

Pak-Iran cooperation

Pak Foreign Min
Nathan 30/1/77

IRANIAN Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi, who arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday, held wide-ranging talks with Mr Aziz and Mr Khurshid Kasuri with a focus on improving bilateral commercial relations, the gas pipeline project and the proposed UN reforms. Iran's peaceful nuclear programme and the pressures it is coming under also came under discussion. The considerable potential for growth of trade between the two contiguous countries should be exploited to the mutual benefit of both. The present trade volume could be substantially increased with sincere efforts. There is little doubt that the UN as it stands today needs radical reforms to suit current realities. Its bodies should have wider representational character but under no circumstances should those who have been flouting its resolutions, India in particular, be made permanent members of the Security Council, its main decision making organ.

Laying a pipeline to carry gas from Iran to Pakistan onwards to India, in which all the three countries stand to gain, has been hanging fire because of India's hesitation to participate, even though it is deficient in energy resources and is finding it hard to feed the demands of its expanding industrial sector. Apparently, it is unable to repose confidence in Islamabad's guarantees of uninterrupted flow of the gas. Iran, rich in the natural resources, floated the idea of exporting the gas to the two countries through a pipeline involving \$3 billion in 1996. There seems to be little point for Tehran and Islamabad to wait any longer for New Delhi to accept assurances as the cost of the project has already shot up by one-third. Should India change its mind later on, it could join up and the pipeline extended. The power position in Pakistan is becoming increasingly critical and the government is planning to resort to loadshedding from next month. Already outages are common and the supply remains cut off for hours. If indeed there is any pressure from Washington to back off from the project, Islamabad should simply ignore it and go ahead. There should be no compromise on the national interest. Of course, the extension to India should be made contingent on India's acceptance of a solution to the Kashmir issue.

The US appears bent upon making Iran as its next target of attack and is using its nuclear programme as an excuse, even though the IAEA has not found any evidence that it is weapons oriented. Iran's repeated assurances that it is developing the nuclear fuel cycle in line with the provisions of the NPT and is purely for peaceful purposes are constantly disbelieved, while Israel's well known huge nuclear arsenal is not even mentioned. Pakistan should counsel the US to examine the issue coolly to avoid another tragedy on its borders. The US would find the Iranian nation most determined to resist and most difficult to reconcile afterwards.