

Indo-Pak peace initiative: Rekindling hopes for a troubled region



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on its principled stand on Kashmir (it is to be noted that BJP as main coalition partner of ruling NDA has already soften it stand on Article 371) something that is an anathema to Hindutva.

However, BJP's present stand is nothing new. Since State of Jammu and Kashmir is divided every Indian Prime Minister beginning from Nehru to Vajpayee insisted that Kashmir status quo be accepted by Pakistan thereby declaring LoC as the international border between India and Pakistan. But it was Pakistan's refusal to accept the Kashmir status quo and insistence on the implementation of UN resolution of 1948-49 for the self-determination of Kashmiri people that prevented the resolution of the issue. It was argued that without Kashmir the very foundation of Pakistan would be shaken and Pakistan's security would be seriously compromised. India and Pakistan, thus, remained bogged in the ideological riddle of South Asia. Subsequently, Kashmiri insurgency, which was allegedly sponsored by Pakistan through "cross border infiltration" and its demand to discuss Kashmir first before discussing other issues further complicated the situation. In this context, can Vajpayee offer any concession on Kashmir if Pakistan gives in on "cross-border terrorism" and "freeze" Kashmir so that they (India-Pakistan) can move forward with other issues?

Second, for more than fifty years both India and Pakistan have preached nothing but hatred, mistrust and prejudice about each other. As a result generations have come of age without really getting to know each other. Most are unaware of the commonality of their rich history, culture and heritage. Can the Indo-Pak leadership mobilise the ordinary masses to support the peace negotiation that requires 'give and take' by thwarting the activities of groups like Baigang, Shiv Sena, Shang Parivar, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Hizbul Mujahideen, and Jaish-e-Muhammad who do not want normalisation between India and Pakistan?

And lastly, memories are still vivid when an irate Vajpayee ordered snapping of all communications as well as deploying troops along LoC, which were promptly matched by Pakistan. Does Vajpayee who refused to have any talks with Pakistan unless it stopped its "cross-border infiltration" and talked about Pakistan even that would be like going back

being a fit case for "preemptive" attack following the American invasion of Iraq, really mean business? These are all very poignant points but the fact is he did offer peace talks and we have to look into the factors that motivated him to take such momentous steps and what Pakistan can do on its part to make it a success.

A deeper look into the situation reveals that Indian Prime Minister

say that he is not seeking a place in the sun but he is a seasoned politician and knows that Washington wants a closer relation with India for economic and strategic reasons, which is difficult if Indo-Pak impasse continues, for America also needs Pakistan. Resolution of Indo-Pak conflict indeed is in the interest of Washington and the US, at present, has tremendous influence on Pakistan. He is aware that

recent Presidential waiver to allow the release of \$305 million assistance to Pakistan by the Congress in the fiscal budget of 2003 and Islamabad to purchase some spare parts and military ware despite the sanctions under the Arms Export Act, which forbids economic and military assistance, credits or guarantees, and military education and training and Pakistan-specific

government, has recently adopted an amendment proposal that Pakistan Government be asked to submit a report on "cross-border infiltration" in Kashmir and its weapons of mass destruction by the US President.

Islamabad heaved a sigh of relief since it (the proposed amendment) did not put any restrictions and it was not time-specific and that Islamabad could evade another

peace is superbly timed and is already bearing fruits. According to sources close to ruling PML (Q), Islamabad has already assured US on both counts and "both good will gifts" were delivered to Indian leadership through US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Islamabad has, thereby, retreated to its February 1999 position when Prime Minister Vajpayee and the former Pak Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed the Lahore Accord, which fell apart due to the disagreement between them Pakistan Government and the Army. Actually, every civilian Prime Minister of Pakistan beginning from Bhutto to Nawaz (they have been, however, rare and far between) tacitly, i.e. without losing face, wanted to accept the status quo in Kashmir.

Second, Pakistan government would have to face the wrath of Islamic extremist forces as discerned by Mustahida Majlis-i-Amal's conditional support to Jamali that Kashmir issue should be at the top of the agenda. They may withdraw their support if that does not happen and exploit the already existing anti-American feeling of the Pakistanis. Third, India's insistence on Pakistan making a declaratory statement about "cross border terrorism" and "freezing" Kashmir may again vitiate the environment and make problems for an already troubled Pakistan government. And lastly, if India takes a very strong stand on Kashmir issue due to its position of strength for domestic consumption then the process may be hampered.

