

Irresponsible utterances of BJP leaders

It is not the first time that senior members of BJP are dabbling into a spate of irresponsible utterances. While the catalogue of such statements is long enough to deter anyone to undertake even the compilation within a limited time span, this piece merely concentrates on the most recent utterances of BJP's leaders — more specifically that of the Foreign Minister's utterances. These utterances have managed to not only heighten the incumbent level of tensions between India and Pakistan but have also initiated a flurry of angry responses mostly from the Pakistanis.

On April 2, Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha stated in an interview that India's position on disputed Kashmir had been boosted by the precedent set by the US-led invasion of Iraq. He further stated that India has a much better case to go for pre-emptive action against Pakistan than the US has in Iraq. Denigrating Pakistan he stressed that it has WMDs and it continues to be the epicentre of terrorism. "If these were the considerations for a pre-emptive strike against another country, then definitely India has a better case," he asserted.

Responding to FM Sinha's irresponsible utterances, Pakistani Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali Kasuri warned that "India should not harbour any illusion of launching pre-emptive strike against Pakistan as it would constitute a major miscalculation leading to grave consequences." Somewhat similar remarks were also given by Prime Minister Jamali who said, "If someone is thinking of a pre-emptive strike, Pakistan knows how to defend itself. We know exactly what to do if someone tried such a thing." Even the US administration warned the Indians that they must not use the US-led pre-emptive war against Iraq as a pretext for an attack on Pakistan. "Any attempt to draw parallel between the Iraq and Kashmir situations are wrong and are overwhelmed by differences between them," stressed by

the spokesperson of the Bush Administration.

Three aspects of Sinha's statement deserve comments. First Sinha regards Pakistan a fit case for pre-emptive attack. In this connection he stressed that Pakistan has WMD and is the epicentre of terrorism. It needs to be stressed here that Pakistan was forced to become a nuclear weapon state by the concerted efforts of India. While Pakistan consistently expressed its willingness to sign the NPT provided India would do the same, India determined to acquire nuclear weapons embarked upon various strategies to attain its coveted goal. These strategies included ambiguous posture, asking the nuclear powers to give timetable for getting rid of their nuclear arsenal, the acquisition of the nuclear weapons as electioneering slogan etc.

Since the Indians had already decided to acquire nuclear weapons irrespective of world opinion or its dangerous implications, they successfully bypassed the efforts of international community and acquire the weapons. India has almost regularly demonstrated disrespect for the international norms if they are deemed to be obstructing the passage towards the attainment of its goal. It is unfortunate that a country, which claimed pride in its doctrine of pacifism, has succumbed so rapidly to violence and violent approaches. Comprehending the intentions of the Indians, Pakistan was forced to acquire nuclear weapons for purely defensive purposes. Since the Pakistanis are living under the shadow of the Indians right from inception and have regularly experienced their clever manoeuvring of the situations, twisted distortion of the events and a consistent barrage of threatening statements, they understand the Indians far better than most outsiders. Since India had decided that it must acquire nuclear weapons, it acquired them eventually despite the international community's disapproval and discouragement. In fact they don't



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even bother to take into consideration the concerns and the assertions of the international community.

India is perhaps one of those countries that are known to have withheld the augured and due compliance to accords, treaties, conventions etc. in the past. If a country has to be subjected to pre-emptive attacks on the basis of possession of WMDs and frequently demonstrating disrespect to international norms and the UN resolutions, then it seems that India is certainly the most appropriate target than Pakistan. Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons only for defensive purposes and in response to Indian acquisition of nuclear weapons coupled with its continuously threatening posture. The Indians introduced the nuclear weapons in South Asia.

The second aspect of Sinha's statement deals with his reference to Pakistan as the epicentre of terrorism. Interestingly many Pakistanis consider India as the hub of terrorism. India practices all forms of terrorism but it seems to have specialised in "state terrorism". It seems that they have learned a lot from the Sharon regime in Israel. While India tends to blame Pakistan for helping and sustaining freedom movement in Kashmir and exaggeratedly projects that Pakistan is encouraging cross border infiltration, the Pakistanis not only deny these allegations but also view the ongoing freedom movement with sympathies and the regularly perpetrated brutalities against the innocent Kashmiris with disgust.

