**Declining Bilateral Ties**

**To worsen matters, India is now insisting on renego-tiating the Indus Water Treaty.**

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The relations between Pakistan and India have never been cordial or normal ever since India landed its troops in Srinagar on 27 October 1947, consequent upon the dispute regarding the accession of Kashmir to either India or Pakistan. Though India accepted the UN resolutions to settle the issue through a UN-sponsored plebiscite, it has never exhibited sincerity in fulfilling its obligations in this regard. The acceptance of the UN resolutions was likely a time-buying tactic by India.

In 1957, India unilaterally declared the accession of Kashmir to India and has adhered to that position to this day, notwithstanding the fact that the UN, through its Resolutions 91 and 122, unequivocally rejected the Indian move and reiterated that the question of accession could not be settled by any means other than a plebiscite under the auspices of the UN.

The two countries have fought four wars, and between these, several efforts have been made to move towards an amicable resolution of the Kashmir issue and other contentious matters. However, regrettably, the outcomes have never been encouraging because, on each occasion, India found excuses to withdraw from the process of normalisation.

The relations between the two countries have deteriorated to an unprecedented level since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister of India. This unending nosedive in relations is attributable to Modi’s persistent hostility towards Pakistan and his defiant action of repealing Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which gave special status to IIOJK, its bifurcation into two territories, and their annexation to the Indian Union. Though Pakistan reacted strongly to this move and invited the attention of the international community to the flouting of the UN resolutions by India and the atrocities perpetrated on the people of IIOJK in response to their resistance, the international community, as well as the UN, did little substantive to dissuade India from its actions. Even the reiteration by the UNSC that the Kashmir dispute must be resolved in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter and relevant resolutions did not soften India’s adamant attitude.

Just two days after scrapping Article 370, Narendra Modi is on record saying: “The nation took a historic decision by scrapping Article 370, which will ensure equal rights and duties for the citizens of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The decision has amounted to the realisation of dreams of many of the distinguished leaders of the past.” In his following Independence Day speech, he stated that his government had achieved in seven months what had not been accomplished in the last seventy years, fulfilling the dream of Vallabhbhai Patel.

India insisted that it was an internal matter warranting no outside interference. To present a façade of normalcy in the state, it held local body elections in 2020 and, more recently, provincial assembly elections. In the local body elections, the National Conference and the People’s Democratic Party formed an alliance against the BJP to contest the elections, aiming to restore IIOJK’s special status and statehood. Both these parties, in the past, maintained pro-India postures. The alliance achieved a majority except in Jammu.

In the elections for the IIOJK assembly, the Congress-National Conference alliance delivered a resounding defeat to the BJP, claiming 49 seats out of 90, with the National Conference securing 42 seats. The BJP managed only 29 seats. These results reflect rejection of Modi’s oppressive policies, most notably the revocation of Article 370 in August 2019. Notably, the assembly, in its very first session, adopted a resolution for the restoration of the state’s special status, providing a clear testament to the people of IIOJK’s refusal to accept Modi’s actions.

Nevertheless, Modi remains adamant. Speaking in the Lok Sabha amidst clashes between Congress and BJP MPs, he stated that no power in the world could restore Jammu and Kashmir’s partial autonomy and that Article 370 had been “buried in the graveyard.”

With the international community and the UN showing indifference to the situation, there seems to be no chance of any dialogue between the two countries to normalise relations.

The dilemma is that despite Pakistan’s desire to live in peace with all its neighbours and resolve issues through dialogue, India remains disinclined to engage. In June this year, Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar stated that “the era of uninterrupted dialogue with Pakistan is over. So far as J&K is concerned, Article 370 is done.” To worsen matters, India is now insisting on renegotiating the Indus Water Treaty.

As they say, it takes two to tango. Issues between India and Pakistan cannot be resolved if only one party shows intent and commitment. While India maintains its stance, Pakistan considers Kashmir its jugular vein and will never back down from its position of settling the dispute in accordance with UN resolutions. Improving relations is inconceivable without resolving the Kashmir dispute.

Given the prevailing situation, there is no hope of India showing willingness to discuss the contentious issues, at least as long as Modi remains in power. In light of these realities, false hopes should be avoided, such as those raised by the media when the Indian Foreign Minister visited Pakistan for the SCO summit. It was an international conference, not a bilateral visit. There were no meetings scheduled and no requests from either side. A simple handshake, a routine courtesy on such occasions, cannot be construed as an auspicious development.

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