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BJP's politics of hatred

There is no dearth of sane voices in India. Despite the hatred and anti-Pakistan sloganeering by the leading members of the incumbent ruling group called Sangh Parivar (BJP, VHP, RSS, Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena), there are many people in India who attempt to inject sense to the Hindu fanatics and extremists. Such people are not necessarily the product of any particular profession. They come from almost all walks of life. One such voice is Dr Subramaniam Swamy who has recently visited Pakistan. Dr Swamy did not mince words when he stressed that the BJP was mainly responsible for fomenting anti-Pakistan feelings. In addition, among the sane voices one cannot ignore names like Joyti Basu, Surjeet Singh Burnala, Somnath Chatterji, Kronandhi, Hegde, Ram Jethmalani, Lalu Parshad Yadav, Mani Shanker Ayer, Kushwant Singh, Kuldip Nayyar etc.

While there are many from the Sangh Parivar who are engaged in spreading hatred against Pakistan, L K Advani, Uma Bharati, Nerander Modi, Bal Thakray, Ashok Single, Parveen Tagoria, Gori Raj Kishore, Vishnu Hari Dalmia, Dr Murl Manohar Joshi, Vena Katyar and K C Sudarshin certainly stands out in this undesired and somewhat ignominious race. Subjecting Pakistan to a biting criticism has more or less become a habit of Mr Advani and his colleagues. Some circles in Pakistan often state that nothing good can come from Advani. It is becoming a ritual for them to at least give one statement against Pakistan in a day. It is indeed difficult to refute that politicians tend to read the writings on the wall and then change tune in congruity with the changing circumstances.

If one scans through the history, the lists of sane and insane voices become much larger, each of them being the product of a peculiar set of circumstances. However, the rise of BJP to power seems to be entirely dependent upon the politics of hate in one form or another. Undoubtedly the politics of ha-

tred started much before the partition. During the inapt and ill prepared partition processes millions of people, both Hindus and the Muslims, were butchered while proceeding on their ill-fated treks to either Pakistan or India. The gruesome slaughter that took place during the last days of British Raj left a lasting impression on many who went through the ignominious period of South Asian history. However, the people in the sub-continent gradually began to come out of the dark shadows of partition holocaust.

In recent decades the hydra of hate-politics has re-emerged through the concerted efforts of the Sangh Parivar. Although there is no doubt that the parent organisation which purely indulged and still continues to indulge in politics of hate is the RSS, the contributions of other members of the Sangh Parivar are by no means, less impressive. It was the RSS activist who brutally murdered Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in a payer meeting. For years the extremist Hindu groups hibernated and then made a successful comeback during last decade.

While all members of Sangh Parivar made effective contributions to the politics of hatred in their own respective ways, the BJP seem to have done in somewhat systematic manner. To retrace their nefarious track record one can easily start off from the Rath Yatra that was undertaken by Advani, which was followed by a planned assault on the Babri Mosque. As was planned and anticipated, the Rath Yatra sparked off riots and created the much-desired wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. The main purpose of Rath Yatra, which started from the Somnath temple and ended at Ayudhya, was to invoke Hindu extremism. It is a proven fact that at the time of Babri mosque demolition, three important leaders of BJP (Advani, Joshi and Uma Bharati) were actively inciting the *kar saavaks* to destroy the mosque. Although some action was undertaken against them but not much action has so far materialised against them. In addi-



Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema

The writer works for Islamabad
Policy Research Institute
picheema@ipri-pak.org

tion, the factors like making promises regarding fully equipping India with all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, getting rid of Constitution Article 370 which provided at least theoretically special status to the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, scrapping the Muslim Personnel Law, projecting notions like *Gurva Hindu* (Pride in being Hindu) etc were also effectively employed.

Once the BJP managed to secure power, the obvious concentration has been how to retain power. In this connection they seem to have made Pakistan and the promotion of Hindutva as the major dividend paying cards. Initially the leaders of the ruling group appeared to have opted for a policy of carrot. They invited President Musharraf to visit India hoping to secure a settlement of the Kashmir dispute on Indian terms. When this didn't work, they began to systematically apply anti-Pakistan card as the mainstay of their vote-catching mechanism. When President Musharraf went to India, he was hailed as a great son of Delhi. Later when they were unable to secure their coveted objective, the openly proclaimed great son of Delhi was subjected to all types of character assassination techniques.

Since the failure of Agra summit the BJP and its associates seemed to have opted for coercive diplomacy. In this connection three developments need to be mentioned here. First was the concentration of massive numbers of Indian troops on Pakistan's border. This action, according to BJP stalwarts, was prompted by an attack on Indian parliament. The blame for this attack was routinely placed upon Pakistan. It is interesting to note that the Indian higher

courts have recently awarded death sentences to three individuals who are alleged to have masterminded the attack on Indian parliament. Even more puzzling aspect is that if the planners of the attack on Indian parliament were living in India and are Indian citizens, how do you justify putting the blame on Pakistan. How did these three people acquire so much influence over the banned extremist group of Pakistan that they were able to get their activists to come to India and undertake such a stupendous task rather successfully?

