কথা শুনল না, তখন জাতীয় পরিষদের মাধ্যমে তাদের চূড়ান্ত সতর্কবার্তা দেওয়া হয়। এবং তার পরই তিনটি জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীর বিরুদ্ধে সামরিক অভিযান চালানো হয়। ২০০৩ সালের ১৫ ডিসেম্বর ভুটানে সেনা অভিযান শুরু হয়। অধিকাংশ জঙ্গি নেতা গ্রেফতার হয়। অনেকে আত্মসমর্পণ করে। আবার অনেকে দেশ ছেড়ে পালানোর চেষ্টা করে। তিনি আরও বলেন, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার সন্ত্রাস দমনে এই ঘটনা ইতিবাচক প্রভাব ফেলবে। এর জন্য ভারত ও ভুটানের যত মানুষের মৃত্যু হয়েছে, তাঁদের জন্য তিনি দুঃখ প্রকাশ করেন। তবে সন্ত্রাসের মুহূর্তে ভারতের কাছ থেকে পূর্ণ সহযোগিতা পেয়ে তারা খুশি। তিনি বলেন, এই ঘটনা ভুটান-ভারতের আর্থ-সামাজিক সম্পর্কের ক্ষেত্রে উন্নত ও নিরাপদ পরিবেশ গড়ে তুলতে সাহায্য করবে।



## SAFTA Getting real on Safta The Deal Deserves A Cautious Welcome

IN the midst of the euphoria over the South Asian Free Trade Agreement, it is important to put what has been achieved in perspective. It is not that the agreement itself is insignificant. Far from it. Barriers within the region have had huge economic costs. One of the world's largest consumers of tea, Pakistan, has the world's largest producer, India, as its neighbour. But the political and economic barriers in the region ensure that Pakistan imports most of its tea from faraway Kenya. And in the case of products for which there are no easy substitutes available, like Hindi films, the products have to take a circuitous and often illegal route. And while these barriers may be most formidable between India and Pakistan, they exist between all members of SAARC. In a world where trade barriers are being brought down, South Asia remains an area that is dragging its feet. Safta will then also be consistent with the larger global trend of regional trade agreements bringing down tariff barriers.

Standing at the threshold of such a significant step forward, there is the danger of raising expectations to a level that is patently unrealistic. We are not yet sure just how wide-ranging the reduction of barriers will finally be. The countries are yet to work out the list of commodities that will not be subject to these tariff reduction commitments. Even if these commitments are indeed wide-ranging, it is unlikely that trade within the region will be comparable to, let alone greater than, trade with countries outside the region. On a global scale, South Asia remains a relatively small market. In a large number of commodities, like textiles or software, the targeted markets will remain those in the developed world. And the competition among Safta members in those markets could get intense as the Least Developed Country members of Safta have been promised greater access than India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Safta is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but there is little to be gained by pretending it is a giant leap forward.

# The Statesman

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BRAVING THE STORM TO PEN HIS THIRD BOOK...

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## TO VICTORY, HISTORY

cricketing world is tottering. India but it was drizzling in Sydney up the post-Tea session on Tuesday. batting line-up? Possible, & here's how:



**Damien Martyn**  
Bowl wide outside the off-stump and Team India's asking for trouble; doesn't like in-swingers though, & gets out trying to cut the spinners.

**Adam Gilchrist**  
His strength is attack but what Australia need, at least till Lunch, is solid defence. If the Kangaroos are going for a win, however, he's the man the spinners will have to ensure gets snared in the deep of a lofted shot.

**Simon Katich**  
Maiden century in the first innings, the southpaw will be confident. A repeat will make him the new Aussie hero but he's in a bit of a rut, perhaps.



Sourav has his work cut out, but if he wins India this one his name in history is assured. Anil Kumble is undoubtedly the trump card, top-spin, googly, variation in pace and nagging length in tow. But his partner in spin, Murali Karthik has to ensure the rough is exploited in tandem. Ajit Agarkar has to bowl relentlessly in the corridor of uncertainty and Irfan Pathan of the reverse swinging yorkers needs to produce a couple more on target. Then, there's Sachin Tendulkar.

Rather than being sired by his royal father, the historian alleges Edward was the product of a liaison with an archer. If true, it is the descendants of Edward's brother, George Duke of Clarence, who are the rightful claimants. Hastings is the direct descendant of that Duke. "Well, actually, I don't think it's really sunk in," Hastings told television in Australia a day after the doc-

umentary. "I don't want it... I'm not going to write a letter to the Queen and say 'You've got three weeks to get out and you owe me 500 years' rent'."

Hastings, the president of the local historical society, said his heritage was revealed last June when representatives from a British film company landed at his doorstep. He was unfazed by the news as he had known for many years that he is the 14th

FIRST PM-PERVEZ INTERACTION SINCE AGRA

## Peace meets progress

Nilova Roy Chaudhury in Islamabad

Jan. 5. — A significant narrowing of differences appears to have occurred when the Prime Minister met the Pakistan President this morning, resulting not just in "progress" — that was how the Indian side described it — but even the likelihood of a breakthrough in bilateral relations, leading to the start of a composite dialogue process.

The talks lasted "about an hour" (considerably more than a normal "courtesy call"), but there was no one-on-one interaction between the two leaders. The talks were held in the presence of respective delegations — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee accompanied by foreign minister Mr Yashwant Sinha, national security adviser Mr Brajesh Mishra, foreign secretary Mr Shashank, and India's high commissioner to Islamabad Mr Shiv Shanker Menon; and General Pervez Musharraf with his chief of staff and security adviser Lt-Gen. Hamid Javed, foreign minister Mr Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, foreign secretary Mr Riaz Khokhar, and Pakistan's high commissioner in India Mr Aziz Ahmed Khan.

Sources said the talks would initiate a comprehensive dialogue, including "detailed discussions" on Kashmir. The proposed Srinagar-Muzaffarabad (J&K and PoK) bus service might be of "immense significance" and indicative of a movement towards a "soft border" option between parts of the divided state.

There is almost a complete clampdown on the substance of the hour-long "courtesy call" because, as Mr Sinha said while briefing the media later, "it is not in the interest of the cause to share the details."

"The cause," Mr Sinha explained, was "furtherance of the process started by Mr Vajpayee on 18 April when he extended a hand of friendship to Pakistan in a speech at Srinagar." "We are interested in the success of a certain process." Asked to elaborate on the meeting, he said, "both

malisation of relations and expressed the hope that the process will continue." However, the issue of extending an invitation to either Gen Pervez Musharraf or Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee "did not figure," Mr Sinha said.

The Pakistan leadership, till today, has kept its promise of not raising Kashmir at the Saarc summit, but its information minister did harp on it today, telling a TV channel that "the way leading to normalcy is passing through Kashmir." Sheikh Ahmed Rashid maintained Kashmir and terrorism figured in the talks today, even as he told PTV that there is a "changed atmosphere (now)". India had raised the issue of terrorism, Pakistan Kashmir, he said and hinted at a joint declaration. But Mr Sinha said: "I have said what I had to say" and the rest was "mere speculation" as the issues involved were "very sensitive". Mr Rashid was incidentally dropped as minister-in-waiting on Mr Vajpayee's arrival, for issuing strong statements against India recently.

Discordant notes were also sounded by the extremist Hizbul Mujahideen chief, Syed Salahuddin, who denounced Saarc as a "failed organisation" because it failed to deal with Kashmir's "reality" in a statement issued from Muzaffarabad in Pak-occupied-Kashmir.

But the refrain at the end of the day was best summed up by Mr Vajpayee's statement, made before today's meeting, at the foundation stone laying ceremony for an extension of the Indian high commission chancery complex. "Today the weather has slightly changed" he said, though in the context of today's rain. The chill in the air belied the progress made in ties. Minutes later, Mr Vajpayee elaborated: "Dialogue should continue and we should attempt to understand each others' difficulties as we work together to find a way out (samvad lagataar chalta rahe aur ek doosre ki mushkil ko samajh kar hum mil kar kam karne ka rasta nikate)."

Photographs, more reports on page 2

THE STATESMAN



**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5

**I**N A RARE interview given a few hours before his departure for Islamabad, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee told Nasim Zehra of *The News*: "I think we can have a dialogue with President Musharraf and the dialogue will take us to some results."

A confident Vajpayee who last met Musharraf at Agra in extended one-on-one meetings said: "I am sure about Pakistan and India arriving at some results."

There remains no doubt that a meeting between the Prime Minister and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf will take place when Vajpayee will make a courtesy call on his host. There is also a strong likelihood that the two leaders will discuss modalities for restarting bilateral talks on substantive issues. While talking of hurdles to a Kashmir solution and not denying President Musharraf's flexibility on Kashmir, Vajpayee said: "I feel we have not had solid dialogue on Kashmir. Pakistan has been repeating its position, we have been repeating our position."

While stating India's traditional position on Kashmir that it is an "integral part of India", Vajpayee demonstrated flexibility, adding: "We are willing to openly talk on Kashmir." Also in an interview to *India Today*, Vajpayee conceded that he did not think that Pakistan will be willing to accept the LoC as an international border.

Significantly, it was the first time since almost a decade that Vajpayee himself did not raise the issue of cross-border terrorism while discussing Kashmir. Essentially picking up from

## VAJPAYEE EXPECTS RESULTS FROM DISCUSSIONS WITH PRESIDENT MUSHARRAF

forts towards peace will be successful.

In Pakistan people think you have a passion for friendship with Pakistan we know you have a vision also, so let's move to Kashmir. You also have flexibility on Kashmir. In 2001, you said we will go off the beaten track on Kashmir, one that will strengthen the peace structure of South Asia so then it seems that there is flexibility on both sides; both are willing to move from traditional positions, you said we will find a solution within the context of humanity. So if there is flexibility on both sides, why is it that we do not move forward on Kashmir?

We need time to move forward. There has to be consistent dialogue. We have never avoided talking on Jammu and Kashmir. My claim is that Jammu and Kashmir is a part of India, that is true. But we are willing to talk openly on Kashmir. I feel we have not had solid dialogue on Kashmir. Pakistan has been repeating its position, we have been repeating our position. The world has been saying move on together and resolve the issue. This will take time.

When you went to China, you brought about sweeping changes in India's 44-year-old policy on Tibet. We see you as a man of great vision and stature so we expect that you will bring about such sweeping change in Pakistan and Indian relations as well.

We also want change. How far that will be fulfilled we will see.

People in Pakistan feel that in the 2004 election campaign a part of BJP will go for Pakistan bashing because you won in Gujarat, where 2500 Muslims were also killed, on an anti-Pakistan and anti-Musharraf campaign. What do you as a leader who will take BJP into the 2004 elections say in this regard to Pakistanis?

The Muslim massacre which took place in Gujarat was very tragic. Before that there was burning of Hindus that



Lahore and Agra, Vajpayee acknowledged that the problem existed on its own merit without blaming Pakistan for creating it. He called for "continued dialogue" on Kashmir and dia-logue. Cautioning against seeking instant solutions he said getting to results would "take time".

As the BJP leader whose party won state elections in Gujarat by campaigning on an anti-Pakistan and anti-Musharraf ticket, he said that the issue in the 2004 election campaign will be who befriends Pakistan, not who fights it. He said in state elections subsequent to Gujarat, Pakistan was not an issue in the BJP campaign.

**President Musharraf describes you as a man of peace. How would you describe him?**

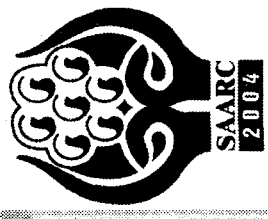
Vajpayee: I came to Pakistan in 1979 as foreign minister. I then decided to open the Indian consulate in Karachi. Since then I am trying that Pak-India relations improve. In between a lot of water has flowed under yet the question of friendship between the two countries remains. It is in the interest of both countries and the region that there is friendship between both countries. And also for the world good, we should live together. Musharraf *sahib*, if I describe me as a man of peace, he is not wrong. I have been working for peace and I will also in the future.

**Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said about Musharraf that he had not seen a Pakistani leader more flexible than Musharraf on Kashmir. In Pakistan too people say Musharraf is flexible, some say too flexible. In President Musharraf's position taken in Pakistan, Almaty, New York and Agra, he talks of a solution acceptable to Kashmiris, India and to Pakistan and that UN resolutions are important but solution can be seen from different angles. His flexibility his positions, I would again ask how do you see him?**

I think that with Musharraf *sahib*

we can have a dialogue. That dialogue will take us to some results, that too I am sure about. First meeting I had with him in Lahore, then it was a different system. Since then we have consistently talked to each other. He is Pakistan's head and would participate in our peace efforts. We hope our ef-

# No strategy for friendship: PM



took place. That was wrong but that was not part of the election campaign. In the subsequent assembly elections, no one spoke of relations with Pakistan. No one made provocative statements. We will not make that into an election issue. The issue will be who wants friendship with Pakistan. Yes it is true friendship should be of a kind that has solid foundation and also in terms of principles it should be correct.

We hope that when dialogue begins then different issues will come up then issues will be clarified and gradually I hope that the shadows will go away and the reality of relationship will emerge.

**Indian analysts say that to end the emerging communalism in India, friendship with Pakistan is important; a communalism that you have tried to stop. Are these people right that an anti-communalism strategy requires friendship with Pakistan?**

Pakistan is a neighbour. For friendship with it, we need no strategy. We have to live together and whether we stay together fighting or as friends. So I think people are gradually understanding this fact.

**Some strategists say that US now wants to be a junior partner of the US the way Israel is in the region. Will such a relationship promote India's interests and the interests of South Asia?**

With the US we are friends, we have partnership too but it is on the principles of equality. What we do not like about the US we oppose that openly, we tell them we do like this about you. I don't think there is any question of being a junior partner at all. I think no one says this. About Pakistan this was said earlier.

## Russia hails India-Pakistan meet

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JAN. 5. Russia has welcomed the meeting of the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, with the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, in Islamabad today, hoping that it would pave the way to the renewal of broad talks between the two countries.

Moscow had a "positive view" of the meet, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The meeting "will play a significant role in strengthening the foundations of stability and security, good-neighbourhood and cooperation in South Asia."

Russia expressed the hope that the talks would mark a "starting point for the resumption of a full-fledged dialogue between India and Pakistan on the basis of the Shimla Accord, and the Lahore Declaration with the aim of resolving the problems facing the two nations."

## Pakistan Islamists accuse leaders of sidelining Kashmir issue

KARACHI, JAN. 5. Islamists in Pakistan today rejected the talks between their Government and India, accusing both of sidelining the Kashmir issue.

"Both Indian and Pakistani leaders have tried to sideline the main issue of Kashmir, but the people of Pakistan will not allow this," Qazi Hussain Ahmed, head of Pakistan's largest Islamic party, the Jamaat-i-Islami, said. "We are not against dialogue with India, but if they called Kashmir an integral part of India, there is no room left for talks." — AFP

## 'A step in the right direction'

# SAARC nations sign social charter

By B. Muralidhar Reddy  
ISLAMABAD, JAN. 5. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries have signed a social charter to reaffirm its principal goal of promoting the welfare of people of South Asia in all fields.

The charter aims to improve the quality of life, accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development and to provide all individuals an opportunity to live with dignity and realise their full potential.

The member-countries agreed to establish a people-centred framework for the social development and to build a culture of operation and partnership, and to respond to the immediate needs of those affected by human tragedy. The provisions of the charter shall complement the national processes of policy-making, their implementation and evaluation, while providing broad parameters and principles for addressing common social issues and developing and implementing result-oriented programmes in specific social areas.

Its implementation shall be facilitated by a national coordination committee or any appropriate mechanism as may be decided in each country.

The charter particularly deals with poverty alleviation, health issues, education, human resource development and youth mobilisation, promotion of the status of women, promotion

of the rights and well being of the child, population stabilisation and drug addiction, rehabilitation and re-integration.

The member-states can amend the charter through an agreement between all the parties.

The Pakistan Prime Minister, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, signed the charter on behalf of his country while the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, the Bhutanese Prime Minister,

Lyonpo Jigme Yaeser Thinley, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Maldives President, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, The Nepalese Prime Minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa, and the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, signed on behalf of their countries on Sunday.

The charter urges all the member-states to attach importance to social development and economic growth. It stresses that legislative, executive and administrative frameworks should be provided for the progressive realisation of social and economic goals.

It asks the SAARC states to maintain a social policy and strategy to ensure an overall and a balanced social uplift of their people.

The states agree that the obligations under the social charter shall be respected, protected, and fulfilled without any reservations and that the enforcement thereof at the national level shall be continuously reviewed through an agreed regional arrangement and mechanism.

## U.S., U.K. welcome India-Pakistan talks

WASHINGTON, JAN. 5. The United States today said it was pleased that the leaders of India and Pakistan had met for the first time since their countries teetered on the brink of war in 2002.

In the first reaction to the talks between the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, and the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit in Islamabad, Washington expressed the hope that there would be more engagement between the South Asian foes.

"The United States is pleased that Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf met today," a State Department official said. "We are also pleased that other senior level meetings have taken place between offi-

cial of both Governments. We warmly welcome these meetings; we hope they will lead to further engagement and dialogue."

"Both countries have taken a number of positive, confidence-building steps over the past several months and we encourage them to continue this process," the official said.

In London, a spokeswoman of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office termed the meeting as a "positive sign."

"We warmly welcome the meeting between Mr. Vajpayee and Gen. Musharraf and also welcome the continued improvement in the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan," she said. "We see it as a positive sign and hope it will lead to increased momentum in

the process of normalisation of relations between the two countries."

In Beijing, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Kong Quan, said China welcomed and appreciated the efforts made by the leadership of the two countries to improve bilateral ties.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, welcomed the meeting and expressed the hope that it would give a "new impetus to serious and sustained dialogue" between the two countries. In a statement, he said he considered "another important" step forward in continuing bilateral efforts to improve relations and resolve outstanding issues between the two countries. — AFP, PTI

# Two alone, three together

Vajpayee's right: our distant neighbourhood

95.8 needs a joint celebration 61

**I**N the annals of history lie not just the roots of mistrust, but also routes to reconciliation. In recommending that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh jointly celebrate the 150th anniversary of the First War of Independence, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee proposed a new mode of partnership. On his last visit to Pakistan — to Lahore in 1999 — he had reminded his hosts and his countrypeople back home that there's no changing geography. At the SAARC summit in Islamabad this weekend, he seemed to be emphasising the need to heed history. "History can remind us, guide us, teach us or warn us," he said. "It should not shackle us. We have to look forward now, with a collective approach in mind." To bridge cleavages in a distant neighbourhood, the prime minister pointed his SAARC counterparts to shared history. He referred to a complex and troubled colonial legacy; but he also sought to demonstrate that there exists a common legacy of joint struggles and aspirations.

At first blush, the atmospherics in Islamabad are heartening. Vajpayee eschewed any direct mention of cross-border terrorism that could have set off a familiar domino effect of Pakistani counter-accusations. Instead, he stressed the need to bury petty rivalries and cash in on the

peace dividend. In tandem, Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali refrained from reciting that old Kashmir-is-the-core-issue chant. He too pointed to the larger achievements of the SAARC summit by reckoning that greater economic integration is crucial to the creation of a political climate of peace and stability. Beyond the duly noted gestures and body language, Jamali introduced a warmth not seen in bilateral exchanges since Vajpayee's Lahore bus ride. He referred to his Indian counterpart as a visionary, a poet and an able politician.

It is taking all those attributes for Vajpayee to extend this season of hope. Therein lies cause for cheer. In step with the opportunities offered by the timing of the SAARC meet and the comfort zone of wider regional pacts, an Indo-Pak matrix for cooperation and dialogue is being assembled. Cooperation and dialogue have acquired muscle as much with consensus on a South Asian Free Trade Area and a Social Charter as with the promise of more cordial, less hyped meetings between Indian and Pakistani leaders and officials. It would not take a game theorist to show that peace is not a zero-sum game. Certainly, Vajpayee hinted as much when he advised the region to be guided by history.

## India Takes On Host Role, Pushes Safta, Terror Protocol Issues

# Pak presses for Atal-Musharraf meet

Diwakar

ISLAMABAD 2 JANUARY

TWO days before the South Asian government heads begin their deliberations, Pakistan has cranked up its attempts to lure Atal Bihari Vajpayee to commit himself to an early summit meeting with General Pervez Musharraf.

The anxiety of the Pakistani establishment to swing a "yes" from Mr Vajpayee for his second summit is coming through clearly and has already shoved the Saarc summit — the official excuse for the presence of the government chiefs — to the backburner. It was pretty much evident from the official

spokesperson, Masood Khan's indulgence of the local press corps who make no secret of their sullenness with India for not yet agreeing to a Vajpayee-Musharraf one-on-one. Pakistan foreign minister, Khurshid Ahmad Kasuri, has publicly confessed that the rule of behaviour forbidding a host from requesting a visitor for an appointment was the only reason why General Musharraf has not been able to make his keenness official.

Indian sources, while persisting with their "no meeting has been fixed" diplomatese, acknowledge Islamabad's ever-growing keenness to use a possible Vajpayee-Musharraf encounter on the sidelines of the

summit for getting India agree to a summit meeting. Delhi does not seem to be in a mood to acquiesce to the request straight away, even though the arrival of Mr Brajesh Mishra, Mr Vajpayee's principal secretary, two days ahead of the schedule triggered a flurry of speculation and whetted the optimism of the galleries which have been cheerleading the summit lobbyists.

