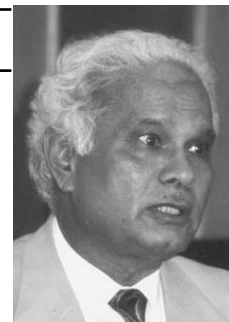


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## Interview: Devendra Kaushik

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# India to take an active interest in the Central Asian region



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**EIR:** Professor Kaushik, you just sponsored a very important conference in New Delhi, on India's relations to Central Asia. Can you say a few words about that event [see *EIR*, Aug. 20, p. 66, and p. 50, this issue]?

**Kaushik:** That conference, on July 28-29, was to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the birth of the late Academician Babayan Gafurov, the former Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. He did a lot to strengthen [the Soviet Union's] cultural and academic relations with India, and he was the first Asian [from Tajikistan] to become the director of the prestigious Oriental Institute, which is now 200 years old.

At the same time, the conference provided the occasion to assess the processes that are going on, currently, in Central Asia. At the conference were scholars from Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. We had also invited representatives from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; they could not make it at the last moment, but they sent their papers. There were also three scholars from China, including Prof. Yang Shu of Lanzhou University, who told us about the growing interest in China about Central Asia; from Russia, including the current Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies; and from India. In all, there were 17 foreign participants, including one from the Schiller Institute in Germany and a member of parliament from Armenia.

The Prime Minister of India, Sri Atal Behari Vajpayee, inaugurated the conference. The Prime Minister and the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. M.M. Joshi, presided over the inaugural session. The Prime Minister stayed for another half an hour, to chat with conference participants. I think the Prime Minister was highly satisfied with this conference, and was particularly happy that the scholars from China took part in it.

I think that the conference also succeeded in projecting the priority which Central Asia is acquiring in India's foreign

policy. All these years, we have been preparing for this, and some solid foundations have been laid. Though we started late, we have taken steps to make up for the delay. India is now going to take an active interest in the developments in the Central Asia region, which the Prime Minister very rightly described as "one geo-cultural space."

This is a concept which is quite different from geopolitics. India is not pursuing some geopolitical goals, as the West is. We would rather stress the geo-cultural unity of this Eurasian/Central Asian region. The players here, traditionally, are Russia, India, and China, which have been interacting in the area of the Central Asian republics over many centuries: Russia, from the north; India, from the south; China, from the east. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics have stepped into the international arena, as independent actors. And, they don't need outside powers to fill in some geopolitical "vacuum."

Historically, we Indians have had close geo-cultural ties with this area, ties that are symbolized by the Dushan state, during the first and second century A.D. The Dushan state included northwest India, present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, Xinjiang [province in China], and large parts of the present-day Central Asian republics up to the borders of Iran. The historical links across this geo-cultural area later became known as the "Silk Routes."

**EIR:** We would like to get into a discussion about some of the politics of the Silk Routes, but first: While the conference in New Delhi was going on, world attention was drawn to Kashmir, the so-called Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan. This is something that people don't quite understand in Europe and the United States, because it seemed like Indian-Pakistani relations were improving, with the February visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee to Lahore, the "bus diplomacy." Could you explain the situation in Kashmir, what you see it leading to, and some of the background to it?

**Kaushik:** It is really very unfortunate, that India and Pakistan should have come to a state of undeclared war, which was fought for several weeks. Our Prime Minister, as you know, had taken personal pains to ride a bus to Lahore; and this had really greatly improved the climate between our two countries.

But, Pakistan, as it is, has become a very complicated

country, particularly in the wake of the situation in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. Pakistan has very much been affected by the spill-over from Afghanistan of the “Kalashnikov culture” and the drug culture. Pakistan has pursued a very wrong policy of trying to create a strategic lever in Central Asia, to be used against India. Pakistan has been actively engaged in aiding and abetting the mujahideen in Afghanistan, who now — as have the Taliban — have acquired a very serious nuisance value of their own. It is becoming increasingly difficult for Pakistan to control these elements; they are no longer in need of financial support from Pakistan, nor do they need any arms supply from Pakistan. They are becoming a problem for Pakistan. Worse, the Pakistani Army has apparently acquired some vested interest in the narcotics and the arms trade. The government of Pakistan, according to many analysts, is a hostage in the hands of the Army.

