

# 'SAFTA will boost regional trade'

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## Joint ventures to create 'trade complementaries'

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** Industry is confident that the formation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) will lead to a steep rise in intra-regional trade but has suggested formation of joint ventures to create "trade complementaries." Estimates made by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) are that India's trade with SAARC countries can touch Rs. 50,000 crore by 2010 and Rs. 1,00,000 crore by 2015 from the present Rs. 25,000 crore.

Assocham President Anil K. Agarwal, who has welcomed the Cabinet clearance of SAFTA, said on Friday that future projections for trade could be achieved if trade competitiveness among SAARC countries was turned into "trade complementaries" for which political will of all countries was essential. In a statement issued here, he proposed that trade complementaries could be created by way of setting up joint ventures in the SAARC region in which the interests of each partner should be equally protected. In addition, he felt the rules of ori-

• **Need to frame friendly rules of origin**

• **Steep rise in share of manufactures in exports**

gin needed to be framed in such a manner that these were neither stringent nor cumbersome to ensure smoother movement of goods from one country to another.

The industry body has prepared a paper on SAFTA which suggests that the top areas of cooperation among the SAARC countries can be textiles, rubber, leather, jute and tea blending. In addition, it says, harnessing of natural resources can be a major source for generating energy requirements of members countries, besides tourism.

Assocham also maintains that though there were many trade reforms in the SAARC region, and most SAARC countries have liberalised trade in recent years, the proportion of intra-regional trade is still quite modest. In fact, it has found that intra-regional trade among SAARC na-

tions as percentage of their total trade with world increased only to 2.46 per cent in 2002 from 2.36 per cent in 1990. India's share with SAARC countries of its total trade with world rose to 3.32 per cent in 2003-04 from 1.50 per cent in 1990-91. Exports and imports grew by 16.46 and 11.12 per cent, respectively, from 1990-91 to 2003-04, it said.

India's trade with SAARC countries was concentrated around a few items, Assocham has pointed out though the share of manufactures in total exports has recorded a phenomenal rise during the period from 1998 to 2003. It notes that the share of the top five items in exports to SAARC is around 48.5 per cent. The share of five main items in India's exports include cotton yarn fabrics (21 per cent), transport equipment (10 per cent), rice (9 per cent) machinery and instruments (6 per cent), drugs and fine chemicals (5 per cent). The share of top five items in India's imports from SAARC countries is around 53 per cent, while the same for Pakistan is 71.2 per cent and Bangladesh 73.8 per cent.

# Dhaka expects rise in regional exports

**Cabinet ratifies South Asian Free Trade Area modalities on Monday**

Haroon Habib

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh has ratified South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and expects exports to increase with the new arrangement scheduled to come into effect on January 1, 2006.

The Cabinet at its weekly meeting on Monday ratified the modalities with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The modalities were finalised at the 12th meeting of the Committee of Experts (COE) on SAF-

TA in Kathmandu.

To kick off the free trade, other member-states will have to do the same and notify their approval to the modalities agreed upon by the negotiators at the meeting.

Some analysts believe, Bangladesh's exports to South Asian nations could rise by four times once the regional free trade accord takes effect. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director of the Development Research Network (D.Net), said Bangladesh would

be the top gainer among the LDCs in the region as it has the ability to offer more products for trading regionally than countries such as Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

Mustafizur Rahman, Director, Research, of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), however, said a major growth in exports could not be expected without raising the capacity to maintain a steady supply of products.

On prospect of growth in India's export to Bangladesh, he

said Bangladesh's tariff level was lower than that of India. A major growth in India's export to Bangladesh may not be possible, as Dhaka was already importing most of the required commodities from India. Imports from India might go up to around \$3.00 billion in the short-term.

The total intra-regional trade amongst SAARC countries is less than \$ 7 billion as against the combined international trade of \$350 billion carried out by the region.

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# SAFTA a historic milestone, says Kamal Nath

Agreement provides for free trade in goods among SAARC countries

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath has described the South Asia Free Trade Area Agreement (SAFTA), which comes into effect from January 1, as a "historic milestone" in the economic profile of South Asia. The agreement provides for free trade in goods among SAARC countries.

In a statement here on Monday, he said the signing of the SAFTA two years ago at the Islamabad Summit was the culmination of a clear commitment arrived at in the 2002 Kathmandu Summit for the creation of the South Asian Economic Union.

He said that despite the limited concessions of South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement so far, regional trade had failed to register satisfactory growth. Implementation of SAFTA would help to correct this by further strengthening our trade

• **Regional trade has failed to register satisfactory growth**

• **Over 90 p.c. requirements of south Asian nations sourced from outside the region**

with SAARC countries, he felt.

On the significance of SAFTA, he said that over 90 per cent requirements of South Asian countries were sourced from outside the region and a major part of exports were destined for countries outside the grouping. Besides, South Asia was not only demographically the largest regional block on the planet, it was also one of the fastest growing regions for several decades — demographically and now economically.

"But the challenges it faces are perhaps also the most serious. South Asia today is home to

almost two-thirds of the world's poor.

Nearly one out of every three people, or over 600 million people, struggle to survive on less than one dollar a day. Wide income disparities existed within and between countries, which needs to be redressed," he pointed out.

The SAFTA coming into effect from next year follows the finalisation of the agreement at the meeting of the Committee of Experts on SAFTA in Kathmandu earlier this month in order to resolve outstanding issues to complete the negotiations.

The objective of SAFTA, which will become fully operational by 2016, is to reduce existing tariffs to less than 5 per cent within the stipulated time frame among the member countries of SAARC, namely, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives and India.

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## Push for reforms in Maldives

V.S. Sambandan

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**COLOMBO:** Maldivian Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed on Friday said his country would seek the advice of an expert from the Commonwealth to "fast-track" the constitutional reforms, which have been delayed on account of "parliamentary procedures."

Dr. Shaheed said here the foreign expert would help the Government in the task based on consultations with political parties. The expert is scheduled to start work in January, but there "is no deadline," for completion of the draft. He described the Maldives, in which multi-party democracy is still in its infancy, as a nation in transition.

Referring to the debates on political reforms, he said there was still no definite opinion on whether the Westminster model or the presidential system of governance was better suited.

The 31-point reforms envisaged by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom were on track and several elements had already been introduced, Dr. Shaheed said.

Minister of Justice Mohammed Jameel, and Minister for Information and Arts Mohammed Nasheed briefed journalists and diplomats on the reforms.

Dr. Shaheed also urged "any international body" to visit the country to inspect the human rights conditions.

THE HINDU

5/12/97  
Safta  
finalised:  
Kamal Nath

**Statesman News Service**

NEW DELHI, Dec. 1. — The South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) agreement has been finalised, commerce and industry minister, Mr Kamal Nath, today announced. The commerce minister, who is in Brussels in connection with G-90 Summit as a special invitee, indicated this in a message on receiving intimation from Kathmandu about the deliberations of the committee of experts (CoE) on Safta.

The committee met in Kathmandu from 29 November to 1 December to resolve the outstanding issues on Safta so as to complete the negotiations. Senior officials of the commerce & industry ministry participated in the meeting, an official communique said.

The agreement, which would come into effect from 1 January next year, is seen as a major boost to regional trade between the seven South Asian countries. Safta, signed during the 12th Saarc Summit held at Islamabad, in January 2004 would be fully operational by 2016. "Implementation of Safta will further strengthen our trade relations with the Saarc countries," Mr Kamal Nath said in his message.

Matters regarding technical assistance had been finalised earlier.

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THE STATESMAN

# For an integrated South Asia

South Asia is the least integrated region in the world. But this is not on account of the infrastructure deficit alone. Intra-regional trade could be increased by policies that permit a more liberal trade regime, says **Praful Patel**.

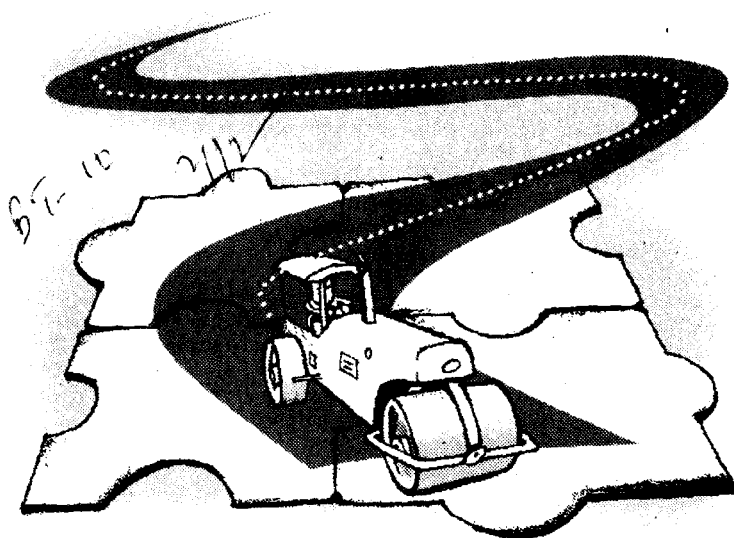
**W**HEN the World Bank appointed me vice-president for the South Asia region just over two years ago, I was eager to visit as soon as possible; to get a first-hand feel of a region I had not worked in previously. But before I even left Washington I realised there was something unusual about South Asia. The most efficient way to move about within South Asia was to get out of South Asia altogether; to go via Dubai or Bangkok.

Of course, some links have been improving a little and we can now fly directly between most Saarc countries, including between India and Pakistan. But still not on a daily basis.

My initial visit two years ago was merely a first-hand experience of the fact that South Asia was — and still is — the least integrated region in the world. The numbers bore this out. Intra-regional trade was less than 1% of GDP in South Asia in 2003, less than half of any other region. Both East Asia and Latin America achieved between three and four times this. On a human level, this South Asian region of ancient cultural ties — this vast space traversed by traders and warriors over centuries — has fewer people-to-people contacts across countries today than any other region. And whereas all other regions have seen major increases in cross-border contact over the last decade, this has changed little in South Asia.

Of course, not all of this lack of integration has to do with what we now call the infrastructure deficit. Intra-regional trade could be increased by policies that permit a more liberal trade regime. While India's trade with Nepal was double India's trade with Pakistan in 2004, some estimates suggest that trade between India and Pakistan could grow to as much as \$6-10 billion a year with a liberal trade regime.

Policy of course matters but without infrastructure, policy will achieve little for regional integration. That \$6 to \$10 billion figure won't be achieved by car-



SASIKUMAR

rying sacks of goods across the border. It will take both improved transportation linkages between the Saarc countries and better trade logistics policies.

And there are additional potential pay-offs in deeper regional integration. Take trade in energy within Saarc and between Saarc and other regions: this would improve energy security and the quantity and quality of energy services. Cross-border management of water resources could help control flooding and improve the availability of water.

Business surveys all point to power and transport as the show stoppers. The Saarc economies are growing at over 5% a year and with that the demand for power, both by business and by growing numbers of the population demanding access to energy. Increased trade within Saarc and between Saarc and other regions could help meet these growing energy demands in a region that is a net energy importer.

The national energy systems of gas and electricity networks in the Saarc countries are largely isolated from each other. There are no gas pipelines crossing

the national borders, whether within Saarc or between Saarc and its neighbours. Electricity interconnections exist but are limited. South Asia lags most other regions in terms of trade in electricity and gas. The advantages of looking at power trading on a larger scale beyond our traditional political borders are the complementarities to be had. Hydropower in Bhutan, Nepal, the northern regions of India and Pakistan; gas resources in Bangladesh; coal in India. Look wider still and there is hydropower in Central Asia and natural gas in Iran, Qatar, Turkmenistan, and Myanmar.

**T**HE economic potential of increased regional energy trade is widely acknowledged. And there are those who recognise the mutual dependency advantages of deeper economic links that could buttress conflict resolution and build confidence at the political level.

The other big show-stopper is transport. Developing infrastructure to meet increasing inter-regional trade and potential traffic could, for example, see trade between India and China, transit-

ing through India via Nepal. Central Asia could be accessed using gateways developed through Afghanistan and the Pakistani ports. And there is considerable scope for increasing the role of Bangladesh and the port of Chittagong in serving the transport needs of N-E India.

But even with the billions of dollars needed for road, rail and air linkages, that alone will not deliver the benefits of intra-regional trade. Beyond concrete we need also to think of streamlining procedures, reducing restrictions and improving regional trade facilitation. Some of the impediments to trade at present reflect policies that increase border crossing times and enforce trans-shipment. New roads alone won't fix that. Fluid transit arrangements have been developed in other regions which provide benefits for all parties, but South Asia seems stuck with borders that rupture transport systems.

The World Bank has done a number of regional infrastructure projects in recent years. Bank Group support can leverage private investment into regional infrastructure, including support by IFC as well as guarantees. Analytical work and institution building have also featured in our support for regional projects, stressing transparency and processes that everyone can trust for the management of natural resource revenues. Recent examples of Bank engagement include the Asean region where we are providing support to the Greater Mekong sub-region for integrating electricity systems, support to the Economic Co-operation Organisation on regional electricity trade; and pipelines in Central Asia and Africa.

It is a complex agenda. Yes we need to build roads, highways and skyways to be sure. But these linkages exist in a complex web of policy and institutional arrangements where trust and transparency will pave the way where asphalt and concrete alone will not. It is also an agenda in which the private sector has to be an important player if any of these ideas are to become a reality.

# Manmohan: let's fight terror together

"Free trade will offer a win-win situation"

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday asked members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to fight terrorism together.

"We have a collective stake in ensuring peace and security in the SAARC region because no investor will come to this region if there is no assurance of peace and security," the Prime Minister said, inaugurating the first SAARC Business Leaders Conclave here.

"To imagine that anyone of us can pursue what economists call 'beggar-thy-neighbour' policies and thereby prosper is to delude oneself," Dr. Singh said, underlining that the SAARC business community had a vital stake in regional security and in victory in the war against terror.

"We must join hands to put our collective house in order as peace in the region will benefit all. Terrorism anywhere will hurt us all," he said. Business and trade would flourish in a secure environment, he pointed out.

"Terrorism, by whatever name, has no place in civilised societies and its basic goal is to cause insecurity," Dr. Singh said.

In an interconnected region and a globalised world, consequences of both poverty and insecurity were indivisible, he said. "No country in this region can be secure when others are insecure and no country can insulate itself from the consequences of poverty and terrorism in any other country."

As envisioned at the 13th SAARC summit, the member countries would forge stronger links on the basis of renewed people-to-people ties, to help strengthen the region-wide partnership for prosperity, he said.

## Free trade

The Prime Minister allayed fears that free trade agreement could hurt smaller countries and called upon the SAARC leaders to move rapidly to meet the deadline for South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

Dr. Singh said the need for im-

• **No country can be secure when neighbours are insecure**

• **Terrorism will put off investors**

• **Beggar-thy-neighbour policies won't work**

plementing SAFTA could not be overemphasised and said it was expected that its implementation would enhance trade in the region to \$ 14 billion from \$ 6 billion in the next two years.

Citing the high growth of bilateral trade witness between India and Sri Lanka, he said it had dispelled fears on both sides that free trade would hurt business in smaller countries.

"This free trade agreement is a win-win agreement for both the countries and could be a model for similar agreements in the region" he said, adding the SAARC leaders must move rapidly to meet the deadline for SAFTA.

The Prime Minister also hoped that the free trade agreement would help move forward towards the eventual goal of the South Asian Economic Union. "I do believe that just as regional integration is not antithetical to globalisation, it also does not hurt the broader interests of any member of a regional group," he said. Dr. Singh said all the member states were committed to an early resolution of outstanding issues under SAFTA and hoped that the ongoing negotiations would ensure that it was operationalised from January 1 next year.

He also focussed attention on the need to expand the ambit of SAFTA to include trade in services in addition to widening the scope of trade in goods to emerge as an effective vehicle for growth and regional integration.

Voicing his concern that SAARC had not succeeded in exploiting the immense economic potential of the region, he said even after two decades, "intra SAARC exports are a mere five per cent of the total exports of

the region. By comparison intra-E.U. exports are 55.2 per cent; intra-NAFTA exports are 51.7 per cent; and intra-ASEAN exports are 20.4 per cent."

Noting that doubts and misgivings among corporate entities in each of the member countries were not rooted in reality and spread out among businessmen, the Prime Minister said change required adaptation and movement from the status quo.

Dr. Singh also emphasised on stepping up investments in the region to build infrastructure and said that as a first step, India had on a reciprocal basis announced measures to move towards open skies regime in the region and was working for greater liberalisation of visa regime to benefit all areas of cooperative interaction.

He also said India had decided to increase the number of visas to leading businessmen of SAARC states and urged the member nations to extend reciprocally each other transit facilities to third countries as it would help connect the region to the ongoing economic miracle in Southeast and East Asia.

"We will also link ourselves to the vast energy markets of West Asia and Central Asia," Dr. Singh said, making it clear that member countries could no longer afford the cost of seeing the region in isolation from the broader Asian context.

He termed the recent SAARC summit in Dhaka as a milestone, saying it showed the continuing relevance of the group. The decision to invite Afghanistan to join SAARC and other new initiatives proposed at the summit would inject new dynamism into the grouping.

"We must strive collectively in a cooperative spirit to remove the barriers to the free flow of goods, people and ideas within our own region," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Macky Hashim said the conference would focus on improving competitiveness and growth in South Asia and improving technological skills and development, among other things.

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## ত্রয়োদশ সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন

# নেতাদের সুমধুর বাণী ছাড়া বিশেষ কিছু পাওয়া গেল না

দক্ষিণ এশীয় দেশগুলির আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতা সংগঠন বা সার্কের সদ্যসমাপ্ত ত্রয়োদশ শীর্ষ সম্মেলন থেকেও যথারীতি নেতাদের সুমধুর বাণী ছাড়া বিশেষ কিছু পাওয়া গেল না। ১৯৮৫ সালে ওই ঢাকা শহরেই সার্কের আনুষ্ঠানিক জন্ম হয়েছিল। ২০ বছর পেরিয়ে আসার পরেও দেখা যাচ্ছে দক্ষিণ এশীয় দেশগুলি— অর্থাৎ ভারত ও তার প্রতিবেশী দেশগুলির মধ্যে অবাধ বাণিজ্য স্বপ্নই থেকে যাচ্ছে। সার্কের লক্ষ্য ও উপযোগিতা নিয়ে সম্ভবত কিছু একেবারে গোড়া ধরে টান মারা প্রশ্ন তোলার সময় এসেছে।

অবশ্যই ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্য সার্কের একমাত্র বিবেচ্য বিষয় নয়। দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণ, মাদক-বিরোধী অভিযান, সাংস্কৃতিক আদান-প্রদান, মহিলাদের ক্ষমতায়ন, জসংখ্যা নিয়ন্ত্রণ, নারী ও শিশু পাচার প্রতিরোধ ইত্যাদি বহুবিধ বিষয় নিয়েও সার্কের কাজ করার কথা। ২০০৪ সালের জানুয়ারিতে ইসলামাবাদ শীর্ষ সম্মেলনে গৃহীত সার্কের সামাজিক সনদে এ সবেরই উল্লেখ রয়েছে। ওই সব বিষয়ে গুরুত্ব স্বীকার করে নিয়েই বলতে হয়, আন্তর্জাতিক উদ্যোগে ওগুলিতে অগ্রগতি যত সহজে হতে পারে, তার থেকে অনেক সহজে এবং দ্রুত ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্য সহযোগিতা বাড়ানো সম্ভব। গত ৩০ বছরে সারা বিশ্বে আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্যের প্রসারের ইতিহাস তাই বলে।

দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দেশগুলির মধ্যে অগ্রাধিকার-ভিত্তিক বাণিজ্যের লক্ষ্যে সাউথ এশিয়ান প্রেফারেনশিয়াল ট্রেড এগ্রিমেন্ট বা সাপটা স্বাক্ষরিত হয়েছিল ১৯৯৩ সালের এপ্রিলে, ঢাকায় অনুষ্ঠিত শীর্ষ সম্মেলনে। তখন কথা হয়েছিল ১৯৯৬ সালের মধ্যে দেশগুলি অবাধ বাণিজ্য চালু করবে। তার পর গঙ্গা, সিন্ধু, মেঘনা দিয়ে বহু জল হয়ে গিয়েছে, চীন-সহ এশিয়ার বহু দেশের অর্থনীতি আমূল বদলে গিয়েছে, আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্যেরও বিপুল প্রসার ঘটেছে। কিন্তু সার্কের দেশগুলির মধ্যে অবাধ বাণিজ্য চালু হয়নি। ইসলামাবাদে ২০০৪ সালে দক্ষিণ এশীয় অবাধ বাণিজ্য চুক্তি বা সাফটার রূপরেখা স্বাক্ষরিত হয়েছিল। সেই অনুসারে ২০০৬ সালের ১ জানুয়ারি থেকে অবাধ বাণিজ্য বলবৎ হওয়ার কথা। বাস্তবে যেভাবে কাজ এগোচ্ছে তাতে সেই সম্ভাবনা শূন্য। এবারের ঢাকা সম্মেলনে এ বিষয়ে কাজের কাজ করতে বৈত কর এড়াতে একটি আংশিক বহুপাক্ষিক চুক্তি সেই হয়েছে এবং কর ও বাণিজ্য শুল্ক সংক্রান্ত বিষয়ে পারস্পরিক প্রশাসনিক সহযোগিতার সূচনা হয়েছে।

বাণিজ্যই যখন এখন সারা বিশ্বে অর্থনীতির চালিকা শক্তি এবং অর্থনীতি আবার রাষ্ট্রীয় সম্পর্কের নিয়ামক শক্তি, তখন আমরা প্রতিবেশী দেশগুলির সঙ্গে সরল বাণিজ্য সম্পর্ক কেন গড়ে তুলতে পারছি না?

এ প্রশ্নের প্রথম এবং প্রধান উত্তর হল পারস্পরিক বিশ্বাসের অভাব। সরকারের সঙ্গে সরকারের সম্পর্কের স্তরে বিশ্বাসের অভাব তো আছেই। সার্কের তিনটি বড় দেশ পাকিস্তান, বাংলাদেশ এবং এখন এমনকি নেপালের সঙ্গেও ভারত সরকারের যথেষ্ট বিশ্বাসের সম্পর্ক নেই। কিন্তু বাণিজ্যিক আদান-প্রদান বাড়ানোর জন্য সরকারি স্তরে বিশ্বাসের চেয়েও বড় কথা বিভিন্ন দেশের ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্য মহলের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক বিশ্বাস এবং আস্থা থাকা বা না থাকা। ২৫টি দেশ নিয়ে ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়ন আজ বিশ্বের বৃহত্তম অর্থনৈতিক গোষ্ঠী এবং বৃহত্তম বাণিজ্যকারী (দু'টি বিচারেই মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের চেয়েও বড়)। ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়নে যোগদানের ব্যাপারে কিন্তু অনেক দেশেরই সরকার বা রাজনৈতিক দলের ততটা সম্মতি ছিল না, যতটা যোগদানের পক্ষে প্রবল জনমত ছিল নাগরিকদের দিক থেকে। সর্বজনগ্রাহ্য আন্তর্জাতিক মুদ্রা হিসেবে মার্কিন ডলারের বদলে ক্রমশ জায়গা করে নিচ্ছে ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়নের মুদ্রা ইউরো। তা সত্ত্বেও কিন্তু এর পুরনো সদস্য দেশগুলির মধ্যে ব্রিটেন, ডেনমার্ক এবং সুইডেন এখনও ইউরো গ্রহণ করেনি, নিজেদের মুদ্রাই চালু রেখেছে। সরকার এবং রাজনৈতিক দল যখন নিজেদের আলাদা রাখার এই চেষ্টাকে নিজস্বতা বজায় রাখা হিসেবে দেখেছে তখন এই চেষ্টা

যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সঙ্গে পাল্লা দেওয়া, এমনকি টেক্সা দেওয়ার মতো অর্থনৈতিক শক্তি যে তাদের হাতের মুঠোয়, সেটাই সাধারণ ইউরোপিয়ানদের কাছে বেশি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। দুঃখের বিষয়, সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলির ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্য মহল সম্পর্কে কিন্তু একই কথা খাটে না। একজন বাংলাদেশি রপ্তানিকারীর চেয়ে সাধারণভাবে একজন চীনা রপ্তানিকারীকে একজন ভারতীয় বাঙালি ব্যবসায়ী বেশি বিশ্বাস করেন। বাংলাদেশের কোনও ব্যাঙ্কের লেটার অফ ক্রেডিটের ওপর অনেক ভারতীয় ব্যবসায়ীই ভরসা করতে রাজি নন। এটা অপ্রিয় হলেও সত্য। এই পরিমণ্ডলে তাই সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলির মধ্যে যবেই হোক না কেন, কাগজে-কলমে অবাধ বাণিজ্য চালু হলেও বাস্তবে বাণিজ্য কতটা বাড়বে তা নিয়ে সংশয় রয়েছে। অর্থনীতিতে এটা এখন প্রতিষ্ঠিত সত্য যে, গণতন্ত্রের সঙ্গে বাণিজ্য বৃদ্ধির একটা ইতিবাচক সম্পর্ক রয়েছে। সার্কের দেশগুলির মধ্যে ভারত এবং শ্রীলঙ্কায় মোটামুটি স্থিতিশীল গণতন্ত্র রয়েছে, বাংলাদেশে গণতন্ত্রের শৈশবাবস্থা চলছে। এবারই সদস্য পদ পাওয়া আফগানিস্তানে গণতন্ত্রের প্রাথমিক পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষা শুরু হয়েছে বলা যায়। অন্য দেশগুলিতে নাগরিকদের চাওয়া-পাওয়া অনেকটাই শাসক রাজতন্ত্রের বা গোষ্ঠীতন্ত্রের অধীন। এই ধরনের দেশ রাতারাতি অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার করে আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য দারুণভাবে বাড়তে পেরেছে, এমন নজির নেই। বরং উল্টোটার নজির আছে। ১৯৭০-এর দশকের শেষ দিক থেকে বিশ্বব্যাপী নানা দেশে গণতন্ত্রের প্রতিষ্ঠার পরই বাণিজ্যবিধির

সংস্কার করে তারা অর্থনৈতিক অবস্থার কিছুটা উন্নতি করতে পেরেছে। এশিয়ায় ফিলিপিনস (১৯৮৪ সালে প্রথম পার্লামেন্টের নির্বাচন, ১৯৮৬ সালে থেকে বাণিজ্য সংস্কার), দক্ষিণ কোরিয়া (১৯৮৭ সালে কার্যকর গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠা, দু'বছর পর থেকে বাণিজ্য বৃদ্ধি ও অর্থনৈতিক উন্নতির শুরু), দক্ষিণ আমেরিকায় বলিভিয়া এবং আর্জেন্টিনা, আফ্রিকায় জাম্বিয়া এর প্রকৃষ্ট উদাহরণ। লক্ষণীয়, এর কোনওটিই কিন্তু

দীর্ঘদিন ধরে শিল্পোন্নত দেশ নয়। সার্কের বর্তমান সদস্য দেশগুলির মধ্যে ভারত, পাকিস্তান এবং শ্রীলঙ্কা বাদে বাকি পাঁচটিই রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের খতিয়ানে সব চেয়ে অনুন্নত দেশের তালিকায় পড়ে। ন্যূনতম গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠার পরই এই ধরনের দেশে বাণিজ্যবিধি সংস্কার হয়েছে— এমনটাই বিশ্বব্যাপী সাধারণ প্রবণতা।

সার্কের গঠনের মধ্যেই এমন একটা অসাম্য রয়েছে যে তার দেশগুলির মধ্যে পরস্পরের সঙ্গে সমান আসনে বসে ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়নের দেশগুলির মতো ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্য করা কিছুটা কঠিন। আফগানিস্তান বাদ দিয়ে গোটা অঞ্চলের জনসংখ্যার ৭৬ শতাংশ ভারতে থাকে, মোট অর্থনৈতিক উৎপাদনের ৮০ শতাংশের বেশি ভারতে হয়। অথচ গোটা বিশ্বের মাপকাঠিতে এটি অন্যতম দরিদ্র অঞ্চল— পৃথিবীর ২২ শতাংশ মানুষকে এখানে ভাগ করে নিয়ে হয় গোটা পৃথিবীর অর্থনৈতিক উৎপাদনের মাত্র দুই শতাংশ। এই দেশগুলি মোট যত আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য করে তার মাত্র পাঁচ শতাংশ মতো নিজেদের মধ্যে। সার্ক যবে থেকে সাপটা বা সাফটার কথা চলছে তবে থেকেই শুল্ক হার হ্রাসের পাশাপাশি শুল্ক ছাড়া অন্যান্য বাণিজ্যিক বাধা নিষেধ (নন-ট্যারিফ) এবং অবৈধ শুল্ক জাতীয় ব্যয় (প্যারা-ট্যারিফ) কমানোর কথা চলছে। কিন্তু পারস্পরিক বিশ্বাসের অভাব এবং সরকারি আমলা ও ব্যবসায়ী মহলের রক্তে রক্তে দুর্নীতির ফলে কোনওটাই করা যায়নি। ভারতের পশ্চিমবঙ্গ এবং বাংলাদেশের মধ্যে বইপত্র, সিনেমা, ক্যাসেট, সি ডি ইত্যাদি আদান-প্রদান একাধারে দু'টি দেশের সাংস্কৃতিক যোগাযোগ এবং বাণিজ্য বৃদ্ধির কাজ করতে পারত। তা হয়নি, বদলে নানা ধরনের নন-ট্যারিফ করা বাধানিষেধ কমান কোনও লক্ষণ দেখা যাচ্ছে না। প্রতিবেশী দেশগুলির সঙ্গে স্থল বাণিজ্যের ক্ষেত্রে যখনই দু'টি দেশের ব্যবসায়ী খরচের হিসেব করতে বসেন, তখন আমদানি শুল্কের সরকারি হারের সঙ্গে 'বর্ডার খরচা' বলে একটা বস্তু যোগ করতে হয়। অবাধ বাণিজ্যের



### সুদীপ্ত সেনগুপ্ত



# হাতে রহিল সার্ক

আজও একটি সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন আসিল এবং চলিয়া গেল। এ বারকার সম্মেলন ছিল ঢাকায়, দুই-দুইবার স্থগিত হইবার পর এই সম্মেলন লইয়া অনিশ্চয়তা দূর হয়। সম্মেলনে বহুপাক্ষিক সমস্যার আলোচনা অপেক্ষা যথারীতি দ্বিপাক্ষিক সমস্যা বেশি উত্থাপিত হইয়াছে। ভারত-পাকিস্তান, ভারত-বাংলাদেশ, ভারত-নেপাল বিরোধগুলিই গুরুত্ব পাইয়াছে বেশি। পাকিস্তানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কে 'বিশ্বাস'-এর অভাবের কথা বলিলে মনমোহন সিংহ তাহা স্বীকার করিয়া অতিরিক্ত আস্থা স্থাপনের উপর গুরুত্ব দেন। কিন্তু একই সঙ্গে তিনি স্মরণ করাইয়া দেন যে স্বদেশের মাটিকে প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রের সার্বভৌমত্ব ও আঞ্চলিক অখণ্ডতা বিনাশের অপকর্মে ব্যবহৃত হইতে না দেওয়ার অঙ্গীকারটি পালিত না হইলে এই আস্থা প্রতিষ্ঠা সম্ভব নয়। উল্লেখ্য প্রায় দুই বছর আগে ইসলামাবাদে স্বাক্ষরিত একটি যৌথ ইশতাহারে পাকিস্তান এই অঙ্গীকার করিয়াছিল। কিন্তু গত দুই বছরেও অন্তত ভারতে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী নাশকতা চালানো জঙ্গি সংগঠনগুলির পাক ভূখণ্ডকে আশ্রয় ও প্রশিক্ষণের ঘাঁটি হিসাবে ব্যবহার করার প্রবণতা কমে নাই। সর্বশেষ নয়াদিল্লির বিস্ফোরণ-কাণ্ডে জড়িত লঙ্কর-ই-তইবা, অযোধ্যা-কাণ্ডে জড়িত জইশ-ই-মহম্মদ কিংবা কাশ্মীরে অন্তর্ঘাতে লিপ্ত হিজবুল মুজাহেদিদের পাক ঘাঁটি এখনও অক্ষত। এই অবস্থায় দ্বিপাক্ষিক আস্থাবৃদ্ধির আকাঙ্ক্ষা মরীচিকা হইতে বাধ্য।

বাংলাদেশও কি তাহার ভূখণ্ডকে ভারত-বিরোধী নাশকতার জন্য ব্যবহৃত হইতে না দিতে কোনও ইতিবাচক পদক্ষেপ করিয়াছে? এই মর্মে যখনই ভারতীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র ও বিদেশ মন্ত্রক ঢাকার দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করিয়াছে, তখনই বাংলাদেশ উল্টা ভারতকেই বাংলাদেশের বিস্ফোরণে জড়িত ইসলামি জেহাদিদের আশ্রয় দিবার দায়ে অভিযুক্ত করিয়াছে। অথচ জেহাদি জঙ্গিরা ইসলামি প্রজাতন্ত্র বাংলাদেশ বা পাকিস্তানের তত শত্রু নয়, যত ভারতের। নজর ঘুরাইবার জন্যই এই হাস্যকর পাল্টা অভিযোগ। এখন নেপালও নয়াদিল্লিকে ঠেস দিয়া কথা বলিতেছে। নেপালরাজ জ্ঞানেন্দ্র বীর বিক্রম শাহের সহিত মনমোহন তো প্রথমে কথাই বলিতে চান নাই। দুই প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রের প্রধান অন্য দিকে মুখ ঘুরাইয়া আছেন, ইহা আঞ্চলিক সংহতির অনুকূল নয়। নেপালরাজ গণতন্ত্র নাশ করিয়া রাজতন্ত্রের পুনরুজ্জীবন ঘটাইয়াছেন। ইহাতে বিরক্ত ভারত তাঁহাকে গণতন্ত্র ফিরাইবার অনুরোধ করায় তিনি ভারতকে জঙ্গিদের সম্পর্কে 'দুমুখো নীতি' অনুসরণের কটাক্ষ করিয়াছেন। অথচ ভারত মাওবাদী জঙ্গিদের হাতে নেপালের শাসনভার তুলিয়া দিতে বলে নাই, নির্বাচিত গণতান্ত্রিক দলের হাতে রাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তরিত করিতে বলিয়াছে।

সম্মেলনে সমবেত রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানদের আভাসে-ইঙ্গিতে পরস্পরকে দোষারোপই প্রমাণ, আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতার মঞ্চ হিসাবে সার্ক আদৌ ফলপ্রসূ হইতেছে না। হয়তো উপমহাদেশে ভারতের অগ্রগণ্যতার বাস্তবতাটি শিরোধার্য করিতে প্রতিবেশীদের অসুবিধা এখনও কাটে নাই। কিন্তু এই অগ্রগামিতা ভারতের ঐতিহাসিক নিয়তি, তাহার প্রতিবেশীদের আয়তনিক ক্ষুদ্রতা ও আর্থ-সামরিক দুর্বলতা যেমন অনিবার্য। স্বীয় প্রশাসনিক ব্যর্থতা ঢাকিতে ভারত-বিরোধিতার সংকীর্ণ রাজনৈতিক উপযোগিতা থাকিতে পারে। কিন্তু ঠাণ্ডা লড়াই-উত্তর বিশ্বে এই বিরোধিতা বেশি দূর জাতীয় স্বার্থকে সিদ্ধ করিতে পারে না। প্রতিবেশীদের ভূয়া জাতীয়তাবাদ ও স্পর্শকাতরতা সম্পর্কে নয়াদিল্লি যতই সংবেদনশীল হোক, আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতার মঞ্চটি সমন্বয়ের তাগিদ রচনা করিতে পারিতেছে না। আসিয়ান কিংবা ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন যেখানে অবাধ বাণিজ্য ও অভিন্ন বাজার হইতে জাতীয়তাবাদের কলুষমুক্ত সীমান্তহীন ভূরাজনৈতিক এককে সংহত হওয়ার প্রক্রিয়ায় (অন্তত সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ তাহার জাতিরাষ্ট্র বিকাশের দ্বন্দ্বদীর্ঘ ইতিহাসের আবর্জনাকে পিছনে রাখিয়া সীমান্তমুক্ত, ভিসা-বর্জিত, রাষ্ট্রপরিচয়রহিত অবিভাজ্য আর্থ-রাজনৈতিক এককে রূপান্তরিত হইতে অগ্রসর), সার্ক এখনও সেখানে দ্বিপাক্ষিক কাজিয়ায় ক্লিষ্ট। নদীর জলের ভাগ লইয়া মনকবাকষি কিংবা প্রতিবেশী দেশে 'ফেরার' ঘোষিত সন্ত্রাসবাদীদের আশ্রয় দিবার মতো সংকীর্ণমনা রাজনীতি অনুশীলন দেখাইয়া দেয়, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার এই দেশগুলি মনমোহন সিংহের ভাষায় 'রাষ্ট্র হিসাবে বিবর্তিত হইতে ব্যর্থ' হইয়াছে। আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতার জন্য জাতীয় ত্যাগ স্বীকারের ঔদার্য তাহাদের নাই। প্রশ্ন অতএব এই মঞ্চের প্রয়োজন লইয়াই।

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2005

## Expanding and consolidating SAARC

**E**xpansion of the two-decades old, seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been on the cards for sometime now. The much-delayed 13th summit of the forum in Dhaka has welcomed Afghanistan to its fold as the first new member since its inception. It has also agreed in principle to the creation of a new category of participants, 'observers', a significant step considering that China and Japan are seeking to engage SAARC in that capacity. These developments are positive and have their own merits. But, sadly, the forum is nowhere near realising the potential from the standpoint of the founder-members. The concept of Free Trade Area (FTA) holds tremendous promise for the region, but the fact that India, as its biggest economy, has gone about signing and implementing bilateral FTA agreements with countries such as Sri Lanka, only underlines the reality that the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) proposal has not really taken off. The entry of a new member, and that too Afghanistan, will involve reworking of schedules and deadlines to enable the eighth member to understand and integrate with the region and the forum. Given the fragile nature of the government and politics in Afghanistan, the responsibility of integrating it with the region will lie essentially with the other member-states. But there is no denying that Afghanistan fits in economically and culturally with South Asia and must identify itself with this region. When it does stabilise, it could emerge as a bridge to Central Asia. Similarly, inviting China and Japan to become observers should enrich SAARC and provide a new dimension to its interactions, trade, and investment.

