

A new India policy, please

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India has fired the biggest gun it has acquired: Ambassador Nancy Powell has told Pakistan at a public function that it should honour its commitment to stop "cross border terrorism" — implying it is not implementing its promise. American ambassador's open criticism of the host country, unusual as it was, needs to be taken seriously. It is America's policy and it drastically diverges from host country's. It is pointless to rail against Ms Powell; she is only asking to live up to promises made.

She has clarified the situation: there is now virtually no country that supports Pakistan's long running Kashmir policy, while all important governments more or less echo India's stance that Pakistan 'should do more' — stop facilitating jihadis from crossing the LoC into Indian-controlled Kashmir. It is time to ponder the India and Kashmir policies.

The immediate background is dismal. Pakistan has felt obliged to declare four Indian diplomats and officials serving in Islamabad HC undesirable persons, spies in fact. This was obviously in retaliation of what the Indian government had done a few days earlier: expel four Pakistani diplomats and officials working in Delhi on the same spying charge. This tit-for-tat is a frequent occurrence between the two neighbours. Such charges are always short on credibility. The way Indian intelligence agencies watch over Pakistani HC employees — indeed every visiting Pakistani — should make it impossible for them to spy. Similarly, the many Pakistani spook services keep all the Indians under such obvious surveillance that any intelligence gathering by them is simply out of the question. There is something juvenile about such numerous tit-for-tat expulsions.

Cognisable today is the deplorably low level of relationship between the two governments in which they are unable to observe even normal courtesies, let alone good neighbourly conduct. Doubtless the issues between them are serious, particularly over Kashmir, and thanks to Pakistan's adoption of jihadist methods, the relationship did reach a nadir after Dec 13, 2001 suicide attack on Indian Parliament: the Indians mobilised for war, deploying the armed forces in war positions and cut off all communication links between the two countries. This extraordinary situation lasted improbably for almost a year and the Indians are still refusing to engage in any dialogue with Islamabad. India demonstrates ill will towards common Pakistanis by refusing to restore the communication links or issuing visas normally. Pakistanis unthinkingly follow suit whether or not any of their policy objectives are served thereby. Simple hatred based on stereotypes appears to have taken hold even on policy-making levels in both countries.

There is a minor, though lighter, side to it. While the governments wrestle over larger issues and threaten in fact a nuclear war, the spooks of India and Pakistan are waging a war of their own. Diplomats and clerks of the two HCs are the worst sufferers, though visitors of one country in the other are watched constantly more professionally in India and more brashly here. In



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the environment created by their superiors not behaving in a civilised manner, intelligence outfits prove their patriotism by harassing the other country's citizens. Unless the governments improve their behaviour, lower level bureaucracies, out to make points, will not.

Pakistan and India have fought almost four wars and a final one was on the cards last year and may still be likely. At least the Indian authorities continue to say that scores with Pakistan remain to be settled. Pakistan's reflex reaction to Indian threats is 'we will nuke them'. Pat comes the reply: we shall wipe out all of Pakistan by massively retaliating in kind. It is doubtful whether these would-be nuclear warriors realise the implications of their macho bragging. There is no cause on earth for which nuclear strikes can be made: Islamabad that claims readiness to be the first to cross the threshold will be vaporising not only the Indian soldiers and politicians in the target area but countless children, women, old men, dogs, cats, goats, cattle, monkeys and all living things including the mother earth itself — all of them and future generations of all living creatures will be born diseased. Enmity between adults can, when anger mounts, lead to brawls: they would kill each other's soldiers and some bystanders too. But systematic destruction of all living beings without distinction goes beyond reason.

One makes two simple points to authority in Pakistan. There are no targets in India which Pakistan can nuke without killing harmless Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and even many Hindus who disagree with Narendra Modi and LK Advani, not to mention the apolitical multitude. Can we Pakistanis be so senseless as to kill indiscriminately? How many mosques, mausoleums of Muslim saints, Gurdwaras, other relics of history will not be wiped out? Similarly the Indian rulers can be angry, very angry with Gen Musharraf and others of the kind. A conventional war, with known rules, can be understandable, though not advisable. But how can they plan the devastation of all of Pakistan, including the killing of toddlers, old men, young girl students and mothers. What have the flora and fauna of Pakistan done to deserve elimination?

The second is that the present Kashmir policy has not worked. In trying to promote a Kashmir solution, Pakistanis now encounter a conundrum. It takes the shape of a possible deadly barter: Islamabad takes out one or two Indian cities in a first strike and buys in return the possible destruction of all its major urban-industrial centres. None of this is however acceptable to us, the people. The question arises: how can Pakistan's near total destruction promote Kashmir's inde-

pendence, the desired denouement? If it cannot, Islamabad must then find new Kashmir and India policies.

Tedious argumentation about the necessity of having nuclear weapons for national security is pointless. Nuclear weapons are an evil. They have no place in South Asia. They must go. Neither side should have them, whatever the reasoning advanced by the two bomb lobbies. The task is to get rid of them jointly if possible, unilaterally if necessary. Instead of helping Pakistan's security, the bomb's security is now the problem. So long as India relies on nuclear weapons for staying secure, nobody in Pakistan can or should feel secure. Similarly as long as Pakistan relies on the bomb for its security, no Indian can trust Pakistan for any meaningful relationship. Even for day-to-day normalcy in relationship, some understanding on the nukes is necessary.

Looked at more closely, India and Pakistan need to agree at two levels. Indian government has to realise that the reasons for which it did not translate its intent of making war into action will continue to operate for some more time in some fashion. Pakistanis would be insane to start a war. If so, the two governments have to enter into talks for as normal ties as Homo Southasianacus can be capable of on the basis of mutual freeze on inducting and deploying nuclear weapons. For the longer-term relationship, Islamabad and New Delhi have to engage in a profounder dialogue over the bomb for doing away with it altogether. The former is a short-term necessity while the latter is vital for stable peace.

The likelihood is that New Delhi would refuse to get back to the normality of even 2001 and not negotiate on the bomb — not in near future. India's strange policy of preferring no links at all between the two neighbours may have to do with the present BJP-run government's politics. It would seem that, apart from its ideological compulsions, it wants to win this year's state and next year's national elections on the plank of Muslims and Pakistan being evil and a threat to India. This is how they won in Gujarat last year and many hope to do better in coming months. Whatever its precise reasons, New Delhi appears to be saying a firm no to dialogue with Pakistan.

In which case Pakistan, instead of imitating BJP government, should go ahead and adopt a positive and proactive policy of normality and engagement despite the Indian attitude. Let it force a policy of peace on India. Let it allow all communication links to be restored; make Pakistani visa as easy to obtain as possible; welcome Indian visitors; make trade with India free and implement Sapta and Safta from its own side. Leave India to react the way it would. If Islamabad does not replicate Indian stand-offish policies, the world will meaningfully see. If India does not talk or take reciprocal action, wait for Indian public opinion to force New Delhi to mend its way. Pakistan should try to create a pro-Pakistan and pro-peace lobby in India. Only, Pakistan need not put any conditions on better relations and it should begin befriending those Indians who want peace and free cultural exchanges.