

“External interference not acceptable”

A country of the size and strength, both economic and military, as India hardly needs to stress upon the known fact that we would be never agreeing to or allowing directly or indirectly any sort of interference in our own internal affairs. Not only that, India has recently shown how and in what manner, it could afford to go far in protecting our borders to the extent of even an inch in respect of the nine month old standoff with China. However, reiterating this stand was again to confirm our policy and commitment because this country has never desired in the past nor has any intention in future, to interfere in the internal affairs of any country and on reciprocity, expects the same from "others" too. However, we see and observe that Pakistan has been parroting "Kashmir issue" for over seven decades not only within its country and building up a false narrative but even hard attempting to raise intermittently the same at international levels disregarding and brazenly violating the tenets of the Shimla Agreement that binds "both" the countries to settle all issues including the one related to Kashmir, if any, only bi-laterally.

On the other side of the fence, if at all, there was any issue regarding Kashmir, it was regarding the huge chunks of areas of the then State forcibly occupied by Pakistan in 1947-48 which needed to be vacated and settled for all times. The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, it may be reaffirmed, has historically been a part and parcel of India and as a natural corollary, shall continue to be an integral part in future as well, come what may. This avowed policy of the Indian Government has been articulated by Indian leaders repeatedly from time to time and Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu on his recent visit to Jammu reaffirming the same, lends credence to the established settled fate of Jammu and Kashmir as part of India which could never become any agenda for any negotiations to altering the position even slightly. Why should not the other countries attend to and settle their own internal problems and instead indulge in diplomatically costly extravaganza of poking their unsolicited nose in our affairs and even comment upon our concerns for human rights which by all counts, if impartial and unbiased survey was conducted, would be found far more better than any country boasting about it.

We may, democratically and as per the provisions of our constitution, bring in constitutional and administrative changes in any of our states and Union Territories including in Jammu and Kashmir, that should be no issue to be discussed, least commented upon or questioned as the Parliament of India being supreme political body to do it by democratic majority could not be questioned in anyway. Verily touching this aspect, the Vice President questioned Pakistan, though not directly, over repeated references by it on the issue of abrogation of Article 370. We basically believing in democracy, the will of the people and all civilized norms of live and let live, mutual respect and tolerance and the like, have historically been imparting knowledge to world countries on such basic and most important issues related to shaping the destinies of civilizations. It is a sort of a boon to the South Asian peace and even the entire world that India is so much committed to maintaining and working wholeheartedly for peace and friendship among the comity of nations, more so between our neighbours. Hence, in this context the advice of the Vice President, who while addressing annual convocation of the IIM, Jammu, to all concerned especially Pakistan and China to mind their own affairs and not meddle in ours, is timely and apt.

Sports Council must release contractors’ money

If the works executed by the contractors in respect of four different sports stadiums and rural playgrounds of Kathua district costing over Rs. 9 crores so far have satisfactorily been done and verified the same too, what is the point in withholding their payments is beyond comprehension. The position reaching this end that they have stopped the work midway rather at the finishing levels rendering the entire exercise of providing sports stadiums for players as of non utility if not entirely wasteful is quite unfortunate.

When timelines are specified by which the projects should normally be completed, when duly sanctions and releasing of funds like issues are taken care of, why administrative incompetence should spoil the entire game especially with regard to projects concerning games and sports playing of different hues? In other words, these stadiums and playgrounds were scheduled to be completed in all respects by the end of 2020 and in fact, reportedly 90 percent of the job being already completed but even after four months delay because of inordinately keeping back clearing of the bills of the contractors and their stopping of the work under protest, it is unlikely that these projects would be soon completed should the Sports Council not clarify its stand.

It is not only the case with these stadiums, even in respect of those "revived" under languishing projects scheme, the same administrative attitude was seen which needs to be changed and any withholding of payments should be backed and supported only by cogent reasons. We, therefore, urge the concerned authorities to look into the issue of the payment of contractors' bills so that the projects are handed over to the Sports Council for specific sports purposes at an early date.

K B Jandial

Post Article 370 abrogation was thought to be a defining moment for Jammu to reassert its lost identity. But regrettably, this moment has washed away and expectations belied. Today, Jammu is struggling to find its feet to get its composite identity recognised. Instead of succumbing to despondency, why can't Jammu convert this 'failure' to an opportunity?

