

# Peace initiative and Pakistani concerns

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Almost all militant Hindu leaders mistakenly and somewhat firmly believe that Kashmir is an integral part of India. They are unwilling to accept the disputed nature of Kashmir either by design or by being ignorant of the actual facts. They view Nehru's commitments to hold plebiscite as an aberration. They believe that the troubles in the Indian Held Kashmir are primarily the product of Pakistani efforts. They refuse to acknowledge the indigenous nature of the ongoing struggle and tend to project that the freedom struggle in Kashmir is sustained by the cross-border infiltrations. They intensely dislike all peace overtures towards neighbours in general and more specifically towards Pakistan in particular. Leaders like Togadia (VHP) publicly slammed Vajpayee's peace move and urged him to punish Pakistan instead of forgiving it for promoting cross-border terrorism. Similarly the recent utterances of Shive Sena supremo Bal Thakrey also convey the same message.

They are still more attracted and appear to be heavily influenced by their violent medieval practices. Perhaps that is why they could not swallow Gandhi's pacifism and eventually murdered him not only in a broad daylight but also in the presence so many of his followers. They have been promoting Hinduisation of multi-ethnic and multi-religious society of India even in the 21st Century. To attain this objective they seem to have opted for the employment of coercive tactics. Some of them even take pride in having killed many members of the minority communities including Sikhs, Christians and Muslims in their concerted efforts to Hinduise India. With this kind of attitude the gradual surfacing of concerns among the Pakistanis is somewhat natural.

Most of the concerns that have been repeatedly highlighted seem to revolve around the incumbent edifice of distrust. The biting statements that are being issued by some of the important members of the Sangh Parivar further strengthen the well-entrenched distrust.

The sudden U-turn of Vajpayee from a policy of coercion and intimidation to reconciliatory approach has naturally given birth to suspicions. Many people in Pakistan refer to this U-turn as another of the India's cleverly devised, sugarcoated move. This kind of apprehension is not at all surprising if placed within the context of the last few years of India's Pakistan policy. Sceptics even have gone to the extent of describing it as another of Indian tricks.

Undoubtedly it becomes little difficult to swallow why suddenly the Indian Prime Minister has changed his tune and tenor. Some regard it as just another well-calculated tactical move, which appears appropriate in view of the existing circumstances. The initial reaction of almost all Pakistanis was positive but when the rider was attached the very next day in a press conference, many began to think differently. The rider was the cessation of alleged cross-border infiltration and the destruction of alleged terrorist camps. Further, the employment of phrase that it is the 'last effort' implied inbuilt coercive elements.

Compared to the Indians, the Pakistanis seem to have opted for a much more constructive approach and have been consistently issuing clearer and meaningful statements. Foreign Minister Kasuri's assertion that Pakistan is prepared to go an extra mile if the Indians make some positive move is indeed appreciable. Prime Minister Jamali has already offered to India many confidence-building measures (CBM) including the restoration of rail, road and air links. It is pretty well known that the India stands to gain a lot more than the Pakistanis from the resumption of air links. The resumption of rail and road links is much more conducive to encouraging people to people contact.

Instead of appreciating the positive spirit demonstrated by Prime Minister Jamali when he offered six trust building steps, the Indians opted to describe it as 'inadequate'. The correct approach would have been to appreciate these steps and suggest some more that could



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accelerate the peace process. Labelling or contemptuously brushing aside even a single good move needs to be avoided if one is really sincere in promoting the peace process. Such an approach tends to strengthen scepticism and provides fodder to the hardliners.

The second major concern that has been repeatedly highlighted by many in Pakistan is the question mark surrounding the future status of Kashmir. There are those who firmly believe that Pakistan is going to drastically modify its Kashmir policy and some have gone to the extent of expressing that there is going to be a settlement on the existing basis. This also implies that Pakistan would ignore the sacrifices made by the Kashmiris and may even abandon them altogether. They tend to highlight the struggle that the Kashmiris have waged over the last 55 years and project the sufferings they have endured.