Aside from the efforts to expand the forum, the summi-teers have also focussed on two challenges confronting the region – poverty and terrorism. Though poverty alleviation has been on SAARC's agenda for over a decade, there has been no meaningful, coordinated attempt to tackle this problem. From the time of Sri Lankan President Premadasa, it has been discussed and debated for long; a SAARC commission was also set up to take a close look at the issue and prepare an action plan. Now, the Dhaka declaration has gone in for instituting a fund and a mechanism to work collectively towards a decade dedicated to the implementation of the plans. There is obviously a realisation that unless poverty is addressed seriously, growth rates and development will have no meaning to a vast majority of the people. So also, the impact of terrorism in most of South Asia. It needs political will to crack down on terrorism and terrorist infrastructure. Addressing the two problems is essential if SAARC is to become an effective instrument for cooperation. Now that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh takes over the leadership of SAARC, the responsibility devolves on India to take the Dhaka declaration forward. India and Pakistan must put aside their bilateral problems to place the SAARC agenda on a fast track. The neighbouring South East Asian Forum, ASEAN, holds valuable lessons for SAARC.

The Hindu

15 NOV 2005

# Manmohan for consensus to avoid Iran vote

Afghanistan invited to join SAARC; "a recognition of long-standing ties of culture and history it shares with us"

Amit Baruah

**DHAKA:** Afghanistan was invited to join the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation as its eighth member after considerable debate and discussion, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced at the end of the two-day SAARC summit in Dhaka on Sunday.

"We are delighted to welcome Afghanistan to our group. This is an appropriate recognition of the long-standing ties of culture and history that Afghanistan shares with us. We have also noted the interest of the People's Republic of China and Japan to become observers in SAARC. We are happy to note that the SAARC Council of Ministers will finalise the guidelines for such status at the earliest," he said.

At a press conference later in the day, Dr. Singh said he hoped that there would be no vote on Iran at the next meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency governing board in the third week of November.

Asked how India would vote after its anti-Iran vote on September 24, he said this would depend on the issues that would be voted upon. India's hope was that efforts "can and should be made" to evolve a consensus so that there was no need for a vote. "But, if it comes to a vote, I cannot predict what we will do. It depends on what are the issues that are the subject matter of voting or not voting," Dr. Singh said. On his commitment to Par-

liament on July 29 that there would be no separation of India's civil and military nuclear facilities before all curbs on New Delhi were lifted and American statements to the contrary, he said: "I stand by what I said in Parliament."

"I think people do make statements directed at specific audiences. We should not get too worked up ... Whatever I said in our Parliament, I think, that is our position," he said.

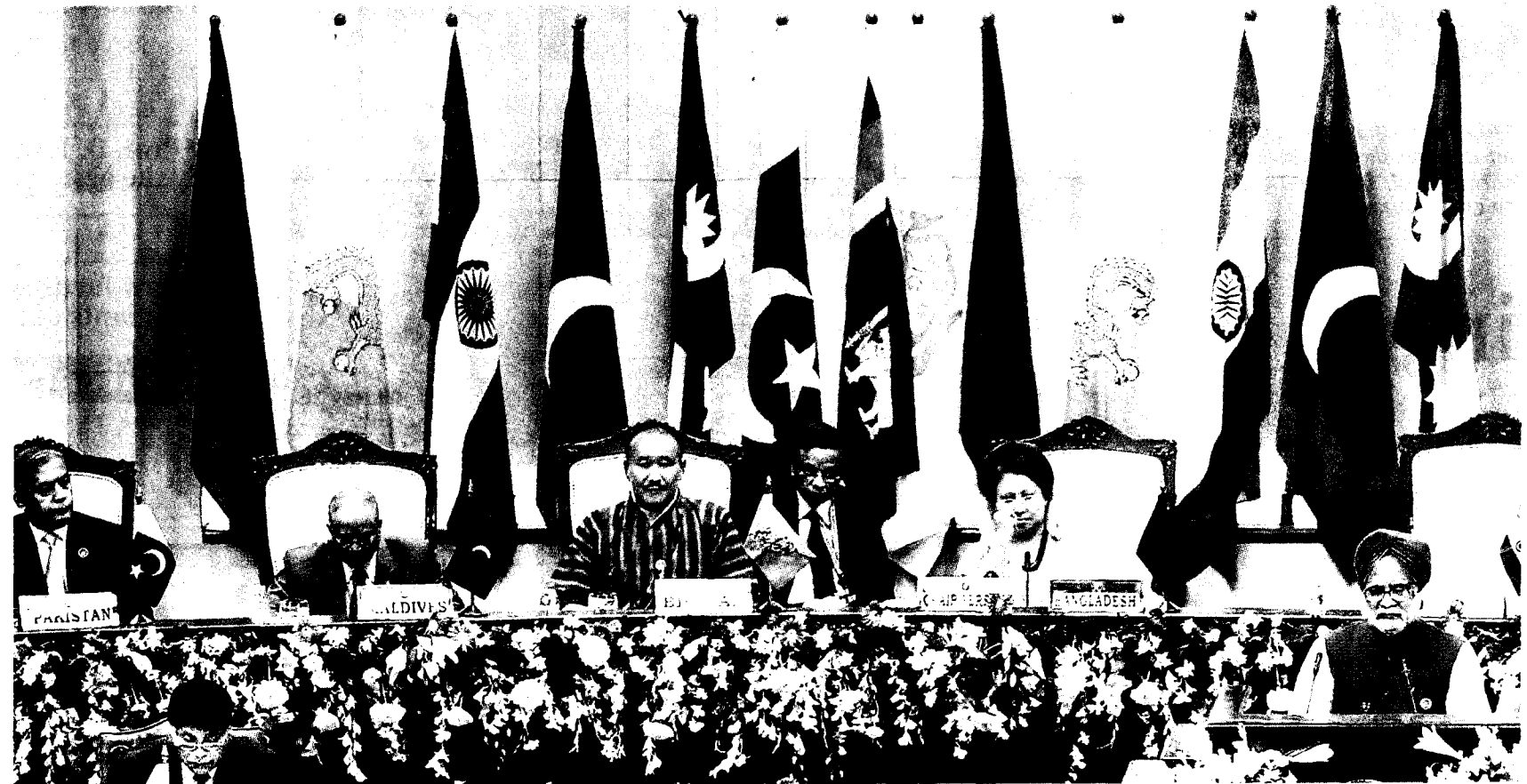
## Trust deficit

Dr. Singh agreed with his Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz that there was a trust deficit between India and Pakistan, but added it was "our obligation" to convert the deficit into surplus.

Referring to Pakistan's January 2004 commitment to curb terrorism against India, he said there had been some reduction in incidents but it was unfortunate that all that needed to be done had not been done. "We, of course, have assurances that the future will be different from the past and we eagerly wait for that moment."

Asked if there was any Pakistani hand in the recent New Delhi blasts, he said inquiries were on and some external linkages had been found. However, Dr. Singh said he would not like to say more till confirmation of external linkages was available.

On whether the Pakistani State or "rogue elements" were responsible for recent incidents, Dr. Singh emphasised that he had said many a time that India



**GRAND FINALE:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh speaks at the closing session of the 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit in Dhaka on Sunday. Among those in the background are his Pakistani and Bangladeshi counterparts, Shaukat Aziz (extreme left) and Khaleda Zia (extreme right). - PHOTO: AFP

did not have the liberty of choosing its neighbours. "We have to do business with governments that are in power ... therefore, using harsh language in public is not the best way, I think, to pro-

mote dialogue and understanding. If we have any concerns, we do discuss with the governments concerned. I do not believe anything great is achieved by conducting this dialogue in full

[public] glare," he said.

## Talks with Nepal King

Referring to his discussions with King Gyanendra of Nepal, Dr. Singh said he had been as-

sured that a carefully worked out road map would be prepared to usher in the democratic process in Nepal that would include multi-party democracy. Such a multi-party system, the King

recognised, was the core of any democracy.

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THE HINDU

# Mannohan wants 'surplus' of trust

## PM replies to Aziz 'deficit'

### BHARAT BHUSHAN

Dhaka, Nov. 13: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wants India and Pakistan to convert the "trust deficit" between them into a "surplus".

At the same time, however, he has not ruled out "external" links — meaning Pakistan — of those responsible for the Delhi blasts but said that he does not believe in using "harsh language in public" as that is not conducive to improving relations.

"There is some truth in what the Pakistan Prime Minister said. There has been a trust deficit. It is our obligation to convert that deficit into a surplus," he said at the end of his visit to the 13th Saarc summit here.

The Prime Minister pointed out that Pakistan was not doing enough to honour its commitment embodied in the January 2004 Islamabad Joint Statement that territory under its control would not be used for terrorist activities directed against India.

"There has been some reduction but it is our feeling that all that needs to be done has not been done,"

Singh said.

The Prime Minister revealed that while inquiry was going on into the Delhi blasts, "available clues do indicate external links to some groups".

"I have said more than once that we can choose our friends but not our neighbours," the Prime Minister said.

However, he refused to say whether the clues pointed to the involvement of the Pakistani state or to rogue groups within that country.

On his meeting with Begum Khaleda Zia, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Singh described it as positive and having contributed to improving ties. "I have always held that a strong and prosperous Bangladesh is in our interest," he said, adding that if there were any "misgivings" about India, he was willing to address them.

"There are no insurmountable issues between us. India will do nothing that will harm Bangladesh," the Prime Minister declared. He said the response of Begum Khaleda to his assurances had been "constructive" and that she had accepted his invita-

tion to visit India.

The Prime Minister said the issue of some Indian militants setting up camps on Bangladesh territory had been raised between the home secretaries of the two countries and "some positive steps have been indicated".

Singh also took the opportunity to clarify that when he had referred to "failed states" in India's neighbourhood, he did not have any particular country in mind. "I was not referring to any particular state. I was drawing attention to the fact that the security situation is becoming serious and that it needs to be addressed carefully," he claimed.

The Prime Minister said India needed to work with its neighbours "to confront and overcome these challenges".

Singh said he was pleased that Saarc had agreed to admit Afghanistan as a new member and noted the interest of China and Japan to get the status of observers or dialogue partners.

He argued for greater connectivity within Saarc countries through easier transit routes and by members providing access to each other's

transport network.

About the forthcoming vote at the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency at Vienna, Singh said India's attempt would be to work towards a "broad-based consensus" so that a vote was not required.

However, which way India would vote would ultimately "depend on the issues being voted".

The Prime Minister also dismissed doubts about India's obligations being fulfilled first for the nuclear deal with the US to be pushed through.

America has been suggesting that India first separate its civilian and nuclear programmes according to a plan in a credible and transparent manner before it moves the US Congress to lift curbs for nuclear cooperation with India.

Singh had suggested that this would be a process in phases.

"People do make statements directed at special audiences," he claimed while recommending that "we should not get perturbed" by them. "I stand by what I said in Parliament," he declared.



Begum Khaleda Zia and Manmohan Singh at the closing ceremony of the Saarc summit in Dhaka on Sunday. (Reuters)

# Saarc sheds past inhibitions

NO DOUBLE STANDARDS IN FIGHT AGAINST TERROR: DHAKA DECLARATION



JOINT STAND: Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and other Saarc leaders attend the closing session of the Summit in Dhaka on Sunday.— AFP

## Press Trust of India

DHAKA, Nov. 13. — Shedding past inhibitions, Saarc countries today agreed that there can be no double standards in the fight against terror and decided to undertake result-oriented efforts to translate pledges into commitments for accelerating economic growth and social progress in the region. Leaders from the seven-member grouping also affirmed their commitment to the realisation of the vision of South Asian Economic Union in a phased and planned manner.

An eight-page Dhaka Declaration adopted at the end of the two-day 13th SAARC Summit said the leaders resolved to make regional cooperation more responsive to the hopes and aspirations of the peoples of South Asia. Describing the Declaration as a “forward-looking document”, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in his remarks at the concluding session said that it would add “new vigour” to the Saarc process.

Addressing a press conference, Dr Singh said it was a “very productive summit” in terms of the number of proposals put forward and reflected the desire of Saarc nations to take more concrete action in regional cooperation.

The Declaration welcomed Afghanistan’s request for membership and invited it as a member subject to completion of formalities. It also welcomed and agreed in principle with the desire of China and Japan to be associated as observers. The foreign ministers will decide the modalities in this regard in their meeting on 27 July next year.

The 13th Saarc Summit concluded today with the signing of three major agreements — avoidance of double taxation, liberalisation of visa regime and Saarc Arbitration Council.

Announcing the far reaching decisions at the concluding session, Dr Singh appealed to member countries to resolve few outstanding issues to facilitate implementation of South Asian Free Trade Agreement (Safta) by 1 January 2006.

“I would like to underline we must expedite the process of resolving few outstanding issues that separate us from the final agreement on Safta”, to implement it from January one next year, Dr Singh said speaking as the Chairman of

the next summit which has been decided to be held in India.

Expressing a sense of satisfaction for making substantive progress in furthering regional cooperation during the two-day deliberations of the 13th Summit, Dr Singh said: “It will be fair to say that this summit will be

remembered for several substantive outcomes that have emerged in Dhaka.”

He said that the Saarc leaders were also delighted to welcome Afghanistan to the grouping.

The Prime Minister said the summit also noted the interest shown by countries like China and Japan to become observers. The Saarc council of ministers would finalise the modalities and guidelines for such status at the earliest.

In terms of the agenda of this summit, Dr Singh said: “We also recorded satisfactory progress.”

The Saarc leaders signed three agreements on avoidance of double taxation among member countries, setting up Saarc Arbitration Council besides agreeing to liberalised visa regime to facilitate freer trade and travel among the people including mediapersons of the region.

At the same time, he said he would like to underline that “we must expedite the process of resolving a few outstanding issues that separate us from the final agreement on Safta”.



SAARC

# No two rules in war on terror

**ANIRBAN Choudhury**

Dhaka, November 13

THE DHAKA Declaration of Sunday, the concluding day of the 13th Saarc summit, did not name the protagonists, but made a pointed reference to terrorism in the region. "There should be no double standards in the fight against terrorism," it said. Stressing that terror couldn't be justified on any ground, the seven member nations decided that their home ministers would meet every year after a meeting of their home secretaries. The security agencies, too, would cooperate and exchange information.

The declaration also pledged a major boost to trade in the region with the member nations agreeing to give South Asian Free Trade Area (Safat) the go-ahead by January, 2006, if outstanding issues are resolved by then. The seven heads of state agreed to undertake trade facilitation measures, including easier transit among Saarc countries, and study



## PM's parting shot at Pak

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh on Sunday made it clear that a whole range of problems would have to be addressed before getting euphoric about the Indo-Pak peace initiative. "The trust deficit still remains though we want to make it a surplus," he told reporters at the Sheraton Hotel after conclusion of the Saarc summit. In spite of some reduction in violence "our feeling is that all the things which need to be done have been done are not being done," he said. Asked if Pakistan had a hand in the October 29 Delhi blasts, he said there was definite evidence of an "external hand". HTC

the Indian proposal for daily reciprocal air service by designated airlines. Another key area that received importance in the declaration was poverty alleviation. It was decided that the years between 2006 and 2015 would be declared "Saarc Decade of Poverty Alleviation".

To speed things up, the three-tier mechanism on poverty alleviation was replaced by a two-tier one, involving only ministers and secretaries.

The members also reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening the multilateral trade regime of the WTO. Significantly, the proposal pushed by India all through the summit — to relax visa rules and expand their scope to include various categories of people, particularly journalists, did not feature in the declaration.

**The three important agreements signed were:**

■ Agreement on Mutual Adminis-

trative Assistance in Customs Matters

■ Agreement on Establishment of Saarc Arbitration Council

■ Limited Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax matters.

The declaration had three other focal points, natural disasters, health and energy with measures agreed by the member nations.

**Natural disasters:** Initiation of work on projects on early warning systems to prepare for natural disasters like tsunami

**Health:** Preparation of strategy to prevent spread of HIV/AIDS and measures to address health emergencies like avian flu pandemic, regional initiative for basic healthcare, cooperation in the field of medical expertise.

**Energy:** Establishment of a Saarc energy centre at Islamabad to promote development of energy sources, including hydropower, and energy trade in the region.

**Continued on P2**

14 NOV 2005

# উগ্রপন্থার মোকাবিলায় বিচারিতা নয়, ঘোষণা সার্কে

অনিলা জানা • ঢাকা

১৩ নভেম্বর: এয়োদশ সার্কে সম্মেলনের শেষে 'ঢাকা ঘোষণাপত্র'-এও নিতুল স্বাক্ষর রেখে গেল ভারত।

উগ্রপন্থার মোকাবিলায় 'বিচারিতা' না-করা থেকে শুরু করে আফগানিস্তানকে সার্কের পূর্ণাঙ্গ সদস্য করা, নেপালের দাবি মেনে চিনের পাশাপাশি জাপানকেও সার্কের 'পর্যবেক্ষক' হওয়ার মর্যাদা পাওয়ার দাবিতে টুকিয়ে দেওয়া— যথেষ্ট সফল হয়েই ঢাকা ছাড়ল ২০০৭ সালে পরবর্তী সার্কে ধীর সম্মেলনের আয়োজক ভারতীয় শিবির।

'ঢাকা ঘোষণাপত্র'-এ উগ্রপন্থা দমন নিয়ে সরাসরি বলা হয়েছে, "উগ্রপন্থা মানবতার প্রতি এমন একটা বিপদ, যা কোনও জাতিতেই যুক্তিসূত্র নয়। উগ্রপন্থার বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদ নিয়ে কোনও বিচারিতা থাকা উচিত নয়। সাম্প্রতিক কালে যে সব দেশে জঙ্গি হামলা হয়েছে, সেই সব দেশের আর্থিক স্থিতি, সামাজিক উন্নয়ন এবং নিরাপত্তার উপরে তার তীব্র প্রভাব পড়েছে।"

প্রসঙ্গত, পাকিস্তান মুখে জঙ্গি-দমনের কথা বললেও কার্যক্ষেত্রে তা করে না—এই অভিযোগ ভারত বহু দিন ধরেই করছে। সাম্প্রতিক দিল্লি বিক্ষোভের পরে এই 'বিচারিতা'-র বিষয়টি সাফল্যের সঙ্গে ঘোষণাপত্রে রাখতে পেরেছে ভারত। পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী অবশ্য আজ সকালে বাংলাদেশের সম্পাদকদের-একাংশের সঙ্গে বৈঠকে আবার

বলেন, পাকিস্তান তাদের মাটি থেকে কোনও জঙ্গি কারকলাপে প্রস্রাব দেয় না। তার কথায়, "ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে আমার একেবারে একান্তে আধ ঘণ্টা বৈঠক হয়েছে। চারটি চোখ ছাড়া সেখানে কেউ ছিল না। জম্মু ও কাশ্মীর-সহ সমস্ত কিছু নিয়েই আলোচনা করেছি।"

লাদেন কোথায়? হাসতে হাসতে শওকত আজিজ বলেছেন, "লাদেনে কোথায়, জীবিত না মৃত— কেউ জানে না। অনেকেই তাঁকে খুঁজছেন। আমি নিশ্চিত, খোঁজ পেলে গর্বিত হয়ে তার সঙ্গে দেখা করবো!"

রসিকতা করে আজিজ যা-ই বলুন, সার্কে ঘোষণাপত্রে আরও একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিষয় অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়েছে— উগ্রপন্থা দমনের মতো গুরুত্বপূর্ণ প্রসঙ্গ সার্কে দেশগুলির বিভিন্ন সংস্থা নিজেদের মধ্যে তথ্য আদানপ্রদান করবে। এই সংস্থাগুলি পারস্পরিক সহযোগিতা এবং সমন্বয়ের ভিত্তিতে কাজ করবে। তা ছাড়াও

সার্কে দেশগুলির স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীর বছরে এক বার বৈঠক করবেন। তার আগেই বৈঠক হবে এই দেশগুলির স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিবদের। ঘোষণাপত্রে ছোট দেশগুলির নিরাপত্তার বিষয়টি বড় দেশগুলি গুরুত্ব দিয়ে দেখবে— এমন কথাও রয়েছে। বলা হয়েছে, রাষ্ট্রসংগের দাবিসমদ মেনেই ছোট দেশগুলির নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা করা হবে। প্রসঙ্গত, সম্মেলনের উদ্বোধনে

এই দিকে ইঙ্গিত করেছিলেন নেপালের রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। তবে কাল রাতে চূড়ান্ত ঘোষণাপত্র তৈরির সময় নেপাল কিষ্কিৎ ফাঁপরে পড়েছিল। ঘোষণাপত্রের জন্য প্রতিটি দেশের কাছ থেকে 'মৌলিক প্রস্তাব বা চিন্তাভাবনা' চাওয়া হয়েছিল। কিন্তু ঘোষণাপত্র প্রস্তুতকারী নেপালের দিক থেকে তেমন কিছু পাননি। শেষ পর্যন্ত কাল রাতে নেপালের বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের কর্তাদের আবার ডেকে পাঠানো হয়। তার পরে তারা কয়েকটি প্রস্তাব দেন।

উগ্রপন্থা ছাড়াও ঘোষণাপত্রে জোর দেওয়া হয়েছে প্রাকৃতিক বিপর্যয় মোকাবিলা, দারিদ্র দুরীকরণ এবং মুক্ত বাণিজ্যের উপরে।

প্রাকৃতিক বিপর্যয় মোকাবিলায় ভারত যে দিল্লিতে একটি 'বিপর্যয় মোকাবিলা কেন্দ্র' গঠনের প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিল, তা গৃহীত হয়েছে। ঠিক হয়েছে, পরিবেশ রক্ষায় একযোগে কাজ করবে সার্কে সদস্য দেশগুলি।

২০০৫ থেকে ২০১৫ পর্যন্ত ১০ বছরকে সার্কে 'দারিদ্র দুরীকরণ দশক' বলে ঘোষণা করে বলা হয়েছে, মিলিত ভাবে একটি 'সার্কে দারিদ্র বিমোচন ওহরিল' গঠন করা হবে। সদস্য দেশগুলির অর্থমন্ত্রীরা সোটির পদ্ধতিগত দিকগুলির খুঁটিনাটি আলোচনা করবেন। প্রতিটি দীর্ঘ সম্মেলনের পরবর্তী তিন মাসে তারা একত্রে বৈঠক করবেন। ঠিক হয়েছে, প্রথম বৈঠকটি হবে পাকিস্তানে।

## সফল ভারতও

পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী শওকত আজিজ আগামী ১ জানুয়ারি 'সাকফটা' কার্যকর করা নিয়ে সন্দেহ প্রকাশ করলেও ঘোষণাপত্রে স্পষ্ট বলা হয়েছে, ওই দিনের মধ্যে 'সাকফটা' চালুর লক্ষ্য নিয়েই দ্রুত এগোবে সদস্য দেশগুলি।

সম্মেলন শেষে প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই সঙ্কট আয়োজক দেশ বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী তথা সার্কে নতুন চেয়ারপার্সন খালেদা জিয়া। প্রথমত, তার প্রয়াত স্বামী, বাংলাদেশের প্রাক্তন প্রেসিডেন্ট জিয়াউর রহমানের উত্ত্যোগেই প্রথম সার্কে সম্মেলন শুরু হয়েছিল ঢাকায়। দ্বিতীয়ত, এ বারই চালু-হওয়া সার্কে পদকটিও দেওয়া হয়েছে জিয়াউর রহমানকেই। সার্কের মাশ্বে উঠে সেই পদক পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী শওকত আজিজের হাত থেকে নিয়েছেন খালেদার পুত্র তারিক রহমান (বলা হচ্ছে, তিনিও রাজনীতিতে এলেন বলে)। তৃতীয়ত, নিরাপত্তার মোড়কে ভারত ভারতীয় সম্মেলন উত্বরে দিয়েছেন বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী।

এটা ঘটনা যে, প্রাক্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা সম্মেলনে যোগ দেননি। বরং তিনি তখন ছিলেন রাজধানী থেকে দূরে, রংপুরে, দুর্ভিক্ষপীড়িত মানুষের কাছে এবং সম্মেলন শেষে ঢাকায় ফিরেই খালেদাকে তাঁর রাজনৈতিক আক্রমণ করেছেন 'অর্ধ অপচয়'-এর জন্য। কিন্তু তিনিও নির্বিঘ্নে সম্মেলন শেষ হওয়ায় সঙ্কট প্রকাশ করেছেন।

আশ্চর্য নয় যে, হাসিমুখে একে একে ছয় দেশের রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানকে বিদায় জানালেন বেগম খালেদা জিয়া।

No question of demilitarisation unless terrorism ends: Manmohan

Amit Baruah

**DHAKA:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told his Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz that there could be no demilitarisation or redeployment of forces unless there was an end to cross-border terrorism and infiltration.

In a meeting on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, Dr. Singh informed Mr. Aziz that India and Pakistan should not be deterred from taking the peace process forward by the terrorist attacks that continue to take place.

Briefing presspersons on the discussions, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said on Saturday that incidents like the terrorist attacks in New Delhi impacted on both public opinion in India and the Government.

"There have been ideas - can we take this peace process forward by demilitarisation? There is no question of demilitarisation or any kind of redeployment unless there is a stop to cross-border terrorism," he stated.

Mr. Saran also stated that eventual redeployment of forces should not be restricted to the Line of Control (LoC).

The idea should be to take away forces all along the International Border in the search for a broader peace.

Asked what was the response to the points made by Dr. Singh, Mr. Saran quoted the Pakistan Prime Minister as saying that Islamabad was opposed to any kind of terrorism and would not permit acts of terrorism to take place.

Also at the first leadership-level meeting since the October 8 earthquake, the two Prime Ministers agreed to cut down the time taken to process applications for people to cross the LoC at designated points to 10 days.

More reports on Page 8

# Manmohan: reconnect the subcontinent

Offers to all SAARC neighbours the facility of daily air services to major Indian cities

Amit Baruah

**DHAKA:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday proposed that all South Asian countries should provide reciprocal transit facilities to connect each other, as well as third countries in the Gulf, Central Asia and South-East Asia.

Making several proposals at the opening ceremony of the 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit, Dr. Singh also offered to all SAARC neighbours the facility of daily air services to Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata, on a reciprocal basis.

In an offer in line with that made to the Association of South-East Asian Nations some years ago, designated SAARC airlines could also start as many services as they wanted to 18 other destinations across India.

The Prime Minister proposed the creation of a centre of excellence - a South Asian University - which could provide world-class facilities to students in the region. While India was willing to host such an institution, it was also prepared to locate it in another country.

Addressing his first SAARC summit, Dr. Singh called for the establishment of a regional food bank to which all member countries would contribute, to be used to meet shortages and losses caused by natural calamities in any SAARC nation.

## Asian resurgence

Pointing to an Asian resurgence indicated by what was happening in East and South-East Asia, he felt that the world was witnessing the rebuilding of the pre-colonial arteries of trade and commerce.

"My question is: Is SAARC prepared to be an emerging part of this emerging Asian resurgence or is it content to remain marginalised at its periphery? If our region wants to be part of a



**MEETING POINT:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in conversation with Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga as Nepal's King Gyanendra looks on during the inaugural session of the 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Dhaka on Saturday. -PHOTO: AFP

dynamic Asia, which is emerging in our neighbourhood, then we must act and act speedily."

Stressing that SAARC could not be the "crossroads" of Asia but remain disconnected within the region, Dr. Singh said: "Ancient roads crisscross the subcontinent and link up with the seaports that were the gateways to the rest of the world. Our rivers form the waterways over which people and cargo travelled across the region."

"If we wish the next 20 years of SAARC to be different, we should take the first decision to reconnect the countries of the

subcontinent, on the one hand, and then reconnect the subcontinent to the larger Asian neighbourhood, on the other.

"We need to recharge and regenerate the arteries of transport and communication that bind us together and, in turn, link our region to the rest of Asia to reclaim the prosperity that it undoubtedly our due."

## South Asian car rally

In the run-up to the next SAARC summit, he offered to hold a South Asian car rally, which would symbolise regional identity and draw attention to

the urgent need to improve transport infrastructure in member nations.

The Prime Minister made it clear that more liberal movement of peoples and goods across border also required greater sensitivity on the part of all SAARC members to pressing concerns.

## Cross-border terrorism

"No member country should allow its territory to be used against the interests of another member country. There should be zero tolerance for cross-border terrorism and for the har-

bouring of hostile insurgent groups and criminal elements.

"It is only in an environment of mutual confidence and a collective commitment against the scourge of terrorism, that we can register the progress we desire in more intense interaction," he said.

Dr. Singh regretted that no member had put forward a project proposal to utilise the \$100 million poverty alleviation fund proposed by India at the last SAARC summit in Islamabad in January 2004.

To set out a roadmap for the

creation of a South Asian Economic Union by 2020, the Prime Minister referred to India's proposal for establishing a SAARC High Economic Council, which could promote initiatives in economic, trade, finance and monetary areas with a view to promoting regional economic integration.

