

# Vote against violence

IRAQIS preparing to cast their ballots in the country's first free election in decades are having to contend with an escalating campaign of violence and intimidation intended to prevent them exercising their democratic right.

Hundreds of members of the country's police and security forces have been killed in recent weeks, many in suicide bombings; election workers have been gunned down in broad daylight.

The unsurprising result is that the national assembly election on January 30 is likely to be boycotted by many Sunni Muslims, the 20% of the population that lost most from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

To them it is an exercise to confirm their reduced status, mounted at the bidding of their hated American occupiers. Shia Muslims, comprising 60% of Iraqis, and the Kurds, are broadly enthusiastic about

choosing their own leaders and writing a constitution for a new era.

George Bush and Tony Blair insist the election must go ahead on schedule, not least because it is the lynchpin of their exit strategy. So does Ayad Allawi, the interim prime minister, who has extended emergency laws. To postpone or cancel the vote, they argue, would hand a victory to the insurgents

—The Guardian, London

# New approaches on Kashmir

By Talat Masood

*Kashmir  
Dawn  
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GENERAL Musharraf's impatience, India's intransigence and the subcontinental bureaucratic mindset characterize the current state of Indo-Pak dialogue on Kashmir.

The endemic problem of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is complex and has several dimensions—human rights, violence perpetrated by the state, the brutality and killings by the militants, lack of economic opportunities, slow development, pervasive corruption, social dislocation, poor governance and the crucial issue of territory.

Among these problems the territorial aspect is by far the most crucial and also the most difficult to resolve. Its resolution requires a process in which all the three parties to the dispute — India, Pakistan and the Kashmiri leaders — should remain engaged both bilaterally and trilaterally in a structured and informal forum for a long period of time, so that they could seek an equitable and viable solution that is acceptable to all. The political dialogue has to be conducted in a tension-ridden environment, otherwise as past experience shows it simply turns rhetorical and counterproductive.

Because of the legacy of the past, J&K today is a bitterly divided society along national identities and state allegiance that needs peace to reduce polarization, overcome passions and transform mutually antagonistic political goals along more productive avenues.

India has to shed its rigidity and its fixation with territorial control which is unacceptable not only to Pakistan but also to a large cross-section of the people of Kashmir. Pakistan, the other hand, cannot wrest Kashmir from India militarily and has to accept a negotiated settlement that would require patience and astute diplomatic skills.

For New Delhi and Islamabad it will also be useful to identify elements of what should constitute a substantive dialogue on Kashmir as both accuse each other of lack of sincerity in approaching the problem. The two countries should take their main opposition parties along during the period of negotiations and when talking to the

cal prisoners could bring about a qualitative change in the law and order situation in the Indian part of Kashmir and will put an end to the anger of the people in Kashmir. India should substantially reduce its security forces within the state and improve its human rights record. Removal of bunkers in Srinagar and other places in Kashmir will be a positive step in that direction. The announced withdrawal of three thousand personnel in a total force of seven hundred thousand from Kashmir is minuscule and more of a cosmetic gesture.

For greater transparency and building of confidence among the people of Kashmir, India should allow international human rights organizations to monitor the situation according to the principles of natural justice and public accountability. The Indian government's argument of non-interference in

and several crossing points established so that divided families could meet and Kashmiris could get an opportunity to interact at the cultural level. In addition, border markets at agreed crossing points could be established. To begin with, Neelam Valley and Uri-Chakhoti could be suitable places for setting up the proposed markets. For promotion of trade and commerce, chambers of commerce from both sides of Kashmir could meet on a regular basis.

Revival of trade in goods and services across the LoC, opening up of multiple land routes within both parts of J&K as well as the creation of infrastructural facilities will give a good boost to the local economy and provide avenues of employment to thousands of young people. Boosting trade activity and developing links in education, communications, information technologies and environment between the two sides of J&K could be important CBMs. Areas close to the LoC will have to be determined for which a comprehensive joint strategy has to be worked out.

Funds allocated for development in Kashmir by India are either frittered away through corruption or recycled back to India to finance hydroelectric projects, which are meant to provide power to other states.

Kashmiri refugees who have crossed over to Pakistan and are living in camps or those who migrated to other parts of India like the Pundits must be allowed to return and their safety and security should be ensured by the state. Through greater accountability and better governance the economic conditions on both sides of Kashmir can considerably be improved.

It may be advisable to let the Kashmiris identify and define the regions, whether five or seven, through mutual negotiations instead of India and Pakistan imposing their ideas on them. In this way a clear identity of the Kashmiris, with shared aspirations, could emerge to facilitate the resolution of the conflict. This will also provide them with the opportunity of fully developing their political vision in more concrete terms thereby fulfilling the political

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For New Delhi and Islamabad it will also be useful to identify elements of what should constitute a substantive dialogue on Kashmir as both accuse each other of lack of sincerity in approaching the problem. The two countries should take their main opposition parties along during the period of negotiations and when talking to the Kashmiris they should involve a broad cross-section of the political leadership and not confine it to their favourites.

By making the process more inclusive the prospects for the success of the talks would be enhanced and a settlement, if reached could be more durable. Apart from the territorial issue, other elements of the Kashmir dispute are relatively easy to manage and progress can be fast, provided there is mutual understanding and sufficient political will.

This would require both countries to take concrete measures to ensure progress on issues affecting the lives of the people and periodically review it within the framework of the composite dialogue. For reducing violence there has to be a cease-fire between the militants and the Indian security forces on similar lines as now prevails between the Indian and Pakistani forces on the LoC.

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The conflict in Siachen has served no useful purpose. There have been more fatalities in Siachen because of harsh weather, accidents and high-altitude related health hazards than through direct combat. It is, however, encouraging to find that for over a year now the ceasefire is holding in Siachen as well. A resolution of this dispute nonetheless would serve the interests of both India and Pakistan in many ways and facilitate progress and cooperation in other areas.

Opening up of the borders and cross-border trade and commerce can give a fillip to economic growth and dynamism in J&K. Bureaucratic hurdles delaying the commencement of the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad should be removed soon and the Jammu and Sialkot route, which is very promising from the point of view of trade and commerce could open new vistas of cooperation.

Similarly, other traditional land routes should be restored

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Devolution of power in the Indian part of J&K will greatly contribute towards a sense of participation. Gradually, both parts of Kashmir, as part of internal CBMs, could be granted self-governance with control on all subjects excluding defence and foreign affairs. The "Kashmir Study Group" too has been a strong advocate of giving Kashmiris maximum autonomy.

Meanwhile, the two sides of Kashmir should be encouraged to develop cross-border institutional linkages in the form of joint meetings of legislatures, common media programmes, good communication links and joint environmental projects. Progress on all these counts will have a very favourable impact on the resolution of the Kashmir dispute including the territorial issue.

*The writer is a retired Lt-general of the Pakistan Army.*