

# Auspicious Hour for Change at Bangalore

by Ramtanu Maitra

The May 26-27 international conference, "World Situation after Iraq War" held in Bangalore, could not have been timed better. Beside attaining the objective of focussing on the increased instability in the region triggered by the unilateral U.S. action on Iraq, the conference sought to provide India's political leaders a fresh option to chart a new direction to the country's foreign policy.

Since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)—a government coalition of 16 political parties—came to power in the Summer of 1999, New Delhi had followed virtually a uni-dimensional foreign policy. The objective of the NDA, under the guidance of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, has all along been to improve bilateral relations with the United States and to mesh New Delhi's foreign policy with Washington's. Although the attempted meshing turned out to be not only a tiring, but also an impossible task, the Vajpayee Administration nonetheless has labored on.

## American Double-Talk

The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist acts on American soil provided some of the BJP leaders, particularly Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Lal Kishenchand Advani, a new hope of hitching India's foreign policy wagon with the Bush Administration. When America declared war on terrorism, India jumped in quickly to endorse it. Then-Indian External Affairs Minister (now, Finance Minister) Jaswant Singh, known for his pro-Washington leanings, made it evident that India and the United States together would eliminate the evil of terrorism from the Subcontinent, particularly the terrorists who reside in Pakistan and operate against American and Indian interests. The Bush White House, eager to keep India under its fold and protect itself from the militants based in Pakistan, promised Indians the Moon. Now Delhi gloated of its diplomatic success, and some at very high levels even dreamt of "solving" the Kashmir dispute by bearing down on Pakistan with the help of the United States. The Jaswant Singhs and Advanis were going around the country at the time telling the media why the United States had no choice but to eliminate the terrorists from Pakistan.

Within a few months, the picture cleared up. On Dec. 13, 2001, the Indian Parliament, at the heart of New Delhi, was attacked by gun-toting terrorists who came from Pakistan. As the entire country, hurt and angry, waited for a retaliatory

military action along the borders to uproot the terrorist camps within Pakistan, New Delhi was straitjacketed by Washington. India, over the next few months, amassed 700,000 troops along the India-Pakistan borders and the disputed Line of Control in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Nine months later, under pressure from the United States, India withdrew most of its troops. The staging and un-staging of the military deployment cost India a few hundred million dollars, but the Vajpayee Administration had nothing to show for it: Terrorism continues, and so does the cross-border infiltration from Pakistan. To add insult to injury, Washington harps on the old, shop-worn theme of telling New Delhi that Islamabad is committed to stopping terrorism.

## Enter Israel

Beside the U.S. pressure, what also emerged in New Delhi is the Israeli factor under the tutelage of Deputy Prime Minister Advani. Advani, along with National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra, who is also the Prime Minister's personal secretary, pushed hard the concept of bringing in Israel to deal with the Kashmiri terrorists. Their view, as it goes, was that the Israeli presence would not only meet Washington's approval but would be a great tactical success. Playing on the anti-Muslim sentiments of some Indians, they cited the Israeli success in containing "Palestinian terror." On May 8, 2003, during his visit to the United States, Brajesh Mishra, addressing the American Jewish Congress (AJC), asked for a joint India-U.S.-Israel effort to curb terrorism.

Despite the drumbeat of the U.S.-Israeli lobby, Prime Minister Vajpayee came to realize that while thriving relations with the United States are a must, Washington cannot, even if it wants to, dismantle the Kashmiri terrorists based in Pakistan. Washington has declared war against terrorists, but the war is not directed against all of them. This little truth was either not understood by Advani and his colleagues, or they kept it a secret from the Prime Minister.

Briefly stated, in Pakistan exist three varieties of terrorists and all of them enjoy the patronage of Pakistan's institutions, particularly the Army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). However, all these terrorists are not equally precious to Islamabad and, in fact, some of them are decidedly dispensable. So, when the Americans demanded liquidation of al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Army was willing, for a price. But Washington, despite months of efforts, has failed to work out a deal by which Islamabad will hand over the Afghan Taliban leaders. On the other hand, it is unclear whether America ever asked Pakistan to get rid of the Kashmir terrorists, the third variety.

