

Baggage to shed

Pak. F. Rel India Down 14.12.0 By Anwar Syed

GUNS on each side of the Line of Control in Kashmir are silent, the bus between Lahore and Delhi is running and others between Lahore and Amritsar, and between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar, may be initiated. The border at Khokhrapar may be reopened, train service between points in Sindh and Rajasthan and a ferry service between Karachi and Mumbai are likely to be established. Air links between India and Pakistan and overflights will soon be restored.

Prime Minister Vajpayee will attend the Saarc meeting in Islamabad early next month, talk with Prime Minister Jamali, shake hands with General Musharraf and at least inquire after his health.

Does this mean that peace is at hand? If peace means absence of old fashioned fighting between regular armies, Pakistan and India have had it for thirty-two years (since December 16, 1971). It is then not peace but the end of a persistent "cold war" that the people on both sides have been seeking.

As some observers have pointed out, if the "peace moves" mentioned above are fully carried out, they will take Indo-Pakistan relations back where they were before the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament on December 13, 2001. An advance beyond that state may be made if the proposed bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar materializes. But even then the two countries will have quite some distance to go before they can be called good neighbours.

As they travel the road to amity, the two sides have burdensome baggage to shed. It is of two types: minds clouded by adversarial interpretations of historical experience; and specific disputes such as the one relating to Kashmir. The first divide is not only the deeper and more basic, it is also the more difficult to surmount.

Many (though surely not all) politically aware persons in India and Pakistan have been raised on unfriendly perceptions of the other side's identity. Indian opinion makers generally believe that the division of India in 1947 was wrong, that the justification for the creation of Pakistan (the two-nation theory) was absurd, and those who led the Muslim separatist movement were instruments of British policy and, in addition, wanting in other important respects. I shall limit myself here to a few such assessments.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, was a reformer but, in the context of the political struggle then emerging, he was a reactionary. He wanted Muslims to remain "useful" subjects of the British crown. The Aga Khan was an instrument of the British at whose instigation he helped organize the Muslim League. Mohammad Iqbal was a fine poet, said Nehru, but he was affiliated with the "old feudal order." Notwithstanding a modern exterior, M.A. Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan) was unacquainted with modern

munalist, dogmatic, intolerant, arrogant, fond of pomp and show, and an Englishman to all intents and purposes. J.N. Sahní, once editor of the *Hindustan Times*, described him as superficial, pompous, vain, rude, an opportunist, and a "pampered child" of the British bureaucracy.

Indian perceptions of post-independence Pakistani leaders have been just as unfavourable. Nehru alleged that they were reactionary, medieval, feudalistic, theocratic, and despotic, and that they were possessed of an irrational hatred of India. The Ayub regime, he said, was a "naked military dictatorship" without parallel in the "wide world today." Sardar Patel referred to Liaquat Ali Khan's government as a dishonest and mischievous covenant breaker that opposed India as a matter of habit. Sahní and others described Ghulam Mohammad and

tions can, and do, change. They are formed partly by the visible ground reality (e.g., actual conflict), and partly by the way it is interpreted by influential commentators and government spokesmen. The winds of change are blowing in both India and Pakistan. It is said that more and more people on both sides are getting tired of the protracted tension between their governments and they want an end to it. It is not surprising then that the objective "reality" in their relations (specific disputes) is currently in the process of being reinterpreted, more so in Pakistan, but to some extent in India also.

A great many of the mistakes that humankind make are not rolled back; they become a part of the way the world is, and folks learn to live with the new reality. Even if we assume for a moment that the division of India in 1947 was a "mistake," it is one

that has been around for more than a half century. The expectation of an earlier generation of Indian leaders that Pakistan would soon crumble under its own weight did not materialize. The present Indian ruling elite, intellectuals, and media people recognize that it is beyond their country's power and resources to undo Pakistan.

That India and Pakistan, as polities and as societies, despise each other, and that one of them is determined to destroy the other, are propositions that can now be safely discarded. Gandhi and Nehru were not taken as leaders by those Muslims who wanted a

As they travel the road to amity, Pakistan and India have burdensome baggage to shed. It is of two types: minds clouded by adversarial interpretations of historical experience; and specific disputes such as the one relating to Kashmir. The first divide is not only the deeper and more basic, it is also the more difficult to surmount. Many people in the two countries have been raised on unfriendly perceptions of the other side's identity.

Iskander Mirza as intriguers, Ayub Khan as a ruthless opportunist and an artful performer, and Bhutto as a "fire-eating" fanatic.

