

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir has been afflicted by the Pakistani sponsored twin scourge of militant violence and civil disruptions for the last twenty two years. These have taken a very heavy toll of over forty thousand lives, and thousands more maimed and injured. The disturbed conditions also resulted in immeasurable loss to the economy of the state, individual and collective financial sufferings, and substantial destruction of the infrastructure. Apart from the apparent loss of huge proportions, the intangible mental distress, feeling of despair and psychological pressure have been of enormous magnitude. This is a huge loss by any standard and India rightly perceives being engaged in a proxy war unleashed by Pakistan in J&K, and now even beyond.

During the last two decades, at least three times, it appeared that the tormented soul of Kashmir was emerging out of the thick fog of gloom and despair. The end of turmoil, agony and suffering seemed in sight. The first time it happened was in the aftermath of the successfully held assembly elections in 1996, which brought the National Conference to power in the state with not only two third majority in the Assembly, but also as the single largest entity in all the three regions of J&K. It was with out any doubt a massive and clear mandate from a distraught and beleaguered people for restoration of normalcy and return of peace. But the political and administrative hierarchies failed to put their act together to deliver the desired results. Unfortunately, a golden opportunity of favourable circumstances and a ground swell of public support was lost.

The military adventure of Pakistan in Kargil during the summer of 1999 put the clock of recovery in the state back; as to meet the new threat effectively, the successful counter insurgency deployment of the forces in the Valley was considerably diluted. This opportunity was fully exploited by Pakistan and its operators to regroup and replenish the depleting ranks and resources of the terror apparatus. The terrorist violence escalated so steeply that in the year 2001 the number of militants killed and losses of the security forces were highest since the beginning of militancy.

The second round of favourable conditions prevailed after the 2002 Assembly elections, when the inclusive political policies and visible thrust on the development process by the new coalition government was coupled with considerably enhanced capacity of the security forces to counter the trans-border movement, due to remarkably constructed fencing all along the difficult, rugged and mountainous terrain of over 750 kilometers of the Line of Control. The next propitious opportunity arose with the unexpectedly impressive participation of the people of the state, including the Valley, in the 2008 Assembly elections held in the aftermath of the wide spread disturbances in Jammu and Kashmir regions due to land controversy related to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board.

However both times the separatist elements, underground as well as over ground – armed as well as unarmed, and their mentors across the border, proved more than a match for restorers of normalcy, peace and tranquility, and outwitted the policy makers and implementing agencies of the centre and the state. The other side has, it needs to be acknowledged, shepherded and preserved their resources, scouted for exploitable loop holes, waited for the right opportunity to present itself and when the time came, very adroitly and skillfully took advantage of every small opening. The ISI has been constantly changing and evolving its tactics according to the ground situation in the state and to ensure optimum utilisation of the resources available, along with predicable and possible collateral support.

Any objective analysis of the militancy in the state would indicate towards 2003 as a watershed year. The most significant impact on the counter-insurgency operations was the erection of fence along the Line of Control. It was indeed a very commendable achievement of the Army which managed to complete over 750 kilometers of this major wire obstacle through extremely difficult mountainous terrain, in a short period of almost one year. This, coupled with improved surveillance equipment and better border management, brought down the level of infiltration quite substantially. For the first time since 1990 the number of infiltrators became less than attrition in the ranks of militants. This trend has continued every year since then, making the border fencing as an extremely effective measure against the cross – border terrorism. The efforts of the security forces were complimented by a very visible and perceptible increase in the developmental efforts of the state government and enhanced cooperation between civil administration and the forces at all levels – resulting in almost seamless synergy in the anti militancy endeavors.

At the political level the state government reached out to Jammu and Ladakh regions on one hand, on the other the “healing touch” policy adopted by it assuaged the feeling of hurt and distress and helped calm the frayed nerves of the people of Valley. Thus faced with a shrinking local support base and hemmed between unrelenting pressure of the security forces and depletion in the ranks, the militants and their handlers were forced to take stock of the adverse situation and reconsider their options. Instead of the earlier vision of expanding the arc of operations and influence, the emphasis shifted to secure safety of the existing assets while undertaking scattered and high visibility strikes with a view to register their continued presence and garner ample media attention. This was also the time when under pressure from the United States and the peace efforts initiated by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Pakistan President General Pervez Mushrraf had promised to rein in the terror outfits. Efforts of the ISI were also circumscribed by this new stance of their military chief and head of the state. This continued for the next over two years with security forces getting an increasing edge over the terrorist elements. The most visible incident during this period was the militant suicidal strike on the Tourist Reception Centre Srinagar on 6th April 2005, just a day before the Prime Minister flagged off the first bus on the newly opened Srinagar – Muzaffarabad route.

