

**Opinion**

**Initiative for Peace in Kashmir**

On 5<sup>th</sup> April 2001, the Indian Government nominated the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr. K.C. Pant as its emissary to hold a broad-based dialogue with all Kashmiri groups, including those who do not favour the idea of a negotiated settlement of the issue or the locals who have taken up arms. The Central government in New Delhi in its communiqué spelled out its agenda as “Peace and how it may be attained in the troubled state”, and said: “The doors are open for the Hurriyat to join the talks. The doors are also not closed for Kashmiri organisations, which are currently engaged in militancy in the state but are desirous of peace”. It called upon all right thinking people in Jammu and Kashmir “to join hands and march purposefully in the quest of peace that has eluded them for the last 12 years.” The Central Government also reiterated its stand that it was ready to reciprocated Pakistan’s offer of dialogue “in accordance with the Shimla Agreement and the spirit of Lahore declaration”, provided it curbed cross-border terrorism and put an end to the vicious anti-India propaganda.

In the wake of this latest peace offer from the side of the Indian Government, the local Urdu press in Kashmir came out with their reactions to the peace process on the anvil. We are reproducing below some extracts of the reactions from the two popular Urdu news papers (*Chattan and Srinagar Times*) from the valley of Kashmir.

**New Delhi’s Peace Overtures**  
***Agenda of the Negotiations***

“On 5<sup>th</sup> April the Indian government, as was expected, made a new move in the political chess board, by announcing its readiness to talk to all ‘peace-loving’ people of Kashmir. According to the announcement, the agenda of negotiations is ‘ensuring peace in the disturbed state’ and the well known diplomat-cum-politician Mr. K.C. Pant will represent the government. The communiqué further says that the government is prepared for unconditional talks with all those elements, who are ready to give up violence and participate in deliberations. Moreover, besides Hurriyat Conference and other political parties, non-official NGOs and important social and religious personages can also participate. Further, it expresses the government’s desire to enter into bilateral discussion with Pakistan in the spirit of Lahore Declaration and Simla Agreement. The government expects that Pakistan will play a positive role in stopping cross-border terrorism, while Hurriyat Conference and militant outfits have been invited to participate in unconditional talks. The Hurriyat Conference has insisted that talks should be unconditional. Since the government has announced negotiations in order to ensure peace, it is the Hurriyat Conference’s duty to realize that any pre-conditions from their side will expose inconsistency on their part. So the doors are open for them, even for militant outfits who want peace, adds the statement.”

***Hurriyat’s response not encouraging***

“Meanwhile, the Hurriyat Conference has not rejected the offer, but shown their indifference, and called it another attempt at procrastinating and delaying matters. According to Hurriyat, bringing in the ‘crowd’ for – negotiations means Delhi’s approach is not serious and not even sincere. The Hurriyat Chairman has called the present offer an effort at presenting the old in a new manner and has suggested that New Delhi should come forward with a formula for meaningful talks. According to him, negotiations need not be held for the sake of negotiations, because it will serve no purpose. Hurriyat Conference has also to talk to Pakistan, side by side says the Chairman. This is possible only if the Hurriyat is allowed to visit Pakistan. But Delhi has given a new turn to the situation by inviting Hurriyat and militants for talks, without involving Pakistan. Another senior Hurriyat leader, Mr. Lone said that if India was not prepared to take the requisite steps after the cease-fire, the Hurriyat was also not prepared to surrender. He wanted to know what prevented Indian government from issuing passports, when Indian government would be benefited either way, whether the Pakistan visit was a success or a failure. The Hizb, as usual rejected the offer saying that any negotiations not based on tripartite strategy, and not including Pakistan, would be fruitless, serving no purpose”.

“Knowledgeable sources say that this latest announcement after unilateral cease-fire, is a well thought of plan, which has been made after considering the pros and cons,. Whatever the objectives or intentions, by nominating K.C. Pant as its representative and extending an offer of talks, the Central Government has thrown the ball into the Kashmiri leadership’s court. Only time will tell how well the Hurriyat Conference and other units, play their card. Mr. Pant is not only a well-known politician but an experienced diplomat. He has all the qualities that a successful diplomat should have. He can talk for hours and also has the patience to listen for hours.”

### ***Hurriyat in a dilemma***

“The observers say that whatever turn the situation might take on the (political) front, or whatever the damage that may be incurred at the international level, the Hurriyat lacks a leader who can match Mr. K.C. Pant. The Hurriyat Conference has already suggested bilateral talks in a triangular manner, instead of direct tripartite negotiations. The Indian Government has expressed its willingness to talk to Kashmiri leadership and simultaneously shown its willingness to have bilateral talks with Pakistan in accordance with Simla Agreement and Lahore declaration, and put only an ‘unimportant’ condition. Since, the Indian government has invited the Hurriyat for talks, because of Pakistan government’s insistence, and also accepted Gen. Musharraf’s offer of talks, anytime, anywhere, on any level; Pakistan should take the first step towards peace by stopping assistance to Jihadi’s and preventing their infiltration into the state. Whatever the background may be India has fulfilled both the demands of the world opinion, i.e. talking to Kashmiri leaders as well as to Pakistan.”

