

## Letter from New Delhi

# Is it mere rhetoric?

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THERE is a saying on our side that after hearing the discourse on the "Ramayana" the whole night, one of the listeners asked who Sita was. Justice Afrasiab Khan from Pakistan reacts in the same manner when he says in one of his articles: "The state of Jammu and Kashmir shall be partitioned on the basis of the two-nation theory as has already been done in the case of Punjab, Bengal and Assam."

Justice Khan is 57 years late in his observation. The two-nation theory he is talking about held good then, not now. Religion as the basis of nationality was buried during the lifetime of Pakistan's founder, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. True, he propounded the theory that Muslims and Hindus constituted two separate nations. But he also gave a different interpretation after the formation of Pakistan. He said that India and Pakistan were two nations. Therefore, those living in Pakistan, whether Hindus or Muslims, were Pakistanis while those in India constituted the Indian nation. Religion was a private affair.

There is a strong lobby in Pakistan which still plugs Justice Khan's line. But that is tantamount to reopening partition, the repercussions of which should not be lost on those who are trying to do so. One million people were killed during the divide and 20 million ousted from their homes.

The division of Jammu and Kashmir, on the basis of religion, which the two-nation theory adumbrated before Jinnah reinterpreted it, will spell disaster for not only the state but also India and Pakistan. Justice Khan does not realize that

debate. But the fact is that Islamabad did set up camps for militants. They are still there. It also introduced the "jihad" to evoke religious frenzy in both Kashmir and Pakistan. Thousands of people have died in the valley. The worst is that an indigenous movement in Kashmir has been communalized and external elements have taken it over.

A delegation of Pakistan MPs to India recently admitted that they were worried about terrorism gaining ground in their country. Still, Islamabad took exception to New Delhi's statement to emphasize the point. The ruling Congress was correct in saying at its convention that the Pakistan government had failed to stop cross-border militancy in Kashmir. But Pakistan's official spokesman only pooh-pooed the statement and complained that it created "road blocks."

Such rhetoric does not help in the midst of confidence-building measures. After all, the violence in Kashmir is essentially being carried out by militants who have their base camp in Pakistan. Belatedly, Islamabad has realized how the ghost of terrorism has become Frankenstein. President General Pervez Musharraf has escaped two attempts on his life. Even mosques have been attacked to show that terrorists can hit anywhere.

It is time that some non-officials — not the Track II type — from both sides met to prepare a common ground. It is tragic that liberals on both sides adopt a rigid or jingoistic approach to Kashmir. If they cannot agree on anything among themselves, how can they expect the rulers, who have their compulsions, to do so? The first round of composite dialogue is more or less over. Though it has not yielded any result, the atmosphere between the two countries is more amiable.

what he is preaching is no longer relevant after the subcontinent was divided in August 1947.

Some Pakistanis still do not face the fact that the 1947 thesis cannot be repeated. I do not know what the deposed Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif thinks now. But when I met him during former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Lahore, Shahbaz Sharif held the same views which Justice Khan has expressed now. He proposed that the Hindu-majority Jammu and the Buddhist-majority Ladakh should be integrated with India and the Muslim-majority Kashmir with Pakistan. I warned Shahbaz Sharif against the danger of resurrecting the ghosts of partition. He was not convinced.

Whatever else we may do to settle the Kashmir problem, the division of the state on the basis of religion is not an option. It will complicate matters. We have paid a heavy price for mixing religion with politics. India is still not out of the woods because the BJP is not reconciled to a pluralistic society. Former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Uma Bharti, mixed religion with politics only some days ago to the detriment of the nation. She exploited the Congress's ill-advised move to reopen the 10-year-old case of her "hooliganism" at the Hubli Eidgah where she tried to hoist the national flag.

Mr Jinnah himself opposed mixing religion with politics. He highlighted the pernicious results of such a policy in his opening speech to the Pakistan Constituent assembly. He made the world understand that his country, for one, would never do so.

This does not mean that Pakistan has to accept the status quo in Jammu and Kashmir. It has conveyed in many ways — and through many channels — that it does not want the LoC as the international border. If India were opposed to making religion the criterion for settling the Kashmir issue, it would have to offer Pakistan something that satisfies it to a large extent. The reason why no such formula has been worked out so far is because of the mindset of the bureaucrats on both sides. They are the ones who formulate policies to humiliate one another, and still worse, they have their own agenda — and their own methods — when it comes to relations with India and Pakistan.

Whether the Pakistan bureaucracy or the military junta thought of introducing militancy in Kashmir to put pressure on India is a matter of

Rhetoric does not help confidence-building measures. It is time that some non-officials from both sides met to prepare a common ground. For, it is tragic that so far a rigid approach to Kashmir has been adopted by both India and Pakistan.

Whenever the secretaries of the two governments have met, they have ended up saying that the talks were "positive." Obviously, there has been no breakthrough.

Islamabad has a feeling that the Manmohan Singh government, unlike its predecessor, is dragging its feet. Some dismiss this as nothing more than a few hiccups. But there are many who suspect that New Delhi has changed its policy. The Congress-led government's emphasis on cross-border terrorism is seen as evidence. Even Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri has said that the India's concerns were not in keeping with the spirit of the dialogue.

This means that Islamabad suspects New Delhi focusing all its attention on terrorism. This may be somewhat true because India's home secretary reportedly gave to his counterpart the facts and figures of training camps in Pakistan and the number of militants trying to infiltrate into India.

I hope we are not receding to square one. National Security Adviser J.N. Dixit has said that Kashmir is an important issue but its resolution should not hold the people of India and Pakistan hostage. On the other hand, Musharraf has made it clear that there will be no progress in other fields until Kashmir is solved. The latter has even wanted a timeframe. New Delhi does not have to follow Musharraf's wishes. But it must give proof of its anxiety to settle the Kashmir issue. To begin with, it should withdraw unilaterally some of its forces in the valley. Another step that will mollify even the Kashmiris is the withdrawal of repressive laws in the state.