

SRI LANKA

A look into Prabhakaran's strategy

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PEOPLE are relieved by the on-going ceasefire. Peace must be given another chance. If we can war, there is no reason why we cannot try to find a negotiated solution.

Prabhakaran too may have to change his mind provided we push him to the right political point where there is a confluence of the interests of all parties and the integrity of the country.

The criticism against the government is that Prabhakaran is inflexible in his aim and method. We all tend to agree to this but if we make a determined effort, we might be able to make him amenable to a negotiated settlement. Perhaps we may fail. The benefit of doubt has to be given to the peace efforts. The all-important thing in the whole exercise is that strategy has to be countered with strategy short of resorting to military confrontation unless, of course, Prabhakaran draws the gun first. He appears to be preening himself on the claim that he's a master strategist. The government too must try to beat him at his own game by working out better strategies in dealing with him.

If the government thinks of handing over administration of North and East to Prabhakaran first and then try to solve the problem then the government leaders are living in a Fools' Paradise or are deceiving the people. Now the initial task before us is to sustain the ceasefire until the peace process fructify. It is here that a fool-proof MoU becomes of paramount importance.

Certain provisions in the present MoU need to be scrutinised in this regard. From the time the Cease-fire is on, to the time of ratification of the final peace treaty or whatever that may be, in a situation like ours, where each party controls areas bounded by lines of control, it is customary let alone judicious for rival cadres and paraphernalia, in our case Army and the LTTE, to be frozen at the points where they were prior to the ceasefire coming into effect. That is, crossflow of personnel and arms is prohibited.

But this is not so in the MoU now in force. The provision of the MoU related to movement of LTTE cadres says that at the end of the first month 50 unarmed LTTE cadres will be allowed into Army controlled areas for the purpose of political work and so on, and at the end of 3 months all of them will be allowed in unarmed.

Perhaps an interim administration for the LTTE is what the government intends by way of facilitating this kind of movement.

Once the floodgates open, the LTTE having consolidated itself in the government controlled areas, will establish their jack-boot rule much to the detriment of the populace in those areas. One word from them is more than enough to make everyone in Jaffna dance to their tune.

No one in those areas will want to end up being corpses tied to lamp posts. Tamils are used to this and put up with this kind of atrocities without complaining. Otherwise how can they forget that they have lost the cream of their leadership, friends, kith and kin, cadres and party supporters to Prabhakaran, the murder? Even the senior most veteran Tamil politician has gone on record saying, "let us forget the past." This is the problem with these politicians; they forget the past so soon! Worse still, they want the people also to do the same.

These shameless Tamils trot the globe and scream about atrocities committed by the Sinhalese. Yes, they must be brought to the notice of the international community - the dastardly manner in which Tamil were burnt alive in the streets of Colombo, their businesses properties destroyed in 1983 and their rights have been violated over the decades. The Tamils in the north and the east are going through hell. But the fact remains that more



Tamils have been murdered by Prabhakaran than the Sinhala goons. Why isn't the world told about Prabhakaran's crimes as well? The picture that is painted by these Tamils is that the Sinhalese are genocidal maniacs and the LTTE is an organisation of ministering angels.

Have we ever heard of these Tamil leaders ever mention child conscription or the murder of dissidents or the Tamils languishing behind the iron curtain put up by Prabhakaran? What moral right do these Tamil leaders who are silent on the LTTE crimes have to talk about the rights of Tamils?

Let us also ponder on the provision in the MOU that allows individual unarmed combatants to visit their families and friends in the areas under control of the other party for a period of 6 days. The reason given is the reunion of cadres with their families! But is this what the LTTE really has in mind?

Take the cadres in the Wannai in 1995, when the LTTE was pushed out of the peninsula it is common knowledge in Jaffna that those who had fear of reprisals because of their connections with the LTTE followed the LTTE to the jungles. Only those who had no connection with the LTTE remained in Jaffna. So, the question of the LTTE cadres wanting to visit their families in the areas under government control does not arise.

Even otherwise, why can't the families of the LTTE cadres travel to the Wannai, which is less than 50 miles and see their children? In other areas a free flow of people across the lines of control is already there. So why should there be this provision in the MoU? I just don't understand.