Another view that is being discussed among many is that the Kashmir dispute is going to be put on the back burner. In other words other issues would be given priority and since Kashmir is a complex issue, it would only be dealt when the overall atmosphere becomes conducive to resolving such a complex dispute. Thus preference would be given to other areas such as economic cooperation, trading links etc. The feelings that the most important dispute between the two antagonists is going to be dealt with only in the end makes many uncomfortable.

Despite the repeated assertions by almost all the leaders who matter that Kashmir can never be abandoned, the emergence of doubts is not very unusual. The government spokesmen have been making it quite clear at different levels that under no circumstances Kashmir cause would be abandoned. It has also

been repeatedly stated that settlement on the existing division is totally unacceptable to majority of the Pakistanis. Settlement on the existing basis implies recognising the LoC (Line of Control) as the permanent border. The question that would confront the government if it were to recognise LoC as the permanent border is that why did they take 55 years to agree to this type of solution and entailed so much expenditure both in terms of human and financial costs.

The issue of placing Kashmir on the back burner has also initiated a lively debate. The advocates argue that the Kashmir dispute has become extremely complicated over the last 55 years with the emergence of so many new related issues; it would only be appropriate to subject it to thorough discussion when the atmosphere becomes more palatable. The opponents argue the longer its resolution is delayed, the more complex it would become and therefore it is imperative to make concerted efforts to resolve it as soon as possible. They also stress that the Kashmir dispute was put on the back burner following the signing of the Simla Agreement. Clause six of the Simla Agreement clearly states that both governments (India and Pakistan) would meet again at a mutually convenient time in future in order to seek the final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir. The other issues that were mentioned in this clause relate to the durability of peace, normalisation of relationship, repatriation of prisoners of war and resumption of diplomatic relations.

They argue that from 1972 (when Simla Agreement was signed) to 1994 the Kashmir dispute remained on the back burner. During the years 1972 to 1994 India-Pakistan met 46 times to discuss various issues and the word Kashmir figured 6-8 times but the basic dispute itself was only discussed once and that too was in January 1994. In other words the dispute remained on the back burner for 22 years. In view of the well demonstrated Indian apathy towards the resolution of the Kashmir especially when it was on the back burner, to

agree again to place the dispute on the back burner is not only unlikely to invoke any kind of enthusiasm but may also invoke angry reactions.

The third concern that is frequently discussed emanates from outsider pressures. Many Pakistanis believe that Americans are pressurising both India and Pakistan to lower tension and initiate some form of dialogue in order to resolve their outstanding disputes including the ongoing Kashmir dispute. Cognizant of American strategic partnership with the Indians along with the accompanying Pakistani perceptions of American tilt towards India, many in Pakistan entertain the thoughts that the American approach is likely to be more favourable to the Indians viewpoint. There are many others who believe that American may even try to provide a solution of Kashmir dispute which is going to be much closer to the Indians desires and aspirations. Initially American role in Indo-Pak tangles was seen as a fire-brigade approach aimed to lower tension between the two nuclear neighbours but now after the Iraq war, it is expected to be much bigger than was the case in the past.

So far the positive gestures demonstrated by both Vajpayee and Jamali not only reflect the determination of the two leaders but is also gradually improving the prevailing atmosphere. Equally encouraging aspect of the latest peace initiative is that the leaders of the two countries have been constantly consulting the elected representatives of the people. In addition, the relaxation between India-Pakistan has been eliciting support from almost all the major players of world politics. The recent trip of high American officials is also seen as part of the concerted pressures to push the two countries to initiate a dialogue. While it is time to start a meaningful dialogue aimed to resolve all disputes that bedevilled their mutual relationships, efforts should also be made to refrain from indulging in all those acts and statements that can invoke strong concerns of the adversary.