

It looks as if Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called General Pervez Musharraf's bluff. Otherwise, the Pakistan President would have immediately reacted favourably to Vajpayee's offer for a dialogue. After all Musharraf had been repeatedly saying that he was ready for talks at any place, any time. Why did he not himself welcome the offer?

The official statement reacting from Islamabad to the offer has been rather disappointing. Pakistan is reportedly trying to appoint a representative for the talks. This is a step in the right direction. But what about Prime Minister Vajpayee's suggestions that cross-border terrorism should stop and the training camps should be demolished? These are no "pre-conditions" as the Pakistan government has made out. All countries follow such norms.

They do not allow their soil to be used for terrorism in neighbouring countries or elsewhere. To consider stoppage of terrorism equivalent to setting preconditions is to admit your own guilt. Why doesn't General Musharraf make his promise good? He told America that he would have the infiltration stopped and the training camps demolished. Washington passed on this information to us. But there is no let-up in cross-border terrorism. In fact, a US Congress team has said in its report that the infiltration went up last year and will increase still further this year.

To make matters worse, Pakistan Foreign Minister Kasuri wants to drag six or seven European nations to supervise the border and see whether there is infiltration. Since



View from New Delhi

Talks and pre-conditions

Kuldip Nayar

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what Kasuri says contradicts what Musharraf told the US, suspicions are bound to arise. Is Musharraf playing a double game?

Musharraf, in his three-year rule, has brought down the relationship to such a pass that even individual level contact has stopped. New Delhi's cussedness too has contributed its bit to help the General curl his lip. He has lived up to his reported remark at a closed-door press briefing, when he took over, that he would show India what "toughness" meant. Musharraf's first step was the army action at Kargil. That Nawaz Sharif, then the prime minister, was "on board" was correct only in a technical sense.

He was aware of the action but did not know the extent to which the General had gone. Otherwise, New Delhi would not have practically reached with him an agreement on Kashmir. "We were almost there," was the remark of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee when the General took over and cleaned the slate. After Sharif was thrown out, Vajpayee's regret was that he (Nawaz Sharif) went "because of us." Whatever the understanding on Kashmir, it is obvious that it was not to the liking of the army which, despite the return of democracy in Pakistan, continues to be the arbiter.

Some time back a Pakistan TV network asked me how the stalemate between India and Pakistan could be resolved. My reply, somewhat simplistic, was: People-to-people con-

tact. Such a persistent exercise, I said, would generate enough pressure on both sides to make them sit across the table to begin sorting out their differences.

It's futile to argue about who was responsible for the partition of the subcontinent. Such an exercise can only be an academic distraction. But the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like partition had become inevitable. Has partition served the purpose of the Muslims? I do not know. In Pakistan people avoid the word 'partition.' On August 14, they celebrate their deliverance not so much from British rule as from the fear of Hindu rule.

During my trips to that country, I have heard people say that they have at least "some place" where they feel secure, free of "Hindu domination" or "Hindu aggressiveness." The Gujarat carnage seems to have confirmed them in their belief. But I feel that the Muslims have been the big-

gest losers; they are now spread over three countries-India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Imagine the influence their numbers-their votes-could have commanded in the undivided subcontinent. They would have been more than one-third of the total population. But it is no use going over the partition exercise. How we can overcome its ravages, still exploited by some political parties, is the question.

The battle could be fought more effectively if peoples believing in the pluralistic ethos in both countries were to join hands. In this context, people-to-people contact becomes all the more important. The atmosphere is too stifling and dreary at present. I do not know if the resignation of Mr Robert Blackwell, America's ambassador to New Delhi, has anything to do with Washington's failure to rein in Pakistan. His statement that "the fight against international terrorism will not be won until terrorism against India ends permanently" gives us a clue. It is apparent that he wanted more pressure to be applied on President Musharraf to stop cross-border terrorism. President Musharraf may ultimately agree to what the American representatives visiting the region next month will dictate.

The wave of jubilation, which has spread all over Pakistan and India, indicates that people on both sides want peace and conciliation. Bringing in other things at this time is to introduce extraneous considerations.

It is obvious that the military in Pakistan has developed a vested interest in not sorting out problems with India. The more hostile Pakistan's relations with India are, the greater would be the need for the military's presence at Islamabad. It may be thinking along these lines. Pakistan's Prime Minister Jamali has himself said that General Musharraf is his boss and not parliament.

I have no doubt that the dialogue between India and Pakistan will take place sooner or later. America is relentlessly applying pressure on both countries to have a dialogue. The question is how to make the dialogue meaningful. There is a point in former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah's statement that the ground should be prepared. A solution between India and Pakistan has to be evolved. It cannot be an overnight happening. Probably that is the reason why the Lahore bus trip did not come to much and why the Agra summit was not successful.

In any case, for the atmosphere to become conducive to a dialogue there has to be peace. Prime Minister Vajpayee's initiative should be grasped by Pakistan with both hands. I hope the Lshkar-e-Toiba's vow to carry on jihad in Kashmir is not with the blessing of Islamabad. Things can go out of hand. Now that New Delhi is willing to have talks with Islamabad there is no reason why Musharraf should be dragging his feet. I wish that if and when the proposal to have a dialogue between India and Pakistan is finalised, some top bureaucrat is not chosen to take over Vajpayee's initiative. All these matters are political. And they require finesse and a sense of accommodation which bureaucrats do not have, particularly retired ones.

