

BJP's communal

Dawn *Pak. F. Rel. - India* game plan

21.2.03 By M.H. Askari

INDIA's conduct of its diplomatic relations with Pakistan has lately been particularly brash and hamhanded. The latest example of provocative behaviour was provided by the expulsion of the acting Pakistan high commissioner in New Delhi by accusing him of indiscreet conduct and filing on FIR against him under the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).

The senior diplomat was accused of having provided funds to two leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) of Kashmir who had called on him. He, along with four members of his staff, were declared persona non grata and asked to leave the country within 48 hours.

Pakistan, which acted with remarkable restraint when the high commissioner himself was similarly expelled some time ago, decided to respond in kind this time, and expelled the acting Indian high commissioner and four members of his staff. The missions of the two countries, which normally carry a heavy burden of diplomatic and consular duties, have been severely depleted.

Following a similar unpleasant phase in their relations in 1991, the foreign secretaries of the two countries had agreed on a formal code of conduct for the treatment of each other's diplomatic personnel. Unfortunately, the code has frequently been violated by both sides with diplomats being shadowed by intelligence personnel and even being roughed up at times and detained without any justifiable reason.

New Delhi has also taken its own time to grant visas for a fresh batch of Pakistani diplomats to fill the vacancies in New Delhi and the Pakistani authorities too have done likewise.

While this favourite game of diplomatic tit-for-tat is being played out, the road, rail and air links between the two countries continue to remain suspended. There were expectations that the regular routes for travel will be restored with the beginning of the new year. This has not happened.

Following the withdrawal of

month period of military stand off, there were expectations that the tempers on both sides will begin to cool off. There are no signs yet of this happening. Indeed, with India increasingly hardening its attitude towards Pakistan, the prospects of normal, neighbourly relations between the two countries seem very remote. The chances of the resumption of a dialogue to resolve bilateral disputes even more so. It sounds almost utopian to recall that Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India had declared in the Indian parliament on September 12, 1958, that "the best course to decide any outstanding matter (between India and Pakistan) is to refer it to an independent party or tribunal... There is no other way." Today, New Delhi refuses to accept mediation for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute.

It also seems like a distant echo from another world that according to the late Prof Jamiluddin Ahmad (who was particularly close to the higher echelons of the Muslim League and who had compiled Mr Jinnah's statements and speeches) at least on two occasions (October 14, 1944, and November 15, 1946) the Quaid had gone on record saying that after independence and partition, India and Pakistan will proclaim a sort of "Monroe Doctrine", implying that the security and integrity of one would be of concern to the other, like the equation between the US, Canada and other countries of the American continent and that one state would cooperate with the others in the event of an attack from outside.

Today the reality is that the Indian prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, decided not to visit Pakistan to attend the SAARC summit last January which led to the summit's indefinite postponement. Following the famous Agra summit, Mr Vajpayee had more than once affirmed that he had accepted President Pervez Musharraf's invitation to visit Pakistan and that he would do so at an early date. But the promise of a return visit to Pakistan is now all but forgotten. Apparently, Mr Vajpayee is under pressure from the militant elements in his own party and government not to soften his tough posture toward Pakistan.

Mr Vajpayee's attitude to the communal question in India to

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Pakistan.
Mr Vajpayee's attitude to the communal question in India too has unmistakably hardened. Speaking at a function organized by the leaders of the arch Hindu rashtra parties —

Rashtriyaswayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) — and other like-minded Hindu leaders in New York on September 9, 2000, Mr Vajpayee, when asked how soon a Ram Temple would be built in Ayodhya, categorically said: "If the electorate gives us a clear two-thirds majority, we will build the India of our dreams; there is no doubt about that."

Unless sanity prevails among the devotees of Hindutva in India, a major crisis over the building of the Ram Temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya would come to a head within the next few days. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, when zealots of the Hindu fundamentalist parties seemed bent upon building a temple at its site, the Indian Supreme Court passed an interim stay order calling upon all parties in the case not to alter the site in any manner until the formal plea asking for permission to build a temple on the site had been disposed of. However, the RSS and other Sangh parivar groups appear adamant in their resolve to start building a temple on Feb 25, regardless of what the court says. If they go ahead with their plan, it could mean a fresh round of Hindu-Muslim rioting in India.

After its victory in the Gujarat state elections late last year, the Hindu zealots appear to believe that they could make electoral gains in some nine states where elections are due to be held later this year by following a similar strategy of militant assertion of Hindu religious and political philosophy.

However, Mr Vajpayee does not seem to have reckoned with the saner elements within his own coalition NDA. According to a report in Dubai-based *Khaleej Times* earlier this week, the BJP could be on a "collision course" with its allied parties on the question of the Hindutva agenda. The report says that the non-Hindutva parties in Vajpayee's coalition have begun to be impatient with the BJP's "dual approach" — one with the (non-Hindutva) allies to remain in the seat of power and another to appease the fascistic Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Overall, Mr Vajpayee's multi-party coalition appears to be in a state of flux. Last Sunday the BJP held a meeting with all its allies to work out a strategy to counter opposition in the parliament session. However, the leading members of the coalition parties who met Vajpayee earlier maintained that the BJP had "to come clear" on the various issues pertaining to the Hindutva agenda. A seasoned politician and intellectual, Mr Vajpayee does not need to be reminded that one cannot fool all the people all of the time.