

The delicate negotiations currently taking place between the three concerned parties, namely, Pakistan, India and the Kashmiri leadership, are moving forward, although at an understandably slow pace. Looking back at the past history of three wars, the dismemberment of Pakistan and many other insurmountable domestic pressures faced by each country, as well as global power politics of a strategic nature, it should not be difficult to realize how and why the Kashmir issue was virtually frozen and put on the back burner after Tashkent and the Simla Accords. The status quo at the Line of Control persisted throughout the Afghan Jihad till the Zia regime came to an end. During the decade of the 1990s, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif did open up the peace process, which ended unceremoniously at Kargil.

After the abortive attempt to melt the ice at Agra, President Musharraf left no stone unturned to open a window of negotiation with India for normalizing relations with the neighbouring country. The tide of history in South Asia has taken a turn in favour of reconciliation. It was this conviction, which prompted Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee and President Musharraf to initiate the ongoing peace process between India and Pakistan in January 2004 at the sidelines of the SAARC Summit at Islamabad. The problem that has defied a solu-

Profiles in politics

Kashmir's future

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tion during the past 57 years cannot be resolved by waving a magic wand. The wounds of the past three wars shall take time to heal. Mutual trust and credibility of commitments have been shattered. Neither side trusts the word of the other. Confidence building measures are therefore the need of the hour.

The third party to the dispute, namely, the people of Kashmir, represented by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, are stated to have worked out three different road maps for the peaceful settlement of the issue. They are keeping their suggested three options close to their chests. Recently major developments have taken place in the Hurriyat Camp singling patching up of their differences and unifying their stance so as to speak with one voice, enabling them to act as a major player to achieve their strategic goal, side by side with India and Pakistan. This is reflected in the press conference at Srinagar on Thursday addressed by Hurriyat Acting Chairman Mir Waiz Umer Farooq. He made the following pertinent points.-

- * Hurriyat is ready for a composite dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue in accordance with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people.
- * To this end Hurriyat leadership seeks the help and cooperation of the other two involved parties, namely India and Pakistan.
- * It is the considered view of Hurriyat leadership that the Kashmir issue can only come to a satisfactory conclusion by all three parties sitting round the table and show the required statesmanship to resolve it by adopting an open and flexible approach.
- * Hurriyat leadership is ready to take all steps in this direction and will be happy to meet the Prime Minister of Pakistan in New Delhi to

demonstrate our resolve

- * The Kashmiri leadership feels that time has come for initiating a new chapter in the history of the state of Jammu and Kashmir

Similar hopes have been repeatedly expressed by the President of Pakistan, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the President of the ruling Muslim League party, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, towards the success of the ongoing peace process paving the way for the ultimate solution of the Kashmir issue, to the satisfaction of the Kashmiri people and of course having the endorsement of Islamabad and New Delhi. To that end, Pakistan has been bending all its energies and showing unmatched one sided flexibility without any reciprocal response from India.

The recent ideas floated by the President of Pakistan on October 25 was a step in the direction of initiating a debate on the issue in both countries. The Indian response to the above was surprisingly negative, in spite of the fact that certain political circles and important newspaper editors and col-

umn writers welcomed the Musharraf proposals as a starting point for discussing various options emerging from different quarters.

The Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has chosen to send negative signals that could create a deadlock in the peace process at the crucial point of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's visit to New Delhi next week. President Musharraf is backed by the entire nation in expressing his disenchantment during his latest exclusive interview to AFP.

The national feeling in Pakistan to the latest signals from New Delhi can be summed up as 'enough is enough'. There will be no unilateral offer of any more flexibility from Islamabad. If India continues to adhere to the latest policy statement on Kashmir by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the only option left to Pakistan will be adherence to its principled stand of Security Council resolutions demanding a plebiscite, in accordance with the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir. The Pakistani leadership inside and outside the Parliament has come to a crucial crossroads whether to rush towards a solution of Kashmir under a variety of pressures or wait for destiny to take its own course in a well perceived time and space framework. It is a difficult choice and a calculated risk has to be taken only with national consensus.

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