The good news is that despite all these complexities both countries are inching towards creating a conducive environment for a meaningful dialogue. Both countries are, especially India is, moving very cautiously. India following the dictum once burnt twice shy is watching the development carefully and it wants to wait and see the "progress" made by Pakistan under US tutelage. Thus, the process would be complex, long and arduous. Many things may happen in between. But we, the South Asians are hoping that India and Pakistan leadership should not act in a manner creating problems for others so that people and groups opposed to peace moves can torpedo it. It will require the wholehearted commitment of Indo-Pak leadership and a realisation that the entire region would be engulfed in acute instability if the peace process is foiled.

I would conclude by stating that at present the peace process in South Asia perhaps has the best possible chance of success than ever before. Although Vajpayee's initial offer of peace was unconditional the pre-conditions have once again resurfaced. But thanks to American pressure and perhaps also the realisation in Pakistani leadership that, in the long run, continued Indo-Pak hostility would hurt Pakistan more than India. Another factor for optimism is the reactions of the Kashmiri people. Kashmiris are weary and tired of continued violence, which has so far cost more than 80,000 lives. As such, the Government of Mufti Muhammad Sayeed and All Parties Hurriyat Conference have welcomed the peace process. The secular forces on both sides are also advocating a better understanding between the two countries.

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was not simply motivated by emotion, situations in Iraq and Kashmir and a realisation that countries of South Asia must come together to safeguard their national security in the backdrop of the recent marginalisation of UN but also by *real politick* i.e. deciding to play the American card. This is not to

since 9/11 Pakistan's position has weakened despite its wholehearted cooperation with the US as its coalition partner in its war against terror.

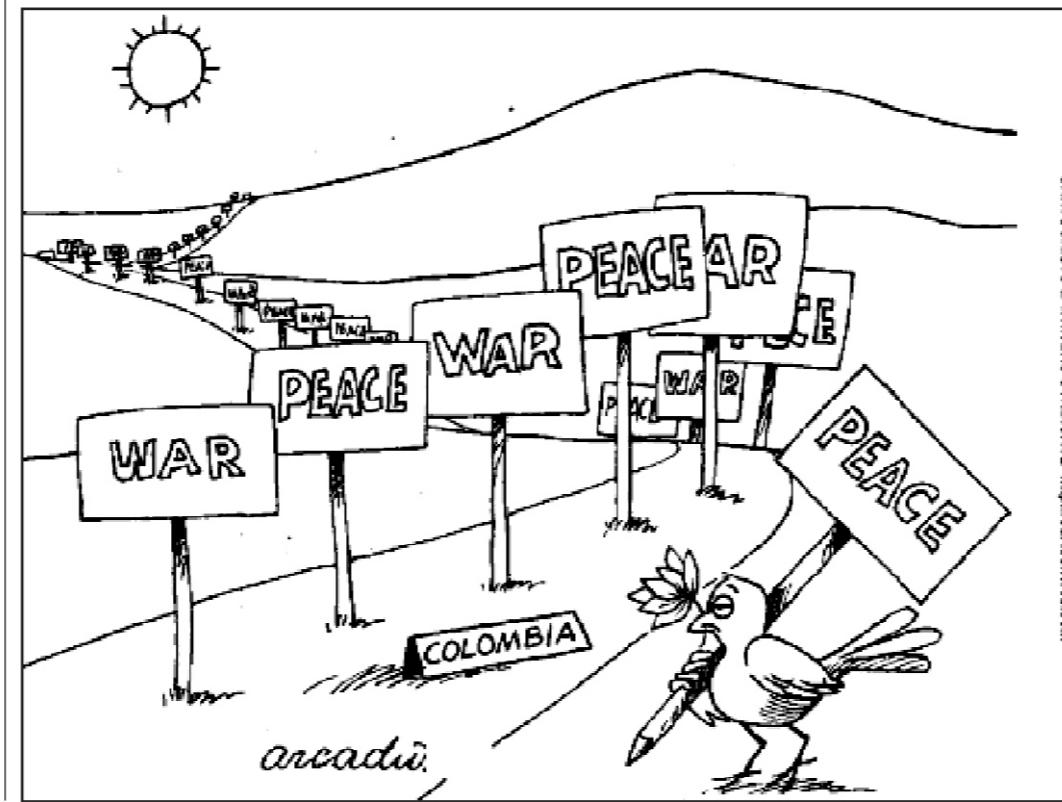
On the surface Pak-US relationship is warm and friendly due to their respective security and strategic

