



South Block's inconsistencies

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As Nepal has been in the limelight, I read again some of the old official letters from the first Indian Prime Minister to King Tribhuvan of Nepal in the 1950s. Surprisingly, Nehru does not address the King as "Your Majesty" as would be proper in an official communication to another Head of State, but by "my dear friend". His "dear friend" was probably not too happy to be addressed with so much familiarity, but he had no choice in the matter. It is notable that during the same period, Nehru always addressed Zhou Enlai as "My dear Prime Minister" or "Your Excellency". Obviously, the mighty had to be treated differently.

This condescending attitude vis-à-vis Nepal has deeply marked the relations between India and the Himalayan Kingdom. Unfortunately, it has had (and continues to have) serious consequences. I remember a visit to Nepal several years ago: I had been invited to stay with a Nepalese family which did not know about my connection with India. Every morning, I used to go for a walk in the streets of Kathmandu with my host who had worked as a senior executive of the Imperial (now Indian) Tobacco Company. During our strolls, his monologues generally targeted India and the shoddy way Nepal had been treated; this bitterness had surprised me. Today, resentment against India is still very strong and widespread in the kingdom.

If India wants to play a more important role in the region, such susceptibility (right or wrong) should be taken care of and dealt with. Apparently, it has not been done in recent months. If reports in the press are true (the King's visit to India is said to have been cancelled thrice), South Block should begin some

introspection, especially since the Ambassador to Nepal has been promoted as Foreign Secretary. The same Mr Saran speaks pragmatically on basic "democratic" values which were the cause for the cancellation of the Prime Minister's visit to the SAARC meeting in Bangladesh.

It seems sometimes that South Block is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Has Delhi forgotten the way the Pakistani General-President came to power in Pakistan after the Kargil war? Why this policy inconsistency (or double standard) towards two of India's neighbours? The point is not that India should not engage Pakistan, but it should not be done in an emotional manner, why use "idealism" on one side and "pragmatism" on the other? Speaking of democracy in Nepal is good, but one should also look at what is going on in Pakistan today.

Soon after the Godhra incident and the regrettable riots which followed, a Pakistani news channel said: "In Pakistan as well as overseas, every Pakistani is praying for safety of fellow Muslims in India, and is thinking 'Thank God we have Pakistan... Thank God for the farsightedness of Iqbal and Jinnah for creating our homeland'." However, this opinion is not shared by everybody. In an updated version of its Global Futures Assessment Report, the US National Intelligence Council and the CIA have predicted that Pakistan is ripe for civil war, bloodshed, and inter-provincial rivalries: She may face a "Yugoslavia-like fate". Already in 2000, the CIA had forecast that Pakistan "will not recover easily from decades of political and economic mismanagement, divisive politics, lawlessness, corruption and ethnic friction. Nascent democratic reforms will produce little change in the face of opposition from an entrenched political elite and radical Islamic parties. Further domestic decline would benefit Islamic political activists, who may significantly increase their role in national politics and alter the makeup and cohesion of the military once Pakistan's most capable institution."

The Report had concluded: "In a climate of continuing domestic turmoil, the Central Government's control probably will be reduced to the Punjabi heartland and the economic hub of Karachi." Last week, Wajid Shamsul Hasan, a former Pakistan high commissioner to United Kingdom, wrote an article in the South Asia Tribune mentioning a forthcoming invasion of Balochistan by General Musharraf's troops. He commented, "The military operation that has been put in motion in Balochistan would further distance the Baloch people from rest of the country." Very few have noted another interesting feature of the CIA report: A map titled 'Jammu and Kashmir: Ethnic Mix of a Disputed State'. For decades the Western powers have sided with Pakistan under the pretext that "Kashmir was a muslim state". The official publication of this map by the CIA proves that the Western mindset is fast changing. Kashmir is an ethnically mixed state, like India is an ethnically mixed nation. But there is more mind-blowing material: A "deal" was reported in the Pakistani press: "The Army has publicly admitted paying Al Qaeda over half a million dollars in the most bizarre deal it has ever made with militant Waziristan fighters, battling the Army and the US forces in the rugged terrain bordering Afghanistan for months."

The announcement was made by Lt General Safdar Hussain, Corps Commander of Peshawar Corps, in-charge of military operations in Waziristan. He said that \$540,000 had been paid to four tribal militants "to settle their debts with Al Qaeda". This was part of a "peace deal" signed with local tribesmen. Can you believe it: The Pakistan state, a special partner of the US, directly and openly pays "dues" to the Al Qaeda? The Pakistani Army considered it a good deal: The militants had initially asked for six times more. The only bad part was that Baitullah Mehsud, the main rebel, (an ex-Guantanamo prisoner) refused to accept his share -it was not enough. The deal was negotiated by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the founder of the Taliban (so well received in India a couple of years ago by the NDA Government).

While the General-turned-President speaks big about the self-determination of Kashmiris, the situation turns grimmer every day in the Northern Areas of POK. Reports mention that Islamabad had to evacuate 36 foreigners from Gilgit last month as the town is under curfew "following a flare-up of sectarian violence". Further, it appears 70 Chinese construction engineers and workers were shifted from the site of a hydro-electric project near Gilgit to a safer location. In January, Gilgit continued to witness riots and unrest for diverse reasons, the main one being that no freedom is granted to the local population which has decided to take its slot to the annual UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva in March. And even better: The Sunday Telegraph in London reported that an investigation by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) "confirmed that the controversial scientist, AQ Khan, provided nuclear expertise and equipment to Iran". This admission came during talks in EU, Brussels, last month: "The EU officials were told that cooperation between Tehran and Dr Khan and associates from his Khan Research Laboratories began in the mid-1990s and included more than a dozen meetings over several years." The newspaper claimed that Dr Khan "sold nuclear codes, materials, components and plans that left his 'signature' at the core of Iranian nuclear programme."

Before leaving for Pakistan, Mr Natwar Singh spoke about the situation in Nepal:

"It would be desirable that immediate steps are taken towards the release of political leaders, journalists and human rights activists; freedom of media is restored; multi-party democracy is reinstated, and efforts are made to evolve a national consensus to address the problems faced by the country." One couldn't be more in agreement with this idealist stand, but one wonders why this standard shall apply to Nepal alone and not to other neighbours as well. Then we could really say: "Thank god we have India."