

Pak. F. Rel - India  
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# Diplomat bashing

Once again the BJP has lived up to its reputation and made an amazingly strange move in order to malign Pakistan. Not only it ordered the expulsion of five Pakistani officials working in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi, it even went to the extent of accusing the Acting High Commissioner of providing money to the representative of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC). It would be rather difficult to accept the Indian version of events. No sane observer is likely to buy the argument that the Acting High Commissioner would personally call the representative of APHC and handover the money. There are many safer and alternative methods available to give money to the target individuals or the groups, if one is determined to do so. The Indians argued that the name of the Acting High Commissioner was in the FIR that was filed.

Whatever the facts of the case are, one thing is quite clear that the move was intended to malign Pakistan on one hand and to discredit the freedom movement on the other. Everybody knows that not only the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi is subjected to all kinds of close observations but all the Pakistani working in the High Commission are also closely watched and at times even harassed. Under such strict vigilance it seems somewhat ludicrous to assume that an Acting High Commissioner himself would be a party to such an act. Either the Indians are running out of sophisticated ideas to sustain their campaign of maligning Pakistan or they have deliberately embarked upon a crude trail of undesirable acts because they feel such acts would be easily comprehensible among a large section of their own gullible society or the act is a part of a well-calculated strategy.

As a consequence of India's unnecessary expulsion, the Pakistanis also reacted and expelled five officials

of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. The Indian Foreign Minister did not wait long to highlight the difference between the two expulsions. He said that the Pakistani diplomats were expelled on the grounds of the FIR that was lodged by the Indian police but the neighbouring country took a similar step as a retaliatory move. He was attempting to stress that the Pakistani diplomats were ordered to move out of India because they indulged in activities that violated international diplomatic rules and practices whereas the Pakistanis merely retaliated without any substantive basis. It is indeed not too far fetched to assume that the Indians must have assessed the likely Pakistani response and had already decided to accuse Pakistan of retaliations without an appropriate reason. In most of the previous similar acts of diplomat bashing and consequent expulsions, the Indians merely advanced the accusations that the activities of the Pakistani embassy official were not compatible with his recognised duties.

This is not the first time that these two countries have expelled their diplomats. The past is studded with many examples in which diplomats are declared persona non grata and then asked to leave the country within 48 hours. While this practice appears to be a legitimate and is being practiced by various countries but not the way India exploits this practice. India is in the habit of cooking up charges and then blaming the other country for causing unnecessary deterioration of relations.

The difference between the Indian and the Pakistani moves is that India plans the moves with well analysed likely reactions from the target country and then executes whereas the Pakistanis, in most cases, merely reacts to the moves. A strange kind of reciprocity is being maintained between these two South Asian states.



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If one reviews the moves made by the BJP since the failure of Agra Summit, it becomes quite obvious that not a single move was intended to secure peace. Following the election victory in Gujarat, the BJP hardliners appeared to be convinced that the only way they could win the elections was by opting for a tough approach towards Pakistan, no matter how irrational it might appear to the rest of the world. Although this approach was tried in UP elections but it did not

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pay the desired level of dividends. Yet the BJP would like to strictly adhere to it primarily because of overwhelming success in Gujarat. One should not overlook the special situation in Gujarat. Not only it shares border with Pakistan but it has also been ravaged by extensive anti-Muslim riots. Anti-Muslim sentiments coupled with anti-Pakistanism were cleverly exploited by the BJP and its associates. In addition, hate pamphlets containing massive exaggeration and gross distortion of facts about the rapid growth of the Muslims in India were distributed in an attempt to scare the Hindus and to invoke extreme Hindu nationalism.

One does not have to dig deep in

order to find out why the Indians are indulging in a systematic vilification campaign against Pakistan. Not only the BJP and other members of the Sangh Parivar are determined to paint Pakistan as a terrorist country but they would also like to keep the pressure on Pakistan by employing various methods such as concentration of forces on Pakistani borders, repeatedly drumming the notion of cross border infiltration — even though they are fully cognisant of the fact the infiltration has been considerably reduced —, exaggerated projection of fundamentalists' rise in Pakistan and continuous accusations against Pakistan in one form or the other.

One has to admire the Indian approaches as they are employing all those allegations against Pakistan that would graphically describe not only the developments inside India but would also prove to be most appropriate and accurate description of the policies. For years, the Indians loved to describe Pakistan as a fundamentalist country and excessively projected a rapid increase in religious groups. The apprehension highlighted was that soon hardliner fundamentalists would rule Pakistan. As a result of the recent elections in Pakistan, this is indeed the first time that the religious parties have gained considerable number of seats. The increase in

their seats is product of two major factors. Part of the success was the product of American-led war in Afghanistan and consequent effective capitalisation and articulation of anti-American sentiments. The second factor that contributed towards their success was their own strategy to unite and then contest elections. Almost all of these parties are moderate religious parties as the extremist religious groups are already banned.

Compared to Pakistan, one has to ask the question how many of the extremist Hindu groups are banned in India. Some of the Hindu extremist groups including those, which have even ridiculed their own supreme court, are enjoying all kinds of state patronage in their nefarious pursuits. The central government of India has so far taken no action against them except advising them not to indulge in harsh language. Even some of the chief ministers in India declared some members of the ruling Sangh Parivar as the terrorist groups but the central government opted not to ban them. On the contrary these groups were employed to spread fears in states where they have influence. There are many groups, which could have been easily declared as terrorist groups.