The Prime Minister was "glad" that India's offer to host a SAARC Centre for Disaster Preparedness had been accepted by member countries in the wake of last year's tsunami and the October 8 earthquake.

THE HINDU

15 NOV 2005



# King sets date for polls

18/11 55-9 Hi Sr- Nepal

## Observer status for China welcomed

18/11 55-9 Hi Sr- Nepal

18/11 55-9 Hi Sr- Nepal

### Press Trust of India

DHAKA, Nov. 12. — Favouring inclusion of China into Saarc as an Observer or a Dialogue Partner, India today said "certain modalities" have to be worked out for which a special session of the Standing Committee of the organisation will be convened early next year.

Foreign secretary Mr Shyam Saran said an MoU would have to be signed between SAARC and China in case it was associated with the seven-nation bloc. China has made a request to the Saarc for admission into the organisation either as an Observer or a Dialogue Partner.

"We would welcome inclusion of China on mutually-beneficial basis... But certain modalities have to be worked out," Mr Saran told reporters on the sidelines of the Saarc Summit here. To work out the modalities, he added, the Saarc has decided to

### Visa regime eased

DHAKA, Nov. 12. — The Saarc countries today decided to further liberalise visa regimes to cover additional categories, including journalists with some years of experience, to enhance people-to-people contacts. Special Saarc stickers will be made available to such journalists who would be able to travel within Saarc countries without visa requirements, foreign secretary Mr Shyam Saran told reporters. PTI

convene a special session of Standing Committee early next year. Depending on whether China is associated as a Dialogue Partner or an Observer, Beijing will have to sign an MoU like that exists with Japan, Germany and the European Union, Saran told a group of reporters on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit here.

DHAKA, Nov. 12. — Under pressure to restore democracy, King Gyanendra today used the Saarc forum to promise general elections in the Himalayan kingdom by April 2007.

"We know that there cannot be a meaningful exercise in democracy without elections. We have asked the Election Commission to make necessary preparations to hold general elections by April 2007," the king told the 13th Saarc Summit which began here today.

The king said the improved security situation in Nepal had allowed Kathmandu to announce a date for municipal elections. "The municipal elections are scheduled for 8 February 2006. We hope the successful completion of municipal elections will create an environment conducive to conducting general elections."

The king also criticised the double standards in the global war on terror, saying it had failed "to reach every nook and corner of the world, especially in weak and vulnerable countries (Nepal)".



General elections in Nepal would be held by April 2007, King Gyanendra told the Saarc Summit on Saturday. AFP

Coming out strongly against his detractors, Gyanendra said his decision to sack the Deuba government in February this year was necessitated by "ground realities" and claimed it had not come at the "cost of democracy". He also rubbished warnings by "friends" of the danger of Nepal turning into a failed state.

The entire political spectrum in Nepal had stoutly opposed the King's decision on 1 February to dismiss the Sher Bahadur Government, clamp emergency, impose restrictions on political leaders and order press censorship. India too had criticised

the decision. "The 1 February step in Nepal was necessitated by ground realities, mainly the failure of successive governments to contain ever emboldening terrorists and maintain law and order. It has not come at the cost of democracy, as some tend to project it," he said. The King, whose participation in the Summit has been opposed by Nepalese political parties, said the security situation "is slowly but surely improving". "We are convinced that those who believe in people's welfare cannot be deterred by any force to reach the people." IANS (With PTI inputs)

DATELINE INDIA

# India for inclusion of China into Saarc

**Dhaka**  
12 NOVEMBER 1981

**F**AVOURING inclusion of China into SAARC as an Observer or a Dialogue Partner, India today said "certain modalities" have to be worked out for which a special session of the Standing Committee of the organisation will be convened early next year.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran said that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) would have to be signed between SAARC and China in case it was associated with the seven-nation South Asian organisation. China has made a request to the SAARC for admission into the organisation either as an Observer or a Dialogue Partner.

"We would welcome inclusion of China on mutually-beneficial basis... But certain modalities have to be worked out," Saran told a group of reporters on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit here.

depending on whether China is associated as a Dialogue Partner or an Observer, Beijing will have to sign an MoU like that exists with Japan, Germany and the European Union, Saran told a group of reporters on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit here.

To work out the modalities, Saran said, the SAARC has decided to convene a special session of Standing Committee early next year. Sources said the SAARC Charter at present did not have any provision of having an Observer and as such some amendments might have to be made to make the adjustments. At the SAARC Ministerial meeting, where no consensus could be reached on Afghanistan and China, Nepal had demanded that Beijing be inducted right away.

There is, however, unanimity on entry into the SAARC of Afghanistan, the second country of Asia which had applied for the membership. "This Dhaka Summit will be remembered as a landmark event for we would

welcome the brotherly country of Afghanistan to the SAARC family," Pakistan Prime Minister and outgoing SAARC chairman Shaukat Aziz said addressing the inauguration of 13th Summit here today. He said inclusion of Afghanistan would "undoubtedly enrich our organisation and add to its strength". On China, Aziz said, "We welcome the interest of our friend and neighbour" to be associated with the organisation as an Observer or Dialogue Partner. Pakistan foreign secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan yesterday said a couple of delegations had raised technical issues to requests of both Afghanistan and China.

Without naming any country, Khan said that "reservations" were voiced mainly on account of first settling guidelines for granting such a status before considering such a request.

Khan said there was another view that the two requests should be linked before modalities were worked out.



**BINDING ACT:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with Bangladesh PM Begum Khaleda Zia (L) and Nepal's King Bhanendra at the inaugural session of the 13th Saarc summit in Dhaka on Saturday. — Reuters

# SAARC to focus on collective approach to poverty alleviation

12/11 South Asia HD-19

## Afghanistan's membership and China's associate status take centre stage

Amit Baruah

**DHAKA:** The issue of Afghanistan's membership and China's associate status with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation took centre stage at SAARC ministerial meetings on Friday ahead of the formal summit on Saturday.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who arrived in Dhaka for the twice-postponed summit amidst unprecedented security, said there would be a special focus on collective approaches towards poverty alleviation and on SAARC "development goals" formulated for the region.

"Another important initiative that will be taken up at the summit will be ways and means of cooperating in the area of disaster preparedness and mitigation," the Prime Minister said in the context of the October 8 earthquake and the December 2004 tsunami. "While in Dhaka, I will take the opportunity of bilateral meetings with other SAARC leaders, besides interacting with our hosts. I look forward to having these discussions in a spirit of friendship, cooperation and good-neighbourliness."

Briefing presspersons on Friday's official-level discussions,

Pakistan Foreign Secretary Riaz Muhammad Khan said the Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries had recommended to the Foreign Ministers that the issue of Afghanistan's membership and China's observer/dialogue partner status be discussed.

Some delegations at the meetings had suggested that guidelines be framed before the

question of China becoming a dialogue partner was addressed. Another point of view was that Afghanistan's membership and China's associate status be linked, but Pakistan did not favour such a view.

Apart from Pakistan, India, too, has supported Afghanistan's membership. Mr. Khan confirmed that Afghanistan's membership application and China's

request for associate status had been circulated to all member states by Pakistan, which has held the chairmanship of SAARC.

Islamabad, Mr. Khan said, felt that if all countries were agreeable, should admit Afghanistan as a member and accord observer status to China at the Dhaka summit itself and not leave the question to a later date.

On the operationalisation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) from January 1, 2006, Mr. Khan maintained that a working group of experts would meet in early December to resolve contentious issues like rules of origin of good, compensation to less-developed countries and the sensitive lists to be maintained.

### India-Pakistan meeting

Asked about the agenda for the bilateral meeting between Dr. Manmohan Singh and Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on Saturday, Mr. Khan said this would be an occasion to review the ongoing peace process between the two countries.

Stressing that Pakistan would like to see progress on Kashmir, Mr. Khan said that Islamabad had already expressed satisfaction at the agreement to open five crossing points on the Line of Control.

Asked about the recent terrorist attacks in New Delhi, the Foreign Secretary said that Pakistan had condemned these incidents in the strongest possible terms. If evidence was provided to Pakistan, it was willing to cooperate with the Indian side in the investigation of the attacks, Mr. Khan reiterated.

## Summit begins today amid tight security

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA:** Dhaka is on alert for the 13th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which begins on Saturday.

At least 20,000 security personnel have been deployed at sensitive points of the city since November 6.

Traffic has been restricted on many roads that will be used for the movement of the SAARC leaders.

The SAARC Foreign Secretaries have decided to seek directions from the political leaders on how to

ensure implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) by January 1, 2006. The decision came at the 31st meeting of the SAARC Standing Committee held here, with Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin in the chair.

The SAARC Council of Ministers decided to set up a South Asian Development Fund (SADF) to deal with poverty, the problems of disabled persons and media development.

It agreed with India's offer to set up a SAARC Disaster Management Centre.

The Foreign Ministers

agreed, in principle, to award membership to Afghanistan. An unconfirmed report said they failed to reach a consensus on giving observer status to China.

However, all the Foreign Ministers, who met since Thursday, have agreed to grant membership to Afghanistan.

If the leaders endorse the proposal, the next SAARC summit, to be held in India, may grant Afghanistan the membership, sources said.

The SAARC Charter needs to be amended for inclusion of a member, and the logo too has to be changed.

THE HINDU

# Singh rings 'failed states' alert

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Dhaka, Nov. 11: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement that a number of "failed states" were emerging in India's neighbourhood may cast a pall of gloom on the 13th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit beginning here tomorrow.

Singh spoke in Delhi at the anniversary of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis before leaving for Dhaka. However, it is the meeting of leaders of some of these "failed states" that he would be attending here.

Singh will have bilateral meetings with King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah of Nepal, a state in turmoil, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, a country which India accuses of promoting cross-border terrorism, and his host is Bangladesh whose internal security situation is a matter of grave concern for India.

Whom does the hat fit?

The Bangladeshis have been the first to take umbrage. They are believed to be taking exception to the Prime Minister saying: "The danger of a number of failed states emerging in our neighbourhood has far-reaching consequences for our region and our people. The impact includes crises, which generate an inflow of refugees and destabilisation of our border areas."

Besides this, the two other issues looming large on eve of the 13th Saarc summit are: the India-Pakistan peace process and the requests of Afghanistan and China to be associated with the South Asian body.

India and Pakistan's bilat-

## WARNING FROM PM ON SAARC MEET-EVE



Manmohan Singh with Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in Dhaka on Friday. (AFP)

eral issues are not a part of the Saarc agenda — its charter does not allow Saarc to discuss bilateral issues. However, the bilateral meeting between Singh and his Pakistan counterpart, Shaukat Aziz, tomorrow on the sidelines of the summit will be no less significant than the meeting of the heads of government.

The Singh-Aziz meeting is expected to take stock of the bilateral relations and the progress made recently in

opening crossing points for relief and for divided families along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir. "The peace process is on top of the agenda between India and Pakistan and we would like to see progress on Kashmir," Pakistan's foreign secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan said this evening.

On Afghanistan and China, however, it seems that the South Asian nations gathered here are divided over which should come first — the

cart or the horse. The issue is the request of Afghanistan for membership of Saarc and of China for observer status or to be a dialogue partner. The question is whether their association with Saarc should be accepted immediately or should rules and criteria for expansion of the association be framed first.

India, which may not be averse to Afghanistan joining, says specific ground rules and criteria need to be developed first before extending the

membership of Saarc or considering any request for the status of an observer or dialogue partner. This is to ensure that China does not come in easily.

Pakistan, without linking the case of Afghanistan and China, wants the Saarc countries to take a decision about both in Dhaka and says criteria for expansion could be left till later. Nepal is linking Afghanistan's membership with China's request and is arguing that if Afghanistan gets in then so should China as an observer or a dialogue partner.

And Bangladesh is indirectly opposing Afghanistan, pointing out that the Constitution and logo of Saarc would need to be changed to permit any expansion.

Pakistan foreign secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan, admitting as much, said: "Our view is that if there is a consensus on Afghanistan, then it should be accepted. Although there are no criteria in place, if the member countries feel that someone should become a member, then that decision should be accepted."

After a meeting of the Saarc council of ministers, which lasted late into the night, Bangladesh foreign minister Morshed Khan said that the decision on China's request had been postponed till early next year. "A special session of the standing committee (of foreign secretaries) will be convened early next year to frame the guidelines," he said.

As for Afghanistan, Khan said: "We are yet to reach a conclusion but we are hopeful of reaching a positive conclusion."

THE HILLGRAPH

# PM to push for terror fight at Saarc

South Asia ST-1 12/11

SNS & PTI

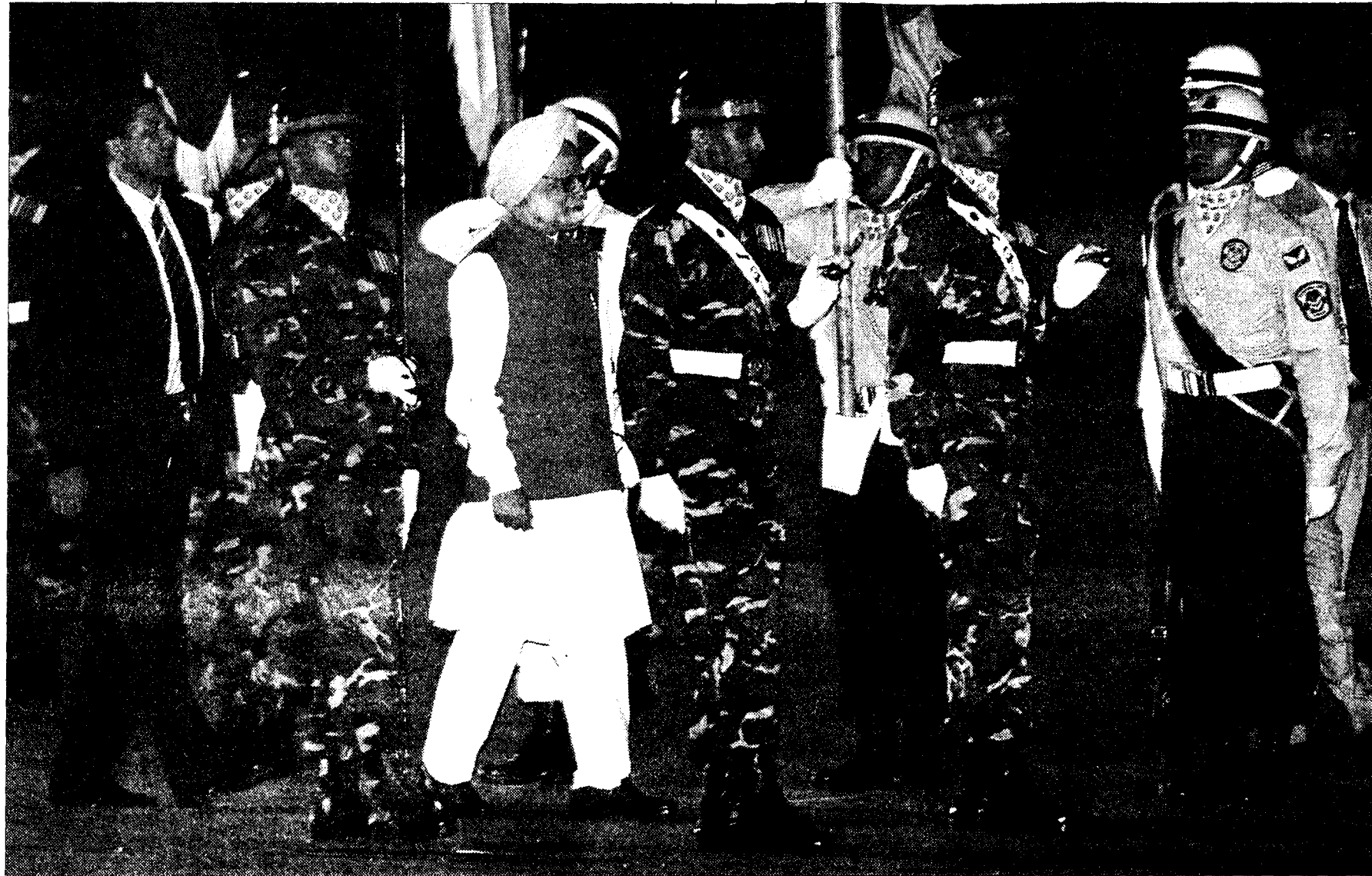
DHAKA/NEW DELHI, Nov. 11. — India is strongly pitching for the twice-delayed Saarc summit that gets underway tomorrow at Dhaka to send out a clear message that there must be "zero tolerance" for terrorism in any form or manifestation. It wants strengthening collective efforts to combat the scourge to be high on the agenda during the Summit deliberations. (The Saarc council of ministers met today to finalise the draft Declaration which would be placed before the two-day Summit commencing tomorrow.)

Recent terror strikes in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have brought home the urgent need for working together to deal with this challenge. Outlining India's approach on the issue ahead of the Summit, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh has made it clear that the fight against terrorism as also poverty in South Asia was an "indivisible" one.

"No government can any longer pretend that what happens across the border is not going to hurt it internally," he stressed.

Dr Singh has a packed schedule with a number of bilateral meetings being worked out on the margins of the SAARC Summit. He will have meetings with Pakistan Prime Minister Mr Shaukat Aziz and Bangladesh counterpart Ms Khaleda Zia tomorrow. He will also meet Bhutan's Prime Minister Mr Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup during his stay here.

Before attending the Summit, the Prime Minister will take part in a joint wreath laying ceremony at the National Martyrs' Memorial 'Savar'. He will also join other Saarc leaders in placing wreaths and unveiling of plaque at former President Ziaur Rahman's mausoleum. The Bangladesh capital has been put under a thick security blanket in the wake of threats to



MEETING GROUND: Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh inspects a guard of honour by Bangladeshi troops as he arrives for the 13th Saarc Summit at Zia Airport in Dhaka on Friday. — AFP

disrupt the Summit. Bangladesh officials said that 30,000 security and police personnel have been deployed to ensure that everything goes off smoothly.

At both the Sheraton Hotel where the leaders are staying and the Sonargaon Hotel where most of the large media contingent is putting up, tight security has been put in place.

The Indian delegation led by the Prime Minister includes minister of State for external affairs Mr E Ahamed, foreign secretary Mr Shyam Saran and High Commissioner Ms Vecna Sikri.

In his departure statement before he left for Dhaka at Indira Gandhi International Airport, Dr Manmohan Singh had said that the 13th Saarc Summit should provide an opportunity to focus regional attention on a number of important initiatives that are being pursued by Saarc. "We will be considering the various programmes and projects decided upon in the ministerial meetings in areas such as trade, environment, information, health and energy," he said. He added that there will be special focus on collective approaches

towards poverty alleviation. He made a reference to the SAARC development goals which will be discussed in detail during the summit.

"Another important initiative that will be taken up at the Summit will be ways and means of cooperating in the area of disaster preparedness and mitigation," he said.

Dr Singh hoped that these initiatives would contribute significantly towards realising the "enormous potential for economic, social and cultural cooperation among the member-states of Saarc."

## India interested in

- **FREE TRADE:** A deadline for creating a South Asian Free Trade Area by January 2006.
- **DISASTER MANAGEMENT:** Delhi's keen its offer to host a South Asian disaster preparedness and management centre be accepted.
- **TERRORISM:** Cross-border terrorism is the issue. On both India's eastern and western borders. Dr Manmohan Singh is likely to emphasise that terrorism can be defeated only through a "sustained, patient and comprehensive" campaign.
- **POVERTY REDUCTION:** The reconstitution of the South Asian Development Fund by merging existing and proposed funds into a Saarc Development Fund with US \$300 million as a corpus. — AP

## Ayodhya plot hatched in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, Nov. 11. — In a major catch that indicated that the plan to storm the Ram Temple in Ayodhya was hatched in Bangladesh, Delhi Police have arrested a Jaish-e-Mohammad militant who allegedly helped the attackers sneak into India from the neighbouring country.

Abdul Baqi (33), hailing from Kolkata, was arrested by the Special Cell when he arrived at the New Delhi railway station here last night by Poorvanchal Express. Delhi police are probing if Baqi was also involved in Delhi serial blasts.

A team of the Special Cell, who were trailing him from Kolkata, was in the same compartment as Baqi but they did not apprehend him earlier as they wanted to nab some of his associates.

However, when Baqi tried to flee after sensing trouble, he was arrested after a brief struggle. Baqi was acting as a "courier" for Jaish-e-Mohammad for at least three years and had helped many militants sneak into and out of the country, Joint Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Mr Karnal Singh said today.

Among them were the wife and infant daughter of Gazi Baba, the mastermind of the attack on Parliament, whom he helped escape to Bangladesh after the Jaish militant was gunned down in August 2003 in Srinagar.

Police said Baqi had helped the men who made the unsuccessful bid to storm the makeshift temple in Ayodhya on 5 July. "Baqi has confessed that the plan for the attack was hatched in Bangladesh," an officer said. — PTI

# Anti-terror steps high on Saarc agenda

## Call to collectively combat threat

AGENCIES  
Dhaka, November 11

FACED WITH the growing threat of terrorism, the Saarc countries are expected to outline a series of steps to collectively combat the scourge which affects the security, economic stability and development of the region.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other leaders of the seven-member regional grouping, who meet for the two-day Saarc summit from Saturday, are likely to emphasise that terrorism can be defeated only through a "sustained, patient and comprehensive" campaign.

A draft declaration prepared for the Dhaka summit has specially focussed on the threats posed by terrorism. It reflects the strong condemnation of Saarc leaders of terrorist violence in all its forms and manifestations and the "ominous challenge" it poses to all states.

It indicated that the leaders would renew their commitment to the Saarc regional convention on suppression of terrorism and its additional protocol, which recognises the seriousness of the problem of terrorism as it "affects the security, economic stability and social development of the region".

The leaders are likely to affirm their commitment to reinforce their coordinated efforts at the national, regional and international levels to face this "virulent challenge", the document indicated. In line with coordinated efforts, the leaders are expected to take a decision on holding annual meetings of Saarc home ministers which would be preceded by a meeting of home secretaries.

The leaders shared the view that terrorism violates the fundamental values of the Saarc charter and the UN and constitutes "one of the most critical threats to international peace and security in the 21st century". The document indicated that the leaders would come out in strong support of the UN resolutions while affirming their determination to redouble efforts "collectively as well as individually to prevent and suppress terrorism in all its forms and manifestations".

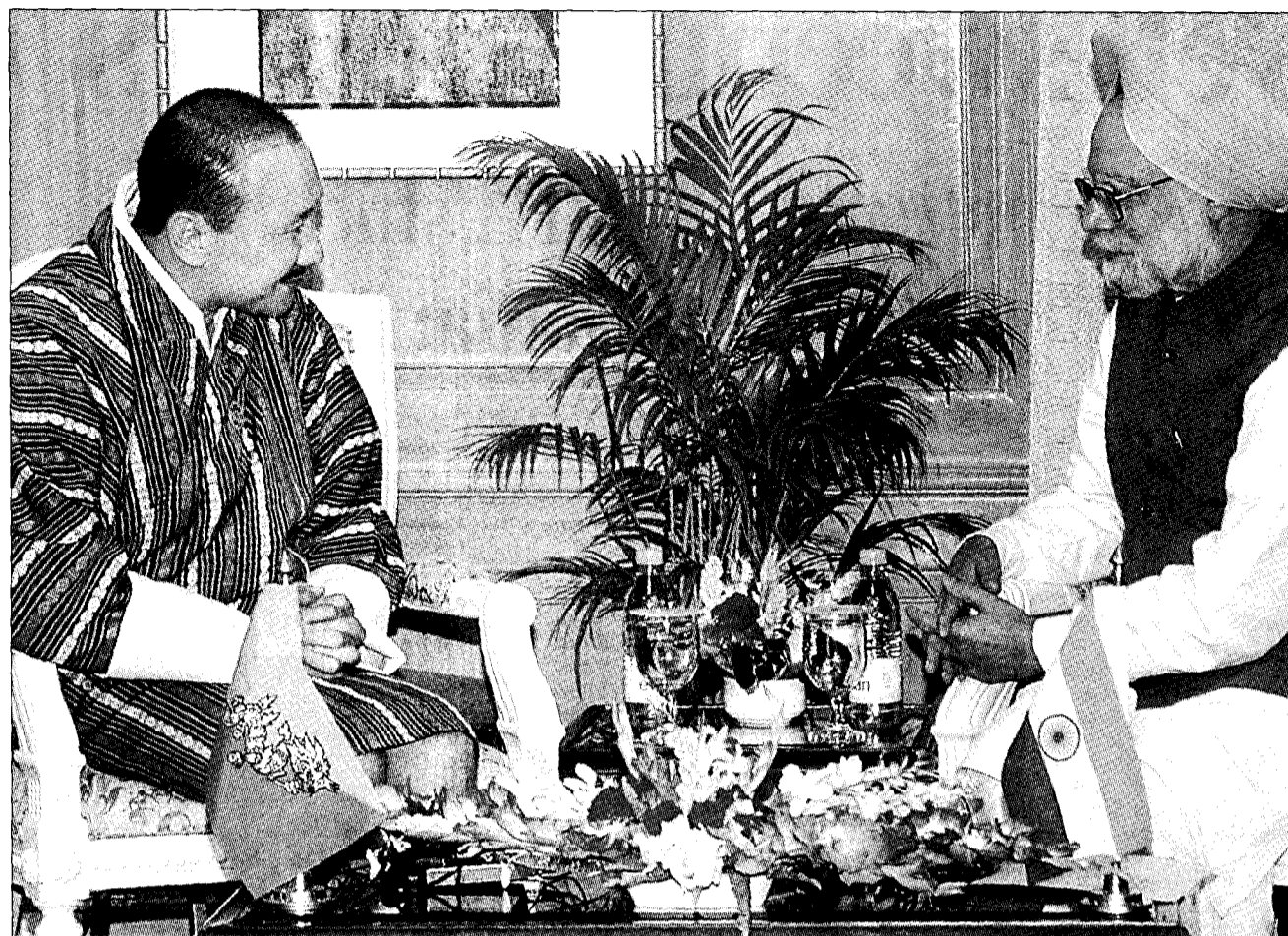
AHEAD OF the Saarc summit — beginning in Dhaka on Saturday — Pakistan has said that it will highlight the cause of the Kashmiri people and the need to resolve issues for creating an "enabling environment". Making these remarks here before departing for the Bangladeshi capital, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said he would convey these to the leaders attending the summit. On the sidelines of the summit, Aziz said he would discuss with the leaders "the recent earthquake, thank them for their help and support and highlight the cause of the Kashmiri people and present concerns and challenges they face and need to resolve issues to create enabling environment".

PTI, Islamabad

Significantly, the leaders are expected to give a call to all member-states to prevent financing of terrorist acts by "criminalising the collection of funds for such acts and refraining from organising, instigating, assisting or participating in terrorist acts in states or acquiescing in organised activities within its territory directed towards another country".

The leaders will underscore the need for an early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism, according to the draft. The Saarc members are expected to agree to strengthen cooperation in important areas such as exchange of information and coordination among their relevant agencies to deal with the scourge. The leaders may recommend that concrete measures be taken to enforce the provisions of the regional convention on narcotics drugs and psychotropic substances through an appropriate regional mechanism. On the economic front, the leaders are likely to renew their commitment to the realisation of the vision for a South Asia Economic Union in a phased and planned manner.

The document said with Saarc completing 20 years of existence, it was an opportune time to draw a roadmap for regional cooperation in South Asia for the next decade.



Manmohan Singh with the Prime Minister of Bhutan in Dhaka on the eve of the Saarc summit.

ASHOK NATH DEY/HT

## A shark without teeth?

ANIRBAN Choudhury  
Dhaka, November 11

THE 13TH Saarc summit begins here on Saturday with too many questions being raised about it, primarily because of the snail-paced growth of cooperation and the non-existent commercial transactions.

In the words of a senior diplomat, it has become a "shark without the teeth". Perhaps it is true that after 20 years, the Saarc is losing charm.

Saturday's summit, however, is beginning with a high note of hope over the implementation of South Asian Free Trade Area which could revolutionise trade in the entire region. There are hitches among the seven member nations regarding Rules of Origin, trading of sensitive items and compensation of revenue loss.

The Charter bans any discussion on bilateral issues. Ironically, the three big players in the association — India, Pakistan and Bangladesh — have been locking horns over several bilateral issues ever since Saarc's inception. Kashmir, infiltration and water sharing have always remain the bone of contention.

It is very difficult for India to forget that Lahore Declaration was followed by Kargil and Agra meeting preceded the attack on Indian Parliament. From Pakistan's point of view, India is an obstinate partner which refuses to consider Kashmir as a disputed territory. With two nuke neighbours at loggerheads forever on the issue of militancy, it's unlikely that words like "fighting terrorism unitedly" will see proper implementation.

India is covertly opposing China's entry into the Saarc and is not too happy that Nepal, another Saarc partner, received about \$ 990,000 military aid from China in October.

Former Saarc secretary-general from



Security drive in a Dhaka street on Friday.

ASHOK NATH DEY/HT

Bangladesh Q.A. Rahim, while addressing a seminar in Dhaka raised several questions about the association not having enough teeth. "In the past 20 years, there have been 12 meetings which adopted four important decisions. None could be implemented so far". According to him, unlike the other international bodies, the Saarc secretariat lacks teeth to implement decisions and talks about "increase in people to people contact" had so far resulted in harassment to get a visa.

Despite the scepticism in both political and diplomatic circles, the Standing Committee meeting of foreign ministers on Friday ratified the decision to have an integrated "Saarc Development Fund" with \$100 contribution from India. There

will be three windows — Poverty, Infrastructure and Economy—to deal with the issues separately. The heads of governments and states started arriving with Indian Prime Minister's aircraft touching down the Zia International Airport at about 6-30 p.m. He was received by the Begum Khaleda

## PM suggests 3 pillars to meet challenges

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, November 11

EMPHASISING THE importance of engaging all major powers in a cooperative, constructive and mutually beneficial relationship, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said here on Friday morning that India must find ways to use international opinion as a force multiplier in addressing external challenges effectively.

In his foundation day address that coincided with the 40th anniversary of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), the Prime Minister identified three pillars that would support India's security concerns in the emerging global order. First, strengthen the nation economically. Second, develop adequate defence capabilities

so as to meet the challenges to our security and finally to develop partnerships in the strategic, economic and technological spheres in order to enlarge "our policy choices and developmental options", he explained. "Our engagement with the major powers and indeed with the world must be set in this perspective", the PM added.

Highlighting the need for adopting interdisciplinary approaches towards national security, Singh stressed the importance of improving the security paradigm in all its dimensions — economic, social, political and in terms of food and energy security. The PM released three IDSA publications to mark the occasion. He honoured eminent defence and strategic analyst K. Subrahmanyam with the lifetime achievement award at the function. Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee and IDSA director Narendra Sisodia spoke on the occasion. Former defence minister K.C. Pant, senior personnel of the armed forces, diplomats and security experts were present on the occasion.

### Manmohan hopeful

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hopes that the initiatives to be taken at the Saarc summit will have significant contribution towards realising the enormous potential for economic, social and cultural cooperation in the seven-nation grouping.

"This Summit will provide an opportunity to focus regional attention on a number of important initiatives that are being pursued by Saarc", the PM said before embarking on a three-day visit to Dhaka for the summit beginning on Saturday. In view of the national mourning after the death of former President K.R. Narayanan, the already scaled-down departure ceremony at the Prime Minister's residence was dispensed with.

### THE FORMULA

- To develop partnerships in the strategic, economic and technological spheres to enlarge India's policy choices and developmental options
- Strengthen the nation economically
- Develop adequate defence capabilities to meet the challenges to security

# SAARC at 20: will the future be different?

It is time for the grouping to move ahead with real economic integration. *Sunita Khatun*

Amit Baruah

IT SHOULD have been the 20th summit, but it is only the 13th. When leaders of the seven South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations meet for their "annual" summit in Dhaka on November 12 and 13, they will have an opportunity to reflect on the performance of the 20-year-old organisation.

Set up on December 8, 1985, SAARC has often found itself hostage to the India-Pakistan dynamic. Tensions between the two countries have meant several SAARC summits have not taken place.

Though the beginnings of a free trade area will be set in motion on January 1, 2006, as agreed to by SAARC leaders in Islamabad two years ago, there is little doubt that South Asia, given its size and potential, is still to be reckoned as a regional trading area of consequence.

India and Pakistan, having made steady progress in improving their relationship since a ceasefire took effect on November 26, 2003, can now take the lead in pushing ahead with trade facilitation measures and transport linkages that could serve as examples for the rest of the region.

In previous years, SAARC had been an

occasion for India and Pakistan to spar over Kashmir. Now, with the active engagement of Islamabad and New Delhi, fresh energy can be infused into the region on the economic front.

Given the fact that India's northeastern States would benefit from trade and transport linkages with Bangladesh, New Delhi needs to take stock of its relationship with Dhaka and begin a process that will alter the negative environment that currently exists between the two countries.

In fact, Bangladesh had shown considerable resistance to moving ahead with the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in Islamabad two years ago, but was persuaded to go along after extracting certain concessions.

Since India's relationship with key SAARC countries is often linked to security questions, New Delhi needs to do some hard thinking on what it needs to do vis-à-vis Bangladesh. As is well known, Bangladesh suffers from a massive trade imbalance, with its exports to India standing at a paltry \$100 million and imports from India close to \$2 billion. As a beginning, India should unilaterally announce that it would allow duty-free access of Bangladeshi goods into the country as a gesture of goodwill. This would, at least, dent the perception that India is

only interested in "exploiting" Bangladesh. Equally, Bangladesh should move ahead in giving all the necessary clearances required to the Tata group to allow for its estimated investment of \$2 billion in the country. The Tatas' proposal includes a two million tonne steel plant, a 1,000-megawatt power project, and a million tonne fertilizer plant to be set up in Bangladesh.

