

A personal view

Pakistan's strategy for talks

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The News 6.5.03

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What were the motives which propelled PM Vajpayee to extend his "hand of friendship"? The increasing American pressure with an edge added after the Iraq operation, the futility of continuing with belligerence and coercive diplomacy, the failure to crush resistance in Kashmir and the mounting concerns for finding a way to deal with an irksome and expensive liability, concern about the coming general elections and BJP's prospects, and above all a desire on his part to untie the forbidding knot of hostile India-Pakistan relations.

After this "promising, very promising" initiative, as Colin Powell has put it, it will be fascinating to watch how the two enemy states move ahead to prepare the ground for opening talks at the highest level.

Pakistan, which for years has been asking for dialogue, has naturally welcomed the Indian offer. Jamali's telephonic conversation with Vajpayee, inviting him to visit Pakistan and Kasuri's near-euphoric response has revealed how anxious Islamabad is to make the best of this new window of opportunity and Pakistan has also indicated its willingness to go "an extra mile" and is coming out unilaterally with confidence-building measures.

While Indians too are keen to restore full-fledged diplomatic relations and Vajpayee has said so, also indicating the opening up of the severed communication links between the two countries, the question is how much will India make Pakistan yield to meet New Delhi's demands? Considering that Vajpayee's offer is hedged with the condition to totally stop "cross-border" terrorism and destroy the terrorist "infrastructure" in Azad Kashmir and Pakistan, what may or can Pakistan do to satisfy New Delhi on this account? Pakistan's plea for international monitoring of the Line of Control has not been put forward with enough emphasis and persistence with the result that it has been cavalierly brushed aside by India and ignored by the international community.

The way things are moving, India, unlike Pakistan, is following a calibrated approach. For instance the one thing India fears most is the re-internationalising of the Kashmir issue at the United Nations and the entry of a third party. New Delhi's apprehension that the matter could be raised in the Security Council has surprisingly

enough been attended to by our permanent representative and currently Council's President, stating publicly that the Kashmir issue is not on the Council's agenda. This need not have been said straightaway and might have been conceded, if at all, on the basis of some give and take. In fact here was an excellent opportunity to revive the issue and to steer the discussion of it, that India's initiative for talks and the legitimacy of Pakistan as an internationally acknowledged party to the "dispute" both could have been duly acknowledged and appreciated. There is possibly still — a way to indirectly draw Security Council's attention to the current new developments. The last time the Security Council referred to Kashmir was after the two countries tested their nuclear devices in 1998.

Another area where India wants Pakistan to yield ground is the speedy resumption of economic ties and in particular the opening up of trade relations. Here too our Foreign Minister has rushed into reversing the hitherto tightly held stand that trade relations would only be resumed when the Kashmir question was taken up for a settlement along with other issues. Kasuri's U-turn on this question is a major concession before even the talks have begun at the lower levels. This must have pleased the Indians mightily as without conceding anything they have been handed over on a platter one of their long-cherished objectives. Not that there is something intrinsically wrong to mutual trade relations as such but while a hint to take up this question would have been politic, to concede a much pressed demand at this stage is certainly questionable.

CRaja Mohan writing in *The Hindu* (May 4) has accorded more importance to trade relations than even the question of terrorism. Says Mr Mohan: "While it may take a while to measure the trend-lines on cross-border infiltration, Pakistan's attitude to the peace process can be immediately assessed by what it does in the next few days on economic cooperation". This needs to be read in the light of the emphasis, Mr Vajpayee laid in his prepared statement read out in both the Houses of the Parliament, last Friday "on the importance of substantive progress on the decisions for regional trade and economic cooperation taken at the summit of the South Asian leaders in Nepal in January 2002". To read the Indian mind, we may have a look at C Raja Mohan's following words: "It is entirely possible that Pak-

istan, as it unveils a set of confidence-building measures in the next few days, would remove most of the 219 items from the negative list and present it as a big step forward. But New Delhi will be looking for a basic change in the attitude towards commercial relations with India rather than counting the number of tariff lines being opened up".