The LTTE cells operative in Jaffna are weak. The LTTE has to strengthen them and rebuild its fragmented organization in Jaffna by making use of the free movement of cadres now permitted by the MoU. It wants to reorganise its Baby Brigade, revive the cash making unit; and more importantly to stage an insurrection from within in the event of their advancing into the army controlled areas in the peninsula.

In 2000, they almost achieved this. But the hastily acquired MBRL of the

Army started booming from Jaffna and they had to retreat. Days before the reversal, India had been requested to evacuate 40,000 odd soldiers trapped in there.

Since the MOD clearance for travel to Jaffna has been done away with, the defence circles in Jaffna are well aware that specially trained LTTE cadres brought to Colombo from the Wani and the East have already flown into Jaffna. They are operating undercover for the moment.

So far they haven't been able to organize group activities openly in Jaffna. The tip of the iceberg is visible in Jaffna and the army is helpless to do anything about it. There are hidden dumps of arms in the peninsula. These arms will be sufficient for the LTTE to create havoc in the peninsula militarily if the war flares up and the LTTE tries to take back Jaffna.

It all looks as if the people were in for re-living miseries. We have to remind ourselves of the Premadasa fiasco, in this connection. The IPKF was sent back. This was a blunder. The blunder two was to give Prabhakaran a free hand. The LTTE consolidated its power in the vacuum created by the IPKF pull out. What he has done ever since is history.

However I am not saying that Prabhakaran will repeat this once again. Much water has flowed under the bridge. But knowing Prabhakaran for what is capable of, why should one do experiments again?

He still can do what he wants and get away with it. Despite all assurances that Washington has given, Americans won't go in for him unless he decides to commit harakiri by taking some targets in the US like bin Laden. This is highly unlikely. India has enough and more problems to sort out and won't bother to give us a helping hand.

What is on is not a permanent ceasefire, which requires agreement of both sides on a solution. A fragile cease-fire like the present one, as I have said earlier, requires separation of the combat formations carefully in keeping with the positions they held prior to the ceasefire. The Norwegians are no babes not to know that this elementary condition has to be met to sustain the cease-fire in an atmosphere pervaded by mutual distrust and suspicion.

Why this condition was not met is a question that defies an answer. It might be better if the troops are pulled out without exposing them to danger of being trapped once again.

The LTTE claims that it wants to rebuild the war devastated Tamil regions. They could very well begin this in the Wannai and expand activities to other areas if there dawns peace by any chance. The atrocities being committed by the LTTE in the east are well known to us. Incidents of abduction and extortion are rampant.

The Norwegians and the international community have a lot to do in this regard. Unless Prabhakaran mends or is made to mend his ways peace will be never possible in this country.

Those whom he holds in high esteem will have to tell him this. No amount of seminars, peace marches and the like are going to be of any help. Prabhakaran must be told to put an end to murder, intrigue, treachery and hypocrisy. And most of all, cross-flow of cadres and material must be prevented.

Sri Lanka needs an end to this war!

The writer, a former member of a Tamil guerrilla group fighting against the LTTE. He is a human rights activist.

PAKISTAN

Tone deaf in Islamabad Benazir Bhutto

BENAZIR BHUTTO

LAST month, General Pervez Musharraf travelled to Washington to bask in the limelight given to the leader of a key nation in the global war against terrorism. This month he travelled to Tokyo to receive accolades for the role Islamabad played in the fallout of the events of September 11.

There were dinners and toasts and warm words. Yet the bouquet the General most yearned for remained outside his reach. He failed in his bid to derail Pakistani democracy.

The General hoped that by joining the war against terror, he could keep himself in power and deny the will of the people. He has said he is interested in democracy "as a label".

In Washington he surprised audiences by declaring, "You want the label of democracy. Okay, I will put a label" making it clear that dictatorship would continue under re-labelling. His foreign secretary advised discretion. But the General, being 'forthright' when needed, made the same statement at his next meeting. "My foreign secretary," he said, "doesn't like me saying this but you want me to put the label of democracy. Okay, I will put it." Since then, he repeatedly labels dictatorship as "democracy". In the new language, engineered elections are labelled "fair elections" and "military will" is labelled as the "people's will".