It is also stated that in addition to other objectives, one was to place extra burden on the fragile economy of Pakistan. Admittedly the Pakistani response did cost a lot to Pakistan's economy. Does this mean that introducing another of their negative instrument satisfied the Indian leaders? While the troops concentration was unable to effectively assist BJP in the attainment of their objectives, it nevertheless did cost the country considerably.

The second development in the pursuit of politics of hatred is the communal carnage in Gujarat. The Hindu fury was unleashed in such way that almost every sane voice within the country was critical of what happened in Gujarat especially the State government's active participation was condemned by both the insiders as well as the outsiders. Despite the fact that almost all the international investigative reports and the human rights watch groups within and outside India thoroughly condemned the state machinery, the Gujarat's state machinery remained unruffled. On the contrary the state's Chief Minister Modi cleverly and effectively capitalised over the communal carnage and further propagated the politic of hate. This was the third significant development, which needed to be mentioned here. Modi even distributed hate pamphlets.

The electoral triumph in Gujarat has given a new impetus to the Sangh Parivar's campaign of hatred politics. Many among them believe that they must try

the same card in the coming state elections. According to an Indian newspaper *Amar Ujjala* the hate pamphlets have already been distributed in the Hamachal Pradesh (the elections in this state are scheduled for Feb 26, 2003) in limited quantities. The initial limited distribution is meant to assess the reaction of the people. Grossly exaggerated figures of Muslim population are given to scare the Hindu population. It is argued that the current Muslim population is around 300 millions and the rate of reproduction is so high that within no time they will exceed the Hindu population and then they will rule again. Therefore, it is imperative to vote for Hindu cause and Hindutva stands for Hindu cause.

Even the recent cabinet reshuffle is aimed to send important BJP stalwart to various states in order to make preparations for the coming elections. Four important cabinet members have been assigned party posts with a view to further promote the politics of hatred and prepare the potential voters to vote for Hindu extremism. While the next round of scheduled elections is due on Feb 26 (in states like Himachal, Tripura, Meghalay and Nagaland), the BJP leaders have been sent to important states like Rajasthan, Madayah Pradesh etc.

It is a pity that BJP allies in the ruling National Democratic Alliance appears either to be blind to the spread of hate politics by the BJP leaders or deliberately maintaining their silence which may have been caused by their own local political compulsions. According to an eminent Indian analyst, the BJP is aiming to secure the appointments of state governors as well as part officials from the RSS in order to promote and capitalise on hate politics. Saffronisation coupled with concerted attempts to promote politics of hate may pay some temporary dividends but in the long run it is likely to damage rather badly both the Indian secularism and society. In addition, the peace of South Asia is likely to be pushed into a considerable distance in the future.

Indo-Pak relations: the (il)logic of conflict

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Noman Sattar

India-Pakistan relations are again at a critical point, which could simply be characterised as more of the same. India expelled Pakistan's Charge d'affaires on charges of activities incompatible with his diplomatic status; Pakistan responded with a tit for tat move, expelling India's acting High Commissioner along with four diplomatic personnel. This development may have added a new strain, but that's nothing new for the two countries and the onlookers; it could make anyone yawn, saying: "What's new? That's the way they are, that's the way they will be!" India-Pakistan rivalry has reached a stage where it has become boring, where it has ceased to evoke interest, or positive expectations.

The current strain comes soon after an almost year-long period of tension, in which both the adversaries had amassed their troops on the borders, and were ready to attack the other (costing both millions of dollars). While Kashmir has been on the front burner for over ten years, the immediate problem was the attack on Indian parliament and India's contention that Pakistan was behind the act of terrorism. India was quick to garner the support of Washington, thus preempting the US-Pakistan alliance (or partnership) in the war against terrorism. While Pakistan was obliged to provide the US all facilities at its disposal in the face of strong public reaction. The US chose to use these at will, while offering India blanket support in its war against terrorism, which it has directed against Pakistan.

Pakistan offers moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri separatists as a matter of principle, it did make an effort to curb cross-border terrorism across the LoC, and banned some *jihadi* outfits. While Kashmir remains the core issue, preventing a real Indo-Pak detente, it is often used as a ruse. During the earlier democratic interlude (Benazir-Sharif eras), Indo-Pak relations were more or less normal, with the insurgency going on, and the issue on the side-burner. The Lahore summit took place in the same scenario, taking cognizance of the nuclear reality, paving the way for better relations. Then came Kargil, then the military coup and then the attack on Indian parliament, putting the strained relations on a crisis footing. Agra was an opportunity lost, where the two sides were unrealistic enough to expect the other to make unilateral concession(s). One can only hope that the lesson of Agra has been registered, if not learnt.

