

# INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

## Pragmatic thinking

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Military confrontations and wars aggravate animosities instead of resolving the conflicts besides causing incalculable loss to the warring parties in terms of men and material and wastage of precious resources which otherwise could be spent on development and other pressing social needs to ameliorate the lot of the teeming millions. That is exactly what the senseless war over Siachin glacier has done since April 1984 when India airlifted its forces on the glacier in complete disregard to the Karachi agreement of 27th July and Pakistan perforce had to defend its territory. The conflict, which is an unfortunate extension of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India, has cost dearly to both the countries without any tangible gains to either party.

Viewed in the backdrop of the futility of this confrontation, one can hardly take issue with President Zardari's observation while speaking to a group of journalist in Karachi that it was time that both the countries disengaged their forces. That reflects a pragmatic thinking on his part from which both the countries will stand to gain if they earnestly so desire. But the most sordid aspect of this conundrum is that India has never shown any genuine desire to remove the irritants and resolve the core issue of Kashmir that have bedevilled relations between the two countries since partition.

The Lahore Declaration of 1999 wherein both the countries agreed on the need for a composite dialogue including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir as well as a number of nuclear and conventional CBMs, was perhaps the highest water-mark in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The dialogue process, however, remained suspended for nearly five years in the aftermath of the Kargil conflict. Under the international pressure India resumed the dialogue in January 2004 but it failed to produce any tangible results. In fact India has been making deliberate attempts to scuttle the process using the terrorist incidents in India as a pretext for its foot dragging. The Indian leadership regrettably remains hostage to their internal politics as is evident from the failure of the much hyped recent talks between the two foreign ministers in Islamabad.

President Zardari, therefore, was absolutely spot on to say that the talks failed due to the internal problems of India. The only way the dispute between Pakistan and India can be resolved, is through a dialogue characterised by sincerity of purpose and unqualified recognition of the international obligations concerning the Kashmir issue.

Dilating on the internal situation, the president said that the PPP government was determined to convert the challenges faced by the country into opportunities to extricate the country from the existing quagmire. He also referred to the threats from terrorism and said that his government relished performing under pressure, which was a real test of the leadership. He also snubbed the nationalist elements trying to exploit the water issue and expressed the hope that the plausible solution would be found through consultations with the provincial governments. What the president said is not rhetoric. The PPP led-coalition in the centre has proved equal to the challenges. Its politics of reconciliation and consensus has been a roaring success. The phenomenon of terrorism, which posed an existentialist threat has been contained. The constitution has been restored to its original shape and the way cleared for good governance in the country. Festering issue of distribution of resources has been amicably resolved through the monumental 7th NFC Award. People of Gilgit-Baltistan have been given internal autonomy and a process of reconciliation launched in Balochistan through Aghaz-e-Haqooqe Balochistan initiative.

And above all, due to the economic policies of the government aimed at achieving macroeconomic stability and reducing the fiscal deficit, the GDP registered a 4.1 per cent growth during the year 2009-10 as compared to the dismal showing of 1.2% growth during 2008-09. The International Monetary Fund in its report on the World Economic Outlook has indicated that the economy of Pakistan will grow by four per cent during the current fiscal year and expand to 6% within the next five years.

It has also predicted further reduction in the current account deficit during the next five years due to the measures sculptured by the Pakistani authorities. That assessment is a ranting endorsement of the success of

the economic policies of the present government, despite the ill-effect of the current global recession. The World Bank has also approved a new \$6.2 billion four year programme spanning 2010-13 which manifests an increasing confidence in the future prospect of the Pakistani economy.

What is remarkable about this effort is that the government has not only focused its attention on growth but has also given due attention to the reduction of poverty through an imaginative step known as Benazir Income Support Programme designed to provide financial assistance of Rs1000 per month to the poor families. The move also is a positive step towards women empowerment.

During the fiscal 2008-09 a sum of Rs22 billion was distributed among 1.8 million beneficiaries. In the budget for 2009-10 the allocation was raised to Rs72 billion. Presently the number of beneficiaries of this scheme stands at 2.2 million. This year the allocation has been further increased by Rs4 billion. Yet another revolutionary measure taken under BISP initiative is the launch of Waseela-e-Haq scheme aimed at providing a cash loan of Rs300,000 to deserving families randomly selected through a computerised draw out of the beneficiaries of the BISP.

Both these poverty reducing measures, contrary to the claims of its critics, also have a tremendous potential in boosting the demand for consumer goods and services and helping the growth process in a positive way. In others words, it is an investment to spur demand which is considered to be the basic ingredient of any growth process. The injection of Rs74 billion into the consumer market through these schemes is also likely to have a multiplier effect and increase its impact manifold. This move to tackle poverty is also in consonance with the objectives of the global poverty reduction effort.

Speaking on the occasion of 11th draw of Waseela-e-Haq scheme, the president rightly lamented the lack of continuity of the schemes or projects put in place by an outgoing government, which invariably fell victim to the permeating culture of undoing anything associated with the previous regimes. This leads to the wastage of precious resources and the effort that goes into putting together those policies. That trends need to discourage. Instead of scrapping the policies of the outgoing governments, the focus should be on plugging the loopholes and improving them.