

Convert J&K into Federation

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Natural calamities do not recognize the artificial lines drawn upon the earth. Yet the human sufferings, wherever caused, are identical and the feelings of pain similar. Shared sorrows call for shared responses, as the common adversity envisages united efforts, to minimize the impact. In tackling the devastating effect of 8th October Earthquake, India and Pakistan seem, more or less, to be directing their efforts on these lines, which is highly gratifying.

Besides the host of measures taken by the two countries, the five points recently opened on the Line of Control to allow the divided families to meet, share each others grief and concern and help in relief and rehabilitation, can go a long way in mitigating the sufferings of such families. Our party is of the considered opinion that many more such points be opened to render the Line of Control virtually irrelevant to enable an unhindered and smooth travel between the two parts of the state.

The tragic earthquake that played havoc in J&K (on both sides of divided line) had dramatically expanded the political space for both India and Pakistan to make a pro active political intervention but unfortunately the two countries could not get much out of it. True, both India and Pakistan have observed maximum restraint militarily on borders and diplomatically in the corridors of respective ministries but the situation demands pro activism and vigorous efforts based on sincerity and trust. The decision of sustained peace process and a purposeful dialogue on Kashmir, however, was a long overdue attempt to address the genuine political concerns of the parties involved but the results from this have not been entirely satisfactory, they have not been meager either. Some how both India and Pakistan have to work out a mechanism to abandon the insurgency and counter insurgency prerequisite for considerable progress on Kashmir. The most visible form of such mechanism would be to discuss the options before rejection of any one among the lot. There could be drawbacks in each of the proposals but simultaneously could be helpful in understanding the limitations of each party concerned and the amount of sincerity prevailing thereof. There has been a persistent demand of the intellectual class home and abroad that proposals should be thoroughly looked into and the points of minimum interest should be taken care of at least with critical appreciation. .

Our party is of the opinion that time for tabling options and proposals has come, precisely propounded at this juncture when the huge disaster has provided a unique opportunity that should be used to built bridges of understanding and friendly relations to strengthen the peace process and cooperation for creating

atmosphere conducive to workout suitable strategies for future course of action viz-a-viz peace settlement of Jammu and Kashmir. Political Autonomy to both parts of divided Kashmir, Self Governance, Joint Control of India and Pakistan over the state and many more options, offered, should be given due respect.

However it needs to be stated here that our party has time and again reiterated that whatever solution is evolved should take care of the cultural, religious and regional diversity of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which of course has survived great invasions and intrusions in the past and this very character should form the basis for any such solution. It is immensely important to take care of the federal character of the state to let the secular ethos flourish and to let the people live together. Greater regional balance is to be ensured and division of the state should be subjected to outright rejection. There are powerful forces demanding a trifurcation of the main regions of the state – Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh – into separate administrative units. Posing as an imaginative solution, this demand, if conceded, could lead to violent social disruptions in the state and create a communal polarization that would not just irretrievably destroy the cultural and social fabric of the state, but have perilous consequences for communal relations in the rest of India. In addition, trifurcation would forever end the possibilities of reviving the plural traditions of communal harmony in the state that had once made it a symbol of the very idea of : unity in diversity. It is in this backdrop that broader consultations with the political leadership in the state should be initiated henceforth to accommodate views and aspiration of each religious, ethnic, racial and political group in the state. Inter-Kashmir and Intra –Kashmir dialogue process could be a better methodology which would eventually serve the purpose of re-unification of the federal units of the state. In this scenario, the party stresses goal oriented, well thought out measures, based on the ground realities. For this, meaningful and visible efforts shall have to be undertaken for finding concrete solutions to the long-pending Kashmir issue. It needs to be stated here that a huge vested interest, at almost every level, has come into existence, during the past years which is out to scuttle the peace and settlement moves at every step. This, however, should not come in the way of reconciliation process and ways and means shall have to be found to overcome the hindrances. Moreover, **the external interference** in Jammu and Kashmir is not conducive to the on going peace process, therefore the concerned parties should exercise restraint in going so in the best interest of the sovereignty and integrity of the region. **We also hold the strong opinion that the Settlement should be accompanied by large-scale economic inputs, enabling the people of the state step in an era of economic independence and to promote the living conditions of the people who have suffered major material loses during the entire post partition period.**

Indeed tireless efforts are needed for improving the ground situation in the state where unabated violence is still a major threat to peoples involvement in the

ongoing peace process. A lot of Kashmir specific measures are required to end the turmoil that has engulfed the state for 16 years.

In the meantime, however, a living society cannot be asked to stop growing. The people need education, health- care, jobs, infrastructure, rule of law, equal opportunities, good governance and many more things. This can certainly not wait till final settlement, which shall take its own time.

We have a Constitution for the state, which despite having provisions for the adult franchise, the separation of powers, checks and balances etc, remains unitary in its essential characteristics. Ultimately, the virtual power is exercised by a solitary authority. This is bound to breed apprehensions of discrimination---- real or perceived. This, often, leads to inter-regional as also to intra-regional conflicts, which has the potential to frustrate even the final solution of Kashmir issue. The remedy lies in the empowerment of people by making the state a true federation with devolution of power (both political and allocation of resources) at the regional, the district, the bloc and the panchayat/ward level, based on democratic representation at each tier. The idea is to allow the varied groups to live together, where each separate group enjoys the fullest opportunity to maintain its identity and flower out according to its peculiar aspirations. It needs to be emphasized here that no solution of Kashmir can endure unless the state is constituted into a true federation.