

Rao's meeting with Clinton opens door to U.S.-India collaboration

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Despite the best efforts of the U.S. State Department's India-baiters and some pro-British elements in the Indian political system over the last few months, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's meeting with President Bill Clinton has helped to clear up at least part of the misunderstanding between the world's two largest democracies. However, the ferocity of the opposition prior to the meeting indicates that both Prime Minister Rao and President Clinton would do well to build upon the meeting quickly and use the relationship to counter the forces seeking violence and chaos.

The May 19 summit between the two leaders has been highlighted so far in the Indian media for what did *not* happen, and little emphasis has been given to the positive outcome of the meeting. It was a matter of great relief to some in India that President Clinton did not threaten India with economic sanctions for failure to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) document. It was also noted in New Delhi that the President had little new to say on the complex Kashmir issue other than reiterating that it should be resolved by India and Pakistan bilaterally. There is also no indication that President Clinton said anything particularly specific, or disturbing, vis-à-vis India's missile technology development.

In fact, what did *not* happen was best described by Prime Minister Rao himself at the press conference addressed by the two heads of state following their meeting. When a newsman asked whether President Clinton had put any pressure on him on various issues over which there exists a distinct difference of point of view, Prime Minister Rao said, "My arm is absolutely intact. The President did not even touch it."

Rumor mills against the meeting

As soon as the formal invitation to Prime Minister Rao to visit Washington was extended by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, a personal friend of President Clinton, the rumor mills in India and the United States began churning out "source reports" pointing toward a hostile confrontation between the two leaders. Every difference that exists between the two nations was highlighted and blown up. Opinion polls were conducted asking people what position Prime Minister Rao should take when President Clinton demands that India sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, dismantle the

space program, and when he takes a pro-Pakistan position on Kashmir. The media were bombarded with articles spreading fear that India is on the way to signing the NPT or facing economic sanctions. A number of legislators, influenced by the campaign by the pro-British elements within the Indian bureaucracy and political layers, demanded postponement of the meeting. It is evident that the months-long anti-Clinton campaign carried out by the British media under the tutelage of the Hollinger Corp. and geopoliticians of the British kind had recruited a number of influential officials and fellow-travelers along the way.

The first sign that active efforts were being made to sabotage the meeting surfaced in April around the time that Indian officials held a round of talks with their American counterparts, ostensibly on the nuclear proliferation issue in London. There were indications that some individuals in the Indian External Affairs Ministry were involved in leaking the "secrets" of the London talks, apparently to embarrass the Rao administration and plant the idea that Prime Minister Rao was in the process of making a deal with the Americans on the nuclear issue behind the population's back. Concerned Indian scientists rightly came out with statements that any compromise on the nuclear and space programs would be suicidal for India in the long run. In the External Affairs Ministry, where a "dog-eat-dog" situation has existed for years, the Joint Secretary ranking officer in charge of the American desk was divested of his responsibilities on April 12.

In addition, one intelligence-linked correspondent, writing for a major English news daily, had gone to the extent of saying that the leader of the Indian delegation at the London talks, N. Krishnan, former ambassador to the United Nations and a bureaucrat of high integrity, was picked by Prime Minister Rao himself with little input from the Ministry of External Affairs. It has also been said that Krishnan was picked because of the former U.N. ambassador's flexible attitude concerning the signing of the NPT, an accusation which is highly biased.

Blast from Washington

While the fissiparous forces in New Delhi were actively trying to sabotage the talks, they were ably backed by the

same crowd based in Washington. First, a debate raged about the outcome of the London talks. Unnamed officials in Washington claimed that India had earlier agreed to multilateral talks, as proposed by Secretary Talbott, to de-nuclearize the South Asian region, but that New Delhi had backed out during the London talks. New Delhi, of course, denied any agreement to the multilateral talks at any point in time.