compulsions as evidenced by recent Presidential waiver to allow the release of \$305 million assistance to Pakistan by the Congress in the fiscal budget of 2003 and Islamabad to purchase some spare parts and military ware despite the sanctions under the Arms Export Act, which forbids economic and military assistance, credits or guarantees, and military education and training and Pakistan-specific

proposed Pakistan-specific amendment attaching more "overrides" to an annual presidential waiver, which would have asked Pakistan to stop "cross-border terrorism" in Kashmir and give up weapons of mass destruction in return for US assistance. It was proposed by Congressman Ackerman, an active member of the Indian lobby with strong anti-Pakistan views in the US House of Representatives who subsequently withdrew after being persuaded that it would not be in US interest in fighting terrorism and promoting peace between India and Pakistan.

Thus, US leverage and influence in Pakistan and its dependency on Washington is, indeed, noteworthy. Surely the United States needs Pakistan badly for its war on terrorism but perhaps Pakistan's reliance on Washington has also never been so overwhelming for various reasons like its economy in shambles, political instability, Afghan situation and threats from Islamic extremists who would relish the ousting of President Parvez Musharraf. Pakistan Army, the key player in Pakistan's politics is keenly aware of this fact, which has manifested by its, including ISI's, support for Jamali's response to Vajpayee's offer. Vajpayee, thus, knows that the US has the ability to pressure Pakistan into not insisting on the implementation of UN resolution of 1948-49 and choking the "cross-border infiltration" by rolling back terrorist camps as well as agreeing to "freeze" Kashmir issue and focus more on improving trade and diplomatic ties.

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As the axis of evil turns, Christian fundamentalists are at the gate

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ING Iraq and the Middle East." But Bush remains proud of the religious zeal he has exhibited in the political arena and talks openly about how he was headed toward damnation but was saved from a desolute life dominated by the alcohol bottle. He attends Bible study and encourages his subordinates to do likewise and starts his cabinet meetings with prayer. It's hard to recall a time when one of his speeches did not make a reference to his Christian faith. Indeed, those speeches with their liberal inclusion of Biblical references have revealed the president's world view to be quite simple: good versus evil. You are either with us or against us.

Michael Gerson, a brilliant wordsmith and theology graduate, writes many of Bush's speeches. It was Gerson who coined the memorable "axis of evil." For Bush's

the Jews are part of a divine plan that doesn't really have a happy ending for them. According to the Evangelical script, the founding of Israel in 1948 was the first in a series of Biblically mandated events that will lead to Armageddon and the return of Jesus. Now the evangelicals are waiting for the period of extreme violence and turmoil in which millions die, including many Jews. The survivors -- including the remaining Jews -- see the light and embrace Jesus.

Some Jewish groups have asked: With friends like that, do we really need enemies? To what extent will a theological view that calls for Armageddon in the Middle East lead (evangelicals) to support policies that may move in that direction, rather than toward stability and peaceful co-existence?" Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of Religious

population that has not heard the Gospel of Jesus in their language. Stanley uses the American owned Evangelical Broadcast Network to beam his weekly sermons by satellite TV and short wave radio across the 10/40 window.

But at a time when many Muslims are suspicious of the West and view such Christian missionary activity as being just another Christian crusade, the presence of these foreign religious zealots can only exacerbate tensions and distrust. Islamic website Khilafath.com has described Franklin Graham's plans for post war Iraq as the "fourth Crusade war" and characterised Graham's plans as "enhancing the connection among Arabs and Muslims that the U.S. led war of aggression on Iraq is part of a new crusade campaign."

