

Others talk, when neighbours do not

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Had we been stable-economically sound, socially secured and intellectually sensitive-Nancy Powell would not have "exceeded" diplomatic norms; and in case she would, we would have rejected both, her statement and her ambassadorship. But can a nation remain stable, while living with the conflicts that it cannot afford? So, Nancy's speech should be taken rationally, not emotionally. She is right when she says militancy is terrorism.

She may be wrong in directly connecting us with what is happening in Kashmir valley, but the fact remains that the valley is under distress. And the fact remains that Pakistan is under more distress. And the fact remains that we had so many Lashkars, Jasihs, Hizbs and Harkats around, who had openly been projecting their activities-in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Central Asian States -as holy wars. No one stopped or discouraged them: Neither the ambitious intelligentsia, nor the dreaming Generals, nor the sleeping politicians, nor the ritualistic rich, nor the bungling bureaucracy. The recruits willing to sacrifice their lives in the holy wars, however, came from the most deprived sections of the society.

On struggle of Kashmir let us be more realistic. If the Indians could end a thirteen years long Sikh militancy in just thirteen days, why didn't they do the same to that of Kashmiris? It was all due to their well thought out planning. Before 9/11 their strategy was to extend, and not to end, the conflict: Because excessive use of force that worked in Punjab would have succeeded only for some time

in Kashmir. The Kashmiris would have risen again and soon, and they would have again attracted Pakistani support. So the Indians preferred long time strategy to weaken Kashmiris and Pakistanis both from within. Besides Kashmir, this was to help them achieve even much bigger objectives.

India's bigger gains lay in the regional cooperation, in opening of land route from Pakistan to Afghanistan to Central Asia to East Europe; and from Pakistan to Iran to the Gulf to West Europe. It did not happen. First, due to America, which blocked the route through friendship with Pakistan. A connection in which India and the USSR would have been major players would have cut to size American influence in the region. Second, after the break-up of USSR the situation did not change much, though America did not remain that interested, but Afghanistan came partly under anarchy and partly under Pakistan. And on Iranian side, America continued to remain additional hindrance.

So, Indians had nothing to gain unless Pakistan would cooperate, Afghanistan would become normal and America would have no objection to Iran-India having land access. Only a miracle could arrange so many things for India. The Indians, however, depended on their own wisdom. Since Pakistan was pivotal to the big arrangement, it was to be tackled either by seeking its cooperation or engaging it to fatal conflicts. But seeking cooperation without

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agreeing to a Pakistan friendly solution of Kashmir was impossible. Thus, Pakistan was to be weakened from within and without, by keeping it engaged with the conflicts, and hence to excessive defence spending, so that it would submit, one day, under economic compulsions. Our ambitious policy makers did not disappoint them. They saw in Kashmir militancy a hope for a pro-Pakistan solution; and the Indians got the required pretext to implement their strategy.

Having failed in befriending Kashmiris through unlimited financial aid and social reforms, the Indians exploited the opportunity (provided by the Kashmiri militancy) by turning to the methodology that the Mughals, the Afghans, the Pathans and the Dogras had used successfully in Kashmir. It was to humble the Kashmiris, physically as well as psychologically, as much as possible by lengthening their miseries so that they would succumb in entirety. The strategy would also make Pakistanis suffer consequentially was obvious.

Indians were quite successful, though not fully, both in Kashmir

and Pakistan. At least two generations of Kashmiris have been pushed into depression, and the Pakistanis are no better; and their agonies are not ending: they are increasing. The numerical strength of Indian army always remained almost double than ours. Their military expenditures remained as percentage of GDP half than ours. Moreover unlike ours their defence industry is research oriented and has a strong link with their civil industry. The rise in their economy, about 6 percent GDP growth, was achieved from 1990 onwards. Ironically, this is the period that saw us declining fast. Surprisingly, this is the period when militancy originated in Kashmir and sustained.

The time was passing steadily. Kashmiris were busy with their militant struggle and Pakistanis were busy in supporting them, and the Indians were busy in exhausting both. However, the Indians too had their share of agony. Not economically, but physically and hence psychologically. That they lost about twelve thousand soldiers was no small a trauma. So all felt the pinch, and a need to soften their rigidities. Attempts were made through Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Lahore, and President Musharraf's visit to Agra, but they proved fruitless; and the situation returned to square one; and the tussle continued. Meanwhile the miracle happened, though at the cost of innocent Americans. After 9/11 the situation as in the entire world also started changing in our region. The Indians began to see hope in

Pakistan and beyond. With America encouraging regional cooperation, and with Afghanistan becoming normal, Indians' westward interaction becomes boundless, provided Pakistan obliges. And that Pakistan is not doing, again due to Kashmir. So this is the cause of Indians' current and unusual frustration. Should Pakistan oblige? Given its internal conditions and external pressures, it must. Even otherwise it is not the Indians only who will benefit. Once it happens it would be a climatic change. With so much economic activity generating in the region, it is bound to boost not only trade and excise but also manufacturing in Pakistan. Imagine the atmosphere and visualise how attractive it would be for the investment, but what to do with the obstacle, the Kashmir problem.

Ultimately both countries would have to talk. However, the talks should not be like the ones of the past, when we talked in Lahore, but simultaneously planned the Kargil expedition; and when we talked in Agra, but spoiled it with impatience. Let us talk sincerely and hope that a continued useful interaction will bring the best solution to our problems. May be we reach a stage where economic trust emerges. If it could happen at many places, why not in South Asia. And the appropriate time will certainly come and sooner than expected if Nancy is given serious attention. Her talk is neither an advice nor a threat; it is a suggestion; and a positive one; and it would certainly not have come, had we, Indians and Pakistanis, talked meaningfully, before she talked.