Musharraf was met with much fanfare in Tokyo as befits the leader of a key country in an international alliance. His own role in guiding Islamabad to join the international alliance was appreciated and acknowledged. However, Japan, committed to democratic values as its global foreign policy made it clear that it supported the restoration of democracy in Pakistan through the holding of fair and free elections.

The insistence on the restoration of Pakistani democracy is critical to the global democratisation structure put in place after the fall of the Soviet Union. There are many other countries out there, and many other ambitious generals and politicians watching Pakistan to see if they too can come out of the wings and impose tyranny. The world can ill afford a community where the choice is between the military dictator and a Taliban dictator.

This places General Musharraf in a quandary. Fair elections, according to political indicators, mean the return of the popular Pakistan People's Party and its

leadership. This the General has, rather unwisely, sworn to oppose - and boxed himself into a corner.

He has threatened to lock up the key Opposition. He did it by arresting over one thousand peaceful activists agitating on a water issue on March 15. However, locking up the Opposition is one thing and stopping them from contesting from behind the prison bars is another. And the more the General fights the Opposition, especially the ladies, the less heroic he looks to his own men. Muslim culture venerates women as mothers and sisters. Men who lock them up lose respect.

Caught in the bind between culture and politics, the military regime considers passing a law preventing a political leader from contesting for chief executive thrice. The problem is that any law the regime passes needs Parliamentary ratification. And the laws that the parliament ratifies depends on whether the elections are engineered or fair.

The military regime did hold several rounds of talks with political leaders of all shades and hues initially. But the negotiation between the main Opposition and the generals is logjammed on three issues.

The first issue pertains to the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles and the withdrawal of politically motivated cases that ran their course and remain unproven in their sixth year. The second logjam is on the proposed law banning a person from election as a chief executive for the third time. The third logjam is on the Opposition insistence that certain election modalities be adopted to ensure fair elections in name rather than in label.

The third logjam causes the most apprehension among the military regime. It apprehends that if there are fair elections, a popular party leader can influence

the Assembly from Dubai, London or Washington. The case study of the previous Opposition Azad Jammu and Kashmir government is cited.

This would make the General dependent on the goodwill of the party leader rather than the Parliament dependent on the goodwill of the General. Thus it appears that the military regime is on a double collision course: both with the democratic Opposition candidate for prime ministership as well as with the concept of fair elections.

The absence of fair elections condemns Islamabad to continuing instability. The new premier can blackmail the president by threatening to join with the democratic Opposition. This is what Premier Junejo did in the 1980s taking generals from their plush Mercedes Benz limousines and putting them in small Suzuki cars. He defied them on other issues too, such as the Geneva process relating to Afghanistan. Such defiance strained his relations with the military president.

He was dismissed, of course ostensibly, for corruption and incompetence. Islamabad plunged into

further turmoil. Extra-constitutional measures lead to extra-constitutional reaction. It is expected that rigged elections can allow extremist elements to hijack the domestic Opposition. Thus a fair election is important to Pakistan's national interest although a few persons may see it as damaging to their personal interest.

Before Islamabad joined the international intervention in Afghanistan, it was regarded in a hostile light. Islamabad was then considered the patron-saint of the Taliban as well as a sympathiser of Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden who had taken refuge in Afghanistan.

The military nature of the regime made it an outcast. When US president Bill Clinton visited South Asia in

2000, he was in India for five days. He visited Islamabad for five hours.

History can change in a minute. And it did on September 11. The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon made Islamabad a key country. In breaking ties with the Taliban and the Osama bin Laden group, even if under pressure and threat, Musharraf made the war against terror easier to organise. As such, he is now recognised and welcomed in capitals and by leaders who previously had little to do with him. Emergency economic aid has flown in generous amounts from Japan, Pakistan's largest aid donor, as well as other countries. Tokyo promised \$300 million over two years to the country. For a country with a debt in tens of billions of dollars, that is a generous help. But it is not a long-term solution.