The Americans consider "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against the non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clan-

destine agents" as terrorism. The activities of state patronised and encouraged sub-national groups like VHP or Bajrang Dal in the Gujarat communal carnage last year can only be described as acts of terrorism. Yet the Americans, in their own wisdom, deemed fit not to put them on the list of terrorist groups. Perhaps the Americans are fully cognisant of fierce reaction that BJP government could undertake if such a move is made and this is not the time, from the American point of view, to annoy the Indians. After all everybody knows how an Indian Prime Minister, known to be much more rational than entire BJP lot, reacted to Queen's remarks during her tour of South Asia and declared England a "third class" country. Indeed, in many ways, this was reflective of tolerance level of most of the Indian politicians.

In the Indian Held Kashmir (IHK) it not just the state patronised sub-national groups but even the Indian security forces themselves have been regularly perpetrating deliberately contrived acts of violence against the innocent civilians. The entire Indian efforts are concentrated on projecting the freedom movement as a terrorist movement. Too much emphasis on cross-border terrorism is in fact a concerted attempt by the Indian authorities to divert the attention of the international community from the ongoing freedom movement in Kashmir. Offers of independent or UN monitors does not cut ice with the BJP leaders primarily because they are well aware of the fact that the presence of a third party is likely to expose their exaggerated claims.

Third aspect of Sinha's statement is an attempt to draw parallel between the Iraq and Kashmir situation. Not only the US State Department's spokesperson categorically stated that no parallel exists between Iraq and Kashmir situation but even a casual comparison would highlight the major differences. A systematic scrutiny of the two situations could indeed bring out a long cat-

alogue of the differences. On the other hand one can find similarities in Iraqi dictatorial regime of Saddam and the BJP policies. Iraq invaded Kuwait and brutalised the Kuwaitis. India had occupied Kashmir forcibly in 1947 and promised rather repeatedly to ascertain the wishes of Kashmiri people through a plebiscite under the UN auspices. Instead India maintains more than 700,000 security forces in the IHK. Many international human right groups have regularly recorded the brutalities perpetrated against the Kashmiris in IHK. The Indian security forces have sponsored and patronised many sub-national groups to cause division among the united leadership of freedom movement and weaken the freedom struggle.

The American argued that action against Iraq has been taken after the failure of 12 years of UN efforts to secure Iraqi disarmament. Compared to Iraq, India has refused to honour its commitment to the people of Kashmir, to the UN and to the world at large to hold plebiscite in order to allow the Kashmiris to exercise their promised right of self-determination. Doesn't this make India a fit case for somewhat similar action? While India often blames other countries for missile transfer, it tends to push under the carpet its own help and cooperation that was reported to have been extended to a third country's missile programmes.

The American rejection and dismissal of Sinha's remarks linking Pakistan to Iraq did not go down well with the Indian Foreign Minister who promptly and somewhat contemptuously retaliated by asserting that Washington's inability to see similarities between two situations was unacceptable. Interestingly sometimes the security and advancement of one's own national interest raises the tolerance level. Very few individuals in position of influence would dabble into uncivilised behaviour but then there are always exceptions.

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Vajpayee springs a surprise

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Speaking from behind a bullet-proof glass screen, under the watchful eyes of a special commando unit, Prime Minister of India Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee addressed on Friday last, a government-organised rally in a strike-stricken Srinagar, 15 years after another Indian PM spoke to a somewhat similar gathering in the "disputed" state.

What made his speech significant was his unconditional offer of talks to Pakistan: "We want friendship and brotherhood with our neighbours. We are again extending the hand of friendship but hands should be extended from both sides. Both sides should decide to live together. All issues can be resolved through talks, nothing can be resolved through war."

What prompted Mr Vajpayee to utter these welcome words? Last year when visiting Kashmir he wanted a "decisive battle" to determine the future of the region.