While some interaction which goes beyond mere exchange of pleasantries looks plausible, New Delhi is unlikely to venture further immediately. It is not sure of Mr Musharraf's motives, suspecting that local enthusiasm for the summit may have to do more with the General's calculations to

portray himself as the hero who could get India back to the table without conceding even a bit on what New Delhi called its bottom-line — a complete end to cross-border terrorism. The apprehension stems from the way Mr Musharraf's spin doctors milked India's decision to call off the deployment of troops along the border. The ceasefire along the LoC has not dulled the fear because as, a top Indian functionary pointed out, the jihadi infrastructure remains very much in place and the tap can be turned on any time.

Scalded at Kargil, New Delhi, also, does not subscribe to the "Musharraf is last buffer against a jihadi take-over of Pakistan" no-

tion while the looming Lok Sabha elections are another deterrent against another Lahore-type experiment.

These contrasting priorities have resulted in a ding-dong battle between the two sides. The Indian side has tried to keep the attention on Saarc and its agenda — a framework agreement to usher in the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (Safta) by 2006, an agreement on Additional Protocol on Terrorism, a social charter, a proposal for a freedom from hunger campaign and a Saarc Food Bank, a regional anti-poverty drive as well as discussion building up on Mr Vajpayee's vision of a common currency and a regional economic union.

## Saarc nations agree to usher in Safta by 2006

Diwakar

ISLAMABAD 2 JANUARY

TALKS on Safta (South Asia Free Trade Agreement) are set to go off the agenda for future Saarc summits with the member countries agreeing to usher in a free trade agreement by January 1, 2006. The agreement was facilitated by a climb-down by Bangladesh which had till Thursday, brandishing its LDC status, held up by an understanding, as well as by a concession on Pakistan on how to get the LDCs in the region to lift their respective import barriers.

Bangladesh had kept up a rigid posture on matters such as the sensitive list — a catalogue of goods for which a high import duty regime is allowed for a

longer timeframe, claiming to speak for other LDCs in the region such as Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan. Though the developing countries were ready to be flexible, they did not favour a total disregard of WTO norms, as demanded by Bangladesh.

The softening up was brought about as much by the unity of developing countries — India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — as by a surprise concession by Pakistan. Pakistan, which cited the size of its economy to refuse to go as far as India to meet the LDCs' demands for concessions, agreed on Friday to the idea of positive discrimination for LDCs and a deferred schedule for the implementation of Safta.

The understanding, promptly seized upon by India to keep the

spotlight focused on Saarc, is considered to be a breakthrough even though many thorny issues like rule of origin and product coverage, remain to be sorted out. Local TV networks showed Indian businessmen claiming that the implementation of Safta, which will make Pakistan's refusal to grant MFN status to India redundant, may boost the value of the bilateral trade to \$5 billion in next five years.

Foreign minister Yashwant Sinha also called it a "win-win" development for all, pointing out how a free trade agreement with India helped India boost its exports by 37%. Pakistan, preoccupied with its concern for an early Vajpayee-Musharraf summit, seemed somewhat less excited, but welcomed the agreement.

## Improve ties before taking up J&K issue: Atal

Islamabad

2 JANUARY

On the eve of his visit to Pakistan, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said an acceptable solution to the Kashmir issue could be found much earlier if both countries took steps to improve relations in other areas to develop a spirit of accommodation and compromise instead of one of unremitting hostility.

Rejecting the four-point formula enunciated by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf at the Agra summit where he insisted on the centrality of the Kashmir issue, Mr Vajpayee said India and Pakistan should improve their relations first before embarking on attempts to settle intricate issues like Kashmir.

Mr Vajpayee, who arrives here on Saturday for the Saarc summit said in an interview to Pakistani daily Dawn: "What India had been saying all along was that the two countries should first establish political, economic, cultural and social relations, so that we could approach our bilateral differences with a spirit of accommodation and compromise, rather than one of unremitting hostility." He, however, hastened to add that this did not mean brushing aside Jammu and Kashmir and other contentious bilateral issues.

"They will remain on the agenda. If we can discuss them with friendship and understanding — rather than suspicion and hostility — we are likely to find acceptable solutions much earlier," he said. Asserting that his current peace initiative was his last attempt Mr Vajpayee said only terrorism remained a hurdle to resolve the vexed issues between the two countries. "If we could put violence, terrorism and

hostility behind us, I can see no obstacle to establishment of a climate of friendship and cordiality in which we can discuss and resolve all our outstanding bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

The Prime Minister also countered Pakistan's stand that the Agra summit failed due to hardliners in the Indian government. On the contrary, he said the summit could not make progress as Pakistan insisted on the centrality of Kashmir. "We could not accept that. For us other issues too needed to be discussed and Kashmir is one of the issues." Asked about the agreed draft which Pakistanis alleged was sabotaged by some elements in his Cabinet, Mr Vajpayee said the draft was written by the two foreign ministers, but it did not have the government approval and, therefore, it was not the final draft.

Asked why he was hesitant to talk to Pakistan leaders after offering to hold unconditional talks in his speech at Srinagar in April last year, Mr Vajpayee said India was still concerned about issues relating to terrorism. "We should build on the current momentum and on the recent positive developments in a constructive manner," he said. Mr Vajpayee said he had extended his hand of friendship in the hope that the two countries could put behind them the hostility and confrontation that had plagued their relations for so many decades.

"Both countries have taken several positive steps since then. These eight months have witnessed the ground swell of popular enthusiasm in the people of both our countries — parliamentarians and political workers, businessmen and professionals, artists and social activists — for a normal, peaceful and cooperative bilateral relationship. — PTI

5 JAN 2004

The Economic Times

5 JAN 2004

# লক্ষ্য এক, পথ নিয়ে দ্বিমত অটল-জামালি

১১/১/০৪

সুমন চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও  
জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • ইসকামাধার

৪ জানুয়ারি: আলোচনার মাধ্যমে বরফ গলার প্রক্রিয়া শুরু হলেও, বিবাদ-মীমাংসার কোনটা প্রকৃত পথ তা নিয়ে ভারত-পাক মতবিরোধ ফের নাটুন করে শোনা গেল সার্কের মাঝে। আজ এখানে সার্কের স্বাধীন শীর্ষ সম্মেলনের উদ্বোধনী অনুষ্ঠানে, ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী এবং পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী মির জাফরুল্লা খান জামালি দু'জনেই শক্তিশালী দক্ষিণ এশিয়া গভার ডাক দিয়েছেন। কিন্তু লক্ষ্য এক হলেও দু'জনের পথ যে ভিন্ন বাজপেয়ী যা বলেছেন তার মর্মার্থ, অর্ধনৈতিক সুসম্পর্কের মধ্য দিয়ে সুগম হবে রাজনৈতিক বিরোধের মীমাংসার পথ। অন্য দিকে জামালির বক্তব্য, আগে রাজনৈতিক বিবাদের মীমাংসা করে সহযোগিতার অনুকূল পরিবেশ গড়তে হবে। তার পর সম্ভব হবে অর্ধনৈতিক বৈকল্য। অর্থাৎ, অন্য ভাবে বলতে গেলে অর্ধনীতির পথ ধরে রাজনীতির মীমাংসা চায় ভারত আর পাকিস্তান চায় রাজনীতির পথ ধরে অর্ধনৈতিক মীমাংসা।

রাজনৈতিক বিরোধকে দূরে সরিয়ে রেখে অর্ধনৈতিক সম্পর্ক আরও নিবিড় করার জন্য অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী তাঁর ভাবশে, আজ আহান জানিয়েছেন। ইউরোপ, আফ্রিকা, লাতিন আমেরিকা এবং ক্যারিবিয়ান দ্বীপপুঞ্জের অস্তিত্বের প্রশংসা টেনে এনে বাজপেয়ী বলেছেন, এই সব অঞ্চলেই রাজনৈতিক বিষয় ছুঁলে গিয়ে প্রতিবেশী দেশগুলি অর্ধনৈতিক সহযোগিতার রাস্তায় এগুবে। কয়েক

শতাব্দীব্যাপী যুদ্ধ আর আত্মঘাতী সংঘর্ষের পর ইউরোপে তৈরি হয়েছে ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন। বাড়ির কাছে 'আসিয়ান' জোটভুক্ত দেশগুলিও তাদের পারস্পরিক রাজনৈতিক সমস্যাকে অর্ধনৈতিক সহযোগিতার পথে অস্তরায় হতে দেখনি। একই ঘটনা ঘটেছে আফ্রিকা, লাতিন আমেরিকা এবং ক্যারিবিয়ান দ্বীপপুঞ্জে। বাজপেয়ীর কথায়, 'এই সব দৃষ্টান্তই আমাদের শুধু একটি জরুরি কথা সরণ করিয়ে দেয়। তা হল রাজনৈতিক স্বার্থ ও সংস্কারের উপরে স্থান হওয়া উচিত বাস্তবমুখী অর্ধনীতিয়।

বাজপেয়ীর ব্যাখ্যায়, 'আমরা যদি পরস্পরের অর্ধনৈতিক সম্পর্কের শরিক হতে পারি তা হলে অন্যান্য সমস্যার প্রতি বাড়াতি সহানুভূতি দেখানো মোটেই কঠিন কাজ হবে না। এই ভাবেই আমরা ধীরে ধীরে একের পর এক অতীত লক্ষ্যে অনাম্যাসে পৌঁছতে যেতে পারি। যেমন, মুক্ত বাণিজ্য অঞ্চল, অর্ধনৈতিক জোট, আবহাওয়ার উন্নতি সাধন করতে হবে। তা অবাধ সীমান্ত এবং অভিন্ন মুদ্রা। মোদা কথায়, রাজনৈতিক মতবিরোধের উর্ধ্বে উঠে অর্ধনৈতিক বোঝাপড়া বৃদ্ধির উপরেই আজ তাঁর ভাবশে জোর দিয়েছেন ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী। লিখিত ভাষণের প্রায় এক তৃতীয়াংশ ব্যয় করেছেন পাকিস্তান সহ

প্রতিবেশী দেশগুলির কাছে এই বাজপেয়ীর পেশগুলির কাছে এই বাজপেয়ীর পেশে দিতেই। কিন্তু বাজপেয়ীর পেশনৈতিক সঙ্কে পাকিস্তান যে এক মত নয়, জাফরুল্লা জামালির বক্তব্য তা স্পষ্ট করে দিয়েছে। পাকিস্তানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী তাঁর পাকটা বক্তব্যে বলেছেন, রাজনৈতিক মতপার্থক্য ও বিরোধ-ই দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় প্রকৃত অর্ধনৈতিক সহযোগিতার পথে দীর্ঘদিন ধরে অস্তরায় হয়ে রয়েছে। এটাই রূঢ় অথচ

বাস্তব সত্য। সুতরাং জামালির পেশনৈতিক হলে আগে ন্যায্য ও বাস্তবসম্মত উপায়ে রাজনৈতিক আবহাওয়ার উন্নতি সাধন করতে হবে। তা না হলে দক্ষিণ এশীয় অর্ধনৈতিক জোট, অভিন্ন মুদ্রা কিংবা অবাধ সীমান্ত সব স্বপ্নই অধরা থেকে যাবে। মোদা কথায়, বাজপেয়ী বলেতে চেয়েছেন, কাছাকাছি দূরে সরিয়ে রেখে অর্ধনীতির পথ ধরে

কাছাকাছি আসতে ভারত-পাকিস্তান। আর জামালি বলেতে চেয়েছেন, আগে কাছাকাছি সমস্যার সমাধান হোক তার পর অন্য কিছু। সার্কের মাঝে এই মতবিরোধ নাটুন করে ধরা পড়লেও তা কখনওই কর্কশ কাছিক্যের চেহারা নেয়নি। মৌলিক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর ক্ষেত্রে দুই প্রধানমন্ত্রী দুই ভিন্ন মত পোষণ করলেও প্রায় একই সুরে এবং একই ভাষায় সার্ককে আরও জোরদার করার ডাক দিয়েছেন।

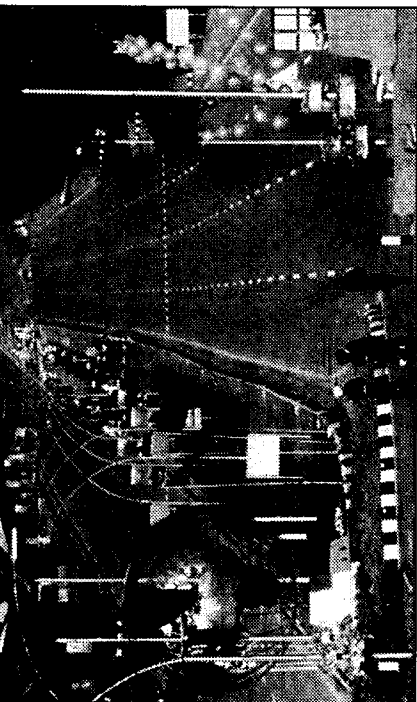
বাজপেয়ী ও জামালি দু'জনেই বলেছেন আঠারো বছর বয়স হয়ে গেলেও সার্ক এখনও পর্যন্ত দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার সাধারণ মানুষের আশা আকাঙ্ক্ষা তেমন ভাবে পূর্ণ করতে পারেনি। দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার যে বিপুল সম্ভাবনা ও সম্পদ আছে তাও বিকশিত হতে পারেনি যথার্থ ভাবে। বিশ্বায়নের প্রেক্ষাপটে দক্ষিণ

এশিয়ার আঞ্চলিক জোট আরও সুদৃঢ় করার প্রয়োজনের উপরও দুই প্রধানমন্ত্রী সমান ভাবে গুরুত্ব আরোপ করেছেন। দু'জনেই প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন বিভিন্ন সক্রিয় সহযোগিতার। যেমন, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় দারিদ্র দূরীকরণের কর্মসূচি বাস্তবায়িত করার জন্য অবিলম্বে একটি টাস্ক ফোর্স গঠনের প্রস্তাব দিয়েছেন বাজপেয়ী। তিনি বলেছেন, এই

টাস্ক ফোর্স সার্ক সচিবালয়ের ছত্রছায়ায় কাজ করতে পারে আবার স্বাধীন ভাবেও কাজ করতে পারে। যদি দ্বিতীয়টি হয় তা হলে সেই টাস্ক ফোর্স গভার দায়িত্ব নিতে ভারতই আগ্রহী। পাশাপাশি দারিদ্র দূরীকরণের জন্য একটি তহবিল গঠনের সুপারিশ করে তাতে ১০০ মিলিয়ন ডলার অর্ধসাহায্যের প্রতিশ্রুতিও দিয়েছেন বাজপেয়ী। তিনি বলেছেন, ভারতবর্ষের বাইরে অন্যান্য সার্কভুক্ত দেশে দারিদ্র দূরীকরণের জন্য যদি এই অর্ধবায় হয় তবে তাঁর কোনও আপত্তি নেই। ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর আহ্বান রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের দেওয়া লক্ষ্য অনুসরণ করে ২০১০ সালের মধ্যে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দারিদ্র অর্ধেক কমিয়ে আনা হোক। একই ভাবে সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলির মধ্যে যোগাযোগ ব্যবস্থা আরও উন্নত করার জন্য পৃথক আর একটি টাস্ক ফোর্স গঠনের ডাক দিয়েছেন বাজপেয়ী।

অন্য দিকে জামালি ডাক দিয়েছেন, বিদ্যুৎ ও শক্তির ক্ষেত্রে সহযোগিতা বৃদ্ধির তাঁর প্রস্তাব হল এ ব্যাপারে একটি 'সাউথ এশিয়া এনার্জি রিং' গড়ে তোলা যায় কি না তা বর্তমানে দেখতে একটি সমীক্ষা চালানো হোক। জল ও তাপবিদ্যুৎ, তেল ও গ্যাস সবকিছুকেই আনা হোক এই সমীক্ষার আওতায়। জামালির কথায়, 'মধ্য ও পশ্চিম এশিয়ার প্রবেশ পথ পাকিস্তান। এ ব্যাপারে আমরা পূর্ণ সহযোগিতা করতে প্রস্তুত।

মোটের উপর এই দুই প্রধানমন্ত্রী আন্তর্জাতিক দুনিয়ায় দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার অবস্থান ও ভাবমূর্তি আরও উজ্জ্বল ও আরও শক্তিশালী করার ডাক দিয়েছেন। দু'জনেই বলেছেন, অন্যস্থায়ী আস্থা, বিবান্য সম্বন্ধীতি, উদ্বেজনীয় শান্তি — এটাই হওয়া উচিত সার্কভুক্ত সকলের আগামী দিনের পাথেয়।



সার্ক সম্মেলনস্থলে যাতায়র প্রধান রাস্তায় নিশ্চিত নিরাপত্তা। — এ এফ পি



# SAARC SUMMIT

## Pervez wants bilateral talks at Saarc

Press Trust of India  
Islamabad, January 4

PAKISTAN PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf on Sunday called for an amendment to the Saarc charter to discuss bilateral issues among member countries but refrained from directly mentioning J&K. Speaking at a banquet he hosted for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and other Saarc leaders at the Presidential House here, Musharraf emphasised, "We must expand the Saarc charter to discuss bilateral issues at regional level. If we fail, cynicism will take over."

Vajpayee and Musharraf shook

hands in the presence of other Saarc leaders before all of them moved into the banquet hall where the Pakistani President welcomed his guests in a 10-minute speech.

This was the first time in two years that Vajpayee and Musharraf came face-to-face after the famous handshake at the previous Saarc summit in Kathmandu in January 2002.

Musharraf said, "South Asia will never achieve its full potential unless disputes and tensions are resolved peacefully."

Elimination of the root cause of tensions and resolution of disputes were essential steps to a cohesive

### 6 held for bid on Pervez

PAK SECURITY agencies have arrested six suspected members of the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba in connection with the December 25 assassination bid on President Pervez Musharraf. The six were arrested from a mosque in Lahore.

PTI, Islamabad

and integrated South Asia, he said. "If we fail, cynicism will take over and the Saarc will lose its credibility and momentum," he added.

"The bitter truth is that Saarc will never achieve its full potential unless disputes and tensions that draws apart are resolved peacefully with justice and equity," he said.

The leaders of Saarc should move towards solving the disputes boldly with the objective of seeking honourable solutions (to disputes) with mutual respect and in the spirit of accommodation, he said.

"We must put behind the mistrust, bitterness and tension and expand our charter and even discuss bilateral issues at the regional level. We owe it to our people," he said, adding, "let us pledge not to disappoint them".

Musharraf said there could be no development in the absence of peace. "There can be no peace so long as political issues and disputes continue to fester".

Musharraf said Saarc countries should refrain from interfering in each other's affairs. Stating that Pakistan's endeavour would be to have better understanding and co-operation with all its neighbours, he wanted similar reciprocation from others to make Saarc "a model for regional cooperation".

He said Saarc members should all contribute to the strengthen the organisation for progress and well-being of its people.



# India's imprint on Saarc inaugural

Statesman News Service

Jan 4. — The opening speeches at the inauguration of the Saarc summit today were music to the Indian government's ears, with no discordant notes in the form of mentions of the K(ashmir) word, appreciation of recent peace initiatives, and the new chair. Pakistan, speaking the language of economic development and free trade. This was a rare occasion when Pakistan did not use a multilateral forum to raise the Kashmir issue; at the last (11th Saarc) summit in Kathmandu, Pakistan's President, General Pervez Musharraf, had made Kashmir a central issue of his speech.

Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, very much the cynosure of all eyes at the massively imposing Jinnah Convention Centre, made references to "mutual suspicions and petty rivalries" that "have continued to haunt" Saarc, but his speech was very Saarc-centric. His central message clearly was that "the development of greater economic stakes in each other would naturally result in greater sensitivity to the concerns of each other," specifically citing the "courageous action" taken by Bhutan.

"It is an outstanding example of sensitivity to the security concerns of a neighbour, which is at the same time in the direct long-term security interest of Bhutan itself," Mr Vajpayee said.

"History," the PM said, "should not shackle us," in a clear dig at Pakistan, and "much more needs to be done" before "the benefits of Saarc" "touched the lives of ordinary people." "After



(Front L to R) Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Jamali, Nepalese Prime Minister Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa, Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, Bhutanese Prime Minister Mr Jigmi Thinley and Maldivian President Mr Maumoon Abdul Gayoom during the inaugural ceremony of the 12th Saarc summit in Islamabad on Sunday. — AFP

centuries of fratricidal conflicts and wars, Europe is now uniting to emerge as the world's most powerful economic grouping," while "closer home" there was Asean, and Saarc could get left behind if it did not grab opportunities now.

The largest country in Saarc by far, the PM offered to set aside 100 million dollars to establish a South Asia development fund, to fund specific poverty alleviation projects outside India.

The newly-anointed Chairman of the 12th summit, Pakistani Premier, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, in his inaugural address this morning, said "it is the stark reality of political differences and disputes that has held back prospects of real economic coop-

eration in South Asia," a tacit acknowledgement of what India has been saying all along.

While the Indian government did not quite say 'we told you so,' it was clear, officials said, that acceptance of this view has largely contributed to the smooth conduct and passage of this summit, with "considerable" movement forward on South Asian regional cooperation, including agreement on a framework for Safta and an additional protocol on terrorism.

The Saarc social charter, that seeks to promote, besides poverty alleviation, population stabilisation, women's empowerment, youth mobilisation, health and nutrition and human rights, was signed at the opening session of

the summit.

It was not that political issues were not raised by the summiters; but more as relief that the two largest Saarc members, India and Pakistan, were in conciliation mode, permitting actual regional work to go ahead. The Sri Lankan President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, commending the "historic initiatives" to resolve bilateral differences, said the winds of conciliation gave hope to the Saarc process, reflected in the landmark regional free trade agreement, Safta. She heaped praise on Mr Vajpayee's statesmanship and leadership qualities, specifically referring at length to his "vision" for peace.

Bhutan's Prime Minister,

Lyonpo Jigme Y Thinley, spoke at length of his government's decision to take military action against "three armed extremist groups from the adjoining Indian states of Assam and West Bengal" which had set up camps "along the entire Bhutan-India border" "to train insurgents, store arms and ammunition and to launch terrorist attacks inside India."

