

The dividing line

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Pak. F. Feb. - India
Dawar 27.5.03

RICHARD NIXON's strength as a tactician was his habit of analysing the pros and cons of any problem confronting him. He would draw a line down the centre of the page of his yellow legal pad (Nixon was a lawyer by profession, and a law-breaker by inclination). He would then list the advantages and disadvantages on opposite sides and evolve a strategy accordingly.

By using this technique, he was able to surmount the numerous crises that punctuated his political life — as a beleaguered vice-president under Eisenhower, a failed candidate for the governorship of California against Pat Brown, and as a contestant for the presidency against Jack Kennedy.

That he succeeded finally in becoming the 37th president of the United States can be attributed as much to his dogged persistence as to the precision of his analysis.

In the context of current developments in the subcontinent, one wonders whether leaders on either side of the line that divides India and Pakistan have thought of conducting such a diagnostic scrutiny. They would be well advised to do so now, for at whatever level their next round of talks are pitched, imperfect preparation could well lead to another Agra-like abortion, with equally still-born results. It is time for each to approach each other's concerns dispassionately, coolly, and without the overhang of mutual recriminations and suspicions that have bedevilled Indo-Pakistan contacts since 1947.

India's yellow pad will predictably be the longer, for it has more to gain and less to lose than Pakistan. That vulnerability is not simply a matter of scale; it is of matter of stature. Ever since the moment of its creation, India has been like some love-lost Abhisarika Nayika in search of its tryst with destiny. Nehru was not only the last Englishman to rule India; he was the latest in a series of insecure imperialists demanding to be taken seriously by the outside world.

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His daughter Mrs Indira Gandhi, when she became prime minister, never forgave President Nixon and his country for their support to Yahya Khan's military government during the Indian-sponsored movement for Bangladesh in 1971. She found it difficult to condone the irony of the world's most prosperous democracy siding against the world's most populous democracy. In her moment of need, she turned to the USSR. Today, both India and Pakistan — redundant pawns in a discarded cold war game between the Americans and the Soviets — have finally realized that they need to talk to each other, not at each other. As permanent residents of the same subcontinent, they ought never to have admitted any other *modus vivendi*.

An American ex-diplomat has hinted that Mr Vajpayee's dramatic offer made in Srinagar may be a covert bid for the Nobel Peace Prize. Those who know Vajpayee better will doubt whether he would like to

gation there of regional parties. Their local dialects and parochial interests may clash during the cacophony of Lok Sabha debates. At their apex, however, they harmonize into one singular voice when it comes to mouthing India's national interests.

Is Pakistan a failed state? As a state, no; as a failing experiment in self-governance, obviously. Its four unequal provinces behave like argumentative siblings, unable or unwilling to find a workable formula by which they could coexist within a federal structure, without inviting military intervention. India once faced this prospect during the unpopular Emergency imposed by Mrs Gandhi in 1975. General Sam Manekshaw, her army chief, could have declared martial law and ousted her from the prime ministership. He elected not to do so. It was a textbook example of constitutional self-discipline, lost on his Pakistani counterparts.

The most touted advantage (and fear) flowing from any rapprochement between India and Pakistan is widely agreed to be economic. One school of businessmen hopes that the grass for them will be greener on the other side. An opposite view is that Pakistani industry and business have everything to lose and nothing to gain. Since independence, India has developed a sustainable economic prowess fed by trained indigenous manpower and domestic resources.

India's industrial muscle, its export capability, its self-sufficiency and the resilience of its domestic consumer markets did not blossom in a hothouse of protectionism; they are the outcome of decades of consistent planning with clearly defined objectives, translated into productive performance. India's peacock plumage is not borrowed.

Once borders are opened between the two countries, Pakistan's coddled economy could find itself under serious threat. Controlled bilateral trade is not the answer, for so long as governments retain that control, business will remain hostage to diplomacy. An international gas pipeline project whose supply valve lies within the grip of a potential belligerent can never be a truly secure investment, however watertight guarantees may seem.

A consignment of fresh onions

The pattern of any future Indo-Pakistan trade is unlikely to be simply bilateral. It will include an elliptical approach by which Indian companies through transnationals will acquire commercial interests in Pakistan. Tata's plan announced recently to use its UK tea subsidiary Tetley's to enter Pakistan's consumer market is a forerunner of such cross-border ownership. As history has shown, nationals of one country do not bomb their own factories located in another.

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In the 17th century, the Mughal emperor Jahangir rejected the gift of a map drawn by the European cartographer, Mercator, because he thought his empire had been shown far smaller than the vastness he knew it to be. In the 20th century, Nehru sought a place for his India (then just another Third World country struggling with economic adolescence) on the global map commensurate with his view of its potential.

Until India's potential could be demonstrated, though, Nehru needed a springboard. The Bandung Conference of 1955 provided that opportunity. There, he sided with other petulant ex-colonies, especially Egypt and Indonesia, in what was known as the Non-Aligned Movement. But whereas Nasser's Egypt could symbolize the emerging continent of Africa and Sukarno's Indonesia the Asian Archipelago, India and China jostled against each other in a bid to represent the mainland of Asia. In their persons, Zhou Enlai and Pandit Nehru shared much in common beyond their ambitions to move their countries closer to the centre-stage of world politics.

Zhou Enlai was the quintessential oriental mandarin, Nehru the urbane westernized Hindu Brahmin. Each nourished a vision for his country higher than the Himalayas that separated them, but even these were not tall enough to prevent the Indo-Chinese conflict of 1962. Significantly, in his moment of need, Nehru appealed not to his non-aligned colleagues but to the superpower he had aligned himself against — the United States.

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In wishing to make peace with Pakistan, India (Vajpayee represents no one else) has a more long-term objective. Since it cannot live without Pakistan, it cannot waste the next fifty-six years learning how to live with it. It recognizes that for any peace to be durable and enforceable, it would have to include not only the government in Islamabad but also the adventurist para-military agencies that operate beyond the confines of territorial jurisdiction and that regard India-baiting as a sacred mission.

Someone with the clout of the United States will need to underwrite that self-restraint. There is a precedent in Hindu mythology for such a role being undertaken by a powerful third party. According to the Devi-Mahatmya, Chandika Devi found herself in combat against the demon Raktavijya whose droplets of blood coagulated on touching the earth into yet more demons. Kali came to the aid of Chandika Devi by slipping her elongated tongue under the bleeding Raktavijya and lapping up his blood before it reached the ground. The parable is obvious: such demons need to have their lifeblood drained out of them.

India as an affected neighbour cannot wait indefinitely for Pakistan to learn how to govern itself. By offering its own experience, India could provide a parallel model of the advantages of representative government. India has the credentials to do so. After a half century of political evolution, it has a vibrant democracy and has succeeded in moving away from diktats issued from a central Congress High Command in New Delhi to an elected aggre-

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A consignment of fresh onions held up peremptorily at Wagah border and then left to rot cannot be an encouraging advertisement for cross-border trade, no more than acts of cross-border infiltration can masquerade as invitations to a negotiating table.

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There will always be many in Pakistan who will feel threatened by any improvement in Indo-Pakistan relations, just as there will always be British xenophobes to whom any contact with Europe is akin to contamination. A British prime minister once articulated his government's policy towards Northern Ireland: it could do one of three things — it could maintain the status quo by doing nothing; it could move backwards, which is hardly a policy; or it could go forward.

Today, the only viable option open to both India and Pakistan is to go forward. However much or little may be achieved, to millions of people on both sides of the dividing line, the risk is worth taking, for the price for success, however small, far outweighs the cost of failure.