Obviously the virulent campaign against Pakistan and the pressure built up by amassing and keeping Indian forces on Pakistani border and the Line of Control, for almost a year, having served the limited purpose of lining up world opinion against Pakistan's so-called cross-border terrorism, was beginning to lose its efficacy. Rude and crude belligerent utterings by Yashwant Sinha and George Fernandes — front men of Lal Krishna Advani, alarmed the world and evoked unfavourable reactions. Excess always has its cost. Washington using diplomatic language pulled up the Indians for hurling threats on Pakistan a la Iraq. Seldom has a foreign minister, violating diplomatic norms, had used such rough and unreasonable language in such a cavalier manner. Fernandes too went berserk when as the defence minister of a nuclear state, he resolved to "wipe out" Pakistan. New Delhi was intelligent enough to sense that it was spoiling its case by indulging in excessively bellicose statements. Powell, in a recent press conference in Washington ticked off India on its threats to use force. While he endorsed India's plea for the cessation of infiltration across the Line of Control, he made a point of impressing on New Delhi to start talking to Pakistan thus emphasising the need for resolving the Kashmir issue peacefully through negotiations. The news that he or his deputy Mr Armatage were planning to visit the sub-continent to administer a clear-cut advice to the two adversaries to open a dialogue may also have influenced Mr Vajpayee's mind. India having entered into a strategic partnership with USA within the framework of a joint vision hatched during Clinton's visit to New Delhi and with eyes on increasing economic and defence returns, which are beginning to accrue because of friendly relations with the sole super power, has to willy-nilly heed words coming from Washington. In fact the advice to talk to Pakistan has been a common refrain of all the G-8 powers for the last many years. As I pointed out in an earlier column, there was no escape from dialogue for the two nuclear states in South Asia.

The expected euphoric response from Messrs Jamali and Kasuri however needs to be tempered in the light of the second statement Mr Vajpayee made in Srinagar before leaving for New Delhi.

In this statement Vajpayee referred to the opening of talks "with the elected representatives and other sections of public opinion in the state" and stressed the need for avoiding manipulating elections

in Kashmir. He also admitted that "we have often faltered in our journey to the goal" of bringing "peace and normality to Kashmir." He referred to more jobs for the Kashmiris and new economic projects including links with Central Asia. "When I look at Kashmir. I find that both geographically and historically, it links India to the lands and peoples of a very important part of Asia. We are deeply interested in strengthening our ties of friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation with all of them", said Mr Vajpayee.

More importantly, in his second statement, Mr Vajpayee relinked talks with Pakistan to the charge of terrorism: "If Pakistan says tomorrow that it will close down the terrorist camps in Pakistan, if it says this today, I will send a top Foreign Ministry official to Islamabad to draw up a schedule for talks." This needs to be read with the words spoken almost simultaneously by Mr V Naidu, President of the BJP that there was no question of talks "unless Islamabad stops encouraging militants." Interestingly enough, in the joint Powell-Straw statement given by hand to Mr Kasuri by the American ambassador, these very words were used. Thus Pakistan is being asked not only to stop "cross-border terrorism", an additional burden is being placed on it to stop militant activities as if there is no struggle for freedom launched by the Kashmiri in the occupied state.

This brings out how the world powers have come to view Pakistan's involvement in terrorism in Kashmir and reflects how this reflects India's successful pursuit of its charge against Pakistan. On the other hand nobody talks or even takes notice of the continuing Indian state-terrorism — thanks to our, inadequate diplomatic performance.

Is Pakistan fully prepared to enter into talks with India? Has it done its homework to evolve options and alternatives when it faces India's well-documented briefs, most intelligently and effectively communicated to Washington and other centres of power. What if under world pressure and India's pressing demand, Pakistan actually completely stops active support to the Kashmiris and after securing this commitment, India takes to tinkering with the right of self-determination of the Kashmiris, what will Pakistan do? Go back to the "denied" infiltration across the Line of Control? Will the world allow that? Will then Islamabad have the guts to defy Washington?

In the circumstances, it is vital for Pakistan to:

1. Clarify its position with regard to "cross-border terrorism", as an internationally acknowledged party to the Kashmir dispute and secure international recognition to its obligations when the other party has unleashed *lakhs* of troops to brutally terrorise the alienated people of Kashmir.

2. Step up exposing India's brutal state-terrorism and horrendous violation of human rights in Kashmir.

3. Use all instruments of public diplomacy in the pursuit of its Kashmir policy.

4. Competently prepare its brief for what and how to talk to Indians when they come to the negotiating table. Mere statements and reiteration of Pakistan's historic stand will not do. At the same time the views of the Hurriyat leaders must be fully considered while preparing the case.

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