In what would add further discomfort to the host government, Mr Thinley said, "there will always be those who will see profit in conflict and instability and will attempt to derail any move towards reconciliation and peace. Their just fate is and must be rejection, isolation and ignominy."

## Leaders sign 10-point Social Charter

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 4. — The Saarc leaders today signed a ten-point Social Charter to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and accelerate their economic growth, while agreeing to adopt a strategy to deal with key issues, such as poverty alleviation, promoting status of women and population stabilisation.

Under the ten-page Charter, signed by the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and other Saarc leaders, the seven-member group agreed to establish a people-centred framework for social development and to respond to the immediate needs of those who are most affected by human distress.

The members agreed to ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable sections were included in social development and the elderly persons lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, while enjoying all rights without discrimination.

They agreed to give "highest priority" to alleviation of poverty in the South Asian countries and start income-generating activities for the poor.

The Saarc members agreed that access to basic education, adequate housing, safe drinking water and sanitation and primary healthcare should be guaranteed in legislation, executive and administrative provisions.

On the health front, they agreed to share information regarding outbreak of communicable diseases and the capacity for manufacture of drugs and

other chemicals, as also these products when sought by a member nation.

They reaffirmed the importance of attaining the target of providing free education to all children between six and 14 years of age.

It was decided to revitalise the Organised Volunteers Programme, under which volunteers from one country would be able to work in other nations in the social fields.

The Saarc nations declared that all forms of discrimination and violence against women were offences against human rights and dignity and must be prohibited through legislative, administrative and judicial actions.

The Saarc members promised to take appropriate measures to ensure to women equal treatment as men, by providing them the scope for effective participation in local, regional and national development processes.

They emphasised the need to reduce and eventually eliminate the gender gap in literacy.

The countries agreed to take steps to reduce low birth weight, malnutrition, anaemia among women and children, infant, child and maternal morbidity and mortality rates.

They decided to set up a Saarc network of focal institutions on population activities for facilitating the sharing of information, experiences and resources within the region.

It was decided to strengthen legal systems, including asset forfeiture, money laundering, extradition and mutual legal assistance to tackle drug-trafficking.



A view of the Saarc venue. — AFP

## Atal for celebrating 1857 with neighbours

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 4. — With winds of change blowing in the region, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today suggested that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh could together celebrate the 150th anniversary of the 1857 uprising against the British colonial rule in the sub-continent.

"Not very long ago, I had visited the Andaman Islands, where during our colonial days, political prisoners were kept in confinement. On the inscription in the Cellular Jail there, I found many names of brave martyrs and freedom fighters from what are today three South Asian countries," he told the Saarc Summit here.

## Pak rules out China as Saarc associate

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 4. — Ruling out China becoming a Saarc associate, Pakistan today said the initial efforts would be to consolidate SAARC from within before considering associating any other nation. "The priority is to consolidate the Saarc from within and then associate other countries," Pakistan foreign office spokesman Mr Masood Khan told reporters in reply to a question on whether China is being admitted into the Saarc. Mr Khan said besides China, there are many countries that have expressed their interest in associating with Saarc. "Our priority is to consolidate the organisation and strengthen it from within," Mr Khan said, adding: "we would welcome association of other countries with the Saarc later". — PTI

The Prime Minister said: "Our forefathers had fought side by side, transcending religious, regional and linguistic differences, against a common colonial oppressor, in our first war of independence in 1857. It reminds us that many of us have a shared history, which pre-

dates our more recent divisions."

Mr Vajpayee said: "Perhaps India, Pakistan and Bangladesh can together celebrate the anniversary, in remembrance of our joint struggle against a common adversary." — PTI

## FREEING TRADE

<sup>South Asia</sup> <sup>5/11/09</sup>  
The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has agreed to make the south Asian free trade agreement operational from January 2006. The debate over multilateral liberalization *vis-à-vis* regional liberalization is clichéd. The fact remains that despite the Uruguay Round and despite the World Trade Organization, regional trading arrangements have proliferated. With the Doha development agenda temporarily stuck, both the United States of America and the European Union have been pushing for free trade agreements. It is understandable that India should feel marginalized and seek membership in its own FTAs, if nothing else, as a countervailing force. Having said this, India's attempts seem to lack logical cohesion. If an FTA with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is being negotiated, what is the point of FTAs with Thailand or Singapore? There was a time when SAFTA had not made much headway and the south Asian preferential trading arrangement was only limited to duty elimination on a few limited products identified in positive lists. Coupled with problems with Pakistan, that was the driving force for sub-regional cooperation, India having signed an FTA with Sri Lanka and begun the process for negotiating one with Bangladesh admitted that FTA negotiations with Bangladesh have been temporarily postponed. But if the SAFTA idea is a serious one, FTAs with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh become pointless. The Islamabad meeting of SAARC foreign ministers has been used for some kite-flying, especially by India. Mr Yashwant Sinha wants an economic union. Even earlier, the Indian prime minister floated the idea of a common south Asian currency.

<sup>5/11/09</sup>  
A prerequisite to all these objectives is a genuine FTA, followed by a customs union with common external tariffs. A common market with free cross-border movements of labour and capital comes next. It is only then that the question of an economic union or a single currency arises. Given protectionism, it is doubtful that any SAARC member will agree to a genuine FTA. Forget other countries. Is India ready for a common market? Notwithstanding the protocol on terrorism, it is doubtful that India will agree to free cross-border movements of labour. Had that not been the case, Sri Lankan visitors would also have obtained visas on arrival in India.

Most traditional FTAs have been restricted to manufactured products, services being a late entrant in such liberalization. Within manufactured products, witness the resistance in India to FTAs with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Negotiations with Bangladesh (and Nepal) are stuck because India wants complicated rules of origin. The one with Sri Lanka was signed in 1998, but not notified for two years, because of similar reasons. Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will cite any number of non-tariff barriers India has erected. Instead of economic unions and common currencies, India is better advised to stick to old-fashioned FTAs and accept the following. First, relatively larger gains from liberalization accrue to smaller countries. Second, the large country needs to subsidize the process, without insisting on reciprocal concessions, especially because unilateral liberalization brings welfare benefits to India.

SAARC SHOULD DISCUSS BILATERAL ISSUES: MUSHARRAF

# Vajpayee meets Jamali as ties are put on track

By Amit Baruah and  
B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4. Ending a nearly three-year-long drought in bilateral meetings between India and Pakistan, the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today met his Pakistani counterpart, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, soon after the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation got off to a satisfactory start.

As the two countries agreed to carry forward the peace process, the Prime Minister, who sought a "courtesy call" on the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, today, will meet him tomorrow. Speaking at a banquet attended by the SAARC leaders tonight, Gen. Musharraf introduced a jarring note in an otherwise positive atmosphere when he called for the expansion of the SAARC Charter to include discussions on bilateral issues, a viewpoint that India has consistently opposed.

The banquet, attended by Mr. Vajpayee, saw Gen. Musharraf calling for the elimination of the "root causes" of tension in South Asia, a known Pakistani euphemism for the Kashmir issue.

Suggesting that all issues be addressed in a spirit of boldness and accommodation, Gen. Musharraf said that Islamabad was ready to play a role in seiz-

ing the opportunity to live in peace. He did not, however, refer to the Kashmir issue directly.

Earlier, reflecting a degree of rare agreement between India and Pakistan, the official accounts of today's meeting between Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Jamali and the two Foreign Ministers, Yashwant Sinha and Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, used identical language.

"They [the two Prime Ministers] met in a warm and friendly atmosphere. The meeting [with officials present] lasted for about half-an-hour out of which about 15 minutes was a one-on-one between the two Prime Ministers," Mr. Sinha told presspersons.

Referring to his meeting with Mr. Kasuri, Mr. Sinha said: "Both of us expressed our satisfaction at the progress in our bi-

lateral relations. We discussed various ways of maintaining the momentum and agreed on the need to do so."

Asked whether these meetings could be construed as a formal resumption of the dialogue between the two countries, Mr. Sinha preferred not to get into details. On the terms of the dialogue, he maintained: "I have said what I had to say in my statement already."

Speaking separately, Mr. Kasuri said today's meetings augured well for the bilateral relationship. He had established a "good personal relationship" with Mr. Sinha, which could be used to improve bilateral ties. He had discussed the "bilateral and international situation" with Mr. Sinha.

Accounts gleaned from a variety of sources show that the

bilateral relationship has been put on track and a new degree of confidence appears to have emerged.

The sources said that a range of preparatory contacts between the sides, including in the days before the arrival of Mr. Vajpayee to Islamabad, had taken place. In order to maintain the sanctity of the process, officials are reluctant to reveal the exact nature of the contacts.

When Mr. Kasuri was asked what the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, had been doing in the Pakistani capital since arrival on New Year's day, he replied: "He [Mr. Mishra] is performing his duties... there's nothing particular."

The ease with which the meetings took place after a period of public wrangling on who should seek a meeting first as well as the Id-ul-Fitr ceasefire seems to suggest a prolonged period of quiet contacts between the Indian and Pakistani leadership.

It is still not clear at what "formal" level the stalled dialogue will resume because Islamabad has been insisting that talks between Foreign Ministers would give the process a kick-start.

New Delhi, on the other hand, has repeatedly preferred a step-by-step approach in the light of the Agra and Lahore experiences. However, the sources believe, that the formal channel will complement the ongoing contacts.

Conscious of the possible fallout of Mr. Jamali's decision to skip a reference to the Kashmir issue in his SAARC address, the Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman made it a point this evening to stress that Kashmir was a dispute and did not constitute an integral part of India.

However, in a prepared response on Kashmir, the spokesman said that the Indian leadership was aware of the Pakistani position that Kashmir was a dispute that had to be resolved.

Pakistan, he said, welcomed Mr. Vajpayee's remarks to Pakistan Television that the two countries had to have a long-term engagement for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. The dispute, he maintained, must be resolved through peaceful means and its resolution was in the interest of both nations.

Call to combat terrorism: Page 11  
Making a deal: Page 12

## India proposes poverty alleviation fund

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today proposed the creation of a Poverty Alleviation Fund and offered \$100 million as initial contribution for poverty alleviation programmes and projects outside India.

Making the proposal in his address to the 12th SAARC Summit here, Vajpayee said the fund could be professionally managed and could fund specific poverty-alleviation programmes and projects in SAARC. "Once we have agreed on the modalities of the creation of such a fund and on its charter, India would be willing to make an initial contribution of \$100 million to this fund on the understanding that this money would be used entirely on projects within SAARC, but outside India," he said. — PTI



The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, with his Pakistan counterpart, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, in Islamabad on Sunday. — AFP



The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, speaking at the inaugural of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit in Islamabad on Sunday. Seen in the background are (from left): the President of the Maldives, Maumoon Rashid Abdul Qayoom, the Bhutanese Prime Minister, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley, the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Pakistan Prime Minister, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, and the Nepalese Prime Minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa. — Reuters

## Vajpayee, Jamali steer clear of contentious issues

By Amit Baruah and B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and his Pakistan counterpart, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, today refrained from directly highlighting their known positions on issues such as cross-border terrorism and Jammu and Kashmir.

Setting the tone for the SAARC summit, the Pakistani leader, as the newly-elected SAARC chairman, did not make any reference to Kashmir in his opening speech, unlike what his President, Pervez Musharraf, did two years ago in Kathmandu.

On his part, Mr. Vajpayee, in his address to the inaugural session, did not mention cross-border terrorism, but spoke of the "courageous action" taken by Bhutan to crush Indian insurgent outfits based in that country. "It is an outstanding example of sensitivity to the security concerns of a neighbour, which is, at the same time, in the direct long-term security interest of Bhutan itself," he said.

For Mr. Jamali, a South Asian Economic Union would remain a distant dream unless "we are able to address the political environment in our region in a just and realistic manner." He emphasised that multi-dimensional cooperation in South Asia could be transformed into a reality only if members were able to overcome differences and disputes and create a climate of mutual trust and confidence.

Addressing the opening session of the summit, Mr. Vajpayee said: "We have to change South Asia's image and standing in the world. We must make the bold transition from mistrust to trust, from discord to

concord, and from tension to peace."

"The bonds of religion, language, ethnicity and culture which hold us together as a South Asian family are far more enduring than the relatively recent barriers of political prejudice that we have erected. We should renew these bonds to jointly overcome poverty, disease and hunger," he said amid applause.

Mutual suspicions and petty rivalries, Mr. Vajpayee stressed, had haunted South Asia as a result of which the "peace dividend" had bypassed the region. "History can remind us, guide us, teach us or warn us; it should not shackle us. We have to look forward now, with a collective approach in mind."

In a novel suggestion, Mr. Vajpayee called for India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to jointly celebrate the 150th anniversary of the 1857 uprising against the British colonialists, in two year's time. "We have to learn appropriate lessons from the experience of other countries. After centuries of fratricidal conflicts and wars, Europe is now uniting to emerge as the world's most powerful economic grouping. Closer home, the ASEAN countries have found it possible not to allow their political problems to come in the way of economic cooperation."

The Prime Minister said South Asia had to create more opportunities to free commercial interaction. It required joint tackling of smuggling, drug-trafficking, money laundering and gun-running which flourished across the borders due to mutual rivalries and inadequate coordination.

"The development of greater economic stakes in each other would naturally result

in greater sensitivity to the concerns of each other. This would pave the way for the more ambitious — but entirely achievable — goals such as a free trade area, an economic union, open borders and a common currency for our regions," he suggested.

Mr. Vajpayee announced that SAARC nations had agreed on the modalities for the creation of a poverty alleviation fund and India would be willing to make an initial contribution of \$100 million for use in the region, but outside India.

The Prime Minister also proposed that SAARC should set up a task force to commission techno-economic feasibility studies on establishing major transportation links and India would be ready to make a substantial contribution to create viable projects recommended by the task force.

In his speech, Mr. Jamali maintained that energy demands in the region could be met through trans-regional oil and gas pipelines. Pakistan favoured the commissioning of a study on creating a South Asia "energy ring" encompassing hydro and thermal capacities, as well as trans-regional oil and gas pipelines.

Admitting that the potential and promise of SAARC was nowhere near realisation, the Pakistani leader added: "Globalisation presents us with challenges and opportunities. On the one end is the danger of marginalisation, whereas on the other is the prospect of joining the developed regions that are already on the fast track to progress and prosperity. It is imperative that we develop positive links with the globalised world, as we deepen and broaden cooperation in South Asia."

## A Jamali show all the way

By Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4. The suspense has ended and the drama has begun. With the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali meeting soon after the SAARC inaugural session, the focus has shifted completely to India-Pakistan relations.

However, if the objective was to focus on South Asia and SAARC, the timing was a little off. As presspersons got down to reporting the speeches of SAARC leaders, the news of the bilateral meeting (courtesy call in "diplomatese") came in.

With the press, too, being interested principally in India-Pakistan affairs, SAARC deliberations took a backseat. Monday would have been a better day for kicking off India-Pakistan bilaterals since only the leaders' retreat is on the agenda.

Matters of state, clearly, have a logic of their own.

It was Mr. Jamali's moment of glory. For some time now, the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, has taken the leading role in directing Islamabad's foreign policy.

Whether it was addressing the United Nations General Assembly or holding talks with world leaders, it was Gen. Musharraf who has been in the international spotlight.

By presiding over the SAARC summit today, Mr. Jamali seems to have addressed somewhat the "imbalance" in the sharing of the foreign policy cake with

Gen. Musharraf. Needless to say, while the Jamali show at SAARC may be important in returning some sheen to the job of Prime Minister, the President is the one who retains control of foreign policy in Pakistan.

Two members of Pakistan's political class, who are alliance partners, but hold differing views on India-Pakistan rapprochement, were prominently seen sitting in the front rows at the inaugural session of the SAARC summit.

Qazi Hussain Ahmed, chief of the Ja-

### SAARC SIDELIGHTS

maat-i-Islami, and Maulana Fazlur Rehman, head of the Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam (F), are the leading lights of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, a six-party alliance of the religious right.

Last time in Lahore, the Qazi's boys were leading a concerted protest against Mr. Vajpayee's visit in February 1999.

This time, he was quietly listening to the Indian Prime Minister's speech at the Jinnah Convention Centre. And soon after the session ended, the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers met in a bilateral setting.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, whose party takes inspiration from the Deobandi movement, paid a much-heralded visit to India last year, during which he met the Prime Minister.

They may be working together in do-

mestic politics, but the Qazi and the Maulana differ on India-Pakistan issues.

At the opening SAARC session, the Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman, Masood Khan, was the master of ceremonies. Speaking to the assembled gathering in advance, Mr. Khan suggested that those assembled should stand up when the Heads of state/Government walk in.

He went on to suggest that the gathering should accord the dignitaries "spontaneous applause". While the applause later was pre-arranged, there was much "spontaneous laughter" from the press corps that had gathered in strength to the spokesman's announcement. Whatever the message, Mr. Khan's objective was fulfilled.

"Go slow, please." That is the title of an "appeal" made by the veteran peacenik and former Finance Minister, the Lahore-based Mubashir Hasan.

In a statement, he suggested to Indian and Pakistani leaderships that they go slow in normalising the spectrum of relations between the two countries.

"Their intentions are most laudable, their goals for neighbourly bonding and steps that they are taking have historic significance. They will be remembered as statesmen for generations to come. However, at the moment their power to control the adverse reactions to the agreements they make is not without limits," Dr. Hasan said.

Several times bitten, always shy?

## BJP plans to sell 'peace with Pakistan' in poll campaign

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JAN. 4. If in 1999 the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance successfully sold the Kargil war as a major election issue, all indications are that it is getting ready to sell peace with Pakistan as a significant election plank in 2004.

The BJP has calculated that a successful SAARC summit in Islamabad leading to the resumption of a substantive bilateral dialogue with Pakistan will help the ruling coalition at the Centre.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, the party general secretary in-charge of elections, Pramod Mahajan, said that "all peace-loving people in this country — Hindus, Muslims and others — would certainly appreciate the Prime Minister's efforts towards peace ... directly or indirectly, it will help the BJP in the forthcoming general elections".

Such a development was expected to "soften Muslim animosity" towards the BJP; it would blunt the rhetoric of the "secular front" and wield a positive influence on the large section of the general population wanting peace with the neighbours. The total political effect would be favourable to the BJP, Mr. Mahajan felt.

The party also noted that Pakistan was no longer insisting on discussing Kashmir first, but as part of a composite dialogue. Moreover, India's point of view that trade could be improved was also being appreciated — when the SAFTA agreement takes off, trade between the two countries could go up by leaps and bounds.

Before departing for Islamabad, it is learnt, the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, Brajesh Mishra, had a long meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, where the nitty gritty of what may happen

in Pakistan was discussed. The political fallout domestically, and no one denies that there will be a significant reaction, was also apparently discussed.

"A peace dialogue with Pakistan will be a very positive development for the BJP," the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha, V.K. Malhotra, said.

"It will take the wind out of the sails of the secular front (secularism *ki saari hawa nikal jayegi*)," he added. "They [the Congress leaders] were not able to resolve the issues with Pakistan for the last 50 years... the signs are that Mr. Vajpayee will be able to do something."

Another party veteran, J.P. Mathur, said that "the Prime Minister's efforts at SAARC will have a positive effect on the forthcoming elections... improvement of relations with Pakistan would be yet another point demonstrating the diplomatic acumen of the Prime Minister."

Privately, party leaders said that "only the BJP led by Mr. Vajpayee" could resolve outstanding issues with Pakistan. One senior leader admitted: "the Congress party has not tried to address this issue seriously, but even if it had we [the BJP] would not have allowed them to be successful".

On the other hand, a civilian head of government in Pakistan would also not be able to solve the problem, as the all-powerful Pakistan army would not have permitted this to happen.

With Gen. Pervez Musharraf as President, that hurdle could also be crossed. That was the argument given.

After the two recent attempted bids on Mr. Musharraf's life, there is the additional worry that if he were to go "fundamentalist forces in Pakistan could gain the upper hand," a BJP leader said. That would be a setback to the peace moves.

# SAFTA: Trade or development?

By Nagesh Kumar

**A**T LONG last, the SAARC region seems to be heading towards a Free Trade Area, SAFTA, that is an initial step in the evolution of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation as a regional trade bloc and an economic union. There is much speculation about its favourable effect on intra-regional trade. Is promotion of trade the only rationale for the recent trend of regionalism all over? Regional economic integration is more about finding an engine of growth rather than trade. Countries — developed as well as developing — have started looking at regional economic integration as a means of strengthening their international competitiveness and as an engine of economic growth in recent years.

By removing strong trade policy barriers to intra-regional trade, SAFTA would lead to expansion of intra-regional trade. By conservative estimates, it may help in trebling of the proportion of intra-regional trade, making it look more respectable compared to a marginal 4-5 per cent as of now. By making it possible to trade directly rather than through third countries, it would also lead to savings of substantial value for the region. However, expansion of mutual trade, saving of freight costs etc., should be seen as the spill-over rather than the real gains from the creation of SAFTA.

The new-found interest in regional trade arrangements (RTAs) the world

over is about exploiting the potential of efficiency-seeking restructuring of the industry to take advantage on a pan-regional basis rather than promotion of trade. These efficiencies

RTAs in global FDI inflows has gone up.

Therefore, RTAs are not about trade as much as investment and industrial restructuring although they

**To exploit SAFTA's full potential, the SAARC countries need to complement it by a customs union and then gradually move towards an economic union.**

lead to generation of income and hence could be valuable drivers of growth.

