

The Kashmir Times Nov 22, 1995

J&K political package

Dear Editor,

This is with reference to the Prime Minister's announcement of political package on Kashmir.

The history of Kashmir after Independence is in fact a story of continuous bungling by the Central Government of its Kashmir policy, and the present situation in Kashmir may clearly be seen as a direct result of this bungling. The most damaging streak that runs all through the Government of India's Kashmir policy is that, in, what was intended to be an effort to strengthen the nationalist forces, too much dependence was made on individuals rather than the masses. These individuals, helped by the political uncertainty in the state (in the fanning of which they themselves have had a big hand), acquired a position which they could use for black-mailing the Central Government into giving them a free hand which amounted to *de facto*, if; not *de jure*, autonomy. These individuals, however used this free hand not so much for the benefit of the people, in whose name it was acquired, as they did for securing their seat of power and perpetuating corruption to fill their coffers. For fear of harming the "National cause," no one questioned their phenomenal rise from rags to riches. Nor were these individuals asked as to why, even after the State had received billions and trillions of rupees in aid/loans from the Central Government for the economic uplift of the people, the Kashmiri peasant was still poor – unable to earn enough during the summer to be able to pull through the winter months without having to move down to the Plains in search of work. In fact the Central Government turned a blind eye to even the notoriety with which these "nationalist" rigged elections to remain in power. The political package now announced seems to be a continuation of the policy of submitting to blackmail by the so-called India loyalists, in what is considered as national interest.

The contents of the package are still not clearly discernable but whatever they may be, the offer by itself is indicative of bad state-craft. Apparently the Government has yielded to, what it has been made to believe are, the peoples' aspirations. It is time we realised that the peoples' aspirations, over which political battles are fought are in fact moulded by their leaders, at times, to suit their personal and party interests and not necessarily be to the advantage of the people. In any case in the present context, Farooq Abdullah, who till a few days back could not even dare to enter the Valley openly, let alone face the people there, can certainly not represent the aspirations of the people. He is only, probably, trying to take advantage of the peoples' aspirations as moulded by the militants over the past six years or more. We need not feel unduly perturbed over the militant inspired aspirations of the people. These are likely to change dramatically after the end of militancy just as they did in Punjab. The extent of *azadi* granted through the package may not, outwardly, be very significant, but the weakness displayed by the Government in yielding to the demand of the militants, even if to a limited extent, is likely to give impetus to demands for more *azadi* and even, perhaps, to an urge for another round of militancy. That such an offer should have been made at a time when the back of the militants has been broken and they are set on the run, makes it look even more imprudent.

The *azadi* for J&K, whatever form that it may take, would have ramifications too. Some awkward questions are likely to arise that would need to be answered satisfactorily if the process of national disintegration is to be prevented from getting started. The basic question that will

arise is why this *azadi* for J&K only and not for other states. Is it because J&K is a Muslim majority state and as such deserves special treatment under a particular interpretation of secularism, or is to be granted as a reward for violence and terrorism. Moreover does J&K mean Kashmir only. Would not *azadi* for Kashmir mean *ghulami* for Jammu and Ladakh.

Evidently the lasting solution to the Kashmir problem lies in making some concerted efforts to convince Kashmiri Muslims that their freedom is already guaranteed by the Indian Constitution even without Article 370 and they do not have to depend on unscrupulous leaders for safeguarding it. They may, like any other, fight for their rights under the Constitution or even for changing it if it fails to fulfil their aspirations for which they will find many supporters, including their co-religionists, many times more in number, living in various other parts of the country. It would, however, be in their interest and interest of the country to keep the Constitution universal and not discriminatory.

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