

Manmohan - Musharraf meet

FORMALISING THE STATUS QUO

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While General Musharraf's latest expression of determination to find a solution to the long-standing Kashmir imbroglio is to be welcomed, one could hardly feel too optimistic about the prospects of his efforts bearing fruit. Evidently, the time wrap of over half a century and the political compulsions of both the countries, resulting from opposing and irrevocable stands adopted by them over the years have put a hold on the initiative of the heads of the two countries. The people in both countries have been worked up to such a state of emotional frenzy over the issue that neither side can afford to make concessions or indulge in the diplomacy of give and take that is so essential for solving any dispute. This uncompromising mindset of the people precludes the employment of 'persuasion' as an instrument of diplomacy for settling the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan has already learnt, even if the hard way, the futility of using 'force' for settling its score with India on this account. Besides, Pakistan no longer enjoys American patronage that enabled it to act with impunity in the past. For the United States India is today as important as Pakistan in its strategy for war against terrorism. It is, therefore, genuinely interested in peace between the two as a matter of self-interest. As a matter of fact that present Indo-Pak talks are widely believed to be the outcome of behind-the-scene efforts of the United States. With both compromise and the use of force ruled out, there can, therefore, be no solution to the vexed issue of Kashmir and India and Pakistan do not appear to have any option other than of maintaining the status quo. Surely this is not the solution of the Kashmir issue that the General would want to brag about but he is heading towards it nevertheless. What with Manmohan Singh, reportedly, suggesting "no redrawing of borders" during his talk with Musharraf following the Indo-Pak cricket match and the latter reacting rather tamely with a "positive response". It would appear that the General's bravado and business-like talk is part of the rhetoric that he must indulge in to pacify the political hard liners in his country who fail to appreciate the usefulness of the peace process if it is not to lead to the solution of the Kashmir issue.

Acceptance of the status quo in Kashmir would no doubt sound the death knell of the movement for self-determination in Kashmir, which has been sponsored and nursed by successive Governments in Pakistan over the years since the end of the Indo-Pak war 1947-48. General Musharraf need not, however, suffer any twinge of conscience in this regard as no scruples or principles were involved in Pakistan's support to this movement. As a matter of fact Pakistan has never been a votary of the ideal of self-determination or the people of the State as such. Even as India was acting imprudently and squandering away the advantage of the Maharaja's support on the issue of accession by advocating the principle of accession on the basis of the wishes of the people, Pakistan was advocating the legalistic view of the Maharaja being the sole arbitrator. It was only after its efforts to woo the Maharaja proved unsuccessful and its raiders failed to "liberate" Kashmir that Pakistan switched over to its third option of securing accession on the basis of self-determination. Even then it was not intended to be of more than propaganda value. Little wonder that Pakistan, scuttled the issue by refusing to implement its part of the terms and conditions laid down in the UN Resolution on plebiscite in Kashmir. Pakistan would know that the conditions for the plebiscite that Pakistan could not implement then are harder - nay impossible - of implementation now after the lapse of fifty years. Plebiscite, is therefore, a dead issue now and Pakistan may well take the credit of driving

the last nail in the coffin of this option. Pakistan's continued interest in seeking self-determination for the Kashmir has, thereafter, been for providing a "rallying cry" for the insurgency that it sponsored and fuelled in the State as part of its proxy war. Pakistan's attempts to involve its protégé, the Hurriyat Conference, in the present talks are now more for assuaging the hurt feelings of the people whom he would be ditching by accepting the status quo than for upholding the principle of Kashmiris' involvement in the peace process. Who does not know that the Hurriyat, propped up by the gun wielding terrorists, as it is, could hardly sustain its claim of being representative of the people.

If Kashmir is vital for Pakistan as it often proclaims, it is certainly not out of human considerations, as professed outwardly, but only as a matter of concern for its own physical and economic security. The cat has been let out of the bag a number of times by the Pakistani leaders during moments of self-revelation. The most revealing moment in this regard has been the speech of President Ayub Khan at the National Press Club, Washington, on July 13, 1961, during which he is reported to have said:

"You might say, 'why can't you give up Kashmir?' Well, we cannot give up that dispute not because we are bloody-minded but... for the reason that Kashmir is connected with our physical security. Thirty two million acres in Pakistan are irrigated from rivers that start in Kashmir."

This would leave very little doubt in anybody's mind that self-determination has only been the 'means' by which Pakistan has sought to achieve its physical and economic security 'ends'.

Acceptance of the status quo, as a solution to the Kashmir imbroglio is, however, not going to be too easy. So much has been said by both sides against status quo as the permanent solution to the Kashmir issue during the not too distant past, that neither side is likely to now accept it openly for fear of political reprisals in both countries - especially in Pakistan. The Pakistani leaders have through intense malicious propaganda over the years, projected their struggle for acquisition of Kashmir synonymous to Jihad or holy war. Acceptance of any solution to the Kashmir issue other than complete integration of the whole State with Pakistan would amount to being blasphemous as far as the 'faithful' in that country are concerned. The acceptance of the status quo now would, therefore, have to take the form that it took in the Simla Agreement — both the sides sticking to their respective stands on the issue but at the same time agreeing not to use force to alter the present situation. A de facto status quo that could be made de jure ultimately, after emotions have subsided on both sides. The CBMs being undertaken by both sides are, in fact, part of their efforts to douse the fires, (which they have been stoking for the last five decades and more), so as to make status quo politically palatable to the two peoples.

Because Indo-Pak agreements on maintaining status quo have failed in the past cannot automatically be taken to mean that any new agreement will fail too. For, the circumstances under which the present talks are taking place are widely different from those prevailing prior to such agreements in the past. The previous agreements failed to take off because Pakistan had been entering into agreements with India not with the intention of solving issues but only for extricating itself from sticky situations that it found itself in after every misadventure. Pakistan could afford to act like a rogue state because of the encouragement and support it received from the United States. The situation is now different. With the US needing India as much as Pakistan for its war against terrorism, it can no longer afford to act in a partisan manner as hitherto fore.

Shorn of the American support Musharraf has, apparently, had to do some re-think on his India policy. He has, perhaps, realised the futility of open wars with India, as none of the three

that have been fought so far have produced any results favourable to Pakistan. Musharraf may have, therefore, decided to call it a day as far as open wars are concerned. As a General he would also know that low intensity wars such as Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir cannot succeed without some successful push from across the cease-fire line as the final coup de grace. The Kargil experience, on the other hand, would have amply demonstrated to him the impracticability of such an action by Pakistan. He might, therefore, be prepared to withdraw Pakistan's proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir, if India would assure him that Pakistan's genuine security and economic concerns would be appropriately addressed, even with the major portion of Kashmir remaining permanently with India under terms of the status quo.