

**Pakistan Perspective**

# The Peace Primer

## Trust and Talk



■ **Gen. Jehangir Karamat**

**T**he primacy of the United States was never in doubt in the post-Cold War world. After Afghanistan and Iraq, the unipolarity of the world and the vast superiority of the United States in all the elements of national power have been sharply emphasised. The United States is not likely to have a rival in the foreseeable future. For South Asian countries, like the rest of the world, the message is clear: conform to international control regimes and cooperate with the United States in addressing its concerns otherwise your sovereignty will not be respected. There is a scramble to forge long term strategic relationships with the United States. For India this has meant a realignment in its relationship with the United States that started soon after the Kargil episode and a tacit acceptance of the United States as a facilitator in Indo-Pakistan bilateral relations. Indian efforts are helped by the relationship with Israel and the war on terror as well as by the lobbying efforts of the Indian-American community. For Pakistan it has meant a change in policy in Afghanistan that was already being considered when 9/11 made it imperative and a falling back on its old allied and cooperative status with the United States. For both, India and Pakistan, the cost of protracted conflict and the economic, political and social benefits of peace have been starkly highlighted.

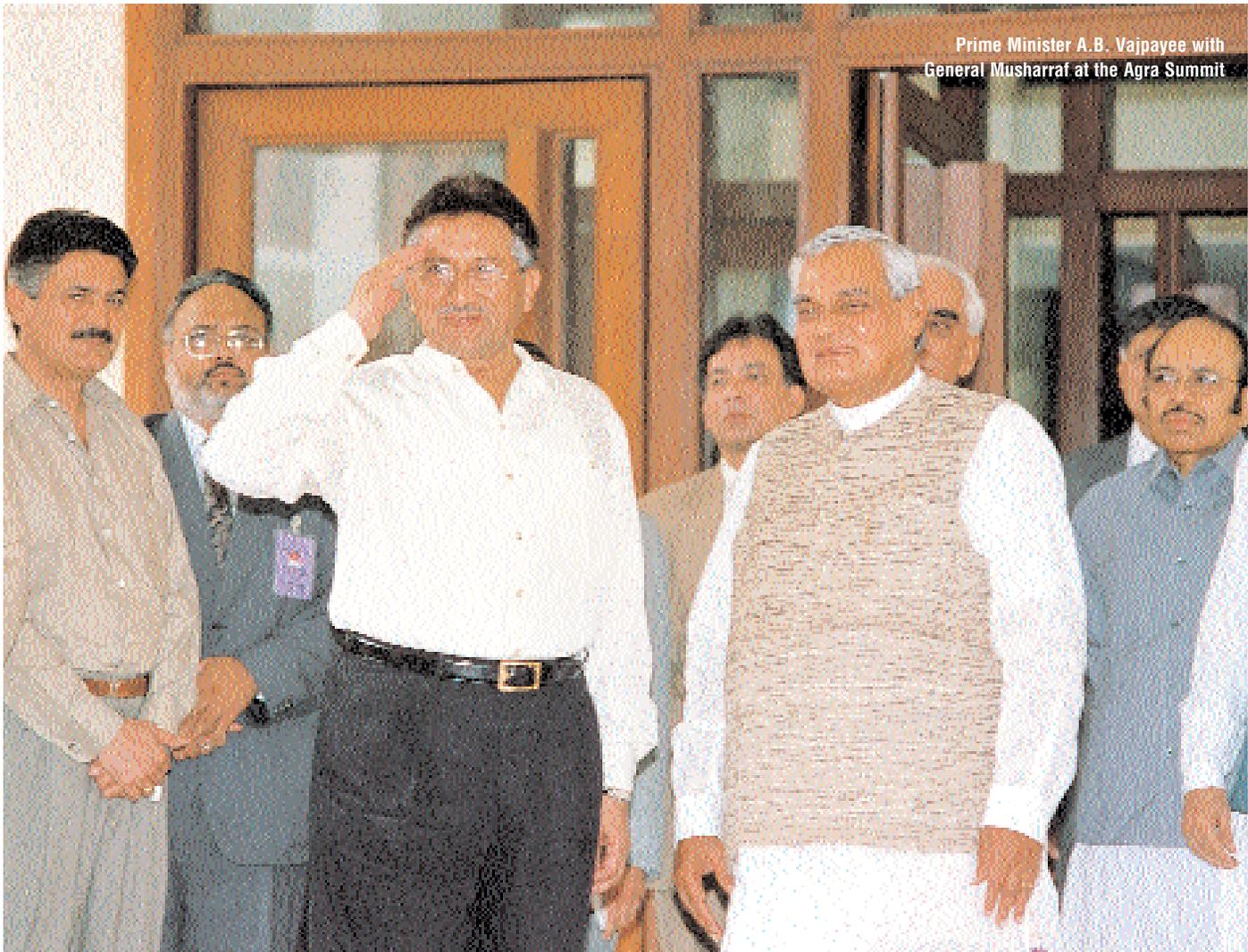
Both India and Pakistan must now look inwards to consolidate politically and economically. The priority has to shift to poverty alleviation and to the large numbers of the socially excluded in their growing populations. India, as a sovereign country, has every right to arm itself but to Pakistan, India's military build-up plans seem non-threat oriented and, therefore, a bid to establish overwhelming strategic superiority. Understanding the futility of an arms race Pakistan seeks selective up-gradation in all spheres to ensure that its deterrence remains credible and its determination not to compromise never wavers. A restraint regime can be established only if there is continuous communication, if negotiation is accepted as the route to conflict resolu-

