

# Need for a calibrated approach

Inayatullah

Now that the excitement generated by Vajpayee's sudden and surprising announcement in Srinagar on April 18 has subsided, it is time to critically look at the goings on.

First to review what Vajpayee or the Indian government has been saying. The initial extension of the "hand of friendship" has been linked to the stoppage of the "cross-border" infiltration and destruction of the terrorist infrastructure. This conditionality has existed all along. It is being reiterated and reemphasised. Reference has been made to the creation of a conducive atmosphere. The statement issued by the Indian external affairs ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna indicates how India views the recent developments and the Armitage visit: "India will judge Pakistan's response to PM Atal Behari Vajpayee's peace initiative by what they do, not what they say. It is for India to judge whether a conducive atmosphere has been created for a dialogue to take place". On Saturday Mr Vajpayee himself said that Pakistan must put an end to the "rebel flow" into Kashmir. The Ministry's spokesman also observed that the six confidence building measures announced by Mr Jamali were "inadequate (referring in particular, to trade relations)".

Indian National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra in a press conference after meeting Colin Powell has said that the talks will begin only after cross-border terrorism ends permanently. Added Mr Mishra: "I cannot tell you today what kind of solution will be found really once the dialogue begins and it is sustained over a period. We must not jump into some meeting or anything like that at the present moment".

And let us see what Richard Armitage had to say in New Delhi after

meeting Indian leaders and officials. He praised Vajpayee's "far-reaching act of statesmanship" and said: "I am cautiously optimistic that the process begun by the act of statesmanship by the prime minister of India could possibly lead to a step-by-step process that would eventually resolve all issues. It is a long trip to when we get there and I just hope we've begun a process. Our point of view, the fact of the matter is, all violence has got to end". He said he relayed to Indian leaders Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's remarks that "there is nothing happening" along the LoC. "It is not my job to give assurances. It is up to India to make up her own mind about that particular statement from President Musharraf".

It is noteworthy that (a) India has agreed only to restore diplomatic relations and air links and not the road and rail communications. Nor has it indicated any other steps; (b) Pakistan's request for a meeting at the PM level has been declined and the confidence-building measures announced by Islamabad have been pooh-poohed as "completely inadequate"; (c) India will take its own time to open talks. It has indicated that a "conductive atmosphere first needs be created and that progress will be step by step starting with the officials meetings. (d) It considers that "cross-border terrorism" continues and it alone will be the judge if it was being reduced or stopped by Pakistan.

According to the London *Economist*: "Some sort of a coordinated rapprochement is under way. But the danger is that this, like every other India-Pakistan initiative, will founder on the rock that is Kashmir. On this issue, there is no real change to be discerned on either side".

The fact of the matter is that for various reasons as spelt out in my last column, Mr Vajpayee is inclined to move towards a solution of the Kashmir issue, lower tensions with

Pakistan and get on with the job of developing India into an influential regional power to prepare ground for joining the big league. He however wants this settlement at New Delhi's terms. He feels that Washington has been won over sufficiently to ensure that Pakistan stops its active or material support to the Kashmiris in their fight for the right to self-determination.

India's stand needs to be viewed in the light of the high-pitch diplomatic moves seen at the US Congress where resolutions were sought to be moved against Pakistan for its support to terrorism, Yashwant Sinha's meeting with Colin Powell in Moscow and important official meetings of Mr Brajesh Mishra with Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and President Bush himself. India has taken another important step in enlisting support against terrorism (read Pakistan). Addressing the American Jewish community in Washington, Mishra proposed an anti-terror alliance amongst US, Israel and India. Such an alliance, said Mishra, would have the political will and moral authority to take bold decisions in extreme cases of terrorist provocation. In this connection he referred to the need for "preventive measures like blocking financial supplies, disrupting networks and sharing intelligence". Richard Boucher, State Department spokesman told the press: Mr Mishra had "a very good meeting on a broad range of US-India relations, and also about the question of India's relations with Pakistan". To these significant contacts may be added Vice President Cheney's invitation to Mr Advani personally delivered to the latter by Armitage in New Delhi.

With a single masterly move, Vajpayee has pushed the ball into the Pakistani court. Both India and USA will be twisting the screws on Pakistan to altogether stop support to

the Kashmiris. Indian diplomacy has so intensified the pitch that the state-terrorist India is viewed by US and the international community as a victim of the "villainous" sponsorship of terrorism by Pakistan. Almost forgotten is the just cause of the Kashmiris, the UN obligations and Pakistan's right of involvement in what India blatantly does to the alienated, aggrieved Kashmiris, as an internationally recognised party to the dispute. By complying with the dictates and demands of Washington and to save its skin, Islamabad does, off and on, evoke American appreciation for the services rendered. Now, it has been called upon to do US bidding at the UN Security Council of which currently it is the president.

Are we adequately watching how India moves diplomatically from point to point lining up US and other powers on its side? Are we alert and active enough to counter India's moves in so far as these adversely affect our interests? Do we take proactive diplomatic initiatives to strengthen our position at the international stage or do we rest content with defensive and reactive activities only?

India has already drawn a dividend by securing appreciation for the move for peace from the world community. It also has made headway in extracting another commitment from Musharraf to put an end to infiltration and the "terrorist camps". It has further been able to soften Pakistan's stand on trade relations before the talks have begun. It is insisting on more of it.

And yet there is no programme for the process of talks to begin. Pakistan needs to watch how India is working for its national interests. It must follow a calibrated approach keeping in view its own overarching and long-term objectives.

The writer is a Lahore-based columnist

pacade@brain.net.pk