In a speech on November 9 that dealt with South Asia, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said: "Given the strong trends towards economic integration which go far beyond tariff reductions to gradual economic convergence, any region can ignore the formation of its own scheme of regional integration only at its peril."

Clearly, there is a realisation at the highest levels of government that SAARC needs to move ahead with real economic integration, which would bring benefits to both people and business, especially in the border areas. India may be convinced of the benefits of regional integration, but its other neighbours, especially Bangladesh, need to be on board if a South Asian economic union is to become possible.

## Little movement on promises

At summit after summit, in declaration after declaration, SAARC leaders have re-

ferred to goals such as poverty reduction, preferential and free trade, and the need to establish good neighbourly relations in general terms. Yet precious little forward movement has taken place compared to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or even the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) grouping that comprises China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Stepping away from formal declarations, South Asian leaders need to take note of the hunger and suffering of their citizens; the fact that benefits of economic development have reached some, but are yet to reach many others.

SAARC leaders should step away from the routine of issuing declarations and statements, many of which read the same, submit after submit; the variations being restricted to changes in the English language common to all the seven members. Issuing long-winded joint declarations should be dispensed with and, instead, leaders should spare no effort in getting on with the job of regional integration. At the last summit in Islamabad, SAARC leaders reiterated their commitment made in Kathmandu in 2002 to set up a South Asian Economic Union. It is time this commitment was translated into reality.

11 NOV 2005

# Power game to the fore at Dhaka

## Afghan's Saarc entry hits roadblocks

ANIRBAN Choudhury  
Dhaka, November 10

NOTES OF diplomatic discord have surfaced over inclusion of Afghanistan into the Saarc. Till Wednesday, it seemed almost certain that given the eagerness of big brother India, Afghanistan was sure to be included in the Saarc bouquet. Pakistan too welcomed the decision.

On Monday, the standing committee of Saarc sat for long hours in which the foreign secretaries of the member nations deliberated on various issues which are likely to come up in the meet from November 12.

In the evening, AHM Moniruzzaman, additional foreign secretary of Bangladesh said "There was no consensus over inclusion of Afghanistan because there were reservations about it". He refused to elaborate which country or countries had the 'reservation'. He said Afghanistan has also not yet 'formally' applied for inclusion.

Just an hour later, the Indian delegation attempted to maintain their upbeat mood over Afghanistan. Minister of State for external affairs E Ahmad said, "in the next summit in India, Afghanistan will surely be included". When asked whether there was any objection from member states, India's foreign secretary Shyam Saran said, "To my knowledge, there hasn't been

any objections. Some modalities need to be worked out in order to include the country".

Diplomatic sources said the differences over Afghanistan have been a result of the power game that is played in every summit, in which some countries are sure to feel insecure with a pro-India country entering the Saarc fold. India, on its part, has also been resisting inclusion of China as a Saarc member wanting it to remain in a consultative capacity.

As the Afghanistan issue continued to prick the diplomats through the day, the much-awaited South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta), which is scheduled to be implemented from January next year is sure to miss its deadline.

It is learnt that the standing committee meeting on Thursday failed to resolve the long standing contentious issues like "Rules of Origin" or "Compensation for Losses". The Committee of Experts dealing with it will meet by the end of this month to speed up things. But things look grim as far as the January deadline is concerned.

However, the Standing Committee meeting took two important decisions — to set up a permanent disaster management center and to bring different funds under one umbrella of Saarc Development Fund for all member countries.

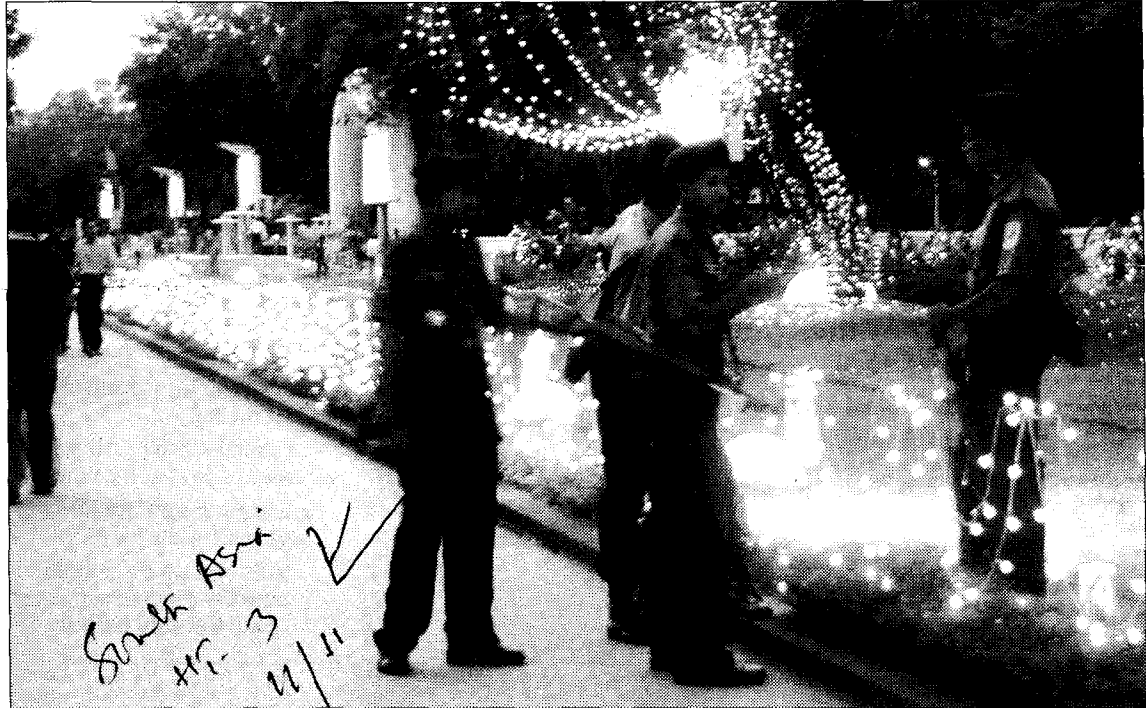


### Differences

**Bangladesh says** There are reservations about it

**India says** Some modalities to be worked out

**Diplomats say** some feel uncomfortable to back pro-India country's entry



Security personnel keep a watch at the decked-up venue for the 13th Saarc summit in Dhaka.

ASHOK NATH DEY/HT

## Five facts about Saarc meet

### HISTORY

SAARC — which includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — was founded in 1985 to accelerate economic growth in one of the poorest regions in the world. But the group has been hobbled by an inability to overcome internal rifts, especially between its two biggest members — nuclear rivals India and Pakistan. According to its charter, the group avoids bilateral and contentious issues.

### STATISTICS

The region is home to about 1.5 billion people and the combined economies are worth about USD900 billion. One-third of the people live

in abject poverty. India has about 70 per cent of the region's people, wealth and land area.

### DISASTERS

South Asian countries have been hit by two of the world's worst natural disasters in the past one year. The December 26 tsunami, besides devastating Indonesia's Aceh province and Thailand's shoreline, also ruined many parts of Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and the Maldives. The massive Kashmir earthquake just over a month ago is estimated to have killed more than 85,000 people, not only in Pakistan but also in Pak occupied Kashmir and Jammu and Kashmir.

### AGENDA

Poverty alleviation, cooperation in the aftermath of natural disasters and combating terrorism will dominate the agenda of this year's summit. Pakistan has said it will also put forward a proposal to include Afghanistan in the group.

### WHO'LL ATTEND

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz are likely to meet on the sidelines of the summit to nudge forward the peace process between the two countries. Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga will be making a farewell appearance.



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Thursday, November 10, 2005

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Edits

10/11/05

SAARC bites

Indian investment can lift South Asia. But can FDI-wary India preach to its neighbours?

In the deep waters of regional economic cooperation, SAARC is very small fish. Those despairing whether its size would ever matter may see — in the Tatas's three billion dollar investment proposal for Bangladesh — the first promise of a growth pill. Indian FDI can take care of a major problem in SAARC economic cooperation. The fear of large trade deficits has come in the way of freer trade with India for many fellow SAARC members. The fear may be economically illogical — free trade benefits all participants — but SAARC members are hardly the only countries in the world to ignore economics when it comes to trade. Politicians' grievances about a widening of trade deficit can be addressed by Indian FDI because the latter will add to the host country's volume and value of exports. This has happened with Sri Lanka, and in a lesser—and more messy way—with Nepal. This can happen with Bangladesh and Pakistan. But FDI can't cure the fear of trade if SAARC members fear FDI, too. And here, India's case for delivering a sermon to its South Asian neighbours is not as strong as South Block may think.

The world's second fastest growing economy is itself afraid of FDI. This, despite more than a decade of reforms. And despite the serial proof that FDI has encouraged domestic economic activity, not killed it. Dhaka can well tell Delhi not to lecture it on the benefits of foreign investment, when tortuous negotiations have to precede a simple matter like hiking FDI limits on telecom in India. Islamabad, if it wants, can recall amusing stories about how FDI in the retail sector has been a victim of a supposed traders' lobby. Every bit of resistance Dhaka staged over the Tata investment proposal — over clearances, over supplies of the chief raw material, over incentives — would find an echo in the manner Delhi has chosen to handle dozens of FDI projects. India has been there, done that.

Bangladesh shouldn't go there. Neither should Pakistan, or any other SAARC member. But they can hardly ignore the point that India still doesn't have a simple, transparent policy for FDI: make government clearances redundant for all sectors, barring those figuring in a very small, publicly known negative list. As the Tatas struggles with Dhaka's obstructionism, many in India will recall what Delhi did to the Tata-Singapore Airlines proposal. The worrying thing is Dhaka may remember it, too.

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12/21/2005

**The Indian EXPRESS**

Sumit Asa  
CSHAK()

Thursday, November 10, 2005

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**National Network****PM moots united colours of Saarc**

10/11/05

**BAJINDER PAL SINGH**

**CHANDIGARH, NOV 9** A week before the beginning of the SAARC summit, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh mooted the expansion of SAARC as a regional trade bloc and an economic union.

Expressing his happiness at the arrival of South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), Singh described it as "the first step in the evolution of SAARC as a regional trade bloc and an economic union". Regional economic integration is more about finding an engine of growth rather than just promoting trade, he said.

Coming a few days before the SAARC summit, his remarks seemed a tactic to set the agenda for the talks and pre-empt any move to derail the process of regional economic union.

Citing the examples of EU, ASEAN Free Trade Area and proposed Free Trade Area of Americas (FTAA), the PM stressed that India's neighbours must see it as a land of opportunity. He also identified the fight against terrorism and poverty as "indivisible", stating that no country can pretend that some one's terrorists could be some one else's freedom fighter.

Attempting to allay fears of India being the big brother, the Prime Minister cited instances of benefits accrued by Sri Lanka and Nepal from bilateral trade agreements with India. "The lesson from recent experiences of regional economic integration in South Asia is that smaller and poorer countries benefit more as their trade becomes more balanced", Dr Manmohan Singh said. He cited the case of EU where countries with lower income level like Spain, Portugal and Greece have benefited from economic integration.

Delivering the inaugural address at the P N Haskar Memorial Conference at the Centre for Resarch in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), an institute which he once headed, Dr Singh remarked that South Asia shares boundaries and civilisation roots.

"The two recent natural disasters, tsunami last year and the recent earthquake have proved that even nature has ordained it so", he added.

Describing SAFTA as a forerunner of deeper economic integration in the region, the PM cited two examples, one of Sri Lanka and the other of Nepal.

In Sri Lanka, an Indian tyre company has set up a large export-oriented plant to take advantage of local supply of natural rubber. Today, India is the third largest investor in the island. Indian consumer goods companies have invested in Nepal, resulting in the same items becoming the most important exports to India.

# সার্ক বৈঠকে হাল ধরতে কোমর বেঁধেছে ভারত ও পাকিস্তান

আর্থসারথি সেনগুপ্ত • নয়াদিল্লি

২৬ অক্টোবর: সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলিকে নিয়ে একটি মুক্ত বাণিজ্য অঞ্চল গড়ার ব্যাপারে অগ্রণী ভূমিকা নিচ্ছে ভারত ও পাকিস্তান।

ভারত-পাকিস্তান ছাড়া বাংলাদেশ, নেপাল, ভূটান, শ্রীলঙ্কা বা মলদ্বীপের মতো সার্কভুক্ত অন্যান্য দেশগুলি অপেক্ষাকৃত অনুরত হওয়ায় হাল ধরতে হচ্ছে এই দু'টি দেশকেই। ফলে রাজনৈতিক দ্বন্দ্ব ভুলে অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে যৌথ নেতৃত্ব দিতে এখন একযোগে কোমর বাঁধছে ভারত-পাকিস্তান।

সার্ক সম্মেলন উপলক্ষে ১২ ও ১৩ নভেম্বর ঢাকায় যাওয়ার আগে সে বিষয়েই চূড়ান্ত অনুশীলন সেরে নিচ্ছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। আসন্ন সার্ক সম্মেলনে অর্থনৈতিক আলোচ্যসূচির খসড়া বিদেশ মন্ত্রক ইতিমধ্যেই পাঠিয়ে দিয়েছে অর্থ ও বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রকে। সেই সঙ্গে বিদেশমন্ত্রকের (সার্ক বিষয়ক) যুগ্মসচিব পি কপূর একটি চিঠিও দিয়েছেন অর্থ মন্ত্রকের সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তা ডি এস চৌহান ও বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রকের শ্যামলাতা গুরুকে।

মুক্ত বাণিজ্যের স্বার্থে 'সাইথ এশিয়ান ফ্রি ট্রেড এগ্রিমেন্ট' (সার্ক) চালু হওয়ার কথা ২০০৬ সালের পয়লা জানুয়ারি থেকে। ওই চুক্তি অনুযায়ী সার্কভুক্ত সাতটি দেশ পারস্পরিক বাণিজ্যে শুল্ক কমাতে রাজি হয়েছে। আপাতত অসম্ভব ঠেকলেও পরবর্তী পর্যায়ে সদস্য দেশগুলির মধ্যে একই মুদ্রা (ইউরোর আদলে) চালু করার স্বপ্নও দেখাচ্ছে সার্ক।

চিঠিতে অর্থ ও বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রকের সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তাদের কপূর লিখেছেন, "আগামী ১২ ও ১৩ নভেম্বর ঢাকায় সার্ক সম্মেলনে আলোচ্য চারটি বিষয়ের উপরে বিস্তারিত নোট তৈরি করে দ্রুত তা প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতরে পাঠিয়ে দিন। আলোচ্যসূচিতে থাকছে এই বিষয়গুলি:

- ২০০৬ সালে সার্ক চালু হলে নেপাল, ভূটান, বাংলাদেশের মতো পিছিয়ে পড়া সার্ক দেশগুলির শুল্ক খাতে যে আয় কমবে, সেই ধাক্কা সামলাতে কী ভাবে সাহায্য করা যায়।

- সামাজিক, অর্থনৈতিক ও পরিকাঠামোগত উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে প্রায় ১০ কোটি মার্কিন ডলারের একটি নতুন তহবিল বানানো।

- বর্তমান 'সাইথ এশিয়ান ডেভলপমেন্ট ফান্ড'-এর কতটা সদ্যবহার হয়েছে তা খতিয়ে দেখে এই তহবিল পুনর্গঠন করা।

- সার্ক সদস্যভুক্ত দেশগুলি একে অন্যের মাটিতে বিনিয়োগ করলে, তা সুরক্ষিত রাখার বন্দোবস্ত করা।"

আলোচ্যসূচির প্রথম বিষয়টিই ভারত-পাক যৌথ নেতৃত্বের গুরুত্ব বুঝিয়ে দিচ্ছে। বহির্বাণিজ্যের

উদারীকরণে ১৯৯৩ সালে যে 'সার্ক প্রেফারেনশিয়াল ট্রেডিং এগ্রিমেন্ট' (সাপটা) স্বাক্ষরিত হয়েছিল, ২৫ অনুচ্ছেদ বিশিষ্ট সার্ক চুক্তি সে তুলনায় অনেক পরিণত। সার্কটায় বাংলাদেশ, ভূটান, মলদ্বীপ, নেপাল ও শ্রীলঙ্কাকে স্বল্পোন্নত বলে চিহ্নিত করে তাদের বিশেষ সুযোগসুবিধা দেওয়ার কথা বলা হয়েছে। আর দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার উন্নয়নের মাপকাঠিতে ভারত ও পাকিস্তান রয়েছে প্রথম সারিতেই। তাই প্রথম সারির দুই দেশের মধ্যে রাজনৈতিক সমস্যাগুলির (যেমন কাশ্মীর) সমাধান দূর অস্ত হলেও তাদের যৌথ নেতৃত্ব ছাড়া এখন গতাস্তর নেই।

সার্কটায় চালু হওয়ার দু'বছরের মধ্যে ভারত ও পাকিস্তানকে বহির্বাণিজ্যে বর্তমান শুল্কের হার কমিয়ে ২০ শতাংশের মধ্যে আনতে হবে। দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ে ২০০৮ সালের পয়লা জানুয়ারি থেকে পরবর্তী পাঁচ বছরের মধ্যে শুল্কের হার ২০ শতাংশ থেকে কমিয়ে ৫ শতাংশেরও নীচে নামাতে হবে। অন্য দিকে, বাংলাদেশ, ভূটান, নেপাল প্রভৃতি দেশ প্রথম দু'বছরে শুল্কের হার কমিয়ে ৩০ শতাংশের মধ্যে নিয়ে আসবে। দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ে পরবর্তী আট বছরে তা কমিয়ে পাঁচ শতাংশেরও নীচে নামিয়ে আনতে হবে। দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ে স্বল্পোন্নত দেশগুলিকে আট বছর সময় দেওয়া হয়েছে। তবে শ্রীলঙ্কার ক্ষেত্রে তা ছ'বছর করা হয়েছে। কারণ শ্রীলঙ্কার অবস্থা তুলনামূলক ভাবে ভাল।

স্বল্পোন্নত দেশগুলির শুল্ক হ্রাসের ধাক্কা সামলাতে তাদের সঙ্গে দীর্ঘ ও মধ্যম মেয়াদি আমদানি চুক্তি করবে ভারত ও পাকিস্তান। ওই দেশগুলিতে বিশেষ বিশেষ ক্ষেত্রে কাঁচামাল সরবরাহ করে উৎপাদিত সামগ্রী কিনে নেওয়া হবে। ওই সব দেশের রফতানি মূল্যও সুরক্ষিত থাকবে। দেওয়া হবে প্রযুক্তিগত সহায়তাও। স্বল্পোন্নত দেশগুলি থেকে আমদানির পরিমাণের উর্ধ্বসীমা শিথিল করা হবে।

তবে দুই গোত্রের দেশই তাদের অভ্যন্তরীণ উৎপাদনের সুরক্ষায় কিছু বিশেষ পণ্যের একটি তালিকা বানাবে, যেগুলির ক্ষেত্রে সর্বসম্মত ভাবে উচ্চহারে শুল্ক বলবৎ থাকবে।

প্রতি চার বছর অন্তর সেই তালিকা সংশোধিত হবে। সাইথ এশিয়ান ডেভলপমেন্ট ফান্ড পুনর্গঠনের পাশাপাশি দারিদ্র দূরীকরণের জন্য সামাজিক, অর্থনৈতিক ও পরিকাঠামোগত উন্নয়নের যে তহবিল গড়া হবে, প্রাথমিক ভাবে সেই তহবিলে ৩০ কোটি মার্কিন ডলার বরাদ্দ করার প্রস্তাব এসেছিল। সেপ্টেম্বরে কাঠমান্ডুর সার্ক সচিবালয়ে এক বৈঠকে অর্থনৈতিক বিশেষজ্ঞরা এই প্রস্তাব দেন। ভারত মনে করে এই মুহূর্তে দশ কোটি মার্কিন ডলারের জোগানই বাস্তবসম্মত হবে। লম্বির জন্য সার্ক পর্যায়ে একটি পৃথক ব্যাঙ্ক গঠনের কথাও ভাবা হচ্ছে।

42,000 INJURED, GOVT HELP YET TO REACH BALKOT IN POK

# 30,000 feared dead in Pakistan



A seriously-injured Kashmiri woman pleads for help from a Pakistani soldier. (Below) Pakistani soldiers search for victims in the debris of a school. In PoK capital Muzaffarabad on Sunday. — AFP (More reports on pages 2 & 5)

Associated Press

**BALAKOT (PoK), Oct. 9.** — Villagers desperate to find earthquake survivors dug with bare hands on Sunday into collapsed homes and schools where children had been heard crying under the rubble. Officials said nearly 20,000 bodies had been counted, but estimated the toll could exceed 30,000. The quake is believed to have killed many students in Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir, said the region's communications minister

peratures. Mr Mahmmod said the army was providing help to survivors only in PoK's major cities and towns and that the troops had not started relief work in remote villages where people were still buried in the rubble, and in some areas, nobody was present to organise funerals for the dead. "We are handling the worst disaster in Pakistan's history," said Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan, the country's top military spokesman.

Two survivors — a boy and a woman — were pulled out on Sunday from a destroyed apartment building



Mr Tariq Mahmmod. Pakistan army too suffered heavy casualties in the devastating earthquake which left 215 of its soldiers posted in PoK dead and 424 others injured there, defence spokesman Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan told the media here today.

Earlier, Pakistan's interior minister, Mr Aftab Khan Sherpao, had said his country's death toll was 19,136 — 17,388 of them in PoK — and 42,397 were injured. The worst-hit city was the PoK capital, Muzaffarabad, where 11,000 died, Mr Sherpao said. Many survivors were left without shelter in near-freezing nighttime tem-

peratures. Mr Mahmmod said the army was providing help to survivors only in PoK's major cities and towns and that the troops had not started relief work in remote villages where people were still buried in the rubble, and in some areas, nobody was present to organise funerals for the dead. "We are handling the worst disaster in Pakistan's history," said Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan, the country's top military spokesman.

Two survivors — a boy and a woman — were pulled out on Sunday from a destroyed apartment building in Islamabad. They were listed in a stable condition and said others were trapped alive, said Adil Inayat, a doctor at Islamabad's PIMS hospital. At least 24 people died in the building, and dozens were injured. Officials fear dozens are still trapped.

Pakistani military helicopters ferried troops and supplies to some areas, but there was no sign of government help in Balakot, a northern town of 30,000 where the quake levelled the main bazaar, crushing shoppers and sending gas cylinders, bricks, tomatoes and onions spilling into the streets. Injured people covered by

shawls lay in the street, waiting for medical care. Residents carried bodies on wooden planks. The bodies of four children, between 4 and 6, lay under a sheet of corrugated iron. "We don't have anything to bury them with," said a cousin, Saqib Swati.

Nearby, business administration student Faizan Farooq, 19, stood outside the rubble of a four-story school, where at least 250 pupils were feared trapped. Farooq said at first he'd heard children crying for help under the rubble. "Now there's no sign of life," he said. "We can't do this without the army's help. Nobody has come here to help us."

Elsewhere in Balakot, 100 km north of Islamabad, shop owner Mohammed Iqbal said two primary schools also collapsed. He said more than 500 students were feared dead. Several International Federation of Red Cross trucks laden with tents, food, medicine and other aid were trying to reach the hard-hit areas in Pakistan, said Ms Layla Berlemont, a spokeswoman for the group. A UN disaster coordination team arrived in Islamabad on Sunday and quickly began setting up centres to coordinate international relief efforts.

The USA is sending cash and eight helicopters to Pakistan to help with rescue and recovery, President George W Bush said on Sunday. "The USA wants to help," Mr Bush said from the Oval Office.

#### Aftershocks

Two aftershocks, one measuring 6.0 on the Richter Scale, rocked parts of Pakistan and Gujarat's Kutch region early today. A tremor measuring 4.1 on the Richter Scale shook Kutch region at 2.18 a.m. (IST). The region had suffered large-scale destruction in a monster earthquake in January 2001. Another quake, measuring 6.0 on the Richter Scale, shook northern parts of Pakistan at 2.43 a.m.

## J&K toll touches 450, Rs 42 cr more pledged

Kavita Suri in Jammu

#### Tragedy truce

Oct. 9. — As the toll in Jammu and Kashmir in Saturday's devastating earthquake touched 450, the state was promised Rs 42 crore from the Natural Calamity Fund besides the Rs 100 crore already pledged to it by the Centre.

UPA chairperson Mrs Sonia Gandhi and defence minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee today flew in to the state to take stock of the situation arising out of the devastating seismic upheaval. The Chief of the Army Staff, General JJ Singh, and senior Congress leader Mrs Ambika Soni also accompanied them.

Soon after her arrival at Srinagar early this morning, Mrs Gandhi flew to Uri and Tangdhar with chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, Mr Mukherjee, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, Gen. JJ Singh and Ms Mehbooba Mufti. Commiserating with the quake-hit people, Mrs Gandhi assured them Centre's full support and cooperation in rehabilitation.

"Hum aapke gam mein barabar ke sharik hein (we are with you in these testing times)," she said. Mrs Gandhi also directed Mr

JAMMU, Oct. 9. — It took the nature's fury to bring the feuding neighbours together. And, the Army was perhaps the first witness to this change of heart. An Indian soldier serving in Tangdhar sector had mistakenly crossed the Line of Control during yesterday's catastrophe to enter PoK territory. The Pakistanis brought back the man today. Governor Lt. Gen. (Retd) SK Sinha confirmed this. The defence personnel, on their part, held flag meetings along the LoC with Pakistan Commanders and offered help. Meanwhile, the "Peace Bridge" linking J&K and PoK repaired this year after decades following a thaw in relations, nearly collapsed in the earthquake, Army spokesman Col. JS Juneja said today. "Two piers of Aman Setu have been damaged on the Pakistani side and sunk there. It is now unoperational," he said, adding this would disrupt the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service, adds AP. — SNS

Ghulam Nabi Azad to personally monitor the rescue operations.

Mr Mukherjee said the Army was geared up to do its best. He announced that J&K would receive an additional Rs 42 crore from the Natural Calamity Fund. Mufti Sayeed said the government would take at least two-three days to reach all the tremor-struck villages. The state has closed all educational institutions in Kashmir for two days and postponed the annual tests.

Nearly 280 bodies — 258 civilians, 19 Armymen and three BSF jawans — were pulled out on Sunday from the worst-hit Tangdhar, Kupwara. There is no news yet from four villages in Teetwal. Fearing after-

shocks, people camped in the open last night. Senior Congress leader Mr Taj Mohiduddin said 10,000 tents will soon be distributed among the survivors. The Army flew more than 100 tonnes of food and other ration and 20 tonnes of medicine to Uri and Tangdhar, where the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, trained in disaster management, has been deployed. Some 2,000 policemen and Home Guards are helping in relief efforts and the state has provided them with satellite phones to keep the line of communication alive between Srinagar and the remote areas. The IAF is airlifting survivors to make-shift hospitals.

# CROSS-BORDER QUAKE

- Thousands die
- Pak hit hardest
- Valley bleeds

IMTIAZ GULAND  
MUKHTARAHMAD

Islamabad/ Baramulla, Oct. 8: India and Pakistan were tied together in tragedy today by a natural phenomenon far more unfathomable than the manmade factors that led to Partition over half-a-century ago.

A mighty earthquake killed thousands in Pakistan and hundreds in India at 9.20 am (IST), wreaking havoc in Kashmir on both sides.

Pakistan, where the epicentre was located, bore the brunt with as many as 400 children reported killed in two schools and two apartment blocks in an affluent locality reduced to ruins. Over 1,000 died in Pakistan-occupied

towns and villages.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi and other top Congress leaders — discussing the political tremors that hit the party with yesterday's court verdict on Bihar — were rushed out of their Chandigarh conclave venue as the doors and windows began to rattle.

By then, villages had vanished and towns turned to rubble in the northern mountains and valleys.

In Jammu and Kashmir, Uri town was the worst hit, with 130 dead. "Eighty per cent houses have either caved in or developed cracks in the town," said Javed Mukhdomi, state inspector-general of police.

In Islamabad, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf visited the site where two blocks of a 10-storey apartment building had come crashing down, trapping over 100 residents, their moans audible between the wails of ambulance sirens on the streets. The government said all Indians in the capital were safe.

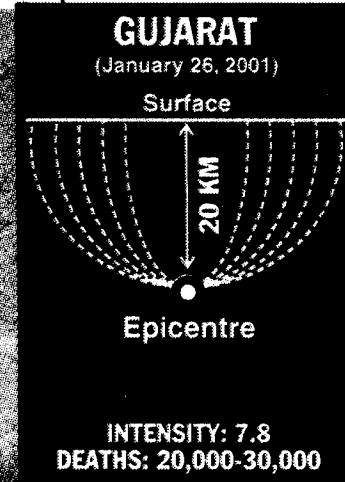
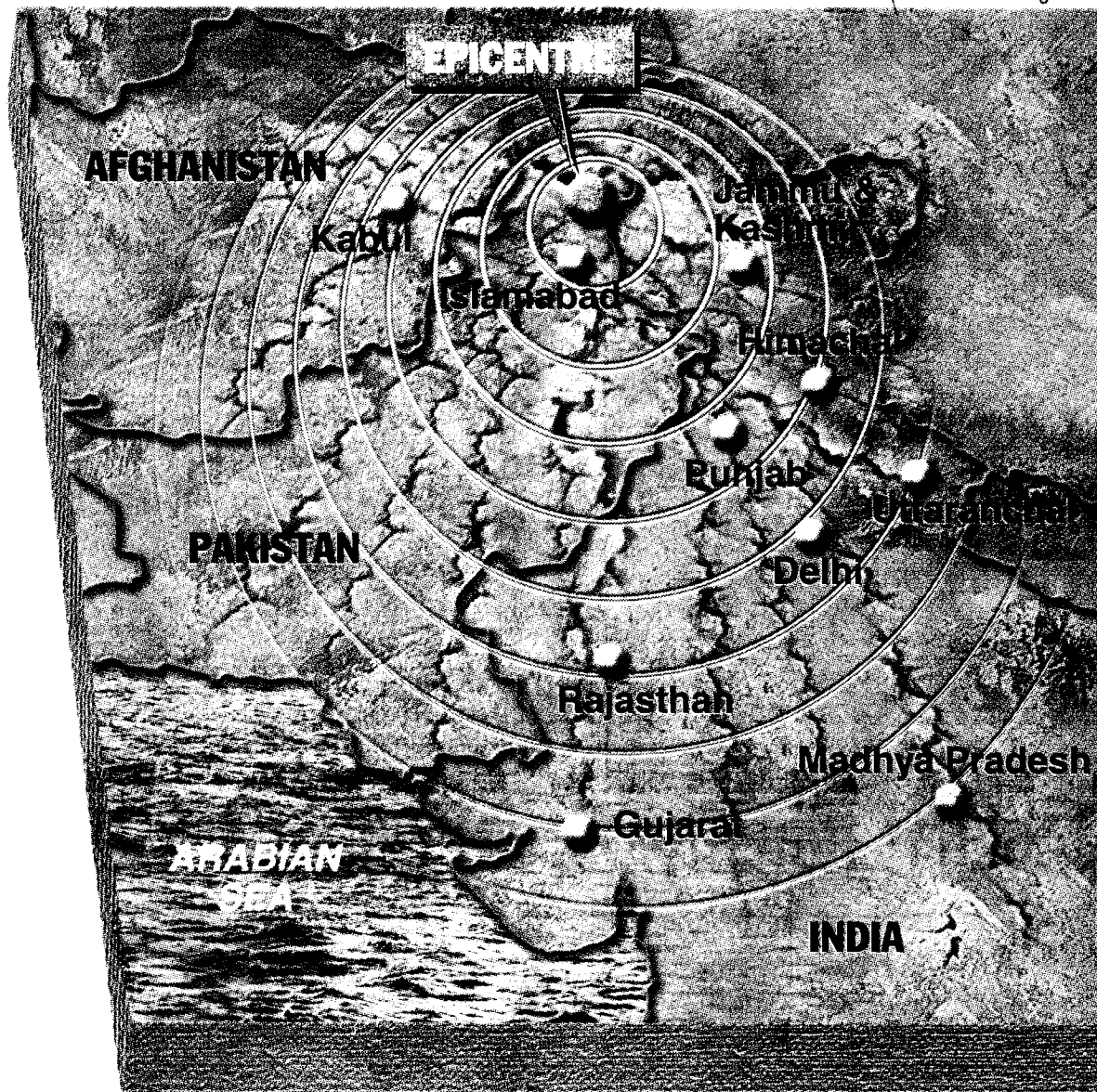
Singh sent a message of solidarity to the Pakistan President, saying: "While parts of India have also suffered... we are prepared to extend any assistance with rescue and relief which you may deem appropriate."

Singh and Musharraf later spoke to each other and exchanged offers of help. They also agreed to stay in touch regularly till rescue-and-relief operations stabilise.

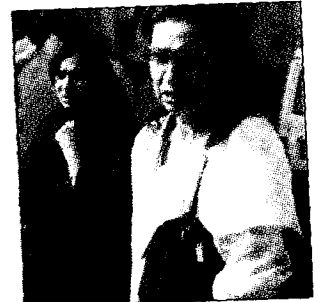
Britain and the European Union promptly offered help, with global aid agency Oxfam appealing for an urgent supply of "winterised tents and blankets" for the "most-affected" Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Hundreds of houses have collapsed in Jammu and Kashmir, too, where hospitals are crammed with patients.

