

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali and President Pervez Musharraf should please go slow in normalising the spectrum of relations between their two countries. Their intentions are most laudable. Their goals for neighbourly bonding and the steps they are taking have historic significance. They will be remembered as statesmen for generations to come. However, at the moment, their power to control the adverse reactions to the agreements they make is not without limits.

Strong vested interests lie deeply entrenched in the national security and economic concerns that have come into existence over the last half a century. Passions and prejudices in the psyche of the two peoples cast long shadows over logic and good sense. The benefits of confrontation cannot be converted into dividends

Go slow, please

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of peace overnight. The process involves giving succour and inflicting some pain simultaneously. Therefore, the baggage of the past cannot be shed in haste. It shall take time. It should be allowed to take time.

True, that the overwhelming support for peace and normalisation among the masses and classes in both the countries is real at the moment. International support is also there. But suspicion of each other is also a reality. Distrust abounds, especially among hidden theoreticians and actors. The agents of vested interests, national and international, lurk in the shadows. Sections of masses and classes can easily be swayed in the

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wrong direction and aroused against the actions of the two governments.

The elections for Lok Sabha are due in India. The government of Pakistan is in the process of consolidating its recently acquired legitimacy. The times are not the most propitious for radical measures.

Each measure implemented for normalisation of the relations is bound to have some adverse reaction. Small

steps will evoke smaller reaction when compared with the reaction against radical measures. Mild reaction can be easily countered with minor adjustment and accommodation. Big reactions will prove to be big setbacks in the peace process. Painfully made progress can come to naught by a burst of politically motivated measure. Therefore, it is essential that Pakistan and India proceed slowly in their endeavour towards achieving permanent peace. Many small steps taken over a prolonged period will amount to big steps in the end.

The issue of Kashmir calls for a tripartite amicable solution. The solution agreed to only among India and

Pakistan with the consent of easily-swayed Kashmiris will not work. The dissent among the Kashmiris is based on strong nationalistic fervour. Scores of thousands of lives have been lost. The part of Kashmir with India and the Azad Kashmir under the wing of Pakistan are in a state of ferment. It is wrong to assume that their dissent can be suppressed by use of force - even the forces of India and Pakistan, combined.

The consent of the Kashmiris to a solution jointly proposed by India and Pakistan can only be won through love and peace, freedom and prosperity for the people of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir. Both Pakistan and India must win the hearts and minds of Kashmiris. Only then a workable solution of the Kashmir issue acceptable to the three sides can be found. That will take time. Haste is counter-productive.

*Pch. F.R. - India
5/1/04 The Nation*