



Fencing is part of the deal

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To the satisfaction of some, and to the frustration and annoyance of others the controversial fence along the LoC is almost complete. Most people don't fully understand the impact it will have on the ongoing struggle and future of the Held Kashmir.

Many think this fence is similar to the wall Israel is building on the West Bank, as the rationale behind both is to stop 'infiltration'. Both countries think that by erecting these obstacles they will be able to solve the problem that they couldn't tackle militarily. But they fail to understand that political disputes cannot be resolved by the use of gun or by erecting walls.

As for the LoC fencing, India, for many years, tried to erect it, but failed to do so due to continued shelling across the Line of Control. India was desperate about a fence as its counter-terrorism experts believed that the only way to stop militancy is to deprive it of its support from across the border. Their belief was that if 'infiltration' from across the border could somehow be stopped, then it would be only a matter of time when a large Indian force deployed in Kashmir will be able to root out militancy.

This view was shared by many in the West, as well as by some in the power circles of Islamabad who were eager to take such measures so as to, at least, curtail the militancy in order

people, paid some lip service and issued some statements. At one stage Pakistani government officials at the highest level said that we cannot do anything because India is building this fence five miles inside the territory under its control: thus implying that India has a free hand to do anything on that side of the LOC even though the whole State is disputed.

But this policy was soon reversed on the issue of Bagliar Dam, and Pakistani officials wasted no time and went across to hold meetings with the Indian officials to resolve the matter. This clearly shows that Pakistani government had worries about the flow of water reaching its territory even though Bagliar Dam was built more than 'five miles' inside the Kashmiri territory controlled by India.

As there was an understanding over the issue of fencing, Pakistani government under disguise of ceasefire, indirectly helped the Indian government to build this fence, and made no attempt to stop it. Cease-fire was declared on LOC and on Siachin where, as a result of cross border firing, there were casualties of both Pakistani and Indian soldiers. This saved lives of soldiers of both the countries, and also helped to build the fence.

It is ironic that since 1989 a whole generation of Kashmiri people have lost their lives, and it was they who urgently needed some relief in the

to establish friendly relationship between Pakistan and India.

Peace and harmony in South Asia was not only the need of India and that of the international community, multi-nationals and transnational corporations, but of Pakistan as well. The Government of Pakistan under strong leadership of General Musharraf took some tough decisions which no civilian government could have dared. Many in Pakistan said that after dumping 'their own boys' in Afghanistan, the military regime, under international pressure, worked out a plan to 'dump' Kashmiris.

The people of Kashmir, barring those who are always willing to dance on the tune played by Islamabad, felt that Pakistan has once again betrayed them. At one time an overwhelming majority of Kashmiris wanted to accede to Pakistan, but our wrong policies, especially in the past decade, has turned that majority into a small minority.

With that background, where internal and external pressures were simultaneously working against both the governments, it was decided to jump-start the peace process, and Vajpayee Sahib and Musharraf Sahib can claim credit for taking difficult decisions to get the ball of peace process rolling.

The peace process and what is to follow could not be successful if people continued to cross the LOC and to embitter the relationship between the two countries, hence create instability in Kashmir and in South Asia, and endanger the economic and strategic plans which have their roots outside the boundary of this volatile region.

So it was imperative that something had to be done, and fencing was perceived as one solution which will surely stop 'infiltration', and it will also strengthen the position of the Indian army in Kashmir.

Those who cross the LOC, whether they are Kashmiris or non-Kashmiris and whether they have the right to cross it or not, do it with some help and support of Pakistani army, which has complete control of borders on the other side; and this fact is now increasingly acknowledged by many Pakistani writers and leaders. So if Pakistani government is determined, as is the Indian government, to stop 'infiltration', then there is very little chance of anyone crossing the LOC in the presence of two large armies guarding the borders from both sides.

And if anyone, somehow, manages to hoodwink both armies and crosses the LOC, he will be hunted down within that five mile area which separates the LOC and the fence; as it is virtually impossible to cross this fence which is high and wide, and has electric current running through watch-towers, and is controlled and monitored by satellite.

Some critics believe that it is as a result of this tacit understanding that the government of Pakistan neither made a formal complaint to India, nor raised the issue at any international forum. However the government of Pakistan, in order to satisfy

form of some kind of cease-fire, but it was not even considered. Both governments have taken many confidence building measures and I wholeheartedly support them; but, in my view, it was more appropriate to declare cease-fire in Kashmir as well and to have presented it as a package, so that the people of Kashmir too could have got some relief and confidence in this peace process.

It appears to Kashmiris that the lives of Pakistani and Indian soldiers and the issue of water is more important than the lives and difficulties of the Kashmiri people. I discussed the issues related to the fence and ceasefire with one Pakistani official and complained why Pakistan did not take this issue to the international level.

His point of view was that it is just a waste of time as India does not pay any attention to any international treaties, and gave example of the UN resolutions on Kashmir. I explained to him that Pakistan is also partly responsible for the fate of resolutions on Kashmir. I further said that we all know Israel's record is second to none when it comes to violations of human rights and total disregard of dozens of UN resolutions, and yet the case of Israeli wall was taken to the ICJ, and appropriately declared as illegal. If Pakistani government had not given a tacit agreement then they could have taken this case to the ICJ as it is clearly a violation of international law and UN resolutions on Kashmir.

This official, though a senior person, but his knowledge on the subject was very limited, and he said, "Shabir Sahib, apart from the fence Pakistan has many other problems, and we have to look after the Pakistani interest". He soon turned his guns against me and started talking about divisions among the ranks of Kashmiris, and asserted that it is because of these divisions the fence was erected and Kashmir is still divided.

I acknowledged divisions in the ranks of the Kashmiri leaders and said that these divisions are created by our occupiers. Their territorial aims could only be satisfied if Kashmiri leaders and the State remain divided. I further said that the fence is part of the deal which they have on Kashmir. In future this will become a de-facto border between both the countries, as no one will be able to cross this fence. Perhaps both will set up certain checkpoints for the purpose of visits and trade, annex certain parts of the State, and give some kind of autonomy to the remaining parts of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Even before I finish my 'sermon' on Kashmir dispute which I claim to know fairly well, I realise that I have annoyed another Pakistani official; and, soon he will report back that Shabir Choudhry is 'anti Pakistan' just because I have dared to criticise Pakistani policy on Kashmir. Unfortunately, these officials fail to see the difference between the state and government, and criticism on government is construed as 'an attack on the integrity of the State'.