“Analysts say that not to talk of recognizing Hurriyat as a representative body of Kashmir in tripartite talks, even in bilateral talks, it has been given the status of a disgruntled group, at best first among equals. The Hurriyat’s ranks are not united. Who is in better know of the serious differences within Hurriyat than New Delhi? Hurriyat’s problem is that they cannot reject or counter the Indian argument that doors of negotiations can not be kept open only for Hurriyat but other units/groups also have to be taken care of. Both the countries find it difficult to give up their claims. Some quarters say that not only thinkers, but the people of the two countries. India and

Pakistan also feel that the sooner they get rid of Kashmir conflict the better it is. The policy makers of the two countries are aware that no military or political solution of Kashmir conflict, that can fulfil the strategic needs of the two countries, is possible in near future. Kashmir may be a white elephant for India. But, the emotional upsurge in the country at the time of Kargil war, has made it clear that India can not retain its sovereignty, if it gives up Kashmir or hands it over to Pakistan. The same is true of Pakistan. Nawaz Sharief, who enjoyed a three-fourth majority in the Parliament, was reduced to zero from being a hero after Kargil, even US couldn't save him. In such circumstances, when both the parties can neither fight a war nor give up their claims, who bothers if Kashmiris die. They can not take any step that can jeopardize their sovereignty. So, negotiations can at least while away some time, and help in reaching some secret understanding. The observers say that it is the selfish and insincere politics of the Kashmiri leaders that has made a mess of the whole situation. The 'leaders' are fighting not on behalf of the Kashmiri people, but for India or Pakistan, and that too in the land of Kashmir. That is why it has not been possible to decide who the real leader of the people is, who can claim to be their true representative. Every Kashmiri leader is in himself a political party. In this messy situation, there is no relief or joy for Kashmir".

*(The weekly Chattan, 9-15 April, 2001)*

### **K.C. Pant's Task Delicate and Complicated**

#### ***The move-not fully comprehensible***

"The Central Government's decision to hold talks with the political parties of J&K seems to be incomprehensible to many quarters. The objective of the initiation of negotiations has been declared to be 'peace', and it has been said that talks would be held with those groups who are interested in restoring peace to the valley. The government is aware that peace has been disturbed and the state has been in a state of turmoil because of the militancy. As long as the militancy continues, it is not possible to ensure peace. In spite of this, the intention of holding talks with political groups seems to be beyond comprehension. There is plethora of political parties in J&K, some parties have an historical character, and can play a meaningful role in the politics of the state, because of their fifty years' association with the politics of the state. With the beginning of militancy in the state, political parties became silent. In presence of the gun, all political activities were suspended. The real problem of Kashmir is that of the gun. Can holding talks with political parties and ignoring the gun-wielding groups help in restoring peace and in creating an atmosphere where all parties can carry on their activities? All political parties of the state, whatever their colour or nature, realize that peace is the first priority. But efforts to secure peace after ignoring the very outfits that were responsible for this turmoil, are beyond comprehension."

#### ***Negotiations can help in knowing the views of the people***

"The initiative taken by the Central Government, of holding negotiations with political groups, is a serious and significant move. The person entrusted with the task, enjoys the rank of a minister. The talks with the political parties are being held at a high level. It is difficult to say what is the real objective of the Central Government. But what is evident is that the government wants to know the collective view of the people by talking to all political groups instead of one party and to find out the point of agreement, if any, between different political outfits."

“The political parties, active in the state have their separate policies. There are parties that believe in secularism, and also those that are non-secular, parties that want complete integration with the country, parties that want Kashmir to retain its independent identity. There is Hurriyat Conference and others, who have their own points of view. When the negotiations begin, it will be possible to know what approach the Central Government is adopting in these talks, and which parties is it ready to talk to. Talks with the militant outfit Hizb came to an abrupt end in the first instance. After talks begin, it will be known which parties are coming forward for talks. During the recent years many new political parties have come into existence. Many former militant commanders have given up gun and started their political outfits. Kashmiri Pandits also have formed many groups. Some non-political groups have also expressed their desire to participate in these deliberations. After a formal announcement regarding the commencement of talks is made, it will be possible to know about the attitude and approach of various groups. The Hurriyat Conference is calling its executive meeting to discuss the issue, though it said that it would be a waste of time. The Hurriyat leaders were ready for talks right from the day of their release from detention. They were waiting for a formal invitation. This time, under K.C. Pant’s leadership, there will perhaps be open invitations to the political groups, and there are no pre-conditions for talks.”

***The offer, not without merits***

“Even if this initiative of the central government, whose objective/agenda is peace, is not successful, it will be possible to know which way the current of the public opinion flows. Though this offer is a little unique, yet it will bring out the feelings and desires of different groups. It can reflect regional feelings and class attitudes. It is to be seen whether the negotiations are begun with a positive feeling or a negative objective. Though hopes of peace are not very bright, but this initiative can create a disturbance, a sensation. Mr. Pant’s mission is delicate, important as well complicated.”

***(Srinagar Times, 8 April 2001)***

*The translations from Urdu have been rendered by J.L. Raina.*