No doubt Pakistan is under intense pressure from USA to totally stop all "terrorist" activities across the Line of Control. At India's goading, Islamabad has also been asked to put a stop to militants' activities even in Kashmir. A number of Kashmiri militant groups have only the other day been placed on Washington's Watch List thus encouraging Indians to suppress them through massive security forces deployed in the occupied valley. Under pressure Pakistan has also started tightening screws against certain *Jihadi* groups. Unlike India's massive propaganda about terrorism, Pakistan has failed to impress upon Washington that there was need for taking a serious notice of non-stop state terrorism being perpetrated against Kashmiri civilians for the last 14 years in defiance of international human rights norms and codes. This weakness on our part has veered the international public opinion to the view that all the trouble in the occupied state is because of Pakistan's infiltration with the result that the alienated and repressed Kashmiris' resistance and struggle for the right of self-determination (in terms of UN Resolutions) has been eclipsed altogether. The Americans are ~~now~~ as insistent as the Indians themselves on Pakistanis giving up their support to the Kashmiris. Armitage in his earlier visit used the word "permanent" in relation to the cessation of "cross-border" infiltration.

Goodwill and bowing under American pressure should not be the sole guides to how Pakistan may deal with India when the process of negotiations begins. A measured, well-crafted and goal-oriented approach is called for, to match India's astuteness and finesse. Kashmir has to remain the centrepiece, which indeed it is, considering that Vajpayee spoke from Srinagar when he set the ball rolling. The Kashmiris' valiant struggle and the supreme sacrifice of tens of thousands of men, women and children in the occupied state must weigh in the scales of a just and a realistic solution to the old dispute.

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The News
8.5.03
Pak. P.L. - India

US involvement in Kashmir issue

The most bizarre aspect of any official or unofficial discussion in Pakistan or in India on Jammu and Kashmir is regarding the role of the United States. Many wax eloquent on the why, how, and what of the US involvement; on supporting it and opposing it. Justifications put forth for keeping the US out include "upholding national sovereignty", "not allowing a sell-out on Kashmir" and Washington's pro-India approach. All this is merely academic. Mostly shadow-boxing. After all United States is already involved in the issue. And ironically at the insistence of the two parties to the conflict, India and Pakistan, who remain somewhat in denial of this reality. Both have complained to the United States against the other; India against what it calls Pakistan's "cross-border terrorism" and Pakistan against India's refusal to come to the dialogue table.

India's complaint has received a sympathetic hearing in Washington. It has struck a chord among Washington's "anti-terrorism" campaigners in the pre- and post-9/11 phase. Washington's operative policy on Kashmir has reflected this. The US pressure has been mainly on Pakistan to control cross-LoC infiltration. Significantly, the US position on Kashmir has moved from ignoring the issue to seeking its containment and now finally wanting to facilitate a permanent solution. The US policy has gone through three phases:

The first phase, which began with the Kashmiri uprising in 1989, was the one in which Washington opted to ignore the issue. Essentially when tensions flared up along the LoC coinciding with the nuclear-related sanctions, the Gates Mission arrived Islamabad in 1990 to warn Pakistani President Ghulam Ishaq Khan against nuclear proliferation and creating trouble along the LoC leading to heightening of Pakistan-Indian military tensions. This policy of warning Pakistan against any 'adventurism' in Indian-held Kashmir continued throughout most of the nineties.

The second phase was that of seeking containment of the issue. Especially after the nuclear tests of 1998 and the increased US fear-cum-propaganda of "Islamic terrorism", Washington began to play a more active role in containing the Kashmir problem. It acknowledged the existence of the problem and reiterated its position that J&K was a disputed territory.

The year 1999 opened up on a positive note with the Vajpayee-Nawaz Lahore summit and ended with the post-Kargil acrimony. Kargil, a direct fallout of the unresolved Kashmir problem, caused direct US involvement in the Kashmir problem. The Zinni-Lampher Mission arrived in June to convince Pakistan to withdraw from Kargil. Early July Pakistani Prime Minister rushed to Washington for US intervention. Washington had promised to facilitate Pakistan-India negotiations, was the Pakistani version of the July 4 four-point Washington Declaration. India saw it as documenting Pakistan retreating from Indian-held Kashmir.



