



uphoria or mere optimism that overtook to what all 'good feel' happened from 4 to 6 January in

Islamabad, particularly between top leaders of India and Pakistan. It is bound to yield gradually to dispassionate retrospection and introspection with specific reference to scope and possibility of success of the 'Composite dialogue'. It is understood that commitment to composite dialogue by the Indian and Pakistani leaders is perhaps the strongest message ever given after mid-50s when dialogue between the two countries on Kashmir issue was lost into oblivion and dust of history because to the disliking of New Delhi, Pakistan had opted to join US-sponsored military pact. The Indian PM Nehru had then argued that the step taken by Pakistan had altogether broken the threads of the dialogue because of military imbalance, which could not be taken to its logical conclusion. For the last five decades of political wilderness, armed conflicts, hard positions and changing world scenarios have led the leaders on both sides of the 'Divide' that there is no better alternative to dialogue for conflict resolution. To hold on to this maxim, a peep into composite dialogue is as imperative as commitment to it.

Commitment to composite dialogue reflects a strategic shift in the decade long attitudes of New Delhi and Islamabad about the core issue to which they remained committed resolutely thus far. India has given up her posturing on Kashmir that it was an 'atut ang' of India without making a declaration. Its silence and readiness to talk about Kashmir issue are the declaration. Pakistan has stepped back from its principled stand of resolving the issue through plebiscite. Hardly a month earlier, President Musharraf walked 'half-way' by declaring to set aside UN resolutions on Kashmir issue. Pakistan also agreed to start CBMs (Confidence building measures) and resolution of to other minor irritants concurrently. Previously, she had insisted that political issue of Kashmir be resolved first. India had refused to oblige and the deadlock persisted at least for no less than three decades from 1971.

What has changed the thinking in New Delhi and Islamabad? Can the

# Commitment to dialogue

**MS. QAZI** says commitment to composite dialogue reflects a strategic shift in the decade long attitudes of New Delhi and Islamabad

leaders of two countries now at the helm of affairs direct events and resolve the conflict during their stay in power within the 'good feel' mindset and a viable frame work which six months hard work of their confidants has produced? Will their predecessors, fall in line? Do their policies have the support of their people? Support which the Indian PM and Pakistani President have got from Washington and elsewhere is understood for reasons that hardly need to be elaborated. But, to what extent does it really matter is generally important.

In changed world scenario, the Indian leaders are changing their foreign policy objectives to align India with the US to foster US-India strategic partnership, to import high tech, attract foreign investment, increase trade, strengthen and upgrade military arsenal. All this suits Washington also. But, the goal of strategic partnership could be achieved according to western perception only if New Delhi were to shed-off extra-regional baggie, that is, resolve the Kashmir issue with Pakistan. It has become a flash point of nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan according to Washington and other western capitals' estimate. Irresolution of Kashmir issue has also provided a rationale to Islamabad to go nuclear. Islamabad's nuclear weapons are a-matter of serious concern for Washington. It has the apprehension they could end up in the hands of religious extremists.

Vajpayee had to shroud India's national interests in the message and overtures for peace and peaceful conflict resolution in South Asia in order to create environment that would enable India to exploit her

economic, military and human resource potential to the fullest and foster US-India strategic relationship profoundly and deeply. Corporate India also wants Indo-Pak tension to be diluted at the earliest. Alleviating poverty (400 million Indians living below poverty line according to the World Bank, which is on the decrease according to latest estimates) is yet another important factor that is pressurising the Indian leaders to seek regional economic integration. It would be possible only if composite dialogue became a successful story. SAFTA is a step in this direction.

Pakistan has somewhat different story. Its foreign policy objectives of keeping Kabul on its side by supporting Taliban government without being enable to lay hand on



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Washington and to PM Vajpayee to let jihadi spirit to resolve Kashmir die its own death. With redefining of national foreign policy objectives, national interests and modus operandi to achieve them, the entire spectrum of regional politics has undergone a radical change. With no-win situation for anyone, both India and Islamabad have shed extra historical dead weight presumably to gain something. We need to look at what will be India and Pakistan's gains and correspondingly what will be the gains of leaders who have laid foundations for the composite dialogue.

India had wanted all that which Pakistan offered in Islamabad on reciprocal basis but however, religious right, military establishment and certain business circles only till recently were formalised in Islamabad for fear of losing national identity, compromising national security and dumping industry. 15-year low intensity war in Kashmir also pin down New Delhi and blocked her way to make any strides that she wanted to make to become a regional hegemony. The new trend acceptable to regional nations is to be cooperative, to put controversial political issues in the backyard and integrate economically for the benefit of masses.

Any sort of South Asian integration suits India and its leaders. In the remote part of their subconscious mind rests the lost glory of Akhand Bharat or United India, which the moderate face of BJP and RSS, PM Vajpayee wants to regain perhaps in quick time. He could not hold on to himself and prematurely talked about free borders and one currency. The political buoyancy achieved through SAARC summit is likely to result in advancing the Indian general elections to consolidate empowerment of religious right with greater votes in the parliament. In Pakistan, the loud talk of making history or remaking it is going on. The religious parties and others are also subdued. Masses are waiting for some sort of economic betterment. In case composite dialogue aimed at political conflict resolution (resolution of Kashmir issue) after integrating the region economically and the masses, as is being envisioned by hawks turned moderates of BJP turned out to be close Pakistani leadership may face yet another challenge of keeping national interests in tact. ●

Osama bin Laden, as wished by Washington, and supporting Jihad in the Indian Held Kashmir (IHK) boomeranged when Washington as a follow up 11 September attacks bracketed regional struggles for independence in areas of conflict across the world, with terrorism and terrorism alone. Pakistan's last attempt to force a 'military solution of Kashmir through Kargil misadventure under nuclear deterrence umbrella turned out to be counter productive. It derailed Lahore process of 1999, eroded any western support which the Kashmir issue could have won for resolution according to UN resolutions and plunged the country into deeper political crises that haunt the nation till now. Notwithstanding the

negative fallout of Islamabad's pursuit of hot diplomacy and adventurism to match the Indian irredentism, the Kashmir issue became a flash point of a conflict, which showed potential to trigger a nuclear conflict. Despite their diverse foreign policy objectives and kowtowing with Washington in pursuit of national interests, neither Islamabad nor New Delhi could afford to deflect Washington's pressure to seek a peaceful solution of the Kashmir issue through bilateral talks, to diffuse nuclear conflict potential.

Bilateral talks on the Kashmir issue preceded by CBMs and liberalisation of trade were the hot pursuits of New Delhi that were consistently deflected by Islamabad for quite sometime till recently. A stage came

up, only a few months earlier, when Islamabad had no option except to concede to CBMs, fight terrorism along with India and not to allow its territory for such acts. New Delhi also agreed to talk about the Kashmir issue. Mutual agreement on these points became the rock-bed of composite dialogue. It is likely to be pursued further and perhaps with certain degree of success because of high stakes involved. The statement made by the Indian deputy prime minister L.K. Advani, a hawk turned moderate after SAARC moot in Islamabad said that "cross-border terrorism and infiltration of terrorists have perceptibly come down in recent months". His statements is a sort of re-affirmation of president Musharraf's commitment given to