

### Time for Peace-building

The political scenario in Kashmir is changing. The sense of despair that clouded the minds of Kashmiris during the past years of turmoil is slowly yielding grounds to a feeling of hope. The internal as well as international situation is changing for the better. The growing consensus on rejecting violence as a mode of political resistance is determining the contours of politics everywhere. Kashmiris are no exception. They have had enough of turmoil. They have realised that the years of turmoil are like blank pages in the book of history of Kashmir; that the gun of the militant gave rise to the gun of the security forces and unleashed a vicious cycle of violence that has held an entire community hostages for almost 13 long years. They are slowly but surely stepping out of their cocoons of self-isolation and redeeming their commitment to peace.

The Kashmiri mindset is changing. The approach of the central government in New Delhi is changing too. The correlation between these changes is not difficult to establish. The willingness of the establishment to walk an extra mile in ensuring popular participation in the political process in Kashmir has found a sympathetic chord in the hearts of the Kashmiris. The coming elections have emerged as the point of reference for all concerned observers within Kashmir and outside.

At another level, the culture of suspicion, of fear and distrust is being replaced by a culture of openness. If one feels the pulse of the people correctly, as can be gauged from the reports in the local media, they have expressed their readiness to put the years of distrust behind, to consign them to history and start afresh. The people standing in the way of a smooth peaceful transition from militancy to meaningful popular participation have also realised that their policy of isolation will pay no more. Does not this explain why the Jamait decided not to urge the people not to vote in the coming elections. This realisation is equally perceptible in the desperate threats being issued from across the border that anybody participating the elections will be treated severely by the mujahideen. But for the first time during all these years of militancy, the people appear ready to face the challenge. There is a groundswell of opinion against adopting violent methods of resistance. The spirit of democracy is in. Terrorism is out.

This is not to say, however, that the challenges have disappeared into thin air. They are very much there. The cross-border infiltration is a regular phenomenon. The brutalization of violence indulged in by the alien forces of terror has the capacity to shut out sanity once again. The assurance from Pakistan not to meddle in Kashmir is still not forthcoming. The blueprint for going about the next elections in Kashmir from the New Delhi side is yet to take final shape. The doles or packages are yet to be decided—autonomy, neutral observers, trifurcation etc. etc. These challenges could alter the scenario, could wipe away all good work done until now.

It is time therefore on the part of the central administration to take due note of the political aspiration of the people, their fervent hope for a peaceful transition from a gun infested socio-political structure to an acceptable dispensation selected through ballot. It is time for peace-building. Such opportunities come rarely in history. Wisdom consists in seizing the opportunity and going the whole hog to ensure that the Kashmiris yearning for peace are gifted with a system of governance they can freely choose, they can relate to. They deserve it.”

