

Indo-Pak Relations **The heart is civil** *Deewan 24.8*

WHEN does a charm offensive become more offensive than charming? It is a judgment call, obviously. What defines the difference? Trust. If the charm is sincere, no offence. But if the charm is only as slippery as oil, then someone will end up on the floor, with less than salubrious consequences.

President Pervez Musharraf has a remarkable quality for a military ruler: two summers ago, he had editors at Agra eating out of his hand instead of concentrating on their breakfast, and he turned hard-boiled politicians into soft-boiled yolks when he met them some days ago at Islamabad. It is easy to be cynical for a non-participant, or even a participant.

I do recall the only question I asked President Musharraf at the famous, or infamous, Agra breakfast: after submitting that I was impressed by the fact that a visiting general had offered homage to Mahatma Gandhi, the symbol of non-violence, I asked Pakistan's leader whether he would be as committed to non-violence if the Agra summit failed a few hours later. The summit failed, non-violence disappeared out of the window and last year at this time a nuclear shadow loomed so large over South Asia that American think-tanks began body-counts in their projections.

Some of the analogies being drawn by the Pakistan leadership as yet another momentum builds towards peace are too disingenuous to last the course. There is the rather self-pitying suggestion that India is the 'Big Brother', or at least the 'Bigger Nation', and must therefore show greater magnanimity over Kashmir. This sits ill with the rhetoric as well as the reality of the last five decades. Pakistan has and should frame its discourse within the concept of equality, and nothing else.

Pakistan is too big to be a small nation. More to the point, small and big are geographical facts, not political realities. Israel is smaller than Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Syria, and yet militarily more powerful than all of them put together. We who have been ruled by Britain should know this best. Britain was no more than the size of a province, but ruled subcontinents in Asia and Africa. There is a tinge of self-pity about this big-small equation that erodes

NOTES FROM DELHI

By M.J. Akbar

bomb, invade and occupy two nations at a cost that is slowly taking on the proportions of a wave.

The issue is not terrorism but trust. Here is a simple test for President Musharraf. When Washington asks for a suspect living in Pakistan in its war against terrorism, the suspect, if found, is handed over without much fuss. The noun one has used is 'suspect', which means that the person concerned has not been tried and proven guilty before being handed over to American authorities. Why is a self-declared terrorist operating against India protected by the Musharraf government? Would the Lashkar-i-Tayyaba have been able to proudly claim in its official publication that it had launched a particular attack against an American army unit

valley. Some of it was repetitive: let the Hurriyat travel to Pakistan. And some of it was actually self-exposure.

As for instance when President Musharraf suggested that the "mujahideen" could stop operations if there was a parallel end to military operations by India. If President Musharraf can talk on behalf of the "mujahideen" then ipso facto he has some control over their operations. Which in turn proves that the Pakistan government is not as distant from them as it pretends to be. The "mujahideen" are not going to take dictation from those who provide only "moral" support.

But whatever the nuances of the offer, the one thing it did not deserve was the response that Delhi gave almost before it was made. Here is a broad rule for diplomatic manners. When spokesmen jerk their knee they should learn to smile when they hit their chin. It is not necessary to look defiantly grim in disagreement, as if it were some terrible personal battle. There is a mature way of dealing with disagreement. The best instance came when we were in Pakistan.

The reason why President Musharraf impresses visitors is because he has missed his vocation. He should have been a lawyer. When he insists, for instance, that a dialogue could begin "tomorrow" he does not dwell on why India does not start talking "tomorrow". He finesses the fact that if it was so easy to stop terrorism he would have been able to prevent the terrorist attack that left more than 50 people dead in a Quetta Imambargah.

In another speech President Musharraf suggested that the time had come to rearrange the structure of Saarc so that bilateral issues could also be discussed in that forum. Our ambassador in Islamabad, Shiv Shankar Menon, was asked for a comment. "We are always open to ideas," he answered. Perfect. The external affairs spokesman in Delhi could have said precisely that, with a smile, and left the exercise of options to his superiors.

If he had waited for three days, he would also have learnt what his superiors thought. Peace with Pakistan, without compromise on fundamentals, was at the centre of one of the finest speeches delivered from the ramparts of the Red Fort in recent times. On Independence Day, Prime Minister Atal

Behari was cogent, lucid, clear and forceful. But if he had a message for our neighbour, it was less in what he said about the Indo-Pakistan relationship and more in what he said about India.