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In the mid to late nineties containment phase Indian forces came under US criticism for violating human rights in the Valley. So did the Kashmiri mujahideen. Pressure on successive Pakistani governments to stop military support to Kashmiri mujahideen continued in private meetings and publicly articulated policy statements. US President Bill Clinton's early 2000 statement was an open warning to Pakistan to stop military support to the Kashmiri mujahideen. US efforts to encourage Pakistan and India to take confidence building measures like increasing trade, improving cultural ties and engaging in dialogue over issues

Washington and Delhi both must understand that without following the principle of reciprocity no negotiations can proceed further. Unlike the Middle East where the absence of power balance has enabled Israel supported by the US to abandon completely the principle of reciprocity, in South Asia, given the power balance that prevails, brushing aside reciprocity and moving towards a Kashmir solution will not be possible

other than Kashmir continued. Irrespective of Washington's pressure, especially on Pakistan, Islamabad was not willing to forget Kashmir or accept the Indian position on the dispute. However, together India and Pakistan agreed to initiate a composite dialogue to cover Kashmir, nuclear and other issues. The underlying problem simmered, leading to a military eruption at Kargil. US was merely a tension-absorber; nothing more. The pressure still was on Pakistan, more so after Kargil.

The third and the present phase of US policy over Kashmir is that of solution-seeking. Developments on the Pakistan-India front in the year 2000 and beyond have continuously demonstrated the perils of an unresolved Kashmir problem. Its solution or at least the initiation of a process seeking a solution is indispensable to ending the low intensity conflict and high intensity diplomatic confrontation between the two countries. Repeatedly the US has faced a nightmare situation with million troops of nuclear armed neighbours deployed in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. Hence, Washington, especially after Afghanistan and Iraq, believe it must attempt to successfully

bring the Kashmir conflict to a close.

US Deputy Secretary of State Armitage arrives in Islamabad with a clear mandate to push forward the process of Pakistan-India normalisation as well as that of helping to create an 'enabling environment' in which the Kashmir issue will be tackled by the two. Washington believes there is need to create a conducive environment through confidence building measures.

The Indians believe that from behind the scene US will force the two to the dialogue table. It would start with pushing the two for normalisation, creating an atmosphere in which dialogue is possible. The two should get into comfortable space. Then, there should be a summit in which Kashmir should be discussed. The Indian establishment believes that US has concluded that the LoC should be converted into an international border. Indian media and leading strategists have referred to the latest CIA map showing IHK as part of India as illustrative of the Bush administration's thinking. There is no formal announcement of change in the US policy on the Jammu and Kashmir issue. American position remains that Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory.

Washington is, however, hoping that in the immediate term India and Pakistan should discuss CBMs like people-to-people contact, culture, trade, visas, etc. Americans believe this would subsequently lead to a Pakistan-India summit in which Kashmir would be resolved. Decreasing tension is a priority which feeds into a medium-term dialogue process to resolve the Kashmir issue.

So far so good. But for Washington the question is whether this would necessarily lead to a Pakistan-India détente. Inevitable Armitage will raise the question of cross-LoC infiltration. In India cross-LoC infiltration has been projected as cross-border terrorism and like in the Kargil days Indian position has been inflexible. Then it was Pakistan's retreat to its own side of the LoC. Now it is zero cross-LoC infiltration. Physical geography, nature of elements involved in the Kashmir struggle and also realpolitik within Pakistani policy-making circles, all rule out the possibility of a zero infiltration. At Almaty, declaration by General Musharraf was implicitly time-bound when he said we would do all that is in our control and we expect India to reciprocate with a dialogue on Kashmir. Reciprocity was not viewed by Washington as essential; India too demanded zero cross-LoC infiltration. Reduction was not enough.

It is most likely that Pakistan will again propose CBMs on the Kashmir issue on the basis of reciprocity. Washington and Delhi both must understand that without following the principle of reciprocity no negotiations can proceed further. Unlike the Middle East where the absence of power balance has enabled Israel supported by the US to abandon completely the principle of reciprocity, in South Asia, given the power balance that prevails, brushing aside reciprocity and moving towards a Kashmir solution will not be possible.