

Letter from New Delhi

# One-upmanship

## game

By Kuldip Nayar

MEETING at the summit between India and Pakistan, whether on the sidelines of the UN or in formal surroundings, is always welcome. It indicates that the two countries have journeyed, going on still towards normalization. It sustains hope that persistent meetings may span the distance between the two one day, however hard it may look at present.

The important point is that the talks should continue. America and the then Soviet Union did not stop talking even at the height of the cold war. Representatives of the two countries would secretly meet at one place or the other and keep the dialogue going. India and Pakistan should have done this after independence.

However, the interview by President General Pervez Musharraf to *Washington Post* a couple of days before meeting the Indian prime minister appears to take the entire process to square one. He has said that Pakistan does not go along with the Indian idea to put off the substantive discussions on Kashmir in favour of short-term confidence-building measures. This means Kashmir first and other steps later. We have gone over this exercise earlier without any result.

Status quo is not the answer, says Musharraf. But there is no option till the two countries sort out the problems between them. The status quo, that is the Line of Control, can be modified as indicated in Dr Manmohan Singh's interview to the *Time* magazine. The report has naturally been denied. But there could be something in it.

I recall after the Tashkent agreement in 1966 Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin asked Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to solve the Kashmir problem as

and most Pakistanis genuinely believe that New Delhi may influence the decision on Kashmir once it sits in the array of Council's permanent members. It does not happen that way. New Delhi by itself can hardly do anything.

If Pakistan is keen on straightening things out with India, then why continue with the same old obduracy? What can New Delhi do if it becomes a permanent member? America is firmly behind Pakistan. No member, not even Russia, has anything against Pakistan for New Delhi to exploit. India gets no advantage on Kashmir if it is a member.

Were Pakistan to shed its hostility, it would realize that New Delhi in the Council would be a source of strength to South Asia. Pakistan should recall how New Delhi withdrew its objection to Islamabad becoming an observer at the ASEAN and how it okayed its membership to the Commonwealth although Pakistan continued to be a one-legged democracy. However, I admit that Delhi's opposition was wrong in the first instance. Personal pique should never dictate policies because they are unproductive. India's membership of the Council is, however, dependent on Washington. It may one day support the proposition for some reason or the other. What will Pakistan do then? It should know that international politics works enigmatically. At present Islamabad is in a position to show the gesture and even propose India's name.

Islamabad believes that Kashmir should be solved before India gets the membership. None objects to that. But even if there is no settlement it does not

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well. He agreed and talked to Lt-Gen Kumaramangalam, then India's chief of the army staff-designate. Shastri told Kosygin that India would be willing to make some adjustment in the ceasefire line and give some territory of the state to Pakistan. Kosygin conveyed Shastri's offer to Ayub. He did not reject it and said he would consider it and give his reply later. He never did.

Humayun Khan, Pakistan's former high commissioner to India, has also revealed in a book: "Zulfikar Ali Bhutto convincingly argued with Indira Gandhi at Shimla that given enough time, he would be able to make Pakistan accept the LoC with minor adjustments as a permanent border." The Pakistan establishment denies this. But there is enough evidence to indicate that Bhutto gave such an understanding. Musharraf's statement to "take the bull by its horns" sounds odd when the ground has not been prepared.

New Delhi's unilateral relaxation of visa restrictions is a step in the right direction. Only people-to-people contact will remove the distrust which is the core of the problem. Why couldn't New Delhi relax visa restrictions many years earlier? The Shimla agreement in 1972 gave it an opportunity. But the mania of reciprocity has obsessed New Delhi so much that it inch-tapes the stride Pakistan takes to determine the response.

Even the relaxation, I fear, may not be implemented on the ground. New Delhi has genuine problem of infiltration because the Pakistan policy to send militants into India has been relaxed, not renounced. Only a few days ago did the army chief say: "500 militants are waiting in the wings to cross over to Jammu and Kashmir." If this goes on, how can there be a climate for a settlement?

Easy travel is welcome but the trade is the one which establishes the real bond. Lifting the restrictions on import of goods from Pakistan unilaterally would have created a stir in that country. It is the economic activity that develops a vested interest which becomes the sinews of peace. People resent the snapping because their livelihood depends on ties.

If a list were to be prepared of what the two countries should have done but did not do, it would run into many pages and indicate missed opportunities. That is the reason why I fail to understand Islamabad's persistent 'no' to India's permanent membership of the Security Council. Granted suspicion has crusted into layers of hostility

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mean that the region with two billion people should be denied a place on the body which has become lopsided. When it was founded after the Second World War, the importance of countries was different from today.

Keeping India out and allowing the UK and France to be permanent members does not make sense.

Coming to Kashmir, the path the two countries have taken so far does not lead them to the stage where a solution is possible. From the days of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President General Ayub Khan, the effort has been to talk at the top and see if some solution can come about. Parleys between Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ayub, Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Inder Gujral and Nawaz Sharif and Atal Behari Vajpayee and Musharraf were at the top. The solution has to be built from below where the desire of the people to live in peace is strong. They are sick and tired of tension.

In fact, officials particularly and ministers in general have tangled the problem still further because their purpose is to show political one-upmanship, not to face the reality. People nominated to Track Two are cleared by New Delhi and Islamabad. How can they have a different approach?

The new formulas that have emerged away from religion and regionalism are the ones which are based on the people-to-people contacts. The process will accelerate once travel and trade are liberalized and allowed to touch all tiers of activities. Ultimately, not only India and Pakistan but the entire South Asia, from Afghanistan to Myanmar, should become one economic union, beyond borders and beyond bickering. Kashmir will come to submerge in that scenario.

The writer is a leading columnist based in New Delhi.