Jammu's identity is defined by its long admired distinct composite culture & khand mithi (sweet) languages and rooted in religiosity centered around globally revered Shree Mata Vaishno Devi, Sudmahadev & Mantalai, Shri Raghunath ji temple with idols of 33 crores deities, Bawe-wali-Mata, Peer Kho, Ziarat Shadhara Sharief, Ziarat Peer Baba Budanshah, Shiv Khori, Gurdwara Dera Baba Banda Bahadur, Gurdwara Nangali Sahib and Churches. It is rooted in pious rivers like Devika, Utttarvehni, and Suryaputri Tawi; and the mighty one, the Chenab on whose eastern bank is Akhnoor, where Gulab Singh's coronation as Raja of Jammu was performed under Jiya Pota tree on June17, 1822 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the beginning of the Dogra Rule. Valour and sacrifice had been synonym with Dogras. Dogra rulers Rajas and Maharajas like legendary lambhulochan, Gulab Singh to Hari Singh, Gen Zorawar Singh, Maj. Somnath Sharma, PVC, Brig. Rajinder Singh MVC, Sub. Maj. Bana Singh PVC, and many more who are proud icons of Dogra's unparalleled valour. But then there are Dogras who are immortalized into Duggar's folk ballads like Baba Jitto (symbol of asserting tillers' rights) Data Rampat alias Data Ranu (sacrificed his life for dispensing justice) & Main Dido (symbol of resistance against non-Dogra Rule). Besides, its identity is also defined in Jammu' cultural icons like K L Sehgal, Malika Pukhraj, Dinubhai Pant, Allah Rakha, Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma, Ram Nath Shastri, K S Madhukar, Sansar Chand Baru, Padma Sachdev, Nain Sukh etc. World famous Basohli miniature paintings, folk lore and dances too contribute to Jammu's composite splendid identity. This identity separated Jammu from Kashmir & Ladakh.

In a way, Jammu is at a cross-road of its contemporary history and trying to assert its identity and relevance that has diminished and ignored ever since J&K became the part of India, interestingly at the hands of last Dogra ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. Concerns on it and perpetual discrimination are being expressed at many fora including during the low key celebrations of the 175th Foundation Day function on 16th March at historic Dogra Sadar Sabha to commemorate the birth of the unified Dogra's State of Jammu & Kashmir under the suzerainty of British Empire. Hopefully, it could become an annual feature to show case Jammu's political, linguistic, cultural identity and make these rallying points for projecting Jammu's identity.

Regrettably, the Govt of India had always overlooked the pioneering role of Dogra rulers in

integrating diverse regions in to one unified State and extending its boundaries up to Tibet after conquering Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan which became India's national boundary on October 26, 1947. How can the Govt forget that it was the legendary Gen Zorawar Singh, also called Napoleon of the East, whose conquests against Tibetans including the Mount of Kailash, extended J&K's frontiers all the way to the edges of China? Even when India is faced with hard negotiations with China amid military build-up on the edges of Ladakh including Galwan Valley, few in India realise that India's borders with Tibet & Xinjiang as also with the Wakhan corridor and Khyber

Public demand is growing as never before, for official recognition of the contributions of the founder of Dogra Rule, Maharaja Gulab Singh and other Dogra rulers. It necessitates public celebrations of days or events important for Jammu & its people like coronation of Gulab Singh, making of an integrated State of J&K (Foundation Day), accession day etc.

STRAIGHT TALK

Pakhtunkhwa, are in fact the legacy of this great Dogra General. While contributions of gallant Dogras were never recognised by the Govt , in peculiar rarity, the defeated Tibetans honoured great Dogra warrior by creating his Samadhi at a hilltop in Toyo which is venerated even today. Back home, even Dogra MPs could not project contributions of Dogras in any debate in the Parliament including on border dispute with China. The documented historical facts of conquering entire Ladakh up to the edge of China in 1841 could have effectively countered Chinese manipulated claims on border dispute.

Jammu's identity has been overshadowed by Kashmir ever since Dogra Rule came to an end in 1949 with forced exile of the last ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. Jammu is trying to find its feet in cauldron of identity crisis. And with this started the process of ignoring Jammu's identity.