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After the Vajpayee-Jamali conversation

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It is noteworthy how little it takes for the dark and bitter shadow hovering over Pakistan and India to begin to recede. No matter for how long. Yet suddenly within the media and bureaucrats there is an expectation-cum-suggestion that the 15-minute telephonic conversation between the two Prime Ministers has 'broken the ice.'

The factors that prompted this conversation may mark the beginning of the end of the 17-month hostile Pakistan-India relations. This time the factors will not prove to be a stand-alone hence the stillborn 'peace offering' of January 2002. Then Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf's bold handshake with Prime Minister Vajpayee earned him instant applause from the media gallery at the SAARC. No more.

Vajpayee's April 18 dialogue offer prompted the April 28 telephone call which no doubt will go down as a significant event in the annals of a troubled Pakistan-India relationship. Yet the credit for making this happen goes to the Pakistani policy-makers. Across the board, within the civilian and military institutions the decision was to 'go all the way' to seize the opportunity offered by Vajpayee's offer. Go for selective perception; just see what you need to; ignore what you don't. Go for the offer, ignore the qualifiers, the condition attached. Interestingly Jamali's phone call came within less than 24 hours of Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani's reiteration of the Indian position that no dialogue unless 'cross border terrorism' is completely stopped.

The strategy and the logistics for the Vajpayee-Jamali conversation were well rehearsed. 'Friends' from a third country got a prior guarantee that Vajpayee will take the call. In fact Vajpayee's key aide said 'Vajpayee would also be gracious' to his Pakistani counterpart. A meeting of Pakistan's top national managers took place to go over the likely contents of the telephone conversation. It was a decision that had input from the General himself. There was an institutional consensus on the Jamali call. Foreign office which had stated the need to 'adopt a proactive and positive' response to Vajpayee's offer was also brought on board this very proactive response!

Interestingly the last call to Vajpayee from the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad was in end June 1999. Nawaz Sharif had called Vajpayee who received the call in Kargil. Sharif was seeking 'military deescalation' and Vajpayee's response was 'you stabbed me in the



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July 2002 General Musharraf turned near adversity into an opportunity. Islamabad worked on bringing down cross-LoC infiltration considerably. Indian leadership acknowledged this decrease. Islamabad mostly exercised restraint with repeated rhetoric hurled out from Delhi. To the extent that Prime Minister Jamali's phone call came from a policy context where consensus for dialogue on the basis of principles of legality and equality already prevailed, it was an easy, though commendable move to have made.

Vajpayee nevertheless must get credit for veering away from the prevailing 3 point anti-Pakistan consensus in India; the troika of ter-

Pressures for talks coming from outside countries led by the United States notwithstanding, unless the logic for a dialogue is not homespun and the willingness to conduct is not home-grown, sustainable and result-oriented process is not possible. Vajpayee and Musharraf-Jamali alone can ensure this

rorism-Kashmir-Pakistan. Upon this has rested the near political consensus of no-dialogue with Pakistan. Admittedly multiple factors including pressures from Washington and other G-8 countries wanting Delhi at the dialogue table with Pakistan and the unresolved Kashmir problem, must have prompted Vajpayee's April 18 offer to Pakistan. It was also a qualified offer but still the dominant message was that of dialogue. The human element in the

take this 'ice-breaking' event forward. Already Delhi is showing some flexibility even in the bureaucratic circles. On April 30 the MEA in Delhi contradicted BJP spokesman's statement that Vajpayee has rejected Jamali's invitation to visit Pakistan.

Pressures for talks coming from outside countries led by the United States notwithstanding, unless the logic for a dialogue is not homespun and the willingness to conduct is not home-grown, sustainable and result-oriented process is not possible. Vajpayee and Musharraf-Jamali alone can ensure this. Beginning with Agra, Pakistan has consistently demonstrated its commitment to a genuine dialogue. Vajpayee is now beginning to show his willingness.

A three-dimension approach must be adopted to ensure that this April initiative by Vajpayee and Jamali does not become stillborn at the bilateral, unilateral and multilateral level. One, the bilateral level normalisation process. Its four elements should be; one, resumption of rail-road and air links between the two countries. Two, reverting back to the pre-December 2001 visa policy so that normal travel between the two countries can recommence. Three, posting of High Commissioners and gradually rebuilding High Commission staff to the pre-December 2001 strength and four, resumption of sports links. Two, at the unilateral level in the most troubled area of their relationship in Kashmir Pakistan can call for a unilateral ceasefire along the LoC. India can call for a ceasefire within Indian Held Kashmir easing pressure of gross human rights violation in IHK. Three, at the multilateral level effort can be made by Pakistan to seriously examine ways in which the movement promised on the economic front within the SAARC context can take place.

While Washington continues to 'advise' Pakistan and India on bilateral ties, Delhi is asked to resume dialogue; Islamabad to further control 'cross-LoC infiltration.' This would be the thrust of US Under Secretary of State Richard Armitage's counsel to Delhi and Islamabad. There are limits to what US pressure on Pakistan can deliver, there are limits to what the 'internal track' on Kashmir can deliver and there are limits to what conventional military superiority and coercive diplomacy can deliver to India. Serious minded India understand that the Kashmir problem can be solved without Pakistan's involvement. The solution process, that war is no option against Pakistan and that the US pressure should not force a Pakistani U-turn on its foreign policy. Also the no-dialogue policy should be abandoned. Pakistan is not paying additional dividends. In fact the law of diminishing returns appears to have set in.

Pakistan and Kashmiris struggling in IHK understand the limits of armed struggle. India pays dividends within a political strategy. Among other elements central to that strategy is the process of dialogue among all the parties to the conflict. It is time to start that dialogue. With sincerity on all sides.