The experience of the European Union suggests that the formation of the Single European Market led to a substantial restructuring of industry on a pan-European basis and hence enabled it to exploit the economies of scale, scope and specialisation. RTAs are also about investments and have led to concentration of FDI inflows in them. In the post-WTO world, RTAs enjoy additional advantages as they can still use the instruments of policy to deepen their industrial structure such as rules of origin under exemptions provided under Article XXIV, which are not permissible to other WTO members. Hence, the formation of trade blocs has been followed by tariff jumping FDI inflows, and mergers and acquisitions as outside MNEs have attempted to secure their access to the markets. Hence, the share of

also create trade. Will SAFTA lead to such industrial restructuring?

The answer is yes if one goes by the results of limited experiences with trade liberalisation in the region. The Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral FTA for instance, even within a short period of less than three years of implementation, has led to a lot of dynamism in the intra-regional investments. Similarly, India-Nepal FTA of 1996 spurred some Indian companies to shift production of common consumer goods of every day use such as toothpaste for the north-Indian market to Nepal. As a result these items emerged as some of the most important items of Nepal's exports to India.

Thus, SAFTA may help in evolving a horizontal specialisation across the region to enable the most optimal utilisation of the synergies of the member countries for their mutual advantage. Sri Lanka may well emerge as the region's hub for rub-

ber-based industries, Bangladesh for energy-intensive industries and Bhutan, forest-based industries, and so on. The other lesson that comes out of recent experiences of regional economic integration in South Asia, as elsewhere, is that relatively smaller and poorer countries benefit more from RTAs. India-Sri Lanka FTA has brought down the trade surplus of India with the country from 8.6:1 to 4.9:1 in just two years. Therefore, RTAs lead to convergence in the levels of development. Regional economic integration will also make member countries, especially the smaller ones, more attractive destinations for third country investments by obviating the constraint of small domestic market.

Therefore, an agreement to form SAFTA taken by the leaders of the region is a step in the right direction. However, to exploit its full potential for efficiency-seeking restructuring of regional economic integration, they would need to do further work to complement SAFTA by a customs union and then gradually move towards an economic union. The regional economic integration in South Asia could generate billions of dollars of new income, employment, trade and could help the region in its fight against poverty.

(Dr. Nagesh Kumar is Director-General, Research and Information System, a Delhi-based policy think-tank specialising in trade issues. The views expressed here are his own.)

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# Looking Saarc

Summit  
HT-6

**T**HERE IS a 'feel good' factor about the Saarc summit as well — in marked contrast to what the scene was during past such meetings. Ever since the inception of the South Asian grouping, it has been held hostage to India-Pakistan differences. Now, for the first time, the improving relations between New Delhi and Islamabad have given rise to the hope that the Saarc may at last produce a positive result. Evidence of this new mood is available from the agreements on free trade and terrorism. These are major steps forward, especially on trade, which have the potential of changing the economic profile of the region. Besides, the reduction of the earlier tension between India and Pakistan will mean that all the deals, in business or in other fields, will be conducted in an atmosphere of normality where no country will try its tricks of one-upmanship as before.

That hangovers of the past still remain is evident from the Pakistani reluctance to accept India's proposals on a South Asian economic union on the lines of the European Union and the introduction of a single currency. Not unexpectedly, Pakistan has let it be

known that it believes that these measures are tantamount to moving too fast too soon. Instead, it wants the focus to return to 'conflict resolution', which, in Islamabad's lexicon, means dealing with the Kashmir problem first. Pakistan has always suspected that the Indian moves to improve relations on various fronts — through people-to-people contacts, closer economic and cultural ties, etc. — are intended to divert attention from Kashmir. Once there is a dramatic improvement in India-Pakistan relations, Kashmir will be relegated to the back burner, in Pakistan's view.

India's stand is the opposite. It believes that improved ties will facilitate the task of dealing with Kashmir. India doesn't believe that continuing ill feelings are the best way to tackle the problem. However, if Saarc fulfils its initial expectations by enhancing cooperation among the member countries, the outlook for the future will be bright. The emphasis will shift from simmering tension — and not between India and Pakistan alone — and acts of terrorism to constructive endeavour. That will be the best news the region has had in many years.

# RHYME REASON

## SAU real... can be a global power house

Prime Minister Vajpayee's projection of a South Asia Union may appear to be a dream but not an unrealistic one. It has the reverberations of Nehruvian vision of Asian resurgence, which had got lost in the Cold War and intra-Asian conflicts. Today, the people are more than prepared for such a community. Five reasons why we should have the Union...

**1 Economic gains**  
Experts predict, Indo-Pak trade alone will reach the \$10 billion mark within five years of free trade agreements in the region. Integrated economies and markets will also make South Asia an attractive destination for foreign investment. Free movement of labour across the borders may cause some problems but unrestrained flow of goods, services, technologies and investments would create millions of jobs. Naturally, South Asia's chronic problems of poverty, inequality and discrimination will be tackled. Also, its human development indices will go up.

**2 Regional harmony**  
The subcontinent's civilisational harmony and cultural continuity, marred for long by discordant political forces, will be reactivated. This will facilitate the upsurge of a composite culture, evolved in the region through centuries of mutual engagement. As a result, these countries will be better equipped to fight fundamentalist forces.

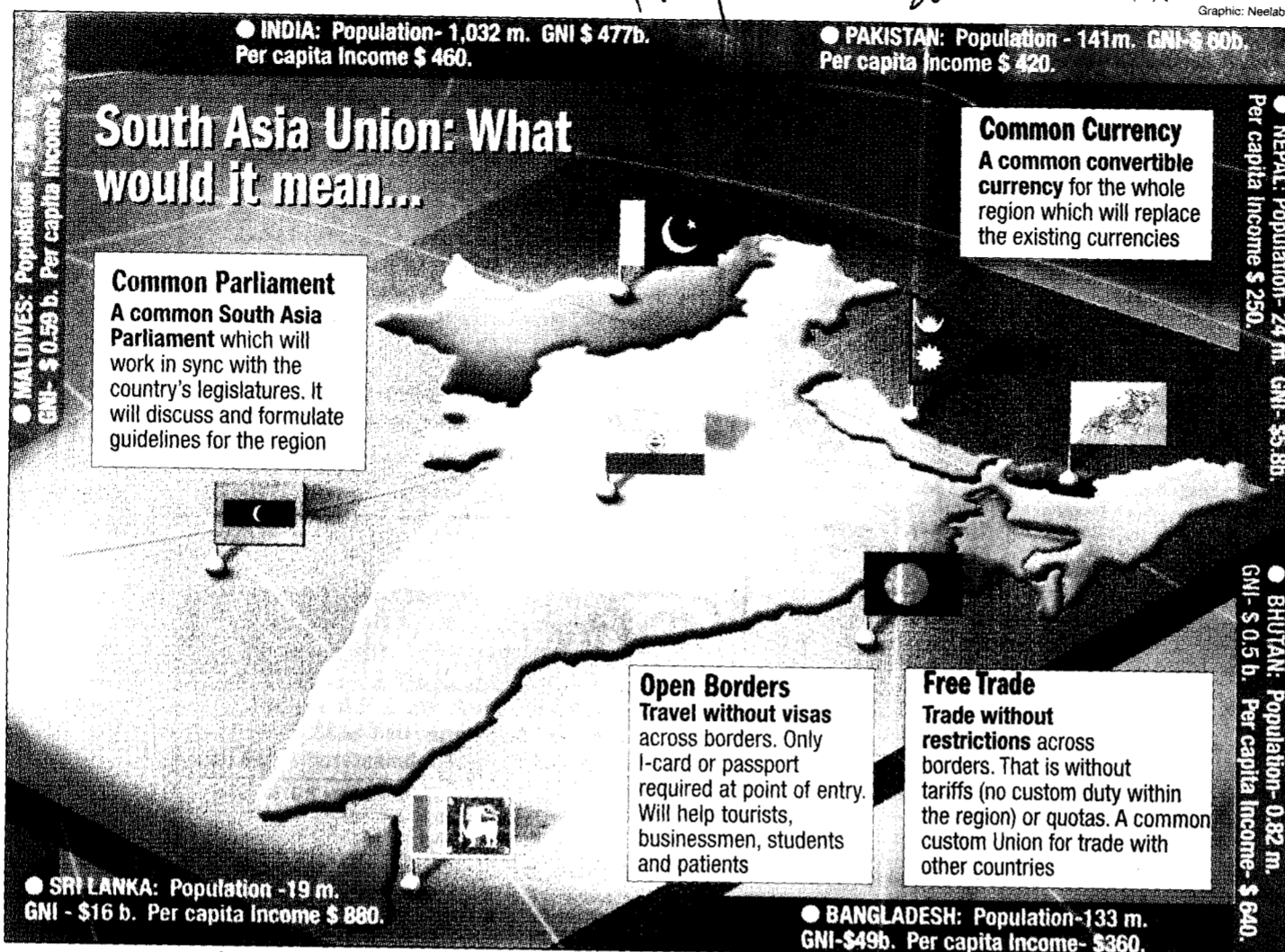
**3 No conflict zone**  
Inter-state conflicts will not exist anymore. Intra-state challenges of terrorism, ethnic conflicts and sectarian violence can be managed better. Security forces among the member states will therefore be downsized and can be modernised to meet any security challenges from outside the region. There would be no excuse on the part of the military to dabble in national affairs and dominate its politics. This will boost the prospects of democratic reinforcement and people-based policies in the region.

**4 Global power centre**  
A harmonious and strategically compact South Asia will deter the pernicious and divisive influences of extra-regional powers. No outside country, no matter how powerful, will be able to interfere in South Asian affairs and exploit their mutual differences. The region will become an attractive destination for constructive engagement to enhance strategic harmony and economic development.

**5 Advantage India**  
The collective strategic and economic weight of South Asia in world affairs, will increase considerably. Being the largest member of the Union, India will be better equipped to play its legitimate role in world affairs. Free from the burden of regional dissonance, India will be able to devote its energies towards building a vibrant Asia and a democratic, peaceful, multi-polar world. And the world will have to take cognizance of South Asia as a community and India as its core member.

S. D. Muni  
● The author is a Professor of South Asian Studies at JNU

Five reasons why we need a South Asia Union. Five steps to formulate it. Five roadblocks on the high road. **Sunday Times** on the blueprint that is still being thrashed out at Islamabad



# Unification

India's proposal to create a South Asia Economic Union on the lines of EU has met with stiff resistance from Pakistan, but it seems others are willing. Yashwant Sinha said on Friday that some are in favour of putting such a Union in place by 2015 rather than 2020. Utopia? No, say experts. Says Professor Mahendra Lama, JNU, "The region has an edge because of its common history. Before 1947, we had a single currency and an integrated market. Also, the way intra-regional trade has been growing — from \$1.2 billion in 1980 to over \$7 billion now — there are indications that the region is ready for a Union. And soon." A roadmap on how it can be achieved.

**1 Free Trade Area**  
The first step was taken on Friday itself. SAARC foreign ministers cleared an agreement to set up a South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) by 2006. This means, abolition of tariffs and quantitative restrictions in the region. According to former Pakistan ambassador G Parthasarthy, once SAFTA becomes operational, the region will also become attractive for foreign investors. "International players can then think of investing in crossborder projects in the region," he says.

**2 Customs Union**  
Individual custom territories of countries will have to be substituted with a single customs union. Explains Lama: "In a free trade area, there are chances of possible leaks in the system. That

is, a country could import a product and then re-export it to another country where the tariffs are higher. A customs union will take care of all such situations."

**3 A Common Market**  
Once a customs union takes place, common market is the next stage. Under this, all restrictions on crossborder investment, movement of labour, technology transfer, management, sharing

## ROAD MAP

of capital resources etc, will have to go, say experts. At the same time, various confidence-building measures have to be taken. "Countries have to address peace and security issues jointly. Terrorism, crossborder crime, etc, will have to be handled together. There has to be common patrolling of borders and investing agencies have to work in tandem with each other," says Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee (retd), Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. This is also the time when people-to-people interactions will increase. "Open borders will ease travel without visas. This will help tourists, patients, students and divided families," adds Banerjee.

**4 Economic Union**  
This is the stage when free exchange of goods and services take place. Countries have to agree on maintaining a fiscal discipline, stability in the exchange rate, and stabilising interest rates, etc. At a later stage, a common currency can be introduced. That is, countries will replace their individual currencies with a common South Asia currency. Lama adds, "Common currency is the last stage of economic union. Before that countries have to harmonise their economic and monetary policies."

**5 Political Union**  
The fifth and final step when regional institutions have to be created. Countries will have to harmonise their security and foreign policy. A common South Asia Parliament can then be formed with representatives of all the seven nations. This will work in sync with the individual country's legislatures. This is the stage when countries will be willing to dilute their national identity to a large extent and become a part of the Union, say experts. "EU has not been able to reach this stage even after 40 years," says Parthasarthy. Maj. Gen. Banerjee feels, "Perhaps, that is why the EU model is not right for South Asia. What we need to follow is the Asean model. The process began in 1967, and evolved over 30 years. Member countries maintain their sovereignty and policies in all major spheres but cooperate enormously with each other. That's the ideal Union."

Sujata Dutta Sachdeva

# ROAD BLOCKS

## SAU unreal... simply a pipe dream

Day-dreaming is becoming a national pastime. How else can one explain the near-hysteria over Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Islamabad visit and the fantasies being woven around it? Visions of an EU-style South Asia Union are being conjured up when Pakistan has been loath even to establish a normal trading relationship with New Delhi and Bangladesh is hesitant to sell its natural gas to India. Five reasons why the Union is a pipe dream...

**1 Pakistan or Problemistan**  
Pakistan is not a normal state. It's Problemistan, and is likely to remain so. No nation has more deadly transnational terrorists on its territory than Pakistan — the Al Qaida, Taliban and assorted Kashmir-jihad groups. While the world worries about terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction, Pakistan flaunts both state-supported terrorists and nuclear weapons controlled by Islamist generals. How can any union include a nation engaged in covert actions in breach of international law, including the export of terrorism, narcotics and nuclear materials? Can India, the world's back office for IT, realistically partner with Pakistan, the back office for IT of a different type — international terrorism?

**2 Political incompatibility**  
Democracies cannot form a union with autocracies. An EU-style union demands minimal political and economic compatibility among its members. India and Sri Lanka are the only thriving democracies in this mottled region, which shows off a military dictatorship in Pakistan, an Indian-reinstated autocracy in the Maldives, a palace-dictated democracy in Nepal, a monarchy in Bhutan and a flawed democracy in Bangladesh. How can we expect economic and political transparency that a union necessitates when some states do not have an independent judiciary or even rule of the law?

**3 Open borders spell trouble**  
When India's security is being undermined by transborder terrorists and millions of illegal immigrants despite closely-guarded borders, imagine what open borders would bring. Bangladeshi refugees would economically and culturally swamp India. Due to its open border with India, Nepal has already become a happy hunting ground for Pakistani and Chinese intelligence as well as for other foreign interests seeking to undermine Indian security. For India, the challenge is to better manage and control its 15,200 km long land frontier with six countries and its 7,683 km coastline.

**4 Geopolitical compulsions**  
South Asia is geopolitically uncongenial to the union concept. The other SAARC members do not border each other. But all of them border India, which they view with innate suspicion because of its dominance. While the EU is the result of equilibrium among several major middle powers, India geographically and economically casts too large a shadow over South Asia. In the SAARC framework, India would have to constantly bend backwards to accommodate others and yet not be able to ease their concerns. India's natural strategic compass, is much broader than South Asia — a land-mass compromising mainly of the former undivided India.

**5 SAARC's a small market**  
The SAARC market is small for India. Such is the size and sophistication of the markets of other SAARC countries that Indian IT exports are almost equal to Pakistan's entire exports. It's only by looking at markets beyond South Asia that Indian companies are becoming competitive. Yet, India needs to attract and influence its immediate neighbours. Having established a general SAFTA framework for liberalising trade and capital flows, India should push for bilateral accords and turn free trade with Sri Lanka into a regional model. With Dhaka, India could start modestly and phase in gradual trade liberalisation so that Bangladesh, rather than illegally exporting its surplus labour, employs them at home to make goods and services for export to India. Such bilateral tie-ups and faster Indian economic growth (not the pursuit of a union pipedream) would arm India with leverage to influence Pakistan's conduct.

Brahma Chellaney  
● The author is a strategic affairs expert

# Peace in air, <sup>growing</sup> Valley on alert <sup>5/11/84</sup>

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, Jan. 3. — Within hours of the *fidayeen* attack at Jammu railway station, security forces in Kashmir valley sounded a red alert today and reinforced police pickets guarding minorities in different villages, to avoid a repetition of Nadimarg and Chattisingpora like carnages.

The IGP, Kashmir range, Mr K Rajendra Kumar, said security forces had been instructed to maintain the highest level of alert to foil ultra designs. "We have a bitter experience about ultras going on rampage and killing innocent people during high-profile visits. Chattisingpora and Nadimarg massacres are grim reminders. This time we don't want to take chances. We have doubled our efforts to maintain peace in the Valley", he said. Militants killed 32 Sikhs at Chattisingpora when former US President Mr Bill Clinton was visiting New Delhi a few years ago. And on 24 March last year, ultras killed 24 Kashmiri Pandits at Nadimarg.

It was after the Chattisingpora massacre that police pickets were set up wherever Sikhs and Pandits lived. These pickets have been coming under militant attack on several occasions. After the killings at Nadimarg, government deployed paramilitary troops at some places.

The IGP said extra precaution was being taken during the Saarc summit.

## A HERO'S DEATH

JAMMU, Jan. 3. — Last night, Lieutenant Triveni Singh played the "hero" at the Jammu railway station as he gunned down two militants singlehandedly before making a dramatic exit from this world.

Lieut. Singh and his team of "ghatak" commandos reached Jammu station within ten minutes of the militant attack in which seven people were killed and fifteen injured. In the ensuing exchange of fire, Lieut. Singh succeeded in killing a militant. The second militant threw a grenade at the officer, injuring him grievously but Lieut. Singh shot him down. "Task accomplished," Lieut. Singh said and saluted the GOC before expiring. — PTI

## Mufti on peace process

Asserting that the attack at Jammu railway station was the handiwork of fringe elements opposed to Indo-Pak reconciliation, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed said today that enemies of peace would fail to derail the peace movement that has gathered momentum this time in both India and Pakistan with "unprecedented popular support".

Speaking after inaugurating a police school complex at Miransahib, near Jammu, he said such attacks would never succeed.



**HANDS OF FRIENDSHIP? Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee being welcomed by Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali at Islamabad on Friday. — AFP**

# Pakistan diary: A trip back in time

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

## JAISH ON PM

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 3. — Some members of the huge visiting Indian media contingent were taken on a trip back in time today when Pakistan Information Department arranged a visit to the ruins of the ancient Buddhist monastery and museum at Taxila.

The 40-km journey from Islamabad, which was against visa provisions (visas were provided for Islamabad and Lahore only — even Rawalpindi and cantonment areas are technically exempt), was arranged after Indian High Commission officials requested for it. What was specially fascinating at the ancient site was the shared history that even the local guides spoke about; the bustling third century BC township along the famed Silk Route close to where Chandragupta Maurya defeated the Greek general, Porus.

At the museum, where exquisite sculptures of the Buddha done in the Gandhara school of Indo-Greek art have been preserved, a signatory in the visitor's book was our national security adviser, Mr Bijesh Mishra, who took a trip down history yesterday.

The ruins nearby at Sirkap, a Unesco world heritage site, had a series of well-preserved rectangular remains of stupas, a Jain temple, residences, market place and guard rooms, all along a "main street"; but the rocks used for conservation appeared closer to circa 1980 AD than third century B.C. (much like conservation work at Siri Fort before the 1982 Asiad), and there were definite signs of cement and concrete.

Another place on today's itinerary was the Sikh shrine at Hassan Abdel town called Gurudwara Panja Sahib, one of the holiest Sikh shrines where Guru Nanak had supposedly stopped the fall of a boulder with his bare hands.



## REVIVING SAARC

It's been a good foreign policy year

NOW that a South Asian free trade agreement looks all but hammered out, there can no better new year's gift to the subcontinent than if the SAARC heads of state meeting in Islamabad were to sign on the dotted line. That would be a much more significant development than the issue pundits are currently debating: whether Atal Behari Vajpayee will shake hands with Pervez Musharraf or not. The latter is a matter of detail and may eventually happen, although the PMO is deliberately damping down expectations remembering, perhaps, the failed Agra summit. With the world clustering into supranational trading zones the rationale for a South Asian economic zone looks obvious, but was held up for a long time due to Islamabad's insistence that Kashmir be resolved first. But the dispute over Kashmir is not amenable to a quick solution — it will be a while before any position acceptable to Delhi becomes palatable in Islamabad, and vice versa. Delhi has been unable to resolve its boundary dispute with Beijing, where the issues are much more tractable. What can be hoped for, rather, is that Delhi and Islamabad put aside their differences and develop areas of cooperation, and mutually beneficial trade is high up on the latter list. If free trade in South Asia is an accomplished fact by 2006, businessmen will acquire a vested interest in continuing good relations, countering powerful militaristic lobbies on both sides of the border — albeit more powerful in Pakistan where the military controls civil society. It is this factor, rather than woolly-headed peaceniks communing at the Wagah border, that is likely to yield durable results. Economic bonds can be more powerful than emotional ones, although the latter have their place — Karl Marx called right on that one.

*South Asia*  
If SAFTA were to be signed, that would cap a successful foreign policy year for the Vajpayee government. In 2002 India and Pakistan looked poised on the edge of a destructive conflict, but war clouds receded in 2003. There was Vajpayee's initiative to Beijing which considerably improved atmospherics and trade between the Asian giants. Relations with Washington also improved, and an agreement for transferring sensitive high-tech is on the anvil, while Delhi managed at the same time to bypass insistent American demands to send jawans to Iraq's killing fields. Vajpayee supped with both Israel's Ariel Sharon and Syria's Hafez Assad.