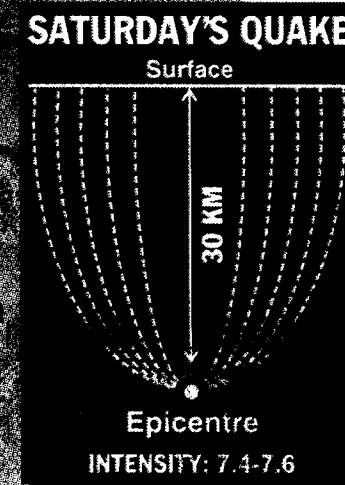
Landslides have cut off Srinagar from the rest of India and also blocked the road to Muzaffarabad, reopened to traffic earlier this year after six decades.



COMMON  
CURSE...



A Pakistani woman leaves a collapsed building in Islamabad



A Kashmiri woman outside her damaged home in Uri

... AND CURE

The two-day-old hotline between the Indian and Pakistan foreign secretaries crackled to life when Delhi offered Islamabad help. Manmohan Singh and Pervez Musharraf also spoke to each other and decided to stay in touch. Pakistan said it was willing to cooperate with the Indian Army.

**IMPACT**  
The deeper the  
epicentre, the higher  
the risk for highrises

scnooboy Um

**YOUR VOICE**  
TODAY'S QUESTION  
Q: Are our highrises safe from quakes?  
Options: a - Yes, b - No  
SMS your reply  
tpoll <your option> to 8243  
YESTERDAY'S RESULT  
Q: Should the Supreme Court have cancelled the Bihar polls?  
89.29% No 10.71%  
Available to Hutch, Airtel, Tata Indicom, BSNL and Reliance subscribers

Kashmir, 850 in North West Frontier Province and 300 in Jammu and Kashmir amid collapsing buildings and bunkers.

"Everything around me was swinging," said Mohamad Zaman, 55, in Srinagar. "The earth was heaving, the houses were shaking, the mighty Chinars were swaying forwards and backwards. I thought doomsday had arrived."

On the Line of Control, shelters turned death traps with at least 36 soldiers entombed in their bunkers on the Indian side. Across the border, Pakistan counted 200 "martyrs" among its troops.

The quake was centred 90 km northeast of Islamabad and 125 km northwest of Srinagar; but the wobble was felt from Kabul to Delhi to the far-away coasts of Gujarat and Chittagong, triggering panic on streets and in homes across

# DINNER THAT WENT WRONG

## BEHIND THE NEWS

VIR Sanghvi  
New York, September 16

ON THURSDAY afternoon, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dropped in to meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at his hotel in New York. Rice's agenda was wide-ranging: to discuss the whole gamut of India-US relations and to ascertain India's position on the Iran issue.

But once these issues were out of the way, she made an unusual request. Could India please do something to help General Musharraf? The General needed *something* to convince his people back in Pakistan that the peace process had yielded results. He needed to take back a concrete concession by India — perhaps on the withdrawal of some troops from Kashmir.

Dr Manmohan Singh was polite but explained to the US Secretary of State that such concessions were only possible when India was convinced that Pakistan has stopped assisting cross-boarder terrorists. Nevertheless, Rice's plea had the effect of annoying Indian officials.

While India has tried to stop defining its foreign policy in terms of Pakistan and therefore, did not mind that President Bush hosted a dinner for Musharraf (Manmohan met Bush at the Waldorf Astoria but there was no attempt to turn the encounter into an occasion), there has been considerable disquiet over what is clearly a change of stance for the General. And there are concerns that he has got Washington to back him in his latest bid to extract concessions from India.

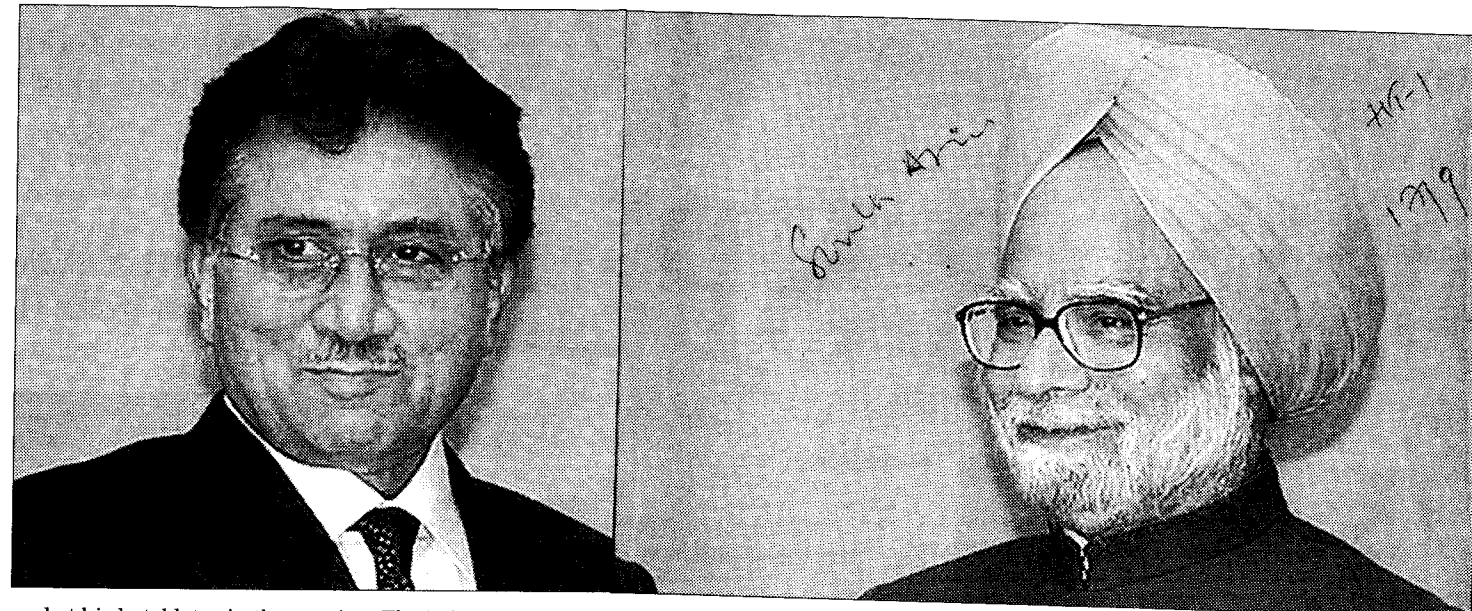
The shift in the General's position took the Indian delegation by surprise. Before the visit began, intelligence reports, the progress of back-channel diplomacy and assessments by our mission in Islamabad suggested that the General was content with the state of India-Pakistan relations and the pace of negotiations.

Then, Musharraf's speech at the General Assembly shattered this view. Last year, the General had made a non-controversial speech. But this year, he was back to talking about the 'core issue' of Kashmir and comparing it to Palestine. Before the speech, there had been another minor incident. Manmohan Singh's Media Advisor, Sanjaya Baru, had gone on television to announce, somewhat gratuitously, that the Indian PM had told President Bush that Pakistan was encouraging cross-boarder terrorism. The Pakistanis had responded by publicly demanding troop withdrawals from Kashmir.

Even so, these skirmishes between officials did nothing to prepare the delegation for Musharraf's sabre-rattling speech. On Wednesday evening, Manmohan Singh held a crisis meeting in his suite which was attended by Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan and Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran.

The men studied Musharraf's speech and then looked at the speech he had delivered at last year's General Assembly. There was no doubt that the tone was radically different — something that Narayanan's back-channel diplomacy had not led him to expect.

None of this augured well for the small dinner that Manmohan Singh was hosting for the Gen-



eral at his hotel later in the evening. The Prime Minister decided that he would confront Musharraf over the change of stance.

When the General arrived for dinner, he was bluff and full of bluster. Asked about the change in his position, he denied there had been any change. The Indians offered to show him the two speeches — last year's and this year's — and Musharraf finally conceded that he might have sounded more strident this year. But this was only because some speech-writer might have got carried away. If the Indians liked, he would issue a clarification.

This statement mystified the delegation. Could the President of Pakistan really not have noticed that his speech was so strident?

The doubts were cleared up when Musharraf suddenly began making a series of demands. Why was the Indian government refusing to let Mehbooba Mufti visit Pakistan? On the contrary, said Dr Singh, it was Pakistan that had refused her a visa when she had wanted to travel on the bus. She could go to Pakistan any time she liked, as far as New Delhi was concerned.

What about withdrawing some troops from Kashmir, then? Well, said Dr Singh, some troops had already been withdrawn. That was not very convincing, responded Musharraf. The troops had only been shifted to nearby bases. They could be sent back to Kashmir whenever India wanted.

The Indians protested that once troops had been withdrawn, it was hardly Musharraf's business where they were now stationed. No, said the General — he wanted to see more withdrawals.

Manmohan Singh restated India's position. Infiltration had gone down but violence in the Valley was up. Intelligence reports suggested that 31 terrorist training camps still functioned in Pakistan. Unless these were dismantled and the violence went down, no sensible government could afford to withdraw troops.

The General argued that all the terror camps had been dismantled and that about five camps for rehabilitation were all that remained. As for the violence, this was caused by militants who were already inside Kashmir, so there was nothing he could do. The Indians were just being stubborn.

So this debate raged, Musharraf cut to the chase. It would do very well to talk about the

**Musharraf's nitch to Manmohan: My people are getting impatient. They need something concrete. Can't you give me something to take back?**

bus, about trade, about people-to-people contacts, about Sir Creek and about Siachen. But as far as Pakistan was concerned, the peace process would go nowhere unless India agreed to major concessions on Kashmir.

So, what did Manmohan Singh *really* want? What was the ultimate objective of these talks from the Indian perspective?

The nonplussed Indian delegation repeated India's position. Manmohan Singh did not have a mandate to redraw India's border. No Indian Prime Minister would get such a mandate in the foreseeable future. The purpose of the peace process was to change the mindset of people on both sides of the border so that some solution was possible. Surely, Musharraf knew all this? Manmohan Singh had explained it to him at last year's General Assembly.

But the General was unrelenting. His people were getting impatient, he said. They needed something concrete. Couldn't the Indians give him something to take back?

And so it went for three hours. The General was, in turn, hostile and petulant. And though the Indians tried to be patient they were clearly baffled by the turn the relationship had taken.

Eventually, with the talks going nowhere, they moved to the dinner table. After an initial stiff-ness, Musharraf finally relaxed a little and talked about cricket and his children. He is believed to have also assured Manmohan Singh that while he is convinced that Sarabjit Singh is guilty, he will not let him hang.

All this elevated the mood somewhat but the time dinner was over, the Indians had a big problem. Around 75 journalists had been invited to the hotel for a post-dinner briefing. It was not clear, however, what the two leaders could tell the press. A joint statement — bland and crucial to blur the differences — was drafted by Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations, and prepared for distribution.

The press conference, though, was fiasco. The two men read out the bland statement. Musharraf answered one question but Manmohan Singh seemed unwilling to say very much, departing after giving half an answer.

The journalists, who had been kept waiting for four hours reckoned this was not good enough. Though it was now late in the night in New York, it was daytime in India and the TV channels needed instant responses.

The Indian side then made yet another fatal error of media management. Rather than try and organise some damage control, the PM decided it had nothing to say, told the journalists to go home and said that there would be a briefing by Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran the next morning — or several hours later.

Inevitably, the journo's headed for the Roosevelt Hotel where the Pakistanis were based.

The Pakistani delegation's media management is vastly superior to the Indian variety and so Pakistani media managers were happy to offer a blow-by-blow account of the dinner, casting Musharraf as the decent man who wanted demilitarisation while the Indians came off as slippery and unwilling to concede anything.

While the Indian delegation slept, it was this characterisation of the dinner — as another

Agra-type fiasco — that reached the subcontinent, severely denting Manmohan Singh's image as a successful peace-maker and seemingly confirming A. Vajpayee's reservations about the prospects of this particular peace process. Now, as the Indian delegation scrambles to come up with the answers, there is still mystification over the General's sudden turnaround. Clearly, there is a complete failure of intelligence because RAW and the rest of the national security apparatus had not predicted how Musharraf would behave.

The consensus that seems to be emerging is that the General has been pushed into a tighter corner domestically than the Indian side recognised. His room for manoeuvre is limited and he needs desperately to appease his domestic constituency. Moreover, his American mentors are also worried about his survival and therefore want India to make some gesture that he can take back to the people.

But what can India give him? Foreign Minister Natwar Singh is due to visit Pakistan in early October when the discussions will progress. But Manmohan Singh knows that any decision taken by the BJP as succumbing to pressure — and this was explained to Condoleezza Rice.

The Indians' delegation says — in Shyam Saran's phrase at his press briefing — that negotiating peace is a process and not an event. Yes, domestic pressure may force a cornered Musharraf to react petulantly and unreasonably but such pressure can ease. Moreover, all of India's dealings with the General have convinced policy-makers that it is unwise to read too much into a single encounter.

The General Assembly speech, Indian officials believe, was meant solely for a domestic Pakistani audience. The petulance at dinner was because Musharraf wanted to prepare the ground for American pressure on India to offer some concessions.

But unlike Agra — which was an event and not part of a process — Wednesday's dinner is not seen as a major setback. There will, say Indian officials, always be some roadblocks along the way to peace and the General is essentially a shrewd political survivor who makes up his policy as he goes along. If this gambit does not work — and it probably won't — he will simply think of something else.

So, India is disappointed and a little peeved. But nobody is at all pessimistic.

WE

# PM, Musharraf agree to walk peace path

New York  
15 SEPTEMBER

**A**FTER a marathon four-hour long meeting that spilled past midnight, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf agreed to pursue all possible options for a peaceful negotiated settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir issue.

Meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the two leaders issued a four-para joint statement which was read out by President Musharraf after the dinner hosted by Dr Singh at his hotel. The statement limited itself to the well-known positions of the two countries as stated in the joint statements issued on January 6 last year and April 18 this year. They reviewed progress in

their relations since they last met and referred to the earlier statements reiterating their pledge that they would not "allow terrorism to impede the peace process".

"They reaffirmed their commitment to the decisions taken at their meeting in Delhi, agreeing to expedite their implementation. They also welcomed the progress made within the framework of the composite dialogue, including promotion of trade and economic relations, people to people contacts and confidence building measures. The recent release of prisoners on both sides was lauded and both agreed to continue this process on a humanitarian basis," the statement pointed out.

The two leaders expressed their commitment to ensure a peaceful settlement of all pending issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides. They agreed all possi-



**JOINT PLAN:** Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf & Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New York on Thursday — PTI

ble options for a peaceful, negotiated settlement in this regard should continue to be pursued in a sincere spirit and purposeful manner," the joint statement said. The President said he utilised the occasion to invite the Prime Minister to visit Pakistan. He had been "kindly accepted".

After his guest read out the statement, Dr Singh said President Musharraf and he had covered extensively the issues of concern to them and he was "satisfied with the outcome of the talks." A Pakistani journalist immediately shot off a question about Dr Singh's statement on rulling out redrawing of borders.

The Prime Minister parried it saying the joint statement was reflective of both the countries' position. President Musharraf, who was initially prepared to take

questions from an Indian journalist, joined Dr Singh saying "this is sufficient for today. We will leave everything for later. We have the task of pursuing the process in a sincere manner," he said. Ahead of their meeting, both had made their priorities clear in their separate talks with US President George W Bush.

Dr Singh told Mr Bush the flow of terror continued from Pakistan. Unless stopped, there could not be any realistic progress in the peace process.

On his part, President Musharraf had said there was need for troop reduction from areas like Baramulla and Kupwara in the Kashmir valley. He maintained if there was no reciprocation on India's part, then all the confidence building measures would lose their importance.

— PTI

# “No intent to perpetuate status quo in Maldives”

The new Foreign Minister of the Maldives, Ahmed Shaheed, has been his country's Foreign Secretary and chief government spokesman. On his first visit to India in his new post, he answered a range of questions.

Amit Baruah

## How did your talks with External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh go?

**Ahmed Shaheed:** I've always believed that the success of a Foreign Minister of the Maldives would depend pretty much on how well he can develop a rapport with the Indian External Affairs Minister. India and the Maldives have always had very good relations, and I am confident of developing these further.

We decided to co-sponsor the G-4 resolution [for U.N. Security Council reform] because we believe it's also a seat for South Asia in some senses because we are partners in SAARC. Success for India in this [Security Council] effort will elevate our own standing in the councils of the world. In a globalised world, it's very important that South Asia has the just voice that it deserves in the councils of the U.N.

India has been very active in peacekeeping operations, it has been very active in the case of the Maldives in assuring peace and progress in the region; and also has a very high profile ...

## Do you see the recent cooperation between India and the Maldives after the tsunami as a model for the future?

Absolutely. If you want to look at models, there are many examples – not only the tsunami collaboration, but also the assistance that you rendered to us in 1988 – when we had a security threat against the Maldives.

When the tsunami struck, the first thing I did as government spokesman [then] was to call the Indian High Commissioner and asked him what had happened in the Andamans. Immediately, we got the Indian response in terms of dispatching relief and logistical assistance.

## How has the process of rehabilitation gone in the Maldives after the tsunami? Are tourists returning to the Maldives?

Unfortunately, the recovery is very slow. Tourists aren't coming back in large numbers. Tourism, even today, is 50 per cent of what it was last year. This is a serious concern because our way to recovery is through tourism.

The reconstruction programme is going forward. But we were the only nation where the tsunami affected the entire country. The whole nation is reeling from it.

The short answer is that recovery is slow. We remain concerned about the sluggish recovery of tourism, but we remain buoyant that we will be able to ... [make a] recovery with international support.

## We are moving towards the SAARC summit in Dhaka. Do you think the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) deadline of January 1, 2006, will be met?

We are happy at the way SAARC has come along because we now have regular meetings. There is a forum for us to sit and talk,



Ahmed Shaheed: “The Maldivian Government is committed to democracy.” – PHOTO: SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

there is a sense of a common identity developing. There have been benefits from that.

Now, for free trade, of course, they [SAARC leaders] signed an agreement in Islamabad [January 2004]. I believe not only is there scope for free trade, but a necessity to develop that.

It's hard for me to say at this point [if the SAFTA deadline will be met]. Not all the negotiations have moved at the same pace. For the Maldives, it's very important that SAFTA be operationalised by the timeframe [set in Islamabad].

## Turning to internal issues in the Maldives, are we going to see the formation of genuine, multiparty democracy in your country?

Absolutely. The Government's priority now, having introduced a multiparty system, is to ensure that we build the free institutions that are required to support a functioning, multiparty democracy. A revised electoral system that can support multiparty elections and a free press ... a judiciary,

which is independent.

Equally important is voter education. Before we go to a multiparty framework, they [the people] should know how they've been empowered in this process. We have to create political awareness.

## When will the new constitution come into force?

The Government had hoped that it would be ready by the end of the current year. But, it's only now that we are approaching the conclusion of its standing orders. We've been disappointed by the slow progress. Our target is still, hopefully, the end of the year.

But, we are also conscious of the fact we need the expertise to have a modern, working constitution in place. We are talking to the Commonwealth, we would be happy to welcome experts from the Government of India.

We've had a preliminary exchange of views on this subject [of getting the services of Indian legal experts]. A lot of this would depend on the Assembly [Majlis]. We cannot

present experts to the Assembly.

**In August last year, there were some very unfortunate events in the Maldives. Amnesty International says that at least 22 persons were subjected to physical abuse and torture. Is the Government planning to prosecute those responsible for these excesses?**

We will, of course, prosecute those who are found responsible for these abuses. We've asked [the new] human rights commission to investigate. I think they are doing it.

The Government is committed to improving the human rights record of the country. In fact, we signed the convention against torture last year. We've also introduced a five-year action plan to overhaul the entire judicial system.

## Are there any political detenus in the Maldives?

No, but there were some [recent] troubles in the Maldives on the anniversary of last year's problems. The Home Ministry had given permission for two meetings to be held, but said they would move against elements that created disorder.

Despite this caution, some elements decided to instigate crowds. The police had to disperse them and make some arrests; this included the Chairperson of the Maldives Democratic Party [Mohammed Nasheed].

When things were descending into public disorder, the police had to make more arrests. As we speak, 38 are in police custody, but they are not political prisoners, they are not there because of their political views. Many of them will be released as things calm down.

## Can such events make the Maldives take a step back from creating a full democracy?

The Government is determined not to step back. But we found over the past 12 months that not everybody that wears the garb of democracy wants democracy ... there are some concerns about extremism from religious groups.

But the Government remains committed to democracy, because in the long run, that is the only way in which we can maintain peace and law and order. We will not be deterred from our path of full democracy, but we will have to make sure that law and order is respected by all parties.

## The interpretation of law and order is sometimes convenient to perpetuate the status quo.

I think we've done enough over the past one year to demonstrate that there is no intent at all to perpetuate the status quo. The President [Maumoon Abdul Gayoom] has voluntarily given up many of his prerogatives and powers; the whole agenda has been voluntarily set forth by him.

His [Gayoom's] intent is to create as his legacy a functioning democracy. That's his ambition, that's his goal. This does not entail perpetuating the *status quo*.



# US jolt to Pak bid for nuke parity

## Washington presents fresh evidence of Islamabad's uranium tech supply to N Korea

S. Rajagopalan  
Washington, July 29

PAKISTAN'S BID for parity with India over nuclear cooperation with the US may have received a fresh jolt with Washington presenting specific evidence for the first time on Islamabad's supply of uranium enrichment technology to North Korea.

The US move came about in a different context - while confronting North Korea with intelligence on the source of its nuclear technology at the ongoing six-party talks.

The evidence points to Pyongyang secretly obtaining the uranium enrichment technology from the network operated by discredited Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan, the New York Times reported quoting two senior administration officials.

The development could not have been more ill-timed for Pakistan, which had lately begun making out a case for parity with India in terms of civilian nuclear cooperation with the US.

Earlier this week, Pakistan's foreign office spokesman, Naeem Khan, had stated in Islamabad: "Having its own strategic relations with the US, Pakistan would like to extend this cooperation in multiple fields, including the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and space technology".

But the US had even earlier scotched media speculation that Washington could feel compelled to work out a nuclear pact with Pakistan like the one it announced for India during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit here last week.

Brushing aside the talk by pundits on this score, US under-secretary of state for political affairs Nicholas Burns had made it clear last week that "there was no reason for us to have a hyphenated strategic framework for South Asia".

As he put it, there are issues where the US would like to pursue "individual relationships" with India and Pakistan. "And, certainly, in the case of civil nuclear cooperation, we're going to have individual relationships," he had said, indirectly shooting down the parity proposition.

While justifying the deal with India, President Bush publicly affirmed India's track record as "a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology". Observers say that Pakistan with nothing of the type to show on non-proliferation will be hard put to making out a case for a nuclear cooperation deal with the US.

### Pervez firm on peace

Apparently addressing India's concerns over militant training camps in Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf on Friday said the situation was "on the mend" and asserted that the peace process was "very much on track", adds a PTI report from Islamabad.

"About the training camps, let me assure you that the situation is on the mend. There's improvement in every sphere of activity."

"But, having said that, we have to have responses which give comfort to the people of Kashmir. That's what Pakistan looks forward to", Mushar-

raf told foreign correspondents in the garrison city here.

He said the peace process was very much on track despite a spate of recent rhetorical statements that followed remarks by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made during his recent visit to Washington.

Singh, on his US visit, had expressed fears that Pakistan's nuclear programme might fall into the hands of Islamic militants.

He had also said that acts of terrorism and infiltration could make it difficult for India to continue the peace process.

"The peace process is exactly where it was. Yes, indeed, there's rhetoric, which gives an impression of going back or swing down."

But the reality is that inter-governmental relations on the issue of moving on confidence-building measures and resolution of disputes have not slid back at all. So, now, there's no doubt in my mind that the peace process will continue", he said.

Musharraf said the two countries should take some "corrective action on rhetoric" and added, "There was some rhetoric in the US by the Indian leadership and there's a counter-rhetoric from this side. However, it has not affected the reality of the peace process."

"If we control all that, I'm sure the peace process will continue to go forward. Our desire is to move forward. We should learn lessons from all that has happened and don't get involved in issues that create a gulf between ourselves and hurt the peace process".



Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh at a Congress meeting in New Delhi on Friday.

PTI

30 JUL 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Delhi wangles anti-terror pledge

## I have come with a change of heart: Gen



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shakes hands with Pakistan President Musharraf after a joint statement in New Delhi on Monday

**New Delhi:** Surmounting the terrorism-related hitches delaying the joint statement, India and Pakistan on Monday unveiled a document that pledged not to let militancy impede the "irreversible" peace process and presented a series of measures to bolster people-to-people contact.

The statement, read out by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf by his side at Hyderabad House, where they held talks on Sunday, also agreed to address the Kashmir dispute in a "purposeful and forward looking manner" for a final settlement.

Among the fresh confidence building measures announced was an increase in the frequency of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus and a decision to allow trucks to ply on the route to promote trade—a victory for India's "softer border" policy. The neighbours also agreed to open additional routes between Poonch and Rawalkot and start the Khokhrapar-Monabao rail link by January 1, 2006.

The two-page statement, signed at the end of Musharraf's three-day visit, expressed hopes of an early start of another bus service between Amritsar and Lahore and to religious places such as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.

Condemning the attempts to disrupt the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service, the two leaders pledged that they would "not allow terrorism to impede the peace process", the statement said.

Singh said the two sides discussed Kashmir and agreed to continue these discussions in a "sincere and purposeful and forward looking manner for a final settlement".

Both sides "assessed positively" the progress made so far through confidence building measures, people-to-people contacts and enhancing areas of interaction and were determined to

- Advocates 'out of box' solution without any rigid time frame
- Rules out military option
- Floats a new three-phased approach to the problem
- Says LoC cannot be permanent border

build on the momentum.

Significantly, the document mentioned the joint press statement made in January last year during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit and the statement issued in New York a few months later after Singh's first meeting with Musharraf. Both had spoken about Musharraf's assurance not to allow territory under Pakistan's control

to be used by terrorists against India.

Unlike the failed Agra Summit in 2001, the atmosphere this time was one of bonhomie and smiles all around. It was agreed that respective consulates in Mumbai and Karachi would be opened before the end of this year.

The statement said, conscious of the "historic opportunity" created by the improved environment in relations and the overwhelming desire of the peoples of the two nations for "durable peace", the two leaders had "substantive talks" on all issues. "They determined that the peace process was now irreversible," the statement said. In line with the view that the neighbours would work together for greater prosperity in the region, the statement called for reactivation of the joint economic commission as early as possible and agreed that the joint business council should meet soon. PTI

► Pak media hails Musharraf's visit, Page 10

**New Delhi:** Declaring that he has had a change of heart, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on Monday ruled out a military option to resolve the Kashmir issue and instead advocated an "out of box" solution without any "rigid timeframe."

At the very outset, he remarked that he disagreed with some Indian media headlines that "he had come with the same heart" and said, "I have come with a new heart."

Asked what had led to his change of heart—outside pressure, public opinion or his own realisation—the President said, "I think it is a combination of all. I think the world has changed very much, specially after 9/11." The world was now so focussed on economic development and conflict resolution had come to the forefront.

Summing up his three-day visit to New Delhi at a breakfast meeting with a select group of editors, the Pakistani ruler said that he had achieved more than what he expected and that both sides had adopted a flexible approach.

India and Pakistan need to discuss Kashmir by analysing in deeper context the issue of independence, self-governance

joint control and joint management on a step-by-step basis for a solution that would be acceptable to India, Pakistan and the people of the state, he said, while cautioning that the issue could "erupt" in the future.

In sharp contrast to the tough rhetoric that had marked his breakfast meeting with Indian Editors at Agra four years ago, it was a different General during the hour-long interaction on Monday morning. He was his usual candid self but his answers did not have the harsh tone that contributed to the failure of the Agra summit.

But, for his audience back home, he proposed a three-phased approach on Kashmir consisting of "broadly ascertaining" the will of Kashmiris to "set a broad direction," evolving a consensus "through debate and discussion" and lastly, the top leadership of India and Pakistan taking a decision on this basis.

Musharraf answered questions on his discussions with PM Manmohan Singh covering the Kashmir issue, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), terrorism, Iran gas pipeline through Pakistani territory, trade and commerce and the Indo-Pak

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Play over, result withheld

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 17: After the tame loss at Ferozeshah Kotla, India managed an honourable draw with Pakistan at the diplomatic table.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reminded General Pervez Musharraf about terrorism and was reminded of Kashmir. If that gives the impression that nothing much has changed, there is the promise of a joint statement tomorrow which will encapsulate the progress made by the two sides.

"The joint statement will reflect the progress on all issues, including Kashmir," Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri said.

(PTI reported late tonight that differences over wordings related to terrorism and confidence-building measures have

## TRADE TO TRAIN

Both sides agreed to

- Revive joint trade panel
- Set up business council
- Run train between Munabao and Khokrapar from December
- Raise frequency of Srinagar bus

## Joint statement

Expected to touch on

- Siachen
- Baglihar dam
- Sir Creek
- Consulates in Karachi and Mumbai

delayed the final draft of the statement.)

The two leaders watched some cricket in the morning, with Musharraf explaining LWF (last wicket fell) and such scoreboard mysteries to the uninitiated like the Prime Minister's wife, Gursharan Kaur — not that Singh himself is an aficionado.

A lengthy meeting followed, so protracted that Musharraf was late for lunch with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

The slate of decisions

taken today contained a resolve to start the railway service between Khokrapar in Rajasthan and Munabao in Sind in December while at the business end, the joint commission to push trade and economic cooperation would be revived.

All other proposals, especially those on Kashmir put on the table by India for greater people-to-people contact and turning the Line of Control into a soft border, were greeted by the Pakistan side with an assurance of favourable consideration.

If that left a sense of disappointment in the already heavy-with-cricket-grief air of Delhi, the agreement to issue a joint statement was seen as a positive development, given the dramatic breakdown of talks in Agra in 2001 with much acrimony exchanged between the two sides over a similar document.

During the talks today, Delhi ensured that Islamabad did not gloss over its commitment to stop terrorist activities directed against India while highlighting that — though there was no dramatic breakthrough on Kashmir — the two sides remained engaged in negotiations.

Singh sought an unambiguous re-affirmation from Musharraf of his commitment to prevent terrorism.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran said Singh referred to the January 6 joint statement issued in Islamabad last year by Musharraf and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in which the Pakistan President had promised not to allow terrorist activity from Pakistani territory.

"We have to ensure that the positive ambience in our bilateral relationship is not thwarted by terrorists," Saran quoted Singh as saying.

Musharraf acknowledged the improvement in bilateral relations but, just as terrorism was sticking in Singh's throat, the Pakistan President coughed out Kashmir. Confidence-building measures could continue in other areas,



Manmohan Singh waves to the crowd and Pervez Musharraf salutes during the Kotla match on Sunday. (PTI)

he said, adding that India and Pakistan must "seize the opportunity" to move closer towards resolving Kashmir.

The few words he spoke in public were the right words. Talks were going in the "right direction", held in a "positive atmosphere" and had an "optimistic note" to them.

The "note" was so high that the Beatles' *I want to hold your hand* was played by the military band at Kalam's luncheon party.

The Pakistan President freely offered invitations to visit Pakistan — to Singh, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the leader of Opposition, L.K. Advani. He will meet Vajpayee tomorrow.

The two sides agreed to increase the frequency of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus

service, but there was no accord on similar routes across the LoC. Nor was there a consensus on meeting points for divided Kashmiri families.

On the disputed Baglihar dam, the Prime Minister assured Musharraf that India would not do anything to harm Pakistan's interest. But the visitors gave no assurance to recall the dispute from World Bank mediation.

On the gas pipeline projects — from Iran and Turkmenistan — and on proposals to establish trade and transit routes through Pakistan for Indian goods to the Gulf and Central Asia, there was no movement, though neither side wanted to make an issue of the lack of agreement.

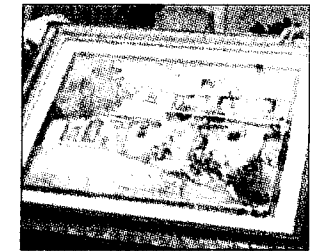
■ See Page 6

## Gifts for all shades

Not many will agree that the best gift India gave Pervez Musharraf was the cricket win, but it was a day of presents all right.

Manmohan Singh handed him a painting of Naharwali Haveli in Old Delhi where Musharraf spent his early childhood (below).

The Prime Minister also gave the Pakistan President his birth certificate and those



of his elder brother and sister, all of whom were born in Delhi. The papers were bound in leather (above right).

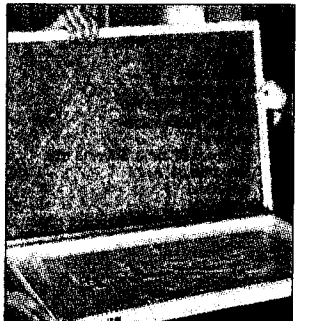
In return, Musharraf presented Singh with a silver engraving of Lahore enclosed in a wooden box (right).



Musharraf had an unusual gift for L.K. Advani. He brought along an album of photographs from Advani's school days in Pakistan.

Advani said it was a "precious" gift. Both had studied at Karachi's St Patrick, about which they chatted for a while.

Sources said Advani is likely to send a return gift tomorrow.



# PM to meet King, Nepal frees leaders

28/4 South Asia HC-1  
Nilova Roy Chaudhury  
and Agencies

Jakarta/Kathmandu, April 22

MANMOHAN SINGH and King Gyanendra have cleared the decks for a meeting in Jakarta on Saturday.

The Prime Minister on Friday confirmed that he had agreed to meet Nepal's monarch on the sidelines of the Asian-African summit. This was after external affairs minister Natwar Singh had met the King in Jakarta and called for speedy release of detained political leaders and lifting of Emergency and media censorship in Nepal.