They are also putting many Christians in Muslim countries at risk. For instance, Salon revealed that in recent months there have been attacks on Christians in Lebanon, Yemen, Algeria, the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria and other Muslim countries. Meanwhile, Sheik Abdelfatih Homeim, a leading Muslim cleric has called for the killing of Christians. Given such developments, President Bush has a responsibility to rein in his evangelical friends and allies. Now is not the time to be raising the red flag of Christian fundamentalism in the Muslim world.

address to Congress this year, the wordsmith wrote for his boss the lyrical phrase: "the loving hand of God behind all of life." Since taking office, Bush has often carried his evangelical message to the public. This past February, for instance, he spoke at a National Prayer Breakfast held at a Religious Broadcasters Convention in Nashville. In attendance were 1000 leading evangelicals, including Jerry Falwell, who has called Muslims "terrorists," and Pat Robertson, who said this on his television program: "This is worse than the Nazis. Adolf Hitler was bad, but what the Muslims want to do to the Jews is worse."

Bush told the faithful "we're being challenged." So how does the most powerful statesman in the world believe the U.S. should deal with that challenge? "I look to faith to solve the nation's deepest problems." Such statements go well with the forty million evangelical Christians in the U.S., but unsettle those of us Americans who worry at how the Bush administration keeps chipping away at the long-standing wall that separates church and state in America and who question how much thought, analysis and rationality go into the making of Bush's foreign policy. But Israel doesn't really care what role faith plays in U.S. politics so long as it gets support for its agenda. So what, according to the Evangelical script,

mentalist with close ties to him are poised and ready to swarm into the war torn country and begin proselytising for Jesus and spreading the word of the Christian gospel.

"The opportunity for broadcast expansion in post-war Iraq is phenomenal," enthused Don Black, Vice President of In Touch Ministries in Atlanta, in an interview with the web site Salon last month (April). "It would be one of our goals to be able to have a platform to tell the truth as we understand it, as any communicator should have the right to do." In Touch, which Bush's good friend evangelist Charles Stanley heads, claims to broadcast to every country in the world. Samaritan's Purse, a relief headed by Franklin Graham, who got in hot water with U.S.-based Muslim groups last year when he described Islam as "a very evil and wicked religion," is another group planning to proselytise the people of Iraq, which, by the way, is 97 percent Muslim. All these groups are doing it under the guise of providing aid to the Iraq people.

Such missionary activity in Muslim countries, of course, is not new. Evangelicals refer to the area in which Middle East and much of the Muslim world is located as the 10/40 window, a 10 by 40 degree area north of the equator containing the majority of the world's

population that has not heard the Gospel of Jesus in their language. Stanley uses the American owned Evangelical Broadcast Network to beam his weekly sermons by satellite TV and short wave radio across the 10/40 window.

Robert O. Freedman, political science professor at Baltimore Hebrew University, agrees. "Once you get in bed with them (the evangelicals)," he said, "You are to a certain extent, subscribing to their view of what America ought to be. And that, in my view, is not in the best interests of the Jewish people."

But it has been tough for Israel to reject the tremendous amounts of money and other kinds of support that has been forthcoming from Evangelical groups. For instance, some 250,000 evangelicals have donated more than \$60 million towards Jewish immigration and relief support to Israel, while another group said that it raised enough money to help 65,000 Jews immigrate to Israel between 1991 and 2002.

One can't help but wonder what kind of strategy is being planned in the meetings Elon and other Israeli envoys have had and are having with evangelical Christian leaders, who don't really have a stake in seeking peace and justice in Palestine. After all, a Middle East settlement would be contrary to the coming doom that the Bible promises will come. Many Evangelical groups support Israel only because they believe Israel's dominance in the region will hasten the scenario

of freedom of religion, it's a question of common sense. The U.S. is in control and can restrict movement of those whose actions can destabilise the country. After all, George Bush, Jr. is Commander in Chief of the U.S. armed forces. The buck stops with him.

Yet the Bush administration has been part of the charade being played by the evangelicals. Bush administration spokesman Ari Fleischer said it's not the administration's responsibility to determine which groups can provide aid to Iraq. Ibrahim Hooper, a spokesman for the Washington DC-based Council on American-Islamic relations, spoke for those who don't want to play charades with Bush and his religious soul mates: "They come with food in one hand and Bible in the other."

You can bet that somewhere in the wilds of Afghanistan or Pakistan U.S.'s bitter enemies in the War on Terror are smiling and hoping -- "Onward Christian soldiers."

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