

THE ECONOMIC WEEKLY

Talks Again

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IN Indo-Pak relations everything is connected to everything else. The intrusion of Pakistani forces into Indian territory in Cachar has been described, probably correctly, as a ruse to divert attention from the two posts set up by them in Kutch and Pakistani generally provocative attitude all along the border in recent months can be linked in turn to President Ayub Khan's forthcoming visit to the United States where he will try to convince the Johnson Administration that American military assistance to India creates a serious threat to Pakistan. It is possible from here to go back step by step, taking in every manifestation of Indo-Pak antipathy including Pakistan's blossoming friendship with China, till we come to Kashmir which is what the Indo-Pak problem is basically.

Given this connected pattern it is really pointless to get worked up about border infringements and skirmishes or to expect any lasting improvement in Indo-Pak relations from their settlement. It is of very little importance whether the proposed talks on the Kutch-Sind border begin after Pakistan has removed her posts from Indian territory or before or even if they begin at all. Of course, formally India has conceded that this part of the border is *not* demarcated and Pakistan has claimed some 3,500 square miles of what is now Indian territory. So it is a border dispute, but only technically; basically, the trouble is not about the border at all. Magnanimity here is, therefore, wasted. Pakistan's friendship, let us face it, cannot be won with the present of a few square miles here or there. Of this Pakistan has not left anyone in doubt.

This is not, let it be understood, a plea for the 'tough-line' towards Pakistan. But we have been through the border incident-cease fire-talks cycle so many times that it is well to admit that they make little difference to Indo-Pak relations and that if we seriously seek improved relations with Pakistan we have to be prepared to tackle the problem of Kashmir which has been the dominant influence in shaping these relations so far.

But can the Government of India do anything about Kashmir? Basing itself on the formal accession of the State to India, it has always claimed Kashmir as a part of India and has been committed to keeping it such. This policy was developed under Pandit Nehru but the Shastri Government has identified itself with it completely. The formal process of Kashmir's integration with the rest of the country has been in fact accelerated recently. The Congress party has extended its operations to the State by taking into its fold the ruling faction of the National Conference and, even more recently, the titles of *Sadar-i-Riyasat* and Prime Minister have been replaced by those of Governor and Chief Minister as in the other States. These may be formal changes but they mean only one thing — that the Government will not countenance any change in the status of Kashmir. As for popular opinion in the country, if not in Kashmir itself, it will permit any change even less. Those who do not regard a reopening of the Kashmir question too high a price for the possibility of friendly relations with Pakistan are definitely in a minority.

But, while on the question of the status of Kashmir itself the Government's stand has been clear, it has not always appeared to realise that the implication of this is permanent unfriendly relations with Pakistan. The result is the recurring spectacle of injured innocence whenever there is a border 'incident' created by Pakistan. After much fire-breathing, this is inevitably followed in due course by futile talks and minor compromises which achieve nothing in the long-run. Talks between governments may at times be diplomatic ends in themselves, but surely not when they are repeated with monotonous regularity over fifteen years? Keeping to this pattern there are now to be talks on the Kutch-Sind border, first at the level of officials and later at a "higher level".

Here we go round the mulberry bush once again!

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