The Muslim League leaders before independence, and Pakistani leaders and commentators since then, on their part, did not think well of the Congress and its leaders. Mr Jinnah saw Gandhi as a "Hindu revivalist" and, under his influence, the Congress as a Hindu party determined to destroy Muslim culture, authoritarian in its programmes and methods, reactionary in spirit, dedicated to the establishment of Hindu raj in India. Nehru had his own share of deviousness. He dismissed the communal problem in India by denying that it existed. His professions of secularism, socialism, and modernism made no impact on his party's outlook; they served only a propagandistic purpose abroad, especially in the West.

The editor of this newspaper in the 1950s (Altaf Hussain) described Nehru as the "greatest living believer" in the efficacy of deceit; Chanakya (the ancient Hindu theorist of power politics) and Machiavelli guided his thinking. Other opinion makers in Pakistan believed that India was an implacable enemy that would undo Pakistan if it could, and that in any case it did not wish Pakistan well. These were the dominant Pakistani perceptions of India and its leaders, but I see indications that they may gradually be yielding to second thoughts.

Some of the Indian characterizations of Pakistani leaders and rulers are confirmed in the statements of Pakistani politicians and commentators themselves. Some of the Pakistani apprehensions and reservations concerning the Indian polity and society will be found confirmed in the writings of several

separate country of their own. But there can be little doubt that they were the more notable among the architects of India's independence, and that they were truly great as leaders of those who chose to go with them. Pakistanis owe them respect at least as much as they owe the founding fathers and heroes of any nation; perhaps even more, for if India had not become independent, Pakistan would not have come into being. Indian spokesmen should likewise begin to show a bit of respect for Mr Jinnah (if they must speak of him) because, as they must know, he is a dearly beloved hero of the Pakistanis.

It is well to bear in mind also that the Congress and Muslim League notables, referred to here, were pre-eminently politicians placed in adversarial positions in relation to one another. In their public utterances they downgraded their opponents as politicians everywhere do. Their characterizations of one another need not then be taken very seriously.

Consider also that they have been dead and gone for a long time. The dead cannot, and in fact do not, hold the succeeding generations prisoners of their own time-bound preferences and pronouncements. Many in the new generation that has come of age, and will soon begin to manage our affairs, do not think the way their fathers and grandfathers did. Every time I write about issues between India and Pakistan, I get messages from the Hindu readers of this newspaper (congratulations to the editor, for they appear to be quite numerous) telling me that they bear Muslims or Pakistan no ill will, and that they want amity and cooperation between the two countries.

likely to be established. Air links between India and Pakistan and overflights will soon be restored.

Prime Minister Vajpayee will attend the Saarc meeting in Islamabad early next month, talk with Prime Minister Jamali, shake hands with General Musharraf and at least inquire after his health.

Does this mean that peace is at hand? If peace means absence of old fashioned fighting between regular armies, Pakistan and India have had it for thirty-two years (since December 16, 1971). It is then not peace but the end of a persistent "cold war" that the people on both sides have been seeking.

As some observers have pointed out, if the "peace moves" mentioned above are fully carried out, they will take Indo-Pakistan relations back where they were before the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament on December 13, 2001. An advance beyond that state may be made if the proposed bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar materializes. But even then the two countries will have quite some distance to go before they can be called good neighbours.

As they travel the road to amity, the two sides have burdensome baggage to shed. It is of two types: minds clouded by adversarial interpretations of historical experience; and specific disputes such as the one relating to Kashmir. The first divide is not only the deeper and more basic, it is also the more difficult to surmount.

Many (though surely not all) politically aware persons in India and Pakistan have been raised on unfriendly perceptions of the other side's identity. Indian opinion makers generally believe that the division of India in 1947 was wrong, that the justification for the creation of Pakistan (the two-nation theory) was absurd, and those who led the Muslim separatist movement were instruments of British policy and, in addition, wanting in other important respects. I shall limit myself here to a few such assessments.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, was a reformer but, in the context of the political struggle then emerging, he was a reactionary. He wanted Muslims to remain "useful" subjects of the British crown. The Aga Khan was an instrument of the British at whose instigation he helped organize the Muslim League. Mohammad Iqbal was a fine poet, said Nehru, but he was affiliated with the "old feudal order." Notwithstanding a modern exterior, M.A. Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan) was unacquainted with modern political thought, and he had become a willing prisoner to reactionary ideologies. He did not believe in democracy, and he left the Congress because it was becoming a party of the masses, the "Hindustani-speaking," poorly dressed people, whom he disliked.

