



Prime Minister Vajpayee



President Pervez Musharraf

India-Pakistan: the ground realities

BY MANSOOR ALAM

Prime Minister Vajpayee has extended the hand of friendship and followed it up by deciding to restore full diplomatic relations and the air links. Prime Minister Jamali has responded promptly and followed his phone call by issuing a formal invitation. Although statements about ending the cross border terrorism as a pre-condition for resumption of talks are still coming from India, I am confident that more good will measures will follow and lead to the dialogue on all issues.

However, the question is whether the next round will be as futile as all the previous ones spanning a period of 53 years. After all, the road to peace or "Shahra-e-Aman" between India and Pakistan is littered with the corpses of failed summits and spectres of 1965, 1971, Siachin, Kargil and many eye ball to eye ball confrontations of millions of troops across the length and breadth of their common borders. Hence, if the next round is also not to become a dead corpse, the two sides will have to keep the following ground realities in mind for a sustainable progress towards rapprochement.

Reality No. 1: There can be no military solution of the Kashmir issue. The two have fought three full scale wars, 1948, 1965, 1971, two mini wars Ran of Kutch and Kargil, are engaged in a continuous war in Siachin since 1984 and have resorted to many dangerous face to face deployments costing huge sums of money without producing any results. Now that the two have also become nuclear powers the possibility of a military solution is out of the question, leaving only the possibility of "mutual and assured destruction" MAD.

Reality No. 2: War is not an option; there is no such thing as a limited war between two nuclear powers. Kargil was a skirmish and had to be stopped. Similarly, Siachin's occupation by India was a thoughtless move. It has given no real strategic advantage to India, but has cost hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of young and precious lives, more by

tions accepted by India and many unequivocal statements made by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promising the right of self-determination to the Kashmiris. Therefore, it is not and cannot become integral part of India simply because the Indian parliament has passed such a resolution. Unless it is settled peacefully with the consent of all three parties, Kashmiris, Pakistan and India it will continue to tick like a bomb waiting to explode. India has to understand that and give up the "integral" bit to break the vicious cycle of war and peace.

Reality No.7: (Pakistan). It keeps saying that Kashmir is the "core" issue and unless settled there cannot be full normalization of relations. There is no doubt that Kashmir is the core issue but let us recognize that it is also the most complex and complicated one. It has become a part of the emotional psyche of Pakistanis, Indians and Kashmiris. All of them equally regard it as an issue of life and death. Therefore, it is not amenable to an early solution. On the other hand, an improvement of ties in other areas, economy, trade, culture, sports, travel, water etc will be conducive to the final solution of the Kashmir issue. Nature also teaches that the core cannot be reached without cracking the crust and the periphery. So it will be better to leave the core aside for the time being, and without abandoning our principled stand, move towards normalization and cooperation in all other areas. We should learn a lesson from our good friends the Chinese and leave the territorial issue aside till such time as emotions and apprehensions have calmed down. Alsace-Lorraine was a cause of three wars between France and Germany for a period of over 70 years. Today's French and Germans hardly know where it is located.

Reality No. 8: The Kashmiris are the real issue. While Kashmir can await a solution the plight of the Kashmiris must be ameliorated immediately. They are the ones who are suffering death, destruction and depravity on a daily basis. India has

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Reality No. 2: War is not an option; there is no such thing as a limited war between two nuclear powers. Kargil was a skirmish and had to be stopped. Similarly, Siachin's occupation by India was a thoughtless move. It has given no real strategic advantage to India, but has cost hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of young and precious lives, more by frost bites than by enemy's bullets. It should be of no comfort that Pakistan has suffered equally.