This is one of the reasons that the “bus diplomacy” got wrecked. Our Prime Minister had wanted to improve the climate of relationship between our two countries, which might have helped in the long run to resolve the outstanding issue of Kashmir. The Pakistani aggression in Kargil amounted to a betrayal of the trust we had posed in the Pakistani leadership. While we were busy making new efforts to improve the climate of friendship between the two countries, they were planning to infiltrate our territory, by crossing the Line of Control in Kashmir, in violation of the Shimla Agreement — that the Line of Control will be respected as sacrosanct by Pakistan.

**EIR:** The Line of Control being what exactly?

**Kaushik:** The line marking the advance of Indian troops in Kashmir when the 1971 India-Pakistan War ended. That was made the Line of Actual Control in the 1972 Shimla Agreement between Indira Gandhi and then-Prime Minister [Zulfiqar Ali] Bhutto. Later on, the line of control was drawn very exactly on maps, and the military commanders of both sides signed the maps. So, both sides were treaty-bound to respect the line of control.

In violation of that, Pakistani forces entered some 15 kilometers deep into our territory, in the high mountain area around Kargil. It is extremely difficult to keep control of this territory. In the winter, our troops patrolling these areas were withdrawn. Taking advantage of this, Pakistani forces infiltrated our territory and positioned themselves and large amounts of supplies in the bunkers, which were manned by our troops during summertime. So, when the snow began to melt this year, and our soldiers moved back to the Line of Control, they found the Pakistanis, who fired on them. They were regular soldiers of the Pakistani Army; they were not in uniform, but several of them were killed and their identification papers were discovered, which showed that they were officers and soldiers of the Pakistani Army. There were also mercenaries, Afghan mujahideen, and other so-called Islamic mercenaries.

Pakistan tried to wash its hands of responsibility, saying

that the infiltrators were Kashmiri “freedom fighters.” The Pakistani line was: “What can we do, if you try to suppress the will for freedom of the Kashmiri people, and try to deprive them of the right to national self-determination? So, they are taking up arms, and we have nothing to do with it.” But then, it became impossible for them to convince the world at large, that they were not behind it. The evidence was too obvious: the identification papers, the intercepted signals, the sophisticated arms. That all proved that the fighting in the Kargil region was carried out by regulars of the Pakistani Army, by light infantry units.

**EIR:** How do you see the Kargil conflict in the broader strategic context? There are efforts for more Eurasian cooperation, but there are also international forces that are very much opposed to this kind of cooperation. The Kashmir situation erupted, just when the Kosovo war was raging.

**Kaushik:** For the moment the mood in India is one of gratitude to NATO countries, the United States and Britain, because they have supported diplomatically our position in Kargil, and they strongly pressed Pakistan to withdraw behind the Line of Control. But, I feel that things are not what they appear to be at first glance.

Looking at the strategic picture in its totality, the Balkans war and NATO’s thrust toward the Caucasus and Central Asia, I won’t be surprised if the military in Pakistan and, in particular, the military intelligence service, ISI, which is known for its strong links with America and Britain, were acting in some form of coordination with Western interests. At least, there seemed to have been some knowledge of, and maybe some promotion of, the Pakistani designs.

Look at the Caucasus, where Georgian President [Eduard] Shevardnadze wants NATO peacekeepers deployed in Abkhazia, or Azerbaijan, which also demands that NATO forces be deployed there. So, maybe these military and ISI circles in Pakistan wanted to create a situation, in and around Kashmir, to justify some sort of international arbitration or some kind of international peacekeeping.

For the present, perhaps Pakistan is being restrained by the United States. Currently, Sino-U.S. relations are estranged, through the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, the North Korean missile issue, the Taiwan question, and the alleged nuclear espionage. So, Washington might be thinking to keep India in good spirits for the time being. But, one has to remain careful on what the ultimate intentions are. I think that there is a definite interest in destabilizing all the great powers, or potentially great powers, which might some day form an entente, resisting plans for military domination of the world. And, as the international financial crisis deepens, I see a clear trend to use NATO as the muscle, bringing military pressure on countries which are not willing to toe the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the financial oligarchy line. Look at how Britain is pushing this internationalization of NATO. I fear that NATO is becoming the military instru-

ment of the finance oligarchy, which is getting more and more desperate in view of the looming collapse of the international financial system.