2006 - 2007: The Sex Scandal

Having lost the capacity to pose any serious challenge to the security apparatus and, probably, alarmed by the forthcoming second Round Table Conference on Kashmir, chaired by the Prime Minister himself at Srinagar on 24th and 25th May 2006, the militants struck twice during the month. At two different places in Udhampur and Doda districts of Jammu region, 28 persons of minority community were killed on 1st May. An audacious fidayeen attack was made on a public meeting to be addressed by the Chief Minister in Srinagar on 21st May. Due to some confusion the

militants, who had gained access to the venue dressed as police personnel, opened fire before the arrival of the Chief Minister killing couple of civilians and causing injuries to many. The IGP of Kashmir Range was also seriously injured in this episode. This time the militants had overreached, in targeting the chief executive of the state and almost killing the top ranking police officer of the Kashmir division. Shaken to the core by the magnitude of the security lapse, the state police went after the militants and their infrastructure like never before, particularly focussing on defanging the capacity of the terrorist groups to mount suicidal attacks. Already feeling the loss of depletion in the ranks, the aggressive posture of the police and other security forces severely curtailed the militant outfits' capabilities to inflict serious damage to the state structures through armed actions. A search for softer alternatives had begun.

Literally clutching at the straws, the separatist network exploited to the hilt an ongoing public exposure which had caused embarrassment to some important state functionaries. The infamous sex scandal came to light in the month of April 2006 with the circulation of nude picture of a girl on the mobiles phones in Srinagar. This became tip of an iceberg leading to surfacing of a full fledged flesh trade racket. The rumour mills worked overtime alleging the involvement of former ministers, legislators and senior officers in sexually exploiting women for cash or favours. Anybody mentioned by the kingpin of the racket and her half a dozen accomplices was painted black and denounced as a lecherous offender of the worst kind. Unsurprisingly all the names mentioned in the court or appearing in the public domain, at regular intervals, were of highly placed individuals with known nationalist credentials.

For some obscure reasons, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court took up the case as a Public Interest Litigation on its own accord and made the High Court Bar Association, an overtly and known separatist organisation, as a party. The Bar in collaboration with overground and underground separatist elements had a field day, with the media gleefully joining in for its own reasons, running down, denigrating and reviling the entire state system and machinery. Alleged individual transgressions, which are yet to be proved after judicial intervention, were loudly proclaimed as part of a pre-planned and well determined conspiracy of "pro-India elements" to dishonour the Kashmiri womanhood.

Alarmed by the high pitched media hype and the street lung power displayed in the expected localities of Srinagar, the state government handed over the case to CBI. The state High Court regularly monitored status and progress of the CBI enquiry. The CBI arrested and charge sheeted almost two scores of high profile persons. The accused, finding the entire Bar hostile and vocally prejudiced, approached the Supreme Court for transferring the case outside J&K. Their plea was accepted and the case was shifted to a court in Chandigarh, where it is still sub-judice. With this, the CBI closed the case against others for lack of evidence.

The terror masterminds and separatist networks had hit a propaganda goldmine. Having lost the capacity to engineer effective, sustained armed incidents, they had successfully utilised state resources and instruments against some of its own important functionaries, tarnishing their professional standings and personal images beyond repair. Disruption of day to day life, denigrating the state organs and disregarding law and order machinery was to be the future strategy. Also till another and more important issue did not become available, the current matter was to be stretched to the possible extent and what could be more expedient than to level charges against some other important individuals. Help came in the form of another judicial intervention.

