

The mood in New Delhi

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DECEMBER is the month of chrysanthemum blooms in Delhi. A variety of this flower — perhaps new — appears like a large round ball of fresh snowflakes. There is also a freshness and quiet confidence in this sprawling metropolis that rules over a billion people. Perhaps for the first time ever there is a hint of light at the end of the Indian horizon mired in centuries of poverty and dust.

With a hundred billion dollars in foreign exchange tucked in its coffers, a 7.3 per cent GDP growth this year, a middle class twice that of Pakistan's population, a world class pharmaceutical industry producing a range of advanced medicines at low cost, an aggressive software and outsourcing service reach which is set to earn ten billion dollars per annum; a safe tourist destination for hundreds of thousands of wintering Europeans, Japanese and Americans, India is on the trail of China for growth, development and armed night.

To top it all, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee not only looks healthier in his eightieth year, than he did at the time of Agra, he seems to have out-distanced his nearest rival, Mr Advani, and all set to sweep the polls in next year's general elections.

What does this all mean for Pakistan? And the Kashmir dispute? Two conclusions were drawn after three assassination attempts within 11 days on President Musharraf. One, our terror organizations which exist in subterranean Pakistan have decided to wage a full-blooded war against Musharraf for the suspension of shelling across the

graph showing the declining numbers of terrorists entering Indian Occupied Kashmir this year with precise figures for previous years. But, this begs the question; if they have intercepted radio messages and ingress to the last man why can't they pinpoint locations and eliminate them, or, if this is not possible, jam the communications?

If camps really exist on our side then these exist with the consent of the ISI or the army. Recently, I questioned in the National Assembly about the number of the so-called freedom fighters caught by the army in attempting to cross the LoC and action, if any, taken against them. The question was disallowed by the Speaker.

Likewise the Indians fail to explain why an army of 700,000 persons patrolling the LoC is unable to control the insurgency. The freedom fighters could not survive unless they have strong support among an alienated people. Sealing the LoC is not likely to heal the festering wound inside the Valley.

A solution must lie in a process, with the process becoming the solution. The process must be acceptable to moderates and the people of goodwill in both countries. It should not be a zero sum game. The wall of moderation should be able to withstand the lashing waves of the extremists and super-patriots on both sides. Once a process is agreed upon, India and Pakistan will need strong leadership to deliver.

acquired by the old state by conquest and have nothing in common, culturally or linguistically with the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, Ladakh and Baltistan should be constituted as union and federal territories in India and Pakistan respectively by mutual agreement. Shrinking the problem will help to make the "process" a little easier.

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution grants autonomy to Jammu & Kashmir. This autonomy has been more of a fiction than a fact for the past half century. Full autonomy — a concept which needs to be defined and developed must be conceded to the Indian held Kashmir. For the autonomy to succeed Pakistan's cooperation and India's large-heartedness will be needed. Likewise, the same quantum of autonomy must be conceded by Pakistan to Azad Kashmir. The two parts of Kashmir will remain within the constitutional jurisdictions of India and Pakistan and will have their own Supreme Courts; their heads of government will be titled prime ministers as before.

Autonomy will grant the right of near-sovereignty to the respective parts of Kashmir. The only right not conceded to these states will be the right to change constitutional status. Both countries will have the right to retain troops in their respective parts and to maintain law and order if requested by the state governments. Trade, immigration and tourism will be the prerogative of the autonomous governments.

The respective Kashmir governments will have the right to open trade and tourist offices in foreign countries following the example of the French and Dutch parts of Belgium and the Hong Kong-China model. Once full autonomy is in place, the line in

blooded war against Musharraf for the suspension of shelling across the LoC and going soft on the plebiscite issue.

Taking advantage of the ceasefire, India plans to fence with barbed wire and thermal image the 770 kilometer LoC by next April, making any unauthorized cross-line movement in Kashmir very difficult. Second, New Delhi recognizes Musharraf as a credible negotiating partner who has the means and the will to take on the extremist organizations which have developed deep roots in Pakistan soil. Pakistan without Musharraf is likely to be a rudderless political entity, hostage to instability, terrorism and adverting to hardline positions on Kashmir.

India apparently is willing to enter into a dialogue but on its terms on Kashmir once the infrastructure of terrorism is eliminated in Azad Kashmir. I requested Mr Brijesh Mishra, the national security adviser and the man closest to Mr Vajpayee to explain his certitude on the existence of terror camps in Azad Kashmir. He referred to some transcripts of radio messages of an incriminating nature sent from these camps to operatives across the LoC. When requested to hand me over a specimen of these transcripts he declined but offered to let me read the transcripts. The offer was not taken up.

Mr Mishra claimed to know the exact number of "terror" camps with locations operating in Azad Kashmir. The Indian *Sunday Express* published a

leadership to deliver.

Only time will tell us the truth. It is time for both countries to come clean. Pakistan must satisfy India that acquiescing in the cross movement of freedom fighters has come to an end. Sadly, it appears that in tolerating the freedom fighters we take two steps forward and one backwards.

One would welcome a parliamentary debate on the issue to convince the unconvinced that terrorism is not only a two-edged sword that recoils on the perpetrator but in net result, counter-productive and disreputable for any state to be an abettor. India must appreciate that the Kashmiris of the valley are a deeply alienated lot. A recent BBC film on Srinagar was a pointer in this direction.

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A 'process' heard in New Delhi runs somewhat as follows: -

Ladakh and Baltistan were the colonies of the former Maharaja of Kashmir who was a British satrap. These territories were

model. Once full autonomy is in place, the line in Kashmir will tend to get blurred. Elected assemblies on either side should be allowed to have joint sessions to discuss inter-Kashmir trade and local problems. There is no foretelling where the process will end. The drama of real life is more daring than what our timid imaginations will allow for now.

The most encouraging thing in our inter-state relations is the overwhelming response of the people. People on both sides exhibit an extraordinary warmth, like estranged relatives now wishing to leave the ghost of the past behind.

I shall give one example of this. We were invited to a TV programme, 'Face-to-Face' with about 200 persons, mostly young people. A BJP MP in his tirade repeated the Kargil episode, as an example of Pakistan's bad faith after the Lahore declaration. One of my colleagues said in reply, "Yes, Kargil was bad, but if you must bring up Kargil then why stop there; go back to Siachen and East Pakistan". The crowd clapped thunderously at this response and Kargil was not mentioned again.

I once wrote that we — India and Pakistan — sleep in the same pit, but dream different dreams. I think, young people dream the same on both sides.

The writer, an MNA, recently visited India to attend the South Asia Forum of Parliamentarians meeting in New Delhi.

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