

Readiness for dialogue

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By Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti

WHETHER it is the approach of the Saarc summit, or international pressure, India has been taking steps that suggest that it may resume the dialogue with Pakistan that was interrupted under the impact of the 9/11 events. The latest indication was the statement by Mr. Vajpayee during his talks with President Putin in Moscow that India had not rejected dialogue with Pakistan.

The information minister, Shaikh Rashid Ahmad, who attended the Saarc moot of information ministers in New Delhi, was upbeat about the prospects, and gave voice to high expectations from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali himself has been making optimistic statements, and even expressed readiness to go to New Delhi to push the process of dialogue. He has also written to Mr. Vajpayee in this regard.

The frequency of positive gestures has increased, without a concrete step towards a composite dialogue of the type that had been initiated before the 9/11 events. India has come out with its own proposals for reducing tensions, such as the twelve confidence-building measures (CBMs) proposed on October 22 this year, which made no reference to the core issue of Kashmir. However New Delhi has not taken serious notice of Pakistan's response, based on accepting these CBMs but suggesting the inclusion of the Kashmir issue in the agenda of resumed talks. President Musharraf's four-point proposal for taking up the Kashmir issue in a manner that leaves out the traditional positions of the two sides, and explores a settlement that may be acceptable to the three parties involved, i.e. India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir, has not elicited a positive response either.

The 'take it or leave it' approach on its own initiatives adopted by New Delhi reflects an attitude of great power chauvinism based on confidence in its standing in the post-cold war world. Indian diplomacy has been a beneficiary of the paradigm shift in the global perceptions since the end of the cold war. It may be pertinent to recall the historical evolution of regional and global perceptions, since the end of the cold war, to put the prospects for dialogue in perspective.

New Delhi had moved deftly, to take advantage of the fundamental shift in western global perspective in 1989 in order to end its isolation resulting from its non-aligned policy, combined with the alliance with Moscow during the cold war. The two main concerns of the West, after the defeat of the Soviet Union in the cold war, were non-proliferation, and countering the perceived threat from the Islamic world. Though India had led the way in developing nuclear capability in the region, the West felt comfortable with that on account of India's potential role in containing China as

revival of the role of the UN, and served to reinforce the liberation struggle by the Kashmiris, who launched an armed struggle against military repression by India. Many Kashmiris who had been forced to migrate to Pakistan began to trickle back across the Line of Control to join the local Mujahideen. Some of the Mujahideen from other countries who had joined the Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan also began to extend their support to the Kashmiri struggle.

India found it expedient to blame Pakistan for the souring of Indo-Pakistan relations by this upsurge of insurgency after seventeen years of relative calm in Kashmir following the Simla Agreement of 1972. It called the Kashmiri freedom fighters "separatists" and "terrorists", although the worst

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atrocities and human rights violations were perpetrated by the Indian military and paramilitary forces whose number mounted steadily, till it reached 700,000 by 2000. India held Pakistan responsible for igniting the insurgency in Kashmir, and for sustaining it by encouraging and arming militants. Insisting on its stance that Kashmir was "an integral part" of India, New Delhi blamed Pakistan for creating instability within its territory. However, Pakistan stood by its stance that Kashmir was a disputed territory, whose people were struggling for the right of self-determination, promised under UN resolutions that India had accepted.

With its new diplomatic leverage, fast growing economy and increasing military strength, India became even more intransigent. The rest of the world did not take the Kashmir dispute very seriously, despite the massive violations of human rights taking place there. When the BJP formed the government in New Delhi in 1998, it decided to go nuclear, to ensure a great power status Indian leaders had aspired for since independence. India also expected to acquire unchallengeable superiority over Pakistan. As it happened, Pakistan felt obliged to conduct nuclear tests soon after India, and this resulted in strategic parity that Pakistan had lacked in conventional weapons.

With the tension over Kashmir now seen likely to unleash a nuclear conflict, the international concern over the dispute grew. UN Security Council Resolution 1172, passed in early June, 1998, not only called for adherence by the two countries to CTBT

visit of President Clinton to South Asia in March 2000, the US and India formed a working group against terrorism. During his short stay in Islamabad, Clinton urged Pakistan to end support to militant groups active in Kashmir. When the 9/11 events traced the attack on the US to the terrorist "Al Qaeda" organization, based in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, New Delhi sensed another change in global perceptions it could exploit to its advantage.

With terrorism in the spotlight, India sought to capitalize on Pakistan's erstwhile support to the Taliban, as well as on Islamabad's backing to the Kashmiri intifada. Pakistan's decision to join the anti-terrorist coalition meant a U-turn in Afghanistan that had the effect of alienating the Pakhtun element of the Afghan popula-

tion. As Pakistan's recognition of the Taliban had earlier forced the Northern Alliance to forge an alliance with India, the post-9/11 events also redounded to India's advantage in Afghanistan, just as the post-cold war trends had proved beneficial for India's global diplomacy.

Pakistan's post-9/11 stance, and the major role it is playing in the war against terrorism, have considerably improved its relations with the sole superpower, which also attaches importance to its role as a moderate, and progressive Muslim power within the Islamic world.

