

An unwarranted drift

Pakistan seems to be in danger of being overwhelmed by an inexplicable drift in its external relations, which in turn will undermine its policy goals

It was at the start of 2004 that a new euphoria pervaded Pakistan's external policy dimension with a breakthrough in the Pakistan-India relationship on the sidelines of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in January 2004. Eventually the stalled dialogue got back on track and with cricket diplomacy creating its own emotions, Track II was thriving as never before. And so it has continued throughout the year with people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and India increasing with each new exchange of groups/delegations. We now have a Peace Committee visiting us, which comprises people of Pakistani and Indian origin from the US, Canada and the UK. Meanwhile, with Punjab's emotions going overboard, Indian entrepreneurs are finding all manner of covert means of investing in Pakistan.

No wonder, then, the Indians are under no compulsion to move on resolving the substantive conflictual issues. No confidence building measures (CBMs) relating to security and suggested by Pakistan have found favour in New Delhi. On Kashmir and water issues the Indians are clearly playing for time, while several of high profile civil society representatives flood us with emotive appeals of how we are all "one people". The cultural claims of oneness are misleading given that India itself is a heterogeneous country with diverse nations within it; certainly the people of the NWFP would have more in common with our northwest neighbour rather than with India, just as the Baloch would be hard-pressed to find cultural commonality with India. Even the Punjab can, at best, claim a cultural affinity with parts of northern India while Sindh could, with a little imagination find some links across its neighbouring Indian vicinity - but for Mira Nair to think of Pakistanis and Indians as "one nation" is overdoing the Indian cultural sell! Even though some quar-



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Badawi, on a visit to New Delhi, proclaimed that India was a strategic partner and eligible for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. A greater eye-opener for Pakistan, which has assumed a close and special affinity with the Gulf states, should surely have been the UAE's endorsement of India's bid for a permanent UNSC seat, on December 27, 2004, after Indian External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh met with UAE's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

What should really make Pakistan sit up and take note is the growing economic relationship between China and India. The Indian inroads into the Chinese intelligentsia and the market are extensive - and both sides are clearly keen to build these even further. With

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systems and state-of-the-art offensive weapon systems by the US to India. Worse still, the US media and segments of its political elite continue to focus on Pakistan's nuclear programme and especially the Dr A Q Khan issue, which will not go away despite Pakistan's censure of the scientist and his associates and President Musharraf's clear-cut stance that no outside power will have access to Dr Khan.

At a recent conference in Wilton Park, England, focusing on the 2005 NPT Review Conference, an entire discussion group was dedicated to "The Khan Revelations and the NPT". There was nothing about the Indo-Iranian nuclear cooperation or the private proliferation networks involving the Europeans. Present at this conference was a big group of American policy-makers, academics and analysts and Europeans who attempted to present erroneous facts about the issue, including half-truths and unsubstantiated accusations against the Pakistani state.

How does one deal with the US media which continues its Pakistan-bashing on the nuclear issue? In a recent *New York Times* article by William Broad and David Sanger, the focus was the US administration's decision not to pressurise Pakistan into handing over Dr A Q Khan for questioning by the US! The hint is that with the search for Osama supposedly "waning", the US has not gained anything on the proliferation issue, so perhaps it should move more strongly on that count in the coming months. And there is a general sense that in a few months the US will indeed put pressure on Pakistan in relation to the Dr Khan issue. While Pakistan has the ability to withstand extraordinary pressure on crucial issues, as demonstrated by our ability to acquire nuclear capability against all odds, such pressure at the present time would certainly present a major irritant for this country.

as one nation is overdoing the Indian cultural sell! Even though some quarters in Pakistan have been claiming the demise of the "two-nation theory", the fact is that if this theory was redundant then there would have been no Bangladesh because East Pakistan would have been merged into Indian West Bengal.

While we know now what the Indian game plan is, where is Pakistan headed in its India policy? Are we to continue following the Indian plan of dialogue for the sake of dialogue? There are those who claim that the process is important at this moment. But what process and what direction? For each process will focus on a particular direction and policy goal, and Pakistan seems to be in danger of being so overwhelmed by the process of dialogue itself that it may lose sight of the end.

In fact, there is a general sense of being at sea on a number of external fronts even as our foreign policy focuses on the relationship with the USA. General Musharraf's visit to Latin America has introduced Pakistan to an important part of the world, but we may be losing ground in terms of our old allies. Just before 2004 ended the Malaysian leader Prime Minister

a US\$12 billion trade relationship, both have a lot at stake and because the trade balance is in India's favour, this advantage is being exploited by India. This economic relationship is spurring on a growing politico-military cooperation, most recently reflected in the Indian army chief's reported offer to the Chinese defence minister, for "joint military exercises in non-traditional security", in the last week of December 2004. While Pakistan is secure in its politico-military relationship with China, its reliance on past history is losing ground in the face of India's aggressive economic and military diplomacy. Perhaps there is some recognition of this in the reaction of a senior foreign ministry official, *who reportedly stated that while "cooperation to counter menace of terrorism should continue, we hope no attempt will be made to cross red lines"*.

As for the US, on which we have focused so much energy and attention, how are we faring? Well, we still cannot match the military cooperation between India and the US - which directly impacts our own security parameters, especially the supply of missile defence

which certainly present a major irritant for this country.

Worse still, we now find that our troops in Wana may have been fired upon by US or Coalition troops from across Afghanistan. This has compelled Pakistan to lodge a protest with the Coalition authorities, especially since the firing led to the death of one of our soldiers. Not that the US showed any sensitivity in this regard earlier either, when brazenly indulging in hot pursuit across the international Pak-Afghan border.

Whether it is just a feeling, or whether we really are adrift, there is a growing - and totally unwarranted - sense of self-flagellation pervading our view of our place in the international system. We may have our share of problems, including religious obscurantism, but neo-fascism is on the rise in Europe, Christian fundamentalism in the US which is threatening to actually curtail American Muslims' rights, and, of course, Hindu extremism in India - to name just a few cases. But our people have an inner resilience and goodness and as a state we have our strengths. There is nothing extraordinarily wrong with us, so let us reassert our faith in our nationhood and state in this new year.

96