

INTRODUCTION

The Simla Agreement of 1971 commits India and Pakistan to a final settlement between the two countries. A narrow interpretation of the Simla Agreement would mean a final settlement on the political status of Jammu & Kashmir. While this is essential, it is inadequate for a final settlement between India and Pakistan. The scope of conflict between the two countries has now expanded to cover several parts of their own territories, as well as other countries in the South Asian region.

The process of composite dialogue and confidence-building measures, initiated in January 2004, continued in September 2004 and planned until September 2005, offers hope. It is necessary to build on the optimism it has generated. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that superficial euphoria does not ignore subsurface realities. The period of peace process January 2004-March 2005 has so far witnessed about 20 missile tests by India and Pakistan. This period has also seen an expensive shopping spree by the defence ministries of the two countries. Thus, the current peace process is more about talks and less about action. Nevertheless, it has generated hope, which can be a catalyst for a real change. Hope can drive results; not substitute them.

The most difficult challenge is in defining the conflict itself. It can be witnessed in the form of brutality at the partition of 1947, the strife in Jammu & Kashmir in 1948-49, the wars of 1965 and 1971, the Kargil war of 1999, low intensity violence in Punjab in the 1980s, in Jammu & Kashmir since the late 1980s and in the Indian north-east since the 1990s. At the beginning of 2005, the theatre of conflict stands expanded to Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The conflict extends beyond its violent expression. It is reflected in the opportunity lost in business, education, culture and comprehensive regional cooperation. It is mirrored in the loss of innocence of the youth and bitter memories of the old.

The Pakistani elite considers self-determination of the Kashmiris as the core issue of the conflict. The Indian public opinion considers terrorism as the core issue. The Pakistani argument focused on Jammu & Kashmir fails to explain why Bangladesh and Balochistan, as well as Punjab and Nepal, should be victims of violence. The Indian thesis concentrating on terrorism ignores the fact that three India-Pakistan wars took place prior to 1989, before terrorism was introduced in the Jammu & Kashmir valley.

Whether we like it or not, the core issue between India and Pakistan is a pathological deficit of trust. It surfaced in the form of disputes over Rann of Kutch in the 1960s, Bangladesh in 1971, Punjab in the 1980s, Jammu & Kashmir in the 1990s, and perhaps Assam and Balochistan around 2005 and probably Indus River waters around 2010. So long as the deficit is not covered by trust and mutual conviction in bilateral relations, there will be myriad excuses to light the fires.

Whatever the excuse, the primary reason for the most serious violence in the history of the subcontinent will be control over water resources in the second half of the decade. Ironically, this may happen when India and Pakistan should be celebrating the golden jubilee of the Indus Water Treaty signed in 1960. So far the treaty has endured the wars of 1965, 1971 and 1999. Unfortunately, India and Pakistan are heading towards the worst war ever despite the treaty.

And, of course, there is the issue of Jammu & Kashmir. It is more significant than others because it has persisted ever since Independence while each of the other issues lasted for a decade or less. It is also easier to resolve if India and Pakistan decide that they do not need an issue to carry on with confrontation to justify the need of nationhood in one case and secular character of the society in the other to define their respective identities.

The search for the final settlement between India and Pakistan must therefore begin with their respective identity crisis. The conflict will go on if the two countries look back at the events of the eighth, eleventh, sixteenth and twentieth centuries to seek their origins. They will be able to arrive at the final settlement if the two states, and all of us, over 1.2 billion people of the two countries, commit to redefine ourselves in terms of the twenty-first century.