Pakistanis decry Musharraf's inability to get Islamabad's debt written off. They cite his poor negotiating skills. After all, Egypt, Jordan and other countries managed to get their debts written off in incidents of international crisis. Musharraf, unaware of economic intricacies, got Pakistan's debt "restructured". Restructuring is a euphemism for adding on debt. Now Islamabad has double the debt that it had earlier. The difference is that the payment will start in post-Musharraf period. His regime gets the benefit and the unborn children get the punishment.

Prime Minister Koizumi, as leader of a country that knows the devastation caused by nuclear attack, would also have spoken to General Musharraf about nuclear affairs. Tokyo has urged Pakistan to continue its moratorium on nuclear testing. It has urged the country to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). And the leaders must have discussed these issues too. But the issue that would have troubled the military leader most was the issue of democracy and the holding of fair elections. It is a Tone that is sung wherever he goes.

Last month he was in Washington. This month in Tokyo. The continents, culture and cuisines change. But one item on the menu remains constant, an item the General could not digest: continued economic support to Pakistan is contingent on the restoration of the democratic process through the holding of fair, free and impartial elections. And the disempowered people of Pakistan appreciate that message.

(Benazir Bhutto was formerly Prime Minister of Pakistan. This article is published by arrangement with the Dawn newspaper)



A distant dream called Democracy

M ABDUL HAFIZ

AT the time of 1999 coup the world regarded General Pervez Musharraf as a usurper and his country as a pariah. He was an outcast except in countries labelled 'rogue state' by the west end, of course in some gulf countries having traditional ties with Pakistan. Stopping short of snapping diplomatic relationship practically the whole world condemned the military take-over.

Any international visitor who happened to be in Pakistan during those days seemed interested only in demanding timetable for return to democracy. In a dramatic reversal of things after 11 September 2001 when the general willy-nilly threw in his lot with the Americans he became a celebrity who was fated last month in Washington by the US President George W Bush was unable to remember the general's name a year ago; now he called Musharraf a 'friend'. London or Paris wherever he stopped over accorded him the same treatment.

Last week he attended a luncheon given by Japanese emperor, the severest critics of Pakistan's nuclear text in 1998. In the meantime a string of big-wigs, from British Prime Minister to German Chancellor as well as US Secretary of state and defence secretary have been descending on Islamabad with none of them discussing the topic of democracy. Musharraf's decisions have proved, at least for the present, a boon for Pakistan. But it is his personal stock at home that has risen most conspicuously.

Although the military rulers are seldom challenged in Pakistan they have to be legitimised through processes that becomes embarrassing at times. With an uncanny sense of timing Musharraf started those processes less than a year after he took over the reins. He amended the Political Parties Act through an executive order with

a view to debarring the politicians convicted by the courts at any level from not only contesting election but also holding any party post. The move was widely seen as an attempt to keep out of politics both Ms Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif, the leaders of two mainstream parties and former prime ministers Ms Bhutto who heads the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was convicted by a lower court in a corruption case in 1998 and has been exile ever since. Nawaz Sharif who heads Pakistan Muslim League (PML) was sentenced in several cases including one related to the 'hijacking of the plane in which Musharraf was travelling'. In a deal believed to be brokered by Saudi Arabia, Sharif left Pakistan with an undertaking that he would not dabble in Pakistan's internal politics for next 10 years.

Thus, after having neutralised his two main opponents Musharraf, in what has been called a 'second coup', cut short the term of President Rafique Tarar in June 2001 and asked the latter to quit after the National and Provincial assemblies were dissolved. It was argued that once the term of the bodies that elected Rafique the President was over, the latter lost the right to hold, the post any more. The baffled Pakistanis looked askance if the Chief of Army Staff could continue once the man making the appointment ceased to be the Prime Minister. But nobody raised those questions. Meanwhile, in a masterstroke, Musharraf, the chief appointed himself the President of Pakistan without specifying the terms, conditions and tenure of the new post. In the heats and hypes of Musharraf's ensuing visit to India at the invitation of Prime Minister Vajpayee those points were again overlooked.