If the NPT and missile programs were the main targets of the Clinton administration, media reports from Washington indicated that there are other weapons available to hurt India. When U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor urged India to complete its legislative process for copyright protection and follow through with effective implementation, the line went out that the U.S. Super 301 trade law would be used by President Clinton to browbeat the Indian prime minister during the summit. Little attention was paid to the clause that India, in fact, had been given an additional two months before being nominated as a "priority foreign country" in violation of intellectual property rights.

The last attempt to step up the tension was created well after Prime Minister Rao had landed in the United States. The media splashed on their front pages the statement of Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and the designated U.S. Ambassador to New Delhi Frank Wisner, who testified before a Senate subcommittee that the Clinton administration has no intention of promoting India's candidacy for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council and, instead, Washington would promote the candidacy of Japan and Germany. The statement was put in the light of the Clinton administration's allegedly deliberate attempt to slight India while the Indian prime minister is in Washington.

The positive signs

Although the meeting between Prime Minister Rao and President Clinton will help to clear up a lot of mistrust, it apparently did not meet with approval from one and all. For instance, Prime Minister Rao's speech before the joint session of the U.S. Congress, where the Indian prime minister urged better U.S.-India relations, was blacked out by the American media. One Washington paper carried a 50-word item on page three, while others didn't even mention it. In the electronic media, while Cable News Network covered it, neither ABC, CBS, nor NBC covered this significant event.

The wire service report which the Washington paper carried also said that the State Department, in its annual report on human rights, had criticized India, but did not mention the fact that John Shattuck, the assistant secretary for human rights who prepared the report, had praised India's measures taken to improve human rights and called its record in this respect "inspiring."

While these gestures are indicative of the hostilities borne by the cold warriors and pro-British geopoliticians against better Indo-U.S. relations, it is worthwhile to note what Pres-

ident Clinton said in the joint press conference. There is no question that President Clinton has no intention of making an "India tilt," but, at the same time, he is certainly ready to put India-U.S. relations in the right perspective. He made this clear when he said that he had been disturbed by the apparent strain or limitation on the relationship between the United States and India as reported in the press "not only here but in your country. . . . We have a very great stake, it seems to me, at the end of the Cold War, in having not only a friendly relationship but also a constructive and an operating relationship."

For New Delhi, this is a message that cannot be ignored. Prime Minister Rao's trip to Washington and his meeting with Clinton will not bring India major "victories" in the areas of its differences with the United States, but it clearly indicated an opening to work together in a time of extreme difficulty and danger.

Around India, the region is heavily strained, to the point of breaking. Russia, a longtime friend of India, is in complete disarray, with its economy torn to bits but its nuclear arsenal still intact. Meanwhile, the anger of the famished Russians is becoming focused against the West, which has so far treated the new-found freedom of the Russians as an opportunity to degrade and bankrupt them.

Not far from the southwest of India, near the African land mass, a new nation has emerged in Gaza-Jericho following years of domination by Israel and manipulation by the forces tied intellectually to the colonial masters in London. It is an opportunity to stabilize the situation in that part of the world and defeat the colonial interests. It is also a responsibility that India acquires because of its long association and promotion of the Palestinian cause. A friendly Washington, a vital requirement, will help India to meet this responsibility.

A similar situation has also emerged in South Africa, where the Father of Modern India, Mahatma Gandhi, lit the light of individual freedom in every black citizen's mind in the early part of this century. Almost eight decades later, after many deaths and much suffering, the opportunity has finally arrived to build South Africa for one and all and use it as the beacon of hope for the rest of Africa—a continent which has suffered more than any other and deserves attention more than any other continent. India, too, has a responsibility handed over to it by Gandhi, and this responsibility cannot be denied.

These are some of the tasks lying before India and the rest of the world. If the two largest democracies, of which both Prime Minister Rao and President Clinton spoke eloquently, can initiate a process to carry out these major responsibilities, the geopolitical and colonial forces can be pushed back, however temporarily. On the other hand, if the Rao-Clinton summit cannot be converted into collaboration for the sake of a greater good, few positive results will come out of it and the real victors will be those who seem to have suffered a set-back at this point.