tion and if India as the biggest South Asian country tempers its policies with reassurance and flexibility. The enormity of recent events and the opportunities that the globalised world offers must not be lost yet again.

It is in this context that Mr Vajpayee's ice-breaker from Srinagar must be seen. It has been unkindly suggested that the overture was under American pressure or to ward off that pressure. There is also a view here that important hardliners in the Indian government are not on board and India does not intend to take the matter any further. The fact that the Indian Prime Minister's statement found immediate resonance (but alas, briefly translated into euphoria) indicates that there is a great desire on both sides of the border to give peace a chance. It would be futile to find fault, to raise suspicions and speculate as to who has the upper hand in the initiative for peace. There should be a moving forward from the point that has been reached; the process of 'normalisation' should continue at a steady pace in small incremental steps till both decide that they can start talks. The immediate, and perhaps the most important effect, has been the reduction of tension and the settling down of the spectre of war between two nuclear capable countries. Non-state actors seeking to disrupt the environment to maintain the status quo that suits them have also realised that this time the political intentions are positive. Nothing in Pakistan's domestic politics should cause a concern in India because these are transient situations and there is firm control over all events.

The one lesson that should be learnt from our previous ventures into talks should be, that an enormous amount of homework needs to be done prior to any dialogue. Talks have to be given a context over a period of time by reaffirming previous agreements, by emphasising and fully implementing all existing confidence building measures, by restoring the normalcy that existed prior to the military stand-off and above all by preparing the people so that they know what to expect. In the past talks have tended to be media events with sky high expectations on both

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Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with General Musharraf at the Agra Summit

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sides that were quickly dashed when the leaders came under pressure and started talking to their domestic audiences rather than each other. A mutual understanding and agreement on this process may be essential in our environment where events can be disruptive and unbridled rhetoric can change the atmosphere.

It would be unproductive to insist on conditions or attitudes or on a public acceptance of guilt or culpability. If the assurances held out are not considered enough in spite of the reality on the ground then mutually agreed verification measures could help in making a determination that can move the process forward. Concerns on both sides will have to be addressed and any effort to use the current environment and outside influences to put one side in the dock will not take us anywhere. There should be a realisation that having improved the environment marginally it is easy to stop forward movement and again slide back into the morass of unending conflict — internal political situations may create such temptations but these will have to be resisted.

Finally we need to consider that when talks do start what will we talk about. It is easy to state and restate each others' positions but this quickly raises brick walls. By now there should not be any

doubt that both India and Pakistan realise that the core issue is Kashmir and that the resolution of this dispute is essential for confrontation to end. There could be agreement on this as a starting point with the commitment that negotiations to consider possible solutions will follow. The other very important issue is the nuclear weapons build-up in both countries. There could be agreement to discuss possible restraint regimes taking each others' security concerns into consideration. This might point the way towards crisis management procedures and nuclear risk reduction measures at some point in the future. The other outstanding issues could also be taken up in tandem so that the whole process starts and remains on a comprehensive note but with the sights clearly fixed on the priority issues. The important thing is not to rush into a summit or expect a miraculous solution in the first meeting — a sense of history should be introduced to give the process depth and sustainability. It is absolutely essential that trust replaces a fear of betrayal because this is what introduces hesitation and doubt — for this there will have to be iron-clad guarantees. •

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