Justice Bashir Ahmad Kirmani of the J&K High Court in his order on 8th October 2006 asked the CBI and Chief Judicial Magistrate Srinagar to reopen the closed case and reconsider available material against more than a score of high profile political and official functionaries, including a cabinet minister, Chairman of the J&K Bank and a former Vigilance Commissioner. All those mentioned in the 119 page order appeared to have been virtually condemned unheard. Part of it made a lyrical reading, "....When ministers misbehave, legislators break law, civil servants become uncivil and police officers plunder....". The Honourable Justice probably did not consider the advice tendered by Francis Bacon in his celebrated work "Of Judicature", in the early seventeenth century, which included "....Judges ought to be more learned than witty, more reverend than plausible, and more advised than confident....Judges must beware of hard constructions, and strained inferences; for there is no worse torture than the torture of laws; especially in case of laws penal, they ought to have care that that which was meant for terror be not turned into rigour...". Or was His Lordship playing to the gallery. In that case who were the applauding audience?

While the separatists and their supporters were probably savouring the new found avenues, the security and law and order establishments had not taken due notice of this development and comprehended its full import and future potential for mischief. The commanders at all levels were smugly citing statistics to emphasise that the level of militancy and violence had come down as compared to the previous year or the tenure of their predecessors. There was no information available, at least in the public domain, to suggest that the government either at the centre or in the state was aware of the newly tested mischief capacity of the overground separatists. Hence, no plans were made or new strategy formulated to neutralise any future efforts to undermine the state structures.

2008: Shrine Board Land Row

The state government provided an ample opportunity to the mischief makers during the summer of 2008, in what came to be known as the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board land allotment issue. It all started on 20th May 2008 when the state cabinet approved diversion of 39.88 hectares of forest land to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board at Baltal and Domel, in Ganderbal district of central Kashmir. This set in motion a series of incidents which, over the next three months, not only gave a serious setback to the progress towards normalcy but almost tore apart the proud secular fabric of the state.

The earliest reactions appeared in the local press voicing concern about the impact of this step on the fragile ecology of the area. The separatists picked up the refrain and launched an agitation against the move giving it emotional, political and communal twist. As if on a cue, several separatist outfits closed their wide differences, which had continued for years, to join hands and a joint Action Committee on Land Transfer was formed to launch a coordinated agitation across the Valley. This movement turned violent towards middle of June. To make matters worse for the coalition government the PDP, whose representatives in the cabinet had not only been a party to the decision but also held the important portfolios of Deputy Chief Minister as well as Forest Minister, publically dissociated itself

and demanded revocation of the land allotment. In a bid to cool down tempers and to save the coalition government, the newly joined Governor NN Vohra, who was also Chairman of the Shrine Board, withdrew its request of land to the state government following which the contentious order was withdrawn on 1st July. This had an unprecedented reaction in Jammu where the move was interpreted as an abject surrender to the separatist and communal elements. Jammu erupted like never before, with widespread agitations, at times turning violent, and anti government demonstrations spearheaded by BJP dominated Shri Amarnath Sangharsh Samiti comprising over 30 organisations.

All this resulted in the fall of the coalition government on 7th July followed by imposition of the Governors Rule. The Jammu agitation re-ignited the flare-up in Kashmir, and both provinces witnessed peak disturbances during the month of August. Normalcy started returning only after the state administration was able to resolve the whole issue in negotiations with the Sangharsh Samiti. Without going into the merits or otherwise of the root cause of the issue, it became very clear that the mainstream political leadership was woefully unable to gauge the susceptibilities of the people of the two regions, could not comprehend the designs and capacity of the separatists networks to foment trouble and exhibited opportunism to secure short term gains.

The turmoil which was engineered over an apparently trivial issue had served the desired purpose of the perpetrators; uniting the disparate overground separatist outfits, anti - India slogans were probably loudest in the last 18 years and brought Syed Ali Shah Geelani back into the reckoning as an important focal and rallying point. On the other hand some incidents during the agitation in Jammu dented the secular image of the region - its greatest strength in the post Independence era. And for the first time one could discern fault lines between the Hindu and Muslim majority areas of the division. These developments in the two regions would have gladdened the hearts of the terror groups and their supporters. The state government had scored a self goal; worse, it had shot itself in the foot.