This was discussed on the second day of our conference. There was much support for the assessment that there is a common threat to the security and stability of India, Russia, and China. The presentation by [Schiller Institute representative] Michael Liebig, on "NATO, the Emerging Eurasian Triangle and the Caucasus/Central Asia Region," evoked great interest and a positive response from the participants.

The second day session of our conference was addressed by Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Dr. Faruk Abdullah, who didn't mince words to decry the security threat, caused by forces of religious extremism and cross-border terrorism, brought up in the "nursery" of Afghanistan, with the direct assistance of outside powers. Dr. Abdullah made it very clear that today it might be India which happens to be at the receiving end, but China will not be far behind. He told conference participants that Indian authorities in Kashmir have arrested a number of Islamic terrorists, who in the process of interrogation revealed that dozens of military training camps are being operated in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And that, in these camps, young terrorist recruits from China, the Chinese province of Xinjiang, as well as from all the Central Asian republics, are being trained.

I think that recent events in Dagestan and Chechnya are proving this. Look at these Wahhabites, coming from Saudi Arabia. There are forces in the West which may, at times, for public consumption, deliver threats to the Islamic terrorist leader [Osama] bin Laden and demand his extradition from Afghanistan, but they are not reluctant to use these very forces when it suits them.

**EIR:** Could you say a few words about the potentials for cooperation between China, Russia, and India?

**Kaushik:** I think that there is a realization, even though slow, among influential circles in these three countries, that they face a common threat to their territorial integrity and their independence. They face destabilization attempts, which are fuelled by external forces. That realization is still to be strengthened; I think that mutual relations are still rather weak. As far as the Chinese are concerned, I think that they seem to be aware of these common security threats, as we have seen in their attitude toward the Kargil conflict. China insisted on a bilateral solution to the Kashmir problem; they did not lend any support to Pakistan, with which they have very warm relations of traditional friendship. They disappointed the Pakistani Prime Minister, who had gone to Beijing in search of support, but who had to cut short his visit and come back in just two days. So, there are some positive signals that the Chinese are distancing themselves from these Pakistan adventures. It is a good sign, but much more needs to be done to build up confidence between India and China.

There is no such lack of confidence between India and

Russia, but Russia at present is really economically weak and politically disoriented, which has obvious consequences for the efficiency of Russia's military forces. I think that the coordination between India and Russia in monitoring the activities of the forces of destabilization in Central Asia is developing quite successfully, particularly in Tajikistan. The same is not yet true in the case of China, although some positive developments have taken place of late. In his presentation, Prof. Ma Jiali from Beijing indicated that China would be willing to react positively to a suggestion made by India to share intelligence about the activities of religious extremists and cross-border terrorism. The Chinese participants recognized that Islamic fundamentalism is a threat to the stability of Central Asia. They admitted the existence of this threat to their part of Central Asia, while saying that it was not of a really big magnitude.

**EIR:** India is now leading up to national elections. Could you say a few words about what can be expected?

**Kaushik:** Elections will be held between the middle of September and the first week of October, the vote counting will begin Oct. 6. The election campaign has already started, and the political forces are busy making alignments. I think that the chances of Vajpayee and the National Democratic Alliance, with the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] at the center of it, are quite bright. The opposition is divided; the Congress Party is split. The National Congress, as it is called, is a big challenge to the Congress Party, led by Sonia Gandhi, in some of the states, particularly Maharashtra. The Janata Dal party is also badly split. I believe that Vajpayee's authority is recognized by the majority of Indian voters and this will determine the result of the elections.

**EIR:** You mentioned earlier that sponsorship of the Taliban and other extremists by elements in Pakistan has now become a problem for Pakistan itself. Is there a view in India that Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is himself hostage to these forces, that he does not control?

**Kaushik:** It is very difficult for us to judge. Our leaders would like to believe that the Pakistani Prime Minister was not part of this dreadful move in Kashmir. But, it is becoming clearer by the day that it could not have happened without his knowledge.

Pakistan, I would like you to understand, is a creation of the British, and it has remained a loyal, trusted ally of the British. The Pakistani military has for a long time been under the effective control of what you call the British-American-Commonwealth power group. Pakistan has been used against India, against Russia, and it might be used against China. The sooner the Chinese understand that, the better. Kashmir is close to Xinjiang and Tibet. If the forces of religious extremism and cross-border terrorism managed to entrench themselves in Kashmir, it would be just like a pistol being pointed to the head of China, in Tibet and Xinjiang.