

Hard talk on Kashmir

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By M.P. Bhandara

YOU can best fly a kite if you are firmly entrenched on the ground; but, try and fly with the kite and you are likely to fall off the wall like Humpty-Dumpty.

The Kashmir euphoria commenced with Vajpayee-Musharraf concord last February. This hot air balloon gained momentum after the Manmohan-Musharraf talks in New York last August, and with the opening up of a debate on 'options' and the withdrawal of 3,000 Indian troops from advanced areas. The ongoing debate on 'detente' with India has opened the flood gates of sweet expectations in the mistaken belief that what could not be obtained by force of arms can be obtained otherwise. These expectations pave the way for later disappointment.

Following our dicta not to fly with the kite, let us recall some basics by standing firm on 'terra-firma':

- India is not likely to agree to any change in Kashmir status, such as joint sovereignty or UN mandate. Reason: This will require a constitutional change passed by the Indian parliament, which requires a two-thirds majority vote.

- Pakistan is not likely to accept the LoC as an international border. Reason: We have been offered this consolation prize since the 1950s and its rejection has been the cornerstone of our Kashmir policy ever since.

- A modicum of clear-headed thinking will concede that there has never been a Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) problem

One, India should recognize Azad Kashmir, Gilgit, Hunza and Baltistan as parts of Pakistan and likewise Pakistan should recognize Ladakh and Jammu as integral to India. To legitimize this mutual award, internal referendums in these territories should be held under the supervision of the respective India and Pakistan Human Rights Commissions.

Voters be given three choices: Total integration with India/Pakistan or autonomy with special status in India or Pakistan as the case may be. I do not envisage a joint human rights referendum body. Each referendum commission shall consist of its own well-known nationals having administrative experience and a human rights track record. Likewise, law enforcement officers should be selected on the same basis. The

Valley administration should have the power to regulate trade and immigration matters with Pakistan and other countries.

Any solution lies in a process requiring patience and flexibility. Yet another factor that helps in such emotionally charged cases is ambiguity. An example in this regard is Northern Ireland. Ambiguity as regards the final solution has stopped violence. This is the key to any solution. If the end point is cut and dry, it will be subjected to darts and nails in the incubator. Ambiguity reinforces hope in all stakeholders to achieve their desired ends.

The Valley's historical direction has always been towards the areas which are now in Pakistan. If we were to declare that our immediate intention is a sovereign Valley there is little hope of India agreeing. Indeed, any

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During a recent Kashmir conference which invited a former general well

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as such. The problem relates to the Valley alone. There is no secessionist movement in any part of the old J&K state currently controlled by India or Pakistan. All parts of J&K excepting the Valley are better integrated in Pakistan and India than say FATA in Pakistan and NEFA in India.

The dispute is Valley-centric. The one Kashmiri leader who commands a surer political base in the Valley than any other in the APHC is the spiritual and political leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. He is reported as saying "We cannot ignore the fact that three regions — Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh — represent different cultures, languages and ideologies. The people of Jammu and Ladakh don't support the freedom movement. In fact, they have a lot of complaints against us (the APHC and other freedom groups)."

The Kashmir Valley, which was once regarded as a heaven on earth because of its beauty and grandeur — and nowadays more of a hell on earth because of the blood trail — is area-wise a tiny fraction of the old J&K state which nominally included the northern territories of Ladakh, Baltistan and Gilgit.

internal referendums should be open to international monitoring.

The second prerequisite is for both countries to remove the engines of violence. If India is to substantially demilitarize the Valley, Pakistan must ensure that the so-called "liberation" camps in Pakistan are closed down. According to the latest Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB) report, "83 training camps are in operation, 47 in AJK, 10 in the Northern areas, and 26 in other parts of Pakistan".

UN observers should be given access to any pointations made by India and as mutual confidence grows, the Indians themselves may be given this access on a mutual basis.

The third and most important part of the peace process is to grant autonomy to the Valley, where the "sky is the limit" as conceded by two former Indian prime ministers on a freshly negotiated format between the Indian government, APHC and the current government in Kashmir. The Valley administration shall consist of its citizenry with police power drawn exclusively from locals to take care of security. The title of prime minister should be restored to the

a former general well known for his jihadist views, the bottom-line of his swan song was: just slog on with the Kashmir jihad as we have for the last 15 years. Why don't these ardent fighters make a balance-sheet of the jihadist period, which was financial bankruptcy, gaining one band of so-called friend which were the Taliban of Afghanistan and losing goodwill among our traditional friends — China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia apart from being ostracized in the western world. The Taliban period in 1990s was certainly the most unfortunate period of our national existence. It was marked by religious extremism, sectarianism, mega political corruption, and a collapse of economic indicators.

At the opposite end we have major political leaders who publicly and privately have questioned the creation of Pakistan. At least one major right-wing religious party, which opposed the Quaid's Pakistan tooth and nail, now makes Kashmir and jihad the cutting edge of Pakistani nationalism.

Where do we proceed from here? There is only one way forward: go back to the teachings of our Founder.

The author is a member of the