

nature. . . . Earth is worshipped as the spouse of God. . . . These days it looks as if human beings have forgotten that a particular natural condition on Earth enabled life to come into existence and evolve to the human level. Humanity is disturbing this natural condition on which his existence, along with the existence of all other forms of life, depends. . . . Hindu religion wants its followers to live a simple life. It does not allow people to go on increasing their material wants. For example, not to use anything belonging to nature, such as oil, coal or forest, at a greater rate than you can replenish it; not to destroy birds, fish, earthworms and even bacteria which play vital ecological roles—once they are annihilated you cannot re-create them. . . . “Conserve ecology or perish” is the message of the *Bhagavad Gita*. . . .

Islam: . . . People have been seduced from their roots primarily through the built-in biases of the modern education system, which is ultimately development-, consumer-, and career-orientated [sic]. . . . People who are still rooted in nature and untainted by “progress” follow the ways of their forefathers, and live through their responsibilities to the Creator as natural, unconscious environmentalists. These are the people we can learn from, but they are a rapidly dwindling minority. . . .

Jainism: . . . Jainism is fundamentally a religion of ecology and has turned ecology into a religion. . . . Jains are always ready and willing to look positively and with enthusiasm upon environmental causes. . . .

Sikhism: . . . In the matter of conservation and ecological concerns, Sikh teaching is very clear. . . . The Sikh scripture declares that the purpose of human beings is to achieve a blissful state and be in harmony with the earth and all creation. There is serious concern that the earth may no longer be a sustainable bio-system. . . . In Sikh beliefs, a concern for the environment is part of an integrated approach to life and nature. . . . Environmental concerns have not yet come to occupy a prominent place in governmental policy [in the northwestern Indian state of Punjab] or in the thinking of most people; industrial development remains of primary concern. However, a number of steps are being taken, both due to external pressure and due to initiatives from a few indigenous groups. . . .

Taoism: Tao simply means “the way.”. . . The Tao took form in the being of the Grandmother Goddess. She came to Earth to enlighten humanity. She taught the people to let everything grow according to its own course without any interference. . . . With the deepening world environmental crisis, more and more people have come to realize that the problem of the environment is not only brought about by modern industry and technology, but it also has a deep connection with people’s world outlook, with their sense of value and with the way they structure knowledge. Some people’s ways of thinking has, in certain ways, unbalanced the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, and over-stressed the power and influence of the human will. People think that nature can be rapaciously exploited. . . .

Iranian President’s visit to India opens up new possibilities

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

The April 17-19 high-visibility visit to New Delhi, India by a large Iranian delegation led by President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was long on political implications. The visit, originally scheduled for September 1994, was highlighted by a number of landmark statements and economic agreements. From the outset, the visit was intensely political, notwithstanding the reservations expressed by Washington. Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao broke protocol and personally went to the airport to receive Rafsanjani, and saw him off when the Iranian President left for Georgia three days later. However, it remains to be seen what this revived bilateral relationship will achieve for the region.

From the Indian viewpoint, a number of statements by the Iranian President are of great tactical value. Rafsanjani’s speech in Lucknow, organized by the Shia community there, was studded with messages well liked by New Delhi. “Your freedom struggle against British rulers had set an example and Iran learned a lot from your experience,” he said. Welcoming India’s tolerance of its large Muslim population, Rafsanjani said that “being a Muslim and also an Iranian, I wish for peace and harmony in India.” To the great relief of Indians, Rafsanjani said that he hoped that India’s detractors would not succeed in spreading disinformation and hatred on contentious issues like the Babri Mosque and Kashmir.

On another occasion, he offered to help end the strife in Jammu and Kashmir. “There has been no change in our policy on this issue. We have already said we are not happy and satisfied with the position in Kashmir. We have told the prime minister [Rao] of the need for a consensus among India, Pakistan, and the people of Kashmir and have offered mediation for this position,” he said. In a bit of grandstanding, he also criticized the United States for offering to broker talks on Kashmir, if agreed to by New Delhi and Islamabad.

Rafsanjani drew an ovation in a speech at Asafi Imambara in Lucknow, when he proposed a gas pipeline from Iran to India which would pass through Pakistan. He said that such a pipeline would help improve relations between India and Pakistan. He supported the proposal made by his host, Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh Mulayam Singh Yadav, for the formation of a confederation of India, Pakistan, and

Bangladesh which would, in essence, un-do the 1947 partition of India by the British colonial rulers.