Much before the Constituent Assembly of J&K abolished the Dogra monarchy by a resolution on 12 June 1952, there was shocking resistance by the Dominion Govt on the inclusion of word "Jammu" with Kashmir in the Constituent Assembly Indian. It all started with the introduction of 4-A para in the Schedule to the Constituent Assembly Rules by Sir Gopalaswami Ayyangar on 27th May, 1949. It allowed the "Ruler of Kashmir" to nominate the representatives of the State "on the advice of his Prime

Minister" to fill four seats in the Constituent Assembly. Pertinent issue here is not the nomination of 4 members but the name of Jammu & Kashmir State recorded as "Kashmir" in the first schedule to the draft constitution which carried names of the States acceded to India. Jammu's name was erased by the then Govt. This was the beginning of the despicable treatment Jammu was to get in years to come.

K. T. Shah, member of the Constituent Assembly from Bihar had moved the amendment that "before the word 'Kashmir' wherever it occurs, the words 'Jammu and, be inserted." While agreeing that Jammu and Kashmir, no doubt, describes the State better, Ayyangar expressed his inability to change the nomenclature of the State from Kashmir to Jammu & Kashmir (as the amendment had sought) on the pretext that they have to change it at many places in the draft Constitution and thus made a case to accept 'Kashmir' in the constitution "that means Jammu & Kashmir only".

Noticing the unfavorable mood of the House, Pt Nehru put forth another proposal. He said that since there was a slight confusion in people's minds, it would be better to describe the State as "Kashmir State" and then put within brackets, the words "otherwise known as the State of Kashmir and Jammu". Thus, after the words 'State of Kashmir' in the proposed paragraph 4-A, the words within brackets would be inserted, viz., "otherwise known as the State of Jammu and Kashmir". It clearly revealed how uncharitable the Govt of India was towards Jammu and Dogras.

It has become a fad to keep criticising Govts for waning Jammu's identity without asserting it by the people. Jammu's rage on IIM convocation robes was shot lived and like it people accepted humiliation at different occasions with indifference and the result is before everyone. It's little encouraging to find Dogra Sadar Sabha to keep some hope alive by occasionally flagging these issues concerning Jammu's identity.

Dogri Sanstha is yet another important institution that can be trusted for safeguarding Jammu's art, culture and Dogri language. But the Dogras, by and large, are unconcerned and hardly speak this sweet language. The Dogri Sanstha, apart from promotion of Dogri literature, has to take up the challenge of popularizing Dogri language among common man especially among the younger generation who has to make it language of communication in every home. Dogri is Dogras' first identity of which there can be no better 'ambassador' than iconic & Vedic scholar,

Dr. Karan Singh.

Lt. Governor, Manoj Sinha mentioned JKAS (Jammu & Kashmir Administrative Service) with the name of the District Information Officer, Udhampur Sajad Bashir Somberia in his condolence message on his demise. Perhaps, it is for the first time that the top constitutional authority of J&K has added Jammu with the popularly known KAS. Not many would know that 'Jammu & Kashmir Administrative Service' is actual name of the UT's premier civil service. In the SRO notification issued by the General Administrative Department for recruitment through Public Service Commission in 2018, all the three premier services are mentioned as (i) Junior Scale of Jammu & Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) (ii) Jammu & Kashmir Police (Gazetted) Service (JKP)&(iii) Jammu & Kashmir Accounts (Gazetted) Service (JKAS) (Actt). But, still the Govt in every order mentions these services without Jammu despite Jammu prefixed in their nomenclature like JKAS.

While GAD should mention JKAS for KAS with the name of the officers of the service, why don't all these officers, especially of Jammu start writing JKAS instead of KAS in their name plates and also in all official communications? It won't attract any disciplinary action, first it is the actual name of the Service, and secondly it doesn't offend anyone, not even the colleagues from Kashmir as 'Kashmir' continues to be there.

Public demand is growing as never before, for official recognition of the contributions of the founder of Dogra Rule, Maharaja Gulab Singh and other Dogra rulers. It necessitates public celebrations of days or events important for Jammu & its people like coronation of Gulab Singh, making of an integrated State of J&K (Foundation Day), accession day etc.

Jammu also needs to celebrate its iconic festivals which are many. These include historic Mela Pat, Lohri with multicolored chajja which is imitation of peacock feathers, Navratras with Mela Bahu Fort, Panchari Mela to name a few. The famous Ram Lila(at Dewan Mandir which produced many stalwart artists) is another unique feature that needs to be revived in its originality.

