

THE GREAT INTERLOCUTOR GAMBIT

In a three-part article, Rakesh Kaul, Chairman of Spherenomics and a highly-respected community leader, analyses the recommendations of the Government of India-appointed interlocutors on Jammu & Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir Interlocutors report which has been released at the end of the last Parliamentary session has garnered support from the PDP party in the Valley but universal condemnation from all others within J&K and in India. Its parents, the Home Ministry and the ruling National Conference, to date exhibit blushes when asked to take a position on the report thus preserving plausible deniability. This is unfortunate because the exercise did represent a positive gesture on the side of the All Party Parliamentarians. The interlocutors are hoping that in the next three and four months there will be sufficient engagement within the Valley so that Parliament can justify some action in its next session. The interlocutors have exhibited a good heart and sincerity in seeking a solution. They are right for the wrong reasons that this report needs engagement and open, transparent discussion. While the report is comprehensive it is not hard headed in its comprehension and even though it may prove to be dead on arrival there is a danger that it will be resurrected, when it serves the powers to be, in the form of a new constitutional committee. The report therefore needs to be examined on its merits and needs to be dealt with objectively and effectively. Dismissing the report as the Indian media and politicians have done is to miss its far reaching import and especially for the Kashmiri Hindus its complicity drives them further into extinction.

One of the interlocutor's admonishments is the need for speed and their unsupported position that the deal window is open for only a few months before it will close again. However, the Beacon signs on the J&K Highway may well be very applicable to this situation—Dangerous Curves Ahead, Speed kills. As a first step it would be helpful if the interlocutors were to publicly post all of the submissions that they have received from the various parties that they have met. This will permit independent analysts to review how objectively the interlocutors have analyzed the demands and case statements put forth by the multiple parties and more importantly how they have synthesized these inputs. If there has been a lack of discriminate judgment then clearly the squeakiest wheel wins. Kashmir needs light and truth in all processes not packaged deals cut in smoke filled rooms and this tool needs to be made accessible to the public without requiring an activist to have to file a RTI. This first part



The Jammu & Kashmir interlocutors with Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram in New Delhi

article evaluates and analyzes the report which is quite revealing of the mind set which exists within the Indian and Kashmiri establishment. The fate of the Hindus in Kashmir is a litmus test for the idea of India in Kashmir and hence their vantage point is used unapologetically to help understand the ramifications of the report's recommendations.

The main political objective of the report is to demonstrate that India is prepared to make some movement on Center State relations by going back to the terms of the Abdullah Indira Gandhi accord wherein India only manages external and internal security and vital economic interests. The interlocutors are right that Kashmir can only be solved by dialog and the Hurriyat has made a huge error in not engaging with the interlocutors and this might well push them into further counterproductive activities. The Indian calculation must be that this concession would be sufficient to create a split within the separatists who either have to join the mainstream and commit to an above board participation in democracy and pluralism to rule the State or else risk further marginalization on the International and National stage. Alongside the recently initiated local movement to counter the Wahabis there must be a hope that this would provide sufficient impetus to the Peace process and keep the Valley from embracing violence again. Meanwhile mainstream political parties in the Valley, with a wink in their eye, are selling the interlocutor report locally in the guise

of a two step process, the first step being complete autonomy and the second step being defacto independence. The Indian establishment is fully cognizant but is gambling that if they can get Pakistan to do a mirror image of the Indian proposal then over time the Indian controlled Kashmir would lose its urge for independence and the Kashmir problem would become moot. Devolution is the promise held out to the non Valley residents who are fed up with the hegemony of the Valley so that they play along with this game. How this new compact would be sold to the Indians is not disclosed at this stage but perhaps the PR machine will re crank the UN Security Council membership card or the Iranian pipeline or some other so called peace dividend or clothe it in the innocuous domestic context of the increasing Federalization of the Center State relationships. You cannot make an omelet without cracking eggs and the interlocutors report does throw a few strategic considerations under the bus. The report has ten sections with individual Chapters and in this article we comment on the first half.

SECTION I

The interlocutors painstakingly enumerate all of the parties that they met. It is interesting that the Global Diaspora of the Kashmiri Hindus had organized a briefing session with the benevolent Mr. Dileep Padgaonkar on February 4 2011. He was extremely sympathetic and supportive of the concerns that were shared with him verbally

and in writing. Forget the fact that none of their concerns found any presence in the report; the Global conference call did not even merit a mention in the list of the parties that the interlocutors interacted with. So much for the Global Kashmiri Hindu voice! Now this is not a big deal and things do slip through cracks but one will begin to see a pattern of omissions later that does end up making a material statement on the interlocutors' biases or blind spots. The interlocutors key unspoken political take away from the 700 delegations that they do admit to meeting must have been that J&K has become so completely fragmented that there is no unified opposition to the plans that they would seek to move forward with as long as they get the PDP and the NC/Congress buy in. The shattered Kashmiri Hindus revealed their total lack of institutional unity and unfortunately the Ladakhis and Jammuites who constitute the remaining Pro India constituency did not speak with a unified voice either. If, and this has proven to be a big if, they can get Geelani and Hurriyat inside the tent before the anti interlocutor recommendation forces unite and gather strength then the interlocutors must think optimistically the job is done! Who knows this may even serve as a template for the Chinese to settle their Tibet problem and one can then dream of the Nobel Peace prize.

SECTION II

The interlocutors describe the central problem as that of victimhood. It is not clear as to why the

interlocutors did not call a spade a spade namely that a section of the Kashmir Valley does not endorse its full accession to India. This is the core of the Kashmir problem and it is this separatist sentiment that only varies in degree, which has held J&K and India hostage for the last 60 years. It is this anti India sentiment which has brought Pakistan sponsored militancy into Kashmir and fuels the Hurriyat's obduracy. Unless one diagnoses the problem objectively instead of subjectively then the prescriptive solution will never be right and solving one thousand collateral problems in Kashmir is not going to be of any help in making progress with the core problem. The interlocutors need to make a compelling case that their recommendations will eliminate, shrink, isolate or make irrelevant this hardcore separatist group otherwise we have solved nothing and got nothing.

A corollary issue is that if one characterizes a party as a victim then one also has to an opinion as to who the transgressor is. The interlocutors should have either been non judgmental entirely and taken the no fault approach or they have to ascribe fault equally. By granting the term victims the interlocutors have been selective in their concession and inadvertently laid down the foundation for the Indian leadership laying itself open to charges of being war criminals and or guilty of severe human rights violations. Lest this may seem as mere semantics and sensational it is the interlocutors who themselves in their recommendations section Page 110 para (8) make the alarming recommendation A judicial commission should be established to look into the unmarked graves.....evoking shades of Bosnia and Serbia!! There absolutely is a human need here for identification and closure which can be accomplished by a medical, administrative team but why does that need a judicial enquiry? In sharp contrast they remain silent on the oft made request for a judicial enquiry into the causes of the expulsion and cleansing of the Kashmiri Hindus from the Valley. These folks by the way have not been tagged officially as victims but merely as migrants. A dialog has to be a two way process and the question to the interlocutors is did they dialog critically or passively? Who brought violence and the consequent mayhem into Kashmir needed to be the starting point of the interlocutors' enquiry with all of the groups that they met?

To be continued next week...
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