As if in response, Nepalese authorities in Kathmandu released 61 leaders, including former Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari, who had been under house arrest.

On his way to Jakarta, Manmohan explained why he had agreed to meet Gyanendra. "We can choose our friends, but not our neighbours," he said. In February, India had pulled out of the Saarc summit, and reporters asked Singh what had changed since then. "We never said we would not talk to our neighbours. I look forward to meeting the Nepalese monarch," he replied.

The PM said he would try to get "an assessment" of the situation in Nepal from Gyanendra. All matters, including military aid to Nepal, would come up in the discussions.

Natwar was the first Indian diplomat, other than ambassador Shiv Mukherjee, to meet the Nepalese monarch after the declaration of emergency.

Natwar met Gyanendra for 45 minutes. The King "explained the circumstances that led to the declaration of emergency", an official statement said. He also "outlined the steps that he had already taken and proposed to take soon to lift the Emergency and restore democratic processes in Nepal".

Sources said the meeting was held in spite of the external affairs ministry's initial reluctance, with the ministry of defence citing close existing ties with the Royal Nepal Army as vital. The home ministry also pitched in with the need to combat the Maoist menace. The



The PM arrives in Jakarta

We can choose our friends, but not our neighbours. We never said we would not talk to our neighbours. I look forward to meeting the Nepalese monarch

Manmohan Singh

Prime Minister's personal efforts to bring peace to the neighbourhood helped overcome any objections, the sources said.

In a speech at the summit, Gyanendra said he was forced to seize power because his insurgency-racked country was on the "edge of a precipice. Terrorism and the inability of the political parties to rise to the challenge of ever emboldening terrorists were driving the country to the edge of precipice," he told leaders from about 80 countries.

23 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



# Cricket for lunch, CBMs for dinner

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, April 15

PERVEZ MUSHARRAF will surely watch Sunday's ODI at the Kotla. But he could also face some proposed CBMs thrown at him by Manmohan Singh. These could be suggested as more humanitarian gestures such as increased people-to-people contact across the LoC through road routes and meeting points.

India had proposed five meeting points — at Manthar, Poonch, Suchetgarh, Uri and Tangdhar — for reunions between families separated by the LoC in December when foreign secretary Shyam Saran travelled to Islamabad to review the progress in the composite dialogue process. Musharraf is expected to okay the idea and propose the opening of more cross-LoC road links as part of the CBMs aimed at converting the LoC into a soft border.

According to former national security adviser Brajesh Mishra, "it's too early to talk about a settlement of the Kashmir dispute". In an interview to the BBC, Mishra said, "It is not premature to explore options but it is premature to think that you can come to a speedy solution, as President Musharraf has suggested."

The General has succeeded in his intent to raise the dialogue to the level of a full-fledged summit. The MEA today issued a detailed advisory on his programme, which includes a call on the Pak President by external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh, followed by a dinner meeting with the PM on Saturday evening.

On Sunday, after watching the ODI, Musharraf will meet the PM for discussions. The MEA is preparing briefs on the status of all CBMs proposed and the current status of various segments of



## On the menu

**INTENTION:** Converting LoC into soft border

**PROPOSALS:** More roads across LoC, meeting points for separated families at Manthar, Poonch, Suchetgarh, Uri and Tangdhar

**EXPECTATION:** Pervez will agree

the composite dialogue to avoid a repetition of the 2001 Agra summit, which found the government ill prepared and which, Mishra said, "failed very badly".

Mishra, however, shared Musharraf's assessment that the bilateral peace process was almost "irreversible."

"I personally think this peace process, although it will encounter bumps on the road, will continue. It will not stop... if it continues in the way it is going, and there is some give on the part of Pakistan in regard to trade and economic cooperation...there will be the beginning of a conducive atmosphere for compromise."

On Sunday, Musharraf will also meet President Abdul Kalam, who will host him for lunch, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani and members of the Hurriyat Conference.

See also Page 2

# Ready for Saarc, Delhi tells Dhaka

Press Trust of India

JAKARTA, April 24. — India has said it is ready to accept any suitable date for the twice-postponed Saarc summit in Dhaka if it was acceptable to other members of the seven-nation grouping.

This was conveyed by the external affairs minister Mr K Natwar Singh to his Bangladeshi counterpart Mr Morshed Khan when he met him here last night on the sidelines of the Afro-Asian Summit.

The issue of rescheduling the Saarc summit was raised by Mr Khan and it was conveyed that India was willing to agree to any date acceptable to all members, a spokesman of the ministry of external affairs said here today.

Pakistan is the current chairman of Saarc. The chairmanship will go to Bangladesh once it hosts the summit. Besides India and Bangladesh, other Saarc members are Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives.

The indication of India's willing-

ness to attend the summit assumes significance as it comes close on the heels of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's meeting with Nepal King Gyanendra here yesterday.

India had earlier refused to attend the summit in February citing "disturbing developments in the region" — a reference to the royal takeover in Nepal on 1 February.

This had led to postponement of the summit which was earlier postponed in January due to the tsunami disaster.

25 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

From an Indian point of view, South Asia is a well-meant fiction

# To be ever more itself

MUKUL KESAVAN

South Asia is a coming term. There are histories of South Asia, there are journalists' associations that style themselves South Asian, there's SAARC and every time a test match between India and Pakistan goes well, we're all (temporarily) South Asian.

As a region in a physical geography textbook, South Asia makes sense. There's the monsoon that waters most of it, there's the great dust cloud that pollutes all of it, there are the mountains and the seas that give it plausible boundaries. But if you were to trade in the physical map, all greens and browns, for a political map, filled in with bright primary colours, if you consider South Asia as the idea that underwrites SAARC, it is hard to know what it means.

South Asia consists of India and a bunch of countries that share a boundary (land or sea) with India but not each other. It's reasonable to say that India defines South Asia, not only because it is so much the largest country, but also because the others are connected to one another at one remove, *via* India. South Asia feels like a unity when Punjabis cross the border and exclaim at similarities. Or when Bengalis from either side of India's eastern borders do the same. Or when Sri Lankan Tamils like Muralitharan come to find brides in Madras. It is India's diversity that gives South Asia meaning. Otherwise the Nepalese don't feel a special kinship for Tamilians, nor do Sindhis feel intimately linked with Sri Lankans.

The irony is that this South Asian identity, this idea of a regional family of nations which would have no meaning without the connections supplied by India's diversity, is made up of nations established on principles diametrically opposed to the idea and reality of India. India was founded as a pluralist democracy and it has remained one for more than fifty years. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, on the other hand, are sporadically democratic, avowedly majoritarian states, owned by dominant religious communities. Pakistan and Bangladesh style themselves Islamic republics, Nepal is famously the only Hindu state in the world and Sri Lanka altered its constitution to give Buddhism the "foremost" place in the life of the nation. The ruler of Bhutan, rightly or wrongly, is committed to cultural ho-

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mogeneity and spends his time policing his Nepali subjects or expelling them. The one non-Indian attempt at pluralism was undivided Pakistan and the reflexive chauvinism of South Asian identity (always excepting India) put paid to that.

To put this difference in terms of nationalism, India's neighbours believe that nations are built to house particular communities. Or that the deeds to the nation are properly owned by its majority community. Think of an India where the Bharatiya Janata Party has been in power for decades, where *Hindutva* is formally enshrined in law and the Constitution, where victorious cricket teams take their trophies to be bles-

in democratic pluralism. Sri Lanka dislikes India because Tamil politics spills over the Palk Straits. Bangladesh, unable to differentiate itself sufficiently in terms of language, chooses to do so in terms of Muslim identity. And the Hindu monarchy of Nepal lives uneasily adjacent to an ocean of Hindus who choose to live in a secular democracy. Pakistan, already compromised as a national project by the birth of Bangladesh, is daily confronted by the fact that its citizenry, despite being homogeneously Muslim, is ruled as a matter of course, by a military junta, while India, home to more Muslims than Pakistan, remains, despite bouts of barbarism like the pogroms in Gujarat, a func-



sed by *sankaracharyas*, and you have some idea of where the best of these South Asian states, Sri Lanka, is today. One way of understanding the BJP is to see it as the archetypal South Asian political party, committed to that great South Asian project, the sectarian state. Were the BJP to become the natural party of government in India, India would become a properly South Asian country and SAARC would become a coherent family of nations.

The other problem with the idea of South Asia (apart from the sterile Area Studies ring to it) is that an important part of the identity of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka is an anxiety about India. Some of this is the understandable wariness of (relatively) small countries bordered by a huge neighbour, and India hasn't been averse to throwing its weight around. But forming the kernel of this anxiety and resentment are India's diversity and its commitment to framing this diversity

tioning pluralist democracy.

From an Indian point of view, South Asia is a well-meant fiction. So long as its neighbours remain majoritarian states defined by religious identity and threatened by diversity, India's relationship with them can at best be prudential, designed to forestall conflict and encourage economic cooperation. Neither the ASEAN nor the EU provides us with an appropriate model of association, but they do supply some historical lessons. ASEAN was made up of a group of nations with a shared geopolitical vision and a common security strategy. They were also mainly authoritarian states which dealt with diversity without the challenge of democracy.

The European Union began as a common market made up of rich western European states. Its transition to quasi-confederalism has been underwritten by a commitment to secular democracy. Countries like Spain purged themselves of authoritarian, clerical histories before they were ad-

mitted, and Turkey is being held (almost unfairly) to even higher standards as a condition of membership.

South Asia shares neither a political system nor a common strategic vision. For "South Asia" to be more than a geographical expression or a sentimental aspiration, India's neighbours will have to re-invent themselves as democratic states. This isn't to argue against *détente* with Pakistan or "people-to-people" contacts; it's wonderful to have cricket matches as catalysts of cross-border travel and buses carrying people from one country to another can only be a good thing. But goodwill and bonhomie don't add up to fellowship.

It isn't unreasonable for Indians to expect neighbouring civil societies to demonstrate their commitment to non-sectarian politics. Liberals in these countries have for too long argued that Islam sanctions democracy or that Buddhism is the embodiment of tolerance — in the interests of meaningful fellowship, Indians should insist that these arguments, however useful rhetorically, are, in a pluralist, secular polity, besides the point. India has a stake in the future of pluralist democracy in its neighbourhood. It's hard enough opposing majoritarianism within India without bigotry in Bangladesh or Sri Lanka giving chauvinists fuel for their fires.

It goes without saying that India could do better. You only need to look at Gujarat or Kashmir or Nagaland to know that. But this is not the same as saying that *azadi* for Kashmir or an independent Nagalim is a solution. India's adventures in democracy and diversity have taught us that to oppose majoritarianism is also to oppose the cruel simplicities of self-determination. Today's self-determinists are nearly always tomorrow's majoritarians. A quick glance round India's neighbourhood should illustrate that graphically. Complicated nations that learn to deal with diversity are better than simplifying ones that try to draw borders around a People. Democratic Indians can, with perfect consistency, at once oppose the Sinhala Buddhist primacy in Sri Lanka and the project of a Tamil *eelam*.

Meanwhile, as Indians settle down to wait for their neighbourhood to improve, they would do well to remember that the best thing India can do for "South Asia" is to be ever more itself, to be the best advertisement possible for pluralist democracy. South Asia will begin to make collective sense when India's neighbours are remade by the ideas that made India.



## F-16 SUPPLY FUELS FEAR OF ARMS RACE

# Pak sale takes shine off US jets

SUJAN DUTTA

**New Delhi, March 26:** The Indian Air Force is likely to issue a tender next month inviting bids for its multi-billion-dollar contract to acquire 126 multi-role combat aircraft.

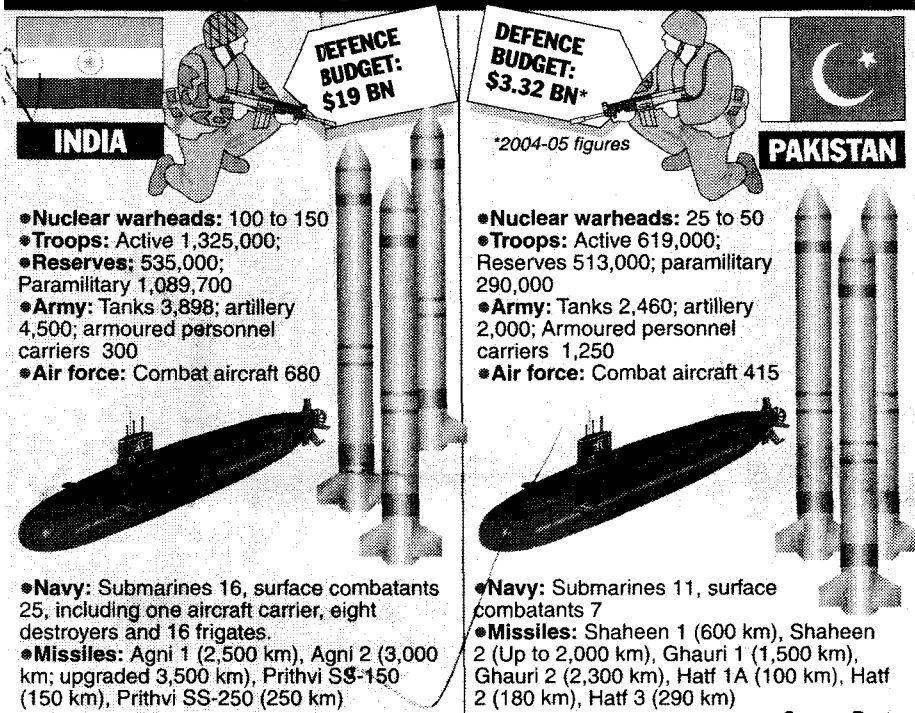
The US decision to supply the Pakistan Air Force with Lockheed Martin-manufactured F-16s will reflect poorly on the company that is also in the running for the contract despite assurances from Washington that it is offering New Delhi a wider array of military hardware.

The Indian Air Force order is one of the biggest military contracts going currently. The IAF is the fourth largest air force in the world and a big-time customer for global defence contractors.

The aircraft could cost India \$5 billion or more over five years. The US announcement that it will lift curbs and supply F-16s to Pakistan has come at a time when the Indian Air Force is desperately trying to upgrade its combat fleet and get back to its authorised strength of more than 39 squadrons. It is currently down to about 30 squadrons.

The defence ministry had last year sent requests for information to four companies for the contract — Dassault Aviation of France for its Mirage 2000-V-Mk2, Sweden's SAAB for its JAS 39C Gripen, Russia's RSK MiG Corporation for the MiG-29M/M2 and, as an afterthought, to Lockheed Martin for the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

## LETHAL COUNT



India has always been cagey of signing long-term defence contracts with the US because New Delhi perceives Washington as an erratic military supplier, an impression that was just about getting dispelled after military-to-military relations were put on an upward trajectory since 2002.

A Lockheed Martin spokesperson said the US was offering the F/A 18 Hornet, a more advanced aircraft than the F-16, to India. But sources in air headquarters say a combination of factors weigh heavily against sourcing from the US.

Chief among these are a history of arm-twisting with military supplies, the IAF's inventory that does not have American-made combat aircraft, and, Washington's timing of its announcement when India and Pakistan are engaged in a peace process.

Of the three armed forces, India has so far enjoyed a clear superiority in numbers and

fighting ability in the air element. The Pakistan Air Force has about 20 squadrons, mostly of mixed aircraft, that comprise second and third generation American fighters and also an older generation of Mirage. Even though the IAF is down to 30 squadrons, it retains superiority.

The supply of F-16s, air force sources say, will mean that it will take more for the IAF to maintain the asymmetry. Washington's announcement has not detailed the number and the kind of F-16s it will be supplying to Pakistan.

But with the IAF planning to add about 200 combat aircraft — 126 multi-role and the rest in strike and air defence components — by 2010 India will still be ahead. There is little doubt, however, that the US offer will intensify the arms race in South Asia.

The sources say it is not clear if the US is supplying the F-16s that were contracted by

Pakistan but stalled by Washington after sanctions in 1990 or it is supplying a new version of the aircraft.

The F-16 is used by air forces in about 20 countries but it has undergone enormous changes in its avionics, manoeuvrability and weaponry in the last 20 years.

Pakistan had contracted 71 'block 15' F-16s in 1988 and 1989 but in accordance with the Pressler amendment the US announced on October 6, 1990, that it was stopping arms deliveries to Pakistan.

By 1994, 28 aircraft that were manufactured for Pakistan were ordered to be stored. Pakistan had paid \$685 million on the contract. IAF sources in Delhi say the 'block 15' F-16s are of an older generation than the aircraft currently in use by the US Air Force.

Against this background, the offer of the F/A 18s is not immediately being seen in New Delhi as one that can be seriously pursued.

# Planes to cool anti-US anger

IMTIAZ GUL

**Islamabad, March 26:** Pakistan feels that the decision to clear the sale of F-16s will not only open up a new chapter in defence cooperation with the US but also help cool "anti-American sentiments".

"The US government has conveyed its decision to Islamabad and we will soon submit the bill before Parliament," Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said, terming it a "red-letter day" for the Pakistan Air Force.

The proposed sale ends nearly two decades of stalemate after former US President George Bush suspended Pakistan's economic and military aid, including the delivery of F-16s, over its nuclear programme and slapped sanctions under the Pressler law.

Former US senator Larry Pressler, after whom the legislation was named, dubbed as "unwise" Washington's decision to resume delivery of the warplanes to Pakistan and said the move could fuel tensions in South Asia.

Pakistan information minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad said the US will deliver the most advanced C and D versions of F-16s, being flown by Nato countries.

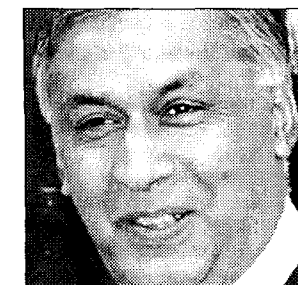
The decision is also the first significant vindication of Pakistan's status as a major non-NATO ally, granted by the Bush administration last year for the country's role in the on-going war on terror.

Defence analysts in Pakistan have termed the decision a "positive development" in Pakistan-US defence ties.

"This will help upgrade Pakistan Air Force and will contribute to improving Pak-US relations," Professor Hassan Askari Rizvi said. He be-

lieves the decision will also considerably defuse the anti-US sentiments that have increased in recent years, especially after military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"There was an anti-American campaign by some of the political parties who complain that the US was not helping Pakistan's security in return for its contribution to US security," he said.



Aziz: 'Red-letter day'

However, defence analysts felt that the balance of power, especially in conventional weapons, would remain tilted towards India, though the F-16s may marginally "reduce the Indian superiority".

Many Pakistanis greeted the news with surprise as well as excitement. "This is really great. I had prayed to God Almighty that our country may get more F-16s while watching aerobatics by this magnificent jet during the Pakistan Day parade on March 23," said Tazeem Zafar, a student in Islamabad.

Foreign ministry spokesman Jalil Abbas Jilani tried to address Indian concerns, saying it will be appropriate for Delhi to enter into comprehensive discussions on security and stability.

Prime Minister Aziz said: "Pakistan does not foster any aggressive designs against any country."

## Bhutan takes first step towards democracy

**Thimphu:** Bhutan has proposed a two-party political system to wield power in place of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck as it unveiled its first constitution on Saturday in public ceremonies across the country.

The proposed constitution will replace a royal decree of 1953 giving the monarchy absolute power, and transform the majority Buddhist nation of 534,000 people into a parliamentary democracy, officials said.

Thirty-four articles in the proposed constitution will outline the role of the monarchy, clergy, fundamental rights and duties of the people while creating new constitutional offices including a National Council. Chief Justice Sonam Tobgye said he expects every family in Bhutan to receive a copy of the constitution for discussion before a referendum is held later this year on whether to adopt it.

"It is posted in public domain for debate on the Internet in both English and the national language, Dzongkha, to extend the discourse on the constitution," Tobgye said.

"This follows the king's constant reminder of the need for people to understand the constitution and to provide their views on it." Agencies

SAARC 12-13  
112-13

# India suggests SAARC agenda on WTO issues

31/3

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 29.** India today suggested a three-point agenda to SAARC member nations for dealing with instruments such as Trade Defence Measures, Implementation issues and Special and Differential Treatment regimes under the WTO framework.

The Commerce Secretary, S. N. Menon, outlined the agenda while addressing members of parliament, lawyers, businessmen and media persons from SAARC countries at the regional workshop on "Understanding WTO instruments — implications for SAARC countries" organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the SAARC Chamber of Commerce

and Industry. Mr. Menon advised the regional grouping to closely look at Trade Defence Measures like the Agreement on Anti-Dumping and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures and called for transparent anti-dumping rules. This had become imperative in view of the growing recourse to non tariff barriers as tariff levels worldwide came closer to zero.

## Implementation issues

The issues of implementation of existing commitments under the Uruguay Round and operationalisation of provisions of Special and Differential Treatment continued to remain in the grey zone. "The development dimension that is much orchestrated in the context of

the multilateral trading system is not found to be very much in evidence or operational".

He thus went on to advise SAARC nations to close ranks on these issues as "considerable amount of thinking and research went into the proposals submitted by less developed countries at the Doha Ministerial Conference," he remarked.

Convergence of views amongst SAARC countries was essential and they should resist attempts at further differentiation of their countries for special treatment, the Commerce Secretary said, and called for greater South-South trade by opening up the markets of the regional grouping. Mr. Menon said SAARC countries would have to start seeing themselves as one market as far as agricul-

ture and textiles and clothing and other non-farm products were concerned. Under SAFTA, Pakistan might need to look at the SAARC market as a whole, taking into account the demand-supply balance in respect of different goods and services, including agricultural products.

In a more integrated SAARC market, as envisaged under the proposed SAFTA by January 2006, the supply-demand scenario and price competitiveness in member countries should be taken into account while taking any position in the multilateral trade negotiations.

Yogendra K. Modi, immediate past president, FICCI, called for a united stance among SAARC countries based on the commitment to regional cooperation.

# Gayoom loosens grip after tsunami crisis

19/3 20 5  
■ Maldives president promises reforms, releases prisoners

**PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

**T**HE tsunami may have ravaged Maldives but it has also helped the island nation tide over a political turmoil which was steadily building up after President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom ordered the arrest of several pro-democracy demonstrators last August.

Most political prisoners have been released ever since, Gayoom has promised a multi-party democracy by the year-end, and is all set to begin a fresh chapter with a visit to India later this month.

Gayoom's visit is also significant as it comes at a time when India is pushing for restoration of democracy in Nepal too. The Maldives President has recently said in an interview that his country would have a multi-party democracy by this year-end. This, sources said, helped him ensure his visit to India, which had been urging Maldives to release the political activists.

Gayoom, who is among

the longest serving presidents in Asia, came under immense international pressure for the arrests, which led his government to invite the Amnesty International to undertake a re-



**Gayoom will  
be in India on  
March 28**

search mission and make necessary recommendations.

Just as Maldives was under the grip of this political crisis, the tsunami hit its shores and prompted a transformation. Maldives was one of the worst affected and much of India's own relief material was di-

rected there, even as more countries like the US joined in.

Gayoom responded by granting amnesty to several political prisoners. His government also assured an independent human rights commission and initiated the process to develop a National Criminal Justice Plan to remove the discrepancies in the system.

A constituent assembly—called the Special Majhlis—for drafting a new constitution also came up. But there are differences in the Special Majhlis with pro-democracy members insisting on a secret ballot instead of vote by counting of hands. Nonetheless, India is expected to welcome the positive movement in Maldives.

Gayoom is slated to be here on March 28 for three days and will be meeting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh. The Maldives President will also convey his appreciation for the timely assistance provided by New Delhi when the tsunami hit this sparsely populated island.

## উপমহাদেশে রাইস

মার্কিন বিদেশ সচিব কন্ডোলিসা রাইসের ভারত ও পাকিস্তান সফর মার্কিন রণনীতিতে উপমহাদেশের বর্ধমান গুরুত্বেরই দ্যোতক। জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশের রাষ্ট্রপতিত্বের দ্বিতীয় পর্বে বিদেশ সচিব হইয়া রাইস প্রথমে ইউরোপ ও পশ্চিম এশিয়ার কয়েকটি দেশ সফর করেন। তাহার পরই উপমহাদেশে পদার্পণ। হয়তো রাইস নিজের মতো করিয়া উপমহাদেশের পরিস্থিতি সম্পর্কে একটা প্রত্যক্ষ ধারণা করিতে চাহিয়াছিলেন। একই সঙ্গে বুশ রণনীতির কটর প্রবক্তা বলিয়া গণ্য রাইস হয়তো প্রেসিডেন্টের দ্বিতীয় দফার শাসনকালে উপমহাদেশ সম্পর্কিত মার্কিন নীতির ধারাবাহিকতা অটুট রাখার ব্যাপারেও সংশ্লিষ্ট রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানদের আশ্বস্ত করিতে আসিয়াছিলেন। সফরকালে দুই দেশের সম্পর্কের সীমান্ত প্রসারিত হওয়ার লক্ষণগুলির উপরেই জোর দেওয়া হইয়াছে। এখনও ভারত-মার্কিন সম্পর্ক ভারত-পাকিস্তান সম্পর্কের বন্ধ জলা হইতে পুরোপুরি উত্তীর্ণ হইতে পারে নাই। পাকিস্তান এফ-১৬ যুদ্ধবিমান পাইলে ভারতের প্রতিরক্ষার উপর তাহার কী নেতিবাচক প্রভাব পড়িবে, মার্কিন অতিথিকে তাহা না জানাইয়া বিদেশ মন্ত্রী থাকিতে পারেন নাই। কিন্তু রাইস বুঝাইয়া দিয়াছেন, ভারতের সহিত আমেরিকার সম্পর্ক পাকিস্তানের সহিত আমেরিকার কিংবা পাকিস্তানের সহিত ভারতের সম্পর্কের উপর নির্ভরশীল নয়।

বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ যখন রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের সংস্কার তথা নিরাপত্তা পরিষদের স্থায়ী সদস্যদের কোটা সম্প্রসারণের বিষয় উত্থাপন করেন, তখন অবশ্য দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধোত্তর এবং ঠাণ্ডা লড়াই-উত্তর পরিবর্তনশীল আন্তর্জাতিক পরিস্থিতির প্রেক্ষিতেই ভারতীয় কূটনীতির উড়ান ঘটে। কিংবা কন্ডোলিসা রাইস যখন ইরান হইতে পাইপ-যোগে ভারতে পেট্রোলিয়াম আমদানির বিষয়ে মার্কিন আপত্তির কথা তোলেন, তখনও পাকিস্তান নয়, পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় মার্কিন রণনীতির অগ্রাধিকারের সহিত ভারতীয় অর্থনীতির বর্ধমান চাহিদাকে মিলাইবার চেষ্টা চলে। নটবর সিংহ অবশ্য বিকাশমান ভারতীয় অর্থনীতিতে জ্বালানির উত্তরোত্তর চাহিদা বৃদ্ধি এবং ইরানের সহিত নয়াদিল্লির ঐতিহ্যগত সুসম্পর্কের প্রসঙ্গ তুলিয়া এই বিষয়ে ভারত-মার্কিন মতান্তরকেও কার্যত প্রতিষ্ঠা করিয়াছেন। ভারত যে তাহার নিজের পর্যবেক্ষণ অনুযায়ীই আপন রণনীতি নির্ধারণ করিবে, ইহা রাইসের কাছেও স্পষ্ট। নবোদিত আর্থিক শক্তি হিসাবে ভারতের যোগ্যতাও রাইস স্বীকার করিয়াছেন। নেপালে গণতন্ত্রের পুনরুদ্ধার, ইরাকের পুনর্গঠন, আফগানিস্তানের নবনির্মাণ ভারতের সহিত একসঙ্গে কাজ করার অভিপ্রায় ব্যক্ত করিয়া রাইস মার্কিন রণনীতিতে নয়াদিল্লির অংশীদারি আরও নিবিড় করিতে চাহিয়াছেন। এ ব্যাপারে নয়াদিল্লিরও এখন পর্যন্ত কোনও সমূহ আপত্তি নাই।

ঠাণ্ডা লড়াইয়ের যুগ পার হইয়া ভারত ও আমেরিকা বেশ কিছু কাল পারস্পরিক স্বার্থকে বিদেশ নীতির অগ্রাধিকার নির্ণয়ে প্রাধান্য দিতে অভ্যস্ত হইয়াছে। মতাদর্শগত সংঘাত যে নিশ্চিহ্ন হইয়াছে, তাহা নয়। তবু বাস্তব পরিস্থিতি এবং জাতীয় স্বার্থের ভিত্তিতে নীতিনির্ণয়ের প্রবণতাই প্রবল। পরীক্ষামূলক পরমাণু বিস্ফোরণের পরবর্তী তিজতা কার্যত অন্তর্হিত। পরমাণু প্রসার রোধে নয়াদিল্লিকে যে চাপ দিয়া কোনও বশ্যতা স্বীকার করানো যাইবে না, আমেরিকা তাহা বুঝিয়াছে। প্রতিবেশী পাকিস্তানের সহিত সম্পর্কে বিদ্বেষ ও অনাস্থার অবসানও এ ব্যাপারে সহায়ক হইয়াছে। পাকিস্তান সুদীর্ঘ কাল (বস্তুত প্রায় তাহার জন্মলগ্ন হইতেই) উপমহাদেশে আমেরিকার 'ফ্রন্টলাইন' রাষ্ট্র হিসাবে গণ্য হওয়ায় এবং ভারতের সহিত পাকিস্তানের সম্পর্ক 'অহিনকুল' হওয়ায় ভারত-মার্কিন সম্পর্কও স্বাভাবিক হইতে পারে নাই। সাবেক সোভিয়েত রাশিয়ার সহিত নিবিড় বন্ধনে আবদ্ধ নয়াদিল্লিকে আমেরিকাও সন্দেহের চোখেই দেখিয়াছে। সেই ইতিহাস পিছনে ফেলিয়া ভারত ও আমেরিকা যখন পারস্পরিক সহযোগিতা বাড়াইতেছে, তখন তাহার সমান্তরালেই ভারত-পাকিস্তান সম্পর্কও স্বাভাবিক হইতেছে। এই পরিপ্রেক্ষিতেই কন্ডোলিসা রাইসের উপমহাদেশ সফর বিশেষ ভাবে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ।

## India, Pakistan to work together on SAARC

17/17 By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 16. India and Pakistan today agreed to "work together" for the early convening of the twice-postponed South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit that was to be held in Dhaka.

The Pakistani Foreign Minister, Khurshid Kasuri, said that bilateral talks with his Indian counterpart, Natwar Singh, had been held in a cordial, frank and positive atmosphere. The two sides also discussed the Siachen issue. "It was agreed to direct the Defence Secretaries of the two countries to discuss the issue in a friendly and cooperative manner. I hope that the issue will be resolved in accordance with the understanding reached earlier."

Mr. Kasuri also appreciated the Indian decision to treat the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline as a standalone project. "We hope for the early finalisation of the project." "We have

noted with satisfaction the overall improvements in atmospherics between the two countries. We have taken positive steps that augur well for the future of bilateral relations. We are strongly committed to carrying forward the composite dialogue process to make it productive and fruitful," he said.

"We had discussions on the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir and have impressed upon the Indian Government for an early settlement of the issue in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Kashmir," Mr. Kasuri said in a prepared statement read out to presspersons.

According to him, the two sides also held discussions on the Baglihar and Kishenganga projects. "I impressed upon my counterpart for an early resolution of the issues in accordance with the Indus Waters Treaty."

"We discussed issues of peace and security. Pakistan expressed the hope that both the countries will be able to move forward to promote strategic stability in South Asia."

THE HINDU

17 FEB 2005

11/16

## Big fish and Saarc

✓  
Sunk the 16/2 ✓

**I**NDIA IS so big, and right now, its development potential so extraordinary, that some resentment is inevitable from its neighbours. Saarc harbours more than the natural share of resentment because members like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are potential failed States and, typical of this syndrome, choose mischief, sometimes mayhem, over reform. A message from New Delhi was overdue, therefore. The MEA did well to take advantage of the need to respond to neighbourhood criticism about Manmohan Singh opting out of the Dhaka Saarc summit and broaden its message: Don't mess with us simply because you are jealous; work with us and you will all benefit; but we don't need you to go forward. This is a tough message for a tough neighbourhood, but also a practical and sensible one.

Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal — the three particularly troublesome Saarc members — all stand to gain hugely in the event of South Asian economic cooperation. Take Pakistan's case. The country suffers from both low savings and low investment. India could have been a big source of regional investment. But not a single Indian rupee is sunk in a Pakistani venture while Indian firms have spent nearly \$ 1 billion this finan-

cial year buying companies or setting up ventures in the West. This is absurd from Pakistan's point of view. But Islamabad would rather be obstructive about a Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service than be constructive about economic cooperation. In fact, the best way to promote broader engagement is not through ministerial pacts but trade. Intra-Saarc trade accounts for just 5 per cent of the total trade volumes of Saarc countries — another absurdity. Fears that Indian goods will flood Saarc markets if trade is liberalised have been disproved by the experience of Bhutan and Nepal. Both have been recipients of Indian goods and investment and for both, India is the most important export market. If Nepal's king now decides he will bait India to win points at home, he will be doing his people the biggest disservice.

The onus is, hence, on India's neighbours. They could look at Latin America for some inspiration. The 'Yankee' isn't loved in most South American countries. But most do business with the US; they welcome American capital, they lobby for easier entry rules for their labour. They acknowledge that they need America more than it needs them. Similar hardheaded realism is required in South Asia.

# “India cannot impose democracy on others”

Saran  
ANA  
15/2

By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

HD-11

NEW DELHI, FEB. 14. India can encourage and promote democracy in the region but it is not something that can be imposed on others, the Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, said today in an address on New Delhi's approach to its immediate neighbours.