The separatists and their support structure had found a new tool and they effectively used it against the state systems by bringing life to a grinding halt for most of the summer in the nerve centre and the summer capital of the state, Srinagar, and few other towns. With situational modifications the act could be replicated in the coming years. The script of disruption and disturbances was re-enacted during the next two summers also with agitators dislocating the normal life, causing difficulties and misery to the people and huge loss to the state economy. The government, police and para - military forces were most of the time on their back foot and acting in a reactive mode. The price of not reading the developing game plan, absence of anticipatory actions and preventive measures turned out to be heavy, and not merely in financial terms.

2009: Shopian Women's Death

Elections to the state assembly were conducted under the Governor's Rule, in seven phases from 17th November to 24th December 2008. Consequently, a coalition government of National Conference and Congress, headed by Omar Abdullah was formed in the first week of January 2009. The spirited campaign and impressive participation of voters exceeded all forecasts and surprised political analysts. It would be interesting to make a comparison between the three assembly elections held in 1996, 2002 and 2008. The polling percentages in these were 53.92, 43.70 and 61.47 respectively. Similarly the number of contestants per assembly seat was 6.26, 8.09 and 15.56. Such huge involvement of the people in the electoral process was the most authentic proof that the area of influence and the ideological support base of the terror groups and their supporters were indeed very limited.

The new government soon after its move to the summer capital Srinagar in May came to face a situation which snowballed into a crisis. On 29th May night Shakeel Ahangar reported to Shopian police that his wife Nelofer aged 22 years and sister Asiya aged 17 years had not returned home from their orchard across Ranbiara Nallah. A search led to recovery next morning of dead bodies of the two ladies from the Nallah. The burial proceedings were taken over by a separatist leader alleging rape and murder by security forces. A call for "Shopian Chalo" and Kashmir Bandh was given by APHC (Geelani) for 1st June. Facts were twisted and orchestrated through media which led to a public perception that the women had been gang raped by security forces and that Police was shielding them. Separatists from different camps, the Bar Association and even the mainstream opposition found in the incident an opportunity to attack the Government and the security forces/police. Hartal call was extended till 5th June and APHC (G) gave a week long programme beginning from call for "Shopian Chalo" on 8th June. The agitation and clashes with police / CRPF continued for a couple of months.

State Government constituted a judicial enquiry into the incident to address the public outcry. Special investigation was ordered under a DIG, which was later supervised by an IGP on the directions of the High Court. With no break through to link the crime to the security forces, the axe fell on the police officers including the district SP and a Deputy SP who were alleged as perpetrators of the crime or involved in cover up. They were arrested and interrogated and remained in custody for over a month before getting released on bail. They became victims of a design to foment trouble by separatists and other vested interests to keep the pot boiling and not allow return of peace. The investigation of the case was handed over to the CBI on 17th September. The CBI based on forensic evidence concluded that the death of two women was a case of "accidental drowning". The post mortem reports were found to have been manipulated. Swabs were not taken from the bodies of the deceased as was revealed through DNA analysis. The concerned doctor confessed having taken swabs from gloves used to examine other patients. Hymen of Asiya was found intact. The police officers arrested earlier were not found by CBI to be in any way involved in the crime or its alleged cover up. The case is under trial in the court of CJM Srinagar since December 2009. Another summer in Kashmir had been disturbed and thrown into disorder. Compare this with the stunning silence over the murder of two young sisters of Sopore, Arifa and Akhtar, by the militants on 31st January 2011.

2010: The Stone Pelters

The phenomenon of disturbances and disruption was repeated again in 2010, almost immediately after seat of the government moved to Srinagar for the six months of summer in May. The tempo of demonstrations and clashes with police and the CRPF started building-up in the down town localities of Srinagar after a 17 year old boy Tufail Mattoo got killed by a tear gas shell fired by the police to control a rioting crowd. This incident was used to trigger a series of

protests in Srinagar and Baramulla, which followed a set pattern. A gathering of young people, mostly in their teens and early twenties, would defy prohibitory or curfew orders, indulge in stone throwing, arson, damaging and burning government property and escalate violence to a level that would leave the police and CRPF no alternative but to resort to lathi charge, lob tear gas shells and in some cases open fire.