Along with these festivals, Jammu needs to revive and celebrate Jammu's folk dances. There are many folklores & folk dances which enthrall everyone and could become true identity of Jammu. There is perhaps no match to the fascinating Kud dance popular in Bhaderwah-Kishtwar -Bhumag belt. Surma nema nema, Paranda, Gitro, Phumniyan are few of other colourful dances of various areas that were once brand Jammu and should be promoted as such. Bhaakh is another folk that represents Jammu's cultural richness.

Jammu has to wake up and change its attitude. People have to start asserting Jammu's identity and feel proud of it. Jammu cannot wait for the Govt to recognise Jammu's composite identity and instead start promoting it at every level. Think of wishing each other with Jai Duggar, Jai Hind.

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India-Pak ceasefire: Need to stick to red lines

Ashok Bhan

Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them friends-(Ibrahim Lincoln)

The guns blazing across the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, since the terrorist attack on a military camp in the border town of Uri in 2016 were suddenly silenced on the intervening night of February 25. While this ceasefire is holding and it was now expected that it will graduate towards further movements, the latest U-turn by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan on resumption of trade brought to the fore that a sustainable peace process was still far away.

A day after the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet announced that Pakistan would buy sugar and cotton from India, the cabinet made a U-turn and deferred the decision of the ECC. Subsequently, a meeting of a special cabinet subcommittee to discuss relations with India declared that there will be no trade with India until India reversed the constitutional reforms in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

It did put a question mark on the fledgeling 'peace process' that is being carefully choreographed on the back-channel, reportedly operating directly with Pakistan's military establishment. This announcement of ceasefire was accompanied by India's gesture allowing Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's plane to overfly on way to Sri Lanka. On March 23, which is marked as Pakistan Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dispatched a letter to his Pakistani counterpart extending greetings to people of the country and desiring cordial relations. "At this difficult time for humanity, I would like to convey my best wishes to you and the people of Pakistan for dealing with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic," he wrote. He did mention that an environment of trust, devoid of terror and hostility, is imperative for carrying the relations forward.

These developments coincided with the resumption of water talks between the two countries with the arrival of Pakistan's Indus Commissioner Syed Mehr Ali Shah to New Delhi, the first time in over two years. There was also a warm welcome to the members of Pakistan's National Tent Pegging Team in India, which had arrived to attend the World Cup Qualifiers of the Equestrian Tent Pegging Championship. While the sudden flight of doves across the border has come as a surprise to many, the silencing of guns has greatly relieved the Basmati rice cultivators in Ranbir Singh Pura, Kathua, Bishnah, and Hiranagar. Due to relentless incidents of shelling, that peaked at over 5,000 in 2020, farmers in these areas had either abandoned their farms or were living in bunkers.

Although the LoC had witnessed the occasional exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani troops since 2008 in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Mumbai, their frequency jumped after February 2019, when Indian air force planes dropped bombs on the Pakistani village of Balakot.

-Relief to people living along LoC

According to official figures, nearly 30 lakh people from Kargil in Ladak to Akhnoor in Jammu live along the most militarized line. In Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) as well nearly 21 lakh population lives in close vicinity. Therefore, the constant shelling of mortars and snipers not only keeps the lives of more than 50 lakh people on edge but also affects their livelihoods.

Looking at the ceasefire announcement and the developments that rapidly followed, it looks that there was arduous homework behind, involving both the political and military leadership of two countries.

Just a day ahead of the announcement, Army Chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane, speaking at a webinar organized by the Vivekananda International Foundation, expressed confidence that with continued engagement with Pakistan, there could be some sort of understanding because unsettled borders and violence on the borders benefit no one.

"We always want peace and tranquillity in our border areas, whether it be the western front or the northern front and the Line of Actual Control. Or whether it is on the Indo-Myanmar border, we are always looking for peace and tranquillity and our role is to ensure that so as the rest of the nation can develop," he said.

Earlier, Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa is reported to have sent many peace overtures. In early February, he said Pakistan and India must resolve the Jammu and Kashmir issue in a "dignified and peaceful manner." He added: "It is time to extend the hand of peace in all directions." Later on, March 18, at the Islamabad Dialogue, he said it is time for India and Pakistan to forget the past and move forward. He added that peace between the two neighbouring countries will help in opening up the possibilities of development in South and Central Asia. It is believed that the opening of the historic Kartarpur corridor in November 2019 to facilitate



the visa-free entry of Indian Sikh pilgrims to celebrate the 550th birthday of the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak Dev was his brainchild.