That the Kashmir insurgency makes India unstable should also be viewed against a cost-gain calculus, ie, has it made India any weaker, and has it made us any stronger? Considering the global scenario, Pakistan needs to rethink its strategy; the ongoing war on terrorism, close US-Indian and Indian-Israeli nexus, and the underlying strains in Pakistan-US relations. One is still not sure what kind of relationship we are in with Washington, alliance or partnership, and for how long?

The two sides ignore that the longer they take to reach accommodation, the more complex the issues are going to become; also, they are going to be faced with new issues, like terrorism. Unfortunately, India-Pakistan relations are now driven by a convoluted logic: that it is in the national interest to keep up the confrontation; that brinkmanship pays; that a nuclear capability is enough to guarantee security; and they can live with the Kashmir issue unresolved. All of the above have proved counterproductive, and a poor recipe for an amicable relationship.

What has become characteristic is for both sides to aggravate the situation just as they seem to improve a tad. The troops had hardly left the borders, and tension eased a bit that Gen Musharraf's statement relating to the use of nuclear weapons during the crisis appeared. In the India-Pakistan relationship such news adds spice, leading to a new strain, whether it is a fact, or fiction, whether intended or leaked; it helps both governments harden their stands, and justify their policies. What is ignored is that on both sides it is adding to the culture of ill will, hostility and suspicion, instead of removing it.

It is noteworthy that amid the rancor, both sides call the other to talks, PM Jamali on Kashmir day, and Mr Advani, in an earlier statement. Pakistan's Information Minister also calls for talks. But do the two sides seriously mean talks to settle issues or an exercise in rhetoric and futility? If they are serious, they need to make a concrete offer forthwith to break the vicious circle, the four-year-old intermittent crisis that has taken a heavy toll on their precarious relations, aggravating the security situation. The way the two sides have conducted themselves it seems obvious that they are not serious in settling the issue, are rather keen on keep it lingering for their own reasons. On the Pakistan side, the situation lends credence to the view that India-Pakistan relations remain tense and conflict prone during military regimes. It behooves the present civilian government to move ahead to seek accommodation in the interest of regional peace and the well being of the people. The same logic should move the Indian government. It should find it easier to deal with a civilian government. It also offers President Musharraf an opportunity to support the civilian government to finish a job left undone at Agra. As (and if) the two sides agree for talks they should realise that it should not be another Agra, and that both have to make simultaneous concessions, or there would be no deal! Exacting concessions from one protagonist is like a ransom deal, which more often fails to deliver!

To expect the US to deliver Kashmir is wishful, shallow thinking. Washington's "concern" over Kashmir does not mean that it subscribes to Pakistan's position. Its concern stems only from seeing Kashmir as a potential flashpoint for a nuclear showdown. The visit of President Musharraf to Russia could be (and is being) viewed as a potential opening to India. Only Russia is in a position to influence or convince India to seek a resolution of the Kashmir issue; but it would definitely not imply transferring sovereignty of the state of Kashmir to Pakistan. It is time for Pakistan to take realistic stock of the situation, narrow and rationalise its options, and make these a base for serious dialogue. India should realise that its recipe for addressing the Kashmir issue ignores ground realities, and needs drastic reappraisal. When India and Pakistan mention Kashmir, they are on different frequencies; while deluding the other, they are also deluding themselves.

"*Hanoor, Dilli door ust*," is both an historical allegory, as well as a symbol of ignoring the reality. *Dilli* still remains far proverbially, so long as the two sides want to keep the distance. An effort was made to reduce the distance between Delhi and Lahore in 1999, resulting in the Lahore declaration. Unfortunate events overcame that. A similar effort is needed in order to meet the challenges posed by the scourge and war on terrorism.

India could blame Pakistan for the Kashmir problem, but not for what transpired in Gujarat. The carnage in Gujarat is a grim reminder that India needs to get its act together, and address its Muslim problem in earnest; this cannot be unless it addresses the Kashmir problem, and that puts Pakistan in the picture as a party to the dispute. There would be more Gujarats, and blaming Pakistan would not help. With all its military might and economic clout, India remains weak and vulnerable. Pakistan is much smaller and weaker in comparison. It has its own compulsions to seek accommodation, keeping in view its erratic relationship with the US, as it uses Pakistan for seeking its objectives.

The current crisis offers the two adversaries another opportunity to make a new start, make another try at addressing Kashmir, and not to use it as a stumbling block in addressing other issues, and having normal, neighborly relations. To reach across fifty years of hostility needs exceptionally strong resolve and political will. The two leaders failed that test at Agra. That failure and continuing tension — should lead them to try again. It seems late to address (and resolve) Kashmir, but it is still early to give up trying.

The writer is Senior Research Officer, Area Study Centre, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad
pakirish@yahoo.com