

Reason to Worry

Objective reality is not determined by what vested interests want. Nor can they change the ground reality simply by overplaying a pre-conceived notion. The sultans of Delhi continue to nurse the grand illusion that they are very much into American orbit because they are too eager to become empire-servers in the changed geopolitical context in South Asian region. After every bout of failed Indo-Pak parley they look forward to Washington's reaction. So India's external affairs minister S M Krishna was quick enough to brief US secretary of state Mrs Hillary Clinton, about the outcome of his 15 July talks with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi, in Islamabad when they met in Kabul on the sidelines of the International Conference on Afghanistan. In truth there was not much to report as they began to pack up even before starting the process of dialogue after some ugly exchanges. For Pakistan Kashmir is the 'core' issue. And for India, 'terrorism', rather 'cross-border terrorism' is the 'core' issue. For obvious reasons they failed to bury the bitter legacy left by history and nothing substantial emerged from 'dialogue diplomacy'. Despite Mr Krishna's best efforts, Mrs Clinton, however, echoed Pakistan's stance as she identified though with mild overtones, Kashmir as an impediment to developing a better understanding that would be beneficial to both countries.

Whether Delhi bosses like it or not, Pakistan is no less important in America's gameplan despite the collapse of Soviet power. They desperately need Pakistan more than ever before to control Afghanistan. The military junta in Islamabad has been successfully playing the role of American valet ever since the inception of Pakistan in 1947 and, it is not that easy to break that time-tested bond, notwithstanding India's relentless efforts to allow American multinationals to loot the country.

An identical scenario prevails in the Middle East. Not that pro-American sheikhdoms are against Palestine. Nor do they like the existence of Israel and yet they can do little when it is the question of breaking America-Israel alliance against the Arabs. The hard reality is that Israel's nuclear weapons and America's nuclear backing for Israel are not just abstract issues on some distant horizons. It was probably no coincidence that while the NPT conference was taking place in New York on May 28, the Israeli security establishment silently sentenced Mordechai Vanunu to three months in prison. Vanunu is the Israeli scientist who in 1986 for the first time disclosed to the British press with authentic photographs and documents how Israel was secretly carrying on its nuclear weapons programme targeting its neighbours including Iran. Eight US presidents from Nixon to Obama knew and helped Israel keep it officially secret. Vanunu's exposure is a threat to America's Middle East strategies and interests. He was jailed for 18 years and has been continually hounded by Israeli authorities. Not that the Obama-Clinton team doesn't know how Pakistan-backed jihadi groups promote terroristic activities against India with a view to making India's presence in Kashmir totally insecure. And yet much to the dismay of Indian policy-makers, America is not going to tilt its scale of balance in favour of India by forcing Pakistan to fall in line which is precisely the objective of New Delhi.

Returning empty-handed from Islamabad Mr Krishna advocated somewhat vaguely to set up an instrumental mechanism for resolving the concerns between India and Pakistan. They maintain some kind of instrumental mechanism with China—a number of committees that meet periodically to assess the situation and yet they have not been able to move an inch from their respective political and geographical positions they held in 1962 when border war shattered all myths of old civilisations and age-old friendship.

Pakistan along with America is fighting Taliban insurgents and a number of Wahhabi-influenced jihadi movements in its western tribal areas bordering Afghanistan while maintaining clandestine relationship with the Taliban as its long-term strategy. America knows it. So long as Pakistan serves America's strategic interests, the Clintons would like to ignore minor irritations. The American administration doesn't really stand to gain anything by supporting India's desire to legalise status-quoism along the line of control as permanent solution. Also, they won't benefit much by completely subscribing to Islamabad's idea of integrating the entire Jammu and Kashmir province with Pakistan in the name of self-determination. As a result they have chosen the middle path by over-emphasising the dialogue diplomacy to keep the ball rolling.

It is an advancement in the sense that they agreed not to disagree in continuing the dialogue diplomacy. Unless people on both sides of the fence develop peace movement against their rulers it is simply absurd to think of a better atmosphere that has been vitiated over the last 60 years. People's initiatives that gained momentum in the recent past to improve bilateral relations are totally absent today because the persons in authority in New Delhi are against such initiatives. The net result : dialogue for dialogue's sake. But people are looking for ways to act, to live in peace, to say goodbye to jingoism.