For almost five months the cities of Srinagar and Baramulla along with Anantnag and Sopore were rocked by stone throwing youth resulting in clashes with police / CRPF and casualties, with further spiralling effect. The two months of July and August were particularly distressing. According to a Frontline story, "In just six days, from July 30 to August 4, the situation took a turn for the worse as a large number of public and private property was destroyed. In the wave of anger that consumed the Valley, nine police stations, police posts and SOG (special operations group) camps, eight government vehicles and one coach of a train, one railway station, two houses of political activists and 13 government offices were destroyed."1 Toll during the summer disturbances, over a hundred deaths, was heavy and unfortunate.

Stone throwing is nothing new in the Valley and Law and Order authorities had effectively dealt with it two years ago during the Amarnath Land agitation. The police, at least in some of the disturbed areas, abdicated authority. Reportedly, a few of the Srinagar SHO's avoided going to the troubled spots. Morale of the State Police, otherwise a very fine force, was dented with steadily mounting casualties in its ranks, lack of effective command, clear directions and inspiring leadership from the top.

Inability to ensure regular attendance in the offices and curb disenchantment among the employees, particularly in the capital city, and virtual breakdown of the functioning of the Executive Magistracy and its synergy with the police further highlighted inefficacy of the state apparatus. There were also reports of lack of coordination and absence of harmony between the top echelons of Civil, Police, CPMF and the Army.

The elements inimical to the interests of the state and the nation could not have asked for more. Although the disruptions were restricted to Srinagar and few other towns of the Valley, the developing situation had all the potential of spreading to other areas of Kashmir. That it did not happen is only because of the fact that a vast majority of the population, outside the pools of influence of the separatists in downtown Srinagar and some urban areas, is in favour of leading a normal and peaceful life. The credit for localising and containing the disturbances belongs fully to the people of the Valley and not to any sagacious political initiative or imaginative and competent administrative handling.

Prognosis

The focal design and modus-operandi of the controlling apparatus of the stone pelters was very aptly and succinctly described by the noted strategic analyst K Subrahmanyam as, "All it requires is some 39 - 40 trained dedicated jihadi terrorists introduced in each town as sleeper cells over the years with enough resources at their disposal. They get embedded in the stone-throwing crowds and direct and manipulate their operations. They are in a position to use the separatists who are in a small minority but in sufficient numbers to provide such jihadis logistic and other backing. Their aim is not to get "azadi" or jobs for young men but to create chaos in the Valley and rebut the Indian claim that constitutional democracy prevails in Kashmir under a government elected in a free and fair poll"2.

This shift from the armed insurrection of the early nineties to the softer options of street protests and demonstrations was almost forced on the ISI due to external and internal developments. This transformation was cunningly conceived and smartly carried out, changing tactics in accordance with the developing situation and, wherever and to the extent possible, using the strength as also means of the adversary to cause damage. Endeavours of the ISI to continue high pitch terrorist activities in J&K received a serious jolt with the erection of border fence along the LOC and upgraded border surveillance in 2003. With this the trans - border movement became so much more difficult and the rate of attrition in the militant ranks higher than the possible replenishment. This inverse ratio, continuing for the last seven years, has caused severe dent in their capacity, and even willingness of the cadres, to pose a challenge to the security forces. Particularly in the affected districts of Jammu division the presence of militants can now be counted on finger tips. In Valley also their number is constantly on the decline.

This setback on the ground was compounded by beginning of the Composite Dialogue between India and Pakistan in January 2004 and consequent scaling down of General Musharraf's support to the terror network and the ISI, which was further circumscribed by considerable and persistent international pressure on Pakistan following the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai. Thus faced with depleting ranks in the field, crunch of resources, increasing pressure of the Indian security forces and reduced support from the highest quarters, the ISI probably had no alternative but to refashion its strategy and depend more on the non - combatant local cadres and their supporters in order to remain meaningful agent of disturbances and disruption in J&K. This is the conceptual framework and parameters within which the ISI, different terror outfits, the overground separatists and their supporters appear to have been operating in unison, and with considerable success, during the last five years. Large scale protest have been generated leading to clashes with the police and CRPF resulting in loss of life, injuries and damage to property, leading to cyclic repetitions carefully timed to last the summer season with a view to garner optimum media coverage and also to take advantage of the comfortable weather conditions. If these elements have their way, they would like to continue this trend summer after summer till circumstances become favourable, from their point of view, to embark on a more direct and adventurous course. The summer of 2011 is not going to be an exception.