“We must also recognise, regrettable though this may be, that the countries of South Asia, while occupying the same geographical space, do not have a shared security perception and, hence, a common security doctrine. This is different from the E.U. or ASEAN. In South Asia, at least some of the states perceive security threats as arising from within the region,” he said.

According to him, India's approach to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was to set aside differing political and security perceptions for the time being and focus attention on economic cooperation.

“The fact is that SAARC is still largely a consultative body, which has shied away from undertaking even a single collaborative project in its 20 years of existence. In fact, there is deep resistance to doing anything that could be collaborative,” he said.

In an indirect criticism of countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, Mr. Saran maintained that some SAARC members actively sought association

with countries outside the region or with regional or international organisations in a barely disguised effort to “counterbalance” India within the grouping or to project SAARC as some kind of a regional dispute settlement mechanism.

“It should be clear to any observer that India would not like to see a SAARC in which some of its members perceive it as a vehicle primarily to countervail India or to seek to limit its room for manoeuvre ... if there continues to be a resistance to such linkages within the region, even while seeking to promote linkages outside the region; if the thrust of initiatives of some of the members is seen to be patently hostile to India or motivated by a desire to contain India in some way, SAARC would continue to lack substance and energy.”

## Call for free market

Calling for the creation of a free market in South Asia, Mr. Saran said unless cross-border linkages and transportation arteries were restored in the region, the proposed South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) would remain a “limping shadow” of its true potential.

The Foreign Secretary said some neighbours had taken advantage of India's economic strengths while others had not. “Do countries in our neighbourhood envisage their own security and development in cooperation with India or in hostility to India or by seeking

to isolate themselves from India against the logic of our geography?”

According to him, India needed to project itself as a vast, productive hinterland that would give greater economic opportunities to its neighbours. “It is true that as the largest country in the region and its strongest economy, India has a greater responsibility to encourage the SAARC process. In the free markets that India has already established with Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, it has already accepted the principle of non-reciprocity. We are prepared to do more to throw open our markets to all our neighbours.”

## India's vital concerns

Mr. Saran, however, linked this to India's neighbours demonstrating sensitivity to New Delhi's vital concerns. “These vital concerns relate to allowing the use of their territories for cross-border terrorism and hostile activity against India, for example, by insurgent and secessionist groups. As countries engaged in the task of economic cooperation, we need to create a positive and constructive environment by avoiding hostile propaganda and intemperate statements. India cannot and will not ignore such conduct and will take whatever steps are necessary to safeguard its interests.”

India, he said, wished to assure its neighbours that it respected their independence and sovereignty.



57-29  
12/2

# Natwar feels time ripe for South Asia union

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 11. — The external affairs minister, Mr K Natwar Singh, expressed confidence that the South Asian free trade agreement would come into effect from 1 January 2006. He also said talks with Pakistan were going well. The minister was speaking at the release of a book "South Asian union" written by a senior journalist, Mr Ranjit Kumar, in the Capital today.



Mr Singh said that South Asia could draw inspiration from European Union and Asean on economic integration and advo-

ated a time-bound project-oriented approach by Saarc nations towards achieving developmental goals.

Rejecting allegations that talks with Pakistan had reached a standstill, Mr Singh said that the pace of negotiations was "quite extraordinary".

On the other hand Mr Natwar Singh said that they were not going soft on the military junta in Myanmar, even as the first meeting of the India-Myanmar consultative group on non-traditional security issues was concluded today. "We have mentioned to our friends in Myanmar our concerns regarding human rights there," he added. Meanwhile, during the two-day consultations, the Indian and Myanmar delegations agreed to strengthen bilateral co-operation in counter-terrorism measures.

# India for democracy in Nepal, says Saran

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

**S**TRESSING on India's preference for dealing with a secular democracy in Nepal rather than an autocratic monarchy, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said today visits by Indian leaders to Kathmandu would be considered if the semblance of stability was a direct implication.

"If we think that visits will help stabilise the situation, we will not shy away from the idea. Detraction from democracy does not provide the answer to Nepal's internal problems, and this is precisely what the Indian Government is trying to get across to Nepal's monarch," said Saran.

Saran stressed that the Ministry for External Affairs was engaged in the formulation of a comprehensive neighbourhood policy, to effectively

make more intelligent the Government's responses to incidents like King Gyanendra's dissolution of government and seizure of power.

Ahead of Minister for External Affairs Natwar Singh's visit tomorrow to Islamabad and Kabul, Saran said ties with both countries were poised to develop positively, but that India's sensitivities needed to be borne in mind. The concerns, he outlined, included use of neighbours' territories for cross-border terrorism and hostile activity pointed at Indian sovereignty.

Saran said SAARC was so far only a consultative body and had failed to engender "even a single collaborative project between countries". "We wish to reassure neighbours that we recognise their sovereignty. We must exorcise the ghosts from the past and unleash our collective energies. India is an opportunity, not a threat," Saran said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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MUSHARRAF PICKS ON INDIA

# 'No member can stymie Saarc'

Statesman News Service & PTI

ISLAMABAD/KATHMANDU, Feb. 9. — Apparently critical of India's decision not to attend the Saarc summit leading to its postponement, Gen. Pervez Musharraf has said a mechanism should be evolved to allow the meetings to take place even if a member state decides to abstain. Saarc member states should make a decision so that summits are not postponed again, Gen. Musharraf told reporters last night.

In a related development, Pakistan today said King Gyanendra's declaration of emergency was an internal matter of Nepal and Islamabad would continue its assistance to Kathmandu. According to a statement issued by the Pakistani embassy in Kathmandu, Pakistani Prime Minister Mr Shaukat Aziz spoke with King Gyanendra on phone on 1 February. The heads of the two states discussed bilateral relations and the Saarc summit since Islamabad is the current chairman of the regional body.

According to the statement, King Gyanendra "expressed full confidence in Pakistan to set a new date for the summit due to be held in Dhaka", Nepal's state-owned daily, the *Rising Nepal* reported today. "According to the Pakistani embassy, the king shared Mr Aziz's disappointment over the postponement of the summit."

In Islamabad, Gen. Musharraf said: "If somebody does not want to attend, they should not, the others should attend, why should one country have the onus of postponing or scuttling the whole meeting. We feel that because of the frequency of postponements we have seen over the past years, we need to collectively decide on what course needs to be taken."

Speaking at the same occasion, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga said she favoured early convening of the Saarc summit and "we will do our best to help hold it as soon as possible".

In another development, the new Nepal government said at least 43 people have been detained or put under house arrest following imposition of emergency in the country. The home ministry said about 25 people have been arrested and 18 were put under house arrest in order to "avoid any law and order disturbances and for their personal safety".

Politicians, however, claimed that hundreds of political leaders and workers have been detained.

## Indian envoy meets king

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — The Indian ambassador to Nepal met King Gyanendra for the first time since the imposition of emergency on 1 February.

Mr Shiv Sharan Mukherjee conveyed Delhi's firm stand that it stood for the early return of democracy in Nepal and also asked for the removal of restrictions on political leaders.

The King reportedly told Mr Mukherjee about the circumstances which led to the events of 1 February, which has since been described as a "royal coup". He had already met with the US and British ambassadors earlier.

Mr Mukherjee reiterated India's statement, where it had described the actions as a "setback" to democracy and violating the Nepalese Constitution.

"During the meeting, the ambassador urged a return to democratic process at the earliest," the foreign ministry spokesperson said.

Mr Mukherjee also "emphasised the importance of bringing the political party leaders into a broad national consensus", the spokesperson said.

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2005

# Delhi won't attend, so Saarc summit postponed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

**T**HE 13th SAARC Summit has once again been postponed with India today conveying its inability to attend the Dhaka meet in the backdrop of serious political developments in Nepal and the deteriorating security situation in Bangladesh.

With the SAARC charter mandating the presence of all heads of government... which seven member states for a

summit, India's decision means fresh dates will now be worked out through diplomatic channels.

Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said he had spoken to his Bangladeshi counterpart and conveyed the decision which is based on New Delhi's independent assessment of the current situation in the neighbourhood.

The summit, Saran said, has to take place in a conducive political and security environment. "If you have the kind of environment... which prevails today, we genuinely

believe desired outcomes are not possible. So we should wait until the time is propitious to have such an important and significant summit."

While he made it clear the decision was not to project India's unwillingness to share the stage with King Gyanendra, Saran said, the events in Nepal were a cause of grave concern. "The constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy are the two pillars of political stability in Nepal. This principle has been violated."

The Foreign Secretary also

pointed out that the security situation in Bangladesh had deteriorated following the fatal attack on former Bangladesh Finance Minister S.A.M.S. Kibria. There have been reports of three explosions in the past 24 hours, one of which was apparently close to Hotel Sheraton, the venue for the summit.

Dhaka, however, has rejected this assessment and in a strong reaction stated that unprecedented security arrangements had been made for the summit. "It is ironic that India undertook to announce the decision when an Indian security assessment team was still present in Dhaka and consulting our se-

curity agencies," Bangladesh Foreign Ministry said. As for the recent political developments in the neighbourhood, Bangladesh has accused India of disregarding the SAARC Charter which states that bilateral and contentious issues will not be raised. "It is a sad commentary for South Asia that its largest member state should retract its commitment to the Charter on this excuse."

Saran sought to downplay concerns of any "big brotherly" attitude, saying that India had the freedom to make its own assessments and arrive at its independent conclusions. The decision, he underlined, was not directed against any particular country. "Nobody can deny there is a serious situation prevailing in the neighbourhood. What has happened in Nepal is not an ordinary event. What has been happening in Bangladesh is not ordinary either," he said. "These are objective facts... not something we have manufactured," he said.

Dhaka, which was itself

nervous on the prospects of the summit after the dramatic events in Nepal, was buoyed by the decision of the Nepal King on Tuesday to attend the summit. However, none of this impressed India.

On Wednesday, PM Manmohan Singh met his predecessors A.P.J. Abeyaratne and Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani before deciding External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh also spoke to the King of Bhutan, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and Maldives President Abdul Gayoom on the issue.

# সার্ক-সিদ্ধান্তে সমর্থন জোগাড়ের চেষ্টা দিল্লির

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন ভঙুল করে দেওয়ার বিড়ম্বনা এড়াতে দিল্লি এখন দল ভারীর চেষ্টা শুরু করেছে। বাংলাদেশে নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে দুশ্চিন্তার কারণ দেখিয়ে কাল ভারত জানিয়েছিল, প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ ঢাকায় যাবেন না। আজ বিদেশ মন্ত্রক বলেছে, এই বক্তব্য নয়াদিল্লির একার নয়। সার্কের বাইরে অনেক দেশও একই সুরে নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তুলেছে।

বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র নভোজ সারনার বক্তব্য, বাংলাদেশে প্রাক্তন অর্থমন্ত্রী ও আওয়ামী লীগ নেতা শাহ কিব্রিয়ার হত্যার পরে আমেরিকাও ক্ষোভ প্রকাশ করেছিল। মার্কিন বিদেশ দফতরের উপ-সচিব ক্রিস্টিনা রোকা বাংলাদেশের বিদেশমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে এই নিয়ে কথা বলেছিলেন। বিদেশ মন্ত্রক বলেছে, তুলে ধরছে ঢাকায় উপস্থিত ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের দেশগুলির রাষ্ট্রদূতের বৈঠকেও। কিব্রিয়ার খুনের পরে ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের দুতেরা সম্মিলিত বিবৃতি দিয়ে বলেছিলেন, তারা এই হিংসার ঘটনায় অত্যন্ত চিন্তিত। এই সব উদাহরণ দেখিয়ে নভোজের বক্তব্য, "আমরাই একমাত্র বাংলাদেশের নিরাপত্তা পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে সরব হয়েছি, এটা বলা ঠিক নয়।"

আজ দুপুরে প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের সঙ্গে ভূটানের রাষ্ট্রদূতের বৈঠক হয়। পরে ভূটানের রাজার সঙ্গেও প্রণবের ফোনে কথা হয়। প্রণব নিজে কিছু না-জানাতেও বিদেশ মন্ত্রক বলেছে, বিভিন্ন দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয়ে এই ধরনের আলোচনা হয়েই

নিরাপত্তার প্রশ্ন তুলে এয়োদশ সার্ক সম্মেলনে ভারত না-আসায় আয়োজক বাংলাদেশ তো ক্ষুব্ধ বটেই, পাকিস্তান এবং চীনও ভারতের পাশে দাঁড়ায়নি।

পাকিস্তান পরিষ্কার বলেছে, বিশ্বের নানা প্রান্তেই হিংসা চলছে। সুতরাং কেনও একটা জায়গায় হিংসার দোহাই দিয়ে সন্মেলন বানচাল করার কোনও অর্থ হয় না। ইসলামাবাদ থেকে পি টি আই জানাচ্ছে, পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী খুরশিদ মেহমুদ কাসুরি বলেছেন, ভারতের সিদ্ধান্তে "আমরা অবশ্যই হতাশ।" পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী শওকত আজিজও পাকিস্তানের রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রকে ফোনে তাঁদের হতাশার কথা জানিয়েছেন। চীন সার্ক বাতিল হওয়া নিয়ে সরাসরি মন্তব্যে যায়নি, কিন্তু দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলি ভাল কাজ করছে

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## সার্ক পাণ্ড: ক্ষোভ ঢাকার

জহিরুল হক: ঢাকা, ৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি— ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিং ঢাকায় যেতে অক্ষমতা প্রকাশ করায় সার্ক বৈঠক স্থগিত হওয়ায় বাংলাদেশ ক্ষুব্ধ। মনমোহনের না যাওয়ার কারণ হিসেবে ভারত-বাংলাদেশের নিরাপত্তা সমস্যা ও নেপালের অস্থির পরিস্থিতির কথা বলায় বাংলাদেশ একে 'অজুহাত' আখ্যা দিয়েছে। আজ ঢাকায় বাংলাদেশের বিদেশ সচিব শামসের মোবিন বলেছেন, ভারতের এই সিদ্ধান্ত অনাকাঙ্ক্ষিত, অপ্রত্যাশিত ও দুঃখজনক। বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী খালেদা জিয়া বলেছেন, সার্ক সম্মেলন সুষ্ঠুভাবে চালাতে এবং নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা দুর্ভেদ্য রাখতে তিনি বিরোধী দলনেত্রী শেখ হাসিনারও সমর্থন চেয়েছিলেন। এদিকে সার্ক সম্মেলন না হওয়ায় কার্যত সুবিধা পেয়েছেন বিরোধীরাই। বাংলাদেশে অশান্ত পরিস্থিতিই চলছে, বিশেষত গত সপ্তাহে হবিগঞ্জে বর্ষীয়ান আওয়ামী লিগ নেতা প্রাক্তন অর্থমন্ত্রী শাহ মহম্মদ কিবরিয়া গ্রেনেড- হামলায় নিহত হওয়ার পর পরিস্থিতি উত্তপ্ত। ওই গ্রেনেড-হামলায় আরও ৪জন নিহত হয়েছিলেন, আহত হয়েছিলেন ৫০জন। এর প্রতিবাদে পর পর হরতাল ডেকে চলেছে আওয়ামী লিগ-সহ বিরোধী দলগুলি। আজ হরতালে জনজীবন ছিল স্তব্ধ। ঢাকায় জনতা-পুলিস সম্মুখে আহত হয়েছেন ৪০জন। আগামীকাল জুম্মাবার। শনি ও রবিবার টানা ৪৮ ঘণ্টার হরতাল ডেকে আওয়ামী লিগ জানিয়েছে, খালেদা সরকার এর পরও ইতিবাচক পদক্ষেপ না নিলে শুরু হবে জোরদার আন্দোলন।

AAJKAL

04 FEB 2005

Some ...  
KAR...

## যাত্রা বাতিল অন্যায্য

ভারতের অসহযোগিতায় ঢাকায় অনুষ্ঠিত সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন স্থগিত হইয়া গেল। নেপালে রাজনৈতিক পালাবদন এবং বাংলাদেশের অনিশ্চিত নিরাপত্তার অজুহাত দিয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সফর বাতিল করার সিদ্ধান্তই ইহার কারণ। এই সিদ্ধান্তে বাংলাদেশ স্বভাবতই ক্ষুব্ধ, ক্ষুব্ধ পাকিস্তানও। উভয় দেশেরই মনে হইয়াছে, এতদ্বারা নয়াদিল্লি দ্বিপাক্ষিক কূটনীতির অগ্রাধিকার দিয়া বহুপাক্ষিক সহযোগিতার মঞ্চকে অন্যায্য ভাবে নিয়ন্ত্রণ করিতে চাহিয়াছে। একটি ভৌগোলিক অঞ্চলের প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রসমূহ পারস্পরিক আলোচনার মাধ্যমে অঞ্চলের অনেক সমস্যা মিটাইতে পারে, যেগুলি ইতিহাসের সৃষ্টি বা অঞ্চলের অসম আর্থ-রাজনৈতিক বিকাশের ফল। ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন এ ধরনের সহযোগিতারই দৃষ্টান্ত। আফ্রিকার দেশগুলির সংঘ, ইসলামি রাষ্ট্রগুলির সংগঠন, তৈল উৎপাদনকারী পশ্চিম এশীয় রাষ্ট্রজোট কিংবা দুই আমেরিকা মহাদেশের রাষ্ট্রগুলির সংগঠনও এ ধরনেরই মুশকিল-আসান সংস্থা। দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব এশিয়ার উন্নয়নশীল রাষ্ট্রগুলির সংগঠন 'আসিয়ান'ও এমনই সংস্থা। ওই সব সংগঠনের সদস্যরাষ্ট্রগুলির পারস্পরিক সম্পর্ক যেমনই হোক, সংগঠনের মধ্যে সকলের পক্ষে লাভজনক বিষয়গুলিই আলোচিত হয়। ভারতীয় উপমহাদেশের ছোট-বড় সাতটি দেশ একত্রে দক্ষিণ এশীয় আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতা সমিতি (সার্ক) গড়িয়াছিল মোটামুটি এই একই উদ্দেশ্যে। পারস্পরিক সহযোগিতা বৃদ্ধি, অবাধ বাণিজ্যে পরস্পরের আর্থিক বিকাশ, দীর্ঘলালিত বহুপাক্ষিক সমস্যাগুলির নিরসন ছিল সার্ক তৈয়ারির লক্ষ্য। কিন্তু ক্রমশই ইহাকে দ্বিপাক্ষিক কাজিয়া ও দরকষাকষির মঞ্চ করার চেষ্টা পরিলক্ষিত হইয়াছে। এ ব্যাপারে পাকিস্তান বা বাংলাদেশ যেমন তৎপর, তেমনি বৃহত্তম সদস্য ভারতও পিছাইয়া নাই। ঢাকায় অনুষ্ঠিত সার্ক সম্মেলন উপলক্ষেও এই দুর্ভাগ্যজনক প্রবণতা লক্ষ করা গেল।

বাংলাদেশের সহিত নদীর জলবণ্টন লইয়া বিরোধ, বাংলাদেশের উপর দিয়া ত্রিপুরার প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাস আনার পাইপ-বসানো লইয়াও মতান্তর, ভারত-বাংলাদেশ বাণিজ্যে বাংলাদেশের বিপুল ঘাটতিও একটি কণ্টকিত বিষয়। সর্বোপরি বাংলাদেশে ভারতীয় বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদীদের আত্মগোপন ও প্রশিক্ষণের বিষয়ে ভারতের আপত্তি। কিন্তু এ সবই দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয়, সার্ক সম্মেলন যাহা লইয়া বিতর্কের মঞ্চ হইতে পারে না। বা এই সব প্রশ্নে মতান্তরের কারণে বাংলাদেশে অনুষ্ঠিত সার্ক সম্মেলনে অনুপস্থিত থাকা সমীচীন নয়। অথচ নয়াদিল্লি ঠিক তাহাই করিল। সে দেশের বিরোধী দলের একটি সভায় বিস্ফোরণে কয়েকজন নেতাকর্মীর মৃত্যুর ঘটনাকে নিরাপত্তাহীনতার অজুহাত হিসাবে খাড়া করিয়া ভারত প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সফর বাতিল করিয়া দিল। অথচ বাংলাদেশের পরিস্থিতি পাকিস্তান, নেপাল, শ্রীলঙ্কা, এমনকী ভারতের কোনও কোনও অঞ্চলের তুলনায় এমন কিছু খারাপ নয়। সার্ক সম্মেলনকে এমন দ্বিপাক্ষিক হিসাবের মঞ্চ করিয়া তোলা অনুচিত। নেপালে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের ক্ষমতা কুক্ষিগত করা নবীন গণতন্ত্রের উপর আঘাত, সন্দেহ নাই। কিন্তু সে জন্য সার্ক সম্মেলনকে নেপালরাজ-বিরোধী মঞ্চে পরিণত করার চেষ্টা অনুচিত। বিশেষত তিনি যখন নিজে ঢাকা যাইবার সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করেন। সম্মেলনে তিনি থাকিলে তাহাতে ভারতের যোগদান রাজতন্ত্রের ভারতীয় অনুমোদন রূপে গণ্য হইবে, এমন 'যুক্তি'তে বিদেশ মন্ত্রক বিভ্রান্ত।

এই যুক্তির প্রবক্তারা খেয়াল রাখেন না, সার্ক-এরই সদস্য ভূটানও বরাবরই রাজা শাসিত, সে দেশের রাজতন্ত্র নেপালের তুলনায় আরও একচ্ছত্র। পাকিস্তানে পারভেজ মুশারফের ফৌজি একনায়কত্ব গণতন্ত্রকে ক্রমেই স্থগিত করিয়া চলিয়াছে। তাহাতে কি ইসলামাবাদের সহিত সার্ক-এর মঞ্চ ভাগ করিতে দ্বিধা হইতেছে? বহুপাক্ষিক মঞ্চে পাকিস্তানের কাশ্মীর প্রশ্ন উত্থাপন যেমন গর্হিত, তেমনই অবাঞ্ছিত নেপালের শাসনব্যবস্থার প্রকরণ লইয়া প্রতিবেশীর ভাবনা। ভারত দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার বৃহত্তম রাষ্ট্র, সামরিক শক্তিতে অদ্বিতীয়, আর্থিক বিকাশেও শীর্ষে, গণতন্ত্রের অনুশীলনে তো সারা বিশ্বেই বন্দিত। আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতাকে কার্যকর, সচল ও ফলপ্রসূ করিয়া তোলার দায়ও তাহারই সর্বাধিক। অঞ্চলের স্বাভাবিক নেতৃত্বের দাবিদার হইতে গেলে সেই সঙ্গে একালমবর্তী পরিবারের বড় ভাইয়ের মতো দায়িত্ববানও হইতে হয়। দুর্ভাগ্যের বিষয়, নয়াদিল্লির কর্তারা সেই উদার দায়িত্ববোধের পরিচয় দেন না। মানসিকতায় এখনও তাঁহারা চণ্ডীমণ্ডপের সংকীর্ণতায় আবদ্ধ।

04 FEB 2005

Sun 3 Feb  
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## Dhaka upset by India's withdrawal from summit

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By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, FEB. 3.** Bangladesh has termed India's decision not to attend the 13th SAARC summit in Dhaka scheduled for February 6 and 7 as "unwarranted and unexpected."

Dhaka also rejected as "unacceptable" India's contentions about the "security situation" in Dhaka.

"We are shocked and dismayed at the unwarranted and unexpected decision of the Government of India," the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, told journalists after New Delhi's announcement that led to the postponement of the 13th SAARC summit.

Quoting the Indian Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran's statement, Mr. Chowdhury said the Indian Government took the decision in view of the developments in the neighbourhood and the security situation in Dhaka over the past few days. He said the reasons assigned by the Indian Government about "the security situation in Dhaka" were "unacceptable and rejected outright."

"Comprehensive and blanket security arrangements have been made at an unprecedented level. All Indian security concerns were fully considered and accommodated." Regarding the "developments in Nepal," he said it was a shared belief that SAARC should not be held hostage to bilateral considerations.

"It is regretted that once again a SAARC summit has been postponed at the last moment because of a decision by the Government of India. Such postponement goes counter to the letter and spirit of the SAARC charter which precludes member-states from raising bilateral and contentious issues," the foreign secretary said.

It is a "sad commentary for South Asia that its largest member-state should retract its commitment to the charter on this excuse." The summit had been postponed when all preparations had been completed and the pre-summit processes had begun with full participation of all seven member-states in a friendly atmosphere.

The current SAARC chairperson and Pakistan Prime Minister,

Shaukat Aziz, has also expressed disappointment the postponement. While talking over the telephone with the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, Mr. Aziz termed it "unfortunate" and "upsetting."

He said Pakistan, as chairperson of the SAARC, was satisfied with all the preparations, including security arrangements, for the summit.

The situation in Nepal was a "totally internal" affair of that country, he said.

Begum Zia said there were no flaws in the arrangements and security was guaranteed according to requirement of the heads of state and government of the SAARC nations.

At a meeting chaired by the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, today, the ruling four-party alliance held the main Opposition, the Awami League, responsible for creating an atmosphere that led to the postponement.

The pro-ruling alliance student wings held a rally at the Dhaka university campus condemning the Awami League for "dishonouring the country."



PM CANCELS VISIT TO BANGLADESH

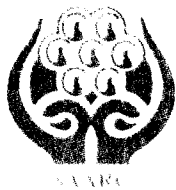
# Saarc meet called off

South Asia

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Statesman News Service



NEW DELHI, Feb. 2. — The 13th Saarc summit, scheduled to be held in Dhaka on 6 and 7 February, was called off for the second time, after India pulled out from the multilateral meeting citing the "recent developments in our neighbourhood".

The announcement was made this evening by foreign secretary Mr Shyam Saran where he said that the decision had been formally communicated to the Bangladesh government, along with a request for fresh dates. The Prime Minister was scheduled to leave for Dhaka on 5 February.

The statement read out by the foreign secretary made a specific reference to the situation in Bangladesh as the reason for the decision to pull the plug out of India's participation. "The security situation in Dhaka has deteriorated in recent days following the fatal attack on the former finance minister of Bangladesh, Mr SAMS Kibria," he said.

The Bangladeshi Opposition had called a nationwide strike after the killing of Kibria at a public rally, which led to a series of violent incidents leaving several people injured. The Opposition's call for a three-day strike had also coincided with the first day of the Saarc summit.

The foreign secretary also mentioned the three bomb blasts in Bangladesh yesterday as an example of the continuing pattern of violence.

This is the second time that the summit has been called off. It had earlier been scheduled to be held

## Unwarranted: Dhaka

NEW DELHI, Feb. 2. — Bangladesh has termed India's decision to pull out of the Saarc summit as "unwarranted and unexpected". On India's contention that "recent developments in the neighbourhood" dictated its action, the Bangladeshi foreign affairs ministry said that "Saarc should not be held hostage to bilateral considerations". Rejecting India's assessment of the security situation in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi foreign affairs ministry has said that arrangements had been made on an "unprecedented level" and addressed all Indian security concerns. "It is ironic that India undertook to announce the decision when an Indian security assessment team was still present in Dhaka and consulting our security agencies," said the official statement. It regretted that the summit was "postponed at the last moment". "It is a sad commentary for South Asia that its largest member state should retract from its commitment to the Charter on this excuse," the Bangladeshi foreign ministry noted. — SNS

between 9 and 11 January but was delayed after three members — India, Maldives and Sri Lanka — were hit hard by the tsunami disaster.

The summit became uncertain again yesterday after the King of Nepal declared emergency and dissolved parliament.

The formal announcement of the cancellation of the meet was made by the current chairman of Saarc, Pakistan, in Islamabad this evening. The Pakistani Prime Minister spoke to his Bangladeshi counterpart on the matter. No new date has been fixed. A Pakistani official said: "Saarc summits are not held for altruism but to promote regional cooperation which is an imperative."

THE STATESMAN

03 FEB 2005

# SAARC meet off after Manmohan decides to abstain

By Amit Baruah

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 2.** For the second time in succession, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit, scheduled for February 6 and 7, was postponed after India announced that the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, could not attend the SAARC meeting due to poor security conditions in Dhaka and recent developments in Nepal. Previously, the summit, scheduled from January 9 to 11, was put off in the wake of the tsunami.

Under the SAARC charter, a summit cannot be held even if one of the seven heads of government/state cannot attend the meeting.

The Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, told presspersons that India wanted to work out new dates for the summit.

The decision not to travel to Dhaka was taken by Dr. Singh after consultations with Left party leaders on Tuesday, top Bharatiya Janata Party leaders on Wednesday and on the assessment of a security team that travelled to Dhaka.

Mr. Saran said India was committed to the SAARC process. "It is only in an environment free from political turmoil and violence that a summit would yield the desired outcome."

Facing a volley of questions, he said the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, had spoken to the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, and the Maldivian President, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, to explain why India took the decision not to attend the summit.

Bangladesh, of course, had

been informed formally while no contact had been possible with King Gyanendra's regime in Kathmandu. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry had also been informed about India's decision.

Mr. Saran denied that India would be seen as a big brother at a time when the remaining five SAARC leaders were ready to travel to Dhaka. "There is no question of behaving like a big brother. Our main objective is to make certain that the SAARC summit comes up with the desired outcomes."

Mr. Saran said the Prime Minister's decision not to travel to Dhaka was not directed against this or that country. No one could deny that a "serious situation" prevailed in India's neighbourhood. "What has happened in Nepal is not an ordinary event. What has been taking place in Bangladesh is not something ordinary."

Asked whether there was a specific threat to the Prime Minister, Mr. Saran said: "Obviously, a certain security assessment has had to be made in the light of the most recent developments including the three bomb blasts which took place in Dhaka ... and including at the high security zone where the Sheraton Hotel is located."

"Every country would make its own assessment with regard to the security situation. We will not speak on their behalf. Our responsibility is with regard to the safety and security of our leaders. In the light of the assessment that we have received we believe that the time is not propitious for holding such a summit," he said.