M.K. Gandhi once declared that Jinnah's mind was enslaved, and that he allowed himself to be used by the British as a "cloak" for denying freedom to India. Subhas Chandra Bose characterized him as a leader of the reactionary elements among Muslims. Sri Prakasa (first Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan) described Jinnah as a rabid com-

passionate Hindu. In the case of the Ayub regime, he said, was a "naked military dictatorship" without parallel in the "wide world today." Sardar Patel referred to Liaquat Ali Khan's government as a dishonest and mischievous covenant breaker that opposed India as a matter of habit. Sahni and others described Ghulam Mohammad and

As they travel the road to amity, Pakistan and India have burdensome baggage to shed. It is of two types: minds clouded by adversarial interpretations of historical experience; and specific disputes such as the one relating to Kashmir. The first divide is not only the deeper and more basic, it is also the more difficult to surmount. Many people in the two countries have been raised on unfriendly perceptions of the other side's identity.

Iskander Mirza as intriguers, Ayub Khan as a ruthless opportunist and an artful performer, and Bhutto as a "fire-eating" fanatic.

The Muslim League leaders before independence, and Pakistani leaders and commentators since then, on their part, did not think well of the Congress and its leaders. Mr Jinnah saw Gandhi as a "Hindu revivalist" and, under his influence, the Congress as a Hindu party determined to destroy Muslim culture, authoritarian in its programmes and methods, reactionary in spirit, dedicated to the establishment of Hindu raj in India. Nehru had his own share of deviousness. He dismissed the communal problem in India by denying that it existed. His professions of secularism, socialism, and modernism made no impact on his party's outlook; they served only a propagandistic purpose abroad, especially in the West.

The editor of this newspaper in the 1950s (Altaf Hussain) described Nehru as the "greatest living believer" in the efficacy of deceit; Chanakya (the ancient Hindu theorist of power politics) and Machiavelli guided his thinking. Other opinion makers in Pakistan believed that India was an implacable enemy that would undo Pakistan if it could, and that in any case it did not wish Pakistan well. These were the dominant Pakistani perceptions of India and its leaders, but I see indications that they may gradually be yielding to second thoughts.

Some of the Indian characterizations of Pakistani leaders and rulers are confirmed in the statements of Pakistani politicians and commentators themselves. Some of the Pakistani apprehensions and reservations concerning the Indian polity and society will be found confirmed in the writings of several eminent Indian intellectuals — for instance, Nirad Chaudhuri, Pran Chopra, Krishan Bhatia, and Kuldip Nayar among others.

I should like to emphasize, however, that it is irrelevant to our consideration of the normalization of Indo-Pakistan relations whether, or to what extent, the characterizations under reference were accurate. They were, at best, impressions. Their authors likely knew that they were polemical and exaggerative. Our reason for considering them is that they may have been transmitted to the succeeding generations.

Fortunately, it so happens that percep-

in Pakistan, but to some extent in India also.

A great many of the mistakes that humankind make are not rolled back; they become a part of the way the world is, and folks learn to live with the new reality. Even if we assume for a moment that the division of India in 1947 was a "mistake," it is one

that has been around for more than a half century. The expectation of an earlier generation of Indian leaders that Pakistan would soon crumble under its own weight did not materialize. The present Indian ruling elite, intellectuals, and media people recognize that it is beyond their country's power and resources to undo Pakistan.

That India and Pakistan, as polities and as societies, despise each other, and that one of them is determined to destroy the other, are propositions that can now be safely discarded. Gandhi and Nehru were not taken as leaders by those Muslims who wanted a

separate country of their own. But there can be little doubt that they were the more notable among the architects of India's independence, and that they were truly great as leaders of those who chose to go with them. Pakistanis owe them respect at least as much as they owe the founding fathers and heroes of any nation; perhaps even more, for if India had not become independent, Pakistan would not have come into being. Indian spokesmen should likewise begin to show a bit of respect for Mr Jinnah (if they must speak of him) because, as they must know, he is a dearly beloved hero of the Pakistanis.

It is well to bear in mind also that the Congress and Muslim League notables, referred to here, were pre-eminently politicians placed in adversarial positions in relation to one another. In their public utterances they downgraded their opponents as politicians everywhere do. Their characterizations of one another need not then be taken very seriously.

Consider also that they have been dead and gone for a long time. The dead cannot, and in fact do not, hold the succeeding generations prisoners of their own time-bound preferences and pronouncements. Many in the new generation that has come of age, and will soon begin to manage our affairs, do not think the way their fathers and grandfathers did. Every time I write about issues between India and Pakistan, I get messages from the Hindu readers of this newspaper (congratulations to the editor, for they appear to be quite numerous) telling me that they bear Muslims or Pakistan no ill will, and that they want amity and cooperation between the two countries.

The "potholes" in the road to friendly relations between Pakistan and India are beginning to be filled, but a lot more mending needs to be done which the governments and other opinion makers in the two countries should take in hand. There are elements in the "baggage" to be shed, and substantive issues, which I have not discussed for want of space. These will have to keep until next Sunday.

The writer is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Massachusetts, USA.
E-mail: anwarsyed@cox.com