2011: Likely Scenario and Remedial Measures

The scenario of last five years indicates towards inevitability of the mischief makers trying to create trouble during the coming summer months. These elements do not have to stick to any fixed time schedule or play by a given script. They would wait for an opportunity, an opening or a slip by the administration, police or security forces or happening of a triggering event. Anything to spark a few protest demonstrations is good enough to generate clashes with the law enforcing agencies; then escalating these to firing of tear gas shells and bullets, hoping the resultant damage would in turn generate a blow-back effect acquiring a critical mass. As the mode and momentum of the disturbances can not be predicted in advance, therefore, the preparedness of the state government to deal with such eventuality cannot be

based on any single scenario. Whispers are already making rounds in Srinagar saying *khoon ka badla june* (revenge of blood in June), indicating that if no new issue is on the anvil then last year's casualties would be resurrected for agitation. There is also a talk of attempting Cairo's Tahrir Square type sit-in at Lal Chowk Srinagar. It could be any other matter ranging from the death sentence of Afzal Guru to Ali Shah Geelani's detention or even elopement of a girl. Therefore, the state government has to prepare itself to effectively and speedily respond to any developing situation with a mischief potential, in a calibrated and coordinated manner.

The state administration would do well to embark on a three pronged strategy to achieve the desired results. It must deal with the trouble makers and lumpen elements with decisive determination, take good care of the majority-peace loving people and also address internal dimensions of the Kashmir issue in conjunction with the central government. In the last few months police has swung into action and apprehended few hundred stone pelters and booked them under various offences. Few have also been detained under Public Safety Act (PSA). But most of those taken into custody have either been released by the police or secured bail from the courts. The past experience in such matters shows that cases of the accused will not be taken to the logical conclusions and hence the culprits may not be deterred from repeating their past actions. Every mischief maker must be made to bear the consequences of legal proceedings involving apprehension, prosecution and conviction. That has not been happening for the last many years. There is hardly any reported case in which a person has been jailed for rioting, damaging government property or assaulting a policeman or an employee, in spite of clinching evidence available against so many people in the form of still and video photographs. The fear of law seems to be absent from the minds of those who break it and that should be restored. There is also an urgent need to revive the practice of taking recourse to the time tested preventive provisions of substantive laws, which seems to have gone into disuse. In this regard, the Executive Magistrates and their police counterparts must aim at achieving seamless coordination in all matters relating to maintenance of peace and good public order. PSA detentions should be resorted to only in exceptional cases. As the Punjab experience has shown, strengthening of Police Stations could be central to any strategy aimed at securing and maintaining peace.

If the law and order apparatus is to ensure peace it is imperative to put curbs on the activities of and deal decisively with separatist leaders and overground workers (OGWs). A widespread feeling has gained ground, and not without reasons, that all the top leaders of various separatist parties and organisations are beyond the reach of civil and criminal laws of the State and the Nation. Main cause for this is the unwillingness or inability of the law enforcing system to make the law breakers face the consequences of transgressing provisions of the substantive laws of the land. The separatist leaders do not consider themselves accountable to the State and the Indian legal system but, at the same time, are mortally afraid of Pakistani Establishment and the ISI.

Similar is the case in respect of the OGWs. This category comprises people from different walks of life, who collectively provide immense sustenance to the militants to keep the problem alive. They furnish material, logistic and, very importantly, media support to the militant organisations. Their activities and financial dealings attract provisions of a number of laws. Virtually none of these have been booked, prosecuted and convicted so far. It would be much more effective and deterrent to launch civil and criminal cases against them and secure convictions than to occasionally resort to detentions under the PSA. As of now this group takes immunity from law as almost granted. The diversity and level of access of these people is truly amazing. If only the Income Tax Department, the Enforcement Directorate and the police effectively enforce the normal laws under their respective jurisdiction, a major source of ground level and logistic support to the militants can be substantially checked.