Reality No.3: (Pakistan bleeding India) Kashmir is not Afghanistan. In Afghanistan the Mujahideen had international military, financial, political and moral support. The world was fighting with them. They received uninterrupted supply of most sophisticated weapons and training from the west led by the USA. They had killed 15000 soviet troops in 10 years. In Kashmir they are isolated and, of late, are regarded as terrorists. In 13 years no more than 2000 Indian soldiers have been killed as against over 60000 Kashmiri civilians, mostly Muslims. In 10 years the Soviet economy had reached a point of collapse, while during 13 years of Jihad in Kashmir the Indian economy has grown stronger. The attempt to bleed India in Kashmir, as the USSR was bled in Afghanistan, has failed. It must be stopped.

Reality No. 4: (India, bankrupt Pakistan). India's attempt to bankrupt Pakistan through an arms race, on the pattern of cold war rivals, has equally failed. Pakistan's economy has recovered in all areas and is expected to grow at a faster rate than India's in the years ahead. At the same time Pakistan has been able to maintain the traditional ratio in conventional arms while keeping neck to neck in the nuclear and missile race. India can continue on this perilous road till both have acquired the capacity to destroy each other many times over and then spent an equal amount on dismantling this dangerous stuff or stop the arms race and utilize the money on its people allowing Pakistan to do the same. Arms race between two of the poorest countries of the world is crime against humanity.

Reality No. 5: Pressures and preconditions do not work in the subcontinent. Pakistan thinks that it can put pressure on India to make concessions on Kashmir by restricting trade, denying MFN status, mounting operations like Gibraltar and Kargil, stroking the fires of militancy in Kashmir. India which started the game by withholding Pakistan's share of military and financial assets threatening to stop the flow of water in the fifties intervened in 1971, occupied Siachin in 1984, deployed a million soldiers on the borders, severed diplomatic and communication links and refused to resume dialogue for 18 months until "cross border terrorism" was ended. Neither was able to extract concessions from the other.

Reality No. 6: (India). It insists that Kashmir is its integral part but Pakistan insists that Kashmiris and the world see it as a dispute. It is an issue on which there are many UN resolu-

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Reality No. 8: The Kashmiris are the real issue. While Kashmir can await a solution the plight of the Kashmiris must be ameliorated immediately. They are the ones who are suffering death, destruction and depravity on a daily basis. India has to stop the brutal use of force and withdraw laws like POTO. And both countries should cooperate to make life easy for them. It was during a lull in the firing on the LoC that I took the Foreign Service trainees deep into the Neelam Valley in July 2001. One evening we saw a group of people standing across the river that formed the LoC in that part. It was a woman and a man on our side and a few people on the Indian side. As we approached we saw them throwing letters tied to stones across the river. The sister on our side and the brother on the other side were exchanging messages and small gifts as they could not hear each other due to the noise of the torrent and could not cross it because the soldiers will not let them, though it was a shallow stream of narrow water which could be easily waded through. They were permitted only one hour for the exchange of letters and gifts. Yet they had traveled for three days just for that little mercy permitted by the two countries.

Reality No.9: Peace between India and Pakistan is not only desirable but also essential for peace, prosperity and stability of the whole of South Asia. Since independence the population of the two countries has increased fourfold, Pakistan's from 33 million to 140 and India's from 250 million to one billion, while the size of their territories has not increased by an inch and the volume of water they get annually has remained the same. More than 70 percent of their population is living on or below the subsistence level. Thanks to the green revolution engineered by Dr Burlogue, the subcontinent has been saved from famine, disease and mass scale death. Kashmir, yes, but there are bigger problems staring the two in the face and unless they can learn to cooperate to deal with the common problems of population explosion, growing water shortage, illiteracy and environmental degradation etc, today's conflict over of Kashmir will look like child's play tomorrow.

Reality No.10: There are extremists within and outside the establishment in both countries. They are convinced of the justness of their cause and do not believe in any kind of compromise. They will try their utmost to prevent any move forward between India and Pakistan and grab at any opportunity that the leaders of the two countries may give them by delaying the resumption of dialogue, enforcement of confidence building measures such as restoration of air, rail and road links, removal of over flight restrictions, easing of visa regime and reduction in the propaganda warfare by the government controlled media of the two countries.