

Nuclear power and Kashmir

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Dawn

By Kunwar Idris

NO other country is so conscious of, and vocal about, its being a nuclear power as Pakistan is. The government ministers crow about it all the time. Here is a sample from their recent published statements:

Defence minister Rao Sikandar: The country's ultimate security lies in the use of the atom bomb; it is not a mere showpiece. Chief of the ruling coalition Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain: The bomb is made for war and not for fireworks on a festive night. Information minister Shaikh Rashid: Anyone casting a "dirty" (evil) eye on Pakistan will be taught a lesson of a lifetime.

The effect of the ministerial rhetoric in popular imagination is buttressed by President Musharraf and PM Zafarullah Jamali's frequent assurances to the soldiers and people alike that the defence of the country is impregnable and that India should have no delusion, nor anyone else any doubt, that it can get away with a pre-emptive strike at Pakistan.

Both have been circumspect enough not to mention the possession or use of the bomb in their claims to invincibility, though, the other day, the president chose, of all the forums, a tribal jirga to declare that Pakistan's nuclear capability is a guarantee of its sovereignty.

The boasts about the bomb were earlier confined to Jihadi clerics. It is made to fire and not to eat, Maulana Samiul Haq had once said. The doctrine of pre-emption, or attack as a means of self-defence, now established by America, and threats by India's new hawkish Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha to invoke it against Pakistan has sucked Pakistan's responsible officials also into the nuclear bombast. It is amazing how nuclear horror is reduced to political banter. They all need to make a trip to Hiroshima.

Being lost in the process is a good opportunity by our irrepressible leaders to refurbish Pakistan's generally perceived terrorist image by showing equanimity in the face of Sinha's bellicosity. Once again, the world is advising India to show restraint while, in its eyes, Pakistan remains in the dock for brandishing its bomb and fomenting rebellion in Kashmir. Repression and killings by the Indian troops attract no censure nor does the fight for freedom

in the government and opposition alike.

Keeping the political passions and bomb bravado aside, the overwhelming opinion in the country today is for creating conditions conducive to a settlement on Kashmir. Every political party or leader of note is for it. Chaudhry Shujaat in his *Dawn Dialogue* conceded that some "unpopular decisions" shall have to be made to resolve the Kashmir problem by "going beyond the UN resolutions."

Imran Khan in his *Dialogue* held that Pakistan has lost the moral stamina to stand by the people of Kashmir and now has to rely on the liberal elements in India to promote a settlement in the midst of a surging tide of a Hindu fundamentalism. Even Qazi Hussain Ahmad whose party, flouting the rule of customary hospitality extended to guests, had converted the Lahore streets into a battleground on Vajpayee's visit is also now in favour of talks with India.

Punjab, which for long has been the only part of the country unwilling to compromise on the right of self-determination, is now reconciled to a Kashmir solution which is achievable rather than ideal. If there is now a realization in Pakistan that it cannot wrest Kashmir by force, India too has learnt its lesson that it cannot ever quell either the spirit of the freedom movement in Kashmir or its violence, as it has not been able to do over the past 13 years despite the trickery of elections and deploying half a million troops.

How quickly and smoothly can a settlement be negotiated depends now entirely on the president and the army. Pakistan may be militarily invincible, if he insists, but Kashmir problem out of the way will also make it economically and politically stronger. The "principled stand" he vows never to give up has brought nothing for over half a century but death and sorrow — mainly to the people of Kashmir and Pakistan and very little to India.

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The support of the world community for the Kashmir cause that Pakistan could have mustered as a quid pro quo for its pivotal role in the regime change in Afghanistan, and now for its ambivalence in Iraq crisis, has been squandered by our leaders

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as it did when the Russians departed.

Even in this situation where America is willing to help because it needs us, Colin Powell mentions the "painful and difficult actions" across the Line of Control but not in the valley, so deep rooted is the bias against Pakistan and its fundamentalism. The will to help is only under compulsion and it is transitory. Odds already appear to be stacking against Pakistan.

The American government at this critical juncture, when it needs Pakistan, could not have imposed sanctions on Kahuta laboratories had it not been in possession of some evidence, however tiny, of Pakistan's nuclear collaboration with North Korea. An Islamabad defence analyst in a BBC interview the other day lent credence to the American action when she noted a marked similarity between the North Korean and Pakistani missiles.

To the Americans, North Korea is a rogue state. Pakistan may escape punitive action for now for the suspected deal but not for all times. Saddam Hussein didn't for long though, egged on by America, he had inflicted uncounted deaths and untold sufferings on the Iranian, as well as his own, people for eight long years.

Pakistan cannot stand by its outdated, unhelpful principles when the overriding rule of international politics and warfare is the national interest. And then no principle can stand above the safety and prosperity of the people for whom it is fashioned.