Most commendable of all, Arun Jaitley led an Indian negotiating team which, by forging alliances with other Third World powers like Brazil, China and South Africa, successfully headed off rich country pressures at Cancun that would have opened poor country markets to invasion by heavily subsidised rich country farm products, and rung the death knell for millions of Third World, including Indian, farmers. Vajpayee has had a strong interest in foreign policy throughout his political career, and the government he leads displayed a lot of chutzpah in this arena in 2003. Let's hope the same level of performance can be kept up in 2004, by whoever is in power by the end of the year.

# অটল-মুশারফ বৈঠক হচ্ছেই

জঙ্গি ঘাঁটি  
ধ্বংসে অটল  
চাপ দেবেন  
খালেদাকে

সুনম চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও  
জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● ইসলামাবাদ

৩ জানুয়ারি: আর কালবিলম্ব না-করে বাংলাদেশে ঘাঁটি গেড়ে থাকা জঙ্গিদের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়াকে অনুরোধ জানাবেন।

বেগম জিয়াকে পরিস্কার বলা হবে, বাংলাদেশের জঙ্গি ঘাঁটিগুলি ভূটানের মতো অবিলম্বে ভেঙে ফেলা হোক এবং পরেশ বড়ুয়া, অনুপ চেটিয়া ও অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া-সহ অন্যান্য আলফা নেতাকে ভারতের হাতে তুলে দেওয়া হোক। এত দিন গড়িমসি করলেও এ বার নয়াদিল্লির এই দাবিতে ঢাকা কর্তৃপক্ষ করতে পারে বলে আশা করছে ভারতীয় শিবির। (ঢাকার খবর, বাংলাদেশে গত ক'দিন ধরেই ভারতের ত্রিপুরা, অসম এবং মায়ানমারের জঙ্গিদের শিবির ধ্বংস করার অভিযান চলছে। বাংলাদেশের স্বরাষ্ট্র প্রতিমন্ত্রী লুৎফজ্জামান বাবর বলেছেন, নয়াদিল্লির চাপে নয়, নিজেদের তাগিদেই এটা করা হচ্ছে।)

পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে কথা বলার ব্যাপারেও যেমন আগাম প্রস্ততি নিয়ে আজ এখানে পৌঁছেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী বাজপেয়ী, ঠিক সে ভাবেই বাংলাদেশের সঙ্গেও দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকে এ ব্যাপারে চাপ সৃষ্টি করতে মানসিক প্রস্তুতি নিয়ে এসেছেন তিনি। ইতিমধ্যে বিদেশমন্ত্রী ও সচিব পর্যায়ে এই দ্বিপাক্ষিক কথাবার্তার ক্ষেত্র প্রস্তুত করে ফেলা হয়েছে।

মূলত তিনটি দাবি বাংলাদেশের কাছে পেশ করা হবে। এগুলি হল— ● বাংলাদেশের চট্টগ্রাম পার্বত্য এলাকা ও রাজশাহী জেলায় দীর্ঘদিন ধরে থাকা আলফা ঘাঁটিগুলিকে নিশ্চিহ্ন করা। ● আলফা-সহ অন্য জঙ্গি নেতাদের ভারতের হাতে তুলে দেওয়া। ● পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, অসম, ত্রিপুরার মতো রাজ্যে অনুপ্রবেশ রোধে কার্যকরী ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা। ভারত ইতিমধ্যেই বাংলাদেশ সরকারকে এ ব্যাপারে কিছু রিপোর্ট ও মানচিত্র দিয়েছে। ৬ জানুয়ারি ঢাকায় বাংলাদেশ রাইফেলস-এর সঙ্গে বি এস এফ-এর সীমান্ত সমস্যা নিয়ে বৈঠক শুরু হচ্ছে। এই বৈঠকে অনুপ্রবেশ রোধে কিছু ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে বলে আশা ভারতের।

ভূটানে আলফা, কামতাপুরী ও বড়ো জঙ্গিদের ঘাঁটি নির্মূল করার অভিযানে সাফল্য অর্জন করে ভারত এখন অনেক আশাবাদী। এর পরে বাংলাদেশ ও নেপালের মত প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রে একই রকম 'প্রো-অ্যাকটিভ' কূটনীতির কৌশল গ্রহণের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে বাজপেয়ী মন্ত্রিসভার নিরাপত্তা বিষয়ক কমিটি। ইসলামাবাদে এসে বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহা জানিয়েছেন, ভূটানের দুটান্ড অন্য প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রগুলির কাছে তুলে ধরা হবে। ভূটান তো তাদের ঢাকাগামী বিমান চলাচলও সাময়িক ভাবে বন্ধ রেখেছে, যাতে কোনও আলফা জঙ্গি তাড়া খেয়ে পালানোর সুযোগ না পায়। সীমান্তও 'সিল' করে রাখা হয়েছে।

এর পর যোলোর পাতায়

## এখনই কাশ্মীর-ইস্তাহারে নারাজ দিল্লি

সুনম চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও  
জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● ইসলামাবাদ

৩ জানুয়ারি: পাকিস্তানের প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ ও প্রধানমন্ত্রী মির জাফারুল্লা খান জামালির সঙ্গে অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ীর সাক্ষাৎ চূড়ান্ত হয়ে যাওয়ার পরে পাকিস্তান এখন কাশ্মীর নিয়ে বৈঠকের নির্ঘণ্ট যৌথ ইস্তাহারের মাধ্যমে প্রকাশের দাবি জানাচ্ছে।

সর্বোচ্চ স্তরের কূটনৈতিক মহলে এই পাক প্রস্তাবটি গুরুত্ব সহকারে বিবেচিত হলেও ভারত এখনও পর্যন্ত এতে সম্মতি জানায়নি। এ ব্যাপারে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত অবশ্য নেবেন বাজপেয়ী নিজে। সার্ক সম্মেলনে যোগ দিতে অটল আজ এক বিশেষ বিমানে এখানে এসে পৌঁছেছেন।

বাজপেয়ী এখানে মুশারফের সঙ্গে দেখা করবেন কি না, তা নিয়ে একটা সাময়িক বিভ্রান্তি তৈরি হয়েছিল। এখানে আসার আগে দূরদর্শনে দেওয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এক সাক্ষাৎকারে পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে কোনও দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠক নয়, এ জাতীয় একটি মন্তব্যকে ঘিরে এখানে পাক শিবিরে তুমুল বিভ্রান্তি হয়। সম্ভবত, এখনই কাশ্মীর নিয়ে দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা হবে না, এ রকম কিছু বলেছিলেন বাজপেয়ী। এখানে এসে যাবতীয় সংশয় ও বিভ্রান্তি দূর করার দায়িত্ব নেন বাজপেয়ী নিজেই। পাক টিভিকে দেওয়া এক সাক্ষাৎকারে তিনি দ্ব্যর্থহীন ভাষায় জানিয়ে দেন, সার্কসদস্য সব দেশের রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানের সঙ্গেই তিনি আলাদা আলাদা বৈঠক করবেন। সার্ক চেয়ারম্যান পাকিস্তানের রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানের সঙ্গে তো বটেই। প্রধানমন্ত্রী এটাও জানিয়ে দেন, কাশ্মীর নিয়ে তিনি পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে কথা বলতে তৈরি। কিন্তু কথা শুরু হচ্ছে না কেন, জানতে চাইলে বাজপেয়ীর মন্তব্য, আমরা দুই দেশই নিজেদের বক্তব্য একে অন্যকে জানিয়েছি, কিন্তু আন্তরিক আলোচনা হয়নি। সে জন্য সময় লাগবে। একই প্রসঙ্গে পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী খুরশিদ মেহমুদ কসুরি বলেন, কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করার ভারতের তরফে পূর্ব শর্ত আরোপ করা উচিত হবে না।

আলোচনা সূচি ভিত্তিক দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠক না-করলেও মুশারফ ও জামালির সঙ্গে বাজপেয়ী যে একান্ত বৈঠক করবেন, তা ইতিমধ্যেই স্থির হয়ে গিয়েছে। ভারতে লোকসভা নির্বাচনের অব্যবহিত পরেই কাশ্মীর নিয়ে দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনার নির্ঘণ্ট বাজপেয়ীর বৈঠকে চূড়ান্ত হবে। এখন পাকিস্তান চাইছে, সেই ঘোষণাকে একটা আনুষ্ঠানিক রূপ দেওয়া হোক, ভারত ও

পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ থেকে এ বিষয়ে একটি যৌথ ইস্তাহার প্রকাশ করা হোক।

যৌথ ইস্তাহার প্রকাশিত হলে মুশারফের যে সুবিধা হবে, তা সহজবোধ্য। পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট সে ক্ষেত্রে বরফ গলানোর কূটনৈতিক সাফল্য দাবি করে দেশের মধ্যে সমালোচকদের মুখ বন্ধ করতে পারবেন। পাকিস্তানের মুশারফ-বিরোধী কট্টর মহল ইতিমধ্যেই অভিযোগ তুলছে যে, ফৌজি



ভবিষ্যৎ-ভাবনায় মগ্ন। বিমানবন্দরে বাজপেয়ী ও জামালি। — এ এফ পি

## মুশারফের জন্য নতুন সুরক্ষা-কবচের হৃদিস

সুনম চট্টোপাধ্যায় ● ইসলামাবাদ

৩ জানুয়ারি: কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু না-করুন, এ দেশের ফৌজি প্রেসিডেন্টকে তাঁর নিজের সুরক্ষার জন্য একটা নতুন যন্ত্র ব্যবহারের পরামর্শ দিতেই পারেন অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী। সুরক্ষা যন্ত্রটির পোশাকি নাম 'ইনিশিয়েটর'।

ইসলামাবাদ বিমানবন্দর থেকে সারিনা হোটলে আসার পথে বাজপেয়ীর নিরাপত্তার জন্য ব্যবহৃত হয়েছে এই অত্যাধুনিক যন্ত্রটি। তাঁর ভি ভি আই পি কনভয়ের একেবারে সামনের গাড়িটিতে। যাত্রাপথে কোথাও বিস্ফোরক লুকিয়ে রাখা হলে এই 'ইনিশিয়েটর' তাকে আগে থেকে চিহ্নিত করে ফাটিয়ে দিতে পারে। এবং এই ভাবে কতকটা অনায়াসে এর সাহায্যে ষড়যন্ত্রীর লক্ষ্যভ্রষ্ট করে দেওয়া যায়।

বাজপেয়ীর আজকের নাতীর্ঘ যাত্রাপথে বিস্ফোরক তো দূরস্থান, মামুলি পথচারীরও দাঁড়িয়ে থাকার কোনও অবকাশ ছিল না। ফলে, 'ইনিশিয়েটর'-কে

তার কাজ করতে হয়নি। কিন্তু, পারভেজ মুশারফ যে রকম ঘন ঘন নিজের দেশে আক্রান্ত হচ্ছেন, তাতে এমন একটা যন্ত্রের প্রয়োজন তাঁর হতেই পারে। পাকিস্তানের নামজাদা দৈনিক 'ডন'-এ দেখলাম মুশারফের গাড়িতে যে সুরক্ষা-যন্ত্রটি থাকে, তার নাম 'জ্যামার'। তবে এই 'জ্যামার' বিস্ফোরককে আগে থেকে চিহ্নিত করতে পারে না, শুধু বিস্ফোরণকে কিছুক্ষণ বিলম্বিত করে দেওয়ার ক্ষমতা ধরে। গত ১৪ ডিসেম্বর, প্রথম বার আক্রান্ত হওয়ার দিন গাড়িতে 'জ্যামার' ছিল বলেই প্রাণে বেঁচে গিয়েছিলেন মুশারফ। এ বার বাজপেয়ীকে দেখে তিনি যদি 'ইনিশিয়েটর'-ও কিনতে উৎসাহী হন, আশ্চর্য হওয়ার কিছুই থাকবে না।

যেমন, বাজপেয়ী এখানে পা দিয়েই মুশারফের সঙ্গে আলোচনার কথা ঘোষণা করে দেওয়ার পরে পাকিস্তান শিবিরে যে উচ্ছ্বাস আর আনন্দের বন্যা ছলে যাবে, তা নিয়েও কোনও সন্দেহ ছিল না। খোলা থেকে বেড়াটি বাজপেয়ী নিজেই বের

করে দেওয়ার আগে পর্যন্ত এখানে ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের বিদেশ দফতরের কর্তব্যজ্ঞারা যতগুলো সাংবাদিক বৈঠক করেছেন, তার প্রত্যেকটিতে বার বার ঘুরে ফিরে উঠে এসেছে একটাই প্রশ্ন-আসছেন তো বাজপেয়ী, কিন্তু তিনি মুশারফের সঙ্গে দেখা করবেন তো? হবে তো দু'জনের মধ্যে কথাবার্তা? সিডনিতে আজ সচিবের ব্যাটিং দেখে অস্ট্রেলিয়ানরা যতটা হতাশ, বাজপেয়ী আলোচনায় সম্মত না-হলে মুশারফ এবং পাকিস্তানিরা হতাশ হবেন বোধ হয় তার চেয়ে কয়েক গুণ বেশিই।

অটলবিহারীর ভাবমূর্তি এ দেশে যথেষ্টই উজ্জ্বল। শুধু মুশারফ কেন, সাধারণ পাকিস্তানিরাও মনে করেন ভারতের বর্ষায়ান প্রধানমন্ত্রী সত্যিই তাঁদের দেশের সঙ্গে বন্ধুত্ব চান, এবং চান কাশ্মীর সমস্যার সমাধানে আন্তরিক ভাবে উদ্যোগী হতে। লালাকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী বাগড়া না-দিলে আগরাতেই বাজপেয়ী আর মুশারফের মধ্যে সমঝোতা হতে পারত বলে পাকিস্তানিদের স্থির বিশ্বাস। সে দিক থেকে

দেখতে গেলে এ বার আলোচনা শুরু করার পথে উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী কোনও প্রতিবন্ধকতা সৃষ্টি করেননি, পাক শিবির তাতে হাঁফ ছেড়ে বেঁচেছে। আগরার মতো এই ইসলামাবাদেও তাঁর সঙ্গী হওয়ার জন্য আডবাণীকে অনুরোধ করেছিলেন বাজপেয়ী। কিন্তু আডবাণী সেই প্রস্তাবে রাজি হননি। পাকিস্তানিদের কাছে সেটা অবশ্যই 'সুখবর'।

সঙ্গে না-আনলেও পাকিস্তানে এসে তিনি ঠিক কী কী করতে চলেছেন, সে ব্যাপারে উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে সম্পূর্ণ অবহিত করেই দিল্লি ছেড়েছেন বাজপেয়ী। তা ছাড়া, এ বার 'কিংকর্তব্য', তা নিয়ে বাজপেয়ী আর আডবাণীর মধ্যে কোনও মতবিরোধও ছিল না। আগরার ব্যর্থ আলোচনায় মুশারফের দাবি ছিল একটাই। তা হল, সবার আগে কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আলোচনা করতে হবে। তার পর আলোচনা হবে অন্যান্য বিষয়ে। ভারতের পাল্টা বক্তব্য ছিল, কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আলোচনা হতেই পারে। কিন্তু

এর পর যোলোর পাতায়

# অটল চাপ দেবেন খালেদাকে

প্রথম পাতার পর

বাংলাদেশের পাশাপাশি একই আর্জি নেপালের কাছেও পেশ করবেন বাজপেয়ী। সেখানে মাওবাদী জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ বন্ধের জন্যও চাপ দেওয়া হবে। নেপাল-ভারত দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকে বাজপেয়ী জানাবেন, কী ভাবে এখনও মাওবাদী জঙ্গিরা বিহারের পূর্ণিয়া ও পশ্চিমবঙ্গের শিলিগুড়ি করিডর দিয়ে ভারতে ঢুকছে। উত্তরপ্রদেশের তরাই অঞ্চল দিয়েও এদের অবাধ আসা যাওয়া বন্ধে দু'দেশ যৌথ ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণের চেষ্টা করবে।

বাংলাদেশের জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ সম্পর্কে ভারত তার উদ্বেগ অবশ্য নানা ভাবে খালেদা জিয়াকে জানিয়েছে। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর প্রিন্সিপাল সেক্রেটারি ব্রজেশ মিশ্র নিজের ঢাকা গিয়ে বেগম জিয়ার সঙ্গে এ ব্যাপারে বৈঠক করেছিলেন। কাঠমান্ডুর সার্ক সম্মেলনের সময় বাজপেয়ী-খালেদা দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকেও বিষয়গুলি নিয়ে আলোচনা হয়। কিন্তু নয়াদিল্লির অভিযোগ, এর পরেও কোনও ব্যবস্থা নেয়নি বাংলাদেশ সরকার। সবচেয়ে বড় সমস্যা— অনুপ্রবেশ ও জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপের কথা বাংলাদেশ সরকার কোনও দিনই স্বীকার করেনি।

বাংলাদেশের কাছে ভারতীয় গোয়েন্দাদের যে সব তথ্য জানানো হচ্ছে, তাতে বলা হচ্ছে, প্রায় দেড় কোটি বাংলাদেশি অনুপ্রবেশকারী ভারতের বিভিন্ন রাজ্যে বসবাস করছেন। ৪০৯৬ কিলোমিটার দীর্ঘ সীমান্তের অনেকটাই এখনও কাঁটাতারের বেড়া লাগান সম্ভব হয়নি। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রকের রিপোর্ট অনুসারে, পশ্চিমবঙ্গে ৭৯ লক্ষ, অসমে ৫০ লক্ষ, বিহারে ৪.৭৫ লক্ষ, ত্রিপুরায় ৩.৭৫

লক্ষ, দিল্লিতে ৩.৭ লক্ষ বাংলাদেশি অবৈধভাবে বসবাস করছেন। নাগাল্যান্ডে ১৯৯১ সালে ২০ হাজার বাংলাদেশি বসবাস করছিলেন, এখন তা হয়েছে ৭৫ হাজার।

উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের জঙ্গিরা বাংলাদেশের কোন কোন এলাকায় কী ভাবে ঘাঁটি গেড়েছে, তা-ও জানানো হয়েছে। বাংলাদেশে এরা আশ্রয় নিচ্ছে, প্রশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্র গড়ে তুলছে এবং অস্ত্র সঞ্চয় ও পাচারের কাজ করছে। ত্রিপুরার এন এল এফ টি, এ টি এফ, অসমের আলফা, এন ডি এফ বি, মেঘালয়ের এইচ এন এল সি, এ এন ভি সি, নাগাল্যান্ডের এন এস সি এন (মুইভা এবং খাপলাং গোষ্ঠী), মণিপুরের পি এল এ, ইউ এন এল এফ জঙ্গি সংগঠনগুলি বাংলাদেশের বন্দরবন, রাস্তামাটি, চট্টগ্রাম, খাগড়াছড়ি, মৌলবীবাজার, হবিগঞ্জ, শ্রীহট্ট, ময়মনসিংহ, কুড়িগ্রাম, কুমিল্লা ও ঢাকায় ঘাঁটি তৈরি করে আছে। কক্সবাজার হল জঙ্গিদের অস্ত্র কেনা-বেচার প্রধান জায়গা। এখান থেকে সড়ক পথে ভারতে অস্ত্র পাচার হচ্ছে।

যে সব জঙ্গি নেতা বাংলাদেশে আছেন, তাঁদের নামের একটি তালিকাও তৈরি করে বাংলাদেশকে দেওয়া হয়েছে। আলফা নেতারা ছাড়া অন্যদের মধ্যে রয়েছেন কে এল ও প্রধান জীবন সিংহ, এন ডি এফ বি সভাপতি রঞ্জন দইমারি, এইচ এন এল সি চেয়ারম্যান জুলিয়াস ডোরফাং, এ এন ভি সি চেয়ারম্যান দিলাশ মারাক, এন এল এফ টি চেয়ারম্যান বিশ্বমোহন দেববর্মা, এ টি এফ সভাপতি বক্ষিত দেববর্মা। এঁদের অধিকাংশের কাছেই বাংলাদেশি পাসপোর্ট আছে। ভারত এঁদের ফেরত চায়।

পাকিস্তানের জঙ্গিরাও বাংলাদেশকে

ভারত-বিরোধী কার্যকলাপের জন্য ব্যবহার করছে বলে অভিযোগ জানানো হয়েছে। ভারত চায়, আল কায়দা জঙ্গিদের মতো ভারত-বিরোধী জঙ্গি সংগঠনগুলির বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নিন পাক-প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ। একই প্রত্যাশা বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর থেকেও।

ভারতীয় গোয়েন্দা রিপোর্টের ভিত্তিতে ইতিমধ্যেই বাংলাদেশ সরকারকে কিছু তথ্য জানান হয়েছে। ● গুজরাতের প্রাক্তন স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী হারিন পাণ্ড্য-র হত্যায় জড়িত অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের অসগর আলি জানিয়েছে, এই হত্যার আগে আট জনকে বিশেষ প্রশিক্ষণ নিতে বাংলাদেশ হয়ে পাকিস্তান পাঠানো হয়েছিল। ২০০২ সালের ডিসেম্বরে এই প্রশিক্ষণ দেওয়া হয়। ● লে-মানালি সড়ক উড়িয়ে দেওয়ার হুক কবেছিল হিজবুল মুজাহিদিন জঙ্গি কারি সালিম। কিন্তু পরিকল্পনা সফল হওয়ার আগেই '৯৯ সালে গুয়াহাটীতে তাকে ধরা হয়। কারি সালিম জানিয়েছে, বাংলাদেশ থেকেই সে ভারতে এসেছিল। ● কাঠমান্ডু থেকে আই সি-৮১৪ বিমান ছিনতাইয়ের ঘটনায় ধৃত জঙ্গিরাও '৯৯ সালের ডিসেম্বর মাসে পাকিস্তান থেকে বাংলাদেশ হয়ে ভারতে এসেছিল।