However, the US has a strategic partnership with India, which is perceived as a

major market, and a potential counterweight to China's growing power. Therefore, the US, while wishing to promote peace in South Asia by facilitating a dialogue, is reluctant to press India to resolve the Kashmir issue. The other major powers, such as the European Union and Russia are also supportive of India. As such, India's readiness to engage in a dialogue appears to be contingent on Kashmir being put on the back burner, while other issues are addressed.

The western analysts also consider that India's reluctance to engage in a dialogue arises out of Pakistan's support to the militant struggle inside Kashmir, which has the effect of shedding Indian blood. As India has no intention of abandoning its physical occupation of Kashmir, the onus for enabling a dialogue is placed on Pakistan. It can accept progress on other non-controversial matters, such as communications, trade, cultural exchanges and other aspects of regional cooperation, without insisting on the immediate inclusion of Kashmir. India feels it is on a strong wicket, internally, and externally, and Pakistan risks an internal implosion if it engages in an arms race with India, which has access to technology and weapons from many sources. Any optimism that India may soon agree to a composite dialogue, or accept an expansion of the Saarc's mandate must be tempered with realism, based on this broad perspective.

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year, which made no reference to the core issue of Kashmir. However New Delhi has not taken serious notice of Pakistan's response, based on accepting these CBMs but suggesting the inclusion of the Kashmir issue in the agenda of resumed talks. President Musharraf's four-point proposal for taking up the Kashmir issue in a manner that leaves out the traditional positions of the two sides, and explores a settlement that may be acceptable to the three parties involved, i.e. India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir, has not elicited a positive response either.

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Another consequence of the end of the cold war was a democracy movement all over the world, with the most far reaching results in Eastern Europe where the pulling down of the Berlin Wall signified the end of tyranny of the Soviet Communist dictatorship. Among the areas affected by the democracy movement was Indian-occupied Kashmir, where an indigenous uprising took place against the Indian rule that had paid no heed to the desire of the people of Kashmir to be liberated from forcible occupation. As the movement gathered momentum, and India resorted to brutal repression, there was widespread sympathy in Pakistan for the Kashmiri struggle.

The elected governments that took office in Pakistan after years of military rule felt obliged to reflect the popular feeling on the continued violation by India of its obligations under resolutions of the Security Council. The Gulf War of 1991 had seen a

atrocities and human rights violations were perpetrated by the Indian military and paramilitary forces whose number mounted steadily, till it reached 700,000 by 2000. India held Pakistan responsible for igniting the insurgency in Kashmir, and for sustaining it by encouraging and arming militants. Insisting on its stance that Kashmir was "an integral part" of India, New Delhi blamed Pakistan for creating instability within its territory. However, Pakistan stood by its stance that Kashmir was a disputed territory, whose people were struggling for the right of self-determination, promised under UN resolutions that India had accepted.

With its new diplomatic leverage, fast growing economy and increasing military strength, India became even more intransigent. The rest of the world did not take the Kashmir dispute very seriously, despite the massive violations of human rights taking place there. When the BJP formed the government in New Delhi in 1998, it decided to go nuclear, to ensure a great power status Indian leaders had aspired for since independence. India also expected to acquire unchallengeable superiority over Pakistan. As it happened, Pakistan felt obliged to conduct nuclear tests soon after India, and this resulted in strategic parity that Pakistan had lacked in conventional weapons.

With the tension over Kashmir now seen likely to unleash a nuclear conflict, the international concern over the dispute grew. UN Security Council Resolution 1172, passed in early June, 1998, not only called for adherence by the two countries to CTBT and NPT, but also urged efforts to resolve their political disputes, notably that over Kashmir, peacefully. The sole superpower undertook shuttle diplomacy to promote non-proliferation, and in the meantime to encourage a political dialogue.

The evolving situation in Afghanistan became a factor in the tensions in South Asia. After initially backing the Taliban, the US became concerned when the regime continued to play host to Osama bin Ladin, the Saudi dissident who had been used by the CIA against the Soviets, but had to seek sanctuary in Afghanistan after the US walked out of Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal. He launched a jihad against the US after it stationed troops in Saudi Arabia, and kept extending total support to Israel to the detriment of the Arabs. After the terrorist attacks on US embassies in Nairobi and Daressalam were traced to Osama, the US even rained cruise missiles on Afghanistan in August 1998.

India was able to persuade the US that the Taliban were supporting "terrorism" in Kashmir, and training freedom fighters who were infiltrating into the state, with the alleged cooperation of Pakistan. During the

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As Pakistan will be hosting the Saarc summit in early January next year, can we at least count on an informal exchange of views with Mr. Vajpayee in the sidelines? Again one needs to be cautious even about expecting Mr. Vajpayee to come personally. Even while inaugurating the ministerial level Saarc meetings in New Delhi during this month, he was far from communicative, and a question mark continues to hang over his participation. Hopefully, he will be swayed by a desire to demonstrate India's commitment to the goals of Saarc by leading his country's delegation.

Though he is undoubtedly keen to go down in history as a peacemaker, he will be persuaded by BJP stalwarts to maintain a tough stance over Kashmir in a year that will be marked by general elections. The condition implied in Indian initiatives for normalizing relations so far has been to exclude Kashmir from the immediate agenda. India's obduracy has been fed by its nexus with advocates of pre-emption like Israel and the US. It may take changes of leadership as a result of Indian and US elections next year to produce a sea change in the current power-based international order.

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