Analysts say that the latest moves came after Pakistan realized that its propaganda against India has not cut much ice. On the other hand, post-August 5, 2019, when India dissolved the state of Jammu and Kashmir and revoked its special status, Pakistan failed to garner diplomatic support in world capitals. Pakistan had gone to the extent of expelling the Indian ambassador in Islamabad and recalled its envoy to send a stern message. While the world expressed concern at the potential of two nuclear-armed countries going to a full-fledged war, they maintained a studied silence and largely bought the Indian argument that its intention of bringing grassroots democracy and development should be given a chance.

Further, India succeeded in

alarming the world that Kashmir needs to be controlled lest the arrival of global terrorist groups creates a situation like Afghanistan, Yemen, or Syria in the region.

-Aimed at US administration

Some analysts like Sushant Sareen say that Pakistan's 'peace and dialogue offer' to India was aimed more at the new US administration. Imran Khan and Bajwa were trying to project themselves as reasonable people who were ready to talk peace with India, and then use this to portray India as being obdurate. The Pakistani game plan is to exploit the negative coverage of India in the Western press and public opinion in the

peace had taken off in 2004 when Atal Bihari Vajpayee had travelled to Islamabad. His successor Manmohan Singh continued the initiative. But these efforts were not reciprocated by Pakistan.

This time India will also need to guard against the possibility that the entire episode could be used by the Pakistanis to impress upon India to cut them some slack that otherwise India would be reluctant to do. The Pakistan Army could wave the cabinet's rejection of the trade opening to claim that their hands are tied. To move things along they will ask India to do something that can then be sold to the civilian government and get it back on board.

It is not the first time that the doves are seen fluttering across the borders. These 'peace offers' from Pakistan follows a pattern. For one, it is either made to tide over some domestic crisis, or to exploit, or at times evade, some international pressure. For another, it is never unconditional. If anything, the conditions are invariably maximalist, and therefore, a non-starter. In 2001, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf met Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Agra. But Pakistan's intransigence pulled down the talks. After Dr Manmohan Singh became prime minister of India in May 2004, the Punjab provincial government declared it would develop Gah, his place of birth, as a model village in his honour and name a school after him. But it never happened and Pakistan continued to provide cover-fire for the terrorists whenever they infiltrated into Indian territory from Pakistan. In 2005, Pakistan's current Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid was alleged to running a terrorist training camp in 1990 in Pakistan.

-Stick to red lines

What India needs is to stick to the red line, it has drawn and continuously monitor and verify Pakistan's 'hand of peace. What matters for India is not Pakistan's words but its actions. In recent years, while there are few actions like decreasing terrorist levels, but they still need to be verified. Pakistan must put a stop at the language being used by Imran Khan, his cronies against the Indian Prime Minister, government and people. It is utterly vile and vituper-

ative and will not help the peace process. At the same time, India must lay out clear metrics that Pakistan must meet before clapping its 'hand of peace. India should not let down the guard for a moment or get taken in by the seductive words. If things move in the right direction, India will be happy to dance along; but if Pakistan reverts to form and tries to once again backstab India, it will give her yet another opportunity to expose Pakistan's perfidy and treachery in front of the world. India can use the ceasefire to beef up its security grid, strengthen its bunkers, and fix some of the gaps in the fence-straddling of the LoC.

The fact remains use of terrorists as a part of a policy matrix by Pakistan has outlived and Kashmiri's have always rejected it from 1947 till date.

Every big step forward requires courage of conviction and imagination.Prime Minister Modi has demonstrated both.

Analysts say -Given these complexities, there is a high chance these negotiations- be held behind closed doors and outside the purview of media and formal diplomatic channels- that would expedite any outcome.

India and Pakistan have to move forward and can not live in hatred all the time with mutual hostility and tension. Despite honest starts and multiple attempts by India – which have been responded and followed by terror attacks by Pakistan – PM Modi is very keen to move beyond,but as diplomatic community puts it -peace looks elusive, but a peace process does not. By all aspects, it is clear the process is and has to be seen thriving to succeed in thrashing out major differences.The engagement with other nations more so with the neighbouring countries is the sine quo non of diplomatic jurisprudence of any nation state. Pakistan-India have to move forward,there is a rationale to it -that is peace, development and stability for the people of South Asia

An intent of peaceful solution does not need to decide the fate of the most complex geopolitical problem of the subcontinent right away; the meaningful process has to go on and on.

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(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)