এ রকম নানা তথ্য পেশ করে ভারত বাংলাদেশকে বার বার সতর্ক করেছে। এ বার খোদ ইসলামাবাদের মাটিতেই খালেদার উপরে প্রবল কূটনৈতিক চাপ দিতে চলেছেন বাজপেয়ী। তবে, সার্ক সম্মেলন শুরুর আগেই বাংলাদেশ যেভাবে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কিছু আলফা জঙ্গিকে গ্রেফতার করেছে, তাতে ভারত আশাবাদী, এ বার হয়তো পাকিস্তানের পাশাপাশি বাংলাদেশকে কেন্দ্র করে তৈরি উত্তেজনা প্রশমিত হওয়ার সুযোগ মিলবে।

JAN 2004

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

4 JAN 2004

# সন্ত্রাস রোধে প্রতিশ্রুতি দিতে চলেছে পাকিস্তান

সুমন চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও  
জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • ইসলামাবাদ

২ জানুয়ারি: আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে এ বারের ইসলামাবাদ সফরে কোনও দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠক না-হলেও এ বার কাশ্মীর নিয়ে পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে আলোচনা শুরু করার চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে চলেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী।

এপ্রিল-মে মাসে সম্ভাব্য লোকসভা নির্বাচনের পরে সচিব পর্যায়ে কাশ্মীর নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু হবে। তার নির্ধারিত তৈরি করার কাজ এই সফরেই শুরু হতে চলেছে। বাজপেয়ী এই নির্ধারিত চূড়ান্ত করার বিষয়ে পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ এবং প্রধানমন্ত্রী মির জাফারুল্লা খান জামালির সঙ্গেও সৌজন্যমূলক সাক্ষাৎ করতে চলেছেন। দিল্লিতে এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েই আগামী কাল এখানে এসে পৌঁছছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী।

কাঠমাণ্ডুর শীর্ষ সম্মেলনের মধ্যে বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে মুশারফের সেই নাটকীয় করমর্দনের পরে দুই নেতার চাক্ষুষ দেখা পর্যন্ত হয়নি। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের সাধারণ অধিবেশন উপলক্ষে তার পরে দু'জন একই সময়ে একাধিক বার নিউইয়র্কে থেকেছেন, কিন্তু পরস্পরের মুখদর্শন পর্যন্ত করেননি। এ বার পাকিস্তানের রাজধানীতে সেই তিক্ত অধ্যায়ের যবনিকাপাত ঘটতে চলেছে। সুত্রপাত হতে চলেছে বন্ধুত্বের নতুন অধ্যায়ের। ভারত-পাক আলোচনার নির্ধারিত রচনা এ বার সার্ক সম্মেলনে এক নতুন নাটকীয় মাত্রা যোগ করবে।

বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে যেন তেন প্রকারেণ মুশারফ ও জামালির সাক্ষাৎ সম্ভব করার ব্যাপারে পাকিস্তান শিবির ছিল প্রথম থেকেই মরিয়া। তবে ভারত প্রথমে অনেক বেশি অনমনীয় ছিল। ভারতের ঘোষিত অবস্থান ছিল, সীমান্তপারের সন্ত্রাস বন্ধ না-হলে দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা নয়। এ বারও তাই ঠিক ছিল। কিন্তু পাকিস্তান জানিয়েছে, এই সন্ত্রাস রোধে ব্যবস্থাগ্রহণের ব্যাপারেও তারা ইসলামাবাদে ভারতকে প্রতিশ্রুতি দেবে। আর তার ভিত্তিতে ভারত তাদের অবস্থানকে আগের তুলনায় অনেকটা নরম করতে পারে। ফলে, কাশ্মীর নিয়ে দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা শুরু না-হলেও দিনক্ষণ ঠিক করে ফেলা হবে।

সম্মেলনের উপরে দু'দুবার জঙ্গি হামলায় ফলে ভারতের উপরেও আলোচনার রাস্তায় যাওয়ার চাপ বেড়েছে। ভারতকে বুঝিয়েছে, এর পর মুশারফের সঙ্গে কথা না-হলে পাক প্রেসিডেন্টকে ক্ষমতায় থাকতেই দেবেন না

জিহাদিরা, এমনকী তাঁকে হত্যা করার চেষ্টাও আরও প্রবল হয়ে উঠবে।

সার্ক সম্মেলনে সন্ত্রাসবিরোধী প্রস্তাব গ্রহণেও পাকিস্তান আগের কট্টরবাদী অবস্থান পরিত্যাগ করেছে। সন্ত্রাসবিরোধী যৌথ প্রস্তাবে অতিরিক্ত প্রোটোকলের খসড়া নিয়েও পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে জোর

## দঃ এশিয়ায় অভিন্ন মুদ্রা চাইল ভারত

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, ইসলামাবাদ, ২ জানুয়ারি— সার্ক বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকে ভারত আজ দক্ষিণ এশিয়া অর্থনৈতিক জোট গড়ার কাজ ত্বরান্বিত করার প্রস্তাব দিল। এরই সঙ্গে সমগ্র দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার জন্য একই মুদ্রা চালু করা যায় কি না, তা-ও বিবেচনার প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে নয়াদিল্লি। পাকিস্তান তেমন সম্ভাব্যজনক সাড়া না-দিলেও সার্কভুক্ত বাকি দেশগুলি ভারতের এই প্রস্তাবকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছে বলে বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহা দাবি করেছেন। অন্য দিকে, সন্ত্রাসবাদ সাফটা এবং সার্কের নতুন সামাজিক সনদ নিয়েও প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই আজকের বিদেশমন্ত্রী পর্যায়ের বৈঠকে সম্পূর্ণ একমত হয়েছিল। গত কালই বিদেশসচিব পর্যায়ের বৈঠকে এই বিষয়গুলি নিয়ে একমত হয়।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী কিছুদিন আগে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার জন্য অভিন্ন মুদ্রা চালু করার আহ্বান জানিয়েছিলেন। তারই জের টেনে আজ বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকে আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে প্রস্তাবটির অবতারণা করেন বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহা। তিনি বলেন, ২০২০ সালের মধ্যে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার অর্থনৈতিক জোট গড়ে তোলার একটি প্রস্তাব ইতিমধ্যেই সার্কের কাছে রয়েছে। ভারত চায়, সৌহার্দ্য ও সহযোগিতার নতুন বাতাবরণে সেই নির্ধারিত আরও অন্তত পাঁচ বছর এগিয়ে আনা হোক। অর্থাৎ, ২০২০ নয়, এই জোট গড়া হোক ২০১৫ সালের মধ্যে। এই জোট গড়ার রূপরেখা তৈরির সঙ্গেই সমগ্র দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার জন্য অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থা চালু করা যায় কি না, তা-ও খুঁটিয়ে দেখা হোক। প্রসঙ্গত, ২০২০ এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

বিতর্ক চলেছে বিদেশ সচিব পর্যায়ের বৈঠকে। যারা কাশ্মীরে জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ চালায়, পাকিস্তান তাদের স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামী বলে মনে করে। ভারত তার বিরোধিতা করায় সন্ত্রাসের সংজ্ঞা নিয়েই বিরোধ চলছিল। আগার শীর্ষ বৈঠকেও মুশারফ এই অবস্থানে কোনও পরিবর্তন করতে রাজি হননি। এবার কিন্তু পাকিস্তান তা-ও মেনে নিয়েছে।

বিদেশমন্ত্রী যশবন্ত সিনহার সঙ্গে গত কালই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর প্রিন্সিপাল সেক্রেটারি ব্রজেশ মিশ্র ইসলামাবাদ চলে এসেছেন। দিল্লি ছাড়ার আগে তিনি উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী'র সঙ্গেও বৈঠক করে এসেছেন। নেপথ্যে ভারত-পাকিস্তান বরফ গলানোর কাজে তিনি এখানে সক্রিয়।

সরকারি ভাবে পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ থেকে ইতিমধ্যেই একতরফা ভাবে ঘোষণা করে দেওয়া হয়েছে যে, অটল-জামালির মধ্যে কথাবার্তা হবেই এবং তার জন্য ৪০ মিনিট সময় বরাদ্দ রাখা হয়েছে। অন্য দিকে, সম্মেলনের শেষ দিনে মুশারফের প্রস্তাবিত চা-চক্রে ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী যাতে হাজির থাকেন, পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ থেকে সেই চেষ্টাও চালানো হচ্ছে। ৫ জানুয়ারি জামালির বাড়িতে 'রিট্রিটে'ও এই একান্ত আলোচনা সেরে ফেলতে পারেন বাজপেয়ী। তার আগে মুশারফের দেওয়া মধ্যাহ্ন ভোজনের আসরে অটলবিহারী যে হাজির থাকবেন, তা-ও মোটামুটি নিশ্চিত।

কিছু দিন আগে লখনউতে বাজপেয়ী জানিয়েছিলেন, পাকিস্তানে এলে এদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে তাঁর দেখা হতেই পারে। একই সঙ্গে তিনি এ কথাও বলেছেন যে, আলোচনা হবে কী হবে না, তা সম্পূর্ণ ভাবে নির্ভর করছে পাক কর্তৃপক্ষের বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ মনোভাবের উপরে।

অটলের কথায়, "শত্রুতা ও বন্ধুত্ব একই সঙ্গে চলতে পারে না। পাকিস্তান যদি প্রমাণ দেয়, তারা শত্রুতা ছুঁলে বন্ধুত্বের হাত বাড়াতে আন্তরিক, তা হলে ভারতও সাড়া দেবে।"

গত কয়েক দিন ধরে ঠিক যেন সেটাই প্রমাণ করতে চাইছেন মুশারফ। অর্থাৎ তিনি দেখাতে চাইছেন, এ বার তিনি সত্যিই বন্ধুত্ব চান। ইতিমধ্যেই বেশ কয়েকটি স্পর্শকাতর বিষয়ে পাক প্রশাসন এমন মনোভাব দেখাতে শুরু করেছে, যা আপাতদৃষ্টিতে বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ মনোভাবেরই ইঙ্গিতবাহী। যেমন—

১) পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ থেকে ইতিমধ্যেই বলা হয়েছে যে, এ বারের সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলনে তারা কাশ্মীর প্রসঙ্গ উত্থাপন

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

# অভিন মুদ্রা চায় ভারত

প্রথম পাতার পর

সালের মধ্যে অর্থনৈতিক জোট গড়ার প্রস্তাব সার্কের কাছে রেখেছিল বিশিষ্ট নাগরিকদের একটি কমিটি। সেই সুপারিশের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে ভারত আজ নতুন করে এই প্রস্তাব রেখেছে বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকে।

আজ রাতে এখানে এক সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে যশবন্ত সিনহা বলেছেন, ভারতের এই প্রস্তাব সদস্য দেশগুলি স্বাগত জানিয়েছে। কিন্তু পাকিস্তান যে সেই সুরে গলা মেলায়নি, তা-ও আজ পরিষ্কার হয়ে গিয়েছে। পৃথক এক সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে পাক বিদেশ দফতরের মুখপাত্র মাসুদ খান পরিষ্কার জানিয়েছেন, জোট গড়ার ব্যাপারে তাঁদের নীতিগত কোনও আপত্তি নেই। কিন্তু পাকিস্তান মনে করে, ভারতের সঙ্গে বিবাদ জিইয়ে রেখে এই জোট গড়া সম্ভব নয়। অতএব, প্রয়োজন প্রথমে রাজনৈতিক বিবাদের মীমাংসা। এ ব্যাপারে ধীরগতিতে চলার পক্ষপাতী পাকিস্তান।

অন্য দিকে, প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই আজ বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকে সন্ত্রাসবাদ সংক্রান্ত প্রস্তাব, সাফটা এবং সার্কের সামাজিক সনদ নিয়ে সম্পূর্ণ মতৈক্য হয়েছে। সন্ত্রাসবাদ সংক্রান্ত প্রস্তাবটি গৃহীত হয়েছে সন্ত্রাসবাদের সংজ্ঞা নিয়ে বিতর্ক এড়িয়ে গিয়ে। অর্থাৎ, ভারত ও পাকিস্তান উভয়েই একমত হয়েছে যে, সন্ত্রাসবাদের বিরুদ্ধে দায়বদ্ধ থাকাটাই অনেক বেশি জরুরি, সন্ত্রাসবাদ নিয়ে কাজিয়া করা নয়।

সন্ত্রাসবাদের প্রক্ষেপে এত সহজে একমত গড়ে তোলা সম্ভব হবে কি না, তা নিয়ে গোড়ায় ভারতের সংশয় ছিল। যশবন্ত সিনহা নিজে সেই সংশয়ের কথা সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে আজ স্বীকারও করেন। ভারতের আশঙ্কা ছিল, পাকিস্তান সন্ত্রাসবাদের সংজ্ঞা নিয়ে সংঘাতে যাবেই। এবং সে ক্ষেত্রে প্রস্তাব গৃহীত হবে না। কিন্তু সেই আশঙ্কা সত্য প্রমাণিত না-হওয়ায় ভারতীয় শিবির দৃশ্যতই সন্তুষ্ট। পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ থেকেও বলা হয়েছে, সন্ত্রাসবাদের সংজ্ঞা নিয়ে বিতর্ক যেমন চলছিল, তেমনই চলবে। এ ব্যাপারে পাকিস্তান নিজের বক্তব্য থেকে সরে আসছে না। কিন্তু পাকিস্তান চায় না, সার্কের প্রস্তাবে সেই বিতর্ক প্রতিফলিত হোক। পাক মুখপাত্রের কথায়, রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ-সহ বিভিন্ন আন্তর্জাতিক মঞ্চে সন্ত্রাসবাদের মোকাবিলা নিয়ে যে যে সিদ্ধান্ত হয়েছে, সার্কের নতুন প্রস্তাবেও মোটামুটি সেটাই প্রতিফলিত।

সাফটা-র সুবাদে সার্ক সদস্য দেশগুলি নিজেদের মধ্যে মুক্ত বাণিজ্য অঞ্চল গড়ে অবাধে পণ্য আমদানি-রফতানি করতে পারবে। এ জন্য প্রতিটি সার্ক সদস্য দেশই একে অপরের পশ্যের আমদানির ক্ষেত্রে নামমাত্র শুল্ক বসাবে। কিন্তু সাফটা চুক্তির ক্ষেত্রে প্রধান আপত্তি এসেছিল বাংলাদেশ ও নেপালের মতো ছোট দেশগুলির কাছ থেকে। তাদের আশঙ্কা ছিল, এই চুক্তি গৃহীত হলে ক্ষুদ্র ও সব চেয়ে অনুন্নত দেশ হিসাবে তাদের বাণিজ্যিক ও অর্থনৈতিক স্বার্থ বিঘ্নিত হবে। শেষ পর্যন্ত সাফটা চুক্তির যে-খসড়া তৈরি হয়েছে, তাতে ছোট দেশগুলির এই স্পর্শকাতরতাকে যথাযথ মর্যাদা দেওয়া হয়েছে। যদিও সেটা কী ভাবে হয়েছে, বিস্তারিত ভাবে তা এখনও জানা যায়নি।

অন্য দিকে, সার্কের নতুন সামাজিক সনদ নিয়ে কখনওই কোনও স্তরে কোনও মতবিরোধ ছিল না। বিদেশসচিব ও বিদেশমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকের পরে এ বার শীর্ষস্তরের বৈঠকে এই তিনটি বিষয় নিয়ে চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরিত হবে।

অসম্ভবকে এই ভাবে কতকটা অনায়াসে সম্ভব করার পরে ভারত এই সার্ক সম্মেলনকে সফল ও ঐতিহাসিক বলে বর্ণনা করা শুরু করেছে। যশবন্ত সিনহা বলেছেন, এতখানি যে সম্ভব হবে, গোড়ায় আমরা তা ভাবতেই পারিনি। একই কথার প্রতিধ্বনি শোনা গিয়েছে পাক মুখপাত্রের মুখেও। পাকিস্তানও মনে করছে, সার্কের ইসলামাবাদ শীর্ষ সম্মেলন এগোচ্ছে ঐতিহাসিক সাফল্যের দিকেই।

# Superbazar South Asia

## Islamabad summit could be a new beginning for the region

As the curtain goes up on the 12th SAARC summit at Islamabad on Sunday, the atmospherics look better than usual. Long dismissed as a mere talking shop for the world's poor, the South Asian grouping is suddenly being seen as a potentially thriving economic community. Some have even suggested that if the leadership of two of the major countries in the region — India and Pakistan — can set aside their history of conflict and animosity, then SAARC could well re-invent itself as the South Asian equivalent of the European Union. Free trade, common currency and, arguably, the world's single biggest market in terms of numbers. The possibilities are limitless. But let's face it: Given the close co-relation between the fortunes of SAARC and the state of Indo-Pak relations, there can be no way forward without a normalisation of relations between the Big Two. The current thaw between New Delhi and Islamabad gives the summit a better chance of success. No less significant are two other long-term developments. Time was when Pakistan saw its strategic future almost entirely in West Asian terms. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once famously told a top-ranking Indian bureaucrat that Islamabad wanted to turn its back on India because its eventual destiny lay with its West Asian co-religionists.

That option appears less probable today. Post-9/11, Washington is increasingly wary of Pakistan's regional 'look West' policy, particularly given its role as the epicentre of global terror networks. Recent evidence of Pakistan's complicity in transferring nuclear secrets to Iran and, further afield, Libya, has only added to the American anxiety. It makes eminent sense for Pakistan to reconsider its strategic choices. Then there is the economic rationale. After nearly a decade of liberalisation and growth, India is today equipped to play the role of an economic powerhouse that can drive the region to a new era of prosperity. Clearly, it's in the interest of everyone to cooperate. And it is interest rather than idealism that provides the only lasting basis for cooperation among nations. Any significant breakthroughs at the SAARC summit will, however, still hinge greatly on the initiative and conviction shown by Atalji. Not only because he leads the biggest member-state in SAARC. But also because he alone among the present South Asian leaders has the necessary vision and, not least, political standing to do so. By giving voice to his dream of a common South Asian currency in Delhi recently, Atalji has indicated how he'd like the region to evolve. At Islamabad, he can lend that dream a touch of reality by coming up with a new economic roadmap for South Asia.

## HEARTENING DEVELOPMENTS IN SAARC

81 ✓ 110-12 ✓ South Asia  
THE APPROVAL OF a draft framework treaty for a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) to be signed at the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Islamabad next week is a huge morale-booster for the region. The treaty, first discussed in 1995, has been long in the coming. It missed the original deadline of 2001 mainly on account of Pakistan's refusal to deal with economic issues ahead of a resolution of the Kashmir issue. But the fact that the vision is now nearly a reality owes as much to the improved relations between SAARC's two biggest member-states as to the realisation by all members of the seven-nation group that economic cooperation is one of the key ingredients to building a stable and peaceful South Asia. The SAFTA framework treaty — approved by the Foreign Ministers in preparation for its finalisation by the leaders at the summit — and the agreement on an additional protocol to the SAARC Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism are concrete signs that SAARC members are finally ready to move on core issues of regional cooperation. The protocol on terrorism, which will bring the regional convention in line with the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373, had been hanging fire since the last summit in Kathmandu in 2002 because of disagreement between India and Pakistan over the definition of terrorism. For a group bogged down since its inception by the tensions between these two countries, even unable to hold the summit on two occasions for this reason, these are breakthrough achievements.

The SAFTA agreement is also evidence that the bigger countries in the region are capable of accommodating the interests of the smaller ones despite fears to the contrary. India and

Pakistan both strove to remove one of the last stumbling blocks to SAFTA by agreeing to fast-track the lowering of tariffs on imports from the less developed member-states. But the signing of the agreement will be the easier part of the deal. The true test for regional cooperation will come when the member-countries begin working out the nuts and bolts of the agreement, such as negative lists, rules of origin and non-tariff barriers. The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement, signed in 1998, offers the lesson that good intentions and political will are necessary but are not by themselves adequate in a matter like trade that affects the interests of various lobbies and pressure groups. The main fears of the smaller countries are of being swamped by goods from the bigger countries, of losing revenues from import tariffs, and of balance of payments turning unfavourable because of an inadequate manufacturing base.

The challenge for SAARC will be to manage these sensitive issues. The treaty does give less developed countries more time to implement SAFTA, and thereby does partly address these concerns, but clearly, the larger economies will need to make some sacrifices. At the moment, trade within SAARC is less than five per cent of the total trade of its individual countries. This is in part due to the similarities of the economies in the region. But open borders can encourage greater diversification and specialisation so that intra-SAARC trade can soar to the levels in other groups, such as the Association of South East Asian Nations. SAARC has taken the long-awaited first step. If its leaders can carry forward the process of economic cooperation, they will have contributed substantially to improving the political climate in the region.

THE HINDU

03 JAN 2004

# Securing South Asia

The value of a SAARC protocol on terror would depend on how it works on the ground

THE consensus among foreign secretaries of the seven countries of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at Islamabad, ahead of the ministerial meeting and the summit, is a welcome change from the traditional roadblocks that have always beset it ever since its inception in 1985. One of the biggest of these obviously was the tension between India and Pakistan. It can, of course, be argued that Pakistan's need to see a successful summit being hosted by it after a gap of 16 years — and despite the fact that the shadow of terrorism continues to loom over the country as the two recent assassination attempts on its president testified to — has provided a major incentive for its cooperation. At this point it is reasonably clear that the countries have an agreed draft protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism agreed upon in 1987. But it seems to be similar to a half full — or empty — glass of water, and hence subject to the perceptions of the beholder.

