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The emerging scenario

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Welcome indeed is the beginning of a process to lower tension and move towards normalisation between the two hostile countries in the sub-continent. But will it endure?

Great hopes were pinned on the Agra submit but it foundered on the rocks of intransigence — the two sides sticking to their unchanging stands on Kashmir and the so-called cross-border terrorism. Earlier the Lahore accord looked like the start of a new chapter in the India-Pakistan relations — Mr Vajpayee going to the length of visiting the Minar in Iqbal Park and expressing good wishes for Pakistan as an independent country. The hopes this raised were dashed on the Kargil mountains. The international events and in particular Nine Eleven were used by India to accuse Pakistan of exporting terrorism and the struggle for the liberation of Kashmir from the Indian stranglehold came to be dubbed as terrorism, damaging severely the cause of Kashmiris' fight for the right of self-determination. India kept mounting pressure on Pakistan and was able to secure international and in particular American support to its firm stand that there would be no dialogue unless the infiltration was totally stopped. All pleas for talks from Pakistan were arrogantly spurned and strong language was used to malign and haul up Pakistan before the international community as a villain. General Musharraf's offer of a cease-fire and for helping defuse militancy within Kashmir last August were rejected and in fact misconstrued as an admission of Pakistan's active involvement in the occupied state. Intermittently also came gestures to open up communications between the two countries along with exchange of citizens to create good will. It, however, didn't amount to any real break of the stalemate. Earlier this month Indian Foreign Minister's interview with a Pakistani journalist on a TV channel left little doubt that India was not willing to move even an

inch from its stated stand. Noteworthy were Mr Sinha's remarks that the only point regarding Kashmir for discussion related to the future of Azad Kashmir which had been occupied by Pakistan.

India's response therefore to Mr Jamali's offer of a unilateral cease-fire is a bit surprising. What perhaps persuaded India this time to react positively and agree to the cease-fire on its side also, was possibly the willingness on the part of Pakistan to agree to some of the proposals initiated earlier by India, i.e. the Karachi-Mumbai ferry service, the restoration of the Sindh-Rajasthan links and a promising reference to Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service. Also the readily agreed commitment to extend the cease-fire to the Siachin glacier.

For Yaswant Sinha now to say that he could see a change in the Pakistan "mind set" needs to be analysed and understood in terms of his earlier statements. What he possibly was hinting was that Pakistan might move towards the settlement of the Kashmir issue, on Indian terms.

India appears to be hopeful of achieving its ends by opening talks with a faction of the Hurriyat in Srinagar.

Talking of the split in the Hurriyat, has Pakistan's acceptance of Gilani's group as the authentic part of Hurriyat a wise move? Wasn't it hasty and impolitic to do so? Mushahid Hussain as been warning Pakistan not to go for favourites as indeed it was done in Afghanistan with dire results. Wasn't it proper for Pakistan to have engaged all the leaders of the Hurriyat and have sought to bring them together so that they could remain united and put up a common front. Display of Gilani's activities and ignoring others on PTV clearly indicates that Gilani alone is being backed. This in fact has been confirmed by unambiguous statements emanating from the prime minister himself. For India this has been a happy development as is clear from the remarks attributed to Mr Lal Krishna Advani, India's Deputy Prime Minister. If the Ansari group enters

into negotiations with the Indian leaders and arrives at some sort of an agreement or even a common understanding will it not adversely affect Pakistan's position on Kashmir? India by entering into an understanding with Ansari could further step up action against Gilani and his followers. With Pakistani support stopped altogether, how long just one faction continues its struggle for freedom? Abdul Ghani Bhat and Mir Waiz Farooq are outstanding and popular Kashmiri leaders. Pakistan government should without delay initiate engagement with them and make efforts to contain the damage to the cause of Kashmir and its own stand vis-a-vis India.

It is interesting to read Kuldip Nayar's recent article captioned "Not another partition" and especially on Hurriyat's split: "New Delhi should thank Islamabad for positive response from the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani's offer for talks. Had Pakistan not encouraged Syed Ali Shah Gillani, its Trojan horse, to break away from the organisation, the APHC might not have agreed on the meeting. Gillani would have insisted, like in the past, on having a third chair for Pakistan at the negotiating table. New Delhi could not have accepted such a proposition because it would have meant extending recognition to Islamabad as a partner".

Much more telling is Kuldip's approach to a possible future settlement. He clearly says that no government of any party (in India) could stay in power "if it ever tries to tinker with the accession". It is intriguing that an apparently reasonable columnist of considerable standing would not like Pakistan to be "partner" for talks to finally settle the Kashmir issue. More than that he would not envisage any compromise on the question of Kashmir's "accession" to India (which stands questioned by the United Nations, and for years the state has been described as a disputed territory by USA). As for the Hurriyat split Kuldip is categorical in stating that leaders like Mir Waiz Omar Farooq, Abdul Ghani Bhat and

APHCs new president Abbas Ansari who had been looking towards Islamabad for years are so much cut up that they did not attend even the *iftar* dinner party of Pakistan High Commission to India. His conclusion is that the "short sighted policy makers" in Islamabad "have cut the ground from under their feet by playing the Islamic card through Gilani, the Jamaat-e-Islamic leader." He has more to say on the point: "it has in part alienated the state's two other regions, the Hindu majority Jammu and Buddhist majority Ladakh on the one hand and pushed up the back of communal elements in the rest of India on the other".

The question is: Will Pakistan for the sake of peace and good relations, laudable objectives as there are — keep on conceding India's demands for enhanced communications, trade and tourism — things which suit a larger and economically and culturally pre-dominant country? If at all at a certain stage New Delhi does, under international pressure — provided enough of it is forthcoming — agrees to discuss Kashmir, what will be Pakistan's final terms for a settlement. If as Kuldip says India will not be willing to allow any "tinkering" with Kashmir's accession to India, will the dialogue not come to an abrupt stop? Instructive it is to recall while under international pressure at the end of 1993 when Pakistan was praised to table a resolution on Kashmir in UN General Assembly Third Committee, India readily agreed to open talks on Kashmir, the dialogue petered out on the very first day on January 1, 1994 when the Indian Foreign Secretary asserted that Kashmir was an integral part of India. Period.

Considering the complexity of the evolving situation and the high stakes involved, will it not be appropriate if the latest developments and in particular the changing scenario in Kashmir are discussed at length in a session of the Parliament specially called to focus on these issues?

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