In this game of actions and reactions the diplomats would continue to experience unnecessary bashing. Repeated expulsions without any tangible reason and convincing evidence is likely to eventually invoke stronger reactions and may even push the Pakistanis to go beyond the ongoing game of tit for tat. Already some in Pakistan are suggesting that in view of extremely uncivilised behaviour and total disregard of established diplomatic practices by both the Indian agencies and members of the ruling Sangh Parivar, India should at least be declared as a non-family station for the diplomats.

**I**t suits both the government in New Delhi and Islamabad to sustain the estrangement of two neighbours. They have developed a vested interest in the distance itself. The belief is that they would gain by holding themselves aloof and by spurning any offer for normalcy, much less friendship. That is the reason why all contacts, particularly non-official, have been snapped for all practical purposes. The reduction of diplomatic staff in each other's high commissions may still be reduced because that gives a dramatic touch to the scene.



The BJP, which heads the government in India, has learnt through experience in Gujarat how it can win at the polls by raising the bogey of Pakistan. Hindutva leaders have come to believe that the anti-Pakistan bias at some stage gets converted into anti-Muslim feeling. Therefore, even when the name of General Pervez Musharraf was used during electioneering in Gujarat, the word "Mian" was prefixed to deride the Muslim community.

Since the party has no compunction in playing the religious or other cards, it will not initiate or reciprocate any step for conciliation, from within or without the country, with Pakistan. The argument is that why it should do anything that may confuse the tainted and potential voters at a time when elections are due in 10 states within a year and in the country within 20 months.

Terrorism, too, has come in handy to the BJP. It has created the impres-

## View from New Delhi

# Actions without a policy

*Pak. F. rel. India*

Kuldip Nayar

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sion that its sponsors are either the people from across the border or from among the fundamentalists living in India. Since those apprehended or killed happen to be Muslims, particularly from Pakistan, the question of their motive is increasingly suspect. No better scenario would have been possible for the spread of saffronisation because it strengthens the Sangh parivar's agenda to create ill will against Pakistan as well as the Muslims. This also polarises the society further.

The Pakistan government is equally comfortable with the situation. It helps Islamabad in two ways. One, it can parade itself as the bastion of Muslims and a defender of the two-nation theory, rejected by India. No wonder, President Musharraf raised the question of Gujarat at the UN to emphasise that Pakistan has the right to speak on behalf of the Muslims in India. Two, President Musharraf can allay the fears of religious parties in Pakistan that he has not left the jihadi militants in Kashmir high and dry despite the pressure from President Bush.

Islamabad also sits pretty with continuation of terrorism across the border. It labours under the impression that it has been able to "hoodwink" Washington on the existence of training camps in Pakistan. One specific example is that of a Pakistani agency misleading the FBI agents, who visited a suspected militant training

camp in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. Intelligence officials reportedly ordered inhabitants -35 of them were from Saudi Arabia -to hide in the jungle to make the camp appear deserted. Pakistan's Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed refused to comment on whether such a FBI probe had taken place.

Still New Delhi, although unhappy with Washington for not putting enough pressure on Islamabad, is somewhat satisfied that it has brought down the level of terrorism. On the other hand, Islamabad feels gratified that some Lashkar-e-Taiba militants here and some Fadaiaans there have kept India on tenterhooks. Strange, Pakistan sees in President Musharraf's visit to Moscow "a chink in the armour" of friendship between India and Russia, although Moscow has sent New Delhi the verbatim

record of conversation between President Musharraf and President Vladimir Putin.

Whatever message this may convey, the fact remains that the entire gamut of Indo-Pakistan relationship suffers from the belief that both should persist with their tit-for-tat policy. Any leeway given, according to them, will look as a departure from the tough stand the two have come to adopt for their own purposes. That retired diplomats and former military officers have played havoc on both sides goes without saying. Close to the government on both sides, they give them inputs for accusations, threats and cussedness.

I was amused to hear at Islamabad that Pakistan was not in favour of reciprocating India's gesture of allowing PIA flights over Indian airspace because it was costing New Delhi "a hell of a lot of money" while taking circuitous routes to avoid Pakistani airspace. But at the same time I was asked: Suppose Islamabad allowed over flying of Indian aircraft, would New Delhi allow PIA to land at Delhi? Our foreign office is aware of this. My impression is that it will happen sooner than later but nobody can give an undertaking beforehand. Still this indicates the extent to which the pettifoggery goes on between the two countries.

Pakistan is yet to give India the MFN status, which New Delhi ac-

corded to Islamabad a couple of years ago. Under the WTO charter, this is automatic. Why should Islamabad drag its feet when it is obliged to take the step eventually? I found Pakistan divided on this issue. Once again the enmity against India seems to be affecting the decision. I thought that there would be some goodwill if Islamabad were to extend the MFN status now. But then that does not fit into the policy Islamabad pursues.

In the same way, India's participation in the SAF Games at Islamabad will generate friendly feelings. But that does not fit into the BJP's scheme of things. Against this background, the appointment of a former bureaucrat, N. N. Vohra, as New Delhi's interlocutor to Jammu and Kashmir does not help the situation. True, he has been appointed to have talks only with the leaders on our side. But at some stage New Delhi will have to associate Pakistan for a final settlement.

This is spelt out both in the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration. A political leader of stature would have given a correct message not only to Srinagar but also to Islamabad. At present it looks like an exercise which New Delhi wants to go over to meet the demand for talks with the Kashmiri leaders. One hopes that the Hurriyat will not be kept out. But whoever he talks to, Vohra will have to have a brief. New Delhi does not have a policy on Kashmir except that it wants to curb "the insurgency" in the state. But then a party that does not accept Article 370, giving a special status to J and K, cannot be expected to go far, much less accommodating those who want autonomy within India.

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