The protocol draws its substance from the numerous UN resolutions on terrorism dating to pre- and post-September 11, 2001, and covers the issue of the freezing of funding to ter-

rorist organisations. Pakistan is signatory to these resolutions and claims to be a principal partner of the international community in its war against terrorism. To that extent its acceptance of the protocol by itself may be dismissed by some as inadequate evidence of a change in its stance. As it is, it was holding up the draft over the issue of the definition of terrorism itself.

At the same time, the very fact that SAARC could agree to a protocol on terrorism, one that takes the 1987 convention forward, should be viewed as significant progress. Its value for the future would be governed by the way it would work in practice. What is needed is the sincere and expeditious implementation of the protocol, and to look beyond it for the future. External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha's call for a regional coalition against terrorism, therefore, assumes great relevance and importance. Bhutan's cooperation, and for that matter that also of China, in recent anti-terrorist operations stand out as models for SAARC countries to follow. But this, as Prime Minister Vajpayee told a Pakistani newspaper, would require "a spirit of accommodation and compromise rather than one of unremitting hostility."

INDIAN EXPRESS 03 JAN 2004



# Ready for dialogue, ball in India's court: Pakistan

● Sinha-Kasuri bonhomie at SAARC meet

By Amit Baruah and B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, JAN. 2.** Keeping up the positive momentum on the India-Pakistan front, the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, said tonight that the draft agreements on trade and terrorism among the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations had the potential of "rubbing off" on bilateral ties in South Asia.

While refusing to commit himself on whether or not there would be a bilateral meeting at the highest levels between the Indian and Pakistani leadership on the sidelines of the SAARC summit, an upbeat Mr. Sinha told a large gathering of presspersons that they should remain in suspense for a while.

As the accords on trade and terrorism became formal, the focus in Islamabad has completely shifted to what will happen to India-Pakistan relations once the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, arrives here on Saturday evening to attend the summit from Sunday.

Mr. Sinha said that a SAARC panel had been asked to study the idea suggested by Mr. Vajpayee for the creation of a common currency in South Asia. The deadline for a possible South Asian Economic Union should be advanced to 2015 from 2020.

The Prime Minister's National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, who arrived here with Mr. Sinha on Thursday, maintained a low profile and it was not known if he had any preparatory meetings with Pakistani authorities or not.

Asked about the possibility of a bilateral meeting, the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, said the question should be put to Mr. Vajpayee. "You should address this question to the Prime Minister of India. He will be here tomorrow. He will give you a more meaningful reply. It is only he who knows what is in his mind," Mr. Kasuri told some Indian journalists after a seminar on SAARC economic integration.

"Pakistan is ready for a composite dialogue with India which includes all issues of concern to both the countries, not just Pakistan, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir," he stressed. "We are ready for a dialogue, but the ball is in India's court. Whether there will be a dialogue or not does not depend on Pakistan... it takes two to tango. We cannot do it by ourselves," he said.

Mr. Kasuri was at pains to emphasise that the good atmosphere created due to a series of confidence-building measures and the agreements at the preparatory meeting of SAARC should not be lost.

Earlier in the day, at the opening session of the Council of Ministers, there was much bonhomie between Mr. Sinha and Mr. Kasuri, which was captured by television cameras.

Both of them made it a point to mention in their press meetings that the preparatory process for the summit had gone off remarkably well. Both used the term 'historic' to describe the progress achieved in Islamabad.

In fact, Mr. Sinha, during the course of his press conference, conceded that when he left for Pakistan, he had not anticipated such quick progress on the contentious issues of trade and terrorism. "That is why I am more happy," He disagreed with the view that India's massive size and population should be held against it. This, he suggested, should be leveraged for the greater benefit of the region.

To a question from a Pakistani journalist, he rejected the notion that the proposal for a South Asian Economic Union was New Delhi's ploy to undo the "Partition."

**Editorial on Page 10**  
**A transit route: Page 11**

## Interviews cancelled

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 2.** The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today cancelled interviews with Pakistan Television and Doordarshan due to "sore throat." Scheduled to leave for Islamabad tomorrow, Mr. Vajpayee has been advised by doctors not to strain his throat, sources said. — PTI

Tide is turning in the affairs of men and the state on either side of border

# Happy end to 7-year marriage itch

CHANDRIMAS BHATTACHARYA

Mumbai, Jan. 2: Thanks to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf cooing at each other, other people can get married.

As a radiant Faiza, heavy gold jewellery glittering on her neck and ears, emerged from the long immigration-clearing process at the Mumbai international airport, the 40-odd family members — they had hired a bus to come to the airport — swamped the bride-to-be, leaving her severely out of breath. But she had waited for this moment for seven years.

Twenty-something Faiza, a resident of Karachi, has been engaged to Asif, her 23-year-old cousin in Mumbai, for seven years. There have been several attempts to marry them off, but the ceremony was put off every time because of what was happening across the border. Till the resumption of the air service between Pakistan and India.

The first Pakistan Interna-



A Pakistani woman greets her relative from Mumbai at Karachi airport. (Reuters)

tional Airline flight arrived in Delhi yesterday from Lahore. The second carrying Faiza and 160 others, including her parents and grandparents, landed at the Mumbai international airport at 1.30 pm today.

"Finally my son can get married," said Asif's father, Abdul Gaffar, a Mumbai businessman, a relieved man.

"There were problems every time we planned the marriage," he said. "Since the direct India-Pakistan air service stopped, someone coming from Pakistan would have to pay about Rs 40,000 in Pakistani currency to come here. Now they are paying only Rs 12,000 in Pakistani currency," Gaffar said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

# Saarc wind drives ties

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Islamabad, Jan. 2: The wind is in the sails. The boat is raring to go and both India and Pakistan are in it. The gathering forces may just propel them forward willy-nilly.

The historic outcome of the Saarc summit here has the potential to help jump-start the stalled bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan.

"Ultimately regional cooperation translates into bilateral operation also. It is bound to rub off on bilateral ties, including those between India and Pakistan," said external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha.

However, he admitted that he was not in a position to end the suspense about whether Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee would meet the Pakistani leadership over the next four days. "You will have to live with the suspense for some time," he quipped.

Sinha predicted that the meeting of Saarc leaders would be "historic". And historic indeed it may turn out to be.

Who would have thought that the desire for peace and regional cooperation would so overtake the countries of this region that they would decide to propose setting up a South Asian Development Bank, plan a common food bank to ensure food security, bury their differences for the cause of creating a free trade

## READY FOR SIGNING

- Agreement to create a free trade area by 2006
- A protocol adopting global obligations to curb terrorism
- A social charter on poverty alleviation, health, children's rights

## ACCORD REACHED

- Study steps to create economic union by 2015
- Run a freedom-from-hunger camp
- Create a South Asian food bank

area by 2006 and agree to multilateral obligations to suppress terrorism?

India today went to the extent of proposing that a South Asian Economic Union be put into place by 2015 and that the finance ministers and governors of central banks of Saarc countries explore the idea of a common currency. The idea of an economic union is blasphemy to many.

To the question of a Pakistani journalist that the idea of an economic union went against the history of Partition of the subcontinent, Sinha argued forcefully that India does not want to "undo" the Partition.

"We have nothing but the well-being of the people of South Asia in mind through improved trade relations, harmonisation

of tariffs, transport linkages, creating a development bank and greater cooperation among the central banks of the Saarc countries. The concept of an economic union has been clearly defined and accepted internationally. Nobody need read anything more into this," he said.

Sinha argued that "today, countries who form regional groupings are in a better position to meet the challenges of globalisation than individually".

"Switch on the engine of South Asian growth to travel on the road to prosperity," he argued. But the official spokesperson of Pakistan sounded immediate caution.

Economic union is "an idea that must be pursued but right now it is premature", said Masood Khan. "You have to resolve political disputes...."

He said: "There has to be an element of simultaneity. You cannot ignore political issues and seek cooperation in other areas."

However, what is clear is that the regional atmospherics show signs of changing dramatically. This can easily facilitate the addressing of India-Pakistan bilateral issues on the sidelines of the summit.

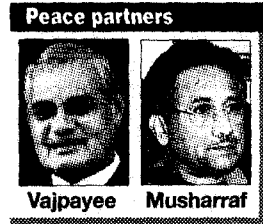
Heavens will not fall now if Vajpayee were to meet Pakistan's leadership and declare intent to restart the dialogue between the two countries.

See Page 8

# Let's make ceasefire permanent: India

## It is madness even to contemplate nuclear war, says PM ahead of Saarc meet

New Delhi: In yet another move towards building trust and confidence with Pakistan, India on Thursday said it is interested in making the existing open-ended ceasefire a "permanent" one.



Before emplaning for Islamabad for the Saarc summit, external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha said that the ceasefire now in place was open-ended and not bound by any timeframe. "Therefore, India is interested in making this a permanent ceasefire. It is incumbent on both countries to ensure that the ceasefire holds. It is a comprehensive ceasefire because it includes the international boundary, the Line of Control and the actual ground position line in Siachen."

"It will be our hope that both India and Pakistan will continue to ensure that this ceasefire remains in place," he added. Sinha's flight is the first Indian aircraft that will land on the Pakistani soil after a gap of two years. India and Pakistan had snapped air links on January 1, 2002, following the December 13, 2001, terrorist strike on Parliament.

Sinha, accompanied by national security advisor Brajesh Mishra, Arun Singh, joint secretary in the external affairs ministry and other senior officials, was seen off at the Delhi airport by Pakistan deputy high commissioner Munawar Bhatti and other senior officials.

Asked whether there will be any bilateral meetings between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the Pakistani leaders on the sidelines of the Saarc summit, Sinha said: "There will be meetings. There will be a number of occasions for official meetings and meeting socially. Apart from that no other meeting has been planned."

"We are going (to Pakistan) with a message of brotherhood," he said, noting that ever since the PM extended the hand of friendship to Pakistan in April last year, several steps have been taken to improve relations.

Meanwhile, in an interview with an Indian magazine here, Mr Vajpayee has stated that "it is madness even to contemplate nuclear war. Our nuclear weapons are meant to be a deterrent".

Referring to the 'nuclear button', the Prime Minister said, "The only button I will press is of an electronic voting machine."

Asked if it was right to conduct the Pokhran nuclear tests in 1998, Mr Vajpayee defended his government's decision to carry out the underground explosions.

"It was definitely the right decision. Most countries today recognise this, though they may not not publicly admit it. The nuclear tests strengthened our national security in a strategic sense," the Prime Minister said.

## PM gets new host minister

Islamabad: Pakistan has suddenly replaced the minister appointed to host PM Vajpayee during the upcoming Saarc summit here, an official said on Thursday.

Finance minister Shaukat Aziz will now act as "minister-in-waiting" for Vajpayee in place of information minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed.

"The change has been made because the Indian external affairs ministry objected to the nomination of Rashid as minister-in-waiting," the official said. Sources said Rashid was considered unacceptable because of his hawkish views towards India.



SOARING HOPES: Cabin crew of the first commercial flight in two years between India and Pakistan exit a PIA plane after it landed at the Indira Gandhi International airport in New Delhi on Thursday.

## Pakistani nationals delighted to return 'home' from exile

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Yusuf Iftekar kissed the Indian soil the moment he disembarked from the PIA (Pakistan International Airlines) flight at IGI airport in Delhi. It was a much awaited homecoming for him after two years of 'exile'.

Iftekar was among the 40-odd Pakistani nationals who were on board Flight PK270 that touched down at IGI at 4 p.m. on Thursday, marking the resumption of air links between the two neighbours after a two-year gap.

"Only (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee could have achieved this. I have waited for two years to come back to India. I belong here, my ancestral house is here in Bijnore. Even my daughter is married to a family in Bhopal. We may have shifted base to Pakistan but this is still my country," said an ecstatic Iftekar.

The 55-year-old businessman from Karachi had to flee India in the wake of the December 13, 2001, attack on the Indian Parliament. "I was here for my daughter's wedding in 2001 when the attack took place. I had to conduct the marriage hurriedly and immediately return to Karachi with my daughter. We took the last flight out of India before ties were snapped and are back on the first flight again."



Yusuf Iftekar's daughter and granddaughter touch down in Delhi on Thursday.

His daughter Ayesha is also relieved. "My husband is now settled in the US. I am here to stay with my in-laws for some time before joining him in the US. This is the first time I will be staying with them since my marriage in 2001," she said.

Most of the passengers on the first PIA flight to India are affluent or non-resident Pakistanis who are visiting relatives in India. "We have been coming to India every year. For the last two years, we have been coming via Dubai and I am happy that the two governments have decided to resume ties. It'll benefit common people like us," said Mukhtiar Bhatt.

Now settled in the UK with his family, Bhatt, along with his wife Yasmeen and 10-year-old son Sohail, were headed for Srinagar.

Though the flight from Lahore (with a capacity to seat 115 people) was more than half empty, the return flight, which left at 5 p.m. on Thursday, was choc-a-bloc and the airline had to offload two passengers.

"This is just the beginning. We expect more people to start taking the flight now as normal schedules will be maintained," said Parvez Khan, PIA's country manager for India.

# WHITHER SAARC?-II

South Asia

5/8/11

## Positive Signals From The Summit

By PARMANAND

Indeed, Kashmir has become an old problem between the two South Asian states. Both are trying to seek their national identity through Kashmir for India. Kashmir symbolises the secular nature of its state structure. But for Pakistan, Kashmir is a contiguous Muslim-dominated area which should rightfully have belonged to her. This problem has for long precluded the creation of a peaceful and friendly environment in the region, something which is vitally needed for economic development and prosperity at the regional level.

### Diplomatic skill

There is, though, another aspect of the problem of Indo-Pak relations as well — a positive and yet irritating one. When Indo-Pak relations are good even for a short time, these relationships exhibited through their leaders before, during or after the summit, supersede other problems in a matter and to the extent that other member-states feel neglected or even irrelevant. This problem, in fact, needs to be managed through good diplomatic skill. After all, Saarc is a multi-member organisation based on the principles of equality.

Not that nothing has happened on the front of regional cooperation in South Asia. The very existence of an organisation like this and the very fact that even pessimist analysts do not suggest its dissolution speak enough for its desirability. Cooperation among the member-states on the front of economic and even security is not only desirable but a crying and serious necessity.

The association did not take much time in establishing secretariat. The Saarc secretariat as established in Nepal's capital Kathmandu in 1987. Intra-regional trade has also increased through the mechanism of the

South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement — which became a concrete reality in December 1995. Now the members are engaged in the fourth round of negotiations. During the first round of negotiations the member-states identified 226 items for mutual concessions — and



India offered concessions ranging from 10-100 per cent on 106 items. The second round of negotiations concluded in November 1996, and resulted in concessions being exchanged on about 2000 tariff lines by all members. The third round of negotiations that concluded on 23 November 1998 had tried to proceed on a sector-to-sector basis.

### Reservations

The South Asian Free Trade Area is yet to become a reality, however. But the movement in that direction is visible. Pakistan, too, appears to be removing her reservations to making it func-

tional. However, Pakistan has not accorded to India the Most Favoured Nation status — something required under the rules and regulations of the World Coming closer of India and Pakistan on the front of trade in an institutionalised manner is bound to remove, or at least

in its present form and manifestations did not exist then. And the two states had democratically constituted governments. Things have changed substantially thereafter.

Things are probably changing once again for the better. Speaking at a function organised by an English daily in New Delhi on 12 December, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee emphasised, inter alia, the possibility and desirability of "mutual security cooperation", "open border" and "single currency" in this region. He is said to have set the tone on the eve of the Saarc summit. On 8 December Pakistan Prime Minister Mir Zafrullah Khan Jamali called up Vajpayee in a goodwill gesture.

### Ceasefire

They reviewed the latest political developments between New Delhi and Islamabad and agreed that it was "important" to sustain "positive trends" in the bilateral relationship. Jamali had, indeed, called Vajpayee from Paris and chose the occasion to thank the latter for confirming his participation at the Summit. Both Vajpayee and Jamali agreed that there had been positive bilateral development over the past few weeks. These developments included the ceasefire along the Line of Control and in Siachen. Earlier on 28 April, the two prime ministers had a telephonic talk on the desirability and importance of people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

The background for the twelfth Saarc summit, then, appears to be positive. Pakistan has signalled only recently that she wants to make the Safta a reality sooner than later. One hopes Saarc emerges as a more vibrant and purposeful organisation and tries to compensate the time it has lost in negative bickering.

(Concluded)

# Accord on SAFTA draft, protocol against terrorism

● Prospects look up for India-Pakistan bilateral talks

By Amit Baruah and  
B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 1. The stage seems set for a possible bilateral meeting between India and Pakistan here as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations today approved the draft South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) framework treaty as well as an additional protocol to the existing regional convention on the suppression of terrorism.

Describing the breakthrough on SAFTA as "historic" for the region as a whole, the Foreign Secretary, Shashank, told presspersons tonight that the accord was reached at the informal discussions among the Foreign Ministers in the evening. India and Pakistan have agreed to tariff-free imports from the least-developed countries (LDCs) in the SAARC within a stipulated timeframe.

India always said that to make the SAARC meaningful, an accord on the SAFTA should be clinched. Now that this has happened, India could be more amenable to a bilateral meeting

on the sidelines of the SAARC summit.

Mr. Shashank said the SAFTA accord would boost development and economic cooperation in the region. Official sources said they saw the SAFTA as the Most-Favoured Nation "plus" in the India-Pakistan bilateral context.

Referring to the accord on the additional protocol, Mr. Shashank said the regional convention on terrorism had been finalised in the light of the developments of September 11, 2001 as well as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 on counter-terrorism measures.

Expressing happiness over the agreements, the Pakistan Foreign Secretary, Riaz Khokhar, told presspersons separately that there had been no request from India for a bilateral meeting with the Pakistan leadership.

Asked why Pakistan was "forthcoming" on the issue while no request had come from India, Mr. Khokhar said: "The SAARC summit is about the seven countries of the re-

gion and whatever discussions take place bilaterally are on the sidelines. ..."

Referring to the calls that had been sought by other visiting Heads of State Government, Mr. Khokhar said: "We are not begging or soliciting [for a meeting]. None of those things. We are the host country and the ground rules of regional and multilateral diplomacy are always very clear."

Mr. Khokhar said: "When, for instance, the Pakistan President [Pervez Musharraf] went to Kuala Lumpur... the President requested a call on the Prime Minister of Malaysia. So, there is what you call a culture of diplomacy. We certainly respect that."

Responding to a reported statement of Mr. Shashank, Mr. Khokhar suggested that if the Indians had said something on a bilateral meeting not being fixed so far, they should stick to it. He, however, said that the SAARC leaders would meet in "retreat" on January 5 at the Pakistan Prime Minister's residence and the leaders could "step aside" and talk about oth-

er things. There was no agenda for the retreat.

Asked about the differences that had marked the discussions on the additional protocol, Mr. Khokhar said Pakistan was mindful of its vital interests and of its obligation as far as combating terrorism was concerned.

The SAARC countries, he said, did not get into the contentious business of defining terrorism. There was, he claimed, no difference of opin-

## Brajesh Mishra's visit raises hopes

By Our Islamabad Bureau

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 1. The unexpected arrival here of Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, has raised hopes of resumption of the stalled dialogue between India and Pakistan. Mr. Mishra came in the afternoon along with the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, in a special aircraft.

Mr. Mishra was in Pakistan in February 1999 ahead of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 'historic bus ride' to Lahore, which resulted in a significant declaration between the countries.

ion insofar as an agreement on the text of the additional protocol was concerned. The draft did not contain any reference to "cross-border infiltration" from Pakistan to India.

In response to a question from a Bangladeshi reporter that India and Pakistan were together when it came to the SAFTA, Mr. Khokhar said it was not as if Islamabad and New Delhi were ganging up against Dhaka. He declined to say whether Nepal and Bhutan also wanted the LDCs status. In response to a question on the SAARC Charter, he said: "We are very clear that it is important for the future of the SAARC that outstanding problems and disputes must be resolved. That will create a normously good atmosphere or progress in the SAARC, for the stability of the region."

Confusion over

Minister-in-waiting: Page 11

## Summitry and chemistry

It's important to get this right during the SAARC meet if the region is to make lasting gains

**E**VEN before the preparatory talks took off, there was an air of expectation about the 12th SAARC Summit, a presumption that it would be more successful than previous ones. For one, there has never been such a friendly atmosphere preceding any SAARC summit in the recent past; and Prime Minister Vajpayee's natural proclivity to move boldly beyond barriers put up by regional or bilateral differences has only added to the air of cautious optimism. Moreover, there is a growing realisation among all the member countries that with the rest of the world moving towards cooperation in all spheres, including in the areas of terrorism and greater economic and cultural linkages, the region can afford to lag behind only at its own peril.

Determined to make this summit a success, Islamabad has been making all the right noises, even promising not to bring up the Kashmir issue and to be "constructive and supportive" on issues such as terrorism. Unfortunately, sharp differences did arise among the members of the programming committee, as the host country sought to dilute the language of the paragraph on terrorism in the draft declaration. Still, expectations continue that something concrete will emerge, particularly in the area of economic cooperation. As Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank said before crossing into Pakistan, "We have to be united against terrorism....and

for free trade. We have to be united for better economic cooperation." Among the items that are expected to be taken up on a priority basis is the thorny issue of the finalisation of the draft pact on regional free trade, which has eluded agreement thanks to differences between India and Pakistan, with the latter insisting on linking trade with the resolution of the Kashmir issue. But with Pakistan's foreign secretary's recent statement that Islamabad was no longer averse to free trade with India through SAARC, and that his country was committed to the regional free trade process or SAFTA, there is hope that there will be some positive developments on that front, including an expectation that Pakistan may grant India the most favoured nation status as required under regional preferential trade (SAPTA).

