

Congress and prospects of Pak-India dialogue

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Regardless of the fact that Muslims of India traditionally have been voting for Congress, throughout history this party has attempted to engender a bunker mentality among the Muslims of India. The Congress has been a central instrument of feeding the Muslim mind an impression that without them they will be laid waste. In the present period it preferred to keep on weeping, wailing over the dead bodies of Muslims in Gujarat. But in actuality it hardly did any thing to put a damper on the communal menace. When in 2003, the Hindu temple in Gujarat was taken over reportedly by some Muslim militants, Sonia Gandhi did not wait a second to visit and joined the blame game of BJP openly in running down the Muslims of India even without waiting for the findings of the probe into the incident.

The Congress party ruled India for more than four decades and during the period, most of the communal carnages took place without the perpetrators being taken to task. The historic Babri mosque was desecrated not in BJP's rule in 1992 but in Congress rule led by Narasimha Rao in the centre. The ensuing communal riots that battered Mumbai in 1993 — yet again in the Congress rule — saw the law enforcing agencies not only killing Muslims but providing arms and other means to facilitate the mass slaughter.

The worst uprising abetted and sponsored by the Indira Gandhi government took place during the period of Emergency in 1975 when late Sanjay Gandhi ordered and supervised violence against the Muslim and Dalit communities through his henchman Mr Jagmohan, who was acting then as lieutenant governor. The method encompassed not only killing but dislocating, demolishing and depriving the Muslims and the most underprivileged Dalits from having recourse to justice under the Emergency regime. Amongst the Muslims of India this is known as the "Turkman Gate" incident of 1975.

All three major wars between India and Pakistan have been fought during the Congress rule and the fourth one was evaded while the yearlong Brasstacks military exercise was under

progress.

The state of Pakistan lost its eastern part due to the physical intervention and active support of the Congress government led by late Indira Gandhi.

Seen in this backdrop, one is forced to not harbour any hope of considerable improvement in the relationship between the two countries. One could very safely anticipate that the major policy position of the new Congress government towards Pakistan for most part of it would remain committed to buying time and concealing the reality to the international community. More to the point, a conference was held in the European parliament in Brussels on 14th April which was attended by over 15 parliamentarians and other people from Pakistan, India and from both sides of Kashmir. In response to a query of one member as to how should the European Union help or facilitate both the countries to find a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute, Mr Kuldeep Nayar's response was to stay away from meddling into the affairs of Pakistan and India.

This offers us a glimpse of Indian secular thinking within which India's Pakistan specific foreign policy will be evolved and which is far more represented by Congress. The two theatres of "buying time" and "concealing the reality" Congress government has been effectively managing in the past and thereby escaping solution to the problems.

To forestall recurrence of such precedence, President Musharraf will have to convince Congress leadership that the times of disparity in strategic strength and lack of political will and vision are no more at play. Therefore, honest dialogue is an indispensable way forward while realising the constraints.

As witnessed during the NDA government led by Vajpayee, a dangerous probability was increasingly gaining possibility — the strategists of India and in response those of Pakistan seemingly believed that a nuclear war is fightable and to some extent winnable. Over Kargil war both countries had assumed literally a position to detonate the nuclear fuse if it hadn't been for Washington's intervention. But there is the possibility that this regular feature of escalation will in time discontinue and consequently a veneer of peaceful polit-

ical atmosphere may prevail. But this standpoint will suit India and Pakistan only as long as India, Pakistan and Kashmir as a contributory constituent are able to sustain the momentum of hope towards underscoring the promotion and progress on Kashmir dispute. Although, the recent hostile and unwarranted statements from Nawaz Singh have inflicted profound damage to the efforts to secure peace for the peoples of both the countries.

The government of Pakistan should attempt and urge India to establish a framework for peace or crises control mechanism on political basis between the two countries. Particularly under newly emerging political scene in India where the left parties have fundamental differences with Congress on economic, political and perhaps even on strategic issues.

As president Musharraf extended invitation to Sonia Gandhi and talked to Vajpayee he should couple it with some fresh peace initiatives, showing courage and ability of decision making in the face of hard choices. It may be wise for President Musharraf to not look backwards — sagacity demands not to dig old graves and adopt a fresh approach as per the present order.

We have observed some mixed bag of statements from India thus far — some healthy and some disappointing. But on the whole the people of both the nations are on the same wavelength — that detente is in the interest of both the nations. The need for it is understood by all responsible, realistic politicians. But it is also opposed by strong forces in both countries that are directly or indirectly preparing sabotage; extremists and people citing Simla agreement or UN Resolutions are present in the state apparatus and the mass media. To revoke all such forces both countries need to get into each other's shoes and grasp the feelings and compulsions of the other side. The political leadership of both countries must come with a mechanism for honest, negotiating possibilities. Both parties will have to explore a common ground of convergence of interests.

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