Ten years ago, there did not seem much difference between India and Pakistan as you travelled that great road conceived by Sher Shah Suri, and consolidated by every succeeding generation, an artery that is truly the grand trunk of the subcontinent. But now the difference is becoming visible. Pakistan's economy is

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But the real reason why President Musharraf invites serious attention is because when he takes a position publicly, and on the record, then it becomes what might be called a political fact. He made two important points on August 12, both of which must be considered to constitute Pakistan's policy. After the obligatory argument that peace was better than war, he averred that both sides needed to show flexibility over Kashmir.

Some of the analogies being drawn by the Pakistan leadership as yet another momentum builds towards peace are too disingenuous to last the course. There is the rather self-pitying suggestion that India is the 'Big Brother', or at least the 'Bigger Nation', and must therefore show greater magnanimity over Kashmir. This sits ill with the rhetoric as well as the reality of the last five decades. Pakistan has and should frame its discourse within the concept of equality, and nothing else.

Pakistan is too big to be a small nation. More to the point, small and big are geographical facts, not political realities. Israel is smaller than Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Syria, and yet militarily more powerful than all of them put together. We who have been ruled by Britain should know this best. Britain was no more than the size of a province, but ruled subcontinents in Asia and Africa. There is a tinge of self-pity about this big-small equation that erodes respect. Of the many points that Musharraf made in his well-prepared verbal encounter with Indian politicians and journalists, this was certainly the most hollow. It was not even good enough to be insincere.

But the reason why President Musharraf impresses visitors is because he has missed his vocation. He should have been a lawyer. No one argues a case more convincingly, leaving out the uncomfortable facts, or finding seemingly reasonable justifications for them. When he insists, for instance, that a dialogue for peace between India and Pakistan could begin "tomorrow" he does not dwell on why India does not start talking "tomorrow". He finesses the fact that cross-border terrorism has not stopped (even Independence Day saw its quota of death) with the silken thrust that if it was so easy to stop terrorism he would have been able to prevent the terrorist attack that left more than 50 Shias dead in a Quetta mosque. And then adds that life is a seesaw — terrorists ("freelancers...mujahideen...or whatever you want to call them") get encouraged by the absence of peace, so it is all the more important to start a dialogue that will bring India and Pakistan closer.

Such advocacy is easily answered. It is perfectly true that you cannot bring terrorism under control easily, or eliminate it with the wave of some wand. If it was easy, India would not have struggled in Punjab and Kashmir for as long as it has done, and the United States of America would not have found it necessary to

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It is not a terribly secret secret that if there had been an Agra Declaration two years ago, as there almost was, there would have been no reference to the United Nations in the document. This would have been the first time that Pakistan would have signed a pact with India without referring to the United Nations. The solution of the Kashmir problem through bilateral means, which has always been the Indian position, has therefore been accepted as the only way forward.

If therefore the "will of the Kashmiri people" has to be determined, as Islamabad still claims it must, then other means have to be found. This opens its own range of possibilities, even as it closes options that a group like the Hurriyat in Jammu and Kashmir clings on to. A solution has not been found, nor will it be found in any hurry, but space has been created. That is one small step for Islamabad, but a huge stride for South Asia.

The second offer made by President Musharraf was to nail down specifics that would calm the border and discourage violence. Some of it was straightforward: an immediate end to the shelling across the ceasefire line. Some of it was disingenuous: release of "political prisoners" by Delhi, force reduction in the

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Ten years ago, there did not seem much difference between India and Pakistan as you travelled that great road conceived by Sher Shah Suri, and consolidated by every succeeding generation, an artery that is truly the grand trunk of the subcontinent. But now the difference is becoming visible. Pakistan's economy is chained to conflict, and its people are getting restive. More than half the budget disappears in a single line that no one dare discuss. There is no cow holier than the "defence" budget. A substantial portion of the rest goes in debt repayment and cost of government (the army does not pay from its pocket for the administration of the country it rules).

Less than 10 per cent is left for developmental spending, with barely two per cent spent on education. It is not a scenario designed for sending missions to the moon, and the young Pakistani knows it. There is an impatience in the land, as the army takes control of every aspect of life and becomes an all-consuming dictatorship. This subterranean anger is not personal, in the sense that it is not directed against Musharraf; but it is institutional. Those in power know that they can use patriotism to justify that single-line budget entry up to a point, and that point is coming nearer.

Imperatives will create peace, if we are to achieve it. Goodwill is simply not good enough, even if there was much sincere goodwill available. Peace will come when the people shape the moment, when a child called Noor is the source of change, and teenagers are greeting with the special rapture that the young reserve for their own, melting borders with their warmth and teasing armies with their laughter. Peace will come when governments learn to follow the people.

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