

Our forgotten commitment

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Pak. F. Re - India
Down 2.6.03

EVERY time some leader of India or Pakistan makes a comment on the desirability of ending tensions and creating better relations between the two countries, there is an overwhelming response from the people on both sides, welcoming the move and then waiting eagerly and anxiously for something to happen.

A Pakistani public, grown cynical over half a century of governments — the last thing on whose minds has been the welfare of the people — is still capable of holding its breath whenever there is a prospect of normalization of Indo-Pak relations.

The obvious conclusion is that there is an indissoluble bond between the peoples of the two countries. Despite the continued efforts of the policy-makers of the two countries to create different identities, for instance, by separating the languages (by Sanscritization and Persianization of what used to be known as Urdu or Hindustani), and by erecting an information barrier between the two peoples, the memories of a common culture and a common past have not been erased altogether.

Over half a century of hostilities, four wars, countless people dead, economic disaster and terrible impoverishment of the people — these are the results of the very flawed policies that have governed the relations between India and Pakistan. Every man, woman and child now understands that enmity with India has cost us the freedoms, the democracy, the prosperity and the living standards we had every right to expect from gaining independence.

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Pakistan became a reality. The hundreds of thousands of Muslims spread from north to south India, who could never hope to be accommodated in Pakistan and who in any case would be reluctant to abandon the graves of their ancestors or their undoubtedly glorious heritage, supported its creation wholeheartedly.

So there continues to be a shadow, a slight niggles at the back of our minds about our dealings with India. There is this large population of Muslims, almost greater than the numbers in Pakistan that is deeply affected by the state of our relations with India. We know that we cannot in all conscience afford to be enemies with India. That was not the intentions of our founding fathers.

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worst sufferers were the Muslims of India. Until 1965 it appeared that indeed the Indian Muslims had a rosy view of Pakistan and their loyalties were perhaps divided.

But in the wake of the war of 1965 they made the final commitment to India and cut off their sentimental attachment to Pakistan. But this does not absolve Pakistan of its fundamental duty — to safeguard the Muslim community of the sub-continent against the tyranny of the majority. Nor indeed was the Hindu extremist perception of Indian Muslims changed. The destruction of the Babri mosque, the Bombay killings and the Gujarat communal riots have occurred in recent years. Life continues to be uncertain for the Muslims of India. There is no dearth of right-wing politicians to call their loyalty into question and to blame them for the ills of the country.

Fiftysix years after partition it is high time that Pakistan realized its actual role in the sub-continent. The creation of Pakistan came with certain commitments. We failed badly in one of these — of justice and fair play for all the people and for the provinces of the federation and the result was the bloody dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971.

So far we have also had very convenient amnesia about our commitment to the Muslim community of India and pursued our petty agenda to the detriment of our national well-being. We talk ad nauseam about the Muslim Ummah. But where is this Muslim Ummah? Is it just in the Arab countries that call themselves Arab but hardly describe themselves as 'Muslim Ummah'? What about the Ummah back here in our historic homeland — the community which is the integral part of our history, the integral part of our freedom struggle? No one talks about that. The time has come to live up to the commitments of our founding fathers. They may not have realized what was

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Fed up with the hostilities, the Pakistani public wants an end to these. It wants peace and understanding, normal cordial relations, to be able to come and go freely, to visit shrines and relatives, exchange ideas and to share knowledge. It wants to see what India has done for agriculture and for the environment; to debate on issues common to our two countries, to read newspapers and books from the other country, see films and write fair and unbiased history books for the children of the subcontinent.

They long to do all this and more. But there is another factor as well which makes normalization, friendship and understanding even more imperative than all the reasons given above. This is the existence of a large minority of Muslims in India. This is the real loose link, the casualty of partition.

In all our arguments for peace and for all our justifications for going to war, these are the people who are most affected and most forgotten. We talk of Kashmir endlessly, of mountain peaks that must be secured, of military might that we must ensure in order to be secure but we forget the 'core' of our freedom struggle, the reason Pakistan became first a possibility, then a fact. The reason was the unified demand for the creation of Pakistan made by all the Muslims of India. This was the demand of the Muslims of Madras and Hyderabad as much as that of Dhaka and Lahore.

We proudly write in our history books that the demand for Pakistan was the demand of the Muslims of India as a whole. Of these the most vocal were the Muslims of the minority Muslim provinces. At a Muslim League conference in Allahabad, my father (the late Mohammad Ayub Khuhro) asked a vociferous supporter of Pakistan whether he knew that Pakistan would not include the part of the subcontinent he came from and of what use would Pakistan be for him. He replied that he did not care as long as Pakistan became a reality.

Perhaps this was emotionalism just like that of the Khilafat movement but the fact is that

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This vague and undefined division did not materialize. Instead there was the 'truncated' Pakistan which messed up the vision of Pakistan as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic state with a Muslim majority — a sort of mirror opposite of India — and in its place there was more or less a single-religion state which could not be a guarantor of the security of Indian Muslims.

Unfortunately, the leadership of Pakistan did not take stock of the situation and work out some via media with India which would allow peaceful coexistence and realization of their vision of an independent subcontinent. Instead, the exact opposite happened and a situation of distrust and hostility developed, thanks to unwise decisions on both sides. India was ungenerous and Pakistan cantankerous. The distrust led to the first hostilities over Kashmir and the rest is history.

Gandhi was assassinated by Hindu extremists because he was perceived to be 'soft' on Pakistan. Pakistan chose to fight over territory rather than think of the larger interests of the people it was meant to 'secure'. So where did this leave the Muslims of India? The Muslims who had always had the moral support of the Muslims of the majority provinces were now scattered and a vulnerable minority all over India. They bore the blame for the division of India and for continuing disloyalty.

The most articulate and educated section of this community migrated to Pakistan leaving the rest, poor and leaderless, to struggle out of a very difficult situation unaided. Every time Pakistan made a hostile gesture or went to war with India the

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may not have realized what was in store for Pakistan but enduring good relations with India were a necessary part of their programme because only that would ensure the security of the huge Muslim community in the rest of the subcontinent. It is not fair to just concentrate on Kashmir, which after all is majority Muslim state and in the last resort able to look after its own interests.

We have to think about those who cannot ensure their own security and if that involves getting off our high horse, so be it. It is an accident of history and the ulterior motives of the imperialists and our own lack of forethought and wisdom that we stand where we do today — isolated and bewildered, unable to fulfil our commitments. We must get out of this bind. There is nothing eternal or essential about being inimical to India. We are the same people and we share the same ancestors and the same culture. We have a thousand years of amicable coexistence.

Let us make fresh beginnings which will also ensure that our co-religionists elsewhere in the subcontinent can sleep easy at night.

It will do us good to remember that for the major part of his life, the Quaid fought for a unified India in which Muslims would have constitutional guarantees that they would not be victims of the tyranny of the majority. These guarantees were not forthcoming, so very reluctantly he opted for a separate state which would provide that security. Let me quote the great Quaid-i-Azam speaking from his heart:

"We are all sons of this land. We have to live together. We have to work together and whatever our differences may be, let us at any rate not create more bad blood... Believe me there is no progress of India until the Musalmans and Hindus are united, and let no logic, philosophy or squabble stand in the way of coming to a compromise..."