

A realistic approach

Pak. F. rel India

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By Kuldip Nayar

"ZULFI, I know that we must find a solution for Kashmir. But we have got caught in a situation which we can't get out of without causing damage to the systems and structures of our respective societies." Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru told this to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Pakistan foreign minister, as far back as November 1961 in London. This holds good as much today as it was then.

President General Pervez Musharraf is right in saying that he will not give up Kashmir. No ruler in India or Pakistan can stay in power if he or she relinquishes Kashmir. People on either side will not accept a settlement which they perceive as a defeat. But it is wrong if the Pakistan president expects Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to concede anything basic on Kashmir. He has more compulsions than Musharraf.

The problem has, in fact, become more complicated than before because the Kashmiris, those living in the valley, have begun to cherish the dream of becoming independent. People in the Hindu-majority Jammu and the Buddhist-majority Ladakh, the two other regions of the state, have openly dissociated themselves from the demand of independence. They want to stay part of India. This scenario has, unfortunately, polarized the state, more aptly, trifurcated it.

Musharraf was realistic when he said that he had "left aside" the 50-year-old demand for a UN-mandated plebiscite in Kashmir. Both prime minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali and foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri unnecessarily misinterpreted Musharraf's reading of the situation so as to placate the extremist opinion in Pakistan. They should know that holding a plebiscite is neither feasible nor possible.

If at all, where do you hold it? Apparently, in the valley where the Muslim population has swelled to more than 98 per cent after the migration of Kashmiri pandits who number only 20,000 now. What will it prove? The All Party Hurriyat Conference has already admitted that its influence — or claim — does not go

ter a fatal blow to India's pluralism. Hindutva, so far a danger in the distance, may come to engulf the country. The Sangh parivar will hawk around the country that even after 56 years the Muslims of Kashmir preferred to opt out of Hindu-majority India and join the Muslim-majority Pakistan. A secular society, with 12 crore Muslims, cannot even entertain such a heinous thought.

In fact, Pakistan has itself moved from the plebiscite demand. It did so first implicitly in 1966 at Tashkent and then explicitly in 1972 at Shimla. At both the places, plebiscite did not figure either directly or indirectly. No UN resolution regarding the plebiscite was recalled. At the preparatory meeting at Murree (April 1972) for the Shimla conference, DP Dhar from India and Aziz Ahmed from Pakistan exchanged several documents on how to establish "a durable peace." But none of them mentioned plebiscite. Nor did Pakistan bring it up at any stage, not even during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's meeting with Indira Gandhi at Shimla.

A bilateral dialogue for a "final settlement" has come to be accepted a way out since the Shimla conference. For a long time after the conference, Islamabad did not even mention the UN resolutions. Later when the Kashmiris came into the picture, Pakistan began clubbing together the Shimla conference and the UN resolutions to suggest the Kashmiris' participation.

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If at all, where do you hold it? Apparently, in the valley where the Muslim population has swelled to more than 98 per cent after the migration of Kashmiri pandits who number only 20,000 now. What will it prove? The All Party Hurriyat Conference has already admitted that its influence — or claim — does not go beyond the valley. Still if a plebiscite is held and the choice given between independence and the integration with Pakistan, more than 90 per cent will opt for independence.

Only recently did Musharraf reject the proposition of independence. There are yet some in Pakistan to argue that it is only a matter of time before the independent valley of 98 per cent Muslims will join the Islamic state of Pakistan. An independent Kashmir is considered part of the strategy. The Pakistan government, on the other hand, says that it recognizes only the Hurriyat faction headed by Syed Ali Shah Geelani who has always advocated that Kashmir should join Pakistan.

As far as the Kashmiris are concerned, they do not like the prospect of joining Pakistan. They are opposed to be part of a country where the military set-up has reduced liberty to a farce and where the different provinces have little autonomy. "We do not want to change masters," as many Kashmiri leaders say. "We want independence."

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that a "Middle-East defence pact" with Pakistan was in the offing. Nehru warned then that the whole psychological atmosphere between India and Pakistan would change "for the worse" and every question pending between the two nations would be affected by Pakistan's membership of military pacts.

The point that the Indian prime minister was making was that with American arms increasing Pakistan's fighting potential, it would be ridiculous to talk of "demilitarization" of Kashmir as the first step to hold a plebiscite. Nehru even wrote to Mohammad Ali Jinnah: In fact, the question before us becomes one of militarization and not that of demilitarization.

This was the beginning of New Delhi's subsequent stand that military pacts by Pakistan had negated the very basis on which India agreed to a plebiscite.

It is no use beating a dead horse. Musharraf is right — he is on tape — to keep aside the plebiscite. But it does not mean that Kashmir should not be discussed. To begin with, India should implement the agreement on the Siachen that its foreign secretary initialled more than 15 years ago.

Whatever the outcome, an overall situation, as Nehru told Bhutto, should not cause damage to the "systems and structures" that India and Pakistan have.

Repercussions of Kashmir's independence or integration with Pakistan or India are beyond proportions; they are too dangerous to even contemplate. People in the rest of India will see it as the Muslim-populated area seceding from the country on the basis of religion. It will amount to reopening partition. Fires of hatred might rage to such an extent that the very complexion of Indian polity might undergo a change.

Not only that, a political party that thrives on building up animus against the Muslims will find an apt argument to adminis-

The writer is a freelance columnist based in New Delhi.

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