

Kathmandu moot on Kashmir

Dawn
16/12/04 By Ahmed Sadik *Kash*

A CONFERENCE on the Kashmir issue has just concluded in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu. Pugwash, an American-based think tank, initiated the conference which was attended by all Kashmiri political groups from both sides of the Line of Control.

It was indeed a commendable effort on the part of Pugwash to provide a forum for the leaderships of various factions to evolve a common ground and a common Kashmiri position as an alternative to the Indian and Pakistani positions on Kashmir.

On whose initiative did this conference come about? The simple answer is that it was inspired by the Americans. But there's more to it. The Kashmiri groups based in the United States have played a part. They have always been disenchanting by the Indians, and in the current situation, find themselves equally disenchanted with Pakistan. They say that there is no democracy in Pakistan and ask what chance would Kashmiris have in a Pakistani federation.

The Indian caucus in the United States is quite wealthy and enjoys influence in Congress and the White House to trigger such a move. The Pakistani lobby (if it can be called so) in America has still not quite recovered from the horrendous spillover effects of the 9/11 specially with respect of Muslims residing in America. But primarily, the emergence of Pugwash is the shape of things to come as and when Condoleezza Rice formally takes over as the next secretary of state.

As a consequence of the slow progress of the composite dialogue on Kashmir between India and Pakistan the world powers that matter have, under the lead-

constructed and which is one of our major sources of hydroelectric power in this country under the Indus Waters Treaty.

Thirdly, it provides us with a most feasible site for locating the future Bhasha dam in the Diamer district of the Northern Areas adjacent to its district headquarters town by the name of Chilas. Fourthly, and what is indeed the greatest plus in favour of our holding on to the AJK and the Northern Areas, is the fact that it provides us the land/road connection with the People's Republic of China that makes it possible for us to conduct even the semblance of an independent foreign policy in the region that we are situated in.

And finally, the AJK and the Northern Areas provide us with a buffer in Indian-occupied Kashmir, preventing the Indians from having land access to the North West Frontier Province and thereby to Afghanistan.

So the moral of the story is that, come what may, Pakistan's vital interests are infinitely intertwined with the AJK and the Northern Areas under any circumstances. There is indeed no room for doing any bargaining here. In keeping with the principles of the 1947 partition plan of India, the areas in Indian-occupied Kashmir to which we can stake a rightful moral and political claim are the entire Kashmir Valley and that part of Jammu that lies west of the Chenab river.

But now, a little more about Pugwash. It is a think tank and describes itself as the Pugwash Conferences to bring together from all over the world scholars and public figures who are concerned with reducing the danger of armed conflict and seeking cooperative solutions to global problems.

Meeting in private as individuals rather than as representa-

ership of the United States, thought of this new stratagem that may either spur the two countries to hastily arrive at a settlement on an "as-is where-is basis" i.e. demarcating the borders at the Line of Control, or lead Kashmir up the garden path to become another client state on the payroll of the United States.

As everybody knows, the formalization of the LoC came about as a consequence of the Shimla Agreement of 1972, at a time when Pakistan having lost its eastern province had no option but to accept what was offered. What Mr Bhutto was barely able to extract was the LoC in Kashmir, the release of 90,000 Pakistani POWs and the areas of Punjab and Sindh that had fallen under Indian occupation during the 1971 war.

This, in effect, gave us relative peace for nearly three decades until we messed up once again in 1999 as a consequence of our Himalayan blunder described as the Kargil war. To be realistic an unelected government at that point of time in 1972 was most unlikely to get that much out of a victorious India.

So with the Pugwash process in motion, what is the prognosis for Pakistan in the ongoing Kashmir dispute? Is it not to accept "the unacceptable LoC" as the official boundary line in Kashmir which it already is in a "de facto" sense? If not, then what is the other alternative?

The way Kashmiri opinion is running at present even Azad Kashmir is no longer "the sort of captive audience" we have had for Pakistan since 1947. But the next question that arises is as to what are the advantages, if any, of holding on to the LoC?

The LoC runs through all the component sub-territories that constitute the disputed state of Kashmir i.e. through the Kashmir valley, through Jammu and through the Northern Areas.

And what is the net strategic worth of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the Northern Areas to Pakistan? Firstly, these territories prima facie as well as geographically are Pakistan's toehold inside the state and has helped us maintain the disputed status of the territory for the last 57 years. Secondly, it has provided us with the site on which the Mangla dam at old Mirpur was

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tives of governments or institutions, Pugwash participants exchange views and explore alternate approaches to arms control and tension reduction with a combination of candour, continuity and flexibility seldom attained in official discussions and negotiations.

The Pugwash Conferences draw their name from the location of the first meeting which took place in 1957 in the village of Pugwash, Nova Scotia, the birthplace of the American philanthropist Cyrus Eaton who hosted the meeting. The stimulus for that gathering was a manifesto issued in 1955 by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein and several other intellectuals and scientists of world class. A basic rule for Pugwash Conferences is that participation is always by individuals in their private capacity.

If Pugwash can help India and Pakistan overcome the Kashmir impasse it will have succeeded where the United Nations and the big powers have miserably failed. And if this were to actually materialize in the aftermath of the Kathmandu talks, it may well add the new word of "pugwashing" to the English language dictionary as indicative of the process of resolving international disputes. What makes it more interesting is that a leading Indian agricultural scientist, Mr. M.S. Swaminathan, who hails from southern India, is currently the president of Pugwash.