

No halfway stop for Musharraf

Dawn
16/4/05 By Kuldip Nayar *Pak. P. Lelehi-India*

WHEN Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, the Muslim League chief, was in New Delhi recently he said that Muslims in India had the option to migrate to Pakistan when the subcontinent was partitioned but today they were citizens of India and should be loyal to the country.

I do not know how a mature person like him came to infer after visiting the Jamia Masjid in Delhi for two hours that Muslims on this side were keen to go to the other side. He was raking up the past with which he was not familiar.

He was even factually wrong while recalling history. One, it was not up to the Muslims in India to go to Pakistan. The transfer of population was not part of the agreement reached between the leaders of the then Muslim League and the Congress. Two, it was a different Pakistan in the mind of its founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He wanted it to be a secular polity, not mixing religion with politics. He died an unhappy man because during his lifetime he saw the country being mutilated and deformed in the name of Islam.

Both he and Mahatma Gandhi tried their best for the people to stay back in the newly-formed states but fanatics pushed them out, killing roughly one million people in the orgy that followed partition. Where was the question of Muslims or, for that matter, Hindus and Sikhs leaving if they had not been forced to do so?

Shujaat Hussain's advice to the Indian Muslims to be loyal to their country was the unkindest cut. He only gave vent to the feelings of the BJP-RSS parivar that have built their following among the Hindus on the anti-Muslim plank. Their propaganda was that the Muslims were not loyal to India and Shujaat Hussain dittoed it. In any case, who was he to assess their loyalty? The Advanis and Modis were enough to make their life a nightmare.

Worse than Shujaat Hussain's comment was the observation by Mushahid Hussain, his deputy, on return to Pakistan: Muslims in India were afraid to say even salaam. I thought he would have been impressed by the open society that India is. People-to-people contact has made thousands of Pakistanis realize that whatever India's limitations, lack of

in Azad Kashmir and they went beyond the diplomatic support.

Still I have not been able to make out why relations between India and Pakistan should be hostage to Kashmir. The problem may take time to solve. Should the rapprochement between the two countries be on hold till then? If it were to be delinked from Kashmir, a solution would be easier to find. This is one reason why a tripartite meeting will create confusion. True, the Kashmiris should be associated with the talks but not at a time when New Delhi and Islamabad have not yet started discussions on Kashmir officially.

The two have many other problems to sort out. The differences over the Baglihar dam should awaken us to those. The Indus Waters Treaty may have to be reviewed. Perhaps, the two should jointly supervise the distribution of all the six rivers — Sindh, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. But Kashmir has come to occupy so much space that there is very little for anything else.

The typical example is the visit of 10 former Pakistani envoys to New Delhi earlier this month. They met some 30 Indian ex-ambassadors. Having been India's high commissioner to Britain, I fulfilled the conditions to be at the meeting. I must admit the former Pakistani envoys did not impress me because they were obsessed with Kashmir. Everything depended on its solution. So they said. Our side too was pedestrian, only countering the points the other side made. I wondered how for decades the foreign offices on both sides had done nothing except negating each other's stand.

Here were brilliant minds who had helped their country formulate foreign policy and

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Pakistanis realize that whatever India's limitations, lack of democracy is not one of them. In fact, they have often questioned: Why couldn't Pakistan have the same democratic structure as India has?

The few Pakistani Kashmiris who crossed into our side of Kashmir through the bus were struck by the openness in the Valley. They were amazed to find the Indian side much more developed than theirs. They found the Valley afflicted with many problems, including human rights violations, but it was not a dictatorial place. Even Islam here took the shape of Sufism, the mystical system, the Kashmiriyat which was pluralistic in content.

If the Shujaat Hussains and Mushahid Hussains were to accept the concept of secularism, the problem of Kashmir or, for that matter, Pakistan would not be so intractable. They should realize the Valley could not go to Pakistan just because it was a Muslim-majority area. The two-nation theory was history. Jinnah wanted to separate religion from politics. President General Pervez Musharraf stopped halfway when he did not apply Jinnah's logic to the Valley.

Musharraf was right when he said that India and Pakistan should talk on Kashmir. But he was wrong when he brought religion to the fore to claim Kashmir. In fact, Islamabad did a great disservice to the Kashmiris' indigenous struggle when it tried to Islamize it in the name of "moral and diplomatic" support. Camps for training the militants were still

implement its ramifications but how limited they were in their vision (our foreign minister is a retired ambassador). Even after retirement, they continued to stick to sterile policies and that might well be the reason why the two had not been able to demolish the wall of hate and mistrust they had raised.

I proposed at the meeting to 'freeze' Kashmir till we had established good relations. In support, I quoted late prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's observation during an interview with me that it should not be incumbent on our generations to solve all the problems. The Pakistani envoys did not agree with me. Nor did they suggest anything concrete. In fact, I was worried about their inference that people-to-people contact had lost momentum.

I feel that the potential of people-to-people contact has not been exhausted. Contact has just begun and it is confined to a few cities. Thousands of people from both sides should meet at different levels and in different parts of the two countries. Mistrust still rules both sides. Both of us are proud to be sovereign and it should stay that way. But borders should be soft and crossing it should be like going from one street to another. The Shujaats and Mushahids should be working towards that instead of delineating the identity of Muslims on this or that side.

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