

I recall the talk I had with Jinnah in 1946 when he addressed the Law College at Lahore. I was then in the final year. I asked him what would happen in the subcontinent after the departure of the British because the hatred between Hindus and Muslims had reached a boiling point. He said: Some nations have killed millions of each other's and yet an enemy of today is a friend of tomorrow. That is history. Look at France and Germany which have fought each other for hundreds of years.

I wish that had come true in the subcontinent. We have fought three and a half wars and killed thousands. Retired military officers who came here and some of ours who went there were then in the forefront. The problem between the two countries has got more aggravated over the years. What was once a Hindu-Muslim hiatus has now become the confrontation between India and Pakistan which are laced with nuclear missiles. Partition has failed to solve the basic problem of communal bias.

I see the same fires of prejudice burning in the two countries. Misinformation, misunderstanding or misinterpretation of religion is grist to the hatred mill which is working all the time. Fundamentalists on both sides are set against communal harmony. The common man wants to bury the hatchet while keeping his identity intact. But fundamentalists on either side sabotage even the most altruistic initiative to span the distance between the two.

It is strange that the Pakistan government should want to take credit for its campaign against prejudice when the history it teaches in schools and colleges is partisan and begins with the advent of Muslim rule in India. What about the civilization of Moenjodaro and Taxila? They do not figure anywhere because they are related to Hinduism and Buddhism. This is how bias is sown.

Revising history books should be one step to judge how serious President General Pervez Musharraf is about fostering secularism, Jinnah's legacy.

People-to-people contact has busted the walls of prejudice and suspicion to some extent — only to some extent. Religious parties wield great influence and they run state governments in the North West Frontier Province exclusively and in Baluchistan with the support of Musharraf. Even other-

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sued secularism. The result is that ideologically the two countries stand poles apart. Musharraf says he is fighting fundamentalists. But he is also seeking their assistance for political purposes. His other problem is the jihadi elements in the military.

In truth, fundamentalists in both the countries are vitiating the atmosphere and stoking the fires of prejudice. The eruption in India is met with eruption in Pakistan. The demolition of Babri masjid is one example. What happened in its wake in Pakistan was equally vindictive when practically all the Hindu temples were damaged in retaliation.

Relations between New Delhi and Islamabad will not improve until fundamentalists are out of the reckoning. If Kashmir is the be-all-end-all for Pakistan, it can be solved only up to the point which has the support of the BJP.

True, former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee deserves all the credit for having set the ball rolling in January this year.

Yet how far he would have conceded to Pakistan would never be known. The Manmohan Singh government, I am sure, must be keeping the BJP in the picture behind the scenes. But the stage of assessing how far it is willing to concede on Kashmir is yet to come. What people on both sides should meanwhile do is to deepen contacts at every level so as to make it difficult for the governments to impose restrictions even when they want to.

People should not be dependent on their whims. In fact, they should be debating the South Asian economic zone, from Afghanistan to Myanmar, to push relations beyond nationalities, borders and religions. It is a pity that the persons who rule the region are pygmies, not visionaries.

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Letter from New Delhi

A shortsighted

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vision Kashmir

By Kuldip Nayar

A FORMER Pakistan air chief who led a delegation of retired military officers to India a few days ago made a poignant remark at a farewell party in New Delhi. He said he wished those who left Pakistan after its formation had not done so because his country missed the texture of society it intended to have.

Probably, he did not realize that theirs was not an easy choice. They had to leave because they were non-Muslims. When they locked their houses behind they thought they would return after things had settled down. There was no going back — this realization came to them only when they saw two streams of human beings on the main Grand Trunk Road, one flowing towards India and the other towards Pakistan. Muslims went through the same traumatic experience.

However, thousands of them have come back to the state, not Punjab but others. In contrast, there is hardly any Hindu in West Punjab. This is what makes India different despite all the onslaughts of Hindutva.

Non-Muslims would have stayed back in Pakistan if Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's reinterpretation of the two-nation theory had been carried out. Its ethos became secularism, not religion. He said that Muslims ceased to be Muslims and Hindus ceased to be Hindus; they were either Pakistanis or Indians. Mahatma Gandhi, in turn, declared that he would live in Pakistan and seek no visa to enter.

Gandhi was shot dead by the extremists and Jinnah was abandoned by similar elements and left dying as a disillusioned man. Both leaders who were at the helm of political affairs then did not envisage that the minorities would have to quit because of their religion in the country to which they belonged. Both were dejected when the migration began.

wise, he has close understanding with the religious elements which first approved of his presidency and now give empty threats that they will not tolerate his uniform beyond December 31.

The process of people meeting from the different fields in India and Pakistan has diluted religious fanaticism. But when Musharraf says, "I am giving bilateralism a final chance in Kashmir" and when Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh declares that "all is not well", the atmosphere becomes heavy. It means that the two governments are beginning to build a case to restrict the contact. Although India is issuing 10,000 visas daily and Pakistan 8,000, they can go back to the old days when the flow of visitors from one country to the other was a trickle. This necessitates the implementation of decisions reached on some of the confidence-building measures. Another round of composite talks that has begun now should see to it.

Kashmir is a symptom. The disease is bias. Even in the valley, fundamentalism has come to the fore, pushing to the background what was once a nationalist movement. Syed Ali Shah Geelani's pre-eminence in the valley indicates that. The efforts made to solve Kashmir are welcome. If they are successful the two countries will benefit immensely. But we would be deluding ourselves about permanent peace if we fail in resolving to tackle bias.

Our priority should be to establish secularism on both sides. India has been lucky because leaders even after Nehru made no compromise with communalism. The BJP which did was ousted lock, stock and barrel. In Pakistan no leader after Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan has pur-

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