That said, the onus of making the summit a success, however, will eventually rest on the ability of the leaders of both these countries to rise above their traditional suspicions of each other. They must adopt a more magnanimous approach so as to allow all member states to work together to develop their socio-economic and political potential to the fullest. SAARC is not a forum for airing bilateral differences, and it would indeed be a pity if once again it was held to ransom to the stated and unstated hostility between two of its most important member-states.

## ROCKY ROAD TO SAARC SUMMIT

### July 16, 2001:

Vajpayee and Musharraf hold a historic summit at Agra in an effort to bring peace between the two countries. The talks break down over a decades-old dispute over Kashmir. Both claimed the Himalayan region

### December 13, 2001:

Islamic militants stage a suicide attack on the Indian Parliament, 14 people die including the five gunmen. New Delhi says Pakistan masterminded the attack, prompting the deployment of hundreds of thousands of troops to the border, the cutting of transport links and the recall of India's high commissioner from Pakistan

### January 6, 2002:

Vajpayee and Musharraf meet in Nepal's capital Kathmandu at the last Saarc summit. In a dramatic move, Musharraf shakes Vajpayee's hand, but the Indian prime minister says he is waiting for concrete actions

### May 14, 2002:

Vajpayee and Musharraf meet at a regional summit in Kazakhstan, but avoid each other

### June 10, 2002:

India lifts the overflight ban on Pakistani aircraft after acknowledging a reduction in infiltration of Islamic militants into disputed Kashmir

### August 21, 2002:

Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha and Pakistani Deputy Foreign Minister Inamul Haq attend a Saarc meeting in Kathmandu. No talks are held

### December 9, 2002:

Pakistan postpones a Saarc summit set for January in Islamabad, blaming India for equivocating on whether it will attend

### February 24, 2003:

Musharraf and Vajpayee attend a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. They attack each other's stands over Kashmir

### June 30:

Pakistan sends its first ambassador to India in more than a year, Aziz Ahmed Khan, to New Delhi



### July 15:

India sends new ambassador Shiv Shankar Menon to Islamabad

### December 1:

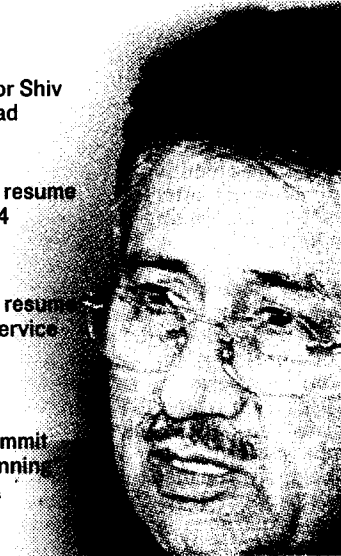
India and Pakistan agree to resume flights from January 1, 2004

### December 19:

India and Pakistan agree to resume 'Samjhauta Express' train service from January 15

### December 25:

Vajpayee says the Saarc summit could result in a 'good beginning' of closer ties between India and Pakistan

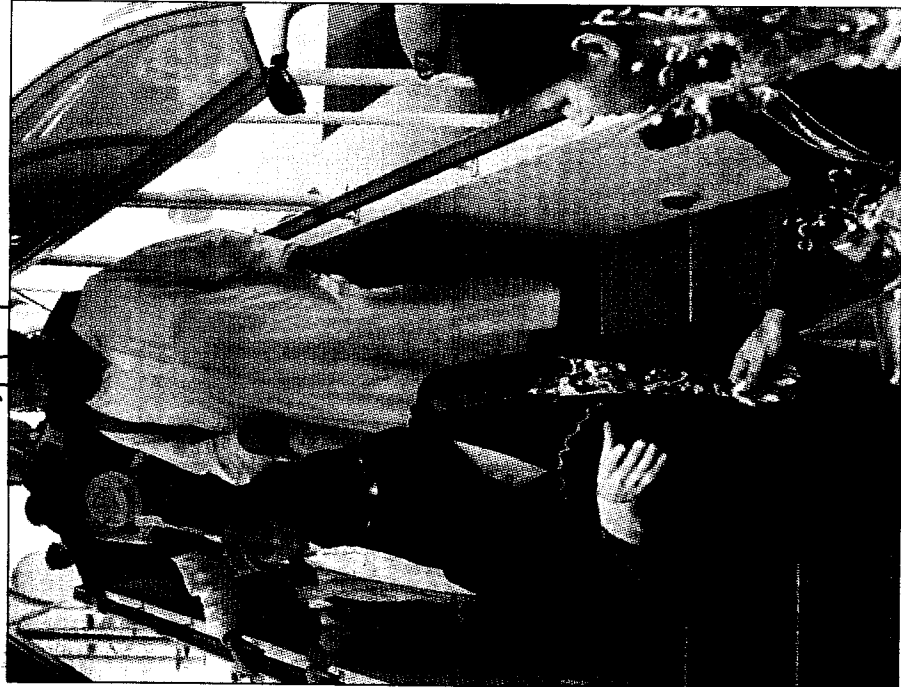


# Saarc agrees on trade & terror

South Asia

4-1-1

2/1/09



**FLYING START:** Passengers of a Pakistan International Airways flight from Lahore — the first PIA flight to India in two years — are welcomed to New Delhi on Thursday. Earlier, an IAF Boeing 737, carrying Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha and National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra, reached Islamabad — the first Indian flight to land in Pakistan since the December 2001 attack on Parliament.

## SAFTA, FREEZE ON MILITANTS' FUNDS SET FOR NOD

Mubashir Zaidi  
Islamabad, January 1

SAARC FOREIGN secretaries achieved a breakthrough on New Year's Day reaching an understanding on terrorism as well as on a regional free trade treaty.

Pakistan foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar said a consensus has been reached on the additional protocol on the 1987 Saarc Convention on Terrorism and the text has now been referred to the Council of Ministers.

The protocol dealt with adopting UN Security Council resolutions on terrorism aimed at freezing funding to terrorist organisations active in the region. Indian foreign secretary Shashank described the decisions as "momentous".

"The framework treaty on South Asian Free Trade Area has been agreed. The foreign ministers, in their informal consultations, described it as a historic process as it would lead to a tremendous upsurge in the economic cooperation among the Saarc countries and also benefit the business community in the region," Shashank said.

The trade will be freed in a fixed timeframe, which means all products, barring a few on the sensitive list, would be open for trading. Under the treaty to be signed during the January 4-6 summit, tariff would come down,

decided not to link trade with India to Kashmir and to open its markets to India under the Saarc process.

Similarly, the additional protocol on terrorism was bogged down by differences over the definition of terrorism. While Pakistan wanted to accord "freedom-fighter" status to people fighting for self-determination, other countries, including India, disagreed with that view. The protocol was finally sealed on the last day of the Saarc foreign secretaries' meeting and okayed by the informal meeting of the foreign ministers.

The meeting of the ministers took place soon after Sinha arrived in Islamabad with National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra. Shashank said the protocol's text has been finalised and will be added to the Saarc Convention on Terrorism approved in 1987. Both Safta and the additional protocol on terrorism would be adopted at a two-day meeting of the foreign ministers from Friday.

Before leaving for Pakistan, Sinha had raised the issue of terrorism and said Bhutan had set an example by cracking down on cross-border terrorists. He also said India is interested in making the open-ended ceasefire with Pakistan a "permanent" one.

**Related reports on Page 5**



### Peace possible in my lifetime: Atal

PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee said on Thursday he was hopeful of a solution to the Kashmir dispute in his lifetime, but that Pakistan needed to change its mindset. Asked if he would ever press the nuclear button, in an interview with *India Today*, Vajpayee said the only button he would ever press is that on an electronic voting machine. "It is madness even to contemplate nuclear war. Our nuclear weapons are meant to be a deterrent," he said.

See Page 5

ranging from zero to 50 per cent. A treaty on Safta had eluded the region since 1998 because of India-Pakistan differences. It finally happened after Islamabad



# SAARC nations strive for trade accord

By B. Muralidhar Reddy  
and Amit Baruah

ISLAMABAD, DEC. 31. Bilateral contacts between India and Pakistan on the sidelines of the SAARC summit are possible if the regional grouping succeeds in adopting the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) framework and the additional protocol to the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.

Highly-placed sources said this evening that these were the two issues that dominated the opening day of the standing committee meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. At the end of the first day, official-level discussions continued in the hope of a possible agreement.

Indications are that as the host country Pakistan is keen on achieving a consensus on both the free trade framework and the additional protocol on terrorism. Most countries assembled here are aware that without a pact on SAFTA, the summit would not be much of a success.

As for the additional protocol on terrorism, the differences are mainly between India and Pakistan on the definition of terrorism. While Pakistan wants a distinction made between "freedom struggles" and terrorism in the context of Kashmir, India is opposed to any such categorisation. India, it appears, is not against showing flexibility in trying to reach an accord on the additional protocol on terrorism. The discussions will continue tomorrow.

Official sources said that experts from member-countries met separately to complement the efforts of the Foreign Secretaries in an attempt to narrow down the differences on SAFTA. As things stand, Bangladesh has reservations about the treaty and wants the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to be given preferential treatment.

"It is not correct to be over-optimistic on the trade agreement at this juncture though in our informal consultations once again special efforts would be made for an agreement. If the Foreign Secretaries fail, another effort would be made at the meeting of Foreign Ministers beginning January 2 as

there is a feeling that we should not let the summit happen without SAFTA," a senior official told *The Hindu*.

The additional protocol on terrorism mainly deals with measures to curb the financing of terrorism in the context of 9/11. While there is no disagreement on the objective, India and Pakistan differ on the approach. India is for bringing the convention in line with a series of post 9/11 U.N. Resolutions and Pakistan favours the adoption of the 2003 NAM Declaration.

The regional convention on terrorism came into force in 1988 following its ratification by the SAARC member-states. On a proposal made by Sri Lanka after 9/11, the member-states had decided that an additional protocol would be included in the convention on suppression of terrorism. A draft of the protocol was prepared by Sri Lanka in May 2002. While there was general agreement on it, an impasse was created as Pakistan and India called for certain modifications in the preamble.

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Security blanket over Islamabad: Page 15

DIGEST

THE HINDU

01 JAN 2004

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## GET SAARC GOING

11/15/09

EVERY SUMMIT OF the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) raises the same question: can this grouping of seven nations ever get its act together to achieve any of its goals? In the nearly two decades of its existence, SAARC has been little more than an acronym for unrealised potential. While other regional associations — most notably the Association of South East Asian Nations and the European Union — appear to be bounding ahead with their business, SAARC has made little headway on the lofty ideals contained in its charter. Together, the members of the group constitute nearly one-third of the world's total population, among the most impoverished and ranked among the lowest in indices of human development in the community of nations. But let alone the ambitious task of tackling poverty in the region jointly, the members have yet to arrive at an agreement for meaningful economic cooperation with one another. SAARC is still struggling fully to implement a preferential trade agreement and to finalise a free trade agreement for the entire region. The main reason for this, as most of its members point out, is that the group has remained hostage to the troubled relationship between its two biggest members, India and Pakistan. Even the summit, meant to be an annual event, has twice fallen victim to the tensions between the two countries. When the leaders of the seven member-countries gather in Islamabad for the 12th summit from January 4 to 6 it will be fully two years since they last met as a group.

But SAARC should not be cynically written off. The concept of a regional association is all the more important now when a single power, through its economic and military clout, is seeking to impose its agenda on the rest of the world. As the former Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka,

Lakshman Kadirgamar, has pointed out, "effective regionalism" is the best way — for both big and small players in a region — to engage with a more demanding outside world. It is encouraging that the leaders of the SAARC member-states have decided to go ahead with the summit in spite of concerns for their security following the attempts on the life of the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf. Apart from being the region's expression of solidarity with Pakistan in its time of crisis, the decision to go ahead with the summit as scheduled shows the importance that members attach to the event and their appreciation that postponing it once again can undermine SAARC's functioning. Now, the leaders must follow up their enthusiasm for the get-together with some real decisions on the ground. An issue that will dominate the agenda at the summit is consensus on the long-delayed South Asian Free Trade Agreement. This is a modest, attainable goal and if SAARC can achieve this, the group will certainly seem more capable of meeting its bigger goals such as an economic union for the region.

Considering that two of the leaders at the summit — General Musharraf and the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga — have come close to being assassinated, SAARC must also send out a firm message on terrorism without getting carried away by the George Bush vision of a "war on terror". By their very nature, regional associations are a difficult enterprise, as seen in the E.U.'s recent failure to forge a common Constitution. SAARC is a comparatively young association but with genuine political will, especially on the part of India and Pakistan, it can grow into a living symbol of South Asian regional cooperation. The thaw in relations between India and Pakistan should definitely help in this.

# Eye on globe, Delhi packs gift for Pak

T-6 11/09 Srinagar



**FOR THE BIG DAY:** A man polishes a newly-built steel globe at Islamabad on Wednesday for the Saarc summit. (Reuters)

## Sweeteners on eve of summit

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Dec. 31: India today announced a fresh set of measures, including technical-level talks for the proposed bus service between the two Kashmiris, to keep up the momentum of the peace process with Pakistan.

The world also sent a message that it is keeping a close watch on the subcontinent with the US, Britain and France wishing foreign minister Yashwant Sinha luck on the eve of his departure for Islamabad. Sinha is due to leave for Islamabad tomorrow to participate in the Saarc foreign ministers' talks between January 2 and 3.

Sinha's British counterpart, Jack Straw, and French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin called him up to discuss bilateral and regional issues and to wish him luck for his visit. In the evening, US secretary of state Colin Powell, who just returned to work after a 15-day break for a surgery, too, spoke to Sinha.

On the eve of Diwali, India had proposed starting the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad and restoring the rail link between Khokrapar in Rajasthan and Munabao in Sindh. It now wants the technical-level talks for the rail link to start from January 12 and that for the bus service from January 19.

India also proposed lifting restrictions, on a reciprocal basis, on the movement of Pakistan high commission personnel. India had confined the movement of Pakistan high commission staffers to the Delhi administration area in the wake of the attack on Parliament.

Foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said India has proposed raising the staff strength in the respective high commissions in Delhi and Islamabad from 55 to 75.

Before the attack on Parliament, India and Pakistan had 110 members in their high commissions. However, as part of the stringent measures unveiled against Pakistan, India had unilaterally announced reduction of high commission staff strength by 50 per cent and, within a few



The Indian flag flutters in Islamabad ahead of the Saarc summit. (Reuters)

days, expelled high commissioner Ashraf Jehangir Qazi.

Sarna said today's proposals were made "in continuation of the step-by-step process of normalisation of links and promotion of people-to-people contacts".

The package indicates that Delhi is giving a careful nudge to the peace initiative to assure the international community that it was making an effort to normalise relations with Pakistan.

At the same time, Delhi refused to give a clear indication whether a meeting will take place between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf or his Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali on the sidelines of the Saarc summit in Islamabad.

The comments of both the British and the French foreign ministers during their telephone conversation with Sinha indicated that the level of expectation of resumption of dialogue between India and Pakistan was high among the world leaders.

## Malik missive to Atal & Pervez

OUR BUREAU

**New Delhi/Srinagar, Dec. 31:** Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front chief Yasin Malik has appealed to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf to seize the chance to bring peace to South Asia by resolving the Kashmir problem. But he added that the efforts will come to naught unless Kashmiris are involved.

"I believe that both of you have firmly grasped the pressing need to initiate a peace process in Kashmir and have voiced statesman-like wisdom on this, the likes of which have seldom been heard from Indian and Pakistani leaders, and what is more, from two leaders sitting in the highest offices of India and Pakistan at the same time," Malik wrote in an open letter to Vajpayee and

Musharraf.

No meeting has been scheduled between the Prime Minister and the Pakistan President, but Malik is sure the leaders will sit down for talks.

"It is a matter of hope to me that I find in your respective public commitments a certain kindred urge for peace and a shared appreciation that a peace process on Kashmir will require statesman-like resolve and a new creativity... I urge both of you to seize the opportunity to now translate your visionary words into visionary deeds," the JKLF chief wrote.

As a goodwill gesture, Malik said his party would not call a general strike on the eve of the



Malik at a news conference in Srinagar. (AFP)

Saarc summit that opens in Islamabad on Sunday.

He reminded Vajpayee and Musharraf of their recent statements that peace in the region is essential. But Malik cautioned that Kashmiris have to be involved, if the peacemaking is to succeed.

"It is my firm belief that the principle of the inclusion of the people of Kashmir is the missing ingredient for a complete vision for a workable peace process. If a peace process is to be just and sustained, it must be accepted that Kashmir is not a territorial dispute: it is about the future and aspirations of living people in Kashmir. It is the reality of loss

and injustice faced by the Kashmiri population and the very deep and real aspirations for freedom and justice that encompass the major substantive component of the Kashmir dispute," he said.

"Being the real victims and subjects of this dispute, the Kashmiris have a rightful, necessary and constructive role to play in the peace process," Malik added.

"No solution... will be lasting unless it is legitimate in the eyes of the people of Kashmir. Quite simply... the key to finding an agreeable middle-ground that will be a win-win solution for India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir is to involve the credible and legitimate representatives of the people of Kashmir in the peace process," the JKLF chief said.

# WHITHER SAARC?-I

## The Unfulfilled Objectives

By PARMANAND

Article III of the South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation Charter talks about the "meetings of the heads of state or government" and says: "The heads of state or government shall meet annually". This should have by now seen eighteen such summits. But thanks to the existing regional politics in South Asia, the Islamabad summit of 4-6 January will only be the twelfth in the series.

### Charter

The founding fathers of Saarc — General HM Ershad, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Rajiv Gandhi, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shahdeva, Zia-ul Haq and Junius Richard Jayewardene — representing their respective states and governments had made this inter-governmental organisation a concrete reality by signing its charter in Dhaka on 8 December, 1985.

Saarc was, in any case, as an inter-governmental organisation founded very late. The Association of the South-East Nations had been established as early as 1967. Several African states had formed the Organisation of African States in 1963, and the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries had been constituted in 1960. Indeed, the Arab League comprising the Arabian states had surfaced as early as 1945.

With the confirmation of the participation of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in the twelfth summit of Saarc an unseemly political uncertainty has been put to an end. By confirming his participation in the summit well in advance Vajpayee has, for sure, exhibited India's commitment to Saarc. In any case, an organisation of the nature and structure of Saarc cannot have any future without the commitment of the region's core state, India.

India's committed participation in the forthcoming Saarc summit assumes a special significance against the backdrop of her role in the just concluded 36th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meet in Nigeria's

capital Abuja. As a member of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the withdrawal of Pakistan's suspension from the body, India chose to rally behind world public opinion that Pakistan's suspension should be withdrawn only when democracy is established genuinely in the South Asian state.

In other words, India has suc-

cessfully shown that while at the international level — particularly at the Commonwealth level — she is concerned over the throttling of democracy, at the regional level she wants the intra-regional cooperation and regional economic prosperity to become a matter of priority. Indeed, India has been encouraging Saarc both as an organisation and a process from the outset.



cessfully shown that while at the international level — particularly at the Commonwealth level — she is concerned over the throttling of democracy, at the regional level she wants the intra-regional cooperation and regional economic prosperity to become a matter of priority. Indeed, India has been encouraging Saarc both as an organisation and a process from the outset.

### Power of veto

The decision-making mechanism of the Saarc Charter, significantly, gives every member-state the power of veto, even without mentioning the word. Article XI(1) of the Charter says: "Decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity". The provision might have by now maintained the principle of equality and might also have given every member-state — particularly smaller ones in

terms of population and area — a sense of belonging and importance, but it has certainly impeded the progress of Saarc in the most significant area of economic cooperation.

Article I of the Charter enumerates the objectives of the IGO and emphasises the promotion of the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to "improve their quality of life". It also aims at accelerating "economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region" and to provide all individuals "the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potential". Another objective of Saarc, according to Article I, is to "promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among countries of South Asia". Saarc also aims at contributing to "mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems". Also, the Association is supposed to "promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields". One objective of Saarc, on the other hand, is "to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries".

Probably ideally, the founding fathers dreamt of strengthening "cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interest"

and cooperating with "international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes".

Needless to stress, the founding fathers of Saarc were guided by a great deal of enlightenment. At the international level, Gorbachov's *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) were attracting attention, even though the USSR, then a superpower, itself had begun to crumble. At the regional level, too, there appeared to be an obvious and irreversible — even though in gradual ways and smaller degrees — march towards democracy and liberalisation. The Charter's objectives were the product of such a regional-international political milieu.

### Export share

One does not, though, need to be perspicacious to discern that none of the objectives enumerated in the Charter has been achieved in any substantial or significant manner. The South Asians constitute about 22 per cent of the world population today, even though the states of this region occupy only 3.36 per cent of the world's land. Many think for this very reason there should have been a great deal of intra-regional economic interaction. The intra-regional export share in Asean is estimated to be 22 per cent; it stands at 63 per cent in the European Union; and it is said to be standing at 51 per cent in Nafta. Saarc cannot hold a candle to any of these regional mechanisms. Its intra-regional trade amounts to less than five per cent of its total foreign trade.

Pakistan, it is true, is not the core or key state of the region. But without doubt, next to India, Pakistan has the maximum potential for making or marring the prospects of Saarc. It is not only the most populous state after India, it is now a recognised nuclear state. Worse, the issue of Kashmir has seen three wars between the two states. And despite the clear provision that "bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations", Pakistan rarely fails to raise the issue of Kashmir in one form or manner or another.

(To be concluded)