Then on ward Musharraf had no hesitation in openly consolidating his position while the international community, an euphemism for the US and its allies was embroiled in war on terrorism. As the war was raging in Afghanistan only days before his scheduled retirement

in October 2001 he gave himself an indefinite extension as Chief of Army Staff on the plea that his services were indispensable to the people of Pakistan at that juncture. No one has clue as to how long he wants to continue either as President or Chief of Army Staff except he hinted in a recent interview to a group of intellectuals from the US that he would continue as President for at least five years after the general election in October next. For sometimes past he also has been talking about the need for a balance of power between the President and Prime Minister so that the latter does not misuse his power. This is reminiscent of President Zia's Eighth Amendment which gave the President the power to dismiss the elected government. Musharraf, in pursuit of 'real democracy' in Pakistan aired the view at an international conference in Islamabad recently that his government was the 'most democratic' in the history of Pakistan.

Only four days after his 'historic' speech of 12 January Musharraf disqualified more than ninety percent of Pakistanis from contesting election, by making graduation the minimum qualification for entering either national or provincial assembly, through an executive order on 16 January while the custodians of democracy in the west looks the other way. Taking cover of the prevailing international mood Musharraf shrewdly unveiled the sweeping electoral reforms even as the country was in the process of absorbing the implication to his January 12 speech targeting 'terrorism' of the religious Right within the country. It is clear from the designs and thrusts of the latest reforms that they are contented to consolidate Musharraf's grip on the country and its political system before he holds the election as mandated by the supreme court.

Barring the abolition of separate electorate all other components of the reforms package like the delimitation of constituencies, reservation of seats for women

and technocrats and introduction of graduation as the minimum qualification for contesting polls are controversial. But more than that, all these changes will require constitutional amendments which is possible only after election. Although majority of the political parties argue that the military government does not have the mandate to amend the constitution General Musharraf is going ahead with the changes. Moreover, it is not clear how a new power structure created by Musharraf at a lower level called 'local bodies' will co-exist with traditional centre of political power i.e. National and Provincial assemblies. Under a so-called devolution place the District Nazim elected on non-party basis (the equivalent to old District Council Chairman) have been bestowed with enormous power. What power, if any, will be exercised by the elected politicians? The constitutional amendments have already been decreed to accommodate a new institutional role for armed forces in politics in the form of National Security Council (NSC) and the general will be staying on as unelected president but will all the powers.

The oppositions to Musharraf's scheme of things are staggering at the best while there are many opportunists willing to cooperate. He already exacted a heavy toll of democracy by appointing himself as the supreme head of the state. The indications are those that he will ensure a compliant parliament. The presidential order for elections in October has been issued and along with it has come assurance by Chief Election Commissioner that the polls will be held under the supervision of judiciary. Not with standing 'order' and 'assurance' anxiety and scepticism persist if the process will yield Pakistan any chance for return to democracy.

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CONFERENCES, EXHIBITS AND EVENTS

South Asian Popular Culture Launch Conference - cfp

4-5 April, 2002

University of Portsmouth, UK

!Local Knowledge -- Global Knowledge: 2002 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women - cfp

6-9 June, 2002

University of Connecticut

Storrs, CT, USA

!SALA: South Asian Language Analysis Roundtable

21-23 June 2002

University of Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

!Romantic Orientalism - CFP

12-15 July, 2002

Gregynog, Powys, Wales

!Asian Contributions to the Formation of Modern Science: The Emergence of Artificial Languages

20-21 September, 2002

International Institute for Asian Studies

Leiden, The Netherlands

!51st Annual Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs

27-29 September, 2002

Wittenberg University

Springfield, Ohio, USA

!12th World Sanskrit Conference

14-19 July, 2003

Institute for Asian and African Studies

University of Helsinki, FINLAND

INDIA

NDA rule threatened?

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE tensions over the programmes of the militant Hindu organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Ayodhya in Ultra Pradesh of India have subsidised to an extent after March 15 as no major violence erupted centring the activities of the VHP following strict security measures adopted by the federal and the Uttar Pradesh state administrations.

The VHP and its supporters were barred from carrying out their religious programmes at the disputed site and entire thing came as a considerable sigh of relief not only for India but outside that country as well. For, any serious break of law and order situation, there or any impression that the militants were allowed to carry out their controversial programmes defying the orders of the Indian Supreme Court could have sent a wrong signal that could have negative repercussions in and outside India.

