

Another world is possible

By Zubeida Mustafa P.F.R. - India

THE Indian prime minister in a recent interview with this paper listed four factors which are forcing Pakistan and India to opt for peace. One of these, he said, was the imperative of globalization which dictates closer cooperation between India and Pakistan for faster economic development.

Another interrelated factor Mr Vajpayee listed was the need for these countries to join hands in the post-cold war world to tackle the numerous economic problems they face. These two are very important compulsions which must be taken into account by Third World countries. It is not very clear in what sense the Indian prime minister understood the "imperative of globalization".

But the fact is that if the developing countries do not want to be overwhelmed by the forces of globalization as they operate today they must act to counter them. Globalization worships the market and believes that the market has its own self-regulatory mechanism which fixes its own problems. But the champions of the neo-liberalization of today fail to heed the warning given by Keynes more than half a century ago that the market doesn't always regulate itself and resolve its problems. Very often government intervention is needed to correct the market which has gone dysfunctional.

Today there are many who find that the problems caused by the present system are mounting. Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize winning economist, writes in his book *Globalization and its Discontents*, "Globalization today is not working for many of the world's poor.... It is not working for the stability of the global economy." As a result there is widespread discontent, and globalization is being challenged all over the world.

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tion is that it is driven by the financial agencies and the multinationals which are not always imbued with human concerns and respect for social justice. True, globalization has many positive dimensions as well. Thus it has led to the emergence of an international political culture which believes in democracy, human rights and social justice. These are not always achieved by a society but the struggle is constantly taking place and this struggle has been globalized. As a result it creates a greater impact.

Thus Mr Vajpayee admitted that "popular sentiments are overwhelmingly positive" in favour of India-Pakistan peace. This has been demonstrated by the people-to-people dialogue which has been taking place for the past several years between the two countries. The goodwill and intense desire for peace was more than evident at the recent convention of the Pakistan-India Forum for Peace and Democracy held in Karachi. It is this aspect of globalization that has proved to be a boon.

For the first time in contemporary history, popular opinion, which is being expressed on issues of universal concern, has transcended international boundaries. Communication technology has made this phenomenon possible because for once people can share their thoughts and ideas with like-minded men and women from other countries and can even demonstrate their will in a massive show of moral force.

While the India-Pakistan forum is only a small example, which hopefully will grow, the World Social Forum is another demonstration of the will of the people which has already begun to create an impact on government policies and the approach of the financial institutions. First convened in Porto Allegre (Brazil) in 2001 as the Third World's answer to the World Economic Forum which meets annually in Davos, Switzerland, the WSF has met every year and has grown in strength. The WSF is people-centred and aims at self-reliant progress rather than neo-liberal globalization. Next week it will meet in Mumbai and is expected to draw a big crowd.

It is not just the idea of a crowd of nearly a hundred thousand coming together to register their protest that is exciting. It is the issues they will articulate that are significant and have a profound implication for the course world politics will take in the coming years. Gone are the rigid concepts such as one of national sovereignty which perceived a country's policy on women, trade, human rights, and so on as falling in its national domain. In fact, states displayed great sensitivity when any outside power tried to intervene with reference to these issues.

The WSF has now emerged as a forum to suggest an alternative to the imperialistic globalization process and the phenomena of neo-liberalism and world domination by international capital. The slogan adopted at Porto Allegre was "Another world is possible". Its thrust is on countering the dehumanizing effect of globalization by reinforcing the humanizing measures being taken by the people's movements which have become the mainstay of the World Social Forum. The key guidelines of the WSF, as enunciated in its charter of principles, are respect for human rights, participatory democracy, peaceful relations in equality and solidarity, and ethnic/communal tolerance.

All these aims can only be attained by mobilizing the people at the grassroots level. The WSF has the collective strength of the people on its side. Since many governments have tended to act as agents of the capitalists and large corporations which are ruling the world, the people will have to raise their voice against the governments which fail to take note of their interest.

In this context the governments should heed the voice of civil society if they do not want to be placed in a position where they may find themselves being challenged by a movement which knows no boundaries but shares common concerns. Thus the governments of India and Pakistan know very well — irrespective of what they may proclaim — that war fatigue has set in and the people in both countries feel they have had enough of conflict and now want peace. It is heartening to see that this realization has now also dawned on the governments in New Delhi and Islamabad. The over-

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tures for the normalization of ties which have been undertaken in recent weeks in South Asia are in line with the thrust towards peace. This is a great opportunity and it should on no count be squandered.

The fact is that globalization has also brought in its wake the tearing down of barriers between civil society organizations in different countries which are networking closely among themselves to create an impact. The significant thing about them is that they pick up relevant issues that are closest to their heart in the areas of their operation and join hands to act as pressure groups. Take for instance the WSF's forthcoming meeting in Mumbai. The organizers have announced that the meeting will focus on imperialist globalization, patriarchy, militarism and peace, communalism and casteism, all of which are issues of direct relevance to the subcontinent and the most important concerns of the people.

The outcome of the Mumbai moot will have a bearing on the policies of South Asian governments. It augurs well for them that they have taken the initiative themselves and decided to act before the pressure builds up further. The Social Charter signed by the participants of the twelfth Saarc summit provides for a people-centred framework for social development. It now remains to be seen how close the strategy will be in line with the policy framework adopted by the WSF.