

Indo-Pak ideological questions

Pak. X. P. - India
The News
12.3
Imtiaz Alam

Pace process is on the move, despite initial hiccups and thanks to increasing realisation on both sides and American facilitation. Yet thick clouds of suspicions persist and will gradually shed with series of confidence-building measures and evolution and stabilisation of a composite negotiation process. Major problem is that while President-COAS Pervez Musharraf has enough time, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is left with little time to seal a permanent peace deal in the sub-continent. Can the causes behind the historical rooted animosity be addressed and tedious questions tackled?

No doubt the dispute over Kashmir has become most irritating of all issues between the two countries at the cost of Kashmiris. This is not in fact the real cause behind the larger divide in the subcontinent. It is, rather, an extension of and tool in perpetuating the real divide. When Pakistan terms the Kashmir question as a "core issue" or an "unfinished agenda of partition", and India terms it as a "core of its secular nationhood" or "integral part", they in fact reveal their ideological fixation rooted in the partition of the subcontinent. Yet Pakistan has survived without what is termed as its "jugular vein" and Indian secularism, despite not conceding on the Kashmir question, continues to struggle with the majoritarian communal challenges. At worse, Islamabad's position is irredentist and New Delhi's annexationist.

The problem, however, is rooted in the ideological divide that persists even after 55 years of partition. The fact of the matter is that the leadership of national liberation movement failed to amicably handle the communitarian or minority question. Despite the partition on religious basis — a historical reality — the Indian secularism that failed to accommodate the concerns of Indian Muslims in the first place is still oblivious of Pakistan reality or excludes the existence of two-nation theory to keep its secular-framework consistent since it suits the dominant communitarian interests. Ironically, the Indian secularism and Hindutva converge on ideological divide and the Kashmir question, although for different reasons.

If the sacred cause of the unity of mother Bharat considers Pakistan's existence as sacrilegious, Indian secularism considers it as irreverent and still excludes minority question. When Mr. Vajpayee went to *Yadgar-e-Pakistan*, he in fact crossed an ideological threshold because Hindutva is amenable to the adoption of the ideal of unity of mother Bharat to the requirement of greater South Asian fraternity and may show 'magnanimity' to find a way out of the smaller Kashmir irritant to achieve greater objective than the secular puritans. And when Indian secularism feels victorious over the exercise of right to self-determination by the people of former East Pakistan, they conveniently forget to extend it to Kashmir sim-

ply because of its selective and exclusionary nature.

No less problematic is the ideological notion in Pakistan that has still not been able to overcome its schizophrenic personality divided between *Ummah* and the nation-state. Insistence on being a part of *Ummah* excludes the imperatives of nation-state and extends its mission just not to Kashmir but to everywhere else, including the Indian Muslims. But it can't explain the separation of East Pakistan, nor find justification for Muslim integration into Indian national composition. Their ideological claim on Kashmir and the Indian Muslims reinforces not only Hindutva, but also exclusionary Indian secularism, besides communalising the Kashmir question.

Pakistan is based in the historical entity of Indus which happened to be the Muslim-majority region. It excluded the Indian Muslims, in the end, negating the very notion of two-nation theory as a necessary cost. It has to live with itself as geographical and multi-ethnic national entity. Kashmir question, as a legacy of hastily worked out partition, should be seen by Islamabad in its self-interest as a democratic right to self-determination of the Kashmir people in the greater context of the general interests of South Asian fraternity and not as a territorial dispute with India. Regardless of Islamabad's legalistic position and its rigid stand, the Kashmir question can only be solved in the greater context of Indo-Pak amity and South Asian fraternity. Similarly, the threat perceptions can be addressed by making the security mutually reinforcing, rather than taking refuge behind half-clever initiatives.

On the other hand, India must address the still un-settled minority question within its secular and democratic framework while admitting Pakistan as no exception to secular rule and accepting Kashmir question to be decided according to the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. It has seen, despite its role as a 'liberator', the assertion of Bangladesh as a sovereign entity. If it can accept some non-state parties, struggling for their independence, as the "Other Party", why can't it accept All Parties Hurriyat Conference, as the other party? If the people of East Pakistan could be welcome for exercising their right to self-determination for the second time, why can't the Kashmiris do so?

First thing is to admit the question, as have the British who had to recognise the Irish question. Now, what could be the possible solution that neither injures Indian secularism and Indian Muslims, nor rewards Pakistan's ideological irredentism and, at the same time allows Kashmiris to satisfy their urge while becoming a buffer between the two competing annexationists. What would be the concrete shape of it should be left to a process of reconciliation between India and Pakistan, on the one hand, and a free interaction among the Kashmiris of different hues and regions over a reasonable period of time. There are various examples that can help develop a model that addresses the concerns of all sides.

Indeed, there are no easy solutions. Nor can there

be any in a short time. Yet, a process can be set into motion without pre-judgments and pre-conditions. For Kashmir question to be solved, this is imperative that India and Pakistan first create the environment of widespread trust and a solid basis of economic and cultural cooperation or a vested interest in peace as a medium of finding solutions to all irritants. The security issues can also be handed in a collective security framework, including the management of nuclear capabilities. Unlike the past, when the approach has been of stumbling over the most stumbling issue, the normalisation process should start with building bridges over the most bridgeable issues without, of course, avoiding the thorny issue nor making all other issues a hostage to the conflicting cores of the "core dispute". In the meanwhile, the two establishments can find other areas for self-perpetuation.

There are other issues that tend to create unnecessary suspicions, such as American involvement. To exclude US, which both sides are vying to win over, it is necessary to become more willing and flexible partners. American facilitation can be helpful as well to both sides since we have failed to address our contentions on our own. India can strategically gain by responding to US consul and Pakistan can pursue its national interest by helping America in acquiring leverage on New Delhi. When India asks the US to get it delivered the terrorists, it creates the obligation to oblige, in return. Similarly, when Pakistan obliges the US, it creates the room for a pro quo, in return for a quid. Some of the naive critics of America in Pakistan want to push the US completely on the side of New Delhi, the Indian hawks are craving for.

Moreover, there are fears of cultural invasion. Greater cultural invasion is not from one side or the other. It is from the West both of us face. Hindi film is essentially an Urdu film that has kept alive the language otherwise dying in India. The capital of divided Punjab is not Delhi, it is Lahore. The top most sacred worship places of the Sikhs are in Pakistan and *Basant* is a festival that is now Lahore's greatest attraction to attract whole of Northern India. Similarly, trade is not a matter of gain at the cost of other. Both sides can gain not only from mutually beneficial trade and investment, but also capitalise on expanding the avenue of cooperation with Central Asia. Not granting India the MFN status is a folly since it can't be withheld longer under WTO, nor by not going ahead with SAPTA and SAFTA is in any way in our interest.

What is most important is that both India and Pakistan should start addressing their real problems and differences from the standpoint of their future and improving the plight of their people, not the past that should only provide lessons from mistakes and high profile security paradigms that have added to our insecurity and misery of our people.

The writer is a staff member
imtiazalampak@yahoo.com