**Manmohan talks tough:  
Page 11; King forms  
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# ভারতের জন্য স্থগিত সার্ক, সমালোচনার ঝড়

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও নিজস্ব সংবাদসূত্র, ঢাকা, ২ ফেব্রুয়ারি: প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ ঢাকায় গেতে পৌঁছে বঙ্গের প্রায় শেষ মুহূর্তে সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন আবার পিছিয়ে গেল। এ বার খনিপিষ্ট কালের জন্য। এর আগে জুনায়ারিতে (৯-১১) সম্মেলন হওয়ার কথা থাকলেও সুনামি বিপর্যয়ের পরে ত্রাণে ব্যস্ত শ্রীলঙ্কা ও ভারতের অনুরোধে সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন পিছিয়ে ফেব্রুয়ারির ৬-৭ করার সিদ্ধান্ত হয়। কিন্তু আজ বিকেলে ভারত জানিয়ে দিয়েছে, প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রের (নেপালে) রাজনৈতিক ডামাজোল ও বাংলাদেশের নিরাপত্তা পরিস্থিতির অবনতির কারণে আসন্ন সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলনে অংশগ্রহণ করা সম্ভব নয়। সার্কের সনদ অনুযায়ী যে হেতু কোনও একটি দেশ অংশ না নিলেই শীর্ষ সম্মেলন করা সম্ভব নয়, তাই আপাতত তা পিছিয়ে গেল। সেই সঙ্গে ভারতের এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়ে প্রতিবেশী দুই রাষ্ট্র

বাংলাদেশ ও পাকিস্তান কড়া সমালোচনা শুরু করেছেন। সাম্প্রতিক অতীতে বাজাপেয়ী সরকারের আমলে এক বার ভারত অংশ নিতে অস্বীকার করার ইসলামাবাদে সার্ক সম্মেলন বাতিল করতে হয়েছিল। কলম্বোতে দেউবা সরকারকে বরখাস্ত করে রাজা প্রতিলজ্ঞ নিজের হাতে ক্ষমতা নেওয়ার পরেই নেপালের অংশগ্রহণ নিয়ে প্রশ্ন ওঠে। কিন্তু গভীর রাতেই নেপালের রাষ্ট্রপুত্র ভগীরথ বারনেট বাংলাদেশের বিদেশমন্ত্রী মোরশেদ খানের সঙ্গে দেখা করে নেপাল রাজার তরফে অংশগ্রহণের বাতী পেন। রাজা জ্ঞানেশ্বরের সঙ্গে রানিরও ঢাকায় আসার কথা। ঢাকার এই খুশির হাওয়া আজ বিকেলে নয়াদিল্লির খবর জানার পরেই ক্ষেপেতে পরিণত হয়। নয়াদিল্লিতে বিদেশসচিব শ্যাম শরন সরকারিতাবে সার্ক না যাওয়ার কথা ঘোষণা করার পরে প্রতিক্রিয়া জানাতে খালেদা জিয়া সরকার কয়েক ঘণ্টা সময় নেয়। রাতে

বিদেশসচিব শামশের মকিন চৌধুরী তাঁর ক্ষোভ জানিয়ে বলেন, ভারত যে দুটি কারণ দেখিয়ে সার্ক সম্মেলনে অংশ নেওয়া বাতিল করল, তা আপনৌ গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়। ঢাকার নিরাপত্তা পরিস্থিতির অবনতির কথা নয়াদিল্লি বললেও তিনি দাবি করেন, নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে ভারতের বক্তব্য অনুযায়ীই সব ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছিল। রাজধানীতে নজিরবিহীন নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা হয়েছিল। ভারতের তরফে ঢাকার নিরাপত্তা পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তোলার কারণ, কদিন আগে হাঙ্গিরার আমলের অর্থমন্ত্রী এস এম এম কিরিয়াকে দুর্ভুক্তীবা হত্যা করে।

এর আগে হাঙ্গিরার জনসভায় গ্লেন্ড হামলায় বহু মানুষ নিহত হন। সার্কের আগে নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা খুটিয়ে দেখতে ভারতীয় নিরাপত্তা বিশেষজ্ঞরা এখনও

ঢাকায়। সে কথা মনে করিয়ে দিয়ে বাংলাদেশের বিদেশসচিব বলেন, পরিহাসজনক হলেও এটাই ঘটনা যে, ভারতীয় নিরাপত্তা বিশেষজ্ঞরা যখন ঢাকায় বসে বাংলাদেশের নিরাপত্তা-কর্তাদের সঙ্গে পরিস্থিতি পর্যালোচনা ও পরামর্শ করছেন, তার মাঝেই নয়াদিল্লি সফর বাতিল করে দিল।

সম্মেলনে অংশ নিতে অস্বীকার করার কারণ হিসাবে প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্র নেপালের ঘটনাবলিকে দেখানোর জন্য বাংলাদেশ ও পাকিস্তান কড়া সমালোচনা করেছে ভারতের। বাংলাদেশ মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছে, সার্কভুক্ত সাতটি দেশ আগেই মনে নিয়েছিল যে দ্বিপাক্ষিক সমস্যাকে কখনওই সম্মেলনে ছাড়া ফেলতে দেওয়া হবে না। বাংলাদেশের বিদেশসচিবের মন্তব্য, "এটা দুঃখজনক যে দক্ষিণ

এশিয়ার সবচেয়ে বড় সদস্য দেশই এ ভাবে সার্কের সনদকে ভঙ্গ করে বসল।" ভারতের এই সিদ্ধান্ত শুধু বাংলাদেশে নয়, পাকিস্তানেও সমালোচনার ঢেউ তুলেছে। পাকিস্তানের তথ্যমন্ত্রী শেখ রশিদ ইসলামাবাদে বলেছেন, "ভারত কেন এ ভাবে শেষ মুহূর্তে সম্মেলনে অংশ নিতে বেকে বসল, তা আমাদের কাছে স্পষ্ট নয়।" ঢাকা থেকে পাকিস্তান বিদেশমন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র মাসুদ খান ভারতের এরশাদকে কটাক্ষ করে বলেন, "সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলনে আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতাকে বাড়িয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার প্রশ্নটিই এক মাত্র বিবেচ্য।" পাকিস্তান মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছে এ ভাবে বার বার সম্মেলন পিছিয়ে দেওয়া হলে সার্ক সম্পর্কে সদস্য দেশগুলির আন্তরিকতা নিয়েই প্রশ্ন উঠতে বাধ্য।

ভারতের এই পিছিয়ে আসার সিদ্ধান্তকে ঘিরে যে সমালোচনার ঝড় উঠেছে তার কারণ, নয়াদিল্লি এ

যাবৎ দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিবাদের বিষয়কে সার্ক আনা যাবে না বলে কাম্পীর প্রসঙ্গ তুলতে পাকিস্তানকে বাধ্য দিয়ে এসেছে। ভারত অবশ্য নিজের পাশে ভুটান, শ্রীলঙ্কা ও মলদ্বীপকে পাওয়ার আশা রাখে। কারণ, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার ভৌগোলিক-রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতিতে ভুটান দীর্ঘদিন ধরেই ভারতের ঘনিষ্ঠ। অন্য দিকে, সাম্প্রতিক সুনামির পরে ভারত যে ভাবে নিজে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হয়েও সঙ্গে সঙ্গে শ্রীলঙ্কা ও মলদ্বীপের ত্রাণে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়েছিল, তা এত অভ্যুত্থিত ভোলায় নয়। লক্ষণীয়, ঢাকায় না যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার পরেই আরোজক বাংলাদেশ সহ প্রতিটি সদস্য দেশকেই আলিঙ্গন আলাদা করে নয়াদিল্লি যোগাযোগ করে বার্তা পৌঁছে দেয়। প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই বাংলাদেশ তীব্রভাবে প্রতিক্রিয়া জানিয়েছে। পাকিস্তানের প্রতিক্রিয়াও অপ্রত্যাশিত নয়। কিন্তু শ্রীলঙ্কা, ভুটান ও মলদ্বীপ এখনও সেই কোরাসে যোগ দেয়নি।





## SAARC: Dhaka monitoring situation

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, FEB.1.** Bangladesh has expressed optimism to host the 13th SAARC summit on schedule but said it is closely monitoring the internal political developments in Nepal where the King has dismissed the government.

The Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury, told reporters on

Tuesday, "All our preparations have been complete. We're optimistic that [the] SAARC summit will be held on schedule."

Asked if the Nepal developments would affect the holding of the summit, he said, "we're closely monitoring the development, we are trying to contact the Nepalese Government and our mission in Kathmandu, but no contact has yet been established."

In reply to a question, the Foreign Secretary said, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, had a telephonic conversation with his Pakistani counterpart, Mahmud Kasuri, and requested him to let the Bangladesh Government know about the Nepalese Government's position. About the possibility of King Gyanendra's taking part in the summit in the changed situation, he said, "We

cannot rule it out."

He, however, said the SAARC programming committee began its deliberations here on Tuesday while the Foreign Secretary from Bhutan already arrived in Dhaka and the Foreign Secretary of the Maldives is expected here tonight.

Mr. Chowdhury also said the summit activities had not been slowed down in the wake of the Nepalese developments.

# Delhi pushed back to square one

K.P. NAVAR

Washington, Feb. 1: King Gyanendra's decision to put himself in Nepal's driving seat has brought the neighbouring Hindu kingdom back to square one for the UPA government which has been treating Kathmandu as a foreign policy priority.

Although a statement by the foreign ministry today describes the king's actions as violative of the constitution, India's top priority would be to see that Nepal does not go back to becoming a staging post for subversion against India as in the 1990s.

For P.K. Horomis Tharakan, the new chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), there is an element of fatalism that Gyanendra check-mated his opponents in the country's

long-running political chess game on the very day he took charge of the external intelligence agency.

Tharakan's last overseas posting as a RAW operative was in Kathmandu, where he oversaw the demolition of a huge Inter-Services Intelligence apparatus that Pakistan had built up and was using to mount covert operations against India.

India's challenge stemming from today's developments in Kathmandu is that these have come just as it appeared that New Delhi's pieces in Nepal were falling into place.

Just over a fortnight ago, India opened its consulate in Birgunj, which is the gateway to Nepal from Calcutta and Patna and has a large population of Indian origin.

After intense bilateral ne-

Delhi gave fresh impetus to its stagnating relations with Kathmandu by announcing an aid package of Rs 76 million for education and medical care in the kingdom.

There were more signals last fortnight that bilateral relations were moving forward when differences which held up an extradition treaty and an agreement for mutual legal assistance were resolved and drafts of those documents were finalised and initialled.

India will do nothing that will upset a painstakingly created security mechanism that has taken root, made up of a bilateral consultative group on security issues, a joint working group on border management and district coordination committees to oversee the implementation of decisions by these bodies.

It is significant that while South Block's statement on Gyanendra's decision to assume governing powers has described it as "a serious setback to the cause of democracy", India has only expressed "concern" and has not condemned the royal takeover.

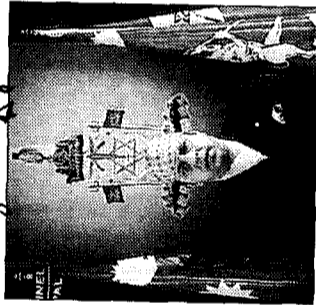
The statement reiterates support for the kingdom's constitution. Today's palace action has been described as violative of the constitution strictly in the context of "multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy enshrined in Nepal's constitution as the two pillars of political stability".

The strikingly mild statement underlines India's "long-standing and unique relationship with Nepal" and makes no threats for a return to political pluralism.

India recently embarked on a major programme for modernising Nepal's police force by providing high-quality training in counter-insurgency and supplying equipment.

The programme was a fallout of India's advice to Nepal that the Maoist insurgency was more of a police problem than a military one. Delhi had also prevailed upon the US and some European countries to rationalise their arms supplies to Nepal in conformity with this view.

For many decision-makers in the UPA government, the dilemmas posed by Gyanendra's action will be a replay of King Birendra's attempts in the 1980s to suppress democracy and the kingdom's difficult road since then on the way to a constitutional monarchy.



King Gyanendra addresses Nepal on Tuesday. (AP)

gotiations spread over months, an inland container depot, set up with World Bank assistance of \$23 million, was to have opened in Birgunj today to facilitate a long-standing Nepalese demand for better facilities for imports into the kingdom coming through Calcutta port.

Also, last fortnight, New

# King Gyanendra takes over Nepal

Sacks PM Deuba And His Govt, Places Them Under House Arrest, Clamps Emergency

**Kathmandu:** Nepal's King Gyanendra on Tuesday sacked the Sher Bahadur Deuba government, assumed all executive powers for the next three years and declared a state of emergency, putting the holding of the 13th SAARC summit in Dhaka on February 6 and 7 in doubt.

"I have decided to dissolve the government because it has failed to make necessary arrangements to hold elections by April," the King said in an address to the nation.

Armoured vehicles with mounted machine guns patrolled the capital amidst reports that several politicians were put under house arrest. Kathmandu airport was closed and all telephone lines, including mobile phone services, were disconnected soon after the royal announcement.

The monarch accused the Deuba government of failing to protect democracy, sovereignty and life and property of the people. The King had only reappointed Prime Minister Deuba last June, two years after dismissing him for failing to tackle a long-standing

refusal to come to peace talks by a January 13 deadline. But many members of Deuba's own cabinet were known to be unhappy with the plan to hold polls, saying it was unrealistic in a country where the rebels control much of the countryside.

Nepal is locked in a bitter three-way struggle between the king, political parties and Maoist rebels. The king is often accused of overstepping his powers and this is the second time he has assumed power in three years. This is the fourth time the king has

sacked a prime minister in less than three years. Nepal has had no parliament since 2002. The rebels have been fighting since 1996 to replace the monarchy with a communist republic, in an insurgency which has cost around 11,000 lives.

Voicing grave concern over the political developments in Nepal, India said it had brought the monarchy and mainstream political parties in direct confrontation with each other and warned that it would only benefit forces that wish to undermine democracy.

"We will continue to support the restoration of political stability and economic prosperity in Nepal, a process which requires reliance on the forces of democracy and the support of the people of Nepal," the external affairs ministry said in a statement in New Delhi.

In an hour-long meeting, external affairs minister K Natwar Singh briefed the PM on the political crisis in Nepal. Foreign secretary Shyam Saran spoke to India's ambassador in Kathmandu S S Mukherjee to get an update on



SOLDIERS PATROL THE STREETS OF KATHMANDU

## India cancels flights

India on Tuesday cancelled all flights to Kathmandu after Nepal plunged into a political crisis. An Air Sahara flight took off from Delhi on Tuesday morning but returned after hovering over Kathmandu airport as it was not permitted to land by the local air traffic control. Indian Airlines and Jet Airways cancelled their flights to Kathmandu.

the developments. "The king of Nepal has dissolved the multi-party government led by PM Sher Bahadur Deuba and has decided to constitute a council of ministers under his own chairmanship. An emergency has been declared and fundamental rights have been suspended.

"These developments constitute a serious setback to the cause of democracy in Nepal and cannot but be a cause of grave concern to India," the MEA statement said. Agencies

# Delhi watch gives Dhaka scare

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Jan. 31: The Bangladesh government is worried whether India will take the initiative to convince South Asian neighbours that the forthcoming Saarc summit in Dhaka should be called off because of deteriorating law and order in that country.

Even as preparations are in full swing for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his team's visit to Dhaka, India feels the situation in Bangladesh in the wake of the killing of a senior Awami League leader last week is "grave".

A senior official said: "We are keeping a close watch over the situation in Dhaka. In our assessment, the situation is grave. But as of now, we are co-

mitted towards attending the Saarc summit."

The summit was earlier to be held in January but was rescheduled in the wake of the December 26 tsunami.

Shamsul Kibira, a former finance minister and senior leader of the Opposition Awami League, along with his nephew Shah Manjurul Huda and three others, were killed in an explosion at a political rally in Bangladesh's Habiganj district last week.

The Saarc summit is scheduled to be held on February 6 and 7. But foreign minister K. Natwar Singh, who is to leave for Dhaka on February 4 to attend the meeting of the Saarc

foreign ministers preceding it, today described the situation as "very distressing" and "very worrying".

He said: "It was very distressing and very worrying. We immediately sent our condolences to the family of Kibira." Asked whether the incident will affect the Saarc summit, the minister said: "I hope it will not."

However, the Indian establishment is keeping a close watch on the situation in Bangladesh where the Awami League has been holding an indefinite *hartal*. Indications suggest the Bangladesh National Party coalition government has been making

Bad law and order casts cloud on Saarc summit venue

all arrangements to ensure that the summit goes on as scheduled and the heads of governments and their delegation members are provided adequate security.

But the situation may turn for the worse if the Awami League and its supporters decide to resort to violence to draw attention to the "persecution of political opponents" in Bangladesh. If they manage to force postponement of the summit, they will be able to prove that there has been a total breakdown of law and order in the country.

For India, making any move to get the summit postponed can be irksome. Irres-

few days on bilateral and regional issues.

In its official statement, India has condemned the attack on Kibira and described it as a "direct attack on the fabric of democracy". Delhi's disappointment with the BNP government stems from the fact that since August last year, such attacks on the Opposition seem to have become its policy.

The BNP is not likely to take to the Indian criticism and may dub it as Delhi's attempt to "meddle in its internal affairs". But India is firm on its stand as it fears that the growth of fundamentalist forces is not limited to Bangladesh alone and may have an adverse impact on the entire neighbourhood.

pective of whether it is Delhi or any other South Asian country which takes the initiative, in the Bangladeshi establishment the needle of suspicion will turn towards India. If that happens, it is likely to bring back the strain in bilateral relations which have, of late, seen more "lows" than "highs".

India has made it clear it will raise its concern on the series of attacks on the Opposition in Bangladesh with the BNP leadership during talks. Both the foreign minister and the Prime Minister are likely to have separate meetings with their Bangladeshi counterparts in the next

# সার্কের আগেই চড়া সুর দিল্লির, দরাদরি চলবে না কাশ্মীর নিয়ে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৩১  
জানুয়ারি: বাংলাদেশে সার্ক সম্মেলনে  
যখন ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের শীর্ষ  
নেতৃত্বের পার্শ্ববৈঠক আসন্ন, তখনই  
ইসলামাবাদের বিরুদ্ধে কামান দাগল  
নয়াদিল্লি।

ভারতের বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে আজ  
স্পষ্ট জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে, পাকিস্তান  
যদি মনে করে সন্ত্রাসবাদ নিয়ে দর  
কষাকষির মাধ্যমে জম্মু ও কাশ্মীর  
সমস্যার সমাধান করবে, তা হলে দিল্লি  
কখনওই তা মেনে নেবে না। ভারত-  
বিরোধী জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ বন্ধ করার যে  
প্রতিশ্রুতি পাকিস্তান দিয়েছিল, তা  
তারা আদৌ পালন করছে না বলেও  
অভিযোগ করেছে বিদেশ মন্ত্রক।

ভারতের বিদেশসচিব শ্যাম সারন  
কিছু দিন আগেই পাকিস্তানে গিয়ে  
কাশ্মীর-সহ বিভিন্ন দ্বিপাক্ষিক বিষয়  
নিয়ে সে দেশের বিদেশসচিবের সঙ্গে  
আলোচনা করে এসেছেন। আগামী  
মাসে বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ যাচ্ছেন  
ইসলামাবাদ। দু'দেশের মধ্যে আস্থা  
বাড়াতে বিভিন্ন ব্যবস্থাও নেওয়া হচ্ছে।  
তারই মধ্যে জম্মু-কাশ্মীরে পাকিস্তানি  
গোয়েন্দা সংস্থা আই এস আই তাদের  
কার্যকলাপ সম্প্রতি বাড়িয়ে তুলছে  
বলে দিল্লির কাছে গোয়েন্দা রিপোর্ট

জমা পড়েছে। জম্মুতে মর্টার বিস্ফোরণ,  
শ্রীনগরে আয়কর ভবনে নিরাপত্তা  
বাহিনীর সঙ্গে জঙ্গিদের রাতভর গুলির  
লড়াইয়ের মতো নাশকতার ঘটনাও  
কিছু দিন ধরে অত্যন্ত বেড়ে গিয়েছে।  
ভারতের কূটনৈতিক শিবিরের ধারণা,  
কাশ্মীর নিয়ে ইউ পি এ সরকারের  
'ধীরে চলো' নীতিতে কিছুটা অসহিষ্ণু  
পাকিস্তান। তাই লাল চোখ দেখানোর  
এই জঙ্গি কৌশল।

আর তাই সুর যথেষ্ট চড়িয়েই  
ঢাকায় সার্ক সম্মেলনের পার্শ্ববৈঠক শুরু  
করতে চাইছে ভারত। এ প্রসঙ্গে সাউথ  
ব্লকের এক পদস্থ কর্তার বক্তব্য,  
"সন্ত্রাসবাদ কখনও কাশ্মীর-সমস্যা  
সমাধানের শর্ত হতে পারে না। কাশ্মীর-  
সমস্যার সমাধানে সন্ত্রাসবাদ নিয়ে  
দরকষাকষি করার জন্য আমরা বসে  
নেই। পাকিস্তানের এই নীতি মেনে  
নেওয়া যায় না।"

পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ  
যে এখনও কথা রাখেননি, সে কথা মনে  
করিয়ে দিতেও তুলছে না বিদেশ  
মন্ত্রক। বলা হচ্ছে, "যে আশ্বাস দেওয়া  
হয়েছিল, তা এখনও পালন করা হয়নি।  
জঙ্গিদের প্রশিক্ষণ শিবির, আঘাত  
হানার অনুকূল পরিস্থিতি তৈরি করে  
দেওয়া, নিয়ন্ত্রণের খার দু'ধারে জঙ্গিদের

মধ্যে যোগাযোগ তৈরির ব্যাপারে  
এখনও প্রত্যক্ষ মদত জুগিয়ে যাচ্ছে  
ইসলামাবাদ।"

কাশ্মীরের মতো 'জটিল' এবং  
'স্পর্শকাতর' সমস্যার চটজলদি  
সমাধান সম্ভব নয়, সে কথাও  
পাকিস্তানকে জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে।  
বলা হয়েছে, "জম্মু ও কাশ্মীরের সমস্যা  
এত বছরের পুরনো ও জটিল। অনেক  
আবেগ জড়িয়ে রয়েছে। তার জট  
ছাড়াতে হলে আগে দু'দেশের মধ্যে  
আস্থা বাড়াতে হবে। বিশ্বাস তৈরি  
করতে হবে। তবেই ওই সমস্যার  
সমাধান সম্ভব। আমরা জম্মু-কাশ্মীরকে  
আলমারির তাকে তুলে রাখতে চাইছি  
না।" জট ছাড়াতে ভারতের যে একটি  
সুচিন্তিত রূপরেখা রয়েছে, সে কথা  
আজ আবার জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

বাগলিহার প্রকল্পের কথা তুলে  
আজ বিদেশ মন্ত্রক পাকিস্তানের বিরুদ্ধে  
বিভিন্ন যৌথ প্রকল্প ভণ্ডুল করে  
দেওয়ার অভিযোগও তুলেছে। বিদেশ  
মন্ত্রকের বক্তব্য, "ভারত যে প্রকল্পই  
করছে, পাকিস্তান তাতে বাগড়া দিচ্ছে।  
বাগলিহার প্রকল্পে যে কারণে বাধা  
দেওয়া হচ্ছে, তাও সম্পূর্ণ রাজনৈতিক।  
তা যদি প্রযুক্তিগত কারণে হত, তা হলে  
আমাদের কিছু বলার থাকত না।"



# Saarc hitch on China entry

## DHAKA TALKS NEXT WEEK TO FOCUS ON 'DIALOGUE PARTNERS'

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, January 27

BEFORE THE summit next week, senior officials will meet in Dhaka to "thrash out" the issue of whether the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) needs dialogue partners at all, after several member-countries have been pushing for China to gain associate entry into the functioning of the regional organisation.

India would not welcome China's (or any other country's) potential entry as a dialogue partner, though a direct veto would not be applied, saying instead that the Saarc constitution does not have such a provision.

According to official sources, the issue of dialogue partners has never been raised in official parleys in the 20 years of Saarc's existence.

Officials will talk of the role of dialogue partners, where they would fit in in the present structure of the organisation and how such a system would work.

The contention being that Saarc needs to consolidate its own position as a functional entity before the question of admitting dialogue partners arises. Unlike Asean, which has a structured format and a provision for the Asean Regional Forum, Saarc, itself, has not really got off the ground, officials said.

While Pakistan, Bangladesh and

Nepal are actively in favour of China's presence as a dialogue partner, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives are non-committal, with India pushing for Saarc to begin functioning as an entity, getting much-needed economic projects off the ground.

India's view on new entrants into Saarc reflects China's own attitude towards the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), where new members are not being encouraged until the organisation carves out a niche for itself.

The six-member SCO — with four Central Asian countries, with China and Russia — aims at dealing with security issues in the region, and India is keen to be taken on board.

28 JAN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# China's SAARC entry is big question for India, Bhutan

C RAJA MOHAN  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 26

AS Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the King of Bhutan, wraps up his visit to India, the Chief Guest at the Republic Day Parade and his hosts will soon have to make up their minds on the difficult question of defining the sub-continent's collective relationship with China.

In the countdown to to 13th summit of the South Asian leaders in Dhaka early next month, India and Bhutan will have to decide on how best to deal with the mounting diplomatic pressure to associate China with the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

At the Dhaka summit, which will mark the 20th anniversary of the founding of SAARC, Pakistan and Bangladesh are likely to intensify the demand for getting China into the sub-con-



Jigme Singye Wangchuk greets Olympic silver medallist Rajyavardhan Rathore as President Kalam looks on. Ravi Batra

continent's institutions.

Despite the growing engagement with Beijing, there is considerable ambivalence in New Delhi about letting China into SAARC.

South Block sceptics ask why India should complicate matters by drawing China into an organisation that has enough problems on its own. Others, empha-

sising reciprocity, are quick to point out that China has not been enthusiastic about India joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that brings China, Russia and the Central Asian states together.

For the declining but persistent tribe of Sino-phobes in New Delhi, any talk of letting China gain a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

27 JAN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Will India and Bhutan let China into SAARC?

formal role south of the Himalayas is sacrosanct. The problem for Bhutan is much bigger. It does not even have diplomatic relations with China. Although Beijing and Thimpu have annual consultations on their boundary dispute, the relationship has not been tension-free.

At the end of last year, Bhutan had protested against Beijing's road construction on its disputed northern frontier. Bhutan is concerned about the trans-border political consequences of the rapidly expanding Chinese infrastructure in Tibet. That probably is the reason why New Delhi and Thimpu have rushed to initiate rail connectivity for the first time across Bhutan's southern borders.

Despite reservations in New Delhi,

and Thimpu, SAARC appears headed inexorably towards a debate on associating China with the economic and political evolution of the sub-continent.

Beijing itself has stepped up the campaign to join SAARC as an associate. In a little-noticed development at the last SAARC summit, held in Islamabad during January 2004, the Prime Minister of Pakistan read out greetings from the Chinese leadership at the opening session.

The final declaration of the summit endorsed, in principle, the idea of exploring possible association with interested countries and organisations.

In developments since then, the SAARC secretary-general travelled to China after receiving a formal invitation

from Beijing. The SAARC secretariat, meanwhile, has drafted a set of procedures for associating other countries. These will come up for discussion and approval at Dhaka.

In any event, India must expect that diplomatic pressure from some of the members will mount at Dhaka for an early decision, for they would at once have the pleasure of seeing New Delhi squirm while scoring diplomatic points with Beijing. It will be tempting for New Delhi to adopt the usual delaying tactics at Dhaka on China's association with SAARC. Instead Prime Minister Manmohan Singh must take a political view.

Singh should ask whether it is worth delaying Chinese association with SAARC. He should recall that a similar

effort by India to keep Pakistan out of the ASEAN Regional Forum could not be sustained. As India and China expand their economic interaction at the national level, can it be prevented on their frontiers and neighbouring regions?

In the end, Singh has two choices in Dhaka. One is to unilaterally promote India's own integration with its neighbours and leverage the weight of China and other Asian powers to quickly fold South Asian economies into the Indian one. The other is to stay with the present glacial course on regional trade that squanders India's natural geographic advantage and tries, unsuccessfully, to prevent other powers from joining South Asia in a globalising world.

27 JAN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

# India upset by slow Saarc

Summit  
25/1

## 'Economic cooperation not happening'

Nilova Roy Chaudhury  
New Delhi, January 24

THE INDIAN government, frustrated at the pathetically slow pace of movement in the organisation, intends to convey to Saarc authorities that they either come on board and begin active measures in implementing specific, project-based cooperative ventures or risk being left behind.

While not specifically targeting Islamabad or Dhaka, seen as blocking the economic cooperation from taking off, Delhi will cite the example of Colombo (coming on board with the FTA — free trade area — and other bilateral cooperation) as an indication of its intent.

Twenty years since its inception in Dhaka in 1985, not only has Saarc "miserably failed to emulate Asean", it has also failed to take off except as a "tourism promotion and talking shop", sources said, with "animosities, jealousies and endlessly deferring decisions" preventing cooperation.

New Delhi now sees that its economy is growing at a good pace, regardless of Saarc and, if members want, they can join the effort, or India will concentrate on other regional

groups like the ARF, the Indian Ocean Rim or even BIMST-EC. "There has been more functional cooperation with BIMST-EC, founded in 1997, than with Saarc," an official said.

Also, at the delayed summit, scheduled on February 6 and 7 in Dhaka, Sri Lanka's proposal for an early warning system against tsunamis will

be discussed among the leaders.

The idea is to get something functional on the ground, with a proposal to hire experts, for a fixed short term if necessary, so that a workable proposal can get off the ground soon. Everyone seems to agree that Saarc needs to get its act together and actually work to implement projects.

India will propose shorter su-

mmits, as is the norm with major multilateral groupings, while even Pakistan has prepared a concept paper, for presentation at this summit, for project-based implementation of regional cooperation ventures. But nothing has come of specific suggestions, including India's proposal for the \$100-million, project-based Poverty Alleviation fund, proposed last year in Islamabad.

### Reviewing Saarc

- Officials feel Saarc has failed to take off except as a "tourism promotion and talking shop"
- Nothing has come of specific suggestions, including India's proposal for a \$100-million poverty alleviation fund
- With its economy growing regardless of Saarc, India will concentrate on other regional groups

25 JAN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

## Opposition wins two seats in Maldives

**MALE (MALDIVES), JAN. 23.** Pro-democracy candidates won the two parliamentary seats in the Maldives' capital, unofficial results showed on Sunday, as the archipelago's Government pledged to speed up democratic reforms. Results for the other 40 legislative seats were expected by Tuesday or Wednesday, following elections on Saturday across the nation still reeling from last month's tsunami.

"It is a great day for democracy," the chief Government spokesman, Ahmed Shaheed, said. "With the election over ... the road is now open to accelerate the reform agenda."

Nearly complete unofficial results from the capital, Male, showed that supporters of the Opposition Maldives Democratic Party had won both of the city's two seats. — AP

**Pak takes  
Baglihar to  
World Bank**

project dam

**Pak raises wall over  
dam and peace talks**

**CHENAB PROJECT I**

**Pak wants World Bank to settle, India says technical talks should go on**

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 18

**C**ASTING a shadow on the ongoing dialogue between the two countries, Pakistan today said it was approaching the World Bank to intervene and settle the dispute over India's plans to build the Baglihar dam on the Chenab in Jammu and Kashmir.

Reacting to the announcement, New Delhi said technical deliberations to resolve differences should continue and "reference to the World Bank is not justified."

At the same time, South Block made it clear that construction at the project site would not stop just because Islamabad had decided to move the World Bank.

Islamabad objects to the 450 MW-hydel power

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

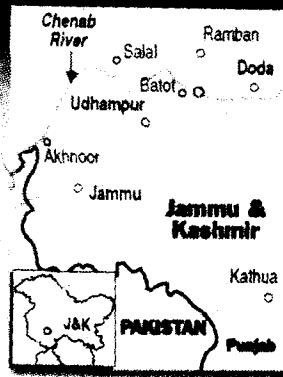
**THE BAGLIHAR BRIEF**



**THE GENESIS**  
Partition cuts through Indus basin, leaves Pak as lower riparian entity  
Key irrigation projects at Madhopur (Ravi) and Ferozpur (Sutlej) goes to India, leading to dispute

**THE TREATY**  
World Bank facilitates negotiations, Indus Water Treaty signed in 1960. Covers six rivers: three eastern (Sutlej, Beas and Ravi) and three western (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab)  
Permanent Indus Commission set up to facilitate sharing arrangement

**THE PROJECT**  
In 2000, work starts on



Rs 4,000-cr 450-MW Baglihar hydel project on Chenab. First project solely executed by J&K govt

**THE DISPUTE**  
**PAKISTAN'S CLAIM**  
Baglihar allows India far more storage capacity than agreed, can lead to scarcity in Pak  
Pak against water gates insists Treaty permits only run-of-river projects

**INDIA'S STAND**  
Project is essential for power and irrigation  
If it gives in, Pakistan's capacity will dip below 150 MW. Gate removal can lead to massive siltation as it happened in Salal project

BK SHARMA & AJIT KUMAR

# No more CBMs with India, says Musharraf

*Gulam Nabi*

*HD-12  
17/1*

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, JAN. 16.** The Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, is reported to have said that Islamabad would not contemplate any more confidence-building measures (CBMs) with India unless the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service is operational without insistence on passports or visas.

A delegation of Kashmir leaders, who called on him on Saturday, quoted him as saying that he would personally welcome leaders of the Hurriyat if the Indian Government allowed them to visit Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The delegation consisted of barrister Majid Trimbo, Kashmir Centre E.U. Director General, Ghulam Nabi Fai, Kashmiri-American Council Executive Director, and Prof. Nazi Shawl, Kashmir Centre London Executive Director. They were here in connection with the

second meeting of the Steering Committee of the European Parliament's All Parties Group for Kashmir. Kuldip Nayar and Rajinder Sachar represented Indian civil society at the conference, which adopted a declaration urging India and Pakistan to make serious efforts for resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

The next meeting of the committee is scheduled in New Delhi. It was not immediately clear if Gen. Musharraf meant Kashmir-centric CBMs or all measures aimed at improvement of relations between India and Pakistan when he referred to the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service.

In his remarks to the Kashmiri delegation, Gen. Musharraf said that in seeking a solution to the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, CBMs and the dialogue process should proceed in tandem. An official statement said that the Kashmiri leaders thanked the President for highlighting the issue throughout the world.

THE HINDU

17 JAN 2005

## Not a pipe dream

The agreement on the Myanmar-India gas pipeline is what regional cooperation is about

**T**HE agreement reached between Bangladesh, Myanmar and India over the transportation of gas through Bangladesh to Kolkata, from Myanmar's offshore gas fields, represents a major breakthrough in regional cooperation. It is a win-win deal for each player so why was it not arrived at earlier? The dodgy state of Indo-Bangladesh ties had a lot to do with this without doubt. Isn't it amazing how governments can work against their own interests in supposed "national interest"? But all that is behind us hopefully. The tripartite agreement could become something of a grid for future economic partnerships on our eastern flank.

For India, in urgent search of sustainable energy reserves, the deal could not have come at a more opportune time. Although it has recently signed a multi-billion LNG deal with Iran, it will be a while before this gets translated into actual supplies. Meanwhile, according to projections, India's gas consumption is expected to

rise to three times its present level by 2009. The geography and geo-politics of the area had reduced its options in the east considerably. For one, India could not transport gas from Tripura to Kolkata in the most efficient way possible and therefore had to cap production; for another, it could not benefit from the fact that ONGC-Videsh and Gail owned a stake in the Myanmar gas fields. Bangladesh will gain considerably, as well, in terms of transit fees and employment benefits. It will also acquire a facility to transport its own gas for domestic consumption or for export, should it choose to do so.

In the long term, this agreement could help foster more harmony in Indo-Bangla relations, becoming a model for other forms of connectivity, including surface transportation. For years, experts have been arguing for better synergy between the countries in the region so that they can benefit from their natural and human resources. The tripartite agreement is a significant step in that direction.



## Dhaka seeks new date for SAARC summit

By Haroon Habib HD-13

**DHAKA, JAN. 5.** Dhaka has once again requested Islamabad to let it know about a rescheduled date for holding the stalled SAARC summit as soon as possible after consulting other member-countries.

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, had a telephonic conversation with the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mehmood Kasuri, the second in a week, on arriving at a consensus date for holding the summit in Dhaka.

"We feel that considering their [the affected countries']

psychological and physical conditions after the tsunami, their convenience will receive priority in fixing a new date for the summit," Mr. Khan told reporters.

He explained that the leaders of Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives — the three affected states — would have a clearer picture of where they stood after the Jakarta world leaders' summit on Thursday, and a decision on the SAARC meet was likely after that. The summit of the world leaders would assess the extent of losses and mobilise international aid to overcome the crisis.

The 13th summit, scheduled for January 9-11, was postponed in the wake of the tsunami disaster.

However, Bangladesh is willing to host the summit within mid-February and spelt out February 7-9 as possible dates, which needs confirmation by six other countries.

Briefing diplomatic correspondents over the latest developments, Mr. Khan said the current SAARC chair, Pakistan, and the SAARC Secretariat were in touch with the SAARC capitals to find a set of dates convenient to all the members.