The position taken by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government despite soft corners for the militants among sections of the BJP helped control the situation that had generated widespread tensions and fears about the shape of things to come on March 15. The VHP had to soften its stance and consequently minority Muslims and secular forces in India felt that a developing crisis was largely averted.

The government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee also felt relieved for the time being although the crisis centring the Babri Mosque temple issue remains far from being resolved.

However, the NDA faces differences over the attitude of the alliance to the communal organisations after several constituents of the rainbow coalition have

mounted pressure on the government to outlaw the VHP and another militant Hindu organisation Bhairang Dal as they accuse them of not only trying to disturb the secular fabric of the country but unity of the NDA itself. Soon after the relief on the Ayodhya issue, these two organisations stormed the state assembly in the Orissa state on the plea that the state government's position on the "Babri mosque - Temple" issue is not to their liking. The communal Hindu organisations want the NDA government to support their line on the issue but the NDA has refused to do so because the coalition feels the communalism can not be encouraged.

The Telegu Desam party in the southern Andhra Pradesh, the Samta party in Bihar, the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the Janata Dal (U) have urged the government to take stern measures against the VHP and Bhairang Dal for the sake of the country and the NDA. Evidently, the pressure is aimed at the BJP, the main constituent of the NDA, since it is known to be close to these organisations.

The VHP and other communal organisations have as such no political platform and they have been supporting the BJP in the national elections. But the BJP was not in a position to form the government by itself because of lack of required majority and allied with as many as 21 other smaller and regional political organisation form the NDA that has been in power for the second term.

However, its first term was cut short because internal squabbles resulting in the loss of power and it then returned to helm with a larger majority in the midterm polls in 1999. NDA has adopted a common agenda to run the government as all the parties do not see eye to eye on sensitive issues like communalism.

Besides, the BJP, generally known as a communal organisation, has softened its stance on this matter after coming to power despite the existence of hardliners in the organisation.

Moreover, BJP knows that it has to work in concert with other partners if it has to remain in power. Otherwise, main opposition Congress or the "third force" covering the leftists and the centrists, who earlier formed government under the aegis of the United Front are the viable alternatives.

Certain provocative comments by the RSS, another communal outfit, along with the stances of the VHP have put Prime Minister Vajpayee in a difficult situation as his BJP is struggling to maintain the cohesion in the NDA on the issue of communalism. A senior RSS leader recently said that the security of the minorities in India depended on the "good wishes" of the majority Hindus and this remark drew immediate critical responses from the secular forces.

BJP, which relies on RSS and other communal organisations for the electoral purposes, can not fully ignore the views of these outfits. The moderates and the hardliners within the BJP are often at odds on party's attitude to these organisations. Some BJP MP's make demands that communal organisations must be checked for the sake of BJP's overall interest while hardliners in the party oppose this position. Vajpayee, known as a liberal within the organisation, is often caught in embarrassing conditions centring communal problems in the

party. Now that several constituents of the NDA and a section within the BJP are coming out with a demand to ban the VHP and similar organisations, his difficulties obviously will increase, as taking tough stand



against these organisations is not easy for him or the government. But the pressure or the views of the partners of the ruling alliance can not also be totally over-looked as they have a say in running the government.

The outcome of recent state assembly elections suggests that the opposition is gaining ground in India and the NDA is losing popularity. Most NDA partners feel that a major reason for this situation is the tendency among the minorities to distance them from the NDA. Besides, they feel provocative and the peace-loving secular people is not liking violent campaigns by the communal organisations. As such, the NDA partners are calling for banning the VHP and similar organisations.

However, it is highly unlikely that such demands could be accepted by a government which is led by the BJP for obvious reasons. But the BJP can certainly take tough position short of outlawing them provided hardliners within the party endorse such stand. If the BJP can not take such attitude, some of its partners may choose to quit the alliance that may trigger a crisis leading to the possible collapse of the NDA government.

However, neither the BJP nor the secular partners would like a situation where the alliance loses power. Hence, such a crisis may not be in the offing in the near future but one thing is clear. Policies on communal issues are creating a cleavage within the ruling coalition at a time when the opposition is growing in strength. The NDA needs to bury differences to help the alliance remain in the helm. For that matter, the BJP needs to accommodate the views of the partners as far as possible on the communal issue.

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