The failure of India's policy vis-à-vis dealing with terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is open for all to see. In recent months, however, this stuck-in-the-mud policy has begun to indicate a shift. There seems to be a new realization that India must discuss the Jammu and Kashmir dispute with China, a giant neighbor and friend of both Pakistan and India. The

objective, of course, is not to bring China to the negotiating table, but only to make clear to the United States that India possesses other options. It is important for both India and China, more so than to the United States, to see the region remains stable and free of major conflicts. The upcoming June visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Beijing has the potential to consolidate this policy shift.

### **The India-China-Russia Strategic Triangle**

These detailed issues were not discussed openly at the Bangalore conference, but were indirectly addressed both days. The presence of U.S. Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche was important. Probably the best-known Democrat in India after former President Bill Clinton, LaRouche has long been urging the Indian leadership to forge a strong cooperative relationship, based on science and technology, with Russia and China. He points out that these three nations together possess all the basic technical and manpower requirements needed to provide a strong agro-industrial basis for the billions who reside in the region; to remove poverty that haunts South Asia, Central Asia, and China; to provide a solid health-care system; to provide security to the region; and to build major international infrastructure projects which would enable the vast Eurasian land-mass to function as one vibrant economic unit.

LaRouche also stresses that the future of the world, to a large extent, depends on how these three nations cope with the prevailing opportunities. If they squander that future, LaRouche says, the world situation will descend into a bottomless abyss.

This viewpoint is not acceptable to those Indian leaders who have chosen to place all their eggs in the U.S.-Israel basket. However, at the conference, it became evident that those who think differently are now willing to show up and speak for themselves. There is no doubt that the unilateral military action of the United States against Iraq has a lot to do with this change in attitude. Prime Minister Vajpayee, during his recent visit to Jammu and Kashmir, had said obliquely that “the world has changed once again after Iraq.” Deliberately, Vajpayee, a man of few words, did not elaborate.

Many in India have recognized the fact that behind the façade of invincibility, the United States is much weaker now than it was following World War II. It is economically weak, financially in great despair, and left with few friends. India, along with China, is a growing power, and it cannot afford to attach itself wholly to the United States to resolve issues that it must resolve itself. The conference exuded both confidence and a genuine desire to attain peace around the world.

### **Significant Political Moves**

The presence of K. Natwar Singh at Bangalore was also of great import. He is now in charge of the foreign policy cell within the Congress Party. Congress is now governing 16 Indian states, as opposed to the BJP’s control over two. What

that may translate into is the likelihood of the Congress emerging as the leading party in next year’s general elections and forming the government at the Center. The prospect of such a success, of course, lies with the party leadership. It must look at the world with clear and friendly eyes and formulate new alliances. The conference indicated that such a process has begun.

The presence of Natwar Singh in a conference organized by the Centre for Social Justice—headed by former Union Steel and Mines Minister Chandrajit Yadav, a pro-Russia, veteran Congress Party member—and the Schiller Institute, whose chairperson is Helga Zepp-LaRouche, also sent a signal that the Congress Party is ready to adopt the view that a total dependence on the United States is a grievous mistake. As noted above, a similar view is emerging in New Delhi around Prime Minister Vajpayee, Defense Minister George Fernandes, and Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal. The convergence of views of these two major political groupings—BJP and the Congress—if it actually jells, may provide India the very option it needs to emerge as a power to reckon with.

Those present at the conference also realized that peace, so desired by the Indian masses, can be attained only if India, along with China, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Japan, and Germany, play an important role in shaping the future world. There is no question that Prime Minister Vajpayee wants peace. As one veteran scribe, who once was a Congress parliamentarian and very close to late Rajiv Gandhi, wrote recently, Vajpayee “believes in a future where people of India and Pakistan can live together as friends, as colleagues in business and trade, as partners in a common culture created by people of many faiths, and eventually as two nations who are forced, by the logic of their self-interest, to find common purpose in key strategic goals.”

India has indicated that it is now, more than ever, ready to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. It has also indicated that the process will follow its own pace, and it would be absolutely necessary for Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism. If cross-border terrorism cannot be brought under control, the dispute cannot be resolved. While Vajpayee wants peace to prevail in Jammu and Kashmir, he is not altogether unwilling to wait.

What else came across during the conference is that the Indians, who prefer a multi-cultural society with multiple traditions residing side by side, are uneasy with the way the world has shaped up. While India must be recognized as a major power, and be given its due position in the community of nations, it will not be able to achieve this through passive means. There has to be an active demand for peace, and this demand must include rapid economic and human development in India.

The youths who spoke at the conference made it clear that only an economically strong India will be able to perform as an active agent for world peace.