

Everything Is On Fire

Nightmare is over. What is not over is continuing shadow-boxing, relying solely on crude rhetoric. As last month's terror strikes surpassed all previous terror actions in scale and gravity, India, quite naturally became the focus of world attention. But there is nothing new in the crisis. Since 2004 about 4000 people have reportedly been killed in India by terror-related violence. In truth 'in the past two years India has lost more lives to terrorism than any other country but Iraq'. The 26-28 November attacks on Mumbai panicked the upper and middle class people most and, for the first time Americans, Japanese, Israelis and Germans among others—were among the nearly 200 dead and 295 injured. The scale of violence unnerved the elite everywhere and, the so-called international community lost no time to express solidarity and sympathy. US secretary of state Ms Condoleezza Rice came all the way from Washington to New Delhi to turn the heat on Islamabad calling for "direct and tough action" by Pakistan against the 'stateless actors', performing from the confines of the state. Ultimately India succeeded to some extent in proving a point or two about Pakistan based anti-India terror campaign by the jihadists. But terrorism is not just India's problem. Pakistan, otherwise training field for different jihadi groups, is no less vulnerable to jihadi terrorism because of its abject surrender to American dictates. Pakistan, backed and funded by America, has created, supported and trained islamic jihadists for decades. But Ms Rice was not that harsh on Pakistan while speaking to Pakistani leaders in Islamabad in her mission to South Asia as the representative of the fading Bush presidency.

For one thing it is meaningless to dub terrorists stateless. Ideological orientation of religious fundamentalism may have its origin in the deserts of Arabia but political activists who profess that ideology are not stateless. Nor do they resort to indiscriminate violence for the sake of violence. They have a goal to reach. Pakistan is a theocratic state. But for the clerics and jihadists this theocracy is too moderate to bring about their dreamland. And Pakistan's mainstream political parties, struggling to build democratic institutions, are reluctant to fight religious fundamentalism at theoretical and ideological levels. All of them think in terms of law and order problem and in the process make more terrorists. The situation is equally dismal in the biggest showpiece of democracy—India—where political parties are indifferent, to face religious fundamentalism politically because of votebank politics, albeit atheists, agnostics and secularists could be a powerful force. Given the changed geo-political context Pakistan has no option but to fight America's Afghan war along Pakistan-Afghanistan border. This means their proxy war in Kashmir is losing momentum.

But jingoists in India continue to feed rivalry, bitterness and finger-pointing which in the end will invite more terror attacks. They are out to create a hostile atmosphere by advocating immediate war with Pakistan. At the time of 2001 terrorist assault on India's parliament there was a war cry in the air, mainly supported by government authorities and major political parties. But this time a section of mainstream media, particularly electronic media, whipped war hysteria from day one without realising that it would produce a backlash in Pakistan, dashing the hopes for revival of much needed peace-process between the two antagonistic neighbours. While grilling Pakistan on 'terror-export', India sometimes find difficulty to defend itself as some of its terror problem is homegrown.

Even some conservatives think America is losing the war in Afghanistan. India and

Pakistan cannot avoid the consequences because both of them are committed to America's 'war on terror'. Despite periodic and sporadic terror actions by anti-Indian jihadists based in Pakistan, in Indian cities, it is Pakistan that faces the prospects of balkanisation at the moment. America won't hesitate to dismember Pakistan if it helps its beleaguered troops win war in Afghanistan. For Pakistan America's 'war on terror' has become a double-edged sword. They cannot antagonise their traditional patron—Uncle Sam. Nor can they really fight the jihadists with full vigour, notwithstanding their tough stance on 'non-state actors' in public. If they try to suppress religious fundamentalism violently with American agenda it might lead to civil war which they want to avoid. The Rice Mission was essentially a balancing act to keep sub-continents in good humour while changing the pattern of diplomatic game a bit. Previously they used to visit New Delhi via Islamabad. This time they did the opposite-visiting Islamabad via New Delhi. Strategic equation is shifting, no doubt, but hawks in India cannot expect much other than sympathetic words from Washington. Jingoism on both sides of the fence has generated new space for peace activists but peace movement in this part of the globe continues to suffer from lack of political intervention. Some individuals and progressives cannot make all the difference in peace initiative. After all terrorism cannot be separated from globalisation. In many ways the terror victims everywhere are the victims of global economic integration that has put everything on fire. □□□