While the law and order machinery is engaged in diffusing or dealing with a situation which, depending on the past experience, would be confined to a very small part, the state administration must ensure that people in the rest of the Valley are able to lead a normal life without any disturbance or breakdown. For this, role of the district set-up is crucial. Only an effective district administration can provide for the basic needs of the people under its care, create conducive conditions for them to pursue their vocations, aspirations and dreams, as also enable them to lead a reasonably comfortable life. This becomes even more important in a conflict situation and disturbed environment, where lives and interests of the ordinary people are under pressure. The emphasis of the district administration should be on accelerating the developmental activities, quick redressal of public grievances and maintenance of services. Proper selection of the two most important functionaries of the district, the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police is of critical importance; merit and suitability should be the only criteria. In the current scenario, situations have to be handled mostly at the cutting edge levels by lower police and executive functionaries, therefore, the synergy and team spirit shown at the district level has a very strong, forceful trickle down effect.

Internal Dimensions

A problem like the Kashmir issue has external as well as internal dimensions. Though the two are inter linked, it is possible to make considerable headway also independently in the two domains. Whereas progress in resolving external aspects would invariably involve Pakistan and in that context endeavours by India alone are not sufficient, serious attention should be given to attend to the internal issues which have remained unsettled and have been generating disharmony and hard feelings in the State as a whole and also within its different constituents. Any objective analyst of the Kashmir situation would surmise that right from the very beginning divergence of interpretations and areas of disagreement have existed between Srinagar and New Delhi. Sharpness of the differing views may have varied at different times during the last six decades, but the grey areas always remained present. These basically relate to two nodal points of non-dilution and continuation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India and quantum of autonomy to the state.

Any attempt in this direction has to be a collaborative and collective effort between not only the State and the Central governments but also between the entire political spectrums of the two entities. A start was made seven years ago and continues in one form or the other. But some political analysts are surprised at the descending order of importance accorded to the initiatives. The attempts to find a common ground were initiated with contacts at the highest level in 2004. Two years later, two Round Table Conferences convened by the Prime Minister constituted six Working Groups; whose deliberations and recommendations have remained ineffective. Currently this task has been assigned to a group of three light-weights and not well known interlocutors appointed by the centre. After handling the

issues for over six decades does the Union Home Ministry need interlocutors recommendations to jog its institutional memory, ask some commentators. But the importance of seriously addressing the internal dimensions of J&K can hardly be over emphasised. The contentious matters are not confined to bilateral resolution between the Centre and the State alone, but also have intra state contours which would require serious consideration for any comprehensive and lasting solution.

Without going into the technicalities of whether the starting point of a resolving formula should be the Instrument of Accession, the 1952 Delhi Agreement or the 1975 Parthasarthy - Beg accord, the fact is that the two matters remain to be settled. This could be the right and proper time to seriously once again address all outstanding political issues between the Centre and the State, and between the State and various stake holders in different regions of the State. Moreover the 2001 Assembly Resolution of the National Conference asking for “autonomy”, as also the more recent competing demand of the PDP for “self rule” makes it imperative for the Central Government to seriously and conclusively address the twin issues of Article 370 and autonomy. The parameters of settlement on Article 370 and the contours of the concept of autonomy mean different things to different people and groups. But it may not be beyond the realm of possibility to work out a formulation that would be practical, viable, credible and acceptable across the political spectrum of the Nation as well as the State. However, for this to happen it has to be a composite scheme of special political dispensation at the state, regional as well as district levels.

Conclusion

Last five summers in Kashmir have witnessed disruptions and disturbances of varying magnitude and intensity, throwing the normal life out of gear and causing lot of distress to the people. The steady progress towards restoration of peace and bringing back normalcy, which began a decade ago, has been adversely affected. The tourism sector, business establishments and educational institutions were particularly badly hit. However, the sufferings of the common man are of least concern to those who master minded and carried out the plans to keep trouble going in the Valley through this duration. That these elements would strive strenuously to repeat the act during the coming summer also should not be a matter of doubt in anyone’s mind, least of all in the perceptions of the State administration. The most effective way for it to deal with the looming trouble is to anticipate the spectrum of probable courses of action by the mischief makers and their controllers, carry out a thoroughly professional assessment and make adequate preparations to meet the challenge. At stake are not only the credibility of the State Government and the welfare of the people but also more fundamental and basic issues.

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