Addressing members of Parliament and diplomats in the central hall of the Indian Parliament, a rare honor bestowed to only a handful of visitors, Rafsanjani called for a revival of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and opposed "the domineering policies of great powers, particularly the U.S.A., and their efforts to exploit international organizations and forums for their illegitimate goals." The Iranian leader said that the world, particularly the South, faced problems of unsystematic population growth, spreading poverty and hunger, economic imbalance, pollution, and reduction of energy resources, and pointed to an emerging crisis at the threshold of the 21st century.

"Rich countries are always trying to impede the progress of the developing countries, while they themselves are utilizing, in fact exploiting, the resources of these countries," President Rafsanjani said. At a press conference in New Delhi, he mooted a strategic understanding among Iran, India, China, and Pakistan. "Cooperation among [them] will give no pretext for foreign forces to interfere in the region. We won't have the problem as in the Persian Gulf," he said.

Rafsanjani's remarks drew an immediate response. China made it known that it would like to see better bilateral relations in the region before any further discussion of regional strategic cooperation. Among Indian observers, Rafsanjani's praise of India's secular policies seemed hollow. His speech calling for revival of the NAM was also described by many in Delhi as mere rhetoric.

The Kashmir gambit

If President Rafsanjani could not make much of a dent in the current thinking of the Indian political class, his visit and support on Kashmir were considered to be major political victories against Pakistan. His support for Indian secularism, and his disregard of the fall of the Babri Masjid, has been construed in Delhi as a voice of rationality undermining the Organization of Islamic Countries' anti-India position on the issue.

In addition, Indian Prime Minister Rao used the Iranian President's visit for one-upmanship vis-à-vis Kashmir. A large section of Kashmiri secessionists—about 45%, according to one estimate—in the Indian part are Shias, and they consider the Pakistani Punjabi Muslims, who dominate the Pakistani social and political scene, as less than friendly, because the Punjabis are by and large Sunnis. By bringing in a leader from a Shia country, Rao has exploited a sectarian factor in the Kashmir issue.

It is, however, another matter whether such policies will have any impact. The problems in the Indian-held part of Kashmir cannot be narrowed down to the sectarian differences between the Shias and Sunnis. There is no doubt that the momentum in Kashmir is now for establishing an independent state. Pakistan knows that and is worried about

it. In that context, the Shia-Sunni factor is of little consequence. What is of importance, however, is the capability of New Delhi to put together a common front in Jammu and Kashmir, with the help of all the Kashmiris, against the secessionist forces. In that context, the Iranian role is of little or no value.

Economic cooperation

President Rafsanjani's support to India's secular policies will have some impact in the Islamic world. More importantly, Rafsanjani's success in putting together a tripartite memorandum of understanding between India, Iran, and Turkmenistan is deeply appreciated in New Delhi. So far, India has been virtually a non-player in Central Asia where two great and unstable powers, China and Russia, share a common border. India is desperately looking for openings to set up something substantial in Central Asia.

Recently, the Anti-Defamation League-linked Stephen Solarz was in India in his role as chairman of the Central Asian-American Enterprise Fund, set up by the Clinton administration to promote development of emerging private sector enterprises. Solarz, whose mishandling of money while serving as a U.S. congressman has made people somewhat apprehensive of his motives, was pushing the Indians to set up joint ventures in the Central Asian republics. And there are reports that the Indian government is developing an airport at Novorossiysk in order to ensure the penetration of Indian goods.

Whether such a proposal will yield any economic benefit for anyone, Iran is keen to act as the middleman in transporting Indian goods to Central Asia through Turkmenistan, and vice versa. The memorandum of understanding reflects the shared aspirations of all three nations to improve trade and economic interaction. It provides for the international carriage of goods by rail and roadways from Central Asia to India through Iran. The proposed arrangement envisages the use of the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas by Indian businessmen. A 140-kilometer rail stretch between Mashhad and Sarakhs in northeastern Iran, expected to be completed by next March, will provide a direct rail link. In addition, Turkmenistan, which is under Iran's political influence because of its geographical proximity and historical ties, has invited India to participate in 32 major projects. Turkmenistan, which is now laying the pipelines to supply gas to Pakistan, has reportedly told New Delhi that it would like to extend the pipelines to supply gas to India as well.

An Indian defense analyst reported that during Rafsanjani's visit, India offered to help the Iranian Navy prepare its Kilo-class submarines for a role in international waters. The offer is not expected to go down well with the Americans, some observers believe. Although India is not selling any weapons system, Washington is afraid that the subs will be used by Iran to threaten the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which almost 40% of the world's oil supplies pass.