

Proposed talks - uncalled for apprehensions

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SOME circles are expressing far-fetched apprehensions about Mr Armitage's and Miss Christina Rocca's visit to Pakistan, especially in the context of the current contacts between Pakistan and India as a result of Mr Vajpayee's initiative. I have already expressed my opinion in these columns and a long programme on GEO TV that this initiative of Mr Vajpayee is the result of his own thinking and American pressure has had no bearing on it.

India is a big country and it cannot accept any American pressure against her national interests. But since Pakistan's internal economic and political position is somewhat weaker as compared to India, it can be apprehended that it may accept such American influence as may not accord with its interests in a strict sense. However, notwithstanding all elements of her weakness, Pakistan has not, in recent years, blindly complied with American wishes and preferences.

One most recent and prominent example is the American effort to get a second resolution from the Security Council. At one stage after the initial pressure, the Americans told Pakistan that if they could get nine votes in the Security Council in favour of their steps on Iraq they would get a moral justification for an invasion on Iraq despite the French veto. That

is what the Americans thought. Pakistan was told that they could get eight votes and Pakistan had the ninth one. If Pakistan said yes the Americans would get at least a moral justification for an attack on Iraq. But since Pakistan was not convinced that its voting for the US would be appropriate, it refused.

Those people are wrong who think that we had covertly agreed to vote for America but because it did not come to voting and that the US herself beat a retreat, our Americanism was saved from exposure. This thinking and line of reasoning is absolutely without any basis. As the probability of talks with India increases some circles in Pakistan are giving vent to their apprehensions that on the basis of the rulers' weakness and under American pressure Pakistan may make such a deal with India, especially on Kashmir and on some aspects of other bilateral issues, as may be against our national interest and our traditional stand.

It is both desirable and necessary to advise the rulers to be cautious but it would not be wise to cry wolf merely on the basis of conjecture.

In spite of 9/11, American occupation of Afghanistan and the recent American takeover of Iraq and notwithstanding the American doctrine that an independent

country can be attacked on the pretext of pre-emptive strike, Pakistan will not compromise its fundamental interests. Foreign Minister Kasuri has already said (interview to CNN) that we would like to start the process of dialogue from where it had broken off at Agra.

Spectacle

By Irshad Ahmad Haqqani

India has not yet accepted this position but it would not make any difference. There may be four stages of dialogue instead of one; initially at the ambassadorial level, then between the foreign secretaries, thereafter at the level of foreign ministers and finally at the summit level, but Pakistan's basic approach will remain the same as it was at Agra. President Musharraf had given Mr Vajpayee a four-point formula:

- 1) Kashmir may be accepted as the core issue
- 2) India should give up its extreme stand of Kashmir being her inalienable part
- 3) Pakistan should give up its stand of simultaneous plebiscite in the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir under the aegis of the United Nations Organisation, and
- 4) Keeping in view all these three cases a solution of the problem acceptable to all three parties of the dispute.

The third party are the Kashmiri people. Even before Agra talks President Musharraf had gone to the extent of saying that if the Kashmiris decided in favour of a third option other than joining India or Pakistan, the latter would accept that also with an open mind he was answering a question of an Indian journalist while addressing a South Asian Conference under the auspices of daily "The News".

It means that if Pakistan accepts a solution on the basis of what it has already said before the proposed talks, it would not be possible to call it disloyalty to Kashmir cause. It will not be correct to describe it as regression. Knowledgeable circles know that more than half a dozen shapes and forms of a solution of the Kashmir issue have remained and are under consideration in international, South Asian and Kashmiri circles.

Acceptance of any one of these to which all parties agree could not possibly be called treachery with the cause of Kashmir. Rather, it will be taken as a realistic approach. If Ayub Khan was not disloyal to Kashmir cause at Tashkent, if we did not accept any compromise on principles on the occasion of Bhutto-Swaran Singh talks (1962-63) before that, if, despite being defeated, Bhutto not only did not surrender at

Simla but laid the foundation of an honourable agreement, if the army under the leadership of President Musharraf foiled the attempt to keep the mention of Kashmir dispute out of Lahore declaration, if President Musharraf preferred to come back empty handed from Agra only because he could not concede the demand of Advani camp that such amendments be made to the agreed draft as were not in keeping with the spirit of the draft then why should we harbour the apprehension in our minds now that we are going to agree to some solution which envisages the Line of Control as the permanent boundary? This is not possible.

The proposed talks may break down but Pakistan cannot accept this solution. Let us not overlook the fact that Mr Vajpayee has taken this initiative after an assessment of some realities. Some of the realities he seems to have perceived are:

1) If Pakistan cannot take Kashmir with military force, we (India) can also not put an end to Kashmiri's freedom struggle and its support from Azad Kashmir by the force of arms

2) The danger of Pakistan being declared a failed or a terrorist state has passed and she has weight and importance in the international community

3) Pakistan's economy is on the mend. For the first time Pakistan has foreign exchange reserves in excess of US \$ 10.00 billion

4) America is not in a position to unduly pressurize Pakistan on Kashmir or any other matter, all efforts and intrigues of India notwithstanding

5) South Asia's development cannot gather mo-

mentum without improvement in relations with Pakistan

6) So long as India's disputes with an important neighbour like Pakistan persist, India herself cannot claim its due place in international politics

7) The US is moving very quickly to mould world affairs, especially in the middle east and South Asia according to her choice. It is useful and important to settle issues with Pakistan in order to escape her dictation

8) Unless peaceful neighbourly relations with Pakistan are established, India herself, with her nuclear weapons, her navy and her air force cannot play and extend its more important strategic role.

These are some reasons realization of which has forced Mr Vajpayee to extend a hand of friendship to Pakistan. These are his compulsions. Otherwise why should Mr Vajpayee offer this hand of friendship suddenly after a tension of one and a half years and despite possible gains from the politics of Hindu extremism?

Therefore the people of Pakistan should rest assured and be not unnecessarily perturbed. Whatever deal is made with India it will be acceptable to all three parties. Otherwise there will be no deal. Neither of the two states is in a position at the moment to impose its undue preferences on the other. If Pakistan has some compulsions to hold talks and make them successful, India has them too and her compulsions are no less than ours.

We should therefore wait for talks with an attitude of "hope for the better and prepare for the worst". God will bring about the best.